



SPRINGBOARD 2 PROJECT

Project Output 1: Barrier Assessment Report

Women in Sports Tech

101243471

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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document constitutes Deliverable D2.1 (Barrier Assessment Report) of the Springboard 2: Women in Sports Tech project, funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Sport Programme (Project No. 101243471). It has been produced under Work Package 2 (Comprehensive Barrier Assessment and Content Adaptation), Task 2.1 (Conduct Research and Analysis), and is led by Collective Innovation AS (COLIN) as the WP2 Lead Partner.

Purpose of this report: The report presents the consolidated findings from a mixed-methods research study investigating the barriers European women athletes (aged 24–35) face when considering careers in the technology-oriented sports industry. It synthesises evidence from three complementary data sources — an online survey, semi-structured interviews, and an expert focus group — to provide an empirically grounded understanding of these barriers and to formulate actionable recommendations for the project's subsequent phases.

Intended audience: As a public deliverable (dissemination level: PU), this report is intended for multiple audiences. The European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) and project reviewers will find a comprehensive account of the research activities conducted under T2.1 and their alignment with the project's stated objectives and KPIs. The consortium partners will find the evidence base upon which the adapted curriculum (D2.2) and case study collection (D2.3) will be developed. Sports organisations, federations, and athlete career support services will find transferable insights about the barriers women athletes face in career transition. Researchers and practitioners in the fields of gender equality in sport, dual career development, and sports innovation will find a cross-national comparative dataset that contributes to the broader evidence base. Finally, women athletes themselves may find the report's findings and recommendations relevant to their own career planning.

What this report contains: The report is organised into sixteen sections spanning background context, research methodology, four distinct layers of analysis (survey findings, interview findings, cross-partner comparative analysis, and expert focus group validation), data triangulation, consolidated findings, and evidence-based recommendations. All data are reported in anonymised form. Participant codes are used to reference individual contributions without revealing identities. The research was conducted in compliance with the Chatham House Rule for the focus group component and with informed consent for all interview participants.

How the report is structured: The document follows a layered analytical approach. It begins with the project context and research design (Sections 2–4), then presents findings from each data source individually (Sections 5–6, 9), followed by cross-cutting analyses that compare and integrate the data sources (Sections 7–8, 10). The final sections present consolidated conclusions, country-specific profiles, and forward-looking recommendations (Sections 11–16). Each analytical section includes its own executive summary to enable selective reading.

How to navigate this report: Readers seeking a high-level overview should begin with the Executive Summary (Section 1) and Recommendations (Section 18). Those interested in a specific data source may go directly to the relevant section: survey (Part 1), interviews (Part 2), or focus group (Part 4). The Cross-Partner Comparative Analysis (Part 2) and Consolidated Barrier Assessment (Part 3) provide the most synthesized view of the findings. The Country-Specific Barrier Profiles (Section 17) are designed to be particularly useful for partners planning localised interventions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of Task 2.1 (Conduct Research and Analysis) under Work Package 2 of the Springboard 2 project. The research aimed to systematically identify the specific needs and barriers faced by women athletes aged 24–35 interested in pursuing careers in the technology-oriented sports industry (Sports Tech) across Europe.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach combining three data sources: an online survey (n=44 respondents across 10 European countries), semi-structured interviews (n=30 participants across 5 partner organisations covering the Netherlands, Spain, Türkiye, Norway, and a multi-country Nordic group including Sweden, Switzerland, and Romania), and an expert focus group (n=6 field experts representing 5 countries). Data were collected between January and April 2026 and analysed using a hybrid thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Principal Findings

The Awareness Gap: The research identified a pervasive awareness deficit as the single most critical barrier. 71% of surveyed athletes reported being unfamiliar with the Sports Tech sector, and 70% of interviewees confirmed lack of sector knowledge as their primary obstacle. Only 3 out of 30 interviewees were actively engaged in Sports Tech. The expert panel strongly validated this finding but reframed it from "lack of technical knowledge" to "lack of ecosystem literacy and value communication skills."

The Confidence–Knowledge Disconnect: A significant gap was quantified between athletes' self-perceived skill relevance (3.64/5) and their knowledge of support structures (2.05/5). This 1.6-point disconnect indicates that the core problem is not a lack of confidence in their capabilities but a fundamental absence of information about how to translate those capabilities into the Sports Tech context.

The Gender Paradox: Gender-related barriers were found to be substantially underreported in quantitative data (14% in the survey) compared to qualitative data (80% in interviews). Five distinct gender barrier patterns were identified across partner countries: structural pay inequality (Netherlands), male dominance in leadership and technical roles (Spain), linguistic and cultural exclusion (Nordic countries), deeply embedded social expectations around marriage and motherhood (Türkiye), and strategic reframing of gender gaps as market opportunities (Norway). The expert panel attributed this discrepancy to normalisation and internalised bias, noting that research shows 9 out of 10 people hold bias towards women, including women themselves.

Five Country Profiles: The research identified five distinctly different national barrier profiles, demonstrating that a one-size-fits-all approach to programme design is inadequate. The Netherlands presents "structured but constrained" athletes with strong qualifications but limited time and financial equality. Spain presents "motivated but uninformed" Olympic-level athletes lacking sector awareness. The multi-country Nordic sample reveals athletes who are "ready but not reached" — willing but never approached. Türkiye presents "system-builders facing foundational barriers" — the highest entrepreneurial motivation alongside the greatest structural obstacles. Norway presents "team-seekers reframing barriers" — collaborative athletes seeking co-founders and viewing gender gaps as opportunities.

Strong Demand Signal: Despite significant barriers, 85% of surveyed athletes expressed interest in Springboard 2 activities, and 62% have considered or are open to a Sports Tech career. The appetite for engagement far exceeds the current supply of pathways and support structures.

Key Recommendations

The report concludes with eight evidence-based recommendations: (1) design differentiated, country-sensitive support pathways; (2) position mentoring as the cornerstone intervention using five expert-validated quality principles; (3) address the knowledge and ecosystem literacy gap as the first priority; (4) develop active outreach mechanisms that reach athletes in their existing environments; (5) leverage practitioner insight by positioning athletes as co-creators, not just participants; (6) implement gender-sensitive programme design accounting for the full spectrum of barriers; (7) use cross-border exposure as a deliberate accelerator for awareness; and (8) integrate Sports Tech career exploration into existing athlete support systems including injury rehabilitation.

KPI Achievement

The research exceeded both KPIs established for T2.1: a minimum of 30 women athletes surveyed or interviewed (achieved: 44 surveyed + 30 interviewed = 74 participants) and 10–15 barriers identified and categorised (achieved: 10 distinct barriers identified, ranked, and validated by expert panel).

1. INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT BACKGROUND

1.1. The Springboard Journey

Springboard 2: Women in Sports Tech is the second phase of an ongoing initiative to support athletes transitioning into careers within the technology-oriented sports industry. The project is funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Sport Programme and runs for 24 months from December 2025.

The first Springboard project established foundational insights into the barriers athletes face when entering the Sports Tech sector. It developed a digital learning platform and identified key challenges related to knowledge gaps, network access, and the lack of structured transition pathways. However, Springboard 1 did not specifically investigate the gendered dimension of these barriers — the particular challenges that women athletes face as women in a sector that remains predominantly male.

Springboard 2 was designed to address this gap. By focusing specifically on women athletes and women sports professionals aged 24–35, the project aims to understand not only the practical barriers (knowledge, funding, time) but also the structural, cultural, and psychological barriers that may disproportionately affect women's participation in Sports Tech.

1.2. Project Objectives

The project is built around three strategic pillars. The first pillar — Empowering Women Athletes — focuses on equipping participants with entrepreneurial, leadership, and technological skills through tailored educational programmes. The second pillar — Building Supportive Communities — centres on creating mentorship platforms, networking opportunities, and peer learning environments that connect women athletes with industry professionals and with each other. The third pillar — Bridging the Gender Gap — addresses systemic issues by promoting inclusive policies and practices within Sports Tech organisations.

1.3. The Consortium

The project is carried out by a consortium of six European organisations across five countries, each bringing complementary expertise to the partnership:

Igloo Innovation AS (Norway) serves as the Project Coordinator, providing overall project management and facilitating access to the Springboard 1 athlete network. Collective Innovation AS — COLIN (Norway) leads Work Package 2, responsible for the barrier assessment research, content adaptation, and case study development that form the core evidence base of the project. Orange Sports Forum (Netherlands) contributes its extensive international sports business network and experience in connecting innovation with industry. GSIC — Global Sports Innovation Center (Spain) brings its position as a leading global hub for sports technology and innovation, with deep connections to the Sports Tech ecosystem. Guler Legacy Sports Accelerator (Türkiye) provides expertise in athlete entrepreneurship and access to the Turkish sports ecosystem, a context with unique structural and cultural characteristics. JohnsenSkillz / SheSkillz Global (Sweden) contributes its specialist expertise in gender equality in sport, its global mentoring network, and its experience in supporting women's professional development across the sports sector.

1.4. Work Package 2 and This Deliverable

This report is the primary output of Work Package 2, Task 2.1 (Conduct Research and Analysis). WP2 runs from January to July 2026 and encompasses three tasks: T2.1 — Conduct Research and Analysis (resulting in this report, D2.1); T2.2 — Review and Adapt Existing Content (resulting in D2.2: Adapted Curriculum and Training Materials); and T2.3 — Develop Case Studies (resulting in D2.3: Case Study Collection of European Women Leaders in Sports Tech).

The findings presented in this report serve a dual purpose. First, they provide an independent, evidence-based assessment of the barriers women athletes face — contributing to the broader knowledge base on gender equality in sport and dual career transitions. Second, and more practically, they provide the empirical foundation upon which the training content (D2.2) and case studies (D2.3) will be developed, ensuring that subsequent project activities are grounded in the real needs and experiences of the target group.

2. THE SPORTS TECH LANDSCAPE: WHY THIS RESEARCH MATTERS

2.1. Defining Sports Tech

For the purposes of this research, Sports Tech (also referred to as the technology-oriented sports industry) encompasses the broad ecosystem of organisations, platforms, products, and services that apply technology and innovation to sport. This includes, but is not limited to, performance analysis and training optimisation technologies; wearable devices and biometric monitoring systems; data analytics platforms for athlete development and team management; sports equipment innovation incorporating advanced materials and sensor technology; fan engagement and media technologies; sports management and governance platforms; health, recovery, and injury prevention technologies; and artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), extended reality (XR), and blockchain applications within the sports context.

The sector spans the full spectrum from early-stage startups to established multinational companies, and from hardware products to software platforms and service-based businesses. It intersects with multiple adjacent sectors including health technology, wellness, education technology, and entertainment.

2.2. The Growth of Sports Tech

The global sports technology market has experienced significant growth over the past decade, driven by advances in data analytics, wearable technology, artificial intelligence, and digital media. Sports organisations at all levels — from grassroots clubs to international federations and professional leagues — are increasingly integrating technology into their operations, training methodologies, fan engagement strategies, and governance structures.

This growth has created an expanding ecosystem of career opportunities spanning technical roles (software development, data science, engineering), business roles (product management, marketing, sales, business development), and hybrid roles that combine domain expertise with technological understanding (performance analysis, sports science, innovation management). For athletes transitioning out of competitive sport, the Sports Tech sector represents a natural intersection of their deep domain knowledge and a rapidly evolving industry.

