



Funded by
the European Union

VERA

VOICE FOR EQUALITY AND RIGHTS
OF WOMEN ATHLETES

VERA PRELIMINARY STUDY FOR THE PLATFORM



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Context	4
I. The platform	4
II. The preparatory study	4
Platform characteristics	6
I. Mandatory characteristics	6
1. Digital	6
2. Exchange of knowledge	7
3. Call for experts	7
4. Athletes and organisations in sport targeted	8
5. Hosted under Assist domain	8
II. Other characteristics	9
1. Overview	9
2. Technology	9
3. Content	10
4. Financing	11
5. Design	11
knowledge sharing digital platforms	12
I. Examples of sharing-knowledge digital platforms	12
II. List of sharing-knowledge platforms providers	12
III. Suggestions for the platform	12
Operating rules	13
I. About the platform	13
II. About services provided under the platform	13
1. Content	13
2. Contributors	14
3. Experts	14
Conclusion	15

CONTEXT

I. The platform

Under the submitted application, one of the main specific objectives of Voice for Equality and Rights of women Athletes ('the Project') is to "create an European platform for athletes, organizations and professionals to strengthen the opportunity to exchange best practices and possible solutions to common challenges, increase empowerment and cooperation."

This platform is further detailed as follows:

- the Project will increase "digital skills among athletes and organizations in sports through the promotion and the implementation of digital tools specifically developed to reach the project's aims (digital campaign and digital platform for exchange of resources and blended capacity building sessions)";
- the Project will "connect digital resources and knowledge on the project's topic to be sure that they can be freely and easily available to women athletes and organizations that support and represent athletes through a European network of expertise that will deposit and exchange information on a digital platform.;"
- an "interactive area within the platform to facilitate constant mutual exchange among participants" will be used as an indicator;
- "video tutorial on the platform";
- a "pool of experts will be available through the digital platform"; and
- "the digital platform will be hosted within the coordinator's website domain, just as the dedicated project's web page [...] The idea is that the platform will remain a tool for dialogue, exchange, comparison and growth on topics related to implementation of gender equality in sport, also reaching decision/policy makers through a massive action of advocacy to increase effective policy engagement in promoting gender equality in athletes' rights. Also keeping in mind the sustainability and the transferability of the output to others than partner organizations and direct target groups reached during the project, partners will produce simple easy to use guidelines that will facilitate the use of and the interaction with the platform as much as possible among athletes and organizations that, to be engaged, need to be required a low investment in terms of time and effort to gain an effective benefit".

II. The preparatory study

In order to establish the platform, a preparatory study must be drafted in accordance with the following:

- "to consider elements of feasibility and accessibility of the tool that partners want to produce, considering the real needs and the actual possibility of commitment of the target groups, as a key factor to make the project really useful and its outputs and outcomes actually transferable";
- "the practices collected, for example, as well as the description of the main structure of the platform will be described in the most effective and easy way, avoiding long text documents and manual that might be hard to be used, preferring a visual approach, with graphics, pictu-

res, testimonials with concrete examples of implementation by partners and people directly involved in the creation and the use of the platform (with interviews, quick video tutorial, podcast...) to facilitate transferability as much as possible by showing step by step the work done offering a sort of roadmap easy to follow by organizations and athletes also beyond the partnership.”;

- “establishment of the digital platform - best practices of complementary initiatives, setting rules and aims among participant organizations, describing the model of functioning for the cooperation and exchange of practices and know-how”; and
- “electronic copy / Approx 15 pp. / English”.

Considering all of the above, the present document has been drafted.

PLATFORM CHARACTERISTICS

I. Mandatory characteristics

It results from the aforementioned that various characteristics of the future platform have been already established. The present section aims at detailing these characteristics.

1. Digital

A digital platform is to be understood as an online platform providing digital services.

