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SCHOOL SAFETY

Analysis of Safety Policy Planning and its Implementation
in General Education Institutions

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and its Implementation
in General Education Institutions

Tbilisi
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Foreword

The present document was prepared within the framework of the ongoing project “Care, Prevention, Rights” (Project CPR) with the support of the European Union. The project is aimed at promoting evidence-based policymaking in the country.

The purpose of the research is to study the “safe school” model operating in Georgia, also to analyze the literature, legislation, and practice, and by that, present recommendations to the responsible parties for creating a safe environment at school. The document will assist policy and decision-makers, including school principals, teachers, and school administrators, in developing student-centered approaches, as well as in identifying and critically understanding the existing challenges. The study will help students and researchers interested in studying the theoretical and practical aspects of school safety.

The Center for Social Justice is grateful to the LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions for their close cooperation in the research process.

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Introduction

The right to education is guaranteed both by the Constitution of Georgia¹ and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC),² according to which every child has a fundamental right to education. According to the Constitution of Georgia, elementary and basic education is mandatory in the country, thus, the state undertakes to offer accessible school education to school-age children.³ In addition to providing quality education, the school plays a central role in the process of child development, among others, it contributes to the formation of children's critical thinking skills, the teaching of non-violent behavior models, and ways of peaceful conflict resolution.⁴

A safe environment in educational institutions is one of the central components of access to general education.⁵ According to the Law on General Education, this principle implies the provision of a safe environment for life, health, and property, for which the school is responsible.⁶ For this purpose, since 2010, the Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions has been integrated into the public school system.⁷

Periodically, the issue of school safety is gaining actuality. Unfortunately, this is almost always related to a tragic incident at school, which is mostly the result of a conflict between teenagers. It should be noted that such cas-

1 The Constitution of Georgia, article 27, paragraph 2.

2 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, paragraph 28.

3 The Constitution of Georgia, article 27, paragraph 2.

4 Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, (2016), Tackling violence in Schools: A global perspective Bridging the gap between standards and practice, foreword.

5 Law Of Georgia On General Education, article 7, paragraph 7, paragraph 3, subparagraph "e" available: <https://bit.ly/3AAuXDN>, accessed on: 10.07.2022.

6 Ibid, article 9, paragraph 9.

7 Ibid.

es are always followed by public outrage and less academic discussion of the issue in the media or among political groups. Criticism is often voiced about the state's ineffectiveness in terms of preventing school violence. It is not surprising that such public outrage quickly subsides and reappears with the next tragic incident, without critical reflection on the challenges of a safe school environment.

For the 2021-2022 school year, almost 625,000 students studied in Georgian schools. 2308 general educational institutions were operating in the country, 90% of which were public, and almost 10% were private schools. The distribution of students in public (90% of students) and private (10% of students) schools is in accordance with the said proportion. More than 10,500 students have the status of a person with special educational needs or disabilities. During the 2021-2022 school year, more than 8,800 students dropped out, which is higher than the data for the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 school years, however, it is significantly lower than the drop-out rates from earlier (2016/2017, 2017/2018 and 2018/2019) school years.⁸

In the said school year (2021-2022), almost 63,000 teachers were employed in general educational institutions,⁹ and more than 1,600 resource officers were assigned to public schools.¹⁰ As of the 2022-2023 school year, resource officers are present in 690 public schools in Georgia,¹¹ covering over 85% of the public school students in the country.¹²

As for the main trends in the juvenile justice system, in 2021, 55 minors

8 LEPL National Statistics Office of Georgia, available <https://bit.ly/3mLW9en>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

9 Ibid.

10 Correspondence of LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions N MES 5 22 0001291300 dated October 13, 2022.

11 LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, available at: <https://bit.ly/3JDmZgi>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

12 Interview with the Planning and Analysis Department and head of psychosocial service center (interview 1).

were found to be administrative offenders,¹³ and in 2022 – 43.¹⁴ The indicators of juvenile criminal convictions are as follows: in 2021, a total of 210,¹⁵ and in 2022, 251 juveniles were convicted.¹⁶ In addition, according to the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia, in 2021, criminal prosecution was initiated against 251 minors, and the diversion mechanism was used in 363 criminal cases.¹⁷ It should be noted that, compared to 2020, the rate of diversion in juvenile criminal cases has slightly increased (approx. 5%).

The purpose of this document is to study the legislation, by-laws, and practices related to school safety, specifically the establishment of a safe school environment. An important part of the document will be devoted to analyzing the activities of the LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions (hereinafter the Office of Resource Officers) as a central unit in creating a safe school environment. In addition, the study will look at the actors and collegial bodies of the school community involved in the process of ensuring school safety. Attention will also be paid to the security infrastructure, mainly technological and surveillance tools. The text analyzes the types of school violations, as well as the excessive role of the police in the process of ensuring a safe school environment. Overall, the document attempts to identify and critically analyze Georgia's current school safety model. We hope that the document will serve to generate new knowledge on the challenges of school safety and encourage discussion on this issue among professionals and academic circles.

13 Correspondence of the Supreme Court of Georgia NP-1272-22 dated November 1, 2022.

14 Correspondence of the Supreme Court of Georgia NP-402-23 dated May 12, 2022.

15 Correspondence of the Supreme Court of Georgia NP-1272-22 dated November 1, 2022.

16 Correspondence of the Supreme Court of Georgia NP-402-23 dated May 12, 2022.

17 2021 Activity Report of the Prosecutor's Office of Georgia, p. 30, available at: <https://bit.ly/3JAfgQ5>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

Methodology

The document is based on the analysis of local legislation and context, as well as academic literature and the information collected from in-depth interviews conducted by the research team. Special attention was paid to the existing normative framework in terms of school safety. The research team reviewed studies and reports on school safety and domestic academic sources.

Various ‘safe school’ models were studied during the research. For this purpose, the research team worked on international sources, including academic papers, also manuals and guidelines developed by international organizations. American experience, namely, the practice of introducing resource officers in schools, was studied separately since this was the inspiration for the reform in Georgia.

An important source of information was the interviews conducted by the research team with the planners and implementers of the school safety policy. Namely, as part of the work on the document, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine respondents, including representatives of the Office of Resource Officers, school resource officers, psychologists at the Psychosocial Service Center of the Office of Resource Officers, a school principal, teacher and an education expert. The interviewees, namely the school principal, teacher, school resource officers and psychologists were guaranteed anonymity, therefore, their comments and opinions are indicated in the study without revealing their identities. Opinions of other research participants are indicated by their identifiers.

An additional source for research was the public information requested from public institutions, especially from the Office of Resource Officers. In addition, in accordance with this public information, the research team worked on statistical data regarding violations detected in schools.

The document does not aim to evaluate the effectiveness of the Office of Resource Officers. For example, the study did not assess the impact of the Office of Resource Officers on the rate or dynamics of delinquency or criminal offenses at schools, hence, there is a space for conducting narrower studies, within the framework of which it will be possible to evaluate the impact resource officers have on school safety or the rate of delinquency and crime in schools. In addition, civic education textbooks were not analyzed within the scope of the study. Civic education curricula and textbooks play an important role in the process of creating a safe school environment, which influences the formation of students' behavior and thinking. The present research neither evaluates the content of the textbook itself, nor the influence of the subject of civic education on the process of creating a safe environment at school.

In addition, the present study does not analyze safety in private schools, because the order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N "On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions" (hereinafter, the order of the Minister of Education No. 06/N) applies only to public schools. The existing legislation allows private schools to develop individual documents regulating safety issues, which is why public schools are the main focus of the research.

Main Findings:

- With the primary role of technological means and security staff assigned to the school (resource officers) under the coordination of the Office of Resource Officers, the Georgian model of school safety architecture is largely based on outdated approaches to creating a safe environment at school.
- Violations detected at schools are routinely registered in the electronic database. Violations are so broadly defined that even class tardiness and lack of items needed for the learning process are noted in the electronic database. The same database records information about the services provided to students by the Psychosocial Service Center, including their names, surnames and other personal data.
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia has access to information in the electronic database and the power to view and copy the data in real time. Apart from this, the police receives information from schools directly in 2 cases – if legislative ground for making a report to the law enforcement body exists or if the school decides to report without existing grounds. Such approach creates risks of excessive police involvement in the management of educational processes.
- Statistical data on violations detected at schools is processed unevenly, which prevents comparison of the rate of violations by years and identification of trends.
- In the list of student violations and grounds for reporting to the police, we find vague and ambiguous titles, which makes it difficult to identify the real content of violations and, therefore, increases the risk of using disproportionate response measures.

- Violations recorded in the electronic database are stored for the duration of a student's status. Accordingly, the Office of Resource Officers and the Ministry of Internal Affairs have access to a variety of personal data related to the student for years. This creates the threat of disproportionately processing students' personal data.
- To monitor the maintenance of order, electronic means are excessively integrated into the public school system. Video surveillance cameras and metal detectors are the primary electronic means the state uses to prevent school violence or offenses. However, there is still no research evaluating the impact of technological means on the rate of violence and other unlawful conduct on school premises.
- The school resource officers routinely rotate. In 2022, almost every third resource officer was subject to rotation, which should be evaluated critically. The practice of systematic rotation confirms that the legislation on the Office of Resource Officers has a blanket approach. Namely, it considers high integration of resource officers with the school environment undesirable and largely subjects rotation decisions to the length of the period spent by resource officers in a specific school.

1. Concept of a Safe School

Several studies and reports indicate that violence among school students and school-age children remains a significant challenge.¹⁸ According to a 2018 study by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), about half of the students between the ages of 13 and 15, 150 million children, have experienced peer violence at or near school.¹⁹ Because school is one of the most common places where violence among peers or other anti-social behavior occurs, safe school models have been developed in order to prevent crime and create a healthy learning environment. The questions often raised in the academic literature are the following – is a school really safe where security or law enforcement officers patrol the school corridors, entrances are controlled by metal detectors, and violent acts are immediately reported to the police? Or are those schools safe, where there seems to be peace at first glance, but there is a sense of division among students according to ‘status’, or where physical violence disguised as a joke is accepted, and is not even reported to the administration?²⁰ There is no universal concept of a safe school since establishing a safe school environment is more than reducing physical or other forms of violence.²¹ However, it is possible to identify the main elements of this model. In particular, a school is safe, where the student’s health and safety are guaranteed, both during the day-to-day functioning of the school and force majeure. The main characteristic of a safe school is its ability to provide

18 A global initiative working to end all forms of violence against children in and through school: <https://bit.ly/3obdrBV>, *სხვევითი*: World Vision, (2020), “OUR research, OUR rights: Ending violence against children through the lens of child researchers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Indonesia, Nicaragua, Romania and Sierra Leone; Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio, (2006), UN World Report on Violence Against Children, p. 138; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, (2016), *Ending the Torment: Tackling bullying from the schoolyard to cyberspace*, p. 101.

19 UNICEF (2018), *An everyday lesson, End Violence in schools*, p. 3.

20 Bucher, K. T., & Manning, M. L. (2005). *Creating safe schools. The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 79 (1), 55-60., p. 56.

21 *Ibid.*

a physically, emotionally and cognitively protected space for the student and to cope with the challenges that arise at school through structural and institutional resilience.²²

The idea of a safe school involves providing an environment protected from both physical and non-physical violence. Three types of non-physical violence are distinguished: emotional, psychological and intellectual violence.²³ In addition, some types of violence (e.g., sexual) include both components of physical and non-physical violence.²⁴ In the same context is referenced the concept of ‘psychological well-being’ and its meaning, which is described as satisfaction, happiness and the ability to cope with difficulties.²⁵

According to modern approaches, the safe school model is defined more broadly and includes offering the student a safe environment from home to the school desk.²⁶ It should be noted here that the goal of creating a safe environment at school goes beyond the students’ interests in physical and emotional safety. Providing a safe school environment should have a positive impact on student behavior, well-being, academic performance, as well as disciplinary actions or expulsion statistics.²⁷ According to the literature, a safe and secure environment in the school should be created

22 UNESCO, International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa, (2017). School Safety Manual – Tools for teachers, p. 6., see also Sofio Gorgodze, Safe School and International Experience, in the collection of articles Safe School without Community Participation (2011), p. 17.

23 Sofio Gorgodze, Safe School and International Experience, in the collection Safe School without Community Participation (2011), p. 17.

24 Ibid.

25 For details see Nino Labartkhava, Ketevan Osiashvili et al. Safe School – Teacher’s Guide, National Center for Teacher Professional Development, 2018, p. 7-8.

26 UNICEF, (2018-2020), Manual on comprehensive school safety and security programme (CSSSP), Training module was developed under Child-Centered DRR programme, p. 9.

