



# SPEAK UP/OUT: COMPARATIVE PAPER

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<sup>1</sup>This paper is based on the country reports compiled by teams in Portugal, Malta, Slovenia and the UK, which can be accessed here: <http://www.bystanders.eu/about/>  
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**INTRODUCTION**

This is a Comparative Report on the key findings from the Bystanders Project, which developed bystander responses to sexual harassment among young people and the implementation of the Speak Up/Out Training Programme, an EU four country study of bystander interventions on sexual harassment in schools.

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency (2014), sexual harassment (SH) is the most prevalent form of violence against women in Europe yet the area of prevention is under-developed. The Bystanders Project focused on raising young people’s awareness and will to act as bystanders that can change the culture within which SH is normalised and tolerated. The term *bystander* refers to someone who witnesses or knows about an event and usually chooses not to intervene (see also Banyard et al., 2009). The Speak Up/Out programme took a whole school approach by seeking to look at ways that everyone within the school space (students, teachers, other school staff) and across all the curriculum subjects can change the context within which SH and sexism more widely, is accepted, normalised and permitted.

Bystanders was a two year research project from December 2016 to November 2018. It was funded by a EU programme and involved teams in England, Portugal, Malta, and Slovenia. The Project had the following research objectives:

- to increase knowledge and awareness of sexual harassment (SH) in students and staff;
- to develop, pilot and deliver a training program for students and school staff to enable them to intervene in situations of SH;
- to increase the motivation of bystanders to stop SH in high schools;
- to develop a manual and materials adapted to each country;
- to develop school policies and protocols on SH;
- to compare across the four countries.

This report provides an analysis of data collected in four countries on staff and student understandings of sexual harassment, gender norms, barriers to action, and the scope for bystander interventions to shift and change school spaces and cultures. This paper sits alongside the Speak Up/Out Manual containing lesson plans for schools and other



education providers and four individual Country Reports which contain further detail on the results from each country.<sup>2</sup>

This section identifies the key contextual issues that impede and enable schools' ability and willingness to deliver and engage with the Bystanders Project in particular, and with tackling sexual harassment more generally. We identified three key factors that shaped conducive contexts: national and local policies; school character; and connected to both of these, the delivery of sex, relationships and citizenship education.

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## NATIONAL AND LOCAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

In general, the work in all countries takes place in the context of international attention to sexual harassment, in part due to the #MeToo campaign and in part due to the Istanbul Convention.

In Portugal, although research on sexual harassment has been going on since 1994 with some impact on prevention work on gender-based violence, sexual harassment was criminalised only very recently, in 2015, and it has gained renewed attention within the national political agenda. The Bystanders Project also contributed to this enhanced policy and media attention and was considered innovative in relation to preventative work in schools, where there has thus far been little discussion or action. At the International Seminar at the end of the Bystander Project, the Secretary of State for Gender Equality was present and made clear the commitment of the government to act against SH and sexual violence.

Moreover, one Municipality and two schools participating in the Portuguese research were open and willing to integrate the prevention of SH into their next local education policy. Mayors and representatives of the City Halls were contacted at the beginning of the Project to discuss the possibility of establishing protocols against gender-based violence and specifically against SH in schools. Two Municipalities were involved with the project but only one committed to establish policies and protocols around SH and SV. The Portuguese team organised a joint seminar with this Municipality at which it found a receptive audience and the Municipality agreed to commit themselves to

<sup>2</sup> All these items are available on the website - <http://www.bystanders.eu/>



including sexual harassment prevention in their next Municipal Plan (2019-2020) and SH in their Municipal Education Policy.

Some school boards were more receptive to staff training – two out of three school boards in the Portugal study attended training sessions and committed themselves to include SH in the next school policy and curriculum plan document, which is established every four years. The Project was implemented in three public schools within two municipal areas. School boards and municipal authorities have relative autonomy to implement local educational policies complementing the national curriculum and educational policy. The Portuguese team achieved the commitment of the three schools and in one of the two municipalities to implement explicit mention to SH prevention in their educational new plan (2019-2023). In the second municipality it was not possible to schedule meetings with the Town Hall authority, so the team did not achieve any commitment for preventing SH in education in this municipal area.

In Slovenia, the Ministry for Education, Science and Sports did not show any interest in working on SH and none of the schools had an independent policy on sexual harassment. The issue of sexual violence is one element of a more general policy on bullying. This is in line with national responses to SV/SH which are tackled under the auspices of the National Education Institute’s (2016) Protocol on Detecting and Dealing with Bullying in Educational Institutions. The Protocol includes procedures for responding and it places a responsibility on all schools to address forms of violence within their school. However, this Protocol does not define sexual harassment specifically but rather includes it within reference to the definition for and acts identified as ‘sexual violence’ so sexual innuendo and jokes with a sexual content, obscene gesturing and speaking, harassment based on gender, sexual solicitation, displaying pornographic material, groping, stalking and sexual assault. While the focus of the protocol is bullying more widely, it does also talk about bystanders as people that detect violence among their peers by directly observing or even encouraging further violence but are not actively involved in that violence nor involved in protecting the victims of violence. Individual schools in Slovenia have their own set of rules setting out rights, obligations and prohibitions for students during school time but the Slovenian team found nothing at its participating schools on sexual harassment or sexual violence. Also, the anti-bullying protocol was not being implemented in these three schools. Moreover, the general rules for all secondary schools in Slovenia in force between 2010-2018 and then revised in 2018, explicitly prohibit physical and psychological violence in schools but does not even mention sexual violence. It is clear that the officials at the Ministry of Education do not recognise the



problem of sexual violence or sexual harassment and certainly do not see it as a priority issue to tackle. This reflects the country context as a whole where SV and SH are not yet given much importance.

