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Equality in sports and physical activity in Finland in 2025

Samuli Oja, Matti Hakamäki, Henni Syväoja, and Kati Lehtonen

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Abstract

This report presents some topical themes in the fields of physical activity and sports in Finland from the perspective of gender equality. It examines the most recent research results broken down by gender and describes, based on available information and data, the changes that have taken place. The key themes discussed are physical activity, participation in organisational activities, competitive and elite sports, and decision-making and management.

Studies show that boys and men still engage in physical activity more keenly than girls and women. Men tend to be more active in sport clubs than women, who prefer private sports and fitness services. There are no significant differences between the genders in their success in elite sports today. The share of women in the management and decision-making posts in third-sector sport organisations has also grown.

Equality must today be considered from the outset in a number of sports policy measures. The criteria for general government grants for sport organisations, for example, have already for long called for equality and non-discrimination plans. However, in the documents, measures to promote equality are at times described in general terms, without concrete objectives or follow-up actions.

Clear information gaps continue to exist in the field of equality in sports and physical activity, including reliable gender-disaggregated data on the number of coaches. Such information nevertheless plays a role in steering public debate on gender equality in these fields, seen that phenomena on which no monitoring data exists easily remain outside the general debate. Gender-disaggregated information and research on gender equality will therefore continue to be needed to support decision-making on sport policy and the promotion of equality.

Keywords sport, physical activity, sports, sport organisations, sport clubs, equality, gender

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Liikunnan ja urheilun tasa-arvo Suomessa 2025

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Tiivistelmä	<p>Raportissa esitellään liikunnan ja urheilun ajankohtaisia teemoja sukupuolten tasa-arvon näkökulmasta, raportoidaan tuoreimpia tutkimustuloksia sukupuolittain eriteltynä ja kuvataan tapahtunutta muutosta saatavilla olevaan tietoon perustuen. Käsiteltäviä pääteemoja ovat fyysinen aktiivisuus, järjestötoimintaan osallistuminen, kilpa- ja huippu-urheilu sekä päätöksenteko ja johtaminen.</p> <p>Tutkimusten mukaan pojat ja miehet liikkuvat edelleen enemmän kuin tytöt ja naiset. Miehet harrastavat naisia yleisemmin seuroissa, kun taas naiset käyttävät enemmän yksityisiä liikuntapalveluita. Huippu-urheilumenestyksessä ei ole tällä hetkellä merkittäviä eroja sukupuolten välillä. Naisten osuus liikuntajärjestöjen johto- ja päätöksentekotehtävissä on kasvanut.</p> <p>Monissa liikuntapoliittisissa toimenpiteissä edellytetään tasa-arvon huomioimista. Esimerkiksi liikuntajärjestöjen yleisavustuskriteereissä järjestöiltä on pitkään edellytetty tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelmia. Tasa-arvon edistämistoimia kuvataan asiakirjoissa kuitenkin paikoin yleisluonteisesti ilman konkreettisia tavoitteidenasetteluita tai seurantatoimenpiteitä.</p> <p>Edelleen on olemassa selkeitä tietoaukkoja liikunnan ja urheilun tasa-arvon suhteen, kuten luotettava sukupuolieritelty tieto valmentajien lukumäärästä. Tieto osittain ohjaa julkista liikunta- ja urheilukeskustelua sukupuolten tasa-arvosta. Ne ilmiöt, joista ei ole seurantatietoa, voivat jäädä yleisen keskustelun ulkopuolelle. Liikuntapoliittisen päätöksenteon ja tasa-arvon edistämisen tueksi tarvitaan jatkossakin sukupuolittain eriteltyä tietoa sekä sukupuolten tasa-arvoon kohdistuvaa tutkimusta.</p>		
Asiasanat	liikunta, urheilu, urheilu- ja liikuntajärjestöt, urheilu- ja liikuntaseurat, tasa-arvo, sukupuoli		
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Rapport om jämställdheten inom idrott och motion 2025

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I denna rapport presenteras aktuella teman inom idrott och motion ur ett jämställdhetsperspektiv. Dessutom redovisas de senaste forskningsresultaten uppdelade efter kön och beskrivs förändringar i jämställdheten utgående från tillgänglig information. Huvudteman i rapporten är fysisk aktivitet, deltagande i organisationsverksamhet, tävlings- och elitidrott samt beslutsfattande och ledarskap.

Enligt forskningsrönen är pojkar och män fortfarande mer fysiskt aktiva än flickor och kvinnor. Män idrottar oftare i föreningar, medan kvinnor i högre grad använder sig av privata idrottstjänster. För närvarande finns det inga betydande skillnader mellan män och kvinnor när det gäller framgång inom elitidrotten. Andelen kvinnor i lednings- och beslutsuppgifter inom idrottsorganisationer har ökat.

I många idrottspolitiska åtgärder ställs det krav på att jämställdhet ska beaktas. Enligt kriterierna för allmänt understöd till idrottsorganisationer har organisationerna exempelvis länge varit skyldiga att utarbeta jämställdhets- och likabehandlingsplaner. I dokumenten beskrivs dock vissa jämställdhetsfrämjande åtgärder enbart på ett allmänt plan, utan några konkreta målsättningar eller uppföljningsåtgärder.

Det finns fortfarande tydliga kunskapsluckor när det gäller jämställdhet inom idrott och motion, såsom tillförlitlig könsuppdelad statistik över antalet tränare. Denna typ av information påverkar delvis den offentliga diskussionen om jämställdhet inom idrott och motion. Fenomen som saknar uppföljningsinformation riskerar att hamna utanför den allmänna debatten. För att stödja det idrottspolitiskt beslutsfattandet och jämställdhetsfrämjande arbetet behövs även fortsättningsvis könsuppdelad information och forskning om jämställdhet.

Nyckelord motion, idrott, idrotts- och motionsorganisationer, idrotts- och motionsföreningar, jämställdhet, kön

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FOREWORD

Gender equality is a key success factor in our welfare society and a social and sport policy objective. Equality does not come about spontaneously, but requires continuous effort: a strong knowledge base, competence development, maintaining a situation picture, and concrete actions and their monitoring. As the discussion on responsibility expands, it should be noted that gender is crosscutting through all other inequality factors and responsibility themes.

According to the Gender Equality Barometer (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2025), gender equality has improved, although men thought its implementation in a more positive light than women. Gender equality measures are widely supported, and it is felt that men also benefit from them as well. However, the barometer also highlights challenges, such as the prevalence of sexual harassment and inappropriate treatment, gender stereotypes in learning materials, and the gendered nature of work and family life practices. For example, domestic chores are still traditionally distributed, even though the role of men who take part in childcare has increased.

The fourth report on equality in sports and physical activity provides valuable data on the state of gender equality and changes in our sector. The report highlights topical themes, recent research results, and trends of change. The results show both progress made and the development still needed. It is gratifying to see the increase in the share of women in management and decision-making positions at sport organisations. New themes include reviews of the gender equality plans prepared by sport organisations, municipal physical activity programmes, and project work. The analysis shows that gender equality measures are often described in a general manner without concrete objectives, measures, and monitoring. In addition, the concepts of equality and non-discrimination are not clear to everyone.

Knowledge guides discussion and decision-making. Gender-specific monitoring data and research will continue to be necessary to ensure that equality remains on the agenda. Promoting equality is a long-term, wave-like process. Decades of work has produced results, but steps forward cannot be taken for granted. Changing attitudes and dismantling stereotypes are slow work, which is why sports and

physical activity actors must work together to build an increasingly equal operating culture. In 2026, this work will be expediated by the International Working Group (IWG) on Women and Sport conference in Birmingham, England, in which Finland will be strongly involved.

A warm thank you to Jamk University of Applied Sciences and especially Samuli Oja, Matti Hakamäki, Henni Syväoja, and Kati Lehtonen for their excellent work in preparing this extensive report. The report provides an excellent knowledge base and tool for developing both strategic and operational equality work in the long term.

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1 Introduction

This report examines the situation in gender equality in sports and physical activity in Finland. It is part of the series of publications describing the situation in 2011, 2017 and 2021. In addition to describing the current state, the aim of all the above-mentioned reports has been to examine changes in gender equality to the extent that the available data makes this possible. Previous reports have also shown a picture of the times with regard to the value debate concerning gender equality in sport policy. For example, the core idea of the 2011 publication was to describe how men and women end up in different tasks in the field of physical activity and how genders differ in their time use and consumption behaviour. In addition, the concept of equality used in the physical activity and sport sector and its connection with non-discrimination were examined.

Similarly, the report on the situation in 2017 was influenced by structural changes in the sports and physical activity system between 2011 and 2017, which meant a change in the statistics on monitoring data related to management, as the number of organisations decreased (see Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018). The previous report published in 2022, on the other hand, contained a considerably extensive section on competitive and elite sport, which was due to an external evaluation of elite sport that was under way at the same time (see Michelsen et al. 2022) and the possibility to use the data collected in this evaluation also in monitoring the development of gender equality.

As in the previous reports, the key contents discussed in this report are based on the objectives and steering instruments of Finnish sport and physical activity policy. Over the years, a large amount of basic information related to gender equality, such as the number of men and women in leadership positions at sport organisations, has been reported in a fairly consistent manner. As in the previous reports, this publication also presents some of its own specific reviews for which no longer-term trend data has been collected or reported. The local and national physical activity development projects reviewed in this report describe the concrete ways in which sport sector actors promote gender equality. A report on municipal physical activity programmes and the gender equality plans of sport organisations has also been produced as new information content.

The previous report on the status and change of gender equality also drew attention to the increased debate on gender diversity in sport and physical activity. More general societal development has challenged the concepts and operating methods of a physical activity and sport culture based on the idea of two genders, i.e. men and women. In Finnish sport, this issue became more topical in 2023 when the amended Act on Legal Recognition of Gender entered into force. Under the new act, a person no longer needs to present, for example, a medical report on their gender in order to verify their gender (Act on Legal Recognition of Gender 295/2023).

At the time this report was being written, the Ombudsman for Equality has examined whether key sport federations have prepared sport-specific guidelines on gender diversity. For example, the Finnish Gymnastics Federation (2025) published a policy on the participation of gender minorities in gymnastics in early 2025. According to the guideline, in Finnish national championship competitions, "those people over the age of 12 who have transitioned from boy to girl may compete in the girls/women categories when they have a written report from a doctor that the gymnast has not yet reached puberty or have started hormone treatment to delay puberty" or "after puberty under the condition that the gymnast, provides a doctor's report stating that their testosterone has been less than 5 nmol/L for at least the last 12 months". Gymnasts can compete in any gymnastics type regardless of their gender or gender identity in local, regional, or lower national competitions.

In the guidelines prepared by the Finnish Tennis Association (n.d.), the restrictions apply to the participation of trans women in elite tennis as defined by the association. For example, in armature and competitive tennis the right to participate is based on legal gender. As a rule, people under the age of 18 are allowed to compete in a series according to the gender they personally specify, regardless of their legal gender.

This report is based on available classifications, publications, and materials. Gender diversity is increasingly taken into account in sport and physical activity research and research data is available on, for example inappropriate behaviour experienced by gender minorities in sport and physical activity. However, in many extensive surveys, the number of respondents other than those representing the male and female genders has remained so small that no statistical analysis has been presented of them (see e.g. Hämylä et al. 2025a). For this reason, research data on gender equality is also presented in this report mainly on the basis of an assumption of two genders. The intention is not to deliberately reproduce a certain understanding of gender, but simply to describe the situation with the division and information that has been used in the available material.

After the introduction, the report will cover the key national norms and international policies related to promoting equality in sport and physical activity. There is also a review of the equality plans of sport organisations as well as of municipal welfare reports and plans and physical activity programmes. After this, the report reviews national research data on selected entities from the perspective of gender equality: physical activity, participation in organisational activities, competitive and elite sport, and decision-making and management in sport and physical activity. Finally, projects aiming to promote equality in sport and physical activity are briefly reviewed and conclusions drawn.

2 Legislation and public sport policy

This chapter presents the key national legislation and international policies related to the promotion of equality in sport and physical activity. In addition, the current government steering practices for promoting gender equality are covered, and the gender equality plans prepared by national and regional organisations promoting physical activity and documents aimed at promoting physical activity in municipalities are reviewed.

2.1 Equality Act and Sports Act

The Act on Equality between Women and Men, abbreviated to the Equality Act, lays down provisions on preventing gender-based discrimination and promoting equality between women and men and, to this end, improving the standing of women, especially in employment. The purpose of the Act is also to prevent discrimination based on gender identity or gender expression. (Act on Equality between Women and Men 1986/609). Grounds for discrimination other than gender are discussed in the Non-Discrimination Act.

For the purposes of the duties laid down in the Act on Equality between Women and Men, the Ombudsman for Equality has issued statements in the administrative branch of the Ministry of Justice on whether various measures related to sport and physical activity have complied with the Act (Tasa-arvoaltuutettu 2025a). For example, in September 2025, the Ombudsman for Equality stated that the City of Helsinki had not acted in violation of the Act on Equality between Women and Men when offering swimming instruction to girls whose own religion or that of their guardians prevents swimming together with boys (Tasa-arvoaltuutettu 2025b).

The National Non-Discrimination and Equality Tribunal (Yhdenvertaisuus- ja tasa-arvolautakunta, n.d.) appointed by the Government also acts as the legal protection body. The Tribunal's resolutions include a decision in 2021 to prohibit the continuation of discriminatory practices in the admissions process for the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä, which violated the Equality Act. The issue concerned the gender quota included in the admissions procedure for subject teacher education in physical education. (Yhdenvertaisuus- ja tasa-arvolautakunta 2021.)

Physical activity in Finland is influenced in particular by the Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity. It sets a framework for the promotion of physical activity and contains general provisions on such matters as the areas of responsibility of the state and municipalities. The act itself lists nine objectives for this. Areas to be promoted include the opportunities of different population groups to exercise and engage in physical activity, the well-being and health of the population, the maintenance and improvement of physical functional capacity, the growth and development of children and young people, civic activity in sport, elite sport, honesty and ethical principles in physical activity and elite sport, reduction of inequalities in physical activity, and sustainable development in physical activity and elite sport. In addition, seven premises are listed for the implementation of the objectives. Gender equality is one of these. The others are non-discrimination, communality, multiculturalism, a healthy lifestyle, a safe operating environment, and respect for the environment. (Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity 390/2015.)

Section 10 of the Act, which applies to the eligibility for state aid of organisations promoting sports and physical activity contains more detailed provisions on such matters as how the way in which an organisation or sport federation promotes equality will affect its eligibility for state aid. Under section 12 of the Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity, the promotion of equality is also taken into account when considering the amount of a government grant. (Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity 390/2015, sections 10 and 12) Eligibility for state aid has not been withdrawn from any party since 2015, i.e. after the current Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity entered into force. In cases where such discretion could have been used, the issue concerned the fulfilment of criteria for the number of member associations or people taking part in activities. (Valtionapukelpoisuus 2025, 21–22.)

The duties of the statutory expert body on sport and physical activity, the National Sports Council include equality. A decree lays down the following as its duties: making motions and issuing statements on issues related to physical activity for people with reduced mobility and functional capacity and to equality, non-discrimination, and multiculturalism (Valtioneuvoston asetus liikunnan edistämisestä 550/2015.)

2.2 Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government

In the Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government, equality is mentioned for the first time in the Principles of the Government chapter. Equality is listed as one of the principles on which sustainable well-being is built. (Programme of Prime Minister Petteri Orpo's Government 2023, 8) Equality is discussed and its importance is emphasised in several of the programme's chapters. Sport policy is included in the Culture, Sports, Physical Activity and Youth subchapter. It contains a general section on equality: "We will safeguard equal opportunities to engage in physical activity and promote equitable provision of support for physical activity". In addition, the programme includes intervention in inappropriate treatment and the establishment and expansion of the "You are not alone" activities. (p. 93–94) The Government programme's chapter titled Strengthening the rule of law and democracy in Finland contains an entry on the preparation of a cross-administrative gender equality programme (p. 193). The Government programme also includes a Governmentled entity named the Get Finland Moving programme. The measures listed therein target different age groups. Gender is not mentioned separately in this section. (p. 209–211)

The cross-administrative action plan for gender equality, in accordance with the government programme (Hallituksen tasa-arvo-ohjelma 2024–2027, 2025) contains measures to promote gender equality. With regard to sport and physical activity, the programme includes the making the 'You are not alone' service permanent and extending it to also apply to youth activities. In addition, the Advisory Board for Sport-Related Ethical Matters will increase in-depth cooperation with various actors to promote a safe operating environment in sports and physical activity. The programme describes how the Ministry of Education and Culture requires organisations and scientific communities to which it provides grants to have equality and non-discrimination plans in place, which are monitored, and how the nature of the plans affects the amount of the general grant. The Action Plan for Gender Equality also states that all data on people collected from organisations promoting physical activity are collected by gender. (Ibid.)

2.3 Resource steering of third-sector sport organisations

Key policy instruments used by the government for sport and physical activity are information-based steering, norm-based steering and resource steering. Over the past few years, the Ministry of Education and Culture has granted just over EUR 40 million in general grants each year to sport associations promoting physical activity (Physical activity and sport organisation database 2025). For example, in 2023, the amount granted as general grants for organisations accounted for a quarter of the state appropriations for sport and physical activity (Ministry of Education and Culture 2024). In addition to general grants, the ministry may also grant special subsidies to sport organisations each year.

A key change related to central government steering concerning the promotion of gender equality and responsibility in general was the reform of the general grant criteria for third-sector sport organisations promoting physical activity implemented in 2021. Even before the most recent reform, attention was given to the activities of the organisations from the perspective of equality when allocating general grants. For example, in the early 2000s, the gender distribution of persons involved in decision-making at sport federations and the coaches and instructors working in the sport was examined in relation to the gender distribution of people taking part in the sport. In addition, gender equality work carried out by the federations was assessed, for example, by examining their gender equality plans. (Ministry of Education 2005.)

Today, the Ministry of Education and Culture divides sport organisations into four groups: sport federations, regional third-sector sport organisations, sport central organisations, and other national organisations promoting physical activity. In 2025, there were a total of 115 organisations receiving general grants, of which 73 were sport federations, 15 regional organisations, 2 were sport central organisations and 25 other organisations promoting physical activity. The criteria for discretionary government grants are divided into two categories: organisation group-specific criteria and responsibility criteria for all organisations. 85 % of the appropriation has been allocated on the basis of the organisation group-specific criteria and 15 % on the basis of the responsibility criteria. (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.-a.)

Responsibility criteria are used in the assessment of "the quality and societal impact of all organisations applying for grants, achievement of the objectives of the Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity, and the ethical principles of physical activity and sport, gender equality and non-discrimination." In addition, the criteria assess "how the organisation complies with international regulations binding on Finland". At the moment, the responsibility criteria consist of five entities:

good governance, gender equality and non-discrimination, a safe and healthy operating environment, environmental responsibility, and anti-doping activities and manipulation of sports competitions. The Finnish Center for Integrity in Sports FINCIS assesses anti-doping activities and competition manipulation as a whole. Other entities are assessed by the Ministry of Education and Culture together with experts. (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.-a.)

By international standards, the responsibility criteria set by the Ministry of Education and Culture can be considered detailed. For example, an examination of the criteria for the general grants distributed to Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish sport federations shows that although attention is paid to the responsibility of the federations in all the above-mentioned countries, resource steering in Finland and its separate responsibility criteria are the most precise. (Oja & Lehtonen 2025.) However, international comparisons are hampered by the differing sport and physical activity systems in different countries. In Sweden, for example, the sports movement's umbrella organisation Riksidrottsförbundet (RF) distributes government grants for sport and physical activity. In its rules, RF requires that its member associations stipulate in their own rules, under certain conditions, that their boards and committees contain at least 40% of both sexes (Riksidrottsförbundet 2023). Therefore, in order to comply with the RF rules, Swedish sport federations must take action to promote equality in decision-making.

Fulfilment of the Ministry of Education and Culture's criterion on gender equality and non-discrimination requires that sport organisations have an up-to-date equality and non-discrimination plan in place. The assessment of the entities included in the responsibility criteria mainly takes place at a strategic level, i.e. in terms of gender equality and non-discrimination, the plans prepared by organisations for promoting equality and non-discrimination are chiefly assessed.

