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Raising the growth and participation
of female sport officials in Europe

A female sports official is seated in a stadium, holding a white flag high in her right hand. She is wearing a blue polo shirt with a Nike logo and "EUROPE ATHLETIC" text, a green armband that says "CHIEF JUDGE", and an orange lanyard with a badge. In the background, other officials in blue shirts are seated, and a large crowd is visible in the stands. A red banner with "SPAR" is partially visible.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The overall ambition of the WINS project is to address gender equity in officiating – across all sports – by undertaking comprehensive research and producing practical solutions which can support the organisations responsible for the recruitment, retention and development of female sport officials.



Four phases of research were undertaken – literature review including WINS partner desk research, the first ever European-wide survey of women sport officials and interviews with key stakeholders.



Some innovative practice in engaging women sport officials across sports and countries is evident.



The survey reached **64 different countries** with **3264 responses** – a very good level of representation from around the world.



Women officials are **generally quite happy**, demonstrating a great enthusiasm and passion for officiating.



Being part of a support network such as an **officiating community is particularly important** to women officials.



78% of women officials strongly agreed or agreed that they are accepted within their sports as normal practice whilst 78% also **strongly agreed or agreed that organisations treat women and men officials the same.**



Women specific training opportunities require further thought. 48% of women officials disagreed or strongly disagreed that training and development is targeted at women officials.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



More development of women training instructors required - 36% strongly disagreed or disagreed that training was delivered by women instructors.



Support through mentoring requires attention - the majority of women officials did not have a mentor but wanted a mentor (if they did not have one provided by their sport).



Women's officiating kit is not provided for two thirds of women officials.



Childcare is not routinely provided for women officials - 36% of women officials either strongly disagreed or disagreed that childcare is adequately considered.



Abuse does not appear to be common towards women officials as a group.



Placement of women officials could help reduce abuse. Reduced abuse towards women officials could mean an increase in women officials which in turn could help reduce abuse in sports where it is more prevalent.



The majority of women officials are not thinking of leaving in the next 12 months. Although if they are thinking of leaving, time commitments, and a lack of support from officiating organisations are two of the primary reasons.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The data collection process generated a number of key themes listed below and the data and findings present these themes in this report:

- Recruitment and retention
- Motivation to officiate
- Workforce characteristics
- Development pathways
- Positive action and promotion of opportunities
- Training, development and mentoring
- Abuse towards women officials
- Discontinuation and attrition
- Women officials and the culture of sport
- Facilities and clothing



1987 1993 1999 2005
2006 2008 2010 2011

1991 1993 1995
2006 2008 2010
2013 2014 2015



WINSO

Supporting the growth and participation
of female sport officials in Europe



1

INTRODUCTION

WINS is an ambitious EU funded project that brings together stakeholders from a variety of national and European sport federations combined with universities, the Olympic movement and officiating associations from several EU Member States. The WINS project is a true partnership aiming to take forward gender equality in sports officiating.

WINS embraces the Council of Europe definition of Sport as **“all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental wellbeing, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels”**. Sport and physical activity is recognised as a sector of significance with real potential to address wider European and government agendas such as health, social inclusion, education, employment, and economic growth.

In all sports, the role of officials (referees, umpires, judges, timekeepers, stewards) involves specific demands such as observation, interpretation of events, decision making and communication. This complex process of rule interpretation and judgment must be executed in real time under the critical gaze of players and spectators. Making correct, impartial, and clear judgements is central to sport officiating across every sport. The role of the sport official is therefore vital at all levels of sport, with sport officials ensuring that fair competition within the rules of a sport is possible.

From grassroots participation, involving ordinary EU citizens at weekends, to elite international competitions followed by an audience of millions across the globe, sport would not be possible without sport officials. No sport officials effectively means no sport. Skill acquisition and physical health and well-being, especially of children and young people, would suffer; social interaction across communities and age groups would be diminished; the social inclusion of marginalised groups, which sport cherishes, would be at risk, and a major source of employment in the recreation and entertainment industry would take be severely affected. All of which means that sport and the wider world needs sport officials.

However, we also need sport officials who are representative of the wider population. In terms of gender equality, the world of sport officiating is trailing well behind other occupations and sectors.

Women referees can achieve the appropriate levels of physical fitness; they observe as keenly as men; they are as fair-minded as men; they can make quick, accurate decisions; they can be great communicators and leaders. We know that many women's sports are undergoing professionalisation (Bowes & Culvin, 2021), and so it is increasingly important for national sport federations to select, train and retain women sports officials who play a critical role in the successful delivery of men's and women's sports. Women sports officials are historically and traditionally an underrepresented group who often experience gender discrimination in addition to verbal and physical abuse common amongst sports officials (Webb et al., 2021). For example, a recent survey by the organisation Women in Football suggested two-thirds of women working in football receive gender-based stigma (Women in Football, 2020).



Given the number of women officials across all levels of sport is growing (e.g., in British football numbers have risen 72 per cent in the last four years; FA, 2020) and there have been recent high-profile appointments in professional sports (e.g., Sarah Thomas was the first women referee to be appointed to the 2021 National Football League Super Bowl in the US and Rebecca Welch was the first women referee to officiate a men's FA Cup third-round fixture in 2022 in the UK), it is timely that a consolidation of knowledge takes place that pinpoints recommendations for sports federations and officiating organisations across all sports.

Research indicates that women sports officials operate in difficult environments. Forbes et al. (2015) argue that deep-rooted sexism in football culture has led to sexist abuse of women officials in addition to general abuse that all referees receive. The authors recommended anti-sexist policy to be put into place by the relevant sport federation to curb the additional burden. Moreover, Guzel (2020) found that karate women officials were evaluated on their physical attractiveness and athleticism ahead of being viewed as integral or role models. In volleyball, Lee et al. (2017) found that women officials advancement was hindered by gender stereotypes from coaches, players and fans, and managing existing family responsibilities. Some NGBs (e.g., Rugby Football Union's Keep Your Boots On campaign in England) have begun to recognise these issues and develop strategies to address gender diversity however, many have focused on player and coach development and neglected strategies focused on officiating.

As such, the research phase of the WINS project seeks to uncover and consider vital aspects related to the barriers, cultural differences and sport specific issues around women participation in officiating around Europe and beyond. Specifically, the research informs on the recruitment and retention of women sports officials in a variety of sports, suggesting strategies and policy for the development of women participation in officiating.

1.1 - THE RESEARCH REPORT

This Research Report is the first of four important outputs from the WINS project, (official title: '*Raising the growth and participation of women sport officials in Europe*'). WINS is a three-year transnational project with nine partners, co-funded by the EU's Erasmus+ Sport programme, running from January 2021 to December 2023.

The project brings together stakeholders from across the sport sector to explore and provide solutions to issues relating to recruitment and retention of women sport officials.

The purpose of this Research Report is to provide a summary of findings from the WINS research activities which underpin all the other activities and outputs from the project.

The University of Portsmouth, through Dr Tom Webb based in the School of Sport, Health and Exercise Science led and managed the research phase for the WINS project and Dr Webb is also the author of the document as work package leader for this output of the project. Research which led to the development of this Research Report is derived from the following sources:

- 🔗 Literature review of academic and industry sources
- 🔗 WINS partner desk research template
- 🔗 European survey of women sport officials
- 🔗 Interviews with officiating representatives in sport federations

1.2 - ABOUT THE WINS PROJECT

1.2.1 - RATIONALE AND AIMS

The overall ambition of the WINS project is to address gender equity in officiating – across all sports – by undertaking comprehensive research activities into the problems facing women sport officials and producing practical solutions which can support the organisations responsible for their recruitment, retention and development.

The main targeted impact of the EU-funded initiative is for sport organisations across Europe to become more capable to put in place effective recruitment, retention and career development policies for women sport officials, ultimately improving gender balance in the role.



1.2.2 - THE WINS PARTNERSHIP

Coordinated by the European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE), the WINS project is innovative in its constitution as it brought various stakeholders such as universities, national and European sport federations, the Olympic movement and associations from several EU member States. This ensures that the development of outputs is aligned with the realities and expectation of the sector, and involves a high level of consultation and dissemination activities.



COORDINATOR OF THE WINS PROJECT

France / Europe

European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE)



France

Association Française du Corps Arbitral Multisports (AFCAM)



Netherlands

Dutch Olympic Committee
Dutch Sports Federation
(NOC*NSF)



United Kingdom

Sports Officials UK
(SOUK)



Netherlands / International

International Federation for
Sports Officials (IFSO)



United Kingdom

University of Portsmouth



Bulgaria

National Sports Academy
«Vassil Levski» (NSA)



Belgium/Europe

European Hockey Federation
(EHF)



Switzerland / Europe

European Athletics

1.2.3 - PROJECT OUTPUTS

1 OUTPUT 1 - (this publication)

A European research report on gender and sport officiating

Building on the WINS research activities this report highlights the key issues and provides new knowledge in gender equity in sport officiating.

2 OUTPUT 2

A European Compendium of good practice case studies on recruitment and retention of women sport officials

This output describes in detail a selection of case studies of good practice in recruitment, retention and engagement of women sport officials. These have been taken from across Europe in different countries, sports and contexts.

3 OUTPUT 3

An innovative online toolkit for recruitment and retention of women sport officials

The partners collaborated to design a practical and innovative online toolkit for sport organisations to respond to the issues and challenges of engagement and retention of women sport officials explored and defined in the WINS project.

4 OUTPUT 4

A targeted mentoring and leadership legacy guide for women sport officials in Europe. This output takes the form of a guide to increase the impact and sustainability of the project. It is a "legacy guide" to emphasise that it is intended to be used by sport organisations to develop mentoring and leadership programmes beyond the life of the project.

All these outputs will be available from the WINS library.



1.3 - LITERATURE REVIEW/DESK RESEARCH

The first phase of the research was a literature review of existing academic research. This focused on published academic journal material and followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The search strategy identified published studies and grey literature (i.e., industry reports, articles in non-reviewed journals, other publication outlets, conference papers and unpublished doctoral theses) for inclusion in the review.

1.3.1 - PROCEDURE

1,194 articles were identified following the initial search (Appendix 1). Screening of articles took place in three stages: at title, at abstract, and at full title. Decisions for the removal of any literature were based on the criteria in Table 1. Articles were sifted with the purpose of including research that addressed issues around gender of sports officials. Full manuscripts were screened and resulted in 21 articles.

Table 1: Inclusion Criteria

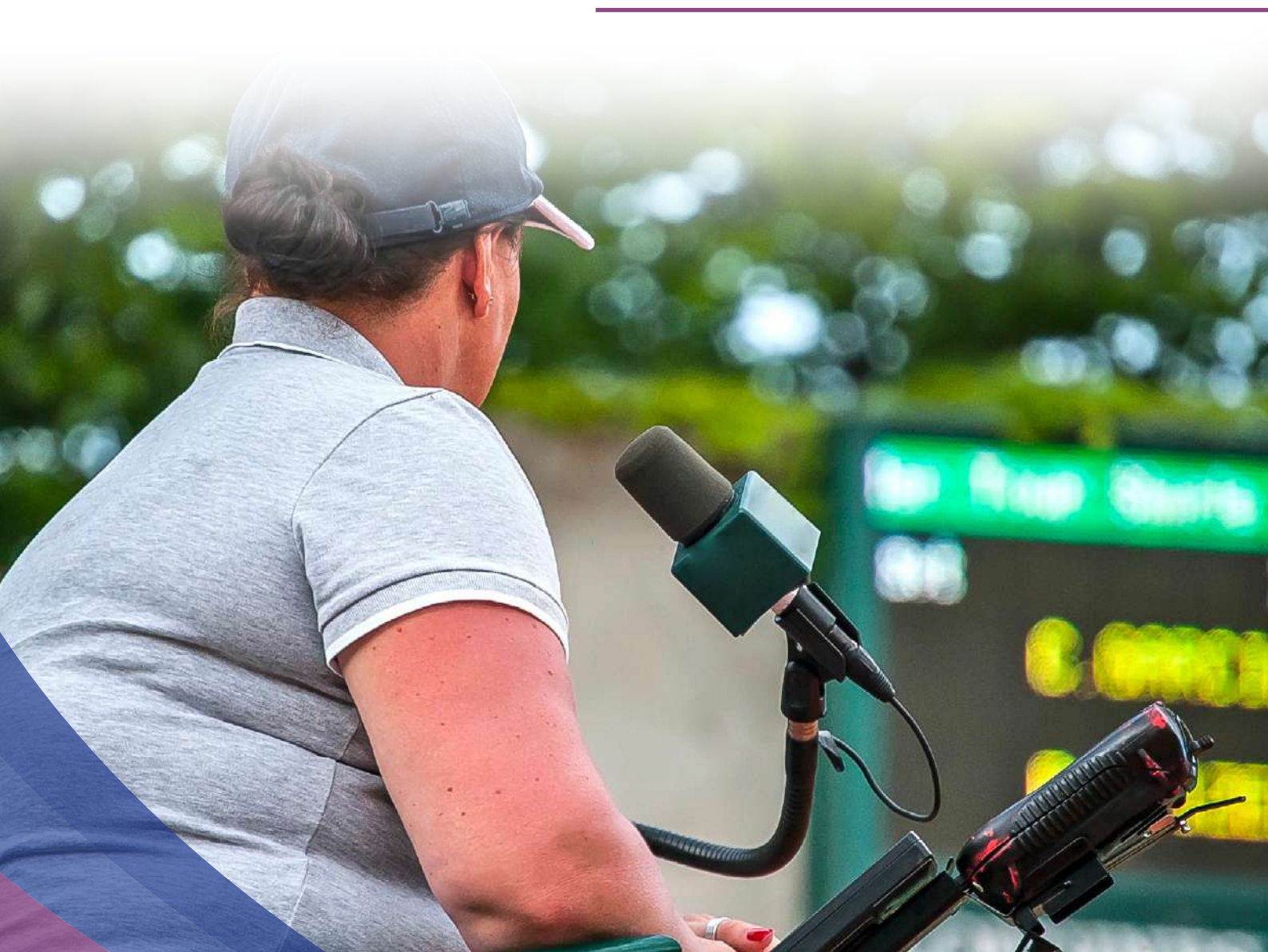
	INCLUSION CRITERIA
POPULATION	Adult population
RESEARCH DESIGN	Qualitative Quantitative Mixed methods
DATA	Data pertaining gender (sex difference studies were excluded)
LANGUAGE RESTRICTION	English
TYPE OF STUDIES	Peer reviewed empirical articles and grey literature

1.3.2 - USING THE DATA

To synthesise research from a variety of methodologies, a qualitative thematic synthesis was determined as the most appropriate method of assessing the literature and identifying a research agenda. This design enabled comparisons of diverse study findings in a structured manner that can be organised into meaningful themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008) and extends the thematic analysis process initially developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse qualitative research.

Data from the results sections of the included studies were coded line-by-line using the thematic analysis processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2018). A process of theme development was subsequently followed, organising initial categories into higher order themes that were refined and (re)named through discussion between those involved in the research. Last, themes were scrutinised to ensure their significance to the aims of the WINS project.

In addition, desk research was conducted with the partners of the WINS project. The partners provided insights related to initiatives, policy interventions and the current issues concerning women in officiating roles in different countries and sports. This ensured that there was an underpinning of understanding of the current environment for women officials and also provided content for this research report.





1.4 - SURVEY METHOD

To explore the aims and objectives of the research phase of the WINS project, a mixed-method online survey was adopted in the research phase. This incorporated open and closed questions, along with Likert scale questions. The survey was designed and distributed using online software, “*Jisc Online Surveys*”, which is widely used across departments and universities in academic research. Collecting large-scale quantitative and qualitative data through online surveys has been an increasingly successful methodological tool in sports literature (Cleland et al., 2018; Hong et al., 2019; Webb et al., 2020a). It provides researchers the advantage and opportunity to receive both large-scale data at the convenience of the participant and for frank and honest accounts to be detailed.

The online survey was accessible through a URL web link, distributed via email, databases held by federations and organisations who are partners in this Erasmus Plus project, social media and personal contacts of the project partners. The survey was designed in English and subsequently translated by the project partners into Spanish, French and Bulgarian. The survey was then disseminated as one URL link with a landing page where respondents then selected the language in which they wanted to complete the survey. The survey was distributed to women sports officials in sports and countries around Europe and beyond. The incorporation of free text format (open) questions and Likert scales in particular, ensured a detailed and rich body of data, enhancing results, with the inclusion of open questions aiding understanding of the participants experiences, which quantitative data alone cannot provide.

The quantitative data from the closed questions provided numerical data of totals and averages across the survey responses from the surveys in different languages. Graphical analysis of Likert Scale data provided a visual representation of the response distribution, in addition to the calculation of totals and averages of the responses for each scale question. In addition, descriptive data is presented and further insight is derived from additional analysis on some questions/themes pertinent to the wider project. The use of these analyses was appropriate due to the focus upon the participant’s perspective, the project’s aims/objectives, and producing findings that are easy to interpret (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This method of analysis has been widely used and is evident in recent literature (Aragão e Pina et al., 2019; Webb et al., 2020b). Responses are presented in the sections that follow and are grouped depending on the focus of the questions.





1.5 - INTERVIEW METHOD

1.5.1 - RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research methodology was deemed most appropriate to understand the developmental process from the perspectives of the administrators working with sports officials who have first-hand experience. Participants were invited to share their stories and accounts regarding women in officiating in conversations with a researcher, through individual semi-structured interviews, conducted over Zoom. The sample included 14 high-level administrators working for a variety of sports federations of sport from across Europe, all involved with women officials. Interviews lasted between 49 minutes and 75 minutes, with an average interview time of 59 minutes.

1.5.2 - PROCEDURE

Following approval through the faculty (University of Portsmouth) ethics process, participants were contacted by either a gatekeeper known through personal contact, via e-mail or through project coordinator EOSE to invite them to participate in an interview. Following this initial contact, a suitable time was arranged for an interview to take place. Participants were interviewed by Zoom due to their varied geographical locations around Europe. As part of the interview process, rapport was established with the interview participants, involving the provision of information related to the project and the interviewer's background, as well an opportunity to ask questions. Questions were focused around the aims and objectives of the WINS project. Questions were also informed by the initial findings from the literature review, desk research and the survey. The interviews were recorded in their entirety, and the audio recordings were then transcribed.

1.5.3 - DATA ANALYSIS

The interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2016). Initially, the transcripts were read several times. Subsequently, codes were generated and then clustered into themes, with each theme having a central organising concept. Themes were then reviewed against the coded data and, where necessary, revised to ensure that the data were correctly represented. The next stage in the analysis involved colleagues independently reviewing the proposed themes to ensure they were consistent with the data set. Following these discussions, the themes were finalised and amended to more appropriately reflect the content. The final stage in the analysis process involved compiling the report of the findings.

2

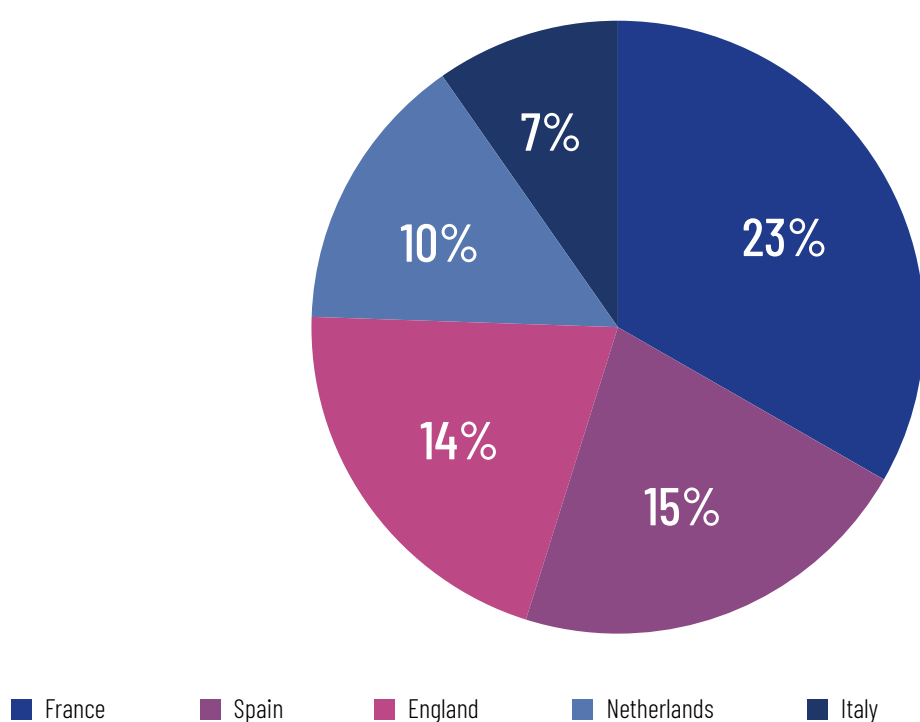
WORKFORCE CHARACTERISTICS

REFeree

The responses are organised under the emergent themes from the entire research process. As each theme is reported, examples are used from each phase of the research. Initially the demographic information from the survey is reported in order to contextualise the women officiating workforce.

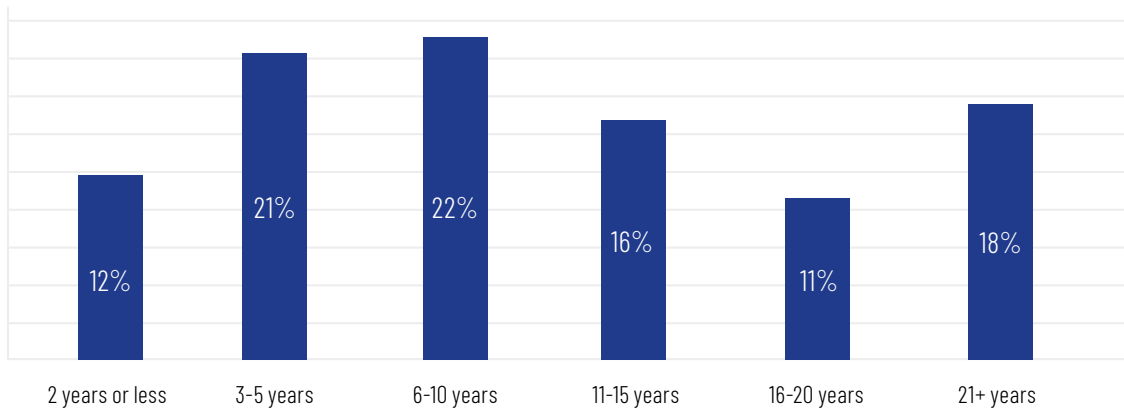
The survey had extensive reach. There were responses from participants representing 64 different countries. The responses from the top five countries are listed below in figure 1. As can be seen from the chart, 23% of the total number of responses came from France, 15% from Spain, 14% from England, 10% from the Netherlands and 7% from Italy.

