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Report from the Closing Conference on

Third-Party Violence in the Education Sector:

Social Partners in Education concerned about Violence
in Schools: *"How to Prevent and Mitigate Third-Party
Violence and Harassment in Schools"*

Brussels, 22-23 October 2012



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Third-party Violence in the Education Sector – Closing Conference

1. Introduction

The Closing Conference of the project *Social Partners in Education Concerned about Violence in Schools: How to Prevent and Mitigate Third-Party Violence and Harassment in Schools* was held in Brussels on the 22 and 23 October 2012. The conference was the finalising event of the project, and gathered around 60 participants from different national teacher trade unions and the European Federation of Education Employers (EFEE). The invited speakers came from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), the International Observatory on Violence in School and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW). The **objective of the conference** was to give the participants opportunity to reflect on how teacher trade unions, teachers and other education employees and education employers can contribute to the prevention and mitigating of third-part violence and harassment in schools. This included inviting the conference participants to discuss and suggest amendments for the Implementation Guide for the Education Sector of the Multi-Sectoral Guidelines to Tackle Third-Party Violence and Harassment Related to Work.

1.1. Project description

The European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE-CSEE) launched the project *Social Partners in Education Concerned about Violence in Schools: How to Prevent and Mitigate Third-Party Violence and Harassment in Schools* under the call for proposals VP/2011/001 within the context of the budget heading "Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue". On 30 September 2010, the European Social Partners from the education, local governments, hospital, private security and commerce sectors, represented by ETUCE, EFEE, EPSU, CEMR, UNI-EUROPA, HOSPEEM, COESS and EUROCOMMERCE¹, signed the *Multi-sectoral Guidelines to Tackle Third-Party Violence and Harassment Related to Work*. The aim of these guidelines lies in ensuring that all workplaces have a results-oriented policy, addressing third-party violence. These guidelines contain practical steps that can be taken by employers, workers and

Definition of third-party violence: physical violence, verbal aggression, or the threat of physical violence where the aggressor is not a work colleague, e.g. the person, customer, client or patient receiving the goods or services (EU-OSHA, 2010)

¹ For the full names see list of abbreviations in section 9.

their representatives/trade unions to mitigate and prevent third-party violence. The European Agency for Occupational Safety and Health (EU-OSHA) defines third party violence as *“physical violence, verbal aggression, or the threat of physical violence where the aggressor is not a work colleague, e.g. the person, customer, client or patient receiving the goods or services”*². Violence towards a teacher from e.g. a parent or a student would thus be considered third-party violence. It is an occupational health and safety hazard, covered by EU legislation.

1.2. Words of Welcome and Introduction

Ronnie Smith, ETUCE President, welcomed the participants to the conference and expressed his appreciation of their interest in the conference topic. Underlining the joint responsibility between employers and employees, Mr Smith pointed out two issues that add to the importance and pertinence of combating third-party violence and harassment in schools. First of all, the global economic crisis creates new challenges for schools, teachers, education employees and employers in tackling the issues at hand. Secondly the many technological changes and inventions create possibilities for cyber-harassment and bullying, making it pertinent to address these types of violence and harassment in schools as well. **Sarah Kik**, Assistant to the General Secretary, EFEE, gave her words of welcome and underlined that the project aim will become more attainable with a dialogue between employees and the employer side. She emphasised EFEE’s commitment and positive approach to the project, accentuating that employers and employees must be able to work together in safe and healthy learning environments. **Martin Rømer**, European Director, gave the participants an overview of the project activities and the ETUCE priorities on the issue of third-party violence and harassment in schools. Mr Rømer stressed the importance for the social partners in education to collaborate and of providing a definition of the concept of third-party violence that holds for the education sector.

2. Key Note Speech: The Impact of Third-party Violence in Education and its Prevention

In his presentation **Eric Debarbieux**, Director of the International Observatory on Violence in School³, France, pointed out the manifold



Eric Debarbieux, Director of the International Observatory on Violence in School

²See <http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/violence-harassment-TERO09010ENC>

