

# LBTI WOMEN IN SPORT

## VIOLENCE, DISCRIMINATION, & LIVED EXPERIENCES



# LBTI women in sport: violence, discrimination, and lived experiences

August 2021



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## With input from

Transgender Network Switzerland, ARELAS - Asociación de Familias de Menores Trans\* de Galicia, DISCOVER FOOTBALL, Civil Work Association, Identity.Education, NNID Foundation, Gruppo Trans APS, Iceland, XY Spectrum, Club LGTB+ Samarucs Valencia, Tags Swimming, Bilitis foundation, OUT\*side project (Seitenwechsel e.V.), TWISF - Tomorrow Women in Sports Foundation, LEAP Sports Scotland, and Les Degommeuses.

In March 2021, a coalition of European networks working on LGBTI rights and including ILGA-Europe, EL\*C, TGEU, OII Europe and EGLSF submitted to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe a briefing note on violence and discrimination against LBTI women in sport. The PACE has drawn attention to gender-based violence and discrimination in sports for many years and the submission aimed at offering a specific focus on the position of lesbian, bisexual, trans, and intersex (LBTI) women in sport, and had the objective to support the PACE in its formulation of the report on "*The fight for a level playing field – ending discrimination against women in the world of sport*" and a consequent resolution. The data and information we collected revealed the specific situations and barriers that LBTI women face in sport, while discrimination and violence against them remain phenomena largely unknown or not visible. We decided for this reason to publish the results of our work and we urge decision makers, stakeholders and sports leaders at every level to take into account the needs of LBTI women in sport and ensure the full respect of their fundamental rights.

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## Methodology

The data and information collected in this report derive from a public consultation conducted via an online survey by the five networks and involving 16 organisations from 11 Member States in the Council of Europe region, including Transgender Network Switzerland (Switzerland), ARELAS - Asociación de Familias de Menores Trans\* de Galicia (Spain), DISCOVER FOOTBALL (Germany), Civil Work Association (Hungary), Identity.Education (Romania), NNID Foundation (the Netherlands), Gruppo Trans APS (Italy), XY Spectrum (Serbia), Club LGTB+ Samarucs Valencia (Spain), Tags Swimming (United Kingdom), and Bilitis foundation (Bulgaria), and from Cristina (Italy) as an individual; 5 organisations/individuals from the Netherlands, Turkey, Germany, Iceland and Switzerland preferred to not be named. Additional input was also received from outside of the Council of Europe region, including from 1 group, Tomorrow Women In Sports Foundation (TWISF) (Uganda), and 2 individuals, Okanmelu Ogochukwu Jane frances (Nigeria and Ghana) and Waleska Vigo Francisco (Brazil). Further consultations and discussions were organised. In particular, TGEU received inputs from five trans women active in sport in Germany, Slovenia, and France, via a group discussion organised by the German OUT\*side project,<sup>1</sup> while EL\*C conducted an additional consultation with lesbians active in sport in Italy and with the lesbian football team Les Degommeuses (France). Additional inputs were received via emails and other informal contacts through the organisations' networks and social media. Whenever contributors consented to be explicitly quoted, we have shared the name of the organisation or the person responding, while if the person or the organisation did not wish to be named, we referred to them as "our contributors". It is important to stress that of all but one of the inputs received from intersex activists, athletes and intersex organisations, be it via the online survey or the other means of consultation, no one accepted to be named and quoted in this document, demonstrating the particularly high level of stigma that intersex people involved in sport are still face.

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<sup>1</sup> The discussion was joined by Thea and Lea Marie in Germany, Maria in France, and Tina in Slovenia. Some of the quotes in the part of this submission concerning trans women come from those conversations. Martin Muñoz, manager of the OUT\*side project, organised the discussion and acted as consultant for TGEU in this report.

## Background

LBTI women engage and participate in sport at every level, as professional and amateur athletes, coaches and spectators. Their experience within sport is however tainted by specific challenges, episodes of violence, harassment and discrimination.

Sport remains a place where broader social stigma related to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristic is very prevalent. In 2012, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) LGBT Survey found that 10% of LGBT people who accessed sport or fitness facilities in the previous 12 months felt personally discriminated against. This rate was highest among trans people (15%), while 7% of lesbians and 7% of bisexual women were also discriminated in sport during the same period; civil society has found even higher incidents, with 28% of trans respondents reporting discrimination in one study from the UK<sup>2</sup>. A number of other surveys found similar results, documenting that a large majority of LGBTI people have witnessed homophobia or transphobia<sup>3</sup> in sport and that this had an impact in their decision to engage and participate in sport<sup>4</sup>. It should be underlined here that there is a significant gap in data with regard to intersex women, considering for instance that while the 2019 LGBTI II survey from FRA included intersex respondents, it did not address questions about sport. Civil society data collection also has not yet been thorough in documenting the experiences of intersex athletes.

As regards LBTI women involved in sport, the specificity of their position stems in particular from the fact that sport is a social environment where sexism and misogyny are still present and deeply linked with the history, structure and dynamics of participation of women in sport. In this analysis, there are two overarching issues related to women's participation in sport that are particularly relevant: the protection of femininity in sport, and sport as a space to control women's bodies, both socially and physically.

Firstly, women's participation in sport is historically very recent<sup>5</sup>. Only in 1900, with the second modern Olympic Games, were women allowed to compete - women were not allowed to participate in the first modern Olympics, nor the ancient Olympics<sup>6</sup>. Over time, allowance for women's participation in sports deemed more "masculine" has slowly increased, with the International Olympic Committee (IOC) accepting women's boxing, for example, only in 2012.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See: [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt\\_in\\_britain\\_hate\\_crime.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_hate_crime.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> In Scotland, the **Out for Sport** survey found that 62% of LGBT respondents had witnessed homophobia or transphobia in sport, While the **Outsport** survey of 5,524 LGBTI respondents in the European Union found that 82% had witnessed homo- or transphobic language in sport within the preceding 12 months.

<sup>4</sup> The **Out for Sport** survey in Scotland found out that 73% of the LGBT respondent considered homophobia and transphobia were a barrier for people who wanted to take part in sport, while 20% of the respondent to the **Outsport** survey refrain from participating in sport and 5% have left sport altogether due to negative experiences based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

<sup>5</sup> Katsarova, I. (2019). Gender equality in sport: Getting closer every day. European Parliament Research Service. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)635560\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS_BRI(2019)635560_EN.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://feminist.org/our-work/education-equity/gender-equity-in-athletics/equality-for-women-in-the-olympics>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Commentary from prominent sport leaders make it clear that the exclusion of women from sport altogether, as much as their exclusion from specific sport, are directly linked to social understandings of femininity<sup>8</sup>, and particularly those understandings by men, who even today hold the large majority of decision-making positions when it comes to sport regulation<sup>9</sup>. Bearing in mind the heavily codified and very patriarchal environment that sport has been historically and continues to be culturally today, it is not surprising that women perceived as non-confirming in society at large, due their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, or sex characteristics (SOGIESC), are exposed to additional stigma and societal pressure. Sport being an especially hostile environment for them, LGBTI women will be more likely to either choose to not engage or to conceal their SOGIESC.

