

# International Women's Day 2024

## Women in Sport

### EU competence in sports set out in the EU treaties

Sport became a focus of EU responsibilities with the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2009, enabling evidence-based policy development and cooperation for physical activity and sports. The Lisbon Treaty granted the EU specific competence in sport under Article 6(e) of the [Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union](#) (TFEU) and Article 165, allowing support and supplementation of Member States' actions in sport. [Article 165 TFEU](#) stresses the social and educational function of sport and the aim to develop the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sportsmen and sportswomen.

Article 165 TFEU also emphasises supporting Member States in education while promoting a European dimension through language teaching, mobility, cooperation among institutions, and youth engagement in democratic life. In sports, it aims to ensure fairness, cooperation between sporting bodies, and protection for athletes, especially young ones. The article also encourages international cooperation with third countries and organisations like the Council of Europe. For implementation, it allows the EU to foster collaboration among Member States without imposing uniform laws and offers recommendations to advance education and sports objectives.

### Sports promoted on EU-level

Several policy initiatives and programmes underscore the EU's commitment to sports. The [2007 White Paper on Sport](#) laid the groundwork, followed by the 2011 Communication on '[Developing the European Dimension in Sport](#)' and the [EU Work Plan for Sport](#) (2021-2024). COVID-19 prompted additional actions, stressing the need for recovery measures at local, national, and EU levels. [Erasmus+](#), a key programme allocating 1.9% of its budget to sport, facilitates learning mobility and cooperation. The EU recognises the importance of sport for tourism and seeks to allocate Erasmus+ funds to enhance opportunities for young athletes and coaches. Moreover, the [European Week of Sport](#) was launched in 2015 and promotes physical activity, with ongoing projects supporting social inclusion through the integration of migrants. Notably, award programmes like [#BeActive](#) and [#BeInclusive](#) recognise initiatives fostering sport and physical activities, in order to break down social barriers and promote European identity.



In the European Parliament, the development of a European sports policy falls under the competence of the [Committee on Culture and Education](#) (CULT).<sup>1</sup> Resolutions and initiatives highlight the Parliament's commitment to gender equality, active ageing, and solidarity between generations. It has addressed human rights in the context of major sporting events and actively fought against match-fixing and corruption in. On 23 November 2021, the European Parliament adopted a resolution entitled '[EU sports policy: assessment and possible ways forward](#)'. In it, MEPs recommended different actions such as more funding for grassroots sports, better regulation of player transfers, equal pay and greater visibility for women in sports, better protection of children in sport and an increase of the number of hours allotted to physical activities in schools. Additionally, a November 2022 [resolution on e-sports](#) distinguishes it from traditional sports, urging a responsible approach and considering a charter for European values in e-sports competitions.

With the inclusion of sport as an area of Union competence, the Council of the European Union took significant steps to address various aspects of sports governance and equality. In 2010, the Council established the [Working Party on Sport](#) as a preparatory body, followed by the [agreement](#) on a three-year [EU Work Plan on Sport](#) in 2011, outlining actions for Member States and the Commission. Subsequently, the Council adopted several key conclusions related to sport, notably focusing on [gender equality in sport](#) in 2014 and [on enhancing integrity, transparency and good governance in major sport events](#) in 2016, emphasising the imperative of gender equality and the eradication of discrimination. Moreover, addressing the issue of corruption in sport, the Council issued [conclusions](#) in 2019. Notably, in 2023, the Council approved [conclusions](#) specifically targeting gender-based discrimination in sport, with the aim of fostering a safe, inclusive, and equitable sporting environment.

## Sports promoted internationally

The International [Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport](#) was adopted in 1978, at the 20th session of the UNESCO's General Conference. It was the first rights-based document to state that "the practice of physical education and sport is a fundamental right for all". Sport has since been incorporated into international agendas, such as the [Beijing Platform for Action](#) in 1995 and [Beijing +5](#) in 2000. The inaugural World Conference on Women and Sport took place in 1984 in Brighton (UK), resulting in the Brighton Declaration in 1994, which championed equity and equality across all facets of sport, including facilities, administration, research, and education. The [Brighton Plus Helsinki Declaration on Women and Sport](#) was endorsed by over 410 sports organisations during the June 2014 conference in Helsinki. Additionally, the UNESCO International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS) declarations of [Athens](#) (2004) and [Berlin](#) (2013) outlined specific measures to promote equal opportunities in sports.

The [European Sports Charter](#) was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1992 and serves as a framework for sports policy that all European countries are expected to endorse, complemented by the Code of Sports Ethics.<sup>2</sup> The [charter](#) outlines commitments by governments to make sports accessible to all citizens, with a focus on children and youth. It emphasises the principles of health, safety, fairness, tolerance, ethical values, personal self-fulfilment, environmental respect, and protection of human dignity. The [charter](#), furthermore, guides member states in refining existing legislations and policies, aiming to create a comprehensive framework for sports. Its achievements include establishing stable parameters for sports policies, defining common frameworks and principles for national sports policies, and ensuring a balanced partnership between governmental and non-governmental entities while maintaining complementary responsibilities.

