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the European Union



Re-imagining the playing field - a gender equality in sport project

Collaborative partnership in sport

Project N°101133364



GUIDE FOR ATHLETES, COACHES, REFEREES AND SPORT PROFESSIONALS



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INTRODUCTION

About the guide

This guide is specifically tailored for athletes, coaches, referees and sports professionals who are committed to building an inclusive and equitable environment within the sports industry. Despite significant progress, gender inequality remains a challenge in sports worldwide. Studies show that women make up only a fraction of leadership roles in sports organizations, receive lower pay and have fewer sponsorship opportunities compared to their male counterparts. For example:

- Women occupy less than 20% of executive positions in major sports organizations globally, limiting the diversity of perspectives that shape sports policy and decision-making.
- In professional sports, female athletes earn significantly less than their male counterparts. According to a report by the BBC, the gender pay gap in sports can be as high as 88%, depending on the sport and country.
- Women's sports receive only about 4% of total sports media coverage, making it challenging for female athletes to gain visibility and recognition for their achievements.

The purpose of this guide is to help sports professionals—athletes, coaches, referees, and support staff—promote gender equality in their sports environments. It aims to:

- Give a clear understanding of what gender equality, fairness, and inclusion mean in sports.
- Show the specific challenges that women face in sports, so everyone can be more aware of issues that may arise.
- Offer simple, useful steps that sports professionals can take to create fair and equal opportunities, like making sure training resources are shared fairly and encouraging everyone to take on leadership roles.
- Motivate sports professionals to treat everyone with respect, use inclusive language, and build a supportive environment where everyone feels valued.

By implementing strategies, athletes, coaches, referees, and other sports professionals—including sports organization staff, team managers, media officers, and board members—can contribute to a culture where everyone, regardless of gender, has equal opportunities to succeed and be respected.

With the growing awareness of gender equality, the sports industry has a unique opportunity to lead by example, creating teams, clubs, and organizations where all individuals can thrive.

About the project

The "Re-imagining the playing field - a gender equality in sport project"(GESP) project is co-funded under Erasmus+ program, as the collaborative partnership in the field of sport, aimed at addressing gender inequality in sports by identifying and tackling the barriers that prevent women from fully participating, leading, and thriving in the sports sector. This project focuses on promoting gender equality and inclusivity across all levels of sport, from grassroots to elite levels, by engaging a wide range of stakeholders, including female athletes, coaches, referees and other experts.

The basis for this project lies in the ongoing and widespread issue of gender inequality in sports. Women and girls continue to face significant barriers in their participation, representation, and leadership in the sports world, including limited access to resources and opportunities, inadequate media representation and inadequate representation in coaching and training roles. These inequalities are not just limited to elite sport but also present in grassroots and community sports. To address these issues and promote gender equality in sports, this project will aim to support organizations in integrating gender equality policies and practices into their operations, identify and address barriers to gender equality and build the capacity of organizations to promote gender equality in sports.

The aim of this project is to promote gender equality in sport by addressing imbalances in gender representation and raising awareness about gender inequalities in sport and to support organizations in integrating a gender equality approach into their operations and ensuring that relevant policies are applied across the organization.

GESP key objectives:

- To raise awareness of gender inequality in sports and highlight the barriers faced by women, such as underrepresentation, limited opportunities, and discriminatory practices.
- To support organizations in implementing gender equality policies, integrating gender-sensitive approaches into their operations, and building the capacity to foster gender equality.
- To facilitate knowledge-sharing through workshops, public events, and a series of podcasts featuring interviews with female sports professionals, which will provide insights into the challenges they face.
- To create resources, including a toolkit, to promote gender equality practices and offer practical guidance to sports organizations.
- To increase public understanding and support for gender equality through a targeted public awareness campaign, ensuring sustainable outcomes.

Project coordinator



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UNDERSTANDING GENDER EQUALITY IN SPORT

Definitions and key concepts

Gender equality

Gender equality in sport refers to the fair treatment of all individuals, regardless of gender, ensuring that everyone has equal opportunities, resources, and access to participate, compete, and excel. In practice, it means providing the same quality of facilities, funding, media coverage and career advancement opportunities for both men and women in sports.

Gender equity

Gender equity acknowledges that men and women may have different needs and face different barriers, so resources and opportunities may need to be distributed differently to achieve fairness. In sports, this might mean targeted support for women's teams, such as increased funding for marketing or development to address historical underinvestment and bring them to a comparable level with men's teams.

Inclusion

Inclusion in sports means creating an environment where all individuals, regardless of gender, feel welcomed, supported and valued. This involves cultivating a respectful culture, using inclusive language, and removing barriers that prevent certain groups from participating fully.

Example:

Sports clubs creating safe spaces for female athletes by implementing codes of conduct that prohibit discrimination and harassment, along with regular training on inclusive behavior for all staff and athletes.

Representation

Representation focuses on achieving a balanced presence of men and women in all roles, from athletes and coaches to leadership and board positions. In a gender-equal sports organization, women are as visible and influential as men, creating role models and opportunities for future generations.

Example:

A national sports organization setting targets to have at least 40% women in leadership and coaching positions within five years, ensuring women are represented across all levels.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the understanding that gender intersects with other identities—such as race, ethnicity, disability, and socio-economic background—and that these overlapping identities can create unique challenges and barriers. Effective gender equality initiatives recognize and address these intersecting factors to ensure that all women benefit from equity and inclusion efforts.

Example:

Some organizations provide mentorship and scholarships for young female athletes from low-income backgrounds, enabling them to overcome financial barriers that may prevent them from pursuing a sports career.

Allyship

Allyship involves active support and advocacy for individuals from marginalized groups by those in positions of privilege or influence. In sports, this means that male athletes, coaches, and administrators work alongside women to solve barriers and promote an inclusive environment for all. It encourages collaborative efforts and can accelerate cultural change within sports organizations.

Example:

Male coaches or athletes advocating for equal resources for women's teams, or leadership ensuring that women's voices are included in decision-making, demonstrates allyship.

Visibility and media representation

Visibility refers to the degree to which female athletes, coaches, and sports professionals are represented and celebrated in media and public platforms. Equal media representation helps normalize women's participation in sports, inspiring future generations and supporting the financial growth of women's leagues.

Example:

Ensuring equal media coverage of women's sporting events, featuring female athletes in promotional content, and highlighting their achievements on social media are key practices for improving visibility.

Advocacy and policy change

Advocacy in sports involves efforts to create systemic change by influencing policies, practices, and cultural norms. By supporting policies for equal pay, funding and resources, sports organizations can institutionalize gender equality and set standards for accountability.

Example:

An organization implementing policies to ensure equal pay for male and female athletes, or a governing body introducing rules that mandate diverse hiring practices, demonstrates advocacy in action.

Checklist for awareness of key concepts

This checklist is designed to help you understand and internalize essential concepts related to gender equality in sport. By familiarizing yourself with these foundational ideas, you'll be better prepared to recognize, advocate for, and implement gender-equal practices within your team or organization.



HOW TO USE:

Review this checklist periodically, especially before engaging in discussions or decision-making on gender equality topics. This will serve as a self-assessment to confirm your understanding or to identify areas where you may want to seek further information.

- ☐ I understand the difference between gender equality and gender equity.
- ☐ I am aware of how inclusion and representation contribute to a gender-equal sports environment.
- ☐ I recognize the impact of intersectionality and acknowledge how various identities can intersect and create unique challenges.
- ☐ I actively support allyship by standing up for gender equality in my sports community.
- ☐ I understand the importance of visibility and media representation and strive to celebrate and promote female achievements.

Importance of gender equality in sports

Gender equality in sports isn't just a moral imperative—it brings tangible benefits to team performance, culture, and overall inclusiveness. By promoting gender equality, sports organizations can create a healthier, more collaborative and forward-thinking environment that enables everyone to thrive.

