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CARING COMPASS



Empowering Support Persons in Social Sphere

Key Takeaways
of the Transnational study



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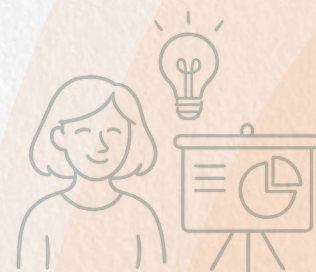
1 Introduction

This document gathers the analysis of the answers received by 117 respondents who work as support persons in France, Sweden, Latvia, Estonia, and Italy. The results of this study should be interpreted cautiously, as they represent only the specific groups of support persons who participated and may not accurately reflect the experiences of all support persons in the partner countries.

The objective is to derive the key takeaways from the meticulous analysis of each questionnaire's answer.

The analysis is divided in 4 sections, as follows:

1. Personal data of the respondents.
2. About the Training.
3. About the Tools and Materials.
4. About the Working Obstacles and Support sessions
5. Overall Summary and Key Takeaways



In the first 4 sections, a general overview is provided in order to assess the main elements and characteristics highlighted by the respondents.

The overview is subsequently developed by presenting how the recurring elements (we refer to crossed-analyzed questions) interact with the different aspects of the section. In this way, a more compact view is available for the WP3 implementation.

At the end of the "Overview" subchapter, there is a dedicated section where key factors from the analysis (those that have been repeatedly examined in relation to other variables) are presented individually. This provides a compact view of all the aspects influenced by each factor, organized into "Trends" and "Thoughts" for clarity and deeper insight.

At the end of each section there is a dedicated "Key takeaways" paragraph, related to the subjects of the chapter.

To look at the result and discussion of each chart, crossed-chart, and open question, please refer to the word file "Results Analysis".

The 5th section is a synthesis of the key findings and implications of all the results obtained.



2 Section 1: Personal data of the Respondents.

This chapter presents an analysis of the demographic and professional characteristics of the support persons who participated in the study across five European countries. Examining these personal data provides essential context for understanding the findings related to their experiences, needs, and perspectives.

2.1 Overview

Age distribution varies, with Estonia and Sweden having an older demographic (predominantly 50+), while France and Italy show a more balanced spread. Younger age groups (18-25) are underrepresented across all countries, particularly in Italy, Sweden, and Latvia. Consistent with sector trends, females are significantly overrepresented in the support workforce across all nations. Educational attainment is generally high, with university degrees most common in France, Italy, Latvia, and Estonia and a mix of degrees and high school diplomas in Sweden.

Non-profit/charity organizations are the most common employer, except in Latvia where social welfare institutions dominate. Hybrid social enterprises are a small presence across all regions. Target group focus varies by country: France emphasizes young people, Latvia focuses on mental health and physical disabilities, and Sweden on refugees/new immigrants. Estonia supports a wider range of target groups. Overall, adults with difficulties to cope, mental health support, and work with young people are the most common areas of focus.

Annual income data reveals that most respondents earn up to €15,000 annually (excluding Sweden, where income data is largely undisclosed). A significant portion of respondents in all countries chose not to disclose their income. Weekly working hours are typically categorized as "less than 10 hours" or "full-time," though Latvia is predominantly full-time. "Less than 10 hours" is most common in France, Sweden, and Estonia. Non-profits often utilize part-time or volunteer staff, while governmental and social welfare institutions primarily employ full-time workers. Educational facilities show a mix of part-time and full-time, while social welfare institutions lean towards a more full-time distribution. Paid work is dominant in social welfare institutions, governmental and educational settings, while non-profits rely heavily on volunteers in addition to paid staff.

Perceived work appreciation is highest for those supporting vulnerable groups (addicts, adults with coping difficulties, and children with special needs). A significant proportion of respondents across several target groups, however, report a neutral perception of appreciation, suggesting a potential need for increased recognition of their work.

