

whistle

Women's
Healthy and active lifestyle
Is **T**hreatened by
verbal sexual harassment:
Let's stop CATCALLING in sport



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WHISTLE

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WHISTLE POSITION PAPER
WP3 - D.3.1



Project Reference

Acronym: WHISTLE

Title: "Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment: LEt's stop CATALLING in sport"

Programme Erasmus + Programme of the European Union

Grant Agreement: "101049134-WHISTLE"

Partnership

Lead partner:

P1 USMA CASELLE ASD – Italy

Partners

P2 Si può fare cooperativa sociale, Italy

P3 Municipality of Padova, Italy

P4 KEAN, Greece

P5 VOLLEYBALL Foundation Greece

P6 Actividades Alternativas, Spain

P7 Fondatzia Kurazh/Courage foundation, Bulgaria

P8 Spor Elçileri Derneği, Turkey

P9 Fundacja Instytut Partnerstwa Strategicznego- , Poland

Deliverable reference

Work Package: WP 3

Deliverable ID/title: D3.1 WHISTLE POSITION PAPER with recommendations

Version: Rev.1.0

Language: English

Format: electronic

Estimated number of pages in the proposal: 10

Due date 30.04.2023

Deliverable Leader: USMA Edited by USMA

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Deliverable Scope (as in the DoA):

D3.1 consists of a document providing the point of view and the understanding of partners and of stakeholder about the problem of catcalling in sport. It is elaborated after a consultation process developed in task 3.1. The D3.1 includes also recommendations for women organizations, for sport clubs and public authorities about a safety sport environment.

Partners involved in the elaboration of the document

Participant No	Organization name	Short Name	Specify if involved
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4	KEAN, Greece	KEAN	Contributor
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7	Fondatzia Kurazh / Courage Foundation, Bulgaria	CF	Contributor
8	Spor Elçileri Derneği, Turkiye	SPELL	Contributor
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History of changes

Rev. n.m	Date	Changes
Rev.1.0	18th January 2023	Elaboration of the first draft
Rev.2.0	2 nd of February 2023	Elaborating the main structure and contents
Rev. 3.0	24th of February 2023	Presentation to draft to all partners and gathering contributions
Rev. 4.0	13th of March 2023	End of peer review
Rev. 5.0	19th of April 2023	Elaboration of the final version and final review
Rev. 6.0	27th of April 2023	Document uploading on Commission website

Notes: This Deliverable is uploaded by USMA Padova Asd (as responsible). The document and its contents were shared and agreed upon among partners.

This position paper is intended to be a "living document", which may be updated during the project implementation.



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WHISTLE POSITION PAPER

Introduction

The scope of the WHISTLE project is to prevent and fight Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH) and catcalling in sport, as this behavior has a negative influence over women's practice of sport being one of the causes of dropout from organized sports and one of the barriers that limits women to practice outdoor physical activity. Catcalling is not a new phenomenon, the novelty lies in the fact that in recent years there has been talk of it, women's movements have been born. Catcalling is not only something that just happens to female runners or cyclists on the streets; it also affects organized sport, even if there is not copious evidence about it; BUT the lack of data does not mean the lack of the problem. The lack of data is much more due to the fear of reporting, the absence of a support system specifically designed for women who practice sport, the shortage of information within sports clubs, the lack of awareness of catcalling as a subtle and devious form of gender-based violence. In this scenario, WHISTLE increases knowledge to better understand the phenomenon, particularly in the organized sports; it educates sport clubs practitioners, women associations and local authorities providing them with tools to detect the problem and to take the right measures to support VSH victims. Specific activities directly address a number of women, who are engaged both to share stories, and take part in pilot empowering programs. A creative awareness campaign on the effect of catcalling on women participation in sport is strategically developed to impact the larger group of males, coaches, sport professionals, managers, and fans. The main outcome can be resumed in the WHISTLE ADVISE SYSTEMs (WAS) established at 30+ sport clubs: here women can find proper support, to react and counter any VSH that could occur. WAS continue over the end of the project in collaboration with stakeholders and will contribute to ensure a more equal participation in sport and physical activity, in the long run

Topic addressed

As we have seen from interviews and from the collection of stories, catcalling is a phenomenon that extends to all segments of the female population who practice sports. Depending on the context, these practices can take place in different forms and modalities, but it is always an undue violation of the private space. This work package is mainly related to two specific objectives (SO2) which have to do with women's training



and reaction capacity, namely a) SO2 to empower women and help them to react adequately to VSH in a sport setting and when practicing outdoors, b) SO2 to provide the coaching communities (sports managers, coaches, practitioners, references, volunteers) with educational /self-learning resources to increase their capacity to detect verbal sexual harassment and to provide women with proper advice and support grassroots clubs to counter and prevent VSH.

