



TRAINING GUIDELINES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF FEMALE REFEREES

Practical approaches for recruitment, skills development, overcoming barriers and mentorship

Project: Empowered Female Referees in Sport

Consortium: Alliance of Amateur Basketball Referees (Serbia), Hate Fighters Network (Serbia), Barcel'hona Sports Events (Spain), JuvenTagus – Associação Desportiva e Juvenil (Portugal)

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Empowered Female Referees in Sport is a European cooperation project focused on increasing the participation, visibility and long-term engagement of women and girls in sports refereeing. The project responds to the continued underrepresentation of women in officiating roles and to the structural, cultural and practical barriers that can affect their entry, working conditions and career progression.

The project is implemented by the Alliance of Amateur Basketball Referees and Hate Fighters Network from Serbia, Barcel'hona Sports Events from Spain, and JuvenTagus – Associação Desportiva e Juvenil from Portugal. The partnership combines experience in refereeing, grassroots sport, gender equality, youth work, education and international cooperation.

The main aim of the project is to create stronger support structures and a network for female referees in sport. Its objectives are to develop practical tools and methods for empowering current and aspiring female referees, promote equal participation in sports officiating, and encourage refereeing as a possible dual career pathway for current and former female athletes.

The project includes research on the position of female referees, the development and testing of Training Guidelines, practical training and pilot activities, mentorship and peer-support opportunities, and awareness-raising actions. The research carried out in Serbia, Spain and Portugal provided information on representation, recruitment, working conditions, barriers, institutional support and the needs of women interested in refereeing.

About these Guidelines

These Guidelines were developed within the project Empowered Female Referees in Sport as a practical resource for sports clubs, referee associations, federations, coaches, trainers, youth sport practitioners and organisations working with women and girls in sport.

They combine findings from national research in Serbia, Spain and Portugal with practical strategies and sessions developed by project partners. The resource focuses on football and basketball while offering approaches that can be adapted to other sports.

The content is non-formal and educational. Sport-specific rules, licensing requirements, disciplinary procedures and safeguarding obligations should always be checked against the current regulations of the relevant federation or governing body.

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1. Introduction to gender equality in sport

Women's sport has gained greater public visibility in recent years. Female athletes compete at the highest levels, national teams attract wider audiences, and more girls are entering organised sport. However, increased visibility of women as athletes does not automatically mean that women have equal access to all roles within sport. Coaching, sport administration, technical leadership and refereeing continue to be areas in which women are frequently underrepresented.

Refereeing is especially important because it combines technical knowledge with authority. A referee must observe complex situations, interpret rules, make immediate decisions, communicate those decisions clearly and manage disagreement from players, coaches and spectators. The role is therefore not only about knowing the rules. It is also a leadership role that requires confidence, fairness, physical preparation, communication, emotional control and resilience.

1.1 What gender equality means in refereeing

Gender equality in refereeing does not mean that every referee will have the same career or that appointments should ignore competence and preparation. It means that women and men should have fair access to information, training, assessment, match experience, mentoring, progression and protection from discrimination. It also means that women should not need to prove their basic legitimacy before their technical performance is considered.

Equal participation requires attention to both entry and retention. A federation may organise a successful recruitment course, but representation will not improve if newly trained women leave after their first seasons because of isolation, hostile match environments, unclear progression routes or lack of institutional support. Sustainable equality therefore depends on the whole pathway: visibility, recruitment, accessible training, safe first experiences, continuous feedback, fair appointments and career development.

1.2 Stereotypes, visibility and authority

Sport has historically associated authority, physical confidence and decisive leadership with men. These expectations can affect how a female referee is perceived before a match begins. Players, coaches or spectators may assume that she is less experienced, less capable of controlling the game or more likely to make mistakes. The same decision may therefore be judged differently depending on who makes it.

Low visibility reinforces this pattern. When girls mostly see male referees, officiating can appear to be a role that does not belong to them. Visible female referees at elite level are valuable, but local examples are equally important. A young athlete may identify more easily with a referee from her club, school, city or regional competition because that pathway feels close and achievable.

1.3 Refereeing as a dual career pathway

Many female athletes stop competitive participation during adolescence or early adulthood because of education, employment, injury, family responsibilities or limited opportunities to progress as players. Refereeing can provide a way to remain connected to sport, use knowledge already gained as an athlete and develop a second sporting role alongside studies or employment.

A dual career approach recognises that playing and refereeing can overlap. A current athlete can begin with introductory education, table officiating, youth competitions, shadowing or supervised practice. A former athlete can transfer her understanding of the game, discipline and communication skills into officiating. This

transition should be presented as a continuation of sporting participation, not as a secondary option for those who can no longer play.

1.4 Safe and inclusive sport environments

Female referees cannot be expected to solve structural barriers through individual confidence alone. Communication and resilience are important skills, but they cannot replace clear institutional procedures. Clubs, leagues, federations, match delegates, coaches and parents share responsibility for creating environments in which discriminatory comments, intimidation and harassment are not normalised.

A safe environment includes clear behaviour rules, visible support from organisers, accessible reporting channels, timely follow-up after incidents and proportionate consequences. It also includes practical conditions such as appropriate changing facilities, predictable payment, safe transport arrangements and appointment procedures that do not disadvantage women.

1.5 How to use these Guidelines

The Guidelines can be used as a complete training resource or as a collection of separate tools. A federation can use the research and recommendations to review its referee pathway. A club can use the recruitment chapter to identify potential candidates among female athletes. A trainer can deliver one or more practical sessions. A mentor can use the agreement and reflection questions to structure support during a new referee's first season.

Core principle

Women should not be trained simply to tolerate unequal conditions. Effective support combines individual skills, peer and mentor support, clear institutional responsibility and changes in the wider sport culture.

2. Analysis of data collected through research

2.1 Research methodology

The project research combined quantitative and qualitative methods in Serbia, Spain and Portugal. Partners collected available official data from football and basketball federations, referee bodies and competition lists, reviewed relevant policies and public information, and consulted stakeholders through semi-structured focus groups. The purpose was to understand both the numerical representation of women and the everyday conditions that influence recruitment, retention and progression.

Focus groups included female referees, young athletes or aspiring referees, coaches and trainers, and sports administrators. Serbia organised two sessions with 26 participants, Spain organised two sessions with 31 participants, and Portugal organised one combined session with 25 participants. In total, 82 people contributed qualitative perspectives. Combined formats were used where this supported participation and dialogue between stakeholder groups.

The availability of data differed between countries and sports. In several cases, federations held official referee lists but did not publish ready-made gender-disaggregated analyses or longitudinal information on entry,

retention and drop-out. This means that the project could identify current representation and important patterns, but could not calculate a fully comparable national retention rate for all countries.

2.2 National snapshots

Country	Selected football findings	Selected basketball findings	Main data limitation
Serbia	Women were 100% of listed referees in the analysed women's top and first leagues, but only 1 of 28 main referees and 0 of 35 assistants in the men's Super League.	Women represented 2 of 42 referees in the men's top league and 6 of 71 in the first women's league. Regional representation ranged from 0% to 20%.	Official lists existed, but the project team had to classify them by gender; no regular longitudinal gender analysis was available.
Spain	No female main referees were listed in the men's first division; women were present mainly as assistants, while the top women's competition used all-female referee teams.	Women represented around one tenth of referees in the national FEB groups and 3 of 36 referees in the ACB list.	Recruitment, retention and drop-out trends were not consistently available across federations.
Portugal	Women were a minority overall and remained largely absent from the highest men's categories, while women's competitions offered more appointments.	National information was limited; district data from Setúbal showed stronger female representation than the national patterns found in football.	Sport-by-sport data were uneven, and current information was often obtained through direct contact with associations rather than one national dataset.

2.3 Comparative findings

Representation is growing, but remains uneven

Across all three countries, women were present in refereeing but were not evenly represented across sports, competition levels or roles. The strongest opportunities were often found in women's competitions, selected regional structures or targeted programmes. Access to the highest levels of men's competition remained limited. This pattern indicates that visibility in women's sport does not necessarily lead to equal integration across the full refereeing system.

Women's competitions can create opportunities, but may also concentrate careers

Women-only or women-dominated referee pools in women's competitions provide valuable match experience, visibility and progression. However, when female referees are appointed almost exclusively to women's competitions, their access to higher-profile men's competitions, broader media exposure and diverse match experience may remain restricted. A balanced strategy should protect opportunities in women's sport while also creating transparent pathways across competition structures.

Recruitment cannot be separated from retention

Focus group participants repeatedly connected refereeing with criticism, pressure and conflict. Several young athletes had never considered refereeing because the role appeared ungrateful and was noticed mainly when mistakes occurred. Female referees described sexist comments and the expectation that they must prove their

competence before receiving basic respect. One Serbian participant directly linked such treatment to her decision to stop refereeing. These findings show that recruitment campaigns will have limited effect without protection, mentoring and support during real match experiences.

Visibility and information remain weak

Young athletes often knew that referee education existed but did not understand the exact steps, costs, time requirements or progression route. Female role models were less visible than male referees, particularly in everyday local sport. Participants across countries recommended direct promotion in clubs and schools, personal stories from female referees, practical introductory sessions and clearer information about how to begin.

