

GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION IN SPORT IN NORTH MACEDONIA



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AYS	Agency for Youth and Sport
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EC	European Commission
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
EU	European Union
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CPPD	Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination
OCNM	Olympic Committee of North Macedonia
IOC	International Olympic Committee
MPC	Macedonian Paralympic Committee of North Macedonia
MCIC	Macedonian Center for International Cooperation
OPD	Organization of Persons with Disabilities
UN	United Nations
RNM	Republic of North Macedonia
CAS	Court of Arbitration for Sport
COE	Council of Europe
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
FIFA	International Federation of Association Football
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women



GLOSSARY

Term	Meaning
Discrimination ground	Discrimination grounds defined in the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination are: race, skin color, origin, national or ethnic origin, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, belonging to a marginalized group, language, nationality, social background, education, religion or religious belief, political conviction, other beliefs, disability, age, family or marital status, property status, health status, personal capacity and social status or any other discrimination ground.
Intersectional discrimination	“Intersectional discrimination” is any discrimination based on two or multiple discrimination grounds that are simultaneously and inextricably linked.
Inclusive equality	Inclusive equality is a new model of equality under the CRPD. Inclusive equality embraces substantive equality across four dimensions, namely: (a) a fair redistributive dimension; (b) a recognition dimension, recognizing the dignity of human beings and their intersectionality; (c) a participative dimension; and (d) an accommodating dimension.
Language	“Language” includes spoken languages, sign language, and other forms of non-spoken languages.
Gender	A socio-cultural construct that encompasses certain characteristics, expectations, and roles of women and men.
Communication	“Communication” includes languages, display of text, Braille communication, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative or alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology.
Person with a disability	A person with a disability is a person who has a long-term physical, intellectual, psychosocial or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various social barriers, hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.
Accessibility	A site, facility, work environment, service or program, information, communication, technology that is easy to approach, enter, operate, participate in and/or use safely, utilize independently and with dignity by a person with or without disabilities. If goods, products and services are open or provided to the public, they must be accessible to all, regardless of whether they are owned and/or provided by a public authority or a private enterprise. Accessibility refers to a group, not an individual. Mandatory application of universal design standards is required.

Reasonable accommodation	Reasonable accommodation means necessary and appropriate modification and adjustments not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden, where needed in a particular case, to ensure to persons with disabilities the enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Reasonable accommodation has an individual approach.
Universal design	Universal design means a design of products, environments, programs and services to be usable by people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or the development of specialized designs. Universal design shall not exclude assistive devices for particular groups of persons with disabilities, where this is needed. It refers to the construction of an environment available and accessible to everyone, including navigational elements throughout the environment and new technological and information products and technologies.
Human rights-based approach to the disability community	The human rights-based approach recognizes that individuals are prevented and disabled by societal attitudes and perceptions, culture and tradition, as well as by barriers created by society as a whole. In this approach, in addition to barriers, the focus is on the autonomy, dignity, identity and culture of the person with a disability, regardless of the disability status.
Ability / Ableism	Ableism is the discrimination of and social prejudice against people with disabilities and/or people perceived to have disabilities. Ableism characterizes people with disabilities as inferior to non-disabled persons. Ableism refers to a set of behaviors and social structures and practices that create feelings of anxiety, fear, hostility, and apathy toward people with disabilities.
Leadership positions in the sports sector	"Leadership positions include president, vice-president(s), members of the executive body/governing board, general secretary /executive director, presidents of commissions, head of mission, staff with direct management responsibility, staff with job titles such as "director" or "head of..."
National Sports Federations	National Sports Federations (NSFs) are leadership bodies in charge of the promotion, development and regulation of specific sports within a country.
National Olympic Committee	A National Olympic Committee is a national organization in charge of overseeing the participation of athletes from a particular country in the Olympic Games. The committee coordinates the selection of athletes, promotes Olympic values, and supports the development of sports at the national level.
National Paralympic Committee	A National Paralympic Committee is the national organization in charge of the participation of athletes with disabilities in the Paralympic Games. The National Paralympic Committee develops, creates, unites and represents the sports and recreational activities of all persons with disabilities.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research analyses the role and representation of women, including women with disabilities, in sports organizations¹ in North Macedonia, focusing on the barriers that limit their participation and advancement to leadership positions. The research has covered 30 national sports federations, the Olympic and Paralympic Committees in order to identify existing obstacles to the active inclusion of women in the sports sector. The research used quantitative and qualitative methods, including primary and secondary sources, to provide comprehensive insight into gender dynamics in sports institutions.

The main focus of the research was on the involvement of women in leadership positions, with an emphasis on the analysis of their representation and the structural and cultural barriers that hinder access to such positions. National policies and their compliance with international standards, as well as perceptions of women's participation in sport, in order to identify challenges and opportunities for advancing gender equality in sport, were also covered.

The findings indicate that women are significantly underrepresented in leadership positions, such as presidents and general secretaries, where they account for approximately 13% and 17% of positions, respectively. Additionally, gender inequality is also evident in the composition of general assemblies and executive bodies, where men dominate with 83% and 77% representation.

Even though 76.7% of organizations declare that gender equality is part of their strategies, only 26.7% have integrated it into their statutes, whereby in most cases it is partially implemented or not implemented at all. Only 13.3% of organizations have established gender quotas, while policies for persons with disabilities are even less present and often remain only on paper.

Women with and without disabilities in sport face numerous barriers to access the decision-making positions. One of the most significant challenges is that the sports sector is often perceived as an inaccessible and unsupportive space for women, without an established positive and inclusive sports climate that would encourage them to apply for leadership positions. This stems from the dominant male culture and structures, creating a sense of exclusion and reducing the motivation for women's participation.

Furthermore, barriers such as the lack of public calls for leadership positions, limited opportunities for professional training and support, as well as general gender insensitivity in sports structures have been emphasized. Discrimination starts at an early age, when girls have reduced access to sporting activities, which negatively affects their further professional development. The family and home responsibility borne by women further limits their career opportunities in sport. At the same time, financial inequality remains a significant problem, since women receive significantly less financial support compared to their male peers.

¹ In the context of this research, the term "sports organizations" refers to National Sports Federations, the Olympic Committee and the Paralympic Committee, which were included as key entities in the data collection and analysis process.

Women with disabilities face dual challenges, combining the barriers to inaccessible sports infrastructure and limited access to resources with additional marginalization that results from their disability. The lack of data on women and girls with disabilities in sport further points to their very low participation and invisibility in sports life.

At the institutional level, the existing normative framework in the field of sport is significantly insensitive to gender issues and disability and is not aligned with the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Additionally, it is not aligned with the provisions of international documents in the field of equality and non-discrimination ratified by the country, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which creates gaps in the protection and promotion of the rights of these categories of citizens. Moreover, the legal obligation to collect and process gender-segregated data through an intersectional lens is not implemented, thus further complicating the possibility to assess the situation and develop appropriate policies.

Furthermore, the lack of systematic research on topics such as the women's sport funding, access to sports infrastructure and opportunities for professional development creates additional obstacles to creating efficient and sustainable solutions.

The recommendations which are developed on the basis of the research are aimed at promoting gender equality and disability issue in sport, and are divided into three categories: general recommendations, recommendations for policymakers, and recommendations for national sports organizations.

General recommendations include research on the gender gap and disability in sport, public campaigns and training to raise awareness of equality and inclusion, as well as encouraging cooperation with civil society organizations and local communities to develop inclusive sports programs.

Recommendations for policymakers call for the introduction of a mandatory gender representation of at least 40% in decision-making positions as a requirement for state funding, alignment of sports laws with international standards for non-discrimination, support for women's sports and sporting activities for persons with disabilities through budget allocations, as well as systematic collection and publication of gender-disaggregated data for transparency. This is key to providing insight into the situation, monitoring progress and, above all, encouraging accountability among policymakers and sports organizations.

Additionally, tax incentives are proposed for projects that promote inclusive equality, both on the basis of gender and disability.

National sports organizations are encouraged to adopt gender equality and inclusion policies, with quotas for representation in decision-making bodies and the establishment of gender equality commissions. There is a recommendation to organize training and mentoring programs for women, in particular for post-sport careers, as well as to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities to sporting activities and sports infrastructure. Organizations should adopt policies that will ensure flexible working conditions, full and equal participation of women and persons with disabilities, as well as actively promote the principles of good governance, including term limits and regular rotation of leadership positions.

These recommendations are aimed at establishing systemic changes that will enable advancement of gender equality, promotion of inclusion and provision of equal opportunities for participation and advancement for all in the sports sector.



INTRODUCTION

Sport plays a significant role in promoting positive values in society, such as mutual respect, tolerance and understanding. Sporting activities have the power to overcome differences and connect people, regardless of their gender, race, religious, age or socio-economic background.

The historical marginalization of women in sport reveals deep gender inequalities that still affect their representation and opportunities. Originally developed by men and for men, sport has long been a space dominated by male perceptions and interests, creating systemic barriers to women's participation and advancement. As a result, gender discrimination is deeply rooted in sport, leading to significantly lower participation of women compared to men. Violence against women, exploitation and harassment in sport are consequences of the culture of men's dominance, physical strength and power, which are traditionally associated with male sport. These factors create an environment that undermines equality and limits opportunities for women in sport.²

Today, women's participation in sport still remains significantly lower than men's,³ partly due to societal stereotypes that associate some sports with men's dominance. These stereotypes create the impression that women do not belong in some sports disciplines, which reduces support for female athletes, limiting their visibility and opportunities for success. Additionally, women's sports are undervalued, with disproportionately fewer resources, unequal pay and awards. The media, in turn, often ignores women's sports or portrays them in a way that reinforces gender stereotypes, rather than promoting their value and achievements.

The lack of women in leadership positions is one of the greatest challenges to gender equality in sport.⁴ Their underrepresentation not only limits their contribution to strategic decisions, but also creates an environment where the needs and interests of female athletes are ignored or marginalized. This further deepens inequalities, preventing progress towards an inclusive and fair sports system.

Globally, many sports organizations recognize gender equality and inclusion as top priorities and are taking action to overcome existing inequality. Yet, data indicate that progress is slow. A survey of Olympic Committees found that women make up only 6.3% of presidents and 15.2% of general secretaries of National Olympic Committees⁵ around the world. According to the European Olympic Committee data, collected in 22 European countries, Norway is the leading country, with women holding 43% of leadership positions in 2017. In the remaining countries, in 13 out of 22 countries, women are represented in less than 30% of leadership positions.⁶

² UN Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2007). *Women 2000 and Beyond*. Available at: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/Women%20and%20Sport.pdf>

³ UNG. A (2020) A/HRC/44/26

⁴ European Commission (2024) 'Study on athletes' rights in and around big sport events: A report to the European Commission;

⁵ [International Olympic Committee](#)

⁶ [European Olympic Committees, Gender Equality in Sport Commission, Newsletter, November 2017](#)

The latest data from the IOC-NOC Annual Review 2024 highlights the ongoing significant gender disparity in leadership within National Olympic Committees. According to the report, 88% of NOC presidents are male, while only 12% are female. In numbers, this means that out of 206 National Olympic Committees, 181 are led by men, whereas only 25 have a female president. The gender breakdown of General Secretaries shows 37% are women and 82% are men, highlighting a significant imbalance.

Women with disabilities face double discrimination in sport – on the grounds of gender and disability. Sporting activities often do not take their needs into account, while systemic barriers make their opportunities to participate even more difficult. Gender and ableism are intertwined systems of norms that shape everyday reality, creating additional barriers to participation. Research indicates that an intersectional approach, which considers gender and disability together, may provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of women with disabilities in sport. This approach is key to developing inclusive strategies that address specific challenges.

In the context of North Macedonia, this research analyzes the status of women with and without disabilities in sport, particularly in terms of access to leadership positions and decision-making processes. By identifying barriers and risks, the research aims to propose strategies for advancing gender equality and creating an inclusive sporting environment.

Raising awareness of the importance of this issue and initiating changes in perceptions and policies may contribute to promoting sport as a space that truly reflects the values of equality and diversity.



METHODOLOGY

Research Subject and Objectives

The objective of this research is to analyze the inclusion of women in sports institutions and organizations in the Republic of North Macedonia (hereinafter: RNM), with a specific focus on the structural and cultural barriers that limit access to and advancement to leadership positions within sports federations, the Olympic Committee of North Macedonia and the National Federation for Sports and Recreation of the Disabled of North Macedonia - Paralympic Committee. To achieve this research objective, a comprehensive methodological approach that combines quantitative and qualitative research methods was applied.

The research structure is based on the analysis of primary and secondary data sources, in order to gain a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics in sports institutions in RNM. The combination of different research instruments provided for a multifaceted examination of the issue, encompassing both systemic factors and individual experiences that contribute to gender differences in sports leadership. The research was conducted in the period from June to September 2024, whereas the data analysis and the preparation of the report were done during September, October and November 2024.

This research is based on the main research question:

How are women and women with disabilities included and represented in leadership positions in sports organizations in North Macedonia?

Hence, the purpose of the research is providing answers about the level of inclusion of women in sports organizations in the Republic of North Macedonia, with a special focus on the barriers they face in achieving decision-making and leadership positions.

Research methods and instruments

To conduct the research, a mixed method approach, incorporating quantitative and qualitative analysis of primary and secondary data, was used.

The quantitative analysis was done primarily by conducting an online survey, using a structured questionnaire.

