

# WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORT ACROSS EUROPE

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## 2023 research summary: background and motivation

### Introduction

Since 2022, the Equality Within Sport (EWS) of the European Non-Governmental Sport Organisation (ENGSO) has conducted research to collect up-to-date data regarding LGBTQI+<sup>1</sup> people in grassroots sport. The following findings are extracted from the 2023 report, which focused on women and adopted an intersectional<sup>2</sup> perspective, specifically taking into account six socio-demographic aspects: age, gender identity, sexual orientation, migrant background, disability and social status. This enabled a deeper look into the lived experiences of women, who belong to the LGBTQI+ community or not, who are marginalised by multiple structures of oppression.

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### Methodology

The study spanned a duration of 6 months. It started in April 2023 with the development of a theoretical framework which led to the creation of a survey, supported by interviews. The online survey was administered in six languages (English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish) and was disseminated through various communication channels, social media, newsletters, within sport organisations, sport federations, LGBTQI+ associations and amateur/professional sport clubs. Data collection began in June with the researcher attending four major sport events in the summer. The sample was representative of the women across key socio-demographics and the results are consistent with some previous studies.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, 6 survey respondents took part in a series of semi-structured interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> LGBTQI+: Lesbian, Gays, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex people and all others who identify in the community

<sup>2</sup> Intersectionality: first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is known as a powerful theoretical framework for examining how diverse patterns of identity-based inequality, such as sexism, racism, ableism, and nationalism are mutually constituted (Crenshaw, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> For examples: ILGA-Europe, EL\*G, TGEU, OIIE, & EGLSF. (2021). LGBTI women in sport: Violence, discrimination, and lived experiences. Link. Menzel, T., Braumüller, B., & Hartmann-Tews, I. (2018). OUTSPORT survey 2018: Basic results in comparative perspective. Internal report. German Sport University Cologne, Institute of Sociology and Gender Studies.

## Survey respondents

Answers to the survey came from 487 respondents over 18 years old who either fully or partially identified as women and have resided in a member state of the Council of Europe within the last 12 months.

**The results are presented with an intersectional perspective, considering six socio-demographic characteristics:**

03

### Age

5 age groups were considered, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, +55.

Women are not a homogenous but a very diverse group,

**84%** identified themselves as totally woman, while

**16%** identified themselves as partially woman.

**11%** identified as transgender women and

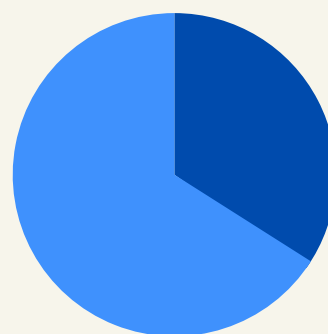
**3%** of women identified as intersex.

### Gender identity

### Sexual orientation:

The two main groups were heterosexual (34%) and non-heterosexual (66%).

Non-heterosexual  
66%



Heterosexual  
34%

Among the non-heterosexual group, the highest representation was lesbians (33%), followed by bisexual women (23%), with smaller percentages of pansexual women (3%), asexual women (2%), and queer women (2%).

## Migrant background

26%

identified themselves as migrant women.

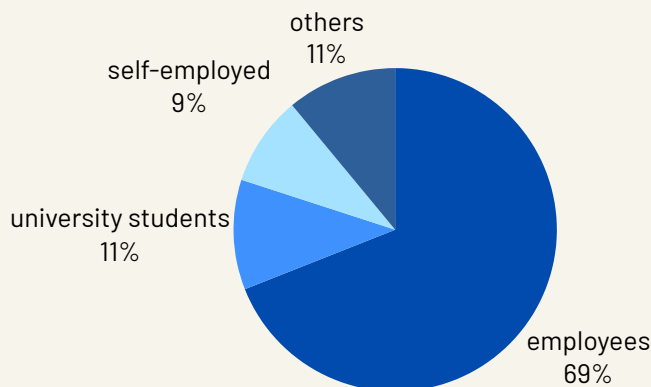
8% identified themselves as women with disabilities.

## Disability

## Social status



the majority of women worked as employees (69%), followed by university students (11%), and self-employed (9%).



## Results and conclusions

The full report is accessible on the [ENGSO Education website \(here\)](#). Results are also presented in three thematic factsheets: (1) Women's involvement and participation in sport and physical activity, (2) Women's experience in sport, (3) Women and the sporting environment. Based on the main findings a list of recommendations was also published as a call to action for actors of the European grassroots sports movement.

