

National Report – Study No. 1

Activity A2.2

"Attitudes&beliefs of organizations towards Wellbeing&Resilience of practitioners in Youth Work"

Developed by

SOWA

National Report of Study No. 1

“The attitudes & beliefs of organisations towards well-being & resilience of practitioners in Youth Work”

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Country: Poland

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Section I: Context and rationale of national study

In recent years, mental health and psychosocial well-being have become increasingly prominent topics in public debate, research, and social policy in Poland. Growing attention has been devoted to understanding the emotional and psychological challenges experienced by young people, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. National studies indicate increasing levels of stress, anxiety, loneliness, and other mental health difficulties among adolescents and young adults, highlighting the need for effective support systems and accessible services.

These developments have important implications for organisations working with young people. Across Poland, a wide range of actors, including non-governmental organisations, youth associations, community centres, educational institutions, cultural organisations, and local government initiatives, provide opportunities for participation, personal development, non-formal education, and social inclusion. In many cases, these organisations also serve as important sources of emotional and social support, particularly for young people facing personal, educational, or social challenges.

As a result, individuals working directly with young people are increasingly expected to respond to complex and evolving needs. Youth workers, educators, trainers, mentors, volunteers, and other practitioners frequently engage with young people experiencing stress, uncertainty, social exclusion, or mental health difficulties. While supporting young people remains the primary focus of their work, these changing realities have expanded both the scope and complexity of their roles.

At the same time, youth work in Poland is undergoing an important process of development and professionalisation. Unlike in several European countries where youth work has long been recognised as a distinct professional field supported by established frameworks and structures, youth work in Poland is still defining its professional identity and standards. Recent initiatives coordinated by the National Institute of Freedom – Centre for Civil Society Development (NIW-CRSO), together with national youth-sector stakeholders, have focused on developing standards for youth work and strengthening recognition of the sector. These efforts reflect a growing awareness of the importance of youth work within broader educational, social, and civic development policies.

The Polish youth sector is also characterised by considerable diversity. Organisations differ in size, mission, geographical reach, and organisational capacity. Many operate in project-based environments that depend on short-term funding and external resources. Such conditions often require organisations to adapt quickly to changing circumstances while maintaining continuity of services and responding to emerging needs among young people. These realities shape the everyday experiences of both organisations and practitioners working within the sector.

Despite increasing recognition of youth work and growing public concern regarding mental health and well-being, limited attention has been paid to the experiences of those delivering youth work activities and services. Existing research, policy discussions, and public initiatives have focused predominantly on young people as beneficiaries of support. Comparatively little is known about how organisations themselves understand and approach issues related to the well-being and resilience of practitioners working with young people.

This gap is particularly relevant in the current Polish context. As youth work continues to develop as a professional field and organisations face increasing expectations regarding the support they provide to young people, understanding organisational perspectives on practitioner well-being becomes increasingly important. Examining these issues can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities currently facing the youth sector.

The present national study seeks to explore the attitudes and beliefs of organisations towards the well-being and resilience of practitioners in youth work in Poland. The study aims to generate evidence on how these issues are understood within youth-serving organisations and to provide insights that may support future discussions on the development, sustainability, and quality of youth work in the Polish context.

Section II: Objectives and research questions of national study no. 1

a. Specific objectives

The overall aim of the national study is to explore how youth-serving organisations in Poland perceive, understand, and address the well-being and resilience of practitioners working with young people.

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To examine organisational attitudes and beliefs regarding practitioner well-being and resilience within the Polish youth sector.
- To investigate the extent to which practitioner well-being is recognised as an organisational responsibility rather than solely an individual concern.
- To analyse how organisational leadership, management practices, and organisational culture influence the promotion of well-being and resilience among youth work practitioners.
- To explore the role of psychological safety, trust, and open communication in supporting practitioner well-being within youth-serving organisations.
- To identify organisational practices, resources, and mechanisms that contribute to or hinder practitioner well-being and resilience.
- To assess how organisations understand the factors influencing practitioner well-being and resilience, including the role of organisational structures, leadership practices, and workplace relationships.
- To generate evidence-based recommendations for strengthening organisational support systems and promoting sustainable youth work environments in Poland.

b. Research questions/working hypotheses/targeted indicators for the main study

The national study was guided by the common methodological framework developed within the POSITIVE – Well-being and Resilience in Youth Work for Social Change project. In line with the project methodology, the study examined how youth-serving organisations in Poland perceive, understand, and address practitioner well-being and

resilience.

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- How do youth-serving organisations in Poland understand practitioner well-being and resilience?
- To what extent is practitioner well-being recognised as an organisational concern and responsibility?
- How do leadership approaches, management practices, and organisational cultures influence practitioner well-being and resilience?
- What role do trust, psychological safety, and open communication play within youth-serving organisations?
- How do organisations reflect upon, assess, and improve their approaches to practitioner well-being?
- To what extent do organisations adopt a systemic understanding of practitioner well-being and resilience?
- What organisational factors support or hinder the development of positive and supportive environments for practitioners?

The study adopted the six working hypotheses established within the project's analytical framework:

H1. Normative Recognition of Practitioner Well-being

It is hypothesised that youth-serving organisations differ in the extent to which practitioner well-being is recognised as a legitimate organisational concern rather than as a purely individual responsibility.

H2. Organisational Responsibility for Well-being and Resilience

It is hypothesised that organisations vary in how they interpret their responsibility for supporting practitioner well-being and resilience.

H3. Leadership Attitudes and Organisational Culture

It is hypothesised that leadership attitudes and management cultures play a central role in shaping how practitioner well-being is prioritised and operationalised within youth organisations.

H4. Organisational Culture and Psychological Safety

It is hypothesised that organisational cultures characterised by trust, openness and supportive interpersonal relationships are more likely to foster psychological safety among youth work practitioners.

H5. Organisational Learning and Improvement Capacity

It is hypothesised that organisations that demonstrate a strong capacity for reflection, learning and adaptation are more likely to critically assess how practitioner well-being is supported and to identify opportunities for organisational improvement.

H6. Systemic Understanding of Well-being and Resilience

It is hypothesised that organisations differ in the extent to which practitioner well-being and resilience are understood as systemic phenomena emerging from the interaction between organisational structures, leadership practices and workplace relationships.

To examine these hypotheses, the study applied six analytical indicators derived from the project's conceptual framework:

Indicator 1 – Organisational Awareness and Strategic Recognition of Well-being

Examines the extent to which practitioner well-being is recognised as an important organisational issue and reflected in organisational values, priorities, and discourse.

Indicator 2 – Organisational Responsibility for Practitioner Well-being

Explores how organisations understand their role and responsibility in supporting practitioner well-being and resilience.

Indicator 3 – Leadership Attitudes towards Well-being and Emotional Labour

Assesses how leadership practices, management approaches, and organisational decision-making influence practitioner well-being.

Indicator 4 – Organisational Culture and Psychological Safety

Examines levels of trust, openness, communication, and psychological safety within organisations.

Indicator 5 – Organisational Learning and Openness to Improvement

Analyses the extent to which organisations engage in reflection, learning, and continuous improvement regarding practitioner support.

Indicator 6 – Systemic Understanding of Well-being and Resilience

Explores whether organisations perceive practitioner well-being and resilience primarily as individual attributes or as outcomes shaped by organisational structures, relationships, and institutional culture.

Together, these research questions, hypotheses, and analytical indicators provided the framework for analysing organisational attitudes and beliefs regarding practitioner well-being and resilience within the Polish youth sector.

Section III: Description of how the national study no. 1 was carried out

a. Research design (quantitative/qualitative/mixed)

In Poland, Study No. 1 was organised and implemented based on the common methodological framework. To carry out the national study, Fundacja SOWA applied both quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to obtain comprehensive and reliable data regarding organisational attitudes and beliefs towards practitioner well-being and resilience within the youth sector. The combination of methods enabled the collection of both measurable data and in-depth perspectives, contributing to a broader understanding of the issues under investigation.

The following research tools were used:

1. Questionnaire Survey

The survey was administered online using Google Forms. In accordance with the project methodology, two separate questionnaires were developed and distributed:

Questionnaire 1 was addressed to youth workers and practitioners working directly with young people. A total of 22 respondents participated in this part of the study.

Questionnaire 2 was addressed to organisational leaders, managers, and decision-makers within youth-serving organisations. A total of 19 respondents participated in this part of the study.

2. Semi-Structured Interviews

To complement the survey findings and gain a deeper understanding of organisational perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three organisational leaders/managers representing youth-serving organisations in Poland. The interviews were based on a common interview guide developed within the project methodology while allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences, organisational practices, challenges, and perspectives related to practitioner well-being and resilience. The interviews provided valuable qualitative insights that enriched and contextualised the quantitative findings.

3. Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion was organised on 9 June 2026 in an online format. The session

involved 10 participants, including 7 organisational leaders/managers and 3 youth work practitioners. The focus group created an opportunity to discuss organisational experiences, explore emerging themes identified through the questionnaires and interviews, and gather additional reflections on factors influencing practitioner well-being and resilience within youth-serving organisations. The discussion also enabled participants to exchange perspectives and identify common challenges and opportunities present within the Polish youth sector.

Throughout the implementation of the study, particular attention was paid to ensuring the participation of both practitioners and organisational leaders, obtaining diverse organisational perspectives, and encouraging open and honest reflection on issues related to well-being, resilience, organisational culture, and organisational support mechanisms.

b. Implementation stages

The implementation of Study No. 1 in Poland followed a series of interconnected stages:

- Adaptation of the common project methodology and preparation of national research tools, including the development and configuration of two online questionnaires using Google Forms.
- Mapping and identification of youth-serving organisations and institutions working with young people across Poland.
- Outreach to organisations and dissemination of information about the study, its objectives, and opportunities for participation.
- Collection of quantitative data through two online questionnaires:
 - Questionnaire 1 addressed to youth workers and practitioners working directly with young people (22 respondents).
 - Questionnaire 2 addressed to organisational leaders, managers, and decision-makers (19 respondents).
- Individual follow-up communication with selected organisations to encourage participation and recruit respondents for the qualitative phase of the study.
- Conducting three semi-structured interviews with organisational leaders and managers representing youth-serving organisations.

