

The diversity of organised grassroots football in Denmark 2024

A follow-up study focusing on age, gender, ethnicity and sexuality

© Søren Bennike¹, Claes Madsen¹, Adam B. Evans²

¹Danish Football Association, Brøndby, Denmark; ²Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

¹Author contact <sobe@dbu.dk>

Published on idrottsforum.org 2025-10-30

This article presents selected results from a follow up study of the diversity in Danish grassroots football. The first study was made in 2019. Results reflect quantitative measures of diversity amongst 10,945 respondents, including club members (players), club boards, coaches, educated licensed referees and the Danish Football Association's political level. Results illustrate multiple measures of diversity, including age, gender, sexuality, ethnic origin, and attitudes and experiences of participation. Results demonstrate continuous inequality regarding girls/women's and immigrants/descendants'

representation in the DFA football landscape when compared to the general population. At the same time, inequality (and the experience of inequality) has declined since the diversity study of 2019 in several respects. However, the results also demonstrate that those outside the 'dominant' group still experience discriminatory and derogatory language and simultaneously perceive their membership and participation in football to be more challenging than for many ethnically Danish, heterosexual men. Again, we call for research regarding the underlying causes of the trends presented.

Introduction

Association football (or soccer in North America) remains the most popular sport in the world in terms of participation at all levels from grassroots to professional competition, and in terms of spectatorship both at matches and through the media. As far back as 2006, FIFA (2007) conducted a large-scale survey that suggested that more than 265 million people played football at some level. Moreover, the Nielsen World Football Report (2018), reported that the levels of interest in football were higher than any other sport from a sample of 20 international markets. In a similar fashion to global trends, football is highly popular in Denmark. According to the national survey on sports participation, 7% of the adult population (16+) and 39% of children (7-15) play football regularly (Pilgaard et al. 2025), a majority of which play in local grassroots clubs under the auspices of the Danish Football Association [DFA]. According to the National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark [DIF], the DFA hosts 381,840 members organised in 1473 grassroots clubs across the country (DIF 2025), making football the most popular sports club-based activity in Denmark (Bennike, et al. 2019). Despite its popularity, however, evidence has demonstrated that for some minority groups (e.g. girls/women, immigrants/descendants, non-heterosexual people), the experience of participating in football can include discriminatory and exclusionary practices (Degele 2019; Bennike et al. 2020; Cleland & Magrath 2020; Pielichaty 2021; Cleland et al. 2022; Bennike et al. 2023; Neves et al. 2023; D'Hoore & Scheerder 2024; Downward & Muniz, 2025; Yiapanas, 2025).

In 2019 the DFA conducted a comprehensive mapping of diversity in Danish grassroots football regarding age, gender, education, income, ethnicity and sexuality, also focusing on the attitudes and experience of participants (Bennike & Schelde, 2020). Results demonstrated the existence of inequality in the DFA football landscape, particularly in terms of gender representation. Moreover, regarding gender, ethnicity and sexuality, the analysis concluded that those outside the 'dominant' group experienced discriminatory language and perceived their membership and participation to be more challenging (Bennike et al., 2020). In 2024 the DFA conducted a follow-up study once more mapping the diversity in Danish Grassroots football, investigating if and how diversity and inclusivity in Danish grassroots football have developed over a 5-year period (between 2019 and 2024). For the follow up study educational status and income

were left out and a focus on disabilities and health issues were included (Madsen & Bennike, 2025).

In the following we present results focusing specifically upon age, gender, ethnicity and sexuality amongst club members (players), club boards, educated licensed coaches, educated licensed referees, and within the DFA's governance structures. The results hold multiple foci, including representation and issues regarding attitudes and experiences concerning participation in organised grassroots football in Denmark. This article serves as a follow up to the 2020 publication "The Diversity of Organised Grassroots Football in Denmark" (Bennike et al., 2020), which focused on gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. That focus is maintained here, although notably categorizations concerning sexuality have become more fractured since 2020. In parallel, a separate article will be published with a specific emphasis on disabilities and health issues. This is partly due to the absence of this perspective in the earlier study, but also because the term "disabilities and health issues" is broad and encompasses a wide range of conditions. These two factors warrant a dedicated article, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the associated challenges.

Methods

The methodology we adopted in the 2024 study is in keeping with the 2019 study. Data was obtained initially through an exploration of the DFA internal database (DFA ID, 2025), which holds information on the age and gender of participants. This was followed by the implementation of an online questionnaire, which was sent via e-mail to more than 190,000 recipients, of whom 10,945 responded. The process of distributing questionnaires, sending out reminders, and extracting the data was carried out between March and May 2024. As illustrated in table A, specific subgroups were invited to participate in the survey. These populations ranged from representatives in the DFA's governance structure and committees (encompassing 257 people) to club members (players), comprising 211,866 individuals). In most subgroups the full population were invited to answer the questionnaire. This is not the case for 'club board', 'coaches' and 'club members'. Regarding club board representatives and unlicensed coaches, the full population size is unknown. And regarding members (players) a sample size of 166,640 members (players) were invited in total, based on the fact that their participation and club-membership information were

recently updated and therefore trustworthy. It was highlighted that all guidelines in the Danish Data Protection legislation would be respected in the invitation, including the General Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act on a European level. The questionnaire was written in Danish, English, Turkish and Arabic, with the latter two languages relating to the largest migrant groups in Denmark. Moreover, the questionnaire was addressed to a responsible adult, most commonly a parent for respondents under the age of 15. The DFA collaborated with Verian, a leading data and insights company, in order to circulate the questionnaires and collect the data. Furthermore, the DFA collaborated with Statistics Denmark, the central authority on statistics in Denmark, who conducted a coding defining all registered persons in the DFA database as ‘Danish origin’, ‘immigrant’ or ‘descendant’ based on citizenship registers.

