sport4prisons

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

Key competencies of prisoners for reintegration

Report on the S4P interviews and surveys results

By TALENTBRÜCKE GmbH & Co. KG

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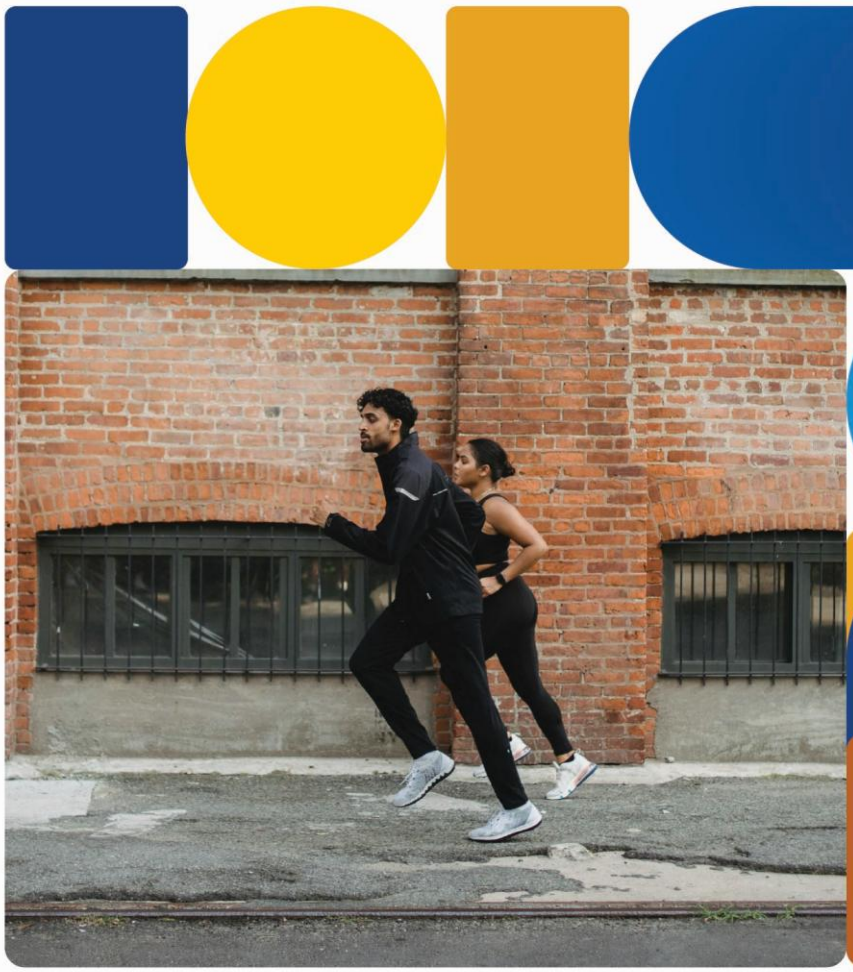

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Executive summary

This report integrates staff surveys (N=52) and semi-structured interviews from four partner countries (Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Türkiye). Using a six-dimensional analytic frame—S1 Assessment, S2 Training formats, S3 Effects/Success, S4 Resources/Staffing, S5 Institutional context, S6 Documentation/Use—we identify convergent signals and actionable divergences.

Across all countries, sport and experiential activities are perceived as highly effective vehicles for building observable social competencies (e.g., teamwork, emotional regulation, problem-solving), while resource and access constraints (staffing, equipment, secure time windows) remain the main bottlenecks. Survey evidence shows high ratings for competencies linked to reintegration (e.g., DE: problem-solving and responsibility 4.55; PT: motivation 4.86), and strong perceived fit between sport/experiential formats and competence gains (e.g., teamwork 4.73 in DE; teamwork and emotional regulation 4.86 in PT). Interviews triangulate these findings but reveal heterogeneous assessment and documentation routines—formalised in TR (21 interviews | 12 survey responses), mixed in DE (5 | 11) , partial in HU (3 | 13), thin in PT (4 | 16).

The cross-country analysis confirms that sport and education are promising tools for prison rehabilitation and resocialisation. However, systemic barriers such as staff shortages, punitive institutional cultures, and a lack of diagnostic routines significantly reduce their impact. Sport4Prisons addresses these gaps by introducing a structured, innovative, and internationally connected framework for competence development.

Future opportunities include expanding sport-based interventions across European prisons, developing common competence assessment methods linked to sport, strengthening international cooperation, and positioning Sport4Prisons as both a practical intervention and a policy innovation aligned with European strategies on prison education, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

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Introduction

Based on the results identified in this projects previous desk research report "Key Competencies for Social Reintegration and Current Available Methods for their Development", there is a clear need to raise the existing standards in the field of sport and education-oriented measures in the prison system in order to create a sustainable basis for the effectiveness of sport and sport-like methods in the resocialisation of prisoners.[1][2] The Sport4Prisons project aims to develop, implement, and evaluate a new and innovative sports method as a tool for assessing and developing prisoner competencies, as well as educate prison officers and trainees to successfully implement the tool in order to enhance the rehabilitation of prisoners.

The objective of this study report is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the prison systems in the Sport4Prisons partnership countries – Germany, Portugal, Hungary, and Türkiye – with a particular focus on the development of key competencies that support the successful reintegration of incarcerated individuals. By examining demographic profiles, legal and policy frameworks, and existing rehabilitation programmes, the report seeks to identify effective practices, highlight systemic challenges, and inform the design of targeted interventions.

In this sense, the goal is to support the development of an evidence-based, context-sensitive sports method for competence development and assessment of individuals within prison settings across the partner countries.

[1] European Parliament Briefing. (2017). Prison conditions in the Member States: selected European standards and best practices.
https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/583113/IPOL_BRI(2017)583113_EN.pdf
[2] Sport4Prisons. WP2 - Key Competencies for Social Reintegration and Current Available Methods for their Development (2025). sport4prisons.eu

Coordinator and Partners

Coordinator:

- Hungarian Water Skyball Federation (HU) www.waterskyball.com/

Partners:

- IPS_Innovative Prison Systems, by Qualify Just (PT) www.prisonsystems.eu
- Wassenberg Base and Softball Association (DE) www.bsv-wassenberg.de/
- FONTANUS Scientific Methodological Research and Educational Center (HU) www.fontanus.hu
- TALENTBRÜCKE GmbH & Co. KG (DE) projects.talentbruecke.de/
- Multi Act Civil Society Support Association (TR) www.mact.org.tr

1. Sample

	Country	33 interviews
Interviews	DE	5
	HU	3
	PT	4
	TR	21
	Country	**51 responses**
Surveys	DE	11
	HU	13
	PT	16
	TR	12

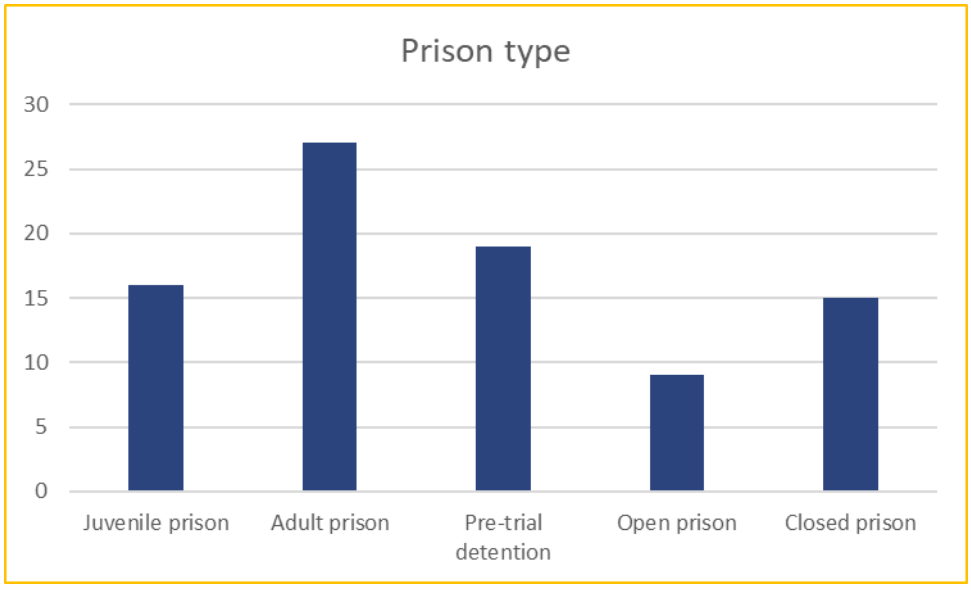

Figure 1: Prisons from the 4 partner countries that participated in the survey and interviews

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2. Methodology

The study was designed as a mixed-methods inquiry, combining a structured survey with semi-structured interviews. The survey included Likert-type items on a 1–5 scale, binary and multi-select questions, as well as optional open text fields. The interviews were conducted with custodial officers, educators, social workers, and programme leads, allowing for a broad view across professional roles in the prison context. Data collection covered at least three institutions per country, resulting in 11 responses from Germany, 13 from Hungary, 16 from Portugal, and 12 from Türkiye. The interview sample reflects a similar diversity of roles, though the distribution is somewhat skewed towards Türkiye in the current corpus.