Examination of gender equality plans of third-sector sport organisations

For the purposes of this report, 16 plans aimed at promoting equality prepared by organisations were examined. The sample was selected so that it consists of organisations representing different groups of organisations in the same proportion as the group of sport organisations to which the Ministry of Education and Culture grants general grants annually. Thus, ten sport federations, four other organisations promoting physical activity, and two regional sport organisations were selected. The Olympic Committee and the Paralympic Committee were excluded. First, the four organisations that received the largest sum in general grants for 2025 were selected (excluding the Olympic Committee and the Paralympic Committee). In addition, three sport federations in which the gender distribution of registered

participants is either man or woman dominant were examined. Three sport federations¹ and four other organisations promoting physical activity were selected to represent a diverse range of different sports and activities. The two regional sport organisations that received the largest general grants for 2025 were selected. A list of the organisations selected for review is presented in Appendix 1.

In addition to the basic information in the plans, the review focused on what goals and actions the organisations have proposed for promoting equality. In addition, the way in which the achievement of the selected objectives is monitored was examined. The aim was to take a separate look at whether gender minorities are taken into account in the plans and whether specific measures are proposed for promoting their status. When reading the results of the review, it should be noted that they do not represent all sport organisations. The purpose of the sampling was to describe the gender equality plans of sport organisations as diversely as possible, not to present an overall and generalised analysis of the plans of the organisations.

In the responsibility criteria included in the general grant, the Ministry of Education and Culture requires organisations to have an up-to-date equality and non-discrimination plan in place (Ministry of Education and Culture, no date-a). In this regard, it is not surprising that none of the organisations under review have a plan for promoting gender equality alone. In practice, the plans examined are titled non-discrimination and equality plans, equality and non-discrimination plans, non-discrimination and equality programmes, non-discrimination plans or responsibility programmes. In general, the gender equality plans of the organisations examined vary in terms of both their scope and content. The length of the plans varies between 3 and 52 pages, with an average length of approximately 17 pages. In terms of the number of pages, it should be noted that some of the plans use a page layout that differs from the others. It is noteworthy that this review only includes plans that cover the promotion of gender equality by organisations more extensively. Some organisations may also have other guidelines or policies² related to equality that were not included in this review.

1 One of the plans examined was the joint equality plan prepared by the martial arts sector and Painonnostoliitto (weightlifting federation). In addition to the Finnish Weightlifting Federation, other federations that have committed to the plan include Finland Aikikai, the Finnish Judo Association, the Finnish Karate Federation, the Finnish Fencing and Pentathlon Federation, the Finnish Boxing Federation, the Finnish Wrestling Federation, and the Finnish Taekwondo Federation.

2 For example, the Finnish Gymnastics Federation (2025) has published a separate policy on the participation of gender minorities in gymnastics.

Most of the plans refer to the legislation underlying the promotion of equality. The plans make varying references to the Constitution, the Non-Discrimination Act, the Act on Equality between Women and Men, the Criminal Code, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity, and the Associations Act. The plans also mention, for example, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Sport culture's internal documents highlight, for example, the Responsibility Programme for the Sport Community, the Fair Play principles, and the studies and reports produced by the Finnish Center for Integrity in Sports FINCIS. The extent to which the above-mentioned documents are processed varies between the plans.

Definitions related to equality and its promotion are often based more or less on the Non-Discrimination Act and the Act on Equality between Women and Men. Some of the plans do not give a separate definition for gender equality. It is noteworthy that despite there being two different laws, many plans place gender equality under the concept of non-discrimination. For example, the Football Association of Finland's plan states that "for the sake of clarity, this non-discrimination plan uses the concept of non-discrimination to describe both gender equality and non-discrimination related to other factors affecting persons". On the other hand, the Finnish Coaches Association, for example, wanted to highlight gender equality separately in their plan on the grounds that "coaching has traditionally been more of a male-dominated sector".

Only some of the plans include a more extensive report on the current status of gender equality and its promotion in the activities of the organisation and assessed the implementation of previous measures to develop gender equality. However, some organisations highlight the aforementioned topics in their plan. The current state and the achievement of previous goals are examined, for example, through various surveys, reports, or studies. This means that goals and measures for promoting gender equality set out in the plan are more consistently based on a more solid basis, although the plans do not always put the matter explicitly into words.

Within the plans, the organisations' goals and measures to promote gender equality can be roughly divided into sub-areas: the organisation's strategic practices, actual sport and physical activities, communications, and the organisation's personnel and management. Objectives and actions related to the organisation's strategic practices include the inclusion of equality objectives in the organisation's action plan or other document, the creation of various guidelines and training related to equality, the implementation of surveys on the status and progress of equality, and the development or maintenance of processes to intervene in abuses.

Measures to promote equality related to activities organised by or within organisations include organising training, participation in projects and maintaining a competition system that promotes equality. More practical measures include providing gender-neutral bathing facilities and changing rooms at the organisation's events and appointing a contact person for harassment or inappropriate behaviour for events.

Many plans also list increasing awareness on gender equality issues as a measure to promote equality. In practical terms, this is implemented for example, by taking the gender perspective into account in the organisation's communications (e.g. when selecting photos), by informing member organisations about gender equality issues and by using gender-neutral language. The communication measures apply to an organisation's internal communications, its communications to member organisations, and communications to the organisation's partners. Previous studies have observed that clubs have found it difficult to implement the promotion of equality (see e.g. Oja 2024a). Some of the plans have drawn attention to the problem, but concrete measures to achieve this goal and indicators for verifying the development have not been defined consistently.

The measures to promote equality among the organisation's personnel and management focus on the organisation's recruitment practices and the selection of elected officials. As a rule, the measures focus on such things as the openness of application processes and informing a large group of people about them. It is hoped that this will ensure that a larger number of representatives of the underrepresented gender will submit applications for positions of trust. In their plans, organisations rarely present more concrete goals in balancing the gender distribution of the organisation's board. Some organisations have gender quotas in their rules to guarantee both male and female representation. In addition to new recruitments, the plans also draw attention to promoting the equality of existing employees and elected officials, which, it was found, was implemented, through equal pay practices, personnel equality training and intervention in inappropriate behaviour.

Many of the plans either do not specify how the implementation of measures aimed at promoting equality will be monitored or monitoring is described in a fairly generalised manner. It is generalised to state, for example, that the realisation of gender equality is monitored, but it often remains unclear how and on what grounds the monitoring is carried out in concrete terms. However, some organisations have defined indicators for their goals and measures, which are monitored either through the organisation's own assessment, figures (e.g. gender distribution) or various surveys.

Based on the examination, the plans as a whole took gender minorities into account in quite a limited manner. Separate measures to promote the physical activity and sport of gender minorities are more rare. Approximately half of the plans mentioned gender minorities in one way or another. In most cases, gender minorities were mentioned in relation to such things as the maintenance of a member register or various data collections, in which case it is stated that gender is not either asked about or there is also an option “other”. An exception to this is the Finnish Cheerleading Federation, whose plan includes a separate section on gender diversity. In addition, the Finnish Gymnastics Federation’s responsibility programme lists ensuring gymnastics is open to gender and sexual minorities as a separate objective. The Finnish Floorball Federation’s Non-Discrimination and Equality Programme lists consideration of gender diversity as one area of development in the assessment of the current state, and within one of the selected priorities, the programme draws attention to gender diversity and improving the opportunities for gender participation in one of programme’s the selected priority’s.

In summary it can be stated that equality plans are just as diverse as organisations, which can be thought of as desirable when it comes to civil society actors. Although some of the plans were thorough, they generally speaking lacked systematism. For example, not all plans based the current objectives and measures for promoting equality on a comprehensive description of the current state. For this reason, it often remained unclear what the goals for promoting gender equality mentioned in the plans stemmed from. The monitoring of the implementation of specified objectives and measures was also not often presented very clearly (see also Isosomppi & Ryba 2025). The lack of concreteness in the setting of goals and measures and in the implementation of monitoring is particularly evident in the case of gender minorities: some of the plans take gender minorities into account, but in practice, measures to promote their status are limited.

2.4 Municipal welfare reports and plans and physical activity programmes

Municipalities play an important role in promoting gender equality from the perspective of physical activity and sport. Many physical activity policy measures, such as projects, the construction of sports facilities, and national programmes, are ultimately implemented in cooperation with local stakeholders. In addition, the municipalities’ financial investments in the promotion of sports and physical activity are very significant.

Municipal strategic documents include welfare reports and plans as well as physical activity programmes. The preparation of a welfare report and plan is statutory, and they must be prepared for each council term (section 6 of the Act on Organising Healthcare and Social Welfare Services 612/2021). The report includes extensive information on the health and wellbeing of residents, while the plan sets objectives and measures to promote these (Kauppinen & Hätönen 2014). The documents support the municipal strategy and serve as tools for knowledge-based management (Kuntaliitto 2022).

The purpose of physical activity programmes is to increase the physical activity of residents and, consequently, their well-being. In many municipalities, physical activity programmes serve as a means of structuring and implementing the objectives and obligations set by municipal strategies at a practical level. Content recorded in the programmes emphasises the provision of versatile and low-threshold physical activity opportunities for residents. (Syväoja 2023.)

The review carried out for this report includes the welfare reports and plans of 34 municipalities or sub-regions for the period 2021–2025. In addition, the physical activity programmes of 13 municipalities of different sizes have been included. The review focuses on the entries on gender equality in documents.

There were entries on gender equality in 27 welfare reports and plans and in eight physical activity programmes. However, there was a great deal of variation in the entries, and only a few of the entries concerned the promotion of gender equality in physical activity. Welfare reports and plans commonly described that the municipality had prepared an equality and non-discrimination plan. Data on physical activity habits, Move! measurements and obesity were often described by gender. In addition, when describing the purpose of the welfare report or when entering conclusions and proposals for measures, it was often noted at a general level that gender equality is an important perspective. Equality was also more of a value to aim for and a background factor in physical activity programmes. The programmes made references to such things as recommendations on promoting physical activity, the Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity, or a city strategy.

Very few concrete measures related to gender equality were highlighted in both welfare reports and plans and physical activity programmes. The entries often remained general in nature, or they were presented as cross-cutting principles, such as:

“Non-discrimination, human rights, gender equality, and inclusion have been taken into account extensively in building the welfare plan and in the planning of the objectives and measures.” – Kankaanpää welfare report and plan (2022)

“The equality and non-discrimination of services will be increased. Steps will be taken to strengthen a customer oriented-approach and inclusion in the development of services and conditions. Particular attention will be paid to those city residents who are inactive and have clear, identified obstacles in becoming active.” – Helsinki’s Physical Activity Programme (2018)

The documents included only limited actions to promote equality in physical activity promotion. The City of Kauniainen’s Physical Activity Programme (2021) described in more detail the results of the School Health Promotion Study on the proportion of girls who are physically active for at least one hour a day and presented measures to promote physical activity:

“The proportion of girls in lower secondary schools who engage in at least one hour of physical activity a day has been declining during the period 2017–2019. The steps taken to activate young people of both lower and upper secondary school age who are not physically active, include discussions with the pupils in different contexts in physical education and health classes, group lessons with teachers in charge and instructors, and by organising different thematic weeks. The help of guardians is also needed especially to increase physical activity among girls in lower secondary schools.”

Gender equality was to some extent mixed up with the concept of non-discrimination, especially in welfare reports and plans, e.g.:

“Efforts have been made to improve the IT capabilities of both staff and students and equality has been supported by increasing/developing equipment.” – Nivala (2021)

As a summary, it can be stated that the manner in which equality is covered in municipal strategic documents varies considerably. In most documents, equality has been approached in general terms, emphasising it as an important and desirable value. At the level of measures, equality was often neglected, and it was rarely translated into practical measures. Especially entries related to equality in physical activity were rare. A few documents have noted that consideration must be given to girls who are not physically active, and measures concerning them

have been highlighted. This demonstrates that some municipalities have made an effort to identify and take into account gender differences in promoting physical activity. The review shows that the goal-oriented integration of equality in welfare work needs to be strengthened so that it could steer the strategic development of municipalities and the planning of measures in practice.

2.5 Gender equality in the European Union sport policy

In 2023, the Council of the European Union published its conclusions on combating gender discrimination in sport. This document includes a series of prompts and requests to Member State governments, the Commission, the sports movement, and stakeholders. These are justified with statements such as "The European sense of belonging and the future prosperity of Europe depend on societies that actively prevent and combat gender-based discrimination". Furthermore, sport is considered an important part of the EU population's life and is considered to have a significant "social, educational, economic, cultural, and unifying contribution to society in the European Union, as well as to its strategic objectives and social values". Sport is therefore seen as an essential tool for the realisation of European identity and EU objectives. The promotion of gender equality is a prerequisite for achieving this goal. (Council of the European Union 2023a and 2023b.)

The importance of equality as a key theme in the sport integrity and protection of values priority area is based on the European Union Work Plan for Sport 2021–2024. The resolution on this issue envisages an increase in the proportion of women, particularly in coaching and sport organisation and club management positions, equal terms (including pay) regardless of gender, and increased coverage of women's sports competitions, and combatting stereotypes. (The Council of the European Union 2020.)

In 2022, the European Commission published recommendations and an action plan to improve gender equality in sport and physical activity. The themes covered in the report are the mainstreaming of the gender perspective, i.e. integrating gender equality into all sport policies and strategies, intersectionality, i.e. linking gender and other inequality-maintaining mechanisms, gender-aware budgeting, policy monitoring, evaluation and research, education and communication. It was also recommended that all sport organisations employ equality coordinators. In particular, it is emphasised that men should not be regarded as obstacles to change who maintain masculine hegemony. Instead, the issue should be approached positively so that men are seen as allies, as part of the solution. (European Commission 2022a).

3 Physical activity

This chapter examines the physical activity of children, young people, and adults and physical activity from the perspective of gender equality. Hobbies in sports and physical activity clubs are discussed separately in Chapter 4.

3.1 Children and young people

The Piilo study published in 2023 examined the amount and quality of physical activity among children aged 4 to 6. A total of 1,834 children and their families from 20 municipalities and 156 ECEC locations across Finland participated in the study. The movement, sedentariness, and sleep of 1,783 children (boys 51.9 %) were measured using an accelerometer. Based on the accelerometer measurements, children aged 4 to 6 on average engaged in light-intensity physical activity for 3.0 hours and moderate to vigorous activity for 74 minutes per day. Children were physically inactive for 9.4 hours per day. A total of 76% of the children met the recommendation of three hours of activity per day, of which at least one hour of moderate to vigorous activity. Boys were far more likely than girls to meet the recommendation (83% vs. 68%), among older children more often than younger children and in urban environments more often than in rural or built-up areas. (Mehtälä et al. 2024.)

The Finnish School-aged Physical Activity study (LIITU) provides follow-up data at the national level on physical activity, behaviour related to physical activity and health, sedentary behaviour, sleep, as well as attitudes, values and experiences associated with physical activity among children and adolescents in comprehensive education and young adults in upper secondary education. The first LIITU dataset was collected from 11, 13 and 15-year-olds in 2014. The most recent data was collected in 2023–2024. Data was collected (electronic survey and accelerometers) for the first time simultaneously for the whole target group of the LIITU study, that is, comprehensive and upper secondary education students (aged 7–20). A total of 21,619 children, young people and young adults responded to the survey, and the accelerometer data consists of the accelerometer measurements of 2,737 participants. Of secondary school students, the LIITU study only reported the results of upper secondary school students. The material from other educational institutions is not representative. (Kokko & Hämylä 2025a.)

Approximately one third (32%) of all children, young people, and young adults aged 7–20 who participated in the LIITU study were physically active for at least 60 minutes seven days a week, as recommended. There has been little change in the physical activity rate of children of basic education age in previous years: 37% of children and young people aged 7–15 were physically active in accordance with the physical activity recommendation, which is approximately the same amount as in previous LIITU studies. In general upper secondary schools, on the other hand, there is a positive change. 19% of upper secondary school students met the recommendation for physical activity. This is five percentage more than in 2020. (Hämälä et al. 2025b.)

The findings of the most recent LIITU study confirm the long-standing trend that boys engage in physical activity in line with recommendation more often than girls, and boys also engage in vigorous physical activity at least three days a week more commonly than girls. A similar difference was also observed in upper secondary education between men and women. Physical activity among boys and men was more common in the past 12 months, while this was not the case for girls and women. (Hämälä et al. 2025b.)

The LIITU study also reinforces previous observations that self-reported physical activity is less common among young people with disabilities than among young people who do not have disabilities. One fifth (20%) of children and young people with disabilities meet the recommendation for daily physical activity. The amount of vigorous physical activity is also lower (54%) than for people who do not have disabilities (70%), as is participation in sport club activities (31% vs. 47%). The similar trend between both groups is that girls are not as physically active as boys, and in overall, the level of physical activity is decreasing during the life course. (Ng et al. 2025.)

The LIITU study pointed out also that self-reported physical activity is linked not only to gender but also to the person's background. In primary schools, 29% of girls with a foreign background met the recommendation for physical activity, while 39% of girls with a Finnish background met the recommendation. Children with a foreign background generally reported all factors preventing physical activity more often than those with a Finnish background. Physical activity was also more commonly linked to fears, perceived health-related obstacles, or the idea that it is not beneficial, necessary, or valued in one's circle of friends. However, the LIITU report did not present any perceived differences related to the country of origin broken down by gender. (Huovinen et al. 2025.)

The School Health Promotion Study conducted by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare produces monitoring data on the perceived health, well-being, lifestyle, school attendance and studies of children and young people. Data is collected with surveys. (THL 2025a.) According to the results (THL 2025b), there has been only a little change in the physical activity habits of pupils in grades 4 and 5 in the comprehensive school, when the comparison includes the share of children who engaged at least one hour of physical activity per day (2017: 45% and 2025: 44%). There has also been no significant change in a comparison of gender differences between years 2017 and 2025. In 2025, almost half of boys (49%) and 39% of girls engaged in physical activity for at least one hour a day. The results of the School Health Promotion Study are thus similar to the results of the LIITU study, which means that the level of physical activity of the pupils in the grades 4 and 5 have been stable during the recent years.

However, more than one in four (28%) of all pupils in grades 8 and 9 were physically active for at least one hour a day, while in 2017 it was one in five. The development has also been positive when examined by gender. Substantially more than one fifth of boys were physically active for at least one hour a day in 2017 and more than one third (34%) in 2025. Similarly, more than one fifth (22%) of girls met this criterion in 2025. A quarter of boys in upper secondary school and more than one fifth of boys in vocational education engaged in physical activity for at least an hour each day. The corresponding rates for girls were 16% and 15%. The share of students in both general upper secondary schools and vocational education who engage in physical activity according to current recommendations has increased since 2017, both in total and by gender. (THL 2025b.)

The LIITU studies have examined the participation of children and young people in different sport and physical activity events. According to the most recent LIITU study, a larger proportion of boys aged 9 to 20 are physically active in sport clubs (52% vs. 45%), school clubs (31% vs. 24%) or in other clubs (20% vs. 18%) than girls. Girls (40%) were more likely than boys (30%) to engage in physical activity at events organised by companies. Independent physical activity was almost as common among girls (90%) and boys (88%). (Hämälä et al. 2025b.)

Of the physical activity locations listed in the LIITU study both girls (77%) and boys (69%) selected the pedestrian and bicycle routes as their most common location for engaging in physical activity. Girls (70%) were more likely than boys (65%) to engage in physical activity in their own or a friend's yard. Boys listed other physical activity locations more often than girls. These locations included genuine nature and forests, indoor halls and ice halls, outdoor fields and ice rinks, maintained outdoor recreation areas and trails, school yards and urban space, including

squares, skateboarding sites, and parks. The biggest differences between the genders were in the use of outdoor fields and ice rinks (boys 40%, girls 23%), school yards (boys 28%, girls 18%) and indoor halls and ice rinks (boys 45%, girls 37%) for physical activity. (Hämälä et al. 2025b.)

Results analysed by gender on participation in various sport and physical activity events and the use of physical activity locations have remained fairly well established in the most recent LIITU studies (e.g. Hämälä et al. 2025b; Martin et al. 2023; Martin et al. 2019). The findings of a study investigating the physical activity of young people in secondary education in 2020 differ slightly from studies examining the physical activity of pupils of comprehensive school age or the physical activity of students in comprehensive school and upper secondary education together. The 2020 study found that independent physical activity and participation in clubs organised by the educational institution were slightly more common among men than among women. (Kokko et al. 2021.) Of the different physical activity locations, on the other hand, genuine nature, maintained outdoor recreation areas, urban space and the school yard were slightly more popular among women than men, which differs from the results of other LIITU studies published in recent years.

