SPORT GVP
Gender Violence Prevention in & through sport

Policy Advocacy: Driving Systematic Change in Sport GVP

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Introduction

Sport holds enormous potential to drive gender equality by improving the well-being of girls and women and boosting their confidence and leadership skills (UNESCO and UN WOMEN, 2023).

However, in Europe, nearly half of women (49%) report never engaging in physical activity, compared to 40% of men (European Commission, 2022). Practical, social, and personal barriers fuel this discrepancy.

On the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Extreme Violence towards Women, Sport and Citizenship & UFEC, as part of the GAP Women project, organised the *"Keeping Girls in Sport"* webinar to highlight how sport can serve as a tool for social change, especially in advancing gender equality. Sport GVP consortium representative Eleni Trichina was among the speakers and had the opportunity to present insights from the project on structural violence as a barrier to women's participation in sports.

The Barriers Women Face in Sports

Despite progress in recent years, women continue to face significant challenges in accessing and participating in sports.

- **Practical Challenges**: Many women lack financial access to sports or feel unsafe in spaces designed for physical activity.
- **Social Norms**: Gender stereotypes and male-dominated sports environments deter participation and discourage women from trying new activities traditionally associated with men.
- **Personal Barriers**: Issues such as low self-confidence, body image concerns, and family influences further reduce women's participation.

These facts show that gender equality needs to be boosted. Addressing these barriers is about increasing participation and fostering an environment where everyone feels empowered, respected, and supported.

During the event, the need for policy advocacy was highlighted, and the participants came up with some recommendations that will have a short-term but systematic impact on our surroundings and a positive impact on sports overall.

Practical Recommendations for the Organisations

Organisations must take proactive steps to address the systemic barriers that limit their participation to create a more equitable and inclusive sports landscape for women. By implementing targeted strategies and fostering a culture of respect and equality, we can empower women to reach their full potential in sports.

- **Educate and Advocate**: Develop a comprehensive understanding of gender inequality and gender-based violence in sports. Resources, such as those available on Sport GVP's website, can provide valuable insights into the depth of the issue.
- **Provide Funding for Equality**: Larger organisations should leverage their financial resources and influence to fund initiatives that promote equal opportunities for all genders. This includes supporting smaller organisations in implementing inclusive programmes.
- **Revisit Policies**: Raise awareness of existing anti-discrimination policies in sports and collaborate with like-minded organisations to revise and improve these frameworks, ensuring inclusivity at every level.

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- **Ensure Safe Spaces**: Advocate for public sports facilities that prioritize safety and accessibility. This includes ensuring that sports areas are well-lit, easily reachable, and designed to create a welcoming environment for everyone.

Conclusion

Sport is more than a game—it is a powerful platform for social transformation. To unlock its full potential, stakeholders across all levels must commit to creating an equitable and inclusive environment. By addressing barriers, revising outdated practices, and fostering safe, accessible spaces, we can ensure that girls and women not only participate in sports but thrive within them. The path forward requires collective action, but the reward is a society where sports truly belong to everyone—equally.

Resources:

European Commission. Eurobarometer. (2022). Sport and physical activity. europa.eu. *https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2668*

Tackling violence against women and girls in sport. A handbook for policy makers and sports practitioners. (n.d.). UNESCO eBooks. *https://doi.org/10.54678/oiyq8917*

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