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Report on Gender Challenges in Sports Among Young People

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of a comprehensive research study conducted in the Czech Republic, Serbia, and Spain in 2025. The study focused on the interplay between gender and sports among 161 adolescents aged 12 to 15. A carefully crafted questionnaire consisting of nine structured questions was distributed among students, capturing both qualitative and quantitative insights into how young people perceive and experience gender in the context of sports. Some questions allowed multiple answers or were optional, which enabled respondents to provide more detailed and nuanced input. The gathered data was standardized to ensure accuracy, consistency, and comparability across responses.

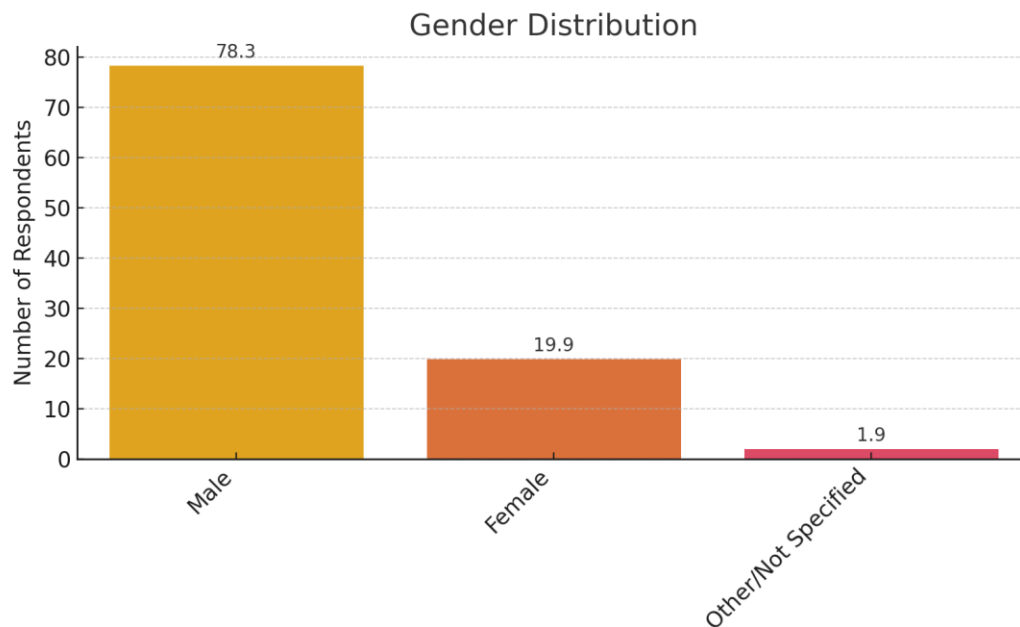
Methodology

The research was conducted using a questionnaire-based approach, targeting adolescents from different backgrounds and educational institutions. The survey was disseminated through schools, youth clubs, and local sports organizations, which ensured the collection of diverse viewpoints. The questionnaire was structured around themes such as frequency of

