

POLICY BRIEF

TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION TO PREVENT EARLY LEAVING FROM EDUCATION AND TRAINING

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

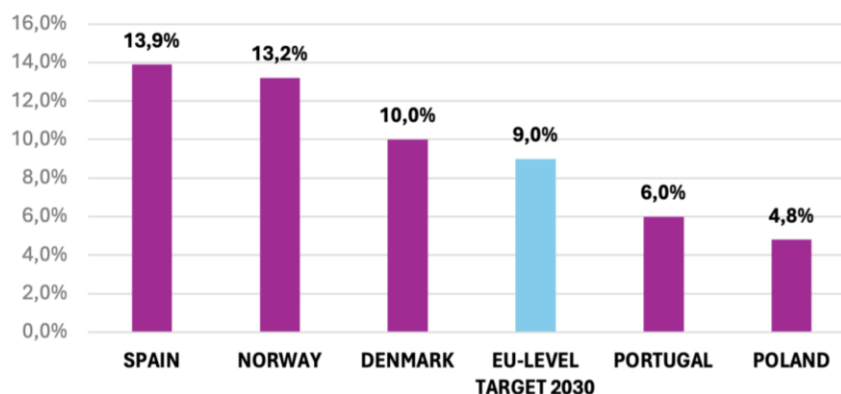
This policy brief is intended at discovering the transformative power of inclusive education by highlighting innovative practices to prevent early leaving from education and training (ELET). Drawing from the rich experiences and insights of the COSI.ed project, we delve into fostering common values across five European countries, aimed at ensuring every young person has their place in society, especially those in conditions of vulnerability and at risk of school disengagement. At the heart of COSI.ed lies the assumption that co-created education and training empowers young people, increasing their educational and social inclusion as a result. Based on the vibrant educational landscapes of Denmark, Norway, Poland, Portugal, and Spain, COSI.ed charts pathways towards inclusivity, fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders (young people, teachers, trainers, broader community) to uplift learners in conditions of inequality. Through co-created approaches, the project challenges traditional power dynamics, amplifying voices of young people and educators both as informants and co-researchers. This policy brief explores opportunities and challenges in reducing power differentials between professionals in the field and young people, addressing the needs of young people aged 15-25, and creating social innovation within educational organisations (HEI and schools). Focused on scaling up promising practices, COSI.ed offers insights from national and local experiences, prioritising diversity and fostering dialogue among countries, policies, and practices.

1. The COSI.ed Project: Addressing Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) in Europe

Over the past decades, European education policies have placed significant emphasis on addressing Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET), a concern that impacts individuals aged 18 to 24 who prematurely exit educational systems without completing upper secondary education or equivalent vocational training (ISCED 3). The EU has set a goal to reduce the share of early leavers from education and training to less than 9% by 2030. In 2022, the average ELET in the EU was 9.6%. However, there are differences between Member States. Some countries, such as Portugal and Poland, have already met the EU-level target for 2030, with rates below the average (6% and 4.8%, respectively). Denmark is almost there with 10%, while Spain and Norway remain far from the target with 13.9% and 13.2%, respectively (Chart 1).

Chart 1 - Early leavers from education and training (2022) in the 5 countries participating in the COSI.ed project.

Based on the sources: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early leavers from education and training](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Early_leavers_from_education_and_training)

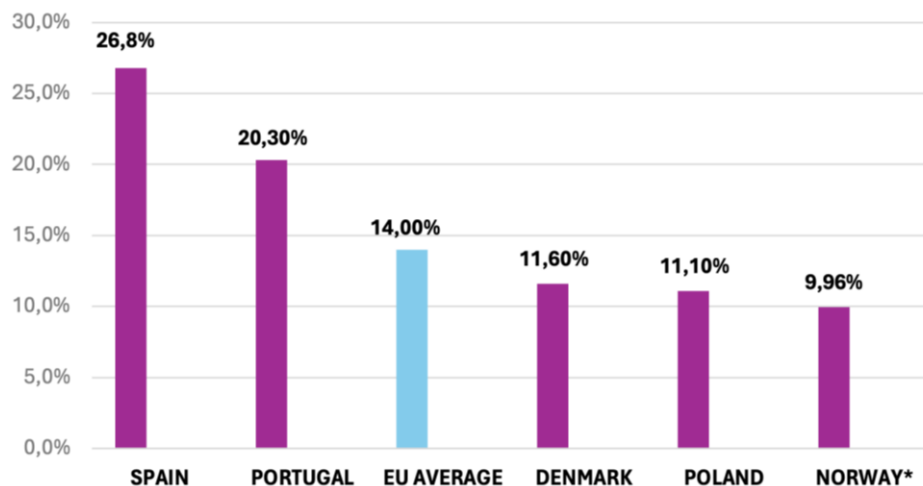


These differences stem from a complex interplay of various measures and policies tailored to each national education system's nuances, which, in turn, relate to the country's position within the EU. For instance, Portugal stands out for its compulsory education extension to age 18, covering upper secondary education, while in other countries compulsory education goes up until the 9th grade. Amidst these measures, a common thread emerges in inter-countries debates surrounding the extension of compulsory schooling, the expansion of educational and training offerings, and the dynamics of youth employment and unemployment. As evidence of the investment in Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems, the EU aims to increase the proportion of recent VET graduates participating in work-based learning programmes to at least 60% by 2025.

