



THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL SECTOR IN THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF CYBERBULLYING

Viktória Bene

Introduction

■ The digital revolution has fundamentally transformed our everyday lives and the dynamics of human relationships. Young people are coming into contact with cyberspace at an increasingly early age, and their intense online presence makes them even more vulnerable and exposed. In cyberspace, numerous dangers lurk—from data protection issues to cyberbullying. These can have serious social, psychological (Körmendi & Szklenárik, 2012), and legal consequences. Although there are initiatives from formal education and state institutions to introduce preventive and intervention programs against cyberbullying, their methodological repertoires and capacities are limited. Effective intervention is further hindered by overregulation and a lack of trust toward these institutions. In contrast, civil society organizations and professionals enjoy greater methodological freedom and can offer more flexible and direct support to those in need.

For my research, I used semi-structured and in-depth interviews as tools of qualitative research methodology. These were conducted with support professionals and individuals over the age of 18 who had been affected, allowing me to gain a comprehensive view of the effectiveness and necessity of prevention and intervention activities.

My study aims to explore the role civil actors play in the prevention and management of cyberbullying, and to examine the experiences they have, which may



complement or compensate for the shortcomings of formal institutional actors. In this study, I define civil actors as professionals, staff members, and volunteers who are not involved as market or state institutional participants, but instead carry out their activities within foundations, associations, or other nonprofit organizations. I seek to answer the questions: what methods do civil actors use in their work, what differences can be observed between civil and state actors, and what experiences and insights do those affected have regarding the prevention and intervention work of civil actors? The research includes perspectives from representatives of nonprofit organizations engaged in human rights education, mediation, youth work, child protection, and children's rights, as well as individual professionals working in internet law and digital parenting.

The structure of my study is as follows: first, I present the theoretical framework and relevant research, followed by the research methodology, results, and conclusions.

Theoretical Overview

The Role of Civil Society in Developing Media Literacy

Civil society encompasses social activities carried out by individuals or groups who are not affiliated with or controlled by state authorities (Civil society organisation, n.d.). The Hungarian literature (Nagy et al., 2014; Balázs, 2019) also highlights the volunteer-based nature of civil society, as well as its flexibility and adaptability.

Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, and evaluate content presented in various forms, as well as to communicate using such messages ourselves. Programs aimed at developing media literacy cultivate the skills necessary to correctly interpret media messages and become critical media consumers (Kovács & Fejes, 2024). Jenkins et al. (2009, cited by Bokor, 2015) describe that media education need not be confined to formal schooling but also includes non-formal educational activities, such as those carried out by civil organizations and other non-formal settings. When discussing formal education, it can be said that the school-based learning process is structured and takes place within predetermined frameworks, which is an organizational advantage. However, this advantage often hinders development, the formation of needs-based approaches, and the dissemination of modern learning organization methods and tools (Váczy, 2012, cited by Bene, 2018). Non-formal learning plays a significant role in the lives of 14–18-year-olds, offering opportunities to develop key competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication. It also allows them to explore their interests and passions, gain real-world experience, build social relationships, and develop a sense of community responsibility (Bene & Tövisskes, 2025).

As mentioned earlier, civil actors have greater freedom in methods and approaches than professionals working in public education, which enables them to act as a



bridge between families, schools, and other institutions dealing with these topics. H. Tomesz and Balázs (2024) state that alongside governmental and economic sectors, civil organizations can meet a wide range of social needs. Hungarian civil organizations are characterized by high responsiveness, reacting quickly and sometimes contrary to previously accepted general trends to changes.

Experiences of Civil Actors in the Prevention and Management of Cyberbullying

Hungary's Digital Child Protection Strategy (2017) also emphasizes that civil organizations can quickly respond to changes brought about by the digital world due to their operational principles, goals, and tools. Equipped with the necessary knowledge and experience, civil actors can achieve significant results and play a key role in promoting digital child protection. The Children's Rights Civil Coalition's (2024) recommendations titled "What Hungarian Child Protection Demands: 40 Proposals for the Renewal of the Child Protection System" stress the need for children's rights education. It is especially important that those working in the child protection system receive ongoing training and supervision, with particular focus on children's rights, trauma-informed approaches, children's needs, recognition and handling of abuse, while they also need practical guidance on laws, procedures, methodological issues, and best practices. Children's rights education must be provided to children, professionals, parents, and the broader public.

