



FEMALE POWER IN SPORTS

TOWARDS EQUALITY IN SPORTS



**PÅ
SAMMA
LINJE**

OUR SOCIETY KEEPS PROGRESSING – AND SPORTS MUST KEEP UP WITH SOCIETY!

Schools, kindergartens, businesses and non-governmental organisations are already working actively for equality.
For sports to remain attractive and viable, standing in the sidelines is not an option.



ROAD TO EQUAL SPORTS

When organised competitive sports arrived in Finland towards the end of the 19th century, there were initially no obstacles for women in sports, which was quite unique in the Nordic countries. However, sports soon began to reflect the established gender roles of society, cultivating the idea that competition is inappropriate for women. As a result, women's engagement in physical activity became limited and sports began to be shaped by men, for men.

To this day, girls and women are in an inferior position in sports, even though equality has been a prominent topic in sports for quite some time. Obstacles and limitations for women and women's sports have resulted, among other things, in lack of role models, insufficient media exposure, lesser sponsorships, smaller number of academic studies, and fewer women with careers in professional sports. In sports, there are prominent structural reasons, unwritten norms and stereotypes that inadvertently hinder women's opportunities to participate and advance. This phenomenon is also known as a 'vicious cycle in women's sports.'

This material stems from the project **På samma linje** (2018–2020) where the main objective was to advance equality, improve equal treatment and increase gender awareness in sports. The purpose of this guide is to provide tips and ideas on how you can help strengthen the position of girls and women in your club, activities, association and sport. Equality work benefits everyone, and we should all strive to advance it regardless of our gender or role.

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Printed: Grano, 2024

HISTORY OF WOMEN'S SPORTS



1876 The first gymnastics club for women in the Nordics is founded in Helsinki (*Gymnastikföreningen för fruntimmer*).

1879 Women and men compete in the same category in the first ski competition in Finland.

1896 The national umbrella organisation, Finnish Women's Gymnastics Association, is founded.

1900 Women are allowed to compete in the Olympics for the first time. A total of 22 female athletes participated in tennis, golf, croquet, sailing and equestrian.

1912 Women competed in the following Olympic sports: archery, diving, swimming and figure skating.

1922 Women's Olympic Games were held as a protest against the refusal to include female athletes in the 1924 Olympics.

1928 A total of 2,883 athletes compete in the Olympics, 277 of them women.



1984 Olympic gold is won for the first time by a Muslim woman from Morocco.

1996 Softball is introduced at the Olympics, intended for women only.

2000 Women are allowed to compete in weightlifting at the Olympics.

2004 Women are allowed to participate in freestyle wrestling at the Olympics.

2012 Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Brunei send female athletes to the London Olympics, meaning that all National Olympic Committees have now sent female athletes to the Olympics.

2014 Women are allowed to compete in ski jumping. All sports are not yet equal in the Olympics; for instance, Nordic combined is exclusive to men while synchronised swimming and rhythmic gymnastics are exclusive to women.

2019 Players in Finland's women's and men's national football team receive equal pay.

EFFORTS

The following sections include concrete tips on how to improve conditions for female athletes at various levels to make sports more equal. The tips can be applied at different levels.

What can you do as an individual?

- Looking at sports (clubs, gyms, etc.) with a critical eye, do women have equal opportunity to participate? If opportunities are not equal, report your observations to said organisation's management.
- You can support women's teams and female athletes by going to games, reading related news and following the athletes and teams on social media.
- Reflect on the language you use in your sports activities. It is not okay to talk in a way that is demeaning, ridiculing, mocking or sexist. Demonstrate that you do not accept such language and lead by example.
- Consider the context in which you use the word 'women's sport'. Use the denominator 'women's' or 'female' only where necessary. If you speak differently about men and women, saying, for instance, 'female football player' rather than 'football player', you continue to uphold structural inequality and unequal attitudes.
- Treat others with respect and maintain a respectful tone. As an adult, you are a role model for children and young people. Do not reinforce negative norms with the way you talk about and act towards women in sports.
- Remember that gender is not limited to men and women. Some do not identify with either gender. Instead, they have a transgender identity.
- Recognise that the activity you are involved in is far from equal. Equality is typically taken for granted, resulting in a failure to acknowledge that some are favoured while some are excluded. Highlight inequality to effect change.

BY SIMPLY giving thought to these issues, you have already come a long way. It is a process, and you learn something new every day, from your mistakes as well.



What can you do as a club?