Data sources in the following tables and figures are indicated by ‘ID’, which refers to data obtained within the DFA’s ‘Internal Database’, ‘V’, which refers to data provided by Verian and ‘SD’, which refers to the coding completed by Statistics Denmark. It should also be noted that, due to the way subgroups are categorized, participants’ responses in the survey conducted by Verian could be included in multiple target group categories. The result is that 10.945 respondents are represented 11.174 times in the table.

Specific definitions relating to ethnic origin were constructed based upon the determination of origin used by Statistics Denmark. In the survey respondents were asked about the birthplace (country) and citizenship of their parents and the birthplace of themselves in terms of defining their ethnic origin. Subsequently results were classified as being of Danish origin, of immigrant origin or a descendant of immigrants. In so doing, the method of defining a participants’ ethnic origin used by Statistics Denmark (SD, 2025) was utilised, as illustrated in figure 1 (overleaf). If the respondent answered “I don’t know” or “I prefer not to answer”, the answer was excluded from the results. Immigrants and their descendants are reported as a joint category in the results section as those with a cultural heritage from outside Denmark. It is important to note that this method does not differentiate between immigrants/descendants from a western and a non-western background, and therefore conclusions regarding ethnicity are grounded in citizenship and migration status.

Table A: *Overview of data sources and respondents*

Data Sources	Subgroups	Focus areas	Respondents (N)	Total populations	Survey invitations	Response rate
Internal Data-base	the DFA political level	Age & gender	257	257		
	Club chairpersons		1510	1510		
	Club boards (incl. chairpersons)		3372	-*		
2024 (ID)	Coaches (educated & licensed)		3710	3710		
	Referees (educated & licensed)		3638	3638		
	Club players (members)		211,866	381,840		
Coding by Statistics Denmark	Referees (educated & licensed)	Ethnic origin	3071	3638		
	Coaches (registered)		17881	25,346		
	Club chairpersons		1001	1510		
2024 (SD)	Club boards (incl. chairpersons)		2537	-*		
	Club players (members)		185,528	381,840		
	the DFA political level		121	257		
Survey by Verian	Club chairpersons	Age, gender, ethnic origin, sexuality (15+), attitudes & experiences.	265	1510		
	Coaches (educated & licensed)		749	3710		
	Coaches (all)		1610	**		
2024 (V)	Referees (educated & licensed)		915	3638		25%
	Club boards (incl. chairpersons)		545	-*		
	Club players (members)		7718	381,840		

* The exact number of club board members are unknown and contact information is not present.

** The exact number of coaches without a license are unknown and contact information is not present. In this paper this subgroup is not presented. This information can be found in Madsen & Bennike (2025).

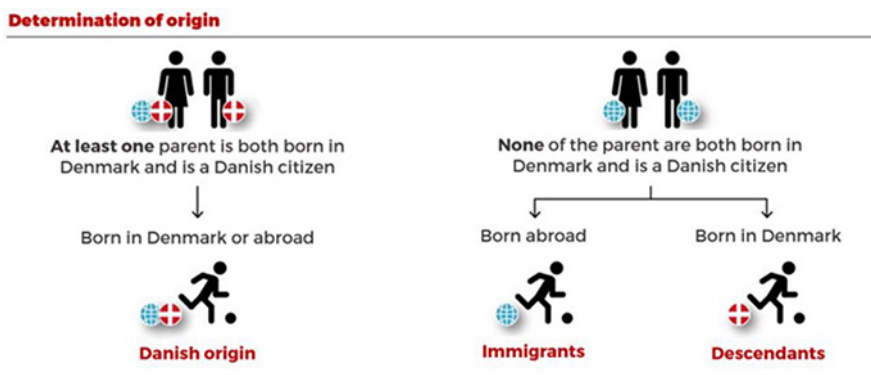


Figure 1: *Determination of origin* (Source: Danish Statistics)

Survey respondents above the age of 15 (the age of consent in Denmark) were asked about their sexuality. This was indicated in two ways; a ‘calculated sexuality’ (see figure 2) and a ‘self-reported sexuality’ (see figure 3), which led to different results for prevalence of specific sexualities, particularly when defining bisexuality. Both methods are presented below and included with the intention of comparing results with both the diversity study from 2019 (Bennike et al. 2020) and the Danish population (Sexus, 2019).

Based on the 2019 study, which uses ‘calculated sexuality’, the respondent’s sexuality was divided into three categories, based on a binary understanding of gender; heterosexuality (physically and/or emotionally attracted only to people of the opposite gender), bisexuality (physically and/or emotionally attracted to both genders) and homosexuality (physically and/or emotionally attracted only to people of the same gender). Respondents were thus asked two questions regarding their sexuality. One question was a direct inquiry about which sexuality best describe the respondent inspired by the research done in Project Sexus (Sexus, 2019), whilst a second question concerned attraction, from which sexuality was calculated based on the respondent’s stated gender. If respondents answered ‘other’ to the question regarding sexual attraction, their sexuality was subsequently defined as ‘other’. If the respondent answered, “I don’t know” or “I prefer not to answer” to the question regarding attraction they are classified as “don’t know/do not wish to answer”. If the respondent answered ‘both male and female’, ‘neither male nor female’, or ‘I am questioning’ to the gender question, they were not included in the calculated sexuality. If the respondent’s gender could not be determined based on

