

## Mentor on The Move: Sports-Based Mentoring Across Borders

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### INCLUSION OF MIGRANT BACKGROUND WOMEN IN SPORTS: LITERATURE REVIEW AND NEED ANALYSIS OF BARRIERS AND POSSIBILITIES

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# PREFACE

This report has been developed within the framework of the Mentor on the Move: Sports-Based Mentoring Across Borders project (2024–2027). Its purpose is to provide both a theoretical foundation and practical insights into the inclusion of women with a migration background in sports.

The starting point of this work is the recognition that, while sport has proven potential to support health, well-being, and integration, women with a migration background often face multiple and overlapping barriers that hinder their participation. These barriers are not only individual but also structural, reflecting inequalities in access to facilities, resources, networks, and information.

With this report, we aim to give voice to women whose perspectives have too often been overlooked. Rather than portraying migrant women as passive recipients of interventions, the report highlights their agency, experiences, and needs. It also acknowledges the crucial role of service providers, organisations, and policymakers in creating truly inclusive practices and environments.

The literature review and needs analysis presented here have been carried out with great care by our research partners at the Migration Institute of Finland. Together, they shed light on barriers, motivations, and possibilities—pointing toward strategies that can make sports more welcoming and meaningful for all women, regardless of background.

This work builds on the long-standing efforts of Monaliiku – Wellbeing and Sports for Multicultural Women, which has been dedicated to promoting the well-being, physical activity, and empowerment of women and girls from diverse cultural backgrounds. Through grassroots activities, mentoring, and advocacy, Monaliiku has witnessed both the transformative power of sport and the persistent challenges that continue to limit access for many.

As coordinator, I warmly thank our authors, consortium partners, and all those who contributed their time and expertise to this deliverable. It is our hope that the findings and recommendations of this report will support ongoing efforts across Europe to use sport not only as a tool for physical activity, but as a pathway to belonging, confidence, and empowerment.

Claudia Elena Nystrand  
Mentor on the Move Project Coordinator  
Monaliiku ry

# PART I - LITERATURE REVIEW

## Introduction for the literature review

Participation in sport has been shown to promote health, enhance well-being and improve physical fitness.<sup>1</sup> Over the past decades, sport has also gained popularity as a tool for social change. However, women with migration background participate less in sport than migrant men or women from the majority population.<sup>2</sup> Non-participation of migrant background women has received much attention from politicians, health authorities and researchers.<sup>3</sup> Sometimes there is a tone in the discussion that implies that women themselves are to blame for non-participation.<sup>4</sup> In these discourses, they are often seen as sole objects of social interventions. While women's non-participation in sport could be perceived as an equality issue depriving them of the numerous health and well-being benefits associated with sports, the problem of non-participation is often reduced to concerns about overweight, health, non-integration and social exclusion. Even though these issues are closely related to inequality, the discourses around the topic rarely give voice to the women themselves resulting in projects with assimilative underlying assumptions.<sup>5</sup>

The issue of migrant background women's non-participation in sport is closely connected to concerns of social exclusion. According to Joanne Crawford and colleagues (2023), migrant women in the Western countries are at higher risk of social exclusion than women in the majority population or migrant men. However, evidently not all women with migration background are at risk of social exclusion. Particularly at risk are women with a refugee background, those from low socio-economic backgrounds or women in other vulnerable positions. Social exclusion that they experience is rooted in the intersection of ethnicity, gender, residence status and other positions.<sup>6</sup> Inequalities that they encounter manifest in several spheres of society. Women with migration background have limited access to the labour market and their work is more often low-paid, low-skilled and part-time. Women face barriers to education and health care, and family responsibilities can limit their living space to stay mainly at home. Due to both economic and social exclusion, migrant women have limited access to social contacts and networks, language learning and other forms of social inclusion. Access to resources is also limited because of the racism and discrimination that the women face.<sup>7</sup>

*Mentor on The Move* (MOTM) is an EU-funded project that aims to make participating in sports more inclusive for women with a migration background through a mentoring programme. This programme will be developed with the project partners from Romania, United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, Belgium and Finland. The project's priorities are to promote the well-being, health and personal development of the migrant background women by emerging more inclusive and culturally aware sporting possibilities for them. The project has a particular focus on migration background women in vulnerable positions. The concept of migration background women refers both to women who have themselves migrated and whose parents have migrated. The findings of the project can be applied to some other target groups as well, for example, to linguistic and cultural minorities. In addition to migrant women, the project focuses on the service providers and organisations, examining how they can promote inclusion both within

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<sup>1</sup> Raja 2017; Spaaij 2015; Zacheus et al. 2012

<sup>2</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a

<sup>3</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Lenneis & Pfister 2017

<sup>4</sup> Cortis 2009; Taylor 2004

<sup>5</sup> Ekholm et al. 2019; Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Lenneis et al. 2022

<sup>6</sup> Crawford et al. 2023; Kauravaara & Rönkkö 2020

<sup>7</sup> Crawford et al. 2023; Sethi & Williams 2015

and through sports. Alongside perceived health and wellbeing benefits, at its best sport can promote social inclusion and integration creating social networks, a sense of belonging and opportunities to learn about mainstream culture and society.

For practical purposes, the term *migrant women* will be used in this report when referring to women with migration background. However, the use of this concept does not imply that migrant women should be seen only in relation to their migration background. The migration background is merely one aspect of their life. The key aim of the project is to listen to the target group; their needs, wishes and knowledge.

This literature review, providing the theoretical framework for the MOTM project examines the sport participation of migrant women focusing on 1) barriers for participation, 2) service providers' perceptions of women's participation and 3) social inclusion and integration related outcomes of the participation. The conclusions consider what should be done in different administrative levels to promote the participation and social inclusion of migrant women. Projects and programmes that aim to integrate migrant women through sport have often failed because women's level of participation has been so low.<sup>8</sup> In earlier projects, gender has been rarely taken into consideration as a crucial factor for participation leading to the implicit targeting of minority boys and men.<sup>9</sup> Migrant women, let alone non-binary migrant individuals, have often been overlooked in sport research. Therefore, it is crucial to consider barriers of participation as a key factor affecting the social inclusion and integration of migrant women. Indeed, most of the literature on migrant women and sport focuses on the barriers and challenges to women's participation. Examining the barriers, which are often social or organisational, is crucial since it challenges the presumption that women's non-participation is primarily due to their religious or cultural background.<sup>10</sup>

Research on minorities and sport has produced contradictory results on how sport participation contributes to social inclusion and integration. At its best, sport participation has shown to promote well-being and social inclusion, but it can as well lead to social exclusion and marginalisation.<sup>11</sup> However, research that investigates how sport participation effects on social inclusion and integration, has typically focused on either men, youth or children with migration backgrounds. There is little comprehensive research on the outcomes of migrant women's participation in sport. Research of this topic is needed, particularly because of the contradictory findings of the previous research on minorities, sport and integration and social inclusion. This literature review responds to the need by compiling results from 29 studies on the migrant women's participation in sport. The review has been conducted as a descriptive literature review.

The following chapters outline the scope of the literature review, beginning with an introduction to the key concepts and an overview of previous research on the topic. This is followed by a critical examination of earlier projects and a presentation of the review's implementation and research questions. The report then continues on to present the findings of the literature review. The first section examines the barriers migrant women face in accessing sport, while the next discusses proposed solutions to address these challenges. Subsequent chapters delve into organisational perspectives on women's participation and outline strategies for service providers to enhance inclusion. This is followed by the analysis of the motivations behind women's engagement in sports. Further, the review considers the broader impact of sport participation on integration and social inclusion. The conclusion chapter synthesises the key insights of the literature review and examines how service providers at different levels of governance can enhance women's participation and promote inclusion through sport.

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<sup>8</sup> Ekholm et al. 2019; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>9</sup> Ekholm et al. 2019

<sup>10</sup> Taylor 2004

<sup>11</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022; Doherty & Taylor 2007

# Research scope in the literature review

## ***Implementation and research questions of the literature review***

This literature review examines the sport participation of migrant women. It focuses on the barriers women face in participating in sport and the ways in which participation contributes to wider social inclusion and integration. In addition, it considers the perspectives of service providers and sporting organisations on the participation of migrant women, as well as how these actors can actively promote their inclusion in sport. The review has been carried out as a descriptive literature review, as it is a method suitable for building a theoretical framework.<sup>12</sup> In a descriptive literature review, data collection is guided by the research questions. The inclusion and exclusion of studies for the review are determined by how effectively they address the research question. The data in this review was collected through implicit selection. This implies that the data has been selected so that the suitability and relevance of each study included has been individually assessed. In this method, the reliability and relevance of the studies are demonstrated in the text.<sup>13</sup>

The research questions of the review are following:

1. What barriers do migrant women face in sport participation and how can these barriers be overcome to promote women's participation?
2. How do service providers, administrators and sporting organisations understand the participation of migrant women and how could they promote women's participation?
3. In what ways does women's participation in sport contribute to wider social inclusion and integration in society?

The selection process included certain inclusion and exclusion criteria. There were three main inclusion criteria. The study had to address 1) women with migration backgrounds 2) their participation in sport and 3) their barriers to participation and/or the social inclusion/integration outcomes it produces. The search was conducted using academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The first criterion was addressed using the following keywords: *migrant women*, *immigrant women*, *migrant background women*, *migration background women*, *women with minority ethnic backgrounds*, *minority women*, and *CALD women*. The second criterion was covered with the terms: *sport*, *physical activity*, *exercise*, and *recreational activities*. The third criterion was explored using keywords such as: *barriers*, *constraints*, *challenges*, *social inclusion*, *integration*, *socialization*, *adaptation*, and *belonging*.

Research concerning people with migration backgrounds that do not specifically focus on women was excluded. Two selected articles examined both men and women, but the results concerning only women could be distinguished from the rest of the analysis. Studies focusing on girls under the age of 16 were also excluded. The inclusion criterion has been women's participation in sport in either guided or informal contexts. Research on professional or elite athletes has been excluded from the review. A table listing the included articles and studies can be found at the end of the file.

The total number of studies selected for the review is 29. In addition to peer-reviewed articles, the review includes book chapters, a final report and a doctoral thesis. The studies were published between 1998 and 2024. The time

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<sup>12</sup> Kangasniemi et al. 2013

<sup>13</sup> Kangasniemi et al. 2013

frame is extensive because there has been limited research specifically on the integration and inclusion outcomes of women's sport participation. One article and the doctoral thesis are written in Finnish and the rest of the studies are in English. Of all the studies, nine were located in Australia, four in Canada, three in Norway, three in Germany, two in Finland, two in Denmark, two in Switzerland, one in the Netherlands, one in New Zealand and one in South Korea. In addition, one literature review was collected from studies conducted in Western Europe. Most of the studies examined sports generally but some focused on certain sports or sport settings. In the studies included there were, for example, a supervised sport group, informal sport settings, community sport club, recreational physical activity, swimming groups, bikers, netball players, gym attendees and kickboxers. Whereas quite a few of the studies focused particularly on young women, none of the studies focused on elderly women.<sup>14</sup> However, even though the elderly women were not a target group as such in any of the studies, participants from different ages were included in most studies. In this review migration background as a category is understood broadly, and studies encompassing various target groups have been included. The target groups include migrants, young women whose parents were migrants, Muslims, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD-women), women from ethnic minorities and multilingual women.

The studies examine women from different backgrounds with different reasons for migration. They focus on recent migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and family-based migrants. Women in the studies are, for example, from Chinese, Indian, Eritrean, Ethiopian and Latin American backgrounds. Most of the studies are qualitative, using a variety of qualitative methods such as individual and group interviews, ethnography and case studies. Some of the studies include both quantitative and qualitative methods. As with most research on migrant women and sport, the majority of studies in this review address the barriers to women's participation in sport. In addition, some studies focus on the social inclusion and/or integration outcomes of participation, while others consider more generally the outcomes of sport, or the meanings attached to it. Integration and social inclusion are examined through concepts such as belonging, social capital, active citizenship and agency.

## **Key concepts**

In this review both the concepts of social inclusion and integration are important. Social inclusion encapsulates subjective wellbeing, whereas integration examines societal settlement and participation through more objective measures. Given the ongoing and often heated debate surrounding integration and social inclusion in relation to migrant women, it is essential to consider what these concepts mean to the women themselves. This review aims to move away from a top-down perspective that overlooks the voices of the target group and defines their needs and goals. Therefore, the central question is what sport participation means for the women themselves and how do they experience social inclusion and integration. To ensure that the analysis does not address problems only at a superficial level, this review attempts to take into consideration intersectional positions and structural constraints faced by the women.

### *Social exclusion and inclusion*

Social exclusion is often understood as the opposite of social inclusion. However, there is a risk of misunderstanding that social exclusion can be reduced simply by increasing social inclusion. Addressing social exclusion requires not just increasing social inclusion but also comprehensive social policy solutions.<sup>15</sup> According to Reinhard Haudenhuyse (2017), the concept of social exclusion draws attention to the power dynamics by which

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<sup>14</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Raja 2017; Walseth 2008; Walseth & Strandbu 2014

<sup>15</sup> Haudenhuyse 2017; Spandler 2007

institutions and policies produce exclusionary and marginalising structures in society. Social exclusion refers to limited access to resources, rights, services, social relations and activities to which most people in society have access. It can occur in economic, political, social or cultural spheres. Groups that experience multiple dimensions of social exclusion simultaneously are described to suffer from 'deep exclusion'.<sup>16</sup> The different dimensions of exclusion are mutually reinforcing and overlapping, which further deepens exclusion. For example, poor health and low education are often associated with unemployment, low societal participation and low income.<sup>17</sup> Deep exclusion has serious implications for an individual's quality of life, well-being and future opportunities.<sup>18</sup>

Research has criticised the issue that sport-for-inclusion projects often define social inclusion in vague terms, making it difficult to monitor the goals and outcomes of projects.<sup>19</sup> The concept of social inclusion is among critics understood as a superficial concept that overlooks considerations of social structures and power hierarchies.<sup>20</sup> In response to the critique, extensive research that addresses societal structures and inequalities, has been conducted within the field of social inclusion. For example, it has been suggested that the concept of social inclusion should be perceived as a dynamic process rather than an outcome.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the various factors influencing the attainment of social inclusion can be identified and considered. Dynamism also better reflects the situational and transient nature of social inclusion. It is a process that is constantly shaped by different dynamics, power relations and circumstances of individuals.<sup>22</sup> The feeling of being valued and recognised, and the opportunity to influence both one's own life and the affairs of the community, are considered central to social inclusion.<sup>23</sup> As Iris Young (2000, 119) points out, social inclusion is not just about formal equality, but also about recognising inequalities and empowering unequal groups to make their voices heard. Hence, inclusion does not remain an empty or meaningless concept that seeks to solve problems only at a superficial level but can address social problems in depth.<sup>24</sup>

In this review, social inclusion is understood according to the definition developed by Richard Bailey (2005) who has examined the dimensions of social inclusion in the context of sport. He has divided social inclusion into four dimensions which are *spatial*, *relational*, *functional* and *power*. The spatial dimension refers to the closing of distance between different groups of people and is promoted in practice by incorporating people from different social, cultural and economic backgrounds.<sup>25</sup> The spatial dimension is considered the foundation of all other dimensions, as developing other dimensions requires individuals to first have access to sports spaces shared with others.<sup>26</sup>

Relational dimension of social inclusion refers to the acceptance, sense of belonging, recognition, identity confirmation and safety that sport participation provides. Participation in group exercise can strengthen both individual and community identity. Identity and belonging, in turn, are connected to a sense of pride and recognition. The relational dimension includes also the development of bonding social capital through sport participation.<sup>27</sup> The functional dimension is about the development of new skills, knowledge and capacities.<sup>28</sup> Participation in sport requires challenging oneself and learning new skills, which can improve individual's self-confidence, self-efficacy

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<sup>16</sup> Levitas et al. 2007

<sup>17</sup> Crawford et al. 2023

<sup>18</sup> Levitas et al. 2007

<sup>19</sup> Coalter 2015

<sup>20</sup> Haudenhuyse 2017

<sup>21</sup> Haudenhuyse 2017; Ponc & Frisby 2010

<sup>22</sup> Ponc & Frisby 2010

<sup>23</sup> Crawford et al. 2023; Isola et al. 2017; Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>24</sup> Haudenhuyse 2017

<sup>25</sup> Bailey 2005

<sup>26</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>27</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013; Bailey 2005

<sup>28</sup> Bailey 2005

and peer acceptance.<sup>29</sup> The fourth dimension, concerning power relations, refers to strengthened community capital and cohesion, expanded social networks, agency and active citizenship.<sup>30</sup> According to Hal Lawson (2005), the development of agency through sport requires a redistribution of power, resources and cooperation. Redistribution of power means breaking traditional power hierarchies, for example, by having more migrant women in administrative and managerial roles in the field of sports.<sup>31</sup> Resources include money, social networks and access to knowledge. New forms of cooperation refer, for example, to sport projects co-designed with the target group.<sup>32</sup>

### *Integration as a multidirectional process*

Increased international migration has made the concept of integration a key political concept and a focus of attention. There are multiple approaches to integration, and they vary depending on, for example, whether it is examined on micro-, meso- or macroscales or whether it is viewed from the perspective of the host society or that of the migrants. Due to the generality of the concept, there is also no single definition for it. It is a concept that is constantly changing and being redefined in social, political and academic debates.<sup>33</sup> It can be defined, for example, in the following way: 'The term integration refers to the process of settlement, interaction with the host society, and social change that follows immigration.'<sup>34</sup>

Integration has several dimensions, the most important of which are work, housing, health, education and leisure. These dimensions are both measures of integration and ways to further promote integration.<sup>35</sup> Typically, integration refers to migrants' language proficiency, access to work, equal access to resources and active participation in society.<sup>36</sup> Integration has also been measured in terms of an individual's upward social mobility and success.<sup>37</sup> Language, communication, security, stability, digital skills and culture are considered key competences for integration. In addition, integration is rooted in the rights and responsibilities of the individual.<sup>38</sup> Despite the complexity of the dimensions of integration, studies often measure it through only one or a few variables, which diminishes the understanding of the holistic nature of integration.<sup>39</sup>

The concept of integration has been criticized in research for its association with the control of migrants. It has been seen as reinforcing the distinction between migrants and the majority population.<sup>40</sup> This discourse raises the question of when a migrant is considered integrated enough.<sup>41</sup> As a result, the concept is proposed to be used only in the context of examining recent migrants.<sup>42</sup> The longer a person has lived in the host country, the more their participation should be viewed through the same lens as that of the majority population.<sup>43</sup> In such cases, reasons for non-participation in sports are likely to reflect broader societal factors, unlike those of more recent migrants, whose reasons may be more closely tied to their migration background. Here, the concepts of *universal* and *specific barriers* are useful.<sup>44</sup> It is essential to recognize the diversity among migrant women: while some may face universal barriers, others may encounter challenges that require more specific and tailored consideration.

