



EQUALITY IN SPORT

ISSUE 14 - EQUALITY MATTERS

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

2021 was undoubtedly a year marked by major sporting events, namely, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) EURO 2020, Tokyo Olympics, and Paralympics.

While providing entertainment to spectators, sports seek to use, maintain, or improve physical ability and skills of participants. There are different types of sports, from those requiring only two participants through to those with hundreds of participants, either competing in teams or as individuals.

While sport activities should create a feeling of inclusion in society, several media organisations report cases of discrimination in sports on a daily basis. In light of this, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE) developed this newsletter on equality in sports.



This newsletter delineates the benefits of sport participation, discrimination in sports on the basis of gender, race and ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, recommendations on how to achieve equality in sports, and the NCPE's role as the national equality body. This issue also features an interview with Ms Anna Calleja, the National Director for Special Olympics Malta.

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of Equality Matters!

THE BENEFITS OF SPORT PARTICIPATION

The benefits of participating in sports are both immediate and long-term.

While sports can help in reaching physical gains and fitness goals, participation may also improve one's mental well-being and academic performance: [1]

Physical benefits

lower risk of obesity, lower blood pressure, higher levels of cardio-respiratory fitness, reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, reduced risk of breast cancer

Social/emotional benefits

improved psychological well-being, greater life satisfaction, stronger sense of belonging, improved self-esteem, reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress

Academic/leadership benefits

improved academic achievement, higher graduation rates, higher college attendance and retention, greater involvement in extracurricular activities, opportunities for leadership and learning



Even though sport is generally considered to be a safe, healthy environment that leads to the positive development of individuals, it is also a field where **discrimination may manifest itself in various ways** on the basis of gender, race and ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics.

DISCRIMINATION IN SPORT

Gender



Gender inequalities are present in the sports sector, from media coverage and representation in decision-making positions to pay discrimination. Women may also face a lack of safe facilities, potentially exposing them to sexual harassment.

In this regard, sports coverage is a powerful tool in shaping norms and stereotypes about gender. The media may reinforce these norms and gender stereotypes, but they may also challenge them by promoting a balanced coverage and fair portrayal of women and men.

The portrayal of women and men in sports media

The media tend to represent women athletes as 'women' first and 'athletes' second. Indeed, coverage of **women** in sport is often dominated by references to **family life, appearance, or age**. This type of coverage devalues women's accomplishments in sport.

On the other hand, **men** are depicted as **powerful, dominating, independent, and valued athletes**. [2]



Sports broadcasting

In the past 20 years, sports broadcasting has become more accessible to women. For instance, British professional tennis player, Emma Raducanu, is the BBC's Sports Personality of the Year for 2021. [3]

Nevertheless, numbers show that there is still a noticeable gender gap. The 2020-2021 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) report found that **women report 40% of sports stories**. [4] This shows that sport broadcasting is predominantly male dominated.

Gender inequalities in the policy area

Women are underrepresented in the decision-making bodies of sporting institutions at local, national, European, and global levels. [5] In 2015, only **14% of all decision-making positions** in sports federations in the EU Member States were occupied by women. In many EU countries, the share of women in decision-making positions in 2015 was below 20%. [6]

Vertical segregation is also visible in decision-making in sports. The gender gap widens as the seniority of the position increases. While overall, **women made up 14% of decision-making positions**, only **5%** held the position of presidents, while **9% of vice-presidents were women**. In addition, the share of **women among board members was 15%**. [7]



The gender pay gap in sport

The **gender pay gap** is a global phenomenon reflecting gender inequality practices, including in sports. *“A total of **83% of sports** now award men and women equal prize money, with cricket, golf, and football displaying the greatest pay gaps.”* [8]

The greatest gender pay gap is in **football**. A 2017 global sports salaries survey showed that the *“combined salaries paid to women’s leagues in seven top-division football competitions in France, Germany, England, the US, Sweden, Australia and Mexico, comprising 81 teams and 1,693 players, stood at £32.8 million a year, a little less than the £32.9 million earned by Brazilian forward Neymar for his playing contract for Paris Saint-Germain in 2017-2018”.* [9]

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I wanted to use sports for social change

Billie Jean King

Similarly, the average pay for the 2017 season in the **US Women’s National Basketball Association** was 96 times less than what a male professional would earn for a season.

