

STEP UP EQUALITY

# Report: SUE Connection Tool

An online community to connect women athletes and leaders to advance women leadership and equality in sport



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### Partners

The project was implemented by the following organizations:

Stowarzyszenie na rzecz Demokracji w Sporcie / Democracy in Sport Association – AKS ZŁY (Poland)

ASSIST (Italy)

Fare Network (Netherlands) and Fare Network (Great Britain)

Fußball und Begegnung e.V. / DISCOVER FOOTBALL (Germany)

GEA Cooperativa Sociale (Italy)

Women Win (The Netherlands)

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# Introduction

## *An online space to build cooperation and networking*

This report is an outcome of the Step Up Equality project. It aims to illustrate the use of the Mobilize APP used during the Project, explain the content collected and shared within the platform, analyze usage data and the strengths and weaknesses related to the offline method. SUE Connection Tool was created as an added value of the project to give the athletes and leaders who participated in the project, in the trainings and pilot actions in the field, a stable digital place to connect, interact and access the materials that were produced and used in the training sessions by each partner organization.

Nowadays, women athletes and leadership roles in sport have more barriers in their professional sport paths, this fact is clear in research conducted in several European countries for Step Up Equality. Women continue to be largely marginalized from the decision-making and leadership sphere of sport, both at the top and grassroots sporting levels. Structural barriers are many, from discriminatory institutional legislation to social and cultural values that still limit women's opportunities.

One quality a woman can have that can be used as a counter to these barriers is the ability to build social networks to obtain the necessary resources, support and useful collaborations.

Therefore, having strong networks (online and offline) can make the difference between getting the position you want or not and having a support group to fight against gender discrimination. Experts agree and state that 70-85% of people on average are in their current position through networking. Networking skills, especially with key stakeholders, play a key role in one's ability to achieve a certain leadership position or simply the position one aspires to, in all fields and of course also in sport. The creation of valuable and lasting social and relational contacts encourages the exchange of thoughts and experiences, trains people to take in new information, to listen and learn from others, and also to support each other for mutual benefit and in case of need.

Networking can be online and offline. In the case of our Project, hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic, offline contact with the women involved was important. The exchanges that took place through the Mobilize platform increased the sense of solidarity and unity between

women athletes and leaders in different countries in Europe, and facilitated the exchange of information and personal experiences. The platform is definitely a place where you can not only circulate information related to the topic of women and sport and gender discrimination, make new acquaintances and find opportunities to travel abroad and perhaps job opportunities, but it was also designed as a space where you can find solidarity and resonance in case of sports discrimination.

Offline networking has a strong impact on the complaints that can be launched by women who suffer discrimination in the world of sport and beyond, but these must be well organised and coordinated in their dissemination and construction. Let's think of three well-known stories on the Italian scene, such as that of Alice Broccoli, a 33-year-old under-12 football coach who was fired because of some photos she posted on her personal Instagram profile. And the impact that Alice Broccoli's complaint has had on social networks, or the case of Lara Lugli, a pregnant volleyball player whose contract was not renewed because of her pregnancy and indeed the club for which she played had asked for damages, helped in the denunciation of her story by the National Association of Athletes (ASSIST), to the role of a player known for her battles on gender equality in sport, Khalida Popal, who launched a video on her Girl Power platform and her personal profiles in solidarity with Afghan women footballers, giving them advice on how to deal with the horror of the Taliban occupation in Afghanistan.

In today's world, online is therefore a tool that is present in the lives of each of us and that can open up avenues and allow us to expand our networks of contacts and broaden our knowledge on specific topics, such as women in sport through training and articles with professional content, since the material stored and the members of the community are regulated and controlled by the managers present on the platform who guarantee a safe space in which women athletes and leaders can feel free.

## 1. Why the Mobilize App to keep in touch

The first chapter presents the rationale for choosing the Mobilize APP for the Step Up Equality project and sets out the functions of the online platform. It offers readers unfamiliar with the platform to learn how to use it and its strengths, particularly in the two years of the Covid-19 pandemic in which online networking was useful for archiving the material created and keeping people involved in the Step Up Equality project in touch.

Mobilize is a free downloadable and online application for smartphones, tablets and PCs. The APP promotes the idea of a virtual community which each member can access through a personal email and password. Members are asked to describe themselves through personal details and areas of interest. Mobilize is great for creating an archive of data and documents as it provides ample space to create a library of documents to share with community members. Within the community there are moderator managers who coordinate and visualize the content that is posted on the platform.

