MindFit

Enhancing Youth Mental Health & Well-being Through Sports

National Report Poland

WP2: MindFit Training Toolkit



Prepared by KAMIENICA 1

2026

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MINDFIT
INCLUSIVE SPORT, STRONGER MINDS

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1. Introduction

Across Europe, and increasingly in Poland, the mental health of children and young people has become a pressing social and public health issue. Rising levels of stress, anxiety, loneliness, and emotional difficulties among young people are connected to multiple factors, including academic pressure, social inequality, limited access to support services, the influence of digitalisation, and the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Young people with fewer opportunities - such as those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, migrant communities, rural areas, or with limited access to inclusive education and leisure activities - are especially vulnerable to mental health challenges and social exclusion.

At the same time, sport and physical activity remain among the most accessible and widely used tools for engaging young people across diverse social contexts. Beyond their well-documented physical health benefits, sport-based activities offer important opportunities for psychosocial development, peer connection, emotional regulation, and the strengthening of transversal skills such as teamwork, communication, resilience, and self-confidence. When implemented in an inclusive and youth-centred way, sport can create safe spaces where young people feel valued, supported, and empowered.

The MindFit project responds to these challenges by exploring and strengthening the connection between youth mental health, sport, and non-formal education. The project is grounded in the belief that sport should not only focus on performance and competition but also serve as a supportive environment that promotes well-being, inclusion, and personal growth. MindFit seeks to equip youth workers, trainers, coaches, and educators with practical tools, methodologies, and digital resources that enable them to intentionally integrate mental health awareness and transversal skill development into everyday sports activities.

A core principle of MindFit is inclusivity. The project places particular emphasis on working with young people who face barriers to participation in both sport and mental-health support systems. Through peer learning, capacity-building activities, inclusive sports practices, and open digital tools, MindFit aims to strengthen professionals' competencies while empowering young people to better understand and manage their mental well-being. Rather than adopting a clinical approach, the project focuses on prevention, early support, and the creation of psychologically safe environments in sport and youth work settings.

This national report contributes to the MindFit project by examining the current situation in Poland at the intersection of youth mental health, sport, and youth work. It provides an overview of existing policies, strategies, programmes, and practices, and identifies gaps, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. By combining desk research with empirical input from practitioners working directly with young people, the report highlights how sport

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is currently used to support well-being, where additional support is needed, and how initiatives such as MindFit can add value at the grassroots level.

Ultimately, the report aims to inform the development of MindFit training materials and tools, ensuring they are grounded in real needs and practical realities. By strengthening the capacity of those working with young people, MindFit seeks to contribute to more inclusive, mindful, and supportive sport environments that foster both mental well-being and lifelong engagement in physical activity.

2. Methodology

The Polish national report draws on three methods: desk research, an online survey, and focused consultations with professionals. Together, these approaches provide insight into how sport and youth work relate to mental well-being in Poland.

Desk Research

The desk research reviewed national and EU-level sources relevant to the Polish context, with a focus on youth, mental health, sport, and inclusion. Materials included government strategies, institutional reports, project documentation, and examples of good practice. Priority was given to sources that:

- Address the Polish context or apply to youth and sport nationally;
- Relate to mental health, inclusion, and non-formal education;
- Are produced by recognised institutions or programmes;
- Offer practical insight into gaps, needs, and opportunities for youth support through sport.

Survey

The online survey collected responses from professionals working with young people through youth work, sport, education, or community-based programmes. The sample was purposive, involving practitioners with direct experience in sport-based youth engagement and mental well-being. Participants included youth workers, coaches, trainers, and educators. The survey explored how sport is currently used, challenges around mental health, and areas where practitioners need further support or tools. Data were gathered via a structured online form circulated through partner networks and social media.

