



D2.2

Guidelines on

Gender Mainstreaming (in sport)

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Executive Summary

Gender equality continues to be one of the major obstacles in the European sports industry. Even with significant advancements in recent years, women and girls still encounter obstacles to involvement, leadership, recognition, and decision-making. Gender stereotypes, limited access to opportunities, underrepresentation in leadership roles, and ongoing gender-based violence still impact the sports experiences of numerous individuals. These Guidelines have been created as part of the FAIR GAME project to assist sport organisations, clubs, federations, local authorities, and other stakeholders in incorporating a gender mainstreaming perspective into their actions and decision-making procedures. Utilizing the insights, thoughts, and effective strategies discussed at the FAIR GAME International Training on Gender Mainstreaming in Sport, this document offers actionable suggestions for fostering more inclusive, fair, and secure sporting spaces. Gender mainstreaming should not be seen as the establishment of distinct initiatives for women and girls. Instead, it is a methodical strategy that guarantees gender factors are incorporated into every policy, action, framework, and decision within sports organizations.

1. Introduction

Sport and in particular women sport is crucial for enhancing health, fostering social inclusion, facilitating education, and encouraging community participation. Simultaneously, sports mirror larger social systems and disparities that are present in society. While sport is commonly seen as impartial and centered on merit, the chances and experiences in sport are often shaped by gender norms, stereotypes, and dynamics of power. These elements determine who takes part, who is depicted, who can access resources, and who holds leadership roles. Gender mainstreaming has become a crucial approach for tackling these disparities. Acknowledged by European bodies and global sports organizations, gender mainstreaming seeks to consistently incorporate a gender viewpoint into every phase of policy creation, execution, oversight, and assessment. For sports organizations, embracing a gender mainstreaming strategy involves transcending standalone equality efforts and integrating inclusion into the culture, governance, participation frameworks, communication plans, and protection mechanisms of the organization.

Gender mainstreaming starts by acknowledging that gender and sex are distinct concepts. Sex typically denotes biological traits, whereas gender pertains to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expectations, and norms linked to women and men. These expectations frequently turn into stereotypes that affect opportunities and experiences both inside and outside of sports. Conventional sporting cultures have often linked athleticism, competitiveness, leadership, and strength to masculinity, whereas women have typically been viewed through more limited social norms. These stereotypes may dissuade involvement, shape coaching



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methods, restrict career advancement, and impact the visibility of women athletes and leaders. A gender mainstreaming strategy necessitates that sports organizations analyze these beliefs and evaluate how policies and practices might impact various groups differently. It also necessitates embracing an intersectional viewpoint¹. People do not encounter gender separately, since elements like age, disability, ethnicity, migration history, socio-economic position, faith, sexual orientation, and gender identity can intertwine with gender, producing various forms of disadvantage or advantage. Grasping these overlapping realities is crucial for creating genuinely inclusive sports settings.

2. Key Areas for Gender Mainstreaming in Sport

Gender mainstreaming requires sport organisations to move beyond isolated initiatives and adopt a systemic perspective. Gender inequalities do not emerge in a single area of sport; rather, they are interconnected and reinforce one another throughout the sporting ecosystem. Participation, leadership, coaching, representation, organisational culture, and safety all influence the opportunities available to women and girls and shape their experiences within sport. A comprehensive gender mainstreaming approach therefore requires action across multiple dimensions simultaneously.

3.1 Participation and Access to Sport

Participation is often the first indicator of gender inequality in sport. Across Europe, women and girls continue to participate in sport less frequently than men and boys. Research presented during the training highlighted that the gender gap begins at an early age and tends to widen during adolescence, when many girls reduce or abandon sporting activities².

This disparity cannot be explained solely by individual preferences. Participation is influenced by a combination of social expectations, family attitudes, economic conditions, safety concerns, mobility restrictions, and organisational barriers. In many contexts, girls are still exposed to stereotypes suggesting that certain sports are more suitable for boys, while women may face additional challenges in balancing sport participation with family and caregiving responsibilities³.

Sport organisations should therefore examine who participates in their activities and who remains excluded. Particular attention should be paid to participation patterns among girls, women, migrants, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and other groups that may

¹ Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color
Kimberle Crenshaw

² Gender in Sport, European Institute for Gender Equality

³ Gender in Sport, European Institute for Gender Equality



face multiple barriers to access. Creating inclusive participation opportunities requires flexibility, accessibility, affordability, and meaningful engagement with the communities concerned.

3.2 Leadership and Decision-Making

Gender equality cannot be achieved without equal representation in positions of power and influence. Despite progress in recent years, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions across the European sport sector. Data presented during the training highlighted that only a small proportion of top decision-making positions in sports federations are occupied by women.⁴

Leadership structures shape priorities, allocate resources, define organisational culture, and influence long-term strategies. When women are absent from these processes, their perspectives and experiences may not be adequately represented.

