

## **Best Practice Conference of the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) and European Crime Prevention Award (ECPA)**

Ljubljana (online), 9 December 2021

The Slovenian police (Tomaž Peršolja, Robert Furman, Urša Habič, Tomaž Beja, Tomislav Omejec, Maruša Turnšek in Boštjan Satošek), European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN; Sarah Bosman) and the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security of the University of Maribor (FCJS UM; Aleš Bučar Ručman and Gorazd Meško) co-organised an online conference on bullying and violence against minors as one of many activities during the Slovenian presidency of the Council of the European Union. The conference speakers were Tomaž Peršolja, a current chair of the EUCPN from the General Police Directorate of Slovenian police, Sarah Bosman of the EUCPN, who presented a draft toolbox on prevention of bullying and violence against minors, Aleš Bučar of the FCJS UM, who gave an overview of research on bullying, and representatives of the competing projects who presented their preventative projects. The conference was chaired/moderated by Gorazd Meško, head of the Institute of Criminal Justice and Security at the FCJS UM.

Nineteen preventative projects were presented during the day, and at the end of the conference, European Crime Prevention Award was presented to three best projects. We first present summaries of all projects that qualified for the 2021 European Crime Prevention Award Competition. After a short presentation of all the projects, the main reasons for awarding the winning ones are presented separately.

### **Belgium – 100% Respect**

100% Respect is a project carried out in the city of La Louvière in Belgium. It emphasises the multilevel character of bullying by including educational, psychological, and judicial aspects in its activities. 100% Respect provides training for youth care professionals and psycho-pedagogues to both detect as well as prevent (cyber)bullying. The training helps the involved actors set up anti-bullying mechanisms, such as regulated discussion areas, where children can freely discuss their experiences and learn to manage conflicts in a non-violent way. Another example is training courses for partners (e.g. police officers). This session consists of pedagogical mechanisms to effectively prevent bullying.

### **Bulgaria – Sport Is the Better Way Children to Grow up**

The project Sport is the Better Way Children to Grow Up is the result of a partnership between the National Police General Directorate (NPGD) and the business association Union of Brewers in Bulgaria (UBB) that was set up in 2014. It is a best practice initiative that aims to create safe spaces against offline and online bullying and violence among minors. Through sport and educational activities, a safe environment of tolerance and responsibility is created in order to help minors develop their social skills. The project has already been implemented in 20 districts in Bulgaria with over 65,000 minors attending free sports activities as well as other creative initiatives. Furthermore, the project has already received four awards from national contests.

### **Croatia – Together against Hate Speech**

The Together Against Hate Speech project was inspired by Nikola Tesla's ideology that all people are interconnected by invisible forces. It, therefore, aims to prevent all types of hate speech by promoting a culture of tolerance, dialogue, non-violence and non-discrimination. The project provides four interconnected modules (Red Button, Respect, I am for FAIR PLAY! and Traffic Tolerance) to connect peers from different social backgrounds. Every module has a specific focus in order to suit everyone's interests and motivations. It encourages pro-social behaviours through creative exercises while also eliminating individual and social risk factors.

### **Czech Republic – FaceUp**

FaceUp (Nenech to být) is a project that revolves around the peer element effect. Through the use of an online trust box, victims and bystanders (e.g. peers or parents) can anonymously raise their concerns regarding problematic interactions at a given school. The trust box is situated on a web-based platform or mobile app that are easy to use for all ages. The form includes information on the victim, such as their name and the name of the school and class they attend. More detailed information can be added if the reporter wishes to do so. Thereafter the report is passed on to the responsible staff member (e.g. a school counsellor or psychologist), who will reach out to the student. This process allows for easy, quick and anonymous communication between students, teachers

and parents regarding any issues in the school environment. Schools involved in the FaceUp project can also receive additional support materials and expert guidance in their effort to develop effective problem-solving solutions.

### **Denmark – Children and Young People’s Online Life on the Edge**

The Children and Young People’s Online Life on the Edge project aims to create an educational programme to support municipal professionals in preventing online extremism among minors. The main focus of the programme is to address youth and parental perspectives that can lead to extremism. Yet, it also addresses other social issues such as bullying, social grievances, inclusion and exclusion mechanisms, grooming, fake news and conspiracy theories. The development of this educational programme is based on a mapping of current research and practice initiatives in Denmark, a qualitative study of professionals’ educational needs and young people’s online experiences, and the co-creation of workshops during which experts with practical experience in the field share their knowledge.

