

A HANDBOOK OF BEST PRACTICE

# Women's leadership and decision making within sport



MARCH 2020

## Imprint

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This handbook is an output of the Step Up Equality project. It aims to tackle persistent gender inequalities and address the underrepresentation of women among trainers, managers, and decision-makers in sport. For further information on the project, as well as downloadable research and support material, go to [www.girlsinsport.se/stepupequality](http://www.girlsinsport.se/stepupequality).

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# 1. Introduction

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Leadership and decision making are the biggest challenges facing sport in its progress towards gender equality. Many policy documents report gender equality as a value but progress in practice rarely aligns with what is written in text. If we want to achieve gender equality in sport we need the leadership to get there, and we need the governance and decision making processes which will truly support that journey.

In addition, and the specific focus of this handbook, is the fact that leadership is the area of sport where women are particularly underrepresented, if not totally absent. So for example, while there has been progress in terms of women's equal participation in sport, progress is certainly not matched in terms of leadership and influence in decision making. If we take Germany as one example, according to the German Olympic Sports Confederation, more than 10 million girls and women are members of sports clubs nationally, which corresponds to approximately 40% of the membership base. In competitive sports, 45% of German Olympic athletes are female. However, only 13% of national coaches and 16% of leadership positions in German sports organisations are occupied by women. High level and prestige positions such as members of presidential boards in particular are dominated by men. Similar and worse patterns are found in many other European countries. In fact, even though these numbers are far from desirable, Germany's statistics are on the higher end of the equality spectrum.

Women continue to be largely marginalised from the decision making and leadership sphere of sport, including at the grassroots level. Structural barriers through discriminatory norms, values, and institutional practices in how sport is "done" still limit women's options and opportunities. Cultural practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes provide further challenges. Capacity gaps that result as a legacy of this discrimination and under investment also mean that women are sometimes less likely than men to have the education, networks or resources needed to become effective leaders.

Many individual women have overcome these obstacles and achieved great success in their leadership; coaching Olympic level athletes, leading international sports teams to victory or in their groundbreaking work related to sports policy or journalism. This is often to the benefit of society at large; not only catalysing wider change within their sports and institutions but also providing important role models for others. However, there is a long way to go in terms of women securing equal opportunities to lead and shape the future of European sport. The project from which this handbook results focused on exactly that challenge; discovering the barriers that women most commonly experience and how they can be successfully overcome or ideally, removed completely. This handbook offers a selection of examples of how to do precisely that!

Gender equality is a key focus in sport at many levels across Europe. This is a positive sign yet change continues to be slow, even in those countries considered to be more progressive such as Sweden. Leadership has a crucial role to play in speeding up this process. The cultures created and supported by specific styles of leadership together with the values, norms and biases they can reinforce have a direct and powerful influence on the success of other means of creating change in sport. If we focus our attention on equality in terms of who it is that makes decisions, who steers how sport is "done", who influences how funds are spent and priorities

determined - then we have the opportunity to work on an area that will catalyse change must faster. The 10 best practice case studies presented here were sourced as part of a wider data collection exercise around barriers to women's leadership. They offer a diverse set of examples of how it is possible to work with leadership and gender equality in sport at the grassroots level within a range of diverse contexts and resource levels. Details of other supporting resources for those wanting to work with women's leadership in sport are available at the end of the handbook.

## **2. How to use this handbook**

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This collection of examples are offered as potential inspiration for those wishing to promote and facilitate women's leadership in sport. This handbook is intended to be of value for those working in grassroots sport with an interest in the more strategic and change process aspects of gender equality work. For example, you may have had discussions in your club or organisation on gender equality and have reached a consensus on the need to initiate a change process, but find it difficult to know where to start. Alternatively, your organisation may have already identified leadership as a key area of focus and would benefit from an overview of what others have been doing and the options available. This handbook can show you what has been possible for others to achieve, and support you in identifying what options might transfer to your situation. These best practice case studies can give examples for how to think about this kind of work and how to follow a change process that will have the potential to support a long term and sustainable shift within your club or organisation.

All best practice case studies were selected based on a number of criteria, including their potential for application to other contexts and settings. Thus, many of these examples offer potential road maps, showing alternative starting points. Then once a starting point is found perhaps other ideas can be incorporated as a process unfolds over time. Any one of these as a single example is unlikely to address all imbalances in your particular organisation or context, but as a first step, and in combination with other measures, something similar can be implemented to create lasting and measurable change. In order to help the identification of those most relevant to different actors or needs we offer a "map" of all the examples presented according to the barriers they tackle and their needs in relation to resources for implementation. We hope this guides you towards those best practices most useful to your chosen focus or context.

Gender equality work in sports organisations is on the one hand about reflecting on norms and structures, and on the other hand about how you yourself as the leader or coordinator of a change process might be influenced by these norms and structures. We are not always fully aware of how we are influenced and what biases we might be subconsciously carrying into what we do. We therefore encourage the user of this handbook to not only draw on the examples given, but also reflect on their own situation, including their experiences of leadership to date. Consider the views that you hold about what "good leadership" looks like and how it is achieved. How do you yourself show up in a leadership role or support others in these roles? Reflect on the goal of gender equality in leadership, what does that actually mean in practice? What is the end point that you wish to reach? What would gender equality in leadership look and feel like within your particular organisation or context? For example, be aware that you may have certain ideas of what leadership itself is, notice those and where they come from and

apply some curiosity over what is “how things should be done” and what is simply habit and sports culture.

Women may have similar ideas as men about good leadership, but it is important to reflect upon how this has been influenced by socialisation and cultural norms around masculine interpretations of leadership and thus and a lack of awareness of potential alternatives. Do you hold women and men to the same expectations and ideals when in leadership roles? This kind of reflection and perspective taking is valuable applied to what leadership as an activity actually is, in addition to how to do it well. This suggested reflection process is not to make one view right and another wrong, but merely to have a more nuanced perspective of where we each are coming from when starting this kind of work. It may also serve as a valuable discussion with others involved in your change process to see what influences and assumptions could already be operating.

Under each case study some of the factors contributing to success are noted, as are the key challenges. Another valuable preparation and compliment to reading this handbook can be to explore your own context or organisation and identify exactly which of the barriers to women’s leadership presented here are most prominent. This knowledge can also support you in deciding in which case studies might be useful examples and which might be less relevant at this point in time.

### **3. Barriers to women’s leadership**

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Examples of best practice case studies were sourced during wider research into the barriers to women’s leadership in sport. This research was carried out by the partners of the Step Up Equality Erasmus+ project during 2019 and is referenced further on in the handbook. We also sourced other best practice examples on a more ad hoc basis from literature and through our wider professional networks. All examples were approved by the project team according to pre-defined criteria. In discussing barriers to women’s leadership it is therefore important to clarify exactly what we mean by “barrier”, as well what we mean by “overcoming or removing”, and “best practice”.

**Barriers to women’s leadership in sport can be defined as:**

any construct, norm or practice within the structural or cultural domains of sport serving to bar passage to or restrict or limit the ability of women to lead, guide or have influence

**These barriers can be further categorised as:**

- a) Structural barriers: discriminatory norms, values, and institutional practices
- b) Cultural practices: attitudes and gender stereotypes
- c) Capacity gaps: education, networks/contacts, resources

For example: a football club that holds its board meetings on evenings and weekends may make it difficult for women to attend due to conflicts with childcare and family time, this could be considered both a cultural practice and a structural barrier. Requiring a previous background in competitive sport as a requirement for selection to a leadership role can be considered a structural barrier. Masculine norms around communication and styles of conflict resolution which might both pay out in board meetings can be considered cultural practices. The domination of talk time in meetings by men, or, for example, a young woman's sense of representing a minority position in such a meeting, could also be considered a cultural practice. The widespread use of sexist jokes can be considered a cultural practice. Lack of wide networks across other sports clubs with contacts to draw on for advice or practical help can be considered a capacity gap. Note that there are not hard and fast boundaries between categories, some issues in sport can clearly be interpreted under two of these categories.

