



Art4Wellbeing

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Research & Need Analysis for Art-based mental well-being tools

Transnational report Focus group & Expert interviews

developed by Associazione Culturale Bubburriga

Content

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction
3. Methodology
4. Comparative findings
5. Cross-country Analysis
6. Recommendations for Work Package 3
7. Conclusions

1. Executive Summary

The Art4Wellbeing project aims to strengthen the emotional well-being of young people through innovative arts-based educational approaches. As part of Work Package 2 (WP2), the project partners conducted a transnational research process to identify the experiences, needs, and expectations of professionals working with young people in Italy, the Netherlands, and Türkiye.

Following a common qualitative research methodology, each partner organised focus group discussions and semi-structured expert interviews involving professionals from youth work, formal education, non-formal education, higher education, counselling, community organisations, and arts-based practice. This common research framework ensured the comparability of findings while allowing each country to explore the specific characteristics of its national context.

Despite the diversity of educational systems and professional backgrounds, the research revealed a high level of consistency across the three partner countries. Participants unanimously recognised emotional well-being as an increasingly important priority in their daily work and identified arts-based methodologies as valuable tools for promoting participation, self-expression, inclusion, resilience, creativity, and meaningful learning.

The research also identified several common challenges affecting professionals across Europe. Limited access to practical educational resources, insufficient training opportunities, institutional constraints, and the lack of structured methodologies continue to limit the systematic use of arts-based approaches in both formal and non-formal educational settings. Many professionals reported developing their competences independently through Erasmus+ projects, professional networks, specialised training, and self-directed learning.

Alongside these shared priorities, the research highlighted several context-specific needs. While professionals in Italy emphasised the integration of arts-based methodologies within school curricula and teacher professional development, participants in the Netherlands focused on supporting students in higher education through practical and adaptable approaches. In Türkiye, particular attention was given to community participation, psychosocial support, and the role of creativity in strengthening young people's emotional resilience.

Overall, the transnational findings provide a clear evidence base for the development of the Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit. Rather than producing a theoretical handbook, the research demonstrates the need for a practical, flexible, and user-friendly educational resource offering ready-to-use methodologies, facilitator guidance, reflection tools, adaptable activities, and implementation strategies that respond to the realities of professionals working in diverse educational contexts across Europe.

The conclusions presented in this report establish the foundation for Work Package 3, ensuring that the future Art4Wellbeing Toolkit directly reflects the needs, experiences, and recommendations collected throughout the transnational research process.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

Across Europe, professionals working with young people are increasingly recognising emotional well-being as a fundamental dimension of education and youth work. Rapid social change, uncertainty, increasing academic and social pressures, and the long-term effects of recent global challenges have highlighted the need for educational approaches that promote resilience, self-awareness, emotional expression, and meaningful participation.

In response to these evolving needs, arts-based methodologies have gained growing recognition as effective educational tools capable of fostering emotional well-being through creativity, participation, and experiential learning. Approaches such as visual arts, music, theatre, storytelling, movement, creative writing, and other artistic practices provide inclusive learning environments where young people can express themselves, strengthen interpersonal relationships, develop emotional competences, and actively engage in their own learning processes.

The Art4Wellbeing project was developed to respond to these shared European challenges. Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, the project aims to strengthen the capacity of youth workers, educators, teachers, and facilitators by developing practical, evidence-informed, and user-friendly arts-based educational resources that support the emotional well-being of young people in diverse learning environments.

2.2 Purpose of Work Package2 - Research & Need Analysis for Art-based mental well-being tools

Work Package 2 (WP2) was designed to establish the evidence base for the Art4Wellbeing project through a collaborative transnational research process. Rather than relying on theoretical assumptions, WP2 adopted a common qualitative methodology that enabled each partner organisation to explore the experiences, practices, and needs of professionals working directly with young people within their national context.

Using a shared research framework, the partner organisations conducted focus group discussions and semi-structured expert interviews to investigate current emotional well-being challenges, existing educational practices, the use of arts-based methodologies, and the expectations of professionals regarding future educational resources.

The findings collected through this research constitute the foundation for Work Package 3 (WP3), ensuring that the Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit is firmly grounded in evidence gathered from professionals representing diverse educational systems, cultural contexts, and youth work environments across Europe.