3.2 Adult population and older people

Statistics Finland's Time Use Survey is a sample survey that is used to collect information on how Finns over the age of 10 use their daily time. Its aim is to determine how much time is spent on gainful employment, home chores, studying, various leisure activities, and other activities. In addition to the time spent on different activities, the daily and weekly rhythm of time use, and spending time together are also examined. Statistics Finland has conducted Time Use Survey approximately every ten years since 1979. The data for the latest study were compiled in 2020–2021. Starting from 1999–2000, data have been collected under EU harmonisation. Participants in the study keep a record of their time use for two days. Interviews are conducted over the telephone. Data collection covers the last 12 months. (Tilastokeskus 2025a.)

The results show that both men and women spend more time on daily physical activity than in the 1980s. The change from the 1980s was especially substantial for women. At that time, women reported an average of 28 minutes of physical activity per day. In 2021 they reported an average of 45 minutes per day. Men have always been more physically active than women, but changes have been moderate. In

the first measurement, men reported 41 minutes of physical activity per day. Four decades later, men reported that they spent ten minutes more on physical activity every day. (Time Use survey, Official Statistics of Finland 2021.)

The Healthy Finland survey conducted by the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) in 2022–2023 consisted of a survey and a health examination. 61,000 randomly selected people aged 20 or over from different parts of Finland were invited to respond to the survey. Of those invited, 28,000 (46%) responded to a survey. (THL 2023a.)

Compliance with the recommendation for health-enhancing physical activity was measured in the survey of the Healthy Finland study by asking respondents to assess the amount of weekly light, moderate-brisk, and vigorous physical activity they engaged in as well as the amount of physical activity that maintains and develops muscular strength. Respondents who reported that they engaged in moderate endurance exercise for at least 2 hours and 30 minutes or 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous endurance exercise per week or a combination of these, and that they exercised at least two days per week to maintain muscle fitness, were classified as meeting the health-enhancing physical activity recommendation. Respondents who walked, cycled, or engaged in other similar physical activity several hours a week, engaged in fitness exercise for several hours or trained regularly in a competitive manner were reported in leisure time physical activity and in the amount of physical activity engaged in. (Borodulin & Lahti 2023.)

According to the results, an increasing number of men aged 20–64 met the recommendations for health-enhancing physical activity. The share of those meeting the recommendation increased from 42% in 2020 to 47% in 2022. Similarly, an increasing number of men aged 65 or over met the recommendations (2022: 40%). A smaller amount of women met the physical activity recommendations, and there had been no change to the previous measurement. 40% of those in the younger age group (20–46-year-olds), and 33% of those over the age of 65 exercised in line with the recommendations. (THL 2023b)

The results also reveal that the share of those engaged in leisure-time physical activity had increased among men and women aged 65 or over between 2017 and 2023. In 2017, 70% of men and 61% of women aged over 65 engaged in physical activity in their leisure time. In 2023, the corresponding figures were 77% and 68%, respectively. On the other hand, the prevalence of leisure-time physical activity among men under the age of 65 was slightly lower in 2023 (74%) than in 2017 (77%). The same trend was also observed in women's leisure-time physical activity (2017: 76 % and 2023: 72%). (Borodulin & Lahti 2023.)

KunnonKartta, coordinated by the UKK Institute, is a population study based on a stratified random sample, carried out in a cross-sectional design that measures the physical activity, sedentary behaviour and sleep of Finnish adults (aged 20–69), and their endurance and muscular strength. In addition, the survey examines the respondents' lifestyles and health. The most recent sample in 2021–2022 included 16,500 people selected on the basis of their age, gender and place of residence, of whom 2,269 accepted the invitation to use the accelerometer and used it to at least some extent. At least four full measurement days were recorded for 2,089 people. A total of 2,111 people responded to the research survey, 1,228 took part in blood tests, and 1,759 took part in at least one fitness test. (Husu et al. 2022.)

The results of the KunnonKartta survey differ from the results of the Healthy Finland survey. Based on the KunnonKartta survey data, more than one quarter (26%) of the respondents met the recommendation for physical activity in terms of both endurance exercise and muscular strength and balance and motor skill exercise, i.e. they exercised moderately for at least 2 hours and 30 minutes a week or vigorously for at least 1 hour and 15 minutes a week or reached the recommended amount of moderate and vigorous physical activity each week by combining these, and trained muscular strength and balance and motor skills at least twice a week. The share is clearly smaller than that observed in the Healthy Finland Survey. Similarly, women met the recommendation slightly more often than men (27% vs. 24%), which is the opposite of what was observed from the Healthy Finland Survey. Both studies showed a decline in physical activity with age.

According to the accelerometer data, an average of 58% of the participants aged 18–64 in the KunnonKartta survey met the physical activity recommendation for adults in terms of endurance, i.e. they had at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate physical activity per week, at least 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week, or achieved the recommended amount of physical activity by combining these. The proportion of men who met the recommendation was slightly lower (55%) than that of women (61%). The proportion of women who met the recommendation was higher than that of men in all age groups examined. On average, younger participants met the recommendation better than older participants. (Husu et al. 2022, 36.)

Almost all participants (94%) also reported that they do some exercises during their leisure time. Women use the private sector sport services slightly more often than men (29% vs. 35%). Sport services provided by sport clubs were second commonly used (21%). Men used them slightly more often than women (23% vs. 19%). Those in the younger age groups used private companies and clubs more. Walking is still the most popular form of physical activity among adults and there is no differences

between genders. The second most common form was training at a gym. The next most common forms of physical activity for men were different ball games, running cycling and skiing, and for women, running, Nordic walking, cycling and group exercise. In addition to the above, many respondents reported swimming or aqua jogging and home exercise as the second or third most common forms of physical activity. (Ibid. 26–27.)

The way in which one engages in sport and physical activity and the context in which they do so were also examined in a report on physical activity among the adult population published by the Finnish Institute of High Performance Sport KIHU in 2025. Based on the report, 90 per cent of the Finnish adult population engage in physical activity or sport. The study found no differences between the genders in the prevalence of engaging in physical activity or sport. The three most popular forms of physical activity among both men and women are walking, cycling, and training at a gym. 64% of men and 67% of women engage in their sport or physical activity independently. 31% of women and 32% of men engage in independent activities in a group or group of friends. Women (16%) are more likely than men (10%) to use sport services provided by private companies. (Mononen et al. 2025b.) However, the difference between the genders has narrowed compared to the previous report published in 2019. According to it 21.6% of women and 8.3% of men engaged in their sport through services provided by a private company (Mononen et al. 2019). 15% of men and 12% of women participate in sport club activities (Mononen et al. 2025b). Here, too, the gender gap has narrowed compared to the previous report, according to which 16.3% of men and 10.3% of women participated in club activities (Mononen et al. 2019).

According to the Liikuttaako 2023? report on the physical activity of people with disabilities, one quarter of the respondents engaged in physical activity less than recommended. Similarly, 43% reported that there was no more than one day of vigorous physical activity per week. The majority of respondents (n=2,047) (69%) were women or girls. The largest age group for respondents was those aged 30–64 (n=1,024). Boys and men participated more in sport club activities (18% vs. 10%). On the other hand, girls and women used private services more (16% vs. 8%) and groups organised by adult education centres (13% vs. 5%). Women also used municipal physical activity and leisure services slightly more often than men (25% vs. 21%), but there were no significant differences in participation in groups organised by disability or public health associations (men 17%, women 20%). (Ala-Vähälä et al. 2023).

Older People on the Move (later IKLI) is also a population sample-based study coordinated by the UKK Institute, the main objective of which is to measure the physical and functional capacity of Finns over the age of 70 living at home, as well as their physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and sleep. In addition, the survey collects data on the participants' health, functional capacity, well-being, quality of life, falls, and factors explaining and guiding physical activity. The basic sample of the IKLI study was formed as a sampling from the population register by age and place of residence (Helsinki or Tampere). A total of 2,100 people were selected for the sample, and they were sent a personal invitation to participate in the study. Of those who received the invitation, 412 filled in the study consent form and participated in the study. The average age of the participants was 78, and 47% of them were women. (Husu et al. 2022, 59–60.)

According to the survey data, 16% of the survey respondents engaged in physical activity in accordance with the recommendation for older people, both in terms of endurance training and muscular strength and motor skills training. There was little difference between men and women in the proportions of those who meet the recommendation. In the younger age group (70–79-year-olds), one fifth of respondents (20%) met the recommendation for physical activity, whereas in the older group (80-year-olds and older) the share is only 11%. (Ibid., 64.)

According to the accelerometer data, an average of 35% of the participants in the IKLI survey met the physical activity recommendation for older people in terms of endurance, i.e. they had at least 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate physical activity per week, at least 1 hour and 15 minutes of vigorous physical activity per week, or achieved the recommended amount of physical activity by combining these. In the younger age group, there was little difference between men and women in the proportions of those who met the recommendation, but in the older age group, a slightly larger proportion of women met the recommendation than men. (Ibid., 73.)

Nearly all older people (93%) exercised independently, men slightly more often than women (97% vs. 90%). One third of the respondents used physical activity services provided by the municipality, women more often than men (39% vs. 27%). A quarter of the respondents used the services provided by private sector companies. Women also used these services more often than men (31% vs. 20%). Women were also more likely than men to take part in physical activity services provided by adult education centres (10% vs. 2%). 13% of respondents engaged in physical activities at sport clubs and 4% of respondents at different organisations and associations. There was little difference between the genders in the use of physical activity services provided by the above-mentioned organisations providing

these activities. The younger age group used sport clubs, private sector companies and physical activity services provided by the municipality more often than the older age group. (Ibid, 66.)

3.3 Summary

- Contradictory and, to some extent, even opposite research results have hampered the examination of the physical activity behaviour of the adult population by gender and the changes taking place in it.
- In the children's and young people's age groups, the results show that there has been no change in physical activity among pupils in the lower grades of comprehensive school. However, in the higher grades, more young people meet the physical activity recommendation, regardless of gender. Two persisting trends in physical activity among children and young people are that girls are less physically active than boys in all age groups and that the amount of physical activity decreases for both genders as they age. The significantly lesser physical activity of girls is already apparent before school age.
- Walking is still the most popular form of physical activity among adults and of both genders.
- Women favour services offered by private sector companies more than men, and men participate slightly more in sport clubs.
- People with disabilities are less physically active than the rest of the population in all age groups. Girls and women are less physically active than men and boys.
- Physical activity is not considered as beneficial or valuable among children with a foreign background as by children with a Finnish background, and girls engage in less physical activity than boys.

4 Participation in organised sport

This chapter examines gender equality through sport club activities, the number of people engaging in different sports and the gender distribution of volunteers. Gender equality in decision-making in sport organisations is examined in Chapter 6.

4.1 Participating in the activities by sport clubs

Children and young people

Sport clubs are a key actor promoting the physical activity of children and young people. LIITU studies, published once every two years, report on the amount and development of club activities for children and young people. Over the years, LIITU studies have examined the involvement of pupils of basic education age and students of upper secondary education age in club activities either together or separately. The previous study carried out in 2024 examined participation in sport clubs activities by people aged 9–20. According to the study, 45% of the respondents regularly and actively participated in club activities at the time of the survey. 10% of the respondents took part in club activities occasionally. Slightly less than one third (31%) were not involved in club activities at the time of the survey, but had taken part in them previously. In other words, 86% of the respondents had at least tried participation in sport club activities. (Mononen et al. 2025a.)

Active participation in sport clubs is clearly more common today than previously. A study by Lounassalo et al. (2025) compared the participation of Finnish children and young people in sport clubs activities in the 1980s and 2020s. Their study found that only slightly more than one-third of nine-year-old children participated in club activities in the 1980s. 45% of 12-year-olds participated in sport clubs. In the 2020s, two out of three of the descendants of the original cohort, aged 8–10, and 11–13, were engaged in sport club activities. Especially active engagement in club activities has increased in popularity. The share of those who participated in sport club activities at most once a week were even smaller in some age groups than in the 1980s. (Lounassalo et al. 2025.) In the generational context, part of the current child population, such as those with a foreign background remained sidelined.

Based on the LIITU studies, engagement in club activities is most common among 9-year-olds and 11-year-olds. In these age groups, approximately 70% of children engage in sports activities at sport clubs. In recent studies, the prevalence of engagement in club activities by 13-year-olds has varied between 54% and 59%. Slightly over 40% of 15-year-olds participate in club activities. (Mononen et al. 2025a; Blomqvist et al. 2023; Blomqvist et al. 2019) According to the most recent LIITU study, 44% of 16–20-year-olds participated in sport club activities (Mononen et al. 2025a). The share of those engaging in club activities in this age group was smaller, 36% in the 2020 study (Mononen et al. 2021).

This same phenomenon of a decline in club activities with age can also be seen in the Children and Youth Leisure Surveys. According to the 2022 survey, slightly more than half of children and young people aged 7–14 participated in guided physical activity or sports. Approximately three out of ten of 15–29-year-olds did the same. According to the study, participation in guided physical activity and sport was most common among 10–14-year-olds. In the next age category, 15–19-year-olds, participation in guided physical activity and sport dropped considerably. A total of 38% of respondents aged 7–29 participated in guided physical activity or sport. (Tarvainen et al. 2023.)

In the LIITU studies, the prevalence of participation in sport club activities among children and young people has been studied through two different questions in recent years. At the beginning of the surveys, respondents were asked whether they participate in various sport and physical activity events. The question has been used to map out the proportion of children and young people who engage in physical activity, for example, in clubs held after school, events organised by physical activity sector companies, or independently. One of the options has been training, competitions, or matches organised by a sport club. According to a study carried out in 2024, 52% of boys and men aged 9–20 engaged in weekly physical activity at events organised by a sport club, while 45% of girls and women did so. (Hämälä et al. 2025b.)

A similar gender gap was also apparent in the 2022 study, in which 51% of boys and 43% of girls aged 9–15 participated in weekly sports club training (Martin et al. 2023). In 2020, the LIITU study focused on general upper secondary school students; gender differences were emphasised: 45% of men and 32% of women engaged in physical activity at events organised by a sport club at least once a week. (Kokko et al. 2021.)

The LIITU study surveys have also included a separate section on club activities. In this context, respondents have been asked whether they engage in physical activity or sport in clubs. The answers have been "Yes, I take part regularly and actively", "Yes, I take part occasionally", "I do not currently take part, but I have previously" and "I do not take part, and I never have". (see e.g. Kokko & Hämylä 2025b; Kokko & Martin 2023.)

The responses to this question have not differed as much between the genders. For example, the 2022 LIITU study included a review of the changes in the prevalence of club activities between 2016, 2018, and 2022. The proportions of regular and active participation in club activities did not differ significantly between the genders in 2016 (boys 52%, girls 49%), 2018 (boys 50%, girls 50%) or 2022 (boys 47%, girls 44%). The proportion of boys and girls who participated in club activities occasionally was also within one or two percentage points of each other each year. (Blomqvist et al. 2023.)

However, some differences between the genders in relation to the frequency of participation in club activities have also been observed in the responses to the questions in the section on club activities. For example, according to the 2024 LIITU survey, men aged 16–20 (46%) were more likely than women (42%) to engage in sport club activities (Mononen et al. 2025a). It should be noted that with regard to secondary education, the report only included the responses of general upper secondary school students. Information on young people studying in vocational institutions has been reported in the School Health Promotion Study. According to the most recent survey, 28% of boys and 21% of girls studying in vocational institutions engage in instructed physical activity in their leisure time at least weekly. (THL 2025b.)

According to the LIITU study conducted in 2022, boys (47%) in the study's older age group, i.e. 15-year-olds, were also more likely than girls (38%) to participate in club activities (Blomqvist et al. 2023). Of the group aged 15, some differences were also observed in the 2018 LIITU study, according to which the share of boys who occasionally participated in club activities was higher (8%) than that of girls (4%). In the same age group, the share of girls who had never engaged in club activities was also higher (18%) than that of boys (15%). (Blomqvist et al. 2019.) On the other hand, in the 2024 and 2022 studies, the results flipped, and more 15-year-old boys than girls had never engaged in club activities (Mononen et al. 2025a; Blomqvist et al. 2023). This describes the variation of results between the years of data collection.

A corresponding observation according to which boys engage in club activities more often than girls in older age groups was also in the 2018 Children and Youth Leisure Survey. Based on the study, boys and girls engage approximately the

same amount in sport clubs activities until the age of 14. After this, the amount of girls who engage in club activities decreases significantly more than that of boys. (Hakanen et al. 2019) On the other hand, different observations were made in the most recent Children and Youth Leisure Survey. Based on the survey, boys and girls engage in guided physical activity and sport almost equally at the ages of 10–14, but after this, participation in guided activities decreases significantly more among boys than girls (Tarvainen et al. 2023). However, it should be noted that the most recent study did not refer to sport club activities, but to guided physical activity and sport, which can also be done outside sport clubs.

The gender differences related to involvement in sport club hobbies are most clearly visible in the specific sport that a person has been engaged in. The LIITU studies have asked about the main sport that children and young people engage in at clubs. In a study conducted in 2024, football was the most popular sport among 9–20-year-olds, both boys and men (34%) and girls and women (13%). The next most popular sports among boys and men were ice hockey (14%), floorball (10%), basketball (4%), and boxing (3%). The most popular sports among girls and women after football were horseback riding (12%), dance, and competitive dance (12%), gymnastics (11%), and cheerleading (7%). In general, the responses of girls and women were more evenly distributed between different sports. (Mononen et al. 2025a.) Football has also been the most popular sport among boys and men in previous LIITU studies. On the other hand, the most popular sport among girls aged 9–15 in the 2022 survey was horseback riding (Blomqvist et al. 2022). In the 2020 study, which reported the responses of general upper secondary school students, the most popular sport among women was dance and competitive dance (Mononen et al. 2021).

There are also some differences between the genders in how intensely they participated in hobbies and how goal-oriented they were. While there are no significant differences between the genders in the number of weekly training sessions supervised by coaches in which people aged 9–20 took part in the most recent LIITU study, boys and men seem to engage in their sport independently more often than girls and women. A larger share of boys and men compete at the local, regional, or national level. The share of girls and women is higher among those who participate in hobby-level competitions or who do not participate at all in leagues or competitions. In addition, boys and men (40%) more often than girls and women (24%) aim for success in adult-level leagues or competitions. Girls and women more often than boys and men, aim either for success in youth categories or competitions (42% vs. 29%) or have no competitive goal at all (34% vs. 31%). (Mononen et al. 2025a.)

Respondents aged 9 to 20 who responded to the LIITU survey had stopped participating in sport club activities at an average age of 12. Boys and men (11.8) had stopped engaging in hobbies slightly earlier than girls and women (12.2), but the differences between the genders were not significant. (Mononen et al. 2025a.) It should be noted that the figures specifically indicate the average age at which the 9–20-year-olds who responded to the survey and who have already ceased participation in sports club activities stopped taking part. In other words, these figures should not be used to draw more general conclusions on the average age at which Finns stop engaging in sport club activities. (see Hakamäki 2024.)

The main reasons for discontinuing club activities varied slightly between the genders. More often than girls and women, boys and men replied that the reasons for quitting their sport club hobbies were "It was not exciting enough", "I grew bored with the sport" or "I had other things to do". Girls and women, more often than boys and men, chose the responses "I didn't feel comfortable in the team/group", "illness/injuries", "I wasn't as good as I wanted to be", "I wanted to concentrate on my studies", "the hobby was too expensive" or "I didn't like the coach". (Mononen et al. 2025a.)

There are numerous reasons why it has been considered important that children and young people continue to participate in club activities in one way or another even after they quit a specific sport. This objective has also been included in the sub-objectives of club activities development grants distributed by the Ministry of Education and Culture to clubs (Ministry of Education and Culture, no date-b). In the 2024 LIITU study, general upper secondary school students who had quit participating in club activities were asked about whether they were interested in a role at the club other than that of a physical activity participant. In general, one in ten were interested in acting as a coach or instructor at a club at the time of the survey. 14% saw this as a possibility in the future. Women were interested in acting as a coach or instructor more often than men both at the time of the survey (13% / 3%) and in the future (16% / 10%). In general, interest in taking on the tasks of a coach or instructor was higher among those who were still engaged in sport club activities. Even among them, women were also more interested than men in taking on the above-mentioned tasks. (Mononen et al. 2025a.)