Tennis was the first sport to pay equal prize money. **Billie Jean King** [10] brought awareness to the issue of unequal pay in the early 1970s, when **she was awarded \$2,900 less than her male counterpart** at the Italian Open.

Addressing the **gender pay gap in sports** is pivotal. The more female athletes are paid the same as their male counterparts, the more interest in women’s sports, the more investment in resources, infrastructure, and marketing, and the more access to women’s sports will grow. [11]





Women as victims of sexual abuse in sports

Research shows that **women and girls** are sexually abused in sports more often than **men and boys**. [12]

However, the settings in which sexual abuse take place seem to be approximately the same for both boys and girls. Sexual abuse occurs mainly in places where sports activities are carried out, during training sessions, in the home of the abuser, or during competitions away from home. [13]

Doctor Larry Nassar's **sexual abuse of hundreds of gymnasts** in the USA led to the biggest **sexual abuse scandal in sports history**.

“
women and girls are sexually abused in sports more often than men and boys”



In Malta

In Malta, the Harassment and Abuse Policy of the Maltese Olympic Committee states that *“harassment and bullying cannot and should not be tolerated in any environment and especially more so in sports.”* [14]

Based on the **International Olympic Committee (IOC)** recommendations, the Harassment and Abuse Policy sets out the principles and practices of the **Maltese Olympic Committee (MOC)** *“with regards to abusive behaviour towards all those who, in one way or another, are involved in local sports either through its administration; officiating; coaching, actual participation or following”.* [15]

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harassment and bullying cannot and should not be tolerated in any environment and especially more so in sports

In 1998, the **Women in Sport Commission** was established within the MOC to promote the participation of women in all levels of sports in Malta.

Despite Malta’s geographical limitations, in 2021, the island has produced some spectacular sports results by **women athletes**.



6 MALTESE WOMEN ATHLETES

WHO BROKE PERSONAL AND NATIONAL RECORDS IN 2021

Maja Theuma

broke several personal and national records at the World Para Swimming World Series in Berlin. The 20-year-old **para swimmer** competed in four para-swimming events – the 50-metre freestyle, the 50-metre backstroke, the 100-metre backstroke, and the 200-metre freestyle. [16]

Haley Bugeja

has been named Best Young Player of the 2020/2021 Serie A season by the Italian Federation. The 17-year-old international **football** player took Serie A by a storm after scoring 12 goals on her debut season, finishing as Sassuolo's top scorer in the process. [17]

Sasha Gatt

The 16-year-old **swimmer** Sasha Gatt made her debut at the Tokyo Olympics, finishing sixth in her 400m qualifying heat. Gatt finished the race in four minutes 19.75 seconds, slightly slower than her personal best of four minutes 18.58 seconds. [18]

Yasmin Zammit Stevens

has become the first-ever Maltese female **weightlifter** to hit the Olympic stage. She placed third out of four in the 64kg weightlifting group in Tokyo Olympics. [19]

Eleanor Bezzina

Target shooter Eleanor Bezzina, 44-years-old, represented Malta at Tokyo Olympics. Bezzina participated in the 25m Pistol competition, finishing in 41st place with 565 points. [20]

Sophie Abela

Basketball player Sophie Abela has made history after becoming the first Maltese to win a regional JUCO tournament in the United States. [21]

In this context, the NCPE interviewed Ms Anna Calleja, the National Director for Special Olympics Malta, who emphasized the importance of providing equal opportunities for women and girls in sports, specifically in decision-making positions.

Would you please introduce yourself to our readers?