<sup>1</sup>

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/143/sport#:~:text=In%20it%2C%20MEPs%20recommended%20different,to%20physical%20activities%20in%20schools>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/revision-esc/>

Since 2014, the UN General Assembly has established the [International Day of Sport for Development and Peace](#) (IDSP), which symbolises the growing acknowledgment of sport's positive impact on human rights, as well as social and economic development. In his 2015 [speech](#), the UN Secretary-General highlighted the role sport can play in achieving sustainable progress and change, by defining sport as 'a major force in eliminating gender barriers'. The same year saw the revision of the [International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport](#), which recognises a fundamental right to physical education, physical activity and sport.

In a [declaration](#) adopted on 27 September 2023, the Council of Europe's [Committee of Ministers](#) invites member states and sport organisations to "promote transparency, accountability, democracy and ethical behaviour in sport, including the establishment of robust governance systems, conflict-of-interest policies, whistle-blower protection mechanisms, effective investigation and prosecution of corruption, manipulation of competitions, violence and other infringements of human rights and the rule of law in the sport context." In order to ensure fair competitions at all levels, the Committee of Ministers supports the establishment under the [Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport \(EPAS\)](#) of the [MARS Network](#).

The [Sport for Generation Equality Initiative](#), which is led by UN Women and invites stakeholders from various sectors of the sports ecosystem, promotes gender equality within and through the realm of sports. In 2023, the [International Olympic Committee](#) (IOC) and UN Women launched the [Gender Equality Through Sport Bridging Project](#), which is a joint initiative that uses sport as a tool to advance gender equality and prevent gender-based violence. The IOC also established the [IOC Gender Equality and Inclusion Commission](#) to advance gender equality in sport and to advocate for equal participation on and off the field, in leadership positions and for the equitable distribution of resources.

## Participation of women in sport

Regarding physical activity more general, in 2022, more men (43 %) than women (35 %) exercised "regularly" or "with some regularity" in the EU. The gender gap was particularly noticeable in Poland, Spain and Slovakia with a difference of 14 percentage points each. In Bulgaria, few people practised sport in general, with 76% of men exercising never or seldom, and 82% of women. On the other hand, in the five EU countries where participation in sport was most common (Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Sweden), the percentage of women who practise sport and engage in leisure activities was almost equal to the one for men. Moreover, men (16%) are more likely than women (10%) to be members of a sports club.<sup>3</sup>

Despite substantial progress in sport participation of women and girls, men still largely dominate the field, especially at elite levels. This male predominance spans across various aspects of sports, such as coaching, journalism, sponsorship, and funding. In professional sports, many competitions have long been exclusively open for male participants. A clause regarding non-discrimination on the basis of sex was only added to the Olympic Charter in 1991.<sup>4</sup>

The [2012 Olympic Games in London](#) saw women competing in every discipline for the first time.<sup>5</sup> However, there are still some disparities within disciplines. The decathlon, for example, is only open for men, while women have to compete in a heptathlon (100-meter hurdles, high jump, long jump, shot-put, javelin throw, 200-meter and 800-meter runs).<sup>6</sup> In the [2020 Olympic Games in Tokyo](#), 48% of the participants were female,

<sup>3</sup> European Commission (2022). Special Eurobarometer 525 "Sport and Physical Activity"  
<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2668>

<sup>4</sup> <https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/Beyond-the-Games/Gender-Equality-in-Sport/2021-IOC-Gender-Equality-Inclusion-Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/Olympic-Movement/Factsheets/Women-in-the-Olympic-Movement.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/06/sports/olympics/us-track-field-decathlon-women-heptathlon.html>

compared to 23% in 1984, and 13% in 1964. Notably, only 13% of the coaches at the 2020 Games were female.<sup>7</sup>

In the FIFA [Women's World Cup 2019](#), 24 teams competed, but this number was increased to 32 in the [Women's World Cup 2023](#), reaching the same amount of teams as in the men's [World Cup 2022](#). However, it was [announced](#) that the men's World Cup 2026 will feature 48 teams, which increases the divide between men's and women's football once again. In the Tour de France, women had been excluded from the sport - except between 1984 and 1989 - up until 2022, when the [Tour de France Femmes](#) was reintroduced.<sup>8</sup>

## Promoting equal access to sport in the European Union

The European Parliament has consistently advocated for gender equality in sport. As early as 2003, in a [resolution](#) on women and sport, it called for the abolition of the distinction between male and female disciplines in elite-level sport. In a 2007 [resolution](#), the Parliament addressed gender-related issues in sport within the context of education. This resolution acknowledged the significance of girls' and women's full participation in sporting activities across all levels and emphasised gender equality and non-discrimination as fundamental objectives inherent to sport's educational and societal roles. Moreover, it highlighted the imperative to ensure equal access and participation for individuals of all genders and backgrounds in all facets and domains of sport, regardless of their societal status.

