

women walking 4 health

Promoting a Healthy Lifestyle During the Menopause and Postmenopause Phases by Advocating for the use of Walking

Work Package 2: Comprehending the walking training provision framework as physical activity during menopause and postmenopause transition

Task: T2.2_ Analysis of the constraints for walking and physical activity for women's experiencing menopause and postmenopausal

Deliverable Title (D2.2): Enablers from the lens of women's experiencing menopause and postmenopausal.

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Control Sheet

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Partners

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction. About the WomenWalking4Health Project

WomenWalking4Health is an 18-month EU-funded project aiming to promote a healthy lifestyle for women during the menopause and postmenopause phases by advocating for the use of walking as a form that can enhance their level of physical activity for both physical and mental well-being.

WomenWalking4Health project will focus on analyzing the main constraints that could discourage women from participating in walking programs for more physical activity during the menopausal and postmenopausal transition periods, in partner countries, and generally in place in Europe. Based on the key elements that will be identified, a manual for trainers will be developed, describing the details of the training for women during the menopausal and postmenopausal transitions. This objective will practically frame the intervention and describe the process, the tools, and the potential audience.

WomenWalking4Health project prioritises the development and delivery of walking and motivational techniques that will help to overcome the constraints of inactivity and ultimately increase the physical activity levels of women experiencing menopause and postmenopause.

2. Enablers from the lens of women's experiencing menopause and postmenopausal

2.1 Purpose and Scope

This deliverable explores the enablers that support women experiencing menopause and postmenopause in engaging with walking and physical activity. It gathers information from women to understand the factors that encourage participation during this stage of life.

The insights collected will help inform the development of training components, educational modules, and practical manuals tailored to the specific needs and preferences of menopausal and postmenopausal women. These findings will also support the creation of strategies and actions designed to promote walking and other forms of physical activity, aligned with the unique needs of women in this life stage.

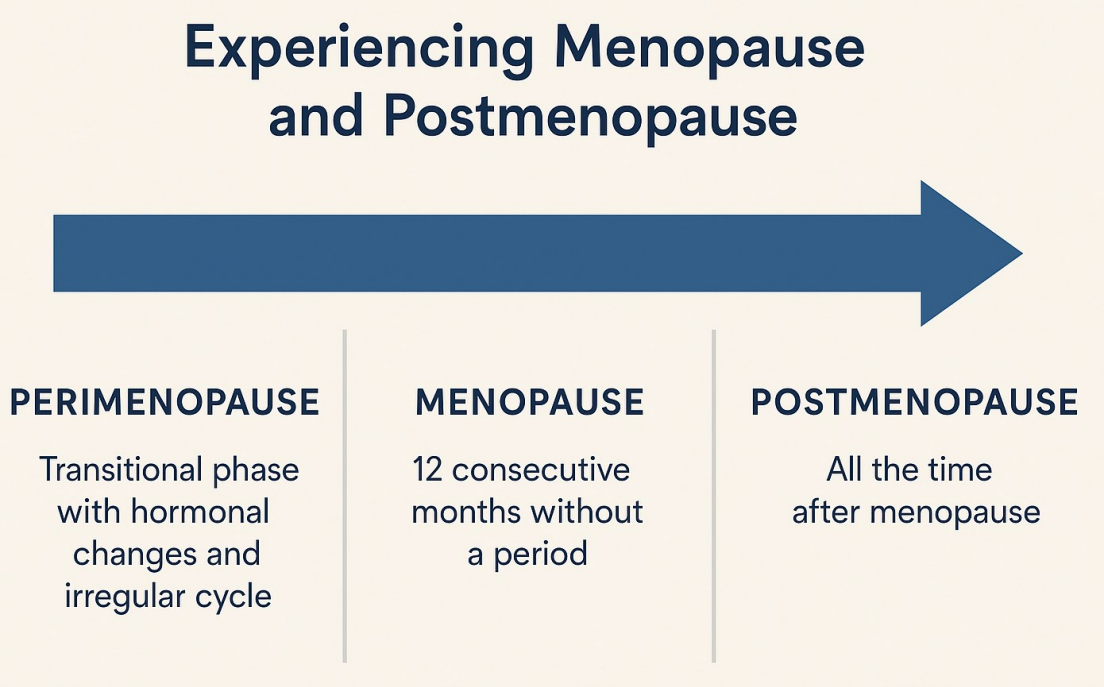
3. Main body of the deliverable

3.1. Methodology of the Qualitative Research and Data Analysis

As part of this deliverable, a qualitative research approach was applied to identify the barriers to participation in walking programs in both urban and peri-urban environments. The objective was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of women in menopause and postmenopause, and to provide a detailed examination of the factors limiting their engagement in walking activities.

In this study, the term *"experiencing menopause"* is used to describe the transitional phase surrounding the end of menstruation, typically occurring between the ages of 45 and 55 (North American Menopause Society [NAMS], 2022). This period includes the **perimenopausal stage**, during which women often report changes in menstrual patterns and various symptoms such as hot flashes, sleep disturbances, mood swings, and fatigue (Freeman et al., 2014). Menopause is clinically defined as the point when menstruation has stopped for **12 consecutive months**, without any other medical explanation (World Health Organization [WHO], 1996). However, participants in this study commonly referred to a broader experience that spans both the **perimenopausal and early postmenopausal phases**, highlighting the gradual and multifaceted nature of this life stage. These phases were often associated with significant physical and emotional changes, which shaped their motivations, barriers, and overall attitudes toward physical activity, including walking and outdoor exercise (Avis et al., 2009; Elavsky & McAuley, 2007) (picture 1).

