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# Equal access and participation of migrant women and girls in sports

A study report



CAMINO

**#SPINWOMEN**

SPORT INCLUSION OF MIGRANT AND MINORITY WOMEN



CAMINO

### **Publisher**

Camino – Werkstatt für Fortbildung, Praxisbegleitung und Forschung im sozialen Bereich gGmbH  
Mahlower Str. 24  
12049 Berlin, Germany  
Tel. +49 30 610 737 20  
Fax +49 30 610 737 229  
mail@camino-werkstatt.de  
www.camino-werkstatt.de

### **Author**

Victoria Schwenzer (Camino), victoriaschwenzer@camino-werkstatt.de

### **Our thanks to**

Matthäus Zinner, Vienna (Layout) and all the experts from Berlin, Budapest, Dublin, Helsinki, Lisbon, Rome and Vienna.  
Photos: Lea Pelc (Cover), SJPF (Page 4, 6, 11, 15, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24), VIDC-fairplay (Page 8, 9, 13)  
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### **Contact SPIN Women Project**

Sport Inclusion Network (SPIN)  
c/o fairplay -VIDC  
Möllwaldplatz 5/3  
1040 Vienna, Austria  
Tel. +43 1 713 35 94 90  
fairplay@vidc.org  
www.sportinclusion.net

The SPIN Women project is co-funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus + Sport Programme. This publication reflects only the author's view and the Agency and the Commission are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contains.



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
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# Introduction

**W**omen's and girls' rights are human rights (CEDAW 1979). They comprise the right to equal access to social life, leisure activities and recreation just as well as the right to be safe from violence and discrimination. When it comes to ensuring that the rights of *all* women and girls are respected, the sports sphere can and must play its part.

But which role do migrant women and girls actually play in European sports? In how far is their equal access ensured? Which barriers exist for those willing to play sports and become involved in a club? Which strategies work with a view to reaching migrant women and girls via sporting activities and ultimately accomplishing their inclusion in a sports club? What recommendations can be given to sports clubs and initiatives on the basis of these findings? These are the main questions the present study aims to answer.

This study relies on an approach based on experience: 54 experts, more than half of them women, met in focus groups in seven different countries and were asked to relate their views and experiences. Focus groups included representatives of sports clubs and initiatives, migrant organizations, further NGOs, sports associations, schools or municipal sports departments. Only experts with previous experience in dealing with migrant women and girls in a sports context were admitted.

The study focuses on newly arrived female migrants, often refugee women and girls. Some focus groups also looked upon members of socially marginalized ethnic minorities, mostly from the Roma community. The term "migrant" is used to describe people who live in another country than they were born in, referring to the experience of international, cross-border migration (Reinprecht 2009: 138). It is applied to a wide range of very diverse groups with different cultural, linguistic, religious and social backgrounds and does not provide any information as to a person's nationality. The term "refugee" is used here in a broad sense for someone who has been forced to flee his or her country, due a fear of persecution, war or violence, natural disaster or poverty. The term includes also asylum seekers who seek for international protection.

The SPIN project has been dealing with the inclusion of people with a migrant or refugee background for several years. Inclusion is understood to comprise an improved social participation, reached via sporting activities, but also equal access to the structures of organized sports, i.e. the different organizational levels of sports clubs and associations, including the management.

Promoting the inclusion of migrants always entails dealing with the issue of racism and discrimination as well. Discriminatory practices can result in a feeling of exclusion on the part of the affected migrants, who might turn away from the club as a consequence or not even consider taking up a sporting activity.

However, with a view to women and girls, an intersectional aspect of discrimination has to be taken into account: Migrant women and girls are not only disadvantaged, because they are migrants, but also because they are female. This double disadvantage becomes apparent within the context of the barriers described below: Many of the obstacles encountered by female migrants or refugees concern migrants and refugees of both sexes alike. However, it is evident that there are further, specific discriminatory practices that affect female migrants, because they are female – both within sports and within the family context. Hence, the study focuses on a disadvantaged group (women and girls) within another disadvantaged group (migrants and refugees). This group is too often overlooked or subsumed under the heading of migrants and refugees, so that the special aspects of the situation of these women are often ignored.

Even though there are strong barriers linked to gender inequality and migrant exclusion, the study shows that there exist successful strategies for inclusion. These strategies include ways to reach migrant women and girls, to develop specific offers, to foster qualification and empowerment and to make clubs more accessible.

The research was conducted by Camino within the context of SPIN Women, with the support of the SPIN partner organizations. SPIN Women (Sport Inclusion of Migrant and Minority Women: Promoting sports participation and leadership capacities) is a project of the Sport Inclusion Network (SPIN), co-funded by the Erasmus + Programme of the European Union.

The following organizations participate in the project: the Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation (VIDC/fairplay) from Austria, sports umbrella organization Liikkukaa – Sport for all from Finland, sports association Unione Italiana Sport Per Tutti (UISP) from Italy, the professional football players' union SJPF from Portugal, Mahatma Gandhi Human Rights Organization from Hungary, the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and Camino from Germany, dedicated to social science research and further education (Camino – Werkstatt für Fortbildung, Praxisbegleitung und Forschung im sozialen Bereich gGmbH).



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# Expert assessments: general situation

At the Focus Group Discussions (FGD), the experts were asked to make a general assessment as to the situation of migrant women and girls in the sports sphere. Although these assessments do not constitute or allow for a detailed description of the situation in each country, they can still serve to gain some insights on the topic (as seen by the experts).

## European sports is male-dominated

Regardless of differences depending on the type of sport, their statements corroborate the fact that in Europe, the sports sphere is largely shaped by and geared towards men. Although there have been some positive changes in the sports culture in the last few decades, the experts still perceive a certain resistance when it comes to accepting women in an active role, not only as athletes and players, but also as instructors, coaches or managers in organized sports, particularly in professional sports (FGD Portugal).

