

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – SESSION 6**

#### **EQUITY IN EQUESTRIAN: ASSESSING GENDER EQUALITY ACROSS KEY ROLES AND LEVELS**

Moderated by the Chair of the FEI Athletes' Committee Jessica Kürten, the final session of the FEI Sports Forum 2024 offered valuable insights into the ongoing conversation about diversity, equity, and inclusion in equestrian sports.

Kürten introduced the session by explaining the nuance between 'equality,' which focuses on treating everyone identically, and 'equity,' which involves considering individual differences to ensure that everyone has equal opportunities for success, both on and off the field-of-play.

While equestrian is widely considered to be a gender-neutral sport, which allows all participants to compete on an equal footing, the reality is that there are still areas within the sport where gender equality is not fully realised.

#### **Taking a closer look at statistics on gender in FEI disciplines**

In his presentation, FEI Vice-President Jack Huang provided key insights from a comprehensive study on gender distribution among FEI Officials, Athletes, and Rankings across Olympic and non-Olympic disciplines that was conducted by the FEI's Technology and Sports Services Department.

Huang presented the following statistics on the gender distribution of FEI Officials:

- The FEI has 4,800 Officials and generally there is an almost equal proportion between the genders with 2,282 women and 2,520 men.
- Male officials are in the majority in the Southern Hemisphere.
- In Dressage, Vaulting, Para Dressage, and Para Driving, women make up between 65% and 80% of officials. In contrast, Jumping, Driving, and Endurance have more male officials.
- Only 15% of course designers are women.

In terms of athlete registrations and participation the study revealed the following:

- Over the past 10 years the male/female ratio has tended to move away from parity in terms of athlete registrations and participations, rising from around 56% to 63%, an increase of 7% more women.
- Jumping and Driving are the two disciplines that have seen the greatest growth in the number of women from 2013-2022:
  - approaching 8.5% for Jumping
  - and exceeding 10% for Driving
- In terms of participation, the percentage of females in Olympic disciplines decreases as the level of the competitions increases. This is especially evident in Jumping where the number of women participating at higher levels of the discipline are significantly less than in Dressage and Eventing. In Eventing, women are the majority overall, comprising 72%, but their representation decreases to 53% in the top 30.

The study showed that the largest gender disparities among athletes in the World Rankings are in the Olympic disciplines.

- In contrast to the overall slight growth in the percentage of female Athletes ranked, it is clear that the gap between men and women widens in the top 100 and even more in the top 30 Athletes ranked in most disciplines.
- In Jumping as a whole, female athletes represent around a third of the ranked Athletes, and even more in recent years. In the top 100, however, this percentage falls considerably, to 20% by 2022, and 6.8% in the top 30.
- Eventing follows the same trend, with the overall proportion of women, although a majority overall, falls significantly at the top of the rankings, from 72% overall to 53% in the top 30 in 2022.

Statistics on the National Federation structure indicate that gender balance in administrative roles needs improvement, with more efforts required to bring women into leadership positions.

The statistics have shown that while equestrian sport is committed to fairness and inclusivity, there are areas with fewer women involved. Addressing these disparities and encouraging female participation is crucial. Additionally, strategies to increase young male involvement could enhance the sport's overall appeal.

Huang also put forward some key insights from a Market Research Study conducted by FEI Commercial Team which showed the following:

- That in eight key markets (Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden, UK and USA) equestrian has a higher female than male fanbase.
- Women have a stronger relationship with horses (45% vs. 35% men).
- Women favour Dressage, while men prefer Driving and Endurance.
- Equestrian sports rank among the top 10 practicing sports for women.

### **Diversity and inclusion with British Equestrian**

Mandana Mehran Pour, Head of Participation and Development at the British Equestrian Federation (BEF), then took the floor to share findings from the federation's #HorsesforAll research, which informed the publication of BEF's diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy in November 2023.

The BEF's research was driven by the belief that equestrian sport should reflect the diversity of the UK's population, particularly by addressing current underrepresentation, especially in terms of ethnicity.

Key points to emerge from the research were as follows:

#### Importance of Diversity & Inclusion

- Fostering diversity enriches the talent pool and facilitates engagement with communities historically disconnected from equestrian. This promotes broader understanding and appreciation for horses and their welfare.

#### Barriers to participation

- Independent research conducted in 2022 identified various barriers to participation for underrepresented groups. These include affordability,

perceptions of exclusivity, instances of bullying, and experiences of racial discrimination. The research also highlighted gaps in awareness and pathways to participation. However, it underscored positive aspects such as the demand for equestrian activities and the health and well-being benefits associated with interactions with horses.

### Community Feedback

- Participants from ethnically diverse communities shared instances of discrimination, microaggressions, and feelings of exclusion within equestrian environments. These insights underscore the importance of empathy, understanding, and proactive efforts to cultivate an inclusive atmosphere.