In England and Wales, at government level there has been some recognition of SV/SH in schools, with the Minister for Women establishing an inquiry (Women and Equalities Committee, 2018). While publication of the report achieved widespread media coverage there has been little movement from the ministry responsible for schools to address the issue. At the participating schools from England, none had a specific sexual harassment policy or even a statement against it, this meant that they lacked a clear definition, common language and understanding of sexual violence or sexism. Members of staff at two schools came to the realisation that their schools had regularly made statements against racism and, in effect, had a zero-tolerance approach to racist language, yet sexist language was prevalent and rarely challenged, contributing to a culture in which sexual harassment was normalised. Sexual harassment was, therefore, seen to be part of safeguarding policies and procedures or subsumed under anti-bullying policies, but there were many gaps - limited attention to sex discrimination and sexism, with minimal references to sexist or sexual bullying. This meant that we were working in institutions with little overt policy level commitment to challenging the gender norms and contexts within which sexual harassment takes place and is normalised. Importantly, this project coincided with, but had not yet felt the impact of, government consultations on sexual violence and sexual harassment. Also, the re-emergence of feminist societies within schools. Two out of three schools participating in this study had feminist societies.

Similarly, in Malta, none of the schools had an explicit sexual harassment policy, but like a school in Slovenia, one of the Maltese schools had a dress code which girls described as sexist and unfair. As with Slovenia and the UK, sexual harassment was dealt with as a bullying issue and like Slovenia, there was no explicit recognition of the gender dimension. Schools could be taking their lead from the State Education Department who had issued an explicit anti-bullying policy. Also, within schools, sexual harassment is dealt with by the same designated teacher that deals with all cases of bullying.

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## SCHOOL CHARACTER

School culture, ethos, student profile, pedagogy, and leadership are all intertwined and contribute to the particular character of each of the schools that engaged with the Bystander Project. It is reflected in the relationships between teachers and students





(trusting discursive relations as opposed to sanction/rules focused relations), hierarchy and discipline. This may come through in the school's ethos, specifically pedagogic methods (active and participatory vs exposition and memory based), activities outside the classroom, relationships with external organisations, relationships with families and with the local area. Moreover, the school board's leadership and teachers' communication and engagement are vital for establishing a constructive context for supporting survivors and for undertaking effective prevention work. In this section, we start with some generic points about the pressures on schools then focus on three intersecting factors that were important across the four countries: social class; school ethos; and the teaching of sex, relationships and citizenship education.

Some of the schools were more accustomed to input from external organisations than others, and a few had particular experience of preventative work delivered by an end violence against women and girls organisation. For instance, in Portugal, the Alternative and Response Women's Association in Portugal has been involved in prevention programmes within schools since 2004, such that many schools are now used to development work with external agencies. In Slovenia, two out of three of the participating schools had been engaged with their partner organisation, DNK (Association for Non-violent Communication). In England, two out of three schools were accustomed to working with external organisations, one on intimate partner violence and the other on sexual violence.

Importantly, a part of the school's character is now determined by a context of limited resources and funding cuts. Not all schools were willing or able to prioritise the development of sexual harassment policies and procedures or to sustain the prevention programme. One of the initial schools approached by the Portuguese team and one approached by the England team pulled out at a late stage. The school board for the Portuguese school stated that teachers at their school would not accept training because they had little time available for this. The teams in England, Portugal, and Slovenia all stated that schools prioritise academic achievement over personal development work: this suggests that there is limited recognition of the impact that sexual harassment can have on achievement.



*Social class*

Although social class is one factor of many shaping the character of participating schools, three out of four of the teams found that social class impacted the receptivity of schools, staff and students to the bystander programme.

In Portugal, every school is obliged to offer two educational paths – the usual academic path and a vocational path. Of their participating schools, both groups selected at one school were predominantly middle-class students and at the other two schools, the school board and the staff felt the programme would be more appropriate for the working-class students on the vocational path. The Portuguese team found that the girls from the vocational groups had a lot of personal experience of sexual harassment to share, particularly during their work placements but also in public spaces such as on the train, and therefore had more empathy and solidarity. They talked about the significant power relationship with their employers and the safety work they undertook to try and avoid this harassment, which they could identify as connected with others along a continuum. Moreover, because of these experiences in the workplace, the boys and the staff and school governors the vocational classes also demonstrated greater awareness of SH and a willingness to intervene and to develop better partnerships with the companies at which work placements take place. This awareness and openness to intervene was impacted by two other factors – neighbourhood and structure of the school, whether it has a more horizontal or hierarchical way of working. While the bystander work at one of the vocational classes benefited from this school’s location within a homogeneous social housing neighbourhood and the school’s ethos of working in partnership with students to overall improve their social condition, the project did not fare as well with the vocational classes at the other school which was located in a less homogeneous area and operated a more hierarchical system. Meanwhile, one particular school chose two classes with middle class students on the academic pathway but given it’s communicative and close relationships with students, the teachers organised many activities outside the classroom and the school goes above and beyond what is expected in delivering the national curriculum. The lack of awareness among students and staff was compensated by this pedagogic approach which created a conducive context for anti SH / developmental work.





*The difference between conservative/liberal and participative/hierarchical school cultures*

