






Raising the growth and participation
of female sport officials in Europe



.....
**EUROPEAN COMPENDIUM
OF GOOD PRACTICE CASE
STUDIES ON RECRUITMENT
AND RETENTION OF WOMEN
SPORT OFFICIALS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

 1 - INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 - About the WINS project	4
1.1.1 - Rationale and aims	4
1.1.2 - The WINS partnership	5
1.1.3 - Project outputs	6
1.2 - Objectives of the European Compendium of Good Practice Case Studies	7
1.3 - Gathering the Good Practice Case Studies	7
1.4 - Key themes and learning points	8
1.5 - Introducing the Organisation Case Studies	9
1.6 - Introducing the Individual Case Studies	10
1.7 - Acknowledgement	10
 2 - ORGANISATION CASE STUDIES	11
French Handball Federation (FFHB) - Feminisation Plan	12
England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) - Diversifying Umpires in Professional Cricket	14
National Olympic Committee of the Netherlands (NOC*NSF) - More National Female Referees in Sports	16
Dutch Hockey Federation (KNHB) - Educating Young Female Officials	18
EuroHockey - Equal Appointments Policy	20
 3 - INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES	22
Amandine Vahé (FRA) Handball	23
Alison Keogh (IRL) Field Hockey	25
Lisa Rashid (ENG) Football	27
Kalinka Ivanova (BUL) Archery	28
Anne-Laure Berthier (FRA) Fencing	29
Iva Dimova (BUL) Athletics	31
Charlotte Girard Fabre (FRA) Ice Hockey, Handball, Curling	32
Antonella Verrascina (ITA) Volleyball	33



WINSO

Raising the status and participation
of female football in Europe



1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 - ABOUT THE WINS PROJECT

1.1.1 - RATIONALE AND AIMS

The overall ambition of the WINS project is to address gender equity in officiating – across all sports – by undertaking comprehensive research activities into the problems facing women sport officials and producing practical solutions which can support the organisations responsible for their recruitment, retention and development.

The main targeted impact of the EU-funded initiative is for sport organisations across Europe to become more capable to put in place effective recruitment, retention and career development policies for women sport officials, ultimately improving gender balance in the role.



1.1.2 - THE WINS PARTNERSHIP

Coordinated by the European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE), the WINS project is innovative in its constitution as it brought various stakeholders such as universities, national and European sport federations, the Olympic movement and associations from several EU member States. This ensures that the development of outputs is aligned with the realities and expectation of the sector, and involves a high level of consultation and dissemination activities.



COORDINATOR OF THE WINS PROJECT

France / Europe

European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE)



France

Association Française du
Corps Arbitral Multisports
(AFCAM)



Netherlands

Dutch Olympic Committee
Dutch Sports Federation
(NOC*NSF)



United Kingdom

Sports Officials UK
(SOUK)



Netherlands / International

International Federation for
Sports Officials (IFSO)



United Kingdom

University of Portsmouth



Bulgaria

National Sports Academy
«Vassil Levski» (NSA)



Belgium / Europe

Euro Hockey



Switzerland / Europe

European Athletics

1.1.3 - PROJECT OUTPUTS

1 OUTPUT 1

A European research report on gender and sport officiating

Building on the WINS research activities this report highlights the key issues and provides new knowledge in gender equity in sport officiating.

2 OUTPUT 2 - (this publication)

A European Compendium of good practice case studies on recruitment and retention of women sport officials

This output describes in detail a selection of case studies of good practice in recruitment, retention and engagement of women sport officials. These have been taken from across Europe in different countries, sports and contexts.

3 OUTPUT 3

An innovative online toolkit for recruitment and retention of women sport officials

The partners collaborated to design a practical and innovative online toolkit for sport organisations to respond to the issues and challenges of engagement and retention of women sport officials explored and defined in the WINS project.

4 OUTPUT 4

A targeted mentoring and leadership guide for women sport officials in Europe. This output takes the form of a guide to increase the impact and sustainability of the project. It is intended to be used by sport organisations to develop mentoring and leadership programmes.

All these outputs are available from the WINS library www.wins-sport.eu





1.2 - OBJECTIVES OF THE EUROPEAN COMPENDIUM OF GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

The main objective of the European Compendium of Good Practice Case Studies is to showcase and promote case studies which illustrate projects and policies on the recruitment and retention of female sport officials in addition to the examples of successful individual female officials, whose stories can reflect good practice.



1.3 - GATHERING THE GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

Throughout 2023, the WINS partnership contacted sports federations throughout Europe to find case studies about programmes and policies that support the recruitment and retention of women sports officials.

