



Handbook of good practices, lessons learned, guidelines

Work package 2 – **Deliverable 2.2**
Coordinated by **Symplexis**

SISTERS



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Summary

The following Handbook is a product of the SISTERS project. The Handbook uses composite methodologies such as desk research, interviews and focus groups in the partner countries. The content explores intersectional discrimination against women and LGBTQIA+ athletes, as well as the stereotypes that exist based on gender. Systemic barriers in the areas of leadership, visibility, funding are reinforced by gender-based violence and SOGIESC-based discrimination experienced by women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, creating an environment with few opportunities. These SOGIESC-based discriminations are also found at the institutional level, since institutional shortcomings such as weak implementation of anti-discrimination laws, poor training of coaches, and limited reporting mechanisms perpetuate the problems, highlighting the need for trauma-informed, community-driven, and educational interventions to challenge norms and promote inclusion.

The Handbook also includes effective good practices that have been implemented in partner countries and share the principles of safe spaces, athlete-led leadership, and community collaboration. In addition, there are several recommendations focusing on enhancing visibility, cross-sector partnerships, and education-based approaches. At the same time, there are some guidance for coaches and individuals involved in sports that will help to enhance the participation of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals in sports but also to better shape the policies that concern these individuals. Policies such as creating national inclusion strategies and mandatory anti-discrimination codes in all sports federations and/or to link funding to equity performance and develop gender-neutral facilities are small steps that will have an immediate impact on women's and LGBTQIA+ people's access to sport.

1. Introduction

The Handbook

The Handbook of good practices, lessons learned, guidelines is an educational material that aims to enhance understanding around gender and LGBTQIA+ in sports. The handbook will provide:

- An international and local overview of the status and trends with regards to gender and LGBTQIA+'s inequitable access to sport through an intersectional lens.
- Guidelines and practical tools on how to tackle the phenomenon with concrete actions.

The handbook will summarise interviews and ideas collected at local level, good practices, guidelines for trainers, managers of sports clubs, educators and families, on the topics of gender and SOGIESC-based discrimination and bias in sport through an intersectional lens. This output provides a realistic picture of the major challenges found among different sports disciplines, besides containing guidelines and practical tools to tackle gender and SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics)-based discrimination and violence in sport.

In a nutshell, the handbook will stress the main needs and share some successful initiatives which have sought to address the aforementioned challenges. The handbook will also allow partners to identify the sports disciplines struggling the most to tackle negative episodes, and to select them in order to focus the project action (and especially the local tournaments) on sports where gender and LGBTQIA+ equity appears to be more challenging. The handbook will be freely available on the project's website.

SISTERS Project

SISTERS aims to promote women's and the LGBTQIA+ community's full inclusion in sports by advancing equity through an intersectional approach. For the sake of this project, the concept of Women is understood based on a non-binary approach to gender identity and hence refers to every person who identifies as a woman. Thanks to an intersectional approach, SISTERS will look at the interplay between different identity attributes including SOGIESC – Sexual Orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics -, national origin, immigrant status, cultural and socio-economic background, ability and/or disability, religion etc., that makes up the unique experience of individual women and members of the LGBTQIA+ community in their

opportunity or lack thereof, to practice sport in an environment free of discrimination and violence. The project has been conceived to:

- Understand trends, facts, and reasons behind women's and the LGBTQIA+ community's inequitable access to sport through an intersectional lens.
- Raise capacities of grassroots sport organisations, trainers and players through gender-sensitive and intersectionality-informed methods to (1) advance equity in sport and to (2) tackle episodes of discrimination and violence on grounds of gender and SOGIESC.
- Raise awareness among sport professionals, players, organisations and the wider society of the detrimental effects of intersecting forms of discrimination and violence on women's and the LGBTQIA+ community's full participation in sports.

6 European organisations will deploy a 30-month workplan divided into 4 parts: (1) research and analysis activities to understand women and the LGBTQIA+ community's experience in sporting environment and gather best practices for equitable access to sport; (2) organisation of a training program for sport professionals and young players; (3) innovative sports tournaments; (4) involvement of policymakers and stakeholders to sustain the project outcomes.

Methodology

The methodological approach adopted for the purposes of the Handbook research activities at the local/national level was foreseen in three main means:

- a) Desk research;
- b) Identification of good practices;
- c) Field research included interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders.

The desk research aimed at offering the consortium deeper understanding and insights into the current situation and the policies of the partner countries' context on the conditions regarding gender and LGBTQIA+ equity in sports. Desk research was conducted into two phases:

First, a review of academic literature, policies and legal frameworks in order to understand the current situation in the countries. Sources included: Articles, research and reports conducted by National Authorities and Civil Society Organisations, as well as EU data. Second, a review on the state of the art of SOGIESC -based discrimination in sports, followed by the identification of key challenges and barriers. Moreover, research on existing good practices that foster SOGIESC inclusion in sports took place. This helps us to identify existing models that can be replicated in a way that can foster an inclusive environment and potentially breed further interventions that foster inclusiveness and accessibility in sports.

The findings of the desk research and the good practices were enriched by primary research conducted via focus groups and interviews with stakeholders, youngsters, adult educators, professionals working in the sports field and parents. More specifically:

- **92 interviews** were conducted in order to understand the conditions that are taking place in the partner countries sports reality, accompanied by
- **18 focus groups** that engaged **136 participants** in total with different backgrounds including women and LGBTQIA+ individuals that discussed and shared their perspective on the situation.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods and the diverse target groups allowed a more in-depth assessment of the situation and provided valuable information for the upcoming activities of the project. In this way, tangible recommendations were produced that can contribute to achieving gender and LGBTQIA+ equity and combating SOGIESC-based discrimination in sports.

2. Understanding Gender and LGBTQIA+ Discrimination in Sports

Intersectional challenges in sports

Nowadays, sports are not just a spectacle that the public watches for the purpose of entertainment. On the contrary, it advocates values such as teamwork, fair competition, solidarity as well as an educational perspective for the public. In addition, sports try to promote equity and combat discrimination in various areas, both social and athletic. Despite the efforts that are made, there are still several obstacles and challenges that need to be overcome in sports, especially regarding gender and LGBTQIA+ equity. Both desk and primary research highlighted challenges that women and LGBTQIA+ people often face when trying to be active in or join sports.

Challenges are often deeply rooted gender and SOGIESC-based stereotypes. Even today sports are divided according to gender lines. As an interviewee mentioned, it is common for coaches and teachers to divide the children in sports based on their gender, “football is for boys, volleyball is for girls”. Crossing these norms is often seen as unacceptable. Cisgender-heterosexual men are often seen as the ‘ideal athlete’ model, something that created norms that are unrealistic for women and LGBTQIA+ athletes, discouraging them from engaging in sports especially combat sports that are framed as inherently masculine. These stereotypes are reinforced by the parents or the surrounding environment that fear femininity's safety in male-dominated sports (SportsGVP, 2025). Therefore, families can either support or limit participation of non-male athletes based on their background. Similar stereotypes exist for the LGBTQIA+ community, where LGBTQIA+ individuals are considered “too sensitive” or “not competitive enough” to be part of a sport and trans athletes are excluded on grounds of “unfair advantage” (trans women) or “weakness” (trans men).

The stereotypes and barriers created by have a severe impact on women and LGBTQIA+ representation in leadership roles across clubs, federations, and national committees. These positions are mostly occupied by cis men, making the elevation of other genders to positions of power extremely difficult. In Italy specifically the research unveiled a persistent underrepresentation of women in sports leadership, even after quotas were introduced in 2011 to public boards, with residual influence in sports structures (Varriale, L., & Mazzeo, F., 2019). The male dominance also exists in the coaching positions where women have few opportunities to

engage as head-coach, as for the LGBTQIA+ individuals, things are even more difficult due to prejudices and stereotypes.

The LGBTQIA+ community faces continued hostilities and exclusion when it comes to their participation in sports. At the same time, homophobic and transphobic rhetoric is a constant phenomenon. This situation leads to exclusion through SOGIESC-based discrimination and a lack of safe spaces for women and LGBTQIA+ individuals. A further sign of exclusion is the frequent use of derogatory or discriminatory language. Most of the individuals taking part in the research indicated that they had personally heard such language, and most of them felt hurt or discriminated against. This has as result the creation of stigma and invisibility around sexual orientation topics since none is willing to risk exposing themselves and remain closeted out of fear. As was pointed out in the interviews, many LGBTQIA+ athletes due to stigmatisation are avoiding particular sports since they feel unsafe to participate in them.

Another challenge that female and LGBTQIA+ athletes face is the little to no media coverage (L. Tsene, 2025). Limited visibility of female athletes in media, it is often accompanied with weak institutional support for gender equity measures. The lack of visibility in all partner countries was affiliated with the lack or reduced role models, since there is no visibility of a challenge for women or LGBTQIA+ athletes to become role models like men who have the majority of the spotlight. The lack of spotlight limits their pathways for professional development as well as their access to sponsorship and fundings. Funding and resources are particularly difficult to secure for women's and LGBTQIA+ teams. Minimal access to resources and low media visibility creates a vicious cycle with many obstacles to participation and professional development in sports, exacerbating gender and LGBTQIA+ inequality in sports.

