



Achieving Gender Equity in Wheelchair Rugby

World Wheelchair Rugby Gender Equity Strategy
2025-2032

Context & Considerations for Implementing the Gender Equity Strategy

What is gender equity?

Equity and equality are often mistakenly used to mean the same thing. Equality means that everyone, regardless of who they are, gets access to the same resources and benefits. Equity means we distribute resources to meet the unique needs of individuals or groups. For this strategy, we are interested gender equity, meaning using tactics and recommendations that fit the needs of girls, women, and non-binary individuals.

To learn more about gender equity from the World Economic Forum, [click here](#).

This resource was created by working with women, non-binary people, and allies in wheelchair rugby, and in consultation with other para sports. Our strategy aims to guide member countries, their state or provincial sport organizations, and their clubs toward creating a more equitable and fair development pathway. This will promote equal participation for women+ individuals worldwide.

You can adapt this resource to suit the environment in your country and/or community. When using the tactics and recommendations, consider the needs and motivations of girls, women, and non-binary individuals. For example, we know the motivations for joining the sport are different for women and men. Also, remember that gender is not the only way to identify. Considering a person's race, ethnicity, disability, social and economic status, as well as their gender, will help you create better programs and solutions.

As you implement the strategy, we urge our members to gather feedback. This will help our global sport grow and improve.

Important note on language: To simplify the document and increase ease of reading, we are using the term women+ to include girls, women, and non-binary individuals, with the goal of inclusivity.

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Welcome

As the organization responsible for the sport on a global basis, we know the transformative impact wheelchair rugby has on those who engage with the sport. Unfortunately, these benefits have not been experienced equally. Girls, women, and non-binary individuals have historically faced underrepresentation in our clubs, on our national teams, in Paralympic competition, and in the many leadership and support roles that enable our sport to grow and flourish.

Despite the many barriers, there have been women+ who have made significant contributions to our sport, progressing to the highest levels of competition and leadership. We want to ensure that girls, women, and non-binary individuals in greater and greater numbers follow in their paths. We know that means creating a welcoming environment for everyone, ensuring we are an attractive proposition. With this in mind, we were proud to announce the creation of a global task force group on International Women's Day 2024, with a mandate to champion gender equity.

Led by Kathy Newman, Director of Competitions & Development, this task force included Teri Thorson (coach), Lauren Templeton (development director for GBWR), Shae Graham (athlete), Sophia Azzi (international referee), Makiko Harada (gender equity advocate), Tasmyn Haynes (international referee and communications expert) and Sara Pardoe (entrepreneur and para sport consultant). This group has done incredible work, consulting with our global community and leading the charge in creating this Playbook, which outlines World Wheelchair Rugby's gender equity strategy. We are proud to share this strategy with you on this important day for raising awareness of gender equity and the pursuit of equality across the globe.

We hope our entire membership joins with us in implementing this strategy and commits to achieving our goal of increasing the participation of girls, women, and non-binary individuals across the entire international development pathway.

Richard Allcroft

OBE, WORLD WHEELCHAIR RUGBY PRESIDENT



"The current moment presents a remarkable opportunity to expand wheelchair rugby worldwide by enhancing female participation as athletes, volunteers, staff, and leaders. By collaborating effectively, we can harness this enthusiasm and momentum to its fullest potential."

Kathy Newman,
Director, Competitions & Development,
World Wheelchair Rugby

WWR
World Wheelchair Rugby

OPEN does not mean equal

Wheelchair rugby has always been an open sport, which means all genders are invited to play and compete on the same teams and courts. However, participation data shows that women+ have been underrepresented in the sport across all levels.

And beyond athlete participation, when we look at leadership and support roles, we see a similar trend. To grow the number of women+ across the sport overall, we must also grow the number of women+ in leadership and support roles.

The WWR Global Advancement of Female Participation Task Group collected data showing participation at the international level, and Wheelchair Rugby Canada gathered data showing current participation at the local club level from its provincial club organizations.

