Co-funded by
the European Union

WALK & TALK

Walk & Talk Handbook

Innovative Methodology for Integrating Young Girls and Women in Sports



WALK & TALK

Responsible organisation:
Mladiinfo International, North Macedonia

Date: November 2026

Content contributors:
ACTIVE Austria and SNWA Slovakia

Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) and
the Project number (101242067).

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

Table of Contents

Part 1: The WAT Framework (Professionals & Instructors Focus) 04

Part 2: The Participant Experience (Girls & Women Focus) & The WALK Segment 05

Part 3: Non-Formal Education & The TALK Segment 06

Thematic Session Cycles 07

Facilitation Games: NFE Energisers and Check-Ins 08

Check-In Activities 09

Energiser Activities 10

Part 4: Eco-Friendly Practices (Plogging) 11

Part 5: Digital Storytelling 13

Part 6: Itineraries & Mapping 14

Part 7: Expanding the Movement 24

Part 8: From Methodology to Practice 25

Female Success Stories 30

Part 1:
The WAT Framework (Professionals & Instructors Focus)



In the late 1930s, cross-country skiers in Finland faced a simple problem: when the snow melted, their training stopped. To stay in peak form during the green summer months, they took to the forest trails with their ski poles, striding across the hills in a practice they called sauvakävely—literally "pole walking." What began as an off-season dry-land routine for competitive winter athletes quietly evolved over the decades into something much bigger. By the late 1990s, health researchers realised that adding poles to a standard walk turned a simple stroll into one of the most balanced physical activities on the planet.

Today, we take that outdoor heritage and blend it with non-formal education to create the WAT(Walk&Talk) approach. We bring together three basic elements: the rhythm of Nordic Walking, the inclusive atmosphere of group learning, and the natural healing space of the outdoors. Moving side by side outdoors breaks down the awkwardness that often comes with sit-down conversations. When young people walk along a trail next to each other, looking forward rather than staring across a table, the pressure evaporates. The trail opens up a natural path for real connection.

This approach offers a timely alternative to the screen-heavy habits of modern life (more about this in part 5). Traditional physical education in schools often focuses on competition, performance metrics, and winning, which can make less athletic or self-conscious young people pull away. The WAT method shifts the focus away from scores and speed. Out on the trail, nobody is benched, and nobody finishes last. It gives young people a chance to step away from their phones, breathe fresh air, and feel part of a team without the fear of judgment.

The physical benefits are built right into the movement itself. Academic studies, including biomechanical research published in PLOS ONE by Dr Barbara Pellegrini and her team, show that using proper poling technique engages roughly 90% of the body's muscles—compared to just 50% in standard walking. It builds functional strength, improves posture, and strengthens the heart without putting extra strain on the joints. Most importantly, we frame these benefits around feeling good, building stamina, and clearing the mind, rather than chasing unrealistic body standards or weight-loss targets (more about this in part 2).

To lead WAT groups effectively, we have to change how we see our role. A WAT mentor is not a drill sergeant or a strict athletic instructor; a WAT mentor is a facilitator and a guardian of psychological safety. Your main job is to create an environment where every participant feels safe, seen, and supported. When you trade the authority of a coach for the empathy of a guide, the forest becomes a place where young people can build physical health, emotional resilience, and lasting friendships side by side (more about this in part 3).

As legendary football icon Mia Hamm once reflected, "Somewhere behind the athlete you've become and the hours of practice and the coaches who have pushed you is a little girl who fell in love with the game and never looked back... play for her." For young women today, rediscovering that pure, joyful connection to movement starts with stripping away digital pressure and stepping into an environment where they can simply move for themselves.

- **The Digital Detox Protocol**

To give participants a genuine break from the relentless stream of notifications, we begin by setting clear boundaries before stepping onto the trail. We present digital detox not as a strict rule or a penalty, but as a shared space for uninterrupted mental quiet. Before the session begins, phones are switched off or placed on silent and zipped safely inside backpacks. By committing to this off-grid boundary together, we remove the constant pressure to post, check updates, or compare. This simple boundary gives young women permission to step out of the digital spotlight and fully show up in the physical world.



Part 2:

The Participant Experience (Girls & Women Focus) & The WALK Segment

- **The Art of Unplugging**

Once the screens are out of sight, the senses naturally begin to awaken. Walking through green spaces turns into an active practice of tuning into our immediate surroundings. Participants begin to notice the crunch of dry soil under their feet, the cool rush of air, the earthy scent of leaves, and the shifting shadows along the path. Engaging with these grounded sensory details calms the nervous system and creates mental space. This quiet presence opens the door for genuine reflection and easy side-by-side conversations with peers that feel natural and unforced.

- **Nordic Walking Basics**

The poles act as a natural extension of this bodily awareness. Far from being mere hiking sticks, proper Nordic walking poles transform a basic walk into an active, full-body exercise that engages the upper back, shoulders, and core with every stride.

Everything starts with an active posture: a tall spine, an open chest with shoulders relaxed down away from the ears, and a soft gaze looking forward at the trail ahead. As you step forward, your arms swing naturally from the shoulders. You plant the pole firmly behind you at an angle, pushing back through the wrist strap to propel your body forward. As your hand passes your hip, you release your grip on the handle, letting the pole trail back smoothly before swinging forward into the next step. This steady push-and-release rhythm builds forward momentum, giving participants a physical sense of strength, balance, and flow.

Part 3:
Non-Formal Education & The TALK Segment

As Friedrich Nietzsche famously wrote, "Only thoughts won by walking are valuable." On the trail, we see this truth unfold in real time. When young women start moving, the mental clutter of daily life begins to quiet down, opening up space for genuine insights, deep self-reflection, and authentic connection. But for these valuable thoughts to surface, the environment must feel completely secure. The role of the WAT facilitator is to cultivate and protect that psychological safety from the moment the group meets until the final debrief.

- **Creating Psychological Safety Outdoors**

Psychological safety is the quiet assurance that one can speak, share, and simply exist within a group without fear of ridicule, judgment, or rejection. In an outdoor setting, building this atmosphere requires intentional care. The facilitator sets the tone by modelling openness, active listening, and unconditional acceptance.

We establish explicit group norms early on: what is shared on the trail stays on the trail, every perspective is valid, and participation in discussions is always voluntary. By removing the pressure to perform or conform, the trail becomes a sanctuary where young women feel safe enough to lower their guard, explore vulnerable topics, and trust both the process and their peers.

- **Side-by-Side Communication**

There is a profound pedagogical logic to walking and talking side by side. Traditional indoor settings often rely on face-to-face interaction, which can feel confrontational, intense, and demanding—especially for young women navigating self-doubt or emotional stress. Staring across a table or sitting in a formal circle forces eye contact, often triggering anxiety and defensiveness.

