



Religious Identity, Bullying and Wellbeing at School: A Transnational Collaboration

Newsletter 2025 Issue 1



ORBIT Chairs' Message

Dear colleagues and friends,

We are delighted to welcome you to the first edition of our project newsletter, and to share reflections from our recent COST Action Management Committee meeting in the historic city of Seville.

Seville offered us more than a meeting location, it offered a living example of how layered identities and interfaith histories can coexist in complex, yet beautiful, harmony. It was a fitting setting for our work exploring the intersections of religious identity, bullying, and wellbeing in schools.

Our project is more than academic inquiry; it is a shared mission to understand how belief, faith, and worldview influence the wellbeing of young people in diverse educational contexts. As classrooms reflect the broader societies they serve, they must be safe spaces where all identities are respected, and every student feels a sense of belonging.

Guided by principles from the UNESCO Framework on Intercultural Understanding and aligned with EU directives on equality and non-discrimination, we are committed to not only preventing exclusion but proactively cultivating inclusion. We are inspired by voices like that of the late Pope Francis, who remind us that dialogue and solidarity across faiths are key to building a more compassionate and just society.

As we continue this important journey, we carry with us the spirit of Seville, a city shaped by diversity, resilience, and the enduring possibility of coexistence. Thank you for being part of this work. Your insight, dedication, and heart are the foundation of our collective impact.

Let us move forward together.

Warm regards,

James, Amalee, Eveline



ORBIT Meetings

🚀 ORBIT COST Action Kicks Off in Brussels 2024

The first Management Committee Meeting of the COST Action *ORBIT – Overcoming Restrictions: Biographical Transitions in Transnational Families* took place on **14 October 2024** in **Brussels**. Representatives from over 30 countries gathered to officially launch the Action, elect key leadership, and lay the groundwork for the coming four years of interdisciplinary collaboration.

🌐 ORBIT COST Action Gathers in Seville, Spain 2025

The second Management Committee and first physical Working Group Meetings of the COST Action *ORBIT* was held on April 7-8, 2025 at the **University of Seville, Spain**.

Hosted by our Spanish partners, the meeting brought together researchers and practitioners from across Europe to begin collaborative work within the Action's four Working Groups. Participants shared insights, defined research priorities, and planned future activities, marking an exciting step forward in building an inclusive and interdisciplinary network.

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- Dr. Amalee Meehan (Ireland)
- Prof. Srdjan Dusanic (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Prof. Joaquin Antonio Mora Mercha (Spain)

We extend our sincere thanks to prof. Joaquin Antonio Mora Mercha and his colleagues from the University of Seville for their warm hospitality and excellent organization.

Photos and presentations are available at: <https://orbit-costaction.eu/news-events/>



RELIGIOUS IDENTITY, BULLYING AND WELLBEING AT SCHOOL: A TRANSNATIONAL COLLABORATION
COST ACTION: CA23120

SPEAKERS

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE AND WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

APRIL 7-8, 2025

THE UNIVERSITY OF SEVILLE, SEVILLE, SPAIN

<https://orbit-costaction.eu>

Facilitated conversation
DR. AMALEE MEEHAN
IRELAND

Keynote speaker
PROF. SRĐJAN DUSANIC
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Keynote speaker
PROF. JOAQUIN ANTONIO MORA MERCHA
SPAIN

Funded by the European Union

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NEXT ORBIT COST Action Gathers in Malta 2025

We are pleased to inform you about the upcoming Core Group and Working Group meetings, which will take place in Malta from Sunday, 31st August to Tuesday, 2nd September 2025. The event will be hosted at Ġ.F. Abela Junior College, University of Malta, Guze Debono Square, Msida MSD 1252, Malta. Due to the budget limitations, this event will gather a smaller number of ORBIT participants.

WORKING GROUP UPDATES

WG 1: Religious identity and School Climate Assessment

Leader: Dr. Ioulia Televantou

ORBIT WG1 was established somewhat later than planned due to the illness of our beloved and esteemed colleague, Peter Smith. Following his illness, Ioulia Televantou, Lecturer in Quantitative Social Sciences at the European University Cyprus, assumed leadership of the group.

