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Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media

Addendum to the minutes of the meeting held in London on 1 June 2023

4. Protecting human rights in and through sport: obligations and shared responsibilities [Doc.15750; AS/Cult/Inf (2023) 04rev]

The Chairperson introduced the invited guests:

- Ms Emily Logan, Commissioner, Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission, Ireland;
- Ms Olivia Jasriel, founder of the Olivia Jasriel Foundation Athletes Against Child Abuse, South Africa;
- Mr Patrice Evra, former captain of Manchester United and the French national team, abuse survivor and campaigner against abuse in sport and beyond;
- Ms Maud de Boer Buquicchio, Chair of the NGO “End child prostitution, child pornography and trafficking of children for sexual purposes” (ECPAT);
- Ms Joyce Cook, Senior Advisor to the President’s Office (Safe Sport Entity), FIFA;
- Ms Kirsty Burrows, Senior Manager, Safe Sport Unit, International Olympic Committee (IOC);
- Mr Simon Mason, Head of Sport Strategy - Department for Culture, Media & Sport, United Kingdom
- Mr Alasdair Bell, Deputy Secretary General, FIFA;
- Ms Ashley Ehlert, Deputy Secretary General and Legal Director, International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF);
- Mr Kit McConnell, Sports Director, International Olympic Committee (IOC);
- Mr Alexandre Husting, Chair of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) Governing Board, Council of Europe.

The Chairperson opened the hearing which focused on “Violence in sport and safeguarding”. She explained that the hearing was open to the public: there were media present, and the records would be published. The hearing consisted of two sessions: the first on “Understanding violence in sport”; the second on “Addressing violence in sport: responses at national and international level”. The two sessions would be moderated by Ms Emily Logan, Commissioner, Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (Ireland) and Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (United Kingdom) respectively.

Session I. Understanding violence in sport

Ms Logan introduced Ms Olivia Jasriel, founder of the Olivia Jasriel Foundation Athletes Against Child Abuse South Africa. She was one of Bob Hewitt's victims. She played international tennis in her youth and was still actively involved in the sport. She worked tirelessly and fearlessly in her personal capacity in various organisations over the past 13 years to bring sexual predators in the sporting fraternity to justice. She had extensive experience in the lodging of cases and court processes of both current and historic abuse cases. She asked what were the main challenges that victims of abuse and sport faced and how they could be addressed.

Ms Jasriel's speech is below.

¹ Approved and declassified by the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media during its meeting on Tuesday 10 October 2023, in Strasbourg.

“Victims of abuse in sport face numerous challenges, including power imbalances, fear, absence of accountability, and low conviction rates. It is important to recognize the vulnerability of our children and address these issues with a focus on prevention and measures to protect and support victims. Furthermore, action is needed at both the national and international levels, considering that sport federations often tend to prioritize self-preservation.

One of the significant challenges faced by victims is the power imbalance that exists within sports settings. Coaches, officials, and administrators often hold positions of authority and control over athletes, making it difficult for victims to speak up. This power dynamic can generate fear of retribution, dismissal of claims, or even threats to an athlete's career. To address this, it is crucial to establish clear reporting mechanisms and independent oversight bodies that can ensure accountability and protect the rights of victims.

Another challenge is the absence of accountability and the low conviction rates in cases of abuse in sport. This can be attributed to several factors, including inadequate investigation procedures, lack of proper legal frameworks, and the tendency of sport federations to prioritize their own reputation and self-preservation. To overcome these challenges, there needs to be a concerted effort to strengthen legal frameworks, enhance investigative procedures, and encourage transparency and impartiality in the handling of abuse cases. It is essential to create an environment where the rights of victims are prioritized over organizational interests.

The vulnerability of children in sports is another critical concern. Young athletes are often targeted due to their limited understanding of boundaries and their desire to please authority figures. Prevention measures must be implemented, such as comprehensive background checks for coaches and staff, strict codes of conduct, and mandatory child protection training. Educating children, parents, coaches, and administrators about recognizing and reporting abuse is also vital in reducing vulnerabilities and promoting a safe environment.

To address these challenges effectively, action is required at both the national and international levels. Nationally, governments should establish robust legal frameworks that explicitly address abuse in sport and provide adequate resources for investigation, prosecution, and victim support. National sport organizations must prioritize prevention and accountability, implementing policies that protect athletes and ensure appropriate consequences for perpetrators.

