



**Equability in and through Handball
Leveraging Women's Inclusion Towards Better
Sports for Everyone**

FINAL REPORT



Univerza v Ljubljani



Sosyal Güçlendirme için Spor ve Beden Hareketi



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Foreword

The Equability in and through Handball: Leveraging Women's Inclusion Towards Better Sports for Everyone (EquaWHand) project was launched under the 2022 European Union Erasmus+ Sport program to address the persistent underrepresentation of women in managerial roles within the handball sector. Spearheaded by the Turkish Handball Federation (THF) in partnership with the University of Ljubljana and the Sports and Body Movement for Social Empowerment Association (BoMoVu), the project set out to create tangible pathways for female leadership in sports governance by equipping participants with the strategic and managerial skills necessary for success.

Since its inception, EquaWHand has evolved into a transformative initiative that not only fostered gender inclusion but also strengthened the broader landscape of sports management in Türkiye and Slovenia. The project's structure was built on a multi-faceted approach, incorporating a carefully designed curriculum that blended theory with practice. The training program began with online education modules, covering essential topics such as strategic management, financial planning, event organization, and leadership in sports. These modules provided participants with a strong conceptual foundation, ensuring they were well-versed in the key principles of sports administration.

Building upon this theoretical groundwork, the project then facilitated a series of face-to-face workshops led by experts, allowing participants to deepen their understanding of real-world challenges in sports management. These interactive sessions included case studies, problem-solving exercises, and direct engagement with professionals working in the field, fostering critical thinking and decision-making skills. The workshops were complemented by practical internships within handball clubs, where participants applied their knowledge in a hands-on environment. By working alongside experienced managers and administrators, they gained firsthand insight into the day-to-day operations of sports organizations, further solidifying their preparedness for leadership roles.

One of the project's most defining milestones was the organization of a high-level handball match between the national teams of Türkiye and Slovenia, planned and executed by the participants themselves. This final exercise served as a culmination of their learning experience, allowing them to take full ownership of a complex event and showcase their management skills in a real-world setting. The event not only demonstrated the capabilities of the newly trained female managers but also provided visibility to the broader goal of gender inclusion in sports. The success of this initiative highlighted the practical impact of EquaWHand and reinforced the importance of hands-on experience in developing confident and competent sports leaders.

The journey was not without its challenges. The devastating earthquake that struck Türkiye on 6 February 2023 had a profound impact on the project and its participants. Some team members faced personal losses, and nationwide disruptions to sports activities led to inevitable delays. As a result, the project timeline was extended to accommodate these unforeseen circumstances, allowing us to fulfill our commitment to delivering a high-quality training program. Despite these difficulties, the resilience of our partners, trainers, and participants ensured that EquaWHand remained on course, culminating in a successful and impactful conclusion.

Beyond its direct outcomes, the project has contributed to a growing awareness of gender equity in sports management. By focusing on skill-building, mentorship, and practical engagement, EquaWHand has empowered a new generation of female leaders who are now better positioned to influence decision-making in handball organizations. Furthermore, the project's findings and methodologies provide a replicable model for similar initiatives across different sports and regions.

As we present this final report, we reflect on the achievements of EquaWHand and the meaningful progress made toward a more inclusive sports environment. This document details the project's key milestones, lessons learned, and recommendations for sustaining and expanding the impact of our work. While this marks the formal conclusion of the initiative, the networks, knowledge, and momentum generated by EquaWHand will continue to shape the future of women's leadership in sports for years to come.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the individuals and organizations who contributed to this endeavor—our participants, trainers, partner institutions, and supporters. Their dedication and commitment have been instrumental in making EquaWHand a success, and we hope this report serves as both a reflection of our collective efforts and an inspiration for future initiatives aimed at advancing gender equity in sports.

The EquaWHand Project Consortium

(Turkish Handball Federation, University of Ljubljana Faculty of Sports, and BoMoVu)