To date, a working sub-group has been formed to address the first aim of the project: collecting existing instruments on school climate measures and conducting a systematic review. A particular focus is on examining the extent to which these instruments address bullying based on religious identity.



WG 2: Religious Based Bullying and, Diversity in Schools: Policies and Practices

Leader: Dr. Glorianne Borg Axisa

WG2 has so far collated data related to **Objective1** (*Ascertain at a national and local level among partner states what religions are being practiced, and what (potential) religious tensions and conflicts exist in that country*). Following discussions among a Task Force from members of WG2, a data sheet was provided to all the members of the WG. The data submitted from 14 countries shall be analysed in the coming months. Once the data is analysed the WG shall establish a publication plan related to this Task.

WG2 is also focusing on **Objective 3** (*Examine policies and practices for schools to deal with diversity and integration, with a particular focus on religion and religious ethos*). The modus operandi to address this objective shall follow the one adopted for Objective 1 - A Task force will set the tools and these will be shared with the other members of the WG. The data collated in Objective 3 shall inform the criteria adopted to address **Objective2** (*Examine the prevalence of religious based bullying in schools*).

The channels of communication between the members of the WGs mainly through emails. The Task forces working on Objective 1 and 3 and having regular online meetings.



WG 3: Religious Education, Spirituality, Wellbeing and Inclusion.

Leader: Prof. Robert Bowie

Considerable work has been done through the establishment of 3 task forces. **Task Force 1 and 2** are focused on addressing **Objective 3**: "To evaluate how the schools' curriculum is inclusive of the whole pupil population and welcomes students of different faiths and worldviews" through two multi country studies, one of which is focused on law and the other on curriculum.

Task Force 3 is focused on developing a multicountry survey to "gather evidence on the relationship between spirituality flourishing and pupils' religious education, wellbeing, and inclusion" which is related to **Objective 1** "To investigate the relationships between

We are also preparing an opportunity for a special issue journal focused around our theme. There will be more information about this which will be sent to everyone in the cost action.



WG 4: Religious-Based Bullying, Wellbeing, School Design, and Safety

Leader: Prof. **Muthanna Samara**

Working Group 4 of the COST Action - comprising 30 members from 18 countries, with a strong representation of early-career researchers - has been exploring the interplay between religious-based bullying, student wellbeing, and the physical design of school environments.

Following in-depth discussions, we collectively agreed to pursue **three parallel projects** and develop a fourth follow-up study, reflecting our shared commitment to interdisciplinary and policy-relevant research. These are:

1. Systematic Review of School Design and Bullying

Building on earlier groundwork, this project aims to systematically evaluate existing literature linking the physical school environment (e.g., layout, space design, safety features) with bullying behaviour and student mental health outcomes. The review will adhere to PRISMA guidelines and cover studies published from 1970 to September 2023 across 10 major databases.

50 countries, to assess how governmental bodies prioritise building infrastructure vs. student wellbeing and inclusion. Preliminary findings indicate a bias toward structural concerns, with minimal attention to the social-emotional aspects of school life, particularly for religious and ethnic minority pupils.

3. **New Systematic Review on Religious Affiliation and School Design**

A newly launched project will examine how **religion** and religious and faith-based affiliations intersects with school design and educational experience. This includes evaluating whether and how religious identity is considered in the planning, architecture, and policy framework of schools, especially in diverse or faith-based settings.

