

Women inclusion in sport-case of Spain, Italy, Serbia and North Macedonia.

European and national practices of girls and women involved in sports. Comparative analysis of the differences and similarities in the partnering countries.

Introduction

European perspective on women in sport, especially in leading position is still very limited, unlike in the USA. This is not a numerical problem but a cultural problem, and it also involves the role of the media and issues of diversity. The issue of sports, we can't even console ourselves with the data from Europe, where there are very few countries in the world where women's empowerment in sports is well established. One of the few studies on this topic dates back to her 2015 and was conducted by the European Institute for Gender Equality. The ratio of women to men in top positions in continental Olympic organizations was distributed as follows: out of 4,444 chairpersons, 96% men and 4% women; vice President 91% men and 9% women. To improve this situation, the International Olympic Committee aims to achieve gender equality at the Olympic Games 2024 in Paris, which is not that impossible to achieve having in mind that the at Games in Tokyo there were around 48% women of the total number of athletes. Bigger challenge is the governing bodies, where in the international Olympic committee itself there are only 37.5% of female members, 33.3% women in the executive board, 47.8% in the committees and 53% in the administration of the Committee.

Sports and equal access to sports facilities for boys and girls is very important for development of all individuals. Along with the physical skills, sport adds benefit for physiological and other soft skills development. Active participation in sports activities,

that add to development of healthy habits and general health wellbeing, is crucial element in the growth of all children, regardless of the gender. The gender is a social construct that concerns both male and female, which should focus on the inequalities between men and women, rather than only female problems. From there, gender equality is in focus of the European union in general, and all the EU bodies that create socio-economic policies, that also includes the policies that are in place in the EU neighboring and candidate countries. Main focus of all the policies is the empowerment of people, especially women, to reach their full potential regardless of their background. In this context, sport is crucial in this process as sports can help individuals achieve excellence through different layers of impact. There are number of benefits from active sport participation of female, from social skills, through cognitive to overall health benefits. In particular, sport participation improves the health and wellbeing, improves gender equality, empowers, sets positive role models, educates, gives sense of belonging, has physiological benefits, which will contribute to future development of skills for higher employability and better prospects:

- Health and Well-being: helps overall psychological and physical health, by sustaining healthy body weight, good cardiovascular conditions and strong physiological endurance.
- Empowerment: it helps busting self-confidence, self-perceptions, self-esteem, quality of life, leadership, learning and practicing of risk taking, fast thinking, developing spatial intelligence, sense of accomplishment and belonging.
- Gender quality: women can participate and achieve excellence in sports as good as men can do, including taking leadership roles and creating wheels of positive change.
- Role models: this is highly correlated to the previous one, where women athletes set positive examples, inspire and serve as role models for young girls, proving that they can all achieve high scores if they are dedicated and persistent in their intentions.
- Education: active sports participation increases cognitive skills, dedication, discipline, coordination and time management, skills that play crucial role in also achieving education success and excellence.

- Physiological benefits: Sports participation has positive impact on the mental health, it reduces stress and depression, strong and healthy body, keeps the mind healthy.
- Economic empowerment: Along with learning important skills and endurance while practicing sports that are important in every segment of adult life, at some point in one is good enough it can also have direct economic benefit like becoming part of professional leagues and sponsorships.
- Community development: women's participation in sports brings sense of unity, brings people together and creates strong communities.

That been said, the main focus of this analysis is to provide country specific and comparative overview on the situation with women inclusion in sport-case of Spain, Italy, Serbia and North Macedonia, as an important segment for female empowerment and inclusion in all segments of life. It aims at reviewing key international and European documents and policies in order to set grounds for the country specific analysis. And in the end it attempts to summarizing the similarities and differences in the stages and approaches of the countries in interest, towards creating appropriate policies for improvement of the situation and narrowing the gender gap in sport participation in the countries of interest that can further be used by all key stakeholders in the field of sport and recreation.

General context; and Historical Developments

It was well believed that girls are less interested in sport, that's why there is less sport activities for girls and women. However, in the masculine world we are living, we are witnessing number of obstacles that are set for female's participation in different segments in life, including sports. Many activities were question of permission by the bodies lead by men. This is still the case in many countries, where for women questions men counterparts are in charge of decision making. The records of female struggle for equal participation in high level sports dates back to 1900 Olympic games in Paris, where they were allowed to participate but only in two disciplines (grass tennis and golf),

(Atansovski et al., 2014). Gender disparities are still present and deeply ingrained in many fields, whether overt (like participation) or covert (like how male and female athletes are portrayed). This is true even if the number of women participating in sport is rising both in Europe and globally. Just for illustration, we will address the female participation in sports, through Olympic games participation data, and female share in each edition:

Table 1: Share of female participation on the Olympic summer games over the years.