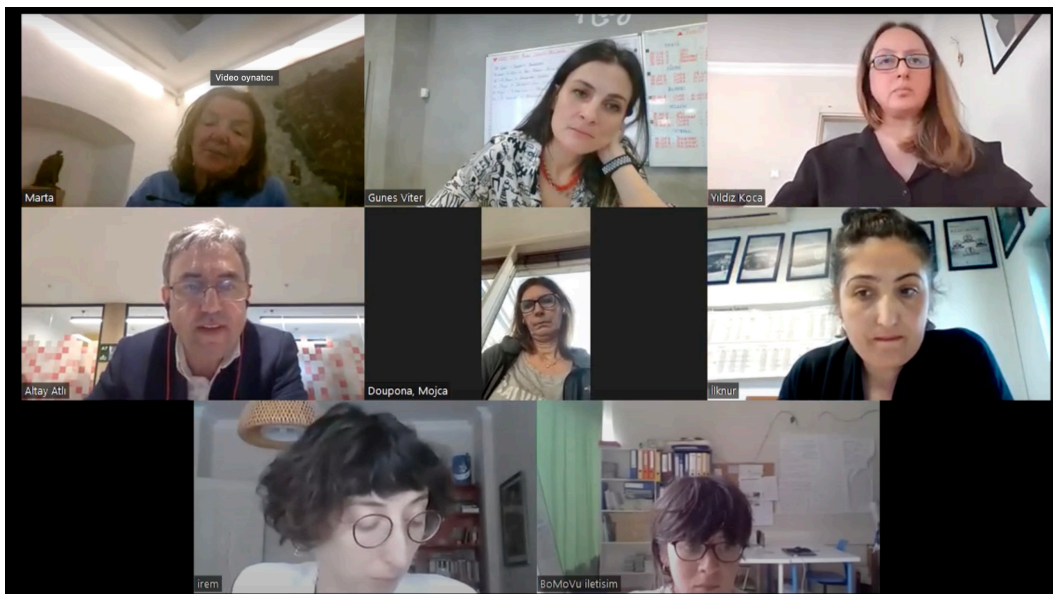
January 2025

Work Package 1: Project management and coordination

T1.1. In-person meetings

Throughout the project timeline, project partners came together in person four times, in addition to numerous online meetings.

The kick-off meeting had to be held online, taking place on 17 April 2023, using Zoom teleconferencing software. During the meeting participants from three partner institutions discussed the guidelines, principles, and contents of the project, agreeing on a roadmap as detailed in the General Agreement.



Online kick-off meeting between THF, BoMoVu and UoL on 17 April 2023

The first in-person meeting of the project partners took place on 12 August 2023 in Ankara (TUR). Project team members from the three partner institutions held their organisational meeting at the facilities of the Turkish Handball Federation, and they also met with the participants who were admitted into the program. A total of 27 participants were admitted into the program following an application and selection process between 19 January and 22 July 2023. This welcoming meeting between the project team and the project participants took place on the sidelines of the European U17 Women's Handball Championships held in Ankara, providing both the project partners and participants to watch top-level handball matches together.



Organizational meeting on 12 August 2023



Meeting on 7 October 2023

The second in-person meeting of the project partners took place on 7 October 2023, on the occasion of a workshop held in Ankara (TUR) with the project participants and a fact-finding meeting.

The third in-person meeting between the project partners took part during the high-level match event organisation activities held in Ankara (TUR) between 17 and 22 June 2024. On this occasion, the partners held an evaluation meeting, and they came together with the participants for a series of lectures and workshops. There was also an opportunity for project partners from the three institutions to meet and exchange ideas with the coaching staff and players of the U18 women's handball national teams of Türkiye and Slovenia, who played the exhibition matches within the framework of

the project.



Project partners with participants on 21 June 2024



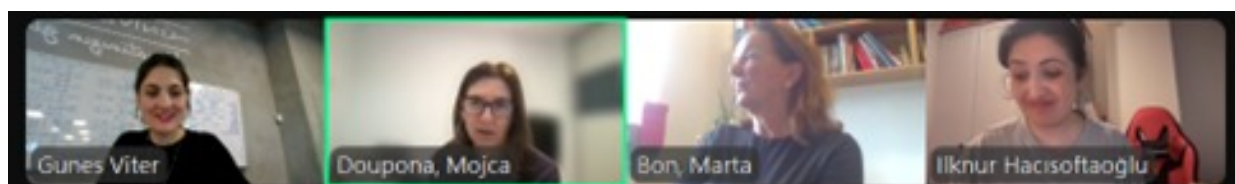
Project partners having their evaluation meeting on 21 June 2024

The fourth in-person meeting between the project partners took part on 18-20 September 2024 in Ljubljana (SLO) when they came together for a workshop and evaluation meeting.



Project partners before their meeting at the University of Ljubljana on 19 September 2024

The closing conference aimed at the final evaluation of the project, dissemination of the results, planning for the post-project activities aimed at the longer term impact took place through two online sessions on 9 and 16 January 2025.



