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# Towards More Gender Equality in Sport

## Recommendations and Action Plan

From the High Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport (2022)



Sport

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Edited by Nicolas Delorme and Kolë Gjeloshaj

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# Foreword

Gender equality is a big priority for the European Union and for me personally. As a Union, we strive to empower everyone to realise their full potential, no matter their background or gender. Sport is no exception, no woman or girl should be left behind.

Sport should be accessible to all; it can improve physical and mental health, boost the immune system, enrich people's lives and play a positive role in society. It is one of the key solutions to tackle obesity and unhealthy lifestyles in Europe. Europeans are still not active enough and the situation has become worse due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The practice of sport and physical activity is now more important than ever. Unfortunately, statistics show that more men than women are active. Women leaders in sport are still in the minority and are facing too many obstacles. On average, women occupy only 14% of all top decision-making positions in European Union Member States' sports federations. Furthermore, we should not tolerate situations in which female athletes are exposed to gender based violence. The latest research provides us with stronger evidence on the magnitude of the problem and the urgent need to protect and empower women in sport.

Composed of former high-level athletes, politicians, members of European and international sport federations as well as distinguished academics, the High-Level Group on gender equality in sport worked together to produce recommendations and address topics related to girls' and women's participation in sport, female coaches, women's representation in decision-making processes, media coverage as well as gender-based violence.

These recommendations and proposals for concrete actions are addressed to the European Commission, Member States and international and national sport organisations. It is therefore important to join our forces and do our utmost to establish a more gender balanced sport sector across Europe. I am personally very committed to working on empowering women and removing barriers for them to realise their full potential – not just as players, but as captains, coaches and leaders.

I welcome this report as an invaluable input to the political debate and invite every sport stakeholder to use it as a practical tool-kit to achieve more gender equality in sport.

**Mariya Gabriel**  
European Commissioner  
for Innovation,  
Research, Culture,  
Education and Youth



# A word from the Chair

**Emine Bozkurt**

Chair of the High Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport



Every sports lover knows the way it works whenever there is an important match; suddenly the country has millions of ‘athletes’ and ‘coaches’ commenting on the performances on the TV or in the stadium. We need the support of sports lovers who want the best for their beloved sport if we are to create a winning team and make sport more equal for women and girls. Equality between women and men has been a fundamental principle of the European Union since its establishment. Female participation in sport and equal treatment at all levels are among the European Commission’s main priorities, but achieving gender equality remains a work in progress.

Sport is about achieving and perseverance, being the best, the fastest, competing with others or with yourself. While a winning mentality thrives in sport, interestingly sport underperforms when it comes to combatting inequalities. Leadership and speedy reforms are needed. Commissioner Gabriel has shown great leadership and commitment to gender equality. She launched the High Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport and appointed its 15 members in December 2020. Work began in February 2021 and was completed in December 2021. The experts, women and men, come from a great variety of Member States, from different walks of life - former athletes, academics, politicians, some coming from sport organisations, international federations, Olympic committees, the women’s movement, universities, all with a great dedication to gender equality in sport. We met online, because of Covid-19, with experts, scientists or practitioners, who were invited to come and share progress in research and good practices. Each of these meetings was followed by working sessions to expand on the topics and formulate recommendations.

I am extremely proud to present you the report of the High Level Group, the great teamwork done by our two rapporteurs Nicolas Delorme, Kolë Gjeloshaj and our other members: Claudia Bokel, Marisol Casado, Sanda Corak, Sarah Gregorius, Marijke Fleuren Van Walsem, Terhi Heinila, Sarah Keane, Dominique Monami, Christa Prets, Sarah Townsend, Tine Vertommen, Bogdan Wenta and myself. A big thank you goes to all the experts, the European Commission, the advisers, many speakers and organisations for their support and input.

We need the support of sports lovers, athletes, coaches, leaders and policymakers to create ‘Team Gender Equality’ to make sport more equal for women and girls. Please help by applying these recommendations in your organisations. Only as a team, inspired by the recommendations and proposed actions in the report, can we win and make our Union live up to its value of gender equality. Join our team!



# Introduction

Gender equality is a fundamental European Union (EU) principle. Enshrined in the Treaties, it is something the EU is actively trying to achieve – most recently through its Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2025. The Strategy aims to give women, men, girls and boys, in all their diversity, the freedom to pursue their chosen path in life and equal opportunities to thrive and to participate in and lead European society.

Looking back at the steps already taken, the ‘Gender equality in sport – Proposal for strategic actions 2014-2020’ has certainly led to achievements, but the pace of reforms needs to be accelerated. Firstly, the principle of gender equality now underpins all actions funded under Erasmus+ Sport and projects supporting women’s sport are actively encouraged. Secondly, awareness raising is at the core of EU action in this field, notably through studies or discussions, such as within the Commission Expert Group on Good Governance. Finally, initiatives such as the annual #BeInclusive EU Sport Awards recognise those organisations using sport to increase social inclusion, including gender equality.

In 2020, Commissioner Gabriel announced the setting up of an expert group with the aim of discussing the way forward and proposing future actions in the area of gender equality in sport to the European Commission, EU Member States and sports organisations. The work of the experts will lead to the implementation of concrete actions at local, national and European level.

This report is the result of the work of the European Commission High-Level Group (HLG) on Gender Equality in Sport. The 15 members of the HLG were appointed in December 2020. Work began in February 2021 and was completed in December 2021. Meetings focused on six areas of engagement identified by the experts. Scientists and practitioners shared findings of their research and good practices. Each meeting was followed by working sessions to summarise the presentations and formulate recommendations.

This report is divided into two parts followed by a bibliography and annexes which include a catalogue of illustrative projects. The first part is devoted to topics applicable to all the main themes. The second looks at key thematic areas and is further divided into three parts: presentation of the current situation from a scientific standpoint and of models put in place by intergovernmental organisations; recommendations; and action proposals for stakeholders, namely the European Commission, EU Member States, sports federations and organisations governing grassroots sport.

Given the importance of sport to society and individual physical and psychological well-being, the members of the HLG want sport to be integrated into public policies on gender equality, particularly as policies relating to sport and physical activity must integrate gender equality systematically. This report takes account of the 'Gender equality in sport – Proposal for strategic actions 2014-2020' report and the EU Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024, while embracing the Gender Equality Strategy's dual approach combining actions to achieve gender equality with stronger integration of a gender perspective in all EU policies and initiatives<sup>1</sup>, and the EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021-2025<sup>2</sup>.

This report is designed to be a concise document reflecting the HLG members' objective of implementing and developing measures for widespread use in order to have a long-term impact. The members see a need to speed up implementation based on clearly defined and budgeted action plans. In the 2010s, all stakeholders were involved in studying the position of women in sport and developing technical tools (gender budgeting, etc.). It remains vital that, within their field of expertise, stakeholders apply long-term actions as widely and as quickly as possible. All actions must integrate the policy on gender equality in sport as a criterion of good governance and any offers of support must be conditional on this. Aware that stakeholder initiatives in this area have multiplied, HLG members stress the need for evaluation and data collection to measure impacts, making it possible to achieve quantitative and qualitative objectives related to integration of women in sport.

HLG members focused on the adoption of practical measures at local level. While public authorities and sports federations have undertaken many initiatives at the highest levels, particularly international level, major dissemination, awareness-raising, monitoring, evaluation and support efforts must be made for the grassroots level. The members noted that a large number of relevant reports and recommendations had been available for several years, showing that awareness of the issue was widespread at the beginning of the 2010s. These resources are still relevant today. Members thus favoured a practical approach supported by appropriate tools and expertise (the transversal subjects) and wide dissemination of information for use by all groups involved, thereby ensuring that this report is relevant for everyone.

The multiplicity of initiatives, studies and publications on gender equality in sport, as well as the number of actors involved, makes it possible to identify common practices for each theme and maximise efficiency. The eight cross-cutting topics selected came up repeatedly during the work on the main themes. Since they are relevant to all six key thematic areas of engagement, we decided to highlight them for two main reasons: they are essential to the development and implementation of actions within the key thematic areas; and this allows members to focus on new, particularly scientific, and more specific contributions.



<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda\\_20\\_357](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_357)

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/join-2020-17-final_en.pdf)

The choice of transversal subjects makes it possible to reflect new developments and needs identified in the implementation of gender equality policies, resulting in the inclusion of topics such as 'Men as allies', 'Intersectionality' and the need for 'Coordinators for Gender Equality'.