27 UNESCO, International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa, (2017). School Safety Manual – Tools for teachers, p. 9.

by establishing specific norms, goals and values, the purpose of which is to create a positive school climate including by introducing democratic management models in the school.²⁸

1.1. Safe School Models

The concept of a safe school does not only include the prevention of violence or crime and caring for the physical and emotional well-being of students, nor does it address student behavior alone. Creating a safe school environment involves organizing and bringing every aspect of school life into a unified framework.²⁹

However, when discussing a safe environment at school, the issue is mostly narrowed down to the topics of physical and psychological safety of students and protection from violence, since this is a very visible challenge. Accordingly, the present document as well pays more detailed attention to the latter.

Two major school safety models are distinguished in the academic literature:

- The first, which we can refer to as a product-based model,³⁰ involves visual-technological surveillance on the school premises, control and disciplinary sanctions as means of achieving school safety.

28 Ibid; see also Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of educational research*, 83(3), 357-385, p. 1-2.

29 Such are safety of school and classroom, spaces for physical activities, access road to the school, the area around the school, excursions; also, existence of a protocol of action in case of emergency or crisis situations in the school, control of air, water, food safety, school health care etc. for examples see: Department for Education, Guidance, Health and safety responsibilities and duties for schools, 2022; *საგვეობლოგია*: Frumkin, H., Geller, R. J., Rubin, I. L., & Novdin, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Safe and healthy school environments*. Oxford University Press.

30 Bucher, K. T., & Manning, M. L. (2005). Creating safe schools. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 79 (1), 55-60., p. 58, see also Sofio Gorgodze, *Safe School and International Experience*, in the collection *Safe School without Community Participation* (2011), p. 21.

- The second, more modern approach, gives preference to the creation of a positive school climate as a means of establishing safety at school. This model tries to prevent anti-social behavior in the school not by focusing on discipline, but rather the coordinated action of different school units (principal's office, teachers, technical staff, psychosocial service center staff, students, parents, neighborhood).³¹ Such an approach is referred to in academic literature as process-based safety.³²

Besides, the role of the school environment-based preventive model³³ should be singled out here. This model combines the above two approaches, however, puts emphasis on the architectural and infrastructural transparency of the school as the main mechanism for ensuring a safe environment at school.

1.1.1. Product-based Safety Model

As mentioned, the product-based safety model focuses on the establishment of discipline on the school premises and considers supervision and control mechanisms as means of achieving school safety.³⁴ According to this approach, prevention of anti-social or criminal behavior in schools should be achieved through a structured security architecture. Video surveillance cameras, security personnel, metal detectors and electronic systems for keeping personal files on students are considered to be part of this architecture.³⁵ It is worth noting that this approach to school safe-

31 Bucher, K. T., & Manning, M. L. (2005). Creating safe schools. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 79(1), 55-60., p. 56.

32 Ibid. 58, see also Sofio Gorgodze, *Safe School and International Experience*, in the collection *Safe School without Community Participation* (2011), p. 21.

33 Frumkin, H., Geller, R. J., Rubin, I. L., & Nodvin, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Safe and healthy school environments*. Oxford University Press, p. 253.

34 Bucher, K. T., & Manning, M. L. (2005). Creating safe schools. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 79 (1), 55-60., p. 58.

35 Ibid, see also Sofio Gorgodze, *Safe School and International Experience*, in the collection *Safe School without Community Participation* (2011), p. 21.

ty repeats the logic of a zero-tolerance policy. Accordingly, criticism is voiced regarding the methods of its implementation.³⁶ School management with a safety philosophy includes, among other features, strict and mandatory disciplinary sanctions, such as suspension or expulsion from school. This, in case of misconduct by a well-disciplined child, is an excessively harsh sanction. On the other hand, for a student with problematic behavior who needs more support, strict sanctions do not only reduce the probability of overcoming antisocial behavior, on the contrary, it increases the risk of developing unwanted behavior, and threatens the maintenance of a positive relationship between students and teachers.³⁷ In addition, a student who will not be allowed in school due to his/her behavior is outside the observation of school personnel, which deprives the school of the opportunity to support and positively transform the student.³⁸ Therefore, it is considered that the product-based safety model does not increase the sense of safety. On the contrary, it worsens the school climate and contributes to the alienation of students from the school environment, since the latter is perceived as a space of supervision and control.³⁹

1.1.2. Process-based Safety Model

According to the second, more modern model, both the establishment of a safe environment at school and the formation of students' behavior are mainly influenced by the existence of a positive climate in the school. We

36 Ibid.

37 Frumkin, H., Geller, R. J., Rubin, I. L., & Nodvin, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Safe and healthy school environments*. Oxford University Press, p. 264; see also Bucher, K. T., & Manning, M. L. (2005). *Creating safe schools*. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 79 (1), 55-60., p. 58.

38 Frumkin, H., Geller, R. J., Rubin, I. L., & Nodvin, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Safe and healthy school environments*. Oxford University Press, p. 264.

39 Sofio Gorgodze, *Safe School and International Experience*, in the collection *Safe School without Community Participation* (2011), p. 21. See also: Frumkin, H., Geller, R. J., Rubin, I. L., & Nodvin, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Safe and healthy school environments*. Oxford University Press, p. 264.

can refer to this safe school approach as the process-based safety model.⁴⁰ The said approach implies positive transformation in the educational process and coexistence of the school community, thus, a healthy school climate. Therefore, it tries to eliminate violence and antisocial actions at school not through short-term, result-oriented rigid interventions, but by promoting forward-looking changes and creating a positive climate at school. To create a positive school climate, a number of different methods have been introduced, the most frequently tested of which is the so-called 'whole-school approach'. In this approach, the entire school community shares the common goal of reducing school violence, and therefore, school administration, teachers, students, parents, technical staff, medical staff, and the surrounding neighborhood/community are committed to working together to achieve these goals.⁴¹ According to the said model, programs aimed at the reduction and prevention of school violence operate at the whole school level, proactively, with the involvement of all actors, and this is precisely how it differs from the product-based approach, which provides for individual sanctioning methods for students prone to violence or antisocial behavior, and is therefore more reactive.⁴² Accordingly, based on modern approaches, the creation of a safe school environment is a unified, continuous process aimed at creating a positive school climate.

In order to create a positive climate at school, teachers must have the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to establish discipline with positive methods, such as constructive criticism, by defining clear rules of behavior

40 Bucher, K. T., & Manning, M. L. (2005). Creating safe schools. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 79 (1), 55-60., p. 58; see also Sofio Gorgodze, *Safe School and International Experience*, in the collection *Safe School without Community Participation* (2011), p. 21.

41 World Health Organization (2019), *School-based violence prevention, a practical handbook*, p. 3; see also: Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence Against Children, (2016), *Tackling violence in Schools: A global perspective Bridging the gap between standards and practice* p. 16.

42 Bucher, K. T., & Manning, M. L. (2005). Creating safe schools. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 79 (1), 55-60., p. 58.

ior. For this, it is necessary to strengthen teachers in terms of teaching alternative disciplining methods. Teachers, who are themselves equipped with prosocial, constructive teaching methods, increase students' resilience and the chances of coping with difficulties in alternative ways.⁴³

Significantly, the creation of a positive school climate is not just aimed at dealing with school violence. According to a 2013 study (Thapa et al.), school climate has a significant impact on students' mental and physical health, self-esteem, and self-criticism. A positive and healthy socio-economic climate at school is associated with the consumption of illegal psychoactive substances and mental health problems. More specifically, the conducted studies show that the existence of a positive school atmosphere reduces the consumption of drugs among students, frequent absences from school. Moreover, a positive climate has a significant impact on academic performance by increasing student motivation, as well as reducing the impact of student's socio-economic difficulties on the learning process. Positive climate also contributes to less aggression and violence and is a protective factor in terms of learning and positive life management, while also having a positive effect on teachers' sense of self-efficacy, self-confidence, and their commitment to teaching.⁴⁴

At the same time, the creation of a positive climate does not exclude and, on the contrary, requires the presence of specific rules at school and, in case of violation of these rules, an appropriate response.⁴⁵ It should be emphasized here that the appropriate reaction to the violation of such

43 UNESCO International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa, (2017), *School Safety Manual – Tools for teachers*, p. 19.

44 Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of educational research*, 83(3), 357-385, p. 4., see also: *Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018*, National Assessment and Examinations Center, 2020, p. 152, available at: <https://bit.ly/3a8yHBR>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

45 World Health Organization (2019), *School-based violence prevention: a practical handbook*, p. 42. *об. обгггг*: Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of educational research*, 83(3), 357-385, p. 6.

rules should not be aimed at punishing the person who committed the violation. First and foremost, schools should try to use the principles of restorative justice, where attention will be directed to the elimination and correction of harm.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the existence of rules and potential responses serves the purpose of establishing a fair and unified approach at school. Research shows that schools in which rules are effectively enforced, and where school discipline is managed successfully, have relatively low rates of student victimization and delinquency.⁴⁷

1.1.3. School Environment-based Preventive Model

According to the academic literature, an environment-based preventive model can have a significant impact on creating a healthy school environment.⁴⁸ This approach focuses on school architecture, infrastructure, visibility and the spread of formal control. In contrast to the product-based model, which considers technology and security personnel as means of achieving discipline and crime prevention, the environment-based model focuses on the architectural and infrastructural arrangements of the school. This implies the possibility of carrying out natural visual surveillance on the entire territory of a school, for example, the visibility of school entrances from different points of the school building, and the elimination of natural or artificial barriers (trees, bushes, walls) inside or outside school that hinder visual surveillance. Visibility and openness can become important mechanisms for preventing criminal or anti-social acts. Students are more likely to refrain from inappropriate behavior if they know they may be observed.⁴⁹

46 Ibid.

47 Thapa, A., Cohen, J., Guffey, S., & Higgins-D'Alessandro, A. (2013). A review of school climate research. *Review of educational research*, 83(3), 357-385 p. 6.

48 Frumkin, H., Geller, R. J., Rubin, I. L., & Nodvin, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Safe and healthy school environments*. Oxford University Press.

49 Ibid, p. 255.

In addition to the architectural factor, the model focuses on the issue of strict demarcation of the territory. The school's perimeter should be clearly marked, which helps the school show that its jurisdiction extends to that area. This model also includes careful control of entrance and exit doors to schools, registration of incoming and outgoing visitors, etc.⁵⁰ In addition to school buildings and yards, the environment-based model takes into account the improvement of the access road to the school. The school should ensure that there is no street 'graffiti' of objectionable content on the way to the school, or if there is, the latter should be replaced by works with a positive message created by students themselves. In addition, according to this model, there should not be so-called blind corners in and around the school building,⁵¹ where there is an increased risk of students gathering and engaging in undesirable behavior. A more recent form of the environment-based prevention model, which focuses on a positive school climate along with a protected physical environment, is considered particularly progressive. In particular, it gives equal priority to the issues of positive climate and protected environment at school, for example, whether students receive a quality education, what the school's operational model is, both academically and socially, how students evaluate their own role and belonging to the school community, whether they believe that they are receiving relevant education and acquiring the necessary skills.⁵² It should be noted that the UNICEF Child-Friendly Schools Manual is precisely based on the principles of environment-based prevention, such as school architecture and design, transparency, infrastructure, absence of blind corners, school boundaries, etc.⁵³

According to the more recent version of the model, schools should ensure the identification of the risk factors related to students' school life, such as

50 Ibid p. 257.

51 Ibid. pp. 258-259.

52 Frumkin, H., Geller, R. J., Rubin, I. L., & Nodvin, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Safe and healthy school environments*. Oxford University Press, p. 264.

53 Unicef, (2009), *Child-friendly schools' manual*, Chapter 3.

frequent antisocial behavior, early academic challenges, an inappropriate approach to school, etc. For such cases, schools should have a comprehensive intervention and problem-solving plan in place. The plan, depending on the situation, can be different and include teaching peaceful ways of solving problems, involving a student in a group project, school research. The main thing is for students to feel that he/she plays an important role in school life.⁵⁴ This recent approach to environment-based prevention and school safety focuses on the creation of a supportive, mutually respectful, and positive school climate to eliminate the need for traditional school safety measures.⁵⁵

To summarize, modern safe school models rely on a multi-component, multi-sectoral, 'whole-school approach' in which the process of creating a safe school environment depends on the involvement of various actors. Consequently, safety is seen as a component of school and classroom climate more broadly (along with student-teacher relationships and discipline).⁵⁶ In this way, modern approaches differ from earlier means of achieving school safety, where a safe school environment was achieved through security infrastructure and personnel, sanctions and strict discipline. In order to ensure safety and security at school, schools should take into account several core factors: architectural and infrastructural arrangement of school buildings to ensure the visibility and transparency of the school territory; a positive school climate in the school based on student participation and equality; Mechanisms of involving the school community in school management, clear rules of conduct at school and informing people at all layers of the school about them; prosocial teaching methods and strengthening of teachers for this purpose.

