



*The **GEAR** against IPV approach*  
**Gender Equality Awareness Raising against Intimate Partner Violence:**  
*Empowering new generations to build healthy intimate relationships*

**European Parliament**  
Wiertzstraat 60, B-1047 – Brussels, Belgium  
Meeting Room: 6Q1

**21 November 2017**



**Gender  
Equality  
Awareness  
Raising**  
*against*  
**Intimate  
Partner  
Violence**

Under the aegis of host MEP Mr. Francesc Gambús it was organized by the "European Anti-Violence Network" and "The Smile of the Child" the event "The **GEAR against IPV approach - Gender Equality Awareness Raising against Intimate Partner Violence: Empowering new generations to build healthy intimate relationships**" that was held on 21 November 2017 at the European Parliament.

The aim of the event was to present to Members of the European Parliament the material, methodology, interventions implementation and effectiveness evaluation in five Member States (Greece, Cyprus, Romania, Croatia, Spain) of the GEAR against IPV Approach. In addition, the elements of success for the active engagement and participation of teens and children in their own awareness raising and empowerment were presented. In this framework, invited speakers were representatives of the project's beneficiaries (teachers and teens) that that participated in the project from the 1st Junior High School of Agios Nikolaos (Crete) and the Home of "The Smile of the Child" in Aigion.

The teacher Ms Maria Karakou from Crete, mentioned that "After two years, all these experiences are still following me and, up to a certain point, define my attitude, not only as a teacher but also as a parent and as a human being" and concluded her speech "I hope that our experience will contribute to highlight the importance of the GEAR against IPV being included to the official high school programme. It should be treated as a very important subject, supported by teachers adequately trained by the European Antiviolence Network".

Ms Dora Triantafyllopoulou, teacher at the Home of "The Smile of the Child" in Aigion, mentioned: "I was watching, all those gender stereotypes that had been built inside them one by one being deconstructed and I cannot find words to describe my joy when a 9-year-old girl told us that she wanted to join a football team – where she has proved a great talent, by the way! It was a wish she had not expressed before because she was taught to believe that only boys can practice this sport in an organized manner. It is so great to see a child "unlocking" herself this way!"

The teens shared among others the following:

- "Concluding, I think you would be glad to know that I learned how to protect myself and to assert my rights. At the same time, I am helping others towards that same goal."
- "I can confirm that the programme helped us to recognize what is a healthy relationship and to wish to achieve one, not just for us but for all our peers, thus building an alliance against gender violence."

Prof. Carol Hagemann – White (University of Osnabrück) emphasized on policy perspectives for violence prevention via empowerment of children to value equality in relationships.

Ms Kiki Petroulaki (President of the BoD of European Anti-Violence Network) and Mr Costas Yannopoulos (President of the BoD of "The Smile of the Child") expressed their desire all children to have the chance to participate in such programs that contribute to building healthy intimate relationships free from any form of violence.

Below are provided the statements of the beneficiaries.

## ADOLESCENTS

Good morning,

My name is Nicky Tzanopoulou. I am currently at the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of senior high school and I am here today to talk about my experience with the GEAR against IPV Workshop that took place two years ago.

From our very first sessions, I realized that it was something completely different from any Workshop I had attended up to then. That was mainly due to the very interesting activities that raised our interest, to the relationships that developed inside the group and between the pupils and our teacher and also to the feelings that rose to surface.

So, very quickly, I witnessed how the Workshop contributed to our changing of perspective towards issues concerning gender relations, to the re-evaluation of problematic assumptions and to the shaping of more functional perceptions about the role of women.

Already from our first meeting, by setting our own rules of behavior, I learned to function as a member of a group, to freely express my feelings and share my thoughts. Through the many different views, I realized, maybe for the first time, the difference between criticism and disagreement. Of course there had been some moments of tension, mainly during the first sessions; however, I think that even those moments had a positive effect on me and helped me understand the true meaning of respect: to be able to accept the views of the others, even if they are different from my own views.

Through team work, I was able, at first, to deconstruct stereotypes and then to get rid of many stereotypical assumptions. I felt really angry about the social constructs that confined me to certain roles –often incompatible with my character. Thus, I decided not to let others define my choices and to start cutting the bars of my gender prison.

