

GENDER EQUALITY AND COACHING¹



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Although there is a general lack of centralised sex-disaggregated data regarding accredited coaches at European level, it is generally acknowledged that there is a significant underrepresentation of female coaches across all fields and levels of sports. As concluded in a report commissioned by the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (2011)²:

- Women represent a small minority of the coaches employed in elite sports.
- The percentage of female coaches tends to decrease the higher the level of performance.
- Female coaches are more likely to train athletes enrolled in typical women's sports rather than in traditional men's sports.
- Female coaches are almost exclusively training either women, youth or children.

To illustrate these points, two examples are provided. First, only 11% of the European accredited coaches participating at the 2012 London Olympic Games were women³. Second, a recent report on Head Coaches of Women's Collegiate Teams⁴ shows that male head coaches tend to be overrepresented in women's teams, particularly in those sports that are traditionally played by men. Examples include: alpine skiing (100%), water polo (100%), track & field (91,6%), diving (91,4%), ice hockey (87,5%) and swimming (85,9%). Conversely, female head coaches are leading women's teams of field hockey (100%), lacrosse (92,6%), equestrian (77,8%) and golf (76,3%). These figures may indicate that female coaches refrain or are excluded from training teams of sports that are traditionally perceived as masculine.

This acute unbalance may be explained by stereotypical perceptions about coaching being a male (professional) occupation requiring traditional masculine traits and by a prevailing hegemonic masculinity in sport settings. Indeed, research⁵ indicates that the masculinist culture of sport is segregating female coaches. Consequently, their motivation and self-assurance are brought down. Research⁶ also shows that organisational factors are affecting female coaching career development. Systemic barriers alienating female coaches from public sports organisations include male-dominated workplaces setting masculinised standards for recruitment and career progression, family-unfriendly working environments, the prominence of male-dominated networks, and the lack of female role models. In fact, the overrepresentation of men throughout decades in sport results in the so-called 'homologous reproduction' whereby male coaches tend to hire those who look most like them, i.e. other men. Moreover, there seems to be a connection between the gender proportion of athletes and the men-women-ratio among coaches as former (male) athletes became (male) coaches⁷.

It is thus not surprising that literature⁸ is signposting that it is very unlikely that female coach students will eventually become coaches. Therefore, measures need to be put in place to combat multidimensional barriers (crossing the individual, interpersonal, organisational and cultural levels) that are discouraging and preventing women to become or progress as coaches.

¹ This factsheet was compiled in November 2016 by Yellow Window.

² Source: Pfister, G. (2011). *Gender equality and (elite) sport. A report compiled for the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport.*

³ Source: International Council for Coach Education and Leeds Metropolitan University (2014). *Presentation at the 6th IWG World Conference on Women and Sport: "Gender & Coaching Report Card: London 2012 Olympics"*. Last accessed on 14/11/2016 at: http://www.icce.ws/assets/files/news/IWG/Leanne_Norman-Gender_Coaching_Report_Card.pdf

⁴ Source: LaVoi, N. (2015). *Head Coaches of Women's Collegiate Teams – A report on select NCAA division-I FBS institutions 2014-2015.* Tucker Centre for Research on Girls & Women in Sport and the Alliance of Women Coaches

⁵ Source: Norman, L. (2012). *A crisis of confidence: women coaches' responses to their engagement in resistance.* *Sport, Education and Society*, Vol. 19, Issue 5, pp. 532-551

⁶ Source: Greenhill, J., C. Auld, G. Cuskelly and S. Hooper (2009). *The impact of organisations factors on career pathways for female coaches.* *Sport Management Review*, 12, pp. 229-240

⁷ Source: Pfister, G. (2011). *Gender equality and (elite) sport. A report compiled for the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport.*

⁸ Source: Fasting, K., T. Svela Sand and N. Knorre (2013). *European female sport students as future coaches? European Journal for Sport and Society*, Vol. 10, Issue 4, pp. 307-323

Some policy recommendations from the Council of Europe to ensure gender-balanced and gender-sensitive coaching in sport

- Identify barriers faced by women and girls, including those from disadvantaged groups, as regards their access and participation in all levels and fields of sport, including in coaching positions.
- Identify female coaching role models and involve them in the promotion of equality between women and men in sport.
- Create gender-sensitive and transparent recruitment, selection, appointment and election procedures and practices to increase the number of women participating at all levels of sports organisations, including in coaching.
- Adopt policies which allow a balance of private and family life and sports careers, with a special focus on coaches.
- Ensure that statistics regarding individual participation and representation in all areas and all levels of organisations, including in coaching, are disaggregated by sex and published and disseminated regularly.
- Promote awareness initiatives and/or training on gender equality, gender mainstreaming and different needs of those involved in sport to provide personnel, coaches, athletes, sport managers and decision-makers at all levels with necessary tools and competences to implement gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the organisation.

The detailed set of measures can be found [here](#).

EXAMPLE 1. STRENGTHENING COACHING WITH THE OBJECTIVE TO RAISE EQUALITY – SCORE

Promoter: European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO)

Implemented in: 2015-2016

SCORE, an EU-funded project, aimed at promoting gender equality in coaching. More specifically, it focused on increasing the number of employed and volunteer female coaches at all levels of sport, as well as on enhancing knowledge on gender equality in coach education. The project targeted sports and coaching organisations at all levels, along with coaches/trainers, former athletes, volunteers and decision-makers in the field of coaching. An education programme for mentors and an [educational toolkit](#) were developed within SCORE.

EXAMPLE 2. REACH – SUPPORTING WOMEN IN COACHING

Promoter: Sports Coach UK

Running since: 2015

Reach is a national campaign run by Sports Coach UK and supported by many sports organisations around the country. The goal of this initiative is to raise awareness and inspire more women to get into coaching. It also aims at ensuring that female coaches are fully supported by the people they coach for so that they stay motivated to coach. Reach can support those who are thinking about coaching for the first time or want to improve their current coaching practices. This campaign targets women of all ages and backgrounds. The website of the Reach campaign is a hub of information intended to support women, celebrate their success in coaching through case studies, videos and photos, and provide useful resources which can, in the long term, create a cultural change in coaching. More information can be found [here](#).

EXAMPLE 3. A NETWORK FOR FEMALE COACHES

Promoter: Female Coaching Network

Launched in: 2014

The Female Coaching Network (FCN) is a global community of female coaches who support, drive and influence real change in sports diversity. The FCN is an independent, non-governmental organisation founded by a track & field coach in the United Kingdom in 2014. This organisation represents the interests of all women who coach at all levels, from all nationalities and from all sports. In partnership with Project 500, the FCN is facilitating a weekly online discussion with female coaches from around the World: #womenswednesday. In addition, the FCN developed a strategic plan for 2016-2020, including key performance indicators. More information can be found [here](#).