Violence against children with disabilities in schools

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High Level Meeting on Disability
Riga, 11-12 May

EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Overview of the project

- **What?** Violence against children with disabilities
  - legal and policy framework
  - triggers, forms and settings
  - challenges and promising practices

> In school: "You were told all the time that you were worthless, you're bad, stupid and all that. So I never had any friends at all."
> (Sweden, male, 45)

- **Why?** Under-researched area falling between the gaps

Research design

- **Where?**
  - 28 Member States, and
  - 132 interviews in Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, the United Kingdom

- **Who?**
  - CRPD Article 33 bodies
  - Public authorities
  - Representative organisations (DPOs, NGOs …)
  - Human rights protection bodies

International and European legal and policy framework
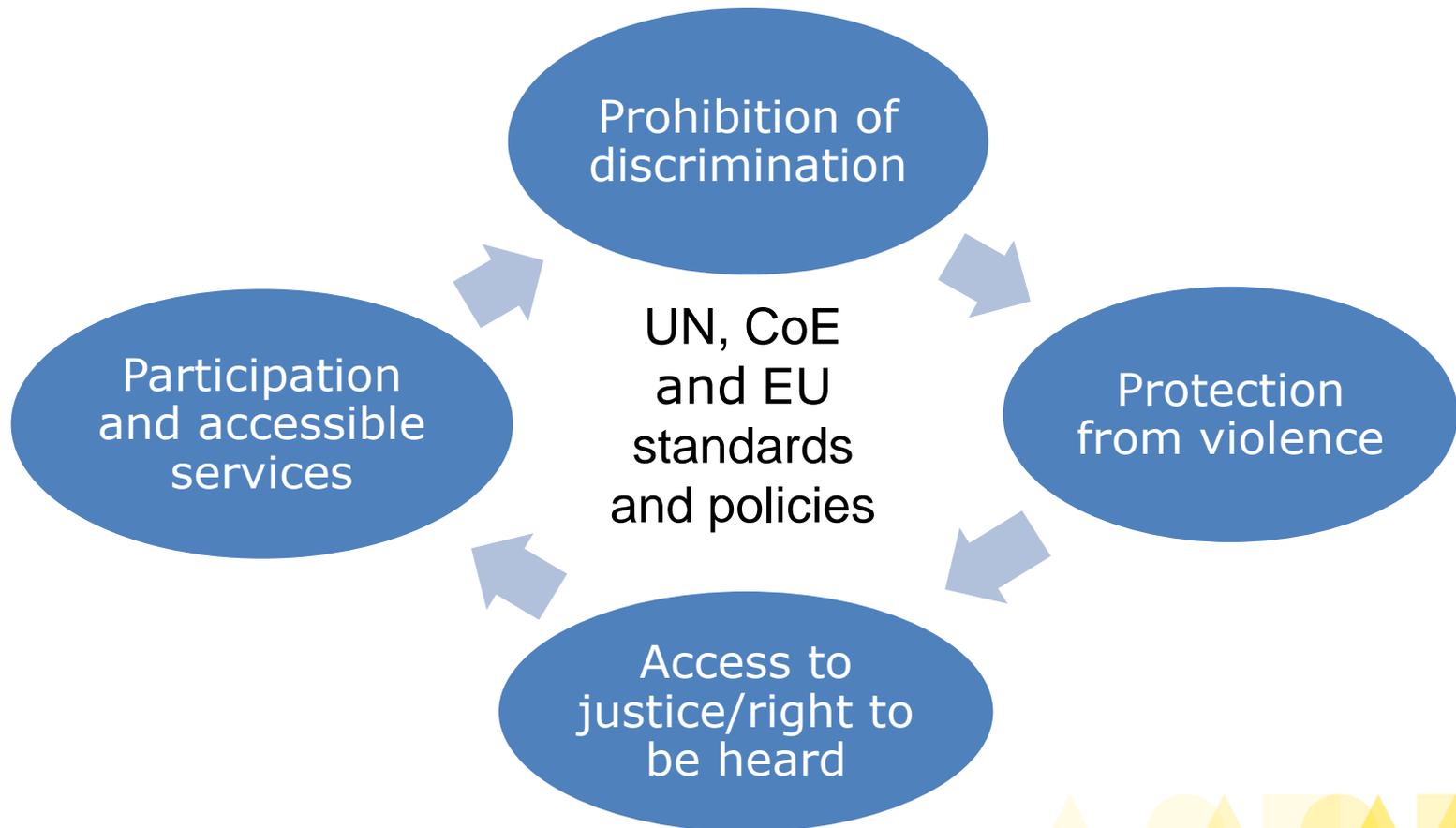
National legal and policy frameworks