CURRENT STATE OF ATHLETE PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT

International Competition:

- Athletes competing in the Paris Paralympics (2024) – 91% were men, **9% were women+**
- Athletes attending national competitions in 2024 – 90% were men, **10% were women+**

Local Club Play (in Canada):

- We estimate players participating in local club level were 75% men, **25% women+**

CURRENT STATE OF LEADERSHIP & SUPPORT

International Competition:

- Coaches attending World Wheelchair Rugby events between 2020-2024: 94% were men, **6% were women+**
- Officials attending World Wheelchair Rugby events between 2020-2024: 55% were men, **45% were women+**
- Classifiers across the globe: 30% are men, **60% are women+**

The unique needs and motivations of women+ to engage in wheelchair rugby

Note: the motivations, channels for discovery and reasons for leaving were drawn from the national survey findings collected through this research. The sample size of women and non-binary respondents was N=154, and the total number of respondents was N=298.

In creating this strategy, we gathered insights from many women+ and men worldwide who are involved in wheelchair rugby. Findings confirmed that women+ and men differed in both the ways they found the sport as well as motivations for joining and leaving. Women+ reported the community aspect of wheelchair rugby as being more important than men did and most commonly found the sport through family, friends, and peers. We believe that by understanding these differences, we can begin to create the change we would like to see throughout the sport.

Discovering Wheelchair Rugby:

The top ways women+ first discovered wheelchair rugby:

- Family, friends, and peers
- Transitioned from another para sport
- Rehab centre

Motivation to join the sport:

The top motivations for women+ to join the sport were:

- To be part of a team and community
- For fitness and physical health
- To have fun

Reasons for leaving wheelchair rugby:

Some of the most common reasons survey respondents said a woman+ they knew left the sport:

- Facing gender stereotypes and barriers from male-dominated culture
- High contact nature of the sport
- Poor experience and/or a lack of opportunity to play and progress

The Benefits of Sport Participation for Women+

The benefits of sport participation for women+ have been studied, tested, and validated. We hope more women+ can experience the benefits captured below through their participation in wheelchair rugby.



70%

of girls who participate in sports say their participation has a positive impact on their mental health ¹

50%

Half of girls who participate in sports say their participation positively influences their body image ¹

35%

of girls who play sports are more likely to be involved in community service versus 21% of girls who don't ²

23%

of girls who play sports are more likely to be involved in academic enrichment activities ²

30%

of 12th grade high school girls who participated in sports were more likely to indicate an average grade of A/A- ³

1.5x

Girls who play sports report having 1.5x higher levels of meaning and purpose compared to their peers who do not participate in sports ²

85%

For women in the workforce, 85% of those surveyed said the skills they learned through playing sports were important to their success in their professional careers ⁴

¹ Canadian Women and Sport, Rally Report 2024: A Call to Reimagine Sport So All Girls Can Play

² Women's Sport Foundation, Thriving Through Sport: The Transformative Impact on Girls' Mental Health

³ Women's Sport Foundation, The Healing Power of Sport: COVID-19 and Girls' Participation, Health and Achievement

⁴ Deloitte, 85% of Women Surveyed Who Played Sports Say It's Important to Their Career Success

Equity for Women+ Benefits **Everyone**

Using the tactics in this resource will boost participation of women+ in wheelchair rugby. This will benefit our sport worldwide. Below are just a few examples of how your country or community could benefit.

Increasing the player pool across the entire pathway will create **more opportunities for play and competitions and increase the player pool for high performance pathway.**

More women+ come into the sport with non-spinal cord related disabilities (e.g. multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy) compared to boys and men. By adapting to include to include these women+, we expand the environment to **be more inclusive for a broader range of disabilities.**