Authority is judged through a gendered lens

Participants generally agreed that technical competence should be the central criterion. At the same time, many described a double standard in practice. Men were more likely to receive initial authority automatically, while women had to demonstrate knowledge and firmness before being treated as legitimate. Sexist comments from spectators, coaches and sometimes fellow sport professionals were reported in all three contexts.

The surrounding environment matters

Coaches and administrators identified spectators and parents as frequent sources of hostility, especially in youth sport. Female referees need communication and conflict-management skills, but clubs and organisers must also intervene. The research highlighted the need for codes of conduct, match-day response procedures, reporting mechanisms, sanctions and education for coaches, parents and athletes.

Mentoring and gradual exposure support confidence

Participants valued learning through practice, shadowing and feedback. A safe progression from introductory exercises to youth matches, assisted roles and supervised appointments can reduce the shock of entering a hostile environment without support. Mentors can provide technical feedback, emotional reassurance and guidance on career decisions, particularly after difficult matches.

2.4 Key needs identified through the research

- Clear, publicly accessible information about referee entry requirements, education, licensing and progression.
- Targeted recruitment of current and former female athletes, supported by clubs, schools and families.
- Practical introductory experiences that allow girls to try the whistle, signals, positioning and simple decisions.
- Training that combines rules and mechanics with communication, confidence, pressure management and conflict de-escalation.
- Structured mentoring, peer support and shadowing during the first stages of a referee's career.
- Visible institutional protection against sexism, harassment and aggressive behaviour.
- Fair and transparent access to appointments, assessment, further education and higher competition levels.
- Regular gender-disaggregated monitoring of recruitment, licensing, appointments, progression and drop-out.

2.5 Implications for the Guidelines

The practical chapters respond directly to these findings. Chapter 3 addresses limited information, low visibility and weak recruitment pathways. Chapter 4 combines technical learning with confidence, communication and pressure management. Chapter 5 shifts responsibility from the individual referee to the whole sport environment and introduces institutional response planning. Chapter 6 turns role models and mentorship into a structured support process. Chapter 7 translates the evidence into concrete actions for federations, clubs, coaches, media and public institutions.

3. Motivation and recruitment of female referees

3.1 Why women choose refereeing

Girls and women enter refereeing for different reasons. The strongest motivation is often a passion for sport and a wish to remain connected to a game they already know. Current and former athletes understand competition, training routines and team dynamics, which gives them a strong basis for learning officiating. Refereeing can also provide supplementary income, new friendships, access to a wider sport community and opportunities for personal development.

Leadership, communication, decision-making and conflict management are not only refereeing skills. They are transferable skills that can support education, employment and community participation. Recruitment messages should therefore explain what candidates can gain, not only what federations need.

3.2 Barriers to joining and remaining

- Gender stereotypes that present authority and officiating as male roles.
- Limited visibility of female referees and lack of relatable local role models.
- Insufficient information about courses, costs, time commitments and career pathways.
- Fear of criticism, verbal abuse and discriminatory treatment.
- Weak encouragement from clubs, coaches or families.
- Difficulty combining refereeing with education, employment, playing and family responsibilities.
- Uncertainty about whether initial training will lead to real appointments and progression.

3.3 Targeted recruitment

Recruitment should not rely only on a general public call. Different groups need different messages and entry points. Strong potential candidates include active athletes, former athletes, university students, physical education teachers, female coaches and women already connected to clubs through voluntary or organisational roles.

Recruitment should be understood as a process rather than a single advertisement. A useful sequence is:

Recruitment pathway

Increase visibility → Spark interest → Facilitate entry → Provide support → Create belonging → Offer progression

3.4 Practical recruitment strategies

- Share personal stories from local, regional and elite female referees through short videos, interviews and club events.
- Organise open days and introductory sessions in clubs, schools, universities and community sport events.
- Invite female athletes directly rather than waiting for them to respond to a general call.
- Present refereeing as a dual career and a way to remain in sport.
- Give candidates a low-pressure practical experience before asking them to register for a full course.
- Provide one clear contact person and simple written information about the next step.
- Follow up quickly with participants who express interest.
- Connect new candidates with a mentor or peer group from the beginning.

3.5 Recruitment message template

Sample message

Stay in the game. Lead it from a new position.

Refereeing can help you develop confidence, decision-making and communication while remaining connected to the sport you already know. Join an introductory session, meet female referees and try basic officiating tasks in a supportive environment. No previous refereeing experience is required.

3.6 Organizing an Introductory Refereeing Activity

Introductory refereeing activities create a bridge between general promotion and formal referee education. Awareness campaigns may help girls and women learn that refereeing exists as an opportunity, but information alone is not always enough for them to imagine themselves in the role. Many potential candidates remain uncertain because they do not know what referees actually do, how difficult the first steps will be or whether they already possess relevant skills.

A short practical activity can reduce this uncertainty by allowing participants to experience basic elements of refereeing in a safe and supportive environment. Depending on the sport and available space, participants may try using a whistle, making simple decisions, practising official signals, observing a short game situation or discussing how a referee communicates with players and coaches. The purpose is not to test participants or reproduce a formal referee course. It is to make the role more understandable, realistic and accessible. These activities are particularly useful for current and former female athletes. Athletes often already possess knowledge of the game, discipline, concentration, communication skills and experience of making decisions under pressure, but they may not recognise that these abilities can be transferred to refereeing. An introductory activity should help them identify this connection and present officiating as a possible continuation of their involvement in sport. The quality of the follow-up is as important as the activity itself. Participants who express interest should receive clear information about the next available step, such as observing a match, attending an open day, speaking with a female referee or registering for an introductory course. Without a clear follow-up pathway, initial interest may quickly disappear.

This checklist can be used when organising an introductory workshop, open day, referee simulation or one of the practical recruitment sessions presented in this chapter.

Before the activity:

- Define the target group and adapt the content to participants' age, sport experience and level of knowledge.
- Cooperate with clubs, coaches, schools or universities to identify and directly invite potential participants.
- Select a suitable venue where participants can safely try basic practical tasks.
- Invite at least one approachable female referee to share her experience and answer questions.
- Prepare simple activities that do not require previous knowledge of refereeing.
- Confirm accurate information about referee education, registration, costs, schedules and local contact persons.
- Prepare all necessary equipment, such as whistles, balls, signal cards, scenario cards and printed information.
- Inform participants clearly that the activity is introductory and that no immediate commitment is expected.

During the activity

- Begin by asking participants what they already know or assume about refereeing.
- Explain the referee's role in simple and practical language.
- Include direct experience, such as using the whistle, practising signals, observing game situations or making basic decisions.
- Connect refereeing skills with abilities participants may already have as athletes, coaches or sport volunteers.
- Create space for questions about criticism, confidence, time commitments, training and progression.
- Present both the benefits and the realistic challenges of refereeing.
- Avoid placing participants under pressure or publicly evaluating their performance.
- Provide a respectful atmosphere in which uncertainty and mistakes are treated as part of learning.

At the end of the activity

- Ask participants what surprised them and whether their perception of refereeing changed.
- Explain the next available step clearly and realistically.
- Provide written contact information and basic details about further education or observation opportunities.
- Allow participants to express interest voluntarily.
- Explain how their contact details will be stored and used.
- Thank participants and remind them that interest in refereeing can develop gradually.

After the activity

- Contact interested participants shortly after the session.
- Provide one concrete next opportunity rather than only general information.
- Where possible, connect interested participants with a female referee, mentor or peer contact.
- Record the number and profile of participants, their level of interest and the main questions raised.
- Review which parts of the activity worked well and what should be adapted for the next group.
- Follow whether interested participants attend further education or practical activities.

An introductory refereeing activity should not be evaluated only by the number of immediate registrations. It can also be considered successful when participants better understand the role, recognise their own transferable skills, develop a more respectful attitude towards referees or become open to considering officiating at a later stage.

Practical session: Whistling Is Fun

Theme: Introductory refereeing, confidence-building, whistle use, signals and basic decision-making

Time: 40 minutes

Overview: Three short basketball-court activities introduce young participants to the whistle, basic signals and quick observation. The session is designed as a first positive experience of refereeing and can be adapted to other sports by replacing the sport-specific signals and violations.

Objectives:

- To make the first contact with refereeing enjoyable and accessible.
- To become familiar with basic referee equipment and signals.
- To practice confident whistle use and public gestures.
- To strengthen observation and reaction speed.
- To motivate participants to explore further referee education.

Group size: 10-15 participants. The activities can be implemented with a slightly larger group if additional equipment and space are available. If there are more than 15 participants, divide them into two lines or two smaller working groups so that each participant still has enough time to use the whistle and practise signals.