- Prepare an equality and equal treatment plan that includes concrete measures. The plan serves as a foundation for your club's equality work.
- Assess your club's current situation. Be objective (ask for outside help if necessary) and examine your activities thoroughly from various points of view, e.g. how resources are distributed (training schedules, finances), what is the gender distribution among participants, and what is the gender and age distribution of your organisation's board of directors.
- Make female athletes aware of their opportunities for a professional career in sports. Inform people about job opportunities available to them after their career as an athlete is over. For instance, they may put their skills to use as coaches.
- Encourage children and young people to perform equally, regardless of their gender. Do not separate activities for girls and boys.
- Give everyone equal training opportunities. You can break traditional patterns and gender norms by ensuring sufficient diversity among the people who are trained for different tasks and roles in your club.
- Increase the involvement of girls by providing information and opportunities to try sports at an early age, e.g. by visiting and collaborating with schools and daycare centres.
- Organise activities for women only as well as for everyone. This can help you increase the involvement of women because women-only activities can lower the barrier for participation.
- In some cultures, women are only allowed to participate in activities that are led by women and held in closed facilities. Ask the women in your organisation for their needs and wishes.
- Review your club's rules, guidelines and values to ensure that they support diversity and equality. For best results, this should be done together with your club's members.
- Target a 40/60 gender quota in your decision-making bodies and working groups. This results in greater variety in your decision-making and improved representation of your membership.
- Assign a person who has the responsibility to ensure that resources are shared equally, including training schedules, funds, coaches, facilities, educational opportunities and equipment. Ensure that this applies to all your activities.
- Divide groups according to their skill level rather than by gender. This way, everyone has the opportunity to participate at the level that suits them best.
- Increase club members' awareness of gender roles and norms. Try to consciously break the established gender roles that exist within the club.
- Have the courage to make decisions to put more effort towards women. A decision is a prerequisite for change and it leads to action.

- Communicate your planned and conducted equality work to everyone in the club. It is important to make club members aware of the efforts and have an opportunity to participate in the decision-making and the related activities. It is also a good idea to communicate your efforts to the outside world, as this can be good publicity for your club.
- You can review your club's activities critically with the help of the following questions: Do our activities attract people? Who is missing? What is the reason for members quitting? How are we perceived by others? Is everyone treated respectfully? How open are we to new ideas? Correct any deficiencies that come to light.
- Promote gender equality in your communication channels by featuring men and women equally in your visual and textual content.
- Help media provide equal representation in their news coverage. Prepare press releases where you provide information on what is topical at the moment and what could make for a good article. Highlight both women and men; it is important to provide equal visibility to all activities.
- Treat women's sports equally to men's when it comes to scheduling competitions.
- In terms of public and media interest, there is a big difference in allowing women to play between 6 and 7 p.m. compared to 8 and 9 p.m.
- Arrange events and matches one after the other. If men's sports generally attract more spectators, you can support women's sports by scheduling their matches before or after men's matches. This way, both matches get visibility.
- When you speak about female athletes, give them the same respect you give to male athletes. Clearly indicate that you value both equally regardless of the gender distribution of your club.
- Review your club's communications. Ensure that words and images used in your marketing present your activities as attractive and welcoming to everyone. This does not mean that materials intended for girls are in pink but rather that women are portrayed as athletes and that diversity is taken into account, for instance.

MAKING DECISIONS and communicating about club activities tends to be rather hasty and routine-like. Consider pausing for a moment to ensure that no one is left out.

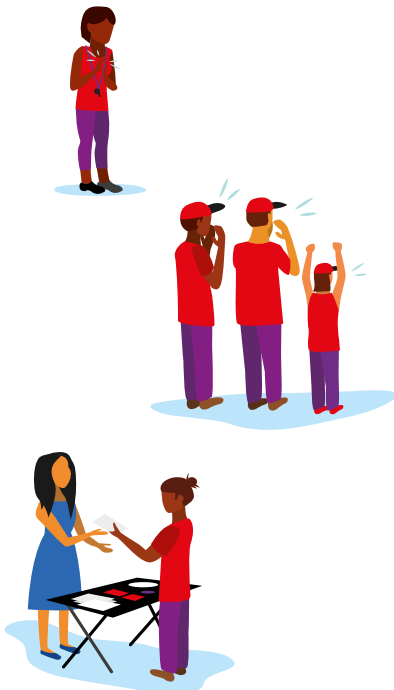


What can be done at the association level?