Project partners meeting online on 9 January 2025

T1.2. Continuous coordination between project partners

Online tools, such as Zoom for teleconferencing and WhatsApp for messaging, were utilized to maintain ongoing coordination among project partners. Numerous video conferences were held at each crucial phase of the project, with the administrative officer responsible for organizing and managing these meetings.

T1.3. Financial management

Financial management involved overseeing the project's monetary inflows and outflows, including grant revenues and expenditures, in a transparent and accountable manner. This process was supported by the finance and accounting departments of the partner institutions.

T1.4. Monitoring, evaluation and quality control

The project's activities were continuously monitored and assessed at every stage to ensure the highest standards of quality.

Deliverables:

D1.1. Interim evaluation report: Completed and submitted.

D1.2. Final report: Prepared and submitted at the conclusion of the project.

Work Package 2: Training Modules

T2.1. Fact finding meeting

Project partners met in Ankara (TUR) on 7 October 2023, to discuss and decide the methodologies to be employed during the project, contents of education modules, barriers to entry for women into sports administration roles and possible ways to overcome them. The meeting also included other key stakeholders, such as coaches, referees & delegates, managers, athletes, and academics & experts forming five different groups. Two parts of the meeting were conducted with the established groups. During the first part, existing problems related to the identified topics were discussed, while the second part focused on solutions and needs regarding these problems. To identify the problems, the participants concentrated on three key questions: i) What are the challenges and obstacles that women face in sports environments? li) What mechanisms support the development of women and their participation in sports? lii) What are the reasons for women not being able to participate in leadership positions within sports management? The problems identified during the discussions and the proposed solutions to these problems were compiled in a report.



Fact-finding meeting on 7 October 2023

T2.2. Curriculum development and preparation of educational materials

Based on the outcomes of the fact-finding conference, a comprehensive curriculum for the project was created, incorporating both online training modules and in-person workshops. This development process also involved preparing the educational materials required for these activities.

T2.3. Online training modules

All of the online education modules are completed. Sessions were held using Zoom teleconferencing software. A list of the modules and sessions that were undertaken are as follows:

MODULE 1: Sports Management

5 March 2024: “Essentials of Strategic Management” Offered by Dr. Cem Tınaz (Bilgi University & Tennis Europe)

This intensive two-hour course is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the principles of strategic management and their applications in modern sports organizations, where participants will explore key concepts, frameworks, and tools necessary for effective strategic decision-making and organizational success within a sports context.

7 March 2024: “Understanding Sports Governance” Offered by Dr. Cem Tınaz (Bilgi University & Tennis Europe)

This two-hour intensive course provides participants with a comprehensive understanding of the principles, structures, and challenges in sports organizations, exploring key concepts, best practices, and strategies for effective sports management in the modern sports environment.

13 March 2024: “Understanding Handball Regulations: Standards and Legal Frameworks” Offered by Dr. Ümit Orhan (Marmara University & Turkish Handball Federation)

This two-hour specialized course provides a comprehensive overview of the legal regulations governing handball worldwide, with an in-depth examination of the legal framework for handball in Türkiye, exploring the rules, regulations, and key legal aspects in both international and local contexts.

YAKLAŞIM

- İyi planlama
- Yeterli düzeyde örgütsel/kurumsal kapasite
- İşini iyi yapan ve motivasyonu yüksek bir proje ekibi
- Ortaklar arasında iyi ve açık bir işbölümü ve üstlenilen görevlerin yerine getirilmesinde kararlılık
- Projenin gerçek bir sorunu ele alması
- Yararların kadın ve erkek arasındaki eşitliği gözetmesi
- Hedef grupların ihtiyaçlarına yanıt vermesi

Projenin başarısını etkileyen en önemli faktörlerdir. Bu faktörlerin arasında gerçek soruna eğilme ve hedef grupların ihtiyaçlarına yanıt verme ise projelerin başlangıç noktasını oluşturmaktadır.

Participants in the sidebar: Gunes Viter, Hamit Levent Evcil, Merve Sefa, İlknur Hacıoğlu, Nesrin Turgutlu.

Screen shots from online education sessions

A grid of 12 video feeds from a Zoom meeting. The participants are: Top row: A man, a woman, a woman, and a woman. Middle row: A woman, a woman, a woman, and a woman. Bottom row: A woman, a woman, a woman, and a woman. Some feeds are labeled with names like 'Sevgi iPhone'u', 'Merve Sefa', and 'Nermin iPhone'u'.