Focus Group

Qualitative input came from a **single focus group with 10 practitioners** working directly with youth in Poland. Participants represented a range of youth and sport organisations, including those working with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. The discussion explored

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how mental health is addressed in practice, how sport supports engagement and inclusion, and what tools would be useful for the MindFit project. Insights contributed to the section on practitioner perspectives.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. For the focus group, participants were informed in advance about the objectives and how their contributions would be used. They signed a consent form confirming their agreement to participate and be cited anonymously in the report. No sensitive personal data was stored. All inputs were handled in accordance with GDPR principles, particularly given the topic's relevance to mental well-being and youth inclusion.

3. Desk Research Findings

3.1. 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.

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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.

3.2. Existing programmes and projects

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 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.

3.3. Main challenges and gaps

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

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- 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.

3.4. Best practice template

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

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	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 https://kamienica1.pl/
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.

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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://gryfroundnet.pl/ 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
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

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Link or contact details (if available)	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects

4. Field Research Findings

4.1. Survey Results

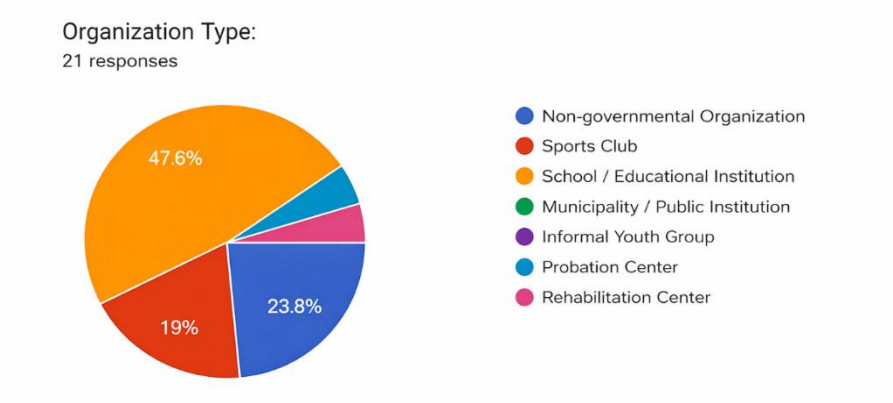


Figure 1. Type of organisation of respondents

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.

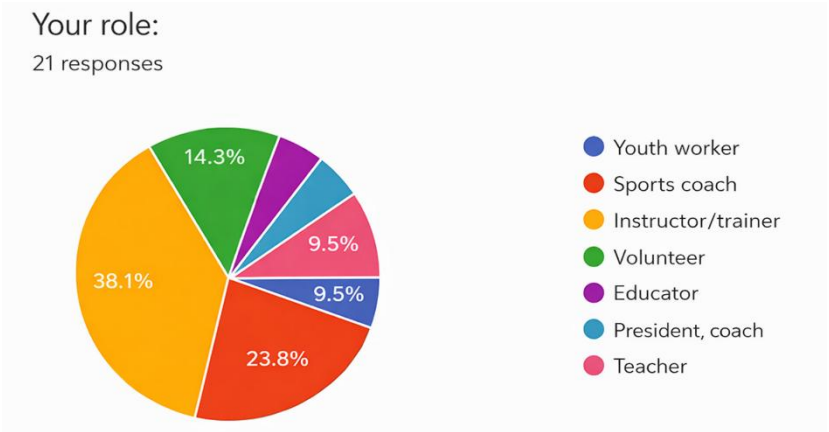


Figure 2. Role of respondents

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

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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.

