

EMBRACE

The logo for EMBRACE, featuring the word "EMBRACE" in blue, with three colored blocks (A, B, C) to its right.

EMBRACE

Fostering inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in early childhood education and care

PR4 Pilot Summary

Author: The logo for Emphasys CENTRE, featuring the word "Emphasys" in blue and "CENTRE" in red below it.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction of PR4	3
2. Piloting	4
1. Piloting in Poland	5
2. Piloting in Cyprus	5
3. Piloting in Greece	5
4. Piloting in North Macedonia	6
1. Piloting in Belgium	6

1. INTRODUCTION OF PR4

PR4 - Awareness-Raising Toolkit: Inclusion Of Children With Intellectual Disabilities In Early Childhood Education And Care

The main aims and objectives of the PR4 are to design, develop, and pilot a toolkit for ECEC settings with useful and effective resources for raising awareness of the importance of inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in early childhood education and care (Result 4).

The tools developed within the Toolkit will be created for two different audiences:

- children at pre-school age (both with and without intellectual disabilities),
- adults – parents of pre-school-aged children (with or without intellectual disabilities) and other community members.

These tools will seek to inform and educate these main audiences to influence their attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs toward supporting inclusive ECEC environments for children with intellectual disabilities. This will lead to fostering community cultures that empathize with the challenges of intellectual disability, instead of attitudes of avoidance and intentional or unintentional exclusion. Recognizing the value and importance of attending early childhood education and care parents of children with intellectual disabilities will be more encouraged to enroll their children where they can achieve their full potential.

The duration of the PR4 was 12 months from November 2022 until November 2023 and is available on the [project website](#) in all languages (English, Polish, Greek and Macedonian).

The methodology used to develop the ToolKit was:

- **Phase 1:** Development of the content of the toolkit
- **Phase 2:** Piloting and Evaluation
- **Phase 3:** Finalization, Publication and Dissemination

2. PILOTING

In total **22 kindergartens, schools/and education institutions** participated in the piloting phase of the PR4 from all partner countries Poland, Cyprus, Greece, North Macedonia, and Belgium.

Overall, all participants exhibited a positive and supportive attitude toward the awareness campaign toolkit. Most of the participants/schools mentioned that they will use the toolkit to organise a campaign for the inclusivity of children with intellectual disabilities.

Some of the common comments mentioned in all partner countries:

- ✓ All the promotional materials are very useful and will be used by teachers
- ✓ Chapter 1 with detailed dissemination strategies will help and support teachers in making successful campaigns
- ✓ Factsheets are very helpful to be printed or sent as dissemination of the project

In all partner countries, they mentioned detailed feedback for all three chapters in which the partners revised the toolkit and developed the final toolkit.

Some of the common comments mentioned in all partner countries to be aware of:

- Add more graphics to the promotional material
- Add specific activities on how to use the posters, brochures and videos
- Translation of the toolkit into additional languages

More specifically:

1. Piloting in Poland

The group that took part in the toolkit activities consisted of nursery school staff. The group size was twenty-two people. Among them were: 2 kindergarten directors, 2 special pedagogues, 18 female kindergarten teachers. It has to be said that in Poland, the kindergarten director teaches the children although he does not lead the group. He therefore remains a kindergarten teacher, although organisational, reporting and planning tasks are added. All have a university degree at the Master's level. Work experience ranges from six years to over 30 years. People working in two kindergartens took part in the activities. Hence, one can speak of two compact subgroups. The people in each subgroup know each other very well, as they have been working together for at least several years. Staffing in public kindergartens is quite stable, and this is the form of the kindergartens whose staff took part in the project activities.

The idea of creating graphic materials (brochures, posters) and films drew widespread applause. Nursery school staff (parents too) recognise the importance of images and audio-visual materials. However, it was also pointed out that posters contain batches of text, making it necessary to have adults help to fully perceive them. Several statements formulated the opinion that the posters are addressed to adults.