14 March 2024: “Ethics in Decision-Making Mechanisms: Ensuring Integrity in Sports Institutions” Offered by Dr. Bahri Gürpınar (Akdeniz University)

This two-hour course is dedicated to exploring the critical role of ethics in decision-making mechanisms within sports organizations, where participants will examine the ethical principles, dilemmas, and frameworks necessary for maintaining integrity and fair practices in sports management.

19 March 2024: “Sustainability in Sport: Nurturing a Greener Future for Athletics” Offered by Dr. İlknur Hacısoftaoğlu (BoMoVu & Istanbul Bilgi University)

This two-hour comprehensive course explores the intersection of sustainability and sport by focusing on principles, practices, and initiatives that contribute to creating environmentally conscious and socially responsible sports communities, with participants delving into sustainable strategies, green initiatives, and the importance of ethical practices in sport for a healthier planet.

MODULE 2: Soft Skills

20 March 2024: “Effective Communication for Women in Leadership” Offered by Pınar İlkin (Pikan Ajans)

This concise two-hour course is specifically designed for women in leadership roles, focusing on enhancing communication skills, boosting confidence in public speaking, and developing effective interpersonal connections to navigate professional environments successfully.

1 April 2024: “Empowering Women Managers in Sports: Digital Literacy Essentials” Offered by Çağrı Öner (Technology Collective for Civil Society)

This two-hour course is designed to equip aspiring female leaders in the sports industry with essential digital literacy skills needed to succeed in management roles in the digital age, exploring key digital concepts, tools, strategies, and the use of digital media in sports organizations.

4 and 8 April 2024: “Comprehensive Project Management Cycle: From Initiation to Closure” Offered by Hamit Levent Evci (Korteks Akademi)

This four-hour intensive course offers a comprehensive examination of the project management cycle, covering crucial stages from initiation to closure, and provides a structured approach to effectively plan, execute, monitor, and successfully close projects, equipping professionals with essential tools and methodologies.

26 April 2024: “Financial Literacy for Women Leaders: Empowering Financial Confidence” Offered by Dr. Erdem Turgan (Marmara University)

This two-hour course is specifically designed for women in leadership positions, aiming to empower them with essential financial literacy skills to effectively navigate financial decisions both personally and professionally.



MODULE 3: Rights of Women in Leadership Positions

2 May 2024: “Promoting Gender Equality and Health Rights in the Workplace” Offered by Dr. Ece Üner (Lawyer) and Dr. Özgün Biçer (Marmara University)

This two-hour course aims to explore the intersection of gender equality and health rights in professional settings, empowering participants with the knowledge and strategies needed to create inclusive, healthy, and equitable workplaces for all genders.



Screen shots from online education sessions

3 May 2024: "Inclusive Leadership for Women in Sports Leadership Roles" Offered by Dr. Ece Üner (Lawyer) and Dr. Özgün Biçer (Marmara University)

This two-hour dynamic workshop, aimed specifically at women in leadership positions within the sports industry, focuses on inclusive leadership strategies to promote diverse and evolving sports environments, equipping female leaders with the tools and knowledge needed to advocate for inclusivity, diversity, and equality in the sector.

14 and 16 May 2024: "Addressing Gender-Based Violence: Understanding, Prevention, and Support" Offered by Gilnitz Kotza (BoMoVu)

This four-hour comprehensive workshop aims to provide an in-depth understanding of gender-based violence, its various forms, impacts, and strategies for prevention and intervention, designed to equip professionals, community leaders, advocates, and individuals with the knowledge and practical tools needed to contribute to the eradication of gender-based violence, using a combination of lectures, case studies, group discussions, role-playing, and interactive exercises to facilitate learning and engagement.

6 June 2024: "Child Safeguarding and Participation" Offered by Güneş Viter (Turkish Handball Federation & Özyeğin University) and Selmin Cansu Demir (Özyeğin University)

This two-hour workshop is specifically designed for female leaders in sports organizations, focusing on child protection and encouraging active participation of children in sports environments, aiming to equip women leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to create safe, supportive, and inclusive spaces for children in sports settings.

T2.4. In-person workshops

Two rounds of in-person workshops were held in Ankara (TUR), and a third workshop was organized in Ljubljana (SLO).

In the first in-person workshop, which was held on 7 October 2023 in Ankara (TUR), participants discussed, under the guidance of experts from the three project partner institutions, topics such as challenges or obstacles that women face in sports environments, mechanisms that support women's development and participation in sports, and reasons why women cannot take part in management positions.