The analysis was conducted using the method of summarised qualitative content analysis, combining a deductive and inductive coding approach. The deductive backbone was provided by the S1–S6 framework, which differentiates between six dimensions: assessment, training formats, effects and success, resources and staffing, institutional context, and documentation and use. Inductive coding was then added to capture patterns emerging in the material, such as constraints in Portugal linked to high remand populations or the scarcity of mentoring opportunities reported in Germany and Hungary. To ensure reliability, clear inclusion and exclusion rules were defined for each code, and spot checks with double coding were carried out. Nonetheless, certain limitations remain. Open survey fields tended to under-report assessment and documentation practices (S1 and S6), and the interview material is unevenly distributed across the partner countries, with Türkiye more strongly represented than Germany, Portugal, or Hungary. The triangulation of survey and interview data mitigates these imbalances by reducing single-source bias. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that half of the participants in the interviews and surveys have more than 10 years of experience working in the prison system.

The analytic frame applied throughout the study was structured along six key dimensions. **S1 refers to assessment**, including entry screening, periodic reviews, and certification checks. **S2 covers training formats, spanning education, vocational training**, in-prison work, sport and experiential learning, counselling, and mentoring. **S3 focuses on effects and success, particularly observed behavioural change, participation and completion rates, and certification**. **S4 addresses resources and staffing**, such as staff levels, equipment, space, and available time windows. **S5 considers institutional context, including security regimes, sentence length and type**, and administrative routines. Finally, **S6 refers to documentation and use,**

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including plans, portfolios, and notes, and their application in planning and steering prisoner rehabilitation efforts.

Quality Considerations: The balance of data reflects some unevenness: interview volume is higher in Türkiye, while survey open fields tend to under-report assessment and documentation practices (S1/S6). These imbalances are mitigated through triangulation and by focusing on consistent patterns across sources. Reliability is strengthened through dual coding on a sample basis and clear inclusion and exclusion rules for each code. Transferability is ensured by framing recommendations as minimal viable standards that can be adapted across different prison regimes.

3. Results

Table 1: Dimensions overview from structured content analysis of the interviews and surveys

Dimensions (incl. nominations) Interviews & Surveys			
	S1 Assessment (systematic)	45	Organised, comprehensible procedures (diagnostics, criteria, scoring, observation sheets) to record the initial situation and progress.
	S2 Training formats	99	Specific settings and methods (sport, school, workshop, peer learning, coaching) with which skills are developed and tested
	S3 Effect & Success	72	Observable changes at participant, group and institutional level (e.g. discipline, teamwork, conflict resolution, motivation), including indicators.
	S4 Resources & staff	59	Available rooms, equipment, time budgets and personnel (qualification, capacity) and their influence on quality and scaling
	S5 Institutional framework	15	Rules, security, processes and cooperation (e.g. with NGOs, schools, law enforcement) - which opens up or limits room for manoeuvre

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	S6 Documentation & use	68	How results are recorded, shared and reused (files, portfolios, recognition, transition management).

3.1. Interviews

Hungary

- **Narrative overview.** Offers exist but are **irregular**; space, equipment and staff are tight. Effects are reported when continuity is achieved (e.g., fewer conflicts). Assessments and documentation occur **in parts** (screenings, periodic notes), but routines lack consistency. Security/access rules further constrain usage.

Table 2: Exemplary overview of the dimensions found in interviews with prison staff in Hungary

	Description	Anchor (example)
S4 Resources & staff	All interviewees stress that there are too few colleagues. This leads to overload, limited program development, and less individual support.	"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." [ID: I#1_HUN]
S2 Training formats	Psychological aspects such as resilience and emotional control are seen as crucial. Mental skills are considered easier to develop than practical ones.	"They find it easier to develop mental abilities than practical ones. […] psychological aspects should be developed more, because many inmates lack emotional control. In everyday practice, the focus is strongly on mental abilities, as these are essential for reintegration." [ID: I#3_HUN]

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S1 Assessment (systematic)	All interviews mention systematic or semi-systematic skill assessments (entrance assessments, observation, credit points).	"Later, officers write evaluations, and these are considered when defining further steps. There is also a larger credit summarization every six months to track development." [ID: I#3_HUN]
S4 Resources & staff	Lack of professional staff (and physical space) is a limiting factor in activities.	"More staff would be needed; civil organizations could help with this. […] The most limiting factor is staff shortage." [ID: I#1_HUN]
S5 Institutional framework	NGOs, conferences, and external inputs are seen as important sources of new ideas and support.	"Possibly social assistant instructors, psychologists, probation officers, EFOK project staff, lead reintegration officer, and in some cases, teachers from external educational institutions." [ID: I#1_HUN]
S5 Institutional framework	Large differences in education among inmates pose challenges for uniform training.	"There is a high number of inmates with below-average education. No two people are the same, neither among the colleagues nor the inmates." [ID: I#1_HUN]
S2 Training formats/ S3 Effect & Success	Programs must be practical and usable in everyday life, not only theoretical.	"The programs are mainly theoretical, with fewer practical components. They are absolutely practice-oriented and have personally witnessed the changes that occur in people during such activities. Even a more difficult individual could be uplifted by the team." [ID: I#2_HUN]

Germany

- **Narrative overview.** Sport and education are established pillars. Programs run regularly and are embedded in planning routines. Staff highlight visible effects on behavior and self-control; **measurement is still mainly qualitative**, particularly in youth/short sentence contexts. Security

procedures require careful scheduling. **Documentation** (e.g., treatment plans/tools) supports continuity, while **assessment** varies between structured and ad-hoc.

Table 3: Exemplary overview of the dimensions found in interviews with prison staff in Germany

	Description	Anchor (example)
S2 Training formats/ S3 Effect & Success	Sport is seen as central to teamwork, discipline, and conflict resolution.	"Of course, skills such as conflict resolution and teamwork should not be forgotten; further development in these areas is always beneficial." [ID: I#5_GER]
S2 Training formats	Communication and conflict resolution skills are key to reintegration.	"For me, conflict resolution skills are the top priority. Even the potential emergence of conflicts is addressed together with the inmates in order to identify alternatives. Furthermore, we always aim to influence the motivation of the prisoners" [ID: I#5_GER]
S2 Training formats	Communication and conflict resolution skills are key to reintegration.	"For me, conflict resolution skills are the top priority. Here, too, I would place conflict resolution skills as most important, because they are essential for both inmates and staff. Communication skills are equally important, as they help reduce tensions and build trust." [ID: I#5_GER]
S2 Training formats	Education and school-based programmes are vital for rehabilitation, especially for low-educated inmates.	"This means that I teach physical education in the mornings, just like in a normal school, and in the afternoons, we replace sports with various courses as a hobby." [ID: I#5_GER]
S1 Assessment (systematic) / S6 Documentation & use	Some institutions use structured programs (Steps, SOP), while others work more individually.	"There are some who really want to work with us, and there are others who don't care about anything, who are just serving their sentence and

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		don't want to cooperate at all." [ID: I#8_GER] "What is needed to help them develop further? At least at the team exchange level, there is currently no method that we use permanently and regularly." [ID: I#4_GER]
S4 Resources & staff	Many interviewees highlight a lack of staff and overload.	"But many also have intrinsic motivation in the sense that they have realised that something has gone wrong in their lives." [ID: I#4_GER]
S3 Effect & Success	Recognition of inmates' strengths and potentials motivates and supports reintegration.	Clearly, there can be extrinsic motivational factors, such as: I would like to be released earlier,... Sport definitely plays a role. As a social worker, I'm not very involved in that area; my tools and methods are more focused on conversation techniques,.. " [ID: I#4_GER]
S2 Training formats	Standardized programs often don't fit – individual adaptation is needed.	"In detention centres, except during free time, you often have individual contact, but here you have the group context because of the school classes." [ID: I#6_GER]
S5 Institutional framework	Increasing diversity among inmates (education, background) makes standardized programs difficult.	"What we have learned and are trying to promote among the prisoners is very difficult to test here in this laboratory environment." [ID: I#4_GER]
S2 Training formats	Calls for experiential education and EU projects.	"Yes, if I may answer the question from the perspective of the sports department, I must of course mention experiential education, but sport as a whole offers a great deal in terms of influencing the social skills of prisoners." [ID: I#5_GER]

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S5 Institutional framework	Sentence length is seen as either a secondary or a decisive factor for reintegration.	"The type of sentence is of secondary importance, but depending on the length of the sentence, we have to consider carefully which of our measures is the right one for the right prisoner." [ID: I#5_GER]

Türkiye

Narrative overview. Broad, regular programme landscape (public education courses, workshops, school/sport). **Assessments and certificates are formalised**; staff report clear success pathways. Constraints include staff/equipment and security/time windows; yet classroom feedback loops support continuous adjustment.