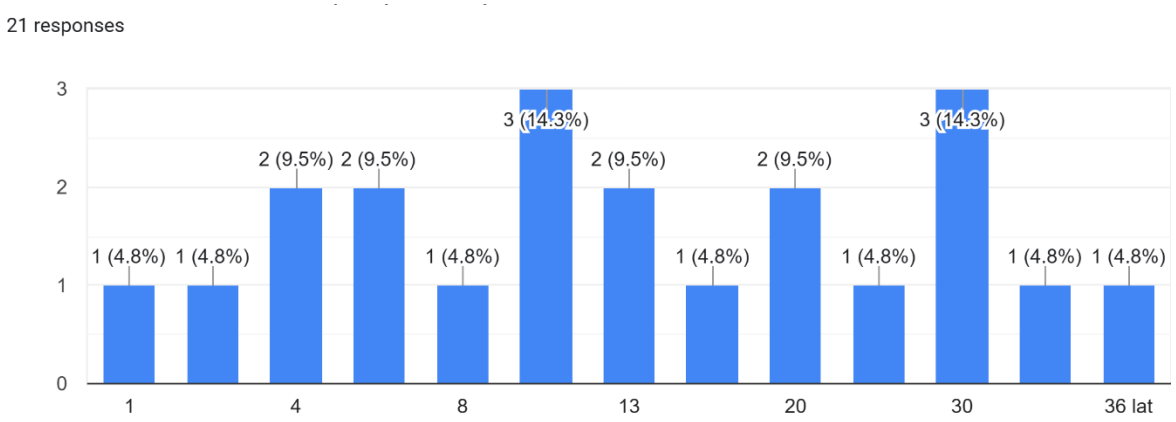


Figure 3. Years of experience working with young people

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.

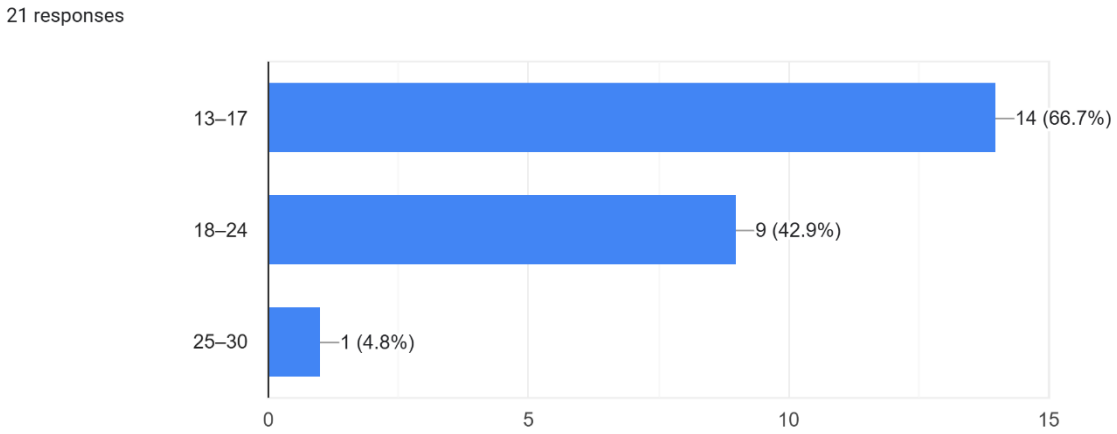


Figure 4. Age group(s) mainly served by respondents

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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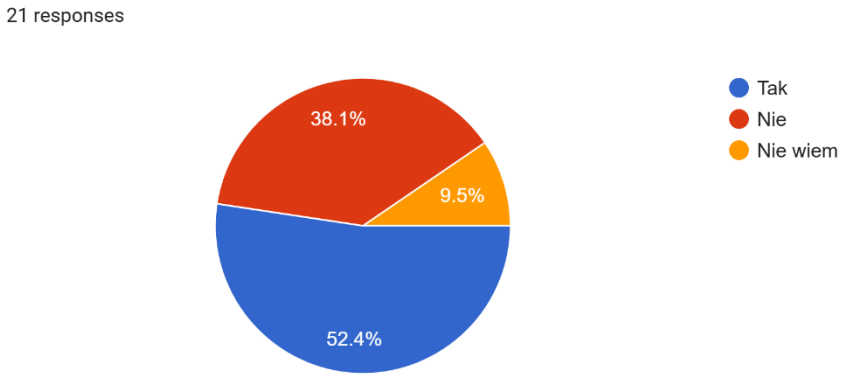


Figure 5. Work with young people with fewer opportunities

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.

