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*EXECUTIVE MASTERS IN SPORTS ORGANISATION MANAGEMENT*



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***Decision-making positions within international sports organisations  
– where are the women candidates?***

Julie Ravlo  
Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee  
and Confederation of Sports

**Tutored by Professor Tracy Taylor  
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology**



## **ABSTRACT**

This MEMOS project addresses the pressing issue of the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions within international sports organisations. Through an in-depth analysis of various national federation members of the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF), the study explores the barriers and facilitators faced by women candidates during the internal nomination process for an international position within the respective national federation.

By employing a mixed-methods approach that includes both quantitative data and qualitative insights from interviews with key stakeholders both from the national federations and the NIF, the research highlights the disparity between men and women's representation in international positions on behalf of their national federation. It identifies the socio-cultural, organisational, and policy-related factors that contribute to this imbalance and proposes actionable strategies to promote gender equity for future nomination processes.

The findings underscore the necessity for policy reforms, inclusive practices, and programs to foster a more balanced and equitable environment when it comes to the nomination process. This paper aims to not only illuminate the current gender gap but also to inspire change and encourage the adoption of measures both at NIF level and at national federation level, that support women's advancement into international decision-making roles.

The ultimate goal is to pave the way for a more diverse and inclusive decision-making landscape in international sports organisations.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Ce projet MEMOS aborde la sous-représentation des femmes dans les postes décisionnels des organisations sportives internationales. Il analyse les obstacles et les facilitateurs pour les candidates lors du processus de nomination interne au sein des fédérations nationales du Comité Olympique et Paralympique Norvégien et de la Confédération des Sports (NIF). Grâce à une approche mixte, combinant données quantitatives et interviews qualitatives, la recherche met en évidence les disparités de représentation entre les hommes et les femmes.

Elle identifie les facteurs socioculturels, organisationnels et politiques contribuant à ce déséquilibre et propose des stratégies pour promouvoir l'équité de genre. Les résultats soulignent la nécessité de réformes politiques, de pratiques inclusives et de programmes favorisant un environnement plus équitable.

Cet article vise à éclairer l'écart actuel entre les sexes et à encourager des mesures pour soutenir la progression des femmes dans les rôles décisionnels internationaux et à créer un paysage décisionnel plus diversifié et inclusif.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

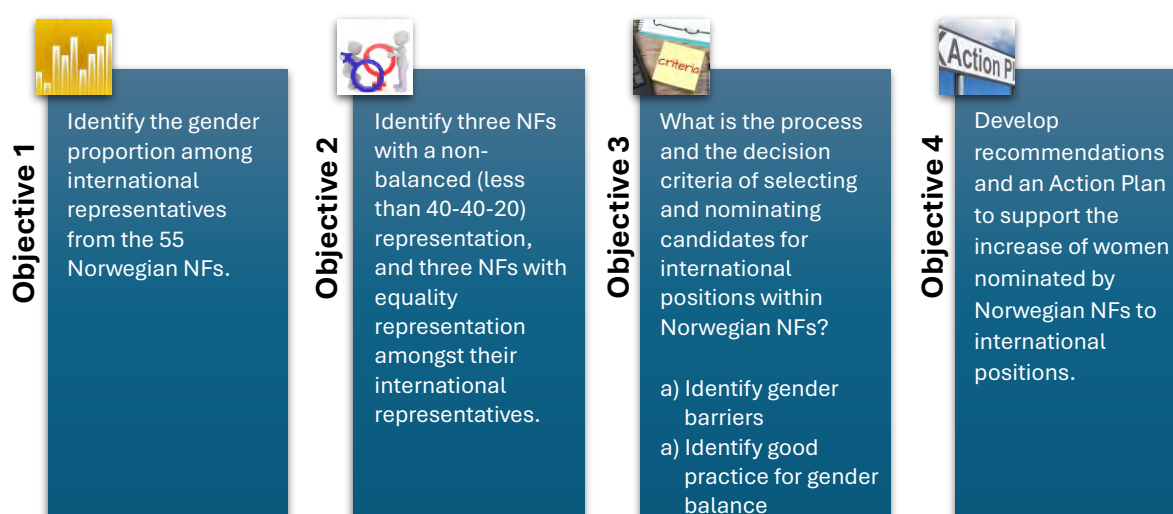
Research indicates that leadership positions in sports have historically been dominated by strong masculine hegemony, which has proven challenging to change (Bryson 1987; Light & Wedgwood 2012; Sogn 2023). Despite increased participation opportunities for girls and women in sport, women<sup>1</sup> are underrepresented in decision-making positions at all levels of sport, and women occupy only fourteen percent of decision-making positions in sport organisations in Europe (Burton, 2015; Elling, Hovden & Knoppers, 2019). If national sport federations (NFs) do not promote women candidates for elections to their international affiliations, male dominance is likely to persist despite gender equality rhetoric and quotas.

Increasing the number of women candidates can lead to more women being elected in international sports organisations. Gender equality, both in sport in general, but also in governance and decision-making positions in sport is desired both to strengthen the governance and to reach UN Sustainability Goal 5 – Gender Equality (United Nations, n.d.; Wicker et. al, 2020).

### 1.2 Research purpose

The project aims to address the question of: What are the barriers and facilitators for women representatives from Norwegian NFs to be nominated by their respective NF to positions in European and International Sport Federations? Furthermore, to propose recommendations that may facilitate the number of women candidates put forward by Norwegian NFs to candidate for positions within their international affiliations.

### 1.3 Research objectives



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<sup>1</sup> Within this project, the term gender is based on two gender categories, women and men. This project is therefore based on a binary approach. Nevertheless, it is recognised that intersectionality and gender complexity is present in society.

### **1.3 Approach**

A mixed-method approach was used to investigate the research question and objective outlined above. The project combines quantitative desk research data with qualitative data from interviews and a focus group workshop.

The desk research involved analysing internal data from the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) to identify the gender representation among international representatives. Six interviews were conducted with secretary generals, three men and three women, from various NFs to explore gender-specific barriers and best practices. The data collection process was divided into three stages. Desk research, interviews, and a focus group workshop with five NOC colleagues to discuss possible recommendations and actions. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data, identifying patterns and themes, which resulted in findings, recommendations and two action plans, one for the NIF and one for Norwegian NFs.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a broad picture of existing knowledge related to research related to the project topic and research questions. This includes evidence of barriers, best practices, and recommendations for diversity, equity and inclusion in sports and more specific on women and sports leadership. In particular, works covering gender diversity within boards in general, and gender diversity on sports boards, the meaning of diversity, equity and inclusion, and why this is important within sport. Furthermore, there is a short section on gender diversity in sports in general and in decision-making positions within sports, both in a Norwegian and international context.

Historically, girls and women have not had access to the same opportunities and possibilities as boys and men in sports and there has traditionally been gender inequality, both on the field of play and in the governance structure (Sogn, 2023). While many countries have shown increased opportunities for girls and women to take part in sport activities, sport governance remains gender-imbalanced across the world (Fasting et al., 2018).

The issue of gender-imbalance relates to different roles in sport, such as active athletes, board member positions, chief executive officer positions, coaches, or other officials. Within this milieu, the focus of this project is on women candidates for elected positions in European federations (EFs) and international federations (IFs), and how the NFs run the process before they decide whether to nominate candidates for international positions.

### 2.1. What is diversity, equity and inclusion and why do we need it?

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is a unified concept and terminology to encapsulate considerations for an organisation in their staffing and ways of work. According to Spaaij et al. (2019) diversity is a desirable outcome in sport, from a participation through to employment perspective. Each of the three components are outlined below.

#### 2.1.1 Diversity

According to the United Nations Global Compact, diversity often focuses on quantity and refers to the representation of different groups and their different experience of opportunity and treatment based on the group they belong to. Each person may have multiple groups they identify with, and that this status might change over time, and therefore potentially might influence the opportunities and treatment they experience. The United Nations Global Compact refers to diversity as;

not only to similarities and differences linked to personal characteristics such as age, disability, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation



and people living with HIV but also similarities and differences such as values, workstyles, caring responsibilities, hierarchical levels and work roles. (UN Global Compact, n.d.).

Furthermore, Staurowsky and Hart (2023, p. 5) suggest that;

the concept of diversity encompasses a wide range of qualities and characteristics that distinguish people from one another. Diversity is used broadly to refer to demographic attributes such as sex, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, ability, age, national origin, religious beliefs and education.

In this project, the focus will be on the gender dimension of diversity, where gender diversity can be defined as an equitable representation of human beings of different genders, most referred to as an equitable ratio of women and men (Sytsma, 2006).

### **2.1.2 Equity**

The United Nations Global Compact argues that while diversity has a focus on quantity, equity is focused on quality. Furthermore, equity refers to the recognition of different circumstances to take into consideration and reaching equal outcomes will not necessarily be achieved by treating everyone in the same way.

Staurowsky and Hart (2023, p. 5) define equity as “the recognition that we do not all start from the same access level; we must acknowledge imbalances within sport entities, make adjustments to address those imbalances, and intentionally cultivate access and opportunities for historically underrepresented populations.”

