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# *Barriers to Sport Participation Faced by Ethiopian and Eritrean Migrant Women in Switzerland*

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## **Abstract**

Global migration (both forced and voluntary) has intensified the interaction between existing and emerging cultures. Sport has gained recognition as an effective tool for enhancing migrants' overall wellbeing, active participation, and social integration. However, a growing number of studies have shown that migrant women have the lowest rate of sport participation, especially in organized clubs. These findings have brought the accessibility and inclusion of existing sport structure and culture in host countries into question. Using the six-factor model of constraints by Tsai and Coleman (1999), this study explored the barriers that hinder Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant women (EEMW) from participating in sport in Switzerland. Thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2016) was applied to analyze semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (n=12, 18-51 years old) to understand the interplay between barriers to sport participation and their influence on social integration. The study found that socio-cultural differences from the host community, discrimination, the high cost of sport participation, and structural barriers were influential factors hindering the participation of EEMW. Thus, interactive sport participation among EEMW must be promoted by supportive, multicultural settings to better integrate these women into Swiss society.

Keywords: Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant women, migration, sport participation, barriers, social integration, Switzerland.

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## 1. Introduction

By the end of 2019, about 26 million refugees around the world had fled their home countries due to conflict, persecution, and climate change (UNHRC–The UN Refugee Agency, 2020), and many countries, including Switzerland, experienced an increase in the proportion of their population with a migrant background. For example, in 2019, 38% of Switzerland's permanent residents (age >15 years) had a migration background (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2019), and the country had received 14,269 asylum applications (Staatssekretariat für Migration, 2019). However, most European countries have also experienced a significant rise in right-wing nationalism and aggressiveness toward newly arrived refugees and the existing migrant population (BBC, 2019; EU-FRA, 2018). This has further ignited the ongoing debate about challenges to and opportunities for migrants' and refugees' political, economic, and social involvement in host countries (Lutz, Belanger, 2017), which is needed to improve cohesion.

As in most Western countries, sport participation in Switzerland is considered an integral part of social life (Hayoz et al., 2018) and voluntary sport clubs are the main venue for their sport participation (Albrecht et al., 2019; Makarova, Herzog, 2014). Sport has gained recognition for its potential to enhance the overall wellbeing, active participation, and social integration of migrants (Hatzigeorgiadis et al., 2013); for instance, studies have shown that sport participation exposes migrants to larger social circles (Walseth, 2006). This social contact is more important than the sport itself, especially for those whose social support has been eroded because of forced migration, as it provides the opportunity to build new friendships and support systems (Cardone, 2019; Makarova, Herzog, 2014). These, in turn, establish a sense of belonging and safety in the new environment (Elling et al., 2001; Walseth, 2006). Regular sport participation also enable migrants to learn the local language, norms, and culture; learning these is essential to the migrants' integration (Abur, 2016; Zacheus, 2010). Sport is also a suitable platform for actively participating in the local community through voluntary work (Spaaij, 2012). Moreover, migrant sport participation helps create a positive narrative about the migrant communities (Dukic et al., 2017; Spaaij, Broerse, 2018; Stura, 2019) and enhance better understanding and cultural negotiations between migrants and local communities (Elling et al., 2001; Makarova, Herzog, 2014; Stura, 2019).

However, sport is also part of the socio-cultural and institutional structure that can, to a degree, reinforce the existing power dynamic between migrants and the host culture, which lowers migrants' ability to fully engage (Agergaard, 2018; Spaaij et al., 2014). Several studies in different countries (Abur, 2016; Allen et al., 2010; Allender et al., 2006; Elmoose-Østerlund, van der Roest, 2017;

Sawrikar, Muir, 2010; van Haften, 2019; Waardenburg et al., 2018; Walseth, 2006; Walseth, Fasting, 2004; Zacheus, 2010) showed a significant disparity in sport participation between migrants and local communities. These studies indicated that migrant women, especially from South-Eastern Europe, Africa, South America, and Asia, have a lower participation rate than migrant men. This disparity is also true of Switzerland (Adler-Zwahlen et al., 2017), where the participation rate of female migrants is 15% lower than that of their male counterparts (Makarova, Herzog, 2014). This emphasizes the fact that not everyone has equal access and opportunity to participate in sport (Agergaard, 2018).

