



UEFA Playmakers Project
Literature Review- Executive Summary
Produced by the Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University
September 2019

This review has been completed on behalf of UEFA by the Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University (UK).

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September, 2019

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Executive Summary

This literature review was commissioned by UEFA to develop an evidence base for the forthcoming Playmakers Project. It is intended that the research and insight gathered as part of this exercise will inform programme design, content and delivery. It is also the starting point for a UEFA girls and women's football research and evidence partnership.

As well as the literature review, an international scoping exercise of best practice in sport programmes for women and girls was undertaken. In total, 27 examples of good practice were identified with key features of these programmes highlighted. These included: programme goals, target audience, recruitment and delivery strategies, and impact.

The literature review was structured around the following themes:

Benefits and Challenges of Girls Participation in Football

In the main, the literature reviewed shows positive outcomes from participating in sport and physical activity during childhood and adolescence. Amongst other, these include:

- Increased educational attainment and employment prospects.
- Increased likelihood of being physically active as an adult.
- Enhanced health and wellbeing.
- Development of life and social skills.

Despite the well-known benefits, it is also clear from the evidence that women and girls' participation in physical activity is lower than that of men and boys. Global statistics showcase that 84% of girls under the age of 17 are not meeting the WHO minimum activity guidelines (WHO, n.d.). Similar findings have been published in European settings, with boys aged 15-24 twice as likely to regularly participate in sport than girls the same age (European Commission for Education, Sport, Youth and Culture, 2018).

It would appear that these statistics can be linked to a number of challenges experienced by women and girls. For example, many sports, including football, are seen as masculine pursuits, where characteristics associated with men and boys - competitiveness, strength and aggression - are highly valued. This traditional positioning of football as a masculine space, makes it undesirable for women and girls to engage in the sport (Norman, 2016). These kinds of belief systems are instilled in girls from an early age, with games like football continuing to be offered unquestioningly as part of boys' Physical Education, yet not the norm for girls (Paetcher, 2003). Yet, we must also recognise that women and girls are not all the same. For example, the work of Ahmad (2011) and Hamzeh (2015) calls attention to the ways in which the hijab ban has excluded some Muslim women and girls from playing football. Different age groups and girls with disabilities will also face different sets of challenges and needs when taking up football.

Girls' Needs, Influences and Motivators to take part in Football

In relation to girls' needs more broadly, the review shows that a focus on fun and enjoyment is a primary reason for getting involved in sport at a young age (Allender et al., 2006; McCalpin et al., 2017; Yungblut et al., 2012). Conversely, competition and highly structured activities are identified as demotivating for young children and girls (Allender et al., 2006; Casey et al., 2014; Farmer et al., 2018). This is an important distinction from the motivations of adults. Perhaps more importantly, it is worth noting that it is often the motivations of adult stakeholders (coaches, policy makers, initiative drivers, parents) that are prioritised over those of the young participants.

Another critical need to facilitate involvement in football is the functional and emotional support of parents (Allender et al., 2006; Knight et al., 2011). However, parental actions and behaviour (coaching from the side lines, arguing with officials, an emphasis on winning) can also negatively impact a young girl's enjoyment (Knight et al., 2011; Goodman and James, 2017). The importance of peer relationships also should not be underestimated because of the assistance, positive feedback, encouragement and social experience they afford (McCalpin et al., 2017; Yungblut et al., 2012). The notion of friendship as an effective promotional tool to encourage new girls to attend football sessions should be noted (Schaillee et al., 2017).

A further issue highlighted within the literature is that it is often the environment that girls are expected to play football in that is the problem – not the girls themselves (Kirk and Oliver, 2014). Two linked and problematic environmental factors which are influential in girls' decision to participate include:

- Girls-only or mixed sex settings, and
- Competitive environments.

For girls who define themselves as sporty, mixed classes are often preferred as they provide opportunities for them to improve at a faster rate by playing against boys (Casey et al., 2014). However, for the majority of girls, this is not the case, with single-sex spaces favoured. This is linked to girls' concerns regarding teasing from boys, and boys' domination of the activity – i.e. not passing to the girls and marginalising their involvement (Casey et al., 2014; Oliver and Hamzeh, 2010).