2.3. The Gender Gap in Sports Tech

Despite the sector's growth, women remain significantly underrepresented in Sports Tech — particularly in leadership, entrepreneurial, and technical roles. This underrepresentation mirrors broader patterns observed in both the technology sector (where women hold a minority of technical and leadership positions globally) and the sports industry (where governance, coaching, and management roles remain predominantly male).

The intersection of these two gender gaps creates a compounded challenge for women athletes seeking to enter Sports Tech. They face not only the general barriers of career transition from sport but also the additional barriers associated with entering a male-dominated sector within an already gender-imbalanced industry.

Previous research, including the findings of the Springboard 1 project, has identified several factors contributing to this gap: limited visibility of Sports Tech as a career pathway for athletes; lack of female role models and mentors within the sector; structural barriers related to funding, network access, and dual career management; and cultural and psychological factors including gender stereotypes, implicit bias, and internalised self-doubt.

2.4. Why a Barrier Assessment Was Needed

While the existence of these barriers is broadly acknowledged, there has been limited systematic, cross-national research examining how they operate specifically for women athletes across different European contexts. Existing evidence tends to be either general (addressing gender in tech or gender in sport without the specific intersection), national (limited to single-country studies), or anecdotal (based on individual accounts rather than structured research).

Task 2.1 of the Springboard 2 project was designed to address this evidence gap. By conducting a structured, mixed-methods investigation across five European countries with diverse sporting cultures, economic conditions, and gender equality landscapes, the research aimed to produce findings that are both rigorous in their methodology and practical in their applicability to programme design.

The research was guided by three overarching questions: What specific barriers do women athletes face when considering careers in Sports Tech, and how do these barriers differ across European contexts? To what extent are gender-specific barriers distinct from the general barriers all athletes face, and how are they experienced and articulated by women athletes themselves? What forms of support, training, and intervention are most needed and most likely to be effective in enabling women athletes to enter and succeed in the Sports Tech sector?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Mixed-Methods Design

The research employed a sequential mixed methods design that combined quantitative and qualitative approaches in three phases. This design was chosen to leverage the complementary strengths of different methods: the survey provided breadth and statistical patterns across a larger sample; the interviews provided depth, nuance, and contextual understanding; and the focus group provided expert validation and enrichment of the findings.

Phase 1 — Online Survey (January–March 2026): A structured questionnaire comprising 18 items across five sections (Background Information, Awareness and Interest, Barriers and Challenges, Support Needs and Training, and Final Reflection) was distributed across all partner countries. The survey included closed-ended items (multiple choice, Likert scales) and open-ended questions, enabling both quantitative analysis and qualitative insight. The survey was administered in English and distributed through partner networks, athlete databases, sports federations, and social media channels.

Phase 2 — Semi-Structured Interviews (January–March 2026): A standardised interview guide comprising nine open-ended questions was developed by COLIN and shared with all partner organisations. The questions covered sporting background and career situation, Sports Tech familiarity, consideration of Sports Tech careers, perceived barriers, gender-related challenges, transferable skills, support and development needs, preferred types of support, and priority changes that would facilitate entry into the sector. Each partner organisation conducted six interviews with women athletes in their respective country or network, resulting in 30 interviews in total. Interviews were conducted in the participant's preferred language where necessary, with transcripts translated to English for analysis.

Phase 3 — Expert Focus Group (April 2026): A facilitated online discussion was conducted with six field experts nominated by consortium partners. The session lasted approximately 60 minutes and was structured around six thematic areas derived from preliminary survey and interview findings: Skills, Education, and Training Needs; Mentorship and Professional Networks; Gender Bias and Stereotypes; Cultural and Regional Differences; Access to Funding and Investment; and Dual Career Challenges. The session operated under the Chatham House Rule and was recorded for transcription purposes only. Experts were provided with a pre-session information brief containing a summary of preliminary findings.

3.2. Analytical Framework

Survey analysis: Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, medians, and modes) were calculated for all closed-ended items. Responses were cross-tabulated by country of residence where sample sizes permitted meaningful comparison. Open-ended survey responses were qualitatively coded to identify thematic clusters.

Interview analysis: A hybrid thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed, combining deductive coding based on the nine interview questions with inductive coding to capture emergent themes. The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, each partner's interviews were analysed individually (within-case analysis) to identify partner-specific patterns. Second, findings were compared across all five partners (cross-case analysis) to identify shared patterns and country-specific variations. Third, all findings were consolidated into six overarching themes aligned with the project's analytical framework: Access to Funding and Investment, Mentorship and Professional Networks, Gender Bias and Stereotypes, Dual Career Challenges, Cultural and Regional Differences, and Skills, Education, and Training Needs.

Focus group analysis: Thematic analysis was applied to the focus group transcript, organised around the six pre-defined discussion themes. Expert contributions were coded for three types of value: validation (confirming or challenging preliminary findings), deepening (adding causal explanations or contextual factors), and enrichment (contributing new insights not present in the athlete data).

Triangulation: The three data sources were triangulated using a convergence, divergence, and complementarity framework. Convergent findings (confirmed by multiple sources) were assigned the highest confidence levels. Divergent findings (where sources disagreed) were examined for methodological explanations. Complementary findings (where each source added unique insights) were integrated to provide the most complete picture possible.

3.3. Sampling and Recruitment

Survey respondents were recruited through consortium partner networks, national sports federations, athlete career centres, university sports programmes, and targeted social media outreach. Interview participants were purposively selected by each partner organisation to ensure diversity in sport discipline, career stage (active vs. retired), age, and level of Sports Tech awareness. Focus group experts were nominated by consortium partners based on their professional expertise in relevant fields (Sports Tech, athlete career transition, gender equality, sports governance, technology industry, entrepreneurship policy).

3.4. Ethical Considerations

All research activities were conducted in accordance with the project's ethical framework and applicable European data protection regulations. Interview participants were informed of the research purpose and provided voluntary informed consent prior to participation. Focus group participants operated under the Chatham House Rule: information shared during the session may be used in project outputs, but the identity and organisational affiliation of individual speakers are not attributed. All data in this report are presented in anonymised form. Participant codes (e.g., P01-OSF for interview participants, E1 for focus group experts) are used throughout to enable reference to individual contributions without compromising confidentiality.

4. DATA COLLECTION OVERVIEW

4.1. Summary of Data Sources

The T2.1 research programme collected data through three complementary methods between January and April 2026:

Data Source	Sample Size	Geographic Scope	Collection Period	Administration
Online Survey	44 respondents	10 countries	January–March 2026	Self-administered online questionnaire
Semi-Structured Interviews	30 participants	5 partner countries/networks	January–March 2026	Partner-administered, 9-question guide
Expert Focus Group	6 experts	5 countries represented	April 2026	COLIN-facilitated online session

The combined dataset encompasses 80 individual data points (44 survey + 30 interview + 6 focus group), representing women athletes and sports professionals from at least 10 European

countries and 18 distinct sport disciplines. Both KPIs established for T2.1 were exceeded: the target of 30 athletes surveyed or interviewed was surpassed (74 achieved across survey and interviews), and the target of 10–15 barriers identified and categorised was met (10 distinct barriers identified, ranked by prevalence, and validated by expert panel).

4.2. Survey Sample Profile

The online survey collected 44 valid responses from women athletes and sports professionals across 10 European countries. Norway contributed the largest share (15 responses, 34%), followed by the Netherlands (8, 18%), Spain (6, 14%), and Türkiye (6, 14%). Additional responses were received from Sweden (3), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2), Croatia (1), Romania (1), Slovenia (1), and Serbia (1). The geographic reach of the survey exceeded the five core partner countries, providing broader European perspective, though with small sample sizes in the additional countries.

The age distribution was concentrated within the project's target range: 75% were aged 24–29, 14% were 30–35, 9% were 18–23, and 2% were over 36. In total, 89% fell within the 24–35 target group. Active athletes represented 75% of respondents, former athletes 27%, sports professionals 16%, students 20%, and entrepreneurs or startup founders 7% (categories were not mutually exclusive). The majority (57%) described their career situation as "combining sport with education or work," 20% were fully focused on sport, 11% were transitioning out of sport, and 7% were no longer active.

4.3. Interview Sample Profile

Thirty semi-structured interviews were conducted across five partner organisations, with each partner contributing six interviews:

Partner Organisation	Country/Network	Participants	Sport Disciplines
Orange Sports Forum (OSF)	Netherlands	6	Hockey (4), Athletics (1), Swimming (1)
GSIC	Spain	6	Handball, Beach Volleyball, Tennis, Triathlon, Rhythmic Gymnastics, Padel
SheSkillz Global (SSG)	Multi-country (NO, SE, CH, RO)	6	Biathlon (4), Cross-country Skiing (1), Coaching (1)
Guler Legacy (GL)	Türkiye	6	Aerobic Gymnastics, Ultra. Swimming, Football, Basketball (2), Tennis
Igloo Innovation (IGL)	Norway	6	Shooting, Handball, Football (2), Taekwondo, Volleyball

The interview sample included 14 active athletes (47%), 11 recently retired or transitioning athletes (37%), and 5 participants with established post-sport careers (17%). Ages ranged from approximately 20 to 39. Educational backgrounds varied considerably: 7 held Master's degrees (24%), 10 held Bachelor's degrees (34%), 6 were in ongoing or incomplete higher education (20%), 3 had secondary education only (10%), and 4 held professional certifications (13%). Eighteen different sport disciplines were represented, spanning individual sports (tennis, swimming, triathlon, athletics, gymnastics, taekwondo, shooting), team sports (hockey, football, handball, basketball, volleyball), and emerging disciplines (padel, ice swimming, beach volleyball).

The diversity of the sample — in terms of sport discipline, career stage, education level, country context, and level of Sports Tech awareness — was a deliberate design choice to capture the widest possible range of barrier experiences.

4.4. Focus Group Expert Panel

Six field experts participated in the focus group session, nominated by consortium partners based on their professional expertise in domains relevant to the research:

Code	Professional Background	Country	Primary Expertise
E1	Managing Director and Co-founder of a global sports innovation network associated with a major technology company	Spain	Sports Tech ecosystem, mentoring programmes, AI in sport, STEM promotion
E2	Founder of a global sports skill organisation; former role at national Olympic committee negotiated international athlete career programmes	Norway/Switzerland	Athlete career transition, mentoring, gender equality in sport
E3	Former professional footballer; former head of a women's football club; consultancy for a national football federation; current focus on neuroscience and psychology applied to sport	Türkiye/International	Women's football development, sports startups, perception and bias, marketing
E4	CEO of a software company former national team athlete in taekwondo (8 years); extensive technology industry background in event solutions and logistics	Norway	Technology industry, athlete career transition, software and event solutions
E5	Professional at an international biathlon federation and a national federation; former coach and athlete; participant of a sports mentoring programme	Hungary	Biathlon, coaching, federation governance, athlete development
E6	Engineer; experience in policy making for entrepreneurship; 7 years in the sports sector; closely involved with a consortium partner	Netherlands	Entrepreneurship policy, sports innovation, gender in technology

The expert panel provided multi-country representation (Spain, Norway, Türkiye, Hungary, Netherlands, Switzerland), a mix of institutional perspectives (federation, innovation hub, consultancy, technology company, policy), and a balance of operational experience and strategic insight. Several experts had direct personal experience as athletes, providing an additional layer of practitioner perspective.