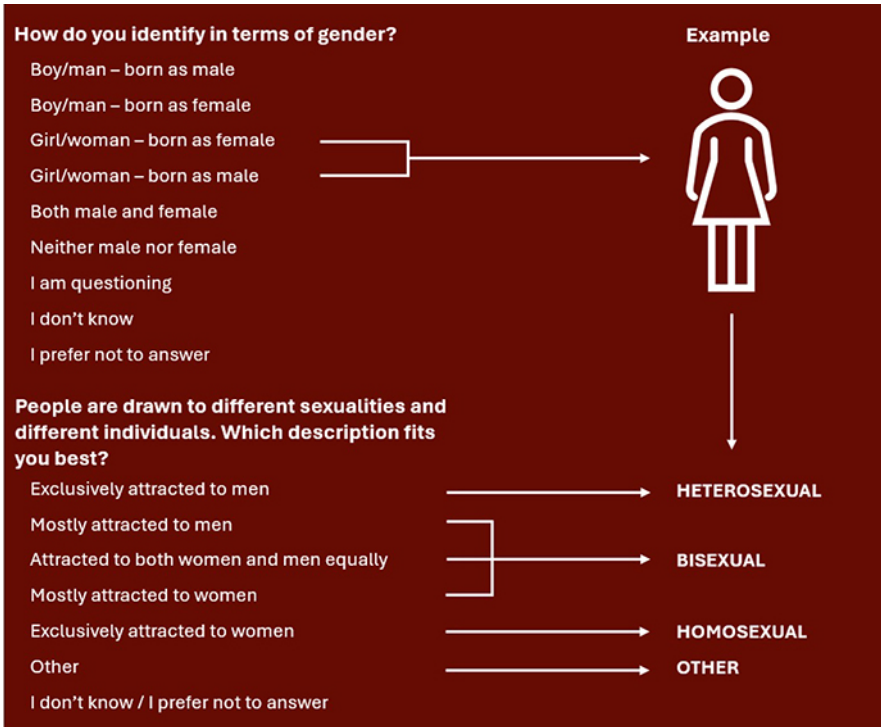


Figure 2: *Defining sexuality (15+ years) – calculated*



Figure 3: *Defining sexuality (15+ years) – self-reported*

a binary understanding of gender, it was deemed impossible to indicate sexuality using the ‘calculated sexuality’ method. When the respondent indicated their ‘self-reported sexuality’, however, sexuality was instead divided into ‘heterosexuality’, ‘bisexuality’, ‘homosexuality’, ‘pansexuality’

and ‘asexuality’. This categorization is based on the respondents’ answer to the question noted in Figure 3. It is important to note that the survey focused upon grassroots players and therefore does not include professional football players. Hence, conclusions relating to the proportion of elite footballers of different sexualities are beyond the scope of this article.

The diversity study 2024 includes a group defined as LGBTI+ individuals. The five letters stand for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex. Other abbreviations are sometimes used, including additional letters to represent other groups, and a “+” is added to include those not explicitly mentioned in the acronym, here the shorter form is used. This group is identified based upon how respondents self-define their gender and sexuality (see figure 3). The following three tables offer an overview of the distribution of gender identity and sexual identity, indicating whether each response category is included in the LGBTI+ group and in the calculated sexuality.

Table B presents the distribution of self-reported sexuality across the entire sample (15+ years). Table C presents the distribution of self-reported gender identity across the entire sample. Table D presents the distribution of calculated sexuality across the entire sample (15+ years). Further details concerning sexuality are given in the results section.

Table B: *Distribution of sexuality – self-reported (N: 6,059)*

Self-reported sexuality (15+)	Respondents (N)	Percentage	LGBTI+ individuals
I am heterosexual	5359	88 %	No
I am homosexual	47	1 %	Yes
I am bisexual	53	1 %	Yes
I am pansexual	18	0 %	Yes
I am asexual	9	0 %	Yes
I am questioning	21	0 %	Yes
My identity doesn’t fit into the categories	82	1 %	Yes
I don’t know	48	1 %	No
I prefer not to answer	422	7 %	No

Table C: *Distribution of gender – self-reported (N: 10,945)*

Self-reported gender	Respondents (N)	Percentage	LGBTI+ individuals	Used in the calculated sexuality
Boy/man – born as male	8760	80 %	No	Yes
Boy/man – born as female	10	0 %	Yes	Yes
Girl/woman – born as female	1922	18 %	No	Yes
Girls/woman – born as male	4	0 %	Yes	Yes
Both male and female	10	0 %	Yes	No
Neither male nor female	5	0 %	Yes	No
I am questioning	17	0 %	Yes	No
I don't know	49	0 %	No	No
I prefer not to answer	168	2 %	No	No

Table D: *Distribution of sexuality – calculated (N: 6,059)*

Calculated sexuality (15+)	Respondents (N)	Percentage
Heterosexuality	5119	84 %
Homosexuality	57	1 %
Bisexuality	405	7 %
Don't know / prefer not to answer	411	7 %
Other	67	1 %

Results

Results are divided into 2 sections; first, we focus on ‘age’, ‘gender’, ‘ethnic origin’ and ‘sexuality’ in terms of the composition of subgroups involved in grassroots football in Denmark. Second, we focus upon respondents’ attitudes and experiences in relation to issues regarding gender, ethnicity and sexuality. Results shown for all respondents combined are weighted by gender, age, geography and origin based on the composition of the full population (see table A).

Mapping age, gender, ethnic origin and sexuality

The following four tables map the diversity of Danish organised grassroots football. Changes in percentage points since 2019 are indicated in parentheses. Table 1 shows different subgroups divided by age. Please note that specific groups are presented according to different age intervals arising from the management of data from multiple internal sources. It is worth

