

EGPiS2 - Encouraging Girls' Participation in Sports 2

Encouraging Girls' Participation in Sports

Report: research on Social Factors

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Memoriam and Dedication

This project, its results, outcomes and potential are dedicated to the memory of our wonderful colleague, Sture Hermansson, who passed away in 2018. Sture was an inspirational figure, who thrived on learning and helping others learn. Sture's most special gift to the profession was his light-hearted and joyful approach to life and work.

He had a positive intensity and infectious enthusiasm for his work. Those of us who had the pleasure to work with Sture will always have that experience with us. We will pass on the values and commitment we learned from him to those we work with and hopefully we will be able to do it with Sture's humor and joy.



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INTRODUCTION

The project *Encouraging girls' participation in sports - 2, EGPiS2*, was born in the wake of the success of the homonymous previous project EGPiS, financed by the European Commission in the framework of ERASMUS+ Programme.

EGPiS2 aims to deal in-depth with some crucial aspects concerning the theme of girls' and young women's participation in sports, aspects that were brought to light from the first project.

The importance of gender equality thematic is largely recognized by European institutions, so much that it's considered one of the fundamental principles of the European Union, and it's described as "basic principle of democracy and respect for humankind" (Communication from the Commission "Incorporating equal opportunities for women and men into all community policies and activities", 1996).

Coherently with this general target, gender equality has been considered as key topic for EU policy in the field of sports, as mentioned in the European Strategy for equality between women and men (2010-2015, p.32), which states: "*promoting non-discriminatory gender roles in all areas of life such as education, career choices, employment and sport is [...] an essential contribution towards gender equality.*"

But Europe's reality is, unfortunately, very far from this target if we take into account the small number of European societies that truly recognize gender equality in sports as a priority, and consequently the small number of states which put into practice actions and strategies which aim to fill in this gap.

When it comes to the participation of young girls and women in sports, the problem is further worsened because in the whole of Europe we can observe a certain difficulty concerning involvement in sports in between 11 and 16 years of age, for both boys and girls, with a higher percentage of girls not getting involved.

The EGPiS project aimed to find out which are the factors that would support the development of sporting practices with the specific targets of:

- developing and testing new methods based on the active participation of girls, non-competitive approaches, team spirit, creativity and fun;
- creating methods and educative paths in order to enhance active participation of girls in designing new sport dynamics together with the teachers and sport professionals, including all types of games, music-based activities, sports combination, adaptation of rules, etc.

Research has been developed, involving both schools and organizations that are involved with sports for girls and young women in a non-formal setting. From that research, from the work concerning the realization of outputs and from the experimental phase, have emerged further targets to work upon, which is what EGPiS2 intends to focus on. Specifically:

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a) some aspects concerning the **EGPIS methodology** which was defined in with the first project. The importance emerged to work in-depth on elements tied to how the sports practice should have been structured, elements such as: the role of joint sports activities for girls and boys; the differentiation between 'leisure' time activities that are school-based and the ones that are not; how to retain participation of girls in sport.

b) concerning 'social factors' that influence sporting practices for young women and girls, the emerged aspects concern:

- how to act at the level of **environmental and social factors** like family, peer groups, schools, sport clubs and other groups girls belong to, in order to develop participation of girls and young women to sport activities;
- the necessity to intersect the issue of participation of girls in sports activities with **intercultural dialogue**, as a crucial aspect in European societies that become more and more intercultural and keep on evolving in that direction.

c) a further aspect concerns the necessity of introducing these themes in the **training of trainers and coaches**, both in order to raise the awareness of these operators and to offer them precise methodologies to intervene.

d) **a last aspect concerns the level of Policies**, in terms of exploring useful practices to urge local institutions to come up with ways and programs for the development of sports opportunities for girls and on equal opportunities in sport. The present study is an attempt to address these issues.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. DEEPENING PREVIOUS RESEARCH

1.1.1. THE ROLE OF COEDUCATIONAL SPORT ACTIVITIES

The significance of Joint Sport activities for young people exceeds at large the range of benefits and impact that occur from the engagement in single sex team sports. However, this notion is not highlighted adequately. Cohen et al., (2014) mention that while there are many benefits of participation in team sports -such as fitness, bonding, structure, and social development- few researchers have examined the impact and benefits of coeducational (coed) sports and quote Messner (2002, p.166 as cited in Cohen et al., 2014, p. 221) who claims that participation in coed physical activities could act as a means for *"leveling the playing field and simultaneously changing the rules of the game to make the world more just, equitable, and healthy for all"* (p. 166).

As already implied by Messner (2002), the potential positive effects of coed sport activities concern both boys and girls. Colgate (1999) stresses out that they can provide equal opportunities for participation and allow girls and boys to socially interact while Hills & Croston (2012) suggest that the framework of 'undoing gender' in Sports can help to destabilise norms that serve to limit boys' and girls' willingness and freedom to engage in activities and behaviours that challenge conventional formulations of masculinity and femininity. This is maybe the reason why McDowell & Schaffner (2011) proposed that it is imperative for men to proactively remove gender bias in sport in an effort to promote equality and the Women's Sports Foundation suggests that: *"Coeducational sport competition should be encouraged at all levels where there are rules that require equal numbers of females and males on both teams and also rules that maximize fair competition between the sexes"* (WSF, 2012, p. 2)

CHALLENGES

Despite the potential crucial role of coed sports mentioned above, this does not mean that its positive effects simply occur in coeducational settings. On the contrary, researchers mention that females in coed physical education (PE) are at risk for negative social consequences such as harassment, name calling and exclusion from activities and this, according to Beasley (2012), is the reason why they often report lower levels of enjoyment and satisfaction in coed physical education. Beasley (2012, pp. 36-37) summarizes the main challenges that coed physical education faces as follows:

- **Participation and Enjoyment:** One factor that contributes to lower levels of effort and enjoyment and lack of participation is a curriculum that consists mainly of stereotyped activities and a coed physical education context which often reinforces a gender hierarchy where high-skilled males are valued and respected (Rich & Brown, 2002 as cited in Beasley, 2012).

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- Awareness of Male Observation: Physical education often requires students to use their bodies in front of others to demonstrate their knowledge and skill. If females feel that their abilities, bodies, or skills are being scrutinized, they may be less inclined to participate.
- Perceptions of Ability: Females consider themselves to be less skilled in coed physical education compared with males and report lower self-perceptions of ability and competence (Lee, 2009 as cited in Beasley, 2012). Students -both male and female- tend to avoid participating in activities in which they do not feel competent and if females perceive themselves as less competent than males in the class, their engagement will be negatively affected.
- Student - Teacher interaction: In general, females in coed physical education receive less feedback and have fewer interactions than males. Additionally, teachers may reinforce traditional gender expectations for males and females and have lower expectations for females in their coed classes by using common phrases such as “girls push-ups” and “throwing like a girl” (Constantinou et al., 2009 as cited in Beasley, 2012).

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN COED PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Hils & Croston (2012) suggest that developing workable mixed gender Physical Education requires an intervention ‘in the existing culture of PE’ through the implementation of strategies for enhancing girls’ PE experiences such as: increased choice, curricular diversity, disrupting gender exclusive practices, challenging stereotypes, providing opportunities for students to reflect on gender, sport and embodiment and raising teachers’ awareness of gendered discourses and practices. As far as the teachers are concerned Beasley (2012, p. 37) believes that teachers have the power to promote Gender Equity in coed PE by:

- Offering unique alternatives to traditional gender-stereotyped activities
- Modifying equipment, activity structure, and rules to maximize student participation
- Incorporating a variety of cooperative activities into the curriculum
- Structuring competitive activities in such a way that all students have an equal opportunity for success
- Focusing on students' personal improvement instead of social comparison and
- Demonstrating an awareness of personal bias and the hidden curriculum

1.1.2. DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN SCHOOL-BASED AND OUT OF SCHOOL ‘LEISURE’ TIME ACTIVITIES

Participation in extracurricular activities is strongly associated with several positive academic, social and behavioural effects. This includes increased academic achievements and mental wellness as well as less smoking. These positive results may be due to activities providing teenagers with opportunities to explore their identity, develop initiative, learn to self-regulate emotions, develop positive peer relationships and acquire social skills (Guèvremont et al., 2014). Thus, the importance of promoting active lifestyles from a young age is widely recognized, not only because of its

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contribution to the restriction of the continuing increases in overweight and obesity in children and adolescents (Gidlow et al., 2008) but also because of its overall contribution in the cognitive development of children and adolescents, especially among those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Motos, 2016).

One aspect of extracurricular participation that has received little attention in the literature is the context (i.e. whether the activity occurs in the school environment or elsewhere in the community after school). Most studies have focused either on school based extracurricular activities or have combined several activities into one overall level of participation but according to Guèvremont et al., (2014, pp.317-318) it is possible that in-school and non-school settings have different consequences for adolescents.

In-school activities are generally promoted by the school as a means of increasing school-spirit and attachment, whereas out-of-school (community based) activities may provide youth with additional opportunities for development, including involvement with different peer groups. Additionally, in-school activities are often free or low-cost and usually do not require additional transportation, whereas out-of-school activities frequently incur costs and usually do require transportation. These factors may influence which students are able to participate, in particular for lower-income families who may not be able to afford participation in (or provide transportation to) out-of-school activities (ibid).

After-school activities have become an area in which social inequalities are reproduced, whereby a family's socioeconomic capital features as one of the main factors in the lack of equal opportunities to access these activities (Lauer et al., 2004). Given the importance of this issue and the fact that school takes up approximately 40% of pupils' waking time (Fox, 2004) schools provide a unique opportunity and an ideal "micro-environment" for multi-faceted interventions to help children and adolescents accumulate sufficient physical activity within the school day to benefit their health. Better targeted, more effective physical activity promotion in schools aims to instil positive health behaviours early on and maintain them into adolescence. If successful, this could have important public health consequences in terms of reducing the risks of physical inactivity and associated morbidities into adulthood (ibid). Numerous interventions have been evaluated, mostly within primary schools. The weight of evidence indicates that multicomponent interventions that consider the school environment and related policy hold most promise for improving on the short-term increases in physical activity often reported (Gidlow et al., 2008, pp. 1411-1412).

1.1.3. WAYS TO RETAIN GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN SPORT ACTIVITIES

According to Dumith et al., (2011) the decline in physical activity during early adolescence is greater among girls than boys and begins earlier in girls than boys. James (1998) suggests that girls who resist the trend to drop out of sport, and continue to participate, are more likely to remain active later in their lives. Given the benefits of physical activity, the exploration of strategies and

interventions which could prove effective on retaining girls in sports and enhancing their rates of participation in physical activities is crucial.

Biddle et al., (2014) conducted a meta-analysis in order to address this challenge. More specifically, their purpose was to quantify the effect of physical activity interventions for pre-adolescent girls by including 22 previous intervention studies that provided results for girls separately. Their main findings are as follows (ibid, pp. 128-129):

- There was support for educational interventions and for interventions that used multiple components (e.g. education plus environmental change). Education, maybe more effective when other elements are in place. For example, educating children about the benefits of walking to school can only be helpful if the local environment near the school is relatively traffic-free, or there are attractive and safe routes to walk to school. However, it will remain a challenge to achieve some changes to the environment in the short term due to logistical or financial difficulties. This means that behaviour change sometimes must take place without positive changes to the environment, and it is here that further work is needed.
- There were larger effects for interventions that focused on diet as well as physical activity. While there is not always agreement on whether single or multiple health behaviours should be targeted, it could be argued that for this age group an approach reaching across health behaviours could help focus the children on mutually beneficial behaviours and provide a stronger focus on behaviour change. Single behaviours may get lost when competing with other behaviours and influences across the day.
- Interventions were more effective when the intervention was quite short. This may be accounted for by the motivation and interest being kept higher for this younger population. Children may get bored with longer interventions or the intensity of the intervention may be unsustainable over longer periods. But a challenge here is to maintain initial changes in behaviour.
- Stronger effects were noted for studies that not only were of higher quality but also were atheoretical. Some interventions may be simply environmental changes or provision of extra physical activity opportunities - factors that may lead to behaviour change without reference to theory.
- There is a higher effect size for interventions that targeted just girls rather than boys and girls together. While one might expect such a finding for adolescent girls, due to self-presentation issues such as body image, it appears to be also the case for younger girls.
- The interventions reviewed used different methods to assess physical activity. While most studies had some objective assessment, the effect size for interventions using both objective and self-report methods was higher.

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Overall, Biddle et al., (2015) concluded that greater effectiveness appears to result from interventions that are multicomponent, theory based, school based, with girls only or with younger adolescent girls, and target both physical activity and sedentary behaviour. Moreover, Casey et al., (2009, p. 891) came to the conclusion that concerning participation of adolescent girls in sports practitioners, policy makers, and physical education teachers need to focus on developmentally appropriate activities that are fun, providing opportunities for single sex classes, and generating cultural changes that encourage non-competitive and self-referencing activities.

Adolescents need to be encouraged to resist making comparisons between themselves and the efforts and achievements of their peers, and a broad range of physical activities need to be emphasized to ensure a balance between competitive and self-referencing activities (Garrett & Wrench, 2005 as cited in Casey et al., 2009, p. 891). Finally, adolescent girls should be included in the decision-making processes.



1.2. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS

Athletic activity, whether involving children in organized sports, physical education in school or free play, positively affects their physical and mental health. Koskeridou (2010) mentions that several researches (Bruner, 1985; Gallahue, 1987; Piaget, 1988) conclude that children participation in sports is a key factor not only for their physical development but also for the completion of their cognitive and socio-emotional characteristics. Moreover, according to Piaget (1972) participation in physical activity contributes to the multi-faceted development of children who evolve through play and exercise.

The Ecological Model defines several factors associated with a child's physical activity levels. These factors include individual characteristics (e.g. gender); the school and home environment (e.g. parent activity patterns); community & industry influence (e.g. availability of safe places to be active); and societal norms or values (Huberty et al., 2012).

Relevant literature highlights indications that social support from important others affects the levels of physical activity of girls and young adolescents, however this relationship is complex and needs further investigation. For this reason, the basic parameters that appear to interfere with girls' physical activity will be analysed in the following sections. More specifically, we will attempt to examine:

- The role of the family as a determinant of the participation of girls in sports
- The role of peers
- The role of school and teachers
- The importance of participating in sports clubs

In order to investigate the above-mentioned parameters, the main research results of relevant studies will be presented in a coherent and concise way based on a systematic review of the recent literature.

1.2.1. THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY

The role of the family in actively involving children and adolescents in physical activity seems to be the subject of a variety of studies in an international level. While most of the researches on family relationships and children participation in physical activities is not focused on girls, in recent years there has been a shift in the interest of researchers and the involvement of girls and young women is highlighted.

Several studies that examine the role of social support by important others lead to the conclusion that *“social support from parents serves as one of the primary influences of youth physical activity-related behaviors. Family support has also been consistently reported correlation of physical activity*

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in adolescents” (Kohl and Hobbs 1998; Kercood et al., 2001). According to Goldsheider et al., (1993), adolescents live in most cases for eighteen years in close relationship with their parents and this period seems to have a catalytic effect on the adoption of health-related behaviors of children (Hopper et al., 1996).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Sciences (2000) reports that parents may play a catalytic role in changing the sedentary lifestyle of their children by acting either as models or supporters. Duncan et al., (2005) suggest that active parents tend to have more active children and they are expected to be more involved in their child's physical activities. In the same line Power & Woolger (1994) argue that the positive attitude of parents is directly related both to the participation of children in school and extra-curricular physical activities and to the interest and pleasure that children derive from them.

Analysing social support, Cengiz (2014) argues that social support was accepted as a functional characteristic related to the interaction between a parent and his/her children. Social support seems to play an important role in participating, discussing, and providing activity-related opportunities. More specifically, according to Beets, Cardinal and Alderman (2010), there are four types of parental social support related to participation in sport, which fall under the following two mechanisms: a. tangible and b. intangible social support. Tangible social support includes purchasing equipment, payment of fees and transportation -and conditional- doing activity with and watching/supervision. Intangible social support is divided into two categories: motivational-encouragement and praise and informational- discussing benefits of sports. Most of the studies demonstrated positive associations among selected measures of parental tangible and intangible social support and youth activity.

Trost & Loprinzi (2011) mention that studies investigating the effect of the family on the physical activity of children led to the conclusion that parental support was consistently positively and significantly associated with child activity. With respect to the association between parents' and children' physical activity, there was little evidence occurred. Although the evidence linking parenting style and family cohesion with child physical activity was non supportive, very few studies have examined these relationships to draw firm conclusions.

Shaw & Shaw (2014) suggest that *“the family is an important source of social support for youth. Support might take a variety of forms: informational and emotional (e.g. providing information, viewing practices and discussing physical activity) and instrumental/tangible aid (e.g. offering to take part in the activity with the child, and assisting with fees, equipment and transportation). Studies have shown that parents may influence their child's physical activity both directly and indirectly. Mechanisms hypothesised to account for consistencies in family activity include genetics and environmental variables (e.g. modelling shared activities and social support)”*.

Interesting findings also arise from the studies that examine the factors that influence active engagement in sports and utilise the social learning theory as interpretative framework. Greendorfer & Lewko (2013) suggest that the role of the important others, especially the family,

seems to have a positive impact on adults' and athletes' participation in sport, but this does not seem to be the case concerning the active involvement of children. In particular, the results of this study show that the traditional comparison of the role of the family, peers and teachers does not apply to girls, while the data for boys are slightly differentiated. For this reason, the researchers propose the investigation of the role played by family members individually, concluding that the influence exercised by the father is more important for the participation of children in sports (ibid).

Literature review of researches investigating the influence of important others on girls and adolescents' physical activity reveals that family influence plays a catalytic role. Dowda et al., (2007) suggest that *"Physical Activity behavior of youth was associated with parental support especially for girls"*. Researchers conclude that *"changes in girls' physical activity levels were significantly correlated with changes in perceived family support, independent of race, perceived behavioral control, and self-efficacy for Physical Activity. Although total Metabolic Equivalent (METs) or energy expenditure decreased over time, increased parent support was found to be positively associated with an increase in overall METs. The findings showed that the more supportive a family was perceived to be, the more active girls were found over time."*

Positive correlations between girls' participation in sport and parental support occurred in various cases. A variety of studies show that *parental support was the highest in predicting team sport involvement among girls* (Saunders et al., 2004; Duncan et al., 2005; Hoefler et al., 2001). Moreover Hoefler et al., (2001) suggest that *among adolescents families' providing transportation to places where they could be active contributed to a significant increase particularly in girls' total Physical Activity level and both genders' participation in sports/activity classes* and Kientzler (1999) mentions that parents who participated in regular physical activity were far more likely to have daughters who also did so.

Finally, in one of the very few studies exploring relationships between parents' and adolescents' PA in different racial or ethnic groups, McGuire et al., (2002) it was mentioned that parents reported encouragement was positively related to girls' Physical Activity.

1.2.2. THE ROLE OF PEERS

During young adolescence, parents may have a greater role in providing specific types of social support that influences physical activity behavior. On the contrary, various studies showed that peer support has a greater influence as children grow older (Jackson, Crawford, Campbell, and Salmon, 2008; Prochaska, Rodgers, and Sallis, 2002). Peer support may serve a number of different functions (e.g., social integration in PA, emotional support, informational support, tangible aid, reassurance of worth), which may help support a youth's Physical Activity efficacy beliefs and assist in overcoming perceived barriers to Physical Activity participation (Duncan et al., 2015).

According to the findings of various researches, friends' physical activity is consistently related to youth physical activity (Beets et al., 2006; Voorhees et al., 2009). For example, Dunton et al., (2007)

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and Rusby et al., (2014) found that higher levels of exercise were reported with friends, outdoors, and at school while Maturo et al., (2013) also reached similar conclusions reporting that children's physical activity was positively associated with encouragement from friends, friends' own physical activity, and engagement with friends in physical activity.

In the same line Salvy De La Haye et al., (2012) suggest that relationships with peers are an important precursor to physical activity during childhood and adolescence. Adolescents who report a greater presence of peers in their lives also report stronger engagement in physical activities, while lonely children, who are often friendless and isolated from their peers, report the least amount of physical activity. Furthermore, the presence of peers has been found to increase the variety of physically active alternatives, subsequently increasing the amount of physical activity in which youth participate.

Observational studies (Salvy et al., 2012; Keresztes et al., 2008; Duncan et al., 2007) provide some additional evidence that peers and friends are important models of physical activity during childhood and adolescence. For instance, studies have shown that adolescents' physical activity is correlated with the physical activity of their friends. Furthermore, de la Haye et al., (2011) suggest that friends engage in similar levels of physical activity due to socialization and modelling processes, as well as social selection processes (whereby two adolescents similar to each other in physical activity level select each other as friends).

The review of relevant literature suggests that studies which examine the importance of social support by friends and relatives and focus on girls and teenagers are limited. Therefore, caution will be needed in drawing conclusions. However, based on the available data, social support from friends and peers is positively correlated with girls' involvement in physical activities (Heitzler, et al., 2006; Fitzgerald, et al., 2012).

Flintoff and Scratton (2001) mentioned that participation for many female children was based on the participation of a same-sex friend or a mother. Moreover, for many adolescent girls, participating in PA with friends' present was critical to their participation, and thus the idea of being physically active without them was viewed as intimidating, and had the potential to result in a lack of PA participation. Another research revealed that girls' weekend and afterschool moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) level increased as the number of physically active friends they had increased (Sheedy, 2015).

According to Beets, Pitetti, and Forlwa (2007) peer support in rural adolescent girls was related to increased self-efficacy for overcoming barriers and resisting competing activities. The findings suggest that having peers that promote PA involvement and the perception that one's peers are open to PA are linked with efficacious beliefs of one's ability to overcome potential barriers (i.e. feeling tired, poor weather conditions) when participating in physical activities.

Voorhees et al., (2005) research leads in similar conclusions since it suggests that adolescent girls who had more physically active friends reported higher activity levels.

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Most activity-related peer social network items (i.e. peer involvement in doing activity, participating in a class or on a sports team with a friend, having a friend ask you to be active, and asking the friend to be active with you) were positively associated with increased activity among adolescent girls. Furthermore, Springer et al., (2006) found that both family and friend social support indicators (encouragement and PA participation) were associated with moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA) among adolescent girls.

However, Duncan et al., (2015) point out that intra-group variations arise from different ethnic groups. More specifically, in a research that investigated the correlations of factors influencing African American, Latino, and white girls physical activity, it is shown that peer influence is more important for African American girls and this differentiation must be taken into consideration when designing interventions enhancing girls' physical activity of girls also for other ethnic groups.

Finally, Macdonald-Wallis et al., (2012), suggest that correlations between peers' influence and physical activity are stronger among boys. This finding may be explained by the higher level of enrolment of boys in organized sports clubs and thus greater opportunity for co-participation in physical activity with friends, or the propensity for boys to foster friendships through common sporting interests and local neighbourhood physical activity, whereas girls may be more likely to make friends through non-sport related activities.

1.2.3. THE ROLE OF SCHOOL

As already mentioned, support from important others (parents, peers and friends) is an important prognostic factor for the participation of girls and young adolescents in sport activities. Researches that examine the role of school and physical education teachers in children's participation in sports underline the importance of the school environment both for encouraging children's participation and for establishing long-term health-promoting behaviors.

From an Ecological Model perspective schools are a key setting to promote Physical Activity, especially considering that children spend as much as 60-70% of their waking hours at school. Previous qualitative researches with school stakeholders identified the school as a key setting for improving health behaviors (Huberty et al., 2012). According to Bailey (2006) for many children, school is the main environment for being physically active, through either Physical Education school programs or after-school activities. There is evidence that for a growing number of children, school provides the main opportunity for regular, structured physical activity as a combination of economic pressures and parental concerns for safety means that fewer children are able to play games in non-school settings.

School-based Physical Education offers a regulated opportunity for usually qualified, accountable teachers to introduce physical activities and lifestyle skills and knowledge in a structured way to all children, within a safe and supportive environment. From this perspective various surveys examining the importance of programs and interventions that promote girls' participation in sports

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emphasize the importance of understanding all the factors and the obstacles related to the participation or not of the target group in order to adopt appropriate strategies.

Coakley and White (1992) claim that gender stereotyping has serious negative effects on girls' participation. Furthermore, Ennis (1996) suggests that schools affect boys and girls differently through physical education (PE) classes. Thus, more girls than boys are believed to have negative physical education experiences that lower their interest and involvement in subsequent leisure time physical activity. In the same line Allender et al., (2006) support that negative experiences during school physical activity (PE classes) were the strongest factor discouraging participation in teenage girls. Tight, ill-fitting Physical Education uniforms were major impediments to girls participating in school sport. These concerns over image and relationships with peers led to an increased interest in non-active leisure.

Constantinou et al., (2006) suggest that most girls, however, still feel alienated from "male" subjects. For the most part, career aspirations are still highly gendered and girls still find themselves in classroom environments where boys dominate attention and monopolize teachers' time. Stereotypical gender-role expectations, attitudes, and behaviors among both teachers and students appear to be more intense in a coeducational PE setting. In the past, many teachers used organizational patterns and teaching strategies that sent condescending messages that might have limited girls' potential for success. As girls were bombarded with stereotypic expectations, girls became marginalized and alienated in PE classes.