The EU-coordinated effort on gender equality in sports policy began in 2010 with the [EU Council's Conclusions](#) on the role of sport in fostering active social inclusion. The set objective involved promoting gender equality in sport, particularly focusing on equitable access to sports and representation in decision-making bodies. Active measures against gender stereotyping were emphasised. Within these Conclusions, both Member States and the Commission were urged to champion actions that integrate gender equality concerns into sports-related activities. This entails ensuring equal gender access to decision-making positions and addressing the intersection of sport with gender roles, aligning with the [Strategy for Equality between Women and Men 2010-2015](#).

The European Parliament [resolution](#) from 2 February 2012 on the European dimension in sport places a significant emphasis on gender equality within the sports domain. The resolution advocates for the extension of the Olympic Charter to all sporting events, particularly those in Europe, to prevent gender discrimination. Furthermore, it urges action against homophobia and transphobia in sports, calling on relevant authorities to implement legislation and anti-discrimination policies for the benefit of lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender athletes. It also addresses the regulation of demonstrations at sports events and calls for measures to promote women's participation in sports, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, the resolution stresses support for women's rights in sports through the endorsement of the European Charter of Women's Rights in Sports and urges gender mainstreaming in all sports-related activities, focusing on access, decision-making, and media coverage.

In the European Parliament [resolution](#) of 10 February 2021, the EP highlights the important societal function of promoting inclusion, solidarity, diversity and (gender) equality. In the [resolution](#) of 23 November 2021 on EU sports policy, the EP emphasises the importance to ensure that sports policy and legislation support gender equality, with particular attention to tackling all forms of violence and harassment, gender stereotypes, low visibility and media coverage, and disparities in wages, premium pay and awards.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/3343\\_unwomen\\_unesco\\_vawg\\_handbook\\_6a\\_singlepage.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/3343_unwomen_unesco_vawg_handbook_6a_singlepage.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/07/28/sport/tour-de-france-femmes-spt-intl/index.html>

The [conclusions](#) on women and equality in sports were approved by the Council in November 2023 in order to combat gender-based discrimination and ensure access to a safe, inclusive and equal playing field.<sup>9</sup> The [conclusions](#) called on Member States, the Commission, and the sports movement to take specific actions, including mainstreaming gender equality, improving conditions for women in professional sports, promoting research, and fostering cooperation. The document underlined that gender equality is a sports policy objective at the EU level and invited ongoing efforts to promote equality, monitoring progress and supporting transnational initiatives.

Initiatives aimed at encouraging girls and women's participation in sport include the Erasmus+ co-funded project [ISF She Runs Active Girl's Lead](#) programme, which engaged over 2000 female students aged 15-18 from more than 35 countries, fostering physical activity and skill development through sports. The Erasmus+ Sport co-funded [SCORE project](#), led by the [European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation](#) (ENGSO), focused on increasing the presence of female coaches at all levels of sport and enhancing understanding of gender equality in coach education. Additionally, the [European Women's Basketball Summit](#) project, supported by [FIBA](#) and the European Commission, provides learning opportunities for female coaches and referees from various European countries, facilitating skill enhancement and knowledge sharing.

## Media coverage and visibility of women in sport

The [Special Eurobarometer 525](#) showed that in 25 EU Member States, the majority of respondents agreed that they evenly like to follow female sport in the media as they do for male sport. The highest levels were found in Poland (76%), Croatia (75%), Hungary (74%) and Slovenia (74%). This majority is smallest in Denmark (49%), the Netherlands (54%) and Czechia (55%).<sup>10</sup> However, there are differences in media coverage and the sizes of arenas and courts. In tennis, Danish tennis star Caroline Wozniacki has [stated](#) that women do not get to play on the best courts at Wimbledon as much as men do.

[According to UNESCO](#), women received only 4% of the total sports-related media coverage in 2018. In the same year, the [research project](#) "Where are all the Women?" funded by Erasmus+ aimed to assess how well the media represents women's sport across five countries (Greece, Malta, UK, Romania, Sweden). The [study](#) found that women's sport coverage (TV, online and print media) was consistently lower than men's across all countries. Romania displayed the highest coverage among the monitored countries, which is assumed to be heavily influenced by tennis champion Simona Halep. Malta, however, showed the lowest level of women's sports coverage, which is impacted by limited resources and the timing of the sports events. The study also found that media portrayal of women athletes often focuses on appearance rather than athletic achievement.

An [analysis](#) of gender bias in Lithuanian media from 2013 to 2016 revealed significant disparities, with male athletes mentioned 4.5 times more than females. Television broadcasts heavily favoured men's sports, comprising 97% of all events aired, despite a majority of respondents acknowledging gender equality in sports achievement. During an [awareness-raising initiative](#) in Croatia in 2018, the statistics revealed a significant disparity between women's sport representation in electronic media. Women's sport events constituted only 16% of broadcasts compared to men's 84%, and women's sports comprised just 11% of sports news against men's 82%.

