



GENDER EQUALITY POLICY FOR SPORTS FEDERATIONS

Sports 4 All | Lead the Change

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Purpose: To provide sports federations with a practical, evidence-informed framework to advance gender equality, inclusion, non-discrimination, and safe participation across governance, workforce, athlete development, media, and organisational culture.

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1. Executive Summary

Sports federations play a decisive role in either reproducing or removing gender inequality. This policy addresses the structural barriers that continue to limit women's access to leadership, coaching, officiating, participation, visibility, and safe sporting environments.

Women's underrepresentation in sport is not mainly a matter of individual choice or talent; it is shaped by systems that have historically privileged men through informal recruitment networks, opaque governance, unequal access to resources, care burdens, biased media coverage, and weak accountability.

This policy provides a practical framework for federations to implement gender equality as a core governance, operational, and cultural responsibility. It is designed for use by international, national, regional, and sport-specific federations, and it should be adapted to each federation's legal and structural context.

The policy recommends action across:

- Governance and leadership reform.
- Coaching and officiating pipelines.
- Equal access to athlete development and resources.
- Fair media representation and marketing.
- Prevention of discrimination, harassment, and abuse.
- Inclusion and accessibility for all women and girls.
- Gender-disaggregated data and public reporting.
- Accountability through implementation plans, deadlines, and sanctions for non-compliance.

International best practice shows that progress happens when federations move from symbolic commitments to measurable, enforceable change.

2. Background and Context

Gender equality in sport has improved, but the pace of change remains too slow because the underlying system still reproduces inequality. The barriers facing women are structural: federations often rely on informal appointment practices, historic male-dominated networks, full-time leadership models that penalise care responsibilities, and competition structures that give men's sport greater resource priority.

The consequence is visible across the sector. Women remain underrepresented in decision-making, coaching, officiating, and other technical roles, while they also receive less media attention and less consistent access to funding, facilities, and high-performance support. These gaps are not isolated; they reinforce one another, making it harder for women to enter, stay, and progress.

International policy trends now clearly support intervention at federation level. The IOC Gender Equality Review Project produced 25 recommendations across sport, funding, governance, portrayal, and human resources, specifically to remove barriers to participation and strengthen equality across the Olympic Movement. The European Union's High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport likewise identified participation, coaching and officiating, leadership, media, gender-based violence, gender mainstreaming, gender budgeting, and monitoring as the key levers for change.

This policy therefore treats federations as central agents of reform. Federations control rules, budgets, pathways, appointment procedures, and public narratives, so they are uniquely positioned to change the conditions that shape who leads, who participates, and who benefits. When they adopt clear targets and enforce them consistently, they can expand the talent pool, improve decision-making, increase credibility, and make sport more sustainable.

3. Policy Objectives

Federations should set baseline data in year one and adopt targets that are ambitious but achievable within a three- to four-year cycle. The objectives below should be adapted into federation-specific targets, annual workplans, and public reporting systems.

Area	Objective	Suggested KPI
Governance and leadership	Achieve gender-balanced representation in governing bodies and executive structures.	At least 40% of each gender on boards, executive committees, and key sub-committees.
Coaching	Increase the number of women in coaching roles at all levels, including high-performance and head coach positions.	At least 30% of national-team head coaches and a year-on-year increase in women’s coaching licences.
Officiating	Expand the pipeline of women referees, judges, and technical officials.	At least 35% of accredited national-level officials are women.
Participation	Reduce the gender gap in participation, retention, and progression.	Female participation growth equal to or higher than male participation growth.
Resources	Ensure fair access to funding, facilities, staffing, and performance support.	Equal investment in equivalent men’s and women’s programmes, with annual resource-parity audits.

Media and visibility	Improve the visibility and quality of women’s sport coverage.	Minimum coverage targets, equal production standards, and annual portrayal review.
Safety and non-discrimination	Prevent and respond to discrimination, harassment, and abuse.	Zero-tolerance policy, trained safeguarding leads, confidential reporting, and case resolution timelines.

Targets should not be treated as symbolic. They should be linked to governance rules, budget decisions, leadership evaluation, and, where applicable, eligibility for funding or recognition.

4. Governance and Leadership

Gender inequality in sport leadership is sustained by recruitment systems, informal influence networks, and leadership models that assume uninterrupted availability and traditional career patterns. To change this, federations need to redesign how people are selected, supported, and promoted, rather than simply encouraging women to apply more.

