POLICY MONITORING REPORT

Reporting and Addressing Harassment in Schools

Municipality of Lipjan

Author: Rinor Murati

Review: KYC Kosova

Design: Sh.P.K. "SUKI"

 "Social Urban Innovation Kosova"

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of a monitoring initiative on harassment and bullying in secondary schools within the Municipality of Lipjan. Based on legal analysis, fieldwork, and student feedback, the report identifies gaps between existing policies and their implementation at the school level. Despite a comprehensive legal framework, harassment—particularly sexual harassment and bullying—remains underreported, and trust in institutional response mechanisms is low. The report concludes with targeted recommendations for strengthening local responses and ensuring safer, more inclusive school environments.

Harassment is a concerning phenomenon in secondary schools, negatively affecting students' sense of safety and well-being. Meetings with Student Councils have shown that harassment cases—especially sexual harassment and bullying—are not handled effectively, resulting in a lack of trust in educational institutions, case silence, and hesitation from students to report incidents.

This monitoring had two main objectives:

- Analyze whether existing policies on harassment (bullying, insults, sexual harassment) are clear and enforced in secondary schools;

- Provide concrete recommendations for improving the reporting and handling systems of such cases.

Methodology

Data collection focused on two aspects:

1. Analysis of existing laws and documents;

1. Field analysis, including:

- Meetings with the Lipjan Student Council;
- Discussions with school directors and municipal education officials;
- Student surveys on harassment types, reporting, and responses.

Legal and Regulatory Framework Analysis

Regulation QRK No. 21/2013: Governs prevention, identification, reporting, and handling of violence/harassment in pre-university institutions, requiring inter-institutional cooperation.

This protocol regulates the prevention, identification, reporting and treatment of all forms of violence and harassment in pre-university institutions, aiming at the protection of students and the creation of a safe environment. It requires inter-institutional cooperation (school, MED, police, etc.).

The main obligations of schools include:

- Establishing a Violence Prevention and Referral Team.
- Immediately reporting cases of violence to the authorities.
- Keeping documented evidence of cases.
- Providing psychological support to victims.
- Taking disciplinary measures against perpetrators.
- Informing students and parents about reporting and protection.
- Organizing training for staff.
- Cooperating with other institutions for complex cases.

Regulation QRK- No. 21/2013 on the Protocol for the Prevention and Referral of Violence in Pre-University Education Institutions (2013). Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo.

Law No. 05/L-021 on Protection from Discrimination

This law defines harassment as a form of discrimination and obliges institutions to take preventive measures and handle cases effectively. The law obliges schools and Municipal Education Directorates to:

- Create clear mechanisms for protection from discrimination and handling cases of harassment;
- Appoint responsible persons within schools for monitoring and reporting cases of discrimination and harassment;
- Ensure that any complaint is handled impartially and effectively;
- Provide for punitive measures for those who commit or incite discrimination or harassment in school premises.

Law No. 05/L-021 on Protection from Discrimination (2015). Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo.

Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality

This law clearly prohibits sexual harassment and bullying, considering it a violation of the dignity of the individual. It also requires educational institutions to promote gender equality through education and monitoring mechanisms.

Obligations for schools and municipal directorates:

- Ensuring a safe and non-discriminatory environment for all students.
- Including education on gender equality and prevention of violence in the school curriculum.
- Appointing gender equality officers at municipal and school level to monitor and report cases of harassment and discrimination.
- Providing training for educational staff to identify and address cases of harassment and gender inequality.
- Developing and implementing strategies to eliminate gender stereotypes in the school environment.

Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality (2015). Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo.

Law No. 06/L-084 on Child Protection

This law establishes the obligations of educational institutions to ensure a safe and protective environment for children, requiring policies to prevent and address all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect.
It obliges educational personnel to be trained to identify and report such cases, in cooperation with local child protection mechanisms.