Figure 1: Top 5 responses by country



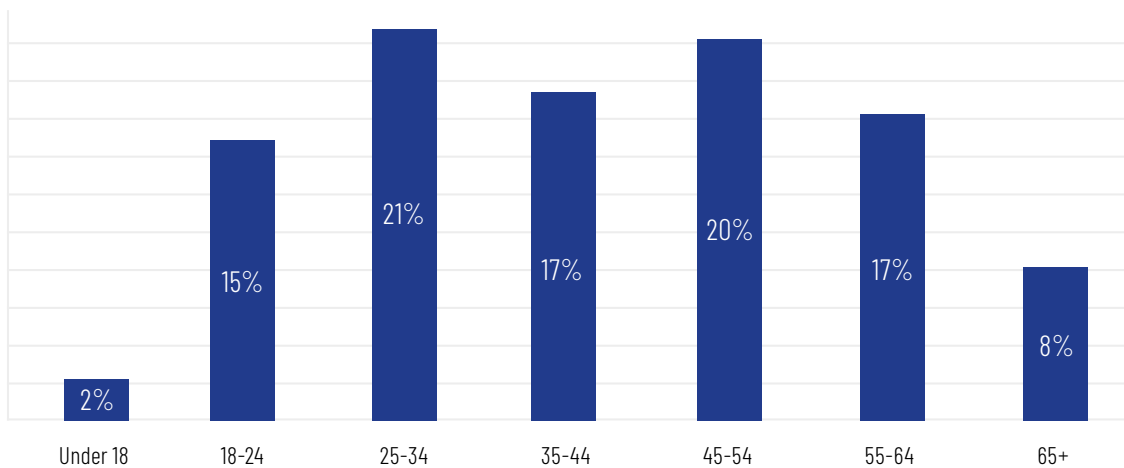
The survey respondents were from a range of backgrounds. For example, the experience of the officials and how long they have been officiating was varied. Those who officiated 6-10 years (22% of the total number of respondents) and 3-5 years (21% of the total number of respondents) were most represented. 21+ years (18%) and 11-15 years (16%) were also well represented, demonstrating a representative sample (figure 2).

Figure 2: How many years have you been officiating?



We can also see that the survey elicited a good spread of responses across age brackets. The fewest number of responses came from the under-18 (2%) and 65+ categories (8%) respectively, whilst the 25-34 (21%) and 45-54 (20%) age brackets had the highest number of responses (see figure 3).

Figure 3: What is your age bracket?



The survey respondents were well educated. For example, 36% of respondents held a postgraduate qualification and 34% of respondents held a bachelor's degree or equivalent, whilst only 12% of respondents held a secondary education as their most advanced educational qualification (figure 4). Moreover, 51% of respondents were employed full time (figure 5).

Figure 4: What is your highest level of educational achievement to date?

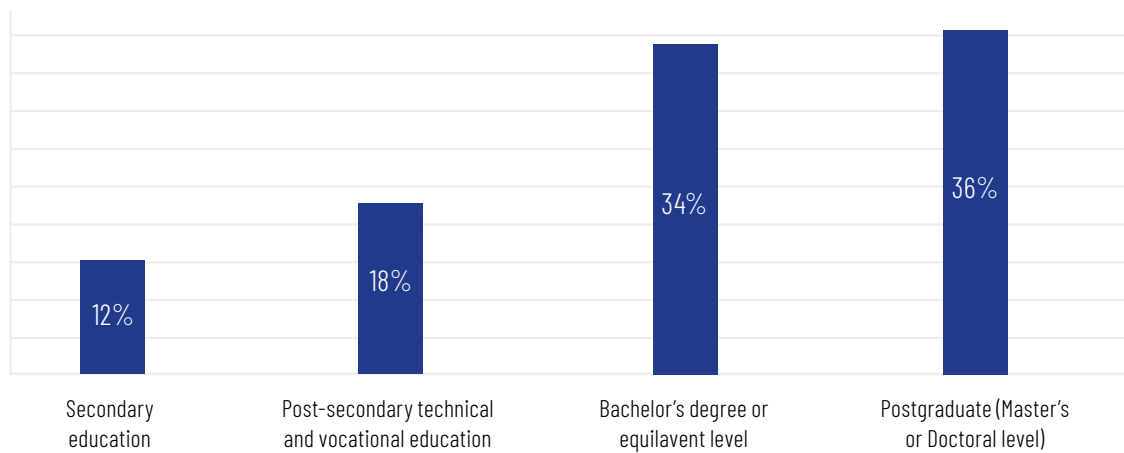
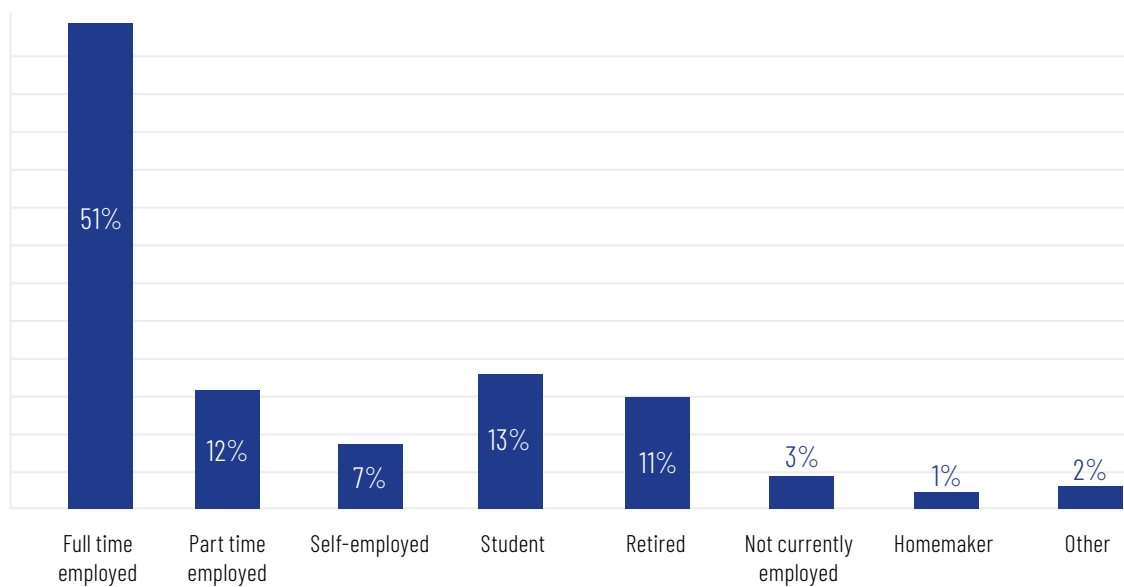


Figure 5: What is your employment status?



The officials that responded to the survey officiated at a variety of levels across all countries. However, 40% of respondents officiated at national level and 28% at regional level, whereas 19% officiated at international level, meaning that the respondents represented a good or very good level of officiating expertise, whilst only 10% of officials operated at society or grassroots level and fewer (3%) at junior level (figure 6). This may indicate an issue with the cascading and dissemination of the survey to officials at these lower levels.

Figure 6: What is your current level of officiating?

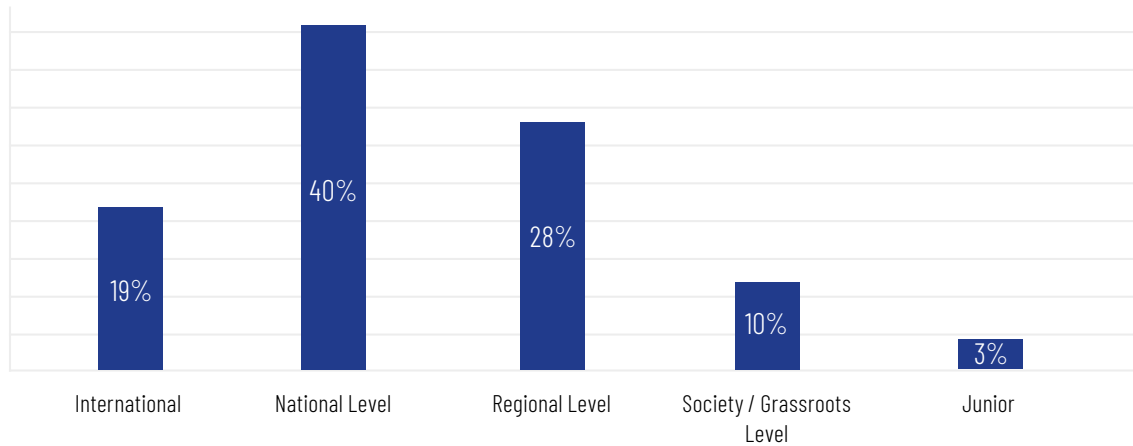
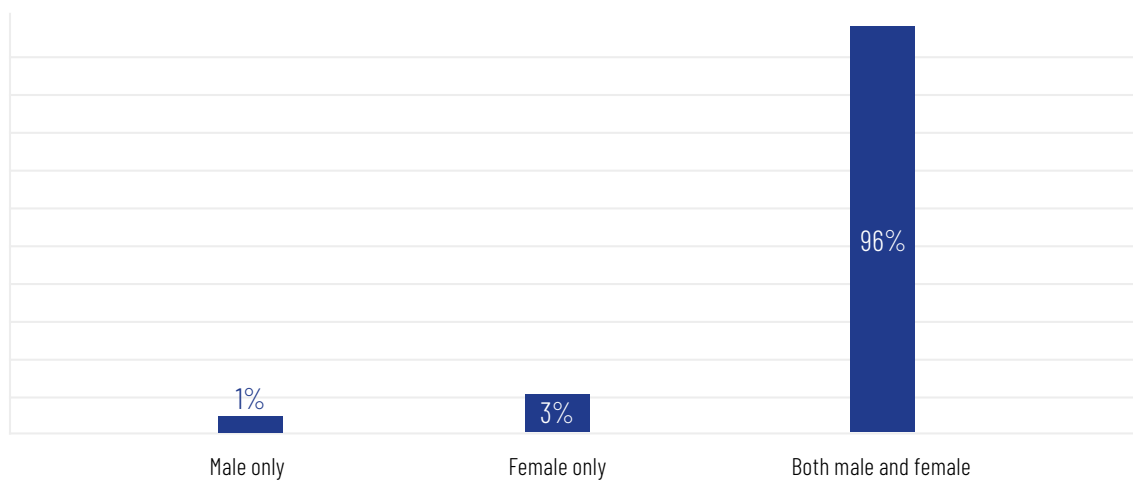
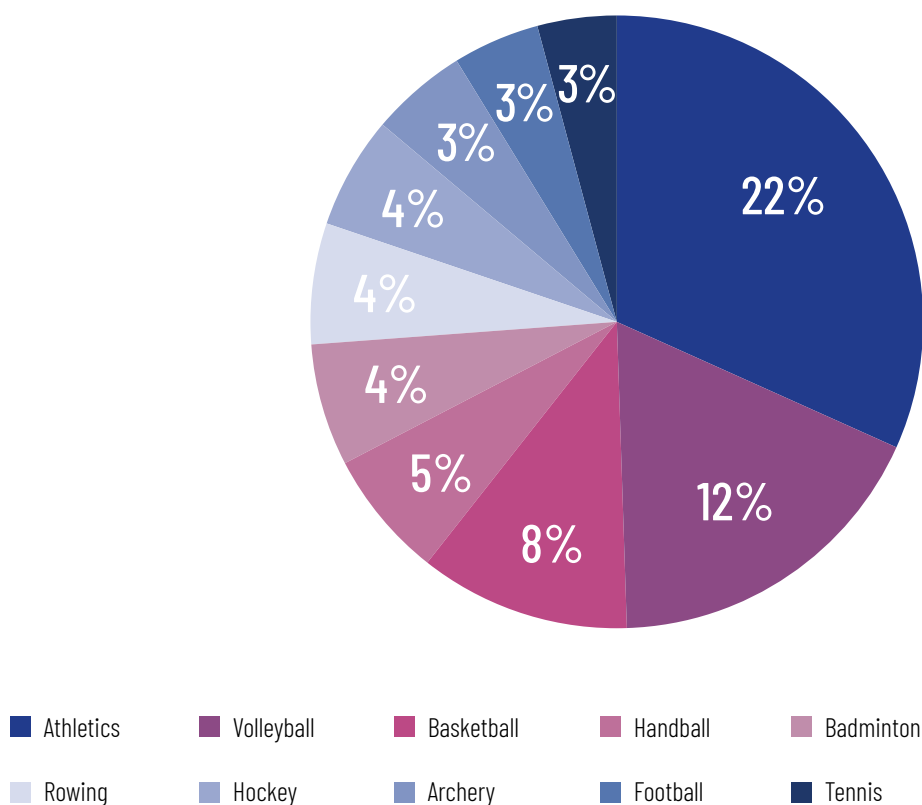


Figure 7: Do you operate only in female sport, male or both?



..... The officials that responded to the survey almost entirely officiated both male and women sport (96%) with only 3% officiating women sport only and 1% male sport exclusively.

Figure 8: What is the main sport that you officiate?



There were 61 sports represented in the survey (including the 'other' category), and therefore to try and give an indication of the spread, the top 10 most cited sports are included in figure 8. Athletics and Volleyball were the most popular sports recorded, followed by basketball and handball. Further insight into the number of women who are officiating in sport across Europe was provided by the background research, the open survey responses and the interviews that were undertaken as part of the research phase of the WINS project.

According to AFCAM, France is currently the only country that can provide a real and accurate figure of the number of referees/sports officials that are active in the country. Currently there are 246,000 officials for all sports combined. 30% of this number were women in 2020. At the elite level, every year the Ministry establishes a list of sports officials according to very specific criteria of performance and level of competitions. At this level, women make up approximately 18% of the workforce.

The numbers of women officials are still low across sports and countries when compared to the number of male officials. There are also issues with transparency in the reporting of officiating numbers more widely, including the numbers of women in officiating roles. In the Netherlands, Hockey KNHB (mainly due to the obligation that every player should have an official's license at the age of 16 at club level) there are no problems about the quantity of the officials. However, at national level the ratio is approximately 600 men to 50 women officials. In cycling (KNWU), there are 191 licensed officials who are men and 45 licensed officials who are women, whereas in table tennis (NTTB) approximately 13-16% are women officials. Basketball Nederland has a total of 535 referees nominated by the federation. Of this group, 80 are women, which amounts to approximately 15%. In the highest division, which is a men's competition, 23 referees are active, of which 5 are women (approx. 22%) This is above the national average. In Bulgaria, as with many countries around Europe, these numbers and statistics are not available for the entire country. Although in athletics, there are no discrepancies between gender and age. Whereas in Basketball in Spain and specifically the Catalonia region, in the 2020-2021 season there were 777 men officiating and 134 women (approximately 14.7% of the total officiating number).

The interviews also provided additional information regarding the number of women officiating in different sports. In cricket in England, currently there are approximately 2% of the umpiring workforce who are women;

“

«...we have about 35 active traditional [women] umpires you might call them, that we know about operating in traditional cricket...I think it's about 2%.»

Whereas in hockey in England, there are more women than men at the introductory level, although some similar challenges are apparent as officials progress and matches become more competitive and the numbers become difficult to record and follow;

“

«...for people who are taking that introductory step into officiating, it's 53% female, 47% male... the challenge is we can't see who umpires a lot of the club games at the moment, so we can only go on what's happening at appointable levels. Those ratios dropped to 75% male, 25% female...in some areas of the country it's 100% men, 0% women. So, it's a real struggle.»

⋮ Rugby Union in England reports numbers of women officials growing, but also challenges with their measurement and tracking these numbers;

“

«...we nearly had 70, which considering our last stat was 57 female officials across all societies in 2020, that's showing us that we've got more out there. We also know that we've got female referees at club level, at school level who are just doing a little bit here and there. Some that are qualified that do it in schools but not necessarily part of a society...»

⋮ This struggle to measure numbers and have accurate figures is difficult in many countries and across many sports. For organisations that are federations, such as the European Handball Federation, who often deal with officials at higher levels of competition, it seems easier to measure the number of women officials;

“

«...we have 126 indoor handball referee pairs. 107 men, 18 women, and one mixed pair. We have 36 female referees at the moment.»

⋮ In Savate (a French kickboxing combat sport that uses the hands and feet as weapons combining elements of English boxing) the world governing body FISav reports that they;

“

«...have 123 officials and it's 98 males and 25 females.»



It is also worth noting that many governing bodies and federations cannot state the number of women officials that exist, and therefore the measurement of the current status in terms of the number of women officials, and any subsequent growth in these numbers, is difficult to track.

The overarching aim of this report is to present the information gathered and analysed, specifically related to the recruitment and retention of women in officiating. Within this aim, there are a number of inter-related concepts which are considered, all with the aim of developing understanding of recruitment and retention of these officials.

Within the women officiating workforce there are significant differences from sport to sport and from country to country across Europe. Some sports are towards the beginning of their journey in terms of the development of the number and profile of women officials, whereas other sports are more advanced in this process. There can be historic and cultural reasons for these differences – some sports have historically recruited women officials, and therefore this is an accepted practice. Other sports, however, have not traditionally recruited women officials, and therefore this makes it more difficult to increase the number of women officials more quickly. Moreover, some countries and cultures are more ready to accept the integration, promotion and development of women in officiating roles than other countries or cultures.



3

STRUCTURES OF ORGANISATIONS VARIABILITY IN APPROACH

In addition to the information regarding the demographics of women sports officials, it is also important to understand the current structure of organisations and any differences in these structures between different sports and countries. These structures and different approaches to governance involving women sports officials are important because any differences can demonstrate a lack of uniformity. Initially in this section the current structure of some sports and organisations is presented to better understand the current landscape for women officials.

In 2022 the European Hockey Federation introduced a 30% gender balance to umpire nominations for Education programmes in order to further increase the number of women umpires. This is despite the fact that hockey requires the same number of men and women being educated to support European Level Competitions. For technical officiating education programmes, there is already a 50% gender balance for nominations. In hockey many countries have the same recruitment and development pathways for women and men and this is also the case for a number of sports.

In the Netherlands there have been projects and initiatives designed to stimulate the number of women who are officiating. For example, in hockey, football, basketball, korfbal, volleyball, waterpolo and handball Zijfluittop was launched with the aim of recruiting and retaining more women officials and providing a framework for these officials to operate within. There are also other initiatives such as workshops that are run and operated solely for women officials and a buddy system/mentoring for talented officials. In football in the Netherlands a recently designed development pathway for women referees has been introduced. The pathway mirrors that which is available to men. Another recent development in football in the Netherlands has been the introduction of a digital environment. This platform is used for women referees to obtain more knowledge and to let them contact each other and to create connections and relationships, irrespective of their geographical location in the Netherlands. They also receive additional mentoring and coaching in their own districts and can attend extra meetings regarding football officiating (related to rules, interpretations, regulations etc.)

In athletics in Bulgaria, the rules for electing officials are the same for both men and women. Bulgaria is part of the Association of Balkan Athletics Federations, European Athletics, and World Athletics, and shares the regulatory international rules and as such, the provision for men and women mirrors what is advised at European and world level. However, there is no specially designed national system, structure, or framework for women officials across different sports in Bulgaria. Women are expected to meet the same requirements as men.



In the Catalonia region of Spain there are no specific structures for women sport officials, based on research conducted in 2021. Although in basketball, the Catalan Federation has created a commission for women's basketball and this commission includes players, coaches and referees (<https://www.basquetcatala.cat/noticies/8786>). In France the organisation of sport involves the *Conference permanente du sport féminin*. This can be attended by the Minister of Sport, the Minister of Women's Rights, the Minister of the Economy or the Minister of Communication, or it may be consulted on any bill or draft regulation relating to the organisation of sport in France, as well as on any draft European Union act or international convention relating to sport. This conference is being used to promote the role of women in sport, and this also includes women sports officials.

In England differences exist between governing bodies throughout the country. Examples are given below from different governing bodies, although it is clear that women's sport and also officiating is receiving increased attention in order to improve recruitment and retention of women officials – see links to pathways for women officials below:

- 🔗 **RFL (Rugby League)** – have launched a women and girls officiating strategy - <https://www.rugby-league.com/article/60730/rfl-launches-womens-and-girls-match-officials-programme>
- 🔗 **FA (Football)** – have a Gameplan for Growth for women across coaching, playing and refereeing - <https://www.thefa.com/news/2017/mar/13/fa-womens-football-strategy-gameplan-for-growth-double-participation-130317>
- 🔗 **LTA (Tennis)** – ‘She rallies’ initiative – aimed at women players, coaches and officials - <https://www.lta.org.uk/49d343/siteassets/about-lta/file/she-rallies--rallying-together-to-make-tennis-a-truly-gender-balanced-sport.pdf>

All countries, sports and governing bodies identified, are structured and operating differently and are at different stages when it comes to the training, integration and deployment of women sports officials. In addition to the information derived from sporting organisations around Europe, the interviews also highlighted some challenging areas that require further consideration by governing bodies and officiating agencies. For example, interview participants identified the centralised structure of certain organisations as a particular challenge;

“

«...it's extremely centralised. It means that the federation has a commission in charge of race officials, and they have delegation from the President to organise everything for race officials and judging. So, they are in charge of education and appointments, they only delegate this to regional committees for meetings at regional level in France. We have five grades, one is the higher, five is the lower. Grade 5A, B, C are managed by regional committees and the same federation manages everything at the top....the system is extremely centralised.»

