

# The Camogie Association



Written Statement- Oireachtas Joint Committee Round Table Discussion- Issues Facing Women In Sport And The Progress Made Following The 20x20 Campaign.



April 2021

## Opening Statement (3 Minutes)

A chairde,

Go raibh mile maith agat as ucht an cuireadh go dtí an coinne seo inniu. Táim lan sasta chun an abhar seo a cuir chun cinn sna titheanna an Oireachtais.

Thank you for the opportunity to meet with you in this round able setting this evening. It is positive to see the issues in relation to women's sport being considered by the Joint Oireachtas committee.

My name is Sinéad McNulty and I am the CEO/ Ard Stiúrthoir of the Camogie Association. I have been in the role since June 2019, having come from a community sports development and third level sport background, and like everyone across the world, I have spent the last 13 months learning on the job of leading a voluntary sports organisation in a global pandemic.

I welcome the attention that women's sport has been given by government over recent years, ensuring that the National Sports Policy was augmented by a specific women in sport policy, and associated funding through Sport Ireland, as well as the appointment of a dedicated Women in Sport Lead. Nora Stapleton has done a fantastic job in raising the profile of women's sport in Ireland ably supported by a high performing committee. These are all very positive steps in the right direction.

The two topics posed to us in advance of this evenings meeting were:

1. issues facing women in sport, and
2. progress made following the 20X20 campaign.

## 1 Issues Facing Women In Sport

I come to this question with a perspective as CEO of the Camogie Association initially and from my own personal experience also.

### 1.1 Participation

A key and never-ending challenge of any CEO in a national governing body for sport is participation.

In the Camogie Association we want more people playing camogie more often and in more places in Ireland and internationally. Yet it is more than that. We want to make sure that every girl or woman who comes into a camogie club has a positive experience, receives high quality coaching, enjoys high standard facilities when training and playing, is adjudicated by high quality officials in competitions and is supported by excellent volunteers.

There are a lot of pieces that need to be in place, in the right order, all of the time to ensure that girls have a positive Camogie experience. If one aspect fails, the risk is that we lose that player perhaps forever.

Our players come to the sport through family connections to a club or the sport, through schools, through friends, through colleges. Once they take up the sport – the key is to keep them playing for as long as possible, and when they retire from playing, to attract them into the other aspects of the sport – officiating, administration, coaching – a cradle to grave connection to Camogie.

A key factor in women's sport is engagement through education at primary, second level and third level. The PE curriculum developments are very positive – are the needs of the students (and Who recommendations actually) being met though? Investment in women's sport throughout education, in all areas, locations and among all demographics is vital.

In camogie we have seen through investment and focussed interventions, the impact of womens sport with wonderful progress being made in counties such as Cavan, Kerry and Mayo providing living proof. Mayo will field an intercounty team for the first time in 2021. Kerry won the premier junior all Ireland final in 2019, and Cavan won the Nancy Murray cup and contested the premier junior final in 2020 earning a soaring star for Roisin O’Keeffe of Lacken Camogie club. These success stories are built on the hard work of many – players and volunteers – and will inspire generations.



Roisin O’Keeffe, Liberty Insurance Soaring Star Winner 2020

*Popular sports among gender and age groups (%)*

Sport	Total	Men	Women	Aged under 35	Aged 35 or older
Personal exercise	16	16	16	25	12
Swimming	9	8	9	9	8
Running	7	8	6	10	5
Cycling	4	6	3	4	5
Soccer	3	6	1	7	2
Yoga	3	1	5	3	3
Dancing	3	1	4	4	2
Golf	2	4	1	1	3
Gaelic football	2	3	2	6	1
Weights	2	3	2	4	2
Pilates	1	-	2	1	2
Hurling/Camogie	1	1	1	3	-

*Types of sport participated in by gender and age (%)*



Sport	Total	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Personal exercise	16	23	25	16	12	11	13
Swimming	9	10	9	11	9	11	6
Running	6	7	9	10	5	2	-
Cycling	3	2	4	3	3	3	1
Soccer	1	3	1	1	-	-	-
Yoga	5	2	8	6	6	6	2
Dancing	4	10	3	2	3	5	4
Golf	1	-	1	1	1	3	2
Gaelic football	2	7	2	1	-	-	-
Weights	2	2	3	3	2	-	-
Pilates	2	1	2	3	4	3	1
Hurling/Camogie	1	4	1	-	-	-	-



Sport	Total	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Personal exercise	16	30	23	16	10	9	7
Swimming	8	8	11	9	10	6	4
Running	8	13	12	11	6	3	1
Cycling	6	6	5	8	9	7	4
Soccer	6	17	10	8	4	1	-
Yoga	1	-	1	2	1	1	1
Dancing	1	1	-	1	1	-	2
Golf	4	1	2	3	2	7	8
Gaelic football	3	13	3	1	-	-	-
Weights	3	5	5	3	2	1	1
Pilates	-	-	-	1	1	1	-
Hurling/Camogie	1	6	2	1	1	-	-

## 1.2 Cost of getting involved

To get a young person started in Camogie – buying Helmet hurl and boots – will cost a parent c. €100-130. This is a limiting factor for some parents, many schools and a lot of clubs.

