

# PINK CLAW®

## PINK CLAW - 101090089 D5 - Longitudinal study - Country report - ITALY



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# INTRODUCTION

## Summary of the project / objectives of the PINK CLAW project

PINK CLAW is a project funded in the framework of the ERASMUS+ SPORT programme of the European Union aiming at the promotion of the practice of physical activity among women aged 18 - 35 who have never exercised or have not exercised regularly for at least 2 years.

By means of its activities, the project wants to promote their physical, psychological, and social well-being, and to create an inclusive environment in which participants feel comfortable and supported. In particular, the project aims to engage women in regular and sustained sports practice, stimulating their motivation through the innovativeness of the proposed activities and the support offered by the coaches, who are role models and mentors for the participants.

Moreover, PINK CLAW is part of a broader European campaign to promote sport and physical activity as tools for disease prevention and promoting a healthy and ecologically sustainable lifestyle. Finally, the project also aims to raise awareness of gender equality and diversity by promoting the inclusion of all women, including those from discriminated or marginalized groups.

PINK CLAW is a multidisciplinary project that combines a range of physical and mental practices, each structured in individual and group modalities.

Its exercise programme is based on five (5) selected disciplines that are considered particularly effective in stimulating motor activity among women:

1. Obstacle Course Racing,
2. Self-defence,
3. Tactical fitness,
4. Mindfulness and
5. First Aid.

PINK CLAW involves only female coaches because they could become role models for the participants. As said, women are more likely to identify with a female coach who also acts as a mentor and helps them counter stereotypes by increasing girls' confidence, self-efficacy and sense of belonging.

The rationale behind the project is that we want to create and support relationships among the project participants because only in this way, we can engage and retain girls and women in sport.

Thanks to the well-functioning of the relations among the participants and between the participants and the female coaches, the project will achieve its objective to promote sport and physical activity, to stimulate women's and girls' desire to practice sport and physical activity not only for their health and wellbeing but also for their self-empowerment.

To achieve such goal, the PINK CLAW project is divided in two main phases:

1. Engaging women in regular physical activity through an innovative multidisciplinary outdoor sports program, shared across Europe, that encourages participants to have fun and challenge themselves.
2. Training female coaches in the project program (of which this manual is integral part of). PINK CLAW female instructors will be experts in the different disciplines and have natural relationship-building skills to support the group, particularly in sports settings. The training has a “Train the Training” approach in order to be sustainable and be replicable in all EU countries and contexts.

To know more about the project, its consortium and results please visit <https://www.pinkclaw-europe.eu>

### **Specific purposes of the survey**

The survey presented in this report stems from the partnership's desire to listen directly to European women about their experience and perception of the world of sport. This is an initiative promoted by the Alice Milliat Association, partner of the PINK CLAW project, with the aim of collecting qualitative and quantitative data that help build concrete proposals that adhere to reality.

The main purpose of the survey is to identify the real needs, motivations and barriers that affect women's participation in sport. In particular, the questionnaire was designed to include:

- The level of physical activity actually practiced by women in different age groups and territorial contexts.
- Previous experience in sport, including any episodes of abandonment, and the reasons behind it.
- Expectations, desires and interests in new sports proposals.
- The logistical, organizational and relational conditions that can facilitate or hinder women's sports participation.
- The role of social representation and female sports models in the construction of interest and self-efficacy.

The questionnaire has also been designed to collect practical suggestions and ideas directly from the participants, which may influence the future planning of the activities planned by PINK CLAW. The objective is twofold: on the one hand to collect a database useful for research and design reflection, on the other hand to activate a process of empowerment also through the simple action of "telling oneself", of actively participating in a survey that recognizes the value and importance of the voice of women.

## **Survey target and geographical area involved**

The target of the survey is women who self-identify as such, without any limitation with respect to age, occupation, marital status or cultural background. The questionnaire has been designed to be inclusive and accessible, with simple language and intuitive questions, which can be used online via the Google Forms platform. Dissemination took place through the channels of the project partners, who used mailing lists, social media, local networks and direct contacts to promote their compilation.

The survey was conducted on an European scale, involving PINK CLAW's partner countries. Each partner independently took care of the dissemination of the questionnaire in its own national context, also taking care of the collection, analysis and production of a local report. This approach made it possible to collect country-specific data, while maintaining a common and consistent structure, useful for subsequent comparative analysis.

The aim of this document is therefore to offer an in-depth and contextualized snapshot of the French sample, useful for guiding the actions that will be carried out in Italy within the framework of the activities envisaged by the PINK CLAW project. The analysis focuses on the trends, needs, barriers and motivations expressed by Italian women, to ensure targeted, realistic and culturally appropriate interventions.

# NATIONAL CONTEXT ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND THE USE OF SPORT FOR HEALTH

## The Use of Sport for Health in Italy

Sport and physical activity are increasingly recognized as vital tools for improving public health in Italy. Over the past two decades, the share of Italians who engage in leisure-time physical activity has risen from about 59% in 2000 to 66.2% in 2021 (ISTAT, 2024). This positive trend corresponds with a decline in the completely sedentary population (those doing no physical activity) from 37.5% to 33.7% (ISTAT, 2024).

Promoting an active lifestyle is seen as a way not only to enhance individual well-being but also to reduce healthcare costs associated with non-communicable diseases. In fact, recent estimates suggest sports participation in Italy reached an all-time high in 2023 – about 64.8% of the population (38.2 million people) engaged in sport – a 3.1% increase from 2022 that “contributes significantly to reduce health expenditure” (Banca Ifis, 2024).

**National Policies and Initiatives:** The Italian government has integrated sport-for-health strategies into its national health policies. The **National Prevention Plan 2020–2025** prioritizes physical activity promotion across all life stages as a means to prevent chronic diseases. This plan is implemented in synergy with the healthcare system's **Essential Levels of Care**, which now include counseling on healthy lifestyles and exercise for disease prevention (World Health Organization, 2024). In practical terms, this means doctors and health professionals are encouraged to advise patients on physical activity; indeed, Italian health guidelines (2021) recognize exercise as a “therapeutic tool” for chronic conditions like obesity, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases (World Health Organization, 2024).

Another cornerstone program is “**Gaining Health: Making Healthy Choices Easy**”, a Ministry of Health-led intersectoral strategy aiming to facilitate active living at national, regional, and local levels (World Health Organization, 2024).

This strategy involves multiple sectors (health, education, environment, urban planning, sport, transport) in a comprehensive effort to encourage regular exercise for all populations, including initiatives like guided walking groups for children, routes for older adults, and sports opportunities for people with disabilities. Such multi-level approaches underscore Italy's view of sport as a public health investment.

- *Promotion in Communities:* Under the Prevention Plan, **Active Communities** programs work to increase access to exercise in disadvantaged groups

. These interventions focus on populations that are typically less active – for example, people with disabilities, those facing mental health challenges, or low-income groups – to mitigate health inequities. Activities include mapping local opportunities for physical activity and raising awareness so that information on accessing sport facilities is readily available to at-risk communities.

By targeting sedentary lifestyles in harder-to-reach populations, Italy aims to ensure the health benefits of sport are equitably distributed.

- *Workplace and Daily Life:* Italy also promotes physical activity in everyday settings. The National Prevention Plan introduced the program “**Workplaces that Promote Health,**” encouraging employers to facilitate active lifestyles (e.g. offering exercise breaks or fitness programs) in both the public and private sectors. All Italian regions have developed regional prevention plans aligned with these goals

. Additionally, national surveillance systems (such as PASSI) monitor active transport and mobility trends, reflecting an interest in walking and cycling as part of daily routines (World Health Organization, 2024).

By embedding movement into work life and commuting (through policies on walking/cycling infrastructure and road safety), Italy links sport and physical activity to broader health determinants like urban design and transportation (Sportesalute, 2022).

- *Schools and Youth Programs:* Physical education in schools is a key pillar of Italy’s sport-for-health strategy. It is mandated as part of the curriculum – currently at least **1 hour per week in primary schools and 2 hours in secondary schools** (World Health Organization, 2024).

– with ongoing efforts to strengthen these programs. Recognizing that early habits track into adulthood, authorities have invested in projects to encourage activity among children. **OKkio alla Salute**, a national surveillance system on childhood nutrition and physical activity, found in 2023 that about **29% of 8–9-year-olds** are overweight or obese (Istituto Superiore di Sanità, 2024).

This has prompted school-based interventions and educational campaigns to promote healthier behaviors. For example, schools are encouraged to implement “quality physical education” and extra-curricular sport activities (World Health Organization, 2024)., often in collaboration with local sports associations. National surveys show that in 2021, however, only 36.2% of children aged 3–17 were engaging in continuous sport (a sharp drop partly due to the COVID-19 pandemic) while sedentary behavior in this age group rose to 27.2% (ISTAT, 2024).

. To counter such trends, Italy participates in international initiatives like the EU’s **HealthyLifestyle4All** campaign and WHO’s “Let’s Move” exercises, aiming to re-invigorate youth fitness after the pandemic. Moreover, beginning in 2022, the government introduced specialized physical education teachers in primary schools to improve the quality of activity for younger pupils – a significant step in a country where generalist teachers previously handled PE at the elementary level.

Despite these comprehensive efforts, Italy faces persistent **challenges** in leveraging sport for health. There are stark regional disparities: northern regions have more sports participation and infrastructure than southern regions, reflecting broader socio-economic divides. For instance, the highest share of regular sports practitioners is in the North (around 41.5%), compared to only 24% in the South (ISTAT, 2024).

. Culturally, a sedentary lifestyle remains common for a third of Italians, and many do not meet the World Health Organization's recommended activity levels. The aging population is another concern – ensuring older adults stay active is crucial for healthy ageing, yet reaching this demographic requires tailored programs (Italy's strategies do include seniors, such as exercise classes for the elderly through community centers and the promotion of "active ageing" gyms).

Overall, Italy's approach to sport for health is characterized by strong **government commitment and multi-sector collaboration**. By embedding physical activity promotion into healthcare, education, urban policy, and community programs, the country has made strides toward a more active society. Early data suggest positive impacts (e.g. rising participation rates and potential reductions in healthcare utilization) (Banca Ifis, 2024).

Going forward, continuing to address regional gaps and sustaining post-pandemic momentum will be key. Sport is increasingly seen not merely as recreation, but as a public health necessity – one that Italy is actively fostering through national plans and grassroots initiatives to improve the well-being of its people (World Health Organization, 2024).

### Women's Participation in Sport in Italy

Women's participation in sport in Italy has grown substantially in recent decades, yet it **remains lower than men's participation** by multiple measures. According to national survey data, in 2021 about **29.6% of Italian women (aged 3 and above) practiced sport** either continuously or occasionally in their leisure time, compared to 39.8% of men (ISTAT, 2024).

This gender gap of roughly 10 percentage points, while significant, has narrowed by nearly 30% since 2000 (ISTAT, 2024).

– a positive trend indicating that more Italian women are embracing physical activity over time. In fact, long-term comparisons show steady progress: around the year 2000, only ~23% of women engaged in sports, whereas by 2020 that share had risen to around 29% (Censis, 2023).

Recent ISTAT figures (2022–2023) suggest a further slight uptick, with approximately **24% of women now reporting they practice sport regularly (continuous involvement)**, versus 32.9% of men (UISP, 2025).

. While men still outnumber women in sports participation, the gap is closing and women's involvement is at its highest level on record.

However, these national averages mask considerable **regional and age-related differences**. Italy exhibits a pronounced North–South divide in sports participation that affects women strongly. In the more economically developed North, both women and men are far more active – the overall share of people doing sport in the North is about 41%, dropping to 36.7% in the Center and only 24% in the South (ISTAT, 2024)

. This suggests that in Southern Italy, female participation is especially low, given that the overall figure includes men. Cultural and infrastructural factors in the South (such as fewer sports facilities, more traditional gender norms, and higher socio-economic barriers) contribute to fewer women engaging in sport. National research confirms that **girls and women from disadvantaged backgrounds are the least likely to participate**: one study of youth sports (1997–2022) found that girls from families with lower education and income have consistently lower sport engagement, and their participation dropped more steeply than boys' during times of economic hardship (Censis, 2023).

