

European Toolkit for Schools

UPRIGHT Project

Universal Preventive Resilience Intervention Globally implemented in schools to improve and promote mental Health for Teenagers

WHEN WAS THE MEASURE FIRST IMPLEMENTED?

The UPRIGHT research project (<http://uprightproject.eu/>) is funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation programme under grant agreement No. 754919. The main proposal of this project is to co-create the UPRIGHT resilience-based intervention, which is designed as a whole-school approach, targeting adolescents from 12 to 14 years of age, as well as their families or legal guardians and the school staff. Increasing the participants' resilience levels should improve their mental health and prevent mental disorders in the youth.

The research project started in January 2018, when the theoretical framework of the resilience-based programme was developed, and was then co-created and validated through an innovative methodology involving adolescents, teachers and families. The UPRIGHT intervention was first implemented in the participating schools in August-September 2018 in the following European regions: Basque Country (Spain), Lower Silesia (Poland), Trentino (Italy), Reykjavik area (Iceland), and the regions of North-Sealand, West-Sealand, Funen, North Jutland and Eastern Jutland (Denmark).

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

The first step taken was an updated theoretical revision of school-based resilience interventions conducted by UPRIGHT consortium partners in the six countries involved. More than 20 scholars and practitioners from diverse disciplines agreed on a theoretical model of four components and eighteen resilience skills comprising the UPRIGHT model. Then, in close collaboration with the five local European teams (pilot sites), the Norway-based team of resilience experts (belonging to the UPRIGHT consortium) designed, monitored, and systematised the co-creation process for the programme. The overarching objective of UPRIGHT's co-creation was to adjust a universal whole-school resilience programme to different socio-economic and cultural contexts, and to generate a valid and feasible regional adaptation strategy by incorporating the main school stakeholders' knowledge and

experiences. The co-creation process followed a rigorous participatory mixed-method design implemented over eight months. The process had nine specific objectives, to which qualitative and quantitative paired strategies of data collection were tailored – designed for adolescents, family members, school professionals, and teachers. As a result, the consortium created a standardised regional adaptation strategy that was presented in UPRIGHT’s Teachers’ Manual; the strategy allowed local customisation of the programme based on prioritised resilience skills, adolescents’ contextual concerns, and preferred strategies and activities for the implementation of the programme. The qualitative information obtained during the co-creation was translated into recommendations throughout the Manual (i.e., session structure, guidelines for teachers), and into suggestions of extra-mural, outdoor, media, and social media activities for the second year of the intervention. The methods and outcomes of the co-creation process are systematised in two scientific publications.

The next step was to explore the cultural differences and needs of target groups in each pilot region, to co-customise the core resilience intervention according to the needs detected, and finally to validate the resilience intervention programme. The validation phase has been three-part, featuring: 1) an initial validation performed by stakeholders using member-checking methods, 2) an internal audit conducted by an appointed researcher from each of the participating pilot sites, and 3) a manual validation performed by stakeholders using member-checking methods. The UPRIGHT programme, which is based on the theoretical framework and feedback of a co-creation process with stakeholders, has been thoroughly validated to ensure a high-quality project, and to ensure a high level of commitment from participants in the execution of the intervention programme as a means to improve well-being and resilience and to reduce mental illness. The UPRIGHT intervention programme has finally materialised as a manual for teachers (and students). This manual has also been validated by participants, confirming that the final product not only meets the needs, interests and expectations of end users but is also aligned with the evidence of the field. Researchers and educators involved in the UPRIGHT project, participants from the working group sessions, and other stakeholders convincingly concluded that the UPRIGHT intervention programme and the manual are very feasible and very relevant for all stakeholders, especially adolescents.

