



European Practices Analysis Report



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Executive Summary

This report examines the wellbeing and mental and physical health approaches in schools and educational systems across Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, and the wider European region. It brings together policies, studies, and initiatives addressing the needs of students, teachers, families, and other education stakeholders. Guided by the LifeComp 2020 framework ^[1], the analysis highlights practices that strengthen personal, social, and learning competences.

The report identifies promising approaches in areas such as early intervention, supportive school environments, teacher training, and cross-sector collaboration. It concludes with recommendations for fostering student wellbeing, enhancing communication and collaboration skills, and building stronger systemic support to sustain mental health in education.

LifeComp 2020

LifeComp, the European competence framework, includes 9 competencies divided into 3 areas



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PERSONAL COMPETENCES

Self-Regulation, Flexibility, Wellbeing

1. Self-Regulation

The ability to control one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviours in a way that promotes goal achievement, positive social interactions, and personal wellbeing is known as self-regulation ^[2]. Self-regulation consists of emotional awareness, stress and frustration management, and optimism and resilience. It is closely linked to wellbeing and critical thinking, as it enables people to maintain focus, manage stress, think things through before acting, and make deliberate, well-informed decisions. It also plays an important role in school learning by enhancing academic performance and fostering motivation and active engagement.

The National Mental Health Strategy ^[3] in Lithuania directly supports the development of self-regulation in alignment with the LifeComp 2020 framework. By engaging youth in school-based preventive programmes, the strategy fosters emotional awareness as students are encouraged to openly discuss mental health and express their feelings in a supportive, peer-led environment. Through participation in these initiatives, students also enhance their ability to manage emotions and behaviours, as they learn from positive role models and practice responsible decision-making within group settings. Furthermore, the strategy builds resilience and optimism by promoting self-confidence, emotional safety, and problem-solving skills.

The État des lieux 2024 report ^[4] in Belgium provides important information about the systemic and environmental elements that affect students' capacity to control their emotions, behaviours, and learning processes. The report recommends focused interventions that help children build internal resources to better regulate their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours essential for lifelong learning and wellbeing.

Recommendations

- Integrate social and emotional learning into the curriculum by actively teaching skills such as emotional awareness, stress management, and goal setting.
- Establish supportive and structured classroom environments through consistent routines, clear expectations, and the use of positive reinforcement.
- Encourage student autonomy and reflective thinking by promoting self-directed learning and offering choices in tasks and problem-solving activities.
- Offer a balance of structured activities and family time: Involving children in choosing activities, maintaining light routines, and encouraging participation in group settings (such as camps) helps them develop focus, autonomy, and emotional management.

2. Flexibility

Flexibility, understood as the ability to adapt to change, manage uncertainty, and face challenges with resilience, is a key competence for students' personal and academic development ^[2]. However, current research indicates that this competence is often underdeveloped among young people.

In Ireland, the Primary Schools Counselling Study ^[5] shows that children are often overwhelmed by emotional difficulties and family disruptions, with schools struggling to provide systematic support to help them develop adaptability. The study also highlights the need for stronger collaboration between schools, psychologists, social workers, and community services to provide emotional, social, and educational support. Although wellbeing is gaining importance in Irish educational policy, flexibility remains inconsistently integrated into school practices ^[6].

In French-speaking Belgium, the *OASE 7* report ^[7] emphasises that improving school climate through relational, normative, and pedagogical dimensions is essential for fostering students' ability to manage changes and uncertainties. Similarly, the *HBSC Survey* ^[8] identifies academic pressure and social tensions as factors that challenge young people's flexibility and resilience.

In France, the Mentalo study ^[9] highlights the high levels of stress and future-related anxiety among young people, suggesting difficulties in adapting to evolving academic and social demands. The Enabee study ^[10] also reveals early signs of emotional inflexibility among younger children, manifested through difficulties in managing fears and social interactions.

In Lithuania, the National Mental Health Strategy ^[3] focuses on developing emotional regulation, resilience, and the ability to face challenges, aligning directly with the promotion of flexibility from the early stages of education, for example through the integration of resilience training and psychological support within schools.