A 2023 [study](#) suggests that women now receive 15% of sports-related media coverage. Compared to 2018-levels, the media coverage has more than tripled. This increase is assumed to originate from the growth of

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/11/24/women-in-sports-council-approves-conclusions-to-combat-gender-based-discrimination/#:~:text=The%20Council%20calls%20on%20member,and%20violence%20at%20all%20levels>

<sup>10</sup> European Commission (2022). Special Eurobarometer 525 "Sport and Physical Activity" <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2668>



streaming services and social media.<sup>11</sup> However, the gap between men's and women's coverage is still significant and could be due to the overrepresentation of men in sports journalism.<sup>12</sup> [Research](#) on sport journalism in Austria revealed persistent male dominance, with 46% of sport journalist citing disinterest and 19% mentioning low advancement opportunities. Conversely, females faced challenges such as balancing family commitments, whereas 23% noted low advancement opportunities and 16% indicated a low understanding of sports.

## Promoting increased media coverage in the European Union

In 2020, the European Commission published the [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#), as part of its efforts for a 'Union of equality'. The new strategy advocates for an inclusive European Union where individuals of all genders and backgrounds have the freedom to pursue their aspirations, enjoy equal opportunities, and actively engage in and lead within society. This principle extends to the realm of sports, as highlighted in a recital Z and Section 102. It acknowledges the challenges women and girls encounter in sports, including violence, pay disparities, unequal prize money, unfavourable working conditions, and significant underrepresentation in sports organisations and media.

In its [resolution](#) of 23 November 2021, the EP stresses the importance to include all relevant stakeholders in ensuring that sports policy and legislation support gender equality, particularly by addressing gender stereotypes, low visibility, and media coverage. Moreover, the [Council conclusions](#) on women and equality in sports emphasise the importance of improved visibility, along with media and online coverage of women's sport. Additionally, they highlight the urgency to end sexualised and sexist treatment of women in sport.

Initiatives aimed at fostering adequate media coverage of women in sport encompass a range of strategies and actions. The Finnish Broadcasting Company [Yle](#) has taken significant steps to increase gender equality in sports journalism. Through initiatives such as the Mestaruusputki concept, which raised the visibility of women's national team sports matches, and broadcasting women's football World Championships at the same standard as men's, Yle has significantly enhanced the representation of women in sports media, positively impacting attitudes and conversations about sports and gender equality.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the [European Broadcasting Union](#) (EBU) Handbook, titled "[Reimagining Sport – Pathways to Gender Balanced Media Coverage](#)," showcases initiatives by EBU Members to drive growth for women's sport, providing recommendations and concrete case studies for achieving gender-balanced sports coverage. The [IOC Press Committee](#) plays a crucial role in ensuring equal coverage of female and male athletes by establishing [IOC portrayal guidelines to address unequal media representation](#).

## Equal pay and rewards for women in sport

[Research](#) indicates that the disparity in salaries is particularly prominent in the field of sports. This inconsistency leads to certain repercussions; as female athletes earn comparatively less and often need a second job for sustenance, they have less time to refine their skills. Consequently, their career opportunities decrease. A [survey](#) from 2017 highlights the persistence of the gender pay gap within sports, despite some progress in the last years. In 2017, 83% of sports events offered the same prize money for both genders, an increase from 70% in 2014.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, significant differences persist, notably in sports such as golf and football.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.teamwass.com/news/new-study-womens-sports-comprise-15-of-sports-media-coverage/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/684ab3af-9f57-11ec-83e1-01aa75ed71a1/language-en#>

<sup>13</sup> [https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-07/Illustrative%20projects\\_v1.pdf](https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2022-07/Illustrative%20projects_v1.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/646192/EPRS\\_ATAG\(2020\)646192\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/646192/EPRS_ATAG(2020)646192_EN.pdf)

The Council of Europe's [Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport \(EPAS\)](#) hosted a [round table](#) in March 2021, to discuss the current situation of gender inequality in sports. Discussions revealed that while there has been improvement for female footballers, a noticeable disparity persists between men and women, particularly in terms of opportunities. The journey towards professionalism in football was emphasised, highlighting the significance of academies and the early and serious consideration of girls in training. Initiatives aimed at nurturing talent from a young age were seen as instrumental in enhancing the overall quality of the sport. Salary disparity emerged as a contentious issue, and the significance of role models in breaking gender barriers was underscored.

## Promoting equal pay in the European Union

The European Parliament [resolution](#) from 2 February 2017 underscores the importance of an integrated approach to gender equality in sports to counter stereotypes and foster a positive social environment. It welcomes initiatives that promote gender equality, encourage equal participation in decision-making roles, facilitate the balance between family and professional sport life for female athletes, and strive to diminish gender-based remuneration gaps and award disparities.

As mentioned above, the European Commission advocates for equal opportunities and freedom to pursue aspirations for all genders in the [Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#), as part of its efforts for a 'Union of equality'. It particularly acknowledges disparities in pay and unequal prize money, as well as unfavourable working conditions.

