



EVALUATION REPORT

**For the project: "CARING - Challenging social and gender norms
to reduce violence against children in school"**

Co-funded by the European Union

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i. Acknowledgments

We extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed to the successful completion of this evaluation. Special thanks go to Terre des Hommes (Tdh) Romania for their significant efforts in facilitating this process within tight timelines. We are also sincerely grateful to the other implementing partners (Association Roditeli, Hrabri Telefon, SAPI, Tdh Hellas, and Tdh Hungary) for their valuable collaboration and support throughout. Our appreciation extends to the children involved in the initiatives, school staff, government officials, and all participants who generously shared their insights and feedback through interviews, group discussions, and surveys. Finally, we thank the communities, institutions/organizations, and individuals in Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary and Romania who were directly engaged in and benefited from this important project. Your collaboration and commitment helped to make schools and communities safer and more inclusive spaces for all.

ii. Disclaimer

This report reflects the Evaluation Team's evidence-based perspectives and may not entirely represent the views of Tdh Romania and its partners, or other stakeholders mentioned in this report. Significant efforts have been made to verify the accuracy and reliability of the information presented. However, any inadvertent errors or omissions are unintentional and are the sole responsibility of the evaluation team. The content herein aims to provide an accurate account based on the data and observations gathered during the evaluation process, considering the limitations described in the report.

iii. List of Acronyms

CCB	-	Child Consultative Board	M&E	-	Monitoring and Evaluation
CERV	-	Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme	SO	-	Specific Objectives
EMT	-	Evaluation Management Team	SRGBV	-	School Related Gender-based Violence
ET	-	Evaluation Team	Tdh	-	Terre des hommes
IDI	-	In-depth Interviews	ToC	-	Theory of Change
KII	-	Key Informant Interviews	ToR	-	Terms of Reference
FGD	-	Focus Group Discussions	ToT	-	Training of Trainers
MEAL	-	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning	WP	-	Work package



iv. Executive Summary

The CARING project—"Challenging social and gender norms to reduce violence against children in schools"—was implemented from May 2023 to April 2025 across Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Greece. Co-funded by the European Union under the CERV programme, the project aimed to address school-related gender-based violence through participatory, child-centered, and multi-stakeholder approaches. Terre des hommes led implementation, in collaboration with national partners experienced in child protection, education, and youth empowerment.

This external evaluation and accompanying capitalization exercise were conducted between March and April 2025. The evaluation aimed to assess the project's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and EU-added value, using a mixed-methods approach (desk review, KIs, FGDs, direct observations, and surveys). The capitalization component, as a simultaneously conducted exercise, focused on identifying and documenting best practices, challenges, and lessons to inform future programming and replication.

Key Findings:

- **Relevance:** The project effectively addressed critical needs related to gender norms, violence prevention, and child participation, particularly aligning with national education priorities and broader EU frameworks. While some local adaptations led to broader discussions on violence, the core thematic focus on GBV remained clear in most settings. Stakeholders (children, teachers, statutory stakeholders, and parents) consistently rated the project's relevance highly, with an average alignment score of 9 out of 10.
- **Coherence:** CARING was highly consistent with Tdh's strategies and built on prior experiences, particularly through its use of the REVIS/ACTIV methodology. The CARING project demonstrates strong external coherence by directly contributing to key EU priorities on gender equality, child protection, and GBV prevention, aligning closely with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, the European Child Guarantee, and the new 2024 EU Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence.
- **Effectiveness:** The project effectively identified harmful social and gender norms and GBV issues by conducting Rapid Assessments throughout all four implementing countries (S01), strengthened capacity for gender equity in schools (S02), raised awareness of SRGBV among students and staff (S03), and fostered collaboration between key stakeholders (S04). Facilitators and teachers reported significant improvements in recognizing gender biases and promoting inclusive practices, while youth-led initiatives fostered positive peer cultures. Although formal multi-agency cooperation was limited, the project achieved important policy-level uptake in Romania. Overall, CARING empowered children, improved school environments, and contributed to longer-term systemic change.
- **Efficiency:** The project demonstrated excellent financial management, ensuring high project cost effectiveness, while reaching more beneficiaries than initially planned. However, project time management was slightly under constraint, causing 11 out of 17 deliverables to be done on time (65%). Aside from the adjustment of the project activities with the school calendars, these delays could be related to significant project staff turnover and communication gaps across the consortium, which highlight the need for stronger onboarding, documentation, and handover protocols.



- **Impact:** The project catalysed positive change at multiple levels—individual, school, and policy. Examples include strengthened peer support systems, enhanced teacher collaboration on sensitive topics, replication of student initiatives across schools, and policy uptake at the national level in Romania.
- **Sustainability:** While sustainability was not an explicit project objective, evidence of embedded practices (e.g., school action plans on GBV, national policy integration) suggests potential for long-term impact. However, spontaneous replication of initiatives would benefit from structured post-project support tools.
- **Child Participation:** A key strength, the project operationalized meaningful child participation through 32 youth-led initiatives. Children reported feeling empowered, respected, and capable of advocating for safer, more inclusive school environments. Opportunities remain to expand the Child Consultative Boards' roles in future project cycles.
- **EU-Added Value:** The CARING project aligns closely with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child. Its school-based, youth-centered model is highly adaptable and recommended by over 94% of participating teachers and 81% of students. It presents a strong potential for scaling within and beyond EU Member States.

Conclusion and priority recommendations:

Overall, CARING proved to be a **highly relevant, impactful, and innovative initiative**, capable of informing future policies and practices on GBV prevention in educational settings across Europe. Considering future initiatives and prioritizing feasible, high-impact actions, the key evaluation recommendations are outlined below:

- **Implement structured self-assessment tools** for schools prior to selection to ensure readiness, motivation, and alignment with project goals.
- **Adapt the Theory of Change** to distinguish interventions for younger children (7–12) and adolescents (13–17), tailoring engagement strategies accordingly.
- **Enhance facilitator support** through mentoring systems, peer-exchange opportunities, and minimum quality standards for activity implementation.
- **Transform monitoring data into learning opportunities** by introducing quarterly review workshops and user-friendly progress-tracking dashboards.
- **Institutionalize project practices at the school level** by embedding standardized protocols for GBV response and structured support for child-led initiatives into school action plans.
- **Formalize multi-agency cooperation** by establishing operational referral mechanisms and formal agreements between schools, social services, police, and NGOs.



1. Introduction

Terre des hommes (Tdh) is the leading Swiss child relief agency, working globally to protect vulnerable children and their families, improve their well-being, and ensure their rights. In Europe, Tdh operates in multiple countries, including Romania, Hungary, Greece, Kosovo¹, Moldova, and Ukraine, implementing national and regional projects focusing on child protection, juvenile justice, and the protection of children affected by migration and trafficking.

Tdh focusing on strengthening child protection and justice systems, supporting children affected by migration, and promoting the social inclusion of vulnerable communities. As part of its commitment to improving access to justice and reducing violence against children, Tdh Romania and Tdh Hungary are leading the implementation of the EU-funded CARING project which is being carried out between May 2023 and April 2025 across five countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary and Romania.

The CARING project addresses school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) by challenging harmful gender norms and social stereotypes that perpetuate violence in school settings. The project aims to reduce violence against children in 32 schools, throughout four countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece), by raising awareness, building the capacity of school staff, empowering youth to become agents of change, and strengthening cooperation between schools, public institutions, and communities.

The project contributes to the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and the European Child Guarantee, aligning with the broader goals of the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) Programme. Through an integrated approach, the project engages students, teachers, parents, and statutory stakeholders to promote gender equity, foster non-violent relationships, and create safer school environments. The consortium comprises six partner organizations, each contributing expertise in child protection, GBV prevention, and capacity building. In Bulgaria, the project is implemented by Association Roditeli and SAPI; in Croatia, by Hrabri Telefon; in Greece, by Tdh Hellas; and in Romania, by Tdh Romania. Although there was no direct implementation of the project in Hungarian schools, Tdh Hungary played an important role in project management and implementation, overseeing two out of four projects' work packages (WP).

The evaluation aims to deliver an extensive analysis of the project's impact (to date), enabling the donor to assess the effectiveness of their contribution. It aims to achieve the following specific objectives (SO):

1. **Social and gender norms (SO1):** Assess the project's effectiveness in identifying and mitigating specific social and gender norms within the selected schools. Determine the extent to which project activities have addressed the specific norms,
2. **Capacity building (SO2):** Evaluate how the project has affected the promotion of tolerant, inclusive, and non-violent communication and behavior for gender-equity in schools. Specifically, determine the extent to which the project has impacted educational staff and school management to implement and contribute to gender equity efforts.

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



3. **Awareness of GBV issues (S03):** Estimate the project's impact in increasing awareness and knowledge of SRGBV, gender norms, and gender equity. Assess how research, data collection, and best practices have contributed to awareness and prevention for both students, staff, and management.
4. **Multi-agency cooperation (S04):** Assess the extent to which the project fostered collaboration at local/country level in partner countries. Assess the sustainability of partnerships and networks established during the project. Determine whether project initiatives

2. The Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

The primary purpose of this evaluation is to assess the overall performance and added value of the project, with particular emphasis on its effectiveness in addressing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and promoting child protection and empowerment across the four implementing countries. The evaluation aims to generate actionable insights that can inform future programming, strengthen institutional learning, and contribute to policy development at both national and EU levels. In addition, it seeks to identify and document good practices, challenges, and lessons learned, ensuring their preservation and practical use beyond the project's duration. To further support the dissemination and uptake of these insights, a dedicated Capitalization Report has been developed to promote the wide sharing of successful approaches and innovations.