2.3 Purpose of the Transnational Needs Analysis

The purpose of the Transnational Needs Analysis is to bring together the findings of the national research conducted in Italy, the Netherlands, and Türkiye, identifying both shared priorities and context-specific needs emerging across the three partner countries.

Rather than comparing countries individually, this report seeks to identify common patterns, recurring challenges, and complementary perspectives that can inform the development of educational resources with genuine European relevance. The analysis highlights areas of convergence, where professionals from different contexts expressed similar needs, while also recognising national specificities that should be considered when designing flexible and adaptable educational methodologies.

By synthesising the evidence collected across all partner countries, the report establishes a common framework for the development of the Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit. Its purpose is not only to summarise the research findings, but also to translate them into concrete design principles, methodological priorities, and practical recommendations that will directly guide the implementation of Work Package 3.

3. Methodology

3.1 Common research framework

To ensure consistency and comparability across the partner countries, all research activities were conducted using a common qualitative research framework developed within Work Package 2. This shared protocol established the research objectives, guiding questions, data collection procedures, and analytical approach adopted by each partner organisation.

Although each partner explored its own national context, the use of a common methodology ensured that the findings could be systematically compared and synthesised into a transnational analysis, while still capturing the diversity of educational systems, professional experiences, and cultural contexts represented within the partnership.

3.2 Data collection

Each partner organisation carried out its national research using the same qualitative data collection methods:

- ❖ **Focus Group Discussions**, designed to encourage dialogue among professionals, identify shared experiences, and explore common challenges related to emotional well-being and arts-based methodologies;
- ❖ **Semi-Structured Expert Interviews**, conducted to gain more in-depth insights into professional practices, educational needs, existing barriers, and recommendations for future educational resources.

The research involved professionals from a wide range of sectors, including youth work, formal education, higher education, non-formal education, community organisations, counselling, and arts-based practice. This diversity of perspectives contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges associated with promoting emotional well-being through arts-based methodologies.

3.3 Data analysis

All qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. Each partner identified recurring themes, key challenges, existing practices, and recommendations emerging from the focus groups and expert interviews before preparing their respective national reports.

The transnational analysis presented in this report builds upon these national findings by comparing recurring themes across Italy, the Netherlands, and Türkiye. This process enabled the identification of both shared priorities and context-specific needs, providing a robust evidence base for the design of the Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit within Work Package 3.

3.4 Overview of the research framework

The following table provides a concise overview of the common research framework adopted across the three partner countries. This shared methodological approach ensured that the findings presented in this report are comparable and collectively provide a reliable evidence base for the development of the Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit under Work Package 3.

COMPONENT	COMMON APPROACH
Research design	Qualitative research
Research protocol	Common WP2 research framework
Data collection methods	Focus Group Discussions and Semi-Structured Expert Interviews
Participants	Professionals working with young people in formal, non-formal and community settings
Partner countries	Italy, the Netherlands and Türkiye
Data analysis	Thematic analysis
Main purpose	To identify shared and context-specific needs for the development of the Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit

4. Comparative findings

The transnational analysis combines the findings emerging from the national research conducted in Italy, the Netherlands, and Türkiye. Although each partner explored different educational contexts and professional environments, the comparative analysis revealed several recurring themes that were consistently highlighted across the three countries.

Rather than presenting the national findings separately, this chapter identifies the common priorities, shared challenges, and context-specific perspectives emerging from the research. These themes provide a comprehensive understanding of professionals' experiences and establish the evidence base for the development of the Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit.

Each thematic area presented below reflects a synthesis of the focus group discussions and expert interviews conducted across the partnership, highlighting both common trends and distinctive national contributions.

Across the three partner countries, emotional well-being emerged as a fundamental priority in the daily work of professionals supporting young people. Regardless of the educational setting or national context, participants agreed that promoting emotional awareness, resilience, self-confidence, and positive relationships has become an essential component of educational practice.

Although the specific challenges experienced by young people varied across countries, professionals consistently recognised that emotional well-being directly influences learning, participation, motivation, and social inclusion. The research therefore confirms that educational approaches addressing emotional well-being are no longer optional but represent a core responsibility for educators and youth workers.

4.1 Emotional well-being as a shared educational priority

The comparative analysis revealed a remarkable level of consensus across the three partner countries regarding the importance of emotional well-being in educational and youth work settings. Despite differences in national contexts, professional roles, and educational systems, participants consistently described emotional well-being as an essential prerequisite for meaningful learning, active participation, and healthy personal development.