The European Commission launched the [High Level Group on Gender Equality](#) in sport at the beginning of 2021. It is composed of 15 experienced and distinguished individuals in the field of gender equality in sport. This group published their Recommendations and Action Plan [Towards More Gender Equality in Sport](#) in 2022. Part of this [action plan](#) are six transversal recommendations:

- the implementation of a gender mainstreaming approach for all main stakeholders,
- the adoption of an intersectional approach,
- gender budgeting/financing, policy monitoring,
- education, communication, and the appointment of coordinators for gender equality (CGE).

## Equality policies in sports federations

Regarding equality policies, in Spain, 59% of sports federations incorporate mentions of gender equality in their long-term plans or business plans, while 22% have explicitly formulated written policies aimed at advancing gender equality in sports for both females and males.<sup>15</sup> In comparison, France exhibits higher figures with 77% mentioning gender equality and 74% having specific written policies.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, in Belgium, the percentages are lower, with 33% incorporating gender equality in their plans and 13% having specific written policies for advancing gender equality in sports.<sup>17</sup>

In Norway, the athlete Ada Hegerberg, who was the first Women Golden ball winner in 2018, fought for equal pay between men and women national teams. In the summer of 2017, Hegerberg decided to stop representing the national team as a form of protest due to a dispute with the Norwegian Football Federation about how they treat women's football. Despite some improvements including the doubling of the remuneration pot for women, Hegerberg felt there was "still a long way to go" so has continued to refuse to

<sup>15</sup> <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/fr/web/gender-equality-in-sport/resources1#%7B%22250381712%22%3A%5B%5D%7D>

<sup>16</sup> <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/fr/web/gender-equality-in-sport/resources1#%7B%22250381712%22%3A%5B%5D%7D>

<sup>17</sup> <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/fr/web/gender-equality-in-sport/resources1#%7B%22250381712%22%3A%5B%5D%7D>

be called up and missed the 2019 World Cup. She described her time with the national team "deeply depressing", giving her "nightmares" and leaving her "mentally broken".<sup>18</sup>

Various national football federations, including those of England, Ireland, Norway, [Spain](#), [Slovenia](#), and the United States, have taken steps to ensure that male and female footballers representing their countries receive equal pay.<sup>19</sup> Despite these efforts, a substantial [disparity](#) persists in the salaries of male and female footballers, highlighting a broader issue within the sport. It is worth noting that in 2023, not a single woman ranked among [the top 100 highest-paid athletes](#) globally.

In 2023, the [England and Wales Cricket Board](#) (ECB) [announced](#) the increase of match fees for the women's team to be equal to that of the men's team. Similar initiatives were taken by [New Zealand Cricket](#) and [Cricket Australia](#). Notably, football stands out as one of the sports exhibiting substantial disparities in prize money between the men's and women's teams. The FIFA prize fund for the Women's World Cup stood at around one third of the men's prize fund in 2023.<sup>20</sup> The prize money for the winner of the female Tour de France [remains](#) relatively low at 50,000 Euros [compared](#) to 500,000 Euros for the male winner.

## Gender budgeting and funding

The European Commission's [2020-2025 gender equality strategy](#) was adopted to achieve significant progress towards gender equality by 2025. Various funding mechanisms and budgetary guarantee instruments within the EU are available to support initiatives aimed at advancing women's equality. Under the [2021-2027 multiannual financial framework](#), tracking systems to [monitor](#) gender-relevant expenditure in EU funding programs were introduced. Moreover, a [methodology](#) was developed to classify EU budget allocations based on their contribution to gender equality. In 2022, 84% of the budget either directly contributed or had the potential to contribute to gender equality.

Past observations indicate that successful policy development relies heavily on adequate funding, budgeting, and resource mobilisation.<sup>21</sup> Given the diverse array of stakeholders and the pressing need for increased investment in women's sports, meticulous attention to gender-sensitive budgeting processes has become essential. Currently, up to 70% of resources in sport are spent on boys and men.<sup>22</sup> In 2022, [EIGE](#) published a [gender budgeting toolkit](#) in order to assist managing authorities in the EU to apply gender budgeting tools. Moreover, in 2023, the OECD presented their [Best Practices for Gender Budgeting](#), aiming at elevating the standard of gender budgeting efforts, fostering greater consideration of gender equality in budget decision-making processes to advance national gender priorities.