- **The structured questionnaire** had the purpose of collecting quantitative data on the inclusion and share of women in leadership roles, as well as assessing whether sports policies at the national level include a gender perspective and disability in an intersectional manner. The questionnaire was available online, on the Google Forms platform, and it was distributed to the

National Sports Federations in the RNM, as well as to the Olympic and Paralympic Committees of North Macedonia. Additionally, five of the sports organizations for persons with disabilities completed the questionnaire through an interview with the research team. The questionnaire was sent in the course of July 2024 to a total of 60 sports organizations, of which 30 responded, as of September. In order to ensure greater representativeness of the research sample, the research team obtained data on officially registered sports federations in the Agency for Youth and Sport (AYS) and in the Central Registry. However, the data obtained from the two institutions were not aligned, that is, 82 entities are registered as National Sports Federations in the Central Register, whereas only 68 entities are registered in the Agency for Youth and Sport. Additionally, when analyzing the entities on the lists, it was found that some of them do not possess a decision on performing sports activities, a document issued by the Agency for Youth and Sport, and for the issuance of which they must meet a series of criteria. The research team contacted all National Sports Federations - members of the Olympic Committee and the Paralympic Committee in North Macedonia, as the top ranking sports organizations, as well as the additionally registered sports federations with a decision on performing sports activities having available and functional e-mails, in order to expand the sample and include as many federations as possible. Some of the registered federations do not have official websites or contact information, which calls into question their activity in the field of sport, thus creating certain limitations for this research. Out of a total of 60 sports organizations being contacted (Annex 3 attached), only 30 responded, which is a response rate of 50%.

Several research instruments were used within the research for the purpose of qualitative analysis.

- **Content analysis (desk analysis)**, used to make a systematic analysis of a range of textual data, including publicly available documents, strategies, laws and policies, as well as pieces of research and reports relevant to the inclusion of women and women with disabilities in sports institutions and the general implementation of the principle of gender equality in terms of an intersectional perspective, at the national and international levels. The purpose of the analysis was to understand the norms, strategies and regulatory frameworks that impact gender dynamics in these institutions, in particular regarding the access of women and women with disabilities to decision-making positions.
- **The focus group**, consisting of 12 participants from different target groups (active female athletes, former national female athletes and women employed in sports structures, as well as women with disabilities), initially planned to be conducted in person, was held online via Google Meet due to an insufficient number of participants who confirmed their presence. The discussions were aimed at exploring the barriers and risk factors that these women face or have faced in their careers. A questionnaire with open-ended questions and a discussion guide were developed for needs of the focus group.
- **Interviews** with experts in the field of gender equality and sport enabled the collection of various insights into the situation regarding gender-based and intersectional discrimination in sport in the Republic of Macedonia, as well as the challenges and potential strategies for overcoming gender discrimination in sports institutions. Thus, a total of 10 interviews, online, by telephone and in person, with various experts in the field, were conducted.

Research Limitations

As it was already stated in the section on research methods and instruments, the research team encountered certain limitations in defining the sample due to the discrepancy in between the data of the institutions, that is, the Agency for Youth and Sport and the Central Registry, the incoherent qualification of the entities as sports federations, but also the lack of contact information or official websites of some of the registered federations, which causes problems in the activity in the field of sport and poses certain limitations for this research. As a result, the research team was not able to adequately define the sample, and hence to accurately determine the response rate.

One of the limitations of conducting the research, which was also confirmed by the findings of this research, was the lack of cooperation, as well as the history of conflicts between different groups in the sports sector, due to which some of the National Sports Federations were not prepared to share information about their internal policies and the situation of gender equality, which significantly complicated the data collection process, that is, affected the response rate of the federations to the questionnaire. These factors create additional obstacles to a precise assessment of the current situation and identification of needs for improvement in this field.

Some of the limitations encountered by the research team also regarded the lack of relevant data on gender equality in sport, as well as the absence of gender-segregated information on women's participation in sport, as well as on state funding. Access to public information was significantly difficult, which is partly due to the long waiting for a response from the institutions in charge. The data in the response from the Ministry of Sports that the research team received through the "Request for Access to Public Information" was incomplete, with the explanation that the Ministry has no obligation to collect gender-disaggregated data, as well as that some of the documents could not be submitted because they were sent for inspection at the State Audit Office. Additionally, a large number of sports organizations do not have publicly available data on their official websites, while some of them do not have websites at all.



1. ANALYSIS OF THE NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK AND STANDARDS FOR THE EXERCISE OF THE RIGHT TO SPORT THROUGH A GENDER AND DISABILITY PERSPECTIVE

1.1. The right to participate in sport as a human right _____

Sport is anchored in human rights values. Sport promotes fairness, non-discrimination, respect and equal opportunities for all. Participation in sport is recognized as a human right under the provisions of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (hereinafter: UDHR), as part of “participation in the cultural life of the community”⁷.

The right to participate in sport is recognized as a fundamental human right in international legal documents, such as the Sport for All Charter of the Council of Europe⁸ (hereinafter: CoE), the International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (hereinafter: UNESCO)⁹ and the Olympic Charter¹⁰.

Other United Nations treaties that address the right to participate in sport, culture and play on a non-discriminatory basis include: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979; the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 1975/2006; the Convention on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, 1989; the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities, 1999¹¹.

The right to health is of particular importance and is linked to the right to physical activity, enshrined in Article 25 of the UDHR, which states that everyone has “the right to a standard of living

⁷ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁸ Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the Revised European Sports Charter, Council of Europe. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/recommendation-cm-rec-2021-5-on-the-revision-of-the-european-sport-cha/1680a43914>

⁹ UNESCO. (2015). *International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235409>

¹⁰ International Olympic Committee. Olympic Charter. Available at: <https://olympics.com/ioc/olympic-charter>

¹¹ A. J. Veal. (2022). Sport and human rights: assessing the performance of nation states in assuring the right to sport participation. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/16138171.2022.2032920>

adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family.”¹². Similarly, Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes “the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”¹³

Another aspect of the right to physical activity is related to the right to education, which is widely recognized at the international level and is set out in article 26 of the UDHR and article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹⁴. This right requires, inter alia, that education be directed to the full development of the human personality. Article 29(1)(a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities should be developed to their highest potential.

The International Olympic Committee also proclaims the practice of sport as a human right in the Olympic Charter, adding that every individual must have access to the practice of sport, without discrimination of any kind in respect of internationally recognized human rights within the remit of the Olympic movement. The Olympic spirit requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play¹⁵. The European Sports Charter of the Council of Europe (Article 6) also states that “all stakeholders shall respect and protect the internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms [...] of those involved in or exposed to sport-related activities”.

If physical activity is considered a human right, the attributes of this right can be defined based on its availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality. Accordingly, if access to sport and physical activity is considered a human right, it implies a series of obligations for States imposed by international human rights instruments and common law¹⁶.

Therefore, States have a responsibility to ensure equal access to sport and physical activity for all, in particular girls and women, and to use all resources to promote gender equality in sport. This will not only improve physical health, but will also encourage social inclusion and economic equality.

1.2. Gender equality in sport

The fundamental principle of the Charter of the United Nations¹⁷ adopted in 1945 promotes equality and non-discrimination, whereas specifically the equal rights of men and women are confirmed in the UDHR of 1948.

In one of its strategic objectives, the Beijing Platform for Action¹⁸ also recommends to 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 training process, coaching and administration and as participants in competitions at national, regional and international levels.

¹² Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (1948). General Assembly Resolution 217A (III), Article 25.

¹³ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. (1966). General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI), Article 12.

¹⁴ Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (1948). General Assembly Resolution 217A (III), Article 26.
International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. (1966). General Assembly Resolution 2200A (XXI), Article 13.

¹⁵ International Olympic Committee. Olympic Charter.

¹⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations. (2016). Human Rights: A Handbook for Parliamentarians No. 26. Inter-Parliamentary Union.

¹⁷ United Nations. (1945). Charter. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>

¹⁸ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration>

The UNESCO International Charter¹⁹ which specifically states that the equal 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.

At the European level, the European Convention on Human Rights (hereinafter: ECHR), referring to the principles of the UDHR, points to equality and non-discrimination on any ground, including gender (see Article 14 ECHR and Protocol No. 12 ECHR).

Namely, the realization of equal rights is also included in the CoE Gender Equality Strategy 2024-2029²⁰, which focuses on six strategic areas: preventing and combating gender stereotypes and sexism, preventing and combating violence against women and girls and domestic violence, ensuring equal access to justice for women and girls, achieving balanced participation of women and men in political, public, social and economic life, ensuring women's empowerment and gender equality in relation to global and geopolitical challenges, and achieving a gender mainstreaming and including an intersectional approach in all policies and measures. Additionally, this strategy also supports the Recommendations on a gender mainstreaming in different fields, including education, the media, sport and the audiovisual sector, adopted by the Committee of Ministers.²¹

Violence against women in sport is also recognized in the CoE Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)²², which states that states should take measures and action "for gender equality in formal curricula and at all levels of education" and "in non-formal education institutions, as well as in sports, cultural and recreational facilities and in the media".

In this context, it is also important to mention the Resolution on the European Dimension in Sport²³, where the European Parliament calls on the Member States to include gender equality in all their activities related to sport with an emphasis on access to sport for migrant women and women from ethnic minorities, access to decision-making positions in sport, media coverage, and ensuring that policies and legislation in sport are based on gender equality.

The principle of equality is part of the Treaties and an objective that the European Union (EU) is actively trying to achieve through the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.²⁴ The Strategy calls for the promotion of gender equality in sport and the participation of women and girls in sport and physical activity, as well as gender balance in leadership positions in sports organizations.

Furthermore, the White Paper on Sport (2007)²⁵ promotes equality in sport, imposing an obligation to ensure equal conditions for all, regardless of gender, age or social background. In the new EU Work Plan for Sport 2024-2027²⁶ approved by the Council of Ministers for Sport which lists three main priorities, under the priority area of integrity and values in sport, gen-

¹⁹ International Charter, UNESCO. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235409>

²⁰ European Union. (2020). *Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/items/682425/en>

²¹ Council of Europe. (1998). Recommendation No. R (98) 14 on gender mainstreaming. Council of Europe. (2007). Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)13 on gender mainstreaming in education. Council of Europe. (2008). Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)1 on gender mainstreaming in health policy. Council of Europe. (2013). Recommendation CM/Rec(2013)1 on gender equality and the media. Council of Europe. (2015). Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)2 on gender mainstreaming in sport. Council of Europe. (2017). Recommendation CM/Rec(2017)9 on gender equality in the audiovisual sector.

²² Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168046253a>

²³ Resolution on the European Dimension in Sport, 2022. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A52012IP0025>

²⁴ European Union. (2020). *Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2025*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/items/682425/en>

²⁵ European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *White Paper on sport*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2007

²⁶ European Union. (2023). *European Union Work Plan for Sport 2024-2027*. Available at: <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/news/adoption-of-new-eu-work-plan-for-sport-2024-2027>

der equality is one of the key objectives which includes increasing female participation, especially among coaches and in leadership positions in sports organizations and sports clubs, equal conditions (including payment) for female and male athletes and coaches and increasing the media coverage of women's sports competitions and fight against stereotypes.

One of the most relevant strategies for promoting gender equality in the European context is described in the Report on Towards More Gender Equality in Sport: Recommendations and Action Plan,²⁷ prepared by the High Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport. The recommendations included proposals for an action plan in six thematic areas, such as participation, coaching and officiating, leadership, social and economic aspects of sport, media coverage and gender-based violence in sport.

Accordingly, in the Revised European Sports Charter,²⁸ the principle of gender equality is included in the section on values-based sport, where it is stated that work should be done towards gender equality in and through sport, in particular by implementing the strategy of gender mainstreaming in sport.

In 2017, the International Olympic Committee also published the Report²⁹ with recommendations for advancing gender equality in the Olympic movement. This review resulted in 25 specific recommendations with guidance on how to contribute to advancing gender equality in various domains, such as equal access and participation in sport, access to decision-making and governance positions, distribution of funds, communication, human resources and media portrayal.

Taking into account that the right to equality and access to and participation in sporting activities is a fundamental human right, it is difficult to justify the restrictions that girls and women face in exercising this right. This is particularly concerning when considering the numerous benefits of playing sports, which include not only improved physical and mental health, but also greater social status and general well-being.

1.3. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter: CRPD)³⁰ is the first binding legal instrument that provides legal and political guidance for change and covers a wide range of rights³¹.

The CRPD also regulates the right to sport for all through Article 30.5. As the only international document that recognizes the intersectionality of discrimination on multiple grounds, the CRPD calls for the necessity of changing structural social norms and accepting disability as a developmental social process. Hence, Article 3 points to non-discrimination and gender equality as a principle, whereas Article 6 (rights of women with disabilities) points to the obligations that states shall take to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Additionally, this article also points to the obligation to take appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women in all areas, including sport.

²⁷ European Commission. (2022). *Towards More Gender Equality in Sport: Recommendations and action plan*. Available at: <https://sport.ec.europa.eu/policies/sport-and-society/gender-equality>

²⁸ European Union (2024). Revised European Sports Charter.

²⁹ International Olympic Committee. (2017). Report with recommendations on gender equality. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/cm-rec-2019-1-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism/168094d894>

³⁰ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN 2006 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

³¹ CRPD does not create new rights, it merely further clarifies the applicability of existing human rights law in the specific context of disability.

Taking into account its hybrid nature and human rights-based approach, through Article 30.5, the CRPD aims to raise awareness of the acceptance of disability as part of human diversity, the personal autonomy of persons with disabilities, respect for and promotion of their identity in the realization of the right to independent living through their full active participation in all aspects of society, and are key to realizing the right to sport, that is, providing sport for all.