#### The transversal themes are:

- Gender mainstreaming
- Intersectionality
- Gender budgeting/funding
- Policy monitoring and evaluation and research
- Education
- Communication
- Coordinators for Gender Equality
- Men as allies

#### The six key thematic areas of engagement are those which are most relevant for public authorities and sports federations in particular:

- Participation
- Coaching and officiating
- Leadership
- Social and economic aspects of sport
- Media coverage
- Gender-based violence

Over the past 10 years, many documents have become available on women's role, participation and impact in sport. These documents have the potential to contribute to more effective and rapid integration of women in the field. The trend is towards empowerment of women, a greater role in management, increased visibility, better protection in a healthy and safe environment, a reduction in discrimination and prejudice, and more regular and supervised participation in sport. Approaches are evaluated as much in terms of good management and governance as in terms of impacts on public health and physical and psychological well-being.

The challenge is to guide young people in particular towards a path of learning and empowerment in a structured way and on a large scale. The long-term objectives are to increase the numbers of women taking part in sport and people able to invest in all aspects of sport, from the most political to the most technical. Public authorities should impose the integration of a gender equality approach as a condition of their support. Monitoring and support mechanisms should be put in place by involving all actors and management functions (budget, human resources, networking, communication, etc.) should be organised so as to ensure that objectives defined by public authorities and other stakeholders are achieved. Increased efforts must be made to communicate with young women so as to enable them to better understand that through sport women can gain influence and experience and build self-confidence.

The aim is to ensure that, from local to international level, organisations integrate a gender equality approach into their operations and that everyone in the organisation applies the relevant policies. A special effort should be made to ensure wide dissemination of reference documents.

Efforts must be focused on training to supplement physical activity from childhood, with a special effort made to develop opportunities in schools, where compulsory attendance allows information to circulate more easily and structured extracurricular activities can be developed and linked with clubs run by qualified and experienced staff.

In the next years, the objectives defined in the previous decade must be achieved and monitoring and support mechanisms must be put in place for all levels of sport. It must be a decade of implementation with grassroots actors and investment in education to change mentalities and practices, starting from the learning of sport in school or clubs. It must also be one of increased access to positions of responsibility, moving from a symbolic presence to real leadership. Measures can only be effective by streamlining projects through evaluation by specialists and cooperation with the scientific community to establish broad data collection and analysis. This will allow for appropriate cross-cutting measures to be taken for the different forms of participation and target groups, with more knowledge of the most recent trends becoming available.

# Cross-cutting criteria and transversal recommendations

When considering the six key thematic areas, it is important to keep the eight transversal recommendations in mind. In each thematic area, some recommendations or 'ways forward' are directly linked to these transversal recommendations.

## 1. Gender mainstreaming

All main stakeholders (especially sport organisations) must implement a gender mainstreaming approach to achieve a global, integrated, structured and long-lasting impact. As European-level texts recommend integration of gender mainstreaming into sport-related activities<sup>3</sup>, sport organisations (especially at national and local levels) must be more consistent in adopting such an approach.

Gender mainstreaming is defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) as involving 'the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design,

<sup>3</sup> Council conclusions of 18 November 2010 on the role of sport as a source of and a driver for active social inclusion, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52010XG1203%2804%29>;

European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2012 on the European dimension in sport (2011/2087(INI)), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52012IP0025>;

Council Conclusions of 21 May 2014 on Gender Equality in Sport, EUR-Lex - 52014XG0614(09) - EN - EUR-Lex (europa.eu)

*"This report seeks to bring to life, through specific actions for all, how we can make a real impact on gender equality in sport. A key element is recognising that the traditional rules and structures of sport were primarily made for men and that we should mainstream gender equality into all sport policies and strategies."*

**Sarah Keane**  
CEO Swim Ireland  
and first female  
President of the  
Olympic Federation  
of Ireland



implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures and spending programmes, with a view to promoting equality between women and men, and combating discrimination’.

**Gender mainstreaming in sport can entail a three-pronged approach<sup>4</sup>:**

- **gender as a transversal theme and the integration of gender into the analysis, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all projects/programmes;**
- **gender-specific programmes and initiatives/budgets addressing specific gender issues;**
- **engendering organisations that integrate gender into procedures, staff competence, budgets, partnerships, organisational culture and equal opportunities policy.**

Only by having a gender approach in all sport-related activities, policies and structures can gender equality be achieved. Public authorities and sports organisations must include the gender mainstreaming concept in their reference texts.

## 2. Intersectionality

Although this action plan focuses specifically on gender equality, an intersectional approach to equality is essential. Intersectionality is a lens for examining how interlocking systems of power impact on individuals’ experiences and produce inequalities<sup>5</sup>. It posits that multiple patterns of identity-based inequality, such as sexism, racism or homophobia are mutually constituted<sup>6</sup>. Because of the overlapping of these inequalities, individuals experience them at varying intersections – sex/gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, etc<sup>7</sup>.

Consequently, adopting an intersectional approach will help us to understand why sport participation rates among multi-marginalised groups are still very low compared to those among dominantly situated groups. The same is true for all of the other areas covered by this report (i.e., coaching and officiating, leadership, social equality, media coverage and gender-based violence). Whiteness, maleness and heteronormativity are still prevalent in sport and sport organisations, and black women or LGBTQ+ athletes’ experience of inequality will be more accurately understood by taking an intersectional approach rather than viewing it through a single-identity lens. We thus recommend including an intersectional approach in gender equality policies (i.e., by also taking into account race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.).

“ I find truly important the strong commitment of high-level sport leaders to gender equality – in all aspects, at all levels. This requires change, both in leadership and structures. Sport organisations must have the courage and the will to make continuous efforts for gender equality and diversity, to support equal access for women in decision-making and coaching, as well as to tackle sexual harassment and violence in sport. The role of the media is crucial, and a lot of good progress in this respect has been achieved lately.”

**Terhi Heinilä**  
Secretary General,  
National Council of  
Women of Finland



4 Charlie Sever: Gender and Sport: Mainstreaming Gender in Sports Projects, ed. Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), 2005, [https://www.sportanddev.org/sites/default/files/downloads/9\\_gender\\_and\\_sport\\_mainstream\\_gender\\_in\\_sports\\_projects.pdf](https://www.sportanddev.org/sites/default/files/downloads/9_gender_and_sport_mainstream_gender_in_sports_projects.pdf)

5 Collins, P. H. (2015). Intersectionality’s definitional dilemmas. *Annual review of sociology*, 41, 1-20.

6 Collins, P. H. (1993). Toward a new vision: Race, class, and gender as categories of analysis and connection. *Race, Sex & Class*, 25-45.

7 Lim, H., Jung, E., Jodoin, K., Du, X., Airton, L. & Lee, E. Y. (2021). Operationalization of intersectionality in physical activity and sport research: A systematic scoping review. *SSM-population health*, 100808.

### 3. Gender budgeting/funding

Experience suggests that the sustainability and proper development of any policy depends on adequate funding, budgeting and the ability to mobilise resources. Ensuring budgeting that boosts the growth, development and sustainability of a project by influencing the main strategic operations should be a core regulatory goal for all stakeholders. Given the number and diversity of the stakeholders and the need for increased investment to overcome the current chronic underfunding of women's sport – with up to 70% of available resources currently spent on boys and men<sup>8</sup> – it is crucial to conceive, plan, approve, execute, monitor, analyse and audit budgets in a gender-sensitive way<sup>9</sup>.

As the European Parliament has highlighted a lack of progress in gender budgeting between 2015 and 2017, it is necessary that both public authorities and sports organisations dedicate budgets to gender equality in sport, regardless of the numbers of women taking part. It is also essential to ensure that sport is included in investment programmes under established gender equality policies (e.g., the EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 or the OECD Gender Equality Framework) and to make its inclusion in future policies mandatory. Use of the EIGE gender budgeting toolkit, which is available in all EU languages<sup>10</sup>, could help to achieve this goal.

All sports organisations (and their stakeholders) should dedicate part of their operational budget to the development and implementation of gender equality policies and actions. Sustainable provision of public funding is key to the development (and long-term viability) of such policies.

Allocation of a significant part of any public funds must be conditional on the implementation of concrete actions. Based on an initial cost assessment, a cost-benefit analysis, political judgment and prioritisation of projects, an initial affordability decision can be made. It is recommended that public authorities promote implementation of the OECD gender budgeting programme.

 *We need a winning team to make sport more equal for women and girls, for the wellbeing and safety of all EU citizens. Let us play together across the whole stadium, from policy to grassroots level, from the Commissioner to the volunteer on the field. Only as a team, inspired by HLG recommendations and proposed actions, can we win and make our Union live up to its value of gender equality. Join our team!"*



### 4. Policy monitoring, evaluation and research

Monitoring and evaluation of gender equality policies, along with scientific research, must be integrated into all actions. Policies must go into greater depth to allow adjustments to be made to actions that will contribute to progressive long-term change. Policies should be constantly adjusted to respond to changes in local situations and specific environments. When actions are planned, the different levels of the organisations must clearly indicate the monitoring, evaluation and data collection methods to be used.