Year	Sports	Women's only Events	Mixed Events	Total events	% of women's only events	% of women's/mixed events	Women participants	% of women participants
1900	2	2	1	95	2.1	5.3	22	2.2
1904	1	3	0	95	3.1	6.4	6	0.9
1908	2	4	8	110	3.6	10.9	37	1.8
1912	2	5	6	102	4.9	10.8	48	2.0
1920	2	8	16	156	5.1	15.6	63	2.4
1924	3	10	4	126	7.9	11.1	135	4.4
1928	4	14	3	109	12.8	15.6	277	9.6
1932	3	14	4	117	12.0	15.4	126	9
1936	4	15	4	129	11.6	14.7	331	8.3
1948	5	19	5	136	14.0	17.6	390	9.5
1952	6	25	7	149	16.8	21.5	519	10.5
1956	6	26	9	151	17.2	23.2	376	13.3
1960	6	29	8	150	19.3	24.7	611	11.4
1964	7	33	11	163	20.2	27.0	678	13.2
1968	7	39	18	172	22.7	33.1	781	14.2
1972	8	43	20	195	22.1	32.3	1,059	14.6
1976	11	49	19	198	24.7	34.3	1,260	20.7
1980	12	50	19	203	24.6	34.0	1,115	21.5
1984	14	62	15	221	28.1	34.8	1,566	23
1988	17	72	14	237	30.4	36.3	2,194	26.1
1992	19	86	12	257	33.5	38.1	2,704	28.8
1996	21	97	11	271	35.8	39.9	3,512	34.0
2000	25	120	11	300	40.0	44.0	4,069	38.2
2004	26	125	10	301	41.5	44.9	4,329	40.7
2008	26	127	10	302	42.1	45.4	4,637	42.4
2012	26	132	8	302	43.7	46.4	4,676	44.2
2016	28	136	9	306	44.4	47.4	5,059	45
2020	33	156	18	339	46.0	51.3	5,457	47.8

Source: International Olympic Committee, 2023

Committee (IOC) show that with 47.8% in overall and only 46% in single gender event, of those competing in the 2020 Summer Olympic Games being women, there is now a broad gender-balanced level of participation

Figure 2: Share of female participation on the Olympic winter games over the years.

Year	Sports	Women's only Events	Mixed Events	Total events	% of women's only events	% of women's/mixed events	Women participants	% of women participants
1924	1	1	1	16	6.3	12.5	11	4.3
1928	1	1	1	14	7.1	14.3	26	5.6
1932	1	1	1	14	7.1	14.3	21	8.3
1936	2	2	1	17	11.8	17.6	80	12
1948	2	4	1	22	18.2	22.7	77	11.5
1952	2	5	1	22	22.7	27.3	109	15.7
1956	2	6	1	24	24.0	29.2	134	17
1960	2	10	1	27	35.7	40.7	144	21.5
1964	3	12	2	34	35.3	41.2	199	18.3
1968	3	12	2	35	34.2	40.0	211	18.2
1972	3	12	2	35	34.2	40.0	205	20.5
1976	3	12	3	37	32.4	40.5	231	20.6
1980	3	12	3	38	31.6	39.5	232	21.7
1984	3	13	3	39	33.3	41.0	274	21.5
1988	3	16	4	46	34.8	41.3	301	21.2
1992	4	23	3	57	40.4	45.6	488	27.1
1994	4	25	3	61	41.0	45.9	522	30
1998	6	29	3	68	42.0	47.1	787	36.2
2002	7	34	3	78	42.5	47.4	886	36.9
2006	7	37	3	84	44.0	47.6	960	38.2
2010	7	38	3	86	44.2	47.7	1,044	40.7
2014	7	43	6	98	44.9	51.0	1,121	40.3
2018	7	44	9	102	42.7	52.0	1,169	41
2022	7	46	12	109	42.2	53.0	1,267	44.7

Source: International Olympic Committee, 2023

Participation in Winter Olympic Games is slightly lower, with 44.7% overall participation and 42.2% in single gender event, of those participating in the latest edition being women, but nonetheless the level has been increasing since 1992, with the exception of a slight dip in 2014.