4.1 Board and executive representation

Federations should adopt a formal rule requiring at least 40% representation of each gender on boards, executive committees, and strategic sub-committees, with a clear timeline for compliance. Some sport governance reforms have moved toward even stronger 50-50 targets for boards, chairs, and key sub-committees, showing that formal targets are feasible when linked to accountability.

Recommended measures:

- Amend statutes and electoral rules to include gender balance targets.
- Require all nomination committees to present gender-balanced shortlists.
- Publish the gender composition of all governing bodies annually.
- Introduce corrective measures where targets are missed, including co-option, reserved seats, or reopening nominations.

4.2 Transparent recruitment

Federations should move from informal, relationship-based appointments to structured, competency-based recruitment. Vacancies should be publicly advertised, selection criteria should be published in advance, and appointment panels should be gender-balanced and trained in bias awareness.

Recommended measures:

- Use competency matrices for board and senior roles.
- Require written evidence of how gender balance was considered.
- Remove unnecessary barriers such as elite-network-only nomination routes.
- Introduce term limits to open space for renewal and diversity.

4.3 Leadership pipelines

A sustainable pipeline requires more than training; it requires access, sponsorship, and experience in decision-making roles. Structured leadership programmes, mentorship, and progression pathways are essential if women are to move from participation into authority.

Recommended measures:

- Create mentorship and sponsorship schemes for emerging women leaders.
- Reserve places for women on finance, legal, and high-performance committees.
- Offer flexible meeting formats, hybrid participation, and childcare support.
- Build succession plans for all senior governance roles.

5. Coaching and Officiating

Women's underrepresentation in coaching and officiating is a pipeline problem and a retention problem. Federations often recruit from narrow networks, fail to support career transitions, and do not remove practical barriers such as unpaid labour, travel expectations, and lack of flexible working structures.

5.1 Building entry routes

Federations should create formal entry routes for former athletes, grassroots volunteers, and early-career professionals. These routes should include paid apprenticeships, shadowing, match experience, and supervised progression so that women can enter the system without needing unpaid or informal opportunities.

Recommended measures:

- Target retiring female athletes in recruitment campaigns.
- Offer subsidised or fully funded certification pathways.
- Guarantee paid placements for shadowing and apprenticeship roles.
- Publish annual targets for women entering coaching and officiating programmes.

5.2 Retention and progression

Women often leave coaching and officiating because the system is not designed around care responsibilities, career breaks, or flexible progression. The policy should therefore include return-to-role pathways, maternity and caregiver support, and promotion criteria that value competence rather than constant availability.

Recommended measures:

- Introduce return-to-sport schemes after maternity or caregiving breaks.
- Recognise part-time, hybrid, and seasonal coaching models.
- Require mixed-gender interview panels for technical appointments.
- Track appointment, retention, and promotion rates by gender.

5.3 Professional development

Federations should invest in women's technical development across all levels, including high-performance environments where women are especially underrepresented. Development should include sports science, analysis, communication, leadership, and event management, not only basic certification.

Recommended measures:

- Fund advanced qualifications for women coaches and officials.
- Build peer networks and mentoring communities.
- Give women access to elite competitions, camps, and international exchanges.
- Measure progression into senior roles, not only course completion.

6. Athlete Support and Resources

Equal participation is impossible without equal access to facilities, expertise, competition structures, and financial support. Federations should therefore apply gender-responsive budgeting and annual resource-parity audits to ensure that women's programmes are not systematically underfunded or treated as secondary.

6.1 Equal access to resources

Federations should compare equivalent men's and women's programmes across funding, staff support, venue quality, travel, medical services, and competition preparation. Differences should be justified only by transparent, objective criteria and never by historical custom.

Recommended measures:

- Conduct annual parity audits on funding and facilities.
- Use equivalent travel, accommodation, and support standards.
- Align calendar planning so women's competitions are not structurally disadvantaged.
- Review prize money and commercial investment for inequities.

6.2 Gender-responsive athlete services

Women athletes have specific needs that must be built into support systems rather than treated as exceptions. These include menstrual health, pregnancy and postpartum support, RED-S awareness, body image pressures, mental health support, and safeguarding against abuse.

Recommended measures:

- Train medical and performance staff in female athlete health.
- Provide pregnancy and return-to-competition protocols.
- Offer childcare support during camps and travel where relevant.
- Appoint accessible athlete welfare officers with clear reporting lines.