Nonetheless, many of these studies were limited to mainstream sport clubs and did not address the challenges and needs of different migrant groups regarding sport participation (Agergaard, 2018; Sawrikar, Muir, 2010; Spaaij et al., 2014). Thus, a critical examination of specific migrant groups, the accessibility of sport structure, and the socio-cultural practices within host countries remains fundamental to providing a better understanding. Therefore, this study aimed to examine barriers hindering the sport participation of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant women (EEMW; the largest migrant and refugee groups from East Africa) in Switzerland (Staatssekretariat für Migration, 2019).

Tsai and Coleman's (1999) six-factor model of constraints was used as a theoretical guide to examine factors hindering the sport participation of EEMW in Switzerland. This model address assertive, physiological, socio-cultural, access, and interpersonal constraints, as follows:

1. *Assertive constraints* refer to the extent to which sports and sport settings are meaningful or appealing to specific target groups.
2. *Physiological constraints* refer to barriers that hinder sport participation due to participants' age and health status.
3. *Socio-cultural constraints* exemplify relationship between sport (e.g., types, intensity) and cultural expectations for gender roles, as well as the negotiation of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds (e.g., understanding and accepting multiculturalism).
4. *Access constraints* refer to access to and information regarding sports services, and facilities
5. *Resources constraints* examine crucial resources for sport participation (cost and time).

*Interpersonal constraints* examine adequate skills and knowledge of the sport as well as the availability of social support for sport participation.

## **2. Methods**

In-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to analyze factors that hinder EEMW's sustainable sport participation and social integration.

### ***2.1 Sample***

The study focused on 12 EEMW living in Switzerland. Participants were recruited using an arms-length approach through university and community center networks and social media, as well as snowball sampling (Marshall, 1996). Though the sample size was small, it included diverse and extensive narratives, as the participants differed in age, socio-economic status, sports background, migration status, and length of resettlement in Switzerland. The study thus provided diverse insights into sport experiences, challenges to participation, and integration. Table 1 summarizes the study sample's demographics.

### ***2.2 Data collection***

Multiple data sources were used to comprehend EEMW's sport participation in Switzerland. The first author conducted voluntary/participant observations in group settings comprising both non-participants and sport participants within informal sport (self-initiated) and formal sport (sport clubs) settings. Subsequently, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to understand participants' interpretation of their sport participation, the factors hindering their participation, and their social integration in sport and into Swiss society (Creswell, Poth, 2017). Two focus group discussions were held to encourage open discussion on sensitive topics (e.g., experiences of racism, xenophobia, etc.) and to follow-up on individual interview discussions (Heller et al., 1990). The semi-structured interviews and focus groups followed theory-based guidelines, lasted 50–90 minutes, and were audio-taped with the participants' permission. They were conducted in the participants' preferred language, and were then translated and transcribed to English. The data collection process followed the University of Bern Ethic Committee's recommendations, and participants were identified with pseudonyms.

### ***2.3 Data analysis***

The data were analyzed using the methodological guidelines by Braun et al. (2016) for thematic analysis of individual interviews and group discussion according. The deductive category approach was used to filter, organize, and summarize the perceived and experienced barriers to sport participation and its

impact on the integration process. However, the data analysis and overall research process were flexible; additional categories that supported or challenged the research questions could be inductively examined. During the coding process, the categories were consistently revised to ensure a reliable representation of relevant factors within and outside of the sport arena that hindered sustainable participation and social integration (Braun et al., 2016).

The individual interviews, focus group discussion transcripts, and initial coding were shared with the study participants to ensure the resonance and accuracy of their responses in order to provide a correct representation of the participants' interpretation of their experiences (Burnard, 1991). Furthermore, an independent academic colleague with proficiency in Amharic and Tigrinya<sup>1</sup> evaluated the transcripts, thereby minimizing subjective bias and unintended alterations in the data analysis.

