



Football Association of Ireland

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media Opening Statement, 11th October 2023

Cathaoirleach, deputies, senators, on behalf of the Football Association of Ireland I would like to thank you for the invite to address the committee on the important issue of inclusion in sport.

At the FAI, we can see that sport has the unique ability to bring people from all walks of life together and has an important role to play in promoting diversity and inclusion across Irish society. We believe football is the most inclusive and accessible of all sports and diversity and inclusion are at the heart of much of our work. We also believe football reflects what is a changing Ireland. Our population is growing and becoming increasingly diverse and football, as the global game, has a key role to play as we embrace this new population.

The FAI's strategic vision is to "use football to inspire the nation and connect communities" and our mission is "to grow participants to our game and deliver the best footballing experience for all". Today, over 450,000 people in Ireland participate in football as players, coaches, officials, and volunteers, making football the single biggest participation sport in the country.

In our written submission to this committee, we have outlined the wide range of programmes and projects that we are supporting to drive greater participation in football across Ireland and how driving greater female participation in our sport is a key priority for all of us in the FAI. The strong level of support that we have seen across the country for our national women's football team, with a record attendance of 36,000 at their recent Nations League game against Northern Ireland in the Aviva Stadium following their debut appearance at the FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand this summer, is an example of the success we have seen in promoting the women's game here.

At the FAI, we have a clear focus on encouraging all members of the community to participate in football. We do this, because we believe football belongs to everyone, its joyful simplicity transcends borders and cultures, and we want to ensure everyone has the opportunity to play the 'beautiful game'.

Within our submission, we have detailed our actions to promote diversity and inclusion in football across the following areas:

1. Increasing Female Participation and Driving Gender Equality and Representation Throughout our Sport
2. Linking Sport and Disability
3. Addressing and Supporting Mental Health Issues via Football
4. Working with and Integrating the LGBTQIA+ Community
5. Embracing People and Communities from Diverse Ethnic, Cultural, Religious or National Backgrounds
6. Grassroots Sport and Socioeconomic Diversity



7. Encouraging Older People to Stay Involved with Football

The FAI works closely with all key stakeholders in relation to our approach to inclusion, including UEFA and FIFA as well as central and local government in Ireland and of course Sport Ireland and many other dedicated and specialist organisations.

In our four-year strategy for 2022-2025, we outlined our vision and stated purpose to enrich the lives of all through positive football experiences, with the six key pillars of our strategy designed to deliver on this ambition. In particular, our strategic pillars of transforming football facilities and infrastructure, driving grassroots football as the heart of the game, nurturing football pathways for all, and developing the full potential of football for women and girls will support the creation of an environment that will enable football to build upon its position as the most inclusive and accessible of all sports.

As I have already mentioned, we believe that sport, and football in particular, has the power to bring people together and we welcome the committee's efforts to examine the measures being taken by sporting organisations here around diversity and inclusion. My colleagues and I would now welcome the opportunity to respond to any questions you might have on how the FAI is promoting inclusion in football.