The toolkit including posters, brochures and videos was assessed as helpful for educational activities and for working with parents. It was noted that everyone needs to adapt the choice of tools to their group of children and their group of parents. In the closing remarks, there was a question about the availability of graphic resources, how they could be obtained and how many there would be.

2. Piloting in Cyprus

In October 2023, Emphasys organised a series of piloting workshops for the awareness-raising toolkit in 4 kindergartens/nurseries in Cyprus. Emphasys, contacted the kindergartens/nurseries in Cyprus which participated in the piloting workshops for the PR2 and PR3 as they are interested in the project and the implementation of the EMBRACE results.

The majority of teachers attended from the schools really liked the idea of developing promotional material, especially the videos that are included in the toolkit which numerous teachers and schools can visit at any time and can use this material. Additionally, most of the teachers totally agree that social media is the easiest way to organise several campaigns and to share information regarding the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities, so they really like the idea of having a section with tips for social media campaigns.

3. Piloting in Greece

The pilot for the Toolkit (PR4) was conducted online and brought together representatives from 8 different kindergartens. A total of 21 participants, including dedicated kindergarten teachers, stakeholders and parents, participated in this initiative. Within this group, there were 2 kindergarten directors, 2 special education experts, 11 female kindergarten teachers and 6 parents.

During our pilot event, the participants were positive about the Toolkit and its various components, especially the practical materials (brochures, leaflets, posters and videos). They particularly praised the practical tools, including the brochures, posters, and videos, which were seen as highly effective in conveying important information and promoting inclusion in kindergarten environments.

Furthermore, the participants expressed great appreciation for the guidance on planning and implementing activities to promote events and gatherings within the school, especially through the social media posts and the communication tips. They found these instructions invaluable in their efforts to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all children.

4. Piloting in North Macedonia

In November 2023 KMOP Skopje organized the piloting activities from the Awareness-raising toolkit in 4 kindergartens in North Macedonia. The piloting sessions involved in total 29 participants, adults including ECEC staff and parents. Furthermore, the activities involved a group of children from the targeted kindergartens. Most of the participants were females. The ECEC staff is with more than 10 years of experience in working with children and supporting their socio-emotional development and education. According to their educational level most of them have completed higher education and throughout have been following other trainings for further professional development.

Furthermore, the implemented activities supported the process of improving the collaboration between the ECEC professionals and the relevant stakeholders in the community, including the parents of children with intellectual disabilities and typical development.

The participants expressed a high level of interest in using the developed resources from the Toolkit in their work and promoting social inclusion in the community.

According to the feedback from participants in the piloting sessions the developed resources are useful for the target groups. Most precisely, the content of the tools for the children is adapted to their level of knowledge and understanding, but they cannot follow the content by themselves.

The resources aimed at adults, including the ECEC staff, parents and community are engaging. However, most of them need to be better structured and present the content more efficiently.

1. Piloting in Belgium

During September and November 2023, the European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) organised a series of piloting workshops to introduce and evaluate the efficacy of the awareness-raising toolkit, PR4, across three schools in Belgium. This initiative was a pivotal aspect of the ongoing EMBRACE project, where EASPD proactively engaged with schools and educational institutions in Belgium featuring inclusive education settings. Among these, two schools and an inclusion coach from the Flemish region demonstrated specific interest in the project and implementation of the workshop.

The overall feedback for the awareness-raising toolkit during the piloting workshops was positive, with participants expressing strong enthusiasm and appreciation for the initiative.

During discussions, it emerged that some schools had already implemented some practices aligned with the toolkit's objectives, citing the example of a practice similar to Poster on Sharing is Caring. The first school, BEPS International School, also shared an example of a game that specifically addresses diversity.

Overall, schools exhibited a positive and supportive attitude, aligning with a shared dedication to advancing inclusive education practices. One school has already initiated the dissemination of materials, actively promoting their use within their educational community. Additionally, there is a clear interest in translating the materials into Dutch or French.

The feedback and suggestions from the piloting workshops are taken into consideration for the ongoing development of the awareness-raising toolkit.