

Introduction

Various forms of racism, discrimination and intolerance often find fertile ground in the world of sport, leading to verbal and physical violence. However, sport should primarily be an instrument for the promotion and transmission of values such as fair play, mutual respect and tolerance. This is why racism, discrimination and intolerance, including hate speech, have no place in sports events and must be vigorously addressed through the implementation of instruments and strategies to combat racism and intolerance in sport and at sports events.

The Saint-Denis Convention, as well as Recommendation Rec(2021)1, sets out general principles and good practices to prevent and combat such hateful behaviour.

What does Article 5 of the Saint-Denis Convention say?

Article 5 of the Convention states that "The Parties shall encourage their competent agencies to highlight the need for players, coaches or other representatives of participating teams to act in accordance with key sporting principles, such as tolerance, respect and fair play, and recognise that acting in a violent, racist or other provocative manner can have a negative impact on spectator behaviour."



Sport is an important tool for the promotion of values such as fair play and mutual respect

Better identifying acts of racism, discrimination and intolerance

Acts constituting racism, discrimination or intolerance and/or any related offences may include:

- ▶ Public incitement to violence, hatred or any form of discrimination;
- ▶ Public insult and defamation;
- ▶ Threats against a person or group of persons on the grounds of, inter alia, "race", colour, language, religion, nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender or sexual orientation, or disability;
- ▶ Public expression of an ideology that asserts the superiority of one group of people or denigrates or devalues another group of people on the basis of, inter alia, "race", colour, language, religion, nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender or sexual orientation, or disability;

1. It is worth noting in this regard that, since all human beings belong to the same species, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the specialised monitoring body of the Council of Europe, rejects theories based on the existence of different 'races'. However, in order to avoid leaving people who are generally and erroneously perceived as belonging to an 'other race' without the protection of its recommendations, it uses this term in its texts.



Coaches play a key role in informal education of young generations for human rights

- ▶ Denying, trivialising, justifying or condoning in public discrimination or intolerance against any person or group of persons on the grounds of, inter alia, 'race', colour, language, religion, nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender or sexual orientation, or disability; and
- ▶ Disseminating or distributing, and producing or storing with the intention of disseminating or distributing, written material, images or other material which constitute manifestations of racism, discrimination or intolerance which are prohibited by law.

” Sport is an effective tool to promote social cohesion and transmit essential values such as fair play, mutual respect and tolerance

Hate speech in sport: a breach of human rights and security

■ Acts and opinions that demonstrate excessive intolerance, racist and discriminatory attitudes or political or religious extremism are human rights violations.

■ These incidents can also undermine the concept of inclusion, jeopardise its implementation and thus increase the risk of safety and security incidents at sports events. They can also polarise opinions and generate antagonism, tension and possible confrontation among spectators who want to watch a match in peace.

■ Verbal abuse is widespread in sport. It can take the form of racist insults or chants, particularly anti-black, antisemitic or anti-Muslim, or homophobic, transphobic and/or sexist. These forms of abusive speech violate human rights and constitute incitement to violence.

■ In sports venues, 'monkey chants' directed at black players and antisemitic chants are among the most publicised forms. However, racist acts can also be written, visual or allusive, with the use of symbolic objects, extremist iconography or the vandalism of opponents' symbols.

■ These phenomena most often occur collectively, among fans, but they also take place on the field of play, involving players, coaches or referees, either as perpetrators or as victims of abuse. The online phenomenon, on social networks, has also been growing in recent years.



Magistrates and law enforcement should be trained to address hate speech, racism and other discriminations at sports events

Preventing and combating acts of racism, discrimination and intolerance

Training, awareness-raising and education

■ Law enforcement officers, stewards and other safety and security personnel should receive specialised training in law enforcement, detection of offences, and dealing with more coded forms of racism, discrimination and intolerance.

■ Training should also be provided to all actors in the criminal justice system, including law enforcement officials, prosecutors and judges, to improve their knowledge of racist, discriminatory and hateful behaviour and how to effectively prosecute such acts in the specific context of sporting events.

■ Awareness-raising campaigns should be organised and effective and targeted communication and media relations strategies should be developed.