In Slovenia, most education is public and financed by the state although there is a small amount of private provision as well. Government funded secondary education takes three forms: vocational education; technical education; and general education (classical, economic or art gymnasium projects that offer the International Baccalaureate). The Slovenian team selected one school of each type. They found that the intersection of gender and the educational context had a significant impact on levels of understanding of SH and the willingness/ability to engage with the bystander programme. One school had predominantly female students because of the focus on health, it has worked with an anti-violence organisation, its counsellors seemed very interested and committed to the topic. However, pushing against these possibilities for a productive response to SH, it had a traditional hierarchical structure with strict dress codes which is typical of the professions that it trains students to join. This rather conservative focus on dress codes seemed to filter through to students' views as they were more inclined to victim-blame if they believed that the victim was dressed inappropriately. In the general education school, the students and staff demonstrated the best knowledge before and after the interventions, they were less inclined to think in terms of stereotypes and victim-blaming, and students and staff seemed to have greater awareness of gender stereotypes, sex roles and the connection with power relations. This school also did the most work in terms of developing protocols. The Slovenian team surmise that this could be because there was space for developmental discussions and the leadership team/staff were particularly committed to the issue. At the vocational school, commitment to SH prevention work seemed to wane and the team needed to make extra effort to organise the workshops. The students and staff attending the sessions at this school seemed the least interested in the topic. The specific nature of these schools impacted the possibility of a whole school response - one of the schools had greater access to information because they were learning within the context of a general education curriculum whereas the Speak Up/Out programme was too demanding for the technical and vocational schools, presumably because of the workplace focus of these schools. The Slovenian team found that schools with a broader curriculum are more open to engagement with discussions on SH and less likely to victim-blame and reproduce stereotypes.

In Malta, the education system consists of state schools, private schools, and Catholic Church schools. In terms of school ethos, the Maltese team pointed to the difference



between schools geared towards individual academic achievement, those focused on creating and consolidating a school ‘community’, and those schools that are run to a ‘business’ model of private fee paying. For example, at the school with the business model, students suggested payment as a method for preventing harassment. Two schools had a more disciplined and consistent approach that made it easier to implement the Speak Up/Out programme but there were problems with the way these schools approached SH and neither took the work forward. The Catholic Church school committed itself to a whole school approach by looking at ways of incorporating work on gender into various subjects and to providing more focus on SH and on gender in the school development curriculum. That said, this took place within a hierarchical and top down culture, in which students found it difficult to take a critical approach. The fee-paying school made the SH project compulsory for all students, a project that would be marked and graded.

In England, secondary education was traditionally divided between state-funded schools and private fee-paying schools but in the last twenty years this has changed considerably; neo-liberal policies have surfaced as public-private partnerships in all public sector spheres including education. There are now four main forms of schools: local authority-controlled schools, academies (publicly funded from central government but with varying degrees of autonomy and private investment), free/independent schools which are fee-paying schools, and home schooling. Almost two thirds of secondary schools in the UK are now academies so it is no surprise that two out of three of the participating schools in the Bystanders Project were academies and the third school was local authority controlled. The local authority-controlled school is also a Pupil Referral Unit for young people with very complex needs that have often already been excluded from other forms of mainstream education. Although two schools were Academies they were very different in their practice, with one focused more on academic achievement while the other, already high up in the League Tables and categorised as ‘outstanding’, was able to devote more attention to pastoral and developmental activities.

*Sex, Relationships and Citizenship Education*

While many schools were able to think about how they could develop a whole school approach to tackling the gender norms that make sexual violence permissible, in reality, most relied on the delivery of sex, relationships or personal, health and citizenship





education to tackle gender-based violence. In all four countries, schools are required to provide some kind of sex, relationships and citizenship education.

In Portugal, since 2007, sex education has been compulsory and in the last year the government introduced a National Strategy for Citizenship Education that requires schools to work and debate gender equality and VAW. The focus has been on bullying, teen dating violence and domestic violence. SH was not a part of the existing delivery and was not picked up as a priority. The Bystanders Project shifted some of that, but not for all schools.

The Slovenian team noted that, in general, there was little connecting of the issues and students, staff, governors and parents are not getting enough information, either at school or within wider society, about the connection between gender relations, power and inequality, and sexual violence.

In 2013, the State Education Department in Malta issued guidelines for teaching sexual and relationships education (SRE) but these do not oblige schools to deliver SRE. So, whether or not these are implemented is largely dependent on the commitment of individual teachers or the general ethos and focus of the school.

In England, the continuing uneven provision of sex and relationships education was also a source of variation between schools, with only one ensuring it was part of timetabled activities. One senior teacher spoke passionately about the decades long erosion of feminist inspired activities on sexism and gender equality within schools. Interestingly, this project coincided with the re-emergence of feminist societies within schools, with a Feminism in Schools conference in November 2018, at which there was a great deal of discussion about sexual harassment. Two out of three schools participating in this study had feminist societies.

**METHOD**

To answer the research questions, the Bystanders Project involved the following steps:

- a literature review and a description of the national policy contexts;
- conducting preparatory focus groups with young people as research for developing the lessonplans;
- recruiting schools and working with staff on the bystander intervention;





- developing and piloting of a bystander intervention programme;
- delivery of the programme in three schools;
- monitoring and evaluating the impacts of the programme.

This section outlines the numbers and types of participants and also briefly summarises issues for the delivery of these activities and our ability to collate the data.

Each of the research teams worked with civil society partners to deliver the Speak Up/Out programme lesson plans. Each of the teams worked with three schools but there was variation in the staff and students that participated and also in the length of the sessions. In Portugal and Slovenia, the student sessions were close to the expected 90 minutes each. In Malta, the sessions lasted between 45 and 60 minutes each. In the UK the variation was wider - sessions were anywhere between 30 minutes and 90 minutes.

Table 1 below shows that 106 staff engaged in the project, and Table 2 shows 429 young people took part across four countries.

The Bystanders project engaged members of school staff including teachers from a range of subjects, pastoral and citizenship leads, school nurses and school counsellors. However, staff participation was lower than expected in all countries.