Despite these efforts, ELET individuals are more likely to face unemployment or inactivity, be Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET), and experience social exclusion and poverty. In 2023, the EU average for youth unemployment is 14%. Again, there are differences between COSI.ed Member States, for instance Spain has the highest rate of youth unemployment in the EU (26,8%), followed by Portugal (20,3%), while Denmark, Poland and Norway have rates below the EU average, with 11,6%, 11,1% and 9,96%, respectively (Chart 2).

Chart 2 - Youth unemployment rates (2023) in the 5 countries participating in the COSI.ed project.

*The data about youth unemployment rate in Norway is referred to 2022.



Based on the sources: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/266228/youth-unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/>
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/812894/youth-unemployment-rate-in-norway/>

In summary, European education policies have made strides in addressing ELET through educational reforms, interventions, and social inclusion educational measures. However, ongoing collaboration and innovation are necessary to ensure that all young people have equal opportunities to succeed and contribute to society. The COSI.ed sought to contribute to these efforts by fostering collaborative research and innovation to develop an inclusive educational model responsive to contemporary societal and individual needs and to prevent social exclusion with effective tools and evidence.

2. COSI.ed foundational concepts

The COSI.ed project aimed at preventing and reducing ELET, in accordance with an EU priority. As referred to, the project targeted young people with disadvantaged backgrounds who are at risk of social exclusion. COSI.ed was developed in countries and specific zones where the ELET rate is high and there seems to be a lack of engaging methodological options that keep young people in education and training. COSI.ed was implemented in various institutions across the different countries, including preparatory basic education and training institutions in Denmark, vocational upper secondary schools in Norway, public primary schools in Poland, second chance schools in Portugal, and non-governmental organisations in Spain. The project aimed to support young people aged 15-25 who were at risk of dropping out of education and training or experiencing social exclusion.

The COSI.ed model builds on the understanding that practitioners and the young people can co-create as part of a community of practice. Here the experts (educators) and the beginners (learners) work side by side, learning together and developing knowledge and competence, building on the dialogue among different voices. As the collaborative work between educators and learners within a community of practice, **co-creation** is the main dimension of COSI.ed; it fosters shared learning and skills development. By using the **Indirect Approach (IA)** and the **Equality Literacy (EQL)**, the co-creating entails communication providing space for the expression of young people's voices, supporting them in understanding and reinventing their story (IA), and through this, identifying aspects of their situations that hinder their further learning (EQL). In this process, the young people learn about themselves and how to excel, and the practitioners develop skills and new understandings on how to support the social inclusion of the young people. Additionally, the COSI.ed project introduced the practice of **Collaborative Competence Groups (CCG)**, as a group of consultants and advisers composed of young people, academics, broader stakeholders, and policymakers, whose discussions and feedback about diverse dimensions and tools of the project guided each step of the project ensuring meaningful comprehensive and inclusive decision-making. The expectation is that the upscaling of the COSI.ed model to policy level will empower groups of young people in disadvantage all over Europe, radically increasing their educational success and completion rate and concurrently provide the European practitioners with the knowledge and skills to include young people of all ages at risk of social exclusion.

3. Policy recommendation on the regional level – per country

NORWAY

Institutions: University of South-Eastern Norway (USN), Educational and Psychological Counselling Service (PPT) and Kragerø upper secondary school

National/Regional Educational Policy Overview

Norway's education policies, shaped by the Education for All and Lifelong Learning Strategy (2020¹) prioritise quality and equity. The Education Act 1998 ensures compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 16 (ISCED 2), with no upper age limit for completing upper secondary school. Recent reforms focus on differentiated teaching methods and extended rights for pupils. The Vocational Education Act, enacted in 2019, aims to provide high-quality vocational education and training. Regionally, strategies aim to promote mental well-being for individuals aged 0 to 25, aligning with the Education Act's social mission. Norway's commitment to inclusivity is evident, with 81% of young people completing their studies within 5/6 years from 2016 to 2022, and an average of 69.6% completing vocational education programmes within the same timeframe.

COSI.ed Context and Partners

In Norway, the COSI.ed project was implemented by the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN), in collaboration with the Educational and Psychological Counselling Service (PPT) and Kragerø upper secondary school. The PPT, based in Vestfold og Telemark County, provides professional guidance to school-age children, particularly those at risk of not completing upper secondary school (ISCED 3). Kragerø upper secondary school offers diverse ISCED 3 programmes, including university preparatory and vocational education, aiming to support young people in completing their education. Educators from these two institutions were the COSI.ed role models in Norway. USN oversaw the role models' initial training and coordinated the COSI.ed intervention.