- Organisation and facilitation of an online focus group on 9 June 2026 involving 10 participants, including 7 organisational leaders/managers and 3 youth work practitioners.
- Compilation, systematisation, and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected through questionnaires, interviews, and the focus group discussion.
- Identification and interpretation of key findings concerning organisational attitudes, practices, and perspectives related to practitioner well-being and resilience.
- Preparation of the National Report of Study No. 1 and contribution to the subsequent transnational analysis within the POSITIVE – Well-being and Resilience in Youth Work for Social Change project.

c. Methods & instruments use

The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to capture both broad organisational trends and more detailed perspectives regarding practitioner well-being and resilience within the youth sector.

a) Online Questionnaires (Google Forms)

Two structured online questionnaires were developed and administered using Google Forms. The first questionnaire was addressed to youth workers and practitioners working directly with young people, while the second targeted organisational leaders, managers, and decision-makers. The questionnaires collected data on organisational attitudes towards practitioner well-being and resilience, perceptions of organisational responsibility, leadership approaches, organisational culture, psychological safety, and existing support mechanisms.

b) Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three organisational leaders and managers representing youth-serving organisations. The interviews provided an opportunity to explore organisational experiences, management approaches, perceived challenges, and organisational responses related to practitioner well-being and resilience in greater depth. The semi-structured format ensured consistency across

interviews while allowing participants to elaborate on issues particularly relevant to their organisational context.

c) Focus Group Discussion

An online focus group discussion was conducted with 10 representatives of both target groups, including youth work practitioners and organisational leaders. The focus group created a space for collective reflection and discussion on organisational cultures, workplace experiences, support mechanisms, and challenges affecting practitioner well-being and resilience. The discussion also helped contextualise and deepen the findings emerging from the questionnaires and interviews.

d. Data collection

Quantitative data collection was conducted through two online questionnaires administered via Google Forms. The questionnaires targeted the two groups defined in the methodology: youth workers and practitioners working directly with young people, and organisational leaders, managers, and decision-makers within youth-serving organisations. In total, 41 valid responses were collected, including 22 responses from practitioners and 19 responses from organisational leaders and managers. Qualitative data were collected through three semi-structured interviews conducted with organisational leaders and managers representing youth-serving organisations in Poland. The data collection process was complemented by an online focus group discussion involving representatives of both target groups. Due to the availability of organisational leaders and managers, the focus group was conducted on 9 June 2026. A total of 10 participants took part in the discussion, including 7 organisational leaders/managers and 3 youth work practitioners. The focus group enabled participants to reflect collectively on the study themes and provided valuable contextual information supporting the interpretation of survey and interview findings.

e. Ethical considerations (voluntariness, anonymity, consent)

Participation in all research activities was entirely voluntary. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, its objectives, and the intended use of the

collected information before deciding whether to participate. Respondents retained the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in interviews and the focus group discussion. Participants were informed about the nature of the research, the handling and storage of data, and the use of anonymised quotations in reporting where applicable. Consent was also obtained for audio recording of the qualitative sessions. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were ensured throughout the research process. Personal and organisational identifiers were removed, pseudonymised, or aggregated during the analysis and reporting stages to prevent the direct or indirect identification of individuals or organisations. All collected data were used exclusively for research and reporting purposes within the framework of the POSITIVE project and were handled in accordance with applicable data protection and privacy principles.

f. Difficulties and limitations encountered

Although the study was successfully completed and generated valuable insights into organisational attitudes towards practitioner well-being and resilience, several limitations and challenges should be acknowledged.

One of the main challenges encountered during the data collection process was the limited availability of potential participants. Many youth-serving organisations in Poland operate in demanding environments characterised by high workloads, multiple project commitments, and limited staff capacity. As a result, practitioners and organisational leaders often had limited time available to participate in research activities. Recruiting respondents therefore required considerable outreach and follow-up communication. Initial dissemination through general calls and email invitations generated limited engagement, while direct contact and the use of existing professional networks proved significantly more effective in encouraging participation. Consequently, the final sample reflects the perspectives of organisations willing and able to engage in the study within the available timeframe.

As with most social research, the findings are based primarily on participants' self-reported experiences and perceptions. Consequently, the results reflect how

respondents understand and interpret organisational realities, which may not always fully correspond to formal policies or documented practices. Although anonymity and confidentiality were ensured throughout the study, some participants may have been inclined to present their organisations in a more positive light. In addition, the study provides a snapshot of organisational attitudes and practices at a particular point in time. As the youth sector in Poland continues to develop and professionalise, approaches to practitioner well-being may evolve further.

Despite these limitations, the mixed-methods design strengthened the overall reliability of the findings. The combination of survey data, interviews, and focus group discussions, together with the inclusion of both practitioners and organisational leaders, enabled a comprehensive understanding of how youth-serving organisations in Poland perceive, support, and respond to practitioner well-being and resilience.

Section IV: Specific national legislation related to the study topic

The well-being and resilience of practitioners working with young people are influenced not only by organisational cultures and practices but also by the broader legal and policy framework regulating employment conditions, occupational health and safety, volunteer engagement, mental health promotion, and youth work development. Although Poland does not currently have a dedicated legal framework regulating youth work as a distinct profession, several national legal acts and policy documents are directly relevant to the issues explored in this study.

The Labour Code (Kodeks pracy)

<https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19740240141/U/D19740141Lj.pdf>

The Labour Code (Act of 26 June 1974, as amended) constitutes the primary legal framework regulating employment relationships in Poland. It establishes employers' obligations to ensure safe and healthy working conditions, protect employees' dignity, prevent discrimination and workplace harassment (mobbing), and organise work in a manner that minimises occupational risks. These provisions provide an important legal basis for addressing both physical and psychosocial aspects of employee well-being.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (BHP)

<https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu19971290844>

Polish occupational health and safety regulations require employers to assess workplace risks and implement preventive measures aimed at protecting employees' health and safety. Contemporary occupational safety approaches increasingly recognise psychosocial risks, including chronic stress, excessive workloads, emotional exhaustion, and workplace conflicts, as important factors affecting employee well-being. These regulations are particularly relevant for organisations working with young people, where emotional demands often form an integral part of everyday practice.

Act on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteer Work

<https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20030960873>

The Act of 24 April 2003 on Public Benefit Activity and Volunteer Work plays a particularly important role within the Polish youth sector, where many organisations

rely on both paid staff and volunteers. The Act establishes the rights of volunteers and the responsibilities of organisations, including the obligation to provide safe conditions for carrying out voluntary activities and appropriate organisational support.

National Mental Health Protection Programme

<https://www.gov.pl/web/zdrowie/narodowy-program-ochrony-zdrowia-psychicznego>

The National Mental Health Protection Programme (Narodowy Program Ochrony Zdrowia Psychicznego) provides the strategic framework for mental health promotion, prevention activities, and access to support services in Poland. While the programme primarily addresses the population as a whole, it reflects the growing recognition of mental health and psychological well-being as important public policy priorities and contributes to broader awareness of psychosocial well-being in educational, social, and workplace settings.

Standards of Youth Work in Poland

[https://niw.gov.pl/krajowa-koalicja-na-rzecz-pracy-z-młodzieżą-opracowała-standard-y-pracy-z-młodymi-osobami/](https://niw.gov.pl/krajowa-koalicja-na-rzecz-pracy-z-mlodzieza-opracowala-standard-y-pracy-z-mlodymi-osobami/)

An important development in the Polish youth sector has been the creation of the Standards of Youth Work (Standardy Pracy z Młodzieżą) developed by the National Coalition for Youth Work with the support of the National Institute of Freedom – Centre for Civil Society Development (NIW-CRSO). The Standards provide a common framework for organisations working with young people and promote principles related to quality, participation, inclusion, safety, professional development, and ethical practice. Although they are not legally binding, they represent one of the most significant initiatives aimed at strengthening the professionalisation and recognition of youth work in Poland. The Standards also contribute to ongoing discussions regarding the competencies, working conditions, and support needs of practitioners engaged in youth work. The Polish legal and policy framework provides important protections related to occupational health and safety, employee dignity, volunteering, and mental health promotion. At the same time, youth work remains an evolving field that is still undergoing professionalisation and institutional development. While recent policy initiatives and sectoral standards increasingly recognise the importance of quality youth work, there are currently no specific legal provisions directly addressing the

well-being and resilience of youth work practitioners.

As a result, many aspects of practitioner support, psychological safety, supervision, and workplace well-being depend on organisational cultures, leadership approaches, and internal practices. Understanding how organisations perceive and address these issues is therefore particularly relevant in the current Polish context and provides the rationale for the present study.

Section V: Description of organisations involved in study no. 1:

a. Typology of participating organisations

The organisations involved in the Polish study form a youth-work ecosystem composed primarily of NGOs providing programmes and activities for young people, complemented by youth NGOs. Across both questionnaires, these two organisational profiles accounted for all participating organisations, ensuring that the study reflects both direct service providers and organisations working specifically for and with young people.

Questionnaire 1, completed by youth workers and practitioners (n = 22), was dominated by NGOs providing programmes or activities for young people (86.4%), while 13.6% of respondents represented youth NGOs.

Questionnaire 2, completed by leaders and managers (n = 19), showed a more balanced organisational structure, with 57.9% of respondents affiliated with NGOs providing programmes or activities for young people and 42.1% representing youth NGOs.

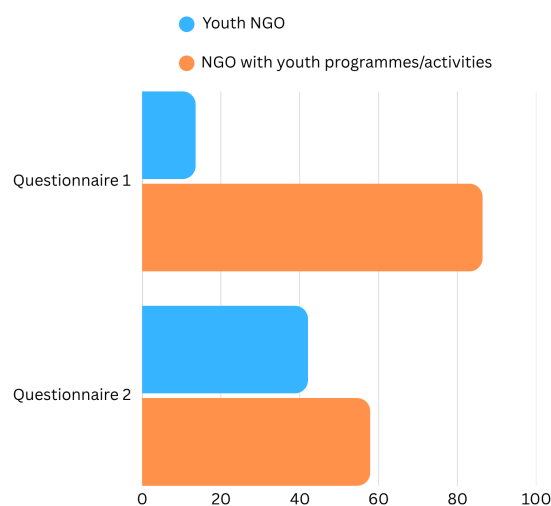


Chart 1. Typology of participating organisations (in percent)

b. Field(s) in which organisations operate

The fields of activity represented in the study reflect the diversity of organisations involved in youth work and youth support in Poland. The most frequently represented area is youth development and empowerment, selected by 11 respondents (26.8%). This is followed by community development and civic engagement, selected by 8 respondents (19.5%). Arts, culture and creative sectors account for 6 responses (14.6%), while social inclusion and equal opportunities were indicated by 5 respondents (12.2%). Smaller but still notable shares of organisations operate in education and lifelong learning (3 respondents; 7.3%), entrepreneurship, employment and the labour market (3 respondents; 7.3%), and mental health and wellbeing (3 respondents; 7.3%). The least represented field was sport, recreation and extracurricular activities, selected by 2 respondents (4.9%).



