



BEING OPEN, INCLUSIVE, EQUITABLE, AND DIVERSE:

A Short Guide on Openness for Swiss HEMA Clubs





THE CASE FOR BEING OPEN:

Switzerland is a diverse country, where, according to the Federal Statistical Office, more than a quarter of the people living here are foreign nationals. Some cities, such as Geneva, Basel and Zurich, have large immigrant populations with different ethnic backgrounds and varied beliefs. Even in those towns or cantons that are apparently more ethnically homogeneous, other social differentiations exist (gender, sexual orientation, social status, age or abilities).

Sporting activities and sport clubs are important places for people with different backgrounds and abilities to meet and exchange experience. By encouraging openness towards all members of society, sport clubs are able to develop their participant base and to tap into new ideas. Helping people from diverse backgrounds to learn to co-operate and compete together also helps to build a better society.

However, it is recognised that sport clubs often don't fully reflect the composition of their local communities. Certain groups - women and girls, minority ethnic or religious communities, elders and people with disabilities - tend to be underrepresented in sport, and especially within leadership or instructor positions. While those from the LGBTQ+¹ community or from different ethnic groups often experience harassment or discrimination.²

The Federal Office for Sport has identified the need to improve inclusion, equality and diversity in sport (which it equates with integration). The law on the encouragement of sport mandates the Confederation to encourage behaviour that supports the positive values of sport in society and which opposes the abuses of sport. Its imple-

menting ordinance further provides, under the heading Ethics and Safety, the promotion of social integration by taking integration measures when useful and necessary. Further, it strives to ensure that sport is conducted in a fair, safe and inclusive space, and endeavours to advance several societal goals.³

At Swiss HEMA⁴ we have the desire to promote the appeal of the sport and activities we love into the wider-society. We believe it is beneficial to all involved when HEMA participation is representative of the communities where we are based and where any member of those communities might consider HEMA as an activity suitable for them. Indeed, diversity is vital for the future development of HEMA - some would say a part of its definition - and is closely connected with the need to create an inclusive environment. One where all our participants, instructors, volunteers and member club administrators feel equally valued and able to contribute to their full potential. Put simply, being open to all is the right thing to do.⁵

Swiss HEMA's **Openness Commitment** (see back cover) requires us to project and embody a message of openness and inclusion, by welcoming people from all backgrounds, regardless of ability, gender, sexual orientation, age, origins or ethnicity. We strive to broaden and deepen the diversity of HEMA participation, so that anyone may freely participate in member clubs' training, events and other activities.

However, to do so, across all our activities, we – as a federation, as member clubs and as individuals – need to make conscious efforts to ensure equality, respect for diversity, and support more inclusion. Among other things, growing female participation and developing opportunities for women and girls is needed. As is ensuring a safe and inclusive environment to practice HEMA for both the LGBTQ+ community and ethnic minorities.

This guide, which focusses on promoting openness, is targeted at Swiss HEMA clubs and their leaders, instructors and members. While recognising that all clubs are at different stages in their efforts towards being more open, with few starting from zero, it was developed to help club members to discuss how their clubs can become more inclusive, equitable and diverse.

BENEFITS TO CLUBS:

Being an open and inclusive club, and striving to be more diverse, can be challenging. It takes effort, but, by being positive, and seeing this as part of a longer-term strategy to build and diversify your club into a more successful sporting community, it has many benefits:

- **Membership benefits:** Many HEMA clubs are fairly small; widening your appeal can attract more people to take part and lead to an increased membership. Having access to a wider talent-pool can contribute to and enhance competitiveness and raise performance levels.
- **Organisational benefits:** New members and volunteers will bring new skills, abilities and expertise to your club, which can help to provide innovation and new ways of thinking and working. It means that there will be more practitioners, volunteers and administrators, who can contribute to the running of your club.
- **Community benefits:** Your club can profit from those broader community networks that diversity brings. Being an inclusive club will improve the image and profile of your club, which will also support the positive perception of our sport, challenging external stereotypes and demonstrating that HEMA is a sport that everybody can enjoy.
- **Social benefits:** A positive and richer club environment can develop, through which your members may appreciate and learn from each other's backgrounds and experiences. This contributes to addressing the needs of different local communities and strengthens wider society by building increased understanding.
- **Financial benefits:** As well as the increased income from more membership fees, diversification provides an opportunity for support from local or national funds or sponsorship from companies.⁶