The notion of competition and other kinds of performance-based outcomes is the other recurring issue contributing to exclusionary environments for girls. As previously identified, the primary motivation for many young girls participating in football is fun and enjoyment, yet traditional competitive sporting environments may suppress this aspect (Spencer-Cavalier et al., 2017).

Coaching Strategies to Engage Girls in Football

Finally, other aspects to consider in creating a positive environment for girls' participation in football relate to the coaching strategies adopted by the coach. One such strategy involves the use of storytelling and imaginative play. This outlook reflects the need for coaches to adapt their coaching in ways that support co-constructing activities with their participants and opportunities for free-play activities. More recent research has begun to address concerns regarding the lack of consultation with participants, asking girls themselves for the reasons behind their non-engagement. Moreover,

these researchers have adopted an approach that places the girls at the heart of research, working with them to create more positive physical environments to enable them to take part (Enright and O'Sullivan, 2010).

Coaches should, therefore, also be encouraged to move away from creating ego-orientated environments to ones that are more task focused, where individual learning, effort and improvement are celebrated through positive reinforcement. Central to this will be coaches who are willing to listen to their participants, critically reflect on their practice, and move away from more traditional views of the coach-participant relationship. However, regardless of who is doing the coaching, the ways in which coaches are trained is also a crucial aspect to consider. Norman (2016) identifies coach education as a significant factor in coaches' ability to work with both men and women (and boys and girls) in sport. Importantly, she argues for coaching courses to move beyond a one-size-fits all approach to working with athletes, and begin to consider their background and identity, including their gender (Norman, 2016).

Scoping Exercise of International Best Practice

The scoping review of 27 local, national and international examples of good practice highlighted that effective sports programmes for women and girls should consider the following:

- Whole community approaches that recognise the importance of considering the needs of, and collaborating with parents, friends, teachers, coaches and community workers.
- Removing barriers of cost, transport, kit, equipment, prejudice, stereotypes and negative attitudes.
- Promoting fun through non-competitive games and/or storytelling.
- Education of key issues that affect young women and girls' lives e.g. peer pressure, sexual health, grooming, body issues, pregnancy.
- Offering a broad and varied range of activities.
- Recognising girls as experts in their needs and encouraging them to help design, deliver and evaluate programmes.
- Developing girls to become role models, leaders and mentors for future programmes.
- Offer activities that develop skills that enable young women and girls to take control of their lives - confidence, self-esteem, resilience, leadership, communication and empowerment.

Overall Key Issues for Programme Design, Delivery and Promotion

Based on the literature review and scoping exercise of best practice a number of key issues that stakeholders should consider when designing, delivering and promoting football programmes for young girls have been identified.

Designing the Programme	Session Plans: important to stress the need for flexibility and not force coaches to follow these to the letter, but to adapt based on participants.
	Coach Education/Training: include more than just ‘what’ to coach – what are the challenges girls face? How can coaches create a task-oriented environment? How can they encourage ownership?
	Child-Centred Design: Is the programme designed around an adult-centric view of fun? What does fun look like to a 5-8 year old girl? Consider ways to get their input into the session design.
	Consider Exit Routes: – how does this 8-week programme translate into club football? Are clubs/coaches involved in delivery? Are the sessions hosted at a club? Do the club coaches know about the importance of fun/ownership? Or will the girls be faced with the ‘same old’ challenges once they join a club?
Delivering the Programme	Coach Flexibility: Importance of striking a balance between ‘following the guide’ and coaching what is in front of you.
	Child-Centred Pedagogy: Understand the need for ownership and empowerment – what does the coach want it to look like, and what do the girls want it to look like? These may be different.
Evaluating the Programme	Research Gap: Use this programme to conduct research into 5-8-year old girls in football – address research gap(s).
	Evaluation Methods: Consider how the programme is evaluated – are the focus and methods adult or child-centric?
Future research	Very little research has been conducted with girls aged 5-8 in football, physical activity and sport settings.
	Recognise challenges relating to gender that girls have to overcome in order to engage in sport and football contexts.
	Understand differences between girls and across European contexts. Different challenges and opportunities will arise when working in different places, with different people.

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