TABLE 1. *Demographics of the study participants.*

	Age	Resettled in CH	Marital status	Reason for migration	Occupation	Informal sport involvement
1	31	2015	Single	Studying	Student	Running and swimming <b>(Organizer)</b>
2	51	2013	Single mother (1)	Studying	Office administration	Walking and running <b>(Organizer)</b>
3	32	1999	Single	Refugee (F)	Hospitality	Running, fitness and volleyball
4	24	2014	Single	Refugee	Unemployed	Gymnastic, fitness <b>(Organizer)</b>
5	34	2007	Married (2)	Refugee (F)	Nurse	Walking and volleyball
6	31	2001	Single	Refugee (F)	Nurse	Running, fitness, and swimming
7	41	2015	Single mother (3)	Refugee	Unemployed	Fitness and swimming
8	30	2012	Single	Refugee (F)	Hospitality	Walking, cycling, swimming, and ball games
9	28	2010	Married	Refugee (F)	Unemployed	Basketball, running and fitness <b>(Organizer)</b>
10	25	2014	Married	Refugee	Unemployed	Fitness, volleyball, and running
11	18	2016	Single	Refugee (F)	Unemployed	Volleyball, running, and fitness
12	19	2017	Single	Refugee	Unemployed	Gymnastics and swimming

**Marital Status: (0)**, number of children, **Reason for migration: (F)**, former refugee Prior to resettlement in Switzerland, some of EEMW in this study has also lived in Sudan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Italy and Germany.

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Alemtsehay Teklay Subhatu, Geographic Institute, University of Bern, Switzerland.



### **3. Results**

#### ***3.1 Gender and cultural expectations***

Most participants in the study repeatedly stated that traditional gender roles, stressing domestic responsibilities and placing women in the role of “caregivers” continued to affect their sport participation (Walseth, Fasting, 2004). According to some participants,

Sometimes it feels like I don't even have a say in what I do with my time because I am busy doing things that are expected of me as a “woman” ... taking care of the house and our family being the top priority. (Hiwi, 6).

I mean, we grew up, and so did our parents, in a patriarchal society...This means endless responsibility and boundaries that come from being a woman. I hate to say it, but our way of thinking and living as a Habesha community is still like this. (Sa, 3).

Participants noted that as they got older, these gender roles and cultural expectations intensified and became more constraining:

One minute I was a little girl, and the next I am getting trained to be a “woman” by mimicking my mother on how to take care of my family. So all the hobbies, including sport, become a thing of the past. (Sa, 5).

It is a quick change [getting older] when you start noticing the pressure from the family to stay indoors, and family responsibilities are transferred to us. (Ra, 3).

Thus, designated gender roles and expectations among the EEMW affected their transition and resettlement in Swiss society. Although girls' sport participation was somewhat culturally accepted, the long-term participation in and the relevance of sport in EEMW's lives was still closely tied to gendered norms and cultural expectations. Sport became a lesser priority, and was viewed as a distraction from these women's expected responsibilities, first from family commitment and later from the pursuit of education and a career. Therefore, the women's decreasing sport participation (Yan, Cardinal, 2013) was not surprising.

Additionally, the participants stated that women's role as caregivers often hindered their engagement in sport because the well-being, needs, and active participation of others were prioritized before their own (this was especially true for those with children). For example,

Often Habesha people see women's effort to be active in a sport as a selfish act, especially those with children. (Ra, 11).

Even when we get lucky to be part of sport, you often find us being volunteers and spectators because we need to look after our children while the men are playing [referring to a football festival]. (Sa, 8).

Participants also highlighted their uphill battle with the Habesha community's negative perception of their sport participation. They believe that these criticisms were an extension of patriarchal thinking in their home countries; participation in a vigorous sport can be viewed as "unfeminine" or "unwomanlike" (Knoppers, Elling, 2001).