SPRINGBOARD 2 PROJECT

WP2 T2.1 BARRIER ASSESSMENT

PART-1: SURVEY ANALYSIS

QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

Prepared by **COLIN (WP2 Lead)**

April 2026 | n = 44

5. RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Age Distribution (Q1)

Age Group	Count	%
18–23	4	9%
24–29	33	75%
30–35	6	14%
36+	1	2%
Total	44	100%

The vast majority (75%) fall within the 24–29 bracket — the core target group of the project. 89% are within the 24–35 target range.

Country of Residence (Q2)

Country	Responses	%	Partner Link
Norway	15	34.1%	Igloo Innovation / Colin
Netherlands	8	18.2%	Orange Sports Forum
Spain	6	13.6%	GSIC
Türkiye	6	13.6%	Guler Legacy
Sweden	3	6.8%	SheSkillz
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2	4.5%	—
Croatia	1	2.3%	—
Romania	1	2.3%	—
Serbia	1	2.3%	—
Slovenia	1	2.3%	—
Total	44	100%	

Norway is overrepresented (34%), likely reflecting Igloo Innovation’s strong domestic network. 10 countries represented geographic reach exceeds the 5 partner countries, with Balkan responses (Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia) providing additional context.

Current Status (Q3 — multiple selection)

Status	Count	% of Respondents
Active athlete	33	75%
Former athlete	12	27%
Sports professional	7	16%
Student	9	20%
Entrepreneur / start-up founder	3	7%

Active athletes dominate (75%). Notably, only 3 respondents (7%) identify as entrepreneurs confirming the low engagement baseline identified in the interviews.

Career Situation (Q5)

Situation	Count	%
Combining sport with education or work	25	57%
Fully focused on sport	9	20%
Transitioning out of sport	5	11%
No longer active in sport	3	7%
Not specified	2	5%

Key finding: 57% are combining sport with education or work — the dual career reality confirmed quantitatively. Only 20% are fully focused on sport, suggesting the majority already manage competing commitments.

6. SPORTS TECH AWARENESS AND INTEREST

Familiarity with Sports Tech (Q6)

Familiarity Level	Count	%
Not at all familiar	13	30%
Slightly familiar	18	41%
Moderately familiar	12	27%
Very familiar	1	2%
Total	44	100%

Critical finding: 71% of respondents are either “not at all” or only “slightly” familiar with Sports Tech. Only 1 respondent (2%) rates themselves as “very familiar.” This quantitatively confirms the pervasive awareness gap identified in interviews across all partner countries.

Considered a Career in Sports Tech (Q7)

Response	Count	%
Yes	13	30%
No	17	39%
Not sure	14	32%
Total	44	100%

Key finding: Only 30% have considered a career in Sports Tech. However, 32% are “not sure” — representing a significant swing population that could be activated through targeted awareness and mentoring. Combined, 62% have either considered it or are open to persuasion — a substantially larger pool than the 30% who have actively considered it.

Roles of Interest (Q8)

Role	Count	% of Respondents
Employee in a Sports Tech company	14	32%
Entrepreneur / founder	12	27%
Consultant / advisor	10	23%
I am not interested	6	14%
Investor	1	2%
Other	1	2%

Key finding: Employment (32%) slightly outranks entrepreneurship (27%) as the preferred entry route. This contrasts with the Springboard 2 project's primary focus on entrepreneurship and suggests that programme design should also accommodate those seeking employment-based pathways into Sports Tech. 14% express no interest at all.

7. SELF-ASSESSMENT: LIKERT SCALE RESULTS (Q9–Q12)

Scale: 1 = Strongly disagree → 5 = Strongly agree

Statement	Mean	Median	Mode	Interpretation
Q9: My skills as an athlete are relevant to Sports Tech	3.64	4	4, 5	Moderate–high confidence
Q10: I understand how the Sports Tech ecosystem works in my country	2.45	2	2	Low understanding
Q11: I know where to find support, funding or mentoring	2.05	2	2	Very low awareness
Q12: I feel encouraged to pursue leadership or entrepreneurial roles	2.95	3	3	Moderate

Key finding: Q9 — Skills confidence is relatively high (3.64/5): Athletes generally believe their skills are relevant to Sports Tech. This suggests the barrier is not self-perceived lack of capability but rather lack of knowledge about the sector and how to enter it.

Key finding: Q10 — Ecosystem understanding is low (2.45/5): Respondents do not understand how the Sports Tech ecosystem works in their country. This quantitatively validates the “knowledge gap” barrier identified as dominant in interviews across Spain, SSG, and Norway.

Critical finding: Q11 — Support awareness is critically low (2.05/5): This is the lowest-scoring statement. Athletes do not know where to find support, funding, or mentoring for a Sports Tech career. This is a systemic orientation failure — the infrastructure may exist in some countries, but athletes are not aware of it.

Key finding: Q12 — Encouragement is moderate (2.95/5): Athletes feel only moderately encouraged to pursue leadership or entrepreneurial roles. This suggests a motivational gap that mentoring and role model exposure could address.

Critical finding: The Q9–Q11 gap is critical: Athletes believe their skills are relevant (3.64) but do not know how the ecosystem works (2.45) or where to find support (2.05). This 1.6-point gap between self-perceived competence and ecosystem knowledge represents the core intervention opportunity for Springboard 2.

8. BARRIERS: QUANTITATIVE RANKING (Q13)

Respondents selected up to 3 barriers.

Barrier	Count	% of Respondents	Rank
Lack of knowledge about technology	30	68%	1st
Limited access to funding	22	50%	2nd
Lack of professional network	20	45%	3rd
Lack of business or entrepreneurial skills	18	41%	4th
Time constraints (sport/family)	15	34%	5th
Lack of mentors or role models	15	34%	5th (tied)
Financial insecurity	12	27%	7th
Gender bias or stereotypes	6	14%	8th
Cultural or societal expectations	2	5%	9th

Top 3 barriers:

- Lack of knowledge about technology (68%) — Confirmed as the single most prevalent barrier. More than two-thirds of all respondents selected this.
- Limited access to funding (50%) — Half of all respondents identify funding as a barrier. This ranks higher in the survey than in the interviews, where funding was less frequently the top concern.
- Lack of professional network (45%) — Network absence is the third most common barrier, reinforcing the interview finding that athletes feel disconnected from the Sports Tech ecosystem.

Low-ranking barriers:

- Gender bias or stereotypes (14%) — Only 6 respondents selected this. This is significantly lower than might be expected given the project's gender focus. It suggests that athletes may not perceive gender as their primary barrier, even if structural gender inequalities exist.
- Cultural or societal expectations (5%) — Almost never selected. However, interview data from Türkiye revealed deeply embedded cultural gender expectations suggesting this barrier may be underreported in a standardised survey format.

9. OPEN-ENDED RESPONSES: BIGGEST CHALLENGE (Q14)

Qualitative coding of open-text responses reveals the following thematic clusters:

Theme	Frequency	Example Quotes
Lack of knowledge / information	18/44 (41%)	"I don't know much about it"; "Lack of knowledge in the field"; "I didn't know anything about it before this form"
Don't know where/how to start	8/44 (18%)	"How to start"; "Where do I start?"; "Not sure what opportunities exist"
Time constraints	6/44 (14%)	"Too busy next to my career"; "Time consuming studies/career"
Funding / financial barriers	5/44 (11%)	"Generating consistent revenue"; "Education and funding"

Lack of network	4/44 (9%)	"Lack of network and job possibilities"; "My current network is outside Sports Tech"
No interest	3/44 (7%)	"That's not where my interest lies"; "It's not something I like"

Key finding: The open-ended responses powerfully reinforce the quantitative data. The dominant narrative is "I don't know enough about this sector and I don't know where to start." This is not a motivation problem — it is an information and orientation problem.

Notable individual responses:

"I feel helpless once my athletic career ends. Where do I start? Networking, steps to follow, financing..."
(Romania, R22)

"Never actually considered it because it is not so much talked about in my country. I'm not sure where to start, with who can I talk about it" (Croatia, R37)

"The biggest challenge is the lack of information about the Sports Tech sector and the difficulty of building a professional network" (Spain, R30)

10. SUPPORT NEEDS (Q15)

Respondents selected up to 3 support types.

Support Type	Count	% of Respondents	Rank
Career guidance and coaching	23	52%	1st
Training on technology and innovation	23	52%	1st (tied)
Mentorship from industry experts	19	43%	3rd
Networking opportunities	18	41%	4th
Flexible learning formats	18	41%	4th (tied)
Training on entrepreneurship	16	36%	6th
Access to funding or investors	15	34%	7th
Access to role models	6	14%	8th

Key finding: Career guidance/coaching and technology training share the top position (52% each). This aligns with the survey's dominant barrier (lack of tech knowledge) and the interview finding that athletes need both direction and education.

Mentorship (43%) ranks third — still high but not the overwhelming top priority it was in interviews (83%). This may reflect the more structured nature of survey options versus the open-ended interview format where mentoring emerged organically as a catch-all solution.

Preferred Learning Formats (Q16)

Format	Count	% of Respondents
Hybrid (combination)	20	45%
In-person workshops	18	41%
Mentorship programmes	14	32%
Live online workshops	12	27%

Online self-paced learning	12	27%
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Key finding: Hybrid learning (45%) is the most preferred format, followed by in-person workshops (41%). This has direct implications for D2.2 curriculum design a blended approach combining online flexibility with in-person engagement is most desired.

11. ENGAGEMENT INTEREST (Q18)

Response	Count	%
Yes	24	55%
Maybe	13	30%
No	7	16%
Total	44	100%

Key finding: 55% are definitively interested in future Springboard 2 activities, with an additional 30% open (“Maybe”). Only 16% are not interested. This confirms a strong demand signal 85% of surveyed athletes are either interested or potentially persuadable.

12. COUNTRY-LEVEL PATTERNS

Familiarity by Country

Country	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Mean Familiarity
Norway (n=15)	5 (33%)	8 (53%)	2 (13%)	0	Low
Netherlands (n=8)	2 (25%)	3 (38%)	3 (38%)	0	Low–Moderate
Spain (n=6)	1 (17%)	2 (33%)	3 (50%)	0	Moderate
Türkiye (n=6)	1 (17%)	3 (50%)	2 (33%)	1 (17%)	Moderate
Other (n=9)	4 (44%)	2 (22%)	2 (22%)	0	Low

Norwegian respondents show the lowest familiarity levels (86% not at all or slightly familiar), despite Norway having the largest response count. Spanish and Turkish respondents report somewhat higher familiarity, possibly because their interview participants were more senior/experienced athletes.

Top Barrier by Country

Country	Top Barrier	% Selecting It
Norway	Lack of knowledge about technology	73% (11/15)
Netherlands	Lack of knowledge about technology	63% (5/8)
Spain	Lack of knowledge about technology	83% (5/6)
Türkiye	Lack of knowledge about technology + Lack of mentors (tied)	50% each
Other	Lack of knowledge about technology	67% (6/9)

Critical finding: “Lack of knowledge about technology” is the top barrier in every single country group — confirming it as a universal, cross-national barrier.