Picture 1. Experiencing Menopause and Postmenopause



The study followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework (Table 1) as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and further elaborated by Braun, Clarke & Weate (2016). This method is well-established for analyzing qualitative data in the field of sport and physical activity (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016; Hall et al., 2015; Moore & Hesson, 2015) (table 1).

Table 1. The six phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description
Phase 1: Familiarization with the Data	• Read and re-read the data (e.g., interview transcripts, field notes). • Note initial ideas or impressions. • Become familiar with the dataset.
Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes	• Organize the data into meaningful segments. • Create initial codes that represent specific pieces of data. • Code manually or using software.
Phase 3: Searching for Themes	• Group related codes into potential themes. • Identify broader patterns in the data. • Collate codes into themes or subthemes.
Phase 4: Reviewing Themes	• Review themes to ensure they accurately represent the data. • Refine themes, split, combine, or discard if needed. • Revisit the dataset to confirm themes.
Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes	• Clearly define each theme and its significance. • Develop a description for each theme. • Link themes to research questions.
Phase 6: Producing the Report	• Write up the analysis and interpret the themes. • Present themes with supporting quotes. • Situate findings within existing literature.

A total of 20 women participated in this independent study, recruited from each partner organization. None of the participants had previously taken part in organized and structured walking programs on a regular basis. The semi-structured interviews focused on the participants' views regarding barriers to participation in walking programs, as well as—where applicable—the reasons for discontinuing previous involvement in such programs.

Probing techniques were used throughout the interviews to clarify participants' responses, encourage deeper reflection, and refine questions when necessary, following the approach of Strauss & Corbin (1998). The interviews lasted between 20 and 35 minutes. All sessions were

either digitally recorded or documented through written notes, then transcribed and prepared for thematic analysis.

Participant confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the process.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. Participants were clearly informed of the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and the measures taken to ensure their anonymity and the confidentiality of their data. All data were stored securely in accordance with GDPR and relevant ethical guidelines.

3.1.1. The Process Followed for Participant Interviews and the Interview Questions

The process followed for conducting the interviews with participants included the following steps:

1. PREPARATION

- Ensure logistics: Test technology (for video calls) or confirm the interview location (for in-person).
- Have materials ready: Interview guide, notepad, and recording device (with permission).

2. INTERVIEW FORMATS & BEST PRACTICES

A. In-Person Interview

- Choose a quiet, comfortable setting with minimal distractions.
- Ask for permission to record the interview on your device, if necessary.
- Keep the conversation flowing but stay on track to manage time (aim for 45–60 minutes).

B. Video Call Interview

- Ensure the participant has the correct meeting link and a quiet space.
- Manage technical issues calmly; offer to reschedule if needed.
- Keep the session between 35–50 minutes.
- Suggestion: record the interview on your phone instead of Zoom recording.

3. Post-Interview Steps

- Review notes and recordings (if used) immediately.
- Ensure data security and anonymization.
- Reflect on the process for improvements in future interviews.

3.1.2. Interview Questions

Introduction (Interviewer's Script)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. I am conducting research on the factors that encourage or discourage women from participating in walking programs during menopause and postmenopause. Your insights will help us understand how to design more effective programs that meet women's needs. This interview will take about [30] minutes, and all responses will remain confidential. You are free to skip any questions or stop the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Demographic Information (3-5 min)

1. What is your age?
2. What stage of menopause are you in? (Perimenopause, Menopause, Postmenopause)
3. How often do you engage in physical activity, including walking, on a weekly basis?

Enablers: Encouraging Participation in Walking Programs (12-18 min)

A. Motivational Factors

- What would make you feel more motivated to participate in a walking program?
- Would setting personal goals (e.g., weight management, mental well-being) help increase your participation?
- Would measuring your walking achievements via tracking gadgets like smart watches or smartphones, or joining (online or within walking group) challenges motivate you?

B. Program Structure & Preferences

- What type of walking program would you prefer? (e.g., individual, group-based, flexible schedule, structured program)
- Would you be interested in a program specifically designed for women going through menopause?

C. Social & Community Support

- Would walking with a support group (e.g., other women experiencing menopause) make you more likely to participate?

D. Awareness & Education

- What types of information would be most helpful in encouraging you to walk more regularly?
- How would you prefer to receive information? If you prefer online resources, could you share which platforms you use the most often (e.g., online resources, doctor recommendations, workshops)

E. Environmental & Practical Considerations

- What would make a walking space more comfortable or appealing to you? (e.g., safe paths, access to rest areas, low-traffic areas, flat terrain, restrooms etc.,)

- Would an indoor walking option (e.g., mall walking, gym tracks) be more appealing during bad weather?

Potential Solutions and Final Thoughts (5-8 min)

- What changes would make walking programs more accessible and appealing for you?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with physical activity?
- Would use of walking poles or other supportive sport tools motivate you?

Closing Statement (Interviewer's Script)

Thank you so much for sharing your insights. Your responses will be very valuable in helping design better walking programs for women in menopause and postmenopause. If you have any additional thoughts later, feel free to reach out. Would you be interested in receiving updates on the study's findings?