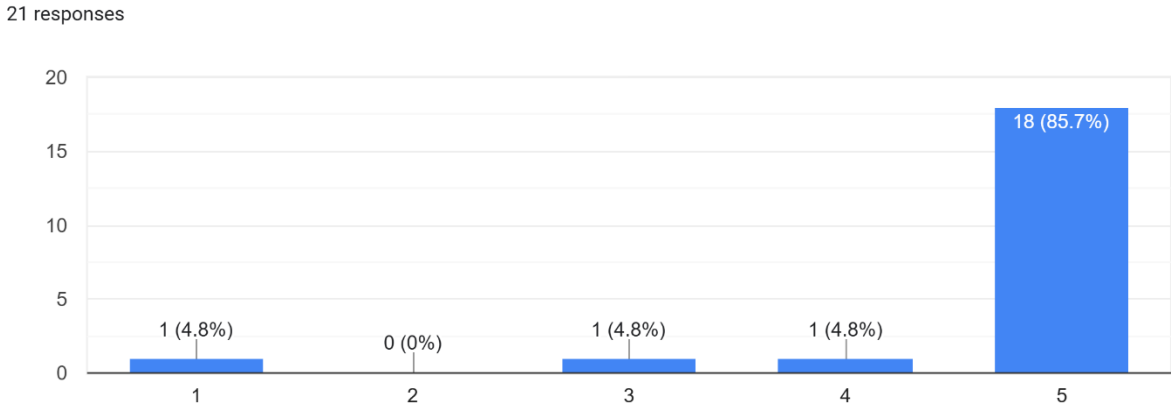


Figure 6. Regular use of sport or physical activity in work with young people

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.

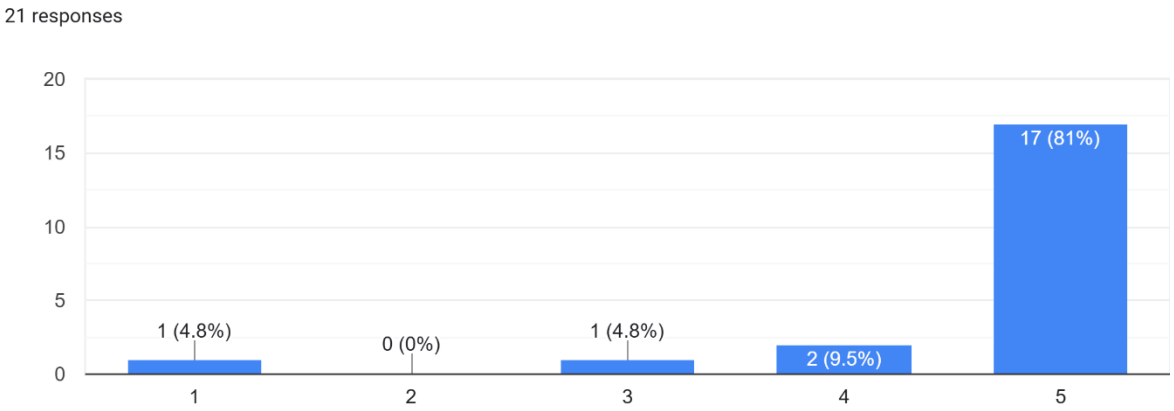


Figure 7. Intentional use of sport to build teamwork, communication, and resilience

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.