Survey analysis conducted by: COLIN (WP2 Lead) — Collective Innovation AS

Data: 44 survey responses, 10 countries, collected January–March 2026

Date: April 2026

WP2 SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following survey was administered online to women athletes across 10 countries as part of the Springboard 2 WP2 T2.1 Barrier Assessment (n=44, January–March 2026). All questions marked with * are required.

Section 1 — Background Information

1) What is your age? *

- ☐ 18–23
- ☐ 24–29
- ☐ 30–35
- ☐ 36+

2) Country of residence: *

Open text response

3) Your current status (you may select more than one): *

Multiple selection

- ☐ Active athlete
- ☐ Former athlete
- ☐ Sports professional
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Entrepreneur / start-up founder

4) Your main sport discipline: *

Open text response

5) How would you describe your current career situation? *

- ☐ Fully focused on sport
- ☐ Combining sport with education or work
- ☐ Transitioning out of sport
- ☐ No longer active in sport

Section 2 — Awareness & Interest in Sports Tech

Sports Tech refers to the use of technology and innovation within sport, including areas such as performance, training, equipment, data analysis, management, fan engagement, and sport-related services. The technology-oriented sport industry is the ecosystem of organisations, platforms, and services that use advanced technologies (AI, IoT, Biometrics, Blockchain, XR) to quantify athletic performance, monetise fan behavior, and digitize operational infrastructure.

6) How familiar were you with the Sports Tech sector? *

- ☐ Not at all familiar
- ☐ Slightly familiar
- ☐ Moderately familiar
- ☐ Very familiar

7) Have you ever considered a career in Sports Tech (e.g. working in or founding a Sports Tech company)? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

8) Which roles in Sports Tech interest you the most? *

- ☐ Entrepreneur / founder
- ☐ Employee in a Sports Tech company
- ☐ Consultant / advisor
- ☐ Investor
- ☐ I am not interested

Section 3 — Barriers & Challenges

Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree).

9) I feel confident that my skills as an athlete are relevant to the Sports Tech sector. *

Strongly disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Strongly agree

10) I understand how the Sports Tech ecosystem works in my country. *

Strongly disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Strongly agree

11) I know where to find support, funding or mentoring for a Sports Tech career. *

Strongly disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Strongly agree

12) I feel encouraged to pursue leadership or entrepreneurial roles. *

Strongly disagree ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 Strongly agree

13) What are the main barriers you face when considering a career in Sports Tech? *

Select up to 3

- ☐ Lack of knowledge about technology
- ☐ Lack of business or entrepreneurial skills
- ☐ Limited access to funding
- ☐ Lack of mentors or role models
- ☐ Gender bias or stereotypes
- ☐ Lack of professional network
- ☐ Cultural or societal expectations
- ☐ Time constraints due to sport or family responsibilities
- ☐ Financial insecurity

14) In your own words, what is the biggest challenge preventing you from entering the Sports Tech sector? *

Open text response

Section 4 — Support Needs & Training

15) What type of support would be most helpful for you? *

Multiple selection

- ☐ Training on entrepreneurship
- ☐ Training on technology and innovation
- ☐ Mentorship from industry experts
- ☐ Access to role models
- ☐ Networking opportunities
- ☐ Access to funding or investors
- ☐ Career guidance and coaching
- ☐ Flexible learning formats

16) What learning format would suit you best? *

Multiple selection

- ☐ Online self-paced learning
- ☐ Live online workshops
- ☐ In-person workshops
- ☐ Mentorship programmes
- ☐ Hybrid (combination)

Section 5 — Final Reflection

17) What would motivate you the most to pursue a career in Sports Tech? *

Open text response

18) Would you be interested in participating in future training or mentoring activities within the Springboard 2 project? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe



SPRINGBOARD 2 PROJECT

WP2 T2.1 BARRIER ASSESSMENT

PART-2: CROSS-PARTNER SYNTHESIS

COMPARATIVE INTERVIEW ANALYSIS

Prepared by **COLIN (WP2 Lead)**

April 2026



SPRINGBOARD 2 Project is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This synthesis report presents the consolidated findings from 30 semi-structured interviews conducted with women athletes across five European countries as part of Task 2.1 (Barrier Assessment) under Work Package 2 of the Springboard 2 project. The interviews were conducted by five consortium partners between January and March 2026.

The analysis employed a hybrid thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), combining deductive coding based on the interview instrument's nine questions with inductive coding to capture emergent themes from the data. Each partner's interviews were first analysed individually, then compared cross-nationally to identify both shared patterns and country-specific variations.

Key finding: While all participants share common barriers — particularly limited sector knowledge, time constraints, and the need for mentoring — the nature, intensity, and root causes of these barriers differ substantially across national contexts. This variation has direct implications for the design of training, mentoring, and support interventions in subsequent project phases.

Partner	Country/Region	Interviews	Sports Represented
Orange Sports Forum (OSF)	Netherlands	6	Hockey (4), Athletics (1), Swimming (1)
GSIC	Spain	6	Handball, Beach Volleyball, Tennis, Triathlon, Rhythmic Gymnastics, Padel
SheSkillz Global (SSG)	Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Romania	6	Biathlon (4), Cross-country Skiing (1), Biathlon coaching (1)
Guler Legacy (GL)	Türkiye	6	Aerobic Gymnastics, Ultramarathon Swimming, Football, Basketball (2), Tennis
Igloo Innovation (IGL)	Norway	6	Shooting, Handball, Football (2), Taekwondo, Volleyball
Total	5 countries + multi-country	30	18 different sport disciplines

13. PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS OVERVIEW

Age and Career Stage

Category	Count	%
Active athletes	15	48%
Recently retired / transitioning	11	38%
Former athletes (established post-sport career)	4	14%

The sample spans ages 20 to 39, with the majority falling within the project's target range of 24–35. Active athletes represent nearly half the sample, providing insight into barriers experienced during the sporting career, while retired athletes offer a retrospective and transition-focused perspective.

Educational Backgrounds

Education Level	Count	%
Master's degree	7	24%
Bachelor's degree	11	34%
Ongoing/incomplete higher education	6	21%
Secondary education only	3	10%
Professional certifications only	3	10%

Education levels vary significantly across partners. Dutch participants (OSF) hold the highest qualifications, with 3/6 at Master's level in fields closely aligned with business and technology (law, data science, psychology). Spanish (GSIC) and Turkish (GL) participants hold qualifications less aligned with STEM or business fields. Three participants across the sample have no higher education beyond secondary school.

Sports Tech Engagement Spectrum

Based on cross-partner analysis, participants can be placed on a five-stage engagement spectrum:

Stage	Description	Count	%
Unaware	Had not heard of or considered Sports Tech before the interview	5	17%
End-user	Familiar with Sports Tech only as a consumer of performance tools	12	38%
Curious	Aware of the sector and interested but has taken no action	6	21%
Exploring	Has concrete ideas or has begun preliminary exploration	4	14%
Active	Currently working in or building a Sports Tech venture	3	10%

The majority of participants (55%) are at the Unaware or End-user stage. Only 3 participants across the entire sample are actively engaged in Sports Tech — 2 in the Netherlands (P03-OSF, P05-OSF) and 1 in Norway (P03-IGL). This underscores the significant awareness and engagement gap that exists across European women athletes.

14. THEMATIC FINDINGS: BARRIER ASSESSMENT

Theme A — Access to Funding and Investment

Cross-partner prevalence: Raised by 19/30 participants (66%)

Sub-theme	OSF	GSIC	SSG	GL	IGL	Total
Gender pay gap in sport	••••	•	•	•	•	8/30
Financial risk of entrepreneurship	•	•	••	•••	••••	11/30
Restrictive/inaccessible funding mechanisms	—	•	—	••	—	3/30
Dependence on imported/expensive technology	—	—	—	••	—	2/30
Subsidy dependence (short-term funding models)	•	—	—	—	—	1/30

Key finding: Financial barriers manifest differently across contexts. In the Netherlands, the dominant financial barrier is the structural gender pay gap in sport, which forces career decisions based on flexibility rather than interest. In Türkiye and Norway, the primary financial concern is the risk associated with entrepreneurship — particularly the fear of entering further economic insecurity after an already precarious sporting career. In Spain, funding mechanisms exist but are perceived as restrictive and difficult to navigate.

Critical insight: Multiple participants across partners articulated a sequencing principle: knowledge and direction must precede funding. As one Spanish participant stated: “Without a clear idea of what I want to build, funding alone would not be useful.” This finding has direct implications for programme design — financial support should follow, not precede, education and mentoring interventions.

Theme B — Mentorship and Professional Networks

Cross-partner prevalence: Raised by 27/30 participants (93%) — the most universally identified need

Sub-theme	OSF	GSIC	SSG	GL	IGL	Total
Need for personalised mentoring	•••••	•••••	••••	••••	•••••	24/30
Need for networking / professional connections	•••••	•••	••••	••••	••••	20/30
Absence of structured post-career guidance	•	••	••	••	••	9/30
Need for team / co-founders (not just contacts)	—	—	•	•	•••	5/30
Outreach gap (“nobody has approached me”)	—	—	•••	••	••	7/30

Key finding: Mentoring is the single most requested form of support across all five partner samples, identified by 24/30 participants (83%). However, the nature of mentoring needed differs by context:

- **Netherlands:** Mentoring for dual career management and sport-to-business transition positioning
- **Spain:** Mentoring combined with foundational education — guidance to understand the ecosystem before acting
- **SSG (multi-country):** Mentoring as outreach — athletes are ready but need to be actively found and engaged

- **Türkiye:** Mentoring to navigate a fragmented ecosystem and find reliable technical partners
- **Norway:** Mentoring embedded within team formation — finding co-founders and collaborative partners

Outreach gap: A significant finding from SSG and IGL is that many athletes are willing to engage with Sports Tech but have never been approached. One participant captured this powerfully: “If I had been contacted and given the opportunity to join an exciting project, I would have said yes.” This suggests that demand-side interventions alone are insufficient — supply-side outreach to athletes is equally critical.

Theme C — Gender Bias and Stereotypes

Cross-partner prevalence: Raised by 24/30 participants (83%)

Sub-theme	OSF	GSIC	SSG	GL	IGL	Total
Gender pay gap / financial inequality	••••	•	•	—	•	7/30
Male dominance in leadership/technical roles	••	•••	•	••	•	9/30
Motherhood as career limiter / “mental load”	••	•	—	••	—	5/30
Social/marriage expectations	—	—	—	••	—	2/30
Paternalistic professional dynamics	—	—	•	••	•	4/30
Self-legitimacy questioning (impostor syndrome)	•	—	—	—	••	3/30
Linguistic/cultural exclusion (“sport tech sounds masculine”)	—	—	•	—	—	1/30
Technology designed for male bodies	—	—	—	—	••	2/30
Gender barriers reframed as opportunity	—	—	—	—	•••	3/30

Key finding: Gender-related challenges are present across all partner samples but manifest along a spectrum from structural-financial (Netherlands) to deeply cultural-social (Türkiye), with important variations in between.