Gender equality in sports is also on the Council of Europe's agenda. The framework of the [2007 Council of Europe Recommendation on gender mainstreaming in education](#) explicitly included sports. This recommendation highlights the imperative of promoting gender mainstreaming in sports and leisure activities. The Council of Europe's [Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017](#) outlined its dedication to integrating gender considerations, such as gender budgeting, into various policies, including sports. The [strategy](#) guides the Council of Europe's activities, focusing on five strategic objectives: combating gender stereotypes and sexism, preventing and combating violence against women, ensuring equal access of women to justice, achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, and implementing gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2019/06/05/soccer-hegerberg-mentally-broken-by-norway-national-team-experience>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)635560\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS_BRI(2019)635560_EN.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/asifburhan/2023/09/26/men-and-women-split-over-equal-prize-money-in-womens-soccer/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/684ab3af-9f57-11ec-83e1-01aa75ed71a1/language-en#>

<sup>22</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/684ab3af-9f57-11ec-83e1-01aa75ed71a1/language-en#>



Regarding gender equality projects within sport federations, in Spain, 82% of sports federations have implemented actions and measures, while 60% of these have given economic aid to women and girls' sport.<sup>23</sup> In France, 84% of sport federations have initiated measures to increase gender equality and out of these, 77% dedicated financial resources to the increase of the number of girls and women in sport. In 2018, the Ministry of Sports in France allocated 2.8 million Euros to promote initiatives targeting elite-level women's sports.<sup>24</sup> In the Netherlands, only 36% of sports federations have implemented measures to increase the participation of girls and women in sports and physical activities since 2015. The [Dutch Olympic Committee](#) ensures equitable access to sports facilities for elite-level athletes regardless of gender and has implemented particular measures for pregnant athletes.<sup>25</sup>

In 2023, [UN Women](#), [UNESCO](#), and the [Global Spotlight Initiative](#) – a partnership between the European Union and the United Nations aimed at eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls – published a comprehensive handbook titled “[Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport](#).” According to the [handbook](#), one in every three women, equivalent to 736 million individuals worldwide, encounters some form of physical or sexual violence during her lifetime. Within the sphere of sports, the incidence of violence against women and girls is comparably high. Nearly 21% of professional female athletes have reported experiencing sexual abuse during childhood in sports, a rate nearly double that of their male counterparts. Additionally, 87% of all abusive Twitter posts during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games were directed at women athletes.

On 11 July 2023, the European Court of Human Rights in the landmark case [Semenya v. Switzerland](#), held *inter alia* that there had been a violation of Art 14 (the prohibition of discrimination) of the [ECHR](#). The case involved a female athlete who faced discrimination based on regulations related to her natural testosterone levels. These regulations, known as the [DSD Regulations](#)<sup>27</sup>, had been created by [World Athletics](#). The court [argued](#) that the discrimination against the athlete based on sex characteristics required "very weighty reasons" for justification and a thorough review of the institutional and procedural safeguards, which, in this case, were found lacking.

*(Version 2.0, approved by World Athletics Council on 23 March 2023, and coming into effect on 31 March 2023)*

## Motherhood and sport

Historically, female athletes faced challenges regarding motherhood and their careers, including financial implications, physical doubts, and societal perceptions.<sup>28</sup> However, in recent years, there has been a positive shift, with female athletes like Nia Ali, Allyson Felix, and Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce demonstrating that motherhood does not hinder athletic success. Examples of successful comebacks after childbirth include Ingrid Kristiansen, Paula Radcliffe, and Faith Kipyegon, who returned to competition stronger than before.<sup>29</sup>

However, there are still many structural obstacles for athlete mothers. In 2020, Nike faced criticism when Allyson Felix revealed that during a contract renegotiation, the brand allegedly asked her to take a 70% pay cut when she became pregnant.<sup>30</sup> Another case includes Olympian Kara Goucher who ran a half-marathon three months after giving birth because Nike would cease payments until she started racing again, damaging Nike's reputation.<sup>31</sup>

More and more sports governing bodies and clubs are implementing sport-specific maternity policies to support female athletes, with various approaches tailored to the nature of the sport, such as team sports versus individual sports.<sup>32</sup> The [Women's Tennis Association](#) established the Special Ranking Rule, which is a maternity provision that takes into account the ranking the player had before her maternity leave, as this significantly influences the prize money.<sup>33</sup> The [Rugby Football Union](#) (RFU) tailored their approach after commonly offered financial packages (26 weeks of fully paid leave) and offers support into alternative employment, as well as paid travel and accommodation for children under 12 months, to enable the parents to travel to matches with their children.<sup>34</sup>

In 2021, FIFA [introduced](#) a maternity policy, which is to be implemented by the member associations. It includes 14 weeks of maternity leave, whereas the player receives 2/3 of her salary. One case that landed in front of FIFA's Dispute Resolution Chamber (DRC) includes Sara Björk Gunnarsdóttir, who while playing for Olympique Lyonnais (Lyon), became pregnant and was owed €44,828 for outstanding salary and benefits, according to FIFA's regulations. Lyon disputed the payments. Subsequently, the DRC found Lyon liable to pay Sara €82,094.82 plus interest, or face a transfer ban.<sup>35</sup>

## Gender-based violence and harassment in the European Union

Gender-based violence is a recognised issue in sports, with changing attitudes in sports organisations acknowledging its presence. Empirical [studies](#) in nine European countries reveal varying prevalence rates for gender and sexual harassment in sports, ranging from 14% to 73%. This problem cuts across all sports, with higher instances of sexual harassment observed at elite levels compared to recreational settings. Verbal sexual harassment emerges as the most prevalent form. Male coaches perpetrate abuse and sexual harassment on women and girls, especially in environments traditionally deemed 'masculine,' marked by misogyny and homophobia. Intersectionality exacerbates the issue, with disabled women experiencing higher rates of violence. In 2007, the European Parliament [called](#) for the identification of best practices in

