

ANALYSIS

# GENDER EQUALITY IN SPORT

IN NORTH MACEDONIA





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# Acronyms

AYS	Agency for Youth and Sport
BPfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
DV	Domestic Violence
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EU	European Union
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GE	Gender Equality
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IOC	International Olympic Committee
Istanbul Convention	Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
MOC	Macedonian Olympic Committee
NSF(s)	National Sports Federation(s)
PRO	Public Revenue Office
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
TUS	Time-Use Survey
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
VAW	Violence against Women



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“Let me tell you what I think of bicycling. I think it has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. It gives women a feeling of freedom and self-reliance. I stand and rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a wheel... the picture of free, untrammelled womanhood.”

Susan B. Anthony, suffragist leader, 1896

# Introduction

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Physical education and access to sports is extremely important for the development of all individuals. Apart from the physical skills and the sporting abilities that young people develop when they participate in sports, an important benefit is the development of social skills. Through participation in sports and physical activities, young people learn and develop skills and personality traits such as: teamwork, self-esteem, confidence, respect, solidarity, empathy, etc. Furthermore, sport and physical activity have positive impact on the mental health, increasing self-confidence and self-esteem, developing ways to cope with stress and anxiety, developing a sense of independence, among other things.<sup>1</sup> The development of a healthy attitude towards the body and the development of a physically strong and healthy body are key elements in the growth and development of children and young people.

The benefits of sports participation for girls are numerous, including increased physical health, mental health benefits, increased educational and intellectual attainment, as well as benefits to reproductive health.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, participation in sport improves the social skills, self-perceptions, self-esteem, quality of life, and leadership skills, which in turn contributes to the development of the employability skills improving the future prospects, especially for girls and women.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women (2021) Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Sports Organizations, Ankara: UN Women. Available at: [https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/7/UNWOMEN\\_Guidelines%20ENG-min.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/7/UNWOMEN_Guidelines%20ENG-min.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Bailey, R, I. Wellard, and H. Dismore (2004) Girls' Participation in Physical Activities and Sports: Benefits, Patterns, Influences and Ways Forward, World Health Organisation. Available at: <https://www.icsspe.org/sites/default/files/Girls.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

The basic human right to acquire physical education and to have unhindered access to sports was highlighted in the Charter for Physical Education and Sports of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

*“Every human being has a fundamental right of access to physical education and sport, which are essential for the full development of his personality. The freedom to develop physical, intellectual and moral powers through physical education and sport must be guaranteed both within the educational system and in other aspects of social life.” (Art. 1).<sup>4</sup>*

The Charter was revised in 2015,<sup>5</sup> further stating that “[e]qual opportunity to participate and be involved at all supervision and decision-making levels in physical education, physical activity and sport, whether for the purpose of recreation, health promotion or high performance, is the right of every girl and every woman that must be actively enforced”. (Art. 1)

The UN Sustainable Development Agenda<sup>6</sup> addresses gender equality, more specifically SDG 5 (“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”), requiring urgent action to eliminate the root causes of discrimination that are an obstacle for women to fulfil their rights in all spheres of life. Equal rights and opportunities for girls in sport are incorporated in this goal. Sport for development is a powerful tool for social change, social development, and promotion of human rights. It plays an important role for sustainable development and peace, contributing to solidarity, non-discrimination, social inclusion, diversity, and respect.

In 2017, the Kazan Action Plan<sup>7</sup> was adopted, linking sports policies with the SDGs. According to the Kazan Action Plan, in 2021, the Global Observatory for Women, Sport, Physical Education and Physical Activity has been established in Lausanne, Switzerland, with the aim to overcome global and systemic inequalities for girls and women in sport.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (1978) International Charter of Physical Education and Sport. Available at: [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sport\\_e.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/sport_e.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (2015) International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235409>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations (2015) Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO (2017) Kazan Action Plan, International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport, 6th, Kazan, Russian Federation, 2017. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000252725>

<sup>8</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/news/launch-global-observatory-women-sport-physical-education-and-physical-activity-1>

Sport as a human right is also proclaimed by the Olympic Charter,<sup>9</sup> in the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, which also adds that this right should not be contradicted by discrimination of any kind and that the spirit of friendship, solidarity, and fair play are paramount to practicing this right. The Charter further emphasizes the importance of providing equal opportunities for participation in sport, which should be made possible for every individual regardless of their gender.

The notion of “*sport for all*”, promoted by the Council of Europe,<sup>10</sup> puts emphasis on sport as an opportunity for education and social development for girls and boys, women and men, as well as contributing to fostering good health and well-being in the society, allowing girls and boys to develop the essential values for life in a democratic society, growing into responsible citizens. Furthermore, CoE acknowledges the importance of sport in promoting social integration of disadvantaged groups and its contribution towards better understanding among communities. However, CoE also recognizes the existing gaps between the standards and the practice, between *de jure* and *de facto* gender equality and discrimination against women and girls.

Having in mind the significant benefits of sport for all living beings, it is extremely difficult to accept the historically visible unequal treatment of women in sport. Women’s presence in sport and their right to practice sport has been restricted in access, opportunities, and funds. Discrimination and marginalization of women and girls in sport is something that marks their presence throughout the history of sport.<sup>11</sup> Gender inequalities are evident in representation in decision-making and media coverage.<sup>12</sup> Girls and women also face a lack of safe and appropriate sports facilities, potentially exposing them to physical or verbal sexual harassment, and other constraints, such as lack of childcare facilities and/or lack of time.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, public sport spaces are often not lit properly or do not have adapted spaces for women and girls to be physically active.<sup>14</sup>

Despite all the limitations in access, opportunities, and funds, women have proven their excellence in sport and sports activities. Their advancement in the field is considerable and marked by important historical achievements.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup> International Olympic Committee (2020) Olympic Charter, Lausanne. Available at: <https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/General/EN-Olympic-Charter.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Council of Europe, Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Gender Mainstreaming in Sport, Pub. L. No. CM/Rec(2015)2 (2015), <https://www.icsspe.org/system/files/Council%20of%20Europe%20-%20Recommendation%20Gender%20Mainstreaming%20CM%20Rec%20%282015%292.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Fasting, K. et al. (2011) Sexual Harassment in Sport toward Females in Three European Countries, International Review for the Sociology of Sport 46, no. 1, 76–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690210376295>; Carson, F., C. McCormack, and J. Walsh (2018) Women in Sport Coaching: Challenges, Stress and Wellbeing, ACTIVE: Journal of Physical Education, Sport, Health and Recreation 7, no. 2, 63–67, <https://doi.org/10.15294/active.v7i2.22100>.

<sup>12</sup> EIGE (2017) Gender in sport. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-sport>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Brady, M. (2005) Creating Safe Spaces and Building Social Assets for Young Women In The Developing World: A New Role For Sport, Women’s Studies Quarterly. 33:1&2.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2007) Women, gender equality and sport, Women2000 and beyond. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/Women%20and%20Sport.pdf>.

## Goals of the Analysis

The main goal of this analysis is to provide a comprehensive overview of the situation with gender equality in sport in North Macedonia. It aims at providing a review of the key international and national documents and policies in order to bring understanding of the topic of sport and gender equality on a global and European level, connecting it to the North Macedonian context. It also examines the North Macedonian efforts towards gender equality in sport and presents valuable information on the current needs of women in sports in the country, presenting the experiences of women athletes, sport managers, and other relevant stakeholders in the area of sport.

## Methodological Approach

The analysis was conducted with a qualitative methodological approach, according to the needs, but also taking into consideration the lack of relevant statistical data. Qualitative approach was also preferred since it provides a more nuanced and direct knowledge and access to the lived experiences of women engaged in the sports sector.

Starting point for the analysis was a comprehensive overview of the legal framework and relevant policy documents at international and national level. National structures, institutions, and policies were analysed through public information available from online resources on the websites of the organizations/institutions, as well as from media reports. Additional source of information were employees in public institutions and organizations that were interviewed for this analysis.

Significant part of the findings in the analysis come from various stakeholders that were interviewed. A total of 10 interviews were conducted with representatives from relevant institutions, federations, organizations, and sportswomen who are managers, club owners, national sport representatives, referees, and selectors. The interview participants were identified on the basis of the goals of the analysis and were directly contacted by the consultant engaged for the analysis. They were informed about the confidentiality of the interviews and that their identities are fully protected. The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions and were conducted either face-to-face or through telephone or internet application (Zoom/Skype), according to the availability of the participants and the possibility for in-person meeting, taking into consideration the situation with COVID-19 in the country. The average duration of the interviews was approximately 45 minutes.

## Limitations

Significant limitation for the analysis, as well as for other similar analyses, is the overall lack of relevant and reliable data on gender equality in sport and participation of women and men in various sports activities in North Macedonia. The public institutions either don't have relevant information, or the information is not publicly available. The relevant sports institutions (clubs, federations, etc.) are also lacking relevant information on gender issues in their fields. Furthermore, there is also a lack of publicly available and relevant research on the topic of gender equality and challenges in sport in the country, as well as a lack of official statistical data on sports.

The overall inertness of the public institutions is particularly visible when trying to access the available data. The high level of partisanship in general within the institutions is also contributing to the lack of trust both within the institutions and especially towards outside actors, and consequently, the lack of interest in collaboration with researchers. The ingrained culture of deeply entrenched patriarchal values and the lack of awareness and knowledge on gender equality issues further contributes to the lack of interest in this topic.

## International context

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA),<sup>16</sup> adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, is the most progressive blueprint for the advancement of women's rights. It recognizes the right to access to sport for all individuals globally and references sport explicitly:

*“Provide accessible recreational and sports facilities and establish and strengthen gender-sensitive programs for girls and women of all ages in education and community institutions and support the advancement of women in all areas of athletics and physical activity, including coaching, training and administration, and as participants at the national, regional and international levels.” (p. 52)*

Additionally, the BPfA calls for the creation of educational programs which will provide the same opportunities for girls and women of all ages to participate in sport, physical activity and recreation as the opportunities available to men and boys (p. 68).

<sup>16</sup> UN Women (2014) Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action: Beijing+5 Political Declaration and Outcome. Available at: [https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/PFA\\_E\\_Final\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/PFA_E_Final_WEB.pdf).



The Platform further recognizes negative stereotyping of women and men when it comes to decision-making and points out the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions in the areas of art, culture, sport (p. 120).

