

STAY!

Decreasing teenage dropout in sport

FOCUS GROUPS REPORT

IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND NEEDS CONCERNING DROPOUT IN SPORT ORGANISATIONS



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dropout in sport*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

The issue of youth drop-out from sports is a pressing concern that requires a multifaceted approach to address effectively. The project "STAY!" aims to tackle this problem by strengthening the capacity of coaches and sport associations, developing comprehensive policies, and offering engaging opportunities for youth.

Youth drop-out from sports is a significant issue affecting the development and well-being of young athletes. Many factors contribute to this problem, including social pressures, lack of resources, and inadequate support from sport organisations. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing effective strategies to keep youth engaged in sports. To address this, focus groups were conducted with sport organisation officials, including coaches, managers, and other professionals who work directly with youth. These focus groups aimed to gather detailed insights into the reasons behind youth drop-out, the role of sport organisations in preventing it, and the specific needs and challenges faced by sport staff.

1.2. Objectives

The primary objectives of the focus groups were:

- 1. Identify Common Reasons for Drop-Out:** To understand the most common factors that lead to youth dropping out of sports, from both the perspective of the youth and the sport professionals.
- 2. Evaluate the Role of Sport Organisations:** To assess how sport organisations currently address the issue of drop-out and what more can be done to prevent it.
- 3. Determine Required Skills and Knowledge:** To identify the specific skills and knowledge that sport staff need to effectively reduce drop-out rates.
- 4. Develop Effective Strategies:** To gather suggestions and develop strategies that sport organisations and staff can implement to keep youth engaged in sports.
- 5. Address Challenges:** To understand the challenges sport organisations face in preventing drop-out and to explore potential solutions.

These objectives guided the discussions and ensured that the focus groups provided actionable insights that can be used to develop training materials, policies, and programs aimed at reducing youth drop-out in sports.

1.3. Research Questions

The focus group research aimed at youth asked only: “What are the reasons why youth drop out of sport?”

The focus group research aimed to gather insights from experts concentrated on the following key questions:

1. What are the most common reasons why youth drop out of sport?
2. What role do sport organisations play in preventing drop-out?
3. What skills and knowledge do sport staff need to reduce drop-out?
4. What are some specific strategies that sport organisations and staff can use to reduce drop-out? What kind of skills and knowledge are required to implement these strategies?
5. What are some of the challenges of preventing drop-out, and how can these challenges be addressed?

Additional questions to be explored included:

1. What are the differences in drop-out rates between boys and girls?
2. What are the differences in drop-out rates between different sports?
3. What are the differences in drop-out rates between different socioeconomic groups?
4. What are the long-term consequences of dropping out of sport?
5. What are the benefits of staying involved in sport?

These questions guided the focus group discussions, helping to uncover the underlying factors contributing to youth drop-out in sports and identify effective strategies to address this issue. The findings will inform the development of the E-learning platform, policies, and recommendations for sport organisations and staff.



2. Methodology

2.1. Participant Selection

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of youth drop-out in sports, participants were carefully selected based on specific criteria. The primary objective was to include a diverse range of perspectives from both youth participants and sport professionals.

Participants were chosen from various sports organisations across different regions, including Bayer Leverkusen in Germany, EMCA conducted its research in Rotterdam, Netherlands, Lazio in Italy, SUS in Slovenia, Levski in Bulgaria, and HAŠK Mladost in Croatia.

Youth Participants:

The demographic profile of the participants was diverse, representing a wide spectrum of backgrounds to provide a holistic view of youth drop-out in sports.

Selection criteria for youth included:

1. **Age Range:** Youth participants aged between 10-18 years to capture experiences from childhood through late adolescence.
2. **Gender Representation:** Both boys and girls were included to explore gender-specific drop-out reasons and to ensure balanced gender representation.
3. **Sport Type:** Participants involved in both team sports (e.g. soccer, basketball, water polo, field hockey) and individual sports (e.g. gymnastics, athletics, rowing, swimming) to understand sport-specific factors.
4. **Socioeconomic Background:** Youth from varied socioeconomic backgrounds were included to assess the impact of financial constraints on sports participation.

Sport Professionals:

Sport professionals involved in the focus groups were selected based on their roles within their organisations, ensuring insights from coaches, administrators, and club managers.

- **Roles:** Coaches, team managers, club administrators, and sport psychologists were selected to provide a comprehensive view of the organisational perspective on youth drop-out.
- **Experience:** Professionals with varying years of experience in the sports industry, ensuring a mix of seasoned insights and fresh perspectives.

By selecting participants through these criteria, the study aimed to capture a broad and inclusive range of experiences and viewpoints regarding youth sports drop-out.



2.2. Discussion Guide

A document was created to serve as the discussion guide for the focus groups being conducted as part of the STAY Project. The guide outlined the scope, procedure, and key topics for the focus groups, which aimed to gather insights from sport professionals on the reasons behind youth drop-out from sports, the role of sport organisations in preventing drop-out, and the necessary skills and knowledge for sport staff to reduce drop-out rates. The information collected through these focus groups helps in informing the development of resources and strategies to address this critical issue.

2.3. Data Collection

The data from youth was collected through individual interviews and was used as input for conducting the focus groups.

The data collection process for the focus groups varied depending on the location and circumstances in each of the partner countries. A total of six focus groups were organised, with some held online and others conducted in person. For those conducted online, platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom were used to facilitate the discussions. In-person focus groups were held at designated venues within each partner country.

The approach to recording the sessions also varied. Some of the focus groups were audio recorded to ensure accurate capture of the discussions, while others were not recorded due to technical or privacy considerations. Regardless of the recording status, all focus group leaders meticulously took detailed notes throughout the sessions. These notes were then used to compile comprehensive focus group reports, capturing the key findings and insights discussed by the participants.

3. Findings and Analysis

3.1. Common Reasons for Youth Drop-Out from Sport Data Collection

Organisational and Structural Issues

- **Disorganisation within Sports Clubs:** Participants noted that disorganised sports clubs, where lessons are frequently canceled, contribute significantly to youth dropping out.
 - *"Sports clubs are often too disorganised. Lessons are cancelled frequently."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- **Inadequate Facilities and Scheduling Conflicts:** The lack of suitable sports offers, mismatched times, and insufficient sports facilities in schools were commonly mentioned.
 - *"Schools aren't equipped with sports facilities."* (Lazio)
 - *"No suitable offers, not many people of the same age."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- **Destroyed competition:** pooling talent in financially stronger clubs weakening the competition. Athletes dropping out because of the non-competitiveness of their team or struggle with inter club competition and leave due to increased pressure.
 - *"Stronger clubs invite 5-7 players from each birth year, leaving smaller teams non-competitive."* (SUS)
 - *"Talented girls drop out because they aren't used to internal competition within the team."* (SUS)

Personal and Social Factors

- **Time Management and Academic Pressure:** Balancing sports with academic demands and other interests was a significant reason for dropout.
 - *"Cannot organise their time between studies & sport."* (Lazio)
 - *"More pressure/time at school, longer school hours."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- **Changing Interests:** As youths grow older, their interests often change, leading them to prioritize new hobbies, relationships, or jobs over sports.
 - *"Getting different kinds of interests at a certain age, like a boyfriend/girlfriend or a job."* (EMCA)
 - *"They have other interests and priorities in life."* (Levski)