Moreover, institutional inertia and policy gaps hinder women and LGBTQIA+ participation in sports, since their protection framework is incomplete. Federations and sports clubs often do not prioritize gender inclusion in their activities, something that instead of tackling challenges is enhancing them. The research discovered lack of education and training of coaches, staff, teachers and decision-makers in sports that exacerbated inequalities. Furthermore, in most countries there are no official clear anti-discrimination or reporting mechanisms for LGBTQIA+ athletes, especially transgender and non-binary participants to report the discrimination that they are facing leaving them unprotected to challenges that create bullying, GBV or harassment.

The institutional resistance for change in the partner countries mirrors the broader societal reluctance that exists in matters of gender and LGBTQIA+ equity.

Common forms of discrimination and bias

Equity in sports is something that should be guaranteed for all the members of the society. Yet, despite legal frameworks that exist and growing awareness, discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation continues to limit opportunities and undermine the safety of athletes across Europe. The research identified that challenges in sports for women and LGBTQIA+ are several and can be identified in many sectors. Analysing the challenges faced by women and LGBTQIA+ individuals in sport highlights the urgent need for changes. In the European Gender Equality Index for 2024, many of the partner countries rank low with Greece lower in ranks 25th among the 27th EU countries. This is one place lower than the previous year, although Greece made some changes they were not enough (S. Psaropoulou, 2025). Despite the efforts that are taking place, and mostly related to harmonization with European directives, masculinity continues to be the leading factor in sports, both in the sport itself and in the highest decision-making bodies and key administrative positions.

The underrepresentation in leadership and decision-making process is among the main challenges that was identified through the research in all partner countries. Women and LGBTQIA+ individuals are notably underrepresented in top positions in federations, coaching and executive roles that can have an impact in the field. Various research, like the small-scale case study conducted by the University of Banja Luka on gender (in)equality in decision-making roles in sport, confirm the underrepresentation and identifies cultural and structural barriers to it (Ljubojević et al., 2024). Male-dominance in sports is undeniable and we can identify it in all countries. This reflects entrenched cultural perceptions of sport as a “male” domain, where women’s contributions are undervalued, despite their historical success in disciplines like gymnastics, volleyball, and athletics. Male dominance in sports governance perpetuates stereotypes and forces a systemic invisibility and fear of discrimination that particularly LGBTQIA+ athletes face.

Their lack of representation is reinforced by the absence of open role models in professional sports, which perpetuates silence and discourages participation at grassroots and competitive levels. Women and LGBTQIA+ athletes often are treated as invisible by the media that leads to a lack of recognition for their achievements. The limited visibility and recognition by the media and

the respective bodies active in the field of sports make it difficult for women and LGBTQIA+ to take part in sports (L. Tsene, 2025). As for LGBTQIA+ athletes, explicit data and statistical numbers are difficult to find in many countries. Undoubtedly, the absence of such data is indicative of the persistent lack of openness and engagement with this issue that continues to characterize the sports sector today (IGLYO, 2022).

The whole situation creates an unsafe environment where harassment and abuse has become a common incident. The impact of SOGIESC-based discrimination can be found in different levels of sport for women and LGBTQIA+ athletes. One of the most significant cases that brought to light the reality faced by many women in sports is the case of Olympic champion Sofia Bekatorou, who revealed in 2021 that she had been sexually abused in the past by a senior sport official. This was not an isolated case, since in the past years athletes from various sports, one by one, now having the support of public opinion, came forward with similar claims of abuse showcasing the gender-based discrimination they are facing through their career (H. Smith, 2021). Similar cases are also encountered by LGBTQIA+ individuals. Many LGBTQIA+ athletes and staff report concerns about safety, discrimination or exclusion in sporting environments (ILGA-Europe, 2025).

Additionally, discrimination is based on the culture surrounding sport, which makes it a predominantly male occupation, both by fans and athletes and administrators. This perspective often creates stereotypes, e.g. that women are not good athletes or that LGBTQIA+ people are not tough enough to cope with the demands and pressures of sport. Besides this, the reproduction of sexist stereotypes, transphobic and homophobic rhetoric by both athletes and stakeholders (especially in football) and the media is a frequent factor that discourages people from getting involved in sport (N. Papanikolaou, 2021).

Discrimination is exacerbated by the intersectionality of some social groups. Intersectional barriers disproportionately affect Roma women, people with disabilities, and individuals from rural areas. These groups often face compounded discrimination due to socioeconomic exclusion, limited access to facilities, and prevailing gender stereotypes that restrict participation opportunities and consider them unable to participate in sports. Additionally, women face inequalities in funding, careers, and support during maternity. In many cases, athletes are asked if they plan to have children, which is direct discrimination based on gender. For LGBTQIA+ individuals, realities of discrimination and exclusion — especially for trans and

intersex people and those who experience violence/hostility in competitive contexts — is a common case that targets them due to their appearance or gender (ILGA-World, 2024).

Discrimination is widespread and often due to persistent structural barriers, such as stereotypes, limited resources, and patchy adoption of inclusive rules. Several countries have taken some measures to help normalize gender and LGBTQIA+ equity laws and anti-discrimination legislations, but enforcement is inconsistent. The lack of training and awareness in gender and LGBTQIA+ equity by sport institutions, coaches and those involved in sport create a situation that reinforces discrimination.

National policies and legal frameworks addressing discrimination

In recent years, there have been several efforts to combat SOGIESC-based discrimination and promote gender and LGBTQIA+ equity in several European countries. Some have undertaken comprehensive reforms in order to combat discrimination and the violation of rights that women and LGBTQIA+ people often face, both institutionally and socially. In the handbook, we list some of the legislative changes that have taken place in partner countries in recent years. This will help users of the handbook to understand the legislative framework that prevails in some countries and to compare it with their own with the aim of strengthening the existing framework of protection and promoting gender and LGBTQIA+ equity.



Bosnia and Herzegovina has established several legal instruments aimed at combating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities. The Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, through Article II, guarantees the enjoyment of rights and freedoms without discrimination on any grounds, thus setting the highest-level commitment to equality. Building on this, the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination (2009, amended in 2016), (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2009/2016) prohibits discrimination on a wide range of grounds, explicitly including sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual characteristics. The law applies to all public and private spheres, and explicitly covers areas such as education, science and sport, as well as access to goods, services and public places. Similarly, the Law on Gender Equality (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2003) guarantees equal opportunities and treatment for all genders in both public and private life. The law specifically recognises the right

to equal participation in sport, banning sex-based discrimination and further extending protection to cover sexual orientation.

In addition to these general frameworks, the state-level Law on Sports of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2008/2009/2016) also contains explicit equality provisions. The Law stipulates that access to sport must be granted without discrimination based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity, and highlights equal participation of men and women as one of its key principles. It reinforces the ban on discrimination in line with the broader anti-discrimination and gender equality legislation, thereby embedding these standards within the sports sector specifically. Taken together, these instruments provide a relatively solid normative framework for the protection of LGBTQIA+ persons and the promotion of gender equality in sport. However, despite their existence, implementation remains inconsistent.

	<p>Bulgaria in the recent years have added it in their legislative system a few legislations that aim at combating discrimination. The most prominent are the Protection Against Discrimination Act that prohibits discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, and other factors. While comprehensive, its enforcement in sports remains weak, with very few cases formally reported or resolved in the sector. The Equality of Women and Men Act of 2016 is another initiative that promotes state-led gender equality actions. However, the Act is primarily implemented in education and employment, with limited targeted measures in sport governance or practice. Lastly the Constitution of Bulgaria affirms equal treatment before the law. In practice, this broad protection has not translated into sector-specific policies, leaving sports federations without concrete guidance on LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Despite these frameworks, enforcement in the sports sector is weak. Sport-specific guidance on gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusion is lacking, and initiatives often depend on EU-funded projects rather than sustained national policy.</p>
	<p>At the national policy level, Cyprus has adopted gender strategy frameworks and has begun to integrate gender equality objectives into broader policy instruments. The government's National Strategy for Gender Equality (and related action plans) provide a formal policy basis for addressing gender</p>

disparities across sectors, including sport, and call for concrete actions on representation, access and safety (Strategy document and action plan, 2023). Legal protections against discrimination on the grounds of sex and sexual orientation exist in Cyprus under general anti-discrimination law and related legislation; in recent years the government and ministries have moved towards developing more targeted measures and guidance for LGBTQIA+ inclusion. However, sport-specific regulatory frameworks (e.g., explicit anti-discrimination rules, reporting/complaints mechanisms embedded in federations and clubs) are still being developed and unevenly implemented (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, 2024).