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<sup>29</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>30</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>31</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013; Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>32</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>33</sup> Heath & Schneider 2021; Hofmann & Rzayeva-Ahmadli 2024

<sup>34</sup> Garcés-Masareñas & Penninx 2016, 11

<sup>35</sup> Ley et al. 2021

<sup>36</sup> Cheung & Phillimore 2017

<sup>37</sup> Hofmann & Rzayeva-Ahmadli 2024

<sup>38</sup> Ley et al. 2021

<sup>39</sup> Cheung & Phillimore 2017

<sup>40</sup> Könönen 2014, 118–120

<sup>41</sup> Rönkkö 2023b

<sup>42</sup> Saukkonen 2020

<sup>43</sup> Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>44</sup> Rönkkö 2023b

Integration can be understood as a multidirectional process in which all members of society adapt to each other and seek new ways of living together. According to this understanding both the migrants and the society have obligations and rights to fulfil. Migrants are both encouraged to maintain their cultural identity and interact with mainstream people and culture, while the host society should ensure equal access in society for everyone.<sup>45</sup> In practice, multidirectional integration in the sport context involves not only encouraging minorities to participate in mainstream activities, but also prompting the mainstream population to change their ways of participation, for example, by participating in minority ethnic sports clubs.

## ***Previous research on migrant integration and social inclusion through sport***

When considering the connection between sport and integration, it is essential to determine whether the focus is on integration within sport or through sport. Integration within sport refers to actual participation in sport and inclusion in the sporting community, while integration through sport refers to the opportunities that participation in sport provides in relation to other spheres of society, such as education, employment or housing.<sup>46</sup> According to Sine Agergaard (2018), integration through sport is difficult to achieve because sport is only loosely connected to other societal spheres. Research indicates that participation rates do not allow concluding anything about the connection between sport participation and integration.<sup>47</sup> Participation does not necessarily imply that the individual engages willingly or finds the experience positive. In some cases, individuals may feel excluded or uncomfortable, yet still participate due to a lack of alternative options. The concept of social inclusion has also been distinguished between social inclusion within and through sport. With regard to both concepts, it is essential to emphasize that participation does not automatically guarantee social inclusion or integration. Sport is merely a societal platform that brings people together.<sup>48</sup>

Sport, like other societal domains, has the potential to support individuals in adapting to a new society. At the same time, as in other spheres of society, it is shaped by processes of othering, which can create divisions between the majority population and individuals with a migration background. As such, sport holds the capacity both to foster and to hinder social inclusion and a sense of belonging. The outcome largely depends on how sport is organized, for instance, how welcoming and inclusive the environment is, and how effectively potential barriers related to othering are addressed.<sup>49</sup>

Research has shown that sport can contribute to integration and social inclusion. When used purposely as a tool for social outcomes, sport has been shown to be beneficial for learning societal rules, practices and language, promoting health and well-being, developing social capital, a sense of belonging and active citizenship.<sup>50</sup> In addition, sport can contribute to agency and social recognition.<sup>51</sup> One of the central research areas in sport studies investigates the formation of social capital through sport. It has been shown that both minority-ethnic and multi-ethnic sports clubs develop bonding social capital and spaces of belonging.<sup>52</sup> Sport is regarded as a possibility to

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<sup>45</sup> Cheung & Phillimore 2017; Hofmann & Rzayeva-Ahmadli 2024; Ley et al. 2021

<sup>46</sup> Agergaard 2018; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>47</sup> Haudenhuyse 2017; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>48</sup> Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>49</sup> Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>50</sup> Agergaard 2018; Ley et al. 2021; Smith et al. 2019; Spaaij 2015; Zacheus et al. 2012

<sup>51</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Ley et al. 2021

<sup>52</sup> Agergaard 2018; Lenneis et al. 2022; Spaaij 2015

create social relations with one's own ethnic group, other ethnic groups and the majority population. All these relations are considered essential for integration and social inclusion.<sup>53</sup>

Tuomas Zacheus and colleagues (2012) have conducted a study on the connection between sport and integration. Among the 399 migrants that participated in the study, slightly less than half perceived that sport had facilitated their integration. Sport had been considered useful in language learning, familiarising with the host society and establishing friendships. Instead, 44% experienced no connection between sport and integration. The researchers concluded that sport participation may have multiple positive effects, which cannot be distinctly categorized based on their contribution to integration. Social contacts and language learning are frequently regarded as primary indicators of integration, although increased well-being, reduced stress and physical benefits are equally crucial.<sup>54</sup> According to this and other studies, for many migrants, sport has been their first or only possibility to create contacts with majority people which implies very limited interaction between migrants and host population.<sup>55</sup>

It should be emphasised that the positive effects of participation in sport are not self-evident or automatic consequences. Sport can equally challenge the well-being and integration of participants.<sup>56</sup> Sport causes exclusion and marginalisation in situations where people with migration backgrounds must assimilate into the mainstream language, culture and values to be accepted and welcomed in sports or if they are encouraged to participate for assimilative reasons. Participation in sports and exercising with majority population may also expose participants to racism and stereotyping, leading some to arrange segregated sports clubs or abandon sports altogether.<sup>57</sup> Exercising with one's own ethnic group can enable resistance to oppressive structures, offer a safe space from discrimination and othering, and help maintain cultural ties to the country of origin.<sup>58</sup> In addition, it is crucial to take into consideration that previous research on migrant integration/inclusion through sport is almost exclusively conducted among male participants. Therefore, it is important to be critical when generalising the results.

## ***Critical research on previous projects***

The integration of migrants through sport is not a simple process, and several projects have been criticised for their problematic starting points. In the 1980-1990s, interest in promoting the social inclusion and integration through sport emerged in the Western Europe. Sport-for-inclusion and sport-for-integration projects began to be developed to facilitate social interventions through sport. Sport was conceived as a democratic and egalitarian sphere of society, developing trust, teaching values and providing access to a range of resources.<sup>59</sup> Sport participation was considered a gateway to broader societal participation.<sup>60</sup> The objectives of the projects created at the time were based on an assimilationist understanding of integration. The aim was to assimilate ethnic minorities into mainstream values and norms by encouraging their participation in mainstream sports clubs.<sup>61</sup>

Since then, especially in the 2010s, there has been criticism concerning the assumption that participation in sport automatically promotes social inclusion and integration of participants. The key argument in the critique is that the connection between sport and integration or social inclusion is not unproblematic or inevitable.<sup>62</sup> Sport participation

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<sup>53</sup> Agergaard 2018; Stodolska & Alexandris 2004

<sup>54</sup> Zacheus et al. 2012

<sup>55</sup> Stodolska & Alexandris 2004; Zacheus et al. 2012

<sup>56</sup> Ley et al. 2021

<sup>57</sup> Spaaij 2015

<sup>58</sup> Smith et al. 2019

<sup>59</sup> Agergaard & la Cour 2012; Coalter 2015; Raja 2017; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>60</sup> Raja 2017

<sup>61</sup> Agergaard & la Cour 2012; Ekholm et al. 2022

<sup>62</sup> Coalter 2015; Smith et al. 2019

has been found to contribute to these objectives in certain circumstances, but it has equally been found to contribute to social exclusion and marginalisation.<sup>63</sup> In addition, these projects are criticised for their implicit assumptions. Sport-for-integration/inclusion projects are considered to perpetuate imperialism, racial hierarchies and inequalities.<sup>64</sup> Projects have been targeted at different groups perceived to be in need of integration or intervention. These include young people, people with disabilities, migrants and older people. All migrants, and especially not the majority population, are seen in need of integration. Interventions often target minorities originating from non-Western countries, especially Muslims, whose culture or values are considered as problematic.<sup>65</sup>

Critical research on sport and integration argues that sport participation cannot change broad social structures, i.e. the root causes of marginalisation and social exclusion.<sup>66</sup> Thus, sport has been considered as overly simplistic solution to complex social problems.<sup>67</sup> On the contrary, according to Ramon Spaaij (2015), inequalities related to gender, sexuality, race or nationality are reinforced in sport. These inequalities he describes as 'institutionalised inequalities'. With concepts of 'hard indicators' and 'institutionalised inequalities', Spaaij refers to the key determinants of individuals' opportunities for social mobility, which cannot be changed by sport-for-integration/inclusion programmes. Hard indicators of social mobility include an individual's occupation, level of education and family background.<sup>68</sup> In the worst case, such projects focus on changing the habits, perceptions or values of the target group, diverting attention away from structures, and thereby legitimizing and reinforcing structures producing inequalities.<sup>69</sup> According to Haudenhuyse (2017), the mainstream understanding of social inclusion does not identify structures or power hierarchies, resulting in projects that focus uncritically on the problems and deficits of target groups.

Discussions on integration through sport often imply that integration requires participation with majority people in mainstream sports clubs.<sup>70</sup> Migrants' own sport communities are sometimes considered merely a transitional step in integration, through which migrants gradually move into mainstream sport communities.<sup>71</sup> The notion that integration only occurs through interaction with majority people suggests an assimilationist understanding of integration. There has been criticism of the fact that while the lack of diversity in terms of ethnicities or genders is viewed as a problem in migrant-majority contexts, the same issue is not recognised in the homogeneous participant profiles of mainstream sport communities, such as tennis or hockey.<sup>72</sup> When examining the low participation rates of minority people in majority clubs, it is often overlooked that the attitudes and exclusionary behaviour of the majority people itself cause minorities to isolate in their own sporting communities.<sup>73</sup>

Social inclusion or integration through sport can only work if the activity takes into consideration the structural barriers that undermine opportunities for integration and inclusion.<sup>74</sup> Social and political contexts, power relations, discourses and previous traumatic experiences are among the factors that should be considered affecting the outcomes of sport.<sup>75</sup> Researchers remind that power relations are a key component of sport, which is important to consider when designing interventions.<sup>76</sup> Past programmes have been failing because they do not recognise the

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<sup>63</sup> Spaaij 2015

<sup>64</sup> Darnell 2014; Ekholm et al. 2022

<sup>65</sup> Agergaard 2018; Ekholm et al. 2022; Raja 2017

<sup>66</sup> Ekholm et al. 2022; Spaaij 2015; Haudenhuyse 2017

<sup>67</sup> Agergaard 2018; Coalter 2015

<sup>68</sup> Spaaij 2009, 252

<sup>69</sup> Ekholm et al. 2022; Haudenhuyse 2017

<sup>70</sup> Agergaard & la Cour 2012; Agergaard 2018

<sup>71</sup> Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>72</sup> Kuppinger 2015; Raja 2017; Smith et al. 2019

<sup>73</sup> Raja 2017; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>74</sup> Agergaard 2018; Olliff 2008

<sup>75</sup> Ley et al. 2021

<sup>76</sup> Engh et al. 2013

real-life contexts of individuals, have an individualistic perspective, are fragmented or are designed to address only a specific problem.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, projects need to be holistic and consider participants' intersectional positions, life situations and structural factors.

## Findings

### ***Barriers to sport participation for migrant women***

In earlier research, the challenges that migrant women face in sport participation are often directly connected to their religious and cultural background.<sup>78</sup> This can be true to some extent but emphasising it may lead to overlooking structural factors or to the perception that women's religious or cultural background is a problem for participation in itself. In the sphere of sport, there are interpretations that migrant women are reluctant to participate in sport because of their cultural or religious background. This implies that low participation rates are the fault of the women themselves.<sup>79</sup> The claim that women are unwilling to participate in sport has been disproven. Many studies emphasise that although there are many barriers in participation, it is not a question of reluctance. On the contrary, migrant women would like to participate in sport, particularly in group exercise, and many would like to have opportunities to participate with majority women.<sup>80</sup> As is explicitly emphasised in several articles, migrant women do not themselves consider their religion or culture per se as a barrier to sport participation.<sup>81</sup>

It was emphasised that it is important to turn the problematising attention away from women and focus it on the practices and structures of host countries.<sup>82</sup> The challenge, often related to women's background and religion, can equally be understood as related to gaps in sport facilities and practices suitable for women. Thus, the problem to be solved is not religion or culture, but the exclusive structures in the sport culture in the host societies.<sup>83</sup> Considering the barriers of participation, it is essential to keep in mind that migrant women are highly heterogeneous group in terms of, for example, socio-economic background, cultural practices, immigrant status and reasons to migrate.<sup>84</sup> The results presented below are therefore generalisations of the studies included in the review and evidently do not apply to all migrant women.

### *Life situation and cultural practices*

For migrant women, family and household responsibilities were a significant barrier to sport participation.<sup>85</sup> Overall it has been shown that having small kids in the family reduces parents' participation in sports.<sup>86</sup> While women's greater responsibility of family and household is universal, research suggests that gendered caregiving responsibilities may be an even more heavily distributed burden on women in migrant communities.<sup>87</sup> The caregiving burden

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<sup>77</sup> Coalter 2015

<sup>78</sup> Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012; Taylor & Toohey 1998; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>79</sup> Frisby 2011; Haudenhuyse 2017; Taylor & Tooley 1998; Walseth 2006

<sup>80</sup> Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Alemu et al. 2021b; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>81</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>82</sup> Haudenhuyse 2017; Lee et al. 2014

<sup>83</sup> Lee et al. 2014; Lenneis & Pfister 2017

<sup>84</sup> Hofmann & Rzayeva-Ahmadli 2024

<sup>85</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Cortis et al. 2007; Lee et al. 2014; Lenneis et al. 2022; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>86</sup> Rovio et al. 2011

<sup>87</sup> Cortis 2009; Lenneis & Pfister 2017

of migrant women can be increased also as the care provided by relatives is often no longer available after migration.<sup>88</sup> In addition, studies revealed women's double shift – i.e. domestic and childcare work alongside paid work.<sup>89</sup> While many studies linked caregiving pressures to the cultures of origin, there were also findings indicating that women's caregiving burden stemmed from the culture of the host country as well.<sup>90</sup> For example, Latina women living in Canada described their experiences of how society places more pressure on mothers concerning childcare responsibilities, making mothers feel guilty about spending time on sports.<sup>91</sup>

Household and family responsibilities were a barrier, either due to lack of time, physical exhaustion or because children did not have a place to stay or could not be taken with in sports.<sup>92</sup> Lack of time was almost always related to women's responsibilities for household and family but also emerged as an independent issue.<sup>93</sup> In particular, the life situations of women who had recently migrated could be so busy that they had no time, energy or motivation to do sports.<sup>94</sup> The post-migration period may also be associated with psychological burdens.<sup>95</sup> For example, waiting for a residence permit or uncertainty about the residence status were described as situations of significant psychological strain. Such types of stressful life situations reduced motivation to participate in sport.<sup>96</sup> For the women who worked in a low-paid, physically demanding job, the physical exhaustion of work emerged also as a barrier to participation.<sup>97</sup>

Several studies described how women's participation in sport in purpose of gaining health or well-being was unfamiliar in many of the cultures from which women had come. Many of them had never thought about participating in sports before migrating. Culturally, especially women's sport may have been perceived as a waste of time. Therefore, sport was generally placed very low on the women's life priorities.<sup>98</sup> For example, interviews with women of Ethiopian and Eritrean backgrounds showed that women gave higher priority to the well-being and needs of other family members than themselves which reduced their sport participation levels.<sup>99</sup> In some studies, women described how during integration into the host country, attitudes towards sports had changed. On the one hand, this increased the pressures they felt about their body image, but also their willingness to participate in sports.<sup>100</sup>

Some studies found that women had done sports in their home country but had stopped it when they migrated to a new country.<sup>101</sup> Eva Rönkkö (2023a) found that migration disrupted sporty lifestyles also for women who had done sports in their country of origin. The reason given is the reshaping of everyday routines in the new country. On the other hand, the disruption of routines also enabled people who had never exercised before to take up sports.<sup>102</sup> Quitting the sport participation after migration was sometimes also due to practical reasons, such as cold weather or shyness to use public space as a place to do sports. Some women experienced public sporting spaces as male-dominated which them feel unwelcome and uncomfortable.<sup>103</sup> One study found that women's experiences of harassment in public places in their country of origin limited their use of public sporting spaces.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Cortis 2009

<sup>89</sup> Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Ramos Salas et al. 2016

<sup>90</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Ramos Salas et al. 2016

<sup>91</sup> Ramos Salas et al. 2016

<sup>92</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Cortis et al. 2007; Lenneis et al. 2022; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>93</sup> Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>94</sup> Frisby 2011; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Taylor 2004; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>95</sup> Ramos Salas et al. 2016

<sup>96</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a

<sup>97</sup> Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Ramos Salas et al. 2016

<sup>98</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Cortis 2009; Cortis et al. 2007; Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Maxwell et al. 2013; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>99</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a

<sup>100</sup> Cortis 2009; Lenneis & Pfister 2017

<sup>101</sup> Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>102</sup> Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>103</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>104</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a

The studies revealed that values and perceptions of women's cultural background might also affect sport participation. Some studies identified family or community resistance as a barrier.<sup>105</sup> For example, a study examining the participation of young women from the Norwegian-Pakistani community found that women experienced challenges in sports participation due to community resistance.<sup>106</sup> The resistance is often related to cultural perceptions of proper womanhood and appropriate femininity.<sup>107</sup> In some studies, such cultural barriers were coming from outside, while in others the decision to non-participation was described as a women's own decision.<sup>108</sup>

### *Lack of appropriate facilities and practices*

The most common and central challenge to women's participation identified in the literature was the lack of women-only sport facilities.<sup>109</sup> Several articles showed how women-only spaces directly increased the number of participants, reflecting how essential they are for including migrant women.<sup>110</sup> The lack of women-only spaces forced some women to stop exercising altogether or to do it alone and in isolation.<sup>111</sup> Previous research sometimes suggests quite bluntly that migrant women, especially Muslims, cannot sport in non-segregated spaces since this is prohibited due to their religious or cultural background.<sup>112</sup> However, such an interpretation oversimplifies the many reasons why women cannot or do not want to play sport in spaces where men are present.

