

Observatory SOS-Attendance ACTION PROTOCOL

European Protocol for the Prevention and Intervention in School Attendance Problems (EP-SAP)

Building Engagement, Preventing Absence, Securing Futures.

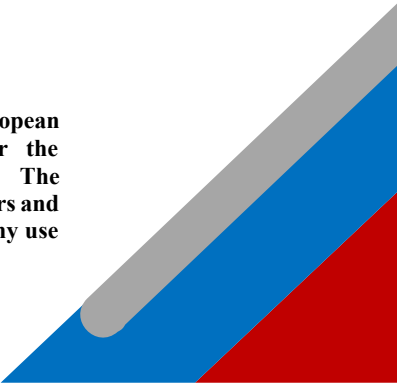


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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The development of a unified *European Protocol for School Attendance Problems* (EP-SAP) within the framework of the Observatory SOS-Attendance project responds to critical shortcomings identified in the comparative analysis of national and regional protocols across the four participating countries (Italy, Portugal, Spain & Türkiye). Findings indicate significant inconsistencies, including the absence of consensus regarding the definition of School Attendance Problems (SAPs), limited implementation of preventive measures, and a lack of systematic evaluation and monitoring mechanisms following protocol application. Such gaps hinder comparability across contexts, impede the transferability of good practices, and undermine the establishment of a coordinated European strategy to address SAPs effectively.

The protocol is grounded in evidence-based frameworks that have demonstrated efficacy in addressing attendance difficulties, such as the *Multi-Tiered System of Supports* (MTSS) proposed by Kearney and Graczyk (2020), which provides a structured continuum of interventions organized into universal prevention, targeted early intervention, and intensive individualized support. Empirical evidence underscores the efficiency of this model in managing the wide spectrum of SAPs while ensuring scalability and adaptability across diverse educational systems (Graczyk & Kerney, 2024; Kearney & Graczyk, 2022).

Furthermore, the protocol incorporates the multicausal explanatory model of school refusal proposed by Kearney (2008), which emphasizes the interplay of individual, familial, school-related, and socio-environmental factors. This systemic perspective moves beyond reductionist interpretations of absenteeism, promoting instead a multidimensional understanding that is essential for designing interventions tailored to the heterogeneous realities of students.



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The adoption of the umbrella term “School Attendance Problems” (SAPs), as defined by Heyne et al. (2019), provides a coherent conceptual framework that includes four primary categories of problematic attendance: school refusal, truancy, school withdrawal, and school exclusion. The use of this standardized terminology enhances interdisciplinary collaboration and ensures greater consistency in research, policy, and practice across countries.

The EP-SAP is structured in four phases. The **prevention phase** focuses on universal actions such as promoting a sense of school belonging, ensuring a safe and inclusive climate, strengthening family and student engagement, and enhancing tutorial support systems. The **early intervention phase** emphasizes the timely identification of warning signs of problematic attendance through systematic observation and record-keeping, as well as targeted actions such as social skills training, positive reinforcement, and sustained school-family collaboration. The **intensive intervention phase** provides tailored responses for students with chronic or severe attendance difficulties, including individualized reintegration plans, alternative education programs, second-chance schools, and evidence-based therapeutic interventions such as cognitive-behavioural therapy. Finally, the **evaluation phase** addresses a recurring weakness identified in current national protocols: the absence of systematic monitoring and assessment of implementation and outcomes. By incorporating a structured evaluation framework, the EP-SAP ensures that schools and policymakers can measure effectiveness, track progress over time, and adapt interventions in light of empirical data. This evaluative component strengthens accountability, supports continuous improvement, and guarantees that the protocol remains dynamic, evidence-informed, and responsive to evolving educational challenges.



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Beyond its scientific foundations, the EP-SAP contributes to the promotion of equity and social cohesion across Europe. Establishing a common evidence-based framework enables greater comparability of outcomes, facilitates the dissemination of best practices, and ensures that all students, regardless of their country or educational context, have access to timely and effective support. Moreover, by emphasizing systematic monitoring and evaluation, the protocol strengthens accountability and supports continuous improvement in practice and policy (Pérez-Marco et al., 2025).