**Overcoming or removing a barrier is defined as:**

- Removing: The identified barrier is no longer present, a woman or girl will no longer encounter it in the future. This often involves more fundamental structural and cultural shifts.
- Overcoming or adapting to: Women or girls move around the barrier but the barrier itself still exists, for example perhaps adjusting their behaviour or employing certain strategies. Recruitment quotas would also come here.

**A “best practice” is defined as:**

*A practice, approach or method that is proven to work well and produces good results, and is therefore recommended as a model for others to follow or use. It is a successful action or measure, which has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, and which deserves to be shared so that a greater number of people can adopt it. A best practice can include a successful project, initiative, event or campaign. It could also be about a sub-aspect of another larger project or initiative, such as a strategy for recruiting women within a larger leadership program, or specific changes to working hours as part of a wider recruitment process.*

The following criteria were used as guidance in determining a “best practice”:

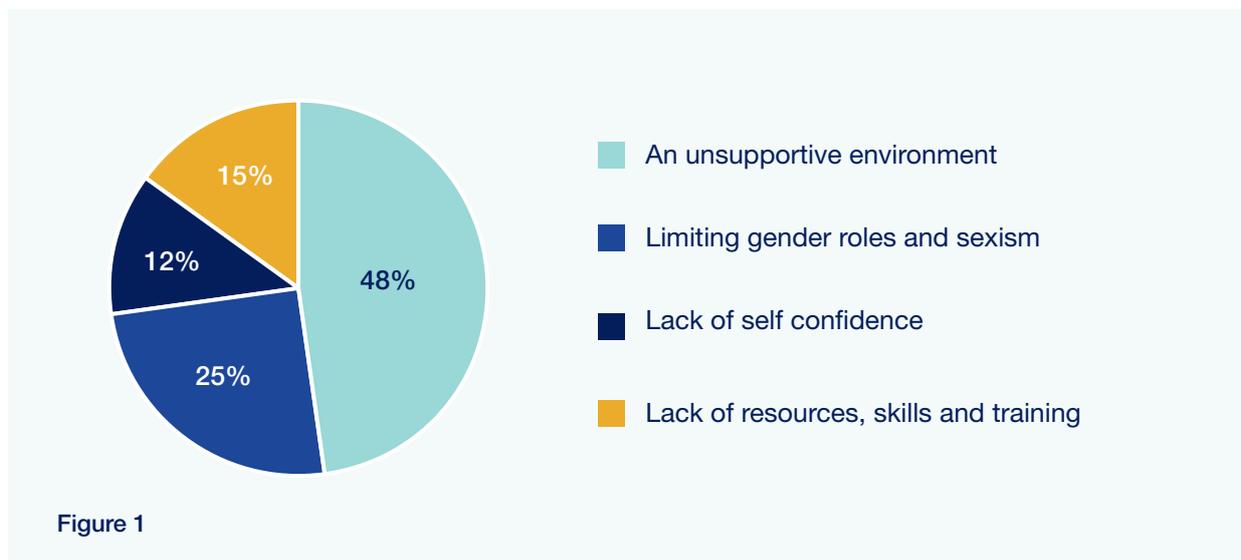
- Effective and successful - it is a practical/useful way to achieve a specific objective; it has been successfully adopted and has had a positive and at least a medium/long term impact (not merely temporary) on individuals and/or groups/organisations.
- Technically feasible – it is relatively easy to learn and to implement
- Replicable and adaptable – it should have the potential for replication and should therefore be adaptable to similar objectives in varying situations and contexts

In selecting examples for the handbook and drawing on an analysis of the most barriers we endeavour to offer useful examples of means for addressing some of these most common barriers. We also endeavoured to offer a spectrum of small to large scale initiatives encompassing diversity with respect to scale and scope in terms of available resources. In other words, both top down organisationally supported interventions as well as more grassroots level initiatives and local activities.

## Barriers to women's leadership

While gathering the case studies presented in this handbook, surveys and interviews were also carried out with women athletes as well as women and men in leadership roles in sport across Europe. Further information from this study is available in a companion report also from the Step Up Equality project (see supporting resources) .

Participants in the survey (over 200 individuals) were asked what they regarded as the top three barriers for women to take on leadership positions within sport (Figure 1). While men also took part, 90% of respondents were women so we can assume that this information gives us important insights into what women active in sport are currently experiencing. Interestingly, a lack of previous experience of leadership, and lack of motivation - two of the most commonly cited reasons for the low levels of representation of women in leadership roles in sport - were not at all supported by the data (Figure 1).



### The most common identified barriers were:

1. An unsupportive environment (structural barrier): Many women cited a lack of support from peers and more senior members of their organisation in terms of adequate time and financial resources with which to do their job, as well as inadequate prioritisation of their activities in scheduling or organisational planning. This category included lack of recognition and standard hiring practices.
2. Limiting gender roles and sexism (cultural practices): This included the stereotypical sexism in relation to talk time in meetings as well as domination techniques and gaslighting that can take place in board meetings and other leadership contexts. In addition, requests like making tea and taking on more administrative functions directed at the women present were common. This category included gender based violent, overt sexism as well as stereotyped gender roles.

3. Lack of self confidence (capacity gap): For example, several women doubted their capacity specifically to take on a leadership role, for example because of lack of previous experience. In many cases it was also clear that norms and ideals regarding what leadership is and involves were also influential. This category included self assessed lack of experience and lack of confidence in leading.
4. Lack of resources, skills and training (capacity gap): Some women described how they lacked many of the networks and contacts that would potentially make their role easier. Part of this was a lack of support specifically from women peers, most commonly due to lack of a network of women or specific means of connecting and having opportunities for exchange and building relationships and support. Another aspect of this was the lack of prioritisation of training for women taking on new leadership roles by the superiors or organisation. This category included lack of access to training, supportive services, insufficient time to carry out the required duties as well as inadequate professional networking opportunities.

The 10 case studies that follow are mapped according to which of these barriers was the main focus for a response or action, and the level of resources involved in implementing that action.

Response	Financial resource level (Approximate budget per year of the initiatives implementation or support, note this does not include time from volunteers which is a main resource in many of these best practices)
Shifting the Environment	<b>Low:</b> 1000–5000 Euros
Gender roles and sexism	<b>Medium:</b> 5000–10,000 Euros
Women and girls empowerment	<b>High:</b> More than 10,000 Euros
Investing in resources and skills	

## 4. European examples of best practice

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### Best practice #1

#### Using an education platform for leaders to support gender equality

*“The club president’s gender should not matter, but hopefully I can inspire more women to take part in grassroots and professional leadership and get more women in leadership positions in Golf in Sweden. It really is needed!”*

- **Maria Möller, Chairman, Swedish Golf Federation**

<b>Name:</b>	“Vision 50:50“
<b>Location:</b>	Sweden
<b>Implementer:</b>	Swedish Golf Federation
<b>Funder:</b>	Swedish Sports Federation
<b>Timeline:</b>	2013 – ongoing
<b>Resource level:</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Focus:</b>	Development of an online educational platform for golf club leaders focused on gender equality. The education is change-orientated, so leaders are not just learning about what is needed in theory but also follow a process of planning and initiating equality focused shifts within their individual particular golf clubs.
<b>Response:</b>	<b>Shifting the Environment</b>
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="http://www.golf.se/vision5050">www.golf.se/vision5050</a>

Golf has a reputation for being particularly old fashioned and somewhat resistant to change. In Sweden, leadership within golf has almost totally excluded women up until very recently with 90% of club managers and chairmen and very close to 100% of course managers being men. In 2013, the Swedish Golf Federation made a commitment to shift this situation after recognising that this image was a serious threat to the sports future. While the initiative, named “vision 50:50”, placed a large focus on women’s participation in golf, it did so via a focus on club leadership and specifically education as a foundation for a longer term change process. The initiative identified and supported the implementation of measures to increase women’s leadership presence and influence as well as educating men in leadership roles on how to go about creating and supporting change.



