

SUPPORTER Recommendations **for universities and faculties of sport** **to advance gender equality and safeguard students' and** **staff's wellbeing through inclusive gender equality plans.**

May 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 one of the largest recreational activities for children, young people, adults, and seniors of different ages, as well as part of high-performance athletes', coaches' and managers' professions. The process of commercialisation and marketisation of sport has led to an increased attention directed towards the ways in which sport can and should be run. In this way, individual practices within sport draw meaning from wider discourses on, for instance gender and sexuality in society. Universities and faculties of sport together with sports organisations, simultaneously are constructing gender and being gendered, and this gendering is linked to power. Here universities and faculties of sport are uniquely positioned to lead the way in advancing gender equality and safeguarding the wellbeing of both students and staff through inclusive Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). These institutions are not only responsible for the development of athletic skills but also for fostering the culture of inclusion, respect, and fairness within their academic and athletic programs. By embedding gender equality principles into their core operations, universities can ensure that all students and staff, regardless of gender, feel valued and supported.

Incorporating key values such as integrity, fairness, and respect into the university's ethos is essential for promoting an inclusive environment. Integrity requires transparent practices in recruitment, selection, and opportunities for advancement, ensuring equal treatment for all. Fair play, when applied to academic and athletic contexts, promotes equal access to resources, coaching, and recognition, regardless of gender or other characteristics. Respect, particularly in terms of gender equality, fosters an environment where stereotypes are challenged, and all individuals have the opportunity to thrive.

Implementing comprehensive GEPs and robust policy frameworks is crucial for creating institutional cultures that encourage students and staff to come forward with concerns and ensure their safety. GEPs serve as a strategic tool to address gender disparities, offering clear guidelines to promote gender equity in hiring, retention, career progression, and access to facilities. These plans also ensure that policies explicitly protect against harassment and discrimination, fostering a safer and more supportive environment.

For faculty decision-makers, HR staff, Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion officers, and Gender Equality officers, the value of GEPs is evident in their capacity to establish clear, actionable measures that hold all members of the academic and athletic communities accountable. Such frameworks ensure that universities not only provide a safe and supportive environment but also equip students and staff to thrive and succeed, ultimately contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and equitable sporting culture.

Recommendations for gender+ GEPs

Getting started: foundations for gender equality

- Clarify the intentions and ambitions of the GEP in a specific sport-specific context
- Define key concepts (sex, gender and intersectionality) in both binary and non-binary sport contexts.
- Conduct a gender+ audit to identify inequalities in sport (themes of a GEP)
- Secure leadership commitment to gender equality, as being part of the values of the University and education to ensure sufficient and sustainable allocation of infrastructure and resources (budget and personnel).
- Engage a broad range of stakeholders in the design and implementing process of the GEP.

Structural recommendations: building a GEP

- Set clear objectives, targets and monitoring systems for gender+.
- Create/support Gender Committees and support mechanisms and persons (i.e. trust persons) for gender-based violence cases.
- Building a gender-inclusive research and educational ecosystem.
- Establish dedicated departments and fund research focused on gender+ and sports.
- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration on gender-focused topics.

Training, Awareness and Capacity building

- Conduct annually compulsory awareness sessions on gender inequalities and gender-based violence, e.g. on supporting mechanisms for reporting parties and sanctions (disciplinary) for perpetrators.
- Train teachers and coaches and support staff in victim-centred approaches and their roles in addressing gender-based violence.
- Promote student-led initiatives and peer mentorship (support each other).
- Include safeguarding training and workshops on whistleblower protection.

Organisational culture and work-life balance

- Challenge stereotypes and normative ideals in a sport environment.
- Address explicitly work-life balance in a male-centric sport context with a strong competitive culture.



- Support work-life balance initiatives, including parental and career break mechanisms for all staff (including temporary, PhD)
- Foster pathways for women athletes to transition into coaching and leadership roles.
- Establish permanent roles focused on gender equality and safeguarding.

Leadership, recruitment and career progression

- Promote gender balance in leadership and decision-making positions.
- Implement gender-sensitive and transparent recruitment and evaluation processes including by revising merit claims and selection procedures.
- Support inclusiveness through education and mentorship programmes for leaders (i.e. gender sensitive leadership).
- Support career development through education and mentorship programs for including female mentorship and networking.

Gender-based violence

- Establish comprehensive policies, with actions within the 7Ps framework (prevalence, prevention, protection, prosecution, partnership, provision of services and policy).
- Maintain accessible structures and safe reporting channels.
- Conduct regular risk assessments both within the university premises and outside (e.g. competitions, field work, etc) and ensure psychological safety across university and sport activities.
- Make sure that the workplace is a safe place to raise and discuss these topics.
- Plan for sustainability through structural timelines and resource allocation.

Overcoming resistances and sustaining change

- Acknowledge and manage resistance proactively.
- Support change agents through peer networking (both nationally and internationally) and training.
- Develop and implement a strategic communication plan promoting gender equality initiatives and successes. Highlight women athletes, leaders and researchers to serve as role models.



Monitoring, reporting and collaboration

- Collect and monitor gender equality data, setting clear reporting standards.
- Publish annual reports detailing progress and challenges for gender equality and gender-based violence.
- Foster internal and external partnership and communities of practice.
- Participate in regional and EU-wide initiatives to advance gender equality in sport and academia.

Building alliance for gender equality

- Frame gender equality initiatives strategically to align with institutional and international goals (e.g., ERA).
- Engage human resources department, ethical committees, student union and senior management as allies.

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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