highlighting that participants in grassroots football ‘management activities’ are the oldest group (including members of the DFA governance structures, membership of club boards and club chairpersons). This becomes very clear when focusing on the DFA political level, where 67% of all members are 51 years old or more, an increase from 59% in 2019. In contrast, there is a rising number (+7 pp) of young coaches holding a coach education and a license. Table 2 shows the percentage of women across the subgroups. In most groups the percentage of women is rising, though overall women remain in the minority, particularly in relation to educated licensed coaches (5%) and educated licensed referees (3%). Table 3 shows the ethnic origin of respondents. Here it is worth mentioning that the share of immigrants/descendants in Danish society in 2024 is 16% (SD, 2025). In football, the lowest proportion of persons of immigrant/descendant ethnic origin is among club chairpersons, whilst the number of persons with immigrant/descendant ethnic origin at the DFA political level or amongst educated licensed referees is higher than the number of persons with immigrant/descendant ethnic origin who are club members. When comparing these numbers with the study from 2019, an increasing number of educated and licensed coaches (+4 pp) and referees (+8 pp) with an immigrant/descendant’s background can be observed. Finally, table 4 shows the percentage of bi- and homosexual respondents in the survey data. As outlined above, data reflects figures derived from both ‘calculated’ and ‘self-reported’ sexual orientation figures (cf. figures 2 and 3). As was the case in 2019, sexuality varies according to gender (i.e. relatively more bi- and homosexual women than men participate in football). It is also notable that sexual identity varies according to how sexual orientation is reported. It is our view that the self-reported method provides the most reliable representation due to the level of inference required in the calculated method. According to Project Sexus, using the self-reported method, 1,6% of the Danish population identify as homosexuals and 2,6% as bisexuals (Sexus, 2019).

Table 1: *Percentage of respondents categorized by age group*

Subgroup	0-9 y/o	10-18 y/o	19-29 y/o	30-49 y/o	50+ y/o	Respondents (N)	Total Population	Data source
the DFA political level			2 (-1)*	30 (-9)**	67 (+8)***	257	257	ID
Coaches (educated & licensed)			57 (-3)	17 (-5)	749	3710	ID	
Referees (educated & licensed)			30 (+1)	40 (-3)	3638	3638	ID	
Club chairpersons			45 (+3)	42 (-9)	1510	1510	ID	
Club boards (including chairpersons)			49 (+3)	38 (-7)	3372	-****	ID	
Club members (players)	26 (+6)	40 (+3)	17 (-5)	13 (-4)	6 (+1)	211,866	381,840	ID

Changes in percentage points since 2019 are indicated in parentheses.

* This is based on 21-30 y/o
 ** This is based on 31-50 y/o
 *** This is based on 51+ y/o
 **** This is based on <30 y/o
 ***** The exact number of all club board members is unknown, and contact information is not present.

Table 2: *Percentage of women respondents*

Subgroup	Percentage of women	Respondents (N)	Total population	Data source
the DFA political level	20 (+4)	257	257	ID
Coaches (all)	18	25,346	-*	ID
Coaches (educated & licensed)	5 (+2)	749	3710	ID
Referees (educated & licensed)	3 (+1)	3,638	3638	ID
Club chairpersons	14 (+3)	1,510	1510	ID
Club boards (incl. chairpersons)	17 (+3)	3,372	-*	ID
Club members (players)	21 (0)	211,866	381,840	ID

Changes in percentage points since 2019 are indicated in parentheses.

* The exact number is unknown, and contact information is not present.

Table 3: *Percentage of respondents with immigrant/descendant ethnic origins*

Subgroup	Percentage of immigrants/descendants	Respondents (N)	Total population	Data source
the DFA political level	5 (-3)	121	257	V
Coaches (All)	8	17,881	-	SD
Coaches (educated & licensed)	9 (+4)	749	3710	V
Referees (educated & licensed)	16 (+8)	3071	3638	SD
Club boards (incl. chairpersons)	4 (-1)	2537	-	SD
Club members (players)	11 (+1*)	185,528	381,840	SD

Changes in percentage points since 2019 are indicated in parentheses. *The exact number is unknown, and contact information is not present. **In the 2019 study the number was 7%. Due to a stronger methodology based on a coding by Statistics Denmark we argue that the correct increase is +1 (see also Bennike & Schelde, 2020).

Table 4: *The identification of sexual identity in percentage of respondents (15+ years)*

Subgroup	Percentage of non-heterosexuals	Percentage of bisexuals	Percentage of homosexuals	Percentage of homosexuals	Respondents (N)	Total population	Data source
the DFA political level	4**	11 [†] (+5)	1**	3 [†] (+3)	121	257	V
Coaches (all)	3**	5 [†]	1**	1 [†]	1610	-***	V
Coaches (educated & licensed)	4**	5 [†] (-3)	2**	1 [†] (0)	749	3710	V
Referees (educated & licensed)	3**	6 [†] (0)	1**	1 [†] (0)	915	3638	V
Club boards (incl. chairpersons)	2**	7 [†] (-1)	1**	1 [†] (0)	810	-***	V
(all) Club members (players)	5**	7 [†] (-1)	1**	1 [†] (0)	5581	193,384****	V
(men) Club members (players)	3**	4 [†] (-1)	1**	0 [†] (-1)	4609	144,874****	
(women) Club members (players)	9**	16 [†] (-1)	2**	2 [†] (-1)	972	48,460****	

Changes in percentage points since 2019 are indicated in parentheses. *This is based on a methodology that combines gender with sexual attraction. See figure 1. **This is based on respondents' self-defined sexuality. We argue that this methodology is most accurate. This methodology was not used in 2019. **The exact number of 'all coaches' and 'all club board members' are unknown, and contact information is not present. ***Data is retrieved 31.7.2025 from the DFA Internal Database (ID)

Attitudes and experiences in relation to gender, ethnicity, and sexuality

In addition to mapping diversity, respondents were asked several questions regarding their attitudes and experiences towards ‘club life’ in organised Danish grassroots football. We present key results below, referring to changes since 2019 in relation to selected minorities, including girls/women, people of immigrant/descendant ethnic origins, and those who identify as bi- or homosexual/non-heterosexuals. The questions asked in the questionnaire are used as titles for the figures.

