PROJECT SUMMARY · LITHUANIA · LATVIA · ESTONIA

Safe schools free from gender-based violence

A joint Baltic project helping educational communities recognise, respond to and prevent gender-based violence (GBV) and the gender stereotypes that underlie it.

Research | Teacher training | School network | Methodological materials | Parents | Policy advocacy

1 Context and overall objectives

Gender Equality Index scores in the Baltic states are consistently and significantly lower than the EU average, and gender-based violence remains a large part of this inequality.

LITHUANIA	LATVIA	ESTONIA
64.1/100	**61.5**/100	**60.2**/100
17th in the EU	19th in the EU	22nd in the EU

- **Lithuania:** one in three women experiences some form of violence, and gender stereotypes persist across all generations (Limantė, Tereškinas and Vaičiūnienė, 2024).
- **Latvia:** according to 2022 data, 25.1% of women and 19.5% of men aged 18–74 have experienced physical or sexual violence, mostly from male perpetrators; 30% of women have experienced intimate partner violence.
- **Estonia:** in 2024, according to Statistics Estonia, 41% of women had experienced intimate partner violence, with higher rates among young women aged 18–29.

A legacy that still shapes attitudes

During the Soviet occupation, gender-based violence was minimised in all three countries as a mere conflict and a private matter. This legacy, together with persistent gender stereotypes, prejudice and victim-blaming, still hinders efforts to stop violence against women.

After joining the EU, the Baltic states made significant progress in placing GBV on the political and, to some extent, the legal agenda. Yet there is still no effective prevention that would transform societal attitudes towards stereotypical gender roles, duties and norms.

Schools at the centre

Educational environments play a crucial role in spreading gender stereotypes and prejudices, particularly those related to masculinities, norms, attitudes and behaviours that contribute to the justification of GBV.

At the same time, schools have become sensitive arenas of ideological battles. Resistance to “gender ideology” in the region has mobilised many members of society, including educators and parents, who seek to shield school communities from any critical reflection on gender and gender roles.

In Lithuania, the “Life Skills Programme” introduced in schools in 2023 encourages some reflection on gender stereotypes as a source of harmful practices, yet it was labelled “gender ideology” and met massive resistance. This has created a culture of fear among educators and parents. Latvia currently has no form of sexual education in schools that would

include reflection on harmful gender stereotypes or the promotion of healthy alternatives. In Estonia, anti-"gender ideology" narratives have gained popularity since the 2019 election.

Legal frameworks

All three Baltic states have signed the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention, but its public acceptance and implementation still face challenges. Estonia and Latvia have ratified it; Lithuania has not. None of the three countries yet has a legal system covering measures to prevent all forms of GBV. Latvia lacks a dedicated law on GBV and domestic violence, and Lithuania lacks recognition of GBV throughout its legal system (Vizgunova and Graudiņa, 2020; Khoma and Kozma, 2021).

What the project sets out to do

The project focuses on educational environments as the main pillars of GBV prevention. It brings together Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian academic, non-governmental and governmental organisations to develop large-scale, integrated actions. Its ambition is to strengthen school communities' ability to identify, respond to and prevent GBV and the stereotypes behind it, and to pursue joint Baltic advocacy for better prevention in education systems and in national legislation.

2 Work performed and main activities

The project addresses gaps in awareness, training and policy related to GBV in educational settings through research, comprehensive training and advocacy, so that educators are well trained, school networks are supportive and policies support prevention and intervention.

The changes the project aims to trigger

1
A cultural shift in schools, where GBV is actively prevented and addressed.

2
Comprehensive, evidence-based training programmes that can serve as models for other regions.

3
Legislative changes that provide a robust framework for ongoing GBV prevention and intervention.

4
Advocacy beyond schools to challenge societal stereotypes and the root causes of GBV.

Main activities

RESEARCH AND UNDERSTANDING

1. Identifying practices, obstacles, knowledge gaps and available and missing resources of teachers and other school community members in addressing gender stereotypes and GBV in the Baltic states.

13. Identifying the challenges that prevent teachers from integrating GBV prevention into their lessons.

15. Compiling an accessible toolbox of tools already used in EU schools, together with resources, data and good practice adapted to the Baltic context.

SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS

2. Using a participatory approach that actively involves educators in all project activities.

3. Establishing a national network of schools that enables school communities to respond to GBV.

4. Developing a comprehensive training programme for teachers and educational support professionals on GBV prevention.

5. Designing methodological materials, manuals and toolkits for teachers and school staff.

6. Creating an e-learning platform with tools and resources on each country's national education portal.

14. Working with school communities to find the most effective ways to encourage teachers to include GBV prevention in their daily work and teaching materials.

PARENTS AND SOCIETY

7. Involving parents in GBV prevention at school so they can respond, prevent and support children when cases occur.
12. Raising awareness of GBV, its roots and wider societal implications, to support effective prevention and intervention.

POLICY AND BALTIC COOPERATION

8. Running an advocacy campaign for structural change in the legal systems of the three Baltic states.
9. Preparing and presenting policy briefs to support legislative amendments.
10. Sharing good practice and challenges between the Baltic states and coordinating advocacy goals.
11. Signing a memorandum of cooperation on GBV between the countries.

3 Expected results and impact

The project is designed both to deliver immediate practical results for schools and to foster long-term, systemic change in how the Baltic region addresses gender stereotypes and GBV.

Short term
Within 1 year

Awareness
Greater awareness among educators, policymakers, parents and children of the prevalence and impact of GBV and gender stereotypes in schools, based on the first research findings.

First training
Foundational training materials and the first training sessions for educators and other stakeholders.

School network
A national network of schools committed to addressing GBV, with first collaboration and support structures.

Medium term
2–3 years

Stronger capacity
Teachers and support staff trained to recognise GBV and intervene.

Change in school culture
More cases reported and addressed, and fewer gender stereotypes reproduced in the school environment.

Policy influence
Policy briefs and meetings with decision-makers leading to proposed legislative amendments.

Long term
Beyond 3 years

Lasting systemic change
Established policies and practices in schools that effectively prevent and address GBV.

Safer schools
Inclusive, supportive schools with clear prevention measures, clear reporting and investigation mechanisms, and clear guidance for students on what to do if they experience GBV.

Stronger legislation
Long-term improvements in national frameworks for GBV prevention and intervention.

Sources cited: Limantė, Tereškinas and Vaičiūnienė (2024); Statistics Estonia (2024); Vizgunova and Graudiņa (2020); Khoma and Kozma (2021); European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index.