This evaluation provides a comprehensive review of the entire project. It covers all countries involved in the implementation—Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, and Romania—and spans the full project duration, from May 1st, 2023 to April 30th, 2025. The primary focus is to assess the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact, in accordance with the DAC/OECD evaluation criteria (see the Evaluation Matrix in the Inception Report – Annex 4). This evaluation scope ensures a structured and thorough assessment of the project's performance, aligned with international standards, ethical principles, and the specific needs of its stakeholders.

Recognizing that valuable lessons and practices can be lost during project implementation due to challenges in knowledge capture and transmission, this exercise emphasizes mechanisms for ensuring that insights are effectively documented, retrieved, and applied. Lastly, to maximize the impact of these insights, the exercise has defined strategies for knowledge transfer, ensuring that findings are not only recorded but also integrated into future programming and policy development.

3. Methodological Approach

The evaluation is based on a mixed-method approach, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data. In parallel with the evaluation, a capitalization exercise has been conducted to systematically document best practices, challenges, and key lessons from the CARING project. The approach emphasizes participatory methods to ensure that insights from project staff (including all implementing partners), school staff, children, and other stakeholders are accurately captured. The evaluation builds on existing project monitoring and



evaluation data while integrating additional primary research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the project's successes and areas for improvement.

3.1. Data Collection

Primary data collection was conducted through a combination of in-person field visits (Romania and Croatia) and online methods, using the **mix method approach** and the following sources (see Annex 3: Data Collection Plan and Annex 4: Inception Report for details):

1. **Document review (40+ documents):** An extensive review of over 40 project-related documents was conducted to inform tool development and provide contextual understanding. Documents were analyzed in alignment with the primary defined questions, with critical elements highlighted to support the capitalization process.
2. **Key Informant Interviews/In Depth Interviews (KIIs/IDI – 29 total):** A total of 29 semi-structured interviews were conducted both online and in person with key project stakeholders. These included 13 project staff members, 6 facilitators, 5 statutory stakeholders, 3 children who were involved in the creation of initiatives, and 2 parents. The interviews provided rich, multi-perspective insights into the project's implementation and impact.
3. **Focus Group Discussions (8 FGDs):** Eight FGDs were held across different stakeholder groups. Four FGDs were conducted with children who participated in the initiatives, one with the Child Consultative Board (CCB), and three with trained school staff. These group discussions offered valuable reflections on the project's relevance, strengths, and areas for improvement from a grassroots level.
4. **On-site direct observation:** Unstructured, non-participant observation was conducted during field visits in Croatia and Romania, as well as during the final project conference in Zagreb, which the Evaluation Team (ET) attended online.
5. **Online survey** was administered to facilitators and trained school staff (n=73), trained youth leaders and children participated in initiatives (n=79) and parents (23). While the entire population from these categories was targeted, a convenience sampling approach was used. In the end, the sample included the targeted population in all four implementing countries, with participants drawn from at least three schools per country.

3.2. Data Analysis

The data analysis for this evaluation employed a comprehensive mixed-method approach. Qualitative methods—including thematic analysis, open coding, and narrative analysis—were used to explore key themes such as empowerment, community engagement, and gender equality. Quantitative survey data supported the analysis by measuring changes in awareness (up to some point attitudes and behaviors), including the perceived effectiveness of interventions. Descriptive statistics were applied to analyze quantitative data using SPSS software. Contextual and comparative analyses, along with data triangulation, ensured depth and credibility. The SCORE framework was used to assess strengths, challenges, and lessons learned, contributing to strategic insights and future improvements.



3.3. Limitations

As with most evaluations relying on qualitative methods and beneficiary feedback, the data collection process was inherently influenced by the subjective perceptions of participants, many of whom were direct project beneficiaries or organizational staff, potentially introducing a degree of positive bias into the findings. In addition to these general limitations, several specific factors should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

The simultaneous implementation of the evaluation and capitalization exercises within a limited timeframe presented notable operational challenges. Preparing field visits in two countries while concurrently reviewing project documentation and coordinating activities required intensive effort and logistical agility, which also carried the potential to limit the initial precision of some data collection tools. Although the ET subsequently refined and improved these tools during the process, there remained a risk of minor data gaps.

High staff turnover among project personnel meant that, in some cases, historical context or early-stage project data were less readily accessible. Additionally, overlapping responsibilities related to ongoing activities, typical of the final busy months of project implementation, affected staff availability and occasionally extended timelines for data collection.

Fieldwork involved extensive travel across multiple countries within a short period, limiting opportunities for deeper engagement with some stakeholder groups. Although a broad and diverse range of participants was reached, some data (particularly from online surveys and focus group discussions) were collected through convenience sampling, which may influence the representativeness of findings.

Although the field visits in Croatia and Romania provided valuable comparative insights between these two countries, a detailed comparison with findings from Bulgaria and Greece is less meaningful for most evaluation questions due to differences in data collection depth and context.

The ET applied different strategies to mitigate these limitations but also remained highly flexible and committed to ensuring the quality and comprehensiveness of the deliverables. *For details regarding initially identified limitations, mitigation strategies, and ethical considerations, please see Annex 4: Inception Evaluation Report.*

4. Findings

4.1. Relevance: Is the intervention doing the right things?

The project demonstrated a high degree of relevance by effectively addressing the critical and context-specific needs of children, schools, and communities regarding GBV and SRGBV. Rapid assessments conducted in all four implementing countries, involving 680 respondents (teachers and students), confirmed the need for improvements in several areas: perceptions of gender roles and related societal expectations, perceptions of safety in schools, disciplinary practices among school staff, the occurrence of violence within the school environment, and the ability of students and staff to manage GBV cases. Among others, the results suggest that while traditional stereotypes toward girls persist, there has been a significant shift away from traditional stereotypes toward boys across all countries.



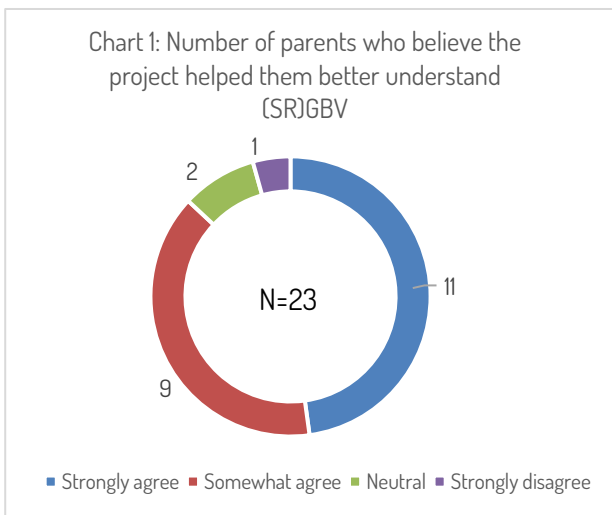
The project's activities and outputs aligned well with its intended outcomes and overall objective of fostering safe, inclusive, and gender-sensitive educational environments.

Across the implementing countries, project activities were consistent with the legal and institutional frameworks governing child protection and gender equality. A results shows that all project activities/tasks were directly related to the project's stated overall goal (see Box 1). A total of 20 tasks (WP1= 7, WP2= 5, WP3= 4, WP4= 4) were defined and implemented under this project.

All these activities (including revised curricula, child-led initiatives, facilitator trainings, and awareness campaigns) directly contributed to achieving the overall project objective. However, KIs with facilitators, KIs with statutory stakeholders, and FGDs with parents revealed this contribution - *primarily related to the activities of organizing thematic parents' meetings (T3.4) and organizing networking meetings or roundtables with stakeholders (T4.1)*

Box 1. The project's overall goal:

... is to address the issue of GBV in schools by challenging social and gender norms and behaviours of school staff and young people, who, in turn, will become change agents promoting positive practices on gender-equity in their schools and communities.

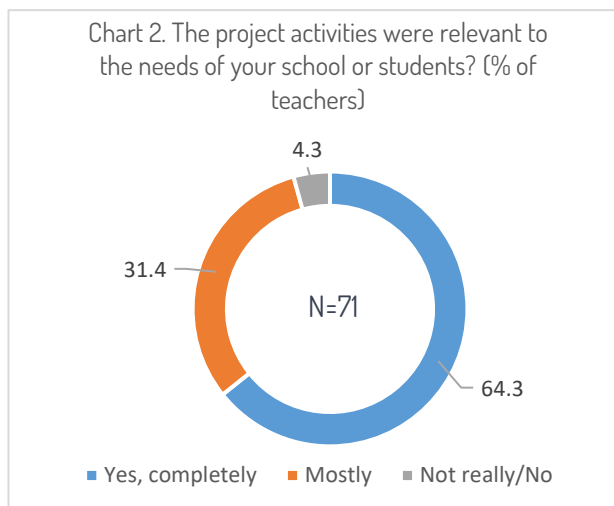


- was more indirect in some schools. Namely, results showed that events involving parents and statutory stakeholders in some schools avoided specifically addressing the topics of GBV or SRGBV, instead focusing more broadly on violence in general or institutional collaboration as a referral mechanism. Consequently, while majority of surveyed parents believe the project contributed to their understanding of (SR)GBV, some parents do not (see, for example, Chart 1). Although this shift can be considered a form of project adaptation to local sensitivities, it introduced some discrepancies compared to the original project design.

While limitations in the methodological approach do not allow for more specific findings (such as the exact number of schools that applied this approach or a country-level disaggregation) this could serve as a valuable focus area for the monitoring process in future phases.

Stakeholders (children, teachers, statutory stakeholders, and parents) consistently rated the project's relevance highly, with an **average alignment score of 9 out of 10**, reflecting strong belief that the project addressed real and pressing needs. These findings are supported not only by qualitative data but also by survey results from school staff (see, for example, Chart 2) and children (see, for example, Chart 3). This is further supported by the successful integration of **needs assessments** that directly informed project planning and led to mid-course adjustments in content and delivery methods.

