



European Women in Sport (E-WinS): Findings of Best Practice

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FORSYTH, J. J., BLACKETT, A.D, MACKAY, L., ELLIS, N. & GIDLOW, C.

STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY

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1. Executive summary

Over a billion people watched the Women's World Cup in 2019 on television or digital platforms (FIFPRO, 2020). This apparent attractiveness of women's football gives hope that complete gender equality and feminisation, in all areas of football, is achievable.

The results presented in this report form part of a project funded by Erasmus+ Sport, entitled "European Women in Sport – For an adaptive governance of women's sports practices" (E-WinS), which started in January 2021 and is due to end in December 2023. The overall aim of the project is to promote and accelerate the feminisation of Sport in European cultures through developing awareness and understanding of the specific problematics women encounter in their sport careers. Six countries, Bulgaria, England, Finland, France, Poland and Spain, are involved in the E-WinS project. The project was started by focussing on practices in women's football.

Through a survey, focus groups and interviews, we wished to gain a deeper understanding of football practices, concerning the following:

- equality for women in football, regarding pay, sponsorship, career progression and access to resources
- practices regarding media coverage, promotion and visibility for women in football
- education, knowledge and understanding about the menstrual cycle and hormone-based contraception
- issues around pregnancy, maternity leave and childcare in women's football

The online survey was completed by 1,129 adults (approximately 77% female), 51% of whom were footballers, 24% coaches, 11% leaders/managers, 8% administrators, and 6% 'other' (mainly support staff and officials). The level of play at participants' clubs was mainly (63%) amateur, 13% professional, 7% semi-professional and 17% junior. Following the surveys, focus groups and interviews were carried out with a subset of 61 individuals (49 women, 12 men), 27 of whom were footballers, 17 coaches, 11 managers, 5 administrators and there was 1 line official.

Despite women's pay being a fraction of what the pay is for men, 13% of our survey respondents said that pay and sponsorship for women was 'extremely equal' at their club in comparison to that for men. Some regional clubs, as well as national governing bodies of sport, such as the football associations of Spain, England and Finland, give equal pay to the men's and women's national teams for international fixtures, and attract and encourage sponsors. Support for careers, coaches and girls in football seemed to be growing and 31% of all survey respondents said they felt their club provided resources and facilities that were equivalent to those for males.

The advantages and disadvantages, in terms of media coverage and promotion, of being an integrated club (men and women together) and a standalone club were highlighted, and specific examples of good practice were given. Live broadcasting of matches and social media were found to be positive ways of increasing the visibility of women's football, as well as attracting more players.

Menstrual cycle tracking by using apps was found to be a positive example of how training could be adapted and enhanced, injury prevented, and positive health ensured. More could be done on this topic though, since 69% of survey respondents felt that education about the menstrual cycle was 'not at all provided'. Despite this lack of education, 22% of respondents said they felt 'extremely confident' talking about the menstrual cycle within their club and noted how having specifically assigned female staff helped with confidence in discussing issues related to the menstrual cycle and hormone-based contraception.

Guidelines on pregnancy are available at national and international level, yet we found that players and staff did not feel particularly well informed of these. At a local club level, however, players and staff generally felt supported, within their club, in their pregnancy, postpartum period and with childcare, owing to a strong sense of solidarity and team cohesion.