According to the European Union, online platforms¹ and digital services² may be briefly described as follows:

Online platforms

- present a wide range of activities including online advertising, marketplaces, search engines, social media and creative content outlets, application distribution, communications services, payment systems and collaborative economy
- ability to create and shape new markets, to challenge traditional ones, and to organise new forms of participation or conducting business based on collecting, processing, and editing large amounts of data;
- operate in multisided markets but with varying degrees of control over direct interactions between groups of users;
- benefit from 'network effects', where, broadly speaking, the value of the service increases with the number of users;
- often rely on information and communications technologies to reach their users, instantly and effortlessly; and
- play a key role in digital value creation, notably by capturing significant value (including through data accumulation), facilitating new business ventures, and creating new strategic dependencies.

Digital services

- include a large category of online services, from simple websites to internet infrastructure services and online platforms; and
- used to communicate with each other, shop, order food, find information, see films and listen to music, trade across borders and access new markets.

Consequently, a digital platform would necessarily imply:

- using solely electronic devices to access it and benefit from the proposed services and, a contrario, preventing people -without an Internet access and/or electronic device- to do so;
- compliance with the applicable regulations and laws, e.g. personal data, as well as protection against relevant threats, e.g. hacking; and
- setting-up the adequate environment to offer online the proposed services.

¹ Communication COM(2016) 288 final 'Online Platforms and the Digital Single Market Opportunities and Challenges for Europe'

² Digital Services Act package webpage

2. Exchange of knowledge

Sharing knowledge appears to be the main service of the digital platform.

Requirements for such a service to be offered are as follows:

Online platforms

ACCESSIBILITY

- The most important feature. The platform must be easy and fast to access and use through all major browsers and electronic devices; and
- According to the targeted groups, a mobile-friendly platform may be required.

CONTENT

- Considered file types must be handled by the platform, e.g. videos, podcasts, reels, short articles, etc.; and
- Permission and access rights should also be considered.

STRUCTURE

- Available content must also be easy to find and consult, through the use of hotkeys, labels, tags, instant search, etc.; and
- An intuitive architecture must be built.

ANALYTICS

- Monitoring allows identification of relevant content; and
- weaknesses of the platform can also be identified.

STORAGE

- The content made available must stay in a secured location; and
- It must be suitable for the considered file types to be used.

Optional features may also be addressed:

- sharing knowledge outside the platform;
- integration with most frequent apps and/or software; and/or
- comment function and/or creation of a community of users.

Consequently, a sharing-knowledge platform would imply:

- setting it up based upon detailed specifications or using an existing platform; and
- considering the number of users, their ways of consuming knowledge.

3. Call for experts

The platform may also be used as a communication tool with appointed experts. As such, various possibilities must be considered:

Q&A SECTION > CONTACT FORM > LIVE CHAT > VIDEO CALL

It clearly appears that the two first possibilities are the easiest to implement, while the two last ones would require an increased availability from the experts as well as specific IT functions for the

digital platform.

As a first step, a Q&A and case study sections should be established. Such formats do not require a lot of efforts to build. However, in order to remain competitive, their content must remain up to date. As a second step, a forum could be set up, based upon the success of the platform.

Under a contact form, in order to be competitive, the response time must be short. Experts to answer should commit to provide an answer within few days.

Consequently, according to the implemented technology under the digital platform as well as the commitment of experts, the contact form and the Q&A section could be created simultaneously.

Besides the aforementioned, special attention must be paid to the 'recruitment' of a sufficient number of experts to cover all required topics, over the European Union territory. This is a challenge which must not be under-estimated. Visibility of these experts could be enough to convince them to be available, their remuneration to be further agreed with those willing to use their services.

4. Athletes and organisations in sport targeted

It is understood that the main target population are athletes. In particular, women athletes. Organisations in sport are also targeted but as a subsidiary target population.

In the absence of generic data on women athletes at EU level³ and for the purpose of assessing this population, the age range should be from 16 to 34 years old⁴.

Consequently, characteristics of the digital platform must be in line with the habits, needs, practices of its users, i.e. the main target population. In this respect, further data should be obtained with respect to women athletes in order to make sure that they find the digital platform suited to them.