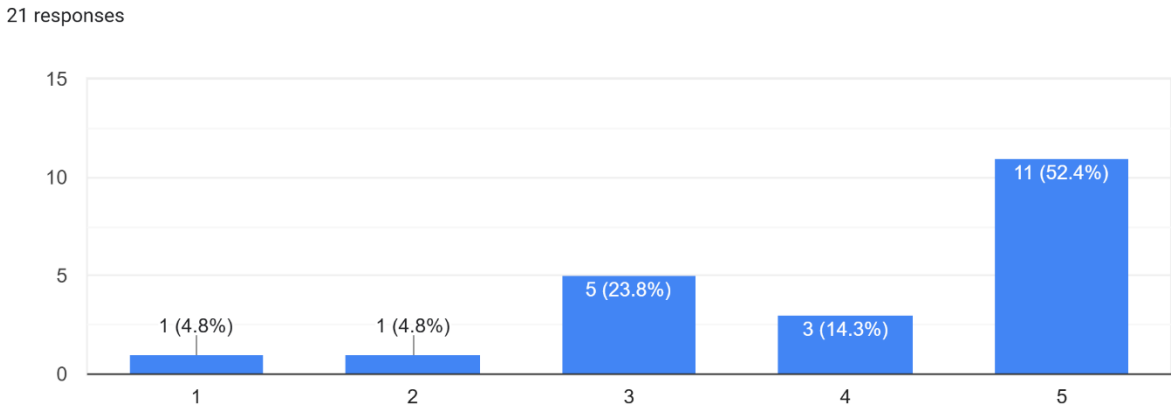
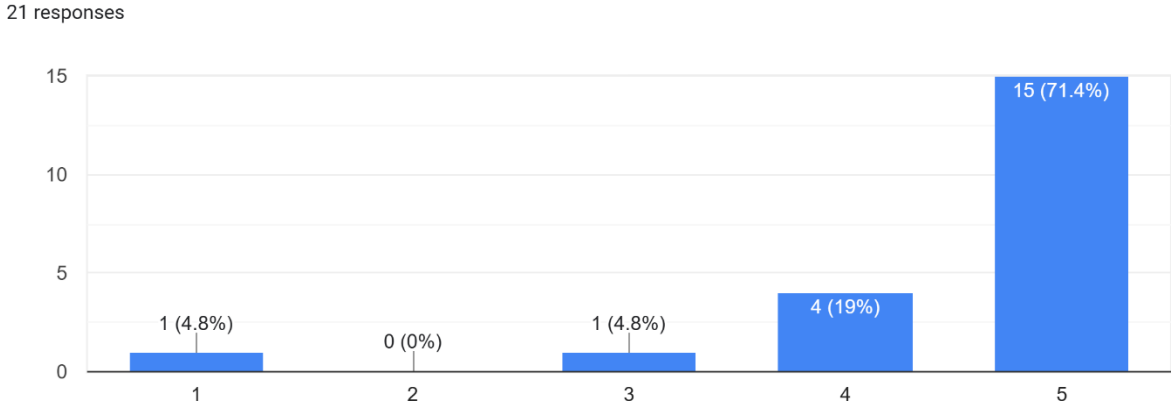


Figure 8. Adaptation of sports activities for young people with fewer opportunities

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.



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.

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.