Promotes fairness and social justice

Gender equality in sports is a matter of fairness, ensuring that all individuals have the right to participate and succeed. Historically, women have been underrepresented and undervalued, leading to disparities in pay, opportunities, and resources. Addressing these imbalances promotes social justice and aligns sports organizations with core values of equality, respect and inclusiveness.

Enhances performance and success

A commitment to gender equality fosters a more inclusive and supportive environment, which positively impacts performance. When both men and women have access to high-quality training, resources, and support, they can achieve their full potential. Research published in the [Journal of Sports Sciences \(2020\)](#) specifically examined sports organizations, finding that teams with diverse coaching staff and gender-balanced leadership excelled at strategic decision-making and problem-solving. Gender-diverse teams also reported higher satisfaction levels and improved conflict resolution, all of which contribute to greater team success.

Expands economic opportunities

Equal representation and support for female athletes open up new markets and fan bases. Women's sports have shown significant growth in viewership and sponsorship when given the same level of investment and media coverage as men's sports.

Builds a positive organizational culture

A commitment to gender equality helps create a respectful and inclusive culture within sports organizations. By fostering an environment where everyone feels valued and motivated, organizations can reduce instances of discrimination, harassment, and bias. This positive culture strengthens relationships among teammates, coaches, and staff, enhancing cohesion and mutual respect.

Inspires future generations

When young girls and boys see gender equality in sports, it reinforces the message that they can aspire to any role, regardless of gender. Seeing role models in coaching, officiating, and leadership positions provides young athletes with diverse examples of success, inspiring them to pursue their passions and break down stereotypes.

BARRIERS TO GENDER EQUALITY IN SPORT

Challenges faced by female athletes, coaches, referees and sports professionals

Gender equality in sport remains a significant issue worldwide, with female athletes encountering numerous barriers that hinder their participation, progression and recognition. Insights from the podcast series recorded as part of this project highlight the following challenges, illustrating the systemic obstacles women encounter in sports today:

- **Limited opportunities and funding gaps**

Female athletes often lack access to the same development programs, training facilities, and financial support that are more r available to male athletes. For example, Natasa Andonova discussed the lack of professional clubs in North Macedonia, which limits opportunities for women to develop their football careers locally.

- **Gender stereotypes and discrimination**

Stereotypes around gender roles affect female athletes, often leading to bias and discrimination from peers, coaches, and society. Angela Rajchevska, a referee, shared her experience of being questioned and not trusted on the field, simply because she was a woman entering a traditionally male-dominated role.

- **Media representation and visibility**

Media coverage of women's sports remains disproportionately low compared to men's sports, impacting female athletes' visibility and potential sponsorships. For instance, Aleksandra Stojkovic noted how the media often focuses more on a female athlete's appearance than her achievements, undermining her professional contributions.

- **Pay gaps and financial security**

The gender pay gap persists across nearly all sports, forcing many female athletes to pursue dual careers. Jovana Damjanovic highlighted the need for female football players to have alternative income sources due to low pay in women's football, despite playing at high levels.

- **Mental health and social expectations**

Female athletes frequently face unique mental health challenges related to societal pressures and the demands of balancing personal and professional lives. Sanja Malagurski shared how the intense pressure to perform led to a mental breakdown, emphasizing the need for mental health support in sports.

- **Lack of female role models and mentorship**

Limited visibility of women in sports leadership roles can hinder young athletes from finding relatable role models. Irena Beleshkova from North Macedonia highlighted the impact of role models in empowering young girls, particularly in rural areas.

- **Lack of trust and respect in male-dominated fields**

Female referees and coaches often struggle to gain the same level of trust and respect as their male counterparts, facing skepticism about their abilities. Angela Rajchevska, a referee, shared that she often encounters doubt and resistance simply because her presence challenges the norm in a traditionally male-dominated field.

- **Limited professional development and networking opportunities**

Female coaches and referees have fewer opportunities to access high-level coaching programs, workshops, and mentorship, making it harder to advance their careers. This limited access often stems from the underrepresentation of women in sports leadership and coaching roles. Jovana Damnjanovic highlighted the need for women to break through barriers that often limit their access to professional development opportunities and prevent them from advancing to higher positions.

- **Gender stereotypes and bias in recruitment and hiring**

Stereotypes about “appropriate” roles for women in sports can limit hiring opportunities for female coaches and referees, who are often perceived as less authoritative or competent in high-stakes environments. Female coaches may be downgraded to coaching women’s teams or youth programs, while male coaches are often preferred for senior or elite roles, reinforcing gender hierarchies within sports organizations.

- **Higher standards and scrutiny in performance**

Female referees and coaches frequently face heightened scrutiny, with their mistakes or decisions judged more harshly than those of their male peers. This double standard creates pressure to constantly prove themselves in ways that male referees and coaches may not experience. Referees like Angela Rajchevska noted that they must be “twice as good” to gain the same respect and acknowledgment as their male counterparts.

- **Lack of female role models and mentorship in leadership**

The underrepresentation of women in high-ranking sports roles means that female referees and coaches often lack mentors or role models who can provide guidance and support. This absence of mentorship can lead to feelings of isolation and limit their career development. Irena Beleshkova emphasized the importance of role models, especially in male-dominated roles like coaching and refereeing, to inspire younger generations and provide support within the profession.

Checklist for recognizing and addressing barriers to gender equality in sport

This checklist is designed to help you identify and address the specific challenges that female athletes, coaches, referees, and sports professionals face. By understanding these barriers, you can contribute to creating a more inclusive, supportive, and equitable environment in sports.



HOW TO USE:

Use this checklist as a reflection tool before team meetings, training sessions or discussions on inclusivity. It's especially useful to review when working on team dynamics or creating support programs. As you complete each item, consider specific actions you can take or improvements that could be made within your team or organization to address these barriers.

- ☐ I can recognize and name gender-based stereotypes and biases that affect women in sport, and I actively work to challenge these when I encounter them.
- ☐ I am aware of the gender pay gap in sports and understand its impact on female athletes' financial stability and career longevity.
- ☐ I encourage open conversations around mental health and social expectations unique to female athletes, ensuring they feel supported.
- ☐ I am mindful of media representation and I avoid supporting stereotypes when discussing female athletes' abilities, appearances, or achievements.
- ☐ I recognize the importance of mentorship and role models for female athletes, coaches, and referees and I support initiatives that encourage these.
- ☐ I acknowledge that women in sports often face limited professional development opportunities and advocate for equal access to training and advancement.
- ☐ I am aware of the lack of visibility and support for women's sports compared to men's sports and support efforts to promote women's events and achievements.
- ☐ I understand that gender-based harassment and discrimination are prevalent in sports and work to create a safe environment where all team members feel respected and protected.
- ☐ I am committed to addressing unconscious biases in recruitment and hiring processes, supporting fair evaluation of skills and potential for women in coaching, refereeing, and leadership roles.
- ☐ I advocate for equal access to resources and facilities for women's teams, ensuring fair distribution of training spaces, equipment and funding.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND REPRESENTATION

Equal opportunities mean ensuring that everyone has the same chances to advance, access resources, and participate fully in sports, regardless of gender. Representation emphasizes balanced visibility and influence of all genders in various roles, from athletes to leadership positions. When individuals advocate for fair treatment, access, and representation, it strengthens team dynamics, promotes a positive environment, and inspires future generations.

This section provides sports professionals with insights and actions they can take to support equal opportunities and fair representation in their environments. By championing these practices, athletes, coaches, referees, and staff can contribute to a sports culture that values fairness and encourages balanced gender representation at all levels.

Practical ways sports professionals can promote equal opportunities

WAYS ATHLETES CAN PROMOTE FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY



Athletes play a crucial role in shaping an inclusive and equitable sports environment. By actively advocating for equal opportunities, athletes can help ensure fair treatment, access, and representation for everyone on the team.

The following are **practical ways** athletes can take initiative—both individually and as a group—to promote equality within their teams and broader sports communities.

Speak up for resource equality:

If you notice that male and female athletes do not have equal access to facilities, practice times, or equipment, organize a team meeting or speak with a coach to highlight these differences. For example, if your team has fewer weight training sessions than a male team, suggest to coaches or administrators that this time be made equal.