As was the case in 2019, results suggest that respondents from each of these groups experienced challenges to their participation and involvement in football that were less apparent amongst ‘majority’ groups (i.e. respondents of Danish ethnic origin, heterosexuals or men). For example, 42% of respondents felt it was easier to be a boy/man than a girl/woman in Danish football. Yet, when girls’/women’s responses are considered in isolation, the proportion of respondents who suggested it was easier to be a boy/man in Danish football increase to 71%, even if the number of women reporting this finding has decreased since 2019 (see figure 4).

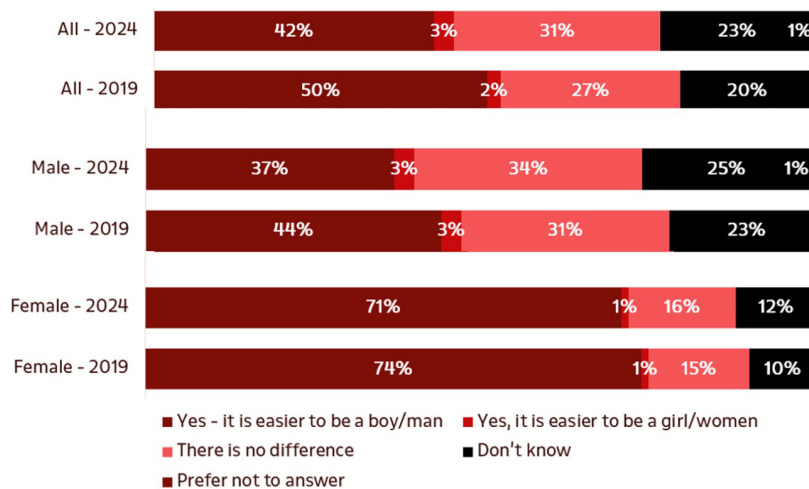


Figure 4: *Do you believe that there is a difference between how easy or hard it is to be a girl/woman or boy/man in Danish football? (V)*

Moreover, 27% of all respondents stated that it was easier to be an ethnic Dane than a person of immigrant/descendent origin in Danish football. When divided by cultural heritage, this observation was considered true by 33% of those with immigrant/descendant ethnic origins, as illustrated in figure 5. Although a considerable number of respondents felt this way, the number of people reporting this finding has seen a significant drop from 48% in 2019. However, it should also be noted that the number of respondents answering ‘don’t know’ (31%) and ‘prefer not to answer’ (2%) increased correspondingly.

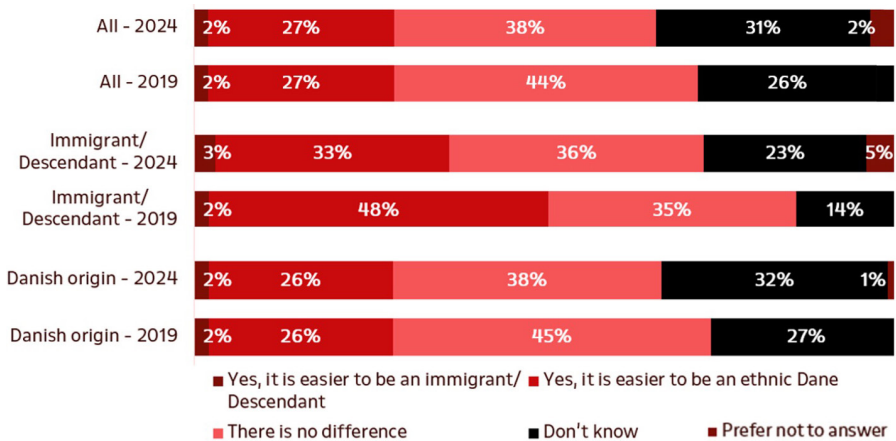


Figure 5: Do you believe that there is a difference between how easy or hard it is to be an immigrant/descendant or an ethnic Dane in Danish football? (V)

Regarding sexuality, 15% of all respondents stated that, in their experience, non-heterosexuals were treated worse than heterosexuals in football in Denmark. This result is similar to the result in 2019. When results are divided according to the sexuality of respondents (see figure 6), 39% of respondents who identified as homosexual considered this to be true, an increase from 33% in 2019. In the 2024 study, 24% believed that sexual minorities are treated worse than heterosexuals in the additional category defined as LGBTI+, which includes self-defined transgenders, bigender, non-binary and questioning respondents, although a relatively large number of respondents answered with ‘don’t know’.

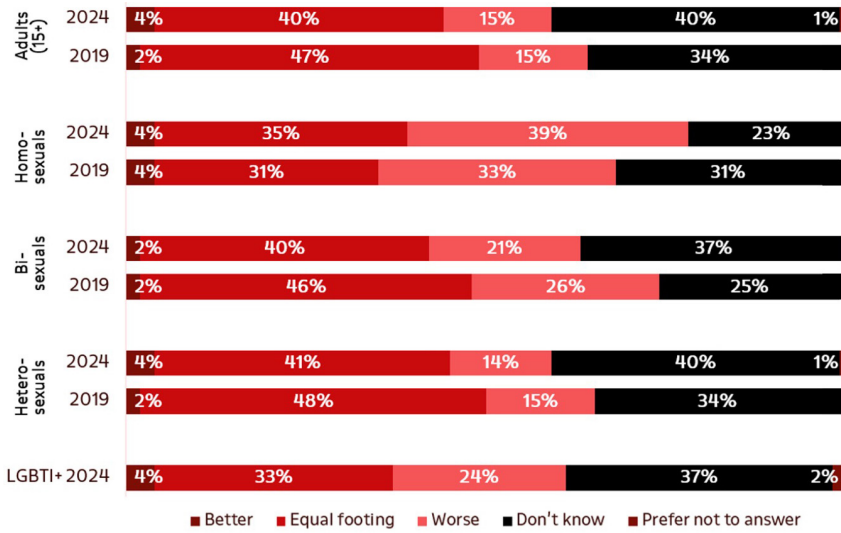


Figure 6: (15+) Do you believe that sexual minorities are treated better, worse or on equal footing with heterosexuals in Danish football? (V)

Discriminatory language in relation to gender, ethnicity, and sexuality Respondents were asked to reflect upon their experiences of discriminatory/derogatory vocabulary regarding gender, ethnicity and sexuality. In relation to gender-based abuse, 15% of all respondents stated that they regularly or often experienced the use of discriminatory or derogatory language (see figure 7), although this was less prevalent among those under the age of 15 (12%). It is also worth noting that 44% of all respondents reported never experiencing verbal discrimination. Additionally, there were gender-related differences in experiences of verbal discrimination, with women aged 15 and above more often hearing discriminatory or derogatory language (35%). These trends are broadly in line with the results reported in 2019, although there is a negative trend among girls under 15, amongst whom 22% regularly or frequently heard discriminatory or derogatory language, representing an increase from 14% in 2019.