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# Women's involvement and participation in sport and physical activity

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## Health benefits

74%

of women achieved the WHO<sup>1</sup> requirement of at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity throughout the week for substantial health benefits.

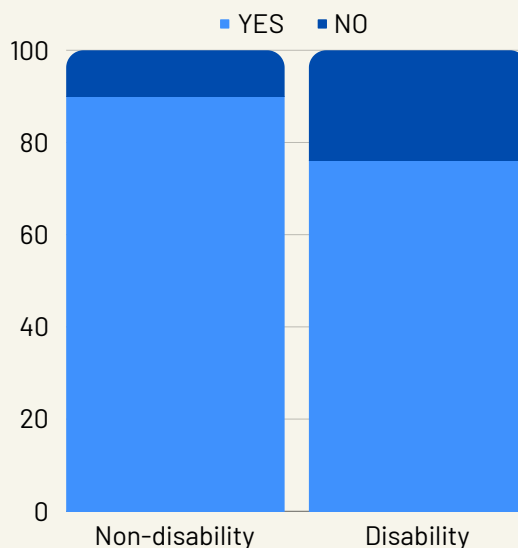
Women with disabilities, older women, transgender women, and migrant women tended to participate less in physical activity or sport.

## Level of physical activity

Example:

women with disabilities

Regular physical activity or sport/s



<sup>1</sup> WHO: Bull, F. C., Al-Ansari, S. S., Biddle, S., Borodulin, K., Buman, M. P., Cardon, G., ... & Willumsen, J. F. (2020). World Health Organization 2020 guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour. British journal of sports medicine, 54(24), 1451-1462. [Link](#)

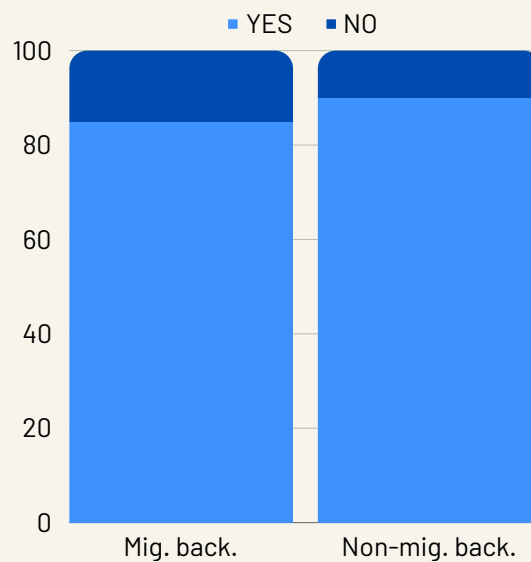
Example: age

Participation in sport		18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+
Yes	#	47	178	111	50	47
	%	87%	91%	93%	83%	81%
No	#	7	18	8	10	111
	%	13%	9%	7%	17%	9%

Example:

migrant background

Regular physical activity or sport/s



## Competition

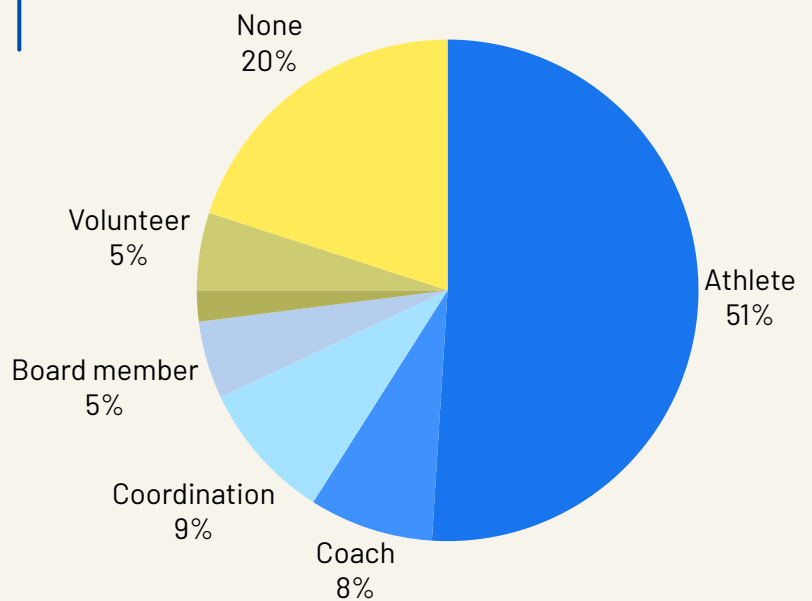
# 80%

As the competitive level of sport increases, the number of women participants decreases, with almost 80% of women in the study preferring physical activity or recreational sport.