Coaching and Training Issues

- **Quality of Coaching:** Poorly qualified trainers and high expectations from coaches were frequently cited as reasons for dropout.
 - *"Coaches expect too much too soon."* (Lazio)
 - *"Trainer not qualified; people don't get on."* (Bayer Leverkusen)



- **Lack of Enjoyment and Motivation:** When sports stop being fun and become more about performance, youths often lose interest.
 - *"Too much pressure, not a lot of fun."* (Lazio)
 - *"Lose enjoyment of their sport, pressure to perform."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
 - *"Fear of failure and too high expectations regarding performance and results"* (SUS)

Financial and Logistical Barriers

- **Cost of Participation:** Financial constraints were a significant barrier for many families.
 - *"The financial burden of participating in sports—such as equipment, travel, and fees—can be a barrier."* (HAŠK Mladost)
 - *"Financial problem /wrestling/."* (Levski)
- **Travel and Accessibility:** The distance to sports facilities and the cost of travel also deterred participation.
 - *"Travel distances for the person/team for playing matches."* (EMCA)

Participant Insights

- A participant from **EMCA** highlighted the complexity of the issue by stating, *"There are many different reasons why youth drop out of sport depending on the age, kind of sport, background, household, etc."*
- A member of **Lazio's** focus group emphasized the impact of academic pressure, noting, *"Schools put a lot of pressure and homework on students."*
- From **HAŠK Mladost**, a participant pointed out the crucial role of family dynamics, *"Family support and involvement play a key role. If sports become a point of conflict, it can influence a young person's decision to quit."*
- **SUS** focus group member mentioned: *"Slovenia is a small country, so it is easy to destroy competition by inviting 5-7 players from each birth year. Financially stronger clubs invite almost all talented athletes at relatively young age to play for them. Athletes from the previous club drop out because their team is not competitive anymore without the leader who left."*

Differences and Commonalities

- **Commonalities:** Across different focus groups, common reasons for dropping out included time management issues, changing interests, and the financial burden of sports participation. These factors were consistently observed irrespective of the country or specific sport.



- **Differences:** There were some variations in reasons based on geographic and socioeconomic contexts. For instance, in Rotterdam, the focus was more on personal interests and relationships, while in Lazio and Levski, academic pressure and lack of sports facilities were more prominent. Financial constraints were a more significant factor in regions with a lower socioeconomic status.

These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of youth drop-out from sports, highlighting the need for tailored interventions that address both common and unique challenges faced by young athletes in different contexts.

3.2. Role of Sport Organisations in Preventing Drop-Out

Structured Programs and Fixed Schedules

Sport organisations play a crucial role by offering structured programs and fixed schedules, which help in maintaining consistency and routine for young athletes.

- *"As soon as you have a fixed date, you are more likely to go to the gym than if you have to motivate yourself every time."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"Sport organisations often offer well-structured development programs that cater to different age groups and skill levels."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Social and Community Aspects

Creating a social and supportive community is essential. Regular times, fixed groups, and social aspects like friendships help keep young people engaged.

- *"The community keeps some people doing sport, regular times, and fixed groups (friends)."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"Social aspect (friends etc.)."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"Team building and working on relationships (among the athletes and athlete coach) as well as Involving parents to club activities – building community."* (SUS)

Adaptability and Customization

Flexibility and customization in offerings are key to retaining youth in sports. This includes adapting programs to meet the evolving interests and needs of young athletes.

- *"Through customization, adapted offerings and flexibility the youth can be triggered to play sport longer."* (EMCA)
- *"A good and broad range of sports can prevent people from dropping out. You should also adapt to the generation and try to pick people up personally."* (Bayer Leverkusen)



Promotional Efforts and Community Engagement

Promotional activities and community engagement play a significant role. Organisations often reach out to schools and local communities to promote their programs and engage potential participants.

- *"From a promotional perspective, they try to reach out to different schools to promote their organisation and sport."* (Lazio)
- *"Engaging with the local community through events, tournaments, and outreach programs helps foster a sense of belonging and support."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Supportive Coaching and Training

Effective and supportive coaching is critical. Coaches who use positive reinforcement, understand developmental needs, and create an enjoyable environment help in retaining young athletes.

- *"Effective coaching is key to keeping young athletes engaged. Sport organisations should invest in training for coaches to ensure they use positive reinforcement, understand developmental needs, and create an enjoyable environment for young players."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Conversations with children and parents; A lighter training program."* (Levski)
- *"Having female coaches and mentors can inspire young female athletes to stay engaged in sports. They serve as role models and can relate to the unique challenges that female athletes may face, offering guidance and support. "* (SUS)

Financial and Logistical Support

Providing financial support, equipment assistance, and ensuring accessibility are important in reducing barriers to participation.

- *"Working to make sports more accessible by providing financial support or scholarships, offering equipment assistance."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Focus on Enjoyment and Participation

Emphasizing fun and participation over competition helps maintain enthusiasm and interest in sports.

- *"Trying to emphasize enjoying the sport rather than just competition."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"There are entertainment groups offering participation in free games - football."* (Levski)

Participant Insights

- A participant from **EMCA**, highlighted the importance of flexibility: *"Organisations must be alert on signals of the youth which could imply youngsters do not enjoy playing the sport anymore."*
- From **Bayer Leverkusen**, a participant noted the value of social connections: *"The community keeps some people doing sport, regular times, and fixed groups (friends)."*



- A participant from **HAŠK Mladost** emphasized the importance of development programs: *"Sport organisations should offer well-structured development programs that cater to different age groups and skill levels."*
- A member of the **SUS** focus group mentioned: *"Shifting the focus from solely winning to personal development, fun, and enjoyment can help keep female athletes engaged in sports over the long term. "*

Differences and Commonalities

- **Commonalities:** Across different focus groups, common strategies for preventing drop-out included structured programs, supportive coaching, and promoting enjoyment and participation. The role of social connections and community engagement was universally acknowledged as crucial.
- **Differences:** There were variations in the specific approaches and challenges faced by organisations in different regions. For instance, financial constraints were more prominent in private organisations (Lazio), whereas flexibility in program offerings was emphasized more in Rotterdam (EMCA). In Levski and HAŠK Mladost, the inclusion of drop-out youth in training programs for coaches or as volunteers was a good approach.

These findings highlight the multifaceted role of sport organisations in preventing youth drop-out by addressing both structural and personal factors, emphasizing the importance of adaptability, support, and community engagement.

3.3. Essential Skills and Knowledge for Sport Staff to Reduce Drop-Out

Understanding and Adapting to Trends

Sport staff need to stay current with trends in youth interests and sports to keep young athletes engaged. This includes introducing new sports and adapting training programs to fit the evolving preferences of young athletes.