My name is Anna Calleja, 63 years of age. I work with the education department but on secondment with Special Olympics Malta - a sports organisation that endorses persons with intellectual disabilities from the ages of 3 and over. Presently, we have around 2,000 registered athletes. I have also been an athlete myself, but of course, many moons ago. Currently, I am the National Director for Special Olympics Malta.

Can you share the memory of a significant personal satisfaction during your career?

The most significant memory was when I was awarded Ġieħ ir-Repubblika. That meant that my work made a significant impression on and contribution to Maltese society.

Can you mention some of the hurdles that you have encountered in your career?

Being in love with sports and wanting to give my best both in teaching and in sports organisations, I encountered hurdles and obstacles along the way, sometimes even facing possible humiliation. This still continues when facing sports boards where most of the administration consists of men. Even today, the National Sports School doesn't have an equal quota in all sports, and girls must compete for a place with boys. This needs to be addressed immediately. One has to make sure of equal participation in all sports, especially in football.

What are some of the challenges you think female athletes face today?

I believe that there have been some improvements in the sector as regards female athletes. Yet, I also believe the quality of training that is given within clubs is always lower for women. For example, national coaches or highly qualified coaches in clubs usually train the males, while females are given the second in charge. Another fact is the venues and time of training. Common grounds are always booked for males with females having to take up the remaining availabilities. Grounds' normal training hours: males train from 5.00pm till 8.00 pm, females can take after 8.00pm accessibilities. Even when national competitions are held, take football for example, males play at the national stadium, while females only play at the second stadium. Why? Other challenges are at administration levels. Higher positions are always occupied by a male. Sports EOs in education departments and SportMalta high-level posts are all occupied by males.

What about female officials and sports organisers – what are their challenges?

Being in love with sports and wanting to give my best both in teaching and in sports organisations, I encountered hurdles and obstacles. This is an important area that needs to be addressed. Most of the high posts are held by men. This is due to the high percentage of males in clubs and organisations as presidents etc.

Even in selections, male figures in sports are still dominant. When a female is included in organisations, she is always given the role of secretary and never important roles such as president / vice president / or sports director. As a result, when decisions are taken, they always favour males. Today, many females are just taking fitness and gym workout and not participating in sports disciplines.



Why is female participation in sport important?

I believe that with an increase in women's participation, there will be a substantial increase in the sport field. Better results, and more females will participate at board levels resulting in a change of mentality. As regards young athletes' participation - this sector has never been addressed. We never had female representatives in Parliament representing sport. In recent years, we have not had a woman CEO in sport. We have never seen a woman chairing the sports boards. In these 50 years, I have never met any woman in any such roles. It's time to start kicking the ball. Women empowerment in sport!

What do you suggest for a better implementation of a gender equality perspective in sports?

As per above, things need to change. Women sitting on sports boards, women officials,

women in education and sport, women in Parliament. I believe that even though the policies are there, they are not really implemented. What about journalism? Does the importance of PR on TV include having enough female presenters. Covering women's sports, is it done equally? On TV sports programmes?

Clubs should give equal importance to female sports. The government should embrace a national programme to empower women's participation and encourage young females to participate on an equal footing with men.

Have you encountered or experienced sexual harassment during your years in sport?

To be honest, yes, I did. Yet, I was strong enough to fight it. But it's not only sexual harassment that you encounter. There are different kinds of harassment. When a male coach is drawn to one participant more than another, talent is not given its due importance. I have seen these stories and lived them. The political issue was another factor that also controlled the sports scene. Bullying was another challenge even when I was teaching. Harassment in sports has many faces that need to be discussed.

What message would you give to girls who aspire to become athletes, officials' organisers?

I pass them a message of light. They need to be strong and know what they want to do. They should be ready for everything and never give up. Becoming an athlete and, at a later stage, an official is something that I encourage. We need more women, and this barrier that sports in Malta is a male's world needs to be challenged and taken more seriously.