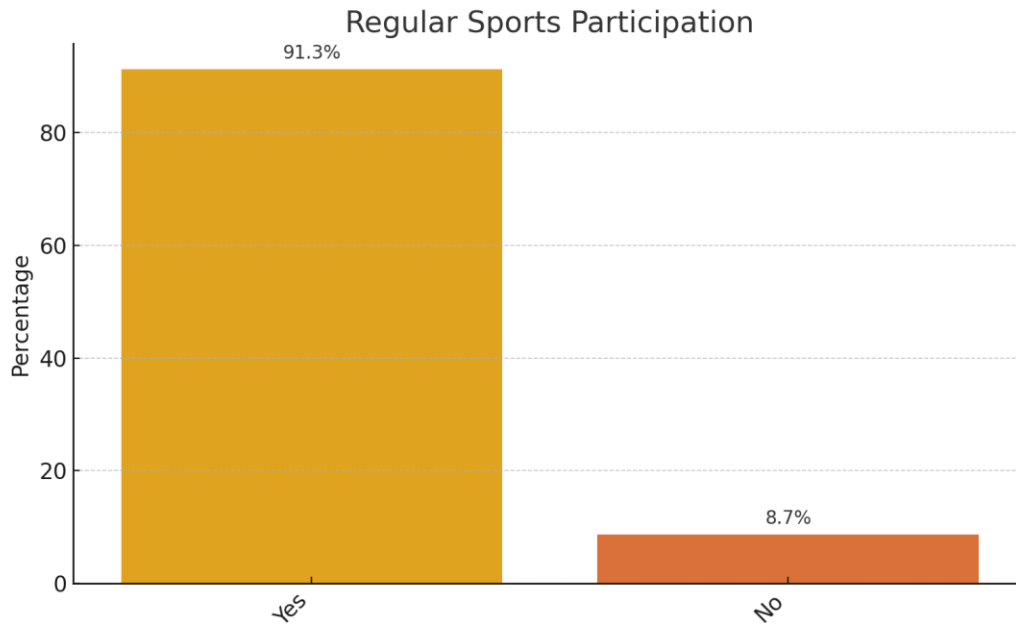
sports participation, entry points into sports, perceived equality of opportunity, and the impact of gender on sports inclusion. This multi-dimensional approach provided researchers with a comprehensive dataset that reflects the complexity of gender-related experiences in youth sports.

Results of the Survey

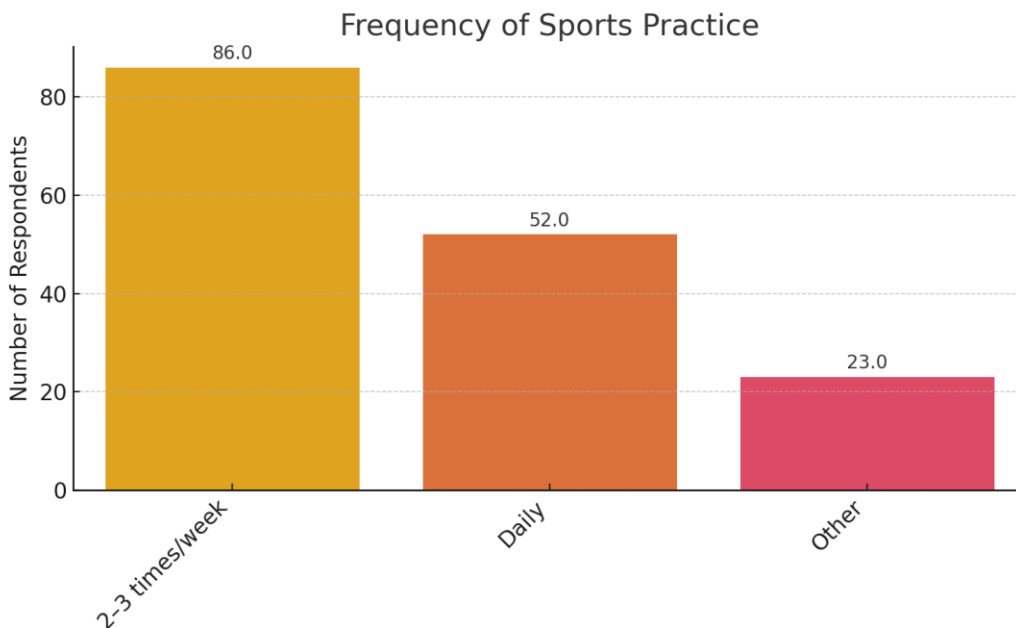
The initial question aimed to determine the gender composition of the respondent group. Among the 161 participants, 78.3% identified as male, 19.9% as female, and 1.9% selected 'other' or preferred not to disclose their gender. Understanding this demographic structure is essential for contextualizing the subsequent findings, as gender identity can significantly shape one's access to sports opportunities, as well as perceptions of inclusion and fairness. It is also worth considering the environments where the survey was administered – particularly schools and clubs – which may naturally have varying levels of male and female representation.