Material:

- A suitable court or open sport space
- One whistle per participant
- One ball per participant or enough balls for small groups
- Comfortable sport clothing and footwear
- A printed or projected basic signal chart
- Copies of the participant handout for the closure part

Preparation:

- Select three to five basic signals and violations appropriate to the participants' age and sport. For basketball, choose very simple examples such as stopping the clock for a foul, travelling, double dribble, out of bounds and direction of play.
- Check the space and equipment before the session. Mark the starting line and make sure participants can move safely from one end of the court to the other.
- Explain safe whistle use and hygiene before distributing whistles. Whistles should not be shared. If reusable whistles are used, clean them before and after the session.
- Prepare a relaxed introduction and avoid testing participants on formal rule knowledge. The purpose is not to check how much they already know, but to let them experience the basic feeling of being a referee.
- Print one handout per participant. Keep it until the closure part so participants can complete it after they have practised the activities.

Instructions:

Step 1: Welcome and introduction (5 minutes)

Gather participants in a semicircle at the side of the court. Welcome them and explain that this is a short, playful first experience of refereeing, not an exam or a formal course. Show the whistle and explain that, for

a referee, the whistle is not only an object that makes noise. It is a tool for communication: it stops the action, attracts attention and gives the referee time to show a decision. Demonstrate one clear, short whistle. Ask participants to notice the difference between a hesitant whistle and a decisive whistle. Then demonstrate the closed fist signal for stopping the clock for a foul and one or two additional signals that will be used later.

Step 2: The Whistle Traffic Light (10 minutes)

Ask participants to form one line at one end of the court. If the group is larger than 12, create two parallel lines. The first participant in each line holds the whistle. Participants start moving slowly from one end of the court to the other. They can walk, jog lightly or move with a ball, depending on the group's age and ability. When the facilitator raises both arms, the participant with the whistle gives one loud, short whistle. All other participants must immediately stop moving and raise a closed fist to signal that the clock should stop for a foul. After each round, the whistle is passed to the next participant. Continue until everyone has used the whistle at least once. If time allows, repeat with slightly faster movement. Encourage short and decisive whistle sounds. Do not allow long, unclear or joking whistles to become the model. If the whistle or signal is unclear, repeat the round in a supportive way. Say what should be improved clearly: for example, 'shorter whistle', 'arm higher' or 'stand still before signalling'.

Step 3: Signal Mirror in Motion (10 minutes)

Divide participants into pairs. In each pair, one participant is the Lead Referee and the other is the Mirror Referee. Pairs spread out across the court so they have enough space to move safely. The Lead Referee moves freely for a few seconds, stops, whistles and performs one of the agreed signals. The Mirror Referee must stop at the same time, repeat the whistle and reproduce the same signal as accurately as possible. After several repetitions, ask partners to change roles. Walk around the court and correct posture, arm position and clarity of movement. Keep corrections short and practical. Use only signals that have already been demonstrated. Do not introduce too many new elements in this first session. Encourage clear posture, full arm movement and eye contact. Remind participants that the signal must be visible to players, coaches and the table.

Step 4: The Dribbling Intruder (10 minutes)

Divide participants into groups of four or five. In each group, one participant is the referee and the others are players with a ball or moving in a small space. If there are not enough balls, players can move without a ball and perform agreed simple actions. Before each round, the facilitator quietly tells one player in the group to make an obvious violation, such as double dribble, travelling or stepping out of bounds. The referee watches the group and must identify the violation, whistle, show the correct signal and indicate the direction of play if relevant. After one minute, rotate the referee role. Each participant should try the referee role at least once. If the group is nervous, begin with slow and obvious violations, then increase the speed slightly. Begin slowly and increase the pace only when participants feel comfortable. If the activity is adapted to another sport, replace the basketball violation with a simple, visible action from that sport.

Step 5: Closure (5 minutes)

Bring participants back into a semicircle. Give each participant the handout. Ask them to write or draw three signals they practised and to complete the short reflection at the bottom. Invite two or three volunteers to share one thing that became easier during the session. Close by explaining the next available opportunity to learn more about refereeing, such as an introductory course, open day, club contact person or federation information.

Debriefing and evaluation:

- How did it feel to use the whistle for the first time?

- Which was more difficult: noticing the action, making the decision or showing the signal?
- What helped you feel less shy when making gestures in front of others?
- What would you like to practise again?
- After this activity, does refereeing feel more accessible than before? Why?

Tips for facilitator: Keep the atmosphere positive; the purpose is exploration, not formal assessment. Do not ridicule weak whistle sounds or incorrect gestures. Correct them practically and respectfully. Allow hesitant participants to observe one round before taking the referee role, but return to them later and invite them to try. For other sports, replace basketball signals and dribbling violations with simple actions from that sport. Make the next step visible by providing course information or a contact person at the end.

Handout:

Basic signal practice card

Write or draw three referee signals you practiced today. For each signal, write one situation when it can be used.

1. Signal: _____ Situation: _____
2. Signal: _____ Situation: _____
3. Signal: _____ Situation: _____

Personal reflection:

One refereeing skill I already have is: _____

One skill I would like to practice is: _____

Material for facilitators:

- Current official rulebook and signal illustrations for the selected sport
- Introductory referee education information from the relevant federation or association
- Safeguarding and participation guidance for activities involving minors

Practical session: From Player to Referee

Theme: Motivation, role models, transfer of skills and recruitment

Time: 45 minutes

Overview: A motivational session helps female athletes recognise that their existing sporting experience can be transferred to refereeing. Most of the time is dedicated to personal stories, identification and benefits, while a shorter part explains formal entry routes.

Objectives:

- To present realistic experiences of female referees, especially those who previously played the sport.
- To identify personal and transferable skills relevant to officiating.
- To explain the personal, social and professional benefits of refereeing.
- To increase interest in an introductory session or referee course.
- To provide a clear and voluntary next step for participants who want more information.

Group size: 15-20 participants. The session can be delivered with a larger group, but the guided conversation works best if participants can see each other and speak without feeling that they are giving a formal presentation.

Material:

- A projector, screen or large white wall
- A short video with testimonies from female referees, or a live guest/referee story if a video is not available
- Flipchart or whiteboard and markers
- Four or five short match clips
- Printed interest forms
- Pens and participant notebooks

Preparation:

- Select short testimonies from referees with different backgrounds and levels of experience. At least one example should be relatable to the participants, such as a local referee, a former player or someone who started in youth competitions.
- Prepare four or five clear match situations suitable for discussion. They should be simple enough for participants to express an opinion without knowing the full rulebook.
- Confirm accurate information about the local referee course and entry route: minimum age, registration process, expected time commitment, costs if any, contact person and next dates.
- Prepare printed interest forms and explain in advance how personal data will be protected. The form should be voluntary and should not create pressure to register.
- Arrange seats in a semicircle or U-shape so participants can see one another during discussion. Keep the flipchart visible throughout the session.

Instructions:

Step 1: Introduction (5 minutes)

Welcome participants and explain that the session presents refereeing as one possible pathway in sport. Make clear that nobody will be asked to decide immediately whether she wants to become a referee. Ask

participants: 'When you hear the word referee, what comes to mind first?' Write their answers on the flipchart without judging them. If negative words appear, keep them visible because they will help the group discuss why refereeing may feel unattractive.

Step 2: Personal testimonies (10 minutes)

Show a short video or present a live/referee story. The testimony should answer practical questions: Why did she start? Was she a player before? What was she afraid of? What helped her continue? What did refereeing give her? What advice would she give to a young athlete? If a live speaker is present, ask her to speak for no more than five minutes and then allow a few short questions. Keep the focus on a realistic pathway, not only on elite success.

Step 3: Guided conversation (10 minutes)

Invite reactions from the group. Do not correct participants immediately if they express doubts. Ask follow-up questions that help them name what feels unclear or discouraging. Use questions such as: What surprised you? Which part of the story felt close to your experience? What still feels difficult or unattractive? What information would you need before considering a course? Write the main ideas on the flipchart in two columns: 'Motivating factors' and 'Open questions or doubts'.

Step 4: Benefits and transferable skills (10 minutes)

Ask participants to name skills they already use as athletes. Examples may include discipline, understanding the game, concentration, communication with teammates, responsibility, dealing with pressure and respecting rules. Next to each skill, write how it can be used in refereeing. For example: 'understanding the game' becomes reading situations; 'communication' becomes explaining decisions; 'discipline' becomes preparation and consistency. Add benefits such as confidence, leadership, supplementary income, friendships, continuous learning and a better understanding of the game.

Step 5: Five-minute referee experience (5 minutes)

Show several short match clips. After each clip, ask participants to choose one of the simple options: foul or legal action, violation or no violation, play on or stop. Ask them to raise a hand, move to a side of the room or answer on paper. After the responses, briefly explain that they have already started to observe, interpret and decide like referees. Do not turn this into a technical lesson; the purpose is to show that refereeing is learnable and connected to their existing sport knowledge.

Step 6: Closure and follow-up (5 minutes)

Briefly present the local entry pathway. Use concrete information: where to register, who to contact, when the next session or course is planned and what support is available. Distribute the voluntary interest form. Explain that participants can complete it if they want to receive more information, observe a match, attend an introductory session or join a course. Collect forms only from those who freely choose to return them.

