Is gender on the international agenda?

Female representation and policy in international sport governance

Executive Summary

March 2021

Dr Jordan Matthews

Dr Lucy Piggott

KEY DEFINITIONS

APPROXIMATE ANNUAL REVENUE: The approximate annual revenue of the organisation and its subsidiaries averaged across the 2016-2019 cycle.

COMMISSION: A group of people appointed by the Council/Board of an organisation, either on an ad-hoc or standing basis, to provide expertise and advice on a particular topic or issue.

COMMITTEE: A group of persons officially appointed or elected to perform a function within the organisation.

CONTINENTAL OLYMPIC ASSOCIATIONS: Umbrella bodies with the aim of guiding and supporting the activities of the national Olympic committees within their region.

CONTINENTAL PARALYMPIC ASSOCIATIONS: Umbrella bodies with the aim of guiding and supporting the activities of the national Paralympic committees within their region.

CO-OPTION RULES: Rules to allow additional members to be elected to a governance body to meet minimum gender requirements.

FULL TIME EQUIVALENT (FTE) PAID STAFF: A concept used to calculate the number of hours worked across a workforce rather than the number of employees. 1.0 FTE is equal to the number of hours a full-time employee works for an organisation.

GENDER AND GOVERNANCE ACTIONS: Actions or measures implemented by an organisation to progress towards gender equality and/or equity. Within this report, this term encompasses six measures implemented by international sport organisations to progress towards gender balance within decision-making positions: gender quotas; gender targets; gender election and recruitment rules; official documents that refer to gender and governance; gender, equality, diversity and inclusion-focused groups; and hosting or supporting women to attend women's leadership development programmes.

GENDER ELECTION AND RECRUITMENT RULES: Numeric or processual requirements relating to the nomination, election and/or recruitment process. The distinction of gender election and recruitment rules from gender quotas and targets is that they are focused on the *process* of elections rather than the *end-outcome*.

GENDER, EQUALITY, DIVERSITY OR INCLUSION-FOCUSED GROUPS: An umbrella term for commissions, committees and working groups that organisations have in place with a focus upon issues relating to gender, equality, diversity, and inclusion.

GENDER QUOTAS: Mandated gender representation outcomes that are clearly stated within the organisation's statutes, constitution, bye-laws or other formal written document that details how the organisation is structured and governed.

GENDER TARGETS: Clearly stated aspirational goals of an organisation in relation to gender representation in governance positions or bodies.

HIGHEST GOVERNANCE BODY: The most senior governance body within the organisation that sits below Congress or the General Assembly. The highest governance body varied

across the different organisations depending on their governance structure. Examples included the Council, Board, Executive Board and Executive Committee. Information about the 'highest governance body' for each organisation can be found in Appendix 1.

HIGHEST GOVERNANCE POSITION: The President or Chair of the highest governance body for each organisation. Information about the 'highest governance position' for each organisation can be found in Appendix 1.

HIGHEST LEADERSHIP POSITION: The most senior paid position within the headquarters of each organisation. Information about the 'highest leadership position' for each organisation can be found in Appendix 1.

INTERNATIONAL FEDERATIONS (IFs): International non-governmental organisations recognised by the International Olympic Committee as administering one or more sports at world level.

INTERNATIONAL MULTI SPORT ORGANISATIONS (IMSOs): International non-governmental organisations responsible for overseeing the activities of a range of sports across a range of countries and regions.

IPC-RECOGNISED INTERNATIONAL FEDERATIONS: International non-governmental organisations recognised by the International Paralympic Committee as administering one or more sports at world level that are not also recognised by the International Olympic Committee.

POLICY: A law, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice implemented by an organisation.

SANCTIONS: A rule in place to penalise member organisations that do not comply with gender quota regulations for governance positions or bodies.

STRATEGY: A plan for the direction of an organisation over a specified period of time.

WORKING GROUP: A group of individuals who possess relevant knowledge and skills that are brought together to achieve specified goals. The subjects of working groups discussed within this report are women, gender, equality, diversity and/or inclusion in sport.

1. Introduction

The continued underrepresentation of women in the senior governance and leadership of sport has been recognised by scholars and activists since the 1980s (Fasting, Sand, Pike, & Matthews, 2014). In the intervening decades, various attempts have been made to encourage international sport organisations to make their gendered representation in governance and leadership more gender equal (United Nations, 2007). However, there is limited contemporary understanding of the statistical representation of women in decision making positions in international sport governance. Existing research on gender representation in international sport governance is now dated and there have been few attempts at developing an in-depth understanding of gender and governance actions undertaken by international sport organisations, and their impact on gender and governance.