In Greece legislations have been implemented with the aim of combating discrimination. The country is harmonizing with European Law by incorporating European directives into its legislative framework and by following EU Roadmaps such as the one against homophobia and discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. This does not mean that Greece has made great leaps in this area, yet legislations have taken place to address discrimination. Anti-racism Law criminalizes hate speech when it can lead to discrimination, hatred and violence against groups or individuals based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity. This law is a benchmark for combating discrimination in Greece. The Law 4443/2016 "strengthens the principle of equal treatment and combating discrimination in employment and occupation. Furthermore, it broadens the scope of application of the principle of equal treatment by introducing new areas considered to be grounds of discrimination, such as racial or ethnic origin, religious or other beliefs, sexual orientation, gender identity and characteristics etc." (Hellenic Labour Inspectorate, 2016). The Law 4491/2017 concerns the legal recognition of gender identity. In this way, individuals of the LGBTQIA+ community have the right to recognition of their gender identity as an element of their personality and the right to respect for their personality based on their gender characteristics (Article 1). The Law 4276/2020 sets up the reform of the institutional framework for candidacies in sports bodies with the aim of achieving balanced participation of men and women in the administrations of sports clubs (GNCHR, 2023). The Law 5089/2024 establishes the "Equality in civil marriage, amendment of the Civil

	<p>Code in other provisions" in Greek legislation that political (religious is still not feasible) marriage between same-sex couples is legal and feasible. Last, the National Strategy for LGBTQIA+ Equality constitutes a comprehensive plan having four pillars, primarily following the structure of the Commission's LGBTQIA+ Equality Strategy 2020-2025. The pillars it covers are equality in education, employment and other services (such as asylum and public sector support).</p> <p>These are the main national initiatives against discrimination. Despite the steps that have been taken, however, Greece is still a country with considerable discrimination regarding gender and LGBTQIA+ rights.</p>
	<p>Italy has several legislations that aim at combating discrimination. Italy's Constitution (Article 3) and Legislative Decree 198/2006 (Equal Opportunities Code) enshrine gender equality. In 2021, the Legislative Decree 39/2021 introduced safeguarding models and codes of conduct aimed at preventing discrimination, however the legislation lacks specific LGBTQIA+ provisions. A proposed bill extending protections (DDL Zan) was rejected by Parliament in 2021, so sports organizations continue to rely on internal guidelines for the prevention of discrimination in sport.</p>
	<p>In Portugal sports bodies like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and organizations such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe promote standards and guidelines for gender equality and inclusion, including governance recommendations, metrics and measures to support women athletes, and rules on diversity/inclusion. Many of these instruments are voluntary but highly influential. Gender equality, including equal access to opportunities and the eradication of discrimination, are core European Union (EU) values. Achieving these goals is a key priority for the European Commission, not only about sport policy, but in all policies in which it is active. The Portuguese Institute for Sport and Youth (IPDJ) and the Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality have programs and a "Gender Equality Seal in Sport" to recognize good practices. This includes guides/brochures and specific funding to increase female participation, support motherhood in high-performance athletes and train managers/coaches. National reports (and Council of Europe studies on Portugal) show progress but also gaps in representation on federation boards and in coaching positions.</p>

3. Good Practices for Promoting Inclusion

Examples of successful initiatives across different countries

The research in the partner countries identified several good practices which are promoting inclusion and equity in sports for women and LGBTQIA+ groups. The practices were selected according to:

- their relevance with the SISTERS project aims and objectives
- the impact that they have in promoting inclusion, gender and LGBTQIA+ equity
- their replicability and adoptability

In each country there were identified at least 3 good practices in National, regional and/or local level. Overall, **26 good practices** were collected, some of which you can see in the following tables. The good practices that are presented in this handbook are an example of how simple initiatives can have a significant impact in gender and LGBTQIA+ equity and change the narrative around the sports environment.

Bosnia and Herzegovina	
Football Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's Women's Football Development Strategy 2025–2029 (Our Time, Our Turn).	At the national level, Bosnia and Herzegovina has seen some progress in addressing gender equality in sport. This strategy, developed with UEFA support, represents the first comprehensive, long-term framework dedicated to advancing women's football in the country. It focuses on grassroots participation, competition reform, talent development, and increased visibility of women's football. While it marks a turning point in embedding gender equality within a major sport, no equivalent good practice can be identified in the field of LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Despite a solid legal foundation that prohibits discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, there are no systematic or institutionalised initiatives promoting the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons in sport. More available at: https://www.nfsbih.ba/images/2024-D/010_oktobar/bosnia-strategy-BHS.pdf
Workshop on reducing	The workshop on reducing homophobia and transphobia in sport, was organised in Sarajevo in October 2024 by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in cooperation with the Council of Europe and the European

homophobia and transphobia in sport.	Union. While this was an important step in explicitly linking LGBTQIA+ rights to sport for the first time, it remains limited in scope. It should be understood as a one-off event rather than a national policy measure, underscoring the absence of broader, long-term initiatives that systematically address LGBTQIA+ inclusion in sport.
Plazma Youth Sports Games (Igre mladih)	In terms of equality more broadly, the Plazma Youth Sports Games (Igre mladih) represent a regional initiative that has been active in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 2011. Every year, tens of thousands of children and young people participate in multi-sport competitions free of charge. The Games promote social inclusion, tolerance, and cross-community interaction, while also incorporating educational campaigns on health, anti-drug awareness, and fair play. Although they do not directly target issues of gender or LGBTQIA+ equality, they are an important example of how sport can serve as a tool for building inclusive communities and addressing wider social divisions. More available at: https://www.igremladih.ba
Women4Sport Erasmus+ project	The Olympic Committee of Bosnia and Herzegovina has also engaged in equality-related initiatives, including participation in the Women4Sport Erasmus+ project and hosting events to promote women's leadership in sport. However, these efforts have not progressed to the level of formal strategies or action plans, and no mechanisms exist within the Committee's work to specifically safeguard LGBTQIA+ inclusion or to enforce gender equity beyond individual projects.

Bulgaria	
Sport for Social Change	Implemented by Champions Factory, this initiative empowered women and LGBTQIA+ youth through inclusive sports events, peer mentorship, and advocacy campaigns. It resulted in measurable improvements in self-confidence and participation. More available at: https://en.bulsport.bg/
Sport for Sustainable	This program integrated sport with sustainability and inclusiveness, focusing on marginalized youth. It emphasized green sports, youth

Development Initiative (SSD)	leadership, and SDG-aligned practices, operating at local and transnational levels. More available at: https://coalition-sport.org/
Women Empowerment through Sport (WEtS)	A transcontinental initiative aiming to increase female participation and leadership in sport. Through job shadowing, exchanges, and capacity-building, the project fostered cross-cultural learning and long-term networks. More available at: https://womenempowerment.eu/

Cyprus	
Access for All Festival	<p>This is a national-level good practice that has redefined inclusive cultural and sporting events in Cyprus. Organised annually in Limassol by RESET and 3on3, the festival combines sport, arts, and culture to promote gender equality, LGBTQIA+ inclusion, and accessibility for people with disabilities. Its innovative approach integrates accessible design features—such as sign language interpretation, sensory-friendly zones, and tactile installations—into every part of the event. By welcoming over 5,000 attendees in 2024 and offering more than 40 inclusive activities, the festival has become a national case study for how public spaces can be transformed into hubs of equity, diversity, and community building. It represents a shift away from tokenistic inclusion toward fully co-created, barrier-free experiences, actively engaging women, youth, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and disabled communities in both participation and performance.</p> <p>The key lessons from Access4All highlight the importance of intentional accessibility and community-driven design. The festival demonstrates that inclusion can be embedded not only as an add-on but as a guiding principle in planning and implementation. It shows how inclusive festivals can generate visibility for underrepresented groups, reshape public perceptions, and catalyse policy discussions on accessibility and equality at the local and national level. The main takeaways underline the value of cross-sector collaboration (NGOs, artists, municipalities, volunteers), the power of grassroots leadership, and the effectiveness of cultural programming in promoting empathy and social cohesion. Access4All provides a</p>

	scalable, replicable model for Cyprus and beyond, positioning itself as a best practice in building inclusive, sustainable, and celebratory spaces for all. More available at: https://www.instagram.com/accessforall_fest/
Her Game Basketball	<p>It is a national-level best practice in Cyprus that empowers girls and young women through sport, addressing long-standing gender inequalities and stereotypes in basketball. Founded by professional athlete Marissa Pangalos, the initiative operates independently from federations and institutional frameworks, focusing on grassroots community engagement. By offering weekly training sessions for girls aged 3–18, it provides a safe and inclusive environment where participants can build skills, self-confidence, and teamwork. What makes Her Game unique is its deliberate challenge to structural barriers—such as the lack of role models, over-competitive sports culture, and financial limitations—that often prevent girls from fully participating in sport. Through mentorship, education, and consistent visibility via social media, the initiative inspires both its participants and the wider community to see sport as a space for empowerment, belonging, and equality.</p> <p>The case of Her Game Basketball highlights how small-scale, athlete-led initiatives can generate outsized impact by focusing on empowerment and accessibility. The project’s innovation lies in combining sports training with mentorship, digital storytelling, and advocacy to reshape narratives around gender and sport. Lessons learned point to the importance of role models, community support, and low-cost, sustainable models that can be easily replicated in different contexts. Despite operating without institutional backing, Her Game has gained growing recognition, demonstrating that grassroots leadership can shift public attitudes and create meaningful opportunities for young girls in sport. The initiative stands as a valuable example for Cyprus and beyond, showing how inclusive, athlete-driven approaches can foster gender equality and open new pathways for diversity in sports. More available at: https://www.hergamebasketball.com/</p>

