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Participant Barriers Mapping Tool

A practical tool for identifying, analyzing, and responding to barriers that may affect the participation of migrants and refugees in sport activities.

1. WHAT IS THIS TOOL?

This learning tool is a practical template designed to help coaches, facilitators, and sport organizations identify and analyze barriers that may affect participation in sport activities.

Based on the findings of the Equal Play project, the tool supports users in mapping the most common barriers experienced by migrants and refugees, including language difficulties, financial constraints, accessibility and transport issues, time limitations, and social factors that may influence participation.

The tool provides a structured approach for examining how different barriers affect engagement, attendance, confidence, and retention. It also encourages users to consider practical responses and adaptations that can help reduce these barriers and create more inclusive sport environments.

Designed to be simple, flexible, and easy to use, the Participant Barriers Mapping Tool can be adapted to different sport settings, organizations, and target groups. It supports a more evidence-based understanding of participation challenges and helps organizations move from identifying barriers to planning meaningful inclusion actions.

2. WHY DOES THIS TOOL MATTER?

Participation in sport is often influenced by barriers that are not immediately visible. While some barriers may be easy to identify, others can remain unnoticed and may gradually affect a participant's confidence, engagement, and willingness to continue attending activities.

Migrants and refugees may experience a range of challenges, including language difficulties, financial constraints, transport and accessibility issues, time limitations, limited access to information, or concerns related to discrimination and social inclusion. These barriers can make participation more difficult, even when individuals are interested and motivated to take part.

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Without a structured way to identify barriers, coaches and organizations may misinterpret irregular attendance, limited participation, or withdrawal from activities as a lack of interest or commitment. In many cases, these behaviors may reflect challenges that participants are facing outside the sport environment rather than a lack of motivation.

This tool supports a more informed and participant-centered approach by helping organizations identify barriers, understand their impact on participation, and develop practical responses. By addressing barriers early, sport providers can create more accessible, welcoming, and sustainable opportunities that support long-term participation and inclusion.

3. UNDERSTANDING PARTICIPATION BARRIERS

Participation in sport is rarely influenced by a single factor. In many cases, several barriers interact and reinforce one another, making participation more difficult over time.

For example, a participant who experiences language difficulties may find it challenging to understand information, communicate with coaches, or build relationships with other participants. This may reduce confidence and increase feelings of isolation, ultimately affecting attendance and long-term engagement.

Similarly, financial constraints may be linked to transport difficulties, limited access to equipment, or reduced opportunities to participate in events and activities. Time constraints may also be connected to work commitments, family responsibilities, language courses, or administrative requirements.

Because barriers are often interconnected, it is important to look beyond the visible signs of non-participation and explore the wider circumstances that may be affecting an individual's experience.

Understanding how barriers influence participation allows coaches and organizations to respond more effectively and create conditions that support meaningful engagement for all participants.

4. COMMON PARTICIPATION BARRIERS

The Equal Play project identified several recurring barriers that may affect the participation of migrants and refugees in sports activities. Understanding these barriers can help coaches, facilitators, and sport organizations recognize potential challenges and develop more inclusive responses.

Barrier Category	Examples	Possible Impact on Participation
Language Barriers	Difficulty understanding instructions, accessing information, or communicating with coaches and other participants	Reduced confidence, misunderstandings, limited engagement
Cost and Financial Constraints	Membership fees, equipment costs, travel expenses, event participation fees	Irregular attendance, reduced participation, withdrawal from activities
Transport and Accessibility	Long distances, limited public transport, dependence on others, difficult access to facilities	Late arrivals, missed sessions, lower participation rates
Time Constraints	Work commitments, family responsibilities, language courses, administrative appointments	Inconsistent attendance and reduced availability
Fear of Discrimination	Fear of exclusion, previous negative experiences, feeling unwelcome, lack of confidence	Social withdrawal, reluctance to participate, reduced retention

Important Note

Barriers do not always occur in isolation. A participant may experience several barriers at the same time. For example, transport difficulties may be linked to financial constraints, while language barriers may affect confidence and communication. For this reason, it is important to consider the broader context of each participant's situation before drawing conclusions about their level of motivation or engagement. For this reason, barriers should be considered collectively rather than in isolation whenever possible.

5. RECOGNIZING EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Barriers to participation are not always directly visible. Participants may not openly discuss the challenges they are experiencing, particularly if they feel uncomfortable, lack confidence, or are unsure where to seek support.

For this reason, coaches and facilitators should pay attention to changes in participation patterns and behavior that may indicate the presence of a barrier.

The signs below do not automatically indicate the presence of a barrier. However, they may suggest the need for further discussion, observation, or support.

Possible Sign	What It Might Indicate
Irregular attendance	Transport difficulties, financial constraints, competing responsibilities
Frequent late arrivals	Transport challenges, work commitments, family responsibilities
Limited participation during activities	Language difficulties, low confidence, fear of making mistakes
Avoiding communication	Language barriers, uncertainty, feelings of exclusion
Difficulty following instructions	Communication challenges or limited understanding of information
Reduced interaction with others	Lack of confidence, social isolation, fear of discrimination
Sudden drop in attendance	Emerging personal, financial, transport, or social barriers
Withdrawing from activities unexpectedly	Multiple barriers affecting long-term engagement

Good Practice

When signs of potential barriers are observed:

- avoid making assumptions;
- approach the participant respectfully;
- ask open and supportive questions;
- focus on understanding rather than judging;
- explore possible solutions together.

Early identification can help prevent small challenges from becoming long-term barriers to participation and inclusion.

6. HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Instead of making assumptions about why participation is low, use this tool to explore possible barriers in a structured and supportive way.

