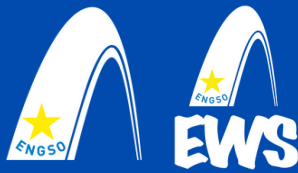


ENGSO POSITION ON

Gender Equality

2023



According to the World Economic Forum Gender Gap report 2022, “at current rate of progress, it would take 132 years to close the gap between men and women around the world.” This annual research shows “how far opportunities for women – in the workplace, in education, in politics and business – lag behind that of men.” Sport is not an exception. It actually tends to perform worse than other sectors and it is also the place for harmful practices, breaches of human rights, and discrimination against people with diverse SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation Gender Identity, Gender Expression, and Sex Characteristics). It is, therefore, necessary to look within its structures, its governance, its models, and propose concrete and measurable solutions to build a more equal and inclusive European sport movement.

A. Gender in grassroots sport

In a sport system historically built on a male/female dichotomy, the grassroots level provides an infinite ground for innovation and change, as it is more adaptable, flexible and bears the ability to be more accessible and welcoming than the elite sport level. However, gender equality might not mean the same to all. Not only do the numbers vary across Europe when it comes to participation (Eurobarometer 525, European Commission, 2022), the understanding of gender equality and its implication in local and national contexts also varies. It is crucial to address the issue at the European level to identify common goals and clear measures that can lead to inclusion, diversity and equality.

Despite the tremendous efforts and achievements since the creation of the European Women in Sport network in 1989, gender equality in grassroots sports is not –not yet– happening. For example, men (16%) are more likely than women (10%) to be members of a sports club and 75% of Europeans agree that gender-based violence in sports deserves more attention (Eurobarometer 525, European Commission, 2022). Another survey revealed that 53% of trans women feel excluded from particular sports as a result of their sexual orientation and gender identity and that 62% of trans people never participated in sports other than mandatory PE in school (EGLSF et al, 2021). Participation level also decreases with the duplication of disadvantages, for example for women with disabilities, women from diverse ethnic communities, or LGBTQ+ women. It is therefore important to keep working on it, monitor the situation by setting goals and keeping track of progress, acknowledge the successes, and continue to implement policies and actions toward equality.

B. Equal opportunities create strong societies

Women were excluded from the decision-making processes in sports in the last century, having to fight back against decisions taken by people who did not tolerate their participation in sports. However, decisions cannot be made without the inclusion and consultation of the individuals concerned. Therefore, ENGSO advocates for transparency and dialogue to carve a path toward full inclusion, fairness, and safety.

As a signatory of the Brighton Declaration (1994) and the Brighton plus Helsinki Declaration (2014) which “commit to upholding the 10 principles that enable women and girls to freely and safely participate, compete and build careers in sport and physical activity” ([IWG, 2014](#)), ENGSO is dedicated to supporting the organised sports movement in improving women’s sport. This comes with acknowledging the diversity of women’s bodies, improving access and participation, increasing media coverage, denouncing violence, targeting funding for training facilities and sports venues, and driving toward the inclusion of all women and girls in sports.

Consequently, ENGSO believes that the concept of “one size fits all” does not apply in the context of sport but that sport offers should be diversified to increase the level of participation and specifically avoid the dropout from sports often observed in teenagehood, which hits girls harder than boys ([Women in Sport, 2022](#)), or durably legitimise exclusion mechanism for people with diverse SOGIESC. New and innovative practices should be encouraged, including competitive and non-competitive formats, to go beyond the traditional gender categories as well as to develop sports offers tailored to the target groups and not always -or not only- the duplication of the men’s competitive leagues and models.

C. Recommendations for moving towards gender equality in grassroots sport

While we see gender equality as a basis for cohesive communities and societies, ENGSO believes in the shared responsibility of all stakeholders of the sports sector, taking into account both a bottom-up and a top-down approach. Moreover, intersectionality will help to identify the exclusion mechanisms that women and people with diverse SOGIESC are suffering from and that should be overcome, while making visible the multi-layered discriminations at stake (ex: religion and gender, socio-economic status and gender, abilities and gender).

1) Pro-active grassroots sports

The voluntary-based model of sport in Europe goes beyond the health benefits of sport (physical and mental). It can build communities, create safe shelters, build a sense of belonging and drive for equal opportunities for all. It can be a powerful tool for social change, development and inclusion of minorities

Recommendations:

- We encourage sports clubs to be places where people feel valued, safe, and able to be themselves. All women and people with diverse SOGIESC have the right to participate in sports and we encourage sport clubs to make public commitment to these values and safe spaces.

- We invite sports clubs to use positive, athlete-centred coaching methods that can decrease drop-out levels of women and people with diverse SOGIESC in sports, thus increasing physical activity and improving public health.
- We encourage the grassroots sport movement to not only create participation opportunities but also create career pathways for female coaches, referees, officials and leaders.

2) Support and guidelines for sports clubs

Sport umbrella organisations issuing policies designed for the elite and high-competitive sports should be aware of the “trickle-down effect” of their policies and how they can impact the lives of all individuals at grassroots sport, including young participants and marginalised groups. One should also acknowledge and foster the role model function.

Moreover, EU decision-makers and national governments are already actively developing policies for gender equality across the public and private sectors which could also touch upon sport as it is mainstreamed across areas.

Recommendations:

- We encourage the sport movement and all decision-makers to open spaces to hear the voices and invite the discriminated groups based on gender when designing new policies and programs on gender equality and inclusion.
- We encourage sports associations to focus on the importance of the right of all people to take part in sport and the responsibility of actors at all levels (national and local) to ensure that their programmes and policies are inclusive to everyone.
- We call on public authorities and institutions (European Union, Council of Europe), research parties (EIGE), and the sport movement (European Olympic Committee, European Paralympic Committee, ENGSO) to coordinate their efforts in Europe to achieve gender equality in sport.
- We call for the introduction of steering mechanisms by funding institutions (municipalities, regions) to ensure that grassroots clubs implement gender equality plans, improve the accessibility of facilities (changing rooms, toilets, schedule of training), and have a more equal allocation of resources.
- We encourage the creation of education, training, and diversity programs that go beyond empowering women and people discriminated against on grounds of gender, and target male leaders in sport to encourage them to become active players and allies in the long road toward gender equality.

Annex

Definitions

Gender

Gender refers to the attribution of gender to behaviour, sexual characteristics, identity, and appearance based on personal experience, cultural norms, and societal ideas. Gender identity refers to the heartfelt personal experience that is associated with a certain sex. It is the complex relationship between physical characteristics and someone's perception of oneself, for instance as male, female, intersex, non-binary, and agender.¹

Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of all individuals independently from their gender identity (the way one identifies/defines their gender) or gender expression (the way one expresses their gender identity). Gender equality implies that the interests, needs, and priorities of all genders are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups.

Equality in Sport

Equality in sport means that sport should be a safe environment for everyone participating at all levels (participation, representation, decision-making, etc). This includes the absence of bullying, discrimination, harassment and sexual violence and the active implementation of inclusion and diversity, which enables all individuals to feel part of a community and to access the benefits associated to sport.

Intersectionality

When addressing equality, we should consider the overlap of spheres of discrimination such as race, socio-economic background, sexual orientation & gender identity, and disability, resulting in multiple layers of disadvantages. Using a collective lens like this, recognising that everyone brings their own unique sets of overlapping experiences and discriminations, offers a deliberate approach to addressing the reality of inequality.



#StandUp4Equality

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¹ Adapted from the Guidance on gender and sex diverse individuals published by the NOC*NSF in 2021