Article 30 paragraph 5 points to the need to initiate a series of inclusive practices to ensure the participation of persons with disabilities in physical activity and sport, from mainstream sporting activities to disability-specific activities. In line with this, States are required (Article 30.5.a) to encourage, facilitate and promote the participation of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels of sport through an intersectional lens. Additionally, persons with disabilities have the right to participate in sports with non-disabled persons, when this is their choice. By “regular sporting activities” it is understood that in all regular sports disciplines a person with a disability has the right to participate, which on the other hand must be accessible and offer equal quality for persons with and without disabilities. The CRPD, on the other hand, also supports the existing practice of disability-specific sports organized through the Paralympics and Special Olympics.

The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has not yet developed guidance on how to address the dilemmas surrounding the participation of persons with disabilities in mainstream sports for non-disabled persons and specific sports for persons with disabilities. Some pieces of research point out that “the Paralympic Games are based on levels of categorization that fall outside the scope of the human rights and inclusive equality model.”³²

States should ensure a fully accessible environment to and in sports venues, centers and clubs and fully accessible sports services provided by both public and private entities. Additionally, all entities should ensure the implementation of reasonable accommodation.

Article 30 (5(d)) requires 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.³³

States should have a strategy to raise awareness of the engagement of persons with disabilities in sport. There should be training for sports club governing boards and non-disabled athletes. But there should also be trainings conducted for persons with disabilities on their right to choose their professional engagement in sport, which they can get in sports clubs or in sports specific to persons with disabilities. Additionally, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/HRC/43/27) in its Report on Public Awareness-Raising under Article 8 of the CRPD points out that states should encourage the media to portray persons with disabilities in a manner consistent with the purpose of the human rights model of the CRPD³⁴.

Internationally, there are few pieces of research that examine the intersection of gender and disability in sport. According to one of the pieces of research in this area, “Gender Equality in Disability Sport”,³⁵ it has been pointed out that “experiences around sport and people with disabilities are dominantly determined by ableism, masculinity and heteronormativity”. In addition to ableism, the influence of cultural and social norms also has a major impact on creating perceptions of the participation of people with disabilities in sport.

³² Analysis: [Sports matches specific for disability and the CRPD: Segregation as inclusion](#)

³³ [Committee on the Rights of the Child, general comment No. 17 \(2013\), paras. 24, 42 and 50.](#)

³⁴ Awareness-Raising under Article 8 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities / [A/HRC/43/27 Report of](#) of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2019, paragraph 75.

³⁵ Culver, D. and Shaikh, M. (2020). [Gender Equality in Disability Sport: A Rapid Scoping Review of Literature](#). University of Toronto Gender Equality in Sport Research Centre.

1.4. Positive practice from the European Union and/or regional context

There are several good practices that relate to creating more opportunities and greater gender representation of women in decision-making positions in sports organizations. Some of the good practices relate to eliminating structural barriers, and therefore include initiatives related to term limits, improved procedures for the selection and nomination of committees and working bodies, improving the recruitment process, etc. Other good practices relate to preparing a new generation of female leaders and providing access to specially designed training for leadership and good governance, as well as initiatives in the context of eliminating gender stereotypes and cultural barriers.

By documenting good practices, sports organizations, as well as state institutions in charge of sports development, have the opportunity to learn from other experiences. Below are several good practices that may be also applied in the context of North Macedonia.

Good Practice 1: State Funding of Gender-balanced National Sports Federations

Sports federations in Spain must meet at least a minimum female representation on their boards in order to receive public funding from the High Council for Sports. The quota was first introduced in 2014, in the call for public subsidies under the Women and Sport program, when the requirement was to have three women on the board or similar body, or 33% female representation. Since then, the requirement has been extended to all calls for public subsidies of the High Council for Sports. In 2019, the requirement was increased to four women on the board or similar body, or 40% female representation. The purpose of this practice is to increase the presence of women on the boards of Spanish sports federations. Based on this measure, all national federations have met this requirement, leading to 230 women on the boards of Spanish federations. One of the main challenges when this measure was established was that most federations did not have the required presence of women on their boards and had to adapt their structures to be able to participate in calls for public subsidies.

Good Practice 2: Gender representation in decision-making positions

In 2021, the International Biathlon Union developed the Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2026³⁶ with the aim of promoting gender equality in the organization and in the activities of its member federations - at all levels. The ultimate goal of this strategy is to achieve better governance, gender sensitivity, as well as equal and diverse representation in the decision-making process. Accordingly, the Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2026 of this federation includes a series of goals set for each domain, and in the domain of "governance" it is requested to meet the quota of a minimum of 30% representation of men and women in committees and working groups of the Federation by 2022, as well as a minimum of 30% representation of one gender in the executive and technical boards by 2026.

³⁶ International Biathlon Federation, Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2026. Taken from: https://assets.ctfassets.net/cz0vl36hcg0x/HAeN2FAcUiOulFihHBA/4a98b4f3772404f662eea9ac8a90eb27/IBU_GE_Strategy_2021.2024.pdf

Good Practice 3: Pregnant Parent Leave

The England Rugby Football Union and the Rugby Players' Association have introduced a "Maternity, Pregnant Parent and Adoption Leave Policy"³⁷ for contracted players in the England Women's Rugby Team. The aim of the policy is to develop guidelines to support female athletes during pregnancy and to create a supportive environment for contracted players following the birth of their children. The policy also provides opportunities for female players due to go on maternity leave (26 weeks on full pay) to move into other safe employment within rugby network, e.g. community coach, until the player goes on maternity leave. If at any point during pregnancy or whilst on maternity leave, the contracts are negotiated or extended, the player will be included in all discussions and have the contract extended for a period of not less than 12 months.

Thus, any player returning to the squad following maternity leave and who has been selected to participate in the program within 12 months of giving birth or adoption of a child and required to travel for training camps, may bring their infant along with provided that a support person travels to assist in the care and supervision of the infant.

1.5. National normative framework and standards

All international documents related to gender equality, including the CRPD, have been ratified by the RNM, which makes them part of domestic legislation and they stand higher than laws in the domestic legal hierarchy. Regarding the national legislation, there are several regulations that, on the one hand, regulate the exercise of the right to sport, but also regulations that relate directly or indirectly to protection against discrimination and regulations that ensure gender equality. These legal solutions and the framework for applied policies individually elaborate on the concept of equality and non-discrimination, gender and sex, without delving more fundamentally into their intersectionality, despite the obligations under the CRPD.

1.5.1. National normative framework in the field of sport

The Law on Sport³⁸ regulates the conditions and manner of performing sporting activities for the purpose of realizing the public interest in sports within the jurisdiction of the RNM, municipalities,

³⁷ Rugby Football Union, Maternity, Pregnant Parent and Adoption Leave Policy. Available at: <https://www.englandrugby.com/news/article/new-maternity-pregnant-parent-adoption-leave-policy-for-england-women-players>

³⁸ Law on Sport (consolidated text), "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 29/02, Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 66/04, Decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Macedonia, U.no. 196/2004, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 83/05, Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 81/08, Law on amending and supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 18/11, Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 51/11, Authentic interpretation of Articles 16, 17, 18 and 19 of the Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 18/11, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 174/11, Law amending the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 64/12, Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 148/13, Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 187/13, Law amending the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 42/14, Law supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 138/14, Law amending the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 177/14, Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 72/15, Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 153/15, Law amending the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 06/16, Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 55/16, Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 61/16, the Law amending the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 106/16, the Law amending and supplementing the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 190/16, Authentic Interpretation of Article 9, paragraph (6) of the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 52/19, the Law amending the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 98/19 and the Law amending the Law on Sport, published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 244/19.

municipalities in the City of Skopje and the City of Skopje, the management of sports facilities owned by the RNM, municipalities, municipalities in the City of Skopje and the City of Skopje, as well as other issues of importance for sport. The Law defines sport as an activity that encompasses all forms of sporting activities of athletes of all ages, as well as sports and recreational activities of citizens.

Despite the long-standing discussion about the need to adopt a new law on sport, over the past years the law has been subject to numerous amendments that have burdened the text of the law itself. Moreover, the amendments have not contributed to its harmonization with national, but also with international regulations, which are of particular importance in terms of protecting athletes against discrimination and violence.

One of the last amendments to the law in 2024 was in the section on the voucher system, that is, the distribution of a sum of 10 million euros, whereby the state supports Macedonian sports on an annual basis. The amendments relate to providing financial incentives based on direct state aid for national sports federations, sports clubs, active athletes in Olympic and non-Olympic sports and other legal entities that have a decision on performing sports activities, raise sports to a higher level in our country and achieve better results both domestically and internationally.³⁹

The funds within the voucher system are allocated in accordance with the **Rulebook on the criteria for using tax exemption funds**⁴⁰ and the amount of the vouchers varies and it is categorized in the form that includes criteria such as achieved results, number of engaged persons, the media presence, etc. However, the analyses to date indicate that there is no gender intersectionally disaggregated data on the distribution of funds through the voucher system, since the provisions of the Law on Sport do not stipulate the distribution of a certain percentage of financial resources to women's and men's sports clubs, or female and male athletes, whereas the Agency for Youth and Sport (hereinafter: AYS) has no obligation to keep such intersectional records.⁴¹

Additionally, the form for requesting tax exemption funds under the Law on Corporate Income Tax by sports clubs is partially gender-sensitive, in particular in terms of language. However, the conditions that sports clubs must meet in order to earn as many points as possible for ranking on the voucher list are not in favor of female athletes. One of the criteria, for example, concerns media coverage, which puts women and women's sports clubs in a significantly more difficult position than men's, given that media coverage of women's sports is much lower. Additionally, the points awarded according to different rankings and placements may reduce the possibility of financial support for female athletes and women's sports clubs, given that the lack of financial support directly affects the conditions for training, competition and their performance, which in turn prevents them from advancing to higher levels and categories.

In terms of the application of the principles of equality and non-discrimination, in particular with regard to gender and disability, the Law on Sport is not harmonized with either international or national regulations on prevention and protection against discrimination. Furthermore, the law is neither gender-sensitive nor disability-sensitive, completely neglecting the specific needs of women and girl athletes and athletes with disabilities, both for their engagement in sports and for their further advancement.

³⁹ Available at: <https://novamakedonija.com.mk/sport/sportovi/izglasani-noviot-zakon-za-sport/>

⁴⁰ Rulebook on the detailed qualitative and quantitative criteria for the use of tax exemption funds, the method of scoring and ranking, as well as the form and content of the request for the use of tax exemption funds and the lists of national sports federations, sports clubs, active athletes competing in individual sports and other legal entities that have a decision on performing sports activities, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 5/2022.

⁴¹ UN Women. (2022). *Gender Equality in Sport in North Macedonia*. Available at: https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/11/gender-equality-in-sport-in-north-macedonia?fbclid=IwY2xjawF916ZleHRuA2FbQlxMAABHbRp6AVmZXmblLjxvV629KJjSG3rmrEw3ST41RH8jFm7roTnfrpSGdvervY_aem_BPI46lmGXcN89QQF_sdAaQ

The Law on Sport stipulates several categories of athletes that constitute the basis for financial support for female athletes and female athletes who are engaged in sports.

Categorized athletes are entitled to material compensation, in the form of monetary compensation, compensation for lost wages and insurance against the consequences of an accident, as well as other types of awards, which they can use for a limited period. Moreover, Article 43 of the law stipulates that a categorized athlete who, due to an injury sustained during training or competition, maternity leave or hospital treatment, has been forced to interrupt sports training or competitions in the country or abroad, shall be entitled to material compensation for a maximum period of one year from the date of interruption.

Athletes under 20 years of age may acquire a sports category – athlete - Sports Hope, based on results achieved in a certain period of time, that is, results achieved in individual sports and based on a ranking list of the most successful young athletes under 20 years of age in the relevant sport prepared by the National Sports Federations, as well as participation in national teams under 20 years of age, in team sports and based on a ranking list prepared by the federations.⁴²

The procedure for selecting athletes who will acquire this category is conducted based on a ranking list for the most successful young athletes submitted by the National Sports Federations, on the basis of which the AYS makes a decision on the number of scholarships in the relevant sport, which are being awarded following the order of the rankings submitted by the federations. According to current data, in the period from 2008 to 2021, 4,405 scholarships were awarded to male athletes, and only 2,386 to female athletes, which is almost twice as many for men.⁴³

National sports recognition is awarded for top sports achievements of athletes, whereby the athlete who has earned national sports recognition is awarded a monthly cash allowance in the amount of half to one and a half times the average monthly salary paid in North Macedonia in the previous year. According to publicly available information of the AYS, only 5 women (11.6%) have earned national sports recognition, compared to 38 men.⁴⁴

To achieve the public interest in the sports sector, the Government adopts an annual program, as well as a five-year **Sports Development Program**, in the development of which the Olympic Committee of North Macedonia and the Sports Council also take part. Additionally, the Sports Council also gives an opinion on the criteria for the distribution of funds, measures and other acts adopted by the official who heads the state administration body in charge of sports affairs.

1.5.2. Normative framework in the field of gender equality

Generally speaking, the national normative framework that directly regulates the sports sphere is not sensitive to diversity, more specifically to gender and disability, nor does it recognize all forms of discrimination, on various grounds, which also indicates the insufficient protection of women in this sphere.

However, despite the fact that the legal framework, primarily the Law on Sport, does not stipulate the protection of female athletes with regard to various types of discrimination, based on sex and gender, as well as gender identity and sexual orientation, nor disability, it is important to note that the general national legal framework is applicable in cases of discrimination and inequali-

⁴² Decree on the conditions, criteria and manner for awarding the category of athlete – Sports Hope, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 127/2008.

⁴³ UN Women. (2022). *Gender Equality in Sport in North Macedonia*. Available at: https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/11/gender-equality-in-sport-in-north-macedonia?fbclid=IwY2xjawF916ZleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHbRp6AVmZXmbLjxsV629KJjSG3rmrEw3ST41RH8jFm7roTnfrpSGdveryQ_aem_BPI46ImGXcN89Q0F_sdAaQ

⁴⁴ Available at: <https://ams.gov.mk/public-call/nacionalnoto-sportsko-priznanie>

ty in sport, and thus the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men refer to, that is, protect female athletes against all forms of discrimination and unequal treatment.

The Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (hereinafter: LEOWM), which was first adopted in 2006, is a basic legal framework to regulate issues related to gender equality, whereby regulating the establishment of equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men, the basic and special measures for establishing equal opportunities for women and men, the rights and obligations of the entities in charge of ensuring equal opportunities for women and men, the procedure for determining unequal treatment of women and men.⁴⁵ Moreover, the law regulates issues of interest for equal opportunities for women and men in various areas of social life, including culture and sport.

In 2012, a new LEOWM was adopted, including gender (as well as sex) as one of the grounds of discrimination, pursuant to the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, which was first adopted in 2010. The LEOWM explicitly prohibits discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment on the grounds of gender in the public and private sectors in the areas of employment and labor, education, science and sports and other areas, as well as discrimination on grounds of gender in access to goods and services in the public and private sectors. The law stipulates both basic and special measures for the establishment of equal opportunities, stating that different treatment that promotes equal opportunities for women and men in accordance with the objectives of this and other laws shall not be considered discrimination. However, it is important to note that the LEOWM deviates from the obligations under the CRPD, as it completely omits disability, and does not even stipulate specific provisions that would recognize, prevent, and protect the rights of women and men with disabilities.

In 2013, the first **Gender Equality Strategy 2013-2019** was adopted, based on Article 9, paragraph 3 of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, whereas in 2022, the current Strategy for the period of 2022-2027⁴⁶ was adopted. The Strategy is a basic strategic document of North Macedonia that establishes a comprehensive framework with activities for the promotion of gender equality and the status of women, in accordance with the LEOWM, in specific areas of social life, whereby the promotion of gender equality in sport is being treated as a separate specific goal. In this regard, the main strategic priority in the field of sport is increasing the number of women in leadership positions in various sports structures, as well as promoting sports and enabling conditions for girls and young women to engage in sports, and then as women to remain in the sports profession. For this purpose, the Strategy states the need for financial support to women's clubs, breaking the stereotype that sport is a "male" domain, hiring more female coaches, and establishing measures to combat violence and sexism in sport. It also states the importance of gender mainstreaming in the construction of sports facilities, which should be adapted, safe, illuminated, and equipped to enable their use by girls and women.

Pursuant to Article 3 of the **Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination** (hereinafter: the LPPD), its application applies to all natural persons and legal entities, as well as state bodies, bodies of local self-government units, legal entities with public powers, in the field of education, science and sports and also stipulates an obligation to take measures or actions to promote and advance equality and protection against discrimination.⁴⁷ The Law defines discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on discrimination grounds, whether by doing or not, aimed at or resulting in preventing, restricting, recognizing, enjoying

⁴⁵ Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (consolidated text), Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 201/2015.

⁴⁶ Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2027, Official Gazette of RNM, no. 170/2022.

⁴⁷ Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 258/2020.

or exercising the rights and freedoms of any person or group on an equal basis with the others. This shall cover all forms of discrimination, including disabling reasonable accommodation and disabling accessibility and availability of infrastructure, goods and services. Moreover, within the discrimination grounds, among other grounds, the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender, gender identity and disability is listed.

In terms of disability, the LPPD defines persons with disabilities as persons who have long-term physical, intellectual, mental or sensory impairments, which in interaction with various social barriers, may prevent the person's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The law also defines the principle of reasonable accommodation as necessary and appropriate modification and adjustment required in a particular case, which does not cause a disproportionate or undue burden, aimed at ensuring the enjoyment or exercise of all human rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, stating that denial of reasonable accommodation shall constitute discrimination.

The implementation of the **Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence** (hereinafter: LPPVWDV), which was adopted in 2021, defines various forms of violence, including gender-based violence as violence directed against a woman because she is a woman or that disproportionately affects her, whereby gender-based violence against women encompasses the causes and results of the unequal power relationship between women and men as a result of a societal rather than an individual problem.⁴⁸ Pursuant to the Law, gender-based violence against women constitutes discrimination against women that restricts their enjoyment of rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men. Additionally, Article 26 of the Law states that legal entities exercising public powers shall take measures and actions to promote social and cultural values of conduct based on the equality of women and men and eliminate gender-role stereotypes and prevent gender-based violence against women in the workplace in accordance with the law. This law, on the other hand, is not fully aligned with the CRPD.

1.5.3. Gender- and Disability-Based Equality in the OCNM and MPC

The Olympic Committee of North Macedonia (hereinafter: OCNM) is the highest Olympic and sports non-governmental and nonpartisan organization - an association of citizens in which the National Sports Federations of the Olympic sports are constituent members. The OCNM is an Olympic and sports association in which National Sports Federations of North Macedonia, in Olympic and non-Olympic sports, may become members. In **the Statute of the Olympic Committee**, among the main goals and tasks of the OCNM is to initiate and participate in activities for the promotion of gender equality in sport, in activities that fully contribute to the development of equal participation of women in sport, as well as to take measures against all forms of discrimination and violence in sport.⁴⁹

National Sports Federations - members of the OCNM acquire the opportunity to fund their Olympic plans and programs for the promotion of the top sports results of Olympic candidates from the respective sport, as well as the right to propose members of commissions, programs, measures and activities in order to successfully realize the Olympic mission, fulfill the goals and exercise the competencies of the OCNM. The OCNM members must meet some conditions in order to establish and maintain membership, including acting in accordance with the positive legal regulations of North Macedonia in their activities, whereby each national sports federation must respect and accept the OCNM Statute, as well as the IOC Olympic Charter.

⁴⁸ Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, Official Gazette of RNM, No. 24/2021.

⁴⁹ Statute of the Olympic Committee of North Macedonia. (2021). Olympic Committee of North Macedonia.

The OCNM is composed of several bodies. The Assembly, as the highest decision-making body in the OCNM, including electing the OCNM President, adopting the Statute and budget, adopting the annual and financial report, etc. The Governing Board (hereinafter: GB) is the executive body of the OCNM and is accountable to the Assembly for its work. The GB elects and dismisses the Sports Director and the members of the Sports Directory, as well as the General Secretary of the OCNM. The Governing Board is composed of the President of the Olympic Committee, who is the President of the GB, four Vice-Presidents of the OCNM, presidents of National Sports Federations and other prominent figures from sports and the private and public sectors, elected by the Assembly upon the proposal of the President of the Olympic Committee, whereby the GB is the only body within the OCNM that envisages a gender quota of 30% of either gender for its composition.

The analysis of gender representation and representation of persons with disabilities in the bodies of the OCNM, presented in table 1, indicates the seriously low level of inclusion of women and persons with disabilities in these structures. The representation of women is highest in the Governing Board and in the expert commissions by 25% each, whereas in the Assembly women are represented by 19%. Regarding the members of the Assembly, it is important to note that the majority of the membership comes from the National Sports Federations, and thus the gender representation in the structure of the Assembly depends on the selection of the delegates representing these federations. There is not a single woman in the Supervisory Board, as well as in the positions of President of the Assembly and the Governing Board, General Secretary and Sports Director. Persons with disabilities are not included at all in any of the bodies of the OCNM.

Table 1. Overview of gender- and disability-based representation

Olympic Committee of North Macedonia				
Bodies	Total	Men	Women	Persons with disabilities
President of the Assembly and GB	1	1	/	/
General Secretary	1	1	/	/
Sports Director	1	1	/	/
Assembly	62	52	10	/
Governing Board	25	20	5	/
Supervisory Board	3	3	/	/
Expert Commissions	74	59	15	/

According to the latest Report on the work of the Gender Equality Commission of the Olympic Committee of North Macedonia⁵⁰ for 2023, the Commission supported several activities and events aimed at promoting gender equality and the principle of equal opportunities for all, including the preparation of the first analysis on “Gender Equality in Sport in North Macedonia”.⁵¹ However, a particularly significant outcome of the work of this commission is the adoption of the first

⁵⁰ Report on the work of the Gender Equality Commission of the Olympic Committee of North Macedonia. (2023). Olympic Committee of North Macedonia.

⁵¹ UN Women. (2022). *Gender Equality in Sport in North Macedonia*. Available at: https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/11/gender-equality-in-sport-in-north-macedonia?fbclid=IwY2xjawF916ZleHRuA2FbQixMAABHbRp6AVmZXmblJxsV629KjSG3rmrEw3ST41RH8jFm7roTnfrpSGdveryQ_aem_BPI46lmGxcN89QQF_sdAaQ.

Action Plan for Gender Representation of Women in Leadership Positions in the Olympic Committee 2023-2028, which aims to advance gender equality in sports leadership throughout the country, by empowering female representation in decision-making positions and establishing a path for women to become leaders through education, training and mentoring initiatives, having the purpose of setting an example for all national federations to follow. The Action Plan consists of five main objectives that are accompanied by respective strategies and steps for their achievement. The main objectives include increasing the number of women on the organizational governing board and committees, the number of women nominated as delegates by federations, advocating for change, creating a pool of qualified female leaders and designing leadership programs for women, gender sensitizing the Olympic Committee's recruitment policies, as well as monitoring and reporting on gender equality in sport.

The Sports Directory, which is set up by a sports director and six members proposed by the President of the Olympic Committee to the GB, is in charge of proposing criteria and norms for the participation of athletes in international sports events for which the Olympic Committee has jurisdiction and proposes a list of Olympic scholarship holders to the GB. In the last cycle of Olympic scholarships for the preparation and participation in the Summer Olympic Games in Paris 2024, the Olympic Committee awarded scholarships to six male athletes and one female athlete.

The National Federation for Sports and Recreation of the Disabled of Macedonia – Macedonian Paralympic Committee (hereinafter: MPC) as a sports, voluntary, social and humanitarian organization has existed since 1965. The Federation aims to develop, create, unite and represent the sports and recreational activities of all disabled persons on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, regardless of the condition, degree and nature of the disability, as well as the causes of the disability.

The Statute of the MPC does not contain provisions based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination, nor do they contain measures for gender equality. According to information received from the MPC, "the statute is in the process of revision and it is expected that they will have a new statute this year." The MPC does not have special rulebooks for protection from violence, nor programs for the promotion of gender equality.

According to the organizational structure, Assembly of the MPC has 24 representatives, of which 9 members are in the Executive Board and 3 members in the Supervisory Board. The planning, organizing and holding of the championships, reviewing the rules and propositions for individual sports and disability categories are under the jurisdiction of the Expert Commission, which has 5 members. Based on the information provided on the inclusion and representation of women with disabilities in the MPC, it can be noted that there is no adequate gender representation with regard to women with disabilities. Of the total number (43) representatives in the MPC structures, only 4 are women with disabilities, which does not even represent 10% (Table 2). Whereas in the structures of the municipal sports and recreation associations in 17 municipalities, dispersed in three regions, out of the total number of representatives (32), only 11 are women, of which three (3) are women with disabilities in the position of a president, whereas in the position of secretary out of a total of 16 people, 9 are women with and without disabilities (Table 3).

Table 2. Overview of gender- and disability-based representation

NFSRDNM – MPC				
Bodies	Total	Men	Women	Persons with disabilities
President of the Assembly and GB	1	1		1
Secretary	1	1		1
Assembly	24	22	2	24
Executive Board	9	8	1	9
Supervisory Board	3	2	1	3
Expert Commission	5	5		5

Table 3. Overview of gender- and disability-based representation by municipal associations

Sports and Recreation Associations of the Disabled in a total of 17 municipalities				
Bodies	Total	Men	Women	Persons with disabilities
Association president	16	13	3	16
Secretary	16	7	9	7

In terms of participation in the International Paralympic Games, from 2000 to 2024, the MPC participated with only three participants in the discipline of shooting with a physical disability, one of whom was a woman with a disability, despite the fact that at the international level there are 28 Paralympic sports approved by the International Paralympic Committee, of which 22 are summer⁵² and six (6) winter sports disciplines.

According to information from the MPC programs, to date, the RNM has not been represented in any Games in any discipline other than shooting.

If we look at the set-up of the program activities by which the MPC is supported by the state through the Law on Games of Chance and Entertainment Games,⁵³ it can be noted that these funds are in essence directed more towards institutional support for the MPC, rather than towards the promotion, advancement and development of sports rights and the introduction of new sports disciplines for the disability community.

The program content is the same for every year, with the exception of 2024, when the Paralympics and sports disciplines such as table tennis, athletics and archery are mentioned for the first time. The program is gender-blind. Apart from shooting as a sports discipline, no efforts have been made in recent years to develop other disciplines.

⁵² At the international level, there are 28 Paralympic sports approved by the [International Paralympic Committee](#), namely 22 summer Paralympic sports disciplines: archery, swimming, athletics, table tennis, badminton, taekwondo, football for the blind, triathlon, bowling, wheelchair basketball, canoeing, wheelchair fencing, cycling, wheelchair rugby, equestrian sports, wheelchair tennis, goalball, archery, judo, rowing, weightlifting, sitting volleyball, and 6 winter Paralympic sports disciplines: alpine skiing, ice hockey, biathlon, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, wheelchair curling.

⁵³ [Law on Games of Chance and Entertainment Games](#).

In 2024, the sport of wheelchair basketball began to develop, including only men with disabilities. Despite the fact that this sport began in 2024, it has been associated with a number of challenges ever since its inception, both with the organizational structure in the MPC, and with the provision of funds and aids for effective training and promotion of this sport.

