



Resolution 1803 (2011)¹

Education against violence at school

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is deeply concerned by the fact that too many schools in Europe continue to be confronted with very serious acts of violence. Incidents include attacks by pupils, with or without weapons, bullying and harassment among pupils, sexual violence, acts of hostility and even attacks on teachers by pupils and the use of violence by teachers against pupils.

2. Although such events may remain infrequent, the Assembly considers that they deserve the greatest attention as they always produce very significant – if not dramatic – effects on the people involved and their immediate environment, provoking feelings of frustration, fear and insecurity. They are a worrying sign that, despite many efforts, the phenomena of violence at school and of violence in society in general have not been properly addressed.

3. Humanism, non-violent behaviour, tolerance and mutual respect are common fundamental values upheld by the Council of Europe since its founding six decades ago and the Organisation takes pride in its long-standing efforts to combat all kinds of violence, in particular against children.

4. Fundamental safeguards are provided by Articles 3 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and by the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163). The latter states in Article 17 that children and young persons shall be protected against negligence, violence or exploitation, with a view to ensuring the effective exercise of their right to grow up in an environment which encourages the full development of their personality and of their physical and mental capacities.

5. The Assembly has dealt with these issues in many texts, including [Recommendation 561 \(1969\)](#) on the protection of minors against ill-treatment; [Recommendation 1666 \(2004\)](#) on a Europe-wide ban on corporal punishment of children; [Recommendation 1778 \(2007\)](#) on child victims: stamping out all forms of violence, exploitation and abuse; [Recommendation 1905 \(2010\)](#) and [Resolution 1714 \(2010\)](#) on children who witness domestic violence; and [Recommendation 1934 \(2010\)](#) on child abuse in institutions: ensuring full protection of the victims.

6. Standards for the protection of children against violence are also included in Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (79) 17 on the protection of children against ill-treatment, Recommendation No. R (85) 4 on violence in the family and Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)10 on integrated national strategies for the protection of children from violence. The Assembly also recalls General Policy Recommendation No. 10 on combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.

7. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees the harmonious and safe development of each child and its Article 19 explicitly relates to protecting children against violence. The Assembly welcomes, in this context, the work of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary General on Violence against Children.

1. Assembly debate on 13 April 2011 (15th Sitting) (see [Doc. 12513](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Flego). Text adopted by the Assembly on 13 April 2011 (15th Sitting). See also [Recommendation 1965 \(2011\)](#).



8. The Assembly recalls that according to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and ethnic or religious groups.

9. Notwithstanding worldwide condemnation, violence unfortunately appears to be an aspect of human relations which is very difficult to eradicate. It occurs everywhere, between individuals and groups as well as within families, social groups and societies. It can manifest itself in direct physical aggression or take less evident, but equally harmful, psychological forms. Violence at school and violence in society are closely linked; it is therefore not surprising that various forms of violence exist within the school environment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

16. The media have been producing and distributing violent content in different forms for decades and the debate about the impact of such content has existed from the start. With the development of new forms of interactive online media, a potentially greater psychological impact has been identified and should be studied further. On the other hand, since children spend more and more time using media, informal education through the media may produce positive effects and should be considered and investigated in more depth.

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

17.1. Legal framework and administrative practices:

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

17.1.2. penal and/or disciplinary sanctions should be proportionate to the seriousness of these acts; however, with regard to young perpetrators of violence, account should be taken of the guidelines enshrined in Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)11 on the European rules for juvenile offenders subject to sanctions or measures, and in the Issue Paper of 2009 on "Children and Juvenile Justice: Proposals for Improvements", published by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights;

- 17.1.3. all acts of violence should be investigated and recorded and, where an act is of a sufficiently serious nature, it should be reported to the competent law-enforcement or disciplinary authorities; in this context, appropriate complaints mechanisms should be set up for pupils in education settings;
- 17.1.4. administrative procedures relating to acts of violence at school should guarantee the right of parents to be fully and promptly informed, as well as the right of the victims of violence to the protection of privacy;
- 17.1.5. school head teachers should be held professionally responsible for the effective implementation of the obligations outlined above;
- 17.2. Awareness raising and training:
- 17.2.1. a culture of democracy and human rights should be promoted at school, in accordance with the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, adopted within the framework of Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7;
- 17.2.2. raising awareness about violence reduction, non-violent conflict resolution and children's rights, in particular at school, should form part of general education curricula; violence should be addressed from different angles in classes on, for example, history, literature, media, the arts, music, sports, sociology, psychology, philosophy and religion or ethics;
- 17.2.3. school teachers and staff should have mandatory training to better understand the different forms of violence (physical, psychological, verbal and behavioural violence) and learn how to combat such violence and respect the right of children to a non-violent school;
- 17.2.4. training for school staff should take into account the specific needs related to their responsibilities, but also the needs of pupils, especially those who are more vulnerable;
- 17.3. Preventive and supportive measures:
- 17.3.1. strict security measures should be taken to enforce the prohibition of weapons and drugs in schools and to prevent criminal acts at school;
- 17.3.2. teaching methods should help address the causes of violence and seek to avoid individual pupils finding themselves in a situation of isolation or exclusion; to this end, schools should provide specific support for pupils with learning, physical, social or other difficulties, reduce competitive trends in classes, foster teamwork, co-operation and tolerance and provide opportunities for pupils to control their physical or psychological tensions in a non-violent manner through sports, music or artistic activities;
- 17.3.3. school staff should include specialised confidential counsellors, trained to help pupils who have experienced violence and those who have committed violent acts inside or outside school; in addition, mediators and psychologists should be available for pupils, their parents and teachers;
- 17.3.4. within each school district, specialised teams with relevant knowledge and expertise should be established to provide advice for schools facing particular difficulties;
- 17.4. Involvement of pupils and their families:
- 17.4.1. schools should develop practical projects and extracurricular activities (such as forums, round tables, open days) on the problem of violence at school, which bring together teachers, pupils and parents; particular attention should be paid to a non-sensational approach of the media (print media, music, television, film, Internet, mobile phones, etc.) in relation to violence at school and social violence in everyday life (such as family violence, group violence, criminal violence);
- 17.4.2. schools should organise voluntary programmes with parents, aimed at helping them to assume their parental responsibilities and ensure full recognition and respect of children's rights;
- 17.4.3. in implementing targeted projects and activities, schools should collaborate with NGOs that have specific knowledge and experience relating to education against violence;

17.5. Monitoring and assessment:

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

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

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

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