In fact, respondents to our call for submissions noted that LGBTI women are exposed to pressure into “feminine” sport, wage gaps compared to men, harassment, bullying, isolation, physical violence (particularly in the context of changing and showering spaces), and blanket exclusion. Even if in themselves the negative experience of LGBTI women in sport are not homogenous, they are all rooted directly on sexist views of the ability of women to participate - physically and psychologically - and the appropriateness of women using their own bodies in sport. First of all, this is clearly exemplified, as will be further discussed in **Section 2**, in the regulation and control of the bodies of intersex women. On other hand, **Section 3** shows how the protection of “femininity” in sport has a profound impact on the experiences of lesbian and bisexual women in sport, especially by imposing via violent acts, discriminatory practices and hate speeches a “compulsory” heterosexuality over athletes and coaches. Finally, as further explained in **Section 4**, arguments related to the so-called “protection” of women in sport are at the basis of discrimination in access to competitions suffered by trans women while they provide the ideological basis for violence, harassment and hate speech faced by trans athletes at all levels when engaging in sport activities.

In addition to exclusion and under-representation in mainstream women’s sports, LGBTI women also express under-representation within broader LGBTIQ sport. EGLSF has found that LBQ women in particular express feeling as “a minority within a minority” in LGBTIQ community sport spaces. This extra marginalisation is indicative of the intersectional experience of LGBTI women in general, and clearly displays how responses to barriers based on single axes of oppression and marginalisation often fail to address the experiences of the most marginalised.

Starting from this understanding of a common position of LGBTI women in sport, the present submission addresses the difference between stigmas related to sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, by discussing the experience faced by intersex women, LBQ women, and trans women in 3 separate sections while a fourth section contains recommendations and good practices. It is important to note that sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics are independent personal features. Because of this, a woman could be both lesbian and trans, or intersex and queer, or intersex and trans,

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<sup>8</sup> In 1912, Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the IOC, described women's sport "impractical, uninteresting, unaesthetic, and we are not afraid to add: incorrect". See:

<https://digital.la84.org/digital/collection/p17103coll1/id/13229/rec/13>

<sup>9</sup> For example, presently, only 5 members of the 16-member IOC Executive Board are women. See:

<https://www.olympic.org/executive-board>

etc<sup>10</sup>. The structure of the report focuses on discrimination and violence on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics each in turn, but many LGBTI athletes will experience intersectional discrimination among these categories as well. Finally, it cannot be overlooked that depending on the identity of the person involved, phenomena of stigma related to gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristic can intersect and can be entangled with other social oppression related in particular to race and class.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, within the OutSport report (see Menzel et al. citation above), intersex respondents were 31% gay men, 23% lesbian/gay women, 23% bisexual and 23% other, as well as 3% trans women, 4% trans men, 9% non-binary, 33% cis women, 38% cis men, and 14% non-identifying with the gender identities listed.

# 1. Violence and discrimination against intersex women/women with variations of sex characteristics in sport

Intersex individuals are “born with sex characteristics (sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, hormonal structure and/or levels and/or chromosomal patterns) that do not fit the typical definition of male or female.”<sup>11</sup> Recent years have brought the issues of athletes with variations of sex characteristics/ intersex athletes, such as Caster Semenya<sup>12,13</sup> and Annet Negesa<sup>14</sup>, into focus in international media.

Historically, so-called “sex testing” of athletes has taken many forms. World Athletics (formerly the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF)) began doing physical examinations in 1966, and in 1968 the International Olympic Committee began conducting chromosomal tests.<sup>15</sup> The World Athletics formally stopped conducting chromosomal testing in 1992<sup>16</sup>, though in 2009 began a practice of hormone testing,<sup>17</sup> which continues today. In each case, testing and verification schemes can be linked with nationalism (i.e. that women athletes from certain world regions were outperforming those from others, and particularly from Europe), racism (i.e. a significant portion of women targeted for these exams, particularly in the 21st century, are Black people or people of colour, originating in Africa and Asia), and sexism (i.e. stemming from the belief that it was not possible for women to perform so well, and thus certain athletes must not be women at all).

Most recently, April 2018, World Athletics introduced “Eligibility Regulations for Female Classification (Athlete with Differences of Sex Development)” for international events, including 400m, hurdles races, 800m, 1500m, one mile races and combined events over the same distances (“Restricted Events”).<sup>18</sup> Under these regulations, all intersex women whose testosterone level exceeds 5 nmol/L will be forced to take drugs that suppress their natural testosterone level in order to be eligible. However, as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has pointed out, “being intersex of itself does not entail better performance, whereas other physical variations that do affect performance [...] are not subjected to such scrutiny and restrictions”.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ghattas, Dan Christian (2019). *Protecting intersex people in Europe: A toolkit for law and policymakers*. ILGA-Europe and OII Europe. p. 9. Available from: [https://oiieurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Protecting\\_intersex\\_in\\_Europe\\_toolkit.pdf](https://oiieurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Protecting_intersex_in_Europe_toolkit.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Caster Semenya has appealed rules requiring her to take medication to regulate her testosterone levels. Her case has been submitted to the European Court of Human Rights.

<sup>13</sup> See: <https://www.facebook.com/oiieurope/posts/2466725523387655>

<sup>14</sup> See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/16/sports/intersex-runner-surgery-track-and-field.html>

<sup>15</sup> Pieper, Lindsay Parks (2014). *Sex Testing and the Maintenance of Western Femininity in International Sport*, *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 31:13, 1557-1576, DOI: 10.1080/09523367.2014.927184

<sup>16</sup> Simpson, J.L., Ljungqvist, A., de la Chapelle, A. et al. Gender Verification in Competitive Sports. *Sports Medicine* 16, 305–315 (1993). <https://doi.org/10.2165/00007256-199316050-00002>

<sup>17</sup> See: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport2/hi/athletics/8210471.stm>

<sup>18</sup> See: <https://www.iaaf.org/news/press-release/eligibility-regulations-for-female-classifica>

<sup>19</sup> United Nations (2015): *Free & Equal. Fact Sheet Intersex*, p. 2. Available from: [https://unfe.org/system/unfe-65-Intersex\\_Factsheet\\_ENGLISH.pdf](https://unfe.org/system/unfe-65-Intersex_Factsheet_ENGLISH.pdf)



In March 2019, the 2019 UN Human Rights Council resolution on the “Elimination of discrimination against women and girls in sport” notes with concern that the World Athletics regulation “may not be compatible with international human rights norms and standards” and called upon States to “ensure that sporting associations and bodies implement policies and practices in accordance with international human rights norms and standards, and refrain from developing and enforcing policies and practices that force, coerce or otherwise pressure women and girl athletes into undergoing unnecessary, humiliating and harmful medical procedures in order to participate in women’s events in competitive sports”.<sup>20</sup> Despite these warnings, World Athletics revised its guidelines in May 2019<sup>21</sup> to specifically mandate testing and coerced treatment based on testosterone levels linked to certain intersex variations.

According to sports experts, testosterone is only one of many factors that impacts performance and the naturally occurring differences in humans (e.g. oxygen uptake, capillary density, or the ability to tolerate high levels of lactic acid) that have direct impact on an athlete’s performance in sports competitions.<sup>22</sup> Regardless whether testosterone is to be considered a key performance factor or not, the World Athletics regulations might lead to further discrimination of intersex athletes/athletes with variations of sex characteristics in all areas of sports. In addition, implementation practices of these regulations may include discriminatory practices and the violation of the athletes right to privacy. The possible physical and psychological side-effects of coerced medication need also to be taken into account.