Gender equity may be defined as “...attaining parity between women and men in the quality of life, academic, and work outcomes valued by our society, without limitations associated with gender stereotypes, gender roles, or prejudices” (Klein et al., 2007, p. 2).

Based on the definitions, an act of equity can be seen as providing resources and opportunities based on individual needs to ensure everyone has a fair chance to achieve equal outcomes.

### **2.1.3 Inclusion**

Inclusion is argued to be the glue bringing all three components together. Staurowsky and Hart (2023, p. 5) define it as “demonstrating intentionality by providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded from an organisation or group structure”. Furthermore, they argue that inclusion in sport refers to the access and the removal of all forms of exclusionary practice that prevent individuals from participating in any area of sport. According to the UN Global Compact (n.d.), inclusion is relational and refers to the experience and feeling of belonging of individuals and groups.

Drawing on the above definitions, inclusion can be seen as a state of belonging where all groups of people are welcomed and valued, regardless of their different backgrounds. Whereas gender inclusion relates to creating a welcoming environment where gender equity is valued and where gender stereotypes are non-existent.

DEI are not separate domains, but synergetic.

#### **2.1.4 Why diversity, equity and inclusion in sport?**

In most countries the sport sector is a diverse arena, both for children and adults, that includes individuals with a range of different backgrounds. DEI in sports means a greater level of diversity on the playing field and in the decision-making bodies. Staurowsky and Hart (2023, p. 5) argue for its importance:

First, being exposed to diverse voices allows a person to view issues and problems from multiple perspectives, derived from distinct experiences, perspectives, knowledge and connections. Rather than viewing the world from a single-focus lens, the person is able to expand their views and consider multiple options. Second, diversity can move people beyond their ethnocentric points of view, to learn not only about others' experiences and backgrounds but also more about themselves.

Research has shown that organisations that focus on and implement actions to reach a higher level of diversity within their organisation, tend to be more innovative, more productive and perform better (Diaz, 2022). Furthermore, board diversity, in various forms, including with regards to gender diversity; “enhances the firm’s strategic decision-making process through offering a broader range of perspectives and ideas and facilitates the acquisition of critical resources for the organization with wider social networks” (Zhang, 2012, p. 686).

There is also a social justice argument for diversity in sport governance (Elling et al., 2018). Sport plays a vital societal role in society and has an ethical responsibility for decision-making bodies to reflect the membership they represent.

Pearson and Misener (2024) research on the benefits of diversity in sports, with a special emphasis on gender and disability, found that it enhances performance, culture. morale and motivation within sports organisations, and that organisations with at least 30% women in top management perform better.

Diversity alone will not necessarily increase the performance or ethical benefits within the decision-making body (Buse et al., 2016). The dimension of inclusion is needed at the same time, meaning other members of the board needs to include the representatives of the underrepresented group and actively integrate the representatives in processes. Diversity may be seen as the initial step but needs to be followed and accompanied by inclusive practices (Storr, 2021).

## **2.2. Status of gender diversity in sports in general and in decision-making positions**

### **2.2.1. A Norwegian context**

In Norway, during the 1970s, awareness of the large gender differences in sport, led to the 1965-1985 sports revolution, where women became part of organised sport in Norway (Goksøyr, 2008).

Strong women fought for equal rights, and in 1987 gender quotas were introduced as a measure to achieve a stronger gender balance within Norwegian sports and became a part of the statutes in 1990 (Sogn, 2023). The aim was to increase formal gender equality and representation by women in elected positions, team leaders, coaches and referees at all levels, in addition to increasing women participation in sports in general (Fasting, 2007; Sisjord, Fasting & Sand, 2017).

Norway introduced wider gender quotas in 2003, with full implementation in 2008, requiring a minimum representation of 40% of each gender within the boards of public limited companies. State-imposed regulation broadened the field and resulted in the recognition of a wider set of capitals as legitimate (Seierstad et al., 2020).

The gender target for the NIF, the umbrella organisation for organised sports in Norway, is the reflection of the gender proportion of the total membership. In 2021, the total proportion of women memberships was 40.5%. The proportion of women in board positions was 36.5%, while the number of chairs and administrative top-level managers were 27.5 and 27.6% (Rambøll, 2023). With these numbers in mind, there is a question about under-representative for the total membership of the NIF.

As of December 31st, 2023, women comprised 23,6% NF presidents, and 24,6% of secretary generals in Norway (Norges idrettsforbund, 2024, p. 41).

The Sports Political Power Index, published by the NOC & Sport Confederation of Denmark every second year, lists decision-making positions in sport organisations divided by the resident country of the person holding the position. The Index barometer shows that the total number of points related to positions in EFs and IFs held by Norwegians, the total score in 2021 was 50 points. By gender, 32 of these points are related to men in positions (64%), while 18 points are related to women in positions (36%) (DIF, n.d.).

The Sports Political Power Index Report from 2021-2023 looked at decision-making positions within 133 EFs and IFs, totalling 1736 individuals in elected positions in sports. Amongst those 133 presidents there were only 9 women, resulting 93,2% presidents were men. When looking at the gender proportion of all the 1736 positions, the percentage shows that 24,8% of the total positions are being held by women. The percentage has consistently increased from 17% in 2017, 20% in 2019, and 23 % in 2021 (NOC & Sport Confederation of Denmark, 2023).

While the Sports Political Power Index, shows a positive increase over several years, it can be argued that there is a persistent gender imbalance in decision-making bodies in sports.

### **2.2.2. A global context**

The focus on gender diversity in sports has increased during the last decade (UN Women, n.d.). There are successful initiatives fostering gender diversity in sports participation, that is likely to have a connection to the IOCs Olympic Agenda 2020 Recommendation 11, “Fostering gender equality”, that was adopted and launched in 2014 by the IOC (IOC, 2014; UN Women, n.d.).

According to the European Commission (2018), 25% of the board seats within the largest publicly listed companies within the EU Members States in 2017 were held by women. Elling et al. (2018), point out that a slowness or lack of implementation of actions to increase this number exists across organisations at various levels. The sport sector notably lags on the level of gender balance within its governance structures, both in national and international sports organisations (IOC, 2018).

The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF) reported on the gender balance of executive boards within the 32 summer Olympic IFs as of 2024. According to their report, four IFs had at least 40% women. Fifteen IFs had between 25% and 40% women. Eleven IFs had between 15% and 25% women. Two IFs had between 5% and 15% women, and none had less than 5% women on their executive boards (ASOIF, 2024, p. 75).

According to the Council of Europe (2019, p. 8), “the under-representation of women in leadership positions in sport can be explained by prevailing masculinised sport settings and stereotypical gender roles, but also by gender-blind or biased institutional norms and procedures”. The Council also highlights that executive members are elected by their peers, and that these peers often tend to elect new leaders that feature similar characteristics as themselves, indicating that men elect men and women elect women.

Knoppers et al. (2021) point out that the lack of change with regards to women board members has been connected to various factors, such as lack of mentors and role models for women, male preference for people who are like themselves (male homosociality), lack of balance between work and life which may be required for most positions, a perception that a token women board member is sufficient, a dominance of networks of men that to an extent exclude women, and the negative stereotypes of strong women leaders.

Evans and Pfister (2021) note that women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions globally, and that organisational culture and patriarchal selection practices reproduce the inequity, even though men in leadership positions acknowledge and recognise the challenge. Furthermore, gendered stereotypes, person-profiling and

patriarchal language are identified as factors affecting both emotional and practical challenges for women in sports governance positions (Evans & Pfister, 2021).

Roos et al. (2020) suggest that “defensive institutional work” powerful organisational actors use of a combination of discursive resources in legitimisation of today's practice and towards their resistance of institutionalisation of measures could increase women's representation.

Gender diversity in sport governance has examined gender quotas, gender diversity in boards, the gendering of sports leadership (McLeod et al., 2021). Wicker et al. (2020) define a gender balanced board as a board having between 40-60% share of women. Wicker et al. (2020) found that gender balanced boards significantly reduced human resource and financial problems, compared to other board compositions. Overall, their findings suggest that board gender diversity is beneficial for some organisational challenges, but not all.

While existing literature and research have explored and expanded our knowledge of gender diversity in governance and gender diversity in sport governance, the nuanced electoral procedures and nomination process in sports organisations beyond the formal channels remains under-explored. The process of how NFs nominate candidates for international positions within EFs and IFs could assist in furthering gender equality.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines how the research objectives were investigated and what type of research design was selected to address the research objectives. The sample population, the data collection tools, and the data collection process are described.

As discussed in chapter 1, the purpose of the project is to identify the actual gender proportion amongst representatives from Norwegian sport holding a position in an EF and/or IF. This meant investigating the representational proportions by gender, and why there is any underrepresentation of women amongst the international representatives. The approach taken was to explore the NFs' process and the decision criteria involved in selecting and nominating candidates for international positions. The study aims to identify what types of barriers and best practices exist within the Norwegian NFs that could impact either a gender balance or lack of gender balance in international representation.