The issue of women-only facilities is a highly politicised topic in the Western countries, although training separately for men and women is a well-established practice in many sports in the Western countries.<sup>113</sup> In several studies, women felt that they could, with appropriate clothing, exercise in non-segregated spaces, but women-only spaces were perceived as more comfortable and safer. Overall, the studies highlighted how playing sport in women-only facilities, even when connected to religious rules, was a personal choice that was influenced by many factors. In such spaces, women were able to focus on sport rather than constantly thinking about their appearance and the appropriateness of their dress.<sup>114</sup> Women also perceived that sporting in non-segregated spaces with Islamic or non-Western sportswear was stigmatising and caused negative attention.<sup>115</sup> One study found that women preferred to play sport with each other because they wanted to play with other novices without the pressure to perform. Women-only spaces were perceived to produce less performance pressure compared to sports spaces open to all.<sup>116</sup> In women-only spaces, women felt protected from the male gaze, but often also from the white gaze, which stigmatises women primarily as migrants and 'others'. Thus, women-only spaces created experiences of safety, familiarity, support and belonging.<sup>117</sup>

In some studies women wished for facilities where there would be a possibility to change clothes in separate changing rooms.<sup>118</sup> In addition to facilities, the study revealed that for many women it was important that men were not involved in sport sessions in any capacity, such as instructors, coaches or spectators, to ensure that all individuals using the facilities during women's time were women.<sup>119</sup> In instances where the nature of the sport made it

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<sup>105</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Walseth & Strandbu 2014

<sup>106</sup> Walseth & Strandbu 2014

<sup>107</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Mohammadi 2019; Walseth & Strandbu 2014

<sup>108</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Alemu et al. 2021a; Cortis et al. 2007; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>109</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Alemu et al. 2021a; Cortis 2009; Cortis et al. 2007; Kuppinger 2015; Maxwell et al. 2013; McCue & Kourouche 2010; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>110</sup> Raja 2017; Lenneis et al. 2022; Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012

<sup>111</sup> Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012

<sup>112</sup> Raja 2017; Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012

<sup>113</sup> Raja 2017

<sup>114</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022; Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Raja 2017; Walseth & Strandbu 2014

<sup>115</sup> Cortis 2009; Lenneis et al. 2022

<sup>116</sup> Lee et al. 2014

<sup>117</sup> Cortis et al. 2007; Lenneis et al. 2022; Raja 2017; Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>118</sup> Cortis 2009; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>119</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013; Raja 2017

impossible to provide women-only facilities, it was important that women were provided with religiously and culturally appropriate clothing to participate.<sup>120</sup> More broadly, the culture of sporting organisations may have had features that excluded women. For example, some studies highlighted the heavy use of alcohol in the leisure activities of sports clubs as a practice that excluded Muslim women.<sup>121</sup>

### *Experiences of racism, discrimination and stereotypes*

Almost every article in this review noted experiences of discrimination and racism as a barrier to women's participation in sport. The fact that this was observed in almost every study indicates that the problem is significant. Across countries, the women had experienced indirect or direct racism, both inside and outside the sport context. Direct racism was manifested through insults and name-calling. Indirect racism was much more common and appeared as experiences of exclusion, stares and hostility from majority people.<sup>122</sup> Women had experiences of not feeling welcomed or entitled to participate in a sport group.<sup>123</sup> These experiences significantly undermined women's willingness to participate in sport. For example, Muslim women in Australia and Switzerland felt unable and unwilling to exercise outdoors for fear of facing Islamophobia.<sup>124</sup>

Experiences related to racism, but articulated differently or emphasising a different perspective, were also abundant in the literature. These were articulated as othering, discrimination, prejudice and xenophobia.<sup>125</sup> The instances had not always happened to women personally but might be related to the experiences of others or to the wider social environment and discourses. In Australia, for example, several studies showed migrant women feeling that although the country's policies nominally encouraged multiculturalism, there was not a genuine support for diverse practices in sporting organisations or sports clubs.<sup>126</sup> Women in both Australia and Switzerland perceived that sport was inclusive only for majority people.<sup>127</sup> In a Danish Muslim women's swimming group, women were reluctant to swim in front of the majority population because social discourses about the burkini created an atmosphere in which women wearing the burkini were portrayed as 'others', not belonging to Danish society.<sup>128</sup> As a result of the exclusive and discriminatory experiences, many started to engage in sports with other minority people, making the sport a safe space from stigma, prejudice and racism.<sup>129</sup>

Stereotypes and prejudices are issues that migrant women were constantly confronted with, either directly or indirectly, in the sphere of sport.<sup>130</sup> The most frequent stereotype in the studies was the perception of Muslim or migrant women as a subjugated group in need of Western emancipation<sup>131</sup> but there were also other stereotypes, for example, expecting that women with certain background would be skilful at or prefer a certain sport.<sup>132</sup> The stereotypes manifest in everyday encounters, but also in the wider culture of sport and the interventions that take place in it. In their study, David Ekholm and colleagues (2022) examined how Swedish sports club managers, coaches and partners problematise the non-participation of migrant girls in sport. Girls' non-participation was interpreted as a consequence of patriarchal culture and families that do not allow their participation. Through sport-based interventions, girls were thought to become emancipated members of society. Thus, the underlying assumption was that they were an underdeveloped, deprived and backward group to be saved by Western interventions.<sup>133</sup> Such

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<sup>120</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>121</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013; McCue & Kourouche 2010

<sup>122</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Alemu et al. 2021a; Alemu et al. 2021b; Cortis 2009; Cortis et al. 2007

<sup>123</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Lee et al. 2014; McCue & Kourouche 2010; Taylor 2004

<sup>124</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Lenneis et al. 2022

<sup>125</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Alemu et al. 2021b; Cortis 2009; Doherty & Taylor 2007; Lenneis et al. 2022; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>126</sup> Sawrikar & Muir 2010; McCue & Kourouche 2010; Taylor 2004

<sup>127</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>128</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022

<sup>129</sup> Frisby 2011; Kuppinger 2015; Raja 2017; Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012

<sup>130</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Frisby 2011; Raja 2017

<sup>131</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Raja 2017

<sup>132</sup> Frisby 2011; Taylor 2004

<sup>133</sup> Ekholm et al. 2022

discourse is characterised by the absence of the voice of migrant girls and women themselves, even though they are the target of interventions.<sup>134</sup>

### *Intersectional exclusion*

According to the intersectional perspective, an individual's position in society is shaped by intersecting characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, age, immigrant status and social class, that influence each other.<sup>135</sup> This means that the experiences of exclusion are holistic and inseparable of each other.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, exclusionary experiences are not always related to racism and discrimination alone but can also be based on other factors such as language proficiency or social class.<sup>137</sup> Sometimes, the holistic or subtle nature of experiences makes it difficult to identify their origin.<sup>138</sup> On the other hand, the difficulty in identifying exclusionary practices may also be since they are often informal or institutionalised. For example, longstanding practices within sporting organisations can be inherently exclusionary, making them difficult to recognise.<sup>139</sup>

In addition to gender and ethnicity the studies in this review consider other intersectional characteristics, most importantly socio-economic status, religion and educational background, that influence women's experiences of exclusion.<sup>140</sup> For example, a study of migrant-background youth found that for some young women, the experience of non-belonging in a majority sport club was mainly due to other participants' different social class.<sup>141</sup> The literature throughout the review shows a people's preference to be in the company of their peers, in terms of background, ethnicity, social class and religion.<sup>142</sup> However, this does not imply that sport contexts with participants from both minority and majority backgrounds are unimportant. Research indicates that for successful integration, it is crucial for individuals to have spaces where they can both enhance their cultural identity and interact with majority population.<sup>143</sup>

### *Limited physical skills, capability or fitness*

As mentioned, some of the women in the studies had no previous experience of organised sport. Thus, they perceived a lack of physical skills as well as self-confidence as a barrier.<sup>144</sup> For elderly women, physical challenges due to high age or poor health further undermined their confidence in their own abilities.<sup>145</sup> Participating in a sport group for the first time, either ever or for a long time, would have required a confidence that many lacked.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, participation was merely the initial step in entering the zone of discomfort required for acquiring new skills.<sup>147</sup> For example, women training to ride a bike described how learning to ride involved constant frustration and experiences of failure.<sup>148</sup> In addition, certain sports seemed scary or dangerous to some participants.<sup>149</sup> For example, in the Muslim women's swimming group some participants had water-related traumas, so just getting used to the water took time.<sup>150</sup> As sporting habits differ across cultures, people who had been involved in sports in

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<sup>134</sup> Ekholm et al. 2022; Raja 2017

<sup>135</sup> Kauravaara & Rönkkö 2020

<sup>136</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Raja 2017

<sup>137</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a

<sup>138</sup> Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>139</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Rönkkö 2023a; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>140</sup> Frisby 2011; Lee et al. 2014; Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Lenneis et al. 2022

<sup>141</sup> Walseth 2008

<sup>142</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Frisby 2011; Kuppinger 2015; Walseth 2008

<sup>143</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a

<sup>144</sup> Cortis 2009; Lenneis & Pfister 2017

<sup>145</sup> Cortis 2009; Cortis et al. 2007

<sup>146</sup> Cortis 2009; Doherty & Taylor 2007; Mohammadi 2019; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>147</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022; Mohammadi 2019; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>148</sup> Mohammadi 2019

<sup>149</sup> Mohammadi 2019; Taylor & Tooley 1998

<sup>150</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022

their home country also found it difficult to start in a new sporting culture if they were not familiar with the games, rules or dressing.<sup>151</sup>

### *Lack of social contacts and information*

Networks, friends or acquaintances who informed the women about sports groups or invited them to join were shown to be a crucial factor in participation. A common reason for non-participation in sport was the lack of acquaintances with whom to participate.<sup>152</sup> Social contacts were important both in easing the nervousness of starting and in providing information about events and sport groups.<sup>153</sup> For example, Rönkkö (2023a) shows that most women had participated in the sport group she studied as a result of an advice from a friend or acquaintance, which reflects the relevance of networks in participation.

The importance of acquaintances and networks in sport participation seems to be more pronounced for recently migrated women. Their lack of networks may be associated with low confidence and skills, low priority for sport and busy lives.<sup>154</sup> In such situations, women would have needed mentors or role models to encourage them to take up sports.<sup>155</sup> The importance of social contacts is reflected in the fact that in many studies the social benefits of sports were perceived as the most important well-being effects of sport.<sup>156</sup> Sport was considered a place to meet new and old friends and people from one's own ethnic group, other minority ethnic groups and the majority population.<sup>157</sup>

Lack of information, which is closely linked to both social contacts and language skills, was also identified as a barrier to sport participation. Lack of knowledge typically manifested in the difficulty that many women had in finding appropriate sports groups for them. This pushed women to sport in informal settings.<sup>158</sup> Lack of information could also become a barrier in situations where women did not know where to find help with childcare or financial expenses.<sup>159</sup> However, difficulties are not necessarily always related to lack of information. Sometimes appropriate sporting opportunities are simply not available.<sup>160</sup> For example, place of residence influences the availability of sporting opportunities: in rural areas, distances are greater and there may be fewer facilities for organised sport.<sup>161</sup>

### *Financial barriers*

Financial costs of participation were identified as a barrier, particularly for women with refugee backgrounds, but also for other women from low socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>162</sup> Overcoming this barrier was challenging since some women perceived financial difficulties as a shameful issue that they did not want to discuss with outsiders.<sup>163</sup> Sport involves several costs that could be a barrier to participation: equipment, transportation, participation fees and social events.<sup>164</sup> The economic situation influences the selection of sports since some sports are considerably more expensive than others. The stigma attached to social class or socio-economic status was sometimes perceived so strongly that women preferred to drop out rather than suffer the exclusion that their economic situation

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<sup>151</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Frisby 2011; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>152</sup> Cortis 2009; Lenneis et al. 2022; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>153</sup> Cortis 2009; Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Maxwell et al. 2013; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>154</sup> Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>155</sup> Lenneis & Pfister 2017

<sup>156</sup> Lee et al. 2014; a 2023a; Spaaij 2012; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>157</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Lee et al. 2021; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012

<sup>158</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Cortis 2009; Lee et al. 2014; Lenneis et al. 2022

<sup>159</sup> Frisby 2011; Ramos Salas et al. 2016

<sup>160</sup> Lee et al. 2014; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>161</sup> Hoekman, Breedveld & Kraaykamp 2017

<sup>162</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Cortis et al. 2007; Frisby 2011; Lee et al. 2014; Maxwell et al. 2013; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>163</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Frisby 2011

<sup>164</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Cortis et al. 2007; Frisby 2011; Maxwell et al. 2013; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

caused. Others continued to participate but minimised their involvement in social events that required money. From an integration perspective, this is unfortunate, as participation in social events is considered as central to integration.<sup>165</sup> It can be assessed that financial barriers can be divided into direct and indirect barriers. Direct barriers include the inability to pay fees or equipment for participation, while indirect barriers encompass non-participation stemming from stigma or a sense of exclusion related to one's socio-economic background.<sup>166</sup>

### *Linguistic barriers*

Developed to unify diverse population groups, the idea of sport as a universal language uniting participants from different backgrounds is a persistent myth in the field of sports.<sup>167</sup> According to Rönkkö (2023a) the understanding of sport as a universal language conceals the power relations and structural inequalities in sport since this consideration implies that sport would be automatically equal and inclusive for all. Poor proficiency in the majority language emerged as a barrier to accessing information, making social contacts, understanding instructions and participating in other social activities.<sup>168</sup> Women described their experiences of disconnection and isolation from the rest of the group due to the lack of a common language.<sup>169</sup>

The instructor plays an important role in determining whether participants' limited proficiency in the dominant language becomes a barrier to participation in sport. The instructor had the possibility to prevent experiences of social exclusion in the situations where participants were from diverse backgrounds.<sup>170</sup> In the sport group that Rönkkö (2023a; 2024) observed, the instructor herself was not a native Finnish speaker, which reduced asymmetrical power relations and pressure to speak correctly. When the participants had a safe space to speak at their own level and make mistakes, the multilingual group became a space of belonging and social inclusion. Also, the exercise itself worked well in a multilingual environment when the instructor spoke simple language, used several languages overlapping and demonstrated the exercises.<sup>171</sup> In another study, the instructor used pictures to overcome the language barriers.<sup>172</sup> In contrast, a study by Betelihem Alemu and colleagues (2021a) showed how the instructor can also make the exercise situation exclusionary and unsafe by ignoring the specific needs and challenges of women. It is essential that facilitators have the sensitivity to encounter participants individually without a migrant frame while still recognizing specific characteristics of the target group that may influence the activity.<sup>173</sup>

Linguistic barriers often emerged as a key factor in the experience of exclusion. For example, in the study of Taylor (2004) while migrant women speaking the majority language had positive experiences in sport groups and expressed feelings of familiarity, acceptance and belonging, experiences of women not speaking the majority language were the opposite. Their participation did not contribute to broader integration or social inclusion.<sup>174</sup> Rönkkö (2024) argues that specifically language barriers might be crucial in non-participation, however simultaneously reminding that language barriers are closely connected with other intersectional factors. In the sport group followed by Rönkkö (2023a; 2024), those who spoke less Finnish did not want to be seated at the front of the hall, so that the fact that they were migrants would not be revealed through their language use. In this context, she describes immigrant status as a social condition wherein the majority population defines individuals as 'other' and inferior.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a

<sup>166</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Frisby 2011; Walseth 2008

<sup>167</sup> Lee et al. 2021; Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>168</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Cortis 2009; Doherty & Taylor 2007; Lee et al. 2014; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Spaaij 2012; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>169</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a

<sup>170</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Doherty & Taylor 2007; Rönkkö 2023; 2024

<sup>171</sup> Rönkkö 2023a; 2024

<sup>172</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020

<sup>173</sup> Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>174</sup> Taylor 2004

<sup>175</sup> Rönkkö 2023a; 2024

Similarly, in Alison Doherty and Tracy Taylor's (2007) study they found that, for women in particular, language challenges, unfamiliarity with sport culture and prejudice against migrants were intertwined creating an experience of social exclusion and non-belonging.