In the second round of in-person workshops held on 21 June 2024 in Ankara (TUR), three sessions were held, each under the guidance of one particular partner institutions. Turkish Handball Federations experts organized the "Gender and Sports" workshop, University of Ljubljana experts carried out the "Effective Communication Skills for Women Leaders in

Sports”, and BoMoVu experts conducted the focus group meetings for impact evaluation among the participants.



Some of the participants of the workshop held on 7 October 2023



Workshop in progress on 21 June 2024



A group of workshop participants and experts, 21 June 2024



Workshop in progress on 21 June 2024

In the third round of in-person workshops held on 19 September 2024 in Ljubljana (TUR) held under the guidance of University of Ljubljana, members of the project team came together with Slovenian sports scientists and well as top-level coaches, female handball managers and national team players to discuss and exchange ideas about the contents



Pre-workshop meeting on 19 September 2024



Slovenian national team players attending the workshop on 19 September 2024



Project team members with coaches and handball managers of the club RK Krim Mercator on 20 September 2024



Project team members visiting the Slovenian Handball Federation in Ljubljana on 20 September 2024

Deliverables:

- D2.1. Fact finding report: Completed and submitted.
- D2.2. Project manual: Completed and submitted.
- D2.3. Educational material: Completed and submitted.

Work Package 3: Hands-on practice packages

T3.1. Internships with local clubs

As a central component of the project, participants undertook a structured internship program, where they were placed in local handball clubs for a five-day immersive experience. During these internships, they:

- Visited club offices to understand administrative workflows.
- Observed training sessions of the clubs' handball teams and, when possible, matches to examine sports operations in practice.
- Conducted interviews with key club personnel, including managers, coaches, and staff, to gain insights into management structures, governance, and decision-making.
- Analyzed club policies on key areas such as child safeguarding, sustainability, governance, and financial management.

Clubs participating in this program were as follows:

- 1954 Hendek Spor Kulübü
- Armada PraxisYalıkavakspor
- Köyceğiz Belediyesi Spor Kulübü
- Kastamonu Candarbey Spor Kulübü
- Kırşehir Belediyesi Spor Kulübü
- Üsküdar Belediyesi Spor Kulübü
- Giresunspor
- Anadolu Üniversitesi Spor Kulübü
- Ankara Yenimahalle Belediyesi Spor Kulübü
- Muğla Üniversitesi Spor Kulübü
- Avcılar Hentbol Kulübü
- Beykoz Belediyesi Spor Kulübü
- İstanbul Defne Spor Kulübü
- Mersin Hentbol Spor Kulübü
- Depaş Enerji Spor Kulübü

At the end of their internships, each participant submitted a structured report based on a questionnaire designed by the project team. This questionnaire guided them to critically evaluate their observations and formulate practical recommendations across several key themes, including:

- Child protection and participation
- Strategic management
- Sports governance
- Ethical decision-making
- Sustainability in sports
- Digital literacy and communication
- Additional observations and recommendations.

In addition to their written reports, each participant took part in an individual interview conducted by the project team. These in-depth discussions provided an even richer and more nuanced perspective on their experiences. While written reports offered structured insights, the interviews allowed for deeper reflections, capturing personal experiences, critical observations, and creative suggestions that might not have been fully conveyed in writing.



One of the participants with the players of the handball club Depsaş Enerji where she held her internship

The interviews also helped the project team identify underlying patterns and recurring themes that may not have been immediately apparent in the reports. Many participants elaborated on specific challenges they encountered, shared first-hand anecdotes from their interactions with club managers and players, and provided concrete examples of best practices and areas in need of urgent reform.

These combined sources—written reports and in-depth interviews—resulted in a wealth of knowledge that goes beyond academic theory and into real-world application. By integrating first-hand experiences with structured analysis, this report offers practical insights and actionable recommendations for improving handball club management, sports governance, and gender inclusivity.

T3.2. Organization of a top-level exhibition match

Within the framework of this project, the U18 women's national handball teams of Türkiye and Slovenia played two exhibition games in Ankara (TUR) on 20 and 22 June 2024. Project participants stayed over this period at the accommodation facilities of the Turkish Handball Federation together with the two teams' players and technical staff. Project participants supported the personnel of the Turkish Handball Federation in the organization of these two matches, and they were also provided with the opportunity to come together with the two teams' players and coaches to discuss issues related to women's empowerment in sports.



Turkish and Slovenian handball national teams with members of the project team

Deliverables:

D3.1. Booklet: Completed and submitted.