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Greece

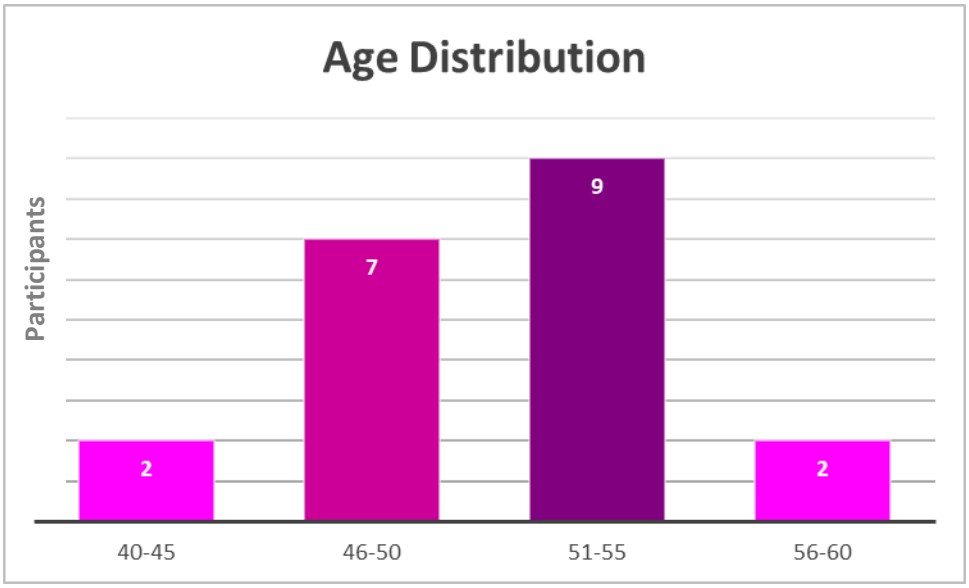
3.2.1.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants. Greece.

3.2.1.1.1. Age Distribution

This study explores the exercise habits of 20 women aged 45–57, focusing on their physical activity frequency and whether they include walking in their routines.

The age group 51–55 has the highest representation, accounting for 50% of the total participants (18 in total). The 46–50 age group follows with 38.9%, while the 40–45 and 56–60 groups are equally underrepresented, each comprising only 11.1% of the sample (graphic 1).

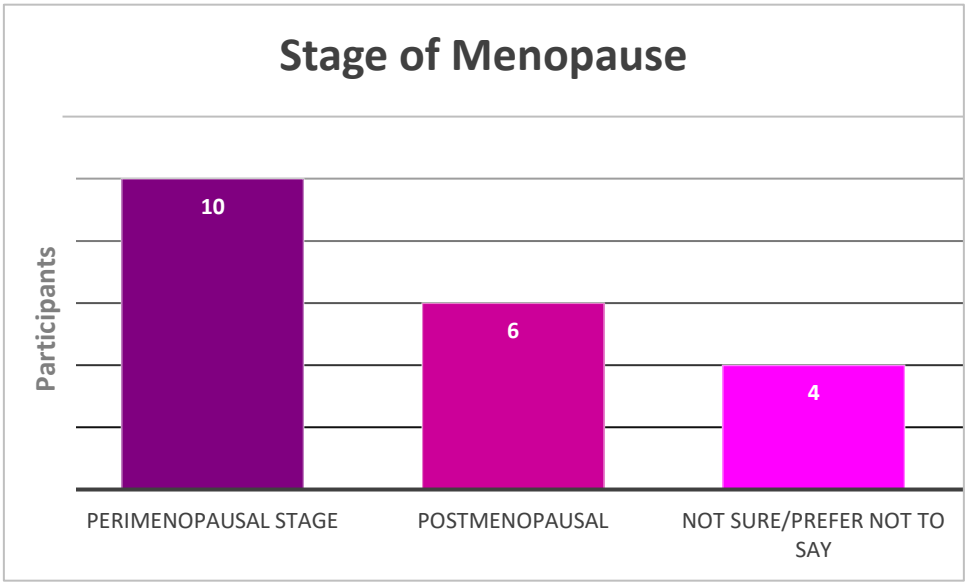
Graphic 1. Age Distribution



3.2.1.1.2. Stage of Menopause

Out of the total 20 participants, half (50%) identified as being in the perimenopausal stage, making it the most represented group. 30% reported being postmenopausal, while 20% either were unsure of their menopausal status or preferred not to disclose (graphic 2).

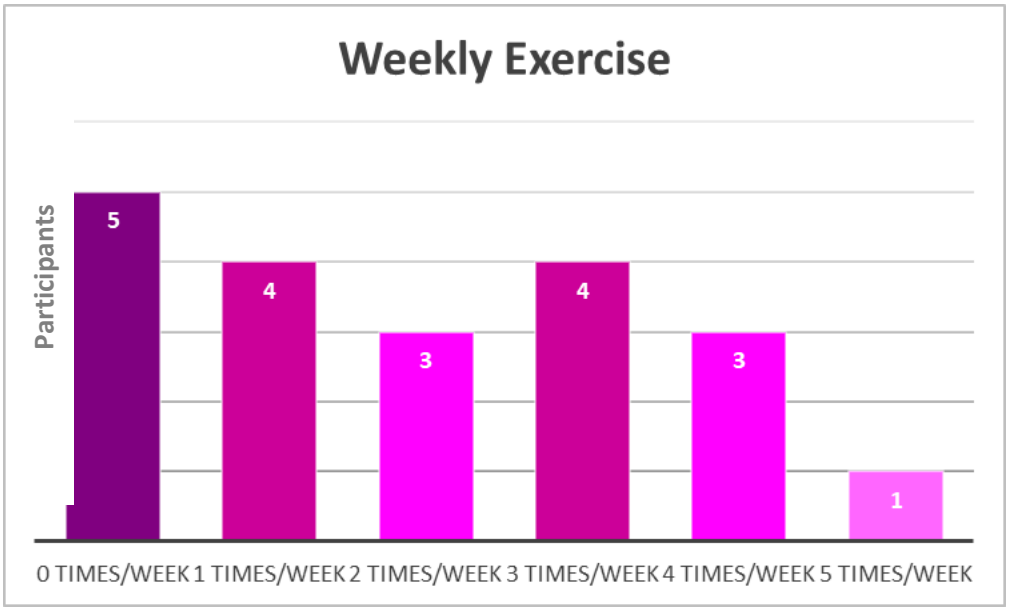
Graphic 2. Experiences of women during the menopausal transition