The five organisation case studies in this compendium came from this wide exploration for good examples from across Europe. The fact that the original aim was to gather ten case studies from a range of sports and countries and this number was not reached serves as a reminder of how important the WINS outputs are and how much there is a need to stimulate new programmes and examples of initiatives to support women sport officials.

It was decided that the compendium should be expanded to include case studies of successful individual women sport officials. The aim of these individual case studies is to capture the informal networks which support women officials to reach the top of their respective sports. Thereafter, understanding these informal networks can assist sports federations when creating their own programmes and policies.

To produce the case studies for the compendium, sport organisations were asked to submit key facts and information under the following headings:

- 🔍 Background/rationale/targets for the case study
- 🔍 Details of the activities carried out
- 🔍 Stakeholders involved and their role
- 🔍 Main challenges and difficulties
- 🔍 Impact of the case study
- 🔍 Dissemination and replicability of the case study

Individual women sport officials were asked for information in the following areas:

- 🎯 What motivated them to begin officiating
- 🎯 What has been their officiating journey and highest level of officiating
- 🎯 What do they enjoy most about officiating
- 🎯 What are the main challenges and barriers to continuation an official
- 🎯 What support has been available to them

Following the submissions, WINS partners came together to edit the case studies to ensure consistency throughout the compendium.

1.4 - KEY THEMES AND LEARNING POINTS

Several key themes and learning points can be drawn from the organisation and individual case studies:

- 🎯 Policies, specifically fast track appointments cannot be done without support mechanisms being put in place to prepare those officials for the next level
- 🎯 Talent identification is a vital part of fast track and mentoring schemes
- 🎯 Role model schemes are important but need to be partnered with a clear pathway to reach that level, the role models themselves must also be supported
- 🎯 Maternity and motherhood are raised repeatedly by women officials as an issue, with some solutions being described including being allowed to take young children to matches
- 🎯 Travelling away from family is also an issue, especially at different times in a women's life when priorities can change
- 🎯 An "adverse events management unit" to regulate and manage situations relating to discriminatory and stigmatising behaviour against women officials would appear to be a point of best practice that others could emulate
- 🎯 There needs to be more women in training/ development and decision making roles to effectively support women officials
- 🎯 Workshops to bring women officials together can be valuable mechanisms to make women officials feel valued
- 🎯 Mentors can be key to progression and preparation for high level officiating for women officials
- 🎯 Perceptions can remain that female referees are not as good as male counterparts, and this must be challenged
- 🎯 Having opportunities to develop and improve motivate officials to stay engaged

1.5 - INTRODUCING THE ORGANISATION CASE STUDIES

The following organisation case studies will be of interest to sports federations and others looking to create programmes or policies to support the recruitment and retention of women officials. Some of these examples could be replicated in different sport contexts and in all cases can inspire greater engagement with women sports officials.

ORGANISATION	CASE STUDY TITLE
French Handball Federation (FFHB)	Feminisation Plan
England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB)	Diversifying Umpires in Professional Cricket
National Olympic Committee of the Netherlands (NOC*NSF)	More National Female Referees in Sports
Dutch Hockey Federation (KNHB)	Educating Young Female Officials
EuroHockey	Equal Appointments Policy



1.6 - INTRODUCING THE INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES

The following individual case studies will inspire sports federations to replicate the success of the informal support networks in the programmes and policies that they develop to support women sport officials.

NAME	SPORT	COUNTRY
Amandine Vahé	Handball	France
Alison Keogh	Field Hockey	Ireland
Lisa Rashid	Football	England
Kalinka Ivanova	Archery	Bulgaria
Anne-Laure Berthier	Fencing	France
Iva Dimova	Athletics	Bulgaria
Charlotte Girard Fabre	Ice Hockey, Handball, Curling	France
Antonella Verrascina	Volleyball	Italy

1.7 - ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The partners in the WINS project would like to sincerely thank the five sport organisations willing to share their good practice case studies and the eight individuals who were willing to share their sport officiating story.



2

ORGANISATION CASE STUDIES



FEMINISATION PLAN

French Handball Federation (FFHB)



What?

As a part of its broader Feminisation Plan, the French Handball Federation included a specific focus on its referees, specifically on the development of more women referees. One of the first sports in France to introduce such an initiative.



Why?

Underpinning the FFHB Feminisation Plan was an assessment of the number of referees. This assessment concluded that only 13% of national referees were women, therefore a key goal of the plan became the search for diversity and parity at this level.



How?

