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**MIGRATION OF WOMEN ATHLETES TO THE ROMANIAN**  
**HANDBALL LEAGUE**

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*Abstract*

It will always be brought to discussion how beneficial or bad the import of athletes is, or the number of these athletes. The advantages of importing foreign athletes are found in the quality of the results. Our research holds focus on the migration of foreign women handball players which are found under a contract and are playing in the best handball league for seniors from Romania, examining the season 2016-2017, in point of the number of foreign players, country of origin, age, the position they are specialized on, Romanian teams they have played for, and also accounting of years spent on our territory. The obtained results reveals that there are 31 foreign handball players in the Romanian women's league, having origins in 15 different countries from 3 continents: Europe, South America and Africa. They represent 14.4 percent of all women handball players under contract with the teams from the best women's league. Close to 50 percent of the players have less than one season spent in Romanian's handball. When it comes to age, the average calculated is 27.9 years, and the most experienced players are the goalkeepers, with an average of 31 years old. Looking at the positions occupied on the field by the players from outside Romania, 42 percent of total are playing left and right back, while the less represented position regarding the foreigners is the left wing, where only one player is in this situation.

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## 1. Introduction

Sport is one of the fields in which the migration of people from one country to another or one continent to another is still a relevant and trending process.

Evans and Stead (2012) consider that sports labour migration is driven by a trade in embodied athletic talent. It represents an exchange of skills and abilities which are temporally limited to short periods during athletic migrants' careers, are specific to a sport and, in some cases, play a specific role within a club or organization.

Migration of athletes is generally related to a series of economic, cultural, geographical and even political problems, the teammates, coaches, managers, sponsors, agents, officials and administrative personnel playing a decisive role in the lives of foreign athletes. The extent of these problems varies from one sport to another, from one corner of the world to another.

The present research addresses migration in the game of handball, in Romania. In 2015, affiliated clubs of the Romanian Handball Federation (RHF) who were involved in the best league for men and women seniors registered a big number of contracts with foreign players. Committees empowered with the Romanian handball strategy considered that this situation may damage the professional growth of young Romanian handball players, taking into consideration also the fact that the number of Romanian handball players activating outside the country has always been and is still very low. That's why, in May 2015, the RHF Technical Board took the decision to change the international transfer regulations by adding the value transfer criterion for foreign players. The measure taken by adding this new rule sought to increase the value of the best national leagues for seniors without imposing a limit of foreign players. Thus, an affiliated club enrolled in seniors' competitions can transfer 2 foreign players without any limitation, but from the third player, contracts could be signed only with players from the best 3 leagues in Europe, according to the hierarchy drawn up by the European Handball Federation (EHF). Also, the clubs could transfer players convened in their national teams or who have gathered over time 10 selections in senior national teams (for players under 33 years old) and players who have participated in at least one official game played by the national team in the last two years (for players over 33 years old).

## 2. Problem Statement

The international debates on migration in sport first appeared in 1994, when the domain's pathfinders, Joseph Maguire and John Bale, have begun to notice the rapid development of this fact. This has meant the beginning of long-term researches of the phenomenon, especially in the male sector. The issue of migration was observed in detail, following, inter alia, the typologies of the migrant athlete, enumerating a number of its characteristics (Falcous & Maguire, 2005). Subsequently, other researchers made different additions to the existing list of characteristics (Darby & Solberg, 2010; Love & Kim, 2011).

The detailed research of migration in sport reveals many branches in which this phenomenon has extended. Most found studies refer to football (McGovern, 2002; Poli, 2010), but references to migration in other sports are discovered, such as baseball (Takahashi & Hotne, 2006), basketball (Falcous &

Maguire, 2005) or rugby (Chiba & Jackson, 2005). About the handball world and migration in this sport , we could find only one article (Agergaard, 2008).

### **3. Research Questions**

The present research aims to answer the following questions:

- How many foreign men handball players have chosen to play in the best Romanian handball league for women?
- From which countries are these players coming and how these countries are spread on the world's map?
- When were these foreign players first registered with a contract for a Romanian club?
- For how many Romanian clubs these players have activated since their initial arrival?
- How old are the foreign women handball players and on which position are they specialized to play?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Our research holds focus on the migration of foreign women handball players which are found under a contract and are playing in the best handball league for seniors from Romania, examining the season 2016-2017, in point of the number of foreign players, country of origin, age, the position they are specialized on, Romanian teams they have played for, and also accounting of years spent on our territory.

