

A Comparative Analysis of Anti-bullying Policies in Azerbaijan and Developed Countries

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Bullying in schools is a widespread problem with significant psychological, social, and educational consequences. It undermines students' well-being, disrupts their social development, and negatively affects learning outcomes. While psychological support mechanisms remain important, effective prevention also depends on clear legal frameworks that establish enforceable responsibilities for schools and other institutions. Recent international data indicates that bullying continues to be a serious issue in Azerbaijan. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022, a considerable portion of students in Baku report experiencing bullying. This suggests that existing measures may lack sufficient enforcement and clear accountability mechanisms. In many developed countries, bullying is not treated merely as inappropriate behavior but as a matter of child protection that engages legal obligations. Schools are required not only to respond to incidents but also to implement preventive measures as part of their institutional duties. This paper examines the effectiveness of such state mechanisms through a comparative analysis of Azerbaijan, the United Kingdom, and Finland, with the aim of identifying how legal and institutional frameworks shape outcomes in bullying prevention.

Case Study: United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has developed a comprehensive legal framework that places responsibility for preventing bullying

firmly on schools. Legislative measures such as the Education Act 1998 and Section 175 of the Education Act 2002 establish a statutory duty for schools to safeguard children and promote their well-being. These laws require schools to adopt anti-bullying policies and integrate them into broader safeguarding practices, thereby shifting responsibility from families to educational institutions (Legislation.gov.uk 1998; Legislation.gov.uk 2002). Despite this strong legal framework, bullying rates in the United Kingdom remain relatively high, with approximately 27 to 28 percent of students reporting experiences of bullying. This apparent gap between legal obligations and outcomes invites further explanation. One possible reason is that the United Kingdom has relatively robust reporting mechanisms, which may lead to higher recorded rates of bullying compared to countries where incidents are underreported. Cultural factors may also play a role, as greater awareness and lower tolerance of bullying can encourage students to report their experiences more readily. At the same time, the persistence of bullying in the UK despite clear legal duties suggests that legislation alone is not sufficient. Effective implementation, school culture, and the everyday practices of teachers and students all shape how these legal norms operate in practice.

Case Study: Finland

Finland is often presented as a leading example of effective bullying prevention, combining a supportive legal environment with evidence-based interventions. While general child protection laws provide the legal foundation, the Finnish approach places particular emphasis on systematic, school-based programmes designed to prevent bullying before it occurs. One of the most prominent examples is the Kiusaamista Vastaan programme, widely known as KiVA. This model adopts a whole school approach that focuses not only on perpetrators and victims but also on bystanders, who play a critical role in shaping peer dynamics (Invest Research Centre 2024). By addressing the broader social environment in which bullying

takes place, the programme seeks to reduce the incentives and opportunities for such behavior. Empirical evidence suggests that this approach has been effective. According to PISA 2022 data, between 15 and 18 percent of Finnish students report experiencing bullying, which is below the OECD average. Studies further indicate that the KiVA programme has led to measurable reductions in bullying incidents and has been successfully adapted in other contexts, including schools in the United Kingdom (University of Cardiff, 2024). The Finnish case demonstrates that legal frameworks are most effective when complemented by well designed, evidence-based interventions.

Case Study: Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, efforts to address bullying operate primarily within broader child protection and violence prevention frameworks rather than through specific, enforceable obligations directed at schools. While policy documents recognise the importance of protecting children from harm, they do not establish clear legal duties requiring schools to implement anti bullying measures. The main policy instrument in this area is the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs' (2020) strategy, which outlines general objectives for safeguarding children. However, this strategy functions as a set of recommendations rather than binding legal requirements. Schools are encouraged to adopt preventive measures, but they face no formal obligation to do so and no consequences for noncompliance.

According to PISA 2022, 21 percent of students in Baku report experiencing bullying at least monthly. While this figure requires careful interpretation, it points to persistent challenges in prevention and enforcement. Reports by international organisations further identify weaknesses in monitoring and accountability mechanisms, particularly the absence of effective oversight and implementation procedures. At the same time, external initiatives, such as projects

funded by the Council of Europe, aim to strengthen child protection systems through training and institutional support. However, reliance on short-term international programmes underscores the lack of sustained domestic commitment and institutional capacity (Council of Europe, 2025). The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance's 2023 report identifies systemic failures regarding monitoring and implementation (ECRI 2023). Specifically, the Commission criticises the "lack of monitoring of Ombudsman and legal implementations."