5. Hosted under Assist domain

It has been stated that the digital platform will be hosted under the website of Assist. While it appears to fit the purpose of targeting women athletes, it must be questioned whether or not this decision is likely to impact the design and functionalities of the digital platform. Indeed, the current website has its own characteristics and limits.

This aspect is to be carefully assessed by experts in this field.

Consequently, any service provider selected to establish the digital platform should be requested to provide its opinion on the aforementioned, especially with respect to the influence on the key characteristics of the platform (exchange of knowledge, call for experts).

³ No partners of the project -which answered a request for information- could report a definition of an athlete at European level.

⁴ Under the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, the range 30-35 years old was referred to the stage of discontinuation of the athletic level.

II. Other characteristics

1. Overview

Considering the scope of the present project:

- the European Union is the territory to be considered;
- competitors would be current European networks or entities with a European coverage dedicated to women athletes. Further to a consultation of the project partners, two direct competitors have been identified⁵: European Women in Sport (<https://e-wins.eu/>), Empowering Women Athletes (<https://ewa-project.eu>) and the EOC gender equality, diversity & inclusion commission;
- besides the opinion of the project partners, there is no clear information confirming that the digital platform responds to a real demand from the target population;
- there must be an outstanding and unique characteristic to attract and retain the target population as well as increase at EU level the reach of the future platform; and
- the digital platform must remain attractive to the partners -with respect to their own objectives- participating to it, in order to keep providing services and updating content. A loss of interest could weaken the sustainability of this platform as well as its competitiveness (information ceasing to be updated, no new content created, etc.).

Consequently:

- the European Union is the territory to be considered;
- competitors would be current European networks or entities with a European coverage
- the use of the respective partners' network must be optimised; and
- the platform must clearly distinguish itself from other similar platforms, e.g. original content, functions, etc. In this respect, latest information available is a plus.

2. Technology

According to latest available statistics, within the European Union:

- 94,49% of individuals (16-24 years old) used the Internet on a mobile phone or smart phone (75% on a laptop or tablet, 37,48% on a desktop computer) 2021⁶;
- 93,62% on individuals (25-34 years old) used the Internet on a mobile phone or smart phone (70,88% on a laptop or tablet, 34% on a desktop computer) (2021); and
- 58,24% of households used a mobile broadband (2021)⁷.

Consequently, the digital platform would necessarily imply:

- to be screen responsive in order to match the internet use of this target population;
- a smooth, reactive and quick navigation in order to match the use of the Internet on a mobile phone; and
- support the below-mentioned content.

⁵ Femixsport (<https://www.femixsports.fr/>) and Sportail Community (<https://sportailcommunity.com>) have been identified but these entities appear to cover the French territory only. Women in Sport (<https://womeninsport.org/>) has also been identified but is limited to United Kingdom while Women's Sports Foundation (<https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org>) or Voice in Sport (<https://www.voiceinsport.com>) covers USA and Canadian Women & Sport (<https://womenandsport.ca>) Canada. UN women (<https://www.unwomen.org>), the IOC gender equality diversity and inclusion commission and International Platform on Sport and Development (<https://www.sportanddev.org>) have a larger scope and territory.

⁶ Individuals - devices used to access the internet [ISOC_CI_DEV_I]

⁷ Households - type of connection to the internet [ISOC_CI_IT_H_custom_5316977]

3. Content

According to latest available statistics, within the European Union:

- individuals (16-24 years old) used the Internet:
 - 57,33%, to look for information about education, training or course offers (2015)⁸;
 - 67,71%, for consulting wikis (to obtain knowledge on any subject);
 - 50,96%, for doing an online course or using online learning material (2022)⁹;
 - 28,24%, for making an appointment with a practitioner via a website (2022)¹⁰;
 - 12,52%, for participating in professional networks (2017)¹¹; and
 - 77,09% for watching video content from sharing services (2022)¹².
- individuals (25-34 years old) used the Internet:
 - 42,27%, to look for information about education, training or course offers (2015);
 - 57%, for consulting wikis (to obtain knowledge on any subject);
 - 32,84%, for doing an online course or using online learning material (2022)¹³;
 - 39,44%, for making an appointment with a practitioner via a website (2022)¹⁴;
 - 20,08%, for participating in professional networks (2017)¹⁵; and
 - 71,43%, for watching video content from sharing services (2022)¹⁶.