Intersex contributors to this submission indicated that “sex verification” testing and the potential to be exposed to invasive medical examinations has a dramatic impact on their ability and even desire to participate in sport. It is especially important to note that many intersex people/people with variations of sex characteristics are exposed to medical violence in infancy and childhood, being subjected to unconsented surgeries and other medical procedures<sup>23</sup> as well as extensive examinations of their genitals.<sup>24</sup> Simply the prospect of exposure to medicalisation can act as sufficient deterrent for intersex women to participate in sport. Women with variations of sex characteristics athletes are also exposed to significant media attention, and in the widely-reported case of Caster Semenya, she reports that the scrutiny of sports associations coupled with media attention have destroyed her “mentally and physically”.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Annet Negesa is an intersex athlete who underwent a gonadectomy to be able to compete; she describes the procedure being misrepresented to her, as “an

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<sup>20</sup> See: A/HRC/40/L.10/Rev.1, para 3. Available from: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/L.10/Rev.1>

<sup>21</sup> See: <https://www.worldathletics.org/news/press-releases/questions-answers-iaaf-female-eligibility-reg>

<sup>22</sup> See: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/2017/08/11/intersex-athletes-learn-will-forced-take-drugs-suppress-testosterone/>

<sup>23</sup> EU Fundamental Rights Agency (2020). *EU-LGBTI II: A long way to go for LGBTI equality*. Available from: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1_en.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> De Bruyn, Piet (2017). Promoting the human rights of and eliminating discrimination against intersex people, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. Available from: <https://pace.coe.int/pdf/0f9c0beef2be1c94882e907480ef9fb51f7a9acc3326667a8259ffe25682ae848428feba12/doc.%2014404.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> See: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/athletics/48820717>

injection.”<sup>26</sup> She stopped competing afterwards and described grossly inadequate physical and mental aftercare for the procedure.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, there is a high risk of human rights violations stemming from these discriminatory regulations and practices. According to the 2016 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Health, these policies “have led to women athletes being discriminated against and forced or coerced into ‘treatment’ for hyperandrogenism [...] a number of athletes have undergone gonadectomy (removal of reproductive organs) and partial clitoridectomy (a form of female genital mutilation) in the absence of symptoms or health issues warranting those procedures.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/athletics/2019/09/27/female-athletes-claim-careers-ruined-coerced-surgery-curb-testosterone/>

<sup>27</sup> See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/16/sports/intersex-runner-surgery-track-and-field.html>

<sup>28</sup> A/HRC/32/33, 56, para 56. Available from: <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/32/33>

## 2. Violence and discrimination against lesbian, bisexual and queer women in sport

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this document, sport has been traditionally associated with virility and generally dominated by men<sup>29</sup>. Sports fields are therefore spaces in which social phenomena such as lesbophobia, intended here as a combination of misogyny and sexuality-related stigma, affecting athletes that are, or are perceived as, non-heterosexual women are extremely difficult to eradicate. Despite some progresses in several countries regarding LGBTI acceptance within societies, lesbian, bisexual and queer (LBQ) women participating in sport have to deal with both: the discrimination and hostile environment encountered by women in general while practicing sport, as well as with the widespread stigma related with non-heterosexual sexual orientation. The 2017 EIGE report on Gender in sport noted that “Some environments (especially those traditionally labelled as ‘masculine’) are characterised by misogyny and homophobia<sup>30</sup>”. This has a direct impact on the lived experience of LBQ women in sport, as explained by one of our contributors from Iceland:

*“My experience as a queer woman in sports is tainted by both positions - being queer and a woman. Being a woman meant being less than the men, which on the whole meant getting less experienced coaches, worse practice times, less money, less respect and interest from the community/club. (...) Being a queer woman was a times shrouded in silence, with people either not daring to discuss queerness or discussing it in very strange (and demeaning) ways, e.g. calling my female partner and I, sisters or pals. Also hearing (after the fact) that certain team members were uneasy about showering with me (and my partner) and knowing that the men’s teams pornified my position as a queer woman. (...)”*

Bias and discrimination against LBQ athletes can occur in particular through negative stereotypes, verbal comments and harassment, discrimination, social isolation, and loss of resources<sup>31</sup>. Often the manifestations of lesbophobia are rather an injunction to silence and invisibility. The experiences shared by our contributors goes in this direction and are described below.

Additionally, mainstream media plays an important part in the equation. Their general coverage of women in sport is not only poor (from 2 to 5% on average across Europe<sup>32</sup>), but furthermore,

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<sup>29</sup> Katsarova, I. (2019). Gender equality in sport: Getting closer every day. European Parliament Research Service. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS\\_BRI\(2019\)635560\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/635560/EPRS_BRI(2019)635560_EN.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> EIGE (2017). Gender in sport. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-sport>

<sup>31</sup> See in particular Barber, H., Krane V. (2007). Creating inclusive and positive climates in girls' and women's sport: position statement on homophobia, homonegativism, and heterosexism. *Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal*, 16 (1),53-56.

<sup>32</sup> Report by FARE and Les Degommeuses (2017) on coverage of feminine football [http://lesdegommeuses.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FARE\\_FOOTFEMININ-1.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2RJP\\_70k2jyphuHmSruv5lp6KohW7SUqPppAGVukectXBsiyvVMV1RNI2A](http://lesdegommeuses.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/FARE_FOOTFEMININ-1.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2RJP_70k2jyphuHmSruv5lp6KohW7SUqPppAGVukectXBsiyvVMV1RNI2A)

journalists are often unequipped to deconstruct misogynistic representations, or the complex specificity of lesbophobia<sup>33</sup>.

## **Hate speech and harassment**

LBQ athletes have to face specific forms of hate speech and harassment based on their gender, sexual orientation and gender expression.

The **Outsport Survey 2020** reported that 82% of lesbian women who had experienced negative events in past year have been verbally insulted in their sports while 36% have experienced verbal threats. This data is confirmed by the experience of LBQ athletes, teams and NGOs.

The NGO **Identity Education** from **Romania** shared that harassment is often directed to athletes on the basis of their gender expression from crowds and audience, especially towards masculine looking/perceived players. Similar testimonies are available from other countries and shared in different media<sup>34</sup>. **Les Degommeuses** a football team and NGO composed by lesbians and allies from Paris, **France** reported to the French press of being insulted as lesbians and being actively discriminated against when trying to enter sporting facilities. *"At the beginning of our weekly slot in the stadium, we kindly asked the coach who was training a team of young boys to leave the field because this was our time to go in. The man got very angry right away. He quickly also became very rude in front of the children, (...) pushing one of my players and then turning to his young players, who must have been 12-13. He galvanized them them by saying: "let's go boys, look, let's applaud the lesbians". There followed a collective outburst with kids jumping and shouting: "booh! Lesbians, baaaah!"*<sup>35</sup>.

## **Discrimination**

LBQ women in sports experience also form of discrimination based on their sexual orientation that impact negatively their willingness to come out and ultimately their well-being.

As reported by the NGO **Identity Education** from **Romania** "LB women in sports usually hide their sexual orientation and relationships from their teammates and from their coaches, as this sometimes influences the decision if they are drafted for a team or not and gossip is unhealthy for a team sport".