The pressure within the Habesha community to perform culturally enforced gender roles is high, but these traditional roles are not as evident in Swiss culture, this disparity creates, conflicting messages about expected behavior for women and young girls. In the traditional cultures, sports is perceived as male-dominated space in which women have no place. Therefore, occupying such spaces comes at the cost of discrimination for women and young girls. They are pejoratively referred to as "men" (culturally translated as being 'non-feminine', not sticking to traditional gender rules). According to one participant who had practiced gymnastics for over 10 years (in Ethiopia and in Switzerland),

People used to be so disgusted to see me doing some of the gymnastics moves. Some even said that I will not be able to have children or that men who will not find me "woman" enough to marry. (Ra, 7).

Another stated that her experiences in sports was often considered "masculine":

I have always loved basketball and football. But I got fed up with consistently being pushed out from the playground because I am a girl and this is not a girl's sport. My mom always said as "real women" we are expected to act, think, speak, walk, and carry ourselves in public in a certain way. Before I even realized, I was becoming a spokesperson for my family based on how I carry myself, and sport was not a way to go. (Yo, 9).

Some participants experienced discrimination in the form of verbal harassment from their male counterparts from the Habesha communities.

You get whistled at you or the guys are catcalling you [from] across the street, simply for playing ball games or exercising in a public place. (Ra, 4).

Some of our countrymen laughed and, mocked me a few times while I went out for a run. It is stupid, but at times it can get to you. (Hi, 11).

Additionally, the participants admitted that they struggled with freely utilizing public spaces, including sports facilities, because they felt that they did not belong in these male-dominated spaces. This indicated a subconscious adherence to the social parameters set by the patriarchy (Spaaij et al., 2014; Zacheus, 2010). In other words, traumatic experiences of verbal and sexual assault in public sport spaces in their home country triggered fears of similar experiences after migration, thereby contributing to the women's hesitation to participate in similar spaces in Switzerland:

My mom used to say that going out for a run or to play ball with my friends was exposing myself to social harassment and vulnerable situations ...Growing up in Ethiopia was not easy for her. She dealt with verbal and sexual harassment simply because she was outside. Even after resettling in Switzerland, these are some of the encounters [catcalling and negative comments] we have to deal with, which are hard and discourage you from ever wanting to be in a public place or even continue to exercise. (Al, 4).

We were vulnerable...I remember the trainers used to sexually harass us during the training. The swimming coach used to grope us or touch us inappropriately. If you dared to say something, you are quickly subjected to "victim-blaming" ... "Well you were not supposed to be there or what were you wearing". (Al, 6).

As seen above statements, societal pressure and cultural expectations, both in their native countries and in Switzerland, directly hindered EEMW's sport participation. This partially explained their low rate of sport participation in Switzerland, which negatively impacted their ability to integrate into Swiss society (Sawrikar, Muir, 2010).

Additionally, some participants continuously talked about traumatic experiences prior to and during their forced migration process that still affects their well-being. Therefore, adequate psychological support is crucial for migrant women to process and overcome their traumatic experiences. During group discussions, it became apparent that the barriers to sport participation have less of an impact on the upcoming generation and on those talented women who have the potential and passion to pursue a career in sports.

### ***3.2 “Social Cost” of sport participation***

Referring to both theirs and their children’s sport participation, the EEMW frequently stated that the basic sport membership fee only represented a small portion of the costs of sport participation. In addition to the cost of transportation and sporting equipment, the participants revealed the high costs of social interactions both within and outside the sport setting (Vandermeerschen et al., 2017). According to the participants,

Our son wants to stay after football training to hang out with his teammates ... He often asks us for money for snacks or drinks. He also wants to go to football camps or day trips with his team or for us to buy him the latest football jersey and shoes, because he wants to be like his Swiss peers. These are additional costs we struggle to keep up with and he is too young to understand it. (Sa, 7).