Regular sports participation was reported by 91.3% of the respondents, reflecting a strong culture of physical activity among adolescents. Only 8.7% indicated they do not regularly engage in sports. This mirrors findings from the 2024 study and highlights the enduring importance of sports as a medium for physical development, social bonding, and mental well-being among youth.



Among those who do participate in sports, 86 respondents stated they engage in activities 2–3 times per week, making this the most common frequency. Within this group, 72 were male, 13 were female, and one respondent selected 'other'. This suggests that while male adolescents remain more prevalent in this frequency group, female participation is increasing. The accessibility of moderate, routine sports engagement seems to support balanced involvement across genders, pointing toward positive developments in gender equality in youth sports.



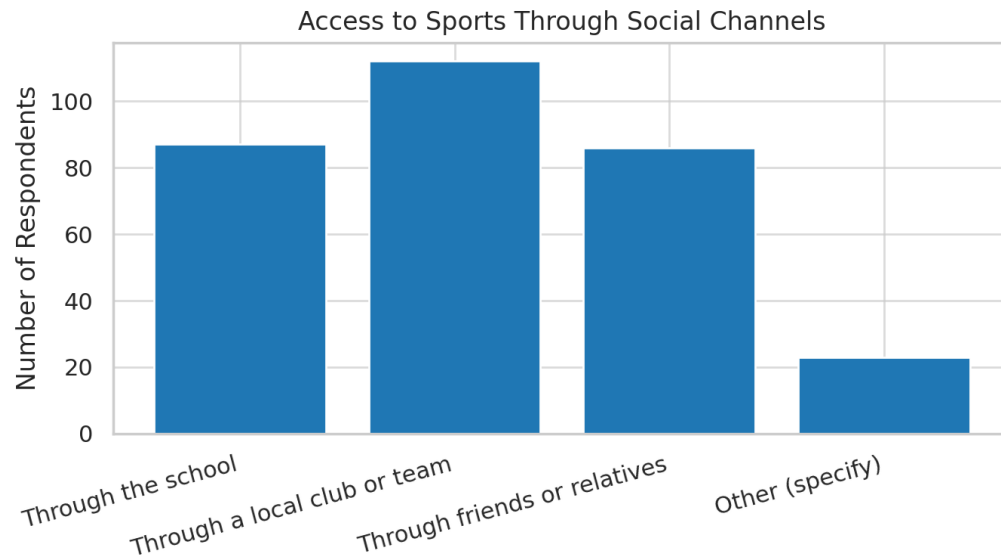
A further 52 respondents engage in sports daily – a level of dedication often linked to competitive training or structured athletic programs. Out of these daily participants, 42 were male, 9 were female, and 1 identified as 'other'. The significant male dominance in this category may reflect ongoing cultural or structural advantages afforded to boys in accessing elite or highly organized sports programs. Nonetheless, the presence of female daily participants is noteworthy and indicative of shifting gender dynamics in competitive youth sports.

A smaller number of respondents reported engaging in sports once a week or less, and these participants were more evenly distributed by gender. Such patterns suggest that while intensive training may remain male-dominated, more casual or recreational participation appears to be accessible to a broader range of youth, regardless of gender. This aspect is crucial in promoting lifelong physical activity habits, especially among young people who may not aim to compete but still seek the social and health benefits of sports.