Form a peer support group:

Start a support group with teammates of all genders to discuss career development, share experiences, and address any perceived inequalities. For instance, female athletes can share challenges they face, while male athletes can show solidarity and work together to bring up issues with management if they see disparities.

Mentorship initiative:

If you're an experienced athlete, consider mentoring younger athletes, especially female athletes or those from underrepresented groups. Provide guidance on navigating challenges in the sport, such as dealing with biases or building confidence. Offer monthly check-ins to discuss their progress and challenges.

WAYS COACHS CAN PROMOTE FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY



Coaches play a pivotal role in fostering equality and inclusiveness within their teams. By implementing strategies that ensure fair access to resources, encourage balanced leadership, and support the career growth of all athletes, coaches can create a positive and equitable environment.

The following actions provide **practical ways** for coaches to advocate for equal opportunities and set a strong example for inclusivity in sports.

Equal training schedules:

Review your training schedules to ensure all athletes, regardless of gender, receive equal access to training resources. For example, if you manage both a men's and women's team, ensure both have the same number of weekly training sessions, time slots, and access to key facilities like gym equipment and training fields.

Develop inclusive drills and activities:

In mixed-gender training sessions, design drills that emphasize collaboration and mutual respect. For example, pair up male and female athletes for skill-building exercises, emphasizing that each partner brings unique strengths to the activity.

Host career development sessions for female athletes:

Organize workshop focused on building skills for athletic or coaching careers, tailored to female athletes. Cover topics like leadership, building confidence, and handling challenges unique to women in sports. Bring in female guest speakers who can share their career experiences and offer advice.

Encourage balanced representation in team leadership roles:

When selecting team captains or assigning leadership roles, ensure that both male and female athletes have opportunities to lead. For example, alternate the team captain role between genders in mixed teams or encourage female athletes to take on visible roles in team meetings.

WAYS REFEREES CAN PROMOTE FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY

Referees are essential guardians of fairness and integrity in sports. Their decisions not only impact the outcomes of games but also set standards for impartiality and respect on the field. By consciously promoting equal opportunities and addressing potential biases, referees can significantly contribute to a more equitable and inclusive sports environment.



The following steps offer **practical ways** for referees to uphold equality and fairness in every game they officiate.

Be mindful of potential bias in officiating:

Reflect on your own biases and ensure fair treatment across all games. For instance, make a habit of reviewing your officiating decisions after games, paying attention to whether you treated male and female athletes consistently in similar situations, like enforcing fouls or issuing warnings.

Advocate for equal promotion opportunities:

If you notice fewer female referees in leadership or high-profile games, encourage management to promote based on merit rather than gender. For example, suggest that the organization consider implementing blind reviews of referee performance, focusing solely on skill and experience without gender influence.

Participate in gender bias workshops: Seek out or suggest gender bias training specifically for referees to become more aware of subconscious biases that may influence officiating. Encourage peers to join as well, creating a culture of accountability and awareness within the referee community.

WAYS SPORTS STAFF CAN SUPPORT EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND REPRESENTATION

Sports staff play an integral role behind the scenes, shaping policies, recruitment and recognition that drive equality within an organization. By implementing fair hiring practices, setting representation goals, celebrating female achievements, and advocating for balanced sponsorship, sports staff can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment.



The following actions provide **practical ways** for staff to actively promote gender equality across all levels of sports operations.

Implement fair hiring practices:

When hiring for coaching, support staff or any other sport staff, use gender-neutral job descriptions and encourage diverse applications by posting on platforms that support women in sports.

Set tangible goals for gender representation:

If you're responsible for team staffing or leadership roles, set a goal, like having at least 40% female representation among coaches within three years. Share this goal openly with the team and develop a clear plan to reach it, such as by hiring female coaches for assistant roles that can lead to head coaching positions.

Celebrate female achievements:

Create a quarterly spotlight that highlights the achievements of women in sport. For example, dedicate "Spotlight on women in sport" a regular section on social media to celebrate the accomplishments of female athletes across the country. Share recent achievements, inspiring stories, and key moments that show the strength, skill, and determination of women in sports. This initiative can help raise visibility, inspire future generations, and foster a culture that celebrates and supports women's contributions to the sporting world.

Facilitate equal sponsorship opportunities:

If you're involved in marketing or sponsorship, advocate for equal sponsorship opportunities for male and female teams. For example, if a sponsor is interested in supporting a team, suggest splitting the sponsorship between men's and women's teams to give both visibility and resources.

EXAMPLE OF THE WORKSHOP: PROMOTING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND REPRESENTATION

Objective: To equip athletes, coaches, referees, and sports professionals with actionable strategies to support and advocate for equal opportunities and gender representation in sports.

| Workshop segment | Duration | Activities | Goal |
|--|------------|---|--|
| Introduction to equal opportunities and representation | 20 minutes | Presentation: Overview of what equal opportunities and representation mean in sports, including current statistics on gender disparities in sports roles Group discussion: Participants discuss why these principles matter for team dynamics and personal growth | Build awareness about gender disparities and motivate participants to understand the importance of fair opportunities |
| Identifying barriers and challenges | 30 minutes | Brainstorming session: Small groups brainstorm barriers they have observed or experienced that affect gender equality (e.g., lack of female coaches, unequal resource allocation) Share back: Groups share top challenges and discuss with the larger group | Help participants recognize the practical barriers to equal opportunities in their specific sports environments |
| Best practices for equal opportunities in daily roles | 40 minutes | Role-specific strategies: Divide participants by roles (e.g., athletes, coaches, referees) and provide tailored best practices for each group (similar to the practical ways above) Peer exchange: Groups discuss how they can apply these strategies in their roles and share any additional ideas they may have | Provide participants with clear, role-specific actions they can implement in their daily activities to promote equality |
| Break 10 minutes | | | |
| Interactive activity: Scenario simulation | 45 minutes | Scenario role-play: Participants are given scenarios where gender inequality or lack of representation is an issue (e.g., unequal access to training, overlooked female referees) Role-playing solutions: Participants role-play potential solutions and responses, focusing on advocacy and inclusive behavior Group feedback: Peers provide feedback on each role-play, discussing alternative approaches and improvements | Equip participants with practical experience in addressing issues related to gender equality, promoting confidence in handling similar real-life situations |
| Break 10 minutes | | | |
| Creating a personal action plan for advocacy | 30 minutes | Goal-setting exercise: Participants write down one or two goals related to promoting equal opportunities in their roles (e.g., supporting female team members, advocating for equal resources) Action plan development: Each participant outlines specific steps to achieve their goals over the next 6 months, including any resources or support they may need Partner Feedback: Participants pair up to share their action plans and provide feedback to refine goals | Encourage participants to make a personal commitment to supporting equal opportunities and representation, ensuring actionable steps to implement after the workshop |

| | | | |
|--------------------|------------|--|---|
| Q&A and reflection | 15 minutes | Open Q&A: Participants ask final questions or discuss lingering thoughts Reflection Activity: Each participant writes down one key takeaway from the workshop and one immediate action they will take Closing Remarks: Trainer summarizes the importance of individual contributions to equal opportunities | Emphasize workshop takeaways, encourage reflection, and foster commitment to ongoing advocacy for gender equality |
|--------------------|------------|--|---|

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

- Understand gender inequality in sports and its impact on careers and teams.
- Identify and recognize personal and systemic biases that affect opportunities.
- Learn practical ways to advocate for equality in their daily roles.
- Develop a personal action plan to promote equal opportunities.
- Commit to fostering an inclusive culture within their teams.
- Gain confidence in communicating and advocating for equality effectively.

Example scenarios for role-play activity

For athletes: You notice that the women's team does not have access to the same quality of equipment as the men's team.

How do you approach this issue with your coach or administration to advocate for equal resources?



For coaches: You're organizing training schedules and realize that male athletes often get preferred time slots or more advanced equipment.