Monitoring is a mandatory element of more and more public policies. UN Women defines it as follows: 'monitoring is the systematic process of collecting, analysing and using information to track a programme's progress toward reaching its objectives and to guide management decisions.... Monitoring is conducted after a programme has begun and

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/gov/budgeting/gender-budgeting.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/gov/budgeting/gender-budgeting.htm>

<sup>10</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-budgeting-step-step-toolkit>

continues throughout the programme implementation period. Monitoring is sometimes referred to as process, performance or formative evaluation. Evaluation includes feedback, learning assessment, transfer levels and results.'

**To support robust policy monitoring and evaluation systems, the OECD focuses on three pillars:**

- **building an institutional framework by putting the right legal, policy and organisational measures in place to support the performance of public policies;**
- **promoting the use of evidence and policy monitoring and evaluation by investing in public sector skills and policy making processes and supporting stakeholder engagement;**
- **promoting the quality of policy monitoring and evaluation, for instance through development of guidelines, investment in capacity building, and ex post review and control mechanisms.**

Data collection is an integral part of these approaches. Researchers must be involved to allow for the regular collection and analysis of data in order to adjust actions. Data collection and the allocation of financial resources to it must be systematic, permanent and compulsory. All stakeholders must build the legal and technical environments and processes to allow access to data and supporting platforms and tools. Online open data is crucial for ongoing monitoring/evaluation and to stimulate scientific research in gender equality. Collaboration with educational institutions such as universities is also highly recommended.

Finally, the implementation and efficiency of these recommendations and actions should be monitored and evaluated. For this, we suggest the creation of a permanent high-level group on gender equality in sport.

## 5. Education

Educational training and information support tools must be an integral part of each stage of the implementation of the gender equality action plans, strategies and measures resulting from the recommendations. They are essential for providing information on the latest scientific findings, learning new practices and explaining the reasoning behind policies, and they must be addressed to all strategic stakeholders, along with the appropriate methodology and format. Their main function is to support implementation by increasing knowledge of the importance and impact of gender equality policies in order to ensure that key players take ownership of gender equality plans.

To achieve this, stakeholders should create exchange platforms to help them convey the same message and implement the measures in the most suitable way. A variety of educational platforms, methods and programmes must be implemented to meet these needs.

An educational project is a strategic tool for defining priorities and expected results and publicising them to target groups. It is therefore part of an approach that promotes consistency and synergies between all levels of the system, taking into account that any change requires time and resources and may meet with reluctance. The most common actions are usually gender training (general or tailored) and awareness-raising activities.

*“As for most children, sport begins with school sport. It is therefore fundamental for ISF, as it promotes education through sport, to ensure that gender equality is well integrated and understood in all sport activities from an early age and at each step of youth development. The Report of the High-Level Group of the European Commission is a very important support tool for youth as it involves all key stakeholders, covering all angles to achieve gender equality in sport.”*



**Kolë Gjeloshaj**  
Deputy Secretary  
General ISF

## 6. Communication

Communication is an integral part of the Gender Equality Strategy and should play an important role in the promotion of this report and the implementation of its recommendations by stakeholders. Consequently, HLG members stress the need to implement a long-term communication plan.

All stakeholders must take ownership of this report so that it contributes to structured implementation of concrete actions. It is necessary to strengthen and structure cooperation between stakeholders so as to develop their instruments, capacities, policies and actions, while facilitating dialogue and exchange of experience.

An initial strategy would involve giving stakeholders comprehensive information because any change requires a real understanding of its nature and means of implementation. The report must thus be a reference document for public policies. It is designed to feed into the action plans of sports organisations and to be the subject of critical analysis by the scientific community.

### The recommendations are:

- disseminate the report to stakeholders and make it widely available as a reference document from international to local level;
- ensure the financial, human and technical means to support consistent, long-term and innovative communication plans and related actions to promote the report;

- communicate on the use of the report;
- refer to the report in relation to actions undertaken within stakeholders' gender equality strategies;
- organise events to present and discuss the report;
- integrate the report into public policies;
- translate the report into all official EU languages.

## 7. Coordinators for gender equality (CGE)

The appointment of CGEs by all sport organisations (from international federations to grassroots levels) and public authorities involved in sport – by hiring someone or training an existing member of the organisation – is highly recommended.

The aim is to ensure that gender equality strategies/ action plans are implemented and monitored in the most efficient and organised manner by people with the requisite knowledge (i.e., a theoretical and practical understanding of gender equality, intersectionality and community development approaches).

This role involves the development, delivery and evaluation of a range of initiatives to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence. The CGE will play a key role in providing technical advice, coordinating and implementing activities (gender training and awareness raising) and applying rules, procedures and gender-mainstreaming in programmes.



The CGE's tasks include but are not limited to:

- assisting with the development and management of gender initiatives for all programme components and the provision of technical support and training in gender approaches for various stakeholders;
- ensuring that gender is integrated into management frameworks, strengthening and supporting gender equality strategies and building gender equality capacity among members of the organisation;
- ensuring that all programmes are gender-sensitive;
- formulating key gender messages gained from field experience, assessments, research and project implementation;
- contributing to the formulation, development and implementation of short- and long-term project objectives and initiatives;
- exploring opportunities to integrate gender equality considerations into other operational areas.

## 8. Men as allies

Sport organisations have historically been dominated by men. There is still an important gap between the numbers of women and men in positions of power in sport<sup>11</sup>. Men in decision-making positions are thus often seen as barriers as they tend to reflect masculine hegemony<sup>12</sup>. However, there

11 Burton (2015)

12 Burton (2019)

is clear evidence in the scientific literature of the positive impact of men acting as allies to women within sport<sup>13</sup>. One can thus shift from a negative to a positive framing, where men are seen as part of the solution. Indeed, allyship assumes that individuals who are part of a dominant social group can ally with a marginalised social group to combat systemic oppression and move toward a system where power is shared equitably<sup>14</sup>.

Gender allyship recognises that men hold most decision-making positions and aims to leverage the access they have to create change within sport. This can be done by supporting women and giving them access to and opportunities in circles from which they are usually excluded<sup>15</sup>. Male leaders have access to strategic discussions that create and shape policies, giving them the opportunity to support radical organisational change in sport<sup>16</sup>. By doing so, men can rally additional allies, which is crucial because an individual ally alone cannot solve the problem<sup>17</sup>. Consequently, male allies play an important role in building a coalition for reform that can create change<sup>18</sup>.

It is thus crucial to empower men as gender equality promoters in all areas covered by this report.

13 Heffernan (2018)

14 Patel (2011)

15 Heffernan (2018)

16 Ely & Meyerson (2000)

17 Bishop (2002); Reason et al. (2005)

18 Heffernan (2018)

*I had a lot of support from both male and female athletes and sporting officials to become the first woman elected as Chair of the IOC Athletes' Commission. This position has given me the opportunity to support, empower and mentor many female athletes into leadership positions. Only by working together we can achieve gender equality and pave the way to a gender-balanced leadership at all levels."*





# Participation

## Background

As highlighted in key reference documents<sup>19</sup>, regular and moderate physical activity brings various health, psychological and social benefits, while a sedentary lifestyle is a risk factor in the development of many chronic illnesses. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased the prevalence of sedentary lifestyles, especially among girls and women<sup>20</sup>.

According to the Eurobarometer on sport and physical activity<sup>21</sup>, women (36%) are less likely than men (44%) to regularly take part in sport in Europe. Similarly, 40% of men never do any physical activity, compared with 52% of women. Even if significant differences exist between Member States, women's participation in sport is always lower than men's. The frequency of women's participation in sport also decreases with age: 33% of women in the 15-24 age group do not do any physical activity. This increases to 42% in the 25-39 age group, 50% in the 40-54 age group and 64% in the 55+ age group. For men, the rate of physical inactivity is

15% in the 15-24 age group, 28% in the 25-39 age group, 39% in the 40-54 age group and 58% in the 55+ age group. Women are also less heavily involved in voluntary activities related to sport than men (4% vs. 8%)<sup>22</sup>.