Table 4: Exemplary overview of the dimensions found in interviews with prison staff in Türkyie

	Description	Anchor (example)
S2 Training formats	School and vocational training are central to preparing inmates for post-prison life.	"After the prison administration and psychologist assess the inmate, they are then referred to our school and evaluated by the Vocational Training Unit." [ID: I#27_TK]
S2 Training formats	Sports and arts are highlighted as effective for discipline, motivation, and teamwork.	"When it comes to discipline, both the school and prison administrations administer appropriate punishments and rewards, which provides positive motivation." [ID: I#14_TK]
S2 Training formats	Anger management, stress coping, respect, and motivation are repeatedly mentioned as crucial.	"Anger management and coping skills are particularly encouraged when dealing with stress." [ID: I#13_TK]
S1 Assessment (systematic) / S6 Documentation & use	Inmates are systematically assessed, documented, and monitored.	"Yes, we evaluate skill development status by conducting regular tests and exams." [ID: I#13_TK] "We evaluate skill development mainly with mastery and apprenticeship certificates and course completion certificates." [ID: I#17_TK]

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S5 Institutional framework	Long sentences often lead to resignation, short ones don't allow programs.	"Even if the inmates' current skills are not at the desired level, their current status is assessed." [ID: I#15_TK]
S4 Resources & staff	Lack of equipment, security restrictions, and scarce materials are common issues.	"Yes, due to prison rules, we are experiencing a lack of educational materials, resources, and equipment." [ID: I#23_TK]
S5 Institutional framework	Different education levels, motivation, and attitudes make standardized programs hard to implement.	"In particular, education levels are quite diverse and different, which makes the process of acquiring skills together difficult." [ID: I#18_TK]
S3 Effect & Success / S6 Documentation & use	Certificates and recognition strongly motivate inmates.	"Certification of inmates' skills should be strongly considered." [ID: I#26_TK]
S2 Training formats	Teachers call for modern, alternative pedagogical approaches.	"Psychologists, social workers, teachers, correctional officers, and, when necessary, healthcare personnel are involved." [ID: I#13_TK]
S5 Institutional framework	International projects provide useful models for prison education.	"The student applies to the education unit with a letter stating "I want to go to school." From the moment the inmate first contacts the school, the teacher remains in contact with the student and the prison guard." [ID: I#16_TK]

Portugal

- **Narrative overview. Short stays and pre-trial custody** complicate planning; nonetheless, offers (team sports, gym) are present and seen to improve mood, cooperation and discipline. Resources are tight

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(funding/equipment). Assessment/documentation is **inconsistent**: interviews report little systematization; survey comments mention isolated regular evaluations.

Table 5: Exemplary overview of the dimensions found in interviews with prison staff in Portugal

	Description	Anchor (example)
S2 Training formats	Sport is named often as an important part of the everyday life in prison.	"And I've been here for over 30 years, so I've been here for many years in fact, and basically what I'm asked to do is the whole area of sport and the entire prison population, who naturally show an interest and appetite for practising it." [ID: I#9_PT]
S1 Assessment (systematic)	No structured skill assessment exists, only informal observations.	"There are no systematic procedures for skill assessment. If I can't focus on everything I'd like to, I'd also like to be God, I'd like to be everywhere, but since I can't, I prioritise things." [ID: I#9_PT]
S6 Documentation & use	Standardized documentation is not a knew concept and works well, when applied.	"We have a programme we use for this called SOPART. It is a documentation programme that is also used to deal with prisoners' concerns, [...] What is discussed about prisoners in the treatment conference is also transferred to the Sotha module in SOPART. We talk about four prisoners per week. This means that, on average, every four to six weeks, a summary of all those involved with prisoners is documented." [ID: I#4_GER]
S5 Institutional framework	In certain areas, interdisciplinary teams work together and build a functioning synergistic network.	"So, in reality, there's teamwork here, naturally, the education technicians, [...] naturally interact with me a lot, because they also like to know and need to know whether a particular person is participating, not participating, cooperating, not cooperating, how their behaviour is, So, there's a closeness, but it's an

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		independent area. The social reintegration officers also sometimes contact me, And then there's the school, but it's a completely separate curriculum and there's no sport at school. [ID: I#9_PT]
S5 Institutional framework / S6 Documentation & use	Long sentences reduce motivation; short ones don't allow continuity.	"Nor, even if we had the opportunity to do so, would it normally allow us to plan for the medium term, I don't even mean the long term, but at least the medium term, because they would then be transferred in the meantime." [ID: I#9_PT]
S4 Resources & staff	Shortages in equipment and spaces limit possibilities.	"Not just the practice itself, but also the maintenance of the spaces, the need for intervention in terms of who maintains the equipment, naturally, the acquisition, an annual inventory is made, the acquisition of material which is then distributed throughout the year." [ID: I#9_PT]
S5 Institutional framework	Lacks in international projects and knowledge exchange.	"I don't have much knowledge of international projects, I confess." [ID: I#11_PT]
S5 Institutional framework	Prison culture sometimes does not include sports as a method.	"In the sports area, there's no benefit, no benefit at all, it's only physical, it's only theirs, and probably what could happen in the sports area, the benefit they'll get is just the fact that if there's an outside activity and they have good behaviour and don't mess up, if they don't have any punishments, they can do it and that's it, [...] it's still not highly valued." [ID: I#9_PT]
S6 Documentation & use	Benefits exist but remain isolated and not institutionalized.	"But it does exist, and in terms of what the basic training we have, or that I have, allows me to try and improve, of course it does, but it doesn't have any, it doesn't have any clearly defined instrument."" [ID: I#9_PT]

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S2 Training formats	Some want more modern methods (yoga, experiential approaches).	"Well, yoga is great, I like it a lot. Rugby is marvellous... Right now I'm trying to set up a partnership with women's football. […] So the creation, therefore, I was here, goes a little bit back to what we were saying earlier, but in essence, what we also want is to create independence for the inmate themselves and habits that are healthy in some way, though, therefore, the creation of a map of classes,…" [ID: I#10_PT]

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3.2. Surveys

The survey results provide a differentiated picture of the four partner countries.

Germany

Respondents in Germany identified problem-solving and a sense of responsibility and reliability as the most important competencies for reintegration, both rated at 4.55, followed by conflict resolution at 4.27. Sports and experiential learning were seen as particularly effective for developing teamwork (4.73), self-confidence (4.36), and emotional regulation or de-escalation (4.18). The key challenges to competence development were language barriers (4.09), limited employment prospects after release (4.00), and intercultural barriers (4.00). Mental health issues (3.00) and a lack of resources or funding (2.91) were also mentioned. Overall, 64 percent of German respondents confirmed the use of sports and experiential activities.

[Scale from 1=not important at all to 5=very important]

- Sport is offered regularly and covers a diverse set of activities. Officers reported regular provision of sports such as baseball, table tennis, and beach volleyball, and explicitly called for more sports and experiential learning programmes. This suggests German facilities already offer sport with some variety, but there is a clear demand to expand both frequency and competence focus.
- Strong linkage to practical and vocational development. Officers highlighted vocational training as an important area, aligning with Germany's broader emphasis on employability within reintegration. Sport4Prisons can strengthen this link by framing sessions around workplace soft skills like teamwork, communication, reliability, and planning.
- Competence assessment exists, but is uneven. While some officers mentioned systematic assessment, others were unsure. This indicates pockets of good practice but inconsistency overall. A lightweight, standardized observation tool embedded in sport sessions could help, especially with short officer training.
- Officer-led delivery with training needs implied. Sport is primarily run by prison officers, not external coaches. The mixed responses on

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assessment suggest a need for applied upskilling, covering session flow, competence observation, and safe non-contact play. A train-the-trainer model tailored to officers' routines is likely to be effective.
- Innovation readiness is high. Repeated requests for more sport and experiential learning indicate openness to new methods, providing a good fit for Sport4Prisons' game-based, competence-focused approach.

Hungary

In Hungary, communication skills, problem-solving, and conflict resolution were all rated equally high at 4.69 as the top competencies for reintegration. Sports and experiential learning were seen as effective for developing endurance and resilience (4.31), emotional regulation (4.23), and problem-solving (4.00). The main challenges were low employment prospects after release (3.46), lack of resources or funding (3.38), low prisoner motivation (3.38), mental health issues (3.31), and a lack of qualified staff (3.31). None of the surveyed institutions reported systematic use of sports or experiential activities for competence development.

[Scale from 1=not important at all to 5=very important]

- Staff described understaffing and heavy workloads as major barriers, limiting attention to rehabilitation activities.
- Sport is secondary, education is primary. Prisons place greater emphasis on literacy and schooling, with sport seen as a supporting element rather than a central tool.
- Competence diagnostics exist in semi-formal ways. Systems like credit points or observation protocols are used, but implementation is inconsistent across institutions.
- Focus on psychological resilience and mental health. Stress coping, anger management, and emotional stability are important themes, but staff request more structured programmes.
- Low education levels of inmates as a systemic challenge. Many inmates have very limited literacy or unfinished primary schooling, making basic education the first rehabilitation priority.
- Interest in external inspiration and NGOs. Staff value fresh ideas from conferences, NGOs, and external partners, showing openness to international cooperation.