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

The co-creation process had 1011 participants from the five European regions where UPRIGHT is being implemented (pilot sites). They were invited as volunteers from the schools selected to take part in the first wave of UPRIGHT. The co-creation participants were adolescents (n = 448), family members or caregivers (n = 345), and teachers and school staff (n = 218). They answered surveys tailored to each group (n = 794) or attended 16 participatory group sessions (n = 217), at least one session for each group of participants in

each country. The information gathered through surveys (mainly quantitative) was used to design the standardised regionalisation strategy and an instrument for evaluating the school environment. The qualitative information gathered in participatory sessions was used to plan and design the sessions, activities and recommendations presented in the Teachers' Manual.

For the validation process, a minimum of 10 students, 10 teachers / school managers and 10 families from each pilot site participated in identifying needs and in the planning and design of the measure.

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

The main actors involved in the implementation of the UPRIGHT programme are:

- five local teams of mental health experts belonging to the UPRIGHT consortium, who are responsible for facilitating and monitoring the implementation of the programme in the five European pilot sites of Spain, Italy, Denmark, Poland and Iceland;
- teachers and school staff belonging to the intervention schools participating in the UPRIGHT project in the five pilot sites, who are trained by the local team of mental health experts, during the first three months of the school year, to deliver the UPRIGHT programme;
- adolescents in the age group 12-14, attending the intervention schools involved in the project, who receive the *Well-being for US* programme from the trained teachers / school staff at their school during the first school year and the *Well-being for ALL* programme in the following school year;
- families or legal guardians of the adolescents involved in the intervention group, who receive face-to-face training on the programme by the local team of mental health experts in each pilot site, as well as online training through the [web platform of UPRIGHT](#), where they can find and download digital materials regarding the programme (in the form of videos, audio tracks, slides, etc.);
- other members of the local school communities who participate in the *Well-being for ALL* activities in the following school year, by attending events and activities organised by the intervention schools to promote a culture of well-being in the school community.

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

The five local teams of mental health experts at each pilot site were first trained on the UPRIGHT *Well-being for US* programme by the experienced members of the UPRIGHT consortium, who developed the programme during the first nine months of the project.

The teachers and school staff involved in the implementation of the UPRIGHT programme receive face-to-face training on UPRIGHT skills from the local team of mental health experts during the first three months of the school year.

During the following part of the school year, teachers and school staff deliver the UPRIGHT programme to adolescents in their school, and they keep regularly in touch with the local UPRIGHT team of mental health experts to receive support if needed and to ensure the correct implementation of UPRIGHT sessions delivered to their students.

Families or legal guardians involved in the UPRIGHT programme implementation receive face-to-face training sessions from the local UPRIGHT team during the school year and online training through the UPRIGHT web platform, where they can visit and download digital resources supporting the programme implementation.

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

In some of the participating schools, teachers and school staff found it difficult to complete the recommended set of *Well-being for US* sessions (18 sessions + 6 optional) planned to be delivered in the first school year of the programme implementation. This issue was addressed by starting children's training earlier in the second school year. By that time, teachers and school staff were also more familiar with the necessary skills and the way to conduct a session, so this remark did not come up in the second year. The more practice schools have with the programme, the easier it is to implement, so as time goes on, it becomes easier, and the culture of well-being becomes more palpable in the classrooms.

Participation of families in the UPRIGHT programme implementation was also found particularly challenging. This is a well-known limitation that many school-based programmes encounter when they involve families.

The COVID-19 outbreak was and still is somehow affecting the implementation of the UPRIGHT intervention. Lockdown, school closure and distance education were the main influences in 2020. In the present year, 2021, we have to cope with quarantines, lockdowns and a socio-economic crisis. The UPRIGHT consortium developed mitigating measures and study adaptations as part of a contingency plan, approved by the European Commission, which served to overcome this obstacle. Main changes were 1) adjustments in the implementation timeline, in order to maintain the same methodology for adolescents' training sessions under the *Well-being for US* programme, and 2) transferring several activities online in the *Well-being for ALL* programme.