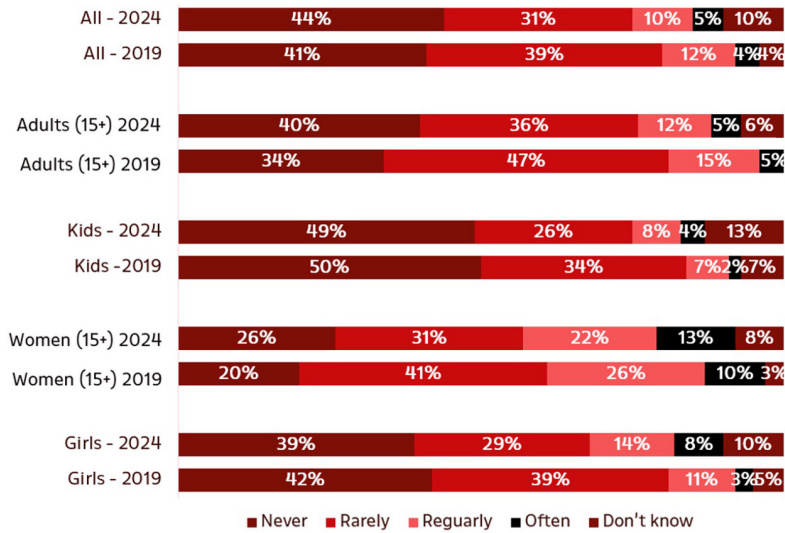


Figure 7: *In connection to football, how often do you hear discriminating/derogatory language in relation to gender? (V)*

Discriminatory language regarding ethnicity was also reported. In total, 16% of all respondents stated that they regularly or often experienced the use of discriminatory language in relation to ethnicity (see figure 8). Again, the proportion of respondents who gave this answer is higher amongst those of immigrant/descendant ethnic origin (21%), although this figure represents a decrease from 31% in 2019.

Finally, 15% of all respondents (aged 15+) stated that they regularly or often experienced the use of discriminatory and derogatory language in relation to sexuality (see figure 9); a decrease from 22% in 2019. The numbers were higher for those identifying as homosexual (40%) or bisexual (24%), although again both figures are lower than in 2019.

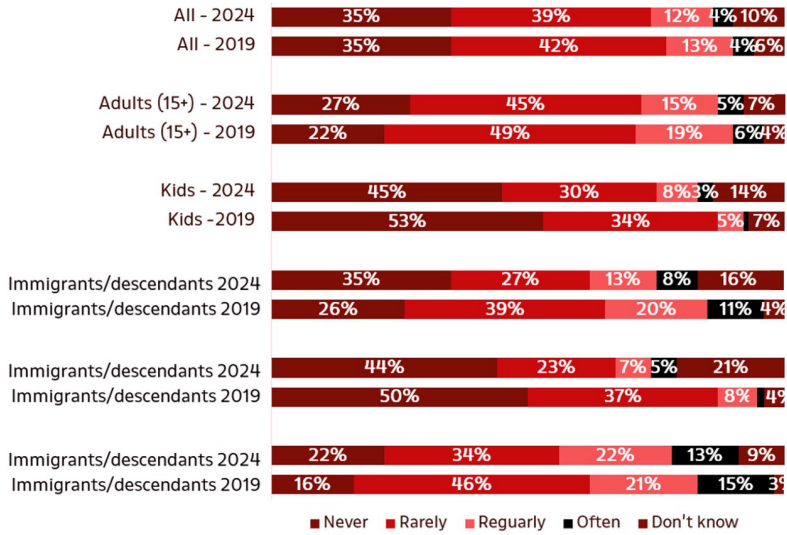


Figure 8: In connection to football, how often do you hear discriminating/derogatory language in relation to ethnicity? (V)

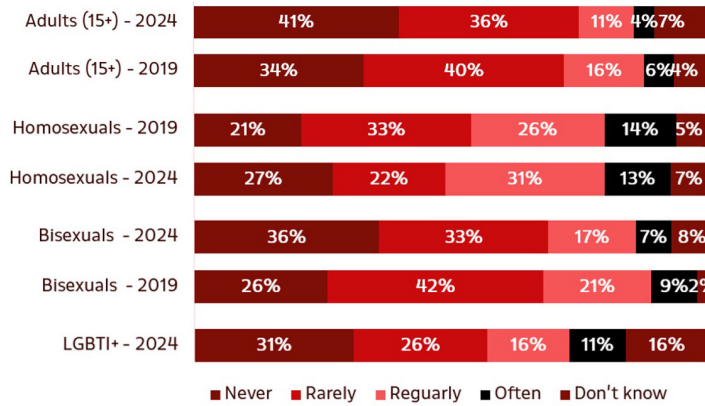


Figure 9: (15+) In connection to football, how often do you hear discriminating/derogatory language in relation to sexuality? (V)