I joined a Zumba class at a local gym, and after a while, a few of the women started inviting me to a hangout session after our class. We often go for “bites” or “drinks”... These are additional expenses that are already out of my budget. Eating out in Switzerland is really expensive, so sometimes I made excuses to skip these. Honestly, it is a really hard dilemma ... I have to choose either to do sport while being socially disengaged or bear an additional financial burden, or worse. Eventually, I had to quit my membership. (Hi, 11).

In my gymnastics club during the off-season, our team often organizes a weekly get-together and weekend in the mountains. It is an opportunity for us to spend time together and bond as a team. Drinks, dinners, movie nights, as well as a stay at a cottage, are part of the package. To be “socially” active in our team, I have to pay ... I find myself stressing because I can’t keep up, but I also don’t want them to look down on me. (Ra, 8).

Thus, social participation in sports can come with extra costs and additional burdens, and some of the migrant women decided not to participate in sport settings (especially organized ones) to avoid or minimize financial burdens. For some of these women, living up to the social pressure of peers was impossible; others wanted to avoid the shame of social class and a sense of “otherness” (Agergaard, 2018; Cardone, 2019; Ratna, Samie, 2018). These women excluded themselves and, at times, their children to stop further social and financial discrimination. Therefore, the disparity between their financial status and the social cost of sport participation hindered both participation and their social integration (Vandermeerschen et al., 2017). Furthermore, some of the migrant women and their children continued participating in sport but

chose to minimize their active social engagement, skipping social get-togethers or team events (e.g., training camps) or leaving the training ground right after the sport activity ended. This clearly entailed a loss of social engagement that would have been beneficial for their long-term social integration.

Most of the study participants stated that the high cost of social participation critically constrained their choice of sport activities and the context of the sport setting, forcing them to seek out informal sport settings as an alternative (Elling et al., 2001; Elling, Knoppers, 2005). Informal sport is free and has minimal additional costs, as participants are able to host social gatherings within their residential area (i.e., sharing home-cooked meals and drinks), this makes, social engagement possible for those who would otherwise face monetary constraints. Most importantly, these migrant-initiated informal sport settings gather people who are in the same situation (e.g., migration status), so they feel less pressured and ashamed of their financial and social status (Jeanes et al., 2019). Thus, informal sport settings help lower the overall financial stress of sport participation. However, as pointed out by a few of the participants, these settings also limits participants' social circles to the migrant community, which hinders their social integration into broader Swiss society.

### ***3.3 Discrimination (racism and xenophobia)***

Unfortunately, direct and indirect discrimination experiences on and off the sport field are still significant barriers to migrant women's sport participation and social integration (Cardone, 2019; Spaaij et al., 2014; Stura, 2019). Study participants shared, emotionally, that they or their children and families experienced social stigma, prejudices, and stereotypes toward their skin color, migration status, country of origin, and social class. One participant who had fled to Switzerland as a minor reflected on her experiences in the Swiss school sports class and playgrounds:

The kids in my new schools were horrible, racist, and bullies. They used to call us names and, sometimes they would get physical. (Ma, 12).

Others drew attention to their unpleasant encounters with local players, coaches, and occasionally, with sport spectators:

They sometimes speak to you in training as if you are stupid, voiceless, and helpless sometimes. (Sh, 12).

Unfortunately, I cannot change my skin color [referring to a few occasions when players from opposing teams refused to shake her hands]. (Al, 15).

Sometimes it is simply the way they look at you and speak behind you thinking that you don't understand what they say. (Hi, 7).

One participant spoke of her daughter's experiences in a local football club:

She is the only non-European and black player on the team...often pointed at or looked at differently ... Her teammates sometimes refuse to share the ball and talk to her. The coach doesn't say anything. She often leaves practice unhappy and discouraged...but how can I explain to her...Do I keep taking her to training or what? The hate I see in their eyes sometimes breaks my heart. (Ba, 9).

