



**SOS-Network –
Social Inclusion of Students/Learners with
Special Needs into Mainstream VET and Labour
Market**

Final Report

Public Part

Project information

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Executive Summary

The SOS-Network was established due to the need for instant and relevant help and inspiration for teachers/trainers, employers, counsellors and others working with social inclusion in vocational education and training as well as on the labour market.

The SOS-Network had two main objectives: One was to reduce early school leaving and the second was to ensure a good transition between education and employment. The main target group was teachers and trainers in vocational education and training, working with students/learners with special needs on a daily basis, but also employers and counsellors who meet these young people in their transition to the labour market. Prior to the project start, the students/learners with special needs were identified with reference to four categories of problems that may cause early school leaving or difficulties entering the labour market. They are:

- 1) Students/learners with medical diagnosis
- 2) Students/learners with social problems
- 3) Students/learners with literacy and numeracy problems (learning difficulties not due to a medical diagnosis)
- 4) Students/learners with immigrant background

The SOS-Network united 14 vocational education and training institutions, job centres, higher education institutions, employers' organisations and others working with social inclusion in education and training from 12 different European countries. Each of these has specific competences and experiences in working with students with special needs. For instance, one partner is specialized in working with student/learners with special needs in mobility projects; another has distinct competences in dealing with young people with Asperger's' syndrome; and others are experienced working with guidance issues or are working specifically with teachers within special educational needs. In total, the consortium represent a wide range of experiences and competences that cover all the aspects of social inclusion dealt with in the SOS-network.

Throughout the project lifetime, all the major steps from the project proposal have been completed. One is a Europe-wide mapping of barriers to education, presenting different perceptions of students/learners with special needs. This mapping set the starting point for the second major step, namely the identification of interesting cases describing innovative and success-proven approaches to students/learners with special needs in different learning environment. This second step has resulted in 65 interesting cases of which 15 cases were identified as best practice cases. All cases are available on the SOS-website. Both the mapping of barriers and the collection of cases have been carried out through questionnaire-based surveys, and with due respect to representativeness in relation to target groups and different learning environments.

The third step was identification of methods and tools with the 15 selected best practice cases forming the basis. Each method was clearly described so that teachers and others interested in employing them in daily practice would be able to download and use them immediately.

The fourth very important step was the testing of the transferability and applicability of the 15 identified and described methods. Each method was tested in three different partner countries, either as an assessment based on already achieved experience with the specific method or as real-time testing involving students/learners in different learning environments. The feedback was collected through questionnaires focusing on expectations and evaluation of the method. Included in the testing was also interviews with some of the students/learners involved in the testing. The SOS portal functioned as the main tool for collecting feedback from the testing, at the same time enabling the partners to put comments and to benefit from the knowledge and experience of the other partners.

All methods and the feedback achieved through the testing are available on the SOS-website, as well as the test report compiling the main conclusions from the testing

Another very important product of the SOS Network project is the SOS-website, which is much more than a website with project information. The SOS portal is a tangible source of inspiration and knowledge on all aspects of social inclusion in education and training, and functions as a 'one-stop-shop' with semantic web functionalities allowing cross-reference between all uploaded materials, giving visitors access to a broad range of information and resources, including methods and tools to be applied in daily teaching/training.

The portal was formally launched at the SOS-Network launching conference in Madrid in March 2014. The conference, 'Towards Inclusive Education, had app. 70 participants from the educational sectors across Europe, and it opened up for debates and discussions on how vocational educational institutions can be inclusive and contribute to the ambition of reducing the number of young people leaving school without completing their education. Present at the conference was among others representatives from the Spanish Ministry for Education, explaining the situation regarding vocational education and training and the inclusive perspective in Spain. The conference also marked the first hand-over of the SOS Award, which is meant to be an annual award given to an organisation or institution that has shown an innovative, empowering and well-proven approach to social inclusion in vocation education and training. Five institutions and organisations was invited to Madrid to present themselves, and the audience selected ONCE, the Spanish organisation for blind people, to be the winner of the 2014 SOS Award. The 2014 SOS Award is regarded the first in a series of annual awards handed over as part of annual meeting consolidating the network and its purpose. In Madrid, the partners decided to proceed with the formal establishment of the SOS-Network with annual meetings, statutes and a board of directors. The first General Assembly will take place in Athens in September 2014.