3.2.1.1.3. Weekly Walking Habits

Key findings reveal that 30% of the women reported no weekly exercise, while 25% exercised 3 times per week. Only 35% included walking as part of their routine, with the majority (65%) not considering it a form of exercise. Perimenopausal women showed the widest variation in activity levels, ranging from inactivity to 5 sessions weekly (graphic 3).

Graphic 3. Weekly Walking Habits



3.2.1.2. Results of Greece and Summary of Participants' Responses.

Category	Subcategory	Causes / Comments
Motivations for participation in physical activity	Physical well-being	Walking helps me feel stronger.
	Mental Health	I feel mentally refreshed after a hike.
	Personal goals	I want to maintain my fitness and avoid weight gain.
	Use of apps, Progress tracking, Competitiveness	The app I use helps me track steps and calories burned. I like seeing my progress and setting goals.
Need for tailored programs	Specialized programs	I would like there to be hiking programs for women in menopause.
	Schedule flexibility	Flexibility in exercise hours is important to me.
	Group participation	I like hiking with other women in the same phase.
Social support and motivation	Support from groups	The company of other women helps me keep exercising.
	Social relationships	Participation is enhanced when I know I'll meet with other women.
	Support from family and friends	Support from family is crucial for daily exercise.
Information and education	Education on menopause, exercise, and diet	I would like more information about menopause and how exercise and diet affect it.
Environmental needs and preferences	Access to trails	I look for trails that are close to my home.
	Safety	Safety on the trail and cleanliness are very important to me.
	Good walking conditions	I prefer areas with mild inclines so I don't get too tired.

The **results from the study** highlight various factors that influence the participation of women in hiking, particularly during menopause. These factors are categorized into **motivations for participation**, needs for **tailored programs**, **social support**, **environmental preferences**, and the **use of technology** for progress tracking**.**

Motivational factors play a significant role in encouraging women to engage in physical activity. Many women are motivated by the physical benefits of hiking, particularly in enhancing their strength and overall well-being. Additionally, hiking contributes positively to their mental health, offering a sense of rejuvenation after physical activity. Personal goals, such as maintaining fitness and preventing weight gain, also drive participation, particularly during menopause when physical changes may occur. These motivations indicate that hiking is seen as a holistic activity that benefits both the body and mind.

The **need for tailored programs** is another key finding in the study. Women expressed a desire for hiking programs specifically designed for women in menopause, which would address their unique physical and emotional needs. Flexibility in scheduling is also crucial, as many participants juggle various responsibilities. The desire for group participation, particularly with other women in similar stages of life, underscores the importance of shared experiences and social interaction. This suggests that group-based activities can foster a sense of community and support, which enhances motivation.

Social support was also identified as an important factor in maintaining regular participation in physical activity. Support from like-minded groups of women can provide encouragement and accountability, making it easier to stay committed to exercise. Additionally, the support of family and friends is considered essential for the consistent engagement in physical activity. This highlights the importance of a strong support network in facilitating long-term behavior change and physical activity adherence.

Environmental factors, such as access to trails and safety concerns, were also significant. Women prefer trails that are close to their homes to make participation more convenient. Safety on the trails, including the cleanliness of the environment, was emphasized as a crucial factor in the decision-making process. Furthermore, women tend to prefer hiking conditions with mild inclines, as this makes the activity more enjoyable and less physically taxing, which can help sustain long-term engagement.

The use of technology also plays a role in motivating women to stay active. Many participants use fitness apps to track their steps, calories burned, and progress, which helps them stay focused on their fitness goals. Additionally, some women enjoy the competitive aspect of tracking their progress and setting personal challenges. This indicates that technology can serve as an effective tool in boosting motivation and engagement, providing tangible evidence of progress.

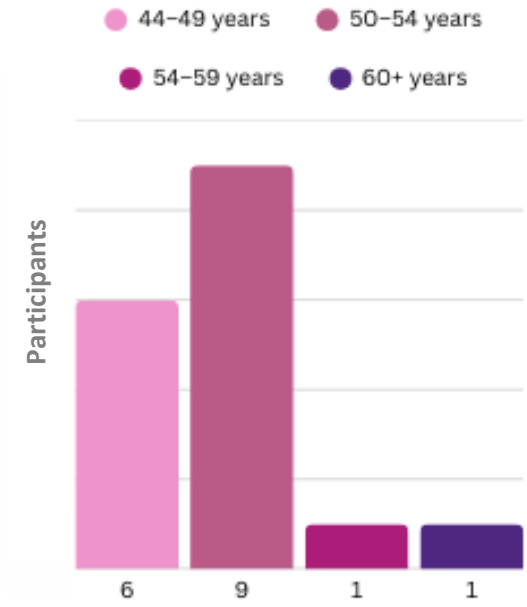
3.2.2. Slovakia

3.2.2.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants. Slovakia.