At the international level, collaboration between sport federations, governments, and organizations such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and international sports bodies is crucial. Global standards and guidelines should be developed to address abuse in sport consistently across different countries and sports disciplines. Sharing best practices, supporting research, and providing resources for victim support can facilitate a coordinated response to the issue.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by victims of abuse in sport, including power imbalances, fear, absence of accountability, and low conviction rates, highlight the urgent need for comprehensive prevention measures and support systems. Addressing these challenges requires action at national and international levels, involving governments, sport federations, and international organizations. By prioritizing the protection of athletes and the well-being of victims, we can create a safer and more inclusive sporting environment.”

Ms Logan introduced Mr Patrice Evra, former captain of Manchester United and the French national football team and abuse survivor and campaigner against abuse in sport and beyond. Olivia's choice was to describe herself as a victim and Patrice's choice was to describe himself as a survivor. Patrice drew on the challenges he faced from poverty to racism to sexual abuse at the age of 13. His main focus was to join the fight to end violence against children and use his platform to raise the voices and visibility of those affected around the world.

Mr Evra didn't see himself as a victim who needed pity but as a witness to a sexual assault at the age of 13 by his head teacher and the lifelong consequences, including pain, shame, and the inability to cry and to open up to his family and friends. Only his wife was able to help him to share his story and to rid himself of toxic masculinity while watching a documentary on pedophiles at the age of 38. He wrote a book about his story to spread the message that one in two children experienced violence during childhood and that had to stop. Important and famous athletes called him to say that had happened to them too. Sport must be a safe environment for children and communication was key. He also fought against racism via his social media, disguised as a black and white panda. He believed children had also to be involved in the debate and was ready to invest all his passion and determination to break the taboo and protect billions of children worldwide. He believed that finding the right person to talk to and feel safe with was essential. All children needed support and some storytelling platforms to help them speak up against abuse.

Ms Logan thanked him for his courageous words and gave the floor to Ms Maud De Boer Buquicchio, who was appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council as UN Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. She was a Dutch lawyer who pursued most of her career in the Council of Europe. She currently serves as chair of the NGO End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes. She has been a steady and determined advocate for gender equality and the promotion of children's rights, in particular the protection of children against all forms of violence. She asked what other forms of violence, in addition to sexual violence, affected participants in sports.

Ms De Boer Buquicchio's speech is below.

“Sport is not immune to physical and emotional violence, to exploitation and trafficking. Unfortunately, there is still much denial and ignorance. But there is also fear of finding out what's going on and of having to take the measures that would stop all this madness.

The prevalence and impact of sexual abuse in sport have been exposed by the disclosure of hundreds of victims. These were victims and survivors who overcame all kinds of obstacles to denounce a crime hidden in plain sight.

Thanks to this evolution, everybody now agrees that sexual violence in sport exists and must be combatted. But not everyone knows and is ready to challenge other forms of violence in sport yet.

I believe this is a combination of two factors: a harmful sport culture and sport evolving as an irresponsible business.

First, more and more athletes and researchers denounce a sport culture that tolerates abuse of power and violence.

The “no gain without pain” approach is used to justify abusive training techniques, extreme and unhealthy diets, doping, bullying, and hazing. All kinds of abuse by coaches have been (and are) tolerated because they bring medals and trophies, because they have an unchecked power over the people they train.

In the name of tradition and a country's pride, extremely young children are forced to enrol in dangerous training and have a slave-like life, a life deprived of their rights to health, education, family life, leisure, participation and protection from violence.

Second, the consideration of athletes as “products” in a very profitable business opens the door to many forms of exploitation, in particular of children. These are less discussed in the media but have enormous implications.

Financial power is used to draw children and their families who are in economic hardship into unfair practices over which they have no control. Recruiters may buy children for competitive training, treating child athletes as commodities with no rights, whose “value” depends on their capacity to work and from which they expect to make a rapid profit.

Children are transferred from one country to another and find themselves in an unknown setting, with an uncertain legal status, which binds them to their employer.

Reports have emerged of children being recruited in developing countries and sold to play in basketball or soccer teams. Behind such recruitment there is a system involving coaches, recruitment agencies and high-level financial transactions, with some children being kept in poor living conditions, having to pay huge fees to their coaches and ending up in very difficult situations if they are not placed in a team.