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1. Project Objectives

The SOS-Network aimed and continuously aims at contributing to social inclusion of students and learners with special needs into vocational education and training and, further on, onto the labour market. The network operates with two main objectives, which are:

1. To reduce early school leaving in the vocational education and training sector;
2. To ensure a better transition from education and learning onto the labour market

More specifically, in order to achieve the objective of early school leaving the intention of the SOS-network was to:

- Provide a better Europe-wide understanding of students and learners with special needs by mapping the barriers to education and the labour market through descriptions of learning environments in different European countries;
- Provide different approaches, methods and tools that are being used with success throughout Europe and which can be adapted and transferred to other learning environments in other European countries;
- Establish a platform for cooperation between practitioners in this field, which can give immediate access to exchange of experience and knowledge within this field;
- Create knowledge of specific work-related requirements that students/learners with special needs will be able to fulfil

The second main objective concerning the transition from education to the labour market was specified into the following objectives:

- Enhancing the cooperation between the vocational education and training sector and the labour market
- Identifying job-related functions that match specific skills, competences and potentials possessed by students/learners with special needs
- Creating awareness among practitioners on the labour market of the skills, competences and potentials that may characterize students/learners with special needs

The SOS-Network also aimed at introducing a new and more positive 'language' with concepts and approaches that are focusing on competences, skills and potentials rather than problems and diagnosis. This objective has been seen as intertwined with most of the specific objectives mentioned above.

Moreover, the SOS-Network intended to create a long-standing and sustainable network for teachers, trainers, counsellors and employers working with young people with special needs. One of the main features of the network is an online portal that functions as a 'one-stop-shop' with easy access to methods and tools, inspiring cases, definitions, and exchange of information and knowledge. The SOS-portal is intended as a dynamic platform that contains possibilities for constant development in the future through interactive involvement of users.

Both teachers, trainers, employers and counsellors have been directly involved in the project by providing descriptions of barriers to education based on local learning environments and by delivering examples of approaches, methods and tools, which are used successfully in their daily activity. Moreover, local stakeholders were invited to participate in Local Reference Groups that were established in the partner countries during the project period. At the meetings, the local stakeholders were informed of the progress of the project, and further involved in testing and commenting on the content and deliverables. Students were also involved directly, primarily by giving their active feedback on methods and tools during the period of testing.

Direct benefits for teachers and trainers involved in this project has been access to new methods and approaches that they did not know of before the project started. Moreover, the variety of experiences that the consortium presents in different learning environments have inspired some of the partners to take up new approaches and to change behaviours. One example is a Spanish school involved in testing some of the methods. The outcome of this involvement has been an inspiration for teachers at this school to look for other ways of working with young students/learners with special needs. Another example is Green Academy in Denmark, which has achieved immense benefit from a method developed in Ireland and presented as one of the 15 identified methods in the SOS-Network project. By applying this method to a specific teaching environment, the school has helped some of the students to stay in education.

The more general impact of the SOS-Network upon the target user group is closely connected to the SOS-portal. The establishment of an online platform that gives direct access to material of different kinds gives the benefit of being able to share experiences and cases of interest with other teachers and trainers and people working with social inclusion in vocational education and training and on the labour market. It provides the users with a tool that does not exist today and which is strongly needed. There is an urgent need for new methods, new approaches, and inspiration across sectors and countries. The project has established a learning lab allowing for common knowledge-based experimentation in the field of special needs education and training. The real impact of the SOS-Network is found in the virtual community, created in the online portal, based on the principles of providing practitioners with inspiration, knowledge, tools and methods that they need in their daily practice.

So far, the portal has created interest but still needs further adaptation and dissemination before reaching the ambitious target of being of immediate use by practitioners. This will be a major task that rely on the network that is being formally established at the moment. Moreover, this aspect will attend further focus through SOS CHANGE, which is a follow-up project, building on the SOS-Network and aiming at employing the SOS material in creating real change in different learning environments throughout Europe.

2. Project Approach

A first very important action in the project was to establish a common framework of concept understanding, which people who are working in this area apply in their daily practice. Are we speaking the same ‘language’ when we are talking about students with social problems? How is a diagnosis like for instance ADHD perceived in learning environments in Poland? Is it the same perception as in Denmark?