54 Frumkin, H., Geller, R. J., Rubin, I. L., & Nodvin, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Safe and healthy school environments*. Oxford University Press p. 265.

55 *Ibid*, p. 267.

56 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018, National Assessment and Examinations Center, 2020, p. 152, available at: <https://bit.ly/3a8yHBR>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

2. School Safety Architecture in Georgia

The main legislative act regulating safety in public schools of Georgia is Order No. 06/N of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia “On Approval of Rules and Conditions for Protection of Safety and Public Order in General Educational Institutions” (hereinafter, Order of the Minister of Education No. 06/N) and Law of Georgia on General Education.⁵⁷ In addition to the specified statutory acts, school safety issues are regulated by orders and policy documents issued by the Minister of Education, head of the Office of Resource Officers and heads of other state institutions.⁵⁸

According to the existing legislative and political approaches in Georgia, the main body responsible for safety at schools is the Office of Resource Officers (Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions). The purpose of the Office of Resource Officers is not only to protect the physical safety of students, according to the regulations of the Office of Resource Officers, but it also aims to create a physically, psychologically and emotionally safe school environment during school hours on the premises of public schools.⁵⁹ This environment should be founded on “*relationships based on respect, where emotional needs of students are taken into account and rights of all subjects involved in the educational process are protected.*”⁶⁰

57 Order No. 06/N of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia, available at: <https://bit.ly/3Pb1c1Q>; Law Of Georgia On General Education, available at: <https://bit.ly/40M68yT>; accessed on: 31.03.2023.

58 For instance, Order of Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. №141/N on Approval of Regulations of LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, available at: <https://bit.ly/3G83QIN>, see also Order №40/N / №18 on Approval of rules on coordination and exchange of information between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education and Science and LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, available at: <https://bit.ly/3FOGBNd>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

59 Order of Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. №141/N on Approval of Regulations of LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, article 2, paragraph “a”.

60 LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, Progress Report 2019-2020 and 2021 Development Plan, p. 2.

According to the declared goals, the activity of the Office of Resource Officers should be primarily aimed at care and prevention.⁶¹ Thus, at the normative and state policy level, this approach generally echoes the established understanding of the safe school concept, which includes both physical and emotional safety.⁶²

Since the establishment of the Office of Resource Officers to the present day, the functions and roles of school resource officers have undergone significant changes (we will review this issue in detail in Chapter III – History of the Resource Office). Today, the school resource officers' duties include the control of inner and outer school premises to detect and prevent crime and conflict situations (including fights, arguments, possession of illegal items, drugs, etc.).⁶³ Resource officers should play the role of a mediator between students in conflict and ensure a safe environment for teachers and school administration.⁶⁴

According to the school principal's standards, "the primary responsibility of the principal as a school leader is to create a safe and cooperative school environment."⁶⁵ Thus, an important function of ensuring school safety is also assigned to the principal.⁶⁶ However, in many cases, the principal enters the school safety architecture not as an individual, but as a representative of the school directorate. Namely, the persons responsible for ensuring safety and order during school hours on the premises of the general educational institution are resource officers and the school direc-

61 Ibid.

62 Irina Gurgenshvili, Emotional Safety in General Educational Institutions of Georgia – Statistical Analysis of Student Violations and Bullying available at: <https://bit.ly/3HZZ49r>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

63 Tatia Khaliani, Resource Officer in School Life (2017), available at: <https://bit.ly/3Iszbzo>, accessed on: 31.03.2022.

64 Ibid.

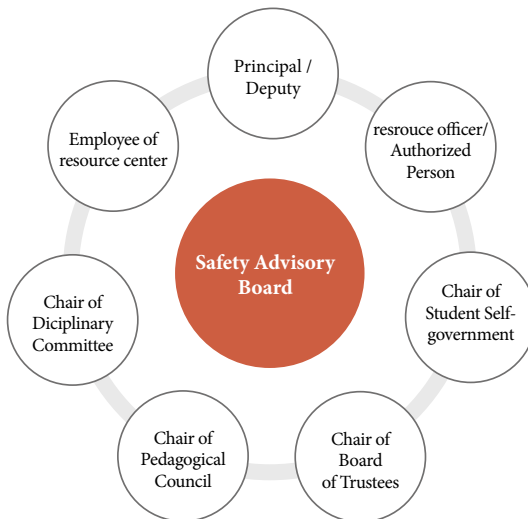
65 Natia Natsvlisvili, Safe School in the collection of articles Management of Modern Schools, National Center of Professional Development (2021), p. 224.

66 Ibid, p. 225.

torate, and at schools with no resource officer – an authorized person and the directorate.⁶⁷ The school directorate includes the principal and his deputy/deputies (if any).⁶⁸

The principal also creates a school safety advisory board, the purpose of which is to ensure coordination between resource officers and structural units of the school.⁶⁹ The safety advisory board includes the school principal and/or his/her deputy/deputies; resource officer or an authorized person (in those schools where resource officers are not present); chair of the board of trustees; chair of the pedagogical council; chair of the disciplinary committee; chair of the student self-government; and the head or an employee of the relevant resource center.⁷⁰

Figure 1: Composition of Safety Advisory Board



67 Ibid, article 3, paragraph 3.

68 Ibid, article 2, paragraph 1, subparagraph “v”.

69 Ibid, article 11, paragraph 1.

70 Ibid, article 11, paragraph 3.

The functions of the school directorate in terms of safety and public order during school hours are quite complex and multifaceted. According to the order of the Minister of Education No. 06/N, which is the central regulatory act of the school safety architecture, the directorate, together with the Office of Resource Officers is responsible for the “protection of order and discipline on the school premises”.⁷¹ The rights and duties of the school principal/directorate are specified in relation to specific cases, however, interestingly, there is also a general ambiguity. In particular, the school directorate ensures “implementation of the appropriate measures for the fulfillment of the recommendations developed by the Office of Resource Officers on public order and safety issues.”⁷² At the same time, the safety advisory board presents recommendations to the school principal to respond to the same issues.⁷³ Such an approach makes it unclear what type of accountability model is formed between the principal/directorate and other structural units (persons), what the difference is between the recommendations presented by resource officers and the advisory board, how to resolve possible conflicts caused by potential differences in recommendations, etc.

It should be noted that critical reflection on the issue of resource officers’ accountability began already when the office was being established. Education specialists pointed out that to a certain extent resource officers needed to be accountable to principals, details of which needed to be regulated in the relevant contract.⁷⁴

71 Ibid, article 44, paragraph 1, subparagraph “k”.

72 Ibid, article 40, paragraph 1.

73 Advisory board “discuss issues related to the protection of safety and public order in the school area during school hours, makes relevant recommendations and submits them to the school principal for further action.”, *ibid*, article 11, paragraph 2, subparagraph “a”.

74 Sofio Gorgodze and Simon Janashia, *Alternative Document on Safe School Politics*, in the collection of articles *Guideline on Child-oriented School*, (2012), p. 21.

The legislation also outlines the role of school administrators⁷⁵ and teachers (including class tutor) in achieving school safety goals. School safety is an integral part of teachers' duties. In order to overcome the difficulties arising in the educational process, teachers need to assume an advisory function and help students solve the difficulties.⁷⁶ Teachers need to remain calm in conflict situations, listen to students' opinions and make objective and fair decisions.⁷⁷ According to the code of professional ethics, teachers are obliged to give due care to the student's health, personal safety and property.⁷⁸

It must be noted that teachers play one of the most crucial roles in terms of violence detection and subsequent response.⁷⁹ However, as is known from the special report of the Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia, the lack of cooperation of the teaching staff with resource officers is a significant problem in practice, which may be caused by awareness of the risk of disciplinary liability.⁸⁰ For example, according to resource officers, "teachers do not inform resource officers about the conflict between children until the situation escalates, which hinders effective and timely response by resource officers."⁸¹ According to the report, cooperation between resource officers and the principal is also problematic.⁸² Naturally, this problem should not be generalized to all schools, however, it seems

75 School administration includes persons in the staff list (excluding teachers), also persons working at school based on employment contract. Order, article 2, paragraph 1, subparagraph "e".

76 Order of the Minister of Education and Science №57/n on Approval of Professional Code of Ethics for Teachers, article 4, paragraph 1, available at: <https://bit.ly/3ON18nv>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

77 Ibid, article 4, paragraph 4.

78 Ibid, article 4, paragraph 5.

79 Special Report on Child Abuse in General Education Institutions, Public Defender of Georgia (2017), p. 21.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

that its existence in some cases is beyond doubt. In addition, the reasons behind the difficulty of cooperation between teachers and resource officers may be different. The in-depth interviews conducted revealed that the difficulty of cooperation between these two may be caused by existing 'historical' distrust towards resource officers (originating from when resource officers also the oversaw fulfillment of regulations by teachers). It could also be related to the fact that the involvement of resource officers in an incident may lead to a more rigid reaction toward the student.⁸³ This will be analyzed in detail in the next part of the document.

At the same time, certain ambiguities of the legislation itself may prevent a clear demarcation of powers and distribution of responsibilities in specific situations. For example, any person, and first and foremost, naturally, teachers are obliged to provide information to resource officers/authorized person/school administration if any kind of violence by the student/against the student is detected or suspected.⁸⁴ However, it is not completely clear in which case and with what intensity the teacher can intervene to resolve the conflict (if there is no objective possibility of immediate involvement of resource officers in the management of the case). Clearly, a detailed normative regulation cannot exist for all cases, however, it is desirable that some important issues be directly regulated by the legislation.

The Ministry of Education and Science is also part of the school safety architecture. Its predominant function is to coordinate, provide for the systemic legislative framework and support in terms of ensuring safety and public order. In this regard, according to the Law on General Education, the Ministry performs functions such as approving the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions; cooperating with the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the ex-

83 Interview with Tbilisi public school teachers (interview 03).

84 The Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N "On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions"; article 25, paragraph 1.

change of information and planning of preventive measures; approval of the rules of coordination and information exchange between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Officer of Resource Officers, etc.⁸⁵ In addition, in terms of school safety architecture, the central role of the Ministry of Education relates to the Office of Resource Officers. The Office of Resource Officers is accountable to the Ministry.⁸⁶ In addition, both the head of the Office and his/her deputies are appointed and dismissed by the Minister of Education.⁸⁷

It is also important how the students and the school staff themselves see the persons responsible for safety, hence, the school safety architecture. As we read in the special report of the Public Defender, the prevailing tendency in this regard is to mark the directorate as the main entity responsible for safety and to neglect or underrate own role.⁸⁸ Namely, “only 8-10% of students and school employees recognize their own responsibility in this regard.”⁸⁹

85 Law Of Georgia On General Education, article 26, paragraph 1, subparagraph h11, h12 and h13.

86 Order of Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. №141/N on Approval of Regulations of LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, article 1, paragraph 2.

87 Ibid, article 4, paragraph 1 and 5.

88 Special Report on Child Abuse in General Education Institutions, Public Defender of Georgia (2017), p. 10.

89 Ibid.

3. History and Development of the Office of School Resource Officers

The Office of Resource Officers was established in 2010 under the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports.⁹⁰ The implementation of the pilot project was initiated by then-incumbent Minister of Education, Dimitri Shashkini.⁹¹ The first criticism precisely concerned the process of introducing this mechanism. Namely, the essence and goals of the project were not discussed with the specialists in the field, and its content was unclear to the public,⁹² besides, according to experts, the pilot project was not for show and the expected effectiveness of the new measure was not confirmed before its implementation.⁹³ However, by July 2010, the Parliament of Georgia had already approved legislative changes, thus creating a legal entity of public law – the Office of Resource Officers.⁹⁴ It is significant that in the majority of schools the position of psychologists was abolished in parallel to this process.⁹⁵

At the initial stage of implementation, the Georgian model of the Office of Resource Officers was a modified version of the School Resource Officers operating in the United States of America. Deployment of resource officers to schools is part of a product-based school safety model dating back to the 1970s and involves placing law-enforcement officers in schools.⁹⁶

90 LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, Progress Report 2019-2020 and 2021 Development Plan, p. 2.

91 Ia Antadze, Sofio Gorgodze, Lika Zakashvili et. al. Safe School without Community Participation (2011), p. 13.

92 Ibid.

93 Interview with education expert Simon Janashia (interview 06).

94 Ia Antadze, Sofio Gorgodze, Lika Zakashvili et. al. Safe School without Community Participation (2011), p. 14.

95 Maia Tsiramua, Psychosocial Service Center In Public Schools, in the collection of articles Safe School without Community Participation (2011), p. 60.

