

A black and white photograph of a group of women triathletes huddled together, smiling and looking towards the camera. They are wearing athletic gear, including swim caps and goggles. The image is used as a background for the text.

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP: TACKLING THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN TRIATHLON

December 2024

SheRACES 

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Introduction

There's something special about racing. It brings us together, helps us push our boundaries and gives us a sense of achievement.

Triathlon holds a notable place in the sporting world, as one of the first sports to offer gender equality, with equal prize money and equal distances for both men and women. From learning new skills and racing together, to finding support among fellow athletes and achieving personal goals, triathlon offers a unique sense of community and empowerment for women.

However, despite the foundational inclusivity of the sport, women still represent a minority of triathletes with the gender participation gap widening as the race distance increases. In the UK, female participation in triathlon sits around 36% overall (source: British Triathlon – race passes purchased between 1st November 2023 and 31st October 2024), but men outnumber women by more than 4:1 at IRONMAN events globally.

This notable difference in participation rates between men and women is, in part, due to societal factors. Women often carry a larger share of family and caregiving responsibilities, and many also face safety concerns, particularly when training alone. With lower earnings on average, financial limitations also present a greater barrier, as the cost of equipment and access to training facilities is high compared to sports such as running or swimming alone.

Beyond societal and financial barriers, however, many challenges arise directly from the structure of events themselves, sometimes unintentionally. These barriers, when addressed, can significantly improve female participation and make a huge difference in getting more women to experience the joy of crossing the finish line.

In 2022, SheRACES conducted the first large-scale survey into female experiences in racing, focusing on road and trail running. Over 2,000 women shared their experiences and provided valuable feedback on what changes would make a meaningful difference.


From this, we developed guidelines that any race can easily implement to become more inclusive. Since then, events from 5kms to multi-day mountain ultras, from countries as diverse as India, Sweden and Japan, have adopted these simple yet impactful changes, resulting in increased participation from women – and, importantly, increases in profitability for those events.

A detailed white paper released by Threshold Sports (in collaboration with SheRACES) showed that a **1.5% increase in event costs to implement these guidelines resulted in an almost 100% increase in female participation in the target race.**

Brands, too, are increasingly eager to support events that align with their own values of inclusivity and equity. Several major brands now use SheRACES guidelines when considering sponsorship proposals, demonstrating the growing influence of sponsor power in driving positive change and encouraging events to adopt these practices.

Many of our existing race guidelines, such as supporting pregnancy deferrals, apply to triathlon as much as running, but triathlons present different barriers to participation, due to the unique nature of the multisport event.





In undertaking this research, our aim was to develop a deeper understanding of female experiences in triathlons and gain insight into how races can improve the experience for a diverse range of female athletes, while attracting more women to the start line.

We present our key findings and in-depth analysis, alongside highlighting specific experiences and themes. We recognise that some of these experiences make for uncomfortable reading. By sharing them, we hope to encourage positive action from both events and from all athletes, male and female, to address the issues raised.

At the end of the report we share the new SheRACES triathlon guidelines based on our insight, as well as feedback from event organisers on practical considerations.

These guidelines can be used by event organisers to evolve their races to be inclusive. In our experience, most race organisers have simply not been aware of ways they can better support a full diversity of female athletes.

Events that commit to the core triathlon race guidelines to support female athletes can opt to apply for [SheRACES accreditation](#). This enables women to find their events, knowing they will be actively supported. Over 84% of respondents said they would be more likely to sign up for an event that committed to equitable and inclusive treatment of women.

We hope that this research is shared widely in the triathlon community. As well as races and events, we want to support all brands, sponsors, partners and media outlets to fully consider female athletes in all their decisions to enable women to have equal enjoyment of the swim, cycle, run experience.

84%

of triathletes would be more likely to sign up for an event that commits to inclusion

With these guidelines, we also want provide a framework for athletes for what they should expect from a race, and empower them to suggest positive changes and raise concerns.

It is important to note that all respondents had completed at least one triathlon. There are many more women, of course, who swim, cycle and run yet have not participated in a triathlon event, and further work is needed to understand how to support them to cross their first finish line.

By recognising diversity in female athletes, we hope the triathlon community can also actively support greater participation from all underrepresented groups, including people of colour and those from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

I'd like to thank Women in Tri UK, for partnering with us on this research; Juliette Westbrook for her data analysis support; British Triathlon and all triathlon communities, clubs, groups and athletes who circulated the survey; and everyone who took the time to respond in such detail and share your personal experiences.



Sophie Power
Founder, SheRACES

SheRACES 



We rely on funding support to carry out our important research and advocacy. Please consider supporting us with a donation [here](#), find out more about what we do and how to help on our [website](#), or contact us about partnerships via hello@sheraces.com.

From our partner, Women in Tri UK

Women in Tri UK is on a mission to bring more women to the start line of triathlons by identifying and removing barriers. Our community is very diverse, with nearly 300 women as of 2024. Impressively, 35% of our participants come from ethnic minority backgrounds – significantly higher than the average for the sport. Additionally, 16% of our athletes live with a disability, reflecting our commitment to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for all. Since 2022, we have supported hundreds of women in accessing swim, bike, run and triathlon opportunities through our various programs.

Since inception, Women in Tri UK has been advocating with race directors on ways to make their events more inclusive. We want women in our community – and everywhere in the world – to experience the joy of this incredible sport. These guidelines are just the beginning, and a strong commitment to equal participation in the sport.

This triathlon survey to female triathletes captures the voices, challenges and triumphs of nearly 1,000 women who share a passion for the sport. Their insights identify opportunities for positive change. Many shared detailed experiences in the sport, the barriers they face and how we can make triathlon better. We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who took the time to contribute. Your voices have made it possible to establish SheRACES guidelines specifically for triathlon.

Together, we can shape a future where every woman feels welcomed, supported and empowered to pursue all her triathlon dreams.



Bianca Fernandez-Clark
Chair, Women in Tri UK





Who

answered

the survey

Who answered the survey

This survey gathered insights from over 900 respondents, providing a broad range of perspectives from female athletes. It was distributed via SheRACES (@she.races) and Women in Tri UK (@womenintriuk) social media channels, and widely shared across numerous accounts and newsletters, including those from British Triathlon. Active outreach efforts were made to engage members of underrepresented groups, including Muslim women and women of colour, ensuring diverse participation.