The Platform focuses on removing the systemic barriers that hold women and girls back in practicing their rights and using the opportunities for development and growth.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the global intergovernmental policy making body on gender equality, addressed sport and physical activity in its review of progress made in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.<sup>17</sup> In its agreed conclusions on women and health, the Commission called on governments, the United Nations, and civil society to encourage women to practice sport and recreational activities highlighting the positive impact on women's health, well-being, mental health, and fitness, and ensure that women have access to equal opportunities to practice sport, use sports facilities, and take part in competitions as men do.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),<sup>18</sup> adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, specifically recognises that women and girls have the same rights as men and boys *“to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life”* (Art. 13(c)), and that States should ensure the same opportunities for women and girls in the field of education, *“to participate actively in sports and physical education”* (Art. 10(g)).

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD),<sup>19</sup> adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2006, in Article 30, reaffirms the right of persons with disabilities *“to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities.”* In the same Article, the Convention urges States to take the appropriate measures *“to ensure that persons with disabilities have an opportunity to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities and, to this end, encourage the provision, on an equal basis with others, of appropriate instruction, training and resources”*, as well as *“to ensure that children with disabilities have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities, including those activities in the school system.”*

<sup>17</sup> United Nations (2010) Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the Critical Areas of Concern of the Beijing Platform for Action 1996-2009. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.18356/5fa286bb-en>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>



Finally, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)<sup>20</sup>, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, recognises “*the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts*” (Art. 31).

In 2020, under the guidance of UN Women, the Sports for Generation Equality Initiative<sup>21</sup> was established “*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). The Sports for Generation Equality Principles are informed by the Kazan Action Plan and the BPfA,<sup>22</sup> addressing the critical areas of concern and objectives in relation to gender equality in sport:

- 1 Undertake efforts to promote women’s leadership and gender equality in governance models;
- 2 Undertake efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls in and through sports;
- 3 Undertake to close the gap in investment in women’s sport and promote equal economic opportunities for women and girls;
- 4 Undertake efforts to promote women’s equal participation and bias-free representation in sports media, including communications to eliminate harmful gender stereotypes and to promote positive role models;
- 5 Undertake efforts to support equal opportunities for girls in sports, physical activity and physical education;
- 6 Agree to monitor and publicly report on progress on an annual basis.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

<sup>21</sup> UN Women (2020) Sports For Generation Equality Framework: Driving Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action through the Power of the Sport Ecosystem. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/News%20and%20events/Stories/2020/Sport-GenerationEquality.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.11.

The Gender Equality and Inclusion Objectives 2021-2024<sup>23</sup> of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) recommend five focus areas which are aligned with the principles of the UN Women's Sports for Generation Equality Initiative. The objectives are focused on:

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	<b>Participation</b>	Access and opportunities for all athletes on the field of play and for staff of sports organizations
	<b>Leadership</b>	Positions with decision-making powers and/or influence
	<b>Safe sport</b>	A sporting environment that is respectful, equitable and free from all forms of harassment
	<b>Portrayal</b>	The language, images and voices used, the quality and quantity of coverage and the prominence given, when depicting individuals or groups in communications and the media
	<b>Resource allocation</b>	Distribution of funding, facilities and non-financial support

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Gender equality is one of the fundamental EU principles outlined in EU Treaties and is enshrined in Article 23 of the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.<sup>24</sup> The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025<sup>25</sup> sets out six key objectives of which one puts emphasis on “*addressing gender equality and women’s empowerment across the world*”. The European Union promotes equal rights and addresses gender inequalities in the Member States, but also on a wider level, through its Gender Action Plan III

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<sup>23</sup> International Olympic Committee (2022) Gender Equality and Inclusion Objectives 2021-2024, Lausanne. Available at: <https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/Beyond-the-Games/Gender-Equality-in-Sport/IOC-Gender-Equality-and-Inclusion-Objectives-2021-2024.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> European Parliament (2012) Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT&from=cs>

<sup>25</sup> European Commission (2020) Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of the Regions: A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, Brussels. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152&from=EN>.

(GAP III).<sup>26</sup> GAP III lays down three core principles of tackling the root causes of gender inequality: taking a gender-transformative approach; addressing intersectionality of gender with other forms of discrimination, and following an approach based on human rights. Through GAP III, the EU aims to accelerate progress on empowering women and girls, and safeguard the gains accomplished on gender equality during the 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action.

The main strategic objectives of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023<sup>27</sup> are: prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism, prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, ensure equal access to justice, achieve balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, protect the rights of migrant, refugee and asylum-seeking women and girls, and achieve gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

With the White Paper on Sport in 2007,<sup>28</sup> the EU has highlighted the importance of tackling gender issues and introducing equal access to sport regardless of gender, age, social background, etc. In 2011, with the Communication on Developing the European Dimension in Sport,<sup>29</sup> the European Commission proposed important actions with focus on issues such as: access of women to decision-making positions; fight against gender stereotypes; and access to sport for immigrant women and women from ethnic minorities.

The Resolution on the European Dimension in Sport,<sup>30</sup> adopted by the European Parliament in 2012, calls on Member States “to include gender mainstreaming into all [its] sports-related activities, with a specific focus on: access to sport for immigrant women and women from ethnic minorities, women’s access to decision-making positions in sport and media coverage of women in sport, and to ensure that sport policies and legislation are based upon sex equality” (item 23).

<sup>26</sup> European Union (2020) Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: EU Gender Action Plan (Gap) III – an Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in EU External Action. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0017>

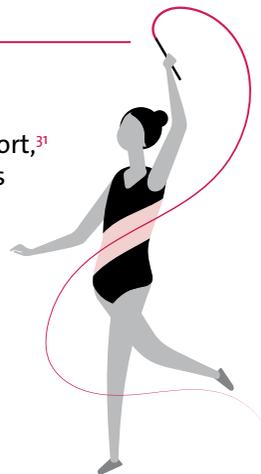
<sup>27</sup> Council of Europe (2018) Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023, Strasbourg. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-093618-gbr-gender-equality-strategy-2023-web-a5/16808b47e1>.

<sup>28</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2007) White Paper on Sport, Brussels. Available at: <https://eurlex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52007DC0391&from=CS>.

<sup>29</sup> European Commission (2011) Developing the European Dimension in Sport, Brussels. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0012:FIN:en:PDF>

<sup>30</sup> See: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2012-0025\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-7-2012-0025_EN.html).

In 2014, the EU adopted its Conclusions on Gender Equality in Sport,<sup>31</sup> acknowledging that women are under-represented in many areas of sport and inviting the Member States, among other things, to “mainstream the gender perspective in all aspects of sport policy and promote the elimination of gender stereotypes in sport at all levels” (40), “conduct research on gender equality in sport at all levels and fields of sport, focusing in particular on coaching, training, management and refereeing in close cooperation with the European Institute of Gender Equality” (43), as well as “support the development and promote the use of adapted gender mainstreaming tools such as gender budgeting and gender impact assessments” (44).



The CoE Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)2 on Gender mainstreaming in sport,<sup>32</sup> provides recommendations on all aspects of gender equality in sport, more specifically, to “promote and encourage policies and practices aimed at introducing, implementing and ensuring gender mainstreaming in all fields and at all levels of sport and establish the existence of specific mechanisms to this end”, in terms of legislation, local level policies, policies and programs to combat gender-based violence (GBV), awareness raising, training, media, data collection and research, monitoring and evaluation, language, funds, etc.

The CoE Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on Preventing and combating sexism<sup>33</sup> urges stakeholders to “foster zero tolerance towards sexism and sexist hate speech in cultural and sporting events” and identifies the areas that need to be addressed: “the sexist attitudes of the media, sport organisations, coaches, sport leaders, athletes, etc.; sexist portrayals of women in sport, trivialising women’s sporting achievements by depicting them in stereotypical roles or demeaning their sports; and sexism and sexist hate speech in sporting events”. The measures to address issues of sexism in sport include producing and promoting tools for combating sexism in the sports sector, such as training material or tools on gender-sensitive language and communication, encouraging leading sporting figures to correct sexist assumptions and denounce sexist hate speech, urging sports federations and associations to prepare codes of conduct to prevent sexism and sexist behaviour which should include disciplinary action, as well as urging sports organisations to promote gender equality and non-stereotypical portrayal of women and men, girls and boys.

<sup>31</sup> Katsarova, I. (2019) Gender Equality in Sport: Getting Closer Every Day, European Parliamentary Research Service. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)635560\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS_BRI(2019)635560_EN.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Council of Europe (2015) Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)2 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Gender Mainstreaming in Sport, Pub. L. No. CM/Rec(2015)2 (2015). Available at: <https://www.icsspe.org/system/files/Council%20of%20Europe%20-%20Recommendation%20Gender%20Mainstreaming%20CM%20Rec%20%282015%292.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Council of Europe (2019) Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 on Preventing and combating sexism. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism/168094d894>.

In March 2022, the European Commission published the document “*Towards More Gender Equality in Sport*”<sup>34</sup> with recommendations and action plan from the High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport. The report contains reflections, data, recommendations, and good practices for the advancement of gender equality in sport. It combines actions for promotion of gender equality and pushes towards the incorporation of a gender perspective in all EU policies and initiatives. It is important to note that in its aim and focus this document relies on the EU GAP III and it recognizes transversal themes such as: gender mainstreaming, intersectionality, gender budgeting/funding, policy monitoring, evaluation and research, education, communication, Coordinators for Gender Equality, and men as allies. It also emphasizes the six key thematic areas of engagement important for public authorities and sports federations which are:



The European Sports Charter<sup>35</sup> has outlined the need for and the relevance of gender equality in sport and serves as an important reference tool for developing national sports policies. The Charter puts special emphasis on the concept of “*sport for all*” and the need to enable participation in sport to deliver its benefits, such as health, inclusion, and education, to the whole population. The Charter further recognizes the role of public authorities in sport and emphasizes the crucial role of sports associations. Furthermore, it acknowledges the need for cooperation with other stakeholders, such as local authorities, the corporate sector, and professional organizations.

<sup>34</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022) *Towards More Gender Equality in Sport: Recommendations and Action Plan From the High Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport*, Brussels. Available at: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/684ab3af-9f57-11ec-83e1-01aa75ed71a1>.

