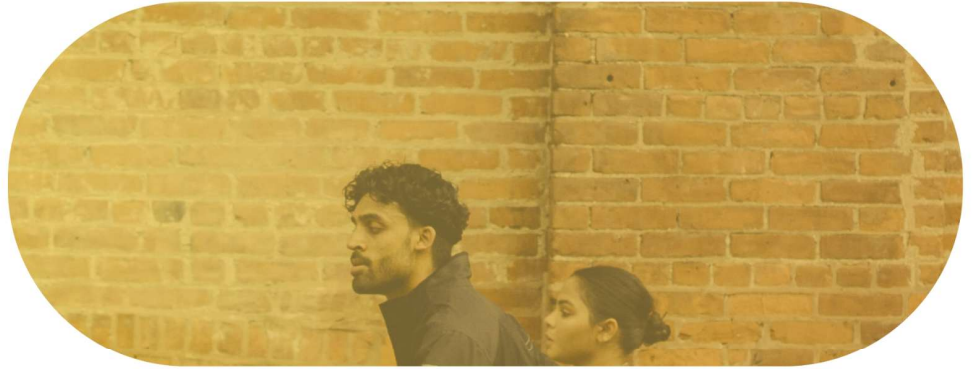




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Desk & Field Research Reports

Executive Summary

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IPS_Innovative Prison Systems

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Introduction

Despite the clear, scientifically validated need for sports-based and educational tools within prisons to support rehabilitation, there remains a significant practical gap in effective methods that promote competence-building and skills development among incarcerated individuals.

The **Sport4Prisons** project seeks to address this gap by developing, implementing, and evaluating an innovative sports-based methodology designed to assess and strengthen the competencies of incarcerated individuals. The project also aims to equip prison officers and trainers with the necessary knowledge and skills to apply this method effectively, thereby enhancing rehabilitation outcomes.

This *Executive Summary* synthesises insights from two reports produced within the project¹: the Desk Research report, which examines demographics, policies, practices, key competencies, and systemic challenges; and the Field Research report, which details key findings derived from surveys and interviews conducted with prison staff across the Sport4Prisons consortium countries. The Summary highlights major findings, compares perspectives across the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), Hungary, Portugal, and Türkiye, and presents a set of actionable recommendations.

¹ The full reports in English, as well as their translations into the national languages of the project's partner countries, are available at: <https://www.sport4prisons.eu/project-results.html>

Desk Research

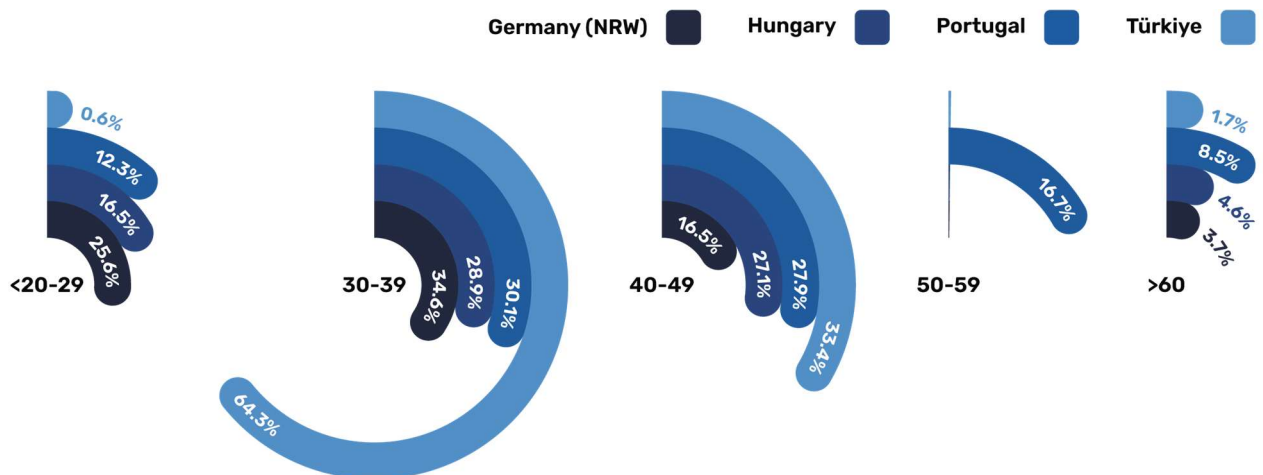
Context and Key Findings

The desk research provides a comprehensive overview of the prison systems in the participating countries, including demographic patterns and existing competency frameworks. Key insights include:

Demographics

The majority of incarcerated individuals are between 25 and 49 years old; the population is overwhelmingly male (over 90%); educational attainment is generally low (with more than 70% not having completed secondary education); and most individuals deprived of liberty are national citizens.