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- Demand for practical and innovative methods. Staff explicitly request practical manuals and experiential approaches, noting that traditional classroom lessons are insufficient to motivate inmates.

Portugal

In Portugal, motivation was rated as the most important competence for reintegration (4.86), followed by teamwork and responsibility/reliability (both 4.71). Sports and experiential learning were perceived as particularly effective for developing teamwork (4.86), emotional regulation (4.86), and responsibility/reliability (4.71). Key challenges were lack of resources and funding (3.86), limited employment prospects (3.86), mental health issues (3.29), low prisoner motivation (3.14), and lack of qualified staff (3.14). Portugal showed the highest rate of already implemented activities, with 88 per cent of respondents reporting the use of sports and experiential activities.

[Scale from 1=not important at all to 5=very important]

- Sport is central but often informal. Football dominates, alongside fitness and basketball, but delivery is ad hoc and dependent on staff and equipment availability.
- Competence diagnostics are almost absent. Progress is observed informally but rarely documented, and certificates are seldom used.
- Education is secondary to discipline. Education and training opportunities are limited, with prison culture focused on security and bureaucracy, reportedly making innovation harder.
- Strong demand for structured sports programmes. Staff request clearer, more regular programmes with defined goals and methods.
- Psychological wellbeing as a recurring theme. Sports are seen as vital for stress relief and emotional regulation, especially given the shortage of psychologists.
- Low staff capacity and high bureaucracy. Staff shortages and rigid approval processes often block promising initiatives.
- Little connection to international projects. Compared to other countries, Portugal appears isolated and less engaged in external networks.

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Türkiye

In Türkiye, communication skills (4.33), conflict resolution (4.25), and literacy (4.25) were rated as the most important competencies for reintegration. Sports and experiential learning were perceived as effective for developing problem-solving (4.45), emotional regulation (4.45), and teamwork (4.36). The main challenges included low prisoner motivation (3.91), lack of qualified staff (3.91), lack of resources and funding (3.64), and both language and intercultural barriers (3.27). Overall, 42 per cent of respondents reported using sports and experiential activities.

[Scale from 1=not important at all to 5=very important]

- Systematic competence assessment is a strength. Türkiye stands out with structured entry assessments, behavioural notes, and monitoring systems.
- Strong emphasis on soft skills and behavioural change. Anger management, respect, and stress coping are central priorities.
- Sport and arts as valued rehabilitation tools. Football, volleyball, and theatre were highlighted as popular and effective in fostering cooperation and discipline.
- Education and vocational training are integrated. Courses and schooling are offered as standard, complemented by sports and soft skills development.
- Staff shortages and resource limits remain. Despite strong structures, workload and personnel shortages reduce programme continuity.
- High openness to international projects. Turkish prisons actively participate in European projects, networks, and exchanges, which provide new tools and credibility.
- Innovation readiness is evident. Staff stress the need for practical and experiential methods, which are more effective than traditional classroom approaches.

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All country results combined

Taken together, these results underscore both commonalities and divergences across the countries, with teamwork, emotional regulation, and problem-solving consistently identified as competencies that can be effectively fostered through sport, while systemic obstacles such as funding, staffing, and motivation remain persistent barriers. [Scale from 1=not important at all to 5=very important]

Importance of competences for reintegration

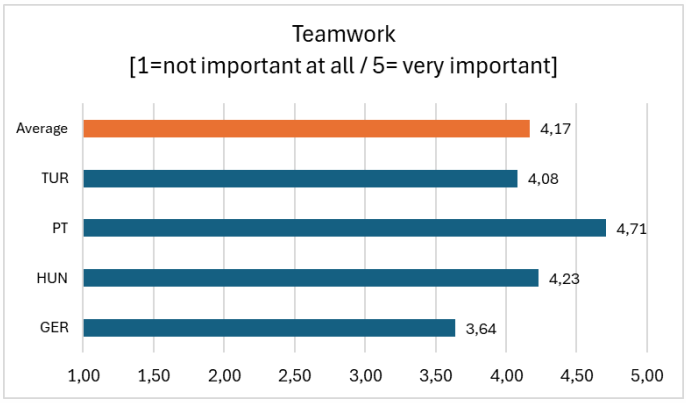

Figure 2 Importance of competences for reintegration - teamwork

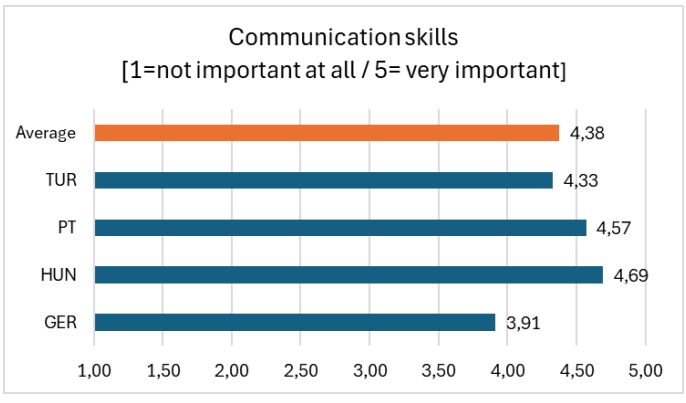

Figure 3 Importance of competences for reintegration - communication skills

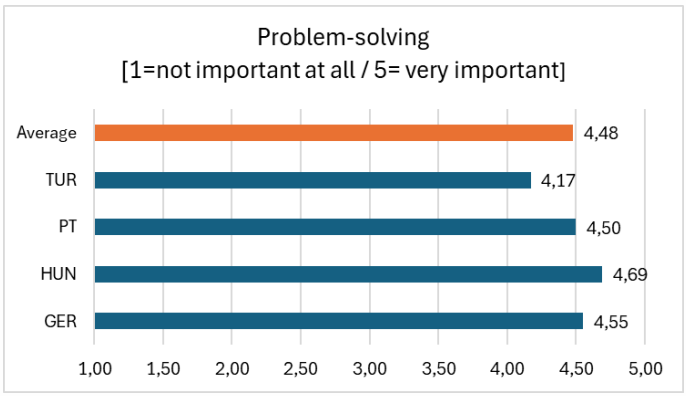

Figure 4 Importance of competences for reintegration - problem-solving

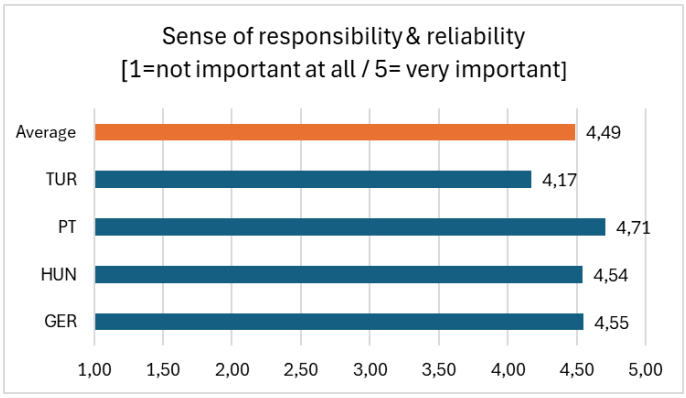

Figure 5 Importance of competences for reintegration - sense of responsibility & reliability