In order to achieve the goal of gender parity amongst national referees, the FFHB has undertaken a series of activities:

- By **empowering the local networks** in the regions of France, the FFHB is now better able to identify and provide support for women referees. To facilitate this, each region has a manager responsible for feminisation, who now liase with the national feminisation lead.
- During its research, the feminisation unit found maternity to be one of the main reasons why women referees stopped officiating. Therefore, the FFHB took part in a **maternity and pregnancy project** and now supports referees with re-athletisation following childbirth, localised appointments to reduce separation during the early months, and appointments at pre-pregnancy grade with additional support.
- Creating an **adverse events management unit** to regulate and manage situations relating to discriminatory and stigmatising behaviour, comments or actions, as well as verbal and non-verbal violence.
- There has been significant work in **training, awareness-raising and promotion** that has taken place at local tournaments, conferences, seminars, and regional meetings.



What were the challenges?

Due to the scale of the sport and the number of bodies involved, there has been some difficulty in relaying the information from the FFHB Feminisation Unit to referral agents and their areas. This has also been an issue for referees who have experienced incidents and found difficulty in receiving support. It is positive to note that the feminisation project is continually developing and working on solving these issues.



Who was involved?

The overall Feminisation Plan of the FFHB first had to be approved by the Board of Directors. Once their support was guaranteed, the key actions relating to referees sat with the National Refereeing Committee which created its own Feminisation Unit. The unit also engaged the refereeing groups throughout France to ensure these policies were enacted throughout the districts.



DIVERSIFYING UMPIRES IN PROFESSIONAL CRICKET

England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB)



What?

The project focused on positive action at the top of the game, supporting female officials to reach the highest levels and in turn create role models for the next generation of female officials.



Why?

Prior to the start of the ECB project, out of the 34 umpires involved in professional cricket in England and Wales, there was only one female umpire. Looking further down the pyramid, at the recreational level only 3% of umpires were women.



How?

During the time the ECB has been pursuing this programme it has seen marked improvements:

- Firstly, a **talent pool of 10 umpires** was created consisting of umpires who had performed well in the 2019 season.
- During the 2020 season, a new fully professional playing structure was introduced. This allowed for a **renewed approach to appointments**, with one umpire from the talent pool being appointed alongside one from the all-male professional umpire list.
- This renewed approach to appointments was bolstered in 2021 by the **launch of a new gender-equal tournament** 'The Hundred'. During this, all 8 remaining talent pool umpires were given roles.
- This success was followed by **five domestic contracts and one full-time professional contract** being offered to members of the group.
- Whilst the umpires selected for the talent pool had largely achieved the goal, the ECB then sought to close the gap below this level by developing **regional talent academies** to better identify and support the next generation of top umpires.



What were the challenges?

While the project has seen great success, it is not without its challenges:

- Team perception** still has a way to go. During the first year of the project, the feedback suggested a 25% difference in the perception of the decision making of male and female umpires, despite there being no discernible gap after independent analysis. Steps are being taken to reduce this gap.
- It was necessary to **take a gamble** on the 10 umpires who were selected for the first batch of umpires, of which, 2 were not able to continue due to either health reasons or because they did not enjoy the experience.
- As this is the first generation of female officials at this level, there is still a **lack of women involved in training/developing/decision-making** who can effectively support them. The introduction of a female umpire coach is the first of many measures to address this.
- Taking time away from work** remains a difficulty for officials trying to gain experience, with many games taking place midweek or across 4 days meaning significant time needs to be taken from work.



Who was involved?

The project would not have been possible without support from the Regional Umpire teams who are responsible for appointing and developing at the regional level. The project has also had an impact further afield, namely the ICC, the world governing body, has recently changed its stance and allowed more female umpires into the international system.



MORE NATIONAL FEMALE REFEREES IN SPORTS



National Olympic Committee of the Netherlands (NOC*NSF)



What?

This project, organised by the National Olympic Committee of the Netherlands was focused on the development of more women officials at the national level and centered around the creation of role models to inspire officials to take that step higher.



Why?

At the participation level in the Netherlands, the recruitment of officials is not considered an issue. However, there is a serious disparity at the national level between the number of male and female officials. Therefore, the main aim was to inspire those club-level officials to pursue officiating roles at a higher level.



How?