Schools and DEs have responsibilities for:

- Identifying and preventing bullying and violence against children.
- Providing a safe environment for students.
- Training staff to recognize and respond to bullying.
- Reporting cases to the relevant authorities.
- Cooperating with local child protection organizations and institutions.
- Cooperating with local child protection organizations and institutions and establishing a protective system.

Law No. 06/L-084 on Child Protection (2019). Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo.

Thematic Modules for Child Protection (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology)

These modules aim to provide guidance on preventing violence and bullying in schools. They include important topics such as:

1. Protection from sexual harassment and bullying;
2. Prevention of violence in school and family environments;
3. Promotion of gender equality and respect for children's rights;
4. Awareness of students and educational staff on the mechanisms for reporting cases of bullying.

Obligations for schools and Municipal Directorates according to these modules:

- Implementation of modules in the school curriculum and extracurricular activities.
- Creating safe spaces for students where they can report cases of harassment and violence.
- Engaging school psychologists to provide support and counseling to victims of bullying.
- Ensuring cooperation with relevant institutions to address reported cases.

Thematic Modules for Child Protection (2018). Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.

Analysis of the situation on the ground

The phenomenon of violence and harassment in schools is not an unknown phenomenon in school premises. Based on the Municipality of Lipjan, two elementary and lower secondary schools of the Municipality of Lipjan were taken as a sample: SHFMU "Hasan Prishtina" Lllugaxhi and SHFMU "Kadri Beba" Ribar i Madh and one upper secondary school, Vocational High School "Adem Gllavica". For further analysis, meetings were also held with officials from the Municipal Directorate of Education, to understand if there are regulations, mechanisms or appointed officials that deal more closely with the reported cases.

Discussion with school principals

The most prominent phenomena

Based on discussions with school principals, cases of violence and harassment —including abuse, bullying, and other forms—are less frequently reported in elementary and lower secondary schools, while they are more present in upper secondary schools. According to them, this trend can be explained by the developmental characteristics of this age group, including the stage of puberty, which is often accompanied by emotional and behavioral changes that can lead to increased tensions and conflicts between peers.

According to school principals, physical violence between students is a constant concern, as evidenced by the data collected in the field. Among the main factors related to the escalation of these cases, the use of social networks is mentioned. Conflicting communications on these platforms often continue outside the digital space and take physical form in or around school premises, increasing the complexity of managing situations of violence in schools.

Mechanisms for reporting cases

In all three schools, the mechanisms are functional: the School Governing Council, the Parents' Council and the Students' Council, through which cases of harassment, violence or other forms of inappropriate behavior in the school premises are reported, examined and prevented.

In all three of these schools, complaint boxes are present, which serve as a mechanism for reporting grievances, which are then examined by the competent school body.

Based on the collected information, if a case is presented where any form of harassment is claimed, that case is first presented to the head of the class, from him/her to the guardian of the class and from him/her to the governing body of the school. If the case is considered to be of a larger scale and that requires more extensive treatment, then the competent bodies are notified, such as: the Municipal Directorate of Education, the Police Station and the Center for Social Work.

Discussion with Directory of Education

According to the data collected by the officials of the Municipal Directorate of Education, there is no specific regulation that provides for the treatment and prevention of cases of violence, as well as the relevant mechanisms for their review. However, there are other bodies, such as the Commission for the Prevention of Domestic Violence and Gender-Based Violence, that oversee such matters. According to the information provided by these structures, cases of violence are handled in schools, except for those that require intervention and reporting to higher levels of authorities.

Discussion with school students

In the framework of this analysis, data were also collected from discussions with students and representatives of three high schools in the municipality of Lipjan. The discussions highlighted cases of harassment and bullying, which do not only belong to the student-student relationship, but also the student-teacher relationship. According to them, a significant number of these cases are not reported. Reasons for not reporting them, or for reluctance to act in this regard, include: fear of prejudice from the social circle, lack of confidence that these cases are treated seriously, and concern for the lack of confidentiality, both by school staff and by Student Councils. When asked about alternative reporting mechanisms, such as complaint boxes, representatives of both schools noted that they are rarely used by students. Some of the students' perceptions on the effectiveness of complaint boxes as a form of reporting include:

1. Placing the boxes in exposed spaces, which violates the students' anonymity;
2. Inadequate handling of complaints placed in them;
3. Despite the fact that the boxes are opened, students rarely receive feedback about them;
4. In some cases, they are opened only by the school directorate, even though the opening of the boxes should be done by the School Governing Council to ensure transparency.