Debriefing and evaluation:

- Which testimony felt closest to your own experience?
- Which skills from playing could help you as a referee?
- What part of refereeing still feels unclear or unattractive?
- What support would make it easier to attend an introductory course?
- Which next step would feel realistic: receiving information, observing a match, attending a trial session or joining a course?

Tips for facilitator: Use relatable local role models as well as elite examples. Avoid presenting only success stories; honest discussion of pressure builds trust. Do not turn the session into a technical lecture. The main goal is motivation and orientation. Make clear that expressing interest does not create an obligation to register. Follow up promptly and provide one concrete next step.

Handout:

Interest form

Name and surname: _____ Age: _____

Club/School: _____

Email or telephone: _____

Before this session, had you considered refereeing? Yes / No

What attracts you most? Tick one or more options.

- Staying in sport
- Learning the game better
- Confidence and leadership
- Meeting new people
- Additional income
- Other: _____

My current level of interest:

- Information only
- Introductory session
- Observe a referee
- Referee course

Questions or comments: _____

Materials for facilitators:

- Local referee course information and contact details
- Short consent-compliant testimonial videos or a prepared live testimony
- Current official regulations for recruitment and licensing
- Data-protection guidance for collecting contact details

4. Training and skills development programmes for female referees

4.1 Principles of referee development

Technical referee education should be understood as the progressive development of skills that allow a referee to perceive, interpret, decide and communicate in accordance with the rules and spirit of the game. Memorising regulations is necessary, but it is not sufficient. Referees need repeated practice in dynamic situations that connect observation, game understanding, positioning, decision-making and communication.

Training for female referees should not assume that women lack confidence by nature. Confidence develops when participants receive accurate instruction, safe practice, fair feedback, gradual responsibility and visible support. Gender-sensitive training therefore combines technical quality with attention to the conditions in which women learn and perform.

4.2 Core technical skills

- Selective attention: identifying relevant information among simultaneous movements, contacts and signals.
- Visual focus: observing spaces and relationships between players rather than following only the ball.
- Perceptual anticipation: predicting where important situations may develop without pre-judging the decision.
- Understanding the game: interpreting tactical intentions, advantage and disadvantage, and the context of contact.
- Positioning and movement: creating open visual angles and maintaining a functional distance.
- Decision-making: moving from observation to interpretation, evaluation and a clear decision.
- Consistent application of rules: using the same criteria throughout the match.
- Communication: combining whistle, signals, voice, posture and respectful interaction.
- Teamwork: coordinating with assistant referees, table officials and match delegates.

4.3 Skills for authority, conflict and pressure

Female referees may face a double standard: a firm style can be labelled aggressive, while a calm or empathetic style can be interpreted as weak. Training should help referees communicate with technical neutrality rather than imitate an exaggerated model of authority. Useful approaches include clear posture, direct but neutral eye contact, short explanations, consistent boundaries and safe physical distance.

Pressure-management skills should be practised before difficult appointments occur. Breathing techniques, pre-match routines, role-play, video review and structured post-match reflection can help referees recognise stress without allowing it to control the decision-making process.

4.4 Recommended programme structure

Stage	Main focus	Suggested methods
Orientation	Role, pathway, expectations and safe learning environment	Introductory workshop, role-model talk, basic signals
Foundation	Rules, positioning, observation and communication	Demonstration, guided practice, video clips, small games
Supervised practice	Applying decisions in realistic situations	Role-play, shadowing, youth games, immediate feedback
Early appointments	Match control and emotional adaptation	Mentor presence, pre-match planning, post-match review
Continuous development	Consistency, progression and specialist skills	Advanced video analysis, physical preparation, peer review, assessment

Practical session: Observe, Understand and Decide

Theme: Observation, positioning, game reading and decision-making

Time: 90 minutes

Overview: This practical session develops the chain that leads to a referee decision: observation, interpretation, evaluation and communication. The activities are based on basketball but can be adapted to other sports by changing the court positions, match clips and examples of contact.

Objectives:

- To improve selective attention and understanding of match situations.
- To practise effective viewing angles, distance and movement.
- To distinguish legal, accidental and illegal contact.
- To communicate decisions with clarity and confidence.
- To make timely decisions under controlled pressure.
- To identify one personal technical objective for further development.

Group size: 10-15 participants. If the group is larger, create two working groups and appoint an additional facilitator or experienced referee to supervise one group during the practical court work.

Material:

- A classroom or meeting room
- A sport court or practical training space
- Projector and screen
- Five to ten short match clips
- Flipchart or whiteboard and markers
- Whistles and basic referee equipment
- Printed observation and decision sheets

Preparation:

- Choose clear clips that illustrate observation, contact and decision-making. Clips should be short and should show one main learning point.
- Prepare several three-player situations for legal and illegal contact. Use controlled movements and avoid any physical action that could create risk.
- Mark practical positioning areas on the court if needed. Use cones, tape or floor marks to help participants understand viewing angles and distance.
- Review the current rules and mechanics for all selected examples before the session. The facilitator should be ready to explain why a decision is correct or why more information is needed.
- Arrange for participants to rotate through referee, attacker and defender roles. Prepare the order of rotation so nobody remains passive for too long.
- Print one observation and decision sheet per participant. Distribute it at the beginning of Step 1.

Instructions:

Step 1: Technical activation - What did you see? (10 minutes)

Distribute the observation and decision sheet. Show five or six very short match clips. After each clip, give participants about 20 seconds to write what they saw: the action, possible violation or foul, who initiated the contact and where their attention was focused. Replay selected clips and discuss which information was

relevant. Ask participants to compare what they first noticed with what became visible after the replay. Emphasize that good decisions begin with good observation.

Step 2: Positioning - Shadow Referee (20 minutes)

Move to the court. Organize a reduced 3 against 3 situation. One participant acts as the referee without using the whistle. Her only task is to move with the play, keep a useful distance and find an open angle where players are not blocking her view. Pause the action after short sequences. Ask the referee: What could you see from that position? Which player blocked your view? Where could you move next? Rotate the referee role every two or three minutes.

Step 3: Contact coverage - Legal or illegal? (20 minutes)

Divide participants into groups of three. In each group, one person is the attacker, one is the defender and one is the referee. The facilitator demonstrates one contact situation at a time, such as legal defence, pushing, illegal use of hands, blocking or charging. Groups repeat the action. The referee observes, makes a decision and gives one short technical explanation. Then participants rotate roles. After each round, the facilitator asks one or two groups to explain their decision to the whole group. Perform each action slowly first and then at realistic speed. Keep the examples controlled and physically safe.

Step 4: Signaling mechanics (10 minutes)

Ask participants to stand in a line or semicircle. The facilitator calls out one decision, for example blocking foul, travelling, double dribble or out of bounds. Participants complete the sequence together: whistle, stop the clock where appropriate, show the signal and communicate the outcome. Correct visible details: posture, arm position, order of signals and clarity. Repeat the same decision several times if needed before moving to the next one.

Step 5: Decide in two seconds (20 minutes)

Use recorded clips or short live situations. Each participant in the referee role has a maximum of two seconds to select foul, violation or legal action and then briefly justify the decision. Repeat selected situations to discuss consistency. If participants disagree, ask what information they used rather than immediately saying who is right. Connect the discussion back to observation, position and rule application.

Step 6: Technical debrief (10 minutes)

Bring the group into a semicircle. Ask each participant to look at her observation and decision sheet and complete the final reflection line: What would I change next time?

Each participant names one strength observed in her performance and one technical behavior she will practice before the next training session or match. The facilitator closes by summarizing the decision chain: observe, understand, decide and communicate.

Debriefing and evaluation:

- Which stage was most difficult: seeing, interpreting, deciding or communicating?
- How did your position affect the information available to you?
- Did time pressure change the quality of your decision?
- What helped you remain consistent?
- What is one technical behavior you will practice before your next appointment?

Tips for facilitator: Give feedback on observable behavior rather than personality. Avoid presenting disagreement as failure; compare the information participants used. Use slow motion only after participants

first make a real-time decision. Ensure all participants rotate through active roles. Adapt contact examples and positioning principles to the selected sport.

Handout:

Observation and Decision Sheet

1. What did I observe? _____
2. Where was I positioned? _____
3. Which rule or principle applies? _____
4. My decision: _____
5. How did I communicate it? _____
6. What would I change next time? _____

Material for facilitators:

- Current official rules and interpretations
- Official mechanics and positioning guidance
- Approved video examples or locally recorded training clips
- Safe-practice guidance for contact simulations

Practical session: Breathe and Lead

Theme: Pressure management, self-regulation, communication and conflict de-escalation

Time: 60 minutes

Overview: Mental preparation is essential before and during competition. This session introduces two brief breathing techniques and a structured response to protests so that referees can protect personal space, maintain emotional control and communicate boundaries without entering an argument.

Objectives:

- To practice short techniques for reducing acute stress.
- To recognize physical signs of pressure before decision-making is affected.
- To maintain safe distance and controlled body language during protests.
- To use short, technical phrases instead of emotional debate.
- To set clear limits and apply the relevant rules consistently.
- To strengthen confidence through repeated role-play.

Group size: 10-15 participants. For the protest practice, participants work in groups of three: referee, player/coach and observer. If the group is larger, create additional groups and rotate roles more quickly.