- Law: risk of falling through the gap

  "Many legal documents were ratified without a clear plan or vision for their implementation. If you try to take a child with Down syndrome to a grammar school, you will hear: 'You must be kidding. We have no training to work with these kids.'"(Lithuania, National Human Rights Body)

- Policies: weak coverage and few practical tools
  - National policies on child rights or disability
  - Violence in particular settings

- Implementation a challenge

Characteristics of violence against children with disabilities

- More likely to be victims of violence than children without disabilities

- Children with 'invisible disabilities' and children with multiple and severe disabilities at higher risk

- Triggers of violence: exclusion, prejudice, 'vulnerability' and 'easy targets', overburdening of parents and overextended and untrained personnel

- Intersection with other characteristics and multiple layers of risk

Forms of violence in schools

> "[in school] a child with disability is not accepted by the principal, not by the professor and not by peers themselves – that setting is a fertile ground for the occurrence of violence, which will go unsanctioned, because it only reflects the attitude of the majority." (Croatia, NHRB)

- Predominant forms: bullying, psychological abuse and verbal insults

- Children with intellectual disabilities and children with psychosocial disabilities at higher risk

> "Not selecting them at gymnastics […], secretly bullying them when the teacher isn't looking, taking their belongings, not wanting to play with them, [...] not wanting to hang out with them, not wanting to sit next to them in class." (Netherlands, representative of funding organisation)

Measures to prevent violence against children with disabilities

"You have to work with the [children] themselves, the staff working with them and the organisation itself to make sure it is a well-rounded and understood issue"
(UK, Representative of NGO)

"In this field there is still a lot to do. It is a pathway that needs education for everybody."
(Portugal, Public Authority)

"I see no reason to create special programmes, special courses and training. Hostility is hostility, intolerance is intolerance, degrading other people is degrading regardless of their physical or mental state, or emotional condition." *(Poland, Organisation for children's education, rehabilitation and upbringing)*

Measures targeting all stakeholders

- Teaching for diversity - increasing awareness and fostering respect (Czech Republic)

- Tackling stereotypes and prejudice against people with disabilities in schools (Slovenia)

"When they teach about human rights, it is one of the best measures against bullying, because it illustrates that you have rights yourself. And when you have rights yourself, you don't have to step on others."

(Denmark, representative of a disability umbrella organisation)

Measures targeted at children with disabilities

- Awareness raising initiatives focus on developing skills to recognise risk situations
  - o 'Stay safe' – personal safety skills programme (Ireland)

"Children with disabilities don't speak out because they get so used to being treated poorly that they actually tolerate far too much abuse without reporting. We have got to get them to understand it is their right to raise issues." (United Kingdom, National charitable organisation)

"Strengthening children's self-image and self-confidence and self-esteem so that children can react when something is not right."
(Sweden, NGO representative)

"We should avoid a situation where only fully able persons have a say in what's good for a person with disability."
(Poland, NGO representative)

- **Empowerment measures**
  - o Involved children and youth - strengthen children's self-esteem and self-image (Sweden)
  - o Rock and Water and children with autism (the Netherlands)

- **Participation of children with disabilities**
  - o Hear our voices - training children with intellectual disabilities to participate in various matters which affect them directly (6 MS)

Measures targeting professionals

- Guidelines, protocols and toolkits
  - Index for inclusion - practical tool to support schools in improving teaching based on inclusive values (United Kingdom)

- Training
  - Anti-bullying alliance: compilation of guidance for professionals on bullying

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