School directors and teachers have been and still are overwhelmed by the tremendous workload. Many families are affected by a reduction or loss of income; overall, people are worried by the general uncertainty, fear, etc. As a result, everyone's engagement and

motivation to participate in the UPRIGHT intervention programme is remarkably reduced. In order to address this challenge, our procedures were more flexible than ever to suit the particular situation – not for the whole region, but for each school, by designing tailor-made implementation and evaluation plans according to the particularities of the school.

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

During the first year of the UPRIGHT project, a document called Deployment Plan (DP) was developed and shared among the five different pilot sites to clearly specify the protocols and templates to be used by the local teams and participating schools in organising and monitoring the correct implementation of the *Well-being for US* and *Well-being for ALL* programmes. The aim of this document was to achieve a consistent implementation of the programme in the different pilot sites. Clear procedures were specified and templates filled in when planning and then implementing the UPRIGHT training with teachers / school staff, adolescents and families / legal guardians. The monitoring templates are key for collecting precise information on the programme implementation, such as: number of participants involved in the activities, number of UPRIGHT sessions carried out by schools, participants' preferences with respect to the methods and contents of the programme delivered, difficulties or obstacles encountered in delivering the programme, solutions, deviations, synergies with other relevant programmes implemented by the schools, etc.

WHO MONITORS AND HOW?

The local UPRIGHT teams are in charge of monitoring the correct implementation of the programme at their pilot site. They use the DP protocols and templates to collect all the relevant information during the implementation of UPRIGHT at their site, and they deliver the filled-in monitoring templates to the consortium at the end of each implementation phase, for an aggregate analysis of the results and a sharing of experiences among pilot sites. Beyond this, the local UPRIGHT teams constantly keep in touch with schools during the programme implementation (by visiting them for interviews with school staff or by calling UPRIGHT referents at the schools), in order to quickly identify any difficulties stakeholders (in particular teachers / school staff) may be facing in implementing the programme and provide them with support to overcome these difficulties.

IS FURTHER EVALUATION PLANNED, AND WHEN WILL THE RESULTS BE AVAILABLE?

UPRIGHT will use a mixed-methods evaluation approach to capture the complexity of the whole school system. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used, together with simulation modelling. Results will be analysed not only at individual level for youths, but also at the level of families / legal guardians, schools and communities, in order to understand the synergistic interactions existing among them and the outcomes related to the intervention. The project will provide data to evince its informed practice by including a comprehensive

evaluation approach. Programme-effectiveness and cost-effectiveness results will be available from January 2022. The results will be published in various scientific articles, some of which are already in the publication phase.

Results

This research is resulting in the publication of several articles in open-access scientific journals. Results of the intervention are also available on the UPRIGHT website at www.uprightprojects.eu.

Below is a list of the published articles describing the research project's protocol and the results obtained so far. The study ends in December 2021, and more results will be available in 2021, and after the end of the project, in January 2022.

- Las Hayas, C., Izco-Basurko, I., Fullaondo, A. et al. UPRIGHT, a resilience-based intervention to promote mental well-being in schools: study rationale and methodology for a European randomized controlled trial. *BMC Public Health* 19, 1413 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-7759-0>
- Morote, R., Anyan, F., Las Hayas, C., Gabrielli, S., Zwiefka, A., Gudmundsdottir, D. G., ... & UPRIGHT Consortium. (2020). Development and validation of the theory-driven School Resilience Scale for Adults: Preliminary results. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 119, 105589.
- Morote, R., Las Hayas, C., Izco-Basurko, I., Anyan, F., Fullaondo, A., Donisi, V., ... & Hjemdal, O. (2020). Co-creation and regional adaptation of a resilience-based universal whole-school program in five European regions. *European Educational Research Journal*, 1474904120947890.
- Anyan, F., Morote, R., Las Hayas, C., Gabrielli, S., Mazur, I., Gudmundsdottir, D. G., ... & Hjemdal, O. (2021). Measuring resilience across participating regions in the UPRIGHT EU Horizon 2020 project: Factor structure and psychometric properties of the Resilience Scale for Adolescents. *Frontiers in psychology*, 12, 235.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF THE MEASURE?

