



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

SPORT IRELAND POLICY ON

WOMEN IN SPORT



#WomenInSportIRE



Version Control		
VERSION NO.	DATE	STATUS
1	2019	Approved by the Board of Sport Ireland.
2	2023	Approved by the Board of Sport Ireland. <i>(Updates made to some objectives and actions)</i>

Sport Ireland is the statutory authority tasked with leading, advocating and providing directed investment for the development of sport in Ireland. This includes, but not limited to, participation in sport, high performance sport, anti-doping, coaching and the development of the Sport Ireland Campus.

Sport Ireland's **MISSION** is to ensure that Ireland is an active nation where people are encouraged to start, continue to participate, progress and achieve in sport.

Sport Ireland's **VISION** is for an active Ireland where everyone can enjoy the lifelong benefits of sport and physical activity.

The **VALUES** underpinning Sport Ireland's work in the development of sport in Ireland:



WOMEN IN SPORT VISION

Sport Ireland's vision for women in sport is one where women have an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential, while enjoying lifelong participation and involvement in sport.





INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Sport Ireland Policy on Women in Sport was first launched in March 2019. This Policy expressed Sport Ireland's commitment to women in sport. It sought to build on the significant work which had already been undertaken in this area since 2005 within the sport sector and, in recognising the opportunity to make a significant impact on the lives of women through their involvement in sport, it provided a blueprint for Sport Ireland's work.

The Policy identified four key target areas which emerged as current gaps & future opportunities for women in sport. These were, Leadership and Governance, Active Participation, Coaching and Officiating, and Visibility.

In February 2023, Sport Ireland, with independent consultant support, undertook a review of its Policy on Women in Sport to determine whether the target areas, objectives and actions of the current Policy were still relevant and if necessary, provide recommendations as part of a new revised policy. The environment in which the Policy operates has changed significantly, outlined herein, and on that basis the review benefited from inputs from key stakeholders within the sport sector.

The review project consisted of desk, quantitative and qualitative research, the analysis of which then informed key recommendations for this revised Policy.

The research was conducted in three phases as set out below.

- 1.** A review of Sport Ireland documents relevant to the Sport Ireland Policy on Women in Sport, as well as documents giving information on international best practice, were reviewed to give context to the original Policy, and the environment the Policy currently needs to operate in.
- 2.** Surveys were created and issued to the Sport Ireland Women in Sport Steering Committee, National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs), other funded bodies, and members of the media.
- 3.** Over 30 one-to-one interviews took place with key stakeholders from the sport sector in Ireland including Sport Ireland staff and committee members, NGB staff/volunteers, LSP staff, members of the media and other key stakeholders.





BACKGROUND

In 2004, a study by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) showed that less than one in five women completed 30 minutes of physical activity on at least five days per week as recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Resulting from this, Sport Ireland developed a Women in Sport programme in 2005. The aim of this programme was to “raise overall physical activity levels and support women’s roles within funded bodies”. Between 2005 and 2019, over €19m was invested through the Women in Sport Programme in National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships.

In 2018, Sport Ireland commissioned specific research to better understand the issues relating to women in sport. Following this work, the first Sport Ireland Policy on Women in Sport was launched in March 2019.

The Policy outlined four key areas which emerged as current gaps and future opportunities for women in sport. To address each of these target areas, Sport Ireland focused on achieving the objectives assigned to each area. These objectives were reflective of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027 and National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020. Underpinning this work were three commitments, all of which were put in place:

- ✓ **Appoint a Women in Sport Lead**
- ✓ **Relaunch the Women in Sport Programme**
- ✓ **Establish a Women in Sport Steering Committee**



THE CURRENT ENVIRONMENT IN 2022

5%

Gender participation gap

10%

Gender gap in social participation

39%

Females on boards

42%

of coaches certified in 2022 were female



Personal exercise is the most popular sport/physical activity for women



1 in 5 girls drop out of sport between primary and post-primary school



The Irish Sports Monitor 2022 (ISM) tells us that sport participation increased by 2 percentage points among both men (45%) and women (40%) since 2021.

The gender gap remains unchanged at 5% since 2021, and as in previous years is eliminated after the age of 45. This percentage is a drop from 15.7% as recorded in the 2007 ISM report.

In 2022, personal exercise was the most popular sport among women (15%), followed by swimming (8%) and running (5%).

8%
gap in recreational walking in favour of women

The gender gap in recreational walking stands at 8%, with women more likely to walk for recreation than men.