Particularly during adolescence, the gender gap widens. By ages 18–19, the difference in participation rates between young men and women reaches about 22–23 percentage point (Tuselli, 2024), indicating many girls tend to drop out of sports in the late teen years. The reasons include societal expectations, lack of opportunities, and interest shifts (explored in Section 3), but the outcome is clear: **female sports participation declines in adolescence** more sharply than male participation, especially in less affluent regions.

Despite these challenges, Italy has seen a surge of successful **female athletes and increased opportunities** for women in sport, which is gradually improving participation and visibility. Federations and sports clubs across the country now count more women in their ranks than ever before. As of the 2021–2022 period, women made up about **28.2% of all registered athletes (tesserati)** in the national sports federations under CONI (2024).

This means roughly one in four competitive athletes in Italy is female – a proportion that, while still low, is higher than in past generations and continues to grow. Certain sports are particularly popular among women: **volleyball, gymnastics, and equestrian sports** are among the most practiced by girls and women, whereas men gravitate more to football (soccer), basketball, and tennis (CONI, 2024). This reflects a degree of traditional gender segregation in sport preferences. But barriers are being broken; for example, women's football (soccer) is rapidly gaining players and fans, and other historically male-dominated sports are seeing increased female participation at the grassroots level.

Professional opportunities for Italian sportswomen have historically lagged behind men's, but recent reforms are changing the landscape. **Until 2020, no women's sport in Italy was classified as professional**, even at the highest league levels, which meant female athletes lacked the contractual and salary protections given to male professionals (UISP, 2025).

. A landmark change came with a 2022 sports reform: Italy's top women's football league (Serie A Femminile) was granted professional status (UISP, 2025).

. This move – the first of its kind for women's sports in Italy – ensures female footballers receive employee status, minimum wages, and social security benefits, closing a significant gap in how women's and men's sports are valued. The professionalization of women's soccer is expected to pave the way for other women's leagues (e.g. basketball, volleyball) to seek similar recognition. In parallel, the **gender pay gap in sports** is gaining attention. Female athletes still earn considerably less on average than their male counterparts, and prize money in many competitions is lower for women. Tellingly, in 2023

**not a single woman appeared in the list of the 100 highest-paid athletes in Italy** (all were men) (UISP, 2025).

Efforts toward pay equity are slow, but the conversation has started, especially as Italian women achieve world-class results (for instance, Olympic golds in athletics, fencing, and archery in recent years) that demonstrate equal merit.

When it comes to **leadership and representation**, sports in Italy remain male-dominated, though some progress is evident. As of 2021, only **12.7% of board members in national sports federations** were women, and women comprised just 19% of certified referees (CONI, 2024)

. At the club level, a CENSIS study found only **20% of coaches and 15% of sport club managers** are female (UISP, 2025), highlighting the underrepresentation of women in coaching and decision-making roles. Furthermore, out of 77 national sports bodies recognized by CONI (including federations for various sports), only **2 are led by a female president** (UISP, 2025).

– an imbalance that can influence policies and resource allocation in ways that perpetuate the gender gap. In response to these disparities, CONI and other institutions have implemented measures such as **gender quotas** for governance. Following the IOC's Agenda 2020 recommendations, Italy's sports system made a concerted push to include more women in leadership: between 2018 and 2022, the number of women in federal sports governance (e.g. federation executives) increased by 27% (CONI, 2024)

. This indicates that deliberate policy can improve female representation. Indeed, the **Parigi 2024 Olympics** marked a symbolic milestone: it was the first Games with equal numbers of male and female athletes participating (CONI, 2024).

The Italian Olympic Committee sent a gender-balanced team to Paris, reflecting the broader international move toward parity. Such high-profile equality can inspire change at the grassroots, signaling that women belong in every arena of sport.

Cultural perceptions are gradually shifting as well. Traditional notions that “sport is a man's world” are being challenged by advocacy and the visibility of women champions. Italian media, however, has room for improvement – women's sports still receive only about **4% of total sports media coverage** (CONI, 2024).

according to a UNESCO report, which means female athletes have far less exposure. This low media visibility has been a limiting factor on female sports popularity and sponsorship. To counter it, various campaigns have emerged: for example, the **UISP (Unione Italiana Sport per Tutti) “SIC!” project** is working to create inclusive sports spaces and raise the profile of women and other underrepresented groups in sport. Additionally, initiatives around the annual International Women's Day often celebrate female athletes and call for greater investment in women's sports. Italy's hosting of global events – like the women's Volleyball World Championship (co-hosted in 2022) or the upcoming Milano-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics – also puts a spotlight on women in sport and may encourage greater female participation domestically.

In summary, Italian women today are participating in sport in **greater numbers and at higher levels** than ever before. Gains can be seen in grassroots involvement, elite competition success, and slowly improving institutional support. Yet, notable gaps persist in comparison to men's participation, especially in certain regions and age groups. The country is actively working toward gender equality in sport through reforms (like professionalizing women's leagues), representation quotas, and promotional programs. These efforts align with a broader understanding that increasing women's sports participation is not just an issue of equality, but also one of public health and social development – as active lifestyles for women yield benefits for families and communities. Continued attention to closing the gender gap in sport will ensure that Italian women have equal opportunity to enjoy the health, social, and professional rewards of athletic involvement.

### **Barriers to Sport for Women in Italy**

*Women and girls often face unique barriers when participating in sports. The image above shows girls playing football alongside boys, a scene that is becoming more common as gender stereotypes in sport are challenged. However, ingrained biases and structural hurdles still discourage many Italian women from full engagement in athletics.*

Several **interrelated barriers** – cultural, economic, and infrastructural – help explain why women's sports participation in Italy lags behind that of men. These obstacles range from deep-rooted gender stereotypes to practical issues like facility access and funding disparities. Understanding these barriers is crucial in order to develop effective strategies to overcome them.

**Cultural Stereotypes and Social Norms:** Sport in Italy (as in many countries) has traditionally been viewed as a male domain, and this legacy continues to influence attitudes today (CONI, 2024).

Stereotypes about femininity and athleticism present one of the biggest hurdles for girls and women. For instance, there is a long-standing notion that certain sports are “for boys” while others are “for girls.” Football, rugby, and boxing are often stereotyped as masculine sports requiring physical toughness, which leads some parents or coaches to consider them unsuitable for females (Terre des Hommes Italia, 2023).

When a young girl expresses interest in playing football or another male-dominated sport, she may be **discouraged or even explicitly dissuaded** from pursuing it (Terre des Hommes Italia, 2023). Instead, girls have historically been pointed toward sports deemed more “feminine” – such as volleyball, gymnastics, figure skating or dance (Terre des Hommes Italia, 2023). While many girls enjoy and excel in those sports, the important point is that societal bias, not individual preference, often funnels them there. This early channelling can limit the spectrum of sports available to women and reinforce the idea that vigorous, contact, or high-endurance sports are “not for girls.” Additionally, in some conservative communities, families prioritize traditional roles for girls that leave little room for sports. It's not uncommon that adolescent girls are expected to help with domestic chores or focus on academics, rather than spend time on the playing field (Terre des Hommes Italia, 2023).

These expectations – that a young woman should prepare for family life or excel in school, whereas sports are sometimes viewed as a distraction – can lead to girls dropping out of athletics around puberty. Indeed, the dropout rate for girls in sports during the teenage years is higher than for boys, often attributed to factors like body image concerns, lack of confidence, and absence of a supportive environment. A recent analysis noted that teenage girls quit sport at roughly **twice the rate of boys by age 14**, frequently citing feelings of inadequacy and social pressures as reasons (Adnkronos, 2023).

Girls tend to internalize societal messages about appearance and may feel self-conscious while playing sports, especially if comparisons (often fueled by social media and influencer culture) make them worry about not looking fit or skilled enough (Adnkronos, 2023).

Such psychological barriers are reinforced by the dearth of female athlete role models in media – when women athletes receive only ~4% of sports media coverage (CONI, 2024), girls have fewer examples to inspire them or prove that sports isn't just "a boys' thing." In summary, **gender stereotypes and biases** – whether coming from family, peers, or media – continue to pose a significant barrier by dampening girls' enthusiasm for sport or redirecting it elsewhere.

**Infrastructure and Access Issues:** Even when interest is present, women and girls can face practical barriers to accessing sports facilities and programs. In many local communities, especially in rural areas or the less affluent South, sports clubs and facilities for girls are fewer in number. For example, a town might have multiple boys' football teams with dedicated fields, but no equivalent girls' team (or just a single team that is hard to reach). This scarcity can create a self-perpetuating cycle: without existing teams or leagues for girls, there's less incentive for girls to start a sport, and low female turnout then discourages the formation of such teams. **Access to facilities** is another concern. It has been reported that female athletes in Italy have "*less access to structures and competitions*" than men (UISP, 2025).

This can manifest in subtle ways, such as women's training sessions being allotted less convenient hours in sports centers, or clubs investing less in women's locker rooms and equipment. Historically, many sports facilities were designed with male athletes in mind, which sometimes makes women feel like "guests" in these spaces. Safety and comfort in sports settings are also part of infrastructure: good lighting, private changing areas, and safe transportation to and from venues can particularly affect women's willingness to participate (especially for those who have to train in the early morning or late evening). In some cases, the lack of female coaches or staff at sports facilities can be a barrier – parents might be hesitant to send teenage daughters to male-dominated gyms or training camps. The **geographical imbalance** in sports infrastructure investment is notable as well: northern Italy has more public sports facilities per capita than southern Italy, meaning women in the South often have simply fewer opportunities nearby to play sports, unless they come from families that can afford private clubs. Finally, the structure of school sports in Italy offers limited competitive outlets for girls. Unlike some countries, Italian schools (especially middle and high schools) do not have as extensive inter-school sports competitions; youth sports are mostly organized by clubs outside school. If those clubs are

not welcoming or affordable for girls, the school system doesn't necessarily fill the gap, and girls may fall through the cracks of organized sport between childhood and adulthood.

**Economic Barriers:** Economic factors intersect significantly with gender, creating another layer of difficulty for women in sport. At the family level, **cost can be prohibitive** – equipment, club fees, uniforms, and travel for sports all require money. If a family has limited resources, they might be more inclined to invest in a son's athletic participation than a daughter's, due to conscious or unconscious bias about who is more likely to benefit. While this is not universally true, traditional views of males as future breadwinners could influence such decisions in some households. Moreover, if pursuing sport as a career appears unrealistic for women (given historically few professional opportunities), parents might prioritize other activities for daughters. On a broader scale, there is a **funding disparity between men's and women's sports organizations**. Many women's sports clubs and federations in Italy operate on smaller budgets, as they attract fewer sponsors and less ticket revenue than men's sports (Terre des Hommes Italia, 2023).

This means female teams often have inferior training facilities, less professional coaching, and lower competition exposure, which can hamper athletic development and drive women to quit elite sport earlier. The recent improvement in women's football status will help that sport financially, but many other women's disciplines remain semi-amateur. **Socioeconomic inequality** also means that girls in low-income families or underprivileged areas are much less likely to engage in sport. Data show that in Italy, sport participation is strongly correlated with education level and income – only 15.6% of people with lower education practice sport, versus over 50% of college graduates (ISTAT, 2024).

Because women on average still earn less and have higher unemployment in Italy, and single-parent households are often mother-led, the **opportunity cost** of time and money for sport can be higher for women. A working mother, for example, may have little time to devote to personal exercise or to drive a daughter to sports practice. The cumulative effect is that economic barriers disproportionately affect female participation. These were starkly observed during the Eurozone debt crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic: in those periods, sports participation drops were heaviest among **girls from lower socio-economic status**, essentially because when resources (time, money, public programs) contract, girls are more likely than boys to lose access to sport (Oncini, F., & Giunti, S., 2025).

Reversing this requires targeted interventions (like scholarships or free community sports programs for girls) to ensure that the benefits of sport are accessible regardless of economic background.

**Harassment and Safety Concerns:** Although rarely quantified, one deeply troubling barrier for women in sport is the prevalence of harassment, abuse, or a non-inclusive climate. Female athletes at all levels have reported experiences of sexism – from insensitive comments to unequal treatment – which can alienate or demoralize them. Even more alarming, a UNESCO publication highlighted that **21% of female athletes have experienced sexual abuse** in a sport setting (UISP, 2025).