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<sup>33</sup> Homosexualité dans le sport féminin : « Out », mais pas trop ! Par Women Sports, July 2020, <https://www.sport.fr/omnisports/homosexualite-dans-le-sport-feminin-out-mais-pas-trop-par-women-sports-668727.shtm?fbclid=IwAR0cwC4vMvOoNuS-NESUBIIODqrTNjGvJJeTNEVqUPOseOKO4Ivu7HoKOFI>

<sup>34</sup> See for example personal testimonies collected for a radio show focusing on lesbian and sport in **Italy**. <https://border-radio.it/podcast/sport-coming-out-e-diritti-negati-con-luisa-rizzitelli-e-unospite-a-sorpresa-ep-4-stag-2020-2021/>

<sup>35</sup> Media report of the incident available here: <https://www.madmoizelle.com/les-degommeuses-lesbophobie-319487>

The **Bilitis Foundation in Bulgaria** reported that the discrimination of LGBTI athletes is so severe that no athlete dares to come out. As they said: *"The oppression of the society is so strong that women in teams agree to not being visible claiming it is the sport that is important not the individuals."* In reality, as with most systems of marginalisation and exclusion, the gender binary and associated stereotypes in sport are so deeply and structurally ingrained that many people end up self-policing, frequently in ways that are not straightforward or apparent even to them. For example, EGLSF reports that many women athletes who are openly out in other areas of their lives, indicate that they are not out in their mainstream sports team, or that when they are, they don't discuss it for fear of "becoming the stereotype" and letting down their teammates.

Discrimination is also acted through professional working conditions, unfair hiring practices and biased recruitment based on stereotypes concerning lesbians, such as the cliché that lesbians are sexual predators and constitute a threat for heterosexual female athletes<sup>36</sup>. In some cases clearly discriminatory and biased special rules are set up in official contracts. **Manuela Benelli**, born in 1963, a former volleyball player who came out as lesbian and is considered the most famous and successful volleyball player in **Italian** history, in 2015 had the courage to denounce her contract as team coach. *"The contract I have signed said that if I bothered one of my players, I would be immediately removed. While a man manager or coach who tries to flirt with a woman in his team,"* Manuela commented sadly, *"usually gets a pat on the back. (...) Do you think there has ever been a mention like mine in a man's contract in Italy?"*<sup>37</sup>

### **The impact of gender stereotype on LBQ athletes**

A common social constraint that has a specific impact on LBQ athletes is the qualification of sports as "masculine" or "feminine". This is particularly taxing for women that engage in those sports at the price of being considered "unfeminine" in their social environment, leading them to drop out of sports or select to participate in socially acceptable "feminine sports"<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, sports deemed "masculine" are also associated with the **stereotype that female athletes** engaging in them are **necessarily lesbians**<sup>39</sup> and this is particularly damaging for LBQ athletes. As mentioned in the UN Report on women and sport a "culture of silence" is often imposed<sup>40</sup> where teams, coaches and social environment may discourage LBQ athletes to

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<sup>36</sup> K. Kauer (2006), Scary dykes and feminine queens: Stereotypes and female collegiate athletes, *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal* 15(1):42-55

<sup>37</sup> Interview to Manuela Benelli in the press available here: <https://www.gay.it/nello-sport-contratti-di-lavoro-omofobi-denuncia-manuela-benelli>

<sup>38</sup> Barber, H., Krane V. (2007). Creating inclusive and positive climates in girls' and women's sport: position statement on homophobia, homonegativism, and heterosexism. *Women in Sport & Physical Activity Journal*, 16 (1), 53-56.

<sup>39</sup> C. Talleu (2016), Access for Girls and Women to Sport Practices, Council of Europe's Handbook on good practices <https://edoc.coe.int/en/gender-equality/6957-gender-equality-in-sports.html>. See also the results of K. Kauer (2006), Scary dykes and feminine queens: Stereotypes and female collegiate athletes, *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal* 15(1):42-55 where the idea that female athletes are lesbians was the first stereotype recognised by all the athletes participating in the study

<sup>40</sup> United Nations (2007), Women, gender equality and sport, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/public/Women%20and%20Sport.pdf>

publicly come out in order not to “confirm” this stereotype and “taint” their reputation and the reputation of their sport<sup>41</sup>. Often, social pressure begins within families, refusing their daughters to access sports considered as “too masculine” and by consequence full of lesbians who will have a bad influence on young girls<sup>42</sup>.

The **Club LGTB+ Samarucs** in Valencia, **Spain** shared that “lesbian women with good sporting results suffer discrimination as they are associated with the masculine and are derided as “butch”. The comments that they receive are often offensive just because they are lesbians. For example, a lesbian within a sports team may cast suspicion on the rest of the players that they are also lesbian, so this can on some occasions generate prejudice and segregation by their teammates and lead to a preference to keep their sexual orientation hidden because it appears to be something “negative”.

Finally, in a context in which women are considerably less represented in governing structures, constitutes a minority of coaches, there is a substantial gender pay gap and there is a substantial difference in investments, media attention and corporate interest in women’s league, lesbophobic stereotypes are often used to reinforce this system and dismiss requests for increased gender equality in sport<sup>43</sup>. In several countries, female footballers are still “amateurs” even when they play at the highest level and therefore have considerably lower salaries and no access to social security benefits when compared with male athletes competing at the same level. In **Italy**, in 2015, during an official meeting, the president of the national league managing female football dismissed requests for increase in investments and pay with the sentence “*Enough with talking about giving money to those 4 lesbians*”<sup>44</sup>.

The lesbophobic environment described above, constituted of the widespread harassment, hate speech and the gender stereotypes, have a direct impact on LBQ women access and participation in sports activities. In the **Outsport** survey, 9% of lesbian women have quit their sports because they felt uncomfortable with their sexual orientation and 10% of lesbian women have refrained from certain sports on grounds of their sexual orientation. The 16% of lesbian women who never participated in any sports except for physical education did so because feeling uncomfortable due to their sexual orientation. This is in line with the experience of one of our contributors that stated “*My experience is coloured by both positive and negative experiences. I had a lot of great times too, support from teammates, success and fun. I do however think that had the environment been better, especially for me as a woman (...) I would have played my sport for longer*”.

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<sup>41</sup> D.C. Plymire, P.J. Forman (2000), Breaking the Silence: Lesbian Fans, the Internet, and the Sexual Politics of Women's Sport, *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 5(2)

<sup>42</sup> The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2008:

[https://www.funding4sport.co.uk/downloads/women\\_barriers\\_participation.pdf](https://www.funding4sport.co.uk/downloads/women_barriers_participation.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> K. Kauer (2006), Scary dykes and feminine queens: Stereotypes and female collegiate athletes, *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal* 15(1):42-55

<sup>44</sup> The sentence caused a broad media attention:

[https://www.repubblica.it/sport/calcio/2015/05/14/news/belloli\\_frase\\_contro\\_ragazze-114351367/](https://www.repubblica.it/sport/calcio/2015/05/14/news/belloli_frase_contro_ragazze-114351367/)

### 3. Violence and discrimination against trans women in sport

Like anyone else, trans people do sports for a variety of reasons, such as fitness, community, competition, or mental well-being:

*“Sports give me a bit of relaxation, feeling especially after work and especially on the bike. I feel this freedom - there are almost no barriers.”* Tina, Slovenia<sup>45</sup>

*“To me, sports is a connection to my body. Sometimes during your transition, there are a lot of changes and things you have to understand. It's nice to channel this energy while doing sports, it gives you a kind of orientation while you are doing your transition.”* Lea Marie, Germany/Argentina

The impact of everyday discrimination, stigma, and violence on the mental and physical health of trans people has been widely documented.<sup>46</sup> Although sports can play an important role in improving well-being, research overwhelmingly points to alarming rates of negative experiences that trans people have to deal with in **sports**.<sup>47</sup> Exclusion and negative experiences in sport can be detrimental and can result in stress, feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, depression, and risk of suicide.<sup>48</sup>

In 2012, the EU FRA LGBT Survey I found that 15% of trans people, who accessed sports or fitness facilities just in the previous 12 months, felt personally discriminated against, compared to 10% among LGBT people on average.<sup>49</sup> The 2019 Outsport survey report<sup>50</sup> presents even

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<sup>45</sup> Some quotes in this section are from trans people who shared their stories with TGEU directly via a group discussion organised by the German OUT\*side project. The discussion was joined by Thea and Lea Marie in Germany, Maria in France, and Tina in Slovenia.

