



European
Commission

Wellbeing and mental health at school: Guidelines for education policymakers, school leaders, teachers and educators

Wellbeing in school, is crucial for improving academic outcomes, for the harmonious psychological development and positive social integration of the students, and for the motivation and performance of the teachers.

Wellbeing requires an empathic pedagogical approach to teaching, within education systems that address equity, diversity, and multicultural understanding, while maintaining high academic quality and high expectations. Furthermore, wellbeing extends to the quality of school life, learning environments, relationships among peers and teachers, and the empowerment of educators and students in decision-making, all while upholding educational excellence. Via the [Pathways to School Success](#) initiative, the European Education Area promotes a systemic change to address mental health and wellbeing in schools and build positive learning environments for all learners.



WHY SHOULD WE INVEST MORE IN WELLBEING AT SCHOOL?

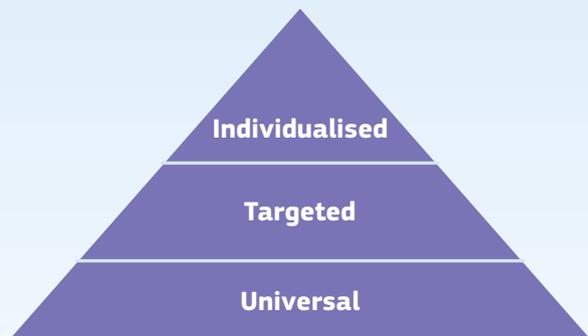
Mental health among children and young people has become a major issue in Europe, with alarming statistics:

- **20% of school children** experience **mental health problems** during their school years.
- **Life satisfaction and self-rated health among teenagers, particularly girls, has been in decline**, with a rise in multiple health complaints, such as difficulty sleeping, backaches or headaches, or feeling low.
- **Adolescent girls report worse mental health and wellbeing** compared to boys (11, 13 and 15

years old), with 15-year-old girls showing the worst outcomes

- **One in five children** reported growing up **unhappy and anxious** about the future due to bullying, challenges with schoolwork, and loneliness.
- **24% of teachers** in Europe report their job having a negative impact on their **mental health**, and 22% report the same for their **physical health**.
- In Western Europe, the estimated **annual cost of mental health disorder in youth (0-19)** amounts to **50 billion EUR**.

A whole-system, whole school approach to wellbeing and mental health



The approach, as illustrated above, is built upon:

- a **universal approach** where **all pupils** are supported to develop and maintain their wellbeing, both in terms of mental and physical health. It aims to reduce risks, build social and emotional competence, resilience, increase the sense of self-worth, and establish supportive environments for wellbeing.
- The identification of the individual, social and structural risk factors, so that **students at risk** of experiencing mental health conditions can be provided with **additional targeted support**, in small groups or at individual level, and in collaboration with health professionals and agencies.



The wheel complements the pyramid by illustrating the **main pillars**. Its different parts are highly interconnected and overlapping.

The **guidelines on school wellbeing and mental health** offer eleven recommendations and inspiring practices to assist policymakers, school leaders, teachers, and educators in implementing this comprehensive approach. A key and transversal element is the establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It is essential to set up structures to gather data on policy implementation and its impact, along with regular evaluations to assess effectiveness across target groups and meet objectives.

Recommendations:

1. Establish a **positive school climate rooted in the active participation and empowerment of learners**.
2. Integrate **social and emotional education into the curriculum**, starting from early childhood education and care to upper secondary education.
3. Foster **collaborative partnerships among schools, communities, and stakeholders to enhance wellbeing**.
4. Fully integrate **wellbeing principles into Initial Teacher Education** programs.
5. Strengthen the capacity of **school leaders to address wellbeing** at school to create inclusive and supportive environments.
6. Ensure the creation of **safe schools** to prevent and address various forms of violence, including gender-based violence, and (cyber-)bullying.
7. Promote **wellbeing in the digital age**.
8. Uphold fundamental rights by safeguarding **core enablers** of well-being: nutrition, play and rest, physical activity, and arts.
9. Provide **continuous professional development and support** to educators on well-being.
10. Prioritise **equity, inclusion and diversity** as essential conditions for well-being, ensuring that no one is marginalised or excluded.
11. Guarantee access to **support services** for learners with mental health needs.



What role for the European Commission?

The European Commission facilitates **peer learning and exchange of experience** in the framework of European Education Area [Working Groups](#) on “Schools - Pathways to School Success” and “Equality and Values in Education and Training”. The [European School Education Platform](#) and the **European Toolkit for inclusion and well-being at school** further support dissemination of guidance material and inspiring resources, including training.

Other European Commission initiatives such as [the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child and the European Child Guarantee](#), [EU4Health programme](#), [HealthyLifestyle4All](#), [EU Youth Strategy](#), [Digital Education Action Plan](#), [Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities](#) promote well-being and aim to reduce the stigma around mental health issues.

EU and national **funds** are available for investment in well-being in education, in particular through Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and the European Social Fund Plus.¹

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024
PDF ISBN 978-92-68-15159-4 doi: 10.2766/590
NC-02-24-465-EN-N

¹ If activities fall within the scope of the adopted Operational Programmes