The project also demonstrated adaptability in meeting different stakeholder needs (especially

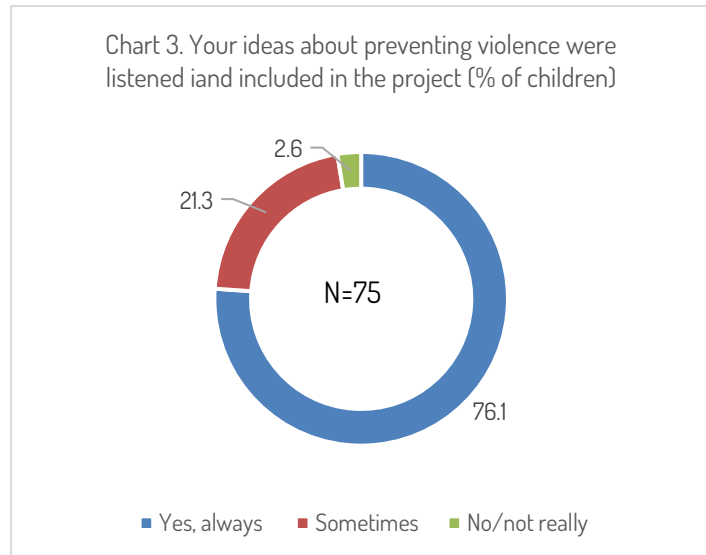




children and teachers), by using child-led approaches and participatory methodologies. **The CCB also contributed to the overall relevance of the project by providing advice and even selecting the most impactful child-led initiatives.** While their role, as defined in the project proposal, was fully fulfilled (mainly through eight dedicated meetings) findings suggest that the CCB could be further engaged in future activities, such as developing project materials or co-designing strategies to support child-led initiatives.² This was acknowledged by both CCB members and some project staff, who

agreed that the board had the potential to play a much more meaningful role, particularly in elevating the level of child participation in decision-making processes within the project. For example, the CCB could have been consulted on whether children in schools need structured guidance to shape the process of creating initiatives and what degree of independence is most conducive to a successful outcome. This kind of support was later identified as a key need by children involved in creating the initiatives.

The project demonstrated well-balanced flexibility by designing a structured yet adaptable Theory of Change (ToC), enabling schools and facilitators to tailor activities to their local contexts without compromising core objectives (For more details see Annex 5, Capitalization report). This flexible approach significantly contributed to maintaining coherence, relevance, and resilience, even in politically and culturally sensitive environments. While the approach (starting from the ToTs for facilitators and continuing through their contextual adaptations in schools and communities) was meant to support relevance, it occasionally resulted in a more general approach of violence. Namely, in several schools, a significant number of activities addressed broader forms of violence, such as peer violence, rather than GBV. This is further confirmed



Box 2: Early-Stage Thematic Drift

In one case, this adaptation (introduced during the internal knowledge dissemination phase) shifted the thematic focus from GBV to broader violence prevention before wider school-level implementation had even begun. Consequently, teachers trained by the facilitator did not perceive GBV as the project's primary theme. This was echoed by one teacher during a focus group: *"GBV in our school and community is a significant problem. I recommend that the project address GBV more specifically next time."* The case illustrates a systemic risk associated with the 'waterfall implementation model': when facilitators reinterpret core content early it can result in diluted focus and thematic misalignment across the entire implementation chain. This finding underscores the importance of clearer guidance, mandatory core messaging on GBV, and more hands-on involvement by project staff (including M&E person) during the early stages of internal training and rollout.

² Project proposal (see p. 22) leaved a pretty broad role to CCB: *"discuss project progress and share opinions/ ideas/ feedback on the tools, methodologies, deliverables of the project, after and before they are developed."*



by the analysis of child-led initiatives, where GBV was rarely addressed as a key issue (instead, the most commonly emphasized themes included tolerance, social justice, child rights, and peer violence). While additional analysis may discover detailed explanation of root causes, this evaluation revealed this tendency was sometimes influenced by facilitators' own assumptions or the perceived sensitivity of the topic within their communities (see, for example, Box 2). Although similar patterns were identified across all countries involved in the project, the issue appeared significantly less pronounced in Romania, where stakeholders more openly discussed GBV during data collection and made a clear connection with project activities.

Parents and children involved in FGDs reported increased confidence, awareness, and willingness to engage with sensitive topics, while facilitators and teachers noted improved capacity to respond to GBV and related challenges. Taken together, these findings confirm that the CARING project was doing the right things, in the right way, and at the right time, with consistently high relevance across different stakeholder groups and national contexts. (See also Annex 7, Demographic characteristics of the surveyed population).

4.2. Coherence: How well does the intervention fit?

The project demonstrates a **high level of coherence, effectively aligning with both Tdh's internal strategic priorities and the broader national and regional policy landscapes**. From an external coherence perspective, the CARING project is well aligned with major EU strategies and policy developments related to gender equality and child protection. Several key objectives of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, particularly those related to ending GBV and challenging gender stereotypes, are actively pursued through the project's activities, such as promoting safe school environments, reducing physical violence against girls, and raising awareness among children, educators, and communities. The project also directly contributes to the objectives set out in the European Child Guarantee, which calls on EU Member States to prioritize the prevention of GBV and the safeguarding of every child. Furthermore, the project's goals and approach are strongly reinforced by the adoption of the 2024 EU Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, a historic milestone establishing the first comprehensive legal framework at the EU level to tackle such crimes. In this context, the CARING project not only supports national-level action but also advances the broader EU agenda, reinforcing regional efforts to create safer, more inclusive, and gender-sensitive educational environments.

The intervention builds upon Tdh's longstanding expertise in child protection, child participation, and gender equality, and directly supports thematic focus areas such as safe and inclusive schools, violence prevention, and youth empowerment. Internally, the project successfully integrated lessons learned from previous initiatives, including the REVIS/ACTIV methodology and other GBV-related school programs. These were reflected in the adaptation of training materials, participatory engagement approaches, and multi-stakeholder coordination models. For example, the progressive integration of child-led approaches and cross-sector collaboration was directly inspired by previous experience, particularly in Romania and Hungary. Document review and stakeholder interviews confirmed the internalization of at least five concrete lessons learned, which were translated into strategic improvements, such as facilitator engagement methods, youth leadership development, and school-based awareness-raising.

In addition to Tdh, three other implementing partners contributed to the CARING project. Each brought relevant experience in child protection and reported having previously implemented projects on



similar themes. Project managers emphasized that their past collaboration with schools was instrumental to the smooth rollout of CARING activities. However, it became evident that not all partners had the same level of capacity, experience, or internal quality standards.³ For instance, Tdh Romania's strong and long-standing partnerships with national stakeholders facilitated smoother implementation, greater effectiveness, and even policy-level uptake. One notable example includes the integration of project outcomes into Romania's national strategy for school violence prevention. As a Ministry of Education representative stated: *"I will ensure that the GBV component becomes part of mandatory teacher training in the next school year, and I will use materials developed through this project for that purpose."*

While some key lessons from previous projects were clearly absorbed, staff across all implementing partners acknowledged that **systematic and organized learning remains underdeveloped**. Learning from past projects often takes a backseat to implementation, due to time constraints and competing priorities. This was evident even during the current project. Although a lessons learned repository was created, project staff noted that it was treated more as a one-time task than an active learning tool. ET also noted that the lessons learned repository lacks several critical components needed to serve as a high-quality learning tool (e.g., the absence of reflections on mistakes or failures and the learning derived from them).

At the **policy level**, the project's activities and outputs demonstrated **moderate to high alignment with national strategies and priorities**. In Romania, Greece, and Croatia, CARING was consistent with child protection strategies, education reform agendas, and gender equality frameworks. At least eight documented references to national or regional policies were identified in official project materials. In contrast, Bulgaria presented challenges due to restrictive legal changes, notably the "anti-LGBTI propaganda" law, which limited full alignment with national education frameworks. Despite this, implementing partners adapted appropriately, maintaining school engagement without compromising safety or compliance.

4.3. Effectiveness: Is the intervention achieving its objectives?

The project, in general, achieved its SOs, with notable and positive effects across (S01) assessing the specific social and gender norms which are promoting and maintaining GBV, (S02) capacity-building, (S03) peer engagement, (S04) institutional cooperation, and awareness-raising efforts. Evidence collected through FGDs, KIIs, surveys, and project documentation suggests that the intervention contributed meaningfully to increased knowledge, behavioral shifts, and multi-level collaboration on GBV and SRGBV prevention in school settings.

From the perspective of multi-country level, defined targets for all project indicators (n=16) are met or overachieved, except the indicator, where slight disbalance (47.85 %males, 42.15 % Females, 0 % non-binary") dominantly appeared due to gender disbalance in the population of school staff and other participant willing to participate. The targets are also reached for at the level of each particular country where the project is implemented. At the multi-country level, the defined targets for all project indicators (n = 16) were met or overachieved, with the exception of the indicator *"% of gender representation in activities with young people:*

³ As there is no information that a formal capacity assessment or due diligence was conducted by the lead organization at the start of the project, the ET can only note indications of varying capacity levels among partners to implement project activities with consistent quality.



target: 49% female -49% male -2% non-binary”. A slight imbalance of the gender reached indicator was observed, with 47.85% male, 42.15% female, and 0% non-binary participation. This discrepancy was primarily due to existing gender imbalances within the population of school staff and among other participants willing to take part. Importantly, the targets were also achieved within each individual country where the project was implemented.