The Mobilize guide can be found in a short video at the link: <https://www.mobilize.io/>

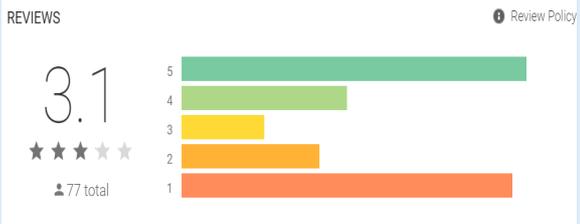
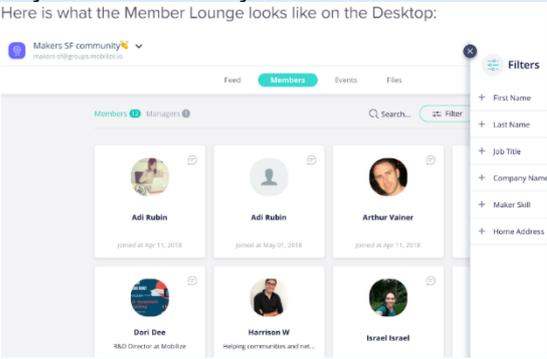
Listed below are the strengths and motivations that led to the choice of Mobilize for the Step Up Equality Project:

- File storage tools, files will be shown to the group or only to subgroups according to what the organizers decide, they can be stored permanently and folders can be created;
- Events can be sent to the whole group or only to subgroups, depending on what decisions are set;
- Keeping the discussion and interaction between people in a group between events is the main reason why the app was created: it really fits our SUE goal for this IO;
- Communication goes through the app and emails, but this function can be deactivated if people don't want to receive too many emails;
- First registration: you have to fill in the registration form, and this can be customized when you ask to join, adding some specific information we would like to have about the participants in our community;
- The group has no expiry date, even in the free version, so once it has been created, it is ours.

The working group of the project met on several occasions to discuss how to transmit the content and how to use the most appropriate tool to create a network between the professionals and the girls and women involved in the project (part training and part sports action on the field). The working group considered it useful not to create a specific App for the project but to exploit an existing platform such as Mobilize, although less known than

Facebook or Telegram, which are well-known social networks where it is possible to create specific groups, so as not to spread and circulate a platform that would have remained little known and would have had greater difficulty in spreading.

## Evaluation summary sheet Mobilize

PRO +	CONS -
<p>FREE forever, featuring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- up to 5,000 members</li> <li>- up to 5 administrators</li> <li>- up to 5 groups</li> <li>- private conversations between members</li> <li>- possibility to create sub-groups (thinking about national training groups)</li> <li>- events planner</li> </ul>	 <p>Reviews by users not positive. Mostly for technical problems of accessing and launching the app.</p>
<p>Easy access and good screen visibility both on the app and from PCs, iPads and smartphones, from different devices.</p>	<p>No possibility to view analytics to assess the performances of our app through the free version.</p>
<p>Layout seems easy and nice for users</p> <p>Here is what the Member Lounge looks like on the Desktop:</p> 	<p>Costs to upgrade some function aren't cheap (PRO version, others are more expensive and with functions we don't need):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starts at \$60/m or \$588/year for up to 5,000 contacts</li> <li>• +\$6/m or +\$60/year per additional 1,000 contacts</li> <li>• Up to 15 groups</li> <li>• Up to 15 admins</li> <li>• More email capabilities</li> <li>• Community analytics</li> <li>• SMS</li> </ul>
<p>Files that are attached to posts in the feed will be automatically added to a shared folder.</p> <p>At first, the only folder that's in the Files section is the Group Attachments, that's where your attached files on your posts go to.</p>	<p>Community manager can then create a new folder by clicking on New &gt; Folder in the Files section. Group Moderators and members don't have the capability to create a new folder.</p>

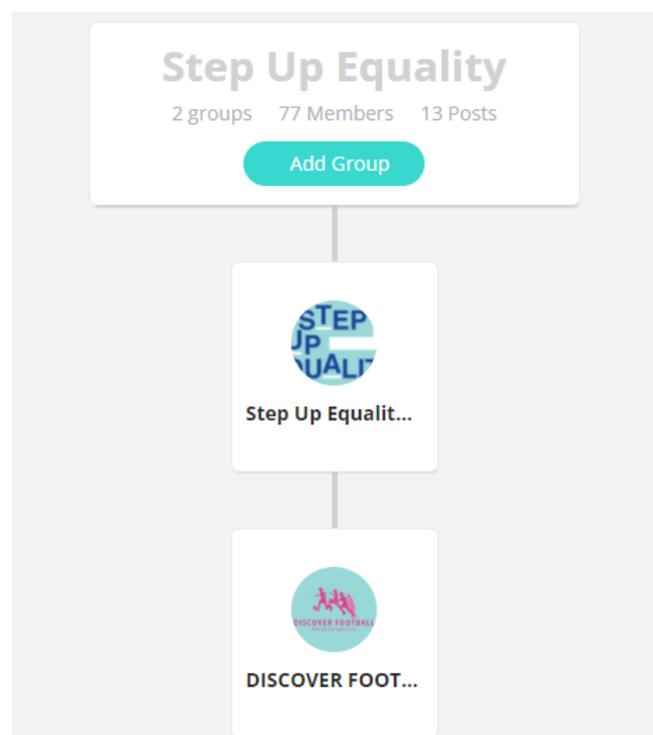
Users can download contents and files, as a manager, you can view who has downloaded the community files.	