### **Estonia – The Bullying-Free School**

The Estonian non-governmental organisation The Bullying-Free School (SA Kiusaisvaba Kool) is a member of the Anti-Bullying Coalition, which is set up in cooperation with the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. It is both nationally and internationally recognised as a centre of competence. The Bullying-Free School organisation provides various services to both schools and communities. It teaches the Anti-Bullying Programme KiVa (created by the University of Turku, Finland) in schools and additionally provides a thorough support system for schools through daily mentoring services. Furthermore, on a societal level, The Bullying-Free School creates public awareness in communities while also providing additional training courses and consultation services through a network of nearly 15 certified Estonian anti-bullying trainers.

### **Finland – Safety skills education**

The city of Oulu in Finland has created a path of safety skills education from pre-primary school to the end of basic education. It aims to prevent sexual crimes against minors by enhancing children’s skills to define and protect their boundaries to protect them from bullying, violence, harassment, and grooming. During the project, several changes were achieved. For instance, a safety skills education training for the teachers was created and administered, and, throughout 2021 and onwards, they will be able to provide skills education training

themselves. Furthermore, an in-service training plan on preventing sexual violence against minors was created and administered to professionals. Finally, the obligation to provide safety skills education is included in the official school safeguarding documents.

### **France – France Médiation**

France Médiation is an innovative pilot project providing social mediation in schools. The aim of France Médiation is threefold: firstly, to prevent and manage violence, conflicts, incivilities and harassment; secondly, to prevent and fight against truancy and school dropouts; and finally to develop civil behaviour and a culture of dialogue and tolerance. The project assigns social mediator positions within elementary and high schools. These mediators prevent conflict situations, harassment, dropping out of school, and even social exclusion, which in its turn can lead to less delinquent behaviour and an improved school climate. The France Médiation project has undergone an evaluation by an independent research institution which indicated a significant reduction of harassment and violence as well as an improvement of the pupils’ well-being due to an enhanced culture of dialogue.

### **Germany – Civilian heroes**

Modern communication technologies can be used to stimulate interaction and dialogue between the authorities and the public in an economically efficient manner. An interdisciplinary research network, therefore, developed a communication platform integrated with three interactive films. Each film aims to increase the public’s moral courage regarding certain crime phenomena: violence in public spaces, hate speech on the internet, and radicalization. To ensure an effective interaction, a gamification approach is applied. After each film scene, pop-up buttons ask the viewer to choose between two actions. Depending on these choices, the film’s storyline takes a particular route. According to the outcome evaluation, this measure is able to increase moral courage and apprehension among Facebook users by 6.5%, which in turn leads to a decrease in violent crime.

### **Hungary – Ask for help!**

The main objective of Ask for help! is to raise awareness on the seriousness and extent of bullying behaviour and the harm it can cause towards victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Therefore, this project provides four pillars containing various art, pedagogical, and educational tools (e.g. professional guided videos, music and drama pedagogy, and a peer-to-peer education programme) that help in discussing bullying in all its perspectives and addressing how to form the

right attitude. Minors often go through challenging social and emotional experiences, which is why the project utilises the power of opinion forming to encourage minors to follow positive examples set by their peers. A second aspect of the Ask for help! project are discussion sessions in order to facilitate dialogue between youngsters, teachers, and parents. These sessions allow for the development of a peer network that can discuss issues and explore effective anti-bullying responses.

### **Ireland – Garda Schools Programme**

The online safety programme within the Garda Schools Programme was developed through a partnership between An Garda Síochána (Ireland's National Police and Security Service) and Webwise (Irish Internet Safety Awareness Centre). It is a nationwide programme that provides a series of online safety talks addressing cyberbullying while also promoting respectful and safe online communication. The programme contains primary (Be Kind) and post-primary (Connect and Be in Ctrl) components and is delivered by trained members of An Garda Síochána. Each programme contains scripted lessons, organised activities, video materials and guidance for delivery.