<sup>28</sup> <https://globalsportmatters.com/health/2023/07/19/women-athletes-fighting-battles-mothers-alex-morgan-serena-williams/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://worldathletics.org/women-in-athletics/news/motherhood-athletics-sport-felix-fraser-pryce>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.penningtonslaw.com/news-publications/latest-news/2023/elite-female-athletes-competing-for-maternity-rights-on-the-largest-playing-fields>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.penningtonslaw.com/news-publications/latest-news/2023/elite-female-athletes-competing-for-maternity-rights-on-the-largest-playing-fields>

<sup>32</sup> <https://mediawrites.law/bouncing-back-maternity-policies-for-elite-athletes/>

<sup>33</sup> 2023 WTA Official Rulebook, p. 160 <https://photoresources.wtatennis.com/wta/document/2023/09/21/9e9cc930-43cd-4ed0-87a0-7d91001c231e/2023-WTA-Rulebook-9-19-2023-.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> <https://mediawrites.law/bouncing-back-maternity-policies-for-elite-athletes/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.penningtonslaw.com/news-publications/latest-news/2023/elite-female-athletes-competing-for-maternity-rights-on-the-largest-playing-fields>

combating sexual harassment and abuse in sports. However, the implementation and assessment of these measures vary across sports and countries.

According to the [Eurobarometer 525](#) from 2022, 75% of respondents agreed that gender-based violence deserves more attention. On the national scale, the majority agreed in all EU Member States. The highest levels of agreement were found in Cyprus (91%), Portugal (88%), and Ireland (86%). The lowest levels were found in Estonia (43%), Latvia (45%) and Czechia (55%).

The Empowering Women Athletes ([EWA](#)) initiative, a collaborative partnership co-financed by the European Commission through the [Erasmus+](#) programme, is dedicated to addressing the pervasive issues of harassment and discrimination faced by female athletes. The goal of the project is to establish a cohesive community comprising female athletes, professionals, sport managers, and policymakers across Europe. This collective effort aims to actively prevent and combat violence, abuse, harassment, and discrimination against female athletes by imparting knowledge, education, and practical tools tailored specifically by the project.

The European Parliament [resolution](#) from 8 March 2022 highlights the pivotal role of sports clubs and federations in addressing racism and promoting social inclusion, equality, and EU values within the realm of women in sports. It emphasises the need for enhanced representation of diverse groups, including women, in sports and managerial positions, urging governing bodies to implement measures for diversity and inclusion. The resolution also advocates for a zero-tolerance approach to racism, hate speech, and violence in women's sports, calling for preventive measures, victim support, and penalties for perpetrators.

On 14 September 2023, the European Parliament conducted a [plenary debate](#) concerning "Violence and discrimination in the world of sports after the [FIFA Women's World Cup](#)." The deliberations focused particularly on the incident involving Luis Rubiales, the president of the Spanish soccer federation, who engaged in an unauthorised kiss with star player Jennifer Hermoso during the Women's World Cup. As a consequence, FIFA instated a 90-day suspension on Rubiales amid ongoing disciplinary proceedings.<sup>36</sup> An investigative judge at a Spanish court has ruled that the kiss was unconsented and Rubiales will have to face trial.<sup>37</sup>

While no sport-specific legal framework exists to prosecute gender-based violence within sports in any Member State, existing sports legislation generally emphasises ethical values, fair play, condemns violence and harassment, and encourages measures to prevent all forms of violence. This observation applies to the sports laws of nine EU Member States: Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, and Slovenia. In certain instances, legislation mandates specific actors to implement preventive measures. For example, Portugal assigns the State the responsibility for adopting measures to prevent and penalise violence in sport, while in Cyprus, Italy, and Malta, addressing violence falls under the jurisdiction of the [Cyprus Sport Organisation](#), [Italian Olympic Committee](#), and [Maltese Olympic Committee](#), respectively. In Romania, sport federations are tasked with implementing measures to combat violence, and in Slovenia, the [Slovenian Inspectorate for Education and Sport](#) holds legal responsibility for monitoring abuses related to athletes' human rights.<sup>38</sup>

An [analysis](#) of legislation in each Member State was conducted by the European Commission to identify aspects of the legal framework pertinent to the definition of gender-based violence adopted in this study. The analysis focused on the coach-athlete relationship, peer athlete-athlete relationship, and relationships between athletes and members of the sports entourage. Additionally, particular attention was given to legislation regarding offenses against children, young people, and child protection laws. The [study](#) also

<sup>36</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1140242>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.euronews.com/2024/01/25/rubiales-to-face-trial-for-unwanted-kiss-at-football-world-cup>

<sup>38</sup> [https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/gender-based-violence-sport-study-2016\\_en.pdf](https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/gender-based-violence-sport-study-2016_en.pdf)

highlighted the need for clarity and consistency in legal language across Member States to avoid sexism and ambiguity.