GOING ABOUT IT: BECOMING AN OPEN AND INCLUSIVE CLUB

With this guide we have tried to bring together some simple suggestions for how Swiss HEMA member clubs might look to become more open and inclusive. It draws from and synthesises various resources and guides produced by sporting associations from around the world.⁷ While it covers many issues, it is not exhaustive, and should be viewed more for inspiration than as a step-by-step manual. Still, the various ideas covered here do provide a coherent suggestion of what might be implemented at your club.

PART ONE: OPENNESS LEADERSHIP SET UP

At the start you might want to identify an Openness Champion/Lead/Officer, who can become a spokesperson for inclusion and lead positive change in your club. It might also be worth, depending on the size of your club, to form a small working group to actively drive your club's efforts to become more open. They, along with the leadership/board, can take the openness initiatives ahead and get members engaged in putting ideas forward.

Some people in your club might feel that creating new contacts, approaches and procedures may be too difficult, too expensive or too time consuming. However, the skills you would use to include people from different backgrounds are essentially no different from what you already do. It really means some adjustments in approach and understanding. An open club adapts to the needs of all individuals in its community.

PART TWO: HOW REPRESENTATIVE AND OPEN ARE WE?

You might believe that your club is already open and inclusive. You may say to yourself: "well anyone can come along and join us". But, what others see and perceive is filtered by their own situation and experience. What an able-bodied, young, white, Swiss man feels when they enter a HEMA training session or read a club website can be quite different from a person who perhaps has a disability, or is an elder, is black, an immigrant, or a woman. Realising that prompts us to ask ourselves: "Is our club really inclusive and open?"

It's worth taking a look around the current membership of your club, does it actually reflect your local community? What's the balance between men and women? How wide is the age range of participation? What's the percentage of immigrants or foreigners that are members? Is there a need to grow or balance these in the membership?

To answer these questions, you may wish to conduct further scoping. Such as, finding out about other similar organisations in your area to see what they are doing, or looking for and inviting local community group representatives and/or cantonal sport or cultural services to visit your club to discuss your club's offer and provide feedback. It is important to be willing to learn and be open to listen to both positive and negative feedback about the club's current culture and approach to equality, diversity and inclusion.

To help identify those areas where you might act, try completing this simple check-list. It's worth doing this in a group of current members (including with some recently joined) and making notes on the different opinions or suggestions as you go.

Check-list: How open is our club?

INFORMATION:

- Is it easy to find out about our club?
- Is it easy to join our club?
- Does our club actively advertise to different communities (through our website or other diverse media)?

ENROLMENT:

- Are our leaders/existing members friendly and open to new members?
- Do we have an enrolment process? Does it find out about an individual's backgrounds, needs and fitness? Do we find out how people wish to be addressed?
- Are our leaders/existing members available and willing to help people fill out any membership forms if they have difficulties with language?
- Do we have an induction process for new members?

INCLUSIVITY:

- Is our club truly open to everyone? Does it represent the composition of our wider-community?
- Is everyone treated fairly and equally, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, age or appearance, disabilities, civil status, social background, religion or beliefs, ethnicity or national origins?
- Do we provide participation opportunities for females, different age groups (children, adolescents, elders), those with disabilities or gender diverse people where appropriate?⁸

ACCESSIBILITY:

- Is our club's location accessible?
- Are there clear directions and easy to read signs?
- Do our training/sparring session times correspond with public transport times?
- Are there appropriate facilities available, such as private changing rooms for men and women?

MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT:

- Do existing members freely offer advice and support to one another?
- How are programmes within our club kept flexible enough to cater for people's varying needs?
- How flexible is our equipment policy? Does it assist those who may have financial difficulties?
- Does our club have an anti-harassment or anti-discrimination policy, so that any forms of harassment, discrimination and/or racism can be addressed quickly?
- Are we mindful of the timing of religious observances, which may impact on the ability of some members to attend training sessions, tournaments or other events?

PART THREE: ACTIONS FOR OPENNESS

Once you have assessed where you measure-up against your local community's composition and considered what the openness check-list tells you, then you can start to prioritise where you think you should act first. To deliver on our ambition to be truly open, the Openness & Safeguarding Commission has identified the need for action in five main areas.⁹

- 1. Swiss HEMA looks, feels and is open:** The way people perceive our sport is key to them choosing HEMA against many competing activities and demands on their time. Anyone engaging with it, in any place or across any medium, would feel like it is for people like me.
- 2. Inclusive leadership and governance:** Role-modelling and driving the right behaviours from the top down and setting expectations for those in leadership roles is important. As is making sure that there are the necessary approaches in place, so that being open is at the heart of everything we do.
- 3. People empowered to be inclusive:** Looking to build greater understanding of inclusion and the capability to be inclusive is needed. While, at the same time, striving to create the conditions that enable everyone participating in HEMA to feel confident in sharing their own experiences and to challenge non-inclusive behaviour.
- 4. Targeted interventions for greater diversity:** Promoting specific interventions, that go beyond a focus on inclusion, to drive more rapid changes in diversity where they are most needed.
- 5. Holding ourselves to account:** Having in place approaches to protect the individual rights of HEMA participants who believe they have suffered harassment, prejudice or discrimination. Making sure that we have the information to report openly on our progress and being transparent in order to learn from both where we do well and where we are weaker.

Following these five areas, this guide presents various club activities that can support and provide more openness. Under each area it describes different actions that you might wish to consider. You may, of course, identify your own.

1. So that our club looks, feels and is open.

The impression that a potential new member gets of your club will determine whether they think it is a place for them and whether they want to find out more. So, it is worth reflecting on your club's image, identifying particular aspects which may be perceived as non-inclusive and thinking about how they might be addressed. Consider what is the experience of someone coming to one of your training sessions for the first time.

Also, are you making use of appropriate and inclusive imagery, language and distribution channels, for your club's promotional and information activities? Doing so will help you to give a welcoming and open impression, and will show the importance your club places on openness and inclusion, ultimately demonstrating and underlining your club's culture.

Some things to think about:

- **Accessibility:** Ensure it is easy to find out about your club's activities and where they take place. Make facilities easy to find, through clear signs and an obvious entrance.
- **Information:** Make sure there is sufficient and up-to-date information on your website (the primary entry point for new members). This should have details of contacts (e-mail/phone/address), sessions, enrolment and access. It should be easy to find information on joining and where to go for further information.
- **Contacts:** Have a dedicated person (such as a membership secretary) who is ready to give an active response for membership enquiries (e-mail/phone). A friendly and encouraging response to questions is vitally important to being open.
- **Enrolment process:** Prepare a plan for how you receive new people, to guarantee that all newcomers feel equally welcomed. Have information materials and enrolment details ready for people to take away. Present your openness commitment on those materials.

- **Presentation:** Include in the presentation (posters, adverts, website) of your club, and its activities, your approach towards inclusion and diversity. Promote the different benefits of HEMA – fun, fitness, culture and social – rather than solely an emphasis on sporting competition.
- **Image and messaging:** Develop communications content that uses inclusive imagery and language. Avoid stereotypes, which may make some communities feel excluded, and lean towards a broader mix of images. Perhaps, consider using non-gendered language in club communications and websites.
- **Diverse communications:** Use varied communication channels to target different audiences. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube all offer different ways of sharing content, but crucially serve distinctive audience demographics. Replication of content across different channels is relatively easy. Don't expect members to migrate to different platforms.
- **Reaching out beyond the HEMA community:** Use local media that serve your area or target diverse communities to help promote your club's activities.