Young talents enrolled in football academies frequently face abuses with arduous schedules and little or no say in their career choices. Even if transferred to big clubs, once they turn 18 they will generally be immediately loaned out to other smaller clubs on third party owner schemes, with no say on their destinies, in direct violation of FIFA's regulations.

Unfortunately, these children and young people remain under the radar and exposed to all sorts of violence.

Distinguished members of PACE:

If we want to uphold sport values and sport to be safe, we must tackle the harmful sport culture AND sport as an irresponsible business that overlooks human rights.

I suggest four kinds of measures:

FIRST: Changes in sports governance and regulations. These include measures to embed human rights and survivors' voices in the operations and governance of all sport bodies. Although all existing human rights standards apply to sport, these would need to be "translated" to the reality of sports. This could be done through the promotion of an international safe sport code embedded in the International Olympic Code.

SECOND: Measures to strengthening safeguarding at national level and in international competitions.

THIRD: Measures to increase sports' accountability, making sure that athletes can access independent and safe reporting systems. I have participated in the consultation that FIFA has just concluded to consider the establishment of an independent global safe sport entity. I clearly see the need for such an entity and encourage FIFA to continuing working towards this aim. I also trust that the IOC will support these efforts.

FOURTH: Research about the prevalence and impact of violence in sport, its drivers and the measures that can efficiently tackle it, in particular in the Global South.

If these measures are not taken, sport will only be safe... for abusers.

Enough evidence?

More and more cases of sexual, physical and emotional abuse are coming to light. These are known to be the tip of the iceberg, as most victims decide not to report because of feelings of guilt, shame and fear of reprisals and other unwanted outcomes. Many victims lack access to safe reporting mechanisms.

Research on this topic is relatively recent and mostly undertaken in countries of the Global North. For years, it has mostly focused on sexual violence, but has lately widened to cover other forms of violence.

A study published last year sheds light into the prevalence and characteristics of interpersonal violence against children inside and outside sport in six European countries², including the UK. The Study is called "Cases"³ and involved research with adults (18 to 30 years old) about their childhood experiences.

Interestingly, it found that:

- The prevalence of interpersonal violence against children inside sport is slightly lower than outside sports.
- The prevalence inside sport is higher for boys than girls in all researched countries. 79% of male respondents and 71% of female respondents reported at least one experience of interpersonal violence.
- Figures for each form of interpersonal violence were broadly similar across countries, suggesting the problem is not unique to one country.
- The prevalence for any form of interpersonal violence against children is 68% at the recreational level and 84% at the international level.
- Children belonging to ethnic minority groups are significantly more likely to experience abuse (76.9%).

Now, looking at the figures on specific forms of violence inside sport:

- 65% of adults reported experiencing psychological violence;
- 55% reported sexual violence (35% non-contact sexual violence and 20% contact sexual violence);
- 44% reported experiencing physical violence;
- Neglect was experienced by 37% of respondents.

Needless to say, these insights are precious to overcome denial, to understand vulnerability and resilience factors so that policies and measures can be explained, demanded and adapted.

This kind of research is needed in the Global South, where we suspect, prevalence of abuse is higher and obstacles to reporting next to unsurmountable. By extrapolating the results of the CASES Study to the Global South, we might be speaking potentially of over 200 million child victims of sexual violence in sport.

ECPAT is determined to shed light into this, and we are currently seeking support to carry out a study that will help to overcome denial and ignorance, identify good practices and to move towards efficient and sustainable change, as ECPAT has done in other areas such as the protection against the sexual exploitation of children in the context travel and tourism.

² Austria, Belgium, Germany, Romania, Spain, and the UK.

³ CASES: General Report.

While we keep investing in research, we must also take steps to improve victims' support and make reporting accessible and safe. For sports, improving access to reporting potentially means many more victims coming forward. It takes courage, but it is an overdue move."