The project was initiated by the National Olympic Committee but also directly engaged seven sports federations (Football, Field Hockey, Handball, Volleyball, Korfbal, Basketball and Waterpolo). Together they undertook the following actions:

- The project was initiated with a **meeting of 21 role models** from across different sports as well as representatives from the seven sports federations.
- They created a **communication campaign** centered around the hashtag #zijfluittop, translating as «she umpires fantastic».
- A **video campaign centered around role models** from each of the participating sports was produced.
- To further support officials striving to reach the national level, 9 events, including 6 **masterclasses**, were organised throughout the country. These masterclasses included both female and male umpires in the hope of also developing male allies.



What were the challenges?

While the project was able to gather support from the groups responsible for officiating within the partner organisations, the project struggled to get the necessary support from the organisations as a whole. For instance, some marketing departments did not engage with the communication campaign. Furthermore, some boards did not fully support the campaign. It has since been suggested that better integration of those responsible for officials into boards would help to solve such issues.



Who was involved?

The project was undertaken by the Dutch National Olympic Committee (NOC*NSF) and was delivered in partnership with the national federations for Football, Field Hockey, Handball, Volleyball, Korfbal, Basketball and Waterpolo. Between these organisations, those who engaged more strongly in the programme achieved more progress as a result. For instance, the football federation took the ethos of this project further and set up a project that was successful in recruiting, educating, developing, and mentoring female officials.



EDUCATING YOUNG FEMALE OFFICIALS

Dutch Hockey Federation (KNHB)



What?

This project, set up by the KNHB (Dutch Hockey Federation), was established to develop and mentor young female umpires, in order to support them as they progress to umpiring at the top national level.



Why?

The KNHB officiating committee initiated the project after reflecting on the period 2005 - 2010, during which 90% of umpires officiating at the national level were men. The project's goal was to have more female umpires in the national women's 1st division and to support these umpires at the international level.



How?

- In order to achieve these goals, the KNHB undertook the following activities:
- 8 young **umpires were identified and paired** with 8 experienced top-level umpires as mentors.
 - The group was initially **promoted to the top regional level**, then when deemed suitable, were appointed to the national level.
 - Workshops were provided for the entire group on topics such **as match management, decision making and communication.**



What were the challenges?

There were two main areas of difficulty. Firstly, there was the need to convince the umpiring committees of the 6 districts to support the programme. The committees would have to accept the 'loss' of these umpires to the national panel, something they were quick to accept. Maintaining the list of 8 also had some challenges, with two umpires stepping away due to study or a loss of motivation.



Who was involved?

As this project revolved around high-level appointments, it relied mostly on the officiating committees of the 6 districts and of the KNHB. This was made possible due to the positive relationship between these groups and between them and the KNHB Officials Manager, leading the project.





EQUAL APPOINTMENTS POLICY

EuroHockey



What?

In order to address the imbalance of officials at EuroHockey Tournaments, EuroHockey committed to equal appointment opportunities for male and female officials, whether that is on-pitch or side-line roles.



Why?

Hockey in Europe is in a uniquely positive position where, in terms of participation, it is a gender-equal sport. However, at the top level of the sport, this was not reflected in the number of officials. Research undertaken during the production of EuroHockey's Equally Amazing campaign concluded that female officials were significantly underrepresented in some roles such as Umpire Managers (27%) or Judges (34%).



How?

While EuroHockey has had a policy of equal appointment opportunities for many years, it recently reaffirmed its commitment to it through several actions:

- During 2019, EuroHockey created its **Equally Amazing charter** targeted at addressing gender imbalance across the organisation. A commitment to equal appointments was included in this charter, which was **signed by all 42 member national associations**.
- In order to support this policy, the EuroHockey Institute installed a **50/50 gender split for all its Officials Education programmes**. As participation in these education programmes is a mandatory step for some roles, safeguarding the slots on these courses enables equal opportunities for all prospective officials.
- Furthermore, EuroHockey has begun appointing **mixed-gender panels to its premier club and national competitions**. This has been done to celebrate the quality of the sport and its officials at the top level.



What were the challenges?

The main challenge in fulfilling this policy is having enough **availability of female officials**. The pool of female officials in most roles is smaller than the male pool for a variety of reasons. For on-pitch umpires, for instance, many more female umpires still play, causing **schedule clashes** and difficulty in giving those umpires regular appointments. Furthermore, while the EuroHockey Institute safeguards half of the places on its courses for female applicants, it still receives **fewer female nominations** for its courses.