COSI.ed Intervention

The main activities of COSI.ed in Norway were:

1. **Training sessions** facilitated by USN for teachers at Kragerø Secondary School (Technical and Industrial Production Workshop, TEK), followed by training the counsellors at the County's PPT. The training focused on the four cornerstones of the COSI.ed model: Co-creating, Context, Indirect approach, and Equality Literacy Framework.
2. **Exploratory visits** from USN and PPT to Kragerø school to understand the context, education system, young people, and teachers. These visits increased relationship-building laying the groundwork for conducting initial interviews.

¹ This year is referred to the White paper that the Norwegian government presented on lifelong learning, based on the strategy of the OECD.

3. **Initial and follow-up interviews** of young people were conducted by USN and PPT aimed at deepening understanding of each student's context and establishing a personal connection to support their individual process over time.
4. **Individual and focus groups interviews** with role models from Kragerø School were conducted by USN to gather insights on how teachers include young people and implement the COSI.ed model in their teaching practices.
5. **Workshops with young people** conducted by schoolteachers **aimed to** visualise their school trajectory and reflect on their experiences through three exercises: 1) Drawing their school history; 2) Photovoice and 3) Creating Collages.
6. **Collaborative Competence Groups (CCG)** were held with young people and stakeholders to discuss the COSI.ed project, including its model, methods, and policies providing valuable insights to the project's process.
7. **Dissemination activities** (30+) were carried out at important strategic schools, meetings/seminars with educational actors and other organisations, locally, regionally, and nationally. This has given both Norwegian partners a greater awareness of the anchoring of the model and been an important factor in the schools' further development work with inclusion for other programs, other schools, and the teachers' education at the university.

Main Contributions

For **Young people** the main results from the COSI.ed intervention were:

- Increased sense of achievement and confidence, heightened feelings of self-assurance;
- Enhanced foresight of successful outcomes, gaining positive future prospects and more awareness of academic and career options; this allows them to set and achieve goals that they previously considered unattainable;
- Improved completion of the academic year;
- Increased young people's participation in decision-making processes;
- Strengthened teacher-student relationships;
- Improvement of peer relationships.

For **Role models** the main contributions from the COSI.ed project were:

- The training course, facilitated by USN and PPT advisers, increased knowledge about how to deepen young people's experiences and contexts enabling them to work towards inclusive and co-created teaching practices that enhance young people's learning and the quality of their school life;
- The development of new concepts and teaching practices that improve the quality of school life. Role models are provided with tools that help them to implement the values and principles outlined in the core curriculum.

Policy recommendations at national/regional level

- **Emphasise social inclusion and a relational teaching perspective in the Norwegian Core Curriculum.** Teachers often prioritise subject-specific aims over the Core Curriculum, potentially neglecting opportunities for inclusive practices. By emphasising the Core Curriculum, teachers can better explore their classroom autonomy to socially include all young

people. This shift would require integrating the principles of the Core Curriculum more prominently into teachers' decision-making processes in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- **Including the COSI.ed model into in-service-training programmes for educational professionals** working with children and youth. Implementing the COSI.ed model for professional development among educators and youth workers offers a transformative approach tailored to vulnerable youth. Central to this model is fostering empowering relationships, particularly crucial for those facing social and educational challenges. Its egalitarian and indirect approach amplifies the voices of youth, promoting their active participation within educational settings.
- **Promote the COSI.ed model in higher education professional programmes** that prepare professionals to work with children and young people. It is important to promote education that focuses on an asset-based empowered approach, when working with children and young people. Research shows that professional educational programmes at universities need to be more interdisciplinary and to apply methodologies that enable young people to empower children and youth. It is particularly important to urgently apply these perspectives in Teacher Education (School, Kindergarten), Special Needs Education, Social Education, and Childcare Education.
- **Enhancing Youth Representation and Voices in Governance** based on the experience of CCG. The intervention showed that CCG facilitates co-creation among different actors, particularly by enriching projects with the perspectives of young people. We suggest following three principles: 1) include enough youth representatives so that they are not a minority (nearly half the group), 2) have only one adult representative from each of the different partner organisations, and 3) keep the group size small, with no more than 8 members.

DENMARK

Institutions: VIA University College and the FGU - Preparatory Basic Education and Training institution focusing on young people aged 15-25

National Educational Policy Overview

The Danish education system, guided by the Principles for Education, ensures equal opportunities for young people aged 6 to 16 through the Folkeskole Act (2014), which mandates compulsory education. The Inclusion Act extends this, emphasising inclusion's economic and social benefits, promoting cost-effectiveness, quality education, social cohesion, and equal access. Denmark aims to meet the EU's 2030 target of 9.5% for ELET, with the current rate at 10%, after a negative trend in its ELET rate from 2013 to 2018. VET is central to Denmark's lifelong learning strategy, highlighted in the Better Paths to Education and Employment document (2017), leading to the establishment of the Preparatory Basic Education and Training (FGU) in 2019. Recent educational reforms prioritise enhancing VET, aiming to boost enrolment and decrease drop-out rates through the implementation of diverse VET programmes and initiatives tailored to achieve these objectives.