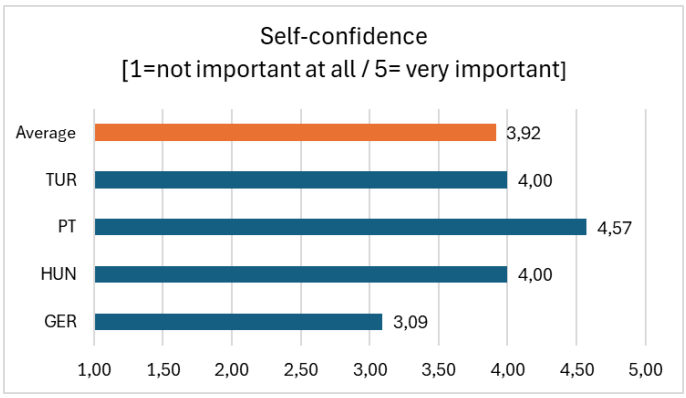

Figure 6 Importance of competences for reintegration - self-confidence

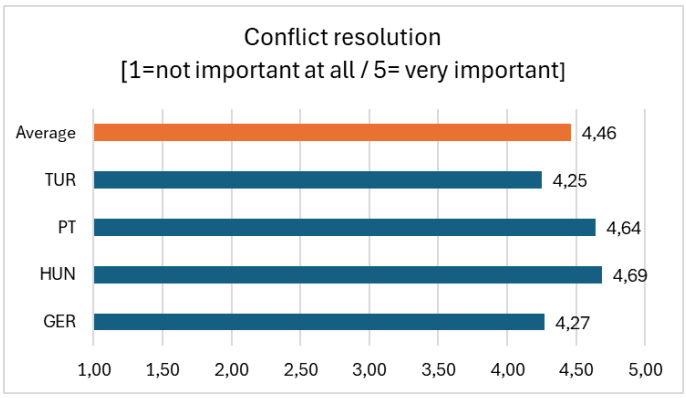

Figure 7 Importance of competences for reintegration - conflict resolution

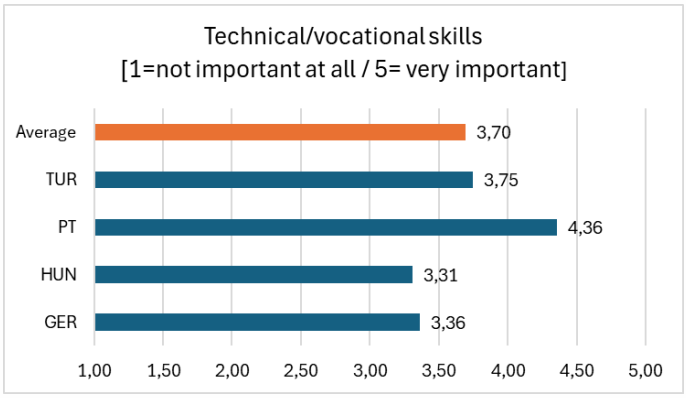

Figure 8 Importance of competences for reintegration - technical/vocational skills

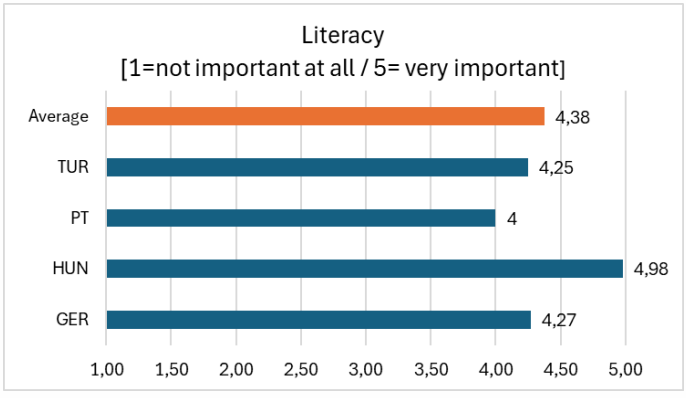

Figure 9 Importance of competences for reintegration - literacy

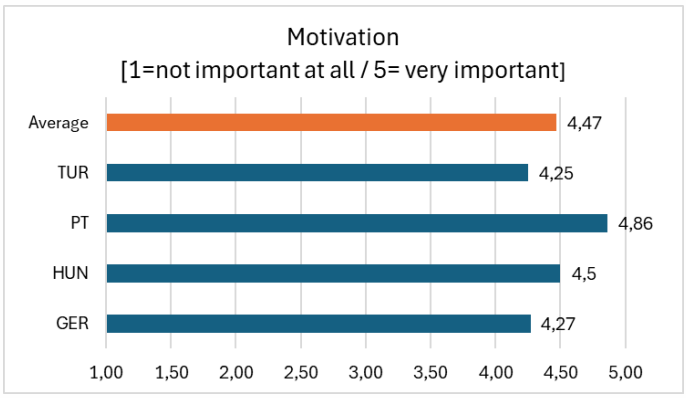

Figure 10 Importance of competences for reintegration - motivation

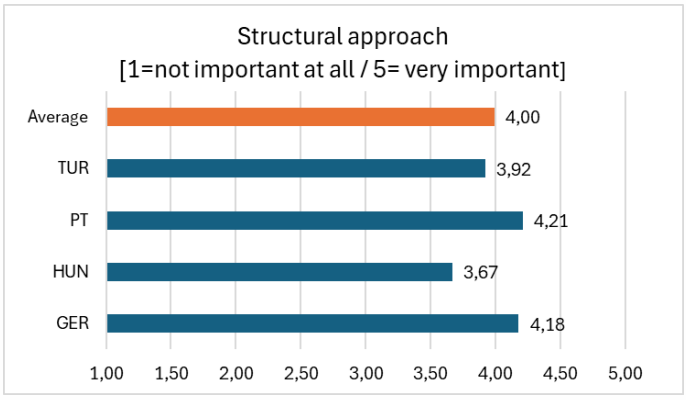

Figure 11 Importance of competences for reintegration - structural approach

Competences best developed by sports

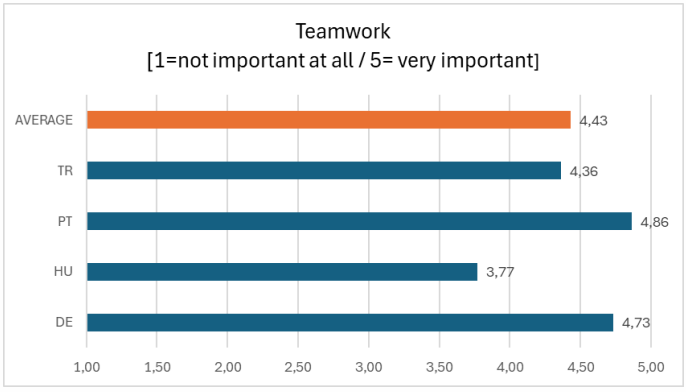

Figure 12 Competences best developed by sports/experiential - Teamwork

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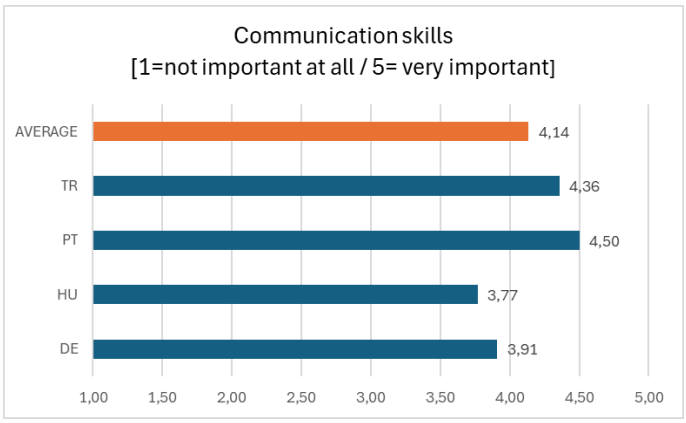

Figure 13 Competences best developed by sports/experiential - Communication skills

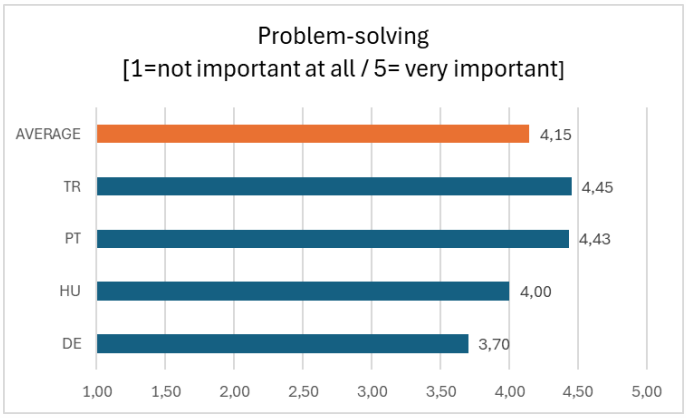

Figure 14 Competences best developed by sports/experiential - problem solving

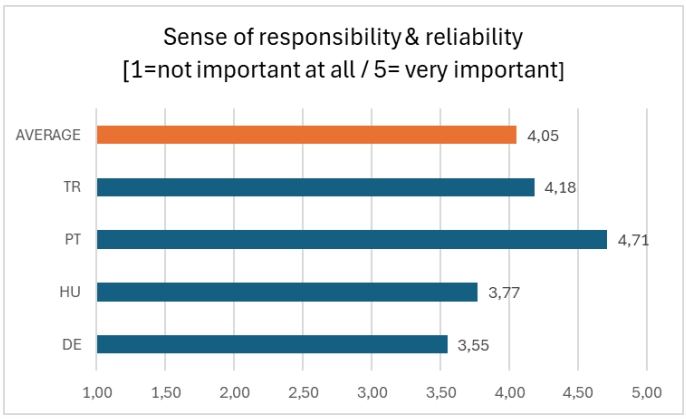

Figure 15 Competences best developed by sports/experiential - Sense of resposibity & reliability

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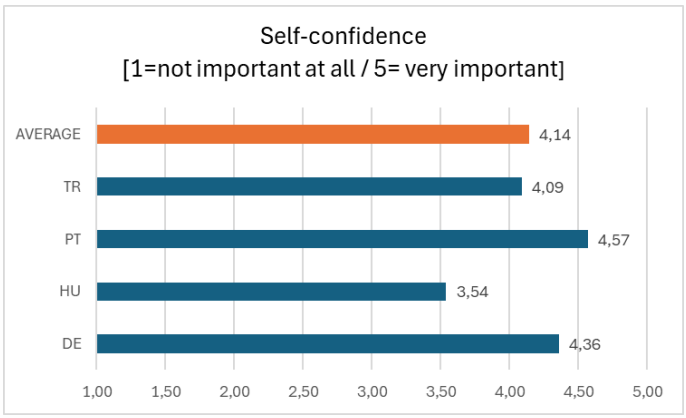