Regarding grassroots sports, they report that the clubs' decision-making structures are often dominated by elderly white males, which makes any type of commitment unattractive for women or girls (FGD Germany). Regarding popular types of sport, such as football, this tendency is even more evident: Society perceives football as a typically "male" activity and neither sports clubs nor the social environment provide sufficient support and encouragement for women and girls to try. As a result, many of them do not consider themselves capable of playing football (FGD Ireland). However, girls' participation in football has slightly increased over the last five years (FGD Ireland).

The results of the Special Eurobarometer on sport and physical activity (2018), based on a quantitative survey in the countries of the European Union, confirm that European sports is male-dominated. According to these, more men (44%) than women (36%) play sports on a regular basis (European Commission 2018: 11). 40% of men never exercise or play sport, compared with 52% of women (ibid.). The majority of those who engage voluntarily in sports clubs are men: On average, volunteers comprise twice as many men as women (European Commission 2018: 78). This makes it more likely that men will define club structures and club cultures.

If women and girls are generally underrepresented in sports, this tendency is even more marked regarding migrant women and girls: Their participation in organized sports is regarded as minimal, although a slight increase could be observed in the last five years (FGD Italy).

Unfortunately, there are no pan-European studies and figures on the participation of migrant women and girls in organized sports and considerable research gaps remain. However, some national data exist. A German investigation by the German Olympic Sports Confederation involving several data sets identifies a pronounced gender-based imbalance regarding the participation of migrants in German sports clubs, with the males clearly outnumbering the females (DOSB 2013: 4). This imbalance is particularly marked among adolescents (ibid.). Yet, no conclusions can be drawn as to the extent to which migrant women and girls might rather exercise in different settings outside sports clubs, such as fitness centres.

Based on the example of football, one expert assumes that a group's degree of social marginalization and its tendency to participate in organized sporting activities might be negatively correlated (FGD Germany). This would mean that female refugees are even more underrepresented in football clubs than female migrants in general (FGD Germany).

## Lack of offers for (migrant) women and girls

Assessments from different countries (FGD Italy, FGD Austria, FGD Ireland) find that neither sports clubs nor civil society organizations working with female migrants provide a sufficient number of demand-oriented offers specifically aimed at (migrant) women and girls. This has a direct impact on this group's participation in sports, since offers tailored to the needs of women and girls tend to be far better accepted than activities aimed at mixed groups (FGD Italy).

## School sports as a means to reach girls

However, school sports can constitute a promising approach to introducing migrant girls to sporting activities and sports club membership (FGD Germany). Apart from regular sports lessons, primary schools in larger cities increasingly tend to cooperate with local sports clubs in order to establish specific leisure sports groups for their pupils, which are run by the local clubs (FDG Germany). Assessments from different countries (FGD Italy, FDG Germany, FDG Ireland) consider school sports an appropriate means to reach migrant girls and motivate them to become involved in sports. Schools encourage girls to play sports and offer a broad range of sporting activities (FDG Ireland). Many refugee girls have never come into touch with sports before they begin to attend sports lessons at school (FGD Austria). Reports from Hungary state that town primary

schools are increasingly more successful when it comes to cooperating with parents from the Roma community (FGD Hungary). However, some hold the view that schools do not really exploit the potential of sports for the inclusion of migrant girls (FGD Portugal).

### **Different target groups are reached to a different extent**

Experts from some countries (FGD Hungary, FGD Germany) state that sporting activities are often discontinued once a pupil leaves primary school. This might be due to the change of schools, pubertal development (FGD Germany) and a lack of suitable afternoon offers at secondary schools (FGD Hungary): Teachers do not receive extra pay for extra lessons in the afternoon, which often means that no such offers, including sporting activities, exist (FGD Hungary).

Assessments from several countries concur in that adult migrant women are far more difficult to reach than

girls, particularly primary school girls. Regarding refugee women, frequent relocation (from a refugee home to their own flat, for instance) can result in the loss of contact with the sports club (FGD Germany). It tends to be easier to reach unaccompanied refugee women than to reach women constrained by family structures (FGD Germany). The latter are often far more constrained by cultural barriers (cf. section on patriarchal family structures) than their unaccompanied peers (FGD Italy). In how far women and girls can be reached also depends on the level and nature of the sporting experience they bring from their countries of origin (FGD Ireland).

General statements are difficult to make, since migrant women and girls differ in terms of age, social circumstances, country of origin, migration experience, sporting experience etc. and since conditions and offers vary from host country to host country. Nevertheless, the next section will describe a number of barriers that impede women's and girls' equal participation in sports, as identified by the focus groups.







## Barriers

*“The clubs say: Of course, we are here for everyone, people should just come, we are open. What these people fail to see is the fact that the standard structures as such can constitute barriers or cause inhibitions.”*

(FGD Germany)

The following section describes the barriers identified in the analysis of the focus group interviews. Some are mainly due to the affected individuals’ marginalization as migrants, others can be attributed to the fact that they are female. Most result from a combination of both aspects.

### Scarce information on sports initiatives and the positive effects of sports

Insufficient information at various levels constitutes one of the barriers identified by the experts. Migrant women and girls do not receive sufficient information on existing offers regarding sporting activities in their neighbourhood (FGD Italy, FGD Ireland). Language difficulties can constitute an additional obstacle. There is too little communication between sports initiatives and refugee homes,

so that the information on opportunities to play sports does not reach migrant women (FGD Ireland), who also lack information on the positive effects of sports, e.g. on sports as a means of health preservation (FGD Germany, FGD Ireland, FGD Italy). This is also true of the Hungarian Roma community; no efforts are made to educate and convince these people (FGD Hungary). Migrant parents also tend to lack knowledge on sports as a means of inclusion (FGD Portugal).