Italy has had its share of high-profile cases of abuse or maltreatment of sportswomen, which can deter participation if women fear for their safety or dignity. While Italian authorities and federations have begun implementing safeguarding measures (such as anti-harassment codes of conduct and confidential reporting mechanisms), the historically male-centric power structure in sport may make it hard for young women to speak up. The “*locker room culture*” in some sports environments has not always been welcoming to women – if the atmosphere is overly aggressive, sexist, or dismissive of women’s contributions, females may opt out. This barrier is closely tied to culture but deserves separate mention because ensuring **safe and respectful environments** is fundamental to enabling women’s participation. Without it, no amount of policy or promotion will sustain involvement.

In light of these challenges, what can be done to **overcome the barriers** facing women in sport in Italy? A multi-pronged approach is needed, addressing societal attitudes, resource allocation, and supportive policies. Below are several key strategies:

**Challenging Stereotypes through Education:** It is crucial to actively dispel the notion that sports are gender-specific. Campaigns and school programs can teach youth that *no sport is “for males only” or “females only”* – all genders can enjoy football, rugby, ballet, or any activity equally. (Terre des Hommes Italia, 2023).

. Featuring female athletes in traditionally male sports (e.g. women footballers, boxers) in media and textbooks can help normalize their presence. Italy’s sports institutions and schools are increasingly celebrating women’s sports achievements, which helps create new role models. For example, showcasing champions like Federica Pellegrini (swimming) or Paola Egonu (volleyball) in the media and at events sends a message that athletic excellence knows no gender. Anti-stereotype training for coaches and PE teachers is another tactic; when coaches are aware of their own biases, they can consciously encourage girls and boys equally. Over time, these efforts erode old-fashioned views and make it more socially acceptable for girls to pursue any sport they love.

- **Improving Grassroots Access and Facilities:** To reduce infrastructural and access barriers, investment must flow into local sports opportunities for women and girls. This includes creating more girls’ teams, clubs, and leagues at the community level. National programs like “*Sport di Tutti*” (Sport for All) have provided free or low-cost sports courses in disadvantaged areas, explicitly targeting **children and youth from vulnerable groups, including girls** (Sport e salute, 2022). Continuing and expanding such programs will help ensure that cost or location is not a prohibitive factor. Additionally, municipalities can institute measures such as reserving equal field time for female leagues, upgrading facilities (e.g. adding women’s changing rooms, better lighting for evening practice which benefits women’s safety), and organizing female-only sports events to spark initial interest. Schools can partner with clubs to form after-school sport groups for girls, providing a comfortable entry point especially in communities where families might be hesitant to send girls to public clubs. In Italy, some schools have begun offering extracurricular sports like self-defense or aerobics classes geared toward female students to get them active

in a supportive environment. Mobile sports units and community sports festivals for women are other innovative approaches tried in some regions to bring sport directly to where women are.

- **Financial Support and Incentives:** To tackle economic hurdles, dedicated funding and incentives are needed to boost women's sports. The government and Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI) have started to earmark funds for women's sports development – for example, offering fiscal incentives to professional clubs that invest in women's teams. Continuation of such funding, along with sponsorship drives for women's leagues, can improve the financial viability of women's sports. On the individual level, providing scholarships or fee waivers for girls (especially teenagers) to join sports programs can prevent dropouts due to cost. Some local governments have introduced **sport vouchers** for low-income families, which can be used for children's sports activities, with a focus on including girls. Ensuring that prize money and appearance fees in competitions are equal for women and men is another important step (recently, some Italian tennis tournaments and the national athletics championships committed to equal prize payouts). These measures not only help retain women in competitive sports but also signal that society values their athletic achievement on par with men's. Over time, as women's sports become more financially rewarding and sustainable, more girls will be motivated to stay in the game.
- **Promoting Female Leadership and Mentorship:** Increasing the presence of women in coaching, officiating, and sports management can create a more welcoming environment that encourages female participation. Italy's adoption of gender quotas in sport governance is a start (Tusselli, 2024); continuing to enforce and extend these can elevate more women to decision-making roles where they can advocate for women's needs in sport. Additionally, training programs to develop female coaches and referees are vital. When girls see women as their coaches or officials, it can reinforce that sport is for them and provide relatable role models. Some federations (e.g. the Italian Football Federation) have launched mentorship schemes pairing young female coaches with experienced mentors to help them advance. Likewise, celebrating and publicizing the success of female sports administrators (like the few federation presidents who are women) may inspire others to follow. **Mentorship networks** connecting elite female athletes with girls at the grassroots can also help break psychological barriers – hearing directly from a role model who overcame challenges can boost a young woman's confidence to continue in sport. In Italy, former champions like Valentina Vezzali (fencing) and Fiona May (athletics) have been active in mentoring and even political advocacy for women in sport, showing how leadership off the field can influence opportunities.
- **Media Visibility and Representation:** Overcoming the media coverage gap is key to changing cultural perceptions and attracting resources to women's sport. Italian media outlets can be urged or incentivized to increase the coverage of women's competitions. For example, RAI (public broadcaster) in recent years has started to air more women's volleyball and basketball games, and a dedicated women's

football TV deal was established for the Serie A Femminile. Continuing this momentum will require pressure and encouragement from both the public and regulators. When women's sports are regularly seen on TV and online, it normalizes female athleticism and can ignite interest among young viewers. Sports journalism should also strive to treat female athletes with the same seriousness as male athletes – avoiding sexist language or focusing only on personal life/appearance (an issue UNESCO highlighted globally) (UNESCO, 2018). Italy could look to best practices from countries that have successfully elevated women's sport in media (for instance, France and the UK with women's football). Social media is another powerful tool: campaigns like **#CheGiocoFa?** or **#WomenInSport** (hypothetical examples of hashtags) can trend and draw attention to female athletes' stories. The bottom line is that greater visibility fights stereotypes, attracts sponsors, and creates a virtuous cycle that can help diminish several of the barriers mentioned.

- **Strengthening Policies for Safe and Inclusive Sport:** Finally, ensuring that sports environments are safe, inclusive, and free from harassment is non-negotiable. Italian sports federations need robust policies to prevent and address any form of abuse or discrimination. In recent years, there have been steps such as the Italian Volleyball Federation's zero-tolerance policy on harassment and FIGC (football federation) launching an anonymous reporting platform for misconduct. Such measures should be expanded across all sports. Coaches and staff should be educated on gender sensitivity – for example, avoiding comments that shame girls for their physique or stereotype their abilities. By cultivating a respectful atmosphere, women and girls will feel more comfortable participating and staying in sports. Moreover, making clubs and gyms more **female-friendly** – for instance, by offering women-only training sessions or hiring more female trainers – can help newcomers who might feel intimidated at first. Inclusivity also means acknowledging different needs: providing child-care options at gyms could enable more young mothers to exercise, and designing programs for different age groups (like “women's sport for health” classes targeting middle-aged and older women) can draw in those who didn't have a chance to do sports when younger.

In conclusion, while Italian women face a constellation of barriers in sport, there is a clear recognition among policymakers, researchers, and communities that these challenges must be addressed. The path to overcoming them lies in **cultural change, investment, and inclusive policy**. By confronting stereotypes, improving access, funding women's athletic endeavors, and ensuring safe environments, Italy can continue to close the gender gap in sport. This is not only a matter of equal rights; it stands to deliver broad societal benefits – from better health outcomes (as more women engage in physical activity) to the empowerment of women and girls through the confidence and leadership skills sport can foster (UNESCO, 2018). The ongoing efforts and real initiatives described above offer hope that the coming years will see an Italy where women's participation in sport is as commonplace and supported as men's, truly making sport “for all.”

# SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Understanding physical activity habits is essential to improving public health strategies and promoting inclusive access to sport. This study focuses on women aged between 18 and 35, a key demographic often navigating work, studies, family responsibilities, and identity building.

The main research question was: “What are the motor activity habits of women aged 18 to 35?”

For this questionnaire, the Alice Milliat Association chose to consult directly with women in Europe.

The terms “women” and “female” are aimed at individuals who self-identify as such.

To address this, a mixed-method questionnaire was developed, combining the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) with custom questions designed by project partners. This combination enables a comprehensive understanding of both quantitative activity levels and qualitative elements such as motivation, perceived barriers, and openness to community-based initiatives.

The hybrid structure of the questionnaire combines scientific validity (IPAQ) with a contextual and gendered-approach lens, taking into account the specific needs of each woman, tailored by the project partners. This approach acknowledges the complex reality of women's daily lives and explores what facilitates or hinders access to sport practices.

## Structure and Methodology of the Questionnaire

The full questionnaire (in English) is available here <https://forms.gle/s8og2qcdDTAX73q69>

The questionnaire is structured into **6 main sections**:

### **1. Personal and personal information section (age, occupation, marital status, children, place of residence)**

The first section gathered basic data on age, job status, residence, marital status, and presence of children. These variables enabled a socio-demographic profile and showed how personal circumstances influence sport participation. Occupation and family status were recoded for clarity. Territorial information helped assess accessibility to sports based on urban or rural areas. This section also served to ease participants into the survey and support an intersectional reading of the results.

### **2. Physical activity section (levels, frequencies and types)**

This section examined the participants' current involvement in sport, including type of activity, frequency, and setting (e.g. at home, in a gym). Responses were categorized (e.g. fitness, dance, martial arts). Based on the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ), it measured intensity and duration of weekly activity, and included sitting time to assess sedentary behavior. It provided a clear picture of the physical activity levels of women in the sample.

### **3. Section past experience in sport and reasons for dropping out**

Focused on previous engagement in sport, this section explored reasons for stopping (e.g. cost, lack of time, health, maternity, insecurity), and asked if participants would like to resume. It identified key drop-out phases and potential target groups for reactivation—like

those needing flexible sessions or safe environments. These insights are key for understanding the emotional and structural barriers to continuity in sport.

#### **4. Section motivations and perceived barriers in sports practice**

This part addressed motivating factors (e.g. health, well-being, fun, challenge, socialization) and obstacles (e.g. economic, time constraints, cultural stereotypes). It included a question on the impact of low female visibility in sport, and whether a women-only environment would increase participation. This helped define both enablers and blockers and emphasized the need for non-competitive, inclusive contexts.

#### **5. Interest and preferences for future activities of the PINK CLAW project section**

Participants indicated their interest in PINK CLAW sessions, preferred sports (from yoga to boxing), and suggested additional ideas like wellness workshops and group walks. Preferences reflected a desire for non-judgmental spaces, female trainers, and accessible formats compatible with daily life. These responses are crucial to align project offerings with real interests.

#### **6. conditions and factors facilitating sports practice**

This section explored the practical needs for consistent participation: affordability, flexible hours, proximity to home/work, transport options, emotional support, and female staff presence. It also gathered data on preferred time slots and acceptable travel times, providing operational insights to design realistic and inclusive activities.

### **Tool used**

Google Forms was used for data collection, a free platform accessible online that allows you to create personalized questionnaires and collect responses in real time. The choice of this tool was dictated by several factors: firstly, its accessibility on any device connected to the internet (computer, tablet, smartphone), which facilitated participation even by less digitally savvy users. Secondly, Google Forms allows an automated and secure management of responses, providing data in exportable and easily analysable format, a fundamental condition for subsequent statistical processing work.

The questionnaire was created anonymously, without requiring identification data, to ensure the confidentiality of respondents and encourage greater freedom of expression. The structure of the questions included both single- or multiple-choice closed-ended questions, and open-ended questions, to allow participants to freely express their opinions and proposals.

The Google Forms interface has made it possible to clearly manage even questions with articulated options or with specific display conditions, avoiding confusion or cognitive overload. Finally, the tool provided a first automatic representation of the results through summary graphs, useful in the preliminary phase of exploratory reading of the data before the in-depth analysis on SPSS.

### **Period and duration of data collection**

The collection of responses took place over an extended period of time, between 3 May 2023 and 26 March 2025. This long period of opening of the questionnaire made it possible to reach a large number of participants, ensuring a progressive and diversified

data collection over time. The extended duration allowed the partners in each country involved in the PINK CLAW project to plan and adapt their dissemination strategies according to their own timing and territorial availability.

In the Italian context, the dissemination and promotion of the questionnaire was mainly concentrated between autumn 2023 and spring 2024, the period in which most of the compilations were recorded. The responses collected from Italian women during this time interval were a total of 2.209. Importantly, each project partner independently managed the distribution of the questionnaire in their country and the analysis of the data related to the reference population. In this report, in fact, only the data collected from Italian women are taken into consideration.

