MindFit

Enhancing Youth Mental Health & Well-being Through Sports

Transnational Report

WP2: MindFit Training Toolkit



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MINDFIT
INCLUSIVE SPORT, STRONGER MINDS

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1. Executive Summary

This Transnational Report was prepared in the context of the **MindFit project** ''Enhancing Youth Mental Health & Well-being Through Sports'' to provide a **comparative understanding of:**

How can sport support the mental health and well-being of young people in Poland and Cyprus, and identify the practical implications for developing the MindFit Training Toolkit?

Drawing on desk research, an online survey with more than 40 respondents across the two countries, and qualitative consultations with more than 15 youth workers, coaches, trainers, educators, and practitioners, the report offers a grounded overview of current realities, needs, and opportunities in the two national contexts.

- In both countries, youth mental health is increasingly recognised as a priority.
- There is broad acceptance that sport and physical activity can support prevention, inclusion, emotional support, and social connection.
- Sport is seen as more than a way to improve physical health.
- It is also viewed as a practical and accessible way to build confidence, resilience, teamwork, communication, a sense of belonging, and routine.
- For many young people, especially those less likely to use formal support services, sport can offer a less stigmatising and more natural entry point for participation and self-expression.
- Sport can also help create trust and strengthen relationships.
- The national findings show that both countries already have policies, initiatives, and examples linking youth development, inclusion, and active lifestyles.
- This provides a strong and relevant foundation for the MindFit approach.

At the same time, the research highlights a consistent gap between recognising the potential of sport and using it in a structured and intentional way to support mental health. Across the evidence collected, youth workers and grassroots practitioners often use sport in their daily work, but many do not feel sufficiently prepared to identify early signs of distress, respond in a safe and supportive way, or connect young people with further support when needed. Practical methods for linking sport with emotional regulation, self-esteem, stress management, reflection, inclusion, and referral remain limited. This gap is especially important in settings where practitioners are close to young people's everyday realities but lack training, tools, or confidence to address mental health issues appropriately.

What the research shows	Main challenge	What MindFit should provide
Sport is a strong entry point for youth engagement and well-being.	Mental health is not yet integrated in a structured way into everyday sports practice.	Practical methods to connect sport and mental well-being.

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Practitioners already use sport, but need stronger confidence and guidance.	Many feel underprepared to respond to distress or signpost young people.	Simple tools for support, referral, and safe facilitation.
Inclusion matters and requires adaptation.	Barriers such as access, confidence, and mixed abilities affect participation.	Inclusive, flexible, and ready-to-use activities.

Figure 1: Summary of the findings.

The evidence also points to a strong need for inclusive and realistic resources. Practitioners emphasised that sport-based activities work best when they are non-competitive, adaptable, participatory, and sensitive to different abilities, motivations, and social backgrounds. Barriers such as limited facilities, time constraints, low confidence among participants, social stigma, and uneven access to support services can reduce the positive impact of sport unless they are addressed through careful facilitation and simple, practical design. This makes it clear that the value of sport for mental well-being depends not only on the activity itself, but on the quality of the environment, the methods used, and the confidence of the adult facilitators involved.

Overall, the transnational findings indicate that Poland and Cyprus share a strong basis for the MindFit project and similar practical needs. The report therefore concludes that the MindFit Training Toolkit should prioritise **ready-to-use session plans, simple activity cards, reflection questions, inclusion tips, basic mental health literacy, and clear guidance on supportive responses and learning pathways**. The toolkit should use accessible language, short, modular formats, and methods applicable to youth work, grassroots sport, school, and community settings. It should also be piloted with diverse groups of practitioners and young people to ensure it is practical, inclusive, and relevant in real-world settings. In this way, MindFit can help translate policy intentions and examples of positive practice into concrete tools that strengthen the role of sport in supporting young people's mental health and well-being across different European contexts.



Figure 2: MindFit Project (WP2).

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1. Introduction

The MindFit project, Enhancing Youth Mental Health & Well-being Through Sports, is based on the understanding that sport can support more than physical health. For many young people, sport and physical activity can also strengthen well-being, confidence, resilience, social connection, and inclusion. At the same time, youth workers, coaches, and community practitioners often lack practical tools to use sport more intentionally to support mental health, emotional well-being, and safe participation.

This transnational report brings together evidence from Cyprus and Poland to identify common needs, challenges, and opportunities for developing the MindFit Training Toolkit. Based on desk research, surveys, and qualitative consultations, it examines how sport is currently used in youth settings, where the main gaps remain, and what kinds of practical methods and resources are needed to better connect sport, inclusion, and mental well-being. The report provides a comparative basis for designing a toolkit that is practical, relevant, and adaptable across different youth work and sports contexts.

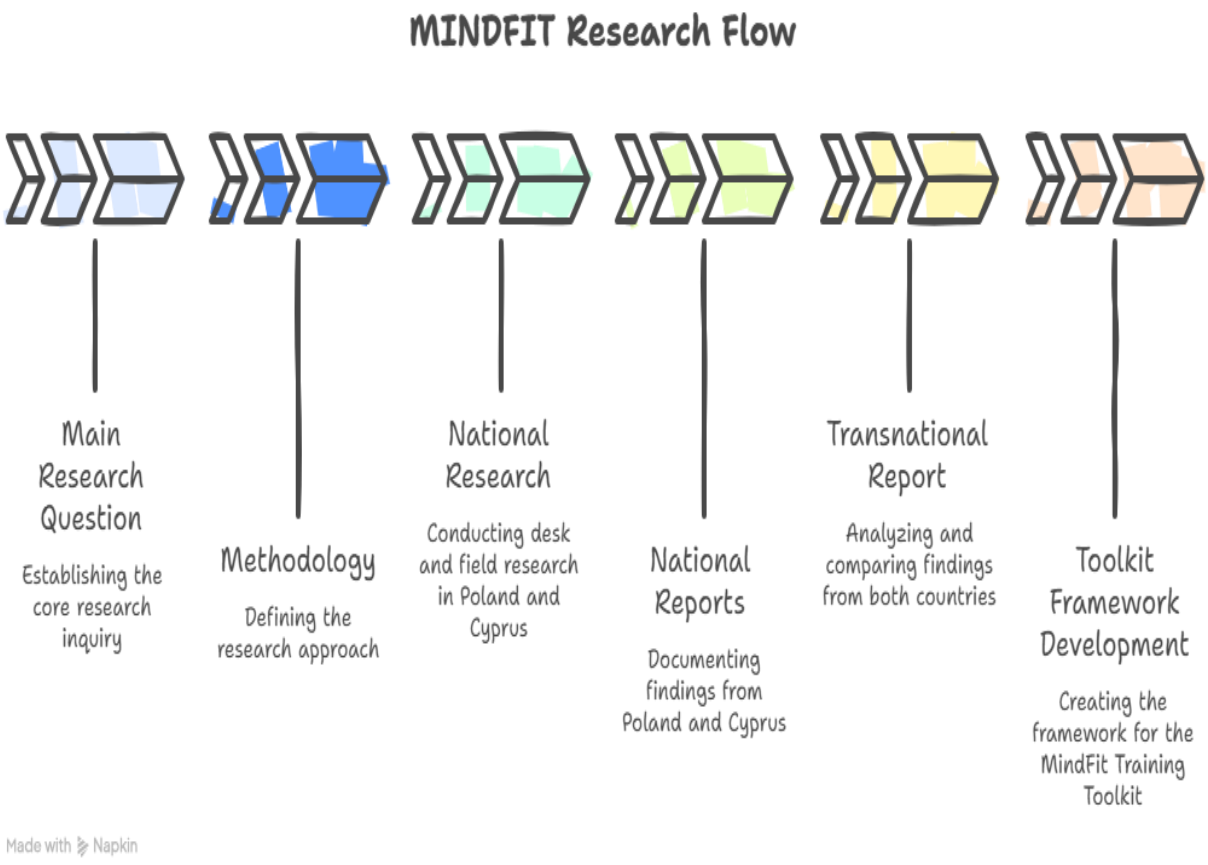


Figure 3: MINDFIT Research Flow.

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2. Methodology

This national report combines desk research, online surveys, and qualitative consultations with practitioners to provide a practical overview of the current state of sport, youth work, and mental health in Policy and Cyprus.

3.1 Desk research approach

The desk research reviewed national and European sources relevant to the Polish and Cypriot context, focusing on youth, sport, mental health, well-being, inclusion, and non-formal education. Sources included national strategies and policy documents, Youth Wiki and other official information portals, reports by public bodies, programme descriptions, project websites, and examples of practices linking sport with mental health or personal development. The search used keywords such as Poland/Cyprus youth mental health, sport and well-being, physical activity and young people, grassroots sport, youth work and sport, mental health in sport, inclusion in sport, young people with fewer opportunities, and coaches and youth workers' mental health support.

The inclusion criteria focused on sources that were:



- ✓ relevant to Poland/Cyprus or directly applicable to the national context,
- ✓ clearly linked to youth, sport, physical activity, mental health, or inclusion,
- ✓ produced by credible institutions, organisations, or recognised projects, and
- ✓ useful for identifying policies, challenges, gaps, and good practices.

Priority was given to sources that helped explain how sport is currently positioned in relation to youth well-being and what practical gaps remain for grassroots practitioners. This was consistent with the wider report objective to examine national policies, existing programmes, and current challenges and gaps.

3.2 Survey approach

40+ surveys were distributed and completed in Poland and Cyprus, aimed to gather practice-based input from people working with young people through youth work, sport, physical activity, community activities, and non-formal education. The sample was purposive rather than representative, focusing on respondents who could provide direct insight into how sport is used in youth settings, what mental health and well-being needs they observe, and what kinds of support or training they require. Participants included youth workers, trainers, coaches, educators, and other practitioners working with adolescents and young adults.

Data were collected through a structured online questionnaire distributed through professional contacts, partner networks, and relevant youth and sport channels. The questionnaire included closed and short open-ended questions covering current use of sport or physical activity, confidence in addressing mental health-related issues, perceived training needs, inclusion challenges, and ideas for the MindFit toolkit. The use of an online tool made participation easier across different locations and allowed responses to be collected in a consistent format for later summary and comparison. The survey directly supported the report sections on current use of sport in youth work, confidence and training needs, and key patterns emerging from practitioner responses.

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3.3 Focus group approach

The qualitative consultation in Poland and Cyprus involved 15+ youth workers and practitioners who work directly with young people in community, non-formal education, and sport-related settings. Participants had experience working with young adults, including those with fewer opportunities, such as NEETs, migrants, rural youth, and young people facing social or economic barriers. Due to participants' availability, the consultation was conducted in a mixed format. Online focus groups and interviews using the same discussion framework. This approach made it possible to retain the depth of qualitative input while adapting to scheduling constraints. The sessions explored young people's mental health and well-being challenges; the role of sport in engagement and support; barriers and enabling factors; inclusion issues; and recommendations for the MindFit toolkit. The group discussion lasted approximately one hour, while the individual interviews were shorter and more flexible in length. Together, these consultations generated the material used in the report section on focus group results, including participant descriptions, key themes, and anonymised quotes.

3.4 Ethical and GDPR considerations

The research followed basic ethical and data protection principles appropriate to a small-scale needs analysis. Participation in both the survey and qualitative consultation was voluntary. Participants were informed about the purpose of the activity, how the information would be used, and that reporting would be anonymised. Because the focus group and interviews were conducted online, no physical signatures were collected; however, informed verbal consent was obtained from all participants before the discussions began. No personal data was collected. Responses were reviewed and reported anonymously or in aggregate, with direct quotations used without names or details. The data were used only for the purposes of the MindFit research and reporting process, in line with GDPR principles of purpose limitation, data minimisation, confidentiality, and responsible handling of participant information.

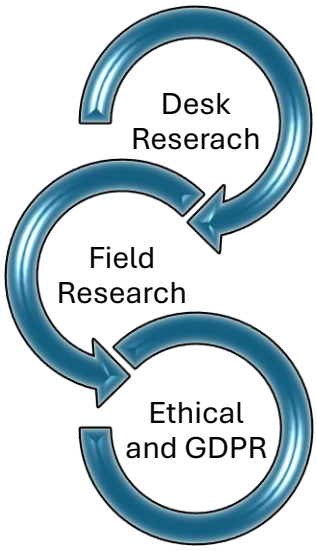


Figure 4: Research Flow

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3. National Context Overview

4.1 Poland Context 🇵🇱

National Policies and Strategies

In Poland, sport and physical activity are embedded within national youth, education, health, and public-health policies, with increasing recognition of their role in supporting mental well-being, social inclusion, and life-skills development among children and young people. The national youth policy framework, coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Family and Social Policy, emphasises healthy lifestyles, psychosocial development, civic engagement, and prevention of risk behaviours. Sport and physical activity are promoted as important tools for fostering resilience, teamwork, self-discipline, and social integration, particularly for children and young people at risk of exclusion.

At the strategic level, the Sport Development Programme and the National Health Programme highlight physical activity as a key determinant of both physical and mental health across the life course. These strategies promote mass participation in sport, physical education, and recreational activity, with a particular focus on children, adolescents, and young adults. Mental health is addressed mainly through prevention, early intervention, and health promotion, with schools and community-based organisations recognised as crucial environments for action.

Poland also aligns its policies with international frameworks, including WHO recommendations on physical activity and mental health promotion. National and regional public-health strategies increasingly stress the importance of cross-sector cooperation between education, sport, health, and social services. However, mental health support in sport contexts is still largely framed indirectly, through general well-being, prevention, and healthy lifestyle promotion, rather than through explicit mental-health literacy or psychosocial skill-building components.

Overall, Polish policy frameworks recognise sport as a valuable tool for health promotion, social inclusion, and youth development. Nevertheless, they offer limited operational guidance for grassroots sport organisations, youth workers, and coaches on how to intentionally integrate mental-health awareness, emotional regulation, coping skills, and referral mechanisms into everyday sport practice.

Existing programmes -projects using sport for mental health/skills

In Poland, a range of initiatives link sport, physical activity, youth work, and psychosocial development, even when mental health is not their primary or explicit focus:

1. School-based physical education and extracurricular sport programmes play a central role in promoting physical activity, teamwork, self-confidence, and social skills among children and adolescents. Schools are also key settings for early prevention and well-being initiatives, although structured mental-health components within sport activities remain limited.
2. Local and regional sport-for-all initiatives, often implemented by municipalities, sport clubs, and NGOs, aim to increase access to physical activity for children, young people, and

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disadvantaged groups. These programmes frequently emphasise inclusion, social integration, and healthy lifestyles, indirectly supporting mental well-being.

3. NGO-led projects, including those implemented by foundations such as Fundacja Kamienica1 in collaboration with Roundnet Szczecin, combine sport, movement, and non-formal education methods to strengthen young people's social competences, sense of belonging, and emotional resilience. Such initiatives often work with young people from urban, socio-economically disadvantaged, or marginalised backgrounds.
4. European cooperation projects involving Polish organisations increasingly explore the links between sport, well-being, inclusion, and transversal skills. Just like MindFit. These projects introduce innovative methodologies, non-formal learning approaches, and capacity-building activities for youth workers and coaches, though their impact is often limited to the project duration.
5. Sport federations and training institutions have begun to acknowledge the psychological pressures experienced by young athletes, particularly in competitive sport. Awareness-raising around stress, burnout, and performance pressure is growing, but access to applied sport psychology and mental-health support remains uneven, especially at the grassroots level.

Main challenges and gaps

Desk research highlights several Poland-specific challenges that the MindFit project can meaningfully address:

- Limited explicit integration of mental health into grassroots sport. While sport is widely promoted for its health and social benefits, most programmes focus primarily on physical performance, participation, or prevention of unhealthy lifestyles, with little structured attention to mental-health literacy, emotional skills, or psychological safety in sport environments.
- Capacity gaps among coaches and youth workers. Coaches, physical-education teachers, and youth workers often lack training and practical tools to recognise early signs of psychological distress, respond to emotional or behavioural difficulties, address bullying or exclusion, and foster supportive, mentally safe sport settings.
- High performance orientation in youth sport. In many contexts, competitive success and results remain prioritised over well-being, increasing pressure on children and young people and potentially contributing to stress, anxiety, dropout, or burnout.
- Fragmentation between sport, education, and mental-health services. Cooperation between grassroots sport organisations, schools, youth NGOs, and professional mental-health services is limited and unsystematic, reducing opportunities for early identification, referral, and holistic support.