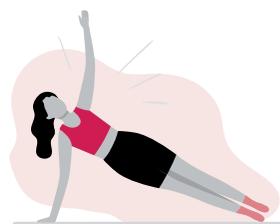
<sup>35</sup> European Commission (2021) Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)5 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Revised European Sports Charter, Brussels. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/recommendation-cm-rec-2021-5-on-the-revision-of-the-european-sport-cha/1680a43914>.

The Gender Mainstreaming Platform of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) addresses five main issues related to gender inequalities in the policy area of sport<sup>36</sup>:

-  women's participation in sports activities;
-  equal representation and gender sensitivity in decision-making;
-  gender equality in sports coaching;
-  gender-based violence in and through sport;
-  gender stereotypes in sport and the role of the media.

## The situation with gender equality in sport

Almost everywhere in the world, girls and women participate in fewer sports and engage in less physical activity than boys and men.<sup>37</sup> The comparable data across EU countries shows a constant total of men spending more hours engaged in sports and outdoor activities than women.<sup>38</sup> According to the Special Eurobarometer on Sport and physical activity,<sup>39</sup> although there are differences between Member States, women's participation in sport is always lower in percentage than men's participation. Women (36%) are less likely than men (44%) to regularly take part in sport, while 52% of women never exercise or play sport, compared to 40% of men.<sup>40</sup> Women's participation in sport also decreases with age, while the difference between men and women is largest in the 15-24 age group - 33% of women in the 15-24 age group never exercise or play sport, compared to 15% of men in



<sup>36</sup> EIGE (2017) Gender in Sport. Available at: <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-sport>

<sup>37</sup> UN Women (2021) Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Sports Organizations, Ankara: UN Women. Available at: [https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/7/UNWOMEN\\_Guidelines%20ENG-min.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/7/UNWOMEN_Guidelines%20ENG-min.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Eurostat: Time Spent, Participation Time and Participation Rate in the Main Activity by Sex and Age Group: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/TUS\\_ooAGE\\_custom\\_3180261/default/table?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/TUS_ooAGE_custom_3180261/default/table?lang=en).

<sup>39</sup> European Commission (2017) Special Eurobarometer 372: Sport and physical activity, Report. Available at: <https://www.europarc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Special-Eurobarometer-472-Sports-and-physical-activity.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

the same age group.<sup>41</sup> The percentage of women participating in the Summer Olympic Games in 2016 was 45%, 38.6% in the Paralympic Games, while in the Winter Olympic Games in 2018 there were 41% women, 23.6% in the Paralympic Games.<sup>42</sup>

In 2015, only 14% of all top decision-making positions in EU sports federations were occupied by women.<sup>43</sup> In the EU, only 17% of women (vs 83% of men) are members of highest decision making body of the national Olympic sport organisations.<sup>44</sup> The International Olympic Committee, as part of its Olympic Agenda 2020, committed to advance gender equality, reaching 47.7% of women in the 30 IOC Commissions, an increase from 45.4% in 2019, and 20% in 2013.<sup>45</sup>

**ONLY 14% OF ALL  
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At the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, the number of women coaches is significantly lower than men coaches:



Sports coaching, as a profession, is dominated by men globally. It is estimated that 20% to 30% of all sports coaches in Europe are women, mainly working in sports that have a high proportion of female participants (e.g., gymnastics, dance, figure skating, etc.), and they predominantly work with girls and women who compete at local and regional levels.<sup>46</sup> At the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, the number of women coaches is significantly lower than men coaches: 10% women coaches in 2010 (Vancouver), 11% in 2012 (London), 9% in 2014 (Sochi), 11% in 2016 (Rio).<sup>47</sup> At the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup, only 9 of the 24 nations had female coaches (37.5%).<sup>48</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> UN Women (2021) Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Sports Organizations, Ankara: UN Women, p. 18. Available at: [https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/7/UNWOMEN\\_Guidelines%20ENG-min.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/7/UNWOMEN_Guidelines%20ENG-min.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Katsarova, I. (2019) Gender equality in sport: Getting closer every day, European Parliamentary Research Service. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)635560\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS_BRI(2019)635560_EN.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> Gender Equality Index 2021, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/domain/power>

<sup>45</sup> <https://olympics.com/ioc/news/female-membership-of-ioc-commissions-reaches-an-all-time-high-of-47-7-per-cent-two-new-female-chairs>

<sup>46</sup> EIGE (2017) Gender in Sport, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-sport>

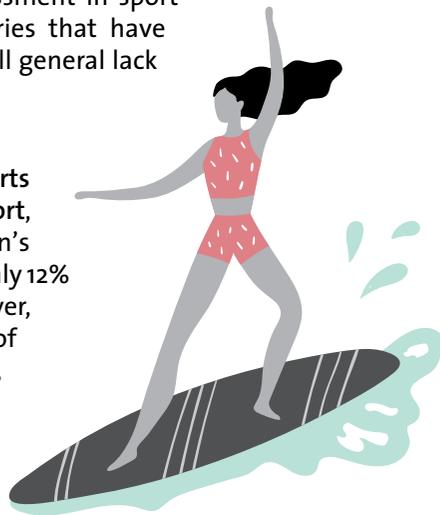
<sup>47</sup> UN Women (2021) Guidelines for Gender-Responsive Sports Organizations, Ankara: UN Women, p. 19. Available at: [https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/7/UNWOMEN\\_Guidelines%20ENG-min.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ECA/Attachments/Publications/2021/7/UNWOMEN_Guidelines%20ENG-min.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

The low representation of women both as participants in sports, as well as in decision-making structures, contributes to a very visible gender pay gap.<sup>49</sup> Even though the pay gap has been narrowing, with many sports reaching parity, there are still sports that pay men substantially more than women, most strikingly football and basketball.<sup>50</sup>

Gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual and gender harassment and abuse are widespread across sports, however they have remained mainly hidden. Recently, there have been several cases where abuse and harassment in various sports have been revealed, which has contributed to raising awareness on the issue.<sup>51</sup> In the EU, prevalence of gender and sexual harassment in sport varies between 14% and 73% (in nine EU countries that have undertaken empirical studies), however there is still general lack of reliable data.<sup>52</sup>

Sports media is male dominated across the world. In 2018, UNESCO indicated that only 4% of sports media content was dedicated to women's sport, a large part of that content referring to women's physical appearance, age, and personal life, while only 12% of sports news was presented by women.<sup>53</sup> However, polls have shown that the lower viewership of women's sports is not due to personal preference, but rather due to lack of TV coverage.<sup>54</sup>



<sup>49</sup> Global Sports Salaries Survey 2017, The Gender (In)Equality Issue, Sporting Intelligence. Available at: <http://globalsportssalaries.com/GSS5%202017.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> Katsarova, I. (2019) Gender equality in sport: Getting closer every day, European Parliamentary Research Service, p. 7. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)635560\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS_BRI(2019)635560_EN.pdf)

<sup>51</sup> Longman, J. (2021) "How much is a little girl worth?", The New York Times, 16.06.2021. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/16/sports/olympics/how-much-is-a-little-girl-worth.html>

<sup>52</sup> EIGE (2017) Gender in Sport, <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-sport>

<sup>53</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-calls-fairer-media-coverage-sportswomen>

<sup>54</sup> Katsarova, I. (2019) Gender equality in sport: Getting closer every day, European Parliamentary Research Service, p. 7. Available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)635560\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS_BRI(2019)635560_EN.pdf)



# The Context in North Macedonia

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## Legislation

Gender equality in sport has not been addressed in any law, strategy, or other official document related to the regulation of sport and sport activities in the country.

The Law on Sport<sup>55</sup> was first adopted in 1996 and since then it has undergone a series of amendments. The amendments in 2002 created conditions for sports associations to have the opportunity to be transformed into a trading company. With the amendments in 2004, decentralization of sport was made possible by transferring the funding responsibilities to the local self-governments. However, the possibilities provided with the decentralization have been and are dependent on the financial power and potential of the local self-governments. Sport associations and sport clubs in the country remain highly dependent on the budgetary support of the state.

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The Law on Sport is completely gender blind, not recognising the different needs, priorities, roles, responsibilities, and capabilities of women and men and not promoting equal opportunities in sport for women and men.

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<sup>55</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 29/02, 66/04, 81/08, 18/11, 51/11, 64/12, 148/13, 187/13, 42/14, 138/14, 177/14, 72/15, 153/15, 6/16, 55/16, 61/16, 106/16, 190/16, 98/19.

Drafting of a new Law on Sport and a new Strategy for Development of Sport has been announced and planned by the Government of North Macedonia,<sup>56</sup> however, at the time of the preparation of this analysis, there has been no new legislation or policy. The lack of strategy for sport extends the need for defining sport as an activity of special social interest connected to the needs of the citizens, especially the young population. Definition of sport in the educational system, in secondary and higher education, in the healthcare system, is also lacking, as well as the development of scientific and professional sports institutions according to international standards and requirements.<sup>57</sup>



The Law on Prevention of Violence and Indecent Behaviour at Sports Competitions<sup>58</sup> regulates the issues related to violence and inappropriate behaviour at sports competitions and establishes measures to prevent them, ensuring the safety of the spectators, competitors, and other participants in sports competitions. Among the acts of violence and indecent behaviours, the Law enumerates *“entering and displaying banners, flags and other objects with text, image, sign or other marks, as well as singing songs or sending messages that cause and incite hatred or violence on the basis of racial, national and religious affiliation or on the basis of other traits”* (Art. 3). The Law does not mention gender, nor does it elaborate on gender-based violence and gendered hate speech at sports events. In order to guarantee the safety of all spectators, including women, it is of particular importance that gender is explicitly mentioned. Hate speech based on gender is one of the most common forms of hate speech at sports events. This kind of gender-based hate speech can incite real violence against women participants in sports events, women employed in the sports events, media crew, as well as policewomen.

The Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2027 recognizes the importance of gender equality in sport.<sup>59</sup> It provides clear aims for the improvement of the situation and indicators for monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the fulfilment of the goals. The Strategy establishes a comprehensive framework for further activities in the direction of promoting gender equality in sport and empowering women.

