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SPORT

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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Working Party on Sport
Subject:	Lunch debate on the place of women in sport - Presidency background note for the ministerial lunch debate on 14 May 2024 (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council)

Delegations will find attached the background note prepared by the Presidency with a view to the ministerial lunch debate which will take place on 14 May 2024 at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council.

LUNCH DEBATE ON THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN SPORT

EYCS COUNCIL (SPORT) - 14 May 2024

Background

Studies and reports show that women are underrepresented at all levels in sport (participation, training, media coverage, leadership), as stated in the Recommendations and Action Plan published by the High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport in 2022. There is a gap in women's participation in sport compared to men's, which is further amplified by higher drop-out rates for women.

Various factors, such as sociocultural norms and personal and/or practical barriers, can contribute to this disparity. Women often face challenges in accessing coaching and decision-making positions in sport which influence gender equality¹. Media coverage of women's sport also remains disproportionately low compared to that of men's sport, perpetuating a lack of visibility and recognition for female athletes². Moreover, women are more at risk of being exposed to inappropriate behaviour in sports environments, such as physical, verbal or psychological violence.

Even though the sports sector alone cannot tackle what is a cross-cutting societal issue, it remains an important vehicle for emancipation. Many women have spoken out against inequality and their lack of visibility in sport. The sports sector has developed specific projects for women at every level, such as the EU-Council of Europe 'All In' project in 2018 and the current 'All In Plus' project (2023-2025), as well as plans to increase women's participation within federations. The development of self-organised sport³ may facilitate women's engagement in sport and have a complementary and beneficial impact on women's sports practice.

Member States have adopted action plans and recommendations in this regard. They have conducted various projects and/or implemented legislation making gender equality a priority at EU and international levels. The recent Council conclusions on women and equality in the field of sport and the Strategy for Gender Equality 2020-2025 both underlined the growing recognition of the issue at EU level.

A wide range of actions and documents highlight gender equality and women in sport at European and international levels, such as:

- ❖ United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 7.
- ❖ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Goal 5 seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- ❖ Charter of Fundamental Rights – Articles 1 and 23.
- ❖ Treaty on European Union – Article 2 states that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.
- ❖ Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – Article 8 provides that in all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities and promote equality between men and women.
- ❖ UNESCO and UN Women, 'Tackling violence against women and girls in sport: a handbook for policy makers and sports practitioners', 2023.

¹ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 'Towards more gender equality in sport – Recommendations and action plan from the High-Level Group on Gender Equality in sport (2022)', Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, pp.22-24.

² European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 'Towards more gender equality in sport – Recommendations and action plan from the High-Level Group on Gender Equality in sport (2022)', Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, pp.28-30.

³ *All forms of physical activity that can occur in informal settings, generally during leisure time, that do not follow strict formal sporting rules, and that do not necessarily involve a competitive format. These activities can take place in local and informal settings, such as parks and neighbourhoods, but also in sport infrastructures, either individually or collectively, such as with friends, colleagues and family members.*

Levers for action

Women's participation in sport should not be thought of as an extension of men's practice. It is important to identify women's needs in order for the sport sector to reflect women's reality. One way to enhance the place of women in sport in this regard is through campaigns and projects aimed directly at women, taking into account studies, reports and recommendations. During this informal lunch, the Belgian Presidency wishes to highlight two ways of increasing women's participation in sport.

Firstly, as proposed in the 'Leadership' section of the Recommendations and Action Plan from the High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport, the proportion of women in leadership roles (board of directors and senior management positions) could be increased at all levels in the sport sector. Balancing the representation of women in decision-making bodies through specific plans to increase the number of women in leadership roles is a positive incentive. Plans like this belong to the category of actions aiming to encourage and enhance women's participation in sport and physical activity. Recruitment and training campaigns are tools that could be used to increase the number of women in these activities. It is also essential to identify obstacles to women applying for these positions.

Secondly, it is important to address the fact that women go through various periods of transition during their lives and that their participation in sport decreases with age⁴. Motherhood can have an influence on how frequently and for how long women practise sports. Mothers often put sport aside to look after their children. Making sport more accessible and attractive to mothers can have a positive effect on the family's overall health⁵. Particular attention must also be paid to single mothers, who often have even less time to devote to sport and physical activity.

In the light of the information presented, the Presidency invites the ministers to exchange views and share experiences on the following issues:

- What measures are you taking to increase women's participation in sport, in particular in leadership roles (on boards of directors and in managerial positions)?
- How are you helping women to maintain their sporting activities during specific moments of transition in their lives?

⁴ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 'Towards more gender equality in sport – Recommendations and action plan from the High-Level Group on Gender Equality in sport (2022)', Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, p.15.

⁵ 'Etat des lieux des pratiques, attentes, freins et représentations en termes d'activités physiques et sportives en Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, Incidence 2020. Administration Générale du Sport, Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, 'Plus Sportives' – rapport, 2024

Onaps. 'Enquête sur les comportements sédentaires et la pratique d'activité physique lors des transitions de vie de la femme' – rapport, janvier 2023.