**Conclusions (long version for the site)**

# Lessons learnt from the civic dialogue procedure

In 2021, EWA project partners took the initiative to start a public dialogue for effectively addressing the issue of gender discrimination in sports. The result was the organisation of round table discussions in all participating countries. These debates involved dozens of representatives of sports related associations, clubs, federations, movements, communities, public entities and other relevant stakeholders.

Recording, analysing and summarizing the views and experiences of this group of people across Europe is considered important in terms of implementing practices against gender discrimination and violence in sport. These people have seen first-hand and know from personal experience “what is working and what is not”, i.e., how can policies against gender discrimination become effective and sustainable. To address this issue, all round table discussions were organised around two main axes:

* the core elements of a successful policy against gender discriminations in sports
* proposals for the operation of an effective European network against gender discrimination in sports and the ways in which each participating organization can contribute towards this end

The main findings and conclusions of this process are presented below in an effort to contribute to the more effective implementation of practices and policies aimed at eliminating the phenomenon.

## **Core elements of a successful policy against gender discriminations in sports**

* The creation of a common ground in each country which would “put on the same page” all the relevant parties involved and the *institutionalisation* of bodies such as the institution of a Welfare Officer, at least one per each sports federation could support effectively the respective policies implemented. The institutionalisation of the “in house Welfare Officer” could work as a point of reference and coordination for all the actions implemented against gender discrimination in sports. Finally, a synergy between federations could multiply the positive effects of the policies implementation. During the debate the role of institutionalisation and the need for standardised procedures was highlighted more than once as a way of achieving permanent changes.
* Emphasis should be given on *interventions at an early stage*, i.e., in schools and during gymnastics lessons where stereotypes and gender stereotypes and violence are reproduced. At the same time, primary education is considered to be the context with the potential for the most effective teaching and changing opportunities. It all starts at school: having less “gendered” sports in PE, training teachers and coaches on equality issues giving visibility to female athletes and the aggressions they suffer.
* The adoption and application of a methodology where no policy is being implemented unless *it comes from and is co-formed by the people who work in sports environments* (athletes, sports professionals, coaches etc.) Cooperation between the latter and policy makers towards the production of a best practices study for example, describes a methodology which helps to fully engage those directly concerned and avoid mistakes, communication issues and dissemination problems which may lead to the opposite from the desired result. In the same direction, the implementation of an *impact study* and a study on how people perceive the changes and the messages which the policy wants to get across are required.
* To enhance further the probability of success, a policy should ensure that *gender related data are gathered* so that one can measure change both qualitatively and quantitatively in the long run. This provision could also help to the creation -and reshaping if needed - of the policy’s plan and goal setting. It sounds “commonplace”, but this provision is not always applied. Keeping quantitative and qualitative data allows stakeholders to monitor the incidents of violence, define the monitoring indicators and ensure that stereotypes are indeed eliminated.
* Especially after the outbreak of #MeToo movement, a policy *should address the risk of stakeholders implementing the bare minimum* provided by law (such as conducting a relevant seminar) without ensuring the *continuous implementation* of the applied policy.
* Any effort related to a policy in the form of manuals, contact codes, legislation, etc. must be associated with constant, well organised training actions*. Storytelling* in sports is an effective way to break gender stereotypes. It has already been successfully implemented widely against homophobic bulling. Moreover, “engaging male allies” for gender equality in sports following the paradigm of Gay-Straight alliances could work effectively and multiply the usefulness of the implemented policy.
* Each policy should *be carefully adapted to the specific needs and sociocultural context* of the country where it is going to be implemented. The indiscriminate adoption of a policy that was successful in one context has not proved to be effective in a different context. Moreover, the sole use of printed material such as a guide tends to become less effective. Emphasis should be given on interactive tools such as role-playing games or short films launched on the mass and /or social media. These ways of intervention have been proven more useful in challenging gender violence, sexual harassment and discrimination.
* A successful policy is crucial to *target coaches, sports teachers and sports professionals* due to their key role in addressing gender discrimination issues. The formation of training seminars with the goal of making them “agents of change” in the field is a way to achieve large-scale changes.
* Any type of political *reform cannot be successful if the voice of women is not heard and respected*. Their perspective and voice must come first to ensure that female sport gets the attention it deserves from grassroots to the highest level. In the sports sector there is a need for increasing the number of women in positions of responsibility in both public and private entities and strengthening the participation of women in coaching positions and decision-making centres.
* It is important to *distinguish between information and training*. Informing and sensitising women and men in the sports world on how to prevent and report any form of discrimination and harassment, although sometimes very hard and frustrating is very crucial. On the other hand, the training part needs to be focused on specific skills and competences that gender equality ambassadors need to acquire to become role models and points of reference for their community.

## **Suggestions for the operation of an effective European network against gender discrimination in sports and ways in which each participating organisation may contribute towards this end**

* It is commonly accepted that after the completion of many relevant projects most collaborations are lost because cooperation and communication between project partners ends. The provision of procedures to *maintain the networks* created during the implementation of projects against gender discrimination is of great importance. To this end network members could take advantage of free, multiplatform messaging apps that let users make video and voice calls, send text messages etc., all with just a Wi-Fi connection.
* The continuity and the sustainability of a network after the end of a project could also be ensured if an operational fund for its maintenance is available. Another way is to *“build on” the project*. For example, a project implemented in secondary education could be adjusted to the needs of primary education by the same network members.
* The establishment of a *centre focusing on gender violence in sports* in each country and subsequently their interconnection at a European level could ensure that the data obtained are being processed and distributed effectively. Well-known and established entities should be included into this network and “ambassadors” whose activities could have a “multiplier effect” should be appointed.
* There is a strong *need for synergies* in the production of material/deliverables and the formation of training so that the network’s efforts may have a positive impact. Sports context “is not an easy one” and negative reactions may occur during an effort to reshape it and combat gender discrimination. In terms of synergies, working groups like EWA’s should be set up because participating organisations do not always have a clear picture of what each partner can offer. Thus, it is important for different organisations to get to know each other.