Chart 2. Field(s) in which organisations operate (in numbers)

c. Their stage of development

The participating organisations represent different stages of organisational development, although the sample is dominated by well-established and mature organisations. More than half of all respondents were affiliated with mature organisations operating for more than 10 years, accounting for 22 responses (53.7%). A further 9 respondents (22.0%) represented developing organisations that had been operating for between two and five years, while 8 respondents (19.5%) were affiliated with established organisations with six to ten years of experience. Only 2 respondents

(4.9%) reported working in early-stage organisations operating for less than two years.

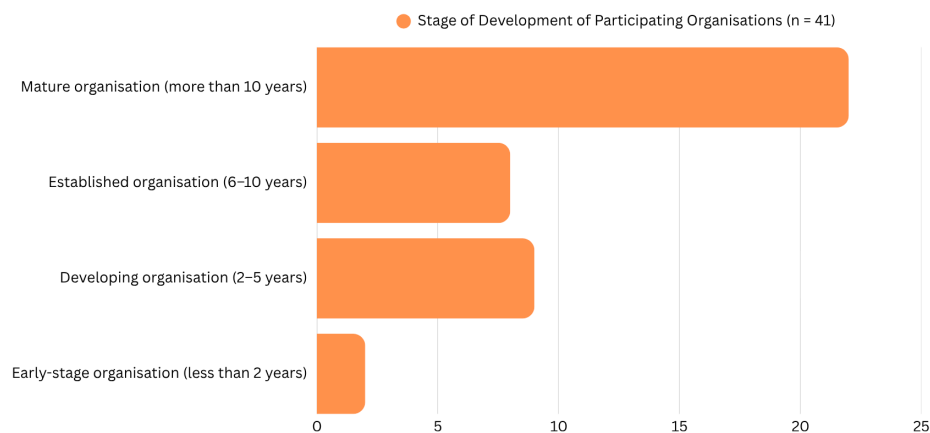


Chart 3. Their stage of development (in numbers)

Section VI: Description of respondents

VI. 1 Target group no. 1

a. Position within the organisation

The respondents in Target Group 1 were primarily employed staff members within their organisations. Out of 22 respondents, 15 individuals (68.2%) identified themselves as employees/staff members. A further 4 respondents (18.2%) reported serving as volunteers, while 3 respondents (13.6%) described their position as associates or collaborators.

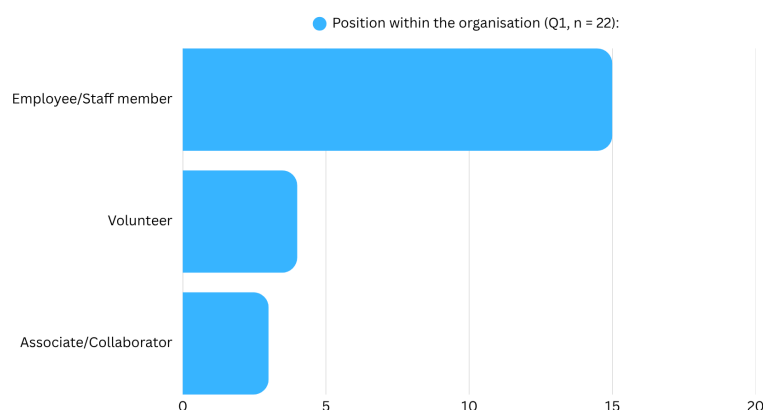


Chart 4. Position within the organisation (Target Group 1) (in numbers)

b. Current role when working with young people

Respondents in Target Group 1 represented a diverse range of professional roles in youth work. The largest group consisted of youth workers, accounting for 8 respondents (36.4%). Two other roles were represented equally: mentors, educators, trainers or counsellors working with young people and project experts or programme staff members, each selected by 7 respondents (31.8%).

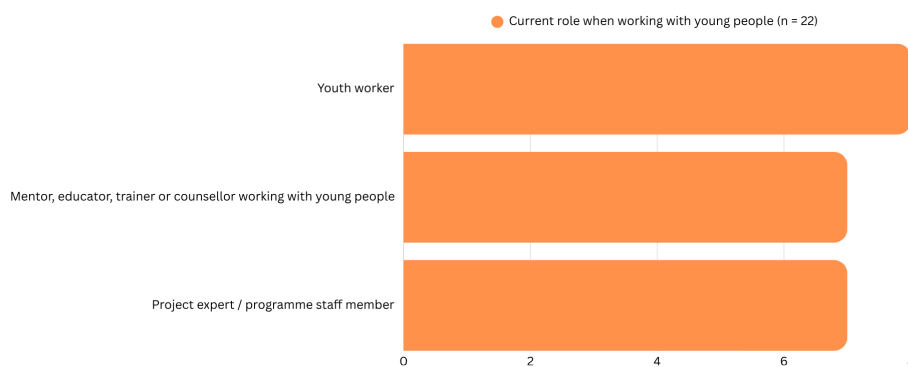


Chart 5. Current role when working with young people (Target Group 1) (in numbers)

c. Years of experience in working with youth

The respondents in Target Group 1 were predominantly professionals with relatively early to mid-stage experience in youth work. The majority of participants, 16 respondents (72.7%), reported having between one and five years of experience working with young people. A further 3 respondents (13.6%) indicated six to ten years of experience, while 2 respondents (9.1%) had more than ten years of experience in the field. Only 1 respondent (4.5%) reported having less than one year of experience.

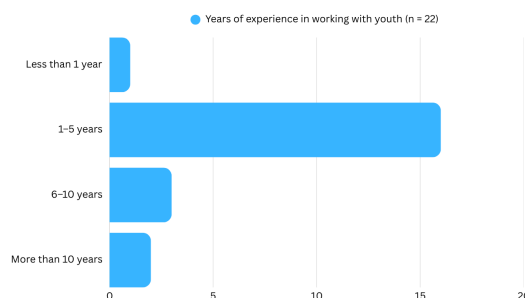


Chart 6. Years of experience in working with youth (Target Group 1) (in numbers)

d. Level of education

Respondents in Target Group 1 were generally highly educated. The majority, 14 respondents (63.6%), reported holding a Master's degree or equivalent qualification. A further 5 respondents (22.7%) held a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, while 2 respondents (9.1%) reported having completed secondary education. Only 1 respondent (4.5%) indicated holding a doctoral degree (PhD).

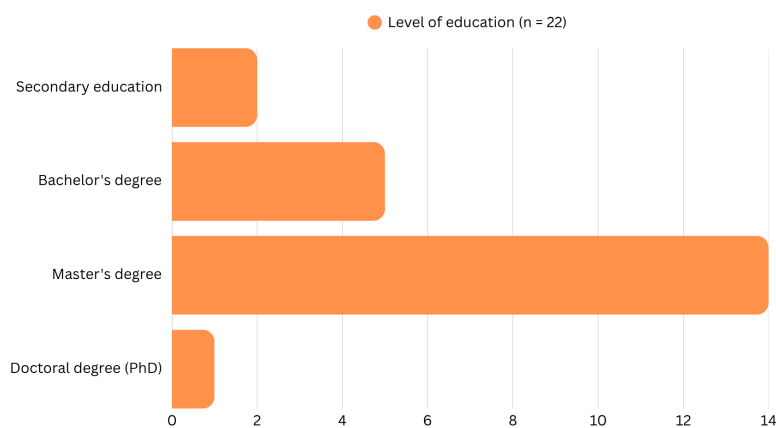


Chart 7. Level of education (Target Group 1) (in numbers)

e. Age

The respondents in Target Group 1 were predominantly young and middle-aged adults. The largest age group was 25-34 years, represented by 10 respondents (45.5%), followed by 35-44 years, with 7 respondents (31.8%). Younger participants aged 18-24 years accounted for 3 respondents (13.6%), while 2 respondents (9.1%) were aged 45-54 years. No respondents reported being 55 years or older.

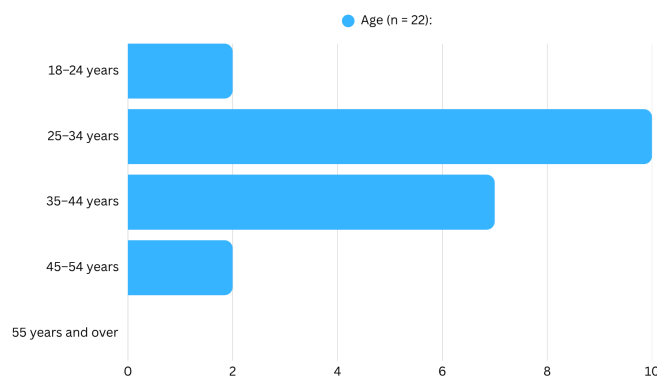


Chart 8. Age (Target Group 1) (in numbers)

VI. 2 Target group no. 2

a. Position within the organisation

Respondents in Target Group 2 occupied leadership and management positions within their organisations. The largest group consisted of Directors, Executive Directors or Chief Executive Officers, representing 9 respondents (47.4%). A further 7 respondents (36.8%) identified their position as Coordinator or Manager, while 3 respondents (15.8%) served as Board Members, Presidents or Vice-Presidents.

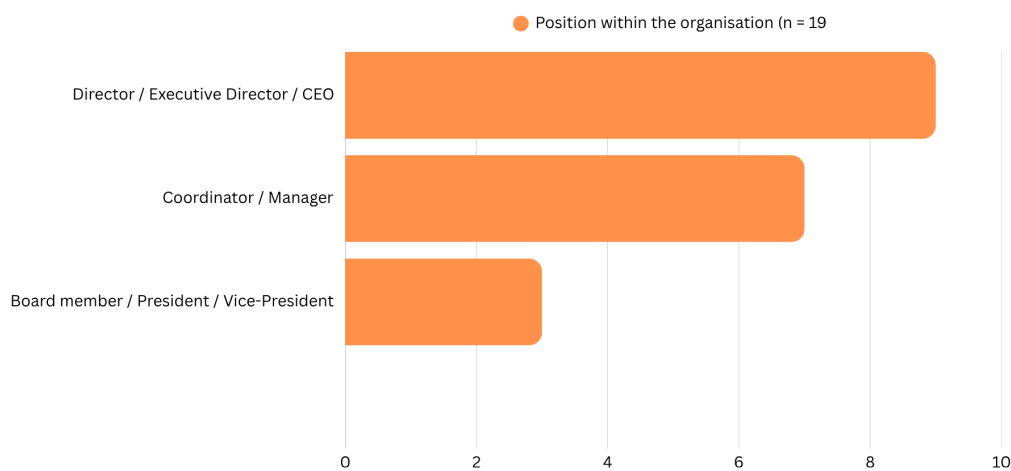


Chart 9. Position within the organisation (Target Group 2) (in numbers)

b. Current leadership or management role in organisation

Respondents in Target Group 2 represented a variety of leadership and management functions within their organisations. The largest group consisted of project coordinators and programme managers, accounting for 8 respondents (42.1%). A further 6 respondents (31.6%) held positions related to executive leadership, such as Director, Executive Director or Chief Executive Officer. Three respondents (15.8%) were primarily involved in organisational management and administration, while 2 respondents (10.5%) occupied roles related to governance and strategic oversight, including board-level responsibilities.