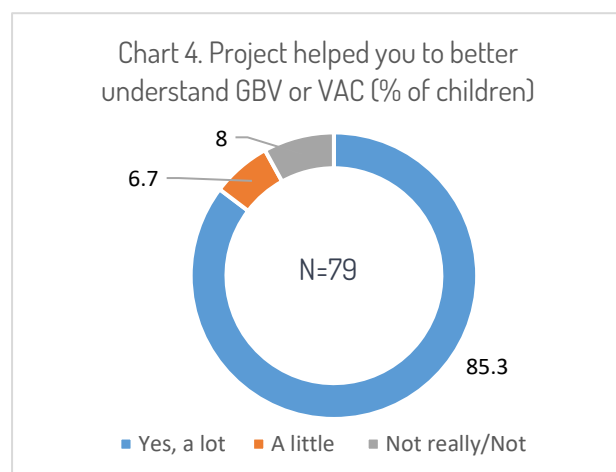
Before presenting the detailed findings related to effectiveness, it is important to note that the results are primarily presented in a summative manner, with selected exceptions (such as notable variations or illustrative examples that best represent broader trends) highlighted throughout the analysis. Detailed results of the conducted survey are available as SPSS outputs in Annex 9.

(S01) Identification and Mitigation of Social and Gender Norms

The CARING project demonstrated strong effectiveness in identifying harmful social and gender norms within the selected schools, as evidenced by the findings from the Rapid Assessment, which was conducted in each implementing country. Results showed that gender stereotypes were still present among both students and school staff, particularly around traditional expectations for girls and boys, tolerance of non-conforming gender behaviors, and perceptions of violence. However, the project successfully raised awareness of these norms, particularly regarding the rejection of violence and greater acceptance of emotional expression among boys across all countries. In many contexts, participants displayed shifting attitudes, such as the increasing rejection of traditional norms linking masculinity with physical aggression or emotional suppression. Students and school staff also recognized forms of psychological and cyber violence, emphasizing the need for systemic responses. Nevertheless, the persistence of stereotypes—especially around gender expression and victim-blaming attitudes—highlighted the continued relevance of school-based interventions. The project’s emphasis on understanding and deconstructing gender norms, combined with efforts to strengthen reporting mechanisms and school-based prevention strategies, provided a strong foundation for lasting cultural change. Research confirmed that challenging gender stereotypes is critical for preventing violence and promoting more inclusive school environments.

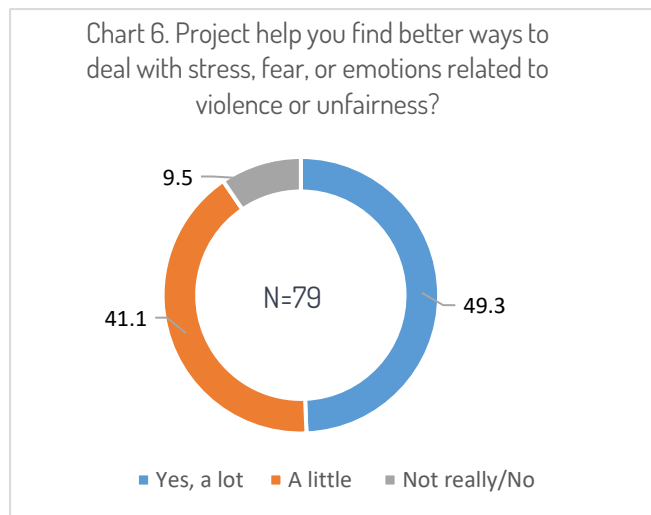
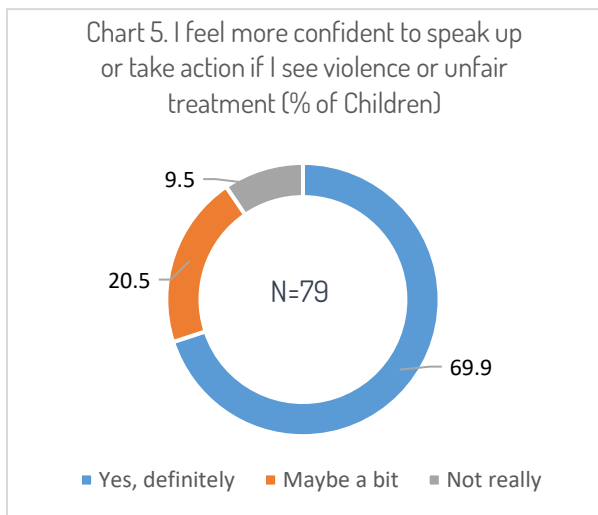
(S02) Capacity Building for Tolerant, Inclusive, and Non-Violent Communication and (S03): Awareness of GBV Issues (SRGBV, Gender Norms, Gender Equity)

Capacity-building activities targeting children, teachers/facilitators, and parents were broadly effective. Among the respondents, more than **80% of targeted beneficiaries reported improved skills** (see, for example, Chart 4) **and positive attitude change in practicing tolerant, inclusive, and non-violent communication** (see, for example, Chart 5 and Chart 6). Project participants—particularly facilitators, youth leaders, and actively involved teachers—demonstrated solid understanding of GBV and SRGBV concepts. This was evident in how they described key terms, applied inclusive language, and intervened in peer dynamics. In focus groups, participants shared rich qualitative examples of attitude shifts and increased sensitivity to gender-based exclusion, scoring an average of 8.3 out of 10 on clarity and integration of GBV





concepts into their school or community life. Children commonly referenced newfound awareness of how their words or actions could reinforce harmful stereotypes or marginalize peers. Children involved in child-led initiatives demonstrated greater confidence in addressing sensitive topics like GBV, and many reported



applying inclusive practices in their daily peer interactions. Several children led awareness campaigns or creative initiatives (e.g., the “Emotional First Aid Box”) that tackled emotional wellbeing, peer exclusion, and stereotype reduction. These initiatives were generally viewed as authentic, youth-driven, and transformative. FGDs with teachers and facilitators confirmed that awareness-raising efforts were relevant, empowering, and prompted reflective thinking on classroom practices and interactions. Survey data indicated high level of project effectiveness from the perspective of teachers and facilitators (See Table 1).

Table 1. Perceptions of project effectiveness from teachers and facilitators (N=73)*

Survey Question	Yes, very much/regularly	Somewhat/To some extend	Not really/No
Did the project help you better understand the causes and consequences of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) ?	71.8%	26.8%	1.4%
After participating in project activities, do you feel more confident in identifying and addressing GBV or VAC incidents in your school or community?	63.4%	33.8%	2.8%
Have you used or applied any gender-based related project materials, tools, or approaches in your regular work with children or youth?	35.2%	40.8%	23.9%
Did the project support you in promoting safe and inclusive school environments?	65.7%	30.0%	4.3%
Have you observed any changes among students as a result of child-led initiatives (e.g., more awareness, respectful behaviour, student engagement) ?	47.1%	40.0%	12.9%
Did the collaboration with other teachers or project staff improve your ability to address SRGBV and VAC?	52.9%	44.3%	2.8%

* As only seven of the participating teachers were male, with the remainder being female, it was not meaningful to conduct a gender-based comparison.



A strong majority (71.8%) reported that the project helped them significantly better understand the causes and consequences of SRGBV, and 63.4% felt more confident in identifying and addressing related incidents. While knowledge and confidence were generally high, only 35.2% of respondents reported regularly using the project's tools in their daily work, suggesting a moderate level of behavioral integration and a need for stronger institutional support to facilitate uptake. Most participants (65.7%) agreed that the project supported the promotion of safer and more inclusive school environments, and over half (52.9%) felt that collaboration with peers and project staff improved their ability to address SRGBV and VAC. Child-led initiatives were seen as somewhat effective, with 47.1% reporting noticeable changes among students, though nearly 13% observed no change—highlighting variation across school settings.

Training methodologies used in the project were largely well-received. Interviewed facilitators emphasized the manual for school staff needs some minor improvements in the context of structure and clarity, but presentations received during the ToTs were precise and contributed to overcoming of any issue related to materials. All 64 trained facilitators successfully facilitated peer learning or support sessions in their schools. Survey data reveal that **82.9% of respondents rated the quality of the sessions (or training) they received as excellent**, while an additional 14.1% rated them as *good*. During the FGDs, facilitators and teachers highlighted the need for more hands-on examples, translated content with consistent terminology, and additional practice rounds to build confidence. **Teachers rated the relevance and applicability of training methods in their work at 8.5 out of 10**, with many integrating gender-sensitive practices into lesson planning and classroom management.

(S04) Multi-Agency Cooperation and Sustainability of Partnerships

The project moderately advanced multi-agency collaboration at the local and national levels, although engagement was more limited compared to other areas of intervention. Project activities included stakeholder meetings with local authorities, but most engagements remained at an informational rather than structural level. They were typically involved in only a single informative session, with no clear expectations regarding policy or practice change. Consequently, it was not reasonable to expect to measure any perceived improvement in referral pathways by key stakeholders. However, facilitators noted that these activities did contribute to initiating or strengthening communication with stakeholders, who are now more aware of certain school-based issues.

Despite this, several promising examples emerged, particularly in Romania, where project results were integrated into the national strategy against school violence through strong cooperation with the Ministry of Interior.

The project's ToC is widely recognized as a key strength, praised for its effectiveness, adaptability, and strong potential for replication across schools and countries, but still with a few requests for improvements. The project's ToC should be considered a key strength of the intervention, as it demonstrated a high degree of efficiency, effectiveness, and replicability, largely due to its inherent adaptability. Across all key stakeholder groups, including project staff, facilitators, local authorities, teachers, and children, the ToC was consistently assessed as clear, relevant, and well-structured.