### **Lithuania – Play Your Role: Gamification against Hate Speech**

There are inadequate prevention efforts in Lithuania regarding hate speech due to the low recognition capacity of hate speech among children and the lack of education among teachers and other adults. Therefore, the Play Your Role project focuses on reducing as well as preventing cyberbullying and hate speech among eleven- to nineteen-year-olds. The project focuses in particular on online gaming platforms, since this is an essential social environment within this age group. They aim to reduce the tolerance for hate speech and eradicate other types of cyberbullying by educating adolescents on these topics and enhancing their social competences. Yet, instead of laying a focus on punishment, they encourage adolescents to choose how to spend their time in social environments positively.

### **The Netherlands – Behind Your Screen Project Week**

On average, 94% of all youngsters in Europe spend time online on a daily basis. Therefore, it is essential to educate them on digital literacy and strengthen their resilience to protect them from online bullying, violence and even cybercrime. The Behind Your Screen Project Week is an interactive week for high schools in the Netherlands that addresses cyberbullying, sextortion, money mulling, fake news and other types of cybercrime. Through the use of digital games, interactive classes,

and film education by journalism students, this project manages to coach the target group, elevate its knowledge regarding the subject matter and provide it with the required tools and skills to recognise and prevent victimisation in the future. The project aligns itself closely with the experiences of youngsters, which contributes to the successful approach. Currently, it is conducted weekly and reaches 8,000 students every year.

### **Poland – Municipal Programme for Prevention of Cyberbullying and Internet Addiction**

Cyberbullying has many facets, such as bullying, threatening, identity theft, harassment. The city of Gdynia in Poland was the first in the country to organise comprehensive actions to combat this problem. Under the Municipal Programme for Prevention of Cyberbullying and Internet Addiction, an information campaign, as well as a social media campaign, were launched. They also organised a conference along with free consultations with psychologists and IT specialists, for employees of educational institutions. On a school level, workshops and training sessions were held for students as well as parents and teachers. Finally, a website was launched containing a test on computer and internet addiction accompanied by mini-guides on actions to prevent cyberbullying and to help its victims. The following programme edition will also include activities targeting internet addiction, and its target group will be expanded to include nursery school children, their parents, and seniors.

### **Romania – The National Anti-Bullying Forum**

Romania set itself the task of establishing The National Anti-Bullying Forum, as bullying had not yet been officially recognised within the country. Consequently, it was not regulated in Romanian legislation despite the numbers of bullying cases rising every year. Many measures implemented prior to founding this forum. A public proposal regarding the prevention and reduction of bullying was elaborated, a national awareness campaign was launched, and a sociological study on a national level including 915 children, 72 parents and 113 teachers was conducted. All this helped gather political support for the adoption of a law and new methodological norms that recognise bullying as a type of violence, giving it a clear definition and establishing detailed prevention measures.

### **Slovakia – Who's next?**

The project Who's next? is a turning point in the fight against cyberbullying in Slovakia. It has reshaped the field of violence prevention among minors. Who's next? created national seminars regarding youth prevention concerning online threats (e.g. cyberbullying) as well as a book is targeting

parents and teachers. It strengthened the role of helplines to assist victims of cyberbullying and created a new helpline aimed at schools and parents. It furthermore inspired two new legislations in which cyberbullying was defined for the first time and featured in an award-winning Netflix film.

### **Slovenia – Skupaj+ (Together+)**

The rise of physical and psychological violence among minors (both online and offline), especially within school environments, has become a cause of social concern. Research confirms the negative impact bullying can cause on minors' (physical and psychological) health, teachers' welfare, and even pedagogic processes. Therefore, Skupaj+ aims to prevent bullying and violence among minors by focusing on the early phases of violence. Furthermore, it also supports the first-line practitioners with effective tools to prevent and manage bullying issues, such as school counselling services and a training strategy for relevant stakeholders. Tomislav Omejec is a representative of the Slovenian Police in this project facilitating the partnership and sustainability of the project.

### **Spain – SocialHaterBERT**

There is a vast flood of unfiltered messages, often containing hate speech, in today's society. This is becoming an alarming phenomenon. To regain control, social media can be enabled to assess the processes and attitudes within society and intervene where necessary. The SocialHaterBERT is an intelligent system that is currently being implemented by the Spanish National Office Against Hate Crimes. It identifies and monitors the evolution of hate speech on Twitter. This programme's contributions are twofold. Firstly, it is the first intelligent system that monitors and visualises hate speech on social media with techniques that analyse social networks. Secondly, it introduces an algorithm that examines additional features of hate speech in an innovative way. A case study demonstrated the programme's utility in identifying senders and receivers of hate messages within a high-school setting while correspondingly monitoring group dynamics and toxic online behaviour.