<sup>46</sup> See for instance: TGEU, *Overdiagnosed but Underserved*, 2017, <https://tgeu.org/healthcare>; Stonewall, *LGBT in Britain: Health report*, 2018, <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/lgbt-britain-health>; Anderssen, N., Sivertsen, B., Lønning, K.J. et al. Life satisfaction and mental health among transgender students in Norway. *BMC Public Health* 20, 138 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-8228-5>; EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Being Trans in the EU - Comparative analysis of the EU LGBT survey data*, 2014, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/being-trans-eu-comparative-analysis-eu-lgbt-survey-data>; EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, *A long way to go for LGBTI equality*, 2020, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1_en.pdf)

<sup>47</sup> Schneeberger Andres Ricardo, Gupta Rahul, Flütsch Niklaus, Recher Alecs. *LGBTQI and sports - future implications for sports psychiatry*. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Medicine Switzerland (SEMS)*. <https://sems-journal.ch/8481>

<sup>48</sup> Barber, Heather and Vikki Krane. *Creating Inclusive and Positive Climates in Girls' and Women's Sport: Position Statement on Homophobia, Homonegativism, and Heterosexism*. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, Volume 16: Issue 1, pp. 53–55. <https://doi.org/10.1123/wspaj.16.1.53>

<sup>49</sup> EU LGBT survey - European Union lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender survey - Main results. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. October 2014. p. 41. [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-eu-lgbt-survey-main-results\\_tk3113640enc\\_1.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-eu-lgbt-survey-main-results_tk3113640enc_1.pdf)

The EU LGBTI Survey II (2019) did not include targeted questions about experiences in gyms and other sports facilities.

<sup>50</sup> Menzel, T., Braumüller, B. & Hartmann-Tews, I. (2019). *The relevance of sexual orientation and gender identity in sport in Europe. Findings from the Outsport survey*. Cologne: German Sport University Cologne, Institute of Sociology and Gender Studies. <https://www.out-sport.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/OUTSPORT-Report-Relevance-of-SOGI-in-Sport-in-Europe-3.pdf>

more alarming results and also highlights that trans people's negative experiences are far more common than those of cisgender LGB people.

- 45% of trans people have **stopped sports** because they felt uncomfortable due to their SOGI<sup>51</sup> [cisgender LB women: 3% and cisgender GB men: 10%]
- 26% of trans people had **negative experiences** in sports [cisgender LGB people: 12%]
- 62% of trans people **never participated in sports**, other than mandatory physical education in school, because of feeling uncomfortable with their SOGI [cisgender LB women: 5% and cisgender GB men: 22%].

In terms of trans women's experiences in particular, the report found that

- 53% of trans women **felt excluded** from particular sports as a result of their SOGI<sup>52</sup>
- 46% of trans women have had **negative experiences** in sports and more than half of them had experienced **physical aggression or violence**.<sup>53</sup>

Domestic NGOs have also studied the experiences of trans people in sports.<sup>54</sup> For instance, the **Swiss** trans organisation TGNS found in a 2020 survey<sup>55</sup> that 75% of trans respondents had negative experiences in sports. Swedish RFSL recently conducted interviews with trans athletes<sup>56</sup> and the City of Reykjavík's Office for Human Rights and Democracy ran a survey with LGBT people about their experiences in sports.<sup>57</sup>

### ***Trans women face discrimination in participating and competing in sports***

Competitive sports often become yet another battlefield for trans women to navigate, adding to the discrimination and violence they already experience on a daily basis.<sup>58</sup>

In 2003<sup>59</sup>, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was the first institution to regulate the participation of trans people in competitive sport, requiring trans women athletes to undergo mandatory surgeries, hormonal treatment, and change their legal gender.<sup>60</sup> Trans athletes,

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<sup>51</sup> Compared to 3% among cisgender women and 10% among cisgender men.

<sup>52</sup> Compared to 12% of cisgender women and 17% of bisexual persons. Among trans people, 57% trans men and 52% of non-binary trans people reported such experiences. Ibid, pp. 24-25.

<sup>53</sup> Compared to 12% among cisgender people and 36% of all non-cisgender people. Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>54</sup> Although not a report, see for instance the recent interview with TENI's Sarah Phillips on trans people's experiences in sports in Ireland. Off The Ball (OTB) on Youtube. 10 January 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B1y7WitMLcE>

<sup>55</sup> Transmensen im Sport: Hindernisse und Bedürfnisse. TGNS. June 2020. [https://www.tgns.ch/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20-06-19\\_Trans-Sein-im-Sport\\_Auswertung.pdf](https://www.tgns.ch/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20-06-19_Trans-Sein-im-Sport_Auswertung.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Trans & Sport: No one should be left behind. RFSL. September 2020. [https://www.rfsl.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Trans-och-idrott\\_enstaka-sidor.pdf](https://www.rfsl.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Trans-och-idrott_enstaka-sidor.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.frettabladid.is/sport/orf-a-hinsegin-frslu-i-irottalifi/>

<sup>58</sup> Schneeberger et al, op.cit.

<sup>59</sup> International Olympic Committee, Statement of the Stockholm consensus on sex reassignment in sports, November 2003. Located at <https://www.olympic.org/documents>.

<sup>60</sup> The surveillance of women's bodies in competitive sports started in the 1930s, allegedly to prevent men from wrongfully competing in women's sports. Both the IAAF (now World Athletics) and the IOC introduced "sex tests" in the 1940s and required women to strip naked and have their genitals examined. The tests became invasive later but continued to police women's bodies. See: Pereira-García, S.; Devís-Devís, J.; Pérez-Samaniego, V.; Fuentes-Miguel,



whose visibility grew over the past two decades, for decades “claimed, with many difficulties and rejections from society, their right to participate.”<sup>61</sup>

Referring to evolving international consensus on the autonomy of one’s gender identity, recognizing that coerced surgeries violate human rights, and affirming the need to include trans people in sports, the IOC dropped the surgery requirement<sup>62</sup> in 2015. The other two conditions still remain and require trans women to undergo regular testing of their hormone levels.<sup>63</sup> Although surveillance of trans women’s bodies have softened, they continue to discriminate, perpetuate stigma, and harm trans athletes on the individual level.<sup>64</sup> Testosterone levels remain unchecked in the case of men (both trans and cisgender); for cisgender women, testosterone testing is highly contested.<sup>65</sup>

Despite meeting the IOC requirements, **Italian** professional Paralympic runner Valentina Petrillo was repeatedly denied by the Italian Federation for Paralympic and Experimental Sport to compete in the women’s race.<sup>66</sup> Feeling uncomfortable competing in men’s running, Petrillo quit professional sports back in the 1990s, despite the prospect of competing in Atlanta in 1996. After years of battle with the Federation, Petrillo eventually secured a racing permit in 2020 and has since competed with great success. She is expected to run in Tokyo in 2021, which would make her the first trans athlete to represent Italy.