Recommendations

- Integrate Social-Emotional Learning programs and flexibility training into school curricula.
- Equip teachers with strategies to foster resilience and adaptability.
- Create environments that encourage safe experimentation.
- Promote participatory approaches that empower students to take active roles in their learning.
- Create a school culture that actively supports students during transitions through mentorship programs, peer support networks, and systems that identify and address stressors can greatly enhance children's adaptability.
- Track students' progress through key transitions enables early intervention when challenges arise.
- Strengthen mental health education and fostering supportive environments are essential for building resilience, enhancing wellbeing, and helping children navigate change with greater confidence and success.
- Improve coordination among services such as schools, social services and health organisations.

3. Wellbeing

The wellbeing of primary school pupils is now a growing educational priority in Europe. In Ireland, wellbeing has become a central focus of education policy, with further development required ^[6]. The Irish study revealed a significant gap in school-based counselling services despite increasing psychological difficulties among primary school children. The research found limited on-site counselling, mainly in urban areas, with common student issues including family problems, anxiety, and academic struggles. Teachers lacked resources to address these needs, and counselling services were funded on an ad hoc basis.

In French-speaking Belgium, the OASE 7 report of the Pact for Excellence in Education ^[7] identified key indicators of wellbeing (school satisfaction, quality of relationships, sense of security) based on concrete indicators (student-teacher relationships, school climate, school satisfaction) and recommends strengthening teacher training, cooperation with families, and the integration of wellbeing into all school practices.

In France, the Mentalo study ^[9] revealed that nearly one in three young people are at risk of anxiety or depression, and that half of them never talk about their distress, often out of shame. In addition, children surveyed in the Enabee study ^[10] reported fears, emotional difficulties and a need for greater support from adults from the age of 6.

Finally, the WHO 2022 report ^[11] showed that the wellbeing of European adolescents declines with age: at age 11, average scores are higher than at age 15, and girls report significantly lower levels of wellbeing than boys. This finding calls for early intervention starting at the end of primary school.

Recommendations

- Clarify indicators of wellbeing at school.
- Train staff in how to assess and promote wellbeing.
- Adopt a participatory approach involving children, families and educational teams.
- Enhance mental health education.
- Expand counselling services.
- Foster collaborations with mental health professionals.



SOCIAL COMPETENCES

Empathy, Communication, Collaboration

4. Empathy

Empathy is the ability to recognise, understand and respond to the emotions and perspectives of others. It is an essential skill for promoting wellbeing and inclusion at school, but in teaching it often remains implicit. In Lithuania, the Health Promoting Schools programme highlights concrete actions to develop empathy: students learn to recognise and respond to others' emotions through systematic educational activities ^[3]. Similarly, in France, the Mentalo study ^[9] highlights that nearly one in two young people feel lonely, revealing a shortfall in schools' ability to create empathetic and supportive environments.

In Ireland, the Primary Schools Counselling Study ^[5] shows that teachers are often alone in dealing with children's emotional distress and recommends the creation of psychological support services to promote more appropriate and empathetic responses. Furthermore, in Greece, recent research reveals that a sense of belonging at school, reinforced by empathetic relationships between peers and adults, is crucial for the wellbeing of pupils, particularly those from vulnerable groups ^[12]. Finally, in Belgium, the HBSC Survey ^[8] and the OASE 7 report ^[7] show that positive school climates, characterised by trust, inclusion, and strong peer relationships, play a central role in cultivating empathy among students.

Today, despite these initiatives, empathy remains insufficiently structured in educational practices. Our analysis suggests that empathy should not be left to chance. It must be embedded across curricula, supported by teacher training, and reinforced by environments that allow all students to feel heard, safe, and understood. This process should also actively involve parents as key partners in fostering emotional awareness and empathetic interactions both at school and at home.

Empathy is not simply an innate quality but a competence that can be nurtured over time through consistent, intentional efforts. When schools prioritise emotional awareness and responsive interactions, across classroom teaching, peer relationships, and teacher-student dynamics, they lay the groundwork for more inclusive, respectful, and resilient communities. Embedding empathy in education is not an optional addition; it is a necessary condition for fostering wellbeing and equity for every learner. Promoting a genuine culture of empathy would not only prevent bullying and exclusion, but also create safer, more inclusive and fulfilling learning environments for all.

Recommendations

- Integrate regular emotional learning activities from primary school onwards.
- Train teachers in recognising and managing emotions.
- Promote mutual support and understanding at the heart of the school climate.

5. Communication

Communication involves using appropriate language, tools, and strategies to effectively convey messages depending on contexts and audiences. Effective communication fosters emotional expression, builds relationships, resolves conflicts, and supports mental health, all essential for overall wellbeing. The studies we've analysed to create this report show that while young people engage in frequent communication, especially through digital platforms, this communication is not always effective, inclusive, or context-sensitive.