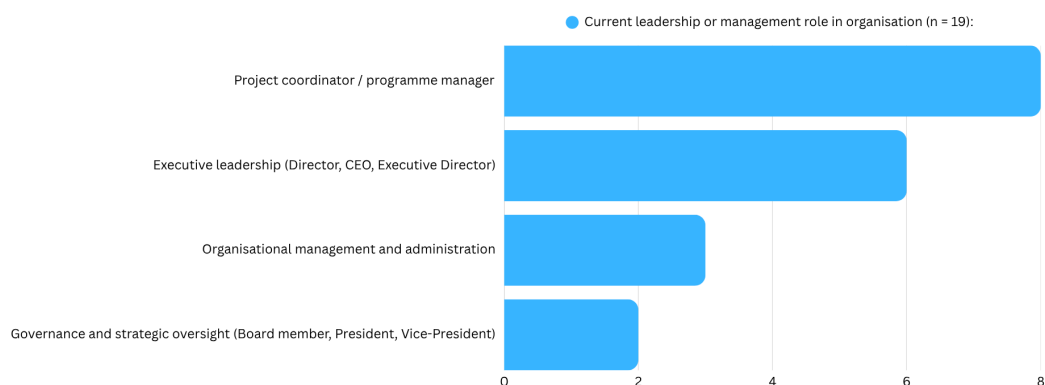


Chart 10. Current leadership or management role in organisation (Target Group 2) (in numbers)

c. Years of experience in a management/coordination position

The respondents in Target Group 2 demonstrated varying levels of experience in management and coordination roles. Nearly half of the participants, 9 respondents (47.4%), reported having between one and five years of experience in a leadership or coordination position. A further 4 respondents (21.1%) had six to ten years of experience, while another 4 respondents (21.1%) reported more than ten years of experience in management roles. Only 2 respondents (10.5%) indicated having less than one year of experience.

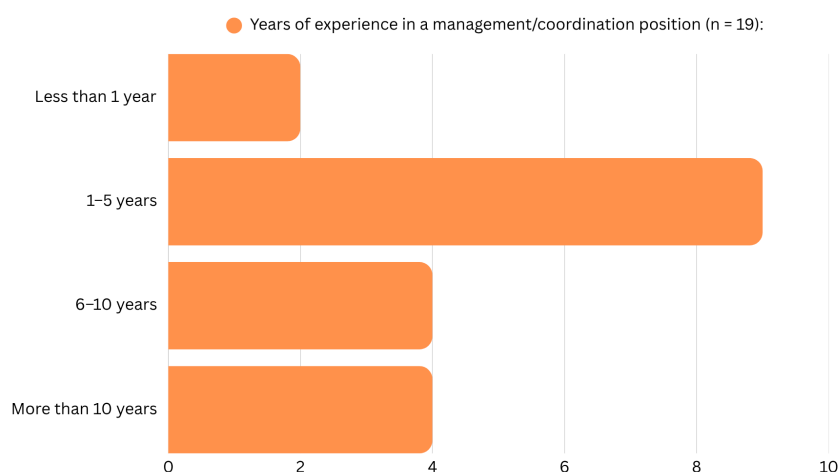


Chart 11. Years of experience in a management/coordination position (Target Group 2) (in numbers)

d. Level of education

Respondents in Target Group 2 were highly educated, with the majority holding advanced academic qualifications. Master's degree holders constituted the largest group, representing 13 respondents (68.4%). A further 4 respondents (21.1%) reported holding a Bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification. One respondent (5.3%) held a doctoral degree (PhD), while one respondent (5.3%) indicated secondary education as their highest level of completed education.

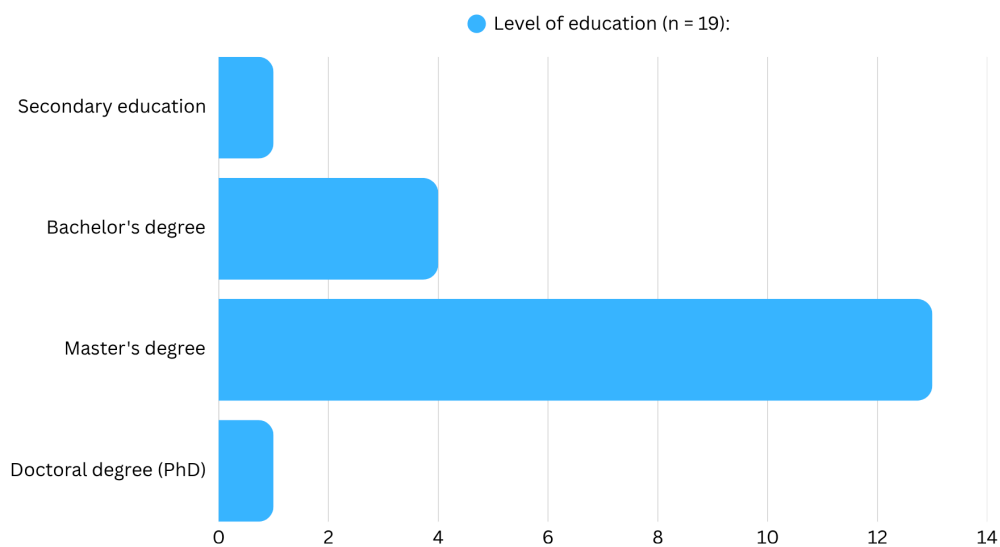


Chart 12. Level of education (Target Group 2) (in numbers)

e. Age

The respondents in Target Group 2 were predominantly adults in the middle stages of their professional careers. The largest age group was 35-44 years, accounting for 8 respondents (42.1%), followed by 25-34 years, represented by 6 respondents (31.6%). A further 3 respondents (15.8%) were aged 45-54 years, while 1 respondent (5.3%) belonged to the 18-24 years age group. Another 1 respondent (5.3%) reported being 55 years or older.

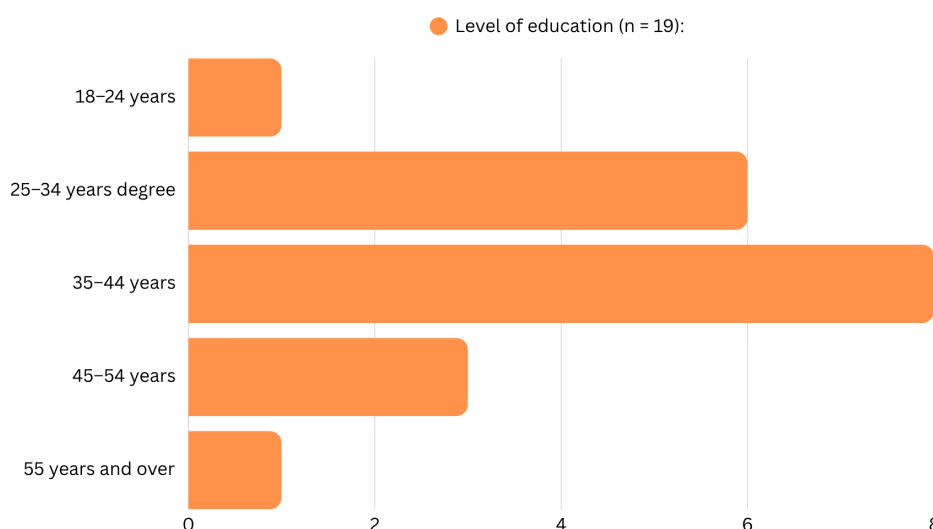


Chart 13. Age (Target Group 2) (in numbers)

Section VII: Key findings – quantitative results and qualitative insights

Indicator 1 – Organisational Awareness and Strategic Recognition of Well-being

The survey findings indicate a high level of awareness regarding practitioner well-being among both youth workers and organisational leaders. Respondents from both groups recognised the emotional demands associated with youth work and acknowledged the importance of practitioner well-being for maintaining the quality and effectiveness of youth services. Among youth workers and practitioners (Target Group 1), 59.1% agreed or strongly agreed that organisations working with young people recognise practitioner well-being as an important organisational issue. A larger proportion (72.7%) reported that their organisations encourage discussion about stress, emotional demands, and well-being. The strongest level of agreement concerned the relationship between practitioner well-being and service quality, with 81.8% agreeing or strongly agreeing that supporting practitioner well-being is essential for maintaining high-quality youth work.

Responses from organisational leaders and managers (Target Group 2) revealed even stronger levels of agreement. Nearly 89.5% agreed or strongly agreed that practitioner well-being should be recognised as a strategic organisational priority. Similarly, 84.2% believed that discussions regarding stress, emotional demands, and well-being should form part of regular organisational dialogue. The strongest consensus was observed

regarding the connection between well-being and service quality, with 94.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing that practitioner well-being directly influences the quality of services provided to young people.

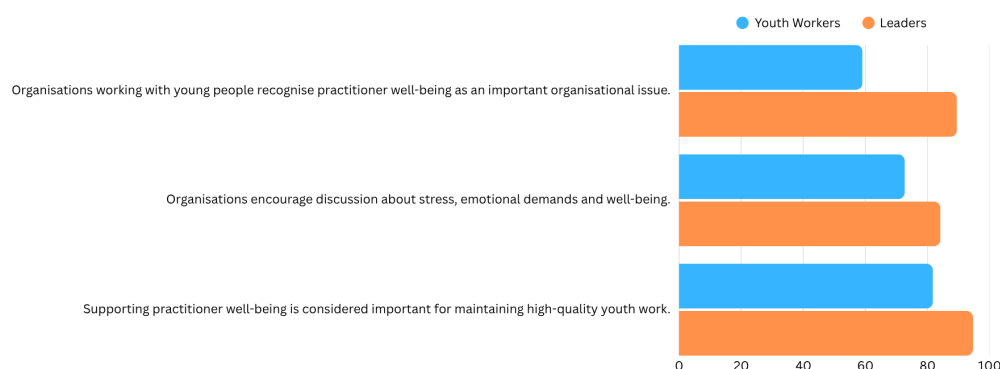


Chart 14. Organisational Awareness and Strategic Recognition of Well-being (in percent)

The quantitative findings demonstrate broad recognition of practitioner well-being as an important organisational issue. Organisational leaders expressed particularly strong support for integrating well-being into strategic and organisational thinking, while practitioners also reported generally positive perceptions, although with somewhat lower levels of agreement. The qualitative findings provide a deeper understanding of how emotional demands are experienced within everyday youth work practice and how organisations respond to these realities. Across the focus group discussion, participants consistently described youth work as emotionally intensive and relational in nature. Respondents highlighted that young people frequently share personal difficulties, family conflicts, emotional distress, and experiences of uncertainty, which practitioners inevitably absorb and process themselves. As one participant explained: “When I drive home, those stories are still going through my head. I sit in the car for a while to process them and make sure I do not bring them home.”