### *Lack of representation and role models*

Several studies mentioned the lack of representation or role models as an indirect factor influencing women's participation.<sup>176</sup> Role models have been found to be an effective way to increase the participation of minority populations in sport.<sup>177</sup> Among minorities, role models have a genuine impact on whether an individual can participate in a sport. If there are prejudices or issues associated with participating in a particular sport, representation and role models can reduce prejudices and enable opportunities for participation.<sup>178</sup> Furthermore, representation strengthens the experience of inclusion and belonging in sport.<sup>179</sup> Migrant women wanted more representation of women like them everywhere in the sphere of sports: in participants, coaches, staff and in the media.<sup>180</sup>

Professional women athletes with a migration background were seen as important role models for women. A professional athlete from an ethnic minority may enhance the support for their sport within the entire minority community.<sup>181</sup> The success of a professional athlete from an ethnic minority may bring national pride and a sense of belonging also to other members of the minority. For example, a female athlete in Walseth's (2006) study reported that a kebab shop owner in Norway had posted a newspaper article about her sporting success on the wall of his shop. This was interpreted as an action where the shop owner wanted to demonstrate that migrant women could also succeed in sport and represent Norway at the national level.<sup>182</sup> The story illustrates how representation at all levels plays a role in creating a sense of belonging and inclusion in sports. Representation can also act as a factor in breaking down prejudices and stereotypes of the majority population.<sup>183</sup>

## ***Organisational perspectives on sport for migrant women***

Some articles in the review examined the views of service providers, administrators and sporting organisations on the participation of migrant women. It should be noted that almost all the studies were conducted in Australia or New Zealand and that some of them are quite old. Nevertheless, they provide an overall picture of the organisational level understanding of the women's participation. Other studies in this review from other countries reference similar perceptions within the sporting world as those presented here, even though the topic is not examined in them in greater detail.<sup>184</sup> In addition, research outside this review is in line with the results presented in this chapter.<sup>185</sup>

Service providers specialised in multicultural activities were typically very successful in reaching participants, which is not surprising considering the comprehensive attention they had given to the barriers and challenges to participation of the target group. Multicultural providers were often familiar with the culture and needs of their target

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<sup>176</sup> Ahmad et al 2020; Alemu et al 2021a; Cortis 2009; Ekholm et al. 2022; Maxwell et al 2013; Raja 2017; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Taylor 2004; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>177</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>178</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; McCue & Kourouche 2010; Raja 2017; Taylor 2004

<sup>179</sup> Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>180</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>181</sup> Raja 2017; Stodolska & Alexandris 2004; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>182</sup> Walseth 2006

<sup>183</sup> Alemu et al 2021b; Lee et al 2021; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>184</sup> Ekholm et al. 2022; Frisby 2011; Lee et al. 2014; McCue & Kourouche 2010

<sup>185</sup> Elling & Claringbould 2005; Pyykkönen 2016

groups. For example, they had studied about Islamic practices and beliefs, and had been open to feedback from participants.<sup>186</sup> Simultaneously, however, problematic stereotypes about Islamic culture emerged in the perceptions of some service providers, reflecting the persistence of such stereotypes. Some of them held assimilationist views about how Muslim women should participate in sport.<sup>187</sup>

The problems faced by multicultural service providers were related to funding, general resistance, ignored racism and lack of understanding by others.<sup>188</sup> For example, two separate service providers had encountered significant difficulties in trying to rent women-only swimming facilities. While the operators renting swimming facilities were resistant to the idea of women-only swimming, the target group also could not give up their demands for gender segregation, which put the service providers in a challenging position. Other service providers had also faced difficulties in obtaining sports facilities or appropriate clothing for Muslim players.<sup>189</sup> Several actors stressed the financial difficulties that they faced which made their services fragmented and non-continuous.<sup>190</sup> They perceived that national funding was constantly being directed for less popular but wealthier majority clubs. Service providers had also been ignored when reporting racism by national sporting bodies.<sup>191</sup> Many of them had a perception of sporting culture as racist and patriarchal.<sup>192</sup>

The organisational perception of women's participation in sport is generally assimilationist and simplistic, except for service providers specifically dedicated to multicultural services.<sup>193</sup> Diversity issues turned out to be almost completely ignored in the comprehensions of national sporting bodies, administrators and organisations. They perceived that there was no need to specifically promote the participation of migrant women. They conceived of sport as a sphere of equal opportunities – inclusive by default – where everyone can participate if they so choose and completely ignored the possibility of racism or other exclusionary practices.<sup>194</sup> Some even argued that the culture of migrant women itself creates a problem for participation. Representatives of national sporting organisations presented several arguments why targeting activities only for the majority population was more effective and reasonable which can be considered structural discrimination. It was seen, for example, as more economically viable. They also thought that sporting activities could not appeal to the majority and minorities at the same time.<sup>195</sup> Explicit racism was relatively rare at the organisational level, but racism was expressed in more subtle ways.<sup>196</sup>

Overall, it can be assessed that organisational representatives and national sporting bodies are indifferent and assimilationist towards migrant women's participation in sports. In principle, activities are open to all, but there is a reluctance to make changes to existing activities to promote social inclusion. Even if there would be activities directed for migrant women, organisations are rarely willing to do anything else to enhance the participation. Therefore, the understanding of women's participation is individualised, and it overtakes the structural constraints that prevent the participation. Minorities are thought to be slowly integrating into the mainstream sporting culture, which makes the "problem" to disappear. Activities directed for minorities are implemented by individual service providers, leaving them fragmented, part-time and underfunded.<sup>197</sup> When activities for migrant women are scattered and project-based, not rooted in organisations' ordinary activities, no one is particularly responsible for enhancing their

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<sup>186</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>187</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020

<sup>188</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Cortis 2009

<sup>189</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020

<sup>190</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Cortis 2009; Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>191</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020

<sup>192</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; McCue & Kourouche 2010

<sup>193</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Cortis 2009; McCue & Kourouche 2010; Taylor 2004; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>194</sup> Cortis 2009; Taylor 2004; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>195</sup> Cortis 2009

<sup>196</sup> Cortis 2009; Taylor 2004

<sup>197</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Cortis 2009; McCue & Kourouche 2010; Rönkkö 2023; Taylor 2004; Taylor & Toohey 1998

sport participation. Consequently, activities for migrant women are often based on the personal initiative of the service providers rather than formal structures.<sup>198</sup>

### *Strategies for service providers to enhance sport participation*

This chapter summarises what could be done to promote migrant women's participation, and hence wider social inclusion. Some of the barriers would be relatively easy to overcome, while dismantling some barriers, such as gendered caring responsibilities and racism, would require large-scale cultural changes.<sup>199</sup> For example, Tracy Taylor and Kristine Toohey (1998) emphasise the need to increase understanding and practice of cultural diversity in the sporting world. Respect for cultural diversity should apply broadly to participants, coaches and directors as well as potential spectators. Increasing diversity practices and cooperation were seen as a strategy for promoting trust and social inclusion of ethnic minorities.<sup>200</sup> More recent research has noted that approaches focusing solely on cultural diversity are considered outdated. Today, diversity is understood more broadly, encompassing factors such as socio-economic background, immigration status, and life situation.<sup>201</sup>

When addressing barriers to participation, it is essential to adopt an intersectional approach, as women's experiences vary significantly depending on their intersecting identities and characteristics. For example, highly educated, English-speaking Indian women didn't have much excluding experiences in sports while refugee-background Eritrean and Ethiopian women had several of them.<sup>202</sup> The literature shows that refugee background impacts women's opportunities to engage in sports due to their economic situation, lack of sporting capital, traumas and uncertain life-situation.<sup>203</sup> Age is also an important factor when considering participation of migrant women despite that the literature examines it only a little. When sports activities are designed for elderly migrant women, it is essential to ensure that the activities are safe and are not excluding anyone due to their skills or sporting capital.

Verena Lenneis and Gertrud Pfister (2017) point out that providing only culturally appropriate practices and spaces does not necessarily increase women's participation if other barriers, such as lack of time or work-related exhaustion, are not considered. Their research focuses on Muslim female cleaners. To address these barriers, they suggest providing sporting opportunities at the workplace during working hours or in the neighbourhood with opportunities for childcare. The role of childcare in supporting participation has been stressed in other studies as well.<sup>204</sup> Similarly, with Lenneis and Pfister (2017), Donna Lee and colleagues (2014) suggest implementing parallel childcare options during women's exercise groups to address constraints related to caregiving responsibilities. Research has also recognised the need for opportunities to participate in sports together with the whole family.<sup>205</sup>

The literature suggests that despite considering other barriers, financial costs may also prevent participation. From this perspective, the most accessible places for women to sport are free and nearby activities, with free social events as well.<sup>206</sup> Among recently migrated women, sport participation could be promoted by providing free opportunities to develop skills and learn new sports. Some women specifically wished for a newcomers' sport group where participants would not have to feel ashamed of their language skills or competences.<sup>207</sup> Women had different preferences for sports in the studies. They hoped for unstructured, light and flexible activities, such as dancing or

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<sup>198</sup> Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>199</sup> Cortis 2009; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>200</sup> Mawell & Taylor 2010; Taylor 2004; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>201</sup> Martikainen & Pöyhönen 2023, 18; Rönkkö 2021

<sup>202</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>203</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a

<sup>204</sup> Lee et al. 2014; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>205</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>206</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Ramos Salas et al. 2016

<sup>207</sup> Lee et al. 2014; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

relaxation exercises, and opportunities for socialisation. Having fun was often perceived as more important than competition and group sports were also preferred over individual activities.<sup>208</sup>

One of the most crucial issues in engaging women is accessibility of information. Even if all other issues are addressed, the target group cannot participate if they do not have access to information about the sporting possibilities. Thus, the focus should be put on dissemination of accessible information through relevant channels.<sup>209</sup> Among migrant women, word-of-mouth communication has been shown to be effective channel for spreading information.<sup>210</sup> An effective way to reach women and girls to participate was encouraging the family members of men and boys already involved to join.<sup>211</sup> Another concrete way to promote accessible information is to translate instructions or advertisements in multiple languages.<sup>212</sup> In addition, cooperation with different local community actors, such as NGO's, libraries or health services, were suggested both to promote the dissemination of information and to integrate activities into the wider community.<sup>213</sup>

Rönkkö (2023a) has argued that it is important that activities for women are flexible, appropriate to their life situation, continuous and reliable. The first two of these refer to the specific needs of migrant women and the fact that they participate only when the conditions of the activities, such as timing, cost and facilities, are suitable for them. Individual's initial experiences play a crucial role in their participation: based on these experiences, they either choose to continue or discontinue their involvement. Continuity and reliability are particularly important because programmes for migrant women are often part-time and project-based experiments. Continuity and reliability are connected in a way that part-time or unsure activities are rarely reliable.<sup>214</sup>

Several studies stress the need for female mentors and coaches and the importance of migrant women's participation at other levels of governance, such as project management and administration.<sup>215</sup> At the grassroots level, women mentors and coaches increase the accessibility of participation for many women.<sup>216</sup> Some of the articles present suggestions of mentoring programs for migrant women. Lee and her colleagues (2014) propose that migrant women who have lived in the country for a longer time could become sport buddies for newcomers helping them, for example, with the language. Similarly, Pooja Sawrikar and Kirty Muir (2010) suggest a buddy program where recently migrated women would be paired with local women. They consider it as a good strategy to overcome multiple barriers.

The participation at administrative levels and in planning activities contributes to drawing attention to migrant-women-specific problems and barriers. When considering migrant women, it is essential to scrutinise not only gender-specific inequities but also the holistic position of women that bases on their intersecting social characteristics.<sup>217</sup> Activities and programmes designed to involve the target group and take into consideration their specific needs are considered to be the most effective in promoting the inclusion of migrant women. These activities would introduce women to other local, continual sporting possibilities and organisations' ordinary activities.<sup>218</sup> It is essential that these practices are designed together with women themselves in a spirit of mutual learning, allowing women to use their experiential and learned knowledge to develop better practices.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>209</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Frisby 2011; Lee et al. 2014

<sup>210</sup> Frisby 2011

<sup>211</sup> Maxwell & Taylor 2010

<sup>212</sup> Lee et al. 2014

<sup>213</sup> Frisby 2011; Lee et al. 2014; Maxwell & Taylor 2010

<sup>214</sup> Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>215</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Lee et al. 2014; McCue & Kourouche 2010; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>216</sup> McCue & Kourouche 2010; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>217</sup> Lee et al. 2014; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>218</sup> Rönkkö 2023; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>219</sup> Frisby 2011; Lee et al. 2014

## ***Reasons for migrant women to engage in sports***

Projects aiming at integration through sport quite often have an assimilationist understanding of integration, implying that the only legitimate way for migrants to participate is with majority people.<sup>220</sup> Some organisations providing sport for migrant women also have underlying assumptions of deprived migrant women in need of Western emancipation.<sup>221</sup> To avoid assimilationist and stereotypical perceptions, it is essential to address why the target group of this study, migrant women, participate in sports. It is notable, that women had other reasons to participate in sport than integration.<sup>222</sup>

Rönkkö (2023a) states that in her study women did not participate for the purpose of learning the language, establishing social relationships or learning the customs of their host country, which were the aims the organisations often used to justify activities for migrant women. Instead, they participated mainly for well-being and health reasons.<sup>223</sup> Some organisations may also have objectives that women would join majority groups after having first participated in a migrant only group, but this did not happen in the group that Rönkkö (2023a) was following as women did not have aims of integration in their participation. However, some studies showed opposite results, suggesting that some women participated in sports with the aim of, for example, learning the language or establishing social relations with majority people.<sup>224</sup>

A typical reason for migrant women to participate in sport is to achieve meaningfulness, health and wellbeing in everyday life.<sup>225</sup> Participation may have been prompted by a doctor's recommendation to adopt a healthier lifestyle or a colleague's suggestion to participate together.<sup>226</sup> For many women, physical appearance was also an important factor.<sup>227</sup> Sporty appearance was an issue that had become more significant for women during the process of integration.<sup>228</sup> On the other hand, there were also descriptions of feeling pressured to conform to Western concepts of beauty.<sup>229</sup> Some participated in sport primarily for socialising reasons, but sometimes social contacts became an important factor in sport participation only later.<sup>230</sup> As Rönkkö (2023a) aptly sums up, 'people joined the group for the exercise but stayed for the social reasons'.

Women's participation in sport for health and well-being can be seen as desirable from the perspective of social inclusion and integration goals as well, as in order to integrate people need to feel well.<sup>231</sup> For example, Cindy Rublee and Susan Shaw (1991) have highlighted general well-being as crucial for integration. Well-being can be considered as the basis from which any other positive outcomes of sport develop. However, research has identified the immigrant health paradox, which refers to the phenomenon where recently arrived migrants tend to have better health than the general population, but the longer they reside in the host country, the more their health tends to decline compared to the average. This has been explained by the challenges and precarious positions migrants often face in their country of residence, such as bad living and working conditions.<sup>232</sup> Therefore, these structural constraints pose a challenge for integration.

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<sup>220</sup> Agergaard 2018; Ekholm et al. 2022; Taylor 2004

<sup>221</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022

<sup>222</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Lenneis et al. 2022; Raja 2017; Rönkkö 2023a; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>223</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022; Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>224</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Doherty & Taylor 2007

<sup>225</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Doherty & Taylor 2007; Frisby 2011; Lenneis et al. 2022; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Rönkkö 2023a, 2024; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>226</sup> Lenneis & Pfister 2017

<sup>227</sup> Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>228</sup> Cortis 2009; Lenneis & Pfister 2017

<sup>229</sup> Cortis 2009

<sup>230</sup> Lee et al. 2014; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>231</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Ponc & Frisby 2011

<sup>232</sup> Dean & Wilson 2010; Rönkkö 2023b

It is essential that participation of migrant women is enhanced because of their right to sport and to enjoy its benefits, not simply because of sport's integrative potential. When service providers have this perception, the outcomes of sport participation are also considered to be more beneficial.<sup>233</sup> Nevertheless, if sport, in all its intrinsic value, produces integration and social inclusion effects, these can be considered as a significant by-product of participation. The following chapters examine the integration and social inclusion outcomes of sport as it is important to know, even as a by-product, what can be the potential outcomes for women participating.

## ***Integration and social inclusion through sport***

The literature in this review shows findings on the integrative outcomes of sports. Some of the literature focuses on the social inclusion that is created within sport, while others focus on how participation in sport contributes to wider social inclusion and integration. In practice, however, it is difficult to distinguish at what point experiences, for example, of belonging and agency in a particular sports group turn into wider social inclusion and agency, as sports clubs are also part of society. Thus, in this section, the experiences of social inclusion, belonging and integration both within and through sport will be examined. The findings from the literature review are presented in four different themes: social capital, cultural capital, sense of belonging and personal development.

Almost every article discovers that the inclusive effect of sport occurs under certain conditions and with certain reservations. For example, Tracy Taylor's (2004) study from Australia did not find evidence of integration or social inclusion outcomes among women of non-English-speaking backgrounds. Her implication was that sports involvement helped familiarising with the culture or provided social capital only for the women from English-speaking backgrounds. While participation in sport can at best have a positive impact, it can also produce experiences of social exclusion and isolation. The reasons are to a large extent the same as those that prevent women from participating: racism, discrimination, exclusionary atmosphere, prejudice, stereotypes and language barriers.<sup>234</sup> Interestingly, a study of young men and women from migrant backgrounds found that the excluding factors in sporting contexts had a stronger impact on women than on men. These results suggest that women might be more sensitive towards exclusionary practices than men.<sup>235</sup>

### ***Social capital***

The most important benefit that women perceived of participating in sport was the relationships and networks developed through participation.<sup>236</sup> Making new acquaintances and contacts is considered as essential for integration into a new country.<sup>237</sup> and central to the relational dimension of social inclusion.<sup>238</sup> Many of the articles in this review have focused specifically on the bonding and bridging social capital that participation in sport provides for migrant women. Bonding social capital refers to the social connections and their reinforcement with people who are similar and familiar to oneself. Such capital can produce close connection and belonging to the community, but it can also be exclusionary towards outsiders.<sup>239</sup> The articles in this review have conceptualised the dimension of bonding capital in different ways. In some studies, it is posited to form within ethnic communities, whereas in others,

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<sup>233</sup> Rönkkö 2023

<sup>234</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Maxwell et al. 2013; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Taylor 2004; Walseth 2008

<sup>235</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007

<sup>236</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Frisby 2011; Lee et al. 2014; Lee et al. 2021; Maxwell & Taylor 2010; Spaaij 2012; Walseth 2008

<sup>237</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007

<sup>238</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>239</sup> Coffé & Geys 2007

it is observed to extend across ethnic minorities, encompassing all migrant background groups.<sup>240</sup> Bridging capital, in turn, strengthens connections with unfamiliar people and creates contacts across groups. Bridging capital is often associated with the benefits of social networks, such as the transmission of useful information.<sup>241</sup> The literature in this review shows that sports clubs are potential sites for the development of both bonding and bridging social capital, but the development of either type of capital is by no means certain or self-evident.