In France, many young people struggle to express emotional concerns, often due to shame or a lack of safe, structured communication channels ^[9,10]. In Ireland, one study highlights that without proper support systems, students lack the tools to communicate distress or articulate needs clearly ^[5]. The findings of this study also place significance on training educators in contextual communication, developing age-appropriate tools, promoting empathy and active listening, fostering inclusive environments, and evaluating strategies regularly. In Greece, two studies demonstrate that open, respectful communication with peers and families is linked to improved wellbeing and social integration ^[12,13]. In Lithuania, youth-led programmes promote effective peer-to-peer communication and intentional message delivery ^[14]. In Belgium, two articles stress the importance of dialogue between students, teachers and families to support mental health and learning engagement ^[4,8].

Recommendations

- Teach students to adapt language and tone based on audience, context, and medium (spoken, written, digital).
- Provide training on safe, respectful, and effective online communication.
- Create structured opportunities for students to practise communication in formal and informal settings.

6. Collaboration

Collaboration is the capacity to cooperate with others in a respectful and productive manner in order to achieve common objectives. It entails creating wholesome bonds with others and finding constructive ways to settle disputes. Working together is just one aspect of collaboration; another is creating inclusive, empathetic, and fruitful relationships that promote individual growth and team achievement.

The article from Greece entitled “Educational Stress among Greek Adolescents: Associations between Individual, Study and School-Related Factors” ^[13] highlights the importance of social support systems, including family and peer relationships, in managing educational stress. One actionable implication that can be inferred from the article relating to support systems is the promotion of physical exercise –encouraging physical activity could be a practical component of support systems designed to reduce academic stress. The article also emphasises that fostering collaborative relationships and communication skills is essential for creating a supportive environment that enhances resilience and wellbeing, which are key components of the social and personal competencies outlined in LifeComp 2020. Similarly, the initiative Children's and Adolescents' Mental Health in Greece: Needs and Priorities ^[15] encourages partnerships among key stakeholders, including educators, mental health professionals, families, and policy-makers, to create inclusive, supportive school environments.

By highlighting the important influence that peer, family, and school environments have on students' health and behaviour, the HBSC survey conducted in Belgium ^[8] encourages cooperation. It emphasises how improving mental health, wellbeing, and general health behaviours requires cooperation between educators, legislators, parents, and students. The report promotes cross-sector collaboration to create supportive environments that enhance students' wellbeing by highlighting areas of concern and intervention opportunities.

In Ireland, one study highlights how schools, families, outside organisations, and community services are all intertwined in meeting children's complex mental health needs ^[5]. It emphasises how important it is for educators, school counsellors, principals, medical professionals, and parents to work together to guarantee efficient identification, support, and referral procedures.

A common dedication to inclusive, student-centred education is further strengthened by encouraging professional collaboration between educators and related professionals through coordinated planning and focused training.

Recommendations

- Incorporate peer and group learning activities promoting effective communication, respect for different viewpoints, and group responsibility.
- Establish strong connections between educational institutions, families, and community organisations, creating a network of support that strengthens students' social and emotional growth.



LEARNING TO LEARN COMPETENCES

**Growth Mindset, Critical Thinking,
Managing Learning**

7. Growth Mindset

The study “Students’ Perspectives on Fostering a Sense of School Belonging in Greece: Moving Beyond COVID-19” explored practices contributing to students' sense of belonging and resilience, indirectly fostering a growth mindset ^[12]. Key findings emphasise practices that align with growth mindset principles, including the belief that effort, resilience, and continuous learning can lead to improvement. This study identifies several practices crucial to cultivating a growth mindset and supporting school belonging:

- Encourage effort and persistence while emphasising that abilities can improve through dedication and hard work.
- Provide feedback focused on improvement and learning from mistakes helps students view setbacks as growth opportunities.
- Promote a positive school climate, which is both supportive and safe, encouraging risk-taking and engagement in learning.

To further nurture a growth mindset, and on reflection of this study, there is a need to enhance mental health education by integrating mental health and resilience-building education into school curricula to help students develop coping strategies and emotional intelligence. The further strengthening of mental health services would help to ensure that services are accessible to all students.