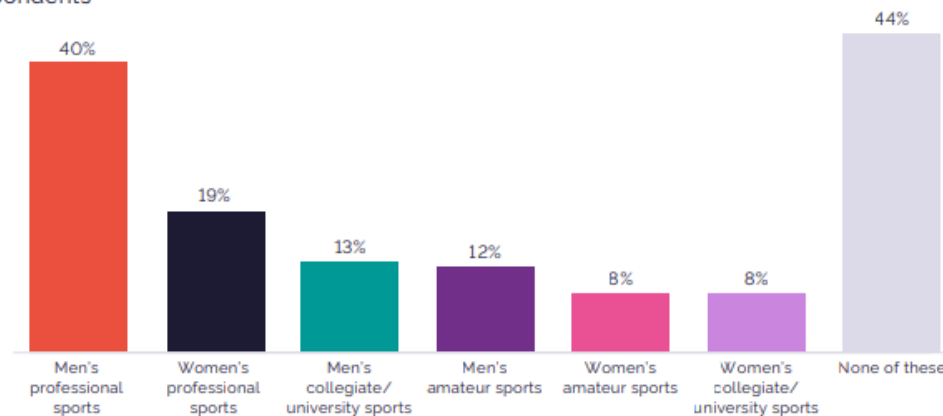
It is encouraging to observe gender gap narrowing with regards to participation in the elite sport events, however this is still not the case with the gender pay gap. Economically speaking, the difference between the earnings and pay of men and women in sports is also obvious. This is noticed on several levels, first is with regards to salaries, then the sums signed for sponsorships, endorsement and prize money. One example would be the price money in Football world cup, the Women's price money was US\$15 million, compared to US\$791 million for the 2018 Men's price.

Atansovski et al., (2014). further outline that the situation in women's sports improved over the last 100 years, where women are more present in professional and high level

sports, however the general interest and publicity for female sport is still much lower than for male sport. The fact that female sports engagement is more recent than that of men may be one reason why it does not receive the same recognition as it deserves. Men's sports, for instance, receive a lot more coverage on television and in other media than women's sports, even though there should be roughly equal coverage of both sexes in the media. Furthermore, men are more likely to be in the top positions for management and training roles as well as for television interviews. The responsibility for promoting gender equality and equitable recognition of sporting accomplishments rests, in part, with the relevant authorities and media outlets' editorial practices.

Some figures showing the interest in male sports vs. female sport:

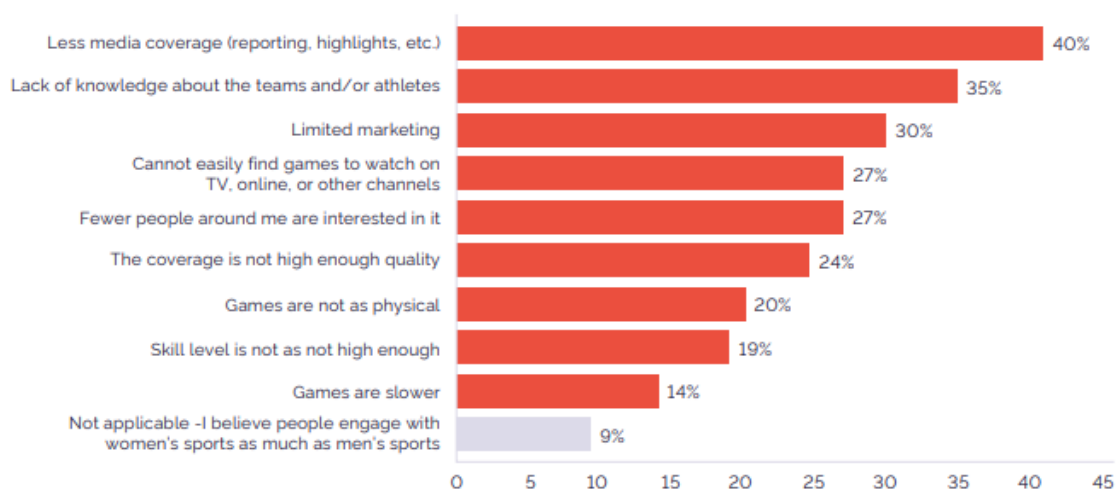
Figure 1: Which, if any, of the following sports do you watch or follow?
% of respondents



Source: WOMEN IN SPORT REPORT 2021 (page 7)

Figure 2: Which, if any, of the following, do you believe are reasons why people don't engage with women's sports as much as men's sports?

% of respondents



Source: WOMEN IN SPORT REPORT 2021 (page 13)

From the two figures up, we can conclude that there is significantly less interest in female sport, and as a reasons for that mainly is less media coverage, less media space in prime time, preference given on male sports over female sports for live broadcasts if two matches take place in parallel. There is less action and physical touches, that make sports less attractive for spectators, also games been said are slower and less interesting to follow.

Selection of international documents-relevant for narrowing the gender gap in sport participation

One important milestone in gender equality is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), from UN General Assembly in 1979, that points out that women and girls have equal rights with their male counterparts to take active participation in sports, and that must be supported by all the participating states.