- *"Go with the trend (e.g., new sports)."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"Maybe find another alternative, let the person think again why they started."* (Bayer Leverkusen)

Understanding Gender-Specific Issues

Sport staff must be knowledgeable about gender-specific challenges faced by female athletes, such as menstruation, body image, and puberty. Also they should understand that female athletes often face societal pressures related to gender stereotypes and family expectations.

- *"Coaches should understand how body image and puberty as well as societal expectations affect girls' participation"* (SUS)



Effective Communication and Listening

Effective communication is critical for sport staff, including clear instruction, active listening, and understanding the needs and concerns of young athletes.

- *"Clearly conveying instructions, feedback, and encouragement in a way that motivates and engages young athletes."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Actively listening to athletes' concerns and feedback to address issues proactively."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Being good listeners."* (EMCA)

Motivation and Empathy

Empathy, patience, and understanding what motivates young athletes are vital. Sport staff need to balance pushing athletes to excel while maintaining a fun and supportive environment.

- *"Empathy and attentiveness are important attributes. In addition, a trainer should try to stimulate the enthusiasm of the participants."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"They need to understand how to motivate children to play a sport and to be part of a team."* (Lazio)
- *"Sports staff must possess patience."* (Lazio)
- *"Have patience."* (Levski)

Psychological and Behavioural Management

Sport staff should have skills in managing behavior, resolving conflicts, and fostering mental resilience among young athletes.

- *"Understanding what motivates young athletes and how to foster this motivation rather than focusing solely on rewards."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Skills to manage conflicts between athletes or between athletes and coaches in a constructive manner."* (SUS)

Health and Safety Knowledge

Knowledge of injury prevention, management, and basic sports nutrition is crucial for ensuring the well-being of young athletes.

- *"Knowing of how to prevent injuries, proper warm-up and cool-down techniques, and how to manage minor injuries."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Providing access to medical professionals and having clear protocols for dealing with injuries helps ensure young athletes are not deterred by health issues."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Creativity and Innovation

Being creative in training methods and program offerings helps keep sports engaging and enjoyable for youth.

- *"Bring in something new."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"Being creative persons."* (EMCA)



Participant Insights

- A participant from **Bayer Leverkusen** emphasized the need for trainers to keep sessions engaging and look forward to: *"Empathy and attentiveness are important attributes. In addition, a trainer should try to stimulate the enthusiasm of the participants and make the visit to the sports program something to look forward to."*
- From **EMCA** a participant highlighted the importance of understanding and responding to youth needs: *"With good analysing skills, being good listeners, being creative persons, asking the right questions, understanding what's going on in the heads of young people."*
- A participant from **Lazio** noted the delicate balance in coaching: *"They need to know when to push and especially when not to push a child in sport."*
- **SUS** focus group gave insight into the importance of acknowledging the gender differences: *"Coaches need to be aware of the gender-specific and also family pressures and societal expectations on female athletes. Understanding the impact of gender stereotypes can help girls stay in sports longer. Support during menstruation and puberty can prevent drop-out."*

Differences and Commonalities

- **Commonalities:** Across different focus groups, the emphasis on effective communication, empathy, and motivation techniques was consistent. The need for creativity and understanding the evolving interests of young athletes was also a common theme.
- **Differences:** There were variations in the specific areas of focus for sport staff. For instance, the focus on health and safety knowledge was more prominent in HAŠK Mladost, while Levski emphasized the importance of professional qualifications and psychological preparation. EMCA highlighted the importance of understanding youth psychology and being creative in approach. SUS called attention to the importance of gender specific differences and expectations.

These findings underscore the multifaceted role of sport staff in reducing youth drop-out by integrating empathy, effective communication, motivation, health and safety knowledge, and creativity into their coaching practices.

3.4. Specific Strategies to Reduce Drop-Out

Engaging Program Design

Sport organisations should design progressive and age-appropriate programs that keep young athletes engaged and motivated. This involves incorporating fun activities and varied drills to maintain interest and excitement.

- *"Create training programs that gradually increase in intensity and complexity to match the athletes' development."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Incorporate games, varied drills, and activities to keep training enjoyable."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Design training programs that emphasize enjoyment and skill development over competition."* (SUS)

Financial and Logistical Support

Providing financial aid, scholarships, and organising transportation can make sports more accessible to all youth, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- *"They could 'gift' seasonal sports passes to children who are not financially well off."* (Lazio)
- *"Host events to raise money for those in need."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Positive Coaching Environment

Creating a supportive and encouraging environment through positive reinforcement and constructive feedback can help retain young athletes.

- *"Use praise and constructive feedback to motivate and encourage athletes."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Create an environment where athletes feel valued and supported."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Enhanced Communication

Regular updates, parent workshops, and open lines of communication can help build strong relationships and ensure everyone involved is informed and engaged.

- *"Provide frequent updates about progress, events, and changes."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Organise workshops to educate parents on how to support their child's sports experience."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Health and Safety

Educating athletes on injury prevention and providing access to medical support can reduce the risk of drop-out due to injuries.

- *"Teach proper warm-up, cool-down, and injury prevention techniques."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Ensure athletes have access to medical professionals and proper treatment for injuries."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Social Interaction

Organising team-building activities and social events can foster a sense of community and belonging, making sports more enjoyable.

- *"Organise activities that build team spirit (pancake party)."* (SUS)
- *"Plan events that allow athletes to socialize outside of training."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Include parents in club activities and build a community"* (SUS)



Feedback and Continuous Improvement

Regular feedback mechanisms can help sport organisations understand the needs and concerns of athletes, allowing them to make necessary adjustments to their programs.

- *"Use surveys and feedback sessions to gather input from athletes, parents, and coaches."* (EMCA)
- *"Make necessary adjustments to training programs based on feedback."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Participant Insights

- **Bayer Leverkusen** emphasized long-term commitment and engagement through various offers: *"Annual contract (longer commitment), special offers for young people, cheaper prices, trend sports, also offers besides sports (barbecue evenings, watching soccer together, youth club with regular activities)."*
- **EMCA** highlighted the importance of understanding youth psychology: *"Good analysing skills, being good listeners, being creative persons, asking the right questions, understanding what's going on in the heads of young people."*
- Lazio pointed out financial and logistical support: *"Gifting seasonal sports passes to children who are not financially well off, creating collaborations with schools, organising transport to the clubs after school."*
- **Levski** focused on staff training and inclusive programs: *"Staff training on how to prevent drop-out, improving sports material base, attracting motivator coaches, organising entertaining sports games and weekend camps for children."*
- **SUS** stressed that knowledgeable club management is needed *"First of all, you need knowledge about management of a sport club. And secondly you need to understand specifics of drop out of sport. Competent leaders are needed and people with good communication and organisational skills to establish cooperation with stakeholders. "*

Differences and Commonalities

- **Commonalities:** Across all focus groups, there was a strong emphasis on the importance of financial support, effective communication, and creating a positive, engaging environment. The need for understanding youth psychology and maintaining regular feedback mechanisms was also widely recognized.
- **Differences:** There were variations in specific strategies and areas of focus. For instance, HAŠK Mladost emphasized structured development programs and health safety, while Levski focused more on physical infrastructure and entertaining activities. Lazio stressed the importance of financial aid and logistical support, reflecting different regional priorities and challenges and SUS concentrated on the need for quality management.