Figure 16 Competences best developed by sports/experiential - self confidence

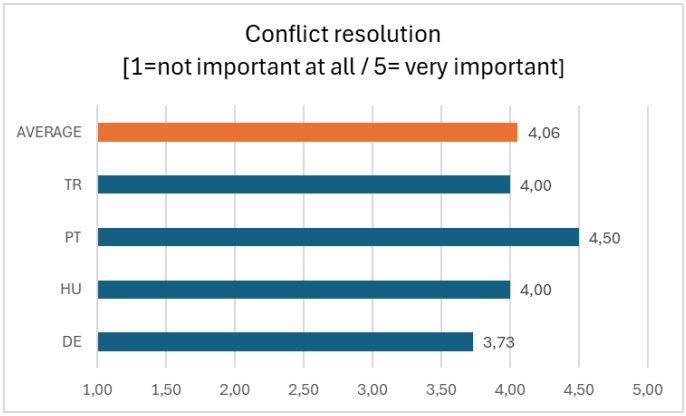

Figure 17 Competences best developed by sports/experiential - conflict resolution

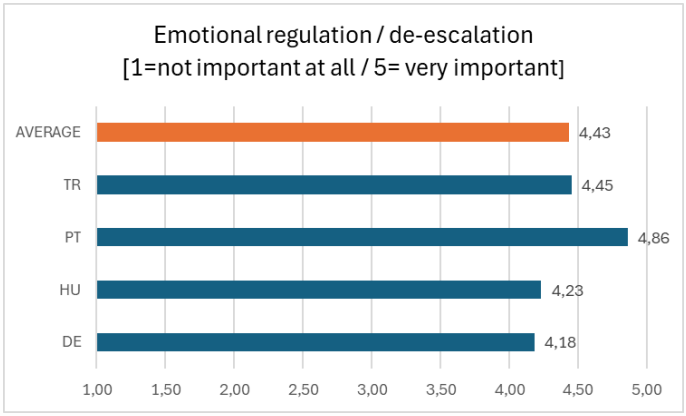

Figure 18 Competences best developed by sports/experiential - emotional regulation / de-escalation

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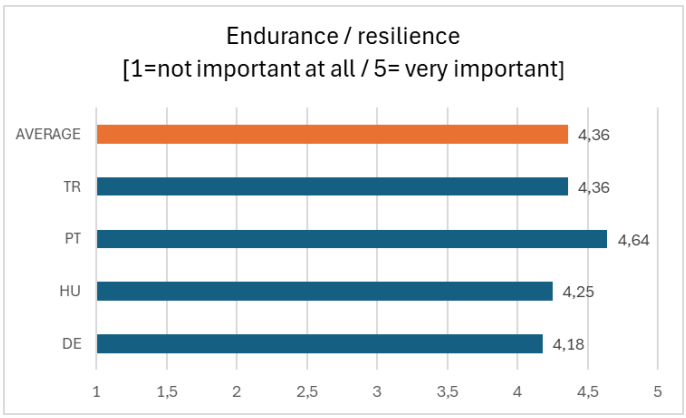

Figure 19 Competences best developed by sports/experiential -endurance / resilience

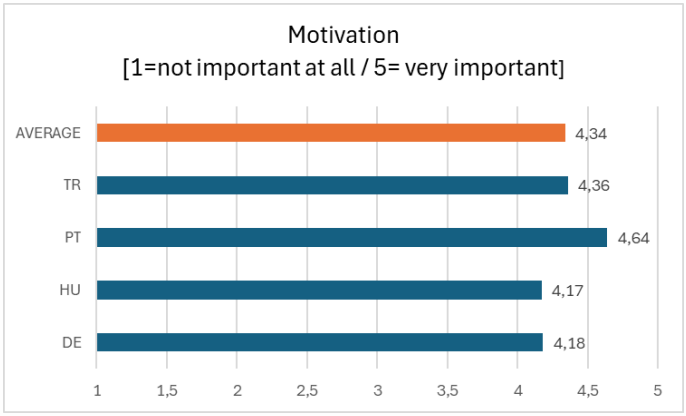

Figure 20 Competences best developed by sports/experiential - motivation

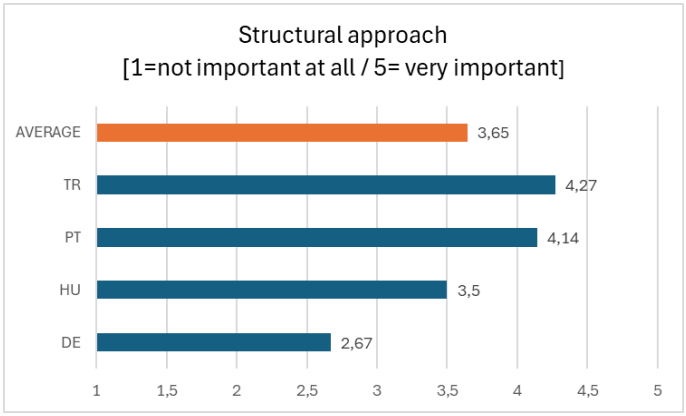

Figure 21 Competences best developed by sports/experiential - structural approach

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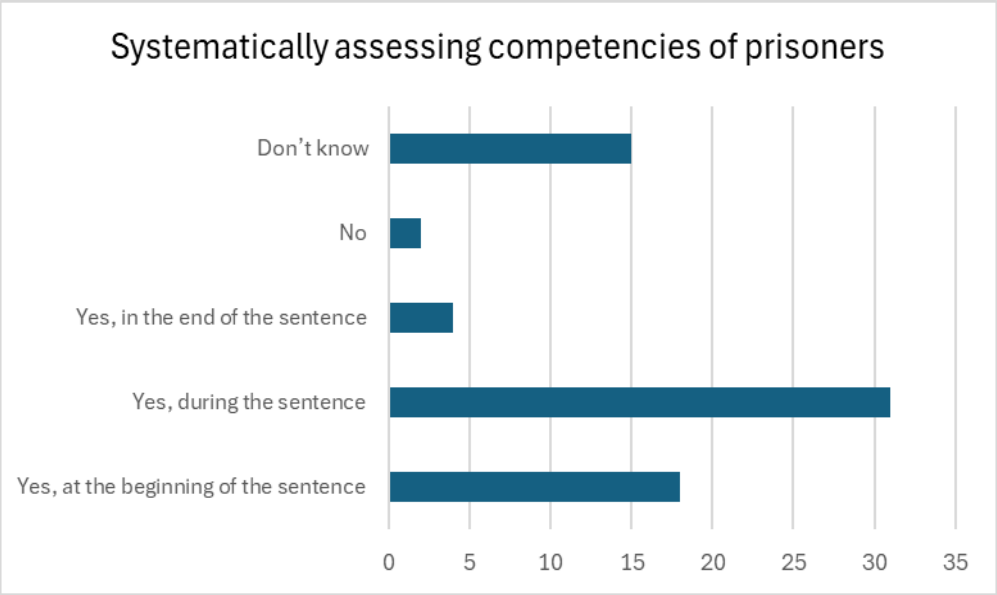

Figure 22 Experiences with systematically assessing competencies of prisoners as named in surveys in HUN, TUR, PT and GER [n=51]

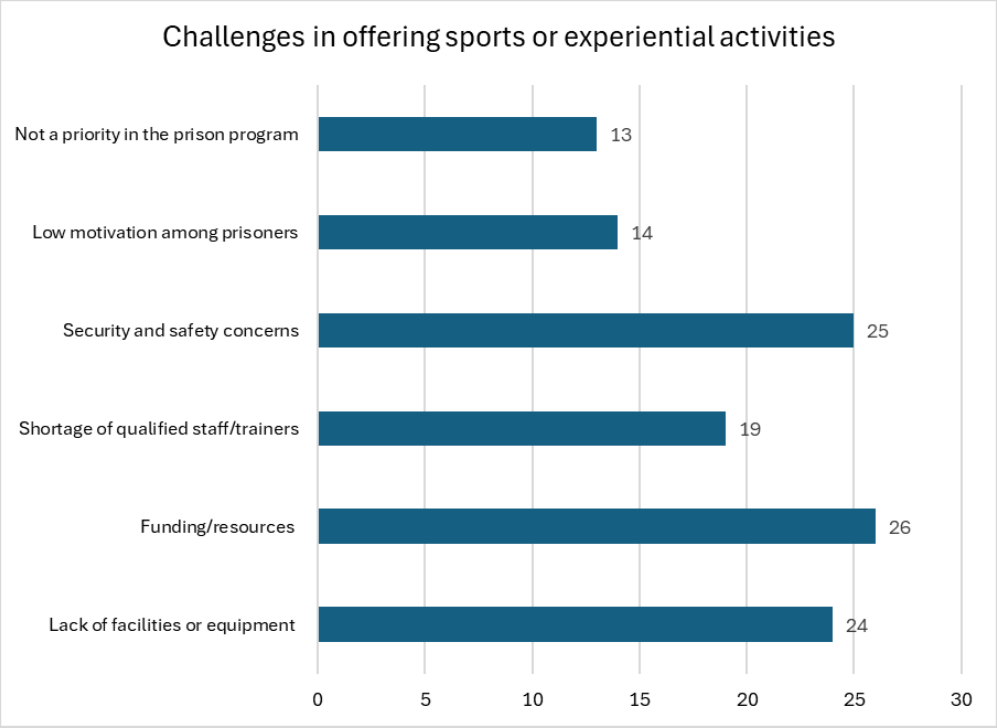

Figure 23 Challenges in offering sports or experiental activities as named in surveys in HUN, TUR, PT and GER [n=51]