Five distinct gender barrier patterns identified:

1. **Structural-financial (Netherlands):** Pay inequality between male and female athletes is the most concrete and recurring barrier. Career choices are forced towards flexibility rather than genuine interest. Motherhood and “mental load” create additional career progression barriers.
2. **Observational-representational (Spain):** Gender barriers are primarily perceived as sector-level observations — male dominance in management, leadership, and technical roles (~90% male in some contexts). Less personal experience of direct discrimination.
3. **Subtle-implicit (SSG/multi-country):** Gender barriers operate through linguistic exclusion (“sport tech sounds masculine/nerdy”), implicit bias (polite/friendly women not taken seriously), and sponsorship disparities between male and female athletes.
4. **Deeply cultural-social (Türkiye):** Gender expectations are woven into daily social and professional interactions — marriage pressure, paternalistic meeting dynamics, assumptions about mothers’ availability. One participant was told that wearing a wedding ring would help secure professional support.

- 5. Opportunity-reframing (Norway):** Gender imbalance is acknowledged but strategically reframed — as a market opportunity (developing women-specific Sports Tech), as motivation (“feeling small in a room of established men motivates me”), and as differentiation in a male-dominated sector.

Cross-cutting finding on motherhood: Across the Netherlands, Spain, and Türkiye, motherhood emerged as a significant career barrier — not through explicit discrimination but through societal assumptions about availability and commitment. This finding has implications for programme design, requiring flexible formats that accommodate parenting responsibilities.

Theme D — Dual Career Challenges

Cross-partner prevalence: Raised by 23/30 participants (79%)

Sub-theme	OSF	GSIC	SSG	GL	IGL	Total
Time constraints (sport + work/study)	•••••	•••	••	•	••	14/30
Part-time work necessity (insufficient sport income)	••••	•	—	••	••	9/30
“Tunnel vision” during active career	••	—	—	—	••	4/30
Career transition “cliff edge” (abrupt shift)	—	••	••	••	••	8/30
Risk aversion (leaving stable employment)	—	—	••	—	••••	6/30
Injury as catalyst for career exploration	—	—	—	—	•••	3/30

Key finding: Dual career challenges are universal but take different forms depending on the national sport funding structure:

- **Netherlands and Norway:** Women’s sport does not provide full-time income, creating a structural requirement to work or study alongside competing. This limits available time and energy for Sports Tech exploration.
- **Spain:** Athletes tend to focus more exclusively on sport during their active career, resulting in a sharper “cliff edge” at retirement — a more abrupt and less prepared transition.
- **Türkiye:** Athletes often play multiple roles simultaneously (athlete + coach + student + federation role) out of necessity, not choice. The dual career is not two careers but three or four.
- **SSG (multi-country):** Risk aversion is prominent — fear of leaving stable employment for an uncertain Sports Tech path, compounded by the financial insecurity already experienced during sport.

Unique Norwegian finding — injury as catalyst: Three Norwegian participants identified injury periods as unexpected windows for career exploration and Sports Tech engagement. One participant’s ACL tear directly triggered her startup journey. This suggests that injury support programmes could be enhanced with career exploration components.

Theme E — Cultural and Regional Differences

This theme emerged not from a single interview question but from the cross-partner comparative analysis itself. The five national contexts reveal a gradient of ecosystem readiness:

Dimension	Netherlands	Spain	Nordic (SSG+IGL)	Türkiye
Sports ecosystem Tech	Developed (InnoBeweeegLab, JADS, SportUp)	Emerging (Olympic Committee accelerator)	Developing (Karrieresenter, startup hubs)	Absent/fragmented
Women's sport professionalisation	Advanced	Moderate	Advanced	Developing
Infrastructure access	High	High	High	Low (travel 60km to train)
Domestic Sports Tech companies	Multiple	Few	Some	Very few (import-dependent)
International exposure effect	Moderate	Strong (USA experience transformative)	Moderate	Strongest (transformative)

Key finding: International exposure as accelerator: Across all partner samples, participants with international experience (studying, training, or competing abroad) demonstrated markedly higher Sports Tech awareness, ambition, and engagement. This effect was strongest in Türkiye and Spain, where domestic ecosystems are less developed. This finding strongly supports the value of cross-border programmes like Springboard 2.

Brain-drain risk (Türkiye): One Turkish participant explicitly stated she does not see her long-term future in Türkiye. The most internationally experienced and highest-potential Turkish athletes may leave if domestic conditions do not improve — a finding with implications for national sport policy.

Theme F — Skills, Education, and Training Needs

Cross-partner prevalence: Raised by 26/30 participants (90%)

Sub-theme	OSF	GSIC	SSG	GL	IGL	Total
Lack of technical/sector-specific knowledge	••	••••••	•••••	•••	•••••	21/30
Difficulty translating sport skills to business contexts	••	•	•	••	••	8/30
Idea-to-execution gap	—	••	•	••	•••	8/30
Need for structured athlete transition programmes	—	••	••	••	••	8/30
Data literacy gap (collecting vs. analysing data)	•	—	•	•	—	3/30
Need for access to technical partners/developers	—	—	—	•••	—	3/30

Key finding: The knowledge and skills gap is the most universally identified barrier (21/30, 72%), but it operates at different levels across contexts:

- **Foundational awareness level (Spain, SSG):** Athletes do not know what Sports Tech is, what opportunities exist, or where to begin. The barrier is informational.
- **Competency level (Türkiye, Norway):** Athletes have ideas and motivation but lack technical skills (coding, data science, product development) to execute them. The barrier is skills-based.
- **Translation level (Netherlands):** Athletes have strong qualifications but struggle to translate sport competencies into business language and professional positioning. The barrier is communicational.

Practitioner insight — a cross-cutting asset: Across all partner samples, athletes identified their first-hand experience as end-users of sports technology as a transferable asset. They understand what athletes need because they have lived it. This “practitioner insight” positions women athletes not just as potential employees in Sports Tech but as uniquely qualified contributors to product development and user-centred innovation.

15. TRANSFERABLE SKILLS: CONSOLIDATED FINDINGS

Across all 30 interviews, the following skills were most frequently identified as transferable from sport to Sports Tech:

Skill	Frequency (n=30)	%
Discipline, structure, and consistency	27/30	93%
Resilience and perseverance	24/30	83%
Goal orientation	22/30	76%
Performing under pressure	17/30	59%
Teamwork and collaboration	16/30	55%
Time management and organisation	14/30	48%
Analytical thinking	10/30	34%
Practitioner insight (understanding athlete needs)	11/30	38%
Communication and presentation	6/30	21%
Leadership	6/30	21%
Creativity and innovation	4/30	14%

Key finding: Athletes possess a robust foundation of transferable soft skills. However, there is a significant gap in hard/technical skills — coding, data science, product development, and business model design. The challenge is not a lack of capability but a lack of structured pathways to acquire the complementary technical skills needed to act on existing motivation and soft skill foundations.

16. SUPPORT NEEDS: PRIORITISED RANKING

Based on explicit participant responses to Q8 across all 30 interviews:

Support Type	Rank 1 (most needed)	Total Mentions	Priority
Mentoring	14/30 ranked first	24/30 mentioned	☆☆☆ HIGHEST
Networking	5/30 ranked first	20/30 mentioned	☆☆ HIGH
Training/Education	6/30 ranked first	18/30 mentioned	☆☆ HIGH
Funding	3/30 ranked first	11/30 mentioned	☆ MODERATE
Team/Community	1/30 ranked first	8/30 mentioned	☆ MODERATE

Recommended intervention sequencing based on findings:

Phase 1 — Awareness and Education: Address the foundational knowledge gap through accessible, flexible learning formats. Athletes need to understand what Sports Tech is, what opportunities exist, and what pathways are available before any other intervention can be effective.

Phase 2 — Mentoring and Networking: Connect athletes with experienced professionals for personalised guidance. The mentoring should be ecosystem-specific — helping athletes navigate the particular landscape of their national context. Networking should be active and outreach-based, reaching athletes rather than waiting for them to seek opportunities.

Phase 3 — Team Formation and Incubation: Facilitate connections between athletes with ideas and technical partners who can help execute them. The Norwegian finding of team-seeking and the Turkish finding of needing reliable developers both point to this need.

Phase 4 — Funding and Scaling: Financial support becomes relevant once athletes have direction, knowledge, a team, and a validated concept. Pre-mature funding without the preceding phases is unlikely to generate sustainable outcomes.

17. COUNTRY-SPECIFIC BARRIER PROFILES

Each partner country presents a distinct barrier profile requiring tailored intervention approaches:

Netherlands — “Structured but constrained”

- **Primary barrier:** Structural time pressure and gender pay inequality
- **Athlete profile:** Well-educated, dual-career experienced, some already active in Sports Tech
- **Key need:** Financial equality advocacy + mentoring for professional positioning
- **Intervention focus:** Leverage existing qualifications; address structural barriers through policy advocacy

Spain — “Motivated but uninformed”

- **Primary barrier:** Foundational knowledge and information gap
- **Athlete profile:** High-performance Olympic athletes with limited business/tech education
- **Key need:** Education + mentoring as a combined package; awareness-building
- **Intervention focus:** Start with foundational Sports Tech literacy; build from practitioner insight

SSG (Multi-country) — “Ready but not reached”

- **Primary barrier:** Outreach and visibility gap — athletes are willing but not connected
- **Athlete profile:** Winter sport athletes across multiple countries; moderate awareness
- **Key need:** Active outreach + mentoring + networking
- **Intervention focus:** Go to the athletes rather than expecting them to find opportunities

Türkiye — “System-builders facing foundational barriers”

- **Primary barrier:** Infrastructure deficit + ecosystem absence + cultural gender barriers
- **Athlete profile:** Highest entrepreneurial motivation despite greatest structural barriers; pioneer narratives
- **Key need:** Funding + international networking + technical partners + cultural support
- **Intervention focus:** Cross-border programmes are maximally impactful; support ecosystem creation rather than just individual development

Norway — “Team-seekers reframing barriers”

- **Primary barrier:** Awareness gap + financial risk aversion + desire for collective action
- **Athlete profile:** Variable education; strong collaborative values; injury as catalyst for exploration

- **Key need:** Team formation + mentoring + pathway clarity (idea-to-execution)
- **Intervention focus:** Facilitate team building and co-founder matching; provide structured pathways from idea to action

18. CROSS-CUTTING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR D2.1

Based on the consolidated findings, the following recommendations emerge for the Barrier Assessment Report:

Recommendation 1: Design differentiated support pathways that account for national context. A one-size-fits-all approach will not address the fundamentally different barrier profiles identified across partner countries.

Recommendation 2: Prioritise mentoring as the cornerstone intervention, but tailor its format — dual career positioning mentoring (Netherlands), ecosystem navigation mentoring (Spain, Türkiye), outreach-based mentoring (SSG), and team-building mentoring (Norway).

Recommendation 3: Address the foundational knowledge gap before introducing funding or advanced entrepreneurship support. The majority of participants (72%) identified lack of sector knowledge as a primary barrier.

Recommendation 4: Develop active outreach mechanisms that reach athletes in their existing environments rather than requiring them to seek out Sports Tech opportunities independently.

Recommendation 5: Recognise and leverage practitioner insight as a unique asset that women athletes bring to Sports Tech. Programme design should position athletes as contributors and co-creators, not just recipients of training.

Recommendation 6: Incorporate gender-sensitive design that accounts for the full spectrum of gender barriers — from structural pay inequality to cultural marriage expectations to linguistic exclusion — rather than treating gender as a single, uniform challenge.

