



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Gender equality in sport – Commission calls for action**

It may be the 21st century, but women and girls are still getting a raw deal in the world of sport. While the sector talks up equality, the reality is often different: sport governing bodies are still dominated by men, female coaches often earn less than their male counterparts and girls are more likely than boys to be victims of sexual harassment in sport. On 3-4 December, the European Commission will host a conference in Vilnius on Gender Equality in Sport. The event will gather representatives of European, international and national sport organisations, including the International Olympic Committee, national Olympic committees, the International Paralympic Committee, UEFA, senior advisors of national governments, and the European Institute for Gender Equality, which is based in the Lithuanian capital.

*"It is clear that girls and women still face numerous barriers when it comes to participating in sport at all levels. This is happening in both amateur and professional sport. Let's be clear, we don't need another declaration, we need action. We have to ensure that women can practise sport in a safe environment and that there are more opportunities for the voice of women to be heard in sport governing bodies,"* said Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner responsible for sport.

The European Commission will be able to support transnational projects to promote gender equality under the sport chapter of the new Erasmus+ programme.

*"We need a coherent set of actions, coordinated at national and European level, which should include training to ensure equal opportunities for women in sport and a coaching environment free from discrimination or harassment. It's time to stop paying lip service to equality: we need to see more coverage of women's sport and a higher number of women working in the sport media if we want to change attitudes,"* added the Commissioner.

The Vilnius event will also highlight the capacity of sport to promote gender equality more generally, the need to address frequent use of over-sexualised images in sport and the media, and good practice in preventing sexual harassment, especially in a sports context.

Participants at the event will include Sir Philip Craven, President of the International Paralympic Committee, Ulla Koch, coach for the German Gymnastic Federation, Esther Vergeer seven-time Paralympic gold medallist in wheelchair tennis, and Daina Gudzinėvičiūtė, President of the Lithuanian Olympic Committee and former Olympic shooting champion.

The conference will include two panels and seven workshops focused on 'strategic actions'. The second panel will also address 'commitments and concrete steps'. The panels will be chaired by Novella Calligaris, former world champion swimmer and Olympic medallist from Italy. The conclusions will be addressed to the EU institutions, the sport movement and the Member States for further actions and support. They will also help to define priorities under the sport chapter of Erasmus+ and the new EU Work Plan for Sport.

In total, the new Erasmus+ programme will allocate around €265 million over the next seven years to organisations in grassroots sport. In addition to promoting gender equality, support will focus on good governance, social inclusion, dual careers for athletes and physical activity for all. The new programme will also support cross-border initiatives to tackle racism, match-fixing and doping in sport.

## **Background**

The Eurobarometer on Sport and Physical Activity (published March 2010) shows that women participate less in sport than men. It found that 43% of men play sport at least once a week, compared with 37% of women. The figures are more striking in the 15-24 age group (71% men v 50% women).

According to research for Loughborough University (UK), the number of women in coaching and leadership positions in sport governing bodies in Europe is still very low (10% on average), with exceptions in some Member States at local club level for leadership positions and lower levels of coaching. Professional female coaches also earn less on average than their male counterparts. For example in Germany they earn €1 000 a month less for the same type of job.

The EU funded project, '[Prevention of sexualised violence in sport](#)', proved that although sport makes children feel strong and self-confident, it also represents an area of significant vulnerability concerning sexual and gender harassment and abuse, as a result of the close relationships and trust developed between individuals when training.

At the [European Women and Sport 'London Calling' conference](#) (16 September 2011), Commissioner Vassiliou invited stakeholders to discuss proposals for more gender equality in sport and invited a group of experts to prepare an action plan on the issue. This week's conference will discuss their proposals.

Before the start of the Olympic Games in London, on 28 June 2012, Commissioner Vassiliou and Vice President Viviane Reding congratulated the International Olympic Committee and International Paralympic Committee because they were the first Olympics where women competed in every sport. Although recognising "an important milestone in the long struggle for real gender balance between women and men in sport", the Commissioners argued for a common framework on gender equality in sport with realistic objectives for governmental and non-governmental organisations to be achieved by 2020.

## **Next steps**

The Group of Experts set up by Commissioner Vassiliou has called for a strategy on gender equality in sport to be included in the new EU Work Plan for Sport, which will be discussed under the new Greek Presidency of the EU. The Council is due to adopt the new EU Work Plan for Sport in May 2014.

## **For more information**

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