WHISTLE WP3 is related to empower women in context of catcalling or verbal sexual harassment. It represents one of the cornerstones in which the OER foreseen in other WP tasks (T3.2 and T3.3) will be developed. The Position paper consists of a document providing the point of view and the understanding of partners and of stakeholder about the problem of catcalling in sport. It is elaborated after a consultation process developed in task 3.1. The D3.1 also includes recommendations for women organizations, for sport clubs and public authorities about a safe sport environment. Besides, the position paper is based mostly on project partners opinions about the project and their experience in developing project activities

Reflections on countries perception of gender verbal violence in sport

This section gathers recommendations and understandings based on their experience with how they conducted interviews and approached girls in conversations. Those are gathered both by partners and by local stakeholders and sport clubs, based not only on their experience with the WHISTLE project but also considering their daily routine. The process of gathering these inputs is a consultation between project partners and relevant stakeholders in the field of sport and women's association; we gathered their impressions and provided us a picture of state of art. Their opinions are based on creating a common document where the main principles of WHISTLE are declared and in which some key elements are provided to reduce the phenomenon of catcalling toward women that



practice sports. They provided their contributions based on experiences and collected their impressions. Once all contributions arrived, we took key details from them and produced a report based on a broad summary of their findings.

Bulgaria

Some findings arose while collecting stories, including the podcast with karate player Nadia Mladenova (under publication). For these issues in Bulgaria, is essential in understanding the behaviour of girls and women. This is not a case that Bulgaria is the only country in the EU which has not signed the Istanbul convention on domestic violence. This means that the legislation in Bulgaria does not predict sanctions for "minor" physical injury. Verbal violence is never or in very few cases reported, and, in both cases (minor physical injury and verbal violence), the police do not take action, General public opinion is not standing behind women victims of violence (common comments in social media: "it is the victim's fault", "women victims look for popularity", "if they do not like it, they should go and not make a fuss". On some news for reporting violence on women - 50% of the emoji reactions are "laughing faces").

These are among the reasons why in such an environment of relatively high tolerance of Bulgarian society to violence 1) girls and women are not willing to share stories, 2) when they decide to answer the Whistle questionnaire, they reply with brief answers, 3) when choose to share a story of violence, they do not take a firm position against the violent people and the passive witnesses of violent acts. They feel helpless because the police do not take action after a case of violence is reported (light injury, no injury, just thread..).

A podcast was realized with Nadia Mladenova, karate player from the Bulgarian National team, after she announced in an emotional message on her FB profile on 5 December 2022 the case of being a victim of physical abuse five years before (her team player an argument a blog she manages gave her a slap on the face in a pizzeria in the center of Sofia that broke her lips and went away, the post is public on FB [whistle.erasmus](https://www.whistle.erasmus.eu)).



Some comments from the podcast with Nadia Mladenova were explicative of the existing cultural problems (Ex: *"I do not say he is violent...he just lost control."* - *"After the incident, I felt abandoned by my team – they said, "come on, it's nothing serious, you know him, he is like this". I understand them."* - *"I know there are countries like Iran where women's rights are violated much more seriously, and we should not complain."* - *"I reported the case, but after five years, when I checked, the police told me they archived the case because the injury the man caused me was light ..."*)

Among those, we can also find some comments on her post of Nadia on Facebook as 1) an aggressive comment by a woman: *"do you know what it means to practice karate? Pumping up muscles in the photos brings you a lot of points in the rating, but if you can't predict that you will be punched in the face, then you are a round zero. Then don't cry that you are a victim. The best karate fighters never get into a fight because they anticipate and avoid it. You are not one of them."* - is a comment by a woman. Followed by different examples as another comment by a woman, a victim of violence, *"I filed a complaint at the police of a threat with a gun pointed at my head. I have had no response today, as the event is over six years old. People, in the same way, told me to keep quiet/not to bother, etc. Yes, no result, but I did what I could."*

Other interesting findings while the interviews:

- People from major cities like Sofia or Plovdiv are more familiar with these topics. Still, women in small towns or villages are uncomfortable sharing their opinions;
- Some of the girls even don't know what verbal sexual violence is (just one girl from a class of 30 responded when asked them what VSH is);
- When tried to go and talk about VSH with sports clubs (volleyball, rhythmic gymnastics, cycling), their trainers didn't even allow speakers to interact with the girls about it, saying that they were swamped and didn't have time, even the manager of the local Women Association didn't want to collaborate,
- Most of the young girls of the city of many interviews (Kazanlak) consider catcalling as something normal, and they don't know how they could react in a situation like this;