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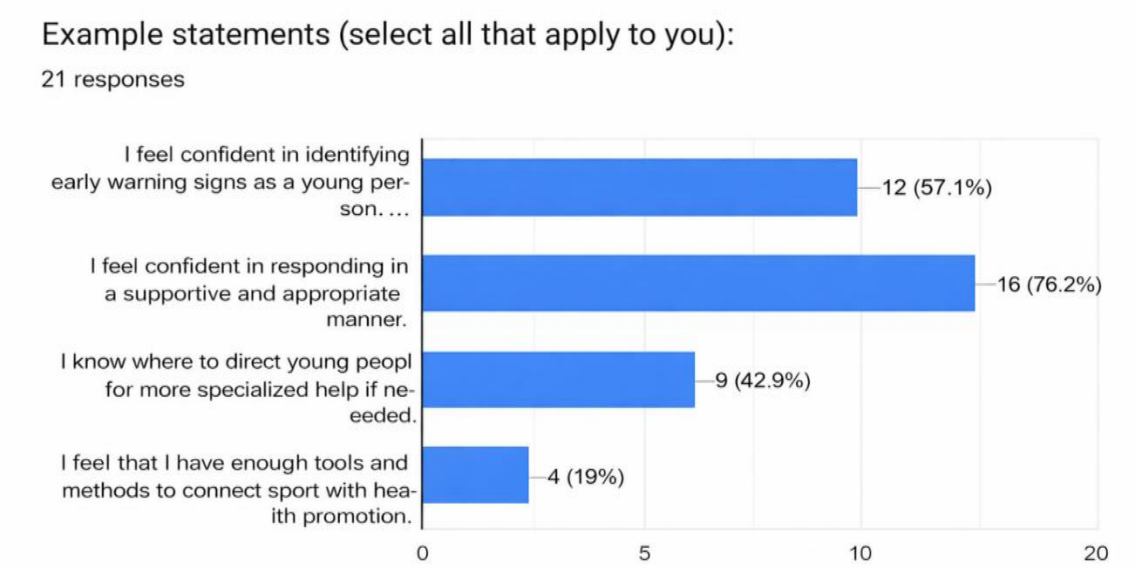
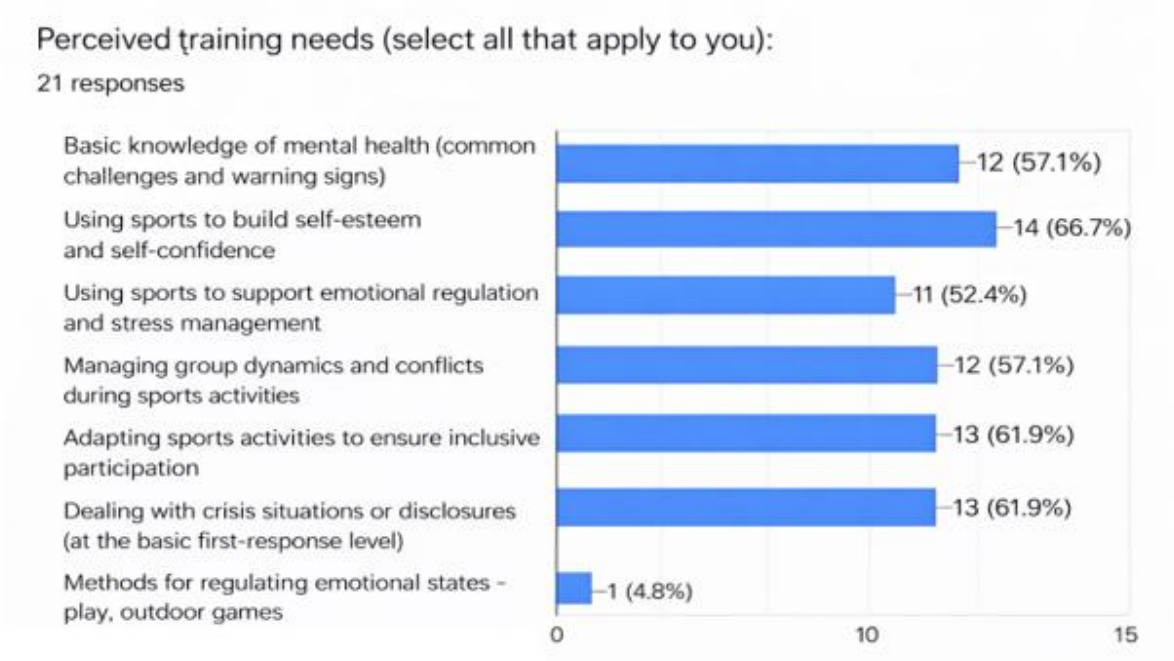


Figure 10. Confidence in noticing and responding to mental health difficulties, directing young people to specialised support, and the perceived availability of tools and methods to combine sport with mental health promotion

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.