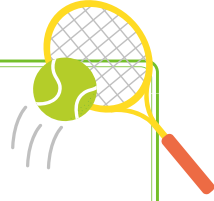
For women and girls to participate in, work with, govern and enjoy sport on an equal playing field, the **UN Women put forward the below set of actions:** [22]

Governments:

- Ensure that schools provide quality physical education for all including through distance learning where possible, and upon recovery
- Support sports for development organisations to expand their offer of sports activities for all, including, equally, women and girls
- Continue to invest in sports programmes focused on young women and girls, preferably combined with life skills sessions to address gender issues
- If economic stimulus packages are to include support to the recovery of sports, ensure that there is equitable distribution of resources for men’s and women’s sport and accountability for the same

Sports organisations:

- Continue to invest in women’s sport
- Include women in the creation and implementation of recovery plans
- Conduct extensive consultations with girls and boys, women and men (athletes, coaches, referees, medical teams and other sports professionals) to better understand how they are being affected differently by the crisis, and by other relevant circumstances, and respond accordingly
- Engage male athletes, journalists, coaches and other male allies to champion women’s sports
- Use high profile persons to raise awareness about the gender dimensions of the crisis
- Invest in and implement safeguarding and protection policies and procedures



Sports audiences:

- Use social media to reach out to clubs, teams, federations and sponsors to show your support for women’s sports
- Set up crowdfunding and donate to NGOs that offer sports programmes and life skills sessions for girls
- Tune into and attend women’s sporting events



Media:

- Strive for balance in coverage and airtime for women’s sports
- Commit to a strategy that advances gender equality both through content production and women’s participation in sports media
- Continue to promote gender balance among sport journalists
- Promote awareness of the exacerbation of harmful gender norms

Private sector sponsors and donors:

- Continue to support women’s professional teams and increase women athletes’ sponsorships
- Continue to promote positive gender equality messaging in sport related marketing
- Expand support to sports programmes for women and girls as a social legacy of the sporting events being sponsored
- Expand support for safe sports for development programmes focused on girls

Sports for Development NGOs:

- Develop protocols to support women and girl survivors of gender-based violence
- Regularly monitor the dropout rates between boys and girls in comparison to the time
- Provide distance learning opportunities where feasible and maintain contact with participants, particularly in lockdown





Race and ethnic origin

Racism and ethnic discrimination can affect all sports and can occur between or against players, spectators, coaches, teams, and referees. [23]

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Racism,
discrimination and
intolerance have no
place in football

UEFA President Aleksander Čeferin

Racism in football

Despite governing bodies in football, such as the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) and the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), acknowledged problems of racism and ethnic discrimination in sport, and supported and cooperated with national and European civil society actors active in this field, [24] **most of the racist incidents** are still related to **football**. [25]

Racist incidents were identified this year in football both at the national and European levels.

Examples of racism in football

National level

In January 2021, Maltese footballer Maya Lucia faced racist abuse. Lucia was playing a Women's Under-19 league match for Raiders Gharghur when parents of players from the opposing side shouted insults at her. [26]



European level

A wave of racist social media abuse was aimed at England players Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho, and Bukayo Saka after they missed penalties in the shoot-out at the EURO 2020 final. [27]



The **European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)** General Policy Recommendation No.12 on combating racism and racial discrimination in sport covers all types of sport, including professional and amateur sports, individual and team sports, as well as all activities related to sport in and outside sports grounds. [28]

It delineates the following recommendations:

Enact and implement anti-discrimination legislation ensuring access to sport for all, and penalising racist acts:

- Conceive appropriate and effective legal and policy measures including the adoption of adequate anti-discrimination legislation to prevent discrimination in access to sport
- Hold sports clubs and federations responsible for racist acts committed during sports events



Train the police to identify and deal with racist incidents in sport:

- Request that local authorities provide the local police force with adequate training for dealing with racist incidents in and outside sports grounds
- Request that the police adopt joint strategies with the security personnel of the organisers of sporting events for dealing with racist incidents