The following specific characteristics of the ToC are particularly important:

1. There are clear causal linkages from activities → outputs → outcomes → impact, as detailed document analysis revealed. The sequence of achieving planned results was largely realistic and plausible. The



steps outlined presented a credible and evidence-based pathway for change, grounded in practical experience.

2. Although the project's activities and outputs were well-established methods for raising awareness about GBV in schools, the ToC did not clearly demonstrate the sustainability of its impact. Specifically, findings from FGDs and KIs suggests there is a lack of strong support for the development of essential tools and policies within schools to ensure (1) further implementation of the created initiatives, (2) possibilities that new similar initiatives will be created, (3) as well as no engagement in policy work with key authorities.
3. Assumptions between each step (activity-output-outcome-impact) were not specifically defined in the project documentation related to ToC (e.g., School staff and young people, when equipped with knowledge and skills, can act as change agents in preventing GBV, the political situation is good enough to work with schools and local authorities, etc.).

The project's design shows strong potential for adaptation to younger children (ages 7–12), offering a strategic opportunity/option for scale-up. Building on the demonstrated adaptability of the CARING project, several facilitators and statutory stakeholders, including a representative from the Ministry of Education, suggested that the intervention could be effectively adapted for younger children, particularly those aged 7 to 12. An illustrative example was also identified: *“As a teacher in an early primary school, I applied what I learned from this project with my students, including the exercises we were trained to use. I adapted the topics to suit the age and context of my students, focusing on themes of tolerance and general equality,”* the teacher shared, highlighting the positive outcomes from the adapted exercises used in her classroom. This indicates an opportunity to expand or differentiate the Theory of Change to include at least two distinct age categories:

- (a) children aged 7–12 and
- (b) adolescents aged 13–17.

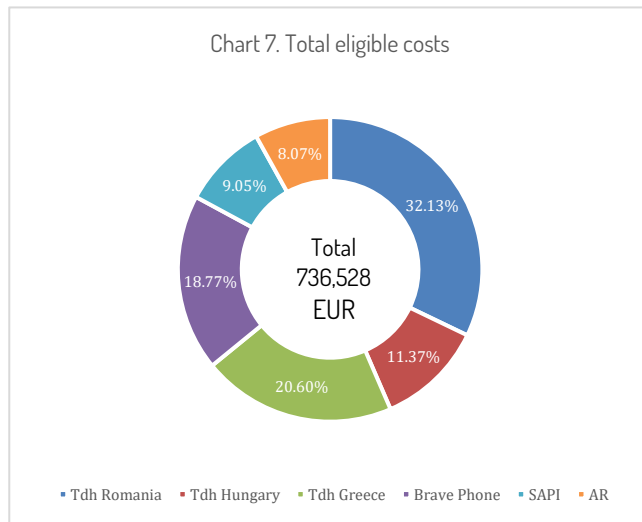
Such an expansion would allow the project to cover the full school-age population, rather than being limited to teenagers alone. One of the most important distinctions emphasized by stakeholders relates to parental involvement. For adolescents, peer relationships tend to be more influential, and parental involvement is primarily about being informed and supportive. However, for younger children, active parental involvement is essential to the success and meaningful implementation of the project. Any future adaptation of the model should therefore account for this age-specific dynamic in designing activities and engagement strategies.



4.4. Efficiency: How well are resources being used?

The project was implemented with **a high degree of financial and operational efficiency, although several challenges in time management and coordination were noted**. Overall, the project succeeded in translating its available resources—funds, expertise, and time—into concrete results, achieving all major outputs across the participating countries.

Project funds were generally well-allocated and used effectively to reach target outcomes. According to financial reports and interviews with implementing partners, there was minimal variance between budgeted and actual costs, **indicating strong cost efficiency**. Partners highlighted that the distribution of financial responsibilities closely followed the division of roles and WPs (See Chart 7). While most partners felt that the budget adequately covered planned activities, several noted that field-level operations—especially those involving facilitators—were more resource-intensive than anticipated.



Stakeholder satisfaction with the **project time management - which primarily reflected whether they had enough time for expected activities - was moderate, with an average rating of 6 or 7 out of 10**. While most deliverables were ultimately completed, tight timelines and delays in key preparatory phases, such as the needs assessments and curriculum revisions, created a ripple effect. These initial delays, particularly in summer 2023, shifted the project schedule and pushed several training and activity implementation phases into the fall. As a result, some facilitators and school staff experienced compressed timelines, causing stress and limiting opportunities for iterative learning. Project teams adapted by postponing activities to align with school calendars, which helped preserve quality and participation rates, albeit with operational strain.

Despite timing constraints, the **project maintained strong output delivery**, with over 90% of outputs delivered on schedule or within a reasonable margin of delay. This includes the successful implementation of child-led initiatives, facilitators' training, awareness-raising activities, and partner coordination meetings. However, specific delays were observed in:

- Finalizing and translating training materials
- Conducting initial ToT sessions (delayed due to curriculum readiness)
- Launching school-level activities.

The impact of these delays on overall project outcomes was assessed as moderate. While they affected sequencing and required adaptive scheduling, they did not prevent completion of key activities or compromise overall effectiveness. On the contrary, the project's flexibility allowed it to absorb the delays and adapt accordingly, a fact appreciated by both project staff and beneficiaries.



Human resource management posed a notable efficiency challenge during the project implementation, particularly regarding **internal communication flow and staff turnover** across implementing partners. While the overall staffing structure was sufficient to support daily implementation, the high turnover of key personnel led to disruptions in continuity, delays in decision-making, and, in some cases, the need for repeated onboarding and re-alignment efforts. These dynamics affected both operational efficiency and knowledge retention, particularly in the context of multi-country coordination. Several project implementing partners reported that information was **not consistently shared in a timely or structured manner**, and the lack of formalized handover protocols further exacerbated communication gaps. A state-level statutory stakeholder from Romania, despite assessing the project and general long-term collaboration very positively, noted: *"The worst thing is when I need to explain to project staff what was agreed earlier and what was already done."* These challenges contributed to implementation delays and occasional misalignment in timelines and expectations, placing additional administrative burden on remaining team members. Project staff emphasized the need for stronger staffing continuity plans based on lessons from this phase, enhanced internal documentation and knowledge management systems to support smooth staff transitions, and reconsider internal communication. Frequent meetings within the consortium were recognized as a critical success factor and was generally well-structured, with monthly meetings and additional coordination as needed.

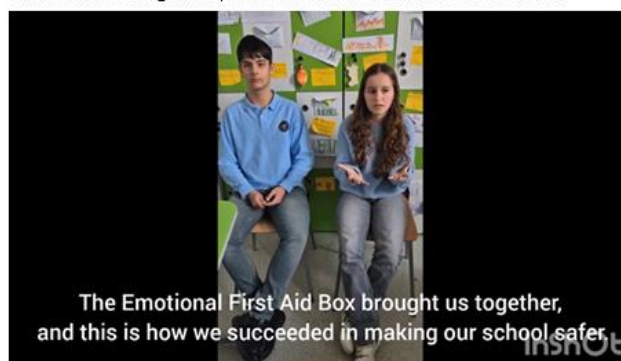
4.5. Impact: What difference does the intervention make?

The project produced **meaningful and measurable changes** across multiple levels—individual, institutional, and policy—contributing to its overarching goal of preventing SRGBV and promoting more inclusive, respectful school environments. These changes stemmed primarily from **project activities**, including youth leadership development, teacher training, community engagement, and multi-stakeholder cooperation. However, the **enabling role of long-term relationships with schools and ministries**, in Romania, amplified the project's potential for systemic impact.

The evaluation identified at least **15 clear examples of positive change** directly attributed to the project, with **8 of these documented through case studies, focus group discussions, and interviews**. Key areas of impact include:

- **Children's empowerment:** Youth leaders and initiative participants reported greater confidence, public speaking skills, and ability to challenge harmful norms. The "Emotional First Aid Box" initiative is a particularly impactful example, helping to foster emotional safety and peer support in schools facing high levels of stress or bullying (See Photo 1). Part of another initiative, an innovative and child friendly tool for reporting violence to school staff is introduced and applied. *"It was the first time we had something in school that made it easy to tell adults if someone was hurt or bullied. It made me feel safer knowing someone would listen,"* said a girl from Croatia.

Photo 1. Presenting the impact of the Child led initiative from Romania



Source: The final project conference (showed recordings)



- **School culture shifts:** Teachers observed more respectful peer interactions and stronger collaboration among staff on sensitive topics. In some schools, new inclusive practices were adopted informally, including “reflection corners” and peer mediation. *“We, teachers, now collaborate much better among ourselves. We report incidents of violence that we might not have reported before—and now we expect a reaction.”* — Teacher from Croatia
- **Policy integration:** In Romania, CARING project outcomes were directly internalized in the development of the national strategy on violence prevention in schools. One Ministry of Education representative committed to integrating the GBV component into mandatory teacher training.
- **Peer replication of initiatives:** In Croatia, students from one school adopted an initiative designed by their peers from another, demonstrating organic, peer-driven scaling of impact without direct project facilitation.

Surveyed parents reported a strong perceived impact of the project on their schools and communities. Out of 23 respondents, 21 agreed that the project improved awareness or attitudes in their school or community, and similarly felt more connected to their child’s school through its activities. Notably, 18 parents also stated that the project made them think differently about how they discuss respect, gender, or emotions with their children—highlighting the project’s influence beyond students to reach families and support values-based dialogue at home.