**Positionality statement:** According to Singer et al. (2019), a positionality statement is important to acknowledge your position within the topic and your possible influence towards the result. Therefore:

I acknowledge my dual role both as the researcher within this project and at the same time as an employee working on international relations within the organisation under study. As an employee of the organisation, I have perspectives, history and opinions that could influence observations and interpretation and by that lead to unintentional biases. I am aware of the risk that this dual position could potentially impact the objectivity of the research process and could potentially influence the conclusions.

### 3.2 Research design and rationale

The mixed method approach provides quantitative data to identify the current gender representation situation. The data to explores the status and situation of persons nominated by Norwegian NFs for international positions, with an emphasise and focus on gender. A qualitative approach, through interviews with selected NFs explored gender-specific barriers and good practices. a combination of quantitative and qualitative data provides a more comprehensive understanding and perspective towards the research topic (Creswell & Clark, 2017). The mixed methods approach is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Methods to address the research objectives

Research objectives	Data	Methods	Sample
<b>Research objective 1:</b> <i>Identify the gender proportion among international representatives from the 55 Norwegian NFs.</i>	Current status on international representatives from Norwegian NFs	Desk research on internal quantitative data obtained by the NIF	Member NFs within the NIF (n=55)
<b>Research objective 2:</b> <i>Identify three NFs with a non-balanced (less than 40-40-20) representation, and three NFs with equality representation amongst their international representatives.</i>	Current status on international representatives from Norwegian NFs	Desk research on internal quantitative data obtained by the NIF	Member NFs within the NIF (n=55)
<b>Research objective 3:</b> <i>What is the process and the decision criteria of selecting and nominating candidates for international positions within Norwegian NFs?</i> a) <i>Identify gender barriers</i> b) <i>Identify good practice for gender balance</i>	Conduct semi-structured interviews with secretary generals within the NF to gather qualitative information about the process	Qualitative interviews	Six NFs identified by the quantitative data on the current status of international representatives (n=6)
<b>Research objective 4:</b> <i>Develop recommendations and an Action Plan to support the increase of women nominated by Norwegian NFs to international positions.</i>	Qualitative data from the interviews and focus group workshop discussion with relevant people working on international relations, candidacies and gender issues from Norwegian sport	Analyse the qualitative data to identify results and outcomes. Discuss results and outcomes from the interviews in the focus group workshop	Interviews: NFs identified by the quantitative data on the current status of international representatives (n=6)  Workshop: Employees in Norwegian sport with experience from international work and gender-related topics (n = 5)

### **3.3 Data collection tools**

Zikmund (2003), highlights that a good research tool must gather information relevant for the research objectives and collect data that are accurate and valid. This project aimed to minimize the risk for methodological errors by using different data collection tools that are already well-known and tested.

#### **3.3.1 Desk research**

According to Basset (2022, p. 4), a “desk-based research is a form of empirical research where you gather your data indirectly”. Internal data was obtained from the NIF, on the 55 Norwegian NFs’ international representatives holding a position in an international sports organisation. There were no gender data in the data, thus of gender for all representatives was created through use of a first name, google search, or a question to the respective NF.

#### **3.3.2 Qualitative approach**

##### **Interviews:**

Six interview sessions were conducted to collect a deeper understanding and insight on existing practices, challenges, possible barriers and best practices applied by the NFs identified in the desk research. The interviews were offered as face-to-face interviews, with a digital platform as the second preferred option. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and were between 30-45 minutes. The interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide, with several topics/ questions (appendix 1) forming the basis, followed by probing questions to elaborate and dive deeper into relevant areas.

##### **Focus group workshop:**

A focus group workshop session was held after the first analysis of the data material from the interviews. Five employees of the NIF, working on topics related to international sport policy and diversity including gender-related topics attended. The workshop aimed to discuss and brainstorm on possible recommendations and actions for the action plan based on the data from the six NFs. The workshop focus was on possible recommendations and actions from two different angles, recommendations for the NFs to implement at their level, and recommendations to be implemented at the NIF level. The participants of the focus group workshop shared their viewpoints and ideas on how the research findings from the interviews can be translated into recommendations for all NFs and the NIF, including planned actions with defined responsibility, available resources and a timeline for implementation.



### **3.4 Data collection process**

The data collection process was divided into three stages, built chronologically to support the different stages of data collection.

1. Desk research establishing the status quo for the gender proportion amongst the international representatives from Norwegian sport. This data was needed to be able to identify three NFs with a balanced gender representation, and three NFs with a poor gender balance amongst their international representatives.
2. Semi-structured interviews with secretary generals from NFs.
3. Focus group workshop to present the collected data from the previous steps and further discuss possible recommendations and actions for the action plan.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

After conducting the six interviews and the workshop with the NIF colleagues working on gender-related topics and international relations, the project had a raw data material of app. 285 minutes of voice recordings. The voice recordings were transcribed by the transcript function in Microsoft Word. After transcribing the voice recordings, the project had app. 150 pages of raw data material in text format in Norwegian.

The next step was to limit the content from every interview and the workshop to a summary of each, kept in Norwegian with the purpose of not losing any possible language specific meaning or context. For the six interviews where the discussed topics from the interview guide were similar, an Excel-sheet was used to divide the different parts of each interview into the different questions/topics raised by the interviewer. This Excel-sheet then systemised the data material based on each interview combined with the different topics, which made it easier to find common patterns or connections in the data material as a starting point.

By using thematic analysis, identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning within the content, the data was arranged by themes (Guest et al. 2012). The researcher-active perspective of the thematic analysis approach described by Peel (2020, p. 3) was followed by:

1. Collection of the data.
2. Familiarisation with the data material.
3. Management of the data by coding: Identifying and coding by setting a label on relevant pieces of the data material. Common threads, contradictions, highlighting of significant sentences that relate to the research questions.
4. Generate themes: Grouping the codes into broader themes by relevant components from the research questions and knowledge from the literature review.
5. Contextualise and represent findings: Clearly define each theme.
6. Writing the analysis: Write a detailed analysis of each identified theme, explaining how it relates to the research questions and supporting it with examples.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Desk research results

The 55 Norwegian NFs hold all together a total number of 212 international positions at Nordic, European and global level. 53 positions were held by women (25%) and 159 (75%) by men.

For identifying NFs with high grade of gender balance and low grade of gender balance amongst their international representatives, only NFs with more than four international positions were considered. The data presented in table 2 and 3 overviews the gender proportion of executive board members both within the NF, the EF and the IF<sup>2</sup>.

#### 4.1.1 NFs with gender balance amongst their international representatives

Several NFs had more than four international positions with a balanced gender representation (40-40-20). The data in table 2 highlights the varying degrees and range of gender balance among the international representatives of these NFs.

Table 2: NFs with gender balance amongst their international representatives:

	Positions in international sport organisations	Positions divided by gender	Gender proportion	Gender proportion national board	Gender proportion European board	Gender proportion international board
Norwegian Gymnastics Federation	5	3 women 2 men	60% women 40% men	6 women 5 men 55/45	9 women 9 men 50/50	9 women 16 men 36/64
Norwegian Powerlifting Federation	5	3 women 2 men	60% women 40% men	4 women 4 men 50/50	4 women 8 men 33/67	6 women 12 men 33/67
Norwegian Handball Federation	9	4 women 5 men	44% women 56% men	7 women 4 men 64/36	3 women 10 men 23/77	2 women 17 men 11/89

When combining the gender data on the international positions and the gender proportions of the national board level, it is interesting to note that national federations with a balanced gender representation (40-40-20) among their international representatives tend to have 50% or more executive board positions held by women at

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<sup>2</sup> This data is obtained in January 2025 from internal data regarding the Norwegian NFs and public available data at the EFs' and IFs' webpages.

the national level. However, when moving from the national level to the European and international level, it is furthermore interesting to see that the proportion of women drops or equals for each level.

#### 4.1.2 NFs lacking gender balance amongst their international representatives

Some NFs have a poor gender balance amongst their international representatives. In these NFs' cases, the gender balance amongst the executive board members at national level is balanced (stronger than 40-40-60) but decreases at the European and international board level. Women board members at the national level could potentially be candidates for international positions, with the question to be explored about why women are not being put forward. All three NFs listed below have more than 85% male representation amongst their international positions.

Table 3: NFs with a low grade of gender balance amongst international representatives:

	Positions in international sport organisations	Positions divided by gender	Gender proportion	Gender proportion national board	Gender proportion European board	Gender proportion international board
Norwegian Kickboxing Federation	11	1 woman 10 men	9% women 91% men	4 women 4 men 50/50	4 women 12 men 25/75	4 women 14 men 22/78
Norwegian Rugby Federation	7	1 woman 6 men	14% women 86% men	4 women 4 men 50/50	4 women 10 men 29/71	5 women 7 men 42/58
Norwegian Bandy Federation (field hockey, bandy and floorball)	7	1 woman 6 men	14% women 86% men	4 women 5 men 44/56	Field hockey: 4 women 8 men 33/67  Floorball: No European federation  Bandy: No European Federation	Field hockey: 5 women 9 men 36/64  Floorball: 4 women 11 men 27/73  Bandy: 2 women 7 men 22/78

### **4.1.3 Desk research discussion**

The desk research results indicate an imbalance in gender representation among international positions, with a predominance of men representatives. NFs that have a balanced representation, could provide best practices and valuable insights for other NFs, similarly possible barriers for the NFs with an imbalance could provide crucial information. This data establishes a foundation for future initiatives to enhance gender equality when nominating candidates for international positions – for either gender. Comparative insights can be used for gender balance recommendations.

