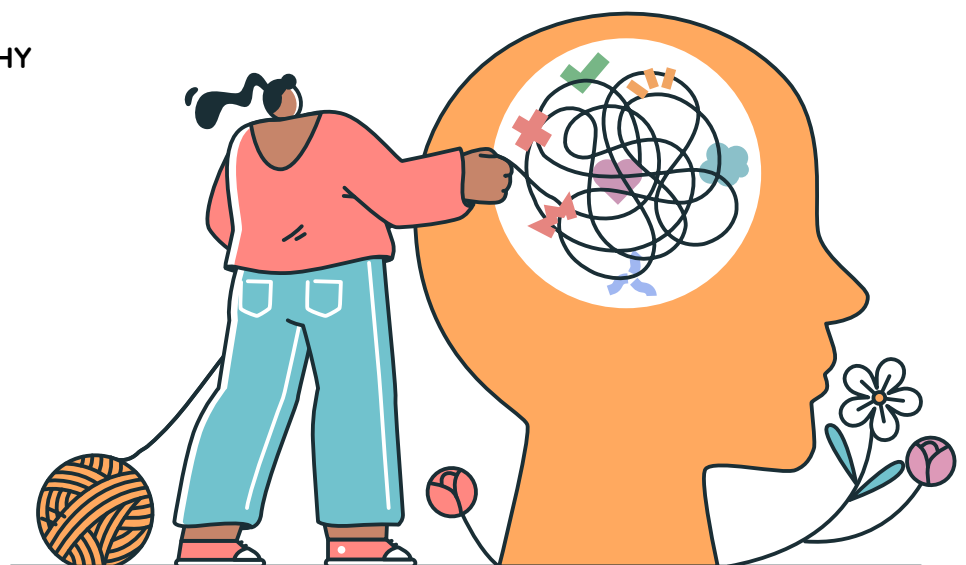


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This project is co-financed by the European Union. The views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union. Neither the European Union nor the funding authority can be held responsible for this.



GLOSSARY

Anorexia nervosa – an eating disorder, that is often associated with bodily maladjustment and psychological problems, and may be manifested e.g. by severe eating restrictions, overeating, inducing uncontrolled ingestion or deliberate elimination of food, etc.

Bulimia, bulimia nervosa – an eating disorder characterised by recurrent episodes of overeating, excessive worry about weight, and attempts to control it through extreme measures (e.g. vomiting, use of laxatives).

Culture shock – adjustment issues that arise when settling in a new and unfamiliar cultural environment. A person may be experiencing a personal unease caused by differences in lifestyle, social challenges, or adapting to a different way of life.

Homesickness – the distress that comes with a combination of depressive and anxious symptoms, withdrawn behaviour, and difficulty focusing on topics unrelated to home caused by being away from home.

Mental well-being – refers to a positive state of emotional, psychological, and social health, characterised by a sense of contentment, resilience, and the ability to cope with life's challenges effectively. It encompasses positive emotions, a sense of purpose, and the capacity to engage in fulfilling relationships and activities.

Mindfulness – the practice of being aware of your body, mind, and feelings in the present moment, to create a sense of calm.

Mental disorder (mental illness or condition) – a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation, or behaviour. It is usually associated with distress or impairment in important areas of functioning. There are many different types of mental disorders.

Panic disorder – a mental disorder with panic attacks as a central feature. It generally appears in younger people and is associated with other mental disorders such as depression and generalised anxiety disorder. Quite common symptoms include shaking hands, numbness of the limbs, palpitations, dizziness, feelings of suffocation, fear of death, and fear of going mad or losing control.

Social anxiety (social phobia) – a persistent fear of social situations. Social anxiety is more than modesty or shyness; it is a fear that affects daily activities, relationships, self-confidence, work, and school life.

Stigma – a set of negative and unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something.

Symptom – a peculiarity, a sign of disease, that indicates a disease process. A symptom is not only a visible and audible sign or a complaint made by the patient but also an abnormality found in the laboratory or by diagnostic tools. A symptom is, for example, a cough, headache, etc.



INTRODUCTION

This study is carried out within the MIND project aiming to **strengthen the capacity of VET professionals to reinforce their mental health practices and promote socio-emotional well-being for VET learners in mobility projects.**

Following the growing burden on the mental well-being of young people who are 30% to 80% more likely to experience a mental health disorder and less likely to receive emotional support, addressing their mental health and well-being is more crucial than ever.

Mental health issues can have lasting negative impacts on education, employment, or personal relationships. Thus, the VET sector is particularly affected, and it can prevent learners from continuing their education and training or can lead them to drop out. Learners participating in mobility projects are included, as changes in environment and culture can lead to needing more emotional support.

To that extent, ADICE and its project partners aim to **provide innovative, pedagogical, and inclusive solutions** to demonstrate that emotional well-being is achievable.

The specific objective of the transnational study is to **highlight existing mental health needs and expectations in the VET sector in European countries. Collected data and results aim to:**

- Analyse the mental health status of VET learners in the European Union and their needs in terms of support, including during international mobility projects.
- Identify the needs of VET professionals to support VET learners effectively.

The MIND project includes 5 European partners from different geographical areas (Spain, Estonia, Slovakia, Macedonia, and France) to share various practices and points of view and to create innovative tools for VET professionals and learners.

Project partners:

- ADICE (France)
- Association for volunteerism volonterski centar Skopje (Republic of North Macedonia)
- Fundación Plan B Educación Social (Spain)
- Občianske združenie KERIC (Slovakia)
- Johannes Mihkelsoni Keskus (Estonia)



WARNING

The MIND project does not claim to be able to carry out diagnosis and treatment for people living with mental disorders. People with illnesses should seek help from the appropriate healthcare professionals for proper treatment. Any disorder that is untreated or poorly treated can worsen.

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

Firstly, to effectively address the mental health needs of VET learners, it is essential to understand what constitutes mental health. As defined by the World Health Organisation (2023),

“Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships, and shape the world we live in.”¹

Mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders. It exists on a **complex continuum, experienced differently from one person to the next**, with varying degrees of difficulty and distress and potentially very different social and clinical outcomes.

Various factors influence our mental health, either safeguarding or endangering it, which determines where everyone falls on the mental health spectrum:

- **Individual factors** such as emotional skills, substance use, and genetics
- **External factors** such as social interactions, and economic, geopolitical, and environmental conditions.



No single factor can predict mental health outcomes with certainty. Many people do not develop mental health disorders despite exposure to risk factors, and others may experience mental health issues without any apparent risk factors. Symptoms can surface at any life stage.

¹Mental Health, World Health Organisation.
https://www.who.int/health-topics/mental-health#tab=tab_1

²Mental Disorders, World Health Organisation.
<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>

Approximately **25% of the global population will experience mental health issues** at some point in their lives, and even more so among young people.

Mental health issues can develop into disorders. Several mental disorders exist and are prevalent around the world, as **“1 in every 8 people around the world is living with a mental disorder.”²**

The most prevalent mental disorders include:

- **Depression:** a persistent and pronounced decline in mood, marked by a loss of joy, decreased energy, and diminished coping abilities. Symptoms can last several weeks or months, and severely impact daily life.
- **Anxiety:** a condition involving strong, persistent inner tension, restlessness, fear, or panic that disrupts daily life. It includes various types like generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and separation anxiety disorder.
- **Bipolar disorder:** characterised by extreme fluctuations in mood, energy, and ability to function. They alternate between periods of depression, manic episodes, and long periods of regular mood.
- **Schizophrenia:** involves perceptual disturbances and behavioural changes like delusions, hallucinations, disorganised thinking, and behaviour. It begins in adolescence and lasts a long time, often reducing life expectancy.
- **Eating disorders:** such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, are characterised by abnormal eating patterns, food preoccupation, and body weight and shape concerns, leading to health risks and impaired functioning.
- **Disruptive behaviour and dissocial disorders:** include conduct-dissocial disorder and oppositional defiant disorder and are marked by behavioural problems like defiance, disobedience, and violation of societal norms, often starting in childhood.

Other mental disorders exist, such as addiction, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), psychosis, etc.

While effective prevention and treatment exist, most people with mental disorders do not have access to effective care. Therefore, many people experience stigma, discrimination, and violations of human rights.



FOSTERING MENTAL HEALTH IN VET INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY PROJECTS

VET learners participating in international mobility face unique challenges related to mental health. **New socio-economic, personal, and environmental factors can greatly impact their well-being.** It is important to address the mental health needs of VET learners, particularly during these experiences.

International mobility refers to activities conducted in different geographical, cultural, and linguistic contexts, involving moving from one country to another for internships, work, or volunteering.

“Mobility” is frequently discussed in the context of vocational education in Europe. For over 25 years, the European Union has promoted the mobility of young people, students, researchers, and citizens through complementary programs such as Erasmus+ program.

Mobilities promote the development of job-specific skills, and a European consciousness while enabling the discovery of new cultural and social realities.

VET professionals play a crucial role in guiding and supporting learners. Their constant interaction with learners means they are often the first to notice mental health challenges. Addressing mental health issues is essential to ensure the well-being of learners and the success of educational programs.

VET learners, as all young people, face heightened mental health challenges during the formative stages of their professional development. These challenges include:

- **Academic pressure** as the demands of coursework and exams can be overwhelming
- **Career-related stress**, since uncertainty about future employment and career paths can cause anxiety
- **Adapting to new learning environments** can be stressful and disorienting.

VET learners participating in international mobility projects face additional layers of complex challenges. They may encounter:

- **Cultural adjustment** as adapting to new cultures and social norms can be difficult and isolating
- **Language barriers** as communicating in a foreign language can hinder social interactions

- **Social isolation** as being far from family and friends can lead to loneliness and depression
- **Separation from support networks** which can make coping with stress harder
- **Uncertainty** as navigating unfamiliar environments and systems can increase anxiety
- **Personal development struggles** as the pressure to grow in a new context can be overwhelming.

Even though international mobility can offer invaluable experiences, understanding mental health needs during international mobility experiences is crucial to fostering a positive and productive experience. It will help participants to:

- **Maximise their international experience academically and professionally**
- **Increase emotional intelligence and resilience and develop coping mechanisms**
- **Ensure long-term well-being**
- **Promote inclusivity, diversity, and global understanding**

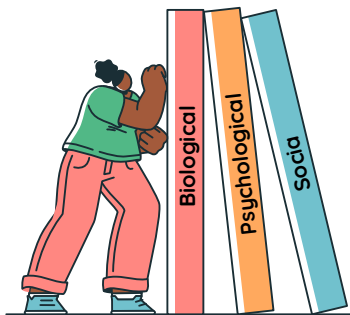
Therefore, this transnational study aims to explore the **understanding of the mental health of VET professionals and learners**, to identify the **current state of knowledge and awareness and potential barriers to adopting mental health practices** in VET organisations.

By identifying the challenges faced and the support needed, the project partners can develop **targeted tools and training programs to facilitate new initiatives** in the VET sector towards mental health. By exploring their insights on mental health before, during, and after their international mobility experiences, needs can be identified that contribute to mental health prevention.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO UNDERSTAND AND IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH

To understand and address the mental health challenges faced by VET learners and professionals engaged in international mobility, the study is based on two foundational theories that account for various factors of positive mental health: the Biopsychosocial Theory and the PERMA Theory of Well-Being. These frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing mental health and well-being.

The Biopsychosocial Theory (BPS theory)³, was developed in 1977 by George Engel. This theory considers that an individual's mental health is contingent upon three aspects:



- **Biological** (bio): associates disease and bodily health. It pertains to the idea that physical health and genetics are important to mental health.
- **Psychological** [-psycho-]: encompasses mental and emotional wellness, including behaviour changes, personal beliefs, etc.
- **Social**: refers to interpersonal factors such as social interactions and community activities impacting one's ability to maintain healthy relationships.