These challenges demonstrate a clear need in Poland for structured tools, training, and cross-sector collaboration that support the mental health of children and young people in sport. The MindFit project, with the active involvement of Kamienica1, is well-positioned to respond to these gaps by strengthening the competencies of coaches and youth workers and promoting more inclusive, mindful, and supportive sport environments.

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Good Practices

Good Practice 1

Title of the practice/programme	**Spike The West – Halowe Mistrzostwa Polski w Roundnet**
Country and organisation	Poland, organised by Kamienica1 https://kamienica1.pl/
Duration/period of implementation	Annual event (VI edition was held in February–March 2026)
Target groups (e.g. youth workers, young people 15–24, girls, NEETs, young people with disabilities)	Youth and adults of all ages Beginners and hobby players Players from Poland
Main objectives (2–4 bullet points)	• Promote physical activity through an inclusive team sport • Increase participation in roundnet among young people • Provide accessible competition opportunities for all skill levels
Description of the approach (short paragraph: what is done, how sport is used, key methods)	"Spike The West" is a multi-category indoor roundnet championship held in Szczecin, open to all participants regardless of experience. It includes categories such as Open, Women, Hobby, and Mixed Pairs to encourage both competitive and recreational involvement. The format is informal and inclusive, creating space for social interaction and physical engagement.
Mental health and/or skill-building focus (e.g. stress management, confidence, social skills	Encourages social interaction and teamwork
Main results or outcomes (qualitative or quantitative)	• Regular participation across multiple editions • Winners gain recognition and opportunities to compete at national/world events • Positive visibility of a new sport within local sport culture
Lessons learned / success factors	Open entry formats encourage wider participation
Link or contact details (if available)	https://wzp.pl/aktualnosci/newsy/sport/spike-the-west-vi-halowe-mistrzostwa-polski-w-roundnet-2026-w-szczecinie/?utm_source

Good Practice 2

Title of the practice/programme	**Gryf Roundnet League – Winter Roundnet League**
Country and organisation	Poland – organised by Kamienica1 in Zachodniopomorskie, supported by local sport authorities and clubs https://kamienica1.pl/

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Duration/period of implementation	Seasonal winter league (2025/2026)
Target groups (e.g. youth workers, young people 15–24, girls, NEETs, young people with disabilities)	• Children and youth from local schools • Roundnet enthusiasts of all ages
Main objectives (2–4 bullet points)	• Introduce roundnet as a regular competitive and recreational activity • Strengthen community engagement with physical sport • Provide structured opportunities to play and practise roundnet
Description of the approach (short paragraph: what is done, how sport is used, key methods)	The Gryf Roundnet League runs a series of winter tournaments across several towns in Zachodniopomorskie (including Gryfin, Police, and Szczecin). Events combine open competitions for experienced players with "recreational" categories, ensuring accessibility for young people and beginners. Several tournaments include local school participation and demonstration activities.
Mental health and/or skill-building focus (e.g. stress management, confidence, social skills	• Social bonding through team sport • Reduced anxiety through play and regular activity • Physical activity as a tool for positive mood and community cohesion
Main results or outcomes (qualitative or quantitative)	• Multiple tournaments held with growing participation • Inclusion of school-age children in demonstration events
Lessons learned / success factors	Recreational categories encourage new participants
Link or contact details (if available)	https://wzp.pl/aktualnosci/newsy/sport/turniej-finalowy-oraz-zakonczenie-ligi-zimowej-cyklu-gryf-roundnet-league-2025-26-podsumowanie/?utm_source

Good Practice 3

Title of the practice/programme	**Erasmus+ Sport and Well-being Projects**
Country and organisation	Poland – Polish NGOs and sport organisations (Erasmus+)
Duration/period of implementation	Project-based (typically 12–36 months)
Target groups (e.g. youth workers, young people 15–24, girls, NEETs, young people with disabilities)	• Youth workers and coaches • Young people aged 15–30 • Volunteers and educators
Main objectives (2–4 bullet points)	• Build competences in sport-for-well-being • Promote inclusion and mental health awareness • Exchange good practices across countries

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Description of the approach (short paragraph: what is done, how sport is used, key methods)	Projects use non-formal education, sport activities, training courses, and youth exchanges to explore mental health, inclusion, and life skills. Sport is combined with reflection, group work, and experiential learning.
Mental health and/or skill-building focus (e.g. stress management, confidence, social skills	• Stress management and resilience • Social and intercultural skills • Self-awareness and emotional regulation
Main results or outcomes (qualitative or quantitative)	• Improved competences of youth workers and coaches • Innovative methodologies tested at grassroots level • Strengthened European cooperation
Lessons learned / success factors	Combining sport with reflection is key International exchange increases innovation
Link or contact details (if available)	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects

Survey Results

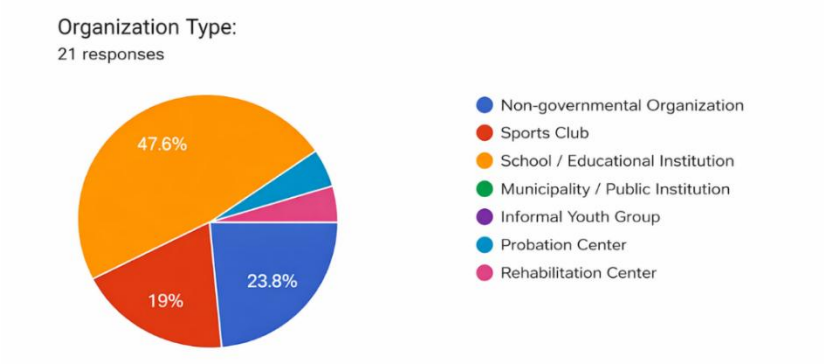


Figure 5. Type of organisation of respondents

Polish survey respondents, **21 in total**, represented a **range of youth-related organisations**. Nearly half **(47.6%) came from schools or educational institutions**, reflecting the strong role of formal education in youth engagement. **Non-governmental organisations (23.8%)** and **sports clubs (19%)** were also well represented. A **small number of participants (9.6%)** were affiliated with rehabilitation centres, probation centres, or public institutions, suggesting **some outreach to more specialised or at-risk youth groups**. This diversity highlights the potential for cross-sector collaboration in applying sport-based approaches to support mental health and inclusion.

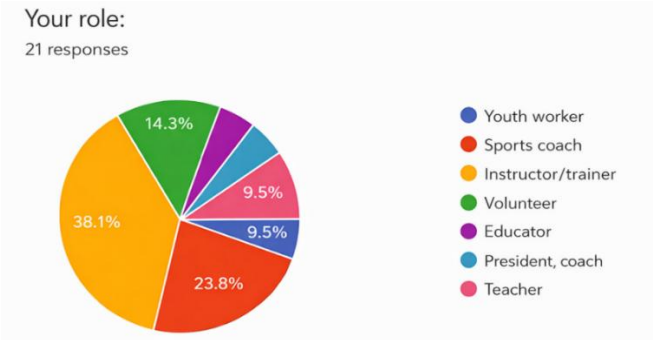


Figure 6. Role of respondents

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The Polish survey engaged a diverse group of professionals involved in youth development through sport and education. The largest group were **instructors or trainers (38.1%)**, followed by **sports coaches (23.8%)**, reflecting a strong practice-oriented perspective. The remainder included **volunteers (14.3%)**, **youth workers and educators (each 9.5%)**, and a few **participants (4.8%) in leadership roles (e.g., president or teacher)**. This variety illustrates the breadth of experience and entry points into sport-based youth engagement in Poland.

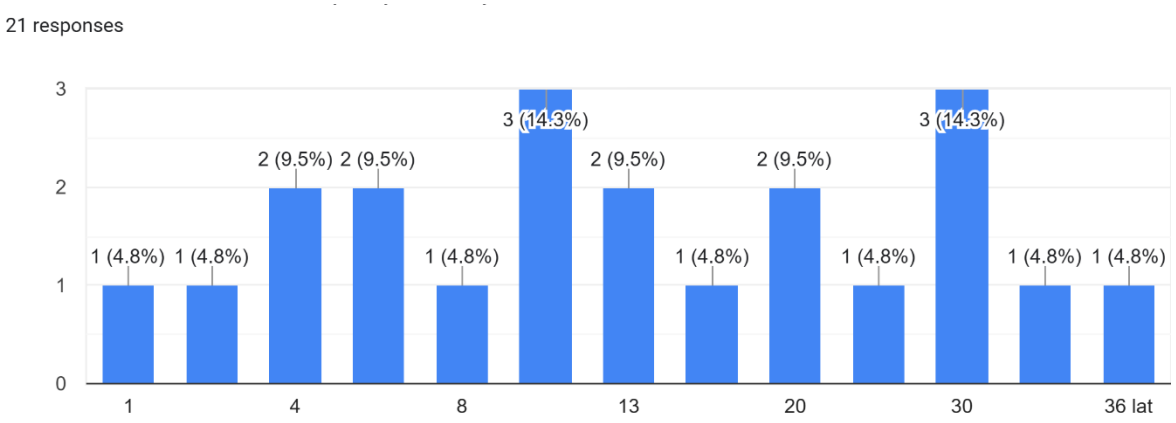


Figure 7. Years of experience working with young people

Respondents had a wide range of experience working with young people, from newcomers to professionals with many years in the field. The largest groups had **8 or 30 years of experience (each 14.3%)**, followed by several with **4, 13, and 20 years (each 9.5%)**. A small number of respondents reported 1, 36, or other years of experience. This distribution suggests that the survey reached both early-career and long-established professionals, offering varied perspectives on youth mental health and the role of sport in their work.

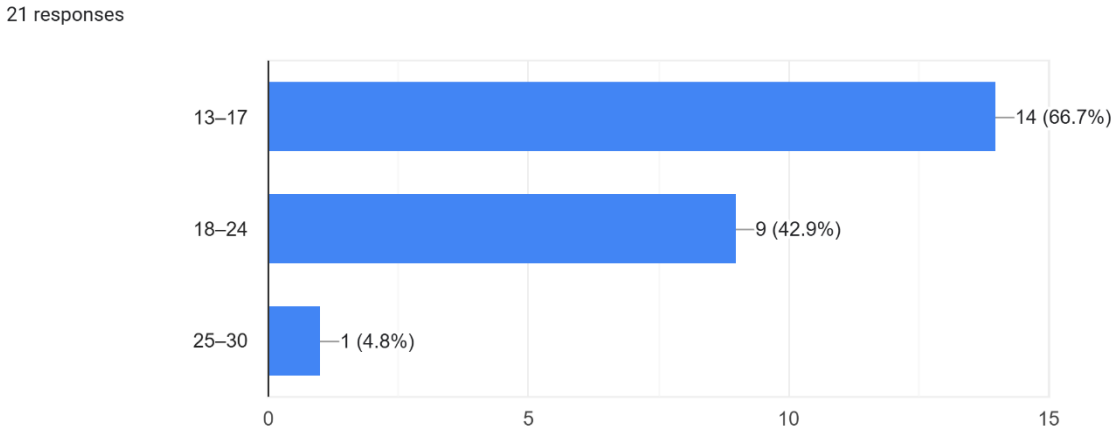


Figure 8. Age group(s) mainly served by respondents

Most respondents work with adolescents and young adults. **Two-thirds (66.7%)** reported working with youth aged **13–17**, while **42.9% reported working with youth aged 18–24**. Only **one respondent (4.8%)** served young people aged **25–30**. These findings align with MindFit's focus on supporting mental well-being in teens and early adulthood through sport-based methods.

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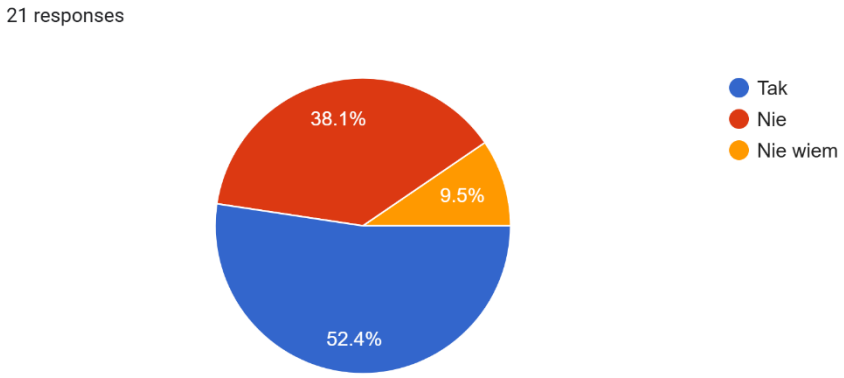


Figure 9. Work with young people with fewer opportunities

Over half of respondents (52.4%) indicated that they **actively work with young people facing fewer opportunities**, such as those from marginalised, migrant, or disadvantaged backgrounds. A further 38.1% reported that they do **not currently** work with this target group, while 9.5% were **unsure**. This suggests that while inclusion is a relevant concern, capacity and experience vary across organisations and may benefit from targeted support through MindFit.

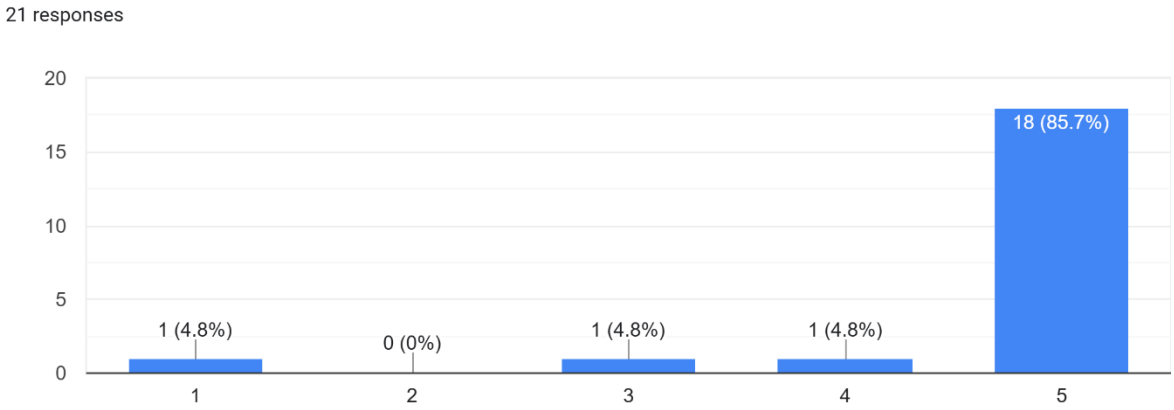


Figure 10. Regular use of sport or physical activity in work with young people

The vast majority of respondents (85.7%) reported **regularly using sport or physical activity in their work with young people**, rating it 5 out of 5 on a frequency scale. **Only a small number** selected lower scores (1 to 4), **indicating limited or occasional use**. These results confirm that sport is already a core method in the work of most surveyed practitioners and represents a strong entry point for mental well-being initiatives.

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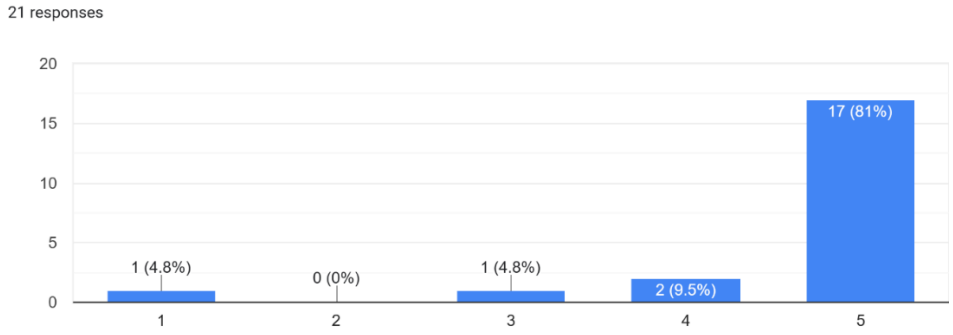


Figure 11. Intentional use of sport to build teamwork, communication, and resilience

Most respondents **(81%) reported** that they **intentionally use sport or physical activity** to **build soft skills** such as teamwork, communication, or resilience, giving this approach the highest rating (5 out of 5). A small number selected lower scores, suggesting limited or less structured use. This confirms that, beyond physical activity, sport is widely seen as a means of fostering psychosocial and emotional development in youth, which is a key objective of the MindFit project.