- Women over 40 are feeling freer to talk about it, but a considerable number of them cannot even remember a situation of VSH, which I think is very indicative that they consider this normal;

In all cases, it was easier to make them fill out a questionnaire, but it was much more challenging to speak about catcalling face to face (especially if the woman is not your friend);

In Bulgaria, all women's associations and NGOs are talking about domestic violence because there is a law protecting the victims, but VSH in society and social life is something nobody is talking about. The Istanbul Convention was not ratified by Bulgaria because a high percent of the society think that the Convention is defending people with different sexual orientations.

Greece

As for KEAN's side, ten face-to-face interviews and ten online surveys have been collected. The first and most evident finding is that face-to-face interviews allow the interviewees to feel more comfortable in sharing their stories: 8 women out of 10 of the participants shared stories in which they were either receiving verbal sexual harassment and/or catcalling or witnessing this happening to someone else, and only two said they have never received or witnessed such a treatment. In the online surveys, 7 participants out of 10 answered that they had never received VSH/catcalling and neither had seen such an episode. One of the reasons that we can consider is that the women interviewed in person already had a connection with the organization, being either a member of KEAN or a friend. Thus people weren't scared or reluctant to share their stories and felt comfortable talking about such a sensitive topic with a person they already knew; on the contrary, the online survey doesn't create a sense of safe atmosphere as it lacks human contact, and it feels very impersonal; thus people might not feel like sharing such delicate episodes of their lives.

Leaving aside the non-shared stories, the interviews and surveys collected show stalking, body-shaming, psychological pressure from male co-athletes, coaches and fan clubs and,



in some extreme cases, even physical harassment. Most of the time, these circumstances caused a shocking reaction; thus, women were unsure of how to deal with the issue. Most didn't share the episode with anyone; some found the courage to talk with family members, coaches, friends and/or co-athletes. Victims often change their sports outfits to avoid receiving specific comments and behaviors from the men's side. Ultimately, they had to quit their sport as the situation became unbearable.

Poland

During research, 15 personal stories were collected across Poland. Most of these stories were reached online, which presented some challenges due to the sensitive nature of the topic. We found that not everyone was comfortable sharing their experiences with strangers, and it was important to create a safe and supportive environment for participants to open up.

One of the key findings from the research was the significant regional differences in the experiences of individuals across Poland. Participants from urban areas tended to report more progressive attitudes towards gender and greater support for gender equality. In contrast, participants from rural areas reported more conservative attitudes and a stronger adherence to traditional gender roles. We also found that the experiences of women in Poland were shaped by a variety of factors, including economic status, educational background, and cultural norms. Women who lived in more urban areas tended to have greater access to education and employment opportunities, which allowed them to challenge traditional gender roles and pursue their goals. However, women from more rural areas often faced greater challenges in accessing education and employment, which limited their ability to challenge traditional gender norms.

Overall, our research suggests that gender roles and attitudes towards gender equality remain complex and nuanced in Poland. While progress has been made in recent years,



there is still work to be done to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their background or location, have equal access to opportunities and support.

Spain

The first element identified in conducting interviews in Spain is that some women would not identify situations of catcalling and VSH. In this manner, women reached through online surveys mostly answered "NO" when asked, "*Have you ever experienced or witnessed situations of catcalling or VSH?*" Only through personal interviews and examples from the interviewer these women would remember some situations where they felt unsafe, uncomfortable or threatened. All in all, the experience from the interactions with interviewees in Spain shows a lack of understanding, given that most women don't know what Verbal Sexual Harassment and Catcalling mean. The lack of information and definition of the term negatively affected the online survey results, as many women were confused about the actual definition of VSH in the interviews and needed some examples and information. Some of them said 'No, I haven't experienced VSH or catcalling' and then remembered several situations after the explanation, which makes us think that this was probably the reason why some people answered with a "no" in the survey, although the phenomenon was described at the beginning of the survey.

In the one on one interviews most women were very happy to finally be able to share their experiences and voice their opinions. Most expressed opinions such as "*finally we address this topic*". Most of them could choose one story from the many experiences they had. Some women who answered "no" also declared they have been subject to some of these behaviours, "*but not in a sports environment or situation*".