The support provided to the MPC through the Law on Games of Chance and Entertainment Games⁵⁴ for 2024 amounts to 4,265,000.00 denars,⁵⁵ which is 13% higher than the support in the amount of 3,450,000.00 denars provided in 2023⁵⁶ and 2022⁵⁷.

Based on the information of the MPC, no gender budgeting or disability-based budgeting is being done, despite the obligations under the CRPD.

1.5.4. Positive practice at national level

Good Practice 1: Discrimination found by the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination

In 2019, on behalf of two wrestling clubs, the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association filed a complaint with the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination against the Wrestling Federation of North Macedonia. The explanatory note of the complaint stated that the Wrestling Federation, according to the statute, has the right to organize and hold competitions in freestyle wrestling and women's wrestling, and that at the state championship in freestyle wrestling, held in April of the same year, female wrestlers were not treated the same as male wrestlers. In this case, the Commission assessed that, without requiring a response, there is a ground of discrimination in the area of gender rights. In doing so, the Commission issued a general recommendation to the Wrestling Federation to align the statute and other general acts and decisions with the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination in a manner that no distinction is made with view to gender, that is, men and women, in organizing competitions.

Gender discrimination in the cases was related to the ranking of championship results, the compilation of ranking lists, giving preference to male wrestlers for scholarships, and the fact that female wrestlers receive diplomas instead of medals. The Commission's recommendation confirmed the existence of discriminatory actions done by the Federation, but also called on all federations and sports associations in the country to align their statutes and other general acts and decisions with the LPPD in a manner that would not discriminate against in between genders.

Pursuant to the law, the Federation has a period of 30 days to align its operations in accordance with the general recommendation. In the meantime, two procedures for discrimination against female wrestlers were initiated before the Basic Civil Court in Skopje due to failure to act.

⁵⁴ [Law on Games of Chance and Entertainment Games.](#)

⁵⁵ [Program for financing the program activities of the national disability organizations, their associations and their union of associations for the fight against domestic violence and the Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia from the revenues from games of chance and entertainment games in 2024](#) "Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia". No. 10-480/8 February 19, 2024.

⁵⁶ [Program for financing the program activities of the national disability organizations, their associations and their union of associations for the fight against domestic violence and the Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia from the revenues from games of chance and entertainment games in 2023](#), "Official Gazette" No. 21 as of 1 February 2023.

⁵⁷ [Program for financing the program activities of the national disability organizations, their associations and their union of associations for the fight against domestic violence and the Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia from the revenues from games of chance and entertainment games in 2022](#), "Official Gazette" No 27 as of 8 February 2022.

Good Practice 2: First Licensed Delegate with a Disability in a Wheelchair of the Basketball Federation in North Macedonia and Europe

Erkan Kail is a person with a disability in a wheelchair. He works in a private pension fund, in the marketing and membership support sector. Sports are his affinity and topic of interest.

"The referee Igor Mitrovski from the Basketball Federation invited me to apply for a delegate of the Basketball Federation 5 years ago. Due to my disability, I indicated to him that I would need support to enter and take the exams. With his support, I applied and passed the exams and officially entered the list of referee delegates in Macedonia in 2019," said Erkan Kail.

According to Erkan Kail, the decision to become a delegate for basketball matches, and not for another sport, is for objective reasons.

He said: *"Regardless of whether it rains or snows, I am indoors. That cannot be at football matches. And in everyday life. As a delegate, I face problems related to accessibility. A great number of the sports halls, but also the environment itself, are not accessible and available to persons with disabilities, regardless of whether they are in a wheelchair or not."*

Erkan plans to advance in the future as a delegate in the first league of Macedonia, but does not rule out the possibility of applying for a FIBA delegate or referee.

"In the beginning, it was very difficult for me. We learned from each other. Now it is easier. My community needs to try harder and not give up. Of course, that requires a lot of effort and commitment on their side and not to expect that they will immediately become someone important," said Erkan Kail.



2. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

2.1. Representation of women in decision-making positions ____

Of the sports organizations that responded to the questionnaire, only 4, or 13.3%, have women as presidents, whereas 5 (16.7%) of the organizations have a woman as general secretary (charts 1 and 2).

Chart 1. Gender of the president of the National Sports Federation/Committee

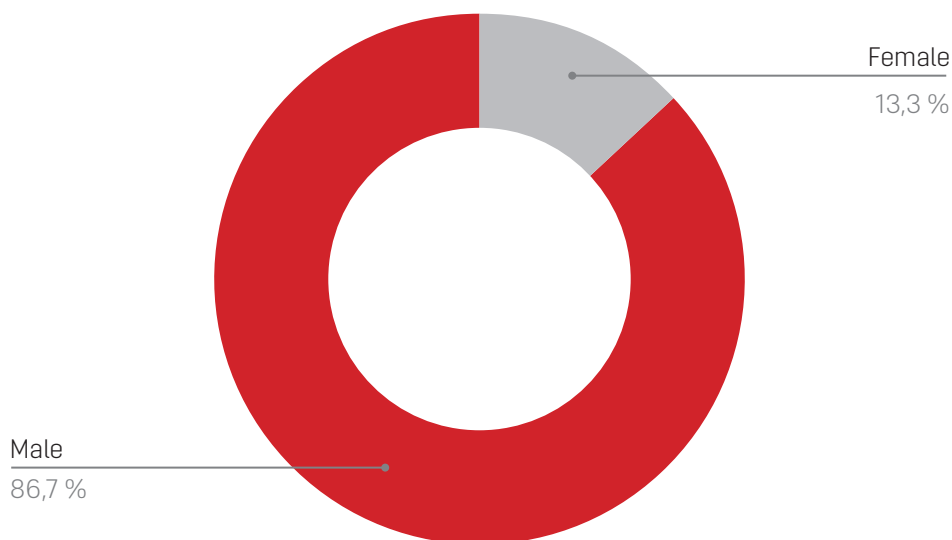
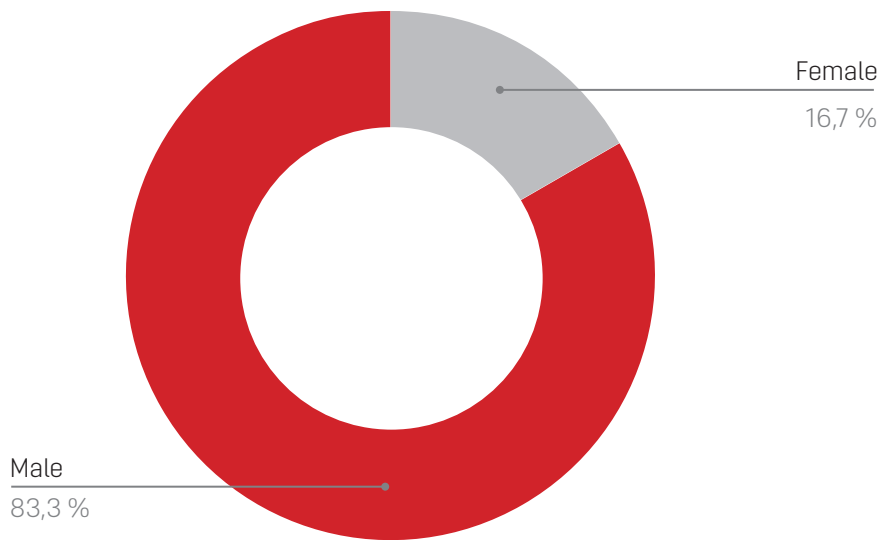
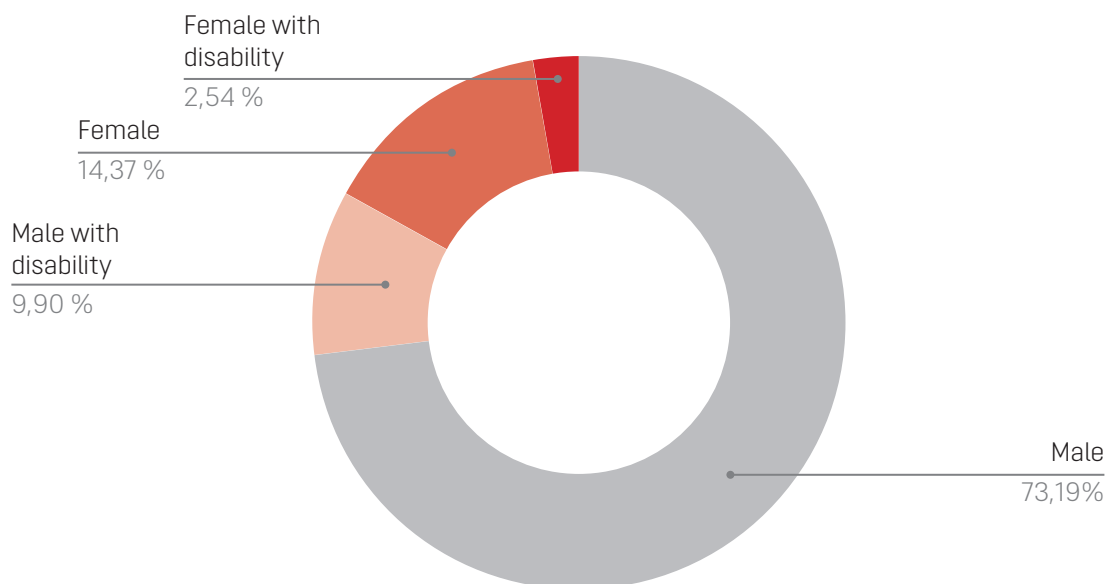


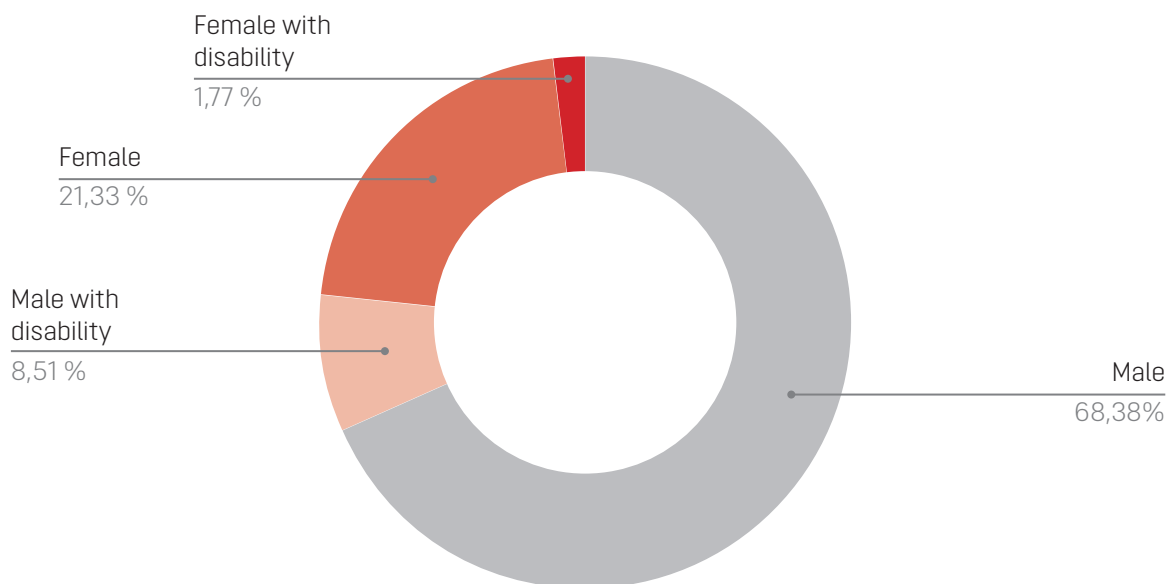
Chart 2. Gender of the General Secretary of the National Sports Federation/Committee

About two-thirds (70%) of the sports organizations responded that they have term limits for the position of a president, of which in most cases the maximum number of terms is 2, whereas the length of a term is most often 4 years. Regarding the position of a general secretary, a smaller number of organizations, that is, 10 (33.3%), have term limits, which most often include a maximum of 2 terms of 4 years each. None of the organizations has an age limit for a person in the position.

Chart 3. Gender representation of women and men, with and without disabilities, in the General Assembly.

Regarding gender representation of members of the General Assembly of organizations, a significantly higher representation of men of 83% may be noted, of which 10% are men with disabilities, compared to only 17% women, of which 3% are women with disabilities (Chart 3).

Chart 4. Gender representation of women and men, with and without disabilities, in the executive body of the organization.

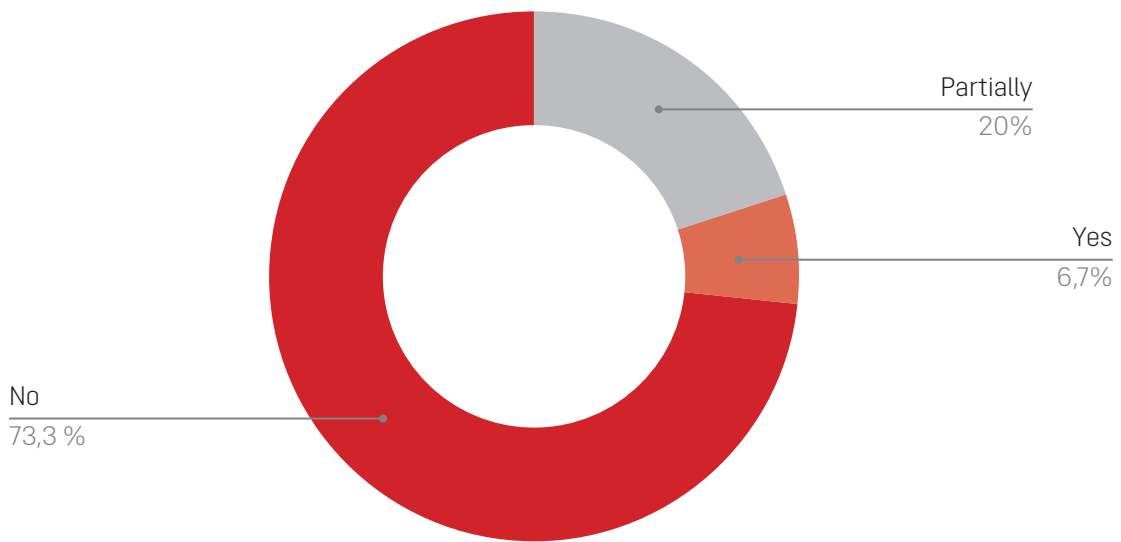


Regarding the members within the executive body of the sports organization, which may be known as the executive committee, governing board or other title, gender representation is again in favor of men who are represented by 77%, of whom 9% are men with disabilities, whereas women by 23%, of whom only 2% are women with disabilities (Chart 4).

