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# EUROPEAN US GIRLS CASE STUDY REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY MARCH 2018



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## Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the organisations and staff who have been willing to share their promising practices and key lessons learned from their experience in engaging female volunteers during the implementation of various initiatives, from events, to trainings and longer-term programmes. Thanks to their incredible hard work, we have been able to collect valuable information that has contributed to the findings of this report. We hope that this case study report can be a useful resource for organisations specifically interested in engaging female volunteers and increasing overall girls' participation in sport and physical activity.

Thank you for your time and being supportive of this study by sharing your knowledge and valuable insight. Last but not least, thank you to all the female volunteers who take time in their daily lives to take on leading roles within their communities to encourage sport and physical activity among girls and women.



## 1. Overview and objective

The European Us Girls Project is a two-year study (January 1<sup>st</sup> 2017 – December 31<sup>st</sup> 2018) funded by EU Erasmus+ Sport. The aim of the project is to increase participation in and equality of access to grassroots sport and physical activities by young women with fewer opportunities aged 13-30 years. European Us Girls aims to do so through building the capacity of female volunteers as peer educators.

During the initial research phase of the European Us Girls project, two reports have been produced. The academic review provided findings from extant peer-reviewed literature with regards to female volunteers in sport and how their role could contribute to girls' increased participation in sport and physical activity. This case study report provides examples of good practices for engaging female volunteers and improving girls' inclusion and participation in sport and physical activity. Anchored in real-life situations, case studies can result in a rich and holistic account of a particular intervention. By collecting good practices, we want to create an evidence base supporting the role of female volunteers in improving equal access and inclusion to grassroots sport and physical activity for girls and young women.

## 2. Report Methodology

### 2.1 Definitions

For the purpose of this report the following characteristics of volunteering have been taken into account and shared with partner organisations as guidance during the collection process for the case studies. According to the European Youth Forum (2017) an activity can only be defined as **volunteering** if it is:

- undertaken of a person's own free will and involves the commitment of time and energy to actions that benefit others and society as a whole;
- unpaid (although it can involve reimbursement of expenses directly related to the activity);
- for a non-profit cause, primarily undertaken within a nongovernmental organisation, and thus clearly isn't motivated by material or financial gain;
- not used to substitute or replace paid employment.

These are general characteristics selected for the purpose of this case study research. The academic review provides further details with regards to the complexity of defining volunteering. It is worth mentioning that for this report, different countries and communities may have a different understanding of volunteering connected to their own histories and traditions. This should be taken into account when considering the application of good practices summarised below as the case studies originate from countries inside and outside the European Union (EU).

Furthermore, as the purpose of the case study report is to collect good practices, the following definition was also taken into consideration:

A **good practice** is a practice that is proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, and which deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it.

A good practice can include a successful project, initiative, event or campaign. It could also be about an aspect of a project or initiative, such as: a strategy for recruiting volunteers, specific activities or ways to measure participation. Practitioners can learn vicariously from the case through the researcher's narrative description. The following criteria were also shared as support in the collection phase of the research. A good practice is:

- **Effective and successful** – it is a practical or useful way to achieve a specific objective; it has been successfully adopted and has had a positive impact on individuals and/or communities
- **Replicable and adaptable** – it should have the potential for replication and should therefore be adaptable to similar objectives in varying situations
- **Technically feasible** – it is easy to learn and to implement

When documenting case studies the following key questions were also considered: How do girls and young women become volunteers? What motivates them to volunteer? How do they remain engaged in volunteering over time? What effect does their participation have on the participation of other girls and young women?

## 2.2 Data collection method

Due to the exploratory nature of our research aim, a qualitative approach was deemed the most appropriate as the paradigm for the research methodology, data collection and data analysis. A good practice case study template was developed by Women Win in order to support effective data collection. Prompts were included in the template to illustrate and expand or clarify responses. The guiding questions in the template referenced female volunteers only, but examples citing mixed-gender initiatives were also included. With regard to validity, the questions fully covered the research aim raised by the project and were relevant to the research topic. The template was then shared with the European Us Girls project partners, who were each tasked to collect case studies within the EU. Women Win was in charge of collecting international case studies from non-EU countries. Clarifying phone calls were also initiated by Women Win to support partners in the use of the template and collection of the case studies.