Their interplay determines the cause, manifestation, and resolution of illness. It suggests that sometimes addressing an underlying

social need or environmental stressors can be more effective than other psychological or biological elements.

To offer a more holistic view of well-being, the **PERMA theory of well-being**⁴ focuses on positive psychology to help people thrive by promoting building skills that allow one to flourish. It outlines five elements of well-being:

- **Positive Emotions**: foster resilience and pro-social behaviour and have a positive and lasting impact on an individual's well-being
- **Engagement**: aligning actions with values to direct your energy towards fulfilling activities.
- **Relationships**: positive personal relationships enhance joy and satisfying and grateful emotions
- **Meaning**: finding purpose has many positive effects
- **Achievement**: achieving goals aligned with personal values brings fulfillment

Other elements can be added to the theory to enhance further understanding and application of well-being, such as mindset, work environment, economic security, etc. The PERMA theory points out that well-being extends beyond positive emotions to include achieving life goals, belonging to social groups, and contributing to causes. Combining the BPS and PERMA theories provides a holistic approach to assess the importance of all aspects of mental health to promote emotional well-being, before, during, and after international mobility. The BPS theory addresses the physical, psychological, and social determinants of health while the PERMA theory accentuates the importance of positive experience and personal fulfillment.

The partners expect that the findings will demonstrate that:

- **Awareness and knowledge of mental health in the VET sector are limited**, highlighting the need for more targeted initiatives.
- **Stigmatization of mental health remains prevalent**, requiring the adoption of practices that promote open communication and reduce stigma.
- **Integrating mental health support into international mobility projects is essential to mitigate stressors.**
- **Knowledge and accessibility of mental health resources are insufficient**, indicating a need for enhanced training for VET learners and professionals.

³ (G. Engel, The need for a new medical model: a challenge for biomedicine, 1977)

⁴ (M. Seligman, Flourish: A new understanding of happiness and well-being, 2011)

MENTAL HEALTH MEASURES WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Before addressing the mental health needs of individuals, it is essential to consider the broader European and national context and what is already in place in terms of mental health initiatives.

Within the European Union, there is a concerted effort to address and improve mental health, including prevention, intervention, and support initiatives. Member states are working together, sharing best practices, and implementing actions with economic support from the Third Health Programme.

Recognising the significance of mental health, the European Commission adopted a comprehensive approach on June 7, 2023, focusing on prevention⁵. Other coordinating programs include:

- The **Mentality-mental health quality practices initiative**, launched in February 2023, seeks to disseminate innovative and sustainable mental health practices.
- The **Healthier Together initiative**, launched in June 2022, addresses mental health as one of its key areas. It aims to promote favourable conditions for mental health, increase resilience, mental health promotion and prevention, improve access to quality services and protect rights, combating stigma, and for social inclusion⁶.

Finally, under the EU4Health program, the European Commission allocates financial support to Member States for mental health projects. Over €30 million has been allocated in the last three years.

The European Commission has also developed projects that include technical and capacity-building support for the exchange of best practices with the WHO and the OECD⁷.

At the national level, **initiatives can vary significantly from one country to another due to differences in cultural, socioeconomic, and political contexts**. Each country has implemented various initiatives with varying degrees of impact to address and promote mental health, reflecting their unique national contexts and approaches. All project partner countries have included mental health in their laws and regulations and created helplines to guide people in the management of their mental health issues.

Each partner country has also implemented unique strategies to promote mental health. North Macedonia has established a strategy focused on young people's mental health. Other countries, such as Slovakia or Estonia, have put in place Councils or Boards to coordinate and promote mental health. In France, a national organisation is responsible for disseminating mental health awareness and advocacy. Finally, in Spain, mental health programs have been included in schools, workplaces, and communities to increase understanding and prevent disorders (See **Annex 1 for more information on National Contextualisation**).

However, most of the support provided in terms of mental health is carried out by organisations and NGOs, working directly with people living with mental health issues, and a lot remains to be done all around the European Union.



⁵ Mental Health, European Commission. Online: https://health.ec.europa.eu/non-communicable-diseases/mental-health_sk

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.



ASSESSING THE MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS IN THE VET SECTOR

This study aims to identify the needs and expectations of VET learners and to support VET professionals in the area of mental health. It focuses on VET learners with diverse experiences, who may or may not have benefited from international mobility: **students, volunteers, unemployed or employed individuals**. Learners, the study's primary focus, need to consider their mental health as an integral part of their VET experience.

Considering VET professionals, the study also encompasses a broad spectrum of profiles with varying skills and responsibilities: **teachers, educators, project managers, volunteers, administrative employees, or directors of VET institutions**. They play a crucial role in implementing new practices and adopting a new approach related to mental health.

To identify the needs of VET learners in terms of mental health in Europe, two questionnaires were created, one for professionals and one for learners. Both questionnaires were adapted to the daily life of each target group and their country. They were created using online tools to facilitate their distribution and translated into the five languages of the partner countries (**French, Spanish, Estonian, Slovak, and Macedonian**) so that respondents could reply in their language, thereby expanding the survey's reach.

A mental health outlook from VET professionals and learners

The survey, targeting learners and professionals, received 849 responses across the five countries. The sample size is significant enough to provide a good representation of the VET sector and draw some conclusions from the data.

✓ LEARNERS

The questionnaire was completed by **671 learners**, predominantly from Macedonia (79%) and France (14%). The strong representation from Macedonia underlines the importance of considering regional dynamics when interpreting the results. **A predominant majority (78%) of surveyed learners are between 15 and 18 years old and approximately two-thirds (65%) identify as female.**

Occupation-wise, a significant majority are students (84%), particularly influenced by Macedonia. In Spain and Slovakia, most respondents are volunteers (60% and 56% respectively), while in Estonia, most learners are unemployed (67%). In France, 64% of respondents are unemployed or volunteers in a VET organisation.

✓ PROFESSIONALS

A total of **178 professionals** from diverse organisations across four European countries took part in the questionnaire on mental health, mainly coming from Macedonia (41%) and France (37%). **A significant majority (67%) of professionals are 41 or older, indicative of professional experience within the VET domain.** Indeed, more than half (54%) of surveyed professionals have been involved in this sector for more than 10 years, affirming their expertise and institutional knowledge.

Also, most of the professionals identify as female (78%), corroborating research that women are more likely to feel concerned with mental health issues as they are more prone to report when they are feeling unhappy, depressed, or have a loss of self-esteem⁸. Occupation-wise, two-thirds of the professionals are teachers and trainers (66%) underscoring their pivotal role in shaping mental health initiatives within the VET framework.

⁸ Gender Inequality Index 2021: Health, European Institute for Gender Equality.

https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/toolkits-guides/gender-equality-index-2021-report/women-report-poorer-mental-well-being-men?language_content_entity=en

✓ A MODERATE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY

The study reveals a notable discrepancy in participation rates in international mobility. Most respondents (62%) have never participated in an international mobility project, highlighting that many responses regarding international mobility may be based on perceptions and stereotypes rather than personal experiences. Slightly more VET professionals (44%) than VET learners (36%) went through an international mobility experience, yet both groups predominantly lack firsthand experience.

Furthermore, most VET professionals (69%) have learners who participate in international mobility projects. Therefore, most professional respondents have experience supporting learners with international mobility and they are answering based on their professional experience, even if they haven't lived on an international mobility project themselves.

✓ A BROAD SPECTRUM OF MENTAL HEALTH STATUS

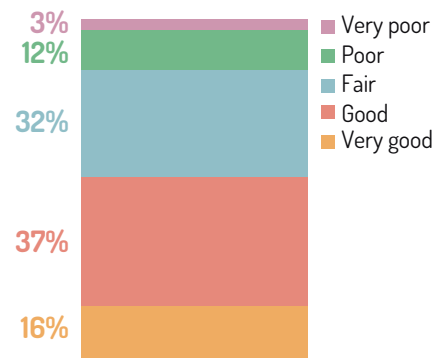
A substantial proportion of respondents (53%) rate their mental health positively, either very good or good. However, 15% of them consider they have poor mental health.

Examining the results by country reveals that Spain, Slovakia, and Estonia have the highest rates of positive responses (76% for Spain and 64% for Estonia and Slovakia). These high rates may reflect better mental health support systems or cultural factors influencing mental health perceptions. For instance, Spain has seen improvement in community-based mental health services, which may contribute to higher self-reported mental well-being⁹. On the other hand, 40% of French respondents considered that they have poor or very poor mental health, suggesting systemic challenges in mental health care or greater stigma around mental health issues in France.

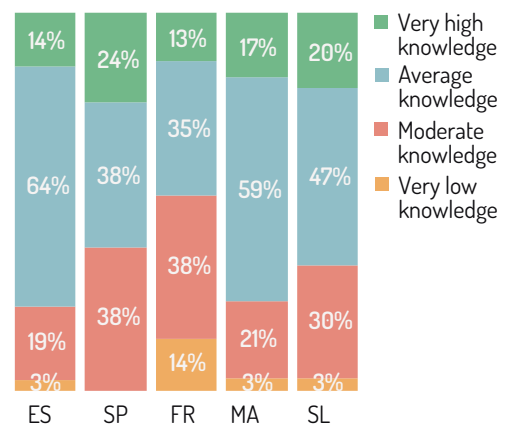
Also, nearly half of the respondents (48%) report experiencing symptoms of poor mental health in the past month, with Spain (71%), France (68%), and Estonia (67%) having the highest percentage of affirmative responses.

While French respondents reported having poor mental health, the responses corroborate the presence of symptoms and might reflect broader systemic issues that need addressing

! In the past month, have you experienced symptoms of bad mental health?



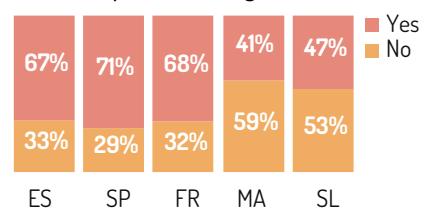
Results per country



! In the past month, have you experienced symptoms of bad mental health?



Results per country



⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Mental_health_and_related_issues_statistics



through improved mental health services.

However, Spanish and Estonian respondents reported relatively good mental health, indicating that their status may vary from day to day, which is consistent with findings that mental health is always influenced by immediate stressors. Respondents have fluctuating mental health states, with general good mental health while still experiencing frequent symptoms.

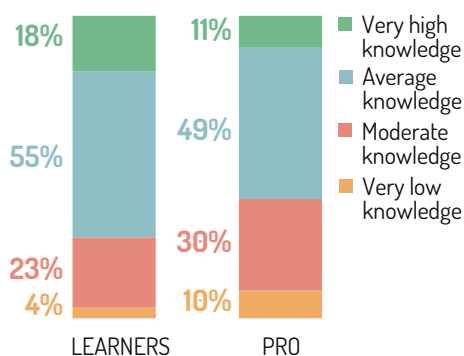
The results emphasise the need for continuous mental health support. Understanding particular dynamics is crucial for developing effective mental health strategies within the VET sector, tailored to the specific needs and contexts of each country.

A need for increased mental health literacy in the VET sector

Mental health is a very current issue, and **the level of knowledge and understanding can vary significantly among different age groups**. Several studies suggest that younger generations have greater awareness and understanding of mental health issues, because they are more vocal about mental health, and have access to more information and resources¹⁰.

