Women Win is a global multi-dimensional women’s fund guided by the vision of a future where every girl and woman exercises their rights. In 2007, we were established to address the enormous lack of girl-centred sports programming. From our very beginning, we have committed to partnering closely with local organisations to shape inclusive and responsive sports programmes unique to the needs of each community. We have been fortunate to walk side-by-side with our partners and co-design innovative sports initiatives that empower girls, resource organisations working at the intersection of sport and girls’ rights, and connect women’s funds and stakeholders to the sport for development sector. Seventeen years later, we continue striving to reimagine and transform sports with more feminist and democratic approaches while advocating for sports as a strategy to achieve gender equity.

Women Win has worked in 100+ countries across all continents. In 2023, we regranted over EUR 6 million to 240 grassroots groups and collectives, registered and unregistered organisations, individuals, activists, and social enterprises in 87 geographies. These partners work to advance gender justice through diverse approaches, including, but not limited to, sports and play-based methodologies.

Paramount to our work is the strong belief that anybody and every body is allowed to feel safe in sports and that violence becomes justified when we start excluding in these spaces. For almost two decades, we have remained firm in our commitment to the equal right to protection from discrimination, violence, abuse, and exploitation of vulnerable groups such as girls, women, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and trans people. For these groups, sport is a powerful tool to challenge gender norms and stereotypes, regain ownership of their bodies, experience joy, freedom and pleasure, rebuild their lives after trauma, further develop skills that are transferable to the work environment, find a safe network and a sense of meaning and purpose, and express their talent and passion professionally.[[1]](#footnote-0)

In our partners’ and our own work, we witness sports not only having positive outcomes for individuals, but also being proven means to successful social inclusion, serving to dismantle prejudice and stereotypes, while building social cohesion and solidarity. Proactively including trans, non-binary, intersex, and gender non-conforming people into sports does not just benefit them, but also their teammates and their communities. Such intentional inclusion can encourage individuals to speak out against discrimination, lead to a more reflective understanding of gender, and foster a more welcoming and safer environment that inevitably translates to attitudes held by wider communities and the society.

In contrast, fear-based campaigns aiming to exclude trans women and girls from sports have violent real-life consequences and threaten the safety of trans, non-binary, intersex and gender non-conforming people, as well as the safety of cisgender women and girls. These campaigns are fueled by misinformation and anti-gender actors, while ignoring the needs and experiences of trans people. In a Europe-based survey on experiences related to sexual orientation and gender identity within sport, more than half of the trans participants reported feeling excluded or at one point having to stop participating in sports due to their gender identity. Trans women reported the highest percentage of negative experiences, including verbal threats, physical violence, cyberbullying, and discrimination, with a significant percentage of perpetrators being coaches.[[2]](#footnote-1) Exclusion from sports and other spaces based on gender identity denies individuals and groups their right to sport, and thus justifies and increases overall discrimination and violence towards already vulnerable groups.

Without the intentional inclusion of girls, women, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and trans people, these groups face a range of serious human rights violations in sports, including documented instances of sexual violence perpetrated by cisgender male coaches, trainers, sponsors, and others. It is crucial to focus on these real and pervasive issues rather than diverting attention by inaccurately portraying trans women as a threat. Such diversions not only misrepresent the situation but also undermine the experiences of survivors of sexual violence in sports.

We unite in solidarity with all who champion the health, safety, privacy, and bodily autonomy of all self-identified girls, women, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and trans people in sports. This commitment extends emphatically to transgender and intersex women and girls, who disproportionately suffer from severe stigma, harassment, and discrimination. We challenge and reject the oppressive scrutiny and coercive practices that undermine the participation of these groups in sports. Women Win remains committed to tirelessly working in partnership towards a sports world that champions equality and honours all identities.

1. EGSLF. (2021). LBTI women in sport: violence, discrimination and lived experiences. Available online at https://www.tgeu.org/files/uploads/2023/11/2021-violence-and-discrimination-against-LBTI-women-in-sport.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Menzel, T., Braumüler, B. & Hartmann-Tews, I. (2019). The relevance of sexual orientation and gender identity in sport in Europe. Findings from the Outsport survey. Cologne: German Sport University Cologne, Institute of Sociology and Gender Studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)