Gender mainstreaming therefore requires organisations to critically assess governance structures and decision-making mechanisms.

Key questions include: Who sits on boards and committees? Who influences strategic decisions? Who has access to leadership pathways?

Ensuring gender-balanced representation is not only a matter of fairness but also contributes to more effective and inclusive governance.

Sport organisations should promote transparent recruitment and election procedures, leadership development programmes, mentoring opportunities, and measures that support women's participation in governance structures at all levels.

3.3 Coaching, Mentorship and Professional Development

Coaches play a central role in shaping athletes' experiences, confidence, performance, and long-term engagement in sport. However, coaching remains a highly gendered profession. Across Europe, women represent only a minority of sports coaches, and many girls and women are coached predominantly by men, even in female-dominated sports.

The lack of female coaches limits the diversity of perspectives within sport and reduces the visibility of role models for younger generations. Furthermore, organisational cultures and recruitment practices may unintentionally discourage women from entering or remaining in coaching careers⁵.

⁴ IOC, Objectives for 2021-2024

⁵ GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION PROGRESS REPORT 2021–2024, International Olympic Committee



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Gender mainstreaming in coaching requires organisations to examine career pathways, professional development opportunities, and workplace cultures. Equal access to training, mentoring, networking opportunities, and leadership development programmes should be ensured. Particular attention should also be paid to creating supportive environments that enable women to combine coaching careers with other professional and personal responsibilities.

3.4 Visibility, Representation and Communication

Representation matters because it influences how people perceive themselves and their place within sport. Media coverage, communication strategies, promotional materials, and public narratives all contribute to shaping social attitudes and expectations.

Despite significant achievements by female athletes, women's sport often receives less visibility, fewer resources, and lower levels of recognition than men's sport. Where women are represented, communication may sometimes reinforce stereotypes by focusing on appearance, family roles, or personal characteristics rather than athletic performance and achievements.⁶

Sport organisations should adopt gender-sensitive communication practices that promote balanced representation and challenge stereotypical portrayals. This includes ensuring equal visibility for women's and men's teams, using inclusive language, highlighting diverse role models, and actively celebrating women's achievements in sport.

Communication should also reflect the diversity of participants and contribute to creating a sense of belonging for all members of the sporting community.

3.5 Organisational Culture and Gender Stereotypes

Gender inequalities are often sustained by deeply rooted cultural norms and unconscious biases.⁷ The training highlighted how stereotypical expectations continue to influence perceptions of leadership, competitiveness, emotional expression, physical abilities, and career aspirations. These stereotypes affect both women and men and can limit individual choices and opportunities.

Many forms of discrimination are not always intentional. Unconscious biases can influence recruitment decisions, talent identification, coaching practices, performance evaluations, and access to opportunities.

Sport organisations should therefore foster critical reflection on existing norms and practices. Regular training, awareness-raising initiatives, and discussions on diversity and inclusion can

⁶ Towards More Gender Equality in Sport, EU Commission Factsheet

⁷ Brotherton, C. (2007)



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help identify hidden biases and promote more equitable organisational cultures. Gender mainstreaming requires organisations to move beyond assumptions and systematically question practices that may unintentionally reproduce inequalities.

3.6 Safe Sport and Prevention of Gender-Based Violence

A safe sporting environment is a prerequisite for meaningful participation and inclusion. Gender-based violence remains one of the most serious challenges affecting the sport sector worldwide. It can take many forms, including psychological abuse, verbal harassment, sexual harassment, physical violence, online abuse, discrimination, and coercive behaviours.⁸

The training highlighted that sport-specific factors can increase vulnerability to abuse. Strong power imbalances between athletes and coaches, cultures that normalise excessive control or harmful behaviour, and the perception that suffering is simply "part of the game" may contribute to environments where abuse remains hidden or unchallenged.⁹

Women and girls are disproportionately affected, while individuals experiencing multiple forms of discrimination may face even greater risks.¹⁰ An intersectional perspective is therefore essential when addressing safeguarding and protection measures.

Gender mainstreaming requires organisations to integrate safeguarding into all aspects of their work. This includes developing clear policies, confidential reporting mechanisms, support systems for victims, regular staff training, risk assessments, and strong accountability procedures. Safe sport should be understood not only as the absence of violence, but as the active promotion of respect, dignity, inclusion, and wellbeing for all participants.

4. Main Challenges Identified

During the training and the exchanges among participants several recurring challenges that affect gender equality in sport were identified:

- **Lack of Representation in Decision-Making:** Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership and governance roles, restricting their impact on strategic choices, resource distribution, and policy formulation.