2. So that our club has open and inclusive leadership and governance.

As club committees, and their members, determine a club's direction and priorities, it is important that club leaders show that they fully support the club's openness initiatives and plans. They exert a big influence on the decision-making, culture, and values of a club. As such, having an understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion issues in a club's leadership is desirable.

As well as being supportive of openness and inclusion, club leadership should also reflect the diversity of membership within it. For example, a club, having the aim to increase the participation of women and girls, with no female members involved in the club committee, would look incongruous. There is a clear link between increased diversity in a sport and associated role models. Indeed, there are strong indications that having a diverse group of instructors can positively impact on a club's ability to build a more inclusive environment and attract a more diverse membership.

Some ideas to think about:

- **Openness role in the committee:** From amongst your current committee members appoint someone to champion the club's focus on inclusion and diversity.
- **Leadership diversity:** Evaluate the current diversity of your club's committee members. Look to recruit new committee members from different backgrounds. This could include setting-up new positions or ensuring rotation of roles. Some of the practical actions that could you take to increase leadership diversity include:
 - Defining representation quotas is one way used by many sport associations.
 - Recruit more women and under-represented groups onto the committee.
 - Provide a transparent pathway for gaining committee/leadership positions.
- **Club openness statement/commitment:** Developing an openness commitment or club statement is helpful to clearly show your backing for an open, inclusive, equitable and diverse club environment. Ensure that all club members are aware of this commitment or statement.
- **Openness plan or strategy:** Set out a leadership endorsed openness plan, with priority actions, resources and responsibilities. Such a plan, with actions, aims and targets, can help communicate the direction and importance of the activities to others across the club. It also ensures that the committee is accountable for its implementation, which is vital to making change happen. Share this via your website and social media channels.
- **Diversify instructor pool:** Look to develop a diverse mix of male and female instructors/monitors from different backgrounds. Make efforts to encourage and support members from a variety of backgrounds to become instructors/monitors, as well as supporting all instructors/monitors to adopt inclusive practices (see below).

3. So that the people in our club are empowered to be open.

If your club has managed to enhance its diversity, it is obvious that you need to ensure that the experience of new members continues in an as welcoming and inclusive environment as promised. There is no point in people joining and then being let down by the actual practice. This will require, throughout the club at all levels, the development of and support for open attitudes. It means involving and instilling values, norms and practices in the membership that ensures your desired culture of openness.

Some things you might do:

- **Awareness raising:** Using cross-cultural awareness training opportunities or information resources helps committee and club members to better understand inclusivity and diversity issues. Encourage members to reflect on their own beliefs/assumptions and how these might impact on others, as well as practical steps to support openness.
- **Peer support:** Select some club members as role models, ambassadors or inclusion champions.
- **Ask for ideas:** Encourage your club members to propose ideas that promote equality, diversity and inclusion, and encourage them to make a difference (see box).
- **Address bias:** Recognise and address how unconscious bias may affect decisions and day-to-day practices within your club:
 - Through following specialised training programmes.
 - By actively engaging with different groups in the club.
- **Make openness visible:** Support external campaigns and events that promote inclusivity or diversity (Women's Day, anti-homophobia or anti-racism days, noting religious observances). Disseminate your message on them through your club's communications channels. Use positive imagery on posters, adverts or on your website.
- **Adapt training and instruction:** Work out inclusive instruction/training practices to be followed in your club. This means adapting and modifying instruction/training practices and activities to ensure that all participants, regardless of their background or characteristics, have the chance to participate if they wish. The standard skillset of a good instructor, when utilised with an openness mind-set, should allow for the inclusion of all participants.

INDIVIDUAL CLUB MEMBERS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY:

- Providing a welcoming environment and offering support and advice.
- Taking time to develop relationships and befriending new members by being open, honest and ready to ask questions about how they are doing.
- Helping new members learn techniques and training practices.
- Being sensitive to equality and diversity issues, and making a stand against any discrimination or harassment they observe.
- Speaking clearly to non-native speakers, and avoiding slang, speaking with a false accent, or talking loudly and slowly.
- Providing logistical support, by offering help with transport or sharing equipment where possible.