The added complexity of Covid 19 and not being able to share equipment will significantly impact on clubs and school camogie activity and its ability to grow and attract new players into the future.

## 1.3 Key Transition Stage Drop Off

A predominant issue in women team sport is the huge drop off in participation at key transition stages and throughout teenage years. It coincides with move from primary schools, move from junior cycle to senior cycle, move to third level education and into the workforce.

The Irish Sports Monitor charts this rapid decline. Women are shown to move towards individual fitness activities with swimming and running seeing a jump in participation where camogie (and hurling) disappears.

We need to extend the lifespan of female sports participation and engagement through development of more recreational camogie opportunities, with coaches and facilities available to support these additional players and recreational teams.

The link between higher education and higher lifelong physical activity levels is well documented in Irish and international research.

There is a need for early intervention, and engagement with girls during primary and second level education, to prevent this drop off, and ensure that the life long societal & health benefits for girls of participating in sport and physical activity are not simply understood – but acted on.

Figure 4.3 – Types of sport participated in by gender and age (%)



Sport	Total	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Personal exercise	16	23	25	16	12	11	13
Swimming	9	10	9	11	9	11	6
Running	6	7	9	10	5	2	-
Cycling	3	2	4	3	3	3	1
Soccer	1	3	1	1	-	-	-
Yoga	5	2	8	6	6	6	2
Dancing	4	10	3	2	3	5	4
Golf	1	-	1	1	1	3	2
Gaelic football	2	7	2	1	-	-	-
Weights	2	2	3	3	2	-	-
Pilates	2	1	2	3	4	3	1
Hurling/Camogie	1	4	1	-	-	-	-

## 1.4 Volunteers

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our association. Without them operating at a club level in 29 counties across the country there would be no camogie – no club championships, national league, all Ireland championship, under 14 blitzes or anything else.

Recruitment, retention and ongoing support and upskilling of volunteers is a challenge, particularly as the demands continue to increase. Each additional task that we place on volunteers may take a year off the end of a volunteering career.

We are supporting and educating units around succession planning, delivering hundreds of upskilling workshops and training sessions throughout the year and the message we are getting back is clear – you are asking too much of us. We need more help.

Funding towards additional professional/ support staff to support the work of the volunteers and enable them to focus on their chosen voluntary role.

There remains much work to do to eliminate the gender gap in participation – and even more so when it comes to volunteering where significant disparities exist.

Figure 4.8 – Types of volunteering role – by gender (%)



Source of tables:

<https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2020-09/irish-sports-monitor-2019-report-lower-res.pdf>

## 1.5 Visibility of our Sport and Sporting Heroes

Broadcasting of women sport has a long way to go to achieve parity. Recent research showed a high of 10.5% in March of women in sport. (Sport For Business).

Women's sport needs to be broadcast and seen. Our athletes train as hard as the men do, yet they don't achieve the screen time, resulting in reduced investment by sponsors/ broadcasters. Data is telling us that women's sport is popular when broadcast – cast your minds back to the women's soccer world cup 2 years ago - the phenomenal coverage and phenomenal games. Women's sport needs to be broadcast with high production values, and excellent commentating. Irish broadcasters have made huge moves in this regard bringing in female pundits – this needs to be the norm and not seen as reactionary.

Broadcasting our games is challenging and costly. Currently the Camogie Association has one marquee game – our all Ireland final – which is free to air. After that broadcasting via TV or Streaming of our games comes at a cost which can be prohibitive.

The stark reality of the current situation of women's sport in key mainstream Irish media is set out below.

**PERCENTAGE OF SPORTS COVERAGE DEVOTED TO WOMEN'S SPORT**



Result drawn from 12 day monitor of Irish Sports Media during Month of March 2021

Since research was carried out in this area by Jimmy Deenihan TD shortly after the 2004 joint committee report, these statistics have not substantially changed. Direct action needs to be taken to ensure increased coverage of females sports.

**1.6 Funding**

Nationally - As a National Association we plan prudently every year, to ensure that we will be here to operate the following year. Our work is focussed and output for investment is high. We have demonstrated this through projects such as the MNÁ programme (Motivate, Nurture, Aspire) which works on coaching young people, engaging their parents, developing new coaches, and implementing a mentor system to maximise success. Focussed projects such as this over a two year period provide a superb opportunity to invest in sustainable projects.