2.2 Factor: Organization type



Trends

1. Target groups

- Non-Profits & Charities: They serve a diverse range of target groups, with a strong focus on young people (students), adults with difficulties to cope and refugees/new immigrants.
- Educational Institutions: They work with several target groups, with a strong focus on children with special needs, youth, refugees.
- People with mental health issues are helped primarily in social welfare institutions, non-profit organizations and local governments.
- Non-profit organizations primarily rely on part-time and volunteer work, with most individuals working less than 10 hours per week. However, there are also some full-time positions, reflecting the need for dedicated roles within these organizations.
- Government and social welfare institutions, on the other hand, offer more full-time paid jobs, likely due to their structured budgets and formal employment policies.
- In educational institutions, part-time work is more common, whereas roles within social welfare institutions tend to have more full-time positions.

2. Work Appreciation:

- Work supporting adults with difficulties to cope, addicts, and children with special needs is highly valued.
- For certain groups like “people who would like to start their own enterprise”, a significant portion of respondents selected the “neutral” answer about the appreciation, which may indicate a lack of awareness or understanding of their needs and the importance of supporting them.



Thoughts

- Refugee Support & Social Needs: Strong focus reflects migration crises & socio-economic instability.
- Maintain appreciation for priority groups.
- Improve conditions & visibility to enhance appreciation: Implement strategies to enhance the contribution of operators who work with undervalued groups, for example by improving working conditions or promoting their role in the community.



2.3 Key Takeaways for WP3

- **Demographic Context:** Consider the age and gender distribution when designing interventions. The underrepresentation of younger support persons may have implications for workforce sustainability.
- **Education & Training:** The generally high education level suggests support persons may be receptive to evidence-based training and materials. Tailor resources accordingly.
- **Organizational Diversity:** Acknowledge the diverse organizational contexts (non-profit, governmental) and their influence on roles, resources, and challenges. Interventions should be adaptable.
- **Target Group Specificity:** Materials and training should address the unique challenges of working with different target groups.
- **Socioeconomic Factors:** Consider the prevalence of lower incomes and varied working hours, particularly in non-profits, when designing support systems. Accessibility and flexibility are crucial.
- **Recognition & Appreciation:** Develop strategies to enhance recognition of support persons' work, especially for those working with less-appreciated groups.
- **Data Limitations:** Be aware of the significant non-disclosure of income data, which may limit socioeconomic analysis. The subjective nature of "appreciation" should also be considered. Further research could explore qualitative measures of work satisfaction and perceived value.

3 Section 2: About the Training.

This section presents an analysis of the training curriculum and professional development experiences of the support persons who participated in the study. Understanding their training backgrounds is crucial for interpreting their perspectives on necessary tools, support structures, and challenges encountered in their daily work.

3.1 Overview

Certification prevalence is highest in Estonia, with a near-even split in Italy and low rates in France and Sweden (Latvia omitted this question). Initial training formats vary: Sweden shows a relatively even distribution across types, while "formal training" and "on-the-job training" are dominant elsewhere, particularly in Estonia (formal) and Latvia (on-the-job). A significant proportion of respondents across all countries, however, believe their initial training could be improved, with Estonia reporting the highest level of dissatisfaction and Sweden noting a high rate of no initial training received.

Key training gaps identified include a lack of practical application and insufficient coverage of necessary topics. Respondents consistently highlight the need for more training in building trusting relationships, active listening, and intercultural competencies. In Estonia and Latvia, skills for working with difficult target groups and conflict management are also prominent concerns. The most frequently used skills in their current work are encouraging autonomy, providing emotional support, and helping beneficiaries set goals. Open-ended responses regarding desired training reveal a strong need for psychological and emotional support skills, followed by communication and active listening, and knowledge of available resources. Stress and burnout management, crisis management, and practical/technical skills are also highly valued. Cultural competence is the least mentioned area for additional training.

Regarding best practices for training, respondents emphasize experiential and on-the-job training, interactive/collaborative methods, and training focused on psychological/emotional support and crisis/conflict management. Resource and knowledge sharing, legislative/administrative knowledge, cultural competence, practical tools/guides, self-care/professional development, and networking/professional collaboration are also considered essential. Analysis by organization type reveals that on-the-job and formal training are most common, particularly in social welfare institutions, non-profits, and hybrid enterprises. Formal training is most prevalent in local governments, while hybrid enterprises show the highest reliance on self-training. Educational facilities utilize specific courses, reflecting specialized roles.