The most progressive guide for advancing women's rights is the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), which was approved during the Fourth World Conference on Women in

1995. It specifically mentions sport and affirms everyone's worldwide right to access sport. Support should also be given to the advancement of women in all facets of athletics and physical activity, including coaching, training, and administration as well as participation at the national, regional, and international levels. The BPfA also demands the development of educational initiatives that would give women and girls of all ages equal access to sports participation possibilities. Furthermore, the BPfA identifies the negative stereotypes of male and female in decision making processes and sheds light on the underrepresentation of female in decision making position in many fields, including sports.

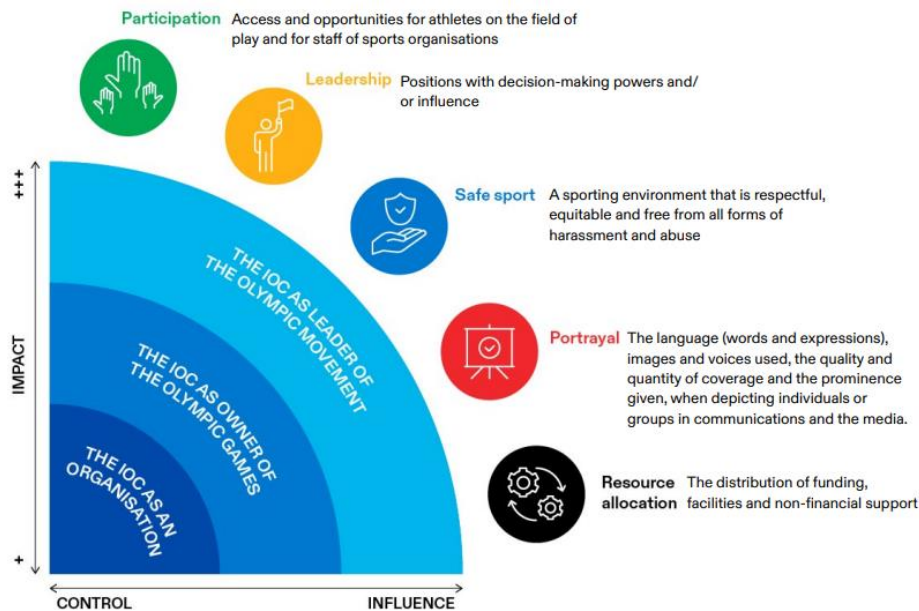
In 2006, UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (CRPD) that was addition to the first convention from 1979, and it reaffirms the article 30 from 1979, that everybody has the right to equally participate with other in sports and recreation.

The most recent document is the Sports for Generation Equality Initiative, established in 2020 under the auspice of UN Women: *"to accelerate progress on a set of common principles and aligned objectives that will harness the power of sport in making gender equality a reality in and through sport."* (p.1), aimed at tackling the most concerned areas with regards to sports and gender equality:

1. Promote women's leadership and gender equality in governance models
2. Prevent and respond to gender-based violence
3. Undertake to close the gap in investment in women's sport and promote equal economic opportunities for women and girls
4. Promote women's equal participation and bias free representation in media
5. Provide equal opportunities for girls in sports, physical activity and physical education

To foster gender equality, one more organization set strategic plan 2020-2024, that is the International Olympic Committee that focuses in 5 areas of work:

Figure 3: strategic framework



Source: Gender Equality & Inclusion Report 2021

In March 2022, the European Commission published the document “Towards gender equality in sport”, which includes recommendations and an action plan from the High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport. This report includes considerations, data, recommendations and best practices to promote gender equality in sport. It is important to note that this document is based on EU GAP III in purpose and focus and recognizes the following cross-cutting themes: Gender Mainstreaming, Gender Budgeting, Policy Monitoring, Evaluation and Research etc. It also highlights six key thematic areas of action of importance to authorities and sports associations:

1. Participation
2. Leadership
3. Coaching and officiating
4. Media coverage
5. Gender-based violence
6. Social and economic aspects

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)'s Gender Mainstreaming Platform addresses five key issues related to gender inequality in the field of sports policy:

1. Women's participation in sports activities.
2. Equal representation and gender considerations in decision-making.
3. Gender equality in sports training
4. Gender-based violence in and through sport
5. Gender stereotypes and the role of the media in sports.

There are more ongoing initiatives and active programs, but for the purpose of this analysis we only chose the several above. They give general framework of what is done and what has to be done in the field of women and girls in sport.

In the following of the analysis, we will continue with country specific analysis of the situation for women in sport. We will first give general countries overviews for the four countries in the focus of this analysis (Spain, Italy, Serbia and North Macedonia) and will attempt to point out the similarities, main differences and possible challenges for future policymaking and analysis.