During the opening period, the collection was monitored regularly, to ensure that the questionnaire remained accessible and functional on all devices, and to stimulate participation through periodic solicitations. In this way, it was possible to intercept heterogeneous targets in terms of age, origin, social condition and level of sporting activity. The length of the period represented an opportunity to observe response trends more continuously, adapting – if necessary – communication messages and sharing channels to improve their effectiveness.

### **Methods of dissemination of the questionnaire in Italy**

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# RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

## Number of participants reached and responses obtained in Italy

In the Country Report of Italy, total number of responses: 2.209

### Profile of respondents

#### Sociodemographic characteristics

To fully understand the profile of the Italian participants involved in the survey, the analysis started from the description of the main socio-demographic characteristics. This section provides a detailed overview of age, employment status, geographical distribution, marital status, the presence of children and declared sports practice. These data form the basis for correctly interpreting subsequent responses and identifying any correlations between personal variables and level of physical activity, motivations or perceived obstacles.

#### Age groups

Età	N	%
11-13	1	0,0%
14-17	25	1,1%
18-24	513	23,3%
25-34	899	40,8%
35-44	419	19,0%
45-54	213	9,7%
55-64	107	4,9%
65-74	26	1,2%
85+	1	0,0%

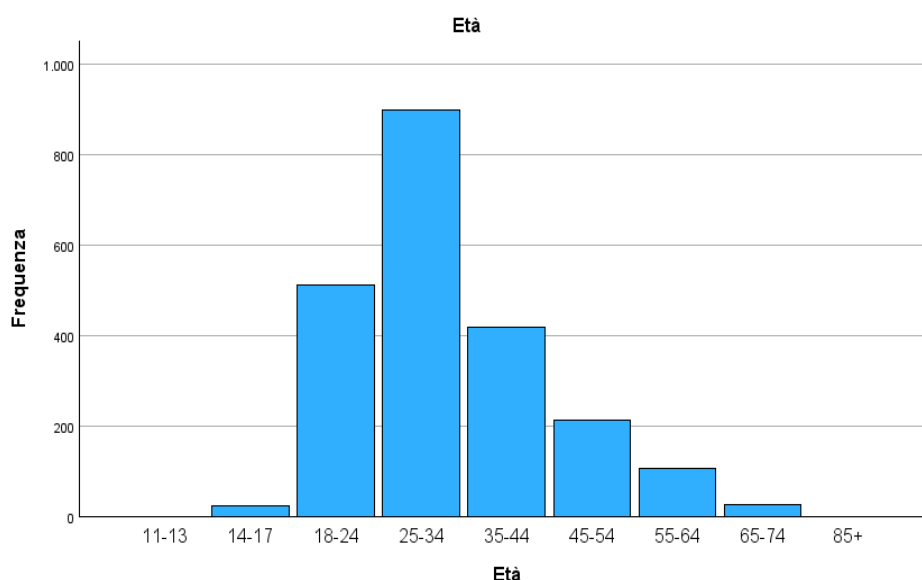


Figure 1 - Distribution by age group of the Italian participants in the questionnaire.

The analysis of the age groups shows that the sample is mainly composed of young and adult women, with a clear concentration in the 25-34 age group (40.8%), followed by the 18-24 age group (23.3%) and 35-44 years (19%). Participants aged between 45 and 54 represent 9.7% of the sample, while the over-55 groups make up 6.1% overall. Only 0.0% (1 response) refers to girls under 13 years of age and women over 85.

This figure clearly indicates that the Pink Claw project has more effectively intercepted young women of university, working and potentially parental age, i.e. central groups in which the relationship with sport can be conditioned by factors such as available free time, work or family management. The low representation of the very young and over 65 highlights an area on which communication and accessibility should be strengthened in the next interventions.

## Occupation

Professione/studi/occupazione		
	N	%
studente	427	19,4%
studente lavoratore	30	1,4%
lavoro generico	286	13,0%
lavori leggeri	802	36,4%
lavori moderati	342	15,5%
lavori pesanti	207	9,4%
pensionato o disoccupato	83	3,8%
atleta o ballerina	27	1,2%

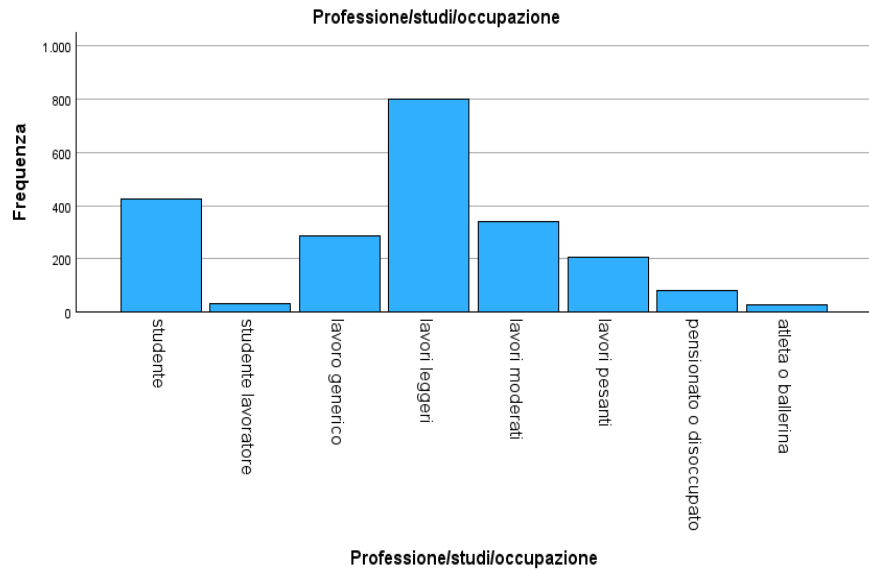


Figure 2 - Distribution of participants by employment status.

As far as employment status is concerned, the largest group is represented by women who do light work (36.4%), followed by female students (19.4%), employed in moderate-intensity jobs (15.5%) and women with general work (13%). Physically heavy jobs account for 9.4% of responses, while working students are 1.4%. 3.8% say they are unemployed or retired, while only 1.2% identify as an athlete or dancer.

The prevalence of light work suggests that the majority of respondents have an activity compatible with sporting commitment, at least on a physical level. However, the distribution also shows how the demands of time, family management or economic precariousness could still negatively affect participation in sport, regardless of the effort required by the profession.

## Region

In quale regione vive?		
	N	%
nord	755	34,3%
centro	1099	49,9%
sud e isole	350	15,9%

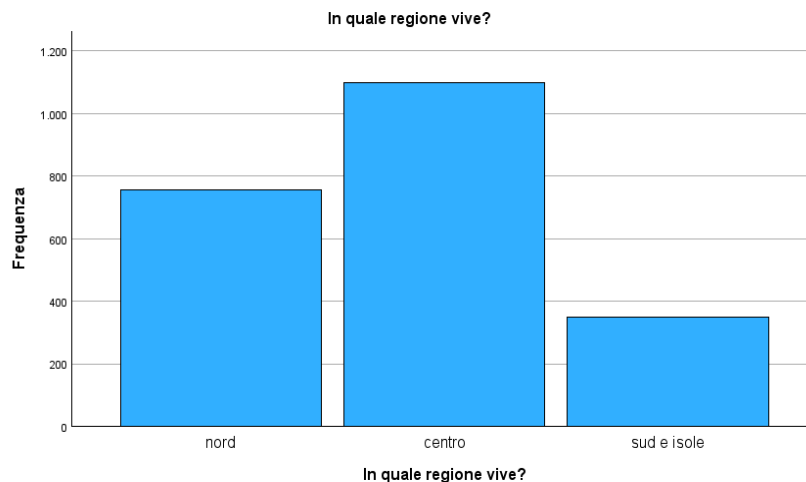


Figure 3 - Geographical distribution of the Italian participants in the questionnaire.

49.9% of respondents live in Central Italy, 34.3% in the North, and only 15.9% come from the South and the islands. This figure is influenced by the operational location of the national partner (based in Rome), but also highlights a lower territorial coverage in the southern regions, where it is notoriously more difficult to reach certain targets due to the fragmentation of services, the lower presence of accessible sports facilities and cultural differences related to gender.

## Marital status

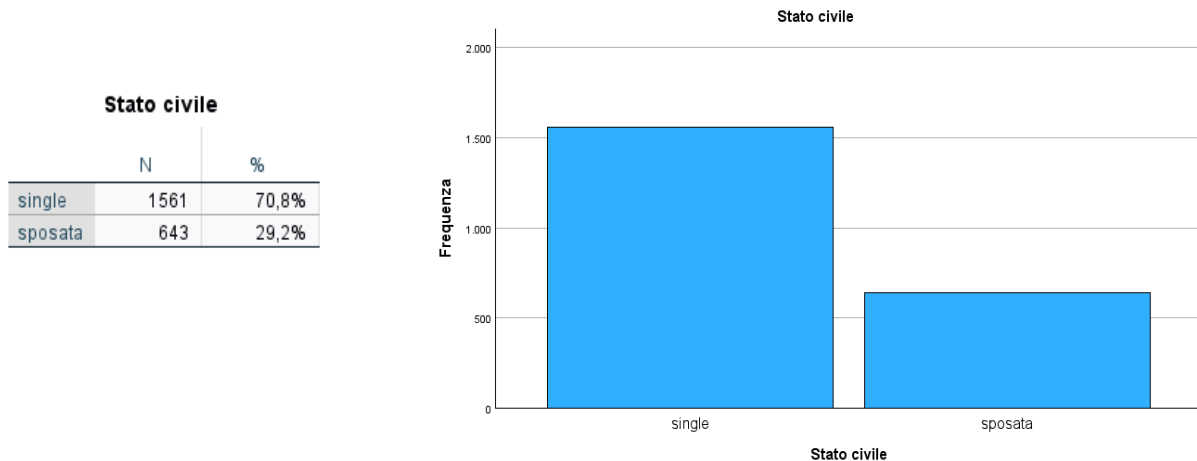


Figure 4 - Distribution of participants by marital status.

70.8% of the sample defines themselves as single, while 29.2% are married. This figure can also be interpreted in the light of the average age of the sample (mainly under 35), but it still offers food for thought on how marital status influences or does not affect the possibility of practicing sports, especially in the presence of children or family dependents.

## Presence of children

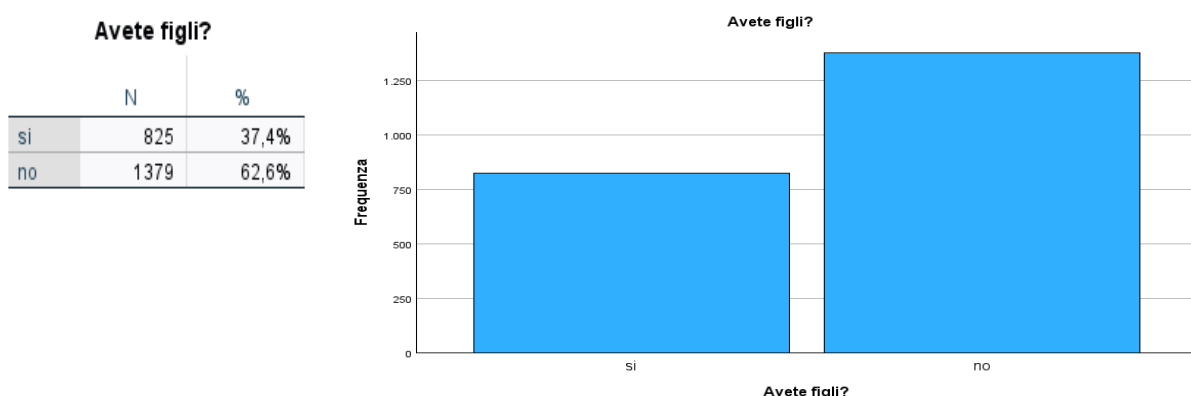


Figure 5 - Presence of children among the participants.

Finally, 37.4% of the participants say they have children, compared to 62.6% who do not. Again, the data reflect the young average age of the respondents, but still provide a useful indication to segment the analysis according to the needs of those with family responsibilities, especially in the organization of Pink Claw activities.