Participants also highlighted some instances of xenophobia (i.e., to dislike and prejudice against African people). For example, one participant recalled an encounter at a public beach volleyball court:

“What the f\*\*\* are you doing here?” he said to me, looking straight into my eyes. He later went on a long rant that people like me—“blacks”—are not welcome here and I should go back to where I come from. (Ba, 12).

Other participants described the consistent hostility they faced, as well as the challenges to connect with the local community, due to xenophobic attitudes:

Us Africans, we are seen as a burden and tumor ... They don't think we come with a set of skills, knowledge and are an asset to the country. I think it is a shame because it feels like there is an expiry date on our stay. (Ma, 20).

Even after 17 years of living here, fluently speaking the language, working full-time ... You are consistently reminded that you don't belong here, not only in sport, but also in schools, hospitals, and public transport. (Sa, 9).

You have to work three or four times harder than them in anything that you do. You have to show them how grateful you are for the opportunity their country offers you. You have to smile to make them be less scared of you. (Ra, 9).

In a way, such discriminatory experiences are reflections/extensions of the current climate of the global refugee crisis, political division within the European Union, and media narratives. The participants argued that these factors cause further division between local and migrant groups and build a sense of “otherness” in migrants (Agergaard, 2018; Cardone, 2019; Ratna,

Samie, 2018). This in turn, discourages sport participation and minimizes the chances of social integration.

### **3.4 Structural barriers**

The EEMW identified a few structural barriers that hindered their sport participation and social integration into Swiss society. The first structural barrier that most participants discussed was the long and difficult legal process required to secure their stay in Switzerland (this is especially the case for those who come as refugees). Depending on their individual cases and canton requirements, the participants could easily spend 3-8 years awaiting their fate (D'Amato, 2011):

I feel trapped here like, I am living in an open-air prison. Four years still waiting, we [with her children] have F residence permit status. You are not allowed to work or leave the country. (Sh, 5).

The long legal battles often meant that the migrant women were financially dependent on the limited canton/state funding, which not all received. Furthermore, they were not permitted to work. This made the women's participation in sport (especially in organized settings) financially infeasible. Those with children struggled to support theirs and their children's sport and recreational expenses because daily needs became financial priorities.

Us refugees, especially those from Africa, have our hands tied. We cannot move or work even if we have the experience, the knowledge, and desire to do so. We are just passengers in our own lives. (Ra, 8).

We are dependent on state funds to cover our basic living expenses, and sport is under our luxury service list. (Ba, 11).

Additionally, the participants faced unbearable psychological stress and uncertainty about their future due to the battle over their legal status, which further deteriorated their motivation to participate in sport:

We feel disconnected, isolated and sad being this far away from everything we know. It's hard to find the energy and motivation to get out of bed. (Sh, 5).

The second structural barrier that participants discussed concerned access to adequate information regarding the locations, prices, etc., of sports services, memberships and facilities. As one participant pointed out:

Accessing this information requires language competence because the one you find [are] either in German or French. You also need access to good internet and computer knowledge. Honestly, I don't think most of us have the know-how ... We are so dependent on word-of-mouth. (Ti, 12).

The participants viewed language as a major barrier not only to accessing information but also participating in sport and get-togethers. Those with poor language proficiency were often isolated and disconnected from the larger group. The sport organizers also failed to provide information in ways that were accessible and understandable to the EEMW. Some participants argued that coaches, teachers and local club members often lacked the training and experience needed to address the specific needs of the migrant women and their children (Knoppers, Elling, 2001; Spaaij et al., 2014). Important figures in sport (i.e., coaches, teachers, training leaders) struggle to address language barriers, group dynamics, and interventions for discriminatory actions (Agergaard, 2018; Spaaij et al., 2014). This meant that the migrant women's needs or challenges within the sports arena often went unnoticed or were even pushed aside. For example, one mother, referring to her daughter's experience of discrimination in a local football club, said,

The coach not once stopped training or matches to discuss [her teammates' poor treatment of her] with the other players ... Instead, he decided to put her on the bench. (Ba, 7).