*“It feels so...normal [...] I feel at home, in the category I belong. Looking back, I’m even more aware of how hard it was for me to run with men. I felt so out of place.”<sup>67</sup>*

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J. ; López-Cañada, E. (2020). The Transsexual and Intersex People in Spanish Competitive Sport: Three Cases. International Journal of Medicine and Sciences of Physical Activity and Sport vol. 20 (80) pp. 539-551 [Http://cdeporte.rediris.es/revista/revista80/artpersonas1186.htm](http://cdeporte.rediris.es/revista/revista80/artpersonas1186.htm)

<sup>61</sup> Pereira-García, S. ; Devís-Devís, J. ; Pérez-Samaniego, V. ; Fuentes-Miguel, J. ; López-Cañada, E. (2020), op.cit.

<sup>62</sup> Trans women must have declared to have the gender identity ‘female’ for at least four years; having had a max. of 10 nmol/L testosterone for at least 12 months prior to their first competition and throughout the duration of eligibility; undergo regular testing. See: International Olympic Committee, IOC Consensus Meeting on Sex Reassignment and Hyperandrogenism November 2015. Located at <https://www.olympic.org/documents>. See also the IOC’s Explanatory Note to the Recommendation on Sex Reassignment and Sports on the same page.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Higher levels of testosterone do not necessarily amount to higher performance, and women with lower testosterone may very well do better in sports than women with higher levels. Sport Disrupted - Sextesting Policies and Fairness, presentation at the 2019 international conference “Sport disrupted. Sexuality matters”.

<https://vimeo.com/422798161> and Karkazis, Katrina and Rebecca M. Jordan-Young, The Powers of Testosterone: Obscuring Race and Regional Bias in the Regulation of Women Athletes. Feminist Formations. June 2018. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320022246>

<sup>65</sup> See: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/12/04/theyre-chasing-us-away-sport/human-rights-violations-sex-testing-elite-women>

<sup>66</sup> Paralimpici: Valentina Petrillo, è lei la prima transgender ammessa a gara ufficiale tra le donne [Paralympian Valentina Petrillo, the first trans person admitted to an official competition among women]. Gazzetta. 9 September 2020. <https://www.gazzetta.it/Paralimpici/09-09-2020/paralimpici-valentina-petrillo-prima-transgender-ammessa-gara-ufficiale-le-donne-3801817096851.shtml>

<sup>67</sup> Italy’s Valentina Petrillo takes a powerful step towards Tokyo. 18 September 2020. Outsports. <https://www.outsports.com/2020/9/18/21443929/italy-athletics-valentina-petrillo-transgender-athletes-athletics-paralymphics-tokyo-sprints>

Michaela Jessica Tschitschke, featured in the documentary 'Game On: queer disruptions in sport'<sup>68</sup>, was able to train on a women's floorball team in **Germany**, but not to race. To receive a competing permit, she was required to undergo surgical interventions, which would have left her permanently sterile. Michaela quit floorball. Returning to sports, Michaela later joined a women's football team in **Germany**. After a year and presumably due to a complaint by a competing team about her trans status, she was told to leave. Natalie van Gogh, a professional cyclist in the **Netherlands** also recounted feeling humiliated when no women's teams allowed her to join.<sup>69</sup>

In **Spain**, trans women and girls must have changed the legal gender in their birth certificates in order to play on women's teams. Although legal gender recognition is available to minors nationwide<sup>70</sup>, only 9 of the 17 regions provide a procedure that is based solely on self-determination.<sup>71</sup> Regardless, the regional regulations only allow for the changing of one's health or student card for instance, while the changing of birth certificates is regulated by the national law. Spain is currently reviewing its national LGR law, and it is hoped that LGR will be available for adults and minors alike, solely on the basis of self-determination. In the meantime, trans female youth who are unable or unwilling to fulfil the intrusive LGR requirements, such as mandatory psychiatric diagnosis and medical treatment, cannot pursue sports. In submitting organisation ARELAS's experience, most trans girls and young women quit sports if their only option is to be on a male team.

The **Serbian** trans and intersex organisation XY Spectrum shared the story of a young athlete, who wanted to return to competitive running after her medical transition. Although she met the IOC requirements, the difficulty was to find a trans-friendly trainer who was willing to work with her. The trainer who eventually agreed was optimistic about her going all the way to the Olympics. Like many other trans women, the athlete did not have a supportive family or financial security to rely on during her training. Overall, the challenges were so great, that the girl gave up after a few months.

France-based former swimmer, Maria shared her experiences:

*"I did swimming when I was younger, then went to compete. But people used to perceive me out of their ideas of masculinity, and never fitted their binary expectations of gender. I decided to stop completely, it was best for me mentally. But I stopped the possibility of going pro and doing my favourite sport. I imagined what if people had supported me back then. Just a "we know that you are here, and this is your space too" would've helped me so much. Maybe I would have had the confidence to keep going."*

Most eligibility requirements for trans people's participation are for elite or competitive level sport and are not designed to govern grassroots sport. Yet, the experience of most trans people

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<sup>68</sup> Game On is a documentary about LGBTQI athletes, which was shared with TGEU by the Hungarian Civil Work Association.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Annual Review 2021: Spain, ILGA-Europe. February 2021. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/2021/spain.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> Trans Rights Europe and Central Asia Index & Maps 2020. [https://tgeu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/index\\_TGEU2020-ENG.png](https://tgeu.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/index_TGEU2020-ENG.png)

is that there is a trickle-down effect: in the absence of clear policy in low-level sport, it is common that sports associations and groups will end up applying elite level standards. Even if they are not applying the actual policies, the culture, the ideas, the messages are often still felt at those levels. In addition, many trans people just look at the media discourse around such issues and decide that a particular sport is not for them as a result.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, the participation specifically of trans women in women's sports has become a lightning rod for efforts to undermine the rights of trans people.<sup>73</sup> Anti-trans and anti-gender actors increasingly insist that even where the aforementioned eligibility criteria have been met, that allowing trans women and girls to participate in sport based on their gender identity will undermine women's sports, despite criteria already existing to address perceptions of advantage or disadvantage. Exclusionary efforts are even resulting in the founding of organisations, who market themselves as "women's organisations", whose primary objective appears to be extending the marginalisation of trans women and girls in sport.<sup>74</sup> Participation in sport is vital for a healthy life - both physically and socially - and debates around the participation of trans women and girls, which in some cases are resulting in a complete ban on their participation<sup>75</sup>, can deny trans women and girls access to sport altogether. This perpetuates anti-trans discourse and exposes trans women to further stigma, discrimination, and violence.