These findings highlight the multifaceted approach required to reduce youth drop-out in sports, involving financial support, effective communication, positive coaching, health and safety, social interaction, and continuous feedback and improvement.

3.5. Challenges of preventing drop-out

Personal Circumstances

One of the main challenges in preventing drop-out is addressing personal circumstances that are beyond the control of sport organisations.

- *"Personal circumstances of members usually cannot be changed/influenced."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"You never know what is going on in the participants' private lives and can only recognize their motivation for the sport to a certain extent."* (Bayer Leverkusen)

Social Integration

Lack of friends in the group and social bonds can lead to disengagement. Activities to foster group cohesion and connection are necessary.

- *"No friends in the group (suggested solution: activities to connect the group)."* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"Difficulty in forming social bonds within the team can lead to dropping out."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Organisational and Logistical Challenges

Volunteer and Staff Limitations

Sports organisations often struggle with a limited number of volunteers and staff, leading to inadequate monitoring of potential drop-out signals.

- *"Most of the sports clubs have a limited amount of volunteers."* (EMCA)
- *"Many signals are not seen of children dropping out of the club."* (EMCA)
- *"A quality coach has very versatile skills additional to sport specific knowledge, which is not very common and not easy to find. "* (SUS)

Financial Constraints

The cost of participation can be a significant barrier, especially for families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

- *"Financial circumstances – gift vouchers."* (Lazio)
- *"Equipment, travel, and participation fees can be expensive."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Time Management and Academic Pressure

Balancing academic demands with sports participation is a common challenge that requires flexible scheduling and academic support.



- *"Time constraints – organise transport."* (Lazio)
- *"Balancing school and training."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Psychological and Health Challenges

Burnout and Overtraining

Intense training and high expectations can lead to burnout and loss of interest in sports.

- *"Too much pressure – coach psychological courses."* (Lazio)
- *"Excessive pressure and physical and mental exhaustion."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Injury Management

Proper management of injuries and providing access to medical support is crucial to keep young athletes engaged.

- *"Early injuries – medical insurance."* (Lazio)
- *"Injury prevention programs and health education."* (HAŠK Mladost)

Participant Insights

- **Bayer Leverkusen** highlighted the importance of social integration and flexibility: *"Activities to connect the group, offering other attractive options and prospects within the club."*
- **EMCA**, emphasized the need for dedicated staff to monitor member satisfaction and introduce new offerings: *"A person in a sports organisation mainly focused on gathering information on the pleasure every member has."*
- **Lazio** suggested financial aid, collaboration with schools, and psychological training for coaches: *"Gift vouchers, organise transport, coach psychological courses."*

Levski focused on family programs and improving communication: *"Programs for the whole family, improving communication - benefits of sports."*

- **HAŠK Mladost** provided comprehensive strategies across various challenges, including financial support, flexible scheduling, and burnout prevention: *"Scholarships and grants, flexible scheduling, balanced training regimens."*
- **SUS** highlighted the importance of coaches education and motivation: *"A lot of coaches have another primary employment, they might lack time for additional educational events. And sometimes they are not motivated to participate in additional non-formal education. It takes great communication and motivational skills to motivate them to understand the need for education and participate. "*

Differences and Commonalities

- **Commonalities:** Across all focus groups, the necessity of financial support, flexible scheduling, and addressing personal circumstances were common themes. The importance of understanding and addressing psychological aspects, such as motivation and burnout, was also widely recognized.

- **Differences:**

- **Bayer Leverkusen** and **EMCA** highlighted the need for better social integration and monitoring member satisfaction, respectively.
- **Lazio** focused more on practical solutions like financial aid and transportation.
- **Levski** emphasized family involvement and communication improvement.
- **HAŠK Mladost** provided detailed strategies covering a broad spectrum of challenges, including academic support and injury management.
- **SUS** highlighted the role and influence of coaches.

These findings underscore the multifaceted approach needed to effectively prevent youth drop-out in sports. By addressing personal, social, organisational, logistical, psychological, and health-related challenges, sport organisations can create a more supportive and engaging environment that encourages long-term participation.

3.6. Differences in Drop-out Rates

Gender Differences

Higher Drop-out Among Girls

Girls tend to have higher drop-out rates compared to boys, often influenced by social factors and team dynamics.

- *"Girls are likely to stop playing sport at an earlier age than boys."* (EMCA)
- *"84.7% of all girls in Italy tend to drop out of sport before reaching 18 years old."* (Lazio)

Boys vs. Girls in Specific Sports

Drop-out rates vary significantly across different sports for both boys and girls.

- *"Volleyball - girls; Rhythmic gymnastics - girls; Football - Boys; Tennis - both; Boxing - boys; Athletics - girls; Basketball - girls; Wrestling - Boys."* (Levski)

Consistency Among Female Participants

Once girls join a club, they are more likely to stay compared to boys.

- *"Once a female person has joined the club, she is more likely to stay in the club than a male person."* (Bayer Leverkusen)

Social and community influences

Lack of female role models – coaches, mentors, athletes. Girls face more social pressures that can discourage sports participation, while boys experience more support.

- *"Social pressures and competing demands such as academic pressures, family responsibilities, and social life, which can lead them to prioritize other activities over sports. Boys are more likely to experience a support from family, friends and even schoolteachers."* (SUS)



Differences in Drop-out Rates Across Sports

Team vs. Individual Sports

Team dynamics and social interactions play a crucial role in drop-out rates for team sports.

- *"In team sports, social interaction and team dynamics can have an influence, while this is not the case with individual athletes."* (EMCA)

Popular vs. Niche Sports

Major sports with greater media attention tend to have higher drop-out rates.

- *"Basketball or volleyball, which also receive greater media attention, have the most members. As a result, the drop-out rate is also a little higher there."* (Bayer Leverkusen)

Specifics of certain sports

Certain sports might have higher dropout rates because of their specifics:

- *"Higher drop out in contact sports as they are more of aggressive nature; sports that require early specialization and intense training from an early age, such as gymnastics and figure skating, Sports that involve high aesthetic demands, and a significant focus on body image, like gymnastics and dance as well as sports where categories are levelled according to weight. "* (SUS)

Specific Sports Data

Drop-out rates vary widely by sport, reflecting different levels of engagement and challenges.

- *"Soccer: M – 58.4%; W – 2.8%; Gymnastics: M – 9.8%; W – 25.10%; Water sports: M – 18.9%; W – 23.20%."* (Lazio)

Socioeconomic Factors in Drop-out Rates

Financial Constraints

Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to participate in sports due to financial barriers.

- *"58.4% of children are unable to practice sport due to their economic conditions and their impossibility to pay for extra scholastic sport activities."* (Lazio)
- *"Children from socially weak families are more motivated to succeed, but they are hindered by the lack of financial resources of the families."* (Levski)
- *"Usually young athletes from financially weak families start working in adolescence to help support the family, consequently they lack time to participate in sports. "* (SUS)

Cultural Influences

Cultural factors also impact drop-out rates, particularly among certain communities.