Moreover, during the focus group discussion, participants drew attention to the challenges they face in finding comfortable and culturally appropriate sports facilities, especially ones offering private changing rooms (Walseth, 2006; Zacheus, 2010):

We come from a culture and religion [not all] that do not permit changing in public. So you could imagine how uncomfortable we feel ... It is conflicting ... Often you either leave without showering or stop coming. (Tim, 12).

The participants were not only uncomfortable in such spaces, but were also forced to miss-out on "locker room" social get-togethers, which would provide a crucial opportunity for social integration. In fact, the lack of culturally appropriate sport facilities continues to push migrant women into informal sports (Sawrikar, Muir, 2010; Spaaij et al., 2014).

Overall, the participants agreed that the existing Swiss sport structure fit the needs of the local communities but not those of the migrant communities. This left it incomplete in relation to addressing current social integration of heterogeneous population in Swiss society. A lack of representation, not only



in participation but also in the organization of sport (e.g., coaching, volunteering) is one an explanatory factor (Spaaij et al., 2014). The lacking representation highlights the urgent need to include migrants in the sport planning process to provide (linguistically) accessible information, culturally appropriate sports facilities and adequate support for coaches and participants (Agergaard, 2018). Until then, migrant women and their children continue to be voiceless and invisible during sport participation, especially in organized sports. Which significantly impacts their social integration. As one participant noted,

I am a black, refugee, and physically-disabled woman. I often feel disconnected and out of place in almost all the social encounters, including in sport. (Sh, 10).

#### **4. Discussion**

This study sought to explore the barriers to sport participation faced by EEMW in Switzerland using the theoretical lens of Tsai and Coleman (1999). Four out of the six of Tsai and Coleman's constraints (socio-cultural, access, resource, and Interpersonal) broadly applied to EEMW. The study found the sport participation of these women was constrained due to various factors, including socio-cultural differences from the host community, discrimination, the high cost of sport participation, and structural barriers.

Socio-cultural constraints were among the most influential factors hindering participation; gender and cultural expectations of women in the Habesha community prior, during, and post migration continued to be evident. The participants shared a range of participation-limiting experiences, including family expectation, utilization of public space, perception of gendered sport, and traumatic experiences.

Another significant barrier to sport participation was the lack of EEMW's social acceptance in sports (i.e., racism and xenophobia), which directly contradicted to the widely held belief that sport is open to all (Agergaard, 2018). Discrimination on and off the field left the women feeling excluded, forcing some to seek refuge in self-initiated, informal (Jeanes et al., 2019), or ethnic sport clubs (Spaaij, Broerse, 2018). Such a setting afforded them the opportunity to be active in a safer, more welcoming environment (Elling et al., 2001).

Structural barriers linked to access and resource constraints were also hindering factors to EEMW's sport participation. The participants pointed out the lack of sufficient information (linguistically, in forms), of culturally appropriate sport facilities (e.g., private changing rooms), and of sufficient

training/experience on the part of sport providers (i.e., coaches, teachers, club members) to address the specific needs of migrant women and their children. Importantly, the participants viewed the extensive legal resettlement process in Switzerland as the hardest structural barrier to their participation and integration.

This study found that promoting interactive sport participation among EEMW in supportive, multicultural settings is important for improving these women's integration into Swiss society. Existing sport structures in Switzerland must critically assess their operations if they truly want to support the seamless integration of EEMW and other migrants. While the women certainly have a role to play in their own resettlement in Switzerland, full integration cannot be accomplished without the combined efforts of the women, sport providers, government and the wider Swiss community. Particularly, sport providers (clubs) must develop interventions to address the barriers discussed in this paper and promote sport that is inclusive and reflective of the current Swiss society.

## **5. Limitation and future perspective**

This study examined a small sample size in-depth. Hence, the study findings should not be generalized, and the findings' relevance to different migrant groups in Switzerland and elsewhere should be evaluated with caution. Further studies with larger sample sizes and women from more diverse migrant backgrounds in different sport settings would allow deeper insights, providing a broader understanding of relevant factors hindering sport participation and social integration.

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