96 Gottfredson DC, Crosse S, Tang Z, et al. Effects of school resource officers on school crime and responses to school crime. *Criminal Public Policy*, (2020), p. 906.

According to relatively recent data from 2016, 48% of American schools have a law-enforcement officer, the largest part of which (42% of American schools) are school resource officers. School resource officers are present in 84% of the schools providing basic education, where the number of students exceeds 1000. In the American model, school resource officers are attached to the school, form part of the police system, and fulfill three roles of an educator, informal counselor, and law enforcement officer. Their competencies include raising students' awareness and knowledge about important issues, as well as informal interviews with them and referrals to social support service providers. However, as law enforcement officers, they are tasked with patrolling the school, detaining a student if necessary, and making important decisions in crises, as well as developing an action plan.⁹⁷

The school resource officers' mechanism operating in the United States was a model for the introduction of the Office of Resource Officers in Georgia. This becomes obvious if we take into account the original functions and duties assigned to the school resource officer by legislation.

Simon Janashia, an education expert, who held a managerial position in the Ministry of Education before the introduction of school resource officers, recalls that the problem of violence in schools became actual largely in 2007, preceded by several murders that occurred in Tbilisi schools over a short period of time.⁹⁸ According to him, on the whole, the Ministry had a long-term approach to the prevention of violence in schools, however, there were also targeted interventions, such as unexpected inspections of schools and students in order to find weapons or other prohibited items. Nevertheless, as Janashia points out, the introduction of the Office of Resource Officers was not considered at this stage. This idea matured with the appointment of Dimitri Shashkini as the Minister of Education in 2010, who, according to the expert, chose a discipline-oriented school

97 Ibid, p. 907.

98 Interview with education expert Simon Janashia (interview 06).

management model typical of the penitentiary system. As he observes, the description of functions and duties of the school resource officers partially coincided with the powers of the prison guard, which, according to the expert, was not a coincidence, but a manifestation of the actual goals of the Office, namely, political control of schools, including teachers and the directorate.⁹⁹

Since the introduction of the School Resource Officers, a major concern has been the manifest police-like nature of the mechanism (along with non-inclusiveness, opacity of the process, and lack of democratic engagement components).¹⁰⁰ Experts noted that school resource officers were taking on the function of control, and the mechanisms of care were being deliberately weakened.¹⁰¹ Besides, the changes, such as equipping schools with surveillance camera systems left the causes of antisocial behavior of students out of sight and was not aimed at its elimination.¹⁰² Such mechanisms only teach/force students to “behave well” in front of cameras.¹⁰³ Therefore, safe school models like this were rather an attempt to take problems out of school.¹⁰⁴

Legislative and policy changes adopted since 2008-2009 were clearly aimed at centralizing the system, increasing the influence of the Ministry of Education on schools, and establishing a control-based learning environment.¹⁰⁵ The creation of the Office of Resource Officers was also part

99 Ibid.

100 Georgian teachers uneasy over school ‘police’, BBC, available at: <https://bbc.in/3uB-B7j8>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

101 Maia Tsiramua, Psychosocial Service Center In Public Schools, in the collection of articles *Safe School without Community Participation* (2011), p. 60.

102 Ibid, p. 67.

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

105 Giorgi Mshvenieradze, *Safe School and Legislation in Georgia* in the collection of articles *Safe School without Community Participation*, 2011, pp. 34-39.

of this process. In the first years, the resource officers' functions included the following:

- *Prevention of unlawful acts committed or detected on the school premises and notification of respective law-enforcement agencies (carrying of hand weapons, possession and consumption of drugs, causing of health damage, violation of tobacco sales rules, petty hooliganism and other actions that violate public order and obstruct the normal course of the educational process);*
- *Oversight over fulfillment of school regulations;*
- *For discovery and seizure, personal inspection of the weapons used for disciplinary misconduct, the object with traces of disciplinary misconduct, the object and valuables obtained through disciplinary misconduct as well as the object and document that are required to clarify the circumstances of the disciplinary misconduct;*
- *Use of the special means in cases directly defined by the legislation of Georgia.*¹⁰⁶

Thus, the resource officers were equipped with particularly broad powers. They practically exercised powers of policing, could conduct personal inspections and use special means (including on the basis of general grounds such as “resistance during the exercise of official authority”)¹⁰⁷ and their scope of action was exceptionally large. In addition, compliance with the instructions of resource officers was made mandatory for any individual.¹⁰⁸ The law on education indicated that “in the performance of

106 Law on additions and amendments to Law Of Georgia On General Education (21/07/2010), article 483, paragraph “b”, “p” “n” and “n”, available at: <https://bit.ly/3OJGt4f>, accessed on: 31.03.2022.

107 Ibid, article 48⁶, paragraph 2, subparagraph “c”.

108 Ibid, article 48⁴, paragraph 1.

official duties, a school resource officer is a representative of the state government and is protected by the state.”¹⁰⁹ The resource officer could also attend the meetings of the school board of trustees, pedagogical council, disciplinary committee, appeals committee and raise the issues belonging to their authority.¹¹⁰

In the literature, it is held that the creation of this type of office with such powers and its integration into the school education system did not correspond to the interests of care and social responsibility. Besides, from the outset it was seen as a kind of political instrument of control over schools and the teachers.¹¹¹ The Office of Resource Officers reflected the prevailing approaches of zero tolerance and crime control, which dominated other areas of Georgian politics (criminal justice policy).¹¹² Overall, this process is conceptualized as an extension of zero tolerance policies and the latter’s incorporation into the education system.

Nowadays, the most problematic functions of resource officers are largely removed. They can no longer use special means, and “personal inspection” has been replaced by no-contact inspection. It is not allowed for resource officers to enter the classroom during lessons on their own initiative (unless there is a threat to the life, health or property of those in the classroom).¹¹³ They also “do not have the right to initiate any type of administrative proceedings against teachers.”¹¹⁴ The powers of resource

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid, article 48³, paragraph 2.

111 For details see Lika Zakashvili, *Safe School Filled with the Sense of Fear* in the collection of articles *Safe School without Community Participation* (2011), pp. 89-102.

112 Nodar Tangiashvilia & Gavin Slade, *Zero-tolerance schooling: education policy, crime, and democracy in post-Soviet Georgia*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, (2014), 30:5, 416-440, p. 421.

113 Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N “On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions”, article 46, paragraphs 4-5.

114 Tatia Khaliani, *Resource Officers in School Life*, available at: <https://bit.ly/3Iszbzo>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

officers also no longer include the function of “oversight over the fulfillment of school regulations”, which means that resource officers no longer oversee the fulfillment of school regulations by the school directorate and administration.

In addition, with the 2018 legislative amendments, the student, parent and teacher were given the right to appeal unlawful and other wrongful actions of a school resource officer.¹¹⁵ Before the legislative changes, the appeal mechanism existed only with regard to wrongful acts of teachers and the school. Despite the positive change, it should be noted that the appeal mechanism needs detailed regulation, namely, in terms of the entity authorized to review the appeal, the deadline for appeal, review of the appeal, and other procedural issues.

115 Law of Georgia on General Education, article 12, paragraph 1.

4. Functions of School Resource Officers

According to the order of the Minister of Education No. 06/N, two groups of functions performed by resource officers can be distinguished: 1. educational and care-oriented measures; and 2. oversight measures undertaken in cases of security and public order violations or for their prevention.

The **first group** of functions included the powers and responsibilities of resource officers such as: handling students with social behavioral problems, interviewing them individually, observing their behavior and informing parents and appropriate representatives of the school about it,¹¹⁶ providing students with information on matters related to civil defense, traffic safety, administrative and criminal offenses and their consequences,¹¹⁷ promotion of healthy lifestyles, participation in the planning and implementation of educational campaigns including against violence (among others bullying) and other preventive measures,¹¹⁸ conflict mediation between students,¹¹⁹ etc.

The **second group** includes the broadest and most central functions of resource officers. This primarily implies the protection of physical safety through remote and non-remote measures, which mainly derive from the two general powers of resource officers. These are the control of the educational institution and its adjacent areas, prevention of violations occurring/detected at school or in adjacent areas and reporting them to the relevant law enforcement agencies.¹²⁰ The legislation stipulates that “safety and public order during school hours on the school premises is protected by resource officers and/or authorized persons, [while] resource officers

116 Ibid, article 48³, paragraph 1, subparagraph “c” and “e”.

117 Ibid, subparagraph “d”.

118 Ibid, subparagraph “v”¹

119 Ibid, subparagraph “z”.

120 Law of Georgia on General Education, article 48³, paragraph 1, subparagraph “a” and “b”

and the school directorate are those responsible for the safety and public order during school hours on the school premises.”¹²¹

These are achieved through the following functions of resource officers: day-to-day use and administration of video surveillance systems;¹²² in specific cases, separation of students in an emotionally and physically safe environment;¹²³ initial management and assessment of students’ condition using questionnaires (a psychologist may be involved at the second stage);¹²⁴ use of physical force only in extreme situations;¹²⁵ No-contact inspection of a student using a metal detector (to detect item/s prohibited by law or school regulations);¹²⁶ keeping of electronic database, namely, recording violations/alleged violations in the database and forwarding the records to the school directorate;¹²⁷ issuance of recommendations on safety and public order in schools,¹²⁸ etc.

Requested public information revealed that separation and no-contact surface inspections were the most frequently used ones by resource officers in 2019. The statistics for the following years show a significant downward trend in this regard. It is also worth noting that in 2019 one and in

121 In schools without resource officers – authorized person and the school directorate, see Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N “On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions”, article 3, paragraphs 2-3.

122 Ibid, article 42, paragraph 1.

123 Ibid, article 32, paragraph 1.

124 Ibid, article 33, paragraph 1.

125 According to the order, the resource officer has the right to use physical force in the following cases: “a) when preventing a crime; b) when there is a threat to the life and/or health of persons in the school and its surrounding area; c) In cases provided for by the legislation of Georgia, when apprehending an offender to be presented to the law enforcement body, when there is sufficient reason to assume that this person will hide or cause harm to those around him.” Ibid, Article 48, Paragraph 2.

126 Ibid, article 21, paragraph 3, and article 22, paragraph 2.

127 Ibid, article 37, paragraph 1 and 5.

128 Ibid, article 39, paragraph 1.

2021 two cases of using physical force to obstruct suicide were recorded.¹²⁹ It is important that in 2019 the educational process took place in a school environment, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020, 2021 and partially in 2022, the educational process took place in a remote or hybrid environment. Therefore, the influence of the pandemic on the statistical data recorded in 2020, 2021 and partly in 2022 is obvious.

Records	2019 calendar year	2020 calendar year	2021 calendar year
Use of physical force by resource officers (to obstruct suicide)	1	0	2
Separation	45	5	5
No-contact surface inspection	7116	1494	2368

Specific rights and duties of resource officers are predominantly reflected in the cases, which, according to the legislation, qualify as a “violation of safety and public order” at school. The legislation singles out 15 concrete and 1 additional (general) cases.¹³⁰

129 Correspondence of LEPL Office of Resource Officers of the Educational Institution N774509 dated 21.07.2022.

130 Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N “On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions”, article 12, paragraph 1.

List of Safety and Public Order Violations
1. Emergency situations (fire, earthquake, flood, etc.);
2. Cases of communicable diseases posing risks to public health at schools;
3. Suicide thoughts; suicide attempts; suicide;
4. Self-harm;
5. Discovery of explosive substances or reports on the presence of explosive substances at school;
6. Possession of an item prohibited by the legislation of Georgia, a weapon for committing an alleged disciplinary misconduct/offense by a student;
7. Carrying, sale, consumption of alcohol and/or drugs by a student/teacher/ other school employee on the school premises and/or being under their influence;
8. Non-attendance and/or tardiness at school without a good reason, when the legal guardian of the student is not informed about this; Leaving the class and/ or school by a student without proper reason and permission;
9. Any kind of violence by/towards a student;
10. Any kind of offense by/against a student;
11. Bullying/Cyber-bullying by/against a student;
12. Discrimination by/against a student based on any ground;
13. Student's disruptive behavior (obstructing educational process);
14. Unauthorized taking of money/things by a student, collection of money, taking money/things from another student with any form of coercion;
15. Destroying property of a student/teacher/school employee/school.
Other circumstances and/or actions that may endanger the life and/or health and/or property of persons present on the school premises during school hours, proper school operation and/or normal course of the educational process, as well as violation of school regulations, students' code of conduct, and Professional Code of Ethics for Teachers.

