

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Leadership

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The continued underrepresentation of women in the senior governance and leadership of sport has been recognised by scholars and activists since the 1980s. Commissioned by UK Sport, this project aimed to develop insight on the current state of gender equity in international sport governance by analysing the representation of women in decision making positions and developing an in-depth understanding of gender and governance actions undertaken by international sport organisations.

From our sample of sixty international sport organisations, we concluded:

There continues to be a significant underrepresentation of women within decision-making positions in international sport organisations.

Across these organisations there is just 22% female representation on the highest governance bodies (such as Councils, Executive Boards and Bureau's), 7% female representation within the highest governance positions (such as Chairs and Presidents), and 21% female representation within the highest leadership positions (such as CEOs and Executive Directors).

It is not the prevalence but the nature of gender and governance actions that are most important.

This research shows that gender and governance action will only be effective in increasing female representation within the governance of international sport organisations if organisations implement actions that are ambitious, process-driven, and embedded across the organisation. It is also important that organisations demonstrate a genuine commitment to achieving these gender and governance actions and that increased female representation is combined with a change to the gendered system of sports organisations. This is to ensure that women decision-makers are not just represented but have the power to influence the governance of international sports organisations.

Some groups of organisations require more support than others in implementing effective gender and governance action measures.

No International Paralympic Committee (IPC)-recognised International Federations (IFs) implemented any of the six forms of gender and governance action featured in this research. Furthermore, neither group of organisations exclusive to the Paralympic movement (i.e. Continental Paralympic Committees/Councils and IPC-recognised IFs) had a prevalence of gender quotas, gender election, and recruitment rules or official documents that make reference to gender and governance. Therefore, a bespoke approach is required to support the organisations to adopt effective gender and governance action measures.

The findings of this project have informed UK Sport's new strategy and have underpinned workshops with its international relations network.

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