Material:

- A quiet room for the breathing exercises
- A court or open area for role-play
- Printed protest scenario cards
- Whistles and referee cards or other sport-specific sanction tools
- Flipchart and markers
- Printed personal pressure-response cards

Preparation:

- Select realistic but non-traumatic protest scenarios. Use common situations such as a player questioning a foul, a coach repeatedly protesting or someone refusing to move away from the referee. Avoid scenarios that are too aggressive for the group's level of experience.
- Print enough scenario cards so each group of three has one card. Scenarios may be repeated across groups.
- Print one personal pressure-response card per participant. Keep it for Step 5, when participants complete it individually.
- Explain at the beginning that participants can pause or opt out of any role-play that feels uncomfortable. This is especially important if participants have already experienced harassment or threatening behaviour.
- Review the sport-specific sanctions and reporting obligations before the session so the facilitator does not give incorrect procedural advice.
- Prepare a calm environment and enough space for safe physical distance during role-play. Mark an approximate arm's-length distance if useful.
- Plan rotations so every participant can practise the referee role at least once.

Instructions:**Step 1: Introduction (5 minutes)**

Ask participants to name common signs of nervousness before a match or after a controversial decision. Write examples on the flipchart, such as fast breathing, tension in the shoulders, shaking hands, rushing the explanation, avoiding eye contact or speaking too much. Explain that self-regulation is not a replacement for institutional protection. Breathing and communication techniques can help referees stay clear and safe, but harassment, discrimination and threats still require action from organizers and referee bodies.

Step 2: Box breathing (10 minutes)

Ask participants to sit or stand comfortably. Guide them through four cycles: inhale through the nose for four counts, hold for four, exhale for four and hold for four. After the exercise, ask them to notice any change in heart rate, shoulders, breathing or attention. Explain when this can be used: before the match, during a break, before entering a difficult conversation or after a stressful moment.

Step 3: Physiological sigh (10 minutes)

Demonstrate one deep nasal inhale, a second short inhale and one long relaxed exhale through the mouth. Repeat two or three times with the group. Discuss when it can be used safely. Emphasize that it should be used during natural pauses and not when the referee must actively observe play.

Step 4: Handling protests on the field (30 minutes)

Divide participants into groups of three: referee, player/coach and observer. Give each group one protest scenario card. Explain the task clearly before starting: the referee practices the response, the player/coach follows the scenario without exaggerating, and the observer watches body language, distance and clarity. The referee practices four actions: maintain an arm's-length distance, use a clear stop gesture, allow no more than a brief statement, repeat one short technical phrase without debate and set the final limit using the applicable warning or sanction. After two or three minutes, stop the round. The observer gives short feedback using three points: What was clear? What helped maintain control? What could be shorter or calmer? Rotate roles so that each participant tries the referee role. Example phrase: 'The decision is made. Step back, please.' If the protest continues: 'That is enough. The next action will be sanctioned.' Rotate roles and repeat with different levels of intensity, but do not allow the role-play to become shouting or personal attack.

Step 5: Closure (5 minutes)

Give each participant the personal pressure-response card. Ask them to complete it individually: one early stress sign, one technique they will use, one short boundary phrase and one person or channel they can contact after a difficult match. End with a reminder that difficult incidents should be reported through the relevant sport procedures and that the referee should not be left alone after discriminatory or threatening behavior.

Debriefing and evaluation:

- Which physical sign of pressure did you notice first?
- Which breathing technique felt most practical for you?
- What made it difficult to remain brief during the protest?
- How did posture, distance and tone affect the interaction?
- At what point should the referee stop communicating and apply a sanction or request support?
- What should the organizer, delegate or club do after discriminatory or threatening behaviour?

Tips for facilitator:

- Do not suggest that breathing can solve harassment or unsafe conditions.
- Keep role-play intensity controlled and stop immediately if personal experiences are triggered.

- Use neutral language and reinforce that the referee does not need to justify every decision.
- Check sport-specific disciplinary procedures before the session.
- Encourage participants to develop phrases that sound natural in their own language.

Handout:

Protest Scenario Cards

The person playing the player or coach should follow the situation realistically, without shouting, insulting or exaggerating. The purpose is to help the referee practice a calm and clear response.

Card 1 - Player questions a foul

After a contact situation, the referee calls a foul. The player approaches quickly and says: "That was not a foul. You are guessing." The player does not step back immediately.

Card 2 - Coach repeats the same protest

A coach disagrees with an out-of-bounds decision. The coach has already made several comments and now says loudly: "How many times will you make the same mistake?"

Card 3 - Player wants a long explanation

After a decision, the player keeps asking for a detailed explanation and follows the referee. The referee needs to continue the match and avoid a long debate.

Card 4 - Bench pressure

Several people on the bench react at the same time after a decision. One assistant coach continues talking after the referee has already explained the decision briefly.

Participant handout / printable material

Personal Pressure-Response Card

My early stress signs: _____

Technique I will use: Box breathing / Physiological sigh / Other: _____

My short boundary phrase: _____

Person I contact after a difficult match: _____

Incident/reporting channel: _____

Material for facilitators:

- Current disciplinary regulations and referee reporting forms
- Safeguarding and harassment response procedures
- Federation guidance on communication and match control
- Contact information for referee welfare or psychological support where available

5. Overcoming barriers

5.1 Barriers are not only individual

Female referees can experience internal barriers such as fear of mistakes, reduced confidence after criticism and a sense of isolation. These reactions are often produced by external conditions: stereotypes, sexist comments, unequal access to matches, weak institutional response or the absence of supportive colleagues. Training should therefore avoid treating women as the problem that needs to be fixed. An effective approach combines personal communication skills with collective responsibility. The referee can practise assertive responses, but the club must control the behaviour of its coaches and supporters. The match delegate must record incidents. The referee body must provide follow-up. The federation must apply procedures consistently and monitor whether women receive fair access to development opportunities.

5.2 Common barriers and practical responses

Barrier	Immediate response	Longer-term response
Sexist comments or questioning of competence	Apply match rules, involve the delegate and document the incident.	Codes of conduct, sanctions, education and monitoring of repeated behaviour.
Fear of mistakes and over-scrutiny	Use a pre-match plan and structured post-match reflection.	Mentoring, constructive assessment and gradual progression.
Isolation	Identify a contact person before the appointment.	Peer networks, mentor groups and regular referee meetings.
Unequal access to training or appointments	Request transparent criteria and written feedback.	Gender-disaggregated monitoring and review of appointment patterns.
Work-life or study conflict	Plan availability and communicate constraints early.	Flexible training schedules, predictable calendars and support for travel or childcare where possible.
Weak facilities or safety arrangements	Report the practical risk and request an alternative.	Minimum venue standards, separate changing options and safe transport procedures.

5.3 Institutional protection checklist

- A named match-day contact is available to the referee.
- Codes of conduct apply to coaches, players, parents and spectators.
- The procedure for stopping or reporting discriminatory behaviour is clear.
- Incidents are recorded in a standard form and reviewed within a defined period.
- The referee receives follow-up information and is not left alone after reporting.
- Repeated offenders and clubs face proportionate consequences.
- Support is available after serious or emotionally difficult incidents.
- Appointments are not withdrawn from female referees as an informal way of avoiding conflict.

Practical session: Breaking the Glass, Calling the Foul: From Barrier Mapping to Collective Action

Theme: Overcoming gender stereotypes, managing ethical conflicts and creating safe sport environments

Time: 90 minutes

Overview: This session distinguishes internal and external barriers, develops assertive response scripts and requires clubs, coaches, associations and parents to define their own responsibilities. The main message is that the environment must change alongside the development of individual skills.

Objectives:

- To distinguish internal barriers from structural and cultural barriers.
- To recognize how adult behavior affects young female referees.
- To practice assertive verbal and non-verbal communication through written response scripts.
- To define immediate institutional actions after sexism or disrespect.
- To create a basic reporting and protection procedure.

Group size: 15-25 participants, ideally including female referees, aspiring referees, coaches and club or association representatives. Divide participants into four small mixed groups of about 4-6 people. If the group is smaller, use three groups and select three scenario cards. If the group is larger, duplicate one or more scenario cards.

Material:

- Flipchart paper
- Markers in several colors
- Tape
- Printed scenario cards
- Pens
- Barrier-mapping and response sheets

Preparation:

- Print the four scenario cards and the shared response checklist. Prepare at least one scenario card and one checklist per group.
- Post four flipchart sheets on the wall titled: Referee, Club/Coach, Association and Parents. These will be used to connect barriers with responsible actors.
- Arrange tables for small mixed groups. Each table should have flipchart paper, markers, pens and tape.
- Review the local disciplinary and reporting procedures before the session. If procedures are unclear, the facilitator should not invent rules, but should mark this as a gap for discussion.
- Prepare support information in case participants disclose personal experiences. Explain at the start that participants should discuss the scenario cards, not pressure one another to share personal incidents.
- Important facilitation decision: this session does not use acting or simulation. Groups discuss the scenarios, prepare written responses and present them verbally.