In each case, the roles and functions of resource officers are more or less different and depend on the substance and intensity of an incident or violation. While in emergency and crisis situations resource officers are tasked with managing the situation, reporting to relevant authorities and

providing first aid, for violations characteristic of the educational process (e.g. student's disruptive behavior), their function mostly consists in searching for information on violations (to inform the student's legal guardian and, if necessary, to refer the child to the center of psychosocial services). In most situations that pose a threat to safety and public order, resource officers engage the law enforcement agency. In some cases, automatic reporting is mandatory (e.g. suicide attempt; discovery of an explosive substance at school; any offense committed by/against a student under the Criminal Code and the Code of Administrative Offenses).¹³¹ Sometimes, resource officers must first assess whether the act contains signs of an offense and only then report the incident to the law enforcement agency (e.g. bullying/cyberbullying by/against a student or any kind of discrimination).¹³²

It should be noted here that the Office of Resource Officers is one of the layers, not the only one, in managing the existing school safety challenges. In most of the considered cases, resource officers do not exercise exclusive powers. The school administration, teacher, and class tutor are involved in the management of specific cases. The legislation makes it clear that the responsibility of managing such situations is shared. In addition, a separate layer of school safety architecture is the center for psychosocial services, which are subsequently involved in the management of relevant cases. In addition to psychological services, in case of need, psychologists and social workers of the center are involved in the multidisciplinary management of incidents identified at school, and are part of the mobile team deployed to schools.¹³³

131 Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N "On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions", article 16, paragraph 2; article 19, subparagraph "b"; article 26, paragraph 2.

132 Ibid, article 27, paragraphs 1-2. Article 28, paragraphs 1-2.

133 Ibid, article 36, paragraphs 1-2.

5. Electronic Records of Violations at School and Exchange of Information with the Ministry of Internal Affairs

5.1 Electronic Records of Violations at School

Resource officers record violations or alleged violations identified at school in the registration form, which is an automatically generated document (erofficers.emis.ge – electronic program).¹³⁴ The said electronic program is a database, where information about measures taken to respond to each violation is stored, not only when those are taken by resource officers, but also by a teacher, the school directorate, disciplinary committee.¹³⁵ The student's violation registration form includes his/her name and surname, identification number, nature, time and place of the violation, and information about the measures undertaken by resource officers.¹³⁶

The research group requested information from the Public Defender's Office about the number of violations recorded in public schools in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022.

134 Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N “On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions”, article 2, paragraph 1, subparagraph “a”.

135 Ibid, article 2, paragraph 1, subparagraph “b”.

136 Order №24/N of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia of May 27, 2021 on introducing amendments to the order №171/N of August 19 of 2019 on approval of violation record sheet form in educational institutions, annex 1, available at: <https://bit.ly/40rKsro>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

Violations identified by students during 2019-2021¹³⁷

N	Types of Violations	2019 calendar year	2020 calendar year	2021 calendar year
1	Suicidal thought/ conduct/suicide;	369	117	17
2	Self-harm;	7	0	24
3	Carrying of explosive substances at school;	7	0	0
4	Carrying of prohibited items at school;	1462	300	805
5	Carrying of high-risk items at school;	141	31	61
6	Consumption of tobacco;	770	179	402
7	Carrying, consumption, sale of alcohol or appearing at school under its influence;	40	12	28
8	Carrying, consumption, sale of drugs (marijuana) or psychotropic substances or appearing at school under its influence;	22	3	1
9	Disciplinary misconduct	19503	4654	3718
10	Violence against a student by another person	108	15	39
11	Violence by a student against a student	2230	435	888
12	Cyber-bullying	20	13	38

137 Correspondence №MES 6 22 0000828469 dated 21.07.2022 of LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, annex N2.

Violations identified by students in 2022¹³⁸

N	Type of Violations	Number
1	Gambling	72
2	Possession of card/other gambling items	141
3	Possession of tobacco products	789
4	Possession of items needed for drug consumption	3
5	Possession of new year's explosives	115
6	Possession of a lighter or match	854
7	Making school premises dirty	13
8	Disrespectful/unethical behavior	779
9	Consumption of tobacco products	832
10	Use of petard/pepper spray	154
11	Use of a pneumatic weapon	4
12	Use of hand weapon	5
13	Possession of fireworks/pepper spray	3
14	Possession of an electroshock weapon	4
15	Possession of cartridge	6
16	Possession of a cartridge case	5
17	Possession of pneumatic weapon	6
18	Possession of hand weapon	162
19	Possession of a baton	2
20	Use of a mobile phone during lessons	307
21	Tardiness for class	2862
22	Leaving class without permission	6376
23	Unexcused absences from class	1136
24	Non-possession of items necessary for class	21
25	Tardiness for school	5520
26	Use of headphones/technical device during class	3
27	Disruption of class or an attempt thereof	4224

138 Correspondence of LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions N. MES 7 23 0000131381 dated 06.02.2023.

28	Damaging of property	22
29	Failure to comply with lawful instructions	193
30	Taking of property without permission	19
31	Consumption of alcohol on the school premises	10
32	Bringing alcohol to the school premises	17
33	Appearing at school under the influence of alcohol	6
34	Self-harm	38
35	Cases of contagious diseases at school	3351
36	Dangerous internet games	1
37	Verbal abuse	389
38	Reckless bodily harm	114
39	Intentional damaging of school property	112
40	Reckless damaging of school property	115
41	Alleged verbal confrontation	109
42	Suicide attempt	10
43	Student's suicidal thoughts	18
44	False alarm	4
45	Physical abuse	2044
46	Cyber violence	36
47	Showing movements with sexual connotations	1
48	Psychological violence	2
49	Physical bullying	4
50	Showing of subculture symbols	3
51	Psychological bullying	27
52	Threat of violence	30
53	Alleged carrying/consumption of drugs on the school premises	4
54	Intentional bodily harm	33

According to the data obtained, it can be seen that the statistics produced by resource officers are inconsistent and the list of violations exceeds the number of violations determined by the order. As mentioned above, except for the cases directly indicated, any other circumstance and/or action that hinders the proper course of the educational process may be considered a violation.¹³⁹ Presumably, resource officers record the statistics of violations precisely based on this provision, and include actions such as e.g. use of headphones/technical device during classes (3 registered cases), using a mobile phone during class (307 registered cases) or non-possession of items necessary for the educational process (21 registered cases). It is also significant in this context that the said statistics are compiled only on the basis of the cases registered in those public schools, where resource officers are present since it is in such schools that the electronic registration of violations are made.

The head of the Planning and Analysis Department of the Office of Resource Officers states that in those schools, where there is no resource officer and an authorized person is designated instead, violations are often not detected and recorded. According to the head of the Department, unless the incident is related to a student's life or health, such facts remain largely unrecorded. This is the biggest difference between schools with resource officers and without.¹⁴⁰

Resource officers routinely record cases that may be undesirable for the school environment, even if contentwise they may not present any kind of a safety challenge. This may also indicate that the meticulous electronic registration artificially increases the number of violations recorded at school, the list of which may include actions whose registration (filling in

139 Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N "On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions", article 12, paragraph 1.

140 Interview with the Planning and Analysis Department and head of psychosocial service center (interview 1).

the violation sheet) does not serve any public interest and handling and prevention of which falls under teachers' competence.

According to the order of the Minister of Education,¹⁴¹ information about violations registered in the electronic database is stored for a period of a student's status, and is automatically deleted afterwards. This once again intensifies the criticism of the routine registration of minor violations detected at school, since the Prosecutor's office (and with it the Ministry of Internal Affairs) can have access not only to minor student offenses, but also the name, surname and other identifiable characteristics of the "offender". The next chapter will be devoted to a detailed discussion of this issue and criticism of the current arrangement.

5.2. Exchange of Information with the Ministry of Internal Affairs

According to the joint order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports of Georgia and the Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia,¹⁴² the Office of Resource Officers and the Ministry of Internal Affairs exchange information and act in coordination. There are two ways to do it: 1. through real-time copying of information kept in the electronic database by the Office of Resource Officers and integrating it in the relevant database of the Ministry of Internal Affairs; and 2. Through oral or written exchange of information between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Office of Resource Officers.¹⁴³ As a result, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has full access to information in the electronic database.

141 Article 37, paragraph 10.

142 Order №40/N / №18 on Approval of rules on coordination and exchange of information between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education and Science and LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions

143 Ibid, article 3, paragraph 1.

According to the order, the Ministry of Internal Affairs processes information mainly for preventive purposes, which implies the conduct of various activities and events with target groups, provision of information regarding legal issues, identification of factors contributing to legal violations, etc.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, “information in the electronic records is stored in the relevant database of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia for the duration of a student’s status and is automatically deleted afterwards.”¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, access to this information by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the existing legislative regulation of the issue is very problematic.

As it was said, resource officers are obliged to register any violation (or alleged violation) identified by them in the electronic program,¹⁴⁶ and these violations are not limited to those violations stipulated by the Criminal Code or the Code of Administrative Offenses. For example, such violations are possession of tobacco/alcohol, non-attendance of a class by a student, violation of school regulations, Student Code of Conduct and Professional Code of Ethics for Teachers.¹⁴⁷

The definition of “violation” is so broad and such diverse information is collected in the electronic database that it is unclear what legitimate purpose is to be served by full access to it by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. In addition, not all types of violations create the absolute necessity for recording and storing such information. In general, total technological monitoring of students’ behavior should not be declared as an unconditional good to be protected. In parallel to being beneficial, it may also

144 Ibid, article 2, paragraph 1.

145 Ibid, article 3, paragraph 5.

146 Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N “On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions”, article 37, paragraph 2.

147 Ibid, article 12, paragraph 1.

contribute to a disciplining atmosphere¹⁴⁸ that is counterproductive to the educational goals of schools.

The need to copy information stored in the electronic database in real-time and integrate it in the relevant database of the Ministry of Internal Affairs is also unjustified. Naturally, an electronic registration system is a useful tool for school safety purposes. However, it is useful to determine to what extent it corresponds to the idea of a care-oriented school in its current form. According to the order, the main purpose of copying the data is to implement preventive activities in schools.¹⁴⁹ However, in order to achieve the preventive goals specified in the order, access to the statistical information produced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs would be sufficient. Information about each violation committed by each student of a school is not a necessary prerequisite for preventive meetings with students and for providing information about violations of law. In addition, working with a student with a specific behavioral problem, or with a child who often violates the rules established by school internal regulations, does not fall under the competence of the Ministry of Internal Affairs defined by the law. Support of such students is the domain of the psychosocial service center of the Office of Resource Officers. In these circumstances, information available to the Ministry of Internal Affairs disproportionately increases the degree of integration of this structure in general educational institutions. Therefore, it remains unclear what legitimate interest justifies access of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to the electronic database of the Office of Resource Officers and all the records available there. Therefore, legislation should differentiate which types of violations the Ministry of Internal Affairs will have access to and which it will not. Besides, there may not be the need for electronic recording of some minor violations in

148 For criticism of school environment focused on discipline, punishment and control, see Nodar Tangiashvilia & Gavin Slade, *Zero-tolerance schooling: education policy, crime, and democracy in post-Soviet Georgia*, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 30:5, 416-440, 2014, p. 432.

149 Order №40/N / №18 on Approval of rules on coordination and exchange of information between the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Education and Science and LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, article 2, paragraph 1.

order not to subject the school climate to excessive technological monitoring, especially when such cases remain in the database for years, for the duration of a student's status.

5.3. Obligation to Directly Report to Law Enforcement Agencies

In addition to accessing the information stored in the electronic database, as mentioned above, resource officers, and in schools where there is no resource officer, an authorized person trained in school safety issues, are required to call 112 if there is an incident at school that entails signs of an administrative offense or a crime.¹⁵⁰ The obligation to contact the police exists also in case of an act (self-harm, suicidal behavior) that requires intervention. The conducted interviews show that the practice of informing the police in order to involve them in handling incidents at schools is not uniform.

The present study evaluated the statistical information collected by the Office of Resource Officers on the practice of reporting to the police about the incidents detected at schools. It should be noted that in 2021, resource officers changed the processing methodology of statistical information. Some kinds of violations have been grouped into one category, and new categories have also emerged. Therefore, an exact comparison of data from 2019 and 2020 with that from 2021 is not possible in some cases, while it is more reliable for violations whose statistical processing methodology has not changed.