In relation to the role of PE teachers Flintoff & Scraton (2011) highlight that teachers who can provide safe and supportive environments, who recognize the often different aspirations and motivations amongst their pupils, and who listen to their pupils, are more likely to be successful than those who subscribe to hierarchical, discipline-based relationships and traditional curricula and pedagogies. Nagasawa (2013) claims that in various researches adolescent girls has identified coaches and physical education teachers as sources of support and encouragement adding that adolescent girls in Robbins' (2008) research named their physical education teachers or coaches rather than family members as their most important sources of support.

1.2.4. THE ROLE OF SPORTS CLUBS

In order to complete the literature review on the factors affecting girls' physical activity it is necessary to analyse the role of organized sports stakeholders such as sports clubs.

Eime et al. (2013, pp. 1-2), mentions that sports clubs provide increased opportunities for social interaction either through structured (organized and competitive) or through unstructured (social) participation in sports and may act as social catalysts by increasing participation rates in sports. However, the results of the survey revealed that there is a relation between participation in sport clubs, socio-economic status (SES), access to facilities, and family/peer support, for female adolescents. Higher levels of participation were associated with monolingual Australian-born

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families, with two parents, at least one of whom was well-educated, with both parents employed, and high levels of parental assistance, engagement and support. Participation in sports clubs among both younger and older adolescent girls was significantly positively related to the SES of both their neighbourhoods and their households, particularly in metropolitan areas. These associations were most strongly mediated by family support and by access to facilities (ibid).

The results of a previous survey showed that girls' participation in sports clubs together with friends is a basic form of social interaction (Eime et al., 2008). The above finding, combined with the role of peer-to-peer social support in girls' participation in physical activity, is an important factor that should be taken into account when designing appropriate strategies and interventions.

Although there has been an increasing trend in girls' participation in organized sport over recent years, research results show that boys' participation rates are still higher than girls while boys' dropout rates are lower (Eiðsdóttir et al., 2008). In addition, the research conducted by Kjønniksen et al. (2009) outlined that boys have higher rates of participation in organized sport programs compared to girls. However, between 13 and 16 there is a decrease in participation for both sexes. Respectively, despite the increasing tendencies of participation in organized sport programs recorded in a survey conducted in Australia, most sports participants did not meet the recommended levels of physical activity. Among the research results, maybe the most alarming is that there is a decreased participation in levels of physical activity during adolescence and especially for girls (Telford et al., 2014).

According to Vilhjalmsson & Krostjansdóttir, (2003 p.p. 364-365), several explanations concerning the influence of organized sport on gender differences in physical activity can be proposed. According to the enrolment hypothesis, sex differences observed in physical activities during leisure time may be explained by the lower rates of girls' enrolment in organized sports activities. This may have an impact on the way sporting activities are organized, resulting to the selection of programs that interest boys more, in which the infrastructure is better and more accessible, and offer more opportunities for boys to compete.

Furthermore, according to the withdrawal hypothesis, girls show higher dropout rates because negative experiences may occur more often from their participation in sports programs (e.g. unjustified requirements, fewer challenges or competition opportunities, less trained coaches and negative coaching experiences). Finally, based on a third hypothesis, the activity differential hypothesis, boys and girls who are enrolled in organized clubs or programs are not equally active, resulting in more frequent and / or vigorous participation by boys. Such differences may reflect higher training skills, expectations and demands of boys' coaches, or, again, greater training and competition opportunities for boys in terms of training hours, training equipment, tournaments or championships, etc.



1.3. SPORT AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

According to an institute for European cultural comparison and research, collaborating with the Council of Europe, intercultural dialogue is “*a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different cultural backgrounds. Among its aims are: to develop a deeper understanding of diverse world views and practices; to increase participation (or the freedom to make choices); to foster equality; and to enhance creative processes.*” (EDCULT 2008, as cited in Gieß-Stüber, 2010).

Gieß-Stüber (2010) suggests that this definition of intercultural dialogue could be compatible with the character of sport only under conditions. For instance, competitive sport does not promote intercultural dialogue because it does not support the goal of developing a “deeper understanding of diverse world views and practices”. In the same line, Morela et al., (2013) mention that despite the belief that participation in sport teams can contribute to overcoming various social problems, such as social exclusion, discrimination, and stereotypes surrounding minority groups, this is not always the case.

However, while sport participation per se may not necessarily be linked to desired social integrative outcomes; features of the sport environment such as team processes may have such a potential. In fact, there is strong evidence that participation in sport activities offers opportunities for socialization and cooperation (Wuest & Lombardo, 1994) and could serve as a tool for promoting equal opportunities.

Gieß-Stüber (2010, pp. 25-26) suggests that sport, movement and games can be a particularly suitable field for intercultural dialogue and -having mentioned that educational work cannot be an alternative to political efforts aimed at overcoming social inequalities- she presents four didactic guiding principles serving this purpose. These principles result from a theoretical framework based upon the sociology of strangeness, identity theory, social psychology and social constructivist approaches (doing ethnicity, doing gender) and include:

1. *Experience of strangeness as a starting point for education*

The encounter with strangeness can be produced methodologically in the most varied ways: familiar movement forms and sport activities can be alienated, or new, unfamiliar movement forms, games, dancing styles and so on can be introduced into the lessons. Pupils realize that their own sport or body culture is just one of many. Commonalities and transcultural elements can be made visible as well as intracultural differences, to which, for example, the different movement cultures of girls and boys belong.

2. *Team tasks as challenges*

Within the context of tasks that need to be solved creatively in teams, conflict-managing skills can be promoted – for example, the ability to see things from another perspective and empathy. Sport

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games can be developed and varied. In this way, rules can be seen, within a consultation process, to be negotiable and “shapeable” on the one hand, and on the other hand, as a prerequisite for co-operation.

3. Experience of recognition and belonging

The experience of recognition and belonging is closely related to the promotion of identity. In sport we communicate with children and young people through verbal and non-verbal messages and evaluations on different levels: emotional, cognitive and social. The goal of a critical analysis with identifications and affiliations can be demonstratively followed in sport.

4. Reflection on the experience of strangeness

Intercultural, educational sport teaching aims to develop competences (intercultural skills) which can also be used outside the methodologically generated situations. Reflecting on learning processes and experiences therefore plays an important role (ibid, pp. 25-26).

Moreover, according to Axmann (2010, p. 45), in order to invite and keep women from different ethnic groups in sport activities, there is a need for female as well as male trainers who care about people from different backgrounds and who have time for the process of welcoming people, getting to know each other, of building bridges and trust, who are capable of creating an atmosphere of authenticity. Last but not least, the specific needs of this population should be taken into account while planning ‘integration through sports’ programs for them (lower fees for socially disadvantaged members; translation services and sufficient time to take sports courses; creating new points of access for non-native women, like combining sport courses with outside education classes, such as language courses etc.)

1.4. TRAINING OF TRAINERS AND COACHES

In a research conducted by Guagliano et al., (2014, p. 12) participant coaches reported that they were capable of altering their training sessions to increase girls' PA, if they felt they needed to and they were able to identify numerous strategies that could be employed in their training sessions to increase opportunities to be active, reduce inactivity, and improve their efficiency and management of training. Given the influence coaches have on their young athletes, according to Conroy & Coatsworth (2006, p.130) coach training is an ideal mode of intervention for two primary reasons. First, coaches are viewed as "experts" by young athletes, and this role can carry considerable influence (Bochner & Insko, 1966 as cited in Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006, p.130).

Within the context of sport, coaches typically have more direct interactions with kids than do other influential adults such as parents. Considering that every experienced or observed coaching behaviour is a "micro intervention," depending on the sport, training schedule, and length of season, young athletes may be exposed to anywhere between hundreds or tens of thousands of coaching micro-interventions. Training coaches to increase certain behaviours and decrease others can change the quality of the micro-interventions to which children are repeatedly exposed and may also enhance youth social development (ibid, p.130).

According to an EU Commission Report entitled 'Gender Equality in Sport Proposal for Strategic Actions 2014 – 2020' (2014, pp.23-24) all coaches in sport should be aware, and respectful of gender differences and the diversity of participants, aiming to create an active and challenging sports environment, which at the same time is safe and secure. They must learn that gender equality is not synonymous with sameness nor with establishing men, their lifestyle and conditions as the norm.

Biological differences between men and women cannot be used to deny female athletes' access to sport and to specific training regimes, which historically have been the case. Coaches should understand that gender is a culture-specific definition of femininity and masculinity and therefore varies in different countries, in time and space, leading to women and men living different lives and developing different values. The inclusion of gender equality in coach education and training is essential as coaches should develop and adopt different coaching styles to suit the individuals they are coaching, addressing their needs at a personal level. Both male and female coaches need to be aware of the gendered variety between men/boys and women/girls and amongst men and women. This may help increase the retention of girls in sport and address the drop off issue of girls taking part in sport after school.

Today coach education courses are mostly co-educational, and many women still feel marginalized in this male-dominated environment. Interviews with female coaches revealed 'flawed coach education which does little to facilitate women's personal and professional development' (Norman 2008, 451 as cited in EU Commission 2014). Women-only courses in team sports, which were very successful in Germany and Norway, for example, have the image in other countries of not being



good enough or not 'tough' enough. But they seem to offer women a fair chance of gaining coaching licenses and qualifications as well as of motivating them to pursue a career as coaches.

The responsibility for the curriculum and the organisation of educational pathways in coach education is organised at the national level. It is up to national bodies and national educational agencies to include possible civic competences needed for certain qualifications. In this respect attention should be given to gender topics in sport. National Qualification Frameworks with reference to the European Qualification Framework and quality assurance systems could function as a guidance and guarantee of gender equality for the education and training system of the sport and leisure sector (ibid, pp.23-24).

Based on the above mentioned issues, all national, European and international sport governing bodies could:

- Initiate and support research which identifies situations that promote and counteract equality and equal treatment in coaching and coach education. This should include gender specific requirements, conditions and characteristics for women and men as professional and voluntary coaches.
- Develop gender equality modules and educational materials that take into account the specific needs or requirements of female and male coaches and of coaching girls/women and boys/men
- Implement codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines to ensure that the coaching environment is free from discrimination or harassment.



1.5. POLICIES

In order to design and implement new, useful and effective policies towards the goal of exploring useful practices to urge local institutions modalities for the development of sports opportunities for girls and on equal opportunities in sports, we strongly believe that is necessary to further review the effectiveness of the interventions applied so far.

The present chapter is based on the results of a systematic review, conducted by Camacho-Minano et al., (2011) aiming to describe the available evidence from physical activity (PA) interventions that targeted girls aged 5–18 years and to determine their effectiveness and key characteristics of success. For the purposes of their study, the researchers reviewed a total of 29 articles, describing the evaluation of 21 interventions (ibid). Their basic findings are presented in summary below (Camacho-Minano et al., 2011, pp. 1044-1046):

- Most of the girls' PA interventions and nearly all effective studies were school based. The school has been identified as an ideal setting for the promotion of positive health behavior such as PA among youth (Kahn et al., 2002 as cited in Camacho-Minano et al., 2011) and also it is argued that schools should assume a leadership role in ensuring that young people engage in enough PA each day (Pate et al., 2006 as cited in Camacho-Minano et al., 2011). However, interventions carried out in the school setting should be gender-sensitive and address the specific problem of girls' physical inactivity.
- Making PE enjoyable for more girls is a high priority in effective interventions, by increasing choice and offering a wide range of non-competitive and innovative activities used as main strategies. Facilitating adequate MVPA during a PE lesson is also seen as crucial in the reviewed studies, in order to meet the recommended levels of PA.
- Adequate training periods that address gender disparities is crucial to meet the challenges that face physical educators in relation to girls' PA.
- The primary influence of peers, as youth move from childhood to adolescence, makes it necessary to focus on this social influence in activity promotion efforts targeted at girls, either through specific intervention strategies, such as peer tutoring or peer modelling, or with specific peer-based interventions.
- Theoretical models, which focus on the personal level, should be mixed with more 'choice-persuasive' environmental perspectives ranging from micro- to meso- to macro- scales. Ecological models of behaviour change provide a valuable approach to organize theory constructs from multiple theories into individual, interpersonal, organizational and community/environmental levels of influence.
- Targeting girls in pre-pubertal age (i.e. before they leave elementary school) may be one way to detain the age-related decline in PA already present as well as combating the further drop-off in PA as they develop into adolescence. Additionally, culturally appropriate PA interventions should be addressed. Culturally tailored interventions should acknowledge and be built on cultural beliefs and practices of these girls, integrate culturally appropriate activities and use

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formative research techniques to incorporate cultural relevant facilitators and minimize barriers to PA.

In the same line Pearson et al., (2015, p. 16) conducted a meta-analysis aiming to evaluate the effectiveness of relevant interventions. They concluded that greater effectiveness appears to result from interventions that are multicomponent, theory based, school based, with girls only or with younger adolescent girls, and target both physical activity and sedentary behaviour.



2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the present research was to study in depth the environmental and social factors, set by EGPiS2 project by adopting a holistic approach. In this context, a systematic review of recent literature in all participating countries has been conducted. In addition, an effort was made to map the current situation in each participating country based on the predetermined issues under investigation and to design the qualitative research plan (interviews and focus groups) in each country. Considering, however, that the utilization of quantitative research methods (in addition to contractual obligations arising from the project) would allow for more research data to be collected concerning the trends in relation to girls' participation in sports and to the phenomenon of their withdrawal from sports, we proceeded with the development of relevant research instruments (questionnaires). It should be noted at this point that the adoption of a mixed research methodology and the collection of both qualitative and quantitative research data aimed at producing useful and accurate deliverables for the needs of the project (e.g. EGPiS2 guide development, educational material etc.). Therefore, the present research report is an integral part of the project and it was designed to respond to its specific needs and not to generalize its conclusions to the wider population. In summary, the research aimed at producing an up-to-date and focusing on partner needs methodology for developing the above mentioned project deliverables. The research aims to investigate the following issues:

- **Deepening previous research:** deepening of the research already achieved in EGPiS_1, "Analysis of the Barriers That Keep girls from Participating in sports", with a focus on: the role of joint sports activities for girls and boys; differentiation between school-based and out of school, 'leisure' time activities and ways to retain participation of girls in sport.
- **Environmental and social factors:** how to act at the level of the family, peer groups, schools, sport clubs and other groups girls belong, to develop participation of girls and young women in sport activities
- **Sport and intercultural dialogue:** intersecting the issue of participation of girls in sports activities with the theme of intercultural dialogue
- **Training of trainers and coaches:** focus on training of trainers, to investigate if - and how - this aspect is present in the training of sports' trainers
- **Policies:** exploring useful practices to urge local institutions modalities for the development of sports opportunities for girls and on equal opportunities in sports

2.2. DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In order to address the issues mentioned above the research utilized a mixed methods approach. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from all nine participating countries with the

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use of three survey instruments (questionnaires, semi structured interviews & focus groups). Before the development of the research instruments an initial consultation phase took place with the participation of all partners in order to utilize their extensive experience in the field of girls' participation in sports. The results of the consultation were examined in relation to the results of the literature review and the following survey instruments were produced:

FOCUS GROUPS

Four Focus Groups guides were developed and four Focus Groups (with Policymakers, Girls, Parents and Trainers) were implemented in each participating country. Each focus group consisted of three to five participants.

Policymakers' focus groups addressed the following issues: ways of supporting the participation in sports practice of girls and young women, ways to operate with groups and people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds in order to grant full equal opportunities for young women and girls in sports and ways to raise awareness among local administrators and politicians on the importance of this issue.

Girls' focus groups addressed the following issues: daily habits related to exercise/sports and the role of social support from the important others (parents, friends and PE teachers/coaches)

Parents' focus groups addressed the following issues: their level of physical activity, ways of parental encouragement for girls' participation in sports, their perceptions of the importance of physical activity, the level of parental awareness about the benefits of physical activity.

Trainers/Coaches' focus groups addressed the following issues: gendered perceptions related to girls and sports, coaches' attitudes concerning coeducation in physical education, the level of coaches' training concerning equal gender participation in sports and gender issues in the workplace.

INTERVIEWS

Two interview guides were developed and three to five semi structured interviews were conducted with trainers/coaches and policymakers in each participating country.

Interviews with coaches and trainers aimed to cover the following issues: changes in children's physical activity from childhood to adolescence based on gender, girls' access to sports activities, issues of gender equality among professional trainers, level of training concerning gender equality in sports, level of awareness concerning intercultural dialogue through sports and policy suggestions.

Interviews with policy makers aimed to cover the following issues: initiatives focusing on girls' participation in sports and promoting intercultural dialogue through sports, gender equality issues

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among professional trainers and the role of training programs for trainers/coaches aiming to promote gender equality in sport.

QUESTIONNAIRES

For the purposes of the study, three (3) questionnaires were developed in order to collect data from parents, coaches/trainers and girls aged 11-16. The questionnaires were developed based on the literature review. They were translated in all eight (8) participating countries languages followed by a pilot testing procedure in all participating countries. The questionnaires, they were anonymous and distributed online or conducted face to face.

- The questionnaire designed for parents included questions concerning demographic characteristics, their level of physical activity, the support provided to their daughters concerning physical activity and the significance of physical activity in their lives.
- The questionnaire designed for coaches and trainers included questions concerning demographic characteristics, their perceptions on gender issues in relation to sports, their attitudes towards coeducation in Physical Education/Sports and their perspective concerning Physical Education professionals' level of training concerning equal gender participation in sports.
- The questionnaire designed for girls (11-16) included questions concerning demographic characteristics, daily habits in relation to exercise and sports, their level of participation in physical activities and sports at School and after School, the role of their family and friends and their attitudes concerning coeducational physical education.

SAMPLING METHOD

The research was based on a non-probability sampling methodology, not representative of the wider population. The collection of data took place at two different periods. The interviews and focus groups were conducted between 16/10/2018 and 30/11/2018.

The questionnaires were distributed online or face to face from 01/12/2018 to 15/01/2019. 707 coaches, 1029 parents and 2066 girls aged 11-16 years participated in the research. The tables below show their distribution per country.

Coaches participation per country

Country of Residence	Frequency	Percent (%)
Bulgaria	116	16.4
Cyprus	85	12.0
Czech Republic	23	3.3
Italy	98	13.9
Latvia	85	12.0
Portugal	43	6.1
Sweden	35	5.0
Turkey	110	15.6
United Kingdom	112	15.8
Total	707	100

Parents participation per country

Country of Residence	Frequency	Percent (%)
Bulgaria	104	10.1
Cyprus	29	2.8
Czech Republic	38	3.7
Italy	110	10.7
Latvia	221	21.5
Portugal	87	8.5
Sweden	93	9.0
Turkey	218	21.2
United Kingdom	129	12.5
Total	1029	100

Girls participation per country

Country of Residence	Frequency	Percent (%)
Bulgaria	112	5.4
Cyprus	45	2.2
Czech Republic	128	6.2
Italy	102	4.9
Latvia	313	15.2
Portugal	120	5.8
Sweden	70	3.4
Turkey	1064	51.5
United Kingdom	112	5.4
Total	2066	100

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DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

Quantitative data for this research was gathered using Qualtrics software and processed with the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS v.20). Statistical results comprise of descriptive statistics. A Thematic Analysis approach was used to handle qualitative data acquired through open-ended questions, which could not be quantified and included in quantitative analysis.

LIMITATIONS

The sample size of respondents in the questionnaires is not representative of the wider population, therefore generalization of quantitative findings is not sufficient. Moreover, due to Turkey's over-representation of girls within the qualitative sample, the data concerning girls was not analysed as a whole and data was processed and presented within each country. Attempted comparisons among countries should be interpreted with caution.



3. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The implementation of qualitative research in all participating countries included:

- Three to five in depth interviews with coaches and policy makers in each participating country
- Four focus groups in each participating country with: girls aged 11 to 16, parents, coaches and policy makers

3.1. INTERVIEWS

3.1.1. COACHES

Changes in children's physical activity from childhood to adolescence based on gender

Most of the participants argue that gender-based changes do occur during the transition from childhood to adolescence. Participants from Bulgaria consider the beginning of puberty to be a critical stage and report that they observe changes in team sport contexts, especially where girls have to co-exist with boys. Respective views are also reported by participants from the UK. They mention higher rates of adolescent girls' withdrawal from sports focusing on the importance of body image, of self-consciousness and “dress codes” during this phase. The significance of the beginning of puberty as a critical factor is also highlighted by the participants from Cyprus who believe that hormonal changes of girls is a factor that requires special handling by coaches, teachers and parents. In addition to this, adolescents, and especially boys tend to play computer games and this is a major factor of withdrawal from sports because virtual reality (e.g. watching sports on the internet) tends to replace real action.

Changes in children's interests during adolescence are also reported by participants from Latvia who highlight the important role of the coaches, who should create an attractive environment for girls at these ages. Family also plays an important role in maintaining girls' participation in sports. The existence of negative stereotypes for the body image in the family context can be dissuasive for the participation of girls in specific sports. Higher rates of withdrawal from sport and physical activity of teen girls are also reported by participants from Portugal. However, there are signs of improvement, such as higher participation of girls in women's football teams. Differences from childhood to adolescence especially for girls are also mentioned by participants from Turkey. As inhibitory factors, they indicate family's constraints on children raising, the importance of body image, coaches' gender and the limitations of clothing. Coaches from Turkey explain that girls are often in a disadvantaged position because of the clothes they have to wear which are not suitable for sports. Therefore, many talented girls stay away from sports.



In Sweden, coaches report no differences concerning the organized activities even though boys tend to be more spontaneously active than girls. Finally, participants from the Czech Republic believe that other factors are also affecting the participation of children in sports, interpersonal as well as social, (e.g. family support and the role of coach).

Equal access to sports activities at school and out of school

Participants from Cyprus, Bulgaria, Latvia and the UK mention that nowadays more girls have more opportunities accessing sports because of raised awareness on the issue and school seems to promote equality of participation for all children irrespective of gender. However, in Cyprus and the UK coaches mention that girls' transition from primary to secondary education is accompanied by fewer access to sports opportunities due to the status of women sports. Participants from the Czech Republic highlight the importance of support from the social context (e.g. family) as well as the role interpersonal factors (e.g. preferences and engagement of girls in certain types of activities). They also observe more active participation of boys in physical education taught at school and they base this argument on fewer excuses and less injuries reported concerning boys).

Participants from Portugal do not seem to fully agree concerning this issue. Some coaches argue that all sports are equally integrated for both genders although there are specific sports that interest girls more than boys and vice versa but there are more choices for boys. On the other hand, another group of participants point out that there are equal opportunities for girls and boys. In Sweden, participants point out that boys tend to "take more space" for example at the schoolyard, while the same is also happening out of school. Moreover, participants refer to the importance of incitement and support from friends, which plays an important role especially for girls as well as to the importance of teaching practices (mixed or separated). Finally, participants from Turkey refer to limited opportunities for girls to access sports due to the lack of sports infrastructure and space, family constraints and religious practices (e.g. in some occasions girls in religious schools have to choose between their religious obligations and outdoor activities).

Mixed or single-sex classes?

In relation to the preference of the teaching methods it appears that the views differ among participating countries. Thus, in Bulgaria, Portugal and the UK participants report they prefer mixed classes. In Cyprus, on the other hand, participants argue that teaching should be differentiated according to the type of sporting activity. Thus, in free play games, coexistence of girls and boys is preferable while in organized sports, single-sex classes are more appropriate due to the different educational needs of boys and girls. Respondents from Sweden argue that working as a coach with both mixed and single-sex groups is a useful experience. Participants from the Czech Republic prefer single-sex classes.

Finally, different perspectives are also observed among the participants from Turkey. Thus, some say they prefer single-sex classes as a teaching method mentioning that it is easier for a coach to

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manage a single sex team and these teams tend to perform better. On the other hand, some participants state that they prefer mixed classes because it is crucial for children socialization, who tend to behave better in mixed classes.

Gender equality among professional coaches/trainers

Coaches from Bulgaria mention that the formal education system ensures equal salaries for men and women. Furthermore, in similar positions at government or community level, men and women have equal salaries. But, beyond the context of the formal education system, there are variations (e.g. a higher number of men in some sports, while in some others a stronger presence of women). In the Czech Republic, participants' responses reveal an increased demand for coaches and trainers. Respondents did not notice inequalities and tend to believe that career progression depends on personal initiative mostly. However, men have more career opportunities because they are usually not in charge of housework and family care.

Participants from Cyprus believe that there are no inequalities in the school environment where men and women have equal access and similar salaries. However, they consider that the existence of stereotypes may lead to women's involvement in specific and limited types of sporting activities such as dance. The views of the participants from the UK vary. Thus, some say that the situation has improved and women have the same access opportunities nowadays. They point out, however, that the sports industry is still a male-dominated area and female coaches are under-represented because of this. The increase of female trainers may improve girls' participation they say but the existence of female coaches in sports where only boys participate does not promote gender equality.