In order to maximise the attractivity and use of the digital platform by the main target population, the content of this platform should match as much as possible the aforementioned.

With respect to the exact content of the digital platform, the target population should be consulted in order to identify the topics it requires an external support. An opportunity should also be given to this population to create content. Moreover, a frequent analysis of the use of the platform should be implemented (SEO, surveys, etc.) in order to guarantee that the topics discussed are (still) relevant and of interest for the target population.

Consequently, the digital platform should:

- focus on video content, similar to the content of wikis with some content dedicated to social media;
- privilege a 'passive' action (watching) rather than active one (participating) when it comes to content consumption;
- use, at least, English as main language;
- enable the creation and development of a community of users through forums and or safe spaces where to share and challenge each other ideas; and
- propose a content which matches the needs of the target population based upon the analysis of the traffic on the platform (pages consulted, etc.) but also possible surveys to be sent its users (polls, etc.).

⁸ Individuals - internet activities [ISOC_CI_AC_I_custom_5319729]

⁹ Individuals - internet activities [ISOC_CI_AC_I_custom_5320079]

¹⁰ Individuals - internet activities [ISOC_CI_AC_I_custom_5323197]

¹¹ Individuals - internet activities [ISOC_CI_AC_I_custom_5323789]

¹² Individuals - internet activities [ISOC_CI_AC_I_custom_5323120]

¹³ Individuals - internet activities [ISOC_CI_AC_I_custom_5320786]

¹⁴ Individuals - internet activities [ISOC_CI_AC_I_custom_5323255]

¹⁵ Individuals - internet activities [ISOC_CI_AC_I_custom_5323718]

¹⁶ Individuals - internet activities [ISOC_CI_AC_I_custom_5320899]

4. Financing

Apart from those related to the development of a digital platform, main costs related to the latter are:

- operational ones including costs for hosting any data online, for having a certain number of users accessing this data, integration of third parties services within the platform;
- transactional ones in case purchasable services are offered;
- maintenance ones with respect to bugs, security, etc.; and/or
- licensing fee in case of use of a platform made available by a third party.

Considering that a minority of the target population may purchase services provided by the platform¹⁷, other sources of incomes must be found.

Consequently, various options could be explored:

- paid partnerships with sports governing bodies as well as athletes and coaches associations granting access to some or all provided services;
- 'freemium' model, i.e. part of the services is provided for free while the rest is not;
- 'pay what you want' model;

5. Design

This section is to be influenced by the following:

- use of an already existing sharing knowledge platform. Indeed, under this scenario, the design is already established and standardised. There may be some decisions to be made but only on a limited set of characteristics;
- main content and services to be provided;
- the platform is to be hosted under Assist's website;
- inclusive with audio and visual tools to help breaking barriers for people with disabilities or learning deficits. Friendly and engaging language, with attention to captive terms for targeted groups so that the underrepresented groups will interact; and
- target population.

¹⁷ Internet purchases - money spent (2020 onwards) [ISOC_EC_IBM_custom_5326352] & Internet purchases - money spent (2020 onwards) [ISOC_EC_IBM_custom_5326604]

KNOWLEDGE SHARING DIGITAL PLATFORMS

I. Examples of sharing-knowledge digital platforms

- <https://www.voiceinsport.com/sessions>
- <https://www.d4daccess.eu/en/discover-our-knowledge-products>
- <https://womenandsport.ca/resources/>
- <https://www.sportanddev.org/research-and-learning/resource-library>

II. List of sharing-knowledge platforms providers

Nuclino	https://www.nuclino.com/product
Notion	https://www.notion.so/wikis
Sharepoint	https://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/microsoft-365/sharepoint/collaboration
Google Workplace	https://workspace.google.com/intl/en/

III. Suggestions for the platform

Topic 1

- training content
- good practice
- Q&A
- case study
- contact form

Topic 2

- training content
- good practice
- Q&A
- case study
- contact form

Topic 3

- training content
- good practice
- Q&A
- case study
- contact form

Topic 4

- training content
- good practice
- Q&A
- case study
- contact form

As part of our benchmarking, the helpdesk developed by Empowering Women Athletes¹⁸ -with respect to harassment and violence- is to be considered. A simple contact form is used. As such, in order to keep a competitive advantage, the digital platform should offer more, e.g. a direct and immediate contact with the expert / mentor such as Whatsapp conversation, selection of a meeting date, etc.