There are term limits on the of members of the executive body in 11 (36.7%) organizations, which in most cases refers to a maximum of 2 terms, whereas the length of a term is most often 4 years. Additionally, none of the organizations have an age limit for the person in the position.

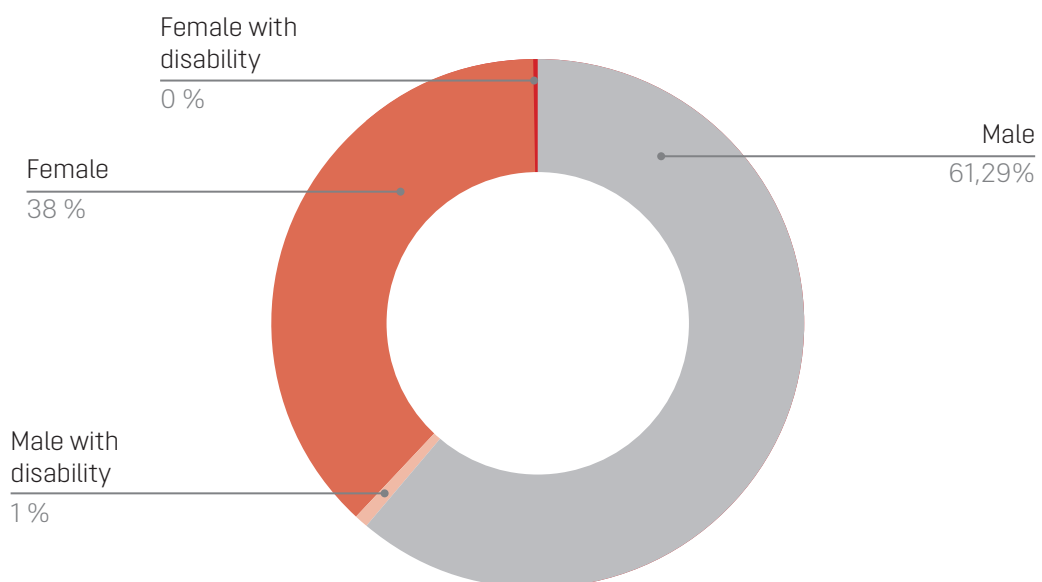
Only 2 organizations select the members of the executive body through open recruitment, that is, by public call based on qualifications and competencies rather than being appointed, whereas 6 organizations select them partially in this manner. Public calls are most often shared on the websites of the organizations. Several sports organizations emphasized that the selection is made within the Assembly, upon the proposal of the president of the federation.

Chart 5. Recruitment of members of the executive body who are selected through open recruitment



The gender distribution among full-time employees in the organization again indicates a male dominance, but also a significantly low representation of persons with disabilities. Hence, only 1% of employees are men with disabilities and there are no women with disabilities, compared to non-disabled men who comprise 61% and women by 38% (Chart 6).

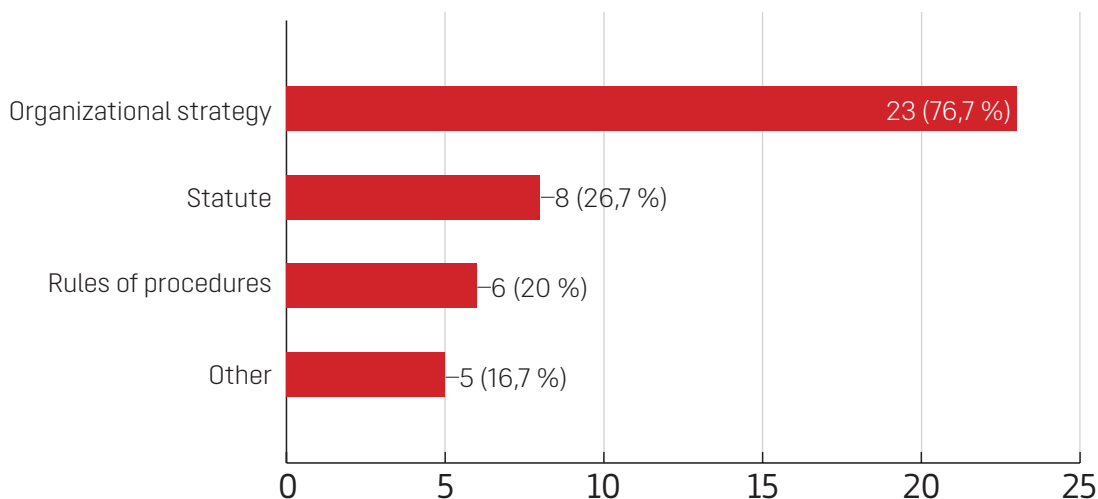
Chart 6. Employees in the organization



2.2. Equality policies

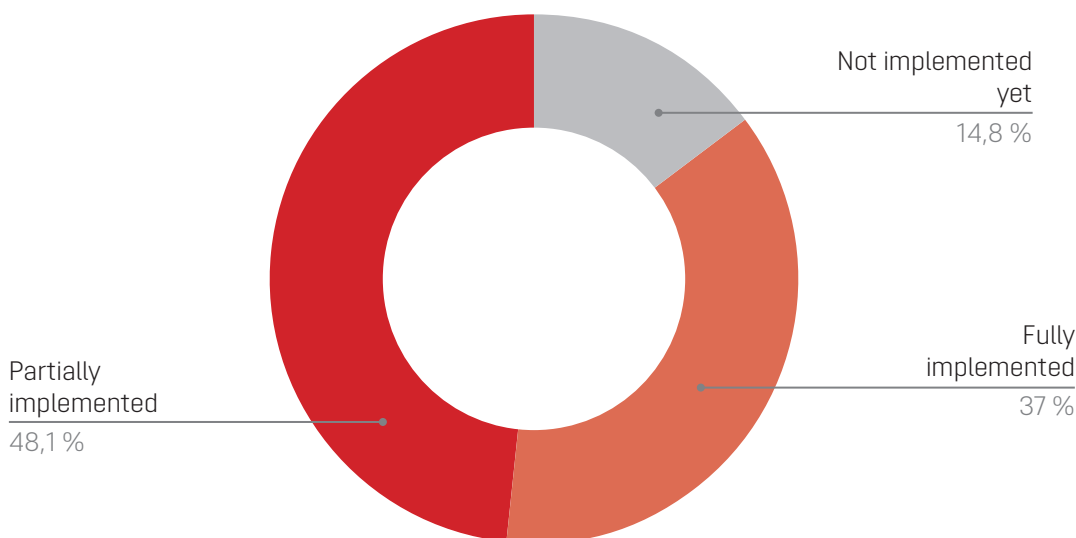
In the majority of organizations (76.7%), gender equality is part of the organization’s strategy. Gender equality is represented in the statutes of 8 organizations (26.7%) and in the rules of procedure of 6 organizations (20%).

Chart 7. Gender equality as part of the organization’s legal documents



The statute of the majority of organizations (48.1%) in which gender equality is an integral part of the organization’s policies is only partially implemented, and in 14.8% of them it has not yet been implemented (Chart 8). One of the organizations stated that it has a Rulebook on Gender Equality.

Chart 8. Status of gender equality implementation



One of the federations stated that, despite supporting gender equality, the election of women to the bodies depends on the number of women that the local bodies, that is, the federation's member clubs, would send.

In order to improve gender equality, the federation plans *"to insert a gender equality clause in the amendments to the statute as soon as possible, but it is not limited or prevented even now. Hypothetically, all members of the Assembly could be women, if we receive such a list."*⁵⁸

Regarding the disability-related policies, half of the organizations (53.3%) indicated that they are an integral part of the organization's policies, half of which are only partially implemented, whereas 31.3% have not been implemented yet (Charts 9 and 10).

Chart 9. Is disability an integral part of the organization's policies?

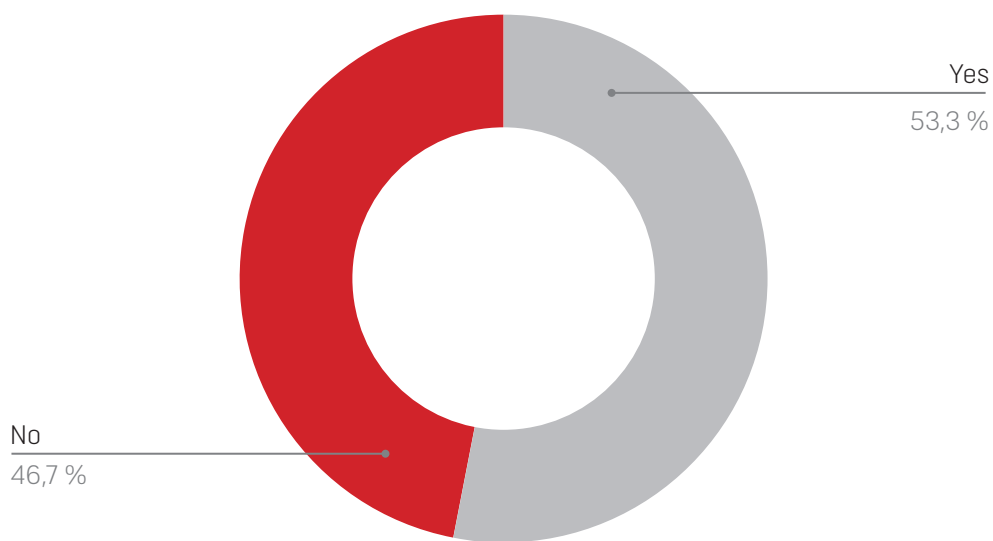
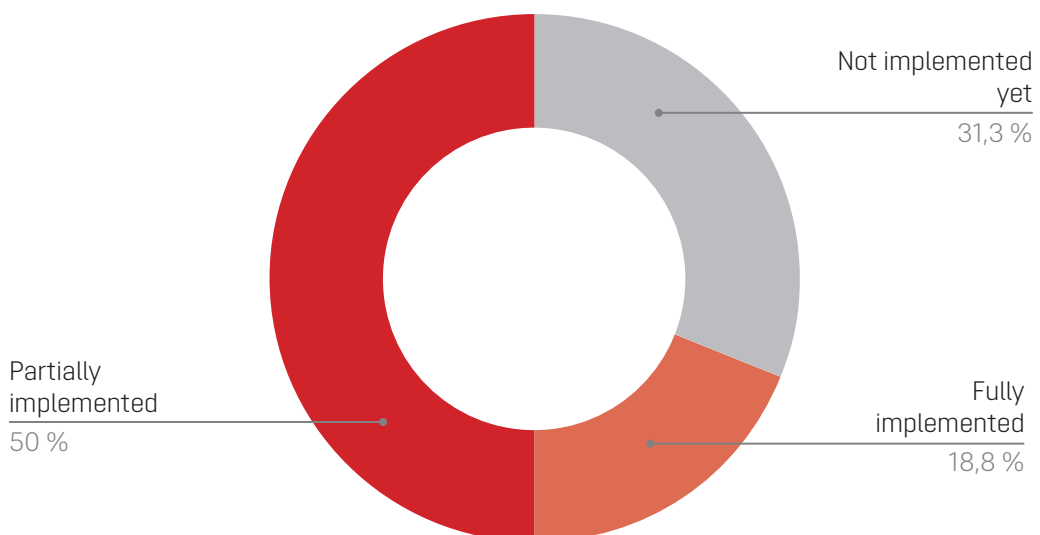


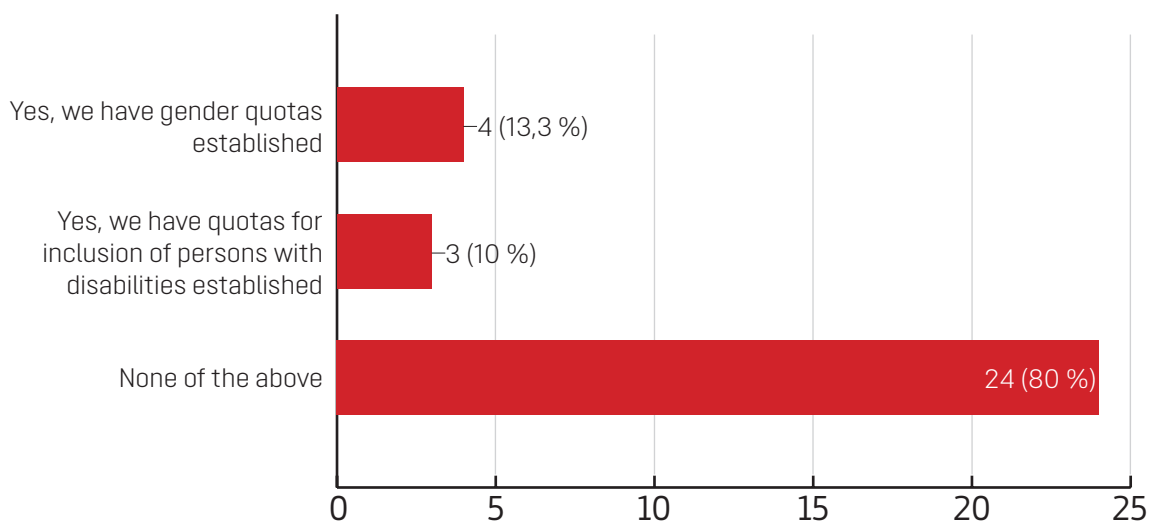
Chart 10. Status of disability implementation



58 Statement in the questionnaire.

Only 4 organizations (13.3%) responded that they have gender quotas established in the organization's statute that relate to the executive board and/or decision-making positions. Slightly fewer, that is, 3 organizations (10%) have quotas for the inclusion of persons with disabilities (Chart 11).

