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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
The Dalit women of India and Nepal	2
The Roma women and girls across Europe	3
The Palenqueros women in Colombia	4
CDWD women of Gambia	5
Recommendations	5

Introduction

Discrimination based on Work and Descent (DWD) affects more than 270 million people worldwide. Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD) can be found on all continents: Dalit communities in South Asia and Buraku in Japan, Roma communities in Europe, Haratin, Osu and other communities in West Africa and Quilombola or Palenque communities in Latin America.¹ DWD is a unique type of discrimination that takes the form of social exclusion based on inherited status and ancestral occupation. DWD is often associated with notions of “purity and pollution” and practices of untouchability.² Consequently, CDWD are faced with harassment and violence on a daily basis and face extreme forms of discrimination in accessing employment, education, healthcare, housing, water and sanitation and other basic services. CDWD are often bound by bonded labour or modern/ancestral slavery practices. CDWD women and girls face heightened marginalisation due to cross-cutting, intersectional discrimination because of their CDWD identity and their gender. They often face economic marginalization due to factors such as racism, sexism, and classism. The prevalence of discrimination against CDWD across the globe creates an environment in which sports participation becomes a secondary interest for the majority of CDWD communities!

The role of sport and physical activity as a tool of public health has been explored on a global scale, but rarely in the context of targeted actions towards invisibilized, disadvantaged, multiple discriminated against groups. The notion of sport specifically as a tool of anti-discrimination and inclusion enjoys modest popularity amongst national governments, sports clubs or civil

¹ More about the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent: [Home - Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent - GFoD \(globalforumcdwd.org\)](https://globalforumcdwd.org)

² For the full definition please see - Draft Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent, Human Rights Council 11th Session, 18 May 2009, Final report of Mr. Yozo Yokota and Ms. Chin-Sung Chung, Special Rapporteurs on the topic of discrimination based on work and descent, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session11/A-HRC-11-CRP3.pdf>

society organisations working with such communities³, yet it has rarely been considered as a serious method for combating discrimination.

The submission focuses on the barriers to accessing sport and physical activity for CDWD women and girls. It demonstrates that discrimination is the primary driver of exclusion from sport and physical activity. While policy at a national level is mostly aware of the gender gap in sport participation CDWD women and girls are totally absent from policy consideration.

The Dalit women of India and Nepal

Dalit community, which has historically faced the inhumane practice of untouchability, and continues to experience the perils of this practice, is one of the largest CDWD existing predominantly in South Asia. Outcasted and discriminated against on the basis of their caste position, it is one of the most socially, economically and politically marginalized communities, with Dalit women being further discriminated due to an added layer of gender. This reality is also reflected in the sphere of participation in sports – where cases of sexual violence against women have unfortunately been on the rise. In this scenario, the aspect of caste presents itself as another huge hurdle in the way to equality – putting Dalit women at a higher risk of violence within the sphere of sports, or their exclusion from the very sphere itself caused by various socio-cultural factors that obstruct their entry into sports from the very beginning.

Recently, **in India**, in the case of Dalit CDWD women, their caste and gender status structurally keep them out of the domain of sports. On the other hand, even if they do make it to the field, they have to face ingrained caste and gender-based violence. For instance, a research study by Oza (2019) among wrestling women in rural Haryana points out how caste plays a fundamental role in structuring success. Her field work revealed that there were no Dalit women engaged in the training programs since Dalit families could not afford training and diet.⁴ Moreover, the structural barriers faced by Dalit women kept them out of the dominant caste spaces. In the instances where Dalit women have crossed these structural barriers to make it to spaces dominated by men and other dominant groups, they have faced further caste-based discrimination – even in Olympics! This was highlighted recently, when a Dalit woman player was blamed, and caste slurs were thrown at her family after India lost to Argentina in the Women's hockey semi-final at the Tokyo Olympics.⁵

Although there is a lack of any disaggregated data in women's participation in sports **in Nepal**, a cursory search on the internet will reveal that various articles featuring sportspersons, or Dalit

³ See for example: [Sport-for-development and social inclusion in caste-ridden India: opportunities and challenges: Soccer & Society: Vol 23, No 8 \(tandfonline.com\)](#) or [Sport Inclusion - ROMA SUPPORT GROUP](#)