According to recent scientific literature<sup>23</sup>, this gender gap is caused by practical, personal and sociocultural barriers. Practical barriers include lack of time, childcare and money, safety concerns and limited access to facilities. Personal barriers include negative body image, lack of appropriate clothing/equipment, lack of self-confidence/self-esteem and parental/family influences. Sociocultural barriers include a perception of sport as male-dominated, gender stereotypes, a lack of female role models, harassment and abuse (see the section on gender-related violence) and attitudes and prejudices regarding sexuality, disability and ethnicity. Because of these barriers, participation in sport among women is more likely to take place outside of sports organisations and clubs than that among men. In addition, because of the

19 The EU Physical Activity Guidelines; the Physical Activity Strategy for the WHO European Region 2016-2025; and the WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour

20 Garcia-Tascon et al. (2020).

21 [https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2164\\_88\\_4\\_472\\_eng?locale=en](https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2164_88_4_472_eng?locale=en)

22 Special Eurobarometer 472: Sport and physical activity (2018)

23 Abdelghaffar & Siham (2019); Andersen & Bakken (2019); Basterfield et al. (2016); Downward et al. (2014); Eime et al. (2015); Grima et al. (2017); Hickey et al. (2017); Hulteen et al. (2017); Jenkin et al. (2017); O'Reilly et al. (2018); Portela-Pino et al. (2020); Somerset & Hoare (2018); Spiteri et al. (2019); Storr et al. (in press)

aforementioned gender stereotypes, women are overrepresented in some sports (such as dance or gymnastics) and underrepresented in others (such as boxing or rugby). Where we see barriers to sport due to a gender binary approach, we must also recognise that the barriers run deeper for some. The recent OUTSPORT survey<sup>24</sup> found that 90% of respondents felt that homo/transphobia was prevalent in sport due to issues ranging from negative personal experiences to homo/transphobic language<sup>25</sup>.



**Sarah Townsend**  
Co-president EGLSF

*Equality in sport means offering everyone the same opportunities in sport, at all levels – from participation to management. Achieving this means challenging ourselves, our clubs, and our sporting bodies; it means changing the culture of sport and learning how to embrace diversity.”*

## Recommendations

### 1. Mainstream gender equality across all sport policies and strategies

Factor gender equality into all sport, youth, health and education policies, allocation of resources and decision making. Starting from schools, set up mechanisms to support the practice of sport by girls and women of all ages, especially among more vulnerable and less active groups. Provide, from grassroots to elite level, opportunities for women to participate in sport in order to ensure convergence of health, empowerment, inclusion and integration objectives and impacts. Promote work/study-family balance and sport practice.

### 2. Create gender equality action plans and earmark funding to advance opportunities for participation in sport for all girls and women

These action plans should cater for women in all their diversity and target participation in sport by women of all ages. They should also highlight the opportunities that sport provides for girls and women in terms of volunteering, citizenship and community leadership.

### 3. Guarantee equal access to resources (including venues, equipment and clothing)

Eliminate barriers and discriminatory behaviour against girls and women. Secure equal access for all girls and women as regards practice and competition times, quality infrastructure and equipment. Develop safe public indoor and outdoor sport spaces.

### 4. Monitoring and evaluation on progress/implementation

Encourage the European Commission, Member States and sport organisations to monitor and evaluate the current status of, progress towards and barriers to gender equality. Develop harmonised monitoring and evaluation methodologies.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.out-sport.eu/survey-2/>

<sup>25</sup> Special Eurobarometer 472: Sport and physical activity (2018)

## Ways forward



### European Commission

- Pursue cooperation with the Council of Europe and continue developing and implementing the All-In project.
- Promote and support research on gender equality in sport and create opportunities for minority groups, taking into account intersectionality.
- Include gender mainstreaming in Erasmus+ and other EU funding instruments. Stress the possibility to allocate funds from the European Regional Development Fund to improve gender equality in sports facilities.
- Measure, monitor, evaluate and share progress towards gender equality in sport. Structures such as EIGE could be mobilised.
- Promote outreach to girls and women through the European Week of Sport (EWoS) and HealthyLife-style4All.
- Establish tools for sport organisations to celebrate inspiring role models and examples of women's and girls' participation (e.g., establishing a BeEqual award or a specific category of the BeInclusive EU Sport Awards).
- Convene a dialogue with all stakeholders to advance gender-equal sport opportunities.



### Member States

- Make public funding for sport organisations conditional on the development and implementation of strategic gender equality plans and actions.
- Create gender-equal sport policies in cooperation with sporting bodies.
- Encourage a practical gender-based approach to the assessment by public bodies of proposed sports projects and programmes.
- Stress the importance of and allocate resources to ensuring quality physical education programmes in schools and extracurricular school sport activities for girls of all ages and in all their diversity to prevent dropout from physical education and school sports activities.
- Provide safe facilities and equipment for all girls and women, especially at venues funded with public money (including schools).

- Require that qualified coaches, officials and leaders advance safe participation in sport for women.
- Endorse international human rights and women's rights conventions to promote sporting opportunities and prohibit the enactment of gender discriminatory regulations and processes.
- Revise legislation, implement procedures and provide incentives and financial support to advance sport-related gender equality policies, education and research.



### International and national sport organisations

- Give funding incentives to member organisations to develop and implement gender equality plans and actions.
- Create gender equal sport policies by revising regulations, providing financial support and other incentives and implementing new procedures.
- Support national, regional and local sport infrastructure (including in schools) by making safe facilities and equipment available to all girls and women.
- Provide financial, material and educational support for qualified coaches, officials and leaders to promote safe participation of women in sport.
- Provide equal opportunities for all girls and women to compete in sport at every level (e.g., design programmes that address gender imbalance).
- Use legacy programmes associated with major sporting events to increase opportunities for girls and women to participate in sport.



### Grassroots entities

- Create gender equality and safeguarding policies for girls and women in all their diversity.
- Provide and secure availability of safe facilities and equipment for all girls and women.
- Include disciplinary measures and procedures regarding gender-based violence/abuse/harassment in codes of ethics and establish support services for those affected.
- Appoint coordinators for gender equality.

# Coaching and officiating

## Background

According to the Eurobarometer on sport and physical activity<sup>26</sup>, men (30%) are more likely than women (23%) to become coaches. Based on figures from seven EU Member States, the 2015 EIGE report on gender equality in sport concluded that only 20-30% of sports coaches in Europe

are women<sup>27</sup>. Similarly, women only accounted for 13% of coaches and 30.5% of officials at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Women are thus clearly underrepresented in coaching and officiating positions, especially at elite level. In addition, women coaches and officials are mainly concentrated in

*The common work with the experts in the HLG has shown very clearly the existing lags related to gender equality in sport and has elaborated appropriate recommendations for action to achieve a fair cooperation between all involved in sport. I hope and wish that, in the coming years, this is really the case in practice by those responsible for sport in the EU Member States."*

**Christa Prets**  
President 100%Sport  
Austria



26 [https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2164\\_88\\_4\\_472\\_eng?locale=en](https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2164_88_4_472_eng?locale=en)

27 <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-equality-sport>

sports with high levels of women's participation such as dance or gymnastics<sup>28</sup>. They are also more involved at local and regional levels than at national and international levels<sup>29</sup>.

According to the recent scientific literature<sup>30</sup>, this gender gap is caused by issues including organisational, sociocultural, interpersonal and personal barriers. Organisational, social and cultural barriers include a lack of opportunity for women to coach, the perception of coaching as male-dominated and gender stereotypes linked to factors such as lack of exposure and opportunities for international experience, lack of networks for female coaches and lack of interest in these issues at leadership levels. Interpersonal barriers include a lack of support from training coordinators and negative interactions with male counterparts due to gender stereotypes. Personal barriers include lack of remuneration, difficulties in balancing family life and full-time coaching, the impact of gender stereotypes on self-confidence/self-esteem and the lack of educational programmes.

If female role models play a significant role in increasing women's participation in sport<sup>31</sup>, the same does not appear to be true for coaching<sup>32</sup> but it does in retention: women who enter coaching are four times more likely to remain if they have a female role model.

Mentoring initiatives thus have a significant impact<sup>33</sup> even if this practice remains conceptually vague<sup>34</sup> but the benefits are limited to the individual and interpersonal levels<sup>35</sup>. The organisational/sociocultural level still needs attention. Along with mentoring programmes, a dual strategy consisting of formal regulations (e.g., targets and quotas) and women-centred approaches to preferential treatment seems to have a positive impact on the recruitment and empowerment of women coaches<sup>36</sup>.

As far as women officials are concerned, a recent scientific literature review shows a lack of reported research in this area, especially at European level<sup>37</sup>. The few available studies focus on four themes: barriers, supports, motives and retention. The main barriers are related to negative perceptions of and sexist attitudes towards female officials from players, coaches and spectators<sup>38</sup>.

## Recommendations

### 1. Provide education on and support development of coaching and officiating opportunities for women from grassroots to elite level

Ensure that gender-equal participation targets are set for educational programmes for coaches and officials. Develop initiatives and programmes with minimum participation targets to provide national and international experience for women (from national level to international championships).

### 2. Mentoring

Develop mentoring initiatives at all levels.