The strength of the platform is that it will be inclusive by design. The starting point to build around inclusion will be challenging assumptions, common use of language and wide stakeholder engagement. In this respect, subtitles and audio support should be incorporated in the building of the platform. The architecture of the platform should reflect that the platform has been built for everyone. A consultation with the target population would be a plus.

¹⁸ https://ewa-project.eu/platform/helpdesk_EN.php

OPERATING RULES

I. About the platform

Various models could be considered to handle the platform from a financial and technical point of view:

- one partner to the project is to manage it and bear its costs;
- an 'economic interest grouping' to facilitate or develop the economic activities of its members to enable them to improve their own results. Under this model, partners would sign an agreement to gather human, technical and financial resources but also share costs and take decisions;
- an international association.

Since the platform is to be hosted under Assist's website, the first model appears to be the most logical. It is also the easiest one.

Consequently, adopting a graduated approach, the first model could be a first step, the international association being the last one. As such, Assist would be the decision maker with respect to all aspects of the digital platform.

II. About services provided under the platform

1. Content

Content may be published on the platform as follows:

- on a free basis, i.e. without any control and/or authorisation whatsoever;
- upon information/consultation of one or more partners to the project; or
- upon approval of one or more partners to the project.

The decision making process could be spread among the partners according to the targeted content, with Assist acting as a coordinator for the whole content.

In addition to it, the production, publication, promotion and dissemination of content should be subject to some rules, e.g.:

- type, duration, length and format of content;
- ownership, responsibility of content;
- peer review before publishing;
- permission or not for third parties to copy, distribute and make use of the content available on the platform, e.g. Creative Commons licenses; and
- etc.

The abovementioned rules would prevent the arising of issues as well as ensure the quality of the content on the platform. In this respect, a content policy could be drafted so any possible contributor would know precisely what to do and what to avoid.

It is to be added that the frequent update of the content is key for the platform to remain competitive.

2. Contributors

Similar to the aforementioned, the ability for a third party to provide content could be made conditional -or not- upon various requirements.

As a mid-term objective, the platform should build a community of users that could then contribute to its development and its maintenance, rendering the platform sustainable and engaging. The users within the community would learn from the platform and eventually will have a space where to become content creators themselves.

3. Experts

Reference is made to the discussion held besides the drafting of this report.

CONCLUSION

The digital platform to be established must be a place for women athletes to find information, learn and exchange with relevant people, in a secured, easy-to-navigate and mobile-friendly environment.

Considering the target population, visual material must be privileged. The content must be very relevant and regularly updated to remain attractive.

It is essential to reach our target populations so they are made aware about the platform. Easy and clear messages (infographics, etc.) which can be easily spread among target populations should be created to enhance the communication around the digital platform (and the project in general), the aim being to attract a high number of individuals. Collaboration with gathering of athletes (unions, etc.) could be explored.

If the interest for such a platform is currently high among partners, it must be 'kept alive' on the long term so the platform remains competitive. In this respect, the contact of experts / mentors and providing latest information available to today's topics (confirmed by target populations) are essential functions. They must be developed and maintained accordingly.

Assist would be the main decision maker with respect to the platform. A content policy and specific decision-making process should be established.

A call for the establishment of the digital platform could be drafted with the following items: budget, timeframe, eligibility and selection criteria, mandatory and optional requirements, expected layout, functions, legal documentation, etc.

Let's start small and get bigger.



Project "V.E.R.A." is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EACEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.