The original intention was to create a mapping of the four different target groups we had identified as a starting point – student/learners with social problems, student/learners with medical diagnosis, students/learners with literacy and numeracy difficulties and students/learners from ethnic minorities. But instead of focusing on these four target groups, which would just have further underlined an approach that focuses on the individuals’ personal situations and defines the problems as related to this, we chose to work with the expression ‘barriers to education’. It removed the focus from the individual and onto the issues that challenge the individual. Moreover, it helped us to avoid a long discussion on how each of those four target groups should be defined and separated from each other. Additionally, the choice of the expression ‘barriers to education’ as the guiding approach in the survey also intended to satisfy the overall objective of a new and more positive approach to the students/learners in question.

The survey was carried out through a questionnaire distributed to different learning environments in the partner countries. The questionnaire included a description of the barrier, as it was perceived, but also a description of the learning environment and the competences, skills and potentials that could be observed in relation to the individual in question.

The survey was not representative for any specific type of learning environment or country, but it gave a first indication of practice-related perceptions of barriers to education, and presented a rather clear picture of the concepts that are used daily in learning environments in our partner countries.

These concepts or topics were reactivated during the next step. This step actually went further into the barriers to education, presented during the first analysis. Through questionnaires sent to schools, training institutions, employment centres, enterprises and other institutions meeting students/learners with special needs, we collected rather extensive descriptions of how different types of barriers to education are approached. The survey was purposely made very broad – we wanted to include not just schools and educational institutions but also other learning environments of formal and informal kind.

The collected cases were analysed in order to come up with at least 50 cases defined as ‘interesting cases’. This analysis was prepared both in relation to representativeness – we wanted to have different sectors and different learning environments represented in the final collection – and in relation to criteria like quality, innovation and identifiable methods and tools. A follow-up interview with either project partners or individuals completing the questionnaire was carried out in cases chosen as interesting cases.

The 15 collected case studies that were regarded as best practice cases, formed the basis for identification of methods and tools and was based on the following criteria:

- Transferable in different environments
- Innovative
- Methods with different backgrounds (used in schools or jobcentres)
- The origin countries where important (is each partner country considered?)

The 15 selected case studies were used as the main foundation for the identification of methods. The extraction and further description of each method followed a manual that was set up by the Scientific Coordinator regarding relevant elements to include in a method description. Through dialogues with partners responsible for delivering the specific case studies and through intense correspondence with the Scientific Coordinator, all 15 methods were described with the intention of making them ready for testing.

The testing was performed in smaller Test Groups, each comprising four partners with different roles:

- Consultant – the partner who delivered the case study that formed the basis for identifying the method. The Consultant only had a consulting role in the Test Group, for instance to answer questions from the other partners and provide further information when requested.
- Coordinator – responsible for communicating the outcome of the testing in the test group to the partner responsible for preparing the test report. The Coordinator was also responsible for stimulating the other partners in the Test Group to perform. Like the Test Partners, the Coordinator should also perform testing of the method in question.
- Two Test Partners - responsible for testing the specific method.

Two different questionnaires were developed for the testing phase:

- **Entry-form** - in order to get to know the testers (the kind of profession, the kind of institution), their experiences with the method and the expectations of usefulness
- **Feedback-form** - which comprises the results of the reviewing/testing as seen by the person performing the testing/reviewing

In order to benefit from the broad functionality on the SOS website, the recordings of the testing were carried out online. The partners involved in testing in each test groups set up smaller 'Local Test Space' on the website, meant for recording the testing taking place in a school, training centre or employment centre in their local area. Each Test Group included fields for comments, allowing the partners and others involved in testing to present comments and questions regarding testing.

The benefit of this procedure was better contact between partners individually and an easier collection and compiling of the test results.

Each method was tested in three different countries. The structure of the Test Groups and Local Test Spaces or Groups are displayed in table 1 below:

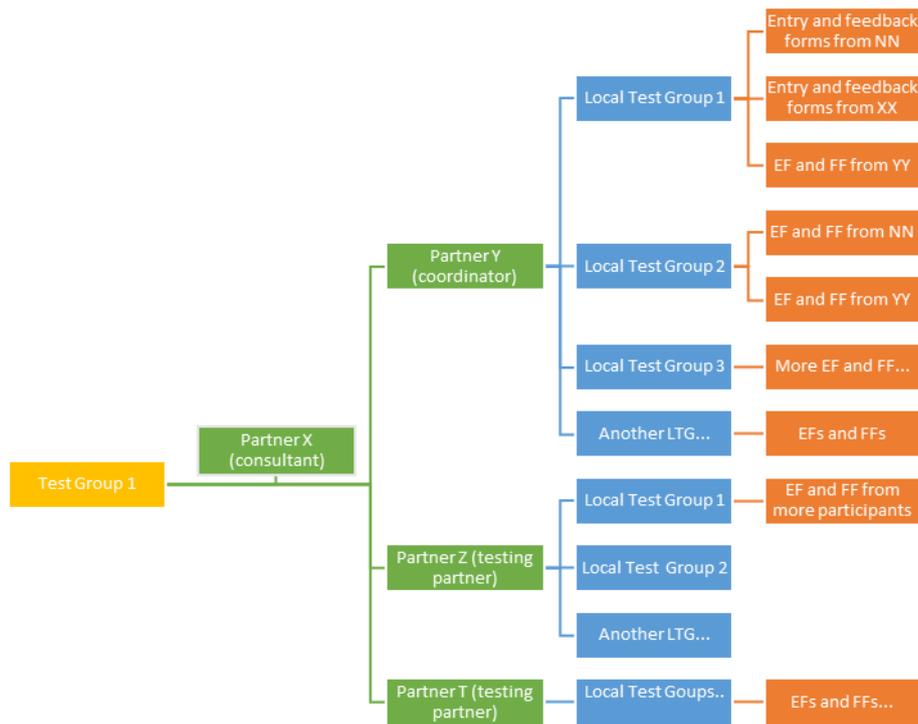


Table 1: Structure of Test Groups and Local Test Groups

The results from the testing were compiled in a test report, using the online feedback results available on the SOS website. Moreover, a separate report presents the outcome of the feedback from young students/learners, obtained through interviews. This report is meant for internal use only as it contains sensitive information that are subject to data protection laws.

The methods being used throughout the project to identify best practice case studies and methods and to perform testing, are the results of thorough discussions at partner meetings preceding the actions.

The project website with its semantic functionalities has been used throughout the project period as a contributor to the performance of specific tasks. Moreover, it functions as a ‘one-stop-shop’ compiling all the data and interesting material that was collected during the project period, giving users immediate access to relevant knowledge and information. It also provides practitioners outside the network with the possibility to upload own cases, methods/tools and relevant information. The SOS Network now presents a fully functional website with all data compiled through the project period.

The evaluation throughout the project period was based on an evaluation plan that predicted in-depths surveys of the progress and the general understanding of the project at critical stages as well as a continued evaluation of meetings through feedback forms. Moreover, the evaluator and the Coordinator have been in contact approximately once every month through Skype during the first project period to discuss issues in relation to progress and involvement of the partners. During the second part of the project period, these Skype meetings have been less frequent. The conclusions of these meetings have been compiled in short minutes, which was sent to the Coordinator. This approach ensured that issues, which could have ended

up being problems, were discussed and potential solutions were found before they became major problems.

The outcome of the in-depth surveys has been forwarded to all partners and discussed at partner meetings subsequently.

The dissemination of the results and activities in the SOS-network was based on a dissemination plan, which was drafted at the very beginning of the project. It included communication of the project through social media and the project website, through Local Reference Groups and through the press (newspapers, magazines, websites, etc.). A Facebook-site and a LinkedIn-group was established – both linked to the SOS-website, www.sosnetwork.eu. In total, five newsletters have been distributed to all partners for further dissemination. The main dissemination channel, though, is the Local Reference Groups that each partner established comprising external local stakeholders. These groups had a disseminating role throughout the project and provided the network with crucial feedback on outcomes.

All partners have been involved in dissemination activities. The intensity in dissemination, though, has peaked during the second part of the project, especially after a successful dissemination event in Brussels in April 2013. This event created awareness of the SOS Network, and the list of participants has later been used for further dissemination of progress in the SOS Network. The awareness has also been used as basis for the first steps towards structured cooperation with networks like EfVET and IncluD-ed. Most recently, this awareness has resulted in an invitation from the Romanian Ministry of Education to Bucharest to present the outcome of the activities at a NEET conference in March 2014, as well as the invitation from CEDEFOP to be present at the June 2014 conference on Early School Leaving in Thessaloniki.

Exploitation aspects have been part of discussions at partner meetings from the very beginning, based on a draft exploitation strategy. This approach has been taken deliberately in order to prepare and qualify the decisions that needed to be taken before the project ends, but also to keep the partners' mind focused on what comes after the project period. The input achieved from the different discussions as well as a survey performed during the project period have fed into the exploitation plan, which concludes the project and sets the targets for the future.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

In the first part of the project period, the SOS-network collected, analysed, structured and released two major bulks of data related to the objective of reducing early school leaving.