In all the studies, the social contacts and relations created in sport were not examined from the perspectives of social capital. Some studies referred more generally to how the social benefits of sports were a reason to exercise or to continue exercising.<sup>242</sup> In contrast, a study by Verena Lenneis and colleagues (2022) found that social contacts were an enjoyable by-product for women, but not the main reason for participation. While lack of friends could be a barrier to participation in sports, sports was also found to be a good way to develop friendships.<sup>243</sup> For example, for recently migrated women whose social networks had been weakened by migration, participation in sport provided an opportunity to re-establish their social safety net.<sup>244</sup>

### *Bonding social capital*

Women's participation in sport strengthened especially their bonding social capital. Bonding social capital was manifested in the form of strengthening existing friendships, making new acquaintances, laughing and gossiping together, receiving social support, helping and encouraging, and a family-like environment in which to tell stories, have fun and share knowledge.<sup>245</sup> Bonding capital was developed, for example, in participation in sport club's volunteering activities, such as running a canteen or taking part in first aid or coaching training.<sup>246</sup> As bonding social capital develops among people who already know each other or belong to the same group, such capital was associated with experiences of safety, belonging, comfort and sense of community.<sup>247</sup> In spaces of bonding social capital women had no fear of being judged or excluded, which could be the case in encounters with people from the majority population.<sup>248</sup>

Playing sports together in spaces of bonding social capital provided women opportunities to develop knowledge, resources and networks.<sup>249</sup> Such information and contacts were seen as key to linking into the migrant community and wider society.<sup>250</sup> The networks developed between and within minority groups often benefited participants in very tangible ways, for example in terms of access to employment, housing, education or healthcare. Information in one's own language was crucial, especially for those who could not access information in other ways due to language barriers.<sup>251</sup> In addition, exercising together with people from same country of origin allowed recently arrived women to learn about the unspoken rules and norms of the host society.<sup>252</sup>

However, also the negative consequences of bonding social capital were identified. Walseth (2008) found that for the participants in her study it was challenging to change sports clubs because it was so difficult to join a new group due to the exclusivity of bonding social capital. This proved particularly challenging when the other sports clubs consisted people of different social classes and of the majority population. In their study of a Muslim-focused sports

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<sup>240</sup> Maxwell & Taylor 2010; Mohammadi 2019; Raja 2017; Spaaij 2012

<sup>241</sup> Coffé & Geys 2007

<sup>242</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Rönkkö 2023a; Spaaij 2012; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>243</sup> Lee et al. 2021; Mawell et al. 2013

<sup>244</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Alemu et al. 2021a

<sup>245</sup> Raja 2017; Spaaij 2012; Walseth 2008; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>246</sup> Mawell & Taylor 2010; Spaaij 2012

<sup>247</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Lenneis et al. 2022; Raja 2017

<sup>248</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022; Raja 2017

<sup>249</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Kuppinger 2015

<sup>250</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b

<sup>251</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Kuppinger 2015; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>252</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b

club, Hazel Maxwell and colleagues (2013) found that the club's focus on Muslim women's needs and challenges appeared to have a negative impact on non-Muslim's participation. Some non-Muslim women had stopped participating because they experienced the club was too much focusing on Islamic principles.

### *Bridging social capital*

Several studies stated that the development of bridging social capital between ethnic minority groups was relatively smooth due to the characteristics that unite the minority people, such as religion, skin colour, gender, shared experience of otherness or minority status in the host society. Women experienced closeness and empathy with other minority people, which promoted bridging social capital.<sup>253</sup> Bridging capital between migrant women manifested similarly with bonding social capital.<sup>254</sup> Group exercise for women with different minority ethnic backgrounds enabled them to share knowledge, resources and peer support in a new life situation.<sup>255</sup> For example, for women who had migrated due to marriage, the multicultural sport setting allowed discussions about thought-provoking topics, such as marriage, relationships and pregnancy. Thus, sporting activities became informal self-help meetings for the women.<sup>256</sup>

While several studies have shown that sporting situations offer good opportunities to develop new friendships, studies looking at the friendships or contacts formed have found that while there is an opportunity to get to know people, it is less likely that women establish friendships.<sup>257</sup> For example, in a women-only gym, both Muslim and non-Muslim interviewees highlighted the gym as a good opportunity to get to know people from different backgrounds. However, when women were asked about friendships formed with people from different backgrounds at the gym, none had been formed.<sup>258</sup> On the other hand, being in a group can create a sense of community and belonging, even if relationships with other group members are loose, so established or long-standing relationships are not the only marker of a sport group's success.<sup>259</sup>

Previous research has found that the development of friendships between people from majority and minority populations through sport is relatively rare.<sup>260</sup> In this review as well, women experienced that social relations with the majority population were one-sided and that there was no interest among the majority population in deepening relationships.<sup>261</sup> It was explained being due to the language barriers but also hostility or prejudices from majority people.<sup>262</sup> This observation serves as a clear example of how integration is rarely a two-way process in practice. The reluctance of majority-group members to engage socially with migrants is often overlooked, while similar behaviour from migrants is problematised. A crucial question, then, is how integration could be made more genuinely reciprocal in the context of sport.

According to Agergaard (2018) and Shahrzad Mohammadi (2019), sport has limited potential to increase the social inclusion of minority ethnic people in local communities because of structural and socio-cultural barriers. Interestingly, despite these results, this aspect is often highlighted in discussions on integration through sport.<sup>263</sup> Kristin Walseth (2008) also states that the role of sports clubs as enablers of bridging capital is limited, as she argues that

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<sup>253</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b

<sup>254</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Lee et al. 2014

<sup>255</sup> Lee et al. 2014

<sup>256</sup> Lee et al. 2021

<sup>257</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Mohammadi 2019; Lee et al. 2021; Lenneis et al. 2022; Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012

<sup>258</sup> Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012

<sup>259</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022

<sup>260</sup> Agergaard 2018

<sup>261</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Mohammadi 2019; Walseth 2008; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>262</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Alemu et al. 2021b; Mohammadi 2019

<sup>263</sup> Kuppinger 2015; Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012

bridging capital fails to overcome the gaps between social classes as well as gaps between minority and majority population. At its worst, bridging relationships may produce experiences of exclusion, discrimination and racism.<sup>264</sup>

Nevertheless, when bridging social capital between majority and minority people was developed, the benefits of it were significant. For example, some of the women who participated in cycling activities had become the facilitators and coordinators of the activities, which brought them a range of benefits. The contacts they made increased their future job opportunities and helped them to develop their language skills and to gain social recognition and appreciation from both their own ethnic community and the majority population. The contacts strengthened their economic, cultural and symbolic capital. However, beneficial contacts required long-term relationships with the project organisers or other members of the majority population.<sup>265</sup> A study by Doherty and Taylor (2007) also found that young migrant women's participation in sport with their majority peers helped them in developing their English language skills and learning cultural practices and customs. These factors developed were considered as key to integration and social inclusion.<sup>266</sup> However, there are also contradictory findings in the research according to which sport participation rarely promotes broad language development, as language learning tends to be limited to the specific vocabulary used in the activities.<sup>267</sup>

In Hazel Maxwell and Tracy Taylor's (2010) study, bridging capital was manifested in contacts and partnerships with the local community and NGOs, which, for example, attracted new sponsors. As the sports club added inclusive practices to its activities, many participants became involved in volunteer work at the club. These links developed wider trust and cooperation between the club and the surrounding community. The results of the study highlighted that promotion of multicultural activities had enhanced the social contacts, belonging and active citizenship in the club.<sup>268</sup>

### *Cultural capital*

Sport was considered as an important and safe place to maintain one's own cultural identity or to learn from other cultures.<sup>269</sup> Celebrating one's own culture through sport was emphasised in sport settings where all participants were members of a particular ethnic group. For Ethiopian and Eritrean women playing sport together provided a safe and comfortable space to discuss openly about life and the challenges of living in a new country. Discussions focused on issues such as identities, norms, values and the conflicts that migration had caused. The safe space enabled in-depth discussions on issues such as relationship problems, raising children and balancing family, work and personal life. Such discussions helped women to cope with their challenges and created a sense of belonging, which helped them to integrate better into host society. The women in the study reported that they longed for spaces where they could be with other people from the same ethnic group, speak their mother tongue and enjoy their own culture. It was noted that interaction and cultural celebration within own's ethnic group also positively supported the process of integration.<sup>270</sup>

In addition to maintaining one's own cultural identity, sport enabled people to learn about the cultures of other participants. Sometimes participation promoted women's familiarisation with the culture of the majority population, but more often women reported learning new things about the cultures of other minority background participants.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Lenneis et al. 2022; Spaaij 2012; Walseth 2008

<sup>265</sup> Mohammadi 2019

<sup>266</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007

<sup>267</sup> Chovanec & Podhorna-Policka 2009, 196

<sup>268</sup> Maxwell & Taylor 2010

<sup>269</sup> Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Taylor 2004

<sup>270</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b

<sup>271</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Cortis 2009; Doherty & Taylor 2007; Lee et al. 2014; Lee et al. 2021; Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012

Some studies highlighted women's desire to participate in sports specifically with majority people, which was believed to facilitate integration and familiarisation with the culture of the host country. Participation with majority people was perceived to enhance language learning and knowledge on norms and customs of the host society.<sup>272</sup> Exercising with members of the majority population was considered to develop tacit knowledge about, for example, how to act in changing rooms or to dress properly.<sup>273</sup> On the other hand, some studies stressed that despite most of the participants being from ethnic minorities, participants learned the culture, language and customs of the majority population through activities and shared language.<sup>274</sup>

### *Sense of belonging*

Women-only sport spaces strengthened participants' sense of belonging both in relation to sport group and society.<sup>275</sup> Belonging in a new country may have been contradictory due to experiences of racism and exclusion, making belonging within the sport group particularly important. For some women, the sport group was the only safe and comfortable space where they experienced belonging.<sup>276</sup> While it is good that women have some places of belonging in their life, this finding is quite worrying as it reveals the exclusive nature of the host society. The findings suggest that migrant women are often highly motivated to integrate and build connections with members of the majority population.<sup>277</sup> However, despite this willingness, such efforts may prove unsuccessful due to experiences of discrimination and exclusion. This highlights the importance of critically examining the practices of the majority population and the lack of genuinely reciprocal integration in order to better understand the participation of migrant women.

The development of belonging was perceived as natural and easy in groups where people shared the same background, language, religion or culture.<sup>278</sup> A safe space where people can be themselves and are encountered without preconceptions is central to the development of belonging. In addition, the opportunity to use one's own mother tongue or a dominant language imperfectly created a sense of belonging and inclusion in the group.<sup>279</sup> In her study, Walseth (2008) has defined three categories through which belonging can emerge in sports. Belonging can develop from the social support and reciprocity received, the importance of sport as an escape from the rest of everyday life, or the centrality of sport to one's identity.

Some studies found that being part of a sport group also increased the sense of belonging to a wider society, community or neighbourhood.<sup>280</sup> For example, Lenneis and colleagues (2022) found in their study that Muslim women's participation in a swimming group developed their sense of belonging and safety as swimming ability was perceived as an important skill in Danish society. Studies also found that the community-based activities of a multicultural sports club and the involvement of migrant women in the development and design of sport projects strengthened their sense of belonging to the wider community.<sup>281</sup>

The participation in sports allowed women to challenge stereotypes and prejudices about them.<sup>282</sup> This can be related to the power dimension of social inclusion.<sup>283</sup> Research on Australian Muslim women shows that they have actively challenged prevailing patriarchal sporting culture by demanding gender-segregated sporting facilities,

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<sup>272</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Alemu et al. 2021b

<sup>273</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Doherty & Taylor 2007

<sup>274</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Frisby 2011; Kuppinger 2015; Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012

<sup>275</sup> Ahmad et al 2020; Alemu et al 2021b; Cortis 2009; Lee et al 2021; Taylor 2004; Walseth 2006

<sup>276</sup> Lenneis et al 2022; Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>277</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b

<sup>278</sup> Lee et al. 2021; Lenneis et al. 2021; Mohammadi 2019; Taylor 2004

<sup>279</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013; Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>280</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Walseth 2006

<sup>281</sup> Lee et al. 2014; Maxwell & Taylor 2010

<sup>282</sup> Alemu et al 2021b; Lee et al 2021; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>283</sup> Maxwell et al 2013

thereby creating space for new identities and belonging in Australian sporting culture. This agency by women reshaped the existing power structures in the sphere of sport giving the Muslim women 'spaces of freedom'.<sup>284</sup> Another study showed how women performed active citizenship by initiating, organising and highlighting the needs of Muslim women in an environment where they were constantly talked over and stereotyped.<sup>285</sup> Thus, agency that arises from a lack of appropriate practices promotes migrant women's active citizenship and social inclusion as they are forced to create new inclusive sport spaces if there are no such existing.<sup>286</sup>

### *Personal development*

One significant consequence of sport participation was personal development which is closely connected to the functional dimension of social inclusion.<sup>287</sup> Personal development contributes to happiness and life satisfaction, both of which are considered essential for integration.<sup>288</sup> For women, personal development meant overcoming barriers for participation, challenging oneself and learning new skills which promoted experiences of success, self-efficacy, self-confidence and empowerment.<sup>289</sup> Women gained sense of agency, control and freedom especially through such sports that provide crucial skills for everyday life, like swimming or biking.<sup>290</sup> Examples of increased agency are the results of a cycling course for asylum seeker background women. In the course women learned how to ride a bike, which significantly increased their everyday physical mobility and gave them wider access to urban spaces.<sup>291</sup>

In addition to knowledge and skills related to sports, some women gained experience of running a civic association, managing a sports club or planning projects through participation.<sup>292</sup> Such knowledge and participation strengthened women's feelings of agency and control over their own lives.<sup>293</sup> Furthermore, sport was important for personal development because it gave the women time to focus on themselves and their own needs. From a perspective of personal time and space, sport provided women with an escape from household routines and caregiving responsibilities and gave them a time for self-care. This was experienced as particularly important as many women had focused most of their lives in other people's well-being.<sup>294</sup>

## ***Summary of inclusion and integration outcomes***

Although the findings on integration and social inclusion were contradictory in the studies, and sport as a platform has certain limitations, several studies identified positive outcomes associated with sport participation. However, these benefits are not guaranteed or universal – they depend heavily on the specific context in which participation takes place.

In promoting integration and social inclusion, the most significant element was the social capital developed by sport in a form of new friendships, contacts and networks.<sup>295</sup> Participation in sports developed especially bonding social capital within communities. Bonding capital produced experiences of belonging and comfort, and enabled access

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<sup>284</sup> McCue & Kourouche 2010

<sup>285</sup> Kuppinger 2015

<sup>286</sup> Kuppinger 2015; McCue & Kourouche 2010

<sup>287</sup> Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>288</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007

<sup>289</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Doherty & Taylor 2007; Lee et al. 2014; Lenneis et al. 2022; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Walseth 2006

<sup>290</sup> Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Lenneis et al. 2022; Mohammadi 2019

<sup>291</sup> Mohammadi 2019

<sup>292</sup> Kuppinger 2015; Lee et al. 2014; Maxwell et al. 2013

<sup>293</sup> Lee et al. 2014

<sup>294</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Alemu et al. 2021a; Lenneis et al. 2022; Shavit & Wiesenbach 2012; Walseth 2006

<sup>295</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Frisby 2011; Lee et al. 2014; Lee et al. 2021; Maxwell & Taylor 2010; Spaaij 2012; Walseth 2008

to information about the host society.<sup>296</sup> Bridging social capital developed easily between ethnic minorities, but rather poorly between minority and majority communities. However, when it evolved, bridging capital proved to be useful in accessing information and various resources, such as finding a job or housing.<sup>297</sup> Generally speaking, sports clubs with both minority and majority women created contacts that remained during participation, whereas in minority clubs, social contacts extended to other spheres of life as well.<sup>298</sup>

Migrant women considered sport as an important way both to maintain their cultural identity and to get to know other cultures. Women felt that they learned about other minority cultures as well as the majority culture through sport although they wished more interaction with the majority culture.<sup>299</sup> Nevertheless, even in contexts where all participants were of migrant origin, the majority culture was learned through games, language and other practices.<sup>300</sup> Sport was also experienced as creating sense of belonging for the women participating. The sport group itself may have been one of the only spaces of belonging for women especially in the exclusionary social environments.<sup>301</sup> In some contexts, participation in sport extended the sense of belonging to the local community or society.<sup>302</sup>

Finally, the research identified several factors related to personal development and personal time that sport participation promoted. It provided women possibilities to learn new skills and challenge oneself. Women developed self-esteem, sense of control and agency through sport participation. Sport participation could also provide important personal time and a break from daily routines.<sup>303</sup>

Research also showed that the outcomes of sport participation are not always positive. Instead of promoting social inclusion and integration, sport can sometimes lead to exclusion and marginalisation.<sup>304</sup> Some studies found that the positive effects of sport participation are limited to a small number of individuals, often those who speak the majority language or are otherwise similar with majority population.<sup>305</sup> Importantly, participation does not guarantee inclusion: individuals may take part in sport even while feeling excluded, especially when they have no other options available.<sup>306</sup> In addition, the pursuit of integration and inclusion often appeared one-sided in the experiences of migrant women. In these cases, members of the majority population did not actively engage in interaction, or prevailing discriminatory and xenophobic attitudes even made a sense of belonging and inclusion impossible.<sup>307</sup> Considering the treatment that some migrant women face in society, it is not surprising that they prefer to participate in sports alongside other women from minority backgrounds. Such forms of participation should not be undervalued or regarded as less significant in terms of social inclusion and integration.

Sport rarely overcomes structural barriers, such as differences in social class, that create divisions between people.<sup>308</sup> As noted at the beginning, the integration outcomes of sport participation are inherently difficult to measure. Therefore, the findings presented in this chapter are based primarily on the participants' own experiences. These experiences suggest that sport participation may support integration at the micro level, such as in everyday interactions and personal feelings of inclusion, while its impact at the macro level appears to be more limited. In fact, it would be unrealistic to expect that sport, as merely one social arena among many, could stand apart from or fully dismantle the power relations, structural barriers and hierarchies embedded in the broader society.

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<sup>296</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Lenneis et al. 2022; Raja 2017

<sup>297</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Lee et al. 2014; Mohammadi 2019

<sup>298</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Walseth 2008

<sup>299</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Cortis 2009; Doherty & Taylor 2007; Lee et al. 2014; Lee et al. 2021; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>300</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Frisby 2011; Kuppinger 2015

<sup>301</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022

<sup>302</sup> Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Walseth 2008

<sup>303</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Doherty & Taylor 2007; Lenneis et al. 2022; Sawrikar & Muir 2010

<sup>304</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Lenneis et al. 2022; Spaaij 2012; Walseth 2008

<sup>305</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Mohammadi 2019; Taylor 2004; Walseth 2008; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>306</sup> Rönkkö 2023a

<sup>307</sup> Alemu et al. 2021b; Mohammadi 2019; Walseth 2008; Walseth & Fasting 2004

<sup>308</sup> Agergaard, 2018; Mohammadi, 2019; Walseth 2008

## Conclusions based on the literature review

This literature review has examined the sport participation of migrant women: the barriers to participation, its outcomes, as well as the perceptions of service providers and their strategies to promote participation. It has been shown that the issue of women's participation is complex, both in terms of engagement and outcomes. The barriers of participation are overlapping and intersectional, often accumulating on women in vulnerable positions. Overall, the literature reviewed considers migrant women in highly diverse positions implying that the findings are generalisations that do not apply to all migrant women. However, the findings can also apply to other groups besides migrant women, such as linguistic minorities or majority women in vulnerable positions who may face similar difficulties as migrant women in participating in sports.

