

Her Sport is the leading organisation in Ireland dedicated solely to women's sport. Inclusion in sport is at the heart of what we do, and we consider ourselves experts in this area. Our goal is for girls and women in sport to be on **PAR** with their male counterparts by increasing:

- **Participation in sport**
- **Attendance at women's sports events**
- **Recognition of female athletes.**

Her Sport welcomes this opportunity to outline the challenges pertaining to the participation of women in sport as requested by the Chair of the Committee, Niamh Smyth TD. This document purports to highlight those challenges relating to female participation in sport. However, based on our considerable understanding and immersion in female sport, Her Sport proposes solutions to these acute challenges being encountered by participants.

Our submission outlines the four recommendations that would contribute to promoting inclusion in sport for girls and women.

## **1. Driving equitable media coverage for females in sport**

Media coverage has a critical role in driving inclusion, participation and visibility in sport. 59% of Irish people believe that the media should do more to promote female sport.

The most up to date research in Ireland shows that just 6% of sports media coverage goes to women's sport. Per Appendix 2 of the Sport Ireland Women in Sport Policy, 4.2% of articles in print media in 2019 represented women's sport while just 5.8% of pictures in print media in 2019 represent female athletes / sport. Despite some progress made in recent years, women's sports coverage is still significantly lower than men's

Men's sport receives significantly more airtime and coverage than women's sport across publicly funded channels - see appendix for example. Women are

contributing to these publicly funded channels, via payment of the tv licence, but see lack of equality and representation of female athletes.

The media has the opportunity to showcase role models. A lack of female role models in the media has impacted participation, a feeling of belonging and of value for women in sport, contributing to cultural attitudes and norms.

We have heard countless people including female athletes talk about the lack of role models and how important it is to see representation. Lisa Fallon has been a trailblazer for women in football as a coach and manager, with a current role in FIFA. She shared her experience as a child and the impact of no visibility of women in sport; “I actually wished I had been a boy. I loved football so much and I didn’t see how it was possible [as a girl]”.

Katie Taylor paved the way for Irish boxing, as well as played a significant role in getting women’s boxing into the Olympics in 2012. Ten years later, 7 Irish female boxers won medals at the European boxing championships. This demonstrates the role media coverage and visibility can play.

Through the lack of equitable visibility , the portrayal of women and girls sport in the media conveys a message that women are undervalued and insignificant. Per the former Deputy Head of Sport at RTE, public service media has more permeation of society than other media.

We recommend the implementation of a policy that requires publicly funded media to commit to providing equal coverage of men's and women's sports, and is publicly announced and reviewed on an annual basis. Additionally we would recommend seeking the commitment from other large private organisations in the media space that have the power to support change.

Sweden provides a successful example of this policy working. The country's public broadcasting company, SVT, created a policy with a goal of broadcasting 50/50 men's and women's sport in the media. In 2019, it was reported that they had successfully met their goal. Some key results below:.

- SVT increased the number of hours of women's sports by 245% between 2015 and 2019,
- SVT noted their policy has had positive effects on the visibility and recognition of women athletes, the interest and engagement of viewers, and the development and growth of women's sports in Sweden.
- A global study by Nielsen Sports found that 84% of general sports fans are interested in women's sport, and that Sweden is one of the countries with the highest interest levels (76%).
- Sports participation among women and girls in Sweden is higher than in other European countries, and that Swedish women are more likely to watch women's sport on TV than men

Ireland can become a leading nation in the world for equality across all sport media..

Additionally we recommend guidelines regarding the language used in sport e.g. referring to the Men's National Teams as the "Mens" rather than the default of "The National Team". Using "The National Team" to describe the Men's team, implies that they are superior to the women's team and demonstrates imbalance. Referring to the Men's National Team as the "Mens" implies that there is a women's team and sets both the mens and womens teams on a level playing field.