Professionals from Italy, the Netherlands, and Türkiye agreed that young people are facing increasingly complex emotional and social challenges. Anxiety, stress, uncertainty about the future, social isolation, low self-confidence, and difficulties in expressing emotions were frequently identified as issues affecting young people's engagement, relationships, and learning experiences. These findings reinforce the idea that educational environments

should not focus exclusively on academic achievement but also promote emotional awareness, resilience, empathy, and positive social interaction.

While the overall priorities were shared, each national context highlighted specific perspectives. Italian participants emphasised the importance of integrating emotional education into everyday educational practice, recognising arts-based methodologies as valuable tools for creating inclusive and participatory learning experiences. Dutch professionals focused particularly on the emotional well-being of students and young adults within higher education, where academic pressure, performance expectations, and the transition into adulthood create additional emotional demands. In Türkiye, participants highlighted the importance of strengthening resilience, psychosocial support, and community participation through creative educational approaches.

Across all three countries, professionals recognised that supporting emotional well-being is no longer an additional educational task but an integral component of their professional practice. At the same time, they acknowledged that effectively addressing these needs requires practical methodologies, structured educational resources, and learning environments where young people feel safe to express themselves, reflect on their experiences, and build meaningful relationships.

These findings establish emotional well-being as the common foundation upon which the Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit should be developed. Rather than treating emotional well-being as a separate topic, the Toolkit should embed emotional learning within every proposed methodology, ensuring that artistic and creative activities contribute not only to skill development but also to the personal growth and well-being of young people.

4.2 Art-based methodologies as tools for learning and well-being

One of the strongest findings emerging from the transnational research is the shared recognition of arts-based methodologies as effective educational tools. Participants from all three countries described artistic approaches as powerful means of encouraging creativity, emotional expression, active participation, collaboration, and personal development.

Rather than viewing the arts as complementary activities, professionals considered them integral to meaningful learning experiences. Visual arts, storytelling, music, theatre, movement, photography, and creative writing were consistently identified as methodologies capable of creating inclusive and emotionally safe learning environments while supporting both individual and group development.

4.3 Current challenges faced by professionals

Although professionals worked in different educational systems and cultural contexts, they reported several common challenges in supporting young people's emotional well-being. Limited time, increasing emotional needs among young people, institutional constraints, and insufficient educational resources were recurring themes across the partnership.

The research also highlighted context-specific challenges. In Italy, participants emphasised the difficulty of integrating arts-based methodologies into formal education and teacher training. In the Netherlands, professionals highlighted the emotional pressures experienced by university students and the importance of maintaining appropriate professional boundaries. In Türkiye, participants placed particular emphasis on psychosocial support, community participation, and strengthening resilience through creative educational practices.

4.4 Barriers to the implementation of art-based methodologies

While professionals strongly valued arts-based approaches, they also identified several barriers limiting their regular implementation. Across all partner countries, participants referred to limited preparation time, insufficient practical resources, and the lack of structured educational materials specifically designed for emotional well-being.

Many participants also highlighted the limited availability of professional training opportunities, explaining that they often rely on Erasmus+ projects, external workshops, or independent learning to develop competences in arts-based education. These findings indicate a clear need for practical and accessible resources that reduce implementation barriers and support educators in their everyday practice.

4.5 Expectations for future educational resources

Professionals across the three partner countries expressed remarkably similar expectations regarding the future Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit. Participants consistently requested practical, flexible, and easy-to-use resources that could be immediately implemented in different educational contexts.

Rather than theoretical guidance, professionals prioritised ready-to-use activities, facilitator handbooks, step-by-step instructions, reflection tools, printable materials, and adaptable methodologies suitable for different age groups, learning environments, and educational objectives. Accessibility, flexibility, and practical applicability emerged as key principles for the future educational resources.

4.6 Key implications for the Art4Wellbeing toolkit

The comparative analysis demonstrates that professionals across Europe share a common vision regarding the educational value of arts-based methodologies while also facing similar implementation challenges. The findings suggest that the Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit

should function as a practical educational resource capable of bridging research and everyday practice.