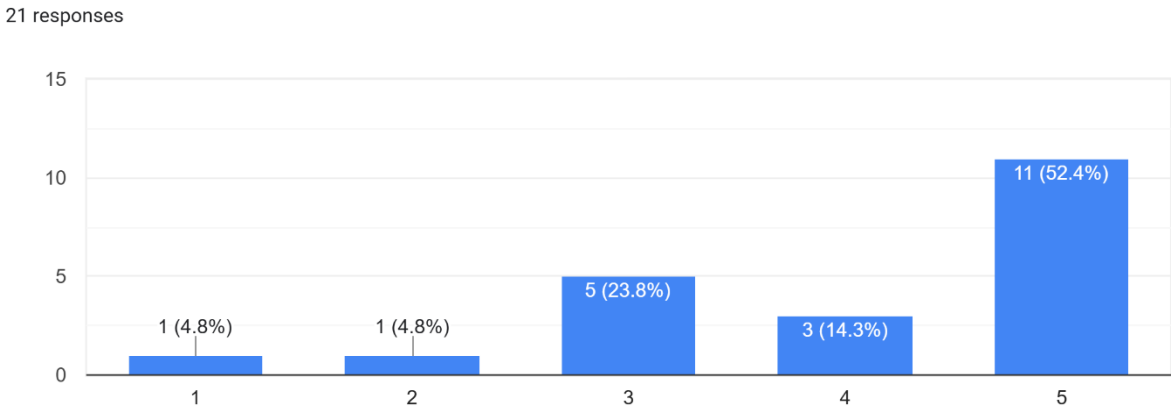


Figure 12. Adaptation of sports activities for young people with fewer opportunities

A majority of respondents (52.4%) reported that they **strongly adapt** their sports activities to include young people with fewer opportunities, selecting the highest possible score (5 out of 5). A further **14.3% selected 4, and 23.8% selected 3, indicating a broader trend of active** inclusion practices among Polish practitioners. These results suggest that **inclusion is already a priority** for many professionals in the field, forming a solid foundation for strengthening and scaling good practices through the MindFit project.

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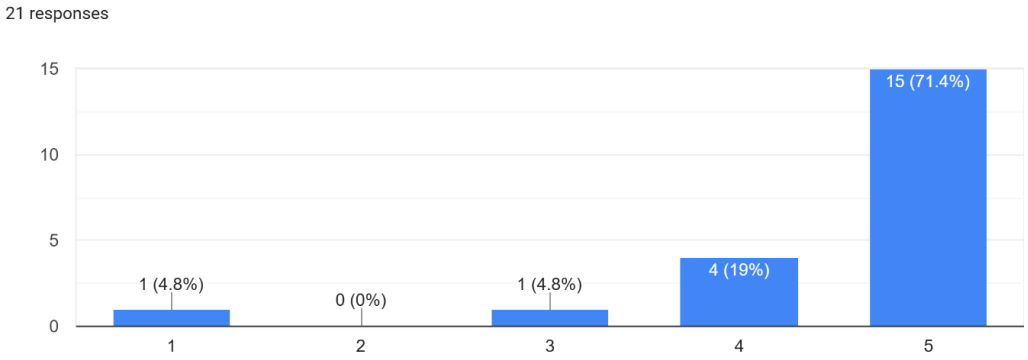


Figure 13. Sport as a context to talk about emotions and mental well-being

A clear majority of respondents (71.4%) **strongly agree** that sport provides a useful and appropriate setting to **discuss emotions and mental well-being.** An additional 19% selected 4 out of 5, **reinforcing a strong overall endorsement**. Very few respondents expressed hesitation, with only isolated responses at the lower end of the scale. These results indicate that Polish practitioners not only use sport for physical development, but also increasingly see it as a meaningful and realistic entry point for mental health conversations with young people.

Open question 1. Examples of sports-based activities that worked well

Respondents shared a variety of physical activities that worked well with their youth groups, highlighting both team-based and individual formats. **Roundnet** was the most frequently mentioned sport, noted for its inclusive approach, ease of learning, low cost, and effectiveness in building teamwork and social bonds. **Swimming** was also commonly cited, with practitioners noting its relaxing, confidence-boosting qualities and its ability to bring joy, movement, and mental relief. Other effective activities included **badminton, table tennis, hiking, blindfolded obstacle courses**, and **cooperative games** such as “Snakes” or tag, which were used as warm-ups or icebreakers. These methods were valued for encouraging **teamwork, trust, communication**, and creating an emotionally safe space, especially in diverse or newly formed groups. Many respondents emphasised that introducing **new or non-traditional sports** helped engage young people and break down barriers, particularly in intercultural or mixed-ability settings.

Open question 2. Main challenges when using sport with youth groups

Respondents identified several recurring challenges that affect the consistent and inclusive use of sport in youth work. **Motivation was the most commonly mentioned issue**, with many professionals noting that young people, especially in the digital age, often lack interest in physical activity or resist committing to regular participation. **Practitioners also described difficulty encouraging sustained engagement, team spirit, and openness to new formats**.

A second major challenge was **infrastructure**. Many respondents pointed to the **lack of access to appropriate facilities**, particularly during colder months or in schools with limited gym space. The **availability of equipment**, time constraints, and the **need to adapt activities** for groups with varying physical abilities or emotional needs were also highlighted. Several mentioned the **emotional sensitivity of participants**, resistance to feedback, or frustration with losing, which can hinder group dynamics.

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Together, these findings suggest that while sport has high potential, its success depends on more **accessible infrastructure, inclusive methods**, and greater **emotional and motivational support** for both young people and practitioners.

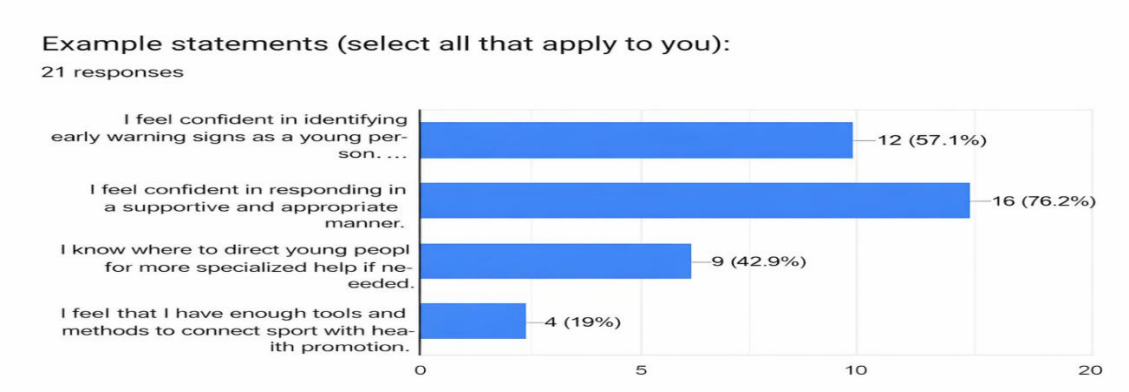


Figure 14. Confidence in noticing and responding to mental health difficulties, directing young people to specialised support, and the perceived availability of tools and methods to combine sport with mental health promotion

The majority of respondents expressed a **high level of confidence** in responding to young people's mental health needs. Most (76.2%) felt confident in **responding in a supportive and appropriate way**, while 57.1% reported feeling able to **recognise early warning signs** of mental health struggles. However, fewer participants (42.9%) stated they knew **where to refer young people** for more specialised help, and only 19% felt they had **sufficient tools or methods to actively link sport with mental health promotion**. These results suggest that while awareness and confidence in responding are strong, there are still clear gaps in having practical tools and knowing where to refer young people for further support.

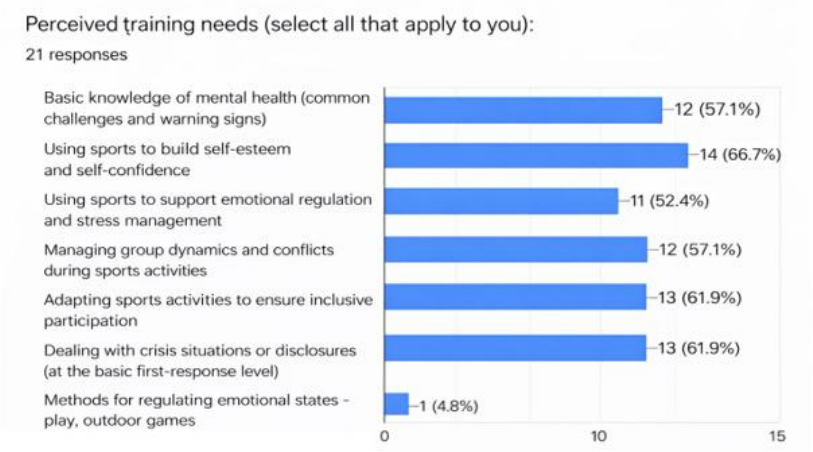


Figure 15. Perceived training needs

Respondents expressed a strong interest in a range of training areas to help them better support young people through sport. The most frequently selected area was **using sports to build self-esteem and self-confidence** (66.7%), followed closely by **adapting activities for inclusion** and **dealing with crisis**

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situations or disclosures (both 61.9%). Just over half of respondents expressed interest in **basic mental health knowledge** (57.1%), **group dynamics and conflict management** (57.1%), and **using sport to support emotional regulation and stress management** (52.4%). One respondent (4.8%) indicated the need for specific techniques for emotional regulation through play or outdoor games. These results show strong demand for practical, confidence-building training that blends mental health awareness with real-world application in sport-based settings.

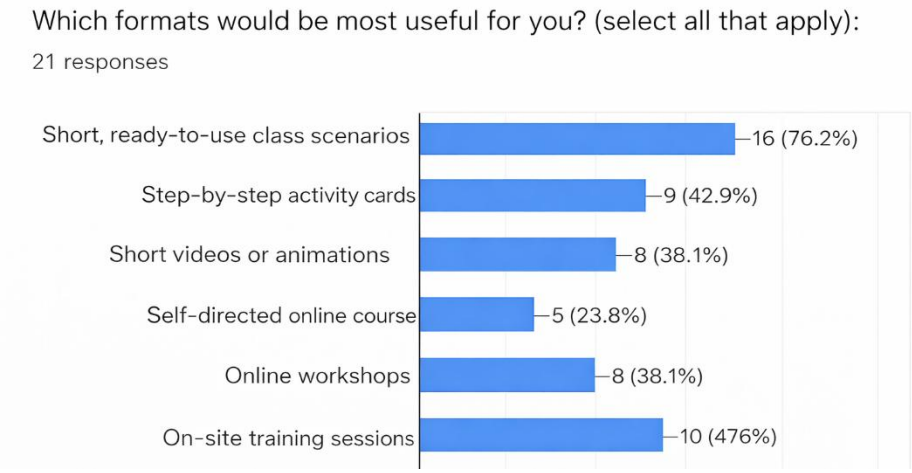


Figure 16. Preferred training and toolkit formats

When asked about the most useful formats for training and resources, respondents clearly favoured **short, ready-to-use class scenarios**, with 76.2% selecting this option. This suggests a strong preference for **practical, time-efficient materials** that can be easily applied in real-life settings. **On-site training sessions** (47.6%) and **step-by-step activity cards** (42.9%) were also popular, pointing to a need for both hands-on and guided formats. Fewer participants preferred **short videos** or **online workshops** (38.1% each), and just 23.8% selected **self-directed online courses**. Overall, the responses reflect a desire for **accessible, action-oriented tools** over more abstract or time-intensive learning formats.

Open question 3. What would make a MindFit Training Toolkit truly useful in practice?

Respondents emphasised that the toolkit should be **practical, easy to use**, and grounded in **real experiences**. Many asked for **ready-to-use materials** like class plans, activity cards, and illustrated resources. Others stressed the need for **clear, situation-based guidance**, especially tips for handling behavioural issues or unexpected situations. Several mentioned that content developed or validated by **experts (e.g., psychologists, coaches, therapists)** would boost the toolkit's credibility and usefulness.

Other key suggestions included:

- Mobile-friendly and easily accessible format
- Interactivity and adaptability for different age groups and needs
- Incentives and engagement tools (e.g., certificates, small prizes)
- Ideas tested in practice and tailored to youth contexts
- A mix of sport and psychology-based methods to enrich daily sessions

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Overall, the message was clear: the toolkit should be **simple, flexible, and grounded in real-life practice**, not theory-heavy or generic.

Additional Comments and Ideas

A few respondents offered practical ideas to enhance the MindFit Toolkit. These included providing the **materials in Polish**, ensuring **age-appropriate content**, and creating a **YouTube channel** with short training videos. Others suggested incorporating **fun, value-driven games** that build confidence and joy, and using **challenges** to boost engagement. While several participants had no additional input, the suggestions received reflect a continued emphasis on **accessibility, creativity, and emotional impact**.

Focus Group Results

Description of participants

The Poland focus group brought together youth workers and practitioners working directly with young people in community, non-formal education, and sports-related settings. Participants represented youth organisations, local initiatives, and sport-based activities involving adolescents and young adults. Their experience included work with young people from diverse backgrounds, including those facing social, economic, or geographical barriers.

Most participants reported already using sport or physical activity in their work, such as team games, outdoor activities, movement-based exercises, and group-building activities. Sport was usually seen less as a formal intervention and more as a practical way to engage young people, build trust, encourage participation, and create a more open atmosphere. At the same time, participants highlighted that while they often notice when young people are struggling, they do not always feel confident in responding or knowing when referral is needed.

Overall, the participant group provided practical insight into how sport is currently used in youth work in Poland, what challenges young people face, and what kind of support practitioners need to connect sport more intentionally with mental health and well-being.

Main themes

Several clear themes emerged from the Poland focus group. These related to the mental health and well-being challenges facing young people, the role of sport in engagement and support, barriers to integrating mental health into sport-based practice, enabling conditions, inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities, and expectations for the MindFit toolkit.

Mental health and well-being challenges facing young people

Participants agreed that many young people face stress, anxiety, low confidence, emotional pressure, loneliness, and uncertainty about the future. School-related pressure, family difficulties, financial insecurity, and the influence of social media were seen as important factors affecting well-being. Participants also noted that young people do not always openly speak about these issues, which makes it important to recognise signs through behaviour and participation.

Sport as a tool for engagement, connection, and emotional support

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Participants saw sport as a valuable way to reduce stress, improve mood, and build relationships. Team activities were especially valued for creating trust, belonging, communication, and peer connection. Sport was considered most effective when activities were enjoyable, inclusive, and focused on participation rather than competition. Participants stressed that sport can support mental well-being, but only when it is facilitated in a safe and sensitive way.

Barriers to integrating mental health into sports-based youth work

The main barriers identified were limited training, low confidence, lack of practical tools, and uncertainty about how to respond when a young person shows signs of distress. Participants also mentioned time limitations, lack of structured resources, and the tendency to see mental health as separate from everyday sports activities. Stigma around discussing mental health was also seen as a challenge.

Enablers and supportive conditions

Participants highlighted trust, small group settings, regular activities, and opportunities for reflection as important enabling factors. They also stressed the need for simple and practical methods that can be used easily in youth work and sports settings. Organisational support, training, and encouragement to work more holistically with young people were also seen as important.

Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities

Inclusion was identified as a key issue. Participants noted barriers such as financial limitations, transport problems, low self-confidence, language barriers, and fear of judgment. They stressed that inclusive sports-based youth work requires flexible, low-pressure activities, simple communication, peer support, and adaptation to different abilities and needs.

Ideas for the MindFit toolkit

Participants wanted the MindFit toolkit to be practical, simple, and easy to use. They asked for ready-made activity plans, step-by-step guidance, reflection exercises, and ideas for linking sport with emotional well-being. They also wanted guidance on recognising distress, responding safely, making referrals, and adapting activities for inclusive participation. Short, accessible materials, checklists, and real-life examples were seen as especially useful.

Overall, the discussion showed that sport has strong potential to support youth mental health and well-being in Poland, but that practitioners need more practical tools, confidence, and inclusive methods to use it effectively.

Selected anonymised quotes to illustrate key messages

- “Sport helps young people open up more naturally and feel part of the group.”
- “We can see when something is wrong, but we are not always sure how to respond.”
- “The activity itself helps, but the real impact depends on whether the space feels safe and inclusive.”