6.3 Inclusion and non-discrimination

Federations should ensure that anti-discrimination policies protect all athletes and participants, including women facing intersectional disadvantage and athletes who are transgender or non-binary, in line with relevant sport-specific and human-rights-based standards. Policies should be evidence-based, transparent, and reviewed regularly.

7. Media and Marketing

Federations should treat media and marketing as strategic levers for gender equality, not as promotional afterthoughts. Visibility shapes value, public interest, sponsor confidence, and the social meaning of women's sport, so unequal portrayal directly reinforces structural inequality.

7.1 Equal visibility

Federations should adopt a formal media commitment that ensures women's sport receives regular, meaningful, and high-quality coverage. This should include clear airtime, content, and promotional targets, not just isolated campaigns during major events.

Recommended measures:

- Set minimum coverage standards for women's competitions and athletes.
- Ensure women's events receive equivalent production quality, graphics, commentary, and digital promotion.
- Place women's competitions in prime-time or otherwise high-visibility slots wherever feasible.
- Build joint marketing campaigns that promote men's and women's sport as part of one federation brand.

7.2 Portrayal standards

Coverage should focus on athletic performance, tactics, achievement, and personality as athletes, not on appearance, family status, or gendered stereotypes. Federation communication teams should adopt internal guidelines that prevent sexualised, infantilising, or otherwise biased portrayals.

Recommended measures:

- Publish internal editorial and image-usage guidelines.
- Train media teams, commentators, and content creators on gender bias.
- Ban sexualised, infantilising, or stereotypical visuals and language.
- Review campaigns and social content for bias before publication.

7.3 Commercial responsibility

Sponsors and broadcasters should be encouraged or required, through federation agreements, to support women's sport in proportion to its strategic importance. Visibility cannot depend only on short-term commercial performance if the federation itself contributes to unequal exposure.

Recommended measures:

- Include gender-equality clauses in media and sponsorship contracts.
- Require promotional budgets to support women's competitions and role models.
- Monitor representation across official federation channels, not only external media.
- Publish annual media-balance indicators.

8. Anti-Discrimination and Safe Sport

Gender equality cannot exist in an environment where harassment, bullying, discrimination, and abuse are tolerated. Safe sport is not a separate agenda; it is a core condition for equal participation, retention, and leadership.

8.1 Zero-tolerance framework

Federations should adopt a zero-tolerance policy covering discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, bullying, abuse, and retaliation. This policy must apply to boards, staff, coaches, officials, athletes, volunteers, contractors, and anyone acting on behalf of the federation.

Recommended measures:

- Define prohibited behaviours clearly and in plain language.
- Require mandatory annual safeguarding and anti-discrimination training.
- Ensure complaint processes are accessible, confidential, and survivor-centred.
- Protect complainants and whistleblowers from retaliation.

8.2 Reporting and response

Reporting systems must be trusted, independent, and easy to use. Federations should provide multiple reporting channels, clear timelines, and external investigation options for serious cases, since internal systems alone may not be sufficient where conflicts of interest exist.

Recommended measures:

- Create anonymous and named reporting channels.
- Appoint trained safeguarding or welfare leads at all major events.
- Use independent investigators for serious complaints.
- Publish annual data on reports, outcomes, and response times without identifying individuals.

8.3 Safe and inclusive environments

A safe sport policy should also cover training, travel, accommodation, selection camps, changing rooms, online spaces, and team culture. Risk assessments should identify gender-specific vulnerabilities and should be updated regularly, especially where young athletes, elite travel, or power imbalances are involved.

Recommended measures:

- Introduce safeguarding risk assessments for all major activities.
 - Require codes of conduct for staff and athletes.
 - Provide clear boundaries for supervision, communication, and travel arrangements.
 - Include specific protocols for pregnancy, maternity, caregiving, and return to sport.
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9. Data Collection and Monitoring

No federation can improve what it does not measure. Gender-disaggregated data is the foundation for understanding where inequality exists, how it changes over time, and whether policy interventions are actually working.

9.1 Data framework

Federations should collect gender-disaggregated data across the whole organisation, from participation to governance and safeguarding. Data collection should be standardised, routine, and integrated into existing registration and HR systems rather than treated as a separate exercise.

Recommended data categories:

- Participation by age, level, and competition format.
- Coaching qualifications, appointments, and promotions.
- Officiating accreditation and deployment.
- Board, committee, and senior staff composition.
- Funding, staffing, facilities, and travel allocation.
- Media visibility and communication outputs.
- Discrimination, harassment, and safeguarding reports.