The gender gap in social participation (club membership, volunteering or attending sporting events), continued to narrow in 2022, to 10 percentage points, compared to 13 percentage points in 2019. This is due to a slight narrowing of the gender gap in club membership and event attendance.

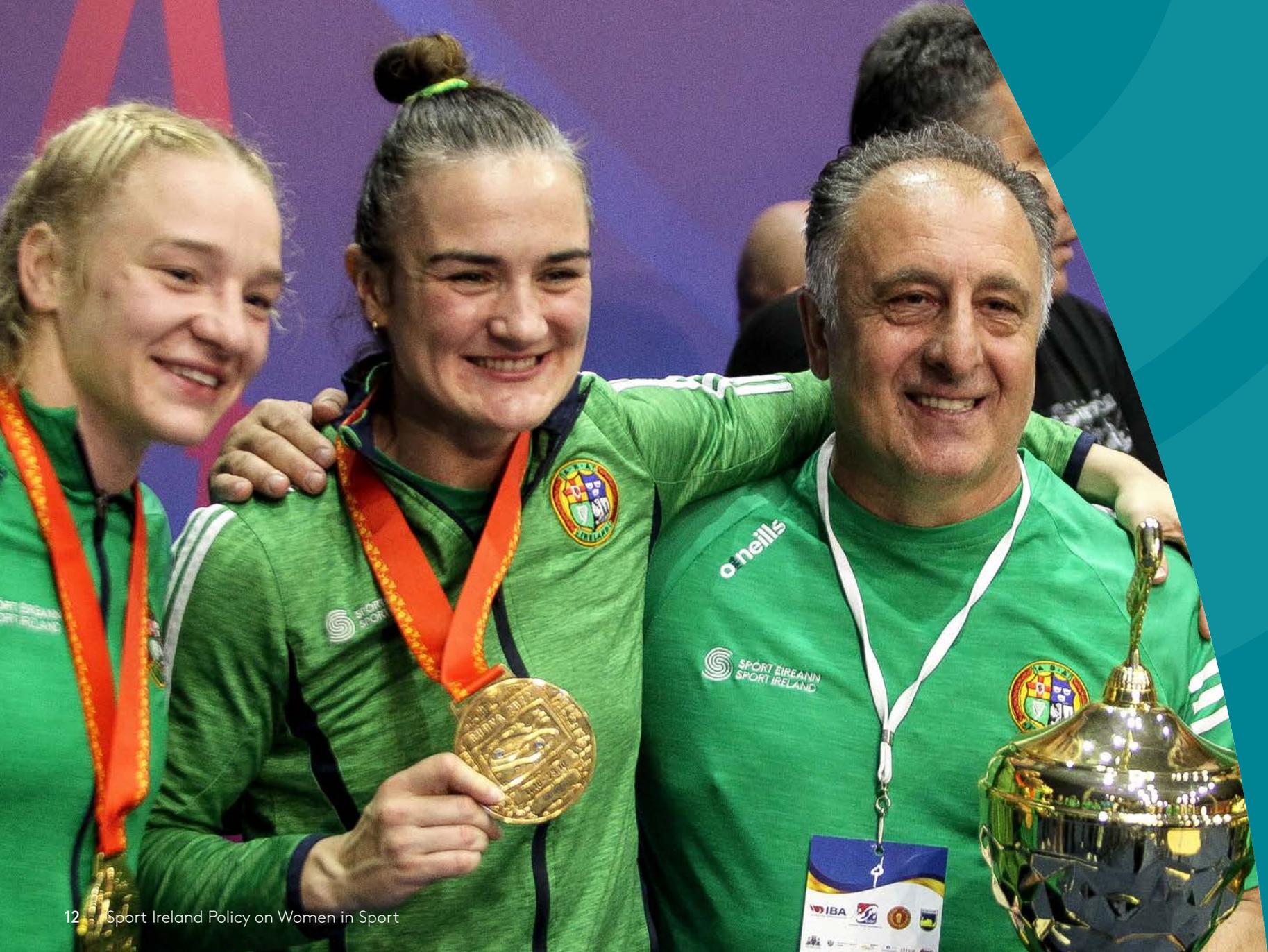
Sport Ireland recognise that womens involvement in sport is moving in the right direction. Notwithstanding this, eliminating the gender gradient remains the ultimate objective. National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027 targets equal participation in sport by 2027.

The 2022 Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA), found that only 11% of girls met the national physical activity guidelines* compared to 19% of boys.