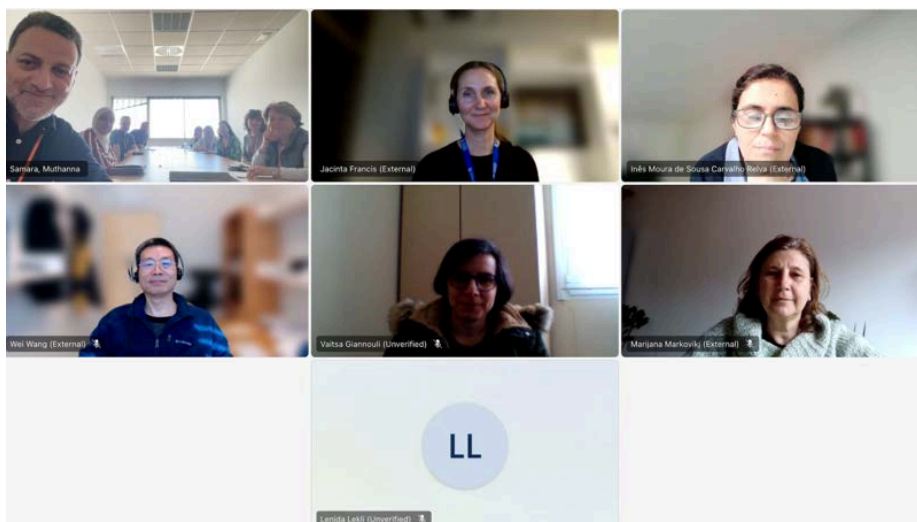
4. **Upcoming Project: International Student Survey on Religious-Based Bullying**

As a natural progression from the systematic reviews, we will be launching a large-scale survey involving children and adolescents to directly capture their experiences of religious-based bullying, perceptions of school safety and design, and associated wellbeing outcomes. This project will allow us to generate primary data that complements our reviews and informs concrete, student-centred policy recommendations.

During the meeting, we finalised the keywords, eligibility criteria, and search engines to be used across the three reviews. The next phase is now underway, with each subgroup commencing their respective research tasks.

We are excited about the collaborative spirit within WG4 and the diversity of expertise that will strengthen the outputs of these projects. Our ultimate goal remains clear: to influence evidence-based policy and design practices that foster safer, more inclusive educational spaces for all students—particularly those from marginalised religious backgrounds.

For further information or to get involved in WG4's work, please contact: Muthanna Samara – M.Samara@kingston.ac.uk





WG 5: Social Media, AI, and Metaverse – Impact on Religion and Wellbeing at School

Leader: Dr. Ljubisa Bojic

Working group 5 has divided its work in 6 following task forces (TFs) with different coordination responsibilities:

TF1 – Literature Review

Coordinator: João Ferreira – naquelepordosol@gmail.com

The team launched a comprehensive review of existing literature on religious-based bullying, cyberbullying, and discrimination.

Current: Synthesizing findings and identifying key themes and research gaps; working on draft summary reports.

Future: Finalizing the literature review and developing recommendations for future research directions. Welcoming collaborators with expertise in literature synthesis.

TF2 – Cross-National Survey

Coordinator: Bojana Dinic – bojana.dinic@ff.uns.ac.rs

Past: Survey instrument drafted through group collaboration, reviewed for cross-cultural applicability.

Current: Preparing for pilot testing in multiple countries; coordinating translation and ethical approval processes.

TF3 – Investigating Chatbot Responses to Youth Religious Bullying Cases

Coordinator: Funda Ergulec – fundaergulec@gmail.com

Past: Outlined goals for analyzing AI/chatbot interaction with youth regarding religious bullying cases.

Current: Curating relevant cases and chatbot platforms for analysis.

Future: Preparing a pilot study; interested in partners with access to youth or chatbot technology expertise.

TF4 – European Framework to Combat Religious-Based Bullying, Cyberbullying, and Discrimination

Coordinator: Eleni Meletiadou – elenim@outlook.com

Past: Initial meetings to define framework objectives and map existing European models.

Current: Drafting a proposal for an integrated European anti-bullying framework; consulting with stakeholders.

TF5 – Analysis of Global Regulatory Frameworks on Cyberbullying

Coordinator: Sedat Ucar – sucar@cu.edu.tr

Past: Collected international case studies and legal documents regarding cyberbullying.

Current: Comparative analysis of regulatory frameworks and legislation.

Future: Publishing a report with global best practices; welcoming legal scholars and researchers for collaboration.

TF6 – Religiosity and Bullying in the Context of the Simulation Hypothesis

Coordinator: Milos Agatonovic – milos.agatonovic@vaspks.edu.rs

Past: Developed a novel theoretical framework linking religiosity, bullying, and the Simulation Hypothesis.