#### **Process and specific activities:**

- An investment from the Golf Federation together with external funding from a charitable foundation initially allowed for the employment of a part time project leader to conduct some background research as well as set up project goals and a project plan as a starting point.
- A pilot project was then implemented with eight golf clubs over a two year period (2015–2017). These clubs worked together with a gender researcher to develop content for a web based gender education platform, and at the same time underwent parts of the education themselves.
- This process resulted in a web-based education program for golf club leaders (namely chairman, board members, club manager, coach and greenkeeper). The education supported a club-level analysis of gender equality status and needs. Completing the education takes 12 months and includes theory as well as practical exercises and tasks. For example, participants learn about “talk time” in meetings, informal power & the use of suppression tactics.
- The education is done by the club management team as a group. In the course of the process the group develops and starts to implement an action plan. The process covers the overall organisation, aspects relating to participation including competition, the golf course itself and its management including personnel. Evaluation and certification of the club occurs at the end of their education. The certification is considered a valuable standard for the club to attain.

## Outcomes:

- The board of the Golf Federation has completed this education, one of their resulting actions was to revise the federations regulations to stipulate that the board is to have equal numbers of men and women
- A woman was appointed as chairperson of the federation in 2017
- The education has been initiated by the management teams of over 100 clubs; 20 have completed and been certified.
- This process has generated several other initiatives, many focusing on increasing girls and women's participation in golf. One in particular involved a review of golf course layouts and womens input into that design process.

## Success factors:

In contrast to the general situation within golf the federations board actually had equal representation of men and women at the time the decision to implement this initiative was taken. It is likely this played a key role in its prioritisation.

An academically supported change process generated a high equality education that translates into practice through the development and implementation of an action plan, i.e. follow up and action was built into the process.

The club-level analysis facilitates an assessment of the clubs current status and supports the identification of clear goals and indicators as well as planning of specific actions to meet these goals.

## Challenges & tips:

In terms of individual clubs nationally the project has seen small increases in women as board members and chairwomen. Starting from an almost non-existent pool to select from or support, the project has found it difficult to get women into these positions. Elections are also only once a year which further slows down the process.

Many positions are still voluntary at the club level and the turnover of people is therefore high. This has a negative impact on change processes such as these which can lose energy and focus over time.

Cultural practices were a strong barrier with many on the "inside" acting in opposition under the belief that the environment is already inclusive and functioning well.

An approach like this is definitely a long term process and requires clubs to have their own motivation to commit and follow through. In this case there is of course a strong incentive with regards to image and reputation but clubs also see that they need this to have a sustainable future.

*" We see a new generation that has new values and new expectations on golf and therefore golf must renew itself to match the rest of society"*

**- Jenni Lundh, Östersund-Frösö Golf club**

## Best practice #2

### A social innovation approach to challenging norms in coaching

*"I have developed as a person and have created a good professional network due to my participation in Coach the Future"*

- Participant 2018

Name:	"Coach the Future"	
Location:	Umeå, Northern Sweden	
Implementer:	Girls in Sport	
Funder:	Swedish Ministry for Gender Equality	
Timeline:	2017-2019	
Resource level:	High	
Focus:	A social innovation initiative "borrowing" professional women with sports backgrounds from their employers and workplaces for several hours a month to go and coach girls in sport in local schools and act as role models.	
Response:	Gender roles and sexism	Investing in resources and skills
Further information:	<a href="http://www.girlsinsport.se/coachaframtiden">www.girlsinsport.se/coachaframtiden</a>	

This initiative aimed to highlight some of the common ignorances around why many women choose not to take up sports coaching roles. In doing so it tested specific ideas regarding what changes are needed in order to engage and involve more women. Specifically:

1. Not having coaching or leadership be an additional time burden taking away from family time in the evenings or on weekends
2. Having enthusiasm for sport be the sole criteria regarding competence to coach
3. Having the chance to share experiences and be supported in the coaching process by other women.

Current norms around sport and voluntary coaching of young people are a significant barrier for women - the way things are done are largely set up to suit mens timetables and preferences. This initiative provided a way around that barrier and went about testing an alternative. By engaging the support of local companies and schools in doing so, girls received sports coaching by women as part of their regular curriculum.



### **Process and specific activities:**

- Recruitment of companies to the scheme including everything from national organisations to local family businesses. Selection of women from these organisations with a background or interest in sport, not necessarily to a professional level but with sufficient competence to teach or support girls.
- Identification of classes of girls in local schools and timetabling of sessions together with school personnel
- A 10 week group process for women focused on self awareness and leadership with intermittent coaching of girls and subsequent sharing and reflection via an online group. The group process developed content on an emergent basis. Topics covered included emotional wellbeing, engaging and connecting with others, stress, observing and challenging stereotypes.
- Added social events for the group of women
- CSR and media work with the women's employers to communicate their participation and values in relation to leadership, equality, participating in society and the importance of health and sports.

## Outcomes:

- 20 women from about 15 different companies have completed the scheme over the course of two years, holding between them around 70 training sessions for teenage girls. Sports ranged from ice hockey and rock climbing to yoga and dance. Girls and their teachers greatly appreciated the contact time with women role models.
- Raised awareness about the importance of getting more women into sports coaching and leadership roles via talks, events, press and CSR material (including articles on individual companies focus on women's leadership and storytelling by individual women participants etc).

## Success factors:

The strong local interest in social innovation and latest business "trends"

Well established competence in leadership and personal development available in-house in the implementing organisation

Strong reputation of, and local support for, the implementing organisation both from companies and also from a local network of active or sports interested professional women

Strong and well established relationships with local schools meant that the logistics and scheduling ran smoothly.

## Challenges & tips:

This approach might be difficult to implement in a large city with large travelling distances for women between their home, workplace and coaching venues

High levels of commitment from participating schools is essential, the women taking part need to feel their time is valuable and appreciated and part of this comes from how they are received and supported in school.

*"Even though we know we are making a difference, we want to do more. We feel that we have an influence on their lives. We want to do more for them!"*

**- Female coach**

## Best practice #3

### Using language to support education and catalyse change

*“Without the support of the members of the board and the trust I needed I could not develop my work nor fulfill myself in working with the team. Women can’t use the opportunities they may have as easily as men and we must remember that every time we want to help them”*

- Patrycja Narkun

Name:	“The Alternative Sports Club”	
Location:	Warsaw, Poland	
Implementer:	Alternatywny Klub Sportowy ZŁY	
Funder:	Fundraising from club supporters and membership fees	
Timeline:	2015-ongoing	
Resource level:	<b>Medium</b>	
Focus:	This is a fully democratic football club built and managed by an association of club fans. The club has a focus on using football as a tool for education and social change, including a specific focus on equality of leadership and influence both in the sport and in society in a wider perspective.	
Response:	Gender roles and sexism	Women and girls empowerment
Further information:	<a href="http://aks-zly.pl">http://aks-zly.pl</a>	

The AKS, a football club, was created by enthusiasts who were united in one common vision of a completely new approach toward football. They wanted to create a club where everyone was equal, and where each member could have an influence on the decision-making process; and so the Alternatywny Klub Sportowy ZŁY was created! Although the president and the members of the board are elected, the club is led by a collective of approximately 40 people. This club has become a very prominent initiative in the history of Polish sport, operating from the idea of football not just as a sport to follow and enjoy, but also as an educational tool to create systemic change in terms of supporting and empowering girls and women in football as well as working on the inclusion of children and refugees. The club is widely known for this work, including actively promoting equality, combating racism and violence. This educational role is considerable given the many 1000’s of viewers and followers.