Among the women respondents, the majority (51%) were athletes, followed by those in coordination or management roles (9%), coaches (8%), board members (5%), volunteers (5%), and referees (2%). 20% of the women did not hold any role in a sport organisation in the previous 12 months.

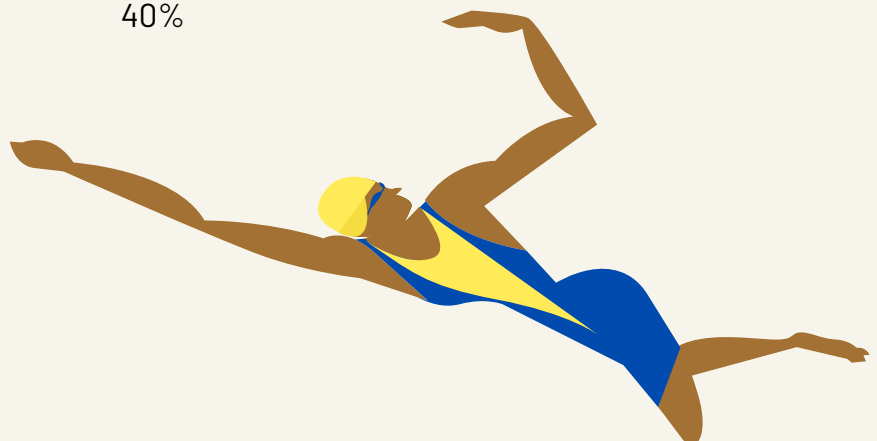
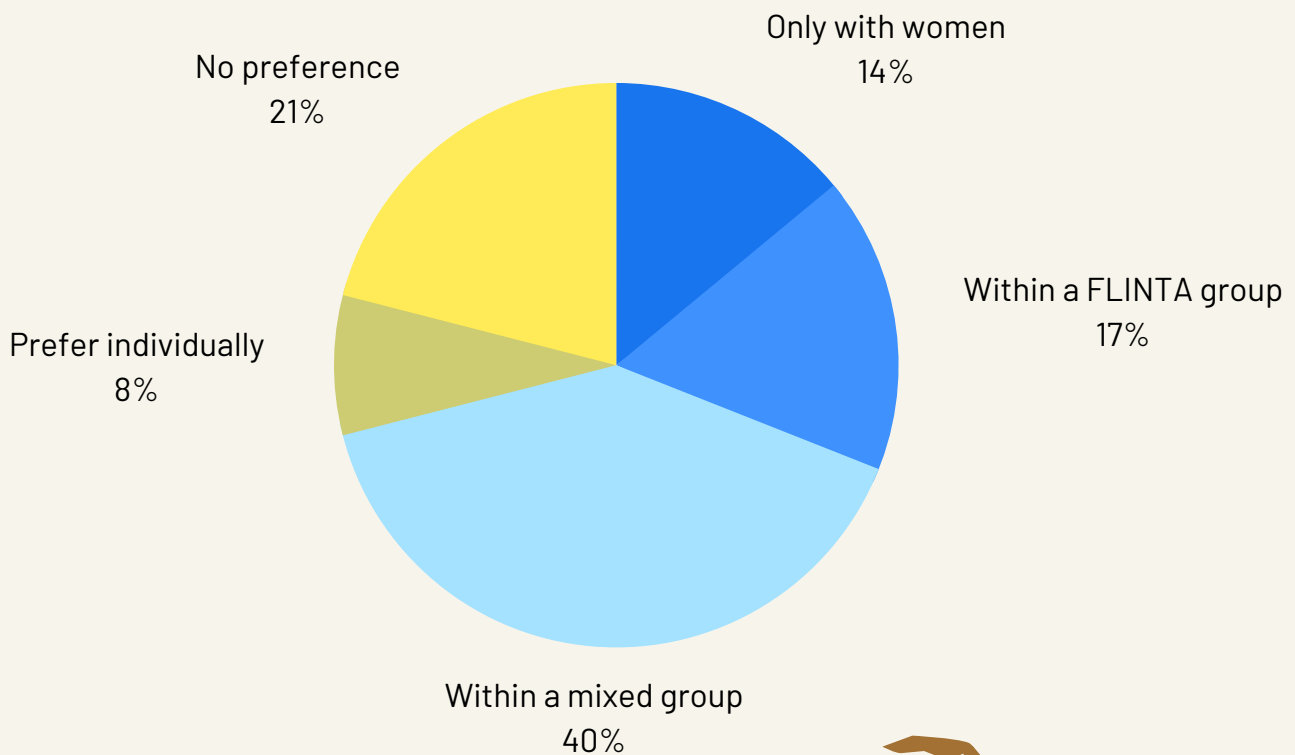


