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EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY



Empowering Women Athletes



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WHAT IS EWA?

EWA is a collaborative partnership co-financed by the European Commission thanks to the ERASMUS+ programme. Yes, but...

“EWA is not just a project, She is an ideal. She is every girl and every woman who loves her sport, who wants to feel safe in the changing rooms of her club, respected as a human being, acknowledged as an athlete, supported by her team of professionals. EWA is the female athlete who struggles every single day to break records, win games, have fun.”

Why we do it

Fighting women harassment and discrimination in sports

Discrimination and harassment towards women in sports is a problem that is pervasively perceived by female athletes in all sports.

Discriminative attitudes or behaviour enacted by men are only the tip of an iceberg that constantly endangers and puts pressure on female athletes in all main sporting fields and pitches.

Each of these — violence, abuse, harassment, and discrimination — refers to a set of dynamics that overlaps with the others, and each of them find expression on a broad range of levels (verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, social, cultural, organisational, economic, media, etc.) and for different noxious purposes (personal self-esteem of the offender, sexual fulfilment, financial exploitation, cultural subjugation, status gain, etc.).

What we'll do

We will develop a community of female athletes, professionals, sport managers and policy makers in Europe to actively prevent and counter violence, abuse, harassment, and discrimination against female athletes in key sports environments, providing them with knowledge, education, and practical tools specifically designed by the project.



Who we'll do it with

Our target groups

Ambassadors of Equal Rights in Sports: A group of female athletes selected and trained during the project, which will play the crucial role of directly impacting on the other target groups.

Female athletes in Europe: The very core of our project: newcomers, amateurs, professionals.

Sports professionals: Executives, coaches, health professionals, reporters, who want to counter the chauvinist culture that is imposed on them while working with female athletes.

Sports audience: On the one side, they promote the development of feminine sports by participating in matches and games, while on the other side, they are statistically recognised as the main violent offenders of the athletes of whom they are fans.

WHY A STRATEGY

EWA Empowerment Strategy is a plan designed to involve the potential targets gender discrimination and harassment in sports in addressing this issue. We aim at enhancing the capacity of women athletes, especially the youngest ones, to take charge of their own safety and help each other in acquiring the necessary competencies and tools to defend themselves.

The innovative solution brought forward by EWA is enacted through a few steps:



- Defining, thanks to this guide, the course of action to engage women athletes in tackling the issue of gender discrimination and harassment in sports;

- involving female athletes to participate in peer-to-peer educational and sensibilisation activities to raise awareness about the risk of violence and discrimination in sports environments, taking the role of Ambassadors of Equal Rights of Sports (AERS);

- implementing educational activities (discussion groups, team-building sessions, self-defence training, education to assertivity thanks to our Training Course: The Crucial Role of Sports Professionals on Abuse, Violence and Discrimination against Women in Sports (available at: <https://ewa-project.eu/upload/files/04-03-2022-EWALearningFormatIO31.docx.pdf>);

- networking and advocating to promote mutual empowerment.



With the present document, we want to summarise how gender discrimination in sports can be countered in practice and how women athletes could get maximum in protecting themselves as well as their peers.



Who's the guide/strategy for and what can be done with it?

Sport is a means of self-expression and fulfilment, as well as a force for citizenship and solidarity, whereas abuse, violence, and discrimination against women still represent insurmountable barriers to the establishment of the presence of women in our sports clubs. These barriers act on multiple levels (verbal, physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, social, cultural, organizational, economic, mediatic, etc.) and are collectively perceived as a pervasive chauvinist culture that permeates the career of any female athlete.

Therefore, EWA initiative is fostering the debate on gender equality and this initiative has an opportunity to put these ideals into action for the realization of gender equality and women's empowerment—both in sport itself and in the wider world, through sport. Sport can be one of the great drivers of gender equality, by teaching women and girls the values of teamwork, self-reliance and resilience.

It can provide girls with social connections and a refuge from violence in their homes and communities, and help them to understand their bodies and build confidence and the ability to speak up, particularly during adolescence, when the pressure to conform to traditionally “feminine” stereotypes leads many girls to abandon sport entirely.