This section examines the respondents' self-assessment and actual knowledge of mental health issues, shedding light on the disparities between learners and professionals, and how these differences impact their experiences and perceptions.

How would you rate your knowledge on mental health?
Results per participants



DISPARITIES IN MENTAL HEALTH KNOWLEDGE IN THE VET SECTOR

Three questions were asked to the participants to assess their understanding of mental health concepts. Investigating the respondents' self-assessment of their knowledge of mental health issues reveals **insightful disparities between learners and professionals**, and across different countries.

Overall, the majority of respondents (70%) perceive that they have either a very high or average knowledge of mental health issues. However, **surveyed learners tend to rate their knowledge higher than surveyed professionals**, as 73% consider having extensive knowledge, while only 60% of professionals believe the same.

¹⁰ Baral, Swayam Prava et al. "Mental Health Awareness and Generation Gap." Indian Journal of Psychiatry vol. 64, Suppl 3 (2022)
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9129327/>

To evaluate respondents' actual knowledge, the study included three questions assessing the understanding of mental health concepts:

1. Relationship between Mental well-being and Mental Health

Respondents were asked about the relationship between mental well-being and mental health, with three options to choose from:

- a) it is the same as mental health
- b) it is part of mental health
- c) they are not connected

Option b) is the correct answer ¹¹.

The majority of respondents answered this question correctly. Surveyed professionals generally answered better than surveyed learners, with 93% accuracy compared to 86% in identifying the relationship between well-being and mental health.

2. The Five Dimensions of Mental Health

Respondents were asked to identify the five dimensions of mental health according to Corbin's theory on Wellness and well-being, with options to choose from:

- a) Emotional, Physical, Mental, Financial, Social
- b) Social, Intellectual, Emotional, Physical, Spiritual
- c) Physical, Financial, Mental, Social, Environmental

Corbin's theory states there are five dimensions of well-being, **physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual** (answer b).

Only 38% of respondents answered this question correctly, with surveyed professionals answering slightly better than surveyed learners (40% and 37% respectively).

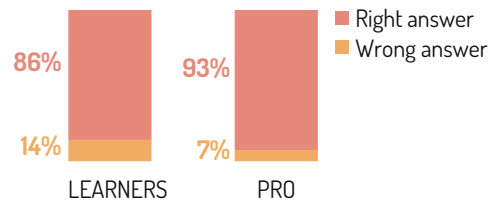
3. Differences between Mental Health and Mental Disorders

Finally, respondents were asked to differentiate between mental health and mental disorders. The following options were given:

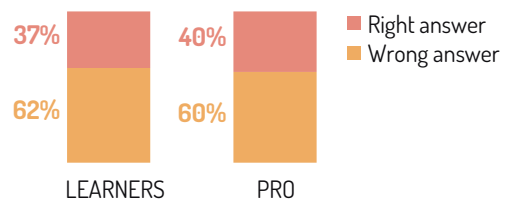
- a) Mental health refers to overall well-being and includes emotional and psychological aspects, while mental disorders are specific conditions or illnesses
- b) Mental health and mental disorders are the same things
- c) Mental health is solely about emotions, while mental disorders encompass overall well-being

Option a) is the correct one ¹².

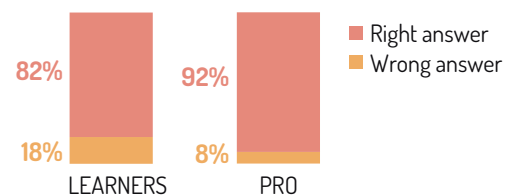
How is well-being related to mental health?



What are the five dimensions of well-being?



What is the difference between mental health and mental disorders?



¹¹ Gautam, Shiv et al. "Concept of mental health and mental well-being, its determinants and coping strategies." Indian journal of psychiatry vol. 66, Suppl 2 (2024)

¹² Galderisi, Silvana et al. "Toward a new definition of mental health." World psychiatry: official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA) vol. 14,2 (2015)



Most respondents (92% of professionals and 82% of learners) answered this question correctly. Nonetheless, once again, surveyed professionals answered more correctly than learners. Overall, **respondents exhibit a positive knowledge of mental health concepts**. However, limitations exist, particularly in understanding nuanced concepts like the five dimensions of well-being. While general awareness of mental health is improving, the understanding of more complex health concepts remains limited¹³.

Despite learners rating their knowledge higher than professionals, they have more incorrect answers, **challenging the belief that younger generations have a better grasp of mental health concepts**. Research suggests that younger individuals often have greater exposure to mental health information through digital media and educational programs, which can lead to overestimating their actual understanding¹⁴. Ongoing and detailed education is important to enhance mental health literacy across diverse stakeholder groups within the VET sector.

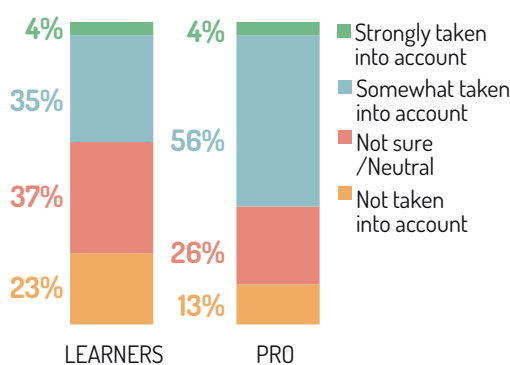
✓ INSUFFICIENT AWARENESS OF MENTAL HEALTH IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

After assessing the respondents' knowledge, it is also necessary to understand their position towards their mental health awareness, examining their sources of information and perceptions of their country's engagement towards this issue. It will help understand the importance of mental health in the target groups' lives and how education is provided.

At the European level, respondents express varied impressions regarding their country's engagement with mental health issues, with **56% of professionals and 35% of learners feeling that mental health receives some consideration in their country**. However, 37% of learners express uncertainty, suggesting potential gaps in awareness and policy implementation.

When looking at national perspectives, Macedonian learners express the highest scepticism (27%) and Spanish respondents exhibit the highest confidence in their country's approach (81%). Despite existing national policies and initiatives at the national level, **respondents indicate a perceived need for further action, as evidenced by the limited 4% who believe mental health issues are strongly addressed**.

! Are mental health issues taken into account in your country?



¹³ Wei, Y., McGrath, P. J., Hayden, J., & Kutcher, S. (2015). Mental health literacy measures evaluating knowledge, attitudes, and help-seeking: a scoping review. *BMC Psychiatry*, 15, 291.

¹⁴ Burns, J. M., Davenport, T. A., Durkin, L. A., Luscombe, G. M., & Hickie, I. B. (2010). The internet as a setting for mental health service utilisation by young people. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 192(S11), S22-S26.

At the same time, **both learners and professionals show limited exposure to mental health information from professionals**, with 38% and 36% respectively reporting having received information in the past. In contrast, **both groups tend to seek mental health information independently**, with 65% and 57% respectively reporting independent research on the topic, suggesting that people are educating themselves on mental health issues.

Consequently, there is a widespread concern about mental health not being adequately addressed in European countries. **Many respondents report having to seek out information on mental health independently because they have not received formal education on the topic.** There is an urgent need to improve awareness and access to mental health resources across Europe. Despite efforts to implement policies and initiatives; disparities in public awareness and engagement persist. **Challenges in accessing professional mental health expertise remain prevalent, despite widespread global and national initiatives.**

The results underscore a reliance on self-learning which accentuate the need for:

- Comprehensive mental health literacy initiatives that bridge the gap between professional expertise and public access
- Accessible and reliable resources to empower individuals in addressing mental health concerns autonomously.

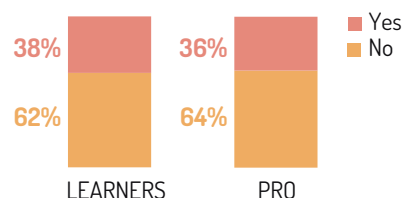
Perceptions and Implications of Mental Health on Daily Lives

To better understand the extent of mental health issues in European countries, it was important to grasp how respondents perceive symptoms, identify causes, and recognise the impact of poor mental health and which activities are useful to cope according to them, in general, and during international mobility.

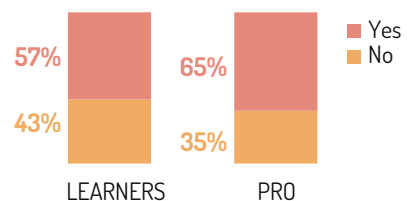
✓ A STRONG RECOGNITION OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS AND SIGNS

Respondents' perceptions regarding symptoms of poor mental health provide valuable insights into the common factors recognised across various European countries. **Stress and inability to cope emerged as the most widely acknowledged**

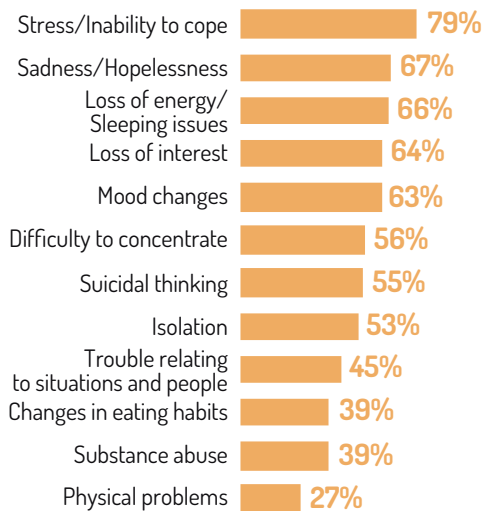
!! Have you already been informed professionally about mental health?



!! Have you search for information about mental health or well being on your own?



Which symptoms are symptoms of poor mental health?



symptom with 79% of responses. This aligns with a broader understanding of stress as a significant contributor to mental health challenges, often stemming from various sources.

Additionally, feelings of sadness and hopelessness (67%), loss of energy and sleeping issues (66%), and mood changes (63%) were also predominantly acknowledged as symptoms of poor mental health. Such acknowledgment emphasises a **strong awareness of psychological aspects associated with mental health disorders**, which can significantly impact daily life and overall well-being.

On the contrary, there appears to be a **gap in recognising physical manifestations of poor mental health**, with only 27% of respondents identifying physical problems as symptoms.

While mental health is often conceptualised in psychological terms, it is essential to acknowledge its physical manifestations,

which can include somatic complaints, gastrointestinal issues, and other physiological symptoms¹⁵. In addition, substance abuse and changes in eating habits, only received 39% of responses, even though there are mental disorders in themselves, which may also demonstrate potential misconceptions or lack of awareness regarding these aspects of mental health.

Overall, it is possible to say that respondents show a strong understanding of psychological symptoms. However, there is a need for broader education on recognising physical manifestations and behavioural changes associated with mental health.

✓ SOCIAL AND PERSONAL ELEMENTS RECOGNISED AS IMPORTANT TRIGGERS OF MENTAL HEALTH

The study also explored factors most likely to contribute to poor mental health among respondents.

While respondents acknowledged a range of situations that could potentially lead to mental health challenges, certain stressors emerged as particularly significant:

- **Loss or grief (84%)** evokes strong emotional responses and is often associated with profound psychological distress and adjustment difficulties
- **Trauma or abuse (82%)** which is deeply distressing and can lead to lasting psychological consequences, such as post-traumatic stress disorder
- **Relationships problems or Family Issues (82%)** as interpersonal conflicts and familial discord can disrupt emotional stability and contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and isolation
- **Health issues (78%)** coincide with mental health challenges, with chronic illnesses and disabilities exacerbating psychological distress.

