

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Europe, Great Britain > Great Britain & Northern Ireland (Europe) > Migrants - refugees, racism (UK) > **Xenophobic bullying souring lives of eastern European pupils in UK**

# Xenophobic bullying souring lives of eastern European pupils in UK

Thursday 22 August 2019, by [WEALE Sally](#) (Date first published: 22 August 2019).

## Study finds children in England and Scotland experiencing rising prejudice since Brexit vote

Eastern European pupils in [schools](#) in England and Scotland have experienced increased levels of racism and xenophobia since the Brexit vote, with some accusing their teachers of failing to protect them and even joining in, [research](#) claims.

The study, led by the [University of Strathclyde](#), found that 77% of pupils surveyed said they had suffered racism, xenophobia or bullying, though such approaches were often disguised as banter. Of the pupils, 49% said the attacks had become more frequent since the EU referendum in 2016.

Pupils told researchers they were the target of verbal abuse in the street and on public transport. There were also physical attacks, but the children claimed most of the those happened at school. Some accused [teachers](#) of ignoring such incidents, and claimed a number even laughed along and joined in.

Daniela Sime, author of the report, who is presenting the paper at the European Sociological Association conference, in Manchester on Thursday, said the attacks and the failure by some teachers to intervene were having an impact on pupils' mental health and sense of belonging to the UK.

"The role of teachers, who were often said to be bystanders and did not intervene, or in some situations became perpetrators themselves, emerged as a profoundly important dimension of young people's everyday experiences of marginalisation," she said. "Teachers were, on occasions, not only discriminatory in their practices, by ignoring young people's presence in class, but also [racist](#) in the views openly expressed during lessons or through ignoring incidents of racism they overheard."

Sime, who is reader in education and social policy at Strathclyde, continued: "Young people said that, in the vast majority of cases, they did not report incidents -because teachers knew and did not act to counter the culture of racism and xenophobia, or because of their belief that teachers would not be interested."

Researchers, who conducted the study between October 2016 and May 2018, surveyed more than 1,000 students aged between 12 and 18. The pupils were mainly from Poland, Romania and [Lithuania](#), and had lived in the UK for at least three years.

One pupil told researchers: "At my last school someone made xenophobic comments about my nationality and tried to burn my hair. Last year, in my current school, a group followed me around chanting 'Ukip' and that I should f\*\*k off back to my country."

Another said: "I was bullied from the age of six to the age of 12. I had rocks thrown at me, vile rumour spread about me, my possessions stolen – I was mocked and verbally abused simply because I'm Polish."

The failure by teachers to intervene and stop abuse was particularly troubling. "Teachers do it – my teacher would say 'give it up for Poliski boy' and they'll all laugh. I'm used to it now," said one student.

"The teachers hear the racist, sexist, comments made by students, but choose to ignore them. Or they laugh along. Trust me, as unrealistic as it sounds, it happens more often than you think," said another.

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said most teachers were committed to protecting their students from racism and worked hard to encourage respect and tolerance. "The incidents reported in this survey are horrifying and unacceptable, and any teacher who failed to intervene to stop racist abuse, let alone colluded in it, would be guilty of serious professional misconduct."

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## **Sally Weale**

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## **P.S.**

The Guardian

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