

5. Elite women's football is capturing the nation's attention



This isn't strictly about cultural audiences, but I wanted to finish on a positive note, and I do think it has relevance.

I'm old enough to remember Euro '96, and all the coverage of the England Men's team. I wasn't exactly "sports mad" but I'd never seen coverage of Women's football, and subsequent research has confirmed that most female players of the time were not full-time sports people. Indeed, even the Women's Super League,¹⁷ didn't become a fully professional league until 2018.¹⁸

In this context, seeing awareness and engagement statistics for the UEFA Women's 2022 Euros is heartening, perhaps even a little moving.

Headline awareness was 67%, with almost identical awareness across men and women.¹⁹ Participation was also high – 38% of those who were aware participated in the event, most commonly following the coverage (94%).

But what's far more exciting is the impact that the 2022 Women's Euros has had on women's football more generally. UEFA's own impact study²⁰ shows that:

"In England, the total attendance during the 2022/23 Women's Super League (WSL) season surpassed 680,000, 172% higher than the 2021/2022 season, with average attendance per game-week nearly tripling"

The same report also quotes statistics from the Football Association which show a *"140% increase in participation levels in the season following the tournament, followed by women aged 16 and older (53% increase). This amounts to 2.3 million more women and girls playing football post-tournament compared to the prior season."*

¹⁷ <https://womensleagues.uefa.com>

¹⁸ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/45355268>

¹⁹ Female 66.7158250950932%, Male 67.2387795789433%.

²⁰ <https://www.uefa.com/news-media/news/0283-186d13be214d-1d7ff6f2e858-1000--uefa-women-s-euro-2022-one-year-on-impact-study-shows-major>

84% of surveyed spectators say that UEFA Women's EURO 2022 has improved their perceptions of women's football.

What does this mean for sector professionals?

For me, the big takeaway here is that **change is possible**. I don't want to understate the incredible amount of hard work that's gone on to get us this far. Time and money, campaigning and lobbying, no doubt blood, sweat and tears from the athletes and their friends and families. But it has happened. And I hope this means that we as engaged professionals can also overcome the structural and systemic challenges that hold our sector back. It will take sustained hard work, time and money, campaigning and lobbying (although I hope less blood, sweat and tears than I see in international sport), but it can be done.