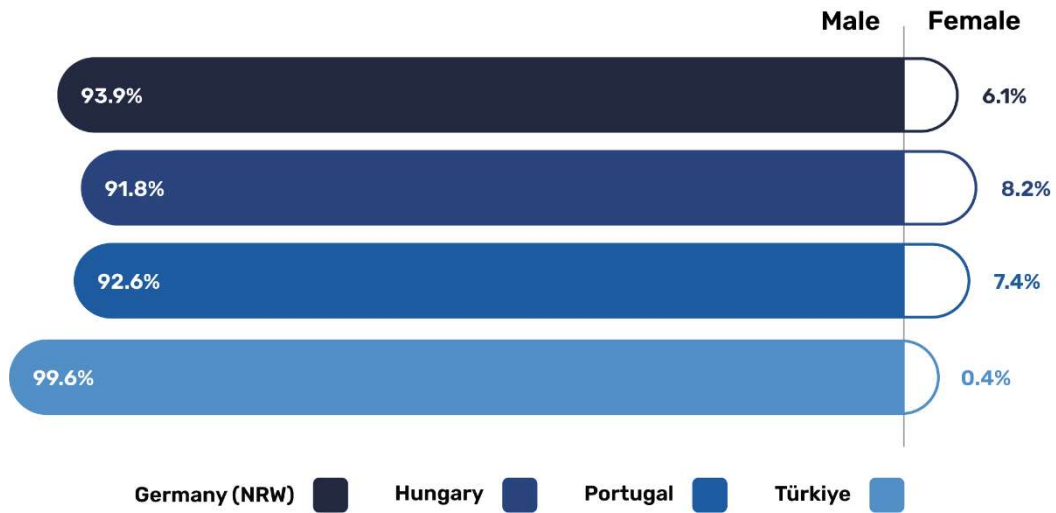
FIGURE 1
Age Distribution of Prison Population (*Cross-Country*)



Note: Germany data refers to NRW state.

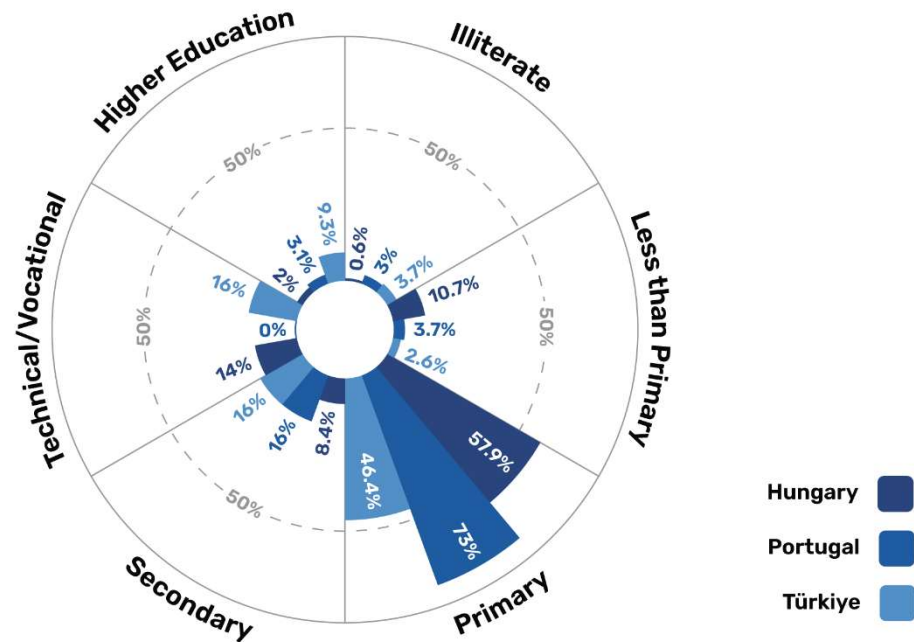


FIGURE 2
Gender Breakdown of Prison Population (Cross-Country)



Note: Germany data refers to NRW state.