Findings from the questionnaire

In order to better understand the students' perspective about bullying and reporting, the Lipjan Student Council conducted a questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed to 149 students from three high schools in the Municipality of Lipjan, which contains 17 questions about their experiences with bullying and reporting mechanisms. Despite the small sample of participants, the collected data serve as an overview and a starting point to further explore the findings. Findings from the questionnaire provide a perspective on these aspects:

The prevalence of bullying and harassment:

A significant number of students (35 out of 149, approximately 23.5%) have been victims of bullying or harassment during their schooling.

A smaller proportion (16 out of 149, approximately 10.7%) admit to being the cause of bullying or harassment. This indicates that there may be an under-reporting of the causative role, which means that the number of students who have admitted to being the cause of bullying or harassment may be lower than the actual number of students who have committed such acts.

- Almost half of the students (74 out of 149, approximately 49.7%) have witnessed cases of violence, bullying or harassment, suggesting that these phenomena are visible in the school environment.

- When asked about the most present phenomena, bullying and teasing were listed as the most frequent, confirming the students' concern about this issue.

Awareness and reporting

- Most students (97 out of 149, approximately 65.1%) are aware of ways to report bullying, which is positive.

- An even greater number (111 out of 149, approximately 74.5%) feel safe to report cases of violence, harassment or bullying. This is a good sign of potential trust in school mechanisms.

- However, despite this, a very large number of students (129 out of 149, approximately 86.6%) declare that they have never reported such cases. This may indicate that feeling safe to report does not always translate into action, perhaps due to fear of prejudice or lack of confidence in taking cases seriously.

The role of the school psychologist:

- The majority of students (121 out of 149, approximately 81.2%) declare that they know the role of the school psychologist.

- A good number (98 out of 149, approximately 65.8%) state that they feel safe to visit the psychologist for their problems or cases of bullying.

- However, the vast majority (105 out of 149, approximately 70.5%) declare that they have never visited the school psychologist. This may indicate a reluctance to seek help or a lack of perceived need.

Perceptions and beliefs:

- A significant number of students (104 out of 149, approximately 69.8%) believe that victims of violence, harassment or bullying are prejudiced by society if they report. This presents a major obstacle to reporting.

- More than half of students (81 out of 149, approximately 54.4%) do not believe that reports are treated with the necessary seriousness until resolution. This may undermine trust in the reporting system.

- The vast majority of students (122 out of 149, approximately 81.9%) do not think that educational staff are the cause of violence, harassment or bullying, indicating a relatively high level of trust in teachers in this regard.

- A large number of students (121 out of 149, approximately 81.2%) believe that social networks are among the main causes of negative phenomena at school, highlighting the impact of the online world on the school environment.

Interventions and awareness:

- More than half of students (91 out of 149, approximately 61.1%) report having had discussions, workshops, trainings or awareness sessions about bullying and other phenomena at school or municipal level. However, a significant number (58 out of 149, approximately 38.9%) have not had such, suggesting that there may be a need for more such initiatives.

- Data show that bullying and harassment are present and perceived as frequent phenomena by students. While there is considerable awareness of reporting methods and a general feeling of safety in doing so, the number of actual reports is very low. This may be related to fear of prejudice and lack of confidence in the effective handling of cases. The role of the school psychologist is recognized, but visits remain few. Social networks are seen as an important contributing factor to negative phenomena. There have been efforts to raise awareness, but not all students have been involved.

