

# NO TO DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

**SAFE SCHOOLS  
EVERY GIRL'S  
RIGHT**

Schools are places for children to learn and grow. But many girls all over the world go to school fearing for their safety, dreading humiliating and violent treatment, simply hoping to get through another day.

Schools reflect wider society. The same forms of violence which women suffer throughout their lives – physical, sexual and psychological – are present in the lives of many girls in and around their schools. The result is that countless girls are kept out of school, drop out of school, or do not fully participate in school.

## DISCRIMINATION

If violence against girls in school goes unpunished, students learn that violence against girls and women is acceptable, and that male aggression is the norm. Discrimination against women and girls is reinforced.

Certain girls face an increased risk of violence at school because of who they are. Lesbian girls, for example, experience both sexism and homophobia combined. They are more frequently subjected to sexual harassment and threatened with sexual violence than their heterosexual peers.

Girls with disabilities face both sexism and disability discrimination, making them targets for teasing, physical abuse and sexual violence. Rates of abuse are higher for girls with disabilities, and the forms of violence they face may be more severe.

Other aspects of girls' identity, including whether they are migrants, orphans or refugees, their HIV status, caste, ethnicity and race, also increase their risk of abuse and shape the nature of the violence they experience.

Victims and survivors of violence, especially sexual violence, may be ostracized and excluded by their families, friends and communities. Girls from marginalized groups may find it even harder to pursue a complaint or access support services than others.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



**EVERY GIRL HAS A  
RIGHT TO EDUCATION  
IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT**



Romani girls at school in Braila, Romania. Many Romani children face long journeys to school, and difficulties in studying or doing homework in cold, overcrowded homes. For children who do go to school, poor clothing marks them out as Roma and as targets for bullying and harassment.

## TEASING, HARASSMENT AND BULLYING

Teasing and verbal harassment are common in schools. Girls who are smaller, of a different ethnicity, poor, disabled, less "feminine" or in any other way distinguished from the norm may be particularly targeted for name-calling, poking, pranks and bullying.

Teasing can itself be a violation of girls' dignity and security, and if left unaddressed, may escalate into physical, sexual or emotional violence. Sexual teasing is considered innocuous and playful by many boys and men, but for the girls targeted it is intimidating and degrading.

Forms of harassment such as whisper campaigns and social exclusion have been joined by cyberbullying. Bullies using mobile phones and the Internet may impersonate others online, post defamatory personal information or start false rumours. In cyberspace, the bully can act anonymously, with little fear of punishment and a huge audience, not just on schooldays but seven days a week.

## ESCALATING BEHAVIOUR

Harassment in and around schools is dismissed by some teachers and school staff as harmless enough. At a certain point however, it ceases to be mere play and becomes harmful. Before it becomes physically or psychologically damaging, action needs to be taken. The behaviour must be stopped and an alternative must be taught.

When sexual harassment happens in school and is not condemned, over time it becomes part of the social norm and the next generation comes to believe that violence against women is acceptable. Girls will understandably not report incidents of violence if they fear further victimization, ridicule and inaction. As long as perpetrators believe that they can commit their crimes without fear of punishment, the pattern of violence will not be interrupted.

From teasing to beating, fondling to assault, all violence against girls in school is wrong and can potentially interrupt a girl's schooling, depriving her of her right to education as well as her right to freedom from violence.

## URGENT ACTION NEEDED

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Amnesty International  
International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House  
1 Easton Street, London WC1X0DW, United Kingdom  
[www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

**Amnesty International recognizes the determination of girls all over the world to gain an education. We demand that states take immediate action to fulfil their international commitments and make schools accessible to girls and safe. Amnesty International calls on governments and schools to:**

- **Train school staff in early intervention strategies to address harassment and violence against all girls in school.**
- **Develop and fully implement a code of conduct for all students that explicitly prohibits sexual violence and sexual harassment in the educational context.**

**STOP VIOLENCE  
AGAINST WOMEN**  
**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**

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We research, campaign, advocate and mobilize to end abuses of human rights – civil, political, social, cultural and economic. From freedom of expression and association to physical and mental integrity, from protection from discrimination to the right to shelter – these rights are indivisible.

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