Several factors influence migrant women's participation in sports. These include both enabling and hindering factors. Many of the barriers to sport participation are related to institutional and organisational practices. The most significant barriers include a lack of appropriate sports facilities and practices, experiences of racism or discrimination, factors related to life circumstances or cultural practices, limited physical capability, fitness and skills, lack of social contacts and knowledge, financial constraints, language barriers, and a lack of representation or role models. Service providers need to consider the accessibility of sport from different perspectives: information provision, costs, childcare and language issues, skills and facilities.<sup>309</sup>

There has been a lot of attention in research on migrant women's barriers for participation as their non-participation has been assessed as a majority challenge for their social inclusion and integration. It has been highlighted both in the literature reviewed here as well as more broadly that the integrative and inclusive outcomes of sport are by no means obvious or automatic. However, in certain circumstances sport has shown to contribute to social and cultural capital, belonging and multiple aspects of personal development. The health and well-being benefits of sport should be acknowledged not only for their own value, but also for their contribution to integration and social inclusion. It can be stated that migrant women's non-participation should be primarily assessed as an issue of equality, depriving them from the multiple well-being effects of sports. Social inclusion and integration are important potential outcomes, but they should not be the only reason to encourage minority women's participation.<sup>310</sup>

The literature involved several suggestions on how to ensure that sport provides a space of inclusion for the participants. It is essential that a sports space is comfortable and emotionally safe.<sup>311</sup> A welcoming, respectful and open atmosphere can overcome various gaps or differences that might otherwise become barriers, such as language skills.<sup>312</sup> It is notable that sport cannot be unproblematically considered as a universal language uniting participants. Even seemingly inclusive services may be based on problematic assumptions, with exclusion manifesting at more subtle levels.<sup>313</sup> It is important to note that sport is merely a social context or platform in which people interact. Whether participation leads to social inclusion depends on the nature of these interactions, whether they are hierarchical and exclusionary, or based on equality, mutual respect and a genuine effort to understand others.

A crucial question for future projects and research is to consider how social inclusion and integration can become genuinely two-way processes, with shared responsibility between majority and minority populations. The findings

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<sup>309</sup> Lee et al. 2014; Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>310</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022; Rönkkö 2023a; 2024

<sup>311</sup> Lenneis et al. 2022; Raja 2017; Rönkkö 2023; 2024

<sup>312</sup> Rönkkö 2023a; Taylor 2004

<sup>313</sup> Rönkkö 2023a

indicate that significant changes are needed within the majority population to ensure that participating in sports alongside majority people feels safe and comfortable for migrant women. However, as previously noted, migrant women's right to participate in sports with other migrant women should be respected as well. Another important question posed in critical integration research is when, or whether, integration can be considered complete. Whose participation should be approached through the lens of specific needs, and whose through a universal perspective?

As migrant women may suffer from overlapping inequalities and challenges, it is essential to ensure that this does not result in sport activities where trainers from majority population adopt a top-down approach, instructing participants on how sport should be done in the host country. This reflects the same perspective discussed earlier, where women are positioned as passive recipients of interventions rather than active agents. Such hierarchical dynamics in sport settings are highly unlikely to foster a sense of belonging or inclusion. Breaking down these power structures, by, for example, increasing the knowledge of service providers and involving migrant women in the planning and implementation of activities, should be a key consideration in inclusive sport practices.

The Mentor on The Move (MOTM) project addresses the needs identified in the research, with a primary focus on developing the mentoring program which will be designed to tackle several barriers, such as lack of information, lack of sporting friends and shyness to participate. The mentoring program emphasises two-way integration, wherein both the mentor and the mentee actively engage in communication and cultural exchange. Since continuity of the sport activities is considered important in research, MOTM project's objective to integrate inclusive practices into core activities in organisations is central for a long-term impact. The need for empowering examples is as well taken into consideration in the project by creating role models in the migrant communities. Furthermore, the research highlights the critical importance of incorporating women coaches and instructors with immigration backgrounds into sports which is an important aspect to consider in the MOTM project.

# PART II - NEED ANALYSIS OF BARRIERS AND POSSIBILITIES

## Introduction of the need analysis

In spring 2025, the Mentor on the Move project conducted two questionnaires to better understand and address the needs and challenges faced by migrant women in the context of sport. The first questionnaire was designed for women with a migration background, aiming to examine their current level of engagement in sports, the barriers they encounter to participation, their aspirations and needs, as well as their recommendations for improving the accessibility and inclusiveness of sports programs. The second questionnaire was directed at service providers operating in the field of sports. It aimed to gather their observations, experiences, and strategies related to facilitating migrant women's participation in sports and empowerment activities. This report is based on the results of the questionnaires and will serve as a context for the mentoring programme designated in the project. As in the literature review, this report uses the term migrant women to refer to all women with a migration background.

The first questionnaire was disseminated in project partners countries, and of overall 125 responses, it received 40 responses from Romania, 20 from Finland, Belgium and Greece and 19 from Spain. A few responses came also from France and Sweden. In addition, 28 respondents had started but not finished the questionnaire. Among the respondents, the most common age group was 36 to 55 years, making up 29% of the total. The smallest group was those over 68 years old, representing just 4%. Additionally, 22% were aged 16–20, 23% were 21–28, 14% were 29–35 and 8% were 56–67. There was a wide variety of mother tongues among the participants, the most common of which were Ukraine, Spanish, Somali, Arabic, Dari and English. Similarly, the number of different countries of birth was high, respondents being from South America, Africa, Asia and Europe. Most respondents are quite recent migrants, as 47 % of them being living 0 to 3 years, 17 % 4 to 7 years and 23 % more than 8 years in their country of residence. Additionally, 16 respondents were born in their country of residence. The respondents were also asked about their care responsibilities, as these has been shown to significantly affect opportunities for participation. The number of respondents who do and do not have dependents under their care was nearly equal: 61 have reported having and 62 reported not having dependents under care.

The second questionnaire received quite evenly responses from all partner countries, with a total of 88 responses. There were 20 responses from Finland, 17 from Romania, Spain and Greece and 16 from Belgium. In addition, 27 service providers had left the questionnaire unfinished. A possible reason for not completing it could be that most of these respondents reported representing sports services that do not offer activities for migrant women. They may have assumed that, since they do not provide such activities, their responses were not relevant to the questionnaire. Of the respondents who completed the questionnaire, one third were NGOs that offer sports activities. Nearly as many (30 %) were sports clubs and 15 % were public sports facilities. Of the respondents, 21 % identified themselves as representing other types of actors within the field of sports, such as national sports federations, schools or regional wellbeing authorities. The open-ended answers revealed that answers were received from both public and private sports providers operating at local, regional and national levels. Notably, neither questionnaire imposed a limit on the number of options respondents could select, which explains the generally high percentages across all options.

## Inclusion in practice: experiences, needs and barriers in sport participation – findings of the first questionnaire

Most of the respondents had engaged in sports both in their country of origin prior to migration and in their country of residence. In their country of origin, 56 % of the respondents had engaged in sports and 35 % hadn't. In their current country of residence 61 % have exercised and 39 % hasn't. However, it is crucial to notice that the respondents were reached mostly through different sports NGO's and organisations, so it is likely that the sample is biased in a such way that it does not represent migrant women comprehensively. In the country of residence, walking and jogging were the most practiced forms of exercise among the respondents which could be expected as they are free, easily achievable and suitable for most people. This may also be explained by time and language constraints. Especially for women who lack the skills or time or have health-related difficulties to engage in more demanding sports, walking or other individual activities may a highly beneficial option. The sport with the second highest participation rate were gym activities, with 30 % of respondents taking part. Group fitness, alongside swimming, was the third most popular form of physical activity, with 25 % of the respondents participating. Yoga or Pilates were practised by nearly as many. Of the respondents, 11–14 % had participated in biking or team sports. In addition, a few respondents reported taking part in boxing, dance, martial arts and gymnastics.

Responses to the question about reasons for not having participated in sports in their current country of residence revealed that nearly forty percent of the respondents had not participated. The main reasons for this were financial constraints (48 %), lack of time (38 %) and language barriers (27 %). Other reasons followed with relatively even distribution, including lack of information (22 %), lack of motivation (22 %), lack of childcare support (22 %), lack of women-only spaces (19 %) and lack of skills and confidence (17 %). The least reported constraints were cultural or religious considerations (11 %) and transportation difficulties (6 %). These responses support the findings from earlier research that migrant women want to participate in sports, but structural barriers constrain their participation. As shown in this questionnaire as well as previous research, women don't see their cultural or religious background as a barrier for participation.<sup>314</sup>

That 48 % of the respondents are constrained by financial reasons, indicates that costs for participation should be a primary matter considered when organising activities for migrant women. Lack of time is a challenge that requires addressing several interconnected elements, such as childcare, location of sports facilities and gendered unpaid work. Especially low-income migrant women often face time challenges in sport participation due to care and working responsibilities.<sup>315</sup> In our questionnaire, interestingly, women with dependents under their care cited lack of time more often as a constraint for participation than lack of childcare support. While this constraint might be particularly pronounced among migrant women, it also encompasses other groups. Thus, the solutions for it should be considered more broadly among national sports organisations and policymakers. Language barriers are also a challenge that has been noted in the previous research. According to Rönkkö (2023) language barriers can function as an umbrella constraint, limiting access to information, instructions, social contacts and other social activities. They seem to be a key factor in the experiences of exclusion.<sup>316</sup>

When asked about the benefits of sport participation, the most frequently identified was health. Of the respondents, 77 % considered health as an important benefit of sport participation. In addition, wellbeing (46 %) and physical

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<sup>314</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Lenneis & Pfister 2017; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>315</sup> Blanco-Ayala, Galvaan & Fernández-Gavira 2025

<sup>316</sup> Doherty & Taylor 2007; Rönkkö 2024; Taylor 2004

appearance (44 %) were central reasons for participation. They were followed by time for oneself (37 %) and relaxation (34 %). These results are consistent with previous research<sup>317</sup> and they seem to be similar as the reasons for sports participation in majority population.<sup>318</sup> It is noteworthy that social contacts and relations gained through participation were the least commonly cited benefit, with support from 24 % of respondents. The results indicate that sports participation enhances social inclusion as physical power (30 %), self-confidence (27 %) and having fun (29 %) were also cited as important reasons for participation.

Regarding experiences of challenges or difficulties in engaging in sports in their country of residence, 37 % of respondents reported not having encountered such issues. Financial constraints (34 %) and language barriers (29 %) were the most prevalent challenges reported. Additionally, it is significant that 17 % of respondents cited that a sense of non-belonging challenged their participation. Thus, although experiences of racism and discrimination were reported only a few (3,5 %), migrant women seem to have more vague experiences and feelings of non-belonging and exclusion in sports. As previous research indicates, experiences of exclusion arise from different intersectional factors – such as gender, ethnicity, age, immigrant status and social class – rendering them holistic and inseparable.<sup>319</sup> Lack of appropriate facilities was also a challenge commonly experienced by women, as reported more than 14 % of respondents. However, in this questionnaire, it did not emerge as a particularly prominent constraint, as it often does in previous research. In research, the demand for women-only spaces is often associated with the needs of some migrant women, particularly those from Muslim-majority countries. However, this does not imply that all Muslim women require such spaces, nor that women from other backgrounds do not. In this context, the profile of the respondents in this questionnaire may help explain why the need for appropriate facilities did not emerge as a prominent theme.<sup>320</sup> Finally, individual respondents mentioned lack of desire, exhaustion and negative attitudes towards sport as challenges in participation.

Consistent with previous research<sup>321</sup>, responses show that information about available sports activities is most commonly (53 %) obtained through friends. According to Rönkkö (2023) information received from friends is considered reliable, as it implies that someone within one's social circle has already tried the activity and found it to be good. Social media is also an efficient information channel, with 44 % of respondents reporting it as their source. Approximately 30 % of respondents reported NGOs as their source of information. However, it is again worth noting that most respondents were reached through sports NGO's, which likely explains the emphasis on their role. In addition, some respondents reported obtaining information about sports activities from authorities (5 %), school, family members, internet or social services.

When respondents were asked about ways to promote their participation in sports, two factors stood out above the rest: suitable location of sports facilities (67 %) and participation without costs (67 %). These findings further underscore the critical importance of addressing financial factors when considering the inclusivity of sports. Interestingly, sports facilities being near home or feasible transportation were identified nearly as crucial as free participation although location was mentioned only rarely (6 %) when asked about barriers to participation. Location of sports facilities has been also cited in previous research<sup>322</sup> but is often less highlighted than e.g. inclusive facilities or childcare. Although inclusive facilities and childcare are often regarded as key factors in promoting women's participation in sports, they were the least cited options in this questionnaire, with inclusive facilities mentioned by 12 % of respondents and childcare by 18 % thus being less supported than e.g. possibility to borrow equipment

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<sup>317</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Doherty & Taylor 2007; Frisby 2011; Lenneis et al. 2022; Ramos Salas et al. 2016; Rönkkö 2023, 2024; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>318</sup> Damásio, Campos & Gomes 2016; Stenner, Buckley & Mosewich 2020

<sup>319</sup> Alemu et al. 2021a; Raja 2017

<sup>320</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Alemu et al. 2021a; Cortis 2009

<sup>321</sup> Cortis 2009; Lenneis et al. 2022; Rönkkö 2023

<sup>322</sup> Raja 2017

needed (20 %). However, it is noteworthy that only half of respondents reported having dependents under their care, which might explain the number of responses regarding the importance of childcare. These results support Rönkkö's (2023) findings that migrant women participate in sports when activities are near, they are free or affordable and children can be brought along if needed. Both information dissemination in different languages and a "bridge person", someone who is already familiar in activities were considered important among 33 % of respondents. Young women aged 16 to 28 particularly emphasised the importance of a bridge person in enabling their participation. This supports earlier research highlighting the crucial role of social networks in facilitating access to and engagement in sports activities.<sup>323</sup>

Regarding safe and welcoming space for sports participation, the majority of respondents (72 %) identified activities targeted for women as important. The fact that this need was expressed by women from a wide range of backgrounds suggests that the preference to engage in sports with other women is a shared experience across cultures and contexts. Some respondents preferred sports activities that are specifically designed either for all migrant background women (31 %) or for women who share the same ethnic background (10 %). A little more than half of the respondents also expressed a preference of female coaches and instructors. On the other hand, a few respondents noted in their open-ended answers that it does not matter to them whether both men and women participate in activities which is an important reminder that migrant women constitute a highly heterogeneous group with diverse needs.

A question regarding the social inclusion and integration outcomes of sport participation elicited responses supporting both types of outcomes. Responses related to social inclusion were slightly more common than those related to integration. The most identified positive outcome of sport participation was increased mental well-being, as cited by 49 % of respondents. In addition, participation has improved respondents' self-confidence and social recognition (44 %) and feeling of belonging to the group and society (33 %). From the perspective of integration most cited response was language learning, which 44 % of the respondents identified as an outcome of participation. A vast body of literature has examined the impact of sports participation on the social relationships of people with migrant background.<sup>324</sup> The previous literature is consistent with the findings of this questionnaire, as the responses show that migrant women develop more social relations with other migrant background women (32 %) than majority women (24 %). Approximately one fifth of the respondents considered that sport participation has also increased their knowledge about society, culture and local community. Although most respondents recognised at least some integration or social inclusion outcomes of their participation, some respondents reported that participation has not helped them to feel more settled in their country of living.

As shown in previous research, while sports can promote social inclusion and integration, it can also hinder integration and contribute to exclusion and feelings of non-belonging. These potential experiences were also considered crucial to be examined in the questionnaire. However, most respondents (61 %) reported no experiences of sport participation that has caused feelings of exclusion in their country of residence. The most common reported reasons of exclusion were language barriers (26 %) and feelings of non-welcome, non-belonging and exclusion (20 %). Interestingly, responses to this question also revealed that feelings of exclusion are more vague or implicit and not linked to any specific cause. For example, only five women reported experiences of racism or discrimination, and just two mentioned exclusion related to the behaviour of an instructor or coach.

In an open-ended question about other comments, many respondents presented their desires for sport providers and organisations. Childcare provided during sports activities was mentioned by a few respondents as essential

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<sup>323</sup> Cortis 2009; Lenneis et al. 2022; Taylor & Toohey 1998

<sup>324</sup> Agergaard 2018; Stodolska & Alexandris 2004 ; Zacheus et al. 2012

regarding their participation. Sport's role in treatment of psychological trauma related to refugeehood was also emphasised. In addition, women expressed their wishes for more affordable group fitness, women-only groups and sports activities, such as swimming, targeted for girls. A need for more effective advertising and communication that would reach and encourage more women to participate was also mentioned.

## **Inclusion in practice: service providers' perspectives on the sport participation of migration background women - findings of the second questionnaire**

Most sports providers (61 %) participated in the questionnaire reported that they are currently running or supporting sports programs for migrant background women. However, also the number of respondents who are not running or supporting such programs was quite high, with 39 % having answered that. It is noteworthy that respondents may have interpreted the question in different ways. Some may have answered affirmatively only if their organization offers activities specifically targeted at migrant women, while others may have considered that activities 'open for everyone' are by definition open also to migrant women. Indeed, some respondents have in the open-ended answers mentioned that they offer sports activities for all, not specifically for migrant women. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine whether this is due to an assumption by sports providers that migrant women can participate on the same terms as others, or simply a result of limited resources. Those that reported providing sports programs for migrant women, most often offer group fitness (46 %), swimming (35 %) and walking or jogging (32 %). Other activities follow with relatively even distribution, including cycling and team sports (23 %) and gym workouts (19 %). Besides, a few respondents mentioned offering yoga or pilates, martial arts, dance, cricket, circus, rowing and recreational sports and games.

When asked about needs for sport services targeted for migration background women in open-ended question, responses are extremely diverse. However, three types of classes were particularly emphasized in the responses: barriers and needs of migrant women, suggestions on how to promote women's participation and outcomes of participation. Regarding barriers and needs of migrant women, the responses emphasized similar constraints and needs as seen in the literature review, and in the responses of migrant women in the first questionnaire. Structural, cultural and more individual factors were assessed in the responses. Barriers and needs are examined together, as they can be seen as two sides of the same issue. For example, if the economic costs of participation are not addressed as a need, they may become a barrier to participation.

