

## NATIONAL ACTION PLAN: AUSTRIA'S APPROACH TO FIGHT SEXUALISED VIOLENCE IN SPORT

*Austrian Federal Ministry of Defence and Sports*

This description comes from the study commissioned by the European Commission on gender-based violence in sport ([Mergaert L., & al., Study on gender-based violence in sport – final report, European Commission, 2016](#)). It was updated within the framework of the European Union-Council of Europe joint project [Pro Safe Sport + “Put an end to sexual harassment and abuse against children in sport”](#), by collecting more recent information from the organisation responsible for the project.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Following the European initiative

The European Commission's Proposal for Strategic Actions on Gender Equality in Sport (2014-2020) calls on the EU Member States to develop and implement a national strategy.<sup>1</sup> In February 2015, the Austrian Federal Minister of Defence and Sports welcomed this policy initiative by developing a National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Sport (hereafter referred to as 'Plan'). He charged '100%Sport' to support and follow up this process. A Strategic Group on Gender Equality in Sport was established as a steering group in charge of the development of this Plan and of the implementation of its measures. This group consists of relevant stakeholders of the Austrian sport community: the Austrian Sport Organisation (BSO), the three governing bodies,<sup>2</sup> four multi-branch organisations,<sup>3</sup> and 60 sports-related associations.

The Strategic Group was responsible for the successful development of the overall Plan and delegated the work on each of the four priority areas to specific working groups. Sexualised violence in sports was defined as one of the four priority areas to be addressed in the Plan. A working group, consisting of members of '100%Sport', BSO, the three governing bodies and sports related associations, experts of victim support organisations and academic experts, was appointed by the Strategic Group to draft the respective sections of the Plan. Measures against sexualised violence in sports were then presented to and discussed with the Strategic Group. The Plan was finalised and adopted in September 2015. It covers the period between 2015 and 2018.

### Fighting sexualised violence in sport

Thirteen objectives were defined in the Austrian National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Sport to combat sexualised violence in sports:

1. The Ministry of Defence and Sports and Austrian sports organisations issue clear commitments against (sexualised) violence in sports and for the protection of athletes.
2. Data on gender-based violence and, in particular, sexualised violence in sports in Austria are to be made available.
3. Sport organisations and sports clubs know how to act when sexualised violence occurs and make use of respective checklists and guidelines.
4. Sport organisations take structural measures to protect athletes from offenders.

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<sup>1</sup> See page 27 of the 'Gender Equality in Sport. Proposal for Strategic Actions (2014-2020)'.

<sup>2</sup> Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sport und Körperkultur (ASKÖ), Allgemeiner Sportverband Österreichs (ASVO) and SPORTUNION

<sup>3</sup> Austrian Olympic Committee (ÖOC), Austrian Paralympic Committee (ÖPC), Special Olympics Austria and the Association of Impaired People (BSV)

5. Sport organisations make the candidates' commitment to the protection of athletes a mandatory requirement in the recruitment of trainers and check if the candidates have committed any offences in the past.
6. Measures combating sexualised violence are a mandatory criterion for publicly funded projects.
7. Sport organisations and funding authorities consider the existence of measures to protect athletes a quality criterion and reward it accordingly.
8. The protection of athletes is structurally embedded within the sport organisations and it is clearly defined who is in charge; 'trust-persons' are appointed and widely known among the members.
9. A co-operation network comprising sports and victim support organisations is established and sports organisations know who to contact in case of an incident of sexualised violence.
10. All people involved are sensitive to the topic of sexualised violence, are aware of their rights and know how to act when an incident of sexualised violence occurs.
11. Educational programmes aimed to raise awareness and provide information on gender-related topics and sexualised violence are developed and implemented.
12. Pilot projects are implemented.
13. Measures to protect athletes in Austria are constantly monitored and evaluated.

The Plan puts an emphasis on the prevention of sexualised violence in sports. Amongst others, it stipulates that educational materials on the topic should be developed and awareness should be raised, that sport organisations should include a commitment to fight against sexualised violence into their mission statements, that topic-specific trainings for coaches should be developed, that the topic of sexualised violence should be included in the general education of coaches, and that children and adolescents should be empowered. Also, the Plan foresees a Position Paper by the Minister of Defence and Sports as well as a joint declaration of the Austrian sports organisations, each underlining the top-level commitment to fight sexualised violence in sports.

A specific group to steer the implementation process

The Austrian Strategic Group on Gender Equality in Sport is meeting regularly until 2018 to discuss the progress made, define timescales, monitor the implemented measures and redress certain measures if necessary. Moreover, the Strategic Group is responsible for communicating all measures of the Plan, including those on sexualised violence in sport. Furthermore, '100%Sport' is developing a detailed communication strategy. Communication actions include: organising an event to publicly sign the position statement (November 2015) by the Minister of Sport and all relevant stakeholders, presenting the educational materials during a press release (January 2017), promoting workshops for coaches and officials, providing ongoing information in regular media (e.g. official journals of the different umbrella organisations and the sports federations), and listing all measures on the '100%Sport' website.

## OUTCOMES AND STRENGTHS

Having a National Action Plan based on the recommendations of the European Commission is to be applauded as it ensures the implementation and concretisation of a coherent approach across the European Union with regard to promoting gender equality in sport, and more specifically addressing sexualised violence in this specific setting. At national level, the fact that this Plan was grafted on the European Commission's

recommendations has made it easier to finance and implement the measures based on evidence, data and promising practices from all over Europe.