<sup>56</sup> Programme for work of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia 2022-2024. Available at: [https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programme\\_of\\_the\\_government\\_2022-2024.pdf](https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programme_of_the_government_2022-2024.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Macedonian Olympic Committee, Strategy for the development of sport. Available at: [http://mok.org.mk/Upload/Content/Documents/STRATEGIJA\\_ZA\\_RAZVOJ\\_SPORT\\_RM.pdf](http://mok.org.mk/Upload/Content/Documents/STRATEGIJA_ZA_RAZVOJ_SPORT_RM.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 89/2004, 142/2008, 135/2011, 27/2014, 154/2015.

<sup>59</sup> National Strategy for Gender Equality 2022-2027. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3AUNHhg>.

Specific goal 2.10 of the Strategy (*Advancing gender equality in sport*) sets the expected results:

-  increased participation of women and girls in recreational and professional sport activities through appropriate programs and stimulation measures;
-  established measures for support of women to remain in sport professionally;
-  increased financial support at central and local level for women's sport clubs and sportswomen; and
-  gender sensitive trained professionals in sports structures.

It further focuses on breaking the stereotypes around sport as a “male” domain, increasing the number of women coaches, as well as establishing measures to combat violence and sexism in sport. Finally, an important aspect of gender equality in sport that the Strategy takes into consideration, is the accessibility and safety of sports facilities, adjusted to the needs of girls and women.

The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men<sup>60</sup> clearly addresses the topic of sport in Article 3 as one of the important areas for the protection of equal opportunities for women and men:

*“Discrimination based on gender is prohibited in the public and private sectors in the areas of employment and labour, education, social security, culture and sports, in accordance with this or any other law.”*

A new Law on Gender Equality is currently being drafted, where “*sport and recreation*” is distinguished as one of the areas of application of the Law.<sup>61</sup>

The Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination<sup>62</sup> further regulates the forms and types of discrimination, as well as the procedures for protection against discrimination. The purpose of the Law is to “*ensure the principle of equality and prevent and protect against discrimination in the exercise of human rights and freedoms*” (Art. 2).

<sup>60</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 6/2012, 166/2014.

<sup>61</sup> At the time of preparation of the analysis, the Draft Law on Gender Equality was published for commenting.

<sup>62</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 258/2020.

The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention),<sup>63</sup> the most comprehensive document on GBV and DV, ratified in 2017, addresses sport in the field of Education (Art. 14) stating that “[p]arties shall take [...] the necessary steps to include teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotypical gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity [...] in formal curricula and at all levels of education” and “in informal educational facilities, as well as in sports, cultural and leisure facilities and the media.”

There is an urgent need to provide mechanisms to promote and encourage gender sensitive tools and approaches within the sports federations and sports clubs. Moreover, there is a need for gender-sensitive regulations and policies in the sports sector, promoting gender-responsive budgeting and financial support to women and girls in sport, providing and supporting equal access and participation of women in all sports, increasing the number of female coaches, as well as providing support and protection against gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination. Finally, there is an urgent need for the establishment of mechanisms to collect, use, and disseminate relevant up-to-date gender-segregated data in all relevant structures at national and local level.

## Sport Structures in North Macedonia

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia supports policies aimed at increasing the number of citizens of all ages, social groups, and backgrounds, who practice sport and sport-recreational activities on a daily basis. At national level, the Government is the authority regulating sport and sport activities by adopting and implementing laws, strategies, policies, and other relevant documents. At local level, local self-government units regulate sport and sport activities by focusing on schools, community sports, and grassroot initiatives.

The Program of the Government of North Macedonia 2022-2024,<sup>64</sup> among other issues, emphasizes several aims for the improvement of the situation with sports in the country, including drafting a new Law on Sport, in line with the European model of sports; new Strategy for the Development of Sport; equal and transparent support of sports and sportspeople; introducing a gender perspective in the creation and implementation of sports policies and budgets at local and central level; and educational activities for gender mainstreaming in policies and budgets of sports organizations.

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<sup>63</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

<sup>64</sup> Programme for work of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for the period 2022-2024. Available at: [https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programme\\_of\\_the\\_government\\_2022-2024.pdf](https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/programa/2022-2024/programme_of_the_government_2022-2024.pdf).

In terms of specific aims and objectives, the Government strives for “*introducing gender equality in sports – 30% women in management bodies (assembly, board, executive committee) starting from 2020, and 50% by 2024*”. Additionally, federations that receive financial resources from the state budget must ensure functioning of men’s and women’s sports, that is, men’s and women’s sport clubs and/or national teams.

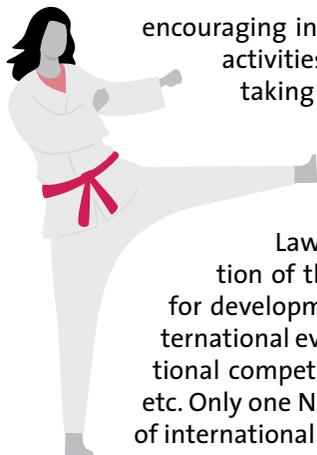
The Agency for Youth and Sport (AYS), as an independent body of the state administration, was founded in 2000, as the only government institution responsible for all aspects of the life of young people in the country, as well as all aspects of sports. According to the Law on the Organization and Work of State Administration Bodies,<sup>65</sup> the Agency is a legal entity for monitoring sports and sports-recreational activities, monitoring the development of sports, and performing other tasks established by law. Decisions for performing sports activities are issued by AYS and the AYS has the authority to “*cancel an issued decision for carrying out sports activity if it determines that the sports club, the National Sports Federation or the Macedonian Olympic Committee do not meet the conditions set by [the Law on Sport]*” (Law on Sport, Art. 12). Under the regulations and oversight of the AYS, there are more than 1,500 active sport clubs, united in 46 national sport unions, with a large coverage of young people and citizens in sports and sports-recreational activities. A branched and rational system of competitions is implemented in all national sports unions, with a large number of participants, coaches, judges, sport doctors, and sports workers.<sup>66</sup>

The activities of the Agency are mainly represented into 5 sectors: Sector for Youth, Sports Sector, Sector for Capital Investments, Sector for Human Resources and Professional Support of the Director, and Sector for Financial Issues. Within the Sports Sector of the AYS, there are four departments with different sub-competencies: Department for National Sports; Department for International Sports and International Cooperation; Department for Inspection Supervision in Sports; and Department for Registration of Entities that Perform Sports Activity. The Sports Sector’s scope of work<sup>67</sup> includes activities and obligations such as: monitoring and processing issues related to the system and organization of sports and international cooperation in the field of sports, monitoring the conditions in associations and other entities that perform sports activities, monitoring the network of sports associations and the system of competitions proposing measures for promotion, development and professional improvement, monitoring sports activities of students and citizens, preparing a Program for the development of sports, proposing, planning and

<sup>65</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia/North Macedonia no. 58/00, 44/02, 82/08, 167/10, 51/11, 96/19, 110/19.

<sup>66</sup> Agency for Youth and Sport, <https://ams.gov.mk/en/pages/sport>

<sup>67</sup> Agency for Youth and Sport: <https://ams.gov.mk/en/pages/sport>



encouraging international cooperation in the field of sports, monitoring the activities of Council of Europe in the field of sports development and taking measures to implement conventions and other international documents in the field of sports, etc.

Sport clubs gather together and are members of a corresponding National Sports Federation (NSF). According to the Law on Sport, the competences of the NSF are: support and promotion of the respective sport; realization of the established programme for development of sport; organising national competitions and major international events; providing financing; selecting national teams for international competitions; nominating sportspersons for various sport categories, etc. Only one NSF can be established per sport and only NSFs can be members of international sport associations.

The Macedonian Olympic Committee (MOC) is the biggest sports non-governmental association in which national sports federations from Olympic sports are constitutive members (Law on Sport, Art. 17). Its function is to represent national sports federations in the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The main activities of MOC include: participating, encouraging, helping and creating conditions for the development of sports in the country; participating in the preparation of the Program for the Development of Sports; coordinating the activities of the national sports federations in the realization of the Olympic programs; determining the composition of the Macedonian Olympic representation in accordance with the criteria and rules established by the International Olympic Committee, etc. Within MOC, Commission for Gender Equality has been established, with the aim to contribute to the creation of gender-equal policies and gender standardization in sports entities, increase the participation of women in all aspects of sport, as well as to establish strategic mechanisms in order to strengthen gender equality in the Olympic Movement. Additionally, it aims to promote Olympic values targeting young girls in sport, to improve the acknowledgment of the achieved results, and to increase the number of female athletes participating in the Olympic Games.

The Paralympic Committee of North Macedonia is a sport and social-humanitarian organization established in 1965. Its main goal is to develop, create, unify, and represent the sports-recreational activities of all people with disabilities in North Macedonia, regardless of the type, degree, and character of the disability. The Paralympic Committee works in accordance with the Law on Sport, its own norms, regulations, and criteria, as well as the norms and the criteria of the International Paralympic Committee. Within the Committee, there are 20 municipal sport and recreation unions for people with disabilities. According to their geographical location, they are regionalized in three regions with regional headquarters in Skopje, Bitola, and Kumanovo. The Committee is generally facing financial difficulties and lack of professional staff and sports facilities to implement its activities.

The **Sports Academy** is a public secondary school aimed at providing high-school education for certain categories of students who have been identified as talented athletes. The activity carried out in the sports academy is of public interest and is performed as a public service. The Sports Academy has formed sports classes in four sports – basketball, tennis, football, and handball. Each of the classes is led by a sports mentor, while professional trainers, selected by the national sports federations, take care of the realization of the training process.

The **Faculty of Physical Education, Sports and Health** is a higher education institution within the University “St. Cyril and Methodius” in Skopje, responsible for the education of professional staff with the highest professional training in four main study programs covering the main areas: physical and health education, sports, sports recreation, and kinesiotherapy. The Faculty also offers master’s studies in kinesiology and sports management, as well as PhD studies in kinesiology. Within the Faculty, in 2013, the **Institute for Scientific Research Work in Sports** was established, with the aim to organize and carry out scientific research and publishing activities, participate in the development of the programs for scientific and research work of the Faculty, perform expert, advisory and other services according to the needs of sports clubs, national sports federations, educational institutions and institutions of central and local government, support the involvement of students in scientific research work, study the possibilities and forms of transfer of scientific research results in practice, and other activities.