**Table 1: Total number of staff participants by country and school**

COUNTRY	SCHOOL 1	SCHOOL 2	SCHOOL 3	TOTAL
ENGLAND	14	6	8	28
MALTA	13	10	4	27
PORTUGAL	11	7	3	21
SLOVENIA	4	10	16	30



**Table 2: Total number of student participants by country and school**

COUNTRY	SCHOOL 1	SCHOOL 2	SCHOOL 3	TOTAL
ENGLAND	44	15	13	72
MALTA	30	25	19	74
PORTUGAL	32	51	39	122
SLOVENIA	60	62	39	161

All teams experienced difficulties in undertaking the full range of activities from the Speak Up/Out manual and/or the full number of sessions, due to not having the amount of time allocated as envisaged or because students took more time to work through the activities, especially the exercises related to recognising and understanding sexual harassment. Similarly, all four teams had difficulty producing clear findings from the pre and post questionnaires because of the inconsistency in attendance at teacher and student sessions. In Malta, variation in student attendance was due to one school making attendance voluntary but then those who attended voluntarily were also more committed to the issue. Conversely, sessions at one of the other schools, where attendance was compulsory, were much shorter and therefore discussion was limited. Both Malta and Slovenia also experienced significant gender variation in classes with some being male dominated and some female dominated. In England, variation in student attendance was because of the high turnover and behavioural issues of students at the PRU and, for staff attendance, this was about staff workloads at all three schools but also reflected varying levels of commitment to tackling the issues. Also, the total numbers of students for the schools in the England study was impacted by obstacles to engaging two classes in two out of three of the schools and also the last-minute change to a PRU where the class sizes were considerably smaller.

The sessions with students involved two single sex sessions and then a final session that brought the boys and girls together. All research teams noted the importance of the single sex sessions for creating safe spaces for the students, especially for the girls. The



Malta and England teams found that the boys were more boisterous than the girls and so facilitators used the single sex sessions to do some work with the girls to ensure that they speak up/out during the final mixed sessions, which boys were dominating. In Portugal, the schools asked for more single sex sessions.

**KEY FINDINGS**

The Bystanders Project teams in the four countries collated a great deal of data comprising the following:

- quantitative data from pre and post questionnaires with staff and with students;
- qualitative data from focus group discussions with staff;
- qualitative data from single sex and mixed sessions with students in response to exercises from the Manual (summarised in the Table below);
- qualitative data from a further session with staff.

Table 3 offers a brief summary of the activities that comprised the Speak Up/Out programme. Much more detail on each of them is contained in the Manual.

**Table 3: Description of Activities**

Session	Activity	Activity description
Session 1 (single-sex)	Where is the Line?	Short descriptions of sexual harassment developed from the pilot were printed onto eight cards (vignettes). One card was given to each of the students and they were asked to consider how OK or Not OK the situation was and to locate themselves along a line.
	Concept Map	Students were asked to work in groups and complete a map containing predefined questions including "who harasses?", "who is the victim?", "where does the sexual harassment occur?"





Session 2 (single-sex)	Combined Concept Map	A joint "concept map" was created by the research team bringing together responses of boys on one sheet and girls on another. Students formed groups and discussed similarities and differences.
	Most likely activity	This session explored gender stereotypes by asking 'who is most likely to...' undertake certain tasks, respond in certain ways, and the final question asked students 'who is most likely to intervene in sexual harassment?'
	Bystanders Video	A short animation with some examples of bystander responses was created for this project. This was used to explore barriers to becoming an active bystander and what other possibilities for action might be.
Session 3 (mixed session)	Bystanders Role-Play	The vignettes used in Session 1 formed the basis for role plays linked to their previous discussion on active bystanding.
	Agenda for Change	An agenda for action was developed with the groups focusing on what needed to change within their schools to improve responses to sexual harassment.
	Speak Up Speak Out Logos	The students developed their own words/slogan written inside an empty logo.
Follow-up	How feelings have	a. The students were asked to write down



<p>session  (mixed session)</p>	<p>changed and their learning</p>	<p>changes in their feelings about sexual harassment, the victim and the harasser. b. The students were asked to write on a speech bubble how their understandings of sexual harassment, victims, harassers and bystanders had changed (or not).</p>
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This section provides comparative summaries of themes from the qualitative data (see individual Country Reports for further detail). This section is divided into two parts: recognising and understanding sexual harassment (including wider issues around gender inequality and gender norms) and responding to sexual harassment. As mentioned in the previous section, there was some inconsistency in staff and students that attended each of the sessions, so it has been difficult to compare the pre and post questionnaire data across schools let alone countries. For this reason, this section concentrates on an analysis of the qualitative data.

**RECOGNISING AND UNDERSTANDING SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Most of this section reflects on the discussions with students but we have also included a couple of paragraphs at the end to summarise relevant points from staff. The first two exercises in the Manual – the ‘where is the line’ activity and the concept maps – provide insights into students’ views on sexual harassment and whether they were able to recognise it as well as their sense of where it takes place, who is doing the harassing, and how it feels for the victim.

**STUDENTS**

The data from these sessions was incredibly rich. The following is a brief summary of the key themes that arose during the sessions with students. As noted above, more detailed discussions can be found in the individual Country Reports.

*Awareness and normalisation*

Across all the schools in all four countries, there was an intense normalisation of SH. In particular students referred to forms of SH either as a joke or as bullying. Where they referred to it as bullying this reflected a policy context that locates SH in anti-bullying



frameworks. While there were signs in all countries that students were clearly connecting forms of SH, particularly through their understanding of power relations, there were many signs that students viewed some behaviours as less severe than others. For instance, some Portuguese students made a distinction between the seriousness of touching and non-touching forms of SH, with the former considered more severe. That said, in one class in both Portugal and England, girls had entirely normalised boys slapping girls on their bums, so this physical contact distinction did not always hold. Girls in Malta could identify a spectrum of verbal, non-verbal and physical behaviour as SH while boys were more likely to think some forms of SH are OK and distinguished these from sexual assault and rape. Interestingly, while girls at the Malta sessions recognised the power dimensions of SH, boys downplayed these.

Across the twelve schools, students identified a huge array of potential harassers including: professors, priests, family members, school friends. Some students stated it could be 'anyone', while others made clear the connection between SH and power relations. However, at some classes in Slovenia and Portugal there was an element of othering going on – boys at one class in Slovenia identified harassers as psychiatric patients and some of the boys at the Portuguese sessions said that harassers are 'people from other ethnicities', 'paedophiles' and 'people with a mental disorder'.