■ Initiatives against hatred, racism and intolerance on the part of supporters should be encouraged, as they can significantly enhance self-regulation and the deterrent effect of collective condemnation of these scourges inside and outside the sports venue. Fan-led diversity initiatives can help create an open climate at sporting events.

■ Education is essential to prevent hatred and intolerance, including in the sport environment, and particular attention should be paid to the role of schools in transmitting the values of tolerance and respect for human dignity.

” Public and sports authorities must be aware that sport is also an environment that can foster the spread of racism

Co-ordination and sanctioning

■ Experience and good practice show that States should establish a national multi-agency body to co-ordinate and oversee a strategy for comprehensive and detailed measures to prevent and combat racist, discriminatory and intolerant behaviour at football and other sports events.

■ This co-ordinating body should ensure the implementation of a clear legal framework, which should define what constitutes racist, discriminatory and intolerant behaviour.

■ Penalties for hateful, racist and discriminatory behaviour should be proportionate, but sufficiently severe and high-profile to prevent such behaviour and deter potential perpetrators, while including an educational dimension, where appropriate.

Promoting inclusiveness and encouraging diversity

■ European societies are becoming increasingly culturally diverse and it is particularly desirable that crowds at sports events are able to reflect this diversity.

■ Everyone has the right to enjoy a sporting experience as a whole, regardless of nationality, skin colour, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, age, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

■ The quest for inclusion in sports venues should not be driven solely by ethical or commercial reasons. There are also important safety, security and service considerations. Experience shows that diverse audiences, representative of the plurality of communities and the population as a whole, can have an overall positive impact on the dynamics of a sports venue and thus contribute to a more tolerant and peaceful climate.



All participants at sports events have the right to enjoy the experience, regardless of their skin colour, national origin, sex or disability



Authorities and clubs should encourage supporters initiatives aiming at promoting inclusiveness, gender balance and diversity at sports events

■ Stadium management and organisers of sports events also have a role to play in ensuring that the composition of stewarding teams and volunteers is representative of local populations. The diversity of staff should reflect the diversity of the population as a whole.

■ Going to a stadium or any sports event should be an inclusive experience.²

Legal instruments to combat racism, discrimination and intolerance, including hate speech

- ▶ [ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 12³](#) on combating racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport is a reference text which aims to assist the various stakeholders (including national and local authorities, the police, sports federations and leagues, sports clubs, athletes, coaches, referees, supporters' organisations, the media, sponsors and the advertising industry) in combating racism and racial discrimination in the context of all types of sports events; and
- ▶ [ECRI's General Policy Recommendation No. 15](#) on combating hate speech also provides useful guidance in the context of sports events. This Recommendation calls, *inter alia*, for raising awareness of the dangerous consequences of hate speech and for providing support to those targeted, criminalising the most extreme manifestations, while respecting freedom of expression.

2. For more information on "Accessibility and inclusiveness of sports events", see Factsheet 14.
3. European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), Council of Europe.

■ In addition to these key General Policy Recommendations adopted by ECRI, two other relevant Resolutions have been adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on these issues:

- ▶ [Resolution 2131 \(2016\) "Sport for all: a bridge to equality, integration and social inclusion"](#), in particular as regards the need of a mechanism for regular and systematic monitoring of discrimination in sport;
- ▶ [Resolution 2276 \(2019\) "Stop hate speech and hate acts in sport"](#), which calls on Council of Europe Member States, *inter alia*, to put in place national educational and communication strategies to prevent and combat hate speech and hate acts;
- ▶ [Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec \(2022\)16 on "Combating hate speech"](#) provides guidance to Member States and key actors on how to put in place a comprehensive set of legal and non-legal measures to cover the following areas:
 - strengthening the legal framework for preventing and combating hate speech in sport, so that it is as comprehensive as possible. It should include criminal, civil and administrative law provisions, as well as methodological standards, and also cover the online dimension;
 - propose recommendations for self-regulatory and co-regulatory procedures to combat hate speech in sport and in particular online;
 - promote awareness-raising measures, education, training and the use of counter- and alternative speech, in order to encourage respect for athletes and sport practitioners (including referees, coaches, safety staff, etc.) of all ages, in all sports and at all levels (professional and amateur sport);
 - provide support to those targeted by hate speech in sport;
 - improve methods of collecting, monitoring and analysing data on hate speech in sport; and
 - strengthen national co-ordination between stakeholders, as well as international co-operation to share good practices.