There are often reasons for a more centralised structure. It could be the maximisation of the resources for a governing body, a central team that is funded and employed by the governing body, but a lack of regionalised representation due to costs. However, these structural and organisational differences are not country specific, and this can be seen from the information presented earlier and also the explanation of the structure of cricket in England and the structure of football in the Netherlands, illustrated by the following insights:

“

«Until now it's all been pretty disparate. We've had people in the program, people in the recreational game, people in customer support, it's all been a bit spread out. Going forward there's going to be a head of officiating and they're going to have three main reports, one of whom looks after the professional game, one who looks after recreational game and one who supports people moving between the two. And then within that, the recreational side, they'll have some staff and this is four regional roles, as well as in training roles, work related roles as well.»

“

«Every referee in Holland starts at club level. We've got about 30,000 matches every weekend. And they're all officiated, but I think 80% is officiated by a club referee. 20% is refereed by an official. At this moment we've got about 4,000 KNVB officials that lead matches almost every week and, at this moment, we've got about 55 female officials....the referee department is integrated in the competition's department. There is the competition's, events, and there is the refereeing part. We have a head of refereeing and then we also have regional offices with a director of refereeing in each regional office. And at the headquarters, there are some people working for refereeing about everything that is related to IT, the global organisation, the different projects, everything that is about the instructors, and all the database for the clips, videos and everything and also there is the maintenance of the app - we have a specific app dedicated to officiating.»

The report now focuses on the motivation for women to officiate. The survey identified a number of reasons why women officiate, and these data are supplemented by quotes from both women officials and administrators involved with women and officiating.



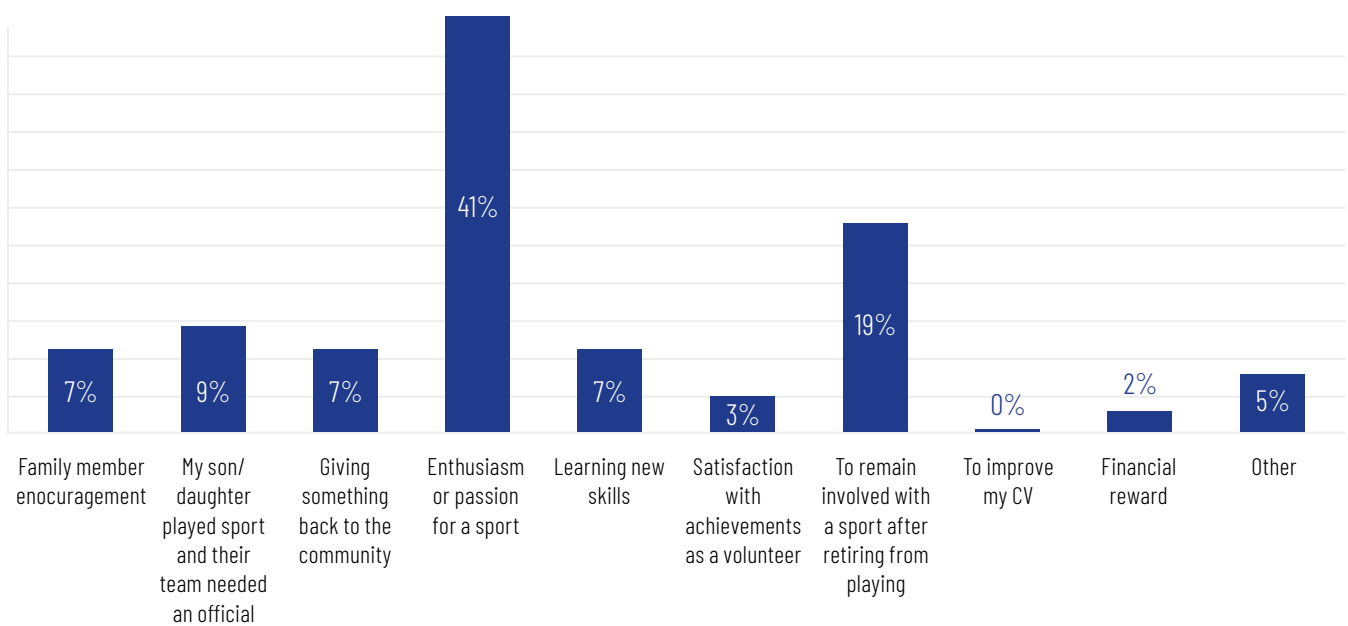
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MOTIVATION TO OFFICIATE

The survey responses show that the reasons why individuals choose to officiate and continue officiating are multifaceted (see figure 9). Nevertheless, the officials reported that the enthusiasm or passion for a sport was a significant driver (41% of respondents). This reason was the most common, although remaining involved with a sport was also a common response (19%). Other responses such as the involvement of a son/daughter in a chosen sport (9%), family member encouragement (7%), Giving something back to the sport (7%) and learning new skills (7%) were also notable. Interestingly, money is not a primary motivation for women sports officials, with only 2% identifying financial rewards as the most important factor which made them decide to officiate.

When considering the aspects that women officials most enjoy about officiating (figure 10), the officials reported that being part of a sport (community) was the strongest reason (53%). However, continuing education and development (20%) and a sense of satisfaction after performing well (18%) were also notable reasons for continuing to officiate. Payment for officiating was only responsible for 1% of all responses and suggests that women sports officials are not motivated by financial reward, but rather for more intrinsic, altruistic reasons. This is perhaps fortunate, as there is very little financial reward available to women officials at the majority of levels of sport.

Figure 9: What was the most important factor that made you decide to become a sports official?



Furthermore, the survey provided some additional illustration through the open responses regarding the experiences of some of the officials. One woman official reported that their involvement in officiating was initially required by their club, and that was how they started, although they also agreed with the way that this was undertaken and stated that their love for officiating grew following these initial experiences;

“*...my club required me to, in the sense of «giving back to the community/club» just not entirely voluntary, but very necessary. And I agree with it...because at first I had to, but after the first match I loved it so much that I started to do it more and more.»*

This initial experience is something that other women officials also identified as important to the start of their officiating careers. For example, another official highlighted that her officiating career started at school, but that enjoyment was what made her continue;



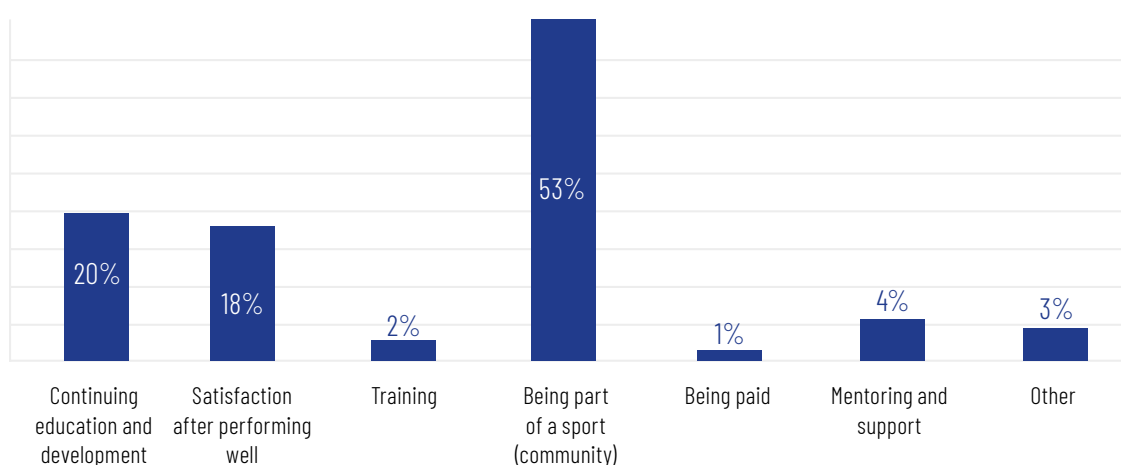
«I started to help out at school and then used the experience for my Duke of Edinburgh's award and enjoyed it so still doing it 30 years on.»

This concept of motivation is very important at the start of the officiating journey for women. Another survey respondent raised motivation as essential and that it is also something that has increased for women officials as the structures and number of women officials has started to become an area of focus for governing bodies;



«I am happy to have motivated girls and players to try it, it was one of my goals, so I wanted to be a referee. At the beginning, when I was 16 years old, it was much more complicated, now fortunately there is more motivation for women to take part. So, I feel proud to have been part of achieving one of the reasons why I started this adventure, that the girls who referee see me and want to be one more.»

Figure 10: What do you most enjoy about officiating?



However, conversely other survey respondents, from different sports, have identified that due to the limited number of women officials there is a requirement for some sports to adapt and permit women officials to have a more prominent role. Although interestingly, there is apparently no lack of opportunity in this case;

“

«...there are very few women in my field, but I do not necessarily feel that we get less opportunities. it is just that the sport needs to adapt to more women a little bit...»



There are also reasons that women sports officials gave that might lead to them potentially discontinuing, namely what they most disliked about officiating (see figure 11). However, a significant proportion equating to just under one third of officials who completed the survey stated that there was nothing that they disliked about officiating (29%). Other notable reasons that were given were demands on time (18%), abuse (11%), lack of support from federations (11%) and too much stress (10%).

Figure 11: What do you do most dislike about officiating?

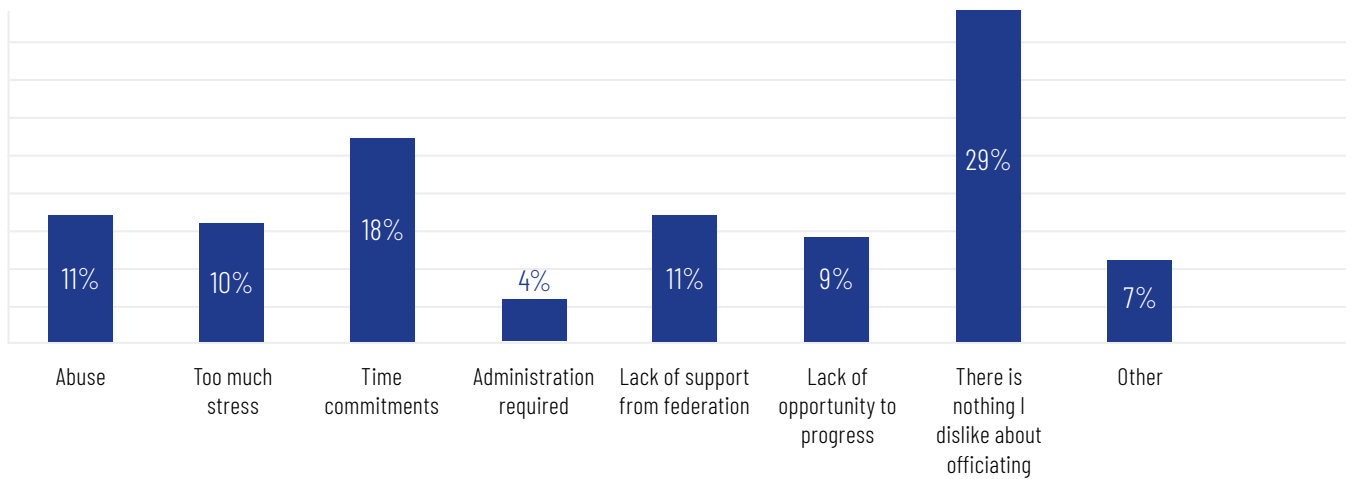


Figure 12, when 'nothing I dislike' is excluded, demonstrates that time commitments (23%), abuse (14%), lack of support from the federation (14%) and stress (13%) are the primary reasons for any dislike towards officiating from women officials.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a large proportion of officials reported that their sport had more male than women officiating representation (72% - see figure 13). 21% of officials reported that they believed the gender representation for officials in their sport was approximately equal, whereas 6% of respondents believed that their sport had more women than men officials, demonstrating that there is a considerable amount of work to be done to improve the parity in these numbers.

Figure 12: Reason for disliking officiating (excluding 'there is nothing I dislike')

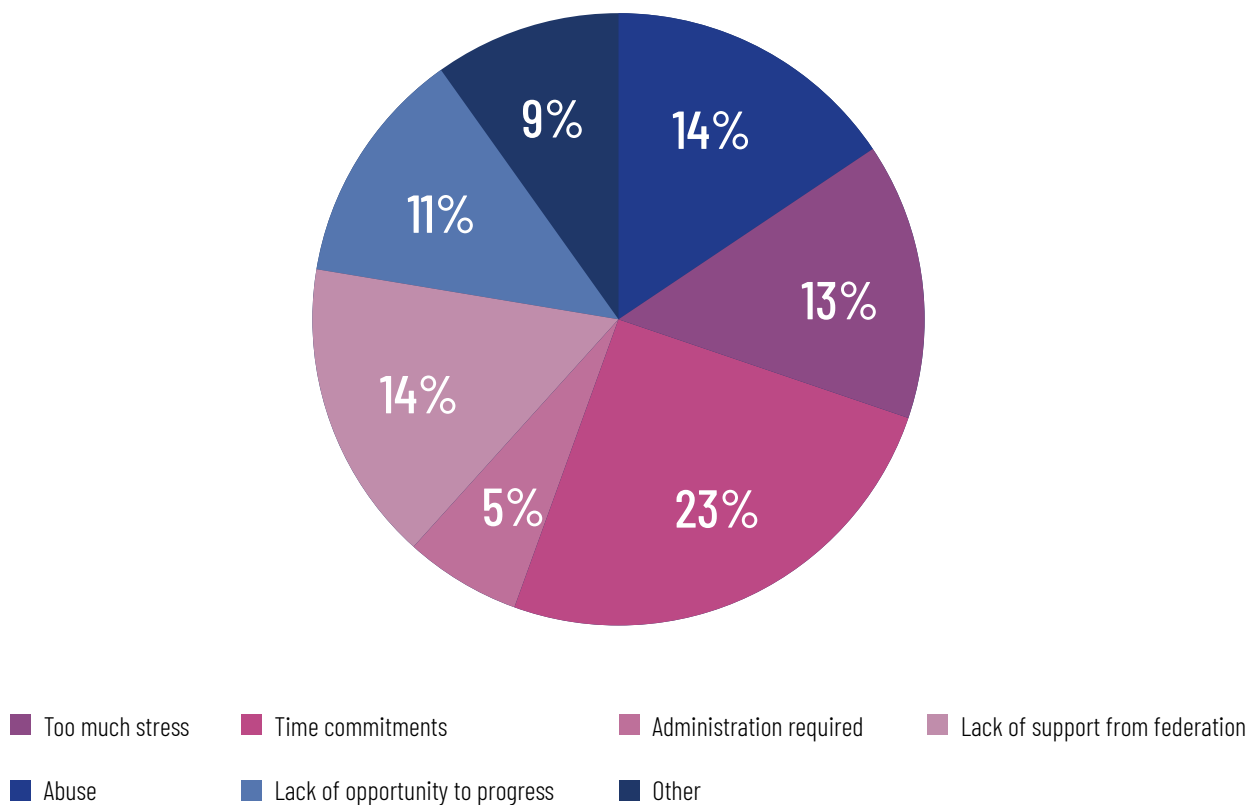
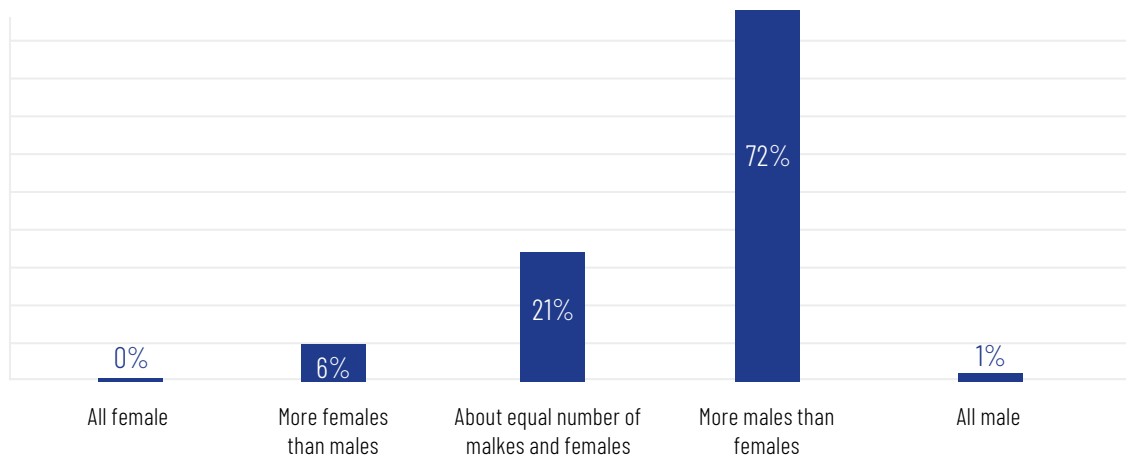


Figure 13: The ratio of female to male officials in your sport



In terms of trying to deal with some of the primary reasons for disliking officiating, namely time demands and lack of support from the federation, one of the interviewees from powerlifting identified the need to pair women officials with particularly strong women officials in order to mitigate against time, family and household responsibilities and provide support around these issues;

“

«What I tried to do was, I paired developing females with strong females. And I think it worked really well. I'd be curious how it would work pairing men and women, both based on the national context, understanding of gender equity and all of this together. And I think the same about family responsibilities, household responsibilities, time of course impacts this.»

Another interview participant from rugby union also identified that time demands can be draining, particularly if women officials are having to deal with issues and preconceived ideas surrounding their status as a sports official:

“

«...it's quite exhausting going out and giving your time to refereeing if you're also having to battle against preconceived ideas that you're the physio or that you're there to referee girls under 12, when actually you're there to referee the men's first team. Just having that mind frame of, "I've got to answer those questions and stand up for myself and be credible before I even step on the pitch", it's just tiring.»

Issues surrounding these differences attributed towards men and women officials were also cited as a significant matter that increased the pressure on women officials by another interview participant from Savate:

“

«Yes, of course there are differences [talking about differences in attitudes towards male and female officials] ...they think that women are weak, and they try lots of things. We have arbiters in the ring, and that is a psychological battle between fighters and arbiters all the time...they try a lot of things when it is a woman officiating, and when they don't know them...but if you apply the rules and they understand that you will follow the rules, after that you don't have problems, but in that moment, yes it's a pressure.»

Evidently there are pressures and concerns for women sports officials, that if not addressed will be a barrier to them either starting their officiating journey or continuing their officiating career. These aspects, such as time pressures, family demands, stress and abuse evidently deter the officials, and some of these factors are also specific to women officials, rather than the wider officiating workforce. Some of these barriers are considered in detail in subsequent sections in this report, as are the implications and recommendations arising from these findings.



5

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES IN THE RECRUITMENT, PLACEMENT AND PATHWAYS FOR WOMEN OFFICIALS

Many sports consider the recruitment of officials as a joint enterprise for both men and women; in essence the recruitment, training and development of officials is undertaken in one process, irrespective of the sex of the official in question. This presents some challenges when organisations might want to prioritise the recruitment and development of women officials. Financial aspects also constrain organisations, and the financial stability and investment of organisations will impact upon the changes and progression they can make when recruiting women officials.

Through the data collection and analysis process for the project, a number of important themes were identified, and these themes have been used to structure this final report. As the analysis of the data continued the importance of women specific recruitment and pathways became clear. Moreover, the differences between sports became clear, as did the role that recruitment and development is required to play in the progression of the number of women in officiating.

There is no uniform approach to the structure of management for women officials. This structure and organisation differs across sports and countries, particularly at national level. There are also differences in terms of the reliance on volunteers and the number of paid, full-time staff. Moreover, there is a distinction to be made between the structure and organisation of women's officiating at local, regional, national and international level. This is not atypical to the process and structures that exist for men, however when the goal is to recruit more women officials, this process is something that requires further consideration.

Information derived from various sporting organisations and individuals involved with officiating around Europe shows that there are differences between organisations in terms of the approach to recruitment/management of officials generally. There are also differences in terms of the appointment of both men and women officials. A summary of the methods of some organisations are outlined below:

European Athletics

At national level, different models of organisation exist and this can differ between countries:

- 🏆 Independent officiating Body with its own Committee of Management elected by the membership
- 🏆 Administered by the federation through an officials committee (ex. Technical Committee)
- 🏆 Administered by one official's management body elected as other bodies in the Federation and technically independent (although not financially)
- 🏆 Specific committees or areas (ex. Race walking judges, appointed groups , etc)



At European and international levels, officials' management is part of the tasks and responsibilities of the Events & Competition Departments and Commissions. The examples below are taken from the Netherlands:

Football (KNVB)

The KNVB in the Netherlands has a professional department. There is a KNVB Academy, which exists as a training centre for all kinds of officials. The KNVB has special account managers for officiating, although at regional level there are many volunteers and a strong reliance on these volunteers. The KNHB (hockey federation) is the only sports federation in the Netherlands who also has an association in approximately 65 districts who look after the interests of non-professional referees. The KNVB are very active in their districts and work closely together with the KNHB.

Hockey (KNHB)

The KNHB in the Netherlands has a professional department for national and regional officiating. They work closely together with a large number of volunteers and all of their officials are volunteers. All of the committees have volunteers, and each committee has a member of the professional department that also sits alongside the volunteers. In addition, the KNHB Academy exists in a similar method to that of the KNVB.

Cycling (KNWU)

All officials within the KNWU are volunteers. There are no paid workers on a regional, national and international level.

Table tennis (NTTB)

Appointments for officials is mainly done by volunteers. Appointments for umpires all arranged and managed by volunteers. In some cases, the NTTB Office appoints the officials, but this is not in every placement of an official.

Basketball (NBB)

Over the past year the NBB has introduced a professional coordinator for refereeing. There are also professionals who nominate and place the referees. However, the guidance, assessment and coaching of referees is organised and administered by volunteers.