How do you adjust your schedule or communicate with other staff to ensure both male and female athletes have equal training opportunities?



For referees: You observe that female referees are not assigned to high-profile games as often as male referees.



How would you address this issue with your supervisor to advocate for fair assignments?

For sport staff: A sponsorship opportunity has arisen that would benefit the men's team significantly, but there is no equivalent support for the women's team. How do you propose a more balanced allocation or advocate for equal sponsorship opportunities?



Checklist for equal opportunities and representation

This checklist serves as a practical guide for athletes, coaches, referees, and sports staff to regularly assess their efforts in promoting gender equality and balanced representation within their teams and organizations.



HOW TO USE:

- Use this checklist quarterly to evaluate your efforts and progress in promoting equality within your role.
- For each item, consider if you're meeting the goal or if there's room for improvement.
- Based on the items you identify as needing improvement, set short-term goals to address them.
- Keep a record of your progress over time and adjust your approach as needed.

- ➔ Are male and female athletes receiving equal access to facilities, training times, and equipment?
- ➔ Have I raised any concerns about resource disparities with management or team leaders?
- ➔ Do I encourage balanced gender representation in team leadership roles (e.g., captains, mentors)?
- ➔ Am I actively supporting and recognizing female athletes' achievements and contributions?
- ➔ Have I taken steps to recognize and address my own biases?
- ➔ Do I apply rules and standards consistently across all athletes, regardless of gender?
- ➔ Am I offering mentorship or support to female athletes and underrepresented groups?
- ➔ Do I promote career development sessions or opportunities for all athletes, with a focus on inclusivity?
- ➔ Are job postings and hiring practices designed to attract diverse applicants?
- ➔ Do I advocate for equal promotion opportunities based on merit, rather than gender?
- ➔ Have I participated in or encouraged others to join gender sensitivity or bias training?
- ➔ Am I up-to-date with best practices for promoting equality in sports?
- ➔ Do I actively celebrate the achievements of female staff, athletes, or referees in team communications?
- ➔ Have I advocated for equal sponsorship or media opportunities for female teams?

PROMOTING INCLUSIVENESS IN SPORT

Creating an inclusive sports environment ensures that everyone, regardless of gender, race, background, or ability, has the opportunity to participate and excel. Inclusiveness goes beyond simply opening doors—it involves fostering a culture of respect, representation, and equal opportunity for all. By actively promoting inclusiveness, sports organizations can support diverse talents, broaden participation, and create stronger, more unified teams. This section outlines practical strategies and best practices for embedding inclusivity into every aspect of sports, from recruitment and training to leadership and community engagement.

INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT AND HIRING PROCESSES

To help build diverse and fair teams, sports professionals can take steps to support unbiased recruitment and ensure that all candidates, regardless of gender or background, are evaluated fairly. This section offers practical guidelines for creating an inclusive hiring process, including using consistent interview questions, involving a diverse group of interviewers, promoting job openings widely, and training to recognize and reduce unconscious biases.

By adopting these **practices**, organizations can promote gender equality and foster a more inclusive sports environment.

1. Use a standardized interview guide with the same questions for all candidates to minimize bias

Using a consistent set of questions for all candidates minimizes bias by ensuring everyone is evaluated on the same criteria. This focuses the interview on relevant skills, experience and values, reducing the influence of subjective impressions.

How to implement this step:

Prepare a list of general, inclusivity-focused, and position-specific questions. Use these questions consistently across all interviews.

Here is some example questions tailored for sports-related positions:

General competency questions:

- "Describe a time when you had to solve a challenging problem. What approach did you take, and what was the outcome?"
- "How do you handle feedback from athletes, colleagues, or supervisors, especially in high-pressure situations?"

Inclusivity and diversity:

- "Can you share an example of how you've contributed to an inclusive environment in a previous role?"
- "What strategies would you use to foster a sense of belonging among all team members, including those from underrepresented groups?"

Position-specific skills:

- For a coaching role:

"How do you ensure fair and equal training opportunities for all team members, regardless of gender or background?"

- For an administrative role:

"What measures would you take to support gender equality in organizational policy-making or resource allocation?"

2. Gender-diverse interview panels

Including a range of perspectives on interview panels ensures that hiring decisions reflect diverse viewpoints, which can reduce unconscious bias and lead to fairer assessments.

How to implement this step:

Create panels with balanced representation (e.g., gender, roles, diversity experience) to evaluate candidates from multiple perspectives.

Suggested steps:

- *For a coaching position:*

A three-person panel could include a senior male coach, a female team administrator, and an HR representative with experience in diversity and inclusion.

- *For a senior administrative position:*

The panel could consist of a female executive, a male operations manager, and a member of the board (preferably gender-diverse) who oversees inclusivity initiatives.

This balanced perspective can help ensure that candidates are evaluated fairly, as each panel member may notice different strengths and challenges in candidates.

3. Broad and inclusive job advertising

Advertising job openings on platforms that focus on inclusivity and gender equality increases the possibility of reaching a diverse candidate pool. This promotes a more inclusive applicant base by encouraging underrepresented groups to apply.

How to implement this step:

To reach a diverse candidate pool, advertise on platforms and networks that are known for focusing on inclusivity and gender equality in sports. The social media networks increase visibility among underrepresented groups, attracting a more inclusive range of applicants.

4. Unconscious bias training workshop

Training helps decision makers and team members become aware of their own biases and learn ways to reduce them. This leads to fairer and more inclusive hiring practices and helps create a lasting culture of equality within the organization.

How to implement this step:

Conduct workshops that include reflection exercises, case studies, debiasing techniques, and role-playing scenarios to equip hiring teams with the skills to make unbiased decisions.

WORKSHOP EXAMPLE UNCONSCIOUS BIAS TRAINING WORKSHOP:

Objective: To equip decision-makers involved in recruitment and team selection with tools to identify unconscious biases and make more objective, inclusive decisions.

| Workshop segment | Duration | Activities | Goal |
|---------------------------------------|------------|--|--|
| Introduction to unconscious bias | 20 minutes | - Brief presentation on unconscious bias and specific examples related to recruitment and team selection (e.g., similarity bias, confirmation bias) | Provide foundational knowledge on unconscious bias and its relevance in sports recruitment |
| Interactive exercise: Bias reflection | 25 minutes | - Individual reflection on a past recruitment decision and identification of any potential biases - Small group discussion to share reflections and insights | Encourage self-awareness and peer discussion around personal biases |
| Case study analysis | 30 minutes | - Present a real-world case study on unconscious bias in hiring or team selection - Group discussion to explore alternative approaches | Enable practical application of concepts through real-life scenarios and discussion |
| Break 10 minutes | | | |
| Debiasing techniques | 25 minutes | - Presentation on debiasing techniques (structured interviews, self-awareness, slowing down decision-making) - Group Q&A for additional techniques | Equip participants with tools and techniques to mitigate biases |
| Role-playing exercise | 30 minutes | - Mock interviews or selection discussions in pairs or small groups, with feedback on unbiased responses - Peer feedback on observed biases and areas for improvement | Reinforce learning through practice and constructive peer feedback |
| Break 10 minutes | | | |
| Takeaway tools and wrap-up | 20 minutes | - Distribute checklist for unbiased recruitment and self-assessment questionnaire - Open discussion for questions and final reflections | Summarize key takeaways, provide resources, and encourage commitment to bias-free hiring |

Outcomes:

- Recognize what unconscious bias is and how it affects recruitment and team selection, especially within the sports sector.
- Reflect on their own biases and how these may influence hiring decisions, leading to greater personal insight and responsibility.
- Learn practical techniques to minimize biases in recruitment, such as using structured interviews and slowing down decision-making processes.

- Practice unbiased recruitment methods through role-playing exercises and case study analysis, enhancing their skills for real-world application.
- Get familiar with the tools (e.g., checklists and self-assessment questionnaires) and an action plan for implementing bias-free hiring practices within their organization.

Checklist for inclusive recruitment and hiring

This checklist is designed to guide HR teams and hiring managers in implementing fair, bias-free recruitment processes. By focusing on inclusivity at each stage, this checklist helps attract and retain diverse talent within the organization.