³Website: <http://www.ijvs.org/1-6035-International-Observatory-on-Violence-in-School.php>

implications of third-party violence for the well-being of everybody in the education sector, students/pupils and teachers as well as other education employees. Having carried out a range of surveys on the topic, he emphasised that it is crucial to have specific statistics to evaluate the actual situation and to develop **specific tools** to find the victims of third-party violence and to make sure that incidents are reported. Often victims of third-party violence do not wish to inform or testify, because they feel ashamed or have fear. Eric Debarbieux introduced two possible ways for reporting incidents, one being a computerised system, connected to public local authorities and their administrative system, the other concerns report systems, established at school level. According to him the most effective way of addressing third-party violence is by improving pedagogies and combating of social marginalisation and exclusion. This may include supportive measures such as video surveillance and cooperation with the police. Mr Debarbieux described the concept of **micro violence** and pointed out that these repeatedly carried out occurrences should not be overlooked. If the focus is directed at severe and major incidences only, the risk is that the repetitive and smaller acts of micro violence are overseen. However, these can make the working and learning environment in class unbearable. He further presented data concerning the perpetrators who are often the parents of students and to a lesser extent the pupils/students. Mr Debarbieux stated that there are many possible reasons for violence in schools, such as the economic situation, the family and the institutional setting. Alluding to the strong link between the quality of the learning environment and the victimisation, he explained that the learning environment is composed of the relations between grown-ups and pupils/students and the capacity to have a dialogue instead of engaging in conflictual confrontations. Mr Debarbieux concluded his presentation by declaring that in the end it is a problem of **lack of respect**. One must improve the learning environment, working together and creating solidarity, helping each other to solve the collective challenge.

Micro violence: small occurrences that amount to violence because they are repeated and accumulated (Eric Debarbieux)

3. Challenging third-party violence in the public sector in Europe

Brenda O'Brien, Manager of the Brussels Liaison Office, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA), contributed to the conference by disseminating her knowledge on third-party violence in the European public sector. She started her presentation by introducing the

EU-OSHA and giving and overview of the agency’s activities, priorities and campaigns⁴. EU-OSHA



Brenda O’Brien, Manager of the Brussels Liaison Office, the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

defines third-party violence very broadly to cover all sectors. She stated that physical violence is one of the most **serious occupational hazards**. She brought up the different **consequences of third-party violence** which can include injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, sickness, absence and poor job performance, all extremely serious both for the individual and his/her workplace. Mrs O’Brien also introduced the primary source for the information used by EU-OSHA called “**ESENER**⁵”

It is important to avoid an individualist approach to third-party violence and to ensure that it is understood as an occupational safety and health hazard which cannot be blamed on the individual (Brenda O’Brien)

(European Survey of enterprises on New & Emerging Risks) and presented the findings on the main concerns and causes regarding

violence from this survey. In the health, social and education sector violence and harassment are the most worrisome issues. The survey showed that **lack of technical support, guidance and expertise** are the most important barriers for dealing with this particular issue. Mrs O’Brien underlined, that risk assessments are obligatory. The main reason why workplaces undertake risk assessments is legislation. However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Progress can be achieved only with the commitment from management and authorities and the involvement of all partners and stakeholders.

4. Presentations of two good practices from the education sector

Johnny Herén, Sociologist, presented the good practice of the Sunnerby School, Sweden. The project had focused on creating a safer workplace school and covered four schools which had experienced incidents of third-party violence. He prepared statistics on basis of 45 lessons which he examined. From his observations he made the primary conclusion that it is necessary to examine the behaviour of staff, pupils and parents in order to mitigate and prevent third-party violence and to create a safer learning environment. Some examples of the 28 prevention activities undertaken included staff education, coordination of anti-bullying activities at schools,

⁴ ETUCE is an official campaign partner for the current EU-OSHA campaign on...

⁵ See <http://osha.europa.eu/en/publications/reports/management-of-occupational-safety-and-health-analysis-of-data-from-the-esener>

name badges for staff and the preparation of a crisis plan. He underlined that working with different stakeholders was important to create ownership, involvement and a feeling of influence. Further key notions were a positive profiling of the schools, awareness raising and the creation of a common school vision.

Jennifer Moses, Policy Officer with NASUWT, National Officer for Equality and Training, UK, explained that it is necessary to consider the political context and climate which impact upon the incidence of third-party violence. Notably the current global economic crisis and its severe consequences for workers and society in general. Mrs Moses described the situation in UK schools, underlining that acts of extreme violence are rare. She brought up the subject of cyber-bullying, an increasing problem inside and outside schools and called for new tools for head teachers to tackle violence and bad behaviour. She concluded her contribution by presenting the NASUWT strategies for tackling violence and harassment at schools among which featured the lobbying of education authorities and training for education staff to promote a climate of non-violence with clear sanctions.

5. The draft implementation guide of the multi-sectoral guidelines to tackle third-party violence in the education sector

Anders Eklund, Advisory Group Member, gave a description of the overall project and the reasons for undertaking the project: preventing violence in schools and thereby improving the working environment for education employees, pupils/students and teachers. He underlined the necessity for **joint action** in order to create sustainable change and concluded by describing the aims of the implementation guide, which in the essence is to prevent and reduce third-party violence.