Country case: Spain

Since 2015, 85% of sports organizations have recruited or increased the number of women in elected/appointed decision-making positions. Spain took different measures to ensure this. These associations include athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, canoeing, cycling, horseback riding, fencing, gymnastics, handball, hockey, ice sports, judo, rowing, rugby, shooting, taekwondo, tennis, triathlon, volleyball, and weightlifting, winter sports, and wrestling. 65% of these sports associations are committed to gender-sensitive election/appointment processes. 44% are organizing leadership training exclusively for women, and 30% are developing strategies to increase the number of women in decision-making positions.

The Olympic Committee also is very active in recruiting more female leaders. They organize training on leadership exclusively for women, carry out awareness campaigns, build networks for women in decision-making, develop mentorship programs for women and conduct research in this field.

The policies that took place to increase the number of female coaches 74% of sports organizations have implemented policies/measures to increase the number or recruitment of female coaches since 2015. These associations include athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, canoeing, cycling, equestrian, fencing, gymnastics, handball, hockey, ice sports, judo, rugby, shooting, tennis, triathlon, weightlifting, winter sports, wrestling, etc. The action taken by most of these associations (60%) is to offer training courses exclusively for female trainers. Half of them have developed clear, gender-sensitive recruitment procedures and 30% have adopted a written action plan to increase the number of female trainers.

The same number also organizes awareness campaigns for women. The Olympic Committee provides resources for women coaches (e.g. designated funding, childcare while attending training seminars and in-competition coaching).

Measures/measures to increase the number of girls and women participating in sport and/or physical activity Since 2015, 82% of sports organizations have increased the number of girls and women participating in sport and/or physical activity.

Actions/measures are being implemented to increase numbers. These associations include archery, athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, canoeing, cycling, fencing, golf, gymnastics, handball, hockey, ice sports, rowing, rugby, sailing, shooting, tennis, triathlon, weightlifting, and winter sports.

Most of these organizations focus on providing equal access to sports facilities for both men and women. Almost two thirds of the organizations have financially support girls' and women's sport by funding specific projects, and half of associations have strategies for girls and women.

The High Council for Sports has been very active in implementing measures to increase the number of girls and women participating in sports and physical activity. The council has developed a comprehensive action plan, carried out awareness campaigns for girls and women, organized training seminars and workshops for coaches, provided funding for women's sport and increased access to sports facilities for men and women, in order to ensur equal access.

The Olympic Committee has been funding sports and physical activity for girls and women by funding specific projects.

The measures taken by these associations are mainly related to financial support. Examples include targeted promotion of women's participation in international competitions, sponsorship of women's teams, and equal pay for athletes.

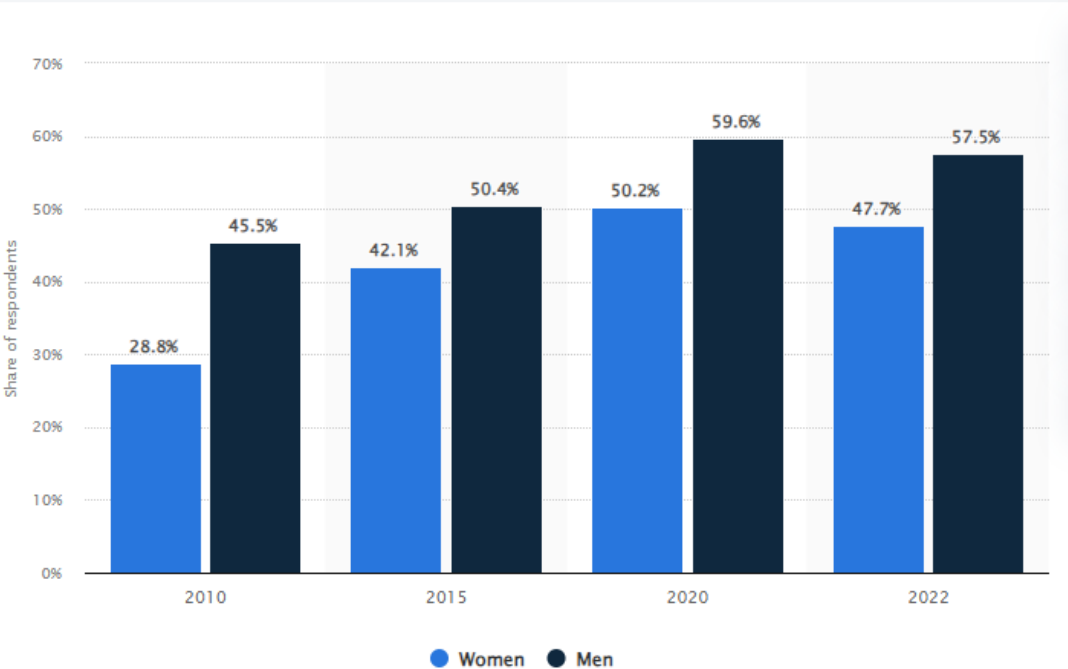
The High Council for Sports supports female athletes with children and helps them reconcile their sports career with their personal and professional life. Communication Guidelines of sports organizations have gender balance guidelines in their communication materials, including social media. Most of these guidelines prescribe gender balance in the various forms of communication issued by the association. This includes internal media, broadcasts, posters, publication of results, etc. Fencing has a women's team dedicated to spreading the news about women's fencing.