Most identified barriers for participation were lack of women only spaces. Thus, the most essential way to promote women's participation was considered to be activities specifically targeted and customized for migrant women. Respondents assessed that women would feel safer, freer, trusted and more comfortable in women-only groups with women instructors. The instructor's role was seen as central, requiring specific expertise in multilingualism, trauma-informed approaches and the unique needs and preferences of migrant women. In these responses, swimming was particularly emphasized, likely because it tends to be especially inaccessible to migrant women if their special needs are not considered. Some respondents hoped for peer-support groups that would include women with similar backgrounds. One respondent, for example, reported organizing sessions that combine yoga and traditional dance, with the primary goal of supporting recovery from childbirth and trauma.

Another major barrier for participation according to sports providers are language barriers. Many of the sports providers have suggested more multilingual practices and translation support in sports activities. For instance, one respondent proposed multilingual orientation tours which would familiarize women with sports and low-threshold trial sessions that lower the barrier to participation. Additionally, it is recommended that the information would be presented in plain language so that also beginners can understand it.

Language barriers and women-only spaces were followed by financial constraints, with most respondents referring to the economical situations of the target group but some also noting the financial difficulties of sport providers. As a solution, some suggested affordable or free activities so that financial situation would not constrain anyone. There are also more creative solutions invented, such as donating refurbished bikes for asylum seeker families and a system that each local women attending in sports groups pays a free slot for a refugee woman.

Third common barriers and needs mentioned were childcare, cultural and religious expectations and most activities being unintentionally exclusive for migrant women. Unintentional exclusion refers to multiple factors that challenge the participation, for example, lack of information, unfamiliar sports culture and feeling of unsafety. The proposed solutions to the childcare issue were straightforward: providing parallel childcare during sports activities would enable women to participate. Cultural and religious expectations may encompass specific needs mentioned separately, such as dress codes, privacy in changing rooms and the preference for female trainers, aligning with the broader need for women-only spaces. However, such needs should not be attributed solely to the culture or religion of migrant women but rather seen as part of a broader desire among women from diverse backgrounds to participate in safe and comfortable spaces. In most cases, these needs were expressed in general terms without reference to a specific sport. However, swimming was often mentioned when discussing specific needs, particularly regarding the availability of women-only swimming sessions and the option to wear culturally appropriate swimwear. Swimming as an essential life skill was highlighted especially among sports providers who mentioned working in coastal cities.

The unintentional exclusion of sports was related to insufficient information or unfamiliarity of sports culture in the country of origin. Sports providers assess that, for various reasons, there is a significant threshold for migrant women to participate in sports and as a result, women often do not seek out sports activities on their own. Rather, one respondent suggests that sports possibilities should be brought directly to women. According to responses, feelings of exclusion and non-belonging can be vague and diffuse, or these may arise from specific experiences, such as cultural stereotypes, racism or gender-based discrimination. Such feelings may lead individuals to withdraw from participation (especially in groups or public spaces) and experience wider social isolation. These responses show again that sport cannot be unproblematically assessed as 'universal language' uniting people from different backgrounds as there are various invisible barriers preventing some people's participation and sense of belonging.

Lack of information is closely linked to the lack of networks and social isolation that are assessed as central constraints for migrant women. Some respondents described the situation as women being figuratively "locked at home", lacking awareness of available sports opportunities or being constrained by other limiting factors. Isolation can also be physical as location of sports facilities is also considered as a barrier. Activities should be near or easily accessible with public transportation. Last category of barriers and needs concerns lack of confidence, skills and knowledge. They are perceived as a barrier to both individual physical activity in everyday life and participation in group-based sports. Practices and culture of sports clubs may be overall unfamiliar for migrant women. To address this challenge, one respondent proposed a cycling competence program for beginners, allowing them to become familiar with basic skills and knowledge needed for riding a bike. This solution was targeted specifically for cycling but programs familiarizing participants with basic skills could be implemented in other sports as well.

Some sports providers highlight the need for role models for migrant women in the field of sports. In addition, it is noted that many migrant women have knowledge related to sports practiced in their country of origin, but this knowledge is rarely recognized by sports providers. Taking women's own expertise into account would strengthen their agency in a context where they are seldom seen as trainers or holders of expertise. Furthermore, the responses emphasize that migrant women are needed in sports not only as leaders, but also their own communities should be engaged in co-creation of activities. For instance, one respondent mentioned that the key objective of their organization is to provide sports activities organized by migrants and targeted especially for migrants.

Finally, there were a few ideas that were mentioned only once. One respondent highlights the need to consider minorities inside minorities, such as deaf migrant women, who have practically no possibilities for participation according to the respondent. This respondent suggests cooperation between different professionals to support participation of those who are in the most marginalized positions. Overall co-operation between different experts in different levels of society including civil society, local authorities and sports institutions, is considered as crucial. Additionally, war-related traumas are recognized as an important aspect in understanding the situation of refugee background women. Many respondents highlight how important it is for them that the activities are designed with intersectional, intercultural, gender-sensitive, anti-racist and human rights-based approaches.

The outcomes of participation reported by service providers closely align with those described by migrant women and documented in the literature. The most frequently identified positive outcomes included improved physical and mental health, as well as enhanced overall well-being. These were followed by notions of increased self-confidence, personal development and empowerment. The third commonly identified group of outcomes concerns social contacts. According to respondents, sports participation leads to increased social relationships and contacts, improved communication skills, and, on a broader level, a stronger sense of connection with others and community building. Respondents also referred often to enhanced integration, though it was not always clear how they interpreted the concept. Language learning, for instance, was cited as an integration outcome that supports inclusion and builds confidence of the participants. In addition, sensitively structured sports settings were recognised as creating an important space of belonging and safeness. One respondent shared that participants in their activities experienced sports as the first place in the country of residence where they felt seen rather than othered. Thus, as confirmed by other responses, sport can also serve as a means of empowerment, promoting women's agency, dignity, resilience and their right to occupy public space.

There were a few outlier responses regarding the need for sport services targeted for migrant women that diverged from mainstream and offered alternative perspectives. For instance, at least three respondents emphasized the similarity of needs among all women or people with migrant backgrounds. In doing so, they challenged the narrative that only migrant women require inclusive activities. One respondent perceived that other help, such as financial support, provided is more in demand among migrant women, while sports does not appear to be a high priority for many of them. This viewpoint is consistent with the findings of the literature review and the first questionnaire, which revealed that many women face exhausting life circumstances that significantly limit their ability to participate in sports.

One participant suggested that there is no need for municipally organized sports activities for migrant women, as numerous NGOs are already providing such opportunities. This response stands out from the others, as most highlight the need for support at the municipal or national level – typically in the form of funding or efforts to integrate activities targeted for migrant women into the core operations of organisations. Another respondent remarked that migrant women should also take personal responsibility for maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This response can be

interpreted in two ways: either as accusatory, implying that most migrant women fail to take responsibility for their health, or as an affirmation of their agency – suggesting that migrant women are not merely passive recipients of interventions but autonomous individuals capable of making their own choices. In addition, although many may not express it openly, a few respondents stated that they welcome everyone to their activities, yet have not taken any special measures to include migrant women. This may be due to limited resources, but it could also reflect an underlying assumption that migrant women do not require special attention and are able to participate on the same terms as everyone else.

The respondents were asked on how they assess the needs of migrant women regarding sports participation. Cooperation with other organisations emerged as the most effective channel for sharing knowledge and information of the needs, cited by 56 % of respondents. Nearly as many (55 %) had identified discussions with migrant women as a best way to assess their needs. That was followed by discussions with the advocates of ethnic communities (24 %), surveys and feedback from participants being the least chosen option (19 %). Some respondents reported collecting knowledge from research and municipalities' migrant support services. On the other hand, some mentioned that they do not distinguish the feedback received from migrant women from the feedback provided by other participants and therefore don't assess the needs of migrant women distinctively.

When asked about the main barriers of migrant women in sport participation, the responses of sports providers were significantly even. Language barriers, financial constraints, lack of awareness about available programs, cultural and religious considerations and family responsibilities were all cited by 60-65 % of respondents. It is noteworthy, that neither in this questionnaire nor in the questionnaire responded by migrant women, lack of women-only spaces was not among the most cited barriers. In this questionnaire 49 % of respondents have mentioned lack of women-only spaces as a constraint. In addition, 31 % of participants cited transportation difficulties as a challenge. Open-ended responses in this question raised similar observations as mentioned already earlier. These were, for instance, lack of role models and women or migrant women instructors, problem with dress codes or lack of peer support group and beginners' group. Several responses also highlighted either a lack of awareness about the importance of sports or personal and familial attitudes and beliefs that may hinder participation.

Among the respondents, 62 % reported having attempted to address the barriers faced by migrant women, while 38 % indicated they had not. Sports providers have employed a variety of creative and diverse strategies to overcome these challenges. The most common approaches included reducing participation fees or offering free activities, as well as providing sessions led by female coaches, childcare services or women-only groups. Respondents emphasized the importance of creating a safe space for women. This was achieved, for instance, by installing curtains to separate showers or ensuring that women could swim in a swimming costume that is comfortable for them. In practice, women-only activities were implemented by reserving specific hours during the day exclusively for women. Some sports providers reported taking into account the most suitable times for women to participate, organizing activities accordingly to better accommodate their schedules. Many respondents had made efforts to address transportation-related challenges. Some had organized activities within local neighbourhoods in collaboration with residents, others had chosen locations with good public transport connections, and a few had even provided transportation assistance. More broadly, many reported having reflected on and discussed topics such as language, culture and religion, and had incorporated these considerations into the planning and organization of the activities.

Language barriers are widely regarded as one of the most significant challenges to women's participation in sports, and various strategies have been employed to address them. Most commonly, sports providers have involved trainers or interpreters who speak the same language as the migrant women participating. Additionally, some have

offered multilingual support and used visual aids to bridge communication gaps. Information about available sports programs is also disseminated in different languages. One respondent reported having employed migrant women as part of their team, not only to address language barriers but also to foster a more inclusive and safer environment for participants. Some providers offer activities specifically designed for migrant women, emphasizing the importance of peer support as a key element of participation. In addition, the role of a bridge person – a woman who can introduce activities to others from the same ethnic background – was considered highly significant. This person could present the club's values, objectives, and offerings in the participants' native language.

One central way to promote women's participation was collaboration with associations, NGOs, multicultural organizations, municipal actors, migrant centres, community leaders and even places of worship. All of these were also perceived as efficient channels of information dissemination. Some respondents themselves acted as intermediaries, listening to women's hopes and needs and connecting them with sports organizations that could respond to those needs. One respondent reported that they interview women that have finished training, in order to understand the reasons for dropping out, and to identify the needs that would support their future participation.

Lastly, respondents also described efforts to promote sports participation among migrant families, particularly children. For example, some sports providers had offered activities in collaboration with kindergartens or schools, or shared information about such opportunities with migrant families. One respondent reported that they have focused on appealing to a new generation of unaccompanied minors. In addition, sports providers mentioned having implemented family-oriented activities designed for both women and children. For instance, one respondent referred to organizing family sports day events. However, the ability to arrange such events was also noted to be highly dependent on available funding and resources.

Indeed, when asked about resources needed to provide activities for migrant women, funding emerged as the most critical factor. According to 76 % of respondents, additional financial support is necessary to enable the organisation of such activities. Therefore, many service providers have viable activities and development ideas but lack the financial resources to implement them. The responses also highlight the need for reports of this kind, as 56 % of the respondents expressed a desire for more knowledge, training and background information regarding the needs of the target group. In addition, nearly 50 % of respondents expressed a need for space-related solutions, such as women-only facilities. A few respondents highlighted a demand for female (and migrant background) coaches and colleagues. Additionally, some emphasized the importance of strengthening networks between organizations working with migrants and sports service providers, in order to better align supply with demand.

In the open-ended response section, some respondents suggested solutions for making sports more inclusive – ideas they may not have implemented themselves but nonetheless consider essential. One respondent emphasized that inclusive sports for all should be viewed as a social responsibility, calling for greater attention and action from local and regional authorities. Especially the needs for more specific groups, such as elderly or deaf migrant women should be considered by authorities. Another respondent suggested that sports activities should be integrated into language training and included in the school days as many women don't have the opportunity to participate in sports activities in the evenings. It was also noted that the attitudes and practices of majority population should be taken into account in efforts to make sports more inclusive. The respondent referred to situations in which participants from the majority population silently excluded a participant with migrant background due to differences in behaviour or unfamiliarity with the norms of sports culture. Additionally, one respondent expressed a need for a common platform for the exchange of good practices and resources. Finally, a few respondents emphasized the importance of tailoring activities specifically customized for migrant women, ensuring that they are safe, welcoming and comfortable.

## Conclusions of the need analysis

Based on the questionnaires, it can be concluded that the major challenges in sport participation among migrant women are financial constraints and language barriers. These factors may not only prevent participation altogether, but also, after joining a sports group, lead to exclusion from other participants and reduce the sense of belonging within society. Although financial constraints present a challenging barrier to participation, the solution is relatively straightforward: increasing funding for service providers. As shown in the literature review and the second questionnaire, service providers that are particularly focused on providing multiculturally sensitive activities are often successful in reaching migrant women, but suffer from constant financial difficulties.<sup>325</sup> The responses show how fragile and fragmented the funding for promoting the participation of migrant women is; more stable resources are needed, as well as cooperation at local, regional and national levels.

Language barriers can be seen as a significant challenge, as they have been shown to hinder access to activities, understanding of instructions, and the feeling of inclusion within the group. The literature highlights the crucial role of the sports group instructor in creating a safe and welcoming environment for participation, thereby helping to address exclusion that stems from language barriers.<sup>326</sup> The instructors' ability to work inclusively in multilingual environments is a key factor in addressing this challenge. Service providers have sought to address language barriers by, for example, engaging volunteer interpreters and employing multilingual trainers. Overall, the findings from both questionnaires highlight a significant need within the sports sector to address power imbalances by involving migrant communities in the planning and organisation of activities.

In all activities designed for migrant women, it is essential to take into account participants' intersectional positions. For instance, while women-only activities might be crucial for some, others prefer participating in mixed-gender groups. Notably, however, the vast majority of respondents in the first questionnaire expressed a preference for women-only activities and female instructors. Additionally, various life circumstances should be considered, such as the timing of the activity, availability of childcare, and age-related challenges. Many of the barriers identified in the questionnaires, such as lack of childcare options, financial constraints and lack of time, are also relevant to women without a migrant background. Therefore, these challenges should be taken into consideration on a larger scale. When considering the participation of migrant women, there is a risk that attention is disproportionately focused on barriers perceived as cultural or religious. However, as the findings suggest, many of the key obstacles are more closely linked to other factors – such as socio-economic status – rather than migrant background itself, and can thus be considered universal rather than specific constraints. For instance, providing women-only spaces may not significantly increase participation if financial constraints are not addressed.

The central reasons for women to participate in sports were health, well-being, and physical appearance. Most participants reported outcomes indicating that sport participation had increased their social inclusion and promoted their integration. The main outcomes of participation were identified as improved mental well-being, self-confidence, greater social recognition, and enhanced language learning. However, some respondents have had expe-

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<sup>325</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Cortis 2009

<sup>326</sup> Ahmad et al. 2020; Alemu et al. 2021a; Rönkkö 2023; 2024

periences of exclusion and non-belonging in sports activities. Both questionnaires indicate that experiences of exclusion and non-belonging are often not linked to any single factor, but rather emerge as complex and multifaceted phenomena shaped by language barriers, differences in social class, and migration background.

Sports providers recognised a pressing need to develop sporting opportunities for migrant women. In contrast to the literature reviewed, among these service providers there was no prevailing view that women could participate alongside others without specific considerations. The service providers appeared to share a largely similar understanding of the key constraints and needs as migrant women themselves, and they proposed a wide range of solutions to address the barriers to participation. However, despite the creative solutions for constraints, most mentioned needing more resources to be able to develop activities. In addition, there was a desire among many for more knowledge, training, and background information on the needs of the target group.

# PART III - Recommendations of the literature review and questionnaires

The objective of the literature review and questionnaires was to establish a theoretical framework and collect evidence-based data for the development of a sport-based mentoring programme. This final section introduces the recommendations to be considered in the project's development and decision-making procedures based on the central findings of the literature review and questionnaires. Both the review and questionnaires highlighted similar findings regarding the needs, barriers, and wishes of migrant women and service providers. While this has led to some repetition in the document, it also reinforces the relevance and consistency of the results.

1. Sport as valuable in its own right
  - Sport's ability to promote integration or social inclusion is not self-evident but depends heavily on the specific context. Nevertheless, even when these outcomes are not achieved, sport can still hold intrinsic value, often contributing to participants' health and well-being. However, it is important to remember that an exclusive sporting environment does not foster health or well-being, on the contrary, it likely leads to negative outcomes such as social exclusion.
  - In the context of integration, outcomes such as health and well-being should be regarded as equally important as social contacts, civic knowledge, or language learning. Therefore, the positive impacts of participation should not be ranked hierarchically, but rather valued equally.
2. Recognising intersectional needs and power relations in sports activities
  - Women participate in sports from different backgrounds with different intersectional positions regarding age, country of origin, religion, socio-economic status, family situation and health. This should be taken into consideration when planning and organising activities.
  - There is a need for sports groups that include only migrant women and those that are open to all women. While some prefer to participate with women from the majority population, it is equally important to acknowledge the specific needs, barriers, and value of peer support within certain groups, especially in those that might face vulnerabilities. However, migrant background does not have to be the only basis for forming new groups; groups could also be created, for example, for mothers of newborns, women with trauma, or women with disabilities.
3. Creating a safe space physically and mentally for all participants
  - The importance of providing a safe, mutually respectful and comfortable space for sports cannot be overstated. Creating a welcoming atmosphere requires sensitivity and collaboration between staff and participants.
  - The role of the instructor is particularly crucial in this process, and careful attention should be paid to both the selection and training of instructors.
  - Attention should be paid not only to the practical aspects of fostering inclusivity, but also to the underlying values and unspoken practices. In this context, it is crucial to examine the hierarchies and power dynamics present within the sports group.
4. Organising grass-root activities with low threshold and flexibility
  - Barriers like low confidence, financial constraints, limited knowledge of sports culture, and occasional lack of time can be addressed by offering free activities that allow for flexible and low-threshold participation.
5. Including migrant women and communities in decision-making, implementing and planning activities

- Migrant women have long been positioned as passive recipients of sports interventions. To address existing power imbalances, they should also be supported to take on active roles as trainers, sports club leaders, and co-creators of activities.
6. Promoting activities in appealing and relevant ways
- Since health, well-being, and physical appearance are often the primary motivations for women to engage in sports, these themes should be central in the project promotion. Inclusion and integration, while important societal goals, may not resonate as strongly on an individual level and should not be the main focus in advertising.
  - Since most migrant women are recruited into sports activities through friends, this form of information sharing should be actively supported and emphasized.
  - A trusted bridge person within sports activities can be an effective way to recruit more women. This person can be also an actor from different services or NGOs. They can also ease the anxiety of joining a new activity alone.
7. Tackling implicit ways of exclusion and discrimination
- Exclusion is rarely overt but often manifests in subtle ways. Solutions should therefore be designed to address these more silent and implicit forms of exclusion.
  - Exclusion must be understood in relation to the behaviours of other group members. An inclusive space cannot be created by the instructor alone, it requires the engagement of all participants.
8. Enhancing collaboration multisectorally in local, regional and national levels
- To ensure that activities are trustworthy, continuous, and impactful, it is essential to secure long-term funding and integrate inclusive practices into the core operations of different organizations.
  - The responsibility for engaging migrant women should not rest solely on projects or NGOs; it must be a shared duty of local, regional, and national authorities. Therefore, effective collaboration between NGOs, institutions, and public authorities is essential.