COSI.ed Context and Partners

In Denmark, the COSI.ed project was carried out by the VIA University College - Research Centre for Pedagogy and Education, recognized for its work in initial teacher training, in collaboration with FGU Nordvest (Preparatory Basic Education and Training), operating in Morsø, Thisted, and Jammerbugt municipalities. FGU Nordvest supports the transition to secondary education programmes (ISCED3) and focuses on young people aged 15-25 facing a range of challenges, encompassing vocational, cognitive, health, personal, or social issues, which put them at risk of ELET. The institution adopts a pragmatic educational approach, integrating subjects such as business, tourism, artwork, mechanics, healthcare, among others, tailored to individual expectations and plans.

COSI.ed Intervention

The main activities of COSI.ed in Denmark were:

1. **Training sessions at FGU Nordvest:** Teachers and staff received training by VIA college researchers to act as role models in their daily work. They learned about the COSI.ed dimensions and how to conduct indirect interviews with students.
2. **Training sessions at VIA University College:** Teacher Education degree' students acted as role models by learning about COSI.ed and its methods/approaches during a teaching module on "Youth Communities" in which the dimensions of co-creation, indirect approach and equality literacy were explored.
3. **Observation and fieldwork:** The students who participated in the COSI.ed-inspired module 'Youth communities' at VIA University College did fieldwork in FGU Nordvest for ten days, but also in other target-group schools, where the students observed, collected data, and tried out the indirect approach methods.

4. **Interviews by students:** Students at Teacher Education in Skive, VIA University College, conducted individual interviews and group interviews with young people from FGU using the indirect approach as part of their degree.
5. **Interviews by researchers:** The students who participated in the COSI.ed-inspired module 'Youth communities' at VIA University College were interviewed by VIA University College staff affiliated with the COSI.ed project.
6. **Interviews by staff at FGU Nordvest:** Staff at FGU Nordvest conducted interviews with pupils at FGU about the aim, process, implementation, and outcomes of the COSI.ed principles.
7. **Collaborative Competence Groups (CCG):** The Danish CCG consists of representatives from VIA University College, teachers, management, and pupils from FGU Nordvest, local politicians (representing Morsø and Skive municipalities) and an assortment of local youth institutions with the aim of discussing the COSI.ed project. The meetings engaged the stakeholders in developing and qualifying methods, models, intra-institutional collaboration, and policy recommendations. The meetings took place at FGU, VIA University College and local youth institutions/schools.

Main Contributions

For Young People from FGU Nordvest:

- Increased confidence and better preparation for further education and employment;
- Emphasis on the importance of regular communication between teachers (role models) and young people for guidance and support;
- Development of closer relationships with teachers as role models;
- Shift in perspectives on educational and career aspirations.

For Professionals Role Models from FGU Nordvest:

- Greater awareness of the need of having an alternative school environment to keep pupils engaged;
- Indirect approach and equality literacy as relevant methods for teaching practice;
- The use of COSI.ed methods resulted in fewer conflicts and pupils being more motivated in relation to teaching;
- Awareness of interviews/informal conversations between teachers and students contributed to a comfortable and safe environment where pupils express their positive and negative experiences with regards to both education and their personal life.

For students at VIA University College (Teacher Education)

By participating in the 'Youth communities' module the students:

- Gained awareness of how to incorporate the COSI.ed principles to develop a more inclusive practice as a teacher, e.g. the importance of a safe environment for pupils in the classroom, peer-to-peer relations, and teacher-pupil relations as a co-contributing factor in creating a motivational learning environment;
- Obtained knowledge about how the school system and teachers can approach pupils in challenging circumstances with the intention of preventing ELET and social and educational exclusion;

- Developed a more comprehensive professional identity, by being conscious of a wider palette of pedagogical methods and strategies.

Policy recommendations at national/regional level

- **Incorporate COSI.ed methodology and tools, including the indirect approach and co-creation and equality literacy, into teacher training programmes and bachelor's and master's degrees.** If the school and education system is to be characterized by inclusive practices, including the COSI principles, it is important that all teachers and educators (at all levels) are trained to reflect on and teach in and according to this. This includes the ability to engage in an ongoing development of professional practices.
- **Extend the integration of COSI.ed dimensions across all levels of schooling to foster inclusive educational practices from primary to secondary school system and further education.** To ensure that all children and young people achieve the same opportunities for education throughout life, it is important to focus on coherent pedagogies and inclusive practices across education levels to avoid early school leaving and social exclusion. Implementing the COSI.ed principles at all levels of schooling and education can act as a link between the different levels and ensure a safer and more secure transition, so that children and young people in challenging positions feel included and welcomed.
- **Promote a stronger integration of pupils' and students' voices and co-creation approaches in educational design and improvement for the development of the whole school system.** It is important that all voices are heard, so that everyone feels included in the process of creating an education system that reflects the diversity of society and can accommodate all types of children and young people.
- **Addressing the huge pressures put upon young people by the demands of time, grades, and performance in schools with more relational and competence-based approaches.** It requires a confrontation with the dominant performance imperative within the educational system with its focus on grading, national tests, and measurable academic learning objectives. Promoting a more inclusive teaching environment across education levels requires a stronger focus on well-being, co-creation, active participation, and equity.