- *"Children from Roma families begin to drop out of sports after the age of 15, due to cultural peculiarities (starting a family)."* (Levski)

Class Disparities

There is a tendency for higher sports participation among middle and upper social classes.

- *"More young people from the middle and upper social classes to be involved in sports clubs compared to those from the lower social classes."* (Bayer Leverkusen)

Participant Insights

- **Bayer Leverkusen** highlighted the importance of providing a supportive environment for girls once they join, noting: *"She is more likely to stay in the club than a male person."*
- **EMCA** emphasized the role of team dynamics in drop-out rates for girls: *"Girls are likely to stop playing sport at an earlier age than boys. Furthermore, the reason for dropping out with girls is when team members are also dropping out."*
- **Lazio** provided detailed statistics on drop-out rates, revealing a higher percentage among girls and the impact of financial constraints: *"84.7% of all girls in Italy tend to drop out of sport before reaching 18 years old."*
- **Levski** discussed the influence of economic resources and cultural factors on drop-out rates: *"Children from socially weak families are more motivated to succeed, but they are hindered by the lack of financial resources."*
- **SUS** concentrated a lot on differences between genders and social norms: *"Girls face more social pressures that can discourage sports participation. These include societal expectations, peer pressure, and the stigma that sports are more "masculine" activities. "*

Differences and Commonalities

- **Commonalities:**
 - All focus groups recognized the higher drop-out rates among girls and identified financial constraints as a significant barrier.
 - The influence of team dynamics and social factors was consistently noted, particularly in team sports.
 - There was a shared understanding of the higher drop-out rates in major sports with greater media attention.
- **Differences:**
 - **Bayer Leverkusen** and **Lazio** provided specific percentages and trends, while **EMCA** focused more on qualitative aspects like team dynamics.
 - **SUS** mentioned mostly the gender specifics of drop-out in term of social influences.
 - **Levski** highlighted cultural factors and specific sports with higher drop-out rates, offering a more detailed breakdown by sport.



- **Lazio** emphasized financial constraints and provided detailed statistics on the impact of socioeconomic status on drop-out rates, whereas **Bayer Leverkusen** noted general trends without specific figures in this.

These findings highlight the complex interplay of gender, sport type, and socioeconomic factors in influencing youth sports drop-out rates. Addressing these challenges requires targeted strategies that consider the unique needs and circumstances of different groups.

3.7. Consequences for Individuals Dropping Out

Health Issues

Dropping out of sports has significant negative health consequences, leading to both physical and mental health problems.

- *"Health issues"* (EMCA)
- *"Individuals may experience a decline in cardiovascular fitness, and long-term inactivity can increase the risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease, and other health problems."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Obesity"* (Lazio)
- *"Deterioration of health"* (Levski)
- *"They may experience a decline in physical fitness and their body becoming less functional overall. "* (SUS)

Social Issues

Social consequences include reduced social interaction, isolation, and loss of important social skills such as teamwork and leadership.

- *"Lack of social contacts"* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"Sports often provide valuable social connections and a sense of community. Dropping out can lead to decreased social interaction and feelings of isolation."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Social isolation, and an inability to relate to others"* (Lazio)
- *"Loss of friends can lead to loneliness and social isolation"* (SUS).

Personal Development

The cessation of sports activities negatively impacts personal development, causing a lack of structure, goals, and the opportunity to develop essential life skills.

- *"Lack of structures and goals"* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"Sports can teach discipline, goal setting, and resilience. Without these experiences, individuals may miss out on important personal development opportunities."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Lack of skills such as leadership or teamwork."* (Lazio)



- *"Missing the opportunity to develop strong communication and leadership skills, team work and becoming a responsible adult" (SUS).*

Mental Health

Sports participation provides significant mental health benefits, and dropping out can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem.

- *"Sports often provides an outlet for stress. Dropping out can lead to increased stress and decreased overall mental well-being." (HAŠK Mladost)*
- *"The absence of sports participation can impact self-esteem and confidence." (HAŠK Mladost)*
- *"Anxiety / fear / of the unknown - whether it will be realized in life." (Levski)*
- *"Unhappiness and self resent." (Lazio)*

3.8. Consequences of Dropping Out for Sport Organisations

Financial Impact

High dropout rates lead to significant financial repercussions for sports organisations, including reduced revenue and the loss of sponsorship and media interest.

- *"Lack of income, because of the members leaving the club" (Bayer Leverkusen)*
- *"Lower participation rates can lead to reduced funds from fees, memberships, and sponsorships." (HAŠK Mladost)*
- *"Loss of resource - human and financial" (Levski)*

Operational Challenges

Organisations face operational difficulties such as forming teams, maintaining program viability, and reallocating resources to address retention issues.

- *"High drop-out rates can affect the viability of programs, leading to potential cancellations or the need for restructuring." (HAŠK Mladost)*
- *"Organisations may have additional costs for recruitment and retention strategies to counteract drop-out rates." (HAŠK Mladost)*
- *"A smaller club with a lot of drop outs will have difficulties forming teams or have a team at all the different ages." (EMCA)*

Reputation and Community Impact

High drop-out rates negatively impact the organisation's reputation and standing within the community, making it harder to attract and retain participants.

- *"High drop-out rates can negatively impact the organisation's reputation, making it harder to attract new participants and retain existing ones." (HAŠK Mladost)*



Talent Pipeline and Volunteer Base

Dropout rates deplete the talent pool and reduce the number of volunteers available, affecting the development of competitive teams and organisational functions.

- *"Dropping out affects the talent pool, making it harder to develop competitive teams or find future role models for the sport."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"The organisation may face gaps in skill development and results if drop-out rates are high."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Volunteers often come from among active participants. High drop-out rates can decrease the number of available volunteers, impacting organisational functions."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"High dropout rates reduce the pool of talented/quality athletes available to advance to higher levels of competition, potentially weakening the overall quality and competitiveness of the sports league. "* (SUS)

Participant Insights

- **Bayer Leverkusen** highlighted the broader impact on individuals, noting the loss of social contacts and goals, and on organisations, mentioning financial losses and decreased media interest.
- **EMCA** emphasized the health and social issues for individuals, and how the size of the organisation affects its ability to handle drop-outs.
- **Lazio** provided a comprehensive view of the long-term benefits of sports and the adverse effects of dropping out, including sedentary lifestyles, obesity, and social isolation.
- **Levski** focused on the anxiety and health deterioration for individuals and the loss of resources for the organisation.
- **HAŠK Mladost** detailed the wide-ranging impacts on physical and mental health, social interaction, personal development, and future opportunities for individuals, as well as financial and operational challenges for organisations.
- **SUS** highlighted health issues for personal consequences. As organisational consequences the main problem recognized was shrinking of the talent pool and losing competitiveness which in turn makes clubs less attractive to future athletes as well as sponsors.

Differences and Commonalities

- **Commonalities:**
 - All focus groups agreed on the negative health impacts of dropping out, including increased risk of obesity and other health issues.
 - The loss of social connections and skills was a recurring theme across the groups.
 - Financial losses and operational challenges were commonly cited as major consequences for sports organisations.