## **4.2 Interview results**

This section presents the discussion and results from interviews with secretary generals (SGs), three women and three men of six different NFs. Three with a strong gender balance and three with a poor gender balance amongst their international positions.

The interviews focused on the process of nominating candidates for international positions (annex 1). The themes identified were; criteria and nomination process, view on gender importance, strategic planning and long-term positioning. Subthemes were identified through a thematic analysis.

### **4.2.1 Criteria and nomination process**

#### **Nomination criteria:**

When considering criteria for nomination for an international position, engagement seems to be a key factor for most NFs. Candidates must be actively involved in their respective sports and have shown their ability to contribute effectively to international contexts. Relevant experience is also essential, notably experience from their sport and committees, including previous roles and positions. Merits and professional background also played an important role. Achievements and experience should demonstrate an ability to contribute to the international level and embody good governance principles. One NF emphasised loyalty, engagement, and the ability to represent Norway effectively. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on aligning international representation with Norwegian values and maintaining integrity. They all mentioned building international visibility and network through participation in working groups, congresses and general assemblies, and leadership programs as essential for successful nominations.

Specific committee requirements must also be met if there are special requirements within the formal papers. For example, nominations to judging committees or appeal boards require candidates to have relevant backgrounds, such as being a judge, observer, or having a particular interest in the specific field. Maturity was another important criterion according to several NFs. “Potential candidates should display

maturity and the ability to manage international positions and cross-cultural competence responsibly and effectively” (SG5).

Four NFs considered the long-term potential of candidates and their ability to develop over time. Availability is crucial, and candidates must be willing and able to take on international roles and dedicate time to it. Competence and background are vital, including the ability to communicate effectively in English and represent the NF well. Loyalty to the NF and align with its values and perspectives when the candidate works at the international level. There was also a shared belief that international representatives should not only hold positions but also actively contribute to shaping policy and “do the work” (SG6).

### **Informal versus formal procedures:**

The nomination process has both similarities and differences among the NFs. All NFs have nominated women candidates for international positions in the last four years, and there is a common effort to ensure gender balance in nominations, although it is not regulated or formalized. Nomination processes typically involve discussions on the board, where candidates are evaluated based on their engagement and contributions, and positions that are important for the specific sport are prioritized.

Differences are seen in the formalization of processes, with two NFs moving towards more structured and strategic nomination frameworks, while two NFs acknowledge that their nomination processes have historically been handled informally or with an ad-hoc approach relying on existing officeholders or known individuals. One NF prepares nominations a year in advance and has systematic processes, while two NFs admit that they lack the capacity for follow-up and do not have either informal or formalized procedures. One NF handle nominations at the administrative level without board involvement illustrated by this secretary general, "

I'm just thinking out loud here, we should probably at least raise it for the board, because until now it's been the administration that has kind of sent in a couple of candidates every now and then. That's not so good (SG6).

In other NFs it is usually a discussion between the president and the secretary general, often without awareness of diversity illustrated by this quote of one of the male secretary generals.

I think there is an unconscious incompetence in a lot of situations where you just don't think about it. It's not a thought that crosses their minds that they should think about gender, it's just (...) yeah, and then it becomes a reproduction then, the boys' club. it's a bit like that. I don't think it's done to harm, but I think it's related to the fact that it's not something we've thought about. It becomes too easy to use the argument of ‘we didn't find anyone else’ (SG5).

### **Renomination practices:**

Renominations are often handled administratively by contacting those already in positions to ask or discuss whether they wish to continue for another term, typically without involving the board. In some cases, EFs or IFs directly contact current representatives to ask if they wish to be renominated, which can bypass the NF's desire to replace the person in position.

Differences in renomination processes included the lack of formal procedures in four of six NFs, leading to the continuation of existing candidates without thorough evaluation. Two NFs are developing formal procedures, including board discussions and considering younger and more qualified candidates, including discussions on diversity. One secretary general highlights the importance of having a structured discussion by saying, "make sure it gets into the discussions at least" (SG5), while another secretary general thinks a formalization would, "force us in a positive way to search with a broader scope" (SG6).

Motivation and suitability discussions are part of the renomination process in some NFs, ensuring that candidates are still engaged and capable of fulfilling their roles. Some NFs adopt a strategic approach to renominations, including early discussions and decisions about potential candidates, while others rely on the willingness of current representatives to continue. Board involvement in the renomination process varies, with some NFs ensuring that decisions align with strategic goals, while others handle the process administratively without board involvement. Two NFs expressed concern about the lack of transparency or strategic review in renomination decisions.

## **4.2.2 View on gender importance**

### **Nominations versus successful candidatures:**

All six NFs have nominated at least one women candidate for international positions in the last four years. However, women candidates are less likely to succeed. For example, the Norwegian Rugby Federation nominated two men and two women, with both men securing positions while only one woman succeeded. Despite nominations of both genders by all NFs, only one NF has nominated more women than men over the past four years, suggesting that women candidates are less frequently nominated and less successful. Therefore, Norwegian NFs nominated more than the 53 women, which gives the 25%, since the data refers to the proportion of actual positions held by women, not the proportion of nominations.

### **Knowledge on gender requirements in international bodies:**

Most of the EFs and IFs where the six NFs have their affiliations, have some minimum gender representation requirement, but most of the secretary generals did not know the details around the gender requirements within their own international structure. One of

the secretary generals out this way, "Hm (...) Honestly, I'm not sure about it " (SG3). The specific requirements vary by sport and there are also variety between the different EF and IF within the same sport. This is probably creating confusion and lack of feeling of control for the secretary generals with regards to which requirements are applicable in which international body. This implicates a need for more knowledge.

### **Barriers for achieving gender balance:**

According to the secretary generals, possible barriers for achieving gender balance amongst their international positions relates to lack of international experience among possible candidates, particularly for women, which often makes them less competitive. Additionally, some NFs also pointed to the challenge of long tenure of male members in leadership roles that limits opportunities for new leaders. Economic constraints, such as the inability to cover lost wages for international representatives, can also deter candidates from taking on these roles.

The significant time commitment required for international positions was also mentioned as a possible barrier, especially for women who traditionally may have family responsibilities. There is often a lack of awareness about the importance of gender balance and insufficient networking opportunities for women. Cultural norms and corruption can also pose challenges, as they may influence the selection process and create an environment that is less welcoming to women, illustrated by the thought of this secretary generals' statement,

a lot is related to culture and corruption, right? All those things that are so natural to us, and then you get out there, and then you see that the world is completely different from what you see back home (SG2).

Two NFs highlighted that women tend to be more critical of how they spend their time and may be less likely to take on roles unless they feel they can make a significant impact. The need for women to support each other and avoid rivalry was also mentioned as a barrier. Most NFs lack a clear, written strategy for promoting gender balance in international positions, and lastly, the nomination process itself can be a barrier, as it often involves informal discussions which may not prioritize or include the aspect of gender balance importance.

## **4.2.3 Perceived importance of diversity**

### **View on diversity:**

All NFs recognized that diversity and gender balance are positive aspects. For some of the NFs was reflected in their strategic documents and budget processes. Diversity and gender balance are considered a natural part of some of the NFs' work and culture, with various projects focusing on promoting women in leadership positions both nationally and internationally. They expressed a strong wish to include gender perspectives in the

nomination process, but at the same time seemed to sometimes forget or skip the discussions needed due to lack of time and lack of long-term thinking, illustrated by one of the secretary generals this way, “it just turned out that way” (SG6).

There were differences in the formalization of strategies among the NFs. Some have formalized strategies for diversity and gender balance, while others do not. For example, one NF has regulated gender balance in the election committee's instructions to ensure a balance between genders in leadership positions. Another NF took a strategic approach to promoting gender balance, including prioritizing women candidates when they have two equally qualified candidates, illustrated by this secretary general,

and when you discuss gender quotas in the international sphere, there is still a great fear that incompetent women will come and take the place of competent men. That is why we have a strategy ensuring that if we have two equal candidates, then you will promote the women candidate because that is what the international federation needs (SG6).

While some NFs have included diversity and gender balance in their long-term plans and international strategies, others are aware of the importance of diversity but have not set specific goals or strategies to increase gender balance in international positions.

### **Strategies and good practice for minimizing barriers:**

Possible solutions mentioned to address the barriers include increasing international experience by providing opportunities for women through mentorship programs, international workshops and meetings. Furthermore, implementing policies that limit the number of terms in decision-making positions can create more opportunities for women to step into these roles.