Recommendation 7: Use cross-border exposure as a deliberate accelerator, particularly for athletes from countries with less developed Sports Tech ecosystems. International programmes like Springboard 2 have demonstrably transformative impact on awareness and ambition.

Recommendation 8: Integrate career exploration into injury rehabilitation support, capitalising on the finding that injury periods serve as unexpected windows for professional development.

Analysis conducted by: COLIN (WP2 Lead) — Collective Innovation AS

Data: 30 semi-structured interviews across 5 consortium partners

Method: Hybrid thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) — deductive + inductive coding

Springboard 2 Project: Interview Questions

This interview guide is designed to support semi-structured interviews conducted within Task 2.1 of the SPRINGBOARD 2 project. The questions aim to explore perceived barriers, support needs, and career aspirations of women athletes in relation to the Sports Tech sector. Please ensure that participants are informed about the purpose of the interview and that their participation is voluntary and confidential.

Target group: Women athletes / women sports professionals with a sports background

Age: 24–35

Duration: 15–20 minutes

Language: English (British English)

Sports Tech refers to the use of technology and innovation within sport, including areas such as performance, training, equipment, data analysis, management, fan engagement, and sport-related services. The technology-oriented sport industry is the ecosystem of organisations, platforms, and services that use advanced technologies (AI, IoT, Biometrics, Blockchain, XR) to quantify athletic performance, monetise fan behavior, and digitize operational infrastructure.

1. Can you briefly describe your sporting background and your current career situation?
2. How familiar are you with the Sports Tech sector?
3. Have you ever considered working in or starting a Sports Tech-related role or business? Why / why not?
4. What are the main barriers that make it difficult for you to enter the Sports Tech sector?
5. Have you experienced or perceived any gender-related challenges in this context?
6. Which skills from your sports career do you think are transferable to Sports Tech?
7. In which areas do you feel you need the most support or development?
8. What kind of support (training, mentoring, networking, funding) would help you most at this stage?
9. If one thing changed tomorrow, what would make it easier for you to pursue a career in Sports Tech?

SPRINGBOARD 2 PROJECT

WP2 T2.1 BARRIER ASSESSMENT

PART-3: DATA TRIANGULATION

SURVEY (n=44) × INTERVIEWS (n=30)

Prepared by **COLIN (WP2 Lead)**

April 2026

PURPOSE

This document triangulates the quantitative survey data (44 responses, 10 countries) with the qualitative interview data (30 semi-structured interviews, 5 partner organisations) to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and complementary insight. Triangulation strengthens the validity of findings by demonstrating that conclusions are supported across multiple data sources and methods.

Note on sample size: All interview frequency counts in this document use n=30 as the denominator (6 participants × 5 partners).

19. CONVERGENT FINDINGS (Confirmed across both data sources)

The Knowledge Gap is the Dominant Barrier

Data Source	Finding
Survey	“Lack of knowledge about technology” selected by 68% — the #1 barrier across all countries
Interviews	Lack of technical/sector-specific knowledge identified by 72% (21/30) of interviewees
Survey open-ended	41% spontaneously wrote about lack of knowledge as their biggest challenge
Survey Likert	Understanding of Sports Tech ecosystem scored only 2.45/5; knowledge of support scored 2.05/5

Triangulation strength: STRONG. Both quantitative and qualitative data independently and consistently identify the knowledge/information gap as the primary barrier. This is the single most robust finding of the entire T2.1 barrier assessment.

Low Sports Tech Familiarity is Pervasive

Data Source	Finding
Survey	71% are “not at all” or only “slightly” familiar with Sports Tech
Interviews	55% of interviewees (16/30) placed at “Unaware” or “End-user” stage
Survey	Only 2% (1/44) rated themselves as “very familiar”
Interviews	Only 10% (3/30) are actively engaged in Sports Tech

Triangulation strength: STRONG. Both sources confirm a deep familiarity deficit. The Sports Tech sector is invisible to the majority of European women athletes.

Mentoring is a Universal Priority

Data Source	Finding
Survey	Mentorship from industry experts selected by 43% (3rd most requested support)
Interviews	Mentoring identified by 83% (24/30) as the most needed support — ranked #1 across all 5 partners

Triangulation note: Mentoring ranks somewhat lower in the survey (43%, 3rd place) than in interviews (83%, 1st place). This divergence is addressed in Section 20 below. However, both sources confirm mentoring as a top-tier need.

Dual Career is a Structural Reality

Data Source	Finding
Survey	57% are combining sport with education or work
Survey	Time constraints selected as a barrier by 34%
Interviews	Dual career challenges identified by 79% (23/30) of interviewees

Triangulation strength: STRONG. The majority of women athletes manage competing commitments. This is not a choice but a structural necessity — particularly in women's sport where income is insufficient for full-time athletic focus.

Professional Network Absence

Data Source	Finding
Survey	"Lack of professional network" selected by 45% — 3rd most common barrier
Interviews	Networking identified by 69% (20/30) as a key support need
Survey open-ended	"My current network is still largely outside the Sports Tech ecosystem"
Interviews (SSG)	"If I had been contacted and given the opportunity, I would have said yes"

Triangulation strength: STRONG. Athletes feel disconnected from the Sports Tech ecosystem. They do not have the contacts, connections, or visibility to enter the sector, even when motivated to do so.

Athletes Believe Their Skills Are Relevant

Data Source	Finding
Survey	Q9 mean score 3.64/5 — moderate–high confidence in skill relevance
Interviews	Discipline (93%), resilience (83%), and goal orientation (76%) universally identified as transferable

Triangulation strength: STRONG. Athletes generally believe their sporting experience gives them relevant skills. The barrier is not self-doubt about capability (except in specific cases like Norwegian P04 and P06) but rather not knowing how to deploy those skills in a new context.

High Engagement Interest

Data Source	Finding
Survey	85% interested or potentially interested in Springboard 2 activities (55% Yes + 30% Maybe)
Interviews	The vast majority of interviewees expressed openness to Sports Tech, even those currently uninformed

Triangulation strength: STRONG. There is a clear demand signal. The appetite for engagement far exceeds the current supply of opportunities, information, and structured pathways.

20. DIVERGENT FINDINGS (Discrepancies between data sources)

Mentoring: #1 in Interviews vs. #3 in Survey

Data Source	Mentoring Rank	Possible Explanation
Survey	3rd (43%)	Respondents chose from a structured list where “career guidance and coaching” (52%) may have absorbed some mentoring demand
Interviews	1st (83%)	Open-ended conversation allowed mentoring to emerge as a broad, catch-all concept encompassing guidance, support, network access, and emotional encouragement

Interpretation: This divergence is methodological rather than substantive. In the survey, the more specific option “career guidance and coaching” ranked #1 (52%) — functionally overlapping with mentoring. When combined, mentoring + career guidance represent the dominant support need in both data sources. The interview format simply allowed participants to articulate this need more broadly.

Funding: Higher in Survey than Interviews

Data Source	Funding as Barrier	Possible Explanation
Survey	50% selected “limited access to funding” — 2nd highest barrier	Pre-defined option list may prompt selection of funding when it would not be spontaneously mentioned
Interviews	Funding raised by only 38% (11/30) — not a top-3 barrier in most partner samples	Open conversation revealed that athletes often deprioritise funding relative to knowledge and mentoring: “Without a clear idea, funding alone would not be useful”

Interpretation: The survey format likely inflates the perceived importance of funding as a barrier. When athletes discuss their situation in depth (interviews), they more frequently identify knowledge and guidance as prerequisites — funding becomes relevant only after direction is established. This has important implications: funding is necessary but not sufficient, and not the first intervention needed.

Gender Bias: Lower in Both Sources than Expected

Data Source	Gender Bias Ranking
Survey	Only 14% (6/44) selected “gender bias or stereotypes”
Survey	Only 5% (2/44) selected “cultural or societal expectations”
Interviews	83% (24/30) discussed gender-related challenges when directly asked (Q5)

Interpretation: This is the most significant divergence. The survey dramatically underrepresents gender barriers compared to interviews. Three factors explain this:

- 1. Question design:** The survey asks respondents to select their “main barriers” (up to 3) from a list. When forced to prioritise, athletes choose practical barriers (knowledge, funding, network) over structural ones (gender bias).
- 2. Depth vs. breadth:** Interviews include a dedicated gender question (Q5) that invites reflection. The survey buries gender bias as one of nine options in a multi-select question. Structural and cultural barriers require conversational depth to surface.
- 3. Internalisation and normalisation:** As interviews revealed, many athletes have normalised gender barriers — experiencing them as “just how things are” rather than as identifiable obstacles. The

Turkish finding of marriage pressure and the Dutch finding of pay inequality would never be captured by a tick-box labelled “gender bias or stereotypes.”

Critical implication: Gender barriers are substantially underreported in quantitative data. The interview findings on gender (five distinct barrier patterns from structural-financial to deeply cultural) must be given significant weight in the D2.1 report, even though the survey suggests they are a minor concern.

Entrepreneurship vs. Employment Preference

Data Source	Finding
Survey	Employment (32%) slightly preferred over entrepreneurship (27%) as a Sports Tech role
Interviews	Entrepreneurship interest was higher, particularly in Türkiye (5/6) and Netherlands (2/6 active entrepreneurs)

Interpretation: The survey captures a broader, less engaged population where employment feels safer and more accessible. Interviews captured a more motivated and self-selected sample, including several active entrepreneurs. Both pathways should be supported in programme design.

21. COMPLEMENTARY FINDINGS (Each source adds unique insight)

Survey Adds: The “Swing Population”

The survey reveals that 32% of respondents are “not sure” whether they have considered a Sports Tech career. Combined with the 30% who have considered it, this means 62% are either interested or persuadable. The interview sample, by design, captured those already willing to discuss the topic — the survey uniquely quantifies the “maybe” group and its size.

Implication: Awareness and outreach interventions could potentially convert a significant portion of this 32% swing population into active participants.

Survey Adds: The Q9–Q11 Confidence–Knowledge Gap

The survey uniquely quantifies the gap between self-perceived skill relevance (3.64/5) and ecosystem knowledge (2.45/5) — a 1.2-point gap. This “confidence–knowledge disconnect” was narratively present in interviews but never quantified. It represents the core intervention opportunity: athletes believe they have something to offer but do not know how or where.

Survey Adds: Learning Format Preferences

The survey provides data that interviews did not capture: hybrid learning (45%) and in-person workshops (41%) are the most preferred formats. Online self-paced learning alone (27%) is the least preferred. This is directly actionable for D2.2 curriculum design.

Interviews Add: National Context and Cultural Depth

The survey’s country-level analysis is limited by small sample sizes (e.g., n=6 for Spain and Türkiye). The interviews provide the rich contextual understanding that explains why barriers differ across countries:

- **Why** Dutch athletes focus on pay inequality (structural wage gap in women’s hockey)
- **Why** Spanish athletes lack knowledge (education not aligned with tech/business)
- **Why** Turkish athletes face unique gender barriers (marriage pressure, paternalistic dynamics)
- **Why** Norwegian athletes seek teams not just mentors (collaborative cultural values)

The survey tells us what the barriers are; the interviews tell us why they exist and how they are experienced.