## Role in the sport organisation



# Preference for engaging in physical activity or sports with others.

40% of respondents preferred mixed spaces, where all genders train or compete, or they do not pay particular attention to their workout companions (21%). Nonetheless, it's worth noting that 17% preferred spaces exclusively for FLINTA<sup>2</sup> groups (for example, spaces excluding individuals identifying as cisgender men), 14% preferred to exercise only with women and 8% preferred to exercise individually.



<sup>2</sup> FLINTA: German acronym stands for Female, Lesbian, Intersex, Trans and Agender. It stands for anyone who is not a cisgender man.

In general, women's participation in professional sports clubs was low, with cisgender women at 10% and transgender women at 2%, whereas their participation in informal groups increased to 24%. Lesbian women primarily participated in LGBTQI+ sports clubs (30%) when heterosexual women mostly engaged in amateur clubs (35%).

## Types of sport organisation

Sport organisation		Professional sports club	Amateur sports club	LGTBIQ+ sports club	Profit organisation	Informal group	Club + informal
Yes	#	1	12	9	6	11	7
	%	2%	26%	20%	13%	24%	15%
No	#	39	99	66	45	57	66
	%	10%	27%	18%	12%	15%	18%

### “The research: “Women's participation in sport across Europe”

These findings are the results of a survey conducted in 2023 by the Equality Within Sport (EWS) committee of the European Non-Governmental Sport Organisation (ENGSO). The answers analysed came from 487 respondents above 18 years old who either fully or partially identified as women, from 30 countries in Europe. The study focused on women and adopted an intersectional<sup>3</sup> perspective, specifically taking into account six socio-demographic aspects: age, gender identity, sexual orientation, migrant background, disability and social status. [Read the full report here.](#)

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# Women's experience in sport

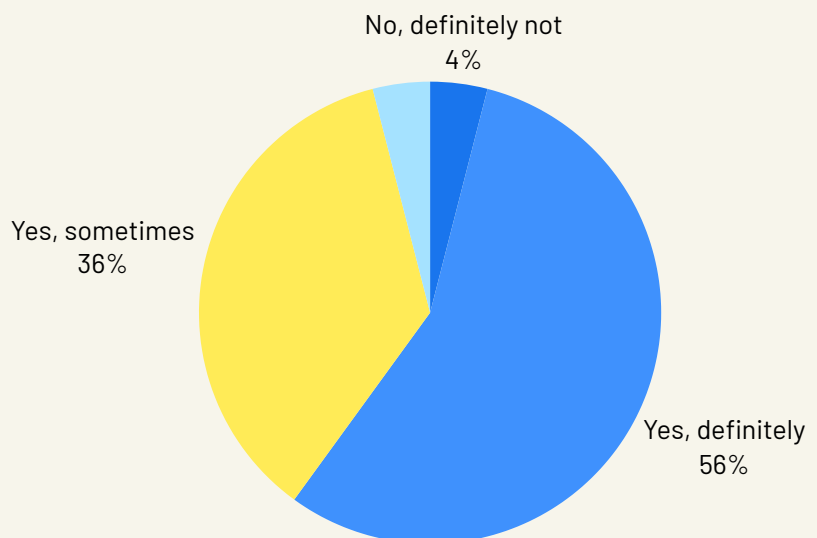
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## Feeling safe

More than half of the women in the study felt safe in their sporting environment.

Do you feel safe within the sport environment?



## About 20% of women

faced a situation of harassment or discrimination in their sporting environment. Gender identity or expression was ranked first in the reasons for experiencing harassment or discrimination.

## Harassment and discrimination

## Reporting

“In 76% of cases, the incidents of harassment and discrimination went unreported.”

Younger women, transgender women, non-heterosexual women and women with disabilities perceived significant barriers to their sport participation.

### The study looked at the following seven barriers:

- lack of confidence in one's ability,
- fear of rejection or harassment,
- friends or family not being sports enthusiasts,
- fear of going alone,
- lack of adequate, inclusive, and accessible facilities (for example, changing rooms) at sports centres,
- cost being too high,
- and lack of LBTQI+ sports associations.