Her Sport	<p>It is a national-level best practice in Cyprus that addresses gender inequalities in football and uses sport as a tool for empowerment, inclusion, and leadership development. Funded under the Erasmus+ programme and implemented locally by RESET and APOLLON Ladies FC, the initiative engages girls aged 10–16, along with coaches, educators, and sports stakeholders, to dismantle stereotypes and cultural barriers that prevent girls from participating equally in football. By introducing gender-sensitive training curricula, hosting workshops on gender equity, and creating safe, welcoming environments for girls, Her Sport promotes systemic change in one of the most male-dominated sporting fields. Beyond training, the project runs public awareness campaigns and media initiatives endorsed by the Cyprus Football Association, aiming to shift perceptions and normalize female participation in football within schools, youth centres, and local academies.</p> <p>The case of Her Sport demonstrates how a structured, evidence-based methodology can bring measurable impact: over 300 girls actively trained, more than 30 coaches educated in inclusive practices, and schools reporting increased interest in forming girls' teams. Lessons learned highlight the importance of visibility, role models, and grassroots engagement in sparking change, while also underscoring the need to address resistance among stakeholders unfamiliar with gender-inclusive frameworks. The project's innovation lies in transforming football—a space historically associated with men—into a platform for equity and empowerment. As such, it provides valuable insights and tools that can be replicated across sports and countries,</p> <p>aligning with broader EU and national strategies on gender equality. More available at: https://hersport.eu/</p>
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Greece	
Athenian Centaurs RFC	<p>Athenian Centaurs RFC is a rugby union club based in Athens, Greece, and explicitly inclusive to LGBTQIA+ persons. Founded by members of</p>

	<p>the LGBTQIA+ community, with the support of International Gay Rugby (IGR), it aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide queer people a safe space to exercise and socialize; • Promote sports, and especially rugby, in the local LGBTQIA+ community; • Advocate for the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ players in rugby. <p>In addition to sports aspects, the club also participates in various events of the queer community in Athens (for example, the Gay Pride), in order to promote its values of inclusion and diversity, as well as inform the public about the club and its activities. The club is well integrated into the small Greek rugby community, and is recognized by the Greek Rugby Federation, participating in the same way as other clubs. The team works on a self-organisation model, with players making collective decisions, with a horizontal model. Part of this organization is a procedure put in place for reporting abuse or violence within the club, with two members responsible for handling the claims and finding solutions. This is part of the club's effort to create a truly safe space.</p> <p>The overall goal of the practice, creating LGBTQIA+ clubs and teams participating in sports is easily transferrable; however, depending on contexts and cultures, such clubs may be more difficult to create and sustain. Finding coaches supporting the mission could be challenging in some disciplines. Additionally, by participating in the local and national rugby community, the club pushes for the inclusion of women (being one of the few clubs with a women's team), as well as that of queer people, by openly being and competing as LGBTQIA+ teams. Indeed, the club has inspired another team, based in another city, to print out stickers "Rugby against homophobia" and take a clear stance for the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons in rugby. More available at: https://www.facebook.com/atheniantaursrfc/about.</p>
Whistle	<p>Whistle is a movement co-founded by the European Commission that wishes to prevent and fight Verbal Sexual Harassment/catcalling in sports. Catcalling is defined as a series of behaviours including whistles, gestures, comments and unwanted sexual advances,</p>

	<p>implemented to attract the attention mainly of femininities in the streets and other public places by strangers. Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH) in sports environments refers to repeated and continuous inappropriate behaviours of a sexual nature, including comments, touching, sending or posting photos, messages and/or requests. All of these are a type of sexual harassment and are a violation of the victim's civil rights.</p> <p>VSH can lead to causing trauma, phobia, dropout and all sorts of psychological and personal problems for the victims. The Whistle movement aims to tackle these harassments and provide solutions to support the women and girls that have faced VSH. The movement's goals are to contribute to the creation of a safe environment where people from around the world can do sports and exercise free of any type of harassment. Especially, tackling catcalling and all sorts of sexual harassment for athletes to be able to enjoy a healthy sporty life.</p> <p>In order to achieve such goals, Whistle aims at raising awareness and collecting stories/testimonies of VSH. Men and general society are indirectly a target since they may have witnessed such behaviours and due to the aim of raising awareness and changing the status quo that women and girls face in sports. By addressing catcalling/VSH girls and LGBTQIA+ individuals' faces, the team of Whistle has developed a reporting tool to collect stories. They have created an online platform where victims can on the one hand identify if they have been victims of VSH, though examples of such behaviour. On the other hand, the platform gives the opportunity also to men to engage in a questionnaire that aims at reporting but also educating them regarding VSH and GBV. More available at: https://whistleproject.eu/.</p>
Shaping Talents and Achieving Vocational Excellence in Sports - STARS	<p>STARS is the first Erasmus+ Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) in sport. The project aims to promote excellence in vocational training in the sports sector. STARS's mission is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish a sustainable and inclusive sports sector that promotes vocational training and the wide variety of professions in the sector

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● contribute to the continuous upskilling and reskilling of sports professionals and athletes ● identify specific skill gaps and provide high-quality training aligned with job-related key competences and current needs of the sector. <p>The target group of the STARS are professionals that are working in the field of sports, new and old athletes of all ages and genders. The structure of STARS is such that it aims at educating every factor that is involved in sports.</p> <p>The project targets gender discrimination by promoting gender equality initiatives that will foster a more inclusive environment for a career in sports but also in education. The vocational training provided in STARS also tackles socioeconomic gaps. Nowadays, access to professional training can be an unbearable financial burden for many people, resulting in lower social strata being excluded. By providing free training, STARS combats social exclusion by providing essential education to all. In addition, STARS combats discrimination and underrepresentation of marginalized groups by promoting the inclusion in sports, sport careers and education.</p> <p>The practice developed educational tools and mechanisms that address discrimination and potential GBV. The Sports School Anti-GBV and Racism mechanism is methodology that includes the Case Management System, supported by a capacity building programme for Sports Professionals as well as the functional and operational requirements for the establishment of the Mechanism in the Sports Schools. Unlike traditional educational methods, STARS used both formal and non-formal methods in teaching and learning. More available at: https://shapingsport.eu/.</p>
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Italy	
Touch Rugby project	Liberi Nantes, founded in Rome in 2007, is a nonprofit organization that uses sport as a tool for inclusion and integration of refugees and asylum seekers. The organization offers free access to football, trekking, and athletics, but its most transformative work lies in its

	<p>programs targeted specifically at women, such as the Touch Rugby project. This initiative was developed for women refugees and survivors of gender-based violence, who often face significant psychological, social, and practical barriers to engaging in physical activity.</p> <p>The Touch Rugby project stands out for its intersectional (gender + background) and trauma-informed approach. Training sessions are supported by a psychologist, offering a safe and welcoming space where participants can build trust, process emotional challenges, and regain confidence—not only as athletes but as women and community members. The inclusion of childcare services further supports participation, recognizing that caregiving responsibilities are one of the major obstacles migrant women face when engaging in sports. The project has been formally recognized and awarded by the European Union, affirming its innovative and inclusive model. Moreover, in collaboration with Outsport, Liberi Nantes has provided gender awareness and inclusion training to its coaches, ensuring that the sporting environment is safe and respectful for all participants. More available at: https://www.liberinantes.org/</p>
Balon Mundial	<p>In Turin, Balon Mundial has redefined football as a platform for social inclusion and intercultural dialogue. This initiative engages migrants, refugees, and LGBTQIA+ individuals in mixed-gender football tournaments, educational workshops, and community events that challenge stereotypes and foster mutual respect. Rather than focusing solely on competition, Balon Mundial uses football as a metaphor for society—emphasizing values such as collaboration, respect, and solidarity. The initiative has seen a steady increase in the participation of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals in what has traditionally been a male-dominated sport. More available at: https://www.balonmundial.it/.</p>
Palestra Popolare	<p>Equally impactful is Palestra Pololare, a grassroots gym located in a working-class neighbourhood in Palermo. Created to resist the commercialization of sport and reclaim it as a fundamental right, Palestra Popolare offers boxing, Muay Thai, yoga, and other fitness</p>