## Physical Activity

pratici qualche attività fisica?		
	N	%
si	1336	60,6%
no	868	39,4%

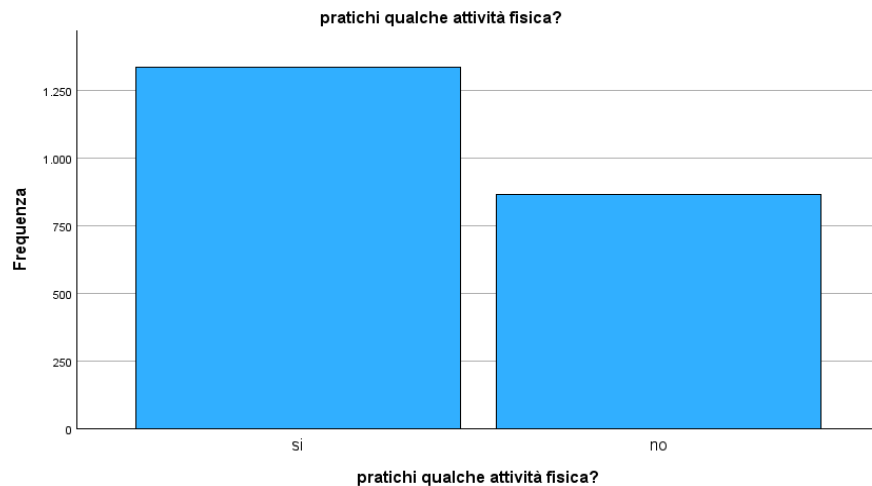


Figure 6 - Participation in physical activity

To the question "Do you practice any physical activity?", 60.6% answered yes, while 39.4% said they did not carry out regular physical activity. This figure is central, as it highlights how, despite an active majority, a substantial share (over a third) of the Italian women involved are not currently engaged in sporting activities, despite having in many cases expressed desire or interest in doing so. The reasons related to this inactivity will be explored in the following chapters.

In order to understand if there are activities that women prefer over others, they were asked which sports they had practiced, or were currently practicing. The graph shows the distribution of sports activities indicated by Italian participants. The answers, which could be multiple, were grouped into seven macro-areas for a clearer and more systematic reading: team sports, individual sports, fitness, swimming sports, dance sports, combat sports and winter sports.

Fitness emerges as the most popular category, with 661 occurrences, followed by individual sports (203), team sports (139) and swimming sports (135). The more "corporal" and accessible disciplines seem to attract a significant share of women, suggesting a strong demand for flexible, customizable and low-organizational activities. Participation in combat sports (36) and winter sports (43) is lower, probably for economic, cultural or logistical reasons.

Importantly, the total number of responses exceeds that of participants, as it was possible to indicate more activities. This figure confirms the plurality of women's sporting interests and offers valuable insights for the design of multidisciplinary programs that encourage involvement, maintenance and return to sporting activity. The classification into macro-areas also makes it possible to identify the most attractive sports sectors and those still to be explored or strengthened, also in relation to the specific targets of the Pink Claw project.

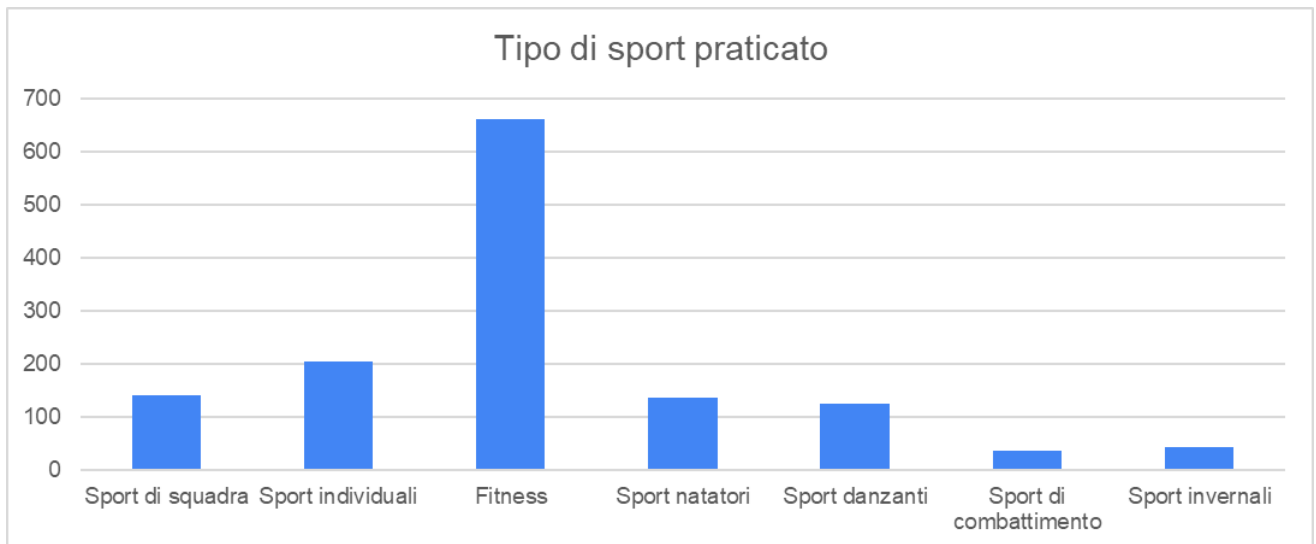


Figura 7 - Distribution of the types of sports practiced by respondents.

We also asked the women where they practiced these sports. The figure confirms a clear preference for fitness carried out in dedicated areas such as gyms, weight rooms and crossfit centers (38.1%), followed by participation in activities organized by clubs (14.2%) and sports associations (13.6%). On the other hand, the number of those who practice sports through initiatives promoted by the Municipality (1.4%) or completely independently (8.5%) is very low. Almost 34% said they do not practice any sporting activity.

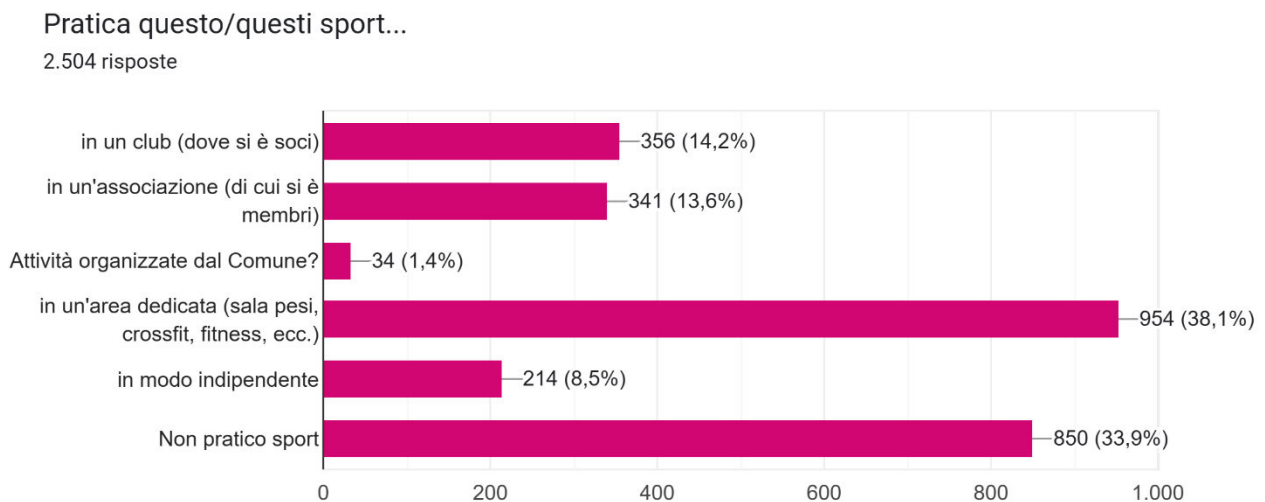


Figura 8 - Preferred settings for sports practice

### Physical activity levels (vigorous, moderate activity, walking, sedentary lifestyle)

The analysis of the weekly physical activity levels of the Italian participants was conducted using the parameters of the IPAQ (International Physical Activity Questionnaire), which allows to measure the intensity, frequency and duration of the physical activity carried out. The data collected were reprocessed and synthesized with SPSS, calculating the weekly averages on the valid answers provided.

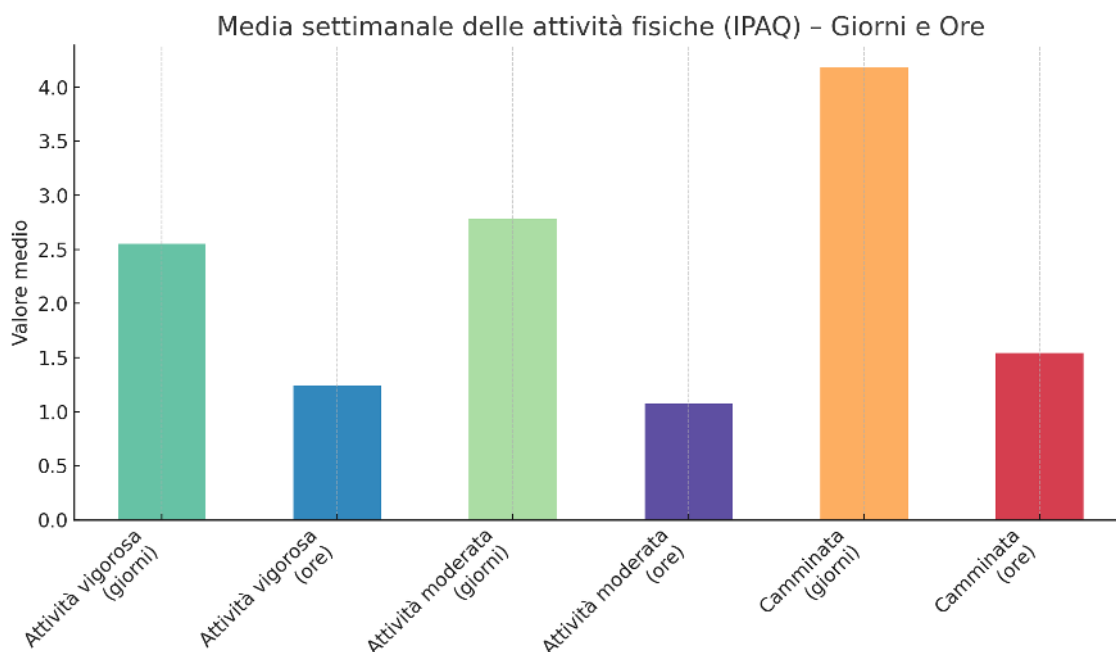


Figure 9 - Weekly Average Physical Activities (IPAQ) – Days and Hours.

As for vigorous physical activity, the participants said they practiced it on average 2.55 days a week, with an average duration of 1.24 hours a day. These are high-intensity activities such as fast running, functional workouts, weightlifting or intensive aerobic sports. This suggests the presence of an active segment of the sample, but also a large area for improvement to encourage more regular participation.

Moderate physical activity, which includes actions such as brisk walking, regular cycling or non-intensive team sports, was slightly more frequent: respondents practiced it on average 2.78 days a week, with an average daily duration of 1.07 hours. This data confirms a good diffusion of accessible practices, which require less physical effort but maintain health benefits.

Very significant is the practice of walking for at least 10 consecutive minutes, carried out on average 4.18 days a week with an average duration of 1.54 hours per day. This value, higher than the others, confirms that walking represents a widespread, sustainable form of movement that is often integrated into everyday life (e.g. home-work journeys, urban travel), even in the absence of structured sporting activity.

The data relating to the average daily sedentary lifestyle were not sufficiently complete to be calculated with statistical accuracy (many answers were empty or poorly formatted), but their treatment will eventually be the subject of qualitative investigations.

Overall, the levels found indicate that many participants engage in intermittent physical activity, with good walking levels and moderate intensity, but with room for improvement in

the regularity of vigorous activity and the reduction of sedentary time. The next sections of the report will delve into the motivations and obstacles related to these behaviors.

To complete the descriptive analysis of physical activity levels (IPAQ), it was considered essential to investigate the relationship between the intensity of sports activity and some sociodemographic and behavioral variables of the participants. For this reason, further statistical analyses were conducted with SPSS, based on the application of the Pearson chi-square test, in order to assess the significance of the association between IPAQ levels (low, moderate, high) and a number of factors: the presence of children, marital status, region of residence, employment status and declaration of sports practice.

