

Call for input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the UN General Assembly on violence against women and girls in sport

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls

1. What are the different forms of violence that women and girls in sports may experience (e.g. physical, psychological, economic, online violence, coercive control, as well as extreme form of discrimination that amounts to violence)?

The Council of Europe [Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#) (Istanbul Convention) defines violence against women as “the violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women”. It includes: “**all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life**”. Article 3(a)

The [European Sports Charter](#) safeguards the right to sport for all (Article 10) and clarifies that “all human beings have an inalienable right of access to sport in a safe environment” and calls for a “policy of zero tolerance for violence and all forms of discrimination” (Article 6) as well as to “protect all people, particularly the young, from violence, harassment and abuse” (Article 8). However, research from the European Union (EU)-Council of Europe (EU) joint project All In (2018-2019) set out in the toolkit “[How to make an impact on gender equality in sport](#)” found that women are more likely to suffer from sexual harassment, violence and abuse than men. The toolkit specifies that gender-based violence may include sexual harassment and abuse, sexual assault, physical or emotional/psychological violence and LGBTQI violence and that these types of violence are not mutually exclusive, but that they actually overlap.

An increasing form of violence from which women and girls suffer to a greater extent is **hate speech**, both online and in a sporting environment. The EU-CoE joint project [#SportsRespect “Combating hate speech in sport”](#) (January 2022-June 2024) aims to combat hate speech in sport by providing technical assistance to public authorities in member states and other sport stakeholders to develop comprehensive strategies within a human rights framework.

For more information see [Annex 1](#).

2. What human rights of women and girls in sports are violated as a result of the exposure of women and girls in sports to violence or the risk of violence?

The [European Convention on Human Rights](#) (ECHR) refers in **Article 3** to the **prohibition of torture**: “No one shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”. **Article 8** refers to the **right to respect for private and family life**: “1 Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence. 2 There shall be no interference by a public

authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.”

These human rights are at risk of being violated as a result of the exposure of women and girls in sport to violence or the risk of violence. The European Court of Human Rights (“the Court”) has dealt with many cases where complaints are made by women about the failure to investigate their allegations of rape or sexual abuse properly and about breaches of the duty to provide effective legal protection against sexual abuse or about the failure to protect them as victims of crimes. Such complaints are examined by the Court under Article 3 or Article 8 of the Convention (as referred to above) and can concern rape and sexual abuse perpetrated by State officials, private individuals or even family members. The procedural obligations of the States Parties extend to the duty to impose adequate criminal sanctions on the perpetrators of crimes and to enforce sentences (for instance, *E.G. v. the Republic of Moldova* (2021)).

The European Sports Charter calls for all stakeholders to “apply a policy of zero tolerance for violence and all forms of discrimination, paying particular attention to individuals and groups in a situation of vulnerability, such as children, migrants and persons with disabilities” (Article 6 para. 2 (d)). For more information see [Annex 1](#).

3. Which actors are responsible for committing acts of violence against women and girls and increasing the risks of violence against women and girls in sports?

Research from the joint European Union (EU)-Council of Europe (EU) joint project (2018-2019) All In, set out in the toolkit “[How to make an impact on gender equality in sport](#)” found that whilst **people tend to associate gender-based violence with abuse by coaches or other personnel within the athletes’ entourage, evidence shows that peer athletes are also often perpetrators**. Data on sexual harassment and abuse on children and teenagers in sport from the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands showed that harassment and abuse often came from other athletes. Perpetrators are more often men but data from Norway and the Czech Republic report cases of harassment from women as well (respectively 13% and 28%).

Generally, people tend to associate gender-based violence with abuse by coaches or other personnel within the athletes’ entourage, such as doctors, physiotherapists or managers. However, evidence shows that peer athletes are also often perpetrators. Data on sexual harassment and abuse on children and teenagers in sport from the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands show that harassment and abuse came mainly from other athletes. Perpetrators are also more often men but data from Norway⁴ and from the Czech Republic⁵ report cases of harassment from women (respectively 13% and 28%).