According to a 2022 UNICEF Hungary survey, 85% of respondents reported being victims of school bullying, and 88% had experienced online bullying in some form. Most cyberbullying occurred via private messages (67%), with Instagram (34%) and Facebook (26%) also common platforms. The Blue Line Child Crisis Foundation (2024) reports that many children—based on 500 consultations—suffer from peer bullying that not only occurs at school but continues in cyberspace, where victims are accessible 24/7. Due to changing social habits, online dating often involves sending intimate pictures, known as sexting. Out of 379 consultations, 59 centered on this issue. The organization was also contacted concerning grooming and blackmail involving intimate images.

These points highlight the importance of civil organizations' work in both research and good practice. In Hungary, numerous civil organizations work on bullying issues and are open to cooperation with educational institutions. In my research, I aimed to gather as many civil perspectives as possible to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and system. Civil actors play an indispensable role not only in prevention but also in intervention, as reflected in the interview analyses. As mentioned earlier, this section presents the views of representatives from nonprofit organizations working in human rights education, mediation, youth, child protection, and children's rights, as well as individual professionals specializing in internet law and digital parenting.



Following this theoretical overview, I describe the methodology used in the research and discuss the ethical considerations and dilemmas weighed during sampling and data collection.

Methodology

Methodological Framework

To gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, I conducted interviews with support professionals and individuals who had participated in sexting. As qualitative research tools, I used semi-structured and in-depth interviews throughout the study. Data collection took place between 2019 and 2023. The interviews typically lasted between 40 minutes and 1.5–2 hours. Due to the geographical location of the participants, interviews were conducted both in person and via video chat. The conversations were recorded using a voice recorder. I assured all participants that the material would be handled in accordance with general research ethics guidelines. Based on Klenke (2008, cited by Mitev, 2015), the following main points can be outlined here: informing participants, voluntary participation, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, and avoiding emotional distress to participants. In accordance with these principles, I assured all interviewees that their data would be treated anonymously, responses would be processed collectively rather than individually, and all recorded materials would be deleted after the study was completed. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, I informed participants at the beginning of each interview that they were free to “pass” on any questions—if they felt uncomfortable or did not wish to talk about something, they could indicate this, and I would fully respect their decision.

The interviews were processed using thematic analysis, which is a widely used method. The six-step framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, cited by Ahmed et al., 2025) is applied across multiple disciplines, including the social sciences. I also applied this framework in my analysis. The six-step framework consists of the following main points: familiarization with the data, generating codes, topic search, topic review, topic definition and naming, and report writing. I used open coding during the analysis. In open coding, the data are broken down into discrete parts, examined closely, and compared for similarities and differences. From this, questions are formulated based on the data to better understand the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, cited by Babbie, 2008).

I interpreted my role as a researcher reflectively and took into account the possibility of researcher involvement in qualitative research, because, as Mitev (2015) writes, researchers must strive to set aside their own perspectives until the end of the research process.



Sample Description

In this research, I used non-probability sampling: snowball and maximum variation techniques. My goal during the research was to collect a number of interviews sufficient to enable an in-depth analysis of the examined phenomenon. I set the sample size at 50 people in advance and conducted the interviews accordingly.

In total, I conducted 50 interviews: 29 in-depth interviews with individuals who had participated in sexting, and 21 semi-structured expert interviews with support professionals. Initially, I reached participants through social media platforms. Subsequently, the data collection process became self-organizing via the snowball method. Interviews were conducted by phone, video chat, and in person. Anonymity was particularly important to participants; in fact, some chose not to turn on their cameras or even share their names, which is not surprising given the sensitivity of the topic.

As previously noted, 29 individuals shared their experiences related to sexting. The respondents included 16 women and 13 men. For ethical reasons, all respondents were over the age of 18. The women were between 19 and 42 years old, while the men were between 22 and 49 years old. Regarding sexual orientation, seven of the respondents were members of the LGBT+ community, three of whom were women and four were men. In terms of educational attainment, 22 respondents held higher education degrees while seven had secondary-level qualifications. In terms of place of residence, 10 respondents lived in county seats, five in the capital, nine in smaller towns or rural areas, and five lived abroad.