### 3. Amend recruitment processes and incentives

Establish appropriate recruitment processes to make coaching and officiating at volunteer and professional levels attractive and open to women. Incentivise the recruitment of women at all levels, with special focus on national teams and higher levels of competition.

### 4. Foster attractiveness and communication

Invest in campaigns to attract and maintain girls' and women's interest in coaching and officiating. Identify and promote role models and positive aspects of being a coach/official.

### 5. Research/data collection

Invest in research, education and policies that promote and safeguard women in coaching and officiating. Implement tools and processes that encourage data collection and research and increase knowledge. Promote exchange of information at European level, requesting that countries set up national registers of coaches and officials with details about women coaches.

28 LaVoi (2017)

29 Norman (2021a)

30 LaVoi (2017); Banwell (2021); Day (2021); Norman (2021b)

31 Mutter & Pawlowski (2014)

32 Wasend & LaVoi (2019)

33 Banwell et al. (2019)

34 Leeder & Sawiuk (in press)

35 Banwell et al. (2020)

36 Tjørndal (2021)

37 Baxter et al. (in press)

38 Forbes et al. (2015); Nordstrom et al. (2016)

## Ways forward



### European Commission

- Promote good practices and targets to support female coaches and officials.
- Promote inclusion of provisions for women in coaching and officiating in the gender equality plans and actions of Member States and sport organisations.
- Draw attention to funding opportunities for research and call on Member States to investigate the numbers, background and experiences of women coaches and officials in a standardised way.
- Support promotional campaigns portraying women and men in non-gender-stereotypical sports and roles.



### Member States

- Provide funding for gender equality officers from national to grassroots levels.
- Lay down provisions for women in coaching and officiating in national gender equality plans.
- Promote equal opportunities and equal pay for women coaches and officials.
- Set targets for the recruitment and development of women as coaches and officials.
- Monitor and evaluate gender equality actions.
- Support mentoring programmes from school and grassroots to professional level.
- Promote work-life balance and family-friendly employment measures.
- Support educational programmes addressing gender stereotypes in schools and sports organisations.
- Support promotional campaigns portraying women and men in non-gender-stereotypical sports and roles.
- Launch additional research on cultural and organisational barriers faced by women high-performance coaches and participation coaches who aspire or have failed to become high-performance coaches.



### International and national sport organisations

- Develop and implement provisions for equal representation of women high-performance coaches and officials in leadership and coaching teams (e.g., gradual targets for sports competitions, educational workshops, etc.).



- Make the closing of the gender gap in coaching and officiating a priority and develop an action plan for the recruitment, training and development of women coaches and officials.
- Offer development opportunities for women coaches at all levels through shadowing, communities of practice, mentoring and networking programmes.
- Regularly monitor the gender gap in coaching/officiating and the effectiveness of the measures in place.
- Include a module on preventing discrimination (targeting gender and racial biases, LGBTQI+-phobia, etc.) in all training programmes.
- Develop and implement measures to retain women coaches and officials (e.g., more education and specialisation, open recruitment processes, child support).
- Introduce measures to support elite women's athlete-to-coach and athlete-to-official transitions at all stages.
- Develop and implement measures that promote work-life balance and safeguard physical, psychological and social well-being among women coaches and officials. Adapt the planning of competitions at different levels, especially grassroots level, to allow women to combine coaching with their personal life.
- Promote women coaches and officials as role models and portray women in roles of leadership to challenge gender stereotypes. Involve men in this.
- Establish a mentoring programme for girls/women interested in coaching and officiating at grassroots level, including in schools. Offer incentives for clubs to take part.



### **Grassroots entities**

- Develop internal processes to enable women to become club coaches and officials.
- Establish a mentoring programme for girls/women at grassroots level. Offer incentives for clubs to take part.
- Adapt the planning of the practice of sport and sports competitions at different levels, especially grassroots level, to allow women to combine coaching/officiating with their personal life.
- Share experience with organisations that have coaches or officials as members.
- Offer incentives for women to go into coaching and officiating (e.g., free membership).
- Implement measures to retain women coaches and officials (e.g., more education and specialisation, open recruitment processes, child support).
- Implement measures that promote work-life balance and safeguard the physical, psychological and social well-being of women coaches and officials.
- Promote local women coaches and officials as role models. Involve men in this.
- Raise awareness of the benefits of coaching and officiating among girls from an early age.

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, speaking and gesturing with her hands in a meeting. Other people are visible in the background, and a coffee cup and smartphone are on the table in front of her. The word 'Leadership' is overlaid on the image in a large, black, sans-serif font.

# Leadership

## Background

A significant number of scientific studies have reported evidence of discrimination in sport management and governance<sup>39</sup>. Research has mainly focused on the lack of gender and racial diversity among leaders<sup>40</sup>. Significant underrepresentation of women and people of colour in leadership positions has been found at all levels, from local clubs to international federations<sup>41</sup>. EIGE found that, on average, only 14% of top decision-making positions in EU Member State sports federations were occupied by women, ranging from 3% in Poland to 43% in Sweden<sup>42</sup>.

A recent literature review<sup>43</sup> based on a multi-level perspective has identified various factors that can help to better understand the underrepresentation of women in sport leadership. At macro level, the organisational demography (i.e., who is seen as the right person for a particular position), hegemonic masculinity (i.e., the form of masculinity where stereotypically masculine traits and attributes are overemphasised), power games, stakeholder influence and institutionalised discrimination are the main factors behind the lack of women in leadership positions.

At meso level, operations are based on a perception of men as powerful and women as compliant. Consequently, all significant positions are taken by men. Organisational culture (e.g., the perpetuation of behaviours that reinforce hegemonic masculinity), negative stereotypes and discrimination (i.e., giving women fewer resources) also play a significant role.

At micro level, social capital (e.g., networks and mentors) has a great influence. Because women do not have access to the necessary social capital, they get significantly fewer opportunities. Studies have also reported that women have lower aspirations than men as a result of hegemonic masculinity and its associated negative stereotypes.

According to various scientific studies, quotas are one of the most efficient ways of increasing gender equality in sport leadership<sup>44</sup>.

39 Adriaanse (2016); Burton (2019); Elling et al. (2018); Evans & Pfister (2021); Kilvington & Price (2017); Pape (2020); Piggott (2021)

40 Delorme (2021)

41 Fowler Harris et al. (2015)

42 <https://eige.europa.eu/topics/sport>

43 Burton (2015)

44 Adriaanse (2017); Adriaanse & Schofield (2014); Sisjord et al. (2017); Valiente (in press)

 *It is great to witness more and more girls and women being included in sport every day all over the world. Still, women in leadership positions are rare and we must be more engaged and more persistent at local, national and international level to empower, educate and ensure an equal position for all in sport.”*



## Recommendations

### 1. Secure positions – empower women

Commit to gender equality in sport leadership and support measures to increase numbers of women in voluntary and high-level leadership positions.

### 2. Advantages of diversity

Raise awareness of and educate sport leaders in the value of diverse gender representation on executive boards and committees.

### 3. Equal representation

Implement a 50% representation quota for women in decision-making bodies at all levels. Establish term limits. Ensure diverse forms of representation, including in leadership positions. Implement principles of good governance.

### 4. Pathways and raising awareness

Set up educational programmes for all sports structures catering for people of all ages to raise awareness of opportunities, benefits and unconscious bias keeping women out of leadership roles. Build pathways to allow as many women as possible to play active roles in the management of sports related-activities.

### 5. Tools and measures

Support use of specific tools and cooperate with third parties specialising in the evaluation and implementation of leadership and gender policies.

## Ways forward



### European Commission

- Promote the use of funds and good practices for the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of sport leadership gender action plans.
- Work with and learn from best practice examples in organisations such as the International Olympic Committee, the United Nations or the HeForShe movement, where specific strategies promoting men as advocates for women are in place.



### Member States

- Allocate funds and develop, implement, monitor and evaluate sport leadership gender action plans.
- Ensure gender balance in government and appoint women to key decision-making positions.
- Offer funding incentives for sports organisations to ensure gender balance in leadership positions.
- Require that organisations receiving funding adopt term limits and minimum representation targets, appoint gender equality officers and report on their gender equality work.



### International and national sport organisations

- Adopt a gender equality strategy, with leadership as a key topic. Entrench gender equality targets for decision-making positions. Examples of good governance<sup>45</sup>:

- no more than three terms in the same position;
  - rotation in gender representation for all key elected positions (e.g., president, treasurer, secretary);
  - a minimum target for representation of women on decision-making bodies;
  - involvement of both women and men experts in gender equality bodies and empowerment of men as gender equality promoters;
  - publication of gender equality data in annual reports;
  - establishment of a diversity portfolio.
- Implement gender-sensitive and transparent selection processes for recruitment and succession planning.
  - Develop leadership programmes to empower and prepare women to apply for decision-making positions.
  - Allocate funds and launch actions to increase the supply of women sport leaders.