Sixty-seven percent of the six sports organizations with gender equality policies also have goals regarding gender representation in decision-making. Half of them have a goal of gender representation in the participation and content of communication materials

produced by their organization. One third of sports organizations is taking positive action and have gender mainstreaming strategies in place.

Spanish sports are dominated by men. This is also reflected in the number of female vice presidents, with only 13% of women serving as vice presidents (2019). The Spanish Olympic Committee is an exception: its president is a man, but there is a gender balance among vice-presidents. Quarter of the association's board members are women. The percentage of registered female trainers is 29%, and the percentage of elite trainers is 19%. Only 22% have a specific written policy to promote gender equality in sport. 59% of organizations have a policy/action plan to prevent and combat gender-based violence, and 41% are taking action in this area. 74% of federations are taking steps to improve the gender ratio of coaches, and 82% are striving to increase the number of physically active girls and women.

Figure 4: Share of respondents who exercised every week in Spain between 2010 and 2022, by gender



Source: Statista 2023

From 2010 to 2020, the proportion of Spanish male and female respondents who are physically active increased significantly, but decreased slightly from 2020 to 2022. For

example, nearly six in 10 men surveyed in Spain reported exercising at least once a week in 2020, an increase of about 14 percent from 2010, but by 2022 it decreased to 57.5%.

Country case: Italy

One of the slowest countries in closing the gender gap in sports in the European Union. Women participate with only 12% as a high level decision making members, they are less likely to take part of sport and leisure activities compared to their male counterparts. Yet, we must point out that in the recent years there is huge improvement in the situation. The presence of women in sports has increased both their direct participation in sports activities as athletes even at the highest level and the possibility of holding leadership positions and other very important roles in the world of sports, such as sports doctors and sports journalists. However, Italy ranks sixth from the bottom for the proportion of women in senior positions in national sports associations in the European Union, well below the average of 14%.

The number of women playing sports in Italy is increasing, numbering around 18 million, making up 48% of athletes and 60% of the female population. The gap that widens with age represents a generational and cultural divide that can be summed up in one word: Patriarchy. Fortunately, this trend is moving in the opposite direction, with more women exercising regularly. But we will have to wait at least another generation before these young athletes decide to continue to coach in their respective fields. Out of 4,708,741 registered athletes in 2019, only 28% were women, from that number only 19.8% were trainers, whereas in the managerial positions and association managers only 12.4% were women. For example, in football, out of 1 056 824 players, only 2% are women. Yet, it's worth mentioning that this number looks very small, but if we look at the data through years, this is significant increase. For example, in 2018, the number of women playing football in Italy was 23 903, which is almost tripled relative to 20 years ago.

According to Statista, in 2019 the most popular sports for women and men in Italy were walking, running and jogging. In fact, about 45 percent of male and female respondents said they do either running, walking, or jogging for exercise. In the same year, out of 22 disciplines, only fitness, gymnastics/aerobics, and yoga/pilates had a higher proportion of female practitioners than male practitioners. They either had practiced yoga in the past, had never practiced but wanted to try it, or were practicing yoga or Pilates regularly during the study period.

In conclusion, effective legislative intervention by the Italian government and the sports regulatory system is now needed to reduce and completely eliminate gender discrimination in Italian sport. Women in particular remain underrepresented in sports administration. Some international sports organizations have provided important data showing that women continue to be underrepresented. In the sports sector, the introduction of gender targets and quotas to increase gender diversity in corporate management did not have a relevant positive effect.

Country case: Serbia

In Serbia, the number of females participate in sport is very low. According to the available statistics, only 10 % of women and 21% of girls are active in sports activities. Out of that numbers, only 14% are members of a sport club or federation, where 80% of the federation presidencies and vice presidencies are male. In two thirds of the sport federations, there are less than 40 % female members. The only federation with majority female members are the synchronized swimming and gymnastics. On the other hand, in sports like football and cycling, women are less than 10 %. Only well balanced federation is the badminton, with 52% females.

Looking at the sport federation work and their agenda to decrease the gender imbalances, almost two third of the federation implemented some measures to work towards shrinking the gaps. Since 2015 following half of the federation undergo some training in gender

equality, one third of the federations have developed strategy for increasing the number of women in governing bodies and they claimed this in their statutes. The last one was supported by the Ministry of Youth and Sport under the action plan "gender representation on boards" in the statutes of the organization.