- **Differences:**

- **Bayer Leverkusen** and **EMCA**, focused more on the immediate financial and structural impacts on organisations, whereas **Lazio** and **HAŠK Mladost** provided a broader view of personal development and social consequences.
- **Levski** uniquely highlighted the anxiety and fear of the unknown faced by individuals who drop out.
- **Lazio** emphasized the educational and developmental role of sports, providing a detailed analysis of how dropping out affects lifelong habits and skills.
- **SUS** recognised as a main problem what impact the shrinking of the talent pool has on the overall club reputation and quality

These findings illustrate the multifaceted impact of dropping out of sports, affecting individuals' physical and mental health, social skills, and personal development, as well as posing significant financial and operational challenges for sports organisations. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that support both individual athletes and the sustainability of sports organisations.

3.9. The benefits of staying involved in sport

Physical Health Benefits

Staying involved in sports provides numerous physical health benefits, enhancing overall fitness, preventing diseases, and promoting better physical well-being.

- *"Promotes osteo-muscular development"* (Lazio)
- *"Regular participation in sports enhances cardiovascular health, muscular strength, flexibility, and overall fitness."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Regular strength exercises reduce the risk of osteoporosis and other bone-related conditions later in life. "* (SUS)
- *"Contributes to the development of a healthy cardiovascular system"* (Lazio)
- *"Sports help in maintaining a healthy weight and reducing the risk of obesity."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Engaging in physical activity lowers the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"There are physical health benefits, such as reducing risk for non-communicable diseases and helping manage body weight. "* (SUS)

Mental Health Benefits

Regular sports participation significantly boosts mental health by reducing stress and anxiety, improving mood, and enhancing cognitive function.

- *"Reduces stress and anxiety."* (Lazio)
- *"Regular exercise can reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety, contributing to overall emotional well-being."* (HAŠK Mladost)

- *Sports can improve concentration, memory, and learning abilities, and may even help in delaying cognitive decline with age.*" (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Improved mental health, better stress management, improved sense of well-being, increased self-esteem and confidence. "* (SUS)

Social Benefits

Sports foster social interaction and cohesion, offering opportunities for socialization, building friendships, and strengthening community bonds.

- *"Offers opportunities for socialisation"* (Lazio)
- *"Sports provide opportunities to meet new people and build lasting friendships, creating a strong sense of community and belonging."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Common goals with your club and people you can identify with"* (Bayer Leverkusen)
- *"Preservation of social environment"* (Levski)
- *"Main benefit is when staying involved in the sport club, is to have the social cohesion with others and the person will be more likely to sport again (different sport or different level)"* (EMCA)
- *"Athletes usually form strong social bonds with teammates, coaches, and club's staff. Friends from sports are for lifetime. Sports creates a wide social network. "* (SUS)

Personal Development

Participation in sports contributes to personal growth, teaching valuable life skills such as discipline, time management, goal setting, resilience, and teamwork.

- *"Regular practice and competition require commitment and good time management, which can enhance personal discipline and organisational skills."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Sports encourage setting and achieving goals, which helps build self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Overcoming challenges and setbacks in sports teaches resilience and perseverance."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Participating in sports fosters teamwork and cooperation, teaching individuals how to work effectively with others towards common goals."* (HAŠK Mladost)
- *"Sports teach athletes how to handle wins and losses, helping them develop emotional resilience and the ability to cope with setbacks in other areas of life. "* (SUS)
- *"Sports helps develop leadership qualities and understanding of cultural (and personal) differences. Sports teach the value of teamwork, cooperation, verbal and non-verbal communication skills, and working towards a common goal. "* (SUS)

Lifestyle and Long-term Benefits

Sports promote lifelong healthy habits, structured routines, and various long-term health benefits, including better sleep, stress relief, and disease prevention.

- *"Involvement in sports promotes lifelong healthy habits, including regular physical activity and a balanced diet."* (HAŠK Mladost)



- *"Improves the quality of sleep and self-esteem"* (Lazio)
- *"Reduces the frequency of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, arterial hypertension, some forms of cancer (breast, prostate, colon)"* (Lazio)
- *"Helps maintain good balance, representing a form of prevention for falls"* (Lazio)

Participant Insights

- **Bayer Leverkusen** emphasized the balance and varied environment provided by sports, along with the importance of shared goals and social identification within the club.
- **EMCA** highlighted the significance of social cohesion and the increased likelihood of continued sports participation in different forms when staying involved in a club.
- **Lazio** provided a comprehensive list of benefits covering physical, mental, and social aspects, emphasizing the wide-ranging positive impacts of sports on health, personal development, and social integration.
- **Levski** succinctly captured the essence of sports as a means to maintain health and preserve a social environment.
- **HAŠK Mladost** detailed extensive benefits, including physical health, mental health, social interaction, personal development, lifestyle habits, educational and career advantages, community engagement, and emotional resilience.
- **SUS** detailed how regular physical activity has been shown to improve cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and problem-solving skills, contributing to better academic and professional performance.

Differences and Commonalities

- **Commonalities:**
 - All focus groups acknowledged the significant physical health benefits of sports, including disease prevention and overall fitness.
 - Mental health improvements such as stress relief, reduced anxiety, and enhanced mood were universally recognized.
 - The social benefits of sports, particularly in fostering friendships, social cohesion, and community involvement, were consistently highlighted.
 - Personal development aspects like discipline, goal setting, and resilience were commonly emphasized as crucial benefits.
- **Differences:**
 - **Bayer Leverkusen** and **EMCA** focused more on the social and environmental benefits of sports, emphasizing social cohesion and the balanced, varied environment provided by sports clubs.
 - **Lazio** offered an exhaustive list of benefits, detailing specific physical and mental health improvements, social opportunities, and long-term preventive health advantages.



- **Levski** provided a more concise view, emphasizing health and social environment preservation.
- **HAŠK Mladost** and **SUS** presented a detailed breakdown of benefits across various dimensions, including physical, mental, social, personal development, lifestyle, educational, career, community engagement, and emotional resilience.

These findings underline the holistic benefits of staying involved in sports, encompassing physical health, mental well-being, social interaction, personal growth, and long-term lifestyle advantages. The insights from different focus groups highlight both shared and unique perspectives, demonstrating the multifaceted value of sports participation.

4. Interpretation of Findings

4.1. Identifying Common Reasons for Drop-Out

The focus groups revealed several recurring reasons why youth drop-out of sports:

- **Boys vs. Girls:** It was noted that boys and girls drop out of sports for a lot of the same reasons but also some are predominately different reasons and at different rates. Girls, for example, are likely to drop out earlier, often influenced by the departure of teammates, later on it is noted that they usually drop out because of different social pressures. Boys, on the other hand, tend to drop out at a higher rate at the beginning when they join but are more likely to stay engaged if they continue in the sport.
- **Sports:** Drop-out rates vary significantly across sports. Major sports with high visibility like basketball and volleyball often see higher drop-out rates compared to less prominent sports like judo. Economic factors and the demand for high sportsmanship in certain sports also play a role.
- **Socioeconomic Groups:** Socioeconomic factors heavily influence drop-out rates. Youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face more barriers, such as financial constraints, which impact their ability to continue participating in sports. Conversely, those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to remain involved due to better access to resources and support.