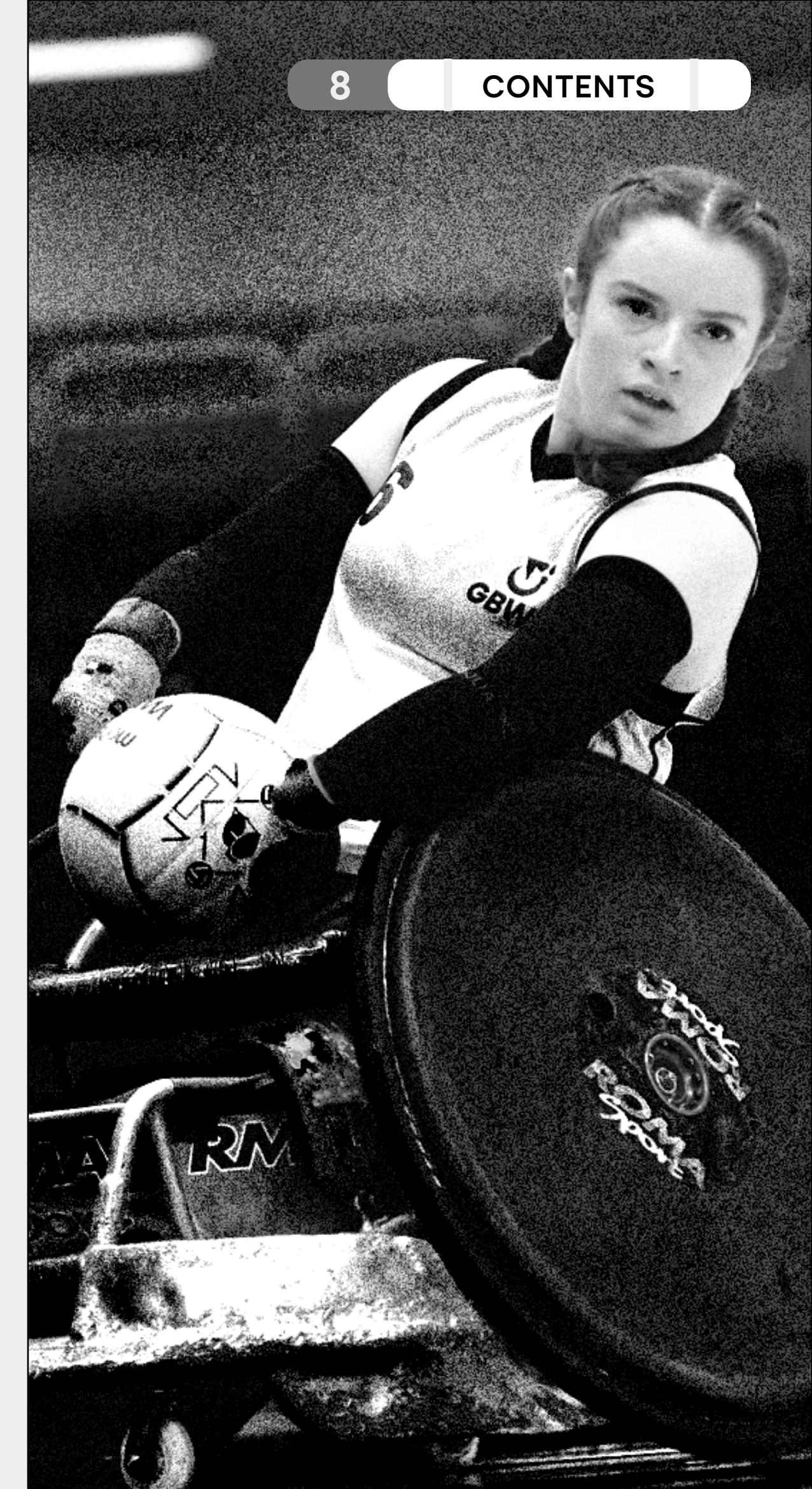
Increasing the participation of women+ in coaching, officiating, classifying, staff, and volunteering fills vital roles that enable a **greater number of play and competition opportunities for all.**

By tailoring the environment and experience to the motivations expressed by women+ (e.g. fun and community) we create space for an **increased sense of belonging.**

Opening more opportunities to **unlock funding through equity focused grants.**

Creating new events and competitions specifically for women+ opens **more opportunities for coaches, officials, and classifiers to participate and learn.**

By **highlighting the strategic aspects of the game**, which are often showcased by women+ on their teams, rather than focusing solely on its rougher, physical elements, we can broaden the perception of the sport. This approach creates an opportunity to attract a more diverse group of players.