### High expenses, transport and safety

Assessments from some countries (FGD Italy, FGD Finland, FGD Ireland) find that participation in organized sports (beyond school sports) entails high costs, which can constitute a barrier for migrant families and is particularly problematic for refugees. This includes sports club membership or participation fees, transportation, expensive equipment etc. Reports from Finland state that many migrant families find it difficult to raise the means that would enable their children to become members of a sports club. If their resources to fund the children’s sporting activities are limited, sons are often preferred over daughters (FGD Finland). It is for financial reasons that migrant groups, particularly adolescents, often prefer to play sports in pub-

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lic spaces, e.g. parks (FGD Ireland). However, there is a lack of suitable and freely accessible spaces as well as a lack of supervised sporting activities that would constitute safe options for women and girls (FGD Ireland). Refugee women and girls tend to feel unsafe in parks, and particularly after dark, most women and girls would rule out public spaces as a safe option to play sports (FGD Italy). Security concerns can be a key reason why women and girls do not participate in sporting activities, especially after dark. A general feeling of insecurity on public transport and difficulties in finding their way in the new country can exacerbate the problem.

### **Social marginalization as migrant women**

Often, the exclusion, social marginalization and discrimination migrant women and girls experience will impede their access to sporting activities, and particularly to the standard activities pertaining to the sphere of organized sports. African NGOs working in Finland report that the women tend to feel excluded, even if they have been living in the host country for along time (FGD Finland). The same applies to migrant families in Portugal (FGD Portugal). African women tend to be sceptical regarding the host country's promise of inclusion. Discriminatory experiences result in withdrawal and a certain unwillingness to participate in activities offered by the host society (FGD Finland).

The Roma community is subject to a very particular level of exclusion and discrimination (FGD Portugal, FGD Hungary), including a highly segregated educational system. Its members also experience a large amount of everyday racism (FGD Hungary).

Refugee women are often exposed to racism and marginalized in spatial, social and economical terms (FGD Ireland, FGD Germany). Accommodation in the periphery can result in a tendency to avoid the long trips on public transport that might be necessary to reach a sports club for fear of racism (FGD Germany). Refugee women housed in collective centres tend to feel very isolated. They can become very frustrated or develop a depression as a consequence of the stressful housing conditions, which in turn will keep them from seeking out any sporting activities (FGD Italy). They might also have other priorities, since their primary concerns usually include existential issues such as their application for asylum, their children's enrolment in school or nursery school and the search for employment and adequate housing (FGD Italy, FGD Germany).

### **Lack of support and empowerment of women/girls**

The focus group discussions have underscored the fact that a lack of self-confidence tends to have an impact on female migrants' preparedness to participate in sporting activities (FGD Ireland). Newly arrived migrants are often beginners when it comes to playing sports, often they have

no sporting experience at all (FGD Finland). Particularly in combination with language difficulties, this lack of experience can make them feel incapable of participating in sports (FGD Finland, FGD Ireland). However, the fact that migrant women and girls are hardly encouraged to do so plays the pivotal role (FGD Ireland). Girls do not receive sufficient support from their parents, but there is also a general lack of support, systematic promotion and efforts to facilitate their empowerment on the part of organized sports, particularly in male-dominated sports such as football (FGD Ireland).

### **Lack of migrant/female role models in organized sports**

In organized sports, there is a clear lack of female instructors, coaches and referees as well as a clear lack of instructors, coaches and referees from migrant communities who could serve as role models and have the necessary language skills (FGD Austria, FGD Germany). The empowerment of women must therefore become the declared aim, encouraging women to assume these tasks (FGD Germany). With regard to the Roma community, reports from Hungary mention marked differences between cities and rural areas where talented girls cannot find role models whose example could serve to motivate them to keep going and not give up their sporting ambitions (FGD Hungary).

### **Patriarchal family structures**

All focus groups identify patriarchal family structures as a crucial barrier that impedes or hampers the participation of women and girls in sports. Traditional gender roles involving household and childcare obligations keep women and girls from playing sports. Due to their responsibility for the children, women have less time to play sports (FGD Ireland) or to qualify as instructors or coaches (FGD Austria). They often lack the means to pay for third-party childcare (FGD Ireland) and tend to reserve the little leisure time they have for other activities, such as language lessons or further education (FGD Ireland). Many girls from Roma families leave school prematurely and become firmly involved in family obligations (FGD Hungary).

Patriarchal structures define and limit the role of women and girls, effectively confining many of them to the household. Husbands will keep their wives from playing sports and parents prohibit their daughters' participation (FGD Austria, FGD Finland, FGD Germany). If parents or husbands intervene and prohibit sporting activities, this tends to discourage the women and girls (FGD Finland): Without further support, they do not see themselves in a position to override such male-imposed restrictions. African NGOs state that in some African countries, playing sports is associated with men only and access denied to women and girls (FGD Hungary).



Traditional, strictly religious Muslim families expect conformity with rules that regulate the behaviour of women and girls (FGD Portugal). As a result, the women themselves might object to the presence of men in gyms and sports facilities, i.e. male spectators, male instructors or coaches, male athletes or players (FGD Austria). The religious precept of virginity can play a role and parents might keep their daughters at home for fear of harm to the hymen or sexual encounters (FGD Austria, FGD Germany). However, religious dress codes do not necessarily constitute a limitation when it comes to participating in sports – as long as sports clubs and associations are prepared to accept flexible solutions. In some focus groups, there was considerable controversy on the extent to which the sports sphere should accommodate the needs of these women and the extent to which female athletes should be expected to adjust to existing rules (FGD Portugal).

Yet, women form part of the patriarchal system as well. The issue does not only encompass prohibitions, restrictions and the prevention of female participation as imposed by others. Whereas some migrant women and girls who play sports understand the latter to be a means of emancipation and empowerment, others do not see the value of emancipation as significant to themselves (FGD Italy). Playing sports is of no relevance to these women, they are hardly interested in sports. This raises the question of how their interest could be aroused and in how far role models could be used to promote alternatives to the traditional gender role, which would allow them to discover sports and learn about its positive effects in terms of health preservation, an improved self-confidence and inclusion.