⁴ Rupal Oza (2019) Wrestling women: Caste and neoliberalism in rural Haryana, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 26:4, 468-488, DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2018.1502162

⁵ Al Jazeera, 2021: <https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2021/8/7/india-hockey-captain-slams-racist-abuse-of-dalit-players-family#:~:text=The%20women's%20best%2Dever%20Olympic,to%20blame%20for%20the%20defeat>.

women in sports, in particular, do not feature any Dalit women sportspersons from Nepal⁶ – a country where Dalit identity is widely spoken about. Missing Dalit women from these lists can be explained through other available analyses on access to socio-economic capital and public spaces. For instance, in the context of skill development training in Nepal (offered mostly by the Ministry of Industry and MoLD), an ILO report notes that around 80% of those who had taken training were male. One of the main reasons for this, in many instances, was that training is conducted outside the village, some even requiring traveling outside the district. Within the demographic of women, the situation of Dalit women is that of most marginalized – as highlighted by various researches, and therefore the education gap among Dalit girls⁷ further leaves them out from sport activities at school⁸. These studies explicitly point towards the limited “access to public spaces” and further lack of “access to national resources, public services and even development projects”.⁹ This form of exclusion and discrimination faced by Dalit women in Nepal, thus, translates into the field of sports as well, keeping them at bay.

The Roma women and girls across Europe

Roma are the largest CDWD in Europe with an estimated population of 10-12 million, including around 6 million in the European Union. One of the key issues affecting Roma women and girls in the represented countries is poverty and the lack of economic opportunities. Those who did not have an opportunity to gain a proper education and who, due to the lack of support and information, did not manage to leave the cycle of intergenerational poverty, still live in poor living conditions and in homes that do not satisfy the minimum space for the number of members, in many cases lacking electricity, running water, a toilet or bathroom, become asylum seekers at some point, in particular those without EU nationality. Roma youth, especially girls, is one of the often-neglected subgroups which has not been sufficiently addressed with regards to different social policy areas such as sport.¹⁰ In 2018, Annamária Horváthová, a **Roma girl from Slovakia** won a running race wearing just ballerinas on her feet. Later she became the 1500m champion of Slovakia in her age group. The case drew massive attention on the exclusion and poverty situation of Roma children across Europe, with huge sporting potential but without opportunity to showcase their skills and competencies.¹¹ Roma women and girls are also present in dancing activities, football, boxing and less in other

⁶ For instance, see SportandDev.org, 2021: <https://www.sportanddev.org/latest/news/six-dalit-sportspersons-you-should-know-about> (Part 1); SportandDev.org, 2022: <https://www.sportanddev.org/latest/news/six-dalit-sportspersons-you-should-know-about-part-2> (Part 2)

⁷ [Trapped in the Intersection: Youth, Gender Inequality, and Discrimination in Surkhet District, Nepal | News | SDG Knowledge Hub | IISD](#)

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/sep/11/nepal-celebrated-dalit-activist-on-her-lifelong-battle-for-equality>

⁹ Bishwakarma, P., 2004:

<https://dalits.nl/pdf/TheSituationAnalysisForDalitWomenOfNepal.pdf>

¹⁰ European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Ryder, A., A synthesis of civil society’s reports on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies in the European Union – Identifying blind spots in Roma inclusion policy, Publications Office of the European Union, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2838/08352>

¹¹ [Born into poverty, the young Roma who are becoming Slovakia's sports success stories - spectator.sme.sk](#)

professional sports. A recent report from the European Roma Rights Center¹² covering the **Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, and Spain** shows that the barriers preventing Roma in Europe from enjoying equal access to sport and physical activity are the following: fear of racial abuse from non-Roma taking part in sporting activities; sports schemes are directed specifically towards encouraging Romani girls' participation and intersectionality in sports participation; the lack of female role models from the Romani community in encouraging young Romani girls to participate in sports; the impossibility of attracting funding from sponsors for Roma sport activities; schools, sports clubs, and municipal authorities directly discriminate against Roma with the deliberate aim of preventing them from engaging with sport and physical activity (romani children are denied by football clubs, local administration would deny Roma access to sport facilities); the prejudice Roma face in every interaction in society as the principal barrier to inclusion and access to sports; the precarious financial situations means that things like bus fare, sports clothing, equipment, and coaching or class fees are completely out of reach for many Romani families from marginalised communities; school segregation - for most children, school is the primary contact they have with sport and physical activity. For Romani children in education this situation is complicated and hindered by the existence of widespread educational segregation; lack of access to water or sanitation in the home has an obvious effect on the ability to participate in sports activities; lack of transport options available to Roma from marginalised communities (the costs associated with public or private transport as well as in many cases the complete lack of public transport availability for Roma living in segregated living spaces); and lack of public squares or spaces where young Roma can spend leisure time.¹³

