



Review of strategies and policies across the world to promote Women in Sports

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This report provides an overview of what initiatives and policies several leading countries across the world are doing to promote women in sports. From this, the *Michigan Taskforce on Women in Sports* can assess solutions based on international best practice for successful, evidence-led policies implemented around the world.

The countries assessed are: England, Scotland, Wales (and UK wide policies), Ireland, France, Australia, Norway, and Canada. With some of these countries specific regional plans and strategies are also examined such as the Île-de-France region in France (Paris), and multiple Australian provinces. These countries were selected due to them being some of the most advanced when it comes to women in sports and government initiatives supporting women in sports, but by no means represent an exhaustive list. The policies examined range from tried and proved initiatives to more recent campaigns launched off the back of new research.

Introduction

Each country and region has its unique approach but as this paper shows, there are some common themes that consistently show up. These can be divided into three main approaches to promoting women in sports: Governance, Communication, and Education.

Governance is a key point whichever country you look at, whether it be structures set up specifically set up to tackle the issue of women in sports, or specific oversight roles assigned. On the communication front the main priorities include visibility and promotion of women in sports, addressing specific media gender imbalance when reporting on sports, and recognising and celebrating female success. The Education priorities are around educating clubs, sporting organisations, and coaches about how to be more inclusive and supportive, how to provide more female role models for young female athletes, and providing the pathways and support for women in sports, particularly around leadership opportunities.

This paper also looks at the bigger picture beyond these sports-specific approaches, through examining recent research into why Norway is such a successful case of female participation and representation in sport and what the non-sporting influences for this could be.



Governance and Oversight

There are two important differences when looking at Michigan and the United States compared to the rest of the world when it comes to sports policy: the way each country runs sporting activities (namely the presence of club sports), and the degrees of government involvement. The United States' sporting model diverges from many of these models, so certain level of caution is advised. Perhaps the biggest difference is that university/collegiate sport is not as central a piece to the sporting landscape. Rather, in many of these countries most sport is played through clubs that do not always receive governmental funding. Therefore many of the policies seen in this report are put in place to promote and assist women in sports in the club system.

Equally, several of the countries this report examines have different forms and layers of government and governance than Michigan. In the case of the UK there is national policy, country-level policy, and then each of the countries have their own "arms-length bodies of government" such as *Sport England*, *Sport Scotland* etc, which are responsible for "growing and developing grassroots sport and getting more people active" across that country. These organisations are often the most active in terms of governmental intervention around addressing the challenges around women in sports. This is a different governmental structure than what is currently in place in Michigan but still useful to observe.

The creation of the Michigan Taskforce on Women in Sports fits a wider international pattern where Advisory Boards have been created to investigate this topic and propose policy recommendations. These include a UK Government Women and Sport Advisory Board chaired by at the time Sport Minister Helen Grant whose final report came out in 2015,¹ and a more recent Scottish Government equivalent.

Sport Ireland (the organisation which oversees, and partly funds, the development of sport within Ireland) in their 2019 report on Women in Sports, not only recommended that the Women in Sports Steering Committee continue its role but also identified the creation of a "Women in Sports Lead" as the priority action going forward. This leadership role would lead, advocate, and evaluate the policies stemming from their strategic vision on women in sports.² A similar approach is advocated by the Île-de-France region report on women in sports, which looks at having project leaders to ensure accountability and oversight of progress.³

¹https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/416060/FINAL.pdf

²https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/wis_policy.pdf

³https://www.iledefrance.fr/sites/default/files/2019-05/rapport_femmes_sport_idf_2019.pdf



Communication Strategies

Promotional Campaigns

One of the most popular initiatives around the world for promoting women in sports in recent years have been major communication plans and campaigns that aim to debunk many of the negative stereotypes faced by women in sports and inspire more women to take part in sport.

It is difficult to measure impact of such campaigns but one successful example is the “This Girl Can” campaign led by *Sport England*, which ran a number of adverts viewed 95 million times. 70% of women who viewed an advert as part of the “This Girl Can” campaign were motivated by it and an estimated 1.6 million women started or restarted exercise as a result of the campaign.⁴ At the federal level, the Australian Department of Health also runs the “Girls Make Your Move Campaign”, inspired by the “This Girl Can” campaign.⁵ These campaigns are first of all about promoting women in sports, but are also hubs for more information, particularly around how to get involved in sport. They are tying the promotional work directly to a call to action to get involved in sport.

Female role models and promoting success of women in sports

Providing a spotlight for female role models in sport is crucial. Governments across the world also look to build on the inspirational campaigns discussed above and help bring women working in sport to go to local schools and talk about their jobs and careers. Sport England’s “Inspiring Women in Sport” campaign does just that, by asking every woman working in any aspect of sport to pledge one hour a year to some activity where they can be providing that inspiration for other women.⁶ Sport Ireland has “Visibility” as one of its priority pillars to focus on. The objectives are to increase visibility and profile of these role models. One requirement is that female athletes who receive funding are required to “give back” as ambassadors and role models for the sport.⁷ At a professional level, governments also look to assist in building networks and mentorship programmes, such as hosting conferences for women in sports, and supporting buddy/pairing programs between women already established in the sporting world, and women who are just starting off.