Guide to World Wheelchair Rugby's Gender Equity Strategy

The Framework

The ingredients of our gender equity framework were created through consultation, research, and referencing best practice gender equity strategies from other sports organizations. The framework is meant to be adapted and customized to your context, including setting appropriate goals based on available resources. For more detailed best practices and ideas for events to increase participation of women+ see the companion document [Gender Equity at the Local Club Level Playbook](#).

Framework Ingredients

Areas of focus

Main themes to guide our efforts grouped by similar goals, activities and stakeholders.

Goals

The outputs and outcomes we are working to achieve in each area of focus.

Actions

The key initiatives, programs, and activities to achieve the goals within a given area of focus that either address a barrier or build on an opportunity.

Foundational supports

Tactics and resources which create the foundation for the success of multiple areas of focus.

Leadership & Support

Helping women+ in leadership and support roles across the sport

Community

Creating programs at the local club level to engage women+ in the sport

Promotion

Creating awareness and interest for wheelchair rugby as a sport for women+

Environment & Experience

Creating the environment to deliver experiences that meet the needs of women+

Events & Competition

Creating the conditions for a more fair, accessible development pathway for women+ to compete in high-performance wheelchair rugby competition





Promotion



Photo credit:
Laurent Bagnis

Creating awareness and interest for wheelchair rugby as a sport for women+.

Our goals:

- More women+ know about wheelchair rugby and want to get involved
- All content promoting wheelchair rugby includes more women+ from diverse backgrounds

How will we achieve our promotion goals?

- Share the development pathway with women+ so they know the opportunities available and the performance requirements at each level
- Promote stories of women+ through social media, websites, or as part of your wheelchair rugby programming
- Collect feedback from women+ to understand their motivations for participating in the sport in your country
- Design recruitment and promotional materials to engage the unique motivations of women+

What does the data tell us? 92% of respondents said that more visibility and promotion in the media using diverse imagery would have a positive impact on increasing participation of women+ in wheelchair rugby.

Total International Survey Respondents N=178



Promotion

Examples of actions to achieve our promotion goals:

Explore new recruiting channels

Exploring new channels to reach women+ in your community. For example, if you usually recruit athletes from a local rehab centre, you might promote the sport in clinics for people with cerebral palsy or multiple sclerosis.

Create inclusive promotional materials

Create a database of promotional content that includes women+. Use images and videos of these athletes, both on the court and in their daily lives. This will help prospective players connect with your promotion and see the range of disabilities that athletes can have.

Market to a range of motivations

Develop promotional content that focuses on the parts of the sport that women+ highlight as primary motivations for joining: community, fun, fitness, and well-being. When you hold events or tournaments for women+, make sure to take pictures and videos to use for future promotion.

Share clear and accessible pathway documents

Collaborate with your coaches, officials and classifiers to map your athlete development pathway. Create a document for new athletes.

Learn how [Wheelchair Rugby Australia has mapped and documented their athlete development pathway.](#)



Environment & Experience



Achieving Gender Equity in Wheelchair Rugby

Creating the environment to deliver experiences that meet the needs of women+.

Our goals:

- More welcoming environments & experiences for women+ at all levels of the sport
- Education to build more inclusion through skill development and tools

How will we achieve our environment & experience goals?

- Create an IDEA committee in your country to implement this strategy and ensure accountability. See how Wheelchair Rugby Canada created their IDEA committee*
- Providing access to gender inclusive facilities and create an environment free of bullying and discrimination
- Improve access to educational materials and training
- Collect feedback from women+ who participate in your programs

***IDEA Committee:** Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility Committee.

Survey respondents said...

Survey respondents sharing reasons why women+ participants they know left the sport.