While the responses still represent a minority overall, with 10% identifying as non-white, this higher representation of ethnic diversity in our sample is a significant step forward. As part of this research, we also spoke to community leaders from minority groups to ensure their needs were understood and included in the guidelines.

The survey was specifically focused on event experience, so all respondents had completed at least one triathlon. While this data provides valuable insights, further research is needed to explore the experiences of women who are active in swimming, cycling, or running, but have not yet participated in a triathlon.

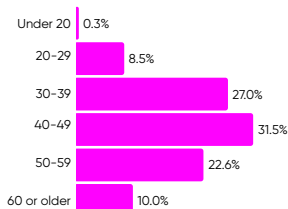


Photo: Women in Tri UK

Demographics and experience

Age distribution

The largest groups of respondents were aged 30-39 (27.1%) and 40-49 (31.6%)



Geographical distribution

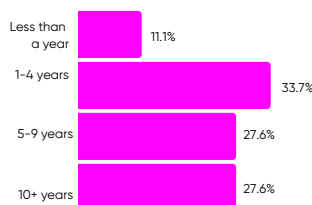
A majority, **76.6%**, were from the UK and Northern Ireland

Other significant regions included North America (13%) and Europe (4.5%).



Triathlon experience

33.6% of participants had been involved in triathlon for 1-4 years



Club membership

66.6% of respondents were members of a triathlon club or community

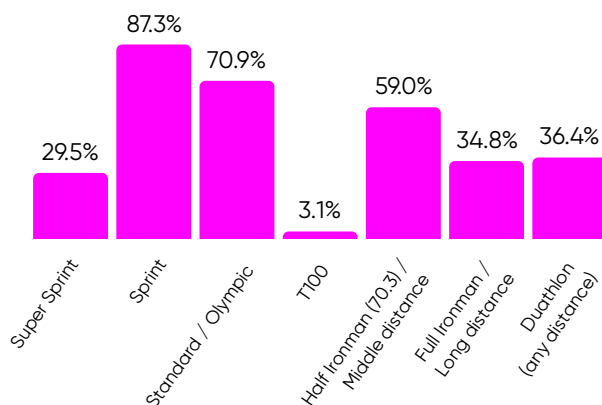


Event experience and abilities

The respondents covered a broad range of triathlon distances.

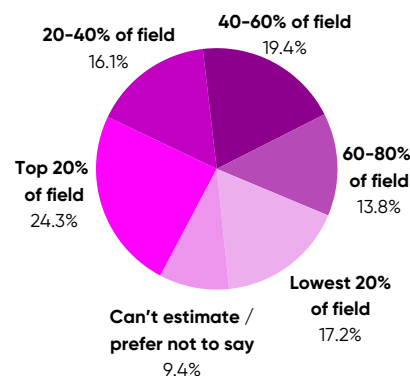
The vast majority (87%) had completed a Sprint distance, while 35% had taken part in an Ironman/full distance, and 59% had completed a 70.3/middle distance triathlon. Additionally, 36% had participated in a duathlon.

This wide range of event experience offers valuable insights into the diverse levels of participation in the sport.



A balanced range of abilities was also represented in the survey.

We asked participants to estimate their overall position in the field, not just among female participants, as this often skews the data in races where women are a minority. This approach resulted in a diverse mix of athletes, offering a comprehensive view of experiences across various skill levels.



Analysis approach

In our analysis, we broke down the data to explore how barriers and challenges differed based on experience, ability and other factors, providing a nuanced understanding of the issues female athletes face in triathlon.



Key findings

Barriers to entering events

A significant 87% of respondents reported being deterred from entering at least one event, despite having previous triathlon experience, due to a range of factors.

Cost

Cost remains a major barrier, affecting 67% of participants.

It's not only the race entry fees, but also the additional expenses of travel, accommodation and equipment, which have all increased post-pandemic. The financial burden deters many from committing to events.



"Start times (very early Sunday mornings) add the cost of overnight stays to a very expensive sport."

Lack of logistical information

23% of participants noted a lack of clear logistical information as a deterrent.

Key concerns include unclear start times, parking, public transport options and insufficient details on course support like aid stations and toilets. This lack of clarity particularly affects those with childcare responsibilities or without access to a car.

- *"I prefer to enter races which have a lot of upfront information so that I can understand the course, logistics, timings and the on-course support. I'm less likely to enter an event if I think I may get stranded on course somewhere if I get into difficulty, or not clear where marshals are, or can't easily plan arrival at event and start logistics."*

- *"There have been cases where there have been no toilets for long distances (over 50km). Had the locations been known, a toilet stop could have been made before the large gap, making the whole race much more pleasant."*

- *"Not knowing when the registration time is can hamper an ability to get to the event especially if childcare is involved. Same goes for the wave timings. If you're a faster swimmer, you have to wait until the end, which for childcare reasons means it's too long."*

Race cutoffs

19% of respondents did not enter a race as they had concerns about meeting cutoff times, with particular emphasis on meeting the swim cutoffs.

Of this 19%, those with less triathlon experience (less than a year) were the most put off by the overall cutoff times (33.7%), compared to the rest of the respondents (13.4-22%). Those athletes who typically finish in the last 40% of an event worry more about cutoff times. In particular, those who finish in the bottom 60-80% worry quite a bit more (30.7%) and those in the last 20% of the field were the most put off entering (52%). By contrast, only 0.5% of those who typically finish in the top 20% of the field have been put off entering by a race's cutoff times.

Some athletes, particularly older participants, also voiced frustrations with the perceived tightness of cutoff times in events like World Triathlon (previously International Triathlon Union) and European Triathlon Union races, feeling these time limits were unrealistic for older competitors.



"[I worry] that aid stations will be cleaned up BEFORE the cutoff time, making aid unavailable to slower competitors."

Concerns over on-course support

The lack of adequate on-course support expected deterred 17% of respondents.

Issues such as insufficient mechanical assistance, inadequate nutrition stations and the absence of facilities for postpartum athletes, highlighted gaps in race organisation.

"When I raced postpartum, I was still feeding so I needed to pump before the race. I could not find a suitable place, so had to walk back to my car and I almost missed my wave start."



Photo: Women in Tri UK

"As a back of the packer, I am concerned I will be out on the course by myself. I like smaller races, but try to find events with large numbers or multiple races occurring at the same time."