To respond effectively to the identified needs, the Toolkit should prioritise adaptable methodologies, clear facilitation guidance, structured reflection activities, and ready-to-use educational resources that support emotional well-being through creative and experiential learning. At the same time, it should remain sufficiently flexible to respond to the specific characteristics of different educational systems, target groups, and national contexts.

4.7 Summary of the comparative findings

THEMATIC AREA	SHARED FINDINGS	NATIONAL SPECIFICITIES	IMPLICATION FOR WP3
Emotional well-being	Emotional well-being is recognised as a priority in all educational and youth work settings. Professionals agree that it directly influences participation, learning, and personal development.	Italy emphasised emotional education in schools; the Netherlands focused on university students' well-being; Türkiye highlighted resilience and psychosocial support.	Develop activities promoting emotional awareness, resilience, empathy, and self-expression.
Art-based methodologies	All partners identified arts-based approaches as effective tools for learning, participation, inclusion, and emotional expression.	Italy stressed the integration of arts into formal education; the Netherlands highlighted reflective and creative practices in higher education; Türkiye focused on community engagement through arts.	Include a wide range of arts-based methodologies (visual arts, storytelling, music, theatre, movement, photography, creative writing, etc.).
Challenges	Professionals reported increasing emotional needs among young	Italy identified curriculum rigidity and lack of teacher training; the	Design flexible methodologies that can be implemented in different

	people together with limited resources and institutional constraints.	Netherlands highlighted academic pressure and professional boundaries; Türkiye focused on social participation and emotional resilience.	educational contexts with minimal preparation.
Barriers	Lack of structured resources, limited preparation time, and insufficient professional training were common across all countries.	The intensity of these barriers differed, but they were consistently reported by participants in all national contexts.	Provide ready-to-use activities, facilitator guidance, adaptable materials, and implementation support.
Educational resources	Professionals requested practical rather than theoretical materials.	Each country highlighted different educational contexts but shared similar expectations regarding usability and accessibility.	Develop facilitator handbooks, activity cards, printable worksheets, reflection tools, and step-by-step guidance.
Toolkit development	Participants agreed that future resources should be practical, flexible, inclusive, and adaptable.	National priorities reflect different educational systems while maintaining common educational objectives.	Build a Digital Toolkit that can be adapted to formal education, non-formal learning, higher education, and community-based youth work across Europe.

4.8 Translating research findings into toolkit design

RESEARCH EVIDENCE	TOOLKIT RESPONSE
Professionals recognise the educational value of arts-based methodologies.	Focus on practical implementation rather than theoretical justification.
Emotional well-being is a priority across all partner countries.	Organise the Toolkit around emotional competences and well-being objectives.

Professionals have limited preparation time.	Include ready-to-use activities requiring minimal preparation.
Facilitators need confidence in using arts-based methods.	Provide detailed facilitation notes, adaptation tips, and debriefing guidance.
Educational contexts differ significantly across Europe.	Design flexible methodologies adaptable to schools, youth work, higher education, and community settings.
Participants requested practical educational resources.	Include worksheets, activity cards, printable materials, reflection tools, and visual resources.
Reflection is essential for meaningful learning.	Integrate structured reflection and evaluation tools into every activity.
Continuous professional development is often self-directed.	Include short methodological introductions and references for further learning and professional development.

Continuous professional development beyond the school system

Another significant finding concerns the professional development of educators. Participants consistently reported that most of their knowledge of arts-based methodologies had been acquired outside formal teacher education programmes through Erasmus+ projects, specialised training courses, professional networks, cultural organisations, and self-directed learning experiences.

Interviewees highlighted the limited availability of structured training opportunities that effectively combine arts-based methodologies with curriculum design and everyday teaching practice. This situation encourages motivated educators to seek learning opportunities independently, while also revealing a broader systemic need for accessible, practice-oriented professional development.

These findings suggest that the future Art4Wellbeing Toolkit should not only provide ready-to-use educational activities but also support educators in developing the confidence and practical competences needed to integrate arts-based approaches into formal and non-formal learning environments.

5. Cross-country analysis

The comparative analysis demonstrates that, despite differences in educational systems, institutional settings, and professional roles, the three partner countries share a remarkably consistent understanding of the role that emotional well-being and arts-based methodologies play in supporting young people.