HOW TO USE:



- Use this checklist as a planning tool when setting up recruitment processes, ensuring that each element is included from the start.
- Refer to the checklist throughout the hiring process to ensure that each step aligns with inclusive practices.
- After each recruitment cycle, review the checklist to assess which practices were successfully implemented and identify any areas needing adjustment.
- Regularly revisit and update the checklist based on new insights, feedback, and changes in organizational goals for inclusivity.

- ☐ Define clear role requirements to attract a diverse pool of candidates, focusing on skills and experience rather than subjective qualities.
- ☐ Use gender-neutral and inclusive language in job descriptions to avoid unintentional bias.
- ☐ Highlight the organization's commitment to inclusivity and equal opportunity in all job postings.
- ☐ Post job openings on diverse platforms that reach underrepresented groups, such as websites, forums, and networks dedicated to gender and cultural inclusivity.
- ☐ Promote job listings on social media and community boards to increase visibility among a broad audience.
- ☐ Encourage employee referrals from diverse networks, emphasizing inclusivity as a priority.
- ☐ Remove identifying information (e.g., names, gender markers) during initial resume screenings to minimize unconscious bias.
- ☐ Use structured screening criteria based strictly on job qualifications and skills, avoiding assumptions based on personal characteristics.
- ☐ Aim to create a diverse shortlist, ensuring representation from different backgrounds and perspectives.
- ☐ Prepare a standardized interview guide with the same questions for all candidates to ensure fairness and consistency.
- ☐ Organize a gender-diverse interview panel to provide varied perspectives and minimize potential biases.

- ☐ Include questions on inclusivity and diversity to assess candidates' commitment to these values.
- ☐ Avoid leading or assumptive questions that may reinforce stereotypes or gender expectations.
- ☐ Use a consistent scoring system to evaluate all candidates, focusing on skills and relevant experience.
- ☐ Review feedback from all panel members, emphasizing inclusivity and cultural fit alongside technical skills.
- ☐ Be mindful of potential biases in the evaluation process, and encourage reviewers to reflect on any assumptions.
- ☐ Ensure that the onboarding process reinforces the organization's commitment to inclusivity and equal opportunity.
- ☐ Provide resources and training on diversity, equity, and inclusion as part of the new hire orientation.
- ☐ Schedule regular check-ins with new hires to gather feedback on the recruitment process and initial experience.
- ☐ Collect feedback from candidates on their experience throughout the hiring process to identify areas for improvement.
- ☐ Monitor recruitment metrics, such as applicant diversity and retention rates, to assess the effectiveness of inclusive hiring practices.
- ☐ Regularly review and update recruitment policies to stay aligned with best practices for inclusivity and fairness.

ESTABLISHING MENTORSHIP AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Mentorship and leadership programs are key to supporting gender equality in sports. These programs give women—whether they are athletes, coaches, or referees—the support and guidance they need to grow in their careers. By connecting them with experienced mentors, organizations can help build confidence, develop leadership skills, and increase representation of women in all areas of sports. This section provides simple steps for setting up mentorship and leadership programs that help women succeed and create a more inclusive sports environment.

1. Launching a mentorship program

Creating a mentorship program helps women in sports gain valuable guidance and support from experienced leaders. This program connects young female athletes and professionals with mentors who can share knowledge, offer advice, and help them grow in their careers.

By following these steps, organizations can set up a structured mentorship program that builds confidence, develops skills, and fosters a supportive network within the sports community.

Identify mentors and mentees:

- Recruit experienced female leaders in the sports organization (e.g., senior coaches, managers) to serve as mentors.
- Identify young female athletes and professionals who would benefit from mentorship and invite them to participate.

Pairing process:

- Pair mentors and mentees based on specific goals, professional interests, or career paths (e.g., coaching, sports management).
- Conduct introductory sessions where mentors and mentees discuss goals and expectations.

Develop a structured mentorship plan:

- Create a mentorship timeline (e.g., 6-12 months) with regular check-ins and objectives for each session.
- Provide resources, such as a mentorship handbook, with suggested activities, goal-setting templates, and communication tips.

Support and monitor progress:

- Schedule quarterly check-ins with both mentors and mentees to gather feedback and adjust the program as needed.
- Facilitate group sessions where all mentors and mentees can share their experiences and challenges, fostering a supportive community.

Evaluate success and gather feedback:

- Conduct surveys or interviews at the end of the program to assess outcomes and gather feedback.
- Use the feedback to improve future mentorship cycles.

2. Leadership workshops and career development sessions

Leadership workshops and career development sessions provide women in sports with the skills and confidence needed to excel in leadership roles. Through self-reflection, practical exercises, and peer support, participants explore their unique strengths, develop public speaking and communication skills, and gain hands-on experience in leadership scenarios. These sessions are designed to help women build a strong foundation for effective leadership and plan their growth within the sports community.

EXAMPLE OF A LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP AND ITS OBJECTIVES:

- Help participants understand their leadership styles, strengths, and areas for improvement.
- Equip participants with assertive communication and public speaking skills.
- Provide hands-on experience through role-playing and scenario-based exercises.
- Encourage participants to create actionable goals and plans for continued growth.

| Workshop segment | Duration | Activities | Goal |
|---|------------|--|--|
| Introduction to leadership and confidence | 30 minutes | Presentation on leadership styles: Overview of various leadership styles (e.g., transformational, transactional, servant leadership) Discussion on self-perception and confidence: Participants share personal experiences with confidence in leadership | Build self-awareness around different leadership styles and recognize the role of confidence in effective leadership |
| Self-assessment and personal strengths | 30 minutes | Self-reflection exercise: Participants complete a self-assessment to identify personal strengths and areas for improvement Group sharing: Small groups discuss their findings and identify common strengths among women leaders | Help participants recognize their strengths and areas where they can grow, building a foundation of self-awareness |
| Public speaking and assertive communication | 45 minutes | Public Speaking Practice: Participants prepare and deliver a short speech on a topic of their choice. Peer feedback and support: Participants provide constructive feedback to each other, focusing on voice, body language, and assertiveness Confidence-building tips: Trainer shares techniques for improving public speaking skills, including handling nervousness and using body language effectively | Develop assertive communication and public speaking skills to enhance leadership presence |
| Leadership in action: role-playing exercise | 45 minutes | Scenario-based role play: Participants act out scenarios, such as leading a team meeting or resolving a conflict within the team Debrief and reflection: Group discussion on the challenges faced during the role-play and strategies for effective leadership | Build practical leadership skills in a safe, supportive environment, allowing participants to practice decision-making and team management |
| Goal-setting and action planning | 30 minutes | Leadership goal-setting exercise: Participants set specific, actionable goals related to their personal leadership growth Action plan creation: Develop an action plan for the next 3-6 months, detailing steps to build confidence and strengthen leadership skills. | Encourage participants to set and commit to personal leadership goals, creating a pathway for continued growth |

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

- Recognize different leadership styles and identify which styles align best with their personal strengths.
- Reflect on personal strengths and areas for growth, developing a stronger sense of self-confidence in leadership roles.
- Build skills in assertive communication, including public speaking techniques, handling nervousness, and using body language effectively.
- Practice decision-making, team management, and conflict resolution through role-playing exercises in a supportive environment.
- Leave with specific, actionable goals for personal leadership development, along with an action plan for the next 3-6 months to guide their growth.