"Having to do my own bike maintenance [would put me off]. I just physically can't get the tyres off if I have a puncture (especially if hands are cold)."

Imagery and marketing

10% of respondents said that they had been actively put off entering a triathlon event due to the imagery and marketing around the race.

Our previous SheRACES research, surveying almost 2,000 female athletes, found that almost 19% of respondents were actively put off entering races due to the imagery and marketing language used, which can come across as male-orientated, aggressive or overly competitive. 54% wanted to see more inclusive imagery used by races.

"The majority of marketing images show only men. It is rare to see a woman on big branded races, such as IRONMAN."



"Generally being intimidated by the vibe – anything that seems too hardcore or aggressive just puts me off. I only enter things that appear inclusive in terms of ability and support."

"Most websites use images of slim men and women, not synonymous with the range of people taking part."

Other concerns

The feedback from participants under the 'Other' category (18%) highlights several concerns, primarily related to course design, safety and facilities.

Safety and course design

A key theme in participant feedback revolves around the design of the race courses, particularly bike courses featuring tight turns, narrow roads and busy traffic. This has led to safety concerns from cyclists over how visible they are to other road users, ie car drivers, especially in events where roads are not closed. The presence of potholes on bike routes was also mentioned, which adds to the anxiety of navigating the course safely. There were specific concerns about the risk of being knocked off the bike by faster competitors, particularly in draft-legal sprints, as well as the potential crowding on multi-loop courses, which could create additional hazards.

Cultural and religious challenges

Respondents from Muslim backgrounds highlighted significant barriers to participation, particularly around the lack of facilities for modest changing from swim to bike, and requirements like race tattoos on bare arms. These concerns reflect the importance of providing inclusive environments that accommodate religious and cultural needs to ensure triathlon truly welcomes everyone.

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“I would be nervous (or potentially put off) where there is a bike course with tight turns and narrow roads. Men seem to have more confidence to whizz past with speed into corners or narrow roads, which can be very intimidating and scary.”

“As a hijab-wearer, I am unsure if there will be a modest changing area for me to use to transition between swimwear and full coverage cycling/running clothes. Also whether I will face any pushback over needing to wear modest swimwear (e.g. if wetsuits are compulsory, I will need to wear loose board shorts as well to ensure my body shape is not completely exposed).”

”

Women who have not faced barriers

While we focus on those women who have faced barriers to participation in triathlons, to help raise participation rates, it's also important to note that 12.4% of athletes had not been actively deterred from entering an event, with 31% deterred only by cost.

However, only 3% of athletes reported neither being deterred from entering a race, or experiencing inequitable provision at an event itself. We want these women to continue to have good triathlon experiences, and changes made to events to be more inclusive should not come at the expense of women already competing who are happy with the way that triathlons are currently set up.

Triathlons should be looking to make improvements to events that support all women, while acknowledging that not all women will seek to make use of the changes. This is about enabling all women to participate in races and attracting more athletes to the sport who have previously been discouraged.

We wanted to acknowledge all voices within triathlon when making our recommendations.



Race experiences

Given that this survey was targeted at women who had raced in at least one triathlon event, we wanted to find out more about their specific race experiences.

Key issues

Respondents were asked if they had experienced specific issues at events they had taken part in, with only 8.8% of all those surveyed not experiencing any of the key issues highlighted.

Almost 70% of respondents had received unisex-only t-shirts, which are not designed for the female body, at an event, while 19% had experienced being provided with a too-small swim hat. Poor facilities also scored highly, including insufficient toilet provision (56.9%) and a lack of private changing facilities (41.6%). Gender disparity was also noted, with 24.1% saying they'd experienced unequal coverage of the men's and women's competition, including before, during or after the event, while 14.3% had attended an event with unequal male and female prizes or awards categories.

Some race issues are more relevant to different demographics. For example, a lack of private changing facilities is of particular importance to those from the Muslim triathlon community; while others responded that they would not think to look for private changing options at an event as they raced in trisuits. When asked if they were comfortable changing clothing in transition areas, 66% said that they were happy to do so, while others would prefer not to, but will do so (22.8%), or would not feel comfortable at all and prefer to have a female changing facility available (11.2%).

Start waves

44% of respondents said that they would, given the choice, prefer a female only start wave. 13% were happy with mixed starts, while 1.3% would only opt for an event with a female only start.

The remaining 42% had no preference, however this did not mean that they hadn't had negative race experiences during the start of the event. Respondents shared bad experiences on a mixed swim start, with many being injured, harassed or unable to swim properly in their race. Another key issue around start waves is in the timing. In cases where faster men are started off after slower women, women have experienced physical and verbal harassment when being overtaken during the event at all stages.

"Mixed swim mass starts put me off entering. No matter how I position myself in the water, every time I am battered by men swimming over me, kicking me and pushing me. I'm a small female and it's dangerous."



Photo: Tampa Bay BABES Triathlon

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“Mixed mass start races are awkward as men push to the front. Even though I deserve to be on the front, I now seed myself further back as I’ve been swam over by the men who start too fast and come out the water behind me. I’ve ended up getting dunked really badly in this situation four times in my early career, so I try to pick races where I can control how I swim.”

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Pregnancy deferrals

SheRACES' roots lie in pregnancy deferral policies, advocating for a minimum two-year deferral period, to ensure that women are able to return to racing at a time that's right for them, their baby and their body.

There is still a long way to go, backed up by the results of this triathlon survey. Of all women who became pregnant during training for a triathlon event in our survey, a huge 79% were not able to defer at least one existing race entry. The impact of this is massive. Not only does it have financial implications, but it also robs them of the opportunity to race in flagship events that they have worked hard to qualify for.

- *"I have put off getting pregnant while trying to gain entry to Norseman. We have been trying and struggling for a baby for years, and also have been trying to get a place in Norseman for years – it's very stressful not knowing what to do/not being able to plan/time things and knowing that if I do get an entry and manage to conceive, I will then have to sacrifice a place in a race I have waited years to get a place in due to their being no [deferral] process."*

- *"A friend was able to defer her space easily for Celtman Solo 5. However, this was not advertised... so she felt like she had to [send] an email explaining why she should be deferred. In reality, they responded quickly and didn't force her to choose which date to defer to. [Had she] known the policy was to allow deferrals, it would have removed the effort and stress."*

“

“Not only have I lost entries, but I've not entered / not raced for seasons because of trying to get pregnant and the risk of then not being able to participate and getting no refund (an extra stab in the heart when trying for five years, countless rounds of IVF and the one thing that keeps you sane you can't enter just in case). I know so many that have been in a similar position.”