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4.2 Cyprus Context

In Cyprus, the mental health and well-being of youth have gained increasing significance in policy and practice discussions. Young people grow up in a context shaped by academic pressure, uncertainty about employment and future opportunities, social media influence, and, for some groups, social or geographical exclusion. These pressures can affect confidence, motivation, participation, and overall well-being. At the same time, there is growing recognition at the national level that youth policy cannot focus solely on education, employment, or participation, but must also address health, prevention, inclusion, and supportive environments for young people.

Within this context, sport and physical activity hold an important place in Cyprus. National policy frameworks already recognise sport as more than exercise or competition. The National Youth Strategy identifies health and well-being as a core area and promotes recreational activities and sports as tools to improve both physical and mental health, support personality development, and prevent social problems among young people. In parallel, the Cyprus Sports Organisation promotes broad participation through large-scale programmes such as Sports for All, which aim to increase access to physical activity across the population, including among vulnerable groups. This shows that, at the policy level, Cyprus already acknowledges the social and developmental value of sport for young people.

Cyprus also reflects broader European and international trends that link physical activity to public health, inclusion, and prevention. Existing national approaches, as reflected in the report draft, link sport to healthier lifestyles, social inclusion, and community participation, while schools, youth organisations, and community sport settings are seen as important spaces for positive youth development. In practice, this means that sport is often used to engage young people, build routine, encourage teamwork, and strengthen social bonds. For many young people, especially those less likely to engage in formal support settings, sport can offer an accessible and less stigmatising entry point for connection, self-expression, and participation.

At the same time, the Cyprus context also reveals a clear gap between recognising the value of sport and using it in a structured way to support mental health. While existing strategies and programmes address well-being, inclusion, and healthy lifestyles, they offer limited practical guidance on how youth workers, grassroots coaches, and community practitioners can integrate mental health literacy, emotional support, coping skills, or referral pathways into everyday sports practice. The report draft also highlights that coaches and youth workers often remain close to young people's daily realities, yet may feel underprepared to recognise distress, respond appropriately, or create psychologically safe environments. This weakens the potential of sport as a protective and preventive tool.

Cyprus, however, does show promising examples that build on this connection. Community sport programmes, school-based health and sports activities, youth exchanges, and newer projects focusing on mental well-being in sport demonstrate that there is already interest and experience in this field. These initiatives suggest that the national context is ready for more practical, targeted approaches that connect youth work, sport, and mental health in a stronger and more intentional way. Overall, the Cyprus context is characterised by growing awareness, supportive policy language, and relevant local practice, but also by clear capacity and implementation gaps. This makes Cyprus a relevant setting for

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the MindFit project, which can help translate broad policy intentions into practical tools and methods for those working directly with young people through sport.

National Policies and Strategies

Cyprus has embedded sport and physical activity within its broader youth and health strategies, with a growing emphasis on well-being and inclusion. The National Youth Strategy 2017-2022 (under revision) identifies "Health and Well-being" as a core field of action and explicitly promotes recreational activities and sports as tools to improve physical and mental health, develop character, and prevent violence, substance use, and other social problems among young people. [1]

The Cyprus Sports Organisation (CSO) Strategy is integrated into this Youth Strategy and underpins large-scale national "Sports for All" programmes targeting the general population and specific vulnerable groups. Objectives include lifelong physical activity, improvement of mental and physical health, promotion of fair play and sportsmanship, and encouraging "healthy hobbies" to help youth avoid crime, drugs and other problematic behaviours[2].

Cyprus also follows WHO recommendations on physical activity; the WHO Physical Activity Factsheet for Cyprus highlights multi-sectoral policies that integrate physical activity promotion into health, education and social inclusion, including special programmes for people in drug treatment and other vulnerable groups. In parallel, national mental health policy documents and recent high-level conferences under the Cypriot EU Council Presidency emphasise prevention, early intervention, and inclusive services for young people, recognising schools, youth organisations, and sports settings as key environments for promoting mental well-being and reducing stigma. [3]

Overall, policy frameworks acknowledge sport as a vehicle for health promotion, social inclusion, and skills development among youth, but they provide limited, concrete guidance or toolkits for youth workers and grassroots coaches on integrating mental health literacy, coping skills, and structured psychosocial support into everyday sport practice. [4]

Existing programmes -projects using sport for mental health/skills

In Cyprus, several initiatives already link sport, youth work and mental health or transversal skills, even if this is not always their primary label:

- The CSO "Sports for All" programme and its Social Sports components offer inclusive sport opportunities in communities across Cyprus and explicitly target groups such as people with psychological problems, chronic diseases and those undergoing drug rehabilitation, aiming to support their physical and mental health and social integration. [5]

[1] https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/cyprus/73-sport-youth-fitness-and-physicalactivity#:~:text=National%20Youth%20Strategy%202017%2D2022%20which%20sets%20Health%20and%20Well%2Dbeing
[2] https://youthpolicy.onek.org.cy/en/national-youth-strategy/8-pillars/
[3] https://cso.org.cy/
[4] https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/librariesprovider2/country-sites/physical-activity-2021-cyprus-eng.pdf
[5] https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/librariesprovider2/country-sites/physical-activity-2021-cyprus-eng.pdf

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- School-based extracurricular sports and health-education activities, highlighted in national and WHO documents, are used to promote physical activity, healthy lifestyles and life skills among children and adolescents, indirectly supporting mental well-being.
- Youth exchanges such as "Sport and Mental Health: Don't bury your emotions, let it flow", hosted in Cyprus in 2025, use a mix of sports, yoga, meditation, journaling, art therapy and group reflection to help 15–19-year-olds understand mental-health issues, express emotions and develop coping strategies.[6]
- Sport is often associated with competition, performance, and results. But what if it were also a positive and inclusive space that enhanced young people's mental well-being? This question is at the heart of MINDFIT – Empowering Minds: Enhancing children's mental fitness, a new initiative that raises awareness of inclusion and young people's mental wellbeing in sport. Co-funded by the European Commission, the project aims to support the psychological health and mental fitness of children, adolescents, and young adults in sports and educational settings by providing practical tools to all stakeholders and promoting more inclusive and mindful educational and sports environments.[7]
- Sport federations and NGOs have started integrating sports psychology and athlete mental-wellbeing content into their communication and training offers; for example, the Cyprus Tennis Federation provides information on psychological pressures faced by young athletes and the need for support structures around them. [8]

Main challenges and gaps

Desk research points to several Cyprus-specific challenges that MindFit can address:

- Limited systematic integration of mental-health content into grassroots sport. National sport policies link physical activity to mental and social benefits, but mainstream programmes (e.g., Sports for All, school sport) rarely include structured mental health literacy modules, coping skills training, or clear referral pathways for youth with emerging problems.[9]
- Capacity gaps among coaches and youth workers. Evidence from European projects involving Cypriot partners indicates that coaches and trainers often feel ill-equipped to recognise psychological distress, address bullying or emotional abuse in sport, and create psychologically safe environments, despite their frequent contact with young people.[10]
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[6] https://www.acpelia.org/post/sport-and-mental-health-don-t-bury-your-emotions-let-it-flow-sporty-mental-ye-in-cyprus-23-10-24
[7] https://cesie.org/en/news/promoting-mental-wellbeing-young-people-sport/
[8] https://www.tennis.com.cy/en/page/sports-psychology
[9] https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/cyprus/75-mental-health
[10] https://sports-tetris.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/TETRIS_PR1_National-Report_Cyprus_v3.0_FINAL.pdf
[11] https://cyprus-mail.com/2024/11/06/a-new-vision-for-sports-in-cyprus-building-a-healthier-more-inclusive-future

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Good Practices

Good Practice 1

Title of the practice/programme	Sports for All – Social Sports Programme
Country and organisation	Cyprus; Cyprus Sports Organisation (CSO)
Duration/period of implementation	Ongoing programme integrated into CSO Strategy and National Youth Strategy
Target groups (e.g. youth workers, young people 15–24, girls, NEETs, young people with disabilities)	General population (children, adolescents, adults, older adults) with specific sub-programmes for people with disabilities, people with psychological problems, people with chronic diseases, individuals undergoing drug-rehabilitation and their families.
Main objectives	• Promote lifelong participation in physical activity for all. • Improve physical and mental health through regular, supervised sport. • Ensure equal access to sport irrespective of age, gender, disability or socioeconomic status. • Use sport to prevent violence, substance abuse and other social problems among youth.
Description of the approach	Sports for All provides low-cost or free, community-based sport classes and recreational activities across Cyprus, delivered by trained instructors in local facilities. Social Sports sub-programmes are tailored to vulnerable groups, including those with psychological difficulties and people in drug-treatment, with adapted activities and small groups. Sport is used as a safe, structured context to build routines, social support and a sense of belonging while promoting healthy lifestyles.
Mental health and/or skill-building focus (e.g. stress management, confidence, social skills	Stress reduction, improved mood, increased self-esteem, social skills and community integration for vulnerable youth and adults.
Main results or outcomes (qualitative or quantitative)	National reporting highlights high participation rates and widening access to organised sport for people who otherwise might be excluded, with positive feedback on well-being and social inclusion.
Lessons learned / success factors	Strong public support, local delivery in many municipalities, symbolic participation fees and explicit focus on vulnerable groups make participation feasible and sustainable for families with fewer opportunities.
Link or contact details (if available)	YouthWiki – Cyprus, Chapter 7.3 Sport, youth fitness and physical activity.

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Good Practice 2

Title of the practice/programme	**Sport and Mental Health: Don't bury your emotions, let it flow (Youth Exchange)**
Country and organisation	Cyprus; implemented by ACPELIA and partners (Erasmus+ Youth Exchange)
Duration/period of implementation	13–24 October 2024 (12 days, including travel), hosted at Hylatio Tourist Village in Pissouri.
Target groups (e.g. youth workers, young people 15–24, girls, NEETs, young people with disabilities)	Young people aged 15–19 from several European countries (including 10 teenagers from the Cypriot organisation) plus youth leaders and stakeholders
Main objectives	• Promote young people's mental health through sport and physical activity. • Raise awareness about mental-health issues and reduce stigma among youth. • Develop practical coping skills (breathing, relaxation, self-expression) related to stress and anxiety. • Foster social inclusion, active citizenship and intercultural learning through group activities.
Description of the approach	The youth exchange combines daily sport activities with non-formal education methods, including yoga, golf, group games, art therapy, meditation, breathing exercises, journaling, reflection groups and cultural exchanges. Sport is framed as a medium for expressing emotions, building connections and exploring healthy lifestyle choices. Participants work in a supportive, multicultural environment that encourages openness about mental-health challenges.
Mental health and/or skill-building focus (e.g. stress management, confidence, social skills	Stress management, emotional expression, self-awareness, social connection, empathy, teamwork and communication skills.
Main results or outcomes (qualitative or quantitative)	The project description reports that sports participation is linked to lower stress, anxiety and depression and to higher resilience, self-regulation and executive functioning, which are explored with participants through experiential activities; the exchange offers concrete experiences that illustrate these benefits.
Lessons learned / success factors	Combining structured sport sessions with reflective and creative methods (art, journaling, group discussions) helps young people translate physical experiences into mental-health learning; hosting the project in a residential setting supports community building and peer support.

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Link or contact details (if available)	ACPELIA project page: “Sport and Mental Health: Don’t bury your emotions, let it flow”

Good Practice 3

Title of the practice/programme	**MINDFIT – Empowering Minds: Enhancing children’s mental fitness (CERV project, Cyprus partner)**
Country and organisation	Implemented in Cyprus, Greece and Italy; Cypriot partners
Duration/period of implementation	24-month project under the CERV programme, starting 1 May 2025
Target groups (e.g. youth workers, young people 15–24, girls, NEETs, young people with disabilities)	Children and adolescents in sport and educational settings; educators, coaches and youth practitioners working with them.
Main objectives	• Support psychological health and “mental fitness” of children and adolescents in sports and education contexts. • Increase awareness among professionals about mental-health challenges in sport settings and how to address them. • Develop and share tools and practices that integrate mental-fitness into sport and educational activities.
Description of the approach	The project brings together professionals in psychology, pedagogy and education from Cyprus, Greece and Italy to discuss cultural differences in how mental health is addressed in sport and to co-create tools and methodologies. The kick-off meeting in Nicosia focused on reflecting on mental well-being in sport settings and identifying common challenges such as the invisibility of mental-health needs and the lack of structured support for young athletes.
Mental health and/or skill-building focus (e.g. stress management, confidence, social skills	Mental-fitness concepts (resilience, emotional regulation, self-awareness), mentoring relationships in sport, and supportive educational practices that normalise discussion of mental-health issues among children and adolescents.
Main results or outcomes (qualitative or quantitative)	As an ongoing project, early results include a shared understanding among partners of key challenges and the development of a work plan for tools and training activities to be piloted in the three countries, including Cyprus.
Lessons learned / success factors	Cross-country collaboration anchored in Cyprus shows that mental health in sport is a common challenge; involving experts from psychology and education from the start

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	increases the quality and relevance of materials for coaches and youth workers.
Link or contact details (if available)	''Promoting mental wellbeing and mental fitness for young people through sport"

Good Practice 4

Title of the practice/programme	**EUYOUSPORT – Bringing Youth Policy to Sports**
Country and organisation	European project with Cypriot partners; promoted in Cyprus by the Cyprus Youth Council and ENGSO Youth.
Duration/period of implementation	Erasmus+ project around 2024–2026
Target groups (e.g. youth workers, young people 15–24, girls, NEETs, young people with disabilities)	Young sport leaders, youth workers in sport organisations, youth councils and sport clubs in Cyprus and other countries.
Main objectives	• Empower and connect young leaders in sport at the European level. • Integrate sustainability, social inclusion and mental-health issues into youth and sport policies. • Strengthen youth participation in sport-related decision-making
Description of the approach	In Cyprus, EUYOUSPORT activities are promoted through the Cyprus Youth Council, which offers information events and opportunities for young sport leaders to participate in European training and policy processes. The project links mental health and inclusion concerns to sport governance and encourages young Cypriots to shape more supportive sport environments within their clubs and communities.
Mental health and/or skill-building focus (e.g. stress management, confidence, social skills	Leadership, advocacy, policy-influencing skills, awareness of mental-health and inclusion issues in sport and development of youth-friendly, supportive sport environments
Main results or outcomes (qualitative or quantitative)	The project is building a network of young sport leaders, including Cypriots, who are better equipped to address mental-health and inclusion issues in sport policy and practice.
Lessons learned / success factors	Connecting mental-health concerns with youth leadership and policy participation enhances the likelihood of systemic change in sport structures, not only in isolated programmes.
Link or contact details (if available)	Cyprus Youth Council – EUYOUSPORT announcement

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Survey Results

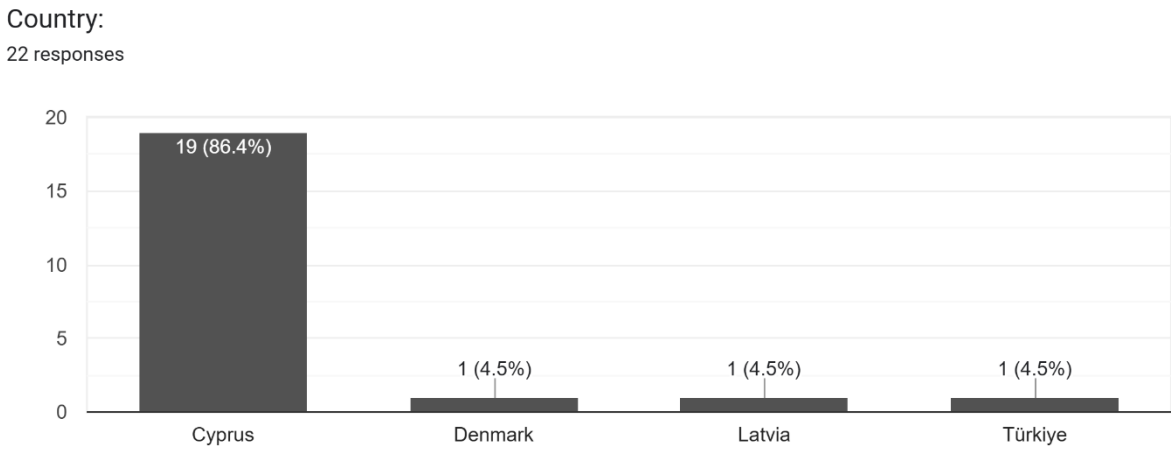


Figure 17. Country of respondents

The survey reached **22 respondents**. Most responses came from **Cyprus**. More specifically, **19 respondents were based in Cyprus**, and **one additional youth worker, originally from Cyprus but currently based in Denmark, also contributed**, bringing the Cyprus-related sample to **20 participants** in total. The survey also included **one response each from Latvia and Türkiye**. This shows that the findings are strongly grounded in the Cyprus context and include a small number of perspectives from other partner countries.