Offering financial support to cover lost wages for international representatives can help candidates take on these roles without economic constraints. Creating flexible schedules and support systems can help especially women to balance family responsibilities with the demands of international positions. Increasing awareness about the importance of gender balance and providing networking opportunities for women through conferences, seminars, networks are crucial steps. Establishing clear guidelines and ethical standards can combat cultural norms and corruption that may hinder promoting gender balance.

Encouraging women to critically assess their potential impact and providing support to help the candidate feel confident in taking on leadership roles is also vital. Fostering a culture of support and collaboration among women can avoid rivalry and increase the number of women in leadership positions. Four SGs suggest embedding gender balance goals in strategic plans and nomination procedures by developing and implementing a clear, written strategy for promoting gender balance in international positions, including specific goals and action plans. Finally, revising the nomination process to prioritize gender balance ensures that women are considered and supported in their candidacy.



Possible good practices mentioned by the NFs could involve taking a long-term perspective when working to get people into positions, as this can take several years of systematic work and proper network building. Effective network building is crucial for getting candidates into international positions, including building relationships and promoting candidates over time. Furthermore, it is mentioned that NFs can support their candidates by providing resources and backing their campaigns for international positions. Collaborating with other nations, especially within the Nordic region, can help promote gender balance in international positions, including working together and coordinating efforts towards common candidates.

Ensuring that candidates are visible and represented in relevant contexts is important for their success in international positions. Raising awareness about gender balance and ensuring it is part of the discussions when considering candidates is crucial. Having written guidelines that include gender balance in the nomination process can help ensure it is consistently considered. Providing financial support for international representatives, such as covering lost wages, can make it easier for more women to take on these roles. Implementing mentorship and development programs to build up candidates over time can help ensure they are prepared for international positions.

Three NFs expressed a desire for more support from NIF, including areas as templates and best practices for nomination processes, financial support for election campaigns and coordination of Nordic or European alliances to strengthen candidacies.

#### **4.2.4 Strategic planning and long-term positioning**

##### **Overall plan and strategy:**

The interviewees highlighted various aspects of the overall plan and strategy for international representation. There were similarities, and differences of viewpoints. These illustrated the varied approaches and levels of formalization in the overall plan and strategy for international representation among Norwegian NFs.

When it comes to long-term planning, all secretary generals emphasized the importance of having a long-term plan and working systematically to place individuals into positions within their international affiliations. They stressed the importance of building networks and allowing future potential candidates build their own international network by allowing them to attend and take part in international meetings, conferences and sporting events.

While there is a broad recognition of the need for a strategic approach to ensure both genders are represented amongst the obtained positions, at the same time the lack of a plan was apparent. One of the secretary generals acknowledged that they have a high grade of gender imbalance amongst their international positions, and described it this way, "No, well, then you would have to have it in a strategy, right?" And furthermore, "There is nothing preventing women from getting international positions. That is, it's just

a... To put it this way, we don't have a plan for it. I just have to be honest enough and say it" (SG1).

Furthermore, all secretary generals acknowledged the critical factor of systematic work. They all highlighted this factor to ensure gender balance in all parts of their work, also including international work. For some of the NFs, representing sports that have traditionally been dominated by one gender, they recognised and acknowledged that the effort of working on gender balance is especially important. There was a consensus that setting goals and systematic target of efforts are required to achieve gender representation goals.

While there was widespread acknowledgement of the importance of the existence of a written plan, there were various levels of this existence amongst the NFs. Only one NF had a written plan and strategy for nominations to international positions, while others do not have a written or formalised plan or goal. The interviews revealed an ad-hoc or informal approach case by case. When it comes to strategic positioning, some NFs have an unwritten strategy to position candidates by allowing them to attend international meetings and act as substitutes for the president, when the president cannot attend in person. One secretary general describes it like this,

we must ensure that they [the women] have access to that [network], because it can often be an obstacle for women that you do not want it yourself, or you are not even considered as interested because you don't have the network needed (SG2).

Three NFs encountered difficulties in generating interest in running for international positions, especially with regards to women,

the international federation obviously manage to get enough women for these committees and boards, but (...) but they just don't come from us. And there are a lot of people who are surprised that a country like Norway is not able to come up with those candidates (SG3).

Another secretary general also highlights this issue by raising, "this is not a big and difficult process for us. We are simply just trying to get more people out there, no matter if they are men or women". (SG1)

Focus on gender balance varies from NF to NF with some having integrated gender balance into their overall long-term plans and strategies, others do not have a specific strategy for gender balance but consider it a natural part of their work, without a specific strategy. None of the NFs have gender goals or requirements mentioned specific with regards to international positions, and one secretary general puts it this way, "it doesn't say anything concrete about gender, but it doesn't say anything concrete about anything else either" (SG5).

One NF collaborate with other NFs within the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland) working on a common Nordic strategy for gender balance within their own international affiliations, while others focus on internal strategies.

### **Proactive versus reactive approaches:**

Two NFs emphasize the importance of long-term planning, including identifying and mentoring possible candidates years in advance. In contrast, two NFs admit being reactive, often defaulting to renominate incumbents due to time constraints.

Four NFs noted the importance of maintaining strong ties between their international representatives and the national NF to keep the relation strong, through regular reporting, shared goals, and strategic alignment.

### **4.2.5 Interview results discussion**

The results from the interviews highlight several key challenges and strategies related to long-term planning and gender balance, or imbalance, within the NFs. Despite the unanimous recognition of the importance of a strategic approach to ensuring gender balanced representation, there is a significant disparity in the existence and implementation of formal plans amongst the NFs. Only one NF has a written plan for international nominations, indicating a lack of systematic efforts across NFs.

The emphasis on building networks and attending international events as a mechanism for positioning candidates is clear. However, there remains a notable gender imbalance, with women often lacking the necessary networks to be considered for these positions. While some NFs adopt proactive strategies, mentoring potential candidates years in advance, others are reactive, defaulting to renominate incumbents due to time constraints.

The interviews reveal a consensus on the necessity of systematic work to achieve gender balance, particularly in sports traditionally dominated by one gender. Yet, the absence of specific gender goals in international positions suggests that this issue is not sufficiently prioritized.

Collaborations within the Nordic countries shows the potential for creating a unified strategy for gender balance, but individual efforts vary. The importance of maintaining strong ties between international representatives and national NFs is also underscored, emphasizing the need for regular reporting and strategic alignment.

In summary, while the recognition of gender balance is widespread, the actual implementation of strategies to achieve this is inconsistent. A more unified and proactive approach, with clearly defined goals and systematic efforts, is essential for ensuring balanced gender representation in international affiliations on behalf of the Norwegian NFs.

### **4.3 Focus group workshop results**

The workshop discussions highlighted several recommendations followed by actions to possibly enhance the gender balance amongst people nominated for international position from Norwegian NFs.

#### **4.3.1 Role descriptions and support**

One notable recommendation mentioned by the participants in the workshop was to develop comprehensive role descriptions for candidates. It was emphasized that the importance of clear role descriptions and clarifying administrative support can boost women's confidence in seeking positions. Practical details such as time commitment, compensation, and task support are critical elements to be a part of a role description. "Without clarity in expectations, many women hesitate to step forward, fearing they might be unable to meet undefined demands" (Participant 2). Furthermore, "The lack of specific guidelines has often been a deterrent for women, who seek clarity before committing to a role" (Participant 3).

Descriptions can be tailored to suit various NFs, offering flexibility and customization based on the specific needs with the aim to encourage more people, and especially women, to find interest for various positions by providing a clear understanding of the expectations and benefits associated with the roles.

Furthermore, the workshop discussion advocated providing support from administrative staff. These staff members can serve as sparring partners and assist with practical tasks, such as booking flights and setting up networking opportunities. This support can ease the logistical challenges faced by international representatives, allowing them to concentrate on their professional responsibilities.

#### **4.3.2 Structural barriers, strategic plans and formalized process**

One participant stressed the distinction between structural changes and individual barriers, and warned against financial incentives that may disrupt balance and emphasized strategic decisions to improve gender representation. "True equity comes not from financial rewards but from fostering an environment where both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations align" (Participant 5). "By making informed strategic decisions and consistently reporting on progress, at the NIF level and within each NF, Norwegian sport may monitor efforts to enhance gender balance and make necessary adjustments on the way" (Participant 1).

Setting ambitions for improving gender balance is a crucial action discussed. A participant emphasized the need for NFs to commit to increasing gender balance in international positions and anchor these ambitions at the highest organizational levels with concrete follow-up actions. "Ambitions without accountability are dreams. Anchoring these goals at the leadership level ensures tangible progress" (Participant 1).

The participants also discussed the importance of formalizing the process of nominations and renominations for international positions by creating a template adaptable for NFs, to ensure that the process reaches a level of minimum satisfaction.

#### **4.3.3 Best practice and role models**

The workshop highlighted the importance of analyzing existing best practices and solutions to barriers that have proven successful in other contexts and in different NFs. They suggested leveraging current successes as a blueprint for future strategies. “When we analyze what has worked, we can create a roadmap for replicating success across diverse contexts” (Participant 4). By drawing inspiration from best practice, the NFs can implement practical and effective ideas to advance their gender balance initiatives.