“Male dominated sport, she felt undervalued.”

“Due to bullying and discrimination”

“Men are not welcoming and harass us and speak down to us.”



Environment & Experience

Examples of actions to achieve our environment & experience goals:

Provide inclusion resources and education

Ensure inclusion resources and best practices are shared across your organization by centralizing them in a location that is easy for everyone to access. Additionally, offer comprehensive inclusion education to existing leaders and individuals in support roles to foster a more inclusive environment.

Create welcoming spaces

Ensure events and competitions provide accessible and gender-appropriate facilities, such as changing rooms and restrooms. Pair new athletes with more experienced athletes to foster mentorship. Additionally, establish clear expectations for behaviour by promoting respect, appropriate language use, and enforcing a zero-tolerance policy for bullying.

Create opportunities to involve athlete's broader community

Create opportunities for members of an athlete's community, outside of the sport itself, to become actively involved. For example, consider inviting family, friends, or supporters to attend a tryout as spectators or encouraging them to participate by volunteering for various roles within the event or organization.

Use feedback for continuous improvement

After an event, actively seek feedback from participants. Use a variety of formats, such as online or paper forms, emails, text messages, or phone calls, to ensure accessibility and convenience. Specifically, ask for recommendations on creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment. For best practices for women+ events see [Gender Equity at the Local Club Level Playbook](#).



Events & Competition

Creating the conditions for a more fair, accessible development pathway for women+ to compete in high-performance wheelchair rugby competition.

Our goals:

- Meet the requirements for the IPC Paralympic Game Program inclusion for women+
- Host one international event per year for women+
- Greater representation of women+ in competitions

How will we achieve our events & competition goals?

- Organize and host a regular stand-alone women's world championship
- To grow the size of the women's world championship and prepare for a women's Paralympic division, organize and host women's national championships across 18 member countries
- Increased number of exhibitions and showcases for women+'s competition
- Embrace alternative formats and exhibitions to increase women+'s participation

What does the data tell us? In 2024, the ratio of men to women competing in the Paris Paralympics was 11:1. That same year, only 10% of athletes competing in national championships across the global wheelchair rugby membership were women.

Data collected by the WWR Task Group



Events & Competition

Examples of actions to achieve our events and competitions goals:

Communicate high performance pathway

Clearly document and communicate the athlete development pathway so women+ understand the steps and performance benchmarks to qualify for their national team.

Provide opportunities for classification

Encourage women+ athletes to get classified and ensure they are supported and educated about the classification process. Provide access to classifiers with expertise in a wider range of disabilities (e.g., multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy).

Access to training and support

Creating access to appropriate training, coaching, and mentorship, where possible with women+ individuals in support roles.

Add a women+ event to existing competition

Look for opportunities to add a day or event to an existing competition. Consider hosting a women+ tournament during your nationals.



Community



Achieving Gender Equity in Wheelchair Rugby

Creating programs at the local club level to engage women+ in the sport.

Our goals:

- Increase in the number of participants and programs that engage women+
- Create more connections in the community amongst peers and allies

How will we achieve our community goals?

- Host a "try event" for women+ in your area*
- Incorporate best practices into your existing club and provincial/state programming*
- Consider events with a more social and community building focus

*Try Event Program, toolkits, and overall best practices for women+ programming are outlined in greater detail in the accompanying [Gender Equity at the Local Club Level Playbook](#).

What does the data tell us? 95% of international survey respondents said that more opportunities to bring a buddy and try the game through a try day event would have a positive impact on increasing participation of women+ in wheelchair rugby.

Total International Survey Respondents N=178



Community

Examples of what creating events and programs in your country could look like:

Emphasize fun and progression over performance

Embrace new ways to deliver the curriculum, supporting this new emphasis of fun, physical fitness, and connection.

To learn how Wheelchair Basketball Canada **created a try event focused on fun**, [click here](#).

Recruiting women+ volunteers

Connect new participants with women+ leadership and support roles. Use the actions from the Leadership & Support focus area to increase the group of women in these roles.