As the scope and expected outcomes of the project are primarily limited to individual schools rather than broader national or regional levels, findings indicate that the **level of change varies significantly across schools**. While various factors influence the overall effectiveness of the project (including national and local contexts, the capacities of implementing partner organizations, the quality of delivered ToTs, and the quality of project materials) **the most influential factors of school level change** are those directly related to school-level stakeholders (facilitators, teachers, and students) and the enabling environment provided by school leadership, particularly school principals. Accordingly, **the key assumptions shaping project effectiveness in schools** (see also Annex 8 for a detailed explanation) are as follows:

1. Selecting schools with motivated and engaged staff (including facilitators, principals, and other teachers) who will further ensure that right students are chosen in the right way (Top-down selection of youth leaders may exclude capable students and affect motivation. Children preferred transparent and inclusive selection, regardless of school grades, English language skills, etc. – *For more details see Capitalization Report in Annex 8*);
2. Facilitators are the cornerstone of project implementation, with the project’s effectiveness and impact largely depending on their capacities, motivation, and competencies;
3. Strong collaboration and effective communication between project staff, facilitators, and school leadership are essential for successful implementation.

Data gathered during the evaluation process indicate that the project’s effectiveness—as a measure of change brought about by the intervention—was achieved across three distinct levels:

1. **Behavioral change** (including attitudinal shifts) among those trained and directly involved in delivering project activities, such as youth leaders and facilitators. Youth leaders reported initiating additional community-based actions to prevent GBV and expressed increased confidence in reporting or intervening in GBV-related situations. Facilitators observed that their methods were replicated by peers and noted a heightened awareness of SRGBV within their school environments. *“Through this*



project, I realized I have the power to speak up when I see something wrong. Now, I feel confident not just to protect myself, but also to help others in my school. I stopped and reported bullying against a younger child in our school." – Boy, Romania

- II. **Attitudinal change** among children who participated in project initiatives and teachers who attended facilitator-led sessions. These groups demonstrated a stronger understanding of GBV-related issues and shared new perspectives shaped by their involvement, reflecting meaningful cognitive and emotional development.
- III. **Awareness-raising** among indirect beneficiaries, including other students, parents, and statutory stakeholders.

The document review revealed that the project's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools were not designed to systematically measure the above-mentioned levels of change or collect related data on such defined outcomes. To strengthen future project phases, differentiated outcome targets for measuring attitude change and behavioral change should be established for each beneficiary group, along with the development of tailored M&E tools.⁴ Aligning outcome expectations with the depth of engagement of each group would significantly enhance the project's ability to capture, measure, and demonstrate both its effectiveness and broader impact.

While the project's overall impact was positive, it also generated **at least four unintended effects**, all of which were documented and assessed as **low or moderate in severity**:

- Although it was clearly communicated by facilitator that only two students will be selected to represent a selected initiative (initiatives selected by CCB as those that stood out through high involvement and high potential impact). at the regional event in Hungary, this led to demotivation among peers who contributed equally. In one instance, students expressed reluctance to participate in future projects after being excluded from a high-profile event.
- Facilitators frequently reported feeling overwhelmed by expectations, particularly related to documentation, logistics, and coordination, without proportional support. This occasionally impacted the quality and consistency of implementation.
- In some settings, particularly where school leadership was hesitant to engage with sensitive topics, activities were reframed more broadly (e.g., under "peer violence" or "school wellbeing"), potentially reducing their relevance to SRGBV objectives.
- Due to internal turnover, some stakeholders, including statutory actors, had to repeatedly brief new project staff on previously agreed actions, which undermined efficiency and trust.

The CARING project produced **visible, meaningful changes in behavior, knowledge, and collaboration** across schools, communities, and national actors. These changes were largely the result of project design and implementation, though existing relationships and stakeholder readiness played an enabling role. While a few **unintended effects** occurred—particularly around recognition, workload, and topic sensitivity—these were **acknowledged and addressed** through adaptive management. The project's ability to respond to these issues reinforces its credibility and enhances the overall quality and depth of its impact.

⁴ See, for example, Garred, M., and Ma, M. (2024). Change Inside and Out: An Evaluator's Guide to Outcome Harvesting + Attitude Change. <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ripple-peace.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/OHAC-Guide-2024.pdf>



4.6. Sustainability: How sustainable are the project results once the project and donor funding ends?

The project demonstrates potential for sustainability through some influence on institutional practices, policy-level outcomes, and the organic spread of project values across school communities. While sustainability was not framed as an explicit objective from the outset, the project catalyzed several systemic and cultural shifts that lay the groundwork for longer-term impact—particularly in the areas of youth leadership, school engagement, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The **project led to the formal adoption or adaptation of at least six institutional practices** across partner countries. These include new reporting procedures for GBV-related incidents in schools, integration of GBV themes in school action plans, and the introduction of follow-up protocols for student-led initiatives. In Romania, Croatia, and Greece, multiple schools embedded elements of the CARING methodology into their annual school planning processes, with some also piloting informal peer-support systems inspired by the project.

The project also **influenced at least four education or protection policy documents at the school, municipal, or national levels**. A standout example comes from Romania, where Tdh’s long-term partnership with the Ministry of Interior enabled the internalization of project components into the national anti-violence strategy in schools. A Ministry representative committed to making GBV content from CARING part of the mandatory teacher training curriculum, and further proposed the national rollout of a theater-based initiative co-designed by youth as a model for scaling child-led awareness campaigns.

One of the **most frequently mentioned outcomes across stakeholder groups was the project’s ability to strengthen bonds between children, teachers, and institutions, both within and across schools**. Though not an original objective, this outcome significantly enhances local ownership and sustainability. A notable case from Croatia involved students from one school replicating and promoting an initiative designed by peers from another school, demonstrating a powerful horizontal transfer of project values and reinforcing the organic spread of GBV-related awareness.

Student-led initiatives were widely acknowledged as genuinely youth-driven. Children across all countries emphasized that these were their own ideas—projects they would have initiated regardless—but the CARING project gave them a formal platform, organizational structure, institutional legitimacy, and support from teachers and facilitators. While this model empowered young people to take action, participants also noted that without ongoing support or clear guidance, similar initiatives are unlikely to emerge spontaneously in other schools. To address this, **children, teachers, and facilitators jointly recommended the creation of a simple, visible “flowchart” tool, to be displayed in schools, that outlines how to start and lead a student initiative**. This would institutionalize knowledge and support student agency in the long term.

Drawing from relevance and effectiveness findings, three priority intervention areas were identified through triangulation of stakeholder input and evaluation results:

- Institutionalizing student participation models (e.g., CCBs) with structured guidelines and visible tools in schools.



- Creating sustainability support tools (like initiative flowcharts or peer-to-peer mentorship guides) to encourage replication of youth-led efforts without donor dependency.
- Deepening collaboration with ministries and training institutions to anchor GBV content and participatory approaches in national education policies and teacher training programs.

While the sustainability of CARING outcomes will depend on continued investment, policy engagement, and institutional will, the project has created a solid foundation of practice, relationships, and tools. Its most enduring contributions lie in institutional adaptations, policy uptake, and the empowerment of children as change agents.

4.7. Child participation and empowerment: To what extent were children actively engaged and empowered in the project?

The evidence collected through focus groups, surveys, and project documentation confirms that **children were actively and meaningfully engaged in project activities, decision-making, and advocacy processes.** The project moved beyond tokenistic involvement, creating structured and supportive spaces for children to lead initiatives, co-design activities, and advocate for change on issues related to equality, tolerance, different type of violence, including GBV.

The child participation **component was implemented effectively across countries, with a total of 32 child-led initiatives facilitated by the project.** These initiatives were developed independently by student groups, often through school-based consultations and guided brainstorming sessions, with minimal input from adults. Children reported that their opinions were respected and acted upon, with 76% of surveyed participants stating that they felt their voices were valued and taken into account. These perceptions were reinforced during FGDs, where children emphasized the freedom to choose their initiative themes and the support they received from facilitators and teachers.

Over 80% of children surveyed rated the project-developed tools (e.g., facilitation guides, visual materials, storytelling exercises) as relevant and accessible to their age, experience, and language needs. Children appreciated the creative and participatory formats, which contrasted with more traditional, didactic teaching methods they were used to. That said, a few facilitators noted the need for improved translations and simplification of key concepts for younger age groups—highlighting the importance of age-differentiated materials in future phases.

The child participation approach significantly contributed to children's sense of confidence, agency, and psychosocial wellbeing. Survey data shows that 72% of children reported increased confidence in addressing GBV-related topics and promoting gender equality among their peers. Many reported feelings safer in school, more able to express their opinions, and more willing to support classmates who faced exclusion or discrimination. "*The inclusive nature of the process, where students co-created, led, and showcased their work, helped reinforce a sense of belonging and empowerment*", explained a girl who led an initiative during the IDI.

While the project's concept of child participation was generally strong, **the role of CCBs was narrowly planned.** CCB organised eight meetings during the project lifetime, focusing on child participation and GBV, progressively built participants' understanding through a sequence of sessions on participation models, child perspectives on GBV, project child-friendly materials, and evaluation of child-led initiatives. While



this process gave children an important evaluative and decision-making role, **their involvement can be further extended to other project phases or activities**—such as co-designing materials, engaging in advocacy, or contributing to design of the awareness-raising campaigns. Both children and facilitators reflected that the CCB model holds untapped potential, and recommended that future project phases leverage CCBs as a cross-cutting structure to support implementation, feedback loops, and ongoing peer-to-peer engagement throughout the entire project cycle.

4.8. EU-Added Value: What unique contributions has the project made at the EU level?

The project presents a **strong added value at the EU level, both through its alignment with EU strategies and its potential to contribute to wider European efforts aimed at preventing gender-based violence (GBV) in educational settings**. The project design, implementation approach, and resulting good practices demonstrate a scalable and transferable model that aligns well with the EU’s strategic objectives and can inform legislative and policy improvements across Member States.