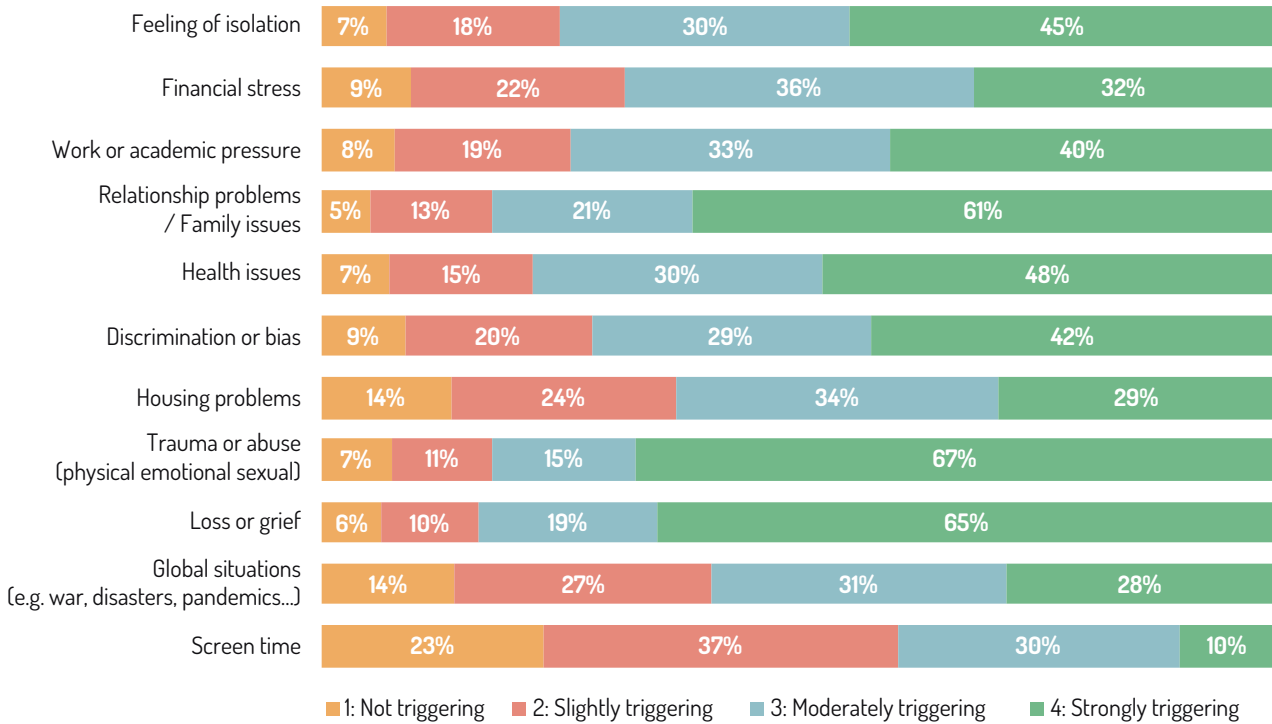
On the contrary, factors such as screen time (10%) and global situations (28%) were perceived as less triggering, indicating that **respondents may prioritise personal over external stressors**.

The analysis highlights the **critical need for interventions addressing personal stressors, while also raising awareness about the role of external stressors in shaping mental health outcomes**. Cultural, socioeconomic, and educational contexts influence perceptions of stressors, underscoring the importance of tailored interventions that address individual and contextual factors to promote well-being effectively.

¹⁵ Hamer, E. G., Orsini, T. T. K., & Smith, S. H. (2021). The relationship between psychological distress and physical health outcomes: An integrative review. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 144, 110-123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpsychores.2021.110123>



Rate the situations below indicating if they can trigger bad mental health



✓ A CONSIDERABLE IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH ON DAILY LIVES

The analysis shows how poor mental health affects different areas of life to various extents. Overall, **the most affected aspects of life that are impacted by poor mental health are the ability to learn and concentrate (73%)**. Thus, mental health plays a significant role in cognitive functioning and academic performance, underscoring the need for targeted interventions and support services in educational settings.

Relationships with family and friends are also identified as highly impacted (71%), reflecting the significant effect of interpersonal components on mental health challenges. Indeed, relationship and family issues are perceived as a cause and an impact of poor mental health by the respondents, as close relationships are vital for emotional support.

Confidence and self-esteem (66%), sleeping patterns (65%), and decision-making abilities (64%) were also recognised as significantly affected by poor mental health, indicating the broad spectrum of functioning influenced by emotional

well-being. The findings underscore the holistic nature of mental health and its implications for personal, social, and occupational functioning.

Interestingly, **financial management (28%) and physical activities (37%) were perceived as less affected by poor mental health**. It suggests potential misconceptions of the broader impact of mental health on various life domains. Indeed, it is important to take into account that both financial management and physical activities can be impacted by poor mental health^{6,17}.

¹⁶ Sweet, E., Nandi, A., Adam, E. K., & McDade, T. W. (2013). The high price of debt: Household financial debt and its impact on mental and physical health. *Social Science & Medicine*, 91, 94-100.

¹⁷ Blumenthal, J. A., Babyak, M. A., Doraiswamy, P. M., Watkins, L., Hoffman, B. M., Barbour, K. A., ... & Sherwood, A. (2007). Exercise and pharmacotherapy in the treatment of major depressive disorder. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 69(7), 587-596.

Which aspects of your life can be impacted by poor mental health?



Hence, it becomes important to address mental health holistically, considering its broad and varied impact on different life domains. The study points out the substantial impact of poor mental health on key aspects of life, including the ability to learn and concentrate, relationships with family and friends, and to a lesser extent, confidence, self-esteem, sleep patterns, and decision-making abilities.

Understanding the symptoms, causes, and impacts of poor mental health is necessary for comprehensively addressing the mental health needs in the European VET sector. The analysis reveals that **respondents have a broad yet nuanced understanding of mental health, with a strong awareness of psychological symptoms and major personal stressors.** However, there is a significant gap in recognising physical symptoms and external stressors, indicating the need for more comprehensive mental health education and interventions.

Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a holistic approach to mental health, considering its diverse and extensive impacts on various life domains, to target necessary interventions and support services.

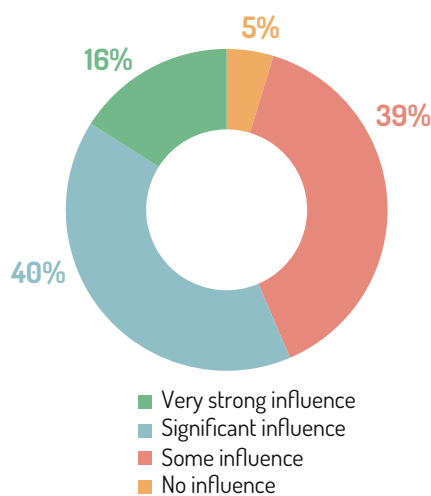
INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY, AN ADDITIONAL FACTOR IN MENTAL HEALTH VULNERABILITY

International mobility, including volunteering, internships, youth exchanges, and working or studying abroad, plays a significant role in the VET sector. This section examines the mental health implications of such mobility experiences on VET learners in European countries.

Respondents provided diverse perspectives on how living in a foreign country affects emotional well-being. **The majority believe it has a significant or powerful influence (56%),** and 39% still consider it has little repercussion. More VET professionals consider international mobility to affect mental health (68% for professionals and 53% for learners). The recognition of the emotional impact of living abroad appears higher among professionals, likely due to their greater exposure to international mobility.

Surprisingly, when asked if their VET learners' mental health was impacted during international mobility, VET professionals' answers were mixed. A slight majority of them (51%) believe that mental health has rarely affected their VET learners during

How does the experience of living in a foreign country influence emotional well-being?



their mobilities. However, **38% think that it frequently or consistently affects them.**

When looking at the results country by country, almost all Spanish and French professionals (64% and 53% respectively) think it frequently or always affects learners' mental health. On the contrary, most Estonian VET professionals (89%) and Slovak VET professionals (73%) consider it have a rare effect.

When asked about situations in international mobility that can trigger poor mental health, some situations appear more significant than others. **Key factors impacting mental well-being among participants include insecurity (72%), isolation and loneliness (71%) and homesickness (69%).** These elements affect self-esteem, self-confidence, and personal relationships.

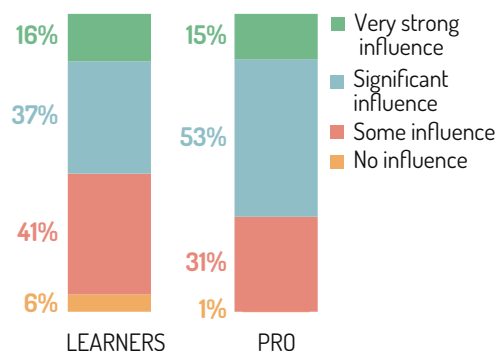
Notably, insecurity emerges as the most significant trigger, suggesting that self-doubt and vulnerability are common among participants in new environments. The high percentage of homesickness, isolation, and loneliness underscores the **importance of social connections and support systems**, which are often disrupted during international mobility. Such disruptions can lead to a diminished sense of belonging and exacerbate feelings of shame.

In contrast, **culture shock (42%) and language barriers (57%) are perceived as less severe triggers** of poor mental health, even though they are still notable. **Such challenges are often anticipated and addressed during pre-mobility preparations**, and participants are often prepared to handle them, which may explain their lesser impact on mental health compared to the more pervasive and personal feelings of insecurity, isolation, and homesickness.

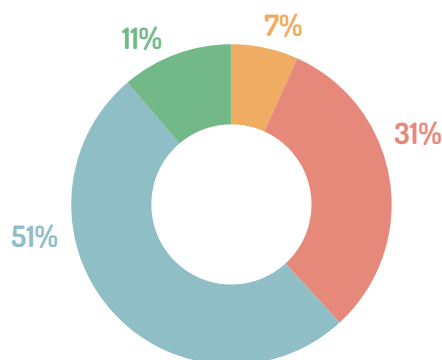
VET professionals, who generally have more experience with international mobility programs, are more likely than learners to recognise insecurity and culture shock as significant triggers. Their firsthand experience and heightened awareness of the psychological challenges associated with international mobility contribute to this recognition.

The results emphasise the need for targeted interventions to address emotional challenges and promote a supportive and understanding environment that can mitigate their impact and enhance the overall mobility experience.