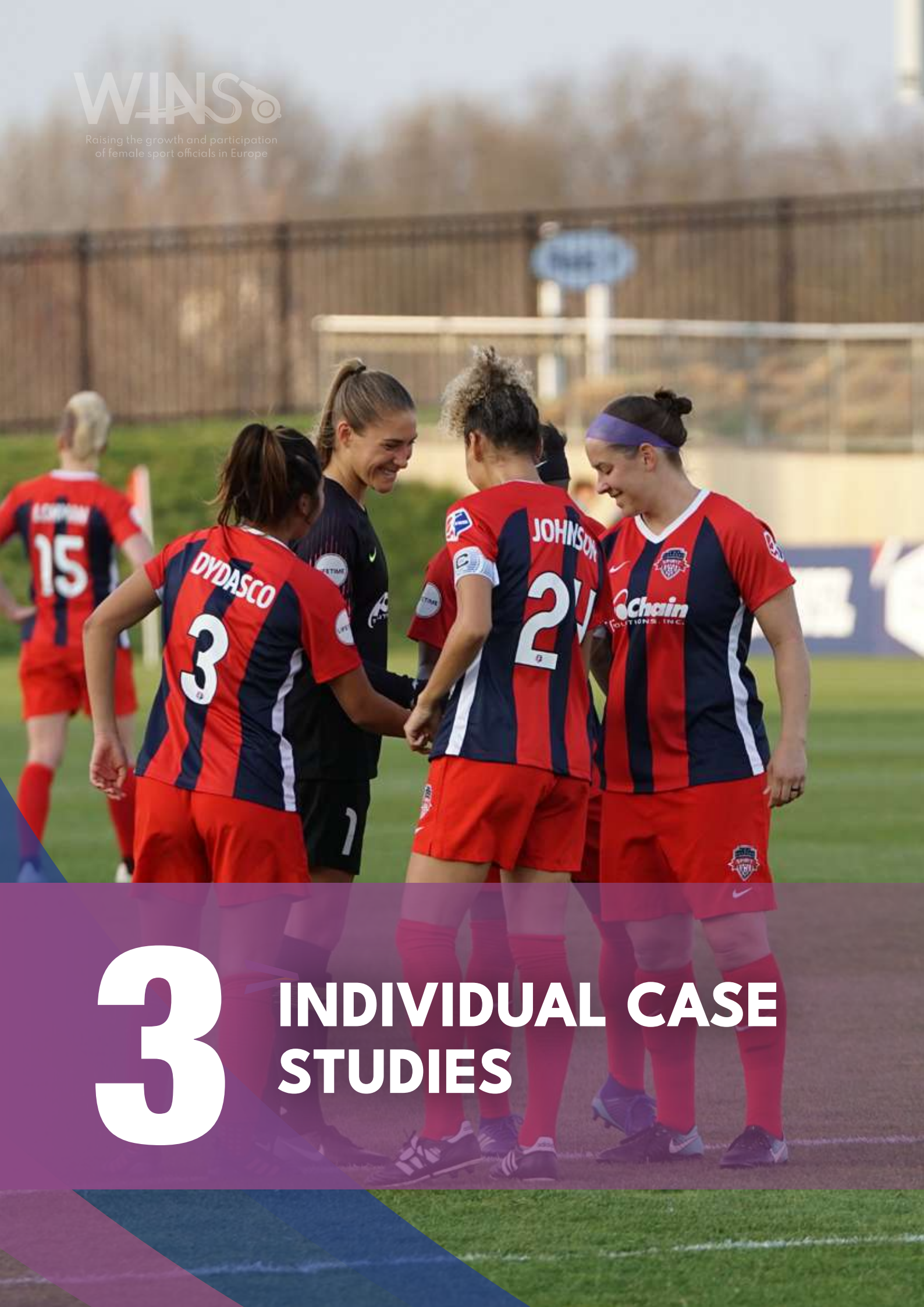
Who was involved?

In order to enact this policy, and the supporting actions, EuroHockey required the support of its Executive Board, Officials and Development Committees, and its 42 member national associations. The policy has seen a trickle-down effect, with more female officials taking up roles at the national level, in preparation for undertaking international roles.





Raising the growth and participation
of female sport officials in Europe



3

INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDIES



AMANDINE VAHÉ

Handball



Amandine Vahé has been a handball official for over 12 years but begun her journey as a player willing to help her local club. She has climbed the ranks and now officiates both men's and women's handball in France, refereeing the top women's division and the second-tier men's division.

Starting as a way to help out her local club, Amandine soon realised that her passion for the sport translated to a passion for officiating.

«As I gained more experience and became more deeply involved in officiating, I found that I truly enjoyed the role, the challenges it presented, and the opportunity to contribute to fair play and the integrity of the game.»

The feeling of community and having a positive impact on the game motivated Amandine to continue, leading to her getting the opportunity to officiate at higher levels.