Firstly, a mapping of barriers to education experienced by teachers, trainers and others working with special needs students in different learning environments in the partner countries has been completed and made accessible at the SOS-portal. The intention with the mapping was to establish an understanding of differences and similarities in the perception of barriers to education in different European countries, and how concepts related to early school leaving are being used and perceived. Even though, the mapping was meant to cover all four target groups of students/learners, a major part of the collected descriptions concerned categories like medical diagnosis and learning difficulties. Moreover, the intention to establish understanding of different perceptions in different European countries was partly hampered by the fact that translation from national language into English, which further was adapted to a proper English meant that the perception lost some of its original and national-related specificities. Nevertheless, the mapping presents descriptions of real-life cases deriving from different European countries and around concepts that practitioners normally meet through clinical definitions or descriptions. As an added outcome, a small report has been produced addressing barriers to education and with focus on specific barriers to education identified in the mapping. The report informs about different perspectives on early school leaving, and uses some of the barriers to exemplify the importance of setting the right perspective.

Secondly, more than 200 case studies describing different approaches to students/learners with special needs in different contexts have been collected. Of these, 65 case studies were selected as interesting cases and furthermore 15 case studies as examples of best practice. These case studies constituted a unique pool of approaches that are easily accessed through the SOS-portal and thus give teachers, trainers and others access to new approaches based on the experiences presented in the cases.

Another major achievement in the project was the identification and testing of 15 methods. The table here below presents the tested methods.

Methods	Expert
Logbook (DK)	Denmark
Learning group (DK)	Denmark
CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility (DK)	Denmark
International Mobility (IT)	Italy
Peer education (IT)	Italy
Psychiatric Foundation Support Plan (DK)	Denmark
Individualized Educational Plan (FI)	Finland
Employment Services for Young People (UK)	United Kingdom
E-Guide (IE)	Ireland
Work Tasting /Experiences (DE)	Germany
The President's Award (IE)	Ireland
Multicultural Inclusion (PL,RO)	Poland, Romania
Internship in a company for students with special needs (ES)	Spain
SIA, Snabbt I Arbete "Quickly into Jobs" (SE)	Sweden
Facilitating Self-reflection through a Relationship of Unconditional Positive Regard (UK)	United Kingdom

Table 2: 15 selected methods

The resting has resulted in a report presenting a description of the methods with a rating of the method in relation to applicability and transferability. Additionally it entails ideas on how to apply the methods in daily use and how to transfer the best practises in different environments. The report can be found on the project website: http://www.sosnetwork.eu/system/files/Testing%20Report%202014_04_07_0.pdf

All collected material has been made available on the SOS website, which is also to be regarded as a major outcome of the project. Differing from a normal website, the semantic functionality at the SOS portal provides users with related material whenever a search is performed. Moreover, through a login-functionality, the user will be able to upload own material (methods, descriptions of interesting case studies, information about events, reports, etc.) that support the intention of creating an online community of practitioners working with students/learners with special needs in education, training and on the labour market and thus supporting the basic of the SOS Network.

The SOS-Network portal can be accessed through this link: <http://www.sosnetwork.eu/>

All the way through the project period, the SOS portal has been used as an important tool for dissemination. Information about the two main events, the Brussels-based seminar in April 2013 and the Launching Conference in Madrid 2014 were uploaded on the website. As part of the preparation of the seminar in Brussels in April 2013, a selection of other relevant projects was carried out, based on an intensive search through European Commission databases like ADAM and EVE. Information about the selected projects are all made available at the SOS portal. Moreover, some of the projects were invited to take part in the event in Brussels, presenting different aspects of early school leaving and social inclusion in vocation education and training and the labour market. Both the seminar and the visibility on the SOS website have put focus on these projects and the results they presented.

The launch of the SOS-portal took place during the launching conference in March 2014, 'Towards Inclusive Education', which also formed the final conference of the project. The conference attracted more than 60 stakeholders from several schools, educational institutions, training centres, ministries, labour market organisations and other stakeholders from different parts of Europe working with students and learners with special needs in education and training. The feedback from the participants showed a general satisfaction with the presentations and interactive sessions at the conference.