Concluding remarks

Overall, the results demonstrate continuous inequality regarding girls/women's and immigrants/descendants' representation in the DFA football landscape when compared to the general population. At the same time, inequality (and the experience of inequality) has declined since the diversity study of 2019 in several respects, including increasing numbers of coaches with an ethnic minority background, and more women involved in Danish grassroots football overall. However, the results also demonstrate that those outside the 'dominant' group still experience discriminatory and derogatory language and simultaneously perceive their membership and participation in football to be more challenging than for many ethnically Danish, heterosexual men. At the same time, results suggest that participants amongst the majority groups hold a notable level of awareness that such issues exist, and data from the diversity study 2024 demonstrates that many respondents had a desire to see the DFA to take action to reduce such inequalities (Madsen & Bennike, 2025:57-58). This is particularly clear in relation to gender inequalities, with 51% of all respondents believing that the DFA should do more to make girls and women feel welcome. Not surprisingly, this perspective becomes stronger when looking at responses from the specific minority group in question. Hence, 74% of all girls and women thought that the DFA should do more to make girls and women feel more welcome in Danish grassroots football. Clearly, and despite several observed positive trends towards greater equity and inclusion, there is still need for further action.

The growing awareness of inequality is also present in the boardrooms. Indeed, that this large-scale survey was commissioned by the DFA for the second time suggests not only a growing awareness of the issues of diversity and inclusion amongst the sports' governance structures, but also a willingness to evaluate changes in discrimination and inclusion. What's more, an increasingly differentiated list of diversity categories, particularly with regards to sexuality, and the inclusion of disabilities and health issues in the 2024 study (not commented in this paper), suggests that awareness of diversity is becoming more sophisticated and nuanced. Furthermore the DFA established a working group with the aim of exploring how football in Denmark can become more inclusive with regard to gender identity (DFA, 2023). Following the results of this study, the Chairman and CEO of the DFA stated the following (Madsen & Bennike, 2025:4):

We cannot close our eyes to the fact that there are still barriers for several groups when they step onto the football field. Although more girls and women are coming onto the fields and into boardrooms, we still want more because it is important for the cohesion of Danish football.

We want to create a football community where differences are celebrated and embraced. Diversity allows us to learn from each other and gives us stronger communities and a richer football culture. Therefore, diversity is crucial for the development and relevance of football in the future. Danish football can and must be a place where everyone feels they have a place. This applies both on the fields, in the clubs, and in the decision-making rooms. This mapping (the diversity study 2024) is a cornerstone in the ongoing work we face.

Recognition of the need for diversity across multiple levels, from boardroom to playing field, is to be lauded, whilst cautious optimism is twinned with a recognition that more is still to be done. Both themes chime with, and build upon, our observations in the 2020 survey (Bennike et al. 2020), in which we outlined the need to address diversity at multiple levels of abstraction in this context. Furthermore, the ephemeral nature of diversity at the strategic level is notable. For example, whilst categorization of ethnicity has remained consistent, debates concerning sexuality and gender have, in recent years, led to changing terminology and blurring of boundaries between population categories that are likely to make monitoring diversity at the level of 'big data' increasingly challenging. The introduction of the LGBTI+ category illustrates such a shift towards recognition of the increasing complexity of diversity, although it remains to be seen how trans- and other gender-related groups could be recognized in the future (e.g. Merrill et al 2024; Baeth et al 2025).

From a historical perspective, diversity regarding gender has been in the spotlight for several years in the Danish context. In 2017 a political commission (DFA, 2017) was employed by the DFA to analyze and discuss the political structure of the organisation. Among other things, they argued for a higher degree of gender diverse representation in boards and committees of the DFA. Consequently, the DFA employed a 'Women's Commission', which devised several recommendations with regards to gender equality in 2018 (DFA, 2018). What's more, from 2019 additional elements of diversity other than gender were considered, and a Diversity Committee was established (DFA, 2019). This Diversity Committee examined the findings of the 2019 diversity study and issued a series of recommendations to strengthen diversity in Danish football. In turn, these recommendations

were reviewed across the Danish football community and the DFA board, who created the framework for several new diversity initiatives, grounded in the DFA Ethics Council as well as the new Governance and Development Committee. Among other actions, this included the appointment of a full-time diversity manager and a revised Code of Conduct (DFA 2020) which outlined much more explicit guidelines regarding discrimination than earlier ones had (§2.10), applicable to all involved in organised football (e.g. players, coaches, leaders, referees, volunteers and employees of the DFA). For example, it states that (§2.10):

Persons covered by this code must not offend the dignity or integrity of a country, a private individual, or a group of people through contemptuous, discriminatory, or offensive words or actions on the grounds of race, skin color, ethnicity, nationality, social origin, gender, disability, language, religion, political belief, wealth, birth or other status, sexual orientation, or any other reason.

When coupled with our data, a growing awareness of discrimination, inequality, and inequity highlighted above provides an important foundation upon which diversity-supporting work in Danish football can build. As in 2019, there remains significant scope for debate and further research within the field of diversity in organised grassroots football and sport in a broader sense, particularly in relation to evolving definitions and categorization in fields such as gender and sexuality. ‘Diversity’ is an increasingly intersectional and complex idea, fracturing due to factors such as the rise of identity politics, the reactionary politics of the right, and fluid power relationships that can lead to emergent social configurations that now supersede prior forms of diversity (Vertovec 2023). Such ‘superdiversity’ is likely to present challenges to sports federations, decision makers and those involved in governance, as social categorization becomes increasingly multidimensional, unfixed and porous. Indeed, such changes suggest that investigation of the lived experience of inclusion and diversity could hold far more weight and meaningfulness to participants than population-level trends in the future. Again, we call for research regarding the underlying causes of the trends presented here and more broadly that focuses not only upon diversity and inclusion, but also the meanings and interpretations both participants and non-participants utilize in negotiating the football landscape.