### **Process and specific activities:**

- A woman appointed president of the club in 2015, it was founded with this break in tradition. Additionally two women as the women's teams coach and administrator, which are both considered leadership roles.
- One woman and one man work together as spokespersons, the club's outreach strategy ensures the involvement of both in each public statement. Gender parity is also maintained in media appearances including with management, supporters and players.
- A new communication strategy was developed with a strong focus on written and spoken language and its influence on the equal participation of men and women, including official documents and social media. For example, use of linguistic forms (masculine vs feminine ) have the negative effects of effectively making women less important or absent. The club decided to use masculine and feminine nouns and pronouns to refer to both men and women even if official letters or club regulations will differ in length or be less comfortable to write and to read.

### **Outcomes:**

- In 2019 AKS ZŁY won UEFA's prestigious award for Best Grassroots Club. The club was recognized not only for its grassroots engagement but specifically for its equal involvement of fans and members in the decision making process and strategic work of the club. The club is an example of how a non-profit, successful sport organization can be managed, and is regularly asked to attend high visibility panels and debates on the basis of this innovation.
- Increasing awareness among members and supporters that the stereotypes present in women and girls surroundings strongly shape their life choices including in relation to career and free time activities. Paying attention to this aspect of the club's mission during various types of appearances and events, including general meeting or section meetings. The case of our former president is a good example as she took the position of a full time consultant in Supporters Direct who reinforces fans of other clubs in Europe to develop structures at the grassroots level.
- Future plans for a woman coach for the men's team
- Professional development of women in leadership roles in the club has been reflected in entry to new networks and their subsequent recruitment.

### **Success factors:**

The club took on the challenge of organising the grassroots community in promoting change for Polish women's football. Such an approach could be transferred to any sport discipline but requires genuine cooperation between women and men based on the agreement that men are currently more likely to occupy positions of power in sports

Lots of media interest and support for the clubs values and activities, supportive public opinion and interest from the sports industry.

An innovative, transparent and inclusive business model of running the club.

All members and supporters volunteer and financial resources for the club in early phases often came from concerts and other crowdfunding style events, sponsors followed once the club got more well known. Competence in the club in terms of coaches, students studying gender, and reasonable media and PR communication

### **Challenges & tips:**

Working with language can be time consuming and requires commitment and specific competence within the club but is a powerful tool for catalysing wider change.

*"If we don't join the party we won't exist. Therefore we decided to work to bring more women and girls into the stadium, making them visible and their voices audible"*

**- Anonymous**

## Best practice #4

### Supporting connections and progress with a women only sports event

*“RNP is a great example of empowering women in sports”*

- Elena Linari, defender in the Italian national football team

<b>Name:</b>	“Ragazze nel Pallone” (Girls on the ball)	
<b>Location:</b>	Padova, Italy	
<b>Implementer:</b>	“Ragazze nel Pallone” a volunteers association	
<b>Funder:</b>	No direct financial support, the event is organised and run by volunteers and supported through donations and practical help from some local companies	
<b>Timeline:</b>	Every year, 3 to 5 days event since 2009	
<b>Resource level:</b>	<b>High</b>	
<b>Focus:</b>	A “women friendly” sports event aimed at creating social connections and networking opportunities between girls and women. Through its visibility the event also aims to generate political pressure for greater support for women’s sport	
<b>Response:</b>	Women and girls empowerment	Investing in resources and skills
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="https://www.ragazzenelpallone.it/">https://www.ragazzenelpallone.it/</a>	

Ragazze nel Pallone is the biggest sports event for girls and women in Italy. As an independent event it brings together around 1000 athletes and sports lovers every year from all over Italy and beyond to enjoy sports tournaments, debates on equality and leadership, fun and friendship. The aim is to build connections between the girls and women attending, and thus support change in sport at other levels by boosting the role of girls and women from only participants as athletes or volunteers to trainers and sport managers that can be inspiring examples for other girls and women. In effect the event is a catalyst for women’s leadership by supporting the creation of more connections and networks, by shifting visibility, and by creating and supporting role models. Key to this impact is the fact that the event is organised and run fully independently, choosing to be free from institutional limits or the demands of sponsors which might compromise its aims. It is completely designed, planned and realized by girls and women, that therefore take on leading roles in different areas (communication, talks, different sports) and relate themselves directly with sports and public institutions and stakeholders involved. This is a further catalyst and a clear example for a new way of doing things.

### Process and specific activities:

- In 2009 a group of women motivated by the lack of good women's sports events decided to set up their own event where women could meet, play together, exchange ideas and opportunities in a safe environment. They felt it was important to create something that met their needs and expectations rather than those of men which dominate Italian sports events.
- In the beginning, the event was only about football but the audience has grown significantly from 16 different teams in 2009 to 54 in 2018. The event also now hosts a real diversity of sports including everything from basketball to ultimate frisbee. Women travel from not only all over Italy but also from elsewhere in Europe to take part.
- The event has improved and widened the activities offered for participants with each passing year and has also become a home for other women's sports initiatives given the high standard that it offers.
- The event combines serious and fun activities, for example mixing debates on gender equality and leadership with more light-hearted activities had a positive effect in engaging more women and a wider audience in general on important topics. This shift and growth of engagement has been steady since 2009.

### Outcomes:

- Women participants have reported that they feel more secure and more likely to request attention and care to their specific needs and expectations in sports and the organisation of sports events. This rests mainly on having seen and experienced an example of a sport event fully dedicated to women, and created by women. Women are active leaders and organizers, encouraged to take decisions and take on responsibilities without any men above them.



- Common prejudices and assumptions regarding the capacity of a women's sports event to attract participants and to offer a quality experience of sport, leisure and networking, have been well challenged by the popularity of this event including being reflected in the questions now around opening up to men.
- RNP offers a fantastic learning experience for girls and women in sports, mainly young athletes and activists, to take on responsibilities and leading roles in organizing big sport events. In most sports events in Italy, in fact, we see women mostly at basic / executive level under supervision and decision of men, especially if young. RNP tries to valorise and boost girls and women's expertise and give them roles of direct decision making and leading in the whole process (which is an yearly process) that leads to the event.

### **Success factors:**

Independence from institutions and deal-based sponsorships allows the event to also develop its political interest and send a strong message in favour of the need for change when it comes to support for women's sport and shifts in sports culture. Aside from fun and networking, this event has been a venue for discussing and highlighting serious issues for women's sport and gaining increasing attention for such issues. This balance has been invaluable to the events' success over the years and the engagement of more women in these conversations.

### **Challenges & tips:**

The main obstacles result from the lack of stability in organisational resources, aside from the volunteers that contribute their time, the event has no core resource base. Additionally the inadequate media attention and general financial support is a challenge due to the low interest in women's sport in Italy. Another challenge has been around the difficulty of keeping the balance between the request of many women to keep the event "women only" and the opportunity to open up to men's participation in order to increase the total number of participants and also diversify the contribution. The idea is that a male perspective could add new values and ideas, as well as boost the potential for wider impact in terms of addressing wider challenges for women's leadership and visibility in sport. This is still very much an open question for the event. Organisers are exploring how to navigate this given the potential implications for sustainability of an event mainly funded by subscriptions and representing a pioneering women's only sports initiative. Currently there is a compromise of limiting participation of men during the evenings and night activities to include women friends and family members.