	<p>activities free of charge or at very low cost. The gym is explicitly inclusive, encouraging the participation of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals in combat sports—disciplines often perceived as male-dominated and exclusionary. With a strong commitment to non-hierarchical, volunteer-led governance, the gym has become a hub for empowerment, activism, and social connection. It also organizes workshops on sexuality and health, creating a holistic and affirming environment that supports both physical and emotional well-being. More available at: Palestrapopolare Palermo Palermo Facebook</p>
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Portugal	
Portuguese Hockey Federation	<p>The Portuguese Federation is the responsible organization for the development of Field Hockey and all the other variants of this sport in Portugal. It's also the organization responsible for the representation of the Portuguese National Teams at International level.</p> <p>In a project implemented by the Council of Europe in 2019 called “ALL IN: Towards balance gender in sport” with data from 2017/2018 we can check that the Portuguese Hockey Federation was the sport organization with a better balance in terms of sport participation, because 49% of the players were women and 51% of the players were men.</p> <p>This federation is an exception in Portugal because the picture painted by the “All IN: Towards gender balance in sport” project reveals that federated sport in Portugal is predominantly male, from participation in sport to refereeing and the management of clubs and federations.</p> <p>In federated sports, women account for around one-third of those affiliated to sports federations with Olympic sports, and this figure is even lower in the case of sports for people with disabilities, highlighting the importance of considering solutions to multiple discrimination.</p> <p>Barriers to full equality are found across the board in sport because the problems and issues identified in sports practice reflect the challenges we face as a society and the impact of stereotypes and gender roles. The balance in Portugal in terms of sport participation in</p>

	<p>federated sports between women and men it's 28% and 72%. More available at: https://www.fphoquei.pt/blog/2013/04/regulamentos-fph</p>
All Together 4 Sports	<p>The Association All Together 4 Sports is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting inclusive sport and creating a safe and accessible environment for all participants, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age, color, ethnicity, religion, among other characteristics.</p> <p>Since its founding, All Together 4 Sports has been a pillar in fostering inclusive LGBTQIA+ sports communities, using sports as a platform to promote camaraderie, friendship and sportsmanship among athletes from different backgrounds.</p> <p>There has been a marked growth in the number of members and sports of the Association. Currently, they have around 250 athletes registered in the 24/25 season, and they develop the following sports and activities: Running, Football, Swimming, Rugby, Tango and Volleyball. All Together 4 Sports (AT4S) was founded in February 2010, initially under the name “Boys Just Wanna Have Fun Sports Club” (BJWHF). It is currently one of the most representative LGBTQIA+ sports associations in Portugal. More available at: https://at4s.org/en</p>
Portuguese Football Federation Women's Football Strategy	<p>The Portugal Football Federation commitment to women's football has been carried out consistently over the last 11 seasons and the number of players has grown year after year, as have the competitiveness and sporting factors related to the various competitions (from youth to senior levels) of football, futsal and beach soccer.</p> <p>The 15 thousand players registered at the end of the 2022/23 season have shown how much effort has been made by the federation to make women's football grow in our country. The strategy used shows very good results, and it continues to work.</p> <p>Today the Portugal Women's first team plays in European championships, world championships and has live transmission on National TV like the Men's teams. The number of female football and futsal players increased by 132% (6,520 vs 15,113) in the period between 2012/13 and 2022/23 (11 seasons). More available</p>

Key factors for success and transferability

These practices are good examples of how we can change the narrative around gender and LGBTQIA+ equity in sports and combat SOGIESC-based discrimination. They demonstrate that it is possible to create an environment based on gender and LGBTQIA+ equity and inclusion. Certain key factors that stem from the mentioned practices and can contribute greatly to successfully achieve the inclusion of women and LGBTQIA+ groups in sport. First, the provision and creation of a safe environment where everyone can flourish plays an important role in the inclusion of groups that are used to being marginalized or excluded. Supporting these safe spaces with strong anti-abuse policies and/or reporting mechanisms as we saw in the example of the Athenian Centaury FC can greatly increase the participation of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals in sports.

Traditional organising models, in which the groups we are examining often have no access to decision-making, do not seem to work. Instead, a model that is self-organising or horizontal can encourage participation as decisions are made jointly, which will also create a spirit of ownership, reinforcing the desire to engage in sport. From good practices we also keep the fact that there needs to be a mechanism to support victims if any discrimination occurs. The empowerment of the victim but also the recording of the harassment through an established mechanism such as this of Whistle, overthrows impunity and creates data with the aim of raising awareness about the discrimination that exists and educating society. Another key factor for a practice to be successful is the design of any action with a community driven approach. Local communities can prove vital for the success of an initiative. The design of community driven initiatives can ensure accessibility for the marginalised groups but also an opportunity for their members to interact with the community. Additionally, can ensure inclusiveness from the outset of the activity, like in the "Access for All Festival" that integrates accessible design features —such as sign language interpretation, sensory-friendly zones, and tactile installations— into every part of the event from the start and not as an add on, that makes its objectives clear.

In addition, initiatives that are led by athletes that are women and/or belong to the LGBTQIA+ community like in the case of "Her Game Basketball" that the founder, Marissa Pangalos, is a professional athlete can build trust towards the initiative and inspire change of the existing

situation. The lack of role models such as female and LGBTQIA+ athletes can be tackled in this way and help young athletes to identify themselves with them. This also shows how important visibility is, and now visibility is low for such initiatives. Therefore, visibility and promotion of athletes other than cis men, can be key factors for the success of an initiative.

The collaboration between various stakeholders such as NGOs, municipalities, sports clubs and cultural clubs can also play a vital role in the success of a practice. Each stakeholder can bring a positive aspect and show unity towards common goals. The stakeholders can also collaborate in the field of educational components. An important factor of the success of an initiative is the integration of educational components, such as workshops, campaigns and/or awareness-building related to sports and not only. Education is important since it helps promote gender and LGBTQIA+ equity and tackles SOGIESC-based discrimination by breaking down stereotypes and prejudices. Many of the good practices that we analysed before have education at their core in order to change the narratives that exist in the local community.

Lastly, it is important to have in mind that many women and LGBTQIA+ individuals have suffered from trauma due to the SOGIESC-based discrimination that they have faced. Trauma informed approaches, like the ones that are taking place in the Touch Rugby where trainings are supported by physiologists, can help the athletes as well as the sport clubs to recognize and respond to the needs that vulnerable groups may have. In this way, by adopting some of the key factors analysed, one can create an initiative that will enhance the participation of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, offering them the basis for a more equitable participation in sports.

At the same time, what makes the mentioned practices good examples of gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusion is their transferability in other contexts and countries. The practices are flexible to adapt to local contexts, cultures and acknowledge that it is possible to face potential resistance in the beginning. The flexibility also is reflected in the general guidelines that are used to build the practices that can be modified for different settings and meet the applicant's needs. In many of them the applied models are scalable that can be expanded from small-scale initiatives to national levels, like in the case of Plazma Youth Sports Games that annually includes tens of thousands of children. In this case however it is wise to reassess the objectives and the implementation of the initiative since different scales also have different needs.

Additionally, the practices are shaped in a way that embraces low costs and sustainable methods to ensure easy adaptation in other contexts without heavy resources. A good such example is the Palestra Popolare, where the initiative is shaped around a strong commitment to non-hierarchical, volunteer-led governance that foster and lower the make the gym sustainable and approachable to everyone. Strong community engagement is part of the successful transferability of the practices. The community engagement ensures local ownership like in the case of All Together 4 Sports, a LGBTQIA+ sports association that is driven by its members. Furthermore, the engagement enhances collaboration like in Balon Mundial that are using the engagement through football as a metaphor for society that can foster respect and solidarity.

Another advantage of the aforementioned practices is one's online presence. The practices have digital and multilingual tools like online platforms and report mechanisms to expand accessibility, something that makes them transferable in a short effort on the needed context. Some practices also include the National Federations showcasing that it is possible to include nationwide strategies in promoting gender-balanced participation. Overall, the practices ensuring that are inclusive of multiple identities such as gender, migrant status and disability which, combined with the development of monitoring and reporting mechanisms that can be replicated to ensure accountability, are ideal for adoption in a context where gender and LGBTQIA+ equity in sports is low and combating SOGIESC-based discrimination is imperative.

Tools and resources for sports organizations

Building on the good practices identified across the partner countries, several tools and resources emerge that can support sports organizations in advancing gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. These approaches demonstrate how federations, grassroots initiatives, associations, local sports clubs and community events can mitigate values of equity and diversity into practical action. The following recommendations are transferable strategies, mechanisms and models that organizations can adapt to their own contexts.

Initially, in terms of the tools that users can draw from the handbook, this would certainly be the long-term strategies as national women's football development plans, which can enhance the competitions and visibility for women and LGBTQIA+ athletes, so it is a good start for organizations that do not have similar long-term plans to establish one. Targeted workshops addressing homophobia, transphobia, and gender-based discrimination in sport are also a very useful tool that would help many organizations to overcome stereotypes and make their

environment safer. In addition, systematic training for staff and athletes with gender-sensitive topics would strengthen the knowledge of the participants, making women and LGBTQIA+ people more acceptable. This can also be done through European training programs and Erasmus+, such as the examples in the good practices. At the same time, the creation of mechanisms for reporting incidents of GBV and racism would be tools that would facilitate women and LGBTQIA+ people to integrate into sports, having as a backup the ability to report an incident.