While a range of potential victims were identified, there was a tendency to refer to them as 'fragile', 'weaker' and more 'vulnerable', with this including family members, the elderly, minorities, and girlfriends. Students from vocational schools in Slovenia and from the vocational pathway classes in Portugal specifically referred to power relations between health professionals such as medical students and superiors, doctors and patients. Classes across the four countries identified girls/women as more likely to be the victims of SH but in England, students at one particular school also referred to sexual harassment between members of the same sex and the use of 'gay' as a derogatory comment.

Across the classes, students identified the following potential locations for harassment: internet/online, schools, parks, on the street, on buses, at bus stops, in the toilets. Some of the girls at the sessions in Malta simply stated 'everywhere'. All Portuguese students and Slovenian boys more than Slovenian girls tended to talk about SH taking place at locations 'out there' i.e. at a distance from them and in public spaces. This was contradicted by other students from the same countries identifying SH within their own schools and within homes.



Students were asked to use the Concept Maps to consider how the harasser and the harassed feel. The contrast in the feelings that students identified was stark. On how the harasser feels, students stated: strong, all powerful, cool, superior, important, special, empowered, happy, excited, wilful. On how the victim feels, students stated: humiliated, hurt, demeaned, depressed, embarrassed, uncomfortable, invaded, unsafe, shame, traumatised, disgraced, shocked, abused, frightened.

In the ‘where is the line’ exercise, all students were clearest about the example of ‘up-skirting’, seeing this as invasive and non-consensual. Although the girls’ and boys’ responses to the vignettes were similar, the boys tended to argue that the examples needed to be context-specific and without context it was difficult for them to judge whether the behaviour was a problem. Across the four sites, students were most uncertain about two specific scenarios – the one where the boy is staring at the girl on the bus, and the one where a group of girls are harassing a boy. Many students also seemed uncertain about whether pornography being shown by boys to other boys constitutes SH, and the boys were far less critical of this behaviour.

There were gender differences in what was considered acceptable behaviour though differences in school context also played into this. During the ‘where is the line’ exercise, girls in Slovenia and England were willing to condone far less of the behaviour under discussion than the boys.

By the end of the sessions, all teams observed increased awareness of SH among students. In England, student engagement with the sessions was strong and the team felt that, given the opportunity, students would likely learn a great deal. On several occasions, girls and boys observed that they had reconsidered what they had said earlier and one could almost see them processing the facilitator’s suggestions and rethinking their position. However, there were times where awareness raising did not change opinions – for instance, boys at the Slovenian teams continued with victim blaming and some students in Portugal continued to believe that cat-calling and other forms of non-physical harassment were not a problem. The Portuguese team noted that students were still learning to balance the patriarchal culture within which they live and the new knowledge they had acquired.

*Victim blaming*

All four research teams evidenced forms of victim-blaming. The Portuguese team noted that students labelled victims of SH as ‘provocative’ and ‘daring’ and as less respectful.





In Slovenia, girls in one particular school blamed the victim where they believed she was wearing provocative clothing though this was rejected by girls at another school. Fortunately, two other classes of girls spoke out against the school's dress codes and the suggestion that girls are provoking harassment by their clothing. Particularly concerning was that in one of the boy's groups, the tolerance to SH was very high and most behaviour, except showing of genitals and video recording, was acceptable to them. Within this group, the boys were particularly hostile and blamed the victim pointing to her dress and behaviour. They projected SH as a show of affection and love.

During the exercise with the Concept Maps, students were asked to discuss what they thought of the victim. They stated that she was exploited and abused, and they felt sorry for her, they were concerned about the victim and wanted to know ways to help. However, some of the boys at sessions in Slovenia said that 'she deserved it' and in Portugal that 'she liked it'. In response to the vignette about a boy being harassed by girls, girls in Portugal and England claimed that maybe he liked the attention.

Moreover, both the England and Portugal teams noted distinctions being made between deserving and undeserving victims. In England, this came mainly from the staff (discussed below) and for Portugal, they put this down to a cultural context within which there are strong divisions between pure/virgin and seductress/whore. While there was some recognition of victim blame, several members of staff as well as some male students placed responsibility on girls to speak up/out.

### *Hegemonic masculinity*

All four research teams noted the importance of single sex sessions for some of the conversations. The Portuguese team noted that, particularly for girls from the vocational classes, the single sex sessions became a safe space for sharing their experiences of SH while on their placements and for offering each other solidarity and support.

One particular feature of hegemonic masculinity was the perpetuation of sexual double standards for girls and boys, and the fact that these can be reproduced by both boys and girls. Some of the girls in the Slovenian sessions reproduced myths about SH by claiming that boys have difficulties controlling themselves because of their hormones. Similarly, at one of the classes in England, girls referred to boys touching girls' bums as both a male fascination with the female body and as usual, everyday behaviour, as one girl stated, 'that's just boys being boys'. In Portugal, boys convinced themselves that the girls 'liked it'.



Moreover, the Portugal team noted gender distinctions in the minimisation of SH such that even if boys and girls are able to recognise SH, boys tended to downplay the abuse by emphasising it was a joke and that it did not cause harm. This could be a way of boys forming a bond to cope with what they do now that they are aware it is SH. Patriarchal mores were reproduced in other ways by boys seeing SH of a woman/girl as a slight on the husband/boyfriend rather than on the woman/girl.

Moreover, male students also performed masculinity during the sessions. Three out of four research teams reported distinct gender differences in the behaviour of students during the sessions. While Slovenia noted that the boys were quieter in the presence of girls, in both Malta and England the boys were boisterous, and this was amplified in the presence of girls while the girls spoke less in the presence of boys and had to be prepared and encouraged to Speak Up/Out ahead of the final mixed session. The Maltese team also noted that girls were looking for support and a supportive environment whereas the boys were acting up. Moreover, when the Bystanders' video was played after a discussion about gender stereotypes, overall the students paid close attention and reported that the video is a good reflection of the reality of sexual harassment, but some boys laughed during the video, particularly when intimate photographs of a girl were displayed on mobile phones. And the racialised aspects of masculinity also came through as boys at two schools made racist comments about one of the black boys in the film.