Participants repeatedly emphasised that youth work requires practitioners to manage not only the emotions of young people but also their own emotional reactions. One respondent noted that working with young people involves “constantly dealing with your own emotions, the emotions of another person, and their reactions,” highlighting the complexity of emotional labour in youth work.

Burnout emerged as a recurring theme throughout the discussion. Several participants described experiences of emotional exhaustion, while others referred to witnessing burnout among colleagues. One respondent directly characterised burnout as a common challenge within the youth work sector rather than an isolated occurrence.

The interviews reinforced these findings. Interview participants consistently recognised that practitioner well-being is fundamental to the quality of support provided to young people. One interviewee emphasised that youth work relies heavily on practitioners themselves as the primary resource through which educational, developmental, and supportive interventions are delivered, stating: “The main tool I have as a practitioner is myself.” The interviews also revealed different organisational approaches to well-being. Some organisations had developed more structured practices, including regular team meetings, check-in rounds, mentoring, psychological supervision, reflective discussions, and training opportunities. One participant linked practitioner well-being directly to communication and team culture, explaining that well-being is strengthened when “regular team meetings happen and there is openness to other people’s opinions and difficulties.” Other organisations relied more heavily on informal support mechanisms. Participants described creating a sense of community, maintaining open communication, providing peer support, and fostering strong interpersonal relationships as key ways of supporting practitioners. In smaller organisations, well-being was often embedded in organisational culture rather than addressed through formal policies or procedures.

At the same time, participants identified several barriers limiting organisational responses to well-being. Lack of funding, temporary project-based employment, multiple jobs, workload pressures, and limited access to professional support were frequently mentioned as factors constraining organisations’ ability to provide systematic well-being support. Focus group participants repeatedly noted that although organisations may recognise the importance of well-being, available resources often make it difficult to implement comprehensive support measures.

The findings from all data sources present a consistent picture of organisational awareness regarding practitioner well-being within the Polish youth sector. At the quantitative level, there is strong evidence that both practitioners and organisational leaders recognise the emotional demands inherent in youth work and acknowledge the

importance of practitioner well-being. Leaders expressed particularly high levels of agreement regarding the strategic importance of well-being, while practitioners also reported substantial support for organisational recognition and discussion of well-being-related issues. The qualitative findings deepen this understanding by illustrating how emotional demands are experienced in practice. Participants described youth work as a profession characterised by intensive interpersonal engagement, emotional exposure, and ongoing responsibility for supporting young people through complex life situations. These experiences often extend beyond formal working hours and contribute to risks of stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout.

Importantly, the findings reveal a distinction between awareness and implementation. While recognition of practitioner well-being is widespread, organisational responses vary considerably. Some organisations have begun integrating well-being into organisational culture through supervision, mentoring, reflective practice, team meetings, and communication-based approaches. Others continue to rely primarily on informal support networks and individual coping strategies due to limited resources, staffing constraints, or project-based funding structures.

Polish youth sector has largely moved beyond questioning whether practitioner well-being matters. Awareness is widespread and broadly shared across different organisational contexts. The primary challenge emerging from the findings concerns the translation of this awareness into sustainable organisational structures, support mechanisms, and strategic practices capable of addressing the emotional demands inherent in youth work.

Indicator 2 – Organisational Responsibility for Practitioner Well-being

The survey findings indicate strong support for the view that organisations share responsibility for practitioner well-being and should actively contribute to creating conditions that support healthy and sustainable youth work practice. Among youth workers and practitioners (Target Group 1), 95.5% agreed or strongly agreed that organisations have a responsibility to actively support practitioner well-being. Similarly, 95.4% agreed that organisational structures and policies should take psychosocial risks associated with youth work into account. At the same time, a substantial majority (86.4%) agreed that in many organisations well-being is still primarily treated as an

individual responsibility rather than a collective organisational concern. Responses from organisational leaders and managers (Target Group 2) reveal a similar pattern. More than four-fifths (84.2%) agreed that organisations have a responsibility to actively support practitioner well-being, while 79.0% agreed that organisations should develop internal structures and policies that support well-being. At the same time, 68.5% agreed that individual resilience is often emphasised more strongly than organisational responsibility in youth work settings. Taken together, the quantitative findings suggest a broad consensus that organisations should play an active role in supporting practitioner well-being. However, respondents also recognise that responsibility for well-being continues to be placed largely on individuals in many organisational contexts.

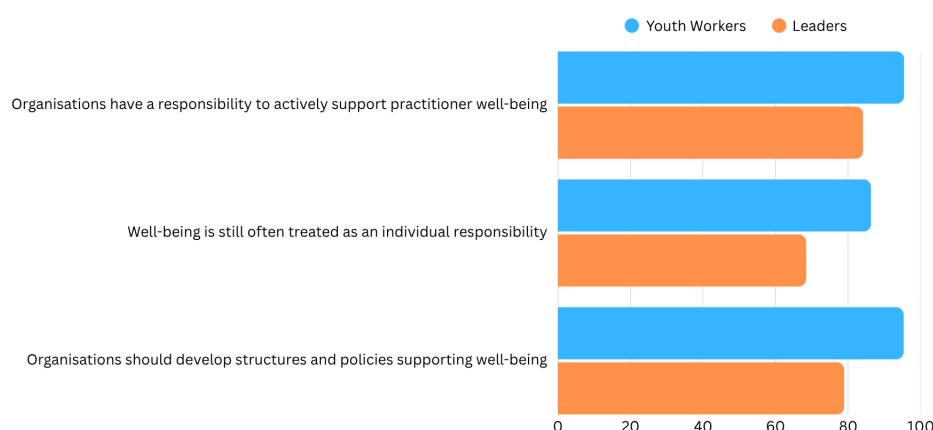


Chart 15. Organisational Responsibility for Practitioner Well-being (in percent)

Across interviews and the focus group discussion, participants consistently rejected the idea that well-being should be treated solely as an individual matter. While respondents acknowledged the importance of personal responsibility and self-awareness, they argued that organisations also have a duty to create supportive environments and working conditions that enable practitioners to remain healthy and effective in their roles. Several participants described organisational responsibility primarily through communication, mutual support, and responsiveness to individual needs. One interview participant explained that within their organisation, conversations have gradually shifted from expecting people to cope independently towards actively identifying support needs: “What do you need? How can we help

you?” This approach reflects a broader understanding of well-being as a shared responsibility, where organisational actors actively contribute to addressing challenges rather than expecting practitioners to manage them alone. Supportive relationships and team culture emerged as particularly important factors. Participants frequently referred to informal support mechanisms, peer assistance, and collective problem-solving as essential elements of organisational well-being. One respondent described how colleagues routinely step in to support one another when workloads become difficult to manage: “He tells us that he will be away, and we simply step in and replace him. There is no problem.”

In smaller organisations, responsibility for well-being was often embedded in long-term relationships rather than formal procedures. One interview participant highlighted the importance of trust and familiarity within the team: “The foundation of our well-being is that we know each other very well and have worked together for many years.”

At the same time, participants acknowledged that organisational support has limits and is frequently constrained by resources, funding structures, and workload pressures. Several respondents described situations in which practitioners experienced significant overload while attempting to balance multiple responsibilities. One interviewee reflected on a period of excessive demands: “At one point I realised it was simply too much: work, family, running the association, leading trainings, and organising a large tournament.” Such experiences illustrate how expectations of individual resilience can become problematic when organisational and structural factors are not adequately addressed.

The focus group discussion reinforced this perspective. Participants repeatedly argued that stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion should not be understood solely as individual weaknesses but as issues requiring organisational attention and collective responses. Respondents emphasised the need for organisational cultures where practitioners feel comfortable seeking support, discussing difficulties, and establishing healthy boundaries without fear of judgement.

The findings reveal a strong shift towards understanding practitioner well-being as a shared organisational responsibility rather than solely an individual concern. The quantitative data demonstrate overwhelming support for organisational involvement in promoting well-being. Respondents from both groups agreed that organisations should

actively support practitioners and develop structures capable of addressing psychosocial risks associated with youth work. At the same time, many participants acknowledged that in practice well-being is still frequently framed as a matter of individual resilience and personal coping capacity.

The qualitative findings help explain this apparent contradiction. Participants described organisational responsibility not only through formal policies and procedures but also through everyday practices, supportive relationships, communication, peer assistance, and organisational culture. In many cases, responsibility for well-being is enacted informally through mutual support and collaborative problem-solving, even where dedicated well-being policies do not exist. However, the findings also suggest that informal support alone may not be sufficient. Participants repeatedly highlighted the impact of workload pressures, limited resources, project-based funding, and multiple responsibilities, all of which can undermine practitioner well-being despite positive organisational intentions.

The evidence indicates that organisations increasingly recognise their responsibility for practitioner well-being. Nevertheless, a significant implementation gap remains between acknowledging this responsibility and systematically embedding it within organisational policies, leadership practices, resource allocation, and long-term organisational planning. The findings suggest that strengthening organisational responsibility for well-being will require moving beyond reliance on individual resilience towards more structured and sustainable forms of support.

Indicator 3 – Leadership Attitudes towards Well-being and Emotional Labour

The survey findings demonstrate strong recognition of the role leadership plays in shaping organisational responses to practitioner well-being and emotional labour. Both youth workers and organisational leaders acknowledged that leadership behaviours significantly influence whether well-being is recognised, discussed, and supported within organisations. Among youth workers and practitioners (Target Group 1), 77.3% agreed or strongly agreed that leaders in organisations working with young people recognise the emotional demands associated with youth work. An even larger proportion (86.4%) agreed that leadership practices influence how comfortable practitioners feel discussing stress, burnout, and emotional challenges. The strongest

consensus concerned the active role leaders should play in promoting well-being, with 95.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing that management should actively support the creation of work environments that promote practitioner well-being.

