

Inclusion & Gender Equality Through Softball



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PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY FOR YOUTH,
SPORT AND VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

THE PROJECT

Inclusion and Gender Equality Through Softball (IGETS) is an Erasmus+ Sports: Small Collaborative Partnerships project aimed to improve gender equality in sport through softball. IGETS brought together three softball clubs from different parts of Europe – Ghajnsielem Redcoats from Gozo, Malta, Olympia Haarlem from the Netherlands and Softball Klub Princ Zagreb from Croatia.

The three clubs worked on exchanging best practices relevant to gender equality in sports and increasing awareness on gender imbalances in sports. There were efforts to encourage youths to play softball and sports in general, and to increase the participation rate in sports, especially among women and girls. There was particular focus on capacity-building relevant to coaching as well as on club administration. The project also aimed to create a lasting network of cooperation among the three project partners. IGETS included four transnational activities along with activities implemented by each partner in their respective country spread over two years.



The 1st transnational meeting was held in Gozo (March 2017) with the focus on coaching during the early stages of the development of athletes. The importance of the multilateral approach was highlighted along with the necessity to encourage young participants to practice more than one sport. The process of exchanging good practices in coaching softball also got underway in Gozo as did the process of raising awareness about gender imbalances in sports with policymakers and stakeholders.

Inclusion, sharing of best practices in club management, and capacity building in coaching youth and senior softball teams were tackled during the 2nd transnational meeting held in Haarlem, the Netherlands, in May 2017.

The second phase of the implementation of IGETS involved using the knowledge gained during the first two transnational meetings to improve the skills of the youth softball players of the three clubs. There was a push to increase awareness about gender equality in sports and efforts to try to reduce it with various activities held by each partner in their locality.

The implementation of IGETS reached its climax with the 3rd transnational meeting held in July 2018, in Zagreb, Croatia. The U17 youth teams of the three clubs participated in a softball triangular training camp and tournament. There was further capacity building and sharing of best practices between the coaches of the three partners. The players showed improvement during the course of the training camp. They also benefited from the nutrition and sports psychology seminars along with the forums that were organised for them. The most important achievement of the activity was that the players grew to love softball even more, and as a result are more likely to continue to play the game for many years to come. This was the most important legacy of the Zagreb training camp and maybe of IGETS itself.



The three partners wanted to conclude IGETS with something special for a greater impact in achieving the various objectives of the project, and to disseminate their findings and outcomes. A high level tournament was organised in Gozo, Malta, this November, with the participation of some of the best senior players of the three clubs, each reigning national champions of their respective country. The two games which were played for the Gozo Cup lived up to the expectations and more. The youth players of the Redcoats were the surprise of the tournament as they played with confidence and performed exceptionally well, empowered by the experience of playing alongside such high level international players. The event gave an opportunity to the project co-ordinators to continue to increase the awareness about gender imbalances in sports, while the spectacular finish to IGETS provided a platform from which the results and outcomes of the project could be announced.

Through two years of hard work and co-operation, the partnership succeeded in bringing this project to its successful conclusion. The passion for the game within the three clubs along with their organisational and administrative capacity saw this project through, achieving the multiple aims set out. In turn, each club benefited considerably from IGETS. Now it is the hope of the project co-ordinators that other clubs would take up the challenge and explore the possibilities of tapping Erasmus+ Sports funding opportunities to finance their projects. The Small Collaborative Partnerships funding strand allows partners great flexibility in the design of the project with the opportunity for each partner to gain in various ways. Such projects also have the benefit of raising the profile of the sport and of the club within the community.

THE OUTCOMES

1. Offering multisport programmes for the younger age groups has the benefit of increasing the rate of participation (enrolments with the club), as well as of developing the participants into complete athletes.
2. Having regular sport-specific sessions at schools helps increase participation and the popularity of that sport. Such sessions also help to improve the physical literacy of students. *Physical Literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activity for life.*
3. Although the American college sports model is difficult to replicate in Europe, having meaningful inter-school sports competitions would help the growth of sports.