The **local self-governments** support and enable sports activities and programs within their possibilities. The responsibilities of the local self-governments in supporting sport<sup>68</sup> are:

-  development of mass sports and recreational activities for citizens, development of school sports system;
-  organization of sports events, organization of competition on local level for certain sports, support on traditional sport events, tournaments, etc.;
-  building and maintenance of sports facilities and recreational zones;
-  management of the sports facilities in the ownership of the municipalities;
-  supporting local sports clubs and local sports associations;
-  adoption of Programmes for development, financing, and organization of sport on local level.

<sup>68</sup> See: <https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Macedonia-Youth-and-sports.aspx>

## Funding in sports

The allocation of funds for the Agency for Youth and Sport is carried out by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, with a decision based on a Program submitted by the Agency. The Program is drawn up by the Agency on the basis of projects submitted by national sports federations, but also on the basis of its own projects for the promotion of sports, with clear indications of the amount of funds and the activities for which the funds are needed.

Another manner of distribution of funds is through the Program for Distribution of Funds from Games of Chance and Entertainment for financing of National Sport Federations and Projects of the AYS for the promotion of sports in the Republic of North Macedonia. Under this Program, there is a specific stream of funding aimed at advancing gender equality within sport federations, which was added in 2020. In 2022, of the total budget of 50,000,000.00 Denars, 4,500,000.00 Denars were allocated to financial support of projects of National Sport Federations for “*support of women in sport, gender equality in all spheres of functioning of sport*”.<sup>69</sup> The amount allocated within this line of funding in 2021 was 3,500,000.00 Denars, while in 2020 it was 2,500,000.00 Denars.

The sport programs that are under the authority of the local self-government are dependent on the financial capacities of the municipalities and rarely provide support for women’s sports clubs or women’s sports competitions.

The amendment of the Law on Sport in 2019 established tax incentives for sports entities by introducing a voucher system, with the aim to support athletes and sports federations for increased sustainability and a more dynamic development of national sports. The voucher system aims to stimulate and provide financial support to sports clubs, sports federations and individual athletes. This measure is implemented through the Public Revenue Office (PRO). A company that donates in sports has its calculated profit tax reduced for the amount of the donated funds, but at most up to 50% of the calculated tax based on a voucher issued by the AYS. Through this measure, a company can donate to one sports entity from each type of sport, and as an exception, it can also donate to two sports entities from the same type of sport, only if one entity is a national sports federation, and the other sports entity is a sports club or an active athlete who competes in an individual sport. The amount of the vouchers is different depending on the sport, the results achieved, the organization of the club, the rank of the competition, media presence, etc. Through this system, the taxpayer who donated money to sports entities, has the calculated profit tax reduced for the amount of the given donation.<sup>70</sup> Overall, in 2021, through the voucher system, 174 athletes, 46 federations and 664 sport clubs received financial support.

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<sup>69</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 94/2022 from 15.04.2022.

<sup>70</sup> Agency for Youth and Sport, Rulebook on the form, content and method of issuing the voucher for the use of the funds from the tax exemption (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 120/2019)

There is no gender segregated data on the allocation of funds through the voucher system, due to the fact that the provisions of the Law on Sport do not require the observance of a percentage of the allocation of financial resources for women's and men's sport clubs, or for men and women athletes, and the AYS is not obliged to keep such records.

In 2021, the Anti-Corruption Commission of North Macedonia recommended a review of the system of financing in sports through vouchers.<sup>71</sup> The State Audit Office performed a financial audit of the Agency for Youth and Sport, an extended audit of the federations that received the largest amount of funds from the voucher system, as well as several other federations. Additionally, objections or reports from sports clubs regarding the spending of the funds, i.e., irregularities in the use of the vouchers were analysed. In the end, several issues regarding the voucher system were pointed out.<sup>72</sup> It was noted that there is no established method of selection of members of the Central Commission of AYS, responsible for the voucher system, which raises doubts that politicization is possible during decision-making. Regarding the members of the Commission, there is a very visible gender inequality, i.e., of the 9 members appointed with a Decision by the Government, in 2019, there were 2 women, in 2020, there were no women, and in 2021 and 2022, there was only one woman. The State Audit Office also noted that there is lack of reports on National Sports Federations and legal entities as beneficiaries of tax relief funds, and that there are no other civil servants among the employees of AYS to carry out inspections of National Sports Federations regarding the procedures of awarding and spending financial resources from vouchers, as foreseen with the Law. Therefore, the financing of sports entities through the voucher system, and in a situation where there is no formally prepared unified form, has resulted in a practice of non-transparency and lack of accountability.

The Agency for Youth and Sport has established several programs stimulating young men and women to engage in sports activities, such as “*Sports Hope*”, a scholarship program aimed at young athletes up to the age of 20.<sup>73</sup> According to the Audit Report on the “Effectiveness of the measures of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for gender equality and appropriate gender budgeting initiatives”,<sup>74</sup> scholarships awarded to male athletes were almost double than those awarded to female - of 6791 scholarships awarded in the period 2008-2021, 4405 scholarships were awarded to male athletes and only 2386 to female. Although the number of girls involved in this program increases, this number is still not significant since certain sports are still considered by

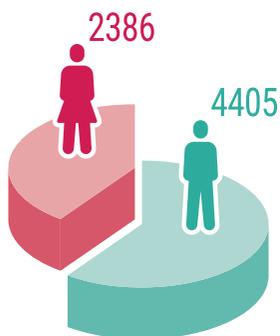
<sup>71</sup> State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, Decision no. 12-1626/161 from 10.12.2021. Available at: <https://dksk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2021-1626-161-odluka.pdf>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Decree on the conditions, method and criteria for awarding the category athlete - Sports Hope (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 127/2008 and 107/2012)

<sup>74</sup> State Audit Office (2022) Final Report on conducted performance audit on “Effectiveness of the measures of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for gender equality and appropriate gender budget initiatives” Available at: [https://dzt.mk/sites/default/files/2022-07/RU\\_Efektivnost\\_merki\\_Vlada\\_rodova\\_ednakvost\\_o.pdf](https://dzt.mk/sites/default/files/2022-07/RU_Efektivnost_merki_Vlada_rodova_ednakvost_o.pdf).

Scholarships awarded  
in the period 2008-2021



the popular culture as “male” sports, such as boxing, wrestling, kendo, aikido, as sports in which *“there is currently no interest on the part of girls”*.<sup>75</sup> There might be several possible explanations for the low participation of girls in those sports, such as lack of support in terms of mentorship, lack of women coaches in the particular sport, lack of financial support for women, systematic lack of support within the federations, stigmatization, etc. The procedure for the selection of scholarship recipients is carried out on the basis of a submitted ranking list for the most successful young athletes which are presented by the National Sports Federations. In this regard, the report states that *“[f]rom the inspection of the ranking lists submitted by the federations, we determined that gender-separated lists are submitted only by the handball*

*federation, while other federations submit aggregate lists depending on the achieved results regardless of gender.”*<sup>76</sup> Although sports federations are encouraged to include women in their lists, this method of selection shows a lack in understanding of necessary measures when it comes to creating opportunities for women and girls.

An important recognition in the field of sport on national level is the State Award “8<sup>th</sup> of September”, awarded to athletes, coaches, and sports workers for achievements in this field. A maximum of five awards can be awarded in one year, one of which will be for lifetime achievement for exceptional contribution to the development of sports, affirmation and promotion of the Republic of North Macedonia internationally.

Both in the Lifetime Achievement category, and in the other categories of the State Award “8<sup>th</sup> of September”, in 2019, 2020 and 2022<sup>77</sup> (the prize was not awarded in 2021 due to the pandemic), state awards were given only to men, because no woman was nominated for the award.

According to the information acquired from the AYS, since the establishment of this type of award in the period 2012 and 2014, only 2 women have received it. Such low number of women recipients is due to the fact that none of the representatives who are tasked with making a proposal, proposed women athletes for this award.

The Macedonian Olympic Committee awards Olympic scholarships to athletes who could potentially compete in the Olympic Games. In 2016, for the Summer Olympic Games in Rio, five out of a total of 11 scholarships were awarded to female athletes; in 2018, there were a total of three scholarship recipients, of which one was female; while in 2020, for the Olympic Games in Tokyo, five out of a total of 12 scholarship recipients were female.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>77</sup> <https://api.ams.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/zivotno-delo.pdf>

# Sport and Gender Equality in North Macedonia

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This analysis on gender equality and sport in North Macedonia is a contribution to the important steps towards positive changes for women's sport in the country which have been made alongside wider national and international debates around gender equality in sport. As mentioned above, it is important to emphasize that there is still a significant lack of research and data regarding gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men in sport in the country. Although no significant changes on policy regarding gender equality and sport have been achieved so far, the voices and experiences of sportswomen have started an important debate and are paving the way to influence social change.

In the following parts, the situation with gender equality in sport is analysed through the main areas, as identified by EIGE.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the analysis of the separate areas is supplemented by the findings from the interviews conducted with 10 representatives from sports institutions, sports organizations, sportswomen and women sport-managers. Since the legal and policy framework almost entirely ignores the issue of gender in sport, the findings from the conducted interviews serve as valuable evidence of the gaps and needs for the improvement of the situation and addressing the important question of gender equality in sport.

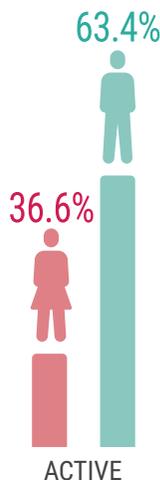


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<sup>78</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/sport>

## Participation in sports activities

Traditionally, sport in North Macedonia is predominantly considered as an activity for boys and men. According to one study conducted in 2014,<sup>79</sup> the participation of girls in sports activities is significantly lower than that of boys in the age range 15-29 - 36.6% of girls active versus 63.4% of boys. Young men more often than young women spend their free time on sport and sports activities, along with going out with friends, playing video games, spending time in bars and clubs, volunteering, and spending time at youth centres, while young women listen to music, read books, spend time with the family, pray, and go shopping more often than their male counterparts.<sup>80</sup> Similar findings are available in the Time-Use Survey (TUS) conducted by the State Statistical Office in 2014/2015,<sup>81</sup> which shows that women and girls spend more time in domestic activities while boys and men in leisure activities, among which sport.



“There are significant challenges we face on a daily basis, starting with training conditions (women’s locker rooms are missing or are not used enough), as well as with accessibility for women in sports facilities (usually the better/more popular training slots in gyms are reserved for men), leading to unequal recognition and promotion of women’s results by the institutions in the country responsible for sports. This contributes towards creating reluctance in girls to join sport clubs and/or start practicing different sports.”