### ***Trans women face harassment on grounds of their gender identity or expression***

Trans women report being targeted by transphobic bullying and harassment, including intrusive questions, staring, by peers, coaches, organisers, and fans alike. Natalie van Gogh, **Dutch** cyclist recounted having been harassed on social media and during races, and an incident when a top athlete asked her "what she had between her legs".<sup>76</sup>

*"It's a fact that I am one of the very few transgender athletes who compete at a high level. It's also a fact there is still a lot of ignorance. [...] I have been testosterone free for years, yet still people find it unfair I compete. But how? Literally all women in the peloton [ed: road bicycle race] have more testosterone than I have."<sup>77</sup>*

The **Italian** Gruppo Trans shared with TGEU that despite the potential of sports to counter social exclusion, they have witnessed many trans people leave sports due to feeling unsafe. A testimony submitted by the group captures the lived experiences of trans women:

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<sup>72</sup> From focus groups conducted by the European Gay & Lesbian Sports Federation in January 2021 from an as yet unpublished study report on *Human rights, trans athletes and athletes with variations of sex characteristics in sport*

<sup>73</sup> See: <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/18/978716732/wave-of-new-bills-say-trans-athletes-have-an-unfair-edge-what-does-the-science-s>

<sup>74</sup> See: <https://theconversation.com/world-rugbys-ban-on-trans-players-has-nothing-to-do-with-so-called-fairness-150589>

<sup>75</sup> On 12 March 2021, the US state of Mississippi banned trans women and girls from participation in women's sports. See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56275274>

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> <https://cyclistsalliance.org/articles/i-am-finally-human/>

*"I'm a trans woman and started my transition two years ago. I've always practised sports, but nowadays I don't, because I don't like to justify myself every time I ask for the disabled toilet to change. I'm not disabled, I'm a transgender woman and I would live according to my gender. I cannot practice team sports either - football, rugby, basketball - because the associations think that a trans woman can have an unfair advantage."*

Working out in the gym, running in the park, or stretching after a hike, women often become targets of harassment and violence that objectifies and sexualises them. Trans women are no exception.

*"I love doing my workout routine in the park. But today was the second time in this month that I saw a man, who just stared at me and started publicly masturbating. I had no one to go to and zero trust in the police, because I doubted their proper training in dealing with a Non-European citizen that happens to be a woman part of the LGBTQ+ community. And I got frustrated, because I was already covering my body. Wearing two oversized jackets and thick sweatpants, to protect myself from being sexualized by people in the park. I felt like I was hiding my femininity so at the end, I left the park." Maria, France*

Migrant trans women shared that they often were not sure why they were targeted in a given incident:

*"I did martial arts when I transitioned. There were strange reactions. At first, I couldn't tell if it was because I'm an immigrant, or not a native speaker, or because I'm trans. People didn't acknowledge my gender identity, my name, or my pronouns. When it's like that, you have to acknowledge that it's not the best place for you. It was sad." Lea Marie, Germany/Argentina*

### ***Trans women feel unsafe in gendered facilities***

Trans people also widely report feeling unsafe when it comes to changing or taking a shower in sports facilities, and many opt out to avoid comments, stares, or intrusive questions. The **Swedish** LGBTQI Federation's 2020 report on trans people in sports<sup>78</sup> feature several testimonies by trans women, who speak about their discomfort with gendered sports gear and changing rooms and having stopped sports due to feeling unsafe. The London based Trans and Gender non-conforming Swimmers' Group (Tags) shared that the **UK's** COVID-restrictions made it mandatory for swimmers to change by the pool, deterring many from practice. Other testimonies also echoed these fears:

*"Witnessing bullying in sports when I was young had a big impact on me and made me want to avoid team settings, to not be exposed. So, I did individual sports for a long time, and avoided changing rooms or gyms where people can comment on your appearance of performance."*  
Thea, Germany

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<sup>78</sup> op. cit. Trans & Sport: No one should be left behind. RFSL.

*“You can’t do what you want, and that’s discrimination. We can’t accept it. People are looking at you as if you were trying to hide something or you were a freak. It’s difficult. I love to go to the sauna. But it took me 6 months to make a decision and go. We have to be treated with respect.”* Lea Marie, Germany/Argentina

Tina, who is a survivor of a hate crime, shared:

*“If it’s possible, I try to avoid situations, so it’s not like what happened to me with those guys [ed: perpetrators]. The only place where I went swimming in a women’s swimsuit was in the sea and it was just me and my friend. But then I had to go to the pool for physiotherapy, and the first times I went to the women’s changing room, people were looking at me strange. But then I went twice for five weeks and they started to accept me. People who run those facilities, gyms or pools, they should accept and support us, not discriminate against us.”* Tina, Slovenia

*“The way sports spaces were set up tended to send a message of well-being only for certain kinds of profiles. It has room for improvements to fit to trans and non-binary people in multiple aspects. It would be lovely to walk into a sports environment, knowing the crew and the leaders involved are prepared and ready to have in mind the whole spectrum of LGBTQ needs.”* Maria, France

### ***Trans people have created their own spaces where they feel safe and empowered***

Trans specific sports clubs and activities exist in several countries. For instance, Tags in **London**<sup>79</sup>; a workout class in a gym in **Bologna** run by UISP and Gruppo Trans APS; the OUT\*side project in **Berlin** for trans, non-binary, and intersex people. Very often, these groups are founded<sup>80</sup> by trans athletes who had long faced discrimination. Trans inclusive sports spaces for LGBTI women include ‘Discover Football’ in **Germany**; Tomorrow Women In Sports Foundation in **Uganda**; and for LGBT+ people, Club LGTB+ Samarcus Valencia in **Spain**. Michaela, from Germany, is now a football coach on the ‘Discover Football’ team, which welcomes women, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. Michaela recounts that this team was the first space where she felt comfortable. Others shared similar experiences:

*“I went to queer games in Rome and Paris. Those experiences were incredible. It’s a really inclusive place and you can really relax.”* Tina, Slovenia

Trans or LGBTI-specific sports events, initiatives, and facilities can be great sources of community and empowerment. Nonetheless, everyone should be welcomed to do sports in mainstream facilities, regardless of their gender identity or expression:

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<sup>79</sup> The transgender swimming club making waves. Dazed. August 2017.

<https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/36935/1/the-transgender-swimming-club-making-waves>

<sup>80</sup> TWISF tackles sexual and gender phobias in the sports fraternity. Kuchu Times. October 2020.

<https://www.kuchutimes.com/2020/10/twif-tackles-sexual-and-gender-phobias-in-the-sports-fraternity/>

*“I love having our group [for trans girls]. But I definitely want to feel safe in mainstream spaces. We deserve mainstream! Especially for young people, who are taking their first steps in their self-expression. It is important to have safe space everywhere.” Marie, France*

It is important to note that trans-specific spaces may work well in big cities, but in smaller and rural areas, there is often no critical mass to sustain them. Consequently, trans women in those areas are excluded by their geography. LEAP Sports Scotland told us:

*“We tried to run trans-specific swimming, football and badminton clubs, but could never get the numbers of people needed to sustain a club. Instead we’ve set up initiatives like Trans\*Active to provide opportunities for trans people to get together, find sports buddies, and self-organise. This also means we can support people in more individualised pathways into sport.”*

## 4. Recommendations and good practice examples

### Recommendations to Member States

- Support awareness-raising campaigns regarding violence and discrimination against LGBTI women in sport, including by uplifting LGBTI women role models.
- States should create laws that explicitly ensure that regulations and practices in public and private sectors, e.g. in competitive sport, do not bypass national protection and anti-discrimination legislation and provisions.
- Ensure that sports associations, teams, and facilities
  - put in place measures to actively include and openly and visibly welcome LGBTI athletes
  - ensure that the gender identity and expression, names, and pronouns of trans athletes are respected
  - ensure that trans athletes can both train and compete according to their gender identity and/or on teams where they feel safe
  - sanction discrimination, harassment, and violence against LGBTI people in sports
  - ensure that coaches, staff, and others are educated on SOGIESC issues
- Provide funding for the creation of LGBTI or trans-specific sports initiatives and spaces.
- Ensure that schools of journalism and media training institutes introduce specialist courses in their core curricula with a view to developing a sense of professionalism which is attentive to the equitable coverage of women in sport with special attention to elimination of lesbophobia, transphobia, and interphobia.
- Collect data on hate speech against LGBTI women in sport media coverage and implement efforts to combat said hate speech.
- Ensure engagement with long-established women's sports organisations, rather than only with newer, highly vocal ones with limited track records, when setting LGBTI-women related sport policies.