POLAND

Institutions: University of Warsaw (UW), Warsaw Centre for Socio-educational Innovation and Training (WCIES), *Dom Przy Rynku* Special Educational Centre (SOW), and Youth Sociotherapy Centre no.4 (MOS)

National Educational Policy Overview

In Poland, efforts to support at-risk youth are embedded in both education and social policies. The Law on School Education, updated in 2016, forms the basis of a quality education system, stressing stakeholder rights and responsibilities. The system underwent restructuring from 2017 to 2023, introducing compulsory schooling for 9 years, including pre-school for 6-year-olds and primary education for 7 to 15-year-olds. Compulsory education extends to age 18, with options for vocational training. National strategies like the Lifelong Learning Strategy (2013) and Human Capital Development Strategy 2030 or the National Programme for Poverty Prevention and Social Exclusion (updated for 2021-2027) prioritise inclusive education and support services. The Act on the Promotion of Employment and Labour Market Institutions (2004) targets youth unemployment and social exclusion, including early school leavers. Poland has consistently maintained one of the lowest rates of ELET in UE, reaching 4.8% in 2022. Vocational Education and Training (VET) is also a measure to align high-quality education with labour market needs, emphasising work-based learning and employer engagement. These efforts align with international goals for sustainable development, quality education, and social inclusion.

COSI.ed Context and Partners

In Poland, the COSI.ed project was implemented by the University of Warsaw (UW) and the Warsaw Centre for Socio-educational Innovation and Training (WCIES). UW was responsible for impact analysis and creating a European COSI.ed model, while WCIES was responsible for the training for professionals and for providing knowledge and education to in-service teachers and psycho-pedagogical teams. The project was developed in two different institutions: the *Dom Przy Rynku* Special Educational Centre (SOW) and the Youth Sociotherapy Centre no. 4 (MOS) in Warsaw. SOW is a facility that provides care and education for young people aged 13-18 who are receiving education outside of their permanent residence. SOW is a public municipal, co-educational facility that operates during the school year (from September to June) and facilitates entry to public schools, vocational training schools, and special education schools in the city of Warsaw. Young people reside on campus during school days, receiving 24-hour supervision, as well as educational and therapeutic support, while commuting to and from school. MOS is a public educational institution for boys with developmental and learning challenges. It offers specialised education, psychological support, and care to prevent social issues. Providing meals, accommodation, and tailored learning, it follows a general education curriculum, fosters community collaboration, and promotes talent development and participation in diverse activities in cooperation with families.

COSI.ed Intervention

The main activities of COSI.ed project at **SOW** and **MOS** were:

1. **Training sessions**, provided by WCIES to educators, pedagogues, psychologists, and in the case of MOS, the director and deputy, based on the cornerstones of the COSI.ed project. The staff at both institutions were equipped with tools to use in their pedagogical practice, including

project materials; literature about tutoring; materials presented in the training; the “Nasz Tygodnik/Our Weekly” tutoring tool with instructions and tools for documenting the work with youth.

2. **Weekly individual meetings**, between tutors (role models) and young people. During these meetings, young people at **SOW** and **MOS** were required to set goals for the upcoming half-year with the aim of facilitating primary school graduation and continuing education at their chosen school. The subsequent meetings focused on discussing achievements, challenges, and reasons behind them, with operational goals set for the following week. At **both** institutions, the tutoring process was supported by the “Nasz Tygodnik/Our Weekly” tool, to help young people outline their goals, plans, reflections, and conclusions. Through these meetings and the constant reflection, tutors encouraged co-creation and implemented communication techniques inspired by the indirect approach, emphasising active listening.
3. **Regular meetings between trainers (WCIES) and tutors** (role models from SOW and MOS), to monitor and support educators, as well as to present COSI.ed results.

Main Contributions

Young People highlighted as the main contributions from COSI.ed intervention:

- **Improving Relationships with Teachers/Role Models:** Through the COSI.ed intervention, young people experienced positive changes in relationships with teachers and role models. This fostered feelings of trust, support, and motivation among the young people.
- **Refining Educational Aspirations:** The intervention positively impacted the academic and career planning of young people, prompting them to refine their educational aspirations and become more aware of concrete steps to achieve their goals.
- **Enhancing Peer Relationships:** Beyond individual interactions with role models, the intervention had a broader positive social impact by enhancing peer relationships, contributing to a supportive and cohesive peer environment within the institution.