3.2.2.1.1. Age Distribution

This report draws on feedback from 20 women, aged 44 to 63. The participants were fairly distributed across the different age groups. Overall, the largest portion (53%) fell within the 50–54 age range, followed by the group (35,2%) aged 44–49. The smallest group, making up 11,8% of the total, were women aged 56-60 (5,9%) and over 60 (5,9%) (graphic 1).

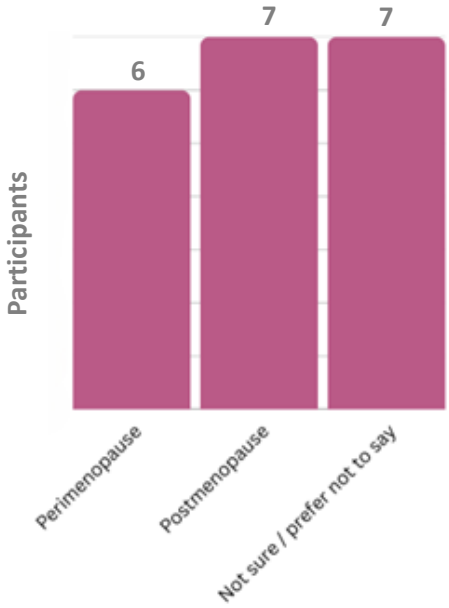
Graphic 1. Age Distribution



3.2.2.1.2. Stage of Menopause

Participants indicated they were at different points in the menopausal transition. The equal parts (both 35,3%) identified as being in menopause and postmenopause, while 29,4% were in the perimenopausal stage (graphic 2).

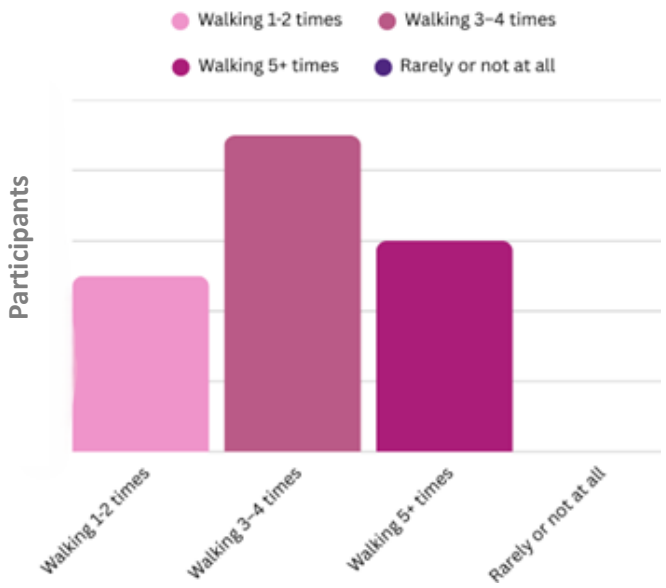
Graphic 2. Stage of Menopause



3.2.2.1.3. Weekly Walking Habits

The responses indicate that while most participants walk on a weekly basis, the frequency differs among individuals. Majority (47,1%) reported walking 1–3 times per week. Slightly fewer (35,3%) said they walk daily and the last group (17,6%) reported walking 4-6 times a week. No participants (0%) stated they are walking rarely (graphic 3).

Graphic 3. Weekly Walking Habits



3.2.2.2. Results of Slovakia and Summary of Participants' Responses.

Category	Subcategory	Causes / Comments
Motivations for participation in physical activity	Mental and Emotional Benefits	If I feel down, I go for a walk to *walk it out*. I listen to my body, to myself. I can peacefully listen to podcasts I enjoy. I spend time in nature with my family. I always think about the result. it's good for my health.
	Physical Well-being & Weight Goals	My knees used to hurt, but once I started running regularly, the pain disappeared. Getting back to physical activity helps me recover after surgery. By walking regularly, I'd like to lose some weight.

		I move mainly to stay healthy and feel good.
	Nature and Outdoors	I enjoy spending time in nature with my loved ones. I enjoy quiet trails and the greenery around me. I usually walk during the day, not early morning. This way I can enjoy the sunshine all day.
	Exploration and Novelty	Having a goal, seeing something—nature, historical sites, etc. Discovering new parts of the region. It's not just walking in a park—it has a purpose, like visiting a castle or lookout point with nice views.
	Tracking & Achievement (mixed views)	We always check how many kilometers we walked that day and altitude too. I always use mapy.cz.
	Social enjoyment	It's more fun in company. I enjoy group walks—they motivate me to walk longer distances. I can walk all day in a group. I'm a member of a hiking club, so I prefer going to the mountains with a group. I like going alone or with my husband, kids, or friends.
Need for tailored programs	Flexibility in Time and Structure	I'd be more motivated if I had more time but I try to make it work with what I have. Flexible schedule, not too structured. Location and accessibility are key factors. A structured program would definitely motivate me to walk more often. We could also talk about safety (ex. how to avoid bears0.

		I'm very flexible and wouldn't have a problem committing to a scheduled program.
	Programs for Women in Menopause	I'd like to find a group I could go on walks with. It would be nice to spend time with people who want to be healthy, with others who share the same challenges or motivations. I would prefer organized events—maybe to improve walking technique, maybe more about the health benefits. If the program is designed for fit people, they can go for longer hikes. For older or less fit people, there should be shorter routes. More promotion of the walking programs.
	Personalized Physical Considerations	Mental Health is my number one priority.
Social support and motivation	Support from Family/Friends	Everyone in my family enjoys sports. I love going for walks with them. I choose to walk with friends who can adjust to my pace and don't mind waiting for me.
	Group Belonging / Peer Connection	I enjoy having conversations in the group. Some of my friends join me—we go together. I prefer walking in a group because the group is very supportive. If I forget something or run out of water, they can help me out.
	Open to Meeting New People	Friendly ambassadors or group leaders would be a great contribution to the program. I like meeting new people.