Most of the women who are open to talk about these situations are women under the age of 35 or younger. In contrast, women over 35 are usually more inclined to accept these situations as "*normal behaviour in men*" rather than calling it harassment. Another barrier when interviewing women of all ages is the political barrier. Some women will decline the interview as they will describe it as "*political propaganda*". So some women less in line with the ideas of certain political parties will refuse to talk about their experiences and



claim that catcalling and VSH “don’t exist” as it doesn’t make anyone uncomfortable, it’s not badly intended or it simply never happened to them.

Turkey

In the course of face-to-face interviews, girls felt more comfortable and gave more straightforward answers. But the situation is different for online forms. A total of 18 people responded from the Google form. The responses were generally in the form of short answers. Also, they still need to share their contact information on Google Forms. Only a few people shared their contact information. We believe this is due to constant social pressure on the girls here, and they were afraid, they hesitated to answer the questions fully.

One more element caught our eye, especially as we went from the east to the west of the country; the rate of answering the questions varies based on geographical location. Generally, people from the urban side, especially in the west, are more comfortable raising their voices and giving details about their situation than peers on the eastern side of Turkey. This latter lives in less developed context, for the most part in the countryside, with less possibility to develop skills and find high qualified jobs and opportunities. We may state that people who feel less gender pressure on them in western provinces can tell stories more comfortably, while the situation is not the same for the eastern provinces.



Recommendations

Those recommendations are based on main findings and includes also recommendations for women organizations, for sport clubs and public authorities about a safety sport environment.

As from all partners' contributions, a series of common points can be tracked as follow. Concerning interviews, most women show several similarities:

1. *Outfit*; majority of athletes underline constant hesitation and worrying about sports outfit, referring to the inability to wear whatever they feel more comfortable with in order not to be a target for harassment;
2. *Fear*; most of them are afraid something bad could happen one day, and some declared they felt in danger in some episodes;
3. *Lack of support* in terms of wide acceptance of the problem as something normal or something they just have to "put up with".
4. *Impact in their life*; most of them agree this affects their life when doing physical activity and some even refer to abandonment of an activity to avoid these situations.
5. General feeling of the *need to speak up and talk about these situations*. Some even agree we should all confront the harasser and make him understand that these sorts of behaviors make all women uncomfortable.

In addition, some key finding impact as well the perception of the issues:

Geographical: generally, people from urban sides, are more comfortable raising their voices and giving details about their situation than peers on the rural areas. This latter lives in less developed context, for the most in countryside, with less possibility to develop skills and find high qualified jobs and opportunities. We may state that people who feel less gender pressure on them in some provinces can tell stories more comfortably, while the situation is not the same for ones which came from countries or less developed regions.

Based on sport: we have examined that some sports, rather than others tend to create more discomfort than others. We are talking about individual sports, such as jogging or outdoor activities, in which girls feel less defended by their "group, " which facilitates a passive acceptance of the phenomenon.

Cultural: This is perhaps the most cultural explanation and the most difficult to oppose, as it starts from accepting a position of the supremacy of the man who can afford attitudes of a particular type towards the woman. This ranges from simple comments to more inappropriate behaviors. This phenomenon follows transversal lines of intervention, i.e. it is the reality in all the contexts analyzed regardless of educational qualifications, training, work, and other indicators.

Based on those key factors, main recommendations are as follows:

- Writing on a board the main emergency number girls can call in case of emergency, both national and European,
- Inside sport club organizing a weekly workshop and brainstorming in which girls can gather their impressions about similar situations that happened and, in case, confront themselves with their peers and be ready to react;
- Reinforcing girls autonomy in terms of self acceptance and belief of practicing sport and be what they want;
- Keep promoting activities of raising awareness inside sport centers, including raise awareness of the phenomenon and inviting guests which can speak about the issue;
- Inviting testimonials which can provide their experience as an example on how to deal with certain circumstances;
- Know which are the official reference centers to rely on in the various countries, by reporting in each center their name, reference, address and email

The position paper is a document that will be shared and signed by project stakeholders. It is in fact important that the basic rules and values within which they operate are well



defined. The document will be signed by many more stakeholders from the various local realities, to create a network of awareness and to make further contributions to its improvement.



Template



Association Logo

Whistle: *"Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment: LET's stop CATCALLING in sport"*

The undersigned
member of the association/sports club/federation
on behalf of the responsible/director/president
acknowledge the importance to end sexual verbal harassment and catcalling in sport, read the WPP and its recommendations, declare the interest of the organization to follow the project whistle and to be interested in results for possible replication, furthermore pledge for a more equal and respectful environment in sport.

Date and place:

Name of the signatory organization:

Signature



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