”

Physical and verbal harassment

Almost a third of respondents (28%) have experienced some form of physical or verbal harassment at a race. Most of the harassment experienced was down to individual athlete behaviour and, in the vast majority of cases, male behaviour.

It's important to raise awareness of the scale of the problem, so race organisers can put in place key systems and initiatives to protect female athletes – something that we've built into our race guidelines – as well as being clear on acceptable behaviour at events, with enforced penalties for those who break the code of conduct. Race organisers need to show that they are proactive at dealing with complaints about other athletes – which is not always the case judging by many of the comments in our survey. It's also a wider issue, addressing the culture within racing that breeds unnecessary aggression.

Verbal harassment experienced by respondents in our survey included being shouted at to get out of the way, comments about their body, clothing or ability, questioning their right to be at the event, and volunteers and race organisers discussing packing down aid stations and commenting on their ability to finish or being 'too slow' to receive aid.



"An official told me as I started the run that I wouldn't make the cutoff and said I was the last person on the course – I wasn't."

Photo: Women in Tri UK

- *"I race in a bathing suit (as many college-aged girls do). It's never the people my own age that make comments; it's always older men while I'm out on the race course. I'm focused on racing well and they're focused on my body. It's frustrating."*

- *"I find that it is routine that men will shout on the bike and expect me to cede the racing line to them – even if I am in front and have earned the right to hold the racing line. It can be exceedingly loud and intimidating, and followed with expletives and insults if I do not cede the line to them."*

Physical harassment was reported to have been experienced at all stages of the race, with female athletes commenting on being elbowed out of the way or swum over during the swim stage; being blocked or dangerously overtaken on the bike leg; or running in unnecessarily close proximity during the run. One respondent even described being spat at during a run by a male competitor.



"Happens all the time on the bike leg. It is my strongest discipline and men rarely take it well when getting passed by a woman. So blocking, unsafe overtaking, or not falling back when passed happens literally at every race."

Photo: Women in Tri UK

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"At Challenge Almere 2023, a male athlete deliberately punched me in the side at an aid station to get me to move out of the way for him. I reported this to the race director, but received no reply."

"In every IRONMAN race I do, less than 1% of men passing on the bike signal their pass ("on your left"). More than 90% of women do signal their pass."

*"After racing in a women's only race in Nice, I can see the difference of passing as intended, and passing and having retaliation passing (which is outside the rules of triathlon). Many men will not let me pass them and drop back; they will re-pass, and now *I* am in a drafting zone unless I really burn a match and speed up."*

”

Physical harassment and violence can have very serious consequences, especially given the relative size and strength of a male-bodied athlete and a female-bodied athlete. Many of our respondents have ended up seriously injured or hospitalised as a result of on-course aggression.

- “[I was] hit by a male pushing his bike in an uncontrolled way in T2, resulting in hospital treatment with 16 staples.”

- “[I was] taken out on the bike course by a group of men. Knocked unconscious and taken to hospital. Suffered severe concussion.”



“I had an accident at Warsaw 70.3 IM in the swim, where a huge guy swam over me, pushed me under and managed to kick me badly in the side of the head as I came up, giving me concussion.”

Our survey also revealed unacceptable incidents of sexual harassment, ranging from male nudity to inappropriate behaviour from volunteers on course, such as unwanted touching or hugging.

- “At the IRONMAN 70.3 there was a man completely naked in transition, when the guidelines clearly said this was not allowed and there were dedicated changing areas. I’m not sure if he was disqualified, but while I was in transition I didn’t see any officials approach him and it made me very uncomfortable. I shouldn’t be seeing men’s genitals while racing!”

What constitutes a 'good race'

Our research showed that the best races, as experienced by our respondents, were typically smaller events, which offered more spread-out starts and less crowding on course. Shorter events, where cutoffs were less of a concern, also rated highly. Many respondents also highlighted women's only races, in particular among those in the USA, where single-sex races are more common.

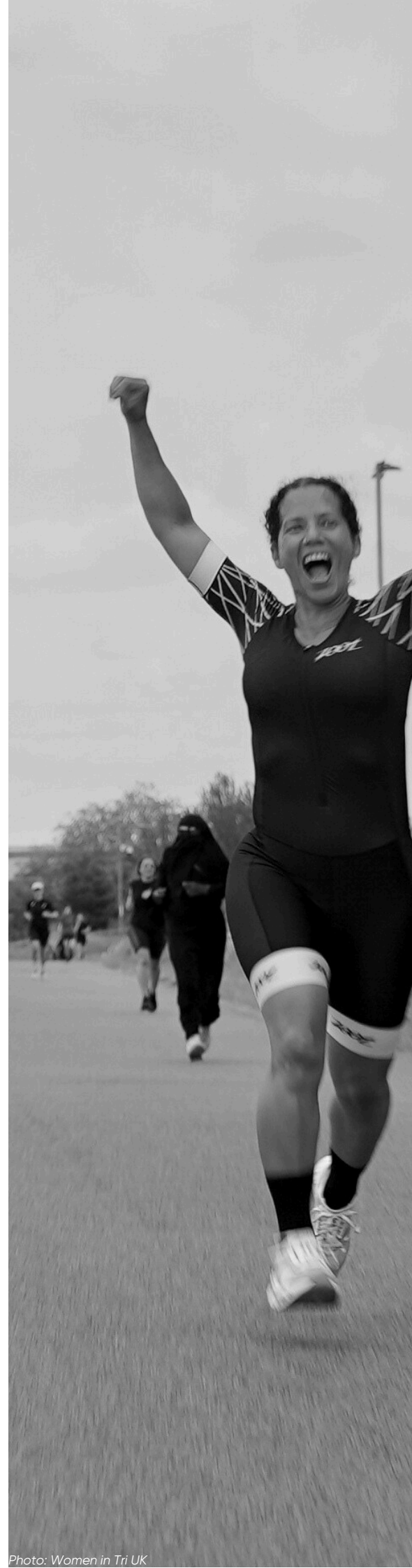
However, there was a recurring sentiment that many races, particularly larger events, are still male-dominated and not particularly female-friendly. Respondents appreciated those events that made some effort towards considering women in their events, such as providing female-only toilets or period products, or ensuring their safety on-course. However, it must be noted that the bar for what constitutes a 'good race' was set quite low due to the current lack of female-focused provisions.