Formal training receives the highest satisfaction ratings, followed by on-the-job training, but even here, many believe training "can be improved." A significant group of respondents did not receive any training at all. Key problems identified with existing training include insufficient coverage of necessary topics (especially in self-taught, specific courses, and on-the-job training) and a lack of practical application (particularly in formal training). Cost is a less frequent concern, except for training on specific topics.

3.2 Factor: Training type



Trends

1. Most Used Training Methods:

- On-site, on-the-job, and formal training are the most used methods in social welfare institutions, non-profits, and hybrid social enterprises.
- Local government organizations primarily rely on formal training, consistent with their structured and regulated nature.
- Hybrid social enterprises show the highest dependence on self-training, indicating a more independent learning approach.
- In educational facilities, there is a strong preference for specific courses, reflecting the need for specialized skills in this sector.



2. Training Satisfaction:

- Formal training receives the highest satisfaction levels among participants, while on-the-job training is moderately well-received but still has areas for improvement.
- A common concern across all training types is that many participants feel there is room for enhancement.

3. Training Problems Identified:

- Key gaps in training include missing topics, particularly in self-training, specific courses, and on-the-job training.
- A lack of practical application is a notable issue in formal training, suggesting a need for more hands-on learning.
- While cost concerns are generally minimal, they are more prominent in specific-topic training programs.



Thoughts

1. Addressing Training Gaps:

- Hybrid enterprises especially and all the others, often depend on self-training, which may lead to knowledge gaps. Ensuring all employees receive at least basic training can help create a more solid foundation.

2. Improving Training Satisfaction:

- Since many participants believe training could be improved, organizations should tailor content based on feedback. Implementing ongoing surveys can help track progress and refine training programs over time.

3. Enhancing Training Effectiveness:

- Pre-training assessments to align topics with participant needs.
- More practical components through interactive activities, case studies, and real-world applications.
- Cost accessibility via tiered pricing, group discounts, or subsidies to ensure broader participation.

3.3 Key Takeaways for WP3

- Training Gaps:** Focus on developing training materials and programs that address the identified gaps in current training, particularly in building trusting relationships, active listening, intercultural competence, and skills for working with difficult target groups.
- Practical Application:** Incorporate more practical exercises, case studies, and real-world simulations into training programs to address the reported lack of practical experience.

- **Targeted Training:** Develop specific training modules tailored to the needs of different target groups and the challenges faced by support persons working with those groups.
- **Accessibility & Affordability:** Consider the cost of training and explore options for making it more accessible to support persons, especially given the prevalence of lower incomes in the sector.
- **Training Format:** Explore a blended approach to training, combining formal instruction with on-the-job training, mentoring, and peer learning opportunities.
- **Ongoing Professional Development:** Emphasize the importance of continuous learning and provide resources for ongoing professional development, including access to networks, resource sharing platforms, and opportunities for skill enhancement.
- **Evaluation & Feedback:** Implement robust evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of training programs and incorporate feedback from participants to ensure continuous improvement.
- **Unmet Needs:** Address the significant proportion of respondents who did not receive any initial training. Develop strategies to ensure all support persons have access to at least basic training.
- **Specific Skills:** Prioritize training in the skills most desired by support persons: psychological and emotional support, communication and active listening, and knowledge of available resources.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** Ensure training programs are culturally sensitive and address the specific needs of diverse populations.
- **Tailor Training to Context:** Consider country-specific needs, such as formal training in Estonia and on-site training in Latvia.

4 Section 3: About the Tools and Materials.



Effective support work often relies on the availability and appropriate use of tools and materials. This section examines the range of tools and materials currently employed by support persons across the five European countries, exploring their perceived effectiveness and identifying areas where additional resources or training may be needed.

4.1 Overview

Tool usage varies, with Estonia reporting the highest prevalence, and Sweden expressing the greatest unmet need for tools. France and Latvia show moderate usage patterns. Across all countries, "lists of resources/services", "support networks", and "practical handbooks and toolkits" are highly valued. "Emergency manuals" are less consistently desired. Italy shows the strongest interest in practical resources, while Sweden, Estonia and Latvia prioritize support networks.