The aim of this research was to collect 25 case studies of good practices, at least 15 from within Europe and 10 beyond European borders.

In total 28 case studies were collected:

- 16 case studies from Europe
- 12 case studies from countries outside of the Europe.

As agreed amongst all partners in the European Us Girls project, the case study report will be a 'living' document. This means that the 28 case studies presented in this report will form an initial selection of good practices. Case studies will be added to the document, which will evolve throughout the duration of the European Us Girls study, in order to create a larger collection of good practices in engaging female volunteers in sport and their role in girls' increased participation in sport and physical activity.

### 2.3 Research challenges and limitations

Challenges and limitations of the research are included in this section of the report and need to be taken into account for the future collection of case studies. These will be especially pertinent if this project aspires to utilise this case study report as a 'living' and evolving document.

For the qualitative case studies, the main limitation was time. Case studies are often labelled as being too long, difficult to conduct and producing a large amount of documentation. For some organisations, including Women Win, the collection of the case studies was time and labour intensive. As the case studies in question were rooted in practical examples, often partners had to reach out directly to the people involved in order to acquire the relevant information and a deeper perspective on a specific example. Additionally, some case studies needed several iterations before they were finalised.

Another challenge identified within the context of this research was access. Not all partner organisations had easy access to people or organisations where suitable case studies could be harvested. Additionally, access was sometimes denied or limited in some way. This may be due to issues related to replicability and ownership of good practices; in fact, some organisations were reluctant to share their examples as they aspired to use them in future funding applications.

Some of the case studies centre on engaging female volunteers as this was the focus of the research aim and template. However, examples of female-only volunteering efforts were not always available in certain contexts. Therefore, some case studies reference mixed-gender events, which were also collected as lessons in this report as they can potentially be adapted and replicated in female-only volunteering initiatives.

An additional limitation of the research involved the corroboration of the causal link between the engagement of female volunteers and the increase in participation on behalf of other girls. From the findings collected through the case studies, there is limited quantifiable evidence and a lack of rigorous measurement in place to substantiate this hypothesis. Regardless, the experiential and anecdotal evidence collected in many case studies does reference the impact that female volunteers have on the participation and engagement of female participants and the importance of their relationship throughout this process. These findings, compared with findings from the academic review, highlight the existing gap between the practical experiences of organisations and the results from peer-reviewed studies. Furthermore, the case studies provide invaluable insight, which reinforces the need for this research regarding this topic to continue. In conclusion, these findings reaffirm the relevance of a project such as European Us Girls for directly focusing on female volunteers' effect on increasing girls' participation in sports and physical activity. These results also point to the need to develop an impact measurement process and tools to satisfy this knowledge gap, which could be extremely valuable to the success of the project and the wider research context.



### 3. Overview of the case studies

A total of 28 case studies have been collected for this report, providing examples of good practices in the United Kingdom, Denmark, France, Italy, Poland, Turkey, El Salvador, Kenya, Nigeria, Zambia, India, Vietnam, Fiji and Tonga. Furthermore, these cases represent a variety of interventions, namely, sport and life skills programmes, campaigns, events, trainings and conferences. The case studies can be found in the full Case Study Report Document which is available on StreetGames' website <http://www.streetgames.org/our-work-europe/european-us-girls>

Overall the majority of the good practices collected from the initial 28 case studies are based on longer term programmes (18 out of 28 case studies) with one case of a volunteer exchange. Both programmes and exchange categories refer to initiatives that are longer-term interventions, often based on a yearly cycle. Furthermore, the two case studies classified as associations and the one exchange could also be considered similar to programmes, as they work with volunteers to lead activities over time. Whereas on the other hand, good practices in relation to events, trainings and conferences provide examples of short-term initiatives (in total 6 out of 28 case studies). Through these variations in intervention, we can understand and collect multiple perspectives of how to engage female volunteers.

In line with the aim of the good practice case studies, the findings will be presented in the following section initially focusing both on the engagement of female volunteers (section 4), and on the impact female volunteers have on the increased participation of girls in sports and physical activity (section 5). It is important to note that throughout this report we will be using the term volunteers to represent female volunteers, unless otherwise specified.