4.2. Evaluating the Role of Sport Organisations

Sport organisations play a critical role in both the occurrence of drop-outs and the prevention strategies:

- **Current Approach:** Many organisations face challenges related to maintaining membership and managing financial impacts from high drop-out rates. There are often insufficient strategies to address the root causes of drop-out or to provide adequate support to keep youth engaged.
- **Improvement Needs:** Organisations need to enhance their approaches by focusing on creating supportive environments, increasing engagement, and addressing specific needs of different demographic groups. This includes implementing strategies that address the unique challenges faced by different sports and socioeconomic backgrounds.

4.3. Determining Required Skills and Knowledge

Sport staff require a diverse set of skills and knowledge to effectively reduce drop-out rates:

- **Skills:** Staff need to develop skills in creating inclusive and supportive environments, understanding and addressing the specific reasons for drop-out in different groups, and managing financial and logistical aspects of sport programs.
- **Knowledge:** Staff should be knowledgeable about the long-term benefits of sports, the physical and mental health impacts, and the social and personal development opportunities sports provide. This knowledge helps in designing programs that cater to diverse needs and improve retention.

4.4. Developing Effective Strategies

Effective strategies to reduce drop-out rates involve a combination of engagement, support, and targeted interventions:

- **Engagement:** Creating a sense of belonging and shared goals within sports clubs is crucial. Programs should focus on enhancing social cohesion and maintaining interest in sports through varied activities and personal connections.
- **Support:** Addressing individual and socioeconomic barriers is essential. Providing financial support, flexible programs, and targeted interventions can help retain youth in sports.
- **Strategies:** Implementing strategies such as mentorship programs, improved communication, and tailored support services for different groups can significantly reduce drop-out rates.

4.5. Addressing Challenges

Sport organisations face several challenges in preventing drop-out:

- **Financial Constraints:** Many organisations struggle with funding and resources, which can limit their ability to implement effective retention strategies.
- **Program Viability:** High drop-out rates can affect the viability of sports programs, leading to cancellations or restructuring.
- **Reputation and Community Support:** High drop-out rates can negatively impact an organisation's reputation, making it harder to attract and retain members.

Solutions: To address these challenges, organisations need to focus on improving financial stability through better resource management and seeking additional funding. Strengthening community involvement and enhancing the perceived value of sports programs can also help overcome these challenges.

4.6. Differences in Drop-Out Rates

- **Boys vs. Girls:** Differences are evident in drop-out rates between genders, with girls dropping out earlier, particularly influenced by team dynamics.



- **Sports:** Drop-out rates vary widely across different sports, influenced by factors such as visibility, economic demands, and the level of professional commitment required.
- **Socioeconomic Groups:** Economic barriers are significant, with youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds facing higher drop-out rates due to financial constraints.

4.7. Long-Term Consequences of Dropping Out

The long-term consequences of dropping out of sports are substantial:

- **For Individuals:** These include physical health issues, mental health challenges, social isolation, and missed opportunities for personal development.
- **For Organisations:** Consequences include reduced revenue, operational challenges, and negative impacts on reputation and community support.

4.8. Benefits of Staying Involved in Sport

The benefits of staying involved in sports are extensive:

- **Physical Health:** Improved fitness, disease prevention, and enhanced immunity.
- **Mental Health:** Reduced stress, improved mood, and better cognitive function.
- **Social Benefits:** Enhanced social interactions, community building, and teamwork.
- **Personal Development:** Development of discipline, goal-setting, resilience, and lifelong healthy habits.
- **Long-Term Benefits:** Sustained healthy lifestyle choices and prevention of chronic diseases.

Conclusion

The findings from the focus groups align with the research objectives, highlighting the diverse reasons behind youth drop-out, the essential role of sport organisations, and the necessary skills and strategies to address these issues. Understanding these factors helps in developing targeted interventions to improve retention and support youth in their sports journey. The benefits of staying involved in sports further emphasize the importance of addressing drop-out rates and creating effective strategies to keep youth engaged.

5. Recommendations

5.1. Actionable Steps

1. Develop Gender-Specific Retention Programs

- **Action:** Create tailored retention strategies for boys and girls, addressing their unique needs and reasons for dropping out. For example, implement mentorship programs and team-building activities to enhance engagement, particularly for girls who may drop-out due to team dynamics.
- **Objective:** To address gender-specific drop-out trends and improve retention rates across different demographics.

2. Enhance Support for Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Youth

- **Action:** Provide financial assistance, such as scholarships or subsidized fees, to support youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, offer flexible payment options and community fundraising initiatives.
- **Objective:** To reduce drop-out rates among economically disadvantaged groups by alleviating financial barriers.

3. Focus on Sports-Specific Engagement Strategies

- **Action:** Develop targeted programs for sports with higher drop-out rates. For instance, enhance support structures for major sports with high visibility and intense competition. For less prominent sports, create programs that emphasize personal growth and community involvement.
- **Objective:** To address the varying challenges and drop-out rates associated with different sports.

4. Implement Comprehensive Health and Wellness Programs

- **Action:** Promote the long-term physical and mental health benefits of sports participation. Integrate wellness education into sports programs, emphasizing the importance of regular exercise for overall health and well-being.
- **Objective:** To reinforce the value of continued sports participation and combat the risk of health issues related to drop-out.

5. Strengthen Community and Parental Involvement

- **Action:** Foster stronger community connections and increase parental involvement in sports activities. Organise events and workshops that engage families and local communities in supporting youth sports programs.
- **Objective:** To build a supportive network around sports programs, enhancing engagement and retention.



6. Improve Program Viability and Organisational Efficiency

- **Action:** Optimize resource allocation and program management to handle high drop-out rates. Consider diversifying funding sources and improving operational efficiency to mitigate the financial impact of drop-outs.
- **Objective:** To ensure that sports programs remain viable and can continue to serve their participants effectively.

7. Increase Awareness and Visibility of Sports Benefits

- **Action:** Launch campaigns to highlight the broad benefits of sports, including physical health, mental well-being, and social connections. Use various media platforms to communicate these benefits to both participants and the wider community.
- **Objective:** To enhance the perceived value of sports participation and encourage continued engagement.

8. Develop Skills and Training for Sport Staff

- **Action:** Provide ongoing training for sport staff on effective retention strategies, understanding demographic-specific needs, and managing financial and logistical challenges. Incorporate skills development in areas such as communication, motivation, and program adaptation.
- **Objective:** To equip sport staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively address and reduce drop-out rates.

5.2. Prioritization

1. Enhance Support for Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Youth

- **Priority:** High. Addressing financial barriers is critical for reducing drop-out rates among disadvantaged youth, making this a priority action.

2. Develop Gender-Specific Retention Programs

- **Priority:** High. Gender-specific strategies are essential for addressing the different drop-out trends and ensuring that both boys and girls remain engaged in sports.