Ms Logan introduced Ms Joyce Cook, CBE, OBE, and one of the world's leading voices on inclusion, anti-discrimination and sustainable development in sport, having been active in the sector for more than 20 years. In September 2019, she became FIFA's first-ever Chief Social Responsibility and Education Officer, leading the organisation's human rights, safeguarding and environmental works. In April 2022, she assumed a new role as FIFA Senior Adviser to the President's Office, to establish an independent multi-sport, multi-agency, international safe sport entity. FIFA recently completed an independent multi-stakeholder consultation process to consider the creation of a multi-sport entity to support victims and international federations in addressing cases of violence after they have fallen under their jurisdiction. She asked her to highlight some of the key needs that were identified in that consultation.

Ms Cook's speech is below.

"Question: FIFA has just completed an independent multistakeholder consultation process to consider the creation of a multisport entity to support victims and IFs in addressing cases of violence falling under their jurisdiction. Can you please briefly highlight the key needs identified through the consultation process, to which a multisport entity could respond?"

Thank you for hosting today's hearing and for the question. Following an initial consultation to identify the prevailing gaps and to test the need for an independent international entity in 2021 and involving more than 230 stakeholders and experts from around the world, in November 2022, a multi-stakeholder Interim Steering Group (ISG) and Secretariat was appointed to consider the creation of an international multisport entity together with 7 International Sports Federations, and to make key recommendations to the founding sports.

A further 40 global experts were convened to support this work, alongside a dedicated global Ad-hoc Survivors Advisory Group (ASAG). 12 survivors and practitioners from around the world (eight countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, France, Italy, Kenya, South Africa, and the United States) that have experienced abuse in different sports joined the survivors' advisory group (American football, Basketball, Football, Judo, Gymnastics, Swimming, Taekwondo and Tennis). In total, 31 survivors were consulted across this process.

The Steering Group and its Expert Groups included representatives of UN Agencies, inter-governmental and governmental entities, international and regional sports organisations, (FIFA, IIHF, ISU, UCI, ICC, ITF and IBU), FiFPro, survivors' groups and individuals with lived experience of abuse in sport, human rights specialists and civil society organisations, the security sector and ombudspersons, child protection experts, national safe sport centres and international sport integrity units, academics, health professionals and independent experts.

A conscious effort was also made to ensure geographical representation - international as well as local stakeholders. In keeping with best practice, FIFA commissioned the Army of Survivors to coordinate the engagement of survivors in this process and to provide counselling support to them when needed. The ASAG members (survivors) were also reimbursed for their time.

Key findings and recommendations - summarised in a Final Report published today – include:

1. International Sports Federations must continue to strengthen safeguarding at national levels and improve their reporting mechanisms to ensure that incidents are prevented and, when they do occur, that victims feel able to trust the systems in place, and to come forward. They must be adequately supported by culturally sensitive experts throughout – counselling / care support and legal aid services - with investigations conducted by trauma-informed specialist investigators. Wherever possible cases should be managed locally at national level.
2. Victims in sport denounced their experiences; complaining of shame and fear of not being believed; re-traumatisation due to a lack of specialist impartial expertise, and because sports systems are not designed to deal with cases of abuse; fearing or experiencing threats and repercussions that have significantly impacted or ended their sporting careers; 'tipping-off' of perpetrators; and a fundamental lack of trust in the sports bodies concerned.

3. More and more cases are coming to light that cannot yet be addressed adequately at national levels, with International Federations required to act as a measure of last resort to violence-related cases falling within their jurisdictions, whilst experiencing significant challenges in providing the trust and specialist services needed. All involved identified the clear need for an independent international multi-sport Entity to provide these specialist services - to support victims and whistle-blowers and to provide trauma-informed investigations services to assist International Federations in removing perpetrators from their sports.
4. The Entity's governance, mission, and operations should comply with international human rights standards and the Entity should also continue to centralise the voices of survivors throughout its creation and operations.
5. The Entity should be very clear on its mandate, scope, operations, and processes and cover all forms of violence (sexual, physical, and psychological). It should apply the highest quality standards in the way it assesses risk, conducts investigations, engages with victims and survivors, and to ensure that it meets national reporting obligations.
6. The Entity should be properly funded and based on a solidarity funding model to ensure that no International Sports Federations are financially prohibited from joining.
7. International Federations joining the Entity should commit to building domestic capacity across their national federations; implement appropriate safeguarding policies and practices; and take remedial (safeguarding) measures to address any gaps identified by the entity. Membership should also be contingent on the commitment to engage with both global and regional efforts, for example by working together with the IOC, other IFs, and national authorities to map legal and policy frameworks at local and national level, as well helping to map national reporting obligations, practices and procedures, and victim support services (including legal aid providers).
8. The independence and impartiality of the Entity is considered to be fundamental to its success. The need to build trust across sport and the public at large - especially victims, parents and guardians, and whistle-blowers considering coming forward - will be paramount and was emphasised repeatedly. Without this trust, violence in sport will continue to be unreported around the world.
9. The Entity should only open its doors once operationally ready to do so and should learn the lessons and address the challenges being faced by existing national entities such as the US Centre for Safe Sport. It is not an option not to act, rather to mitigate risks, appoint competent specialists and experts, and ensure accountability and transparency at both national and global levels.
10. Lastly, the development of an International Safe Sport Code focusing on interpersonal violence to harmonize the safeguarding and ethics policies, rules, and regulations within sport organisations, and amongst public authorities around the world, was considered to be essential, given the complexity of the different ways in which the International Federations Codes and regulations currently establish jurisdiction and define violence and sanctions (similar to the IOC Codes for Anti-Doping and Competition Manipulation).