Additionally, other tools that stem from good practices are awareness campaigns. By using campaigns, organizations will be able to sensitize and inform the world about programs they may have for gender and LGBTQIA+ issues, but also to make it clear that discrimination has no place in sports. Another useful tool that could have a drastic impact on how inclusive an organisation is the provision of psychological support and childcare. Psychological support can help athletes overcome any trauma or stigma they may have from previous failures to engage in sports. As for childcare, it will help women and LGBTQIA+ parents who cannot engage in sports due to family obligations.

In terms of resources that organisations can rely on or learn from, good practices provide a wealth of support for equity in sport. There are many examples of inclusive sports associations and clubs that provide safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ and women athletes such as Athenian Centaurs RFC and Palestra Popolare that can inspire other organisations to do the same. It is also important for users of the handbook to consider grassroots initiatives led by athletes to build advocacy and visibility. Such initiatives strengthen women's and LGBTQIA+ sports, showing that there is room for other models. Finally, festivals that promote equality and embed accessibility and participation are a good opportunity to bring different groups together and create a climate of acceptance.

4. Guidelines for Trainers, Sports Managers, and Educators

Trainers, Sports Managers, and Educators have a very important role in the development of an athlete and in whether sport will be accessible to women and LGBTQIA+ people. However, based on the results of the research conducted during the implementation of the SISTERS project, it was recognized that they have shortcomings in promoting gender and LGBTQIA+ equity, as well as in combating SOGIESC-based discrimination in the field of sport. Below are some recommendations that, based on the research, will help make the sports environment more accessible and inclusive for women and LGBTQIA+ people.

Creating gender-sensitive and inclusive environments

Those directly involved in sport have an obligation to create and maintain a gender-sensitive and inclusive environment. To achieve this, we propose the establishment of mandatory training and certification programs on gender equity, non-discrimination, safeguarding, and trauma-informed practices for coaches, referees, and staff so that they can receive the necessary knowledge and skills they need on issues of gender and LGBTQIA+. The development of inclusive curricula and toolkits with stereotype-free activities, games, and storytelling can serve as a guide to combating SOGIESC-based discrimination and to further understanding the difficulties faced by non-male individuals. This can also be done by collaborating with NGOs and universities that have valued practical and theoretical knowledge in this field and can provide extra training to coaches, athletes, staff, and teachers.

In addition, for an environment to be safe and inclusive, the appropriate infrastructure must also be in place. It is recommended to provide gender-inclusive changing rooms to respect the privacy and safety of LGBTQIA+ athletes and ensure facilities are accessible to all athletes. At the same time, women and LGBTQIA+ athletes must have access to equal opportunities in terms of competition and the equipment they need to effectively participate in sports. It is also considered important to allocate resources to promoting women's and inclusive sports through local media, campaigns, and community events to combat the low visibility that, based on research, exists in women's and LGBTQIA+ sports.

Another good practice that is recommended for those involved in sports is piloting mixed gender activities. Specifically, regarding training sessions and some competitions, this specific proposal

will help to dispel some stereotypes regarding the capabilities of non-male athletes and will enhance the acceptance of women and LGBTQIA+ athletes by their fellow athletes. In addition, it would be legitimate to strengthen the recruitment and promotion of women coaches as well as promote diverse athletes as role models beyond traditional stereotypes. The role models will promote inclusion, increase participation of women and LGBTQIA+ in sports and enhance identification with athletes who represent their gender.

Finally, it is very important to have infrastructures that will concern childcare or practical support for athletes with family responsibilities. Moreover, integrating mental health and wellbeing modules (stress management, teamwork, self-confidence, healthy relationships) into training will help athletes feel safer and more comfortable, while also dealing with potential conflicts that may arise during a training session or a competition. In the same direction, it is recommended to train coaches and teachers to recognize early signs of mental health challenges and make referrals. These proposals will create an environment that will promote sportsmanship and combat SOGIESC-based discrimination, creating a gender and LGBTQIA+ equity environment.

Strategies to tackle discrimination in sports settings

The current situation has highlighted that there are many stereotypes and discrimination in sport regarding women and LGBTQIA+ people, which hinders their participation in sport. In order to achieve equity in sport, strategies that combat discrimination need to be adopted. Codes of conduct, reporting channels, and accountability mechanisms for discrimination, harassment, or abuse should first be established to enable victims to report incidents safely. It would also be helpful to assign a focal person for reporting and follow-up - who will have received the necessary training - so that victims of discrimination know where to turn for help. Furthermore, schools, sports clubs and athletic organizations are recommended to adopt zero-tolerance policies for violence, harassment, and abuse by coaches, referees, or even parents to combat discrimination, while at the same time they must align safeguarding protocols with international standards to ensure safe spaces for diverse athletes.

On top of that, the enforcement of anti-discrimination rules across all levels of sport, either using gender-neutral language in all communication or by actively promoting respect, fairness, and teamwork as core values with the aim of combating phenomena of misogyny, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and other harassment, will be invaluable in combating discrimination. These phenomena can also be combated through campaigns that enhance

visibility while challenging stereotypes and normalising inclusion. Moreover, it is important to have a mechanism for continuous monitoring, feedback, and adaptation of practices based on athlete experiences, which will also help to collect data, to provide insight into progress and identify new barriers. The adaptation of these recommendations will not only tackle discrimination in sport by spreading a message of acceptance for women and LGBTQIA+ athletes.

Engaging young athletes and families in inclusivity efforts

Many young women and LGBTQIA+ individuals are turning away from sports due to the discrimination they face and the non-inclusive situation that prevails. Coaches, teachers and sports club managers have as their mission to bring young people closer to sports, always with a focus on inclusion and not exclusion. One way to bring young people back to sports is to promote co-design inclusive tournaments where young athletes from marginalized social groups will have an active role in their organization. At the same time, supporting youth-led initiatives through grants (if there is financial opportunity) or through volunteer-based projects would create a more gender equal environment that would give opportunities to women and LGBTQIA+ athletes to develop physically and mentally. Furthermore, strengthening partnerships between schools, clubs and NGOs could enhance youth participation and create sports programs that promote inclusion. In particular, NGOs with extensive experience in youth empowerment would have a vital role in fostering an environment that is gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusive.

On the other hand, as shown by the research, parents play a significant role in the participation of young people in sports and can often be the obstacle that prevents them from participating. In order to avoid similar actions that are often done due to parental ignorance or for reasons of child protection, it would be ideal to organize workshops with parents and communities on the impact of stereotypes, pressure, and abusive behaviour. The workshops will enhance both their education on gender and LGBTQIA+ equity issues and their understanding of the challenges faced by young athletes who belong to these groups. In addition, frequent discussion sessions with parents and young athletes are also recommended to reduce cultural resistance on the part of parents. Community-based inclusion activities with the participation of parents and in the collaboration of schools/sports clubs with NGOs would strengthen the spirit of acceptance of the diversity of athletes, thus re-creating the desire for young people to participate in sports. It is very important that parents and families stand by the side of young athletes so that together they can demand an equitable sports environment and opportunities.

5. Policy Recommendations

The Handbook, based on the research conducted, focus groups and interviews that took place in the partner countries, also results in some policy recommendations. The recommendations aim to strengthen national and local-level policies, as well as to create strategies for integrating gender and LGBTQIA+ equity into sports governance.

National and local-level policy recommendations

The current situation in sports remains a deterrent for women and LGBTQIA+ people. Despite the actions that have taken place in some countries as we have seen above, it is considered that there is a need for more policies that could transform sports into more gender and LGBTQIA+ equity.

National Strategies: Developing national strategies or strengthening existing ones for equity and inclusion in sport, are needed for addressing both gender equity and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. Moreover, “good governance principles such as transparency, accountability, and athlete involvement are imperative to safeguard integrity in sport” as recommended in the European sport model (European sport model, 2022). In parallel, it is essential that existing legislative regulations concerning the fight against discrimination and equity have an impact on sport with responsibilities at national, regional, and local levels.

Monitoring Mechanisms: it is recommended to create (where they do not already exist) and strengthen monitoring mechanisms, something that is in line with the recommendations of the EU Commission in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. This mechanism could be under a department of combating discrimination or in a department of Gender Equality. Through the mechanism, the state body will produce annual reports drawing on data from federations, schools, and regional governments to reflect the progress that exists regarding the systems of equity and combating SOGIESC-based discrimination. Thus, states will have gender-disaggregated and diversity sensitive data at their disposal, especially from federations, and will be able to plan their future actions accordingly.

Legislations: Further support is needed in combating discrimination through the enactment of anti-discrimination codes and inclusive policies. Specifically, regarding sports, it is proposed to establish mandatory anti-discrimination codes of conduct in all federations, clubs, and sports organizations. The code will have a dual purpose; on the one hand it will prohibit discrimination

and on the other hand it will provide the possibility of anonymous reporting so that the victim can report the discrimination they have experienced. This will help national policies to line themselves with EU Commissions key objectives in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 regarding ending gender-based violence and challenging gender stereotypes. Moreover, interventions are needed regarding trans and non-binary athletes' administrative procedures, in order to prevent them from being excluded from a sport and/or competition due to their gender.