Step 1. Observe Participation Patterns

Notice any signs that may indicate the presence of a barrier, such as irregular attendance, reduced participation, or communication difficulties.

Step 2. Identify Possible Barriers

Consider which barriers may be affecting the participant or group based on your observations and available information.

Step 3. Record Findings

Use the Barrier Mapping Template to document the identified barriers and their impact on participation.

Step 4. Explore Possible Responses

Review potential actions that may help reduce or remove the identified barriers.

Step 5. Develop an Action Plan

Agree on realistic actions, responsibilities, and follow-up measures.

Step 6. Review Progress

Regularly revisit the situation to assess whether the actions taken have improved participation and inclusion.

7. BARRIER MAPPING TEMPLATE

Use this template to identify, document, and analyze barriers that may affect participation in sport activities. The template can be completed for an individual participant, a group of participants, or a specific sport activity.

When completing the template, focus on observable information, participant feedback, and practical solutions. Avoid assumptions and ensure that any information collected is handled respectfully and confidentially.

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Participant / Group	Identified Barrier	Evidence or Observation	Impact on Participation	Possible Response	Priority Level (Low / Medium / High)

Guidance for Completing the Template

Participant / Group
Identify the participant, participant group, or activity concerned.

Identified Barrier
Specify the main barrier affecting participation (e.g., language, cost, transport, time constraints, fear of discrimination).

Evidence or Observation
Record observations, participant feedback, attendance patterns, or other relevant information.

Impact on Participation
Describe how the barrier affects attendance, engagement, communication, confidence, or retention.

Possible Response
Identify practical actions that may help reduce or remove the barrier.

Priority Level
Assess how urgently the barrier should be addressed.

8. LINKING BARRIERS TO PRACTICAL RESPONSES

Identifying a barrier is only the first step. To support meaningful participation, barriers should be linked to practical and realistic responses that can be implemented within the sport environment.

The examples below are intended as guidance and should be adapted to the specific needs of participants and the local context.

Barrier	Possible Responses
Language Barriers	Use simple language, provide visual demonstrations, use multilingual materials where possible, encourage peer or buddy support, check understanding regularly.
Cost and Financial Constraints	Provide information about available support schemes, reduce participation fees where possible, offer shared equipment, explore sponsorship or community funding opportunities.
Transport and Accessibility	Consider alternative venues, coordinate shared transport, provide clear travel information, schedule activities in accessible locations.
Time Constraints	Offer flexible schedules where possible, communicate activity times well in advance, consider alternative participation options.
Fear of Discrimination	Promote respectful behavior, establish clear inclusion expectations, address inappropriate behavior promptly, create welcoming and supportive environments.
Limited Access to Information	Use clear and accessible communication, share information through multiple channels, provide reminders and practical guidance before activities.
Low Confidence or Social Isolation	Introduce participants gradually, encourage positive peer interaction, use buddy systems, recognize achievements and participation efforts.

Important Considerations

Not all barriers can be removed immediately, and some may require cooperation with external organizations or community services. However, even small adjustments can significantly improve a participant's experience and increase the likelihood of continued participation.

When selecting responses:

- focus on practical and realistic actions;
- involve participants in identifying solutions;
- consider individual circumstances;
- review whether the chosen actions are effective over time.

9. ACTION PLANNING TEMPLATE

Use this template to plan and monitor actions that can help reduce identified barriers and improve participation. The action plan should focus on realistic, achievable measures that can be implemented within the organization or sport setting.

Identified Barrier	Planned Action	Responsible Person	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Status

Guidance for Completing the Template

Identified Barrier
Record the barrier identified through the Barrier Mapping Template.

Planned Action
Describe the specific action that will be taken to address or reduce the barrier.

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Responsible Person
Identify who will be responsible for implementing or coordinating the action.

Timeline
Specify when the action should be completed or reviewed.

Expected Outcome
Describe the intended result or improvement.

Status
Use this column to monitor progress (e.g., Planned, In Progress, Completed).

Good Practice

- Prioritize actions that are realistic and achievable.
- Focus on solutions that directly support participation and inclusion.
- Involve participants where appropriate.
- Review progress regularly and adapt actions if needed.
- Celebrate improvements, even when they are small.

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10. SAMPLE COMPLETED VERSION

This example illustrates how the Participant Barriers Mapping Tool and Action Planning Template can be used in practice. The information below is fictional and provided for demonstration purposes only.

Barrier Mapping Example

Participant / Group	Identified Barrier	Evidence or Observation	Impact on Participation	Possible Response	Priority Level
Young migrant participants (ages 16–24)	Language barriers and transport difficulties	Several participants reported difficulty understanding instructions. Two participants frequently arrived late due to limited public transport options.	Reduced confidence, limited communication with coaches, irregular attendance.	Use visual demonstrations during sessions, provide key information in simple language, and explore car-sharing opportunities among participants.	High

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Action Planning Example

Identified Barrier	Planned Action	Responsible Person	Timeline	Expected Outcome	Status
Language barriers	Introduce visual demonstrations and simple-language explanations during all training sessions.	Coach	Within 2 weeks	Improved understanding of activities and increased participant confidence.	In Progress
Transport difficulties	Collect information about transport needs and explore car-sharing arrangements between participants and volunteers.	Program Coordinator	Within 1 month	Improved attendance and reduced late arrivals.	Planned

Observed Outcome

After implementing the planned actions, participants reported feeling more comfortable during activities and more confident when communicating with coaches and peers. Attendance improved, and fewer participants arrived late to sessions. The organization decided to continue using visual communication methods and review transport needs regularly.