- Ensure gender equality committees and working groups are gender diverse.
- Promote women sport leaders and managers as role models.



### **Grassroots entities**

- Ensure that women are equally represented in decision-making positions and that girls' and women's concerns are voiced and acted on.
- Ask your national governing body or National Olympic Committee for guidance on gender equality.
- Participate in your annual general meeting and contribute to discussions about diversity.
- Look for allies (e.g., other local sports clubs, the local sports council, educational institutions) and raise awareness together.



# Social and economic aspects of sport

## Background

Sport is included in the EU's social and economic goals and equality between men and women includes equality in the labour market<sup>46</sup>. In the European Pillar of Social Rights<sup>47</sup> the EU pledges to foster equality of treatment and opportunity between women and men in all areas.

The main focus for the HLG members is to apply the principle of equality to eliminate the pay and pension gap and to ensure equal opportunities, social protection and a safe working environment. The HLG endorses the five main principles of the 2021 International Labour Organisation (ILO) report 'Empowering women at work'<sup>48</sup>, namely:

- **achieving equal pay for work of equal value;**
- **preventing and ending gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work;**
- **promoting work-life balance and equal sharing of care responsibilities;**

- **supporting women's equal participation in decision-making in the world of work;**
- **building a future of work that works for women.**

Labour market inequalities between women and men are significantly accentuated in sport. In the EU labour market as a whole, women occupy only a third of managerial positions. They also account for the majority of part-time work and their pay is significantly lower. The gender pay gap<sup>49</sup> is significant. Women earn on average 14% less than men, rising to 23% at managerial level<sup>50</sup>. The pay and pension gap is linked to cultural, legal, social and economic factors which go beyond the issue of equal pay for equal work and include childcare, tax systems, education and cultural norms<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union

<sup>47</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights_en)

<sup>48</sup> [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---emp\\_ent/---multi/documents/publication/wcms\\_773233.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/---multi/documents/publication/wcms_773233.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> The unadjusted Gender Pay Gap (GPG) represents the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/labour-market/earnings>)

<sup>50</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/infographs/womenmen/bloc-2d.html?lang=en>

<sup>51</sup> Labour Market Equality Driving Economic Growth Women in a Man's World: Ronald Bachmann and Peggy Bechara: Policy Brief. October 2018, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

Eurostat<sup>52</sup> states that in 2020, more than 1.3 million people worked in sport in the EU – 0.7% of all employment. Employment in sport is growing faster than total employment (8.5% from 2015 to 2020). Young people and men are well represented: 33% of employees are 15-29 years old and 57% are men – a higher share than in total employment. In terms of the impact of COVID-19, of the 54,000 jobs lost in sport from 2019 to 2020, 52,000 were held by women. Moreover, a higher percentage of jobs were lost in sport than in the wider economy: 4% as compared with 1.3%.

The SportingIntelligence Global Sports Salaries Survey<sup>53</sup> compared the wages of women and men and calculated a pay inequality ratio of 1 to 101. It is also worth underlining that the salary gaps in women sports are extremely wide. For example, in the first division of women's football in France, the gap ratio is 1 to 30. The differences are particularly marked in an environment where a very small number of athletes earn very high wages. However, the increasing interest in women's sport must lead to improvements in the working and social conditions of women in this sector.

52 [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment\\_in\\_sport#Men\\_outnumber\\_women\\_in\\_sport\\_employment](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment_in_sport#Men_outnumber_women_in_sport_employment)

53 <https://www.globalsportssalaries.com/>

### Marijke Fleuren van Walsem

President of the  
European Hockey  
Federation, Executive  
Board Member FIH



“*Together’ will be our mantra to support women and men equally in achieving their goals as well on as off the field of play. 50/50 in all aspects! We are making progress, but it will still mean a lot of dialogue, data, presentations and live support. But we will achieve it. Together!*”



## Recommendations

### 1. Ensure equal legal frameworks

Promote equal contract conditions (employment, media, sponsorship). Ensure that laws and rules for the protection of girls and women are applied and adapted to different forms of employment.

### 2. Ensure equal opportunities

Secure equal opportunities and conditions for professional women athletes, including career transition programmes. Implement transparent recruitment processes.

### 3. Secure social benefits

Set up processes to reduce all forms of economic inequality. Promote structured social dialogue and legal and administrative support. Make sure that women's rights under national labour laws are fully applied (addressing pay and pension gaps, sponsorship, social benefits, parental leave and maternity leave).

### 4. Publicise the issue of labour discrimination in sport

Launch campaigns highlighting the need to train employers and employees on the obligation to treat everyone equally. Set up systems to secure and monitor this.

### 5. Secure reporting channels

Appoint counsellors and support and protect whistleblowers.

## Ways forward



### European Commission

- Compile and analyse data on equal pay and other aspects of the working conditions of women in sport, building on information from other EU policy areas. Cover gender perspectives in work on harmonising sport statistics.
- Use Erasmus+ and other EU funds to support projects analysing and promoting equal working conditions for women in sport.



### Member States

- Adopt or adapt legal measures specific to women working in sport.
- Increase controls to ensure that rules on equal working conditions are respected.
- Make public funding conditional on a commitment to gender equality and diversity in human resources policies.
- Ratify and implement legislation related to this topic, such as but not limited to 'Eliminating Violence and Harassment in the World of Work' (ILO Violence and Harassment Convention No. 190 and Recommendation No. 206). Implement existing EU rules on protecting workers from sexual harassment and raise people's awareness about them. Implement the Work-Life-Balance Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers).



### International and national sport organisations

- Include sections dedicated to working conditions in gender equality policies.
- Adopt rules stating that:
  - women and men should earn the same amounts for events they organise;
  - working conditions of all women employees must be equal to those of men employees.
- Educate members about the need for equal working conditions for women.
- Develop maternity and parental leave policies.
- Integrate the issue of equal opportunities into labour representation processes.



### Grassroots entities

- Secure budgets to ensure suitable working environments for women.



# Media coverage

## Background

Media coverage of sport in relation to athletes' gender has been broadly examined in the scientific literature<sup>54</sup>. Studies show that women suffer more often than men from gender-biased coverage, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Most studies found that, quantitatively, aside from international events like the Olympics<sup>55</sup>, women's sports are significantly underrepresented in newspaper articles<sup>56</sup>, photographs<sup>57</sup>, airtime<sup>58</sup> and websites<sup>59</sup>, although this is less pronounced online, with some studies not finding any significant underrepresentation there<sup>60</sup>. Underrepresentation

contributes to a relative lack of visibility of women's sport, which is one of the main methods used by media producers to diminish women's status and reinforce the asymmetrical gender order in sport<sup>61</sup>. Indeed, an overrepresentation of men in media coverage will lead audiences to see men's sport as more important than women's. Through their biased

 *Increasing the visibility of female athletes and improving fairness in portrayal are key issues to fight negative stereotypes and to achieve gender equality."*

54 Fink (2015); Bruce (2016); Sherry et al. (2016)

55 Delorme (2014); Billings & Angelini (2019)

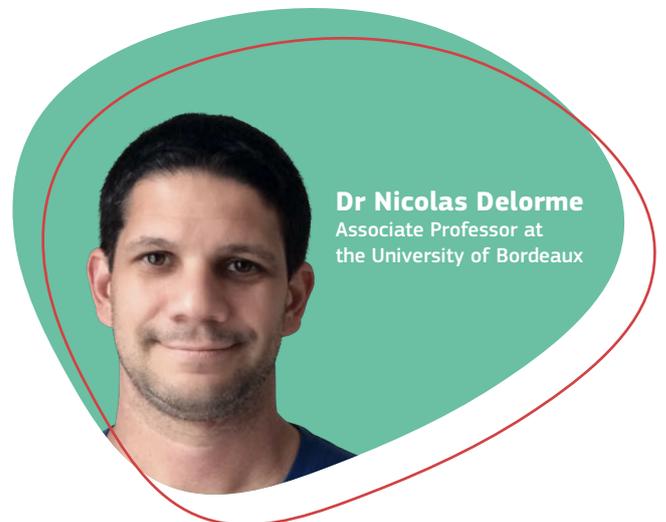
56 Organista & Mazur (2017)

57 Delorme & Testard (2015)

58 Cooky et al. (2015)

59 Coche (2015)

60 Coche (2013)



**Dr Nicolas Delorme**  
Associate Professor at  
the University of Bordeaux

61 Delorme & Pressland (2016)

coverage, sport media send the message that women's sport is not newsworthy. The ideology of sport as an exclusively male domain (i.e., male hegemony) is thus strengthened. Stereotyping in sports coverage also impacts on the LGBTQI+ community and men practising sports seen as feminine.