In addition, I conducted expert interviews with support professionals involved in prevention and intervention efforts. During the selection process, I aimed to include representatives from diverse sectors, ensuring a comprehensive and realistic picture of the phenomenon. I interviewed 21 professionals, including mediators, lawyers, media literacy educators, trainers, human rights educators, social workers, child rights experts, school psychologists, law enforcement professionals, dormitory teachers, school administrators, and teachers from both primary and secondary education. By *support professionals*, I refer to experts working in civil society, education, or state institutions who are engaged in prevention and intervention activities—either professionally or on a voluntary basis. The characteristics of the participants are summarized as follows (see Table 1):

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants in the Research (self-compiled)

Role	Number of Participants	Sector
Support professionals	21	Civil society, formal education, and other public institutions
Affected individuals	29	Private individuals



Ethical Grounds

Topics such as sexting, safe internet use, and harassment required a particularly sensitive approach, and it was essential to ensure the participants' anonymity and their right to refuse to answer any questions. In the study, I interviewed individuals over the age of 18 who had participated in sexting-related activities in some form. ***I insisted on this age threshold to fully protect the rights of minors.*** It was important to avoid any potential external pressure arising from the adult–child dynamic, where participants might feel compelled to answer uncomfortable questions or may not yet fully understand that they are free to decline without consequences. Moreover, I wanted to ensure that children were not exposed to trauma or placed in situations where they might have to relive unpleasant or harassing experiences.

Research Questions

In examining the role of civil society actors, I sought to answer the following research questions:

1. *What roles do civil society actors play in the prevention and management of cyberbullying?*
2. *What methods do they use, and how do these differ from those applied in formal education and by other state institutional actors?*
3. *What professional challenges do they encounter in their everyday work?*

The analysis was conducted along the following dimensions:

1. *Professional Context*
2. *Digital Environment and Personal Experiences*
3. *Problem Identification and Case Management*
4. *Professional Competence and Challenges*
5. *Prevention, Training, and Recommendations*

My research questions regarding the individuals affected are as follows:

1. *What forms of social capital can individuals rely on in the event of a problem?*
2. *In what form does sexting appear in relationships that are created and maintained in cyberspace?*
3. *To what extent did they consider aspects of safe internet use?*

The analysis regarding the affected individuals was conducted along the following key dimensions:

1. *Media usage*
2. *Relationships in cyberspace*
3. *Online dating*



4. *Practices and primary motivations for sexting*
5. *Risks and negative experiences*
6. *Resilience in digital environments*

In the following sections, I present the results of the interviews with civil experts, followed by the perspectives of affected individuals, with particular emphasis on support-seeking possibilities and the role of civil actors in the prevention and management of cyberbullying.

Findings – Experiences of Civil Experts in Managing Cyberbullying

Based on the interviews conducted, it can be clearly stated that—with the exception of the organisation working in mediation—most civil professionals engage with the target group primarily during the prevention phase, often through special sessions, training workshops, or professional development events. A common theme among respondents is that they initially started their civil involvement as volunteers, and in the absence of grant funding, they deliver prevention programs out of personal dedication and on a voluntary basis. In addition to their experiences related to cyberspace, respondents also described incidents that took place offline. In this study, I focus on abuse caused by cyberspace. Civil society actors reported the following types of incidents related to cyberspace (see Table 2):

Table 2: Case Types (self-complied)

Type	Definition
Exclusion	A member of an online group is deliberately excluded or ignored. (Mit jelent a cyberbullying? n.d.)
18+ content	Adult (pornographic) films.
Dissing/Denigration	Spreading false information or rumors with the intent to damage someone's reputation or friendships. (Coloroso, 2020; Csemáné Váradi, 2023: Mit jelent a cyberbullying? n.d.).
Sexting	Sending sexually provocative nude or semi-nude images or sexually explicit messages online. (Domonkos & Ujhelyi, 2015)
Happy slapping	Two individuals randomly attack a third person and record the incident on a mobile phone (Campbell, 2006).
Cyberbullying	Repeated, intentional, aggressive acts carried out through digital technologies. (Zsila – Demetrovics, 2018).



A Typical Case from a Civil Perspective – Exclusion as an Example

In the following, I present the phenomenon and the dynamics of cyberbullying through one type of case shared by civil society actors, namely the category of exclusion, and then I will discuss the prevention and intervention activities of civil society actors. As noted in Table 2, exclusion refers to the deliberate ostracisation of a member from an online community (Mit jelent a cyberbullying? n.d.):

“We’ve been contacted in cases where things had escalated badly... for example, in WhatsApp or Viber group chats within a class. There are several sub-groups, and they’d exclude someone, refuse to add them, or add them only to remove them again, while making very hurtful comments. One school’s teaching staff explained that by the upper grades, the way students treat each other online becomes a serious problem, and it’s incredibly hard for the school to handle it.”