A very important turning point in the Workshop was when we start realizing how much boys and girls differ regarding their perspective for various issues. So, we understood that our behavior can, unintentionally, hurt others, since something that is of little importance to us, can be of major importance to others.

When we started talking about the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships, I was able to detect many of those in my own romantic relationships. What is more, I learned to recognize the warning signals of an unhealthy relationship, I clarified to my mind what kinds of behavior constitute a form of violence, such as, for instance, jealousy or constant control -behaviors that until then, I considered signs of love- but also what should I accept and what not in a relationship. More importantly, I discovered that any concession from my part or any change in my own behavior would not help to alter the other party's violent behavior.

So, at the end, I felt sufficiently equipped to react in case I found myself in a violent relationship. I was also informed about the services and the people I could go to, in case I need help in order to protect myself or my female and male friends.

To sum up, I want to also say that I would like to have gone through this unique experience earlier, maybe during primary school, in order to avoid being trapped in bad role models and to avoid mistakes which, luckily for me, were not decisive for the rest of my life. Unfortunately, that is not the case for other children.

I will give the floor now to Emmanuela to continue...

Good morning,

My name is Emmanuela Skulikari. I totally agree with everything Nicky said. Two years after the completion of the Workshop, I would like to focus my speech on the ways it affected me personally. I actually observed that everything I learned worked on a metacognitive level: many times, in times of need, I recalled what I had discovered during the Workshop in order to protect myself and my friends. Today, I will mention two specific cases:

The first realization came one year after the Workshop: I did not make the mistake to take jealousy as a sign of love and interest so I refused to enter into a relationship where my personality was oppressed.

The second was about the support I was able to offer a friend when I realized that she was suffering psychological and physical violence by her partner and she remains in this relationship, hoping that she could help her partner and that she will manage to make him change his attitude. I assisted her to realize that this would be impossible, that it does not depend on her; finally, also with the help of her parents, she managed to escape, realizing how unfair she had been to her own self.

I strongly believe that the process benefited not only me, but most of the members of the group. I know that because I observed that many of them –mostly boys- had changed their behavior and would think it twice before they resorted to violence. Moreover, with a view to today's meeting, I gave 8 children from my school a questionnaire, consisting of two simple questions:

- 1) What is the thing you mostly remember about the Workshop?
- 2) Do you believe that your attitudes have changed in any way?

Regarding the first question, most of the teens answered that they remembered the atmosphere with the others and the way in which we were discovering new things through experiential activities, leading us to experience various emotions -anger, happiness, surprise, fear etc. and, finally, the bonding created between us and our teacher.

Regarding the second question, the boys' answers were mainly related to releasing their guilt regarding their feelings

- I can freely express my feelings;
- I am sensitive and I am not afraid to show it;
- I ask for help if I need it. I don't have to manage everything by myself.

From the girls' answers, it was clear that they were assisted to feel more empowered and free to make their own choices.

- I am independent;
- I am capable for leading positions;
- I can choose sports, hobbies and a career according to my interests;
- I know how to tell oppression from interest;
- I don't blame myself for other peoples' problematic behavior

Summing up, I can confirm that the Workshop helped us to recognize what is a healthy relationship and to wish to achieve one, not just for us but for all our peers, girls and boys, thus building an alliance against gender violence.

We would like to thank the European Anti-Violence Network which gave us the opportunity to participate in this Workshop and we wish to underline that it is very important that more children and more schools get the chance to participate in it.

We will finish with the [film](#) that we made at the end of the Workshop in order to raise awareness among our peers on how gender stereotypes lead to violence against women and girls, how they pass on from generation to generation and, finally, how we could, by erasing them, to eradicate -or at least reduce- violence against girls and women of our generation.

Thank you very much.

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to stand here today, representing thousands of children from my home country, Greece, who have the luck to belong to the *Smile of the Child's* extended family. Today, I have been asked to talk about an experience that changed my perspective and my worldview. I am referring to my participation to the workshop about healthy intimate relationships.