These analyses have made it possible to highlight recurring patterns and to better understand which categories of women are more active or at risk of inactivity, thus offering essential elements to guide future differentiated sports promotion actions. All the results reported in the following sections are statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) and confirm the importance of considering the personal and social context in designing inclusive and effective sports interventions.

### Having children and IPAQ level

		IPAQ															
		Low Conteggio	Moderate Conteggio	High Conteggio													
Avete figli?	si	180	155	490	<b>Test chi-quadrato di Pearson</b> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="2"></th> <th>IPAQ</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Avete figli?</td> <td>Chi-quadrato</td> <td>18,383</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>df</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Sig.</td> <td>&lt;,001*</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			IPAQ	Avete figli?	Chi-quadrato	18,383		df	2		Sig.	<,001*
			IPAQ														
Avete figli?	Chi-quadrato	18,383															
	df	2															
	Sig.	<,001*															
no	219	221	939														

Figure 10 - Relationship between the presence of children and the level of physical activity (IPAQ). The table shows the results of Pearson's chi-square test for the variable "having children" compared to physical activity levels classified according to IPAQ (low, moderate, high). The data show that childless women are significantly more concentrated in the highest levels of physical activity. The chi-square value ( $\chi^2 = 18.383$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) confirms that the observed difference is statistically significant, suggesting that maternity may be a limiting factor in regular sports practice.

The analysis of the level of physical activity (IPAQ) in relation to the variable "having children" reveals a significant correlation: women without children tend to have a higher level of physical activity than those with children. The data show that 939 childless women rank in the "high" IPAQ level, compared to only 490 women with children. The distribution shows that maternity is a factor that can limit the continuity of sports practice, probably due to the burden of care and daily organizational difficulties. The chi-square test confirms the significance of the relationship ( $p < 0.001$ ), underlining that the presence of children is associated with a reduction in the level of physical activity, even in the absence of pathologies or physical limitations. This reinforces the importance of thinking about inclusive solutions for mothers, such as sports babysitting services, mother-daughter activities or flexible hours.

### Marital status and IPAQ level

		IPAQ		
		Low Conteggio	Moderate Conteggio	High Conteggio
Stato civile	single	213	249	1099
	sposata	186	127	330

#### Test chi-quadrato di Pearson

		IPAQ
Stato civile	Chi-quadrato	88,177
	df	2
	Sig.	<,001*

Figure 11 - Association between marital status and physical activity levels (IPAQ). The table presents the relationship between the participants' marital status (single or married) and their weekly physical activity levels, classified according to the IPAQ. Single women were found to have a higher incidence of high physical activity (1,099 in the "High" level) than married women (330 in the same level). Pearson's chi-square test confirms a statistically significant relationship between the two variables ( $\chi^2 = 88.177$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that marital status has a significant influence on the level of physical activity practiced.

Marital status also has a statistically significant impact on the distribution of IPAQ levels. Single women tend to have higher levels of physical activity than married women: in the high IPAQ level there are 1,099 singles, compared to 330 married. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 88.177$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) indicates that marital status is not neutral with respect to sports practice. Single women may have greater autonomy in managing their free time, fewer family ties and more social opportunities related to sport. Married women, on the other hand, seem to be penalized by a possible unequal division of care and household management tasks. These results suggest the need to consider the family and relational burden in the design of sports interventions, offering concrete supports to encourage the participation of women with more marked family responsibilities.

#### 4.2.2 Region of residence and IPAQ level

The geographical area of residence is another factor that significantly influences physical activity levels. The data reveal that women residing in **Central Italy** are the most active, with 766 participants classified in the high IPAQ level. This is followed by the North (454) and the South and Islands (209). The chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 25.644$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) confirms a statistically significant difference.

		IPAQ		
		Low Conteggio	Moderate Conteggio	High Conteggio
In quale regione vive?	nord	154	147	454
	centro	164	169	766
	sud e isole	81	60	209

#### Test chi-quadrato di Pearson

		IPAQ
In quale regione vive?	Chi-quadrato	25,644
	df	4
	Sig.	<,001*

I risultati sono basati sulle righe e sulle colonne non vuote in ogni sottotabella più interna.

\*. La statistica chi-quadrato è significativa al livello ,05.

Figure 12 - Association between geographical area of residence and level of physical activity (IPAQ). The table shows the distribution of IPAQ levels (low, moderate, high) according to the area of residence of the participants (North, Centre, South and Islands). Women residing in Central Italy have the highest share of intense physical activity (766 in the "High" level), followed by those in the North (454) and finally by the South and Islands (209). The chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 25.644$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) shows a significant relationship between geographical area and level of physical activity, suggesting that the territory of belonging affects access to and continuity of sports practice.

These disparities may reflect structural differences between territories, such as the availability of sports facilities, the presence of sports associations, the quality of public spaces and accessibility to services. In addition, the regional socio-economic context can influence sports culture and the possibility of dedicating time to sport. The Pink Claw project, in order to be effective on a national scale, will have to take into account these differences and structure localized and tailor-made actions, especially to bridge the gap between the South and the Centre-North.

### **Employment and IPAQ level**

Professione/studi/occupazione		IPAQ		
		Low Conteggio	Moderate Conteggio	High Conteggio
Professione/studi/occupazione	studente	71	55	301
	studente lavoratore	3	5	22
	lavoro generico	85	34	167
	lavori leggeri	145	157	500
	lavori moderati	52	63	227
	lavori pesanti	26	41	140
	pensionato o disoccupato	17	21	45
atleta o ballerina	0	0	27	

#### **Test chi-quadrato di Pearson**

Professione/studi/occupazione	IPAQ	
	Chi-quadrato	66,210
Professione/studi/occupazione	df	14
	Sig.	<,001*

I risultati sono basati sulle righe e sulle colonne non vuote in ogni sottotabella più interna.

\*. La statistica chi-quadrato è significativa al livello ,05.

Figure 13 - Association between occupational status and physical activity level (IPAQ). The table shows the distribution of physical activity levels among the different occupational categories of the participants. Women engaged in light work and female students recorded the highest frequencies in the IPAQ "High" level, with 500 and 301 participants respectively. On the contrary, pensioners, unemployed women and those who do heavy work have a lower incidence of intense physical activity. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 66.210$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) confirms a statistically significant relationship between employment and physical activity, indicating that the type of employment significantly affects the ability to play sport regularly.

The level of physical activity of the participants also varies according to their employment situation. The results show that those who do light jobs or study are more likely to achieve a high IPAQ level: 500 women with light jobs and 301 female students are in this category. On the other hand, among the unemployed or retired, only 41 fall within the high IPAQ level. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 66.210$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) shows that working conditions directly influence the level of physical activity. Physically exhausting or excessively strenuous work does not favor sports practice, while those who carry out a less demanding activity may have more energy and time available to train. These results suggest that sport promotion should take into account workloads, differentiating proposals for different occupational targets (e.g. short targeted sessions for female shift workers or relaxing after-work activities for those doing heavy work).

## Current sport practice and IPAQ level

		IPAQ		
		Low Conteggio	Moderate Conteggio	High Conteggio
pratici qualche attività fisica?	si	49	165	1122
	no	350	211	307

### Test chi-quadrato di Pearson

	IPAQ
pratici qualche attività fisica?	Chi-quadrato 626,383
	df 2
	Sig. <,001*

Figure 14 - Relationship between declaration of sports practice and level of physical activity (IPAQ). The table compares IPAQ levels between those who said they exercised and those who didn't. Participants who say they do physical activity are largely concentrated in the "High" level (1,122), while those who do not practice sports are represented above all in the "Low" and "Moderate" levels. The chi-square test ( $\chi^2 = 626.383$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) confirms a very strong correlation between the subjective perception of physical activation and the level measured according to IPAQ, demonstrating the internal consistency between self-assessment and objective results in the sample analyzed.

The link between the declared sport practice and the IPAQ level is the most evident of all those analyzed. Those who responded to practice physical activity concentrated almost entirely in the "high" IPAQ level: 1,122 participants. On the contrary, among those who do not practice, as many as 350 are in the "low" IPAQ level. The chi-square test is highly significant ( $\chi^2 = 626.383$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This data demonstrates that the subjective perception of being active is well correlated with the objective data collected. Furthermore, it suggests that there is a slice of the population that, although not feeling active, is still recoverable on a motivational level. The activities of Pink Claw will be able to exploit this margin, working on gentle reactivation approaches for those with low levels, and on advanced paths for women already trained, thus offering a stratified program accessible to all levels of physical condition.

## Past experience and causes of interruption of sports practice

A central part of the questionnaire was dedicated to the reconstruction of the participants' relationship with sports practice throughout their lives. The question "Have you ever practiced a sporting activity?" received an affirmative response from the vast majority of Italian women involved. However, it has become clear that many of them have stopped their activity over time, for reasons that vary greatly depending on the stage of life, personal conditions and opportunities offered by the context.

To elaborate on this aspect, they were asked to specify "Why did you stop this activity?" tag. The answers, often multiple, were collected in open form and subsequently coded. The data analyzed with SPSS show that the main causes of interruption of sports practice were:

- **Lack of time** (256 responses): this is the most frequent reason, often linked to the reconciliation of work, study, family and other commitments;
- **Life change** (250): transfers, changes of school, job, family events or changes in routine;
- **Health reasons** (215): accidents, chronic diseases, temporary or psychophysical problems;
- **Financial difficulties** (193): too high costs for subscriptions, equipment or travel;

- **Lack of available facilities** (60): absence of adequate space in the area of residence;
- **Negative relationship with one's own body or with sport in general** (42): physical complexes, discomfort in exposing oneself, social judgment;
- **Movements and transfers** (36): related to changes in city or environment;
- **Disagreement with parents** (19): Responses came mainly from participants who stopped sport in school or adolescence.

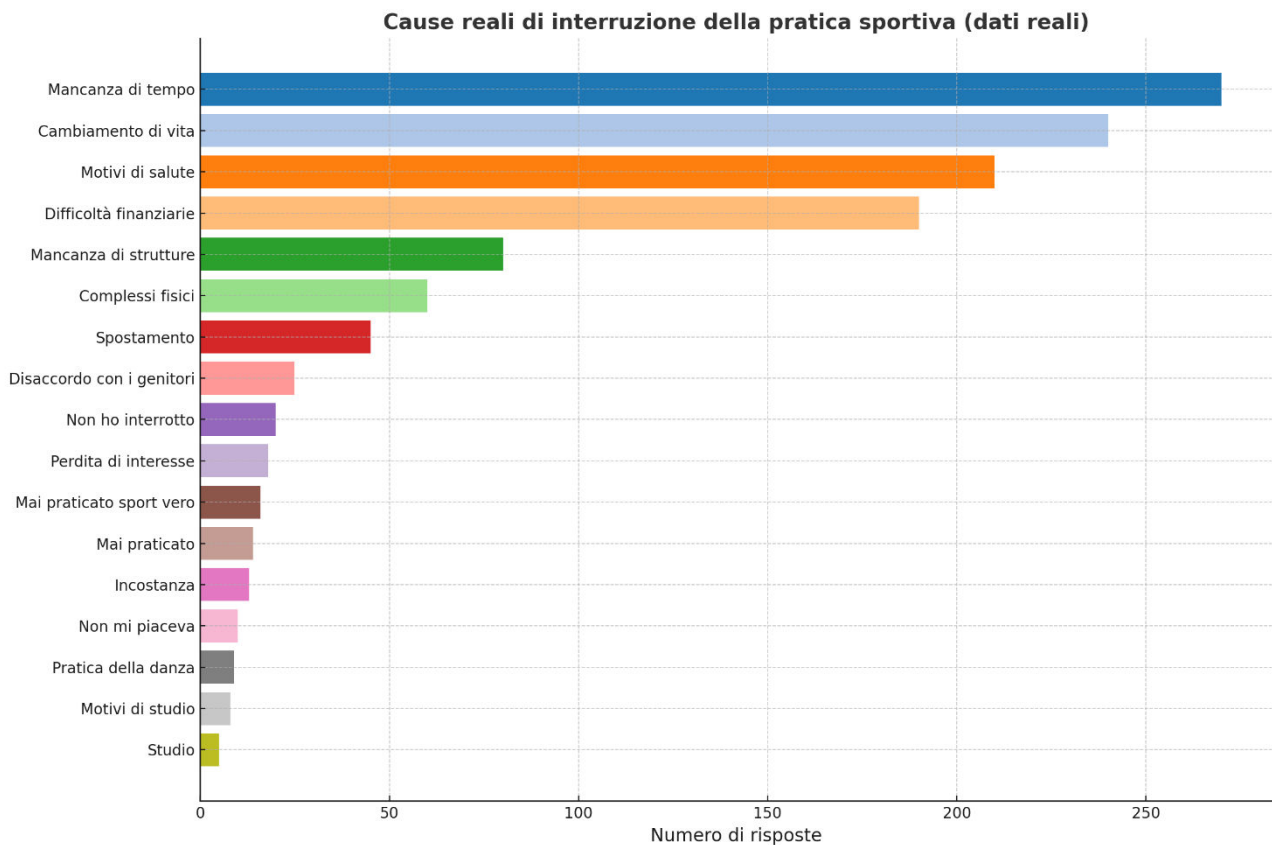


Figure 15 - Real causes of interruption of sports practice

Other less frequent answers brought out specific individual experiences (e.g. "I didn't like it", "reasons for study"), which, while representing individual cases, confirm the variety and subjectivity of motivations.