Sexual harassment and abuse	From athletes	From coaches	From other adults
Sexual harassment ⁶	66%	21%	20%
Sexual harm ⁷	88%	8%	6%
Sexual violence ⁸	33%	17%	41%

4. What are the principal causes of the violence that women and girls experience in sports, including the structural causes of such violence?

5. Which groups of women and girls in sports are more exposed to violence and on what grounds?

The following categories of women and girls are more exposed to violence:

- **Women athletes competing at elite levels** may face heightened pressure, scrutiny, and exploitation. This pressure can manifest itself in forms of verbal abuse, emotional manipulation, and even sexual harassment or assault by coaches, officials, teammates, or other individuals in positions of authority.
- **Women and girls from marginalised communities, including racial or ethnic minorities, refugees, and socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, may face intersecting forms of discrimination and violence in sport.** They may encounter barriers to access, unequal treatment, and systemic injustices that limit their opportunities and expose them to higher risks of abuse.
- **Women working in coaching, officiating, and leadership roles within sports organisations** may face gender-based discrimination, harassment, and exclusion. They may encounter challenges such as lack of respect, unequal pay, limited career advancement opportunities, and harassment from colleagues or athletes.
- **Women and girls who identify as lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or non-binary** may experience discrimination, bullying, and violence in sports environments due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. They may face exclusion, stigmatisation, and hostility from peers, coaches, and administrators, leading to feelings of isolation and fear.
- **Adolescent girls and young women in sport** may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation, grooming, and abuse by older coaches, mentors, or peers. They may lack awareness of their rights, boundaries, and consent, making them susceptible to manipulation and coercion in potentially harmful situations.
- **Women and girls with disabilities** participating in sports may encounter additional barriers and vulnerabilities, including lack of accessible facilities, inadequate support services, and limited opportunities for competitive involvement.

[Resolution 2465](#) (2022) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) states that: “female athletes must be recognised in all their diversity so that appropriate measures to prevent and combat discrimination can be implemented. Taking into account the intersectional dimension paves the way for a targeted response and proper policies.”

6. What are the responsibilities of State and non-State actors in preventing acts of violence against women and girls in sport, including in adopting measures to investigate it, and to hold those responsible for it accountable, and to provide assistance and protection to survivors of violence?

Article 5, para. 2 of the [Istanbul Convention](#) states that: “Parties shall take the necessary legislative and other measures to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide reparation for acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention that are perpetrated by non-State actors.”

Article 16, para. 1 of the Istanbul Convention states that: “Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or support programmes aimed at teaching perpetrators of domestic violence to adopt non-violent behaviour in interpersonal relationships with a view to preventing further violence and changing behavioural patterns.”

Article 18, para. 1 of the Istanbul Convention further states that: “Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to protect all victims from any further acts of violence.” Para. 3 further sets forth that: “Parties shall ensure that measures... - aim at avoiding secondary victimisation;” and “aim at the empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence” amongst other measures.

The element of education is referred to in Article 14 of the Istanbul Convention and could be extended to working with sports clubs and similar bodies to prevent violence against women and the perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes.

The Council of Europe [Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) (Lanzarote Convention) provides in Article 4 that “Each Party shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to prevent all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children and to protect children.” The Convention obliges States Parties, *inter alia*, to take the following measures:

- screen professionals seeking access to occupations involving regular contact with children and improve their knowledge of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation (Article 5);
- ensure the specialisation or appropriate training of services or persons in charge of investigating sexual offences against children and their adequate financial resources (Article 34) and that investigation and prosecution of such offences is not dependent on a report or accusation made by a victim and can continue even if a victim’s statements are withdrawn (Article 32);
- collect and store data relating to the identity and the genetic profile (DNA) of persons convicted of sexual offences against children and ensure that this data can be transmitted to the competent authority of another Party (Article 37), ensure that a legal person can be held liable for sexual exploitation or abuse of children, committed for its benefit by any natural person (Article 26, para. 1);
- adopt a protective approach towards victims in criminal proceedings (Article 30.2), assist victims, in the short and long term, in their physical and psycho-social recovery (Article 14), and ensure that interviews with a child victim do not aggravate the child’s trauma (Article 35).