In general, in the Netherlands there are approximately 40 sports federations and many of these federations have a professional department, although the structure of these federations differs. The professional departments in the governing bodies of football and hockey are the largest, but all others have at least one professional in the federation and he/she works closely together with all the official volunteers. The volleyball federation (Nevobo) has a professional department based around two pillars, national officiating (1 coordinator) and regional officiating (5 coordinators). Since 2022 an officiating manager has been added to this department.

In France, in many national sporting federations there is a officiating/refereeing commission, but very few people are employed in these commissions. As far as women's refereeing is concerned, the French handball federation has salaried staff in charge of refereeing and a commission of volunteers specifically for women's refereeing.

In Spain and specifically the Catalan region of Spain, basketball is organised in a professional structure, with every worker paid for the role and job that they undertake - there is no volunteer workforce. In handball, however, only the administrative staff are paid workers as employees of the Catalan Handball Federation. Referees are also paid when they officiate their games but, when they act as an observer or mentor, they do not earn any money. This is similar in terms of the structure and payment structure to many other sports in different countries.

Participants involved in the interviews from around Europe also identified some specific policies and practices in the recruitment, organisation and placement of women officials. The administrators and managers spoke of specific women only events that have been utilised to recruit and place women officials. For example, rugby union in England has specifically targeted communication channels and social media in order to target women officials;

“

«...we've had some female events, so female playing events where we've specifically put it into our Facebook group and said we're looking for female referees. It's a female event, we want to champion female referees, and a massive group and a cohort of them will go...»

Other sports, such as handball, have also recognised the importance of the placement of women officials and are also actively identifying opportunities that are relevant and appropriate for their development;

“

«...our main, I would say target, is to appoint women referees for female events and competitions. This is not always very easy because first of all, the number of available female referee pairs at any given moment could be lower, but it is our intention to appoint female referees for female events...»

However, despite attempts to place officials strategically within the structures of the sports in question, and those structures outlined earlier in this report, there are challenges that exist. Rather than writing and delivering specific courses for women officials, some sports such as fencing, that do not require as much physical exertion, believed that there is a need to move away from different delivery for men and women and focus on the wider perception of women officials;

“

«...the really big problem is at the beginning; we need to stop thinking that men and women are different...for refereeing we don't need a physical test or anything, so there is no reason to discriminate positively or negatively. So, for me the base is really the way we see women referees, and making people understand that this is the same, and men and women can referee as good as each other, and not discriminate for being a woman and don't start refereeing because we are woman. I think it's more at the beginning that we have to change things, than doing special courses for women.»

As has already been demonstrated in this report, there are differences between the structure and delivery of officiating between sports and also across countries. As such what works in some sports might not work in other sports, and this should be considered by administrators and governing bodies. Nevertheless, there are also shared themes, trends and challenges which transcend specific sports. The recruitment and retention of women officials is something which should be a focus for all sports, just as one participant from basketball in the interview process outlined when discussing the recruitment of women officials;

“

«...they are recruited as former players or current players. They can be recruited, sometimes it's coaches it's quite rare, or from high school, but basically it's players. So, they are recruited in the clubs, that's how it starts. It's because they play, they enjoy playing, and then either they do both playing and refereeing, or they stop refereeing because of any reasons, injuries or something like this, and then they go to officiating. But usually it's players and at the highest level officiating there were very, very good players.»



Recruitment from the playing pool is quite rare in some other sports. For example, in football there are not many examples of players becoming referees, particularly at the elite level of the sport. These examples also demonstrate the differences that exist in some sports in terms of the recruitment of women officials. Although it is clear that the topics of recruitment and retention are important challenges for governing bodies, specifically when considering officials and women officials in particular, as this extract from an administrator from basketball demonstrates;

“

«This is a big topic for federations and a big concern - how to recruit and how to retain [women officials]. I would say to recruit, it has to be fun, but also for the men, but it has to be fun because sometimes the problem with the recruitment [is] they feel less confident at the beginner level and they are shy, so you have to engage them more and to give them some confidence. And then to retain but it's the same now, you start to study, you start to go out with friends, you don't want to commit. I mean, in many countries now young people they don't want to commit, they just want to have fun and don't want to commit to something like officiating every weekend. So that's complicated, but it's also something that you have to create a community to create a safe environment where you can have fun and learn things, and that's how you motivate people.



And also of course to follow them, so whether it is coaching, mentoring, or as things like this, it's really to have a follow up, especially at the first years when there is the most dropout, because they feel they are just left aside. I go to a game sometimes, it is not that good, I've been insulted by people whatever, so you really have to be with them and have some people that are always there to help them, and to follow them and to encourage them.»

Specific initiatives directed towards women officials seem to be quite unique and bespoke to the sport in question. Some sports treat men and women the same when they are considering recruitment, retention and development; where the officials are recruited from can also differ. In basketball it is clear that officials can often be recruited from the playing pool, whereas in other sports this is much rarer. Moreover, some sports did not believe that initiatives should be targeted specifically at women, whereas other sports, such as cricket, believed that this targeting was essential in order to grow the number of women officials;

“

«There's some initiatives that have started in the last three years. There's a project we started, they built up 150 girls playing and umpiring regularly, between 15 and 22, so that's brilliant. And Wales have a pilot going that's got a hundred women and girls turning up in the next couple of weeks. So, you can see that things are starting to shift at that bottom end, but certainly it's the middle that's sort of stuck...we haven't got enough women's cricket yet.»



These examples give an overview of the structure of officiating organisation in different countries and at different levels of the sports in which they operate. However, it is important to focus on the challenges that exist inside these structures in terms of the recruitment of women officials, and their retention and progression once they have qualified and are officiating matches.

The open responses from the survey reinforce some of the issues that have been raised in the previous section. It is recognised that promotion is important for the recruitment of women officials, and much like in rugby union in England, the promotion of courses and opportunities for women officials was recognised as an important step;

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«...we need to promote refereeing among young girls so that they understand that it is not a practice reserved for men and support these young girls in their training.»

In addition, the notion that men and women are treated the same or should be treated the same was an issue that proved contentious. One respondent outlined how this development looked to them in their sport, and how the reality of being a women official is different to what is perceived to be the case by the governing body and often male officials;

“

«I have the impression that in terms of the training and development of female referees, there is equality or even development (to compensate?), but that in practice, more credit is given to a male referee, and that female referees, in order to have an equivalent respect, must have an additional rank or be stricter. I think it's mainly about the place we give to refereeing in the practice and training of each player: if players were more often in the referee's shoes, maybe they would be more indulgent. Would there be a more respectful discourse from some coaches too? I have noticed that players who did not respect the referees did not respect the opposing players, the equipment or even the public. If the referee is a woman, all the less so (she will be seen as hysterical), and the lack of respect can also come from female players, because they are dealing with a woman ... we are aware that female referees are less respected....»

This acceptance that women officials are treated differently and have to work harder to be accepted, alongside the issues identified with training and development, mean that significant barriers can be identified for women officials. Furthermore, some of these barriers are inherent in the structure of a given sport or the culture that exists and that these women officials operate within.



Raising the growth and participation
of female sport officials in Europe

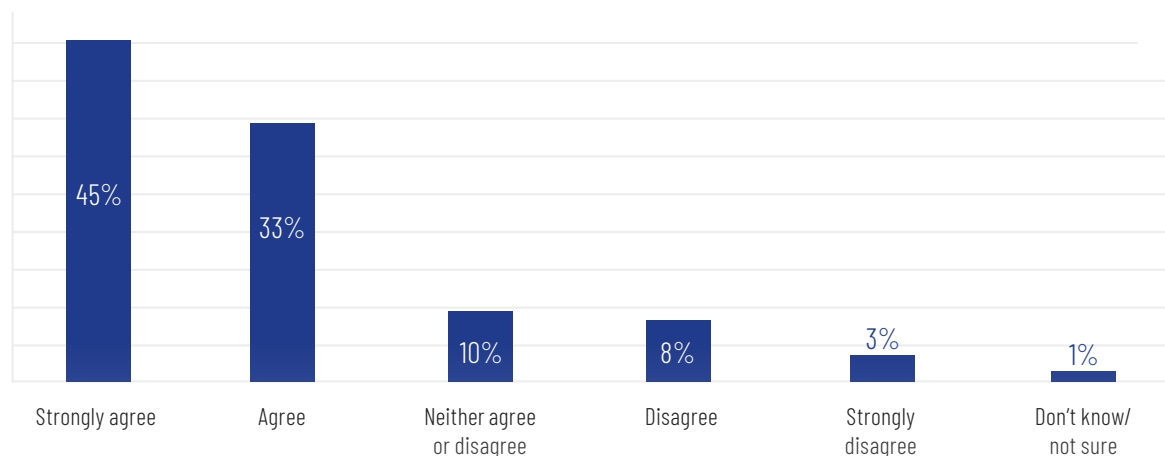


6

THE CULTURE OF SPORT TOWARDS WOMEN OFFICIALS

The survey responses outlined that women officials believed, in general, the organisations and sports in which they operate, treated them in the same way as men who also officiate. For example, figure 14 shows it is clear that women officials feel like they are generally treated the same as male officials. Only 11% of officials disagreed or strongly disagreed that this did not happen in their sport, whilst 78% strongly agreed or agreed that they were treated equally (figure 14).

Figure 14: Organisations treat female and male officials the same



Furthermore, when asked whether their sport accepted women officials, women officials strongly agreed or agreed that they are accepted within their sports as normal practice (78% respectively – see figure 16). In terms of addressing any differences in treatment related to gender, women officials also report that sports have shown that they are willing to address these differences (40% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed – see figure 15). However, this only provides some of the information required. 27% of respondents neither agreed or disagreed that their sport actively addressed gender issues, whilst 13% didn't know or weren't sure and 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed (figure 15). There is, therefore, some further work required within sports around the dissemination of policy and information regarding how any gender issues are being addressed, if this is indeed occurring in different sports.

Figure 15: My sport is active in addressing gender differences in officiating

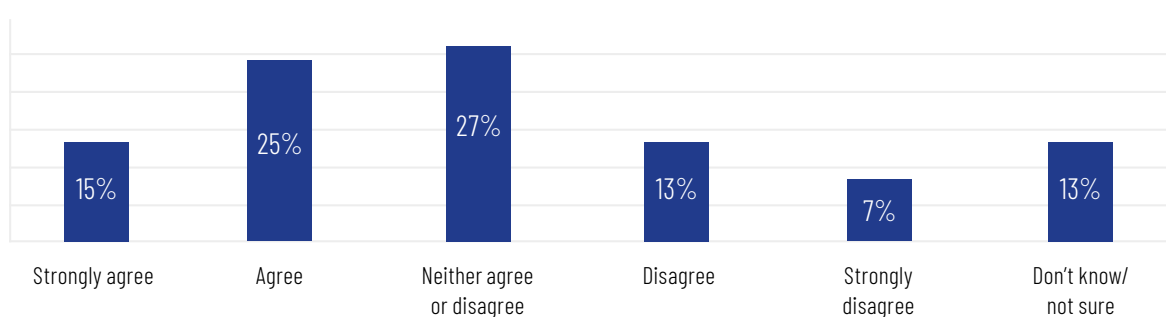
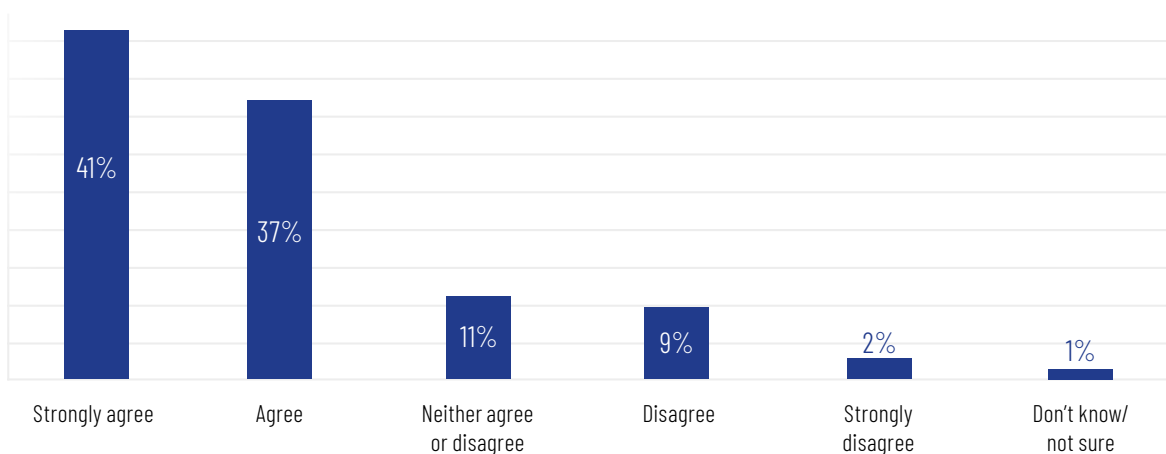


Figure 16: Sport accepts female officials as normal practice





The background /desk research identified some specific areas of challenge in terms of the cultures that exist in sport. In France for example, AFCAM believed that issues do not come from the competitors as often as they do from the public (including parents), coaches and the media. There is also a perception from AFCAM that the place of women in society has changed a lot and that this impacts the standing of women in officiating. In Bulgaria, the perception is that the majority of challenges that are faced in terms of the recruitment of women officials come from the comparatively low wages which means that it is difficult to attract officials, regardless of gender. However, athletics in Bulgaria has a good gender split between men and women officials. This is also true in athletics across Europe.

European Athletics reports that in athletics it seems that women officials begin their officiating journey earlier (15, 16 years old) and on average, there are more women candidates than men (up to approx. 55% in 2021). Moreover, women athletics officials have better grades on the admission courses than men and in the early stages of their training as officials, women officials also often achieve better performances than men. It seems that women officials improve their skills more quickly for almost all the roles, with a few exceptions (such as technical manager, starter, marshal, and competition director). However, it is perceived that in athletics the primary reasons for any issues or discontinuation across the member federations is concerns with the structure and leadership regarding technical officials, cultural issues regarding the participation of women officials after they reach adulthood and a focus on university, and therefore a reduced focus on officiating. There are also gender discrepancies in the candidates proposed by Member Federations for International Officials courses, as well as issues around cultural practice in some European countries where it is still very challenging for women to be accepted into strategic officiating positions, as well as a tendency for men to be involved in officiating, assuming coordination and leadership roles/positions.

This issue is further explained through one of the Member Federations in athletics, who are having a difficult time trying to change internal training structures to deliver more courses for all officials, including women, and to increase the officiating workforce. The issues mean it is not only difficult to train new officials and promote current officials, but it is also difficult to recruit and train new trainers to deliver the courses;

“

«There's a number of higher-level officials that feel that everyone should be really highly qualified and they want to keep control of the courses that we deliver, so they don't allow us to deliver on our courses, and they want to be the ones to deliver those courses all the time. I know that at grassroots level, we have a lot of people wanting to do courses, but people at a higher level and a volunteer side of things from the official side of things that are reluctant...they want to make sure they're the ones delivering the courses....there's a reluctance to allow other people to deliver courses or train people up...we don't deliver a huge amount of courses. And one of our big issues is we don't have enough officials coming up through the ranks.»

The issues regarding current individuals who are providing training and development, the need to grow provision, but those same individuals being reluctant to relinquish any control over the courses that they deliver, clearly presents a problem in terms of the recruitment and subsequent development/promotion of officials. It seems that there are issues within athletics that require attention if women are going to be trained as officials in the numbers that the sport seems to want. In Spain, specifically Catalonia, some previous postgraduate research work through the psychology, arbitration and sports judiciary group based at the Official College of Psychology of Catalonia through Pol Soto-i-Mollfulleda's non-published Master's Thesis (2020) provides some further insight. The thesis found that women officials in basketball were judged by sexist policies or by positive discrimination (this is considered in greater detail in a subsequent section in this report). There was also found to be an absence of gender policies, such as harassment or pregnancy, difficulties officiating alongside other aspects in life such as work or domestic/family, and a perceived prejudgement because of being a referee and, for merely being a woman. One open response from the survey identified that women should not be disadvantaged in their progression as an official, simply by pregnancy, although in reality this is perceived to be what occurs;

“

«It would be important not to slow down a referee's progress because he or she was unable to officiate for some time due to pregnancy. Here again, we are penalised, we are called in less, although it is not that we do not want to referee, it is that family life is also important and that pregnancy requires a temporary halt in refereeing. Men do not have this difficulty. They can officiate even when they are going to or become fathers. This hindrance must be recognised and not penalised.»



It is important that women are not disadvantaged through choices around family. However, this official believes that it is a problem and that this is not the same issue for men.

It was found that some sports federations communicate that they have policies about women's officiating, but there is a lack of specific actions towards it. In the Netherlands, the National Olympic Committee has found that the overall image of umpires is still negative. The perception is that there still is no feeling and no need for urgency to recruit women officials. Federations, committees and governing bodies could do more to create the optimal atmosphere and support so that women officials feel welcome at the higher levels. In future there is a need to have more men and women working to get more women officials and this would require significant public relations and communication approaches. Moreover, in table tennis (NTTB) in the Netherlands there are far more male players and officials and therefore a low percentage of women in the sport, both playing and officiating. In basketball women officials are perceived as being given equal opportunities, although the guidance for women could be improved.

This was supported by the perception of football in the Netherlands, in some parts of the country. The interview process identified that there are still clubs that have a male orientated culture, but despite the growth of women playing and being involved in football in the Netherlands, refereeing is still behind these other areas;

“

«...there still are some clubs that have a real male culture. And that are not really supportive of women's football. There's a lot of work to do, but the number of female players has grown a lot in the last 10 years. We are the biggest female sport in Holland, so we're bigger than hockey or volleyball. But women in a referee role, or board member role, or trainer coach role, that stays behind. That numbers are too low in terms of the number of players, and you can wait 15/20 years and then watch those numbers grow, but we want to stimulate the growth of females, women in football.»

The treatment of women officials was also deemed to be 'different' to that of their male counterparts and this also provides some context for the culture in which women officials can operate. Men can be treated differently to women, and sometimes it is the behaviour on the pitch side and the treatment of the officials from players, coaches and spectators that can differ and this can depend on the culture of the country or the sport in question;

“

«...certain male coaches from certain countries perhaps might treat them [women officials] differently. And by that I mean countries that don't have female officials. So, in the bigger federations or even in the smaller ones with a different setup, they'll have female officials on men's games. Whereas it's not such a thing in some countries, so it's just not something they're used to, they might alter the behaviour for the better, or the worse. Hard to say, but I think if they're not used to seeing a female on the pitch with the players, they react maybe a bit differently.»

Other administrators have identified that they believe the answer is to train more officials and make them better, but not be too focused on whether they are men or women. Rather, the focus should be around the normalisation of women in officiating and the acceptance that women officials are as good and as competent as their male counterparts;

“

«I think we have to train more and better referees, but not specially women. I really think this is not about men and women. We have to normalise the fact that women can referee as good as men, and there is no difference, a referee is referee, despite gender.»



Open responses from the survey also identified the requirement to accept women officials more widely in sport, and to provide education within sport and wider society to show that women officials are accepted;

“

«...female refereeing must first be accepted and seen as a completely normal thing by the federation. In order to educate the sporting public to see a woman referee as normal, it is important to be educated to live in a society where there is no difference between the sexes.»



To affect cultural change there is a need to change perceptions, as identified in the sections above. In fencing, this issue is also something that was raised;

“

«...there is probably prejudice, when a woman turns up...I think fencers and coaches are more anxious...so, I don't think there is really a difference, but in the mind of people, as there are less women, I think there is less trust in women refereeing.»

This sentiment is also identified as an issue in rugby union and this idea of the perception of women officials is evidently a wider issue;

“

«Probably, the main one is a lot of people's perception around being a female match official. Some people see you as a female, so if you make a mistake, they blame you they say that is because you are a female, not because you are a human being and we all make mistakes... probably the most difficult thing to change is perception and culture...people saying, "your way to being a top referee has been easier because you are a female.»



In order to affect and implement any cultural shift or change, social media, websites and consistent messaging can be utilised. In the Netherlands, football is trying to do this through the use of positive imagery of women referees;

“

«...we do a lot in building the image, in the pictures that we use on our website, when we do a test of laws of the game. There are videos with female referees...we want to build a culture where it's normal that female referees are next to the male referees.»

This change in culture appears essential across sports. The use of social media, media messaging and consistent information from governing bodies, federations and other organisations can also help to promote the role of women officials, and help ensure that they are accepted alongside their male counterparts.

As has been discussed in this section of the report, cultural change is important to place women at the heart of strategy, recruitment and retention policy in future. If governing bodies want to recruit more sports officials in the current climate, where many sports are experiencing a reduction in the number of officials, there has to be some kind of shift in the way that this recruitment is undertaken. However, it is also important to provide a safe, enjoyable and productive working environment for all officials, including women. As such the following section focuses on the abuse that women receive whilst officiating, and the barriers that any such abuse might cause.





7

ABUSE TOWARDS WOMEN OFFICIALS

The acceptance of women as sports officials and their treatment does differ depending on the sport in question. For example, from the interview process, it was clear that in fencing any issues experienced are directed towards officials irrespective of their gender, rather than if they are a woman;

“

«I would say pretty similar [abuse towards men and women officials] and it's more depending on if you're good or bad during the match or not. But I saw coaches or fencers yelling at men referees as much as a women referees, so I wouldn't say it's a difference.»

However, other sports do not have the same level of acceptance and abuse levels can also differ between sports. From the open responses in the survey, one participant talked about women in sport more widely, and then women as football referees;

“

«...there is still a long way to go in the acceptance of women in sport, but even more so in the field of refereeing. A woman referee must be able to officiate without being confronted with misogyny. Female referees must be able to officiate at the highest level, regardless of the country...»