According to participants from Latvia, there are no inequalities between women and men, although one participant mentioned that male coaches can have an easier career progression because they face less difficulties than women (family obligations etc.). In Portugal, according to participants, though the situation has improved compared to the past, disguised discriminations still exist and there is a need to increase the number of female trainers and coaches. Participants from Sweden claim that things are easier for male coaches and explain that the picture of a female coach is the "tender, caring person" - the facts and knowledge in sports sort of "belong" to men. Finally, participants from Turkey report that there are no inequalities between male and female physical education teachers, but there is a positive discrimination in favour of women coaches.

Training on promoting gender equality in sports

The majority of participants state that they have not received such training. However, according to participants from the UK additional training on this subject is needed, considering that this could affect positively the participation of girls. In addition, participants point out that older generations of coaches need additional training to modify stereotyped concepts. Respondents from Turkey also referred to the need for additional training and/or retraining.

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In Cyprus, although the participants have not received such training, they mention that there are initiatives for educational programs carried out by athletic psychologists and in workshops in relation to the psychological and biological differences between the two sexes. An interesting finding that came up from participants in Sweden is the limited participation of women in educational processes. Finally, according to Latvia's respondents, there are no inequalities in sports, so there is no need for such education/training.

Activities/projects that promote intercultural dialogue through sport

The majority of participants mention such activities. In more detail, participants from the Czech Republic refer to the Erasmus+ projects as well as to intergenerational & school tournaments, the Olympic Games, the Day of Sport etc. Conversely, participants from the UK refer to a good practice from football: Unity of Faiths, originated in West London and developed further into other areas is an attempt to break down barriers between religions. Moreover, a coach from the UK referred to 'This Girl Can' campaign, but the rest of the coaches did not mention any specific activities or projects.

Participants from Cyprus and Turkey also mentioned Erasmus+ projects as well as 'the Day of Sport' (Cyprus). In Latvia a project called 'Find your Sport' is implemented, a project which includes training twice a week and each time participants get to know a different sport (a total of 10 different sports - basketball, football, floorball, tennis, ice hockey, etc.). At the end of the training, parents receive a certificate indicating the most appropriate sport for their child. Project groups are mixed and anyone can participate (no gender or ethnic background restraints).

Social integration of girls from different ethnic backgrounds through sports

In relation to the importance of sports towards promoting social inclusion of girls from different ethnic backgrounds, the majority of participants perceive it as an effective way. They believe that the interaction of children through sports may help in removing language barriers (participants from the UK) and language & culture comprehension (participants from Latvia). Moreover, participants from Cyprus mention that in the cases that it has been implemented (e.g. through the learning of traditional dances) the results were encouraging.

There is a common belief that sport is for all and has the power to unite people and therefore sporting activities should be provided to everybody (response from Portugal). Furthermore, an interesting finding emerges from the UK participants who believe that Muslim girls should be encouraged to participate by allowing the use of the headscarf, therefore British Gymnastics need to introduce the sports hijab which has been used in the past and proved useful in promoting equality and integration.

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

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Czech Republic:

- There are enough playgrounds and sportsgrounds, but the biggest issue is the lack of qualified coaches and the reward system. Coaches are the main motivators and they are the key factors of success and awareness

Cyprus:

- The implementation of more useful educational programs in a systematic basis is required
- More opportunities should be offered to young coaches in order not to be discouraged from choosing a career in sports
- The utilization of criteria apart from cognitive performance for student assessments in schools is of crucial importance (e.g. assessment of children participation in volunteer/sports/cultural activities etc.)
- The organization of experiential seminars (through dance for example) so children may feel free to express their negative emotions and resolve any possible conflicts
- Presentations should be organized by sports bodies in schools aiming to encourage children and especially girls to participate.
- More effective ways to attract girls in sports through social networks should be “invented”.
- Boost children's physical activity through play and ‘let’s have fun’ approach

UK:

- Coaches wish to see sport accessible for all, irrespective of gender, financial situation, ethnic background etc. Everyone should be able to access all sports
- Sports should be mandatory in schools, more available, not segregating and exceed the perception of “boys” and “girls” sports
- More mixed groups and sessions are needed
- Change the perception of core sports (not being football, basketball etc., but maybe Yoga), promote health, wellbeing and other sports that may be of interest to learners

Latvia:

- Keep promoting active lifestyle for children – so parents hear more and more about it and motivate children to participate in sports
- Must bring back sports into the kindergartens because many things depend on how active family is. If such a policy is implemented, in the cases of inactive families at least children will learn the basics in kindergartens
- Sports should be accessible for everyone

Sweden

- Implement information & knowledge methods about gender equality in all education levels for coaches and teachers in schools
- Make it sustainable and don't give up

Turkey

- There is a need for stable and strong sports policy. There are many missing parts in sports education.

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- Sports policy should be implemented by sports people who are actually involved with athletes and not by irrelevant persons appointed by political parties
- There should be lifelong learning programs for P.E. teachers in order to refresh their knowledge. Courses should be free of charge
- There should be free and open sport activities arranged by local authorities for women and especially for housewives and low-income families
- Exams system should be changed. There are exams after high school during the most productive years of a person. Children spent all their time preparing for the exams and this is the main reason why they don't attend sport activities.
- There is no sports education by professional P.E. teachers in primary education. There should be such lessons in primary schools.
- Sportsmen and sportswomen on media should be trained according to new trends such as intercultural dialogue and social integration and act as role models. They should receive training about how to behave in order to attract young people to sports.

Portugal

- Clubs should employ equal number of male and female coaches and federations should invest more on the integration of female coaches and female managers.

SUMMARY OF COACHES INTERVIEWS

In most participating countries it is observed that girls tend to be less active in sports during the transition from childhood to adolescence. This situation occurs due to factors that are: a. interpersonal (values, change of interests), b. biological (hormonal changes), c. social (change of body image, support from family and important others, peers, friends, coaches and teachers) d. social/environmental (lack of infrastructure, appropriate programs etc.) e. cultural & religious. The factors mentioned above should be considered both by coaches and policy makers in order to reduce drop-out rates. However, the situation in most countries seems to have improved compared to the past especially because of the raised awareness concerning this issue.

Participating countries do not seem to have a commonly accepted and compatible way of teaching. Thus, coaches/trainers' preferences differ depending on each country's educational system. However, there is a significant number of participants who believe that mixed class teaching and the use of techniques from both types of teaching (mixed and segregated classes) shape a useful method.

An improvement is also reported regarding the existence of inequalities among coaches at a professional level. However, disguised inequalities still exist, inequalities which derive from the existence of stereotyped attitudes about sports and the fact that the sporting industry is still male-dominated and deterrent to female coaches. The latter are still fewer and face greater difficulties in accessing and advancing in their professional sector. Moreover, a significant number of participants recognize that the increased responsibilities of women (such as children upbringing, household obligations etc.) are an inhibiting factor in their career development. Consequently, in none of the

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participating countries structured and systematic education and training programs related to the promotion of gender equality in sport were mentioned. The participants' answers reveal the existence of individual, fragmented initiatives and the need for further training.

Regarding the importance of promoting intercultural dialogue and the integration of girls from different national backgrounds, all participants agree that sports is a key factor because sports is for everyone, unites cultures, removes linguistic barriers, helps immigrants to learn the language of the host country and overcome other obstacles. In the cases that such initiatives have been implemented, the results were positive. In most countries there are initiatives launched to strengthen intercultural dialogue, mainly through EU funded programs, but also by national agencies. Finally, based on the respondents' replies, the policy recommendations are as follows:

- Sports should be accessible to everyone
- Strengthening the quality of training for professionals such as lifelong learning seminars, etc. is crucial
- Qualified professionals should be utilized
- Equal representation of women and men in sports clubs, federations etc. is a sine qua non
- The implementation of best practices based on the accumulated knowledge about gender equality in all education levels for coaches in sports and for teachers in schools is needed
- Policy makers should emphasize to the quality of sports education from pre-primary education
- More effective ways to attract girls to sports through, for example, social networks should be discovered
- Sportsmen and sportswomen on media should be trained according to new trends as intercultural dialogue, social integration and act as role models. They should receive training on how to behave in order to attract young people.

3.1.2. POLICY MAKERS

Initiatives/projects focusing on girls' participation in sports

In Bulgaria and the UK, there has been a considerable amount of research developed recently concerning the factors related to girls and women decision of engaging in sports activities. In both countries, national initiatives have been developed. In particular, participants from Bulgaria refer to the national programs 'A Path to TranSportAction' - APTSA, 'Play for Inclusion', 'Make Sport with a Message' and 'SpeeCh'. However, the participants point out that there is a need to make more steps towards this direction.

Participants from the UK refer to the 'Street Games Us Girls' project and the latest research and marketing campaign implemented by Sport England; a campaign entitled 'This Girl Can'. They also mention the implementation of other projects developing on a local level in certain areas of London which aim to engage certain target groups in sports and physical activity such as BMAE.

In Latvia there are initiatives in football that are focused on the participation of girls. In particular:

- UEFA campaign 'We Play Strong' - Latvian Football federation organizes regional festivals and invites girls to come and try football
- 'We Play Football, Come As Well' - Events in regions, where girls, who do not play football yet, may join in along with their parents and give it a try
- 'Girls Football Returns to Schools'
- Special training for women, who have completed their career in football, aiming to become referees. The training course is free of charge

They also mention two digital projects:

- A webpage for girls' football with updated information as well as lists of sport clubs where girls football is being developed¹
- A social media platform especially developed for girls' football.

Respondents from Sweden refer to an initiative taken by a table tennis association aiming to reach more girls and retain them in the field. The results from this initiative are positive so far. Swedish participants also mention that the success so far is based in the intention to involve girls and let them be part of the decision-making processes. Participants from Turkey mention various programs and initiatives that focus on enhancing participation of girls and women in all aspects of social life, initiatives that are supported by institutional organizations. In this context, participants refer to the support offered by public bodies in a local level to women's sports teams and they highlight the existence of good practices implemented by NGOs involved in social inclusion.

¹ <https://www.sieviesufutbols.lv/>

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In Cyprus, participants' views differ. Some believe that there are adequate projects concerning girls' participation in sports which start from pre-school age and are implemented as a part of the 'Spots for All²' program. On the other hand, some participants highlight the fact that although girls have higher drop-out rates from sports, gender equality in sports has not yet been incorporated into a higher level (national strategy).

Initiatives that promote intercultural dialogue through sports

Respondents from Bulgaria point out that physical activity is a tool for social integration, but it is also very useful in order to promote intercultural understanding in an increasingly diverse Europe. Sport is a very powerful tool that can be used to promote integration and fight discriminations and racism. They also state that sports can promote social integration of girls from different ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, sport participation has been recognized as an important socializing agent and sport is considered a suitable setting for the development of social and moral values, especially for girls from different ethnic backgrounds.

Participants from the Czech Republic mention that such initiatives are not available at least in their region. Policy makers from the UK refer to the existence of an initiative that is available through the London Mayors Plan aiming to promote dialogue. They also refer to practices such as 'London Sport', where sport and journalism are utilized to bring together girls from different communities. This is a project that utilizes high profile athletes. In Latvia, policy makers mention the following initiatives: a. 'National Minority Sports Festival'- organized by the Latvian Olympic Academy and b. 'Ghetto Games'- a project which organizes various sport activities to involve people from different backgrounds.

Policy makers from Sweden, refer to an initiative in football which began 25 years ago and aims at bringing refugee boys to play for fun. Through this initiative, the sports field was transformed into a meeting place for children, who exchanged experiences about life in Sweden and practiced the native language. There were, also, further initiatives implemented by football clubs which organized home visits to find new members from target groups, who abstained from sports. Finally, within the municipality, support is provided to families mainly through the provision of interpreters aiming to engage people in sport, but language remains a major obstacle.

According to the participants from Turkey most municipalities organize intercultural events. They mention a swimming contest, involving Greece and Turkey. They also mention -as an example of intercultural dialogue- the 'Sport Culture and Olympic Education Project', organized by the National Olympic Committee of Turkey's Culture and Olympic Education Commission.

As an initiative to strengthen intercultural dialogue, policy makers from Cyprus refer to a sub-program of the national program 'Sports for All' which concerns refugee children living in the

² <http://ago.org.cy/>

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Kofinou Reception Center for Asylum Seekers. Participants also point out that 'Sports for All' sub-programs ensure equal and free access to the families of migrants and refugees.

Do women coaches/trainers have the same opportunities for professional development with their male colleagues?

According to participants from Bulgaria under the formal education system, all Physical Education teachers, men and women, have the same career progression opportunities. However, beyond the formal education system, coaches and trainers have different opportunities for professional development based on their personal skills, experience and motivation. In the Czech Republic, participants say, there are no gender inequalities. On the other hand, participants from the UK say that coaching workforce is still very male dominated. There are some opportunities available, but women do not always feel welcome. A woman would feel intimidated if she is the only one on a course. More needs to be done and looked at in order to provide a less intimidating and more accessible environment for women and girls. Research and insight are suggesting that women want to see more women delivering the courses and marketing needs to change.

In Cyprus and Latvia different perspectives among participants were reported. Participants from Cyprus mention that there is full equality for both sexes, which is reflected in the fact that many leadership positions of many public organizations are occupied by women. On the other hand, the picture given is that many steps need to be taken to promote gender equality in sport, and this is highlighted by the numerical superiority of male coaches in sports clubs, the additional difficulties women face, and the coaching style that even women trainers reproduce, which is more 'manly' in order to be considered acceptable. Policy makers from Latvia mention that there are no inequalities at the professional level and that the type of sport determines the results (e.g. men outnumber women in wrestling and vice versa in gymnastics). However, it is reported that in football male coaches are the majority and the access of women is a more difficult and demanding. At this stage an attempt is being made by the Latvian Football Federation to create more opportunities for women coaches.

In Sweden, although there are signs of a change in status, men still outnumber women in coaching roles. Women -due to increased responsibilities and lack of time (family and household obligations) - find it difficult to become coaches. Still, even if this happens, the acceptance of a woman as a coach differs depending on the type of sport. Thus, in some sports there is no difference between men and women but in some other women find it difficult to be accepted. Finally, participants from Turkey argue that there are no inequalities in the professional progression of women and men, although they believe that women are more flexible and adaptive than men, which is very important in terms of professional development.



Training programs for trainers/coaches that promote gender equality in sports

Participants from Bulgaria do not refer to such programs. However, they point out that qualifying courses on the topic would be a good idea because they may help coaches, trainers and physical education teachers in their everyday work. Programs that promote gender equality in sport should be implemented with the help of trainers, teachers, policy makers and associations of mothers and women. Participants from the Czech Republic and Latvia also state that they are not aware of relevant programs.

Policy Makers from the UK mention that there are training programs for coaches that promote gender equality in sports, but their value and benefits from attending have not been studied. However, apart from StreetGames-Engaging Women & Girls in Sport and Physical Activity' none of the Policy Makers were aware of any other specific training programs available for coaches. In Sweden training programs for coaches are the same for men and women and focus on the specific sport. The programs can become better in a way, policy makers say, by introducing gender equality in the discussion. Finally, according to the participants, it is important to improve coaches' skills at engaging their athletes in the decisions regarding their training.

Participants from Turkey point out that there are no such programs, although they should. They refer to the existence of individual private workshops, but they mention that the latter concern very small groups of people and whoever wants to attend has to pay. Policy makers from Cyprus mention that the promotion of gender equality should be incorporated into a Sport National Strategy and steps are being taken in this direction. Moreover, the publication of a training manual aiming at educating coaches, teachers and NGOs on promoting gender equality could have a positive effect.



SUMMARY OF POLICY MAKERS' INTERVIEWS

- In the majority of the participating countries there are initiatives or national programs launched, which involve the participation of girls in sports. Practices and modalities vary but the fact that most countries have taken initiatives towards this direction is promising.
- Concerning the existence of programs that promote intercultural dialogue through sport, interviews' analysis shows positive results and the importance of sport as a tool for promoting social inclusion and strengthening social cohesion is recognized.
- In terms of promoting gender equality on a professional level, respondents' answers give rise to heterogeneity. Thus, there are perceptions that in some countries there are no inequalities of access and progression of women at the coaching profession, while in other countries participants talk about the existence of disguised inequalities, which are reflected in: a. the numerical superiority of male coaches. b. the difficulties of access due to the increased obligations of women but also because of the difficulty of their acceptance in some sports c. the fact that career progression is still a more demanding process for women d. the coaching style (more "masculine") that even women trainers often adopt in order to become accepted
- Regarding the 'training of trainers' on gender issues, there is a complete shortage of such initiatives in most of the participating countries. Even in countries where participants refer to training seminars on the topic, they are few and, in most cases, participants do not specifically name and describe them. This is an important finding because there may be initiatives aiming at increasing the participation of girls and women in sport and physical activity in most countries, but these initiatives do not include the "training of trainers".
- Promoting equality in the workplace does not appear to be sufficiently linked to the measures and initiatives taken to tackle the withdrawal of girls from sports.



3.2. FOCUS GROUPS

3.2.1. GIRLS

Suitable spaces for play and exercise

There are many public and community sports venues in Bulgaria, where girls can exercise for free. Conversely, all girls who participated in the focus group in the Czech Republic mention that there are sports venues available. In Latvia, according to the participants, there are sports venues, mostly in the cities and events/trainings where children can exercise for free are often organized. Most girls from Portugal, participate in sports groups (volleyball, football and swimming teams) and they report that there are adequate suitable venues in their country. Girls from Sweden also mention that there are plenty of suitable places and that they do not observe any differences in their utilization between boys and girls, but there are some sports that attract more girls and vice versa.

On the other hand, girls from the UK argue that available spaces are mostly occupied by boys to play football. They also talk about boys' sexist behaviors, who do not play with girls because they do not consider them good enough. Conversely, girls from Cyprus report that boys dominate in the available sports. All participants from Italy mention that there are not enough suitable places for girls to play and girls from Turkey also report a lack of suitable and accessible neighbourhood-level spaces. There are private spaces available, but children have to pay for them and this is prohibiting for many families and, as a consequence, boys use to play soccer on the road. Moreover, the public spaces where girls could exercise (e.g. stadiums) are not always attractive for them.

Participation in physical activities at school

Girls from Bulgaria mention that participation in sports at school is mandatory for them. Regarding participation in activities such as tournaments and other sport events at school, girls may participate only if they want to and there are many girls who really enjoy taking part in organized sport events. Similarly, girls from the Czech Republic mention that school organizes sports tournaments (dodge ball, basketball, Christmas Ringo tournament, Christmas fun sports activities, and cycling among others). Participants from Italy also report that school organizes various tournaments (e.g. volleyball, football and basketball, carried out in mixed groups). Girls from Latvia mention that the level of participation in physical activities depends on each school, but many schools offer additional activities such as dancing, aerobics, basketball and badminton.

Participants from Portugal claim that an adequate number of school tournaments are organized at school, however, in terms of girls' participation opinions are divided. Thus, it is stated that boys and girls at school have equal opportunities because most of the tournaments are mixed gender but on the same time some mention that the opportunities are not the same. Girls from Cyprus end up

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with similar conclusions in relation to school leagues. Thus, the opportunities for boys and girls to participate in them may be similar, but what is happening is that the sports selected are those which are more popular among boys.

Girls from the UK state that school leagues could be more and that there are lots of boys' tournaments where girls cannot play. Boys are well informed when football leagues are on, but girls do not always know when women's football matches are organized. Moreover, there is the stereotype of only boys playing football, so if girls choose to do so they are frequently treated as "tomboys". Finally, participants claim that there are enough opportunities for girls to play in their school, but out of school things are different. Girls are treated differently and although teachers encourage both girls and boys to play out of school, there are not many opportunities for girls to play (e.g. in tournaments). Girls from Sweden refer to a variety of factors affecting girls' participation. They suggest that up to thirteen years of age there is space for both girls and boys at school. However, participation depends on class formation (e.g. whether boys or girls are the majority), children's interests, availability of infrastructure, etc. Participants from Turkey mention that there are opportunities for such activities and that P.E teachers do encourage girls to take part.

Method of teaching

A mixed method of teaching is reported in Bulgaria, Italy, Sweden, Cyprus and Turkey, while in Portugal teaching is mixed gender in most cases. Even though the teaching method is also mixed gender in the UK, participants argue that it should be segregated because PE teachers tend to favour boys and give them more credit. Single sex teaching method is reported from girls from the Czech Republic while participants from Latvia report the implementation of both methods.

Advantages and disadvantages of mixed gender Physical Education

Advantages

Girls from Bulgaria mention that in mixed gender Physical Education courses girls and boys may share their opinions and suggestions and this could prove useful for the development of both genders. In everyday life girls and boys should live together, and if they learn to communicate with the opposite gender from an early age, their socializing will be smooth. In the same line of thinking girls from Latvia argue that children in mixed classes learn how to collaborate and respect each other's strengths; they tend to mix better and to be friendlier with each other.

Consequently, in the Czech Republic, Italy and Cyprus participants refer to similar advantages: a. more competitive elements when girls exercise with boys, b. the content of the lesson is different when girls and boys work together and children are motivated to perform better c. boys tend to reassess their perceptions when they watch girls play and e. the creation of an equal environment is promoted. Participants from Portugal claim that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages and

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mention that mixed gender classes strengthen communication between genders and their interaction. Moreover, girls get to know new things, improve their physical skills acquire competitive spirit and get to live in an equal environment.

As an additional advantage, participants from the UK point out that girls get to watch boys play and vice versa and this may prove to be a useful experience. At the same time PE teachers have the opportunity to observe how boys and girls cooperate with other team members and utilize this knowledge in finding ways to get everyone involved. Finally, interaction between the two sexes, the creation of an environment of equality and the entertaining aspect of this experience are highlighted by the participants from Turkey.

Disadvantages

Girls from Bulgaria argue that the main disadvantage of mixed classes in school is that girls do not always feel comfortable with their PE classmates in a particular period of their growth. Accordingly, participants from the UK mention the following possible disadvantages: a. PE teachers' favouritism of a gender (teachers often favour pupils of the same gender) and b. the fact that some boys tend to express aggressive behaviours because they know girls will not react in most cases. A similar conclusion about the aggressiveness of boys comes from Cyprus and Portugal.

As a disadvantage of mixed teaching methods participants from Sweden mention the tendency of girls (even those who are exceptionally good at a sport) to behave more passively when they play with boys. They also mention that boys often tend to ignore girls, which does not allow fair play. Finally, it is argued that the aggressive way boys tend to play football sometimes makes girls feel insecure. Discussing on the disadvantages of mixed teaching participants from Turkey mention the negative role of teasing between children (e.g. against obese children) and the fact that boys tend to "monopolize the place" when playing football.

Participation in physical activities outside school

Girls from Bulgaria mention that they participate in extracurricular activities (mostly in rhythmic gymnastics, athletics, volleyball and basketball). In recent years, many girls are also enrolled in practicing boxing, karate, Latin dances, and Zumba. As far as reasons for non-participation are concerned, they report factors such as low self-esteem or injuries. Similarly, girls from Turkey report that they participate in sports activities and mainly prefer gymnastics, basketball, volleyball, dance and swimming. Most girls from Portugal responded that they are participating in out-of-school sports activities and in relation to their sports of preference girls mentioned volleyball, basketball, dance, running, football and swimming.

Participants from Latvia also responded positively and mentioned the following preferred sports: dancing, horse riding, athletics, volleyball, basketball, swimming, football (recently), skating and ice hockey. In Cyprus, girls mention that they have been supported by the 'Sport for All' program, which

allows girls to try out different types of sports. Girls' main preferences include ballet, athletics, volleyball, dance, swimming, tennis and horse riding. According to girls' answers from Sweden most of the sports are open for girls to try and the sports that mostly attract them are dancing and horse riding. Girls from Italy take part in extracurricular activities and prefer dancing and gymnastics among others. Girls from the UK participate in sports after of school but they mention that in some cases they feel uncomfortable when they coexist with boys. Their preferences are football, netball, basketball, handball and hockey. Finally, most girls from the Czech Republic prefer dancing, pole dance, aesthetic sports and workout with music.

Social support from the important others

a. Parents

Engagement of parents in sports activities

According to respondents from Bulgaria, the engagement of parents in sports activities can positively influence girls' participation and they explain that parents may act as a necessary example that will motivate girls to practice sports. Moreover, girls, whose parents are physically active, are more likely to engage in sports activities now or in the future. Participants from Latvia and Turkey claim that girls are more motivated when they engage in sports with their parents. Similarly, girls from Cyprus mention that parents who exercise affect -even unintentionally- their children's attitude because sport becomes part of the family's daily routine. Of course, this pattern does not apply to cases where parents are forcing their children to exercise. Most Czech participants also agree that the participation of parents affects positively their daughters' participation in sports.

Positive results from family support, are also reported in the UK focus group. Supporting girls to engage in sports by their family members is a major factor concerning their level of engagement. On the other hand, girls from Italy mention the negative role of the feeling that they are pushed to meet family expectations when parents force them to participate. The views of the participants from Portugal and Sweden seem to be diverse. Thus, for some of the participants the involvement of parents does not seem to play any role, while for some other parents' engagement in a particular sport may affect their children's choices.