Now at the national level, Amandine relishes the challenge of the continual development that is required to stay at her best. She has been able to develop her skills, such as mental toughness and communication, which have positively impacted her life on and off the court.

One of the hardest challenges facing Amandine and her officiating career is the difficulty in balancing life and the sport. Most specifically, her responsibilities as a mother.

«The challenge of balancing my responsibilities as a mother with my officiating commitments, including the need to secure childcare during travel for matches, could lead me to consider leaving officiating.»

As an official refereeing at the national level in France, time is one of the key issues. Having to spend significant time away from home to travel across the country, or even stay overnight, to officiate games means more time away from the family.

«I no longer wish to be away for 24 hours just to officiate a match, as my priorities have shifted. I fear missing out on precious moments with my family, especially in the early stages of parenthood.»

Amandine suggests that «flexibility in assignments, reducing the time away from home, and offering support for childcare arrangements during travel would allow officials to balance their family and officiating responsibilities more effectively».



ALISON KEOGH

Field Hockey



Alison Keogh has been umpiring field hockey for 15 years and has built her career umpiring at national level in Ireland, across European Competitions including four EuroHockey Championships and has also spent time on the international stage with two U21 World Cups and two World Cups. Recently Alison has had the honour of being appointed to the upcoming Olympic Games in Paris, the peak of any Hockey umpire's career. Aside from her time on the pitch, Alison now gives back to the hockey community which supported her and helps her national association to develop grassroots umpire programmes in Ireland.

Alison was motivated to start umpiring as an inquisitive player and was quickly identified as somebody who wasn't afraid of pushing herself in the role. After initially umpiring locally, she was pushed towards higher level leagues where she appreciated the support of more experienced colleagues.

«I was always paired with a senior colleague who would look out for me. This was a person that had the experience to step in when needed, without being over-bearing, and who I could follow in terms of the standards they set.»

Early in her international career, exposure to other umpires, mentors and experiences was key in preparing her for what to come. The EuroHockey Umpire Development Programme (UDP) provided this experience.

«The UDP programme introduced me to other umpires, showed me the expectations of international competitions, and provided me with opportunities to umpire at European events.»

Being pushed out of her comfort zone, with the support of colleagues and mentors, is what has continued Alison's upward trajectory.

«When the time was right I was appointed to men's games in my home country, which pushed me out of my comfort zone and showed me that there were still areas I needed to develop further.»

The rise to the top of the hockey umpiring has not come without its challenges, however, Alison feels that the challenges she has overcome, such as balancing the time commitment required, have not been a result of her gender.

Alison's feels that hockey is an equal space for male and female officials, as it is for male and female competitors.

«While there are still elements that need to be improved in terms of player payments etc., from a competition perspective equal time is given to the broadcasting of women's games and men's, the two competitions are often played side by side and at the same venue. The same is seen in officiating, we are one team and the progression into mixed gender appointments has cemented this further.»

With cards that carry a suspension and rolling substitutions, the speed of the game stays high and there is little opportunity for breakdown or abuse. Alison believes that this, in combination with video referrals, has had a fundamental impact on the culture of player behaviour and creates a better environment for officials.

The newest challenges faced are now those outside of the sport. «You sacrifice a lot to get to the top, including holidays, time with family and friends, and money. Significant effort is required to maintain focus, sharpness and fitness and juggle these with 'normal' life. Social media and the rise of armchair critics adds to the pressure.»



LISA RASHID

Football



Starting as a 14-year-old, Lisa Rashid has been refereeing for over 22 years. Now specialising as an Assistant Referee, she has climbed the ladder and is now a FIFA Women's Assistant referee, Women's Super League Assistant Referee, and in the Male game is an English Football League Assistant Referee at League 1 and League 2 level. Off the pitch, she is also a mentor, assessor, and developer, helping to support the next generation of officials.



Lisa began to officiate as a part-time role but after 4-years she moved into the semi-professional game, since then she has continued to progress further.

«What started as a hobby has now progressed into a career.»

For Lisa, several aspects are key to her continuation as an official. Notably, it is important that she enjoys the role and feels she is supported in doing it. Furthermore, having the opportunity to develop and progress keeps her engaged and willing to make the sacrifices required.

Throughout her career as a referee, Lisa has faced a number of challenges specific to being a woman. She believes that there is a perception amongst teams and coaches that female referees are not as good as male counterparts – something which must be challenged.

Away from the pitch, there is a lack of understanding of the role of 'mother', so there are challenges when it comes to work-life balance, especially when it comes to travelling away from family. However, Lisa was able gain support, notably from Kari Seitz, FIFA's Head of Women Referees, to bring her daughter with her to matches. This has since paved the way for other mothers to do the same.