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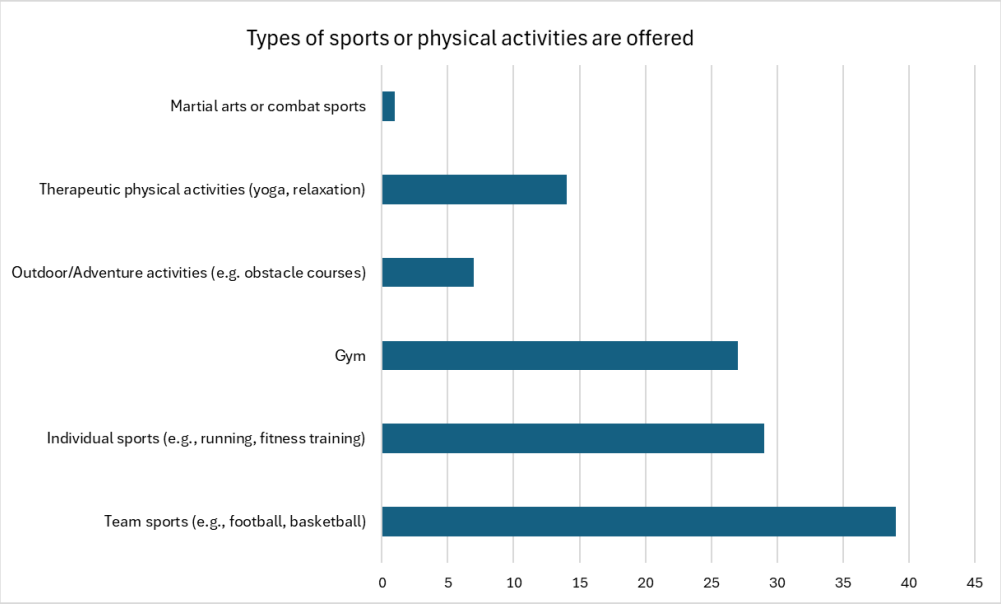

Figure 24 Types of sports or physical activities as named in surveys in HUN, TUR, PT and GER [n=51]

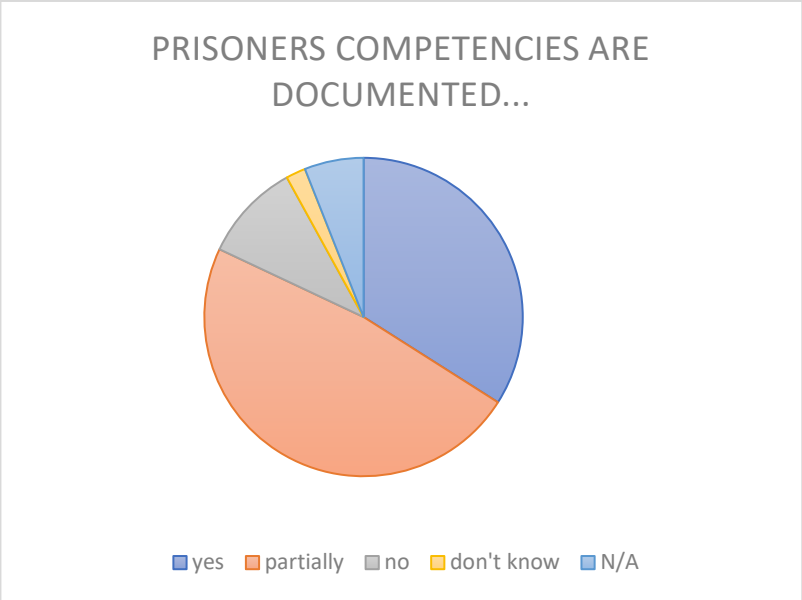

Figure 25 Prioners competence documentation as named in surveys in HUN, TUR, PT and GER [n=51]

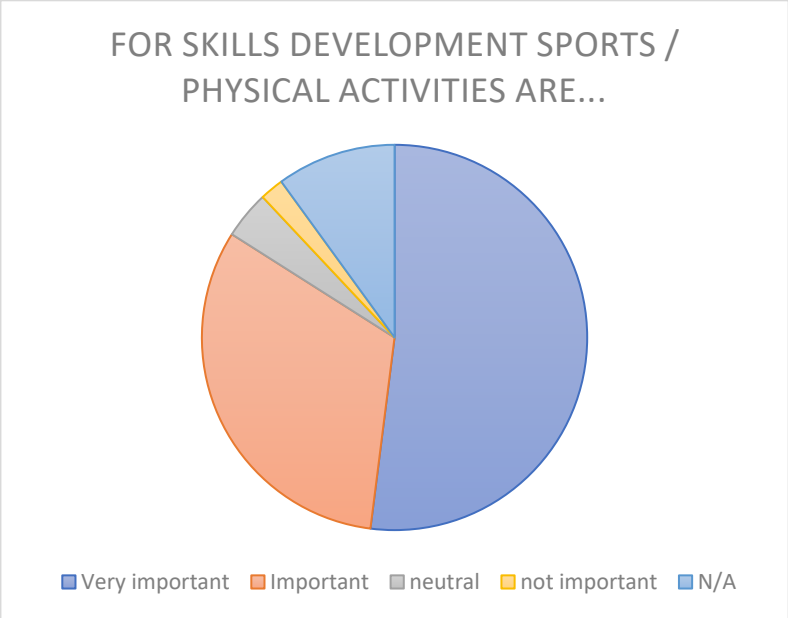

Figure 26 Importance of sports for skills development as named in surveys in HUN, TUR, PT and GER [n=51]

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4. Synthesis

Hungary

In Hungary, the prison system places a strong emphasis on developing mental abilities, often supported by semi-formal competence assessments such as screenings or credit systems. However, the practical implementation of these tools is highly uneven, constrained by limited space and a chronic lack of staff and resources. Hungarian prisons rely heavily on external actors—NGOs, conferences, and international exchanges—to bring in fresh impulses and innovative methods. Despite this openness, the structural limitations significantly reduce the continuity and quality of programmes.

Germany

In Germany, sport and conflict resolution are seen as central tools in rehabilitation, complemented by education delivered through prison schools. Competence diagnostics range from structured programmes such as SOPART to highly individualised approaches that vary across facilities. While there is evidence of good practice, implementation remains inconsistent. Staff report a clear demand for more personnel and for methods that are experiential and innovative in nature.

Türkiye

Türkiye stands out as the most structured system in terms of competence diagnostics and documentation. Entry assessments, behavioural notes, and continuous monitoring are standardised practices. Staff place strong emphasis on soft skills, particularly anger management, respect, and coping strategies. Sports and cultural activities such as theatre are highly valued for their motivational and developmental effects. Furthermore, Turkish respondents highlight the importance of international projects as a source of inspiration, innovation, and professionalisation.

Portugal

In Portugal, settings are different and sport is sometimes considered as a rehabilitation tool or sometimes only as a light free time activity, but it often lacks pedagogical framing. Competence development remains largely informal,

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with no systematic diagnostics or documentation in place. Prison culture is described as bureaucratic, with education frequently taking a back seat to discipline and security concerns. In the interviews, employees stated that they knew little about international networks, although some employees expressed individual interest in innovative practices such as yoga.

Summary

Comparing the four systems reveals marked structural contrasts. Diagnostics are most advanced in Türkiye, where systematic assessment and documentation are in place, while Portugal has virtually no such structures. In terms of institutional culture, Interviews give the impression that Portugal tends towards punitive practices. Germany and Hungary seem more balanced, and Türkiye has developed a more pedagogically oriented system. External networking also varies: Hungary, Germany, and Türkiye are actively engaged with EU and NGO cooperation, whereas Portugal remains largely isolated. Sport is often named central to rehabilitation in Germany, Türkiye, and Portugal, while in Hungary it is secondary to formal education. The following measures were rated by the stakeholders surveyed according to their importance, from very important (rank 1) to less important (rank 6):

Convergences and Divergences in Survey and Interview Data

The triangulation of survey and interview data offers deeper insight into how practices converge or diverge across contexts.