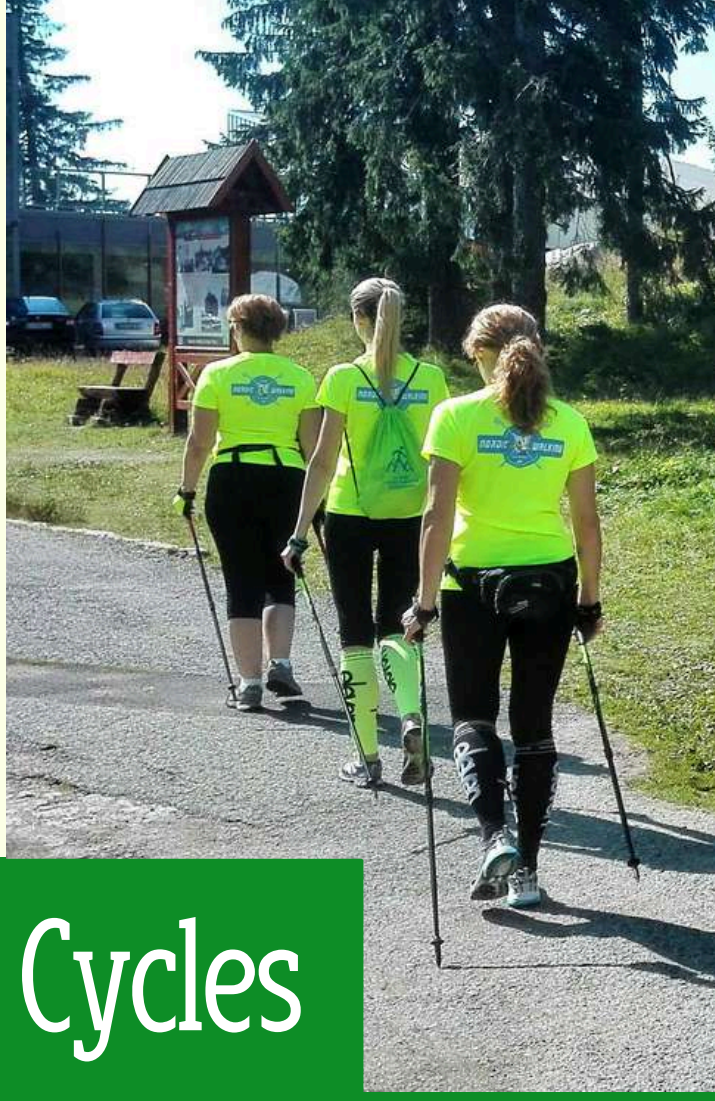
The Facilitator's Core Principles

Guiding a group side by side through nature requires a shift in mindset from traditional leadership. The facilitator operates using four main compass points:

- **Empathy Over Instruction:** The focus is on teaching safe and effective Nordic Walking technique while avoiding performance pressure, perfectionism, and competition.
- **Holding Space:** Facilitators create a supportive container for whatever emotions arise—whether it is frustration, joy, fatigue, or vulnerability—without rushing to "fix" or gloss over difficult feelings.
- **Inclusivity in Motion:** Pace and distance are always adapted to the group's collective rhythm. The walk is only as fast as its gentlest stride, ensuring that no participant ever feels left behind, physically or emotionally.
- **Grounded Presence:** By remaining calm, attentive, and flexible, the facilitator acts as a steadying anchor for the group, making sure the trail remains a safe place to reflect, share, and grow.



When we step onto the trail and walk side by side, the dynamic shifts entirely. Both participants are moving in the same direction, looking ahead at the path rather than directly at each other. This shared forward direction drastically lowers the emotional stakes. Pauses in conversation no longer feel like awkward silences; they simply become moments of shared movement and breathing. The rhythmic, repetitive motion of Nordic Walking helps soothe the nervous system, releasing tension and allowing thoughts to flow more freely. Side-by-side communication transforms heavy dialogues into low-pressure, side-along reflections, allowing young women to share vulnerable thoughts at their own pace without feeling put on the spot.



Thematic Session Cycles

The TALK segment is structured around three core thematic cycles that meet young women where they are. These cycles are designed to be explored progressively over time during the walking phase of the sessions.

Cycle 1: Self-Esteem, Identity, and Body Positivity

This cycle focuses on unlearning internal judgments and shifting the focus from how our bodies look to what our bodies can do. Out on the trail, participants explore their personal identities away from societal expectations. Conversations during this cycle encourage participants to celebrate their physical strength, stamina, and resilience rather than physical appearance. By using poles and navigating terrain, young women experience their bodies as powerful tools that carry them forward, helping them build a grounded sense of self-worth anchored in capability and self-compassion.

Cycle 2: Emotions, Stress Management, and Resilience

Life brings constant emotional pressure, and learning to navigate stress is a crucial life skill. This cycle uses the natural environment as a teacher for emotional regulation. Participants discuss how stress manifests in their bodies and minds, exploring practical ways to process difficult feelings. We draw parallels between the trail and daily life: just as we navigate steep inclines, muddy paths, or sudden weather changes by adjusting our pace and supporting one another, we can navigate life's challenges with patience, adaptable strategies, and peer support. Resilience becomes a lived, physical experience rather than an abstract concept.

Cycle 3: Navigating Social Media and External Pressures

Young women today face an unprecedented barrage of curated online images, digital validation loops, and social expectations. This cycle provides a safe space to unpack the impact of social media on mental health, relationships, and self-image. While walking off-grid, participants reflect on the contrast between online performance and offline reality. Guided trail prompts help them examine external pressures, critically evaluate digital comparison, and discuss strategies for setting healthy digital boundaries, fostering a strong sense of personal agency and peer solidarity.

Facilitation Games: NFE Energisers and Check-Ins



To build trust, spark conversation, and maintain energy outdoors, non-formal education games are integrated seamlessly into the walk. Here are six practical, field-tested activities adapted specifically for Nordic Walking groups.

Check-In Activities

The Weather Forecast

Objective: To help participants identify and articulate their current emotional state without feeling pressure to over-explain.

How It Works: Before starting the walk, the group pauses in a circle with their poles planted firmly in front of them. The facilitator asks each person to give a one-word or one-sentence "weather report" describing their current mood (for example, "Sunny with a light breeze", "Overcast with heavy clouds" or "A bit stormy, but clearing up").

Why It Works: It uses nature metaphors to normalise all emotions, making it easy for quieter participants to express how they feel without having to share personal details unless they choose to.



Poles as the Scale

Objective: To visually gauge group energy levels, stress, or readiness before entering the TALK segment.

How It Works: The facilitator defines an imaginary line on the trail where one end represents "1" (completely exhausted or stressed) and the other end represents "10" (energised and ready). Participants place their Nordic Walking poles vertically along the line to mark where they stand.

Why It Works: It provides an instant, non-verbal snapshot of the group's collective energy. It allows the facilitator to adjust the pace or tone of the walk based on real-time feedback without singling anyone out.

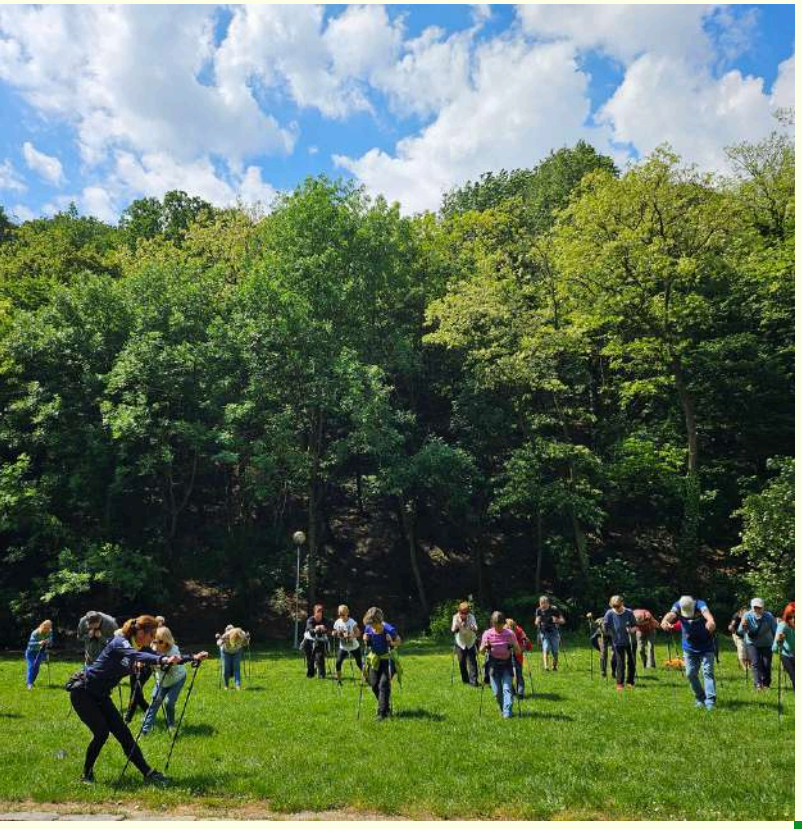
Trail Buddy Check

Objective: To build one-on-one connection and practice active listening during the initial phase of the walk.