### Recommendations to the Committee of Ministers

- Ensure that the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport is adequately equipped to address violence and discrimination against women in all their diversity in sport.
- Review sport standards and guidelines, particularly as related to doping and testing, to ensure that these practices are non-discriminatory within the Council of Europe framework, including on the grounds of sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics; and ensure that such guidelines conform to internationally agreed standards on human rights.

### Good practice examples

- In **Italy**, Samarucs Sports Club created a visibility campaign in 2020 called "Samarucs Dones" through which female athletes were made more visible and which promoted greater participation and enabled LGBTI women to find a pleasant, safe and friendly space in which to develop sports and social practices in the city of Valencia.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See <https://www.facebook.com/SamarucsLGTB/posts/3499410020144853>

- The **Swedish** Skating Association’s gender policy explicitly highlights that everyone, including trans women, trans men, and non-binary participants, must be included in roller derby, regardless of their gender identity or expression (GIE); that a welcoming and inclusive climate will be promoted; that no hostile or discriminatory acts on grounds of GIE are tolerated; and that anyone can play on the women’s team if they feel that is better for them than playing on the men’s team.<sup>82</sup>
- The **Dutch** sports organisation NOC\*NSF adopted guidelines in 2021 aiming for the full inclusion of trans and intersex people in sport.<sup>83</sup>
- The **Italian** Union Sports for All, a national amateur sports association, introduced “alias identity” for trans athletes, ensuring that they can participate in sports according to their gender identity and with the name they use, without needing to change their legal gender.<sup>84</sup>
- The Berlin Soccer Association (Berliner Fußball Verband) in **Germany** allows persons with the non-binary “divers” gender marker, or people undergoing transition, to decide whether they want to compete on women or men’s teams.<sup>85</sup> In 2019, following the lobbying of several trans athletes, Berlin Triathlon allowed non-binary people to compete in a third-option category, regardless of their legal gender.
- **German** sports club Seitenwechsel<sup>86</sup>, one of the oldest and largest sports clubs in Europe founded by lesbians, is a club focused specifically on LGBTI women and girls participation in sport, based on self-determination. Seitenwechsel hosts focused trans and intersex outdoor sporting<sup>87</sup> and has a project focused on combating inter- and transphobia in sport<sup>88</sup>
- In **Scotland**, sports organisation LEAP Sports<sup>89</sup> has developed community sport initiatives for trans community members and a range of resources<sup>90</sup> for the sports sector to educate and raise their awareness of transgender people in sport.

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<sup>82</sup> op. cit. Trans & Sport: No one should be left behind. RFSL.

<sup>83</sup> <https://nocnsf.nl/inclusieve-sport/richtlijn-gender-en-seksediverse-personen-in-de-sport>

<sup>84</sup> La storia di Valentina Petrillo diventerà presto un film [The story of Valentina Petrillo will soon become a film]. UISP. 8 September 2020.

<http://www.uisp.it/nazionale/pagina/la-storia-di-valentina-petrillo-diventer-un-film>

<sup>85</sup> <https://berliner-fussball.de/der-bfv/news/dfb-beraet-ueber-melderechtsanpassung-fuer-drittes-geschlecht-und-transgender/>

<sup>86</sup> See <https://www.seitenwechsel-berlin.de/verein/>

<sup>87</sup> See <https://www.seitenwechsel-berlin.de/aktuelles/outside/outside/>

<sup>88</sup> See <https://www.seitenwechsel-berlin.de/aktuelles/projekt-tinb-strukturen/project-tinb-structures/>

<sup>89</sup> See <https://leapsports.org/>

<sup>90</sup> See <https://leapsports.org/activities/campaigns-and-resources/let-me-be-brave>



### **ILGA-Europe**

ILGA-Europe is an independent, international non-governmental umbrella organisation bringing together nearly 600 organisations from 54 countries in Europe and Central Asia. We are part of the wider international ILGA organisation, but ILGA-Europe were established as a separate region of ILGA and an independent legal entity in 1996. ILGA itself was created in 1978. [ilga-europe.org](http://ilga-europe.org)  
Contact: Cianán Russell (they/them), Senior Policy Officer, [cianan@ilga-europe.org](mailto:cianan@ilga-europe.org)

### **EuroCentralAsian Lesbian\* Community**

The EL\*C is a non-governmental organisation, representing the needs of lesbian, queer, bi and trans women and of lesbian organisations. The EL\*C was founded in 2017 with the aim to advocate for lesbian rights, improve the lives of lesbian, bisexual and other non-heterosexual women and (re)build the lesbian movement, as a response to the growing lack of the fundamental structures, tools and mechanisms to fight lesbophobia, sexism, misogyny, transphobia and all other types of discrimination experienced daily by lesbians. [europeanlesbianconference.org](http://europeanlesbianconference.org)  
Contact: Silvia Casalino (she/her), Co-Executive Director and Ilaria Todde (she/her), Advocacy Coordinator, [info@lesbiangenius.net](mailto:info@lesbiangenius.net)

### **TGEU**

TGEU is a membership-based organisation working to strengthen the rights and wellbeing of trans people in Europe and Central Asia. TGEU envisions a world free from discrimination where gender diversity is celebrated, where trans people are valued, and where trans movements are self-aware, intersectional, and evolving to meet the needs of a diverse and resilient community. TGEU was created in 2005 and currently has 170 member organisations in 47 different countries. [tgeu.org](http://tgeu.org)  
Contact: Leo Mulió (he/him), Health & Policy Officer, [leo@tgeu.org](mailto:leo@tgeu.org)

### **Organisation Intersex International Europe**

OII Europe is the European intersex umbrella organisation with intersex-led member organisations in more than 20 European countries. OII Europe advocates for the protection of intersex people's human rights, raises awareness on intersex issues with policy makers, professionals and the general public, and supports the growth of the European intersex community together with its membership and allies. The NGO OII Europe was created in 2015, as an extension of a network of the same name set up in 2012, and is based in Berlin. [oiieurope.org](http://oiieurope.org)  
Contact: Dan Christian Ghattas (he/him), Executive Director, [dan@oiieurope.org](mailto:dan@oiieurope.org)

### **The European Gay and Lesbian Sport Federation**

EGLSF was founded in 1989 and is a Europe-wide membership organisation representing over 22,000 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (including non-binary), intersex, queer and other diverse identifying (LGBTIQ+) people in sport. The federation exists to combat discrimination, to pursue equality and protection of human rights in sport, and to strengthen and empower the LGBTIQ+ sporting community. [eglsf.info](http://eglsf.info)  
Contact: Sarah Townsend (she/her), Co-President [sarah.townsend@eglsf.info](mailto:sarah.townsend@eglsf.info) or Hugh Torrance (he/him), Co-President, [hugh.torrance@eglsf.info](mailto:hugh.torrance@eglsf.info)