Across Italy, the Netherlands, and Türkiye, professionals recognised that emotional well-being is no longer an additional aspect of educational practice but a fundamental condition for meaningful learning, participation, and personal development. Similarly, participants consistently viewed arts-based methodologies as effective educational approaches capable of fostering creativity, self-expression, empathy, resilience, and social inclusion.

At the same time, the research highlighted several context-specific priorities that reflect the diversity of the partnership. In Italy, participants emphasised the need to strengthen the integration of arts-based methodologies within formal education and teacher professional development. The Dutch findings focused on the higher education sector, highlighting the emotional challenges experienced by university students and the need for practical tools that can be applied within clearly defined professional boundaries. In Türkiye, participants placed particular emphasis on psychosocial support, community participation, and the role of creativity in strengthening resilience and social cohesion.

Rather than representing contradictory perspectives, these differences enrich the overall findings by demonstrating that arts-based methodologies are applicable across a wide range of educational contexts. The transnational analysis therefore confirms that the future Art4Wellbeing Toolkit should combine a shared pedagogical framework with sufficient flexibility to respond to different national realities, educational systems, and target groups.

Overall, the research demonstrates that professionals across Europe are seeking practical, adaptable, and evidence-informed resources that enable them to integrate emotional well-being into everyday educational practice. This common demand provides a strong foundation for the development of a European Toolkit that is both transferable and context-sensitive.

6. Recommendations for Work Package 3

The findings of the transnational needs analysis provide clear guidance for the development of the Art4Wellbeing Digital Toolkit. Rather than functioning as a theoretical publication, the Toolkit should become a practical educational resource that supports professionals in integrating arts-based methodologies into their everyday work with young people.

The Toolkit should be structured around emotional learning objectives, enabling educators and youth workers to select activities according to the competences they wish to strengthen, such as emotional awareness, resilience, empathy, communication, collaboration, self-confidence, or inclusion.

Based on the evidence collected across the three partner countries, the Toolkit should include:

- ❖ a practical facilitator handbook explaining the educational principles behind each methodology;
- ❖ ready-to-use activities requiring minimal preparation and adaptable to different educational contexts;
- ❖ methodologies based on a wide range of artistic disciplines, including visual arts, storytelling, music, theatre, movement, photography, creative writing, crafts, and creative reflection;
- ❖ clear step-by-step implementation guidelines;
- ❖ reflection and debriefing questions accompanying every activity;
- ❖ printable worksheets, activity cards, and visual resources;
- ❖ adaptation tips for formal education, non-formal education, higher education, and community-based youth work;
- ❖ recommendations for working with diverse groups, including young people with different backgrounds, abilities, and learning needs;
- ❖ practical evaluation tools enabling facilitators to assess participation, engagement, emotional learning, and personal development.

The research also highlights the importance of designing a flexible and accessible Toolkit. Activities should be easy to implement, adaptable to different group sizes and timeframes, and suitable for professionals with varying levels of experience in arts-based education.

Finally, the Toolkit should promote reflective practice by encouraging facilitators to continuously adapt activities according to participants' needs, fostering inclusive, participatory, and emotionally supportive learning environments.

7. Conclusions

The transnational needs analysis confirms that professionals working with young people across Italy, the Netherlands, and Türkiye share a common commitment to promoting emotional well-being through meaningful educational experiences. Although the three partner countries operate within different educational systems and institutional contexts, the research revealed a strong convergence regarding both the challenges faced by young people and the educational value of arts-based methodologies.

Participants consistently identified creativity, participation, emotional expression, and experiential learning as essential elements for supporting young people's well-being and personal development. At the same time, they highlighted a significant need for practical resources, structured methodologies, and professional guidance that enable arts-based approaches to become an integral part of everyday educational practice.

The findings also demonstrate that professionals are not seeking additional theoretical knowledge but practical solutions that can be readily adapted to different learning environments. This evidence reinforces the relevance of the Art4Wellbeing project and provides a clear direction for the development of the Digital Toolkit under Work Package 3.

Ultimately, the research illustrates that while educational contexts may differ, the fundamental needs identified across the partnership are remarkably similar. This shared evidence base enables the development of a European educational resource that combines common pedagogical principles with the flexibility required to respond to diverse national and local realities.

By translating research findings into practical methodologies, the Art4Wellbeing project has the opportunity to strengthen the competences of educators and youth workers, promote emotionally supportive learning environments, and contribute to the well-being, inclusion, and active participation of young people across Europe.



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