In Portugal, student-led activities gave rise to some fantastic original ideas about how to prevent SH as bystanders. However, the involvement with proposals for taking the work forward was more difficult in the sports' vocational group, where boys are the majority of the class. This might have to do with their lack of interest about debating this topic, but it can perhaps be related to the fact that they comply with the hegemonic masculinities and intentionally resist these discussions (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Robinson, 2005).

**STAFF**

School staff across all four sites noted the normalisation of sexual harassment and raised concerns about the daily incidence of lots of forms of SH from sexist verbal abuse to touching. However, there were divergent views. On the one hand, staff were keen on the bystander intervention and wanted to create space for what they felt was a necessary conversation and they wanted to learn more about how best to tackle SH. On







the other hand, some of them seemed to come out with the same victim-blaming stereotypes and assumptions as the students. For example, staff at schools in Portugal also referred to girls being ‘provocative’ and claimed they ‘like to be harassed’ and staff had some class-based stereotypes about some girls. At one of the schools in England a teacher wanted to understand how he could have a conversation with girls to encourage them to wear longer skirts while another suggested that ‘shy girls’ just don’t know how to receive compliments. Some staff placed the onus on the girls as they expected them to Speak Up/Out to tackle SH but research teams observed the problem with this in contexts where students do not feel believed and there are no clear reporting and support mechanisms in place.

All four research/intervention teams concluded that staff needed as much awareness raising work as the students. The programme had as much impact on staff knowledge as it did on student learning as staff became more able to recognise SH.

As with students distinguishing between more or less serious forms of SH, staff at schools in England also wanted to distinguish between ‘low level’ and ‘high level’ cases. This was connected to resource implications: wanting to distinguish situations where they have an obligation to respond. In several schools, staff were aware that if they had to respond to all SH, this would take up most of their time. This acknowledgement reveals the extent to which SH has become normalised in schools, and how limited the engagement of staff with it is.

Conversely, the Slovenian team found that staff were distancing themselves from SH so that although they accepted it was happening, they were inclined to think of it as happening out there somewhere, in parks, in large cities, elsewhere, and they maintained that they did not have experience of SH in their specific school. This extended into victim-blaming with staff viewing their role as telling girls where they should not go and how not to dress to ‘avoid’ SH. This followed on from their view that girls have become more violent and more vulgar (so less deserving victims). As noted in the context section above, there were two schools (one in Malta and one in Slovenia) with dress codes and this could either reflect or be a consequence of a more conservative attitude and an undercurrent of sexual double standards as they had different rules for and views of boys. Staff also minimised the effect of sexual harassment by saying they too had experiences of SH but it did not have any major impact on them.



In Malta, teachers and staff mostly expressed the wish to learn about what constitutes sexual harassment, specifically to be guided by a clear definition of what sexual harassment is. The main preoccupation was with wanting a clear set of rules and description of acceptable/not acceptable behaviours and a clear set of guidelines on what to do in particular situations.



**RESPONDING TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

In this section we outline findings from discussions with students and staff about how they have been responding, why they may not intervene, their attempts at active bystanding, and how they planned/did take the work forward. These findings are drawn from the qualitative data collected during the second meeting with staff [T2], and, with students, the Concept Maps activity, discussions after the showing of the Bystanders animation film, the role plays, and the follow up meetings.

**STUDENTS**

As we have already noted above, for the most part, there was a high level of engagement from students. Changes in levels of awareness and feelings about the issues were palpable, particularly in relation to the girls. The Portugal team noted, for instance, that girls may have started out with feelings of shame, fear, compassion and pity, quite a few of them ended the sessions with feelings of anger and resistance, important emotions when connected with the literature that suggests anger precedes action and socio-political transformation (Brody, 1997; Holmes, 2004; Jaggar, 1989). Similarly, the England country report reflects on an example where a female student started out by using phrases like ‘that’s just boys’ but ended a relatively short session with heightened energy and commitment to being at the forefront of a poster campaign against SH. So, previously students may have dismissed SH as ‘usual’ behaviour because of its normalisation within a context of gender norms but their active involvement in creating agendas for change in their school cultures is evidence of the shifts they were able to make in a relatively short period of time. Unfortunately, it has to be said that Slovenia, Malta and Portugal encountered groups of boys that were completely disinterested if not hostile to the programme. This raises questions about the claims that bystander programmes offer an alternative and more positive route to approaching boys and men in work on gender-based violence.

The concept maps exercise was the basis for collecting the thoughts of students about why they do not intervene or respond when they witness SH and also an opportunity to garner their perspectives on why teachers don’t respond. There were a lot of similar responses across the four countries.

Reasons given for why students do not intervene included: lack of interest; not thinking it’s important; playing it down/minimising; thinking it’s useless to react; not recognising it is SH; shame; fear of repercussions; not knowing who to tell/how to report; peer



pressure; threats and bullying. Boys also added: concerns about reputation; that it might be their friend; concern about sanctions by teachers; double standards in the treatment of girls and boys.

We've summarised the students' suggestions on why teachers don't intervene as follows and they are surprisingly similar to the reasons given for the students not getting involved: they don't believe the student; they don't take it seriously; they don't care; don't think it's their problem/part of their job; they are afraid or scared; unaware of the issues; unaware of what they can do; uncomfortable; they are worried about the school reputation; not confident enough; they are worried about making the situation worse; don't want to seem bossy/infringe on students' lives; they are scared to lose their job; and their friends are involved.