EXAMPLE OF A CAREER DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP: STRATEGIC SKILLS FOR ADVANCEMENT AND NEGOTIATION

Objectives of suggested workshop

- Provide participants with an overview of various career opportunities within the sports industry, helping them understand potential paths for growth.
- Equip participants with practical skills for negotiating and advocating for themselves effectively in their careers.
- Help participants identify their unique strengths and learn how to communicate them through personal branding, both online and offline.
- Guide participants in mapping out career milestones and developing an action plan to build the skills needed for future growth.
- Facilitate networking and introduce participants to the value of mentorship, creating opportunities for ongoing support and professional connections.

| Workshop segment | Duration | Activities | Goal |
|---|------------|--|---|
| Introduction to career advancement and goal setting | 20 minutes | Presentation on career paths in sports: Overview of potential career paths in sports, from coaching to administrative roles. Personal goal reflection: Participants individually reflect on their career aspirations and the skills needed to achieve them. | Provide participants with an understanding of potential career paths and the importance of goal-setting for professional growth |
| Negotiation skills and self-advocacy | 45 minutes | Presentation on negotiation tactics: Introduction to key negotiation techniques (e.g., preparing, setting limits, finding mutual gain). Role-playing exercise: Participants practice negotiating in scenarios, such as salary discussions or resource allocation. Feedback and Discussion: Trainer provides feedback on negotiation approaches and participants discuss strategies for advocating for themselves confidently. | Equip participants with practical negotiation skills and self-advocacy strategies to support career progression |

| | | | |
|---|------------|--|---|
| Building a personal brand | 45 minutes | <p>Workshop on personal branding: Participants identify unique qualities they bring to the field and craft a personal brand statement.</p> <p>Social media and networking tips: Trainer discusses how to build an online presence and network within the sports industry.</p> <p>Peer review: Participants share brand statements and receive feedback on clarity and impact.</p> | Empower participants to develop a personal brand and learn how to communicate their strengths effectively, both online and offline |
| Strategic planning and long-term career mapping | 40 minutes | <p>Career roadmap activity: Participants map out their career paths, identifying milestones and goals for the next 5-10 years.</p> <p>Strategic skill-building plan: Participants identify specific skills they need to reach their milestones and set an action plan to acquire them (e.g., by pursuing additional certifications or training).</p> | Enable participants to think strategically about their career progression and identify actionable steps for achieving long-term goals |
| Networking and mentorship opportunities | | <p>Interactive networking session: Participants practice networking skills in small groups.</p> <p>Discussion on mentorship: Trainer shares the importance of mentorship, and participants discuss ways to find or become mentors.</p> <p>Mentorship matchmaking: Optional pairing of participants with potential mentors within or outside the organization.</p> | |

By the end of the workshop, participants will:

- Gain clarity on different career paths in sports and the skills needed to pursue them.
- Feel more confident in negotiating for themselves, whether discussing salary, resources, or career opportunities.
- Develop a clear personal brand statement and understand how to build their professional presence, both in person and online.
- Develop a strategic career plan that includes key milestones and specific skills to pursue over the next 5-10 years.

3. Setting targets for female representation in leadership

Boosting the number of women in leadership roles is key to creating a fair and inclusive culture. Setting clear goals for female representation helps organizations stay focused on reaching gender balance at every level. By reviewing current numbers, setting specific targets, and supporting fair hiring and promotion practices, organizations can steadily build a more diverse and balanced leadership team.

This **practical steps** for setting and tracking targets to increase female representation in leadership.

Assess current representation:

- Start by evaluating the current percentage of women in leadership roles across the organization.

Set clear, achievable targets:

- Establish a concrete goal (e.g., 50% female representation in management roles within five years).

- Break down the goal into yearly milestones (e.g., increase female leadership by 10% each year).

Incorporate targets into hiring and promotion practices:

- Update recruitment strategies to attract more female candidates for leadership positions.
- Encourage internal promotion by identifying talented women within the organization and providing training to prepare them for advancement.

Track and report progress:

- Conduct annual assessments of progress toward targets and share updates with the organization.
- Use data to celebrate successes or identify areas for improvement.

Adjust targets as needed:

- Review targets periodically to ensure they remain relevant and achievable, adjusting them if necessary.

4. Recognizing and promoting female role models

Promoting female role models is a great way to inspire and support women in your organization. Recognizing their achievements builds a culture of empowerment and visibility. By sharing their stories, celebrating their successes, and involving them in mentorship, you can encourage and motivate future female leaders.

How you can do that:

Identify role models within the organization:

- Select women who have demonstrated leadership, success, and commitment to the organization's values.

Highlight role models through media:

- Feature female role models in internal newsletters, on social media, or on the organization's website, sharing their stories and achievements.
- Conduct interviews with role models about their journey and insights to inspire others.

Host recognition events:

- Organize annual events where female leaders are recognized for their contributions.
- Invite honorees to share their experiences with the organization, offering a platform to encourage other women.

Encourage mentorship and networking:

- Invite recognized role models to serve as mentors or guest speakers in workshops, providing them with opportunities to guide and inspire younger female athletes and professionals.

Implement a role model program:

- Create an ongoing program where women recognized as role models participate in outreach, workshops, or mentorship programs, making their impact even more tangible across the organization.
-

Checklist for inclusive mentorship program and leadership opportunities

This checklist is designed to help sports professionals create effective mentorship and leadership development practices that support gender equality.



HOW TO USE:

- Refer to this checklist during planning and implementation to ensure key elements are covered.
- Review the checklist regularly to track progress and adjust practices as needed.
- Use it as a self-assessment tool or discussion prompt in feedback sessions to reflect on successes, identify areas for improvement, and set goals for growth.

- ☐ I identify and invite female leaders within the organization to serve as mentors.
- ☐ I match mentors and mentees based on career goals and professional interests.
- ☐ I establish a mentorship plan with regular check-ins, goal-setting, and structured activities.
- ☐ I provide mentors with resources and guidance on effective mentoring practices.
- ☐ I clarify expectations for both mentors and mentees at the start of the program.
- ☐ I schedule group check-ins for mentors and mentees to discuss shared experiences and challenges.
- ☐ I track and monitor mentorship outcomes through surveys or feedback sessions.
- ☐ I offer ongoing support to mentors and mentees to address any issues.
- ☐ I evaluate the program's effectiveness and make adjustments based on feedback.
- ☐ I document successful mentoring relationships and achievements to inspire participation.
- ☐ I assess current representation to understand the gender balance in leadership roles.
- ☐ I set clear, achievable targets for female representation, with yearly milestones.
- ☐ I update hiring and promotion strategies to actively seek and support female leaders.
- ☐ I organize leadership workshops and training sessions focused on skill-building for women in sport.
- ☐ I celebrate and promote female role models by featuring their achievements in newsletters, on social media and at recognition events.

SAFE AND INCLUSIVE TRAINING ENVIRONMENTS

Creating a safe and inclusive training environment is essential for ensuring that all athletes feel respected, supported and able to perform at their best. This involves implementing practices that prevent discrimination, harassment and bias, while promoting positive interactions and equal opportunities. A safe training environment not only protects participants' well-being but also fosters a culture of trust and inclusivity.

This section provides **practical strategies** for building and maintaining a training space where everyone, regardless of gender or background, can thrive.

1. Develop and implement a code of conduct

Draft the code of conduct:

- Define acceptable and unacceptable behaviors clearly, covering topics like respectful language, inclusivity, non-discrimination, and anti-harassment.
- Emphasize the importance of respecting diversity, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and ability.

Engage stakeholders:

- Involve coaches, staff, and athlete representatives in the creation of the code to ensure it reflects the organization's values and addresses their specific concerns.

Distribute and educate:

- Share the code of conduct with all members of the organization, including coaches, athletes, and staff.
- Conduct mandatory workshops or information sessions to review the code in detail, discuss scenarios, and clarify expectations.

Emphasize with posters and materials:

- Display key points from the code in training areas, locker rooms, and common spaces as visual reminders.
- Include the code in onboarding materials for new members and volunteers.

2. Establish a reporting mechanism

Select a reporting system:

Choose a method that ensures confidentiality, such as:

- An anonymous online form where athletes can submit complaints without revealing their identity.
- A dedicated email monitored by a trained individual (e.g., HR or an external consultant).
- A secure physical drop box located in a discreet area where athletes can submit written complaints.

Train a point of contact:

- Designate a responsible individual (e.g., HR representative, diversity officer) to monitor the reports, handle complaints with sensitivity, and take appropriate action.
- Ensure this person is trained in handling complaints confidentially and impartially.