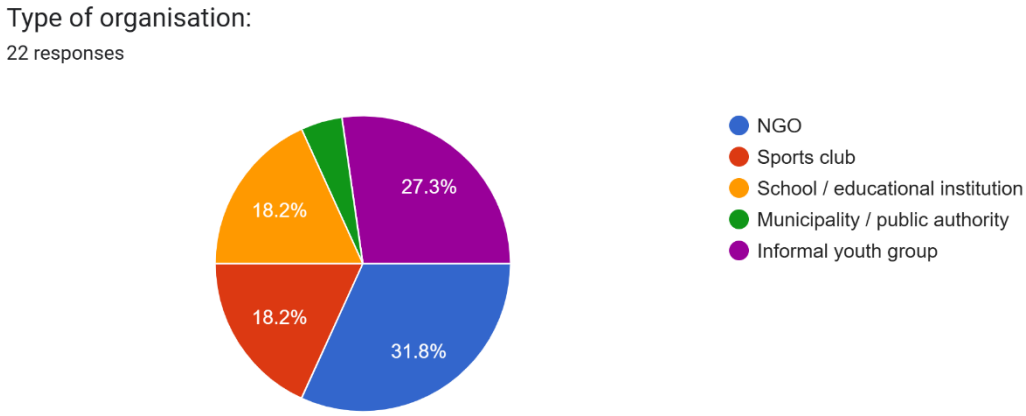


Figure 18. Type of organisation of respondents

The survey sample includes respondents from a **diverse range of organisations**. The largest group comes from **NGOs (31.8%, 7 respondents)**, followed by **informal youth groups (27.3%, 6 respondents)**. **Sports clubs** and **schools or educational institutions** each account for **18.2% (4 respondents each)**, while **municipalities or public authorities** represent **4.5% (1 respondent)**. Overall, this shows that the survey primarily reflects perspectives from civil society and youth fields, while also including views from sport, education, and public-sector settings.

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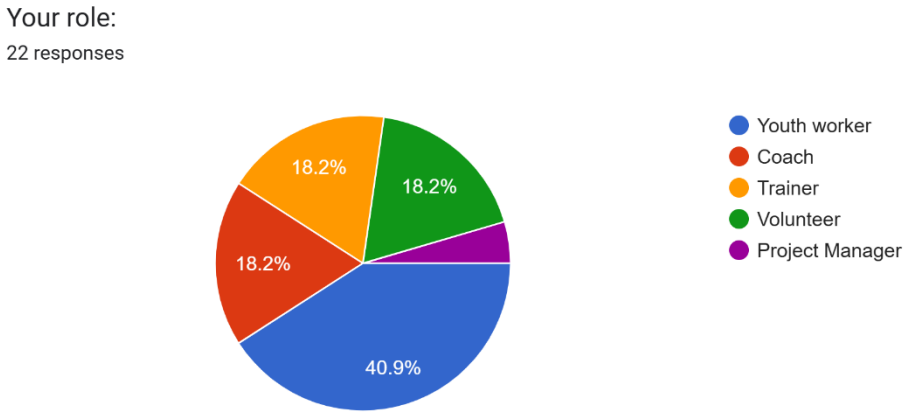


Figure 19. Role of respondents

The largest group of respondents were **youth workers (40.9%, 9 respondents)**. They were followed by **coaches, trainers, and volunteers**, each representing **18.2% (4 respondents each)**. **Project managers** made up **4.5% (1 respondent)**. This shows that the survey mainly reflects the views of **frontline practitioners** who work directly with young people, which is highly relevant for understanding how sport and mental health are addressed in everyday practice.

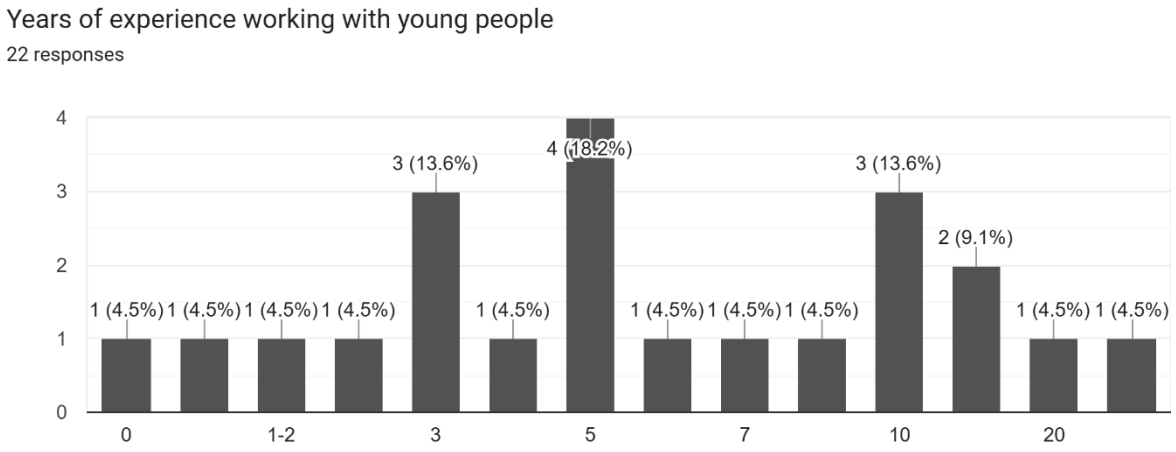


Figure 20. Years of experience working with young people

The respondents show a **wide range of experience**, from newcomers to practitioners with **20 years or more** of work with young people. The largest group reported **5 years of experience (18.2%, 4 respondents)**, while **3 and 10 years were also common, each at 13.6% (3 respondents)**. Overall, the sample includes both less experienced and more established practitioners, providing a balanced picture of views from different levels of practice and professional maturity.

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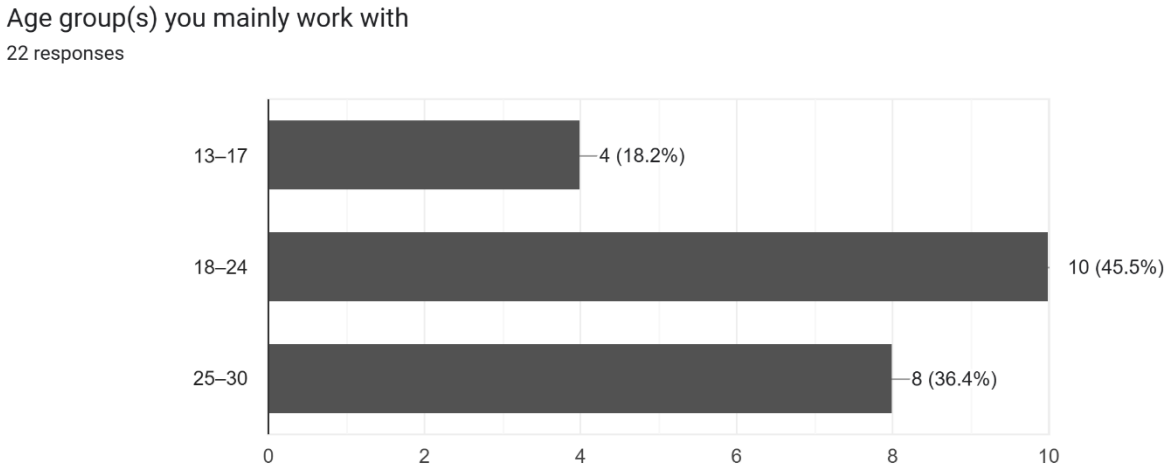


Figure 21. Age group(s) mainly served by respondents

Most respondents work mainly with **young adults aged 18-24 (45.5%, 10 respondents)**, followed by those working with the **25-30 age group (36.4%, 8 respondents)**. A smaller share works mainly with **adolescents aged 13-17 (18.2%, 4 respondents)**. This suggests that the survey findings primarily reflect practices among older youth and young adults, while still including some perspectives from younger adolescents.

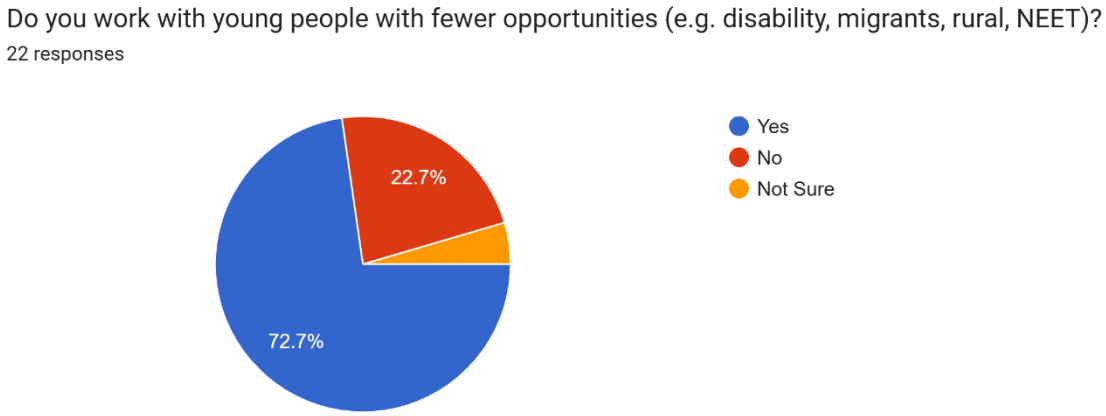


Figure 22. Work with young people with fewer opportunities

A clear majority of respondents **work with young people with fewer opportunities (72.7%, 16 respondents)**. In comparison, **22.7% (5 respondents)** said they do not, while **4.5% (1 respondent)** was not sure. This shows that the survey is strongly informed by practitioners who already work in inclusive or vulnerable youth contexts, which is important for understanding barriers, support needs, and the potential of sport-based approaches for more diverse groups.

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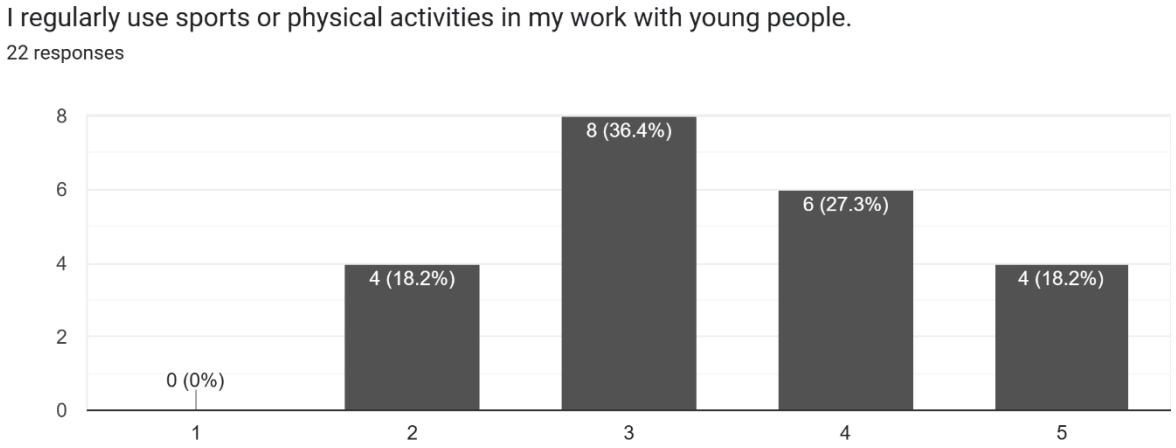


Figure 23. Regular use of sport or physical activity in work with young people

The responses show that sport and physical activity are used **fairly regularly** in youth work, although not always in a highly systematic way. The most common answer was **3 out of 5 (36.4%, 8 respondents)**, followed by **4 out of 5 (27.3%, 6 respondents)** and **5 out of 5 (18.2%, 4 respondents)**. Another **18.2% (4 respondents)** selected **2 out of 5**, while no respondent selected **1 out of 5**. Overall, this suggests that most participants already incorporate sport or physical activity into their work to some extent, which provides a good basis for the MindFit project to build on existing practice rather than introduce a completely new approach.

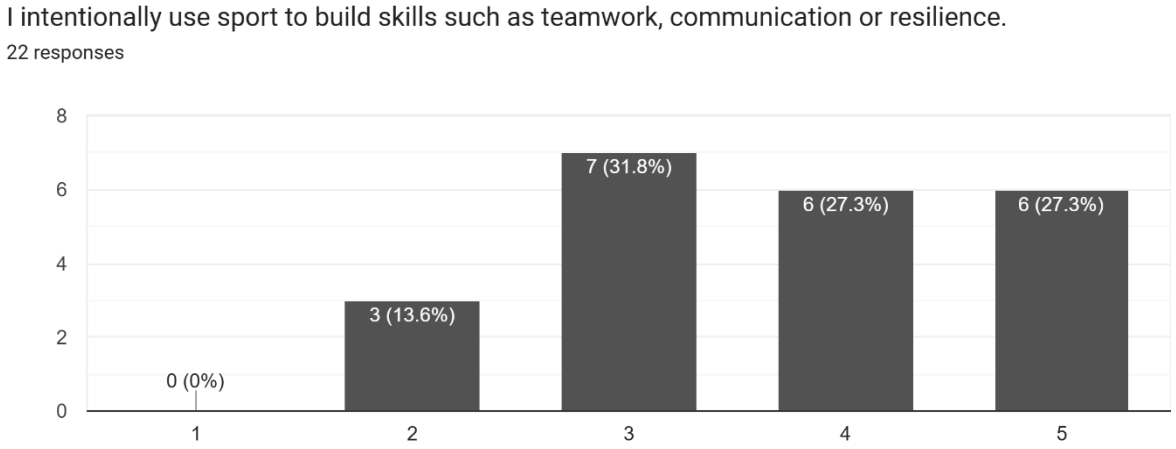


Figure 24. Intentional use of sport to build teamwork, communication, and resilience

The responses suggest that many practitioners intentionally use sport to develop broader personal and social skills. The most common response was **3 out of 5 (31.8%, 7 respondents)**, followed by **4 out of 5** and **5 out of 5**, each with **27.3% (6 respondents)**. A smaller group selected **2 out of 5 (13.6%, 3 respondents)**, while no respondent selected **1 out of 5**. Overall, this shows that sport is not used only for participation or recreation, but also as a tool to support skills such as teamwork, communication, and resilience, which are highly relevant for the aims of MindFit.

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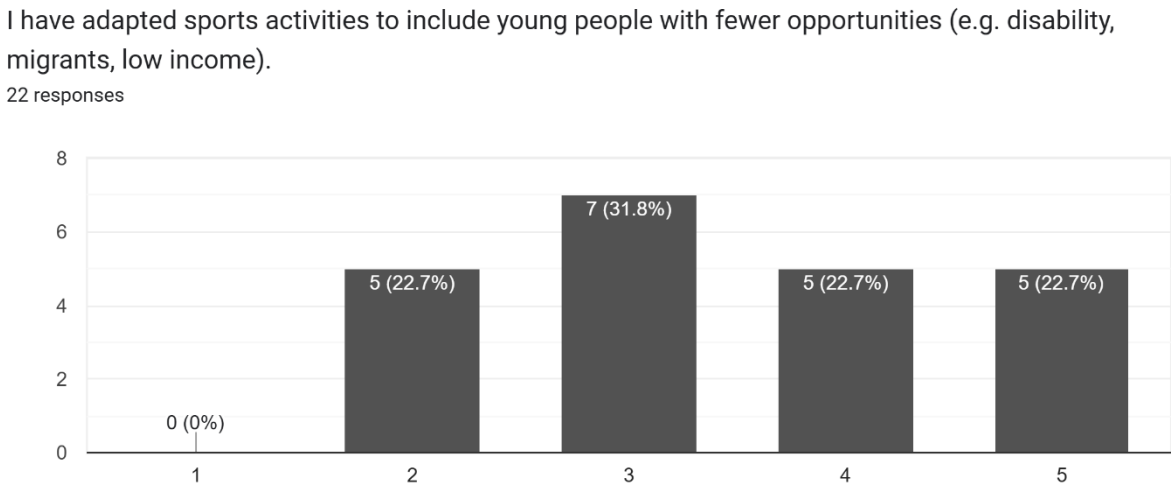


Figure 25. Adaptation of sports activities for young people with fewer opportunities

The responses show a **moderate to strong level of adaptation** of sports activities to include young people with fewer opportunities. The most common answer was **3 out of 5 (31.8%, 7 respondents)**, while **4 out of 5** and **5 out of 5** were each selected by **22.7% (5 respondents)**. Another **22.7% (5 respondents)** chose **2 out of 5**, and no respondent selected **1 out of 5**. Overall, this suggests that many practitioners are already making some effort to adapt activities for inclusion, but the results also point to uneven practice and a need for more structured support, tools, and guidance.