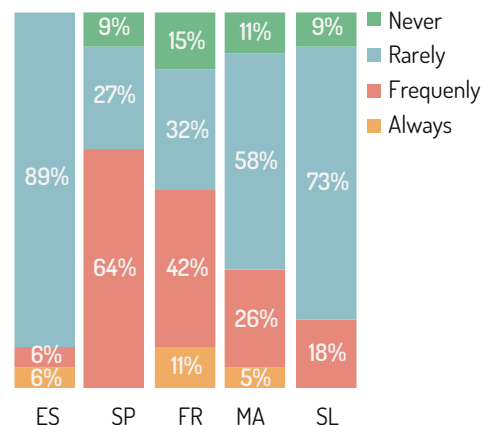
Results per participants



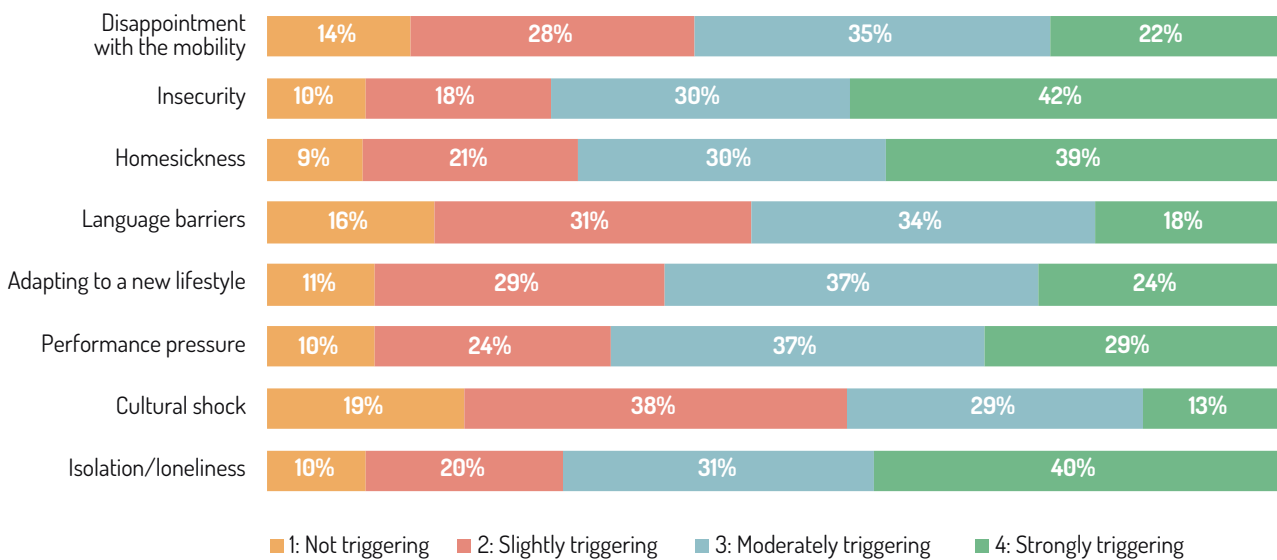
! Based on your professional experience, has mental health impacted your VET learners during their mobilities?



Results per country



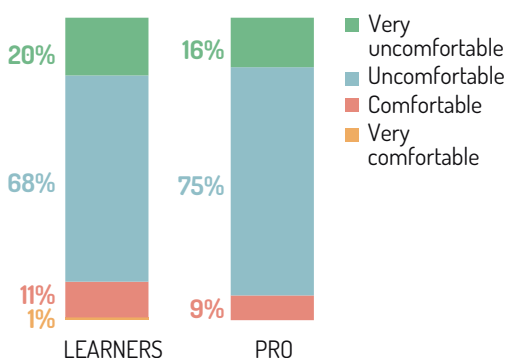
During an international mobility, rate the situations below indicating if they can trigger bad mental health



The results provide a detailed examination of perceptions, causes, and impacts of mental health within the VET sector. It emphasises a strong awareness of psychological symptoms and the importance of personal or social stressors impacting mental health.

Also, international mobility has a significant impact on mental well-being, highlighting the need for tailored support. To achieve this goal, it is also essential to address the stigmatization of mental health within the VET sector.

In your opinion, are people open to discuss about their mental health



Stigmatisation, a largely present barrier in the VET Sector

A crucial aspect intertwined with the experiences of mental health is the stigmatization surrounding these issues within the VET sector. Understanding stigmatization is essential to better support learners' well-being, by fostering a more supportive and effective educational environment.

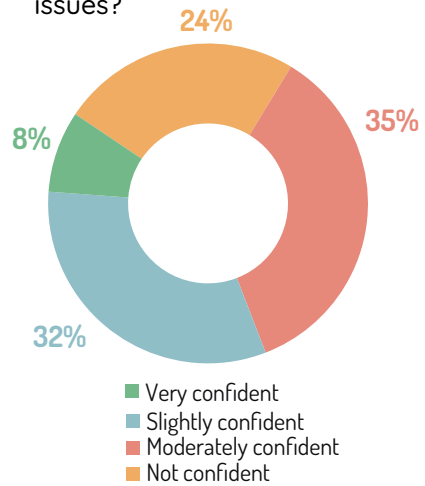
Indeed, the stigmatization of mental health has a prominent place in the VET sector. **Most respondents think that people are uncomfortable when it comes to discussing mental health** (86% of learners and 91% of professionals).

It is corroborated by the fact that when asked if the respondents would be confident sharing their mental health issues, **only 41% expressed confidence in sharing**. Notably, Slovak professionals exhibit higher confidence levels in this area (55%), while Estonians display the lowest (all lack confidence) emphasising regional disparities in mental health openness.

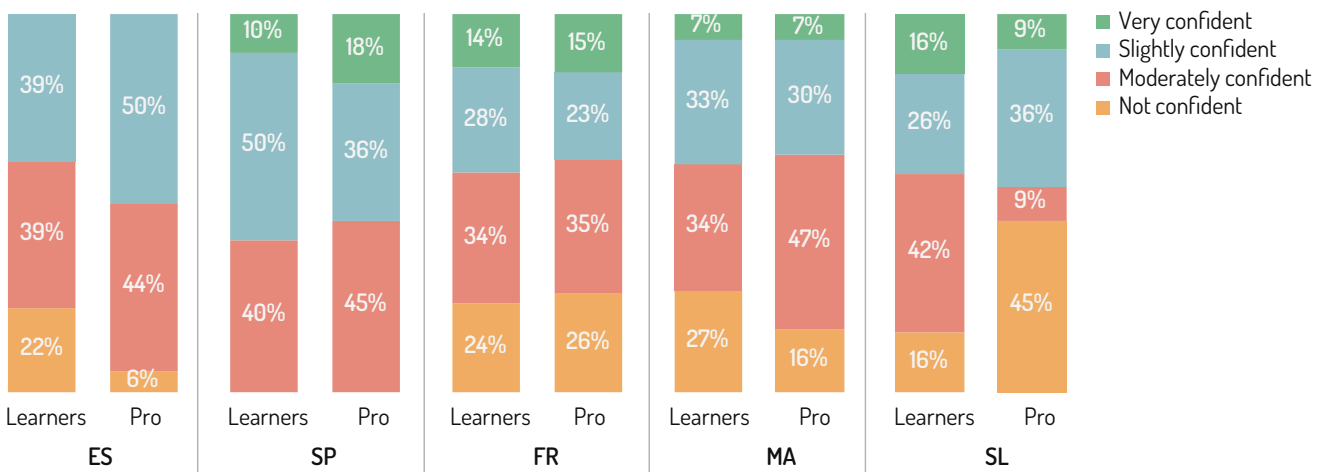
When learners feel comfortable sharing their challenges, they find it easier to talk about them with close friends (67%) and family members (52%). 30% of them still find it easier to share with mental health professionals.

However, there is a reticence in discussing in group settings, with professors or superiors, or with coworkers or peers, probably in fear of judgment or potential repercussions from disclosing the challenges learners face ¹⁸.

How confident do you feel in sharing about your own mental health issues?



How confident do you feel in effectively communicating about your own mental health issues? Results per country



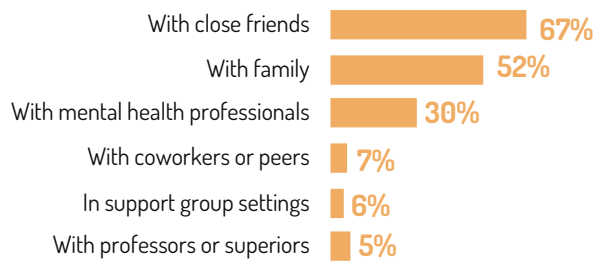
¹⁸ Martin, A. (2010). Workplace mental health: An evidence-based approach. Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 44(7), 695-700.

While the role of social support from friends and family is crucial, it is also limited. Friends and families may not have the necessary training to provide appropriate mental health interventions¹⁹. On the contrary, mental health professionals are well-documented and trained to provide evidence-based treatment. Therefore, even though almost a third of the respondents could talk with mental health professionals, there is a need to diffuse their expertise to address serious mental health issues.

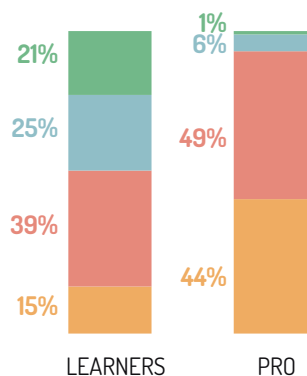
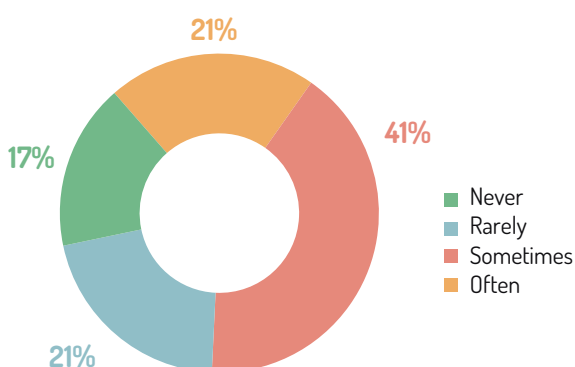
There is also a need to demystify the stigma existing in the professional or educational sphere. **Creating a safe space and providing robust support will enable learners to express themselves more freely and enhance their academic and professional journey.**

Consistently, despite 30% of respondents indicating comfort in discussing mental health with professionals, **62% of them consider that the stigma would prevent them from seeking help.** This fear is more pronounced among professionals, as 93% would refrain from seeking help; compared to 54% of learners thinking the same.

! Are there specific situations or individuals with whom you find it easier to talk about your mental health?



! Does the stigma around mental health can prevent you from seeking help?



¹⁹ Reavley, N. J., & Jorm, A. F. (2011). Young people's stigmatizing attitudes towards people with mental disorders: Findings from an Australian national survey. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 45(12), 1033-1039.

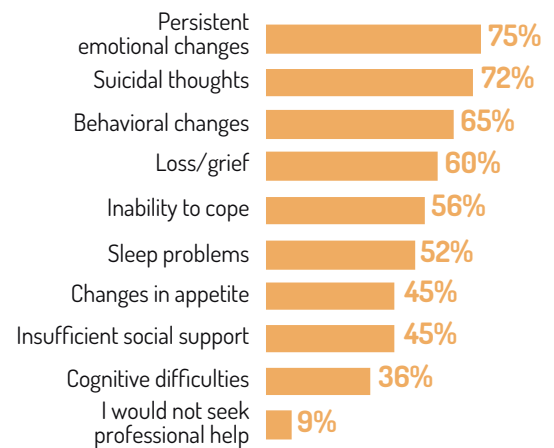
However, most respondents would still seek help if they demonstrated signs of poor mental health. Only 9% of the respondents believe they would not seek professional help. The most frequently cited indicators for seeking professional help are persistent emotional changes (75%), suicidal thoughts (72%) and behavioural changes (65%).

Interestingly, while learners feel that stigmatization is widely present and that they would not necessarily be confident in sharing mental health challenges, **most respondents (72%) have never or rarely experienced mental health stigmatization**. However, 21% report occasional stigmatization and 7% often experience it. While stigma is perceived as a widespread issue, **actual encounters with stigmatization might be less frequent but still significant**²⁰. Such beliefs can lead to self-stigma, where individuals internalise negative stereotypes, further reducing their confidence to share mental health challenges²¹.

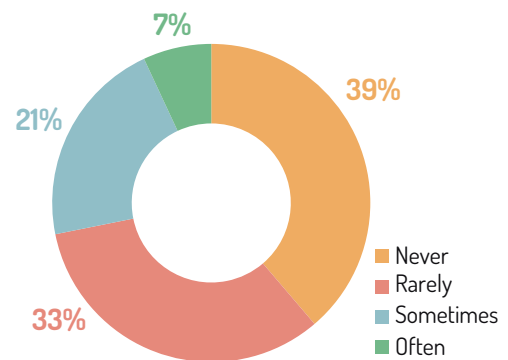
Furthermore, **most respondents feel generally confident in supporting others with their mental health concerns (70%)**. Learners express greater confidence than professionals, a difference that can be attributed to the concept of 'peer support'. Although peer support is effective in mental health, it remains somewhat limited²².