Article 5, paragraph 3 of the Lanzarote Convention reads as follows: “Each Party shall take the necessary legislative or other measures, in conformity with its internal law, to ensure that the conditions to accede to those professions whose exercise implies regular contacts with children ensure that the candidates to these professions have not been convicted of acts of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse of children. According to paragraph 54 of the Explanatory report of the Lanzarote Convention, the provision is left open to also cover voluntary activities.”

7. What measures do State and non-State actors have in place to ensure that incidents of violence against women and girls in sports can be effectively reported, and that they are thoroughly investigated and sanctioned?

Measures for reporting incidents of violence against women and girls by states are described in both the [All In analytical report](#) and examples can be identified through the [All In dashboard](#). In the framework of the ongoing data collection campaign of the EU-CoE joint project “[All In Plus: promoting greater gender equality in sport](#)”, new data will be published pertaining to its participating countries by end 2024 (question 49 of the new data collection questionnaire on stakeholders provides for the preparation of a list of measures for reporting gender-based violence).

The Council of Europe also has long-standing experience in the protection of children’s rights and sport policies, including the “[Start to Talk](#)” project, initiated as a call for action to public authorities and the sport movement to stop child sexual abuse. The protection of children’s rights is also referenced in the ESC and the [Conclusions of the Council of the European Union on safeguarding children in sport](#) (2019) calls upon governments to develop measures and promote strategies to protect children in sport to ensure that there is an adequate legal and policy framework.

In the framework of the EU-CoE joint project “**Child Safeguarding in Sport**” (completed in June 2022), **country-specific roadmaps for effective child safeguarding in sport policies** were prepared in six countries: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Israel, Norway and Portugal.

The [Council of Europe's strategy on the rights of the child \(2022-2027\)](#) provides a framework for member states to protect and promote the rights of children.

The purpose of the [Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse – Child-friendly, multidisciplinary and interagency response inspired by the Barnahus model](#) is to provide a comprehensive and co-ordinated response to children who are victims or witnesses of violence, including sexual abuse. The Barnahus model involves establishing child-friendly, multidisciplinary centres where children can receive medical care, forensic interviews, psychosocial support, and legal assistance in a safe and supportive environment. The goal is to minimise the trauma experienced by child victims and ensure that their rights are protected throughout the legal process. The Barnahus project aims to improve access to justice for child victims of violence and enhance coordination among relevant authorities and professionals involved in their care and protection.

The [Lanzarote Convention](#) obliges State Parties to take measures, *inter alia*, to:

- report suspicion of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse (Article 12);
- ensure that the investigations and criminal proceedings are treated as priority and carried out without any unjustified delay (Article 30, para.3);
- ensure that sexual offences against children are punishable by effective, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions, taking into account their seriousness (Article 27, para. 1) and that appropriate measures are taken against legal persons (Article 27, para. 2 and Article 27 para 3).

None of the Recommendations of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers solely focus on combating violence against women and girls in sport. However, the Council of Europe has produced several documents and recommendations that address violence against women and girls more broadly, which member states can use to inform their policies and practices in the context of sport. One such

recommendation is [Recommendation Rec\(2002\)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the protection of women against violence](#). While this recommendation does not specifically mention sport, it provides a comprehensive framework for member states to address various forms of violence against women, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence. Member states can draw upon this recommendation to develop measures and policies tailored to preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in sport.

Additionally, the Council of Europe's **Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence** (referred to earlier and known as the Istanbul Convention), provides a legally binding framework for member states to prevent and combat violence against women, including in sports settings. While the convention does not specifically mention sports, its provisions apply to all forms of violence against women, regardless of the context. Furthermore, [GREVIO](#) (the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) often examines the situation of violence against women in sport under its evaluation of countries' implementation of the Istanbul Convention. In its [Baseline evaluation report on Greece](#), (2023, 77) whilst not having an overview of authorities' efforts to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence in informal educational facilities, such as sports and leisure activities, GREVIO was informed that such actions are scarce. Moreover, despite the recent public disclosure on cases of sexual abuse in sport, GREVIO was informed that limited measures have been taken to facilitate reporting of abuse in sport and to train coaches on non-violent behaviour.