Acknowledgement and declaration of interest statement

Author Adam B. Evans has no relevant or material financial interests related to the present paper. Authors Søren Bennike and Claes Madsen do not have a direct material or financial interest related to the present paper, but are employed by the Danish Football Association, who funded the data collection.

References

- Baeth, A., Posbergh, A., Bekker, S. and Rochon, R. (2025). Sports and the Limits of the Binary: The Contested Terrains of Trans and Nonbinary Athlete Inclusion. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 42(3), pp.245-252.
- Bennike, S. & Schelde, N. (2020). Diversiteten i dansk fodbold 2019 [The Diversity in Danish Football 2019]. DBU. Available at <https://www.dbu.dk/om-dbu/viden-og-analyse/diversitet-i-dansk-fodbold/>
- Bennike, S., Schelde, N. & Evans, A.B. (2020). The Diversity of organised grassroots football in Denmark. [Idrottsforum.org](http://idrottsforum.org).
- Bennike, S., Schelde, N. & Evans, A.B. (2023). Discrimination in Danish organised grassroots football. In: Agergaard, S. & Karen, D. (Eds.). *Social Issues in Sport, Leisure and health*. Routledge.
- Bennike, S., Storm, R., Wikman, J. & Ottesen, L. (2019). The Organisation of Club Football in Denmark: A Contemporary Profile. *Soccer & Society*.
- Cleland, J., & Magrath, R. (2020). Association football, masculinity, and sexuality: An evolving relationship. *The Palgrave handbook of masculinity and sport* (pp. 341-357. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cleland, J., Cashmore, E., Dixon, K. and MacDonald, C. (2022). Fan reflections on sexuality in women's football in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 46(5), pp.458-476.
- D'Hoore, N. and Scheerder, J. (2024). Football for development, an arena for imperial hierarchies? Racism, the 'white colonial frame', and junior football in Belgium. *Soccer & society*, 25(3), pp.333-346.
- Degele, N. (2019). Talking football: Challenging discrimination and homophobia. *Moving the Social*, 61, 103-122.
- DFA (2017): Kommission anbefaler politiske reformer [Commission recommends political reforms]. Available at <https://www.dbu.dk/nyheder/2017/marts/kommission-anbefaler-politiske-reformer/#:~:text=En%20kommission%20med%20eksterne%20ekspert%20har%20de%20sidste,DBU%2C%20større%20mangfoldighed%20og%20en%20ny%20årlig%20fodboldkongres.>

- DFA (2018): Gå efter guldet – Sådan styrkes Danmark Pige og kvindefodbold. Kommissionen for flere piger og kvinder i fodbolden [Go for gold – How to strengthen girls’ and women’s football in Denmark. The Commission for more girls and women in football]. DBU. Available at <https://www.DFA.dk/media/9780/kvindekommissionens-rapport-09042018.pdf>
- DFA (2019): Nina Groes skal skabe mangfoldighed i dansk fodbold [Nina Groes is set to promote diversity in Danish football]. Available at <https://www.dbu.dk/nyheder/2019/maj/nina-groes-skal-skabe-mangfoldighed-i-dansk-fodbold/>
- DFA (2020): DBU’s Adfærdskodeks [DBU’s Code of Conduct]. Available at <https://www.dbu.dk/media/14973/dbu-adaferdskodeks-2020.pdf>
- DFA (2023): Inklusion af transkønnede, interkønnede og non-binære i dansk fodbold [Inclusion of Transgender, Intersex, and Non-Binary People in Danish Football]. Available at: https://www.dbu.dk/media/wc1ggpzx/dbu-rapport-om-inklusion-af-trans-interkonnede-og-non-binaere-i-dansk-fodbold_final.pdf
- DFA, ID (2025): Internal database of the Danish FA (Fodbolddata).
- DIF (2025): Dansk Boldspil-Union [The Danish Football Association]. Available at: <https://www.dif.dk/om-dif/organisation/forbund/dansk-boldspil-union>
- Downward, P. and Muniz, C., (2025). The opportunities and challenges facing participation in different types of women’s football in England. *Sport Management Review*, pp.1-25.
- FIFA (2007). Federation Internationale de Football Association. FIFA Big Count 2006: 270 million people active in football. FIFA Communication Division. Information Services.
- Madsen, C., & Bennike, S. (2025). Diversiteten i dansk fodbold 2024 [The diversity in Danish football 2024]. DBU. Available at <https://www.dbu.dk/om-dbu/viden-og-analyse/diversitet-i-dansk-fodbold/>
- Merrill, J. A., & Anderson, V. N. (2024). Sporting gender: Cisgender athletes’ attitudes toward trans athletes. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*.
- Neves, S., Topa, J., Borges, J. and Silva, E., 2023. Racism in football in Portugal: perceptions of multiple actors. *Social Sciences*, 12(3), p.165.
- Nielsen Sports (2018). ‘World Football Report’. Available at <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/report/2018/world-football-report/#>
- Pilgaard, M., Petersen, F.J., Munch, A.M. & Andersen, C.R. (2025). Danskernes motions- og sportsvaner 2024 – Hovedrapport med fokus på udviklingstendenser. Idrættens Analyseinstitut.
- SD (2025). Statistics Denmark. Indvandrere og efterkommere [Immigrants and descendants]. Available at <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/borgere/befolkning/indvandrere-og-efterkommere>
- Sexus (2019). Sex I Danmark – Nøgletal fra Projekt Sexus 2017-2018 [Sex in Denmark – Key Figures from Project Sexus 2017-2018]. Available at <https://www.projektsexus.dk/seneste-nyt/2019/rapporten-sex-i-danmark>
- Vertovec, S. (2023). *Superdiversity: Migration and social complexity* (p. 251). London: Taylor & Francis.
- Yiapanas, G. (2025). Addressing gender inequalities in European football: Key dimensions and strategies. *Insight. Sports Science*, 7(1), p.711.