Professionals are also confident in their ability to support others (64%) and **¾ of them have supported students and advised them to seek professional support**.

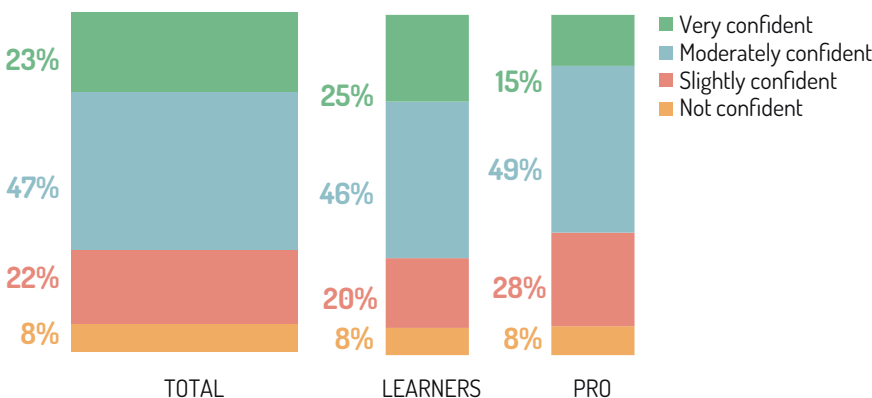
Which signs of poor mental health should lead to seek professional help?



Have you ever personally experienced stigmatization related to mental health?



How confident do you feel in supporting other regarding their mental health concerns?



²⁰ Schomerus, G., Matschinger, H., & Angermeyer, M. C. (2011). The stigma of psychiatric treatment and help-seeking intentions for depression. *European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience*, 261(5), 275-279.

²¹ Corrigan, P. W., Druss, B. G., & Perlick, D. A. (2012). The impact of mental illness stigma on seeking and participating in mental health care. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 15(2), 37-70.

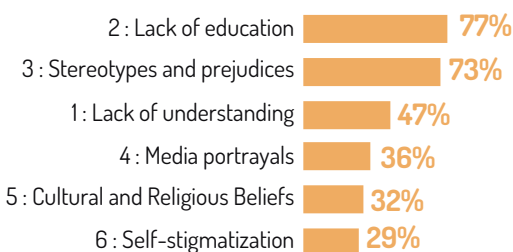
²² Salzer, M. S. (2002). Consumer-delivered services as a best practice in mental health care delivery and the development of practice guidelines. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Skills*, 6(3), 355-382.

However, the study reveals a gap. **Only 47% of the professionals would be able to provide appropriate resources when advising a learner**, indicating a need for mental health training or resources for professionals²³.

Considering the causes of stigma, it is primarily attributed to stereotypes and prejudices (79%) and lack of understanding (78%). Also, half of the respondents cite the lack of education as a contributing factor (56%). **The need for increased awareness and training becomes evident to better educate individuals on this issue.** As for now, respondents consider that multiple challenges still arise when sharing mental health issues, including **fear of judgment and shame (74%), being perceived as weak (72%), the lack of support (71%), and rejection from others (70%).**

In conclusion, while mental health awareness is evident among VET learners and professionals, **stigma remains a significant barrier** to open discourse and help-seeking behaviours. Addressing stigma requires multifaceted approaches including education, training, and fostering a supportive environment that empowers individuals to seek and provide appropriate mental health support.

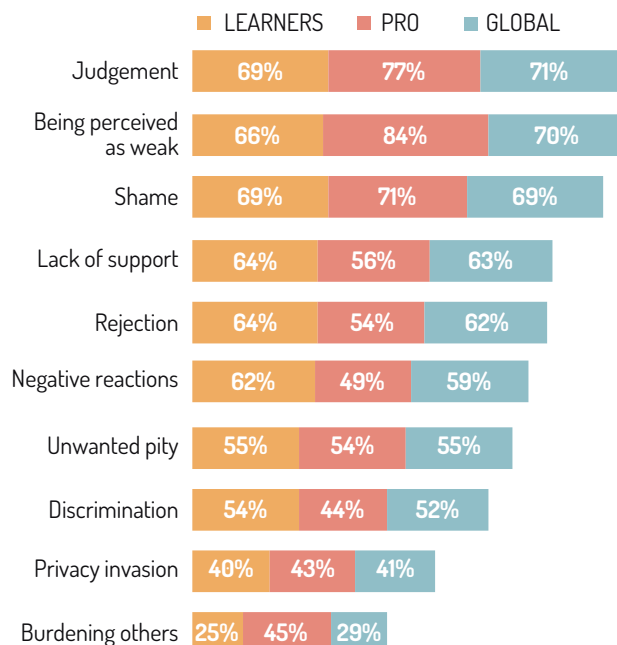
Why do you think stigmas surrounding mental health exist?




During your professional career, have you ever advised a student to seek professional support for their mental health?

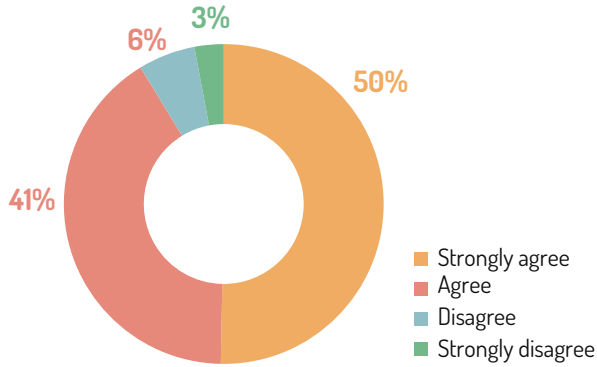


What challenges can people encounter when sharing about their mental health? Results by participants

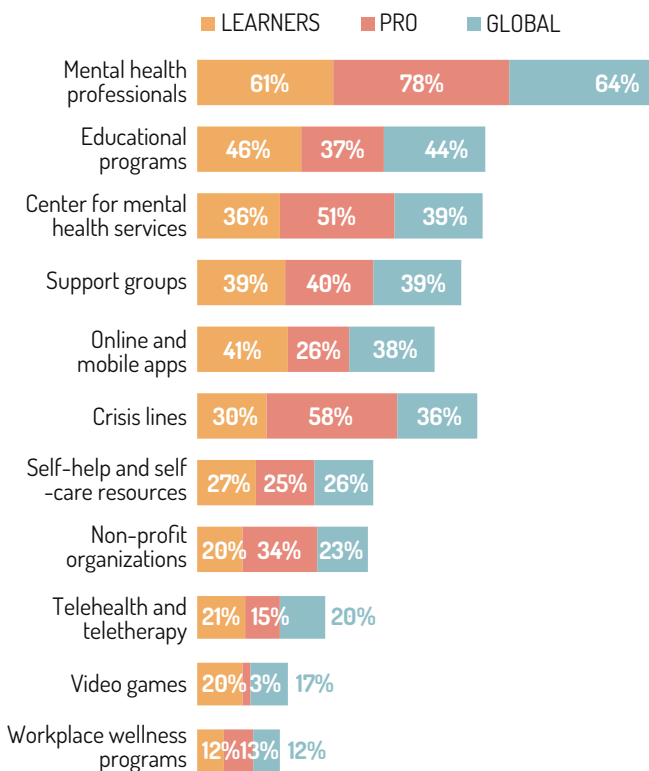


²³ Kidger, J., Gunnell, D., Biddle, L., Campbell, R., & Donovan, J. (2010). Part and parcel of teaching? Secondary school staff's views on supporting student emotional health and well-being. *British Educational Research Journal*, 36(6), 919-935.

 Should there be more educational initiatives to raise awareness and reduce stigma related to mental health?



 Which mental health resources are you familiar with? Results per participant



Limited access to mental health resources and educational initiatives

After concluding that early intervention and prevention of mental health is necessary to support well-being as well as reduce stigma, it is crucial to focus on the availability and accessibility of mental health resources to identify gaps and correctly address the mental health needs in the European VET sector. This section explores the perceptions and experiences of respondents regarding the accessibility of resources, as well as their familiarity with resources and the need for increased awareness and educational initiatives. By analysing these aspects, gaps, and opportunities for improvement will be identified for mental health support within the sector.

A significant majority of respondents (91%) agree on the need for more educational initiatives to raise awareness and reduce the stigma related to mental health, underscoring the critical demand for targeted educational programs to promote mental health literacy.

In line with the results, the survey reveals different levels of familiarity with mental health resources among respondents. **Mental health professionals are the most well-known resource,** as 64% of respondents outline their importance.

For other resources, there is a discernible difference between the knowledge of VET professionals and learners. **Professionals are more familiar with mental health services (51% vs 36%) and crisis lines (58% vs. 30%) than learners.** Indeed, these are more common resources professionals need to learn about during mental health training²⁴. On the other hand, **learners are more acquainted with online and mobile apps (41% vs. 26%)**

²⁴ Bingley, A. (2020). Teachers' Training in Mental Health Awareness and Support: A Critical Review. Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 72(3), 345-362.

and educational programs (46% vs. 37%), highlighting a generational shift towards digital and educational resources.

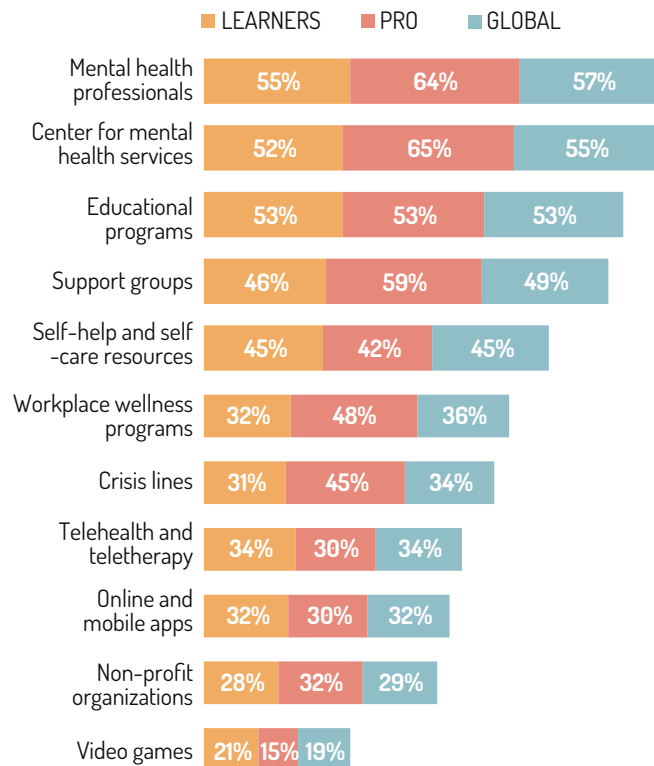
When considering which resources should be more widely known, **respondents emphasise the importance of mental health professionals (57%), centers for mental health services (55%), educational programs (53%), and support groups (49%).** Mental health professionals are already well-recognised, but there is a clear need for more detailed information about their roles and functions. Professionals also advocate for greater awareness of workplace wellness programs and crisis lines when learners see more potential in video games and telehealth/teletherapy, **indicating a preference for innovative and accessible mental health support solutions.**

It points to the necessity of a diversified approach in promoting mental health resources, catering to both traditional and contemporary preferences that would allow younger audiences to be more familiar and comfortable with those issues.