To be honest, at first I was not enthusiastic at all. I dare say I was indifferent and rather bored, thinking it was going to be a tedious and formal procedure. The fact that we were not a homogenous group of teenagers played also a part to my initial attitude. The younger members of the *Smile* were also taking part, something that made things more complicated. By that, I mean that at the beginning we had to take care of the little ones running around before we would be able to really follow the substance and the content of the workshop.

When Miss Dora gathered us to the teaching room, she explained us the subject and said we would take part in some activities. She also said we would be meeting every Friday from 15:00 to 17:00, a detail I didn't appreciate at all. Rather than attending this boring programme, I preferred to spend these hours relaxing or going for a swim with my friends Christiana and Eleni. Neither I nor Christiana and Eleni mentioned that to Miss Dora. During the first sessions, just before the clock struck three, I was complaining to the girls, as we were sitting in our bedroom, how painful it was for me to lose my swimming. The girls agreed. Now, I am looking back on those days and it all seems so funny! But to come back to my story, eventually the situation changed. Suddenly, we were eager to participate to the various activities and we became interested in conversations that struck a chord we did not even know we possessed.

During the first session, Miss Dora handed out some questionnaires that we were supposed to answer. The questions illustrated the position of each gender as it is shaped by stereotypes. For instance "can a woman work and a man take care of the children?" The younger children had difficulty understanding some terms, but with Miss Dora's help both the younger children and we were able to understand the main meaning of the phrases. Then, each one replied separately expressing our own view. I remember the way we used to comment each phrase. Miss Dora gave us an advice that I think helped us a lot. She said it would be good not to get influenced by the opinion of the others but reply according to our own beliefs. I found that extremely difficult. Personally, I had never reflected on, let alone analyze, the position of each gender. I was influenced by the opinions of the others.

Later, through an ingenious role play procedure, we found ourselves in the position of the victim, the perpetrator and the observer, of the man and the woman. Miss Dora would define the part each of us would each time play. We all passed from every position. At first, it seemed very funny, it was a bizarre thing to experience. It was a strange thing to have someone giving you orders and offending you, knowing that this someone is your friend. It was a strange and different way to be addressed to, but also funny in a way. I am referring of course to the role of the victim. As far as the parts of the perpetrator and the observer were concerned, I personally found them easy, they did not emotionally disturb me. While we were role playing and laughing between us, Miss Dora was observing us attentively. After we had finished, she asked us what did that felt. We all said it was funny but nobody liked playing the part of the victim, since that was creating negative feelings and anxiety. After we had expressed our views, Miss Dora asked why, when we had the part of the observer, we didn't react when we didn't agree with what was going on. She told us that as observers we could have taken action to change the situation since we disagreed and disapproved of it. This role play gave us a new perspective as well as a global and enhanced view on the equilibrium between men and women and the fragile relations between them.

I also remember Miss Dora asking us to name one of our favorite songs. After we listened to one of them, we commented on it and we observed that some lyrics repeated some of the gender stereotypes. There was a particular one that disturbed us a lot and gave rise to debate. It said "men don't cry". Stavros, the only boy in our group agreed. The rest of us girls didn't. Wishing to support our position we explained to the boy why we disagreed. Both men and women are humans. That means they have feelings and react accordingly. Every feeling is causing a certain kind of behavior. For example, when somebody is happy, she/he smiles and when she/he is sad, she/he might cry. That has to do with one's own character and also with the way someone chooses to perceive a given situation. So, after he had listened to our view on the matter, he agreed and we

all came to the conclusion that both men and women have the right to express themselves according to their feelings.

In the context of another activity, we were called to mark with different colors on the drawings of the male and female body, the parts that are allowed to be touched, the parts that are allowed to be touched only with our consent and the parts that it is forbidden to be touched. We, the eldest children, handled the task quite easily. That was not the case for the younger ones. Miss Dora and the rest of us had to help them through discussing and providing examples.

Having emotionally experienced a series of situations, we started talking about gender stereotypes, established gender roles and assumptions that put men and women in a superior or inferior position without them even realizing. We also discussed about all forms of violence.

As you imagine, we all started to gain an understanding of all those simple and everyday behaviors that we perceived as given and normal. During the last session, we were given the same questionnaires we had answered during our very first one. We observed that in comparison with the first time, we were able to form our answers in a more clear way. We answered more rapidly than the first time without encountering difficulties. The same goes both for us and the younger members of the group.