Responses from organisational leaders and managers (Target Group 2) revealed similarly high levels of agreement. 78.9% agreed that leaders recognise the emotional demands of youth work, while 94.7% agreed that leadership practices directly influence whether staff feel comfortable discussing stress, burnout, and emotional difficulties. The same proportion (94.7%) agreed that leaders should actively contribute to creating supportive working environments that promote practitioner well-being.

The quantitative findings suggest broad consensus that leadership plays a crucial role in shaping organisational well-being culture. Respondents from both groups recognised that leadership behaviours influence not only organisational attitudes towards well-being but also the willingness of practitioners to seek support and discuss challenges openly.

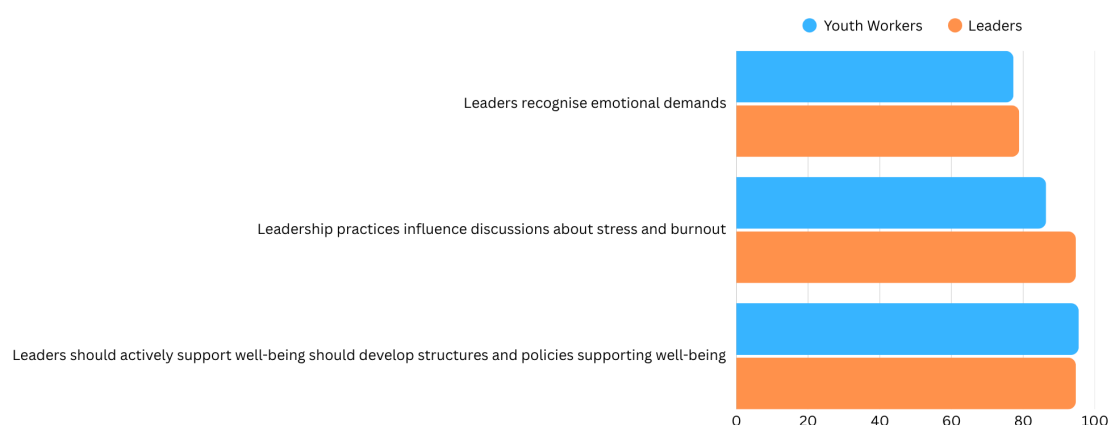


Chart 16. Leadership Attitudes towards Well-being and Emotional Labour (in percent)

Across interviews and the focus group discussion, participants repeatedly emphasised that leaders play a central role in determining whether well-being becomes a legitimate organisational concern or remains an individual matter. Respondents described leadership not primarily through formal authority but through communication, accessibility, empathy, and the ability to create psychologically safe environments. Several participants highlighted the importance of leaders who are willing to discuss challenges openly and model healthy behaviours themselves. One

interview participant described the value of leaders who create opportunities for reflection and dialogue rather than focusing exclusively on tasks and outcomes: “Sometimes the most important thing is simply creating space where people can talk honestly about what is difficult.” Participants also emphasised that leadership behaviours strongly influence whether practitioners feel safe expressing vulnerability, stress, or emotional fatigue. According to several respondents, supportive leaders help normalise conversations about emotional challenges and reduce the stigma associated with seeking support.

Another recurring theme concerned the role of leaders in fostering trust and openness within teams. Interview participants described organisations where leaders actively encouraged feedback, invited staff to share concerns, and treated difficulties as opportunities for collective problem-solving rather than personal shortcomings. Such practices were seen as essential for creating environments where well-being could be openly discussed and addressed.

The focus group discussion further revealed that leadership attitudes can either strengthen or undermine organisational well-being culture. Participants noted that when leaders focus exclusively on productivity, project delivery, and performance outcomes, practitioners may become reluctant to disclose stress or emotional difficulties. Conversely, leaders who demonstrate empathy, flexibility, and genuine concern for staff experiences contribute to stronger organisational trust and greater willingness to seek support. Participants also stressed that leadership support becomes particularly important during periods of high workload, organisational change, or crisis. In these situations, leadership decisions regarding workload allocation, communication, and emotional support can significantly influence practitioners’ ability to cope with demands and maintain well-being.

The findings highlight leadership as a critical factor in shaping organisational cultures of well-being within the youth sector. The quantitative results demonstrate strong agreement that leadership behaviours influence how organisations respond to emotional labour and practitioner well-being. Both practitioners and organisational leaders recognise that leaders play a key role in establishing norms around discussing stress, burnout, and emotional challenges. There is also near-universal agreement that leaders should actively contribute to creating supportive work environments. The

qualitative findings deepen this understanding by illustrating how leadership influences everyday organisational experiences. Participants consistently described effective leadership in terms of openness, empathy, trust-building, communication, and responsiveness to practitioners' needs. Leadership was viewed not simply as a managerial function but as a relational process that shapes whether well-being becomes embedded within organisational culture.

The findings suggest that leadership attitudes serve as a bridge between organisational awareness and organisational action. While awareness of practitioner well-being is widespread across the sector, leadership behaviours often determine whether this awareness translates into meaningful support practices. Leaders who create safe spaces for dialogue, encourage reflection, and model healthy approaches to work appear better positioned to foster sustainable well-being cultures within their organisations.

The evidence indicates that leadership plays a decisive role in shaping organisational responses to emotional labour and practitioner well-being. Strengthening leadership capacity in areas such as communication, emotional awareness, supportive supervision, and well-being-oriented management may therefore represent an important pathway for enhancing practitioner well-being across the youth sector.

Indicator 4 – Organisational Culture and Psychological Safety

The survey findings highlight the importance respondents attach to psychological safety and supportive organisational cultures within youth work settings. At the same time, the results suggest that creating environments where practitioners consistently feel safe expressing concerns remains an ongoing challenge. Among youth workers and practitioners (Target Group 1), 63.6% agreed or strongly agreed that staff feel safe expressing concerns about workload, stress, or well-being within their organisations. A substantially larger proportion (86.4%) agreed that organisational culture promotes mutual support among staff and volunteers. The strongest consensus was observed regarding the importance of psychological safety itself, with 90.9% agreeing or strongly agreeing that psychological safety is essential for effective youth work. Responses from organisational leaders and managers (Target Group 2) revealed a similar pattern. 63.2%

agreed that staff feel safe expressing concerns related to workload and well-being within their organisations. At the same time, 94.7% agreed that organisations should actively foster cultures in which employees feel psychologically safe, while 94.8% agreed that psychological safety is essential for effective youth work. Taken together, the quantitative findings indicate a strong recognition of the importance of psychological safety and supportive organisational cultures. However, they also reveal a noticeable gap between the perceived importance of psychological safety and the extent to which respondents believe it is consistently experienced in practice.

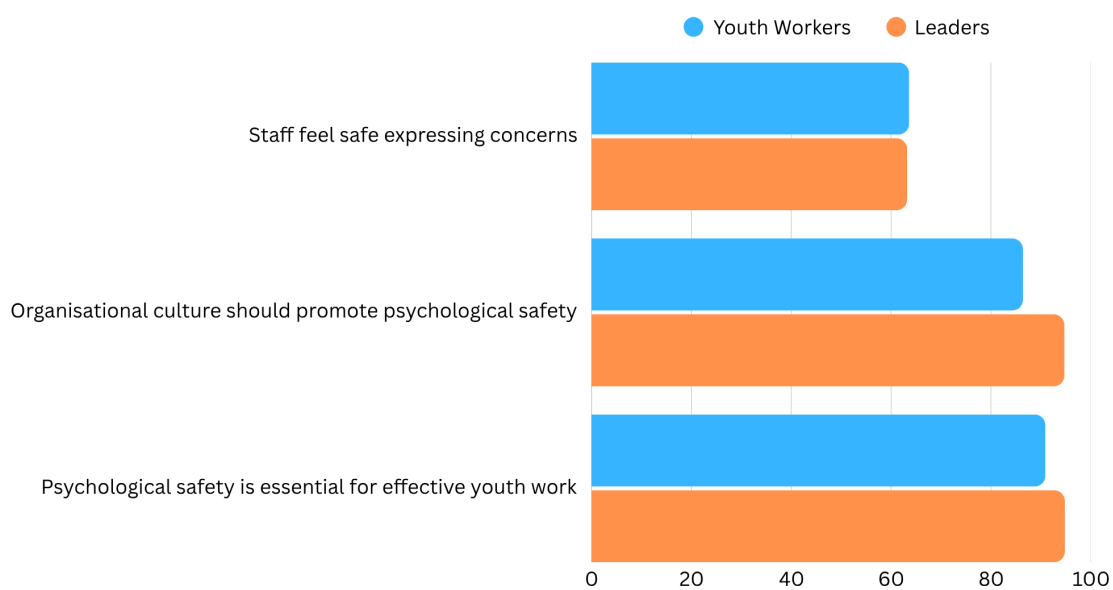


Chart 16. Organisational Culture and Psychological Safety (in percent)

Across interviews and the focus group discussion, participants consistently described psychological safety as closely linked to trust, openness, communication, and interpersonal relationships. Respondents emphasised that practitioners are more likely to discuss stress, emotional challenges, or workload pressures when they feel accepted, respected, and confident that their concerns will be taken seriously. Several participants highlighted the importance of creating environments where individuals can express difficulties without fear of judgement or negative consequences. One interview participant explained that psychological safety is built through everyday interactions and organisational habits rather than through formal declarations alone: “People need to know that they can say something is difficult without feeling that they

have failed.” Participants frequently referred to trust as a foundation for psychological safety. In organisations where team members know each other well, communicate openly, and maintain supportive relationships, practitioners appeared more willing to share concerns and seek help when needed. Respondents described regular conversations, informal check-ins, and opportunities for reflection as important mechanisms that contribute to a sense of safety and belonging.

The focus group discussion also highlighted the role of peer support. Participants described youth work as a highly relational profession in which colleagues often become important sources of emotional support. Several respondents noted that simply knowing that others understand the emotional realities of youth work can reduce feelings of isolation and encourage open conversations about stress and well-being. At the same time, participants acknowledged that psychological safety cannot be taken for granted. Some respondents described situations in which practitioners were reluctant to discuss difficulties because they feared being perceived as less competent, less resilient, or unable to cope with professional demands. Others noted that workload pressures and organisational expectations can discourage open conversations, particularly during busy periods or when organisations face resource constraints. Interview participants also emphasised that leaders and managers play a crucial role in establishing psychologically safe environments. Leadership behaviours that encourage listening, empathy, openness, and constructive feedback were seen as particularly important in fostering trust and supporting honest communication about well-being challenges.

