

# European Toolkit for Schools

## RESCUR SURFING THE WAVES

### A resilience programme

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#### WHEN WAS THE MEASURE FIRST STARTED?

The measure started in 2012 as part of a three-year Lifelong Learning Programme Comenius project. It was completed and published in 2015 at the end of the project.

#### WHAT WERE THE CONDITIONS AND STEPS TAKEN THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED MOST TO THE SUCCESS OF THE MEASURE?

The measure has proved to be successful due to the programme being developed collaboratively by six European partners with expertise in the area, use of critical friends in designing the activities, link to good practice and evidence informed strategies in its development, and its evaluation with 2,000 students in 79 schools in the six partner countries. Its ready-made, user friendly resources made it also popular with schools and teachers. The dissemination strategy by the partners both during the lifetime of the project and afterwards was another key success strategy.

#### WHICH STAKEHOLDERS WERE INVOLVED IN IDENTIFYING NEEDS AND IN THE PLANNING AND DESIGN OF THE MEASURE?

Teacher educators, researchers, Heads of school, school teachers, students and parents.

#### WHO WAS INVOLVED IN IMPLEMENTING THE MEASURE? WHO HAS KEY RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTATION?

Following a training of trainers programme, the trained trainers from the six partner countries then trained about 200 teachers in implementation, following which the teachers implemented parts of the programme in their classroom with close to 3000 school children attending 79 early years and primary schools over a period of months. The implementing teachers were also supported and mentored during the implementation by researchers within the consortium.

### HOW ARE THE DIFFERENT PEOPLE INVOLVED IN IMPLEMENTATION BEING SUPPORTED (E.G. DO THEY RECEIVE SPECIFIC TRAINING?)

The implementing teachers received about 20-25 hours of skills based training in how to implement the programme by trained trainers in their own respective countries. They were then provided with the resources and mentored during the implementation. Parents were also called at the respective schools and provided with information about the programme, how to support the schools in the implementation and how to use the Parents' Manual.

### WHAT HAVE BEEN THE OBSTACLES TO INTRODUCING THE MEASURE? HOW HAVE THEY BEEN ADDRESSED?

Various obstacles were encountered in terms of human resources available given the amount of work needed to develop, pilot, translate and publish three detailed manual of activities (each with over 100 lesson plans) and two guides, one for teachers and one for parents as well as posters, cards, and mindfulness activities. However, with good planning and collaboration between the partners such challenges were effectively addressed.

### IS THERE A MONITORING/EVALUATION SYSTEM IN PLACE? WHAT IS MONITORED?

The curriculum was evaluated with about 2000 students attending 80 early and primary schools in six European countries (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Sweden).

### WHO MONITORS AND HOW?

The evaluation including training, mentoring and monitoring was carried out by the project partners with a lead researcher in each of the six respective partners. The quality assurance team also oversaw the implementation of the project and of the pilot. During the implementation, the classroom teachers kept a weekly reflective diary recording their thoughts and feelings on the implementation process. At the end of the implementation, each teacher also completed a classroom assessment checklist indicating whether they had observed any change in the group's behaviour related to the theme's learning goals since the beginning of the implementation. A number of teachers were also asked to sit for a semi-structured interview or a focus group to express their views on the curriculum and the implementation process; in some cases, all participating teachers were invited to take part. Five of the six partners held learner focus groups, one from each age group (early years, early primary and late primary), exploring the learners' thoughts and feelings on the curriculum, including what they liked and did not like. They were also asked to make drawings of the mascots in the story and other aspects of the activity. In some instances, all learners participating in the programme were invited to participate in the focus groups. Finally, some partners carried out also observations in class during the implementation

## ARE FURTHER EVALUATION PLANNED AND WHEN WILL THE RESULTS BE AVAILABLE?

Since the end of the project in 2015, the six partners implemented the programme again in their own countries and evaluated its effectiveness; most of these trials have also been published in journals and book chapters (see below).

## WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF THE MEASURE?

### PILOT EVALUATION

The pilot evaluation indicated that both the teachers and the learners overwhelmingly found the curriculum highly enjoyable, useful, relevant and easy to use. They looked forward to the possibility of having the programme on a full-time basis as part of the general curriculum in the future. The teachers reported a positive moderate change in learners' behaviour related to the theme implemented and argued that for the implementation to be effective, it needs to take place throughout the whole year. A number of modifications were made in the final version of programme on the basis of the teachers' and learners' feedback.