#### **4.3.4 Focus group workshop discussion**

The findings from the focus group workshop provide an overview of strategies to enhance gender balance in nominations for international positions. A notable recommendation is the development of detailed role descriptions, which are crucial in clarifying expectations and boosting confidence among potential candidates, and women candidates especially. Role descriptions should encompass time commitments, compensation details, and administrative support, thus removing ambiguities that deter women from seeking positions. This approach aims to attract more women by providing a clear understanding of the role.

Additionally, the workshop advocates for administrative support to ease logistical challenges for international representatives. This support includes practical tasks like booking flights and arranging networking opportunities, which allows representatives to focus on their professional duties.

Another critical aspect discussed is the differentiation between structural barriers and individual barriers. Participants emphasized the importance of strategic plans over financial incentives to foster an environment where intrinsic and extrinsic motivations align. Consistent reporting and informed strategic decisions at both the NIF and NF levels are essential for monitoring progress and making necessary adjustments to enhance gender balance.

Setting clear ambitions for improving gender balance is also highlighted. It involves committing to these ambitions at the highest organizational levels and ensuring accountability through concrete follow-up actions. Formalizing the nomination process with adaptable templates is another step towards achieving minimum satisfaction levels and ensuring a fair and transparent process.

Finally, the importance of analysing best practices and existing successful solutions to barriers is underscored. By leveraging these successes, NFs can implement practical and effective strategies to advance their gender balance initiatives.

## CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides recommendations to strengthen international representation, particularly with a focus on gender balance, nomination processes and long-term strategic development for the Norwegian NFs.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1: ESTABLISH CLEAR AND FORMALIZED NOMINATION PROCEDURES**

Across multiple NFs, nomination processes are often informal or ad hoc. To improve transparency and effectiveness it is recommended to:

- Develop standardized, written procedures for identifying, evaluating, and nominating candidates.
- Include structured input rounds and board-level discussions before finalizing nominations.
- Ensure renomination processes are also formalized to avoid default continuation without evaluation.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2: INTEGRATE GENDER BALANCE INTO STRATEGIC PLANNING**

While some NFs have gender balance goals at national level, others lack concrete strategies, and it is recommended to:

- Embed gender balance as a measurable objective in long-term plans and nomination strategies.
- Use gender as a tiebreaker when candidates are equally qualified.
- Include gender representation requirements in committee and commission nominations, not just board positions.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: BUILD AND MAINTAIN CANDIDATE PIPELINES**

Several NFs struggle to find willing and qualified candidates, especially women, it is therefore recommended to:

- Create or apply to development programs and mentorship tracks to prepare future candidates.
- Identify and support “rising stars” early, offering them visibility and international exposure and networking opportunities.
- Encourage participation in working groups and international events to build networks and credibility.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4: STRENGTHEN NATIONAL / INTERNATIONAL LINKAGES**

Ensuring international representatives remain aligned with NFs' goals it is recommended to:

- Require representatives to hold or maintain roles within the NF.
- Establish regular dialogue and reporting mechanisms between international representatives and the NFs' national board.
- Define clear objectives and expectations for each international role.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5: ADDRESS STRUCTURAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS**

Barriers to women participation include time constraints, lack of perceived impact, lack of predictability and underrepresentation in national leadership. It is therefore recommended to:

- Offer flexible meeting formats and support for work-life balance.
- Promote the value and impact of international roles to increase motivation and showcase women role models.
- Ensure administrative staff actively support and assist candidates in practical tasks like travel arrangements and setting up networking opportunities.
- Consider financial support for international engagement, especially for women.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 6: LEVERAGE NORDIC AND NIF COLLABORATION**

NFs benefit from shared strategies and support, and it is therefore recommended to:

- Coordinate with other Nordic countries to promote and coordinate candidates and share best practices.
- Encourage NIF to provide templates, campaign support, knowledge sharing, inspiration, education and strategic guidance.
- Encourage NIF to follow up especially with NFs that lag in international representation and gender balance.

## CHAPTER 6: ACTION PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents an action plan to promote gender balance amongst the candidates that are proposed for international positions by Norwegian NFs. The action plan is divided into two levels, since there are actions to be taken by the NIF and actions to be taken within the NF. The action plan states and describes the specific action required, the recommendation the action belongs to, responsible parties, resources needed, deadline for implementation and the evidence of success for each action.

To track the progress and effectiveness of these recommendations, it is essential to identify possible evidence of success and regularly review the progress. This will ensure that the strategies are being effectively implemented and adjusted as necessary to meet the desired outcomes.

### 6.1 Action plan for NIF

Table 4: Action plan for NIF

Recom- mendation	Action	Responsible	Resource	Date	Success evidence
1. Establish clear and formalized nomination procedures	Create role description template for international positions adaptable to various NFs	NIF's International Relations team	HR dept.	October 20, 2025	Approved and available in the online international guide
	Create templates for nomination strategy including nomination and renomination procedures adaptable to various NFs	NIF's international relations team	Legal dept. HR dept.	October 20, 2025	Approved and available in the online international guide
	Create a template for succession plans for international positions adaptable to various NFs	NIF's international relations team	HR dept.	October 20, 2025	Approved and made available online through the international guide
2. Integrate gender balance into strategic planning	Set ambitions for gender balance in international nominations and anchor these at the top level of the organisation, the NIF GA	NIF Political level	Leadership support, com dept.	May 1, 2026	Inclusion of gender balance objectives in strategic documents
	Include strategic measures to increase the number of women in international positions in the revised international strategy	NIF Political level	Strategic planning group	May 1, 2026	Revised International Strategy from 2027 includes a gender goal



3. Build and maintain candidate pipelines	Establish a mentorship program for candidates for international positions, with dedicated spots for women candidates	NIF's International Relations team	HR Dept.	January 1, 2026	Number of women candidates in mentorship program
	Continue to develop the "Nordic International Leadership Education" for future candidates for international positions	NIF's International Relations team	HR Dept. Dev. Dept.	Ongoing	Number of women participants and number of women reaching the aimed position afterwards
4. Strengthen national-inter-national linkages	Encourage NFs to require representatives to hold or maintain roles within the NF and require reporting from international representatives to the NF Board regularly	NIF's International Relations team	NIF's International Relations Team	Ongoing	Number of international representatives holding positions in the NF and number of reportings
5. Address structural and cultural barriers	Strengthen the possibility of applying for financial support to NFs nominating women candidates for international positions by updating the existing support scheme for candidate support, with gender-based requirements	NIF's International Relations Team	NIF's International Relations Team	January 1, 2026	Total amount of the financial support to women candidates
	Add facts and figures on Norwegian sports' international representatives to the data set of "The gender barometer in sports" published in March every year to set the spotlight on the challenge of gender imbalance amongst international representatives	NIF's International Relations Team	IT Dept. Dev. Dept.	March 1, 2026	"The gender barometer" includes data on international positions
6. Leverage Nordic and NIF collaboration	Support NFs in establishing collaborations with other Nordic NFs to promote and coordinate candidates and share best practices	NIF's International Relations Team	Nordic collaboration network	Ongoing	Number of NFs with operational Nordic cooperations and number of coordinated candidates

	Increase visibility of women in international roles by organize a yearly seminar where international representatives share experiences and the value of their work to inspire others, women particularly, to take on such roles for the future	NIF's International Relations Team	Event Dept. Com. Dept.	January 1, 2026	Number of women on the stage at the yearly seminar and number of women attending followed by a evaluation to all participants
	Secure regular dialogue with international representatives from NFs and NIF by inviting international representatives from the NFs and NIF every year to exchange knowledge and experience on international work	NIF's International Relations Team	Event Dept. Com. Dept.	March 1, 2026	General score of written evaluation by all participants

## 6.2 Action plan for Norwegian NFs

Table 5: Action plan for Norwegian NFs

Recom-mendation	Action	Responsible	Resource	Date	Success evidence
1. Establish clear and formalized nomination procedures	Develop role descriptions stating the purpose for international positions, including expected time commitment, remuneration, and other practical details based on NIF template	NF admin.	HR dept.	January 1, 2026	Number of NFs having descriptions
	Create a plan for how and when to nominate for international positions and formalize procedures for nominations and renominations, including quality control and guidelines to secure that gender is considered in the process	NF admin.	NF Political level	January 1, 2026	Number of NFs having a plan and formalized procedures  Number of women nominated by NFs
	Adopt and secure that all your candidates are familiarised with the <i>NIFs ethical guidelines on international representation</i> .	NF admin.	NF Political level	October 1, 2025	Number of NFs who have adopted and actively use the guidelines