Funding: Legislative interventions are not the only area that states must strengthen, as there is also a need for financial interventions for the better participation of women and LGBTQIA+ people in sports. Specifically, the establishment of funding for women's and LGBTQIA+ sports programs is proposed and/or the creation of a solidarity mechanism that will redistribute funds vertically and/or horizontally between sports (European sport model, 2022). These programs will help access sustainability and increase access to quality facilities, especially in rural areas where women, girls, and marginalized groups, including LGBTQIA+ people experiencing limited accessibility. Furthermore, infrastructures need to be evolved, including new gender-neutral facilities (such as changing rooms, showers, sports areas, etc.) so that athletes who do not belong to traditional genders are not exposed and are given the opportunity for equity participation.

Partnership with NGOs: it is recommended to strengthen partnerships of schools, municipalities, community sports centres, with NGOs. Specifically, NGOs can contribute to several areas due to their long-standing experience in empowerment and inclusion. A national directive that encourages cooperation with NGOs could strengthen the education of all actors and the fight against discrimination through formal or non-formal learning and trainings.

Visibility: National intervention is needed to enhance the visibility of women and LGBTQIA+ athletes. National public campaigns and media initiatives are deemed necessary to challenge stereotypes and change the image that many have of women and LGBTQIA+ sports. Prominence, even in state media, will contribute decisively to combating stereotypes and establishing role models that will inspire young athletes.

Strategies for integrating gender and LGBTQIA+ equity into sports governance

In order to achieve gender and LGBTQIA+ equity in sports, specific strategies are needed, in addition to national policies, that will promote integrating gender and LGBTQIA+ equity into sports governance. The SISTERS project handbook, in line with what was previously analysed, has specific proposals that could strengthen such a strategy.

Action Plans: An important element for sports governance to integrate gender LGBTQIA+ equity is the adoption of Gender Equity and Inclusion Action Plans in national sports federations. These plans should have a specific person or group responsible in each federation to oversee and report on implementation. Progress is proposed to be linked to the funding of federations so that there is an incentive for progress on equity and inclusion.

Equity and Inclusion Commissions: Establish permanent Equity and Inclusion Commissions within National Olympic Committees and national federations, with participation from civil society, academia and (where appropriate) youth representatives. The Commissions will have the ability to monitor progress, propose new measures for the better inclusion of women and LGBTQIA+ athletes, and identify new challenges that arise. The participation of the proposed groups in the Commissions ensures accountability, diverse perspectives and inclusive decision making that reflect broader societal needs.

Education: Recommendation of compulsory training on gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusion for sports staff and decision makers. In this way, those in power will also have the necessary knowledge to respond to the prevailing situation and promote a more inclusive participation in sports administration. This can be achieved through cooperation with various stakeholders and NGOs, as well as through drawing on good practices, e.g. the Council of Europe's recommendations on combating sexism in sport, particularly regarding media portrayal and safeguarding against harassment and violence.

6. Practical Tools and Resources

The chapter will present some practical tools that could directly improve access to sports for women and LGBTQIA+ people. In addition to the tools, there will also be recommendations on how to make a sports program inclusive. The recommendations come from both the interviews and working groups as well as desk research.

Recommendations for inclusive sports programs

Sport needs more inclusiveness, as women and LGBTQIA+ people are often directly or indirectly excluded from it. Among the things a sports program needs to be inclusive are:

Policies and Structure: A program should have policies and structure that are inclusive. This should start with the use of gender-neutral language in all communication and official documents. This is recommended so that athletes can feel more comfortable and accepted on the one hand and on the other hand so that there is fair visibility. In addition, the creation of gender equity policies, especially in team sports, as well as the collection and monitoring of gender-disaggregated data to have a measurable way of results.

Education: A sports program in addition to physical exercise should also offer mental exercise. Sports programs are recommended if they have a more educational character with the aim of educating athletes on gender and LGBTQIA+ equity. As well as issues aimed at combating discrimination that can be done through the development of educational toolkits with stereotype-free physical activities.

Visibility and Empowerment: Through the research it became clear how little or no visibility sports have for women and LGBTQIA+ people. A sports program that concerns these groups must have the bases for proper visibility and support for women's and LGBTQIA+ teams and athletes through local media, social media and community events. This will motivate young athletes as the program will empower them through the problems they will have, taking them out of the margins where they often find themselves.

Grassroots Support: Finally, it is recommended for a sports program that truly desires to be inclusive to have young athletes integrated into the programming from the beginning. Young athletes, especially from socially vulnerable groups, need to have their voices heard. Promoting

youth-led initiatives in collaboration with NGOs that have experience in developing similar actions will strengthen the inclusion of athletes and activate them socially and athletically.

Guidelines and tools for combating the phenomenon of gender and SOGIESC-based discrimination and violence

Gender and SOGIESC-based discrimination and violence are keeping women and LGBTQIA+ athletes away from sports. The eradication of such behaviours and action is needed to achieve full equity in sports for these groups. Based on these the handbook has the following guidelines and tools for combating such phenomenon:

Codes: Anti-discrimination rules for GBV and LGBTQIA+ violence is an essential tool for ensuring zero tolerance towards discriminatory behavior. These rules can be accompanied by clear codes of conduct, safeguarding protocols, and confidential reporting mechanisms. An anonymous reporting mechanism can deter the perpetrator, while giving the victim the opportunity to report such behaviour without being stigmatized.

Education: The inclusion of educational tools to combat harassment, discrimination, and violence can greatly contribute to combating gender and SOGIESC-based discrimination. Specialized NGOs with experience specifically in non-formal education can contribute with the tools/trainings they develop to educate the public on gender and LGBTQIA+ equity issues. Educational trainings and role games for athletes, coaches, staff and parents can be used to tackle stereotypes, trauma and reinforce inclusive values.

Safe Space: Safe spaces and inclusive environments are important for the mental health and wellbeing of athletes that are not cisgender-heterosexual males. Spaces such as changing rooms should be modified in a more inclusive way for every athlete to feel comfortable. Encourage respect towards women and LGBTQIA+ individuals and promote a gender-neutral language that will make them feel accepted. Moreover, enforce coaches and staff to recognize stress, stigma and possible mental break-down so they can provide the necessary support.

Empower: The combat of gender and SOGIESC-based discrimination can be achieved by women's and LGBTQIA+ athletes through media, campaigns, and local events. The visibility of none-cis gender straight male athletes will empower them and demolish stereotypes that are deeply rooted in the society. Furthermore, it is proposed to collaborate with local organizations,

schools and especially NGOs to contribute to strengthening the self-confidence of young women and LGBTQIA+ athletes and to help them create their own initiatives

Programs and initiatives that have successfully incorporated policies and guidelines in their core

Several initiatives have managed to incorporate similar policies into their structure and operation in order to become more inclusive on gender and LGBTQIA+ equity issues. Below are some of the initiatives that can be used as test cases for the users of the handbook. Although they are both examples of football they have a high percentage of replicability in other sports, countries and environments since they are combining fundamentals for achieving equity in sports and combat discrimination.

Girlpower: Girl Power emerged as a movement dedicated to women, initiated, and led by women, utilizing sports for developmental purposes. It began as a networking and advocacy platform driven by a group of refugee women under the leadership of Khalida Popal who fled from Afghanistan. Nowadays, as a non-profit association it is offering sports and leadership educational opportunities to women and girls in marginalized communities. Girlpower have created safe spaces for inclusion and representation in football and continues to empower and educate future leaders. They have managed to increase the inclusion and visibility of female athletes through training programs and collaborations with various organizations, groups and NGOs. At the same time, they continue to support young people and create various Talks, Sports Festivals, mentorship programs, etc. with them. Girlpower, with its inclusive structure, now exists in other countries beyond Denmark, where it was created, continuing its work for more equitable opportunities in sports. Additional info you can find on their website [here](#).

Fare network: The Fare network is an umbrella organisation that brings together individuals, informal groups and organisations dedicated to combat inequalities and use sport as means for social changes. Fare network combats all forms of discrimination, including racism, far-right nationalism, sexism, trans- and homophobia and discrimination against disabled people. Fare works across all levels of the sport, mostly football, to advance social inclusion of marginalised and disenfranchised groups and to engage policy makers, key players and governing bodies in the anti-discrimination movement. They are continuously empowering individuals in groups to engage with sports, giving them the chance through the Football People campaign to design their own initiatives that will focus either in education and/or increase visibility by tackling

discrimination. The initiatives of fare network are an example of how to include in your activities inclusive policies and tools by providing them at the same time to any other individual, club or organisation that is in need of them. Additional info you can find in their website [here](#)

Lessons learned

Creating inclusive programs in sports sounds like a difficult task, but analyzing it, we see that it is achievable as long as there is the will. For a program to be inclusive, it is essential to have a core structure and policies that will defend equity. Education plays a key role both in combatting discrimination and in bringing about changes in the current situation. At the same time, further encouragement is needed for sports initiatives by women and LGBTQIA+ athletes to escape from obscurity. All of this can take place through collaboration between those involved (coaches, staff, parents, etc.) with NGOs that can ensure the integration of best practices.