11%
of girls met the national physical activity guidelines compared to 19% of boys

Primary school girls' overall weekly sports participation rate (97%) was higher than boys (95%). However, due to a greater reduction in girls' participation as they transition to post-primary school, girls' participation rate (80%) dropped lower than boys' (90%) at post-primary level. This equates to roughly 1 in 5 girls dropping out of sport between primary and post-primary school, compared to 1 in 20 boys. This trend highlights the continued need to focus on targeted intervention initiatives that can have an impact on teenage girls' sports participation and physical activity.

* (60mins. of moderate to vigorous activity daily and strengthening/flexibility exercise three times per week).



In October 2022 Sport Ireland launched the All-Island Physical Literacy Consensus statement. Physical literacy is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding that enables a person to value and participate in physical activity throughout life. Ensuring appropriate physical literacy introduction and development for girls and women can support their sustained participation in sport and physical activity.

39%
of NGB boards
are female

41%
of LSP boards
are female

Baseline figures for women in leadership and governance positions outlined the percentage of female board members in NGBs stood at 24% in 2019, while professionally employed female Chief Executive Officers (CEO's) was at 24%. These figures have increased to 39% females on boards (41% in Local Sports Partnerships) and 28% female CEOs in the sport sector.

Of the 11,555 coaches certified in 2022 by Sport Ireland Coaching, 42% were female. In addition, over the last five years, there has been a 9% increase in the number of female coaches certified.

42%
of the coaches
certified by Sport
Ireland in 2022
were female

The 2022 CSPPA study found that at post-primary level, girls (59%) who take part in community sport were less likely to receive coaching than boys (73%). The majority of students reported being coached by men (79%) compared to just 18% who reported being coached by women. Amongst boys, only 3% reported being coached by a woman.

The 2022 ISM found that women (8%) were less likely to volunteer in sport than men (10%) and that while 50% of male volunteers were coaches only 29% of female volunteers were coaches, resulting in approximately twice as many male coaches in the population.

Sport Ireland has invested over €10m in the Women in Sport Programme through NGBs, LSPs, and other sporting bodies between the launch of the first Policy in 2019 and December 2022.

In addition, Sport Ireland developed women in sport programmes/initiatives to continue to support the sport sector to ensure Sport Ireland's vision for women in sport is one where women have an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential, while enjoying a lifelong involvement in sport.

Over
€10m
invested in the
Women in Sport
programme between
2019 and 2022.

These include:

- Gender Balance on Boards Toolkit and Business Case
- Women in Sport Leadership Snapshot
- Women in Coaching Research Report
- Women in Officiating Research Report
- Women in Coaching Toolkit
- Women in Sport Broadcasting Training Programme
- Girls Get Active Research Report
- Her Moves Campaign
- Coaching Teenage Girls in Sport Workshop
- Women in Sport Week
- Her Outdoors Week Campaign
- It's My Time Campaign
- iCoachGirls Play Centre Project



Since the launch of Sport Ireland's first Policy on Women in Sport in 2019, and in tandem with a growing focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and the impact of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors, there has been substantial changes to the Irish landscape for women in sport. This growing focus is also evident within the 2023 - 2027 Sport Ireland Statement of Strategy, which continues to prioritise the implementation of the actions of the Policy on Women in Sport to facilitate that cultural shift and enable full involvement of women in every aspect of sport.

There has been a continued societal movement towards gender equality in sport at all levels, as well as improved media coverage (albeit still with a long way to go), however the opportunities that now exist may

help accelerate this. New ways of watching women's sport, increased commercialisation and investment into women's sport, new technologies and innovations that connect fans with athletes, teams and events, as well as the world class performances of Ireland's female athletes and teams driving interest and attendances are all areas to capitalise on.

It is clear that in 2023 the momentum behind women in sport in Ireland has never been stronger, however it is now critical that this momentum is capitalised upon and accelerated. As a major part of this, it is crucial to ensure that this Policy continues to deliver on Sport Ireland's commitment to increase women's sustained involvement in sport as coaches, officials, volunteers, club members, advocates, leaders and participants from grassroots to the podium.





SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The research and consultation conducted during the Policy development, identified the following key findings.