Chart 11. So-called gender quotas and diversity (disability) inclusion quotas established in the organization's statute



One of the 24 organizations that have no quotas established stated that it believes that quotas impose a lack of quality and that *"it is necessary to work on obtaining quality professional staff who will take their place in the organization, organs and bodies. To this end, we encourage professional training in terms of staff of referees and coaches."*⁵⁹ Additionally, one of the federations believes that only persons with physical disabilities can be participants in competitions, that is, there are no competitions for persons with intellectual disabilities, even on the world level, due to the high risk. The same organization stated that it includes people with disabilities as volunteers at events.

However, some of the interviewed experts are aware of the need for more specific measures aimed at increasing women's participation in sport, including the introduction of gender quotas as well.

*"Quotas need to be introduced through the Law on Sport, otherwise there will be no change for the next thousand years. We have to start somewhere."*⁶⁰

Some experts believe that a gender mainstreaming in sport already exists, but the problem is that *"everything is only on paper."* *"The strategies, laws, policies must be revised, adequate measures and penalties for non-compliance should be envisaged. There are no statistical data on women in sport, thus we do not have evidence-based policies, and implementation is non-existent. It is also problematic that the Law on Sport is being drafted behind closed doors"*⁶¹

It is positive that some of the federations stated that *"we are trying to work in the field of gender equality, in terms of organizing the number of events for men and women, including coaches in the*

⁵⁹ Statement in the questionnaire.

⁶⁰ Statement in an expert interview.

⁶¹ Statement in an expert interview.

work of the federation considering gender equality (as much as the available number allows), as well as educating female referees, in order to equalize the involvement of women in the sports organization.”⁶²

The respondents with disabilities indicated, on the other hand, that the MPC *“has never organized training on gender equality related to disability, non-discrimination for employees and members.”⁶³* Additionally, the respondents indicated that at the MPC level *“there is no mechanism, procedure for ensuring reasonable accommodation.”*

The analysis indicates that even though many organizations include the concept of gender equality in their strategies, the implementation is limited and often there is only partial implementation. There are attempts to improve this situation, including planned changes in statutes and increased awareness of the need for quotas, but concrete actions and visible results are still insufficient. The policies related to disability, though included in some organizations, are not yet fully implemented. The quotas for gender equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities are limited, and awareness of their importance is largely on paper. Additionally, specific training and mechanisms that would ensure true inclusion and equality are lacking.

2.3. Barriers to women’s access to decision-making positions

Regarding the women’s access to decision-making positions in sport, some federations believe that the problem is that women as coaches and athletes are not interested in these positions.

“Here we have a problem of how to find women, and not whether they are jeopardized.”⁶⁴

However, most of the focus group participants, as well as the interviewed experts, indicated that a large number of women are interested, but constantly face barriers of various kinds that make it difficult for them to advance.

“Women do not have a feeling that they are welcome in sports organizations and therefore do not have the desire to stay and work in sports and build a career.”⁶⁵

“The biggest problem is that we do not have female athletes over the age of 16, they usually work and study and give up sports.”⁶⁶

The views of the respondents with disabilities are that *“women with disabilities do not have access to professional development training at the national or international level.”⁶⁷*

According to the focus group participants, public announcements for leadership positions in sports organizations are not publicly available and most often one finds out internally who has been placed in the position, which prevents women from applying for these positions at all. On the other hand, respondents with disabilities indicated that public announcements are not in accessible formats.

Even though some women in sport primarily claim that they have not faced any kind of discrimination in sport, in the course of the conversations it was obvious that almost all of them have been in

⁶² Statement in the questionnaire.

⁶³ Statement in an interview with athletes with a disability.

⁶⁴ Statement in the questionnaire.

⁶⁵ Statement in an expert interview.

⁶⁶ Statement in an expert interview.

⁶⁷ Statement in an interview with an athlete with a disability.

a situation where they have been discriminated against, but also when other women in sport have been discriminated against at the expense of men.

“Women in handball were highly valued due to the great success of Kometal, but despite the fact that currently the achievements of the men’s and women’s national teams are equal, men receive more money.”⁶⁸

There is also gender insensitivity or lack of recognition of the problems faced by women in the sports sector, in particular regarding the risk factors that limit their development and career building. The disproportionate division of responsibilities around the family and home creates serious obstacles for women, but these barriers are sometimes not recognized even by women themselves, who may not fully understand them as factors that limit their opportunities for professional advancement.

“There is no gender-based discrimination, but women do not have enough time to devote to work in sports due to lack of free time and responsibilities at home.”⁶⁹

Discrimination against women in sport, according to some of the statements of various respondents who were included in this research, begins much earlier, during childhood, when access to sport for girls is already made difficult.

“Women have been discriminated against from the very beginning in terms of access to sport – boys have access to a ball, a field, etc. from a very young age.”⁷⁰

“Despite the fact that there used to be teams in both the male and female leagues, in the Municipality of Centar there is a school league that only includes males and there are no female sports at all, except for volleyball. The municipality leaves it up to the teachers to decide which team to include based on the budget they have available.”⁷¹

Moreover, this situation continues with age and is further reflected in the practice of professional sports.

“Regarding the female or male competitors, in any sport, there is a serious problem in terms of basic things – halls, treatment, female coaches, working and training conditions, finances, as the main reason for women giving up sports from an early age.”⁷²

According to the respondents in the research, discriminatory practices are present in all segments of women’s sports, which is particularly visible in the amount of compensation they receive for their work, including not only female athletes, but also coaches and referees.

“There is a large discrepancy in salaries at all levels (female athletes, female referees...). Although there is an increasing participation of women, the difference in monetary compensation is still large.”⁷³

“There is a different compensation for officiating a male or female competition. For officiating a female competition, about 10% of the compensation for officiating a male competition is taken. Additionally, female referees are always the last option for delegating a match.”⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Statement of a focus group participant.

⁶⁹ Statement of a focus group participant.

⁷⁰ Statement in an expert interview.

⁷¹ Statement of a focus group participant.

⁷² Statement in an expert interview.

⁷³ Statement of a focus group participant.

⁷⁴ Statement of a focus group participant.

Respondents with disabilities did not provide any further explanations for the discrimination, but indicated that *“there have been cases of discrimination in the MPC, here we are talking about many of them.”*⁷⁵

It is the very financial aspect as one of the key aspects emphasized by almost all participants in the research, that is, the financial support that female athletes (do not) receive, as opposed to their male peers.

*“It is obvious that for various reasons female athletes are bypassed even when they achieve much better results. The problem is that the federations send the lists, they decide who will be on the list.”*⁷⁶

*“There is an unclear and non-transparent distribution of financial resources. There is still a reasoning present that male clubs will bring more votes and have more influence. The logic of the federations is less money in women’s sports, but how will we get female athletes without financial support.”*⁷⁷

One of the barriers faced by women in sport is the concentration of decision-making power in male figures in sport. Very often, as is often the practice in politics, women are put in positions in order to fill a certain quota, or symbolically, but without having a substantive voice.

*“Even when they (women) are given space to get involved in certain organizations or commissions, their voices are very rarely heard. They are positioned only to fill a certain number, but without being able to make changes. The final word is with the directors and presidents, who are most often men.”*⁷⁸

*“There are many gender stereotypes, in particular that sport and leadership positions are reserved for men, while additionally the problem is that women are not doing networking, they do not encourage each other, they still do not have the awareness that they need to come together and fight for change together.”*⁷⁹

The respondents with disabilities indicated that women with disabilities *“are not involved in the development of the MPC programs/initiatives nor in other initiatives supported by the Ministry of Sports.”*⁸⁰

Regarding the mutual support for change, some of the female experts believe that there is a low level of solidarity among women in sport, which is a result of the insufficient awareness of support, but also the constant disappointment due to the inability to make changes.

*“There is a minimum of female solidarity that stems from the patriarchal culture that is dominant in our country. Girls do not have positive female role models in leadership positions to connect with and mainly connect with male role models of leadership which is very individual. This is dominant in our country and you can see it in sports institutions and organizations, even in photos from important events where you mostly see only men, which immediately puts you in an inferior position.”*⁸¹

*“There are even women who are not sensitive, who have a total distrust of institutions, even of those in which they themselves are employed.”*⁸²

Several of the interviewees pointed to the high level of non-cooperation among different sports organizations and institutions, which prevents the introduction of substantial changes in the sports sector, as well as the creation of evidence-based policies.

⁷⁵ Statement in an interview with a person with a disability.

⁷⁶ Statement of a focus group participant.

⁷⁷ Statement in an expert interview.

⁷⁸ Statement in an expert interview.

⁷⁹ Statement in an expert interview.

⁸⁰ Statement of a female respondent with a disability.

⁸¹ Statement in an expert interview.

⁸² Statement in an expert interview.

"We constantly hear about conflicts and impatience and non-cooperation of sports institutions and federations, as well as political turmoil. It is difficult to do research and collect data because we live a small society and everyone works for themselves, there is non-cooperation even among women in those institutions."⁸³

Regarding the future strategies that will enable positive changes and promotion of policies and practices of equality in sport, the participants pointed to the need for interventions at several different levels.

"We are facing systemic discrimination and limited opportunities for women to advance in our country. Gender (in)equality in sport is an institutional problem and therefore we need institutional changes."⁸⁴

"We need a more aggressive approach. Collecting statistics and raising awareness among people, more training, targeting groups that need to be worked with."⁸⁵

"I see the solution in the financial empowerment of women."⁸⁶

Some pointed to the need to raise awareness at the individual level.

"We must raise awareness about the importance of including women, in particular in leadership positions, through developing essential skills, and not having women leaders with masculine traits."⁸⁷

Some of the respondents in the research emphasized the role of the media, taking into account that the support that women's clubs and female athletes will receive largely depends on media coverage.

"The media in which gender equality is completely absent play a major role, more sensitivity is needed."⁸⁸

2.4. Intersectional discrimination in the sports sector

"We have disappointing numbers in view of helping top athletes, and even less regarding women with disabilities."⁸⁹

The respondents with disabilities indicated that sports halls in the country *"are inaccessible to all persons with disabilities, in particular for the inclusion of athletes with disabilities as athletes. In addition to physical inaccessibility, sports fields are not accessible to persons with sensory disabilities (regarding persons with low vision, as well as persons with impaired vision)."⁹⁰*

Based on the insight into the websites of the OCNM⁹¹ and the MPC⁹² and the Ministry of Sports⁹³, it may be noted that they do not provide information in accessible formats.

⁸³ Statement in an expert interview.

⁸⁴ Statement in an expert interview.

⁸⁵ Statement of a focus group participant.

⁸⁶ Statement in an expert interview.

⁸⁷ Statement in an expert interview.

⁸⁸ Statement of a focus group participant.

⁸⁹ Statement in an expert interview.

⁹⁰ Statement of a female respondent with a disability.

⁹¹ Olympic Committee website <https://mok.org.mk/>.

⁹² Paralympic Committee website <https://mok.org.mk/>.

⁹³ Ministry of Sports website <https://ams.gov.mk/mk/home>.



3. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Conclusions

The research on gender representation in national sports organizations reveals significant barriers and risk factors for women, in particular in decision-making positions and in the implementation of gender equality policies. The data show a drastic imbalance in gender representation in these positions, which indicates a systemic exclusion of women from key decisions in sport. This situation negatively affects the further development of sport at the recreational and professional levels, as well as the new generations of girls who want to get involved in sporting activities.

Even though 76.7% of organizations declare gender equality integration into their strategies, the implementation is significantly limited. More than half of these policies are partially implemented or not implemented at all, which indicates the need for greater commitment to the implementation of these policies and creation of concrete measures to improve gender equality.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that there is a perception of a lack of interest among women to apply for decision-making positions in the sports sector. This sector is often seen as a reserved and male-dominated field, which further discourages women from taking part in these roles.

One of the structural challenges is the limited access to information about vacant positions for work engagement within organizations. Often, these positions are not publicly available or adequately promoted, resulting in insufficient outreach to a large number of women. Based on the analysis of the websites of sports organizations, very few organizations have an accessible website, which further complicates access to information.

An additional barrier is that women often have responsibilities for family and home care, which significantly limits their ability to devote time to a career in sport. This situation creates another risk factor since women have fewer resources and time to develop their careers, which makes their ambitions and opportunities difficult for advancement in sports organizations.

The research results emphasize the discrimination against women with disabilities, who are in an even more disadvantaged situation, with limited access to resources and opportunities for development. Namely, there is almost no data available on women with disabilities in the sports sector, which indicates their low participation.

A lack of data on women's sports has been identified. Often, the data collected by sports organizations is not publicly available, is not processed in accessible formats and, more importantly, is not segregated based on sex and/or gender. It means that there is no clear picture of how resources are allocated, how female athletes are supported or what their participation is compared to male athletes.

