

2 Why should we tackle gender inequalities in sport?

Gender equality in sport matters. More generally, gender equality is a question of fairness and justice. It is enshrined in a number of legal instruments of the Council of Europe such as the European Convention on Human Rights, the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, as well as other gender equality standards,¹ and in the legislation existing in the European countries.



This factsheet explores the main arguments supporting the systematic implementation of a gender equality strategy in all actions in the field of sport.

BENEFITS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN SPORT FOR SOCIETY

Fostering access to and the participation of women and girls in many levels and fields of sport can have a positive impact on society as a whole.

► Sport provides girls, boys, women and men with an environment conducive to education and the social development of the individual and contributes to fostering good health and well-being in society → **public health and social development.**

For instance, by occupying leadership positions in sports organisations, women can develop valuable skills in management, negotiation, communication and decision making to become leaders in all areas of community life. They can provide positive role models and positively influence social attitudes towards women's capabilities as leaders.

► Sport allows girls and boys to develop the essential values for life in a democratic society, such as fair play, respect for others and respect for rules, team spirit, tolerance and responsibility, which contributes to turning them into responsible citizens → **education.**

► Sport can promote the social integration of girls, boys, women and men, from disadvantaged groups exposed to multiple discrimination (when sex and gender overlap with other grounds of discrimination such as age, race, ethnic origin, sexual orientation and disability) and can contribute towards better understanding among communities, including in post-conflict regions → **inclusion.**

Better gender equality in sport can contribute to a better quality of life!

In more gender-equal countries, the chances of enjoying a high quality of life are about twice as high compared to less gender-equal countries.²

¹ See www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality/standards-and-mechanisms.

² Holter O. G. (2017), "Gender Equality and Quality of Life – How gender equality contributes to development in Europe. A study of Poland and Norway". See contributions at www.eeagrants.org/project-portal/project/PL12-0066.

By the way, sport does not merely reflect society, it is also a powerful means for influencing it. As it is highly visible and one of the most powerful social institutions, sport can therefore be an important vehicle for promoting gender equality as well as the empowerment of women and girls.

It can be also a tool for educating, informing and raising awareness of gender-based violence. Sporting activities offer opportunities to reach out to men and boys and women and girls to examine issues related to gender-based violence, gender-based discrimination and stereotypical attitudes, for example on the physical abilities of women and men, on the role of women in social life, in leading positions, etc.

Why prevent and combat gender-based violence in sport?

Gender-based violence affects one woman in three globally and occurs in the sporting context as well, despite the ethical values that sport promotes (see Factsheet 1).

It threatens athletes' physical, emotional and mental health. It impacts on their performance and career which may lead to them dropping out of the sporting world completely. Violence also undermines organisations' reputations and the integrity of sport.

- ▶ Preventing and combating it can contribute to ensuring sport is a safe place for all, which fulfils its role of empowering women and girls.

BENEFITS FOR SPORTS ORGANISATIONS

Investing in gender equality can have a substantial positive impact within sports organisations.

- ▶ Gender equality is generally associated with progressive organisations, responsive to social change, which may improve the image of the organisation in the eyes of government, members, spectators, media, potential sponsors and the general public → **positive image**.

- ▶ As women represent more than half of the European population, including them better offers an organisation an expansion of its "market" through better outreach of all groups and profiles of individuals, attracting more public interest and private investment and, in turn, potentially, more memberships → **economic growth**.

For instance, more coaches of the under-represented sex may shift the culture and the dynamics in the organisation and attract more players.

- ▶ Diversity within teams and organisations brings together varied perspectives, produces a more multifaceted analysis of the issues at stake, and triggers greater effort from all that leads to improved decisions and performance. It can also increase creativity, innovation and members' understanding, and foster mutual learning and motivation¹ → **performing organisations**.

- ▶ In the context where sports organisations often face difficulties in recruiting coaches, attracting volunteers, finding decision makers, etc., investing in women can lead to more human resources → **increase in human resources**.

¹ UEFA and University of St Gallen, "Benefits of Diversity & Inclusion: Outcomes, Challenges & Opportunities" (2017).

ALL IN: Towards gender balance in sport (Erasmus +)

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