



The voice of Irish sport

Joint Committee on Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport, and the Gaeltacht

Submission by

The Federation of Irish Sport

December 9th, 2021

Firstly, I would like to thank the Chairperson, deputies, and senators for inviting the Federation of Irish Sport to make a submission on the topic of *Challenges facing Women in Sport*.

For those who may not be familiar with the work of the Federation, we are a representative body for 110 sporting organisations across Ireland including 81 National Governing Bodies and 29 Local Sports Partnerships.

To be succinct, some of the Issues facing women in sport in Ireland were highlighted in a report in 2018 entitled 'We are Sport'¹ commissioned by Sport Ireland it stated that the six core barriers for women in sport were, Confidence, Prioritisation, Motivation, Education, Influencers, and structures.

From the outset of this submission, I believe it necessary to prioritise and outline that there are significant challenges for women with disabilities being involved in Sport in Ireland.

In Ireland, individuals with a disability are far less likely to participate in sport, walk for recreation, volunteer for sport, be a sports club member or attend a sporting event than those without a disability (ISM, 2019)

Barriers associated with low levels of participation for people with disabilities- Lack of confidence, feeling vulnerable, social isolation, transport issues, inadequate facilities, cost of equipment, lack of funding (I'm in Too Focus Groups, Cara)

In March 2019 Sport Ireland launched a new women in sport policy, Coaching & Officiating, Active Participation, Leadership & Governance and Visibility are the four key target areas of the policy. I will highlight the main challenges facing women in sport under these four pillars.

Coaching and officiating

In Ireland, half of all women (51%) have never volunteered for sport. Those who do volunteer are less likely than men to coach, referee or be a club official (ISM, 2019)

In 2020, 2,374 female coaches from 60 different sports responded to a survey by sport Ireland.

The survey identified barriers to progression which can be grouped in to five areas;

- Time constraints i.e., personal time balancing including work, family, or sporting commitments
- Sexism and gender related issues
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of NGB and Club support and

¹ WE ARE SPORT Mná I gCúrsaí Spóirt Lisa Clancy and Sarah O' Shea 2018



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- Parental Factors

Active female coaches who did not plan to continue coaching or were unsure cited the following as primary reasons:

- Club issues
- Personal impact
- Parental impact

Active Participation

The Key objective under this pillar is to significantly reduce the active sport participation gradient between men and women and reduce the drop-out from physical activity and sport in young girls.

The Sport Ireland Adolescent Girls Get Active Report identified the following barriers relating to teenage girls and physical activity.

The most powerful barrier that prevents inactive girls from taking part in sport and physical activity is not feeling good enough to join in. This stems from both their perceptions and their experiences of competitive sport in Ireland.

- These girls have narrow, and often negative experiences of a small number of traditional (and dominant) team sports in Ireland and think this is all that sport is and can be.
- They feel too old to start a new sport in their teens,
- Girls associate 'sportiness' with team and contact sports, so girls who are interested in exercise do not feel targeted with sporting initiatives.
- 'No room for fun'. Inactive girls are more attracted to activities that focus on fun, enjoyment and wellbeing and take the pressure off having to be talented. There is not enough provision catering to different abilities and levels of competitiveness although this is improving.

Leadership & Governance

Almost three-quarters (71%) perceive the administration and management of sport to be too male dominated (ISM, 2019)

A key objective of the women in sport policy is to progress towards greater gender balance in board membership of funded bodies. The second objective is to provide a pathway for women aspiring to become leaders of funded bodies.

In March 2020, females made up an average of 29% of boards across funded National Governing Bodies in Ireland. This was an increase from 24% when the Sport Ireland Policy on Women in Sport was published in 2019.



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While in 2021 females currently account 32% of board members in funded sport bodies. Females account for 37% of Board members in LSPs.

Barriers to women's leadership in sport can be defined as: any construct, norm, or practice within the structural or cultural domains of sport serving to bar passage to or restrict or limit the ability of women to lead, guide or have influence²

These barriers can be further categorised as:

- a) Structural barriers: discriminatory norms, values, and institutional practices
- b) Cultural practices: attitudes and gender stereotypes
- c) Capacity gaps: education, networks/contacts, resources

The historical nature of how Board meetings have been run can make it challenging for women to commit, e.g., timing of meetings in the evening when women tend to have most of the family responsibilities.

Time constraints is still a challenge for all volunteers. With the level of commitment to a Club committee and Board increasing, less people are likely to want to give this time to volunteering on a club committee/Board.

No term limits for durations on Boards can mean no opportunities for changing the Board membership so less chance of voting on a female member.

Visibility

Worldwide women make up 40% of all participants in sports—yet somehow receive only 4% of sports media coverage. In Ireland, in 2018 just 3% of print's sports coverage (and 4% for online) was dedicated to women's sport

A Sport Ireland report of Irish Print Media outlined the following;

- 4.2% of articles in 2019 represent female sport/athletes
- 5.8% of images in 2019 represent female sport/athletes
- Notable variation between newspapers, e.g., one paper had 2% of articles represent female sport/athletes versus 7.4% in another for the same period.
- Overall, a 1.1% increase in print media coverage of women's sport over a 4-year period.

When asked why coverage was so low in meetings with the print media the following was cited;

- Lack of information and stories provided by the sports,
- Having to provide the content that their readers want which isn't necessary WIS.
- Lack of dedicated WIS resource, i.e., journalist to research and write the articles

Media outlets (print/radio/TV) don't have any gender KPIs or are they held accountable if women's sport isn't included in their coverage of sport.

² <https://www.sportanddev.org/sites/default/files/downloads/sue-ahandbookofbestpractice.pdf> p7



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Please note no direct reference was made to the challenges facing women in sport in high performance in this submission, although relevant the Federation believe we are not best placed to present those challenges.

In conclusion, there are any challenges still facing women in sport in Ireland, however, it must be noted that a considerable amount of work and development has been undertaken since the launch of the Women in Sport policy in 2019 and that significant outputs from that work should become apparent over the lifetime of the policy to ensure sustainable progression along with actions outlined in the recently launched Sports Action Plan 2021 – 2023.

Ends

References

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