Interview participant

The Agency for Youth and Sport has been registering new women’s sports clubs, thus increasing the participation of girls in sports such as football, for example. According to the Register of Sports Clubs within the AYS, in 2021 and 2022, Decision to perform sports activities was issued to five registered women’s clubs: women’s chess club “Prilep”, women’s bowling club “Pelister-T&S Holding”, women’s volleyball club “Rinia” from Negotino-Poloshko, Vrapchishte, women’s volleyball club “Rinia Volley” from Skopje, women’s volleyball club “Flamingo Volley” from Skopje. AYS could not

<sup>79</sup> Topuzovska, L.M. et al. (2014) Youth Trends in the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje: Institute for Sociological and Political-Legal Research, p. 35. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277138661>.

<sup>80</sup> Topuzovska, L.M. et al. (2019) Youth Study North Macedonia 2018/2019, FES, p. 15. Available at: <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15266.pdf>

<sup>81</sup> State Statistical Office (2016) Time-Use Survey 2014/2015. Available at: <https://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.15.20.pdf>.

provide the exact number of women's sports clubs registered in 2019 and 2020 because, as explained, there is lack of data within the Agency itself on the type of registration of the clubs, within the Register, which does not distinguish between male and female sports clubs. In football, there are four registered women's clubs in 2020, but they do not compete in the national league due to a lack of financial means to participate in the competition system. A total of 1,505 girls who practice football are registered in the Football Federation of Macedonia. Also, after a long absence of a national women's volleyball team, the Volleyball Federation of Macedonia, through several volleyball schools and a professional team of male and female coaches, is forming a national team in youth competition up to 19 years of age.

All interview participants agree that the desire to practice sport in a professional manner is challenging for women and girls in North Macedonia. A significant challenge for women in sports is the lack of measures and support taking into consideration women's biological differences and the different needs of women and girls. In terms of providing opportunities for a balanced career in sport, one participant stated that the *"challenge of whether and when to realize yourself as a mother is especially present for girls in team sports, because the club will immediately find a replacement for you."* There are no policies or regulations which protect women athletes who decide to have families and still lead an active professional life. In most cases, women who decide to become mothers fail to make their return to professional sport or return to work in the sports institution or federation they had spent their time and efforts building their sport career.

*"In order to have continuity, the choice of each female athlete is to remain in the sport club where she was previously a member, to be included and engaged in it, in order to be further nominated and appointed in the organs and bodies of the sport club, in terms of taking on certain functions of decision-making positions in the national sports federation."*

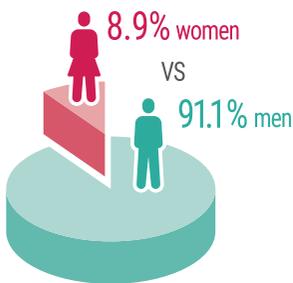
Interview participant

Another significant challenge contributing to the lower participation of women in sport in North Macedonia are the finances, i.e., the drastically lower incomes that women in sport have. This is especially significant for women athletes who do not earn enough from professional sports, so they have to work in other jobs, which reduces the time for training and perfecting the skills and techniques in their sports discipline, which is key for quality and successful sports career.

Although there is lack of more recent evidence-based data on girls' and women's participation in sport in the country, and even though there has been some progress in awareness raising and support of gender equality in sport, there is still need of enhanced programs that will change the patriarchal perception of sport as an activity for boys and men.

The first national conference “*Women in Sport*”<sup>82</sup> was organized in 2017, with the support of UN Women. The main topics presented at the conference were the challenges and gender stereotypes faced by Macedonian female athletes, as well as gender inequalities in all areas of sport in the country. This was one of the first times when prominent women athletes in the country were given the opportunity to voice their concerns and share the challenges they are facing practicing sport in the country. The purpose of the conference was to raise awareness on gender equality in sport, the importance of women's participation in sport, as well as on the importance of women as ambassadors in professional sports.

## Representation and gender sensitivity in decision-making



Members of governing bodies in sport in North Macedonia

Regarding leadership positions in sports organizations and sports institutions in the country, we rely on the information provided in the Gender Equality Index<sup>83</sup> for 2015, where it is stated that the number of women in management positions in National Sports Federations is the lowest of all other social spheres. The largest gender gap is in the indicator that measures the participation of women and men in governing bodies and bodies of NSFs, presented in the subdomain “Social power” - only 8.9% of women against 91.1% of men are members of governing bodies in sport in North Macedonia.

As emphasized by one interview participant, in the preparation of numerous documents, such as analysis of the situation, planning of expected results, preparation of action plans, and through the institutional participation in the preparation of the National Strategy for Gender Equality under the competence of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, “*the main priority in the field of sports is to increase the number of women in management positions in all sports structures*”.

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.takt.org.mk/women-in-sport/>.

<sup>83</sup> Bashevska, M. (2019) Gender Equality Index in North Macedonia 2019, UN Women, Skopje. Available at: [https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/dokumenti/2019/Gender%20Index\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/dokumenti/2019/Gender%20Index_ENG.pdf).

Since the establishment of the Agency for Youth and Sport, the director appointed by the Government has always been a man. Moreover, the heads of departments in the AYS, especially in the domain of sport have predominantly been men. At the moment, there are only two women that are heads of departments in the AYS, in the Youth Sector. Regarding the Council for Sport, the expert-advisory body of the state administration overseeing the work of the AYS and providing opinions and recommendations on specific issues (Law on Sport, Art. 25), its current members selected in 2019 are four men and two women.

Another important decision-making body in the field of sport is the Commission for awarding state awards. The Commission for the State Award “8<sup>th</sup> of September” consist of 12 members, appointed by the Parliament, with a mandate of 2 years. The composition of the newly elected Commission for the period 2022-2024 is eight men and four women.

The National Commission for Anti-Doping in Sport, according to the Law on Sport, is established within the framework of the Agency for Youth and Sport. This Commission has four members. Since 2019, it counts two men and two women.

There have been few efforts to address gender discrimination experienced by women, including underrepresentation in leadership positions, however it has all come down to raising awareness on the matter, but never policy solutions. In 2019, the Platform for Gender Equality, comprised of various non-governmental organizations working on gender equality issues, sent an open letter<sup>84</sup> as a reaction to a conference on the topic “*Sport for the State, the State in Sport*”, organized by the Agency for Youth and Sport, the Association of Sports Journalists, and the Macedonian Olympic Committee. The conference organizers missed the opportunity to invite women sports representatives, so this high-level conference was held only with the participation of men, leaving women’s voices in sport unheard. In relation to this event, the Platform noted that gender discrimination in the sports sector is widespread:

*“... the trend of non-inclusion of women in decision-making processes and/or non-involvement in discussions and debates where priority issues are debated is particularly visible... sport policies must not be carried out in the absence of sportswomen, women sports journalists and women sports veterans, as well as every woman who works in the sports sector.”<sup>85</sup>*

<sup>84</sup> Platform for Gender Equality (2019) Open letter to Agency for Youth and Sport, Association of Sport Journalists and Macedonian Olympic Committee. Available at: <https://rodovaplatforma.mk/blog/2019/12/03/отворено-писмо-на-платформа-за-родова/>

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

## Gender equality in sports coaching

Although there is a lack of data regarding accredited coaches in the country, it is generally acknowledged that sports coaching as a profession is dominated by men. Women coaches are almost never seen in sports which are traditionally perceived as “male sports”, while women sports teams in the country are predominantly led by male coaches. There is a significant underrepresentation of female coaches across all sports in the country. Women represent only a small minority of the coaches employed in professional sports. This lack of balance is due to several factors: stereotypical perceptions about coaching as a male occupation; lack of institutional support for women who want to pursue a coaching career; systemic barriers present in most of the sports organizations; and lack of female role models.

As for increasing the number of women coaches in the country one interview participant points out the need to “*demolish certain stereotypes in order to achieve an incentive measure for establishing and maintaining the level of female coaches in sports clubs and national teams.*” In terms of the role of the sports federations, another interview participant notes:

“National sports federations that are autonomous in their work, through their work programs, encourage gender equality both in sports administration and in the bodies and governing bodies, including in the positions of engagement of female coaches, physiotherapists and doctors who take care of the health of athletes. I think that professional staff exists, but they are not engaged enough.”

The opportunities for women to become more involved in the coaching profession in the country may be improved if there is a systematic support for increasing their skills and knowledge to become coaches. This in the long run will benefit the sports sector in the country because it will produce more women coaches which can contribute to more women and girls being physically active.<sup>86</sup> A more inclusive coaching workforce may also start to attract women from underrepresented backgrounds to participate in sport or be involved in a coaching role, but also in executive roles.<sup>87</sup> Finally, the development of different and new coaching styles and practices may attract not only more girls and women into sport, but also more boys and men.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>86</sup> European Commission (2014) Gender Equality in Sport. Proposal for Strategic Actions 2014–2020, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/events/2013/documents/20131203-gender/final-proposal-1802\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/sport/events/2013/documents/20131203-gender/final-proposal-1802_en.pdf)

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

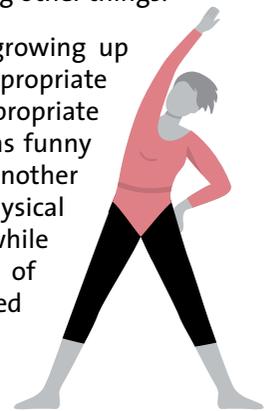
<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

## Gender-based violence in and through sport

Gender-based violence (GBV) represents a serious challenge to women's rights in North Macedonia. The new Law on Prevention and Protection against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence<sup>89</sup> is aligned with the requirements of the Istanbul Convention, ratified in 2017. Although the Law does not mention sport or sport institutions as relevant stakeholders for the protection from GBV, it clearly states that the purpose of the Law is *“prevention and protection from gender-based violence and domestic violence, effective protection of victims from any form of gender-based violence against women, as well as victims of domestic violence, with respect for the basic human freedoms and rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia and the international agreements ratified in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia. The purpose of the Law is based on the principle of equality and elimination of stereotypes about gender roles”* (Art. 2).