FIGURE 3
Educational Levels of Prison Population (Cross-Country)

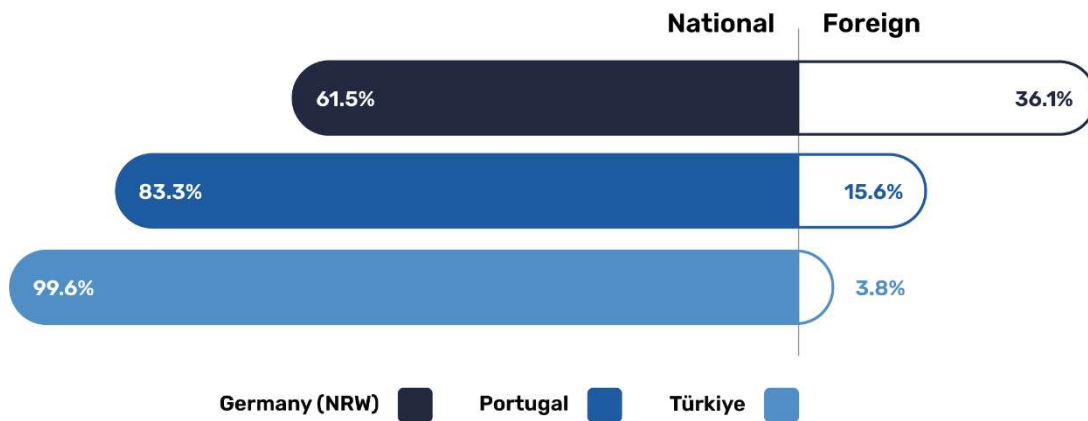


Note: Data for Germany (NRW) are not available.





FIGURE 4
Nationality Breakdown of Prison Population (*Cross-Country*)



Note: Data for Hungary are not available.

Policy frameworks

Germany and Hungary operate within well-established legal frameworks that support rehabilitation; Portugal balances security requirements with strong engagement in qualification pathways; and Türkiye systematically integrates education and vocational training into its prison regime.

Existing competency domains

Key domains include:

	Personal & Social	Educational	Vocational	Civic & Digital
Germany	Self-confidence, emotional regulation, communication	Literacy, numeracy, language	Technical skills, problem-solving	Financial literacy, digital skills
Hungary	Communication, conflict resolution, emotional regulation	Literacy, numeracy	Work ethics, responsibility	Financial literacy
Portugal	Motivation, teamwork, emotional regulation	Literacy, numeracy	Technical skills, adaptability	Digital skills








Türkiye	Anger control, emotional regulation, respect	Literacy	Vocational skills	Digital skills
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Table 1. Key competency domains identified in the partnership countries.

Across the four countries, **competency development** in prisons is pursued through a combination of education, vocational training, psychosocial support, and reintegration programmes, though with distinct national emphases.

 Germany (NRW), while recognising that the degree of implementation varies significantly between institutions in practice, employs a highly structured model integrating formal education, certified vocational pathways, digital learning tools (such as ELIS), and behavioural interventions.

 Hungary similarly offers comprehensive education and labour-market-aligned vocational training, complemented by psychosocial, creative, and restorative practices.

 Portugal focuses on expanding adult education and vocational training, particularly for younger individuals, through nationally recognised qualifications and partnerships with the Ministry of Education.

 Türkiye demonstrates a systematised framework, combining mandatory literacy programmes, formal and non-formal education, wide-ranging vocational certification, spiritual guidance, and cultural activities.

In conclusion, the findings highlight the substantial complexity involved in designing and implementing effective rehabilitation strategies across the partner countries. Although all countries recognise the importance of competence development for reintegration, significant challenges persist, including structural, educational, and psychosocial barriers. These include enduring stigma faced by individuals upon release, as well as disparities in

policy frameworks, resources, and programme delivery, which continue to constrain progress.

A key component of the work conducted in the research was the establishment of trust with prison institutions through clear communication and transparent engagement, ensuring that the findings are grounded in the most realistic data possible.

Why this matters?