Overall, while there were a few races that stood out for being more inclusive, many participants shared frustration about the lack of attention to women's needs in most events.

- **"Leeds Triathlon** had a women's only swim wave and also gave different coloured hats to newbies, or those who were anxious about the swim. This allowed safety crew on the water to keep a close eye on them."

- **"Cotswold 113** just felt so supportive from the language used in race communications to support on the day. It was easy to take part in with flexible logistics. Then it had the best gender split I've ever had in a 70.3 race, probably owing to the above."

- "I haven't been to one that stands out. They are all male dominated and I feel overwhelmed in the swim. And I am sometimes made to feel like I'm just in the way because I'm bigger and a female and slow. But I'm doing the same distance so have the same right to be there."



- 
- *"I've competed in races all over UK and Europe since 2010, but would struggle to name one. I've stopped racing over recent years as there is too much aggressive behaviour from men and I just don't feel safe any more, especially on the bike section."*
-

- *"**Deva Divas**, female only and truly inclusive no matter your experience or time. A definite leader in showing how support should be provided. They even do training sessions to get participants in the river before the event."*
-

- *"**Harbourman Triathlon** in Wicklow. Provided female-only toilets inside transition, which were supplied with feminine products, and a motorbike for female leader the same as the leading man."*

What women want from a triathlon event

Female triathletes were clear about what they want from their triathlon events to ensure that they feel included and have their needs met, but also so that they can have a fair and equal race experience. This visual explores the key themes that came up when it comes to event-specific experiences.

However, women also wanted more outside of the parameters of an event, such as women's specific kit and equipment, support from their family, time to train properly and more understanding around the sport to demystify it. There also needs to be more exposure to the sport at all ages, particularly among underrepresented groups and age categories.



Photo: Women in Tri UK

Most common themes for creating a good triathlon event

Support & Safety

- On-course support
- Familiarisation with course
- Expectations for athlete behaviour
- Penalties for aggressive riding
- Childcare provisions
- Support for slower finishers
- Bike support
- Visible on-course marshal support
- Safe overtaking
- Clear route description

Representation

- Female representation
- Diverse field of women
- Equal imagery
- Male and female announcers

Logistics

- Realistic cutoff times
- Female-fit T-shirt
- Smaller bibs/numbers
- All race logistics provided accurately and in advance

Facilities

- Private changing facilities
- Female-only toilet provision



Triathlon race guidelines

Triathlon race guidelines

Every triathlon is different; from big World Series events, through highly branded well-known names, to small, local events with a community vibe. But what is the same with all these events, is that women deserve to be on the start line, to have a fair, equal and safe experience during the race, and to feel that their performance is valued before, during and after.

We want to empower more women to enter the world of triathlon racing, but more than that, we want to see more women who already compete in triathlon to challenge themselves to progress to more difficult events, to longer distances and in more varied environments while feeling welcomed and supported to do so.

We've put together a set of detailed guidelines for race directors at triathlon events to help support all female athletes, based on our research and the contributions of hundreds of female athletes, as well as key industry figures. Not all guidelines will be relevant to all events; small Super Sprint triathlons will be very different to a mountainous long-distance event. Many races won't be able to put in place everything that we suggest, depending on their resources, size of organisation and scale of event, but we want to raise awareness of what's possible and the difference that even the smallest of changes can make to women's participation rates.

However, most of our guidance will apply for all races, such as the diversity in marketing images and equal race coverage. And many of our guidelines apply to all participants; men also benefit from on-course support, support for novice athletes and those in the back end of the race, and cultural and religious considerations like prayer spaces for longer races.

There are other considerations that triathlons can also make to increase female, as well as overall, participation. For example, given that cost is clearly a sizeable barrier to many, having a generous, interest-free payment plan can help with affordability, as can having a discounted rate for groups and clubs to enter together. Another option could be to have basic entry options without medals, t-shirts etc, at a lower price, which benefits the pockets of athletes as well as the environment.

Events could also offer affordable and safe equipment hire options, so that kit and equipment need not be a barrier towards participation. The hard work of Women in Tri UK tackles some of these issues, encouraging women into the sport in the first place – see the Afterword of this report for more.

At SheRACES, our concern is that when women go on to decide to enter an triathlon, they have an experience that makes them feel valued and safe. We already have our existing race guidelines, which outline the minimum requirements for races to be considered inclusive to women. It comes down to just **8 key commitments** that are already in effect in many events globally through our efforts to great success, plus a commitment to review these annually to ensure continued compliance. We also have elite race guidelines for those events where there is an elite women's field.

Races that consistently meet our requirements and show true inclusivity towards women in their sport can apply to become SheRACES accredited and be listed on our website. Women already use our accredited races database to select events that they know they will be welcome at, increasing entries and participation. We provide more information on SheRACES accreditation at the end of this report.

These guidelines build on the SheRACES race guidelines with triathlon-specific advice and best practice, covering the unique nature of multi-discipline events.

1. Get more women on the start line

Overall, female participation at triathlons is in the region of 25-40% globally, but this number decreases as the distances involved increase. The appetite to race longer events is there – women want to sign up to more challenging races, but they need the confidence to do so.

This confidence is bred from the very beginning, with diverse marketing to show women that they belong and clear logistical information so that they can plan ahead and make arrangements. There should also be guidance around important race details, such as the course, expectations and facilities.



Diverse imagery

Women need to be able to imagine themselves on the start line. This begins with diverse imagery, showing that women are welcome and encouraged to join in. Marketing imagery should include a wide range of athletes, including diversity in sex, race, body type, ability and so on. Not all races have access to diverse imagery because they do not yet have diversity in participation. In these cases, consider developing marketing and outreach initiatives to actively promote triathlon events in underrepresented communities.

Collaborate with local organisations to engage women of colour and other minorities. This will increase diversity on the start line and in race photography, social media content and ambassadors that can then be used going forwards to further widen participation.

Clear commitment to inclusivity

If you are inclusive to women, make it clear from the outset. Women shouldn't have to hunt down information that proves they are welcome. Our research shows that 84% of triathletes would be more likely to sign up for an event that committed to equitable and inclusive treatment of women. Our accredited races usually have a separate SheRACES page on their website outlining their commitment to these guidelines; otherwise, a page dedicated to inclusion that is visible on the website is necessary.