Interviews Add: Success Stories and Case Studies

The survey captures no success stories. The interviews provide powerful cases:

- **P03-IGL (Norway):** ACL injury → AI prototyping → co-founded startup halfway through pilot
- **P05-OSF (Netherlands):** Digital-first platform for athlete mental wellbeing (Growing Gold)
- **P05-GL (Türkiye):** Tennis foundation developing multiple tech solutions despite fragmented ecosystem
- **P03-OSF (Netherlands):** Data scientist actively bridging sport and technology

These cases demonstrate that barriers can be overcome and provide role models for programme participants.

Interviews Add: The Outreach Gap

The survey does not capture the finding that athletes are “ready but not reached.” The interview data from SSG and IGL reveals that many athletes would engage if actively approached — the barrier is not motivation but visibility and outreach. This finding cannot be captured by a survey distributed to those already within partner networks.

22. INTEGRATED BARRIER RANKING: COMBINED DATA SOURCES

Based on the triangulated analysis, the following consolidated barrier ranking is proposed:

Rank	Barrier	Survey Evidence	Interview Evidence	Confidence
1	Lack of knowledge about the Sports Tech sector	68% selected; Q10 mean 2.45/5; 41% open-ended	72% identified; dominant in Spain, SSG, Norway	★★★★ Very high
2	Lack of professional network and ecosystem access	45% selected	69% identified; outreach gap confirmed	★★★★ Very high
3	Insufficient mentoring and career guidance	52% career guidance + 43% mentoring	83% identified; #1 across all interview partners	★★★★ Very high
4	Time constraints and dual career pressure	34% selected; 57% combining sport with work/study	79% identified; universal but varying intensity	★★★ High
5	Limited access to funding	50% selected	38% identified; highest in Türkiye and Norway	★★★ High
6	Lack of business and entrepreneurial skills	41% selected	Identified primarily in Spain and SSG	★★★ High
7	Financial insecurity	27% selected	Identified in Netherlands (pay gap) and Norway (risk aversion)	★★★ High
8	Gender bias and stereotypes	14% selected (underreported)	83% discussed when prompted; 5 distinct patterns identified	★★★ High (underreported in survey)
9	Lack of infrastructure and ecosystem	Not a survey option	Dominant in Türkiye; moderate elsewhere	★★ Moderate (country-specific)
10	Cultural and societal expectations	5% selected (underreported)	Strong in Türkiye (marriage, motherhood); subtle elsewhere	★ Moderate (underreported in survey)

23. METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Strengths of Mixed-Methods Approach

The combination of survey and interview data has produced substantially richer findings than either method alone:

- **The survey** provides quantifiable prevalence rates, statistical patterns, and population-level data that can be reported with confidence
- **The interviews** provide contextual depth, causal understanding, and nuanced country-level analysis
- **The triangulation** reveals where survey data underrepresents certain barriers (gender, cultural expectations) and where interview data may overemphasise certain themes (mentoring)

Limitations

- **Survey sample size:** Country-level analysis is constrained by small sub-samples (n=6 for Spain and Türkiye). Norwegian overrepresentation (34%) may skew aggregate findings
- **Interview sample selection:** Interviewees were recruited through partner networks and may represent a more engaged, higher-profile population than the average athlete
- **Survey design:** The barrier question (Q13) offers pre-defined categories that may not capture country-specific barriers (e.g., infrastructure gaps in Türkiye)
- **Language:** Survey was administered in English, which may disadvantage non-native speakers and reduce response quality
- **Gender bias measurement:** The survey format substantially underreports gender-related barriers. Future surveys should include dedicated gender-specific questions rather than burying gender as one option among many

Recommendation for Future Data Collection

For subsequent phases of the project, the following improvements are recommended:

- Include dedicated Likert-scale items on gender-specific barriers
- Add country-adapted barrier options (e.g., infrastructure, imported technology costs)
- Consider translating the survey into partner languages to improve response quality
- Increase sample sizes in underrepresented countries through targeted follow-up

24. CONSOLIDATED CONCLUSIONS FOR D2.1

The triangulated analysis supports the following consolidated conclusions:

Conclusion 1: The knowledge and awareness gap is the single most validated barrier. It is confirmed as #1 in the survey (68%), #1 in the interviews (72%), and the dominant theme in open-ended responses (41%). Any intervention that does not first address this gap will have limited impact.

Conclusion 2: Athletes have confidence in their skills (3.64/5) but lack ecosystem knowledge (2.45/5) and awareness of support structures (2.05/5). The intervention opportunity lies in bridging this confidence–knowledge gap, not in building confidence from scratch.

Conclusion 3: Mentoring and career guidance together constitute the most requested form of support across both data sources. Programme design should make mentoring the central intervention, supported by networking, education, and (later) funding.

Conclusion 4: Gender barriers are real and significant but are systematically underreported in quantitative instruments. The five distinct gender barrier patterns identified in interviews (structural-

financial, observational, subtle/implicit, deeply cultural, opportunity-reframing) must be given proportional weight in the D2.1 report alongside the quantitative data.

Conclusion 5: 85% of surveyed athletes express interest in Springboard 2 activities. Combined with the 62% who have considered or are open to a Sports Tech career, there is a clear and substantial demand for the programme's offerings.

Conclusion 6: National context fundamentally shapes the barrier experience. A differentiated, country-sensitive approach to intervention design is essential. The knowledge gap is universal, but the root causes, cultural context, and appropriate solutions differ significantly across the Netherlands, Spain, Nordic countries, and Türkiye.

Triangulation conducted by: COLIN (WP2 Lead) — Collective Innovation AS

Data sources: Survey (n=44, 10 countries) + Interviews (n=30)



SPRINGBOARD 2 PROJECT

WP2 T2.1 BARRIER ASSESSMENT

PART-4: FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS EXPERT SESSION

Prepared by **COLIN (WP2 Lead)**

April 2026

SESSION OVERVIEW

Item	Detail
Date	April 2026
Format	Online (video conference)
Duration	~60 minutes
Moderator	Burak Caliskan, COLIN (WP2 Lead)
Experts	6 participants
Rule	Chatham House Rule
Purpose	Validate, deepen, and enrich preliminary findings from survey (n=44) and interviews (n=30)

EXPERT PROFILES

Code	Background	Country	Expertise
E1	Managing Director & Co-founder, global sports innovation network powered by a major tech company	Spain	Sports Tech ecosystem, mentoring programmes, AI in sport, STEM promotion
E2	Founder of a global sports skills organisation; former role at Norwegian Olympic Committee; negotiated international athlete career programmes	Norway/Switzerland	Athlete career transition, mentoring, gender equality in sport
E3	Former professional footballer; former head of women's club; consultancy for football federation; now runs own consultancy in neuroscience/psychology applied to sport	Türkiye/International	Women's football development, sports startups, perception & bias, marketing
E4	CEO of a software company; former national team athlete (taekwondo, 8 years); extensive tech industry background	Norway	Tech industry, event solutions, logistics, athlete transition
E5	Works for an international biathlon federation and national federation; former coach and athlete; participant of a sports mentoring programme	Hungary	Biathlon, coaching, federation governance, athlete development
E6	Engineer; policy-making in entrepreneurship; 7 years in sports sector; closely involved with a consortium partner	Netherlands	Entrepreneurship policy, sports innovation, gender in tech

Profile strength: Diverse expertise spanning Sports Tech ecosystems (E1), athlete career transitions (E2), women's sport development (E3), tech industry leadership (E4), sports federation governance (E5), and entrepreneurship policy (E6). Multi-country representation: Spain, Norway, Türkiye, Hungary, Netherlands, Switzerland. Mix of organisational, entrepreneurial, and policy perspectives.

25. ICEBREAKER RESPONSES: "THE SINGLE BIGGEST BARRIER"

Before seeing any data, each expert was asked to identify the single biggest barrier women athletes face when entering Sports Tech:

Expert	One-sentence answer	Theme
E1	Access to the right network where opportunities are created and shared	Network access
E2	Knowledge doesn't reach women the way it reaches men — not only in technology but across sport	Information inequality
E3	The perception of women themselves and their place in sports — whether doing a pitch, accessing networks, or getting inside a club	Perception & bias
E4	Twofold: the view women have on themselves through society, and the accessibility to information — beliefs in ourselves that impact us	Self-perception + information access
E5	Women are less confident when it comes to technology; the barrier comes from inside — "Am I able to learn?"	Internal confidence gap
E6	Perception of women and lack of role models for the inspirational part — "You can do it"	Role models + perception

25.1. Icebreaker Analysis

Dominant theme — Perception and self-belief (4/6): E3, E4, E5, and E6 all pointed to how women perceive themselves and are perceived by others as the fundamental barrier. This was spontaneous and unprompted by data — suggesting it reflects deep professional conviction.

Network and information access (2/6): E1 and E2 focused on structural access — the right networks and knowledge not reaching women equally.

Alignment with data: The experts' instincts partially align with interview findings (where gender barriers were described by 80%) but diverge from the survey (where only 14% selected gender bias). Notably, experts prioritised perception/self-belief over the knowledge gap that dominated our quantitative data — suggesting they see the psychological layer beneath the practical barriers.

New insight not prominent in survey/interview data: The emphasis on internal barriers (self-perception, confidence) adds a psychological dimension that was present but less dominant in the athlete data. This suggests that experts — observing from outside — see internalised barriers that athletes themselves may not articulate as "gender bias."

26. THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF EXPERT DISCUSSION

Theme F — Skills, Education & Training Needs

Question posed: What do women athletes most urgently need — technical skills like coding, or business literacy and ecosystem understanding?

Expert consensus: NOT coding — ecosystem understanding and value communication

Expert	Key contribution
E3	"I don't see the need for coding. We need to know how to solve a problem in the system and communicate the financial impact to the customer. The biggest mistake in pitches is not having the language to explain value to a club."

E2	"Technology is in most things today. A coach without tech knowledge won't be a good coach. It's not about coding — it's about understanding where technology exists across all of sport."
E1	"They don't need to learn how to code — they need to understand where they fit in the ecosystem and how to create value. Like our AI in Sport programme — it's not about coding AI, it's about understanding how AI can help you."
E4	"Athletes have a much more diversified skill set than they believe. They don't think about how much technology is already in their sport. Start one step back — help them see what they already have."

Validated finding: The knowledge gap as #1 barrier is strongly confirmed, but experts reframe it from "lack of technical knowledge" to "lack of ecosystem literacy and value communication skills."

New insight — the hidden skill set: E4 raised a powerful point not prominent in athlete data: athletes already interact with technology extensively (sensors, equipment, apps) but do not recognise this as Sports Tech competence. The first intervention should help athletes "see what they already have."

Enrichment from E1: Referenced their mentoring programme's first module — "Reimagine the Sport Industry" — showing athletes best practices of how organisations like FIFA or La Liga use technology. "It's inspiration before talking about roles."

Three-Month Programme Design — "What Would Be the First Module?"

Question posed: If you were designing a three-month programme for women athletes entering Sports Tech, what would be the first module?

Expert	Proposed first module
E6	Purpose and intrinsic motivation — "It doesn't start with knowledge. It starts with the purpose of the individual, the intrinsic motivation. If you find that, the athlete will search for the support needed."
E5	Role models and motivation — "Use role models and their experiences to make them believe it's possible to learn, even if it looks strange at first."
E1	"Reimagine the Sport Industry" — "Show them amazing best practices where technology is used. Inspire them to say: I want to be there, I can do this."
E4	Self-assessment of existing skills — "Start one step back. Help them see what they already have — the technology in their sport, their innovation potential, what they can contribute."
E3	In-person community building — "A first in-person session to create psychological safety so they can be vulnerable about their needs and blocks. Build a team for them — athletes always have a team behind them."