- 1. The Sport Ireland Policy on Women in Sport has had a significant and positive impact on Irish sport since it launched in 2019.** A policy such as this needs time to make an impact but given the changes in the landscape, compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic, it was determined that reviewing the Policy was the correct thing to do.
- 2. The four pillars remain relevant as areas of focus but with some changes recommended to the specific objectives and actions required.** In addition, how they are now activated to respond to the ever-changing environment will be key. Each pillar is at a different stage in its lifecycle. It is important that this is recognised, and the objectives/ actions are established accordingly.
- 3. Establishing and understanding what success looks like is essential.** This Policy touches a wide range and number of stakeholders for Sport Ireland. To ensure that all stakeholders are travelling in the same direction, outlining what success looks like, as well as key performance indicators along the way, will be very beneficial to all involved. The Policy is a process, as opposed to a project, which can make it difficult to identify specifically what success looks like.
- 4. It is agreed across the board that Sport Ireland creating the role of Women in Sport Lead was key to making this Policy a success.** It was also found that having individuals with responsibility for Women in Sport in NGBs is essential for success in this area. Success was also accelerated when a board member championed women in sport at board level, driving a culture of inclusivity. However, this comes with a major caution. A 'key person risk' applies if one person in the organisation carries most of the responsibility which dilutes responsibility for others in the organisation.

- 5. Intersectionality and further diversity, beyond gender, needs to be taken into consideration for a revised policy.** While on average, women and girls' involvement in sport is less than their male counterparts across most areas, i.e., participation, coaching, officiating, governance, etc., the diversity within this group has been identified as an area in need of improvement.
- 6. There is genuine and serious momentum across all areas of women in sport, but it is imperative that this momentum is not only continued but accelerated.** Key to this acceleration will be the resources that are made available and the people in sporting organisations who champion the women in sport agenda. Men have a key role in this regard.



POLICY TARGET AREAS, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

Following the review process undertaken, Sport Ireland identifies that the four key target areas of the previous Policy still present current gaps and future opportunities for women in sport. Sport Ireland will continue to target these four areas to deliver on the commitments of this Policy and recognise the need to update and increase the number of objectives and actions under each.

-  Leadership & Governance
-  Active Participation
-  Visibility
-  Coaching and Officiating

To address each of these target areas, Sport Ireland is focused on achieving the objectives assigned to each.

These objectives are reflective of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027, the 2023-2027 Sport Ireland Statement of Strategy and other relevant Sport Ireland publications such as the All-Island Physical Literacy Consensus Statement, the Volunteer Policy and the Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

As referenced throughout this Policy, 'women' is inclusive of all characteristics and recognises the intersectionality of women and girls in Ireland.

Leadership & Governance



Objectives:

1. Ensure gender balance on boards is recognised as best practice with all sporting bodies aspiring to achieve this.
2. Increase the number of women in governance and leadership roles.
3. Ensure the culture within sporting organisations values women's contribution to leadership and governance and sees it as central to the growth and development of their sport.

Active Participation



Objectives:

1. Develop opportunities and support structures which encourages sustained participation in sport by women and girls.
2. Reduce drop out in physical activity and sport in teenage girls.

Visibility



Objectives:

1. Increase the visibility and profile of women's sport and women in sport.

Coaching and Officiating



Objectives:

1. Broaden the coaching and officiating base to include more women and girls from grassroots to high performance.

To address the target areas and achieve the identified objectives, there are a number of actions that Sport Ireland will fulfil. The following outlines seven revised objectives and 26 actions for Sport Ireland’s updated Policy on Women in Sport.



LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	
Objectives	Actions
1. Ensure gender balance on boards is recognised as best practice with all sporting bodies aspiring to achieve this.	1. Conduct and publish a Women in Sport Leadership Snapshot annually to present the current % of women on boards at that time.
2. Increase the number of women in governance and leadership roles.	2. Support processes (and relevant partnerships) that recruit Board members in other professional sectors as well as within the sport sector. 3. Provide guidance, training and/or support (e.g. unconscious bias, recruitment practices) to funded bodies for their board, staff and volunteers in improving or maintaining gender balance in leadership roles within their organisation. 4. Support cross sport mentoring and networking for women in sport leadership. 5. Continue to develop and invest in leadership courses, tools, and resources, as well as the identification of clear pathways, for women and girls looking to progress into leadership and governance roles within funded bodies.
3. Ensure the culture within sporting organisations values women’s contribution to leadership and governance and sees it as central to the growth and development of their sport.	6. Provide guidance, supports and education for the sport sector under the topic of ‘Sport Organisational Culture’. 7. Provide guidance and support to senior leaders (both men and women) in sport organisations to help them foster an equal opportunity sporting environment. 8. Monitor the views of female leaders working/volunteering in sport.



ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Objectives	Actions
<p>4. Develop opportunities and support structures which encourages sustained participation in sport by women and girls of every age and background.</p>	<p>9. Invest in participation programmes and support NGBs/LSPs to address sports structures and systems to ensure equal opportunity for women and girls.</p> <p>10. Re-introduce, recruit and retain women and girls in sport by promoting lifelong participation through the provision of tools and resources to funded bodies to increase participation rates and the physical literacy of women and girls.</p> <p>11. Support the development of guidelines to ensure sports facilities are equally shared, more user friendly and meet the requirements for women and girls.</p>
<p>5. Reduce the drop out in physical activity and sport in teenage girls.</p>	<p>12. Engage with Government departments to develop resources that help schools, clubs and communities to address dropout rates and increase participation amongst teenage girls.</p> <p>13. Ensure the delivery of a sustained Sport Ireland strategic programme/campaign is consistently running at key times of the year, with the core objective of encouraging teenage girls to be more active and involved in sport.</p>



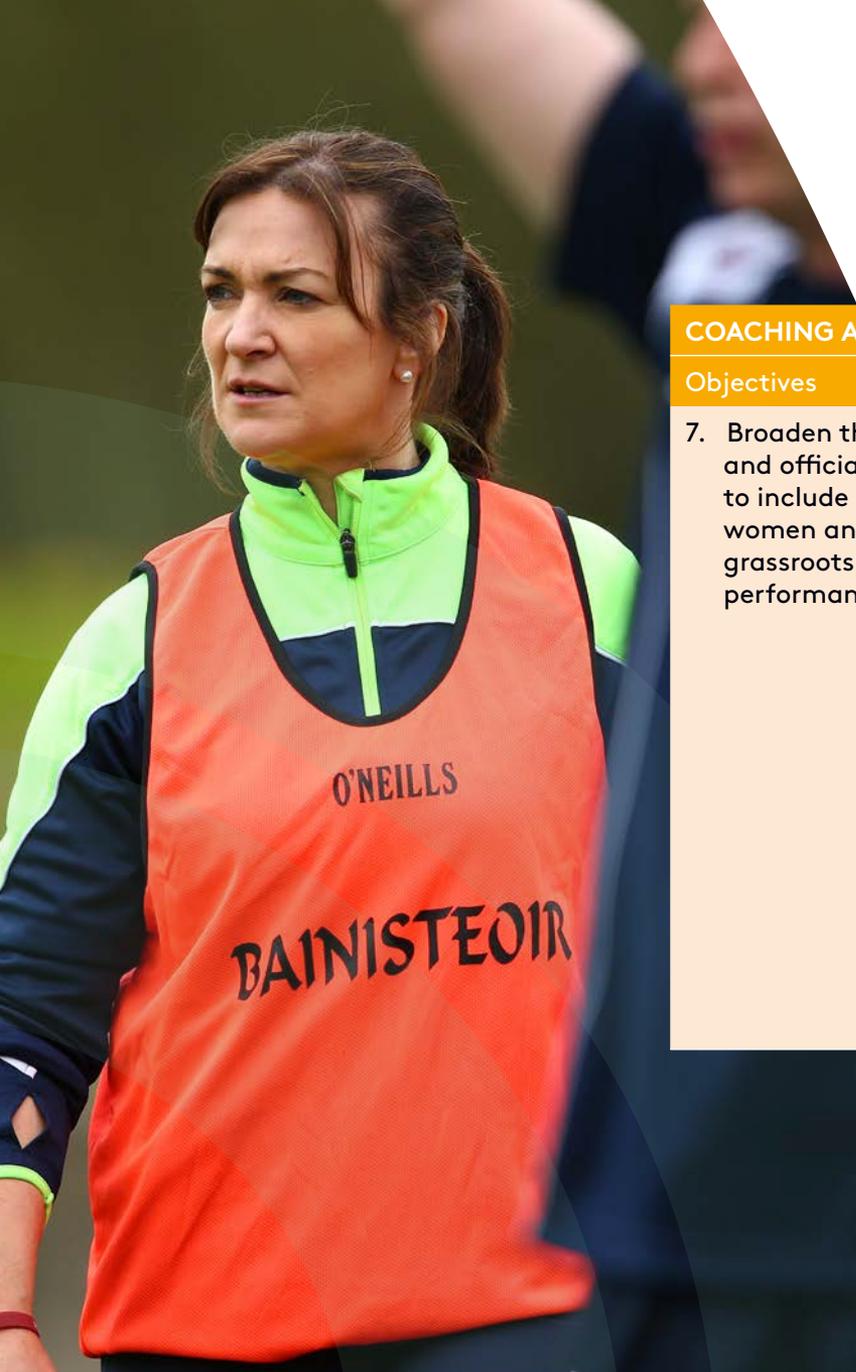
VISIBILITY

Objectives

6. Increase the visibility and profile of women's sport and women in sport.

Actions

14. Support funded bodies and stakeholders with training, tools and resources to enhance the visibility of women's sport and effective engagement with media.
15. Create a Women in Sport media networking group and annual think tank to discuss visibility of women's sport.
16. Provide guidance for NGBs on attracting commercial investment into women's sport.
17. Encourage the use of new channels, technology and innovative audience engagement tools.
18. Provide training for new and existing media analysts, commentators, and co-commentators, to ensure media have a strong pool of females to choose from.
19. Measure women's sports media coverage.
20. Identify opportunities to increase visibility and profile of women's sport with the Coimisiún na Meán, in line with the recommendations for Sports Broadcasting in the Future of Media Commission Report.



COACHING AND OFFICIATING

Objectives

7. **Broaden the coaching and officiating base to include more women and girls from grassroots to high performance.**

Actions

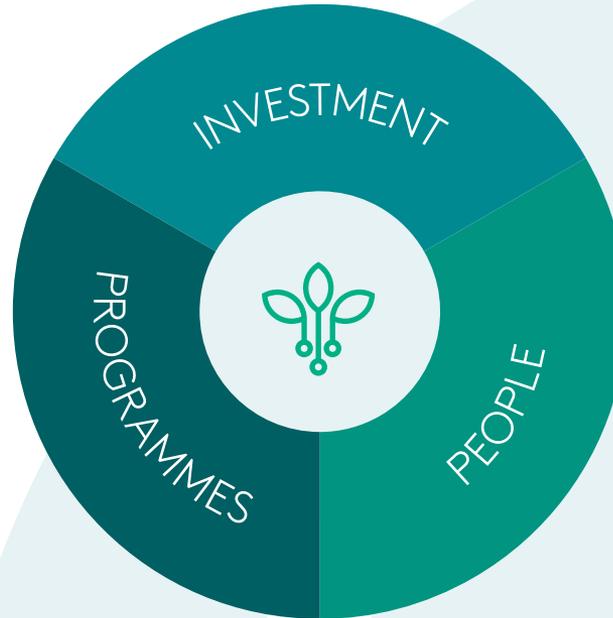
21. Invest in coaching and officiating education and continuous learning programmes which target females from under-represented groups, young people, students, current participants and volunteers.