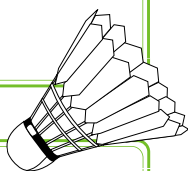
Build coalitions against racism in sport:

- Adopt a national framework agreement, outlining the tasks and responsibilities of each actor
- Invite local authorities to organise sport-related outreach activities bringing together people from different backgrounds
- Invite sports federations and sports clubs to take measures to attract supporters of different minority backgrounds to sports events
- Remind athletes and coaches to abstain from racist behaviour in all circumstances
- Encourage supporters' organisations to adopt supporters' charters, containing anti-racism clauses
- Encourage sponsors and the advertising industry to avoid giving a stereotyped picture of athletes from minority backgrounds
- Promote exchanges of good practices through the creation of a good practice award for combating racism and racial discrimination in sport



Raise awareness of racism and racial discrimination in sport:

- Organise and finance large scale anti-racism awareness raising campaigns in sport at all levels, involving all relevant actors
- Provide funding for social, educational and information activities for NGOs active in the field of combating racism and racial discrimination in sport
- Encourage the media to report on racist incidents taking place during sports events and to give publicity to sanctions incurred by racist offenders





Age

In 2015, around **63%** of the EU-28 population **aged 50-64 years** participated in cultural and/or sporting events. [29]

However, it is often implied that **older athletes** may “get hurt more easily or make mistakes that can cause injuries to other players.” [30]

Athletes who find themselves dealing with **ageism** may still look the same as they did years ago, but their age defines how they are being treated in sport. [31]

It should be up to the athlete to determine when they want to step down in sport.

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And as a 71-year-old myself, I’m now getting the same prejudice that I got 50 years ago as a woman...They said to older people the same thing they said to us 50 years ago as women, you are too weak, you are too fragile you should slow down. Now the ageing population is hearing that, and we are changing that.

Kathrine Switzer is an American marathon runner, who in 1967, became the first woman to run the Boston Marathon as an officially registered competitor. [32]

Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics

The EU-funded Outsport project, which aims to address homophobia and transphobia in sport, surveyed 5,500 LGBT+ people across EU countries, aged between 16 and 78 years for the report titled *'The Relevance of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in Sport in Europe'*. [33]

According to this report, **90% of LGBT people** said that homophobia in sport is a problem, while **70%** believe that the coming out of famous sports stars and high profile

and antihomophobia/transphobia campaigns is helpful to tackle homo/transphobic discrimination. [34]

In this context, in Malta, the **LGBTIQ Equality Strategy & Action Plan 2018-2022** [35] outlines the need to *"promote equal participation of LGBTIQ athletes in sports and increase awareness of the need of a safe and inclusive environment for LGBTIQ persons among sport organisations and fans alike."*



Each sporting organisation should be committed to being inclusive and open to all members regardless of gender, race and ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics, cultural or religious background, or other attributes that may lead to any person feeling discriminated against.

THE NCPE'S WORK

The NCPE works to promote equality in the areas covered by its remit by investigating complaints, creating awareness-raising campaigns, delivering training sessions to different stakeholders, and providing input to policies and legislation.

In 2017, the NCPE gave feedback to the National Policy for Sport in Malta and Gozo: **'Draft National Sports Policy Framework 2017-2027'** suggesting the following points to be added to the Draft Policy:

- Concerted effort to combat gender, and other, stereotypes in sports by means of the media, education, and sports institutions
- Sports institutions are to be knowledgeable on gender-based violence and sexual harassment and have binding codes of conduct in place in order to prevent violence and harassment
- Sports institutions are to implement Equality and Sexual Harassment policies
- The Board of Directors of Sports Malta should be gender balanced
- Periodic Equality Audits are to be carried out by the Research and Development Unit
- Sports institutions should send a clear message that everyone is welcome to participate without fear of judgement and/or harassment



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