In addition, a share of participants declared that they had never interrupted, or had never practiced sports in a structured way. These responses highlight the presence of discontinuous paths, linked to contexts in which access to sport has not been guaranteed from the beginning.

These results underline the need to design flexible and inclusive pathways, capable of taking into account the discontinuities in women's lives, encouraging the return to sports practice even after a long break. With this in mind, Pink Claw can respond to a concrete need, offering opportunities for movement designed to reconcile practical, emotional and social needs.

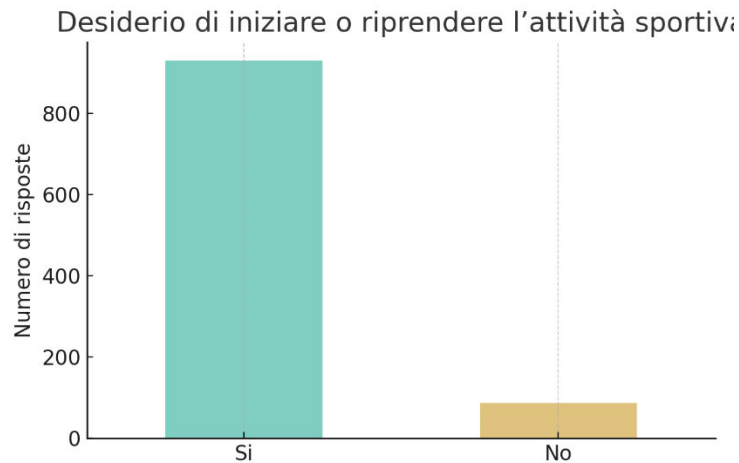


Figure 16 - Declared intention to undertake or resume sports practice.

Another relevant fact that emerged from the analysis concerns the willingness of the participants to reactivate physically. To the question *"Would you like to start or resume a physical/athletic activity in the coming months?"*, 1,015 Italian women responded. Of these, 929 (91.5%) expressed a clear interest in resuming or starting a sporting activity, while only 86 (8.5%) said they did not have this intention.

It is important to underline that not all the 2,209 Italian participants answered this question, since it was only proposed to those who, in the flow of the questionnaire, had indicated that they had interrupted a previous sporting activity or did not currently practice one. The conditional logic of the form (based on Google Forms filters) therefore excluded respondents who were not in this condition from the question, which is why the total number of responses is lower than the general sample.

However, the figure remains very significant: the vast majority of those who responded express a concrete and current interest in the resumption of sports practice, a condition that highlights a widespread and potentially activatable need. Women who have interrupted or never started do not perceive it as a definitive rejection, but as a suspension linked to surmountable obstacles, such as lack of time, life changes or the absence of favorable contexts.

This information is fundamental for the Pink Claw project, as it outlines a wide, motivated audience ready to get back into the game, provided that flexible, welcoming and tailor-made activities are proposed, capable of responding to the real rhythms of women's lives.

### **Interest in new sports activities and related motivations**

One of the central objectives of the Pink Claw project is the creation of sports contexts reserved for women, in which it is possible to practice physical activity in a safe, serene and motivating way. For this reason, the questionnaire included the question: *"Would the opportunity to play sports in a female-only environment encourage you to do more physical activity?"*

Out of a total of 1,354 valid answers, as many as 1,307 women (96.5%) answered yes, while only 47 (3.5%) said that it would not make a difference or be a motivating factor. This result is among the most significant of the entire survey: almost all of the participants recognize the importance and added value of a women's sports environment.

The figure is even more relevant if related to the reasons for drop-out previously analyzed: many women have in fact indicated among the causes of drop-out discomfort in mixed environments, fear of judgment, lack of security or the absence of reference figures. In this sense, offering sports sessions only for women represents not only a logistical solution, but a real empowerment strategy, which responds to a deep need for protection, belonging and freedom of movement.

The figure therefore confirms the full consistency of the Pink Claw project with the desires and expectations of the Italian participants. Activities in female-only environments are not a niche, but a decisive factor of accessibility and a powerful stimulus to participation, especially for those who are inactive, insecure or have had negative experiences with sport.

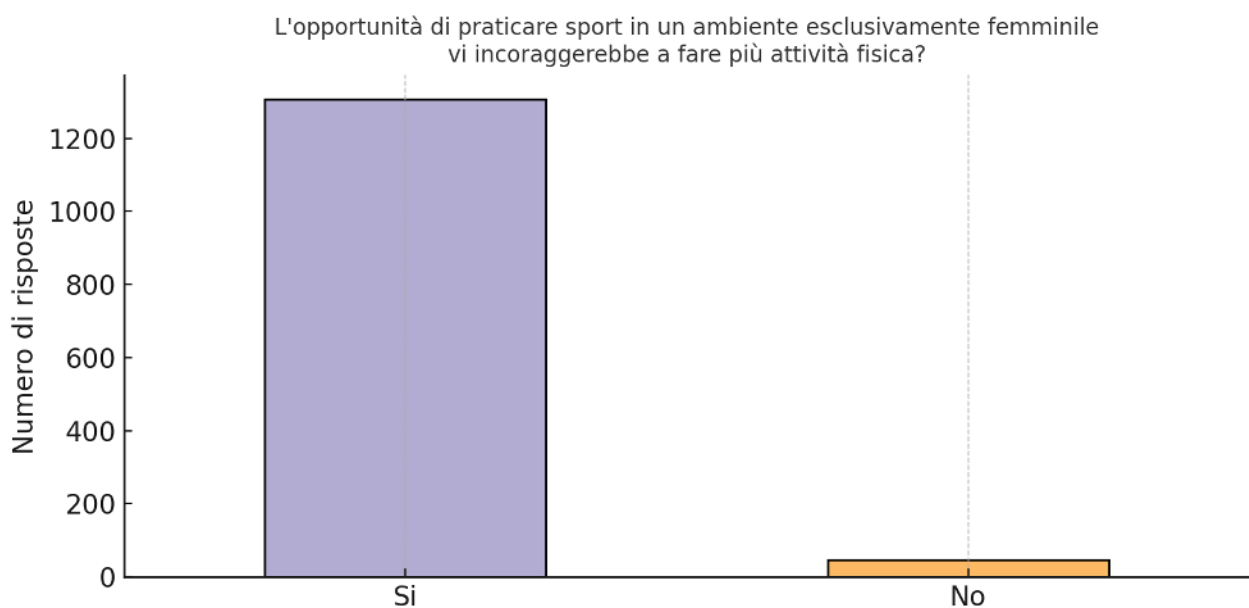


Figure 17 - Perceived impact of a female-only sports environment on motivation for physical activity.

### **Perceived barriers and obstacles (including representation of women in sport)**

In order to understand in depth the individual drives that favor female participation in sport, the question was included in the questionnaire: *"What are the personal motivations that push you to practice a sporting activity?"* tag. The answers, of an open and multiple type, were subsequently coded to identify the most recurring trends.

The analysis returned a very articulated picture, but with some prevailing reasons that emerged clearly. In first place is the feeling of personal growth (699 responses), followed by "taking up a challenge" (602) and "becoming stronger and fit" (547). These data indicate that, beyond the physical aspect, sport is experienced by many participants as a space for personal evolution and affirmation, where it is possible to measure oneself and one's limits.

The dimension of pleasure and well-being also has a significant weight: *"having fun"* collects 541 responses, while *"staying fit"* follows with 476. Body-related motivations are therefore not exclusively aesthetic, but are intertwined with health, energy, autonomy and vitality.

The relational and social motivations are also interesting: *"social dimension"* (455), *"being in a group"* and *"team spirit"* (439 both) indicate that for many women sport is also an experience of sharing, belonging and cooperation. At the same time, *"dedicating time to myself"* (301) emphasizes the importance of carving out a personal space, independent of family or work demands.

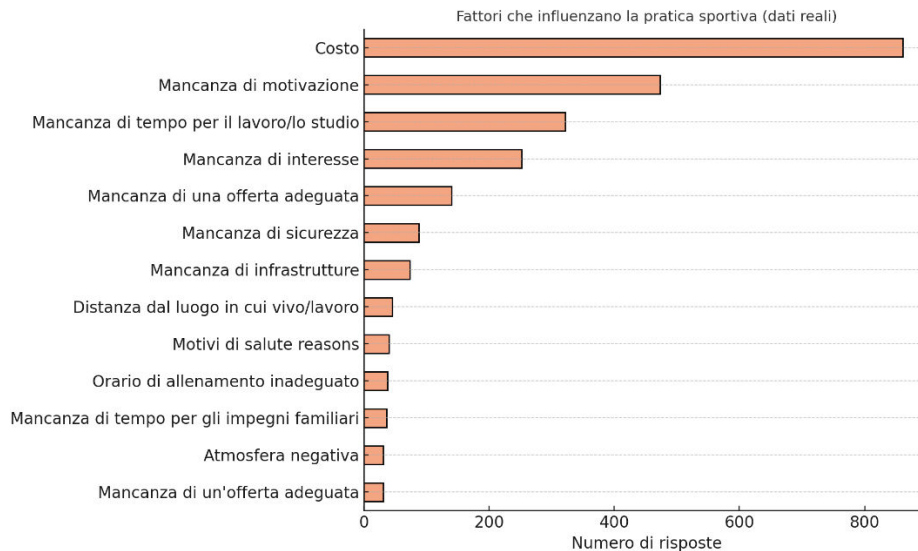


Figure 18 - Factors influencing women's sports practice

These data show that the motivations for practicing sports are complex and multidimensional, and that any effective project proposal must take into account this intertwining of individual growth, pleasure, physical well-being, relationships and personal time. The Pink Claw project can respond to these needs by offering integrated paths, capable of enhancing the body as a place of strength, relationship and free expression.

To understand what are the main obstacles that limit or condition women's access to sport, the questionnaire included a direct question: *"Which of the following factors do you think is/are the most important influencing sport?"*tag. Participants could choose one or more answers from a list of possibilities.

The analysis of the data collected showed that the most cited factor was cost (861 responses), confirming that affordability is a crucial issue for many women. The inability to bear the expenses for subscriptions, equipment, travel or registration is a concrete and often insurmountable barrier.

Next, the lack of motivation emerges strongly (473 responses), a figure that recalls the importance of proposing activities capable of involving and stimulating the participants, also from an emotional, social and personal point of view. On the other hand, the lack of time related to work and study (322) and the lack of interest (252) highlight the difficulties related to the management of everyday life and competition with other commitments perceived as priorities.