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Figure 12. 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 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.

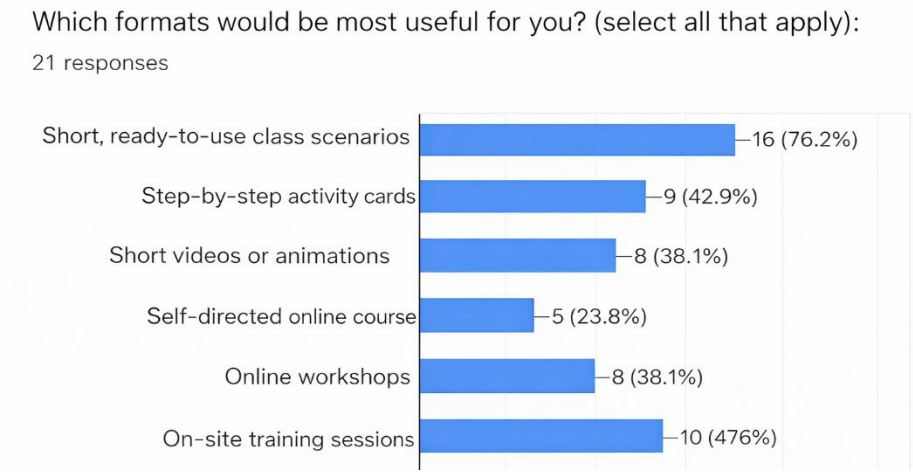


Figure 13. Preferred training and toolkit formats

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

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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

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

Several 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, as well as 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.

4.2 Focus Group

Participant Profile

The focus group brought together youth workers, sports coaches, and physical education teachers working in schools and community sports clubs. Participants primarily support young people aged 12–25, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds and young people experiencing mental health difficulties.

Use of Sport and Physical Activity

Participants reported using sport and physical activity as tools to support young people's personal and social development. Activities are commonly used to help build daily routines, strengthen social skills, encourage teamwork, boost confidence, and foster a sense of belonging among participants.

Mental Health and Well-Being Challenges

Participants identified a range of mental health and well-being challenges affecting young people in their contexts. These included anxiety, low self-esteem, stress related to school or

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employment, social isolation, lack of motivation, difficulties with emotional regulation, and trauma-related experiences.

Link Between Mental Health and Sport Engagement

There was a strong consensus that mental health challenges are closely linked to young people's engagement in sport and physical activity. Participants noted that positive sport experiences can support well-being, while mental health difficulties may reduce motivation, confidence, and willingness to participate.

Facilitators and Barriers to Integrating Mental Health

Good relationships with young people were identified as a key facilitator for integrating mental health considerations into sports-based activities. Barriers included limited time and sport environments that are strongly performance-focused rather than well-being-focused.

Inclusion of Young People with Fewer Opportunities

Inclusion was described as both challenging and essential. Participants highlighted the need for flexible rules, non-competitive activity formats, cultural sensitivity, additional staff or volunteers, partnerships with social services, and accessible facilities and equipment to better include young people with fewer opportunities.

Expectations for the MindFit Toolkit

Participants expressed a strong need for practical and easy-to-use resources. Suggested toolkit elements included short training modules, clear checklists, and real-life scenarios that can be easily integrated into everyday practice.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the state of the art in Poland, the following are conclusions and recommendations:

- ✓ Integrate mental-health awareness and transversal skills more explicitly into grassroots sport and youth activities.
- ✓ Provide practical, non-clinical training and tools for youth workers, coaches, and trainers.
- ✓ Promote inclusive, participation-focused sport formats that reduce pressure and barriers to entry.
- ✓ Strengthen cooperation and referral pathways between sport organisations, youth work, and mental-health services.

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- ✓ Support the sustainability and sharing of good practices through digital tools and peer learning.

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