Now, I can express myself against anything that bothers me, without silly inhibitions and insecurities. It doesn't matter if I know or not the person that I have in front of me. When I see injustice, my hesitations go away. And that is what, in my view, is the unique and valuable contribution of that workshop.

I observe the indifference around me, notably in women issues, and I decide to take action. Of course, this awareness does not concern myself exclusively.

My family, the *Smile of the Child*, reacted swiftly and as a whole. Children and adults, we gathered and expressed ourselves through a project that clearly illustrated our feelings, our impressions and our beliefs. We made a collage that depicted all forms of violence -with the exception of the physical one, which is the most obvious and known. The order of the drawings is not incidental. We wanted to showcase how unhealthy relationships affect each age group. We also wanted to highlight forms of violence that are not easily detectable. At the lower part of the collage, we drew a group of children that represents us and expresses two feelings that show all the things we believe in.

Sometime after the completion of the programme, Miss Dora announced that Christiana and I would go to Athens to take part in a conference about the programme. The aim of the conference was to let us describe our experience and our feelings towards the programme. There were many children accompanied by their programme leaders and they had come for the same reason as we had, namely to present their projects, to share their experiences and their feelings as well as their way of thinking and their perceptions. As our turn was approaching, I was feeling nervous. Nevertheless, once I begun to speak I felt very nice. The mere fact that I was standing in front of so many important people that shared my interest for healthy intimate relationships, made me feel comfortable and express myself without hesitating. I described the thoughts and the feelings I had before, during and after taking part in the programme.

Concluding, I think you would be glad to know that I learned how to protect myself and to assert my rights. At the same time, I am helping others towards that same goal.

The volunteer work that followed later, helped other people to indirectly participate in the programme. By that I mean that the handouts that I distributed to my classmates and teachers, so as to give the example and to motivate them to at least get informed, is a step that I highly recommend everyone to follow, in every school and in every country.

Thank you very much for your time.

## TEACHERS / PROFESSIONALS

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, let me express my joy and honor to be here today in order to share with you my special experience of the programme "Building healthy intimate relationships" which came into my life and the life of the children I am representing about two years ago. After having experienced it myself and having then "taught it" to our children at the Smile of the Child's Home at Aigio, I can now confidently say that it changed our perspective and opened new horizons to our daily lives in a simple, yet meaningful, and most importantly, durable way.

But let me take things from the beginning... Some two years ago, while I was working as a teacher in the Home of the Smile of the Child, I was notified that I should travel to Athens to attend a three-day training that was entitled "Building healthy intimate relationships". I admit that my first reaction was reluctance, if not skepticism. I thought it would be just another seminar, like the many I had already attended, where you've got a speaker talking for hours and an audience listening for hours until most of them –if not all- get bored! Moreover, the subject did not seem very attractive as I thought I already knew enough about it and, since I am an educated and independent woman, I could not see what more was there to know, let alone to be taught about. Furthermore, I have always been a supporter of healthy and equal relations and I have been always talking to by pupils –boys and girls- about the subject. What more could I learn and say that would be worth wasting three days about?! I was certain that I was not making gender stereotypical assumptions and that I was perfectly able to recognize any form of violence and take effective action to intervene and do something against it.

So, I went to the seminar because I was "obliged" to. Already from the first morning I realized not only how silly my initial reaction was but also, and most importantly, how silly I have been thinking for so long. Already from the first morning I felt grateful about the fact that I was "obliged" to attend it. As if using a magic stick, Kiki and Antonia transformed us all –educators and psychologists- into teenagers. The whole seminar was experiential, containing little theory and many interactive activities. It was really interesting. We had fun, we laughed but we also became conscious of many things that constitute violence and which, although they are constantly present to our lives and to the lives of those around us, have been normalized to such an extent and we have become so accustomed to them that we do not even see them anymore and, what is worse, we perceive them as normal.

For three days we have been trained as if we were ourselves the children that later we would be called to train. We experienced first-hand what we should make the children experience. Thus, we got to know exactly what we were supposed to do, what we would ask of the children, how we should expect them to feel, how they would respond and how we would react back, since we had already gone through the same process.