Ways of parental support

According to participants from Bulgaria and Cyprus the ways in which parents may support girls' participation in sports are both intangible (e.g. parents who act as role models and motivate girls to practice sports, spending more time with their daughters) and tangible (money for registration and fees, equipment, transportation etc.). Similarly, participants from the UK point out intangible ways of support (e.g. watching girls' efforts) and examples of material support (enrolment in extracurricular sports activities, fees for transportation, clothing and equipment).

Participants from the Czech Republic also argue that parents may act as role models, support their children by watching their matches and discuss with them on sport issues, motivate them to engage in physical activities and incorporate physical activity as an integral part of family fun. Similar ideas are reported by the participants from Italy who point out that parents may act as models with their behavior, support girls by watching their matches, discuss with them at home about sports and engage in physical activities as part of family fun. Girls from Latvia also highlight the importance of common sports activities with their parents.

Participants from Portugal highlight the importance of parental moral support and motivation and their presence in matches and competitions, the importance of enabling girls to try various activities and of discussing on the benefits of exercise. Girls point out that watching sports activities along with their parents, may also mobilize girls and motivate them to try a sport. They also argue that it is good for girls to watch their parents practicing their sports. Finally, girls from Sweden point out that although it is necessary to focus on school obligations, participation in physical activities is equally important in a non-confrontational so they include parental support in this perspective. In their own words "*... school is important, but physical activities are also important. Explain that it's easier to concentrate in school if you are physically active. That's what my parents have done ...*".

b. Peers/ Friends

The role of friends in girls' participation in sports

Girls from Bulgaria, Latvia and Cyprus consider the role of friends and classmates as extremely important for the participation of girls in sports. Participants from Cyprus point out that friends can stimulate participation in sports and affect the way girls' perspective with sports. The role of friends is also considered important by the participants from Italy and the Czech Republic who believe that friends may motivate girls to try a sport, they may share common experiences and help girls to overcome obstacles. For example, if there's a friend there such the feeling of loneliness is vanished.

The importance of friends' support is also highlighted in the focus group from the UK. Girls explain that friends may motivate you, support you even if something goes wrong and help you react even when the boys behave aggressively. Finally, they highlight the opportunities of socializing and making new friends. Among participants from Portugal different opinions were recorded concerning this issue. Thus, some of the participants believe that friends affect the participation of girls in sports activities while some consider it irrelevant.

Participants from Turkey believe that friends may influence girls' participation in different ways including mutual support and sharing of common experiences. They also argue that engaging in sports with friends can prevent dropout. For example, they say, girls feel less shy and more confident when they practice sports with a classmate or friend. Likewise, girls from Sweden find it very important to train along with friends because this transforms the whole procedure to a more attractive and entertaining experience.

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Sports/physical activity as a part of children's fun activities

Girls from Bulgaria point out that sports and games have always played an important role in every child's life, but they notice that nowadays tablet games, TV and surfing on the internet take more and more of their time. Similarly, girls from Cyprus mention that while play and physical activity is part of children's everyday life up to the first classes of primary school, this changes gradually during the last classes of primary school and there is a shift on girls' interests (social media, music, etc.) Participants from the Czech Republic argue that sports are part of children's fun, but the type of activity plays an important role. Furthermore, most girls from Italy and Portugal consider physical activity as part of children's fun.

Girls from the UK claim that participation in physical activities is necessary for children. They also point out that engaging in sports such as football or basketball is not only entertaining for girls, but it also helps in braking stereotypes and overcoming the perception that "girls cannot participate, because they are girls". Participants from Latvia claim that the level and type of physical activity depend on the season - the tendency is to engage in sports as part of fun activities mostly during the summer, when the weather is warmer and sunnier. Participants from Turkey indicate that although physical activity could be fun and health-enhancing, however, girls seem to consider playing with mobile phones and tablets more entertaining. Finally, girls from Sweden also consider participating in physical activities as a part of children's fun activities.

c. Physical Education Teachers/Coaches

Methods which PE teachers and coaches use to reinforce girls' participation in sport activities

Participants from Bulgaria point out that the ways Physical Education teachers and coaches use to reinforce girls to participate more actively in sport activities include the utilization of their personal example, their support and emotional empathy and the adaptation of specific suitable exercises. Girls from Cyprus indicate that coaches and PE teachers play a key role and if they are indisposed and do not encourage girls the level of girls' participation in sports is going to be low. On the other hand, if they motivate children and are supportive then inevitably most girls will engage in some kind of activity, even those who believe that they are not good at sports.

Girls from Italy and the Czech Republic also perceive the role of PE teachers as important. They explain that teachers' personal characteristics (personality, popularity, support, understanding and enthusiasm), their interest in pupils' leisure time activities or even in their performance in after school sports activities combined with their ability to act as role models, their participation in sports activities and their ability to evaluate athletes' efforts are critical parameters. In relation to the methods teachers may utilize to enhance girls' participation in sports, respondents from the UK point out that teacher's gender plays an important role and that the existence of more women could be supportive and inspiring for girls. They also argue that the way PE teachers & coaches behave, their lesson plan but also the type of the relationship between them and girls are important issues.

According to the participants from Latvia, a coach may work supportively to correct any possible weaknesses, to provide extra motivation and reward a good performance. Girls from Portugal believe that coaches and PE teachers may boost girls' participation in various ways such as: discussing with their students, motivating girls to participate in more activities with boys, highlighting the advantages of sports, explaining girls that is fun to practice sports, creating activities and tournaments for girls, fostering gender equality, helping to stimulate participation in sports events, offering more challenges and providing more sports options. Girls from Turkey argue that PE teachers may contribute a lot in girls' participation in sports activities. Teachers that offer incentives and constantly motivate girls to actively participate in sports, prevent dropout.

Do PE teachers plan their classes in a way that supports girls' participation?

Participants from Bulgaria argue that trainers and coaches in their country are properly trained and this helps their work with girls. Participants from Cyprus argue that it depends on the trainer, if she/he is dedicated to her/his work positive results occur. Girls from the Czech Republic suggest that PE teachers are aware of the differences between boys and girls in their classes while participants from the UK believe that teachers pay more attention to boys and do not take girls into account when planning courses. Participants from Italy point out that there is a specific program based on gender in their country and girls from Latvia report that most teachers have created -or try to create- individual approaches for boys and girls. As a result, both genders participate equally in sports activities they say.

Most girls from Portugal claim that PE teachers take this into consideration when planning their lessons while some other participants claim that they don't. Finally, girls from Turkey believe that teachers are trying to boost girls' participation in their lessons, but this does not necessarily mean that their efforts are always successful.

SUMMARY OF GIRLS FOCUS GROUPS

- Regarding the availability of infrastructures where girls can practice free of charge, participants state that there are adequate places in the majority of the participating countries. However, an interest finding in girls' responses is that free spaces "are dominated" by boys, who mostly use them to play football. There are also cases where girls feel that the available spaces either do not exist or are inadequate (inaccessible, unattractive).
- In most of the participating countries, girls have the opportunity to participate in physical activities within the school. Girls refer mainly to school tournaments and sports events and their responses indicate that their participation is influenced by a variety of factors related to: the classroom environment and the way it is configured, their interests, school infrastructure, the way PE classes are organized (e.g. many of the sports offered are these which are more popular among boys) and the importance of encouragement from PE teachers.

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- In most participating countries, mixed gender methods of teaching are being implemented.
- Summing up the advantages of mixed teaching girls report the opportunities for interaction and communication between the two sexes, the creation of a competitive environment which motivates girls to develop new skills and gain new experiences by achieving better performances. They also mention the potentiality of modifying boys' dominant beliefs about girls and cultivating a friendlier and more equal environment when they play sports together. Finally, mixed teaching is considered to be more entertaining and evaluated as the most appropriate method by the vast majority of the participants.
- As far as **disadvantages** of mixed gender classes are concerned, participants report a. the lack of comfort that adolescent girls sometimes feel when they exercise among boys, b. the expression of girls' passive attitude or even withdrawal in some cases when they coexist with boys because of the aggressive way boys play, especially in sports such as football. Finally, boys' tendency to "monopolize" the place when they play football, but also the fact that obese children are more often bullied, make up the list of the main disadvantages reported by the participants.
- The majority of girls who participated in the focus groups in all countries report that they get involved in after school sports activities. Their preferences vary across a wide range of choices. The most prevalent options include rhythmic gymnastics, athletics, volleyball, basketball, dance, swimming, football, netball, handball, skating, tennis and horse riding.
- Respondents from most countries report that parents' participation in physical activities and sports may positively influence girls' participation. They explain their argument by mentioning that parents may successfully act as role models by mobilizing and inspiring their daughters. Moreover, if participation in physical activities is part of the family's daily routine, children engage spontaneously in physical activities. However, cases where children are forced to meet the expectations of their parents should be excluded from this pattern. Parental pressure is perceived negatively by children and does not bring the desired results. Finally, there are a minority of respondents who believe that participation of girls in sports is not influenced by the involvement of their parents.
- Discussing about ways which can be utilized by parents in order to support their daughters, participants describe forms of intangible (emotional, moral and psychological) as well as tangible support (financial support, enrolment in sports clubs, fees for equipment, transportation etc.). As forms of immaterial support, girls describe the importance of parents as role models, the joint participation in sports activities which may affect and motivate girls, the importance of discussing about the benefits of sports, watching matches and events in which their daughters participate, the provision of opportunities for girls to try out various activities until they come up with the one they prefer and the inclusion of sports as part of family fun activities.



- Participants from most countries argue that the role of friends and classmates is highly important for girls' participation in sports. In particular, friends may motivate girls to try a sport, support them in difficult conditions (e.g. when something goes wrong) and help them overcome obstacles (e.g. to overcome the sense of loneliness and shame that some girls may feel when they exercise with people they do not know), share common experiences, help them build new friendships and make participation in the workouts more fun and attractive.
- Regarding whether participation in physical activities and sports is part of children's fun opinions vary. In some countries, sports are still an important part of children's fun activities, while in some other countries it is reported that children's interests change as they grow older and they tend to prefer computer games, surfing on the internet etc.
- Participants from all countries consider that PE teachers and coaches play a crucial role concerning girls' participation in sports. Explaining their argument they state that the teacher's gender and personality, the way lessons are planned, coaches' role as a model, their participation in activities with children, the interest shown to their young athletes even for their extracurricular sports activities, the creation of additional sports opportunities (e.g. motivation to participate in tournaments, events, etc.), the procedures of rewarding children's efforts and correcting their weaknesses are critical factors that affect directly girls' involvement in physical activities.
- Most participants consider that PE teachers hold the necessary knowledge and are trying to implement appropriate methods to encourage girls' participation in sports. However, this is not the case with all professionals, and their efforts' results are not always successful. Last but not least, girls' focus groups revealed the views of some girls who point out that P.E teachers make discriminations in favour of boys and are more interested in the latter when designing their classes.



3.2.2. PARENTS

Do you think that parents spend enough time to exercise?

Parents from Bulgaria mention that their time is limited due to increased professional obligations and that they would like to spend more quality time with their children. Participants from Cyprus also mention limited available time due to increased family and professional obligations. Parents from the Czech Republic argue that while participation in physical activities is beneficial, parents exercise from a few hours to not at all because of limited time. Participants from Italy also point out that parents do not spend enough time to exercise, and when they do, it is mostly on weekends. Parents from Latvia also refer to the lack of time as the main reason for reduced physical activity and they add that they would like to exercise more. They mention however, that the level of their physical activity varies depending on the season. Thus, greater participation in sports activities is recorded during the summer due to better weather conditions.

The perceptions of the participants from Portugal vary. Some of them believe that parents spend enough time in physical activities while some believe that parents do not exercise enough due to the lack of time. Participants from Turkey claim that this varies from family to family depending on parents' interests, the distribution of roles within the family etc. Similar views are expressed by parents from Sweden who point out that the situation varies from family to family mentioning that active parents tend to have active children and that parents in general have more opportunities for sports when their children grow up. Finally, participants from the UK believe that parents are not adequately engaged in sports and this is mainly due to lack of time and increased professional/family responsibilities.

Do parents of both sexes exercise equally?

Participants from Bulgaria argue that fathers are more involved in sports activities than mothers who spend more time on housekeeping. Participants from Cyprus talk about additional obligations for women due to the multiple roles they are trying to manage and consequently less time available for sports. Respectively, participants from Sweden mention that fathers are more physically active than mothers and explain that in most families, mothers are the "project leaders" and have the complete picture of planning the daily schedule including housekeeping and children's activities. Parents from the Czech Republic also point out that the two members of a couple are not equally involved in physical exercise because of their different interests. On the other hand, parents from Italy mention that mothers are more physically active.

Participants from Latvia point out that this depends on the traditions, values and interests of each family, however, there is a recent trend calling for people to be more active. Parents' views from Portugal are divided. Thus, some participants consider that both sexes exercise equally while some consider mothers to be more active. Participants from Turkey, speaking from personal experience,

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mention that the two sexes do not exercise equally. From the responses of the participants from the UK it appears that the situation varies from family to family. Different circumstances and perceptions of the benefits of sports between the couple inevitably lead to different practices. Thus, some families exercise all together and use their leisure time for sports, while others have reduced physical activity because of various factors (e.g. lack of motivation)

Do you think that boys and girls are equally involved in sports activities?

Parents from Bulgaria point out that boys spend significantly longer time playing sports on a daily basis compared to girls but both boys and girls who participate in sports activities enjoy it equally. Participants from Bulgaria and Cyprus mention that increasing the number of girls who participate in sports and the time they spend there will have both immediate and long-term benefits for girls' physical and mental health. Parents from the Czech Republic argue that participation in sport is not influenced by gender anymore. Accordingly, most participants from Portugal and Italy consider that participation in physical activities is not affected by gender. However, some participants from Italy believe that boys are more active. For some parents from Latvia participation depends on personal reasons, such as the level of their performance. If a person is good at a sport, she/he will inevitably want to continue and evolve. For some other participants however, boys tend to be more active while girls need more effort to be persuaded. According to these parents, girls up to the age of eleven want to exercise but this changes as they grow up.

Participants from Turkey argue that girls are lagging behind concerning this issue and they should be encouraged more. Similarly, participants from Sweden believe that boys tend to be more active than girls who need more encouragement. Boys are being more active both in organized sports and in free play while girls tend to give up sports earlier. The views of parents from the UK vary. Thus, there are some who believe that participation is influenced by the interests and preferences of each child regardless of gender and other who highlight the role of gender stereotypes in sports and mention that we have to overcome them by motivating girls to engage in any sport they are interested in. Finally, some participants point out that boys tend to monopolize school space by aggressively playing football and crowding out girls based on the perception that there are not equally capable.

Do parents influence children's participation in sports?

Participants from Bulgaria argue that parents have a significant influence on their children's participation in sports. The ways in which parents may influence the participation of children in sports vary and include the following: a. parents could look for sports clubs & classes that offer girls appropriate activities (in terms of difficulty level and age) b. they may encourage their daughters to take new classes with their friends so as to make their exercising experience more fun and interactive c. they could swap sedentary family activities with active d. they could act as role models

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through their behavior and motivate children to increase their levels of exercise. Participants from Cyprus also mention that parents could act as role models for their children because it is necessary to constantly motivate them and discuss with them about the benefits of exercise.

In relation to the parental impact on girls' engagement in sports some participants from the Czech Republic believe that parents have an influence and their engagement in physical activities along with their children may affect the latter positively. On the other hand, some participants argue that parents affect their children in early stages but as they grow up children tend to choose for themselves. Concerning the reduced parental influence as girls grow older, participants from Italy also mention that *"girls are more autonomous in the decision process"*. Participants from Latvia point out that there are cases, where parents' attitude does not affect their children, but in most cases parents have an influence on their children when they act as role models through their own participation in physical activity or by limiting the use of new technologies (mobile phones, tablets etc.) and motivating them to adopt a more active lifestyle.

Participants from Portugal believe that parents influence their children's participation in sports in various ways. These include joint sports, an approach which can mobilize children by following their parents' example as well as provide them all the necessary facilitations. Participants from Turkey argue that family plays a key role in many ways. They highlight the significance of guidance, the need for discussion about the benefits of sports and the fact that parents should take into consideration the desires of their children in order to guide and support them properly. Parents from Sweden also point out that parents may influence the participation of children in sports in various ways which include encouraging and inspiring girls and let them discover their talents. However, they point out, there are significant parameters such as the socio-economic status of each family that directly affect this process. Similarly, participants from the UK agree that family income plays an important role. Thus, families with low income find it difficult to support their children's participation in 'expensive' sports. They also point out that parents should not try to meet their own ambitions through their children but help them understand the benefits of participation in sports instead. Finally, some participants believe that it is important to offer girls the opportunity to try different activities and end up with the one they prefer.

How could parents encourage girls to participate more in sports activities?

Participants from Bulgaria argue that parents could encourage girls to participate in sports activities by offering emotional, personal and financial support. Parents from Cyprus also refer to psychological and financial support while participants from the Czech Republic point out that parents may influence children by acting as role models through their own participation in sports. The importance of parental behavior as a model behavior is also highlighted by the participants from Italy who add that parents' presence in their children's sports events may be an effective way of encouragement. According to the participants from Latvia, parents could provide children the opportunity to try different activities until they come up with the one they prefer or encourage them

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by participating in sports activities together. Similarly, participants from Portugal reported the following ways of parental encouragement: a. discuss about the benefits of physical activity b. act as an example and c. participate together in sports activities.

Participants from Turkey also highlight the importance of joint sport activities which may help reduce girls' dropout rates, watching sports events in which their daughters participate and the need to understand girls' needs and support their choices. According to participants from the UK, parents could encourage girls in various ways including: a. getting girls involved in sport from early childhood focusing on fun (getting their friends also involved is a method that has been proven successful) b. fighting against stereotypical perceptions (e.g. "girls are not good at sports") c. discussing the benefits of sports d. involving themselves in sports activities and raising awareness about the benefits of physical exercise. Participants from Sweden indicate that parental interest may motivate girls especially during adolescence and they refer to joint sports as a good practice.

Prioritization of physical activities

Responses from Bulgaria reveal the fact that physical activity is not so high in the priorities of parents. Participants from Cyprus mention that participation in sports is a priority for families but children usually have a demanding program and there is a need for balance between school obligations and sports. Parents from Italy and the Czech Republic point out that this depends on each family while the majority of the participants from Latvia responded that participation in physical activities is high on the priorities of their families, stressing the fact that children have a lot of energy and they have to "channel it" somewhere. Most parents from Portugal also mention that physical activity is a high priority for their families.

Participants from Turkey mention that engaging in physical activity is of great importance. In relation to family practices, some parents say it is high among their family's priorities while some others recognize its importance and try to incorporate physical activities in their everyday life. Parents from Sweden point out that while everyone wants to be physically active, time is an issue and it is easier for families who have daughters that are focused on being athletes, to give high priority in physical activity. Finally, participants from the UK point out that social background, family interests, child's performance at school, family awareness about healthy lifestyles, diet as well as external factors (weather conditions, infrastructure etc.) affect the way family places priorities.

Are parents adequately informed about the benefits of physical activity?

Participants from Bulgaria believe that some parents are adequately informed and some not. Similarly, participants from the Czech Republic argue that parents who are interested are well informed, however, the majority does not treat sport as something important. Participants from Cyprus, Latvia and Portugal talk about well-informed parents while participants from Italy mention

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that parents in their country are well informed, but this is not a sufficient condition in order to solve all issues.

Parents from Turkey mention that there is a flow of relevant information in the mass media, but public events & meetings on this issue are not visible in the public sphere. Participants from Sweden also point out that while everyone is theoretically informed, this does not necessarily lead to the desired changes. They also argue that parents who are active tend to encourage their children more. For the majority of the participants from the UK parents are not well informed about the benefits of physical activity and healthy lifestyle and usually take action when a health issue arises. According to most of them, additional information is required.

Do families enhance the participation of girls in physical activities/sports?

Practicing sports is compulsory in the educational system of Bulgaria (three hours per week). Moreover, a lot of parents enrol their daughters in sports clubs where they practice after school. In Cyprus, participants say, more and more parents enrol girls to sports clubs and training programs. Parents from the Czech Republic consider that the situation is slowly but steadily improving but they point out that as girls grow older (during the transition from elementary to secondary school), parents' influence on their choices is reduced. Parents from Italy also mention that the situation has improved in relation to the past, however this applies only until adolescence and provided that it does not affect school performance.

Participants from Latvia suggest that families should allow girls to try different activities and integrate physical activity in family fun time. The majority of parents from Portugal believe that families are supporting girls' participation in sport. Parents' from Turkey highlight their children's desire to participate in sports activities. However, some participants mention that the existence of insufficient and inadequate infrastructures has an inhibitory effect while other parents say that children's enthusiasm can overcome any difficulties. Participants' responses from Sweden highlight the fact that parents support girls' participation in sports and participants from the UK point out that it is easier to enrol girls in activities that are free of charge or at least affordable and accessible. They also point out that support from the family is also affected by other factors (existence of other children in the family, parallel activities of the children, place of residence, children's age, free time etc.)

Is participation in physical activities a common family fun activity?

All participants from Bulgaria mention that they love spending time in physical activities with their children and that participation in physical activity is part of family fun. Participants from Cyprus and Latvia mention that it depends on the mentality and values of each family. Parents from the Czech Republic report that "*when there is a sport event, you see the same people there*" the so called

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“enthusiastic families”. Parents from Turkey mention that for some families, taking part in physical activity is part of family fun but for some other parents this is not the case, or their involvement in sports is extremely limited.

Participants from Italy report that this does not happen often, but only at major events such as marathons. On the other hand, all participants from Portugal consider participation in sports as an integral part of family fun activities. Parents from the UK point out that there are families who have included physical activity in family fun (e.g. cycling, swimming, and walking) and they also mention that taking part in fun but expensive activities such as ice skating or trampoline is less frequent. Parents from Sweden mention that there are activities which offer fun for the whole family, such as skiing, skating, golf, hiking, running etc., but from a certain age onwards children prefer to play with their friends.

SUMMARY OF PARENTS FOCUS GROUPS

- The vast majority of parents in all participating countries state that while they are aware of the benefits of physical activity, they do not have the time to exercise due to increased professional and family responsibilities.
- Participants' views differ concerning equal participation in sports. Thus, most of them consider that fathers are more active because mothers have increased responsibilities (work, household, family planning etc.) but in some participating countries they tend to believe that mothers are more active. Many of the respondents believe that participation in sports and physical activity is not only influenced by gender but also by parameters such as family values and traditions, interests, different beliefs about the benefits of exercise, performance in sports.
- Concerning the participation of girls and boys in sport different perspectives were also recorded. Thus, for some participants, gender does not affect children's participation in sports but there are various factors which determine whether children will finally engage in sports or not. Participants explain that personal factors such as children's interests and preferences and their performance in sport activities inevitably affect participation. For most of the participants, however, boys tend to be more active both in organized sports and in free play while girls need more encouragement.
- The majority of participants believe that parents may have significant influence on girls' participation in sports. Classifying the ways of parental support two main categories derive: intangible forms such as emotional and moral support, parents as models, motivating girls through engagement in various sports activities until they discover what interests them, supporting girls' choices, discussing the benefits of sports and tangible forms (e.g. registration in sports clubs, transportation fees and equipment). Summarizing their responses parents believe that they could encourage girls to participate more in sports activities by providing emotional, personal and financial support.

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- The majority of responses reveal that participation in sports and physical activities is high on the families' priorities. However, as participants point out while everyone recognizes the benefits of exercise, participation in sports in real life is influenced by factors such as socioeconomic background, family interests, children's performance, awareness and time availability.
- The majority of participants believe that parents are well informed about the benefits of physical activity, but this is not always a sufficient condition for actually engaging in such activities. Furthermore, some participants argue that more awareness-raising events should be organised so that more families adopt a healthier lifestyle.
- In most countries the situation seems to improve. More and more families support their daughters and recognize the importance of girls' participation in sports.
- Concerning the inclusion of physical activity as part of family fun activities it is reported that it depends on the economic status, traditions, attitudes, interests and values of each family.



3.2.3. POLICY MAKERS

How could girls and young women participation in sports be supported when it comes the inclusion of families, peers and local organizations?

According to policy makers from Bulgaria, participation of girls and young women in sports could be supported by the government, mass media and through public awareness campaigns. Moreover, programs aiming to increase family involvement in supporting girls and young women participation in sports could also prove useful. Participants from Latvia point out that there is a need for more campaigns on the importance of being physically active as well as for financial support of the bodies which organize such events and training programs. Participants from Cyprus argue that it would be useful to implement family awareness programs for the benefits of exercise and healthy living, but these should concern both boys and girls.