The main outcomes expected for the UPRIGHT resilience-based intervention are:

- Improved mental well-being in the targeted group of young people. UPRIGHT will also have a direct impact on the mental health status of families / legal guardians and teachers / school staff.
- The innovative interventions will create a strong evidence base for mental well-being promotion programmes in Europe, contributing to greater health equity and improved societal benefits, including for migrants.
- Improved mental well-being in youth should contribute to reducing school and college/university dropout in the short term, strengthening personal confidence and cognitive functions, improving educational efforts and enhancing employability.
- UPRIGHT will build an innovative partnership between the health, social and education sectors to address the occurrence of mental health problems and related comorbidities in youths, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, social exclusion of vulnerable groups, school failure and reduced employability.

- UPRIGHT will establish preventive strategies that have a real effect of reducing the occurrence of mental disorders and comorbidities associated with mental disorders later in life.

The UPRIGHT project's ambition is to be the first school-based, primary intervention programme that will create a real culture of promotion of mental health and well-being, targeting adolescents of 12-14 years of age. Co-creation methods ensured that the intervention took into account the diversity of different regions in Europe, and that the intervention can be adapted to the different cultural needs in each region. The UPRIGHT school-based intervention will provide effective person-centred care. The goal is for it to be integrated into the daily practice of schools through a well-planned and -evaluated implementation process, so as to achieve noteworthy progress in adolescents' mental well-being.

Therefore, implementation of the UPRIGHT intervention will directly improve the short-term mental well-being of nearly 3,000 youths (intervention group target). In addition, all students and education professionals of the UPRIGHT participating schools (around 24,000 children from 6 to 16 years old) will benefit from the change of culture in their schools. Co-design, co-production and co-customisation of the UPRIGHT intervention guarantees that this diversity is preserved, avoiding any potential misunderstanding or rejection of the intervention by teachers, families and youths.

UPRIGHT expects to significantly reduce (by around 25%) the number of cases of bullying, discrimination and violence, and contribute to reducing school and college/university dropouts. The UPRIGHT preventive strategy aims to reduce the occurrence of mental disorders as well as comorbidities associated with mental disorders later in life. The programme addresses and aims to change factors that directly impact mental health, such as unhealthy lifestyles, stress, anxiety, and substance abuse.

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

The UPRIGHT intervention is available on the online platform www.uprightprogram.eu. It will remain password-protected until the end of the research project, when its effectiveness will be probed and all materials will be made public.

The UPRIGHT intervention contains two programmes. The first one is *Well-being for US*, an intensive training on the four main components of UPRIGHT – coping, efficacy, social and emotional learning, and mindfulness – and on the 18 resilience-based skills (see Figure 1 below). This will promote the individual resilience of the participants, including adolescents of 12-14 years of age, their teachers / school staff and their families / legal guardians.

