

Expanded abstract

Women, sport and Social Economy. Participation, evolution and impact of promotion programs in Spanish sports federations

This article addresses the evolution of female participation in federated sport in Spain in the last decade, with special emphasis on the public measures adopted to promote gender equality within the framework of the Social Economy (SE). Three fundamental objectives are pursued: to evaluate gender equality in the different roles of federated sport, to describe the public policies and programs implemented to promote equality and to analyse the perceptions of sports federations in relation to the barriers and specific actions undertaken to improve the inclusion of women in the sector.

From the SE approach, it is considered that sports organizations can be a favourable channel for the promotion of gender equality by sharing values such as democracy, participation and the absence of profit motive. However, reality shows a significant underrepresentation of women in the federated sports field. The research is based on the hypothesis that, despite institutional efforts, patriarchal structures still predominate in the sector and hinder equal access for women to leadership and competition positions on equal terms. Despite the fact that federated sports entities belong to the non-market subsector of the ES and operate under principles of inclusion and shared governance, the figures show that the gender gap is still evident. This phenomenon is explained, in part, by the persistence of cultural biases and the poor implementation of effective equality programs.

The study combines secondary and primary sources to obtain a comprehensive view of the state of female participation in federated sport. Statistical yearbooks from the Higher Sports Council (CSD), reports from the Women's Institute and the Ministry of Equality, as well as official documents from sports federations were analysed. In addition, a questionnaire was applied to 37 national sports federations to collect qualitative information on the implementation and impact of equality programs.

The data obtained reflect that, in 2022, women represented only 24.3% of the total number of federated athletes in Spain. Although this figure has shown slight growth in the last decade, it is still far from parity. Feminization is observed in sports such as gymnastics and volleyball, while other disciplines, such as hunting or billiards, have minimal female representation. Regarding leadership roles, only three of the 64 national sports federations have a woman as president. Although there has been a slight increase in the presence of women on boards of directors and delegated commissions, men continue to dominate decision-making spaces. This fact reinforces the hypothesis that the organizational culture of federated sport

still favours male leadership models. Regarding promotion policies, the “Women and Sport Program” is the most widely used initiative, with 91.89% participation among the federations surveyed. However, other government programs aimed at promoting gender equality in sports management have marginal or no adoption. In addition, many federations are unaware of the existence of these initiatives or do not consider them necessary, which suggests a lack of awareness of gender issues in the sector. The barriers identified include family conciliation, lack of promotion of women’s competitions, gender segregation at early ages and the scarcity of resources allocated to the training of women in technical and managerial roles. In this sense, institutional support has been insufficient to guarantee equal opportunities in the practice and management of sports.

Despite the advances in gender equity in federated sport, the results of the research show that inequality persists and that the evolution towards parity is too slow. It is estimated that, if the current pace is maintained, it would take more than 50 years to equalize the participation of men and women in federated sport in Spain. This situation highlights the need to accelerate the implementation of more effective inclusion policies. The analysis reveals that sports federations have not fully incorporated the gender perspective into their organizational structures. The shortage of women in managerial roles and the lack of implementation of female leadership programs negatively affect the democratization of the sector. Furthermore, the media’s invisibility of women’s sport contributes to perpetuating inequalities and reduces the incentive for women to join federated sport from an early age.

From an economic point of view, the low participation of women in federated sport represents a loss of talent and development potential for the economy of the sector. Previous studies have shown that gender equality is linked to economic growth and the development of the SE. Increasing the female presence in federated sport is not only an imperative of social justice, but also a key factor for the sustainability of the sector in the long term. To reverse this situation, it is recommended to reinforce strategies to promote equality through concrete measures, such as: increase investment in equality programs; implement of gender quotas in management bodies; promote of female role models in sport; increase training and awareness on gender equality; review of regulations and control mechanisms.

In short, although progress has been made in gender equality in federated sport, this progress is still insufficient. To consolidate true equality in the sector, it is essential that federations, public administrations and society as a whole work in a coordinated manner to promote a more inclusive sports culture. The Social Economy can play a key role in this transformation, provided that its entities make a firm commitment to gender equality and adopt effective policies to achieve it.