Access to Sports Through Social Channels

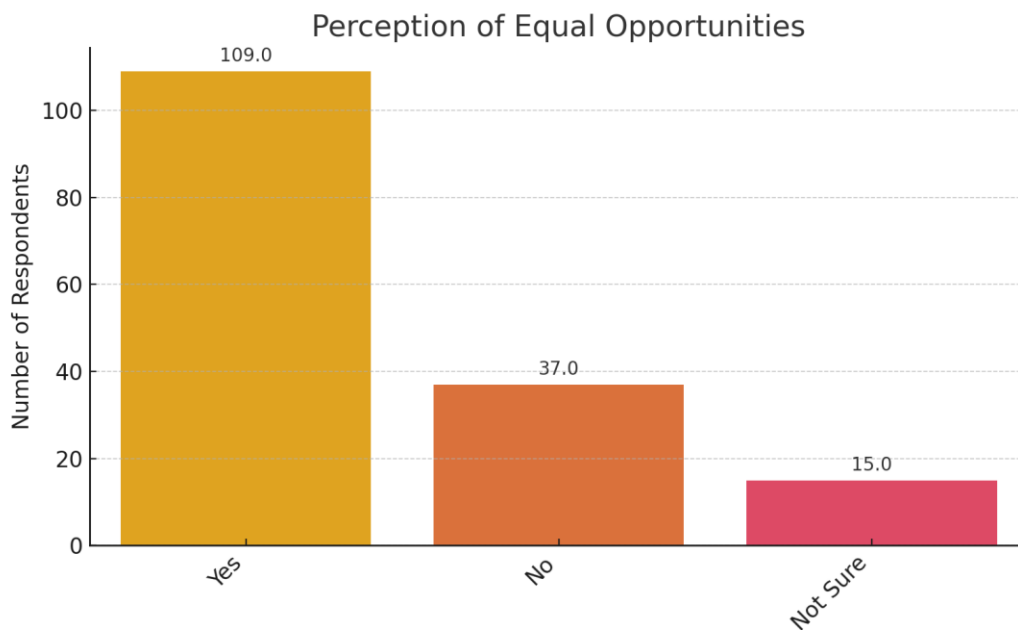
The survey further explored how respondents first became involved in sports. Most indicated that access came through structured channels such as local clubs or school programs. Many also noted encouragement and connection through friends or family members. These entry points are particularly important, as they often determine whether a young person sees sport as an accessible and welcoming space. School programs provide a key opportunity to ensure equal access, but informal pathways such as peer networks can either reinforce or challenge existing gender norms.

Notably, the overlap in responses—where participants selected multiple sources of engagement—revealed the complex social ecosystems surrounding youth sport. It is evident that those who had multiple access points (e.g., school and local club) were more likely to engage frequently in physical activity. This indicates that inclusive and multifaceted support systems are beneficial in fostering consistent sports participation across genders.



Perception of Equal Opportunities in Sport

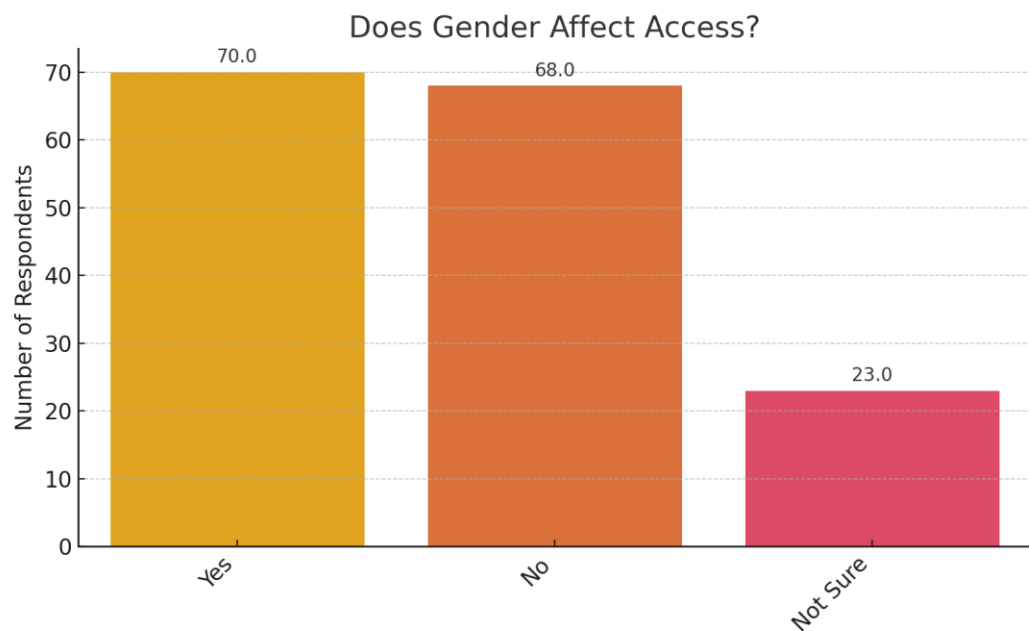
A key element of the research was to assess whether participants felt they had the same opportunity to play their sport of choice as someone of the opposite gender. A substantial proportion of the adolescents surveyed (109 respondents) answered positively, affirming that they believe opportunities are equally available regardless of gender. However, 37 respondents expressed the opposite view, and an additional 15 were unsure. These findings suggest that while there is optimism about gender equality in sports, a significant minority continues to experience—or at least perceive—barriers based on gender.