How It Works: Participants pair up for the first fifteen minutes of the walk. The facilitator gives a simple, low-stakes prompt, such as: "What is one small thing that brought you joy this week?" or "What is one thing you hope to leave behind on the trail today?" Partners take turns listening to each other without interrupting while keeping a steady walking rhythm.

Why It Works: It transitions participants smoothly into side-by-side communication, building trust in pairs before diving into deeper thematic discussions as a larger group.

Energiser Activities



The Rhythm Relay

Objective: To boost group energy, foster coordination, and bring playfulness into the movement.
How It Works: While walking in a single file along a wide path, the leader establishes a specific rhythm using their Nordic Walking poles (for example, two double taps on the ground, then a silent stride). The pattern is passed back down the line from person to person. Once the rhythm reaches the back, the last person calls out "Switch!" and double-polesteps to the front to become the new leader with a new rhythm.
Why It Works: It breaks up physical fatigue, demands focus, and creates shared laughter, shifting the focus away from exertion and back into collective play.

The Human Mirror

Objective: To build non-verbal awareness, trust, and physical coordination between partners.
How It Works: During a mid-walk break, participants face their partners about two paces apart, holding their poles horizontally or planting them for balance. One partner leads by slowly making gentle, deliberate movements (such as overhead pole stretches, side lunges, or balance holds), while the second partner mirrors every movement as smoothly as possible. After two minutes, partners switch roles.
Why It Works: It encourages deep focus and presence, grounds participants in their bodies, and creates a sense of harmony and mutual attention through non-verbal connection.

Eco-Plogging Sprint

Objective: To combine physical energy, teamwork, and environmental care into a quick, high-energy boost.
How It Works: The facilitator gives the group a challenge: for the next five minutes along a designated section of the trail, the team must work together to spot and pick up any small pieces of litter using their hands (while safely parking their poles) or manoeuvring as a team with collection bags.
Why It Works: It adds a practical sense of purpose to the walk, lifts group spirit through shared action, and reinforces the core value of caring for the natural spaces we move through.

Part 4:
Eco-Friendly Practices (Plogging)

Legendary runner and philosopher Dr George Sheehan once observed, "Every run is a new adventure, a new start, a step into the unknown." In the WAT methodology, we take that step into the unknown together. The movement of our bodies becomes the gateway to opening our minds, using the trail as a classroom where real growth happens without desks, grades, or pressure.

As we step onto the trail, that spirit of adventure opens our eyes to the environment we move through. Taking care of our minds and bodies naturally extends to taking care of the spaces that welcome us. When we move through nature with presence and awareness, we quickly notice how human activity impacts the trail, inspiring us to leave every path cleaner and healthier than we found it.

Integrating plogging—a term born in Sweden from combining plocka upp (to pick up) and jogga (to jog)—turns this awareness into an active, hands-on act of environmental care. Plogging transforms a standard Nordic Walk into an empowering, shared mission that cleans up local spaces while we move.



A Practical Guide to Plogging

Tactile environmentalism, or plogging in this case, is about putting ecological awareness into direct physical action. It takes abstract conversations about the environment and turns them into something tangible that participants can feel, see, and do with their own hands.

In practice, plogging fits seamlessly into the Nordic Walking rhythm. Equipped with lightweight collection bags and protective gloves, participants use their poles to balance, stretch, and navigate the trail while spotting litter along the path. Safety comes first: groups focus on non-hazardous waste like plastic bottles, wrappers, and aluminium cans. The physical movement of bending, squatting, and reaching to clean the trail adds a functional, full-body element to the walk, making the environmental effort feel active, intentional, and deeply satisfying.

How to Quantify Environmental Impact as a Team-Building Activity

Framing plogging as a shared team mission shifts the activity from a chore into an inspiring group effort. Working together toward a clear, collective goal builds camaraderie and a strong sense of pride among participants.

To make the impact real, we measure our results at the end of the walk. The group gathers to weigh or count the bags of collected waste, turning a scattered cleanup into a concrete, visual success. Seeing five or ten kilos of plastic removed from a local forest trail gives young women an immediate sense of accomplishment. They realise that their movement has left the trail better than they found it, reinforcing the idea that small, coordinated actions create meaningful change.



Connecting with Municipalities and Local Authorities

The impact of plogging does not have to end at the trailhead. For educators, youth workers, and project leaders, these activities offer a fantastic bridge to connect young people with their local municipalities and community leaders.

After a session, groups can document their achievements through photos, simple infographics, or summary notes highlighting the volume of waste collected and the trails covered. Presenting these results to local municipal councils, environmental departments, or school boards serves a dual purpose. First, it brings public recognition to the young participants, validating their hard work and civic contribution. Second, it demonstrates to local authorities that young people are proactive, responsible stewards of their public spaces, often opening doors for municipal support, equipment sponsorship, or official recognition of the initiative.

Part 5:
Digital Storytelling

As the writer and activist Mary Catherine Bateson once noted, "The human species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories." Throughout the WAT journey, participants step away from their screens to experience the world directly. But technology itself is not the enemy; the goal is to shift from passive digital consumption to intentional creation. Young women can turn their lived outdoor experiences into meaningful digital narratives, giving voice to their personal growth and becoming active storytellers in their communities.

Capturing the "Unplugged" Journey

The digital detox during the walk creates a clean break, allowing participants to fully immerse themselves in the physical environment. The documentarian approach comes into play after the walk is finished. Rather than constantly stopping to snap photos or record videos while on the trail, participants learn to reflect on the experience first and document it intentionally afterwards.

This approach treats the phone as a reflective journal rather than a distractor. To ensure participants remain completely off-grid throughout the walk, a designated group documentarian or photographer quietly captures ambient photos along the trail. Once the group returns to the trailhead or debrief area, participants take out their devices with a clear purpose. They record short voice notes about how their mood shifted, select one or two photos shared by the photographer that capture a specific moment of connection or sensory detail, or write brief journal entries about an insight gained along the path. By separating the live experience from the act of documenting it, young women capture authentic reflections of an unplugged journey rather than curated performances for an audience.

Advocating for Healthy Lifestyles and the Community

When young women share their authentic stories, they naturally step into the role of community leaders and local ambassadors. Digital storytelling gives them a platform to advocate for mental health, active living, and environmental care in a voice that resonates with their peers.

By sharing their real experiences—the physical effort of Nordic Walking, the relief of stepping away from social media pressure, and the pride of cleaning up local trails through plogging—participants inspire others to step outside. Furthermore, these stories highlight the value of local natural spaces, municipal parks, and nearby outdoor initiatives. Through simple digital posts, video reflections, or group blogs, young women show local authorities and community members that investment in accessible nature and youth well-being yields tangible, inspiring results. They transform from quiet trail walkers into vocal champions for a healthier, more connected community.