## 4. Key success factors (good practices) in engaging female volunteers

For the purpose of the European Us Girls project, the objective of collecting good practices is to gather lessons learned from a variety of organisations and interventions working with female volunteers on initiatives designed with the purpose of increasing girls' participation in sports and physical activities. These good practices will provide constructive elements in the later design of the training resources and the two pilot events in the United Kingdom and Italy. Findings from the good practice case studies will also be useful to disseminate as a learning resource for interested organisations.

Furthermore, this case study report complements the findings from the academic review. In fact, peer-reviewed literature regarding female volunteers focuses mostly on their motivations for volunteering in the first place. Information from the academic review is essential input to apply during the recruitment of female volunteers. However, the findings from the case studies include good practices and lessons learned from engaging with female volunteers beyond recruitment, to also include other phases in the life cycle of a volunteer. In fact, findings presented below also include good practices around training volunteers, providing them with ongoing support, offering opportunities for capacity development and leadership pathways.

This section of the report presents the key success factors that emerged from the case studies. What is apparent from the findings is that the success of an initiative is not due to standalone factors, or good practices. Rather, the combination of practices throughout the process of engaging female volunteers is what contributed to the success and sustainability of initiatives. Above all, local context is key in considering how to engage volunteers and for what type of initiative. Therefore, it is imperative to consider local context when applying the findings below to different types of initiatives in different environments. Furthermore, these are good practices from a sample of case studies mostly consisting of sport related programmes that are implemented over time, with limited examples of events or short-term initiatives.

With regards to engaging volunteers, good practices are presented in accordance with the life cycle of volunteers in a sport-related initiative, meaning from the initial recruitment of volunteers to their continued engagement throughout the programme or initiative. The different phases of working with volunteers that were extricated from the findings are: recruitment, training and orientation, sustained engagement, retention and capacity development. Another interesting finding includes the development of leadership pathways for volunteers that some of the case studies allude to. In fact, leadership pathways have been identified as being useful in terms of retention of volunteers, but also as a contributing factor in increasing the participation of girls, as will be further discussed in section 5 of this report.



## 4.1 Recruitment

In many of the case studies recruitment was considered to be one of the most important phases during the life cycle of a volunteer. Critical to this phase is the understanding of volunteers' motivations and expectations, whether they want to volunteer to gain new skills and expertise, to help others, to have access to broader social networks or to have fun. Being aware of the different motivations amongst the volunteer workforce will be useful in selecting the task or roles volunteers should perform during the initiative. Furthermore, volunteers' motivations can also be an indication of the degree to which they want to be involved in the initiative and what role they would be more interested in taking on. Recruiting volunteers who are motivated, interested and passionate in the initiative, not only benefits the volunteer but the initiative as a whole. In fact, volunteers who enjoy the role they undertake are more likely to volunteer over time. The recruitment process can be onerous, and rightfully so. In fact, the more time invested in the recruitment phase, the more benefits will be yielded in the later stages of a volunteer's life cycle, reducing potential dropout rates during the implementation of the initiative. This is especially the case for long-term programmes with the aim of reaching specific target groups.

With these considerations in mind, the following are good practices related to the recruitment of volunteers from the case studies collected:

- A needs assessment prior to implementation will not only inform the project design, but can also be useful in identifying the role a volunteer could play in the implementation of the initiative, guiding the recruitment process
- Outlining the recruitment 'ask' as clearly as possible in addition to the required skills and expected deliverables can facilitate the selection process of volunteers during the recruitment phase
- During recruitment, the ability and skills of a volunteer need to be understood and taken into consideration in order to tailor their role within the initiative; a role that should be adequate to the volunteer
- It is useful to recruit volunteers with a variety of skills and personality traits, and aim to have a mix of new and current volunteers within a volunteer team
- Current volunteers can act as role models for new volunteers
- Girls who already participate and benefit from the initiative could also be considered for volunteering positions, as they are already engaged in the initiative
- A combination of different recruitment methods may be needed in order to engage the most qualified volunteers for the initiative

Recruitment methods from the case studies include: online and offline advertising, promotional campaigns, word of mouth, peer-to-peer, outreach through local community centres, sport clubs or schools, current or past programme or association members.



