

**EUROPEAN HANDBOOK FOR GENDER
EQUALITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION IN SPORT:
A PERSPECTIVE THROUGH THE ERASMUS
+ WOMEN-UP PROJECT**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Handbook on Gender Equality, Equity, and Inclusion in Sports is an intellectual output of the Women in Sport: Gender Relations and Future Perspectives (Woman Up) project, co-funded by the European Union. This comprehensive guide aims to raise awareness and inspire action toward creating a network of support for gender equality in the realm of sports. By engaging stakeholders, including sports operators, policymakers, educators, and citizens, the Handbook emphasizes the value of sport and physical activity while highlighting strategies to promote gender equality, equity, and inclusion.

This Handbook is a substantial resource consisting of eight chapters, each led by esteemed organizations in the field. It covers a wide range of topics and provides valuable insights and guidance for advancing gender equality in sports. The first chapter sets the foundation by exploring the importance of physical activity for individuals of all sexes and ages. This highlights the numerous benefits of engaging in sports, including improved physical health, enhanced mental well-being, and stronger social connections. The subsequent chapters delve into the unique challenges and benefits experienced by women in sports. They shed light on significant issues, such as maternity, menstruation, and female trials, offering valuable perspectives and strategies to address them. Additionally, these chapters examine the risks associated with physical inactivity and stress the importance of promoting health equity through inclusive and gender sensitive approaches.

The Handbook also dedicates considerable attention to the governance of sports organizations through gender lenses. It addresses the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, the critical need for gender equity in sports organizations, and the barriers women face in accessing leadership roles. Moreover, it provides effective strategies and recommendations for promoting gender equality in decision-making processes within sports organizations. Another crucial aspect covered in the Handbook is sports legislation and potential gender discrimination in European countries. It provides an overview of existing legal frameworks and scrutinizes examples of gender disparities in sports legislation and policy. By analyzing the economic aspects of female participation in sports, including pay gaps and financial disparities, the handbook advocates for strategies that promote gender equity in sports legislation and policy through advocacy and reform.

Furthermore, recognizing the dual career challenges faced by female athletes, the Handbook offers insights into the balancing act of athletic pursuits and other responsibilities. It explores the benefits and opportunities that arise from pursuing a dual career and provides practical strategies to support and empower female athletes to achieve their athletic and professional goals. Gender discrimination in the media is another significant concern addressed in handbooks. It critically examines gender stereotypes, biased portrayals of female athletes, and the profound influence of media representation on public perceptions and participation in sports. The Handbook presents strategies to challenge and overcome these biases, advocating for increased representation of women in sports media coverage and the disruption of stereotypes.

Education plays a crucial role in promoting gender equity and social recognition in sports, and Handbook dedicates a chapter to exploring this intersection. This highlights the challenges faced by women and girls in accessing sports education and provides actionable strategies to advance gender equity in educational settings. In addition, the handbook delves into the complex topic of intersectionality in

sports, considering the interplay of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and other social identities. It investigates how these intersecting identities impact participation and experiences in sports, sheds light on gender-based violence, and offers strategies to promote inclusivity and equity for individuals with intersecting marginalized identities. Throughout the Handbook, numerous case studies and scientific, technical, and pedagogical guidance have been presented to showcase practical and evidence-based examples of promoting gender equality in sports.

The Handbook on Gender Equality, Equity, and Inclusion in Sports serves as a comprehensive and invaluable resource for all stakeholders invested in promoting gender equality in sports. This highlights the importance of positive action and the creation of a support network to foster gender equality, equity, and inclusion in sports. By envisioning a future in which individuals of all genders thrive in the world of sports, the Handbook encourages collective efforts toward creating a more inclusive and equitable sporting landscape.

2. BACKGROUND

Gender Equality, Equity, and Inclusion have recently taken center stage in discussions among key policymakers and change-makers working to create a just and equitable society in which everyone, regardless of gender, can thrive and reach their full potential (Quintana and Borghi 2022). In the wake of this, this handbook serves as an unparalleled guide that sparks awareness and fuels decisive action to pave the way for achieving true gender equality within the realm of sports. Crafted as a remarkable intellectual output of the Woman Up project, generously co-funded by the European Union, this handbook amalgamates the profound expertise of esteemed organizations, bringing forth a treasure trove of strategies and insights to propel the march towards gender equality, equity, and inclusion in sports. Building upon the groundbreaking "AGES Project," which meticulously examined gender disparities in adolescent sports engagement and uncovered the persistent presence of gender stereotypes within the sporting domain, this project takes a bold stride forward. It recognizes the pivotal role of coaches and teachers, alongside other stakeholders, in promoting equal practice and comprehensive inclusion of adolescents in sports, aiming to put an end to the gender stereotypes prevalent in the six participating countries. We will navigate the rich tapestry of this handbook, unraveling profound insights and arming ourselves with actionable strategies to champion the cause of gender equality in sports.