— Staff member at a mediation-focused civil organisation

Cyberbullying victims are accessible 24/7, which can leave them in a constant state of fear—even when offline—since harmful or humiliating content can be posted about them at any moment (Moreno, 2015). Victims of harassment can suffer damage on several levels. The first level is the somatic level, where the damage affects the victims’ health and physical well-being. The second is the psychological level, which includes effects that harm the individual’s psyche, emotional state, and self-esteem. The third and final level, where damage can be suffered, is the level of social effects, which includes effects that harm the individual’s social relationships (Körmendi & Szklenárik, 2012).

“One girl had to change schools because her classmates in her previous school excluded her. There was a dominant girl no one could handle—not even after teachers spoke with her or invited her parents. The rest of the class followed her lead, constantly mocking the girl, stealing her pencilcase, etc. She became completely depressed, didn’t want to go to school, and felt terribly alone.”

— Volunteer at a child protection NGO

The above interview excerpt outlines the psychological and social effects on the victim, which are the most serious effects affecting victims. According to Salmivalli (2010), in addition to the victim and the perpetrator, there are also reinforcers among the actors of bullying, who support the perpetrator’s actions. Furthermore, in relation to the actors involved in bullying, it is important to draw attention to the category of bystanders, who are passive and do nothing. In this case, we can talk about passive bystanders based on Zsila et al. (2015):



*“What upsets me the most is the attitude of the majority! Bullying or intimidation never involves just two people—there’s always that damned third party: the hiding onlookers, the majority who watch and **DO NOTHING!** In every workshop or training I run on this topic, I start by talking about these third parties. Why don’t we have the courage to go up to the perpetrator and say, ‘... off!’?”*

— *Leader of a youth-focused nonprofit organisation*

As the speaker points out, fear of standing out often prevents bystanders from taking action. This is closely related to the phenomenon of conformity (Aronson & Aronson, 2023), which may play a role in passivity and may influence these events. With regard to those involved in the harassment, one respondent highlighted the perpetrator’s role and motivation:

“The internet has amplified this kind of bravado, because young people say, and this is really confirmed in the workshop, that when I sit in front of my smartphone or computer, I don’t see the other person’s reaction to my hurtful or offensive act, I don’t have to worry that something will happen or that they will be offended, I will see them cry. The fact that this is not the case gives them greater courage, but it is also important to note that it is not a black-and-white situation where someone is only and exclusively the perpetrator; very often, the perpetrator can become the victim, and the victim can become the perpetrator. These have a strong influence on each other, and it is not just a two-character story, but the whole community is involved, and it also affects the passive participants.”

— *Internet law expert*

The above interview excerpt reveals that anonymity contributes to a feeling of liberation and a loss of inhibitions online (Csepeli, 2014), and that perpetrators are not necessarily aware that cyberspace is a real space (Aiken, 2020) and that what happens there has an impact on other people. Furthermore, the perpetrator/victim category emerges (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004; Cao & Lin, 2015, cited in Zsila, Ujhelyi & Demetrovics, 2015), as in certain cases, a former victim may support the perpetrator or become a perpetrator themselves because they want to avoid being harmed and experiencing further trauma. With regard to the victim profile, the respondents appear to have characteristics and traits that differ from the average in most cases:

„Obviously, very often, and this is also true of abuse in real life, it is those who are a little different, or whose physique shows that they are not exactly supermodel material.”

— *Internet law expert*



Media Literacy and the Development of Key Competencies in Civil Sector Practice

Methodological Freedom of Civil Actors

Civil actors employ non-formal educational methods that contribute to the development of key competencies among young people (Bene & Töviskes, 2025). The relevance of training methods and non-formal education has been demonstrated in several studies (Bene 2018, 2019a, b). These methods offer participants personal experiences and new insights into themselves, others, and how they relate to different situations, primarily through experiential learning. Trainers use various tools, such as games, situational exercises, and role-play activities (Légrádiné, 2006).

The interviewed civil actors mentioned a wide range of techniques they apply in their daily work, including drama pedagogy, training methods, thematic days, community organising, restorative practices, online support, and knowledge-sharing through articles.