Role models highlighted the following key results of the COSI.ed implementation:

- **Cultivating Stronger Individual Relationships:** The COSI.ed method was instrumental in fostering stronger individual relationships between role models and young people. Emphasis was placed on recognizing and valuing personalised interactions, highlighting their unique significance.
- **Reinforcing Fundamental Communication Principles:** The method served as a reminder of fundamental communication principles crucial for relationship building, prompting increased emphasis on regular interactions between role models and young people.
- **Identifying Key Factors for Success:** Role models in Poland identified four key factors—time, space, exclusivity, and regularity—as critical for successful implementation. While these factors posed challenges related to institutional mindset and functioning, they also presented opportunities for effective relationship building.
- **Validating Asset-Based Work Methods:** Role models in Poland emphasised the effectiveness of work methods grounded in the assets approach, particularly in co-creating objectives and reviewing achievements using tools like “Nasz Tygodnik/Our Weekly” during regular COSI.ed project meetings. This approach facilitated goal setting and progress monitoring.

Policy recommendations at national/regional level

- **Establishing an environment conducive to foster meaningful relationships between young people and role models.** Research in the COSI.ed project revealed challenges in organisational awareness regarding the importance of individual contacts for young people development.
- **Advocating for a paradigm shift from hierarchical pupil-teacher dynamics,** predominant in Polish educational institutions, towards cultivating relationships grounded in equality, co-creation, and active participation in fostering a shared community.
- **To build strong cooperation among different social actors** (institutions, families, schools, local communities etc.), as well as between practitioners working in the field of education, child and family support, and academic and research institutions, to produce evidence-based knowledge that informs practice and policy. This community is intended to ensure high quality services, optimisation of resources, support tailored to the diverse needs of young people, more effective responses to complex challenges, promotion of interdisciplinary approaches, and ultimately enhance the wellbeing and resilience of vulnerable youth.

PORTUGAL

Institutions: Second Chance School of Matosinhos (E2OM) and Centre for Research and Intervention in Education (CIIE)

National Educational Policy Overview

Portugal has experienced notable progress in recent years through inclusive education policies, public school initiatives, and innovative strategies aimed at promoting equal opportunities and addressing educational challenges. Key measures include extending compulsory education to upper secondary level (ISCED 3) in 2009 resulting in increased upper secondary attainment and school enrolment rates. Efforts in Early Childhood Education and Care, including updated curriculum guidelines the OCEPE - *Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-primary education*² (2016), have significantly boosted preschool enrolment rates, achieving a remarkable 98.1% rate for 5-year-olds in 2023. Additionally, concerted efforts to tackle early school leaving, educational inequalities, and digital disparities have led to policy initiatives like the PNPSE - *National Program for the Promotion of School Success*³ and the decree-laws No. 55/2018 and No. 54/2018, focusing on curriculum autonomy and flexibility, and on inclusive education. Strategic investments in VET have expanded school offerings in emerging areas, with the Second Chance School (E2O) being officially integrated into the Portuguese education system in 2019 (Dispatch no. 6954/2019). Nowadays, there are nine Second Chance Schools in Portugal and the E2O Portugal - the National Network of Initiatives and Second Chance Schools was created in 2018.

COSI.ed Context and Partners

In Portugal, the COSI.ed project was implemented at the Second Chance School of Matosinhos (E2OM). E2OM stands as an innovative experience in the field in Portugal (established in 2008), diligently working from its inception to set up a new public policy in the country. It serves as both an educational and social response to young people aged between 15 and 25 years old at risk of early school leaving (ESL) and educational exclusion by offering tailored educational programmes to reach ISCED 2 and ISCED 3, that emphasise skills development and provides comprehensive guidance and support (e.g.: arts, theatre) for successful integration into society. The school has been supported by the Matosinhos City Council, and the Ministry of Education through the allocation of teachers, enterprises, and other community members. In what concerns academic partners, COSI.ed project was developed by a team of researchers and master young people from the Centre for Research and Intervention in Education (CIIE) of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Porto (FPCEUP), that worked in close collaboration with E2OM.

COSI.ed Intervention

The main activities of COSI.ed project in the Portuguese context were:

- 1. Training sessions:** eight sessions (12h) of training were organised and jointly provided by members from the two Portuguese partners (FPCEUP and E2OM) to E2OM trainers/professionals and to young people from the master's degree in educational sciences, both assuming the role of "role models". The sessions promoted analysis and discussions

² OCEPE - *Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-Escolar.*

³ PNPSE - *Programa Nacional de Promoção do Sucesso Escolar.*

about Sociocultural learning, Equality Literacy, and Indirect Approach, providing an opportunity for reflection about professional practice and the possibilities for innovation and change.