Current: Designing qualitative and/or quantitative research instruments; preparing a literature-driven hypothesis.

Future: Collaborating with interested theorists and research methodologists; pilot studies anticipated.



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Featured Young Scholar Members

Alaa Albawab (WG4)

Affiliation: Kingston University, London

Position (educational background):
PhD Researcher in Psychology (ongoing)

In 2–3 sentences, tell us what your research/work is about:

My research focuses on the psychological wellbeing of children exposed to trauma, particularly in conflict zones. I am involved in developing and evaluating innovative interventions, including virtual reality tools, to support trauma recovery and emotional resilience in children from Syria and similar vulnerable population.

Which WG are you part of and why did you join the ORBIT COST Action network?

I am part of WG4:Religious-Based Bullying, Wellbeing, School Design, and Safety. This working group continues the efforts of a previous COST Action project that I was part of, which resulted in the publication of the book *Bullying, School Violence and Climate in Evolving Contexts* (Routledge, 2024). I joined ORBIT to continue advancing research that promotes inclusive and psychologically safe school environments.

Based on your experience, why should young scholars join the COST Action?

What are you currently working on and why/how does that activity excite you?

I am currently finishing my PhD. Alongside my doctoral work, I am teaching and mentoring psychology students at Kingston University and taking counselling courses to expand my clinical skills. This combination excites me because it connects research, education, and therapeutic practice to support real-world impact.

Share a significant personal/team achievement since October 2024:

Since October 2024, our team was shortlisted for the Innovation Award at the 2024 Alliance Awards for our work on virtual reality-based trauma interventions. In addition, the publication of the co-authored book *Bullying, School Violence and Climate in Evolving Contexts* was a key achievement from a previous COST Action.

engage in impactful interdisciplinary research, and grow both professionally and personally. It fosters a unique space where innovation, mentorship, and practical application of knowledge intersect crucial for early career researchers. I feel truly fortunate to be part of this network and am eager to be involved in more projects that will not only enhance my own work but also contribute to wider societal impact.

Want to see **your profile** being featured in the next **newsletter** as a feature school member?

Share your profile and thoughts to the network. You never know who else might share similar research interests. Collaborations arise from serendipitous connections! Start a survey below to provide answers on your profile or alternatively contact directly: aleksandar.bozic@uis.no

Start Survey

New EU Guidelines on the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Research

The European Commission, in collaboration with countries in the European Research Area and key stakeholders, has released a new set of **guidelines** to support the responsible use of **generative artificial intelligence (AI)** in research.

As the use of AI rapidly expands across all sectors – including science – these recommendations highlight both the **opportunities and challenges** associated with the technology. Grounded in the principles of **research integrity**, the guidelines are designed to help **researchers, research organisations, and funders** navigate the ethical and responsible use of generative AI.

a **coherent, Europe-wide approach** to integrating AI in the research landscape.

[🔗 Guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research developed by the European Research Area Forum - European Commission](#)

Announcement of the Passing of Professor Peter K. Smith

It is with deep sadness that we share the news of the passing of **Professor Peter K. Smith**, a world-leading scholar in the field of bullying and cyberbullying, and a cherished friend and collaborator of **DCU Anti-Bullying Centre**.

Peter's contribution to our Centre over the years was both generous and invaluable. He supported our work with great energy, wisdom and kindness, and collaborated with us on several key projects, including two significant COST Actions: **TRIBES and ORBIT**. His guidance and insight enriched these initiatives and strengthened our collective mission to understand bullying in all its forms, particularly in education.

I had the privilege of meeting Peter for the last time in London this past January. Even then, despite his declining health, he remained deeply committed to the success of our shared work on the ORBIT project. With characteristic clarity and humility, he recognised the importance of stepping back for the good of the project, and entrusted the continuation of the work to others. It was a poignant reflection of his integrity and dedication to the field.

Peter's generosity of spirit and unwavering support for colleagues around the world have left an indelible mark on our community. We are grateful for the time, expertise, and friendship he shared with us.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and all who were fortunate to know and work with him.

The Chair of ORBIT COST Action

Prof. James O'Higgins Norman

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