Recommendations

- Reward effort and resilience, not just achievement.
- Encourage parental involvement to reinforce positive learning attitudes.
- Implement evidence-based interventions and therefore adopt scientifically supported mental health programs to help students manage challenges and foster personal growth.

8. Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a fundamental skill that enables students to navigate a complex world, but it remains surprisingly underestimated in school wellbeing initiatives. Few of the programmes analysed directly address its teaching, which is a major weakness. However, some studies highlight its indirect importance. In Greece, the study entitled *"Students' Perspectives on Fostering a Sense of School Belonging in Greece: Moving Beyond COVID-19"* ^[12] shows that developing critical thinking, particularly through activities that encourage reflection and personal expression, is essential for strengthening a sense of belonging and school wellbeing, especially for vulnerable students.

The article "The Evolution of wellbeing in educational policy in Ireland: Towards an interdisciplinary approach" ^[6] explores the evolution of wellbeing in Ireland's educational policies over the past decade. It highlights the increasing prominence of wellbeing in policy documents and the challenges associated with defining and implementing the concept in educational settings. Within the context of interdisciplinary wellbeing, students become better equipped to manage emotions and relationships, which supports clearer thinking and better judgment. Moreover, understanding wellbeing from different disciplinary lenses (psychology, education, health) helps students make connections and see issues from multiple perspectives.

The research report "Première analyse de l'objectif d'amélioration de la qualité du système éducatif: OASE 7—Climat scolaire et bien-être" ^[7] stresses the importance of fostering a supportive school climate promoting a safe and inclusive setting that is likely to encourage students to think independently.

In France, the Defender of Rights' 2021 report ^[16] recommends developing children's ability to analyse their digital practices and screen exposure, an essential step in preserving their mental and emotional health. For its part, the European report by the WHO ^[11] stresses that, given the increase in emotional disorders among adolescents, it is necessary to equip young people with reflective skills to understand the factors contributing to their wellbeing and to adopt effective prevention strategies.

The National Mental Health Strategy of Lithuania ^[3] is closely related to developing students' critical thinking skills through its holistic, prevention-focused approach to mental health and wellbeing. For instance, the strategy strengthens self-regulation and resilience, which are prerequisites for critical thinking. This is because, when students can manage stress, understand emotions, and maintain wellbeing, they are better equipped to analyse situations objectively, make reasoned decisions, and reflect on their own learning.

Developing critical thinking from childhood, not only in academic subjects but also in self-management and emotion management, will enable students to become more autonomous, resilient citizens who are capable of actively building their own wellbeing.

Recommendations

- Integrate debate workshops, real-life situation analysis and media literacy into the curriculum from the end of primary school.
- Link critical thinking skills to issues of mental health, emotions and stress management.
- Encourage collaboration between educators, psychologists, digital literacy experts, and health professionals to design interdisciplinary programs that develop both emotional resilience and critical thinking.
- Train teachers to encourage a questioning and reflective attitude in students.

9. Managing Learning

Managing learning, including tasks such as setting goals, planning strategies, and reflecting on one's progress, is essential for student wellbeing and autonomy, yet remains inconsistently supported across European contexts.

In France, Hédon & Deleamar (2021) emphasise the need for stronger school services to foster student autonomy ^[16], while Enabee's 2023 results highlight rising mental health concerns among children aged 6–11 ^[10].

In Greece, Moustaka et al. (2023) document significant educational stress among adolescents—especially girls, older students, and those studying longer hours—highlighting the negative impacts on self-esteem and anxiety ^[13]. Tate et al. (2024) then call for personalised guidance and metacognitive skill-building to foster belonging and resilience ^[12]. Mental health education in Greece is also shown to enhance reflective capacity among learners ^[15].

In Ireland, the Primary Schools Counselling Study (2017) demonstrates how emotional distress undermines students' capacity to engage and learn ^[5], while Nohilly & Tynan (2022) promote interdisciplinary models tying wellbeing with educational outcomes ^[6].

In Lithuania, the 2007 National Mental Health Strategy and Zaborskis et al. (2008) both stress prevention but note the absence of tools for goal setting and tracking learning progress ^[3,14]. Lithuanian governance reviews (2022) ^[17] further point to poor coordination across health, social, and education services.

In Belgium, the 2024 HBSC report and other state analyses link emotional resilience directly to students' capacity for self-regulated learning ^[4,8].