Work Package 4: Impact and dissemination

T4.1. Running a project website

The website of the project, which is available at <https://equawhand.com> was launched after the commencement of the project and it is regularly updated. In addition to the web site, the project had also an active Instagram account, [@equawhand](https://www.instagram.com/equawhand).



A screen shot of the project web site

T4.2. Mentorship for post-project career paths of participants

The project's long-term impact hinges on participants pursuing relevant career paths that position them as agents of transformation. To support this, participants received personalized active mentorship and guidance. This effort is extending beyond the project's conclusion, with mentor/mentee relationships already being established.

T4.3. Dissemination of project results to local stakeholders

Upon completion of the project activities, the results and deliverables were shared with local stakeholders in Turkey and Slovenia. This includes sports clubs, government agencies, media, corporations, and relevant NGOs.

T4.4. Dissemination of project results to international sports authorities

Turkiye and Slovenia are both accredited by the European Handball Federation, the International Handball Federation, and the International Olympic Committee. Upon completion of the project activities, the project's results and deliverables were shared with these organizations, allowing them to disseminate the information to their constituencies and thereby enhancing the project's outreach.

T4.5. Dissemination of project results to academia

For the purpose of academic dissemination of the findings and results of the project, five member of the project teams with academic affiliations, Marta Bon (professor of sports sciences at the University of Ljubljana SLO), Mojca Doupona (professor of sports sciences at the University of Ljubljana SLO), İlknur Hacısoftaoğlu (professor of sports sciences at Bilgi University TUR), Altay Atlı (professor of international relations at Koç University TUR) and Güneş Viter (lecturer of sports sciences at Özyeğin University TUR), authored an article titled “Empowering Women in Handball Through Education”. The article was submitted to and accepted for publication by the peer-reviewed international journal “Kinesiologia Slovenica: Scientific Journal on Sport” (Print ISSN: 1318-2269; Online ISSN: 2232-4062). The abstract of the article is as follows:

“The article discusses the importance of gender equality in sport governance and management, emphasizing the need to involve women in non-athlete roles such as referees, managers, and leaders to improve the effectiveness and inclusivity of sport organizations. It highlights how societal norms and structures often reinforce traditional gender roles, making change a gradual process requiring sustained effort. The article also touches on the economic implications of gender inequality and introduces initiatives like the European project EQUA WHAND, which aims to bridge the gap between academic preparation and real-world demands in sport management, particularly in handball. A total of sixteen females participated in the study, with data collected through self-report measures to gather demographic information and satisfaction with the content of the educational course. The training programs were generally well-received by participants, who found them satisfactory and effective in developing knowledge and skills applicable to their professional lives.”

Deliverables:

D4.1. Project website: Launched.

D4.2. Manual: Prepared and submitted.

D4.3. Summary report of the project: Prepared and submitted.

D4.4. Academic paper: Prepared, submitted to an international peer-reviewed journal for publication.

Conclusion

The Equability in and through Handball: Leveraging Women's Inclusion Towards Better Sports for Everyone (EquaWHand) project has been a significant step toward promoting gender equity in sports management. By empowering women with the skills and confidence needed to take on leadership roles in handball, the project has contributed to a more inclusive and diverse sports environment. Beyond its immediate outcomes, EquaWHand has helped raise awareness about the need for greater female representation in sports governance and has laid the groundwork for future initiatives in this field.

The importance of this project extends beyond handball, as gender disparities in sports management remain a widespread challenge. To build on the progress made, we encourage stakeholders to continue supporting structured training programs, mentorship networks, and policy initiatives that promote women's leadership in sports. Expanding similar programs to other sports, fostering long-term career development opportunities for female sports managers, and strengthening institutional commitment to gender inclusion will be crucial in sustaining the momentum generated by EquaWHand.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of this initiative. The project partners, Turkish Handball Federation, the University of Ljubljana and BoMoVu, all played a crucial role in delivering high-quality training and support. We also thank the trainers, mentors, and industry experts who shared their expertise and guided our participants throughout the process. Most importantly, we commend the participants, those incredible women, for their dedication, perseverance, and enthusiasm—they are the true drivers of change, and we look forward to seeing their continued impact in the world of sports management.

Finally, we express our deepest appreciation to the European Union for making this project possible through the Erasmus+ Sport program. Their support has been instrumental in turning the vision of EquaWHand into reality. While this report marks the conclusion of our project, we hope it serves as an inspiration for further efforts to promote gender equity and create lasting change in sports leadership.



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