This idea of acceptance was also discussed further by another survey respondent, who identified sexism as a particular issue, alongside education;

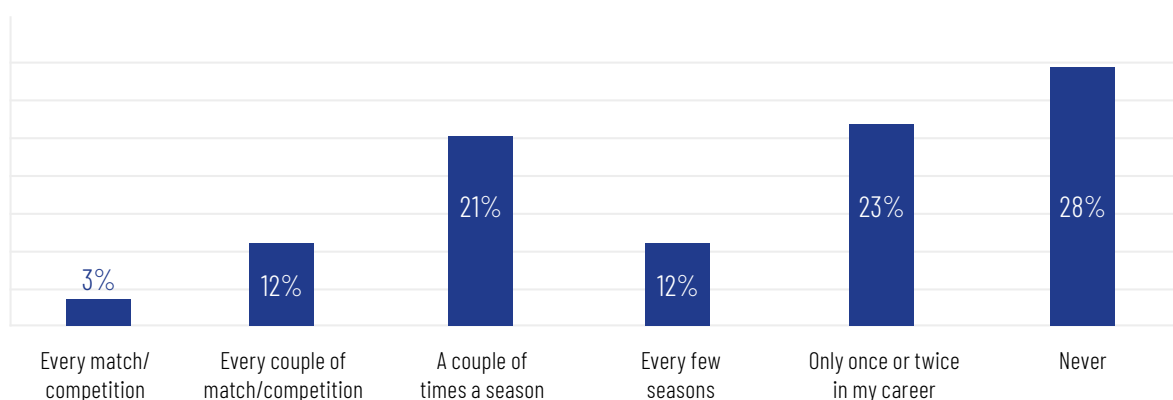
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«...the extremely deeply rooted sexism that prevails in every level of this sport in this country [the Netherlands - is a problem]. From the federation to the players and coaches.»



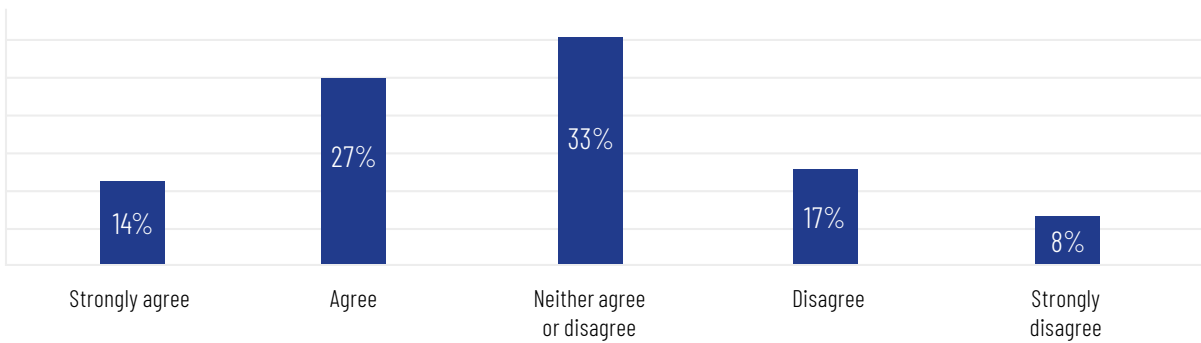
Despite these reservations, and distinctions between sports and countries, the quantitative survey responses painted a somewhat different picture of abuse towards women officials. The women officials who responded to the survey reported that abuse was not as much of a concern as it is with other officiating groups and populations (see Webb et al., 2020a; Webb et al., 2020b). The majority of this research to date has been with large scale officiating groups, and this has meant that the majority of the research has predominantly been with men. Although 15% of the respondents stated they received some form of verbal or physical abuse every match/competition or every couple of matches/competitions, 28% of respondents reported that they never received abuse and 23% stated that they have only had verbal or physical abuse once or twice in their careers to date (see figure 17). This raises some interesting questions around whether women officials are treated any differently to male officials. It is worth noting that the nature and behavior of participants from some of the largest sports in the survey may have contributed to this result. If all sports had equal representation in the survey, this outcome may have been different.

Figure 17: How often do you receive what you consider to be verbal or physical abuse?



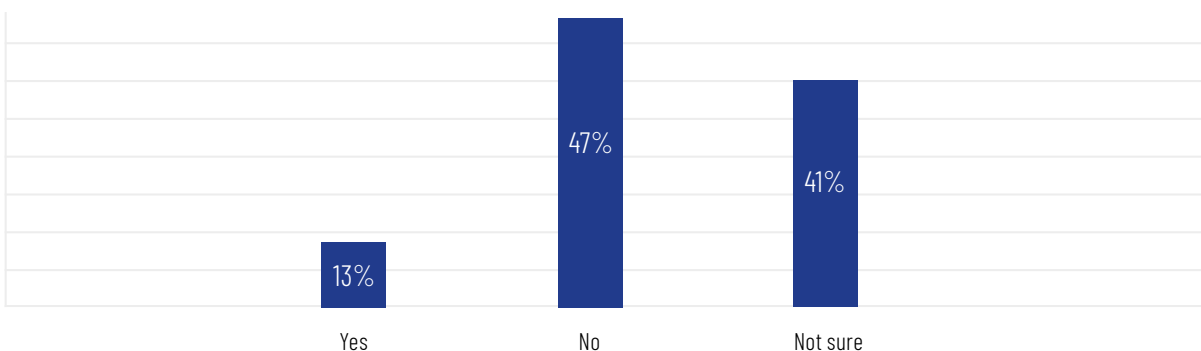
41% of women officials believe that abuse is different towards them compared to male officials, with 25% either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing with the statement (see figure 18). This presents some interesting information for governing bodies and those managing sports official training, development and recruitment. Women officials appear to identify a difference between their treatment when comparing themselves to men, and this could mean that an increase in the number of women officials would assist in the reduction of abuse towards officials more widely.

Figure 18: Abuse is different towards you as a female official compared to male officials



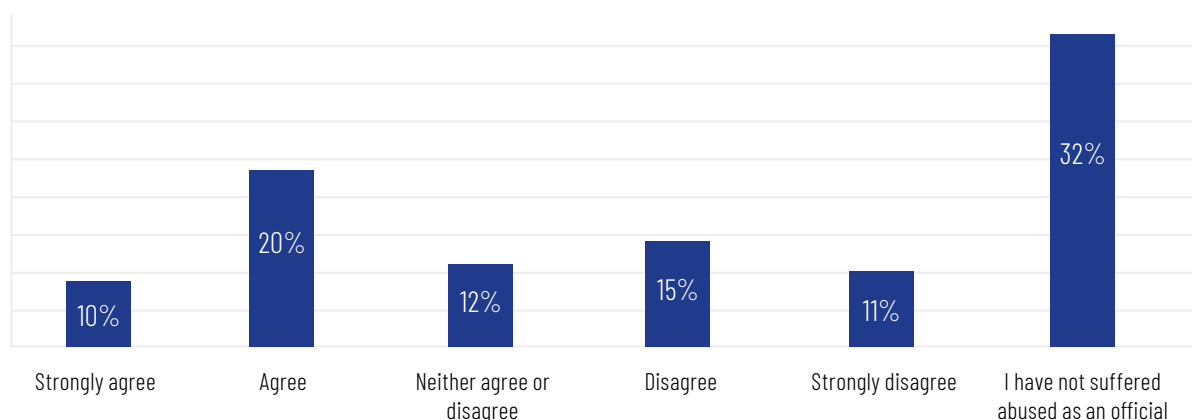
Women officials reported that they either did not believe that abuse towards them had increased (47%) or that they were not sure whether abuse had increased (41% - see figure 19). Those not sure about whether abuse had increased over the last 5 years could, in part, be due to the number of new officials, who did not feel that they could comment on what officiating was like 5 years ago (33% of officials that responded to the survey had been officiating for 5 years or less). It is encouraging that only 13% of officials believed that abuse towards them had increased, although this still equates to 408 respondents and therefore should still be given further consideration.

Figure 19: In your experience has abuse towards female sports officials increased over the last 5 years?



Moreover, it is clear that if officials suffer some form of abuse, it can make them consider whether they want to continue officiating (figure 20). 30% of women officials reported that they strongly agreed or agreed that abuse would make them question whether they want to continue officiating, whereas 26% of officials strongly disagreed or disagreed. Therefore, it is important to maintain reduced levels of abuse towards women officials, or there could be a risk that retention levels deteriorate due to an increasing amount of abuse.

Figure 20: If you have suffered abuse, it make you question whether or not to continue officiating



Clearly there are some differences between the abuse that the women officials in this sample are experiencing and the levels of abuse that have been experienced by sports officials in previous research. This presents some interesting policy decisions for governing bodies. If abuse towards women officials is indeed lower than that reported by other research previously, then it means that it would be worth considering the placement of more women officials at targeted matches that might be identified as difficult to manage, as well as the increased recruitment of women officials. If women officials perceive that abuse towards them is reduced, and the majority of these women officiate men as well as women, then having more women officials could help to reduce abuse in sports where it is more prevalent.

Nevertheless, the interview responses and the open response quotes from the survey described a slightly more nuanced picture than that identified by the quantitative survey data. For example, the use of sexist language as a form of abuse is something that appears to be directed almost entirely towards women officials. Women officials have experienced abuse, and there appears to be incidents of abuse, although clearly this is not as widespread as the abuse towards men and officials as an entire group. In rugby union there are a small number of abusive incidents that have been identified;

“

«I don't think I've ever heard of a male official complain about inappropriate sexual comments. Whereas from a female point of view, I've heard about that on two or three very different occasions just from three female referees that I know. And some people will sort of see that as banter and flattery, and other people will go: "I don't think you'd probably say that to me in a bar or in a coffee shop, so why would you say that to me on a pitch?"»»

This sexist or misogynist abuse is something that women do have to contend with. As previously identified, it can differ between sports, but these sexist and misogynist comments to which women officials are subjected have been identified in previous research in football (Webb et al., 2021), reinforcing this perception. One interview participant from basketball identified these issues as a women official, although it was also clear that it is very difficult to manage these type of comments, and that the coaches and players do not care who the referee is as long as they are good, it is the spectators that have more of a problem with women officials;

“

«...you cannot manage the spectators so sometimes you can have some reactions like: “Go to the kitchen”, “Stay in the kitchen”, “Your place is in the kitchen” whatever. Or: “Ah, this woman”, “They put women referees but they don’t have the level” whatever. But, I mean, I don’t hear all the spectators what they are saying and it really depends, you have old school spectators, let’s say. So this, you cannot manage. I think now we have come to a point that coaches don’t care... they don’t care as long as the referee is good, they won’t make a difference. So now I think, the coaches just want competence and skills and the rest, they don’t care if it’s a woman or a man on the court. And the same for the players.»



The boundaries between what constitutes abuse and what can be seen as jokes, how different women officials might deal with any abuse and how any such abuse might lead to officials leaving their sport, are all concerns for administrators. This appears to be a particular issue for women officials,

“

«...especially for women, verbal abuse is a reason to quit when you don't succeed in managing the jokes by spectators. I think that the border between jokes and verbal abuse is a difficult one, and so some women succeed in smiling about it and go on, and others are intimidated.»

Furthermore, it is also perceived that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted upon abuse towards women officials, although there are specific traits which can be attributed to different sports as well, as this administrator from hockey identified;

“

«It's getting bigger, unfortunately [abuse towards officials]. I think we're seeing after Covid more, we're recording it more, which is a good start, we're still not getting every example but we're recording it more. In hockey yeah, we've got a red card, so we can use that for abuse. What we find is that when we look at some of the reasons given for yellow cards or green cards at the lower end of the game, it should have been a red. The umpire is dealing with people in their own club and they don't want to upset them further and they need to see them next week of training and all that sort of stuff.»

There are also some concerns that were raised through the interview process where administrators identified how women officials were treated in some countries. One administrator identified the differences that exist when women officiate in Muslim countries for example,

“

«...we have problems with Muslim countries. They have different rules in their regular life, so it's almost expecting that they also have different rules in sport. The most terrible thing in our sport is pressure.»



Furthermore, administrators operating at European/international federation level (operating across numerous countries or territories) classified these concerns as socio cultural issues and highlighted the invasion of other sports and their cultures into the sport in which they were involved as a particular concern;

“

«...it appears to be socio cultural issues. And in some countries where there is this football dynamic coming into handball, because the teams are the same club teams who compete in football, they bring the dynamic of football. The fans and the hooligans and this surrounding atmosphere can sometimes make it very difficult for women to survive in that environment. I would say particularly in the south of Europe.»

The description of handball and the influence of football uses the example of sports clubs in Europe where the handball team, football team and other teams are all part of a bigger sports club. This environment appears to be particularly challenging for women officials, and the south of Europe is cited as a particular concern in this area. However, at the higher levels in other sports, such as basketball, abuse seems to be less of a concern, although it is recognised that the picture might be different at more local levels of participation,

“

«...at the international level, I wouldn't say none, but I have never seen any. In basketball generally, it's quite safe. Maybe locally it exists, but this I have no clue...so, we hope that everything's okay and we're happy that we don't have this kind of problem.»



An additional aspect of abuse which presents a different challenge to the instances described above and also in the quotations below, is the emerging area of social media abuse towards sports officials. This is an area that has been briefly considered in the academic literature (see Webb et al., 2021), but it is a relatively new area. However, it was an issue that was raised during the interview process, and social media abuse was cited as negatively affecting some women officials,

“

«...so this is becoming an issue and it's affecting some referees who are saying, "I cannot handle that because it's too much," or they close a social media profile because it's crazy. So, in rugby the issue around abuse is in my view more on social media...»

Many of the points raised through the interview process are also represented by comments in the open responses on the survey. A selection of these comments and observations are included below:

“

«...there is extremely deeply rooted sexism that prevails in every level of this sport in this country. From the federation to the players and coaches. Also, there is a lack of initiatives to incorporate international individuals and making education opportunities available for them as well.»

“

«Being an official isn't fun. It takes up your weekend, takes a lot of time. You always get nagging from the teams...I'm done with that nagging and it causes stress.»



“

«I believe my sport, athletics, could certainly highlight generally what behaviour can be deemed «abuse». I think it's far too easy for females to accept some banter or behaviour as normal, when in fact it is actually (mild) abuse. Maybe we as females need to be advised by our governing body what is deemed unacceptable. We do have a Code of Conduct for all officials which is good, but I think there is still too much low-level «abusive behaviour» which we, as females, just seem to accept as normal within both the sport and society in general. Sometimes we are our own worst enemy!»

“

«Generally - as in life - female officials are less well respected than male...we have to be better than the equivalent male whatever level we are at. As soon as we say anything about this issue then someone always brings up an example of how they support women. It is hard to raise issues therefore - it just needs to be accepted that men should challenge the behaviour of other men - the few men who continue to undermine, mock and block women can overturn the good practice of the majority.»

“

«Refereeing is bad It is unacceptable that every time a referee (male or female) officiates a match he/she is subjected to remarks or insults from players/officials/tribunes. Respect is disappearing more and more. There are less and less referees... If we push too hard, the situation will become more and more critical! Many referees have left the field because of the «psychological aggression»...»

Abuse has been shown to differ between sports, cultures and countries. There are conflicting reports of abuse, but, according to the large sample of the WINS survey, it is not as much of an issue for women officials as it is for their male counterparts based on the results and findings from previous research. However, the incidents and issues that have been reported are often linked to sexism and misogyny and as such are deep rooted and require time, influence and financial impetus to change. Furthermore, this presents challenges for the retention of these women officials, and makes their placement at matches and promotion within the officiating pathway and development system all the more important. As such the following section focuses on the use and implementation of positive action as a means of promoting women officials and retaining them in their given sport.



Raising the growth and participation
of female sport officials in Europe



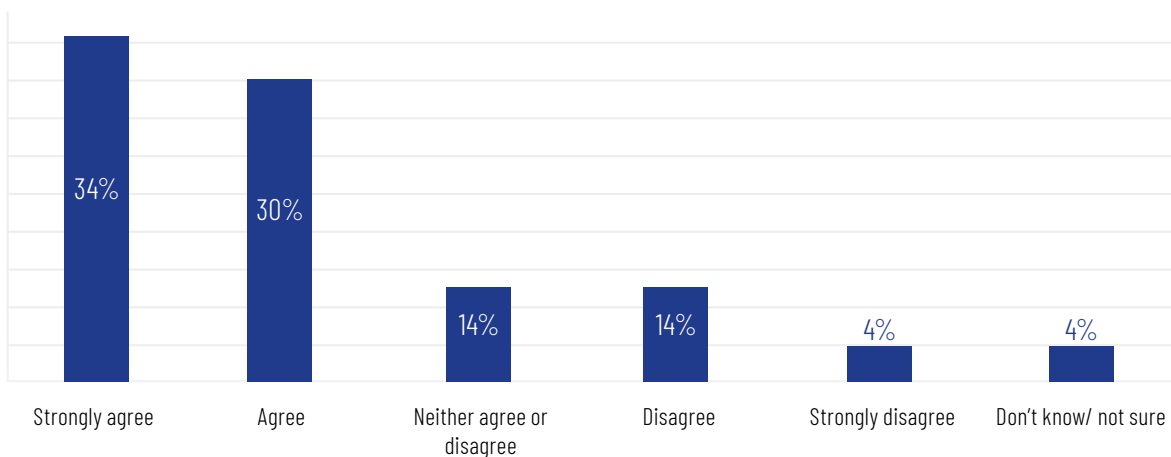
8

**POSITIVE ACTION
(DISCRIMINATION),
PROMOTION AND
WOMEN OFFICIALS**

Positive action, also known as positive discrimination, is a concept that was raised repeatedly throughout the data collection and analysis process. Bradbury (2013, p. 309) argues that positive action approaches can act as a mechanism through which to address any resistance from structural or cultural change and that positive action approaches offer a direct and immediate solution, however, such approaches will only succeed if they are 'delivered as part of a more holistic package of educational, policy orientated and legislative action'. In this case the 'closure' is directed towards the recruitment, retention, and promotion of women officials. Kilvington (2019) argues that it can be assumed that positive action policies would be welcomed by those who are being empowered, although this is not always the case. Women sports officials from this sample do not necessarily want any special attention, or to be promoted more quickly, particularly if it is deemed that they do not warrant any such promotion on merit.

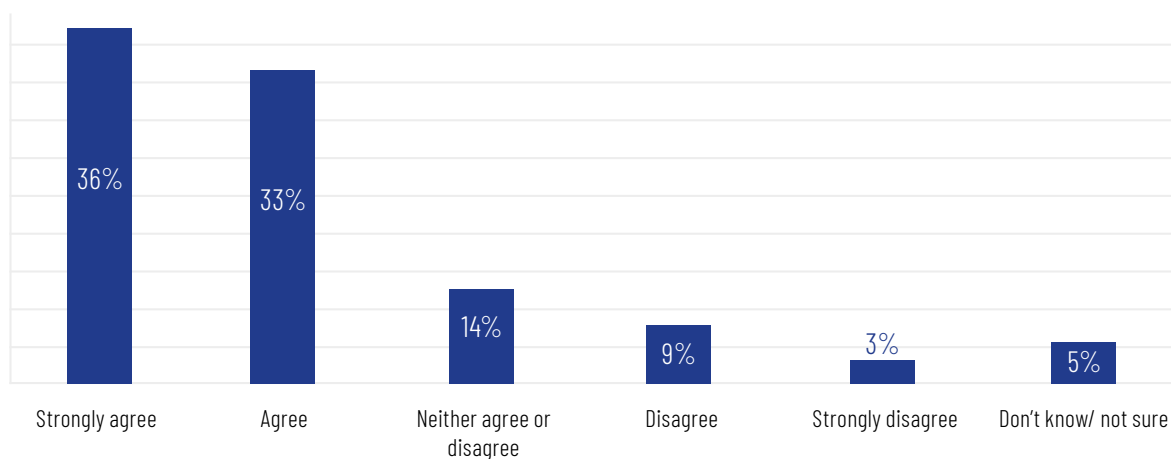
Survey responses reported that although a proportion of women officials believe that promotion opportunities are equal in their sports (64% strongly agree or agree), 18% also strongly disagree or disagree (almost 1 in 5 respondents) and this warrants further investigation (see figure 21).

Figure 21: Promotion opportunities are equal for mal and female officials



Furthermore, whilst a similar number of women officials strongly agree or agree that match official appointments are distributed and allocated fairly (69% respectively), 12% also disagree or strongly disagree and 14% neither agreed or disagreed that these appointments are fair (figure 22), suggesting that further consideration of this practice should be contemplated.

Figure 22: Match official appointments are fair



In addition to the survey responses, the background research also identified some information from governing bodies and partners in the WINS project. In the Catalonia region of Spain there is some evidence of the use of positive action. To identify, recruit and retain more women officials in basketball the referee committee has utilised positive action in order to dedicate more time to women officials and to increase their number. The administrators have utilised positive action when there is a vacant role or appointment *and they have to choose between a man and a woman for that role, they will choose the woman, to promote women officials.*

The use of different social media platforms, the media and wider campaigns have been used to make the role of women officials more visible. The same could be said for retention, because the basketball referees committee in Catalonia focus on women officials and the technical, tactical and physical development alongside more personal objectives, expectations, work and family balance and any gender issues. In handball in Catalonia over the past three years the officiating administrators have recently started to focus on the women officials and although there are no specific recruitment campaigns, there is a focus on retention and achieving excellence. Despite this focus, there is no positive action, with the notion being rejected as a method to increase the number of women officials, although the handball federation is developing a gender equality plan based on supporting women referees and promoting meetings to talk about any specific issues.