Participation in club activities by children and young people from the perspective of intersectionality

As with other phenomena related to physical activity, it is important to examine participation in club activities from the perspective of intersectionality. This means that several background factors can simultaneously affect an individual's actions

and status. For example, being a member of various minority groups may affect a person's opportunities to engage in physical activity. (Asunta et al. 2025a) Such an approach helps in a more in-depth examination of phenomena, which is not possible from a perspective focused solely on gender differences.

In the 2024 LIITU study, sport club hobbies were examined with intersectionality in mind. In addition to gender, the variables examined included socio-economic status, place of residence, and foreign background. In addition, a separate chapter cover engagement in sport club activities by people with disabilities.

In general and as expected, the study found that the family's financial situation is linked to whether children and young people engage in sport club activities. A family's financial situation seemed to affect the active and regular participation of girls in sport club activities more than that of boys. This was particularly evident for girls and women who considered the family's financial situation to be poor. 27% of them actively and regularly participated in club activities. The corresponding share among boys and men was 42%. This was also examined according to the family's wealth for all comprehensive school pupils. Of primary school pupils, boys were more likely than girls to engage in sports club activities no matter what the family's financial standing. Girls in secondary school from families in the highest or middle wealth bracket were more likely to engage in club activities than boys. The situation was the opposite in the lowest wealth bracket. (Asunta et al. 2025b)

The guardians' educational background was also found to be linked to the participation of woman in general upper secondary school in sport club activities. 18% of women whose guardians had only a basic education degree actively and regularly participated in club activities. The corresponding figure for men was 39%. 24% of women and 34% of men whose guardians had a general upper secondary school or vocational education actively and regularly participated in sport club activities. There were no differences between the genders in regular participation in sport club activities when their parents had a higher education. (Asunta et al. 2025b)

Regular participation in sport club activities was generally more common among people living in the centre of a town and those who live just outside of the centre of a town than for those living in rural residential areas or outside these. The greatest gender differences were formed between those living in town centres (boys/men 50%, girls/women 43%) and in the rural village or residential are (boys/men 45%, girls/women 40%). Differences between genders were highlighted when examining those who participated at least once a week in training, competitions, or matches organised by a sport club. (Huhtiniemi et al. 2025.)

According to the LIITU study, participation in sport club activities is more common among children and young people with a Finnish background than among those with a foreign background. In the study a person with a foreign background was defined as a person both of whose parents, or the only known parent, were born abroad. 44 per cent of children and young people with a Finnish background actively and regularly participated in sport club activities. The corresponding figure for those with a foreign background was 36 per cent. The differences were mostly visible in secondary and upper secondary school-aged children and young people, as about half of primary school-aged children actively and regularly took part in club activities, regardless of whether they had a Finnish or a foreign background. (Huovinen et al. 2025.)

From the perspective of this report, the key finding from the LIITU study is the gender gap between the prevalence of regular and active sport club activities. According to the study, there was no statistically significant difference between boys and men with a Finnish or foreign background in active and regular participation in club activities. The situation was completely different for girls and women. Researchers found that girls and women with a Finnish background (45%) were clearly more likely than girls and women with a foreign background (31%) to engage in sport club activities. (Huovinen et al. 2025.)

Over the years, LIITU studies have found that children and young people with disabilities engage in less physical activity than children and young people who do not have disabilities (Ng et al. 2023; Ng et al. 2021). This also applies to involvement in sport clubs activities. According to the 2024 data collection, 31% of people with disabilities reported that they engaged in sport club activities. Of those with no disabilities, 47 per cent participated in club activities. There were no major differences between the genders: 30% of girls and women with disabilities participated in sport club activities. The corresponding figure for boys was 32 per cent. 20% of boys and men with disabilities said that they had never been a member of a sport club. 17 per cent of girls and women reported the same. (Ng et al. 2025).

Adults

Although the LIITU studies report sport club activities up to the age of 20 and the Children and Youth Leisure Surveys report this up to the age of 29, participation in sport club activities by the adult population as a whole is not monitored as regularly as that of children and young people. The matter has been examined, for example, in national physical activity studies (e.g. Suomen Kuntoliikuntaliitto

2010) and in reports by the Finnish Institute of High Performance Sport KIHU on the physical activity, voluntary work, and participation in activities by the adult population (Mononen et al. 2019).

Kihu-produced studies on the adult population represent the population in a balanced manner in terms of gender, age, and area of residence. In a report published in 2019, the respondents consisted of people between of ages of 15 and 74. According to the report, slightly more than 13% of adults engaged in sport club activities, men (16%) more often than women (10%). Eight and a half per cent of adults participated in activities at other associations or organisations. Men (9.6%) were also more commonly involved in these other associations and organisations than women (7.4%). (Mononen et al. 2019.)

The respondents to the survey published in 2025 consisted of people between of ages of 18 and 80. According to the survey, there have been no major changes in the prevalence of participation in sport club activities among the adult population. The share of men engaging in club activities decreased (15%) and the share of women (12%) increased slightly compared to the previous report. As a whole, an equal share (13%) of the adult population participated in sport club activities. Nine per cent of men and eight per cent of women engaged in physical activity in another association or organisation. (Mononen et al. 2025b.)

4.2 Inappropriate treatment, discrimination, and bullying experienced by children and young people in clubs

Similarly to other sport and physical activity activities, sport club activities have traditionally been viewed exclusively as a positive environment that produces the desired consequences (e.g. Salasuo 2019). The findings of the LIITU study presented in brief above provide valuable perspectives on equality in club activities and on how, despite determined efforts, hobbies are not always seen as an open and accessible place for everyone.

Recently, increasing attention has also been paid to inappropriate behaviour, discrimination, and bullying in sport and physical activity hobbies. In the LIITU surveys, the matter was investigated for the first time in 2016. Generally speaking, slightly more than one third (37%) of the respondents aged 11, 13, and 15 reported that they had experienced discrimination or bullying. They were asked in more detail where discrimination or bullying had taken place. After school and the Internet, sport and physical activity hobbies were the most common places where

respondents had experienced discrimination or bullying. Boys (20%) and girls (18%) who were bullied and discriminated against reported almost as often that bullying and discrimination took place in physical activity and sport hobbies. (Laine et al. 2016).

The study also examined the reasons why the respondents felt that they had been bullied or discriminated against in physical activity and sport hobbies. Girls reported more often than boys that the reasons for bullying or discrimination were their appearance (56% vs. 42%), their clothing (33% vs. 24%), their lacking physical skills (35% vs. 30%), the way they spoke (21% vs. 14%) and their gender (17% vs. 10%). Boys reported having been bullied or discriminated against more often than girls due to their language skills (20% vs. 9%), their political views (18% vs. 6%), how rich they were (10% vs. 3%), their skin colour (10% vs. 4%) and their state of health (22% vs. 17 %). (Laine et al. 2016).

The 2020 LIITU study examined discrimination and bullying experienced by general upper secondary school students in physical activity and sport hobbies. The responses of general upper secondary school students highlighted physical activity and sport hobbies as an environment where young people had continued to experience discrimination or bullying the most after school and the internet. One third of respondents who had experienced discrimination or bullying reported that they were sometimes or often discriminated against or bullied in sport and physical activity hobbies, which is more than what was observed in the 2016 survey for children in comprehensive school. (Laine et al. 2021). In general, studies have explained this difference as being due to the differing recreational environments of the age groups or the fact that comprehensive school pupils do not yet necessarily recognise discrimination and bullying, in which case these experiences are only reported when young people reach general upper secondary school (Hakanen et al. 2019). In the 2020 LIITU study, men reported experiences of discrimination and bullying in sport and physical activity more often than women which differed from all other environments and places examined. Women stated far more often than men that the reasons for discrimination or bullying were appearance and gender. (Laine et al. 2021).

The 2024 LIITU study took a different approach to reporting on the topic. Instead of discrimination and bullying, the subjects were asked about their experiences of inappropriate treatment. In addition, the results were reported separately for those who, at the time of the survey, were taking part in sport club activities and those who were no longer involved in sport club activities. The question section on inappropriate treatment was answered by persons of both pupils in comprehensive school and students of general upper secondary school age, which meant that the

age structure of the respondents was slightly different from that of previous studies. (Toivonen & Kananen 2025.) For these reasons, making direct comparisons and describing a possible change is not straightforward.

According to the study, slightly less than a quarter (23%) of those involved in sport club activities said that they had sometimes experienced inappropriate treatment in sport. Approximately one fifth could not say whether they had ever experienced inappropriate treatment. Girls and women reported experiences of inappropriate treatment more often than boys and men. The responses of those who were no longer involved in sport club activities were similar to those of participants who were currently involved at the time of the survey. However, they reported less often about experiences of inappropriate treatment. (Toivonen & Kananen 2025.)

In addition to the LIITU studies, bullying, discrimination, and inappropriate behaviour in sport and physical activity have been investigated for example in the 2018 Children and Youth Leisure Survey. The survey asked 10–29-year-olds whether they had ever experienced bullying, discrimination, or other inappropriate behaviour in physical activity hobbies. Five per cent of the respondents said that they had experienced the above issues often and 26% said they had experienced these sometimes. Experiences of bullying, discrimination, and inappropriate behaviour were clearly more common among older respondents. Boys and men reported experiences of bullying, discrimination, or other inappropriate behaviour more often than girls and women. (Hakanen et al. 2019)

In most cases, inappropriate behaviour in sport and physical activity hobbies does not progress to criminal proceedings. The majority of the cases that emerge are dealt with through the disciplinary procedure of the sport itself. However, sexual offences in sport and physical activity have been examined in two Police University College theses (Turpeinen 2018; 2020). Between 2016 and 2018, a total of 199 sexual offences that took place in the context of sport and physical activity were reported to the police. 87 police reports (44%) had been transferred to the prosecutor for consideration of charges. The most common offence categories were sexual abuse of a child, sexual harassment, public obscenity, and illicit observation. Studies show that sexual offences in sport and physical activity are gendered: 249 of the suspects were men and nine women, in addition to which 179 women and 68 men had been recorded as victims in criminal reports. Approximately one third of the criminal reports were related to competition and leisure time hobbies, while the rest of the reports were related to unorganised physical activity. (Turpeinen 2018; 2020.)

Some of the studies have also reported on the inappropriate treatment, discrimination, and bullying experienced by non-binary people in physical activity and sports hobbies. For example, in the 2024 LIITU study, it was found that the most frequent experiences of inappropriate treatment among sport club participants were experienced by persons who reported other as their gender (Toivonen & Kananen 2025). The same observation had also been made a few years earlier in a Children and Youth Leisure Survey, according to which experiences of bullying, discrimination, and inappropriate treatment in physical activity hobbies were the most common among non-binary people. Based on the survey, nearly 70 per cent of them reported having experienced inappropriate treatment in physical activity hobbies frequently or sometimes. (Hakanen et al. 2019)

Studies that have investigated inappropriate treatment, discrimination, and harassment have been a valuable addition to the discussion on sport clubs and, more broadly, on sport and physical activity. In terms of comparability and longer-term monitoring, it would be important to use concepts consistently in research. For example, distinguishing between discrimination and harassment is slightly misleading in that harassment is a form of discrimination prohibited by law (see e.g. Kokkonen 2019). In the 2024 LIITU study, forms of inappropriate treatment were named, for example, sexual harassment and violence, which are criminal offences under the Criminal Code. In addition, the context of the studies has varied from clubs to sport and physical activity in general, which may also include other types of hobbies than those that take place in a club setting.

4.3 Licences

The number of sport licences is one way of examining the gender distribution of people involved in sports. However, there is a difference in the types of licence systems for each sport, as the grounds for registering licences and the methods of compiling statistics vary according to each sport's own requirements. For this reason, the comparison of licences for different sports is not unambiguous. (Lehtonen et al. 2022.) Lämsä et al. (2017) have found that licences today describe agency in different sports rather than just the number of actively competing athletes.

In spring 2025, the Olympic Committee published the SporttiData report, which presents statistical data related to sport. The most comprehensive section of SporttiData report concerns the examination of sports licences. The examination is mainly based on licence data accumulated in the Suomisport system. Not all federations sell their licences through Suomisport. At the time of the publication

of the report, these federations included the Finnish Gymnastics Federation, Basketball Finland, the Football Association of Finland, the Finnish Tennis Federation, Skating Finland and the Finnish Golf Union. The material in SporttiData has been partly supplemented with information from the Football Association of Finland, the Finnish Gymnastics Federation, the Finnish Golf Union and Skating Finland. (Suomen Olympiakomitea 2025.)

According to SporttiData, in 2024, 68% of licence holders were men and 32% were women. SporttiData enables the examination of gender distributions in separately in some sports. Based on the report, it can be stated that 90% of ice hockey licences, 80% of floorball licences, 76% of football and futsal licences, and 74% of golf licences are held by men. Women hold 99% of cheerleading licences, 97% of gymnastics licences, and 85% of figure skating licences. Licence holders are of a more even gender distribution in Finnish baseball (49% women and 51% men), track and field (55% women and 45% men) and volleyball (66% women and 34% men). (Finnish Olympic Committee 2025.)

In order to gain a broader overall picture, this report also examines the licence data entered by sports federations in general government grant forms. One of the evaluation criteria for grants granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture is the number of people paying membership fees, hobby fees or licences to sports federation, or the number of registered members that has otherwise been reliably verified (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.-a). Federations enter the number of the aforementioned persons by gender and by age group in the application form. These are thus data reported to the Ministry of Education and Culture by the organisations themselves. The most recent information is from the end of 2024, when the federations had to submit their grant 2025 application to the ministry's e-service. Longitudinal monitoring and change descriptions are carried out to the extent that information has been available. For the sake of clarity, this report refers to the numbers reported by federations as number of licences.

For the analysis, gender distribution data from licences reported by 70 sports federations in autumn 2024 were available. The number of licences reported by the Finnish Gymnastics Federation differed significantly from the information listed in SporttiData and the information reported by the Finnish Gymnastics Federation in previous years. Based on the aforementioned sources and the federation's own annual reports, it was decided that the data available in SporttiData would be used as the licence data for the Finnish Gymnastics Federation. A total of 66 % of the sport federation licences were held by men and 34 % by women. The gender distribution is similar to that listed in SporttiData, although the logic for data collection is slightly different. SporttiData refers to the gender distribution

of licence holders whereas the figures reported by sport federations in grant applications concern the distribution of the total number of licences by gender, in which case several licences held by one person may be included.

The previous gender equality report presented the gender distribution of licences reported by sport federations between team and individual sports. At that time, it was found that 74% of team sport licences were held by men and 26% by women. Of the licences for individual sports, 56% were held by men and 44% by women. (Lehtonen et al. 2022) Based on the data recorded in the general grant applications for 2024, 71% of team sports licences were held by men and 29% by women. 61% of licences for individual sports were held by men and 39% by women.

However, the previous gender equality report highlighted ambiguity in how the division between team and individual sports is interpreted, as many sport federations include both individual and team disciplines (Lehtonen et al. 2022). For example, gender distributions are greatly influenced by whether the Finnish Figure Skating Association's and the Finnish Gymnastics Federation's licences are considered team or individual sport licences. If the aforementioned licences were classified in the previous report as team sport licences, men would then have only held 66 % of the licences for team sports. On the other hand, the share individual sport licences held by men would have increased to 62%. (Lehtonen et al. 2022) Similarly, if the data for 2024 were interpreted in the same way, the share of team sport licences held by men would also be 66% (women 34%) and the share for individual licences would be 65% (women 35%).

This report cannot examine the gender distribution of licences between team and individual sports without some ambiguity, as there is no itemised data on how each sport federation's licences are divided between different sports. However, it is possible to make some comparisons. For example, in the largest team ball sports (total number of licences at least 10,000), men hold a larger share of licences than women in all sport federations except in the Finnish Volleyball Association (Table 1).

Table 1. Gender distribution of licences in the largest team ball sports in 2024. (Source: Ministry of Education and Culture, general grant forms for organisations promoting physical activity)

Sport federation	Men's share of licences (%)	Women's share of licences (%)
Football Association of Finland	76	24
Finnish Ice Hockey Association	90	10
Finnish Floorball Federation	82	18
Basketball Finland	64	36
Finnish Baseball Association	51	49
Finnish Volleyball Association	34	66

In these sports, the gender distribution of licences has also remained fairly unchanged. Measured in percentage units, the largest change has taken place in the Finnish Volleyball Association, where the share licence holder who are women and girls has increased from 56% to 66% over the past ten years. (Table 2).

Table 2. Share of licences for the biggest team ball sports held by women and girls, 2014–2024. (Source: Ministry of Education and Culture, general grant forms for organisations promoting physical activity)

Sport federation	2014	2018	2020	2024
Football Association of Finland	23%	23%	24%	24%
Finnish Ice Hockey Association	9%	8%	8%	10%
Finnish Floorball Federation	16%	17%	17%	18%
Basketball Finland	35%	37%	37%	36%
Finnish Baseball Federation	42%	45%	46%	49%
Finnish Volleyball Association	56%	60%	63%	66%

In other sports federations with the largest number of licences, the variation between the genders is greater than in large team ball sports. There are also sports federations in which the share of women licence holders is clearly larger than men licence holders (e.g. the Finnish Equestrian Federation, the Finnish Gymnastics Federation, Finnish Cheerleading Federation) and sports federations in which men hold a clear majority of licences (AKK-Motorsport, Finnish Shooting Sport Federation). The Finnish Athletics Federation's licences are fairly evenly distributed between men and women. (Table 3).

Table 3. Gender distribution of licences in other sport federations with the largest number of licences in 2024. (Source: Ministry of Education and Culture, general grant forms for organisations promoting physical activity)

Sport federation	Men's share of licences (%)	Women's share of licences (%)
Finnish Golf Union	73	27
Finnish Sailing and Boating Federation	78	22
Finnish Equestrian Federation	5	95
Finnish Tennis Federation	62	38
AKK-Motorsport	86	14
Finnish Athletics Federation	46	54
Finnish Gymnastics Federation*	3	97
Finnish Cheerleading Federation	1	99
Skating Finland	12	88
Finnish Shooting Sport Federation	90	10
Finnish Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation	79	21

* The licence data for the Finnish Gymnastics Federation originated from SporttiData (Finnish Olympic Committee 2025).

The gender distribution of licence holders has predominantly remained stable over the past ten years in these sports federations as well. However, for example in the Finnish Tennis Federation, the share of women and girls holding licences has clearly increased compared to the situation just four years ago. (Table 4). In addition to changes in the gender distribution of registered participants, this may be due to changes in statistical or reporting practices. Similar longer-term licence information was not available on the licences of the Finnish Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Federation.

Table 4. The share of licences held by women and girls in other sport federations with the largest number of licences, 2014–2024. (Source: Ministry of Education and Culture, general grant forms for organisations promoting physical activity)

Sport federation	2014	2018	2020	2024
Finnish Golf Union*	30%	29%	28%	27%
Finnish Sailing and Boating Federation	7%	16%	22%	22%
Finnish Equestrian Federation	96%	93%	95%	95%
Finnish Tennis Federation	no information	23%	24%	38%
AKK-Motorsport	9%	14%	11%	14%
Finnish Athletics Federation	55%	54%	56%	54%
Finnish Gymnastics Federation**	97%	88%	91%	97%
Finnish Cheerleading Federation	98%	98%	98%	99%
Skating Finland	no information	93%	93%	88%
Finnish Shooting Sport Federation	11%	13%	10%	10%

* 2013 licence data used as 2014 data

**The data for 2024 originated from SporttiData (Finnish Olympic Committee 2025).

As stated in the Gender Equality Report published in 2022, the number of licences does not describe the total number of people involved in all sports. There are many sports that can also be pursued without a licence. Thus, licences offer only one way of examining the participants in different sports and their gender distribution. (Lehtonen et al. 2022) Although the gender distribution of licence holders seems fairly well-established in many sport federations, the present reporting method does not best serve the understanding of the real-time situation. In addition, the fragmentation of the data used makes reliable follow-up of licence data more difficult. As mentioned earlier, the ways in which entries are made on licences in sport federations varies, which means that the figures recorded in the general grant forms may not be fully consistent between the federations.

In some sport federations, various measures have been taken to increase the number of minority gender representatives taking part in federation activities. For example, in connection with its previous overall strategy, the Finnish Football Association (n.d.-a) created the Sustainable Growth Development Plan, the aim of which was to strengthen football as a sport for women and girls. The association's current strategy also takes the need for specific measures to strengthen participation by women and girls into account. According to the strategy, attention must be paid to such areas as structures, resources, and recruitment practices. (Football Association of Finland, n.d.-b.)