“I believe that human rights education plays a key role in this process. Young people not only become more aware of their rights and learn to show tolerance toward disadvantaged groups, but they also help them develop a wide range of skills. For instance, these sessions are interactive — we sit in a circle, play games, and everyone gets a chance to share their opinion, etc. This way, children learn how to express themselves, how to argue their position without silencing others — that is, assertive communication. They also practice teamwork, learn to recognise connections, and express themselves creatively — for example, through drawing or role-play. Moreover, they get to know themselves and each other better, gain insight into different life situations, and develop a more comprehensive understanding of how the world works. Of course, a single session won't bring radical change, but it can plant a seed.”

— Volunteer from a child protection NGO

The Dilemma of Competency Boundaries in Civil Engagement

The next interview excerpt highlights a methodological challenge: when external professionals are brought into a particular situation, they are expected to respond in real time, while respecting the boundaries of their role. At the same time, it reveals the importance of collaborative partnerships with institutional professionals:

“So we're aware of our own boundaries and frameworks. We know that we're in the classroom for one and a half hours, and there is that conflict surfaces, and



it's been resolved during that time. So, we would rather frame the session as something preventative. If there's already a specific issue — one that the teacher knows about and wants addressed — then we offer conflict resolution sessions rather than this bullying workshop. These are more preventative in nature. But if nothing has happened yet, it's a great opportunity for the students to reflect. Now, if something does emerge during the session — if a problem comes to light — we always make sure to report it to the teacher or school psychologist, or perhaps a school social worker, so we look for a way to calmly leave the scene after talking about bullying with a group, and if it turns out that there is something that would be good to talk about more, we report it to someone we know. And if the matter is heading towards conflict resolution or resolution, we indicate that we have a solution for this as well."

— Staff member of a human rights education organisation

Interdisciplinary Cooperation

Based on the conducted interviews, the respondents reported collaborations extend to parents, teachers, social workers, legal professionals, specialists, mental health experts, doctors, IT experts, AI specialists, media experts, the police, higher education institutions, as well as primary and secondary school and university students. As evidenced by the data, the civil actors operate with a broad and diverse network of contacts, many of whom a teacher would rarely encounter in the course of their work:

"And of course, if there were state funding available for teachers and social workers in the public sector to participate in training programs — not just ours, but any they find relevant — where they feel they receive up-to-date and practical knowledge... Because we hear from a lot of teachers that what is available, and covered by their employer, well... I'm not saying it's bad, but there's serious doubt about the quality. And I think what's really needed is training that helps professionals learn how to think in teams."

— Staff member of a mediation-focused organisation

According to Bacsa-Bán (2025), such collaboration is crucial because it can also contribute to cooperation between state education stakeholders and civil society organizations, which is key to increasing the social prestige of the teaching profession. Based on interviews with both teachers and civil professionals, it is evident that a reform of teacher education is urgently needed in order to equip educators to respond effectively to problems arising in digital spaces. Until such reform takes place, the presence of and cooperation with civil organisations remains



indispensable. They have the knowledge and methods that can help teachers deal with emerging problems:

“There needs to be a real alliance between universities, professionals, civil society, and the teaching community. The IBSZF [a civil initiative] could serve as a perfect model of how to teach, support, and learn from one another. It could take on the role of developing tools for conscious internet use and testing them in practice (e.g., games), developing methodologies, responding quickly to harassment, abuse, intimidation, and humiliation, and reporting incidents at the appropriate level of the reporting system.”

— Director of a youth-focused nonprofit organisation

“...And, well, I was able to deliver a workshop for them — theoretically, they pretty much knew what to do, but it was obvious that it wasn't enough in practice. And of course, the current burden placed on teachers is simply not normal, and how much time is actually left to deal with classroom dynamics or anything else — that's another big question. And they also mentioned that parental involvement is desperately needed.”

— Staff member of a mediation-focused organisation

Challenges in Daily Practice

The civil sector faces significant limitations due to a lack of financial and human resources, which not only hinder the implementation of new initiatives but can also threaten the very existence of their ongoing operations. This shortage of professionals is not only present in formal education systems but is also a pressing issue in the civil sphere, where many organisations rely on volunteers to run their programs. Furthermore, legislative and political obstacles often constrain their work, impeding efforts in prevention, which ultimately leaves the most vulnerable without the support they need. Respondents face numerous challenges, both professionally and due to external circumstances beyond their control. The stigmatization of civil society organizations might, in some cases, lead to institutional uncertainty and resistance:

“Of course, it's another question that in many cases, we have no control over our environment or over how everyday politics interferes with our work and lives — how it ideologises the work of our profession and tries to reshape it according to its own image. It's deeply frustrating when people who have never spent a minute working with real people try to dictate what we should do...”