2. Integrate gender balance into strategic planning	Implement strategic decisions to increase the number of women nominated to positions in international/ European boards and report back on progress to their own NF's general assembly	NF Political level	Leadership support, com dept.	May 1, 2026	Inclusion of gender balance objectives in strategic documents
	Work to include paragraphs related to gender balance in the statutes of your EF and IF by developing proposals for statute amendments for the upcoming GAs	NF Political level	Legal Dept.	January 1, 2026	Number of positive votes for the proposals, number of successful proposals
3. Build and maintain candidate pipelines	Develop succession plans on desired positions to uphold in the future and by this shift from a reactive to a proactive approach in identifying and developing candidates for international positions	NF admin.	HR Dept. NF Political level	January 1, 2026	Number of NFs having succession plans
	Identify women candidates for the NIF mentorship program for candidates for international positions.	NF admin.	NF Political level	August 1, 2026	Number of women candidates for mentorship program
	Identify women candidates and encourage an application for the "Nordic International Leadership Education" for future candidates for international positions.	NF admin.	NF Political level	Ongoing	Number of women participants and number of women reaching the aimed international position after the education
4. Strengthen national / international linkages	Require representatives to hold/maintain roles in the NF	NF Political level	NF admin.	January 1, 2026	Number of international representatives holding a national role
	Invite the international representatives to report at the NF's board meeting once per 6 months to make sure they are connected to the NF's work.	NF admin.	NF Political level	January 1, 2026	Number of reporting sessions

	On the same occasion the international representatives should have a meeting and a social dinner together to connect and exchange experiences	NF admin.	NF admin.	January 1, 2026	Number of social events
5. Address structural and cultural barriers	Investigate gender balance requirements in your EF and IF to familiarise the NF with the existing frameworks and identify any possible rooms for improvement	NF admin.	Legal Dept.	October 1, 2025	Level of knowledge of existing frameworks
	Apply to the NIF for financial support to women candidates for positions	NF admin.	NF admin.	March 1, 2026	Number of applications submitted
	Find and communicate the NFs' statistics on gender balance in international positions from "The Gender Barometer". Use this information to highlight positive changes or imbalance challenges	NF Com Dept.	NF admin.	March 1, 2026	Statistics from "The gender barometer" and comparison from year to year
	Offer support from an administrative staff member to candidates taking on positions, including help with practical tasks. Consider the possibility of covering lost wages for international representatives to increase incentives for taking on roles	NF admin.	NF admin.	October 1, 2025	There is a dedicated person assisting. Number of candidates interested in taking on international roles
	Increase visibility of international roles by organising a yearly seminar where international representatives in your sport, especially women, share their experiences and the value of their work to inspire more people to take on such tasks for the future	NF Admin.	Event Dept. Com. Dept	January 1, 2026	Number of participants attending the seminar, and number of women on the stage

6. Leverage Nordic and national col- laboration	Coordinate with your sister NFs in the Nordic countries to develop a common strategy for nominating candidates to international positions, ensuring gender balance amongst possible candidates	NF Political level	Nordic co-operation network	Ongoing	Number of coordinated candidates and gender balance amongst the candidates nominated by the Nordic countries
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### 6.3 Ideas for further work

For future work, after implementing the action plans, it is a possibility to strategically work with the NFs that have less than 40-40-20 gender proportion where women are underrepresented among their international representatives, and work to identify desired international positions and possible women candidates for the desired positions. Furthermore, the NIF can support a specified number of selected NFs, to support both financially and with dedicated human resources to assist the NF and the candidate in the process towards standing for elections in their respective EF or IF.

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## AI TOOLS USED

Microsoft. (2025). *Copilot* (June 2025 version) [Large language model]. <https://copilot.microsoft.com/>

The AI tool Copilot was used for creating summaries of interviews after transcriptions, translation of one example interview from Norwegian to English and translation of the abstract from English to French.

I am aware that I am responsible for all content of this master's thesis, including the parts where AI tools are used. I am responsible for ensuring that the thesis complies with ethical rules for privacy and publication.

### Interview guide

Factual background to be answered before the interview:

- Does your European federation have a minimum requirement of gender representation within their executive board and/or commissions?
- Does your international federation have a minimum requirement of gender representation within their executive board and/or commissions?
- How many international positions does your federation currently have, and have had in the past 8 years?
- How are the obtained positions divided based on gender?
- How many nominations for international positions (successfully or not) have your federation submitted during the last 4-years period?
- How many nominations of each gender have you submitted the last 4-year period?

Interview topics for the semi-structured interview for representatives from National Federations with a poor balanced representation amongst their international representatives:

1. Can you tell me about your background within the organisation and your experiences in general on selection for international positions.
2. Overall plan/strategy for proposing candidates for international positions
3. Procedures for nominations of candidates for international positions
4. Procedures for renominations of candidates for international positions
5. Usual process when the European or international federation inform the national sport federations about a coming election for executive positions or a coming call for nominations to positions within commissions or committees? What happens internally?
6. When proposing candidates for nominations, discuss the criteria you base the discussion on?
7. View on diversity amongst the candidates you nominate
8. From your perspective and the federations perspective, what might be the barriers for a more gender balanced nomination from your side?

9. What could your federation do different within the process from the call for nominations until the submitting of nominations internally within your federation?

Interview topics for the semi-structured interview for representatives from National Federations with a balanced representation amongst their international representatives

1. Can you tell me about your background within the organisation and your experiences in general on selection for international positions.
2. Overall plan/strategy for proposing candidates for international positions
3. Procedures for nominations of candidates for international positions
4. Procedures for renominations of candidates for international positions
5. Usual process when the European or international federation inform the national sport federations about a coming election for executive positions or a coming call for nominations to positions within commissions or committees? What happens internally?
6. When proposing candidates for nominations, discuss the criteria you base the discussion on?
7. View on diversity amongst the candidates you nominate
8. From your perspective and the federations perspective, what might be the reasons your federation happen to have a gender balanced nomination?
9. What would you say might be success factors for obtaining a gender balance amongst your international representatives?

### **Transcript example of interview with secretary general 1**

**Does your European federation have a minimum requirement of gender representation within their executive board and/or commissions?**

Not sure

**Does your international federation have a minimum requirement of gender representation within their executive board and/or commissions?**

Not sure

**How many international positions does your federation currently have?**

xx

**How are the obtained positions divided based on gender?**

xx men, xx women

**How many nominations for international positions (successfully or not) have your federation submitted during the last 4-years period?**

xx

**How many nominations of each gender have you submitted the last 4-year period?**

xx men, xx women

**Can you tell a bit about your background in the organization and your experiences in general with nominations for international positions?**

The need has arisen over time. As Norwegian delegates have been active internationally, they have taken on more responsibility. This has led to us seeing the need to have resources in the respective levels of the organization internationally. Therefore, I have been a driving force in nominating people from Norway through discussions with our national board.

**Do you have an overall plan or strategy for how, when, and where you nominate international representatives?**

It is defined in our strategy that we should influence international kickboxing, and we work based on this. If you do a job, you get a responsibility. The people who are in position now have been there for a while. We introduced a woman in the women's committee in Europe. This happened last year. In addition, some have gone from being a member of a committee to becoming leaders in a committee. Our members climb up as they get involved. They are all engaged and want to contribute actively. They want to contribute. They are not just there to be there.

**So, from the day you as secretary general receive information from the European or international federation that candidates are to be elected or appointed for nominations, what happens in your federation then?**

Then I go to the board immediately. Yes, some of the information is prepared by the international and European federation, and I help shape this information that the national federations receive. In this way, I also have a clear idea of whether we can contribute something, or if we want the re-election of someone.

Internationally, committee leaders remain in their positions until changes occur, either because someone wants to step down or because a more active committee with new members is desired. The committee chairman has a responsibility.

**When you in the Norwegian board then put this on the agenda for the next board meeting, what happens then?**

The board discusses the information received, especially regarding those who are already engaged internationally as judges, coaches, or through women's committees. We often nominate people who are already active internationally and have a desire for further engagement, rather than looking for new people. It's not like we try to look for new people. Some are good judges, but maybe not as good as committee members.

So the discussion is not very deep, because I actually talk to those I think could fit in a committee, and then the board nominates. So, it is the board that nominates to the international or European federation, so it is a fairly simple process, because it is the people who are already out in the field. The process is simple because the candidates are already active in the field. If it is about building up a new candidate to give them international experience, the situation may be different.

**How do you work to find them, and how do you think about it?**

We try to spread ourselves especially within the role of judges. There are two different judge committees internationally; one for ring and one for mat. We work to send more out so that more can get involved internationally as judges. Usually, there is only one Norwegian in a committee, not two. We look at how they function internationally, simply. This is not a big and difficult process for us. We are simply just trying to get more people out there, no matter if they are men or women. More participate naturally through the national team. The judge committee selects judges based on a budget for international tournaments. Also, getting to the World Championships, European Championships, or international multisport games is the most important. And it has been completely natural that some of them are also good administratively and thus are nominated to committees, as long as there is room for a Norwegian. There are no fixed procedures, just a fixed way the process goes. It is quite flat organization internationally and it is quite a short way from words to action.

It is flexible since it is the chairman who decides who should be committee members, so it is nominated to our board that I want the following composition which is spread across countries and has a gender balance, right? And then we accept it. Yes, unless we see something that doesn't fit, right? People who have no business being there, for example. So, there is a certain safety valve.