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## Table of articles

Authors/Year	Topic of the study	Country of study	Research methods	Sample	Type	Main Results
Taylor & Toohey, 1998	Notions of sport from the perspectives of women from migration backgrounds, and the attitudes of sport service providers about these populations	Australia	Mixed methods, (questionnaire surveys, interviews individually and in focus groups)	Women from Italian, Lebanese and Vietnamese backgrounds (430 in questionnaires and 78 in interviews) and state sporting groups, community ethnic organisations, service providers and local government associations (in questionnaires)	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondents who participated in sport nominated physical/health benefits as the aspect they enjoyed most about playing sport. This was followed by having fun and enjoying looking good. Other common reasons for playing sport related to social aspects and enjoying life.</li> <li>• There is lack of consideration or acknowledgement of cultural diversity issues within sport organisations (government associations and state sporting groups).</li> </ul>
Taylor, 2004	Issues of cultural diversity and inclusiveness in women's netball in Australia	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	18 immigrant women from both English and non-English speaking backgrounds and four netball administrators	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women born in other English-speaking countries recalled feelings of inclusion and limited cultural dissonance and indicated that netball helped them feel as part of their new community and gain social capital via participation.</li> <li>• Although experiences of explicit exclusion or racial discrimination were virtually nonreported, some women felt a strong sense of cultural conformity to Anglo-centric expectations of behaviour.</li> </ul>
Walseth & Fasting, 2004	Minority women's sport participation and societal integration	Studies conducted in Western Europe	Literature review	Literature conducted in Western Europe, from 1990-2004	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation in sport can contribute to the integration process. Research shows that minority women might get a greater network of acquaintances through their sport participation, and some women have even got jobs through this network.</li> <li>• The finding that most minority women choose to do sport at commercial fitness clubs challenges the idea that non-commercial civil society organizations are the right arena for integration work.</li> <li>• No support for the idea that minority and majority girls become close friends through sport participation.</li> </ul>

Walseth, 2006	Connection between sport and belonging	Norway	Qualitative (life history interviews)	21 young, Norwegian Muslim women with immigrant backgrounds	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most of the participants (13/18) experienced feelings of belonging through sport participation. Reasons for belonging were social support, shared norm of reciprocity and feelings of being accepted. Sport was also a place to escape other duties or everyday life.</li> <li>• Sport involvement can have also negative effect on young Muslim women's sense of belonging if they experience social exclusion or non-belonging.</li> </ul>
Doherty & Taylor, 2007	The role of sport and physical recreation in the process of "fitting in" to a new country	Canada	Qualitative (focus group interviews)	40 high school students with migration backgrounds	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The young, recent immigrants described sport and physical recreation as a site for improving their English, which has been recognized as a fundamental factor in successful settlement.</li> <li>• The opportunity to interact with old and new friends, from one's own ethnic group, other ethnic groups, and mainstream peers, through sport and physical recreation participation was particularly valued by the young newcomers.</li> <li>• The young people interviewed in this study also talked about experiences with participation (or anticipated participation) that could be viewed as a negative factor in their settlement due to the social exclusion they elicited.</li> </ul>
Cortis et al., 2007	The inclusion of CALD women in informal and organized sport and recreation activities	Australia	Mixed methods, (questionnaires, individual and focus group interviews)	Interviews with 15 stakeholders in sporting, cultural and women's organisations, 12 focus groups with CALD women (94 participants)	Stakeholder consultation report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six main constraints of participation: socio-cultural, access, affective, physiological, resource and interpersonal constrains.</li> <li>• Strategies to support participation: providing information, ensuring the culturally appropriate facilities, childcare, reducing costs, role modelling and promoting organisations as multicultural, addressing the deep-seated ideas about roles of women.</li> </ul>
Walseth, 2008	The sport participation of young migrant-background women and accumulation of social capital	Norway	Qualitative (interviews)	15 female athletes with migration background	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being involved in sport led to the accumulation of social capital and larger social network (bonding of already-established friendships).</li> <li>• New ties created through participation were weak, more acquaintances than friends.</li> </ul>

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social class can be a barrier either in participation or accumulation of social capital.</li> <li>• Sport can hinder integration by being arena of conflict of "cultural clashes".</li> </ul>
Cortis, 2009	Access and barriers to sport and recreation for CALD women	Australia	Qualitative (interviews)	Interviews with 15 stakeholders in sporting, cultural and women's organisations, 12 focus groups with CALD women (94 participants)	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The women articulated a range of personal, social and institutional barriers to participation, implicating culturally inappropriate venues and facilities as major sources of social exclusion.</li> <li>• Australian sport is imperative, sport and recreation organisations and facilities should consider a series of 'micro' reforms that would promote participation and expand their membership base.</li> </ul>
Maxwell & Taylor, 2010	The inclusiveness of sports organisations for Muslim women	Australia	Qualitative (in-depth interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis)	Individual interviews were conducted with seven administrators, one coach, two participants, two partner organisations and two advocacy organisations. Two focus groups were also held, one with a group of five coaches and one with a group of six participants. Informants included both Muslims and non-Muslims, and male and females.	Journal article	CSOs are a potential site for the production and (re)production of social capital and, as such, they can be seen to value, respect and manage cultural diversity through developing approaches that assist groups such as Muslim women and thus actively promote cultural awareness and gender sensitivity.
McCue & Kourouche, 2010	Muslim women and agency in Australian sport culture	Australia	Mixed methods, (individual and focus group interviews and questionnaire)	110 Australian Muslim women of mixed ethnic backgrounds	Book chapter	In Australian sports culture the dominant discourse is largely male dominated (even with regard to coaches and managers). It is also largely unwelcoming and exclusory to CALD persons, including Muslim women, and it does not view cultural diversity as a high priority and is largely resistant to accommodating the particular needs of Muslim women.

Sawrikar & Muir, 2010	The types of barriers perceived or experienced by Indian women in Sydney, compared to a larger group of culturally and linguistically diverse women across Australia.	Australia	Qualitative (focus group interviews)	94 women from various ethnic minority groups living in Australia	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of exclusion, lack of belonging, lack of media images, and institutional racism were reported as examples of how sport in Australia generates social exclusion.</li> <li>• Despite a number of shared barriers to sport and recreation, some differences emerged between the Indian women and the women from the broader groups, e.g. no barriers like underrepresentation in media, transportation or racism.</li> </ul>
Frisby, 2011	Physical activity inclusion practices for newcomers	Canada	Qualitative (interviews and participatory research)	50 Chinese immigrant women, 11 staff from the City of Vancouver, and 5 staff from an immigration service agency, workshop	Journal article	The practices suggested include: citizen engagement to promote mutual learning and policy/program development; working from a broader social ecological framework; improving the city's leisure access policy; and enhancing community partnerships to facilitate cross-cultural connections.
Shavit & Wiesenback, 2012	A Muslim sports club as a promoter of inclusion or segregation	Germany	Qualitative (ethnographic study, interviews and participant observation)	A field study in the Al-Hayat gym for Muslim women (interviews and participant observation)	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While staff and members emphasize the integrating aspects of Al-Hayat, our observations and interviews indicate that the gym also functions as an enclave segregating women from the majority German society and challenging conventional mainstream German wisdoms on integration.</li> <li>• Al-Hayat liberates Muslim women from feeling "different" due to their ethnic and religious distinction, e.g. wearing a headscarf in public or covering their bodies with towels in the sauna.</li> </ul>
Spaaij, 2012	sport participation and Somali Australians' bonding, bridging, and linking social capital.	Australia	Qualitative (ethnography: participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus interviews)	In-depth interviews with 39 Somali (refugee-background) football players, club officials, and volunteers, and a further 12 interviews with local residents and community workers	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is certainly a demand for sports activities among young Somali women even though the clubs under study do not provide game-playing opportunities for females.</li> <li>• Sport activities are seen to provide an important social space for the women, because they are "stuck at home and don't go out", Women took part in important support roles in the club, such. as running the canteen, laundering uniforms, cleaning etc. which also was a source of bonding social capital.</li> </ul>

Maxwell et al., 2014	The role of organisational practices in facilitating social inclusion of Muslim women	Australia	Qualitative (case-study, interviews)	Interviews with 14 individuals; 10 from Lakemba Sport and Recreation Club, two from stakeholder organizations, and two from community partner organizations. These included nine women, seven Muslim women, and two non-Muslim women and three Muslim men.	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social inclusion of Muslim women within community sport can be enhanced with accommodating clothing, gender segregation, culturally sensitive facilitators, culturally appropriate food and drinks, building competencies and leadership positions, finance and transport, team building activities, positive image on Muslim women and role models and building partnerships.</li> <li>• Feelings of belonging were stronger for Muslim women members. The question remains whether ensure social inclusion of Muslim women so that it doesn't exclude other groups.</li> </ul>
Lee et al., 2014	The impact of physical activity participation on physical and mental health	Canada	Qualitative (interviews)	30 recently arrived migrant women	Book chapter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community physical activity participation had a significant positive impact both on women's mental and physical health.</li> <li>• Migrant women should be included in program planning to give voice to target group and balance power hierarchies.</li> <li>• Opportunities to meet other women from both within and outside their ethno-linguistic groups and develop meaningful relationships and friendships were seen as central in promoting mental health.</li> </ul>
Walseth & Stranbu, 2014	The impact of Norwegian-Pakistani women's culture on sports participation	Norway	Qualitative (interviews)	8 Norwegian-Pakistani women	Journal article	For the young Norwegian-Pakistani women that participated in this study, cultural ideals have constrained their involvement in sports. The finding confirms previous research which found that parents and members of one's ethnic community continue to limit Pakistani or Muslim women's participation in physical activity
Kuppinger, 2015	Muslim Women's Sports Club's contribution in the construction of urban citizenship	Germany	Qualitative (ethnographic study)	Fieldwork in Muslim Women's Sports Club in Germany	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That Muslim women swimmers or gay soccer players organized into their respective associations in the 1990s does not mean that they wished to create isolated platforms apart from society, but that they simply wanted to do sports among their peers in their preferred ways as respected urban citizens</li> </ul>

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The MWSC created a space where Muslimas, whose voices are frequently not heard or even misrepresented in the German public sphere, organize themselves and speak up for their needs. In short: they practice creative urban citizenship.</li> </ul>
Ramos Salas et al., 2016	The migration experiences' influence on weight and physical activity changes among Latin American immigrant women	Canada	Mixed methods (different quantitative methods, focus group and in-depth interviews)	14 in-depth interviews and 6 focus groups (6-10 participants in each group) with Latin American immigrant women	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women born in other English-speaking countries recalled feelings of inclusion and limited cultural dissonance and indicated that netball helped them feel as part of their new community and gain social capital via participation</li> <li>• Although experiences of explicit exclusion or racial discrimination were virtually nonreported, some women felt a strong sense of cultural conformity to Anglo-centric expectations of behaviour.</li> </ul>
Lenneis & Pfister, 2017	the (lack of) PA participation of Muslim minority ethnic women in Denmark and key influences which shape their PA attitudes and practices.	Denmark	Qualitative study (semi-structured interviews and participant observation)	26 female migrant cleaners from non-Western countries and participant observations in different exercise programmes	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lack of appropriate exercise programmes and sports facilities were not experienced by interviewees as being major barriers to taking up physical activities, instead main barriers were lack of time and exhaustion of work.</li> <li>• When they had arrived in Denmark, sport hadn't been important for them but it had become more and more important during the integration process.</li> <li>• Participation in sport needed an outsider who either urged them to move or participated with them, participation was mostly motivated by weight loss</li> </ul>
Raja, 2017	Young Muslim kickboxers, their motivations to play and the effects of it	Netherlands	Qualitative (three-year fieldwork: participant observation and in-depth interviews)	Participant observation and in-depth interviews in a kickboxing gym in the Netherlands	Book chapter	The ladies-only sessions were often compounded by racial, gendered and class structures (intersectionality); they were not necessarily pursued for the same reasons that are widely portrayed in the media, some women much preferred the relaxed social setting of being with other women (space of safe and comfort)
Mohammadi, 2019	Opportunities and barriers of riding a bicycle in the refugee-background women's homelands and Germany	Germany	Qualitative (case-study, interviews)	Participant observation, life story interviews (among newly arrived female asylum seekers), follow-up interviews and a focus group discussion, organizational reports, data retrieved from	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women had generally low level of physical capital (not much sport experience, this was a barrier for participation), participation in Bike Bridge provided the women new skills and essential physical capital</li> </ul>

	and empirical evidence about the outcomes of the project			monitoring and evaluation of the programme		<p>which enabled broader spatial mobility (owning the city) for them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation provided feeling of belonging and some networks but not strong connection or friendships with either other asylum seeker women or local residents (main obstacle for this was poor language skills).</li> <li>• For some of the participants, long-lasting relationships with the trainers and the coordinators provided them economic, cultural and symbolic capital, also social recognition and respect of their ethnic group and Germans.</li> </ul>
Ahmad et al., 2020	The opportunities and constraints for Muslim women's participation in sport and active recreation in Aotearoa New Zealand	New Zealand	Qualitative (interviews)	38 Muslim women (aged 16-63 years old) and 14 sport managers (from ethnic minority groups)	Journal article	<p>Muslim women identifying access to culturally-inclusive spaces as the primary barrier, and sports facilitators locating the 'problem' in the women's religious culture. The latter highlights problematic stereotypes within the sector, including among those working most closely with Muslim women. In addition of trying only increase the participation of marginalised groups, sport organisations need to embrace diversity and alter discriminatory practise.</p>
Alemu et al., 2021a	The barriers that hinder Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant women from participating in sport in Switzerland	Switzerland	Qualitative (semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions)	12 Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant women (aged 18-51 years old)	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The participants agreed that the existing Swiss sport structure fit the needs of the local communities but not those of the migrant communities.</li> <li>• Financial cost of participation in formal sport setting led the women to participate in informal sport settings with other people from immigrant background, this limited participants' social circles to the migrant community, which may hinder their integration into broader Swiss society.</li> <li>• With refugee-backgrounded people it is important to remember that people may have traumatic experiences that still affect their well-being, also the residence permit process.</li> </ul>

Alemu et al., 2021b	the role of informal sport settings (i.e. self-organised and non-voluntary sports clubs) in the social integration of Ethiopian and Eritrean women into Swiss society	Switzerland	Qualitative (semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions)	12 Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant women (aged 18-51 years old)	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sport enabled women: A platform to connect with community members and feel visible and relatable to those around them, sense of belonging to the community, rebuilding and strengthening friendships that had eroded due to forced migration, safe and trusted space to talk about things, such as conflicting identities, social norms etc., space to maintain their cultural identity.</li> <li>• Social bridging was possible especially with people who have similar experiences, this expanded their access to recourses and services and improved their social connectedness.</li> <li>• Some women were worried of experiences and had them of otherness and negative mindset towards migrants.</li> </ul>
Lee et al., 2021	The social integration of migrant women through a sport program	South Korea	Qualitative (participatory observation, field notes, camcorder and recorder data, interview data, online data and self-assessment journal)	10 immigrant women married with a Korean	Journal article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-linguistic characteristic of sports enabled women from different countries to overcome their linguistic barriers and become close, sports program provided a social arena for sharing information, e.g. about child-rearing and relationships with their husbands.</li> <li>• Participation in program allowed the women to easily interact with other women of different nationalities, including Koreans; through the sport games, a new, small culture of their own was created while playing.</li> </ul>
Lenneis et al., 2022	The meanings Danish Muslim women ascribe to their participation in a gender-segregated swimming space	Denmark	Qualitative (ethnography: participant observation and interviews)	14 Danish Muslim women and 2 club officials	Journal article	<p>The participants connected swimming with well-being and self-care and portrayed women-only swimming as a space of belonging, where they felt comfortable and safe and were not only protected from the male but also the 'white' gaze that they encountered in other situations, such as when wearing a burkini on the beach. Consequently, contestations of belonging 'outside' gave particular value to the women-only swimming pool as a space free from such contestations.</p>

Rönkkö, 2023	Social relationships and processes that are born when foreign-born people find their ways into the sports activities in Finland.	Finland	Qualitative (ethnographic fieldwork 2017-2021, participant observation and interviews)	Immigrant background women	Dissertation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The culture of a person's home country does not define their everyday life in a new country when it comes to physical exercise. Instead, the exercise options on offer and experiences regarding them act as the deciding factors. Having an active community and a selection of options suitable for one's life situation were beneficial factors in getting involved in physical exercise in a new home country.</li> <li>• Socially safe spaces for physical exercise and group guidance that takes both collective and individual needs into consideration were also significant factors in this. The level of success of the group exercise was defined by the social and moral support that the instructors gave to the women.</li> </ul>
Rönkkö, 2024	The role of multilingualism in fostering inclusion and belonging in a sports group	Finland	Qualitative (ethnographic fieldwork 2017-2021, participant observation and interviews)	Multilingual women	Journal article	Language practices in the sport groups have significant role either in making multilingual women feel comfortable and safe or making them feel excluded and targets of evaluation.