This perception can stem from various factors: limited representation of female athletes in certain sports, lack of female coaches or mentors, unequal access to facilities, or social expectations about which sports are ‘appropriate’ for each gender. Even when formal opportunities exist, cultural norms and peer pressure can subtly discourage participation among underrepresented groups. Therefore, ensuring equal access is not just about policy but also about challenging social narratives and broadening youth perspectives on inclusion in sports.

The Role of Gender in Shaping Sports Access

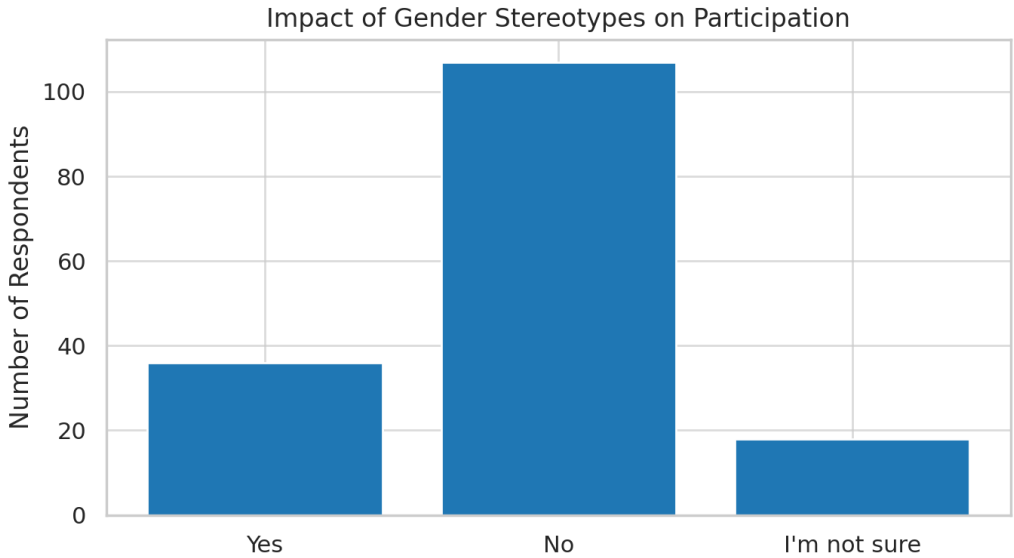
Another important question probed whether respondents believe that gender influences one’s access to sports opportunities. Out of all participants, 70 indicated that they believe gender does play a role, while 68 stated the opposite and 23 were uncertain. These responses highlight a nearly even division in perception, underscoring that gender-based inequalities may not be uniformly experienced but can vary significantly based on context, sport, or geography.