For more information see [Annex 1](#).

8. To what extent are women and girls in sport, as well as the associations that represent them being effectively involved and consulted in the design and implementation of policies that are meant to end severe discrimination and violence against women and girls in sport at the national, regional, and international level?

The Council of Europe project "[Start to Talk](#)" supports national authorities responsible for sport in developing roadmaps for the implementation of child safeguarding policies in sport at national level. Child consultation meetings on the roadmap work are organised in collaboration with a national partner. This may cover consultation of girls in the roadmap work, thereby including their input in policies to combat violence against them.

Under Pillar 1 on data collection of the EU-CoE joint All In Plus, project stakeholders at national and grassroots levels are consulted to ascertain what policies are in place to tackle gender-based violence in sport in participating countries. The Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) also works closely with grassroots sports organisations, including through its Consultative Committee (CC) and in collaboration with its CC Gender Equality Rapporteur (GER), to ensure that there is grassroots collaboration in policy work, including on issues such as combating gender-based violence in sport as attested by the 2023 [Online Breakfast Roundtable on Women in Sport which focused on combating gender-based violence](#).

9. Please provide examples of good practice that have been adopted by State and non-State actors with regards to ending violence against women and girls in sports?

The joint EU-CoE [All In Online library of best practice examples](#) provides up to 100 **examples of best practice examples, including in combating gender-based violence in sport**, that have been adopted at national and grassroots levels by state and non-state actors. In the framework of the ongoing data collection campaign of the joint EU-CoE project “[All In Plus](#)”, new data will be published regarding best practice examples in participating countries and beyond by end 2024 – these will include measures to combat gender-based violence in sport. Both the ongoing EPAS [Start to Talk](#) project and the now completed joint [EU-CoE Child Safeguarding in Sport](#) project respectively provide and provided examples of good practice that have been adopted by State and non-State actors with regard to ending violence against girls in sport.

10. What are the lessons learned from policies and legislations that have been adopted and implemented with regards to women and girls in sports and their implications on the safety, security, dignity, equality and participation of women and girls in sports?

The now completed joint [EU-CoE Child Safeguarding in Sport](#) project (CSiS project – March 2020-June 2022) noted the following lessons learned in terms of **best practice methodology from policies and legislations that have been adopted and implemented with regard to girls (and indeed all children) in sport:**

- the need for pre-planning, methodology and preparation,
- the importance of desk research and carrying out a SWOT analysis,
- building relationships,
- setting up structures (steering committees & core groups),
- organising roundtables,
- conducting a self-assessment of “the state of play”,
- developing roadmaps,
- action planning and reflecting on the implementation.

In the process of the roadmap development, it was important to agree on values and principles and to ensure that the roadmap was child rights/child-centred.

A multidisciplinary and multistakeholder collaborative approach was important, as well as research-based evidence for the development of safeguarding strategies. Although education and training strategy is fundamental for the Child Safeguarding Officers’ ability to respond to concerns, it is also crucial to foster cross-governmental cooperation and establish dedicated roles in the organisations to provide professional support, expertise and supervision to safeguarding officers.

It was also considered crucial to allocate more time to pre-planning, in particular of monitoring and evaluation, to establish common terminology, to develop and adapt methodology in tandem with ongoing work, and to build new partnerships while strengthening the old ones.

Governments need resources to ensure the implementation of the national roadmaps.

Another crucial aspect is ensuring that all children know their rights and whom to contact in case of need. Safeguarding policies must adopt the child's rights approach and focus on listening to the voices of children and people with lived experiences of violence and abuse.

Awareness raising was important as adults should be the ones addressing this issue in order to improve and enhance child safeguarding in sport.