### **Male-dominated sports structures and gender inequality**

Patriarchal family structures are compounded by the male-dominated structures of organized sports. Voluntary commitment or playing sports in a male-dominated club seems hardly attractive to adolescent girls, regardless of their origin (FGD Germany).

In sports, gender inequality can result in different types of discrimination, ranging from openly expressed forms (such as sexist language, stereotypical gender roles, symbolic representations and imagery) to structural discrimination (e.g. a lacking visibility and representation of women, norms and values determined by men, the association of a type of sports with one gender only).

### **Sexualized violence in sports**

Sexualized violence against women and girls (but also against boys) occurs in the sports sphere, and not only sexual harassment, but also cases of sexual abuse. The topic is still largely taboo and scientific studies are lacking. A yet unpublished investigation from Germany assumes that the number of incidents involving sexualized violence is high, in grassroots sports and in competitive sports alike. An online survey among competitive athletes found that one third of the respondents had been exposed to sexualized violence (WDR 2019). A Portuguese study found that sexual harassment is very common in organized sports (FGD Portugal).

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## **Closed club structures and lack of a welcoming ambience**

Sports clubs, particularly those in rural areas, are often characterized by a tendency to isolate themselves and exclude the world outside. New members or interested parties are not necessarily welcomed and promptly incorporated into existing groups and teams (FGD Ireland). Communication habits that perpetuate exclusion (FGD Austria) and a lack of sensitivity regarding the situation of migrant women and girls (FGD Ireland) can constitute further barriers that impede that joint efforts are undertaken in order to allow migrant women and girls to play sports. Mutual misunderstandings due to different cultural norms and disappointed expectations are common problems, e.g. with regard to the rights and duties that come with sports club membership (FGD Germany). Many clubs do not realize that they have to introduce the newcomers to the structures and workings of the system of sports clubs and associations (FGD Ireland). Intercultural communication remains an important challenge for both sides (FGD Ireland). It is competitive sports in particular where a serious lack of intercultural competence on the part of instructors, coaches and clubs has become obvious (FGD Portugal). Competition regulations concerning dress codes can be another obstacle.

## **Focus on performance**

Organized sports is dominated by competition. There is a lack of open, flexible groups and of low-threshold activities that do not entail any type of commitment, are not geared towards competition and allow newcomers to try out various new types of sport, open and suitable for women and girls with different levels of sporting experience, including beginners with no experience at all (FGD Germany, FGD Ireland, FGD Portugal). The general focus on performance in organized sports is also reflected in the fact that low-threshold offers at the grassroots level hardly receive any recognition or appreciation on the part of sports clubs, sports associations and municipal sports departments. As a result, clubs do not even consider this type of low-threshold activity when developing new offers. When it comes to the allocation of training grounds and facilities, clubs that take part in competitions tend to be favoured over clubs that offer low-threshold activities (FGD Germany).

In Hungary, public funding is exclusively allocated on the basis of a club's sporting achievements. As a consequence, access to leisure sports is very limited and expensive (FGD Hungary). Another difficulty concerns the transition of athletes and players from open, low-threshold sports initiatives for (migrant) women and girls to the structures of organized sports: It is due to the high level of performance expected by clubs that initiatives are often unable to place their stronger athletes or players in existing teams (FGD Austria).

## **Lack of specific promotion for (migrant) women/girls**

Sports promotion specifically for girls that takes the needs of female migrants into account is almost inexistent (FGD Germany). Smaller migrant initiatives and clubs willing to establish such offers for migrant women and girls face difficulties when it comes to obtaining funding and access to training facilities without a lot of red tape (FGD Austria, FGD Germany).

Existing sports promotion programmes for girls tend to be based on unrealistic targets with respect to the number of girls to be reached. The fact that it usually takes longer to establish such programmes and projects for girls, and particularly those for refugee girls, is often ignored in their conception; quantitative requirements on the part of the funding bodies are therefore counterproductive (FGD Germany).

Sometimes, sports offers for refugee girls fail, because the collective centres cooperating with the sports club or project consider the effort inappropriate, if only a small number of girls is reached. However, the result is a lack of specific sports promotion for refugee girls (FGD Germany).

## **Traumatization and sexualized violence during war and flight**

The work with refugee women and girls involves special barriers, mostly due to their experiences of war and flight (FGD Austria). Experiences of sexualized violence and traumatization will often lead to a heightened sensitivity when it comes to bodily contact, which can terrify these women and girls or make them feel very uncomfortable. Of course, this constitutes a major barrier concerning many types of sport (FGD Italy).



## Successful strategies I: reaching the target group

The strategies described in the four following sections concern different aspects that are crucial with a view to ensuring that migrant women and girls gain equal access to sporting activities. The first consists in perceiving and reaching women and girls as a specific target group, as described in the following.

### Female role models can make success visible

Female migrant athletes, players, instructors, coaches and referees can play a crucial part and serve as role models: They are able to motivate migrant women and girls to become actively involved in sports and help them reach their goals, an aspect highlighted in many focus groups. In order to achieve this, successful female athletes from migrant communities must become more visible in public, which can be achieved with the aid of specific PR measures, e.g. social media campaigns, events with the athletes and the dissemination of their personal success stories (FGD Hungary). The opportunity to meet such an athlete in person and to start a conversation with them is considered as particularly effective (FGD Italy, FGD Hungary). A training session with a popular athlete or player can awaken or boost a girl's resolve to aim for (higher) athletic goals herself (FGD Finland). Another tried and proven approach

to divulging success stories from the girls' own country of origin consists in the use of videos of players of the corresponding national team during training sessions. This serves to convey the fact that women and girls can play any type of sport, just as much as males (FGD Austria, with Iran's national rugby team as an example). Additional campaigning is crucial in order to raise parents' awareness of the benefits of sports.