It is important to recognize that perceptions of fairness often correlate with lived experiences. For example, girls in regions with male-dominated clubs may be more likely to notice barriers than their male peers. Conversely, in settings where sports programs actively promote diversity, the perception of fairness may be more widespread. This data emphasizes the need for continuous monitoring and local adaptation of gender inclusion policies in youth sport programs.

Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Participation

The final section of the questionnaire explored whether traditional gender stereotypes had caused any of the respondents to stop playing a sport or to avoid one altogether. 36 adolescents confirmed that they had refrained from playing a sport because it was perceived as ‘not suitable’ for their gender. Another 107 reported no such experience, and 18 were unsure. These findings mirror similar patterns seen in previous years and point to the persistent influence of societal expectations on personal choices.



The qualitative responses included examples of specific sports being labeled as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine,’ such as football and gymnastics respectively, as well as comments about peer judgment, lack of institutional support, and cultural stigmas. For many young people, particularly girls, the lack of inclusive messaging and limited visibility of diverse role models contributes to self-censorship in sports participation. These insights reinforce the need for educational and community-level efforts to dismantle such stereotypes and normalize participation across all sports for all genders.

Year-on-Year Comparison

When comparing the 2025 findings to the previous year, several important trends emerge. The overall percentage of young people participating in sports remains high, with a slight increase in daily or frequent activity levels. This may reflect growing awareness of the physical and mental health benefits of regular exercise, as well as ongoing efforts by schools and clubs to engage youth more consistently.

At the same time, the proportion of respondents who perceive gender-based inequality in sport has remained relatively stable, suggesting that while structural opportunities may be improving, deeper cultural attitudes still pose challenges. It is encouraging that more

adolescents now affirm having equal opportunities in their preferred sport, but the number of those reporting barriers remains significant and should not be overlooked.

Overall, the 2025 data underscores the importance of continued advocacy for gender equality in sport. From increasing the visibility of underrepresented athletes to embedding inclusive values into school curricula, there are many pathways forward. This research highlights both progress made and the work still required to create a sporting environment that is welcoming, supportive, and fair to all.

A smaller group of adolescents reported engaging in sports only once a week or less. These individuals were more balanced across gender, with a slight tendency for girls and those who identified as 'other' to be overrepresented in this category. This could suggest that structural barriers, societal expectations, or a lack of motivation affect some youth differently based on their gender identity. Encouragingly, even those who are not engaged in competitive or frequent activity still participate occasionally, reflecting the potential for targeted interventions that promote inclusive and non-competitive forms of movement.

Access Points to Sports

The survey asked how respondents were introduced to sports or how they first got involved in athletic activities. A significant number of participants indicated that schools played a central role in introducing them to sports. This highlights the importance of integrating physical education and extracurricular sports opportunities within the education system. Local clubs and youth teams were also frequently mentioned, especially among boys, pointing to the role of community-based sports infrastructure. Friends and relatives were also a common source of influence, underlining the social nature of sports and the ways in which peer networks and family members shape participation. Interestingly, responses from girls and those identifying as 'other' were more likely to mention informal pathways, such as friends or self-motivation, suggesting a possible gap in institutional access.