I was astonished to realize in such a deep and meaningful way, upon how many gender stereotypes is our society structured and how they keep passing on to the children that are growing inside this society. Times may change and years may go by; we may live in 2017 (twenty seventeen) and not in 1917 (nineteen seventeen); still, gender stereotypes and established attitudes about women, men and their respective nature and position are so deeply rooted into the human mind that they are regrettably considered normal and –unfortunately- often necessary for a child's healthy upbringing and her/his normal socialization! If a girl wants to become a "true lady" and a boy a "real man", they should do -or not do- a variety of several things –I am sure you can easily think of some right now- which, at the end, constitute the prison of their gender.

I was equally impressed by our discussions not so much about the particular forms of violence –these are known and recognizable- but about all those signs that we tend to overlook but which, with mathematical precision, lead to those forms of violence and cause the circle of violence to repeat. If we do not find a way to break it, the circle will keep growing and will cause more victims while many around will be looking as mere observers.

When I went back to the Home of The Smile of the Child where I belong, I was full of excitement and eager to transmit my experience to the children. However, I encountered many difficulties. Most of the children were young, not teenagers. Also, my group was composed of girls and just one, then 8-year-old boy. Many of the children could not yet read and write well either because they originated from other countries or because they had not received the education corresponding to their age before coming to us. But most of all, the children who live at the Smile

of the Child's Homes are children who carry each her/his own hard story, which keeps following and marking them. A story of neglect or even abuse in which violence -if not in every, surely, in most of its forms- is a constant. That was exactly why to engage these children in that programme was not only a challenge but also an urgent need. To my eyes, that was one of the best ways to break their personal circle of violence.

I admit that when I first began with the group, I was nervous about whether that was going to work and even afraid about whether I would be able to keep the children interested, having in mind that the age and composition of the group were not ideal! Although the sessions were designed so that the younger children would participate only to the initial modules about gender stereotypes, equality and healthy/unhealthy relationships while later I would continue only with the two teenage girls of the group with the module about the Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), I was afraid that eventually one of the children would drop out. Each time I was anxious to see how they reacted and responded. At first they were reluctant. There were some protests, as they were losing their play time and their sea swimming, since it was summer. Because of their young age there was also hyperactivity! However, very soon their attitude changed dramatically. Already from the first activities, the group began to show its dynamism and potential. It was a group that didn't stop asking questions, laughing, having tensions and conflicting opinions, admitting mistakes, having objections and expressing anger for all those things that they believed until then or, better, for all those things that they were taught to believe. Above anything else, though, they were a group of children that shared so much, something that was new, even to me that I knew those children for so long. Whatever we said, whatever we shared during our sessions, the children would keep it there. After our meeting was over, they would wait for the next to continue the discussion, without disturbing their daily routines and despite the fact that they were living under the same roof. And, as you know, when children are involved, that is not an easy thing...

Eventually, the children were coming to our sessions without me having to remind them. They themselves were scheduling their programme so as not to have anything else to do during that time. They opened up, they talked, asked, took position, changed their approach to life and declared. I will never forget the moment, when a girl, until then intensely aggressive against everyone, told me in front of all the children: "Miss, I don't want to be violent anymore. I will stop it but I want you to help me because I know it will be difficult. But I will do it". And she did. She was right, it was not easy. And it did not happen overnight. But it DID happen! And the best part is that all the children helped her do it! And let me tell you one more thing. Not even one of the children left the group! They all stayed until the end and now, these children that have suffered violence, have been psychologically, emotionally, physically, and verbally abused, that have been deeply victimized, they don't tolerate violence from no one. They don't let anyone mock, make fun of, isolate them or beat them up. I was watching, all those gender stereotypes that had been built inside them one by one being deconstructed and I cannot find words to describe my joy when a 9-year-old girl told us that she wanted to join a football team – where she has proved a great talent, by the way! It was a wish she had not expressed before because she was taught to believe that only boys can practice this sport in an organized manner. It is so great to see a child "unlocking" herself this way!