The establishment of working groups taking the responsibility for specific topics or actions is commended. For instance, a working group on sexualised violence, which consists of relevant experts in the field in Austria and most of its members are also working in the big umbrella organisations who are responsible for funding projects, ensures ownership for the measures which may enhance their implementation. Moreover, the involvement of different stakeholders also ensures that the measures have been tailored to the needs of these organisations. The creation of a working group that is in charge of monitoring the Plan is also a relevant feature of this practice as the whole implementation process will be monitored and all measures will be documented by '100%Sport' in co-operation with external partners.

The first steps of implementation of the Plan were concretised through the Position Statement "Together against sexual violence and for respect and safety in sport" signed by the Minister of Defence and Sports, all presidents of the Austrian Sports Organisations and its member organisations in November 2015. As an advocate for the topic, the former Minister Gerald Klug invited the representatives to be part of the Strategic Group and joined each of the Strategic Group meetings. His support has brought great visibility and credibility to the topic.

The measures of the National Action Plan referring to sexualised violence are currently being implemented. At the moment, one of three national governing bodies of sports, ASVÖ,<sup>4</sup> started a pilot project 'Mit Respekt' ('With Respect') to ensure the integration of some of the Plan's measures within its organisation. Within the working group, educational materials (stickers, flyer, brochures)<sup>5</sup> were produced and their distribution has begun in January 2017. Workshops for officials, coaches and athletes are currently being facilitated and the head of the Austrian sports organisations are informed during meetings of their gender-agents on a regular basis.<sup>6</sup> In order to ensure an effective implementation of the project, a monitoring and evaluation strategy will be developed to follow up the progress within organisations. It is scheduled to start in 2018.

The Plan ensured the reinstatement of the so-called 'Trust-persons', which is an important outcome and strength of this practice. Educational programmes were offered to sensitise and educate them. They are usually the established gender officers of the sports organisations. These persons are contact points to deliver information about gender equality. They report on the current situation in their organisations and discuss ongoing issues with other gender officers. The gender officers receive advanced training and are empowered to bring forward the issue of gender-based violence in sport.

The preparatory work done during the implementation of the project 'Call4Girls & Call4Boys'<sup>7</sup> in terms of sensitisation and negotiation was crucial to overcome obstacles related to a possible denial of the problem. Since all relevant stakeholders in sport are involved in this Plan, resistance is less likely to occur, which in other cases or in former projects was quite common.

Currently, each of the umbrella federations, their federal state organisations and the affiliated sport federations are in the process of developing an organisation-specific action plan to support the implementation of the National Action Plan.

Finally, the Plan has been triggering other actions. The implementation of an obligatory gender module within the education of sports coaches (so-called 'Trainerausbildung') has already started. Although sexualised violence is not the main topic of this module, teachers are asked to discuss it during the course. In addition, the

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<sup>4</sup> ASVÖ has nine federal state sport organisations, more than 1 Million members, more than 5400 sports clubs.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.100sport.at/de/fuer-respekt-und-sicherheit/broschuere>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.100sport.at/de/fuer-respekt-und-sicherheit/termine2>.

<sup>7</sup> The 'Call4Girls & Call4Boys' is also described in this report.

Plan also prompted Austria's involvement in different studies and projects on gender-based violence. Austrian organisations are currently taking part in the Erasmus+ project 'VOICE' (to give survivors of sexual violence in sport a 'voice' to be heard by sports organisations and to strengthen the collaboration between sport and victim support organisations) and in the international 'BIS – Balance in Sport' project (to develop gender equality indicators in sport, which are useful for monitoring progress in this field). The indicators to be developed under the Council of Europe's project BIS will be used to monitor progress on gender equality in sport in Austria (including on gender-based violence), while considering the measures of the National Action Plan.

## LIMITATIONS

The implementation of the National Action Plan appears to be strongly dependent on political will at national level. The support of the previous Minister for Defence and Sport was crucial for launching the development of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Sport. With the appointment of a new minister (which was the case in January 2016) there was some concern whether the policy would be continued.

Currently it is not clear what the impact of this National Action Plan will be on local sport organisations. Therefore, challenges can possibly be expected in the implementation of the Plan, particularly in reaching grassroots sports organisations (i.e. sport clubs, community sport organisations). It will be necessary to provide guidance and support to local sport organisations in order to ensure the implementation of the measures foreseen in the Plan.

## LESSONS LEARNT

The Austrian National Action Plan mirrors the recommendations of the European Commission's Strategic Actions on Gender Equality in Sport. This approach has proven to be successful in creating visibility, obtaining funding and political support for the topic, and convincing sports organisations of the relevance of promoting gender equality in sport, including combatting gender-based violence. The personal support of the Minister of Defence and Sport, highlighting the importance of the issue, was crucial to launch this initiative.

Establishing a strategic group with representatives from all relevant stakeholder organisations in sport ensures ownership of the policy initiatives and is expected to facilitate the implementation of the Plan's measures. At the same time, a network is built and sports organisations can exchange knowledge and experiences about the topic. By creating a specific working group, with expertise and experience in the field, which was responsible for drafting the Plan's measures to prevent sexualised violence in sport and is involved throughout the implementation process, the chances for a successful concretisation of the Plan's measures are increased.

Although the initiative has yet to be completely unrolled, it is clear that Austria adopts a holistic approach to combat sexualised violence in sport. The proposed actions include a mix of preventive, reactive and curative measures, together with a monitoring and evaluation system, which makes the Plan comprehensive.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

<http://www.100sport.at/de/projekte/eu-strategiegruppe/gegen-sexuelle-gewalt>

<http://www.100sport.at/de/fuer-respekt-und-sicherheit>

<http://www.100sport.at/de/news>