### **Sweden – The Gävle Anti-Bullying Model**

The Gävle Anti-Bullying model is an evidence-based model intended to combat bullying. It is designed on the basis of a Swedish national evaluation of commercial anti-bullying programs. The component model was offered to schools for voluntary participation, which, in 2012, resulted in all municipal schools requesting to be involved (35 schools, with about 11,500 students). The model is based on agreed School Safety Plans, along with designated Safety Teams in each school,

who are assisted by a designated Program Aide. A municipal project co-ordinator and a quality assurance officer guide the model and provide feedback through a bi-annual school safety questionnaire. Detailed data is provided to school principals, who are involved in every stage of the process. This data is also analysed by University Researchers who are members of a steering committee. Using the exact same measurement tool, rates of bullying in the municipality are 20% to 40% lower than the Swedish national average (8.2%).

On 9 December, multilingual EUCPN toolboxes were published on the EUCPN webpage – Toolbox Bullying among Minors: An Ecological Approach Towards Effective Anti-bullying Interventions, Toolbox Bullying among Minors: Effective Prevention Approaches and Toolbox Bullying among Minors: European Crime Prevention Award 2021.

All results of the activities of the EUCPN and partners, and all of the presented projects deserve to be praised. As in any competition, this year's winners are (a short evaluation of the winning projects):

After thorough and extensive deliberation by the jury, comprised of academic experts, EUCPN Secretariat members and selected Member States' representatives, the jury unanimously achieved the decision that third place goes to project *FaceUp* from Czech Republic. As described, the link between the project and the reduction, prevention, and lowering of fear of crime is significant. The targeted groups are not only victims of bullying or minors, but also parents and other adults somehow related to bullying, thus contributing to the awareness of the rising problem of bullying or its actual incidence, which helps lowering fear of crime, as well as preventing it.

Second place goes to the project *Safety Skills Education* from Finland. The jury found the project intriguingly interesting due to the approach of focussing on various aspects (e.g. providing emotional education and improving children's self-confidence and communication skills) as well as including several age groups. It is considered an innovative approach that focuses on often neglected key issues and provides safety skills education with several national and local partners.

The winner of the European Crime Prevention Award 2021 is the project *Ask for Help!* from Hungary. The main advantage of the Project is its ability to help adolescents and minors to put themselves in the shoes of the victim, perpetrator and bystanders through several interactive options. It also significantly features awareness and knowledge campaigns to give all involved necessary skills in recognizing, preventing and handling bullying and thus create a better society.

And, last but not least, I am presenting my views on the importance of joint work of practitioners, policy makers and representatives of the academic community in efforts for evidence-based responses to deviance, crime and disorder.

It is an honour and pleasure to have chaired the EUCPN event on bullying and violence among minors and the European Crime Prevention Award. I work at the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, where I head the Institute of Criminal Justice and Security Research and Chair of Criminology. For almost thirty years, I have been engaged in criminological research, learning about diverse and exciting perspectives of deviance, delinquency, crime, criminals, and responses to crime and delinquency. Violence has been a constant topic in our research. We have studied a variety of violent behaviours, causes of violence, and responses to it, and there are no black-and-white answers. A few of the recent projects we were involved in include violence in post-conflict societies of Southeastern Europe, responses to everyday violence in a democratic society (a project of the CoE), CRIMPREV – Assessing Deviance, Crime and Prevention in Europe (a project headed by the GERN), and cybersecurity and cyber victimisation (a project of the FCJS UM). Our researchers have further played an active role in a PADS+ study on causes of juvenile delinquency and youth violence, especially on parental control, juvenile delinquency in EU countries (Youprev), and, more recently, school-related violence and cyberbullying. General studies of cyber victimisation have been a constant for the past 15 years. After 16 years, Slovenia is again participating in the ISRD4 – International self-reported delinquency and victimisation survey of 12-13 and 16-17-year-old students, focusing on urban-rural, real-cyber perspectives, pre-, during and post Covid-19. This project presents a significant part of our local safety and security efforts in Slovenia.