Instructions

Step 1: Framing the barriers (15 minutes)

Open the session by explaining that barriers faced by female referees can be internal, external or both. Internal barriers may include fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence after criticism or isolation. External barriers may include stereotypes, unequal access to opportunities, sexist comments, pressure from parents or weak institutional support. Ask each participant to say one word that describes the biggest challenge facing female referees today. Write the words on a flipchart. Do not debate each word immediately; use them as a starting point for the next activity.

Step 2: Barrier Tree (25 minutes)

Divide participants into four small mixed groups of about 4-6 people. Give each group flipchart paper and markers. Ask them to draw a tree. Explain the tree clearly: roots are causes of the problem, such as stereotypes or weak procedures; the trunk is the visible problem, such as insults, exclusion or drop-out; branches are the consequences for female referees, such as lower confidence, fear of mistakes or leaving refereeing. After 15 minutes of group work, ask groups to post their trees on the wall. Invite participants to walk around for a few minutes. Then ask each group to identify which actors can change one root of the problem: the referee, club or coach, association, parents, federation or organizer.

Step 3: Scenario and response scripts (30 minutes)

Give each group one scenario card and the shared response checklist. Explain that the group should read the scenario, discuss it and complete two tasks: write what the referee or referee team should say or request, and define at least three mandatory institutional actions after the incident. Ask groups to be concrete. They should write actual sentences, not general statements. For example, instead of 'the club should support her', they should write who contacts whom, where the incident is recorded and what should happen before the next match. Move between groups and ask clarifying questions: Who is responsible? When does this happen? Is it written down? What support does the referee receive? What changes after the incident?

Step 4: Group presentation and collective review (20 minutes)

This step is not a role-play. Each group presents from its table or from the front of the room. They briefly summarize their scenario, read the referee response they prepared and list the institutional actions they propose. After each presentation, the rest of the participants comment using the shared response checklist. They should check whether the answer covers immediate safety, communication, documentation, institutional responsibility, follow-up, consequences and support. The facilitator writes common conclusions on the flipchart. End by asking which actions could realistically be introduced by a local club or association immediately.

Debriefing and evaluation:

- Which barrier is hardest to eliminate and why?
- Which barriers are wrongly treated as the individual referee's responsibility?
- How does adult behaviour in youth sport affect a young referee's confidence and wellbeing?
- What should a club do differently from the next match onward?
- What information and support should the referee receive after making a report?

Tips for facilitator:

- Do not ask participants to disclose personal incidents. Keep the discussion focused on the scenario cards unless someone voluntarily chooses to share an experience.

- Challenge victim-blaming and statements that women only need to become tougher.
- Distinguish assertive communication from tolerating abuse.
- Adapt scenarios to the sport and age group only if necessary, but keep the gender-equality issue visible.
- Where procedures are unclear, record this as an institutional gap rather than inventing a rule.
- Provide a short break or private support if the discussion becomes emotionally difficult.
- Keep Step 4 as discussion and presentation, not acting or simulation.

Handout:

Scenario Card A - Youth sport, parents and coaches

During an under-13 match, parents begin shouting sexist insults at a 17-year-old female referee after a penalty decision. The home coach uses the unrest to question her technical ability because she is a woman.

Group task 1 - Referee response: Write exactly what the referee should say and describe her physical position.

Group task 2 - Institutional protocol: Where is the incident recorded? What does the delegate do? Who contacts the referee after the match? What action should the club take regarding the coach and spectators?

Questions for discussion: What should the referee do at the moment when sexist insults start coming from the stands? What is the responsibility of the coach if parents or spectators from their team are verbally attacking the referee? Should the match be paused if the comments continue? Who should make that decision? What should be written in the match report or incident report after the game? Who should contact the young referee after the match and what kind of support should be offered? What consequences should the club or organiser apply if the same behaviour happens again?

Scenario Card B - "You are too sensitive"

A young female basketball referee is officiating a regional youth match. From the beginning of the game, one coach repeatedly questions her decisions. He does not use openly sexist insults, but addresses her as "young lady," tells her to "calm down," and says that she is taking the game too seriously. When she warns him about his behavior, he responds that she is "too sensitive" and that male referees are able to accept criticism. After the match, the coach tells the organizer that the referee created unnecessary tension. The organizer advises her not to report the incident because the coach is experienced, well known in the local league and "did not actually insult her."

Group task 1 - Referee response: Write what the referee could say during the match when the comments continue. The response should be brief, professional and based on the rules and boundaries of acceptable behavior.

Group task 2 - Institutional response: Define what the match organizer, delegate and referee association should do after the match. Consider whether the comments should be documented even though no direct sexist insult was used.

Questions for discussion: When does repeated condescending language become discriminatory behavior? Should the referee be expected to ignore such comments to avoid conflict? What message is sent when an organizer advises her not to submit a report? How should the coach's influence or reputation affect the response?

Scenario Card C - No appropriate changing facilities

A female assistant referee is appointed to a senior men's football match in a smaller local stadium. When she arrives, she learns that only one changing room has been prepared for the referee team. The organizer suggests that she change in a storage room used for equipment. The room has no lock, no proper seating and no access to a shower. When she says that the conditions are not appropriate, the organizer responds that the stadium is old, that "this is how things are here," and that she should not create a problem shortly before the match. Her male colleagues are supportive but are also worried that the match will be delayed. She eventually uses the storage room because she does not want to be blamed for disrupting the competition.

Group task 1 - Referee response: Decide what the female referee and the rest of the referee team should do before the match. Prepare a short and clear request to the organiser.

Group task 2 - Institutional response: Define the minimum action that the club, league or association should take immediately and what should be changed before another female referee is appointed to the same venue.

Questions for discussion: Is this only a logistical problem or also a gender-equality issue? Who should be responsible for checking facilities before appointments are made? Should the whole referee team support the request? What should happen if the organiser cannot provide a safe and private alternative? How can the incident be documented without placing responsibility on the referee?

Scenario Card D - "Not ready yet"

A female referee has officiated for four seasons and regularly receives positive technical evaluations. She applies for promotion to a higher competition level. Two male colleagues with similar or less experience are promoted, while she is told informally that she is "not ready yet" and needs to develop stronger authority. She asks for written feedback and clear criteria but receives only general comments. During the following months, she continues to receive lower-level appointments, which give her fewer opportunities to demonstrate progress. When she raises the issue again, one official tells her that repeatedly asking about promotion may make her appear difficult and impatient.

Group task 1 - Referee response: Prepare a professional written request for transparent feedback, assessment criteria and a development plan.

Group task 2 - Institutional response: Define what the referee association or federation should do to ensure that promotion, evaluation and appointments are transparent and fair.

Questions for discussion: How can a referee improve if the feedback is not specific? Can appointment patterns themselves prevent career progression? What data should the association monitor to identify possible inequality? Who should review promotion decisions when criteria are unclear? How can referees raise concerns without being labelled difficult?

Shared response checklist for all scenario cards:

- Immediate safety and match control - What needs to happen at that moment?
- Communication - What should the referee say, and to whom?
- Documentation - Where and how should the incident be recorded?
- Institutional responsibility - Which person or organisation must respond?
- Follow-up - Who contacts the referee and within what period?
- Consequences or corrective measures - What should change after the incident?
- Support - What technical, emotional or practical support should be offered?

Material for facilitators:

- Local or federation code of conduct
- Incident and match-report forms
- Safeguarding and anti-harassment procedures
- Contact list for match delegates, referee bodies and welfare support
- Examples of proportionate club and federation responses

6. Role models and mentorship

6.1 From visibility to practical support

Role models show that a pathway is possible. Their stories can challenge stereotypes, create identification and encourage girls to consider refereeing. However, inspiration alone does not answer the practical questions that appear after training begins: How should a referee prepare for her first match? Who can review a difficult decision? What should she do after hostile comments? How can she progress to the next level? Mentorship provides this close and continuous support. A mentor can help interpret feedback, prepare for appointments, discuss mistakes, set goals and connect the mentee with further opportunities. The relationship should not depend on occasional goodwill. Even a simple system works better when expectations, contact frequency and confidentiality are agreed.

6.2 Mentorship models

Model	Description	Best used for
One-to-one mentoring	An experienced referee supports one new or developing referee through regular contact.	Individual goals, confidential discussion and career planning.
Peer mentoring	Referees at a similar level exchange support and reflection.	Reducing isolation and sharing practical solutions.
Group mentoring	One or more experienced referees meet a small group.	Limited mentor capacity and shared learning.
Shadowing	A developing referee observes an experienced official before or during an appointment.	Learning routines, communication and match management.
Reverse or skills mentoring	A younger or newer referee shares knowledge in a specific area, such as digital tools or current youth culture.	Creating mutual respect and avoiding a one-directional relationship.

6.3 Building a simple mentorship system

1. Define who the system is for and what support it will provide.
2. Select mentors based on communication, reliability and ethical behaviour, not only technical rank.
3. Provide a short mentor orientation on feedback, confidentiality and boundaries.
4. Match participants by sport, location, development goals and availability where possible.
5. Agree contact frequency and a simple post-match reflection format.
6. Review the relationship after an initial period and allow rematching when necessary.
7. Connect mentoring with real opportunities for observation, practice and progression.