Some of the key takeaways from the research were as follows:

1. Race and Class Experiences: Barriers within equestrian mirror broader societal challenges.
2. Representation Matters: Diverse role models are pivotal in inspiring broader participation.
3. Value of Equestrian: Despite challenges, participants highlighted the emotional and social benefits derived from engagements with horses.

Following the review of research recommendations with its member bodies, the BEF committed to enhancing engagement with underrepresented groups, in order to provide equitable opportunities, and to develop a comprehensive response to address identified barriers.

Launched in November 2023, the strategy aims to create an inclusive equestrian community that reflects society, where all individuals feel valued and have a sense of belonging. The focus is on diversifying participation and leadership, acknowledging that achieving a cultural shift toward inclusivity is a gradual process.

Recognising the benefits of sport for health and wellbeing, as well as the unique bond between humans and horses, there lies a collective responsibility to ensure that everyone can access the sport.

### **Promoting equality and equity through equestrian sports**

HRH Nanda-Dévi Norodom, Secretary General of the Cambodian Equestrian Federation (CEF), concluded the session with a presentation of real-life examples and personal anecdotes illustrating how equestrian sport fosters equity and inclusivity in local Cambodian communities.

With the aim of changing the notion that equestrian sports are exclusively for the affluent, HRH Nanda-Dévi spoke about the CEF grassroots programmes that have been created to drive social equality and equity. These initiatives include:

#### Offering free riding lessons twice weekly for underprivileged children.

- While the initial aim of this initiative, was to provide an extra-curricular activity for underprivileged children, the CEF saw the potential of designing this programme to become a tool to empower young children. Over the

years, the programme has been structured and extended to provide participants with training equestrian professions like horse care, stable maintenance and management, and farrier services.

### Horse therapy programmes for children with intellectual disabilities or behavioural issues.

- Young children enrolled in these programmes have shown significant improvements in their concentration, autonomy, discipline and social skills at school.

### Talent spotting programme

- The programme has successfully identified 80% of national team members, including those who have won medals in international competitions.

### Collaborating with stables to provide free training for underprivileged riders

- The CEF has joined forces with local stables to support national team members who lack the means to cover their own training expenses. These stables now serve as national training centres, offering free training sessions to underprivileged riders. These sessions take place four to six days a week and include access to the club's high-performance horses and is overseen by a national coach. In return for this training opportunity, riders contribute to the stables by assisting club coaches with group lessons for guests, as well as horse care and grooming, and stable maintenance tasks like cleaning.

In terms of equality, the initiatives implemented by the CEF ensure that all national team athletes have equal responsibilities and opportunities, regardless of their backgrounds. Participation in international events and additional training not only enhances their skills but also boosts their confidence and self-esteem.

Furthermore, vocational training programmes, supported by the 2023 FEI Solidarity Grant, offer disadvantaged girls improved career prospects and financial stability, positively impacting their families.

Economically, national riders earn incomes above the average, bolstered by CEF provisions for health insurance and education. Grooming has become a respected profession with competitive salaries, providing a pathway out of poverty.

In her presentation, HRH Nanda-Dévi also highlighted the success stories of two young men, Savit Sat and Rothanak Kong, who have benefited significantly from these CEF programmes.

Savit Sat has risen from being a groom to becoming a certified national coach and veterinary student, now supporting his family financially through his involvement in equestrian activities. Rothanak Kong, who earned a gold medal with his team at the FEI SEA Youth Cup in Bangkok (THA) in 2023, has benefited from CEF support covering his school fees. He has been attending a private school for three years and is also taking English lessons, aiming to graduate with his high school diploma next year. Rothanak supports his family with his earnings as a national rider. Given his mother's illness and inability to work regularly, and his sister's

lack of steady employment, Rothanak has become the primary breadwinner since his father left the family over a decade ago.

In conclusion, the CEF's initiatives exemplify equity by dismantling barriers and creating pathways for success. These efforts demonstrate how equestrian sports can profoundly impact lives, especially among vulnerable populations, and can be globally implemented at minimal cost to foster social inclusion and development. Support from FEI Solidarity has played a crucial role in nurturing both young athletes and professionals alike.

### **Summary of discussions**

The discussions emphasised the dual challenge women face in balancing a career in sports with family life. Examples were given of successful female athletes who had supportive partners and an entourage who were dedicated to helping these athletes achieve sporting success.

The FEI's point-freezing initiative was praised as a positive step allowing female athletes to balance family and sport more effectively. The need for more women in course designing was also emphasised, with a call for National Federations and the FEI to create opportunities and support networks for aspiring female course designers. The challenges faced by female course designers were also acknowledged. Delegates noted that the course designer job requires extended periods away from home, making it difficult to balance a work and family life.

The Swedish representative shared his personal experiences of being bullied as a young boy because he practiced equestrian sports, which are primarily seen as a pursuit for girls. He emphasised the need to find ways of retaining young boys in equestrian sports during their teenage years, especially since other sports like hockey and football compete for their attention.

The discussion acknowledged the role of societal perceptions and the commercial environment in shaping participation, with suggestions to create more inclusive and supportive environments especially for young boys.