### Cultural mediators can build bridges to migrant communities

Enlisting the help of cultural mediators is seen as a successful strategy: They are able to network and initiate communication between sports clubs and initiatives on the one hand and women and girls from migrant communities on the other (FGD Portugal, FGD Ireland, FGD Germany). Athletes of both sexes can serve as mediators, as well as other well-respected members of the community who are aware of girls' rights (e.g. older persons, former athletes, religious leaders). Such mediators are regarded as crucial, particularly when it comes to gaining access to communities that are notoriously difficult to reach (such as the Roma; FGD Portugal). Enlisting the help of well-connected individuals from the communities can not only be helpful

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in reaching women and girls, but also when it comes to developing offers and approaches that suit their needs, since the mediators can provide the corresponding advice. They can help clubs develop an understanding for cultural traditions, for the requirements of certain groups and communities (FGD Portugal) and for experiences of flight or migration, experiences that they share (FGD Ireland). In this respect, migrant clubs have an advantage due to their membership structure, their built-in bridging function and the corresponding intercultural skills, fine-tuned due to frequent use (FGD Germany). Cultural mediators can also use their position within migrant communities to spread knowledge on the positive effects of sports and to raise awareness for women's and girls' rights (FGD Germany).

### **Partnerships and networks**

Establishing partnerships and networks within the social environment is regarded as another promising strategy (FGD Ireland, FGD Italy). These can include schools, neighbourhood centres, churches, mosques, migrant organizations, women's initiatives, youth clubs, facilities for girls etc. As a first step, it seems reasonable to analyse the socio-spatial context in order to identify existing initiatives, facilities and other places of encounter frequented by migrant women and girls (FGD Italy). Clubs and initiatives that have already gained the target group's trust can help disseminate information on the new offers within the area (FGD Italy). Existing (migrant) women's groups can constitute another point of contact (FGD Ireland). The setting in which the planned sporting activities are supposed to take place plays a crucial role as well: If logistically possible, it is advisable to use the facilities of local clubs or organizations that migrant women and girls are already familiar with, because they visit them for other purposes (FGD Italy).

### **Reaching parents**

In many cases, parents are the key to their daughters' participation in sports. This is why it is crucial to establish contact with the parents, create an ambience of trust and convince them of the benefits of the activities, underscoring the positive effects of playing sports (FGD Portugal, FGD Finland, FGD Italy). In Portugal, positive experiences have been made with the strategy of addressing parents' reservations in direct conversation, discussing the basic conditions and the requirements for the girls' participation in the planned sporting activity: Some parents could be convinced to allow their daughters to take up water ballet (conditions encompassed the option of wearing a burkini). By and by, further girls followed their example. However, the process of establishing a new sports group is not always free of conflict: It is crucial to help the girls uphold their dreams and athletic goals, to provide encouragement and strengthen them, also vis a vis their parents

(FGD Finland). Cultural mediators working to raise awareness for women's and girls' rights can be of assistance (see above). In Portugal, sports schools seek to actively educate parents on sports values.

### **Financial support and transportation can facilitate access**

If girls cannot participate in sports, because their families lack the necessary means, reduced participation fees or offers free of charge can constitute a solution, as well as the provision of equipment (FGD Ireland, FGD Hungary, FGD Portugal). Sports projects including transportation have proven to be successful, e.g. in cases in which parents are unable to accompany their daughters (FGD Portugal). The participation of refugee women and girls can be significantly improved, if they are picked up at collective centres (FGD Germany, FGD Austria, FGD Italy), all the more if these are located in the periphery, if public transport connections are scarce, if sporting activities take place in the evening and/or far off.

### **Connecting sports with crucial messages on health promotion**

It has proven successful to offer sporting activities within the context of health promotion. The latter underscores the positive effects of playing sports and serves to embed sports projects within an overarching framework, such as the prevention of cardiovascular disease or mental disorders via sports (FGD Ireland, FGD Italy, FGD Finland). Sports classes under the heading of health promotion, combined with information and advice on a healthy diet and a healthy lifestyle have also met with great interest among migrant and refugee women (FGD Finland). Advertising material for sporting activities can also highlight social and inclusive aspects (FGD Ireland).

### **Sports in public spaces can improve visibility**

Positive experiences have been made with the organization of supervised sports sessions for girls in public places, for instance in the form of a tournament on courts in a park (FGD Austria). The heightened visibility of such offers makes it possible to reach less sports-minded girls as well (FGD Austria). Generally speaking, more publicly-owned open spaces should be made accessible for sporting activities. This would allow sports initiatives to develop more low-threshold offers that take place within a less formalized context than those of sports clubs (FGD Ireland). Supervision creates a safe framework for migrant women and girls to participate.



## Successful strategies II: developing offers

The second aspect that is crucial with a view to paving the way for the equal participation of migrant women and girls in sports consists in creating offers that are attractive for the target group and suit its needs.

### Offering childcare or parallel sessions for mothers and children

Adult women can often be reached via their children. It is therefore advisable to combine activities for mothers with activities for their children (FGD Italy, FGD Germany, FGD Ireland), offering either sports sessions for women with optional childcare or parallel sports sessions for women and children. Positive experiences have also been made with tournaments for mothers and daughters (FGD Ireland).

### Choosing a social approach: It is not just sports, it is socializing

Sports sessions combined with social activities are apt to reach those women and girls who are either anxious or not interested in “sports only” (FGD Germany). Focus group participants from different countries mention successful projects that combined sports and music (FGD Austria) or consisted in sports sessions followed by joint cooking and meals (FGD Italy, FGD Germany, FGD Austria). Joint visits of events or festivities, for instance events organized by migrant communities or neighbourhood ini-

tiatives, or joint excursions and trips to sports events can create a sense of community (FGD Italy, FGD Austria). The team-building process can also be fostered by uniform sports outfits with the athletes’ or players’ names on them (FGD Austria).