4. So that we offer targeted initiatives for greater equality, diversity and inclusion.

Reaching your club's equality, diversity and inclusion goals will certainly require some thought about how to differentiate your 'club offer'. What you currently do, in terms of trainings or courses, might not be a good fit for all groups or all demographics. You will need to understand whether your club's current activities are relevant to your target communities. Indeed, for disabled people, women and girls, older people, and minority or faith-based communities, it is worth reflecting on their specific needs or on the potential barriers to their participation. Doing some research and speaking with members of those groups can help you.

Some initiatives to consider are:

- **Community outreach:** As a way to introduce new people to HEMA, perhaps try to organise demonstration sessions at local community centres, clubs or faith centres. Find out from your cantonal or commune authorities about cultural events or celebrations that are taking place and offer information about your club, trial sessions and contact details. Flyers and posters can be positioned in places used by your target communities (e.g. speciality shops, colleges, supermarkets and faith centre notice boards).
- **School initiatives:** Look to work with local schools or colleges to develop formal or informal links with your club. Perhaps offer a training session as part of the school sports classes or provide information materials for children to show their parents.
- **Pricing and subsidies:** For many people, especially those on low incomes, the cost of participating in HEMA may be a barrier. Discuss what you can do to make participation more affordable. Expensive equipment might be loaned by your club for example. Different membership options or course rates for children, students, elders, or the unemployed could be set. Perhaps payment in instalments can be introduced alongside full memberships.
- **Women's only groups/events:** Some women may only be comfortable or are only able to access women's only sessions. If this is a barrier for your local community, consider offering women's only groups or events. The same might be offered for marginalised genders, such as Trans, Intersex, gender non-conforming and non-binary participants.
- **Accessible sports facilities and equipment:** Consider how to make reasonable adjustments to allow people with disabilities to become members.¹⁰
- **Contact your cantonal sport or leisure services team:** They may have existing relationships with many of your local community groups and can direct you towards key individuals, organisations and even funding opportunities.

5. So that we hold ourselves to account.

It is important that members, instructors, administrators and others associated with the club show respect and understanding for the welfare of others. Making it clear to members how they should conduct themselves and what is acceptable behaviour is necessary. It will ensure that members act appropriately and in line with the commitment for openness.

A club's committee has an especially important role to play in keeping the club environment open and inclusive. This will likely require an internal mechanism to deal fairly with complaints or mediate in any conflicts. Another aspect to being accountable is to regularly question whether you are actually becoming more diverse over time and reaching your targets.

Some concepts you can put in place:

- **Communicate the Openness Commitment:** Communicating the club's openness commitment clearly to all club members is necessary, otherwise it is not seen. This could be done passively on the club website and other information materials or more actively when members enrol, pay their fees, or in club meetings.
- **Code of conduct:** A club code of conduct should set out the main expectations of behaviour towards all club stakeholders. Such a code of conduct would extend to anyone attending training, tournaments or events of your clubs. It should be signed by all members. Swiss HEMA has developed a code of conduct as an example for our members. It can be found on the Openness & Safeguarding webpages and may be freely adapted.

- **Anti-discrimination/harassment policy:** Think about putting in place an anti-discrimination/harassment policy so that any forms of inequity and/or racism can be addressed quickly. Unaddressed experiences of racism, discrimination or harassment will be a massive deterrent to continued participation.
- **Complaints procedure:** In the unfortunate event that there is a conflict or someone feels harassed or discriminated against, then the club should have a procedure to deal with complaints. The procedure should also include sanctions on those people who are not adhering to the club's code of conduct.
- **Measuring impact:** If you have developed a baseline, against which you developed your openness plan of action, you can use this to assess your progress. Understanding the difference in composition between your current club and the local community should have helped you identify areas where the club is doing well, as well as key opportunities to proactively target new members to grow your club. Reporting this evolution in membership is also important to show your commitment to openness.

These are a lot of suggestions here to take in, so it is important to take a step-by-step approach and set your own priorities. Don't try to do everything at once, but do appreciate all those positives coming from growing and diversifying your club's community. Look around at what others are doing and be creative.