Soon, the time had come to launch the campaign. The task was handed over to our two eldest girls. It was so touching to watch them as they were searching what exactly they wanted to express and not being willing to accept any compromise. Through a painted collage, they wanted to depict all forms of violence because, as they said, they were tired of people thinking just of sexual violence. And they achieved it. They showed everything as they themselves wanted and I personally believe they did a very good job.

Two years have passed. The children have grown up, some of them are now teenagers and our two eldest girls are now adults and are preparing for the independent, adult life. However, the results of the programme are still following them and they will continue to do so. This durability is, from my point of view, the greatest treasure this programme has to offer and the most meaningful intervention against violence. Because how could one achieve a radical change, a meaningful social improvement, a redefinition of gender relations if not by beginning with the children?

I do not want to tire you. I am so enthusiastic about the programme that I could be talking for hours. Nevertheless, I would like to conclude by saying this: I don't think there is a more appropriate place than this one to talk about equality, healthy relationships, deconstruction of

gender stereotypes, violence intervention and fight against any form of violence. Really, I don't believe that there is a better place to talk about the programme "Building healthy intimate relationships" than this place of unity and absolute equality of nations, people and genders.

On second thought, no; I take that back. There is a better place. It is school; every school, every child protection framework and every place where there are children.

I hope and I beg you to take that with you. Allow me to strongly believe that it will prove of value.

Thank you very much!

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

My name is Maria Karakou and I come from Aghios Nikolaos, Crete. Today, I and two other members of my group are going to share our experience from the GEAR against IPV programme.

We feel honored to be standing here today. But most of all, my students and I, we feel lucky to have been able to go through this personal development process together. This wonderful experience helped both me and my students on so many levels.

I will start this short intervention by referring to the training workshops I attended with the aim to get ready for the implementation of the programme. Both the simulation exercises and the theoretical part helped me acquire new knowledge and skills. Moreover, many of the issues raised during these workshops had a big impact on me and made me reconsider my attitude towards my students.

Of course, the picture was completed only after the implementation of the programme in the classroom. During the implementation stage, we had the chance to create a solid ground – inside a safe environment- for reflecting on gender stereotypes and their relation to the violence against girls and women. We also examined the characteristics of healthy versus unhealthy and violent relationships. This, by itself, is a breakthrough, as it was the first time these issues were examined at school.

The process helped not only the pupils, but most of all me, to deconstruct stereotypes and better understand issues that concern violence inside relationships. As I found out, many issues, such as the forms of violence or jealousy were unclear, not only to my pupils but also to me. I learned how I should react in case I find out or a pupil tells me that she/he is being abused, what I could tell, what I should do, what persons and services I should contact in order to help.

From the very beginning, the process –based on very well designed activities- gave me the opportunity to better understand the way my pupils were thinking. We started to go through a reflection process and we experienced intense emotions. Sometimes they were contradictory and they often led to conflict. However, they proved to be the base upon which a new relationship of trust was founded between us. This relationship was expanded to people outside the group as well. The reason was twofold: my view for what caused certain kind of behaviors and the latent messages they send changed. Also, many of the issues discussed were transmitted among the pupils, so that other children, who did not participate in the group, felt that they could trust me. From this point of view, the programme worked for the greater benefit of the whole school, since it created a sense that one could find "allies" there.

Furthermore, the film we created for the awareness raising campaign was shown by the local Media, something that diffused our message on a much larger scale both inside schools and in the local community. Many pupils and parents –from our own and from other schools in our city- expressed the wish to have their children join such a programme the following year. They recognized that it empowered children so they could form relationships based on equality and respect, free from any form of violence.

To sum up, I can say that by implementing the programme, I became confident at approaching issues related to stereotypes, gender equality, healthy and unhealthy relationships, forms of abuse inside relationships and I learned how to help my pupils in case they get involved into a violent relationship, either as victims or as aggressors.

After two years, all these experiences are still following me and, up to a certain point, define my attitude, not only as a teacher but also as a parent and as a human being.

Concluding, I hope that our experience will contribute to highlight the importance of the GEAR against IPV being included to the official high school programme. It should be treated as a very important subject, supported by teachers adequately trained by the European Network against Violence.

At this point, I would like to let the children express their views and talk about their experience.

Thank you,