### Respecting women’s needs from the beginning, encouraging participation

Many adult migrant or refugee women are not so much interested in a particular type of sport, but want to exercise or do something for their health (FGD Germany). This is why sporting activities should have a participatory and flexible character, so that sessions can be adapted to the women’s needs. Instead of implementing a preconceived scheme, this might involve an initial offer of several types of sport to be tried out, for instance (FGD Germany), and adapting the type of activity continuously, depending on the participants’ needs and wishes (FGD Italy). It is crucial to take the women’s needs into account, not only during the planning stage, but also while the project is being implemented, which is why their input and feedback should always be solicited (FGD Ireland). Since an increased responsibility enhances athletes’ commitment and self-confidence, it is recommendable to delegate some tasks and to have functions, such as that of the team captain, rotate (FGD Austria).



### **Introducing new types of sport**

Experience shows that introducing new types of sport tends to work better with refugee girls than relying on well-known ones (FGD Austria): Unknown types of sport can arouse curiosity and place all participants in the same situation, i.e. that of an absolute beginner. In addition, unknown types of sport come without any gender label, meaning that – other than football, for instance – they seem “neutral”, unassigned in terms gender. This makes it easier for girls to make them their own, in contrast to types of sport that are perceived as “typically male” (FGD Austria). Sports clubs can use “open days” to introduce different types of sport for free and allow visitors to try them out (FGD Ireland).

### **Combining sports and further support**

It is advisable to embed sporting activities within the framework of another support system for marginalized families (FGD Portugal), if competent partners from the social care sector are available. If families receive support regarding other issues, such as educational questions or social inclusion, e.g. via a low-threshold counselling service, this can result in an increased open-mindedness when it comes to allowing daughters to participate in sports or social activities (FGD Portugal). Supporting adolescent girls as athletes or players can go far beyond the sphere of sports and include further assistance regarding their academic and professional development, e.g. via cooperation with youth and neighbourhood centres or with projects promoting professional training, which help adolescents find apprentice positions or traineeships (FGD Austria).

Positive experiences have also been made with sports projects accompanied by an interdisciplinary team that does not only comprise sports instructors and coaches, but also social education workers or psychologists (FGD Germany). Such a “team behind the team” means that professional help is readily available and that girls can receive counselling and support regarding social, professional and inclusion issues (DKJS 2019).

### **Finding a trauma-sensitive approach to avoid debilitating effects**

In dealing with women and girls who have been exposed to sexual violence or are traumatized for other reasons, it is crucial to find a sensitive way of dealing with their physical boundaries in order to avoid that sports becomes a psychologically debilitating factor (FGD Portugal). This might mean that the offered activities have to take place without any physical contact, even when correcting postures (FGD Italy). It is crucial to obtain professional counselling and support, i.e. to enlist the help of psychologists who specialize in this area, and to ensure that the affected women receive the professional help of counselling services (FGD Germany). Sports instructors and coaches must be able to see at which point the limits of their own skills are reached and to avoid overburdening themselves (FGD Germany).



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# Successful strategies III: offering qualification

The third aspect that is crucial when it comes to facilitating the equal participation of migrant women and girls in sports consists in identifying any qualification gaps and in providing solutions to close them. These should target the women and girls themselves, but also those who are already implementing sporting activities in different contexts (schools, sports clubs and initiatives, youth clubs etc.).

## Training female migrant coaches and referees

There is a general lack of female migrant instructors and coaches who could build bridges, reach migrant communities and act as role models for migrant women and girls. This is particularly notable in sports clubs. Female migrant coaches are able to motivate migrant women and girls and to instil self-confidence in them (FGD Germany). It is therefore crucial to ensure that further migrant or refugee women undergo training to become instructors, coaches or referees; this issue needs to be pushed (FGD Germany, FGD Ireland). It is not only their peers who can benefit from the experiences and perspectives of migrant women and girls, but also the clubs and initiatives as a whole (FGD Germany). Training and incorporating female migrants as coaches etc. is, in effect, a way clubs can evolve and become more diverse.

## Educating sports teachers, instructors and coaches on women's and girls' rights

Women's and girls' rights are human rights. Sports teachers, instructors, coaches, board members etc. should be educated and made aware of this fact, which should enable them to create a safe environment for women and girls, free of discrimination (FGD Portugal, FGD Germany). Such a training could cover crucial issues including gender inequalities, sexism and discrimination, patriarchal gender roles and sexualized and domestic violence.

## Training sports teachers, instructors and coaches in intercultural awareness and team building

Sometimes, sports teachers, instructors and coaches lack the necessary intercultural awareness as well as the habit of questioning their own attitudes and prejudices (FGD Germany). They may also lack experience in dealing with people from other countries of origin, revert to stereotypes and have difficulties when it comes to putting themselves in the place of migrant women and girls. This is why trainings on intercultural awareness, anti-discrimination, intercultural communication and team building are paramount (FGD Ireland). They can also serve to encourage participants to reflect upon their own expectations towards migrant women and girls and thus avoid misunderstandings. Courses that explain the situation of migrant women and girls create a better understanding for them and can also help (FGD Italy).



## Successful strategies IV: making clubs more accessible

The fourth aspect concerns the accessibility of sports clubs at the organizational level and thus strategies targeting them at the organizational level with a view to opening them up for the specific target group of migrant women and girls.

### Sports clubs must become more female

To become less male-dominated, sports clubs must fill some positions at the different levels with women and girls and men must be prepared to share the responsibility (FGD Ireland, FGD Germany). A sports club in which women are well-represented in all types of roles, i.e. as athletes or players, instructors, coaches and board members, is more attractive for women and girls and its mixed structure can also help to establish a welcoming ambience. Women and girls should not just be regarded as “customers”, but also have a say when it comes to taking decisions (FGD Germany). The participation of women and girls at the decision-making level increases a club’s ability to attract members. In order to reach this goal, sports associations must provide support, e.g. in the form of roadmaps for the process of reaching equal participation and inclusion, as well as assistance in implementing them in clubs (FGD Germany).