Information and education	Clear, Practical Program Information	It's important that the program is led by reliable organizers. The level of performance matters. Positive and motivational words of reinforcement are helpful. It would be great to get recommendations on new routes and safety—something more specific. I need to see the map, difficulty level, water sources, and rest stops.
	Content on Menopause & Activity	Information about health benefits of waking. I'd like to receive recommendations for new interesting walking routes.
	Preferred Channels (Digital/Print)	All respondents prefer online groups and resources. I prefer information on Facebook pages or groups. I'd love to attend workshops and trainings.
	Inspiration from Events & Stories	Refreshments at the end of a program would be nice. I think every woman should find what suits her—what makes her feel more positive.
Environmental needs and preferences	Safety and Comfort	The most important thing is a safe trail. The trails can go uphill, not just on flat terrain. Breaks for rest are very important. I always carry my trekking poles. I like wooden railings or chains on steep or slippery paths—they make me feel safe. I always check the weather to avoid unnecessary danger.
	Access to Facilities	Drinking fountains aren't necessary, I always bring my own water.

Proximity & Public Transport	I support having more urban trails. Using public transport is great—you can rest and don't have to concentrate on driving. If there's a good connection, I absolutely prefer public transport.
Pleasant Nature & Aesthetics	Nice views. Interesting trails in nature. Castles, monasteries, caves.

A wide range of **personal reasons motivate participants** to walk and engage in physical activity. Some seek mental clarity, a sense of emotional balance, or time for peaceful reflection with a favourite podcast. Others are focused on improving their physical health, recovering after illness or surgery, or reaching weight goals. Walking provides a low-pressure way to reconnect with nature, spend meaningful time with loved ones, and enjoy simple routines that contribute to overall well-being. Whether it's about health, happiness, or harmony, movement is a personal journey with deeply rooted motivations.
Participants expressed a strong preference for walking programs that offer both **flexibility and structure.** They appreciate options that respect different levels of physical ability, age, and health status. Programs that are adaptable through varied trail lengths, different pace groups, or flexible time slots are more likely to attract and retain participants. For many, safety is a key factor, especially in areas where wildlife may be present. Thoughtful planning, including tailored routes and practical information, increases confidence and motivation. Specialized groups, such as those for women in menopause, are seen as a great opportunity to create a supportive and relatable space for shared goals and experiences.
Social interaction is one of the most motivating elements for many walkers. People enjoy being active with others, whether it's close family members, long-time friends, or new acquaintances. Group walks provide not only encouragement and accountability, but also a sense of belonging. Conversations along the way make the experience more enjoyable, and supportive group dynamics often help individuals push beyond what they thought they could do on their own. Inclusive and welcoming atmospheres, where different paces and abilities are accepted, contribute to long-term engagement and personal satisfaction.
Clear and practical information is crucial when it comes to joining or staying engaged in walking programs. Participants want to know details about routes, terrain difficulty, available rest stops, safety guidelines, and even seasonal conditions. Educational content, especially related to the benefits of walking during menopause, is valued as a way to better understand the positive impact of regular physical activity. Recommendations for new trails, health tips, and inspirational stories also help to keep motivation high. Accessible communication channels like Facebook groups or hiking club websites are the most preferred sources of this information.

A comfortable and safe walking environment plays a vital role in encouraging regular participation. Many prefer scenic trails with greenery, beautiful views, and peaceful surroundings. Accessibility such as proximity to home or connection to public transport makes it easier to integrate walking into daily life. Safety features like clear signage, secure footing, occasional handrails, and resting points are appreciated, especially on more challenging routes. While amenities like water fountains are considered optional, the overall trail experience must feel welcoming, pleasant, and manageable for walkers of all fitness levels.

3.2.3. Austria

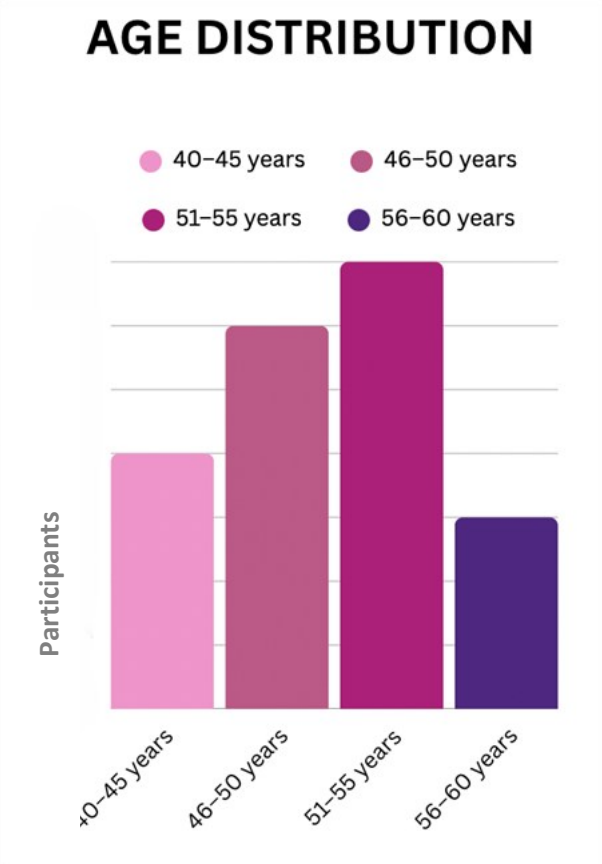
3.2.3.1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants. Austria.