There has been an increasing recognition of the significance of gender equality in various spheres of society, including sports. Sports have the potential to have a positive impact on individuals' physical health, mental well-being, and social connections, irrespective of gender or age (Balish et al., 2005; Balish et al., 2016). Engaging in sports and physical activity can contribute to improved cardiovascular fitness, enhanced muscle strength, and improved overall physical well-being in both men and women. It also plays a crucial role in promoting mental health by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression and enhancing self-esteem and body image (Alley & Hicks, 2005; Balish et al., 2016).

However, despite the numerous benefits that sports offer, gender disparities and barriers persist, hindering the full participation and inclusion of women and girls in sports (Fowlie et al., 2021; Hoerber, 2008). Research has shown that women and girls often face unequal opportunities, limited resources, and societal stereotypes, which discourage their involvement and advancement in sports. This can range from disparities in funding and resources allocated to women's sports programs to discriminatory attitudes and practices that limit access to training facilities, competitions, and leadership positions (Fowlie et al., 2021; Hoerber, 2008).

Studies have highlighted the persistent gender gap in sports participation rates, especially at the competitive and elite levels where women and girls are underrepresented (Fowlie et al., 2021; Hoerber, 2008). This underrepresentation can be attributed to a variety of factors, including societal norms and expectations, lack of role models and support systems, limited media coverage and sponsorship opportunities, and inadequate policies and programs that address gender equity in sports (Fowlie et al., 2021).

For example, Fowlie et al. (2021) examined the barriers faced by women and girls in accessing and participating in sports in a particular region. This study found that societal norms and expectations, such as gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs about women's roles and abilities, played a significant role in discouraging girls from engaging in sports. It also identified the lack of appropriate facilities, equipment, and training opportunities as barriers that limit participation and advancement in sports.

In a comprehensive analysis conducted by Hoerber (2008), gender disparities in sports were thoroughly examined, shedding light on the numerous structural and social barriers impeding women's participation and involvement. The study highlights the pressing need for transformative policy changes

and strategic interventions to effectively address these disparities. One key finding of this study was the importance of investing in women's sports programs and initiatives. By allocating resources and support to develop and nurture women's sports, opportunities can be created for female athletes to thrive and showcase their talents on an equal footing with their male counterparts. This investment can range from funding training facilities and equipment to scholarships and sponsorship opportunities, enabling women to access the necessary resources and opportunities to excel in their chosen sports.

Moreover, the study by Hoerber (2008) emphasized the significance of promoting gender equity in leadership positions within sports organizations. Breaking down barriers and biases that limit women's access to decision-making roles makes it possible to create a more inclusive and diverse sporting landscape (Hoerber, 2008). This not only empowers women to contribute their unique perspectives and insights but also serves as a role model for aspiring female athletes, signaling that their ambitions and aspirations are valid and supported. By implementing policy changes, targeted investments, and promoting gender equity in leadership positions, as suggested by Hoerber's analysis, we can foster a more inclusive and equitable sports environment for women to break down barriers and create a level playing field in which women's involvement and achievements in sports are celebrated and valued (Hoerber, 2008).

To address these challenges and promote gender equality in sports, it is essential to raise awareness, challenge societal norms and stereotypes, and implement inclusive policies and programmes. Organizations and stakeholders involved in sports should work together to provide equal opportunities, resources, and support systems for women and girls. This includes initiatives to increase female participation at all levels, create safe and inclusive environments, promote equitable representation in leadership roles, and address the specific needs and challenges faced by female athletes, such as maternity and menstruation issues (Hoerber, 2008; Fowlie et al., 2021). By addressing gender disparities and barriers in sports, we can create a more inclusive and equitable sporting environment in which individuals of all genders can fully participate, benefit, and excel. This not only contributes to individual well-being but also fosters a society that values and promotes gender equality in all aspects of life.