Analysis of tool preferences based on current usage reveals that non-users see the most value in practical resources like handbooks and resource lists, while regular users value support networks. Those who don't see the value of tools show little interest in any specific tool type. Resource lists are particularly important for those who show a limited resource usage behavior and for those who desire to use tools but currently lack access. Target group analysis reinforces the high demand for resource lists and support networks, particularly among those supporting adults with difficulties coping, people with mental health issues, young people, and people with physical disabilities.

4.2 Key Takeaways for WP3

- **Resource Accessibility:** Develop centralized, up-to-date, and accessible directories of resources and services. Consider online databases, mobile apps, or printed materials tailored to specific regions and target groups.
- **Peer Support Networks:** Facilitate the creation and maintenance of support networks and peer learning opportunities. Explore online forums, regular meetings, or mentorship programs.
- **Practical Tools & Guidance:** Develop practical handbooks, toolkits, and step-by-step guides for daily tasks, tailored to the specific needs of different target groups.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** Investigate the low interest in emergency manuals (except in France). If existing protocols are insufficient, develop targeted resources and training on handling specific types of emergencies relevant to different target groups.
- **Tool Development & Implementation:** Adopt a tailored approach to tool development, considering the specific needs and preferences of different user groups and target populations.
- **Bridging the Gap:** Focus on providing practical resources (handbooks, resource lists) to encourage tool adoption among non-users.



5 Section 4: About the Working Obstacles and Support Session.

Building upon the analysis of target groups and their specific challenges, this section investigates the correlation between the daily obstacles encountered by support persons and their desired types of support. By examining how different obstacles, such as "client is not cooperative" or "work does not produce results," impact the need for peer support, individual coaching, stress management sessions, and access to support networks, we can gain a deeper understanding of the support needs arising from specific work-related challenges.

5.1 Overview

Stress frequency varies, with Italy and Latvia reporting the highest incidence of stress events (more than twice per month), followed by Estonia. France and Sweden report lower stress frequencies (less than once per year or every month). Estonia shows a more balanced distribution of stress frequency. A considerable percentage of French and Swedish respondents answered "I don't know" about their stress frequency.

The most commonly reported daily obstacle is "Client is not cooperative". "Bureaucracy and paperwork" is more prominent in France, Estonia, and Italy. "Lack of supervision," "Burnout," "Lack of clear working instructions," and "Too much intense work" are reported less frequently and with greater variability across countries. French respondents tend to report a lower frequency of all obstacles, aligning with their lower reported stress frequency. Estonia, despite showing a high frequency of stressful events, does not show a similarly high frequency in the daily obstacles, but it must be considered that the number of Estonian participants was higher compared to the other countries.

Italy, Sweden, and Estonia report the highest unmet need for support sessions. Latvia has the highest proportion of regular support access, while France has the highest proportion of respondents who don't feel a need for support. "Yes, but rarely" is a common response across all countries, suggesting current support structures may be insufficient.

"Access to a network of support persons" is highly desired across all countries, followed by "Sessions on stress management and personal well-being." "Individual coaching" receives interest as well, and "peer supervision groups" receive varying levels of interest, with Italy and Estonia showing the highest. Estonia shows the highest overall demand for support.

Open-ended responses reveal key emotionally stressful events: client-related stressors (aggression, mental health issues), interpersonal conflicts, systemic/resource challenges, powerlessness/ethical dilemmas, crises/emergencies, work overload, emotional burden/empathy fatigue, family/child-related stressors, and unpredictable client behavior. Client-related stressors and crises/emergencies are the most prominent.

Success is subjectively defined by client progress and independence, positive client feedback, goal achievement, client well-being, building trust, long-term impact, team success, and personal fulfillment.

Those experiencing stress "more than twice per month" have the highest need for support, while those with low stress frequency report the lowest need. "Access to a network of support persons" is consistently highly valued. Stress management sessions are most desired by those experiencing stress more frequently. Individual coaching is desired also by those with less frequent stress. Peer supervision receives moderate interest across groups.

Regarding daily obstacles, a support network is highly desired for uncooperative clients. Stress management and Individual coaching show a consistent level of interest across most obstacles.

"Lack of skills/experience," "Client is not cooperative," "Bureaucracy, paperwork", and "Lack of supporting network for client" are prominent obstacles across target groups. Bureaucracy is a consistent challenge.