9.2 Indicators and reporting

Federations should publish a public annual gender equality report with a small set of clear, trackable indicators. Reporting should not only describe activity; it should show outcomes, trends, gaps, and corrective actions.

Recommended measures:

- Use baseline data in year one and compare progress annually.
- Present indicators in dashboard format for board and public use.
- Benchmark against national and international peers where possible.
- Tie senior leadership performance reviews to progress on agreed indicators.

9.3 Accountability cycle

Data should lead to decisions. If a target is missed, the federation should be required to explain why, publish a corrective action plan, and show how leadership will intervene. This turns monitoring into a governance tool rather than a descriptive report.

Recommended measures:

- Establish quarterly internal monitoring and annual public reporting.
- Require action plans for underperforming areas.
- Link funding, recognition, or internal approvals to compliance where appropriate.
- Review the policy every two to four years.

10. Implementation Guidelines

This policy should be implemented as a federation-wide reform programme, not as a one-off document. The most effective practice is to begin with a baseline audit, then adopt a time-bound action plan with named responsibilities, public targets, and annual review.

10.1 Phased implementation

Federations should follow a staged approach:

1. Board adoption and public launch.
2. Baseline gender audit.
3. Revision of statutes, regulations, HR rules, and budget procedures.
4. Rollout of training and safeguarding systems.
5. Launch of leadership, coaching, officiating, and participation actions.
6. Annual monitoring, reporting, and correction.

10.2 Governance responsibilities

Implementation should be led by the Board, supported by a Gender Equality Steering Group or equivalent committee. The policy should assign responsibilities to legal/governance, HR, performance, communications, safeguarding, and data teams, so accountability does not sit with one isolated department.

10.3 Suggested timeline

Period	Priority actions	Minimum output
Months 1–3	Adopt policy, appoint lead, collect baseline data.	Approved policy and diagnostic report.
Months 4–6	Revise governance documents, set targets, launch training.	Updated rules and training completion plan.

Months 7–12	Start leadership, coaching, officiating, and media actions.	First public progress update.
Year 2	Review budget equity, participation growth, and safeguarding systems.	Corrective action plan where gaps remain.
Year 3–4	Evaluate outcomes and reset targets.	Full gender equality report and revised strategy.

10.4 Monitoring and correction

If progress is weak, the federation should be required to explain the causes, publish a corrective plan, and show how leadership will intervene. This approach aligns with international audit practice, which emphasises diagnosis, action planning, and follow-up rather than simple compliance checking.

11. Gender Equality Diagnostic Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to help a federation assess its current maturity on gender equality. It can be used as a self-assessment tool by the Board, management, or an external auditor, and it should be repeated annually to track change.

How to use it

Answer each question with one of the following:

- Yes.
- Partly.
- No.
- Not known.

Suggested scoring:

- Yes = 2
- Partly = 1
- No = 0
- Not known = 0

Interpretation:

- 0–20%: Initial stage.
- 21–40%: Basic awareness.
- 41–60%: Developing.
- 61–80%: Implementing.
- 81–100%: Leading practice.

Questionnaire

A. Governance and leadership

1. Does the federation have a written gender equality policy approved by the Board?
2. Are there gender balance targets for the Board, Executive Committee, and key commissions?
3. Are board and senior leadership vacancies openly advertised with clear selection criteria?
4. Are women represented in decision-making roles at a minimum level of 40%?
5. Are there succession plans and leadership pipelines for women?

B. Recruitment and workplace culture

6. Does the federation use structured and competency-based recruitment processes?
7. Are recruitment panels gender-balanced and trained on bias?
8. Are flexible working, remote participation, and childcare or care-friendly arrangements available?
9. Are gender equality responsibilities included in job descriptions and performance reviews?
10. Is there evidence that informal networks do not dominate appointments?

C. Coaching and officiating

11. Is there a clear plan to recruit more women into coaching and officiating?
12. Are certification fees or development costs subsidised for women?
13. Are there paid shadowing, apprenticeship, or mentoring pathways for women?
14. Does the federation track the appointment, retention, and promotion of women coaches and officials?
15. Are return-to-role pathways available after maternity or caregiving breaks?

D. Participation and athlete support

16. Does the federation monitor female participation at all levels?
17. Are there equal access standards for facilities, travel, equipment, and performance services?
18. Are women's programmes funded on an equitable basis compared with equivalent men's programmes?
19. Are athlete services adapted to female health needs, including maternity, menstrual health, and RED-S?