Recommendations

- Embed metacognitive strategies and reflection practices in daily teaching.
- Offer consistent, personalised academic and emotional guidance.
- Train staff to connect learning goals with emotional wellbeing.
- Promote whole-school approaches that empower students to plan, monitor and adjust their learning.



HEALTH

10. Health

Health is a comprehensive state of mental, physical, and social wellbeing that permits people to participate in social interactions, learning, and personal growth. Health is more than just the absence of disease; it is the capacity to comprehend, preserve, and enhance one's general wellbeing in order to live, learn, and communicate successfully throughout one's life. Putting health at the heart of education means giving every child the opportunity to grow, learn, and flourish, laying the foundations for a healthy and balanced adult life.

In French-speaking Belgium, the HBSC 2022 survey ^[8] highlights a growing prevalence of emotional disorders, stress and feelings of loneliness from the end of primary school onwards. These issues are worsened by socio-economic factors, reinforcing health inequalities among students. Moreover, according to Belgium's Observatoire de l'Enfance, de la Jeunesse et de l'Aide à la Jeunesse (OEJA) annual report ^[4], mental health issues frequently arise and develop during adolescence and early adulthood, affecting a young person's entire life with risks of academic decline, social inadaptation, and future work difficulties. It also comes to the conclusion that these challenges are frequently overlooked, which makes mental health problems more difficult for kids to see.

In Ireland, the Primary Schools Counselling Study ^[5] warns of the lack of structured psychological support services in primary schools. Only 12% of children in need of help receive appropriate support, despite strong demand from teachers and school leaders. This situation puts additional pressure on educational teams, who would benefit from further upskilling to respond to mental health issues.

The publication of Children's and Adolescents' Mental Health in Greece: Needs and Priorities ^[15] emphasises the significance of mental health competencies as crucial pillars for lifelong learning and personal development. It highlights how important it is for students to develop personal competencies like self-awareness, resilience, and emotional control.

In France, the Mentalo study ^[9] reveals that one-third of young people aged 11 to 24 are at risk of anxiety and depression, while the Enabee study ^[10] shows that as early as age 6, children express emotional support needs and exhibit behavioural or attention disorders in significant proportions. The annual report of the Defender of Rights ^[16] emphasises the importance of a comprehensive approach: it is not enough to treat symptoms, we must actively promote an environment conducive to the overall health of children.

Recommendations

- Increase the presence of health professionals (school doctors, psychologists, nurses) accessible to all pupils
- Integrate systematic mental and physical health education into school curricula in the form of regular workshops.
- Set up early detection tools to identify signs of distress before they become serious
- Promote collaboration between schools, families and health structures for comprehensive and coordinated support.



FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

11. Future Suggestions

Mental Health

- Integrate mental health education and programmes into school curricula.
- Expand school counselling services.
- Collaborate with mental health professionals.

Student Agency, Autonomy, and Participation

- Promote self-directed learning and offer choices in tasks and problem-solving activities.
- Set up whole-school participatory approaches which empower students and parents to take an active role in their education by planning, monitoring, and adjusting their learning.

Communication and Collaboration Skills

- Teach students to adapt language and tone based on audience, context, and medium (spoken, written, digital) in both formal and informal settings
- Provide training on safe, respectful, and effective online communication
- Incorporate peer and group activities promoting effective communication and respect for different perspectives.

Early Intervention and Transition

- Create a school culture actively supporting students during transitions through mentorship programs, peer support networks, and early detection tools identifying and addressing stressors
- Track students' progress through key transitions, enabling early intervention should challenges arise.

Teacher Training and Professional Development

- Equip teachers with strategies fostering resilience and adaptability.
- Train staff in assessing and promoting wellbeing, recognising and managing emotions, and encouraging a questioning and reflective attitude in students.
- Encourage and reward effort, persistence, and resilience while emphasising that abilities can improve through dedication and hard work.
- Provide feedback focused on improvement from mistakes, allowing students to see setbacks as opportunities for growth.

Supportive School Environments

- Promote mutual support and understanding for teachers, students, and parents.
- Create environments encouraging safe experimentation, risk-taking, and management of uncertainty.
- Offer consistent and personalised academic and emotional guidance.
- Increase the presence of health professionals such as doctors, psychologists, or nurses.

Systemic Collaboration and Infrastructure

- Improve coordination among services such as schools, social services and health organisations.
- Adopt a participatory approach involving children, families, teachers and school staff, mental and physical health professionals, community organisations, social services, and other schools.

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