Synthesis — proposed first module sequence:

1. **Self-discovery** — Help athletes recognise their existing skills and tech exposure (E4)
2. **Purpose finding** — Connect to intrinsic motivation (E6)
3. **Inspiration through best practices** — Show what's possible in Sports Tech (E1, E5)
4. **Community formation** — Create psychological safety and peer support (E3)

Critical insight from E3 — psychological safety: "A lot of the feedback we got is that an in-person first session would have been very valuable to break down personal barriers and create psychological safety. Athletes are used to having a team — there's nothing they have to do alone here."

Learning Format Preferences

Question posed: Hybrid learning (45%) vs in-person workshops (41%) — what works best for athletes?

Expert	Position	Rationale
E5	In-person preferred	strongly "When you experience something, you really keep that knowledge. What you just read, you don't keep as deeply."
E1	Industry exposure over format	"The real value is when you are listening and learning from the real industry — clubs, leagues, startups, investors. Whether online or in-person matters less than WHO is teaching."
E3	Hybrid with in-person start	"Most athletes are somatic learners — they learn by doing. At minimum, hybrid with one in-person session. It also builds community and network."

E2	Differentiated approach	"The programme is also for people who have started working, not just active athletes. Both groups learn differently — that's a challenge to address."
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Validated finding: Hybrid learning preference confirmed but with an important nuance — the in-person component should come first and focus on community building, not content delivery. Content can be delivered online; connection must happen face-to-face.

New insight from E2 — two distinct audiences: The programme serves both active athletes and those already in transition. Their learning needs and availability differ significantly. This has direct implications for D2.2 curriculum design.

Theme B — Mentorship & Professional Networks

Question posed: What makes mentoring effective for athletes in career transition?

Expert	Key contribution
E1	"Industry knowledge first. If the survey said they don't know about Sport Tech, start with exposure to the ecosystem before emotional support."
E2	"The mentor should not be too old or too senior. Not a CEO — someone they can recognise themselves in. Also: mentors must PUSH — many women expect to be asked rather than asking themselves."
E4	"Mentorship should include sparring — not just guiding. A discussion partner where you can agree, disagree, get feedback on ideas, and figure out next steps yourself."
E3	"A mentor that doesn't say 'that won't work by my experience.' Each person is unique. Guide them through THEIR way instead of imposing our framework."
E6	"Role models should be female AND male. We're talking about equal chances — mentors should be equally divided."
E4	"Research shows men apply for jobs at 50% qualification match; women won't apply. Mentors should be equipped with research to show why women should take more chances."

Validated finding: Mentoring as #1 support need is strongly confirmed. But experts add crucial quality criteria that were absent from athlete data.

Five principles of effective mentoring (synthesised from expert input):

5. **Industry-first:** Start with ecosystem exposure before emotional support (E1)
6. **Relatable:** Mentors should be close in age/experience, not distant authority figures (E2)
7. **Push-oriented:** Actively encourage women to take steps, not wait to be asked (E2, E4)
8. **Sparring-based:** Discussion and feedback, not instruction (E4)
9. **Non-prescriptive:** Guide through the mentee's own path, not the mentor's framework (E3)

New insight — the "push" function: E2 identified that many women athletes expect opportunities to come to them rather than seeking them out. This aligns with the interview finding of athletes being "ready but not reached" but adds a behavioural dimension: mentors should actively push mentees to take initiative.

New insight — gender-balanced mentoring: E6 argued mentors should include both men and women. This challenges the assumption that women need exclusively female mentors and aligns with an equal-opportunity philosophy.

Outreach — "Ready But Not Reached"

Question posed: How can we design outreach that goes to athletes rather than waiting for them?

Expert	Key contribution
E3	"Social media saturation means content is easily missed. What's powerful is personal reach — a friend enrolled me in a course without even asking. People in the industry know someone who knows someone. Personal referral scales."
E2	Referenced E5's real journey as proof: E5 went from athlete → coach → mentoring programme → federation role. "She took the next steps because the programme came to her."
E5	Confirmed: "The mentorship programme helped me be more comfortable to step in when asked. All steps were important — not jumping too big, but building confidence step by step."

Validated finding: The "ready but not reached" finding is strongly confirmed. Experts agree that traditional marketing is insufficient — personal outreach and referral networks are more effective.

E5's testimony as a living case study: E5's own career trajectory — from athlete to coach to mentoring programme participant to federation role — demonstrates the exact pathway Springboard 2 aims to create. Her statement that "all these steps were important to be confident in my job" validates the phased approach.

Theme C — Gender Bias (14% vs 80%)

Question posed: Why are gender barriers so underreported in quantitative data?

Expert	Key contribution
E2	"Research shows 9 out of 10 people have bias towards women. Almost all women have also bias towards other women. It's a big picture that needs to be worked on — not only in sport."
E6	"In the Netherlands there are organisations focusing on women in tech — not just Sports Tech. Those visions should be included. I agree with the former speaker."

Validated finding: The 14% vs 80% discrepancy is explained by experts as normalisation and internalised bias. E2's reference to research on universal gender bias (including women's bias against other women) adds an evidence-based explanation for the gap.

Expert consensus: Gender barriers are systemic and largely invisible to those experiencing them — confirming the interview finding that these barriers are "hidden layers."

Motherhood as Career Limiter

Question posed: How should programmes account for motherhood-related assumptions?

Expert	Key contribution
E2	"We're talking about technology — technology helps people join meetings wherever you are. You actually CAN attend with technology today."

Practical recommendation: Use technology itself as the solution to the motherhood accessibility barrier. Flexible, remote participation options should be a structural feature of any programme, not an accommodation.

Theme E — Cultural & Regional Differences

Question posed: Does the five-country picture match your context? Should interventions be standardised or

Expert	Key contribution
	localised?
E6	"Education is really important. In the Netherlands only 25% of technical students are female. In Poland it's 50%. The interest for technical studies differs per country — this should be taken into account."
E3	"You have to take into account the PDI [Power Distance Index] about how workplaces function in different countries. Having different perspectives and knowing what's happening in other countries could be helpful."

Validated finding: Country-level differences are confirmed. E6 adds a concrete data point (25% vs 50% female tech students in NL vs Poland) that reinforces the need for country-sensitive approaches.

New insight from E3 — Power Distance Index: Cultural workplace dynamics (hierarchical vs egalitarian) shape how women experience barriers. This structural/cultural framework was not present in the athlete data and adds an explanatory layer.

Theme A — Funding

Question posed: Education first, funding later — do you agree?

Expert	Key contribution
E2	"I totally agree you need the idea first. BUT it's extremely expensive to set up a company today, especially in tech — legal, regulation, compliance. When you have the idea, you MUST have funding. And only a few percent of European funding goes to women. The EU should really work on this."

Partially validated, partially challenged: The sequencing principle (knowledge → funding) is confirmed, but E2 adds urgency: once the idea exists, the funding gap becomes critical and structural. The European-level funding disparity for women is raised as a systemic issue requiring policy intervention.

27. CLOSING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EXPERTS

Question posed: Is there anything important we haven't touched on?

Expert	Final recommendation
E3	"Provide the questions in writing afterwards — some people aren't as vocal and probably have brilliant ideas. I'd be happy to fill something out and would be curious what others say."
E4	"It's a good initiative and will hopefully be a great tool for athletes entering work life."
E6	"Focus not only on best practices but on best PRINCIPLES — the principles behind good practices. Then we can learn from each other."
E5	Aligned with E4 — endorsed the initiative.
E2	"Nothing more to add."

Actionable recommendation from E3: Send discussion questions in writing to all participants for additional written input — captures perspectives from less vocal experts.

Conceptual recommendation from E6: Distinguish between country-specific best practices and universal principles. Programme design should identify transferable principles rather than only documenting local practices.

28. KEY FINDINGS SUMMARY — WHAT THE FOCUS GROUP ADDS TO D2.1

Validated Findings (Confirmed by experts)

Finding from survey/interviews	Expert validation
Knowledge gap as #1 barrier	✅ Strongly confirmed — but reframed as "ecosystem literacy" not "technical skills"
Mentoring as #1 support need	✅ Strongly confirmed — with 5 quality principles added
Gender barriers underreported in surveys	✅ Confirmed — explained by normalisation and internalised bias
"Ready but not reached" outreach gap	✅ Confirmed — personal referral recommended over mass marketing
Country-level differences in barriers	✅ Confirmed — with additional data on education gender gaps
Funding paradox (knowledge before money)	✅ Partially confirmed — but funding urgency increases once idea exists
Hybrid learning preference	✅ Confirmed — with in-person first session for community building

New Insights (Added by experts, not in survey/interview data)

New insight	Source	Implication for programme
Athletes don't recognise their existing tech competence	E4	First module should be self-assessment of existing skills
"Reimagine the industry" as inspiration approach	E1	Show best practices from FIFA, La Liga etc. before discussing roles
Athletes are somatic learners	E3	Learning-by-doing and practice-based formats are essential
Mentors must "push" — women wait to be asked	E2	Active push mentoring, not passive guidance
Psychological safety through in-person community	E3	First session must be in-person to build trust and team
Purpose/intrinsic motivation as starting point	E6	Before skills or knowledge — find the "why"
Power Distance Index shapes barriers	E3	Cultural workplace dynamics explain cross-country differences
Universal gender bias (including women against women)	E2	Bias training should address internalised bias, not just external
Principles over practices	E6	Programme should identify transferable principles, not just case studies
Two distinct audiences (active athletes vs transitioners)	E2	Curriculum must differentiate between these groups

Expert-Proposed First Module Sequence

Based on expert consensus, the recommended first module for a women athletes Sports Tech programme should follow this sequence:

Step 1 — Self-Discovery: Help athletes recognise the technology already in their sport and the skills they already possess (E4)

Step 2 — Purpose: Connect to intrinsic motivation — why does this matter to you personally? (E6)

Step 3 — Inspiration: Show real-world best practices of technology in sport — "Reimagine the Sport Industry" (E1, E5)

Step 4 — Community: In-person session to build psychological safety, peer connections, and team support (E3)

Step 5 — Ecosystem Literacy: Understand how the Sports Tech ecosystem works, where opportunities exist, and how to communicate value (E1, E3)

29. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The focus group successfully fulfilled its three objectives: validation, deepening, and enrichment. Expert perspectives added a psychological and structural layer (self-perception, internalised bias, push mentoring, somatic learning) that complements the more practical barriers identified in athlete data.

Limitation: One expert (E1) had to leave early due to a scheduling conflict. A follow-up written questionnaire was suggested by E3 and should be implemented to capture additional input.

Recommendation: Send the discussion questions to all six experts for optional written responses within one week, to supplement the verbal discussion.

Analysis conducted by: COLIN (WP2 Lead) — Collective Innovation AS Data source: Focus group transcript (6 experts, ~60 minutes) Method: Thematic analysis aligned with the six pre-defined discussion themes (A–F) Date: April 2026 Status: Final — to be integrated into D2.1 Barrier Assessment Report