

FITNESS TRENDS IN PORTUGAL FOR 2026

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For the sixth consecutive year, fitness trends were analysed in Portugal.

The Portuguese survey of fitness trends was based on the American College of Sports Medicine's (ACSM) Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends and included 55 trends. Beyond the 50 trends of the ACSM Worldwide Survey of Fitness Trends for 2026, 5 trends have been included in the Portuguese survey concerning experts' recommendations: Stretching/Flexibility Training; Crosstraining; Hyrox; EcoGyms; Outcome Measurements.

The online survey was sent to Portuguese universities that have bachelors in sports sciences area, vocational schools that promote fitness courses, associations of the fitness sector, and the link was also shared on social networks, and fitness events and sent directly to many fitness professionals and sports sciences and fitness students.

Data were collected through the SurveyMonkey platform, from 18th April to 8th June (approximately 7.5 weeks). There was no financial incentive offered to complete the survey. The research was constructed using a Likert-type scale, ranging from a low score of 1 (least likely to be a trend) to a high score of 10 (most likely to be a trend). At the end of the survey, an opportunity was given for respondents to include possible non-listed fitness trends.

The survey participants included 630 respondents from Portugal: fitness professionals (including fitness instructors, technical directors/owner/operator/coordinators in the fitness area), health professionals related to exercise, and students of the fitness/physical education or sports sector. Their mean age was 37.1±11.0 years, ranging from 18 to 67 years old, and the mean professional experience in the fitness sector was 10.5±8.0 years. Demographics data is available in Tables 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Table 1 – Demographics Data – Gender

Gender	Frequency (%)
Female	47.8
Male	50.8
Missing Value	1.4

Table 2 - Demographics Data – Qualifications

Qualifications	Frequency (%)
High School or less	25.1
Bachelor' degree	46.7
Master' degree	21.4
PhD' degree	5.4
Missing Value	1.4

Table 3 – Work Status

Work Status¹	Frequency (%)
Part-time (≤ 29 hours/week)	34.5
Full-time (≥ 30 hours/week)	65.2
Missing Values	0.3

¹Respondents currently in fitness professionals' function

Table 4 - Profession/Functions

Profession or functions in the fitness sector¹	Frequency (%)
Group Exercise Instructor	36.2
Gym Exercise Instructor ²	30.3
Personal Trainer	52.9
Crossfit/Crosstraining/Hyrox Instructor	8.1
Technical Director/Owner/Operator/Coordinator	24.6
Teacher/Professor (in Fitness courses)	18.1
Bachelor Student (Fitness, Sport or Physical Education)	11.3
Vocational Student (in Fitness area)	9.5
Health Professional related to exercise	6.0
Others	9.7

¹Possibility to tick several options

²Cardiofitness/Strength training room

Table 5 - Workplace

Workplace¹	Frequency (%)
Gyms/Health Clubs	62.3
Box	7.0
Community Recreation Center	15.0
Pools	9.6
Fitness Studios/Boutiques	32.9
Clients Home	22.2
Outdoor	14.7
Hotels and similar	1.6
Medical Fitness Center and similar	8.3
On-line	24.1
Others	2.9

¹Possibility to tick several options

Results

Table 6 – Top 20 of Portugal Fitness Trends 2026

Portugal Fitness Trends 2026	Mean
1 Employing Certified Exercise Professionals	8.34
2 Personal Training (Face-to-Face, Online, or Hybrid)	8.31
3 Specialized Fitness Studios	7.98
4 Fitness Programs for Older Adults	7.90
5 Exercise for Mental Health	7.81
6 Traditional Strength Training	7.79
7 Exercise in Physical Rehabilitation and Adaptive Training	7.78
8 Exercise for Chronic Disease Management	7.76
9 Pre- and Postnatal Fitness	7.72
10 Exercise in Neurodegenerative Disease Management	7.60
11 Exercise for Weight Management	7.57
12 Small Group Training	7.56
13 Exercise in Cancer Treatment	7.55
14 Functional Fitness Training (FFT)	7.50
15 Exercise is Medicine	7.37
16 Wearable Technology	7.35
17 Outdoor Fitness Activities	7.30
18 Hyrox	7.29
19 Youth Active-Lifestyle Building	7.29
20 Lifestyle Medicine	7.24