The CSiS project's [online resource centre](#) brought together 85 examples of best practice across 8 categories designed to prevent and combat all forms of violence and abuse against children in the context of sport.

11. Please provide recommendations as to how violence against women and girls in sport can be prevented and what needs to be done to better respond to the needs of survivors of such violence?

A list of recommendations as to how violence against women and girls in sport can be prevented is included in the joint EU-CoE All In Toolkit [“How to make an impact on gender equality in sport”](#). See text box below.

How to combat and prevent it

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

Knowing that the general legal framework applies in cases of gender-based violence in sport is crucial to combating 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 to, 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 Convention² 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)³ was created to monitor the implementation of the convention by the parties.

The assessment of good repute of sport professionals is a very important measure for ensuring the protection of athletes. Checking the criminal background of both voluntary 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).

Complementing the existing legislation, sports 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 for victims), measures to protect potential victims of gender-based violence and procedures to report incidents, or registration systems to record cases of offenders who have 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 bodies across the world. Interestingly, stakeholders are teaming up to address gender-based violence in sport. In the European Union, partnerships combating gender-based violence in sport are multilevel, multi-actor and multidisciplinary. They include governmental, public, private and civil society organisations from different sectors, such as sport; health; education; children's, young people's, women's and LGBTIQ people's rights; gender equality; the police; and child welfare.

In [Resolution 2465 \(2022\) The fight for a level playing field – Ending discrimination against women in the world of sport](#), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe called on Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as on all States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Assembly, to:

- “take measures to prevent violence against women and girls, including LGBTI women, in sport at all levels, including in schools and sports organisations;

- provide support to survivors of violence, with an independent and specialised structure;
- train sports personnel at all levels to prevent all forms of gender-based violence;
- ensure that perpetrators of violence are prosecuted and put an end to impunity in this area;
- launch awareness-raising campaigns on preventing and combating gender-based violence, including at major sporting events;
- collect, analyse and publish data on violence against women and girls in sport;
- ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention, if they have not yet done so;
- ensure the safety of all at sporting events;
- implement the revised European Sports Charter of the Council of Europe, if they have not yet done so;
- accede to the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport, if they have not yet done so."

In this resolution, the Assembly also called on sports federations to engage in the fight against gender-based violence and discrimination and take appropriate action against perpetrators; support the practice of sport by women and girls in all their diversity and promote athletes' work-life balance; ensure full and equal access to the practice of sport to all women and, to this end, allow transgender and intersex athletes to train and compete in sports competitions consistent with their gender identity.

Article 14 of the [Istanbul Convention](#) is also relevant here and refers in para. 2 as follows: "Parties shall take the necessary steps to promote the principles referred to in paragraph 1 in informal educational facilities, as well as in sports, cultural and leisure facilities and the media."

On International Women's Day, 8 March 2024, the [EDVAW Platform](#) (Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women) issued a statement reaffirming its commitment to eradicating gender-based violence and poverty. This statement comes as a poignant reminder of the persistent challenges faced by women and girls worldwide and the urgent need for collective action to address them. The mechanisms of the Platform highlight the entrenched link between gender-based violence and poverty, emphasising that women and girls are disproportionately affected by insecurity, economic disempowerment, and social inequalities. Despite decades of efforts, discrimination against women persists, exacerbated by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflicts, and climate change.

In their statement, the experts stressed the importance of robust legal frameworks and comprehensive policies to address the root causes of gender-based violence and poverty. They called on governments and international stakeholders to prioritise legislative reforms, integrate gender-sensitive measures into social and economic policies, and allocate adequate resources to empower women and girls economically and socially.

Moreover, the statement applauded recent achievements in advancing gender equality, including collaborative efforts by the EDVAW Platform. Through joint actions, thematic papers, and advocacy initiatives, the EDVAW Platform has contributed significantly to promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls globally.

The EDVAW Platform's statement served as a call for intensified efforts to dismantle systemic barriers and underscored the importance of solidarity and collective action in achieving gender equality and ensuring the full realisation of women's rights and opportunities.