Many organizations have undertaken policies and structures to modify organizational culture to prevent violence against women and promote gender equality. Many male-dominated sporting organizations have attempted to improve women's participation by having better female representation on their board of directors and creating gender-equal human resource policies. Also, have guidelines for preventing violence against women in their player and employee codes of conduct, and have mechanisms for responding to allegations of sexual misconduct and violence. Nevertheless, while the progress which is done is encouraging, all these mechanisms still do not prevent from the violence and harassment, too many of those responsible for gender-based violence are not brought to justice, and many sport women lack access to the support and resources they need to rebuild their lives.



Who's the guide/ strategy for and what can be done with it?

Violence, abuse, harassment, and discrimination represent different yet intertwined phenomena that find expression in the most serious and flagrant cases of violence or sexual abuse toward women. Discriminative attitudes or behavior enacted by men are only the tip of an iceberg that constantly endangers and puts pressure on female athletes in all main sporting fields and pitches. Each of these — violence, abuse, harassment, and discrimination — refers to a set of human interaction dynamics that overlaps with the others, and each of them find expression on a broad range of levels and for different noxious purposes.



The myths that exist in society, which justify violence against women, further aggravate the situation of women who experience violence, constitute obstacles to a normal life, it is therefore very important that women who have experienced violence know where to go and what help they can get.

With this Empowerment strategy is intended to show how this can be combated in practice and women athletes could get maximum in protecting themselves as well as their peers. An Empowerment strategy is a plan of actions (practical solutions, advocacy and networking) designed to involve the interested stakeholders to fight the violence, abuse, harassment, and discrimination towards girls and women's in sport sector.



What is harassment of women in sport?

Sport, when purposefully planned, gives us the environment and opportunity to enforce values such as respect and equality, both on and off the field, and can reduce gender inequalities and violence against women. Yet, sport can also inspire attitudes and behaviours that condone violence against women, and is often a space where harassment can take place.



Nonverbal harassment includes distribution, display or discussion of any written or graphic material that ridicules, denigrates, insults, belittles or shows hostility, aversion or disrespect toward an individual or group because of national origin, race, colour, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, pregnancy, appearance, disability, sexual identity, marital status or other protected status. According European Institute for Gender Equality sexual harassment is any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature occurs, with the purpose or

effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It could be three harassment types: verbal, nonverbal and physical.

Verbal sexual harassment includes innuendoes, suggestive comments, jokes of a sexual nature, sexual proposals, lewd remarks and threats; requests for any type of sexual favor (this includes repeated, unwelcome requests for dates); and verbal abuse or „joking” that is oriented toward a prohibitive form of harassment, including that which is sexual in nature and unwelcome.





What is harassment of women in sport?

Nonverbal sexual harassment includes the distribution, display or discussion of any written or graphic material, including calendars, posters and cartoons that are sexually suggestive or show hostility toward an individual or group because of sex; suggestive or insulting sounds; leering; staring; whistling; obscene gestures; content in letters, notes, facsimiles, e-mails, photos, text messages, tweets and internet postings; or other forms of communication that are sexual in nature and offensive.

Physical sexual harassment includes unwelcome, unwanted physical contact, including touching, tickling, pinching, patting, brushing up against, hugging, cornering, kissing,



fondling, and forced sexual intercourse or assault.

Well-mannered, mutually respectful, agreeable, non-coercive interactions between the athlete's, coaches', member's and other interested persons in that are appropriate in the Sport organization and acceptable to and welcomed by both parties are not considered to be harassment, including sexual harassment.

In this Empowerment strategy harassment understood as any spoken or physical behaviour intended to threaten, intimidate or force an athlete, coach, member and other interested person working for or on behalf of Sport organization.

What is gender discrimination in sport?

The social impact of organized sports has always served an important role in society. Sports unite society and have broken down historical barriers of racism and prejudice throughout the years.