Table 7 – Top 10 of Portuguese Fitness Trends 2021. 2022. 2023. 2024. 2025. 2026

	Portuguese Fitness Trends 2021 (Franco et al., 2021)	Portuguese Fitness Trends 2022 (Franco et al., 2022)	Portuguese Fitness Trends 2023 (Franco et al., 2023)	Portuguese Fitness Trends 2024 (Franco et al., 2024)	Portuguese Fitness Trends 2025 (Franco et al., 2025)	Portuguese Fitness Trends 2026
1	Licensure for Fitness Professionals	Licensure for Fitness Professionals	Licensure for Fitness Professionals	Personal Training	Personal Training	Employing Certified Exercise Professionals
2	Employing Certified Fitness Professionals	Employing Certified Fitness Professionals	Employing Certified Fitness Professionals	Employing Certified Exercise Professionals	Employing Certified Exercise Professionals	Personal Training (Face-to-Face. Online. or Hybrid)
3	Personal Training	Personal Training	Personal Training	Exercise for Weight Loss	Exercise for Weight Loss	Specialized Fitness Studios
4	Exercise for Weight Loss	Exercise for Weight Loss	Exercise for Weight Loss	Small Group Personal Training	Pilates	Fitness Programs for Older Adults
5	Lifestyle Medicine	Lifestyle Medicine	Lifestyle Medicine	Traditional Strength Training	Traditional Strength Training	Exercise for Mental Health
6	Outdoor Activities	Health/Well-being Coaching	Health/Well-being Coaching	Pilates	Fitness Programs for Older Adults	Traditional Strength Training
7	Body Weight Training	Outdoor Activities	Exercise is Medicine (EIM)	Pre- and Post-natal Fitness	Small Group Training	Exercise in Physical Rehabilitation and Adaptive Training
8	Health/Well-being Coaching	Functional Fitness Training	Strength Training with Free Weights	Fitness Programs for Older Adults	Exercise for Mental Health	Exercise for Chronic Disease Management
9	Functional Fitness Training	Body Weight Training	Outcome Measurements	Multidisciplinary Work Teams	Group Fitness Classes	Pre- and Postnatal Fitness
10	Wearable Technology	Small Group Personal Training	Outdoor Activities	Group Fitness Classes	Functional Fitness Training (FFT)	Exercise in Neurodegenerative Disease Management

Brief Discussion

The results of the 2026 fitness trends in Portugal have the same top 2 as in 2025. with Employing Certified Exercise Professionals in 1st place and Personal Training in the 2nd place. which have occupied the top two spots since 2021 (Franco et al., 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025), revealing the consistency of the Personal Training service in Portugal as well as the importance given to the qualification of fitness professionals.

Specialized Fitness Studios entered to the Portuguese top 10 this year. directly to 3rd position. Regarding Portuguese Fitness Barometer of 2024. these physical exercise setting has been increasing in Portugal in recent years. being the type of fitness facility currently with the second highest percentage of representation (Pedragosa & Ferreira, 2025).

The trend Fitness Programs for Older Adults continues to climb the top 10. rising from the 8th in 2024 (Franco et al., 2024). 6th in 2025 (Franco et al., 2025). to 4th in 2026. Awareness towards the practice of physical exercise in older adults continues to increase. with the World Health Organization (WHO. 2020) and other organizations (ACSM, 2021) indicating specific guidelines. and the encouragement of the National Health Service (SNS) to carry out programs with this population (SNS. 2017).

Mental health it's a rising concern of the world. regarding the growing crisis of world mental health (WHO. 2022) and maybe this fact justifies that the trend of Exercise for Mental Health occupied continue to climb the top 10. rising from 8th in 2025 (Franco et al., 2025) to 5th place in 2026.

The 6th place is occupied by Traditional Strength Training. remaining in the top 10 since 2023 (Franco et al., 2023, 2024, 2025). There is increasing scientific evidence that strength training is important for health (ACSM. 2021), which is reflected in several recommendations for physical activity (WHO, 2020) and exercise (ACSM, 2021), which may be one of the justifications for its growth.

Exercise in Physical Rehabilitation and Adaptive Training (7th place), Exercise for Chronic Disease Management (8th place), and Exercise in Neurodegenerative Disease Management (10th place) have emerged as new in the top 10 Portuguese fitness trends for 2026. Recent studies show the importance of fitness professional regarding adaptive and inclusive training (Mehring et al., 2025), highlighted the benefits of regular physical activity in managing chronic conditions (Anderson & Durstine, 2019), and the preventive and therapeutical potential of physical exercise in neurodegenerative diseases (Liu & Yang, 2024). These studies underscore the importance of integrating exercise into treatment plans for rehabilitation, chronic disease management, and neurodegenerative conditions, reflecting a growing trend towards using physical activity as a key component of holistic healthcare approaches.

Pre- and Postnatal Fitness trend returned to the Portuguese top 10, being in 9th position in 2026. There is increasing scientific evidence regarding the benefit's multigenerational effects of exercise practice in this population in special phase of life (Santos-Rocha, 2022), as well as guidelines for exercising during this phase from the recognised organization American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (ACOG, 2020).

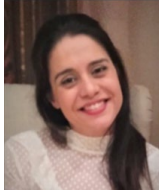
Comparing the results obtained by the ACSM fitness trends with Portuguese fitness trends, 11 similar trends were identified in the top 20, mostly in different positions. Only 3 trends are similar between them in the top 10, namely: Fitness Programs for Older Adults; Exercise for Mental Health; Traditional Strength Training. The Personal Training trend stands out, continuing in the Portuguese top (2nd place), not even appearing in the ACSM top 20. With the exception of Wearable Technology, digital technology trends such as Data-Driven Training Technology and Mobile Exercise Apps appear in the ACSM top 20 but not in Portugal.

The main limitations of this study are related to the fact that the sample is not random and not representative of the population of professionals/students in the sector.

This study aims to increase knowledge about fitness trends for 2026 in Portugal and help organizations and professionals adjust their services, products and programs offered.

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