Part 6:
Itineraries & Mapping

To translate the WAT methodology into real-world action, selecting the right trail is just as important as the activities themselves. A trail is not merely a path from point A to point B; it is an outdoor classroom, a safe psychological space, and an environmental canvas. When mapping routes across Austria, Slovakia, and North Macedonia, all partner organisations adhered to three core track selection criteria to ensure every itinerary serves the needs of young women and youth groups:



1: Safety & Accessibility

Safety is the absolute foundation of psychological comfort. Selected tracks avoid dangerous drops, unmanaged cliff edges, or routes requiring specialised technical scrambling. Paths should be clearly defined, well-maintained, and accessible via local public transport or short commutes. Furthermore, reliable mobile reception or clear evacuation points are essential so facilitators can lead with confidence.

2: Social Width (Side-by-Side Usability)

Because the TALK segment relies on low-pressure, side-by-side communication, single-file narrow dirt tracks or overgrown paths are avoided wherever possible. We prioritise double-track forest roads, wide park avenues, or gentle gravel paths. A "social width" allows two to three participants to walk side-by-side comfortably, swinging their Nordic Walking poles without clashing or blocking the trail for others.

3. Environmental & Pedagogical Potential

A great WAT track offers varied sensory details and opportunities for non-formal education. Routes are chosen for their green canopy, quiet zones suitable for reflection and check-in games, and areas where plogging can yield a tangible environmental impact. Visual milestones—such as open clearings, natural streams, or panoramic view spots—give the walk a natural rhythm and a sense of shared journey.

Standardised Itinerary Template

To maintain total consistency across all nine itineraries (Austria, Slovakia, and North Macedonia), every track is documented using the standardised format below. This structured breakdown provides teachers, instructors, and facilitators with all essential technical details, logistical notes, and NFE facilitation checkpoints at a glance.

Austria track 1	**Details**
Track name	Nußdorf to Leopoldsberg
Location and start point	Nußdorf train station, Vienna — accessible via Tram D or S-Bahn S40/S80
Distance & Duration	6.64 km | Est. duration ~2 hours (including NFE stops)
Terrain & Trail Width	Mixed asphalt (Danube/street section) and natural surface (vineyard climb); comfortably fits 2, often 3 people walking side by side throughout
Difficulty Level	Easy to Moderate (~300 m net climb from Nußdorf up to Leopoldsberg)
Safety & Amenities	*Restaurants and WC near the start at Nußdorf; facilities and public transport available at Leopoldsberg for the way down*
Recommended NFE Cycle	*Cycle 1: Self-Esteem, Identity, and Body Positivity*
Plogging Potential	*Moderate to High along the Danube/residential stretch near Nußdorf; Low within the vineyards and near the summit*
Track Description & Highlights	*Starting at Nußdorf, the trail follows the Danube through a residential stretch lined with restaurants, before climbing gently through Vienna's vineyards toward Leopoldsberg. The route builds naturally from an easygoing riverside start to a rewarding panoramic view over the city, with public transport available to descend if needed.*

Austria track 2	**Details**
Track name	Stadtwanderweg 9 — Prater Loop
Location and start point	Praterstern, Vienna — (accessible via U1, U2, tram 5, tram O, buses 5B/80A/82A, and S-Bahn
Distance & Duration	Approx. 13.4 km. | Est. Duration ~4–4.5 hours (including NFE stops) — pure walking time is closer to 3:30h
Terrain & Trail Width	Mix of wide paved avenue (Prater Hauptallee) and maintained gravel/forest paths through the Auwald — path width varies on the forest sections; the Hauptallee section is a broad, well-known avenue that easily fits several people side by side.
Difficulty Level	Easy — (essentially flat, with only ~24m of elevation gain/loss over the whole loop
Safety & Amenities	*Café Restaurant Lusthaus and Schutzhaus Wasserwiese along the route (food stalls and full facilities at Wurstelprater at the finish; good mobile coverage expected given the route stays within the city*
Recommended NFE Cycle	*Cycle 2: Emotions,* *Stress Management, and Resilience; — as your longest track by far, it has a natural "sustained effort, steady pace" arc that fits well; leaves Cycle 3 open if you're doing a third track*
Plogging Potential	*Although generally clean, Prater Park is regularly visited by a high number of people; therefore, the potential to find some litter can be higher, especially around sitting areas where people tend to stay.*
Track Description & Highlights	*A gentle, fully flat loop from Praterstern through Vienna's Prater — one of the city's last authentic floodplain forests. The route winds past the Hauptallee, the Lusthaus, and the Freudenau backwaters, offering long stretches of quiet nature within the city, before returning through Krieau to a lively finish at the Wurstelprater.*

Austria track 3	**Details**
Track name	Vienna Skyline – Danube Island Loop (from Handelskai)
Location and start point	Handelskai station, Vienna — accessible via U6, and S-Bahn lines S1/S2/S3/S7/S45
Distance & Duration	6.01 km | Est. duration ~1.5–2 hours (including NFE stops)
Terrain & Trail Width	Mostly paved/asphalt path along the Danube waterfront and Donau City; wide enough for 3–4 people to walk side by side
Difficulty Level	Easy — flat, only ~20m elevation change
Safety & Amenities	*Public toilets under the Georg-Danzer-Steg bridge and again roughly halfway (some free, some €0.50); swimming spots with small "beaches" on both riverbanks; Summerstation restaurant; multiple food stalls and further toilets near Reichsbrücke, where the route turns*
Recommended NFE Cycle	*Cycle 3: Navigating Social Media and External Pressures*
Plogging Potential	*Moderate to High — a popular recreational spot (swimming, restaurants) with realistic litter potential*
Track Description & Highlights	*A flat loop from Handelskai along the Danube waterfront, passing the DC Tower and Donau City's modern skyline, Donaupark's sculptures, and riverside swimming spots, before crossing back via the Georg-Danzer-Steg. The contrast between the polished high-rise skyline and the relaxed, unpolished river-beach atmosphere gives this route a natural rhythm between "on display" and "just being" — well suited to open conversation on the walk.*

North Macedonia track 1	Details
Track name	Vodno Forest Trail: Sredno Vodno - Markovo Krushce Loop
Location and start point	Sredno Vodno, Skopje (Accessible via public bus 25 from the Central Bus Station or personal transport).
Distance & Duration	Approx. 7 – 8 km | Est. duration: 2.5 – 3 hours (including NFE stops).
Terrain & Trail Width	Broad dirt forest roads and wide gravel paths (>5 m width) shaded by pine and deciduous trees.
Difficulty Level	Easy to Moderate (steady, gradual elevation gain with smooth footings).
Safety & Amenities	*Excellent mobile reception, frequent benches, drinking water fountains, seasonal refreshment points, and clear trail markers.*
Recommended NFE Cycle	*Cycle 1: Self-Esteem, Identity, and Body Positivity.*
Plogging Potential	*Low to Moderate*
Track Description & Highlights	*A serene forest route on the slopes of Mount Vodno offering fresh mountain air, quiet forest glades for grounding exercises, and open vantage points over the Skopje valley.*

North Macedonia track 2	**Details**
Track name	Park Gazi Baba Nature Loop
Location and start point	Main Entrance of Gazi Baba Forest Park, Skopje (Accessible via urban bus lines 2, 16, or 45).
Distance & Duration	Approx. 5 – 6 km | Est. duration: 2 hours (including interactive stops).
Terrain & Trail Width	Narrow earthen trails, soft forest floor, and packed gravel pathways (<2 m width).
Difficulty Level	Easy (gentle rolling terrain, suitable for all fitness levels).
Safety & Amenities	*Full urban emergency access, good mobile coverage, multiple shaded clearings, and close proximity to city transport.*
Recommended NFE Cycle	*Cycle 2: Emotions, Stress Management, and Resilience.*
Plogging Potential	*Very high in peripheral park areas and informal rest spots.*
Track Description & Highlights	*A calm, green urban forest haven within the city. Features gentle footpaths, pine scent, and secluded glades ideal for mindfulness, stress relief, and group energisers.*