This research sought to address these knowledge deficits through the following aim and objectives:

Research aim:

To develop insight on the current state of gender equity in international sport governance and help inform the identification of targeted initiatives to increase the number of women in decision making positions in international sport as part of UK Sport's 2021-25 strategy.

Research objectives:

1. To develop insight on current gender representation trends across Olympic and Paralympic IFs, Olympic and Paralympic continental committees/councils, associations of summer and winter Olympic sports (ASOIF/AIOWF), and the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC).

2. To explore the prevalence and nature of existing gender equity policy in international sport governance and identify policy gaps.

3. To use the research findings to provide recommendations for targeted initiatives as part of UK Sport's 2021-25 strategy.

2. Methods

Sixty international sport organisations were categorised into six groups:

- International Multi Sport Organisations (IMSOs; n=6)
- Continental Olympic Committees/Councils (n=5)
- Continental Paralympic Committees/Councils (n=5)
- Summer Olympic International Federations (IFs) that are members of ASOIF (n=33)
- Winter Olympic IFs that are members of AIOWF (n=7)
- International Paralympic Committee recognised IFs (n=4).

The data collection process comprised two components: 1) an extensive focused search of the websites of each international sport organisation, and 2) subsequent

communication by, and on the behalf of, the research team with each international sport organisation to ensure the data was correct.

A trawl of the organisations' websites for the following data was undertaken by both researchers:

- Types and characteristics of organisations
- Gender representation across governance bodies and positions
- The prevalence of six forms of gender and governance action: 1) gender targets, 2) gender quotas, 3) gender election and recruitment rules, 4) official documents that make reference to gender and governance, 5) gender-, equality-, diversity- or inclusion-focused groups and 6) leadership development programmes related to gender and/or women

Three phases of data analysis were undertaken, and each led to the generation of recommendations and/or good practice examples:

1. The collation and analysis of representation and prevalence statistics. This included female representation across the highest governance body, highest governance position and highest leadership position, and whether organisations had the six forms of gender and governance actions in place.
2. A relationship analysis. The variables included in phase one were considered against female representation within the governance of the organisations to identify any significant relationships between gender and governance action and female representation in international sport governance.
3. A comparative analysis of the gender and governance actions of organisations with female representation of 30% or higher on their highest governance body (n=14) against organisations with 15% or lower female representation (n=14).

3.1. Main findings relating to gender representation

Female representation was analysed across the highest governance body, within the highest governance position, and within the highest leadership position across the different types of organisations. Table 1 shows the percentage and number of women in senior decision-making positions across six different groups of international sport organisations.

Table 1. Percentage and number of women in senior decision-making positions across six different groups of international sport organisations

	Women on the highest governance body		Women in the highest governance position		Women in the highest leadership position	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
International Multi Sport Organisations	32%	26	17%	1	33%	2
Continental Olympic Associations	20%	19	0%	0	0%	0
Continental Paralympic Associations	24%	8	0%	0	33%	1
Summer Olympic IFs	22%	181	6%	2	26%	8

Winter Olympic IFs	17%	15	14%	1	14%	1
IPC-recognised IFs	26%	10	0%	0	0%	0
OVERALL AVERAGE/TOTAL	22%	259	7%	4	21%	12

Main Findings

3.1.1. International sport organisations continue to have poor representation of women within decision-making positions. Across these organisations there is just 22% female representation on the highest governance bodies, 7% female representation within the highest governance positions and 21% female representation within the highest leadership positions.

3.1.2. International Multi Sport Organisations (IMSOs) are the leading group when it comes to female representation on the highest governance bodies (32%) and highest governance positions (17%). For the highest leadership position, IMSOs are joint-highest with Continental Paralympic Committees/Councils (both 33%).

3.1.3. Continental Olympic Associations have no women in the highest governance and leadership positions and ranked fifth out of six when it came to female representation on the highest governance body (20%). International Paralympic Committee-recognised IFs replicated this but had 26% female representation on the highest governance body. Winter Olympic IFs scored less than 18% across each category.

3.1.4. The representation of women on the highest governance body of international sport organisations was broadly consistent when analysed against different organisational characteristics (i.e. year established, annual income, FTE staff[1]). This was different for female representation in the highest governance position and highest leadership position, where it was found that the younger and smaller the organisation is, the greater the prevalence of women in these positions.

3.2. Main findings relating to forms of gender and governance action

The six forms of gender and governance action were analysed according to their prevalence across the different groups of organisations and their relation to female representation in decision-making positions.