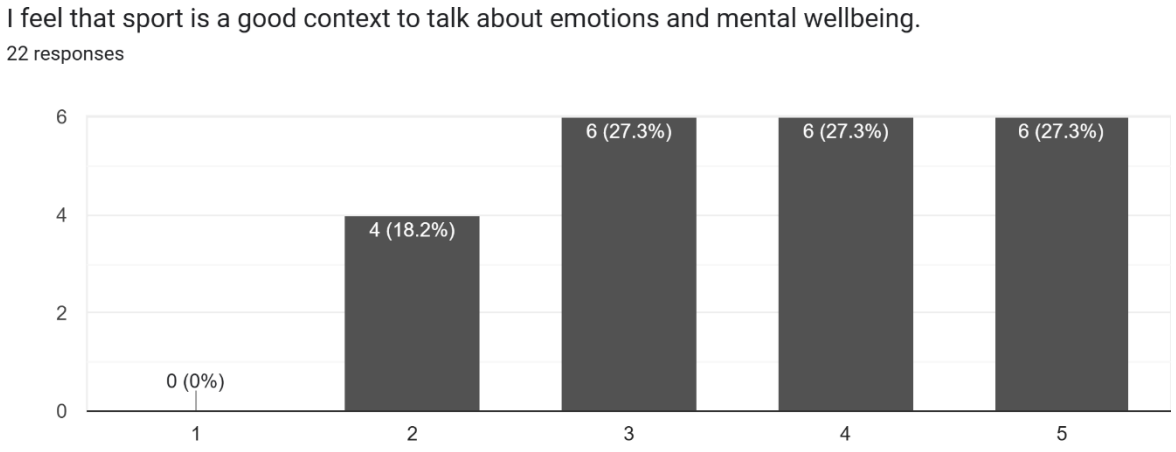


Figure 26. Sport as a context to talk about emotions and mental well-being

The findings show a **generally positive view** of sport as a setting to discuss emotions and mental well-being. Responses were spread across the upper-middle and high end of the scale, with **3 out of 5**, **4 out of 5**, and **5 out of 5** each selected by **27.3% (6 respondents)**. A smaller group selected **2 out of 5 (18.2%, 4 respondents)**, while no respondent selected **1 out of 5**. Overall, this suggests that most practitioners see sport as a useful and realistic entry point for conversations about well-being, even if confidence and practice levels may differ.

Open question 1. Examples of sports-based activities that worked well

Responses show that the most successful activities were **outdoor and team-based**, such as hiking, treasure hunts, volleyball, basketball, football, beach tennis, and cooperative group games.

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Participants highlighted that these activities worked well because they promoted **teamwork, communication, trust, problem-solving, and active participation**. Several responses also indicated that adapted, **non-competitive formats** were especially effective for mixed-ability and intercultural groups, helping young people feel included, relaxed, and connected.

Open question 2. Main challenges when using sport with youth groups

The most common challenges mentioned were **limited facilities**, **time constraints**, and **difficulties related to inclusion**. Respondents also referred to **different motivation levels**, especially among young people who do not see themselves as sporty, and the need to adapt activities for different physical abilities, confidence levels, and backgrounds. Overall, the responses suggest that while sport is seen as valuable, practitioners need **more accessible spaces, flexible methods, and stronger support for inclusive delivery**.

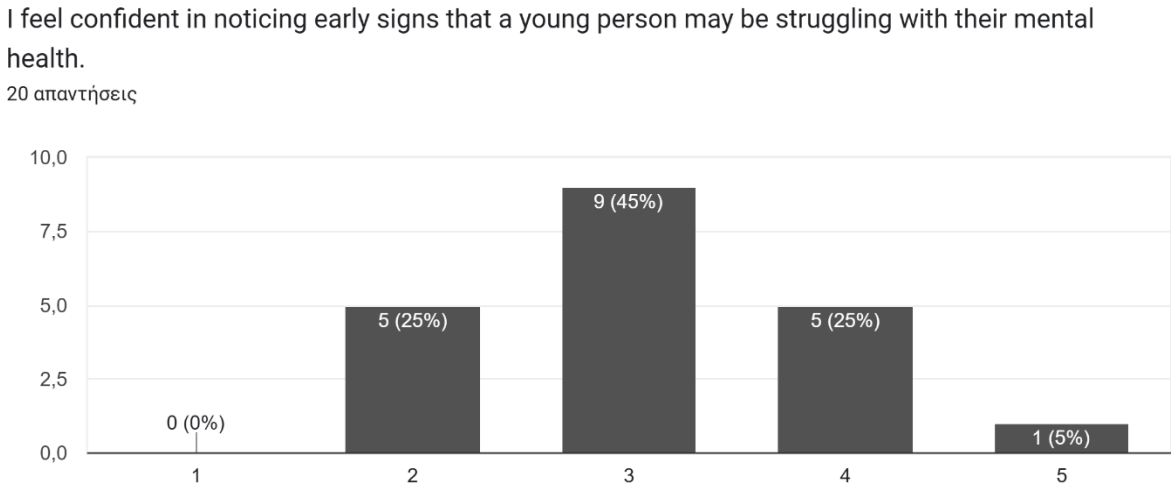


Figure 27. Confidence in noticing early signs of mental health difficulties

The responses suggest a **moderate level of confidence** in recognising early signs that a young person may be struggling with their mental health. The most common response was **3 out of 5 (45%, 9 respondents)**, while **25% (5 respondents)** selected **2 out of 5** and another **25% (5 respondents)** selected **4 out of 5**. Only **5% (1 respondent)** selected **5 out of 5**, and no one selected **1 out of 5**. Overall, this indicates that most respondents feel somewhat able to notice warning signs, but relatively few feel highly confident, pointing to a need for further training and practical guidance.

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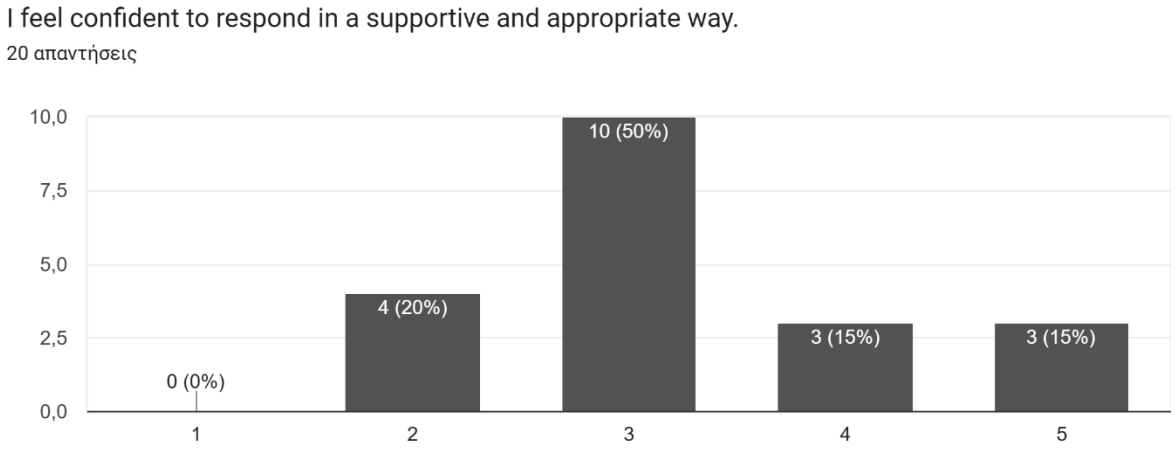


Figure 28. Confidence in responding in a supportive and appropriate way

The responses indicate a **moderate level of confidence** in responding to young people in a supportive and appropriate way. Half of the respondents selected **3 out of 5 (50%, 10 respondents)**, while **20% (4 respondents)** selected **2 out of 5**. A smaller share reported higher confidence, with **15% (3 respondents)** selecting **4 out of 5** and another **15% (3 respondents)** selecting **5 out of 5**. No respondent selected **1 out of 5**. Overall, this suggests that many practitioners feel somewhat able to respond, but confidence remains inconsistent, reinforcing the need for practical training and clear guidance.

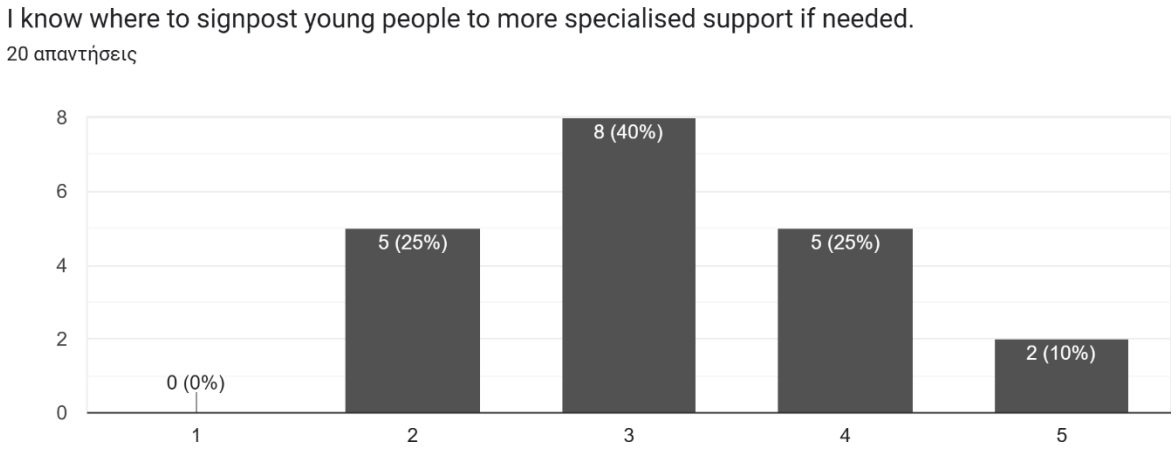


Figure 29. Knowledge of where to signpost young people for specialised support

The responses show a **moderate level of awareness** of where to refer young people for more specialised support. The most common answer was **3 out of 5 (40%, 8 respondents)**, while **25% (5 respondents)** selected **2 out of 5,** and another **25% (5 respondents)** selected **4 out of 5**. Only **10% (2 respondents)** selected **5 out of 5**, and no one selected **1 out of 5**. Overall, this suggests that some practitioners know referral pathways, but this knowledge is not yet strong or consistent across the sample.

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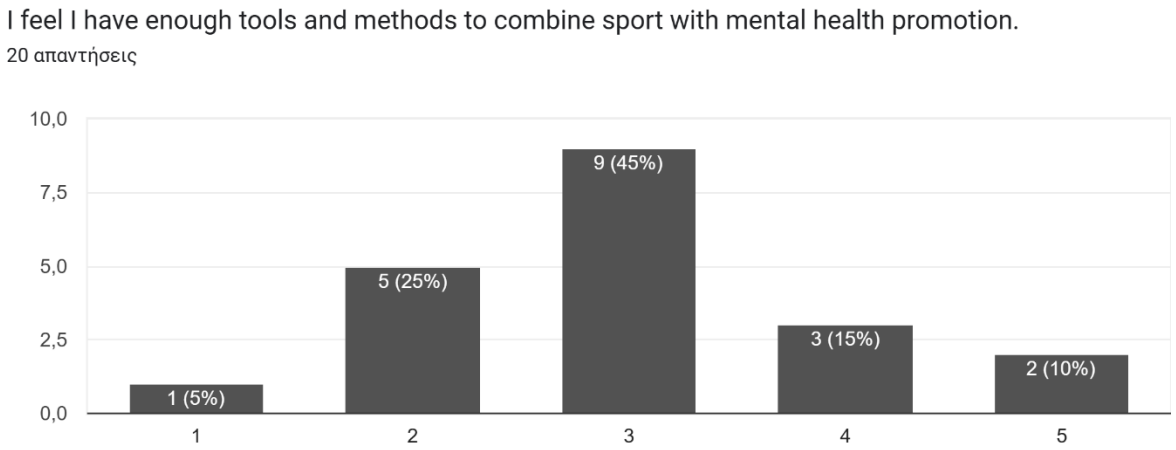


Figure 30. Perceived availability of tools and methods to combine sport with mental health promotion

The responses show that many practitioners do **not yet feel fully equipped** with the tools and methods needed to combine sport with mental health promotion. The most common response was **3 out of 5 (45%, 9 respondents)**, followed by **2 out of 5 (25%, 5 respondents)**. Only **25%** reported higher confidence, with **15% (3 respondents)** selecting **4 out of 5** and **10% (2 respondents)** selecting **5 out of 5**, while **5% (1 respondent)** selected **1 out of 5**. Overall, this points to a clear need for practical resources, ready-to-use methods, and targeted training through MindFit.

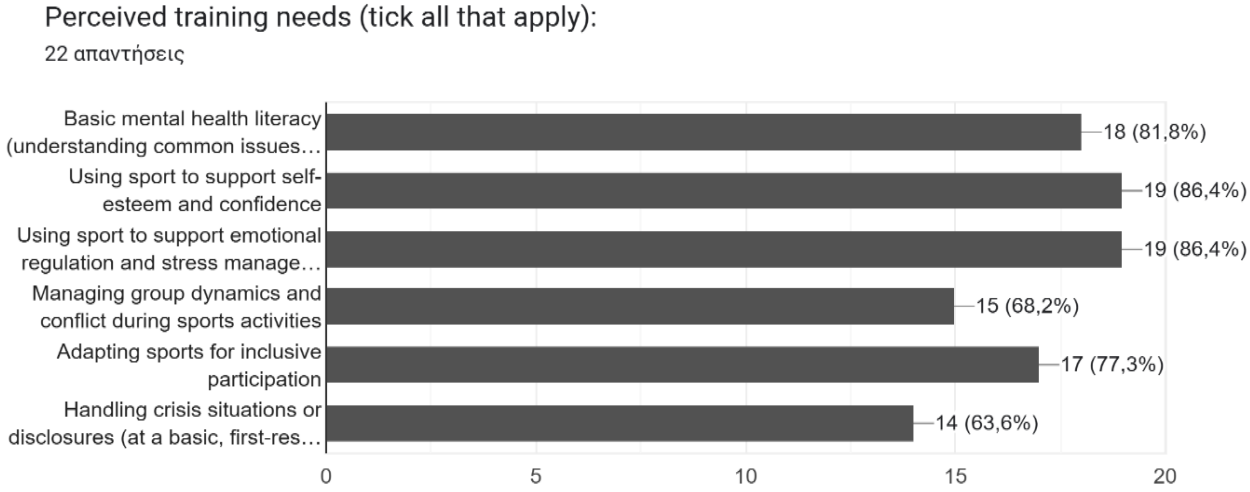


Figure 31. Perceived training needs

The results show strong demand for training across all areas, with the highest needs linked to using sport to support self-esteem and confidence, and to **using sport to support emotional regulation and stress management**, both selected by **86.4% (19 respondents)**. This was followed by **basic mental health literacy (81.8%, 18 respondents)** and **the adaptation of sports for inclusive participation (77.3%, 17 respondents)**. Lower, but still significant, needs were reported for **managing group dynamics and conflict (68.2%, 15 respondents)** and **handling crisis situations or disclosures at a basic level (63.6%, 14 respondents)**. Overall, the findings show that respondents want practical training that helps them connect sport, inclusion, and mental health in a safe and confident way.