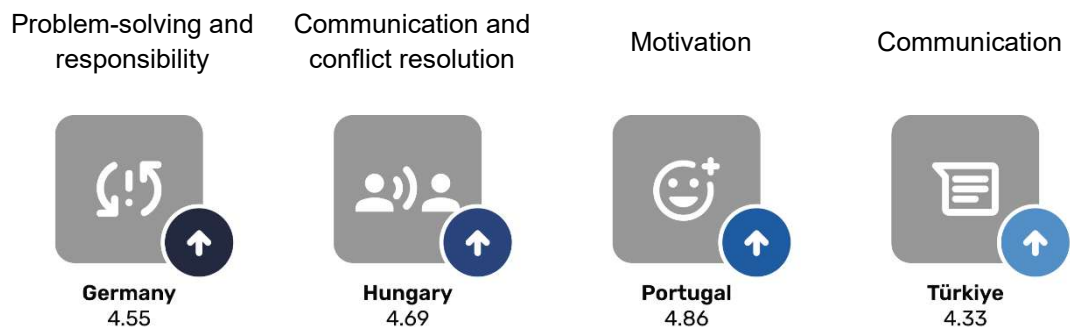
Reintegration requires a broad set of personal, social, vocational, educational, and civic competencies, with foundational skills and employability-focused training forming a common core, complemented by promising initiatives such as vocational pathways, psychosocial support, and restorative practices. This highlights the need to address the transversal and context-specific constraints that undermine the continuity and scalability of such efforts.

Field Research

Insights and Data

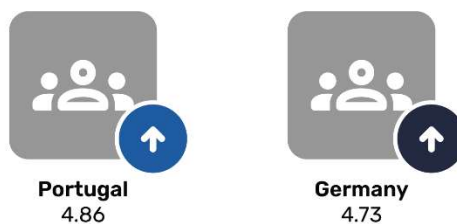
The field research drew on surveys (N = 52) and interviews (N = 33) conducted across the four partner countries. The findings show notable cross-national variation.

On a 1–5 scale, respondents identified different priority competencies: problem-solving and responsibility were rated highest in Germany (4.55), communication and conflict resolution in Hungary (4.69), motivation in Portugal (4.86), and communication in Türkiye (4.33).



Sport was widely perceived as an effective means of fostering teamwork and emotional regulation, with the strongest ratings recorded in Portugal (4.86) and Germany (4.73).

Fostering teamwork and emotional regulation





“Of course, skills such as conflict resolution and teamwork should not be forgotten; further development in these areas are always beneficial”.

Interviewee in Germany

Similar to desk research findings, key barriers included staff shortages, inconsistent documentation, punitive institutional cultures, and security- or time- related constraints.



“There are few colleagues, few state supported professionals available, which limits the possibilities. The institution is understaffed and there is a large amount of work to do with little staff. Since we are all overloaded, many things cannot be developed to the extent needed”.

Interviewee in Hungary

Qualitative evidence further highlighted systemic contrasts across the partner countries: Türkiye demonstrates well-structured assessment and certification processes; Germany (NRW) displays mixed yet promising practices, characterised by the use of sport and conflict resolution as rehabilitation tools alongside prison-based education, with competence diagnostics ranging from structured programmes to more individualised approaches and uneven implementation across facilities; Hungary relies heavily on NGOs for innovative provision; and Portugal remains highly bureaucratic and comparatively isolated from international developments.

FIGURE 5
Competencies Developed Through Sport in the Sport4Prisons partnership countries