On the other hand, it is important that in every action you take, we also have as a guideline the fight against gender and SOGIESC-based discrimination that lurks in sports. A clear code of conduct and reporting mechanisms will lay the foundations for limiting and reprimanding such issues, providing safety for all athletes. Safety is also an important factor when it comes to the facilities where the sport is held. A safe environment, a cesspool of physical and psychological conditions are essential for athlete wellbeing. Programs that have successfully managed to integrate policy implementation, education, and collaboration have managed to have measurable progress in gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusion in sports. Therefore, collaborations in the field of fighting gender and SOGIESC-based discrimination are considered highly indispensable.



7. Conclusion

Summary of key findings

The creation of the SISTERS project Handbook brought to light several of the problems that prevail in sports regarding women and LGBTQIA+ people. Initially, there is a constant gender and SOGIESC-based discrimination which continues to limit women's and LGBTQIA+ participation and representation in sports. The discrimination is reinforced by the prevailing stereotypes, often stigmatizing non-cis gender athletes, but also by the male-dominance in leadership issues which reinforce exclusion and underrepresentation in decision-making roles. In almost all countries, positions of power are held by men, with the other genders having a path full of obstacles to be able to rise to a similar position.

Marginalization continues due to minimal or complete lack of visibility from the media, making sports for women and LGBTQIA+ athletes a non-event. The minimal visibility and lack of role models for women and LGBTQIA+ athletes, depriving youngsters of the ability to identify with people of their own gender, on the other hand systemically promoting the image of the cis gender straight male athlete. Despite the actions that have taken place at the level of policies and legislation, the gap remains large, and these actions are inconsistently implemented.

The good practices found show that practices that are community driven and have a more inclusive character can have positive results. Such practices as mentioned are grassroots initiatives and/or athlete led projects that have equity in sports at their core. In addition, it emerged that education and the tools that stem from it can play a prominent role in changing existing narratives. Educational programs and training for coaches, staff, parents and youth can be a lever to remove the discrimination and restrictions experienced by women and LGBTQIA+ people in sports. The education of these groups will bring immediate changes that will establish a safer and more accessible environment for all involved and especially athletes.

Changes should not only come from those directly involved in sports but also from the state. Policies that will ensure equal access as well as monitoring mechanisms are essential actions to institutionalize gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusion in sports governance. This should of course not be done with a unilateral move but through cooperation and dialogue with NGOs and multi-stakeholders to achieve a long-term impact. NGOs in particular have a lot to offer in the field of combating discrimination based on gender and promoting a more inclusive sports world. Their

years of experience in education and awareness raising can contribute catalytically to the fragmentation of stereotypes, discrimination and the creation of an inclusive and equal environment. At the same time, they will have the ability to research and analyse data on intersectional discrimination in sports, recording progress and needs for future actions.

Future research needs

The need for further research continues to exist. The need for a better database in terms of Women's and LGBTQIA+ Participation in sports at National and local Levels. The data collection would be appropriate to have an intersectional character, thereby contributing to the collection of multidisciplinary data such as age, gender, sport-type, SOGIESC etc. In addition, research aimed at the experience of non-binary and transgender athletes', since there is room for better recording of their obstacles they face due to their gender identity.

In addition, the SISTERS project can continue to respond to training programmes for coaches, educators, and sports professionals with the aim of raising awareness and discrimination. In addition, the project could fill the many gaps in the field of education, especially in terms of coaches, teachers and schools on inclusiveness. Special care would be wise to have been for the staff of sports organizations for trans and non-binary athletes, as the greatest knowledge deficiencies are found there.

Finally, the project must focus on the correct handbook Dissemination to organizations and sports clubs. This will help with the gradual awareness raising and possibly an activation of the local community. Through campaigns and videos in social media with regard to gender and LGBTQIA+ equity in sports, visibility will be reinforced and releasing new role models, challenging stereotypes and normalising inclusion in sports culture. At the same time, Sisters partners can enhance their collaboration with local authorities, federations and schools to maximize project Impact. Maintaining a continuous and vibrant dialogue between policymakers, civil society, grassroots and youth actors enables the replication and scaling of effect initiatives to ensure sustainability beyond project duration.

8. SISTERS Handbook self-assessment test

The self-assessment test will assist coaches, managers, sports clubs, federations, educational institutions, and community organisations to evaluate the gender LGBTQIA+ equity and inclusion that they promote in their sport activities in line with the suggestions of the Handbook. The self assessment test consists of statements regarding the level of maturity and integration of LGBTQIA+ inclusion measures, divided into specific fields of operation.

Users can apply it as a reflection and improvement tool. The goal is to understand the areas that there is a lack of equity and create a plan for a safer, equity and more inclusive sports environment.

Instructions: Users need to rate the following statements according to the following answers:

- **1 for NO**
- **2 for PARTIALLY**
- **3 for YES**

SISTERS Self-assessment test	
Policy & Structure	
There is an anti-discrimination and inclusion policy that explicitly covers gender and LGBTQIA+ issues.	
You have established a code of conduct with clear reporting mechanisms for discrimination and/or Gender Based Violence.	
The leadership team includes women and LGBTQIA+ representation in decision-making roles.	
Funding or performance evaluation is linked to equity and inclusion outcomes.	

Internal policies are often reviewed in order to ensure compliance with national and EU equality frameworks.	
Field score:	
Education	
Coaches and staff have received training on gender and inclusive practices.	
There is a provision of continuous professional development on anti-discrimination and trauma-informed approaches.	
Staff and volunteers are familiar with SOGIESC-related terminology and rights frameworks.	
There is an established collaboration with NGOs and/or experts for training and awareness sessions.	
Field score:	
Services	
The facilities (changing rooms, showers, uniforms) are gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusive and accessible to all.	
You actively encourage participation of women, girls, and LGBTQIA+ individuals in all sports levels.	

Services such as psychological support or mentorship programs for marginalized athletes are provided.	
Mixed-gender or inclusive activities/trainings are implemented.	
Childcare or family-friendly options for participants with caregiving duties exist.	
Field score:	
Communication	
Use of gender-neutral language in communication materials.	
Women's and LGBTQIA+ achievements are equally promoted across your media and events.	
Participation in and/or organisation of campaigns raising awareness about equity in sports.	
Field score:	
Reporting	
Existence of a confidential reporting system for discrimination or harassment incidents.	

Feedback from both athletes and parents as well as staff is regularly gathered and used for improvements.	
Publication of yearly inclusion progress reports or summaries.	
Field score:	

Field scoring		
Policy & Structure	10-15	You have a stable policy framework. The Handbook can assist you to further extend the existing framework.
	Below 10	There are low policy initiatives that can increase gender and LGBTQIA+ equity in sports in your framework. Strengthen your policy framework using the Handbook's guidance and best practices.
Education	8-12	The educational curriculum is promoting gender and LGBTQIA+ equity in sports. There are several practices in the Handbook that can help you enhance learning outcomes.

	Below 8	There is a need for educational activities that will promote gender and LGBTQIA+. Use the Handbook to start gaining knowledge on gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusion in sport and to implement inclusive educational training.
Services	10-15	Provided services are supporting the inclusion of women and LGBTQIA+ athletes. Continue building on current strengths using the Handbook's recommendations.
	Below 10	Services need to evolve and address women and LGBTQIA+ needs. Apply the Handbook's recommendations on how to improve gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusive in these matters.
Communication	6-9	You constantly promote gender and LGBTQIA+ inclusion in your communication activities. Using the Handbooks recommendations will amplify your visibility actions.
	Below 6	Communication strategy is poor and lacks gender and LGBTQIA+ focus. The Handbook can assist you to change and to redesign your communication strategy.

Reporting	6-9	You have built a reporting sequence that is supporting women and LGBTQIA+ rights. The handbook can help to further refine your reporting process.
	Below 6	Reporting procedures are weak or nonexciting. Consult the Handbook and apply the recommendations to improve your reporting structures.

The following table has the interpretation of your **Overall scoring**. To find your scoring, sum up the answers in the test. Based on your results you can identify how equity is your work in the field of sports.

Overall Scoring and Interpretation		
Overall Score	Assessment	Meaning
50–60	Inclusive champion	Gender and LGBTQIA+ equity in policies, training, and culture has a strong presence. Maintain progress and share your good practices.
40–49	Developing inclusivity	Strong foundations exist, but some areas need formalization or consistent implementation. The Handbook can be an assistant for deeper actions.
30–39	Emerging awareness	Inclusion principles are recognised but not yet operationalised. There are recommendations in the

		SISTERS Handbook that can assist you to further increase your outcomes.
Below 30	Needs for immediate action	Key mechanisms for safety and equity are missing. Use the SISTERS Handbook's tools, examples and recommendations for improvements.

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