Participants from Italy suggest that a useful way is to convert sports grounds into friendlier environments for girls: *“if we could make girls feel sports grounds and gyms as “home”, it would be an important improvement”*. Participants from Turkey indicate that initiatives for the involvement of girls in sports should be implemented from an early age. *“Sports habits we formed at an early age turn out to be a constant lifestyle”* they say. In order to achieve this, it should be ensured that every girl is involved in a physical activity and public organizations should support families with low incomes. Moreover, sports clubs should cooperate with schools and act together in order to create desired sports programs with fruitful outcomes. They also argue that there are already many projects involving girls' participation in sports and this is achieved through the support of women's sports teams by public bodies.

Participants from Portugal refer to the importance of raising awareness on supporting girls and on combating sexist prejudices at school (from pre-school to tertiary level of education), so it is up to policy makers to form and promote methods which could be utilized within the school context, as well as to invest in a School Park endowed with spaces and equipment favourable to sports. Furthermore, school sports could offer a major contribution in combating girls' exclusion from physical activity as well as EU funded projects which promote women's participation in sports. Finally, they argue that incentives should be offered to sports institutions, either through financial support or through the creation of leisure spaces in order to resolve this issue and promote the formation of teams and the organisation of events, which will eventually lead to increased participation.

Similarly, participants from Sweden highlight the importance of cooperation between local sports organizations and schools suggesting that leaders in sport associations should be properly trained to handle girls' needs. In addition, they emphasize on new ways of organizing sports in order to include girls who withdraw from sports due to increased school responsibilities. Girls, especially at the age of 14 to 16, should be persuaded that it is equally important to be good at both school and sports.

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Participants from the UK suggest the following: a. parallel activities (e.g. delivering sessions for parents alongside with sessions for girls/young women b. emphasis on the benefits of sports for the family as whole (new friends, new skills, building confidence, volunteering) c. promote successful initiatives which support children to engage in sports with their friends d. utilise local organizations and educational institutions, which may provide introductory sessions especially for girls in order to support them break barriers f. promote best practices produced by projects such as 'The Sports at the Heart' & 'This Girl Can'.

How to act with people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds in order to grant full equal opportunities for young women and girls in sports?

Participants from Bulgaria mention that sport is a strong and powerful tool for integration of people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees. Physical activity and different sports in well-designed programs could be a very influential tool of promoting values such as tolerance, team spirit, solidarity and fair play as well as breaking social isolation stereotypes, building self-confidence, body awareness and leadership skills. Sport and physical activity also increase the visibility of girls and women in public spaces. Participants from Cyprus mention that the implementation of such sports activities, although difficult and complex, may offer a positive contribution towards strengthening social cohesion.

Participants from Italy argue that managing this issue is particularly important in combating stereotypical perceptions. In this direction, a good idea would be to organize multicultural events on a steady basis, involving boys and girls from different backgrounds and putting them together in mixed teams regardless from their religion or country of origin. Moreover, participants from Latvia believe that this could be achieved through the organization of free training activities and especially during the summer in outdoor spaces. Participants from Portugal believe that in addition to the dissemination of information about the existing sports grounds, it would be useful to create new spaces which should be available for free.

Participants from the UK claim that it is easier to launch initiatives when focusing on groups that have a long-term establishment in the host country because they have already developed their social structures (organizations, groups etc.) while with regard to new cultural groups new ways of approach should be established. Participants point out that the key to this process is to record the needs of different groups and take appropriate initiatives. Participants from Turkey point out that organizing cultural and sport activities is often more effective than conducting seminars on intercultural dialogue, stressing at the same time the need to create new learning environments.

Ways to convince local administrators and politicians of the importance of this issue

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Participants from Bulgaria mention that the benefits of sport at all levels (economic, social and cultural) should be recognized by the government. Respectively, participants from Italy point out that working on integration processes is an advantage for the society we live in. Girls integrated in sports will become more determined women, mothers and citizens. In order to launch this innovative process, sports could be the key, at one condition: it should be free of any kind of limit and border. Participants from Portugal point out that creating equal opportunities for both sexes and promoting methods to enhance the participation of women and girls may help promoting a healthier society.

The need to capitalize on research results and statistical data is reported by participants from Latvia. Accordingly, participants from Sweden argue that *"the best way to get politicians and local administrators is to show the statistics and facts and get them to understand the importance of physical activity"*. Participants from the UK argue that the results of recent surveys, statistics and good practices from various projects should be exploited to highlight the importance of implementing relevant programs in practice. Finally, participants from Turkey point out that policy makers know the subject, but they do not evaluate it as important. Targeted initiatives and projects could trigger a change in society both top-down and bottom-up.

SUMMARY OF POLICY MAKERS FOCUS GROUPS

- Most participants believe that awareness of girls' participation in sports should be enhanced. Thus, the following ways of intervention are considered suitable by the participants:
 - initiatives for public awareness campaigns
 - support sports clubs by public bodies for the organization of informational events
 - cooperation between local sports clubs and schools
 - highlight the importance of active involvement of girls in sports from pre-school age
 - promote the benefits of sports and active lifestyle for families
 - train the leaders of sports associations in order to meet girls needs
 - utilize relevant E.U. projects and best practices from national programs already in action
 - come up with new, flexible ways of organizing sports so as to be accessible to girls who withdraw from sports
- Most of the participants seem to agree that physical activity is an important tool for promoting intercultural dialogue. For some of them the organization of intercultural sports events may bring useful results. Some other participants, however, point out that first of all it is very important to approach vulnerable social groups and record their needs and design programs that are compatible with their needs and interests.

- It seems of the utmost importance to exploit relevant research results, studies and reports, statistical data and the experiences of successful interventions in order to inform the relevant bodies and design appropriate programs.



3.2.4. COACHES

Do girls and boys participate equally in sport activities?

According to participants from Bulgaria there is no equal participation of boys and girls in sports activities. Boys spend more time than girls playing sports in their everyday lives. Participants from Turkey also report increased participation of boys in sports activities. Boys are more involved because they have more opportunities and less limitations than girls (less restrictions on free spaces, time and family obligations). They also point out that participation is influenced by the availability of infrastructure and the type of sports activity. Correspondingly, coaches from Cyprus point out that boys are more active both in extracurricular sports activities and in school activities, while girls need more encouragement. Furthermore, they argue that age plays an important role and as children grow older there is a decrease in their physical activity.

Coaches from Latvia point out that while in school sport activities boys and girls participate equally, in extracurricular activities boys tend to be more active while girls are more involved in dance and other -mostly cultural- activities. They also describe age as a critical factor. Girls' transition to adolescence is accompanied by a decrease in physical activity and a change in their interests. Finally, they note that the decrease in physical activity is accompanied by increased rates of obesity while the new generation's involvement with technology is accompanied by increased rates of inactivity.

The importance of age is also highlighted by the coaches from Portugal, who point out that the transition from childhood to adolescence is accompanied by higher dropout rates of girls. Coaches report that while boys participate more, however, there is an improvement in girls' participation, which is evidenced by the number of girls participating in women's football clubs. Participants from the Czech Republic express diverse opinions. Some of them believe that boys are obviously more involved, some report a small difference in favour of boys, while some claim that when girls participate in sports, they tend to be more enthusiastic and dedicated.

Coaches from Sweden point out that there are more differences among girls than between the two sexes. They also mention different dimensions of gender participation, for example, girls are more focused on social issues during training. Finally, coaches from the UK mention that participation is nowadays more equal although complete equality remains unfulfilled. They believe that it is easier to overcome boundaries when there is no pressure, however there are still schools where the perception that football is mainly a boys' sport remains dominant.

Do girls and boys differ in relation to their performance in sports?

In terms of performance in sports, coaches from Bulgaria point out that boys excel and this may be because they get encouraged to spend more time participating in sports. Coaches from Cyprus point out that this depends on the type of sport. Thus, there are sports where boys excel (e.g. football,

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martial arts) and other where girls perform better. According to the participants this is due to a number of factors which include: age of engagement, familiarization of children with specific types of sports, due to the fact that a stereotyped concept of women and men sports leads parents to enrol their children in specific sports (e.g. boys-football, girls-dancing etc.)

Coaches from the Czech Republic mention that there are differences in performance therefore PE classes are single gender in their country and that interpersonal factors such as personality and girls' reduced interest on sports' competitive elements tend to affect their performance. Coaches from the UK believe that age is a crucial factor and girls' involvement in activities from an early age may act as a deterrent to their withdrawal. The importance of age is also reported by coaches from Latvia, who underline that *"till the age of 10-12, girls show better results. Girls grow and develop faster than boys"*. Participants from Sweden point out that children get involved in sports activities for various reasons. Thus, some children are more focused on the activity itself while some others are more interested in meeting friends for example. Depending on the reasons of participation there are differences in performance especially during puberty. Children who feel uncomfortable tend to withdraw and this happens earlier to girls. Coaches from Portugal state that although boys exercise more, however, there is a growing tendency of girls' participation in sport activities. Finally, according to coaches from Turkey *"boys seem to be faster and stronger than girls, but girls are more flexible and have a better performance in long run"*.

Are there "male" or "female" sports?

Participants from Bulgaria point out that sports such as rhythmic gymnastics are considered to be typically feminine while other such as martial arts or boxing are considered to be masculine, but more and more girls choose them. Participants from Cyprus express similar views and report that more and more girls are still involved in 'masculine' sports. Participants from the Czech Republic express a variety of views. Some highlight the social dimension, arguing that some sports are traditionally considered "more feminine" and some "more masculine" while others highlight factors such as the offer of sports options or even the social perceptions of girls' and women involvement in 'male' sports. Finally, some participants report that in many sports no differences are mentioned.

Coaches from Italy also express diverse opinions. Thus, for some participants, *"there are differences in the physical structure"* while others point out that *"it depends on how much strength/power is requested"*. Moreover, some participants argue that differences, which may occur from different types of infrastructure and training processes, are becoming less significant. Participants from Latvia mention that girls are now participating in more and more sports, even in those considered 'masculine'. Participants from the UK also believe that *"our generation is much more open to females participating in sports"*, however they argue that there is still a perception of male-female sports maybe based on parents' beliefs.

Coaches from Portugal argue that there are no 'female' or 'male' sports while participants from Turkey point out that participation in different sports is compatible with existing social perceptions. Thus, in the context of school sports, volleyball is considered to be a 'female' sport and more girls try it, while football is considered to be 'male' sport and boys are the majority. In fact, they say, when girls participate in 'male' sports like football they tend to adopt a more 'masculine' attitude in order to be accepted. However, it is also argued by some participants that *"all sports are female sports. Girls can do all sports that boys do but boys cannot do all sports girls do as well as girls..."*. Coaches from Sweden underline the fact that most sports are now available for both boys and girls. However, even today there are fewer women's teams in many sports and in some cases if a girl wishes to participate in a team, the only option is to exercise with boys.

Sports activities and promotion of gender equality

Participants from Bulgaria point out that *"sports build bridges rather than creating walls"* and sports do not make gender discriminations. Coaches from Cyprus stress the fact that things have improved, but there is still a lot of work to be done. They explain that in order to achieve gender equality, a closer and stronger relationship between school, family and sports clubs should be established. Participants from Portugal also observe an improvement in relation to the past and coaches from Latvia say that *"nowadays more and more girls get involved in sports activities and the best way to promote gender equality is mixed teams"*. Participants from the UK also highlight the importance of changing perspectives, more mixed teams, more opportunities for girls and additional content on female participation in sports literature/resources in order to promote equal participation. Consequently, participants from Italy point out that mixed class teaching as well as a focus on fair competition are important steps in this direction.

In the same line of thought participants from Turkey point out that mixed teaching is the best way of interaction between girls and boys. They also refer to a process of social transformation of gender perceptions, which is visible and supported by relevant projects. Although the foregoing are important steps, according to some coaches there are still practices of gender segregation present. Coaches from Sweden also point out that there are still cases where PE teachers divide groups based on gender and there is a need to enhance visibility of the achievements of women in sports. Finally, participants from the Czech Republic argue that this dimension is not explained to children in school and that promotion of gender equality is not achieved.

Ways to increase girls' participation in sports

In order to engage more girls in sports coaches from Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic and Latvia suggest: awareness raising campaigns aiming to raise girls' awareness on the benefits of sports and physical activities, open days to promote sport as an integral part of a healthy lifestyle, and promotion of famous athletes through the mass media who may act as positive models, inspire and

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mobilize girls and offer more sports opportunities for girls (competitions, events). Participants from the Czech Republic and Italy suggest the utilization of coaches' skills, who should be able to recognize early signs of withdrawal in time and discuss with the girls in order to prevent it.

Participants from Latvia, the Czech Republic, Italy and Turkey stress the importance of engaging family and friends through the use of successful intervention models. Coaches from the UK point out that girls should be given the opportunity to participate in games and compete in a female only environment if they want to. It is also argued that less competition and more inclusive sessions will help participation and equality. Similarly, coaches from Portugal refer to the need of equal presence of women and men coaches in sports clubs and the promotion of equality in federations (more women in leadership positions). Coaches from Sweden stress the importance of choosing sports that do not reproduce social stereotypes while coaches from Turkey highlight the need to include gender equality in PE teachers' training programs as well as in the national strategy for sports. Finally, coaches from the Czech Republic, Italy and Turkey argue that it is important to utilize projects results, such as EGPIS, to increase awareness.

Are coaches and trainers adequately trained to promote gender equality in sports?

In relation to the existence of properly trained professionals most participants argue that professionals are not adequately trained on this issue as it is not part of their formal education curriculum. In more detail, coaches from Cyprus point out that while there are seminars addressing this issue, they are not part of trainers' formal education and additional training is needed. Coaches from the UK also point out that *"there is no specific training around female participation, so they are not adequately trained"*. Lack of relevant programs is also reported by the participants from Turkey, who further mention that some of their colleagues still do not recognize this dimension and do not consider these inequalities as a problem.

Coaches from Portugal believe that although the situation has improved compared to the past, there are still emerging issues: *"It is important that more women start to work as coaches in women's football, the federation should promote more training courses for women. There is a lack of female coaches"*. Accordingly, coaches from Sweden mention that there are no relevant training programs and that although some people believe that boys and girls are treated equally, this is not true. Professionals should take this fact into account in their everyday practice. Participants from the Czech Republic refer to the existence of individual and fragmented relevant events, which, despite their success, are organized every three years. Participants from Italy observe improvement compared to the past, but they also report limitations. However, there are participants who believe that professionals are making efforts to promote gender equality.

Participants from Bulgaria point out that most coaches in the formal education system challenge gender discrimination. They teach their lessons avoiding discriminative practices and in many cases they adapt their methods to raise awareness improve participation rates and meet girls' needs for

physical activity. Coaches from Latvia note the dissemination of relevant information through mass media has contributed in this direction, so no further training is needed.

Are coaches and trainers treated equally in their workplace?

Coaches from Bulgaria, Cyprus and Turkey point out that in relation to equal treatment of men and women trainers in their workplace, work conditions in schools and public organizations are the same for both sexes. However, discriminations are being reported in private organizations. One of the key issues highlighted by coaches from the UK is the under-representation of female coaches as it is more common for women not to pursue a professional career despite having all the qualifications. Coaches from Portugal report that managers discriminate against women even when professionals have all the corresponding qualifications. Moreover, participants from Sweden mention that the reproduction of stereotypes, even by women themselves although they may be in 'leading positions', is a sign that equality has not been established yet.

Finally, there are some coaches who claim that there are equal opportunities and the same conditions apply for both sexes at a professional level. This category includes participants from Latvia while coaches from the Czech Republic believe that equality has been established. On the other hand, participants from Italy argue that even nowadays, a male coach is often considered to be more 'professional'.

Suggestions to improve physical education training programs

Participants from Bulgaria point out that *"each course that enhances knowledge and experience on the topic will improve the day-to-day work of coaches with their students"*. Coaches from Cyprus suggest that initiatives should be launched to help professionals in their day-to-day practice (e.g. acquiring knowledge to prevent girls' withdrawal, manage mixed gender teams etc.) Coaches from Turkey talk about the need for proper training but also about the importance of utilizing gender politics produced by the E.U. organizations for 'training the trainers'.

Participants from the Czech Republic point out the need to promote and increase girls' awareness as well as to link exercise to eating habits in an integrated method. Participants from the UK stress the need for gender equality training in PE, they mention the obstacles women face and their need to take time to develop themselves. Moreover, according to participants from the UK male coaches need to gain more experience working with girls and should work with other coaches which lead female sessions. Respectively, participants from Italy suggest a. the inclusion of gender equality in PE teachers' formal education b. the organization of informational meetings with professional athletes of both sexes and c. the preparation of theoretical tools in order to address relevant issues where different perceptions exist, issues such as: diet, professional sports career, health and wellness.

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Coaches from Portugal suggest that *"each time clubs start a new activity for boys they should be obliged to start the same activity for girls"*. Participants from Sweden underline the importance of individual focusing on the achievements of each athlete within each group, as well as exploiting the benefits of mixed teaching. On the other hand, coaches from Latvia claim that the availability of relevant information from the mass media has helped to highlight the issue and they believe that there is no need for special training.

SUMMARY OF POLICY MAKERS FOCUS GROUPS

- Regarding equal participation of both sexes in sport, respondents' answers seem to be diverse. Thus, most of the participants argue that boys tend to be more active in sports than girls who tend to withdraw earlier. However, trainers point out that girls who participate in physical activities are more committed and focused in their targets. Nonetheless, there are participants who claim that there are no longer major differences, and that it depends on the type of sport, the age and the context of physical activities (in/out of school). Thus, in the school, children of both sexes exercise more equally compared to out-of-school activities where differentiations - in favour of boys- emerge.
- Regarding the performance of both sexes in sports, the majority of participating coaches indicate that age plays a crucial role. Thus, for some participants, girls in younger ages are well-performing but there is a greater possibility of withdrawing when they enter puberty. This is why participation in sports from an early age is very important for girls to continue to be active as they grow up. Moreover, some participants point out that boys seem to excel in some sports, but this is due to their greater familiarity with sports, but also because of the greater social encouragement they enjoy in relation to girls. Girls on the other hand seem to adopt a less competitive attitude, while when they are engaged in sport activities they tend to be more committed to their goals.
- Concerning participants' perceptions about the existence of 'male' and 'female' sports, the majority of coaches believe that all sports "belong" to both sexes. This means that boys and girls may equally get involved in almost all types of sports. This seems to be the case in most countries as there is a growing number of girls participating in sports, which in the past were considered "male dominated". However, as some participants say, there are still obstacles (e.g. lack of social acceptance) that prevent girls from participating in specific sports such as football but also fewer sports options for girls (e.g. fewer women's teams in many sports)
- Regarding the issue of promoting gender equality in both school and extracurricular sporting activities, the overwhelming majority of participating coaches argue that the situation has improved considerably in relation to the past. Good practices in this direction include the use of mixed teaching, the participation of girls in school championships and games and the availability

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of more sports opportunities for girls. However, some participants argue that there are cases of P.E. teachers/coaches who still underestimate the promotion of girls' achievements in sports.

- Coaches propose the following practices for attracting more girls in sports:
 - Campaigns to raise girls' awareness on the benefits of sports and physical activities, events such as 'open days' to promote sports as an integral part of a healthy lifestyle and engagement of famous athletes -who may act as positive models- in campaigns aiming to inspire and mobilize girls and create more sports opportunities (competitions, events, games etc.)
 - Utilize the competencies and skills of coaches, who should be able to recognize early signs of withdrawal and discuss with girls
 - Engage family and friends through the use of successful intervention models
 - Create more inclusive training sessions without emphasizing on competition
 - Provide girls the opportunity to play and compete in a female only environment
 - Emphasize on the equal women and men coaches' representation in sports clubs and the promotion of equality in federations (more women in leadership and other key positions)
 - Promote sports that do not reproduce social stereotypes
 - Focus on the inclusion of gender equality issues in PE teachers' education programs but also in the national strategies
 - Maximize the exploitation of projects such as 'EGPIS 2' to increase awareness
- In relation to the existence of professionals properly trained in promoting gender equality, most participants argue that coaches/trainers are not trained adequately and gender equality is not part of their formal education curriculum. They also argue that the theoretical approaches concerning the issue are not sufficient for practical implementation. However, there are participants who say that the situation has now changed and that coaches are making every possible effort to promote gender equality.
- Concerning equal treatment of men and women trainers and coaches in the workplace, participants point out that working conditions in schools and public organizations are more or less the same for both sexes. However, in private organizations discriminations do occur. One of the key issues highlighted by many coaches is the lack of a sufficient number of female trainers and the fact that it is more common for women not to pursue a professional career although they have the qualifications required. Furthermore, the reproduction of stereotypes, even by women in key positions, is an indication that equality has not been established yet. However, some coaches claim that equal opportunities are provided and that the same conditions apply for both sexes in a professional level.



- Regarding the improvement of ‘training the trainers’ on gender equality, participants argue that initiatives should be launched to raise awareness through information events and that appropriate training programs should be organized (e.g. on gender issues, on additional obstacles and difficulties women face, on educational approaches to attract more girls in sports, but also on developmental psychology, mixed gender group management etc.)



4. QUANTATIVE RESEARCH

4.1. COACHES

4.1.1. DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 707 coaches from nine countries participated in the research. Regarding their gender 44.6% are men and 55.4% women. Within the participating countries, Portugal is the country with the largest representation of men (69.8%) (Table 1 & graph 1), while Latvia and the Czech Republic are the country with the largest participation of women (74.1 and 73.9% respectively) (Table 2).

Table 1: Country of Residence

Country of Residence	%
Bulgaria	16.4
Cyprus	12.0
Czech Republic	3.3
Italy	13.9
Latvia	12.0
Portugal	6.1
Sweden	5.0
Turkey	15.6
United Kingdom	15.8

Graph 1: country of residence



Table 2: Gender per country

Country of residence	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	%
Bulgaria	66,4%	33,6%	100,0%
Cyprus	42,4%	57,6%	100,0%
Czech Republic	26,1%	73,9%	100,0%
Italy	43,9%	56,1%	100,0%
Latvia	25,9%	74,1%	100,0%
Portugal	69,8%	30,2%	100,0%
Sweden	42,9%	57,1%	100,0%
Turkey	38,2%	61,8%	100,0%
United Kingdom	39,3%	60,7%	100,0%
Total	44,6%	55,4%	100,0%

The majority of the participants (32%) belong to the age group of 31-40 years, followed by 29.6% of the participants who report that they belong to the age group of 21-30 years. 26.4% of the participants are 41-50 years of age, while 12% of them stated that they are more than 50 years old.

Table 3: Age per country of residence

Country of residence	Age				Total
	21-30	31-40	41-50	51 +	%
Bulgaria	35.3%	14.7%	44.8%	5.2%	100.0%
Cyprus	23.5%	57.6%	10.6%	8.2%	100.0%
Czech Republic	78.3%	4.3%	8.7%	8.7%	100.0%
Italy	20.4%	27.6%	28.6%	23.5%	100.0%
Latvia	18.8%	21.2%	32.9%	27.1%	100.0%
Portugal	18.6%	51.2%	14.0%	16.3%	100.0%
Sweden	28.6%	14.3%	48.6%	8.6%	100.0%
Turkey	30.0%	44.5%	20.9%	4.5%	100.0%
United Kingdom	38.4%	33.9%	19.6%	8.0%	100.0%
Total	29.6%	32.0%	26.4%	12.0%	100.0%

In relation to the type of occupation, the majority of the participants (40.7%) state that they work as trainers/coaches in sports clubs, while the second most prevalent type of job is "PE teachers in public primary school" (26.6%). In six out of nine countries the majority of the participants work as trainers/coaches in sports clubs while in Turkey and the Czech Republic, the majority of participants work as PE teachers in public primary schools (Table 4).

Table 4: Employment Status per country of residence

Employment Status	Public Primary School	Public High School	Private Primary School	Private High School	Trainer in Sports Club	Trainer in Athletic Union	Other
Bulgaria	28.4%	7.8%	3.4%	2.6%	45.7%	7.8%	4.3%
Cyprus	6.0%	8.4%	6.0%	8.4%	36.1%	15.7%	19.3%
Czech Republic	47.8%	8.7%	4.3%	4.3%	17.4%	0.0%	17.4%
Italy	16.3%	6.1%	10.2%	3.1%	52.0%	10.2%	2.0%
Latvia	20.2%	32.1%	0.0%	0.0%	27.4%	9.5%	10.7%
Portugal	0.0%	2.4%	2.4%	0.0%	80.5%	0.0%	14.6%
Sweden	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	75.8%	6.1%	18.2%
Turkey	80.0%	5.5%	0.9%	0.9%	3.6%	2.7%	6.4%
United Kingdom	13.9%	11.1%	0.9%	0.0%	55.6%	1.9%	16.7%
Total	26.6%	10.1%	3.3%	2.2%	40.7%	6.8%	10.5%

Moreover, in relation to education, the majority of the participants (47.7%) are university graduates, while the high educational profile of the participants is supplemented by 16% of respondents who hold Master's Degrees and 11, 2% who are PhD holders. The country with the highest representation of university graduates is Turkey (90.8%), followed by Cyprus and Portugal (57.1%). Czech Republic

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is the country with the largest Master's Degree holders representation (69.6%), followed by Latvia, Cyprus and Italy. Finally, most PhD holders were reported in Bulgaria (34.8%) and Italy (30.2%) (Table 5).