- Make sure that your equality and equal treatment plan is well thought-out and organised. This means that long-term goals, sub-goals, concrete measures, schedules, responsible persons and assessments are clearly specified. The association and its board of directors must take charge of equality – both at club and association level.
- Involve people of different genders in the equality work to highlight that this is not a gender issue but a matter of developing the sport and the association.
- Review how equality is implemented in your association. Present the results to your members. Appoint an ombudsman for equality who follows up and measures equality work and assesses progress.
- Educate coaches and other club officials in equality and respectful treatment.
- Ensure that coaches' training builds on studies that include both male and female athletes. Current coaching courses are often primarily based on studies centred around male athletes. If the perspective is exclusively male, essential aspects concerning female athletes are excluded, such as the impact of menstrual cycle on performance.
- Arrange babysitters for national team training camps to ensure that childcare or lack of a babysitter does not stand in the way of anyone's participation.
- Ensure that your coaches have equal titles and salaries.
- Make the titles for competitions and athletes gender neutral. When you treat everyone as an athlete rather than a member of a gender, you help make activities more equal. Names for Finnish national football teams, Huuhkajat and Helmarit, are good examples of team names that are not gender-specific.
- Give media opportunities to improve news coverage of women's sports, both quantitatively and qualitatively. For example, encourage stories about women as athletes rather than about them combining sports with the demands of family life.
- Try to ensure that women's and men's matches have equal news and spectator exposure. This includes, for instance, releasing match schedules simultaneously and ensuring that they are played under equal conditions.
- Encourage female athletes to continue in sports after the end of their athletic career, e.g. by becoming coaches or taking on board duties.
- Ensure that the association funds male and female athletes equally.
- Help female athletes become role models. Help athletes of, for instance, different ages, body types and ethnicities emerge by taking diversity into account.
- Identify the challenges clubs face in terms of women's sports. Based on

your findings, you can provide tools, materials, support, networking events and regular training to the clubs to better develop women's sports.

- Ensure that competition rules are equal to everyone. Make sure there is an equal distribution of different sports and levels between the sexes. The same applies to prize money and trophies.
- Give smaller teams opportunities to borrow players from other teams to help them participate in matches. Cooperation between small clubs promotes athletes' opportunities to compete.
- Encourage international federations to work for the development of women's sports.
- Create a network of mentors (e.g. former elite athletes) who support younger athletes.
- Collaborate with various bodies and organisations, such as educational institutions, sports institutes and businesses, with similar interests in increasing or strengthening women's sports.
- Acknowledge how the prevailing culture and structures within a sport affect women's sports. Make efforts to change negative structures and encourage an equal sports culture.
- Target a 40/60 gender quota in your decision-making bodies and working groups. This is a way to increase diversity in decision-making and improved visibility of different role models.



FOLLOW the Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity where equality issues are highlighted. To be eligible for state aid, an association should have an equality and equal treatment plan with concrete measures.

What can be done at the municipal level?

- Review your municipality's sports activities to ensure they promote equality and equal opportunity to participate. It can be a good idea to conduct surveys at regular intervals to gain insight on gender distribution within the municipality.
 - Check that the municipality's facilities enable equal opportunity for everyone to participate. Facilities should not exclude anyone. They should be available for all and provide a safe environment for everyone regardless of gender.
 - Distribute training schedules equally so that all sports are taken into account. Consider the distribution between men and women and girls and boys.
 - Collaborate on equality with the sports clubs active in your municipality. Review the clubs' rules, guidelines and values to ensure that they support diversity and equality.
- Best possible results are achieved when everyone works together towards the same goal.
- Do not get stuck in the old patterns of focusing only on few established sports, such as ice hockey and football. Do not exclude marginal sports but rather provide facilities and opportunities to allow them to continue in the municipality. Encourage schools and sports clubs to work together to raise interest in different sports among children and young people. Municipalities can help with the coordination.
 - Encourage and reward sports clubs that work for equality and invest in girls' and women's sports.
 - Establish guidelines for clubs for applying for grants and subsidies in a way that also supports equality and equal treatment. Provide more support for clubs that contribute more to equality.



DARE to demand equality. Municipality has a central role in guiding and steering activities in the right direction. The residents of your municipality have the right to gender equality in sports.

EXERCISES

Promote equality by trying out the following exercises:

The **'Teflon test'** helps you make your position in relation to different norms visible.

Text and image analysis helps make gendered language and images visible.

'Guess the athlete' is about acknowledging one's own and the society's notion on how an athlete should look and behave.

'Board work' helps management teams review their work critically.

You can find the exercises (in Swedish) at sammalinje.fi/praktiska-ovningar



READING TIPS

Naisten ja tyttöjen urheiluvalmennus.

Mero, A., Uusitalo, A., Hiilloskorpi, H., Nummela, A. & Häkkinen, K.

Women at the Olympic Games

www.topendsports.com

Research report 'All in- Towards gender balance in sport'

public.tableau.com/profile/all.in.coe#!/

Research report 'Jämställdhet bland idrottens ledare'

www.rf.se

'På samma linje' website

www.sammalinje.fi