Comprehensive strengthening of the agency of all those taking part in the sport, but especially those representing a minority gender, is therefore important. Examining the gender distribution of the number of licences only provides a limited perspective on the gender equality situation of a sport. From the perspective of an individual sport federation, it is often desirable to increase the number of participants representing gender minorities, but from a broader perspective, it is not unambiguous whether the unequal gender distribution of licence holders in different sports as such is problematic and thus evening out this imbalance is particularly desirable. It is essential to remove structural barriers to the participation and agency of gender minorities so that everyone, regardless of their gender, would find it equally possible to take part in the sport.

4.4 Voluntary work

Finnish sport club activities have become more professional in recent decades, which is reflected, for example, in the increase in paid workforce in clubs. At present, slightly more than one fifth of clubs that are members of sport federations act as employers. However, the amount of paid employment in the majority of these clubs is relatively small, as 55% of the clubs employed personnel who worked less than one person's annual working time in 2021. (Turunen & Kukko 2023.) As a whole, it can therefore be said that the majority of the work carried out in clubs is still carried out on a voluntary basis.

Over the years, different studies have examined the amount of voluntary work carried out in clubs. However, the wording of questions has varied, which has made it more difficult to form an accurate overall picture and compare research results (Lehtonen & Hakonen 2013, 28). However, on the basis of both Finnish and international reports, it is possible to draw general conclusions on the amount of voluntary work carried out by Finns in the field of sport and its gender distribution.

According to a report published by Kihu in 2018 on the adult population's physical activity hobbies, 12% of the adult population participated in the voluntary work at sport clubs. When voluntary work for other physical activity or sport organisations (2.7%) and at other associations and organisations (7.4%) were included, the share of those engaged in voluntary work in sport increased to 20.5% of the adult population. According to the report, voluntary work in sport was more common among men (23.4%) than among women (17.5%). This was also the case more specifically in sport clubs, where 15.5% of men and 8.7% of women did volunteer work. Men also did volunteer work in sport more than women in general and in hours volunteered, although the gender gap was not great. (Aarresola et al. 2019.)

Kihu republished a similar study in 2025. According to the study, the share of people who carry out voluntary work in sport is 19.5%. This share is slightly lower than in 2018. Men (22.2%) are still more likely than women (16.9%) to do volunteer work in sport, although the gender gap has narrowed. The decrease in volunteering is reflected in the decrease in the share of volunteers, especially in sport clubs: according to the latest data collection, 10% of the adult population volunteer at clubs. This decline is most evident in the proportion of men engaged in voluntary work in clubs, which has decreased from 15.5% in 2018 to 11.6%. The share of women volunteering in clubs (8.3%) has remained almost unchanged. (Mononen et al. 2025b.)

Internationally, Finns have been hard-working volunteers in sports. However, according to Eurobarometer surveys published by the European Commission, a continuously smaller share of Finns do volunteer work in sports. For example, in the 2009 survey, the share of volunteers was 18% (European Commission 2010). Comparable data was next collected in 2013, and this share had fallen to 13% (European Commission 2014). In 2017, this share was 11% (European Commission 2018) and in the most recent survey conducted in 2022 it was 9%. According to the survey, 6% of Europeans do volunteer work in sport, so despite the drop, Finns still rank higher than Europe in general. (European Commission 2022b.)

Kihu's surveys have also examined other types of participation in sport club activities. The aim has been to find out about participation that is not directly understood as voluntary work. The surveys have asked respondents about their participation in club functions (e.g. parents' evenings) and whether they attend competitions or matches to cheer on and support athletes. In addition, participation in activities in other ways has also been examined. According to the 2018 study, 8.6% participated in club functions, 26.3% attended competitions or matches to support athletes, and 0.7% participated in other ways. Some of the respondents could participate in several of the above-mentioned ways. 70.9%

did not participate in any of these ways or could not say about their participation, which meant that 29.1% participated. (Aarresola et al. 2019.) Based on a report published in 2025, this type of participation in club activities has clearly decreased. According to the study, 22% participate in club activities in the manner described above. Both men (32.2% → 24.3%) and women (26% → 19.7%) participate less than previously. (Mononen et al. 2025b.)

4.5 Summary

- The research results on how many children and young people are involved in sport club activities from the perspective of gender equality are partly contradictory. The research results on adults are more consistent, and men are more likely to be involved in club activities than women.
- According to studies, children and young people experience inappropriate behaviour more often in sport than in other hobbies. Gender differences vary between studies.
- Men hold around two thirds of sports federation licences. Within each sport, the gender distribution of licences seems fairly well established, with some exceptions.
- Men participate more than women in the voluntary work in sports.

5 Elite sport

This chapter examines gender equality in competitive and elite sport. The entities examined include government grants for athletes, sport success, coaching, and inappropriate behaviour.

5.1 Government grants for athletes

The government's athlete grants system dates to the mid-1990s. In 1994, the government adopted a decision based on which the candidates for the Olympic Games in Atlanta (1996) and Nagano (1998) was granted a tax-free annual subsidy of 60,000 Finnish marks (EUR 14,290 in 2019 rate). The decision was modelled based on the state grants system for individual artists introduced in 1968. The tax-free government grant for athletes was made permanent in 1999. Three years later, a decision was made to extend the grants to talented young athletes. Over the years, paralympians and athletes in non-Olympic sports and team sports have also been able to apply for and receive athlete grants. (Lämsä 2020, 4–6.)

When the grant scheme was introduced in the 1990s, the grant was awarded to approximately 30 athletes. Awarding large (EUR 12,000) and small grants (EUR 6,000) was first introduced in 2002. This distribution model remained in place until 2004, at which time a three-tier grant system was introduced. (Lämsä 2020, 16–17.) From autumn 2025 onward, this model will be replaced by a new system in which there are two athlete grants: 24,000 euros and 12,000 euros. In the future, coaching and training grants for athletes will be allocated to international elite athletes in accordance with the revised criteria. The reform will also make it possible to award a large athlete grant for a period of two years. The grant will not be awarded if the athlete's taxable income exceeds 60,000 euros per year. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2025a.)

In addition to personal grants, the grants to sports federations for enhancing elite coaching will also be reformed. These will be targeted to national team activities in team sports that already operate at the international elite level or that have realistic opportunities to reach this level. Individual sports federations are granted if the federation has the capacity to assist athletes who are already competing at an international elite level, or who have realistic opportunities of reaching this level. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2025a.)

According to statistics compiled by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2025b), a total of approximately EUR 37 million has been awarded to athletes as grants between 1995 and 2024, amounting to more than 3,700 individual grants. Women have received nearly 1,600 grants (42%) and slightly over EUR 15 million in funding (41%). Support for athletes through grants has increased since the early 2010s, both in the number of grants awarded and in the total amount of funding (Figures 1 and 2). Although fewer grants have been distributed in the past four years compared to the peak period of 2017–2020, the annual number still remains well above 200. The share of women among the grant recipients has been gradually increasing. In 2015, the grant was awarded to more than 50 women and three years later (2018) to more than 130 women. That year, the number of grants awarded to women and men was nearly the same. The largest single factor affecting the grants awarded to women in 2018 was that there was a significant increase in the number of grants awarded granted to women athletes playing in the National Ice Hockey Team. In euros, women received more grants than men in the period 2018–2020. Reforming the grant system in 2025 may have an impact on how grants are allocated between genders in the future.

Figure 1. Athlete grants distributed 1995–2024 (number).

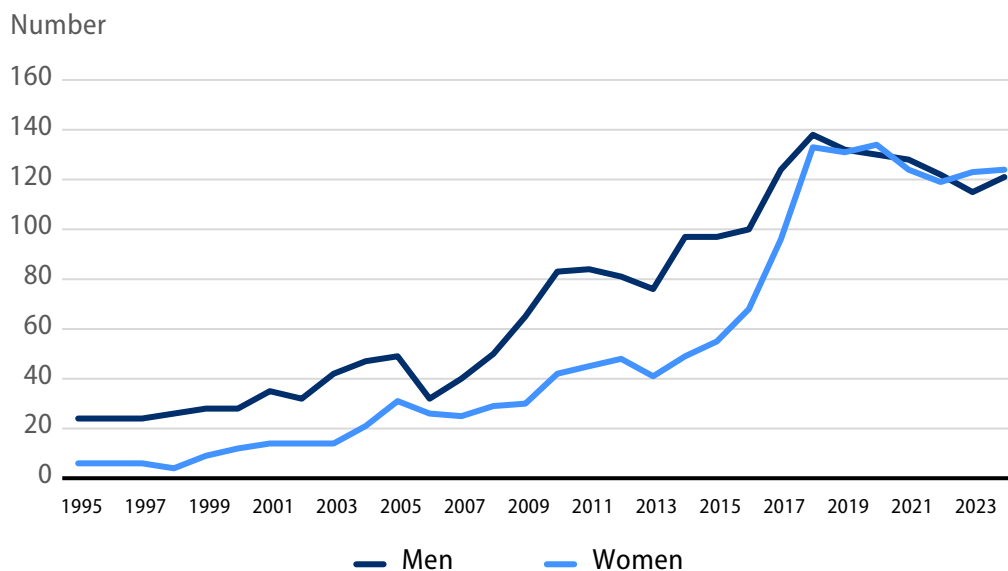
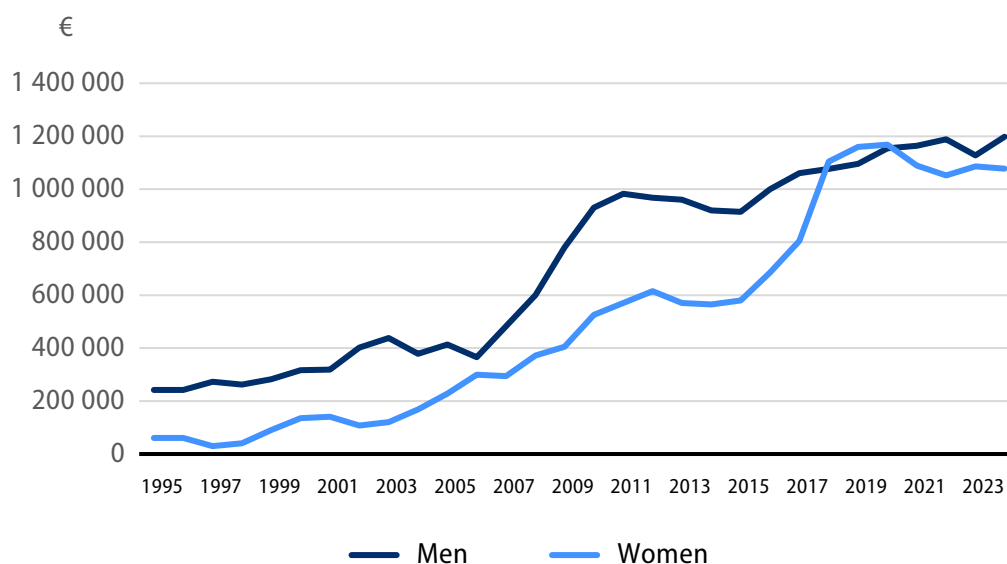


Figure 2. Athlete grants distributed 1995–2024 (€).

5.2 Elite sport success

International success in elite sport between countries is monitored through various ranking systems. These consider Olympic and non-Olympic sports and the broader range of sports. This report uses statistics maintained by the Tahto Center for Finnish Sports Culture on the success of Finnish athletes in major international competitions in the same manner as in the 2022 review (Lehtonen et al. 2022).

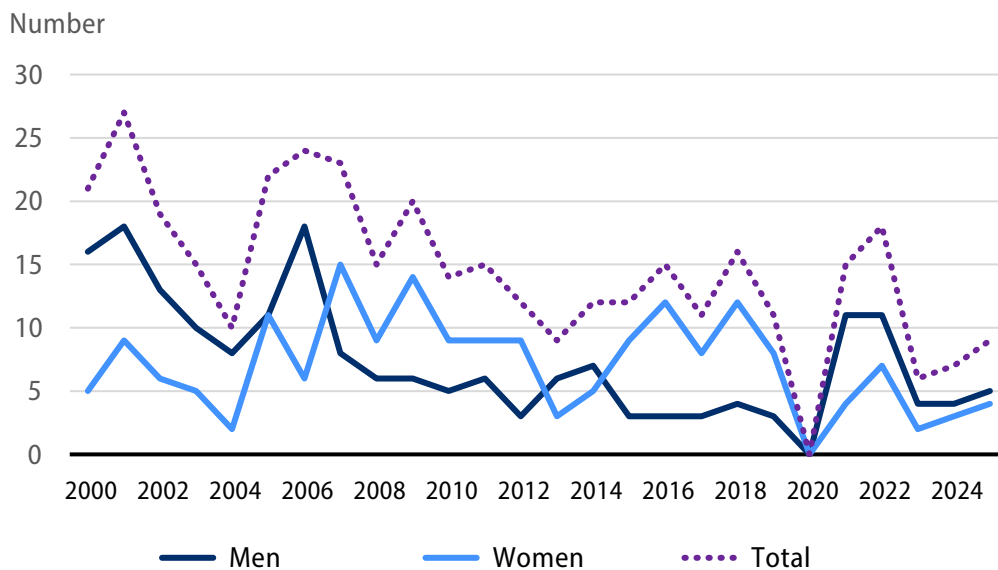
The elite sport success statistics take into account the medals achieved at the Olympic Games, World Championships and European Championships in the sports included in the programme of the next Summer and Winter Olympic Games. The exception to the previous report is that the results of short-track swimming and indoor athletics competitions are no longer recorded. A new practice for monitoring sport success is statistics on top-8 standings, i.e. finishing in the top eight. This statistics on so-called point positions includes not only finishing in the top three as mentioned above but also finishing in positions 4–8. The monitoring of point scoring positions expands the previously used statistics on elite sports success.

In the 2000s, women have achieved a total of 186 medals in Olympic Games, World Championships, or European Championships in the sports included in the Olympics, while men have achieved 192. Figure 3 shows the combined Olympic, World Championship, and European Championship medals won by men and

women in Olympic sports since the 2000s. Overall, it appears that the number of medals achieved has started to decrease at the end of the first decade of the 2000s. Between 2014 and 2019, the number of medals won by Finnish athletes varied between 11 and 16 and increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the past three years (2023–2025), the total number has varied between 6 and 9 medals per year.

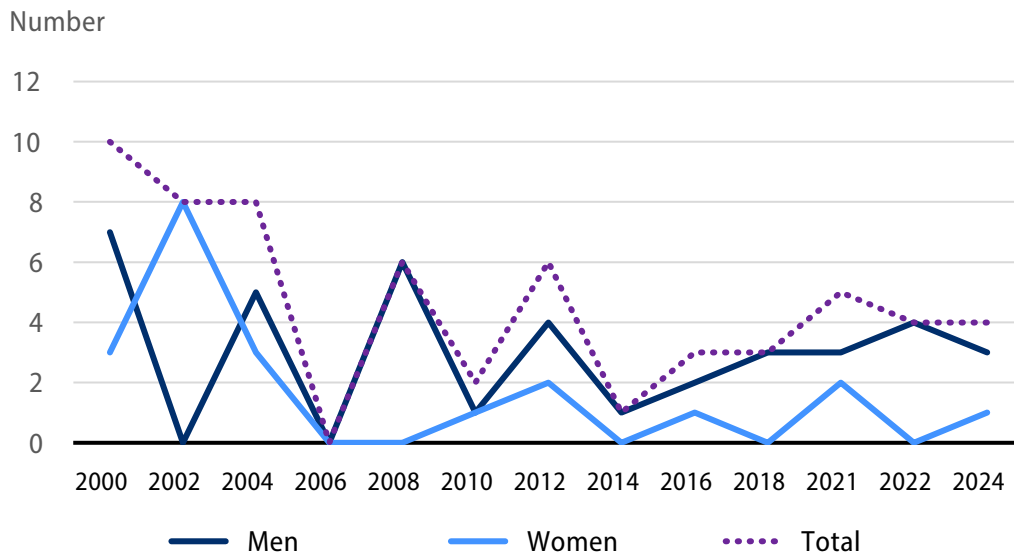
Measured by the number of medals achieved, women’s success in elite sports began to grow in the middle of the first decade of the 2000s. A turning point came in 2007, when women first achieved more medals than men. The next turning point was the COVID-19 pandemic, after which women have had less elite sport success than men based on the number of medals achieved.

Figure 3. Finland’s medals from men’s and women’s Olympic sports 2000–2025. Includes Olympic Games, World Championships, and European Championships (Source: Tahto Center for Finnish Sports Culture 2025, statistics by 23 October 2025).



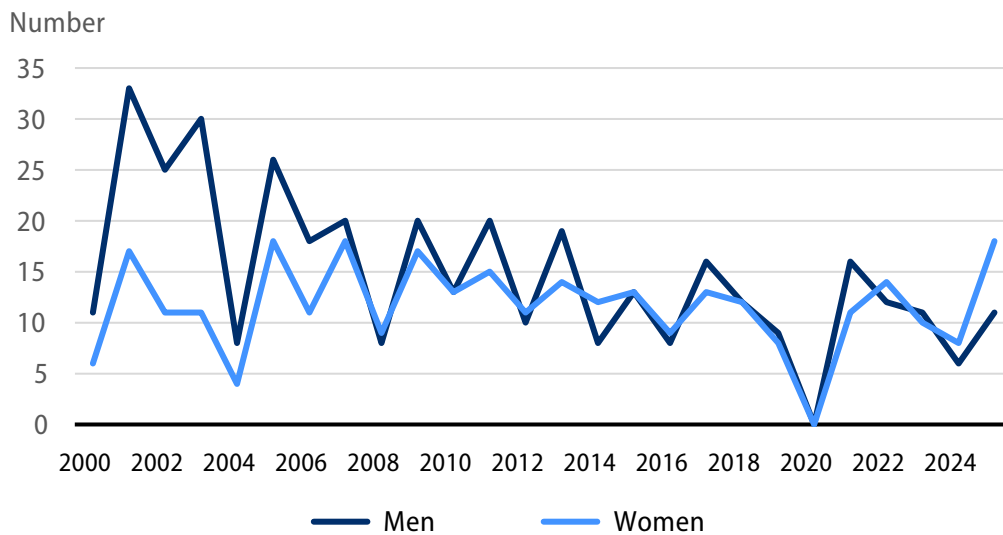
The medals achieved in the Paralympics in 2000–2024 (Figure 4) have been recorded in the statistics on paraspports. Statistics show that the number of medals has decreased and the total number of medals won by women has been lower than that of men in almost all the years monitored.

Figure 4. Medals won by Finnish athletes in the Paralympic Games 2000–2024. (Source: Tahto Center for Finnish Sports Culture 2025, statistics by 23 October 2025).



In 2000–2025, women athletes achieved 44% of Finland’s top-8 finishing places. The difference in the number of top points attained by men and women is biggest in the early 2000s (Figure 5). In the 2010s, the difference was significantly smaller or there was no difference at all annually. In addition, based on the examination of the top-8 places, there have been no differences in women’s and men’s success in elite sport success in the post-COVID-19 period compared to the examination of medals achieved.

Figure 5. Top-8 finishes by men and women in Olympic Games and the World Championships 2000–2025. (Source: Tahto Center for Finnish Sports Culture 2025, statistics by 23 October 2025).



5.3 Coaches

There is no detailed information or statistics on the total number of coaches operating in competitive and elite sport and more extensively in the sports sector in Finland. However, based on various data sets, surveys and professional organisation estimates can be made on the total number of coaches and the development of gender equality in coaching.

Statistics Finland also reports on the number and gender distribution of sports coaches in its employment statistics. In 2023, the register's professional category "Sports coaches, instructors and officials" had a total of 3,422 people. Based on the register data, it can be assumed that the number of professional coaches has increased quite dramatically, as, for example, a total of 1,667 people were in the register ten years ago in 2015. Over the years, women have accounted for roughly just over one third of the people listed in the occupational category. In the most recent reporting year, i.e. 2023, the share of women was 37%, which is higher than at the beginning of the decade (e.g. in 2011–2012, the share of women was 32%). However, the development has not been linear. An example is the rise in the share of women close to around or above 40% in the second half of the 2010s. Starting from 2019, the proportion of women has remained close to 37%. (Tilastokeskus 2025b.)