Table 5: Educational level per country of residence

	College	University Graduate	Master's Degree	Ph.D.	Other	Total
Bulgaria	40.0%	11.3%	13.0%	34.8%	0.9%	100.0%
Cyprus	10.7%	57.1%	25.0%	6.0%	1.2%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	30.4%	69.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	11.5%	39.6%	17.7%	30.2%	1.0%	100.0%
Latvia	26.5%	43.4%	27.7%	1.2%	1.2%	100.0%
Portugal	11.9%	57.1%	9.5%	7.1%	14.3%	100.0%
Sweden	20.6%	47.1%	2.9%	0.0%	29.4%	100.0%
Turkey	0.0%	90.8%	8.3%	0.0%	0.9%	100.0%
United Kingdom	45.4%	46.3%	4.6%	0.0%	3.7%	100.0%
Total	21.5%	47.7%	16.0%	11.2%	3.6%	100.0%

4.1.2. PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERFORMANCE

Regarding participants' perceptions of the role of gender in child performance, the majority (55.7%) argues that there is no difference between boys and girls. However, one out of three respondents (35.1%) reported that boys excel, while the corresponding percentage of respondents who stated that girls excel is only 9.2%. It is also important to notice that in six participating countries there is a significant percentage (over 30%) of respondents who state that boys excel.

In detail the overwhelming majority of participants from Bulgaria (72.1%) consider that boys excel, while the corresponding percentage of participants from the Czech Republic (69.6%) is also high. It is worth mentioning however, that at the same time Bulgaria time presents the highest percentage among participants who consider that girls excel (14.4%)

Table 6: Perceptions of Gender Differences in Performance

Country	Boys excel	Girls excel	There is no difference	Total
Bulgaria	72.1%	14.4%	13.5%	100.0%
Cyprus	39.2%	11.4%	49.4%	100.0%
Czech Republic	69.6%	4.3%	26.1%	100.0%
Italy	8.3%	12.5%	79.2%	100.0%
Latvia	30.3%	10.5%	59.2%	100.0%
Portugal	34.1%	2.4%	63.4%	100.0%
Sweden	18.2%	12.1%	69.7%	100.0%
Turkey	20.0%	5.5%	74.5%	100.0%
United Kingdom	35.0%	4.9%	60.2%	100.0%
Total	35.1%	9.2%	55.7%	100.0%

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“BOYS EXCEL”

Regarding gender-based perceptions, we notice that **among participants who responded that “boys excel”** the overwhelming majority (72.9%) say that they agree (47.4%) or they fully agree (25, 6%) with the perception that boys are stronger. (Sweden: 83.3% “agree” and 16.7% “strongly agree”, Czech Republic: 75% “agree” and 12.5% ‘strongly agree” and Latvia: 69.6% “agree” and 13% “strongly agree”) (Table 7).

Table 7: Gendered perceptions per country “Boys excel”

Boys are Stronger						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	9.0%	11.5%	17.9%	21.8%	39.7%	100.0%
Cyprus	3.2%	12.9%	6.5%	48.4%	29.0%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	6.2%	6.2%	75.0%	12.5%	100.0%
Italy	37.5%	0.0%	37.5%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%
Latvia	8.7%	0.0%	8.7%	69.6%	13.0%	100.0%
Portugal	0.0%	0.0%	14.3%	50.0%	35.7%	100.0%
Sweden	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	83.3%	16.7%	100.0%
Turkey	4.5%	4.5%	0.0%	72.7%	18.2%	100.0%
United Kingdom	0.0%	13.9%	13.9%	61.1%	11.1%	100.0%
Total	6.0%	8.5%	12.4%	47.4%	25.6%	100.0%

Concerning the perception that boys “try harder” 31.7% of all participants “agree” and 15.4% “strongly agree”. Among the participants who attribute the superiority of boys to this feature respondents from Turkey present the highest percentage (65% “agree” with this perception and 25% “strongly agree”) (Table 8).

Table 8: Gendered perceptions per country “Boys try harder”

Boys try harder						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	4.0%	14.7%	13.3%	42.7%	25.3%	100.0%
Cyprus	13.3%	40.0%	23.3%	13.3%	10.0%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	18.8%	43.8%	25.0%	12.5%	100.0%
Italy	25.0%	12.5%	25.0%	25.0%	12.5%	100.0%
Latvia	4.5%	36.4%	27.3%	18.2%	13.6%	100.0%
Portugal	7.1%	50.0%	28.6%	14.3%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	16.7%	33.3%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Turkey	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%	65.0%	25.0%	100.0%

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United Kingdom	5.6%	30.6%	27.8%	30.6%	5.6%	100.0%
Total	6.2%	25.1%	21.6%	31.7%	15.4%	100.0%

With regard to the perception that coaches “encourage boys more”, participants' 9.9% of those who reject this perception, “disagree strongly” and 24% “disagree”. 24% “neither agree nor disagree” while 29.6% “agree” and 12% “fully agree” with this perception. The largest percentages of agreement with this perception are cumulatively recorded in Bulgaria (41.2% “agree” and 23.8% “strongly agree”) while the highest percentages of disagreement were recorded in Cyprus (32.3% “disagree” and 22.6% “strongly disagree”) and Italy (12.5% “disagree” and 37.5% “strongly disagree”).

Table 9: Gendered perceptions per country: “Trainers encourage boys more”

Trainers encourage boys more						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	3.8%	16.2%	15.0%	41.2%	23.8%	100.0%
Cyprus	22.6%	32.3%	22.6%	16.1%	6.5%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	50.0%	43.8%	6.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	37.5%	12.5%	25.0%	12.5%	12.5%	100.0%
Latvia	4.3%	43.5%	30.4%	21.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Portugal	7.1%	7.1%	28.6%	35.7%	21.4%	100.0%
Sweden	33.3%	0.0%	50.0%	16.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Turkey	5.0%	35.0%	20.0%	30.0%	10.0%	100.0%
United Kingdom	14.3%	17.1%	28.6%	34.3%	5.7%	100.0%
Total	9.9%	24.0%	24.0%	29.6%	12.4%	100.0%

With regard to the perspective that “family and friends encourage boys more”, 35.8% agree, while 14% “strongly agree”. The highest percentages of agreement with the above-mentioned perception are recorded cumulatively in the UK, Turkey and Portugal. Accordingly, the highest percentages of disagreement are recorded in the Czech Republic, Latvia and Cyprus (Table 10).

Table 10: Gendered perceptions: Family & friends encourage boys more

Family & friends encourage boys more						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	0.0%	18.2%	24.7%	35.1%	22.1%	100.0%
Cyprus	6.7%	23.3%	40.0%	23.3%	6.7%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	37.5%	56.2%	6.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	25.0%	0.0%	25.0%	37.5%	12.5%	100.0%
Latvia	4.5%	27.3%	45.5%	22.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Portugal	7.1%	0.0%	28.6%	50.0%	14.3%	100.0%
Sweden	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%

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Turkey	0.0%	15.0%	20.0%	50.0%	15.0%	100.0%
United Kingdom	2.8%	8.3%	13.9%	55.6%	19.4%	100.0%
Total	3.9%	17.0%	29.3%	35.8%	14.0%	100.0%

Regarding the perception that boys “are more skilful”, 42.5% of all respondents state that they either “agree” or “strongly agree” while 23.4% neither agree nor disagree. Among the participating countries, high percentages of agreement were recorded in the Czech Republic and Latvia while the highest percentages of disagreement were recorded in Sweden and Cyprus (Table 11).

Table 11: Gendered perceptions per country: Boys are more skilful

Boys are more skilful						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	2.6%	23.4%	20.8%	29.9%	23.4%	100.0%
Cyprus	9.7%	38.7%	6.5%	38.7%	6.5%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	25.0%	12.5%	62.5%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	25.0%	0.0%	37.5%	25.0%	12.5%	100.0%
Latvia	9.1%	18.2%	22.7%	45.5%	4.5%	100.0%
Portugal	0.0%	28.6%	42.9%	28.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	66.7%	16.7%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Turkey	9.5%	38.1%	19.0%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%
United Kingdom	8.3%	27.8%	41.7%	19.4%	2.8%	100.0%
Total	7.8%	26.4%	23.4%	32.5%	10.0%	100.0%

However, among the participants who claim that boys excel 33.3% “disagree” and 14.7% “strongly disagree” with the perception that boys are “more mature”. In eight of nine participating countries the disagreement in this regard is majority (Table 12).

Table 12: Gendered perceptions: Boys are more mature

Boys are more mature						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	3.8%	17.5%	21.2%	40.0%	17.5%	100.0%
Cyprus	35.5%	29.0%	22.6%	12.9%	0.0%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	62.5%	18.8%	18.8%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	25.0%	25.0%	12.5%	12.5%	25.0%	100.0%
Latvia	4.8%	42.9%	38.1%	14.3%	0.0%	100.0%
Portugal	42.9%	28.6%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Turkey	21.1%	42.1%	15.8%	15.8%	5.3%	100.0%
United Kingdom	13.9%	47.2%	25.0%	11.1%	2.8%	100.0%
Total	14.7%	33.3%	22.5%	21.6%	7.8%	100.0%

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With regard to **the respondents who believe that girls excel** 31% of them “agree” and 6.9% “strongly agrees” with the perception that girls are stronger (Table 13). It is worth mentioning that among participants who believe that boys excel the degree of agreement with the perception that boys are stronger is much higher reaching 72.9% cumulatively (Table 8).

Table 13: Gendered perceptions per country: girls are stronger

Girls are stronger						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	12.5%	25.0%	100.0%
Cyprus	0.0%	22.2%	22.2%	55.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Czech Republic	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	0.0%	10.0%	40.0%	50.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Latvia	0.0%	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Portugal	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Turkey	20.0%	40.0%	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%	100.0%
United Kingdom	0.0%	60.0%	0.0%	40.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	8.6%	24.1%	29.3%	31.0%	6.9%	100.0%

62.5% of the participants “agree” (41.1%) or “strongly agree” (21.4%) with the perception that girls try harder. The highest percentages of agreement were recorded in the Czech Republic, Sweden and Cyprus. Accordingly, the highest percentages of disagreement with regard to this perception were recorded in Portugal, Latvia and Turkey (Table 14)

Table 14: Gendered perceptions: Girls try harder

Girls try harder						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	6.2%	12.5%	6.2%	43.8%	31.2%	100.0%
Cyprus	0.0%	0.0%	37.5%	62.5%	0.0%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	9.1%	18.2%	9.1%	27.3%	36.4%	100.0%
Latvia	0.0%	37.5%	0.0%	37.5%	25.0%	100.0%
Portugal	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%
Turkey	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%
United Kingdom	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	40.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	3.6%	17.9%	16.1%	41.1%	21.4%	100.0%

In relation to the perception that trainers/coaches encourage girls more 35.7% of the respondents “disagree” (28.6%) or “strongly disagree” (7.1%), while 35.7% of them “neither agree nor disagrees” and 28.6% “agree” (14.3%) or “strongly agree” (14.3%). Among the participating countries, the highest percentages of agreement with this perception were recorded in Italy, Bulgaria and the UK while the percentages of disagreement were recorded in Bulgaria, Cyprus and Latvia (Table 15).

Table 15: Gendered perceptions per country: Trainers encourage girls more

Trainers encourage girls more						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	20.0%	40.0%	0.0%	13.3%	26.7%	100.0%
Cyprus	0.0%	44.4%	55.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	9.1%	9.1%	27.3%	27.3%	27.3%	100.0%
Latvia	0.0%	37.5%	62.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Portugal	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	100.0%
Turkey	0.0%	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%
United Kingdom	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	40.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	7.1%	28.6%	35.7%	14.3%	14.3%	100.0%

Similarly, with regards to the perception that family & friends encourage girls more 30.3% of participants “disagree” or “strongly disagree”, 33.9% “neither agree nor disagree”, and 35.7% “agree” or “strongly agree”. The highest rates of agreement among the participating countries are recorded in Italy and the UK, while the highest rates of disagreement are recorded in the Czech Republic and Turkey.

Table 16: Gendered perceptions per country: Family & friends encourage girls more

Family & friends encourage girls more						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	18.8%	18.8%	25.0%	25.0%	12.5%	100.0%
Cyprus	0.0%	37.5%	37.5%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	10.0%	10.0%	10.0%	30.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Latvia	0.0%	12.5%	75.0%	12.5%	0.0%	100.0%
Portugal	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Turkey	0.0%	75.0%	0.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
United Kingdom	20.0%	0.0%	20.0%	60.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	8.9%	21.4%	33.9%	25.0%	10.7%	100.0%

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With regards to the perception that girls are more skilful, the majority of the respondents either “agree” (42.1%) or “strongly agree” (14%) with this perception. The highest rates of agreement are recorded in Italy and Cyprus, while the highest rates of disagreement are recorded in Portugal and the UK (Table 17).

Table 17: Gendered perceptions per country: girls are more skilful

girls are more skillfull						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	18.8%	12.5%	25.0%	31.2%	12.5%	100.0%
Cyprus	0.0%	0.0%	22.2%	77.8%	0.0%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	20.0%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Latvia	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Portugal	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%	100.0%
Turkey	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	100.0%
United Kingdom	20.0%	20.0%	40.0%	20.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	12.3%	10.5%	21.1%	42.1%	14.0%	100.0%

Finally, the overwhelming majority (66.7%) of the respondents believe that girls are more mature. The highest rates of agreement with this perception were recorded in the Czech Republic and Portugal and the highest rates of disagreement in Latvia and Turkey (Table 18).

Table 18: Gendered perceptions: Girls are more mature

Girls are more mature						
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Bulgaria	12.5%	12.5%	0.0%	50.0%	25.0%	100.0%
Cyprus	0.0%	0.0%	12.5%	75.0%	12.5%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	18.2%	0.0%	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	100.0%
Latvia	12.5%	37.5%	25.0%	25.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Portugal	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	0.0%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	66.7%	100.0%
Turkey	40.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	40.0%	100.0%
United Kingdom	0.0%	25.0%	25.0%	50.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	12.3%	10.5%	10.5%	42.1%	24.6%	100.0%

In summary coaches/trainers who believe that there are differences in performance based on gender attribute different characteristics to their gender representations. Thus, those who consider that boys excel mention as performance-influencing attributes the perceptions that boys are stronger and/or that they are more encouraged from family and friends.

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Respectively, those who believe that girls excel in sports tend to attribute this belief in other features (girls try harder and/or they are more skilful and mature).

4.1.3. PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER AND PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS

Regarding coaches' perceptions of girls' and boys' participation in sports, respondents' answers reveal the following: 43.7% of the participants disagree with the perception that “girls do not have to worry about whether they are doing well in sports”. Moreover, the majority (44.7%) rejects the perception that “girls participate more passively in sports activities”. With regard to the idea that “fair play suits girls better” 39% of the participants express their disagreement, 30.6% neither agree nor disagree and 30.3% agree or strongly agree (Table 19).

Most of the participants seem to reject the idea that girls should not be competitive in sports if they wish to be accepted by boys. The majority (49.3%) disagrees or strongly disagrees with the idea that “girls often hide their athletic skills to be liked by boys” and 46.3% of the participants disagree or strongly disagree with the idea that “it is more important for girls to succeed in sports than boys”. Finally, the majority rejects the idea that “girls are not as capable as boys in sports” (61.2%) and believe that “girls need more encouragement than boys” (49.2%) (Table 19).

Table 19: Perceptions of gender and participation in sports

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Girls do not have to worry about whether they are doing well in sports	15.0%	28.7%	21.6%	20.2%	14.4%	100.0%
Girls participate more passively in sport activities (e.g. watch boys play)	11.8%	32.8%	22.8%	28.3%	4.3%	100.0%
Fair play suits girls better	11.4%	27.6%	30.6%	22.7%	7.6%	100.0%
Girls should not be competitive in sports if they wish to be accepted by boys	32.6%	32.7%	19.0%	11.5%	4.2%	100.0%
Girls are more persistent than boys	5.7%	19.4%	39.1%	29.3%	6.5%	100.0%
Girls often hide their athletic skills to be liked by boys	13.8%	35.5%	26.7%	20.1%	3.8%	100.0%
It is more important for girls to succeed in sports than boys	12.7%	33.6%	33.3%	16.1%	4.4%	100.0%
Girls are more interested in sports than boys	10.1%	36.8%	38.8%	10.6%	3.8%	100.0%
Girls are not as capable as boys in sports	26.9%	34.3%	24.2%	10.3%	4.3%	100.0%
Girls need more encouragement than boys	7.3%	20.3%	23.1%	36.1%	13.1%	100.0%

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Boys have higher movement skills and achieve higher performance in sports	11.8%	31.0%	27.6%	23.8%	5.8%	100.0%
It suits boys better to participate in sport activities	21.3%	34.5%	22.7%	15.9%	5.7%	100.0%
Boys perform better than girls in sports	18.0%	31.0%	25.8%	19.9%	5.3%	100.0%
Boys are not interested in fair play	13.4%	41.2%	31.1%	8.8%	5.5%	100.0%
Boys need more encouragement than girls	12.7%	39.5%	32.0%	12.2%	3.6%	100.0%
Boys participate more actively in sport activities	8.2%	17.6%	23.5%	41.8%	8.9%	100.0%
Boys are “more difficult to manage” than girls	8.6%	26.9%	30.2%	28.1%	6.1%	100.0%
It is more important for boys to succeed in sports than girls	16.2%	26.1%	30.4%	20.5%	6.8%	100.0%
It is not necessary for a boy to be good at sports	10.5%	22.5%	33.3%	25.8%	7.8%	100.0%

Furthermore, the majority of the participants (42.8%) reject the perception that “boys have higher movement skills and achieve higher performance in sports” as well as the perception that “it suits boys better to participate in sport activities” (55.8%). The majority of the participants (49%) do not believe that boys perform better than girls in sports. Moreover, the majority of the participants (54.6%) disagree with the idea that “boys are not interested in fair play and that they need more encouragement than girls” (52.2%). However, the majority of the participants “believe that boys participate more actively in sport activities” (50.7%) (Table 19).

4.1.4: DIFFERENCES IN WORKOUTS BASED ON GENDER

By examining participants' perceptions about differences in workouts based on gender, we observe that the majority (79.9%) of the participants claim to promote participation of both boys and girls in sport activities. Moreover, 67.4% of the participants stated that they use the same rules for both boys and girls and 71.7% that they use both boys and girls as examples when explaining physical activities. 54.8% reported that they form groups with equal numbers of girls and boys and 75.1% of the respondents that they take equally into account suggestions made by boys and by girls. 74.1% of the participants suggest that they focus their attention equally on boys and girls and 59.4% that they use the same verbal expressions for both boys and girls and 77.2% that they give responsibilities to boys and girls equally. The following table (20) presents in detail the level of agreement or disagreement among participants concerning practices they implement.

Table 20: 4.1.4. Gender and Workout

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
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I devote different amounts of time to correcting exercises, depending on gender	14.4%	25.5%	29.8%	21.5%	8.8%	100.0%
I promote participation of both boys and girls in sport activities	1.4%	6.0%	12.7%	42.5%	37.4%	100.0%
I suggest different activities according to gender	13.8%	25.1%	25.5%	26.6%	9.0%	100.0%
Depending on the kind of activity, I find coeducation difficult to manage	11.5%	26.4%	31.5%	24.2%	6.4%	100.0%
I use the same rules for both boys and girls	2.2%	12.0%	18.1%	44.2%	23.4%	100.0%
I use both boys and girls as examples when explaining physical activities	2.2%	8.4%	17.8%	44.4%	27.3%	100.0%
I form groups with equal numbers of girls and boys	2.5%	11.8%	30.8%	38.9%	15.9%	100.0%
Physical improvement varies according to gender	6.7%	19.4%	27.6%	37.5%	8.8%	100.0%
I take equally into account suggestions made by boys and by girls	2.2%	5.2%	17.5%	44.4%	30.7%	100.0%
I motivate and encourage boys and girls differently	9.2%	24.6%	22.8%	32.8%	10.6%	100.0%
I focus my attention equally on boys and girls	1.9%	6.3%	17.7%	45.1%	29.0%	100.0%
Existing PE materials intrinsically promote sexist attitudes	11.5%	30.3%	35.2%	17.7%	5.4%	100.0%
I use a different tone when speaking to girls	17.4%	34.4%	24.6%	18.8%	4.9%	100.0%
I use the same verbal expressions for both boys and girls	3.6%	15.0%	21.9%	41.9%	17.5%	100.0%
I give responsibilities as much to boys as to girls	2.5%	5.3%	14.9%	46.1%	31.1%	100.0%

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4.1.5. COACHES' PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL / TRAINING PROGRAMS AIMING TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

72.3% of the participants state that they have not received education or training aiming to promote gender equality. In all participating countries the percentages of coaches who report a lack of relevant training are quite high. The highest rates were recorded in Turkey (87,5%) and Bulgaria (87,4%). The highest rates of coaches who reported that they have received relevant training are recorded in Sweden (56.2%), Cyprus (48.6%) and the UK (37.8%).

Table 21: Participation in educational / training programs aiming to promote gender equality

	Yes	No	Total
Bulgaria	12.6%	87.4%	100.0%
Cyprus	48.6%	51.4%	100.0%
Czech Republic	31.8%	68.2%	100.0%
Italy	25.5%	74.5%	100.0%
Latvia	29.6%	70.4%	100.0%
Portugal	22.5%	77.5%	100.0%
Sweden	56.2%	43.8%	100.0%
Turkey	12.5%	87.5%	100.0%
United Kingdom	37.8%	62.2%	100.0%
Total	27.7%	72.3%	100.0%

Regarding the level of coaches' training on gender issues in their country, we observe that 59.7% of the respondents from Latvia claim that coaches are "trained" and 7.5% consider them "well trained". In Portugal, 57.5% of the participants claim that coaches are "trained" and in Bulgaria that most coaches are either "trained" 27.3% or "well trained" (44.5%). At this point, it is worth mentioning that although Sweden has the highest percentage of coaches indicating that they received training on gender issues (see Table 21), most of them tend to believe that the overall level of training on gender issues in their country is not satisfactory (30.3% of the respondents believe that coaches are "not trained at all" on gender issues while 36.4% believe that they are "not really trained") (Table 22).

Table 22: The level of coaches' training concerning equal gender participation in sports

	Not trained at all	Not really trained	Neither trained nor untrained	Trained	Well trained	Total
Bulgaria	8.2%	11.8%	8.2%	27.3%	44.5%	100.0%
Cyprus	6.8%	23.0%	24.3%	36.5%	9.5%	100.0%
Czech Republic	18.2%	22.7%	31.8%	22.7%	4.5%	100.0%
Italy	2.2%	20.4%	62.4%	14.0%	1.1%	100.0%
Latvia	3.0%	9.0%	20.9%	59.7%	7.5%	100.0%
Portugal	5.0%	20.0%	17.5%	57.5%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	30.3%	36.4%	9.1%	21.2%	3.0%	100.0%

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Turkey	8.8%	46.1%	23.5%	20.6%	1.0%	100.0%
United Kingdom	1.0%	28.6%	32.7%	30.6%	7.1%	100.0%
Total	6.9%	24.3%	26.9%	30.7%	11.3%	100.0%

Finally, concerning the importance of education / training on gender issues, we note that the vast majority of respondents from all participating believe that it is an important or very important issue (Table 23)

Table 23: Importance of training the trainers on gender issues per country

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Neither Unimportant nor Important	Important	Very Important	Total
Bulgaria	4.6%	0.9%	9.3%	33.3%	51.9%	100.0%
Cyprus	2.9%	0.0%	15.7%	32.9%	48.6%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	9.1%	18.2%	54.5%	18.2%	100.0%
Italy	0.0%	3.4%	47.1%	34.5%	14.9%	100.0%
Latvia	1.5%	4.5%	17.9%	58.2%	17.9%	100.0%
Portugal	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	52.5%	42.5%	100.0%
Sweden	3.1%	0.0%	3.1%	40.6%	53.1%	100.0%
Turkey	3.9%	2.0%	2.0%	31.4%	60.8%	100.0%
United Kingdom	7.3%	0.0%	4.2%	45.8%	42.7%	100.0%
Total	3.2%	1.8%	13.9%	40.1%	41.0%	100.0%

SUMMARY

The sample of this survey consisted of a total of 707 participants from nine participating countries. With regard to the gender of the participants, 44.6% are men and 55.4% are women. Concerning their age, the majority of the sample (32%) states that it belongs to the age group of 31-40 years followed by 29.6% the participants who belong to the age group of 21-30 years. In relation to the type of occupation, the majority of the participants (40.7%) reported that they work as trainers/coaches in the sports clubs, while the second most prevalent type of job is "teacher in public primary school" (26.6%). In terms of education, the majority of participants (47.7%) are university graduates, while the high educational profile of the participants is supplemented by 16% of the respondents who hold a Master's degree and 11.2% who hold a PhD.