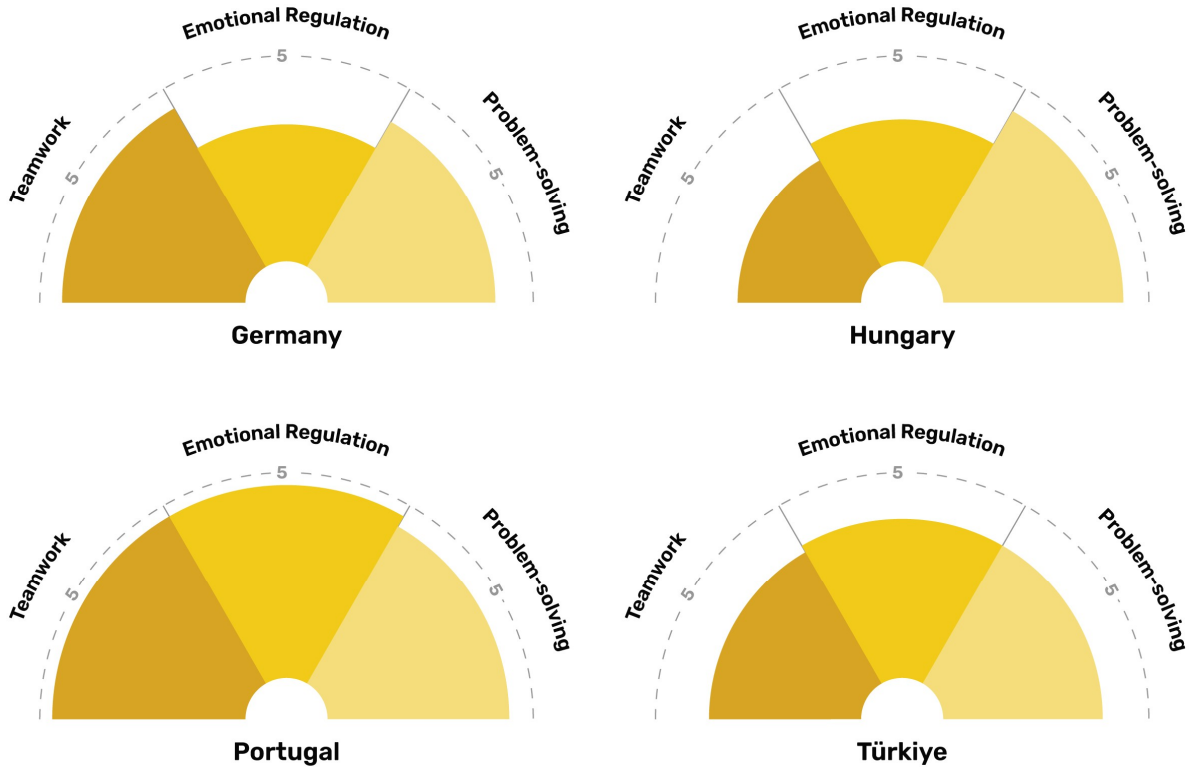
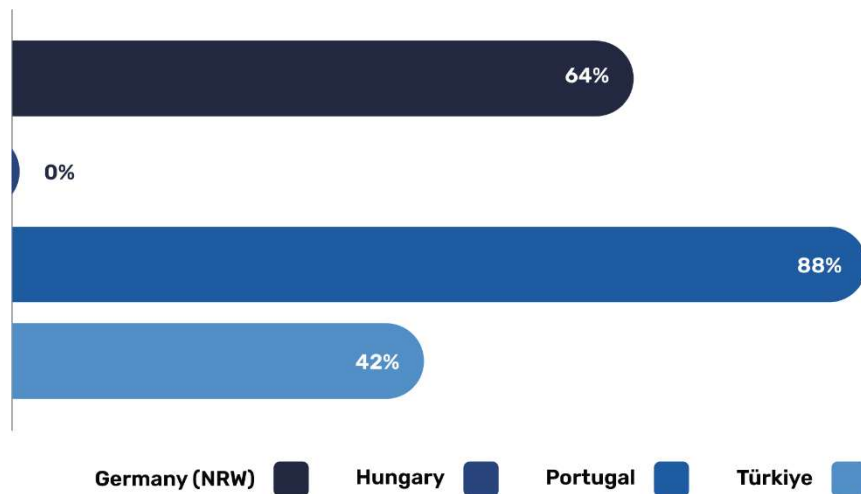


FIGURE 6
Adoption of Structured Competence-Development Tools across the Sport4Prisons partnership countries



Note: Hungary – no systemic use identified (0%).



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It should be noted that, across the partner countries, variations in the uptake of structured tools should not be interpreted solely as a lack of willingness or commitment on the part of institutions or staff. In different contexts, practical and systemic factors, such as staff workload, legal and administrative documentation requirements, and the coexistence of parallel reporting systems, significantly influence implementation practices. These contextual constraints help to explain differences in adoption and underscore the importance of situating implementation patterns within their respective organisational and regulatory frameworks.

Why this matters?

These findings demonstrate that, while sport is broadly recognised as an effective tool for developing key competencies in prison settings, its implementation and formalisation vary considerably across countries. The uneven adoption of structured competence-development tools and the presence of persistent institutional barriers limit the consistency, quality, and transferability of outcomes. Identifying both shared challenges and context-specific practices is essential for designing a common, evidence-based methodology that can be adapted to different national systems while improving effectiveness and sustainability of interventions across countries.



Strategic Insights



The analysis identifies several **points of convergence** across the partner countries.