«Family are not usually allowed at tournaments and this had never been done before, but she [Kari Seitz] made this possible and I was able to go to the tournament, my daughter came for part of it, and I was able to continue to breast feed.»

Lisa feels that the re-entry into officiating following pregnancy is a difficult time for officials, so more support is always needed. Including in the areas of fitness, where protocols are set-up for males.



KALINKA IVANOVA

Archery



Kalinka Ivanova is an Archery Official within Bulgaria and has had this role since 2005. Her journey began when she was made General Secretary of the Bulgarian Archery Federation, where she felt it was important to fully understand the role of an official to better fulfil her work duties. She began with a judge's course but has since gone on to fulfil the role of Chair, Shooting Director and Line Judge and continues in these roles despite having left as general secretary in 2015.

Aside from the need to understand the different roles in sport, Kalinka also cites her love of the sport as the main reason for her wish to become an official.

The opportunity to continue to progress also motivates Kalinka, she currently holds one of the highest standards in sport officiating in Bulgaria and wishes to push herself further, to fulfil the requirements of the highest national category, the title of Republican Official.

Throughout her career as an official, Kalinka has felt supported in Bulgaria, with people such as Ivan Bohev, an experienced official, happy to share the experience he has from many years and many roles in Archery.

«Ivan Bohev has helped me with guidance and references during the preparation of events, preparation of officials' schedules, setting up the field or hall for archery.»

Kalinka has found that Archery, specifically in Bulgaria, is supportive of female officials and the challenges she has faced are related more to the role of officiating in general.

For instance, there is an overall lack of officials. Kalinka believes this is because many of the judges are themselves athletes, so prefer to participate as competitors and not officiate.

To keep officials engaged, they must be motivated. For Kalinka, being continually pushed and developing is what keeps her engaged in officiating.



ANNE-LAURE BERTHIER

Fencing



Anne-Laure Berthier is an international level referee in two weapon disciplines (sabre and foil) and has refereed at the European Seniors Championship as well as several senior grand slam events. She has been refereeing at the regional level since 2001 and progressed to the national level in 2003, breaking onto the international stage in 2006 before adding her second weapon internationally in 2014. Aside from this journey, she has also been a member of the technical committee, member of national refereeing committee and an assessor for European U17 events.

Being intrigued by the rules as an athlete, Anne-Laure wanted to better understand the referee's perspective so decided to take-on the role to experience this.



«[The referee] is an essential part of the game, so putting myself in his shoes was essential for me. I wanted to understand how a referee might feel, how a fencer should communicate with the referee and what are the difficulties of the role.»

After gaining this understanding, Anne-Laure found that she had a talent for the role and begun to enjoy the intensity of refereeing.



«I also like the pressure of the matches, which helps me to give my best. The feeling when you've achieved a great performance is really incredible.»

With the 2024 Olympics taking place in France, Anne-Laure has set her sights on officiating a home Olympics. She wishes to be a role model, showing that a woman can be one of the best referees in the world.

In France, Anne-Laure has had some brilliant support. Notably from Bruno Gaby, who helped take her through all the steps required to be a referee and a trainer of young referees, giving her confidence.

At the international level, however, there have been more challenges. While the international federation encourages female referees, amongst peers, there is a feeling that «it is because of this encouragement that women referees take part in competitions, not because they have the level».

The higher up the pyramid that Anne-Laure travels, the more difficult the dynamic gets. There is a feeling that up-and-coming referees upset the established order and, therefore, an even greater level of skill is required to usurp an established male referee.

In addition, finding a work-sport balance can be hard when you must often take time off work to officiate but are paid little or nothing in return for the role.



IVA DIMOVA



CHARLOTTE GIRARD FABRE

Athletics



Iva Dimova is a track and field athletics official in Bulgaria, she has held multiple roles in officiating, acting as an umpire, referee and a Technical Delegate in different competitions. Iva has been a part of the officiating team for the Indoor and Outdoor National Championships in Bulgaria. She now sets her sights on international officiating, having become a World Athletics Silver Level referee and a member of the International Technical Officials Panel.

Iva was a track and field athlete and looked to remain close to her favourite sport by taking up officiating. She began as a track judge, who carries out observational duties such as judging, lap board and bell, break line, relay take over judge and hurdle observation. Following success in this role, Iva was rotated around different roles and was able to get experience in different athletic disciplines.

This possibility to develop, experiencing different roles in officiating, excites Iva and motivates her to continue her development.