In addition, studies have pointed out significant qualitative biases in journalistic reporting, such as gender marking, infantilisation, differential framing and ambivalence, focus on femininity/heterosexuality or different production techniques<sup>62</sup>. Scholars argue that these biases likewise significantly contribute to preserving male hegemony in sport, particularly through the creation/maintenance of negative gender stereotypes. Consequently, a quantitative increase in women's sport coverage must be accompanied by qualitative improvements in the portrayal of women athletes; otherwise negative gender stereotypes will be strengthened.

Editorial choices often favour men's sports because most sports journalists/decision-makers are men<sup>63</sup>. These biases are however not limited to media coverage. Many international and national sport organisations reproduce them by favouring men's competitions in their own communication channels. In so doing, they actively participate in the preservation of male hegemony and the spread of negative gender stereotypes. Finally, competition scheduling and commercial investment also impacts on media coverage of women's sport.

Biased media coverage has various consequences, two of which have big impacts: firstly, the lack of visibility of women leads to a lack of role models which has direct consequences on young women's participation in sport and their future involvement in other roles such as coaching or board membership<sup>64</sup>; secondly, the lack of media exposure has a direct impact on the economic value of women's sport, making it harder to attract sponsors or guarantee fair wages.

*“Women can contribute to greater diversity in sport and combat stereotypes, as they become role models, inspiring young generations.”*

62 Fink (2015); Bruce (2016)

63 Hardin (2013)

64 Meier (2015); Young et al. (2015)

## Recommendations

### 1. Increase media coverage

Encourage the development of strategies, incentives and regulations to ensure that the different stakeholders (public and private sector media, sport organisations) increase media coverage of women's sport. Public sector media should be seen as key actors in this.

### 2. Improve portrayal

Launch initiatives to deconstruct negative gender stereotypes and portray women athletes fairly. Media organisations should be encouraged to hire gender editors and increase gender balance in their staff.

### 3. Raise awareness of biased coverage

Raise awareness of and educate sports journalists – and anybody else involved in sports information – on quantitative and qualitative biases in women's sports coverage. Include a specific module in journalism curricula.

### 4. Support scientific research

Implement tools and processes encouraging on-going data collection and research. Promote exchange of information at European level. Suggest that Member States create national platforms monitoring sports journalism. Publish standards for gender mainstreaming in the media.

#### Bogdan Wenta

Mayor of Kielce, former professional handball player and coach



## Ways forward



### European Commission

- Promote possibilities for gender-based analysis of sport media coverage in order to provide diachronic<sup>65</sup> quantitative and qualitative open data.
- Facilitate discussion with all stakeholders (e.g., private/public sector media, sport organisations, athletes, researchers, schools of journalism) in order to set objectives, analyse improvements, exchange good practices, define a common code of ethics on gender equality, etc.
- Use the European Week of Sport to promote women role models, especially in traditionally male-dominated sports.
- Publish and promote a toolkit on gender-equal media coverage.



### Member States

- Impose/encourage gender-balanced coverage in all public sector media. Scheduling of sports events (at prime-time) should also be balanced.
- Offer incentives for private sector media to provide gender balanced coverage (e.g., tax reductions, specific funding).
- Promote the inclusion of a gender equality module in journalism curricula.
- Support the adoption of a common code of ethics on gender equality in the media.
- Develop measures to increase the number of women in sports media and eliminate harassment of women journalists.
- Create a national observatory of sports journalism or a national platform to provide quantitative and qualitative diachronic open data on media coverage.



### International and national sport organisations

- Ensure gender-balanced coverage in external and internal communication, including on social networks.
- Use scheduling to influence coverage of sports competitions.
- Educate communication staff on the relevant issues.
- Inform women athletes about their rights in relation to media coverage.
- Work with media organisations to increase coverage of women's sport and improve portrayal of women.
- Provide guidelines, training and tools for grassroots entities.
- Create packages that include women's events when selling broadcasting rights. Include gender-equality and fair portrayal conditions in media-rights agreements.
- Perform market studies on potential audiences to target the best media partners.
- Create awards to promote media that provide gender-balanced coverage.



### Grassroots entities

- Ensure gender-balanced coverage in external and internal communication, including on social networks.
- Promote women and men as positive role models to challenge gender stereotypes.

<sup>65</sup> Diachronic means in this context "relating to changes that happen over time".

# Gender-based violence

## Background

Sport can increase physical, mental and social well-being and play a positive role in society. But it can also be the setting for harassment, violence and abuse due to inherent features such as authority relationships, pressures of competition, ambition, the necessity of physical contact, away-days and changing and shower rooms. More and more athletes are sharing personal stories of abusive relationships with the public through the channels offered by modern media.

In the last two decades, growing attention has been paid to gender-based violence (GBV) in sport in research, policy and practice. The European Commission defines GBV as 'violence directed against a person because of that person's gender (including gender identity/expression) or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately'<sup>66</sup>. GBV can take various forms, from physical (beating, strangling, pushing), to sexual (verbal and non-verbal sexual harassment, assault, rape) and psychological (emotional and online abuse, coercion). It can be expressed in verbal, non-verbal, contact, non-contact, online and physical forms. It is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm. Since the early 2000s, researchers in Europe and elsewhere have

shown that recreational, competitive and high-level athletes have all been exposed to violence in sport. Initial studies on sexual GBV showed that between 14% and 73% of female athletes in Europe are exposed to sexual harassment in sport<sup>67</sup>. Gender and sexual harassment were reported across a range of sports and levels, with verbal sexual harassment the most common form.

The latest research provides stronger evidence. Several national and international studies on GBV offer additional knowledge on prevalence, victim and perpetrator characteristics and circumstances. Most studies show that experience of GBV is higher among females than males. For example, researchers comparing the experiences of high-level athletes in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands found that 42% of females and 19% of males reported sexual violence<sup>68</sup>. A recent study on sexual harassment and abuse in Finnish competitive sport showed that 32% of women and 19% of men had experienced it, mostly from fellow athletes, while 23% of female athletes and 3% of male athletes had faced gender-based harassment<sup>69</sup>. A Canadian study of 995 national team athletes found that female athletes

66 European Commission. What is gender-based violence? [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence_en)

67 Fasting et al. (2011)

68 Ohlert et al. (2020)

69 Lahti et al. (2020)

had experienced significantly higher rates of all forms of harm than male athletes<sup>70</sup>. Sexual violence is most often experienced through comments, glances or hurtful jokes about looks or sexual orientation. Psychological violence is the most common form of GBV, most often reflected in verbal abuse and humiliation. As regards physical violence, the most frequently reported types are punishment with excessive exercise, pushing and hitting. As most studies do not differentiate between GBV and other types of interpersonal violence, it is nearly impossible to determine the full extent of GBV in sport.

While girls and women were the focus of the first studies into GBV in sport, recent studies have shown that boys and men are victimised to a greater extent than had been thought. In a new European study, conducted using anonymous questionnaires, young men reported higher levels of all forms of violence in sport up to the age of 18<sup>71</sup>. It is currently not possible to determine the extent to which violence against male and female athletes is gender-based.

Based on current knowledge, LGBTQI+ athletes, athletes of immigrant background and high-level athletes appear to be at more risk of violence<sup>72</sup>. A survey conducted by the European Outsport project found that homophobia and transphobia are prevalent in sport, with up to 82% of LGBTQI+ participants having experienced homo- or transphobic language in the previous 12 months<sup>73</sup>. Negative experiences linked to sexual orientation included verbal insults, structural discrimination, crossing of physical boundaries and physical violence.

The impact of such experiences is not only felt by individuals but also impacts on their families, other members of the organisation and the wider society.

 *Gender-based violence is a prevalent problem in society and in sport. The impact of such experiences is not only felt at the individual athlete level; it impacts the family, the sport organisation, and the wider society. It is clear that a multifaceted approach to prevention is needed, including preventive and repressive initiatives, targeting all stakeholders in the sport milieu.”*

70 Willson et al. (in press)

71 Hartill et al. (2021)

72 Vertommen et al. (2016)

73 Menzel et al. (2019)

## Recommendations

### 1. Implement educational and prevention programmes

Along with awareness raising, intensify efforts to implement educational and prevention programmes at all levels, especially grassroots level, targeting all members of the sporting community and covering the definition, forms, risk factors and impact of (cyber) GBV. A commitment from sports leaders and organisations at all levels to end sexual harassment and violence in sport is expected.

### 2. Collect data and monitor initiatives

Set up data collection to measure the extent of the problem and the efficacy of safeguarding initiatives.