This Handbook addresses these challenges by providing a wealth of knowledge, case studies, and evidence-based strategies for promoting gender equality in sports. It engages a wide range of stakeholders, including sports operators, policymakers, educators, and citizens, emphasizing the value of sports and physical activity in achieving gender equality (Farias et al., 2017). By presenting practical guidance and showcasing successful examples, this handbook aims to inspire action and foster a supportive environment where individuals of all genders can thrive in sports.

The Handbook consists of eight chapters, each led by esteemed organizations with expertise in various aspects of gender equality in sports. The first chapter highlights the positive effects of physical activity on individuals' physical health, mental well-being, and social connections, emphasizing that these benefits should be accessible to individuals of all sexes and ages. Subsequent chapters delve into specific topics, such as women's challenges and benefits in sports, maternity, and menstruation issues, as well as the importance of health equity and inclusivity. The Handbook also examines governance in sports organizations, gender representation in leadership roles, and effective strategies for promoting equality in decision-making processes (Herdt 1996; Hoerber 2008). Additionally, it explores sports legislation, identifies gender disparities, and provides recommendations for reform (International Working Group on Women and Sport, 1994).

Recognizing the unique challenges faced by female athletes, the handbook addresses dual career challenges and offers support strategies to help athletes balance their sporting and academic pursuits (Guerrero & Guerrero Puerta, 2023). It also examines the issue of gender discrimination in media coverage, highlighting the importance of fair and equal representation of athletes of all sexes (Fink, 2008). Furthermore, the Handbook explores the role of education in promoting gender equity, recognizing the impact of intersecting identities on sports experiences (Gil & Etxebeste, 2019).

Throughout the Handbook, numerous case studies, scientific research, technical guidance, and pedagogical approaches have been presented to provide practical and evidence-based examples of promoting gender equality in sports (Casey & Quennerstedt, 2020; Gil-Arias et al., 2021). By highlighting these examples, the handbook aims to inspire stakeholders to implement effective strategies and interventions in their respective contexts.

In light of the above, the Handbook on Gender Equality, Equity, and Inclusion in Sports serves as a valuable resource for individuals and organizations committed to advancing gender equality in sports. By providing comprehensive guidance and practical examples, this handbook aims to inspire action and foster a future wherein individuals of all genders can thrive and excel in sports. The journey toward gender

equality in sports requires a collective effort, and this Handbook aims to be a catalyst for change. Together, we can create a supportive network that champions gender.

3. TARGET GROUP AND CONTENT

The Handbook on Gender Equality, Equity, and Inclusion in Sports caters to diverse target groups, encompassing stakeholders involved in the realm of sports and gender equality. This includes sports operators, policymakers, educators, citizens, athletes, and individuals interested in promoting gender equality in sports activities. The content of the handbook is designed to provide comprehensive insights, practical strategies, and evidence-based guidance to address challenges and promote gender equality in the sports sector. It covers a wide range of topics, including the benefits of physical activity, unique challenges faced by women in sports, the governance of sports organizations, sports legislation, dual-career challenges, media representation, education, intersectionality, and case studies. By tailoring the content to the needs and interests of the target group, the handbook aims to inspire action, raise awareness, and foster a supportive network of gender equality, equity, and inclusion in sports.

4. STRUCTURE OF THE HANDBOOK

The Handbook on Gender Equality, Equity, and Inclusion in Sports is structured in a comprehensive and organized manner and comprises eight informative chapters. Each chapter is led by esteemed organizations in the field, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives and expertise. The handbook begins with a foundational chapter that explores the importance of physical activity for individuals of all genders and ages, highlighting its benefits to physical health, mental well-being, and social connections. Subsequent chapters delve into specific areas, such as the challenges and benefits experienced by women in sports, and address issues such as maternity, menstruation, and female trials. The governance of sports organizations with a gender lens is extensively covered, emphasizing the need for gender equity in leadership positions and providing strategies to overcome barriers. The handbook also examines sports legislation, identifies gender disparities, and advocates for equity through advocacy and reform. Recognizing the dual career challenges faced by female athletes, practical insights are offered to support and empower them to achieve their athletic and professional goals. Additionally, the handbook addresses gender discrimination in the media and explores strategies to challenge bias and increase representation. Education and intersectionality in sports are also examined, along with case studies and practical guidance throughout the handbook, to showcase evidence-based approaches for promoting gender equality in sports. The well-structured and comprehensive nature of the handbook ensures that readers can easily navigate and access valuable information to support their efforts to foster gender equality, equity, and inclusion in the sports domain.