150 Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N "On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions", article 25-26.

Reporting of Violations Identified by Students to the Police during 2019-2021¹⁵¹

	Types of Violations	2019	2020
1.	Alleged carrying, sale, consumption of drugs or psychotropic substances by a student/teacher/ other school employee on the school premises and/or appearing at school under their influence;	29	1
2.	Alleged carrying consumption, sale of alcohol, appearing at school under its influence.	31	8
3.	Taking, collecting and the like of money/ property without permission.	63	6
4.	Self-harm by a student	35	2
5.	Physical abuse	416	85
6.	Verbal abuse	27	1
7.	Threat of violence	25	6
8.	Unethical conduct	16	1
9.	Suicide attempt by a student on the school premises	0	1
10.	Presence of an unidentified person on the school premises	32	1
11.	Damaging of School Property	4	3

	Types of Violations	2021
1.	Drugs (marijuana), its analogs, precursor, psychotropic and hard substances	2
2.	Alleged carrying, consumption, sale of alcohol, appearing at school under its influence.	10
3.	Taking, collecting and the like of property without permission.	7
4.	Self-harm by a student	7
5.	Physical abuse	198
6.	Verbal abuse	17
7.	Threat of violence	12
8.	Unethical conduct	11
9.	Suicide attempt by a student on the school premises	5
10.	Presence of an unidentified person	10
11.	Damaging of School Property	4

151 Correspondence №MES 6 22 0000828469 dated 21.07.2022 of LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, annex 2.

School Safety

12.	Possession of prohibited items (including high-risk prohibited items: electroshock weapon, pneumatic weapon, hand weapon, sharp object)	181	29	12.	Prohibited items (toy guns that look real, razor, so-called marijuana bong)	5
13.	Non-attendance of a class by a student	9	2	13.	Possession of high-risk prohibited items (electroshock weapon, pneumatic weapon, hand weapon, sharp object).	48
14.	Disruption of class/ attempt thereof	1	0	14.	Use of high-risk prohibited items (pneumatic weapon, hand weapon, sharp object)	8
15.	Consumption of tobacco	3	0	15.	Disciplinary violations by students	16
16.	Non-compliance with a lawful order	2	0	16.	Disruptive behavior by students	4
17.	Medical Incidents	12	0	17.	Possession of medicine	1
18.	Other incidents at school	260	32	18.	Economic Violence	7
				19.	Cyberbullying	18
				20.	Sexual Violence	2
				21.	Alleged Verbal Fight	30
				22.	Intentional bodily harm	12
				23.	Psychological bullying	2
				24.	Other violations at school	12
Total		1146	178			448

As for 2022, the information provided by the Office of Resource Officers failed to break down grounds for informing the Ministry of Internal Affairs. According to the official correspondence from the office, it can only be established that in 2022, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was informed about 995 incidents in total.¹⁵² The presented data show that the mode of remote

¹⁵² Correspondence of LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions N MES 7 23 0000131381 dated 06.02.2023.

and hybrid learning during the Covid-19 pandemic had a substantial impact on the number of incidents and the reporting rate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. If in the pre-pandemic period, in 2019, 1146 incidents were reported to the police, in 2020 and 2021, this number was reduced to 178 and 448 incidents. However, after the acute pandemic period, in 2022, the Ministry of Internal Affairs was informed about 995 cases.

The requested public information shows that in previous years (2019, 2020, 2021), resource officers reported to the police about violations observed in schools, even in the absence of grounds directly provided for by the law. For example, “unethical conduct”, “verbal abuse” and the like were such specified grounds.¹⁵³ This is not merely a problem of practice. The legislation should clearly indicate that violation of school regulations alone should not lead to the involvement of law enforcement agencies. Besides, it may not be appropriate either that, according to the legislation, suspicion of any administrative offense is an automatic ground for reporting to the police. Considering the duty of care to students, in some cases it may be desirable that a different approach is used towards them, which does not *a priori* favor policing measures. Thus, the Ministry of Education should discuss the development of a new vision on this issue with the involvement of education specialists, lawyers, psychologists, social workers and other relevant field experts.

5.3.1. Practical Aspects of Reporting to Law Enforcement Agencies about School Incidents

In practice, the obligation of the school and resource officers to report appropriately to 112 during an incident at school is still problematic. The head of the Planning and Analysis Department of the Office of Resource Officers Ekaterine Markhvashvili notes that the Office has often become

¹⁵³ Correspondence of LEPL Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions N774509 dated 21.07.2022..

an object of criticism because sometimes it has to inform the police about relevant violations committed by students. According to her, there are violations for which a response is mandatory, citing the carrying of a cold weapon at school as an example. She explains that when a possible administrative responsibility of a student lies on one side of the scale, and on the other side is the life and health of students, the latter must be favored. The head of the department also points out that a uniform approach and standards are necessary, and the perception of justice and equality at school may be damaged by an individual approach to students in each individual case. Besides, the school and the Office of Resource Officers are assigned responsibility for tragic incidents at school. According to the department head, “if there is a stabbing, they say, where was the resource officer, why did he not react”. Thus, resource officers act in accordance with the law and report to the law enforcement agencies about any act that could constitute a violation of law.¹⁵⁴

Resource officers confirm the statements of the department head. They clarify that they call 112 in case of a physical confrontation, or when finding a prohibited item at school, for example, a hand weapon, after which the police visits the school and assesses the situation.¹⁵⁵ According to resource officers, they had a case of finding a hand weapon, a knife in the school. Namely, the student made such movements that they reasonably suspected he possessed a knife. A no-contact surface inspection was conducted, which confirmed the suspicion, accordingly, the child’s parent and the police were notified. As resource officers state, since the act represented an administrative offense, administrative proceedings were initiated, as a result of which the student was given a warning. Resource officers recall there was a precedent of calling the police to the school also in case of a physical conflict. According to their story, following the physical confrontation between the students, the resource officers discovered the circum-

154 Interview with the Planning and Analysis Department and head of psychosocial service center (interview 1).

155 Interview with Tbilisi public school resource officers (interview 4).

stances of the conflict, a social worker was involved in the case and an interview was held with the students. The students refused to reconcile and it seemed that the confrontation was bound to continue outside school possibly in the form of a verbal fight. Therefore, the grounds for reporting to the police was present. Law enforcement officers arrived at the school, and the children were taken to the police station, where they were interviewed in the presence of their parents. According to the resource officers, as a result of the involvement of the police in the case, both the children and their parents clarified their relationship with each other and the incident ended. In the following days, they returned to school and there was no more tension between them.¹⁵⁶

It should be noted that the involvement of law enforcement officers in a physical conflict may often be the only appropriate way to prevent escalation of the situation. However, it can also become problematic if the police is routinely called for conflicts between students at school. It is important that schools have the resources to properly assess the severity of conflicts or the threat of their escalation, and also to consider possible ways to stabilize the relationship between students, including the involvement of a mediator and parents. Accordingly, the police should be involved in the process of resolving the incident when the school itself lacks the capacity for conflict resolution or mediation, and judging from the actions of the parties involved in the conflict, it is obvious that there are risks conflict will continue or deepen.

Ekaterine Markhvashvili notes that often there are cases when a school teacher or the principal does not inform resource officers about an incident, as resource officers will have the obligation to inform the police.¹⁵⁷ According to Nino Shatberashvili, the head of the Psychosocial Service Center, there have been cases in some schools where reporting to the po-

156 Ibid.

157 Interview with the Planning and Analysis Department and head of psychosocial service center (interview 1).

lice had even resulted in criminal liability. This is why some teachers are in doubt whether they did the right thing when they brought information about the violation to the responsible authority.¹⁵⁸

This view of the head of the department is also confirmed by other sources. The special report of the Public Defender shows that the lack of teachers' cooperation with resource officers is a significant problem in practice.¹⁵⁹ For example, according to resource officers, "teachers do not inform resource officers about the conflict between the children until the situation escalates, which hinders effective and timely response by resource officers."¹⁶⁰ According to the report, the difficulty of cooperation between resource officers and the principal is also identified.¹⁶¹ Naturally, this problem should not be generalized to all schools, besides, several years have passed since the publication of the said report of the Public Defender. Nevertheless, the observations in the report are partially confirmed by the information obtained as a result of the interviews conducted for this research with the school principal and the teacher.

The principal of the school interviewed as part of the research says that often, the school itself can defuse a specific situation. In the principal's experience, some issues are better resolved by talking to the student than by involving resource officers, law enforcement and investigative officers. The principal recalls two incidents, in the first case a representative of the law enforcement agency was called to the school, and in the second case the school was able to resolve the problem with its own resources.¹⁶² According to the school manager, resource officers called 112 on the alleged case of bullying at the school, followed by the arrival of a public order

158 Ibid.

159 Special Report on Child Abuse in General Education Institutions, Public Defender of Georgia (2017), p. 21.

160 Ibid.

161 Ibid.

162 Interview with a Tbilisi public school principal (interview 2).

officer and criminal police at the school. According to the principal, this may have had a devastating effect on the children's psychology, as the students were taken to the police station for questioning, which lasted until midnight. This was also the cause of aggression from the parents, directed towards the school and the resource officers. The principal says that often because of the excessive police reaction, the school management and resource officers are reluctant to reveal the facts. In these circumstances, law enforcement agencies "are no longer a supporting, but a hindering factor". Finally, for the indicated incident, the suspicion of bullying was not confirmed. According to the head of the school, the police may provide physical safety protection, but the child's psychological safety may be neglected in this process, which should be regarded as an equally important building block of school safety architecture.¹⁶³

The principal recalls another case resolved with the involvement of the school staff as an example of how response without police involvement can defuse a specific situation at school. As she states, the alleged fact of theft was detected at school, which contains clear signs of crime, and therefore resource officers had the obligation to report it to the police. However, the principal and the resource officer spoke to the students of the class where the incident occurred and asked them to voluntarily return the stolen item. According to the principal, shortly after the conversation, one of the students approached her personally and confessed what he/she had done, and as a result, the incident was resolved. The principal believes that the said incident would not have been any less serious if the law enforcement officers were involved. The identity of the child may have been made public, but in this case only the school principal, resource officers and the parents knew about it. According to the principal, on the one hand, they may have avoided the interaction of the child with the police and the likely psychological stress, however, on the other hand, because they did not act in accordance with the procedure defined by law, they were unable to refer the child to a Psychosocial Service Center for counseling for possible

163 Ibid.

kleptomania. In this case, as a result of an interview with the child at the psychosocial service center, it could be revealed that theft was committed in one of the schools, which was not appropriately reported to the Office of Resource Officers and the law enforcement agencies. This may have led to the disciplinary liability of the principal and resource officers.¹⁶⁴

As for the case about possession of a hand knife, the principal recalls an incident when after deliberating with resource officers, she made the decision to confiscate the item and inform the parent. According to the principal, if she knows that the student does not have an anger management issue, or is not ordinarily implicated in similar violations, she will give a verbal warning regarding the violation and will try to modify his/her behavior together with the parent. As the principal explains, the representatives of law enforcement agencies will only be involved in the case if there is a risk of harming a student or someone else, or if the parent does not react to the information received from the school and does not cooperate with the school administration. The principal has a similar approach to recording the violations detected at schools in the electronic database. She believes that filling out a registration form for all violations is counterproductive, because if it is not followed by a reaction, that is, imposition of a disciplinary penalty, the students will no longer take it seriously. According to the principal, in her school, a violation registration form is not used as a punitive measure, but as a mechanism to defuse the situation. According to the principal, more violations could have been registered in the school than are now, however, this is a well-thought-out policy of the school based on the principles of an alternative approach of care for students.¹⁶⁵

The teacher interviewed also believes that it is better to resolve cases by communicating with the student and parents about some of the violations detected in the school, than by drawing up a violation registration sheet

164 Ibid.

165 Ibid.

or calling the police. As the teacher explains, if he sees that a student has brought a cold weapon or marijuana to school, for example, he will try to confiscate the prohibited item himself and inform the class tutor and the parent. According to the teacher, he knows that it is the prerogative of school resource officers to respond to such incidents, but he fears that the resource officer or the school administration “will have a more rigid attitude, which will rather bring worse consequences for the student than achieve the understanding [of the action].”¹⁶⁶ According to the teacher, if a cold weapon is found to be in the possession of a student who has been observed to engage in anti-social behavior before, or if she finds an unidentifiable powder, presumably narcotic substances at school, he will report this to the resource officer, not to the principal. In this case as well, the motive for turning to a resource officer is the fact that the response of a resource officer might be more proportionate. Namely, the student could be referred to the Psychosocial Service Center of the Office of Resource Officers to avoid his or her expulsion from school at least temporarily (a decision, which could be made by the principal).¹⁶⁷

It can be said that the existing relationship between resource officers, school management and teachers largely determines the issue of their potential positive cooperation. This is reflected both in the process of reporting a specific incident to a resource officer, as well as in making a joint decision about the response required to manage the situation. That is why the experience of schools both in terms of registering violations in the electronic database and reporting to law enforcement agencies may be strongly determined by the relationship between the school staff and resource officers and the climate in the school. Also, the difference may be even greater between the schools in cities and small settlements, as in the latter case schools may be making decisions in terms of registration and responding to detected violations considering the local context and dynamics of relations.