The project is well aligned with the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, particularly in its focus on tackling gender-based violence, promoting gender-sensitive education, and empowering youth as agents of change. In addition, CARING contributes to the goals of the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee, by advancing safe, inclusive learning environments and supporting child participation in decision-making processes. Through school-based interventions and structured engagement with teachers, students, parents, and local authorities, the project embodies EU-level recommendations to address GBV holistically and through multi-stakeholder collaboration. A policy analysis confirms the project’s high alignment with these frameworks, especially in the areas of violence prevention, psychosocial wellbeing, and gender equality in education.

The CARING model is highly replicable and adaptable to diverse educational and cultural contexts across the EU and abroad. According to facilitators, its flexible structure, grounded in participatory approaches, school-level empowerment, and localized adaptations, positions it as a scalable intervention for EU Member States seeking to strengthen their national responses to GBV in schools. The project’s effectiveness in Romania, Croatia, and Greece, despite their differing institutional and cultural landscapes, illustrates its versatility and transferability. According to survey data, 94.3% of teachers will certainly recommend CARING project to other schools, while 81.1% of students confirmed they would participate in similar activities.



5. Conclusions

5.1. Relevance

The CARING project was highly relevant to the needs of children, teachers, and schools in addressing school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) and promoting gender equality. Project activities directly responded to gaps identified in the rapid assessment—particularly around stereotypes, violence management, and safe school climates. The project aligned with national child protection strategies and major EU frameworks, such as the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and the new Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. Stakeholders across countries rated the project’s relevance very high, recognizing it as timely, necessary, and responsive to the real needs of school environments.

5.2. Coherence

The project demonstrated strong internal coherence by building on proven methodologies from previous initiatives (REVIS, ACTIV, and YouCreate) and integrating them into a structured and logical Theory of Change. This ensured that activities and expected outcomes were strategically aligned. External coherence was also evident, as the project’s objectives and approaches strongly aligned with broader EU frameworks, such as the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, the European Child Guarantee, and the recently adopted EU Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. Through its focus on preventing SRGBV, promoting gender equality, and empowering children as change agents, the project directly contributed to EU priorities, reinforcing both its thematic relevance and strategic positioning at the European level.

5.3. Effectiveness

The project demonstrated strong effectiveness across its specific objectives. It successfully contributed to identifying and challenging harmful gender norms (S01), with 88% of students and 79% of teachers reporting improved recognition of such norms, and youth-led initiatives increasingly promoting respect, equality, and emotional wellbeing. Capacity building efforts (S02) were highly effective, as 82.9% of facilitators rated their training as excellent, and teachers reported improved sensitivity toward gender equity and violence prevention in their daily practices. Awareness of GBV and SRGBV (S03) significantly increased among students and staff, with many moving from knowledge to action through student-led initiatives. While multi-agency cooperation (S04) was initiated through stakeholder engagement activities, deeper institutionalization of referral pathways remains an area for further development. Overall, the project achieved substantial behavioral, attitudinal, and cultural changes within schools, laying a solid foundation for long-term impact.



5.4. Efficiency

While the project maintained strong financial and output delivery performance, efficiency was occasionally undermined by human resource issues—including turnover, communication gaps, and weak handover practices. These disruptions created additional pressure on staff, slowed decision-making, and compromised institutional memory.

5.5. Impact

The project created meaningful and lasting impact at personal, institutional, and policy levels. Students gained leadership skills, confidence, and stronger peer networks; schools adopted more inclusive practices (e.g., reflection corners, peer mediation); and national-level policy integration was achieved in Romania, where project outcomes were incorporated into the national strategy on violence prevention in schools. Peer-to-peer replication of initiatives further extended the project's reach, demonstrating a ripple effect beyond direct beneficiaries.

5.6. Sustainability

While CARING laid a strong foundation for sustainability, maintaining momentum will require formalizing good practices into school protocols and scaling partnerships (primarily with Ministries of Education). Many initiatives are now embedded within schools' annual plans, and schools have expressed willingness to continue activities independently. However, long-term sustainability depends on developing simple institutional tools (e.g., internal GBV protocols, standardized templates for initiatives) and formally anchoring the project's practices into national teacher training systems and education policies.

5.7. Child Participation and Empowerment

The CARING project successfully moved beyond tokenistic child participation by creating structured spaces for meaningful engagement, leadership, and decision-making. Children were empowered to design and implement initiatives, express their views, and contribute actively to school-level change processes. Survey and focus group results showed that three-fourths of children felt their opinions were valued, and many youth leaders reported increased confidence, public speaking skills, and agency. However, opportunities remain to further strengthen participation by providing clearer guidance for initiative design, expanding the role of CCBs across all project phases, and formalizing youth-driven feedback mechanisms to ensure sustainability and deeper ownership in future initiatives.

5.8. EU-Added Value

The project contributed significantly to EU-wide priorities by operationalizing core elements of the EU Gender Equality Strategy and the European Child Guarantee. CARING provides a scalable and adaptable model for SRGBV prevention, demonstrating that participatory, child-centered, and school-embedded interventions can effectively challenge harmful gender norms and foster safer, more inclusive environments across diverse educational contexts within the EU.



6. Recommendation

Building on the evaluation findings and with a focus on feasibility and high-impact potential, the following key recommendations are proposed to inform and strengthen future related initiatives:

- 1. Introduce a Structured Self-Assessment for School Selection:**
Require all schools interested in participating to complete a self-assessment prior to selection, evaluating their readiness (available time, motivated facilitators, supportive leadership) and alignment with project goals. Schools scoring below an agreed threshold should either receive targeted capacity-building support before joining or be reconsidered for participation to prevent implementation gaps.
- 2. Adapt Theory of Change to Reflect Different Age Groups:**
Modify the ToC to specifically differentiate interventions for (a) younger children (7–12) and (b) adolescents (13–17). For younger children, prioritize parental engagement and create joint parent-child activities; for adolescents, design more peer-led initiatives and youth leadership programs. Tailor curricula and training content accordingly to ensure developmental relevance and maximize impact.
- 3. Enhance Facilitator Support and Strengthen Quality Assurance:**
Provide facilitators with continuous support through a structured mentoring system, periodic peer-exchange forums, and field visits by project staff. Develop and enforce minimum standards for activity quality (e.g., minimum core messages on GBV) to prevent drift from key project objectives, while maintaining flexibility for school-level adaptation.
- 4. Use Monitoring Data for Learning, Not Just Reporting:**
Complement existing data collection with reflection and learning spaces—such as quarterly review workshops—where facilitators, teachers, and project staff can jointly review monitoring data and extract lessons learned. Set up simple, user-friendly dashboards (e.g., Excel-based or online visualizations) that allow facilitators to track progress and reflect on challenges throughout implementation.
- 5. Institutionalize CARING Project Practices at School Level:**
Formalize key project components within school operational structures by developing standardized internal protocols for handling GBV, templates for student-led initiatives, and school checklists for leadership support. These tools should be mandatory elements introduced at the start of project implementation and embedded into school annual action plans to ensure sustainability beyond project cycles.
- 6. Formalize Local Multi-Agency Cooperation and Referral Mechanisms:**
Move beyond one-time stakeholder information events by establishing formal cooperation agreements (e.g., Memoranda of Understanding) between schools, social services, police, and NGOs. Ensure that every participating school has an operational referral mechanism for SRGBV cases, including clear roles and procedures for timely support and intervention.



7. Annexes

7.1. Annex 1 – Full list of required questions in the ToR

The capitalization exercise should respond to questions focusing on successes & challenges encountered during project implementation, adjustments needed, quality of implementation, partnership aspects, resources needed vs resources available. Below are listed some guiding questions:

1. Which were the best practices used during project implementation who conducted to achieving project set goals and objectives?
2. Overall, how satisfied are you with the quality/performance of this project? Any further comments?
3. What kind of feedback did the stakeholders/beneficiaries share with the project team?
4. What are the main assumptions, information gap in CARING project's theory of change that we need to verify?
5. What are the main gaps in evidence during the project implementation Tdh needs to learn about?
6. How easy were the evidence gathering processes of the project to apply and conduct were easy to conduct?
7. How efficient were the tools applied during the project implementation for informing project outputs? What about the balance between qualitative and quantitative data gathering processes?
8. Did the project staff and implementing partners organize reflection meetings for gathering lessons learnt, best practices and recommendations aiming to enhance project implementation? To what extent were these project learnings implemented?
9. What were the results of implementing the findings from the project's learning sessions? How did applying lessons learned during the project impact its implementation and results?
10. Is there anything needed to complement the set of indicators for accountability and learning purpose? What are the qualitative questions linked with our quantitative indicators that we must consider for ensuring rich, robust and useful information?
11. Did this project lead to any unexpected changes/ outcomes? If yes, please provide details (including why you didn't expect this to happen).
12. What activities need to be changed to make the project more effective? What new or different activities can be suggested to be considered for further replicability?
13. What about the project duration, timing or sequence of activities? Was it a perceived need to change it? If yes, why?
14. Did the project reach its intended target groups? Were any changes necessary during implementation compared to the original plan? Do you think the target group was well chosen, or would you suggest adjustments for future projects?
15. Was the Gender & Age & Diversity Marker applied during the project implementation? What was



the progress made in this regard after using the tool? What should be done differently next time? Any learnings from this process?

16. How were the dynamics between partners and stakeholders? What went well? What were the challenges and why?
17. Would you involve different stakeholders or partners? If yes, who/ why? (If possible, list the partners you would choose to work with again, and those you would not), and argue the choices.
18. Was the budget sufficient? If not, why not? What activities were under-resourced?
19. Did the project have enough competent staff to carry out the planned activities? If not, why not? What additional competencies or HR resources would have helped this project?
20. What additional support from the Regional Office or the HQ might have helped?
21. To what extent lessons learnt and project recommendations are enabling the replicability and transferability of the approach and results to other European countries, specifically to those with similar particularities of violence in schools: Spain, Italy, Cyprus, Poland, Latvia, Slovakia?