It is important to keep in mind the different recruitment strategies described in the case studies as they vary depending on initiatives (e.g. yearly programme in comparison to national events) and the approach taken (e.g. open to all or based on specific demands for the initiative). The key is to allow the task or role the organisation has planned for their volunteers inform the recruitment process. For example, recruiting for events at the National arena in Warsaw was open to everyone who wanted to join. On the other hand, recruitment for the Youth Leadership Exchange Project in Norway had a more rigorous process from assessing the needs of host organisations, to carrying out interviews with interested volunteers and matching the expertise of volunteers with the tasks required, being mindful of expectations and motivations of the volunteers. Furthermore, in order for the recruitment process to be successful (i.e. low or no dropout rate during implementation) the context where volunteers will be working and the participants they will be engaging with need to be taken into consideration as well. For example, in the Jail and Sport programme in Italy volunteers carry out sport activities with detainees in prison. The condition of female detainees in jail is complex with many of the women having psychiatric problems and often detainees are judgmental and critical towards each other. Therefore, during the recruitment of volunteers, the recruiter not only has to assess volunteers' motivations, but also their psychological resources to face tough situations. This case study may seem extreme, however the point is that in complex contexts it is important to assess volunteers' motivations, expectations, skills and abilities, not only for the recruitment process to be successful, but also to ensure the wellbeing of volunteers themselves.

## 4.2 Training and orientation

After recruitment, training and orientation of volunteers was often highlighted as imperative to the effectiveness of volunteer engagement and the role they would be taking on as volunteers. Both training and orientation help volunteers gain knowledge on their role, on what is expected of them; these processes also engender confidence in their ability to perform their role. For this purpose, Football For All Vietnam (FFAV), to name but one example, developed a manual specifically for volunteers that outlines pertinent expectations (in terms of volunteers' tasks and responsibilities) which is shared during the initial training phase. However, FFAV also included information in the manual about FFAV's responsibilities *towards* its volunteers. This additional resource can help foster an equitable relationship and an environment where both parties are accountable to one another.

Overall, the case studies highlight the following insights:

- Training is especially useful for younger volunteers, or new volunteers who do not have any previous experience related to the activities they would need to carry out
- Providing welcome packs and specific guidelines can be helpful in outlining not only the responsibilities of the volunteer, but also the responsibilities of the organisation towards the volunteer



- Institutionalising a code of conduct is essential to inform the expected behaviour of volunteers
- Training and orientation can also be an appropriate time to involve volunteers in planning activities for the initiative
- Specifically, for programmes that include volunteers becoming peer educators and leading sport or life skills sessions for girls, an extra train-the-trainer element should be included in the initial training. This provides further support for volunteers, encouraging them to feel capable and confident in the activities they take on. It is also positive in terms of allowing participants to share experiences with each other and discuss solutions to challenges they may face
- Team building sessions during training are also constructive techniques for creating a stronger bond between volunteers

As is the case with recruitment strategies, trainings and orientations depend on the type of initiative and local context. However, it is worth mentioning that providing orientations and trainings is also a way to manage volunteers' expectations. This aspect is crucial in creating the foundation for the continued participation of a volunteer and the success of any type of initiative. In fact, if their expectations are not met, volunteers are more likely to be dissatisfied with their role, and consequentially also likely to stop volunteering; this can ultimately impact the success of the initiative and the participants who are benefitting from the intervention. Some case studies also highlighted how managing volunteers' expectations is a challenge, especially in contexts where there are not strong volunteering traditions. In fact, during the data collection process for the case studies, staff in organisations outside of Europe, frequently emphasised the lack of a volunteer tradition in many countries (e.g. in Kenya, Vietnam, Fiji to name a few). In these cases, orientation and initial training with the volunteers were considered extremely important in clearly informing the volunteers of the initiative itself and the role and responsibilities they would be taking on within that initiative.

### 4.3 Sustained engagement

Training and orientation are key during the initial stages of the initiative. However, they are not the only way or time during which an organisation should be providing support for their volunteers. Throughout the life cycle of a volunteer's engagement in an initiative, continuous support was highlighted as another general good practice. Volunteers give up their time to take part in the initiatives. What is key for organisations is to not only be aware of this, but to be ready to support volunteers in their role. Failure to do so is more likely to have negative effects on retention.