*"Ragazze nel Pallone is a challenge born to give values and contents to female sport, and in time has showed that women can cooperate and overcome difficulties reaching great results"*

**- Elisabetta Torresin, RNP founder**

## Best practice #5

### Using sport as a tool to support girls leadership development

*“I’ve begun to believe in myself more. That instead of saying I don’t dare to try, I say: I can! I learned that when we did rock climbing ”*

- Strong Girls participant

<b>Name:</b>	The Strong Girls Project
<b>Location:</b>	Sweden, International
<b>Implementer:</b>	Girls in Sport
<b>Funder:</b>	The Swedish Inheritance Fund (Arvsfonden)
<b>Timeline:</b>	2016 to 2018
<b>Resource level:</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Focus:</b>	Strong Girls is a sport and outdoor adventure curriculum that empowers and promotes physical and emotional well-being in teenage girls, building skills such as leadership, self awareness and conflict resolution.
<b>Response:</b>	Women and girls empowerment
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="https://www.stronggirlsproject.com">https://www.stronggirlsproject.com</a>

Strong Girls is a sports and outdoor adventure-based leadership and personal development program that aims to “build girls who are strong on the inside, mentally and emotionally, and strong on the outside—physically and energetically”. The program had extensive testing and development by an NGO with experience of working with girls sport and it was compiled into a handbook to lead others step-by-step through a process of setting up their own Strong Girls Program. A key motivation in developing the Program was the need to support girls leadership skills and self awareness using sport as the tool of empowerment.

#### Process and specific activities:

- The project spent two years developing and tested different ways to offer sports to girls, outside of the typical school sport format, in particular to those girls not very engaged with physical activity. The goal was to offer a new and better experience of sport and at the same time lead girls through a process of self development including leadership skills, emotional intelligence and civic engagement. The Program also includes discussion on challenging issues such as body image, social media, harassment from boys, bullying and other topics.

- Small groups of 10-15 girls participated, most of them between the ages of 13-16. The program was run in partnership with 3 local schools during its testing period.
- A handbook presenting the curriculum was written to support other teachers, parents or sports coaches keen to use sport as a tool to support girls leadership. Education courses were also run for those already working with teenage girls.

### Outcomes:

- About 80 girls completed the program during its development and testing.
- The handbook was made available free to read online and users have spread not just across Sweden but also to Australia, the US and Hong Kong.
- A private FB group of those who have taken the Strong Girls education and are active users of the material share questions and experiences to support each others learning and work with groups of girls in their own respective schools or sports clubs. Several other smaller projects that want to use the Program are being established.



### **Success factors:**

Giving the girls the chance to try more sports more typically regarded as appropriate for men or boys. Activities like weightlifting, a zip line through the forest and ice swimming, challenged their own assumptions about themselves and what they are capable of doing. They were then supported in transferring this mindset over to other parts of their lives including school and relationships and civic engagement.

Giving the girls language to use in sharing and reflecting on their experiences as well as some basic education around feelings such as fear or sadness, also are powerful tools at this age and key foundations for leadership.

Using a solid theoretical framework in its development led to the production of a really robust and effective program, for example in setting up and implementing the program in their school a teacher is led through a self reflection process enabling them to look at their own leadership and self awareness in order to better support the girls.

### **Challenges & tips:**

In Sweden many girls at this age range have challenges with anxiety, forms of depression and other issues, which mean their engagement in a program such as this one can require a very committed and skillful program leader.

Working within the school system can be challenging when staff are limited and communication is often not functioning as well as it could. Working in a more well resourced school system and with smaller groups of girls, might alleviate some of these difficulties. Overall the support of a dedicated head teacher who recognises the power of sport to achieve these goals and who want to actively contribute to supporting girls development and leadership throughout the school process is vital.

Starting to work with young girls might be advantageous as ideas about leadership, self-authority, speaking up in a group and valuing your own ideas and opinions seem to be formed very early on. This work highlighted how well established some of these cultural norms and behaviours can already be by the time a girl reaches 13 years old. In which case there is a need to “undo” the damage already caused, as well as try and build and develop new capacities.

*“I’ve really developed, I don’t know, it just feels like it. It feels good!”*

**- Strong Girls participant**

## Best practice #6

### Supporting mentorship in career transitions

*“The program and my mentor gave me space for exchange and provided important ideas for my career after competitive sport.”*

- **Amelie Kober, Olympic medallist**

<b>Name:</b>	“As a mixed double to the top”
<b>Location:</b>	Germany and other countries in Europe
<b>Implementer:</b>	The German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB)
<b>Funder:</b>	Olympic Solidarity
<b>Timeline:</b>	Established in 2012, four rounds so far and has completed four additional rounds, the current 12 month round spanning 2018/19
<b>Resource level:</b>	<b>High</b>
<b>Focus:</b>	supporting women transitioning out of an athletic career into leadership positions.
<b>Response:</b>	<b>Investing in resources and skills</b>
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="https://gleichstellung.dosb.de/themen/mentoring/">https://gleichstellung.dosb.de/themen/mentoring/</a>

Athletes develop high levels of competence in many personal and professional skills throughout their athletic career; discipline, determination, assertiveness, and endurance. These are all essential for successful leadership roles both inside and outside the sports arena. “As a mixed double to the top” is a scheme directly working to boost the numbers of women in leadership roles. This Mentoring program aims to empower young women who are former athletes and also interested in either a career as a coach or in a leadership role within professional sports organisations. The mentors involved in the program, both male and female, are successful and experienced leaders in sports organizations.

#### Process and specific activities:

- The program was first implemented in 2012 and has completed four additional rounds since then. Each round spans over 12 months. However, many participants stay in touch with their mentors and their peers after the end of the program.
- The 12 month program includes regular workshops in German and other European cities (4 sessions during 12 months) as well as individual correspondence between the mentees and mentors in between and meetings connected to larger events and conferences at the DOSB

- Mentors act as coaches in the development of specific skills and competences. Mentees also gain insights into national and international sports organizations an important foundation for them in understanding sports political structures and in building a strong professional network.
- One focus of the program is to explore ways in which to connect the skills the mentees have gained through their career as professional athletes to career opportunities in organized sports. The program includes seminars on communications skills and unconscious bias for example.
- An awareness raising component was included to enhance knowledge regarding the role of personal and professional development via mentorship and thus challenge perceptions by sport federations that the program was simply about promoting women
- Visibility of mentees and mentors at Olympic committee events in order to raise awareness of the program, benchmark its importance and and offer the association representatives the opportunity to find out more about the program.
- An external evaluation report was commissioned in 2017 after the first three rounds to further improve the program.



## Outcomes:

- After the first three rounds, 50% of the alumnae succeeded in getting full-time jobs in sports.
- An external evaluation of the scheme showed the following key results: 90 percent of the participants are motivated to take on a management position and are planning an related career.
- The program undoubtedly promoted and endorsed the discussion about the need for personnel development strategies in sport.

## Success factors:

Supporting former athletes who are passionate about sports and understand the needs of other athletes seems to result in very motivated mentees by the time they are ready to go out and look for new positions. Being able to focus first on sport and then transition to a leadership focused career offers more stability than women who have tried to compete and take on a leader role in parallel.

The value of former athletes taking on leadership roles is quite well established, however the greatest success comes when more support is given directly from relevant federations. For example, some national federations, such as badminton and rowing are also addressing former top athletes in their programs, for example in order to train them as coaches. In the future, the program organizers aim at establishing closer partnerships with the federations.

## Challenges & tips:

The concept of personal development has had little prior attention in German sport thus some lessons were learnt in terms of how such prior knowledge and awareness can enhance understanding and receptivity. The explicit targeting and promotion of female mentees leads to the program being perceived as a measure for the promotion of women, rather than more accurately as a measure for personnel and thus professional development. This false perception led to the program being taken less seriously by the federations and regarded less highly. Thus, highlighting the focus on personal development and the benefit thereof is important.