2. **Implementation of educational activities** at E2OM by its professionals based on COSI.ed training. In the 1st implementation cycle, E2OM proposed to analyse Anne Frank's Diary, owing to its potential for life story work and incorporate some elements into the final performance. In the 2nd implementation cycle, given continuity to life story narratives, E2OM activities prioritised young people's own stories. For example, the practice of "Burn of Judas", that took place as a public presentation, involved young people in writing texts and reflecting upon life situations that posed barriers to their personal development.
3. **Participant observation and Interviews:** the master young people who completed the COSI.ed training as role models actively accompanied the implementation of all these activities engaging in participant observation. In addition to their observational role, master young people conducted interviews with young people, based on the indirect approach. This process culminated in the production of concise short narratives and videos which captured the experiences of young people.
4. **Organisation of Collaborative Competence Groups (CCG).** Led by CIIE researchers, the national CCG was constituted by several stakeholders such as E2OM professionals, E2OM young adults, local municipal councillors, political advisers, and external researchers, fostering discussions on COSI.ed dimensions and tools. Given the project's emphasis on amplifying the voices and perspectives of young adults, local CCGs were organised at E2OM only with young adults as preparatory sessions. These groups aimed to support and empower young people with information, arguments, and skills, enabling their active participation in the national CCG sessions. Researchers served as mediators of their proposals when young people were unable to participate in the full CCGs. The national CCGs served as authentic forums for co-creation and knowledge-sharing, promoting equal treatment and substantial engagement among all members in the development of project research instruments of data collection and data analysis. Moreover, representatives of young people participated in the international CCGs meetings bringing to the fore their opinions and ideas.

Finally, allowing for meta-reflection acquiring the practice of reflecting on the practice, these activities were monitored with interviews to E2OM's professionals and the University master students in both cycles of implementation, as well as guided surveys to young people from E2OM.

Main Contributions

For **E2OM Role Models**, the COSI.ed intervention:

- Increased the awareness of the legacy and impact of second-chance education practices and initiatives;
- Promoted the diversification of strategies to engage young people in co-creation processes;
- Refined the processes to foster more meaningful educational experiences;
- Improved the relational proximity to young people;
- Enhanced the communication skills.

For **Master students' Role Models:**

- Impacted on professional identity and future as educators mainly through the training activities;
- Led professionals to rethink schools and educational contexts based on alternative pedagogical strategies;
- Acknowledge of educational challenges and diversity, recognising the importance of engaging in more balanced power relationships and the development of communication skills.

For **E2OM Young people:**

- Impact on teacher-student relationships and subsequent effects on their school experiences;
- Increased trust in teachers more frequently used as confidants;
- Identification of E2OM as a safe space, well-being and belonging;
- Increase in the communication and proximity to their teachers, during and after the implementation of the COSI.ed project, in relation to the use of indirect approach.

For **Academics** (members of FPCEUP - researchers, lecturers, students):

- Increased innovative and effective ways of promoting the use of participatory methodologies centred in co-creation in research with young people with vulnerable backgrounds.
- Improved integration of contextual learning in the initial training of education professionals.

Policy Recommendations at national/regional level

- **Promoting the integration of principles of the indirect approach, co-creation and equality literacy in bachelor's and master's degree courses for initial training of teachers and other education professionals.** While in this project we worked only with master students in a course that does not certify teaching, the experience and knowledge developed, particularly through comments made by young people, led us to believe that these principles should be integrated more explicitly into initial training and qualification courses for basic and secondary education schoolteachers.
- **Develop in-service training that brings together second-chance education professionals with professionals from mainstream and VET schools** to promote the transference of experiences and knowledge built up on the use of the indirect approach, co-creation and equality literacy, and reflection on their articulation in educational practices with curricular integration.
- **Expand the integration of collaborative competence groups in socio-educational research and intervention projects that actively involve a wide range of stakeholders** in educational counselling. This integration ought to take place with particular attention to ensure the preparation of participants who may risk falling in situations of power imbalance towards other stakeholders, as sometimes is the case of young people towards adults.

SPAIN

Institutions: University of Balearic Islands (UIB), Sociedad Cooperativa de Iniciativa Social y Formación Ocupacional Jovent (Jovent), and Projecte Socioeducatiu Naüm (Naüm)

National/Regional Educational Policy Overview

In Spain, the Organic Law 2/2006 of Education mandates compulsory education for individuals aged 6 to 16, covering primary (ISCED 1) and lower secondary education (ISCED 2). The recent update, Organic Law 3/2020, aims to establish an equitable, inclusive, and quality education system, including upper secondary education (ISCED 3) divided into secondary education, *bachillerato*, and VET. VET aims to prepare young people for professional activity and personal development and progression in the education system, with basic vocational training equipping pupils with lifelong learning skills, while intermediate vocational training extends these skills and adapts them to a professional activity. Despite improvements, Spain still has one of the highest rates of ELET compared to the European Union average, although rates decreased from 16% in 2020 to 13,9% in 2022. At the regional level, the Balearic Islands have one of the highest ELET rates in Spain, standing at 21.3% in 2021. Initiatives like the National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2020-2023), the Pact for Social Inclusion (2020) and regional efforts in Balearic Islands target social inclusion and cohesion through the collaboration between political parties and stakeholders. Additionally, Law 5/2022 promotes active youth participation in decision-making and addresses various needs, including employment, training, education, housing, and health. Spain, particularly the Balearic Islands Parliament, is actively working to strengthen measures for education, training, and employment opportunities for youth.