The following are good practices relevant in engaging and supporting volunteers:

- Respecting and trusting the volunteer and showing gratitude for their contributions
- Recognising the value of the work a volunteer performs both formally (e.g. through recommendation letters) and informally (e.g. verbally)
- Assigning a staff member (volunteer coordinator) dedicated to managing volunteers who can assist them through mentoring and supporting them throughout the initiative, providing any tips or guidance including toolkits and learning materials



- Supporting volunteers especially during the initial stages of the initiative implementation. Specifically, in longer term programmes, staff should attend and support the initial facilitation sessions, until volunteers build their confidence and take the lead themselves
- Beyond initial training and orientation, holding regular meetings for volunteers is useful for them to be able to share the challenges they face, support and learn from each other and plan the upcoming activities. This is especially helpful for new volunteers. These meetings also offer the opportunity to discuss future goals and implementation activities for the initiative
- Being aware of the barriers volunteers face, acknowledging them and supporting them to overcome them

Specifically related to the last point, a challenge that is often mentioned with regards to working with volunteers is time constraints. For example, limitations to volunteering could be due to school or work hours. At the Tonga Netball Association, the community engagement officer mapped the availability of all volunteers. This was used as a strategy to overcome challenges related to time constraints. However, overall volunteering in of itself is based on the free time that people have and decide to spend doing activities for the benefit of others. Another challenge some volunteers may face is in the recruitment of the target group for the programme or initiative. For example, the volunteers from the StreetGames Big Sister's programme found it challenging to engage girls aged 16+. Project leads in the organisation were able to support the volunteers in carrying out further local consultations within the community to try and ascertain the needs of the older target group and the barriers they were facing in participating. An awareness of the potential barriers volunteers may face must inform organisational volunteering strategies.

#### 4.4 Retention and capacity development

Retention refers to the number of volunteers who continue to be involved in the initiative over time. Having a positive experience does affect a volunteer's interest in keeping up their voluntary activities. Thus beyond motivations and expectations being met through the voluntary activity itself, and feeling aligned with the mission and objective of the initiative, providing incentives was also considered a good practice in improving retention rates.

In order to encourage continued participation, various examples of good practices were collected through the case studies:

- Encouraging a youth-led and girl-centred approach as it is important to provide volunteers and participants with some ownership and control over the initiatives that they will be involved in and ultimately benefit from
- Providing ongoing support for volunteers (as mentioned in the previous section)
- Offering material incentives
  - Some examples mentioned: kit (t-shirts, hoodies or equipment); stipends (to cover cost incurred during volunteering); or discounts or free passes to events or extra training courses



- Related to material incentives, offering a ‘rewards’ package for volunteers when they achieve their goals
- Celebrating volunteers’ achievements which could also be achieved by providing certificates of completion or awards
- Offering capacity building training, beyond the initial training, so that volunteers also feel they are developing their skills throughout the initiatives
  - Some examples include: attending life skills and leadership training or camps, gaining qualifications (e.g. coaching, first aid or refereeing), taking new courses (e.g. event planning, marketing, computer literacy etc.)
- Organising social events with volunteers and team building activities to build rapport and personal connections
- Allowing for flexibility in the role so that young women can also learn and develop skills through the initiative at their own pace

Offering incentives (both material and in terms of capacity building) as a retention strategy is deemed successful, especially considering that volunteers are not paid a salary for the work that they do. Specifically, in addition to building the capacity of the volunteers, organisations should also provide the opportunity for girls to be involved in decision-making processes and extend their responsibilities. In many cases, by building their capacity, girls also have the opportunity to take on leadership roles within the initiative or the organisation. The following section explores an interesting example of an institutional structure that provides such opportunities.

#### 4.5 Leadership Pathways

Related to the section above regarding retention and capacity building of volunteers, another interesting finding in terms of encouraging the continued participation of female volunteers is through leadership pathways. Leadership pathways represent clearly defined and structured opportunities for a volunteer to develop their leadership skills within the programme (only found in case studies based on long-term programmes). For example, as a beneficiary of a programme, a girl may have the opportunity to join the volunteers as an assistant coach or instructor. After gaining more experience and knowledge, she could become a coach and facilitate activities on her own and encourage other girls to join the programme as well.