6.4 Questions for regular mentoring meetings

- What went well since the last meeting?

- Which situation was most difficult and why?
- What was under the referee's control and what required institutional action?
- What feedback was received and how should it be interpreted?
- Which technical or communication skill will be prioritised next?
- What support or opportunity is needed before the next meeting?

Practical session: From the Stands to the Whistle: Building Your Network for Success

Theme: Structured mentorship, talent retention and sports career pathways

Time: 90 minutes

Overview: This session turns mentorship from an inspirational idea into a practical support structure. Participants map likely challenges, identify the type of support needed and create a mentor-mentee agreement covering goals, contact, post-match feedback and confidentiality.

Objectives:

- To understand different mentorship models in grassroots and amateur sport.
- To distinguish an inspirational role model from a practical mentor.
- To map technical, emotional and institutional support needs.
- To develop a personal two-year refereeing pathway.
- To create and discuss a clear mentorship agreement.
- To identify low-cost methods for keeping support active throughout a season.

Group size: 12-20 participants, ideally combining early-career and experienced female referees. If experienced referees are not available, participants can still complete the pathway and agreement as a model for future mentor matching.

Material:

- Printed personal pathway sheets
- Printed mentor-mentee agreement templates
- A4 paper
- Markers and pens
- Projector for role-model stories, if available

Preparation:

- Print one personal pathway sheet and one mentorship agreement template for each participant. These are the participant handouts for the session.
- Collect brief information about participants' experience and goals before the session, if possible. This helps the facilitator decide whether to work individually, in pairs or in triads.
- Plan balanced pairs or triads while avoiding forced disclosure of personal details. If the group includes both experienced and early-career referees, pair them where appropriate. If not, ask participants to work in peer pairs.
- Prepare one local and one higher-level role-model story. The story is facilitator preparation material, not a participant handout. Whenever possible, select a referee whose pathway is relevant to the participants' sport, age and environment.
- Explain that mentoring is not therapy and identify referral options for issues outside the mentor's role. If a participant describes a safety, harassment or safeguarding issue, the facilitator should refer to the relevant procedure rather than keeping it only within the mentoring discussion.

Instructions:**Step 1: The power of visibility (15 minutes)**

Present a short role-model story. The story should last three to five minutes and should include the referee's sport, current level, previous role in sport, reason for starting, one barrier, one support mechanism, one achievement and one realistic piece of advice. After the story, ask participants to identify one quality they admire and translate it into a concrete behavior. For example, 'confidence' can become preparing a pre-match routine, asking for feedback or practicing signals. Explain the difference between a distant role model who inspires and a practical mentor who gives regular support.

Step 2: Personal pathway (30 minutes)

Distribute the personal pathway sheet. Ask each participant to draw a two-year refereeing timeline. The timeline should begin with her current point and end with a realistic goal, such as completing a course, officiating youth matches, becoming more confident in communication or applying for a higher level. Ask participants to mark three anticipated difficult moments on the timeline. Examples may include a first match, first senior appointment, physical test, critical feedback, conflict with a coach, lack of confidence or uncertainty about promotion. For each difficult moment, participants identify what type of support would be useful: technical advice, emotional support, institutional protection, transport/logistical support, feedback, peer discussion or a clear explanation of procedures. After individual work, participants discuss in pairs what kind of support appears most often.

Step 3: Mentorship agreement (30 minutes)

Distribute the mentorship agreement template. Participants work in pairs or triads. If experienced mentors are present, they can complete the agreement as mentor and mentee. If not, participants complete it as a model agreement for a future mentorship relationship. The group defines the mentoring model, main goal, frequency of contact, communication channel, post-match feedback structure, confidentiality and referral boundaries. The facilitator should remind participants to make the agreement realistic. For example, a ten-minute call after weekend matches may be more sustainable than a long meeting every week. After completing the template, each pair or triad checks whether the agreement answers three questions: What support will be provided? How often will contact happen? What should be done if the issue is outside the mentor's role?

Step 4: Support network plenary (15 minutes)

Invite each pair or triad to share one practical strategy for keeping support active with limited resources. Examples may include a short call after matches, shared video review, monthly group meetings, WhatsApp peer group, shadowing one match per month or a pre-season mentor meeting. Write all strategies on the flipchart. Close by asking participants which strategy could realistically be introduced in their club, association or referee group during the next season.

Debriefing and evaluation:

- How might a mentor have changed your response to a difficult match?
- Which mentor qualities matter beyond technical knowledge?
- What should remain confidential and when must a mentor seek additional support?
- How can the system remain active across the full season?
- What will show that the mentoring relationship is useful?

Tips for facilitator: Do not assume that the most senior referee is automatically the best mentor. Avoid mentor-mentee matches with serious conflicts of interest. Make contact expectations realistic and

sustainable. Encourage feedback that is specific, balanced and linked to future action. Clarify safeguarding, confidentiality and escalation boundaries. Allow participants to request a different mentor without negative consequences.

Handout 1:

Personal Pathway Sheet

My current point in refereeing: _____

My realistic two-year goal: _____

Difficult moment 1: _____

Support I would need: _____

Difficult moment 2: _____

Support I would need: _____

Difficult moment 3: _____

Support I would need: _____

One first step I can take in the next month: _____

Handout 2:

Structured Mentorship Agreement

Mentor: _____ Mentee: _____

Model: One-to-one / Peer mentoring / Group mentoring / Shadowing

Main goal for the next period: _____

Contact frequency and channel: _____

Post-match reflection will address:

- What went well?
- How was emotional pressure managed?
- What technical priority comes next?

Confidentiality: Both parties will keep personal reflections confidential except where safety or safeguarding obligations require action.

Boundaries and referral: Issues outside the mentor's competence will be referred to: _____

Review date: _____ Signatures: _____

Material for facilitators:

- **Role Model Story - Facilitator Preparation Template:** Before the session, select one female referee from the local, national or international context. Whenever possible, preference should be given to a referee whose experience is relevant to the participants' sport, age and environment. The story should last approximately three to five minutes and include: her sport and current refereeing level; whether she was previously an athlete, coach or volunteer in sport; why she decided to become a referee; one difficulty or barrier she experienced; what kind of support helped her continue; one important achievement or moment of progress; and one realistic piece of advice she would give to a new female

referee. The story should not present the referee as someone who succeeded only because she was exceptionally strong or able to tolerate every form of pressure. It should also show the importance of education, mentoring, institutional support, colleagues and opportunities.

- ***Questions after the story:*** Which part of her experience felt most realistic or relatable? What helped her remain in refereeing? Which barriers were personal, and which were created by the sport environment? What support would a new referee need in a similar situation? Which part of her pathway could be applied in the participants' local context?
- ***Safeguarding and confidentiality guidance***
- ***Official progression pathway and assessment criteria***
- ***Referral contacts for technical, welfare or psychological support***

7. Recommendations for stakeholders

The recommendations below are based on the national research, focus groups and practical contributions developed within the project. Each recommendation identifies what should be done, who should take responsibility and how the action can be implemented in practice.

7.1 Sports federations and referee associations

What should be done	Responsible actors	How it can be implemented
Produce annual gender-disaggregated referee data.	National and regional federations; referee committees	Record applicants, course completion, licences, active status, appointments, promotion and drop-out by gender and competition level.
Create a visible female referee recruitment pathway.	Federations and referee associations	Publish clear requirements, costs, dates, contact persons and progression steps; promote them through clubs, schools and universities.
Link recruitment with retention measures.	Referee committees	Assign a mentor, provide supervised first appointments and schedule follow-up after the first month and first season.
Review appointment and progression patterns.	Appointment and assessment bodies	Use transparent criteria and periodically analyse whether women receive comparable experience, assessment and access to higher levels.
Establish reporting and follow-up procedures.	Federations, leagues and disciplinary bodies	Use a standard form, defined response period, named contact and feedback to the referee after sexist or threatening incidents.
Include gender-sensitive content in referee education.	Education departments and trainers	Integrate realistic scenarios on stereotypes, authority, communication, safeguarding and institutional support into general technical education.
Support dual career participation.	Federations, clubs and education partners	Offer flexible learning formats and recognise that candidates may combine playing, study, work and refereeing.

7.2 Sports clubs and competition organisers

What should be done	Responsible actors	How it can be implemented
Identify potential female referees.	Club coaches, coordinators and administrators	Invite current and former athletes to introductory sessions and explain refereeing before they leave organised sport.
Create respectful match environments.	Clubs and organisers	Adopt codes of conduct, brief coaches and parents, display behaviour rules and intervene immediately when abuse occurs.

What should be done	Responsible actors	How it can be implemented
Protect young and new referees.	Match organisers and delegates	Provide a named contact, safe changing arrangements, clear escalation procedures and post-match follow-up.
Provide practical entry opportunities.	Clubs and local leagues	Offer supervised youth games, table-official roles, shadowing and club tournaments with experienced support.
Avoid hiding the problem through appointments.	Club and league management	Do not remove female referees from challenging environments instead of addressing misconduct by teams or spectators.