Ensure that things like pregnancy deferrals are easy to find, and actively encourage women to get in touch with any questions or requests for specific requirements, for example a breastfeeding area, breast pump storage or a prayer space. Offering an equal experience for all athletes benefits everyone, men and women.

Planning – around the race

Triathlons typically have more planning than a single-discipline race. There is more equipment to consider, longer timescales to plan around and travel plans to attend bigger events. Ensure that information is clearly available to enable women to feel comfortable outside of the race environment.

This includes things like the logistics of how to get to the event, considerations around extra costs – for example, very early starts can mean factoring in a hotel stay – and the timings of public transport, which may not always be available at the right times.

Minimise additional costs to athletes where possible, for example by offering on-the-day racking (as opposed to needing to rack the day before), or offering shuttle services from easy-to-reach locations.



"More info on the website is helpful, because we often have to plan logistics in advance. Eg, what are options for kids? Nursing? Dietary restrictions? Parking? Is there mobile (cell) service at the venue? Are roads closed? When will awards start/end, so we know how long a day it will be?"

Photo: Women in Tri UK

Race logistics

Ensure that key race logistics are easy to find and comprehensive. This includes course maps with descriptions, cutoff times with what pace is needed for each section, what waves are available, the likely water temperature, what facilities are available, the mechanics of the event, what support is available and answers to common questions about 'what happens if...?'. Ensure that those coming to the event for the first time, or expect to be towards the back of the pack, feel supported and comfortable to enter. Consider offering free training plans or signposts in the direction of them; bear in mind that women often have more time constraints due to caring responsibilities and training plans offered should be realistically achievable.

- *"If I feel like [the event] is not interested in making sure that mid- and back-of-pack folks are also valued/supported, then for longer races (full especially) I'm not confident going in."*

Generous cutoffs

Cutoffs are a genuine concern for many would-be and experienced triathletes, and are a barrier to participation. While cutoffs are important for the safety of all participants and the logistics for race organisers, unnecessarily strict cutoffs can penalise women, who are, overall, slower than men. Ensure that cutoffs for all participants, especially those with later start times, are as long as feasibly possible and also ensure that women do not have shorter cutoffs than men based on their start waves. Generous cutoffs also encourage more participants in general, across the board, by enabling slower athletes to feel comfortable entering the race.

Fair pregnancy deferral policies

Women should not be penalised for having a baby, and should feel comfortable to return to racing when it's right for them. The lack of clear and easy-to-find deferral options can prevent women from entering an event in the first place, but it can also force women to race before they are ready if they don't want to have to give up a hard-earned race place. It's not just a financial decision when it comes to returning to racing too soon, but an emotional one too. Women should have clear options that enable them to make decisions based on their own body and the time it needs to recover. We advocate for a deferral policy of a minimum of two years, or a refund, ensuring women can return to racing when they're ready.

- *"I did look at the policy and thought it would be unlikely I would get a refund either. I decided to race the event 8 weeks pregnant."*

- *"I would love to sign up for 70.3 Sunshine Coast & Busselton, but when asking about a refund due to pregnancy I have had no response."*

- *"The cancellation terms did not include pregnancy or baby loss. I am trying for a family and many of the expensive races do not give refunds for these reasons. I can't know months in advance if I can compete."*

2. Give women a better experience

In order to give the best triathlon experience possible for all, it's important to look at events from a female perspective.

Toilets and changing facilities

Women have different needs to men. It's clear from our research that having female-specific toilets and changing facilities is incredibly important to women who want to take part in events – even those who have not faced barriers. There should be appropriate toilet facilities at the start and finish, and at relevant points on course for longer events.

Period products should be easily available in toilets and on aid stations – women can't always know when they're going to need these products, and carrying them themselves is a hindrance to their race. Single-sex changing facilities enable women to feel more comfortable at the event, and also consider whether there is a need for private changing areas in transition for those with cultural requirements around public changing. All these facilities should be sufficient for the race field and well marked, as well as clearly communicated in advance.

"Race falls when I'm due my period and there will be no toilets in transition, so if I come out of the swim feeling like I need to change my tampon... tough! I'm stuck like that for the bike and run."

Consider flexibility in rules for cultural needs too, such as allowing swim caps to stay on until within a changing area for those who need to keep their hair covered or not requiring race tattoos on bare arms where skin cannot be exposed, and ensure that all volunteers and marshals in the areas are aware of this so that they don't cause unnecessary distress to participants.

Equal fit kit and race accessories

Unisex fit t-shirts and kit are not unisex. They are male fit, and this doesn't always fit a woman's body. If you are going to provide t-shirts at all, and we always encourage races to offer an opt-out for sustainability, then they should be offered in unisex and female fit, ensuring that these are ordered in advance so all athletes receive the correct size.

If t-shirts are provided, ensure that a size guide is provided upon entry so women can make the right selection. Everything else provided in goody bags at the finish line should also be equal and appropriate for both sexes. Swim caps should be offered in different sizes to accommodate all hair types, and it should be clear that these are available and how to change sizes.

Consider the size of race bibs too; overly large numbers can be uncomfortable to race in. SheRACES' research shows that the largest recommended bib size is 21cm (length) by 15cm (height).



Photo: Women in Tri UK



Photo: © Maverick / Jake Baggaley

Consider race start timings

Where possible, offer both a mass start and female-only waves, as well as self-seeding. Women (and men) who are more comfortable in a mass start will choose this one, and participants can self-seed based on their own swim ability, or join a female-only start wave, which can also be self-seeded.

Consider also the timings of waves and when different waves will meet in the water, as this can have a huge impact on a woman's ability to race. For example, faster men being set off after slower or older women, which can result in those men pushing through or intimidating women; and faster women starting off after the slower or older men, making it harder for them to maintain their race pace and space, comprising their right to a fair race .

Also consider the size of each wave; a rolling start may be more appropriate. Ensure that there is visibility on parts of the course where more novice athletes may need more support or feel less comfortable. Think about the experience of all athletes, including those at the back of the pack who deserve equal support.

"Races need to remember the last 20% are still racing too! We aren't just mobile obstacles. Packing up around us is heartbreaking!"