⁸International Olympic Committee. (2017). Safeguarding athletes from harassment and abuse in sport: IOC toolkit for International Federations (IFs) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs). International Olympic Committee.

⁹ UNESCO and UN WOMEN, 2023

¹⁰ Discrimination and gender-based violence in sport, European Parliament 2024

- **Cultural Stereotypes:** Conventional gender roles persist in influencing views on capabilities and roles in sports, affecting involvement, leadership prospects, and public acknowledgment.
- **Stereotypes Concerning “Masculine” Sports:** Some sports continue to be viewed as more appropriate for men, discouraging girls and women from taking part and restricting equal opportunities in various disciplines.
- **Participation of Marginalised Groups:** Marginalized or underrepresented groups frequently encounter extra obstacles linked to their socio-economic background, disability, ethnicity, migration status, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
- **Lack of Gender-Sensitive Approaches:** Numerous sports policies and programs are created to be gender-neutral, overlooking the distinct experiences, requirements, and obstacles encountered by women and men.
- **Limited Leadership Opportunities for Women:** Women frequently encounter limited access to leadership routes, mentoring initiatives, and career growth opportunities within sports organizations.
- **Unequal Sponsorship and Financial Support:** Women’s sports often experience reduced sponsorship, investment, and financial acknowledgment, which impacts both growth prospects and lasting sustainability.
- **Limited Visibility and Media Coverage:** The accomplishments of women in sports still gather minimal media coverage and public acknowledgment, diminishing the presence of role models and perpetuating existing disparities.

5. Practical Recommendations - Different Stakeholders Perspectives

Based on the discussions and good practices explored during the FAIR GAME training, the following recommendations are proposed.

- Create a culture of inclusion within the organization. Actions that can be put in place to achieve this are:
 - **Promoting Gender-Sensitive Communication:** Ensure the consistent use of gender-sensitive language and inclusive visual representation in all communication materials, campaigns, publications, and promotional activities.
 - **Invest in Education and Awareness-Raising:** Promote gender equality education both within and beyond schools by integrating these topics into educational programmes, extracurricular activities, coach training, and community initiatives.
 - **Develop Inclusive Sport Infrastructure:** Ensure that sport facilities and infrastructure are accessible, safe, and designed to meet the needs of diverse users, taking into account gender-sensitive planning and inclusion principles.

- Establish and express a clear dedication to gender equality. An action that can be put in place to achieve this is:
 - **Develop Practical Tools and Resources :** Provide organisations with ready-to-use templates, guidelines (as this document) and operational tools to facilitate the implementation of gender mainstreaming actions and policies.
- Incorporate equality principles into the values and strategic plans. An action that can be put in place to achieve this is:
 - **Encourage the Exchange of Good Practices:** Create opportunities for sport organisations and institutions to share successful experiences, methodologies, and lessons learned in promoting gender equality and inclusion.
- Encourage the use of respectful and inclusive language in every communication. An action that can be put in place to achieve this is:
 - **Strengthen Visibility and Dissemination Efforts:** Increase the visibility of gender equality initiatives through communication campaigns, social media platforms, local events, and stakeholder networks to raise awareness and encourage participation.
- Enhance the role of local authorities. An action that can be put in place to achieve this is:
 - **Support municipalities and local governments:** integrating gender equality principles into local sport policies, funding schemes, community programmes, and sport infrastructure planning.

While these recommendations are applicable across the sport sector, they may require adaptation depending on the specific stakeholder involved, including sport organisations, local authorities, policy makers and local communities. For this reason, based on the FAIR GAME Training partners tried to think about their perspectives and how they could be more effective, what action could be necessary to implement and what could be updated.

6. Conclusion

The FAIR GAME International Training confirmed that gender inequalities remain present across different areas of the sport sector, including participation, leadership, visibility, access to resources, and decision-making processes. While progress has been made in recent years, significant challenges continue to limit the full and equal participation of women and girls in sport.

The discussions and exchanges among participants highlighted the importance of adopting a gender mainstreaming approach as a cross-cutting strategy capable of addressing these challenges in a systematic way. Integrating a gender perspective into policies, programmes, governance structures, communication activities, and safeguarding measures can contribute to creating more equitable and inclusive sporting environments.

The recommendations presented in these Guidelines are intended to support sport organisations, local authorities, educational institutions, and other relevant stakeholders in strengthening their commitment to gender equality. Their implementation should be adapted to local contexts and organisational realities, while maintaining a long-term perspective and a focus on continuous improvement.

Promoting gender equality in sport requires cooperation among institutions, sport organisations, public authorities, and local communities. Through coordinated efforts and sustained commitment, sport can become an increasingly accessible, inclusive, and representative space for all members of society.

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