Gender-based violence and harassment is a fairly regular occurrence in sport which has not been recognized and properly addressed. However, there have been some efforts to raise awareness on the issue, mainly led by non-governmental organizations. The first conference on *“Gender-Based Violence in Sport”*<sup>90</sup> was organized in 2017, where the participants pointed out to the presence of violence, harassment, and discrimination in sport in the country, and emphasized the need to deal with this problem and raise awareness for timely recognition and prevention. The main conclusions were that education of young people is needed in order to recognize GBV, abuse and harassment; mechanisms need to be established that will be specifically intended to help and support women and girls in sports who have been subjected to violence and/or harassment; mechanisms need to be established for reporting cases of violence, harassment and abuse, among other things.

One of the interview participants recounted that while growing up and practicing sport, she didn't even recognize the inappropriate advancements by the boys in her club and later, the inappropriate remarks by her coach which at that point were discarded as funny and considered a normal and not unusual occurrence. Another interview participant remembered a situation with her physical education teacher who *“liked to touch the girls behind”* while performing certain exercises. She pointed out that many of the girls in her class avoided physical education or invented different explanations in order not to participate.



<sup>89</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 24/2021.

<sup>90</sup> <http://www.takt.org.mk/gender-based-violence/>

These serious situations are an indicator that policies for protection from and prevention of gender-based violence in sport are urgent. The lack of such policies puts young girls and women in danger of being harassed and abused, missing out on the opportunities for personal development that sport offers. Programs for protection from GBV in sport targeting young girls and women must be incorporated in sports institutions and sports organizations. Raising awareness on recognition and reporting of such incidents must become a common practice in sports clubs and federations, as well as in schools. Women and girls need to have an independent and safe contact point to whom they can reach out if they become victims of GBV, harassment or abuse. Moreover, the country needs to register cases of GBV in sport in order to recognize the causes and identify tactics to prevent its occurrence. Finally, there is an urgent need for a more serious approach to research and data collection for evidence-based policy making in the field of GBV, harassment and abuse in sport.

## Gender stereotypes in sport and the role of the media

Sports coverage in media is extremely powerful in shaping gender stereotypes and norms, as well as challenging them and promoting equal representation of women and men. It encompasses several aspects, such as portrayal of women in sports media, number of women broadcasters and sports journalists, and coverage of women's competitions and practice.<sup>91</sup> Despite the tremendous advancement and growth of women's sports, female athletes are still considered inferior, objectified and mainly invisible, compared to male athletes and men's sports.<sup>92</sup> Female athletes are often portrayed in a stereotypical, sexualised and sexist way, frequently referring to their physical appearance and femininity rather than their athletic ability.<sup>93</sup> Even when discussing the performance of female athletes, the primary comparison is to another male athlete.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, sport journalism is still male-dominated specialty all over the world.

Following the global trends, the media outlets in North Macedonia mainly promote sports traditionally practiced by men. Reporting on sports news mainly focuses on the performance of men in sports, whereas women in sports and their achievements come second, after those of men. The percentage of media coverage of male sports events and competitions is 80% vs. 20% for female sports events and competitions.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> <https://en.unesco.org/themes/gender-equality-sports-media>

<sup>92</sup> Trolan, E.J. (2013) The impact of the media on gender inequality within sport, *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 91, 2015-227.

<sup>93</sup> Council of Europe (2016) Gender equality in sport and the role of the media, factsheet. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/bis-factsheet-gender-equality-sport-media-en/1680714b8f>

<sup>94</sup> Shifflett, B. et al. (2016) Gender Bias in Sports-Media Analytics, *Journal of Sports Media*, 11:2, 111-128.

<sup>95</sup> Rajchevska, A. (2021) They are on the field, but not on TV, it is rarely reported on women in sports, *MIA*, 8.03.2021. Available at: <https://mia.mk/gj-ima-na-teren-no-ne-i-na-tv-za-zhenite-vo-sportot-se-izvestuva-retko/>.

It is worrying that sports journalists justify such lower coverage of female sports with low viewer interest for women's sport, lower quality of women's competitions, and insufficient success, especially at international level, among other things.<sup>96</sup> Exonerating themselves from the biased reporting and presentation of sports, media workers state that quality and success dictate the representation of women in sport media and not gender, which is an indicator of insufficient gender sensitivity and awareness.

“Women in sports have to work three times more than their male counterparts to achieve any visible results, and the main struggle is in proving that women also understand sports and know how to be successful athletes, coaches, managers”.

Interview participant

The analysis “*Gender in the Media 2021*”<sup>97</sup>, published by the Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services, provides the most comprehensive overview of the situation with the presentation of women's and men's sports and women and men athletes on Macedonian television. On the national television channels (MRT 1 and MRT 2), coverage of male sports is significantly higher than female sports – around 80% of sports media space has been dedicated to men's sports, while more than 82% of verbal presentation was by men, which points to the fact that the national television service is biased towards men and men's sports.<sup>98</sup>



Around **80%** of sports media space has been dedicated to men's sports

More than **82%** of verbal presentation was by men



“Women in sports in our country do not have enough recognition and coverage when it comes to awards, scholarships, sharing their successes on social media and their representation through journalists... Due to the fact that society considers sports to be more for boys, women's sports have very low attendance.”

Interview participant

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Micevski, I. (2021) *Gender in the Media: Gender issues and the way women and men are represented in the sports program of the national terrestrial televisions*, Agency for Audio and Audio-Visual Media Services. Available at: <https://avmu.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Родом-80-спортската-презента-.-pdf>

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

Over **96%** of sports experts on MRT 1 were men, while on the other two public channels **no women appeared as sports experts.**



There are very few women sports journalists presenting on the national TV – on MRT 1 around 81% of sports journalists were men, on MRT 2 that percentage was around 88%, while on MRT 3 there were no women.<sup>99</sup> There is absolute domination of men appearing on the national TV as sports experts – over 96% of sports experts on MRT 1 were men, while on the other two public channels no women appeared as sports experts.<sup>100</sup> The findings were similar for the private TV stations in the country.

## The challenges women in sport face in North Macedonia

According to the interview participants, the challenges are systemic (institutional) and cultural. In terms of structural challenges, one participant stated that these challenges have their roots in the “*poor structure of women’s sports in the country first, and then from the traditional views of the citizens in the country.*” The main problem is indicated in the institutional framework and the instruments, or the lack of instruments, for tackling the challenges related to gender inequalities, and for the promotion of gender equality.

Furthermore, the sense that there is the cultural issue of a traditionalist view of women in the Macedonian society is common. The participants view this as an additional problem from which many obstacles for women in sports in the country arise.

“The main problem is the culture in which male hegemony dominates and limits the opportunities for women athletes for career development, so that there is no equal recognition and promotion of women’s results by the institutions in the country responsible for sports, in the media and in the broadcast media.”

Interview participant

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

Due to the traditional views of sport in the country, men have largely monopolized power in national and international positions and are overrepresented. The same tendencies can be found in terms of coaching positions, referees, and administrative positions, which are traditionally considered as male jobs.

One interview participant stated that aside from the cultural issues (“*patriarchal society*”), a big problem is the “*big ego among people who are in key and decision-making positions in the institutions that are responsible and competent for sports in the country.*” The traditional views go further to the conviction that women do not understand sports, that it is a “*male profession*”. This can be interpreted as lack of institutional checks and balances, as well as mechanisms for gender equality, since “*big ego*” or other personal traits become more emphasized within institutional frameworks where the mechanisms for professional excellence are lacking.

The interview participants mostly agree that women in sports in North Macedonia are facing a number of challenges that also represent obstacles to increasing the number of female athletes. To summarize, some of the challenges identified by the interview participants are:

-  Fewer opportunities for women in sport – large number of clubs and sports do not have a group for girls and women;
-  Social stigma when it comes to sports – there is a prevailing assumption in the society that sports are more for boys than for girls;
-  Lack of support/measures/policies that take into consideration the biological differences of women – women who become mothers and form a family often drop out of sport;
-  Lack of pathways for leadership positions and pathways for coaching for women;
-  Lack of positive examples towards which girls can aspire in sports – successful women athletes are not promoted sufficiently within national sports institutions, such as federations, as well as other high ranking and highly visible official positions which are mainly held by men;
-  Insufficient recognition of the success of female athletes within the wider society and by the relevant institutions - the awards for various sports competitions are disproportionately more generous towards men and boys;
-  Finances – there is still a significant gender pay gap in sports;

-  Unequal and stereotypical coverage of women's sports in the media – disproportionately more space dedicated to men's sports, while women in sport are often covered with sexist and stereotypical language;
-  Widespread gender-based discrimination and harassment with no appropriate system in place to address gender and sexual harassment and abuse and GBV - inappropriate behaviour by boys and men towards girls and women is normalized;
-  Insufficient or lacking implementation in practice of relevant documents and strategies and no mechanisms for monitoring;
-  Fewer employment opportunities in sports institutions and organizations for women;
-  Restricted access to sports facilities for girls and women, especially in terms of safe spaces, lighting, changing facilities, etc.

The roots of the problems with gender equality and women's representation in sports, apart from the widespread patriarchal and traditionalist views in the society, can be located in the sports clubs, federations, and the lack of policies that will support women in sport and provide opportunities for their better inclusion in the sports institutions in the country. One interview participant locates the problem in the institutional structure of the *“sports clubs and in the national sports federations, in the people who are in management positions in the sport, who should realize that the capacities of the clubs and federations should be strengthened for gender-sensitive policies and gender-responsive budget, equal access and the participation of women in all segments of sport, increasing the number of women coaches, finding new sources of sponsors to increase the financial support of women's sports clubs at the local level, raising awareness on gender-based violence against women in sports and cultivating a zero tolerance and sexism and sexist hate speech during sporting events.”*



## Conclusions and recommendations

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Sport is a topic that acquires increasingly more attention on a global level. Sport and sport activities are being recognized as beneficial to the health and wellbeing of the individuals, as well as to the society as a whole. Sport not only contributes to the overall health and wellbeing, it also helps creating social bonds between individuals and communities, builds character and helps in developing a healthy worldview. Moreover, sport contributes to building and maintaining peaceful and harmonious societies. Hence, equal access and equal opportunities for all in sport is highly beneficial for the society, for the businesses, and for the individuals.