Facilitators from the partner organisations worked with the vignettes discussed above to encourage students to think seriously about becoming active bystanders by encouraging them to role play appropriate and useful responses to the scenarios. In England, it was enlivening – students really engaged and offered a number of alternative ways of responding that involved deflection, distraction and interruption. The facilitators were very experienced in doing this work in schools so had suggestions for the students when there was a block. Interestingly, there was a gender dimension to the bystander interventions proposed by students – in both the UK and Malta, boys were far more aggressive, they regularly advocated fighting or confronting the harasser whereas girls largely focused on creating distractions, finding ways to safely exit the situation and for bystanders to act as a form of support by standing by/next to the victim.

Unfortunately, both the Maltese and Portuguese teams had difficulty implementing the role play exercise. For Malta the issue was one of time because so much time was required for the awareness raising aspects of the programme that there was not enough space to complete all the tasks assigned for that session and therefore it was the role play that was dropped. In Portugal, time was also an issue but when the team tried the role play with one school, the response was limited as most students remained passive bystanders. The Portuguese team put this down to the lack of specific training of the facilitators to really ensure this was a dynamic activity. At the school where the activity was attempted, both boys and girls said they would not intervene because "they do not do it in real life" and/or did not view the situation as SH.



However, students across the four countries, had a huge number of suggestions for things that students and teachers can do, with Slovenian students adding the proviso that responses need to be immediate. These suggestions included: distract by asking for the time or where a classroom was; act like you were really pleased to see the victim and take them by the arm and move away with them; confront the harasser; support the victim; stand close to the victim; get a group to rally round and get involved; tell an authority figure; film it (typical of social media generations); shout and get physical. Some students and teachers argued that a better intervention depends on the willingness of the victim to do something about it.

These potential actions were reflected in the poster or Speak Up/Out logo activity for which students created really strong and positive slogans including:

- Don't have fun by humiliating others
- Help. Today for me, tomorrow for you
- Harassment is NOT OK
- Fear? Ashamed? Don't be. Ask for help
- Stop catcalling
- Speak with teachers about sexual harassment
- Sexual Harassment is violence!
- No one has the right to ignore the "NO" of a woman!
- I do not want your compliments, I want your respect
- Teach men to respect, not women to fear
- Public transportation is public, women's bodies ARE NOT
- My body, my rules
- The body is hers, do not touch without permission
- You have to act!
- Respect and you will be respected
- Observing is not enough, act
- Stand up, speak louder!
- Stand up but don't stand by
- Bystanders stand with you!
- Stand up and fight for everyone!!!



**STAFF**

As discussed in the previous sections, quite a few members of staff across the four countries spoke about the normalisation of sexual harassment, which means they were fully aware of it and also that it tended to be overlooked as ‘usual’ behaviour. There were very engaged and committed staff across the schools that appreciated the bystander intervention and were poised to take the work forward. However, as noted under ‘Country Contexts’ the absence of specific policies and the limited attention paid to sexism and gender inequality more broadly meant that either staff did not have a common language or understanding of SH and/or procedures were not in place to respond to it. Few felt able in these contexts to prioritise tackling SH as part of their workload.

Other barriers to intervention echoed concerns raised by students that teachers may lack the knowledge or competence to respond to reports of SH. From our perspective, part of the problem with responding to student reports of SH was clearly about not recognising behaviour that constitutes SH. Also, a cycle which reproduces the status quo - staff minimise SH because they think it’s less common or serious than it is and students are less likely to report an incident if they think it’s not taken seriously or if there is no procedure for reporting. Clearly there were staff that were unaware of protocols where they did exist and there were specific issues for staff, such as in Slovenia, hearing of students being sexually harassed or aware of this happening to others during their work placements. Slovenian staff also said that they would feel more confident if there was a supportive environment in which they could consult with an expert on appropriate responses. Staff expressed concerns about accusing someone of sexual harassment if they were unsure of the views of the girl or the motivation of the harasser. While staff in Portugal were surprised to learn that students identified teachers as potential harassers, in Slovenia they made clear that they would see teacher-student harassment as more serious than peer harassment.

In Portugal, some staff de-prioritised the issue not because of ‘academic’ workloads, but rather because they did not consider it to be a serious issue that merited attention, the project team observed that by the end of the project there were still some teachers that did not recognise SH as gender-based violence. In England, staff engagement was fairly consistent in two out of three schools but the school where staff engagement declined significantly after the first session, they, particularly the male teachers, minimised SH and tended to hold the victim responsible. Ironically, these members of staff presented themselves as already knowledgeable and did not want to engage in awareness raising







exercises. Staff at the other two schools were engaged but were struggling with heavy workloads.

Both the Slovenian and Portuguese research teams reported latent (and sometimes overt) socio-biological determinism whereby staff claimed SH to be a natural part of courtship, they excused it as a way for boys to gain the attention of a girl they find attractive. This would suppose that harassment is a necessary precursor to an intimate relationship because boys are expected to be insistent and ‘conquer’ girls, whether the girl wants the attention or not. It’s clear from the Portuguese country report that students were well aware of this view among teachers.

When asked what they *were* doing in response to sexual harassment, Slovenian staff said they were reporting it to the police where they thought a crime had taken place though they were not overly familiar with the law on this. Staff in England reported to the police in relation to new laws around sexting but otherwise referred (some, not all) cases to their school’s safeguarding officer. Staff in Slovenia and England tended to confiscate phones as an immediate reaction to online harassment and Slovenian staff identified responding to online harassment as a specific gap in their knowledge.

*Follow up and taking the work forward*

While a considerable amount was achieved during the course of the project, there were some issues with the timescale, which meant that we began work with schools mid-way through a school year and by the time we completed the sessions, most schools were approaching exam periods and summer recess. In Malta, as the new academic year began, the headmaster at one of the schools changed and this impacted the follow up. The knock-on effect of all these factors is that for all four teams, on returning to the schools for our three month follow ups, little had changed and indeed there would need to be contact over a longer period of time after the intervention to ensure that proposals convert into action.