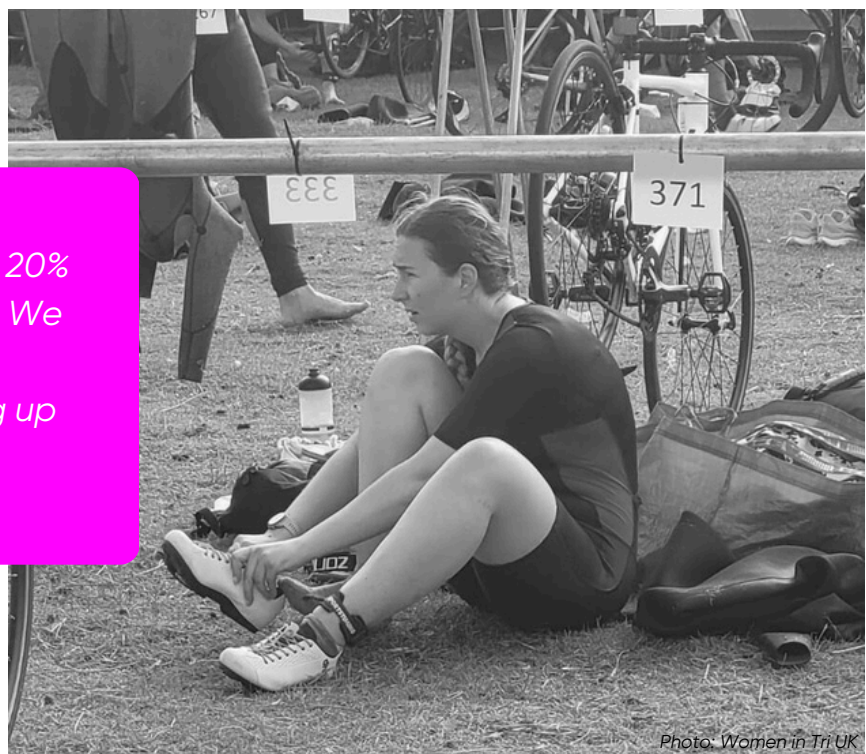


Photo: Women in Tri UK

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“Started ALL men first and then let all women go two minutes later. The faster females didn’t have a chance trying to get around the beginner slower males in the water. Put females at a big disadvantage.”

“Timing of setting off women’s waves. After older men’s age groups we are held up and the swim/bike is congested, forcing us to do lots of overtaking. But equally starting further ahead we don’t want lots of male powerhouses chasing us down. I would prefer seeded start waves at appropriate times within the men’s field. Or a completely different time – an hour separate at least to allow a wider spread of athletes and everyone to perform their best.”

”

Set expectations around behaviour and safeguarding

Our research shows that harassment at events is a common issue for female triathletes. While this is not down to the events themselves, race organisers can impact how other athletes behave and set expectations around conduct, as well as put strict safeguarding protocols in place.

This includes clear policies outlining expected behaviour, as well as penalties for those who exhibit poor behaviour – which must be followed through on. Codes of conduct should be obvious and accessible to all competitors on the race website, along with any repercussions, and not hidden away in terms and conditions. Consider making all athletes acknowledge and agree to a code of conduct regarding expected behaviour as a condition of entry to an event. Educate all volunteers and marshals on conduct and behaviour, as well as providing training on safeguarding.

Give women a clearly communicated way to contact race support with concerns around the behaviour of other athletes, and encourage women to speak out about bad experiences so that they can be addressed.

Also, encourage male competitors to support female participants and call out poor behaviour when they see it. Provide guidance to male athletes about how their behaviour on course can impact others, as they may not be aware of how their actions can affect female participants.

This can include things like assumptions that a female competitor is less capable, making inappropriate or offensive comments or jokes, aggressive behaviour, running or cycling too close to a female participant, comments around a woman's body, ability or pace, uninvited touching or hugging and giving unwanted attention to another competitor.

Be a good example of the behaviour and conduct you expect by exhibiting it as a race organiser at all times. This means ensuring inclusive language in all race communications and during race briefings (remembering that both men and women are present, and avoiding stereotypical gender-based assumptions), training volunteers to spot poor conduct, and being visible during the event to address any problems that crop up on course.

- *"At IM Cascais, the whole of the athlete briefing assumed that all competitors were male: 'don't sleep with your wife, sleep with your chip', 'you won't be able to go to the IM merchandise store during the race, but give your wife your credit card and send her' and 'follow the fellow in front'."*

- *"Have strict rules (and repercussions) about the way participants communicate to each other."*

- *"Educating male athletes on how intimidating they can be, especially on the bike."*

3. Equally value our race

Remember that in every event, there are two separate competitions – the women's and the men's. We just race together. Women deserve to have their race recognised and valued, especially in triathlons where there's not the distinct split on the start line that we might otherwise see in other single-discipline events, for example.

Attract elite female athletes equally

If there is funding available for male competitors (including things like free race entries, funded accommodation and travel, participation fees for elite athletes, etc), make sure that there is an equal pot for women. Ensure that this is communicated clearly, and actively seek elite competitors to take part to expand the depth of the field.



Give us room to race

Ensure that all participants have space on the start line with clear visibility – this enables us to watch the female competition as easily as the men's. With badly timed starts or mixed waves, the women's competition can get caught up within the men's, making it hard to differentiate or see how the race is progressing. Competitive female athletes vying for a podium position should not be held up by the slower end of the men's competition. Enable all women to have the chance to perform at their best. Having women visible also means more imagery of the female competition available for the media and race coverage, further confirming that women are welcome and respected.

- *"I have been put off several races as they pack too many competitors in and it becomes drafting – this is terrible as a competitive female as other females often draft men either by design or because they can't see a way out."*

- *"In mixed Open & Age Group qualifying races, they often put the women qualifiers after all the men, including Open categories. However, many of the women, even my AG, are faster than a lot of the men in open waves. This means we get held up. It's unfair, shows a bias against women and a thinking that all men are faster than all women."*

- *"Providing an elite wave allowing women competing for front-of-pack placement to have open space to race without interference from middle/back-of-pack men."*

Equal race coverage

Any discussion of the race – before, during or after – should include equal reference to the women's field and result as the men's. This includes race previews, highlighting equal male and female competitors, as well as tracking and commentary during the event. Ensure that results posted online are split so that the women's results are separated out from the men's/open classification.

This makes it easy to see the female podium, rather than it being lost within the overall. Apply equal coverage to all social media posts, interviews and analysis.