The importance of sport for young people was stressed by several interview participants. One participant especially identified the need for sport programs for young people based on gender equality principles:

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“What I consider crucial is that we have to create habits among young people that anyone who wants to engage in sports, they can do it regardless of the sports discipline they choose. Programs for education through and with sport in the country are indeed lacking. Innovative programmes and approaches can improve girls’ participation in sports. There are sports such as ultimate frisbee, for example, which provide opportunities for both boys and girls to play together, levelling the field and making inclusion of girls in sport easier.”

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Although gender mainstreaming and gender equality in sport is starting to be part of some relevant documents, strategies, and laws, it still needs to be further addressed. More actions are needed and **more policies, laws, and strategies on sport must be revised and gender mainstreamed**. Each club should commit to having a certain percentage of women in its executive board or management team, to have a women's team, and generally to create opportunities where women can engage in a given sport. Moreover, interview participants stressed the importance of effective implementation of policies, acknowledging the fact that even when there are policies, laws, and regulations in place, their implementation is lacking. Therefore, the laws, strategies, policies, and regulations must be effectively implemented with appropriate measures and fines for non-compliance and mechanisms for their monitoring.

In addition to the need for implementation of strategies, laws, and other regulations for gender equality, there is also the need for **higher professional standards for the personnel in public institutions and sports federations**. Persons working in management positions responsible for the implementation of laws, strategies, and other regulations need to be gender-sensitive and have knowledge and awareness on gender equality, gender mainstreaming and various gender equality tools and measures.

Having evidence-based and widely available research on various aspects of sports is of utmost importance. In North Macedonia, the lack of data and the lack of important research on the topic of gender equality in sport makes evidence-based policy creation challenging. In this aspect, academic debate on the topic is limited, if not non-existent. Even though there is a widely accepted perception that personalized forms of exercise such as fitness, aerobics, running, and walking are becoming more popular among women, there is lack of data and research that would support this claim. The research and data that exist show lower participation of women and girls in physical activity than their male counterparts. There is no data to present the involvement of women from marginalized communities in sport, as there is little to no data about the possible causes for dropping out from sport and physical activities of teenage girls.

Another area of improvement is to have **more recognition of women's sports and women's successes in sports**. Several interview participants stated the need for promotion of successful female athletes who have achieved great sports results, athletes who have obtained a high degree of education, work in an environment where they are respected and, at the same time, continue to be engaged in sport professionally. The most important thing, one of the interview participants stated, is *"how we will present ourselves and promote ourselves in the media, including*

*sports events, and thereby help create a positive view about women athletes in the society and convey that to the younger generations. I am also constantly advocating for awarding the athletes according to specific criteria, appropriate methodology, and equal ranking of female and male athletes.”*

It is also desirable to have more scholarships for women in sports and financial assistance for sports clubs that want to start working with women’s teams. Most of the interview participants suggested that there should be equalization of the financial incomes of men and women in sports and especially provisions for maternity coverage. Regarding professional sport, there is also the need to “encourage professional athletes to obtain education and gain knowledge about coaching, referees, sports management and after the end of their sports career to be ready for new challenges, in decision-making positions, so that the number of women who will make decisions in sport in the country will increase.”

The interview participants stressed the importance of the media as an opinion-making tool within the society and the need for a wider media literacy and the improvement of journalistic standards, as well as the need for training and awareness-raising activities aimed at sports journalists. The need for the use of a more gender-sensitive language in media was emphasized:

“It is crucial to make a strategy and to cooperate with the media. They are the creators of public opinion. Journalists should be educated about correct and gender equal reporting in the media. A woman basketball player cannot be the sexiest and a man basketball player the most successful. Women’s national football team cannot be reported with derision because of the convincing defeat, and the men’s with “they fought like lions” despite the convincing defeat.”

Interview participant

Finally, the interview participants emphasized the need to develop measures for prevention and protection against gender-based discrimination, and gender and sexual harassment. Interview participants have shared both personal experiences as well as the experiences of other women and girls.

“...After completing my specialist studies in sports management, I approached one of our best men’s basketball clubs for a job. Despite the fact that I already had work experience in the field of sports management, the position and salary offered to me by the club was two-thirds lower than that offered to my male colleague who, first of all, did not have a university degree at all, nor did he have enough work experience as a sports manager, because he was a sports journalist by profession. Of course, I left the engagement to the colleague.”

Interview participant

Another interview participant mentioned a case of discriminatory actions with unequal treatment of female athletes in martial arts for which there was a Petition submitted by the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association to the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for unequal treatment and discrimination of the female athletes. The Petition was accepted, and the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination issued a general recommendation stating that the federation committed discrimination on the basis of sex and gender.



The EU Commission puts emphasis on the need for a **specific national strategy on gender-based violence in sport**.<sup>101</sup> To fight GBV and gendered harassment and abuse in sport, a holistic approach is needed including: assessment of the magnitude of the problem; prevention initiatives; comprehensive legal, policy and disciplinary provisions to prosecute and punish perpetrators and to protect athletes from GBV; provision of services for those subjected to acts of GBV; and multi-level, multi-disciplinary and multi-actor partnerships.

<sup>101</sup> European Commission, Directorate General for Education and Culture. and Yellow Window (2016) Study on Gender Based Violence in Sport: Final Report, Luxembourg: Publications Office. Available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/501661>.

## Specific recommendations

Based on the analysis of relevant documents and the data collected from the interviews, the next necessary steps for improving the situation with gender equality in sport in North Macedonia can be summed up in several important segments.

To **improve girls' and women's participation in sports activities**, the following is recommended:

-  Implement measures which will ensure balanced participation of women in all sports organizations in terms of membership, practice, competition, coaching, national and international representation, ensuring their regular monitoring and evaluation. Promote programs for better inclusion of marginalized women and girls in sport with focus on women and girls with disabilities.
-  Implement gender mainstreaming principle in all sports policies and programs, as a necessary measure to improve representation of women in sport in the country.
-  Create national strategy on increasing the participation of girls and young women in sports activities by following good practices from EU countries.
-  Improve access to sports facilities for women and girls, such as accessible entrances, reception areas, changing rooms adapted to the needs of girls and women, etc. Implement measures to improve access to sports facilities for women and girls with disabilities.
-  Increase the number of women trainers who provide additional support to women and girls in sport and recognize the challenges they might be facing.
-  Launch and promote awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of participating in and benefitting from sport and physical activities. Implement campaigns which will counter the negative traditional gender stereotypes in sport.
-  Improve participation of young girls in sport and physical activity on national and local level with programs designed for their better inclusion in sport and empowerment.
-  Provide incentives to sports organizations that have plans and actions in place to increase the membership of women within their clubs/ organizations.

-  Recognize sport for development of skills as an important aspect to empowering and improving participation in sport for young girls.
-  Implement gender responsive budgeting of women's clubs on national level, including improvements in awarding systems.
-  Distribute equal budget at local level to women's and men's sports clubs, and if possible, launch positive affirmative actions for sports clubs that aim to increase female participation.

**Equal representation and gender sensitivity in decision-making** is paramount if we want to improve gender equality in sport in the country. To address the challenges, the following actions should be taken:

-  Provide equitable employment opportunities for women in the sports sector, including better representation of women in leadership positions, with quotas and/or other measures to improve the number of women in managerial positions in sports clubs and sports federations.
-  Create national policy on gender equality that is binding for all National Sports Federations when applying for state funding, e.g., setting 50% representation quota for women in all decision-making bodies within sports federations.
-  Provide capacity building and education to all sports federations on creating GE policies particularly in introducing gender equal representation.
-  Create and fund programmes and projects to raise awareness about the benefits of gender diversity in leadership positions.
-  Create and fund programs which develop leadership skills for girls and women in sport, with particular focus on women professional athletes.
-  Implement trainings and awareness-raising activities on gender equality and gender mainstreaming for employees in the sports sector, especially aimed at senior management.
-  Encourage setting up of gender equality commissions or establishing focal point for GE in sports structures.
-  Develop guidelines on recruitment process, election committees, HR policy and other, as relevant.

To improve **gender equality in sports coaching**, the following actions should be taken:

-  Create gender-sensitive and transparent recruitment and selection procedures and practices in sports federations and sports clubs which will increase the number of women in coaching.
-  Adopt gender-sensitive policies to protect and support women coaches' rights for professional development, especially in relation to motherhood.
-  Regularly collect and disseminate statistical data on the participation of women in coaching training and coaching careers.
-  Support female coaching role models and involve them in the promotion of equality between women and men in sport.
-  Implement campaigns to tackle gender stereotypes and identify challenges which restrict women in coaching professions.

With the aim to prevent **gender-based violence in and through sport**, the following actions should be taken:

-  Conduct research to understand the magnitude of the problem, the mechanisms for prevention, the areas of intervention.
-  Adopt and implement a specific national strategy, including an action plan.
-  Include specific measures and regulations tackling sexism and sexist language at sporting events and competitions, as well as indecent sexual behaviour.
-  Incentivize sports federations to adopt action plans and procedures for the prevention of GBV and gender and sexual harassment and abuse in sport.
-  Incentivize sports clubs to update their regulations in order to explicitly forbid GBV and gender and sexual harassment and abuse, with appropriate measures for the perpetrators and support for victims.
-  Develop and implement programmes to empower girls and women athletes against possible harassment and abuse in sport.
-  Implement programmes for education and training of athletes/coaches/managers/technical staff to recognize gender-based harassment and violence and to be able to act upon it accordingly.

-  Implement media campaigns tackling gender-based harassment and violence in sport.
-  Organize awareness-raising campaigns for prevention of GBV, harassment and abuse.
-  Adopt regulation prescribing each sport organization to have a contact point for reporting GBV and gender and sexual harassment and abuse. Provide training to contact points for reporting GBV in sport.

Regarding **fighting gender stereotypes in sport and the role of the media**, the following recommendations are important:

-  Revise the relevant laws, strategies, and policies to include prohibition of all types of discrimination on the grounds of sex and gender, as well as all types of gendered/sexist hate speech, and any form of gender-based harassment.
-  Launch an initiative to render equal the award system for state funded awards for athletes, sports managers, coaches and more (e.g., State Award “8th of September”).
-  Monitor national media outlets regarding representation of women athletes and female competitions and raise awareness on the importance of equal representation.
-  Implement trainings to media workers on gender equality and equal representation of women athletes and women’s sports.
-  Raise awareness on gender stereotypization and the harms from discrimination and discriminatory speech through media campaigns.
-  Implement media campaigns on gender equality in sports.

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