166 Interview with Tbilisi public school teachers (interview 3).

167 Ibid.

6. Work of Psychosocial Service Center in Schools

Strengthening and development of students' social, emotional and behavioral habits is of great importance for school safety. One of the crucial tasks in this regard is performed by psychosocial service centers. It is believed that the so-called wave model is well suited for this task.¹⁶⁸ In the wave model school activities are considered at three levels. The first involves any kind of intervention that has benefits for students (training, staff support mechanisms, development of uniform school policies, curriculum enrichment, etc.).¹⁶⁹ The second level involves distinguishing students (groups of students) with specific needs and offering them appropriate support.¹⁷⁰ The third stage consists in individual work with the most sensitive students. Often "these students have such serious, long-term and diverse problems that they require the support of a multidisciplinary team of specialists, and identification of such a need is the school's responsibility."¹⁷¹

A central component of an alternative, care-oriented model of safety is continuous on-site psychosocial support in schools. There are different [sub]models that try to adapt psychosocial services to specific situations of school contingent, operational area and functional burden.¹⁷² However, it is held that the psychosocial service model should be based on the presence of at least one social worker and one psychologist in the school.¹⁷³

168 Natia Natsvlishvili, Safe School in the collection of articles Management of Modern Schools, National Center of Professional Development (2021), p. 235.

169 Ibid.

170 Ibid.

171 Ibid.

172 Maia Tsiramua, Psychosocial Service Center In Public Schools, in the collection of articles Safe School without Community Participation (2011), p . 82-83.

173 Ibid, p. 83.

In general, the role of social workers in educational institutions is to provide “a link between school, family and community. Social work at school focuses on helping students improve their social, emotional, and behavioral skills.”¹⁷⁴ The intervention by a social worker is of great importance when a student has to deal with problems such as oppression, violence, difficult financial situations, stress, academic performance, etc.¹⁷⁵ A social worker is a kind of a mediator (counselor) between school administration, family and groups of students.¹⁷⁶ In this way, a social worker contributes to the accessibility of the right to education for each student and their development in a better environment.¹⁷⁷

The importance of the work of psychosocial services in schools is recognized by the Office of Resource Officers.¹⁷⁸ The psychosocial services (to which the social work component was added in 2019)¹⁷⁹ are integrated into the Office of Resource Officers, and students or their legal representatives can receive its services by applying to the center. If necessary, resource officers can themselves refer a student in order to receive appropriate services or counseling.¹⁸⁰ In addition, students and their legal representatives can receive psychosocial services by phone or online consultation (on the website befriend.mes.gov.ge) and through a mobile phone application.¹⁸¹ The statistics of referrals to the psychosocial service center are increasing¹⁸² and look like this:

174 Sofio Kiladze, Ana Pirtkhalashvili, *Handbook of Social Work* (2018), p. 138, available at: <https://bit.ly/3nSWxVg>, accessed on: 31.03.2023.

175 Ibid, p. 139.

176 Ibid.

177 Ibid, pp. 138-139.

178 LEPL Resource Office of Educational Institutions, *Progress Report 2019-2020 and 2021 Development Plan*, p. 14.

179 Ibid, p. 4.

180 Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N “On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions”, article 34, paragraph 2.

181 Ibid, article 9, paragraph 1.

182 Correspondence №MES 6 22 0000828469 dated 21.07.2022 and Correspondence MES 7 23 0000131381 dated 06.02.2023 of LEPL Resource Office of Educational Institutions.

2020	Reporting Rate: 928	
	Internal Reporting: 608	Self-initiative: 320
2021	Reporting Rate: 1955	
	Internal Reporting: 1315	Self-initiative: 640
2022	Reporting Rate 3556	
	Internal Reporting: 2633	Self-initiative: 923

An important step in terms of social work in general educational institutions was taken in 2021, when social workers' services began to be directly provided on the ground in schools. In the first stage, the Office of Resource Officers with the component of social work was introduced in 36 public schools (Tbilisi, Mtskheta, Telavi, Rustavi, Gori, Akhaltsikhe, Ambrolauri, Imereti, Poti, Batumi, Khelvachauri).¹⁸³ In the same year, the school mediation process was also launched in a pilot mode.¹⁸⁴ The goal of mediation is "peaceful resolution of a conflict situation, proactive response and prevention through early and effective intervention."¹⁸⁵ According to the head of the psychosocial service center, at least 12 mediators are currently trained and are ready to lead the mediation process.¹⁸⁶ Information requested regarding the mediation pilot program indicates that as of the summer of 2022, one case has been reported to the center for psychosocial services, but the mediation did not take place because the parties refused to participate in the school mediation process. According to the information provided by the Office of Resource Officers, the pilot program continues and the results will be announced after its completion.¹⁸⁷

183 Activity Report of LEPL Resource Office of Educational Institutions (2021), p. 2.

184 Ibid, p. 8.

185 Ibid, p. 9.

186 Interview with the Planning and Analysis Department and head of psychosocial service center (interview 1).

187 Correspondence №MES 6 22 0000828469 dated 21.07.2022 and Correspondence MES 6 0001333935 dated 21.10.2022 of LEPL Resource Office of Educational Institutions

As of summer of 2022, 39 psychologists are employed in the Office of Resource Officers across the country, who are present only in psychosocial service centers. Also, the center employs 54 social workers and 3 professional supervisors. Psychosocial service center with social work component is present in 49 public schools throughout Georgia.¹⁸⁸

It is significant that in the professional circles the institutional role and function of the psychosocial service center is criticized. According to Simon Janashia, the integration of the psychosocial service center into the Office of Resource Officers makes the latter part of the mandatory education system, which he believes is unjustified. The specialist points out that the referral of a child to the psychosocial service center by a school may turn into an additional leverage for disciplining students. In addition, the cultural differences between teachers and students may become the reason for the referral of a child to the psychosocial service center. In addition, even if it turns out that a student does not have any psycho-emotional problems, he/she will still suffer from the traumatic experience of being “sent for treatment” by school/teachers.¹⁸⁹

It is worth noting that the employees of the psychosocial service center of the Office confirm the existence of such a tendency: “Sometimes referrals to us is a mechanism of punishment and blackmail, I will release you to a psychologist, and when they come here they are so scared and do not know what to expect.” According to psychologists, one of the reasons for this may be the stigma associated with psychological services. Besides, specialists talk about the level of inappropriate training of teachers when it comes to the psychological needs of students. Psychologists mentioned a case during the interview, in which the reason for referring the student was that the child was “deliberately tickling” his peers. According to psychologists, this is sometimes because teachers may not know what kind of behavior needs correction and lack the skills to effectively manage the classroom.¹⁹⁰

188 Ibid.

189 Interview with education expert Simon Janashia (interview 06).

190 Interview with psychologists of the psychosocial service center of the resource office (interview 5).

Janashia sees the danger of excessive state intervention with the formation of a child's behavior in placing the center of psychosocial services under the control of the state. According to him, "school should work as a community and not as a collection of specialists". In the desired model, the school teacher should have basic training in psychology, due to which there may be no need for a school psychologist.¹⁹¹ As he clarifies, along with the professional strengthening of teachers this will be achievable as a result of fundamental changes to the school culture and its management system, in which a teacher does not consider himself/herself a specialist hired to teach a specific subject, but will serve the purpose of educating students as members of society.¹⁹²

In addition, Janashia sees the issue of state access to personal information at the center of psychosocial services as problematic. According to him, the state's access to information about a citizen processed during his childhood or adolescence is dangerous. The expert especially emphasizes the cases when the state may use this information for discrediting or creating public opinion about a citizen due to his/her political or public positions.¹⁹³

Social Justice Center requested information on the processing of students' personal data in the psychosocial service center of the Office of Resource Officers. According to the information provided by the Office of Resource Officers, as in case of violations, the information about the services provided at the psychosocial service center is stored for the duration of a student's status. For each student, the record created in the electronic system (erofficers.emis.ge) contains the following data: student's name and surname, date of birth, personal number, the reason for applying to the center, date of application, information about the student's emotional state, anamnesis and measures taken in relation to the student.

191 Interview with education expert Simon Janashia (interview 6).

192 Ibid.

193 Ibid.

The current practice of processing students' personal data in the center of psychosocial services should be critically evaluated. Presumably, the need to store data is related to the aim of allowing psychologists of the center to get acquainted with the anamnesis of a student in case of repeated visits to the center, or if the psychological services continue for years, to the aim of observing and analyzing the dynamics of a student's condition. However, information about the psychological state of students is particularly sensitive, and it is desirable that the order defines different terms and modes of processing and storing information. For example, cases that are considered to be closed, or in which a student was referred to a psychosocial service center and the need for receiving any kind of psychological service was not confirmed, would rather not be stored in the electronic database. Also, it is possible that the student himself/herself or his/her legal guardian decides on the issue of storing or deleting information about his/her psychological condition.

The said issue is very problematic, due to the fact that the Ministry of Internal Affairs has access to all the records in the electronic system (eroficers.emis.ge), including those created by the psychosocial service center. Therefore, state access to the records reflecting the psychological state of a student disproportionately increases the risks of interference in the private life of a person, accordingly, requires detailed regulation on a legislative level.

7. Other Legislative Approaches and Practical Challenges Potentially Detrimental to Classroom Climate

7.1. Use of Technological Means

As already noted, one of the models of establishing a safe school environment, the product-based one gives special importance to policies based on the logic of safety, the main attributes of which are technological and largely police-like means.

The use of security technologies in public schools has increased more and more with the establishment of the Office of Resource Officers. In accordance with the order of the Minister of Education, all schools, where a resource officer is present, have a metal detector for the purpose of finding prohibited items in schools, and carrying out no-contact surface inspection of students.¹⁹⁴ According to the same order, the central component of the school safety infrastructure is surveillance cameras installed in schools.¹⁹⁵

According to the order, the video surveillance system placed on the inner perimeters of schools provides video surveillance of all corridors, entrances, foyers, and stairs of the school and allows visual observation and identification of persons present there. The same applies to the outer perimeters of schools (sports field, garden, square). Video surveillance does not take place in school hygiene points and changing rooms, teachers' room and classrooms.¹⁹⁶ According to the requested public information,

194 Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N "On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions", article 50.

195 Ibid, articles 41-42.

196 Ibid.

as of summer of 2022, the Office of Resource Officers served 607 public schools, 486 of which were equipped with video surveillance camera systems, and the cameras were temporarily disabled due to renovation works in 20 general educational institutions.¹⁹⁷

The same order regulates the administration of the video surveillance system. The electronic footage obtained as a result of video recording must be stored in a properly protected place for at least 30 days and upon justified request, must be transferred or shown to authorities directly defined in the order. Unlike school staff and law enforcement officers, students' legal guardians can only have access to video footage on-site.¹⁹⁸

The analysis of data from the last three years shows that requests to see and be handed over the recordings of the surveillance cameras are increasingly submitted to the Office of Resource Officers.¹⁹⁹ This may be attributed to the remote or hybrid learning mode in schools in 2020-2021.

Year	The total number of requests for video surveillance recordings on the inner and outer school perimeters			Number of requests for seeing video recordings	Number of requests for being handed over video recordings
2020	32	18 Satisfied	14 Not satisfied	10	22
2021	62	51 Satisfied	11 Not satisfied	31	31
2022	86	79 Satisfied	7 Not satisfied	35	51

197 Correspondence №MES 6 22 0000828469 dated 21.07.2022 of LEPL of the Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions.

198 Order of the Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia No. 06/N "On approval of the rules and conditions for the protection of safety and public order in general educational institutions", article 42.

199 Correspondence of the Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions N MES 2 22 0001571234 dated 08.12.2022.

As it transpires from the correspondence of the Office of Resource Officers, requests for the disclosure of video recordings are granted only in cases when it is based on a court order, disciplinary proceedings, or a request of a student's legal guardian regarding his/her child's actions.

