

GUIDE FOR THE PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN SPORT IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Czech National Olympic Committee

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

Background

Since 1996, the Czech Olympic Committee has been the most committed Czech institution on fighting gender-based violence in sport, specifically through its Commission of Equal Opportunities in Sport. This Commission was established in 1996 to comply with an instruction from the International Olympic Committee. The research agenda pursued since the early 2000s has brought valid data on sexual harassment in this area, which triggered greater awareness and first actions. International cooperation has played a significant role in prompting the institution to gather knowledge and take action. On the basis of the results of the research to assess the prevalence of sexual harassment in sport in the Czech Republic, it was decided to publish a guide for the prevention of sexual harassment in sport. Released in 2006, this document is an adapted version of the Finnish document ‘Allowed to care, allowed to intervene’ (also described in detail in this report). The Czech Olympic ombudsman has also been involved in the process since 2014, particularly in finding solutions to individual cases of harassment. The Czech Olympic Committee also recently adopted the IOC Guidelines and Toolkit in preventing sexual harassment and abuse in sport. The Committee has since updated the material by sending a letter to all national sport organizations and federations about these Guidelines in 2016. The Committee of Equal Rights in sport of the Czech Olympic Committee has signed an agreement with Charles University, Faculty of Sport and PE, to have frequent lessons for faculty students on the subject ‘preventing sexual abuse in sport’ for all future coaches and sport administrators.

Problem addressed

Considering the controversial and recent inclusion of the definition of sexual harassment in the law back in 2006, the title of the guide did not explicitly refer to this concept to avoid possible resistance. “Harassment”, in the broad sense, was used instead and is understood as an act of a sexual nature. Harassment includes:

- sexually connoted jokes and gestures;
- sexually connoted allusions and remarks regarding one’s physical appearance, clothes, expression, attitude or sexual orientation;
- sexually connoted, unwanted physical contact;
- undesired phone contact (conversation or SMS) with a sexual content and their dissemination to third parties;
- sexist remarks or jokes;
- reiterated sexually connoted offers and invitations;
- forced sexual relations, including rape.

Sexual harassment and violence perpetrated by peer athletes, by coaches or other sport staff, against adults or children and young people, are covered in this guide. Homophobic violence is also encompassed within this definition (as evidenced by the multiple references to 'sexual orientation').

Approach

This guide constitutes a pedagogical effort to raise awareness on a variety of real-life situations where sexual harassment and rape occur. The guide adopts the perspective of the victim, stressing that while harassment will not necessarily be perceived as such by the perpetrator and/or the surrounding of the victim, the perspective of the latter should prevail.

Multi-level, multi-disciplinary and multi-actor actions

Published and disseminated by the Czech Olympic Office, the guide explains the respective roles of relevant actors in combatting harassment in sport, including: coaches and teachers; health professionals involved in sport (such as physiotherapists, psychologists, and physicians); managers and administrative staff; cleaning personnel and other supporting staff; family members of potential victims and perpetrators; and spectators and sponsors. Contacts of various civil society organisations active in the fields of gender equality and gender-based violence, as well as the contact of legal agencies, are provided at the end of the document for further support, if needed.

OUTCOMES AND STRENGTHS

This guide was the first public document to be disseminated among sport actors, to provide an extensive definition and examples of real-life situations of sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence in sport in the Czech Republic. According to the main promoter of this guide, this practice has been widely disseminated throughout the territory to 5,000 sport clubs and schools. A strength of this practice is the combination of developing a useful instrument with awareness-raising activities that were organised to support its dissemination. This helped in enhancing the acceptance (and possibly the use) of the guide as it has been positively received by sport staff. Particularly, coaches attending awareness-raising actions showed growing interest in the guide, especially if working abroad, as they endeavour to commit to international standards.

The illustrations of real-life examples are potentially useful to clarify which legal provisions should apply depending on the acts of violence they refer to.

Another strength of this practice is its victims-centred approach. In its definition of harassment, the guide clearly states that the individual's perception is the starting point. Thereafter, the guide lists specific negative experiences, ranging from mild verbal or non-verbal harassment to severe forms of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape. Instead of focussing on the legal definition only, harassment is more widely defined, starting from the victim's perspective.

Finally, this guide and the awareness-raising initiatives organised for its promotion have triggered other actions in the Czech Republic. The Czech Olympic Committee decided to include a link to a website of the International Olympic Committee that focuses on sexual harassment and abuse (described in detail in this report). Since 2006, the Committee of Equal Opportunities of the Czech Olympic Committee organises yearly seminars on the issue, and its experts deliver presentations on the topic in the university programmes for sport students.

LIMITATIONS

Despite the ground-breaking work carried out in the Czech Republic, some limitations can be pointed to the guide, its contents and to the approach followed to give it visibility. First, the guide does not provide a step-by-step method to assist sport staff to act on and victims to report incidents of gender-based violence. Moreover, in the absence of a broader strategy to fight gender-based violence in sport, actors are compelled to act in relative isolation. Second, although the guide comprehensively addresses grooming, sexual harassment and different categories of sexual violence, the definition given to 'harassment' in the guide tends to blur differences between each form of gender-based violence, which may create some confusion. Third, the awareness-raising actions carried out in relation to the dissemination of the guide were not monitored, neither was their impact in changing attitudes and behaviours in relation to forms of gender-based violence in sport.

While an initiative like this should be encouraged in countries where little has been done, it becomes clear that a more comprehensive strategy is needed to protect athletes from gender-based violence in sport. The guide has its value in raising awareness and informing sport stakeholders, but lacks a proper follow-up with practical instruments that can be implemented in sports organisations.

LESSONS LEARNT

As an initiative from the Czech Olympic Committee, this guide is implemented using a top-down approach, which adds credibility to its meaning and utility. The definitions and examples provided are relevant as they clarify, in practical terms, what sexual harassment entails and how it can be prosecuted under the Czech legislation. The combination of developing a guidance instrument and awareness-raising actions to promote its value and use, along with the sensitisation of key actors has proven to be relevant. The Czech effort to break the taboo on gender-based violence in sport can serve as an example for other countries that traditionally have been slow to adopt measures to fight such violence.