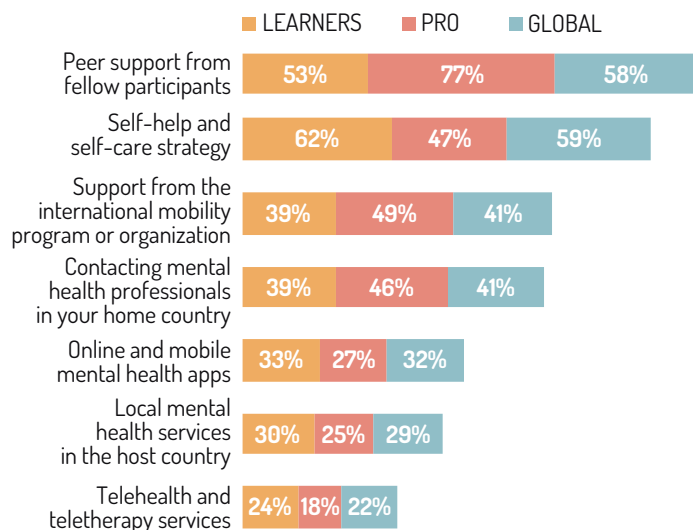
In the context of international mobility, respondents indicated varying mental health resources and assistance they would likely use. **Self-help and self-care strategies (59%) and peer support (58%)** are the most commonly cited resources. However, these options may not be universally recognised or deemed effective by all respondents.

Learners tend to rely more on self-help strategies (62%), while professionals prefer peer support (77%). This difference may reflect varying levels of self-reliance and perceptions of available support systems. Notably, resources such as telehealth services (22%) and local mental health services in host countries (29%) are less favoured, likely due to concerns over accessibility, language barriers, and unfamiliarity.

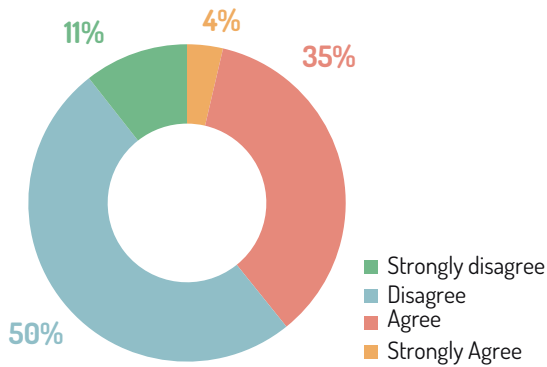
Which mental health resources should be more widely known? Results per participants



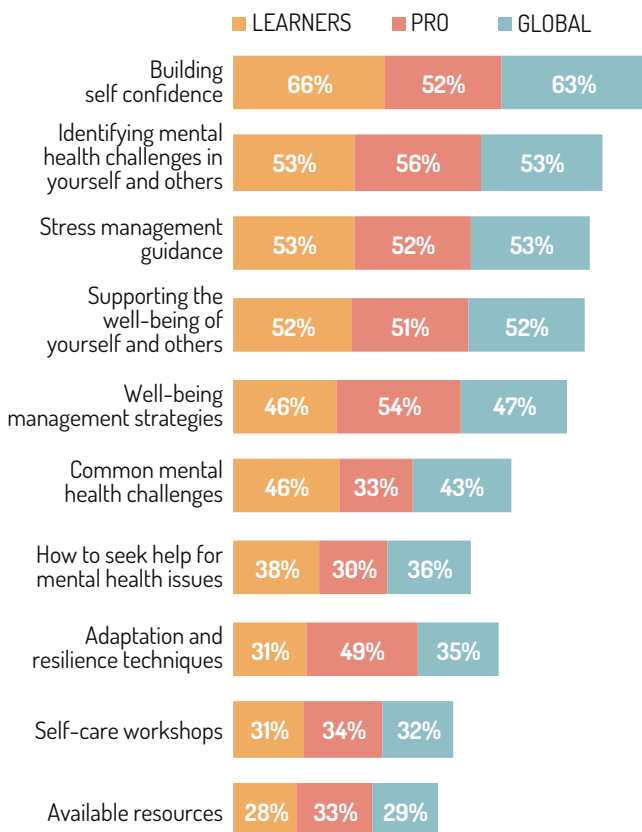
During an international mobility, which resources and assistance would you use? Results per participants



Do you think that mental health resources are easily accessible?



On which subjects would you like to be trained on mental health?



A critical issue brought out by the survey is the perceived accessibility of mental health resources. **A significant proportion of respondents (61%) consider that mental health resources are not easily accessible.** This sentiment is especially pronounced among Spanish (81%) and French (74%) respondents, who express substantial dissatisfaction with the current state of mental health resources availability. Only 39% of respondents believe that mental health resources are easily accessible, strengthening the requirement to make more resources available and known to young people.

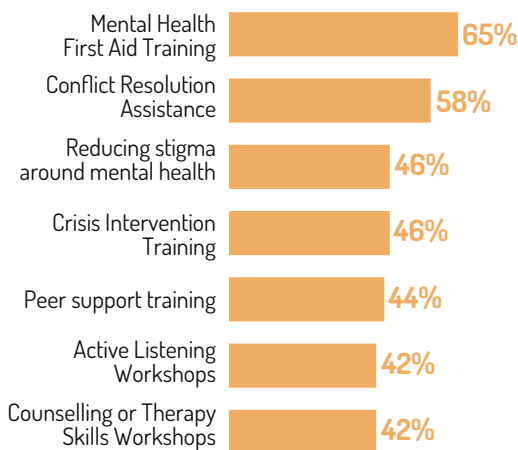
The findings emphasise the critical need for increased educational initiatives to raise awareness and reduce the stigma associated with mental health in the VET sector. There is a clear disparity in the familiarity and perceived importance of different mental health resources between professionals and learners, suggesting the need for tailored approaches to meet the diverse needs of the target groups. Furthermore, the perceived inaccessibility of mental health resources highlights a significant area for improvement.

A need for extensive training in terms of mental health

After understanding that there is a need to make the resources more accessible, it is also essential to comprehend the training needs of VET professionals and VET learners to enhance their mental health awareness and coping skills.

The findings reveal that **building self-confidence emerges as the most sought-after subject for mental health training among respondents**, with 63% indicating a desire for such training.

On which subject would you like to be trained to enhance your capacity to support your peers?

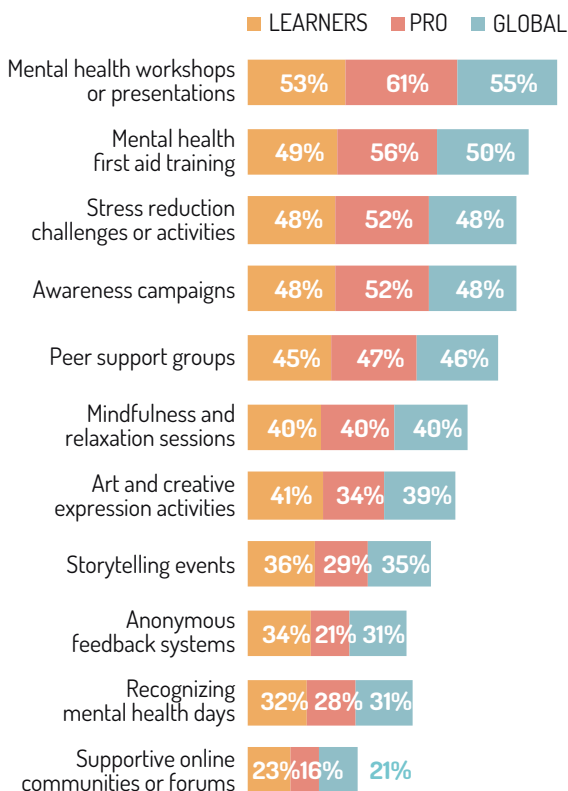


A majority of participants also showed interest in learning about common mental health challenges (59%), identifying mental health challenges in oneself and others (58%), and stress management guidance (53%). These results accentuate **the need for more foundational knowledge of mental health.**

There is also a notable divergence between the preferences of VET professionals and learners. Professionals are more inclined to focus on supporting others' mental well-being, reflecting their roles and responsibilities within educational settings. In contrast, learners prioritise building self-confidence, reflecting on their developmental stage, and the importance of self-assurance in academic settings.

Likewise, regarding reinforcing the capacity to support peers, most respondents showed significant interest in Mental Health First Aid Training (65%) and Conflict Resolution Assistance (58%), indicating the importance of being equipped to address mental health issues as they arise in their communities.

What types of activities could help improve discussions about mental health in your organisation?



In terms of activities that could improve mental health discussions in their organisations, respondents demonstrate diverse preferences. Globally, **55% of respondents believe that mental health workshops and presentations are the most effective, with mental health first aid training (50%), which aligns with traditional educational practices.**

Professionals are also widely interested in developing stress reduction challenges and activities or awareness campaigns (52%). On the other hand, learners are interested in expanding peer support groups (45%), art and creative expression activities (41%), or mindfulness and relaxation activities (40%). These preferences also emphasise the importance of innovative and peer-based approaches in engaging learners in mental health discussions.

The diversity in training preferences and preferred activities for improving mental health discussions among VET professionals and learners underscores the need for tailored mental health education initiatives. Both traditional and innovative approaches are necessary to stimulate reflection among professionals and learners. It can effectively enhance mental health literacy and support mechanisms within the VET sector, promoting a more resilient and supportive environment for all stakeholders.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that there is still room for improvement in mental health in the VET sector. It reveals great diversity in perceptions of mental health across the European countries studied.

The differences in perception observed can be explained by the variations brought about by the biopsychosocial theory (BPS), which postulates that mental health is influenced by a complex interaction of biological, psychological and social factors.

The differences in perception can be explained by the variations of the three aspects. For example, more robust support systems in Spain, Slovakia, and Estonia could respond effectively to people's biological, psychological, and social needs, thereby improving their perception of mental health.

In contrast, France may face challenges in one or more of these areas, which could explain its more worrying results. This variation underlines the importance of adapting mental health interventions to meet the specific needs of each national context.

Several challenges and opportunities concerning mental health awareness, stigma, accessibility of resources, and training were raised from the results. By exploring these features, the study provides insights into the multifaceted dimensions of mental health within educational settings, emphasising the importance of tailored interventions and supportive environments to foster resilience and well-being.

✓ MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE

In terms of Mental Health Awareness and Knowledge, there is a compelling disparity between perceived and actual knowledge of mental health among VET learners and professionals. It can be analysed through the PERMA theory emphasising well-being as a multidimensional concept. **While general awareness is high, younger generations tend to overestimate their knowledge of mental health, and there are gaps in understanding nuanced concepts and access to reliable resources.** As most respondents relied on self-learning for information, there is a need for more ongoing education.

A more comprehensive approach to mental health is also necessary as respondents have not fully grasped all aspects of the issue.

By focusing on positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement, PERMA theory suggests that educational programmes must not only provide information but also reinforce these aspects to promote true fulfilment.

✓ IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH ON DAILY LIFE

The results show that **mental health has a wide impact**, but that certain aspects, such as financial management, are perceived as being less affected. The BPS theory accentuates the importance of social and environmental factors in the manifestation of mental health. If certain aspects of daily life do not appear to be directly affected, this could reflect an insufficient perception of the overall impact of mental health. PERMA theory suggests that **complete well-being involves not only positive emotions but also personal fulfilment and effective management of the various aspects of life.**

A holistic approach is needed to recognise and address these impacts more fully.