The lack of research on this topic further complicates the creation of effective policies and measures to promote gender equality in sport. Without systematic research on issues such as funding of women's sport, access to sports infrastructure, and opportunities for professional development, women remain on the margins. This reduces the visibility of women's sport, limits the chances of improving conditions for female athletes, and prevents the development of comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

The lack of sex- and/or gender-disaggregated data is also present at the institutional level. Even though the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men and the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination stipulate the obligation to maintain and submit gender-disaggregated data to the State Statistical Office, this obligation is often not implemented in practice. The lack of such data makes it difficult to perceive the real situation and create effective policies for the promotion of gender equality, in particular in sport.

In order to achieve gender equality in sport and ensure equal gender representation in decision-making positions, it is necessary to implement systemic measures and strategies. These measures should guarantee that women, including those with disabilities, have equal opportunities for participation and advancement.

There is a need for specific activities that will focus on addressing the structural procedures and cultural barriers that reinforce the gender gap. In parallel, it is important to promote professional development programs in sport, creating favorable conditions for the inclusion and advancement of women in all spheres of the sports sector.

3.2. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of the research findings, there are recommendations developed with the purpose of creating systemic solutions that will improve the status of gender equality and inclusion in sport. They are divided into three categories: general recommendations, recommendations to policymakers, and recommendations to national sports organizations, in order to ensure targeted action and effective implementation.

General Recommendations

- Conduct research and analyses on gender (in)equality in sport and propose effective measures to improve inclusion and representation.
- Raise public awareness of the importance of gender equality and inclusion through campaigns and educational programs.
- Support the creation of an inclusive sports environment by recognizing and eliminating discriminatory practices, with an emphasis on ensuring equal opportunities for all.
- Encourage cooperation with local communities and relevant organizations to develop and promote inclusive sports programs and activities.

Recommendations for institutions in charge in the field of sport

- Introduce a mandatory requirement for state funding of national sports federations, with a minimum of 40% gender representation in decision-making positions in the federations' structures.
- Adapt laws and bylaws in the field of sport towards greater gender- and disability-based sensitivity and start alignment with international standards for non-discrimination and equality.
- Ensure capacity building of National Sports Federations in order to familiarize them with the development and integration of both gender-based and disability-based responsible policies and to be prepared to respond to the mandatory requirement for state funding.
- Establish a system for collecting, analyzing and publicly publishing intersectionally disaggregated and accessible data, in order to transparently monitor the support and development of women's sports.
- Improve communication between the Central Registry of North Macedonia and the Ministry of Sports, in order to ensure timely and efficient exchange of information on registration and changes within the legal entities that perform sports activities.
- Initiate and support existing tax incentives for projects that promote gender equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities in sport, developed by experts in this field.
- Support activities for the development of women's sports and sports disciplines that are specific to persons with disabilities, through budget allocations and financial support.
- Provide equal support in awarding state awards for outstanding athletes and sports workers, in both male and female categories, including disability.
- Establish indicators for monitoring progress in inclusive equality in sports programs.
- Encourage cooperation with civil society organizations working on gender equality and disability in sport.
- Provide funds for campaigns that will raise awareness and understanding of the rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities in sport.

Recommendations for national sports organizations

- Aim for at least 30% of leadership roles (chef de mission, deputy chef de mission, team leaders) to be filled by women in delegations sent to international sporting events.
- Ensure gender representation in the General Assembly by mandating the inclusion of both a female and a male representative. This approach ensures a more inclusive decision-making environment and strengthens women's participation in governance.
- Adopt and implement gender equality and disability policies, including gender quotas in decision-making bodies.
- Establish gender equality and inclusion commissions or designate individuals in charge of these issues.
- Promote principles of good governance, including limiting a maximum of two terms in office and encouraging gender rotation for key positions elected (that is, president, financial director, secretary).

- Promote, both actively and publicly, available positions in sports structures through various channels and accessible formats, in order to reach out a greater number of women, while using gender-sensitive language in advertisements.
- Develop training, mentoring and leadership programs for women, in particular following their sports careers, with the aim of greater personal and professional development and retention of women in the sports sector.
- Organize gender sensitizing training for all members of the organization, including topics such as respecting gender equality, diversity and inclusive leadership, as well as identifying the obstacles faced by women with and without disabilities.
- Ensure the full participation of women with and without disabilities in the drafting of all documents relevant to the development of the organization, as well as in creating the budget.
- Promote flexible working arrangements for women in the sports sector, including flexible working hours and/or working from home, which will allow for a greater balance between private and professional life.
- Establish internal policies in sports organizations that will actively promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all areas of the organization, including the recruitment of staff, coaches, referees, etc.
- Develop mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating progress in the inclusion of persons with disabilities, with clear performance indicators and regular reporting in regular sports activities and in sports federations of persons with disabilities.
- Introduce programs to support sports clubs for the inclusion of people with disabilities, including equipment and infrastructure.
- Ensure accessibility of all sports activities and programs for people with disabilities, by developing new disciplines and adapted formats.



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ANNEXES

Annex 1. Questionnaire on gender representation in national sports federations, the OCNM and MPC _____

Questionnaire on the representation of women in the leadership structures of national Olympic, Paralympic and sports institutions

This research is being conducted within the project “Fair Play: Supporting Gender Equality in Sports Policies” and will serve to collect data on the representation of women in decision-making positions in national sports federations.

The main objective of the project is to advance gender equality in the sports sector and it includes capacity building of national federations, as well as their sub-granting in order to implement the recommendations for overcoming systemic gender-based barriers and greater gender representation of women in sports and the sports system, with special reference to women with disabilities.

The questionnaire consists of 20 questions and sub-questions and will take you 5-10 minutes to complete. We thank you in advance for your time.

All data collected through this questionnaire will be treated with a high level of confidentiality. The data will be used exclusively for the purposes of this research.

If you have any questions regarding filling out the questionnaire, please contact: mitevaska@sportsolutions.mk

*decision-making positions in national federations refer to president, general secretary or executive director, voting members of the general assembly, voting members of the governing boards, presidents of commissions.

*persons with disabilities are persons with long-term physical, sensory, intellectual and psychosocial impairments which in interaction with various social barriers may prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Question 1.

Please provide the name of your Olympic/sports organization.

Question 2.

Please indicate the gender of the president of the national sports federation/committee.

- Male
- Female

Question 3.

Please indicate the gender of the general secretary of the national sports federation/committee (in further questions the term "organization" will be used).

- Male
- Female

Question 4.

Please indicate the number of members of the organization's General Assembly who are men.

4.1. Please indicate the number of members of the organization's General Assembly who are men with disabilities.

Question 5.

Please indicate the number of members of the organization's General Assembly who are women.

5.1. Please indicate the number of members of the organization's General Assembly who are women with disabilities.

Question 6.

Please indicate the number of members of the executive body (which may be known as the executive committee, governing board or by another name) of the organization who are men.

6.1. Please indicate the number of members of the executive body of the organization who are men with disabilities.

Question 7.

Please indicate the number of members of the organization's executive body who are women.

7.1. Please indicate the number of members of the organization's executive body who are women with disabilities.

Question 8.

Does the organization have a term limit for the position of a president?

- Yes
- No

8.1. If the answer is YES, please indicate the maximum number of terms the president can serve and the length of each term.

Number of terms _____

Length of a term _____

Question 9.

Is there an age limit for the position of a president?

- Yes
- No

9.1. If the answer is YES, please indicate the age limit of the president.

Question 10.

Does the organization have a term limit for the position of a general secretary?

- Yes
- No

10.1. If the answer is YES, please indicate the maximum number of terms of the general secretary and the length of each term.

Number of terms _____

Length of a term _____

Question 11.

Is there an age limit for the position of a general secretary?

- Yes
- No

11.1. If the answer is YES, please indicate the age limit of the general secretary.

Question 12.

Does the organization have term limits for all positions in the executive body?

- Yes
- No

12.1. If the answer is YES, please indicate the maximum number of terms and the length of each term for members of the executive body.

Number of terms _____

Length of a term _____

Question 13.

Does the organization have an age limit for members of the executive body?

- Yes
- No

13.1. If the answer is YES, please indicate the age limit for positions in the executive body.

Question 14.

Are some members of the executive body selected through open recruitment (public call) based on qualifications and competencies rather than being appointed?

- Yes
- No
- Partially

14.1. If the answer is YES or PARTIALLY, please indicate how the public call is being announced (check all relevant responses).

- Federation website
- Federation social media
- Print media
- Other

14.2. If the answer is OTHER, please indicate the methods by which the public call is announced.

Question 15.

Please indicate how many full-time employees in the organization are male (Please do not include staff who only assist you on certain occasions, such as organizing certain events).

15.1. Please indicate how many full-time employees in the organization are men with disabilities

Question 16.

Please indicate how many full-time employees in the organization are women (Please do not include staff who only assist you on certain occasions, such as organizing certain events).

16.1. Please indicate how many full-time employees in the organization are women with disabilities.

Question 17.

Is gender equality an integral part of your legal documents (check all relevant responses)?

- Organizational strategy
- Statute
- Rules of procedure
- Other

17.1. If the answer is OTHER, please indicate.

17.2. If gender equality is an integral part of the organization's policies, what is the status of its implementation?

- Fully implemented
- Partially implemented
- Not implemented yet

Question 18.

Is disability an integral part of the organization's policies?

- Yes
- No

18.1. If the answer is YES, what is the status of its implementation?

- Fully implemented
- Partially implemented
- Not implemented yet

19. Do you have gender and diversity (disability) quotas established in the organization's statutes that apply to the executive board and/or decision-making positions?

- Yes, we have gender quotas established
- Yes, we have quotas for inclusion of persons with disabilities established
- None of the above

20. Please indicate if you have any additional comments or data regarding the research topic you would like to share.

Annex 2. Questionnaire for expert interviews

Questionnaire for expert interviews

1. What is your opinion/impression about the situation of gender equality in sport in Macedonia, that is, the position of women and women with disabilities in sport, as athletes, but also in decision-making positions? What is the situation in sports clubs, sports federations, other sports institutions?
2. In your opinion, is there gender sensitivity and sensitivity to diversity within sports organizations and institutions? Where do you see this? How, in your opinion, could the sensitivity of sports organizations and institutions be improved in terms of their greater awareness and sensitivity to diversity issues?
3. Do you think that there is interest among women in advancing to leadership positions in sports organizations and institutions? In your opinion, what barriers do women and women with disabilities face when advancing to leadership positions? How do you think they could be overcome?
4. Do you think that existing laws and policies adequately address the issue of gender inclusion and equality and inclusion in terms of a disability perspective? If not, what do you think would contribute to improving the legal regulation in this regard?
5. Do you think that female athletes and women's sports clubs in Macedonia have adequate support, in particular financial, for engaging in sports and advancing? In your opinion, are the criteria for receiving support discriminatory against women and women with disabilities and women's sports? If so, what does the unequal treatment consist of?
6. Have you ever directly encountered or know of a case of any type of gender discrimination and/or discrimination on the grounds of disability in sport? How do you think gender discrimination and discrimination on the grounds of disability in sport could be overcome?

Annex 3. Sports organizations contacted via email regarding the questionnaire

1. Football Federation of Macedonia
2. Handball Federation of Macedonia
3. Basketball Federation of Macedonia
4. Macedonian Volleyball Federation
5. Athletic Federation of Macedonia
6. National Boxing Federation
7. Wrestling Federation of North Macedonia
8. Macedonian Canoe Federation
9. National Swimming Federation of North Macedonia
10. Ski Federation of North Macedonia
11. Macedonian Sports Shooting Federation
12. Macedonian Archery Federation

13. Tennis Federation of Macedonia
14. Macedonian Badminton Federation
15. Table Tennis Federation of Macedonia
16. National Federation for Sports and Recreation of the Disabled of North Macedonia - Paralympic Committee
17. Olympic Committee of North Macedonia
18. Judo Federation of Macedonia
19. Cycling Federation of Macedonia
20. Macedonian Taekwondo Federation
21. Macedonian Fencing Federation
22. Rowing Federation of Macedonia
23. Equestrian Sports Federation of Macedonia
24. Sailing Federation of Macedonia
25. Gymnastics Federation of Macedonia
26. Sambo Federation
27. Triathlon Federation of North Macedonia
28. Karate Federation of Macedonia
29. Macedonian Traditional Karate Federation
30. Kickboxing Maitai Federation of Macedonia
31. Bowling Federation of North Macedonia
32. Automobile Federation of North Macedonia
33. Macedonian Sport Climbing Federation
34. Macedonian Alpine Climbing Federation
35. Motorcycle Federation of Macedonia
36. Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation of Macedonia
37. Macedonian Dance Sport Federation
38. Air Sports Federation of Macedonia
39. Aikido Federation of Macedonia
40. Kendo Iaido Federation of Macedonia
41. Mountaineering Federation of Macedonia
42. National Orienteering Federation
43. School Sports Federation of Macedonia
44. Union of Sports Federations of Macedonia
45. University Sport Federation of Macedonia
46. National Federation of Sport for All of North Macedonia
47. National Sports Federation of the Blind of Macedonia
48. Macedonian Weightlifting Federation
49. Teqball Federation of North Macedonia
50. Golf Federation of Macedonia
51. Skating Federation of North Macedonia
52. Modern Pentathlon Association of North Macedonia

53. Special Olympics Association - Macedonia Skopje
54. Biathlon Federation of North Macedonia
55. MKD Skate
56. Sports and Recreation Association of the Disabled of the City of Skopje
57. Sports and Recreation Association of the Disabled of Bitola
58. Sports and Recreation Association of the Disabled of Veles
59. Sports and Recreation Association of the Disabled of Strumica
60. Sports and Recreation Association of the Disabled of Tetovo