## **2. Playing for increasing board representation at grassroots level**

The current National Sports Policy outlines a target of achieving 30% gender balance on boards of funded bodies by 2027. The Ireland Sports Action Plan 2021-2023 set out a target to have 40% representation on the boards of National Governing Bodies by the end of 2023. This policy is aimed at achieving greater gender balance in board membership, providing a pathway for women aspiring to become leaders of funded bodies and promoting gender balance in decision making across funded bodies.

We recommend an extension of this policy target to be implemented across all Sport Ireland funded clubs at grassroots level, nationwide. This will support equality and promote inclusion in all aspects of sport including board representation, coaching, officiating, participation. We believe that extending the gender balance target to grassroots level is crucial in promoting diversity and inclusivity in sports across the

nation. With more female representation at board and committee level, there is a greater likelihood that the needs and interests of girls and women in sports will be prioritised. Additionally it will provide a pathway for women to take up leadership positions at every level of sports, promoting diversity and equality.

### **3. Parity of access to stadia and associated facilities**

Considerable state funding has been allocated to the development and maintenance of stadiums, including prominent national stadiums such as Croke Park and the Aviva Stadium.

Example: The Aviva Stadium is jointly owned by the Football Association Ireland (FAI) and Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU). Per our research, the Aviva stadium cost €460 million to build with a government contribution of €191 million. The Aviva stadium accommodates the Irish national men's soccer and rugby teams, but the Irish national women's teams do not receive this privilege. While there was direct contribution from the state to the development of the stadium, there is additional state funding provided by the state to the FAI and the IRFU on an ongoing basis. The state funding is supported by taxpayers, both the women and men of Ireland.

Our recommendation is to provide equal access to stadiums and facilities at high performance level, supported by a robust marketing plan in relation to competition, to promote attendances.

### **4. Elimination of the demarcation of GAA, LGFA & Camogie Association structures**

Gaelic Games is an enormous part of Irish culture, with Gaelic football and hurling/camogie some of the most played sports in the country. Within Gaelic Games, from local clubs to larger stadiums, the GAA owns all grounds, bar one in Armagh, owned by the LGFA. The GAA only represents men's football and hurling. The GAA clubs have been built by and funded by the local communities for decades; by women and men. Within GAA clubs there is continuous struggle for equal access to facilities. In many clubs, men's sport is a priority, with girls and women's teams less supported. Additionally, there are numerous accounts of dismissal of and poor attitude towards women in sport. Our recommendation is to prioritise the

amalgamation of the GAA, LGFA and Camogie Association, which will make a significant change across communities in Ireland from both access and cultural perspective. As communities are steeped in Gaelic Games, creating cultural change within Gaelic Games would make a significant difference for inclusion in sport and also impact the wider

Numerous organisations in Ireland are trying to improve the landscape of women's sport, but these organisations need the support of the government too or they can be harnessed by the government.

## Appendix:

The level of coverage of men's sport vs women's sport on TG4 and RTE are demonstrated below for the week of 27th March - 2nd April. On the right hand column we also show the women's games that were not covered, but were covered for the men.

Week of 27th March - 2nd April				
RTE		TG4		Women's Games That Occurred That Were Not Covered by RTE or TG4
Women's Sport	Men's Sport	Women's Sport	Men's Sport	
	Allianz League Sunday		Cuimhní Órga Spóirt	LOI 29th March 5 games
	The Game	GAA 2023	GAA 2023	Women's Champions League
	Champions League Magazine	Cispheil Bheo	Cispheil Bheo	Camogie Antrim v Wexford very League division 1B
(Six Nations 1 game - RTE Player)	Heineken Champions Cup		GAA Beo Wicklow v Sligo	Six Nations - 2 games
	SSE Airtricity League Live		GAA Beo Cavan v Fermanagh	
	European Qualifiers		GAA Beo Dublin v Derry	
			GAA Beo Galway v Mayo	
			GAA GOLD	