Women's participation in sport has a long history and has a lot of examples by female athletes and important advances for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. These accomplishments were made in the appearance of frequent barriers founded on gender discrimination. Women were frequently perceived as being too weak for sport, mostly in endurance sports, such as running, powerlifting and biking. In 1896, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics, stated: "No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks." Such stereotypes drove gender-based discrimination in physical education and in recreational and competitive sport, sporting organizations and sport media.

What is gender discrimination in sport?

Nevertheless discrimination and the lack of gender diversity in the sports world continue to have major effects on the ability of everyone having equal opportunities to advance in all areas in sports. Moreover, sportswomen tend to be portrayed in stereotypical, comical, sexualised and sexist ways. Their physical appearance, femininity and/or sexuality are more often referred to than their athletic ability. European Observatory of Working Life defines discrimination as: different treatment of individuals or groups based on arbitrary a scriptive or acquired criteria such as sex, race, religion, age, marital or parental status, disability, sexual orientation, political opinions, socio-economic background, and trade union membership and activities. EWA Empowerment strategy thought practical solutions, advocacy and networking would like share potential ways how to promote the equality in sports, promote ethical principles, fair play and integrity by highlight the value of women in industry.





IT IS NOT OK TO...

Name calling or stereotyping : using an easy-to-remember derogatory term to identify a person or a concept

Insulting : offending or intending to offend

Shouting : letting out a loud, incoherent scream

Belittling : expressing disapproval

Threatening : conveying or implying a threat of injury, danger, or other negative consequences

Humiliating : extremely damaging to one's dignity or self-respect

Scapegoating : scapegoating is a type of violence and aggression analysis in which people who have had or are having unpleasant experiences blame an innocent individual or group

Ignoring : refusing to pay attention to somebody

Rejecting : to fail to provide someone with the affection and attention they need and expect from you



IT IS NOT OK TO...

Bullying : the urge to inflict mental or physical damage on the other on a regular basis

Isolating: the act of an abuser gradually severing all emotional relationships save the one to himself/ her

Gaslighting: to manipulate a victim's perception of reality

Refusing to give corrections to the athlete

Promoting disordered eating

Slapping: to hit with the open hand with a forceful blow

Hitting: to deal a blow

Shaking: to inflict a painful shock on someone, causing them to become disturbed and fearful

Throwing equipment at or near a player

Kicking: to hit someone forcefully with the foot

Pulling hair or ears



IT IS NOT OK TO...

Shoving: to push someone or something forcefully

Grabbing: to take physical control or possession of someone suddenly or forcibly

Hazing: oppressive behaviour, consequence or expression of bullying

Punishing "poor" play or rule violations through the use of excessive exercise

Punishing "poor" play or rule violations by denying fluids

Punishing by the denial of sustenance or food

Rough physical corrections of position/movement

Improperly treating injuries and forcing injured athletes to play

Inadequate equipment

Allowing bullying or hazing by teammates

Not having basic needs met such as food/water



IT IS OK TO... ASK FOR SUPPORT

If you find yourself in a situation (in the gym, in the club, on the field, etc.) when you become the target of improper or borderline behaviours, or if you feel or suspect you're being discriminated because of your gender, you may feel more alone and more vulnerable if you keep it to yourself.

It's very important that you share what happened what is happening with someone you trust and know that can offer you support, even just to chat it.



Talk with your peers

It's always good to talk about what's going on with other teammates, colleagues or fellow sportswomen and sportsman. When you're used to openly share your experiences and emotions with your peers, you may find out that a certain behaviour you saw around you or received from somebody is not proper, it's not supposed to happen and should be stopped. Also, listening to what others have to say, you'll establish a long-lasting trust atmosphere that may avoid those behaviours to spread.

Speak with a more experienced sportswoman near you

If you're a young athlete at the beginning of your career or training path, it might be difficult for you, in the beginning, to understand what's "normal" and what's not in the new environment you're in. Whenever you have doubts, it would be great to speak to a more experienced sportswoman near you: she'll probably already have seen and experienced a lot more than you, and she'll be able to guide you.