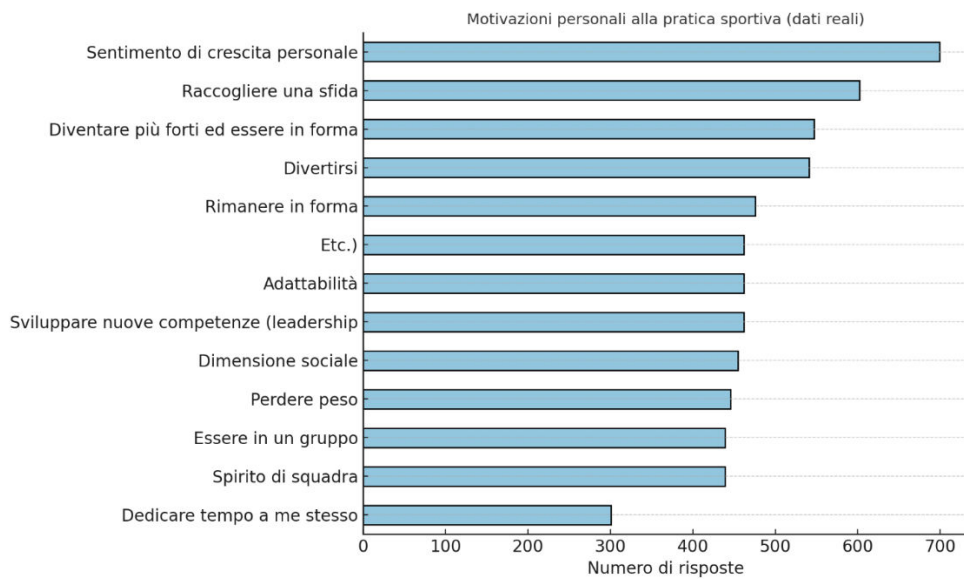


Figure 19 - Personal motivations for sports practice

Other relevant factors include: lack of adequate provision (140), lack of safety (88), distance from the place of practice (45), inadequate training time (38), and lack of time for family reasons (36). Further down the ranking, but still significant, are the overrepresentation of men in sports environments, the negative atmosphere, the lack of communication, and health-related problems.

These results confirm that access to sport for women does not depend only on personal will, but is strongly conditioned by structural, logistical, cultural and emotional factors. To be truly effective, every intervention – including that of the Pink Claw project – must take into account this plurality of obstacles and design actions capable of reducing or compensating for them, creating truly accessible, safe and motivating spaces.

### Timetables, travel time, sports environment

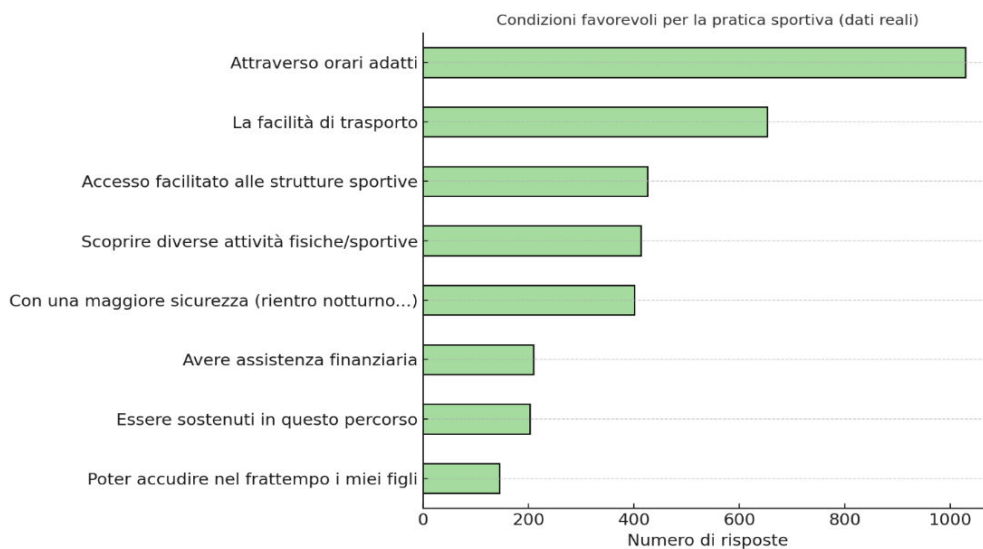


Figure 20 - Conditions considered favourable to encourage sports practice

Understanding what are the factors that affect women's sports practice is essential to design effective and targeted interventions. To the question "*Which of the following factors do you think is the most important influencing sports practice?*", the Italian participants clearly and articulately indicated a variety of critical elements, many of which are related to economic, organisational and motivational barriers.

The most evident figure concerns the cost of sporting activity, indicated by 861 participants as the main obstacle. This element represents a transversal barrier that significantly affects access to sport, especially for those who are in unstable economic conditions or also have to bear family expenses. The second most cited factor is the lack of personal motivation, with 473 responses: this recalls the urgency of rethinking physical activity not only as a performance, but as a rewarding, engaging and useful experience for psychophysical well-being.

This is followed by lack of time due to work or study (322) and lack of interest (252), which indicate a lack of compatibility between the timing of sport and the real rhythms of women's lives. Also of note are the lack of adequate sports offer (140), the perception of insecurity in sports spaces (88), the distance of the facilities (45), and schedules that are not compatible with daily commitments (38). To a lesser extent, but still significant, family difficulties, precarious health and the lack of clear communication about available opportunities emerge.

The picture that emerges shows how sports practice is influenced by a complex set of conditions, in which material and subjective factors are intertwined. The Pink Claw project will therefore have to act on several levels, offering activities that are affordable, organized with attention to schedules and distances, and enhanced through a clear and inclusive message. Only in this way will it be possible to really reduce barriers and make sport a concrete possibility for all women.

# DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

## **General Interpretation of the Characteristics of the Sample**

The analysis of the Italian sample in the Pink Claw project shows a predominance of young women aged 25–34 (40.8%) and 18–24 (23.3%), a key life stage for personal and professional growth. Women aged 35–44 (19%) also show interest, while participation drops significantly after 45, likely due to cultural, digital, or motivational barriers. Most participants have light jobs (36.4%), followed by students (19.4%) and those in moderate-intensity jobs (15.5%). Only 9.4% have heavy jobs, and 3.8% are unemployed, possibly reflecting access difficulties. Geographically, 49.9% are from Central Italy, 34.3% from the North, and just 15.9% from the South and Islands, showing a regional gap. A large share are single (70.8%), while 29.2% are married; 37.4% have children, confirming that motherhood often limits sport participation. Regular physical activity is practiced by 60.6%, while 39.4% are inactive due to time, motivation, health, or cost barriers. The overall profile reveals shared challenges and directions for tailored interventions.

## **Discussion of the Main Barriers to Women’s Participation in Sport**

The main barriers identified include economic costs (fees, equipment, transport), time constraints (work, family), and social issues (competitive environments, stereotypes, lack of female role models). Physical distance from sports venues and limited public transport access add to the difficulty. Health problems and the lack of adapted programs further restrict participation, as does poor communication about available opportunities. Overcoming these barriers requires integrated strategies: financial accessibility, support services, inclusive environments, efficient transport, tailored activities, and clear, inclusive information.

## **Motivational Factors and Favourable Conditions**

Top motivations include personal growth, self-challenge, fitness improvement, fun, and social interaction. Many women view sport as a source of empowerment and well-being. Having personal time and friendly environments is essential. Key enabling conditions are facility proximity, affordability, and flexible scheduling—crucial to ensure regular and satisfying participation.

## **Specific Analysis of the Preferences Expressed for the Pink Claw Project**

Participants strongly prefer women-only sports environments, seen as safer and more welcoming. There is high interest in typically “masculine” activities like self-defense and tactical fitness, indicating a desire to break stereotypes. Flexible scheduling and easily accessible locations (under 30 minutes travel) are essential. Lastly, childcare services or parallel kids' activities are highly valued, making participation easier for mothers. These preferences provide clear guidance for structuring an effective and inclusive project.

# CONCLUSION OF RESULTS OF THE STUDY IN ITALY

## **Operational indications for the PINK CLAW project**

To optimize the impact of the Pink Claw project and respond effectively to the needs of the women involved, it is essential to focus on organizational, structural and methodological aspects. Below, some recommendations are presented that are based on the analyses and reflections that emerged from the project, supplemented with information from recent studies:

- Women-only spaces are essential to ensure comfort and freedom from judgment, promoting non-competitive, inclusive environments.
- Variety of activities should be offered, including both traditional (e.g., fitness) and non-traditional (e.g., self-defense, obstacle courses) disciplines to challenge stereotypes.
- Affordability must be ensured through reduced fees or free access for vulnerable groups like single mothers or unemployed women.
- Flexible scheduling is critical. Activities should be available at various times, including evenings and weekends.
- Easily accessible locations and, where needed, transport support (e.g., shuttles) must be provided, especially in remote areas.
- Motivational support, such as group coaching or personal guidance, helps build confidence, especially for beginners.
- Inclusivity must be a priority: all women, regardless of background, should feel welcome and represented.
- Ongoing monitoring is needed to adapt activities to real needs, measure impact, and ensure project relevance.

## **Strategies to address and reduce identified barriers**

To promote women's participation in sport, it is crucial to address the main barriers identified in the Pink Claw survey through integrated and practical solutions. Economic constraints are one of the most significant obstacles. Many women, especially those in vulnerable situations such as single mothers or unemployed individuals, are unable to afford fees for sports activities, equipment, or transport. To counter this, projects like Pink Claw should offer discounted or free options and make use of public or shared community spaces. Additionally, partnerships with sponsors or local authorities can help reduce financial burdens and ensure wider access.

Time management is another critical issue. Women often juggle work, family, and social responsibilities, making it difficult to attend fixed-schedule activities. To respond to this, sport programs should offer short, flexible, and modular sessions at various times during the day, including evenings and weekends. Digital formats—such as online classes or on-demand video workouts—can further increase accessibility, allowing women to participate from home or during breaks in their day.

A major barrier linked to personal well-being is the sense of safety and inclusion. Many women feel uncomfortable or judged in mixed-gender or competitive sports settings. It is therefore essential to create inclusive, welcoming, and safe environments. This includes training staff on gender sensitivity and respect, fostering non-competitive atmospheres, and increasing the presence of qualified female professionals who can serve as points of reference and build trust among participants.

Cultural stereotypes remain a powerful disincentive. Sports are still often perceived as male-dominated or based on performance and competition. To challenge this, the Pink Claw project should include educational workshops and awareness-raising activities that promote a new culture of sport—centered on well-being, empowerment, and inclusivity. Highlighting diversity in sport and encouraging every woman's right to participate regardless of age, body type, or experience level can gradually dismantle these barriers.

Promoting strong female role models is equally important. Women need to see themselves reflected in sports leadership, media, and public discourse. Sharing stories of women from different backgrounds who engage in sports—through videos, social media, or community events—can inspire others and foster a sense of belonging. These narratives should emphasize personal growth, resilience, and the joy of movement, not just athletic achievements.

Accessibility to sports facilities also plays a key role. Activities should be hosted in easily reachable locations, preferably close to participants' homes or workplaces. In remote or underserved areas, transportation support (e.g., shuttles) could be provided to remove logistical challenges.

Supporting mothers is another critical aspect. Offering childcare services during activities or creating parallel sports sessions for children can significantly increase women's ability to participate. Such family-friendly formats create inclusive spaces where sport becomes part of a shared routine, not a separate or competing commitment.

Finally, communication must be clear, inclusive, and proactive. Centralized digital platforms should provide updated information on available activities, schedules, and access conditions. For women new to sport, offering beginner-friendly sessions—like yoga, pilates, or walking groups—can build confidence and encourage gradual engagement, reducing fear of judgment and increasing motivation to stay active.

### **Tips for Future Insights and Research**

Although the study is extensive, several areas deserve further exploration. A deeper focus on motherhood and family dynamics would be useful to understand how to better support women in balancing sport and caregiving.

Another line of research could address the cultural and social influences on women's sport participation, particularly the impact of stereotypes and media narratives. Using qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups could capture more nuanced insights into women's fears, expectations, and experiences.

It's also important to extend the analysis to underrepresented age groups, especially teenagers and older women, to better understand their barriers and motivations. Investigating sports drop-out in adolescence would be especially valuable for shaping long-term habits.

The role of digital tools in improving access to sport is another promising area, especially post-pandemic. Future research should assess how to make online formats truly inclusive and effective.

Territorial differences also warrant closer investigation. More localized research could identify region-specific needs and effective strategies, considering public infrastructure, policies, and existing networks.

Lastly, a long-term monitoring of Pink Claw and similar initiatives would help evaluate the sustained impact on women's participation, behaviors, and lifestyles.

Overall, this study lays a strong foundation, and the proposed directions can enhance knowledge and strategy development, with Pink Claw positioned as a replicable model for gender equality in sport.

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