The sports bodies servicing male sports have built up their resources over many years through Government and public funding and investment from their male and female members. Those promoting female participation are playing catch up and need extra support to deliver excellent quality services, supports and facilities to our members. It is no time to move the dial on investment in female sport.

Increases to core funding, and opportunities to submit additional applications for project funding will enable such activities to become mainstream and support clubs to grow, increased coaching numbers and more connection and participation in our sport. As mentioned above the increasing administrative workload is a source of stress for members so an opportunity for supported employment in sports environment – perhaps through internships (similar to aspire programme – potentially co-funded) might provide an opportunity to create employment and support volunteers. In reality what is required in relation to funding is a complete assessment and review of spending on sport. Funding models need to be assessed for gender impact and not just add on schemes for women's sport. Unequal investment focussing on women's sport, will be required to generate equity in access, participation and capacity building in women's sport at all levels.

**1.7 impact of Covid 19**

Time will tell what the long term impact of Covid 19 on sport will be...

- will players return to their sports clubs – or keep doing individual sport?
- will people go back to attending live games or will they want to watch every game on livestream from the comfort of their home?
- will families elect to continue with family outings at weekends and summer evenings rather than ferrying their children in different directions to numerous activities and events?
- Will schools return to after school extra curricular team sports activities?
- Will Volunteers return to sport – or now that they have experience ‘sport free time’ in spring and winter, might they retire and focus on other hobbies?
- What will minor and adult team sport look like in 5/6 years if children drop out now as a result of covid?

There are more questions than answers – it remains to be seen. We may well need to take remedial action, to resolve these possible outcomes.

## 2 Progress made following the 20X20 campaign.

The 20x20 campaign was a very effective marketing campaign that generated huge awareness around women in sport – and shone a light on the differences between male and female sport. Some of these issues had been highlighted before – but this campaign set out a clear mission and set a challenge to every individual across Ireland to contribute to a change in how we participate, attend, and view women’s sport.

The buy in from NGB’s was strong – The Camogie Association were early sign ups to the Charter. The call to action was clear and we encouraged our members and units to engage with the programme.

It is unfortunate that Covid 19 hit when it did – as we all had exciting plans and targets for 2020 – the culmination of the campaign.

### **How did we do???**

In 2019

- the Camogie Association enjoyed record attendance at our All Ireland Championship finals in Croke Park reaching almost 25,000.
- In 2019 those same finals were the most watched live women’s sport fixture on TV with 255,000 people watching the excitement as Galway won the trophy. While there were less people watching, the winners of the Intermediate and Premier Junior finals created their own stories with Westmeath winning intermediate and moving to Senior only 2 years previous. Kerry lifted the Premier Junior Cup in the same year.
- These three winning teams inspired young girls in their counties to pick up the hurl and practise more... to earn their chance at the title.

In 2020

- Membership wise despite covid 19 – we maintained a fairly level membership base, although we were unable to fulfil a number of competitions and fixtures due to restrictions.
- Evidence of the impact of investment in Tier 3 counties was brought to the fore in 2019 and 2020 All Ireland championships.
- Thanks to financial support through the Covid 19 Resilience fund and Inter County Championship Supports we were able to run an excellent championship competitions, under the strictest guidelines, and stream all bar one game – securing viewership over the series in the region of 700,000 people through streaming and broadcasting.
- The games were behind closed doors

It sounds positive – but as outlined above the impact of covid 19 might take a bit longer to show itself.

### 3 Recommendations for Action

The Camogie Association recommends and seeks support for the following actions:

1. **Establishment of a Task Force** to research review, recommend and deliver on initiative which will make real, long terms sustainable change tackling the issues in women's sport, increasing participation, engagement and viewership.
2. **Funding**- a detailed review of funding allocations to the Female sports, and implement deliberate long terms action to increase investment, and evaluate outcomes.  
**There should be a Multi Annual Funding Approach** to the Sport and women's sport projects e.g. Inter County Government Grant Scheme – to enable planning and certainty for stakeholders
3. **Extend the lifespan of female sports participation and engagement** through early intervention, and creation or enhanced and diverse opportunities at key drop out stages – investment in women's sport in schools and education, and cross department working similar to Healthy Ireland Strategic Approach should be utilised.
4. **Visibility of Women's Sport** - Ensure increased broadcast and media coverage for women's sport- using tools such as Free to Air, license fees etc.
5. **Develop a dedicated All Ireland Women in Sport Activation Plan** – aligning the work of Sport Ireland and Sports Northern Ireland in the women in sport Space, with specific Women's Team sport targets set out in the National Sports Policies and funding in place.
6. **Monitor the long term impact of Extended Covid 19 restrictions on Sport, Women's sport** and women's team sport in particular.