3.2.3.1.1. Age Distribution

This report is based on responses from 20 women aged between 40 and 60, who provided insights into their walking and physical activity habits during various stages of menopause. The group reflects a diverse range of experiences, life contexts, and physical activity levels.

Participants were relatively evenly spread across age groups. Overall, the most participants (35%) were in the age range of 51-55 years, followed by 46-50 years and 20% of 40-45 years. The least representatives (15%) were aged 56-60 years. (graphic 1).

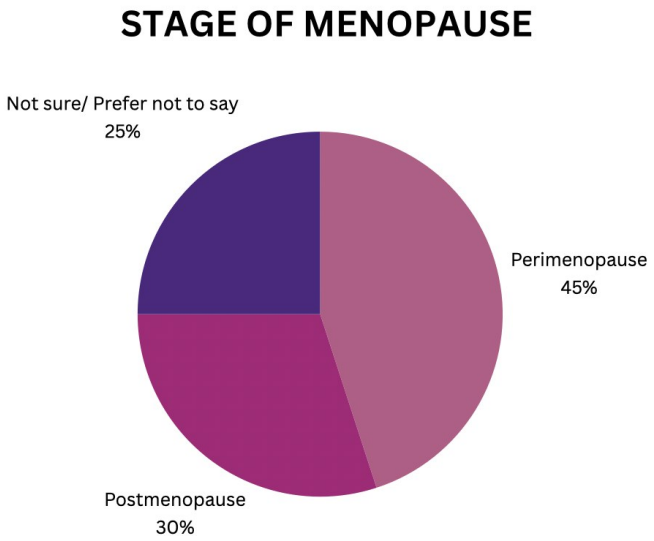
Graphic 1. Age Distribution



3.2.3.1.2. Stage of Menopause

Participants reported being at various stages of the menopausal transition. The largest proportion (45%) were in perimenopause, followed by postmenopause (30%). A small number were uncertain about their current phase or prefer not to share this information (25%) (graphic 2).

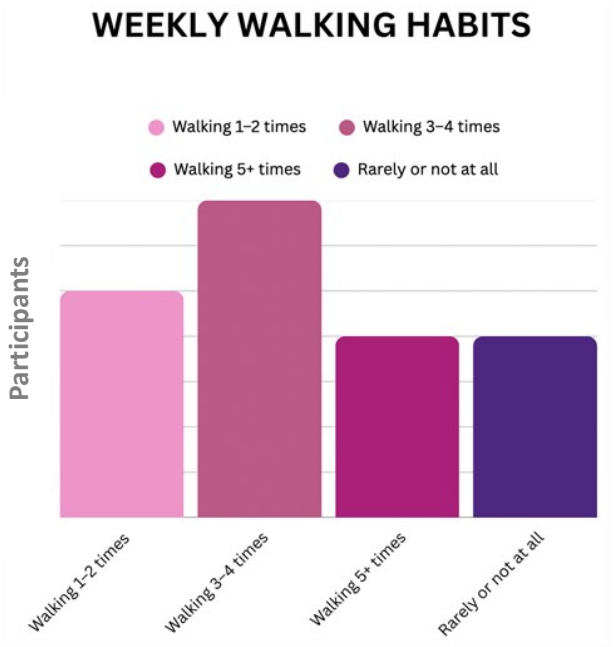
Graphic 2. Stage of Menopause



3.2.3.1.3. Weekly Walking Habits

Responses show that most participants engage in some form of walking activity each week, but the frequency varies. All in all, an equal percentage of women (30%) reported walking 3-4 times a week and more than 5 times a week. A little lower percentage of 25% reported walking 1-2 times a week and the least amount of 15% walks rarely or not at all during the week (graphic 3).

Graphic 3. Weekly Walking Habits



3.2.3.2. Results of the Austria and Summary of Participants' Responses.

Category	Subcategory	Category
Motivations for participation in physical activity	Mental and Emotional Benefits	Walking helps clear my mind. I feel better when I move. I enjoy the calming effect of walking or yoga.
	Physical Well-being & Weight Goals	To lose weight and make like-minded people. Yes, to the personal goal, everyone wants to improve something.
	Nature and Outdoors	A hike in the woods or surrounded by trees is motivating. Doing it in a nice place in nature.
	Exploration and Novelty	To explore different parts of the city I've never visited. Discover new routes.
	Tracking & Achievement (mixed views)	Tracking can be a hook, a nice push during low days. I'm not a numbers person, but playful elements like challenges or places to visit help.
	Social enjoyment	More fun to go with friends or other women. Group walking motivates me more.
Need for tailored programs	Flexibility in Time and Structure	If it's close and at a suitable time. Flexible schedule, not too structured. If it's aimed at working mothers, flexible times and not late.
	Programs for Women in Menopause	Yes, a program for women like me would be helpful. Still really a taboo, so walking with others in the same stage would be good.
	Personalized Physical Considerations	Learning how to walk without harming our bones. Light activity is better during menopause.
Social support and motivation	Support from Family/Friends	My family knows I love it and gives me space. Friends invite me to go out for walks.
	Group Belonging / Peer Connection	It's nice to meet other ladies. Motivation is higher in a group. Common goals give reciprocal motivation.