Communicate the reporting process:

- Inform athletes, coaches, and staff about the reporting options and reassure them of confidentiality and protection from retaliation.
- Post clear instructions on how to use the reporting system in common areas and distribute them through internal communication channels.

Follow up and take action:

- Investigate complaints promptly and thoroughly.
- Implement necessary actions, such as mediation, counseling, or disciplinary measures, depending on the severity of the incident.

3. Provide training for coaches on creating inclusive environments

Develop a training curriculum:

- Cover topics such as recognizing unconscious bias, understanding the specific needs of female and marginalized athletes, and creating a supportive training environment.
- Include practical scenarios and role-playing exercises to reinforce skills.

Schedule regular workshops:

- Offer mandatory training sessions for all coaches on inclusivity and respect in the sports environment, held annually or bi-annually.

Bring in experienced facilitators:

- Partner with external experts or diversity consultants who specialize in sports and inclusivity to lead the sessions, ensuring trainers have expertise in both the content and the context.

Evaluate and provide ongoing support:

- After each workshop, ask coaches for feedback and conduct follow-up sessions to discuss progress and address ongoing challenges.
- Provide coaches with resources, such as handbooks on inclusivity best practices, that they can refer to in their daily work.

WORKSHOP EXAMPLE: BUILDING INCLUSIVE TRAINING ENVIRONMENTS

Objectives of suggested workshop:

- Understand the importance of inclusivity and the challenges faced by diverse athletes.
- Identify and mitigate biases that impact athlete experiences.
- Develop skills to create safe and supportive training environments.
- Create actionable steps for personal inclusivity practices.
- Commit to continuous learning and fostering inclusivity.

| Workshop segment | Duration | Activities | Goal |
|--|------------|--|--|
| Introduction to inclusivity in sports | 20 minutes | Presentation: Overview of inclusivity in sports, its importance, and common challenges faced by female and marginalized athletes Group discussion: Participants share personal experiences related to inclusivity or barriers in sports | Help participants understand the importance of inclusivity and recognize common challenges faced by diverse athletes |
| Understanding unconscious bias | 30 minutes | Interactive exercise: Participants complete a brief quiz on unconscious bias Case study: Review a case study where unconscious bias impacted inclusivity in sport Small group discussion: How can biases affect training environments? | Increase awareness of unconscious biases and how they can impact athletes' experiences and inclusivity in training |
| Creating safe and respectful training environments | 45 minutes | Role-playing exercise: Participants act out scenarios (e.g., handling disrespectful language or resolving conflicts during training). Group feedback: Provide constructive feedback on responses Tips for respectful language: Trainer discusses best practices for using inclusive language and setting respectful standards | Enable participants to identify and address the needs of diverse groups, promoting a more inclusive approach to coaching |
| Developing an action plan for inclusivity | 30 minutes | Goal-setting exercise: Participants set personal goals for creating an inclusive training environment. Action plan development: Each participant drafts an action plan with specific steps (e.g., implementing a code of conduct, adjusting communication style). Peer review: Share plans with a partner for feedback. | Empower participants to apply workshop learnings by creating a realistic, actionable plan to foster inclusivity in their training environments |
| Q&A and closing remarks | 10 minutes | Open Q&A: Participants can ask final questions or share key takeaways. Wrap-up: Trainer highlights main points and encourages participants to commit to fostering inclusivity. | Reinforce workshop goals, answer remaining questions, and encourage ongoing commitment to inclusivity |

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

- Recognize the importance of inclusivity and understand challenges faced by diverse athletes.
- Identify their own biases and understand how these can impact athlete experiences.
- Demonstrate skills to create safe, respectful, and supportive training environments.
- Develop a personalized action plan with steps to foster inclusivity in their role.
- Commit to ongoing learning and implementing inclusivity practices.

3. Communicating respectfully

Effective, respectful communication is a key component in building a positive, inclusive sports environment. By using gender-sensitive language and maintaining an awareness of how words and actions impact others, sports professionals can support gender equality and foster a culture of mutual respect.

Use inclusive language:

- Use terms that include everyone, such as "team," "athletes," or "everyone," rather than gendered terms like "guys."
- Make an effort to use each individual's preferred pronouns and titles. This small step shows respect for personal identity and reinforces inclusivity.

Promote respectful interaction:

- Show respect by listening attentively when others speak, acknowledging their points and responding thoughtfully.
- Stay clear of comments that reinforce gender stereotypes. For example, avoid assumptions about abilities or roles based on gender.

Encourage open and supportive dialogue:

- Ensure that everyone has an opportunity to share ideas, feedback, and concerns. Encourage quieter team members to participate.
- When providing feedback, focus on the individual's efforts and improvements, and avoid any language that might unintentionally diminish their contributions.

Address unintended bias and correct missteps:

- If you realize you've used language that may be insensitive or biased, acknowledge it openly, correct it, and learn from the experience. This models growth and respect for others.
- Encourage team members to politely point out instances of biased language or actions in a constructive way.

4. Arrange mixed-gender training sessions

Plan balanced training drills:

- Design activities that encourage cooperation and teamwork, such as mixed relay races, small-sided games, or skill drills where pairs or small groups work together to complete tasks.

Promote team-building activities:

- Incorporate team-building exercises within the training sessions that emphasize collaboration and respect, such as group discussions or trust-building activities before or after practice.

Rotate group pairings:

- Ensure athletes have the opportunity to train with different teammates each session, which promotes adaptability, understanding, and respect across genders and skill levels.

Establish ground rules for respectful behavior:

- Communicate clear guidelines for mixed-gender interactions, focusing on mutual respect, support, and fair play.
- Coaches should monitor the sessions to ensure interactions remain positive and reinforce respectful behavior.

Facilitate post-session reflections:

- At the end of each session, gather the group to reflect on their experience and discuss any takeaways on teamwork and respect. Encourage feedback to continually improve future mixed-gender training.

Checklist for safe and inclusive training environments

This checklist serves as a practical tool for coaches, team leaders and sports staff to create and maintain safe, respectful, and inclusive training environments. It provides actionable steps to prevent discrimination, foster positive interactions and ensure all athletes feel valued and supported.



HOW TO USE:

- Review each checklist item before implementing training policies or organizing sessions. Identify areas where current practices may need adjustment to align with inclusivity goals.
- Refer to the checklist to ensure inclusive practices are consistently applied, such as rotating group pairings and setting respectful behavior guidelines.
- Use the checklist as a reflection tool to assess what worked well and where improvements are needed. Gather feedback from athletes to continually refine training practices.

- ☐ Clearly define acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, covering respectful language, inclusivity, non-discrimination, and anti-harassment.
- ☐ Emphasize the importance of respecting diversity, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and ability.
- ☐ Involve coaches, staff, and athlete representatives in creating the code to ensure it reflects organizational values.
- ☐ Distribute the code to all members and conduct mandatory workshops to review and clarify expectations.
- ☐ Display key points from the code in training areas and include it in onboarding materials for new members.
- ☐ Choose a confidential reporting system, such as an anonymous online form, a dedicated email, or a secure drop box.
- ☐ Designate a trained individual (e.g., HR or diversity officer) to handle complaints with sensitivity and confidentiality.

- ☐ Inform all members about the reporting options and reassure them of confidentiality and protection from retaliation.
- ☐ Post clear instructions on how to report in common areas and through internal communication.
- ☐ Investigate complaints promptly and implement necessary actions based on the severity of the incident.
- ☐ Develop a curriculum covering unconscious bias, needs of diverse athletes, and strategies for a supportive training environment.
- ☐ Include practical scenarios and role-playing exercises to reinforce inclusivity skills.
- ☐ Schedule mandatory workshops for all coaches on inclusivity, held annually or bi-annually.
- ☐ Partner with external diversity consultants to lead sessions and provide expertise.
- ☐ Gather feedback after each workshop and offer resources, like handbooks, to support coaches in their daily work.
- ☐ Plan balanced drills that encourage cooperation, such as mixed relay races, small-sided games, and teamwork exercises.
- ☐ Incorporate team-building activities that emphasize collaboration, such as group discussions or trust-building exercises.
- ☐ Rotate pairings so athletes work with different teammates each session to promote respect and adaptability.
- ☐ Set ground rules for respectful behavior, focusing on mutual respect, support, and fair play.
- ☐ Facilitate post-session reflections, gathering feedback to continually improve mixed-gender training experiences.