Organize peer support volunteers

Recruit women+ athletes from your clubs to act as peer support for new participants. Ask these peer volunteers to follow up with participants to create a sense of belonging among new athlete recruits.

Create opportunities for connection beyond the court

Provide opportunities for women+ to connect outside of gameplay. This could be a social media group, WhatsApp group, or in-person social gatherings focused on community and fun.



Leadership & Support



Helping women+ in leadership and support roles across the sport.

Our goals:

- More women+ entering and advancing within these roles
- Incorporate more intentional support and consideration to women+ with a disability

Support roles = coaches, officials, classifiers, staff and any volunteer position within wheelchair rugby

How will we achieve our leadership and support goals?

- Create and implement policies to recruit, retain, and advance women+ in leadership and support roles
- Create a peer mentorship program for women+ that will connect them with more senior individuals in similar roles for guidance and support
- Where possible, ensure promotional materials show images of women+ in support roles
- Implement the actions for leadership and support roles in the local club-level gender equity Playbook

What does the data tell us? 86% of survey respondents said that fewer visible role model athletes in wheelchair rugby on teams, in leadership positions in the sport, and in the media was a barrier to women+ individuals starting to play the sport.

Total International Survey Respondents N=199



Leadership & Support

Examples of actions to achieve our leadership & support goals:

Set goals for representation

Work with your country's IDEA committee or leadership to set specific goals for increasing the number of women+ in support and leadership roles. For some countries this may be more inspirational targets, for countries with more established programs, consider more specific and ambitious goals.

Create mentorship opportunities

Look for women+ who are experienced in their roles to be mentors for newer recruits. If you have no women+ to take on a mentorship role in your wheelchair rugby system, look to other national parasports for potential mentors. They may be able to help alongside your existing leadership.

Share clear and accessible pathway documents

Map the development pathway for each leadership and support role (coaches, officials, classifiers, volunteers). Then, create a shareable document for prospective women+ recruits. This will help them understand the growth opportunities in their new roles and the requirements at each stage.

Provide dedicated financial support

Create a dedicated budget line of financial support for recruiting and training of women+ for supporting roles.

Building a Foundation for Success

Integrating Key Supports into
Our Approach for Lasting Impact

FUNDING

Dedicated funding and human resources to support programs aimed at meeting the needs of women+.

EDUCATION

To advance understanding and create greater capacity for inclusion. Leading to more welcoming environments through the system.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT & IMPLEMENTATION

Documenting our commitments in policy to ensure sustained impact and accountability.

Many educational resources and best practices exist in some of WWR's membership and in other out-of-sport, parasport, and sport systems. A clear recommendation from interviewees, focus groups participants and the symposium participants was to continue prioritizing dialogue, collaboration and making the resources created in pursuit of increasing women+ participation available to all.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

To increase efficiency by sharing learning and collaborating with allies who can help advance our goals and increase funding to support our programs.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

To support increased player participation, sustain the sport's growth, and celebrate our successes.

MEASUREMENT & ACCOUNTABILITY

To clarify our goals, track progress, capture learnings, and adapt tactics and recommendations based on what we learn.



Photo credit:
Laurent Bagnis

World Wheelchair Rugby's Big Bold Moves Towards Gender Equity

Brighton Plus Helsinki Declaration

As a first step towards implementing our gender equity strategy, World Wheelchair Rugby's leadership and board have agreed to become signatories of the Brighton Plus Helsinki Declaration. This major milestone affirms our sport's desire to increase the participation of women and girls across all levels of wheelchair rugby play and competition.

As part of the declaration, World Wheelchair Rugby commits to:

- Creating a dedicated strategy for gender equity and equality.
- Creating specific programs designed to support and empower women in the sport.
- A clear commitment to addressing fundamental barriers to gender equity and equality in the sport.

To learn more about the [Brighton Plus Helsinki Declaration, click here.](#)

Ambassador Program

World Wheelchair Rugby is creating an ambassador program to help achieve our gender equity goals. This is in addition to signing the Brighton Plus Helsinki Declaration.

