

GENDER EQUALITY AND PARTICIPATION IN SPORT¹



Funded
by the European Union
and the Council of Europe



COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Implemented
by the Council of Europe

In general, men tend to practise sports or other physical activities² more often than women in the European Union³. For instance, 45% of men exercise or play sport at least once a week, whereas 37% of women do so. The frequency to play sport or engage in other physical activity significantly differs according to age. The biggest difference is noticed in the younger group (15-24 years old): 75% young men compared to 55% young women practise sport or other activity at least once a week, while 15% young men compared to 8% young women engage in sport or other physical activity at least five times per week. This gap tends to narrow for older age groups.

Gender differences can be noticed in relation to the setting where sport or other physical activities⁴ are practised: men are more likely to engage in physical activities at a sport club or at work, and women at home or on the way between home and school, work or shops. In line with this observation, more men than women believe that local sport clubs and other local providers offer many opportunities to be physically active. These differences may be connected to the traditional gender roles attributed to women and men: for instance, women commonly take up caregiving roles which may explain the settings where they mostly practise sport or other physical activities. Men are twice more likely than women to be members of a sport club (16% vs. 8%)⁵.

Although both men and women are motivated to practise sport or other physical activity to improve their health (61% and 63%, respectively), gender differences can be identified in relation to what motivates people for engaging in sport or other physical activities. Whereas men are more likely to engage in sport or physical activity to have fun (33%), to be with friends (23%) or to improve physical performance (26%), women are concerned with controlling their weight (26%), to improve their physical appearance (24%) or to counteract the effects of ageing (17%). These differences may be explained by a need to comply with gender stereotypes: men are expected to be strong and athletic, and women are expected to look pretty, slim and young.

The participation rate of women in Olympic and Paralympic Games has been increasing over the last 90 years. Recent figures of the Games in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 show that a gender-balanced participation has been reached as approximately 40-45% women participated in Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Slightly more men than women are employed in sport (55% vs. 45%)⁶, either working in sport-related occupations in the sport sector (e.g. professional athletes, professional coaches) and outside the sport sector (e.g. school sports instructors), or in non-sport occupations in the sport sector (e.g. receptionists in fitness centres). The same trend applies to men and women who engage in voluntary work that supports sporting activities (9% vs. 6%)⁷.

Roles occupied by men and women in sport tend to be different. In the voluntary sector^{8,9}, men are more likely than women to occupy the role of coach/trainer (33% vs. 23%) or referee or official (11% vs. 6%). These differences tend to be more acute when age comes into play. For instance, more young men than women aged 15-24 are coaches/trainers (50% vs. 33%). At the same time, more women than men tend to be responsible for administrative tasks (21% vs. 13%), to support day-to-day club activities (23% vs. 18%) or

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

² Other physical activities such as walking, cycling, dancing, gardening, etc.

³ Source: European Commission (2014). *Special Eurobarometer 412 "Sport and physical activity"*.

⁴ Ibidem

⁵ Ibidem

⁶ Source: Eurostat (2016). *Eurostat Compact Guides: Sport statistics – 2016 edition*.

⁷ Source: European Commission (2014). *Special Eurobarometer 412 "Sport and physical activity"*.

⁸ Ibidem

⁹ No data broken down by sport-related occupation could be found for the paid employment sector.

to provide transport (18% vs. 14%). The latter tasks (support and transport) are mostly performed by women aged 25-39 and 40-54 and those with children. Again, traditional gender roles may be behind these observations and explain these differences.

Although there is a balanced representation of women and men employed in sports, there is evidence of a gender pay gap in sport, including athletes' contractual earnings, sponsorships, endorsements, and prize money. Even though the gender pay gap in sport is seldom estimated¹⁰, Forbes published in 2016 a list of the World's Highest Paid Athletes¹¹. In a list of 100 athletes, there are only two women: in the 40th and 88th positions. The salary difference between the first (occupied by a male football player) and the fortieth (occupied by a female tennis player) position is 59.1 million dollars. According to a BBC study carried out in 2015¹², 10 out of 35 sports that attribute prize money do not pay the same amount to sportswomen and sportsmen.

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

- Launch and promote awareness-raising campaigns for the promotion of equality between women and men of all ages in accessing, participating in and benefitting from sport and physical activities.
- Adopt measures to counter negative traditional gender stereotypes and protect those affected by these stereotypes through their free choice and practice of sport.
- Develop strategies and implement special measures, where and when appropriate, until a balanced participation of women and men is reached at all levels of sports organisations in terms of membership, practice, competition, coaching, national and international representation, etc. and ensure the regular monitoring and evaluation of these strategies/measures.
- Identify the reasons for which women, girls, men and boys drop out of sporting and organised or competitive sport, as well as the barriers faced by women and girls (including those from disadvantaged groups) as regards their access to and participation in all levels and fields of sport.
- Encourage sponsors to support both women's and men's programmes equally and to award women and men equal grants, pay, prize money and bonuses.

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

EXAMPLE 1. HANDBOOK ON GOOD PRACTICES TO PROMOTE ACCESS FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN TO SPORT

Promoter: Council of Europe

Published in: 2011

This handbook describes the situation about the participation of girls and women in sport in Europe in 2011. A range of good practices are presented to provide inspiration for practices to promote access for girls and women to sport. Based on an assessment of obstacles to sport and the lessons learnt from the good practices, a series of recommendations is formulated. Download the handbook [here](#).

EXAMPLE 2. FUND FOR SPORTING EQUALITY

Promoter: Scottish Government

Launched in: 2016

sportscotland commissioned a study about equality in Scottish sport, which was funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The [report](#) analysed who participates in sport, the barriers to participation, and suggests potential solutions. Considering the results of this report, the First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced in July 2016 the creation of a Sporting Equality Fund (£300.000) to increase women's engagement in

¹⁰ Source: *Women on Boards (2016). Gender Balance in Global Sport Report.*

¹¹ Source: *Forbes (2016). The World's Highest-Paid Athletes.* Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/athletes/list/#tab:overall>. Last accessed on 17 October 2016.

¹² Source: BBC (2015). Men get more prize money than women in 30% of sports. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/29789953>. Last accessed on 17 October 2016.