7.3 Coaches and trainers

- Treat female and male referees according to the same standards of respect and technical discussion.
- Model appropriate behaviour during disagreements and stop sexist comments from players, staff or parents.
- Explain the referee's role to young athletes and include short officiating experiences in training.
- Recommend refereeing to girls who show interest, game understanding, responsibility or communication skills.
- Participate in joint pre-season education on rules and expectations where inconsistencies exist.
- Give feedback through official and respectful channels rather than public confrontation.

7.4 Mentors and experienced referees

- Provide specific, balanced and actionable feedback.
- Discuss emotional pressure without presenting abuse as a normal test of character.
- Help mentees distinguish technical mistakes from discriminatory treatment.
- Support preparation for first appointments and progression opportunities.
- Maintain confidentiality while respecting safeguarding and safety obligations.
- Connect mentees with wider peer networks so support does not depend on one person.

7.5 Media and communication actors

- Show female referees as professionals and sport leaders, not only as exceptional firsts.
- Use images and stories from grassroots, regional and elite levels.
- Avoid language that focuses on appearance, emotion or gender when it is irrelevant to performance.
- Give female referees space to explain the pathway, skills and realities of the role.
- Include information about courses and entry opportunities in awareness campaigns.

7.6 Local and national institutions

- Fund targeted recruitment, mentoring, safe sport and training initiatives.
- Support cooperation between federations, clubs, schools, universities and civil society organisations.
- Include officiating and technical sport roles in gender-equality and women-in-sport policies.

- Recognise clubs and organisations that demonstrate effective protection and progression of female referees.
- Support research and public reporting on women in sport leadership and technical roles.

7.7 Priority actions

Five actions that can begin immediately

1. Publish one clear national or regional pathway explaining how a girl or woman can become a referee.
2. Organise practical Try Refereeing sessions with direct invitations to female athletes.
3. Assign a mentor and a named institutional contact to every new female referee.
4. Adopt and apply a match-day response procedure for sexist and threatening behaviour.
5. Begin annual gender-disaggregated monitoring of recruitment, active referees, appointments, progression and drop-out.

Conclusion

Increasing the number of female referees requires more than a recruitment campaign or an occasional training course. The research conducted within this project showed that underrepresentation is connected to several stages of the refereeing pathway. Girls and women first need to recognise refereeing as a realistic option, understand how to enter the profession and have an opportunity to try the role in a safe and supportive environment. Once they enter training, they need quality technical education, gradual practical experience, constructive feedback and clear information about future progression.

Recruitment and retention must therefore be addressed together. Attracting new candidates will have limited long-term value if newly trained female referees face isolation, repeated questioning of their authority, discriminatory comments or unclear access to appointments and promotion. The responsibility cannot be placed only on women to become more confident or resilient. Personal skills are important, but they must be supported by fair procedures, appropriate working conditions and a visible institutional response when unacceptable behaviour occurs.

The practical sessions and tools included in these Guidelines provide accessible starting points for clubs, referee associations, federations, trainers and mentors. They can be used to introduce girls and women to refereeing, strengthen technical and communication skills, examine structural and cultural barriers, and create more organised mentorship and peer-support systems. The methods can be adapted to different sports and local contexts, while maintaining the central principle that women should be able to learn, officiate and progress under fair and respectful conditions.

Responsibility for change is shared across the sports environment. Female referees will continue to develop their technical knowledge, communication, decision-making and capacity to manage pressure. Mentors will provide guidance and help new referees interpret experience and feedback. Coaches, clubs, athletes, parents and spectators will shape the atmosphere in which matches take place. Federations and referee bodies will determine access to education, appointments, assessment, promotion and disciplinary protection. Public institutions and the media will influence wider recognition, visibility and the public image of women in officiating.

Progress will be sustainable when these different actors work as part of the same support system rather than through isolated actions. Refereeing will become a more realistic and attractive pathway for women and girls when they can see that entry opportunities are accessible, competence is assessed fairly, support continues after initial training and discriminatory behaviour has clear consequences. Strengthening these conditions will not only benefit female referees. It will also contribute to safer, fairer and better-governed sport environments for everyone involved.

About Erasmus + Sport

Erasmus+ is the European Union programme supporting education, training, youth and sport. Its overall purpose is to contribute to the educational, professional and personal development of people through learning, cooperation and participation. The programme also supports sustainable growth, social cohesion, innovation, European identity and active citizenship.

In the field of sport, Erasmus+ supports organisations that use sport and physical activity as tools for learning, participation and community development. It promotes cooperation between organisations from different countries and encourages the exchange of knowledge, working methods and practical experience. The programme recognises that sport can contribute to physical and mental wellbeing, inclusion, equality, volunteering, social participation and the development of skills and values. Erasmus+ Sport also addresses challenges within the sports sector itself. Supported projects may focus on equal opportunities, gender equality, dual careers for athletes, good governance, integrity in sport, discrimination, violence, intolerance and barriers to participation. Particular attention is given to grassroots sport because local clubs, associations, coaches and volunteers have a direct influence on whether sport environments are accessible, safe and inclusive. Organisations active in sport can participate in several types of Erasmus+ actions. The most relevant cooperation and event-based opportunities are described below.

8.1 Cooperation Partnerships

Cooperation Partnerships enable organisations to work together on shared needs and priorities in sport. They support the development, testing, transfer and wider use of practices, methods and tools that can improve the quality of sport activities and strengthen the capacity of participating organisations. These partnerships can address topics such as participation in sport and physical activity, social inclusion, gender equality, dual careers for athletes, good governance and threats to the integrity of sport, including doping and match-fixing. They can also support education for coaches, referees, volunteers and other sports professionals. Cooperation Partnerships normally involve organisations from several countries and are suitable for projects that require structured international cooperation, a longer implementation period and results that can be used beyond the original partnership. Participating organisations are expected to exchange experience, develop joint activities and produce results that are practical, transferable and relevant to a wider group of stakeholders.

8.2 Small-scale Partnerships

Small-scale Partnerships are designed to make Erasmus+ more accessible to grassroots organisations, smaller organisations, newcomers to the programme and organisations with limited experience in international cooperation. Compared with Cooperation Partnerships, they have lower grant amounts, shorter implementation periods and simpler administrative requirements. These projects provide an opportunity for local clubs, amateur sports associations, municipalities, schools and community organisations to begin working with partners from other countries. Activities can combine national and transnational elements while maintaining a clear European dimension. Small-scale Partnerships can be particularly useful for testing practical ideas at local level, developing smaller educational resources, organising joint training activities or creating cooperation between grassroots organisations facing similar challenges. They also support the inclusion of people with fewer opportunities and can help bring European cooperation closer to local communities.

The **Empowered Female Referees in Sport** project demonstrates how this type of cooperation can be used to connect research, training, practical testing and awareness raising. By combining experience from different national and organisational contexts, the project will develop tools that can be adapted and used by sports organisations beyond the original consortium.

8.3 Not-for-profit European Sport Events

Not-for-profit European Sport Events support the preparation and organisation of sport events with a clear European dimension. These events are intended to encourage participation in sport and physical activity while promoting wider social and educational objectives. Supported events may focus on volunteering in sport, social inclusion, the inclusion of people with disabilities, gender equality, the fight against discrimination and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Depending on the format, an event may take place in several countries or bring participants and organisations together through a shared European activity. The sporting event should not stand alone. It can be accompanied by workshops, seminars, training for volunteers, educational activities for athletes and coaches, communication actions and follow-up measures that strengthen its longer-term value. In this way, the event becomes a platform for learning, cooperation and public awareness rather than only a competition or one-time gathering.

8.4 Capacity Building in the Field of Sport

Capacity Building in the field of sport supports international cooperation between organisations from EU Member States and countries associated with the programme and organisations from eligible third countries not associated with the programme. Under the current programme framework, this action includes cooperation with the Western Balkans and the Neighbourhood East. The purpose of these projects is to strengthen the capacity of grassroots sports organisations and support the development of sport activities and policies. Sport is used as an educational and social tool for promoting participation, inclusion, fair play, tolerance, teamwork and stronger communities. Capacity-building projects may include training, exchange of practices, development of educational tools, organisational improvement, networking and pilot activities. They are particularly relevant when organisations from different regions wish to work together on common needs while adapting methods to different local, social and institutional contexts.

8.5 The value of Erasmus+ cooperation in sport

Erasmus+ Sport creates opportunities for organisations to learn from one another and develop solutions that may be difficult to create in isolation. Different countries and sports systems often face similar problems, but their responses, resources and levels of experience may vary. International cooperation makes it possible to compare these approaches, test methods in different environments and create resources that are more adaptable and useful. The value of an Erasmus+ sport project therefore extends beyond the organisations directly involved. Training materials, practical tools, research findings and tested methodologies can continue to be used by clubs, federations, coaches, referees, volunteers and community organisations after the formal project period has ended. This long-term use of results is one of the ways in which Erasmus+ contributes to improving the quality, accessibility and social role of sport across Europe and in cooperating regions.