### Taking measures to ensure a safe, discrimination-free environment

Associations and clubs must adopt specific measures to ensure that all members can play sports in a safe environment, free of discrimination (FGD Ireland, FGD Portugal). This includes the elaboration of anti-discrimination guidelines that cover racism as well as sexism, the implementation of anti-discrimination trainings (see above) and appointing an officer for child protection and sexualized violence who has received the necessary training. The club should state very clearly that there is no room for sexual harassment, sexualized violence or racist discrimination. Participants of the Portuguese focus group recounted that many girls had given up sports due to discrimination during games. In view of this, it is crucial that referees attend trainings on anti-discrimination as well, since it is the referee who ensures a respectful game (FGD Portugal).

### Changing rules to eliminate barriers

It is fundamental to recognize cultural barriers before any decisions that might lead to the exclusion of women and girls are taken (FGD Portugal). A key strategy highlighted by some focus groups consists in a sports club’s or association’s preparedness to change the rules in order to

break down barriers (FGD Italy, FGD Portugal, FGD Germany). This concerns female dress codes in particular, but also dietary habits and other cultural or religious precepts. For instance, wearing a hijab should be no impediment to playing sports (FGD Finland). On the contrary, existing expectations and conditions should be adapted to suit the women's and girls' needs (FGD Portugal). They should not be forced to wear short garments, but be allowed to select the type of sports outfit they wish to wear (FGD Italy). Even in swimming, rules can be changed so that religious women can participate (wearing a burkini, for instance). In some cases, it might be necessary to call for the creation of suitable conditions at the municipal level (if the municipality runs the swimming pool, for instance). However, some hold the view that adapting dress codes to cultural or religious precepts could be counterproductive, since it means restricting the women's and girls' newly-won room for manoeuvre.

### **Establishing personal contact, providing contact persons**

Experience shows that interested women and girls will often approach sports projects due to personal contacts, word-of-mouth recommendations or individual Social

Media contacts (FGD Austria, FGD Germany). In order to achieve a continuous participation, it is key to establish trustful personal relationships and to keep inviting participants personally (FGD Austria, FGD Germany), especially refugee women and girls. A trustful personal relationship with a contact person is crucial (FGD Germany, FGD Ireland, FGD Portugal). This can be the coach or another contact within the sports club or initiative, such as an intercultural officer, as long as that person represents the guarantee to be in a place that is safe for women and girls, in which they can feel at ease (FGD Germany).

### **Providing information on the workings of a sports club**

Often, new participants lack information on how a sports club works, on the offered range of activities or on the rights, tasks and duties membership entails, a situation that can give rise to conflicts, prejudices or misunderstandings (FGD Germany, FGD Ireland). Therefore, it is important to provide details, e.g. in the form of an information package in simple language (FGD Ireland) and/or in frequent personal conversations with the new participants, answering questions and providing guidance, for instance on options to participate as volunteers.



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# Recommendations: aspects to consider

**W**hich aspects should be considered when it comes to involving migrant women and girls into sports? Some recommendations follow.

## Heterogeneity of the target group

Migrant and refugee women and girls form a very heterogeneous group. They differ in terms of age, sporting experience, social, cultural and religious backgrounds, level of education, experiences made during migration, experiences and time spent in the host country, residency status and many other aspects. Newly arrived elderly refugee women have very different needs than young migrant girls who have spent years, grown up and attended school in the host country. Sports clubs and initiatives should be aware of this diversity and develop offers tailored to the different needs of different sub-groups.

## Sporting experience

When developing concepts, one should consider the fact that they might attract migrant women and girls with very different types and levels of sporting experience. Among other things, the latter may depend on the significance of sports in their countries of origin, the popularity of different types of sports (which might be different in the country of origin and in the host country) and on whether women and girls were given access at all. Experience shows that the level of performance varies greatly among refugee women, for instance, which may cause conflicts within a team. It is crucial to offer specific low-threshold activities that allow women without any sporting experience to exercise as well.

## Proximity and a flexible schedule

With a view to the deconstruction of barriers, the spatial proximity of accommodation and sports facilities is a key factor. Sporting activities offered within the same neighbourhood are far more visible, particularly to refugee women and girls, whose range of movement is limited. Experiences from different countries show that the activities offered by fitness centres tend to suit the needs of female migrants or refugees better: They appreciate the proximity to their homes, the temporal flexibility and the option to exercise independently, without any commitment. Sporting activities for girls must respect the girls' temporal room for manoeuvre, for instance if they are from conservative families and not allowed to leave the house in the evening.

## Women only vs. mixed groups

All focus groups have discussed the significance of creating sporting activities for women only. Regarding this

aspect, experiences differ. Some experts report that young girls in particular like to play sports in mixed groups, during sessions and tournaments alike, that they find it attractive and see it as a special challenge.

However, a majority from different countries state that according to their experience, women and girls tend to prefer a protected, safe space and offers aimed at women only, which are far more successful in reaching them. This need reflects the fact that an all-female environment allows women to interact in a different way, to feel more at ease and to focus less on the competitive aspect of sports. Due to traumatizing experiences, such a protected space can be crucial for refugee women in particular. What is more, some women and girls can only be reached, if men are strictly excluded from the sporting activities in question, also as instructors, coaches or spectators, due to cultural or religious reasons (e.g. in swimming). This has to be considered in the development stage, if one plans to target this group: Creating an all-female environment, i.e. employing female instructors or coaches and female staff only, is key, just as well as separate rooms whose users cannot be seen from the outside.