Equal Opportunities in Sports

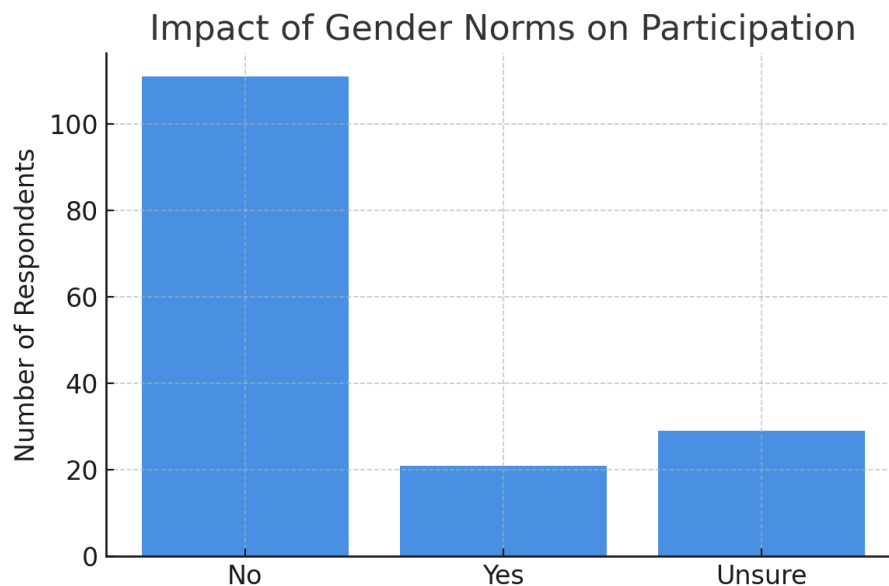
Respondents were asked whether they felt they had equal opportunities to participate in the sports of their choice, regardless of gender. 93 participants responded positively, stating they believe sports opportunities are equally available. However, 40 adolescents disagreed, and 28 were unsure about the level of equality. This reflects both real and perceived barriers that continue to influence youth engagement. From qualitative comments, several participants reported that certain sports are still seen as 'for boys' or 'for girls', which affects their confidence or decision to engage. For example, girls mentioned being discouraged from joining football teams, while boys were teased for enrolling in gymnastics or dance. Such social norms continue to restrict freedom of choice and reveal the importance of ongoing awareness-raising and inclusive sports education.

Influence of Gender on Availability

When asked whether gender played a role in the availability of sports opportunities, 58 participants said yes, 69 said no, and 34 were unsure. Many of those who perceived an influence pointed to a lack of clubs or teams for girls in certain sports, or a social stigma attached to boys pursuing 'non-masculine' sports. This indicates that while opportunities may exist on paper, actual access is often filtered through gendered expectations and community attitudes. Teachers and coaches were occasionally mentioned as reinforcing these norms, either by encouraging stereotypical sports choices or failing to support diversity in participation. To counteract these tendencies, role models and inclusive programming are essential to create welcoming environments for all.

Impact of Gender Norms on Participation

Another critical question asked participants whether they had ever avoided or quit a sport because they felt it was not appropriate for their gender. 21 respondents confirmed this, indicating that gender norms had a tangible effect on their participation. 111 answered negatively, while 29 were unsure. This finding highlights the powerful influence of social conditioning during adolescence, where belonging and peer approval often shape individual choices. Some students noted that although they enjoyed a certain sport, pressure from peers or even family led them to stop. This was particularly common among boys choosing traditionally 'feminine' sports and girls aspiring to compete in 'male-dominated' disciplines. Breaking these norms requires not only policy-level inclusion but also everyday encouragement from schools, families, and youth organizations.



Year-on-Year Comparison

Compared to 2024, the results from 2025 show continuity in overall engagement in sports, with more than 90% of respondents still reporting active involvement. The rate of regular participation has remained high, while perception of equal opportunities shows marginal improvement. 93 students believe they are treated equally in terms of access to sports regardless of gender, which represents a positive trend. Yet, nearly one-third of respondents either disagree or remain uncertain, suggesting the need for ongoing monitoring and improvement. Notably, a slightly higher percentage of respondents in 2025 acknowledged the role of gender in influencing access to sport, indicating a growing awareness of inequality.

The persistent presence of stereotypical thinking was highlighted again this year, as multiple participants shared examples of discouragement or exclusion. Despite some progress in promoting gender-inclusive sports practices, social expectations continue to affect adolescents' choices. More work is needed in promoting diverse role models, redesigning sports curricula, and educating adults who influence youth. Through consistent advocacy and inclusive practices, the goal of achieving true gender equality in youth sports remains attainable.