Prevalence of Gender and Governance Action

Table 2 summarises the prevalence of gender and governance action amongst the six groupings of international sport organisations.

---

[1] Data for annual income and FTE paid staff was only obtainable for summer Olympic IFs.

Table 2. Prevalence of gender and governance action across the organisations within each group of international sport organisations (%)

Gender and governance action	IMSOs	COAs	CPAs	Summer IFs	Winter IFs	IPC-recognised IFs	Overall average
Targets	40%	0%	33%	33%	29%	0%	28%
Quotas	60%	60%	0%	85%	86%	0%	70%
Election and recruitment rules	80%	20%	0%	45%	43%	0%	40%
Gender-, equality-, diversity- and inclusion-focused groups	80%	100%	33%	70%	43%	0%	63%
Official documents	60%	20%	0%	56%	71%	0%	48%
Women's Leadership Development Programmes	80%	50%	50%	39%	14%	0%	38%

Main Findings

3.2.1. For *gender targets*, less than one-third (28%; n=16) of international sport organisations had at least one target for gender representation in governance positions and/or bodies. Moreover, of these 16 organisations, only 38% had a timescale attached to the gender target. IMSOs had the greatest proportion of organisations with at least one gender target in place (40%), though they do have senior responsibility in the governance, funding, and power hierarchies of international sport.

3.2.2. Seventy per cent (n=40) of the organisations had at least one *gender quota* for gender representation in governance positions and/or bodies. Quotas are mandated gender representation outcomes rather than aspirational goals, and so should have greater impact on increasing the number of women in leadership positions.

3.2.3. *Gender election or recruitment rules* in place for governance positions or bodies were prevalent in 40% (n=23) of the organisations. In comparison to the higher prevalence of gender quotas, this signifies that organisations are more focused on election outcomes – i.e. ensuring a minimum number or proportion of women/the underrepresented gender are elected – rather than ensuring that the election process is gender-inclusive.

3.2.4. Almost half (48%; n=27) of organisations had at least one *official document that referred to gender and governance*. Over half of IMSOs and summer and winter Olympic IFs had official documents in this regard.

3.2.5. Nearly two-thirds (63%; n=36) of organisations have a *gender, equality, diversity, or inclusion-focused group*, though there was significant variation across the groupings. For example, 70% of summer Olympic IFs have a group compared to 43% of winter Olympic IFs and zero IPC-recognised IFs.

3.2.6. Over one-third (38%; n=21) of organisations had either *hosted or supported women to attend a WLDP*. IMSOs were the most prevalent group here (80%) followed by 50% of both Continental Olympic and Paralympic Associations.

3.2.7. For each gender and governance action, there was much variability within and across each organisational grouping. For example, no Continental Olympic Committees/Councils had gender targets, but every organisation had a gender, equality, diversity, or inclusion-focused group. The gender and governance action with the lowest prevalence amongst summer Olympic IFs are gender targets (30%) and for winter Olympic IFs it is hosting or supporting women to attend WLDPs (14%). Conversely, gender quotas had the highest prevalence for both groupings (85% and 86% respectively). The strongest performing group were IMSOs as, apart from gender targets, more than 50% of these organisations undertake each gender and governance action.

3.2.8. Three forms of gender and governance action were non-existent within the two groups of organisations that are exclusively part of the Paralympic Movement (Continental Paralympic Associations and IPC-recognised IFs): gender quotas, gender election and recruitment rules, and official documents that make reference to gender and governance. Furthermore, no IPC-recognised IFs had implemented any of the six forms of gender and governance action. IPC-recognised IFs tend to be significantly smaller organisations with less wealth and resource compared to other organisations in the sample. Therefore, more support to IPC-recognised IFs is required. Other groupings also demonstrate that assistance is required with particular gender and governance actions.

Relationship between gender and governance action and female representation in decision-making positions

Table 2 summarises the impact of whether organisations do or do not engage with the different forms of gender and governance action on current female representation on the highest governance body, highest governance position and highest leadership position of the organisation. Green cells signify that organisations that are implementing the gender and governance action have a positive difference of five per cent or higher in female representation compared to organisations who are not implementing the action. An orange cell indicates that a positive or negative difference in female representation that is smaller than four per cent. Red cells show a negative difference in female representation that is five per cent or more.