In the same context, some of the federation undertook measures to increase the number of female coaches. Around 40% of them, athletics, canoeing, diving, golf, judo, rowing, sailing, volleyball, and wrestling, have managed to increase the number. But in around 60% of the federation there is active training or seminar on the gender equality issues.

Half of the federations also took active role in motivating girls and women to actively participate in sport activities, by ensuring equal access to boys and girls. More than 50% of them put in place written strategies. This was also put on higher level, i.e. the Ministry of Youth and Sport has also developed a strategy in this area, and another important body that got involved in the rising awareness is the Olympic committee through their campaigns.

Elite sport in Serbia is scoring well, that also lead to improve the situation for female athletes. About 40% of the federation made effort to improve the situation for female: athletics, basketball, football, judo, rowing, sailing, swimming, tennis and volleyball. That improvement is both in facilities and in findings that female athletes get for being active in sports and representing the country internationally.

However, the communication and media coverage is still misbalances, despites some written guidelines and communication strategies implemented by some of the federations, and the effort of several federations for equal coverage.

Country case: North Macedonia

Traditionally, sports in North Macedonia is dominated by men. There is a lack of recent evidence-based data on girls' and women's participation in sport in this country, and although some progress has been made in increasing awareness and support for gender equality in sport, there is still a lack of Improved programs are needed to address the problem. The patriarchal perception that sports are an activity for boys and men.

However, in the following we will try to summarize in a best manner all available data that we could acquire. According to a survey conducted in 2014, girls aged 15 to 29 participate significantly lower than that of boys, with 36.6% of girls being active compared to 63.4% are active. Young men are more likely than young women to spend time in sports and sports activities, doing more leisure time and fun activities, volunteering at youth centers, while young women are more likely to listen to music and spend time at youth centers. Similar results were found in the Time Use Survey (TUS) conducted by the State Statistics Office in 2014/2015. The survey showed that the girls spend more time on household activities, while boys and men engage in leisure activities such as sports.

There are some positive trends in the recent years, according to the Agency for Youth and Sports has registered new women's sports clubs and increasing women's participation in sports such as football. Only in the 2021/2022 season there are five new registered club, along with several new women volleyball clubs. However, the statistics are very limited and we cannot see the trends over the years, since the way the legislations are when clubs are registered with the Agency for youth and sports, they do not differentiate between men and women sports clubs. A total of 1,505 female players are registered as football players in the Macedonian Football Association.

For a long time, there was no national women's volleyball team, but the Macedonian Volleyball Association has formed a national team for youth competitions up to the age

of 19 with professional teams from several volleyball schools and male and female coaches.

Another significant challenge contributing to the decline in women's sports participation in North Macedonia is finance. Women's earnings in sports have declined significantly. This is especially important for female athletes who don't earn enough money in professional sports and must pursue other careers, which limits the time for trainings and perfecting skills and techniques in the sports field, which is essential for a successful and quality sports career.

The 2015 Gender Equality Index states that the proportion of women in leadership positions in national sports associations is the lowest among all other sectors of society. The largest gender gap is in the indicators measuring women's and men's participation in NSF's governing bodies and committees, shown in the subdomain "Social Power. " 91.1% of men are members, compared to just 8.9% of women in the sports world and its governing bodies in N. Macedonia. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, "the main priority in sport is to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions in all sports organizations". However, since the establishment of the Youth and Sports Agency, the government-appointed director-general has always been a man. Little effort has been made to address gender discrimination against women, including their underrepresentation in leadership positions. But it was all about raising awareness of the problem, not a political solution. On the last Olympic games, women's sports teams were primarily led by male coaches, with few female coaches in sports that have traditionally been considered "men's sports. " The number of female coaches in all sports in this country is severely underrepresented. Only a minority of employed coaches in professional sports are women. This lack of balance is due to several factors. Stereotypes about coaching as a male profession. Lack of institutional support for women pursuing coaching careers. Organizational barriers exist in most sports organizations and the lack of female role models.

Gender stereotypes in sport and the role of the media Sports coverage in media is extremely powerful in shaping gender stereotypes and norms. While sports news coverage primarily focuses on men's achievements in sports, women and their achievements in sports are second only to those of men. Sports journalists have justified reducing their coverage of women's sports on the grounds, among other things, of low audience interest in women's sports, the low quality of women's competition, and the lack of success, especially at international level.