7.2. Annex 2- Typical questions for SCORE analyses dimensions

Strengths

- **Strengths.** What would we regard as our strengths in this?
- **Services.** What services and capabilities do we have? What services can we call on from others?
- **Support.** What support-resources do we have available to us? What support do we have, from others?

Challenges

- **Challenges.** What are the issues we need to address? – within the organisation? – in relationships with partners, suppliers, other stakeholders?
- **Constraints.** What holds us back? What would constrain us to prevent any needed change? How will we resolve or work around those constraints?
- **Capabilities needed.** What new capabilities and services would we need? What skills would be required? What would be needed to develop these skills and services?

Options

- **Opportunities/Risks.** What opportunities present themselves? What risks arise from with those opportunities? What opportunities arise from those apparent risks?
- **Options.** What are our options in relation to those opportunities and risks? How can we act on those options? How should we prioritise those options and actions?

Responses

- **Responses.** What responses would we expect from stakeholders? from customers? competitors? providers? partners? staff?
- **Returns / Rewards.** What is the value or implication of each opportunity and risk?

Effectiveness

- **Local scope.** How can we make *this* work better?
- **Global scope.** How can we use this to make *everything* work better, for all stakeholders in scope?



7.3. Annex 3 – Data collection plan



Data%20Collection%
20Plan.xlsx

7.4. Annex 4 – Inception Evaluation report



Evaluation_Inception_Report_final.pdf

7.5. Annex 5 – Capitalization report



Capitalization_Exercise_Report_Final_Cle

7.6. Annex 6 – Emerging topics identified by needs assessments

The project addressed part of the needs and issues related to GBV in schools that were identified during the needs assessment conducted in September 2023 by Tdh Hungary such as:

1. **Gender Stereotypes & Norms**
 - Persistent stereotypes influence perceptions and treatment of students (e.g., “boys shouldn’t cry,” “girls need protection”).
 - Gender nonconformity is more tolerated in girls than boys.
 - Students generally hold stronger stereotypes than staff.
2. **Types & Prevalence of Violence**
 - **Verbal abuse** is the most common form across all countries.
 - **Physical violence** is more frequent among boys; **sexual violence** and **verbal abuse** more often affect girls.
 - **Cyberbullying** is growing, especially in Bulgaria.
 - Discrimination based on gender, social status, ethnicity, or sexual orientation is widespread.
3. **Underreporting & Weak Response Mechanisms**
 - Students fear retaliation or think reporting won’t help.
 - Teachers often lack clarity or training on how to respond.
 - Formal protocols are often weak or inconsistently applied.



4. **School Climate & Trust Gaps**

- Staff often perceive schools as safer than students do.
- Students are more open to discussing sexuality and violence but lack trust in adult support systems.

5. **Disciplinary Practices**

- Schools rely more on punitive or informal measures.
- Positive disciplinary approaches and student engagement are underused.

6. **Need for Training & Awareness**

- Teachers and staff need more training in GBV, positive discipline, and inclusive education.
- Psychosocial support structures are under-resourced.

7.7. Annex 7 – Demographic characteristics of the surveyed population

Children

Chart 8. % of surveyed children per country

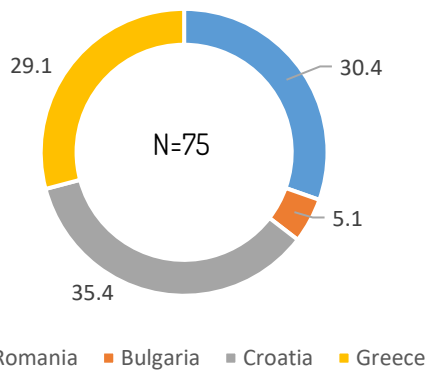


Chart9. % of surveyed children per age category

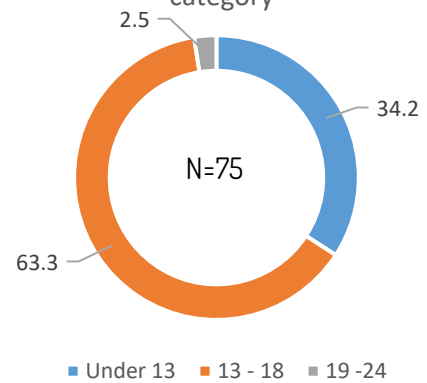
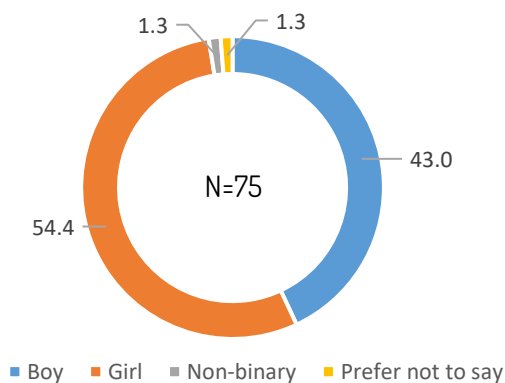


Chart 10. % of surveyed children per gender





7.8. Annex 8 – Key assumptions shaping project effectiveness in schools

- 1. The project chooses the right schools for participation:** Choosing schools with motivated and engaged staff—including facilitators, principals, and other teachers—is essential to the success of the project. Observations from project managers consistently highlight that the schools identified as strong examples were those that showed genuine enthusiasm for the initiative and a clear commitment to implementing change. This insight was also echoed by a representative from the Ministry of Education in one of the implementing countries, who viewed the project as highly valuable overall. Additionally, one project manager highlighted this as a core challenge, particularly when discussing how to select schools under limited resources: “*We often struggle with choosing schools because we can’t include everyone. For instance, it’s especially difficult to involve small schools.*” These insights suggest that a more systematic and criteria-based approach to school selection, combined with an assessment of facilitator readiness, could improve both efficiency and impact. It was recommended to introduce a pre-assessment or self-assessment tool for schools and their staff to evaluate their readiness (capacities) and willingness to participate in the project. This idea was discussed with project staff and facilitators and they strongly supported it.
- 2. Facilitators are cornerstone of the project implementation, while also the project effectiveness and impact mainly depend on their capacities, motivation, and abilities:** However, there is strong evidence facilitators they believe there is too many duties and high expectations from them, specifically emphasizing that administrative part of their work is particularly frustrating (for example, scanning documents, arranging meals for participants, organizing rooms for all activities including those with parents, children, and school stuff). This is recorded in the schools assessed as best examples by project managers, and emphasized by facilitators who were best examples in the current project phase. And it is also approved by other facilitators. This is HIGH RISK for CARRYING 2.0 because expectations are even higher while planned financial benefits for facilitators are less significant (Additionally, there was no established mechanism to replace a facilitator in the event they discontinued their involvement, which posed risks to continuity and quality of implementation). Another related gap is the initial unfounded assumption that facilitators would be highly flexible in adapting to the project’s approach. However, in practice, their abilities and working styles varied significantly, affecting implementation. Although not formally part of the project team, facilitators played an equally important role in implementation. However, their role and responsibilities were not always clearly communicated. In particular, expectations regarding time commitment, activity delivery, documentation, and reporting were not consistently outlined, which led to frustration among some facilitators.
- 3. There is strong collaboration and effective communication between project staff and school stakeholders, including facilitators and principals:** Strong communication and collaboration between project staff and principles are key to the successful implementation of activities. Several factors influence the quality and effectiveness of this cooperation, including how communication is initiated and maintained, the clarity of expectations, and the



presence of direct, in-person interaction. In many cases, schools that are geographically closer to the implementing partner tend to demonstrate higher levels of engagement and commitment, likely due to more frequent and accessible communication, particularly in-person communication, which in addition had some function of monitoring. The involvement of school principals is essential when planning collaboration with schools. For example, in one school in Romania, principals must approve each activity in advance and later require formal reporting on implementation. This highlights the need for a well-structured and detailed action plan that clearly outlines expectations for facilitators and schools alike. Such a plan would not only support progress monitoring but also help prevent misunderstandings during implementation. Although this idea was initially raised by evaluators, all facilitators interviewed expressed strong support for it, confirming that “*it would be very helpful for internal use within schools.*”

7.9. Annex 9. Detailed survey results in SPSS outputs and data basis

Facilitators/Teachers



Output_SPSS_Facilitators and Teachers.s

Children



Output_SPSS_Children.spv

7.10. Annex 10. Emerging topics identified by needs assessments

For learning purposes, qualitative indicators could include:

- 1. Impact of Practices and Interventions:**
 - *Qualitative Question:* How have the practices implemented influenced the children's and educators' day-to-day experiences or outcomes in a meaningful way?
- 2. Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback:**
 - *Qualitative Question:* What are the key insights shared by the facilitators/children/school management about the challenges and successes of the project? How do these insights align with or diverge from the intended outcomes?
- 3. Capacity Building and Knowledge Transfer:**



- *Qualitative Question:* In what ways have the activities contributed to the educators' long-term skills development or organizational capacity? Can we observe evidence of skills being applied in real-life contexts?
- 4. **Sustainability and Continuity:**
 - *Qualitative Question:* How likely is it that the practices introduced will be sustained after the project ends? What are the barriers to long-term adoption?
- 5. **Contextual Relevance and Adaptation:**
 - *Qualitative Question:* How well do the project activities align with the local context or needs of the beneficiaries? Were there any changes made to adapt the project to specific local circumstances?