Through capacity building, volunteers develop skills and confidence, which they can then directly put into practice during programme implementation. Leadership pathways give girls the opportunity to take on leadership roles and incentivise them to continue their engagement in the programme. In some case studies, organisations also mentioned the possibility of paid employment for volunteers who had graduated through a leadership pathway and were volunteering with the organisations for a few years. Thus beyond contributing to the economic empowerment of the individual volunteer, investing in their capacity building can also benefit the implementation of the initiative and the organisation as a whole.



An example which illustrates the impact of embedding leadership pathways in a sports programme is the case study of the Community Sports Coaches (CSCs) from the Naz Foundation India Trust (Naz). Through the CSC model, adolescent girls who are former participants in the netball and life skills programme have the opportunity to become leaders (volunteer CSCs) for a period of 18 months. In fact, at least 48% of programme staff are former participants. During the 18 months, the young leaders not only receive ongoing capacity development, but also employability training to help with their future career plans beyond the programme. This is both an incentive for girls to continue their engagement (through training), and it also helps maintain the programme or association for many years, increasing its sustainability.

As members of the community themselves, CSCs become role models for other girls and young women in their communities and to future programme participants. In fact, 45% of programme participants consider their CSC as their role model. This aligns with one learning from the academic research that states that the identity of the volunteer as a local girl, gives credibility and can cultivate acceptance of the initiative in the wider community.

Furthermore, after the 18 months, CSCs have the opportunity to apply for paid positions as junior coaches. Leadership pathways go beyond being a retention strategy (through capacity building and skill development), they also help individuals by increasing their opportunities for leadership roles and, at a later stage, employment either within the organisation or elsewhere. Through this leadership pathway and CSC model, Naz has increased participation in their netball and life skills programme from 69 girls in New Delhi in 2006 to over 40,000 girls in Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore and New Delhi.

## 5. Increased participation due to female volunteers

The role of the female volunteer is considered essential in all case studies, where the initiatives relied on volunteers for the success of the project. The rise in the numbers of girls playing sports due to the initiatives is often measured, however there is limited quantitative evidence regarding the extent to which this increase is attributable directly to female volunteers.

However, anecdotally, the majority of the case studies mention that they do observe higher participation of girls and that female volunteers have an effect on girls who participate in sport or physical activities. Volunteers as leaders and role models for other girls in the community was frequently mentioned as a contributing factor to girls' increased participation in sport and physical activity. In fact, greater participation by girls has been associated to the identity of the volunteer (section 5.1 of this report) and the related sense of local ownership of the initiative (section 5.2 of this report).

### 5.1 Identity of the volunteer

The following characteristics regarding the identity of volunteers were recognised as influencing the participation of girls in sport and physical activity:

- A female well known to the participants and with whom they can relate and interact freely
- Female volunteers who are local community members have a stronger impact on girls
- Female volunteers from the same socio-economic background, religion or sharing other social markers as the girls are seen as role models. These female volunteers can connect on a deeper level with the girls taking part in the programme as they have most likely faced similar experiences. They can also identify with the problems that affect programme participants as women.
- 'Less sporty' female volunteers were also able to better engage girls who were not interested in sports or who were discouraged to take part in physical activities due to the inherently competitive culture

The identity of the female volunteers and the fact that girls could relate to them provides the foundations for a relationship to develop between volunteers and players. This relationship has been singled out as a key reason for the girls to continue their participation in the programme, and explains their interest in "becoming" a volunteer as well. In the case of the Big Sisters programme, for instance, the need for female volunteers was highlighted by the target group of girls themselves. During the consultation period for the programme, the girls were the ones who created the name 'Big Sisters', referring to female volunteers. The term itself and its connotation to the idea of family highlights the importance that, in this case, girls give to female volunteers in the programme and the presumably close relationship they would have together.