Identified deficiencies in compliance with the legal and regulatory framework

Lack of a specific regulation at the municipal level for dealing with violence and bullying in schools

The Municipal Directorate of Education in Lipjan states that there is no specific regulation that addresses violence in schools, which creates an institutional gap in a structured response to this phenomenon.

Teams for the prevention of violence, reporting and provision of psychological support formally exist

Students express a lack of confidence and fear of stigmatization, so there is reluctance on their part to report cases. Furthermore, based on the discussion with students, they are not adequately informed about the forms of reporting in case of violence or harassment at school.

Complaint boxes do not meet confidentiality standards

The placement of boxes in exposed spaces, the lack of transparency and feedback to students, make this reporting tool non-functional.

The schools included in the monitoring do not have designated officers for gender equality

Education about this issue is often missing from daily activities or lesson plans. The students state that there are members of the school staff who often intentionally or unintentionally deepen gender stereotypes through their comments and attitudes.

Schools do not have policies for managing bullying and digital violence

Social networks are cited as triggers of violence, but there are no apparent policies within schools to manage bullying on digital platforms.

Conclusion

This monitoring identified challenges and deficiencies in the system of reporting and dealing with bullying in secondary schools of the Municipality of Lipjan.

Although there is a legal framework at the central level, local implementation is partial and not always effective. Legal analysis shows clear guidelines, but findings from the field reveal the presence of harassment (especially in high schools) and doubts about the effectiveness of basic reporting mechanisms.

The lack of a specific municipal regulation and the negative perceptions of students (fear, lack of trust, confidentiality) are important barriers. The report identified key shortcomings such as the lack of municipal regulation, ineffective complaint boxes, lack of gender equality officers and policies on digital violence.