The mixed attitude of the school personnel towards the presence of surveillance cameras in the school is also noticeable. The principal indicated during the interview that there are about 20 video cameras in her school, which cannot provide adequate visibility of all school spaces. The principal states there are problematic places at the school where students climb out of the windows, and she would wish that cameras are added to these places and the outer perimeter, since the inner courtyard of the school is not closed and it is difficult to control visitors.²⁰⁰ For the school principal, surveillance cameras are an important resource for securing a safe environment in the school. However, according to a teacher of a Tbilisi public school, "cameras are absurd and completely incompatible with the school community, just like a person in uniform", however, the teacher also noted that cameras are very important for the directorate and resource officers.²⁰¹ The school teacher discusses video surveillance cameras, metal detectors and policeman's uniform in the same context and believes that the said elements worsen the school climate.

Commenting on the issue of surveillance cameras in schools, psychologists from the center for psychosocial services stated: "from a psychologist's point of view, there is no need for cameras, a child should have freedom and space where they can express themselves as they want, and on the other side is the issue of security, I saw the need for after working here, finding out what kind of things happen. It turns out that sometimes proof is needed to say that this happened and I don't know... it's very difficult... it's a very difficult issue, otherwise, in theory, a child should enjoy freedom at school."²⁰²

200 Interview with a Tbilisi public school principal (interview 2).

201 Interview with Tbilisi public school teachers (interview 3).

202 Interview with psychologists of the psychosocial service center of the resource office (interview 5).

According to psychologists, the starting point should be what kind of preventive effect the installed video cameras have, and to know this, it should be evaluated what has changed in the school with the appearance of surveillance cameras. Namely, it should be determined whether the number of violent incidents has decreased or how much the school climate has improved.

The intensive integration of technological and security means in the educational process indicates that the Georgian model of a safe school is still based on product-based approaches. Electronic registration of violations, metal detectors and surveillance cameras cannot be considered as attributes that promote a positive school climate. The use of technological means may indeed have a short-term effect on students' behavior, however, we cannot consider this as a reliable indicator for the assessment of a safe and secure environment at school. In addition, the issue of the necessity and proportionality of processing this amount of personal information is questionable. In some cases, footage recorded by the video surveillance system may be the most reliable way to establish the objective truth. However, its broad use will contribute to the process of obtaining appropriate evidence in case of a possible offense rather than preventing the offense itself. As mentioned above, it is objectively impossible to visually control every nook and cranny of the school, and in case of intent to commit a violation or a crime, a person will always find a space free from video cameras.

7.2. The Impact of Resource Officers' Rotation on the School Climate

Rotation in educational institutions implies the change of workplaces for resource officers, which is regulated by an order of the head of the Office of Resource officers. According to the order, the decisions on the distribution and rotation of resource officers in educational institutions should

consider the number of students in the school, number and types of detected violations and other security-related circumstances. In addition, the infrastructural features of the school (number of buildings, number of building wings, floor layout, etc.) should be taken into account. Apart from this, resource officers should not have any type of connection with the specific school, in particular, he/she should not have received education in the school to be assigned to, nor should his family members work or study in the specified institution.²⁰³ The normative regulation of the issue automatically regards an officer's connection with the assigned school as an undesirable fact. Presumably, the specified rule was developed to ensure the neutrality and impartiality of resource officers, however, on the other hand, frequent change of resource officers may have a negative impact on the school atmosphere.

According to the information provided by the Office of Resource officers, the rotation affected 95 resource officers in 2020, 59 – in 2021, and 615 – during the 9 months of 2022. It is noticeable that since the ending of hybrid learning in schools, the resource officers' rotation rate has significantly increased and rotation has had a routine character, as almost a third of the employed resource officers were subject to rotation. The interviews conducted with both the school principal and the teacher make it clear that rotation does not represent a purely internal organizational, technical change. This may even bring significant changes to schools and reflect both on the attitudes of students and the number of violations recorded.

According to school resource officers it takes time to build trust with children, for students to see them as guarantors for their safety and to turn to them in times of need. The reasons for resorting to resource officers are diverse and not limited to school issues. It is often the case that a student simply needs advice or a conversation. According to the interviewed em-

203 Order N132 dated 19.11. 2019 of the head of resource officer on distribution and rotation of resource officers of LEPL resource office of educational institutions in general educational institutions

ployee, he/she knew the students well in the school where he/she worked for several years, which helped with the identification of specific challenges, “I could feel what could have been done from the facial expression of students, what they were having trouble with and what could help them.”²⁰⁴

Besides, according to the experience of resource officers, getting to know children on an individual level, knowing their character and interests, observing peer relationships can be an important tool for identifying various problems, including bullying.²⁰⁵ Due to the rotation principle, when moving to a new school, resource officers have to re-acquaint themselves with a new school and students, establish individual communication with them, which may be a rather long process.

The Tbilisi public school teacher also discusses this: “Now we had a very friendly resource officer, though the Ministry ensures that he/she [resource officer] does not get into a close relationship and that is why rotation takes place. Therefore, when they get close to [students], they have to change schools. But, these children prefer a friend and their hearts are broken, [...] that who came now and who was there before as well, was not that loved – they say seeing him/her makes them tense and they are afraid. So it’s very personal.”²⁰⁶

The school teacher draws attention to the importance of the impartiality and neutrality of resource officers. Nevertheless, for the teacher it is a problem that when resource officers gain students’ trust and establish a friendly relationship, they are transferred to another school. In his opinion, it was precisely the factor of personally knowing children and their family situation that helped resource officers in their professional activities. Therefore, the teacher considers it possible that resource officers like teachers are assigned to one school. However, he sees challenges in this

204 Interview with Tbilisi public school resource officers (interview 4).

205 Interview with Tbilisi public school resource officers (interview 4).

206 Interview with Tbilisi public school teachers (interview 3).

regard as well, namely, close collegial or friendly relationships may form between resource officers and teachers, which, according to him, is not desirable.

The principal of one of the schools in Tbilisi evaluates the practice of resource officers' rotation as negative. The principal emphasizes the role of resource officers in terms of preventing students from leaving school during school hours, or identifying violations committed by students and responding to them. The respondent believes that the transfer of resource officers may harm the order established in the school.²⁰⁷ "A kid I've been watching all year, practically has grown in my hands, I know what to expect and not to expect from him/her. I can already recognize by face and in case of sneaking out of school, I know that this one has seven lessons, now is the sixth and [I will say] hey go back to school..."²⁰⁸

As she states, his school was lucky because rotation has not affected her and hopes that it will not affect her either. The resource officers and the school administration work in coordination and their functions are properly distributed, resource officers are focused on eliminating specific problems in the school, rather than registering as many violations as possible.

The observations of the interviewed members of the school community are mostly in agreement with each other, and the rotation of resource officers is largely criticized. However, it is possible that sometimes rotation will be necessary due to objective circumstances and considering the interests of resource officers, school and students. Therefore, rotation shouldn't have a routine character and the issue of transferring a resource officer to another school should be decided individually, based on the existing need, and not the period spent by a resource officer at the school.

207 Interview with a Tbilisi public school principal (interview 2).

208 Ibid.

7.3. Certain Bullying-related Challenges

Bullying is a serious challenge not only in Georgia, but also in countries with well-developed school systems. Bullying often leads to physical conflict, which often ends with serious consequences. The respondents interviewed for this research agree that the level of awareness regarding bullying and cyberbullying has considerably increased. However, there are still significant challenges in this direction. According to the psychologists of the center for psychosocial services, there is still a lot of work to be done with both children and school staff in the process of eliminating the problem of bullying. According to them, reporting to a teacher or resource officer by victims of bullying, especially, boys is still problematic. Among boys, this is still considered as “snitching”.

According to psychologists, often, if a student declares that he/she is being bullied, this can trigger additional bullying from other students.²⁰⁹ “On the one hand, we are telling children to involve adults by all means, on the other hand, children avoid “snitching”. They do not tell a parent, resource officer or teacher, they can’t solve this problem themselves and ask an older friend for help, which can lead to a tragedy.”²¹⁰

According to psychologists, the stigma of snitching or asking for help is related to the criminal mentality, which has not been fully eradicated in the country and still has a great impact on adolescents. However, the psychosocial service center employees indicate that during training sessions on bullying, they have frequent contact with teachers and school staff. In these processes, it can be seen that teachers still do not possess the appropriate competence to recognize bullying, or more so, sufficient sensitivity to the issue. According to them, there were many cases when teachers expressed objections during the training sessions on bullying that name

209 Interview with psychologists of the psychosocial service center of the resource office (interview 5).

210 Ibid.

calling should not be considered as bullying. Psychologists also indicate that they have also encountered teachers with exceptional tolerance towards bullying. Despite this, according to psychologists, “no one wants to hear about bullying anymore, they think it’s an overemphasized topic, but when it comes down to it, there’s still a lot of work to be done.”²¹¹

The school teacher points out in an interview that “bullying is well known to everyone, including students, [...] and teachers are given a lot of training, training has become a hated word, so many training sessions are conducted that a prejudice has been formed around training, that it is something bad”.²¹² The head of the center of psycho-social services notes that despite the fact that teachers are trained in many subjects, this is not particularly visible in practice.²¹³

The practice analysis shows that there is an understanding of the problem of bullying in the school and both the Office of Resource Officers and other segments of the Ministry of Education focus intensively on this issue. The progress on bullying awareness is noteworthy. However, there are challenges related to the coordinated, planned action of different segments of the Ministry. Besides, the specific results achieved in the fight against bullying are unknown. This indicates the need for an internal assessment of school safety at the local school level, as well as for research on a Ministry level on bullying dynamics in schools using a reliable methodology. This is important both for evaluating actual statistics and the competence of school employees.

211 Ibid.

212 Interview with Tbilisi public school teachers (interview 3).

213 Interview with the Planning and Analysis Department and head of psychosocial service center (interview 1).

Summary and Recommendations

In the recent years, the legislative framework has become more systematized, new acts/documents have created a solid legal framework for responding to various situations. Despite this, there are still ambiguous provisions, including on the distinction of competencies and responsibilities.

At the same time, existing approaches to safety reinforced by legislation and policy still favor control-oriented mechanisms. This somehow by inertia follows from the formation of the Office of Resource Officers and the ongoing debates at that time, which led to the introduction of such mechanisms as metal detectors and surveillance cameras. It is true that, compared to the initial years, the care component in the resource officers' obligations has increased and the office itself is generally headed in this direction, however, the radical transformation toward the policy of care in the school system as a whole still has not taken place. Among others, this is attributed to the radically scarce resources of social workers and psychologists in the general educational institutions/system.

It is also problematic that there is largely fragmented knowledge about safety issues in schools. This has a negative impact on the general school climate, the quality of cooperation between different structural units/persons, the approaches used toward students, etc.

Finally, on the legislative and policy level, the system is still not focused on care and support. The mechanisms aimed at controlling students' behavior are still leading in the school safety policy. It is important that relevant agencies and the state as a whole actively work on introducing a new political vision in this direction.

Against this background, the research team is giving the following recommendations:

- It is important to introduce and develop democratic management models in the school. The issue of school safety in the education system should be considered as an integral part of school life, and not as a set of attributes and measures, which have an interventional nature and are aimed at short-term results.
- The coverage area and functions of the psychosocial service center need to be expanded, namely, the center with the social work component should be present in all public schools where resource officers are placed.
- The list of actions considered violations at school should be specified and resource officers need to qualify an act as a violation considering the principles of reasonableness and proportionality.
- The existing procedure for registration of violations should be revised and resource officers should only register those violations relevant to school safety in the electronic database.
- The scope and procedures of information exchange with the Ministry of Internal Affairs should be revised. Namely, types of violations, access to which may be important for crime prevention need to be specified. In addition, the Ministry of Internal Affairs should have access only to statistical data related to schools and not to individual violations of students.
- Legislation should clearly define the basis for direct reporting to law enforcement agencies, and the police should be called to a school only in cases that are beyond the competencies of the school or the Office of Resource Officers.

- The practice of using the school mediation process should be strengthened.
- Information about violations, as well as records about referrals to the psychosocial service center and the services received, should be processed in the best interests of children and for the time necessary to protect their interests or to ensure an appropriate level of safety at school.
- The role of electronic monitoring tools in managing the educational process should be reviewed. The central function of video surveillance cameras should not be to record the detected violation for evidence, but to protect the safety of students during the educational process.
- Rotation of resource officers should be based on the individual needs of the institution. The decision of rotation should not be made on the basis of the high degree of integration of resource officers into the school community or the time spent in the institution, on the contrary, long-term placement of resource officers in specific educational institutions should be encouraged.