Regarding participants' perceptions about children performance in sports and the role of gender, the majority of the sample (55.7%) argues that there is no difference between boys and girls. However, one out of three respondents (35.1%) stated that boys excel, while the corresponding percentage of respondents who stated that girls excelled is only 9.2%. It is worth mentioning that coaches who say there is a differentiation in performance based on gender attribute different characteristics to their beliefs. Thus, those who consider that boys excel mention as performance-influencing attributes the perceptions that boys are stronger and/or that they are more encouraged from family and friends. Respectively, those who believe that girls excel in sports tend to attribute this to the belief that girls try harder and/or that they are more skilful and mature. Exploring participants' perceptions of differences in gender-based training reveals that the majority (79.9%) of the participants argue that they promote the participation of both boys and girls in sport activities. In relation to coaches' participation in education/training programs aiming to promote equality, 72.3% of the participants state that they have not received such education or training, but relevant training is considered to be of great importance in all participating countries.



4.2. PARENTS

4.2.1. DEMOGRAPHICS

1029 parents from 9 countries (Table 24) participated in the research 766 of which are women (74.4%) and 263 men (25.6%)

Table 24: Country of Residence

Country of Residence	%
Bulgaria	10.1
Cyprus	2.8
Czech Republic	3.7
Italy	10.7
Latvia	21.5
Portugal	8.5
Sweden	9.0
Turkey	21.2
United Kingdom	12.5
Total	100

The majority of the participants (41.04%) stated that they belong to the age group of 41-50 years followed by 39.94% of participants who reported that they belong to the age group 31-40 (Table 25).

Table 25: Age per country of residence

Country of residence	Age				Total
	21-30	31-40	41-50	51 +	%
Bulgaria	29.8%	41.3%	26.9%	1.9%	100.0%
Cyprus	6.9%	41.4%	41.4%	10.3%	100.0%
Czech Republic	7.9%	44.7%	47.4%	0.0%	100.0%
Italy	15.1%	27.4%	37.7%	19.8%	100.0%
Latvia	4.6%	48.4%	41.9%	5.1%	100.0%
Portugal	10.3%	44.8%	33.3%	11.5%	100.0%
Sweden	8.8%	11.0%	71.4%	8.8%	100.0%
Turkey	5.5%	66.1%	28.0%	0.5%	100.0%
United Kingdom	10.9%	34.4%	41.4%	13.3%	100.0%
Total	11.09%	39.94%	41.04%	7.91%	100.0%

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In relation to their level of education, the majority of the participants (34.37%) are university graduates. 20.94% of them are high school graduates and 17.86% college graduates (Table 26).

Table 26: Level of Education per country of residence

	Less than high school diploma	High School	College	University Graduate	Master's Degree	PhD	Other	Total
Bulgaria	0.0%	8.7%	16.3%	31.7%	34.6%	8.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Cyprus	0.0%	27.6%	24.1%	24.1%	20.7%	0.0%	3.4%	100.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	10.5%	28.9%	34.2%	23.7%	0.0%	2.6%	100.0%
Italy	1.9%	22.6%	9.4%	36.8%	15.1%	14.2%	0.0%	100.0%
Latvia	1.4%	16.6%	21.2%	40.1%	18.4%	0.0%	2.3%	100.0%
Portugal	4.6%	34.5%	11.5%	39.1%	8.0%	2.3%	0.0%	100.0%
Sweden	2.2%	16.5%	22.0%	44.0%	11.0%	1.1%	3.3%	100.0%
Turkey	26.1%	41.3%	0.0%	20.2%	2.3%	0.0%	10.1%	100.0%
United Kingdom	0.8%	10.2%	27.3%	39.1%	18.0%	0.8%	3.9%	100.0%
Total	4.11%	20.94%	17.86%	34.37%	16.87%	3.01%	2.84%	100.0%

In relation to the type of occupation, the overwhelming majority of the participants (54.3%) stated that they work full-time. 13.5% of them are self-employed and 11.6% unemployed. Sweden (82.4%), Czech Republic (76.3%) and Cyprus (75.9%), present the highest full-time employment rates. In relation to self-employment, the highest rates were recorded in Italy (32.1%), Bulgaria (23.1%) and Portugal (18.4%) while the highest unemployment rates were recorded in Turkey (26.1%), Bulgaria (17.3%) and Portugal (11.5%). Finally, with regard to part-time employment, the highest rates were recorded in the UK (21.1%), Portugal (13.8%), Czech Republic (10.5%) and Cyprus (10.3%) (Table 27).

Table 27: Employment Status per country

	Full time	Part time	Self employed	Unemployed	Retired	Other	Total
Bulgaria	49.0%	9.6%	23.1%	17.3%	1.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Cyprus	75.9%	10.3%	3.4%	10.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Czech Republic	76.3%	10.5%	13.2%	0.0%	0.0%	76.3%	100.0%
Italy	52.8%	9.4%	32.1%	0.9%	1.9%	2.8%	100.0%
Latvia	69.6%	6.0%	8.8%	7.4%	0.0%	8.3%	100.0%
Portugal	52.9%	13.8%	18.4%	11.5%	1.1%	2.3%	100.0%
Sweden	82.4%	8.8%	3.3%	2.2%	2.2%	1.1%	100.0%
Turkey	26.6%	2.8%	8.3%	26.1%	4.6%	31.7%	100.0%
United Kingdom	50.8%	21.1%	13.3%	8.6%	2.3%	50.8%	100.0%
Total	54.3%	9.1%	13.5%	11.6%	1.9%	9.6%	100.0%

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In relation to their annual family income, the majority of parents (34%) answered that their annual family income is up to € 10,000, followed by families with an annual income of €10.001 to €20,000 (24.8), while 13.5% of the participants have an annual family income that exceeds €50.000. The family income gap between the participating countries is remarkable. While in Sweden 73.9% of the participants report an income higher than €50.001, the vast majority of participants from Turkey (72.8%) and Bulgaria (68.6%) report that their family income is less than €10.000 (Table 28).

Table 28: Annual Family Income per country

	Up to €10.000	€10.001 – 20.000	€20.001 – 30.000	€30.001 – 50.000	More than €50.001
Bulgaria	68.6%	13.7%	13.7%	2.9%	1.0%
Cyprus	8.0%	44.0%	20.0%	12.0%	16.0%
Czech Republic	5.3%	52.6%	26.3%	10.5%	5.3%
Italy	4.8%	29.5%	41.0%	15.2%	9.5%
Latvia	39.1%	37.7%	10.6%	8.2%	4.3%
Portugal	20.6%	36.8%	36.8%	4.4%	1.5%
Sweden	0.0%	3.4%	8.0%	14.8%	73.9%
Turkey	72.8%	11.2%	8.3%	5.9%	1.8%
United Kingdom	13.6%	22.9%	20.3%	18.6%	24.6%
Total	34.0%	24.8%	17.8%	9.9%	13.5%

4.2.2: PARTICIPATION IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regarding weekly participation in physical activity 17.1% of the participants indicated that they got involved in relevant activities up to 2 hours during the week, 16.4% up to 3 hours and 14.7% up to 1 hour. The highest participation rates (up to 4 hours) were recorded in Sweden (25.3%) and Czech Republic (21.9%). Consequently, the highest non-attendance rates were recorded in Cyprus (23.1%), Turkey (18.5%) and Latvia (14.9%) (Table 29).

Table 29: Physical activity during the week per country

	Not at all	Up to 30 min	Up to 1 hour	Up to 2 hours	Up to 3 hours	Up to 4 hours
Bulgaria	0.0%	6.8%	4.5%	9.1%	6.8%	18.2%
Cyprus	23.1%	7.7%	23.1%	7.7%	11.5%	7.7%
Czech Republic	3.1%	6.2%	18.8%	15.6%	15.6%	21.9%
Italy	1.0%	9.2%	9.2%	29.6%	26.5%	12.2%
Latvia	14.9%	9.6%	17.0%	18.6%	12.8%	9.6%
Portugal	8.3%	11.7%	18.3%	15.0%	26.7%	11.7%
Sweden	2.5%	1.3%	8.9%	19.0%	16.5%	25.3%
Turkey	18.5%	19.0%	20.0%	13.3%	12.3%	7.7%
United Kingdom	1.9%	8.3%	9.3%	15.7%	20.4%	10.2%
Total	9.8%	10.6%	14.7%	17.1%	16.4%	12.0%

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4.2.3 TYPES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN GIRLS' PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

In relation to the types of parental involvement in their daughters' participation in physical activity it is recorded that joint activities are not established but occur mostly occasionally (35.8%) or rarely (31.2%). However, this is not the case in Bulgaria where parents exercise with their children often (34.1%) or very often (31.8%). The highest non-participation rates were recorded in Turkey (21.1%), Cyprus (14.8%) and in the UK (14.4%) (Table 30).

Table 30: Frequency of physical activity with daughter during the week per country

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	2.3%	13.6%	18.2%	31.8%	34.1%
Cyprus	14.8%	48.1%	29.6%	3.7%	3.7%
Czech Republic	0.0%	25.0%	50.0%	18.8%	6.2%
Italy	1.0%	20.2%	49.5%	23.2%	6.1%
Latvia	11.2%	39.6%	37.4%	10.2%	1.6%
Portugal	11.7%	20.0%	36.7%	23.3%	8.3%
Sweden	10.3%	42.3%	29.5%	12.8%	5.1%
Turkey	21.1%	37.7%	27.6%	12.1%	1.5%
United Kingdom	14.4%	18.0%	44.1%	18.9%	4.5%
Total	11.9%	31.2%	35.8%	15.8%	5.3%

The majority of participants transfer their children very often (27.3%) or often (21.6%) to after-school sports activities. This form of parental support is very common in Bulgaria (54.5% very often and 15.9% often), Portugal (53.4% very often and 22.4% often) and Sweden (53.2% very often and 20.8% often).

Table 31: Frequency of transporting daughter to sports clubs after school per country

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	4.5%	11.4%	13.6%	15.9%	54.5%
Cyprus	26.9%	3.8%	3.8%	19.2%	46.2%
Czech Republic	6.5%	22.6%	19.4%	25.8%	25.8%
Italy	1.0%	6.1%	40.4%	34.3%	18.2%
Latvia	35.0%	13.9%	11.1%	18.3%	21.7%
Portugal	10.3%	3.4%	10.3%	22.4%	53.4%
Sweden	3.9%	2.6%	19.5%	20.8%	53.2%
Turkey	46.0%	14.9%	16.7%	12.6%	9.8%
United Kingdom	14.0%	9.3%	19.6%	31.8%	25.2%
Total	22.5%	10.6%	18.1%	21.6%	27.3%

Parents tend to discuss with their daughters about the benefits of physical activity often (35.4%) or very often (28.9%). In more detail, 79.5% of the participants from Bulgaria mention that this happens often or very often, followed by participants from Sweden (80.6%), Cyprus (73.1%), Portugal (70.7%) and Italy (68.6%) (Table 32).

Table 32: Frequency of discussing with daughter about benefits of physical activity per country

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	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	0.0%	11.4%	9.1%	22.7%	56.8%
Cyprus	3.8%	3.8%	19.2%	30.8%	42.3%
Czech Republic	0.0%	3.3%	26.7%	33.3%	36.7%
Italy	0.0%	2.0%	31.3%	44.4%	22.2%
Latvia	1.7%	8.8%	26.5%	33.1%	29.8%
Portugal	0.0%	1.7%	27.6%	44.8%	25.9%
Sweden	2.6%	2.6%	14.3%	41.6%	39.0%
Turkey	12.5%	7.6%	26.6%	35.9%	17.4%
United Kingdom	3.7%	4.7%	33.6%	27.1%	30.8%
Total	4.1%	5.8%	25.8%	35.4%	28.9%

Regarding their daughters' participation in sports the vast majority of parents assess it as a very important (49.3%) or important (33.1%) issue. The vast majority of participants from Sweden consider it as very important (80%) followed by participants from Bulgaria (75%), Portugal (61.7%) and Cyprus (50%) (Table 33).

Table 33: Daughter's participation in sports-Level of importance per country

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Neither Unimportant nor Important	Important	Very Important	I don't know
Bulgaria	0.0%	2.3%	4.5%	18.2%	75.0%	0.0%
Cyprus	3.8%	3.8%	23.1%	19.2%	50.0%	0.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	0.0%	29.0%	35.5%	32.3%	3.2%
Italy	0.0%	0.0%	23.5%	36.7%	38.8%	1.0%
Latvia	1.7%	2.8%	15.6%	32.2%	47.2%	0.6%
Portugal	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	30.0%	61.7%	6.7%
Sweden	0.0%	0.0%	4.0%	16.0%	80.0%	0.0%
Turkey	2.0%	0.5%	12.2%	42.6%	39.6%	3.0%
United Kingdom	8.4%	2.8%	5.6%	36.4%	45.8%	0.9%
Total	2.1%	1.5%	12.3%	33.1%	49.3%	1.7%

Finally, concerning the involvement of parents in their daughters' sports activities 50.5% of the participants consider it important and 32.6% very important. 59.1% of the parents from Bulgaria consider it very important, followed by parents from Sweden (54.7%).

Table 34: Involvement in daughter's sporting events - Level of importance per country

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Neither Unimportant nor Important	Important	Very Important	I don't know
Bulgaria	0.0%	2.3%	9.1%	29.5%	59.1%	0.0%
Cyprus	3.8%	7.7%	3.8%	42.3%	42.3%	3.8%
Czech Republic	0.0%	3.2%	22.6%	58.1%	16.1%	0.0%
Italy	0.0%	0.0%	20.2%	48.5%	31.3%	0.0%
Latvia	2.2%	4.5%	16.1%	54.4%	22.8%	2.2%

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Portugal	1.7%	0.0%	1.7%	50.8%	45.8%	1.7%
Sweden	0.0%	0.0%	9.3%	36.0%	54.7%	0.0%
Turkey	2.6%	0.5%	9.3%	59.1%	28.5%	2.6%
United Kingdom	4.7%	2.8%	17.8%	48.6%	26.2%	4.7%
Total	1.9%	1.9%	13.0%	50.5%	32.6%	1.9%

4.2.4: PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AS A FORM OF FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

The analysis of the results shows that participation in physical activities as a form of family entertainment is not a well-established practice. 39.8% of the participants mention that this happens occasionally, 22.1% rarely, and 13.2% never. However, 26.4% of the participants exercise for fun with their family members often or very often. It is worth mentioning here that the vast majority of parents from Bulgaria mention that this is happening very often, whereas, according to 40% of the participants from Turkey, this is never the case (Table 36).

Table 36: Frequency of family physical activity as a form of family entertainment (per country)

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	2.3%	4.5%	18.2%	15.9%	59.1%
Cyprus	36.0%	24.0%	24.0%	12.0%	4.0%
Czech Republic	0.0%	9.7%	38.7%	35.5%	16.1%
Italy	1.0%	12.2%	52.0%	24.5%	10.2%
Latvia	5.6%	28.8%	49.7%	11.9%	4.0%
Portugal	3.3%	11.7%	38.3%	31.7%	15.0%
Sweden	1.3%	20.0%	45.3%	24.0%	9.3%
Turkey	40.0%	28.2%	25.1%	5.1%	1.5%
United Kingdom	4.6%	26.9%	39.8%	19.4%	9.3%
Total	13.2%	22.1%	38.6%	16.5%	9.6%

SUMMARY

A total of 1029 parents from nine countries participated in the research (766 women and 263 men). The majority of them (41.04%) were 41-50 years followed by 39.94% the participants declaring that they belong to the age group 31-40. In relation to their level of education, the majority of the participants (34.37%) are university graduates, while 20.94% are high school graduates and 17.86% college graduates. In relation to their type of employment, the overwhelming majority of the participants (54.3%) work full-time, 13.5% are self-employed and 11.6% unemployed. In relation to family annual income, the majority (34%) of the surveyed parents reported annual family income of up to €10,000, followed by participants with an annual income up to €20,000 (24.8%). The family income gap between the participating countries is remarkable. While in Sweden 73.9% of the participants report an income higher than €50,001, the vast majority of participants from Turkey (72.8%) and Bulgaria (68.6%) report that their family income is less than €10,000. The majority of participants transfers their daughters to after-school sports activities often or very often and they tend to discuss with them about the benefits of physical activity often (35.4%) or very often (28.9%). However, participation in physical activities as a form of family entertainment is not a well-established practice. 39.8% of the participants mention that it happens occasionally, 22.1% rarely, and 13.2% never.



4.3. GIRLS

4.3.1. DEMOGRAPHICS

2066 girls aged 11-16 years participated in the research. The table below (37) shows their distribution per country.

Table 37: Participation per Country of residence

Country of Residence	Frequency	Percent
Bulgaria	112	5.4
Cyprus	45	2.2
Czech Republic	128	6.2
Italy	102	4.9
Latvia	313	15.2
Portugal	120	5.8
Sweden	70	3.4
Turkey	1064	51.5
United Kingdom	112	5.4
Total	2066	100.0

In relation to girls' age, in most participating countries the majority of girls were 16 years old with the exceptions of Czech Republic, where the majority were girls aged 11 years old (24.2%) and the UK, where the majority of girls were 14 years old (40.2%) (Table 38).

Table 38: Participants' age per country of residence

Country of residence	Age					
	11	12	13	14	15	16
Bulgaria	8.0%	11.6%	13.4%	14.3%	20.5%	32.1%
Cyprus	10.3%	17.9%	12.8%	17.9%	17.9%	23.1%
Czech Republic	24.2%	36.7%	13.3%	8.6%	8.6%	8.6%
Italy	2.9%	6.9%	8.8%	19.6%	26.5%	35.3%
Latvia	9.6%	16.0%	19.8%	15.3%	17.3%	22.0%
Portugal	15.0%	14.2%	15.8%	17.5%	17.5%	20.0%
Sweden	5.7%	17.1%	7.1%	12.9%	24.3%	32.9%
Turkey	14.1%	13.6%	14.5%	12.4%	16.4%	28.9%
United Kingdom	10.7%	8.9%	8.9%	40.2%	16.1%	15.2%
Total	11.17%	15.88%	12.71%	17.63%	18.34%	24.23%

4.3.2. PARTICIPATION IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT

Considering WHO's physical activity guidelines for children, the research examined the frequency of girls' participation in physical activity on a country-by-country basis. From the analysis of the results it is revealed that among participating countries Latvia (35.9%) and Portugal (35.8%) present the highest rates of girls who report that they participate in physical activity more than an hour per day. Subsequently, the highest percentages of girls reporting that they were practicing less than 15 min per day were recorded in Turkey (37.5%), Sweden (18.5%) and Italy (11.8%) (Table 39).

Table 39: Daily walking per country of residence

How long do you walk every day?	Less than 15 minutes	15-30 minutes	30-45 minutes	45-60 minutes	More than 60 minutes
Bulgaria	8.0%	25.0%	23.2%	25.0%	18.8%
Cyprus	5.6%	30.6%	33.3%	19.4%	11.1%
Czech Republic	7.1%	25.4%	19.8%	20.6%	27.0%
Italy	11.8%	42.2%	27.5%	8.8%	9.8%
Latvia	6.5%	24.8%	17.6%	15.0%	35.9%
Portugal	7.5%	15.8%	15.0%	25.8%	35.8%
Sweden	18.5%	36.9%	32.3%	7.7%	4.6%
Turkey	37.5%	36.2%	12.1%	5.0%	9.2%
United Kingdom	8.1%	39.6%	19.8%	9.9%	22.5%
Total	12.29%	30.72%	22.29%	15.24%	19.41%

Concerning girls' participation in sports clubs and groups after school the highest participation percentages were recorded in Sweden (95.5%) and the lowest in Turkey (13.4%). Subsequently, the highest percentage of girls claiming they never participated in such activities were high in Turkey (62.3%). As far as former members of sports club were concerned, the highest dropout percentage was recorded in the UK (33.9%), followed by Latvia (29.6%) (Table 40).

Table 40: Participation in sports club or group per country of residence

Country of residence	No, I have never been an athlete in a sports club or group	No longer, but I was in the past	Yes, I am an athlete and participate in games
Bulgaria	34.9%	13.8%	51.4%
Cyprus	16.7%	19.4%	63.9%
Czech Republic	19.4%	20.2%	60.5%
Italy	8.0%	24.0%	68.0%
Latvia	30.0%	29.6%	40.4%
Portugal	18.5%	21.0%	60.5%
Sweden	0.0%	4.5%	95.5%
Turkey	62.3%	24.3%	13.4%
United Kingdom	20.2%	33.9%	45.9%
Total	23.33%	21.19%	55.50%

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4.3.3. SOCIAL SUPPORT FROM IMPORTANT OTHERS

In the following section data related on the forms of support received from "important others" will be presented. In particular, forms of support offered by parents, friends and P.E teachers will be examined.

Parents

According to the participants, mothers from Italy (28.4%) and Sweden (28.1%) support their daughters' participation in physical activities very often during the week. In addition, the highest percentages of girls reporting that their mothers often encourage them to participate are recorded in Portugal (33.6%), the UK (31.1%) and Italy (29.5%). On the other hand, the highest rates of girls reporting that their mothers never encourage them were recorded in Cyprus (28.1%) and in the Czech Republic (25%), while the highest rates of girls reporting that mothers rarely encourage them were recorded in Turkey (18.8%) and Latvia (16.4%) (Table 41).

Table 41: Mother's encouragement for physical activity on a weekly basis per country of residence

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did your MOTHER encourage you to do physical activities?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	9.3%	14.8%	25.9%	25.0%	25.0%
Cyprus	28.1%	12.5%	12.5%	18.8%	28.1%
Czech Republic	25.0%	13.4%	22.3%	18.8%	20.5%
Italy	13.7%	9.5%	18.9%	29.5%	28.4%
Latvia	14.5%	16.4%	27.7%	24.6%	16.8%
Portugal	5.2%	9.5%	28.4%	33.6%	23.3%
Sweden	5.3%	10.5%	28.1%	28.1%	28.1%
Turkey	17.6%	18.8%	26.7%	19.6%	17.3%
United Kingdom	14.6%	7.8%	22.3%	31.1%	24.3%
Total	14.81%	12.58%	23.64%	25.46%	23.53%

Concerning girls' participation in joint sport activities with their mothers "very often" or "often" was reported in Bulgaria 37.8%. Italy (54.8%), the Czech Republic (47.6%), the UK (45%) and Cyprus (43.8%) present the highest rates of girls who never get involved in physical activities with their mothers during the week. Finally, 31.2% of the participants from Cyprus, 27.6% of the participants from Turkey and 25.5% of the participants from Sweden mention that they rarely exercise with their mothers during the week (Table 42).

Table 42: Mother's -daughter's joint physical on a weekly basis per country of residence

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did your MOTHER: do a physical activity with you?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	22.6%	16.0%	23.6%	20.8%	17.0%
Cyprus	43.8%	31.2%	18.8%	3.1%	3.1%
Czech Republic	47.6%	23.3%	15.5%	9.7%	3.9%
Italy	54.8%	16.1%	18.3%	9.7%	1.1%
Latvia	33.5%	25.8%	25.4%	11.3%	4.0%
Portugal	37.2%	21.2%	26.5%	9.7%	5.3%
Sweden	32.7%	25.5%	27.3%	9.1%	5.5%
Turkey	32.4%	27.6%	23.3%	9.2%	7.4%
United Kingdom	45.0%	24.0%	18.0%	9.0%	4.0%
Total	38.84%	23.41%	21.86%	10.18%	5.70%

By examining the frequency with which mothers monitor their daughters' physical activities, we observe that the highest rates of "very frequent" monitoring were recorded in Sweden (25.5%) and in Bulgaria (21.6%). In addition, the majority of participants from Bulgaria (29.4%) and Sweden (29.1%) mention that their mothers often watch them exercise during the week. On the other hand the highest percentages of girls who say that their mothers never attend sports activities in which they participate were recorded in the UK (34%), Italy (29.8%) and Latvia (29.7%) while the highest rates of girls mentioning that their mothers rarely attend them participating in such activities were recorded in Latvia (26.8%), the Czech Republic (23.4%) and Italy (22.3%) (Table 43).

Table 43: Mother's monitoring of daughter's physical activity on a weekly basis per country

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did your MOTHER watch you take part in physical activities?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	13.7%	11.8%	23.5%	29.4%	21.6%
Cyprus	25.0%	12.5%	31.2%	12.5%	18.8%
Czech Republic	20.6%	23.4%	23.4%	23.4%	9.3%
Italy	29.8%	22.3%	21.3%	20.2%	6.4%
Latvia	29.7%	26.8%	24.0%	12.6%	6.9%
Portugal	20.0%	8.2%	36.4%	23.6%	11.8%
Sweden	9.1%	18.2%	18.2%	29.1%	25.5%
Turkey	24.7%	21.9%	24.1%	16.0%	13.3%
United Kingdom	34.0%	20.0%	26.0%	11.0%	9.0%
Total	22.96%	18.34%	25.34%	19.76%	13.62%

The highest percentages of fathers encouraging very often their daughters to take part in physical activities were recorded in Bulgaria (29%), Cyprus (25.8%) and Sweden (25, 5%). In addition, high percentages of girls who answered that their fathers encourage them often were recorded in Sweden (36.4%) and Portugal (33.6%). On the other hand, the highest percentages of girls

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mentioning that their fathers never encourage them during the week were recorded in the UK (39.8%), Cyprus (32.3%) and the Czech Republic (30.4%) (Table 44).