### **5. Research Methods**

Consequence of changing the international transfer regulation to Romania, but also of the great result achieved by CSM Bucharest, the Champions League winner in 2016, there are at the moment (season 2016 - 2017) 31 foreign players in the best senior women's league, these players being also the subjects of our paper.

Because the total number of women players was down in 2016, due to the financial problems of 2 out of 14 teams of the championship that had to withdraw, the percent of foreign women players was 14.4.

It will always be brought to discussion how beneficial or bad the import of athletes is, or the number of these athletes. The advantages of importing foreign athletes are found in the quality of the results. Considering this, in sport, migration does not concern only athletes, but also coaches, scientists and administrators, which means that this broader process involves both sport development and development through sport (Maguire, 2006).

Basic statistical and mathematical calculation were used, in order to be able to analyse and to interpret the data, such as the sum, average or standard deviation. The pie chart and clustered column were chosen from the amount of graphical representations, for a clearer view of the results.

## 6. Findings

During the season 2016 - 2017, the best women's handball league from Romania includes a number of 31 foreign women handball players with contracts signed with one of the teams in the Romanian league. The year started with 14 teams, but 6 months later, due to financial problems, only 12 teams were continuing the competition. In 4 of these 12 teams, no foreign player could be found under a contract.

One of these 4 teams, ASC Corona 2010 Brasov, has proposed and put into practice a project dating back to when the migration phenomenon really took off in Romania, a project that supports 100% the Romanian handball, meaning that no foreign player has been under contract with this team since the project is running. The other 3 teams without foreign players are HC Zalau, CSM Unirea Slobozia and CSM Bistrita. The reasons for not signing any contract with a foreign player are explained by the decision-makers of these clubs as follows: the small budgets of the teams, the 100% support for the Romanian handball or, in the case of the team from Bistrita, the fact that it's the clubs' first year in the best Romanian league, meaning the beginning of their road.

At the opposite pole stands CSM Bucharest, a team that has 10 foreign players out of the total of 19 players. Compared to Bucharest, SCM Craiova has only 5 foreign players out of 16 players, but it is in its first year of solid import, while for CSM Bucharest, the migration phenomenon has been going on since 2014. The project was a success, given that, from the very beginning, the team won the Romanian League twice and the Romanian Cup and Super Cup once each, all culminating with winning in 2016 the most important European trophy, the Champions League.

Taking a closer look at the 31 foreign women handball players from the Romanian championship, In Table 01 we will present in which year they arrived to Romania.

**Table 01.** Arrival of foreign women handball player in Romania

| Year           | 2017 | 2016 | 2015 | 2014 | 2013 | 2012 | 2011 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| No. of players | 2    | 15   | 5    | 4    | 2    | 2    | 1    |

As seen above, almost 50 percent of the foreign players are in their first year of experience in our country. Two players came at the middle of the competitive season 2016-2017, 5 players are already counting their second season, and only one player arrived in Romania in 2011, counting her 6<sup>th</sup> competitive season.

The next step in our research was to take a look at the number of clubs these players signed a contract while staying in our country.

**Table 02.** Number of teams changed by each foreign women handball player in the Romanian league

| No. of teams   | 1  | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----------------|----|---|---|---|
| No. of players | 23 | 2 | 2 | 4 |

Table 02 shows that 23 players have not yet changed the teams for which they have signed the first contract in Romania, 2 players are playing for their second club, 2 are playing for their third club, while 4 players are already playing for their 4<sup>th</sup> team.

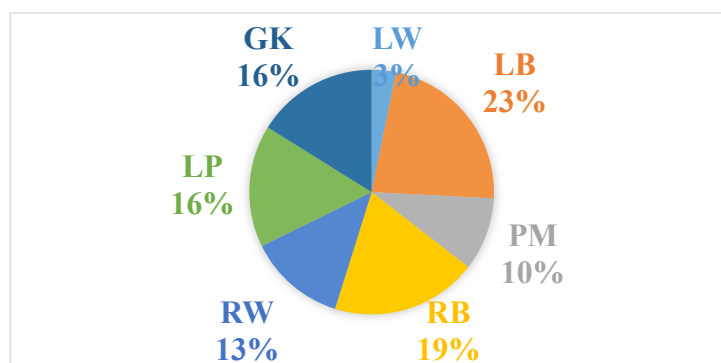
The mean age for the 31 foreign players from the best Romanian women's league is 27.9 years (SD = 3.13). In Table 03 we will position the foreign players by their specialization on the field and by their age. The table shows that most women handball players international transferred to Romania are playing on the left back (7), followed closely by the right back position, with 6 players. Five foreign players can be found each on the goalkeeper and line player positions, while on the left wing position, only one foreign player has a signed contract with a Romanian club.