20. Is childcare or family support available where needed?

E. Media and visibility

21. Does the federation have a media or portrayal policy for gender-equal representation?
22. Are women's competitions given meaningful visibility and quality production standards?
23. Are communications free from stereotypes, sexualisation, or appearance-based framing?
24. Are women athletes used as visible role models in campaigns and commercial partnerships?
25. Is media coverage monitored for bias and imbalance?

F. Safeguarding and non-discrimination

26. Does the federation have a zero-tolerance policy on discrimination, harassment, bullying, and abuse?
27. Are reporting systems confidential, accessible, and survivor-centred?
28. Are independent investigators used for serious complaints?
29. Are safeguarding officers appointed and visible at events and camps?
30. Are there clear policies for transgender and non-binary inclusion?

G. Data, budgeting, and accountability

31. Does the federation collect gender-disaggregated data across all key functions?
32. Is there a public annual gender equality report or dashboard?
33. Are budgets reviewed through a gender-responsive lens?
34. Are gender equality targets linked to senior management accountability?
35. Are corrective action plans required when targets are missed?

Scoring guidance

- 0–15 points: The federation is at an early stage and needs immediate structural reform.
- 16–25 points: The federation has some measures but lacks coherence and accountability.
- 26–40 points: The federation is progressing but should strengthen implementation and measurement.
- 41–56 points: The federation is close to good practice and should refine impact, visibility, and sustainability.



- 57–70 points: The federation shows leading practice and should focus on long-term cultural change.

Annex A. Gender Equality Self-Assessment, Scoring Sheet, and Action Plan Template

Annex A1. Scoring Sheet

Use the scoring method below for each question:

- Yes = 2
- Partly = 1
- No = 0
- Not known = 0

Interpretation of total score:

- 0–15: Initial stage.
- 16–25: Basic awareness.
- 26–40: Developing.
- 41–56: Implementing.
- 57–70: Leading practice.



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Domain	Questions	Score
Governance and leadership	1–5	_ / 10
Recruitment and workplace culture	6–10	_ / 10
Coaching and officiating	11–15	_ / 10
Participation and athlete support	16–20	_ / 10
Media and visibility	21–25	_ / 10
Safeguarding and non-discrimination	26–30	_ / 10
Data, budgeting, and accountability	31–35	_ / 10
Total	35 questions	_ / 70

Annex A2. Traffic-Light Diagnosis

Result	Meaning	Recommended response
Green	Strong practice, but still needs continuous improvement.	Maintain, benchmark, and refine.
Amber	Partial progress, with visible gaps.	Prioritise corrective actions within 6–12 months.
Red	Weak systems and high structural risk.	Require immediate leadership intervention and a formal action plan.

Suggested domain triggers:

- Green: 80% or above in a domain.
- Amber: 50–79%.
- Red: below 50%.

Annex A3. Action-Plan Template

Priority gap	Root cause	Action required	Responsible person/ unit	Deadline	Indicator of success	Status
Example: Low female board representation	Informal recruitment and no term limits	Amend statutes, open vacancies publicly, require gender-balanced shortlist	Governance Committee	30 June 2027	Board reaches minimum 40% each gender	Pending

Annex A4. Federation Diagnostic Summary

Area	Score	Traffic light	Main issue identified	Priority action
Governance and leadership				
Recruitment and workplace culture				
Coaching and officiating				
Participation and athlete support				
Media and visibility				
Safeguarding and non-discrimination				
Data, budgeting, and accountability				

Annex A5. Scoring Interpretation

- 0–15: Initial stage.
- 16–25: Basic awareness.
- 26–40: Developing.
- 41–56: Implementing.
- 57–70: Leading practice.

Annex A6. Short Reporting Note

After completion, the federation should produce a one-page summary covering:

- Total score and domain scores.
- The three biggest structural barriers identified.
- The three most urgent actions.
- The person responsible for implementation.
- The review date for reassessment.

Acknowledgements

This policy has been developed within the framework of the Erasmus+ Sport project **Sports 4 All: Lead the Change**. The partnership is committed to promoting systemic change in sport by addressing the structural barriers that continue to limit women's participation, leadership, and visibility across all levels of sport.

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Together, the project partners have contributed to a policy that aims to support sports federations in building more inclusive, equitable, and accountable governance and sporting environments across Europe.