Table 44: Father's encouragement for physical activity on a weekly basis per country of residence

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did your FATHER encourage you to do physical activities?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	11.2%	14.0%	21.5%	24.3%	29.0%
Cyprus	32.3%	19.4%	16.1%	6.5%	25.8%
Czech Republic	30.4%	21.4%	17.0%	10.7%	20.5%
Italy	15.8%	10.5%	27.4%	26.3%	20.0%
Latvia	28.1%	17.8%	20.6%	16.6%	17.0%
Portugal	10.5%	6.1%	26.3%	36.0%	21.1%
Sweden	9.1%	12.7%	16.4%	36.4%	25.5%
Turkey	29.5%	18.7%	20.8%	15.6%	15.5%
United Kingdom	39.8%	11.8%	18.3%	18.3%	11.8%
Total	22.97%	14.71%	20.49%	21.19%	20.69%

In relation to girls' participation in joint sport activities with their fathers the highest rates of girls who answered "very often" (17.8%) and "often" (24.8%) were recorded in Bulgaria. Cyprus (67.7%), the UK (56.5%), Italy (52.7%) and the Czech Republic (49.1%) present the highest percentages of girls answering that their father never exercises with them. Finally, 25.5% of the participants from Sweden, 22.6% from Italy and 22% from Turkey reported that they rarely exercise with their father (Table 45).

Table 45: Father's -daughter's joint physical on a weekly basis per country of residence

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did your FATHER do a physical activity with you?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	19.8%	17.8%	19.8%	24.8%	17.8%
Cyprus	67.7%	12.9%	6.5%	6.5%	6.5%
Czech Republic	49.1%	20.4%	13.9%	9.3%	7.4%
Italy	52.7%	22.6%	16.1%	5.4%	3.2%
Latvia	45.3%	19.2%	21.2%	8.2%	6.1%
Portugal	30.4%	19.6%	26.8%	15.2%	8.0%
Sweden	25.5%	25.5%	25.5%	9.1%	14.5%
Turkey	42.6%	22.0%	19.4%	8.5%	7.5%
United Kingdom	56.5%	18.5%	12.0%	7.6%	5.4%
Total	43.29%	19.83%	17.91%	10.51%	8.49%

In relation to how frequently fathers watch their daughters exercise the highest percentages of girls answering "very often" were recorded in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic (22.1%). The highest percentages of girls answering "often" were recorded once again in Bulgaria (24%) and the Czech

Republic (24%) followed by Portugal (22.9%) and Sweden (20.4%). The highest percentages of girls answering that their father never attended sporting activities in which they participated were recorded in Latvia (42.9%), Italy (40.2%) and Cyprus (36.2%). Similarly, the highest percentages of girls claiming that their father "rarely" watches them participate in such activities were recorded in the UK (25.8%), Latvia (20.6%) and Turkey (20, 5%) (Table 46).

Table 46: Father's monitoring of daughter's physical activity on a weekly basis per country

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did your FATHER watch you take part in physical activities?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	19.2%	16.3%	18.3%	24.0%	22.1%
Cyprus	36.2%	19.0%	20.0%	13.3%	11.4%
Czech Republic	19.2%	16.3%	18.3%	24.0%	22.1%
Italy	40.2%	12.0%	23.9%	17.4%	6.5%
Latvia	42.9%	20.6%	17.8%	10.5%	8.1%
Portugal	21.1%	15.6%	24.8%	22.9%	15.6%
Sweden	13.0%	14.8%	27.8%	20.4%	24.1%
Turkey	35.7%	20.5%	20.3%	13.5%	10.0%
United Kingdom	32.3%	25.8%	19.4%	9.7%	12.9%
Total	28.87%	17.88%	21.18%	17.30%	14.76%

Friends

The highest rates of friends encouraging "very often" girls' participation in physical activities were recorded in Cyprus (21.9%) and Bulgaria (20.8%) while high percentage of girls declaring that their friends encourage them to participate in physical activities "often" were recorded in Bulgaria (30.7%) and Cyprus (28.1%). On the other hand, the highest percentages of girls declaring that their friends "never" encourage them were recorded in the UK (32%), Italy (25.8%), Turkey (23.9%), Cyprus (21.9%) and the Czech Republic (21.2%), while the highest percentage of girls declaring that their friends "rarely" encourage them were recorded in the Czech Republic (26.5%) and Turkey (25.6%).

Table 47: Friends' encouragement for physical activity on a weekly basis per country of residence

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did one of your friends encourage you to be physically active?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	5.0%	14.9%	28.7%	30.7%	20.8%
Cyprus	21.9%	21.9%	6.2%	28.1%	21.9%
Czech Republic	21.2%	26.5%	17.7%	22.1%	12.4%
Italy	25.8%	20.4%	24.7%	17.2%	11.8%
Latvia	18.8%	21.9%	29.3%	19.9%	10.2%
Portugal	13.9%	24.3%	23.5%	22.6%	15.7%
Sweden	19.6%	21.4%	19.6%	26.8%	12.5%

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Turkey	23.9%	25.6%	23.0%	15.1%	12.4%
United Kingdom	32.0%	14.0%	22.0%	22.0%	10.0%
Total	20.23%	21.21%	21.63%	22.72%	14.19%

With regard to the participation of girls in joint sports with their friends after school, the highest percentage of girls who answered that they exercise along with friends "very often" were recorded in Sweden (40%) and "often" in Bulgaria (30.1%). Correspondingly, Italy (34.8%), Turkey (26.8%) and the UK (26%) present the highest percentages of girls who reported that their friends "never" engage in physical activities with them after school. Finally, participants from Turkey (22.2%) and the UK (22%) reported that they rarely do so, followed by respondents from Italy (19.6%) and Latvia (19.6%) (Table 48).

Table 48: Joint physical with friends after school on a weekly basis per country of residence

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did one of your friends: - engage in physical activity with you in the afternoon?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	5.8%	17.5%	25.2%	30.1%	21.4%
Cyprus	25.0%	18.8%	21.9%	9.4%	25.0%
Czech Republic	21.1%	12.8%	21.1%	23.9%	21.1%
Italy	34.8%	19.6%	28.3%	9.8%	7.6%
Latvia	20.8%	19.6%	25.6%	23.2%	10.8%
Portugal	8.7%	13.9%	27.8%	28.7%	20.9%
Sweden	16.4%	5.5%	16.4%	21.8%	40.0%
Turkey	26.8%	22.2%	24.4%	14.9%	11.7%
United Kingdom	26.0%	22.0%	16.0%	21.0%	15.0%
Total	20.60%	16.88%	22.97%	20.31%	19.28%

Physical Education Teachers

The highest percentages of P.E. teachers who encourage girls "very often" to play sports were recorded in Turkey (34.4%), Cyprus (32.3%) and Bulgaria (29.5%). Moreover, the highest percentages of girls claiming that their P.E teachers "often" encourage them were recorded in the Czech Republic (39.1%) and Italy (37.6%). On the other hand, the highest percentages of girls claiming that their P.E. teachers "never" encourage them to participate in physical activities were recorded in Portugal (13.5%) and Cyprus (12.9%), while the highest percentages of girls claiming P.E. teachers "rarely" encourage them were recorded in the UK (19.4%), Bulgaria (17.1%) and Latvia (17.1%) (Table 49).

Table 49: PE teachers' encouragement for physical activity on a weekly basis per country of residence

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did your physical education teacher encourage you to do physical activities or play sports?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	4.8%	17.1%	21.9%	26.7%	29.5%
Cyprus	12.9%	12.9%	16.1%	25.8%	32.3%
Czech Republic	8.2%	13.6%	25.5%	39.1%	13.6%
Italy	5.4%	8.6%	24.7%	37.6%	23.7%
Latvia	9.2%	17.1%	23.1%	32.3%	18.3%
Portugal	13.5%	11.5%	21.2%	25.0%	28.8%
Sweden	10.7%	16.1%	25.0%	28.6%	19.6%
Turkey	10.9%	12.3%	15.4%	27.0%	34.4%
United Kingdom	17.5%	19.4%	26.2%	23.3%	13.6%
Total	10.34%	14.29%	22.12%	29.49%	23.76%

In relation to the frequency of participants' joint physical activity with their P.E. teachers the highest percentages of girls answering "very often" are reported in Cyprus (32.3%) and Turkey (31.4%). Accordingly, the highest percentage of girls answering "often" are recorded in Bulgaria (31.4%), Turkey (26.1%) and the Czech Republic (25.4%) while Portugal (56.7%) and Sweden (34.5%) present the highest percentages of girls claiming that their P.E. teachers never play sports with them. Finally, 27.3% of the participants from Sweden, and 19.4% from Cyprus answered that their P.E. teachers rarely play sports with them (Table 50).

Table 50: Joint physical activity with PE teacher on a weekly basis per country

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did your physical education teacher do a physical activity or played sports with you?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	10.5%	16.2%	15.2%	31.4%	26.7%
Cyprus	29.0%	19.4%	6.5%	12.9%	32.3%
Czech Republic	12.3%	16.7%	28.1%	25.4%	17.5%
Italy	24.2%	14.3%	34.1%	23.1%	4.4%
Latvia	23.6%	17.9%	24.4%	25.2%	8.9%
Portugal	56.7%	11.5%	15.4%	11.5%	4.8%
Sweden	34.5%	27.3%	27.3%	7.3%	3.6%
Turkey	9.6%	12.7%	20.1%	26.1%	31.4%
United Kingdom	29.4%	13.7%	32.4%	13.7%	10.8%
Total	25.53%	16.63%	22.61%	19.62%	15.60%

Regarding how frequently P.E. teachers tell girls that they are doing well in physical activities the highest rates of girls answering "very often" were recorded in Turkey (36%) and Cyprus (31.2%). Subsequently, the highest rates of girls answering "often" were recorded in Italy (34.4%), Bulgaria (33.7%) and the Czech Republic (30.9%). On the other hand, the highest percentages of participants

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who mentioned that they never receive compliments concerning their performance in sports by their P.E. teachers were recorded in the UK (19.4%), Turkey (13.6%) and Cyprus (12, 5%) (Table 51).

Table 51: PE teacher's rewards for physical activity on a weekly basis per country

Country of Residence	How often during a typical week did your physical education teacher tell you that you are doing well in physical activities or sports?				
	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very Often
Bulgaria	7.7%	13.5%	15.4%	33.7%	29.8%
Cyprus	12.5%	9.4%	25.0%	21.9%	31.2%
Czech Republic	3.6%	19.1%	26.4%	30.9%	20.0%
Italy	9.7%	9.7%	32.3%	34.4%	14.0%
Latvia	10.9%	13.0%	32.8%	22.3%	21.1%
Portugal	10.0%	12.0%	35.0%	25.0%	18.0%
Sweden	1.8%	20.0%	36.4%	25.5%	16.4%
Turkey	13.6%	12.7%	15.9%	21.7%	36.0%
United Kingdom	19.4%	13.3%	22.4%	26.5%	18.4%
Total	9.91%	13.63%	26.84%	26.88%	22.77%

4.3.4. MIXED GENDER SPORT ACTIVITIES

With regard to girls' perceptions of boys' and girls' coexistence in sports, significant rates of agreement were recorded. In eight of the nine participating countries, the vast majority of girls declared that they "agree" or "strongly agree" with this practice. However, it should be noted that 19.7% of the participants from the Czech Republic, 19.5% from Turkey and 17.9% from Latvia mentioned that they "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with this practice (Table 52).

Table 52: Perceptions of mixed gender sports activities per country

Do you agree with the idea of boys & girls playing sport together?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Country of Residence					
Bulgaria	8.5%	2.8%	4.7%	32.1%	51.9%
Cyprus	5.9%	2.9%	8.8%	41.2%	41.2%
Czech Republic	9.4%	10.3%	35.9%	33.3%	11.1%
Italy	1.1%	3.2%	8.6%	32.3%	54.8%
Latvia	7.4%	10.5%	16.3%	33.1%	32.7%
Portugal	0.9%	2.6%	10.3%	28.2%	58.1%
Sweden	0.0%	3.6%	5.5%	29.1%	61.8%
Turkey	10.3%	9.2%	14.1%	31.5%	35.0%
United Kingdom	3.8%	4.8%	24.0%	29.8%	37.5%
Total	5.26%	5.54%	14.24%	32.29%	42.68%

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In relation to the participation of girls in mixed gender groups, the highest percentage (85.2%) was recorded in Bulgaria and the lowest (49.5%) in the Czech Republic (Table 53).

Table 53: Participation in mixed gender sport activities per country of residence

Do you attend any mixed-gender sport activities (boys and girls attending)?	Yes	No
Bulgaria	85.2%	14.8%
Cyprus	64.7%	35.3%
Czech Republic	49.6%	50.4%
Italy	75.5%	24.5%
Latvia	65.4%	24.6%
Portugal	58.1%	41.9%
Sweden	57.1%	42.9%
Turkey	62.9%	37.1%
United Kingdom	54.8%	45.2%

Regarding their satisfaction from mixed gender sport activities, girls who declared extremely and somewhat satisfied are the majority in all participating countries. The highest rates of girls answering “extremely satisfied” were recorded in Bulgaria (75%) and Portugal (71.2%) while the highest percentages of girls answering “somewhat satisfied” were recorded in Latvia (46.7%), Sweden (45.2%) and the Czech Republic (43.1%). In the case of Italy, despite the high satisfaction rates, 8.2% of the participants stated that they are “somewhat dissatisfied” and 11% “extremely dissatisfied”.

Table 54: Participation σε mixed gender sports activities- Level of satisfaction

Country of residence	How satisfied are you from this experience?				
	Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied
Bulgaria	75.0%	15.2%	7.6%	2.2%	0.0%
Cyprus	68.2%	18.2%	13.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Czech Republic	39.7%	43.1%	15.5%	0.0%	1.7%
Italy	34.2%	30.1%	16.4%	8.2%	11.0%
Latvia	36.5%	46.7%	15.6%	0.6%	0.6%
Portugal	71.2%	10.6%	13.6%	3.0%	1.5%
Sweden	38.7%	45.2%	16.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Turkey	63.1%	22.1%	11.8%	2.2%	0.8%
United Kingdom	46.4%	32.1%	14.3%	3.6%	3.6%
Total	52.56%	29.26%	13.83%	2.20%	2.13%

SUMMARY

A total of 2066 girls from the nine participating countries aged 11-16 years participated in the present research. In seven out of the nine countries the majority of the girls were 16 years old. Regarding the frequency of girls' participation in physical activity, Latvia recorded the highest percentage among girls exercising more than 60 minutes daily (35.9%) while in Turkey 37.5% of the girls mentioned that they exercise less than 15 minutes daily. With regard to the participation of girls in extracurricular sport activities, the highest percentage of participation was recorded in Sweden (95.5%) while the highest non-participation percentage was recorded in Turkey (62.3%). Moreover, the highest dropout percentage among girls who used to be members in sports clubs was recorded in the UK (33.9%) .

In relation to support from important others, the highest percentage of mothers' encouraging their daughters "very often" to participate in sports was recorded in Italy (28.4%), while the highest percentage of girls mentioning that their mothers never encourage them was recorded in Cyprus (28.1%). With regard to girls' participation in joint sports with their mother, the highest frequency (very often) was recorded in Bulgaria (17%) while in Italy 54.8% of the girls answered that they never practice with their mothers. By examining how frequently mothers watch their daughters' physical activities, the highest percentage of participants answering "very often" was recorded in Sweden (25.5%), while the highest percentage of girls reporting that their mothers never watch their sports activities was recorded in the UK (34%).

Accordingly, the highest rates of fathers' encouragement were recorded in Bulgaria (29% "very often"), while the highest rates of girls answering that their father never encourages them were recorded in the UK (39.8%). In relation to the participation of girls in joint sports with their father, the highest rates of girls answering "very often" (17.8%) and "often" (24.8%) were recorded in Bulgaria, while the highest percentage of girls who mentioned that they never practiced with their father were recorded in Cyprus (67.7%). In relation to the frequency with which fathers watch their daughters' activities the highest percentage of fathers answering "very often" was recorded in Latvia (42.9%).

The highest percentage of friends encouraging girls to participate in physical activities was recorded in Cyprus (21.9%), while the highest percentage of girls who reported that their friends "never" encourage them to do so was recorded in the UK (32%). Concerning girls' participation in joint sport with their friends after school, the highest percentage of girls declaring that they do so "very often" was recorded in Sweden (40%), while Italy has the highest percentage of girls who answered that they never exercise along with friends after school (34.8%).

In relation to the encouragement girls receive from their P.E. teachers to participate in sports activities, the highest percentage of girls answering that this happens "very often" was recorded in Turkey (34.4%) while the highest percentage of girls claiming that their P.E. teacher "never" encourages them was recorded in Portugal (13.5%). In relation to the frequency with which PE

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teachers play sports with the girls the highest percentage of girls who answered "very often" was recorded in Cyprus (32.3%) while Portugal (56.7%) has the highest percentage of girls claiming that their P.E. teacher practiced sports with them. In relation to the frequency with which PE teacher reward girls by telling them that they are doing well in physical activities or sports, the highest percentage of "very often" verbal rewards was recorded in Turkey (36%), while the UK has the highest a percentage of girls who mentioned that their P.E. teacher never does so (19.4%).

Finally, concerning girls' perceptions of mixed gender sports activities, significant rates of agreement were recorded. In eight out of nine participating countries, the vast majority of girls declare that they "agree" or "strongly agree" with this practice. Concerning participation of girls in mixed gender groups once again in eight out of nine participating countries the vast majority of the respondents participates in mixed gender groups and activities. Regarding their level of satisfaction from these mixed gender sports activities, girls who declare satisfied are the majority in all participating countries.



CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of **the Focus Groups and Interviews** conducted during the present research we reached the following conclusions:

Coaches believe that girls tend to be less active in sports during their transition from childhood to adolescence due to the following factors: a. interpersonal (change of interests and values) b. biological (hormonal changes) c. social & environmental (change of body image, support from family and important others, lack of infrastructure & appropriate programs) and d. cultural & religious (restrictions). According to coaches the situation in most countries is improving because of raised awareness, mixed methods of teaching and availability of more sports opportunities for girls. However, obstacles still prevent girls from enjoying specific sports (e.g. football) and they have fewer sports options. In order to attract more girls in sports coaches suggest, among others, awareness campaigns, use of role models, utilize coaches' competencies and skills (in order to prevent girls withdrawal), engage family and friends, create inclusive training sessions without emphasizing in competition and support equal women's and men's coaches representation in sports clubs & federations, include gender equality issues in Physical Education Studies and maximize the exploitation of Projects' results such as EGPIS_2. With regard to their profession they suggest that inequalities such as stereotyped attitudes and male domination in the sporting industry still exist and at the same time there is a lack of structured training programs related to the promotion of gender equality in sports.

Parents are aware of the benefits of physical activity, but they mention lack of time as a major obstacle. Fathers tend to be more physically active than mothers perhaps due to the increased responsibilities of the latter. Even though participation in sports is high on families' priorities other factors -such as socioeconomic background and time availability- intervene. Parents believe that girls need more encouragement than boys and that they have the ability to influence their daughters' level of participation in sports through: a. intangible (emotional support, role modelling) & tangible forms of support (registration in sports clubs, transportation, purchase of equipment).

Policy makers recognize the issue and suggest the following ways of intervention in order to encourage girls' participation in sports: a. organize public awareness campaigns b. offer support to sports clubs to organize informational events c. reinforce cooperation between local sports clubs and schools d. highlight the importance of exercise from pre-school age e. train the leaders of sports associations to meet girls' needs f. utilize E.U. funded projects and best practices already in action g. implement more intercultural sports events.

Girls highlight the issue of infrastructures. Although there are enough available places to play and practice in the majority of the participating countries, free spaces are "dominated" by boys. School offers them the opportunity to participate in physical activities (school tournaments and sports events) but their level of participation is influenced by factors related to their interests, their PE

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teachers' level of encouragement, school infrastructure and the way PE classes are organized. They believe that mixed gender teaching is the most appropriate method because it offers significant advantages such as more opportunities for interaction and communication with boys, more opportunities to change boys' dominant beliefs and stereotypes about girls and cultivate a friendlier and more equal environment. They also mention that mixed classes are more entertaining than single gender classes. However, girls refer to potential disadvantages of the mixed methods of teaching such as lack of comfort when they co-exercise with boys, passive attitudes or even withdrawal because of the aggressive way boys tend to play (e.g. football), teasing/bullying incidents.

Most girls participate in after school sports activities. Girls believe that their parents' participation may positively influence their participation. If sport is a family's daily routine, children engage spontaneously in physical activities. However, parental pressure is perceived negatively by girls and does not bring the desired results. Parents may offer their support to their daughters in both material (financial support, transportation) and immaterial ways (act as role models, play together, watch them exercise, discuss about the benefits of sports and include sports in family fun activities). Girls also consider the role of friends and classmates as highly important. Friends motivate and help them overcome obstacles, share common experiences and make participation in sports more fun and attractive. The role of PE teachers and coaches is also crucial. Factors that affect girls' involvement in physical activities are related to teacher's gender and personality, and the way activities are organised. PE teachers hold the necessary knowledge and try to encourage girls' participation in sports girls say. However, this is not the case with all professionals, and their efforts' results are not always successful.

Based on the **analysis of the quantitative data** we reached the following conclusions:

707 coaches and P.E. teachers from nine countries participated in the research of which the majority work as trainers/coaches in sports clubs and PE teachers in public primary schools. Regarding their perceptions of children performance in sports and the role of gender, the majority argues that there is no difference between boys and girls. However, one out of three respondents seems to believe that boys excel, while only one out of ten participants believes that girls excel. Coaches who believe that boys excel tend to attribute this difference to the belief that boys are stronger and/or that they are more encouraged from family and friends whereas coaches who believe that girls excel tend to attribute this difference to the perception that girls try harder and/or that they are more skilful and mature. The vast majority of participating coaches argued that they promote the participation of both boys and girls in sport activities but it is significant to point out that seven out of ten participants have never received education or training on gender equality issues though in all participating countries participants consider this kind of training necessary and very important.

1029 parents participated in the research and it is worth mentioning the family income gap among participants from different countries. While in Sweden seven out of ten participants report an annual family income higher than €50.000, seven out of ten participants from Turkey and Bulgaria have an annual family income lower than €10.000. This gap may partly explain the differences

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presented between countries concerning girls' participation in sports given the fact that financial barriers are a major factor restricting sport participation among children from the low-income families and that children and adolescents from low-income neighbourhoods have restricted access to sport/leisure facilities (see Holt et al. 2011, p.p. 490-491). The majority of participants stated that they transfer their daughters to after-school-sports-activities "often" or "very often" and that they "often" discuss with them about the benefits of physical activity. However, participation in physical activities as a form of family entertainment is not a well-established practice.

2066 girls aged 11-16 years participated in the research. In seven out of the nine countries the majority of them were 16 years old. Latvia recorded the highest percentage among girls exercising more than 60 minutes on daily basis and almost all girls from Sweden participate in extracurricular sport activities. In Turkey almost four out of ten girls exercise less than 15 minutes daily and six out of ten girls do not participate in extracurricular sport activities. Given the fact that many extracurricular sports activities are not free of charge it is possible that family income is a major contributing factor. Finally, the UK has the highest dropout percentage among girls who used to be members in sports clubs, but they stopped (more than three out of ten participants).

In relation to support from important others, almost three out of ten mothers in Italy seem to encourage their daughters "very often" to participate in sports while almost the same number of mothers in Cyprus never does so. In Bulgaria girls often participate in joint sport with their mothers, while in Italy half of the girls answered that they never exercise with their mothers. The highest percentage of fathers' encouraging their daughters to participate in sports activities was recorded in Bulgaria while the highest percentage of girls answering that their father never encourages them was recorded in the UK. In relation to the participation of girls in joint sports with their father, the highest percentage of girls was recorded once again in Bulgaria, while the highest percentage of girls who mentioned that they never exercise with their father was recorded in Cyprus. On the other hand, the highest percentage of friends encouraging girls to participate in physical activities was recorded in Cyprus while the highest percentage of girls who answered that their friends never encourage them to do so was recorded in the UK. In relation to the encouragement girls receive from their PE teachers to participate in sports activities, the highest percentage of girls answering that this happens "very often" was recorded in Turkey (34.4%).

Finally, by analysing girls' perceptions of mixed gender sports activities, significant rates of agreement were recorded. In eight out of nine participating countries, the vast majority of girls declared that they "agree" or "strongly agree" with this practice. Concerning the participation of girls in mixed gender groups, once again, in eight out of nine participating countries the vast majority of the respondents reported that they participate in mixed gender groups and activities. Regarding their satisfaction from mixed gender sports activities, girls who answered that they are satisfied are the majority in all participating countries.

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