In the working group session on the draft implementation guide of the multi-sectoral guidelines to tackle third-party violence in the education sector the participants had the opportunity to discuss in detail and propose amendments to the document. The participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that actions are taken at strategic and decision-making level and include teachers' input. Linked to this the **employers' obligation** was highlighted as well as the need to raise awareness on the topic of third-party violence amongst school leaders and management at all levels in the education sector. A general need for a concrete and agreed **definition of third-party**

violence in line with legislative provisions was also reconfirmed. The micro level consequences of the global economic crisis were mentioned as triggers for heightened tension in the education sector, with the economic problems in families spilling over to the educational setting.

6. Third-party violence: Experience in the retail sector

Douglas Russell, Health and Safety Officer, USDAW, UK, provided statistics from the retail sector on the occurrence of violence therein. He underlined the importance of identifying the factors that prompt third-party violence such as robbery, queuing at checkouts, arguments over refunds etc. Mr Russell also presented the campaign '**Freedom from Fear**' that USDAW launched in 2002 which is directed at retail employers to make their workplaces safer. As a major campaign success there is more respect for retail workers from the public. Recommending the sharing of information and good practices across different sectors he highlighted some common issues that pertain to many sectors. Firstly the serious problem of underreporting; reasons for this can be fear of further attacks, fear of being blamed, shame of failure to cope, fear of losing your job, bureaucratic reporting systems etc. The second common issue regards local risk assessment. This demonstrates leadership, gives managers power to act, ensures worker involvement and is therefore important to carry out. A third point regards good conflict management training. The details of the training need to be sector specific, but these three issues can be shared between sectors.

7. Panel discussion on how and what use should be made of the draft implementation guide

Four speakers highlighted the specific use of the implementation guide from the perspective of teachers, teacher unions, education employers and of an external expert. **Anthony Casaru**, International Secretary, MUT, Malta, explained the priorities of the Malta Union of Teachers concerning third-party violence. He described a concrete incident happening in a Maltese school and explained how MUT took action upon hearing about this. Representatives from the union visited the place of the incident, arranged a press conference and immediately declared that violence would not be tolerated. **Stephane Vanoirbeck**, Advisor, SEGEC/EFEE, Belgium, stated that

third-party violence is an issue where the social dialogue is very important. It can influence the morale of staff and the education sector's possibilities for attracting employees. There are both economic and moral reasons for seeking to prevent and mitigate third-party violence and even though it might be impossible to completely eradicate it, the tendency is to eliminate third-party violence. If a member of staff is victimised school management must do the best it can to provide support. **Ewa Utrata**, Teacher at Zespól Szkól, Gdynia, Poland, recommended organizing regular lectures for teachers, pupils and parents in order to mitigate and prevent third-party violence. The best way to solve conflicts was according to Mrs Utrata mediation. Violence is usually a consequence of growing conflict and both sides have their own version of the background and to explain and investigate the situation is the first step. **Johnny Herén** underlined the importance of dialogue between the school management and teacher union representatives and the value of good school management. School management needs to back up the staff and help the teachers in all ways possible. Mr Herén highlighted once again that cooperation and communication are key notions in preventing and mitigating third-party violence.

8. Closing remarks and conclusion

The closing conference provided valuable opportunities for debate amongst the participants on how teachers and other education employees, teacher unions and education employers can contribute to prevent and mitigate third-party violence and harassment in schools. The comments received from the participants in the working group session will be implemented by the Project Advisory Group in order to prepare a draft for the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee in Education. The draft Implementation Guide for the Education Sector of the Multi-Sectoral Guidelines to Tackle Third-Party Violence and Harassment Related to Work will be presented for adoption to the ETUCE Committee in 2013 and the decision-making body of EFEE.

9. Abbreviations

CEMR	Council of European Municipalities and Regions
COESS	Confederation of European Security Services
EFEE	European Federation of Education Employers
EU-OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
EPSU	European Federation of Public Service Unions
ETUCE	European Trade Union Committee for Education
EUROCOMMERCE	Represents the Retail, Wholesale and International Trade Representation to the EU
HOSPEEM	European Hospital and Healthcare Employers' Association
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (UK)
UNI-EUROPA	European trade union federation representing workers in service sectors, such as private security, commerce etc.
USDAW	Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (UK)



**European Trade Union Committee for Education
Comité syndical européen de l'éducation**

Bd du Roi Albert II, 5 – 9th Floor
B-1210 Bruxelles, Belgique

T + 32 2 224 06 91/2
F + 32 2 224 06 94

secretariat@csee-etuice.org
www.csee-etuice.org