DATA COLLECTION AND MONITORING FOR PROGRESS

Establishing gender equality and inclusivity in sports requires more than just initial efforts—it calls for ongoing accountability. By systematically collecting and analyzing data, organizations can gain valuable insights into the experiences, challenges, and opportunities available to female athletes and staff. Regular data collection helps identify areas for improvement, measure progress, and inform evidence-based decision-making.

This section outlines **practical steps** for gathering feedback through surveys, using data to shape action plans, and continuously monitoring changes to ensure that gender equality goals are met and maintained.

1. Conduct regular surveys to assess female athletes' satisfaction, opportunities and barriers

Objective: To gather insights from female athletes about their experiences, access to opportunities, and challenges within the organization.

Steps for designing the survey:

Frequency: Conduct surveys annually to ensure updated insights.

Format: Use a mix of multiple-choice, Likert scale (rating), and open-ended questions to capture quantitative and qualitative data.

Survey focus areas:

Satisfaction levels: Assess athletes' overall satisfaction with training, facilities, and support.

Access to opportunities: Evaluate athletes' perception of equal access to development, competitions, and resources.

Perceived barriers: Identify any specific challenges or biases they encounter.

Inclusivity and safety: Measure athletes' sense of safety and inclusivity within the organization.

Example survey questions:

Satisfaction levels:

- “On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied are you with the facilities provided to support your training?”
- “Do you feel valued and respected as an athlete within this organization? (Yes/No) Please explain.”

Access to opportunities:

- “Do you believe that you have equal access to training and development opportunities as your male counterparts? (Yes/No)”
- “Have you had adequate access to competitions, events, or resources that support your athletic growth? (Yes/No) Please explain.”

Perceived barriers:

- “What barriers, if any, have you faced in advancing within the organization?”
- “Have you encountered any form of bias or discrimination in the organization? (Yes/No) Please describe.”

Inclusivity and safety:

- “Do you feel safe and supported in your training environment? (1 - Not at all to 5 - Completely)”
- “What improvements would you suggest to make the environment more inclusive?”

Analysis and use:

- Analyze survey results to identify trends or recurring issues.
- Share a summary of findings with leadership and relevant departments to guide policy adjustments.

2. Use data to create action plans, adjust policies, and allocate resources effectively

Objective: To turn insights from data collection into actionable steps that improve gender balance and inclusivity within the organization.

Concrete steps:

Review data and identify gaps:

- Analyze the survey results, gender ratios and diversity report findings.
- Identify specific gaps, such as underrepresentation in coaching or lack of resources for female athletes.

Develop targeted action plans:

- For each identified area, outline specific steps to address the gap. For example:
- Underrepresentation in leadership: Create a leadership pipeline for women by providing mentorship and training programs.

Resource allocation: If surveys indicate that female athletes lack access to certain facilities, allocate budget to improve these resources.

Adjust policies based on findings:

- Update policies to address any recurring issues found in the data. For example:
- Implement stricter anti-discrimination policies if surveys highlight bias or discrimination.
- Introduce flexible scheduling options for female staff if balancing work-life demands is a noted barrier.

Reallocate resources where needed:

- Use the data to determine where additional funding or support is required to support gender equality initiatives.

Example:

Increase the budget for female athlete programs if data shows lower satisfaction or participation rates among women.

Establish quarterly checkpoints:

- Schedule quarterly reviews to monitor the effectiveness of implemented changes.
- Adjust action plans or resource allocations based on ongoing feedback and data updates.

Example:

If survey data reveals that female athletes have lower satisfaction with facilities, reallocate funds to improve female locker rooms, add training equipment or enhance safety measures.

Checklist for data collection and monitoring for progress

This checklist is for HR teams, program managers, diversity and inclusion officers, and leadership within sports organizations and serves as a structured tool to help organizations systematically track, assess and improve gender equality and inclusivity.



HOW TO USE:

- Before beginning data collection, review each item on the checklist to set up a clear plan for surveys and reporting mechanisms. This ensures that your approach is thorough and focused on key areas.
- As you gather survey results, use the checklist to ensure consistency in analysis, focusing on satisfaction, access, barriers, and inclusivity. Check off each item as you address it.
- Following data analysis, use the checklist to develop specific action plans and adjust policies or allocate resources as needed. Use the quarterly review items to track ongoing progress and refine approaches.

- ⇒ Plan annual surveys to assess satisfaction, opportunities, barriers, and inclusivity for female athletes.
- ⇒ Design surveys with a mix of question types (multiple-choice, Likert scale, open-ended) for well-rounded feedback.
- ⇒ Include key focus areas: satisfaction levels, access to opportunities, perceived barriers, and sense of safety and inclusivity.
- ⇒ Regularly analyze survey results to identify recurring themes and trends.
- ⇒ Share findings with leadership and departments to drive informed decisions.
- ⇒ Review collected data to identify any gaps or areas of underrepresentation.
- ⇒ Develop specific, targeted action plans to address identified gaps (e.g., mentorship programs, resource allocation).
- ⇒ Adjust policies as needed to address recurring issues such as bias, discrimination, or scheduling needs.
- ⇒ Reallocate resources effectively to support identified needs (e.g., facility improvements or additional programs for female athletes).
- ⇒ Establish quarterly checkpoints to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented changes.
- ⇒ Adjust action plans or reallocate resources based on ongoing feedback and updated data.
- ⇒ Continue tracking progress toward gender equality goals to ensure sustained impact.

CONCLUSION

Achieving gender equality in sport requires ongoing commitment and proactive efforts from athletes, coaches, referees, and sports organizations. This guide has provided practical tools, strategies, and guidelines to help you promote inclusiveness, address barriers, and create equitable opportunities across all levels of sport. By implementing the steps outlined in this guide, you contribute to a more diverse, respectful, and empowering environment for everyone involved.

Creating a truly inclusive sports environment involves understanding, action, and commitment across several areas.

Here are the essential principles to guide your efforts in promoting gender equality:

- ✦ Start by understanding the core concepts of gender equality and why achieving it in sports is essential. This foundational knowledge will strengthen your approach and commitment.
- ✦ Recognize the challenges female athletes and sports professionals often face, such as stereotypes, unequal pay, and limited leadership opportunities. Actively work to remove these obstacles and create a level playing field for everyone.
- ✦ Apply best practices such as using gender-sensitive language, establishing inclusive recruitment processes, and supporting mentorship programs to foster a welcoming environment.
- ✦ Take concrete steps to ensure equal representation across all levels of your organization. Set achievable targets for female representation, celebrate female role models, and promote women into leadership roles. These actions will strengthen both your organization and the broader sports community.

Putting gender equality into practice

- ☑ Achieving gender equality in sports is a continuous journey that requires commitment, incremental actions, and collective effort. Here are four practical steps to help turn this guide's principles into real change:
- ☑ Use this guide as a starting point, and foster ongoing discussions about inclusivity within your organization. Keep your knowledge up to date and regularly share insights with your team to keep gender equality at the forefront of your efforts.
- ☑ Begin by implementing a few key actions, such as revising recruitment language or setting up a mentorship program. As these initiatives take root, gradually introduce additional actions to foster inclusivity across all areas of your organization.
- ☑ Actively involve athletes, coaches, staff, and other stakeholders in the commitment to gender equality. Creating a unified effort ensures that inclusivity becomes a shared responsibility within your sports community.
- ☑ Regularly assess your organization's progress. Gather feedback, track achievements, and adjust your strategies based on what works and where improvements are needed. This reflective approach keeps momentum going and helps ensure lasting impact.



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.