It is essential to emphasise the importance of the Slovenian police in research on crime, criminality, and responses thereto. According to the National crime prevention programme (2019-2023), responsibility for the prevention of school-related violence is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and other partners. Still, the police and other stakeholders are playing a leading role in crime prevention and facilitating other partners. The Slovenian police are also leading in many other prioritised fields of crime and disorder response coordination, where a partnership is expected. Another perspective is evidence-based responses. In this regard, the Slovenian police actively cooperate with research institutions and try to obtain as much information as possible to make professional decisions. One of the most outstanding achievements of the Slovenian police that universities and research institutions could envy is the *Journal of Criminal Investigation and Criminology*, which is the only non-English scientific jo-

urnal listed in SSCI-Web of Science and Scopus published by a national police force. This journal has been published for the past 72 years and has contributed to policing, criminology, victimology, penology, crime policies, criminal justice, and other disciplines. Joint efforts of FCJS UM and the police are also visible internationally with several collaborative publications, to mention only two book chapters published by renowned international publishers (Routledge and Sage) on police and prosecutorial cooperation in the EU and an article on domestic violence against the elderly – guidelines for safer ageing. In this issue of the journal, a paper on cyberbullying co-authored by Aleš Bučar, today's keynote speaker, will be published in a special issue covering urban-rural dimensions of delinquency and victimisation.

I have been a member of the EUCPN from its beginning. As a national academic contact point, I am convinced that the EUCPN is one of the fastest developing and most crucial of all EU crime prevention initiatives. It is vital for the entire EU (and beyond) because:

First, I did my postdoc research on crime prevention in Western Societies at the Institute of Criminology in Cambridge in the UK, in 2001, and I learnt that most research and practice evaluations about crime prevention came from the USA and the UK. The EUCPN has contributed to steady changes in this pattern. More and more European research and practices are collected and presented.

Second, the EUCPN is a qualitative upgrade of the efforts of the Council of Europe, the European Forum for Urban Security, and other EU or European country crime prevention initiatives, especially in the presentation of crime prevention principles, research, and promotion of the practice of crime prevention. It reflects the activities and priorities of the EUROPOL, CEPOL, ENAA, ICPC, and UNODC.

Third, researchers at the FCJS UM, my home institution, have recently developed a research programme on local safety and security covering almost all perspectives outlined in the priorities of the EUCPN (also the UN and CoE). We have published on community policing in November 2021, also discussing perspectives presented in the EUCPN toolbox on community-oriented policing in the EU (2019). So, EUCPN toolboxes need an additional test in national environments as crime prevention is a dynamic matter and the social context matters!

And last but not least, the EUCPN facilitates networking, disseminating knowledge, presenting preventative activities, contributing to EU policy and strategy of crime prevention considering all members in a participatory manner.

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Moreover, the EUCPN activities are in line with the United Nation Sustainable Development Goals, especially 3 – good health and well-being, 4 – quality education, 10 – reduced inequalities, and 16 – peace, justice and strong institutions, to mention just a few; and values of the Council of Europe – the rule of law, human rights and respecting human dignity as well as the development of the European crime prevention.

As a researcher in criminology and crime prevention, I find that the content of the EUCPN webpage is a gold mine offering ideas, some solutions, but even more, processes in the field of cooperation between policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to contribute to evidence-based solutions. These processes are characterised by different priorities, values, ideas, and expectations known in policy studies as bounded rationality in policymaking.

In general, there are also challenges, especially the lack of up-to-date research on complex crime problems. Apart from exceptions, research on crucial topics is often sporadic and of differing quality and local focus (rarely with a all-European focus), and much research is conducted by enthusiasts or doctoral students who translate and reflect upon foreign research findings. My impression is that in a decade or two, European research will prevail in the toolboxes, as most evaluation studies still come from the USA, UK, Canada, and Australia.

It is necessary to congratulate all colleagues from the EU countries who submitted their projects for this year's European Crime Prevention Award. Thank you for your work, enthusiasm, and ambition to contribute to the better development of children and young people, who are indeed our future. Good luck with your noble activities, and may the force be with you. Do not give up, because persistence in crime prevention is crucial. Thanks also go to the organisers of the EUCPN event during the second half of 2021.

*Gorazd Meško*