The Azerbaijani case illustrates that recognising bullying as a policy issue is not sufficient. Without clear legal obligations, effective monitoring, and consistent implementation, preventive efforts remain limited.

Discussion and conclusion

Data from OECD PISA 2022 suggests that when governments establish clear and enforceable legal obligations requiring schools to prevent bullying, reported levels of bullying tend to decline. Within this framework, the Azerbaijani case is better understood not as an indication of social acceptance of bullying, but as a reflection of a legal system with limited enforcement capacity (OECD 2023). At the same time, PISA findings indicate that students in Azerbaijan, similar to those in the United Kingdom, often rely on family support when facing bullying. While such informal support mechanisms can mitigate harm, they cannot substitute for institutional responsibility. From a legal perspective, effective prevention requires that schools are bound by enforceable duties rather than relying on voluntary or informal responses.

The experience of the United Kingdom illustrates how statutory duties can create clear obligations for schools. For instance, the Education Act 2002 imposes legally binding safeguarding responsibilities, which courts interpret based on the wording of the law. This reflects a textualist approach, according to

which the authority of legal obligations derives from their precise legislative formulation rather than evolving social interpretations. However, cross country comparisons also reveal important limitations. The United Kingdom reports bullying rates of approximately 27 to 28 percent, while available data for Azerbaijan indicates a rate of 21 percent in Baku. These figures are not directly comparable, as Azerbaijan lacks comprehensive nationwide data. As a result, conclusions about relative effectiveness must be drawn with caution.

More broadly, the comparison highlights that the relationship between law and outcomes is not straightforward. Strong legal frameworks do not automatically eliminate bullying. Cultural factors, reporting practices, and the quality of implementation all shape observed outcomes. In some contexts, higher reported rates may reflect greater awareness and willingness to report rather than higher actual prevalence. The contrast between the United Kingdom and Azerbaijan therefore illustrates the distinction between formal legal provisions and their practical application. While laws establish a framework for accountability, their effectiveness depends on consistent enforcement and integration into institutional practice. In this respect, the absence of binding obligations and monitoring mechanisms in Azerbaijan remains a key limitation in addressing bullying in schools. Finland further illustrates how the combination of a supportive legal framework and systematic, evidence-based interventions can contribute to lower levels of bullying. Its relatively low reported rates, supported by programmes such as KiVA, suggest that consistent implementation and integration of prevention strategies into everyday school practice play a decisive role in shaping outcomes.

Recommendations

First, Azerbaijan should adopt specific legislation that directly addresses bullying in schools. The existing 2020

strategy developed by the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs outlines general objectives but does not impose binding obligations. A dedicated legal framework should require schools to develop anti bullying policies, implement preventive measures, and report on their activities. The experience of the United Kingdom demonstrates how such statutory duties can enhance institutional accountability.

Second, effective monitoring mechanisms must accompany any new legal framework. As noted in the ECRI report, current oversight remains limited, particularly with regard to the role of the Ombudsman and the implementation of existing policies. Regular inspections, transparent reporting requirements, and meaningful consequences for noncompliance are essential for ensuring that legal obligations are taken seriously. Establishing an independent supervisory body, similar in function to Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) in the United Kingdom, could strengthen accountability by systematically evaluating school practices.

Third, Azerbaijan should adopt evidence-based anti-bullying programmes. The Finnish KiVA model provides a well-documented example of an intervention that reduces bullying through a whole school approach, with a particular focus on the role of bystanders. Evidence from the University of Cardiff shows that this model can be successfully adapted to other contexts, including schools in the United Kingdom (University of Cardiff 2024). Effective implementation would require investment in teacher training, as well as careful adaptation to local conditions.

Fourth, while international support can play a useful role, long term progress depends on domestic commitment. The Council of Europe's 2025 initiative, which allocates 428.000 euros to child protection efforts, provides valuable technical assistance (Council of Europe 2025). However, reliance on external funding is not a sustainable solution. The

Azerbaijani government should allocate resources from its own budget to ensure continuity in training, institutional development, and programme implementation.

Finally, anti-bullying campaigns should complement legal and institutional reforms. Initiatives that engage students, parents, and the media can help shift social attitudes and encourage reporting of bullying incidents. By increasing visibility and public attention, such campaigns can reinforce the importance of prevention and create additional pressure on schools to comply with their responsibilities.

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