Report improper behaviours to your sport organisation or federation

Many sports clubs and federations have internal rules and procedures to take immediate action against harassment, violence and gender discrimination. Take note of the responsible person you should report to and speak to her/him when something happens. Those rules and procedures are there for a reason: you won't be inconveniencing anybody.

Contact the EWA HELP-DESK

If you live in Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania or Turkey, you can also contact our centralised Help-desk through this webpage: https://ewa-project.eu/platform/helpdesk_EN.php You'll be referred to an organisation near you working to prevent violence and discrimination against sportswomen in a totally anonymous way, should it be just for a chat to understand if something "is ok" or "not ok".



IT IS OK TO... BECOME A POINT OF REFERENCE

Everybody needs a role model, especially young sportswomen and sportsmen. Somebody to look up to, somebody to ask questions to, somebody who shows how to behave when you're experiencing a new environment, somebody to consult when something is wrong. That person could be you!



Mentor young sportswomen and athletes

Communicate on social media

You've been there: you've been new at a sport, new on the field or in the club. Now that you know what to do, how to behave, how it's done and, most importantly, what's not ok to do in your environment, why not helping the newbies to acquaint in this "new" world? Over time, more and more young athletes will learn from your example, and will know they can come to you for advice when something doesn't seem right.

Awareness raising nowadays happens more and more on social media. Just think about the #metoo movement, how it spread all over the World in a matter of weeks, and how many important goals it has achieved. If you feel comfortable with sharing your experience and knowledge about improper, discriminatory or violent behaviours you witnessed in sports, discussing it on social media may encourage other sportswomen like you to do the same, with a positive snowball effect.

Take inspiration from the best practices we collected

Thanks to the EWA project, we collected a high number of best practices around Europe to prevent discrimination, harassment and violence against sportswomen. You can find them here:
<https://ewa-project.eu/upload/files/24-05-2022-EWABrochureMay2022.pdf>

Learn with online and offline training courses and materials

We also developed a pool of learning materials you can study, developed by NGOs and Institutions active in gender equality in sports. You can find it here:
<https://ewa-project.eu/upload/files/04-03-2022-EWALearningFormatIO31.docx.pdf>
We also developed a scheme of a training course, with guidelines, exercises and materials you can experiment in your gym, club or federation, with your peers or with younger athletes.



IT IS OK TO... SPEAK UP

The more we speak about a subject, the more we mainstream it, we put it in the circle of public discussion and opinion. The public discourse around gender equality in sports is still not mainstream: it's often restricted to small events and "special projects", and doesn't have the power to influence how public policies are developed and enforced. That's why we need to speak up more.



Support NGOs raising awareness and taking action on gender equality in sports

Many NGOs all around Europe campaign to promote women rights and raise awareness about the importance of gender equality in sports. They also offer free supporting services and finance lobbying activities to develop better policies. Many of them struggle for visibility, to outreach young sportswomen and sportsmen, and they're always looking for spokespersons, volunteers and financial support: that could be you. A small gesture could make a great difference in the long run.

Participate to the democratic life of your club or federation

Gender equality is also a matter of representation, at all level, including the political level. Compared to men, there are much less women represented in sports clubs and federations' Governing Boards. This is not acceptable: it's crucial that women not only participate to the democratic life of their sport environment, but that they are an active part of the decision making process, bringing their point of view on everything that is relevant for the community life. Why not you?

Lobby for better policies that counter gender violence, abuse and discrimination in sports

“Lobbying”, in many European Countries, is still perceived as something negative, something wrong. However, the act of pushing policymakers and decision-makers towards a certain approach can be positive, if it's done with a rightsbased approach and with transparency. If you are in a position to do it, why don't you try to sensitise public institutions to adopt better policies for gender equality?

Sign our petition

Thanks to the EWA project, we're also trying to take action at political level to ask for better policies in the field of prevention of harassment, violence and discrimination of sportswomen. If you agree with what we're proposing, you sign our petition to the European Parliament. You can find it here: <https://ewaproject.eu/petition>

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