

# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN SPORT<sup>1</sup>



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Despite the fact that sport promotes ethical values, fair-play and integrity, violence also occurs in the sport context. In some cases, violence is directed against a person because of her/his gender (including gender identity or expression). This phenomenon is understood as gender-based violence and may include sexual harassment and abuse, rape, physical or emotional-psychological violence, and LGBTQI<sup>2</sup>-violence. These forms of gender-based violence are not mutually exclusive; they actually overlap.

Gender-based violence in sport affects girls, boys, women and men. Gender-based violence has been noticed among peer-athletes, between coaches and their athletes, or between other personnel within the sports' entourage (e.g. managers, officials, doctors, physiotherapists) and athletes. Media has drawn attention to some cases that were taken to court, and a few organisations across the world are keeping records of cases of gender-based violence in sport.

Sixteen EU Member States<sup>3</sup> and a few other countries (e.g. Norway) have attempted to estimate the magnitude of certain forms of gender-based violence in sport. However, by the end of 2016, there still did not exist an approximate and reliable figure translating the reality of the problem in Europe. The research carried out so far has several limitations, is fraught with challenges, and does not allow for comparability between countries.

Over the last 20 years, several policies have been issued to address the problem.

Knowing that the general legal framework applies in cases of gender-based violence in sport is crucial to combat the problem. It is worth noting that the absence of specific legislation to prosecute cases of gender-based violence in sport, the lack of clarity in relation to what a 'sexual act' pertains, or the varied terminology used to refer to forms of gender-based violence across countries can pose some difficulties in handling cases of gender-based violence in sport. The Istanbul Convention<sup>4</sup> is an important initiative from the Council of Europe to protect women against all forms of violence and prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women, including in sporting settings. This Convention seeks to establish a pan-European legal framework to prevent and fight violence against women and girls. An independent expert body (GREVIO)<sup>5</sup> was created to monitor the implementation of Convention by the Parties.

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The Council of Europe takes an active role in issuing policies to tackle gender-based violence in sport. Examples of such policies include:

- European Sports Charter (R (92) 13)
- Code of Sport Ethics
- Resolution on the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse of women, young people and children in sport (3/2000)
- Recommendation on lesbians and gays in sport (1635 (2003))
- Recommendations on gender mainstreaming in sport (CM/Rec (2015)2)

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The assessment of good repute of sport professionals is a very important measure to ensure the protection of athletes. Checking the criminal background of both volunteering and employed sports staff (such as coaches, managers and therapeutic staff) can help protect potential (underage) victims from sexual violence (including sexual harassment and abuse, as well as rape).

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<sup>1</sup> This factsheet was compiled in November 2016 by Yellow Window.

<sup>2</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, or Intersex.

<sup>3</sup> Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Source: European Commission – Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (forthcoming). Study on gender-based violence in sport.

<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe (2011). *Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence*. Last accessed on 14 April 2016 at [www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e](http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e)

<sup>5</sup> More information about the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence can be found here: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/grevio>

Complementing the existing legislation, sport organisations have established internal measures, procedures, structures and resources to protect their athletes. Examples include guidelines on how to handle cases of sexual violence in sport (including support to victims), measures to protect potential victims of gender-based violence and procedures to report incidents, or registration systems to record cases of offenders who had a disciplinary conviction in sport.

Despite missing robust prevalence and incidence estimates, actions to eliminate gender-based violence in sport are being undertaken by different actors across the world. Interestingly, stakeholders are teaming up to address gender-based violence in sport. In the European Union, partnerships combatting gender-based violence in sport are multi-level, multi-actor and multi-disciplinary. They include governmental, public, private, and civil society organisations from different sectors, such as sport; health; education; youth, children's, women's and LGBTQI's rights; gender equality, police; child welfare.

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Some policy recommendations from the Council of Europe to combat gender-based violence in sport

- Adopt, implement and monitor policies and measures, in cooperation with sports organisations, to prevent and combat various forms of gender-based violence against women and girls in sport.
- Devise and implement policies and measures to prevent and combat gender-based bullying, harassment and violence with regard to the practice of physical activity, physical education and sport, and encourage schools, local authorities and sports organisations and clubs to implement them and monitor their implementation.
- Raise awareness about gender-based violence occurring in various levels and fields of sport.
- Implement policies and adopt codes of conduct regarding gender-based violence against girls, boys, women and men in sport and clearly specify the complaint process, disciplinary actions and appeal procedures.
- Convey non-stereotypical images and roles by not reproducing sexist portrayals and eliminating sexist content and language which could lead to gender-based incitement to hatred, violence and discrimination.

The detailed set of measures can be found [here](#).

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#### EXAMPLE 1. AN EDUCATIONAL WEBSITE ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE IN SPORT

*Promoter: International Olympic Committee*

*Implementation period: since 2012*

URL: <http://www.olympic.org/sha>

The website Sexual Harassment and Abuse (SHA) in sport is targeted at sport organisations, coaches and athletes. It aims at raising awareness about sexual harassment and abuse, gender harassment, homophobia and hazing. It is available in six languages (English, German, French, Spanish, Russian and Chinese) in order to increase its dissemination potential. The website includes a practical section with nine interactive videos describing different scenarios to learn how to recognise risk factors of sexual abuse and harassment in sport. A set of prevention measures is also made available on the website.

#### EXAMPLE 2. THE CODE OF ETHICS AND GOOD PRACTICE FOR CHILDREN'S SPORT

*Promoter: Irish Sports Council and the Sports Council Northern Ireland*

*Implementation period: since 2000*

URL: [http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Participation/Code\\_of\\_Ethics/Code\\_of\\_Ethics\\_Manual/](http://www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Participation/Code_of_Ethics/Code_of_Ethics_Manual/)

The Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children in Sport aims at safeguarding children and youth (under 18) in sport, promoting their rights and developing a healthy, respectful and open sport environment for all. It contains a series of principles, policy and practice guidelines for sports leaders, coaches, officials, sports organisations, athletes' parents/guardians, and children/youth. A free app 'Safe Sport' was developed based on the Code. The app provides information and guidance for everyone involved in sport for children and young people. The goal is to raise awareness and ensure a common understanding about safeguarding and best practice in children's sport. The app allows parents to track their child's journey to and/or from the planned sport event. The Code is voluntarily implemented by sports organisations. However, governmental funding is dependent on whether sports organisations demonstrate how they adhere to the Code. This financial incentive has proven to be an effective measure to ensure the adoption of the Code by national governing bodies of sport, clubs, local sports partnerships and community/voluntary groups.