*“You get a lot out of mentoring because you get the chance to reflect on things you would not usually think about.”*

**- Participating Mentor**

## Best practice #7

### A national series of leadership courses for women in sport

*“In sport, women have long been protagonists like their male colleagues, but there is still much to be done on the management front. This is a topic of common interest, stimulating the presence of women in decision-making roles at all levels”*

- **Rossana Ciuffetti, director of the CONI School of Sport.**

<b>Name:</b>	Women’s Leadership Course of CONI	
<b>Location:</b>	Italy, Rome, Napoli, Milano	
<b>Implementer:</b>	Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI)	
<b>Funder:</b>	Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano (CONI)	
<b>Timeline:</b>	Timeline: Feb 2019 ongoing	
<b>Resource level:</b>	Low	
<b>Focus:</b>	To generate a boost in the number of women in leadership positions with a short term one off intervention focused on direct recruitment	
<b>Response:</b>	Shifting the Environment	Investing in resources and skills
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="https://coni.it">https://coni.it</a>	

Italian sport has extremely low levels of participation for women in leadership, under 10% according to research by CONI. The National Olympic Committee wanted to encourage women to participate in board level elections and take on leadership roles so decided to implement a series of workshops for women with this interest. The training included basic information on the importance of women’s participation and involvement in the world of sport as well as information on things such as sharing of women’s experiences, and discussion of topics ranging from emotional intelligence to electoral dynamics. This workshop series was intended as a kick start and one off to push for related targets in women’s leadership nationally.

#### Process and specific activities:

- One day workshops were carried out in different cities across Italy, they involved lectures and activities including a focus on experience sharing from women (while both men in existing leadership roles, and women participated)
- The course was promoted through the website of the School of Sport, the newsletter, the websites of the National Sports Federations and social networks such as facebook and CONI’s instagram with news, posts and promotional videos.

- The training covered themes including: Different skills but same strength in achieving goals between men and women; discussion of leadership, self-coaching and self-efficacy; the importance of and improvement of emotional skills, learning to observe others to improve self.
- There have also been many athletes, men and women of the highest level, who have given their testimony as sportsmen and leaders.

### **Outcomes:**

- Participation was very high, in total 167 people, of which 37 males and 130 females.
- The Olympic Committee agreed that at the next elections there must be a minimum quota of women of 30% taking seats on the board in every regional sports Federation. However it is not clear what action has been taken towards this goal.
- A new edition of the workshop has already been planned for 2020.

### **Success factors:**

The initiative was well publicised in national newspapers and therefore got a lot of attention, including helping to spread the message among eligible women so enthusiasm to participate was very high.

In addition the involvement of the public by the Italian National Olympic Committee in collaboration with the individual Sports Federations supported this.

### **Challenges & tips:**

As typical with one off interventions with less well supported and planned follow up there is some following loss of interest or prioritisation of the issues as time passes. Increasing the availability of women to take up positions was the key goal, this is the beginning of a path towards actually having these women in place, more time, resources and commitment will be needed to realise tangible shifts.

Such training needs to be adjusted to the cultural context where they are implemented, in Italy a specific approach is needed based on where society is at, in other locations awareness of this is needed to not aim too low or too high.

*“I’m very happy to have been involved in this project and to be able to give my testimony. I must say that very interesting were the other testimonies of speakers of the highest level who really bring positive examples in the field to give more and more quality and skills to women. ”*

**Alessandra Sensini, olympic windsurfing champion and vice president of CONI**

## Best practice #8

### Using senior level training to increasing women's representation in the boardroom

*"I am going to be a mentor at the Kick It Out conference in April, something that wouldn't have been offered nor accepted prior to this programme."*

- Programme participant

Name:	The FA "Women in Leadership" Programme
Location:	UK
Implementer:	UK Football Association and The Institute of Directors
Funder:	UKFA and IOD
Timeline:	2017
Resource level:	<b>High</b>
Focus:	Specialised and advanced training of a small group of selected women already in management roles for senior leadership within professional football
Response:	Investing in resources and skills
Further information:	<a href="https://www.iod.com/training/iod-approach/expertpractitioners">https://www.iod.com/training/iod-approach/expertpractitioners</a>

This programme was initiated specifically to address the lack of female representation at the boardroom level. The programme aimed at identifying, supporting and mentoring women with demonstrated potential and commitment to take up board level positions in football. The FA worked with the Institute of Directors (a nationally recognised business leadership organisation in the UK) to design the program around four specific goals:

- 1) widen the football talent pool;
- 2) clarify anti-discrimination regulation and sanctions;
- 3) instil confidence in reporting discrimination; and
- 4) increase knowledge and awareness.



**In terms of content and activities there were two point strategies, individual and organisational:**

- a) Individual: increase self-awareness and openness to personal learning and development; identify solutions to specific work related issues; enhance personal impact and performance; tools for managing stress, conflict or crisis; prepare for career progression and joining the board.
- b) Organisational: Greater commitment to and buy-in from directors and senior managers; retain talent and keep staff engaged; more creative outlook in business planning; improve management of other staff; build positive relationships between people and departments; facilitate the adoption of new culture in business.

**Process and specific activities:**

- The FA nominated ten female colleagues for an advanced level training programme by the IoD who then received exclusive access to leading practitioners in order to develop their leadership capabilities for senior management
- A 5-month programme, included two workshops (one four day and one a single day additional coaching) with time allocated between the workshops for reflective learning and additional coaching to deepen and apply the knowledge acquired



- Coaching sessions focused on behaviour and business awareness. These were very highly rated by participants, so much so that the FA then invested in additional coaching sessions both for the program participants and other staff.
- participants get to experience the in-and-outs of the board room working climate of an A-List sports organisation first hand, while being trained by expert practitioners and having the opportunity to feed back into the programme,

#### **Outcomes:**

- The program demonstrated something that should be obvious to everyone on the board level: if talented women are granted access, coaching and mentoring in sports management they are beneficial to every sports organisation and can make it to board positions
- Impacted the FAs approach to coaching and mentoring and triggered increased investment in coaching, particularly for workplace inclusion purposes

### **Success factors:**

The programme, focused only on 10 women, allowed for a valuable investment and quality of their training.

Inclusion of individual coaching was a big success, all participants believed that it changed their behaviour and business awareness effectively.

The focus on collaborative peer learning environment away from a strict classroom environment opened new communication channels and idea exchange. This allowed for joining participants from different regions, clubs and roles within the organisation proved to be extremely valuable for the FA and its employees, opened new communication channels and idea exchange

Using a diverse approach mixing group learning together with 1:1 coaching gave individualised support and professionalised the program. Such an investment really pays off in terms of the depth of skill and insight gained by participants.

The practical elements of the programme, including simulations and group work were cited as valuable to the learning experience by many of the participants, something that is reflected in the opinions of members of the IoD.

### **Challenges & tips:**

Recruitment requires more reflection, if a more head hunting style approach is used there will be implications for the women selected.

For those doing similar programs it is recommended to include participants from different regions, clubs and roles (possibly also different sports, depending on the implementing organization). This can facilitate a much wider exchange of ideas.

In any kind of training use more diverse learning and mentoring methods (e.g. look at combinations of 1-to-1 teaching, group coaching, interactive case-studies and assessment, a course structure) while being instructed by expert practitioners.

Some women were less engaged in the peer learning opportunities which perhaps reflects a lack of value to them, differences in learning style and/or the influence of time commitments. The programme could have fostered better peer learning activities outside the project with different non-formal activities.