22. Invest in specific initiatives to increase the number of women coaching and officiating in high performance sport.
23. Provide female coaches with opportunities within Ireland's high-performance system.
24. Create guidance for mentoring and networking supports for female coaches and officiators.
25. Support NGBs to create clear pathways from participation into coaching and officiating.
26. Promote inclusivity and equality of access across coaching & officiating through research and follow up action plans created.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

To ensure the Policy can be measured, each action outlined carries a success indicator and will be monitored as deemed appropriate, i.e., when resources are created or through annual reports, research, or other relevant mechanisms.

Sport Ireland will assign appropriate resources to deliver on the commitments of this Policy.

There are three core areas of resource:





INVESTMENT

Funding for the Women in Sport Programme has remained at €2,265,000 annually for the last three years. The Government and Sport Ireland is committed to strategically increasing this investment from 2024.

PEOPLE

The Sport Ireland Women in Sport Steering Committee will continue to deliver on its remit, acting as a leadership group overseeing the implementation of this Policy. Sport Ireland will continue to appoint dedicated Women in Sport staff tasked with policy activation. The Policy is supported and implemented through the work of all Sport Ireland Units and staff where necessary, depending on the project.

PROGRAMMES

Sport Ireland recognises the work of NGBs, LSPs and other funded bodies in delivering initiatives that impact on women in sport. Sport Ireland will continue to invest in the programmes of NGBs, LSPs and others in supporting the objectives and actions as set out in this Policy. Sport Ireland will also continue to develop programmes/initiatives internally which will support the delivery of the Policy as well as the sport sector.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that in 2023 the momentum behind women in sport in Ireland has never been stronger, however it is now critical that this momentum is capitalised upon and accelerated.

As a major part of this, it is crucial to ensure that this Policy continues to deliver on Sport Ireland's commitment to increase women's sustained involvement in sport as coaches, officials, volunteers, club members, advocates, leaders and participants from grassroots to the podium.

Sport Ireland will continue to track progress made in the delivery of this Policy.











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