Through the interview process the administrators identified different approaches to positive action, as well as different thoughts on the practice. Some administrators, such as the example below from rugby union, talked about the need for visibility and that any increased number of women officials and their improved exposure could increase the wider number of women officials over time. This exposure would also help men understand that women could be as competent and worthy as any men who officiate;

“

«...it's about visibility. This see it be it thing. If we have a platform and an opportunity to show other women and girls that they can do it, that helps with recruitment and it helps with retention. If we can show men and boys that it's a normal place for women to be out there refereeing, that can also help with the reduction of those comments...but there is no point in having a female referee, she's not as good as the males but she is female so let's shove her in. It doesn't do her any good, it doesn't do the game any good, and it doesn't do our cause any good either...If you're getting 10% of the women in, well only 10% of the 10% are going to make it up the pathway. So, what we have to do, we have to make sure when it's appropriate, and where we can, and where we're not stomping over other people, that we try and make sure that we are bringing people in at all of those levels to make sure that visibility is seen immediately...but we've got to do something immediately to try and ensure we've got visibility at every level, just waiting is nice and it's equal, but we're not going to attract more women and girls in if they can't see them at every level.»

The need for action means that there is some conflict in the way that women are promoted. There are discussions over the way that women are recruited and retained and the fact that women should be as good as men in order for them to be promoted, yet there is also discussion over women being promoted 'appropriately' and 'immediately' to ensure 'visibility at every level'. As such, there has to be some consideration of positive action in order for this to happen more quickly. In cricket in England, it is clear that positive action has been utilised and there is also some understanding that this action has received mixed responses, although it is also clear that there is an understanding that action needs to be taken and that some of the recent changes in cricket have allowed for some of these changes to take place;

“

«We have taken positive action in the women's game, from two years ago now putting gender neutrality into the women's professional game. It's obviously had mixed responses depending on who you ask and others feeling disenfranchised by that, others feel it's great. So, yeah I think that's the challenge with umpiring...we're starting from a 2% negative sense that we're really backed against the wall, so given women likely are starting in the women's game and the opportunity Covid gave us, and the new professional women's structure that came into place two years ago, we use that as a chance to take positive action...but that positive action will need to be taken in the men's game at the same time, but I think, it's had a mixed response, I'll be honest across the game, trying to push that level of understanding lower down has had a mixed response, depending on where you are in the country and, depending on the personalities and individuals involved.»

The mixed response to positive action from different parts of the country and from different individuals, is perhaps unsurprising given the impact that positive action could have on some officials, their development and progression. It also appears that the message is more difficult to convey at lower levels of cricket, and perhaps this presents a more challenging environment for women officials to operate within. However, the message needs to be consistent throughout the levels of officiating for any success to be maximised. Despite the need for a positive message, outlined in the extract above, other sports are mixed in terms of their use of positive action. In basketball across Europe the focus is on equality of opportunity rather than providing more advantages to women over men, although it is clear that this is a difficult balance to strike when trying to promote women officials at different levels of the game;

“

«...giving the opportunity and giving them confidence, treat them fairly, not to have some more advantageous but just to have the women, they don't want to have more advantages, you know they just want to have the same. So, this is when we talk sometimes more about equity than equality about gender. So, it's just giving the same opportunities to everyone to express themselves and just treat them and judge them fairly and the same...personally I'm more in favour of a recognition of skills. I think it can be good for some topics...but the problem for me is that the question of the skills and if the places really deserve to be here will always be asked. You say okay, maybe the woman is competent and has all the skills, but if you put that in place there will always be a doubt, for me. But the problem is sometimes if you don't do that then there is no progress at all. So, it's quite tricky, but I think I'm more in favour of really putting things in place and initiatives to boost the development of women. But to put in place positive discrimination policies can be tricky, and always questions the skills of the people concerned.»



There is clearly a balance between promoting women within sport, but also ensuring that they are perceived to be promoted or awarded experiences based on their competency rather than any preferential treatment. The women officials themselves want to be promoted because of their talent and their development, they want to be comparable to their male counterparts and treated in the same way. In fact, it seems that some sports do not have positive action (discrimination) at all, or only at higher levels because of particular quotas;

“

«...we don't have positive discrimination except at maybe higher levels when, for example you'd be in a governmental body of our federation, we have quotas for woman. That is a little bit of problem, because if you choose someone just because she's a woman it doesn't feel good. We speak a lot about that on the Gender Commission...I work in governmental bodies here in my local community and sometimes it's good, because if you have quotas and have positive discrimination people pay attention and get used to seeing women at the meetings, and usually women have different approaches to some problems, and that is very helpful a lot of the time.»

The very fact that women are seen at certain levels, both officiating and in administrative roles, appears to be important in itself and something that sports are actively encouraging, rather than a specific, concerted focus on positive action. However, in hockey in England it is clear that at the top of the game there is a desire to promote a full team of women officials;

“

«...in our national program in the premier division, we want a full team of officials that are women. We are not shy in saying that we feel that that's the right thing for their progression. We're not there yet, we won't be there for another couple of years while some of the others come through the ranks.»

However, there is also the belief in hockey that positive action can be negative towards young officials if it is not utilised responsibly when dealing with women who have talent, That loss of talent is a considerable concern and something, particularly given the challenge in recruiting and retaining officials, that is something which cannot continue.

“

«...the other case of positive discrimination is more from our Young Official Program - with someone with talent, we seem to push them too early...I know very well, they were positively discriminated against by giving them that opportunity too early - because of the aspiration of having a female program, we've lost them from the sport.»



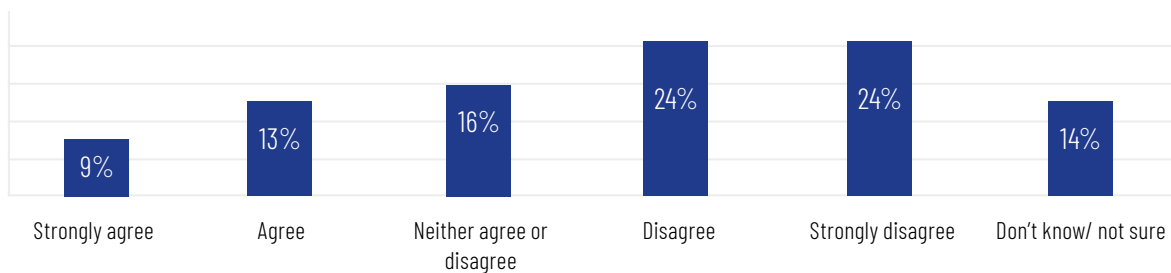
9

TRAINING, DEVELOPMENT AND MENTORING

The positive action directed towards women officials becomes an exceptionally important choice when considered with training, development and mentoring requirements. Mentoring for sports officials is covered in the literature (see Pearson, 2022; Tingle et al., 2014; Webb et al., 2019), and historically any mentoring programmes have been well received by sports officials, who require support given the barriers and challenges they often face. However, these mentoring programmes are also disparate and limited in scope, with many sports officials reporting that they would like a mentor, but that they do not currently have a mentor. Mentoring is part of a training, development and support system and therefore should be considered as part of an integrated process.

Figure 23 outlines the training and development opportunities directed towards women officials. There are clearly some concerns around training and development with 48% of respondents identifying that they either disagreed or strongly disagreed that training and development is targeted specifically at women officials. This is compared to 22% of respondents who strongly agree or agree. There are also a significant proportion of respondents who neither agreed or disagreed (16%) or who do not know what their sport is doing in this area (14%).

Figure 23: Training and development opportunities are directed at women in sport



The women officials who completed the survey did believe that access to training opportunities was fair and equal for them and for male officials (figure 24), although it appears that this training is often run by male instructors or coaches.

Figure 24: Access to training opportunities is equal for male and female officials

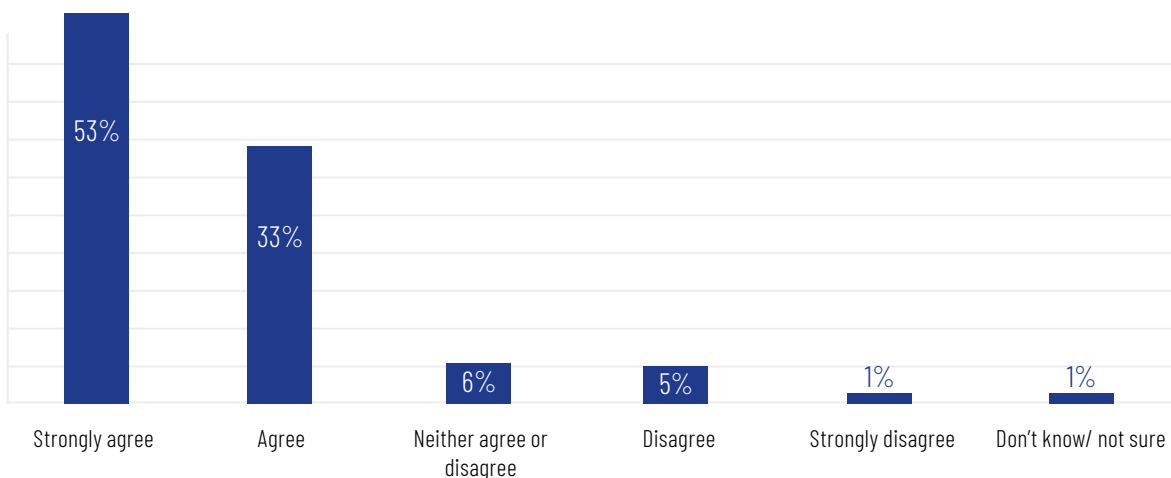


Figure 25: Specific training/development opportunities are designed and run by femal sport officials or instructors

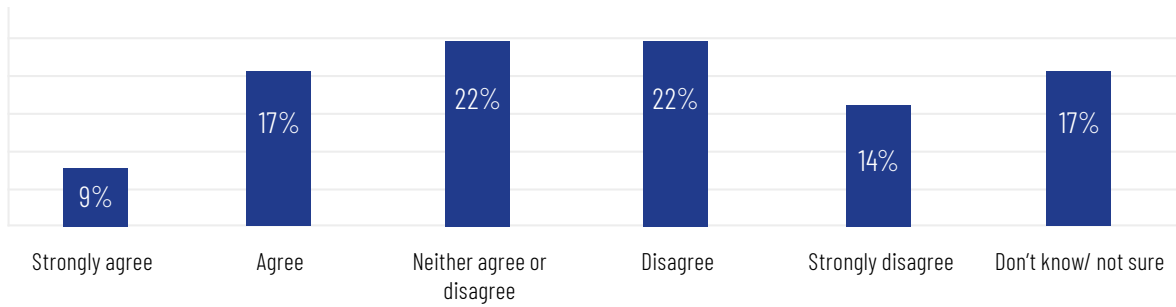


Figure 25 demonstrates that women officials report that they do not believe that the training and development opportunities that they are afforded are often designed or run by women instructors. For example, whilst 26% strongly agree or agree that the courses are delivered by women officials, 36% strongly disagree or disagree that this is the case, whilst 22% neither agree nor disagree and 17% don't know or aren't sure. Whilst it is clearly not necessarily practicable for any training or development to run with women officials in every circumstance, there are arguments to suggest that it might encourage more women officials to engage with these processes and it would also be a good marketing/engagement tool.

Nonetheless, the survey data suggests that information about support and, more specifically, adequate support is not considered a particular issue for women officials. Figure 26 shows that 54% of officials strongly agreed or agreed that the support provided is adequate whereas 17% of officials strongly disagree or disagree, although there are also a quarter of officials who neither agreed or disagreed that the support provided is adequate.

Figure 26: Adequate support is provided for me as a femal official

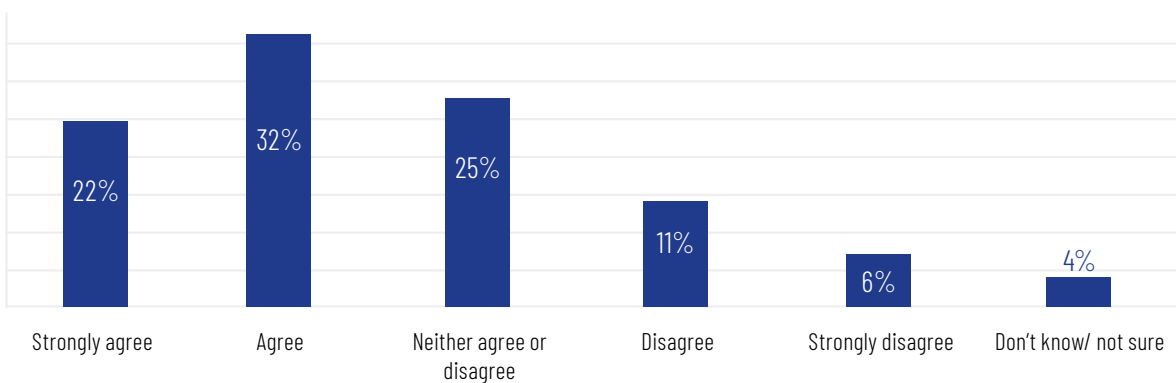
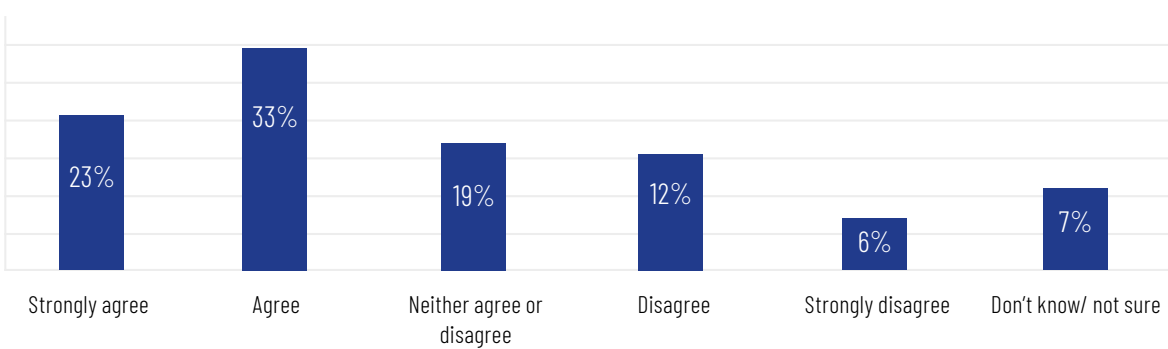


Figure 27 provides further insight. 56% of officials strongly agreed or agreed that they know where they can access support as a woman official, with 18% of officials strongly disagreeing or disagreeing and 19% of officials neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Figure 27: I am confident that I know where I can find and access support as a female official



Continuing with the theme of support, women officials were asked whether they had a mentor and if they did not have a mentor whether this was something they would like to see introduced to provide support and guidance (figures 28 & 29). 65% of officials responded that they did not have a mentor and for those officials that responded that they did not have a mentor, 54% suggested that they would like to be allocated a mentor. In line with wider literature related to mentoring and sports officials (Webb et al., 2020b), it appears that there are also concerns around the provision of effective mentoring programmes for women officials.

Figure 28: Do you have a mentor?

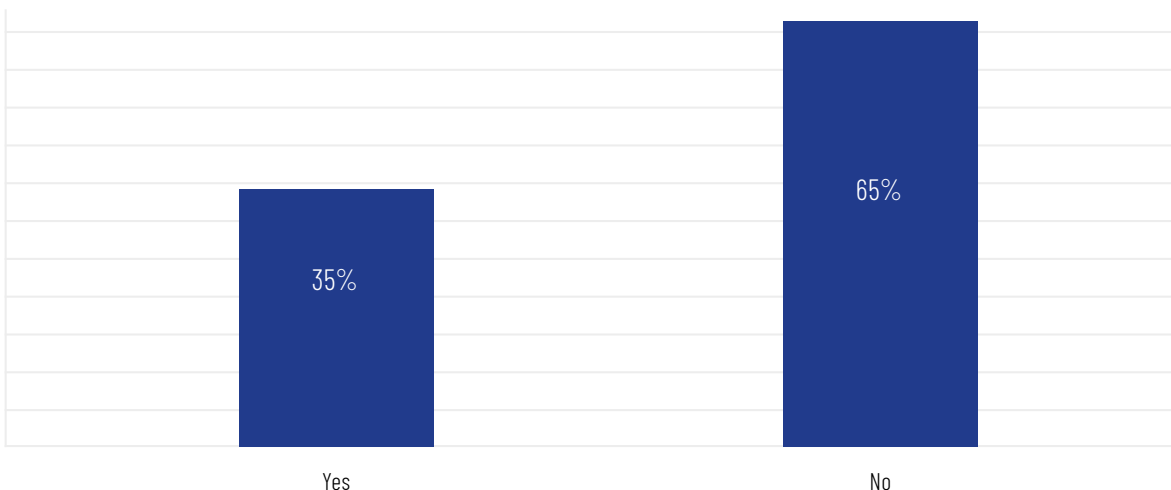
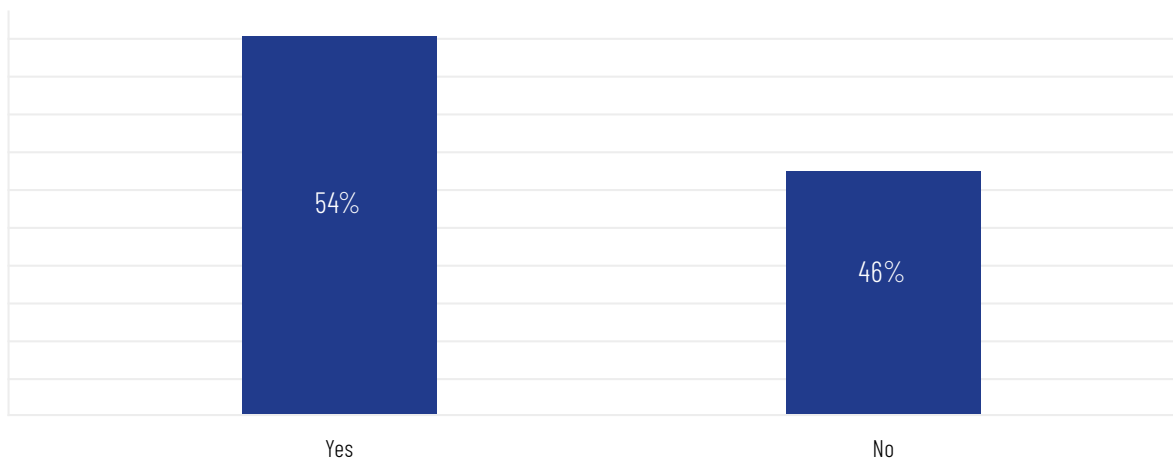


Figure 29: If you do not have a mentor, is this something you would like to see introduced?



The notion of support and mentoring is something that the interview participants also identified as a particular issue. The differences in responses from the administrators demonstrates the variable approach to mentoring and support for sports officials across different sports. For example, in Savate there is no formalised mentoring programme, although there is an informal approach to mentoring and a more formalised approach is something that is an aspiration;

“

«We don't have a mentoring program, we do that informally. But I can imagine that there will be. We have had some sensitive years when women stopped...It's usually when they start to work or they have a family, so I think that is a period of time when they need more support and have understanding that it is hard, that it is difficult, and try to help them to make that transition easily.»

This lack of formal mentoring structures is also evident in other sports. In fencing, there is a similar informality to the mentoring and support provided, and the reasoning behind this is perceived to be because fencing is an individual sport, rather than a team sport,

“

«...we don't have mentors, men or women. We just have friends who talk about some matches, but just between us, there is nothing official, no group for that...maybe it's because it's an individual sport and we are not used to doing group things...»

In other sports the focus is around the fact that a limited number of women officials could mean that those women officials feel unsupported. This is a significant barrier and until more women officials are trained, this lack of support network for women will potentially be an issue,

“

«...in each county you might, for whatever reason, have one woman involved in umpiring, but it means they are sort of a lone voice and there's no network, no support for them, and so we started to try and rectify that...it is something we're very aware of, and it has been a real frustration, because you have got to overcome that barrier in the first place...»



There does appear to be a developing understanding that mentoring and support are essential as sports try and recruit and retain women officials in greater numbers. As part of the WINS project a mentoring and leaderships guide will be produced in order to help those organisations with an aspiration to develop their mentoring provision. Some sports utilise the same pathway for men and women (as has been discussed in this report), although there can also be some amendments specific to women officials within these pathways. In rugby union in England there is an acknowledgment that the pathways are similar for men and women, but that women also require additional support, although this support is not formalised;

“

«...there's a growing appetite for female match officials to feel supported in being able to go up the pathway...we've got a framework loosely in place to give additional support to female referees, it's not separating our female referees and our male officials, everybody is going on the same pathway, everybody is going through the same courses and it's mixed. But we're providing additional support for those that need to ask some questions that maybe they don't feel an all-male room would know the answers to...»

Other sports in different countries have a more formalised structure for mentoring programmes. In football in the Netherlands both men and women are allocated a mentor and there is some consideration around the placement of mentors and mentees to ensure that the relationships is beneficial for both parties. However, there is no specific mentoring programme for women officials,

“

«...we've got mentors for our referees. Male and female. We try to make a good match between the female referee and the mentor, not every mentor is good at mentoring a female referee. We give more attention, but we don't have a specific mentoring group for female referees...the more traditional older mentors, maybe have problems in terms of "how do I mentor a female referee..."»

The fact that some of the older mentors might not have the skills to mentor a women official is a challenge for sports. To enable these skills to be developed would take training for these mentors and, in some cases, it would require additional personal development for the individuals who are mentoring in the first place.

One of the challenges in this process is the perception that mentors have to be older, more knowledgeable and have experienced scenarios and challenges that enable these mentors to pass on this acquired knowledge to younger officials. However, in hockey they are trying to move away from this perception, and perhaps this would provide additional numbers of officials who could become mentors. The number of officials who are perceived to be at the requisite level of the development pathway, who are also eligible and willing to become mentors, is often a reason for a lack of mentors. A proposed solution to a lack of available mentors in hockey is to look outside the traditional methods of recruitment and placement of mentors;

“

«...my concern in hockey is that there's still this ongoing thought and this ongoing culture that, unless you are an experienced umpire and you've done your time on the circuit then only you can be a mentor. I'm mentoring three people in the world panel at the moment in hockey. I have never umpired internationally. But we talk about stuff away from the game, and I'm almost their sounding board just so they can get their head straight or it's just a check in call or something like that and it's great because it's bringing in skills that they're going to get elsewhere, but they don't feel comfortable getting it from other people they're getting it from me, which is fine.»