North Macedonia track 3	**Details**
Track name	Matka Canyon Trail: St. Andrew Monastery to Canyon Viewpoint
Location and start point	Canyon entrance near St. Andrew Monastery, Matka (Accessible via city bus 60 or group transport).
Distance & Duration	Approx. 6 – 8 km (out-and-back) | Est. duration: 2.5 – 3 hours (including scenery stops).
Terrain & Trail Width	Carved stone path, packed soil, and gravel; varies from wide-open sections to narrower rock-edge paths (1.5–2.5 m wide).
Difficulty Level	Moderate (requires attention to footing along carved rock sections; rubber paws recommended).
Safety & Amenities	*Mobile coverage present; clear path layout. Facilitators should maintain group cohesion near water-facing edges. Bins available near monastery area.*
Recommended NFE Cycle	*Cycle 3: Navigating Social Media and External Pressures.*
Plogging Potential	*High along the riverside trail and viewing stops where visitors gather.*
Track Description & Highlights	*A striking trail winding along the high rock walls of Matka Canyon above the Treska River, offering rich biodiversity, dramatic canyon views, and inspiring natural monuments*

Slovakia track 1	**Details**
Track name	Železná Studnička – Partizánska lúka – Kačín
Location and start point	Železná Studnička / Partizánska lúka, Bratislava Forest Park (accessible via bus 43 or trolleybuses 42/45/47 to ŽST Železná studnička).
Distance & Duration	Approx. 8 – 10 km | Est. duration: 2.5 – 3 hours (including NFE stops).
Terrain & Trail Width	Wide gravel roads and well-maintained forest paths (>2.5 m average width).
Difficulty Level	Easy to Moderate (gentle, steady elevation gain).
Safety & Amenities	*Excellent mobile coverage, clear trail markings, multiple rest areas, benches, and seasonal refresh facilities.*
Recommended NFE Cycle	*Cycle 1: Self-Esteem, Identity, and Body Positivity.*
Plogging Potential	*Moderate around Partizánska lúka picnic areas; low along the Kačín trail sections.*
Track Description & Highlights	*A leafy forest trail running through the heart of Bratislava Forest Park. Features gentle forest glades, quiet streams, and spacious rest zones.*

Slovakia track 2	**Details**
Track name	Devín – Devínska Kobyla – Sandberg
Location and start point	Devín Castle parking area / Devín village (Accessible via Bus 29 from Most SNP).
Distance & Duration	Approx. 9 – 12 km | Est. duration: 3.5 – 4 hours (including thematic stops).
Terrain & Trail Width	Mixed forest trails, dirt tracks, and slightly narrower, rocky meadow sections (1.5 – 2.5 m wide).
Difficulty Level	Moderate (includes noticeable climbs up Devínska Kobyla).
Safety & Amenities	*Good mobile reception; open exposed sections require sun/wind protection. Rest stops near Sandberg.*
Recommended NFE Cycle	*Cycle 2: Emotions, Stress Management, and Resilience.*
Plogging Potential	*Moderate along main tourist trails; high focus near viewing platforms and Sandberg entrance.*
Track Description & Highlights	*A trail passing through the protected area of Devínska Kobyla, ending at the ancient Sandberg sandstone formation. Features sweeping panoramic views of the Danube and Morava rivers, Devín Castle, and Austria.*

Slovakia track 3	**Details**
Track name	Bratislava City Tour – Castle – Slavín – Horský Park
Location and start point	Bratislava Castle main courtyard/gates (Accessible via city centre trams/buses or short walk from Old Town).
Distance & Duration	Approx. 6 – 8 km | Est. duration: 2 – 2.5 hours (including cultural stops).
Terrain & Trail Width	Paved cobblestones/sidewalks transitioning to wide, shaded park avenues (>2 m wide).
Difficulty Level	Easy to Moderate (short urban inclines leading to Slavín).
Safety & Amenities	*Full urban infrastructure, excellent mobile reception, frequent water fountains, restrooms, and urban cafes.*
Recommended NFE Cycle	*Cycle 3: Navigating Social Media and External Pressures.*
Plogging Potential	*Low to Moderate in city zones; focus on litter collection within Horský Park trails.*
Track Description & Highlights	*Connects the grounds of Bratislava Castle, the hilltop Slavín war memorial, and the quiet woodlands of Horský Park. Seamlessly blends cultural discovery with a peaceful transition into natural green space.*

*All Excel tables are available in a printable format **HERE.***

Part 7:
Expanding the Movement

A successful initiative does not end when the project timeline concludes; it creates a lasting ripple effect in the community. Expanding the movement means inspiring young women to keep moving and providing the tools to make outdoor physical activity a natural, permanent part of their daily lives. By grounding our curriculum in real-world female role models and establishing sustainable community habits, we ensure the impact of the Walk & Talk approach continues far into the future.

Maintaining the Walk & Talk Habit

To transition from a structured project into a self-sustaining habit, participants need ownership over their routine. Long-term sustainability relies on three key strategic pillars, supported by concrete, field-tested actions developed by our Slovak partners:

1: Peer Leadership and Community Building

Peer-Led Walking Groups: Empowering interested participants to become informal group leads who coordinate regular weekend or afternoon walks using simple messaging groups or local community channels.

Structured Consistency & Accountability: Establishing fixed weekly meeting times to build long-term habits, supported by small peer-support partnerships and digital groups for sharing walking invitations, achievements, and photos.

Seasonal Community Events: Organising recurring walks tied to specific dates (such as Spring Renewal, Earth Day, International Women's Day, or Christmas walks) to keep the initiative visible, meaningful, and engaging throughout the year.

2: Low-Barrier Continuity and Daily Integration

Accessible Infrastructure: Keeping requirements simple by using accessible local trails, public parks, and basic equipment so that walking, talking, and plogging remain free, inclusive, and easy to maintain without official funding.

Routine Integration: Encouraging participants to integrate Nordic Walking into their daily lives—such as active study breaks, outdoor walking meetings, commuting, or weekend outdoor activities.

Independent Resources: Providing participants with clear route maps, beginner guides, and mindfulness and breathing exercises to strengthen the connection between movement and mental well-being independently.

3.Institutional Integration and Capacity Building

Educator and Trainer Facilitation: Training local teachers, youth workers, and sports instructors who can continue leading structured activities long after the initial project period ends.

Institutional Partnerships: Cooperating with local schools, universities, youth centres, and municipal authorities to adopt the WAT methodology as an ongoing extracurricular option or recurring wellness program.



Part 8:
From Methodology to Practice

The Walk & Talk project is built upon the Walk & Talk Methodology developed by the Slovak Nordic Walking Association (SNWA) following the International Training Mobility in Bratislava in April 2026.