Table 2. The relationship between whether organisations engage or not with gender and governance actions and current gender representation on the highest governance body, highest governance position and highest leadership position of the organisation

Gender and governance action	Highest governance body	Highest governance position	Highest leadership position
Targets	+3%	n/a	n/a
Quotas	-1%	n/a	n/a
Quotas with compliance	+5%		
Election and recruitment ules	+1%	n/a	n/a
Gender-, equality-, diversity- and inclusion-focused groups	+1%	-11%	-17%
Official documents	+3%	+7%	-17%

Women's Leadership Development Programmes	+7%	-4%	-5%

Main Findings

3.2.9. Organisations that have a *gender target* for their highest governing body have slightly higher female representation on their highest governance body (25%) compared to organisations that do not have a gender target in place (22%). However, because targets are a continual process, it is difficult to say whether organisations are *en route* to achieving such targets. Gender targets were more commonly focused towards overall decision-making positions or specific governance bodies rather than governance positions.

3.2.10. There is marginally higher female representation on the highest governance bodies of organisations without a *gender quota* in place (23%) compared to those with a gender quota in place (22%). The analysis suggests that gender quotas are most effective across organisations that demonstrate additional thought and commitment in implementing processes and/or sanctions to ensure that quotas are taken seriously and achieved. This is because those who had a quota with compliance measures attached had, overall, 5% higher female representation on their highest governance body compared to organisations with a gender quota but no compliance measures.

3.2.11. Similar to gender targets and gender quotas, there is no significant relation between the prevalence of *gender recruitment and election rules* and female representation on the highest governance bodies of international sport organisations, given that those with gender rules (23%) marginally outweigh those without (22%). However, gender and election recruitment rules are more evenly spread across the different areas, bodies and positions of organisations compared to gender quotas and gender targets.

3.2.12. Organisations that have at least one *official document that makes reference to gender and governance* had slightly higher female representation on their highest governance bodies (24% compared to 21%) and moderately higher female representation within their highest governance positions (11% compared to 4%) compared to organisations that did not have such documents. However, this trend was reversed for female representation within their highest leadership position (21% compared to 16%).

3.2.13. The prevalence of *gender, equality, diversity or inclusion-focused groups* within organisations has little significance on current female representation on the highest governance body (23% overall average female representation for organisations with a group compared to 22% for organisations without). However, for the highest governance and leadership positions there is a negative relationship between the prevalence of such groups and female representation, meaning there is more likely to be a woman in the most senior governance (14% compared to 3%) or leadership (32% compared to 15%) position if the organisation does not have a gender, equality, diversity or inclusion-focused group.

3.2.14. Organisations who had hosted or supported women to attend WLDPs had overall higher female representation on their highest governance body

compared to organisations that had not hosted or supported WLDPs (27% compared to 20%). However, these organisations also had overall lower female representation within their highest governance positions (5% compared to 9%) and leadership positions (16% compared to 21%) too.

3.2.15. Overall, there was not a notable positive relationship between the prevalence of forms of gender and governance action and female representation within decision-making positions. On the contrary, a negative relationship was found between some gender and governance actions and female representation within the highest governance and leadership position. Potential reasons for this include:

a) Some of these gender and governance actions require time to demonstrate their long-term impact, such as time-scaled targets, quotas, and official documents.

b) Some organisations may be implementing gender and governance actions but not demonstrating commitment to achieving them (e.g. no timescales for targets or no compliance measures for quotas). It is notable that the prevalence of quotas with compliance measures demonstrates a significant positive impact.

c) There are vast differences between the nature of the different forms of gender and governance action across organisations.

3.3. Main findings from a comparison of organisations with the highest (≥30%) and lowest (≤15%) female representation on their highest governance body

The gender and governance actions of the 14 highest and 14 lowest performing organisations (in terms of female representation on their highest governance body) were analysed in more depth to better understand how these organisations differed in the nature of their implementation of these actions and their commitment to them.

Main Findings

3.3.1. There was little difference in the number of highest (n=4) and lowest (n=3) performing organisations to have at least one *gender target* in place. Despite the small numbers involved, a significantly higher proportion of the targets in place across the highest performing organisations were focused on their highest governance body (3 out of 4; 75%) compared to the lowest performing organisations (1 out of 3; 33%). Additionally, half of the highest performing organisations with targets in place for their highest governance body had a timeframe attached to this target compared to none of the lowest performing organisations.

3.3.2. *Gender quotas* varied in scope across the organisations. The lowest performing organisations (n=11) had more quotas than highest performing organisations (n=9). However, the highest performing organisations had more ambitious quotas with higher numeric and/or percentage requirements for minimum female/gender representation. Additionally, there was a higher prevalence of gender quotas with compliance measures attached amongst the highest

performing organisations (29%) compared to the lowest performing (21%). Furthermore, all the highest performing organisations had achieved their gender quota whereas three of the lowest performing organisations had not. Therefore, a key finding from this research is that it is not the prevalence of gender quotas that is important in increasing female representation, but the nature of the quotas and the organisation's commitment to achieving them.