Sport consistently emerges as a motivating entry point for engagement, with teamwork and emotional regulation recognised as priority competencies

Staff shortages, however, constitute a significant barrier that limits the effective delivery of competence-development programmes



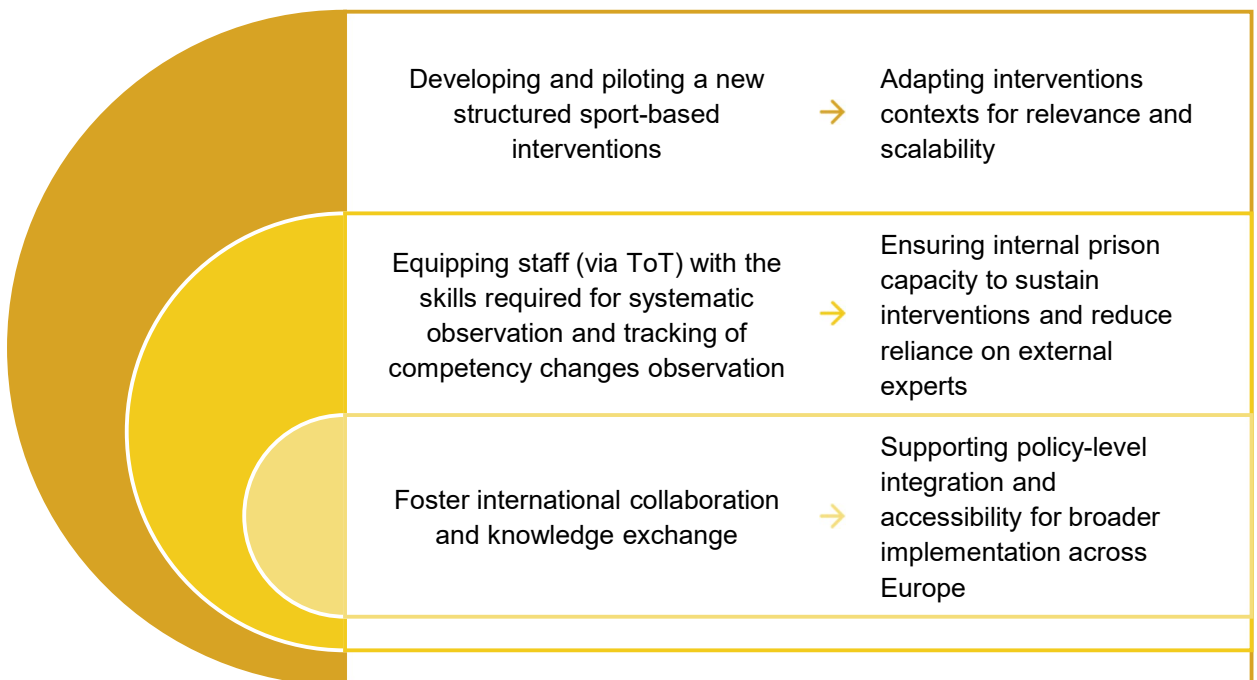
Divergences are equally evident:

Türkiye demonstrates advanced diagnostic and certification structures; Portugal displays a less consolidated methodological approach; and Germany and Hungary exhibit only partial or fragmented practices

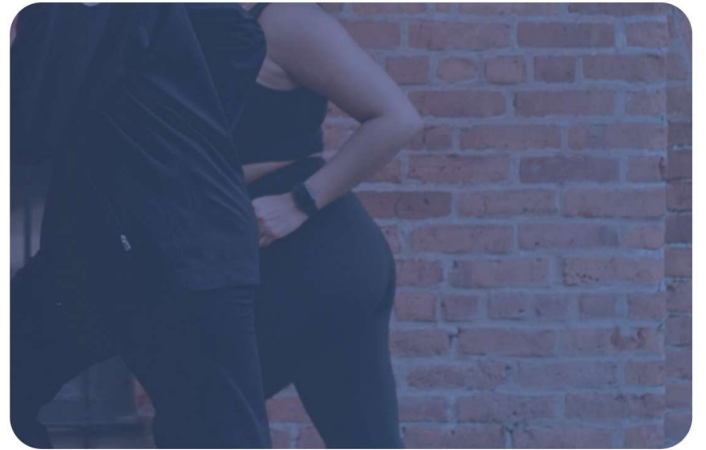
Strengthening staff capacity through train-the-trainer approaches and enhancing international collaboration would further support sustainable implementation and reduce institutional isolation

Conclusion and Next Steps

The **Sport4Prisons** initiative underscores the significant potential of sport as both a pedagogical and rehabilitative tool within prison settings. The next phases of the project involve:



By integrating consistent assessment and documentation processes, the project is well positioned to address existing gaps and to strengthen sustainable reintegration pathways for incarcerated individuals.



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New sports method for prisons as a tool to support competency development, positive values, thus the reintegration of prisoners into society

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