### 3. Secure reporting channels

Set up whistleblowing mechanisms and protection for whistleblowers. Appoint, educate and support safeguarding officers who can handle complaints and reports from athletes and witnesses.

### 4. Exchange experience

Promote exchange of practice to prevent GBV in sport and build partnerships across sectors.

#### Dr Tine Vertommen

Criminologist, Thomas More University of Applied Sciences



## Ways forward



### European Commission

- Monitor research on the prevalence of GBV in sport to pinpoint longitudinal and comparative trends<sup>74</sup>.
- Include sport in a future Special Eurobarometer on GBV.
- Strengthen the partnership with EIGE.
- Investigate the possibility of using the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS) to ban people with recent convictions for sexual offences from working in sport.
- Provide funding for projects aimed at preventing GBV in sport. Highlight the need for such projects in existing funding instruments, e.g., Erasmus+ Sport and the Daphne and Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values programmes.
- Provide funding schemes to promote positive and healthy sport experiences.
- Support the European Parliament initiative on combatting GBV, which calls for a Directive to establish a common criminal law definition of sport gender-based cyber violence and to harmonise sanctions against offenders.
- Include specific measures against (online and offline) GBV in sport in the Directive on violence against women and domestic violence (scheduled for early 2022).
- Cover violence against women in sport in the network for exchanging good practices for preventing violence against women (starting in 2022).
- Mainstream the sport component in all existing actions to fight GBV.



### Member States

- Advocate for research into GBV in sport and evaluation of intervention programmes.
- Develop coherent policy frameworks to prevent GBV inside and outside sport.
- Link the funding of sport associations with the implementation of properly documented and effective policies against GBV.

- Explore the feasibility of national legislation on systematic registration of GBV incidents in sport.
- Explore the feasibility of national legislation on mandatory reporting of GBV in sport.
- Establish or expand national GBV prevention agencies to develop knowledge of and advocacy on GBV prevention in sport, and to support victims, perpetrators and witnesses of GBV inside and outside sport.
- Educate professionals in the police, justice, health-care and welfare systems on risk factors, signs, impact and forms of GBV in sport.
- Commit to zero tolerance of GBV inside and outside sport.
- Fund nationwide campaigns to raise public awareness of GBV inside and outside sport.
- Support national sport organisations in developing, implementing and evaluating safeguarding policies, programmes and initiatives.



### International and national sport organisations

- Develop comprehensive policies and programmes, including for education, screening, reporting and mediation and services for victims, whistleblowers, those accused and witnesses.
- Develop a safeguarding strategy for competitions.
- Appoint safeguarding officers holding appropriate certification.
- Share practices and build partnerships inside and outside sport.
- Provide mandatory training for everyone in sport who works with children, women and high-level athletes.
- Educate witnesses on signs of and responses to GBV, and their responsibility to report and intervene.
- Educate athletes and their entourages on how to recognise signs of and report GBV, and inform them about where to get help and support.
- Propose educational programmes and initiatives during sports events to promote safe sport among athletes and their entourages.
- Commit to zero tolerance of GBV in sport.
- Practice moral leadership to prevent and address GBV in sport.

<sup>74</sup> Longitudinal means in this context “an observation of the same subjects over a period of time”, and comparative - “measuring differences across countries and social groups”.

- Acknowledge that all forms of GBV, including online, occur in sport and can harm all members of the sporting community.
- Develop standards, in line with international practices, to help sports clubs develop and implement safeguarding policies.
- Enlist athletes and other prominent figures to act as role models as part of prevention strategies.
- Raise awareness of GBV in sport, paying special attention to vulnerable subgroups: LGBTQI+ athletes and athletes with disabilities, from immigrant backgrounds or on developmental pathways.
- Assess the risks of GBV in your own organisation.
- Appoint an appropriately trained local safeguarding officer who is supported by the national federation. Make sure this person is easily accessible, well-prepared and capable of prioritising reports of GBV.
- Screen the criminal history and pedagogical competencies of all adults entering a sport organisation who will be in contact with children, adults and elite athletes.
- Provide education to all organisation members or encourage them to follow educational programmes offered within or outside the national sport system.



### **Grassroots entities**

- Raise awareness of GBV in sport, paying special attention to vulnerable subgroups: LGBTQI+ athletes and athletes with disabilities, from immigrant backgrounds or on developmental pathways.
- Monitor and evaluate interventions.
- Propose educational programmes and initiatives during sports events to promote safe sport among athletes and their entourages.
- Communicate online and offline about the existence, risk and impact of face-to-face and online GBV in sport.
- Set up partnerships with the municipality, schools, youth organisations and other sectors in your region.



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# Annex 1 High Level Group members

## Chair

- BOZKURT Emine (NL)**
- Chair of the High Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport;
  - Several leadership roles in Boards of Directors of international organisations;
  - Former Member of European Parliament - Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality and Committee on Culture and Education (Sport);
  - Former Chair of the parliamentary group Friends of Football.

## Rapporteurs

- DELORME Nicolas (FR)**
- Associate Professor in Sociology of Sport (University of Bordeaux);
  - Author of several articles about gender equality (Gender stereotypes in sport and the role of media, Gender balance and equality in decision-making in sport);
  - Member of the scientific committee of the European Think Tank Sport and Citizenship.
- 
- GJELOSHAJ Kole (BE)**
- Deputy Secretary General International School Sport Federation (ISF) (supervision of "She Runs – Active Girls Lead" project);
  - International University Sport Federation (FISU) – Gender Equality Committee (Secretary 2007-2017);
  - Chair of the Consultative Committee of EPAS – Council of Europe (2020 - ...)

## Members

- BOKEL Claudia (DE)**
- Olympian in fencing (Silver Medallist Olympic Games Athens 2004);
  - World and European Champion;
  - Former IOC Executive Board Member and Chair of the IOC Athletes' Commission;
  - Permanent Advisor Dutch Sports Council;
  - President German Fencing Federation.
- 
- CASADO Marisol (ES)**
- President of World Triathlon Union;
  - IOC Member - Member of the International Olympic Committee Women in Sport Commission;
  - Chair of the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations' Diversity and Gender Equality Consultative Group;
  - The Chair of the IOC Gender Equality Review Project Working Group (2017 - 2018).

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| <b>ČORAK Sanda (HR)</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former athlete (5 times ex-Yugoslav champion; 10 times champion of the Republic of Croatia);</li> <li>• President of the Croatian Judo Federation;</li> <li>• Member of the EC of the International Judo federation and the chair of the Gender Equity Commission of IJF;</li> <li>• Vice-President of the Croatian Olympic Committee.</li> </ul> |
| <b>FLEUREN-VAN WALSEM Marijke (NL)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President of the European Hockey Federation;</li> <li>• Member of the IOC Commission 'Women in Sport';</li> <li>• Academic lecturer on gender equality.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>GREGORIUS Sarah (NZ)</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FIFPRO - Policy and Strategy officer;</li> <li>• Former professional football player (Olympic games, World Cups);</li> <li>• Member of FIFPRO Asia/Oceania Women's Committee.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>HEINILÄ Terhi (FI)</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretary General, National Council of Women of Finland;</li> <li>• Former Secretary General, IWG (International Working Group on Women and Sport).</li> </ul>  |
| <b>KEANE Sarah (IE)</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEO of Swim Ireland;</li> <li>• President of the Olympic Committee of Ireland;</li> <li>• Current Member of the Sport Ireland Women In Sport Steering Committee.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>MONAMI Dominique (BE)</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former Olympic athlete and bronze medallist of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games (tennis);</li> <li>• Board member of the Belgian NOC;</li> <li>• Member of the NOC Taskforce "Women in sport" and representative of the Taskforce in the Group 'Game Changers'.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>PRETS Christa (AT)</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Former Member of the European Parliament;</li> <li>• Former sport coach;</li> <li>• Chairwoman of "100% Sport", The Austrian Center of Excellence for equal opportunities for woman and men in sports.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>TOWNSEND Sarah (UK)</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-president - EGLSF - European Gay &amp; Lesbian Sports Federation;</li> <li>• Member ENGSO Equality Within Sport Committee;</li> <li>• President Activ'Elles04 – Women's MultiSport Association.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>VERTOMMEN Tine (BE)</b>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criminologist and researcher on Violence and Safeguarding in Sport (University of Antwerp and Thomas More University of Applied Sciences);</li> <li>• Coordinator of the International Network on Violence and Integrity in Sport;</li> <li>• Involved in EU-funded projects – focus on gender-based violence.</li> </ul>                         |
| <b>WENTA Bogdan (PL)</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mayor of Kielce;</li> <li>• Former Member of the European Parliament; Vice-Chair of the Intergroup Sport;</li> <li>• Former high-level handball player and coach (Polish National team).</li> </ul>   |