Furthermore, in some of the programmes described in these case studies, female volunteers were recruited specifically to act as peer educators. In addition, some organisations mentioned seeking female volunteers within the same if not similar age range of the target group of girls. This was to ensure that the girls and volunteers would be able to more spontaneously build a relationship, in some situations also fostering friendship. In these cases, the effectiveness of peer educators was also contingent on creating a comfortable, safe and encouraging environment for girls. With regard to the question of gender, the reality is that sport is still very much a male-dominated world. Especially in cultural contexts outside of Europe, case studies mentioned how traditional gender norms and expectations were a significant barrier to girls' access to sports and physical activity, and thus could be a factor in discouraging girls from playing. A visible role model from the same background (in terms of religion, ethnicity, class and gender) was identified as a source of inspiration, embodying what girls in the community can aspire to. In many of the case studies, another obstacle girls face in accessing sports is not having a safe space to play. When a female volunteer contributes to the creation of these spaces, this does engender a feeling of comfort among female participants. Furthermore, the emphasis on the fun aspect of initiatives as opposed to the competitiveness aspect is a factor that can contribute to creating a positive and encouraging environment where more girls felt comfortable playing and actively taking part.

In light of the observations above, a first step for a girl in the community could simply be seeing her female peers engaging in the sport or physical activity programme. Then, watching a female volunteer taking on a leadership role can be a further source of inspiration: "if she can do it, so can I!" This conviction would be particularly strong if the participants and the volunteer originate from the same or similar socio-economic background.

## 5.2 Local ownership in project design and implementation

Local ownership of the initiative appears to be a significant factor that contributed to the success of the case studies selected for this report. This has implications at various stages during the programme, event, or initiative, not only during the initial recruiting phase. Indeed, these case studies have shown how important it is to engage local volunteers throughout the entire process in order to work towards and ensure sustainability of the initiative at hand, but also, related to the previous section, the relationship female volunteers and girls from the same background can foster.

In terms of finding volunteers, 'organic recruitment' from within the local communities where the programme is being implemented was identified as a good practice for the following reasons:

- It is useful to engage local volunteers who are known and respected within the community
- When volunteers come from similar backgrounds as participants, the latter find it easier to relate to and connect with the volunteers



- Similarly, recruiting from amongst past participants of a programme or members of local associations was also indicated as an effective way to enhance community ownership of the initiative
- Volunteers from the community are more knowledgeable of community wants and needs
- ‘Local champions’ can be role models for other girls in the community and can inspire them to try new opportunities related to sport and physical activity

Another effective method to increase local ownership was also suggested with regards to the design of the programme:

- Assessments before programme implementation are important for adaptation and contextualisation
- Allowing for a period of ‘consultation’ with local volunteers is useful to assess their needs and potential future barriers to their participation
- Relying on the skills of the volunteers themselves (e.g. knowledge or experience with various sports) can also make it possible to offer unique sport opportunities and enhance the originality of the activities

However, when encouraging local ownership in terms of programme design it is also important for the organisation not to assume that local volunteers or community members know how and where to access services for girls.

- Further support throughout the programme implementation and extra training is extremely positive in these cases
- Community mapping is a useful tool to assess the knowledge and availability of community resources

Related to the concept of local ownership, some case studies also mention the value of volunteers who ‘give back’ to their communities as the programme is being implemented.

- A motivation for local volunteers is their ability to contribute to the development of their own community through a programme they actively participate in
- Through the engagement of the wider community, older volunteers present an opportunity for intergenerational volunteering, for example parents and grandparents
- ‘Giving back’ was also used in reference to the personal relationship volunteers can foster with local participants. Volunteers who return to their communities and become involved in fun sport and play-based activities can use this platform to identify with and talk about the same issues they faced growing up in similar conditions

Overall, local contextualisation was considered crucial, especially for longer-term programmes, as well as the flexibility of the programme to adapt to local needs. Local ownership of the initiative was successful not only in providing leadership opportunities for local volunteers, but also in creating a



network, which in some cases went beyond the scope of the initiatives. Furthermore, local ownership also contributes to the credibility of the initiative at a community level. This in turn could provide a platform for sourcing and recruiting more participants.