3. Implement Comprehensive Health and Wellness Programs

- **Priority:** Medium. Emphasizing the health benefits of sports helps reinforce the value of participation and supports long-term engagement.

4. Improve Program Viability and Organisational Efficiency

- **Priority:** Medium. Ensuring program viability and efficient management is important for sustaining sports programs and handling financial impacts.



5. Strengthen Community and Parental Involvement

- **Priority:** Medium. Building a supportive community and involving parents can enhance engagement and retention but requires ongoing effort and resources.

6. Increase Awareness and Visibility of Sports Benefits

- **Priority:** Low. While important, raising awareness can follow the implementation of more immediate retention and support strategies.

7. Focus on Sports-Specific Engagement Strategies

- **Priority:** Low. Tailoring programs for specific sports should be addressed after foundational support and retention strategies are in place.

8. Develop Skills and Training for Sport Staff

- **Priority:** Low. Training is important for long-term effectiveness but can be phased in as part of broader organisational improvements.

By implementing these actionable steps and prioritizing them effectively, sport organisations can address the key factors contributing to youth drop-out, enhance retention, and create more supportive and engaging sports environments.

6. Conclusion

Common Reasons for Drop-Out: Boys and girls leave sports for a lot of the same reasons with girls often dropping out due to team dynamics more often and boys showing higher overall rates despite initial commitment. Drop-out rates vary by sport, with high-visibility sports and those requiring significant financial investment seeing higher rates. Financial constraints are a key factor, especially for economically disadvantaged youth.

Long-Term Consequences of Drop-Out: Individuals face worsened physical and mental health, increased disease risk, and social isolation. For organisations, high drop-out rates lead to financial losses, operational challenges, and reduced community support.

Benefits of Staying Involved: Continuing in sports boosts physical and mental health, provides stress relief, and enhances cognitive function. It also fosters social connections, personal growth, and offers community and career benefits.

The findings underscore the complexity of managing and reducing youth sports drop-out rates. Effective strategies must address both individual and organisational factors, including gender-specific needs, financial constraints, and sport-specific challenges. Emphasizing the broad benefits of sports can reinforce the importance of continued participation, while targeted support and resource management can mitigate the negative impacts of drop-out.

Sport organisations should prioritize creating inclusive and supportive environments that cater to diverse needs and promote long-term engagement. By implementing actionable strategies and addressing the identified challenges, sports programs can improve retention rates and contribute to the overall well-being and development of young athletes.



7. Appendices

Discussion guide

STAY PROJECT

Focus Group Guideline on Sport Drop-Out Among Youth

Working document developed by UNICAS

Focus Group Scope:

75 participants required by the project description.

Each sport partner organisation should organise a focus group with 15 people (HAŠK Mladost, TSV Bayer, Lazio, Levski, SUS).

The purpose of the focus group is to gather insights from experts on the reasons for sport drop-out among youth, the role of sport organisations in preventing drop-out, and the skills and knowledge that sport staff should have to reduce drop-out.

The target audience for the focus group is coaches, managers, and other sport professionals who work with youth. These individuals have direct experience with sport drop-out and can provide valuable insights into the causes and prevention of this problem.

The key topics that will be discussed in the focus group are:

- The reasons why youth drop out of sport
- The role of sport organisations in preventing drop-out
- The skills and knowledge that sport staff need to reduce drop-out
- Specific strategies that sport organisations and staff can use to reduce drop-out
- The challenges of preventing drop-out and how to address them

As the person responsible for implementing the focus group, you should use the focus group scope to:

- Recruit the right participants: The participants should be experts in the field of youth sports and have direct experience with sport drop-out.
- Use the questions that will generate useful information (see below): The questions should be open-ended and focus on the key topics listed above.
- Facilitate the discussion: The focus group facilitator should create a safe and supportive environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences. The facilitator should also be able to follow up on interesting points and encourage everyone to participate.



Focus Group Procedure:

1. Welcome participants and introduce yourself.
2. Explain the purpose of the focus group and review the ground rules (e.g., confidentiality, respect for different viewpoints).
3. Ask the first question and allow participants to share their thoughts and experiences. Be sure to follow up on interesting points and encourage everyone to participate.
4. Continue asking questions and facilitating discussion.
5. At the end of the focus group, thank participants for their time and summarize the key points.

Tips for Facilitating the Focus Group:

- Create a safe and supportive environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences.
- Be an active listener and encourage everyone to participate.
- Ask open-ended questions and avoid leading participants to a particular answer.
- Follow up on interesting points and ask clarifying questions.
- Take notes throughout the focus group to capture key points.
- At the end of the focus group, summarize the key points and thank participants for their time.

Suggestion on how to help kickstart the discussion

Thinking on how to make it easier and faster for the participants to start talking about what is important to - as an ice breaking activity. In addition, it helps the moderator to ask questions and follow the discussion more easily - and take notes.

The opinions of the participants in this step end up being partially anonymous, so they can relax more easily.

Before starting the conversation and asking questions:

- Take 5 (or 6 to have one for additional questions) bigger pieces of paper (A2 to be enough if there are 15 people participating in the focus group at once)
- On each piece of paper, write the key words of an individual question:
 - Most common reasons
 - Role of sport organisations
 - Skills and knowledge
 - Specific strategies
 - Challenges
 - differences + benefits and long-term consequences

- Each participant gets a few small pieces of paper (preferably post-it) where for each question they leave at least one piece with the first thing that comes to mind.

This whole activity shouldn't take more than 5 minutes after explaining what needs to be done and handing out the materials.

After that, the moderator takes the posters with all the words and starts the conversation using what is written for moderating the discussion.

Eventually, at the end of the discussion, participants can be asked to value the importance of what was written on each poster before the discussion- for example, put 3 stars for the most important thing, 1 star for the 3rd most important thing. With this, we would get some valorisation on the importance of certain things that were said.

For online focus groups you can do this by using the Miro APP:

<https://miro.com/app/dashboard/>

The board that is best for this is called: Quick retrospective.

Analysis of Focus Group Data:

Focus Group Framework

Target Audience: Coaches, managers, and other sport professionals who work with youth

Purpose: To gather insights from experts on the reasons for sport drop-out among youth, the role of sport organisations in preventing drop-out, and the skills and knowledge that sport staff should have to reduce drop-out.

Questions:

- What are the most common reasons why youth drop out of sport?
- What role do sport organisations play in preventing drop-out?
- What skills and knowledge do sport staff need to reduce drop-out?
- What are some specific strategies that sport organisations and staff can use to reduce drop-out? What kind of skills and knowledge are required to implement these strategies?
- What are some of the challenges of preventing drop-out, and how can these challenges be addressed?

Additional Questions:

- What are the differences in drop-out rates between boys and girls?
- What are the differences in drop-out rates between different sports?
- What are the differences in drop-out rates between different socioeconomic groups?
- What are the long-term consequences of dropping out of sport?
- What are the benefits of staying involved in sport?

Once the focus group is complete, you can analyze the data to identify common themes and patterns. This information will be used to develop strategies for preventing sport drop-out among youth.

STAY!

*Decreasing teenage
dropout in sport*

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