The findings suggest that psychological safety represents one of the most important, yet also one of the most challenging, dimensions of organisational well-being within the youth sector. The quantitative results demonstrate near-universal agreement that psychological safety is essential for effective youth work and that organisations should cultivate supportive environments. However, considerably fewer respondents believe that practitioners consistently feel safe expressing concerns about workload, stress, or well-being within their own organisations. The qualitative findings help explain this discrepancy. Participants described psychological safety as something that emerges through trust, supportive relationships, open communication, and everyday organisational practices. While many organisations appear to promote values

associated with psychological safety, creating environments where practitioners genuinely feel comfortable expressing vulnerability remains more difficult in practice. Importantly, the findings indicate that psychological safety is not solely an individual experience but a collective organisational phenomenon shaped by leadership behaviours, team dynamics, organisational culture, and available support structures. Respondents consistently linked psychological safety to the ability to discuss challenges openly, seek help when necessary, and establish healthy professional boundaries. Psychological safety is widely recognised as a cornerstone of sustainable youth work. Nevertheless, the findings reveal a significant implementation gap between recognising its importance and ensuring that practitioners consistently experience psychologically safe working environments. Strengthening trust, communication, supportive leadership, and opportunities for open dialogue may therefore represent important priorities for organisations seeking to enhance practitioner well-being and resilience.

Indicator 5 – Organisational Learning and Openness to Improvement

The survey findings demonstrate exceptionally strong support for organisational learning, reflection, and continuous improvement as mechanisms for strengthening practitioner well-being. Across both respondent groups, participants overwhelmingly agreed that organisations should regularly assess their practices, respond to practitioner experiences, and use feedback to improve support systems. Among youth workers and practitioners (Target Group 1), 95.5% agreed or strongly agreed that organisations working with young people should regularly review how their practices affect practitioner well-being. Similarly, 95.4% agreed or strongly agreed that organisations should adapt their internal practices when practitioners experience stress or burnout. Notably, 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that learning from practitioners' experiences can improve organisational support systems. Responses from organisational leaders and managers (Target Group 2) revealed equally strong support for organisational learning processes. 84.3% agreed or strongly agreed that organisations should regularly review the impact of their practices on practitioner well-being. Furthermore, 100% agreed that organisations should adapt policies and practices based on practitioner feedback and experiences, while 100% also agreed that learning from practitioners' experiences can strengthen organisational support

systems.

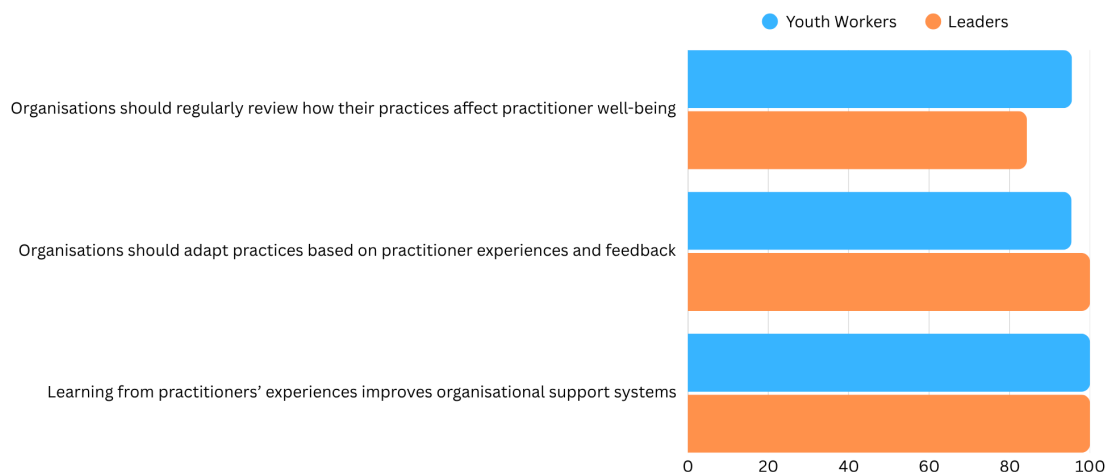


Chart 17. Organisational Learning and Openness to Improvement (in percent)

Across interviews, participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of reflection, feedback, and adaptation as essential elements of organisational development. Respondents described organisations as dynamic environments that must continuously learn from the experiences of staff, volunteers, and young people in order to remain effective and sustainable. Several interviewees referred to regular evaluation processes, team discussions, and reflective meetings as opportunities to identify emerging challenges and improve organisational responses. One participant explained that organisational development depends on the willingness to question existing practices and make adjustments when necessary: “If something is not working, we need to be able to talk about it honestly and change it.” Participants frequently linked learning processes to practitioner well-being. Rather than viewing stress, burnout, or dissatisfaction as individual problems, respondents argued that such experiences can provide valuable information about how organisations function and where improvements may be needed.

Another recurring theme concerned the importance of feedback mechanisms. Interview participants described formal and informal opportunities for staff and volunteers to share experiences, express concerns, and propose improvements. In organisations where feedback was actively encouraged, participants reported greater confidence that challenges would be addressed constructively rather than ignored.

The focus group discussion reinforced these findings. Participants argued that

organisations should not simply react to problems once they become serious but should actively seek opportunities to learn from everyday experiences. Several respondents highlighted the value of regular reflection sessions, evaluation meetings, and open conversations that enable organisations to identify patterns and adapt practices before difficulties escalate.

Participants also recognised that learning requires openness from leadership. Organisational improvement was described as more likely when leaders are willing to listen to feedback, acknowledge limitations, and treat practitioner experiences as a valuable source of knowledge. Respondents noted that organisations may struggle to learn when criticism is perceived negatively or when staff feel uncomfortable sharing concerns.

The quantitative results demonstrate overwhelming agreement that organisations should regularly reflect on their practices, respond to practitioner experiences, and adapt policies when challenges arise. Both practitioners and organisational leaders strongly support the idea that well-being can be improved through continuous learning and organisational development. The qualitative findings help explain why this consensus is so strong. Participants consistently described well-being not as a fixed condition but as an ongoing process requiring reflection, dialogue, and adaptation. Learning was understood as a practical organisational capability that enables organisations to identify emerging challenges, respond to practitioner needs, and improve support mechanisms over time.

Respondents viewed practitioner experiences as a valuable source of organisational knowledge. Feedback, reflection, and open dialogue were repeatedly identified as mechanisms through which organisations can strengthen both practitioner well-being and overall organisational effectiveness.

Organisations within the Polish youth sector are highly receptive to the principles of organisational learning and continuous improvement. While previous indicators revealed gaps between awareness and implementation, this indicator highlights a particularly strong willingness among both practitioners and leaders to learn from experience and adapt organisational practices accordingly. This openness to reflection and change represents an important foundation for developing more sustainable and supportive approaches to practitioner well-being in the future.

Indicator 6 – Systemic Understanding of Well-being and Resilience

The survey findings demonstrate strong support for a systemic understanding of practitioner well-being and resilience. Respondents from both target groups largely rejected the view that well-being depends solely on individual coping capacities and instead recognised the importance of organisational factors, leadership practices, resources, and workplace culture. Among youth workers and practitioners (Target Group 1), 20 respondents (90.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that practitioner well-being depends not only on personal resilience but also on organisational conditions. Furthermore, 22 respondents (100.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that organisational culture, leadership, and available resources significantly influence practitioner resilience. Finally, 21 respondents (95.5%) agreed or strongly agreed that sustainable youth work requires organisations to address well-being at a systemic level rather than relying exclusively on individual coping mechanisms. Responses from organisational leaders and managers (Target Group 2) reveal a very similar pattern. 15 respondents (78.9%) agreed that practitioner well-being depends on organisational culture, policies, and working conditions, not only on individual resilience. All respondents (19 respondents; 100.0%) agreed that organisational culture, leadership, and resources significantly influence practitioner resilience. In addition, 18 respondents (94.7%) agreed that sustainable youth work requires organisations to address well-being at a systemic level. Overall, the quantitative findings indicate broad recognition that practitioner well-being is shaped by organisational systems and environments rather than solely by individual characteristics. Respondents from both groups consistently linked well-being to organisational culture, leadership practices, resources, and structural conditions.

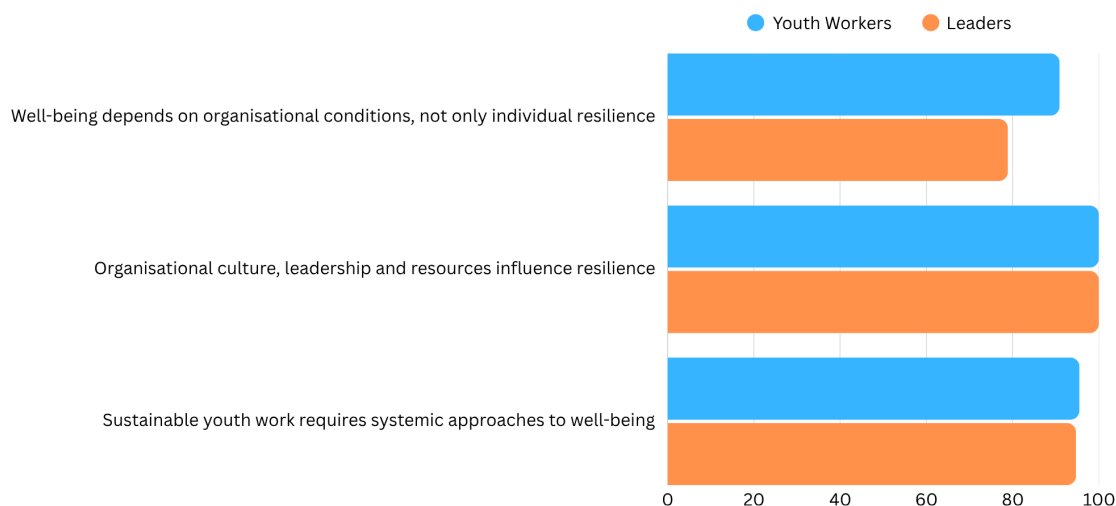


Chart 18. Systemic Understanding of Well-being and Resilience (in percent)

The qualitative findings strongly support this systemic understanding of well-being and resilience. Across interviews and the focus group discussion, participants repeatedly emphasised that practitioner well-being cannot be separated from organisational realities such as workload, funding structures, leadership approaches, team dynamics, and organisational culture. Participants frequently challenged narratives that place responsibility for coping exclusively on individual practitioners. While recognising the importance of personal self-awareness and self-care, respondents argued that organisational environments can either support or undermine well-being regardless of individual resilience. One interview participant reflected on the importance of organisational conditions in shaping practitioners' capacity to remain engaged and effective: "The person doing this work needs to be cared for internally and externally in order to convey the deeper meaning behind the activities we offer to young people." Several respondents highlighted the influence of organisational culture on practitioners' experiences of stress and resilience. Trust, communication, supportive leadership, opportunities for reflection, and access to peer support were all described as factors that strengthen resilience at a collective level rather than solely as individual attributes. Participants also repeatedly referred to structural challenges affecting well-being, including project-based funding, staff shortages, administrative burdens, and the expectation that practitioners manage increasing levels of emotional labour. In the focus group discussion, respondents argued that burnout and emotional

exhaustion should not be understood solely as personal failures but as signals that organisational and systemic conditions require attention.