Women United in Denmark, is a great example of a programme fostering local community ownership. One of the main objectives of the initiative was to guide female volunteers to establish and manage community sports club in deprived areas of Denmark. DGI Foreningskvinder (implementing organisation) provided support to the volunteers during the process by building their individual capacity. However, all activities related to achieving the objective were carried out by the volunteers themselves. In some of the communities, the volunteers also decided to meet each other beyond the activities of the initiative, thus creating a strong and close knit network. Female volunteers who were able to achieve this objective were consequentially able to give girls in local communities more opportunities to access sport in deprived areas in Denmark. This was especially powerful as ethnic girls and women are less represented in Danish sport communities. According to some of the case studies, an increase in the formation of additional sport clubs can result in an increase in girls participating in sports or physical activity.



## 6. Conclusion

This case study report provides an overview of good practices based on lessons learned by a variety of organisations who shared their knowledge and experience in engaging female volunteers in sport and physical activity. Overall, 28 case studies were collected from a variety of countries within the EU and beyond consisting for the most part of long-term programmes aimed at providing sport and physical activities for adolescent girls.

Evidence from these findings complement the research from the academic review. When investigating the role of female volunteers' roles in sport, researchers have mostly focused their attention on understanding the motivations of female volunteers. The case study report, on the other hand, includes findings from good practices with regards to the different stages of the life cycle of a volunteer: recruitment, training and orientation, sustained engagement, retention and capacity building and leadership pathways. Even though in some cases initiatives included volunteers of both genders, good practices collected were aimed at capturing the successes of engaging female volunteers overall. Furthermore, the good practices summarised in this report are derived from a variety of initiatives and cultural contexts. When utilising, and replicating these good practices, organisations should consider contextualisation and local adaptation. For the complete library of 28 case studies, please refer to Annex 1. Overall, the findings and lessons learned presented in this report as good practices already provide valuable insight for organisations interested in increasing girls' participation in sport and physical activity, specifically with regards to recruiting and retaining female volunteers, which can also be considered a goal in of itself.

As was the case with the academic review, the case study report highlights the data gap in relation to the impact female volunteers have on the increased participation of other girls in sport and physical activity. In fact, case studies were unable to provide quantitative data specifically measuring this causal relationship. However, within their initiatives (mostly in relation to the long-term programmes), organisations do observe, anecdotally, that female volunteers affect girls' participation in sport and physical activity. Reasons associated to this are closely tied to the identity of the volunteer, who as a member of the local community becomes a leader and role model for other girls. Furthermore, the local ownership aspect of the initiatives can add to the legitimacy and sustainability of any sport and physical activity initiative, as locally-rooted engagement motivates and encourages community cohesion through increased credibility, popularity and over time, acceptance.

Even if the causal link between female volunteers and the increase in girls' participation may not be corroborated directly through systematic data from the case studies, what does emerge from the findings is the importance of creating an environment where girls feel safe in accessing sport and physical activity. In fact, the availability of safe spaces to play in does have an impact on girls' participation, as findings show across both the academic review and the case studies report. Moreover, some case studies also highlight how having a peer of similar status (e.g. class, age, gender, ethnicity,



religion, etc.) involved in facilitating the activities contributes to making a comfortable environment for girls, especially for those from ethnic minorities or from deprived areas. Therefore, based on the findings from this report, we recommend that organisations take into account both the target group of their programmes and the background of local volunteers, aiming, where possible, to recruit volunteers of a similar peer status (i.e. of similar identity in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, class, etc.) to the girls the programme aims to reach. Even though there is limited data, working with female volunteers can be beneficial in creating a comfortable and accepting environment where girls feel safe and inspired to continue playing sports. Through these considerations and the good practices presented earlier in the report in more detail, organisations can work towards increasing girls' participation in sport and physical activity, whether that is done directly, through engaging female volunteers, or indirectly, through the creation of safe spaces thanks to the presence of these volunteers.

Furthermore, from a research perspective, limited quantitative evidence presents an opportunity for the European Us Girls project to develop and test a methodology to measure this impact, working towards filling the knowledge gap in the sector. The combination of the academic review and the case study report has provided valuable findings on engaging female volunteers. These initial investigations will serve as essential building blocks in forming the foundations of the European Us Girls project, providing a solid starting point based on relevant peer-reviewed academic research and practical case studies.