A special part of the Launching Conference was dedicated to the SOS Award that for the first time was given to an organisation/institution with innovative, empowering and well-proven approaches to inclusive education for students and learners with special needs. The SOS-Network had selected five institutions and organisations from different European countries and invited them to present their activities in Madrid. The Award will be part of future activities of the SOS Network, thus establishing a tradition to look beyond the basic community to find innovative approaches.

An important element regarding dissemination and exploitation is the creation of Local Reference Groups (LRG) in partner countries. LRG activity relates both to the

objective concerning prevention of early school leaving but also to the second objective that deals with the transition between education and the labour market. The inclusion of different local stakeholders in LRG has created an interest in the project and the network as such, but has also given valuable feedback about practitioners' needs and interest throughout the project.

The impact of the dissemination activities is clearly shown in the awareness that the SOS-Network is met with at this final stage of the project period. Both the European Commission and CEDEFOP have contacted the Coordinator of the SOS-Network, in both cases with invitations to take part in conferences on NEET and Early School Leaving in vocational education and training. The European Commission suggested the Ministry of Education in Romania to include the SOS-Network in a conference on NEET organised in Bucharest in the beginning of March 2014. The SOS-Network was accepted as an interesting best practice example and the project's Scientific Coordinator presented some of the outcomes. CEDEFOP contacted the SOS - Network with an invitation to take part in an conference about Early School Leaving in vocational education and training in Thessaloniki in June 2014. This invitation has also been accepted. Furthermore, the SOS-Network has established contact with more networks like EfVET, EUCIS-LLL and IncluD-ed in order to start up collaboration. For the partners, this awareness has created confidence in the quality of the SOS-Network and a clear ambition of continuing the activities in a formal network.

The exploitation plan has been in progress almost since the project upstart as a working document used for spurring discussions at partner meeting. The final version of the plan sets out clear targets and tasks that reach beyond the project period. It depicts the transformation of the SOS-Network project into a formal and sustainable network, based on clear statutes, annual meetings and a board of directors. It also outlines the allocation of different tasks and responsibilities to different partners until the formal network has been established.



4. Partnerships

The SOS-consortium consisted of 14 partners from different institutional and organisational backgrounds in 12 European countries, and with different competences and experiences in relation to early school leaving and transition from education and onto the labour market. A main benefit of a multi-country partnership lies with the possibility to pick specific competences that are not always found in one country. For instance, the SOS Network has benefitted from the unique experience that our Italian partner possess in mobility for students/learners with special needs. Moreover, the high degree of knowledge that our Finnish and British partners have of specialized education for students/learners with special needs also provides the network with a valuable benefit which would not have been achieved if the network had been established nationally. Other examples are the Irish partner with specific experience in working with criminals and young people in NEET (Not in Employment, Education and Training), and likewise the German partner with years of experience in training and employment related activities for young immigrants. The partnership has specific competences that cannot be found in for instance a small country like Denmark.



This diversity of competences had a clear and concrete benefit to the scope of approaches presented in the case studies as well as in relation to the identification of methods and tools.

Another clear benefit of a multi-country partnership is the possibility of obtaining clear statements and arguments. Discussing complex issues like early school leaving and

in general social inclusion of young students/learners with special needs with colleagues from institutions and organisations that operate in a different context in another country drag the participants out of their comfort zone and force them to reflect upon own practice. A concrete example of the benefit that this aspect has given the SOS-Network is the discussion in relation to the target groups at the very beginning of the project. In order not to stay focused on problems and diagnosis, the concept 'barriers to education' was deemed most appropriate to achieve a common understanding of what causes early school leaving and NEET. Another example is the Finnish position that refers to the need to approach these young people, not by how they are diagnosed, but by the educational need they may have, underlining the fact that all students and learners have educational needs thus limiting the relevance of talking about special needs. These positions and the discussions they created, have helped the consortium behind the SOS-Network to raise the quality of the conclusions, and have led to broader and more Europe-wide positions.

A consortium with so many partners from so many different countries and institutional backgrounds also presented a challenge in relation to proper involvement of all partners and a clear understanding of the different positions. Sometimes it took time to get to the core of a subject because a basic understanding of the different positions had to be created. Moreover, the language could be a barrier to some of the partners making them reluctant to participate in discussions. The number of partners and the fact that not all of them were included in the project management board meant that it was a challenge to ensure that all partners felt fully involved and fully informed about the decisions taken. Especially the fact that only the work package leaders participated in all meetings could at times leave the partnership slightly divided.