### POST PROJECT EVALUATION

An evaluation of the early years' programme was carried out in five kindergarten centres in Malta over a one-year period (Cefai et al., 2018). A pre and post intervention study in 20 classrooms with 97 four-five-year-old children showed an improvement in resilience skills, prosocial behavior, and learning engagement. However, the control groups dropped out of the study, which is a major limitation of the study. Another pre-post intervention evaluation of the early years' programme was carried out with 173 3- to 7-year-old children in Croatia over a three month period (Milković, 2017). The study reported an improvement in children's resilience skills and behavior amongst both children considered at risk as well as children coming from more favorable backgrounds. Another small scale study in the early years was carried out in Portugal with 6 preschool children aged between 25 and 38 months, spread over five months (Simoes et al., 2020). The authors reported that both parents and teachers observed improvements in children's behavior, particularly related to the understanding of emotions in communication, expression of feelings and needs, and sharing, cooperation and teamwork. The children with the greatest improvements also had very low scores in anxiety, avoidance and aggressive behavior.

Another larger scale study by Simoes et al. (2021) in Portugal was carried out with 1692 children aged 3 to 17 years old. The evaluation consisted of a one full-year implementation group (experimental group) consisting of 720 children, and a waiting group of 429 children (53.2% males, 50.8% in primary school and 29% in pre-school). The authors reported significant differences between groups at post intervention according to teachers' evaluations, with lower levels of difficulties and higher level of prosocial behavior for the RESCUR group. This difference

however, disappeared at follow up (end of year), except for hyperactive and restless behavior which remained higher for the waiting group. On the other hand, qualitative data from the teachers suggested that the programme implementation teachers perceived a decrease in disruptive behavior and an increase in prosocial behavior, as well as in autonomy and competence to solve problems. In Portugal, the programme has also been adapted and implemented with deaf children.

A pilot study of the theme on relationships was carried out in 35 classes from kindergarten through secondary schools (first level) in Italy, involving a total of 738 pupils and making use of teacher-completed classroom observation questionnaires, focus groups, teacher reflective diaries and teacher interviews (Cavioni et al., 2017). The authors reported that feedback from the teachers clearly indicated that the programme enhanced students' sharing, cooperation and teamwork skills. Both teachers and students greatly appreciated the activities and found them useful, relevant as well as enjoyable. Carelli, Lizzori and Zanetti (2020) carried out a small scale study in Italy making use of pre and post research design with 154 primary school students aged between 7 to 11 years attending 9 classes (5 experimental and 4 control). The different classrooms were randomly assigned to the two conditions. The authors reported a higher level of resilience skills and of prosocial behavior amongst the experimental group participants according to both teachers' and parents' evaluations.

Finally, in a recent study with 100 parents of primary school children exposed to the RESCUR program in Greece, Matsopoulos, Govogiannaki and Griva (2020) found that the majority of the parents reported an increase in their children's social and emotional competence. The authors also found a relationship between the perceived usefulness of the programme for the parents and positive family climate; the more parents thought the programme was helpful for them, the more they indicated that it positively influenced them and their family climate.

### WHAT RESOURCES ARE INVOLVED (MATERIAL, SPACE, AMOUNT OF FUNDING)?

Training of teachers in programme implementation is available in various countries with all the resources made available freely to schools once the teachers are trained to implement the programme.

### IS THE MEASURE STILL RUNNING? IF NOT, WHY NOT?

The programme is still running in various countries, including 5 of the six partner countries and in other countries such as Romania (published in Romanian in 2020), Turkey (published in Turkish in October 2021), Russia (published in Russian in 2020) and Lithuania (published in Lithuanian in 2019). The original six project partners still offer training in their own respective countries and in their own languages, whilst the University of Malta also offers training to interested schools and educational authorities in countries outside the partnership. A second edition of the international English version will be published in 2022. There is also a pending

application to include the programme in the CASEL' Guide to Evidence Based Programmes for Schools.

**CONTACT:** <https://www.rescur.eu/contact/>



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