The Finnish Institute of High Performance Sport KIHU conducted extensive coach surveys in 2009 and 2019 (Blomqvist et al. 2019). The data for the 2019 report were collected with a survey, to which 2,765 coaches representing 61 sports responded. Survey respondents included voluntary, part-time, and full-time coaches. The majority of respondents were men (67%). The share of women who responded to the survey increased by 4 percentage points (33%) compared to 2009. As there is no precise knowledge of the total number of Finnish coaches, the representativeness of the data could not be assessed and the share of women among the respondents is not necessarily equal to the total number of female coaches in Finland.

The share of woman coaches was clearly higher in a survey conducted for coaches in parasport. Of the coaches (n=119) that responded to the parasport coach survey conducted by Mononen and Blomqvist (2023), a slightly higher share were men (59%) than women (41%). Just over half of the respondents were in the 50–59 age range (31%) or 60 and over (23%). Respondents aged 40–49 accounted for 21%, those aged 30–39 for 17% and those aged under 30 for 8%. A larger proportion of women coaches were under 40 years of age (39%) compared to male coaches (14%). The majority (41%) of male coaches, on the other hand, were in the 50–59 age group. In the survey, the term para-athletes referred to physically disabled, visually disabled, intellectually disabled, hearing-impaired and deaf athletes as well as organ transplant athletes of all ages and levels. Despite the title, a paracoach referred to all instructors and coaches who participated in guiding or coaching para-athletes.

In autumn 2023, Wikström et al. (2023) carried out a survey for women currently working as coaches in Finland or women who had previously worked as coaches. In addition to background information, the survey focused on information such as coaching experience and training, the stages of a person's coaching career and factors that enable and prevent a coaching career. In addition, the survey included a section for coaches who participated in the Coach Like a Woman projects. A total of 370 coaches responded to the survey, four out of five of whom reported that they were in coaching positions at the time they responded. Approximately half of the respondents had one to six years of coaching experience. Nine out of ten had a competitive sports background, and half had competed at the national level.

According to the results, the majority of respondents (42%) carried out their primary coaching assignments on a voluntary basis at the time of the survey. More than one third (36%) worked in their position part-time (less than 20 hours a week). The respondents mainly coached athletes that competed recreationally (65%) and at the national level (67%). A quarter of the respondents coached athletes who competed internationally. Four out of five respondents stated that a sport club was their main operating environment. (Wikström et al. 2023.)

Respondents were asked to assess whether gender equality is realised in different operating environments related to coaching. Less than half of the respondents believed that gender equality is realised in media visibility, financial resources, and rewards. A slightly higher number (61–68%) believed that gender equality is realised in how coaches are valued, information sharing, support for coaching, payment of training, and career advancement opportunities. Gender equality was felt to be most fully realised in training conditions, in the appreciation shown for coaches, and in the encouragement to participate in trainings (73–80%). (Ibid.)

Based on the questions related to the assessment of the Coach Like a Woman initiative organised by the Finnish Coaches Association, more than one in ten (13%) of the respondents had participated in the project. The largest number of respondents had participated in regional (51%) and sport-specific meetings (47%) and meetings with top coaches (32%). More than one third of the respondents had participated in multi-sport mentoring groups (34%). Overall, the project measures were found to have had a significant or very significant impact on accessing new coaching networks (57%), self-confidence (47%) and development as a coach (45%). (Ibid.)

The respondents felt that the project had supported their development as a coach a lot or very much with the help of the following factors assessed as most common: networking with the help of other coaches (47%), self-confidence as a coach (47%) and identification of one's own competence (45%). 43% of the respondents agreed somewhat or completely with the fact that the project has contributed positively to appreciation of women's coaching. One third did not agree or disagree and one quarter disagreed with the statement to some extent or completely. (Wikström et al. 2023.)

Finnish Coaches Association and SAVAL

The total number and gender distribution of coaches can also be examined using membership data from professional organisations. The Finnish Coaches Association (2025) describes the purpose of their activities on their website as follows: The Finnish Coaches Association is an association whose mission is to promote, among other things, coaches' competences, appreciation for coaches and communality. The Finnish Coaches Association is the captain of a team of sports coaches, who brings the team together and helps its members to develop their skills, succeed and gain recognition. Any person involved in sports coaching may become a member. Also an organization, which takes care of its coaches and their competence can become a member.

Over the past few years, the membership of the Finnish Coaches Association has fallen by almost 500, but the share of women among the members has increased. In 2020, the total number of members was 3,618, of which 93 were organisation members. Women accounted for 31% of the members. (Finnish Coaches Association 2020.) Four years later, at the end of 2024, the total number of members was 3,161, of which 112 were organisation members. In 2024, approximately one third of the association's members were women (36%) and two thirds were men (64%). The majority (82%) of its members were aged 30–69. (Finnish Coaches Association 2024.)

The Professional Coaches of Finland (SAVAL) is a service and lobbying organisation for coaches that is part of a larger employees' association, the Association for Privat Sector Managers and Professionals (YTY). SAVAL is also a Finnish Coaches Association member organisation. The number of SAVAL members increased by 244 between 2016 and 2021, and the total number of members in 2021 was 1,191. At that time, women accounted for 29% of the members (see Lehtonen et al. 2022). Compared to 2024, the number of members has remained almost unchanged (1,170), as has the share of women (28%) (Nieminen 2025).

5.4 Inappropriate behaviour

The fourth chapter of this report presented research findings on inappropriate behaviour in sport and physical activity hobbies. As a rule, however, the results of these studies have not been reported in a manner that specifies whether the issues are in competitive sport or other types of physical activity and sport. On the other hand, the Finnish Center for Integrity in Sports (FINCIS) has compiled reports on harassment and inappropriate treatment in competitive sport.

The reports have concerned both specific sports or groups of sports and Finnish competitive sports more extensively. For example, slightly less than half of the athletes and coaches who responded to the study on skating sports had experienced or observed bullying during their careers. In relative terms, the number of people who had experienced bullying did not differ much between men and women. One in four respondents had experienced or observed sexual or gender-based harassment. Women had experienced and observed sexual and gender-based harassment more often than men. (FINCIS 2020.) A similar observation was also made in a study on the experiences of players playing in the national football and ice hockey teams. Based on study, experiences of sexual or gender-based harassment were clearly more common among women and girl players than among men and boy players. (Hentunen et al. 2018.)

The reports concerning specific sports or groups of sports have been commissioned by the relevant sport federations. In 2020, FINCIS published a survey which investigated sexual and gender-based harassment in Finnish competitive sports more extensively. A total of more than 9,000 athletes from 48 sport federations responded to the survey. Approximately one in four respondents had experienced sexual harassment in sports activities in the past five years. Almost one in three women and nearly one in five men had experienced sexual harassment. 14 % of the respondents had experienced gender-based harassment. Women (23%) had also experienced gender-based harassment clearly more often than men (3%). (Lahti et al. 2020).

According to the study, the persons responsible for the harassment mostly represented the male gender. Of the men who had experienced sexual harassment, two thirds reported that the person who had harassed them was male. Just under five percent reported that the offender was a woman. Almost one in four (23%) reported having experienced sexual harassment from both men and women. 55% of women who had experienced sexual harassment reported that they had been harassed by a man. 12% of women reported that they has been harassed by a woman. Just under a third said they had experienced harassment from both men and women. In terms of gender-based harassment, the figures varied slightly, but were generally similar to those of sexual harassment where the offender was more commonly a man. (Lahti et al. 2020).

In 2022, FINCIS published a study on the positive and negative experiences of athletes in Finnish competitive sports. In addition to sexual and gender-based harassment, the study also examined experiences of bullying, physical violence, unequal and discriminatory behaviour, irresponsible actions and other inappropriate behaviour. Other forms of inappropriate behaviour include 'unjust criticism', 'opinions have been ignored' and 'silent treatment'. One third of respondents had not experienced any of the above-mentioned forms of inappropriate treatment. In other words, two thirds had experienced some form of inappropriate treatment in sport in the three years preceding the survey. (Kaski et al. 2022.)

According to the study, women had experienced more of all forms of inappropriate treatment than men except physical violence and the form of other inappropriate behaviour "I have been laughed at". There were nearly as many women and men among those who had experienced these. For example, 86% of those who had experienced sexual harassment and 93% of those who had experienced gender-based harassment were women. According to the study, gender affected all forms of inappropriate treatment, with the exception of "other inappropriate actions".

Women were in a risk group for sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, bullying, unfair and discriminatory behaviour and irresponsible actions. For example, women's risk of reporting on their experiences of sexual harassment was six times higher and those of gender-based harassment up to 27 times higher. The male gender was a more statistically significant risk factor in physical violence, and the risk of men experiencing physical violence in sport was double that of women. (Kaski et al. 2022.)

It is noteworthy that experiences of sexual and gender-based harassment were considerably less common compared to the previous study by the FINCIS. In a survey published in 2022, 5% of respondents had experienced sexual harassment and 12.5% had experienced gender-based harassment, compared to 26% and 14% in a survey published in 2020. In the 2022 study, the possible reasons for these differences were believed to be active intervention in abuse, public debate and that athletes spoke up about the topic and their experiences. On the other hand, it was also noted that the datasets used did not necessarily consist of the same respondents. (Kaski et al. 2022.)

In addition to the inappropriate behaviour that happens face-to-face, increasing attention has also been paid in recent years to the inappropriate behaviour experienced by athletes online. This phenomenon is also visible in reports by FINCIS, in which the role of the public, fans, and social media followers as perpetrators of in particular sexual and gender-based harassment has been identified (Kaski et al. 2022; Lahti et al. 2020).

Some women athletes have brought the phenomenon to light by sharing their own experiences of harassment (e.g. Ruotsalainen 2024; Suvinen 2023). In Turtiainen's (2024) study, the majority of players in the Finnish women's football team reported that they had experienced some kind of harassment on social media platforms. Harassment has included, for example, offensive messages, defamatory comments, or threats. In addition to messages related to appearance and those that sometimes meet the characteristics of sexual harassment, the content of defamatory messages have also referred to the players' skills in their sport or, more collectively, to football played by women in general.

According to Turtiainen, the purpose of such comments is to discriminate against women's sport and to create a hegemonic masculinity, a hierarchical gender system and the creation of social media spaces that foster hetero and cis normative views, i.e. questioning women's agency in the male-dominated sports sector in general. Although some players ignore the harassment they have experienced or even make online harassment visible by outing the perpetrators, the primary responsibility for

making structural and operational changes required to prevent online harassment should, according to Turtiainen, be assumed by sport organisations and media companies. (Turtiainen 2024.)

Although ethical problems in sport are still considered in part to be the result of factors outside sport (e.g. Oja 2024b), research has also focused on the characteristics associated with competitive and elite sport, which may expose athletes in these to different types of unethical activity (e.g. Overbye 2013). This perspective is also supported by a study by Muhonen et al. (2024), in which they examined the connection between athletic identity and the emotional abuse they have been subjected to by the coach. The study found a statistically significant link between experienced and observed emotional abuse and athletic identity (Muhonen et al. 2024). The results can be interpreted in such a way that strong identification with an ethic that emphasises success and performance in competitive and elite sport can expose people to experiences of emotional abuse.

From the gender perspective, the research conducted by Muhonen et al. reinforces the observations made by FINCIS that female athletes are at a higher risk of having to experience inappropriate treatment than male athletes. According to the study, women but also non-binary athletes reported having experienced and observed more emotional abuse than male athletes. (Muhonen et al. 2024.)

5.5 Summary

- The reforms made by the Ministry of Education and Culture to grants for elite athletes may lead to such things as the distribution of athletes' grants between genders not following the same trends as in recent years.
- There is no significant gender gap in international elite sport success between women and men when the indicator is success in Olympic sports.
- The share of women among the members of the Finnish Coaches Association has increased slightly between 2020 and 2024, and nowadays more than one third of the members are women. On the other hand, during the same period, the association's total number of members has decreased. The number of members in the Professional Coaches of Finland has remained unchanged, as has the share of women (28%).

- The general fragmentation and randomness of coach statistics continues to restrict the high-quality implementation of gender equality monitoring, if the examination includes, for example, the number of men and women in different coaching tasks.
- Being a woman is a significant risk factor for experiencing different forms of inappropriate behaviour in competitive sport.

6 Decision-making and leadership

The promotion of gender equality in decision-making and management has been a key development target for gender equality in Finnish physical activity and sport in recent decades. Related statistics have been compiled since the 1990s. This report discusses equality in decision-making and management from the perspectives of the public sport administration and third-sector organisations. The gender distribution of board members, board chairpersons and operational directors at third-sector national and regional sport organisations is examined as are the changes that have taken place in these.

The 2011 and 2017 gender equality reports also examined the gender distribution of the leading municipal office holders in the area of sport and physical activity. However, the 2017 report already drew attention to changes in the way statistics are compiled and the expanded range of titles of municipal office holders responsible for physical activity and sport (Turpeinen & Hakamäki 2018). In municipalities, activities included in the field of physical activity and sport can fall under technical, cultural, recreational, wellbeing, or educational services. Although it is possible to collect gender-disaggregated information on municipal employees by title, it is not always possible to determine directly from it whether a person's work is within the scope of sport services. This makes comparisons at the municipal level inaccurate. (Lehtonen et al. 2022) As in the 2021 report, municipal comparisons have also been excluded from the examination in this report.

6.1 Public sports administration

When examining the equality of public sport administration, the relevant legislation must be taken into account. The Act on Equality between Women and Men contains provisions on the composition of general government and bodies exercising public authority. Pursuant to the act, "The proportion of both women and men in government committees, advisory boards and other corresponding bodies, and in municipal bodies and bodies established for the purpose of intermunicipal cooperation, but excluding municipal councils, must be at least 40 per cent, unless there are special reasons to the contrary." (Act on Equality between Women and Men 1986/609).

For the duration of the parliamentary term, the Government appoints the National Sports Council, which acts as an expert body of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The statutory duty of the Sports Council is to address broad and principled issues related to physical activity, assess the impact of government measures in the field of sport, make initiatives and proposals for the development of sport, and provide statements on the use of sport appropriations within its administrative sector (Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity 390/2015).

The gender distribution of National Sports Council members can be described as fairly even. The National Sports Council's chairperson is a man. The deputy chairpersons are a woman and a man. The council comprises six men and four women. The council has two sections: the Research and Evaluation section and the Foresight, Future and Equality section. Both sections are chaired by women. The sections comprise eight men and eight women. The secretaries for both sections are men.

At the regional level, the physical activity measures of the Regional State Administrative Agencies aim to promote the physically active lifestyle, well-being, work ability and functional capacity of the population. There are a total of six Regional State Administrative Agencies, each of which also has a regional sport council. The Councils are responsible, among other things, for issuing statements on the funding plans for projects to establish sport facilities and on grants for the costs of setting up sport facilities. (Aluehallintovirasto, n.d.) At the time of the review, i.e. in late spring 2025, 61% of the members of regional sport councils were men. Four of the chairpersons for the councils were men and two were women.

The gender quota laid down in the Act on Equality Between Women and Men does not apply, for example, to the gender distribution of officials working at the Ministry of Education and Culture. In autumn 2025, six women and five men worked in the area of responsibility of physical activity and sport at the Ministry of Education and Culture. The National Sports Council's secretariat was made up of two men and one woman. Nine women and seven men worked as Senior Officers, Inspectors, Senior Planning Officers or Planning Officers at the Regional State Administrative Agencies Sports Division.

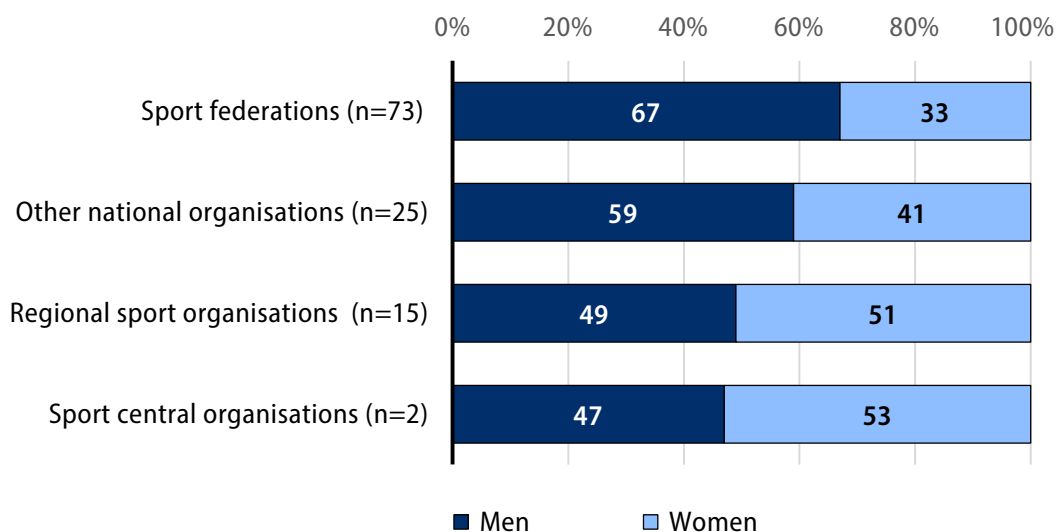
6.2 Third-sector sport organisations

The boards of third-sector sport organisations (n=115) have a total of 1,035 members, of whom 644 (62%) are men. The board's gender distributions vary by organisation group. The share of women is largest in sport central organisations (Finnish Olympic Committee and Finnish Paralympic Committee); 53% of their

board members are women. Slightly more than half of the board members of regional sport organisations are women. In other national sport organisations promoting physical activity and sport, 41% of board members are women. The share of women is the smallest on the boards of sport federations. 33% of their members are women. (Figure 6).

The latest data on the gender distributions of the boards of sport organisations have been obtained from general grant applications of third-sector organisations promoting physical activity and sport collected by the Ministry of Education and Culture for 2025. Thus, the information has been reported by the organisations themselves. The organisations submitted their applications for general grants to the Ministry in October–November 2024. In these application they describe the situation at the time in question. The general grant forms are not used for collecting information on the gender distribution of the board chairs or operational directors of organisations. This information was collected manually from the organisations' websites in spring 2025. The division of organisations follows the method used by the Ministry of Education and Culture to divide organisations into sport federations, regional sport organisations, other national organisations promoting physical activity and sport and sport central organisations. In the general grant form, it is also possible to select "other" as the gender of board members. The gender option "other" is taken into account in data collection, but for data protection reasons it is not presented in the review of organisations by group in this report.

Figure 6. Gender distribution in sport organisation boards in 2024 (%).



According to the rules of the Finnish Olympic Committee (2023), a maximum of 60 per cent of the members of its board may be of one gender. This rule applies to the association's own board and thus does not extend to the activities of its member associations, unlike, for example, in Sweden, where, according to the rules of Riksidrottsförbundet, which is the umbrella organisation for physical activity and sport, its member sport federations must specify in their own rules that their board must comprise at least 40% of both genders if the board consists of at least four persons (Riksidrottsförbundet 2023).

In other words, within the framework of its current rules, the Olympic Committee has no control over the compositions of its member associations, such as the boards of sport federations. In general, in the case of sport organisations, two fundamental rights, such as equality and freedom of association, may conflict. The organisation may organise its affairs as it wishes. Different treatment of genders based on the autonomy of associations is possible, for example, when accepting people as members, if this is provided for in the association's rules. (e.g. Tasa-arvoaltuutettu 2009.)

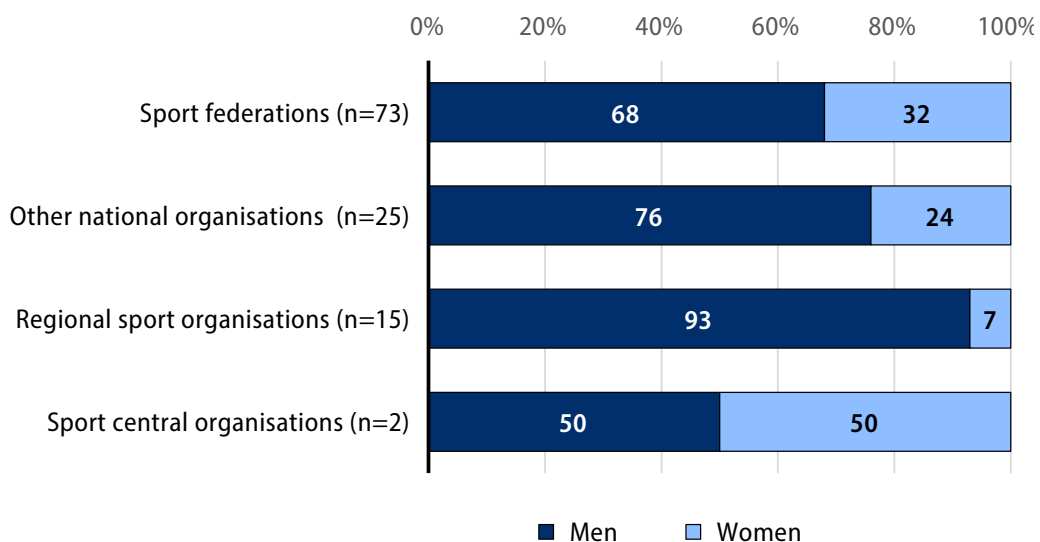
The aforementioned maximum 60% share of representatives from one gender in the organisation's board is realised in slightly more than one third of all sport organisations (Table 5). This is realised in 73% of regional sport organisations, 52% of other national organisations promoting physical activity and sport, and 22% of sport federations. The boards of six sport federations had no women on them. One sport federation had a board entirely made up of women.