Inclusion of local stakeholders has been done through Local Reference Groups where employers, teachers, counsellors, head of schools, social partners and others with an interest in social inclusion of student/learners with special needs met three times during the project period to discuss relevant issues to social inclusion in vocational education and training and onto the labour market. Beyond creating an awareness outside the network of what is going on and what will happen next, it also provided the network with valuable information about the needs and interest of those who potentially will be using the results and outcomes of the network.

The SOS-Network has also reached out to other external stakeholders through the Award ceremony at the Launching Conference in Madrid in March 2014 where external stakeholders from five partner countries were invited to take part and present their approach to inclusive education. Both for the SOS-Network partners and for those invited, this event gave an opportunity to meet others working with the same issues and to learn and get inspired from different approaches.

5. Plans for the Future

The Exploitation Plan, which was finalised at the final partner meeting in March 2014, outlines the activities and objectives that determines the future of the SOS-Network. The main element is the decision amongst the partners to establish the SOS-Network as a formal network with statutes, annual meetings/general assemblies and a board of directors. The Exploitation Plan also outlines who will be responsible for carrying out the activities up until the founding meeting. Moreover, each partner has agreed to spend two hours monthly in preparation for this transformation.

The SOS-Network portal will be in function for the following three years. Before the founding meeting, the portal will be adapted to the specific needs of a network, taking into consideration the need for a page dedicated to network members. Up until the founding meeting, the Coordinator and the webmaster will maintain and update the portal.

All collected material that can be accessed at the portal is freely available by all registered users. The founding meeting of the SOS-Network will take decision on the size of a fee to be paid by future members of the network.

The founding meeting of the SOS-Network will take place in September 2014.

Furthermore, a group of SOS partners have decided to take the results of the SOS Network further in a follow-up project named SOS CHANGE. The intention is to build on the outcome of the SOS-Network and to make change happen through appointing SOS Ambassadors and SOS Champions of Change who will commit themselves to apply SOS methods in their daily practice. The SOS CHANGE project is envisaged to start up in September 2014.

6. Contribution to EU policies

Early school leaving, and in relation to this, transition from education to the labour market are issues placed at the top of the European political agenda. Reducing early school leaving is one of five head targets in the Europe 2020 strategy, and early school leaving is seen as one of the main challenges concerning the objective of creating an inclusive Europe with a well-educated labour force.

In 2010, the Bruges-communicé further pointed to the need for measures in this field, followed up by a Council Recommendation in 2011, and later that year the establishment of a European Thematic Working Group on early school leaving. All this underlines the attention that early school leaving gets today, and the contribution of the SOS-Network is well in line with these initiatives. The explicit ambition of the Thematic Working Group is to analyse and identify best practice – the aim of the SOS-network is to contribute to this ambition.

The necessity of a closer link between the vocational education and training sector and the labour market that the students will access has been clearly expressed since the European Commission in 2008 launched the initiative New Skills for New Jobs. This initiative has also been included in the Europe 2020 strategy as one of seven flagships, and the Bruges-communicé referred to the need for involvement of stakeholders outside the vocational education and training sector in order to provide the labour market with employees who have the relevant competences and skills. Moreover, by giving teachers and trainers within the area of vocational education and training access to methods and approaches that are new and inspiring, the SOS-Network also contributes to raising the attractiveness of vocational education and training, both from the perspectives of the students/learners and the teachers. This is another important European priority that has gained more and more focus during the last couple of years – the non-attractiveness of vocational education to young people and the consequences this will have in the future.

The SOS-Network targets both areas – the vocational education and training and the labour market to which vocational education and training leads. It has a specific and clear focus on young students/learners with special needs, and it provides practitioners in both fields a wide range of inspiring cases and innovative and success-proven methods and tools beyond access to knowledge, organisations, projects and people working with these areas. What is needed to fight early school leaving and ensuring a good transition to the labour market for students/learners with special needs is a basket of methods, tools and approaches that have been tested and proven successful, easily accessible and applicable in different learning environments. This was also highlighted in the report from the European Thematic Working Group on early school leaving. No single approach will help Europe to meet the targets in this field. The SOS-Network is not pointing to one solution or one approach but is setting up a bouquet of different approaches that could be included in different learning environments. By doing this, the network aims at functioning as the European access to practice-based knowledge and experience that can help practitioners to act when it is necessary but based on a fund of knowledge and experience that has been tried out elsewhere.