■ The Recommendation provides a good basis for assisting Member States, federations, sports clubs, sports associations, athletes, journalists and all other stakeholders to implement policies and practices to prevent, sanction, rehabilitate and combat hate speech in sport, including online.

” Racism, discrimination and intolerance, including in the form of hate speech, undermine the foundations of a society based on human rights, the rule of law and democracy

Key points

Sport should not only be about competition, but also an environment in which people from all backgrounds and walks of life can find common ground and interact harmoniously in diversity.

Any form of hatred, racism and discrimination is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated at any sports event. The prevention of and fight against racist and discriminatory behaviour and the fight against intolerance are of concern to all those involved in a sports event. This is also an essential aspect of the implementation of an integrated approach to safety, security and service.



Media literacy training, including social media education, is essential to tackle sport-related hate speech, racism and other discriminations



Combating hate speech in sport

The project "Combating Hate Speech in Sport" aims to explore innovative approaches to combating hate speech in sport. It is co-funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe and implemented by the Council of Europe's Sport Division.

Findings

Despite growing awareness of the seriousness of the problem, public authorities and sports organisations face major challenges when trying to tackle this phenomenon.

Although the European Union and the Council of Europe have developed a strong regulatory framework in this area, sports events are still too often a forum for racism, homophobia, sexism and other manifestations of hate speech. Sometimes, these incidents also escalate into physical violence involving fans and lead to the disruption of the event itself. The risk of such incidents also forces some organisers to restrict or even ban supporters from sports events.

Every case of hate speech is unacceptable behaviour that must be prevented and dealt with.

Objectives

The aim of the project is to provide technical assistance to Member States' public authorities and sport stakeholders to develop comprehensive national strategies involving all stakeholders. Six countries are partners: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Montenegro and Spain.

In order to effectively address hate speech in sport, methods are needed to gather data on the number of incidents, information on the perpetrators of hate speech and on the people targeted by hate speech. Such data are necessary to improve prevention, provide support to victims, engage with supporters and more generally to develop policies.

Education is also a fundamental pillar. It is essential to clarify what hate speech in sport is (in each culture, in the specificities of each national language), why it is a threat to human rights and democracy, how to recognise it and how best to respond.

Awareness of the impact of hate speech on athletes and the problems faced by those targeted in engaging with sports clubs and events should be addressed, as well as the growing connection with online betting.

Formal and informal human rights education is essential to effectively prevent it and have a long-term impact on the spread of stereotypes, discrimination and hate.

Media literacy training is also desirable, including social media education, which provides the essential skills to critically evaluate and engage with content, in collaboration with social media platforms.

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” The Saint-Denis Convention is the only legally-binding international instrument on safety, security and service at sports events

The Saint-Denis Convention

The Council of Europe Convention on an integrated approach to safety, security and service at football matches and other sports events was opened for signature on 3 July 2016 in Saint-Denis (France), on the occasion of the UEFA EURO 2016 championship. It entered into force on 1st November 2017 after 3 ratifications – France, Monaco and Poland – and now has a large number of [States Parties](#).

It promotes an integrated multi-agency approach, covering three complementary and interdependent pillars: safety, security and service. It is the only legally-binding international instrument establishing institutional co-operation between all relevant stakeholders to make football matches and other sports events safer, more secure and more welcoming.

Useful links

1. **Saint-Denis Convention**
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/safety-security-and-service-approach-convention>
2. **Recommendations T-S4:**
 - i. Rec(2021)1: Recommended good practices on safety, security and service
 - ii. Rec(2022)1: Model structure of a national strategy on safety, security and service
 - iii. Rec(2022)2: Model national legislative and regulatory framework on safety, security and service<https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/t-s4-recommendations>
3. To learn more about the Convention and Recommendation Rec(2021)1, you can register for the following open online courses:
 - i. MOOC on Human Rights in Sport (available in English, Russian, Slovak and Spanish)
<http://help.elearning.ext.coe.int/course/index.php?categoryid=590>
 - ii. MOOC on Safety, Security and Service at Sports Events (available in English, Polish and Portuguese)
<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/security-safety-sport/pros4-e-learning-enrolment-form>