4. When teaching any sport skill, better results are attained if this is done in progression with one drill building on the previous one. Coaches should employ different drills to practice the same skill. Incorporating fun games helps to keep practices fresh and interesting for the players.
5. The psychological aspect of playing should be given as much importance as the physical aspect, as often enhancing core human characteristics such as self-confidence, can help athletes achieve their full potential.
6. More importance should be allotted to the administration of clubs. A more professional approach would help the growth of the sport.
7. Personnel shortages are hampering growth. The efforts to encourage volunteering should be intensified and taken more seriously.

8. Clubs should be geared to identify and take advantage of local, regional, national and EU funding opportunities. More importance should also be given to fund raising activities.
9. Coaches, clubs, associations and federations should periodically make a self-assessment to determine if there are processes, procedures, approaches, methodologies or policies within their organisation which hamper gender equality.
10. Policy makers need to be made aware that their decisions related to projects or policies, might have a negative impact on gender equality. They should consider the gender equality implications during the decision making process.
11. Although the drive for improving gender equality should not leave anyone out, the efforts should focus on the younger segment of the population who are more open minded, and have not as yet been saddled by the local perceptions, traditions and cultures which tend to propagate gender imbalances.



12. Sport has been proven as the best way to reduce gender inequality in society. Sport, especially softball, is empowering, and girls who grow up participating in sports tend to develop qualities such as self-confidence, resilience, motivation, determination, and leadership, which, once they grow up, put them in a better position to face, and successfully overcome, barriers which limit women in achieving their career objectives, whether these are sport, or work related.
13. Apathy begets gender imbalances. The apathy which surrounds female sports is not only rendering the efforts to reduce the prevailing gender imbalances in sports ineffective, but it is making the situation worse. In most cases, female sports have become a participation sport rather than a spectator sport. This scenario is hampering the growth of such sports.

14. For a sustainable reduction in the gender imbalances in sports, there need to be an increase in attendances at competitions involving female athletes. Once attendances become significant, the media would be more inclined to cover these events as there would be interest from the general public. Better media coverage would generate more interest from participants to play the sport and from the public to follow it. There would also be interest from corporate sponsors to fund the growth of the sport. By filling the stands with spectators, gender equality in sports will be achieved.
15. Clubs need to generate interest from the relatives and friends of those associated with female athletes. The general apathy towards female sports can be overcome by increasing awareness, making people conscious that by attending games they would be helping improve gender equality in sports.



16. Clubs should occasionally replace a practice session for the younger age groups with an activity that involves having the players on the stands to watch the senior women's team of their club compete. This would (a) help to build a culture of attending female sports events with the younger members of the club; (b) get them to learn from watching games; and (c) make it more attractive for others to attend. The activity could be (i) lunch at the game, (ii) to work on the songs of the team, or (iii) a team building activity. If this takes place once a month, and if parents are encouraged to accompany their children, it would have a positive impact on attendances.
17. Support from policy makers renders the efforts to reduce gender inequalities more effective. The government needs to step in, especially where significant capital investments, such as the construction of sport-specific facilities, are required.

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“The Ghajnsielem Redcoats have been for gender equality in sports since the inception of the Club, striving to provide opportunities for girls to practice a sport. As a result of IGETS we have been more successful in our efforts. The transnational element of the project, through our partnership with Olympia Haarlem and Softball Klub Princ Zagreb, helped us get the attention of key stakeholders and policymakers. In addition, without the involvement of our international partners very important aspects of this project, such as capacity building and sharing of best practices, would not have been possible.”

Joseph Scicluna, IGETS Project Coordinator



If you wish to obtain more information about the *Inclusion & Gender Equality Through Softball* project, or would like to share good practices about reducing gender imbalances in sports, please contact IGETS Project Coordinator, at:

softball@ghajnsielemredcoats.com

www.igets.eu

www.ghajnsielemredcoats.com

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