Table 5. Third-sector sport organisations classified by the gender distribution of their board in 2024.

Gender distribution of the organisation's board	Number of organisations	Share of all organisations (%)
The share of women is over 60%	15	13
Maximum share of the majority gender is 60%	42	37
The share of men is over 60%	58	50

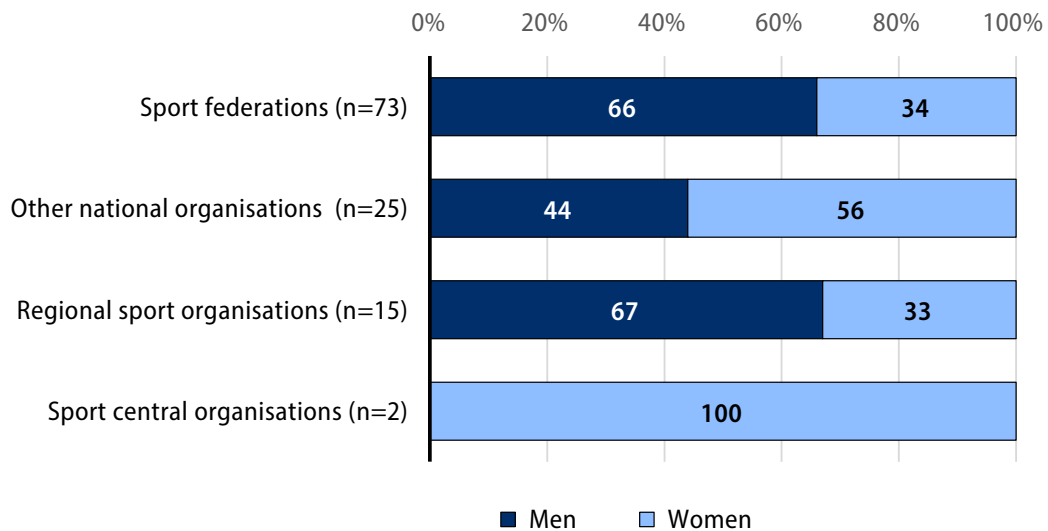
Slightly more than a quarter (27%) of the board chairpersons for sport organisations are women. With the exception of sport central organisations, the share of women as chairpersons is highest in sport federations, where women act as chairs by slightly less than one in three (32%) federations. Approximately one quarter (24%) of the chairpersons of other national organisations promoting physical activity and sport are women. In relative terms, the share of women as chairpersons is lowest in regional sport organisations, of which only one is chaired by a woman. The Finnish Olympic Committee is chaired by a man and the Finnish Paralympic Committee by a woman. (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Gender distribution among the chairpersons of third-sector sport organisation boards in 2025 (%).



The gender distribution of the operational directors of sport organisations is more even than that of the chairs of the boards. Women account for 40% of the operational directors of all organisations. However, there is fluctuation by organisation group: women account for 56% of the operational directors in other national organisations promoting physical activity, for 34% in sport federations and 33% in regional sport organisations. The operational director of the Olympic Committee and the Paralympic Committee at the time of the examination, i.e. in spring 2025, were both women (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Gender distribution among the operational directors of third-sector sport organisations in 2025 (%).

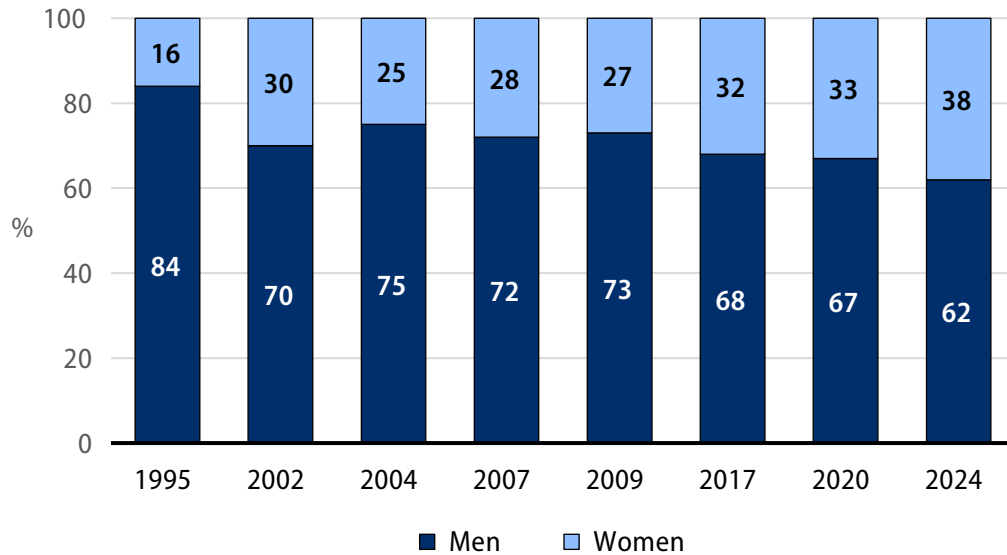


The job titles of the operational directors of the organisations were the Managing Director, Executive Director, Secretary General, Head of Organisation, Development Manager, and Regional Director. In the organisations whose websites did not contain information on a separate employed operational director, the chairperson of the organisation was entered as the operational director.

Since 1995, statistics have been compiled on the gender distribution of the boards, chairpersons of the boards and operational directors of sport organisations. With the exception of recent years, the collection of data has not been systematic or regular. In addition, structural changes in the field of sport and physical activity, such as mergers of national organisations, have changed the breakdowns used in statistics. Nevertheless, the collected data can be considered accurate enough to describe the change in the gender distribution of the boards, board chairpersons, and operational directors of sport organisations.

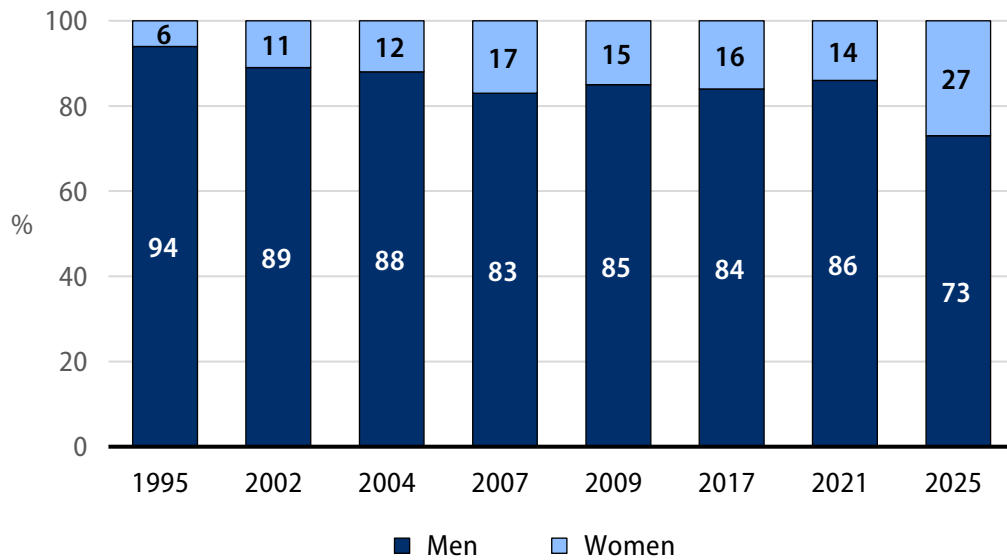
During the period under review, the share of women acting as board members in sport organisations has increased from 16% to 38% (Figure 9). The most significant change took place from the 1990s to the beginning of the 2000s. The previous gender equality report presented the gender distributions of the boards of sport organisations until 2020. After this, the share of women has increased by one or two percentage points each time the statistics have been compiled (Liikunnan järjestötietokanta 2025).

Figure 9. Share of men and women among board members of third-sector sport organisations, 1995–2024 (%).



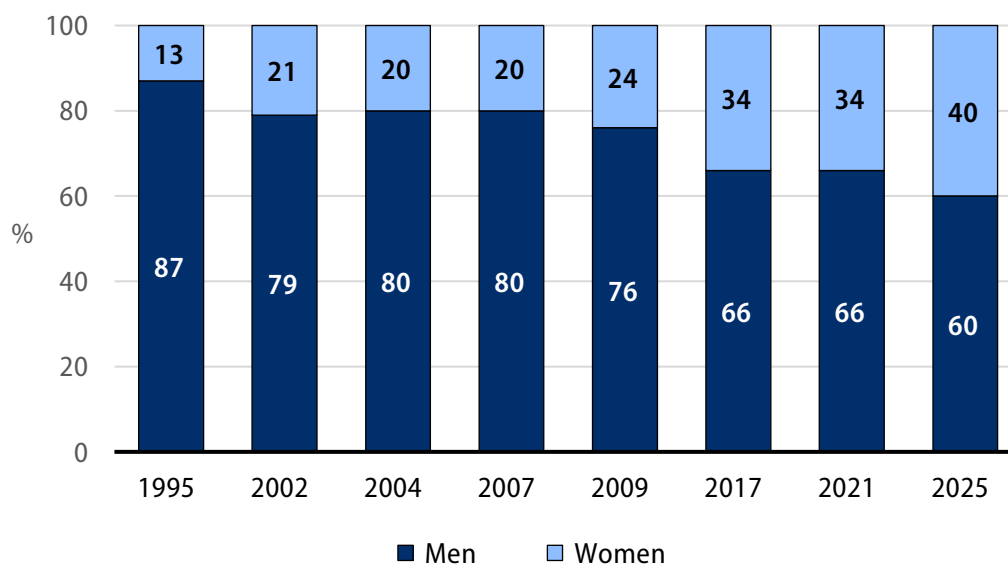
Between 1995 and 2025, the share of women serving as chairpersons of sport organisations has increased from 6% to 27% (Figure 10). In the previous gender equality report, the most up-to-date information on the gender distribution of chairpersons was from 2021. At that time, it was rightly interpreted that the share of women acting as chairperson of the board in organisations had not increased in practice during the 21st century. (Lehtonen et al. 2022) However, changes have taken place after this, especially on the basis of the last three times statistics were compiled (Liikunnan järjestötietokanta 2025).

Figure 10. Share of men and women among chairpersons of third-sector sport organisations, 1995–2025 (%).



During the period under review, the share of women acting as operational directors in sport organisations has increased from 13% to 40%. The greatest leaps in the share of women have taken place between 1995 and 2002 and between 2009 and 2017. In the first decade of the 21st century, the share of women employed as operational leaders remained fairly stable. From 2009, the share of women has increased by 16 percentage points. (Figure 11).

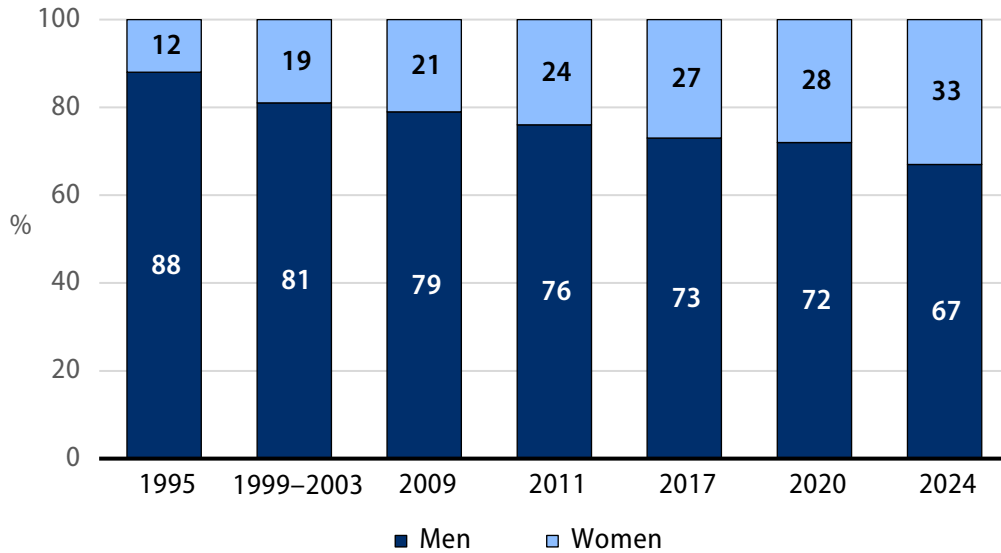
Figure 11. Share of men and women among the operational directors of third-sector sport organisations, 1995–2025 (%).



When examining the gender distribution of the members of the boards in sport organisations, the chairpersons of the boards and operational directors, the focus is on the proportion of sport federations, as their number is considerably higher than that of other organisations. Due to changes in the classification of organisations, there is no itemised follow-up material available on other organisations. On the other hand, the gender distribution of persons in management positions in sport federations has been monitored since the 1990s.

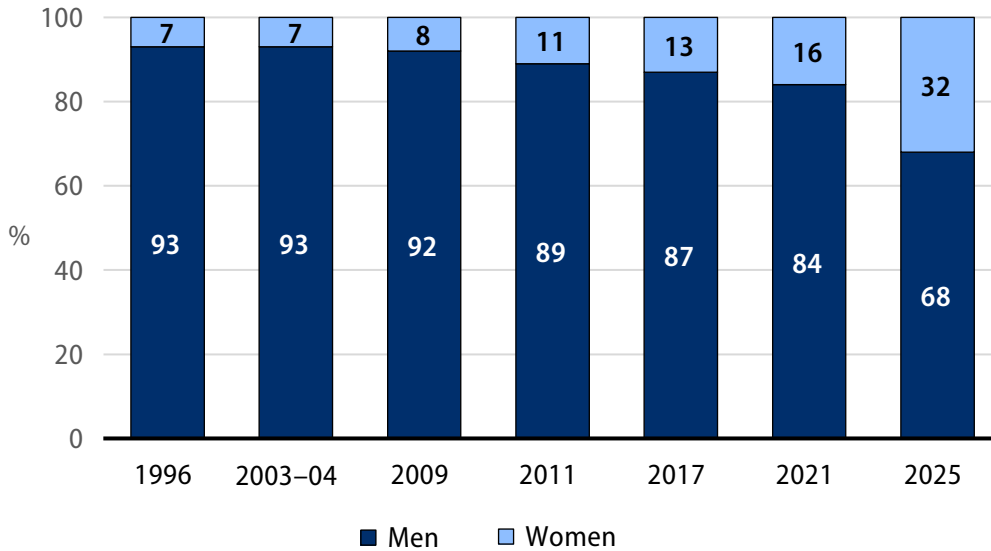
The share of women acting as board members in sport federations has increased from 12% to 33% between 1995 and 2024. Unlike in sport organisations as a whole, the share of women acting as board members has grown fairly consistently over the years. Over the past fifteen years, the share of women has increased by 12 percentage points. (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Share of men and women among sport federations' board members, 1995–2024 (%).



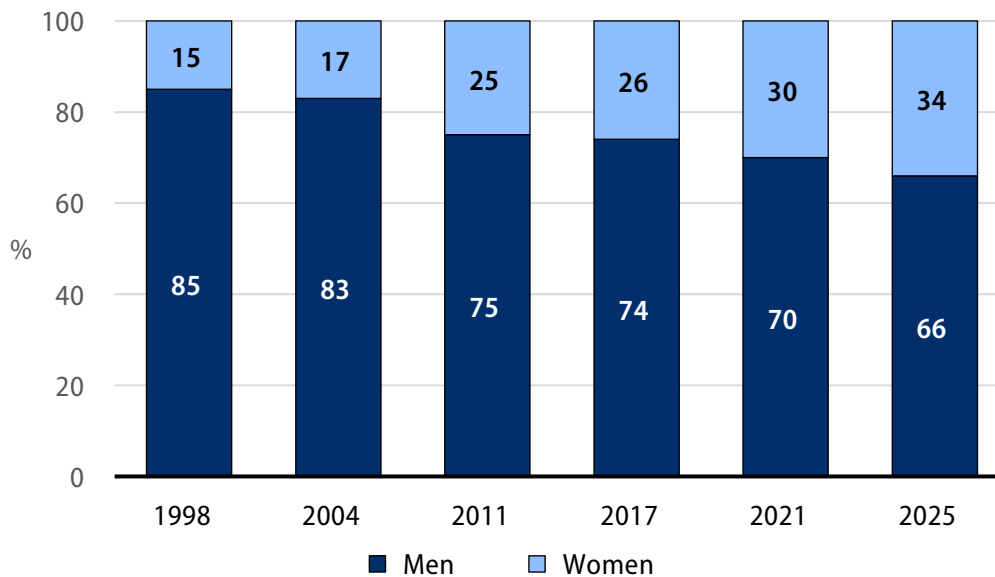
The amount of women acting as chairpersons of sport federations is relatively higher than in sport organisations in general. During the thirty-year review period, the share of women acting as chairpersons has increased from 7% to 32%. The biggest change has taken place in the last few years. Between 2021 and 2025, the share of women acting as sport federation chairpersons doubled when measured in percentage points. (Figure 13). It is still too early to assess whether such a major change is permanent or a deviation in a longer-term review. However, this is not just a one-time compilation of statistics, as the share of women acting as chairpersons of sport federations was also higher than before in the previous two years (22% and 27%, Liikunnan järjestötietokanta 2025).

Figure 13. Share of men and women among sport federations’ board chairpersons, 1996–2025 (%).



The gender distribution of the operational directors of sport federations is also following the longer-term trend similar to the gender distribution of the board members and chairpersons of the federations. Since the late 1990s, the share of women has increased from 15% to 34%. Since the publication of the previous gender equality report, there has been an increase of four percentage points. (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Share of men and women among sport federations’ operational directors, 1998–2025 (%).



The gender distribution of the members of the boards at sport organisations, the chairpersons of the boards and operational directors has also been monitored internationally in projects funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe. In the 2024 data collection, information was gathered on the gender distribution of the board chairpersons, deputy chairpersons, board members and operational directors of the national Olympic Committees, Paralympic Committees and the Olympic and/or Paralympic Federations in 21 countries.

The data are not fully comparable with the data presented in this report. For example, 25 organisations from Finland participated in the data collection, which is considerably smaller number than was included in this report. In the materials of the All in project, women accounted for the largest share of the chairpersons (45%) and board members (49%) of the Olympic and/or Paralympic sport federations in Sweden. The share of women employed as operational directors was highest in Kosovo (55%). The share of women acting as board chairpersons of sport federations (26%) in Finland ranked fourth, the share of women as board members (38%) ranked fifth, and the share of women as operational directors (39%) ranked second highest. Taking into account all countries involved in the data collection, the share of women among the board chairpersons of the federations was 12%, women accounted for 30% of the board members and 23% of operational directors. (All In Plus 2025.)

In other words, Finland does well in international comparisons. Even from a national perspective, many sport organisations are near or have already achieved the goal of women accounting for 40% of the decision-makers in organisations. In the case of board members, only sport federations have not achieved this. However, the share of women acting as board members of the federations has grown steadily. The gender distribution of the chairpersons of organisation boards is the most uneven. In this category, too, the share of women has generally increased, especially in recent years.

International targets for promoting gender equality in decision-making in sport have become stricter. In its 2022 report, the European Commission's High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport also issued recommendation related to leadership and management. One of the recommendations concerned equal representation of the genders. According to the recommendation, a quota of 50% women should be applied to decision-making bodies at all levels. (European Commission 2022a). Although the idea behind the principle of equal representation is to increase the number of women in leadership positions in sport, it can be considered at least partly problematic, for example, from the perspective of gender minorities.