*“As a result of this [leadership programme] I am actively attending more networking events rather than avoiding them, and specifically trying to use the strengths I have and make an effort to build and deepen those relationships.”*

**- Programme participant**

## Best practice #9

### A sports organisation campaigning for equality inside and out

*“Gender discrimination in sport in Italy is so absurd that it cannot be ignored. In Polisportiva the decision-making roles are equally distributed spontaneously, all a result of some great voluntary work by those who believe in a principle of change ”*

- Anonymous

Name:	Polisportiva San Precario	
Location:	Padova, Italy	
Implementer:	Polisportiva San Precario	
Funder:	self-financing by Polisportiva San Precario from small scale fund-raising social activities and events	
Timeline:	2007-ongoing	
Resource level:	<b>Medium</b>	
Focus:	A sport organisation based in antisexist and gender balanced decision-making processes actively campaigning for women’s equal opportunities throughout sport and raising awareness among athletes to catalyse wider and faster change	
Response:	Shifting the Environment	Gender roles and sexism
Further information:	<a href="http://www.polisportivasanprecario.blogspot.com">www.polisportivasanprecario.blogspot.com</a>	

Polisportiva San Precario is creating equal leadership at the same time as exercising that leadership in women’s sport through its own voice and action. The organisation has focused on power balances and decision making processes, that have led to an effective equal representation and leadership between men members and women members. It is then also working on the “outside” to shift culture and structures simultaneously, including with the “Same Sport Same Rights” campaign. The organisation also implemented the first theoretical study on the situation of women athletes in Italy and on women’s sport. All of this has been motivated by the belief that change is desperately needed and that this is the right work to do.

### **Process and specific activities:**

- Successful “Same Sport Same Rights” campaign focused on awareness raising among women athletes to encourage them to take a stand and get engaged in campaigning for change or internal gender equality process. By exercising leadership the organisation is empowering others to do the same and encouraging mutual support among athletes and activists
- Raising awareness of the inequalities in the legal classification of women’s sport including the engagement of more women athletes in pushing for change.
- Hosting events and participating in public activities including debates on gender inequalities in sports and women’s representation to elevate the issues inside and outside the organisation
- Internal work on the organisations own structure and processes of decision making and representation to be sure that there were no internal barriers and stereotyped gender structures and balances
- Research study about gender related stereotypes that influence girls and boys choices in sports highlighting the importance of leadership and role models in working with children and connecting the leadership issue to other priorities for the club.

### **Outcomes:**

- More women in the organisation now put themselves forward as members of the directive board, and take on roles of responsibility and leadership, because they feel more supported, encouraged by the other members and, therefore, more self-confident.
- Men’s awareness of stereotypes and inequalities increased and now men actively participate in the removal of barriers becoming an active part in supporting and proposing initiatives connected to these topics. It is not considered a “women only” topic anymore!
- Two mixed teams and equality in membership in the internal management and decision making roles, as well as equal public appearance with media and institutions when representing the club
- Local media have publicized the debates and the Sport alla Rovescia website publishes the column: Women who have changed sports.

### **Success factors:**

An internal process of “structural” equality within the organization has proven to facilitate practical changes in the process of decision making of the organization

A holistic approach, for example looking at the impact of role models and stereotypes on children’s engagement in sport from the perspective of what influence does the clubs leadership have on sustainable participation in the future, as well as inequality in and between teams, and within management.

Having the enthusiastic engagement of many women, athletes and otherwise supporting and contributing time and ideas towards the organisation and its work: this might seem something of little significance, undervalued especially by countries where women leadership does not face such a hard situation as Italy, but for Italian sport (and general) environment it is a real exceptions, being most of the organizations (social, sport, volunteering included) led by men, leaving young and especially women, outside the leading position.

### **Challenges & tips:**

The lack of funds was a major challenge, all the initiatives were carried out free of charge with some smaller collaborations with other actors. This reliance on volunteers places limits on the scale and scope of activities.

The internal process around leadership and decision making has been long and required a deep commitment, focusing on language, stereotypes, invisible and invisible barriers and ensuring that all members have equal opportunity to participate, lead and take decisions. At the beginning, in order to become a routined sound process, this is time spending, requiring an effort in terms of inclusion, motivation and education of all members.

On the outside, the lack of recognition of all women in sports as professionals by the law of and the persistence stereotypes in society have been challenges and remain obstacles for the organisation. For example the cultural male chauvinism present in Italy and the slow progress in relation to changing the legal structures.

*“Gender discrimination in sport in Italy is so absurd that it cannot be ignored. In our Polisportiva the decision-making roles are equally distributed, and this is the result of a great voluntary work of those who believe in a principle of equal representation”*

**- a member of PSP board**

## Best practice #10

### Young women as peer leaders to boost sports participation

*“I give them the understanding, I help them, I guide them. It’s life skills for them and it’s rewarding to see the outcome.”*

– peer leader from Wales

<b>Name:</b>	European Us Girls	
<b>Location:</b>	United Kingdom, Italy, Denmark, France, Poland and The Netherlands.	
<b>Implementer:</b>	An alliance of StreetGames, European Observatoire of Sport and Employment, Unione Italiana Sport Per Tutti, International Sport & Culture Association, Women Win, Fundacja V4Sport	
<b>Funder:</b>	Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union	
<b>Timeline:</b>	Jan 2017-Dec 2018	
<b>Resource level:</b>	<b>High</b>	
<b>Focus:</b>	To better understand the development process for female peer leaders, increase participation levels and equal access for disadvantaged young women in grassroots sport and physical activity.	
<b>Response:</b>	Women and girls empowerment	Investing in resources and skills
<b>Further information:</b>	<a href="https://network.streetgames.org/european-us-girls">https://network.streetgames.org/european-us-girls</a>	

Women are less represented in volunteer work in sports and often look for opportunities which allow them to maintain flexibility in order to balance their roles within their family and work. The European Us Girls project aims to build the capacity of organisations to work with female volunteers as peer leaders. These peer leaders set an example of occupying a leadership position in sport and can function as a role model for other girls and young women. Furthermore, the project focuses on increasing the participation in, and equality of access to, grassroots sports and physical activity for girls and young women aged between 13-30 years old with limited opportunities. The goal is to increase participation of girls at all levels in sport - both as peer leaders and players. Young women were trained to become peer leaders using the new learning resources, the e-learning platform and app, developed by this project.

### **Process and specific activities:**

- Dropout rates of participants, and especially women, in physical activity in Europe, as well as the absence of an internationalised training were essential factors for European Us Girls to be developed. To address this, the project supports young women to take on a leadership role and act as a role model, as well as encouraging more girls and young women to participate in sports.
- The learning resources consist of six modules for organisations:
- Overcoming barriers for women and girls in sport
- The importance of female peer leaders in sport
- Peer leader recruitment and selection
- Introduction and orientation for the new peer leaders
- Developing the skills of peer leaders and progression
- Providing support for peer leaders
- Two events in Italy and the UK were held to test the e-learning platform. Both events had a mix of activities to develop leadership, team work, communication and confidence as well as workshop style sessions to create videos and design the app. Both events were really successful, as all 20 female volunteers became peer leaders. They had a fantastic experience and provided valuable input for the development of the platform and the app.

### **Outcomes:**

- The e-learning platform is a key output from the project, aimed at organisations and project leaders who wish to engage peer leaders as part of their activity to increase participation in sport and physical activity by women and girls.
- The app was developed with and for young peer leaders in their programming with girls. It contains a wide selection of games, icebreakers, energizers and team-building activities.

### **Success factors:**

By leveraging the knowledge and experience of the peer leaders, the project was able to produce a high quality e-learning platform and app, which were tested by a sample of beneficiaries, ensuring the content was appropriate. Then, the resources were adapted based on the feedback and needs of the peer leaders who were consulted for this project.

The training materials and resources developed were informed by research through the close cooperation with the six partner organisations. All local, national and international expertise and knowledge amongst the partner organisations was leveraged and utilised to continually improve the project deliverables.

The online learning platform and the app created by the project are open source and free to access by all, ensuring they can reach and impact both European and international levels.

### **Challenges & tips:**

The online toolkit is complicated and Euro-centric, it is of importance to ensure global representation in these tools. An adjustment to the cultural context where a project is to be implemented is key.