3.3.3. The highest performing organisations have a greater proportion of *election and recruitment rules* that were more proactive toward gender representation efforts (n=7, 70%) than the lowest-performing organisations (n=4; 50%). Thus, the highest performing organisations have rules where 'gender and governance action' and 'rewarding gender efforts' appear more often than the lowest performing organisations, who have rules where' efforts short of gender and governance action' and 'gender balance erasure' are more prevalent.

3.3.4. The lowest performing organisations had higher prevalence of *gender, equality, diversity or inclusion-focused groups* compared to the highest performing organisations. However, the groups of the highest performing organisations are more likely to be Commissions or Committees rather than Working Groups that were more prevalent amongst the lowest performing organisations. The lowest performing organisations also have a greater prevalence of women comprising such groups.

3.3.5. There were no significant findings for *official documents that refer to gender and governance*.

3.3.6. More than double the highest performing organisations (n=8) *host or support women to attend a WLDP* compared to the lowest performing organisations (n=3). Moreover, the top three highest-performing organisations all do something, whilst nine of the ten lowest performing organisations do nothing.

4. Conclusions

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

This underrepresentation is most significant within the highest governance positions (e.g. Chair or President) of international sport organisations. This demonstrates the need for UK Sport's 2021-25 strategy to include a focus on strategies to increase female representation in the governance of international sport.

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

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

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

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

4.4. Next steps

This report is based on a quantitative analysis of gender representation and policy within international sport governance. This approach has developed important insight into *what* gender and governance actions are being implemented and the statistical relationship between gender and governance action and female representation in international sport governance. However, to understand the *impact* of the different forms of gender and governance action in more depth, as well as the factors that influence the effectiveness of these forms of action, qualitative investigations are required. This would build a fuller understanding of the extent to which organisations are developing equitable cultures and fully committing to delivering/achieving gender policy to increase female representation in their governance.

5. Full list of recommendations

2.1. To provide guidance to organisations on what information should be easily accessible through their website to encourage transparency.

3.1. To investigate the reasons for a significant lack of women in the highest governance positions of international sport organisations, and particularly the largest organisations, and how these organisations can be supported to increase female representation within these positions.

3.2. To encourage organisations to set gender targets for Vice-President/Vice-Chair positions as there are a lack of targets focused on these positions combined with a particular lack of female representation within the highest governance positions of international sport organisations.

3.3. To encourage organisations to include a timeframe with their targets to make them time-bound and measurable. Organisations should also be encouraged to regularly report and publish progress on whether genders targets are being met.

3.4. To encourage organisations that have existing quotas in place to attach compliance measures to these quotas.

3.5. To work with Paralympic organisations to explore the potential benefits of implementing effective quotas (quotas are lacking across these organisations).

3.6. To encourage organisations to set gender quotas for Vice-President/Vice-Chair positions as there are a lack of quotas focused on these positions (as displayed in Table 4 of the main report) combined with a particular lack of female representation within the highest governance positions of international sport organisations (as shown in section 3A of the main report).

3.7. To work with Paralympic organisations to explore the potential benefits of implementing gender election and recruitment rules (rules are lacking across these organisations).

3.8. To work with organisations to develop specific and detailed strategic plans to address an underrepresentation of women within governance positions and bodies rather than generic statements.

3.9. To work with Paralympic IFs to explore the potential benefits of hosting or supporting women to attend WLDPs.

3.10. To correspond with WLPDs to better understand the impact of their programmes on gender equity in international sport governance.

3.11. To encourage organisations to increase the effectiveness of gender, equality, diversity or inclusion-focused groups by ensuring they have: status within the organisation, clear terms of reference, reporting lines to the Board and Senior Leadership Team, a champion at the Board level, and high-quality and respected membership.

3.12. To encourage organisations to host or support women to attend WLDPs as evidence suggests that this is a common factor across the highest performing organisations in the research.

6. References

Fasting, K., Sand, T., Pike, E., & Matthews, J. (2014). *From Brighton to Helsinki. Women and Sport Progress Report 1994-2014*. Helsinki: IWG Secretariat/Finnish Sports Confederation

United Nations. (2007). *Women 2000 and beyond: Women, gender equality and sport*. New York: United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women.

Dr Jordan Matthews

jordan.matthews@chi.ac.uk

Dr Lucy Piggott

lucy.piggott@ntnu.no