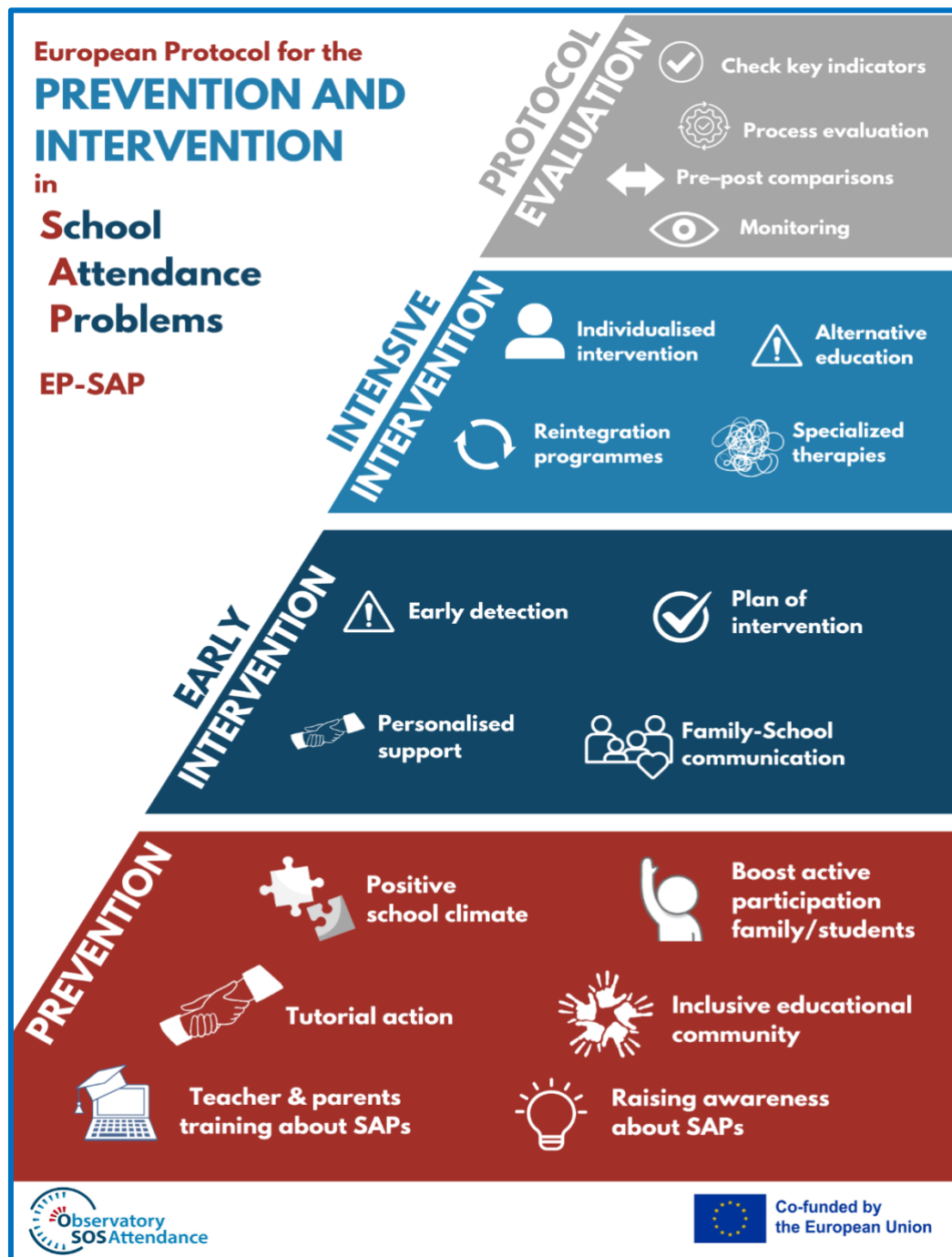
In sum, the development of the EP-SAP is both a theoretical and practical necessity. It consolidates robust evidence, advances a unified conceptual and methodological framework, and provides actionable strategies across prevention, early intervention, and intensive support. By doing so, it not only safeguards the right to education but also fosters engagement, reduces absenteeism, and secures better academic and social outcomes for children and adolescents across Europe.



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