5.2 Factor: Stressful events frequency



Trends

1. Support Needs Based on Stress Levels:

- Individuals experiencing high levels of stress (more than twice a month) have the strongest need for support, with many seeking regular support or expressing a desire for it.
- Those with low stress (less than once a year) show the least need for support, with most stating they don't feel the need.
- Individuals uncertain about their stress levels ("Don't know") have mixed responses, suggesting unclear support needs.

2. Preferred Support Types Based on Stress Frequency:

- Support networks are highly valued across all groups, reflecting a universal demand for this type of support.
- Stress management sessions are most desired by high-stress individuals, who face frequent stress events.
- Individual coaching is a commonly selected option but never the most picked one, suggesting that individual coaching might be seen as a more proactive or preventative measure, or a way to gain clarity on their needs
- Peer supervision groups show moderate but consistent interest across all stress frequency groups.





Thoughts

1. The Power of Peer Support:

- Support networks are consistently in demand, highlighting the importance of shared experiences and community-based support. This suggests that fostering connections among individuals who face similar challenges is crucial in providing effective help.

2. Tailored Support for High-Stress Groups:

- Individuals experiencing frequent stress require more structured interventions, such as stress management programs, coping mechanisms, and mindfulness techniques, to address their unique needs.

3. Proactive vs. Reactive Approaches:

- Coaching is viewed as a proactive approach which can help with personal development and well-being before stress becomes overwhelming.

4. The Role of Peer Supervision:

- While not the most popular option, peer supervision remains a valuable complementary support method. It provides ongoing, collaborative support, especially for those dealing with specific challenges in their roles.

5.3 Factor: Daily obstacles

Trends



1. Most Desired Support for Specific Obstacles:

- Support network of support persons is highly valued.
- "Sessions on stress management" and "Individual coaching" show a consistent level of interest across most obstacles. The results indicate a clear need for stress management resources and training, while the blue bars indicate that this type of support is generally valued but perhaps less urgent than peer support or stress management in relation to specific daily obstacles.
- Peer Supervision Groups: More sought after for "Bureaucracy and paperwork" and "Client is not cooperative," suggesting the value of supervision and collaborative problem-solving when dealing with these specific issues.

2. Insights from Daily Obstacles & Target Groups:

- With the exception of a few minor variations, all target groups reported experiencing all types of daily work obstacles.
- However, the overall distribution of obstacles across the different target groups shows striking similarities. Four obstacles consistently emerge as the most prevalent: "Bureaucracy, paperwork," "Lack of skills/experience," "Client is not cooperative," and "Lack of supporting network for client." These four challenges appear to be significant and evenly distributed across the various target groups, suggesting they are pervasive issues within the support work environment.



Thoughts

1. Match Support to Specific Challenges:

- Support interventions should be tailored to specific work obstacles. Support network is highly valued and should be facilitated. "Work does not produce results" requires further investigation. Peer support can complement, but not replace, formal supervision. An integrated approach combining various support types is crucial.

2. Strengthening Skills & Training:

- Target communication and de-escalation training for individuals working with challenging clients, empowering them with strategies to navigate difficult interactions more effectively.
- Provide ongoing professional development to address the widespread lack of skills obstacle, ensuring support workers are continually growing in their roles and equipped with the necessary skills.

3. Reducing Bureaucratic Burdens:

- Streamline administrative processes and reduce excessive paperwork to ensure that support workers spend more time on direct client care, rather than being bogged down by administrative tasks.

4. Addressing the Root Causes of Unproductive Work:

- Investigate why work feels unproductive by addressing factors such as lack of resources, unclear goals, and client disengagement. Identifying and tackling these underlying issues will help improve outcomes for both workers and clients.



5.4 Key Takeaways for WP3

- **Stress & Support:** Develop targeted support interventions for support persons experiencing frequent stress and address the unmet support needs.
- **Obstacle-Specific Support:** Design support programs tailored to specific obstacles. Peer support is crucial for challenging client interactions, while stress management is essential for burnout.
- **Root Cause Analysis:** Investigate the causes of "unproductive work." Address systemic issues and resource constraints.
- **Integrated Support:** Implement a comprehensive approach combining peer support, stress management, coaching, and improved supervision.
- **Client-Specific Challenges:** Develop training and resources to address the challenges of working with different target groups.
- **Emotional Well-being:** Prioritize interventions to support emotional well-being, given the prevalence of client-related stressors and crises.
- **Defining Success:** Recognize the diverse ways support persons define success and design interventions that contribute to these aspects.