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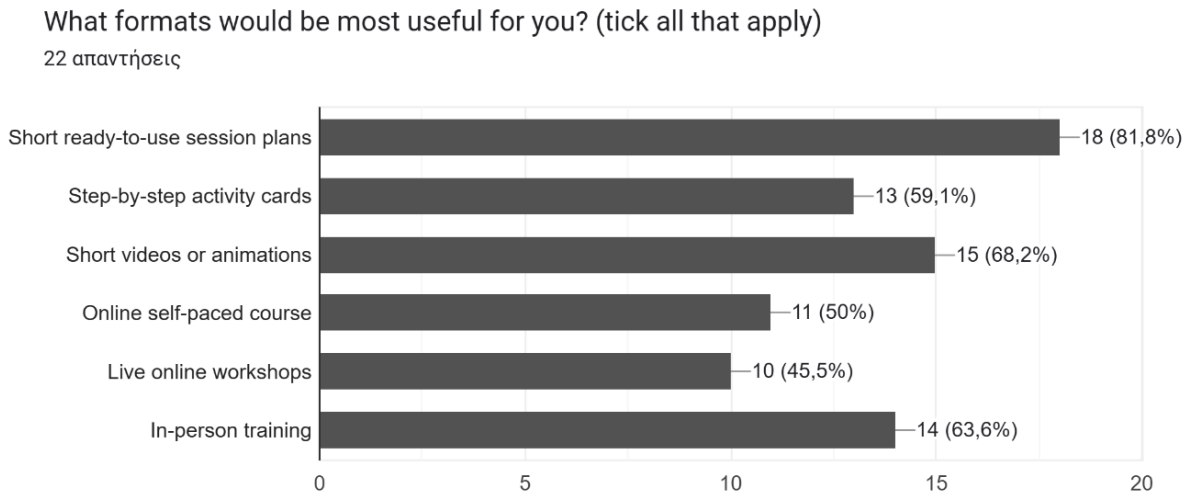


Figure 32. Preferred training and toolkit formats

The findings show a clear preference for **practical and ready-to-use formats**. The most useful option was **short, ready-to-use session plans (81.8%, 18 respondents)**, followed by **short videos or animations (68.2%, 15 respondents)** and **in-person training (63.6%, 14 respondents)**. **Step-by-step activity cards** were also strongly valued **(59.1%, 13 respondents)**. Lower but still relevant interest was reported for an **online self-paced course (50%, 11 respondents)** and **live online workshops (45.5%, 10 respondents)**. Overall, this suggests that respondents prefer simple, practical materials they can apply directly in their work, supported by a mix of visual and face-to-face learning.

Open question 3. What would make a MindFit Training Toolkit truly useful in practice?

Responses reveal a strong preference for a practical, straightforward, and ready-to-use toolkit. Participants consistently requested session plans, step-by-step activity cards, real examples, and adaptable exercises that clearly link sport with mental well-being, reflection, self-esteem, resilience, and emotional regulation. They also emphasised the need for guidance on inclusion, group management, challenging behaviours, refusal to participate, psychological safety, and responding to warning signs or disclosures. Overall, the findings indicate that the toolkit should be highly practical, easy to implement in real youth work settings, and flexible enough to accommodate different group sizes, abilities, time constraints, and facility limitations.

Focus Group Results

Description of participants

The Cyprus focus group brought together 7 youth workers and practitioners who work directly with young people in community, non-formal education, and sports-related settings. Participants represented local youth organisations, youth centres, community initiatives, and sports-oriented activities where young people engage in both structured and informal learning environments. Their experience included work with adolescents and young adults, generally ages 13 to 25.

The group included practitioners working with diverse target groups, including young people facing social, economic, and geographical barriers. Participants referred in particular to young people with

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fewer opportunities, such as NEETs, migrants, young people living in rural areas, and young people who may face exclusion due to disability, limited family support, low confidence, or economic disadvantage. This gave the discussion a practical, grounded perspective, as participants were able to reflect on both mainstream youth engagement and the realities of inclusion in Cyprus.

Most participants reported already using some form of sport or physical activity in their work with young people. These activities included football, volleyball, basketball, outdoor games, movement-based energisers, walking activities, and team-building exercises. In many cases, sport was not used as a formal intervention tool but rather as a practical, accessible way to build relationships, foster group cohesion, and attract young people who may not engage in more traditional workshop-based activities. Participants noted that sport often provides a more relaxed entry point for participation and helps young people express themselves more naturally.

At the same time, participants had different levels of confidence in addressing mental health and well-being issues through sports-based activities. While most felt able to notice when a young person appeared withdrawn, stressed, or emotionally overwhelmed, they also highlighted the limits of their role and the need for clearer guidance, practical tools, and referral pathways. This made the focus group particularly relevant, as participants were able to reflect not only on the value of sport but also on the support they need in order to use it more intentionally for youth mental health and well-being.

Overall, the participant group offered a relevant mix of field-based experience, practical knowledge of youth engagement, and awareness of the growing emotional and mental health needs of young people in Cyprus. Their contributions provided useful insight into both current practice and the gaps that the MindFit project can address.

Main themes

Several clear themes emerged from the Cyprus focus group. These relate to the role of sport in youth work, the main mental health challenges facing young people, the barriers and enabling factors for integrating mental health into sports-based practice, the inclusion of young people from fewer-opportunity backgrounds, and ideas for the MindFit toolkit.

Mental health and well-being challenges facing young people

Participants agreed that young people in Cyprus face a range of well-being challenges that affect their daily lives, motivation, and participation. The most frequently mentioned issues were stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, emotional pressure, loneliness, and uncertainty about the future. School and exam pressure were highlighted as major sources of stress, especially for teenagers. Participants also referred to social media pressure, negative self-comparison, financial insecurity, and family-related difficulties as factors that can reduce young people's confidence and emotional resilience.

There was broad agreement that these issues are becoming more visible in youth work settings. Participants felt that many young people struggle silently and do not always openly express what they are experiencing. For this reason, youth workers viewed sport and physical activity as useful spaces where signs of distress may become more visible through behaviour, mood, withdrawal, or lack of engagement.

Sport as a tool for engagement, connection, and emotional support

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A strong theme across the discussion was that sport can play a positive role in supporting youth mental health and well-being. Participants saw physical activity as a practical and accessible tool that helps reduce stress, improve mood, and create structure and routine. Team sports and group activities were also seen as important for building trust, a sense of belonging, communication, and peer connections.

Participants stressed that sport works particularly well when used in an inclusive, non-pressured way. They noted that young people often respond better when activities are enjoyable, informal, and focused on participation rather than performance. In this sense, sport was described not only as a physical activity but also as a relational tool that helps young people connect with others, feel part of a group, and build confidence.

At the same time, participants were clear that sport alone is not enough. They emphasised that the value of sport depends heavily on the way it is facilitated. A safe atmosphere, positive group dynamics, and sensitive facilitation are essential if sports-based activities are to support mental health in a meaningful way.

Barriers to integrating mental health into sports-based youth work

Although participants recognised the value of sport, they also identified several barriers to more intentional integration of mental health into their activities. The most common barrier was limited training and confidence. Many participants said they can recognise some warning signs when a young person is struggling, but they do not always know how to respond appropriately. They were particularly concerned about saying the wrong thing, crossing professional boundaries, or not knowing when and how to refer a young person to specialist support.

Other barriers included limited time, a lack of structured tools, and the absence of simple resources for everyday youth work. Participants explained that mental health is often seen as a specialist topic, while sports activities are seen as practical or recreational. As a result, there is a gap between the two, and youth workers need help to bridge that gap in a realistic way.

Stigma was also identified as an important challenge. Some participants felt that talking directly about mental health may still be difficult for some young people, families, or communities. For this reason, sports-based activities may offer a useful entry point, but facilitators still need methods to build trust and facilitate safe, open reflection.

Enablers and supportive conditions

The discussion also highlighted important enabling factors. Participants agreed that existing trust between the youth worker and the group makes it much easier to introduce well-being topics in sports settings. Small groups, informal environments, regular sessions, and activities that include time for reflection were all mentioned as helpful conditions.

Participants also highlighted the importance of having clear and practical methods. They wanted activities that are easy to run, adaptable to different age groups, and directly linked to emotional well-being, teamwork, confidence, or stress management. Organisational support was another enabling factor. Where staff have time, training, and encouragement to work more holistically with young people, it becomes easier to connect sports participation with broader well-being goals.

Inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities

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Inclusion was one of the strongest themes in the discussion. Participants agreed that sports activities can support inclusion, but only if they are designed carefully. They identified several barriers to participation for young people with fewer opportunities, including transport difficulties, financial barriers, language barriers, limited accessibility, low self-confidence, and fear of judgment. Competitive environments were also seen as a barrier for some young people, especially those who already feel excluded or insecure.

Participants said that inclusive sports-based youth work requires flexibility, adaptation, and outreach. This may include adjusting activities to accommodate different physical abilities, offering low-pressure, non-competitive formats, using simple language, providing peer support, and creating welcoming spaces where all young people feel safe joining. There was also recognition that inclusion does not happen automatically and that facilitators need practical guidance on adapting activities to different needs and contexts.

Ideas for the MindFit toolkit

Participants expressed a strong interest in a practical and user-friendly MindFit toolkit. They said the toolkit should be simple, realistic, and directly usable in daily youth work practice. The most requested elements were ready-made activity plans, step-by-step session guidance, reflection exercises, group-building activities, and practical tips for linking sport with emotional well-being.

They also wanted guidance on how to notice signs of distress, how to respond safely, and when to refer young people to other services. Inclusion tips were seen as essential, especially when working with diverse groups and young people from less privileged backgrounds. Participants suggested that the toolkit should combine short written materials with checklists, printable resources, and digital formats that can be accessed quickly. Real-life examples and case studies were also mentioned as helpful, along with brief facilitator training to build confidence in using the materials effectively.

Overall, the discussion showed that there is strong potential for sport to support youth mental health in Cyprus, but also a clear need for practical tools, stronger confidence, and inclusive methods that fit the reality of youth work settings.

Selected anonymised quotes to illustrate key messages

Below are selected anonymised quotes that reflect the main messages raised during the focus group:

- “Sport helps young people relax and connect. Sometimes they speak more openly after an activity than in a formal discussion.”
- “We can often see when a young person is not well, but we do not always know what the right way to respond is.”
- “Physical activity can reduce stress, but it depends a lot on the atmosphere. If the environment feels safe, the impact is much stronger.”

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5 Comparative Findings



The comparative findings below bring together the main results from the desk research, survey, and focus group phases in Poland and Cyprus. Taken together, they show strong convergence between the two national contexts. In both countries, sport is already recognised as a valuable space for youth engagement, inclusion, and well-being, yet the intentional integration of mental health support into everyday sport practice remains underdeveloped. Differences between the two contexts are visible mainly in the profile of practitioners involved, the settings where sport is used, and the level of confidence and structure already present in practice.

Comparative findings from the desk research

Theme	Poland	Cyprus	Comparative finding	Implication for MindFit
Policy framing	Sport is embedded in youth, education, health, and public-health policy, with emphasis on healthy lifestyles, resilience, teamwork, and prevention. Mental health is addressed mainly indirectly through prevention and health promotion.	Sport is embedded within youth and health strategies, with strong emphasis on well-being, inclusion, prevention, and supportive environments. Mental health is recognised, but practical guidance remains limited.	Both countries recognise sport as a tool for youth development and well-being, but neither provides sufficiently operational guidance for grassroots practitioners on mental health integration.	The toolkit should translate broad policy intentions into clear, usable methods for everyday youth work and grassroots sport.
Existing practice base	Poland has school-based PE and extracurricular sport, municipal sport-for-all initiatives, NGO-led projects, Erasmus+ cooperation, and growing awareness of	Cyprus has Sports for All, school-based sport and health activities, youth exchanges linking sport and mental health, MINDFIT-related practice, and sport leadership initiatives such as EUYOUSPORT.	Both countries already have relevant practice examples, but mental health is often indirect rather than structured as an explicit sport-based support approach.	MindFit should build on existing practice rather than start from zero.

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	athlete stress and burnout.			
Main system gap	Limited explicit integration of mental health into grassroots sport; high performance orientation; fragmentation between sport, education, and mental health services.	Limited systematic integration of mental health into grassroots sport; capacity gaps among coaches and youth workers; few clear referral pathways.	The central gap in both countries is not awareness of sport's value, but the lack of operational tools, structured methods, and coordinated support pathways.	The toolkit should include both preventive methods and practical guidance on response and referral.
Inclusion dimension	Inclusion is present through local initiatives and NGOs, but varies by organisation and access to facilities and support.	Inclusion is strongly visible in policy language and programmes, especially for vulnerable groups in community sport settings.	Inclusion is a shared priority, but implementation remains uneven in both countries.	Inclusion should be integrated across all toolkit modules, not treated as a separate add-on.
Strongest added value of MindFit	Better support for coaches and youth workers in linking sport with emotional literacy, well-being, and safe practice.	Stronger practical connection between youth work, sport, and mental health, especially in community and inclusive settings.	MindFit is relevant in both contexts because it can fill the gap between policy recognition and practice-level implementation.	The final toolkit should work across school, club, NGO, and community settings.

Comparative findings from the survey

Theme	Poland	Cyprus	Comparative finding	Implication for MindFit
Respondent profile	21 respondents; many from schools or educational institutions (47.6%), followed by NGOs and sports clubs. The largest role group was	22 survey responses overall, including 20 linked to the Cyprus context; largest groups came from	Poland reflects a more school and coaching-oriented sample; Cyprus reflects a more youth work and civil-society-	The toolkit should be relevant to both formal and non-formal settings.

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	instructors/trainers, followed by coaches.	NGOs and informal youth groups, with youth workers as the largest role group.	oriented sample.	
Use of sport in practice	Sport is already a core method: 85.7% reported very regular use, and 81% intentionally use it to build teamwork, communication, and resilience.	Sport is used regularly but less intensively and less systematically; the most common rating was 3 out of 5 for both regular use and intentional use for soft skills.	Sport is established in both contexts, but Poland shows higher intensity of current use, while Cyprus shows broader but more moderate use.	The toolkit should support both advanced users and practitioners at an earlier stage of intentional practice.
Inclusion	52.4% actively work with young people with fewer opportunities; 52.4% strongly adapt activities for inclusion.	72.7% work with young people with fewer opportunities; activity adaptation is moderate to strong, but more uneven.	Inclusion is central in both contexts, but Cyprus respondents appear more heavily engaged with vulnerable groups, while Poland shows stronger reported adaptation among those already working in sport settings.	The toolkit should include adaptable formats for mixed-ability, intercultural, and lower-confidence groups.
Sport as a well-being context	71.4% strongly agree that sport is an appropriate setting to discuss emotions and mental well-being.	Cyprus respondents also view sport positively as a setting for well-being discussions, but	Both countries support the basic premise of MindFit, though Polish responses appear more	The toolkit can confidently frame sport as a valid entry point for emotional

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		answers are more spread across the mid-to-high range.	strongly consolidated.	and mental well-being.
Confidence and tools	Most Polish respondents feel able to respond supportively (76.2%) and over half can notice warning signs (57.1%), but only 42.9% know referral pathways and just 19% feel they have enough tools to combine sport with mental health promotion.	Cyprus respondents reported only moderate confidence in noticing distress, responding appropriately, signposting to support, and having enough tools.	Poland appears stronger in confidence but weak in tools and referral. Cyprus appears weaker across confidence, tools, and referral, but with similar needs overall.	Toolkit content should combine confidence-building, structured methods, and signposting guidance.
Training needs and formats	Top needs include self-esteem, inclusion, crisis situations, basic mental health knowledge, and group dynamics. Preferred formats are short class scenarios, on-site training, and activity cards.	Top needs include self-esteem, emotional regulation, mental health literacy, inclusion, group dynamics, and handling disclosures. Preferred formats are session plans, videos, in-person training, and activity cards.	There is strong alignment on content and strong demand for practical, ready-to-use formats in both countries.	A modular toolkit with session plans, activity cards, visual materials, and training support is clearly justified.