**Table 03.** Distribution of foreign players by specialization and their mean age

| Position        | LW   | LB       | PM       | RB       | RW       | LP       | GK       |
|-----------------|------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Number          | 1    | 7        | 3        | 6        | 4        | 5        | 5        |
| Age (Mean ± SD) | 26.4 | 28.1±3.5 | 26.7±2.1 | 28.1±3.1 | 25.4±2.6 | 27.3±3.1 | 31.2±1.5 |

Legend: LW=left wing; LB=left back; PM=playmaker; RB=right back; RW=right wing; LP=line player; GK=goalkeeper

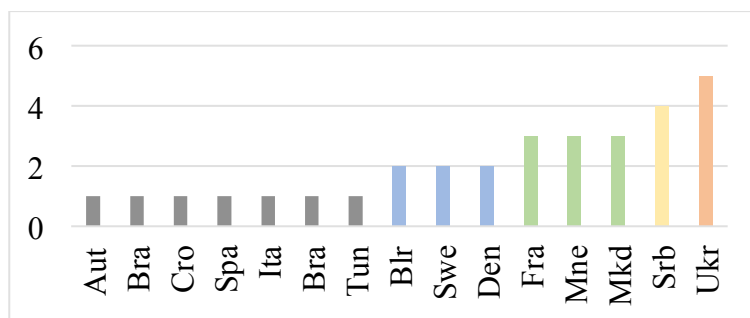
Taking a closer look at the age of the foreign women handball players (distributed by their position), we could see that, the lower limit of mean age is 25.4 years for the right wing players, while the most experienced players can be found on the goalkeeper position, where the mean age is over 31 years. On the back position, both sides of the field, the mean age goes a little over 28 years (28.1).



**Figure 01.** [Distribution of foreign women handball players on playing positions]

Legend: LW=left wing; LB=left back; PM=playmaker; RB=right back; RW=right wing; LP=line player; GK=goalkeeper

The pie chart used in Figure 01 shows in percentages how the distribution on the specialized positions looks like. It can be seen that 23% of all foreign women handball players from the Romanian league are playing on the left back, followed closely by the right back position. The players responsible for long-distance shots represent 42% of all foreign women handball players. Both the line players and goalkeepers represent each 16% of the total, while the left wing is the most underrepresented, with only one foreign player, which means 3% of the total number of foreign women handball players in the Romanian league.



**Figure 02.** Distribution by country of origin

Regarding the country of origin for the 31 foreign women handball players, Figure 02 shows that these players are from 15 countries spread over three continents, namely Europe, Africa and South America. Most of the players are from Ukraine (5) and Serbia (4), 3 players are from France, Montenegro and Macedonia, respectively, while countries like Austria, Brazil, Tunisia, Italia and Spain are represented by only one handball player.

## 7. Conclusion

During the season 2016-2017, the best women's handball league from Romania includes a number of 31 foreign women handball players who has signed a contract with one of the 12 teams, meaning 14.4% of the total number of players.

4 out of the 12 teams, for different reasons, didn't sign any contract with a foreign women handball player. At the opposite pole stands CSM Bucharest, a team that has 10 foreign players out of the total of 19 players, and HCM Craiova, with 5 foreign players.

The average of age for the 31 foreign players is 27.9 years ( $SD = 3.13$ ), and the most experienced players are found on the goalkeeper position, with a mean of 31.2 years old, while the right wing position has the youngest representatives, with a mean of 25.4.

The 31 foreign women handball players are coming in Romania from 15 countries spread over three continents: Europe, Africa and South America. Most of the players are from Ukraine (5) and Serbia (4), 3 players are from France, Montenegro and Macedonia, respectively, while countries like Austria, Brazil, Tunisia, Italia and Spain are represented by only one handball player.

Of the total number of women handball players from outside Romania, 50% of them are in their first year in our country. Two came even later, at the middle of the competitive season 2016-2017. 23 of the foreign players have not yet changed the teams for which they have signed the first contract in Romania, 2 players are playing for their second team, 2 are playing for their third team, while 4 players are already playing for their fourth team.

There will always be a topic of discussion on the sports labour migration, with pros and cons about how beneficial or bad the import of athletes is, or the number of these athletes. The advantages of importing foreign athletes are found in the quality of the results: if they exist, then the financial involvement is justified, and further new sponsors can be attracted.

Importing top athletes means not only good propaganda for handball, children having the opportunity to come into contact with their idols, but also, because sport has contributed over the years to the mixture of cultures, we can say that it possesses a huge intercultural potential.

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