Nonetheless, in order to encourage schools to take the work forward, research teams and their partner organisations took key observations and materials (concept maps, agendas for change, poster statements) from the students’ sessions to a second session with members of staff. Action points were formulated and students/staff that were interested in progressing the work were identified.

At one of the schools in Malta, a student created a website on sexual harassment that was to be made available to all students on the first day of school. They were also given





school funds for a poster campaign. Staff at this school began talks on developing a new sexual harassment policy. In Slovenia, at one school pupils and teachers established a group to take forward the work with the support of DNK (Association for Non-violent Communication). They planned to design a leaflet with basic information, to write a text and to make drawings, so that the leaflet could be shown at the main LCD monitors at school. There were also meetings at all three schools to develop a protocol. DNK will provide guidance to schools as they develop these. At the end of August, a lecture for teachers was held about the results of the project and a common reflection on the treatment of violence at school followed - not just sexual, all forms. The staff planned to introduce new rules on SH when the school documents would be revised. The lecture reminded them on principles that are important in dealing with victims. After the lecture, they worked on the protocol.

In Malta, one out of three schools agreed to include more materials tackling sexual harassment as part of their social studies curriculum. In Portugal, one of the schools was particularly pro-active on this and a range of staff suggested ways to raise SH as part of their curriculum – the physical education teacher suggested talking about sexual harassment within the theme of acrobatics, by discussing unwanted touch and consent, an English teacher said that she could include the topic when studying social media with particular emphasis on gender discrimination, a language teacher proposed including it as part of discussions on medieval lyrics, and the biology and geology teachers suggested an emphasis on "respect for the others" when they teach the human reproductive system.

In Portugal, students at one school composed a song, lyrics and melody, related to loneliness and overcoming problems. Students from another class used sexual harassment as a topic for a marathon of debating philosophy, students on a catering vocational course created a list of cocktails and milkshakes, named in relation to opposition to SH - "Don't put your hand on me", "Stop harassing", "Prevent, defend and combat". They also handed out bracelets with the following messages: "Sexual harassment is not my thing", "We are against sexual harassment", "Don't be ashamed to talk; report sexual harassment".

In England in two schools the issue was taken on by the recently formed feminist societies, and in one it was the topic of a school assembly. One of these two schools also made a clear plan to work with a local women's organisation to develop further educational sessions and policy on the issue. The PRU discussed making a strong



statement on the unacceptability of sexual harassment as part of the contract students signed when they joined the school.

**CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS**

To conclude, we return to the original aims and objectives of the project:

- to increase knowledge and awareness of sexual harassment (SH) in students and staff;
- to increase the motivation of bystanders to stop SH in high schools;
- to develop school policies and protocols on SH;

**RECOGNITION AND AWARENESS OF SH**

There was movement in terms of recognition and awareness among some staff and some students, but this was not consistent either within schools or across the four countries. In a number of schools, the attendance of staff was not consistent across the two sessions, meaning that the same ground had to be covered twice. In all four countries we realised that the understandings of staff on SH, sexism and gender inequality were basic at best, with a few notable exceptions. One of the key learnings of the project is that school contexts are ones in which sexual harassment is normalised and tolerated, which in turn means that teachers take a considerable range of behaviour for granted and have not developed skills and knowledge, nor is there an institutional backing, in order to intervene and create change. In short, they do not draw a line.

That so little attention is paid to the conditions in which girls learn is a matter of considerable concern, given that the EU Fundamental Rights Agency found sexual harassment to be the most common form of violence against women. Our reflection here is that any future use of the Speak Up/Out materials will need to invest more time and resources in working with staff before implementing the intervention with students.

**CHANGE IN STUDENTS ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS**

Most students, with the exception of a few groups of resistant boys in two countries, wanted to be part of change with respect to SH. Many groups of girls attested to the fact that this was an everyday event which they either experienced or witnessed. The content of the programme encouraged and enabled students to question taken for granted behaviours and to explore the impacts they may have on those subjected to



harassment. While the role play exercise meant students were able to practice a range of ways in which they could become active bystanders, there needed to be more time to rehearse and embed this within their class and wider than this to the whole school. Where they had little faith in teachers – for a range of reasons across the four countries – the spaces in which they could make change were diminished. What we were able to show however, was that there was an appetite for the kind of discussions and debates that the programme generated and to be part of creating change among young people.

#### HOW SCHOOLS HAVE TAKEN ACTION

We have noted elsewhere the specific actions which were taken by some schools as a direct outcome of the bystanders project. Here we reflect on why this part of the project was the most challenging to implement. The fact that not a single school across the four countries had a policy on sexual harassment, and no teacher could recall any training on how to deal with it, was another reflection of the limited attention to the issue in schools, and a failure to take responsibility for the fact that schools are a conducive context in which sexual harassment is an everyday experience for girls. This was not, therefore, a fertile field, in which the seeds planted by the bystanders project could thrive and grow. There was limited support from school leadership teams, with much more coming from committed teachers who had already recognised the issue. Without the backing of policy and school leaders, however, their influence had limits.

One shift that was evident across teachers and students was the way in which the intervention required them to think about the victims of harassment. Initial thoughts on what could/should be done tended to focus on the harasser, leaving victims both unsupported and potentially open to social exclusion if they had made a report.

There was a sense of fatalism among many students and staff, and this was so endemic that all that was possible was to respond to the most overt and harmful behaviours through bullying and safeguarding policies.

We are not fatalistic, we know that our materials are engaging and they enable students to ask questions and reach new insights and conclusions. For this to move into change at the institutional level required more time and resources than were available through this project, but we now know that to embed the learning in a school culture requires: specific training for teachers; working over a longer time within schools; building support for the project in school leadership teams and offering template policies which can be adapted by staff and students in specific locations.



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