

### **A goal for women and men to be equal in sports**

One of the biggest events of 2018 was undoubtedly the World Cup, which gathered people from all over the World to support their country or their preferred country of choice. Nonetheless this big interest in football seems to stop only with men's games.

In 2014 the number of viewers watching the men's world cup reached 3.2 billion<sup>1</sup>, whilst a year later the number of viewers watching the women's world cup reached 750 million<sup>2</sup> which, even though it was an all-time record of viewers the number is still low. With this growing interest, more needs to be done to increase the visibility and participation of women and now is the right time to encourage girls and women to get more involved in football and other sports.

Visibility can be an effective channel. The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) is taking the initiative to mitigate the gender gap in football. In fact, for next year's Champion's League final the city of the stadium and the date will be different for women's and men's finals<sup>3,4</sup> so that women's game will not be overshadowed by the men's game. The women's final will be held in Budapest on the 18<sup>th</sup> May and the men's final will be in Madrid on the 1<sup>st</sup> June. UEFA also encourages the media to build heroes and star players so that people will recognise the names of the players and football clubs. Sponsorships were given to the companies who are investing in women's football and in unique sponsorships other than those used by men<sup>5</sup>.

Within the UEFA there is also the Women's Football Development Programme (WFDP) launched in 2014 which envisages expansion at all levels of the sport throughout Europe. This programme works hand in hand with the growth of women's games in view of an increasing number of top-level women footballers as role models in UEFA's pool of ambassadors. Football Associations are being urged to set major strategic and financial goals by UEFA that also recommended the inclusion of women in key positions and ensured that all associations have a domestic women's league and national academies for girls.

In Malta, women's football was initiated way back in the second half of the seventies. During this time two women achieved certification as football referees and in 1978 were awarded

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fifa.com/worldcup/news/2014-fifa-world-cuptm-reached-3-2-billion-viewers-one-billion-watched--2745519>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fifa.com/womensworldcup/news/record-breaking-fifa-women-s-world-cup-tops-750-million-tv-viewers-2745963>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.uefa.com/womenschampionsleague/season=2019/finals/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.uefa.com/uefachampionsleague/season=2019/final/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/about-uefa/administration/marketing/news/newsid=2518534.html?iv=true>

certificates by Sir Stanley Rous who himself was a top-class referee<sup>6</sup> and FIFA president (1961-1974)<sup>7</sup>. However, after a few years, this initiative was not sustained for various reasons.

Interest was revived in 1995 and continued to develop. In fact, there are 708 registered women players in the domestic league –according to UEFA research (2016-2017)<sup>8</sup>. There are 13 registered senior teams with a budget of €225,327. The ratio of men to women coaches is 70:30. The women coaches have UEFA B and National C licence, whilst for the highest coaching certification – UEFA Pro and UEFA A – there are no women. Overall, there are 12 women coaches compared to 493 men coaches.

Indeed, in Malta, there is an increase in the women’s football visibility with more spectators and more awareness on social media. The average attendance at national team matches is 500 and on the increase.<sup>9</sup> This development should be seen as an encouragement to keep working to increase the visibility of women’s football to bring it at par with the men’s league.

Traditionally sport was considered as a men’s only arena. This gender stereotype, alongside caring responsibilities in the family, can hinder women’s participation in decision-making and in participating in sporting activities. In fact, women are underrepresented as coaches, and they are more likely to coach a sport that has a high proportion of women such as dancing, gymnastics, figure skating and equestrian sports.

The media plays a significant role in reinforcing and challenging gender stereotypes in sports. The coverage of the media given to women is by far less than men’s as the latter receive more attention with higher viewership. The lack of women in sports journalism can also contribute to less visibility. On a positive note, this year, The Malta Sports Journalists Association appointed Laura Cunningham as its first female general secretary.<sup>10</sup>

In order to effectively put women’s football on a stronger national footing, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) highlights the need to mainstream gender in the relevant policy areas, by integrating gender equality into every stage of development and implementation of policies or programmes. There can also be targeted measures and initiatives through public debates, training, mentoring schemes and proactive policies that would encourage women to stay in sports. Having legislative or voluntary measures might be a way to increase public awareness and combat prescriptive gender roles. EIGE also stresses the importance to have quality data that is gender disaggregated at EU level that would be

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/the-president/sir-stanley-rous.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.fifa.com/development/news/y=1997/m=6/news=sir-stanley-rous-the-spirit-the-game-and-the-laws-71962.html>

<sup>8</sup>

[https://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/OfficialDocument/uefaorg/Women'sfootball/02/43/13/56/2431356\\_DOWNLOAD.pdf](https://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/OfficialDocument/uefaorg/Women'sfootball/02/43/13/56/2431356_DOWNLOAD.pdf)

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[https://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/OfficialDocument/uefaorg/Women'sfootball/02/43/13/56/2431356\\_DOWNLOAD.pdf](https://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/OfficialDocument/uefaorg/Women'sfootball/02/43/13/56/2431356_DOWNLOAD.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.maltasportsjournalists.com/2018/06/06/lorraine-cunningham-confirmed-as-msja-general-secretary/>



*National Commission for the Promotion of Equality*

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beneficial for policy makers to adopt policies that truly reflect the different needs of women and men and encourage an equal engagement.

Promoting and maintaining the momentum already started for gender equality in sports, which has a vast viewership, can help not only to create a level playing field for men and women but also to have a ripple effect strengthening gender equality in other areas. Let us look forward to positive developments in the next world cup.

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