— Director of a youth-focused nonprofit organisation



For professionals working in helping professions, supervision and mental health support are essential in order to prevent burnout and remain effective in their daily work. All of the interviewed civil actors reported that their organisations provide both individual and group supervision, as well as mentor networks where professionals can turn to one another for support when needed. Furthermore, both online and offline forums are offered for volunteers, allowing them to discuss current dilemmas and reflect on recent experiences. In certain cases, respondents also rely on their personal networks for supervision or mental health support — especially those working outside of formal organisational structures. All these measures contribute significantly to the mental and emotional well-being of the respondents, helping them avoid burnout and enabling them to carry out their preventive and, when necessary, intervention-related work effectively.

In addition to the experiences of civil society experts, it is also important to map the experiences of those affected. The reports of those affected focused on coping strategies, the forms of support available to them, or, in some cases, the lack thereof, which I will present in the following section.

Reflections of Affected Individuals on Help-Seeking Options

In analyzing the interviews conducted with affected individuals, I explored participants' willingness to seek help and their perceptions regarding whom they would turn to in case of a problem. In terms of social capital, it can be said that, compared to the number of acquaintances on their social media pages, the number of people they could ask for help if necessary is negligible. According to the majority, this number ranges from 1 to 10, which represents a small circle of family and friends.

Out of the 29 interviewees, only six had any knowledge about the legal consequences of online harassment. Sixteen respondents stated they would turn to a professional (e.g., psychologist, civil organization, police, platform operator), one person was unsure whom to contact, one would ignore the problem, and eleven would ask for help from their immediate social environment. One respondent said they would contact the platform administrators directly, and three stated that, in addition to turning to their close circle, they would also seek psychological support to cope with the emotional impact. Regarding law enforcement, only seven people indicated they would contact the police, and among them, four said they would only do so as a last resort due to concerns about victim-blaming, previous negative experiences, or the perceived or actual slowness of the system.

Notably, five respondents explicitly stated they would turn to civil organisations for support.¹:

¹ Specifically, Amnesty International Hungary, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (TASZ), the Patent Association, and the NANE Association were mentioned.



“Definitely a civil organisation, because I feel like the state itself is not capable of managing these situations. We’re not good at protecting personal rights—we only seem to apply those principles when it’s convenient for other purposes. But when it comes to real people, real citizens, the law offers us no help. I’ve always trusted the civil sector more, and I wouldn’t act differently in this situation—I wouldn’t go to the police or the legal system or anything like that.”

— Liza, 22 years old, university graduate

The lack of awareness about alternative solutions is further illustrated by the fact that most respondents would not turn to the police unless absolutely necessary, or not at all. However, those who would approach the police typically said they would also recommend this option to others in their close environment. Additionally, one person would recommend seeking help from an IT specialist alongside other avenues. These responses suggest that trust in civil organisations is generally stronger than in state institutions.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of the civil sector in the prevention and management of cyberbullying. The aim was to map out the preventive and intervention activities of civil actors and to gain insight into how affected individuals perceive available help-seeking options. The findings align with previous literature, which emphasizes the flexibility and responsiveness of the civil sector. The research confirmed that these qualities enable civil organisations to respond more effectively to the challenges of the digital world and to cases of cyberbullying.

Thanks to their methodological autonomy and extensive networks, civil actors possess knowledge and information that often fill critical gaps in public and higher education. The non-formal educational approaches they use are more accessible to young people and create space for conversations and issues that may not surface in formal settings. From the perspective of those affected, there is a clear lack of information about the legal consequences of online harm and about the available support systems. Trust in authorities is low among respondents, with some explicitly identifying civil organisations as the only credible sources of help. Both expert and stakeholder interviews indicate that closer cooperation between civil and state actors is necessary. Such partnerships could enhance professional knowledge and expand the methodological toolkit of all parties involved, thereby increasing both effectiveness and public trust in institutions. It is especially urgent that victim support organisations, professionals, and state actors work more closely together to ensure that genuine support is available for one another, and for their target groups as well. This is particularly important because the fear of victim-blaming remains one of the greatest barriers to initiating formal procedures or seeking help



from authorities. The civil sector can compensate where parents, formal education, or other state institutions fall short. Without civil society involvement, the system of prevention and intervention remains incomplete.

This research clearly shows that civil organisations are not merely supplementary, but rather **key actors** in fostering digital self-protection. However, resource constraints — both human and financial — limit their reach. Addressing these limitations should be seen as **a matter of public interest**.

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