Regarding internal policies, in Spain, 59% of sports federations have instituted a written policy and/or action plan to prevent and combat gender-based violence in sports, while 41% have undertaken specific actions for this purpose since 2015.<sup>39</sup> In France, 36% of sports federations possess a written policy and/or action plan addressing gender-based violence. The Ministry of Sports in France has maintained such a policy since 2013, featuring a comprehensive framework encompassing monitoring, evaluation mechanisms, dedicated human resources, and allocated funds for the prevention and combat of gender-based violence in sports.<sup>40</sup> In Belgium, 23% of sports federations have a written policy/action plan for preventing and combating gender-based violence in sports. The [Olympic Committee](#) has a dedicated policy, and the Flemish sport agency adopted an action plan in 2015, supported by monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, funding, and allocated human resources. Additionally, 33% of sports federations in Belgium have implemented measures since 2015 to prevent and combat gender-based violence in sports.<sup>41</sup>

## Women in decision-making positions in Sport

In spite of empirical evidence demonstrating the advantages of diversity in decision-making contexts<sup>42</sup>, studies show that women continue to face discrimination on executive boards in sports.<sup>43</sup> Noteworthy examples include the creative contributions highlighted by the [UN Women's Office in Turkey](#), and studies indicating fewer problems concerning HR, organisational, and financial issues in more diverse contexts.<sup>44</sup> Acknowledging these disparities, the [International Olympic Committee](#) (IOC) has advocated for a specific target and [recommended](#) a representation of at least 30% women on executive boards as a means to address the prevailing gender imbalance in sports governance. In 2020, the Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee itself reached its goal of 30% of women. [Moreover](#), 37% of Commission Chairs and 48% of Commission Members of the IOC are women in 2020, compared to 18% and 20% in 2013 respectively.

Across the European Union, there exists a notable disparity in the representation of women on the boards of the largest listed companies. As of 2019, [data](#) from the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) shows that women comprised 28% of board members on average. Notably, France had surpassed the 40% mark, achieving its target, while countries such as Sweden, Italy, Finland, Belgium, and Germany displayed slightly lower numbers with only around one-third of board positions held by women. A study revealed that member states with mandatory quotas experienced a significant increase in female board representation, with an overall rise of 26 percentage points since 2010. Conversely, inactive member states saw a considerably lower increase, amounting to just 3 percentage points over the same period.

Moreover, there are grave gender disparities in leadership roles across Olympic sport federations. In Spain, the representation of females in leadership positions within Olympic sport federations is as follows: 4% of presidents, 13% of vice-presidents, and 15% of executive heads are female.<sup>45</sup> In France, the corresponding

<sup>39</sup> [https://pjp-eu.coe.int/fr/web/gender-equality-in-sport/resources1#f%22250381712%22:\[1\]](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/fr/web/gender-equality-in-sport/resources1#f%22250381712%22:[1])

<sup>40</sup> [https://pjp-eu.coe.int/fr/web/gender-equality-in-sport/resources1#f%22250381712%22:\[1\]](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/fr/web/gender-equality-in-sport/resources1#f%22250381712%22:[1])

<sup>41</sup> [https://pjp-eu.coe.int/fr/web/gender-equality-in-sport/resources1#f%22250381712%22:\[1\]](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/fr/web/gender-equality-in-sport/resources1#f%22250381712%22:[1])

<sup>42</sup> Claringbould, I., & Knoppers, A. (2008). Doing and Undoing Gender in Sport Governance. *Sex Roles* 58, 81–92, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9351-9>

<sup>43</sup> Evans, A. B., & Pfister, G. U. (2021). Women in sports leadership: A systematic narrative review. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 56(3), 317–342, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690220911842>

<sup>44</sup> Pamela Wicker, Svenja Feiler & Christoph Breuer (2022) Board gender diversity, critical masses, and organizational problems of non-profit sport clubs, *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 22:2, 251–271, <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2020.1777453>

<sup>45</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/spain-gender-equality-in-sport-leaflet-2019-/1680971a6e>







motivating the next generation of female leaders in basketball management and administration. [TIME-OUT 2.0](#), another Erasmus+ Sport co-funded project, is a skills and mobility program to support the implementation of the [EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes](#). [Swim Ireland & Sport Ireland's Women in Sport Leadership programme](#), funded through Sport Ireland Women in Sport Funding, has trained over 100 women, with a significant investment of 4 million Euros announced in July 2021. Additionally, [New Miracle](#), a project led by five National Olympic Committees and co-funded by Erasmus+ Sport, offered a free training programme and mentoring platform for novice sports managers, with the goal of promoting gender equality and leadership in decision-making. Lastly, the [International Biathlon Union's](#) (IBU) Target 26 strategic plan incorporates gender equality as a fundamental principle, with initiatives such as the [IBU Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2026](#), Gender Equality Policy, and mentoring programmes aimed at advancing women's leadership roles within the organisation.

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