A media expert's presentation stated that the representation of women in sports media is determined by quality and success, not gender, which is an indicator of insufficient gender sensitivity and sensitivity. The analysis "Gender in the Media" 2021, published by the Audio-Visual Media Services Agency provides the most comprehensive overview of the situation regarding the representation of women's and men's sports, female and male athletes on Macedonian television: On nationally broadcasted television channels (MRT 1 and MRT 2), there is significantly more coverage of men's sports than women's sports, with approximately 80% of the sports media space devoted to men's sports, and his 82% of oral presentations. This suggests that national television is biased toward men and men's sports. Very few female sports journalists appear on national television. On MRT 1, approximately 81% of sports journalists were male, while in MRT 2 this proportion was approximately 88%. There were no women on MRT 3. There is an absolute preponderance of men appearing as sports experts on national television - more than 96% of sports experts on MRT 1 are male, while the other two This was not the case with public broadcasting.

Comparisons and conclusions

Like in many segments in modern living, in sports as well, gender gap issues are still present and persistent, despite many policies and measures put in place. However, from our analysis we can differentiate between EU countries (Spain and Italy) and non-EU countries (Serbia and North Macedonia). We have limited statistical data on the sports and sport workers in general, but the available data showed us that in the last 10 years' situation of women in sports improved over time. That improvement is more visible for Spain and Italy, where the official data on EUROSTAT suggested that gap between women and men in sport is decreasing (figure 5). However, we have limited data on the earnings gap. Contrary to that, for Serbia and North Macedonia we have situation where we notice slight improvement, but employment in sports is still massively dominated by men.

Figure 5: Share of employment in sports, by gender



Source: Eurostat

As we already outlined, all the countries in the analysis had policies in place for improving gender gap in sports. It is important to mention that in the worlds records, there is no example where women exceeded the men in sports, but there is continues decrease in the gap, and we must make sure that continues and eventually in near future the gaps close.

Measures and policies that Spain put in place to reduce the gender gaps in sports were successful, there is still difference between conditions for male and female athletes, however, majority of sports association adopted gender-sensitive election/appointment processes. Number of women in leadership training exclusively for women has increased significantly, and about 30% are developing strategies to increase the number of women in decision-making positions. The Olympic Committee has very proactive attitude in recruiting female leaders in different federation. Most of these organizations focus on providing equal access to sports facilities for both men and women. The High Council for Sports has been very active in implementing measures to increase the number of girls and women participating in sports and physical activity.

Measures that Italy put in place in the last years also give some positive outcome, but we must mention that Italy is one of the slowest countries in narrowing the gender gap in sports. Compared to Spain where the numbers are above 30%, in Italy women in decision making in sports is around 12%. The number of women playing sports in Italy is increasing, making up 48% of athletes and 60% of the female population. Effective legislative intervention by the Italian government and the sports regulatory system is now needed to reduce and completely eliminate gender discrimination in Italian sport.

Measures that Serbia put in place to fight gender gap in sports are showing some results, but the number of females participate in sport still is very low. According to the available statistics, only 10 % of women and 21% of girls are active in sports activities. There is whole action plan developed by the Ministry of Youth and Sport called "gender representation on boards" with sole purpose to support female position in sport and

increase women in decision making position in the federations and sport councils. In this context, some of the federation undertook measures to increase the number of female coaches (athletics, canoeing, diving, golf, judo, rowing, sailing, volleyball, and wrestling). Also, almost two thirds of the federations have active training or seminar on the gender equality issues and more than half of the federation put in place written strategies aimed at reducing gender gaps.

Measures that North Macedonia put in place to reduce the gender gaps in sports and improve the situation of women in coaching and decision making positions. We must point out that we based these conclusions on very limited data on girls' and women's participation in sport in this country. There are some positive trends in the recent years, according to the Agency for Youth and Sports has registered new women's sports clubs and increasing women's participation in sports such as football. Only in the 2021/2022 season there are five new registered football clubs, along with several new women volleyball clubs.

In all four countries of interest in the analysis, on different levels, yet important variable for the quality of professional athletes and women participation in sport are finances. But also media plays important role in inducing gender stereotypes in sport, by limited coverage and little attention given to female sports, relative to male.

All above been said, we can conclude that by giving appropriate finance and conditions for female sports, as we give to males, situation can improve faster and the benefits will be seen sooner for the whole society. As a result of our analysis on the condition in the four countries of interest, we can outline three recommendation points, that can be used as stepping stones for overall improvement.

- 1) Equal opportunities for female and male sports (this in context of court time, leadership positions, referees, media time and media promotion of female athletes, close the gap in investment in women's sport and promote equal economic opportunities for women and girls, give more decent finances for female spots and

female athletes, state plans for more professional female athletes, more practice facilities, equal prizes)

- 2) Remove traditional obstacles for women in sports (accommodate practice time to the traditional expectations for women in the society, ensure safe environment, prevent and respond to gender-based violence)
- 3) Sport as a tool for girls and women empowerment (promote women's leadership and gender equality in governance models, promote women's equal participation and bias free representation in media, provide equal opportunities for girls in sports, physical activity and physical education)

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