We are launching with 12 ambassadors who represent 12 member countries in our sports system.

Achieving Gender Equity in Wheelchair Rugby

Each working in their country's sport system, their roles will be to:

- Develop the events and programs found in the Playbook and support with implementation.
- Support the implementation of the best practices in existing programs.
- Record and share learnings with other ambassadors.

To learn more about the ambassadorship program or to enquire about becoming an ambassador, please contact the World Wheelchair Rugby Office at: office@worldwheelchair.rugby

Building on these big bold moves, it is World Wheelchair Rugby's desire to:

- **Women's Paralympic Division:** Meet the IPC's requirements for a women's Paralympic division for the 2032 Brisbane Games.
- **Awareness Campaign:** Create and launch an awareness campaign targeted at recruiting women+. This campaign would highlight the game's fun, strategic, and communal nature.
- **IDEA Committee:** Create a global IDEA committee to oversee and support our gender equity strategy across the sports system. This committee will also provide direction to its national peers across the membership.
- **Member Country Adoption:** The global membership adopts our gender equity strategy in ways that align with its readiness and the resources available.

Recommended first steps for members

Success relies on the collaboration of all member countries. We acknowledge not every member has equal access to resources. This is particularly relevant for those developing their wheelchair rugby systems. Even if your country can't implement the entire strategy yet, there are goals and actions you can begin now. A good starting point for all members is to implement the following kinds of initiatives.

Environment & Experience

FORM YOUR IDEA COMMITTEE

One of our goals is for each member country to create its own IDEA committee.

This committee will help develop and put in place policies which will create the conditions for greater inclusion.

Creating inclusive environments and great experiences are a key step in increasing participation of women+.

As a reference point, read [Wheelchair Rugby Canada's IDEA Committee role description.](#)

*IDEA: Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility

Community

BENCHMARKING PARTICIPATION

This strategy's development emphasizes data collection as being vital for achieving gender equity in wheelchair rugby.

In your country, this could mean creating an online survey. Ask your clubs, leaders, and support roles to complete it and share it with other athletes.

This data will help you understand gender participation in your competition system or structure.

Promotion

REVIEW YOUR PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS & STRATEGY

Review your Wheelchair Rugby promotional materials. Do they feature women+ players?

Some of your promotional materials may already include women+. If so, consider different clinics and community centres to post your posters. Also, use social media to reach women+ with disabilities in your local community.

If your country has a well-developed wheelchair rugby sport system and access to resources, you may want to consider supporting another member to put in place the actions contained in this Playbook.

Informed by Consultation

In developing this strategy, we consulted with many athletes, leaders, and those fulfilling support roles. We would like to thank the entire World Wheelchair Rugby community for their thoughtful input as well as the many experts and leaders outside the sport who contributed their thoughts.

27

Focus Groups Participants

Athletes, officials, coaches, classifiers, and volunteers from across from across nine member countries.

34

Symposium Participants

Attending a two-day intensive working symposium hosted by Wheelchair Rugby Canada. Representative athletes, leaders, volunteers in support roles, World Wheelchair Rugby staff, and sport experts gathered in Vancouver, Canada.

10

Interviews

With global wheelchair rugby leaders, out of sport leaders, and gender equity experts.

25

General Assembly Members

Representatives of World Wheelchair Rugby's member countries who gathered for the General Assembly provided feedback on approach and implementation.

298

Survey Respondents

Representing athletes, officials, coaches, classifiers, and volunteers from across all of the membership.

50+

Women's Cup Participants

Athletes, leaders and support roles from around the globe who participated or attended the 2024 Women's Cup in Paris.

Thank you

WWR Gender Equity Strategy 2025-2032

The Playbook in its entirety has been endorsed by World Wheelchair Rugby for use across all its member countries.

For questions about the gender equity strategy, please contact the Global Advancement of Female Participation Task Group at: office@worldwheelchair.rugby



Photo credit:
Laurent_Bagnis