6.3 Sport clubs

The gender distribution in the decision-making bodies of Finnish sport clubs has been examined as part of a sport club survey conducted every ten years. The survey was last carried out in 2016. At that time, it was found that 40% of the board members at the 835 clubs who responded to the survey were women. This share was slightly higher than in 2006, when women accounted for about one third of board members at clubs. On the other hand, in 1996 the share of women was 38 per cent, which was fairly close to the 2016 level. (Koski & Mäenpää 2018, 57–58.)

On the other hand, more consistent development can be observed in the proportion of women acting as club chairpersons. In the 1986 data, 13% of club chairpersons were women. In 1996, the share had risen to 17% and ten years later to 20%. Based on the latest data collected in 2016, 26% of club chairpersons were women. It was noteworthy that the proportion of women was higher, especially among younger chairpersons. (Koski & Mäenpää 2018, 60.)

No similar datasets on the gender distribution of club board members or chairpersons have been collected after 2016. Compared to sport organisations, monitoring is hindered in particular by the large number of clubs and practical problems related to the implementation of systematic and uniform data collection.

6.4 Summary

- The gender distribution of people working in the area responsible for physical activity and sport at the Ministry of Education and Culture, in the Regional State Administrative Agencies' Division for Sport and for the National Sports Council is fairly even.
- Over the past 15 years, the share women among board members, chairpersons of the board, and operational directors of sport organisations has grown.
- In particular, the proportion of women acting as chairperson of the board for sport organisations has increased in recent years. Growth has taken place especially in sport federations.
- Even so, men still account for the majority of members of the board, board chairpersons, and operational directors in sport organisations. Gender distributions vary by organisation group.

- The share of women is the smallest on the boards of sport federations. Even so, the share of women on the boards of sport federations has continuously increased.

7 Developing gender equality in sports and physical activity

Actors in the sport sector can also promote gender equality through individual projects. Projects may focus exclusively on equality, in which case an individual organisation or other actor takes targeted and goal-oriented measures to promote equality, or development may be based on meeting the cross-cutting criteria included in the terms and conditions of discretionary government grants. Actors in the sport and physical activity sector can thus either plan and implement development measures related to gender equality on their own initiative, or the promotion is obligatory when applying for a grant.

This chapter reviews the following Ministry of Education and Culture-granted grants and projects from the perspective of promoting equality: national physical activity development projects, development grants for sport clubs and local physical activity development projects.

Development projects funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture from the perspective of equality

Between 2019 and 2025, the Ministry of Education and Culture has allocated a total of EUR 1.3 million in special subsidies to national and regional sport organisations for 19 projects aiming to develop gender equality. Grants may have been awarded to the same organisation several times, for example for two-year or three-year projects. The themes of the projects included promoting physical activity among women with an immigrant background, equality work in individual sports, development of network activities, promoting swimming skills, and seminar arrangements. In addition, the ministry has also distributed grants for projects focused on knowledge-based management and research projects related to promoting gender equality in sport and physical activity. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2025c.)

In the broader framework of civic activity in sport, the grants granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture mainly prioritise national and regional sport organisations. The club development grant allocated to local sport clubs since 1999 can be considered as an exception. Before 2013, sport organisations were responsible for distributing grants, and from 2013 onwards, the Ministry of

Education and Culture has been responsible for the application and distribution process. Promoting equal and accessible opportunities for recreational activities has been one of the most common objectives promoted in club grant projects. (Lehtonen et al. 2024.) For example, this had been selected as an objective to be promoted in 91% of projects that were given grants in 2020 (n=358). However, a more detailed analysis of project applications showed that the objective was described in a fairly general or vague manner in numerous applications, and measures promoting the objective were not always highlighted. (Oja et al. 2020)

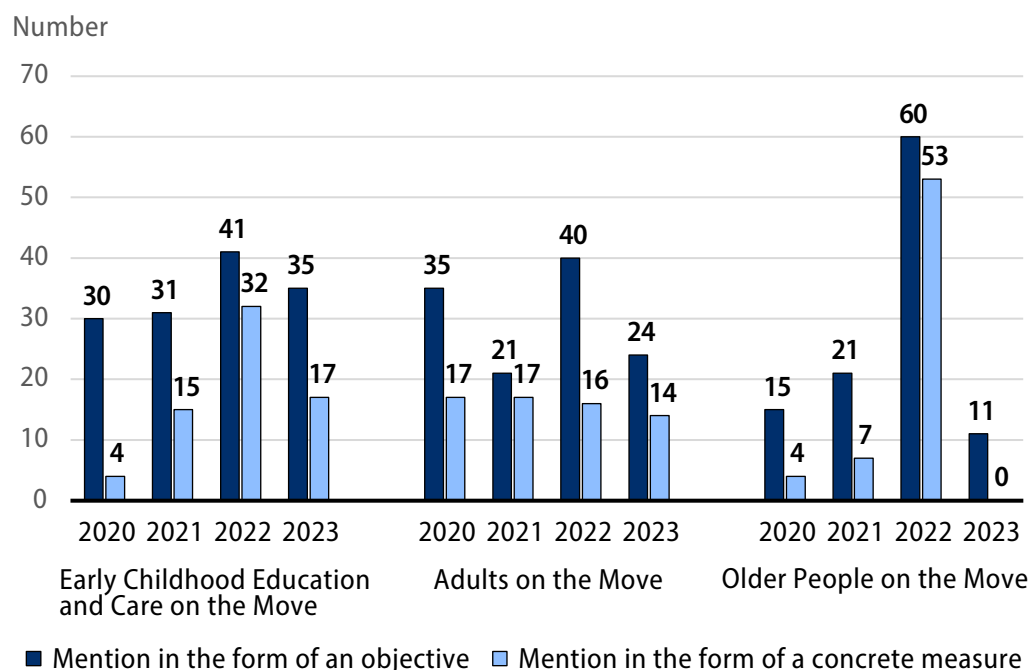
Local grants for the local development of a physically active lifestyle granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture aim to increase the physical activity of the population throughout their lives. The grant is used to implement the On the Move projects locally. (Jamk 2025; Ministry of Education and Culture 2025d.) In this report, gender equality has been examined especially in the Early Childhood Education and Care on the Move, Adults on the Move, and Older People on the Move projects in 2020–2025. The examination focused on the number of participants sought by the projects in either gender and entries concerning gender equality.

When examining all project participants as a whole, the shares of participants were almost evenly distributed between the genders during the period 2020–2025. The share of women (approximately 53%, \pm 1%) has remained slightly higher than that of men (approximately 47%) in the projects. In the early years, the share of women was quite a bit higher in particular in the Adults on the Move and Older People on the Move projects, but later the gender distribution has evened out.

The entries concerning gender equality in project documents have been examined from both project applications and final reports prepared after the projects have ended. A separate report titled Report on equality in the On the Move projects was prepared in 2021 (Tarkiainen et al. 2021).

Mentions concerning gender equality in project applications in 2020–2023 have been divided into target-based and those with concrete measures (Figure 15). There were significantly more mentions of gender equality in goals than in concrete measures where their share fell by about half. In 2022, gender equality was highlighted in goals clearly more often than in other review years. This was also reflected in an increase in concrete measures in the Early Childhood Education and Care On the Move and Older People On the Move projects, but no similar development was observed in Adults on the Move. The increase in mentions could be influenced by the update of the call for applications in 2022, from which time equality has been highlighted as one of the key principles and a success factor guiding the activities.

Figure 15. Equality entries in local development projects for a physically active life-style divided into those specifying objectives and those describing concrete measures.



In project applications 2024 and 2025, the entries on equality have remained more or less the same compared to previous years. Gender equality was often addressed either as a project objective or referred to in general terms, such as:

“Similarly to the previous project, the aim is for all children to have an equal opportunity to grow to their full potential in physical activity. Particular attention is given to the fact that physical activity integrated into everyday life supports the activity of all children.” – Toholampi (2024)

There were very few concrete measures related to gender equality in the projects. The objective of promoting the physical activity of girls who were inactive became more visible in the 2025 Early Childhood Education and Care on the Move projects, although measures for achieving this were minor in concrete terms, for example:

“Special attention will be paid to increasing physical activity among girls, as studies show that they are less physically active than boys.” – Siuntio (2025)

In the final reports on the projects, the strengthening of equality and non-discrimination were highlighted as an impact. The Early Childhood Education and Care on the Move projects described how such things as nature activities, swimming instruction, and tools that support physical activity skills increased

the equality and non-discrimination of children. The responses often lacked concrete actions, such as descriptions of how the measures had promoted equality. Early childhood education and care was seen as an environment where everyday practices support the physical activity of all children participating in early childhood education and care and pre-primary education regardless of their gender or exercise habits and abilities.

The Adults on the Move projects reported that non-discrimination and gender equality were realised through measures such as free physical activity groups, physical activity advisory services, guided physical activity in nature, and equipment lending. In the descriptions of measures, the concepts of equality, non-discrimination, and accessibility were sometimes mixed up with one another. A concrete example of promoting equality was that group exercise offered physical activity types that were particularly intended for men, as women had been more active in participating.

In summary, the number of participants that the projects have aimed for has been evenly distributed over the years between women and men. The entries concerning equality were mainly worded in the form of a target or were general in nature. Few concrete measures were proposed to promote equality. In fact, the objectives presented at the strategic level alone may remain fragmented and may not necessarily be reflected in the project's concrete activities. It may have been assumed in part in the projects that equality would be realised automatically throughout the activities, especially in early childhood education and care, where the environment and activities were often seen as promoting equality. Overall, the examination shows that the concept of equality should be clarified and, consequently, more concrete measures should be defined to promote equality.

8 Conclusions

The key contents discussed in this report are based on the objectives and steering instruments of Finnish sport policy. Pursuant to the Act on the Promotion of Sports and Physical Activity, the objectives of sport policy can be summarised as the promotion of physical activity that supports the well-being and health of the entire population, civic activity in sport, and elite sport as well as increasing responsibility in its different forms. In addition to national standards and statutes, the promotion of gender equality is based on international policies and recommendations.

According to studies, some of the trends related to physical activity seem fairly well-established from the perspective of gender equality. Boys engage in more physical activity than girls in all age groups, and the amount of activity decreases for both genders as they age. The lesser physical activity of girls compared to boys is already visible in children before they enter comprehensive school. Describing the physical activity behaviour of the adult population and changes in it has been hampered by conflicting research results on gender differences in the topic area. However, it would seem that physical activity has probably not decreased among the adult population.

Sport clubs continue to be significant operators promoting physical activity and sport, especially among children and young people. Approximately nine out of ten people at least try out participation in sport club activities at some point in their childhood or youth. Studies have shown slightly differing observations on gender differences in the prevalence of participation in club activities. Despite contradictory observations, it can be surmised that boys are slightly more likely to engage in club activities than girls, especially in older age groups. There are more consistent differences in participation in club activities among adults; men are more likely to engage in club activities than women. Women, on the other hand, use private companies' services more often than men. However, the differences between the genders in participation in private company and club-organised activities have narrowed.

The knowledge base on competitive and elite sport compiled in this report consists of athlete grants, elite sport success, information related to coaches, and reports and studies related to inappropriate behaviour. From 2018, grants have been allocated equally to both men and women. The grant reform that will enter into force this year may in future affect the way in which the flow of grants is distributed between the genders. The greatest factor will likely be how grants are directed at team ball sports. Women's success in sport has been slightly poorer than that of men since the COVID-19 pandemic, when measured by the number of medals in Olympic sports in major competitions. This development was quite the opposite for a long time.

Approximately one third of coaches are women, when measured by the share of women and men who are members of coaches' associations. The fragmented implementation of coaching statistics continues to limit the high-quality implementation of gender equality monitoring. In general, collecting information related to gender equality in the context of elite sport would require a more detailed definition of what is collected and why as well as how the collected information describes the development of gender equality in the context of elite sport.

Increasing the number of women in leadership positions has been one of the key objectives of promoting gender equality in sport. In the previous report, published 2022, a conclusion was that the share of women in positions of trust in third-sector sport organisations had not increased much in the 2000s. In the light of new data now available, a slightly different interpretation can be made. For example, the share of women on the boards of third-sector sport organisations has increased every year since the previous report was published and is now 38%. The increase in the proportion of women acting as chair of organisations has been even faster: in 2021, 14% of sport organisations' chairpersons were women, compared with 27% in 2025. However, it is too early to make further interpretations of the permanence of this change. Time will tell whether the share of women in decision-making positions in sport organisations will continue to grow or whether the past few years have been an exception in the longer term.

However, examining the share of women and men in leadership positions in sport organisations alone will not provide a sufficient picture of gender equality in management. Studies have found, for example, that the people on the boards of Finnish sport organisations tend to have a very similar mindset about board work regardless of their gender. It has been concluded that this is at least in part due to the selection of persons who fit a certain type of sport directors mould to management positions in sport organisations. Such a mould often highlights

features and qualities perceived as masculine. This means that even if the number of women in management positions as such increases, one of the objectives of promoting equality in sport management, i.e. enriching decision-making with different views will not be achieved. In the future, the promotion of equality in decision-making in sport should focus on dismantling different, often unconscious, structural and cultural factors and ways of thinking, rather than trying to "repair" women to act in accordance with the traditional sport leader's mould. (Mikkonen 2023.)

The report describes changes in gender equality in sport and physical activity within the framework of the available data. In addition, some new stand-alone reviews have been carried out, which have not previously been carried out in the framework of this report, such as analyses of the gender equality plans prepared by organisations promoting sport and physical activity and local projects promoting physical activity. The aim has been to highlight new features and perspectives of gender equality in sport and physical activity. In addition to the state of gender equality and changes in it, the report describes the current knowledge base available on the topic in Finland. This can be considered to have at least two kinds of significance.

First, it reveals existing data gaps that research and data collection must fill in to gain a better overall picture. Second, this type of report forms an understanding of the nature of knowledge as a builder and facilitator of reality or, at least, the discussion on it. The content of these types of research reviews is skewed by the fact that some phenomena in the topic area have been monitored systematically while others have not. For example, the gender distribution in decision-making positions in sport organisations has been monitored more or less systematically since the 1990s, whereas there is still no comprehensive information on the total number of coaches and their gender distribution. For this reason, it is more difficult to make interpretations on the realisation of gender equality in coaching. It must also be questioned from existing information whether, for example, the distribution of athletes' grants describes gender equality or whether gender equality issues should be considered in the allocation of grants in general.

When a report is compiled on the basis of the information available above, the problems related to equality in sport and physical activity and the phenomena in the discussions will also remain the same. Thus, the discussion on men and women as leaders will keep going, but some things will not even be brought into public discussion due to lack of information, when the monitoring data related to them is dubious at best. It is difficult to have a discussion on gender equality with

regard to matters that have not been monitored consistently in research. From this perspective, information is of great significance in steering the priorities, general observations, and development targets in discussions on gender equality.

The stand-alone reviews carried out in the scope of this report concerning gender equality plans prepared by sport organisations and documents on the promotion of physical activity in municipalities confirmed the observations made earlier on the unused potential of gender equality planning in sport and physical activity (see Isosomppi & Ryba 2025). Based on the reviews, the documents provided a fairly general description of the measures to promote equality without concrete goal-setting or follow-up measures. In particular, the gender equality-related mentions in municipal welfare reports and plans and physical activity programmes could be characterised as declaration-like.

Some of the plans prepared by sport organisations described the promotion of gender equality consistently from a description of the current situation to planned measures and monitoring. However, as a whole, such a systematic approach was rather rare. The basic problem in the promotion of gender equality, as is the case with the promotion of other areas of responsibility, is the implementation, or rather the non-implementation, of strategic policies at the grassroots level, i.e. physical activity and sport activities in practice, as well as in the daily activities of organisations. When clear objectives and measures are neither set nor monitored this does not contribute to solving the problem. It's also about whether the focus is on monitoring the implementation of concrete measures or on the written content of strategic documents.

The promotion of gender equality has been one of the key objectives of Finnish sport policy since the beginning of the 1990s. The promotion of gender equality in sport and physical activity carried out nationally is also influenced by actors outside Finland, especially the European Union and the Council of Europe. In addition, the goals and entries in the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have an impact on policies related to national responsibility. For example, the gender participation policies of international sport federations play a key role in each sport, on the basis of which some Finnish sport federations have drawn up their own policies on the matter.

Equality in sport and physical activity, like many other phenomena related to physical activity and sport, is no longer a matter that can only be controlled by sport policy. A partially similar conclusion was already drawn in the previous report (Lehtonen et al. 2022). At that time, attention was drawn to gender diversity in the same manner as in this report, but also to the clear conceptualisation of gender

equality as part of the operating processes of general government and policy. In addition, cooperation between municipalities and wellbeing services counties was only just beginning.

Now, debate on the status of trans-athletes has become somewhat concrete in recent years due to the policies of different sports and also as part of national political decision-making in different countries. In particular, the latter decisions link the gender debate on sport with the prevailing political ideological perception of the number of genders in each country or the right of transgender people to participate in sport. However, the entity is fragmented and multidimensional, due to each sport's own requirements, but also due to different political views.

In addition to international general policy, international sport policy also sets a framework for national activities in the sport and physical activity sector. From this perspective, for example, international targets for promoting gender equality in decision-making in sport have become stricter. In its 2022 report, the European Commission's High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport issued a recommendation on the equal representation of the genders. According to the recommendation, a quota of 50% women should be applied to decision-making bodies at all levels of sport. (European Commission 2022a). The policy can be considered at least partly problematic from the perspective of gender minorities if the assumption is that the share of men and women in management positions is equal. At the same time, the situation achieved in Finland in accordance with the previous recommendation where nearly 40 % of the board members of sport organisations are women, seems to be only reasonable in light of the new European criteria.

The increasingly stringent sport policy objectives remind sport sector actors that the promotion of gender equality requires continuous efforts. Objectives guide thinking and activities, which means that it is essential to continue to monitor the development of the sector from the perspective of gender equality. Brainstorming on the co-operation between municipalities and wellbeing services counties to promote physical activity highlighted in the previous report is still necessary. Public debate has demonstrated that the wellbeing services county reform has faced many financial difficulties. Similarly, the provision of municipal sport services requires at least partly new operating methods and acceptance of the fact that municipal practices and possibilities for providing services are already quite varied (Turpeinen & Lappalainen 2025). In the future, consideration should also be given to how municipalities can be supported in the promotion of both physical activity and gender equality, taking into account the differences and needs of each municipality.

Promoting gender equality as part of the ever-expanding discussion on the responsibility of sport also requires attention. There is no trend in sight in which the ethical considerations, regulation, resourcing or policy measures in the sector would be reduced. The way in which the promotion of gender equality is integrated into the aforementioned entity will also depend on selected general government and policy practices, the setting of common goals by various stakeholders and the ability of actors in the sector to respond to the knowledge base compiled on the topic.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Examined organisations and basic information on their gender equality plans.

Civil society organisation:	Name of the plan	Number of pages
Finnish Agility Federation	Tasa-arvo ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma 2024–2025	9
AKK-Motorsport	Tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma 2023–2025	7
Finnish Cheerleading Federation	Tasa-arvo ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma 2024–2028	19
Finnish Ice Hockey Association	Yhdenvertaisuus- ja tasa-arvosuunnitelma 2022–26	13
Finland Aikikai, the Finnish Judo Association, the Finnish Karate Federation, the Finnish Fencing and Pentathlon Federation, the Finnish Boxing Federation, the Finnish Wrestling Federation, the Finnish Weightlifting Federation, the Finnish Taekwondo Federation	Kamppailulajien ja Painonnostoliiton yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma 2024–2025	6
Football Association of Finland	Non-discrimination plan	52
Finnish Sailing and Boating Federation	Yhdenvertaisuus- ja tasa-arvosuunnitelma 2025–2028	12
Equestrian Federation of Finland	Suomen Ratsastajainliiton yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma 2023–2026	15
Finnish Floorball Federation	Salibandyliiton yhdenvertaisuus- ja tasa-arvo-ohjelma 2024–2026	27
Finnish Gymnastics Federation	Vastuullinen voimistelu – Voimisteluliiton vastuullisuusohjelma	18
Finnish Reservist Sports Federation	Action plan for gender equality and non-discrimination	3
Finnish Deaf Sports Federation	Yhdenvertaisuus- ja tasa-arvosuunnitelma 2024	9
Finnish Outdoor Association	Suomen Ladun tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma 2025–2026	9
Finnish Coaches Association	Yhdenvertaisuus ja tasa-arvosuunnitelma 2021–2025	29
Sports Federation of Southern Finland	Vastuullisuusohjelma	17
LiikU	Vastuullisuusohjelma 2025–2028	22

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