

Socio-emotional learning relevant research at the end of the Ps.smile project (August, 2022)

Partnership made a research in partners countries (Lithuania, Bulgaria, Portugal, Italy, Greece) at the application stage, i.e. March-April, 2019, therefore it is important to see how the situation has changed in 3 years in socio-emotional learning area in national levels. Therefore we rise some relevant questions and looked for the answers.

What are the national educational priorities that the PS.smile project responds to?

As the PS.smile project aims to disseminate Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) in primary schools, it effectively responds to specific priorities that have been issued in all project partner countries. More specifically:

- In **Portugal**, the project contributes to the attainment of the priorities listed in the *National Program for School Health* (DGS, 2015), where it is planned to promote the development of socio-emotional skills to improve the students' general and mental health. In addition to that, the PS.smile also supports the *Decree-Law N°54/2018*, which enforces the adoption of an inclusive educational system.
- In **Italy**, PS.smile responds to the *Law's Proposal N°2372*, approved by the Chamber of Deputies at the beginning of 2022, proposes three-year national experimentation for activities aimed at developing non-cognitive skills in all educational levels' curricula. In this context, the outputs developed within the PS.smile project may constitute the basis for this national program.
- In **Bulgaria**, the 2021 "*Strategic Framework for the Development of Education, Training and Learning in the Republic of Bulgaria*" ratifies the need for including SEL practices in schools to support the development of personal qualities, such as "*ethical behavior, curiosity, adaptability, leadership, social responsibility, and acceptance of differences*". All these aspects are faced by our project.
- In **Greece**, SEL is encapsulated within the legal framework regulating the psychosocial support of students within the educational environment. Similarly to the situation in Portugal, the adoption of SEL is often related to mental health and the PS.smile project's outputs go to fit as useful instruments for the development of a more Inclusive and mentally healthy educational environment (*Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs*, <http://iep.edu.gr/en/special-education>)
- Finally, in **Lithuania**, SEL has seen strong and rapid development. Similarly to Portugal and Greece, the Lithuanian state has particularly emphasized the development of educational practices to *increase its diversity, accessibility, and quality*" (*2018-2020 Lithuania Strategic Action Plan of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania*), as well as increase the mental health of children (*2008-2010 National Program for the Prevention of Violence against Children*). In addition to that, the third strategic objective presented in the *2013-2022 Lithuanian Education Strategy* specifically mention the need for the implementation of *social, emotional, sexual, and inter-cultural* education practices. The PS.smile project fits perfectly in this context.

How is SEL integrated into school curricula?

As proven by the national policies listed above, all project countries have, at least, explicitly declared the intention to implement SEL into the school curricula and, the PS.smile project has been contributing to the attainment of this goal.

In the case of **Portugal**, our project fitted within the *Mental Health in Schools* program, which was reinforced with the integration of more psychologists among school staff, in the last years. For this reason, the testing activities in Portugal included a psychologist in support of the project's staff and teachers. Concerning **Italy**, SEL education practices are still in their infancy, but there is a strong will to make them an integral part of the school curriculum. In this scenario, SEL would be integrated among the so-called “*life skills*” of three-year national experimentation aiming to “*guarantee the effective and full development of every young person*”. The results from PS.smile project may support the attainment of this goal. In **Bulgaria**, although SEL does not constitute an explicit element of school curricula, it is included more as a transversal aspect of the pedagogical methods. Moreover, the attainment of Socio-Emotional skills is one of the goals of pre- and primary education. Thanks to our project, three Bulgarian schools that took part in the testing phase of the training course have now developed specific SEL programs for 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades. In **Greece**, SEL is adopted in several school-based intervention programs to promote students' psychosocial health, but it is not contemplated as a subject per se. Among all, **Lithuania** is the country that has seen the greatest growth of SEL in these years. In Lithuanian schools, SEL is adopted through *integrated programs* that are linked to one or more subjects. It is up to the school to decide the specific way in which SEL will be adopted, but SEL still remains a mandatory aspect of school curricula. Lithuania has also instituted the *National SEL day*, during which many schools from all over the country challenge each other in SEL-related activities.

If still, it is not, what are the steps made by the Ministry of Education in relation to that?

Among the project countries in particular **Portugal** and **Bulgaria** are still lagging behind in what concerns the implementation of SEL within schools. Also, **Greece** may improve the situation by including SEL practices and the development of socio-emotional skills within the school curricula, but its adoption in school-based interventions gives room to the further development of more cohesive and well-structured programs. To increase the adoption of SEL in schools, the **Portuguese** Ministry of Education, disseminated the *Essential Learnings document*, the *Profile of the Student Leaving School document*, and the *National Strategy for the Promotion of Citizenship*, which are highly related to implementing SEL practices within schools. Private initiatives such as Escola SaudávelMENTE / HealthMinded Schools (<https://escolasaudavelmente.pt/escola-saudavelmente>) have been promoting the integration of SEL in the school curricula and disseminating scientific data that supports this idea. For what concerns **Bulgaria** and **Greece** there is still not much attention from the Ministries of Education, but the work done by schools and entities from the civil society shows a great interest in the topic of SEL, which is growing year after year.

What is the progress at the national level in relation to that?

Attention to SEL is growing in all partner countries. In **Bulgaria**, there are more and more publications, conferences and other events discussing, sharing and promoting SEL practices. Some examples are:

- A discussion forum on “Socio-Emotional Intelligence” for schools promoted by Prof. Nikola Marinov
- The work of CoSchool on SEL for youth and young workers
- The 2021 National Conference: Socially and emotionally studying in Bulgaria.



- Several of the most used educational platforms in Bulgaria, which include SEL articles and activities, such as <https://priobshti.se> and ucha.se

About **Lithuania**, we can cite the great work done by the *Association of Social Emotional Education*, which has been supporting schools in adopting SEL practices and it has been growing year after year. Not to mention also the work done by the State to include SEL into schools' curricula and the so-called "*SEL Olympiads*", the national context that sees schools from all over the country meeting each other and doing activities related to SEL. In **Italy**, we register further enhancement of the teaching of the so-called *Life Skills*, which include also SEL, as well as the expected three-year experimentation program mentioned above. **Greece** and **Portugal** have been reinforcing inclusive education and mental health prevention programs, using SEL more as a means instead of an end.