The targeted approach to mentoring is something which sports are already doing, although this is apparently not widespread. Other sports believe that any mentor should be a certain type of character to enable the relationships to work. In powerlifting, the approach is explained;

“

«I paired developing females with strong females. And I think it worked really well. I'd be curious how it would work pairing men and women, both based on the national context, understanding of gender equity and I think the same about family responsibilities, household responsibilities, time...»

This targeted approach would be difficult with large numbers of people involved, and the management of this process would require investment or staffing resources. This level of investment, whether that is time resource related or financial, is something that is recognised in basketball;

“

«...it's not free [mentoring]...you can do different formats, you can have a mentoring programme which consists of having, for example, one session per month talking with a referee and saying "Oh how you doing? When's your games? Was it okay? Do you have any problems, technical or in the management of the game or whatever?"...or you can have shadowing, you go, and you see your mentor, if it's a referee then you follow her or him during a game...to have exchanges but on the court, off the court, but together...if you do that, or if you gather the mentees and mentors for specific workshops, this implies costs. So, it's not free of charge and it takes a lot of time, a lot of energy, because you have to train the mentors. It's not because you are a good referee that you are a good mentor, you need some personal skills...Some parts can be free of charge, I mean everybody's happy to help everybody, but when you do a mentoring program, you have to be very precise and to really respect the schedule, and sometimes if you do things on site then it needs a budget. So, these are the limitations. It's the time and cost.»



The points that have been identified in basketball are all relatable to other sports. There are choices in terms of the development of officials, but it is clear based on the quantitative survey responses, the open survey responses selected below and the interview quotations, that mentoring is important for the retention and development of women officials. Mentoring, training and development are linked and each of these areas are important for the progression of officials within any development pathway.

“

«Mentoring is absolutely necessary. It will improve as well to have more female in the higher positions.»

“

«Cross sport mentoring; I do have a mentor but I don't feel I can talk to them about injury, family, professional career for fear of prejudice when making future appointments.»

“

«Better mentoring schemes and check ins. It's easy for the governing body to say that they care about female referees but do nothing to prove it. More observations also, personally I feel men get a lot more observations to help them develop and females are often forgotten about.»

There is an appetite for an increased focus on any mentoring for women officials, both from administrators and from women officials themselves. Furthermore, women officials discuss the possibility of cross sport mentoring in order to share experiences and knowledge because they do not always feel comfortable when discussing issues with other officials from their own sport. This sharing of knowledge between sports officials and wider knowledge exchange could be a method to increase the support network for women officials, whilst also considerably increasing the capacity for any support network around these officials.



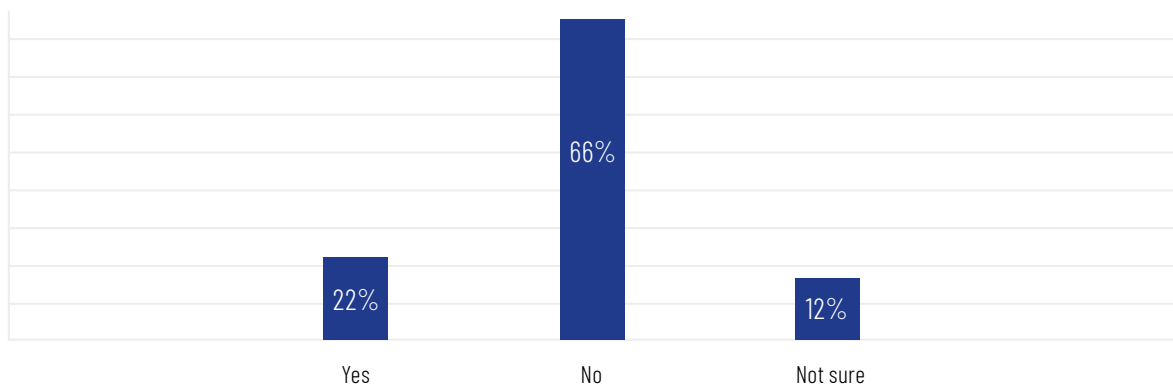


10 FACILITIES AND CLOTHING FOR WOMEN OFFICIALS

There are also other challenges/barriers for women officials that are out of their control. For example, the supply and use of officiating clothing can provide an issue for some women sports officials. The survey responses, alongside the interviews with administrators provide further detail around the supply and use of women's officiating clothing.

Women officials who completed the survey answered questions around the facilities that are provided for them and the services that they can access as part of their role as an official. The first questions in this area focused on the specific provision of women's officiating kit. As can be seen in figure 30 the majority of respondents reported that their sport did not offer specific kit for women officials (66%), with 22% stating that they did have access to women's officiating kit.

Figure 30: Does your sport offer female officiating kit?



If we look further into this provision of specific clothing for women officials, we can deduce that the responses differ if we focus on the English responses broken down by country (table 2), we can see that although in the survey 28% of all respondents reported that they received specific officiating clothing/kit, of the English language survey 51% of officials responding from Scotland reported that they did have women officiating kit, whilst 39% from England also reported this (both higher than the overall figure of 28%). This breakdown also shows that Italy (13%), the Netherlands (20%) and Portugal (21%) were below the overall number of responses from the English language survey.

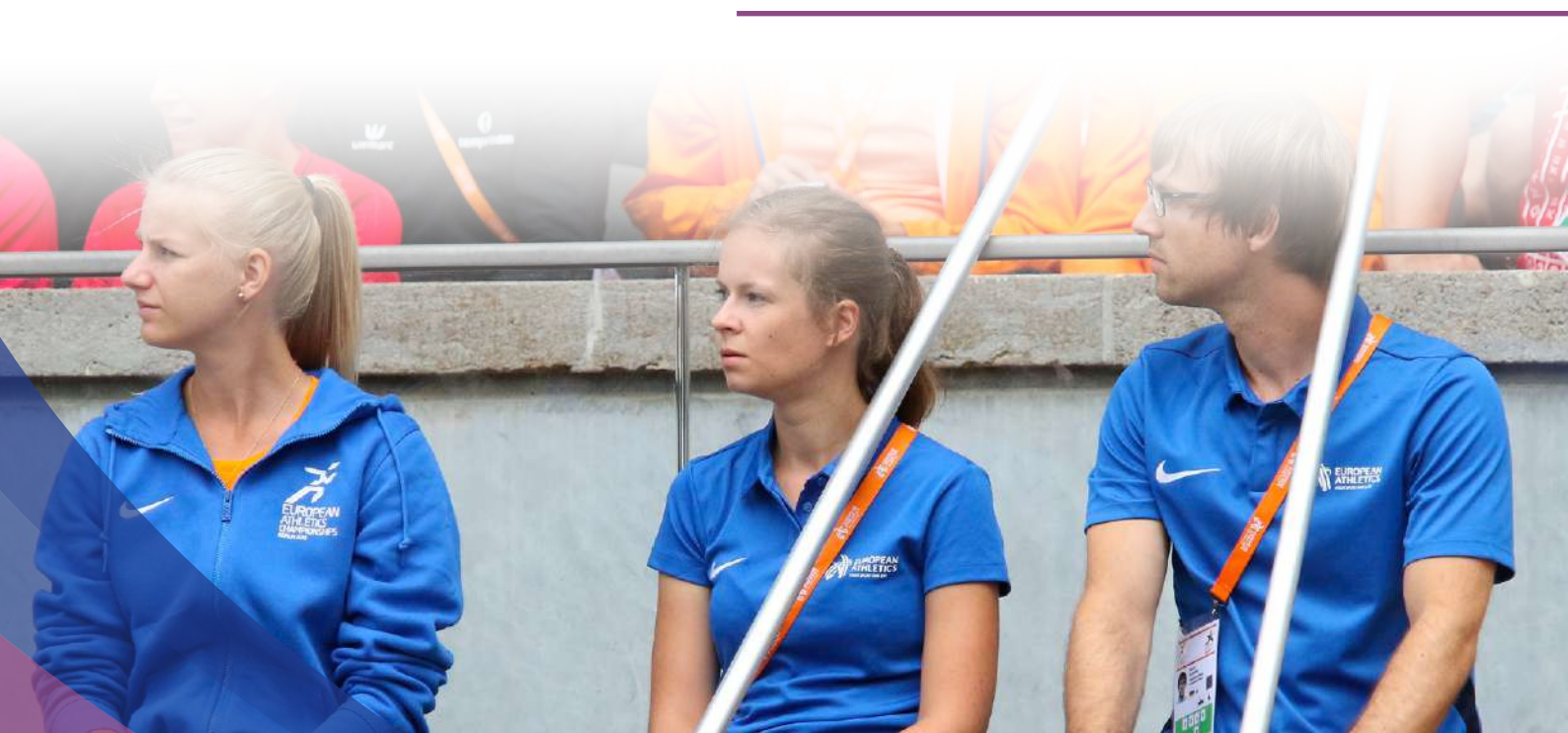


Table 2: English responses broken down by country (top 7 highest respondents)

Country	Yes	%	No	%	Not sure	%	Total
England	182	39%	215	46%	72	15%	469
Netherlands	68	20%	177	53%	88	26%	333
Italy	23	13%	144	80%	12	7%	179
Belgium	26	24%	64	59%	19	17%	109
Scotland	40	51%	29	37%	9	12%	78
France	19	25%	53	69%	5	6%	77
Portugal	14	21%	48	71%	6	9%	68

Administrators also recognised the issues concerning officiating clothing. Through the interview process it was evident that there are differences between sports concerning women’s officiating clothing. Some sports have both a men’s and women’s version of their clothing, such as in powerlifting where there has been a shift in the clothing that is worn by officials, and therefore a change in the approach being taken;

“

«...we have polos and there’s a men’s version and a women’s version, or sizing I think...before that referees were wearing suits. So, the females already we had the option, it wasn’t a rule... they could wear dress pants or a skirt. Or of course men or women could wear either...it wasn’t specific to gender.»

Basketball in Europe has also had a recent change in their approach to the clothing worn by women officials. From the summer of 2021 in basketball specific cuts of officiating clothing were introduced for women officials, although the clothing provider was not able to provide women's clothing for all of the women officials and this meant that they had to get some of the clothing altered themselves;

“

«...this was put in place for last summer. This is something that I really wanted to have for the female officials... it was the same, for example T-shirt or shorts as for the men but women's cut. We have trousers for women, officiating trousers, unfortunately the provider was not able to provide the referee shirts, which is something that you see the most, you know with a better shape for the waist and smaller sleeves or, I mean not that large. So, they had to go to the tailor, but there has been big progress now we have women's kits for female referees, most of the time now and it's something that will be continued for the next cycle, hopefully now with the referee shirts.»

Sports also identified issues with the clothing manufacturers themselves in trying to provide women's officiating clothing. In European handball appropriate sizes were difficult to find for women;

“

«...It is the same uniform but not in the sizing of men. Not so baggy, not so long, it's more fitted for a woman's body. In particular the sizing, because in the past we had issues that we could not find the proper sizes for women, they had to go with small or extra small.»

Whereas in football there have also been problems with the clothing supplier when trying to supply women officials with appropriate clothing;

“

«...it's difficult with [supplier name removed] as a referee sponsor. Because [supplier name removed] it is always a problem with referee clothing. And women have to wait a long time for the right clothing.»

These challenges with the clothing suppliers are experienced in other sports. In cricket, this has also been an issue. Despite the growing demand for women's clothing, it has been difficult to persuade suppliers that it is something they should be doing;

“

«...umpire kits...it's quite a specialised kit, pocket sizes etc, etc. And it's a real big bone of contention, because at the moment it's been a battle within the providers because they're saying we won't provide much female kit because there's no demand for it, but we're saying you've got to provide it, because we've got people wanting it so, it's been a battle in that sense. One of the big things with the girls kit was making sure they've got some kit that really helps them identify as an umpire, and feel they have that status in a positive way... we're going through a new tender process at the moment with kit providers and it's now being stipulated very explicitly that it's something that they have to provide, even if quite clearly for them from a commercial perspective, it might be a loss to start with.»

There appears to be an ongoing dialogue with clothing manufacturers in a number of sports and across countries as well. In rugby union across Europe there have been issues when suppliers of any clothing have changed,

“

«...especially if you change your supplier, then you need to sometimes fight with the new brand to make sure that they have female kit and it's not always the case...»

Whereas, in hockey,

“

«...we specify female fit. They're like sports t-shirts...there's branding guidelines as well, so they always have to send us the example and then we'll come back and say, "is there a female fit"...the last thing is that female officials wear skirts, we're looking to see whether that's an issue for them.»



Correct clothing can mean that an athlete, or in this case a sports official, can feel a sense of belonging and appreciated. If the recruitment and retention of women officials is to be achieved, women officials have to feel wanted and part of the sport in which they are officiating. Sometimes that could mean selecting the men's clothing, but in rugby union the belief is that women should have the choice of clothing and particular fit in order to perform to the best of their ability;



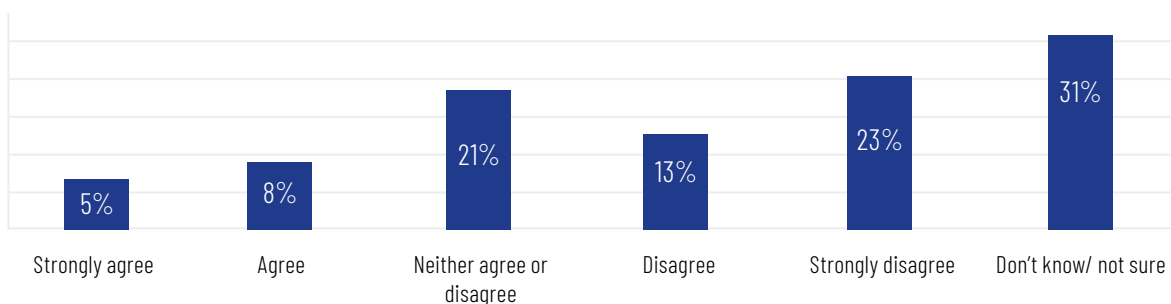
«...how can I be the best version of me if you're giving me kit that swamps me or that's too tight across my chest or doesn't fit over my backside? There's a lot of women out there who actually would prefer the men's fit. Well, you've got that option. What you don't have if you are a size six but with a fairly big chest, you don't have an option to choose something that will make you feel as if you are ready to go, and that you own your role in the middle of the pitch because you're feeling uncomfortable before you've even started...I know on our pathway some of the referees, really high level referees, spend money on tailoring men's fit kit that they get given...»

Even in a pathway that identifies the issues with women's officiating clothing, and provides clothing for those officials, at the top of the pathway there are still concerns around women officials amending and tailoring their own clothing and using their own money to do so. Alongside the differences between sports, it is also evident that there are differences between countries/cultures, as evidenced in Table 2 and from some of the evidence presented from different sports.

Alongside the issues identified around officiating clothing, there are also other areas of support that require consideration for women officials. Figure 31 focuses on the childcare support available to women officials. 36% of women officials either strongly disagreed or disagreed that childcare is adequately considered for women officials, whilst only 13% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that childcare is adequately considered.

Clearly this is an area of provision that requires further consideration by governing bodies and officiating administrators.

Figure 31: Childcare is adequately considered for female officials in my sport



The childcare facilities and the provision of these facilities differ between sports, as does the consideration of such issues. The interviews provided further depth to the findings from the survey responses and gave specific examples related to the provision of childcare facilities for women officials. Some sports believe that the provision of childcare facilities is not a particular issue – this might be because the officials in question are perceived not to require these facilities and are expected to be able to deal with any childcare issues before they arrive for any officiating duties;

“

«It is not foreseen that we have childcare facilities in our competition, because the people who are appointed come there as individuals. They cannot bring families or spouses for whatever reason... they have to solve these issues by themselves back at home. We are not part of that. When they have an appointment for a single match, they usually leave home the day before the competition and they return the day after the competition, so we're talking three days. By that it's up to them how they do it...when you're a referee, you are a referee. You can be a mother or whatever, but when you are appointed as a referee, you are a referee.»

The view from handball is that it is not a specific concern, particularly in the elite fixtures when officials are required to stay away from home, as identified in the extract above. However, if the goal is to recruit and retain more women officials, childcare is an area that will require further attention. If this is a barrier for some women, as the survey responses suggest, attention should be paid to any such provision. Some sports are smaller and have fewer financial resources, and this can present a challenge in terms of the provision of any childcare facilities for women officials (it should also be noted that men who also officiate might also benefit from any childcare provision). However, in Savate it was explained how childcare is managed by the officials,

“

«...we are a small sport, so we don't have organised childcare facilities...my husband is a trainer, I'm an official. We unfortunately don't have kids, but I know other couples who have kids who split the duties...you know, "I will take care of the child when you are doing your job, and then you will", and they do it like that.»



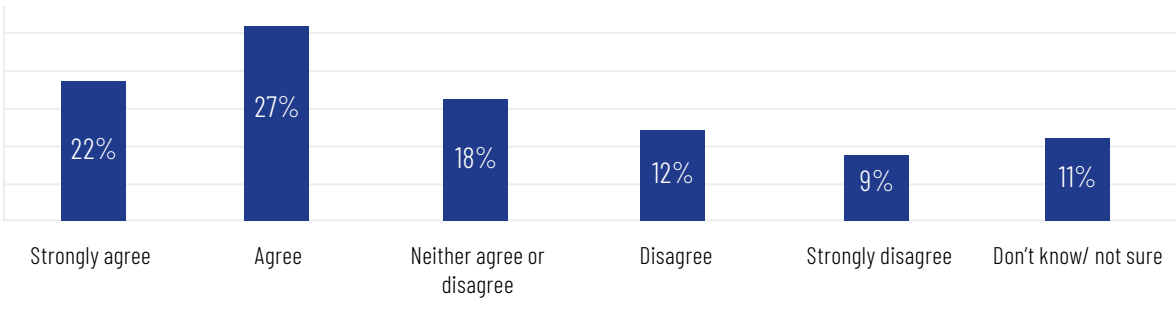
However, there is also a difference between childcare provision and support through a maternity period, something which was explained in the case of basketball through the interview process;

«I was working on the maternity plan. But this is more for women to come back after maternity. But regarding childcare no, nothing. Not for men, not for women. Because referees are not employees, they don't have a contract. So they are like contractors, so they officiate, they have fees for officiating, but there is not a relationship as employer-employee, when you can put things in place and provide, I don't know, social security, childcare, whatever. So, this is not something that is up to the federation's...»

Evidently there are different challenges and barriers depending on the sport that women are officiating. However, the provision of childcare appears to be mixed at best across sports and countries. Another barrier to the successful recruitment and retention of women officials is the access to adequate changing facilities.

The changing facilities that are provided for women officials, are generally well received by the officials. 49% of the officials that completed the survey strongly agreed or agreed that there are changing facilities provided for women officials for training, matches and competitions. However just over 1 in 5 women officials (21%) reported that they strongly disagreed or disagreed that changing facilities were provided for them, whilst 11% didn't know and 18% neither agreed nor disagreed (see figure 32).

Figure 32: Changing facilities are provided for female officials for trainings and matches/competitions



The administrators explained through the interview process that some sports do not have an issue with the use of facilities for women officials, whereas it seems it is more of a concern in other sports. For example, in Savate facilities are not perceived as a problem, with women and men often using the same changing facilities,

“

«...it was 10 years ago that we accepted different areas for changing for men or woman... usually we don't have a lot of women officials and we usually use the same locker room, but at a different time. But they understand the need, and they are very nice and gentlemen, they let us go first so we don't have problems.»

In European basketball there are differences in the use and availability of changing facilities depending on the level of the competition for women officials, although women are still often expected to change with men in the same space;

“

«...at national level it's still the case [there are not many for female officials], at the lower levels. I've experienced that myself, you know you changed behind the door, or I mean your colleague is nice enough to turn, or he waits outside until we have finished. Usually everything goes well, but in the competitions, they have dedicated changing rooms for them.»

Other sports have mandated separate changing facilities for men and women, particularly in the professional game. However, there is clearly a cost associated with this for clubs, and at recreational or grassroots level this is still some way off in cricket;

“

«...every professional venue has been told they must have provisions for both genders of umpire...we've now very clearly made that policy for all professional venues to have facilities. Across recreational cricket, no, still a way off...I know it's in the planning laws now, but obviously that's for long term projects.»

The introduction of separate changing facilities is clearly an aspiration in cricket, but also something that is not going to happen in the near future, despite the inclusion in planning documentation and laws. Indeed, the length of time that it takes to effect meaningful change is also something which administrators are aware of in rugby union. The current facilities were constructed a significant time ago and, as such, their structure does not necessarily permit separate changing areas for men and women officials. As such women officials are encouraged to ask questions of the clubs that they are due to officiate in order to minimise any issues related to the changing facilities;

“

«...this is something that you can't change immediately because clubhouses and facilities were built years ago for men who played and predominantly you'd have 1/2/3 teams that you'd all share the changing facilities and you'd have one referee room...the majority of them [teams/clubs] will have that one room, and that one room will be in the middle of the men's changing block where men will be showering around them...the way that we're managing it is that we're trying to educate and support the female referees to make sure that they are asking the right questions of the clubs before they go. You know, be aware, yes, my name is Chris but I'm a female Chris, and this is what I'm going to need on the day...we're also trying to educate the clubs to be asking those questions so you don't assume that the referee that you're getting is a 45 year old male coming through your door...but you can't change facilities like that, it takes money, planning, permission, and time...»