The process is quite simple, and we have representatives in most important committees, including the coach, athlete, and women's committee.

**When you were to nominate someone to the women's committee, how did the discussion go?**

The one we have had through a program here with you, XXXX XXXXX, who is also very engaged in the board, she has said that she could also think of being involved internationally. And when there was a change in the European federation, I suggested that she should come in there. So, I talked to the leader of the women's committee in the European federation and suggested her. I sent her CV, and they had a chat. So, the discussion was not in the board, but we asked. I said to our president that should we have a chat about XXXX XXXX and then we nominated her. I first talked to her about whether she was willing to stand. If she hadn't been, we would have had to look for other opportunities. But she is engaged and has wanted to contribute, and thus she was nominated.

**When the federation discusses and proposes candidates for positions, what criteria do you base the discussion on?**

Yes, in the Norwegian federation we consider several aspects. We discuss whether the candidate has the capacity to contribute and values principles such as good governance and good management skills. We believe that the resources engaged in our federation, both through the Norwegian committees and the Norwegian board, maintain good governance. We emphasize being transparent, honest, and open, and we want to contribute. This includes being physically present and engaged in the work. These are the criteria, in a way, that we prioritize. So, you trust someone, right?

For example, the one who is the leader, part of the athlete committee, in the international federation XXXXX, is a national team athlete. He is a person we see can also contribute internationally. So, we see that he can contribute internationally. He has a kind of... he is engaged. He looks for improvements in rules, he looks for fair play. He is very engaged within the parameters that the committee internationally has, so he is the profile we consider good when we nominated leaders to the judge committee internationally. XXXXX from XXXXXX, he has been involved internationally and judged for many years, been named the world's best judge in the discipline he judges in. He is critical. He wants to contribute.

Also, the leader of the judge committee, he doesn't function, so we wanted to replace him. And then I say to XXXXXX, could you consider that position because you are so engaged anyway? Then you can take some control and get control over judging and fair play and accountability and such, and he wants that, and then we do it. Talk to the board and then we nominated him. And then I talk to them. I talk to the president for the federation to say that we have a candidate we know well who they believe can be a good administrator for that committee. So, he is elected to that.

**Is there ever an election process?**

It's not like we have 10 candidates to choose from. The only committees that have elections are the athlete committee and the women's committee. All others are appointed to positions. There is no election for the leader of the judge committee. There it is nominated a person we believe can do a good job, while xxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx, she stood for election.

**Do you sometimes look at your international positions as a whole and see the entire group together?**

No, as long as they do a good job in the committee they are in, and we discuss a bit among ourselves. We talk a lot in Norway about what is happening, and they come to me with things that should be done, or with issues, and we discuss it one-on-one. And since I have the central position I have, I often take those conversations.

And as long as they want to contribute. As long as we have good communication among us Norwegians, we don't have any major evaluation criteria. As long as they want to contribute, that they want to, in a way. Also, those who are elected, it can happen that it no longer fits or that they don't want to, that they feel it doesn't give them anything, so they can drop out and then it becomes like that. Then that place with us becomes an easier next choice.

**How do you work in the Norwegian federation, if you know that now there is a position that is about to become vacant here, now we have an opening and an opportunity.**

We bring it up. Yes, we discuss it in the board. Do we have any candidates for that committee? What should one do? Is such competence operational? We have one in the disciplinary committee, right? They work based on cases they receive, while those who are operational very often go to tournaments internationally, right? They have a function like the judge committee. They are operational all the time.

**Let's say that you as a federation wanted to have a more even gender balance among those who represent you in international positions. What do you think you**

**could have done differently to achieve that?**

No, well. Then you would have to have it in a strategy, right? That also means that you have to think about who you actually send out in the field, right? Now it is mainly male judges who are out traveling. Then we have to send women. Now we are actually going to have 2 women to international competition who want to contribute a bit. It is a bit at their own request. We have not had any process that we should have more female judges internationally, for example, where they are the most operational. Then, yes. We have not had any process that we should have more women as judges or women in committees. It has just been those who are in the committees today. They have naturally joined the committee because they have been very engaged. And then openings have appeared for that. No, then we would have to discuss it based on a strategy, right? It also has something to do with judge education in Norway, for example. It is within that field that I see the most need to create a balance because we are 7, 8 judges who travel all year.

**What do you think could be a barrier or obstacle for those people you say naturally fit into an international position, what is it that prevents those people in your Norwegian federation from being women?**

There is nothing preventing women from getting international positions. That is, it's just a.. To put it this way, we don't have a plan for it. I just have to be honest and say it. Hmm. Even though we have engaged women in the judge committee, in the Norwegian judge committee, for example, they have not discussed, or we have not discussed that we should have a strategy. That when we now send out 7, 8, 9 judges during a year, that half of them should be women. We don't have that. We have not had any process on that.

**Do you think it would have made a difference?**

Yes, then someone has to take the initiative for it, then. So, we. We have to take it. Then we in the federation have to take the initiative to say to the judge committee that we want to have more female judges. There are quite a few female judges who judge nationally, but getting them to be involved internationally, it is a bit... It has simply been random, but then we have to put it on the agenda and say that we now want to continue sending out 7, 8, 9, judges every year, which must have a gender balance 50/50 for example. Committee, commission, board position. Yes, so that...

For now, I am talking about operational and being judges, but when you propose women into, into, now, now there is only room for one...

**How many committees are relevant for you?**

It is both at the European level and at the international level, right? There are many committees, but the committees we are engaged in are, beyond the coach, it is of



course the board, the medical committee, then we have the professional committee, right? Which is a very strong legal committee. And then you have all those who are more operational at tournaments. Like, how does the championship look, for example?

**What do you think could be smart for a Norwegian federation to do to ensure that you look broadly when considering potential candidates for a nomination? How can you ensure that? What would work for you?**

I think it is important that those who are to be in a committee are engaged internationally and get to know the environment first.

**How should they get to know the environment? Where should they get to know the environment? What can the Norwegian federation do to get them out in the field?**

For example, coach, we actually send female coaches to championships and as XXXXX XXXXX is another additional coach, and she is a candidate to take over. Simply so good she is, and it has been a conscious choice we have had that we want to have more women when we hired a youth and junior coordinator who will be the national team manager for our youth and junior national team. Then we chose to hire, we had an interview process nationally, and then it was between 3 men and a woman who were equal in terms of qualities. But we simply chose the woman because we want to have a woman, and it is a conscious choice we have had, and then she has to go out in the field and show that she... If it is so that we see potential candidates in another committee within that professional field, for example in coach, then it is a choice we can make.

But there we simply did not choose XXXXX XXXXX, she is thought of as a resource who can be a future national team coach because you are this resource you are and have a desire to contribute, so it is a choice we make.

And then it is. The others are kind of specialist committees. We also have a doctor in the medical committee, she is a specialist and the women in our health team, they are not so engaged and do not have a great desire to contribute, but then we let that ball lie. But only judges sit in the judge committee. Then you can make a strategic choice. And there are more women who judge nationally. So then, but then we have to put it on the agenda, to set up those systems simply.

**Where can you put it on the agenda?**

It must be a board then. A board that makes the decision that we should send out more and gives an order to the judge committee, that we now want, of the 8 we want in the future that we should increase the proportion of women. It is the board that decides that.

**Do you have anything else or other areas or something you think is related to this that you want to mention at the very end?**

No, nothing more than that we. It has been a bit actually a bit random, but it is because I have been so engaged. I have been internationally for so many years that I have seen the need for those of us, with our way of running sports, can do a good job. And then it has just become a completely natural dialogue between me and our board. Even though I was not engaged in the federation nationally. We have many years. I was not nationally engaged from 2005 to 2016, I was only engaged internationally. But it is about the home board. Yes, and I said that I talked to those who were good and those who were engaged. Can't you go into that committee, isn't that a good idea? So, it has kind of been in the plan without it being very strongly founded in a clear strategy in Norway.

It has just been that I have taken the initiative to push people in because I see that then we can influence. Now it is in a strategy that we should influence without really thinking that it says in the strategy that there should be gender balance in that strategy, the international strategy. We don't have that. So, there must be a will from the national federation board that we should increase the proportion of women in our international representatives.

**Do you think that willingness is present?**

Yes, I don't think that is a problem at all. It's just about putting it in the system then.

But it is very interesting what you say, I think that many federations want to do something about it. But they are not. Maybe you are not. You are not aware, you don't know.

But what is the challenge in many federations, is that it is politics with us too, but in some larger federations, the heavier federations, to call it that. And it is the football federation, the ski federation and, right. So, internationally, it is quite political organizations. There is a big fight to get in, and it is also so that there is a strong desire from many to be in committees without wanting to contribute, and it has been a bit like that, so it is like that because it is very important for them nationally to be in committees. To have the position for the sake of the position. Prestige. And XXXXX XXXXX was. He wanted to have a lot of people in all the committees, right? They can't speak English and don't contribute. They don't respond to anything, and then you see, it's not like that, it just does not work like that.