## Performance orientation vs. leisure sports

In many focus groups, the question in how far sports should be geared towards competition was another subject of critical discussion. Most of them hold the view that sports clubs should be prepared to develop more open, flexible offers in the area of non-competitive leisure sports. They further state that the current lack of such offers – due to the performance orientation of most sports clubs – constitutes a significant barrier for migrant women and girls who tend to fall back on open, low-threshold activities run by sports initiatives or on commercial offers (e.g. in fitness centres). Open groups are more accessible for people with different levels of sporting experience and do not encompass any obligation to participate nor any expectations or even pressure with regard to performance.

However, focus group participants also voiced the opinion that competition and tournaments can very well be attractive for women and girls and that a “real” competition can have a very motivating effect. The crucial point is – again – to identify the type of migrant women and girls a specific offer is supposed to reach. It seems advisable to provide different types of sporting activities, competitive as well as non-competitive ones, in order to reach different target groups.

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# Recommendations: attitudes and behaviours

**W**hich attitudes and behaviour patterns are significant for instructors, coaches or supervisors who are supposed to work with migrant women and girls? Some recommendations follow.

## Awareness of the significance of one's role

Sports coaches or instructors must be well aware of the significance of their role. They are key to the success of the offer. If they are unable to motivate participants, to define ground rules or to understand the difficulties and special needs of a particular group of girls, the sports offer is doomed to fail.

## Support and appreciation for women and girls

The coaches' or instructors' fundamental attitude towards the female migrants should be characterized by a willingness to provide support and appreciation. It is of great significance to motivate women and girls to play sports, particularly if they are beginners and/or lack self-confidence. Their coaches' or instructors' appreciation can motivate them and help them to develop their own sporting goals or to engage as a volunteer in the club.

## Understanding and practicing non-verbal communication

Newly arrived migrant women and girls may be shy, but they want to be heard. It is important to communicate non-verbally as well, e.g. via gestures, such as smiles, transmitting the pleasure of spending time together. Coaches and instructors should be able to read participants' behaviour in order to understand those who might have difficulties in expressing themselves verbally.

## Inclusiveness and open-mindedness, reflecting on prejudices

Coaches and instructors have to ensure that they are treating everyone in a welcoming way and accept everyone as a part of their team. This includes questioning one's own prejudices and stereotypes on a regular basis.

## Showing enthusiasm

It is crucial to show enthusiasm, because it is contagious. The tone of voice matters: It is not only what is said, but the way it is said. Body language is very important and can convey a lot that is not being expressed verbally.

## Being flexible and willing to adapt

Coaches and instructors should be flexible and prepared to adapt strategies, approaches and concepts continually. What works with one person might not work with another.

## Being patient

It is crucial to have patience. It might take a while to reach women and one must not be discouraged. It is key to maintain offers as consistently as possible over a long time. Even if only a few women or girls take notice in the beginning, one should not be discouraged. When it comes to working with migrant women or girls, success cannot be quantified in numbers.

## Being understanding without justifying unacceptable behaviour

Paternalistic attitudes (as in: "you poor migrant") must be avoided. All people are different and problematic attitudes or unacceptable forms of behaviour on the part of migrants should not be justified just because they are migrants. At the same time, coaches or instructors should make an effort to understand their specific difficulties and state of mind and to avoid judging them wrongly or too harshly.

## Advocacy

It is crucial to support migrant women and girls beyond the pitch and to act on their behalf. Coaches and instructors should advocate for women's physical and mental health. In view of the existing cultural, religious, social and financial barriers, they need to be prepared to negotiate with the social services and with participants' parents or husbands, e.g. to convince parents to support their children's sporting goals.

## Learning from others

Before launching a new project aimed at migrant or refugee women, it is crucial to study the experiences made by others working in the same field.



## Concluding remarks

All women and girls have the right to equal participation in sports, regardless of their origin. The present focus group research has revealed that as a matter of fact, it is (often) a number of barriers that keep migrant women and girls from exercising this right. Such barriers exist on various levels: within the structures of organized sports as well as within the structures of the migrants' families of origin and the larger context of the host society. An intersectional perspective shows that different forms of discrimination tend to concur and reinforce each other (Crenshaw 1989). Consequently, they must be understood and tackled as a series of factors mutually affecting each other.

This intersectional perspective means a challenge for organized sports – a challenge yet to recognize. As a consequence of the arrival of an increased number of refugees beginning in 2015/2016, for instance, clubs, associations and initiatives in several European countries developed a number of sporting activities for this target group. Women

and girls were hardly reached. What is more, they were not even perceived as a specific target group. “Sporting activities for refugees” meant sporting activities for (young) male refugees. Meanwhile, a few things have changed: Some of the sports projects for refugees are now attempting to adapt to the special target group of women and girls and specific projects have been initiated. Yet, a major imbalance remains.

In order to counter this, to eliminate barriers and to improve the participation of migrant women and girls in sports, the present report presents a number of strategies that have been applied successfully in different countries. These strategies are meant to serve as recommendations for sports clubs, associations and initiatives, migrant organizations, youth clubs etc. For it is only if mainstream sports structures open up to become more female and more diverse, that the right to equal participation can become a reality.



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### Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

*The focus groups took place between April and June 2019.*

*FGD Austria:* 7 participants from sports clubs, NGOs, migrant organizations and a local municipality (2 male, 5 female)

*FGD Finland:* 9 participants from sports clubs, NGOs, migrant organizations and a coaching association (5 male, 4 female)

*FGD Germany:* 5 participants from sports clubs, NGOs and a sports association (1 male, 4 female)

*FGD Hungary:* 8 participants from sports clubs, NGOs, migrant organizations and schools (3 male, 5 female)

*FGD Italy:* 5 participants from sports clubs and NGOs (1 male, 4 female)

*FGD Ireland:* 11 participants from sports clubs, NGOs and migrant organizations (7 male, 4 female)

*FGD Portugal:* 9 participants from sports clubs, NGOs, migrant organizations, municipalities and the football players' union (3 male, 6 female)



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