- **Germany** shows alignment between surveys and interviews on regular training formats (S2) and the role of security restrictions (S5). Documentation practices (S6) also overlap, with structured approaches such as SOPART. However, interviews reveal a wide range in assessment practices (S1) and underline the difficulty of measuring effects (S3) in short sentences.
- **Hungary** presents consistent accounts of resource and staffing shortages (S4) and of irregular training offers (S2). Both surveys and interviews highlight security restrictions as a barrier (S5). Interviews

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provide more detail on partial assessments and informal evaluations (S1, S6), which remain underreported in survey responses.

- **Portugal** shows clear convergence on institutional barriers, such as high remand shares and short stays (S5), as well as financial and resource shortages (S4). Yet interviews stress the absence of systematic competence assessment (S1) and feedback loops (S6), while surveys suggest at least isolated references to evaluation.
- **Türkiye** demonstrates the strongest convergence. Both sources confirm broad, regular programmes (S2), positive effects of sport (S3), and recognition of staff and resource shortages (S4). Interviews add nuance, showing that assessments (S1) and certificates are formalised but not always visible in survey responses.

A comparison of the four partner countries reveals they share challenges and distinctive profiles. Across the board, staff shortages and resource constraints are the most pressing issue. In Hungary and Germany, respondents strongly emphasised the lack of personnel and also pointed out the burden that prisons are taking on rehabilitation. In Türkiye, the challenge is framed more around equipment and security restrictions, while in Portugal, staff shortages are again cited as one of the main barriers to systematic programming.

Psychological and social competencies are a clear focus across the partnership countries, though with different emphases. In Hungary, mental abilities and resilience are prioritised, while Germany highlights conflict resolution and communication skills. Türkiye shows the strongest orientation, with anger management, stress coping, and respect at the core of programmes. Portugal, by contrast, places less emphasis on these competencies.

Sport and creative activities occupy a central role in Germany, Türkiye, and Portugal, though their function differs. In Germany, sport is tied closely to social learning, while in Türkiye both sport and arts are framed as motivational and developmental tools. In Portugal, sport is the dominant activity, but it often lacks a pedagogical structure. Hungary represents the exception, where sport is secondary and primarily supports resilience alongside education.

Education and schooling are consistently present, but their role varies. Hungary and Germany maintain strong traditions of prison schooling and vocational training. Türkiye integrates education tightly with competence development. Portugal, however, offers fewer opportunities, with education often overshadowed by security and discipline concerns.

Competence diagnostics also diverge significantly. Türkiye has the most systematic approach, with structured entry assessments, behavioural notes, and continuous monitoring. Hungary relies on semi-formal instruments, such as

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credit or point systems, while Germany combines more formalised programmes with individualised assessments depending on the institution. Portugal remains the least structured, with competence diagnostics almost entirely absent and staff relying on informal impressions.

Sentence length and motivation are viewed as decisive factors in Türkiye and Portugal, where staff underline the difficulty of engaging short-stay inmates. In Germany and Hungary, opinions are more mixed, with some seeing both short and long sentences as opportunities for competence development under the right conditions.

The role of external actors and openness to innovation also differ. Hungary is characterised by a strong reliance on NGOs and conferences to bring in new ideas. Germany shows active engagement through Erasmus+ and experiential approaches, while Türkiye demonstrates high demand for international exchange and project participation. In Portugal, few individuals express interest in new practices such as yoga, which at first glance draws a less progressive picture.

Heterogeneity of inmates is a recurring theme, particularly in Hungary, where educational gaps are wide, and in Türkiye, where diversity is described as a strong challenge. Germany reports increasing diversity among prisoners, while Portugal places less emphasis on this issue. Recognition of competencies also varies: Hungary uses credit points, Germany emphasises practical achievements, Türkiye provides certificates and feedback, while Portugal recognises strengths only on an individual, ad hoc basis. These patterns mirror the broader system cultures: Hungary with an education-heavy orientation, Germany with a balanced and experiential focus, Türkiye with a structured pedagogical model, and Portugal with a punitive and bureaucratic tradition.

Despite these differences, several themes are consistent. Sport is valued in all participating countries as a low threshold, motivating entry point for incarcerated individuals, particularly in football, volleyball, and fitness. Education is under pressure: Hungary and Germany maintain strong systems, Türkiye integrates it effectively, but Portugal seems to sideline it. Diagnostics represent a gap in all but Türkiye, where systematic processes are already in place. Soft skill development through stress regulation, teamwork, and respect is a universal goal, and staff in all countries express a demand for more structured, practical, and experiential methods. Finally, while Germany, Hungary, and Türkiye show strong international networking, Portugal remains comparatively isolated.

5. Conclusion and next steps

Competence Development and Current Barriers

Competence development in prisons is supported by a broad range of training formats, including education, vocational programmes, sport, and therapeutic interventions. This constitutes the substantive core of rehabilitation practice. Assessments are conducted in some facilities across all countries, "We have systematic assessment procedures in place" [I#13_TK], yet they are not applied consistently across systems, as others note: "There is no specific system-level assessment."[I#2_HUN] Success is typically described in qualitative terms such as participation, motivation, or observable behavioural changes. Standardised indicators remain rare, especially in juvenile or short-sentence contexts where outcomes are perceived as difficult to measure, "That's difficult to measure in juvenile detention."[I#6_GER]

The most prominent barriers are shortages of staff, resources, and equipment. One respondent summarised: "There are few colleagues… There is no money for equipment." [I#1_HUN] Institutional frameworks such as security requirements, limited space, and detention regimes further reduce flexibility and continuity, "Prison security measures can be challenging for us." [I#14_TK]

Documentation practices generally involve reports, certificates, and behavioural notes. While such outcomes often feed into planning processes, this tends to occur on an ad hoc basis. Systematic feedback loops are still underdeveloped, "The reintegration programs are documented with a 6-month evaluation." [I#1_HUN]

Based on these findings, recommendations focus on expanding staff capacity, improving resources and equipment, building stronger links with external providers and aftercare, and introducing more systematic diagnostics with clear indicators of impact. The findings are consistent with external studies, which show that structured educational programmes such as sport play an important role within supportive policy frameworks.[3] The field data adds valuable detail on micro-processes, such as scheduling routines and documentation practices, that enable effective implementation.

[3] Müller, J., Meek, R., Blessing, J., & Mutz, M. (2023). Prisoners' Educational Experiences in Five Different Prison Sports Programmes: A Research Note. *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*, *13*(10), 2290-2298. https://doi.org/10.3390/ejihpe13100162

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Design Inputs for New Observation & Assessment Methods

The findings translate into practical design elements for a New Observation & Assessment Method:

Core indicator set covering participation rates, session adherence, module completion, behavioural observations (teamwork, self-control, persistence), and certificate attainment. Minimum Viable Assessment (S1) for Portugal and Hungary, with a five-minute entry screen (readiness, baseline behaviour) and a five-minute exit check (behavioural change, self- and staff ratings).

Micro-documentation tools (S6) such as one-page Plan–Do–Observe–Adjust sheets, feeding into monthly reviews. Scheduling standards (S5) with fixed weekly slots, contingency windows, and security liaison to pre-clear equipment and movement. These elements can be embedded into an observation framework consisting of sheets with behavioural anchors, entry/mid/exit feedback cycles, traffic-light scoring rules, and a user guide with prompts and vignettes.

Implications for Sport4Prisons

The analysis highlights the transformative potential of sport as both a pedagogical and rehabilitative tool. Sport functions as a universal language—accessible, motivating, and effective across different prison contexts. It makes competencies such as teamwork, resilience, and discipline visible and documentable, thereby filling critical diagnostic gaps. For Hungary and Portugal, the priority lies in systematisation, through simple, low-threshold tools for assessment and documentation. In Germany, the challenge is to strengthen consistency and standardisation across institutions. Türkiye already offers a strong model, particularly with its integration of assessment and certification, that could be adapted in other contexts. Soft skills remain a shared priority. Sport provides a natural setting for building anger control, teamwork, and emotional regulation. Structured programmes can also ease staff workload by offering resource-efficient group activities. At the same time, Sport4Prisons has the potential to serve as a European connector, linking staff and institutions across borders and addressing the relative isolation seen in Portugal.

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Next Steps

The next phase involves establishing pilot sites in each partner country, adapting the Sport4Prisons toolkit to local language and cultural contexts, and training 10–15 staff members per country in competence observation and sport facilitation. The cross-country analysis confirms that sport and education represent the most promising pathways for rehabilitation and reintegration. Yet systemic barriers, staff shortages, punitive institutional cultures, and the lack of diagnostic routines, continue to reduce their effectiveness. Sport4Prisons directly addresses these gaps by providing a structured, innovative, and internationally connected framework for competence development with a connecting terminology. Future opportunities lie in expanding sport-based interventions across Europe, developing common assessment methods, strengthening cooperation, and positioning Sport4Prisons as both a practical intervention and a policy innovation in line with European strategies on prison education and reintegration.

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