

# **Promoting gender equality, inclusivity, and safety in sports:**

## **Guidelines for sports organisations**

**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, reflexions and peer exchanges 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 a part of high-performance athletes', coaches' and managers' professions. The process of commercialisation and marketisation of sport has led to increased attention directed towards the ways in which sport can and should be run. Everyday practices in sport are shaped by broader social issues, such as gender, biological sex or sexuality. Sports organisations, along with universities and faculties of sport, both reflect and influence these dynamics—they are not only shaped by gender norms but also actively contribute to them. This process of "gendering" is closely tied to power structures within sport. Gendered inequalities in the sports ecosystem are deeply rooted in societal norms that prioritise masculinity over femininity. The perception of masculinity, linked to strength, aggression, and dominance, shapes how athletes are trained, promoted, and celebrated. This often marginalises female athletes, undervaluing their achievements and limiting access to resources and opportunities. The understanding of masculinities in sports reinforces gendered expectations and excludes non-binary athletes, further perpetuating a binary view of sex and gender. Female athletes face stereotypes and discrimination, affecting their performance and overall well-being, often leading to lower self-esteem, stress, and isolation.

Additionally, the dominance of masculine norms increases the risk of female athletes experiencing gender-based violence, both within and outside the sport. These incidents often go unreported, as power imbalances and gendered expectations discourage women from speaking out. Sports organisations must address these issues by fostering an inclusive culture that challenges binary gender norms and ensures the safety and well-being of all athletes, regardless of sex or gender identity.

As key players in the sector, sports organisations (clubs, federations, etc) are in a strong position to lead progress by promoting gender equality and protecting the well-being of athletes, sportspeople of all ages, and other stakeholders such as coaches, referees, etc." These organisations are not only responsible for the development of athletic skills but also for fostering the culture of inclusion, respect, and fairness within their sport and athletic programs. By embedding gender equality principles into their core operations, they can ensure that all members of the community, regardless of gender, feel valued and supported.

## How to foster an inclusive culture?

### 1 Set the tone for an inclusive team culture and a safe environment

- **Recognise that gender biases, stereotypes and discrimination exist in sports.**
- **Establish a club-wide equality statement** and promote it widely, ensuring all members are aware of it. Explain that no form of gender-based violence will be tolerated, even incidents that are minor. State the consequences.
- **Encourage the use of gender-neutral language** in team names, chants, and communication (e.g., say “athletes” or “team” instead of “boys” or “girls” when addressing mixed groups).
- **Forbid sexist jokes or comments** to create a respectful environment.

### 2 Raising awareness and training

- Host **workshops and talks** on gender equality in sports for players, coaches, and parents.
- Invite **guest speakers, professional athletes, or gender equality advocates** to inspire club members.
- Run **anti-discrimination training** for coaches and staff to recognise and address gender inequalities, including unconscious bias and girls’ tendency to self-elimination.
- Ensure **awareness-raising and regular training sessions for coaches and staff on gender-based violence**, on supporting mechanisms for reporting parties and sanctions (disciplinary) for perpetrators, and their roles in addressing gender-based violence.
- Educate about victim- and trauma-centred approaches, manipulation techniques such as denial of gender-based violence and reversal of victim/offender roles.
- **Provide mentorship** for athletes, staff members, etc, to support each other (social and psychological support).

### 3 Ensure equal coaching and development opportunities for all athletes

- Organise **mixed-gender training sessions or competitions** when appropriate.
- Provide **equal-quality facilities, training times, and coaching staff** for all teams.
- Introduce **mentorship programs** where experienced athletes support younger players, regardless of gender.
- Support women athletes to stay in sport and to later become coaches.



- **Encourage responsibilities within the club** among all athletes, regardless of gender.
- Ensure **equal pay, prize money, and funding** for both male and female teams and officials (e.g. referees).

#### 4 **Ensure equal opportunities for club staff and members**

- Challenge stereotypes and normative ideals in a sport environment.
- Develop team-building activities that foster mutual respect and break down gender biases.
- Actively recruit and support coaches of all gender to balance representation in leadership.
- Encourage and support career development towards leadership and management positions of all gender.
- Address explicitly work-life balance in a male-centric sport context with a strong competitive culture. Support female coaches and athletes in relation to work-life balance through innovative mechanisms.
- Secure routines for career break (i.e. parental leave).

#### 5 **Engage families and the community**

- Create **family-friendly sports days** that encourage parents to support both boys' and girls' teams equally.
- Partner with **local schools** to introduce more girls to different sports.
- Establish a **scholarship or financial aid program** to support young female athletes facing financial barriers.
- Encourage **male allies** (coaches, players, and parents) to advocate for gender equality.
- Advocate for equal media coverage, sponsorship, and promotional materials for men's and women's teams.

#### 6 **Develop a policy framework for the club**

- Identify if your sports federation has an overall commitment on gender equality and how can this be applied to the reality of your sports organisation.
- What do you want to achieve? Clarify the **intentions and ambitions of a policy framework** or gender equality plan.
- Define what is an **ideal situation of gender equality** in the context of your sports organisations.



- Dedicate attention to gender representation in participation, leadership, and media presence. You can also collect information on gendered inequalities through interviews or a survey.
- Communicate your willingness to the members of your club to address gender equality through a policy framework and **involve members (parents, coaches, athletes) in the design and implementation process.**

## **7** Specifically address gender-based violence

- Develop **clear policies on harassment, discrimination, and gender-based violence**, ensuring all members know how to report issues safely.
- Have a clear and holistic policy framework with a Code of conduct, including definitions, procedures etc (UniSAFE 7P Model). . Develop support systems and reporting mechanisms (formal and informal).
- Ensure infrastructure and resources connected to gender-based violence policy are available and effective.
- Make visible both internally and externally the engagement of the sports organisation towards addressing gender-based violence.
- Have regular risk assessment both within the organisation and outside (e.g. competitions).
- Make sure that the sports organisation is a safe place to raise and discuss these topics.
- For further resources on this topic: <https://unisafe-toolkit.eu/>

## Overcoming resistances

Resistance is part of all change processes! Change agents frequently experience isolation, tiredness, and gender fatigue.

- *Have regular assessments of progress and challenges for reaching gender equality.*
- *Offer regular training on resistance to change agents.*
- *Provide support systems for change agents.*

## 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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