

Promoting gender equality, inclusivity, and safety in sports:

Guidelines for coaches

April 2025

These guidelines are based on findings from the EU-funded SUPPORTER project and draw on learnings from the project's partners, eight sports higher education institutions. They reflect outcomes of peer exchanges and collaborative work during a workshop that took place on 20 March 2025.

Sport is an arena where a wide range of children and young people engage in activities. As such, it has the potential to promote equality and inclusion by fostering values and norms such as integrity, fair play, and respect – including respect related to gender. A key figure in promoting these values is the sports coach. Therefore, coaches need to be aware of the factors that shape inequalities in sport and how to address them. Moreover, sports coaches play a crucial role in setting the tone within the team and ensuring that athletes are safeguarded.



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How to foster an inclusive culture?



1. Recognise gender biases, stereotypes and discrimination

The sports ecosystem is shaped by a strict binary view on gender, which can lead to challenges related to gender stereotypes, sexism, and heteronormativity. Sport is male-dominated and male-centred, built upon traditional forms of masculinity – affecting people of all genders. This also contributes to risks such as aggressive and violent behaviour, as well as an increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV), particularly among ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ athletes, disabled athletes, and high-performing athletes.

- All coaches, regardless of gender, position and type of activities, should have access to and take part in **lifelong learning and training** on gender equality and gender-based violence in sport.

2. Set the tone for an inclusive team culture and safe environment

Coaches are important change agents and therefore can foster a cultural shift, by encouraging an inclusive and respectful team environment that values all athletes equally.

- **Change starts with self-reflection: challenge your own stereotypes and normative ideals.** This could translate for example into encouraging all players to develop a variety of skills (e.g., don't assume boys should be more aggressive or that girls should play defensively).
- Recognise that communication is both verbal and non-verbal and be mindful of gestures and body language that may unintentionally undermine gender equality.
- **Use inclusive language** (e.g., say “athletes” or “team” instead of “boys” or “girls” when addressing athletes). **Call out and correct sexist jokes or comments** to create a respectful environment.
- Explain that no form of gender-based violence will be tolerated, even incidents that are minor. State the consequences.
- Work with **safeguarding** to reassure psychological and social well-being of all athletes.



3. Coaching practices

Coaches can have a direct effect on athletes learning and may influence their health and well-being, therefore, there is a need to pay attention to coaching practice.

- Provide **equal time, feedback, and coaching quality** for all players, regardless of gender.
- Support female athletes by **encouraging them to aim for higher-level competitions**, just as you would for male athletes, aware of girls' tendency towards self-elimination.
- Make sure to respect **every athlete's identity** and support athletes that do not identify with a binary division of gender to find solutions to challenges such as sex divided dressing rooms, single sex teams and excluding rules.
- Push for **equal access to facilities, equipment, and game schedules** for all teams.
- Integrate **innovative, gender-sensitive ideas** into their sport sessions, such as mixed-sport sessions and engagement with unisex sports.
- Introduce gender equality into dialogue before, during and after practice. For example, teach boys to leave space and girls to assert themselves. **Encourage leadership** among all athletes, regardless of gender, by giving equal opportunities to be captains or mentors.
- If possible, **mentor or support aspiring female coaches** to increase representation.

4. Raise awareness

Coaches can raise awareness on gender equality during sport training and practice.

- Highlight **female or non-binary /LGBTQI+ role models in sports** to challenge biases.
- Speak to parents about **encouraging girls to stay in sports** and challenging gendered expectations.
- Collaborate with other coaches to **promote equal standards** across teams of all genders.



5. Networking

Coaches need supports from peers to be change agents

- Coaches of all genders should participate in an independent community where they can openly **exchange experiences** and good practices around gender equality. Recreational coaches, who are often excluded from such discussions should be actively included.
- Act as a **bridge between academia and practice** by holding regular meetings with academics to share concerns and ideas for creating a more gender-equal sport environment.

The SUPPORTER project

SUPPORTER, “SecUring sPORTs Education thRough innovative and inclusive Gender Equality Plans”, is an EU-funded project running from April 2023 until September 2025. The project aims to support eight sports higher education institutions from Central and Eastern Europe in developing their own intersectional, innovative, inclusive and impactful Gender Equality Plans which explicitly address gender-based violence and sexual harassment.

Find out more about SUPPORTER!

<https://supporter-project.eu>

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