6 Section 5: Synthesis of Key Findings and Recommendations for Future Work

This chapter synthesizes the key findings from the preceding sections, providing a comprehensive overview of the characteristics, experiences, and needs of support persons across five European countries. This integrated perspective aims to inform the development of effective interventions and resources for Work Package 3.

Demographic and Professional Profile

The typical support person is likely female, employed by a non-profit or social welfare institution, and supports adults facing difficulties, individuals with mental health concerns, or young people. Age distribution varies across countries, with some regions having an aging workforce. Educational attainment is generally high. Annual income is frequently low (under €15,000), and working hours vary, especially in non-profits. Perceived work appreciation is highest for those supporting vulnerable groups, but many report a neutral perception, suggesting a need for increased recognition. Non-profits often rely on part-time and volunteer staff, while governmental and social welfare institutions primarily employ full-time personnel.

Training Experiences and Needs

Training formats include formal training and on-the-job training. Many respondents express dissatisfaction with their initial training, citing a lack of practical application and insufficient coverage of essential topics. Key training needs include building trusting relationships, active listening, intercultural competence, and skills for working with diverse groups. Training in psychological and emotional support, stress/burnout management, and crisis management is highly desired. Experiential and interactive training methods are preferred. Formal training receives the highest satisfaction ratings, while on-the-job and self-training have identified gaps. A significant portion of respondents did not receive any initial training.

Tool Usage and Preferences

Tool usage varies across countries. "Lists of resources/services," "support networks," and "practical handbooks and toolkits" are highly valued. "Emergency manuals" are less consistently desired. Non-users prefer practical resources, while regular users prioritize support networks. Resource lists and support networks are particularly important for those supporting specific vulnerable groups.

Working Obstacles, Stress, and Support Needs

Common daily obstacles include uncooperative clients, unproductive work, and bureaucracy. Stress frequency varies, with some countries reporting higher levels than others. A significant unmet need for support sessions exists. "Access to a network of support persons" and "sessions on stress management and personal well-being" are highly desired. Individual coaching and peer supervision are also valued. Open-ended responses reveal emotionally stressful events: client-related stressors, interpersonal conflicts, systemic challenges, crises, work overload, emotional burden, and unpredictable client behavior. Success is defined by client progress, positive feedback, goal achievement, and well-being. Stress frequency is linked to support needs. Peer support is highly valued across stress levels. Stress management sessions are preferred by those experiencing more frequent stress. Different obstacles require different support types. Peer support is crucial for uncooperative clients. "Lack of skills/experience," uncooperative clients, and unproductive work are prominent obstacles across target groups. Bureaucracy is a consistent challenge. "Work does not produce results" requires further investigation into its causes.

6.1 Recommendations for Work Package 3

- **Targeted Interventions:** Develop tailored interventions that address the specific needs of different target groups and the unique challenges faced by support persons in various organizational contexts and countries.
- **Practical Resources:** Prioritize the development and dissemination of practical resources, including up-to-date resource directories, practical handbooks, and toolkits. These resources should be easily accessible and tailored to specific needs.
- **Peer Support Networks:** Invest in the creation and maintenance of peer support networks and mentorship programs to facilitate knowledge sharing, emotional support, and professional development.
- **Enhanced Training:** Develop and deliver high-quality training programs that address the identified skill gaps and incorporate experiential learning, practical application, and ongoing professional development opportunities. Focus on psychological and emotional support, crisis management, and intercultural competence.
- **Stress Management & Well-being:** Integrate stress management techniques and self-care strategies into training programs and provide access to resources that promote well-being and prevent burnout.
- **Supervisory Support:** Strengthen supervisory structures and provide training for supervisors to effectively support their staff.
- **Advocacy & Recognition:** Promote the value and recognition of support persons' work through advocacy efforts and public awareness campaigns. Address the perceived lack of appreciation, particularly for those working with certain target groups.



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