To ensure a safe and supportive environment, the implementation and effectiveness of existing mechanisms requires improvement.
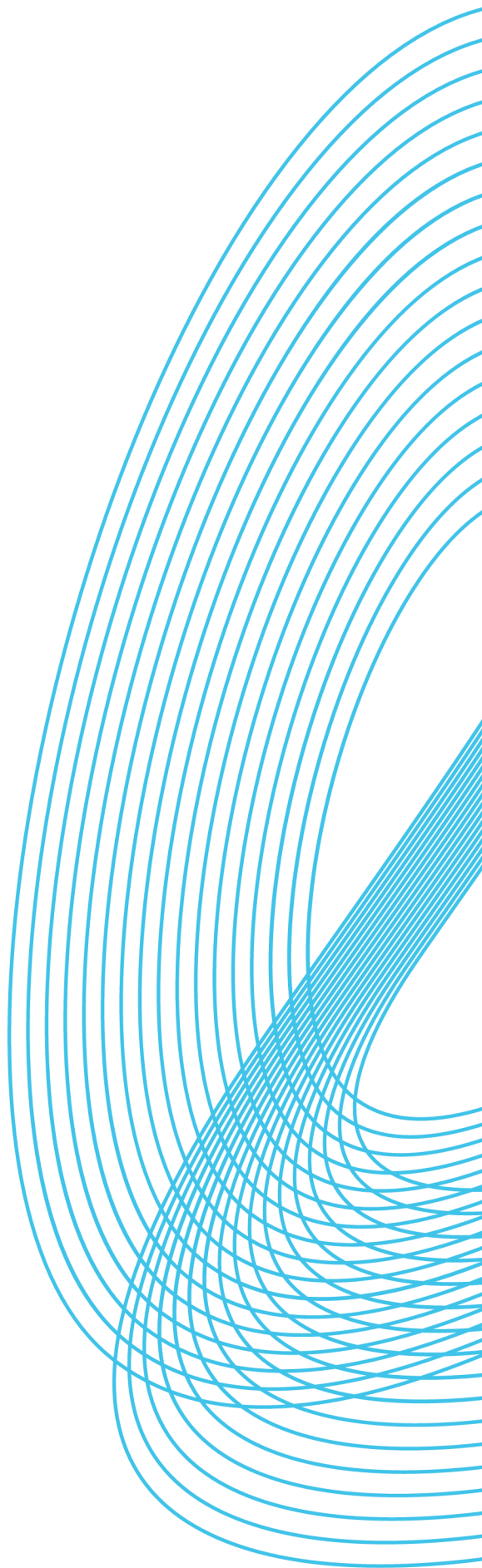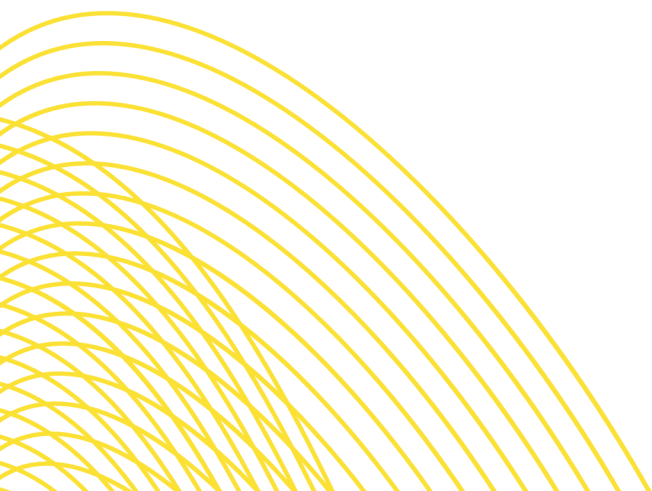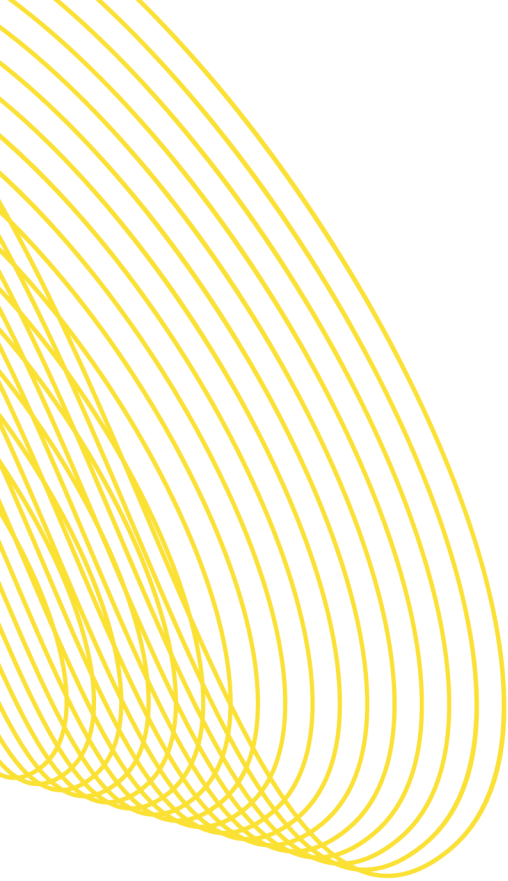
RECOMMENDATION

For MED:
✓ Drafting of the municipal regulation for dealing with harassment.
✓ Actively monitor the implementation of the protocol and provide training.
✓ Appointment of municipal officers for child protection and gender equality.
✓ Support schools in establishing safe reporting mechanisms (anonymous, online).
✓Development of awareness-raising and training programs for all stakeholders.
✓ Strengthening cooperation with relevant institutions (police, social work centers, etc.).

For schools:

✓ Functionalization and training of Violence Prevention and Referral Teams.
✓ Ensuring confidentiality and building trust in reporting.
✓ Improving the complaint box mechanism (opening boxes in accordance with existing protocols).
✓ Appointment of school officials for gender equality.
✓ Drafting internal policies for dealing with bullying and digital violence.
✓ Active engagement of school psychologists/pedagogues.

For Student Councils:

✓ Raising awareness and encouraging students to report cases.
✓ Representing students' concerns and suggestions to staff.

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