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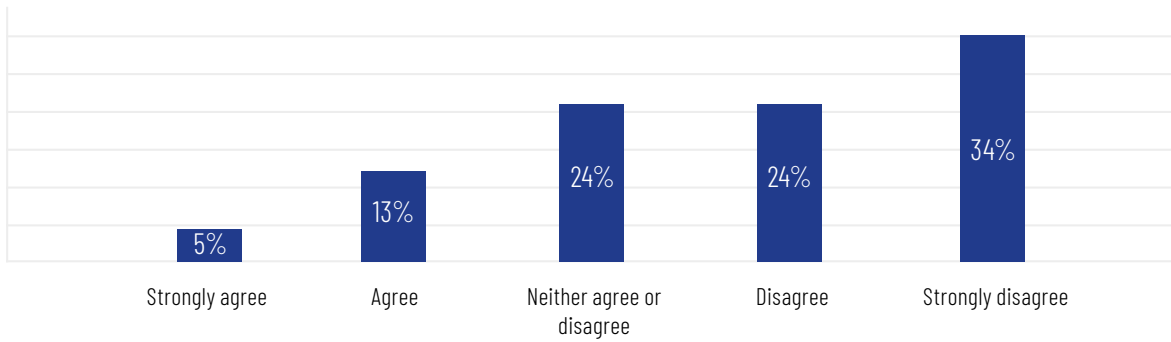


11

DISCONTINUATION/ ATTRITION

Sports officials reported that gender inequality does not mean that they will necessarily consider whether to continue officiating (figure 33). 58% of women officials strongly disagreed or disagreed that gender inequality would make them consider whether to continue officiating, whereas 18% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. However, 24% of respondents were not sure whether gender inequality would mean that they considered whether to continue officiating and this proportion of officials require further convincing of sports actively and positively addressing gender inequality.

Figure 33: Gender inequality makes you consider whether or not to continue officiating



Continuing the theme of officiating drop out or discontinuation, women officials were asked whether they were considering leaving officiating in the next 12 months (figure 34). A significant percentage of women officials are content to stay in officiating for at least the next 12 months (89% stated that they were not considering leaving). However, 11% of officials stated that they were considering leaving officiating in the next 12 months, although it should be stated that these numbers are still low compared to those officials who are choosing to continue.

Figure 34: Are you thinking of leaving officiating in the next 12 months?

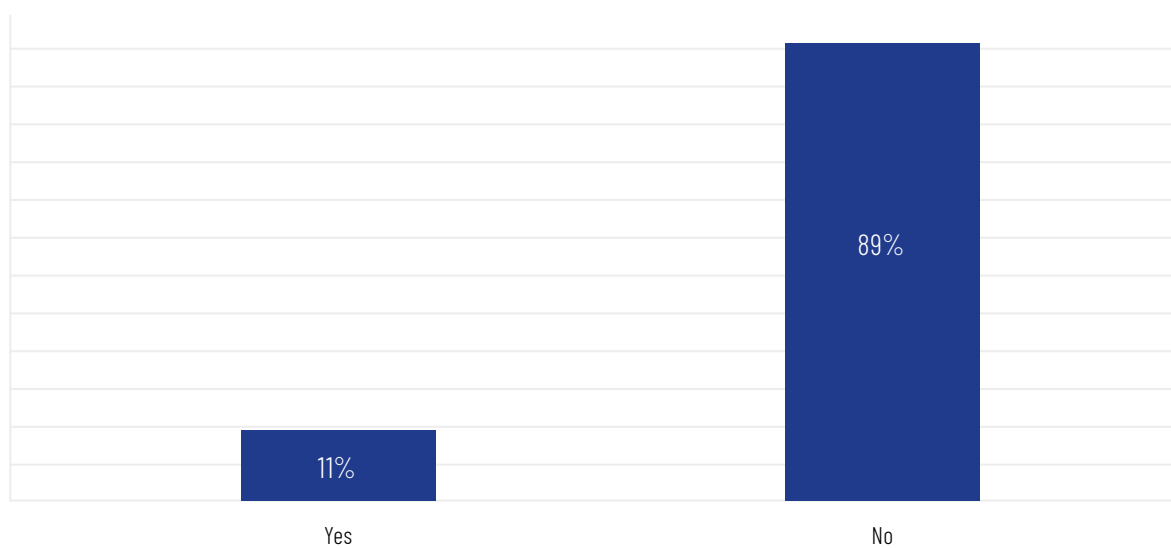
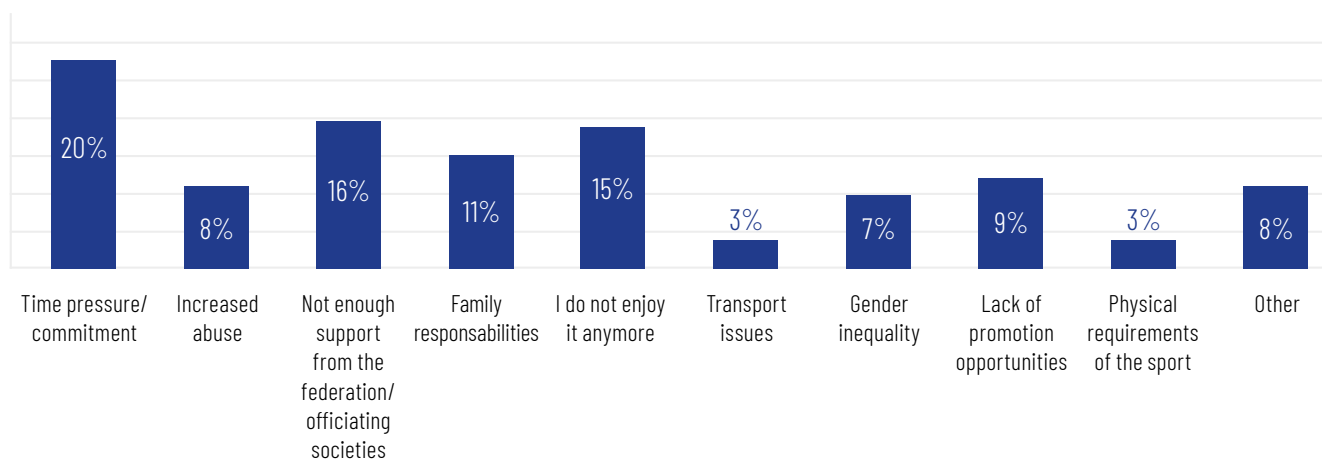


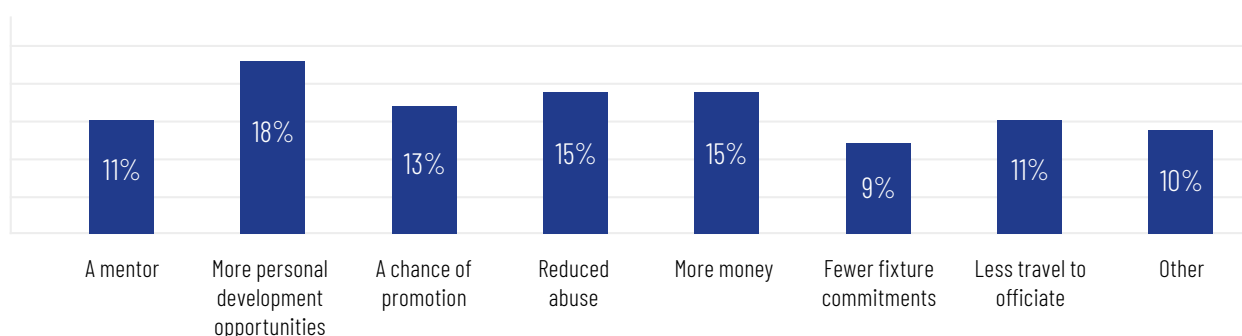
Figure 35 details the reasons concerning why women officials would consider leaving officiating. The main reasons reported were around time pressure/commitment (20%), not enough support from federation/officiating societies (16%), those officials who do not enjoy it anymore (15%) and family responsibilities (11%).

Figure 35: Why are you thinking of leaving?



In order to keep sports officials within their chosen sport, it is imperative to better understand what would motivate them to stay. The responses to the survey were varied with more professional development opportunities (18%), reduced abuse (15%), more money (15%) and a chance of promotion (13%) the top responses (figure 36). These findings demonstrate that officials have varied requirements to prevent them from leaving, if they have expressed that it is something that they are considering. These factors should be further considered by governing bodies in order to recruit and retain as many women officials as possible.

Figure 36: If you are thinking of leaving, what changes would persuade you to continue officiating?





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12

CONCLUSIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS

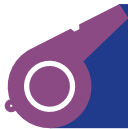
There are a number of positive factors that have been reported as a result of the background research, survey responses and interviews with administrators. Women officials are generally quite positive about their situation and feel that the sports that they operate within are treating them fairly and equitably when compared to men. Furthermore, women officials reported that they felt accepted within their sports and that they were not thinking of leaving officiating in the next 12 months. There are areas which require greater attention, such as issues related to childcare and officiating kit which are both areas that require further consideration and action. There were also concerns raised around a lack of mentors, as a number of officials reported that they would want a mentor if they were offered the opportunity. Given that we know the importance of support networks for sports officials, this should be investigated further.

There was also identification that targeted training for women officials could be improved and that women instructors were not particularly common. This is a barrier that might be preventing women officials from accessing and undertaking training in some situations or circumstances. Finally, abuse towards women officials appears somewhat different to that of other officiating groups (particularly men) and it is also not perceived to be as commonplace within our sample. This finding raises some questions around how we might further tackle the prevalence of abuse towards officials more widely, and the role that women officials could play in any such developments. A final word in this concluding section is provided for women officials and a response from the open survey data which summarises some of the challenges that women officials and sports officials more widely, can face:

“

«Generally speaking, I have the impression that in terms of the training and development of female referees, there is equality or even development (to compensate?), but that in practice, more credit is given to a male referee, and that female referees, in order to have an equivalent respect, must have an additional rank or be stricter. I think it's mainly about the place we give to refereeing in the practice and training of each player: if players were more often in the referee's shoes, maybe they would be more indulgent. A more respectful discourse from some coaches too? Having been a player as well and respectful of the game, the players and the referees, I noticed that players who did not respect the referees did not respect the opposing players, the equipment or even the public. If the referee is a woman, all the less so (she will be seen as hysterical), and the lack of respect can also come from female players, because they are dealing with a woman ... we are aware that female referees are less respected, and the female players also benefit from this...»

The research phase of the WINS project has provided a significant amount of information and therefore a number of recommendations. These recommendations are designed to provide governing bodies of sport, officiating organisations and those involved with the administration and management of women sports officials, a way to focus on women officials and practical measure that can be adopted by these organisations in order to recruit and retain more women officials. The research will inform the following outputs from the WINS project: Toolkit for recruitment and retention of women sport officials and a mentoring and leadership guide.



RECOMMENDATIONS

SHORT TERM

Specific women officiating recruitment and retention strategy – this should be overseen by sports federations working with officiating organisations/associations.

Focus on how to recruit women officials. Consider where these officials are recruited from (locations, organisations), how successful these processes are and have been. Introduce consistent monitoring, evaluation and adaptation of the processes that are in place based on any findings and insight.

An increased prominence within policy of the recruitment of women officials as well as an increased focus on retention immediately after any officials are initially recruited.

Consideration of the training/professional development environment for women officials. Currently the environment across sports is not as appealing as it could be for women officials to continue after initial courses/training.

Placement of women officials – placements at fixtures are not always appropriate for optimum development. A greater focus on the selection of fixtures for women officials is essential for development.

Development of support networks – Increased formal and informal support networks need to be put in place across sports to ensure women officials are adequately supported and therefore develop, progress, and remain committed to their chosen sport.

All sports to make clothing and sportswear specific to women officials. This is still an issue and also requires some input from clothing suppliers and sponsors.

Each sport knowing the number of women officials that it has and monitoring this growth/decline sufficiently. Currently many sports do not know how many women official they have and any targeted initiatives, development and training are therefore difficult to administer and deliver because the workforce requirements are unknown.

MEDIUM TERM

Increased research into women sports officials. Suggestions for further research in this area are as follows:

- Barriers specific to sports and different countries/cultures
- More comparable numbers of responses across sports in order to compare further. If future research can illicit increased numbers of responses from each sport, it would be possible to compare abuse, for example, across sports.
- Engagement with officials who discontinue to better understand the reason/s why these officials leave their chosen sport.
- Longitudinal studies – from the initial course/training across a season or multiple seasons, to better understand behaviour pinch points in terms of training/development and where aspects of the training and development process are working particularly well or struggling.

Addressing issues with childcare, maternity leave and family life. This is a particular issue and something that is holding women back in some sports. A strategy is required in each sport to address these barriers.

Changing the perception of women sports officials. In some sports women are still not accepted as officials, or it is far more difficult to be accepted. Promotion pathways and development opportunities should be inclusive. Sport can also decide whether to have women specific development events. It is recognised that some sports may find this challenging due to facilities/availability of trainers etc but this should be something that is being worked towards.

Increase the marketing and promotion of women sports officials. It is acknowledged that in some sports the increased recruitment of more women officials is required in order to do this, but it should be an aim for federations/governing bodies.

Develop an enhanced mentoring programme for women sports officials. It is important to recruit and retain as many women officials as possible and mentoring is a central part of this, as is the use and promotion of role models to encourage the recruitment and retention of women officials. There are issues around the existence of mentoring at all in some sports and countries and this should change as a matter of priority.

Consideration of strategies regarding differences to the initial process for recruiting officials. If sports aim to recruit and retain more women officials, a variation in approach may help. This happens in the Netherlands. Some sports have specific practices aimed at recruiting and retaining women officials, other sports do not.



LONG TERM

Strategies across sports. Sports to communicate, learn from each other and share good practice in the area of women officials. This could be around successful recruitment campaigns, marketing and promotion strategies, retention issues, or how to mitigate against attrition rates.

Increased number of women officiating trainers. This is an area currently dominated by men and the evidence shows that this can be an issue, particularly for new and inexperienced women sports officials.

Increase the number of women in elite officiating roles. This will require time to recruit women at the mass participation/grassroots level and develop/train them through the promotion pathway. However, for example, in France, according to the last census, there were approximately 30% women out of 246,000 referees. At the highest level, the percentage drops to 15% in France.

Consideration/revision of changing facilities where appropriate. It is acknowledged that this is more of an issue in some sports, but this needs to be addressed and relates to the wider environment that women sports officials operate within.

Identifying, applying for and accessing funding to work on new and related initiatives, such as future Erasmus Plus funding, to build on the findings and outcomes of the WINS project.



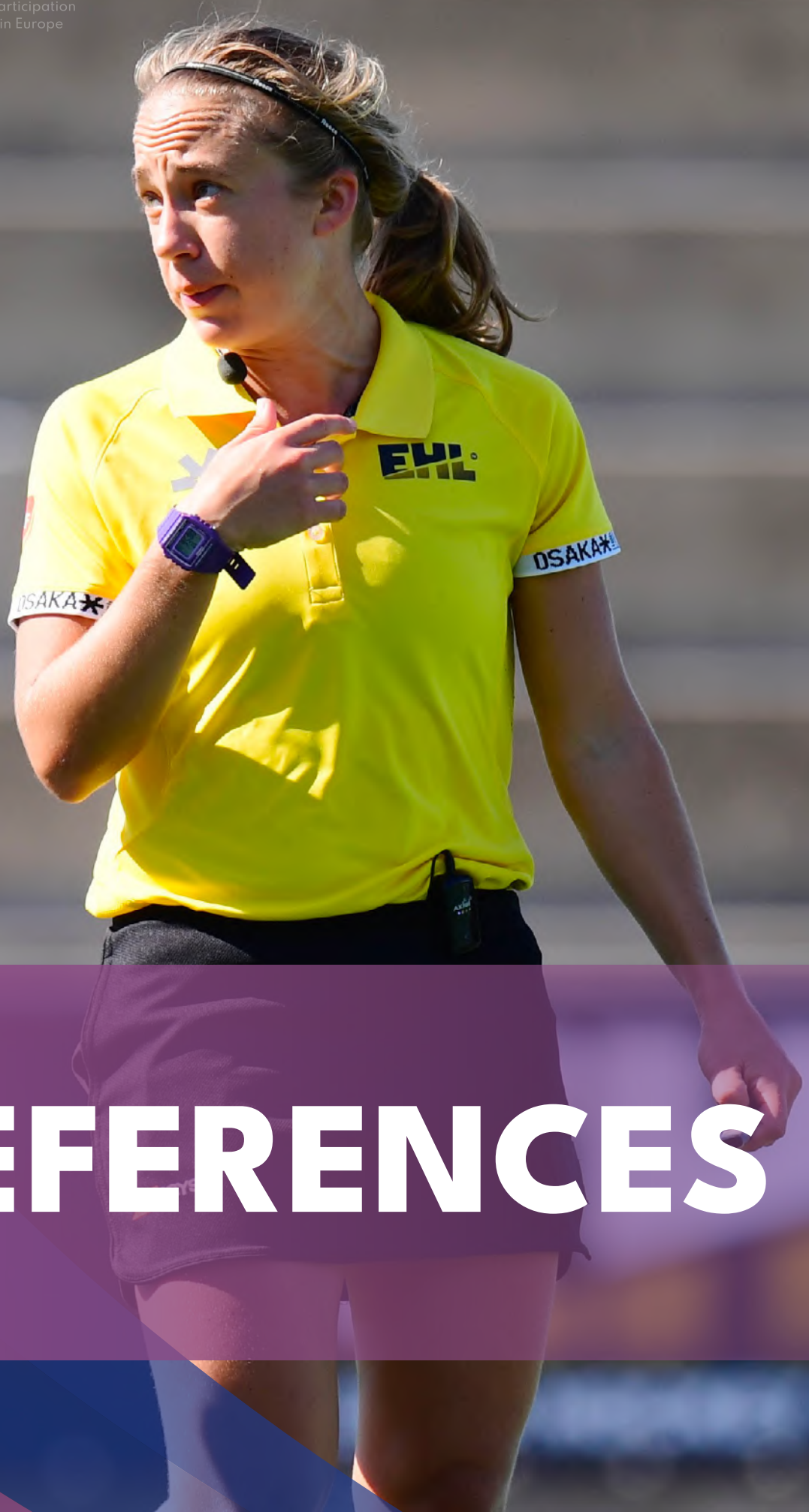
CROSS CUTTING MEASURES TO FEED INTO ALL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improve the media coverage of women officials by communicating with the media and through appropriate social networks.
- Across all levels (clubs, national and international federation) recruit and train “advisors” for women officials. These “advisors” should respond to questions about officiating from those that are considering training to be an official or are new to officiating, to give those who wish to pursue officiating a reference point, understanding and support in their development.
- Move towards a true gender balance in sport.
- Address the impact of maternity inequality.
- Allow those who wish to do so to continue practicing sport or participate in competitions alongside officiating. Officiating should not prevent women from playing their sport.
- Show women that they are justified in officiating by highlighting women officiating at the top level as role models. If you see it, you can be it.





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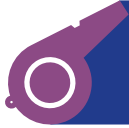


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APPENDICES





APPENDIX 2 THEMES FROM OPEN RESPONSES AND INTERVIEWS

LOWER ORDER THEMES

Pathways

Promotion of opportunities

Mentoring and support

Training

Improving the officiating climate

Governing body investment

Culture

Female officiating considerations

HIGH ORDER THEMES

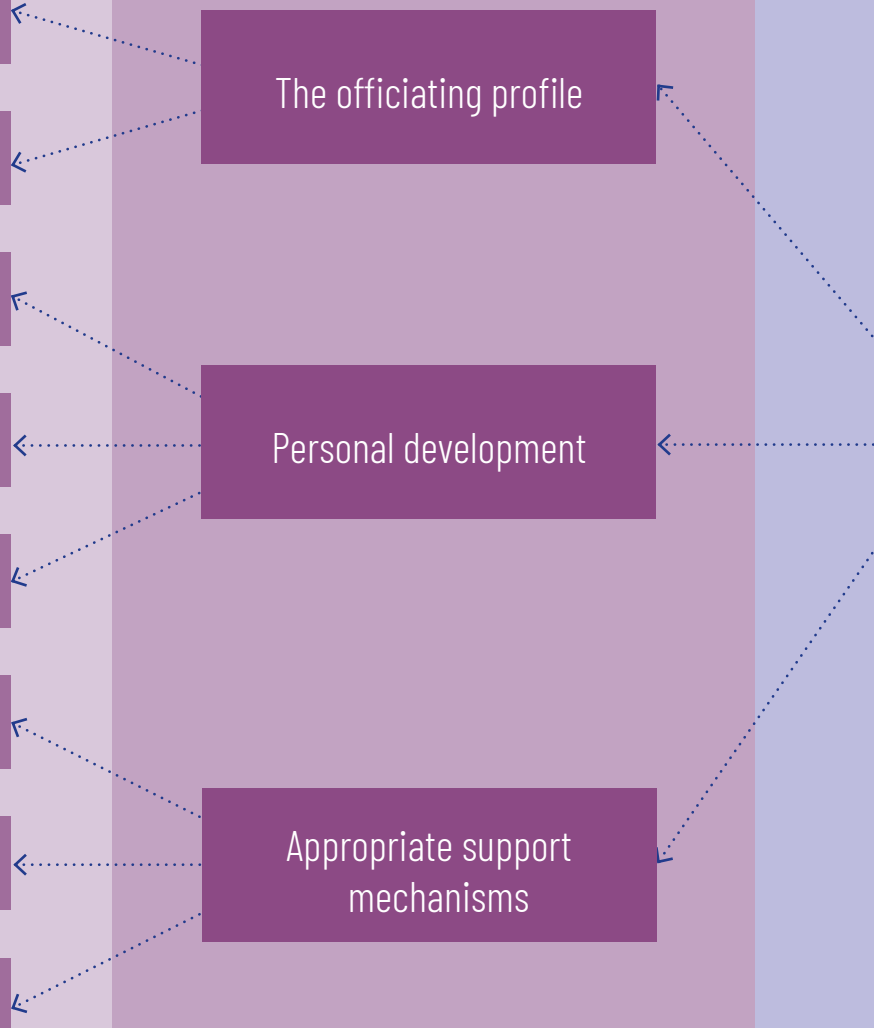
The officiating profile

Personal development

Appropriate support mechanisms

GENERAL DIMENSION

Opportunities for progression in female sports officiating





WINS

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