## Nearly 90%

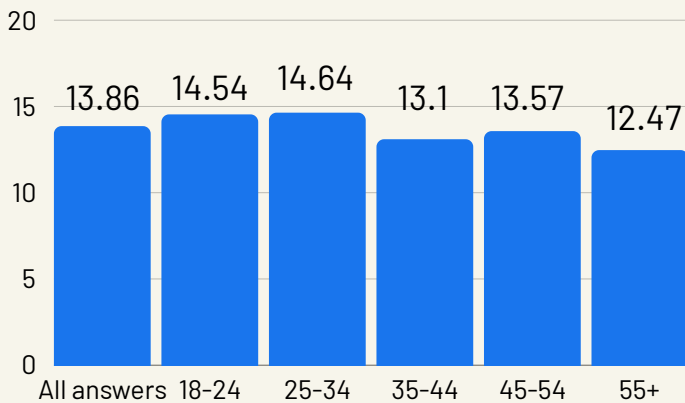
of women had experienced verbal harassment associated with other types of harassment (for example, psychological, power relation, sexual, physical and cyberstalking). In 76% of cases, the incidents of harassment and discrimination went unreported. This trend is consistent across most socio-demographic characteristics, except in the case of women with disabilities, as none of them reported their incidents of harassment.

## Barriers to participation



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Barriers in sport, per age group



Note: the higher the value, the greater the perception of barriers to practicing sports. The overall average score was 13.86



## Almost 90%

of respondents perceived that homophobia and transphobia exist in their sports environment.

## LGBTQphobia in sport

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# Women and the sporting environment



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## Practices of sport organisations

The majority of women (69%) perceived that sports organisations responded adequately to their safety needs, but 67% perceived that sports organisations did not promote LBTQI+ women awareness-raising campaigns. Moreover, respondents believed that LBTQI sport clubs value the voices of the FLINTA's<sup>1</sup> community than other sport organisations.

**41%** of respondents reported that their organisations had anti-harassment policies.

**65%** of women indicated that they did not receive any training on sexual abuse from their sport organisation.

## Anti-harassment policies

## Perception and coverage

**46%** of women considered that the media rarely covers their sports participation. Women aged 18-24 years felt more hyper-sexualized in the sports environment than other women.

**47%** of women frequently felt comfortable in the sporting environment. However,

**19%** of transgender women indicated that they rarely felt comfortable, and

**6%** of transgender women indicated that they never did.

## Sport organisation environment



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# WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORT ACROSS EUROPE



## 2023 research summary: recommendations

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1

### Adopt an intersectional approach:

An intersectional perspective is vital. Women are not a homogenous group, and recognising the diverse experiences of transgender women, women with disabilities, heterosexual women, queer women, migrant women, lesbian women, intersex women, and everyone who identifies as a woman, is crucial in addressing systemic oppressions such as cis-heteronormativity, patriarchy, whiteness, ableism, ageism, and xenophobia.

2

### Promote women role models as coaches or board members:

*"I think it would be very beneficial to educate cis-men in sports teams about gender diversity, and together could create structures to help women feel welcomed and valued in leadership roles."*

(Lesbian women, Austria)

3

## Organise specific campaigns for women only:

*"I believe it's intriguing to delve deeper into these issues and extend their reach to rural areas, where sports facilities are scarce and they do not have a gender-inclusive approach."*

(Heterosexual woman, France)

4

## Promote LGBTQI+ women participation in all communication channels (for example, social media, digital, traditional):

*"We need to talk about it, because they need to understand here are different femininities in our teams."*

(Migrant transgender woman, Germany)

5

## Develop diversity, equality, and inclusion training for all:

*"I coached until the major league for a few years. Very little is done by both the federation and club to raise awareness on inclusion and diversity."*

(Heterosexual woman, Italy)

6

## **Improve facilities (for example, changing rooms) in an inclusive way:**

*"My local area does not facilitate my sport in its venues well. We are struggling to find local locations for events and trainings and are pushed out for more preferable sports."*

(Disable bisexual woman, UK)

7

## **Promote more women participating in grassroots sport:**

86% of respondents indicated that promoting women's participation in grassroots sport would be extremely or very helpful to increase participation level.

8

## **Provide development opportunities for women in elite sport:**

85% of respondents indicated that development opportunities for women in elite sport would be extremely or very helpful.



9

## **Sporting environment needs to be more considerate of the experiences of women with disabilities:**

Research findings reveal that across the board, women with disabilities face additional barriers.

10

## **Ensure safeguarding and reporting measures are in place:**

Ensure that adequate action is taken in case of incidents.

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