⁴ <https://www.thisgirlcan.co.uk/>

⁵ <https://campaigns.health.gov.au/girlsmove/about-this-campaign>

⁶ <https://www.educationandemployers.org/inspiring-women-campaign/inspiring-women-in-sport-2015/>

⁷ https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/wis_policy.pdf



Media Coverage

Working towards equal coverage in sport media covers lots of these other aspects. It increases awareness about women in sports, celebrates success, and provides female role models. As such, several countries and regions have specifically identified sport media coverage as an area to tackle. Sport Ireland's approach is one of accountability, with them carrying out their own regular research on visibility of women's sport in Irish media in order to provide accountability.⁸

The Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board go one step further - they recommended the creation of a Scottish Sport Media Summit in their first report in 2019.⁹ We have yet to see what this would look like in practice but the objectives of said event would be to provide a setting for government and women in sports to discuss with the media about how to achieve a more gender balanced approach.

In France, where 85% of sport on TV is male, the French Government suggested building a communications plan to build media exposure. One of the central aspects of that plan being building a strong female sports calendar for the year, which would be able to provide structure and regularity to the coverage.¹⁰

Building from the media coverage, other countries are looking at how to further promote the success of women in sports. NSW in Australia has a detailed strategy of initiatives to create annual awards: Leadership in Sport, Women leaders in Sport scholarship, and Woman Sport trailblazer Award – with that aim of providing recognition that might be otherwise lacking.

Education

Toolkits

One policy recommendation that appears frequently across different countries is the creation of educational toolkits for sporting organisations, clubs, and teams. *Sport Ireland*, for example, are funding a toolkit to educate coaches on the risks of girls dropping out of sport, and assist them with strategies on how to avoid that.¹¹ Australia have also made strides to provide different toolkits, such as one that provides guidance for building and including female friendly changing rooms.¹² Via a specific website, guidance is provided including details about the differences

⁸ https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/wis_policy.pdf

⁹ <https://api.actify.org.uk/asset/53e5da02-d9e0-48d7-8601-aeb6ae3f196e>

¹⁰ <http://www.sports.gouv.fr/pratiques-sportives/le-sport-pour-tous/Sport-au-feminin-11071/Mediatiser-le-sport-au-feminin/>

¹¹ https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/wis_policy.pdf

¹² <https://www.femalefriendlychangingrooms.com.au/>



between each state in Australia and each sport. Preferred suppliers are also mentioned, which could likely also be one of the funding sources for such work.

Île-de-France, the French region that includes Paris, identified the need for easily accessible education tools. Its latest research report recommends the creation of a website to be the hub for information on possibilities and opportunities for women in sports. This “careers portal” of sorts would be able to target and particularly support the most underrepresented sports for women.¹³

Funding pathways for women in sports/leadership opportunities

Helping provide pathways for women in sports and leadership opportunities is key too. Regional and national governments do this by funding/subsidising different education and training programmes. *Sport Ireland* funds a number of NGBs, and in return asks for the coaches who benefit from the training to give back, as mentioned above.¹⁴ This provides a double usage of sorts for the spending. In Canada and in Australia their strategies also contain a specific fundraising aspect, including providing incentives for corporate funding. There is an acknowledgement that in addition to the government funds they are able to provide, this can help with fundraising.

The Norwegian example

Norway represents an interesting example, as it is one of the top, if not the top, country for women’s participation in sport. This does not translate to the same level of equity at the highest level of sports but still is significantly ahead of other countries. However, one significant recent research paper from Norway suggests that the causes for this are not sport-led initiatives but rather society-level perspectives that address socio-economic gender disparities. The argument here is that sport is not leading society but rather it is following broader society, and the paper’s main policy recommendation is that “instead of individually oriented approaches, sports policies need first and foremost to adopt society-level perspectives that address socio-economic gender disparities”. Such policies may be too ambitious for a nascent taskforce on Women in Sports but given Norway’s success in this field are nonetheless important to consider.

It is interesting to observe the correlation shown in Norway between socio-economic position of women and female participation in sports. Norway’s culture of civic engagement features sport and sporting activity as an important facet. The

¹³ https://www.iledefrance.fr/sites/default/files/2019-05/rapport_femmes_sport_idf_2019.pdf

¹⁴ https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/wis_policy.pdf



sporting culture, at least at the youth level is less competitive, with no game scores, rankings or national championships before the age of 11.¹⁵

For example, this one research paper talks about salary gaps between men and women being amongst the lowest, and increased average monthly earnings in Norway for both men and women. This has been achieved in part through gender quota's for leadership positions both within sport (in boardroom positions among the national sports federations) and outside of sport. Added to this is the fact that Norwegians work considerably less (1414 hours per year) than most people in the OECD (1749 hours).¹⁶ Not only are women becoming better paid and more economically independent but they have the time to also undertake domestic duties such as facilitating their children's economic participation. Effectively women have the "economic wherewithal for sports participation".¹⁷ Other significant policies shown to have a positive impact include mandatory paternal leave in combination with maternity leave.

This has a knock-on effect where the female parental role model for girls in Norway is likely to be a paid, working, sporty mother. There are also cultural elements that mean that physical recreation is one of the most important aspects of Norwegian identity. Included in this are civic responsibilities; involvement in voluntary sports clubs often "appears a rite of passage for many Norwegians, whether as sports participants or, of equal importance, as volunteers".¹⁸

¹⁵<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19406940.2015.1031812?scroll=top&needAccess=true#aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cudGFuZGZvbmxpbmUuY29tL2RvaS9wZGYvMTAuMTA4MC8xOTQwNjk0MC4yMDE1LjEwMzE4MTI/bmVIZEFjY2Vzcz10cnVIQEBAMA==>

¹⁶ibid

¹⁷ ibid

¹⁸ ibid