Equal celebrations and prizes

Where prize money or other rewards are offered, it should be equal for men and women, with the same size podium and same number of age group categories. Awards should also be of equal value and suitability, and post-race celebrations should be equal for men and women.



"No recognition of age group podium winners. Being older, it is unlikely for a 50+ year old to win an event outright – and only outright winners get recognition, which means only the younger women get recognition. Why?"

»» **Women's
only races**

Women's only races

Women's only events are available in triathlon, but there are not enough of them. There are more in the USA, but only a handful in the UK. We have done in-depth research into the need for women's only events (which will be published in early 2025). Early analysis of the results show that for those women who have competed in a women's only event of any discipline, the fact that it was women only was important for over 80% of respondents, with almost 23% saying that they would not have entered otherwise. Among all respondents, whether they had previously done a women's only race or not, a huge 87% said that they would be interested in entering a women's only race in the future.

In this triathlon survey, we received many comments from women who had enjoyed women's only triathlon events, or would like to enter them in the future. Part of this stems from feeling overwhelmed in a mixed race or being put off by overly competitive male participants.

While many triathletes, in particular experienced athletes, are happy with mixed races, we know that offering women's only events offers a gateway into the sport for those who would otherwise not compete at all.

"I have only done one triathlon, but would not enter a mixed race; too competitive and would find it overwhelming."



Photo: Women in Tri UK


Those who are beginners, for example, seeking an inclusive and understanding first race experience; those who have specific religious backgrounds and are not able to compete in a mixed event; and those who are simply not comfortable around male competitors for any reason at all.

Women's only events give women confidence to try something new, enable them to race more frequently, and build the confidence to enter longer and more challenging events. It can also make it easier to build in our race guidelines; when an event is built around women, for women, it tends to be naturally inclusive.

Having women-only waves at triathlon events is a great step forward, but having women's only events could greatly increase participation levels and see more women stepping up to the start line.

"I would like to see more women's only events. I think it provides a friendlier environment especially for those just starting out in the sport. In my experience racing alongside men is much more serious/intimidating than racing at the women's event I do every year, and so I think it's a nice onramp for new people. Not to mention a better experience for seasoned triathletes!"





"Considering women athletes at the centre when hosting triathlons and endurance events is a win for everyone involved. It creates a space where women can show up on race day as their authentic selves – fully and without reservation. As the race director of the all-women's Tampa Bay BABES Triathlon in Florida, I've witnessed the profound impact of this, from the athlete breaking the tape to the final finisher crossing the line."

Coral Owen

Head Coach & Founder, Team BABE Athletics
Race Director, Tampa Bay BABES Triathlon



SheRACES

accreditation

SheRACES accreditation

Events that commit to inclusivity to women and follow the guidelines outlined in this report, can apply to become SheRACES accredited.

SheRACES accredited events are listed on our website and promoted across our channels, giving women an easy way to find and enter races that they know will be accommodating to their needs and truly inclusive. It saves women hours of research and looking through websites to find the information they need to be comfortable to enter an event.

In order to meet our criteria, races only need to commit to 8 key areas, plus an additional step to recommit on an annual basis.

Any race can do this, from the biggest to the smallest. We believe that these key commitments are things that all races should be doing as standard – this isn't above and beyond; everything we outline should be the bare minimum that events commit to to ensure greater female participation.



Photo: Tampa Bay BABES Triathlon

Our 8 key commitments

- ☐ Show a diversity of athletes in marketing imagery.
- ☐ Ensure all prizes and rewards for women are of at least of equal value to those for men. This includes prize money, number of categories and a choice of female fit or unisex t-shirt.
- ☐ Review female toilet and changing facilities to ensure they are sufficient and well communicated. Having period products available at start and finish lines, and where possible on course.
- ☐ Ensure the women's race is given equal prominence in celebrations, social media posts, interviews and other communications.
- ☐ Allow women who fall pregnant before the race to transfer their place to a future event within 2 years.
- ☐ Communicate and enforce a no-tolerance policy for harassment of any kind (to include participants, all event volunteers and staff).
- ☐ Actively seek feedback from participants after each race and making best efforts to make changes to support them better.
- ☐ Make these commitments easy to find on the event website or in participant information.

Races that opt to become accredited with SheRACES can:

- Use our logo on their website to attract female participants. More and more women are looking to sign up to events that are SheRACES accredited
- Be featured in our Hall of Fame on our website and welcomed on social media
- Signal to potential sponsors about the social responsibility of your race
- Ask us for advice and guidance on how to encourage more women to enter your races
- Access more research and insight data
- Receive regular email updates, plus the option of group calls to discuss the guidance

We understand that every race is different, and some of our recommendations in our Race Guidelines may not apply to all. What we're looking for is an active commitment to look at your event through a female lens and take feedback from participants.

We want to know you're encouraging women to the start line, taking account of the female experience before, during and after the race, and valuing the female competition equally.

There is a small annual fee to be accredited, based on the size of race. This goes directly to supporting the work that SheRACES does, enabling us to drive change across the industry and around the world, empowering more women to enter races and have a good experience when they compete.

Full details can be found on our website.



Afterword

Afterword

A final word from Women in Tri UK and their work on encouraging women to sign up for a triathlon.

In just two years, Women in Tri UK has supported over 140 women in crossing the finish line of their first-ever triathlon and welcomed nearly 300 women into our community. Of those, 85% have been in the sport for less than three years.

Since our inception in 2022, the Women in Tri UK community has collectively participated in over 1,000 swim, bike, run and triathlon events. Even more rewarding is that 95% of our first-time triathletes go on to complete at least one more event.

Our athletes tell us the most compelling reason for joining the sport is the opportunity to be part of a women-only group offering free and subsidised coaching, webinars, mentoring and a wealth of support tailored to women's needs. We have a 'no question is a silly question' policy and frequently address topics that women might feel hesitant to discuss.

The knowledge shared within our community has helped demystify triathlon and make the sport more accessible to women from all backgrounds.



Photo: Women in Tri UK

Our first-race entry sponsorship program has been a game-changer. Thanks to the support of generous event partners, this initiative has fully covered race entry fees for women facing financial barriers, significantly reducing the steep cost of entering the sport for the first time.

A large majority of our community members choose events where they know they'll be racing alongside other FHT UK women and where event organisers actively work with us to implement female-friendly policies that meet their needs.

Find out more at: www.womenintriuk.org