



## **FACING CHALLENGES TOGETHER**

Down Syndrome (DS) is one of the most well-known genetic neurological disorders. It is associated with established prejudices that constitute challenges to those who care for DS people. These individuals are thought not to be able to learn and progress in life. Recognizing the need to provide support for parents of DS children and professionals, the Leonardo da Vinci Development of Innovation multilateral project “PoD – Professional Training for Parents of Children with Down Syndrome” developed a new training tool that helped to educate people with DS throughout their lives.

The challenges which those involved in the care and education of DS people face are more entrenched in countries of the eastern part of Europe. In view of this, and owing to the fact that the results from the Development of Innovation project showed that PoD is worthy of further development for use across Europe, KMOP<sup>1</sup> seeks to adapt the PoD tool to the socio-economic and linguistic needs of two new EU countries: Hungary and Bulgaria. Thus the idea for the current project “RE-PoD – Re-investing expertise: expansion of professional training for educators and parents of children with Down Syndrome” is a result of the Leonardo da Vinci Development of Innovation project “PoD – Professional Training for Parents with Down Syndrome Children”, in which KMOP was a core partner.

The project is carried out by a consortium with two partners in each county, representing NGOs, DS associations and educational partners. The Greek NGO KMOP is experienced in management of EU funded projects. It is joined by Greek MAST<sup>2</sup>, a SME<sup>3</sup> with technical expertise, which served as the technical backup of KMOP during the development of the tool. In Bulgaria, DBBZ<sup>4</sup>, a VET<sup>5</sup> provider with experience in training and European projects, is joined by a special needs school that has a focus on children with DS. In Hungary, the Down Syndrome Association will work with an educational centre that has the technical expertise to adapt of the tool. The project also benefits from several associated partners. The consortium includes a variety of organizations, which work with various methodologies of teaching children, adolescents and adults. This presents a solid foundation on which to adapt the tool.

The main outcome will be the revised tool in Bulgaria, Hungary and England, accompanied by an e-learning platform and a teaching methodology. Collateral outcomes will be dissemination tools, such as web-sites, public presentations and articles. The project is expected to be significant both numerically and in terms of results and empowerment of target groups.

It enables professionals to recognize their insufficient skills and thus encourages them to adopt new approaches. This valuable tool will not only qualify them with the skills needed to educate people with DS, but it will also support parents and relatives of DS children by giving them assistance. The partnership will develop training programmes and courses, while the DVD and CD will provide all-encompassing information, complemented by online resources.

### ***A key to success***

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<sup>2</sup> MAST SA Consulting and Informatics Services, GREECE

<sup>3</sup> SME - small and medium enterprise

<sup>4</sup> DBBZ – Bulgarian-German Vocational Training Centre

<sup>5</sup> VET – vocational education and training

Down Syndrome is the genetic disorder affecting intellectual performance with the highest incidence among the population. It affects all races and there are more than one million people with DS in the world. In Bulgaria there are 32,000 and in Hungary the number is estimated at 10,000.

The European Agency for the Development of Special Education highlights the need for complementary training for professionals. People engaged in teaching children with DS in Bulgaria and Hungary are specialists in the medical field, but their education is general and not focused on DS. It is imperative that they know how to respect the needs of those who suffer from DS and how to work with their families.

There hasn't been any successful models for integration of DS children into local communities for the last two countries, which discourages parents from bringing DS children up at home. Many leave them in institutions, where they are not provided with adequate opportunities for intellectual stimuli in order to progress. The training of professionals and parents of children with DS and the introduction of a good European practice for integration of such children into society will increase their chances of a better life.

### ***An effective way of improving the skills***

The overall objective of the project is to improve the skills and knowledge of professionals, teaching staff, social workers, volunteers and families of people with DS in Hungary and Bulgaria by adapting a tool developed in a previous Leonardo da Vinci Development of Innovation project. These groups will see the new and effective methods being applied in different parts of Europe, which improve the understanding of the problems. The transfer is geographical in a basic sense. The product will target the same group, but in a different geographical context (Bulgaria and Hungary).

The specific objectives of the project are:

- Transferring and adapting the training tool with its e-learning system to the Hungarian and Bulgarian contexts
- Testing the tool in Bulgaria and Hungary
- Evaluating the tool's transferability which will lead to further fine-tuning to produce a final tool
- Creating a network to enhance the quality of support
- Improving the beneficiaries' quality of life

The aim of the second Work Package will be to evaluate the needs of the target groups to determine the extent to which the PoD tool will be revised in order to reflect the vocational, personal, social, cultural and language needs of the countries.

The aim of the third Work Package is to adapt the PoD tool to the country contexts of Bulgaria and Hungary, based on the needs defined in Work Package 2, and to develop a corresponding e-learning platform.

The aim of Work Package 4 is to pilot the new RE-PoD tool to 140 professionals and laymen in Bulgaria and Hungary in order to study the learning achieved by participants and provide space for additional features that will lead to an improved tool.

The fifth Work Package aims to outline didactical guidelines on how to use the tool in different educational settings. Its aim is also to indicate how DS organizations can develop training programmes and how to train users on the use of the tool. This training will be accomplished by a guide which training programmes will follow.

### ***Benefits at an European level***

The project has a genuine European added value due to the following points:

- a) As the training tool will be transferred and adapted to other European countries and used by relatives of people with DS as well as professionals, it can be a widely applicable training tool, appropriate for many VET-institutions and special needs organizations around Europe;
- b) Having been piloted in several countries, PoD reflects previous experience, implying that the countries will not only adapt this tool to their specific conditions, but they will also be able to incorporate new training methodologies;
- c) As the training tool has been implemented successfully in some countries, the results achieved will be based on a variety of methods developed in different settings. Through a dissemination process other European associations will be able to exploit many ways for teaching those who care for people with DS;
- d) Through the information offered via the project web-side European societies will learn more about the real nature of DS. That will aid the breakdown of the prejudices about this population which will ease its social integration.

### ***Impact on the national level***

It is well known that the birth of a disabled child causes parents feelings of guilt, depression and anger, making it necessary for them to have assistance throughout their lives. Professionals as well as parents will have the opportunity to be fully equipped with the necessary skills to deal with DS people. This tool will enable the personnel working with children with DS to adapt new and efficient teaching methodologies. Through the on-line platform students will be able to learn more about DS syndrome which will improve their practical skills.

Project's website: [www.repod.org](http://www.repod.org)

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