Comparative findings from the focus groups

Theme	Poland	Cyprus	Comparative finding	Implication for MindFit
Main youth challenges	Stress, anxiety, low confidence, emotional	Stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, emotional	The two focus groups describe almost the same	The toolkit should begin from real

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	pressure, loneliness, uncertainty, school pressure, family issues, financial insecurity, and social media influence.	pressure, loneliness, uncertainty, school/exam pressure, financial insecurity, family difficulties, and social media pressure.	well-being pressures affecting young people.	youth stressors, not only from sport technique.
Role of sport	Sport is seen as a way to reduce stress, build relationships, create openness, and support mood and belonging.	Sport is seen as a practical, accessible space for reducing stress, improving mood, creating routine, and building trust and belonging.	Sport is valued in both countries as a relational and emotional support tool, not only a physical activity.	MindFit should frame sport as both activity and facilitated social process.
Main barriers	Limited training, low confidence, lack of practical tools, stigma, time constraints, and uncertainty around response and referral.	Limited training and confidence, lack of structured tools, time constraints, stigma, and uncertainty about boundaries and referrals.	The barriers are strongly shared across countries.	The toolkit should directly address practitioner uncertainty and safe boundaries.
Enablers	Trust, small groups, regular activities, reflection, and practical methods.	Trust, small groups, informal environments, regular sessions, reflection, and practical adaptable methods.	The enabling conditions are nearly identical.	Toolkit activities should assume facilitation conditions, not just content delivery.
Inclusion	Barriers include financial limits, transport, low self-confidence, language barriers, and fear of judgement.	Barriers include transport, financial barriers, language barriers, accessibility, low self-confidence,	Inclusion challenges are closely aligned, with Cyprus placing especially strong emphasis on	Inclusion guidance should be embedded in each module.

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		and fear of judgement.	fewer-opportunity groups.	
Toolkit expectations	Ready-made plans, step-by-step guidance, reflection exercises, response guidance, referral advice, and inclusive adaptation.	Ready-made activity plans, step-by-step guidance, reflection exercises, practical tips, response guidance, referral advice, and inclusive adaptation.	The requested toolkit design is highly consistent across both countries.	The final toolkit should be concise, practical, and highly transferable.

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6 Cross Country Synthesis

Cross-Country Synthesis

The comparative evidence from **Poland** and **Cyprus** shows a **strong shared foundation** for the **MindFit project**. In both countries, sport is recognised as **more than a physical** activity. It is seen as a practical way to engage young people, build connection, strengthen confidence, and **support wider psychosocial development**.

1 Shared foundation across both countries

- Sport is already **as tool for youth** engagement and well-being.
- It helps create **connection, trust and belonging**.
- It provides a less formal and less stigmatising space **for pileelonging**.
- **Youth workers** have **great as guidance**.



2 Shared gap between potential and practice



- There is not enough imple**mentation** of sport.
- **mental health** frameworks remain underdeveloge.
- youth workers lack thastally in movement *hiset* bul **also** in the **social and relational space it creates**.

3 Survey findings: common needs, different starting points

- **Sport** is **stronger** '**sport practice base,** but stil. the same.
- Across the desk research.
  - Sport can support inclusion, if designed carefully.
  - Main barriers. financial, transport, and mixed abiites.



4 Inclusion as a central condition

- **Sport can support inclusion** if they are designed carefully.
- Main barriers ‹financial, transport. nel,enched youth ǫrenting.
- Marker **btility and resilience**.



6 Focus group message: the issue is not belief, but practice

- Practitioners already believe that sport **can support** mental health.
- Need **support to** translate belle]fs into structured practices.

5 Contextual differences that matter

- **Poland**, a stronger school and coaching **environment**, soheth programs,
- **Cyprus**, a more mixed and communnity-based youth work environment.



7 Lessons from good practices

- **Poland**, Erasmus+ **practices** and **Cyprus, youth programmes,** youth excnanges, and leaderem oriented initiatives.



8 Six cross-country priorities for the toolkit



1. Treat sport as a **relational and** preventive **tool**, not just a physical.
2. **Strengthen practitioner confidence** in noticing, responding, and signposting.
3. **Embed inclusion** throughout the toolkit, that, fic real-life.
4. Offer readyto-use formats that work inlo let esslale ŦeaI- life

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1. Shared foundation across both countries

The evidence shows several common points:

- Sport is already valued as a tool for youth engagement and well-being.
- It helps create connection, trust, confidence, and a sense of belonging.
- It provides a less formal and less stigmatising space for participation and self-expression.
- Its value lies not only in movement itself, but also in the social and relational space it creates.

2. Shared gap between potential and practice

At the same time, the findings show that the potential of sport is still not being used in a sufficiently intentional or structured way in either country.

The desk research shows that:

- both Poland and Cyprus include sport within broader youth, health, and inclusion frameworks
- in both cases, the connection between sport and mental health remains underdeveloped in practical guidance
- Poland tends to frame mental health more indirectly, through prevention, healthy lifestyles, and well-being promotion
- Cyprus uses more explicit language around well-being and inclusion

Despite this difference in framing, both countries face the same practical limitation:

- youth workers, coaches, and grassroots practitioners do not have enough operational support
- they need clearer guidance on mental health awareness, emotional regulation, coping skills, and signposting within everyday sport activities

3. Survey findings: common needs, different starting points

The survey results reinforce this shared gap, while also showing some national differences.

Poland

- sport is used more intensively and systematically in daily practice
- there are very high levels of regular use of sport
- practitioners report strong intentional use of sport for teamwork, communication, and resilience
- respondents also reported higher confidence in responding supportively to young people

However, important gaps remain:

- referral knowledge is still limited
- respondents reported very low confidence in having enough tools to connect sport with mental health promotion

Cyprus

- sport is clearly present in youth work

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- it is seen positively as a context for emotions and well-being
- its use is less systematic
- practitioners report more moderate confidence in noticing distress, responding appropriately, and signposting to specialist support

Overall comparison

In simple terms:

- Poland shows a stronger **sport practice base**
- Cyprus shows a stronger **youth work and inclusion orientation**
- both countries converge on the same need for practical tools and structured guidance

4. Inclusion as a central condition

A second major area of convergence is inclusion. Practitioners in both countries stressed that sport can support inclusion, but only when it is carefully designed and facilitated. The main barriers mentioned were:

- financial barriers
- transport difficulties
- language barriers
- mixed abilities
- low confidence
- fear of judgment
- unequal access to facilities

The findings also show that competitive formats can discourage participation, especially for young people who already feel insecure, excluded, or less physically confident.

This leads to an important conclusion:

- sport is not automatically beneficial
- its mental health and inclusion value depends on how activities are structured
- it also depends on how facilitators manage group dynamics and whether young people experience the space as safe, adaptable, and non-judgmental

5. Focus group message: the issue is not belief, but practice

The focus groups add another important shared insight. Practitioners in both countries already believe that sport can support mental health. Their concern is not whether sport helps, but how to use it safely and effectively.

Participants often said that they can notice when a young person is struggling, but they are unsure:

- how to respond
- what language to use
- where professional boundaries lie

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- when referral is necessary

This is highly important for the toolkit design. The main challenge is not persuasion. It is practical translation. Practitioners need support to move from intuition and goodwill to confident, structured action.

6. Contextual differences that matter

There are also some differences between the two countries that the toolkit should respect.

Poland

- a stronger school and coaching environment
- a higher share of respondents from educational institutions
- more coaching roles
- a younger main age group served

This suggests that in Poland, practitioners may benefit from formats that fit more directly into:

- class-based settings
- structured activities
- coach-led delivery

Cyprus

- a more mixed youth work environment
- stronger NGO and informal youth group representation
- a larger share of practitioners working with young people with fewer opportunities

This suggests that in Cyprus, materials need to work especially well in:

- mixed groups
- community-based settings
- non-formal youth work environments
- more adaptable and inclusion-oriented practice contexts

These differences do not require two separate toolkits, but they do support a **modular toolkit with flexible entry points**.

7. Lessons from good practices

The good practice examples from both countries also point to the value of combining sport with reflection, participation, and supportive facilitation.

Poland

In Poland, roundnet-based and Erasmus+ practices show the value of:

- low-threshold activities
- inclusive participation
- socially engaging formats

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Cyprus

In Cyprus, community programmes, youth exchanges, and leadership-oriented initiatives show that sport can be linked with:

- emotional expression
- social inclusion
- broader youth development goals

The cross-country lesson is clear:

- activities work best when they combine action with meaning
- sport alone may support mood and connection
- stronger mental health value appears when sport is combined with reflection, debriefing, inclusion strategies, and supportive relationships

8. Six cross-country priorities for the toolkit

1. **Treat sport as a relational and preventive tool**, not only a physical one.
2. **Strengthen practitioner confidence** in noticing, responding, and signposting.
3. **Embed inclusion throughout the toolkit**, rather than placing it in one separate section.
4. **Provide short, ready-to-use formats** that fit real-life constraints such as limited time, mixed groups, and uneven facilities.
5. **Balance simple mental health literacy with clear boundaries**, so practitioners feel supported without being pushed into specialist roles.
6. **Ensure the toolkit works across settings**, including schools, clubs, NGOs, and informal youth spaces.

9. Sustainability and long-term use

A final synthesis point concerns sustainability. In both countries, respondents showed limited interest in abstract or highly theoretical materials. They consistently preferred:

- practical session plans
- activity cards visual tools
- facilitated training opportunities

A toolkit that is:

- modular
- practical
- adaptable

has a much stronger chance of being integrated into everyday youth work and sport practice in both countries and beyond.

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7 Conclusions and Final Recommendations

The transnational evidence from Poland and Cyprus shows that sport already offers a strong and credible entry point for supporting young people's mental health and well-being. In both countries, sport is already used in daily practice and is valued for participation, connection, resilience, teamwork, and confidence-building. The main gap is not belief in the value of sport, but the lack of practical tools, confidence, and clear guidance to use it intentionally, safely, and inclusively. The findings also show that inclusion, psychological safety, and realistic delivery conditions are central to success. For this reason, the MindFit Toolkit should be practical, modular, and easy to use across schools, clubs, NGOs, youth centres, and community settings.

- ✓ Sport is already a strong and accepted entry point for youth mental health and well-being.
- ✓ Practitioners need more practical tools, confidence, and guidance on safe response and referral.
- ✓ Inclusion and psychological safety must be treated as core design principles.
- ✓ The toolkit should use short, ready-to-use, and adaptable formats.
- ✓ It should include basic mental health literacy, activity guidance, reflection tools, and signposting support.
- ✓ A six-module structure is justified by the findings from both countries.
- ✓ The toolkit should be piloted in diverse settings and with mixed groups of young people.
- ✓ Long-term value will be stronger if the toolkit is combined with short training and peer exchange.

Proposed modules and methods for the MindFit Training Toolkit

Proposed module/topic	Why it is needed based on the findings	Suggested methods and tools
Module 1. Understanding youth mental well-being in sport settings	Both countries show that practitioners need basic mental health literacy and a clearer understanding of the pressures facing young people, including stress, anxiety, loneliness, low confidence, school pressure, and social media pressure.	Short input sheets, myth/fact cards, youth stress mapping, case examples, warning-sign checklist, reflective prompts for practitioners
Module 2. Creating psychologically safe and inclusive sport spaces	Inclusion and safety were central in both countries. Activities work better when they are non-competitive, adaptable, and sensitive to different needs and confidence levels.	Inclusion checklist, activity adaptation guide, participation ladder, non-competitive alternatives, environment scan, peer-support techniques
Module 3. Using sport to build self-	Self-esteem and confidence were among the highest training	Ready-made session plans, cooperative games,

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esteem, confidence, and resilience	priorities, and both countries see sport as useful for teamwork, resilience, and belonging.	challenge-based activities, success reflection cards, strength-spotting exercises, group debrief templates
Module 4. Emotional regulation, stress management, and reflection through sport	Emotional regulation and stress management were core needs, especially in Cyprus, and respondents in both countries linked sport with mood, calm, and emotional relief.	Breath and movement routines, cool-down reflection activities, mood check-in tools, body-awareness exercises, journaling prompts, guided debrief questions
Module 5. Noticing distress, responding supportively, and signposting	Practitioners in both countries highlighted uncertainty around response, boundaries, and referral, while survey data showed gaps in tools and signposting knowledge.	Observation guide, do/say-don't-say tips, basic response protocol, referral map template, role-play scenarios, safeguarding reminder sheet
Module 6. Planning and facilitating MindFit sessions in real settings	Both countries asked for simple, ready-to-use, realistic resources that fit time constraints, mixed groups, and everyday youth work conditions.	Session planning template, activity cards, facilitation checklist, time-adjustment options, indoor/outdoor alternatives, mixed-group adaptation notes, simple evaluation forms

Final recommendation

Based on the transnational results, the MindFit Training Toolkit should be designed as a **practical six-module resource** supported by **session plans, activity cards, debrief tools, inclusion guidance, response guidance, and short training inputs**. This format fits the strongest common message from Poland and Cyprus: practitioners already believe in the value of sport, but they need simple, structured, and adaptable ways to use it more intentionally for youth mental health and well-being.

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- Best starting point for official sport policy, public information, funding, and linked sport institutions in Poland.
- Polish Sport Development Strategy 2040
- Useful for the current strategic direction of Polish sport policy and long-term national priorities.
- Programmes of the Ministry of Sport and Tourism
- Good source for current ministry programmes, funding streams, and implementation tools.
- Sport Powszechny / Sport for All
- Especially relevant for grassroots participation, physical activity promotion, and inclusive sport.

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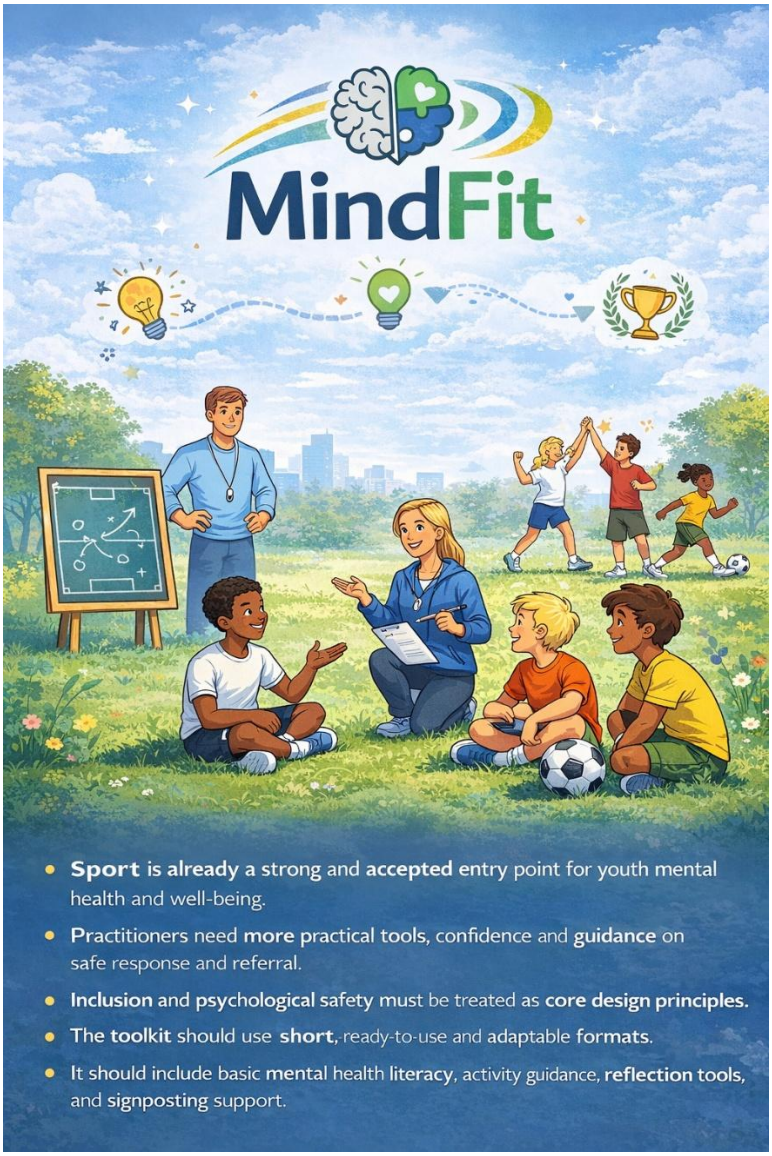
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