“*«Improving my skills and competence, meeting people and learning how to cope with different situations motivates me to continue as a sports official.»*”

Iva has recently become a mother and has, therefore, officiated in less competitions. This has not prevented her from continuing to seek personal development, with Iva having completed the exams to become a World Athletics Silver Level Referee in 2022.

Iva has felt well supported by the Bulgarian National Athletics Association who recognised her talent during her participation in training courses and have supported her to take part in international courses.

She has also felt supported by her peers, coaches, and those at the National Sports Academy Vassil Levski.

Iva has felt that her role as an official has not been impacted by her gender, and that the issues she faces are not specifically related to her being a women official. One such challenge is a «lack of appropriate equipment in all fields of officiating in track and field in Bulgaria».

Ice Hockey, Handball, Curling



Charlotte Girard Fabre is an officiating chameleon, having officiated at the national level in three sports; handball, ice hockey and curling. With over 10 years in the sport, ice hockey was Charlotte’s primary sport, where she refereed in 6 world championships and 2 Olympic games. Since leaving ice hockey, she has begun officiating both handball and curling, reaching the national level in these sports in 2019 and 2022 respectively.

Charlotte’s journey in officiating started young when she realised that «the person who never leaves the field is the referee». So, whenever she was not practising, she was officiating, regardless of the discipline.

Her next step in officiating after this young interest came after her career as a player in the French Ice Hockey national team came to an end, where it was suggested that she should look to officiate now she was no longer playing.

As Charlotte climbed higher in her Ice Hockey officiating, she found some support from a select few individual allies but often felt let down by the structures in her sport.

“*«The outfits are never adapted to the female body type. The changing rooms are never designed for women, there are no bins for disposing of sanitary towels, there’s no privacy. I was appointed to the ‘easier’ matches, I developed more slowly than the men, my male colleagues were jealous.»*”

Charlotte now spends significant amount of time spreading positive messages about officiating and is a role model for many young officials. Unfortunately, during her career there were few female role models and none in France.

“*«There are never or too rarely any female leaders or role models, so there is always at best a kind of paternalistic sexism, or at worst institutionalised or assumed sexism.»*”

Despite these barriers, the desire to climb the ladder and reach the top kept her motivated in Ice Hockey and continues to keep her motivated in Handball and Curling – her latest officiating endeavours.



ANTONELLA VERRASCINA

Volleyball



Starting at age 18 after her playing career, Antonella has been a referee now for almost 20 years, having done so at both the national and international level, officiating in the Italian National A series and in European competition. Furthermore, as a national referee, she has begun tutoring young officials entering the sport.

As a player, Antonella was always curious about refereeing, but it was not until a knee injury prevented her from playing that she took the step into officiating.

«I have always been attracted by their critical role and for this reason, when my knee injury forced me to stop playing, the decision to become a referee and to remain in the volleyball field was an automatic choice.»

Initially, officiating was a way to keep Antonella in the sport that she was passionate about but soon it became a passion of its own, giving her a sense of focus, regardless of what else is going on in life.

«When up on the stand, all everyday life problems disappear. During the match, you must be focused on the court, and you can't think about anything but the game.»

Antonella's development as an official is largely thanks to her own determination and strong will but she also got support from colleagues and friends.

«Every time I have faced disappointments, I have found them there, ready to make me rise from let-downs by telling me what to do to improve and to never repeat that mistake.»

At the level that Antonella officiates, she feels that there are no differences between male and female officials, all are considered a professional.

One difficulty, which she anticipates and has witnessed her colleagues experience, surround motherhood and pregnancy. Antonella fears that not being able to appropriately be there for her children in the early stages of their life could be a reason why she would stop officiating. However, she believes that support, such as the ability to bring her children with her on a long trip, would combat these concerns.

Antonella has learnt to balance her job as a teacher with her officiating by recognising the skills that can transfer between the two.

«I can firmly say that being a teacher is a sort of study of human behaviours and this can be related as well to the athletes I deal with as a volleyball official.»

Antonella has also found other ways to stay grounded and release stress, allowing her to focus herself when officiating.

«I always do yoga and Pilates in the days prior to important matches, which they all are!»



WINS

Raising the growth and participation
of female sport officials in Europe

RAISING THE GROWTH AND PARTICIPATION OF FEMALE SPORT OFFICIALS IN EUROPE



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



EOSE Secretariat
1, Grande rue des Feuillants
69001 Lyon - FRANCE

Tel.: +33 (0) 437 431 939
Mail: eosesec@eose.org
Web: www.eose.org