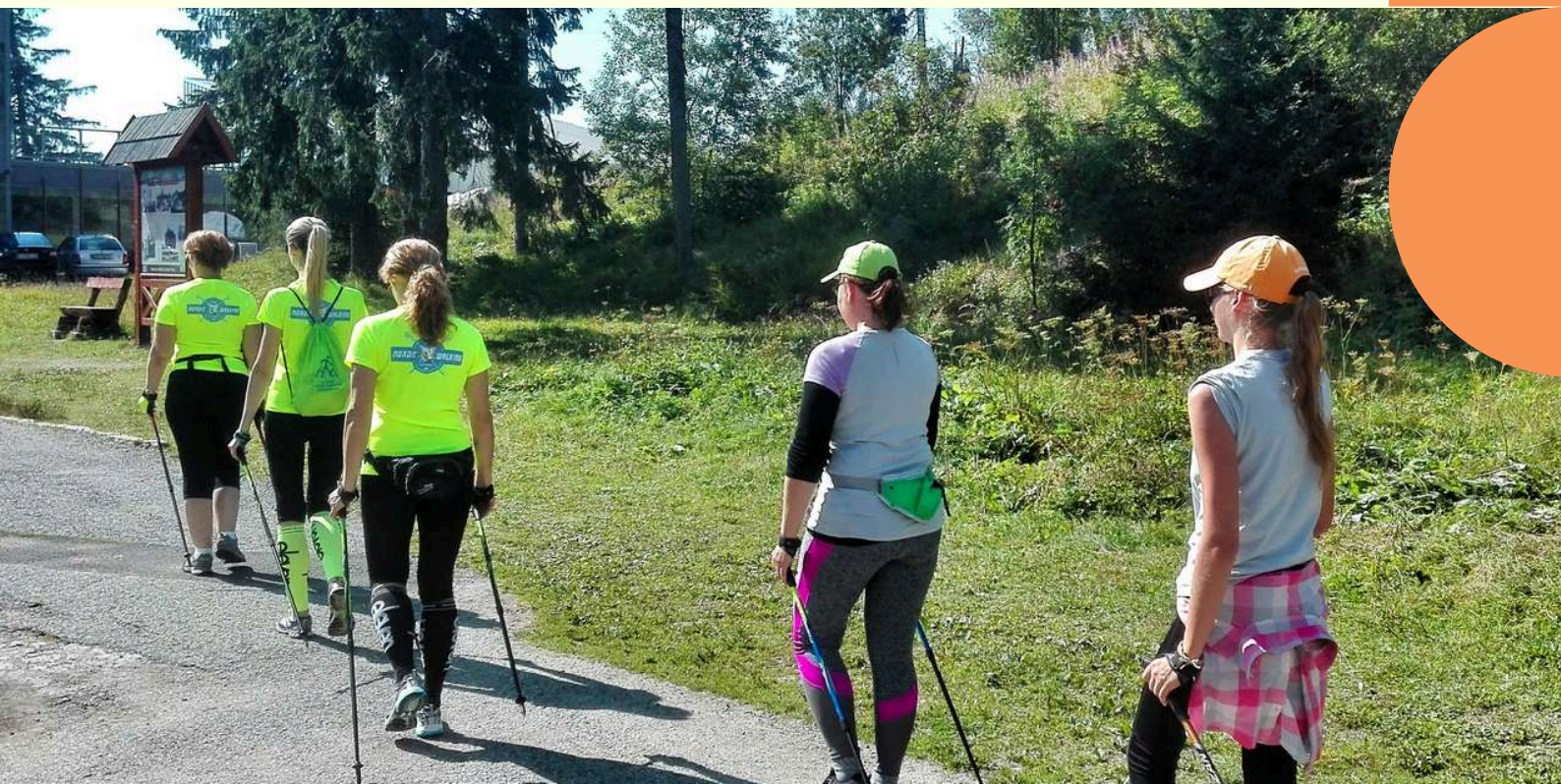
The methodology provides the educational and practical framework for integrating Nordic Walking, non-formal education, mental well-being, mindfulness, functional breathing, environmental awareness and community-building activities.

The Walk & Talk Handbook complements this methodology by translating its principles into practical guidance, exercises, discussion topics and examples that teachers, youth workers, instructors and facilitators can use when organising activities with young people.

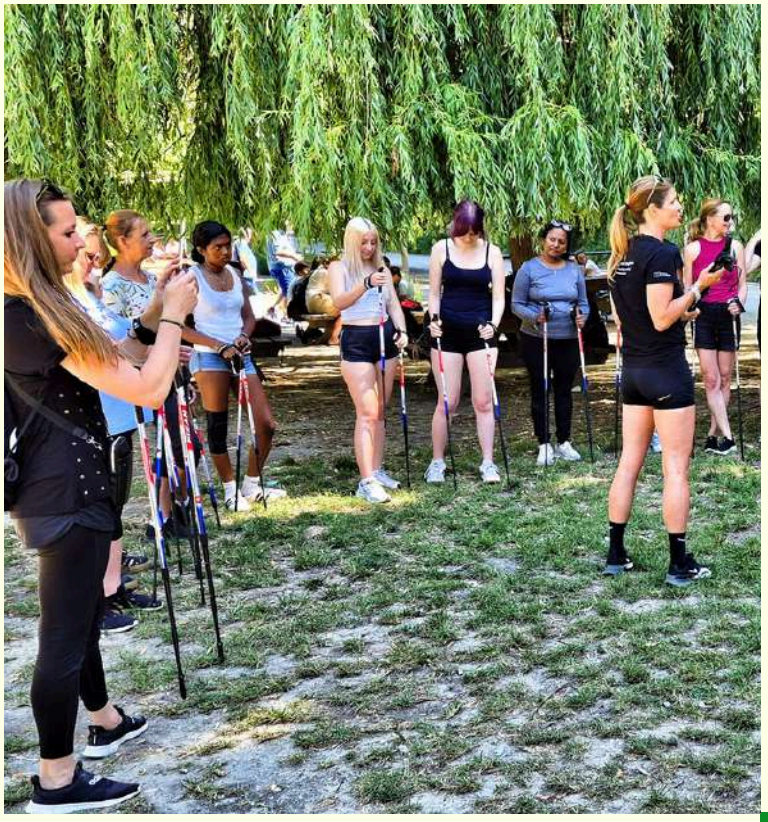
While the methodology establishes the fundamental principles and approach of Walk & Talk, the Handbook provides accessible tools for implementing these principles in different educational and community settings.
Both resources are designed to support the project's long-term sustainability and encourage the continued use of Nordic Walking as an inclusive, non-competitive activity promoting physical and mental well-being.

For a more detailed explanation of the methodological principles, please refer to the Walk & Talk Methodology developed by SNWA.

Read the Walk & Talk Methodology HERE.



Practical Guide:
How to Organise a Walk & Talk Session



Example of a 90-Minute Walk & Talk Session

Main objectives:

- Introduce participants to Nordic Walking in a positive, non-competitive environment.
- Encourage physical activity and enjoyment of movement outdoors.
- Promote mindfulness, emotional well-being and social connection.
- Create opportunities for informal conversations and reflection.
- Encourage a temporary break from mobile phones and digital distractions.

Target group: Young people aged 15-25, with a particular focus on girls and young women.

Group size: Ideally 10-20 participants.

Facilitators: Preferably two adults, including at least one trained Nordic Walking instructor.

Location: A safe, accessible park or forest trail with enough space for group activities and side-by-side walking.

Equipment: Nordic Walking poles, comfortable outdoor clothing and footwear, drinking water, a basic first-aid kit and weather-appropriate equipment.

Suggested Session Structure

1. Welcome and Introduction – 10 minutes

Gather participants in a circle.

- Introduce the Walk & Talk project and explain the purpose of the session.
- Emphasise that the activity is not a competition and that no previous experience is required.
- Explain the importance of respecting individual abilities, personal boundaries and group safety.
- Invite participants to put their mobile phones on silent and keep them in their bags during the session.

Suggested icebreaker

Ask each participant to describe their current mood using one word related to the weather, such as sunny, cloudy or windy. Participation should always be voluntary.