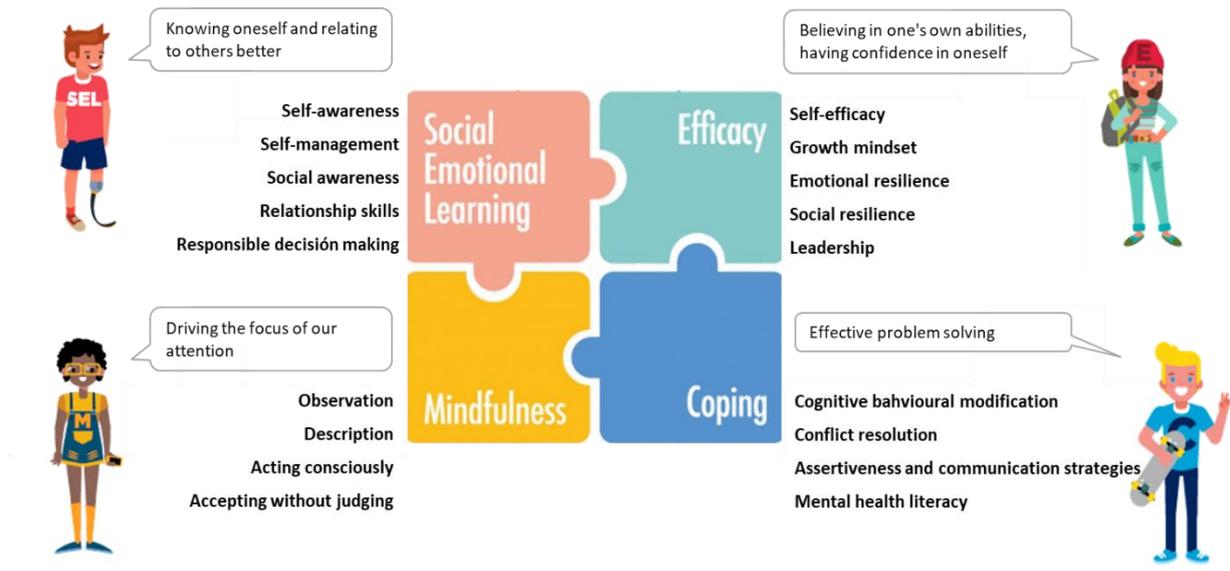


Figure 1. The UPRIGHT resilience-based theoretical framework contains four main components and 18 skills.

The *Well-being for US* programme contains a manual and additional materials (see Figure 2). All materials are available **in seven languages**: English, Spanish, Basque, Polish, Danish, Italian and Icelandic. There is also an adapted version of these materials for families / legal guardians to train at home.

MANUALS

+ ONLINE PLATFORM:

- families/legal guardians
- Teachers/school staff
- Community

+ Ad-hoc **audios** of Mindfulness

+ Ad-hoc **videos** of the components and skills in Youtube channel

+ Ad-hoc **presentations** of the components and skills in PPT format to use in the sessions with adolescents

<https://www.uprightprogram.eu/>

Figure 2. Materials for the *Well-being for US* programme, which in addition to the manual will help to promote the individual resilience of adolescents.

In the *Well-being for US* phase, teachers should be the first to learn the UPRIGHT skills. In the context of this research project, teacher training consists of an approximately five-day course organised by the UPRIGHT local teams of mental health experts in the participating regions. Then, teachers organise sessions with adolescents, during school classes and in group sessions among classmates. The entire programme is expected to be covered in 18-24 dynamic sessions throughout the school year. Families are also invited to train the resilience-based skills in UPRIGHT. The UPRIGHT local teams in the participating regions are in active communication with parents throughout the whole year.

The second programme is *Well-being for ALL*, where collective resilience is promoted. In this way, the theoretical content of the UPRIGHT programme goes outside the classroom and extends to the whole school, students of all grades and their families. Specifically, in this programme, collective activities that promote UPRIGHT skills are carried out in a way that is open to the public. This programme contains the manual and some additional materials (see Figure 3 below), including 17 collective activities. Apart from that, it includes the practice of mindfulness, four posters illustrating the main components, and digital messages to graphically demonstrate the 18 skills, which will be disseminated via social networks.



Figure 3. Materials for the *Well-being for ALL* programme, which, together with the manual, will help to promote collective resilience and thus create a well-being culture in the school community around adolescents.

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

The UPRIGHT resilience-based programme is under evaluation within the research project started in January 2018 and finished in December 2021 (European Commission Horizon 2020 GA no. 754919). Thereafter, the entire programme (manuals and additional materials

described above) in the seven languages (English, Spanish, Basque, Italian, Polish, Icelandic and Danish) will be public and accessible from www.uprightproject.eu.

One of the objectives of the research project is to transfer the UPRIGHT programme to other European regions and beyond by disseminating the results and learning and enabling the definition of innovative action plans for mental well-being in the youth.



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