Good luck with your openness endeavours!

DEFINITIONS:

Open Club: Being an Open Club means that regardless of gender, sexual orientation, age or appearance, abilities, civil status, social background, religion or beliefs, ethnicity and/or national origins, your club allows everyone a fair and equal opportunity to participate. It means placing a positive value on differences and individual life experiences. Open clubs understand equality and embrace diversity, they typically have a diverse make-up of members and volunteers that reflect their local communities. Simply, they are welcoming, open, friendly and committed to helping everyone enjoy the benefits of HEMA.

Equality is about creating 'fairness'. Making sure that we are treating people fairly and that everyone has equal opportunity to participate and fulfil their potential. However, it is not about treating everyone the same. Equality means that we recognise and acknowledge that people are different and that those differences require us to meet their needs differently.

Diversity is concerned with representation and valuing individuals for the different perspectives they have to offer. It means recognising, valuing and respecting someone's background, knowledge, skills and experiences, and placing a positive value on differences and individual life experiences.

Inclusion means ensuring that everybody has a voice and a means to participate. It is the act of making all people within a society feel valued and included. Inclusion is the process of removing barriers to participation and learning so that everyone can benefit from the opportunities on offer. Inclusion is about the culture of our clubs and is everyone's responsibility.

NOTES

1 LGBTQ+ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gender and queer or questioning. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity. The term is extending and developing, but Swiss HEMA uses it to represent all of the communities included in the 'LGBTQQIAA' alphabet.

2 Across Europe, 82% of LGBTQ+ people who take part in sport have experienced or witnessed homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in the past twelve months (Outsport Survey, 2019). In Switzerland, according to the Service for Combatting Racism (SCRA, 2021), the number of reported incidents of discrimination has increased in recent years, especially among younger people. The majority of the population (58%) perceives racism as a serious social problem, and almost a third believes that more needs to be done to combat it.

3 Including: supporting equal opportunities to access sport and universal participation in sport and promoting behaviour that instils the positive values of sport in society.

4 Swiss Federation for Historical European Martial Arts.

5 Swiss HEMA's Openness campaign branding uses the slogan **One for All, All for One**.

6 There is a developing trend that many funding partners and commercial partners will only work with clubs that can demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity.

7 The guide was inspired by many resources gathered from a variety of sporting associations. In particular we must give credit to British Rowing's **Inclusive Club Guide** (2018) and the Government of Western Australia's **How to be an Inclusive Club guide** (2018).

8 Trans, Intersex, gender non-conforming and non-binary fencers.

9 Inspired by the **Inclusion Strategy 2021-2023** of the UK's Lawn Tennis Association.

10 PluSport is the specialist umbrella organisation for disability sports in Switzerland. PluSport supports people with disabilities by offering programmes for all types of recreational and competitive sports, always with the goal of promoting integration and inclusion: <https://www.plusport.ch/en/>



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Swiss HEMA hopes to foster a spirit of openness towards all persons regardless of their personal background and looks to ensure that there is equality, diversity and inclusivity in all our activities and those of our member clubs. This aim is embodied by **our commitment** to treat everyone in the HEMA Community with respect, and without judgement or bias, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, age or appearance, abilities, civil status, social background, religion or beliefs, ethnicity or national origins.

This commitment is an important step towards creating a HEMA community **where everyone can truly belong**. Building a HEMA community where everyone can belong depends on knowing that everyone in our federation understands this commitment and agrees to help us to achieve it. Then we will truly be **“One for All, All for One!”**

This guide, which focusses on promoting Openness, is designed to encourage Swiss HEMA clubs to think about how they can become more open, inclusive, equitable and diverse. By following this guide, clubs can develop their own openness initiatives and encourage everyone in the club to contribute to them.

A companion guide on **Safeguarding: Prevention and Protection** will be developed.



From an example initiative:
Swiss HEMA members show
their support for the
International Women's Day 2023
campaign #EmbraceEquity.