2. Warm-Up and Nordic Walking Basics – 15 minutes

Begin with gentle mobilisation exercises:

- Shoulder circles and arm movements.
- Gentle trunk rotations.
- Ankle and knee mobilisation.
- Walking on the spot.
- Simple coordination exercises using Nordic Walking poles.

Introduce the basic principles of Nordic Walking:

- Upright, relaxed posture.
- Natural walking rhythm.
- Alternating arm and leg movements.
- Correct pole positioning.
- Movement of the arm from the shoulder, not from the elbow.
- Active push with the poles.
- Opening and closing the hands during the arm swing.

The instructor should demonstrate the technique and allow participants to practise at a comfortable pace.

Important: Correct Nordic Walking technique should be taught and encouraged, but without performance pressure or comparison between participants.



Suggested Session Structure

3. Nordic Walking and Social Connection – 20 minutes

Start walking together along an easy trail.
Allow participants to become comfortable with the poles and gradually develop a natural walking rhythm.
Suggested activity – Trail Buddy Check
Divide participants into pairs.
Invite them to walk side by side and discuss simple questions:

- What makes you feel good?
- What do you enjoy doing outdoors?
- What helps you relax after a stressful day?

After approximately 10 minutes, participants may change partners.
The facilitator should ensure that everyone feels included and that the walking pace remains comfortable.



4. Mindfulness and Functional Breathing – 10 minutes

Stop in a quiet and safe location. Invite participants to stand comfortably, relax their shoulders and observe their surroundings.

Suggested exercises:
Sensory Awareness
Ask participants to notice:

- Three things they can see.
- Two sounds they can hear.
- One physical sensation they can feel.

Breathing Awareness
Invite participants to breathe gently through the nose, if comfortable, without forcing or exaggerating their breathing.
Encourage them to notice their natural breathing rhythm and how their bodies feel.
The aim is not to perform a specific breathing technique perfectly, but to develop awareness and a sense of calm.

5. Walk & Talk – Guided Reflection – 20 minutes

Continue walking at a relaxed pace.
Introduce one discussion topic relevant to the group.

Suggested topic: Self-Confidence and Body Positivity
Possible questions:

- What do you appreciate about your body beyond its appearance?
- How does physical activity influence your mood?
- Do social media affect how young people perceive themselves?
- What does being healthy mean to you?

Encourage open conversations without judgment.
Participants should never feel pressured to share personal experiences.
The facilitator's role is to listen, support and maintain a respectful atmosphere rather than provide psychological counselling.

Suggested Session Structure



6. Cool-Down and Final Reflection – 15 minutes

Gradually reduce the walking pace.

Finish with gentle stretching and relaxation exercises.

Gather participants in a circle for a short reflection.

Suggested closing questions:

- How do you feel now compared to the beginning?
- What did you enjoy most?
- What is one small thing you would like to take into your everyday life?

Thank participants for their involvement and encourage them to continue spending time outdoors and moving regularly.

If appropriate, invite participants to share feedback or contribute to the project's digital storytelling activities after the session.

Important Recommendations for Facilitators

Safety first: Check the route, weather conditions and participants' abilities in advance. Ensure access to drinking water, first aid and emergency assistance.

Adaptability: The suggested timing is flexible. Adjust the duration, intensity and discussion topics according to the group's age, experience, physical condition and interests.

Professional guidance: A teacher or youth worker who has attended Walk & Talk training can facilitate discussions and non-formal education activities. However, the technical instruction of Nordic Walking should be provided by a qualified instructor or a teacher who has received appropriate Nordic Walking training.

Inclusivity: Avoid competition, comparison and pressure to perform. Encourage everyone to participate according to their abilities.

Psychological safety: Respect privacy and personal boundaries. Never require participants to discuss sensitive personal experiences.

Digital detox: Encourage participants to stay offline during the activity while ensuring that facilitators retain access to a phone for safety and emergencies.

Optional environmental activity: If the location and schedule allow, include a short plogging activity using protective gloves and collection bags. Only safe, non-hazardous litter should be collected.

Key message: Walk & Talk is not about walking faster, performing better or achieving sporting results. It is about learning to move correctly, enjoying physical activity, connecting with others and developing healthy habits that can continue beyond the project.

Female Success Stories

To inspire young women and show the diverse ways physical activity can build confidence, resilience, and leadership, Part 7 incorporates 9 success stories of remarkable women across North Macedonia, Slovakia, and Austria. The table framework below is designed to collect and standardise these success stories from all partner economies, turning real-life achievements into actionable curriculum inspiration for our facilitators and participants.

Success Story Collection Framework

Framework Parameter	Partner Input & Story Details
Partner Economy & Sport	*Country (North Macedonia / Slovakia / Austria) and Sport/Discipline (e.g., Nordic Walking, Mountaineering, Cycling, Athletics, Rowing)*
Athlete / Role Model Name	*Name of the featured woman/athlete*
Background & Journey	*Brief overview of her background, how she started, and the key milestones in her sporting or outdoor journey*
Challenges Overcome	*Key societal, physical, or personal obstacles she faced as a woman in sports and how she navigated them*
Core Values Demonstrated	*Key themes highlighted (e.g., resilience, body positivity, community leadership, mental strength)*
Curriculum Inspiration & Trail Discussion Prompt	*Specific reflection question or key lesson derived from her story to be used by facilitators during the TALK segment*

Female Success Stories (North Macedonia)

Framework Parameter	Story 1: Milijana Reljić	Story 2: Andrijana Kajevska	Story 3: Eva Mitevska
Partner Economy & Sport	North Macedonia | Taekwondo & Olympic Combat Sports	North Macedonia | Biathlon & Winter Endurance Sports	North Macedonia | Athletics & Youth Sport
Athlete / Role Model Name	**Milijana Reljić** (Olympic Taekwondo Athlete, ~22)	**Andrijana Kajevska** (Biathlete & Cross-Country Skier, ~18)	**Eva Mitevska** (Sprinter and Track and Field Athlete, U18)
Background & Journey	A top-tier taekwondo practitioner who represented North Macedonia at the Paris 2024 Olympics. She delivered historic performances, including defeating a two-time Olympic champion in the Round of 16.	Outstanding winter sports athlete who served as the national flagbearer at the 2024 Winter Youth Olympic Games in Gangwon, competing in the women's biathlon individual and sprint events.	An emerging young athletics talent representing North Macedonia in international sprint competitions. Eva achieved 8th place in the 100m sprint at the Youth Olympic Games in Dakar 2026, demonstrating her potential among the world's promising young athletes.
Challenges Overcome	Battled high-pressure tactical environments on the global stage, demonstrating that young female athletes from smaller nations can challenge established world champions.	Mastered the demanding physical challenge of switching from intense cross-country skiing directly to steady, precision target shooting while managing physical exhaustion.	Overcame the physical and mental demands of competitive sprinting, including intense training, maintaining speed and performance under pressure, and competing against top young athletes internationally.
Core Values Demonstrated	Courage, tactical composure, self-belief under pressure, and breaking barriers in martial arts.	Extreme physical endurance, mental precision under fatigue, focus, and discipline.	Determination, speed, discipline, self-confidence, perseverance, and ambition to achieve excellence in athletics.
Curriculum Inspiration & Trail Discussion Prompt	How can we stay grounded and confident when faced with daunting challenges or high-pressure situations?	How can we train our minds to remain calm and focused even when our bodies feel tired or stressed?	How can setting ambitious goals, practising consistently, and believing in our abilities help us overcome challenges and achieve success?