	Open to Meeting New People	Privately I'm talkative but also anxious… still, I like meeting new people through walking.
Information and education	Clear, Practical Program Information	When and how long it takes is most important. I need to see map, difficulty, water, rest stops.
	Content on Menopause & Activity	Information how walking affects perimenopause symptoms. A program that teaches us how to care for our bodies during menopause.
	Preferred Channels (Digital/Print)	Newsletter or email is fine, not social media. I check the Alpine Club site weekly.
	Inspiration from Events & Stories	Walking events with vineyards or themes inspire me. Other people's experiences help.
Environmental needs and preferences	Safety and Comfort	Flat terrain, well-lit paths, low-traffic areas. I like safe places with drinking fountains.
	Access to Facilities	Toilets and water are a must-have. Good to know if there are rest stops or huts.
	Proximity & Public Transport	It should be close to where I live. I check how we go by public transport or car.
	Pleasant Nature & Aesthetics	Great views motivate me. Interesting routes in nature.

A wide range of personal motivations encourages women to stay active, even during challenging phases of menopause. The most frequently mentioned enabler was the **positive mental and emotional impact of walking**. Many participants described how walking clears the mind, brings calm, and improves mood. Physical well-being goals, such as weight management or maintaining strength, were also prominent motivators. The **natural environment** served as a strong source of inspiration, women said they felt more encouraged when walking in forests, by water, or in scenic areas. Several participants also expressed a desire for novelty and discovery, enjoying walks that allowed them to explore new parts of their cities or natural surroundings. **Although opinions on tracking apps and fitness tools were mixed**, some participants found value in step counting or progress tracking, especially when connected to playful challenges or visible achievements. Finally, the **social element sharing the experience** with friends or like-minded women was a recurring theme in what made walking enjoyable and sustainable.

Participants emphasized a **strong desire for walking programs specifically designed for women in or around menopause.** Many expressed that they felt overlooked in mainstream programs and would welcome spaces where their experiences and needs were acknowledged without judgment. **Tailored programs** could also incorporate education on how menopause affects the body and how to adjust activity accordingly. Flexibility in scheduling and format was another priority. Women often expressed that programs should offer **light structure without heavy commitment**, something they can join when time, energy, and mood allow. Several also highlighted the need for **physiological sensitivity**, such as avoiding high-impact exercises or learning proper walking form to prevent bone or joint strain.

Group belonging and peer support emerged as powerful enablers. Many women said that walking with others — especially those going through similar life changes — significantly increased their motivation. Shared goals, mutual encouragement, and simply feeling understood made group walking particularly appealing. Support from family and friends also helped women prioritize time for walking. A few mentioned that even a simple invitation from a friend or acknowledgment from their family could make the difference in whether they went for a walk that week.

Clear, relevant, and accessible information was seen as essential for women to engage with walking programs. Participants wanted to know practical details — such as distance, terrain, duration, rest stops, and nearby facilities — before committing. This gave them a sense of control and reduced uncertainty. In addition to logistics, there was a desire for educational content about menopause and physical activity, including how to manage symptoms through movement and what precautions to take. Participants expressed interest in inspiration from others' experiences, themed events, or wellness-focused challenges that felt personal rather than generic.

The walking environment plays a crucial role in participation. Women preferred safe, well-maintained routes with lighting, low traffic, and access to drinking water and restrooms. Flat or gently inclined terrain was especially appreciated for comfort and accessibility. Proximity was another key factor — women were more likely to participate if the location was close to home or reachable by public transport. Finally, many participants highlighted the motivating power of beautiful scenery, green spaces, and routes that offer aesthetic or natural appeal.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings highlight that women in menopause across Greece, Slovakia, and Austria are motivated to engage in physical activity by a complex blend of physical, mental, and personal goals. Walking, in particular, is viewed as a meaningful way to support overall well-being contributing to emotional balance, mental clarity, and physical health. However, the most successful engagement occurs when programs are specifically tailored to meet the unique needs of women at this life stage. Flexibility, safety, and inclusivity are essential elements, along with

the understanding that walking is not just a form of exercise but a deeply personal and often social experience.

Across all three countries, social support plays a vital role in encouraging consistent participation. Women value the opportunity to walk with others, whether through formal group programs, local walking clubs, or informal networks of friends and family. These shared experiences offer emotional connection, accountability, and a sense of community. In cultures where family ties and social networks are strong, such as in Greece, or where community-based health initiatives are common, as in Austria and Slovakia, social interaction significantly enhances motivation and long-term commitment.

Environmental factors also strongly influence participation. In Greece, the natural beauty of coastal and mountainous landscapes provides an appealing backdrop for walking, while in Austria and Slovakia, the accessibility of forest trails and public parks creates welcoming and peaceful spaces. Participants across all regions emphasized the importance of safe, well-maintained, and clearly marked trails. Features such as rest areas, secure footing, and visible signage contribute to a feeling of comfort and security, especially for women managing the physical effects of menopause.

Technology is increasingly being used as a supportive tool, with fitness apps and digital platforms helping women across these countries track progress, set personal goals, and stay motivated. These tools enhance individual engagement by offering structure and feedback, while also allowing users to connect with online communities or share experiences, even across borders.

Ultimately, the data reveals that women in menopause are not only willing but eager to engage in physical activity when programs are thoughtfully designed. In Greece, Slovakia, and Austria, programs that are flexible, inclusive, and empathetic, focusing on safety, education, nature, and community are particularly effective in supporting participation. By addressing individual needs and fostering social connection and self-care, walking programs can become powerful tools for promoting sustainable engagement. When the right conditions are in place, walking becomes much more than a health strategy, it becomes a fulfilling and enduring part of daily life that nurtures both body and spirit.

5. Annex

Sources

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