COSI.ed Context and Partners

In Spain, more specifically in Palma de Mallorca, the COSI.ed project was implemented by the University of Balearic Islands (UIB) and developed by two entities in Balearic Islands: Sociedad Cooperativa de Iniciativa Social y Formación Ocupacional Jovent and the Projecte Socioeducatiu Naüm. **Jovent** is a non-profit organisation that aims to address the social and educational needs of vulnerable young people through compensatory measures (Second Chance School). It provides tailored support to promote equal opportunities, improve quality of life, and facilitate social and professional integration. Jovent also offers programmes outside of formal education, offering the possibility of validating certificates of professionalism with regulated studies. **Naüm** is a non-profit socio educational organisation that aims to promote social inclusion and integral growth of young people and their families through a proactive and participative methodology. The goal is to achieve their inclusion in the social and labour fields. Professional internships in companies are also integrated, which can generate employment opportunities for the young people. They professional training while also obtaining the academic equivalent of secondary compulsory education (ISCED 2) within the formal education system.

COSI.ed Intervention

The main activities of COSI.ed project in the Spanish context were:

1. **Training sessions:** teaching teams of the training workshops from Jovent and Naüm received training organised by the team from the University of Balearic Islands (UIB) with members of

Jovent and Naüm. The training of professionals was carried out on two occasions. Firstly, with those who formed part of the teams that would carry out the implementation of the methodology and, secondly, with the rest of the organisation's staff. Three training sessions were held on different days: EQL, Indirect Approach and Co-creation. After a theoretical introduction, practical activities were carried out such as lifeline and interviews. The duration of each training session was adapted to the needs of the groups.

2. **Initial interviews** were conducted in Jovent and Naüm with young people in the beginning of the COSI.ed project, aiming at finding out their educational and employment expectations. These interviews were based on the indirect approach and the role models had a checklist to guide and orientate their practice.
3. In Jovent, **individual follow-up** sessions were conducted where teachers provided guidance to their young people and monitored their progress or changes in their educational and/or professional pathways. In Naüm, the **individual follow-up** process was conducted outside of the institution (in an informal place). Role models introduced new tools, such as the *Sikkhona* card method, which involves group or individual conversations using images and direct/indirect questions. This allowed young people to express their experiences and feelings objectively.
4. **Casual conversations with young people**, whether in the classroom or workshop, that occurred unexpectedly, were used by professionals to establish a closer relationship with the young people. These were also inspired by COSI.ed dimensions.

Main Contributions

For **Role models** (Teachers from Jovent and Naüm) the COSI.ed intervention:

- Enhanced quality relationships and personal links between teachers and young people;
- Increased motivation and professional engagement in education and training;
- Improved success rates for young people, enabling them to confront new challenges with confidence;
- Enhanced their pedagogical practices through using the indirect approach (e.g. introducing new tools, such as Kahoot and the *Sikkhona* card method).

For **Young people**:

- Highlighted the pivotal role of teachers in their learning experiences;
- Increased the bond with teachers that are perceived as not only educators but mentors who showed flexibility and made genuine efforts to understand their unique situations. This bond positively impacted on the young people's self-esteem, motivation, and confidence, enhancing their school experiences.

Policy recommendations at regional/national level

- **Integrating the pillars of the COSI.ed model into undergraduate education, particularly in the fields related to education and social sciences to enhance pedagogical practices and societal understanding.** By incorporating these principles into curricula, young people gain insights into inclusive teaching methods, cultural sensitivity, and strategies for addressing societal inequalities. This approach provides future educators and social professionals with essential tools to navigate complex educational landscapes and promote social cohesion.

- The Education Law, LOMLOE (Organic Law 3/2020, of 29 December) establishes the need to implement the individualisation of the teaching and learning processes, being fundamental to the application of active learning methodologies. In this context, the use of the Indirect Approach and co-creation in the education and training system are fundamental instruments for the prevention of dropout. To make the system more efficient, a strong economic investment is necessary both for the **reduction of ratios and for the inclusion in the initial and continuous training of teachers in the application of the pillars of the COSI.ed methodology** (indirect approach, co-creation and equality literacy) **to different educational and training contexts.**
- **Advocate for educational, social and training policies to prioritise the development of flexible training programmes tailored to the individual needs of the most vulnerable groups.** These programmes should be carefully designed to suit the diverse needs and circumstances of the respective cohorts of learners, thus fostering an inclusive and responsive educational environment. To this end, the use of the Equality Literacy, Indirect Approach and Co-creation should be universalised in both compulsory secondary education and vocational education and training programmes.