Sources:
Milijana Reljić: *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miljana_Relji%E1%B8%B1*
Andrijana Kajevska: *https://www.the-sports.org/andrijana-kajevska-biathlon-spf788290.html*
https://www.biathlonworld.com/athlete/kajevska-andrijana/BTMKD20811200601
Eva Mitkovska: *https://worldathletics.org/athletes/north-macedonia/eva-mitevska-15195942*

Female Success Stories (Slovakia)

Framework Parameter	Story 1: Viktória Chladoňová	Story 2: Martina Buršíková	Story 3: Laura Frličková
Partner Economy & Sport	Slovakia – Cycling & Outdoor Sport	Slovakia – Sport Climbing & Youth Development	Slovakia – Athletics & Youth Sport
Athlete / Role Model Name	**Viktória Chladoňová** (19), Cyclist	**Martina Buršíková** (20), Sport Climber	**Laura Frličková** (19), Hurdler
Background & Journey	Started cycling for fun in a local forest park. Progressed from mountain biking to road cycling and cyclocross, becoming a world champion.	Discovered climbing at a children's day camp. What began as a hobby developed into international competition, supported by a strong sense of community.	Started with gymnastics before exploring different athletics disciplines. Eventually specialised in hurdles and became European U18 champion in 2024.
Challenges Overcome	Progressed from recreational cycling to elite international competition while balancing education and demanding training.	Developed from a recreational beginner into a successful international competitor, learning to adapt to increasingly difficult climbing challenges.	Explored different disciplines before finding her strength in hurdling, progressing through years of training to European success.
Core Values Demonstrated	Perseverance, discipline, enjoyment of outdoor movement and versatility.	Courage, problem-solving, friendship, determination and personal growth.	Dedication, patience, self-belief and continuous improvement.
Curriculum Inspiration & Trail Discussion Prompt	*How can enjoying movement in nature help us discover our strengths and develop long-term healthy habits?*	*How can trying something new, even when it feels difficult, help us build confidence and overcome challenges?*	*Why is it important to explore different activities and find a form of movement that suits our individual strengths?*

Sources:
Viktória Chladoňová: Slovak Olympic Team – athlete profile; **2026 World Championship title**
Martina Buršíková: Slovak Olympic Team – athlete profile
Laura Frličková: **Slovak Olympic Team – athlete profile**; **World Athletics – European U18 Championships**

Female Success Stories (Austria)

Framework Parameter	Story 1: Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner (55)	Story 2: Anna Kiesenhofer (35)	Story 3: Laura Stöckler (17 at her title win)
Partner Economy & Sport	Austria | Mountaineering & High-Altitude Endurance	Austria | Road Cycling	Austria | Sport Climbing
Athlete / Role Model Name	**Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner** (Mountaineer, 55)	**Anna Kiesenhofer** (Cyclist & Mathematician, 35)	**Laura Stöckler** (Sport Climber)
Background & Journey	Trained as a nurse in Vienna while climbing in her free time, only becoming a full-time professional climber at 32, after her fourth 8,000m peak.	A mathematician who left professional cycling after a difficult 2017 season, then returned in 2019 as a self-coached amateur planning her own training, nutrition, and race strategy entirely without a team.	From Haag, Lower Austria — won Austria's first-ever gold medal at the Youth & Junior World Championships in Innsbruck at just 17, taking the combined title across speed, boulder, and lead. She later balanced elite competition with studying Sport and English at the University of Innsbruck.
Challenges Overcome	Attempted K2 six times without success before finally summiting on her seventh expedition in 2011, becoming the first woman to climb all 14 eight-thousanders without supplemental oxygen or porters.	Considered a total novice by the professional field, so overlooked that the favorites didn't realize she was a threat until it was too late - she won Olympic gold in the 2020 Tokyo road race regardless, Austria's first cycling gold since 1896.	Spoke publicly about the pressure of a heavy competition schedule as a teenager, and feeling disconnected from non-athlete classmates who didn't understand her lifestyle.
Core Values Demonstrated	Perseverance, patience, and self-trust — she speaks openly about listening to her own intuition and prioritizing a safe return over reaching the summit.	Independent thinking, self-belief, and succeeding through an unconventional, self-directed path rather than the expected route.	Balancing a serious passion with everyday life and education; strong family support helped her through the pressures of competing young.
Curriculum Inspiration & Trail Discussion Prompt	*What keeps us moving forward after repeated setbacks, and how do we know the difference between pushing through and knowing when to turn back?*	*How can we trust our own preparation and path, even when others don't expect us to succeed?*	*What's it like to feel "different" from your peers because of something you're deeply committed to — and how do you hold onto that commitment anyway?*

Sources:
Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner: *Wikipedia — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gerlinde_Kaltenbrunner*
Anna Kiesenhofer: *Wikipedia — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Kiesenhofer ; CNN interview — https://edition.cnn.com/2021/07/26/sport/anna-kiesenhofer-olympic-gold-tokyo-2020-spt-intl/index.html*
Laura Stöckler: *ORF Niederösterreich — https://noe.orf.at/v2/news/stories/2865259/ ; kletterszene.com Interview — https://kletterszene.com/stories/leistungsklettern-als-jugendliche-mit-welchen-herausforderungen-wird-man-konfrontiert-laura-stoeckler-im-interview/*

Walk & Talk Project

Walk & Talk: Empowering Girls and Women Through Nordic Walking

Walk & Talk is an Erasmus+ Sport project helping young women and girls discover Nordic Walking, community, and eco-friendly outdoor habits across Austria, Slovakia, and North Macedonia. The aim of the project is to encourage more physical activity among young women and girls through Nordic walking, while building a supportive community and showcasing its benefits on physical and mental wellbeing.



The photographs on page (5, 11, 27 and 34) features minor participants from our local project partner, Sport Club Volej (Ohrid), taking part in a Nordic Walking activity. Their photographs are used with prior parental consent obtained by the partner organisation, ensuring the protection of children's rights and the lawful processing of their personal data in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR).

Erasmus+

The project is funded through the Erasmus+ grant scheme.
Erasmus+ is a European Union program that supports education, vocational training, youth, and sport.

The main mission of Erasmus+ is:

- Study and internships abroad – enabling students from secondary schools and universities to go on short-term or long-term stays in another European country (and sometimes outside Europe).
- Youth exchanges and volunteering – young people can participate in international projects, develop skills, and experience other cultures.
- Training and cooperation for teachers and trainers – the program also supports education professionals, allowing them to take part in courses or internships.
- Support for innovation and partnerships – projects between schools, universities, companies, or non-profits receive funding.



Project Partners

SLOVAK NORDIC WALKING ASSOCIATION

The Slovak Nordic Walking Association (SNWA), established in 2013, is dedicated to the systematic development and promotion of Nordic Walking in Slovakia. SNWA provides professional education for instructors, organises courses and activities for the public, and promotes Nordic Walking as an accessible, non-competitive physical activity supporting physical and mental well-being.

ACTIVE AUSTRIA

ACTIVE (Association for Active Life and Education) is a Vienna-based non-governmental organisation, active since 2019, that educates its members and the local community through sport and non-formal education. It promotes healthy lifestyles, outdoor sports and eco-friendly practices, with a focus on including women, young people with fewer opportunities, migrants and seniors.

mladi!nfo INTERNATIONAL

An independent, non-profit organisation working at the intersection of youth development, education, sport, health, sustainability, and social innovation. Since 2003, their work is dedicated in empowering young people and organisations across Europe and beyond by designing, implementing, and promoting high-impact projects aligned with European values and global development goals.

Co-funded by
the European Union

WALK & TALK



Walk & Talk: Empowering Girls and Women Through Nordic Walking

→ *More info at the project website:* ***wat.euactive.org***