The interviews further revealed an emerging awareness that organisational sustainability and practitioner well-being are closely interconnected. Several participants argued that organisations cannot effectively support young people over the long term if they fail to invest in the well-being of the people delivering those services. Organisational resilience was therefore often discussed alongside practitioner resilience, with respondents viewing both as mutually reinforcing.

The quantitative data demonstrate overwhelming agreement that organisational culture, leadership, resources, and working conditions significantly influence practitioner well-being. Both practitioners and organisational leaders reject simplistic understandings of resilience based solely on individual coping capacities and instead recognise the importance of broader organisational factors. The qualitative findings deepen this understanding by illustrating how organisational systems shape everyday experiences of stress, support, and sustainability. Participants consistently linked well-being to leadership behaviours, organisational culture, communication practices, workload management, access to support, and resource availability. Rather than viewing resilience as a personal trait, respondents described it as something that emerges through interactions between individuals and their organisational environments. This indicator brings together themes that emerged throughout the previous findings. Organisational awareness, leadership attitudes, psychological safety, organisational responsibility, and learning processes were all described as interconnected elements of a broader organisational system influencing practitioner well-being.

Polish youth sector increasingly understands practitioner well-being as a collective and systemic issue rather than solely an individual responsibility. This represents a significant foundation for future organisational development, as it creates conditions for moving beyond individual coping strategies towards more comprehensive and sustainable approaches to supporting practitioner well-being and organisational resilience.

Section VIII: General conclusions and recommendations – as they resulted from the interpretation and synthesis of key findings (quantitative results and qualitative insights).

- **Conclusions**

The findings from the surveys, individual interviews, and focus group discussion present a coherent and encouraging picture of practitioner well-being within youth work organisations in Poland. Across all six indicators, respondents demonstrated a high level of awareness of the importance of practitioner well-being and a strong recognition of its relationship with the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of youth work.

One of the most significant findings is the remarkable consistency of views across respondent groups. Youth workers and organisational leaders expressed broadly similar perspectives regarding the emotional demands of youth work, the importance of well-being, the role of organisational culture, and the need for supportive leadership. This suggests that practitioner well-being has become a widely recognised issue across different levels of the youth sector.

The findings indicate that organisations have largely moved beyond questioning whether practitioner well-being matters. Across all indicators, respondents consistently recognised well-being as an important organisational issue and acknowledged that supporting practitioners is essential for delivering high-quality services to young people. Emotional labour was widely understood as a defining characteristic of youth work rather than an exceptional challenge.

The study also revealed a clear shift away from individualised understandings of resilience. While personal responsibility and self-care remain important, respondents overwhelmingly recognised that practitioner well-being is shaped by organisational culture, leadership practices, workload management, communication processes, available resources, and working conditions. Well-being was increasingly understood as a systemic and collective organisational responsibility rather than solely a matter of individual coping capacity.

Leadership emerged as one of the most influential factors affecting practitioner well-being. Both quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrated that leadership behaviours strongly influence organisational culture, psychological safety, openness to discussing stress and burnout, and the extent to which practitioners feel supported. Participants consistently associated supportive leadership with trust, empathy, accessibility, and open communication.

The findings further highlight the importance of organisational culture and psychological safety. Although respondents overwhelmingly agreed that psychological safety is essential for effective youth work, significantly fewer believed that practitioners consistently feel safe expressing concerns about workload, stress, or well-being within their organisations. This gap suggests that while awareness is high, creating psychologically safe organisational environments remains an ongoing challenge.

Another important conclusion concerns organisational learning and openness to improvement. The study revealed exceptionally strong support for reflective practice, practitioner feedback, and continuous organisational learning. Respondents from both target groups strongly agreed that organisations should regularly review their practices, learn from practitioner experiences, and adapt policies and support systems in response to emerging needs. This openness to reflection and change represents a significant strength of the Polish youth sector.

At the same time, the research identified several persistent barriers limiting organisations' ability to translate awareness into practice. The most frequently mentioned barriers include financial insecurity, project-based funding models, heavy workloads, limited organisational capacity, staff shortages, and insufficient access to formal support mechanisms such as supervision, mentoring, or psychological support. While many organisations provide valuable informal support, structured well-being systems remain unevenly developed across the sector.

Overall, the findings suggest that the Polish youth sector has developed a strong conceptual understanding of practitioner well-being and resilience. The primary challenge is no longer awareness, but implementation. Future efforts should focus on

transforming existing awareness into sustainable organisational structures, leadership practices, support mechanisms, and sector-wide approaches that promote practitioner well-being in a systematic and long-term manner.

- **Recommendations** (what should be done)

1. Strengthen leadership capacity for well-being-oriented management

The findings consistently demonstrate the central role of leadership in shaping organisational culture, psychological safety, and practitioner well-being. Organisations should invest in leadership development programmes focusing on emotional intelligence, supportive supervision, communication skills, conflict management, reflective practice, and staff well-being. Leaders should be equipped not only to manage projects and resources but also to create organisational environments characterised by trust, openness, and psychological safety. Regular opportunities for peer exchange among leaders should also be encouraged to facilitate the sharing of experiences and effective practices related to practitioner well-being.

2. Integrate well-being into organisational strategy and decision-making

Practitioner well-being should be recognised as a strategic organisational priority rather than an optional or supplementary activity. Organisations should integrate well-being considerations into organisational planning, decision-making processes, and internal policies. This includes establishing regular opportunities for dialogue about workload, emotional demands, and well-being; incorporating well-being objectives into organisational development plans; and ensuring that discussions about practitioner well-being become a normal part of organisational life. Well-being should be understood as an ongoing organisational responsibility rather than a response to crises or burnout.

3. Develop accessible and sustainable support structures

The study highlights the need for more consistent access to support mechanisms that help practitioners manage the emotional demands of youth work.

Priority should be given to:

- regular supervision and reflective practice,

- peer-support and mentoring systems,
- access to psychological support services,
- structured well-being check-ins,
- procedures for identifying and responding to stress, burnout, and psychosocial risks.

Support mechanisms should be adapted to organisational size and resources while remaining accessible to all practitioners, including volunteers and part-time staff.

4. Promote psychological safety and supportive organisational cultures

Organisations should actively cultivate environments where practitioners feel comfortable discussing challenges, expressing concerns, and seeking support without fear of judgement or negative consequences. This requires strengthening trust-based relationships, encouraging open communication, normalising conversations about emotional labour, and creating opportunities for collective reflection. Particular attention should be given to building strong peer-support networks, which emerged as one of the most important protective factors throughout the study.

5. Strengthen organisational learning and feedback systems

The findings demonstrate strong support for continuous organisational learning as a means of improving practitioner well-being.

Organisations should establish mechanisms such as:

- regular staff well-being surveys,
- anonymous feedback channels,
- periodic reviews of organisational culture,
- reflective debriefing sessions,
- inclusion of well-being indicators within organisational evaluation processes.

Systematic learning processes can help organisations identify emerging challenges and improve support structures before difficulties escalate.

6. Increase sector-level cooperation and knowledge sharing

The findings suggest a need for stronger collaboration across the youth sector regarding practitioner well-being and resilience. National and regional networks should

facilitate the exchange of good practices, resources, and learning opportunities related to organisational well-being. Peer-learning initiatives, communities of practice, and cross-organisational training programmes could help organisations strengthen their capacity to support practitioners more effectively. Greater cooperation would also reduce the isolation often experienced by smaller organisations with limited internal resources.

7. Improve structural and funding conditions for sustainable youth work

Financial insecurity, project-based funding, workload pressures, and limited organisational capacity emerged as the most significant barriers to practitioner well-being. Policy-makers, funding bodies, and sector stakeholders should explicitly recognise practitioner well-being as a prerequisite for sustainable youth work. Funding programmes should allow organisations to allocate resources for supervision, mentoring, psychological support, staff development, organisational learning, and well-being-related activities.

In the longer term, strengthening practitioner well-being will require moving beyond short-term project cycles towards funding models that support organisational stability, workforce sustainability, and long-term investment in people.

Annex 1. Cross-indicator quantitative synthesis

Indicator	Key finding – Youth Workers and Practitioners (n=22)	Key finding – Leaders and Managers (n=19)	Main conclusion
Indicator 1 – Organisational Awareness and Strategic Recognition of Well-being	81.8% agreed that practitioner well-being is important for maintaining high-quality youth work.	94.7% agreed that practitioner well-being directly influences service quality.	Awareness of practitioner well-being is high across the sector.
Indicator 2 – Organisational Responsibility for Practitioner Well-being	95.5% agreed that organisations have a responsibility to actively support practitioner well-being.	84.2% agreed that organisations should actively support practitioner well-being.	Well-being is increasingly viewed as a shared organisational responsibility.
Indicator 3 – Leadership Attitudes towards Well-being and Emotional Labour	95.5% agreed that leaders should actively support practitioner well-being.	94.7% agreed that leadership should actively create supportive work environments.	Leadership is recognised as a key factor shaping organisational well-being.
Indicator 4 – Organisational Culture and Psychological Safety	63.6% felt safe expressing concerns about workload or well-being.	63.2% believed staff feel safe expressing such concerns.	Psychological safety remains an important area for further development.
Indicator 5 – Organisational Learning and Openness to Improvement	100.0% agreed that learning from practitioner experiences improves support systems.	100.0% agreed that practitioner feedback should inform organisational development.	Strong openness to learning and continuous improvement exists across organisations.
Indicator 6 – Systemic Understanding of Well-being and Resilience	100.0% agreed that organisational culture, leadership, and resources influence resilience.	100.0% agreed that organisational factors significantly affect practitioner resilience.	Well-being is increasingly understood as a systemic organisational issue.

References / Bibliography

Project Documentation

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