## 2. App user data and numbers

The App has been instrumental in creating a virtual community between female professionals, athletes, actresses and managers in the world of sport especially during the start-up phase of the project, which started in 2019 and was hampered by the Covid-19 Pandemic that made international training exchanges between female athletes and leaders in sport impossible.

The data emerging from the birth of the community to date are as follows:

- 77 members;
- 2 groups (the first one from the SUE project and the second one from Discover Football partners of the SUE project);
- 13 posts.



Of the 77 members, the majority are women from the world of sport, active in Step Up Equality partner organizations and associations as well as other sports organizations. The project has shown that the participants who joined the community are mainly women "insiders" and therefore already active and attentive to issues of this type. A smaller part of the members who joined the community are female athletes and leaders who participated in the online

trainings and who are not involved in topics such as gender discrimination in sport, institutional and salary inequalities, obstacles in sports participation and leadership roles etc.

Having had no great opportunities on the organization of international and local events (except for the one-day Summer Camp in Padua on sport and women) women and girls did not join the community in large numbers also due to lack of knowledge through activities in the field, for example among the groups of female athletes and leaders from the different European countries that were involved in the Project.

It is difficult for women and girls, even if interested in specific topics, to enter communities without knowing the participants. Offering local support for the organization of sporting events and activities, or being an implementer, is something that comes from a relationship that certainly has to go beyond online acquaintance.

The use of the Mobilize platform was not intended to be used exclusively to create contacts between interested women/girls participating in the project, but to create a further space for comparison and to keep them in contact, while at the same time holding events/activities/trainings where they could meet and physically be together.

The data certainly point to the fact that the App was used above all by sports clubs and NGOs to create a network of contacts on which to draw for advice or practical help, rather than by individual athletes or leaders.

The exchange of thoughts itself was not sufficient. Moderators within the community threw up food for thought, shared training material and threw out questions.

The language barrier should not be underestimated, as for some participants the English language, even more so in written form, is an obstacle with which to express themselves; and the period in which the Project was conducted, the first year in 2019, a difficult period for everyone due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and in which the use of online platforms and the time dedicated to them was pervasive and wearing on everyone's private and professional life.

### 3. Content shared on the platform

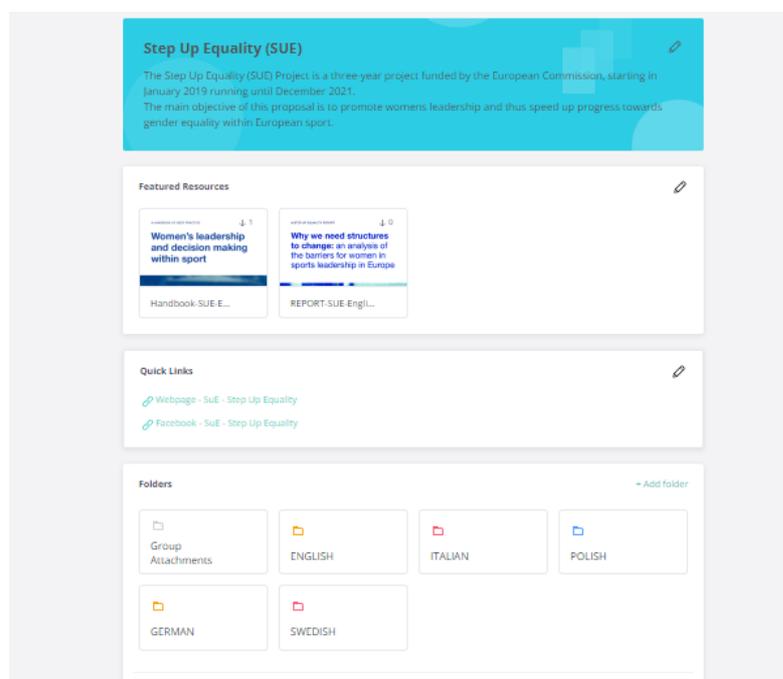
The idea of using Mobilize as mentioned in the previous chapter has a double function: to encourage the emergence of a support group and exchange of information, skills and opportunities and to archive the Project material produced during the different phases.