Programmes often do not have monitoring and evaluation processes in place to measure the impact that female peer leader programmes have on participation in sports. Together with a lack of data about female volunteering, this can cause challenges.

Volunteers as leaders and role models for other girls in the community were frequently mentioned as a contributing factor to girls' increased participation in sport. Furthermore, the combination of the fun aspect and the focus not being on competition, contribute to creating a positive environment where more girls felt comfortable playing and actively taking part.

It is very important to consider the background of the peer leaders. For example, if they come from the same cultural background as the participants, this can have a positive impact, as it provides cultural acceptance.

*“We are really excited about these events and are optimistic that they will have a really positive impact on the project and the girls themselves.”*

**– Project Coordinator from the United Kingdom**

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

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In general, women continue to be largely marginalised from the decision-making and leadership sphere of sport, including at the grassroots level. Structural barriers through discriminatory norms, values, and institutional practices in how sport is “done” still limit women’s options and opportunities. Cultural practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes provide further challenges. Capacity gaps that result as a legacy of this discrimination and underinvestment also mean that women are sometimes less likely than men to have the education, networks or resources needed to become effective leaders.

However, there are growing numbers of positive examples of what can be done to remove or overcome these barriers when the commitment is there. These examples also reveal more about cause and effect - why is it so challenging to shift the gender balance when it comes to leadership and decision-making in sport? From reviewing these best practices it is clear that women are enthusiastic and motivated about taking up these roles, women are keen and willing but structure and culture are still blocking their progress and influence. As the European Us Girls project (Best practice #10) shows, a core motivation for taking on these leadership roles is altruism, emphasising women’s drive to support others. Indeed, women taking on this role of peer leaders in sport does not only increase their own skills, it also increases participation of other young women and girls. Many of these examples also demonstrate something that should be obvious but does not seem to have reached mainstream awareness in sports management - that if talented women are supported and valued, they are an incredible resource to every sports organisation and board. This is as much an issue of sustainability and a thriving sports culture and industry as it is about gender equality and equal opportunity to influence.

### 5.1 Shifting the Environment

Working on structural barriers and fundamental changes to organisational processes and norms appears very much needed but perhaps the area where change is slowest.

This need to prioritise this area is further exacerbated given the fact that in some cases women are all but absent from organisations. Where women are absent, for example as in the Golf example in Sweden (Best practice #1), how does one then go about encouraging women to step up when there are none present to invite or involve? This also means that such work is managed and implemented by men who without direct experience will sometimes struggle to clearly see the problem they are trying to solve. They will also have different perspectives as a result of their own conditioning and socialisation and most likely will underestimate the severity and impact of the barriers encountered by women.

Another key learning from these examples is the importance of who tells the narrative and whether leadership is viewed from this perspective. For example, in the Alternative Sports Club in Poland, women’s leadership in the areas of media and communication has been a top priority and one that has been integrated into every other aspect of the clubs’ activities towards the same goals. For example, they ensure having one woman and one man working together as spokespersons and ensuring both are involved in all communication. This example also highlights the importance of true integration throughout an organisation over more narrowly fo-

cused interventions - looking at everything from founding values to the organisations structure and how its activities are implemented. This supports the ability to work together towards a common vision and therefore have everyone involved pulling in a similar direction

## **5.2 Gender roles and sexism**

Some of the case studies presented, directly targeted sexism and gender stereotypes, in particular cultural norms around gender and gender roles in sport. Interestingly, all of the case studies indirectly are working on this barrier. Any activity or initiative that directly aims to remove barriers to women's leadership and support women engaging in leadership and decision-making roles advertently or inadvertently will be part of shifting such stereotypes by the very nature of normalising this topic. However, for this reason it is important that even when working more directly to target other barriers thought is given to this area. This ensures that we are not inadvertently missing opportunities for influence, or more seriously to be perpetuating damaging norms or stereotypes without realising it. Examples of this are common in nearly all gender equality work and with a little more forethought and awareness of the full picture it is possible to avoid this.

## **5.3 Women and girls empowerment**

Education in particular is one priority that emerges here and was key in several case studies. For both men and women socialisation plays a large role and while overt sexism might be clear and obvious, more subtle stereotyping and norms may not. The importance of educating people about their own oppression and how they unconsciously conform to and reinforce the norms and structures which limit them was highlighted.

It is important to have a focus on supporting girls in their leadership specifically within sport from a young age, in addition using sport as a specific tool to support the development of leadership more generally and life skills for their future. When girls grow up familiar with such roles, being aware and assured in their own capabilities, they will also come to demand the opportunity to influence within sport as they grow up. The importance of women as role models and opportunities for connection and networking among women are also key themes. Events in particular play an important role here, providing meeting places and the chance to share expertise and experiences is something strongly desired by many women already in leadership roles. Those considering leadership roles will also be more likely to take them up if they see evidence of other women being content and supported in existing positions.

## **5.4 Investing in resources and skills**

Women are showing up and trying to make their way in an environment that has been constructed on male norms and ideals - how and when meetings are held, how joined decisions are reached, styles of communicating, values and priority setting. Trying to be an agent of change while at the same time yourself being impeded by the very structures and patterns you want to work to shift can be a heavy task. Those supporting women in these roles need to be aware of the needs for resources and support, including practical training where it is needed but also creating opportunities for mentoring and networking. It is also important that support runs through the whole organisational structure or working context. For example, from the

case study in Germany where former athletes have been mentored in the process of starting a new career, so-called “Patenschaften” (partnerships/sponsorships) have involved their sports federations taking on active responsibility for supporting and supervising after their mentorship period is complete. This places their personal development in the hands of the federation rather than exclusively in an outside scheme.

## **5.6 Recommendations and Next steps**

The case studies presented here illustrate that change is very possible and there are numerous ways for organisations and sports clubs of all different sizes and capacities to work towards removing the barriers to women’s leadership. Much can be gained from understanding what these barriers really are in practice, and by looking at what others have done and learning from their successes and failures. In order to maintain progress and have more lasting impacts, we also need to look with more precision in a few key areas. For example, how do girls and (young) women enter leadership roles and progress? What characterises those situations where women stay and advance, forging a career and a contribution in sport over longer periods? What motivates such women to advance and how do they remain engaged in leading over time? A further key area is to look more closely at the opportunities for synergistic impacts, where one action encourages wider and long lasting progress elsewhere. Women as role models are key in this respect and offer great potential. For example, where women are in leadership roles, what effect does their participation in sport in this capacity have on the participation of other girls and women in the future? One challenge in this regard is the lack of monitoring and evaluation processes to measure the impact of female leadership in sport. This is a critical step in not only fully understanding the potential for impact, but also provides the opportunity to push for more structural changes.

Finally, as we advance in this work it is important to measure progress and stick to tangible changes rather than nice ideas and visions. In doing so we need to stay mindful of where old norms and ideals are inadvertently reinforced. We need to remember to not be too eager to consider the job done but to continually reflect on structures, outcomes and the behaviours and actions they encourage. For example, it has been seen in Germany that more women are taking voluntary positions but this is perhaps not really a true sign of sustainable progress. Particularly, when considered in the light of wider discussions where women’s work and contribution is often considered free. In such a case it is important to look then at leadership in a voluntary role independently from leadership in a paid position and how attention is needed to both. Without attention to such details we risk replicating imbalances seen elsewhere in society again within sport and will this limit ourselves in terms of real and sustainable progress.

## 6. Further support and resources

The accompanying research report to this handbook (“Why we need structures to change: an analysis of the barriers for women in sports leadership in Europe”) as well as summaries of national findings from this research can be downloaded at [www.girlsinsport.se/step-up-equality](http://www.girlsinsport.se/step-up-equality). In addition to links to further information on some of the best practices covered here.

You can find out more about the wider project and all of its activities at [www.girlsinsport.se/step-up-equality](http://www.girlsinsport.se/step-up-equality).



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