✓ INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY AND MENTAL HEALTH

International mobility significantly influences mental well-being among VET learners, bringing out challenges such as insecurity, isolation, and homesickness. Indeed, social interactions and support systems are critical in maintaining mental health as suggested by the BPS theory. Pre-mobility preparations effectively mitigate anticipated stressors like culture shock and language barriers.

However, **ongoing support mechanisms are essential to address unforeseen stressors and sustain mental health during mobility experiences.** To that end, PERMA theory suggests that to improve the well-being of people who take part in international mobility, it is crucial to focus on elements of well-being such as positive relationships and achievement of personal goals. Professionals, with greater exposure to mobility programs, demonstrate heightened awareness of these challenges, underscoring the necessity for targeted support initiatives.



perceive widespread discomfort around discussing mental health reflects significant social barriers. PERMA theory adds that to improve well-being, it is crucial to foster environments where relationships are positive and it is possible to engage openly without fear of judgment. Therefore, **addressing stigma necessitates multifaceted interventions encompassing educational campaigns, training programs, and cultivating supportive environments** conducive to fostering open dialogue on mental health.

✓ MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA IN THE VET SECTOR

The persistent stigma surrounding mental health remains prevalent within the VET sector, discouraging open communication and help-seeking behaviours among learners and professionals alike. The study reveals a paradoxical scenario where despite high awareness of mental health issues, individuals exhibit reluctance to discuss personal challenges due to fear of judgment or shame.

The biopsychosocial theory explains that stigma can affect mental well-being by creating social barriers that limit people's ability to get the support they need. The fact that 86% of learners and 91% of professionals

✓ ACCESSIBILITY OF MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Accessibility to mental health resources emerges as a critical concern among VET respondents. **While traditional sources such as mental health professionals and crisis hotlines are widely acknowledged, there is a notable generational gap in familiarity with digital and online resources.** Younger learners favour interactive digital platforms, indicating a need for adaptable resources to meet evolving preferences and technological advancements. They are also more prone to educational programs increasing their overall knowledge. Moreover, the study advocates for promoting self-help strategies and peer support networks, particularly during international mobility, suggesting a need for diverse and accessible support options.



BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ BEST PRACTICES

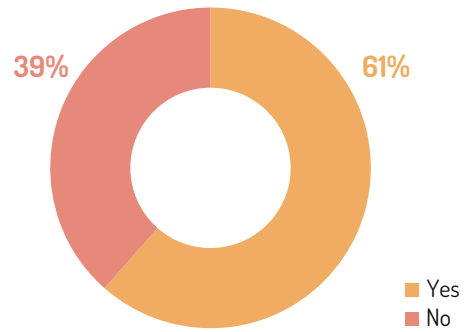
To develop effective tools for fostering support of emotional well-being for learners, respondents were asked to share their best practices and activities to cope with mental health challenges. The results indicate that a majority of participants (61%) are aware of best practices to improve their mental health.

Among the practices employed to maintain mental health, **participating in hobbies and interests (74%)**, **ensuring adequate sleep and rest (73%)**, **engaging in regular physical activity (69%)**, and **seeking support from friends, family, or support groups (65%)** are the most prevalent. These activities are widely regarded as beneficial, with significant engagement across the VET sector. They are broadly accessible to all and have an immediate impact on mental well-being.

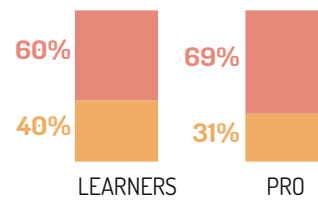
On the other hand, a few participants are doing yoga and meditation (27%), journaling and self-reflection (30%), or using available mental health services and resources (30%) to support their emotional well-being.



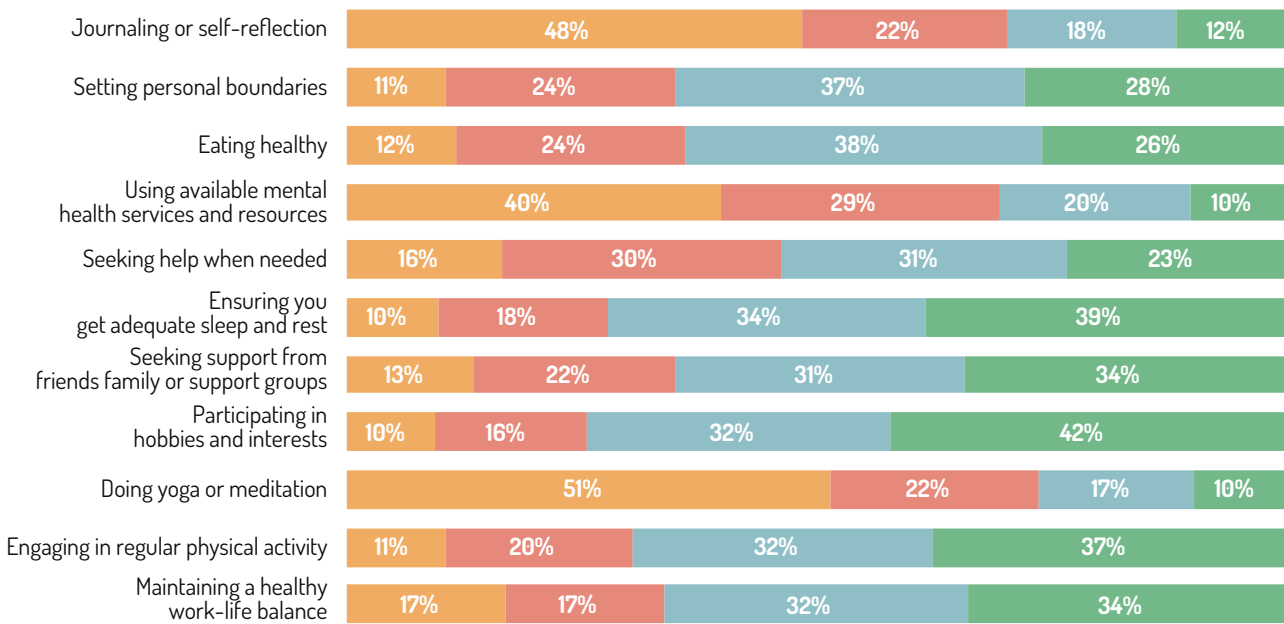
Are you aware of best practices to improve your mental health?



Results by participants



What good practice do you use the most ?



1: Never 2: Rarely 3: Occasionally 4: Frequently

Although these practices have been widely researched for their positive impact, barriers such as time constraints, lack of access, and insufficient knowledge can limit their widespread adoption²⁵.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of various coping strategies in challenging situations was also evaluated to bring out good practices to adopt in case of poor mental health. **Seeking support from family and friends** emerged as the most beneficial (73%), followed by **physical activities (69%)** and **seeking professional help (68%)**. Interestingly, VET professionals (82%) were more likely to seek professional help compared to learners (64%), highlighting a potential area for increasing mental health literacy and reducing stigma among learners.

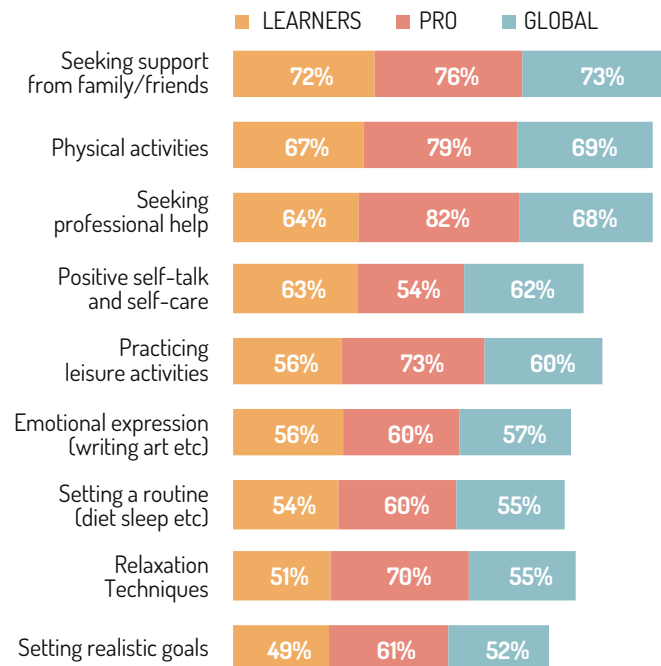
Whether their mental health is good or fragile, respondents believe that physical activity and support from family and friends are important for looking after their well-being. Otherwise, all practices suggested are considered as beneficial for respondents. At least the majority considered all the possibilities helpful to cope with challenging situations.

It is also possible to **use positive self-talk and self-care, practice leisure activities, use emotional expression, set a routine, use relaxation techniques, or set realistic goals.**

✔ RECOMMENDATIONS

The study emphasises crucial aspects of mental health in the VET sector, including variability in perceptions and knowledge and disparities in awareness and engagement. By integrating perspectives from BPS and PERMA theories, it is possible to broaden the understanding and improvement of mental health by taking a holistic approach that considers biological, psychological, and social dimensions, as well as aspects of personal well-being.

! Which activities can be helpful to cope with challenging situations? Results by participants



Recommendations include:

- 1. Strengthening education**
 Developing mental health literacy programmes that comprehensively address the biological, psychological, and social aspects of mental health, while incorporating elements of PERMA theory to promote full personal development, such as stress management and confidence-building.
- 2. Improving resources**
 Increasing access to mental health resources by addressing the specific needs identified, particularly by improving accessibility to services and reducing stigmatisation.
- 3. Specific support for international mobility**
 Implement initiatives that address the specific emotional challenges encountered during international mobility, based on the principles of BPS theory for a global approach and PERMA theory to promote well-being in a new context.

²⁵ Barnes, P. M., Bloom, B., & Nahin, R. L. (2012). Complementary and alternative medicine use among adults and children: United States, 2007. National health statistics reports; no 12. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.

CONCLUSION

In a context where young people feel pressured by several aspects of their lives: education, employment, personal relationships, or the global environment, focusing on mental health is essential to help them navigate life's challenges more effectively. In the VET sector, there is a pressing need for increased initiatives and education on that matter.

VET professionals are pivotal in nurturing mental health practices among learners and are the ones who follow them when they undertake international mobility. VET learners need to rely on reliable resources to pursue their academic journey, which can go beyond international mobility.

This study represents a complex landscape where awareness, challenges, and resource accessibility intersect to shape the well-being of learners and professionals. VET learners and professionals lack knowledge of mental health, and it is partly due to the lack of educational initiatives. Because of stigmatisation, beliefs on mental health are deeply rooted, and stereotypes need to be deconstructed one by one.

As international mobility significantly impacts mental well-being, professionals must implement tailored interventions to prepare learners for the various challenges they could face during an international mobility project. Effective coping strategies such as engaging in hobbies, ensuring adequate sleep, and seeking support from peers and family are widely acknowledged. However, there remains an underutilisation of specific strategies like yoga, meditation, and professional mental health services, highlighting the importance of addressing barriers such as time constraints and lack of awareness.



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ADICE

<https://www.adice.asso.fr>
adice@adice.asso.fr
+33 3 20 11 22 68



Volunteers Centre Skopje

<https://www.vcs.org.mk>
vcs_contact@yahoo.com
+389 75 243 726



Fundación Plan B Educación Social

<https://planbeducacionsocial.com>
contacto@planbeducacionsocial.com
+34 923 994 177



KERIC

<https://www.keric.sk>
keric@keric.sk
+421 908 913 995



JMK

<http://www.jmk.ee>
jmk@jmk.ee
+372 7300 544