The contents of the Step Up Equality group are therefore mainly divided into:

- posts and comments made by the community members themselves;
- pdf material uploaded by the project organizers.

In order to facilitate the reading of the materials written and developed in English (Women's leadership and decision making within sports and Why we need structures to change: an analysis of barriers for women in sports leadership in Europe and other materials to be uploaded in the future) have been translated into the different languages of the project partners: Italian, Polish, German and Swedish.

Each partner has translated and uploaded the materials into the relevant folders on the platform where each member of the community can upload other documents they consider relevant and of interest, which will be placed in the folder shared with users.



The posts published by the members of the platform mainly concerned the training that were being promoted in the different countries, but also sports events and materials with similar themes to Step Up Equality.

**Intro: Hi everybody**

Hej everyone! My name is Lucy, I am living in the North of Sweden and working as part of the SUE project as well as in other sports related projects in womens sport. I am excited to meet other women who are working as coaches or leaders in different sports and in different countries across Europe to see what we can learn from each other and how we might support each others journeys!



**1 comment** Private Reply

**Tesora Veliscek** Dec 20th, 2019

Hi Lucy!

Appreciate Reply

**Paula Klinger** Nov 25th, 2021

We would really like to know more about the Step Up Equality community!

Please, everyone who would like to share: What goals do you have for your sports organisation regarding gender justice? Where do you want it to be three years from now?

**2 comments** Private Reply

awareness of the existing gap is raised and that measures to ensure a... [Read more](#)

Appreciate Reply

**Francesca Masserdotti** Nov 26th, 2021

In my opinion, at least in Italy, it is very important to talk about it and talk about it again. The perception with respect to the lack of femal... [Read more](#)

## 4. Sustainability and future perspectives

As Mobilize is an open tool for all users and will remain active also after the end of the project, participants will continue to have access to content and keep in touch with each other and with the various sports and organizations involved.

Partner organizations are able to continue to post documents and information, in order to further disseminate new skills and develop connections between project participants, committing to maintain the activity also after the end of the project: the platform will represent a means to create opportunities for cooperation and development of further projects and initiatives, to continue exchanging experiences, advice and mutual support, giving users a significant reason to keep it updated and active.

The Online community will therefore significantly increase the impact of the project beyond the activation phase and involve not only the direct beneficiaries but also other interested potential beneficiaries who did not participate directly in the project activities, increasing the opportunities and conditions for transferability and dissemination of the activities and results achieved and maintaining the relationships and connections between women alive and developing further also after the project.

The tool will also give impetus to more opportunities for exchange and networking between women in sports leadership positions in order to encourage solidarity among women through peer support.

As a first concrete result in terms of sustainability, GEA has already started to use the for another purpose: the app has been shared and used with the groups of young refugees and asylum seekers that the organization host and support, as a tool to connect, share educational resources and keep in touch with its social workers during the Covid19 lockdown, when the guests could not go out or talk to any other people, to contrast loneliness and keep learning the language, for example, as well as access other social and educational resources. The app is actually now still in use for this function, and proved to be very effective especially for its connecting capacity.

Also, the partner organization ASSIST is evaluating to valorize the Community in another Erasmus+ Sport collaborative partnership that they are coordinating, the project 622400-EPP-1-2020-1-IT-SPO-SCP "[EWSE Empowering Women for Sport events in Europe](#)". Among the project's aims, in fact, partners should build a network among women sport events organizers and staff, also valorizing an online tool that can trace a map of the events: the SUE Community offers a great model to start to further connect women and girls involved in the organization of

sport events and partners of the project are currently evaluating the connections and synergies that can be valorized between the SUE online community and the EWSE online mapping tool and community.

The use of online technology at a distance will give to the output a much greater value in terms of impact and sustainability in the medium and long term, since once the initial cost will be covered, the participants will be able to keep the output active and productive without other investments than a minimum technical maintenance and updating.

In order for the tool to be validated there will have to be active work by the partners managing the community in order to disseminate not only the project but also other contents related to it.

The alliance between the subjects and the ability to communicate, in presence and virtually, are for the moment the only possible solutions to achieve greater visibility, to break the silence and fight against forms of gender discrimination.

Having a network of relationships and mutual support can overcome the sense of frustration that leaders and athletes may have if they act alone and can lead to better and more successful professional and personal results.