The Palenqueros women in Colombia

Palenquera¹⁴ women **in Colombia** are not excluded from sports, but the support is not the same as for men. They are subject to sexist messages both inside and outside the community, such as that they are lesbians, or that they are very rough women for practicing sports that are for men [REDACTED], who is 19 years old and has been playing soccer since she was 8 years old, says that in San Basilio de Palenque, when a woman is a sportswoman, they are called "*machorras*", a term used in the community to refer to lesbian women.

The Palenquera community has had an informal women's soccer school for 13 years. The director of the women's sports school of Palenque [REDACTED], says that there are no resources allocated to the community for school sustainability.

In conversation with [REDACTED] who is 44 years old and a boxer, she said that she retired 10 years ago and participated in the Gallo category, where she received the 3rd place

¹² [ERRC Moving On EN.indd](#)

¹³ In general, there is a lack of focus on Roma in sports in key policy documents across Europe. For example, in 2020, the Council of Europe's Roma youth recommendation points out the need for member states to fund programmes that strengthen the capacity of Roma youth organisations, youth mediators and community leaders to stand up for their rights, including in the areas of leisure and sport: <https://rm.coe.int/roma-youth-participation-cm-rec-2023-4-web/1680af2a36>

¹⁴ [Palenqueros in Colombia - Minority Rights Group](#)

on the national level. In Argentina she encountered discrimination and was subject to economic violence. This, together with the lack of support from the local municipality, a lack of financial resources made her withdraw. Currently, many girls are taking up skating, and there are 2 girls in the Bolivar soccer team. She says that she has many anecdotes that have occurred when going out with the girls to tournaments outside the village, they have experienced emotional violence and have been discriminated against because they speak Palenquera language outside the community.

CDWD women of Gambia

Sports in Africa have over time been viewed as a male thing, thereby making it even more difficult to encourage adequate female participation. According to a survey carried out by a worker with the Economic Community of West African States, it was revealed that there are very few or even no organized sports activities for girls in countries like Lesotho, Malawi, and some others. It really should be that sport can serve as a powerful tool and platform for empowering women in the continent, with an ambitious view of challenging gender norms on and off the field of play. Female sports had long cried out for better sponsorship, media coverage, and tangible opportunities to be on equal footing with the male counterparts. Thus, poor funding and limited opportunities remain the biggest challenges female athletes face in Africa. CDWD women and girls are under-represented in sports in the Gambia, especially women and girls in the rural Gambia. There is no place for women to play sports, as most community fields in their neighborhoods are generally understood to be for the boys. The few girls who had tried to play in those public fields were reportedly being told to vacate them or even harassed.

Recommendations

Naming and documenting groups and practices in order to acknowledge and recognize the hidden and uniquely vulnerable position women and girls from CDWD are in.

Ensuring the inclusion of CDWD women and girls in sports, education, arts, and cultural life by establishing and funding youth centres and other spaces of learning and networking;

Design specific policies and programs, to accommodate the unique situation of CDWD women and girls.

Provide technical assistance and capacity-building support to law enforcement agencies, legal professionals, and judicial authorities to effectively address cases of discrimination and violence against women and girls from CDWD.

Take all necessary constitutional, legislative, administrative, budgetary, judicial and educational measures to eliminate discrimination based on work and descent and to respect, protect, promote, establish, implement and monitor the human rights of those facing discrimination based on caste and work and descent.

Contribute to the full realisation of the human rights of persons discriminated against on the basis of work and descent by considering ways to include this issue in the regular work of the Human Rights Council.

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