With a total of 23 high-level recommendations, the stakeholders, experts, and survivors involved considered that the results of this extensive global consultation process would provide a timely reference to sports bodies everywhere, and we are also pleased to be sharing the final report with our IOC colleagues and the newly appointed IOC working group.”

Ms Logan introduced Ms Kirsty Burrows, Head of the IOC Safe Sport Unit, who is responsible for overseeing the International Olympic Committee's commitment strategy in the prevention of harassment and abuse in sport and the protection and promotion of athletes' mental health across the Olympic movement. She asked her to provide an overview of the IOC's approach and key initiatives to safeguard athletes in, through and around sport.

Ms Burrow's speech is below.

“It is a real honor to be here today. I would also just like to thank Patrice and Olivia and acknowledge their bravery and courage today.

The IOC has been working in the area of safeguarding in sport since 2004 with the setup of the original working group in 2014. We recognize that whilst fundamental rights can be realized through sport, sport is not inherently good. It exists within the broader context of society, and interpersonal violence is endemic in society. We have seen with the studies and statistics; we see, we hear, we know, how prevalent it is in sport; we understand that there are aspects of sport which can increase the risks; and know that there are also many things that we in sport can do to reduce the risk. But we cannot do this alone.

Safeguarding is a fundamental aspect of the Olympic Charter. It is a recommendation in its own right in Olympic Agenda 2020+5, which is the Strategic Roadmap of the Olympic Movement. It is a central element of the IOC Human Rights Strategic Framework launched last year, of the Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and of Olympism365 which is our strategy in terms of how olympism can help impact the SDGs.

Our work in this area covers many spheres. We have a key leadership role, which Mr. McConnell will later be speaking about, in our approach in terms of the broader leadership of the Olympic Movement. We have systems in place at the Olympic and Youth Olympic Games to ensure safe sporting environments. There has been a concerted effort over the last few years to ensure that we take an evidenced-based approach to safeguarding, really understanding the critical issues in this specialized subject area, including through convening world leading experts to develop consensus statements so we are able to determine what constitutes abuse in sport. We are also taking a public health approach to define, measure, and look at interventions which can ameliorate the risk and then see how we can help to ensure these measures are put in place across the board.

We recently conducted a needs assessment of Olympic International Federations and found that 85% now have safeguarding policies and procedures in place. We developed a Safeguarding Officer Course, which is a seven-month long course of 250 learning hours, developed by an international advisory board of experts from all around the world, to ensure that there was a minimum standard curriculum in safeguarding. Thus far we have over 150 safeguarding officers, and we see that 24% of National Olympic Committees now have a trained safeguarding lead.

Our approach is to ensure that what we do is evidence-based and that it follows a public health approach. We cannot get this wrong. But this is an extremely complex topic and there is no magic bullet. It is a societal issue which exists in sport and must be addressed locally using specialized approaches. Policies are one thing, changing the culture is another. As evidence of this, we saw and heard today about the normalization of abusive behaviors in sport.

It is essential, and much work has been done, including a consensus just last week at the IOC on Youth Athletic Development, which again includes safeguarding as a key and fundamental pillar.

What we can do in sport is go beyond the development and implementation of policies and practices. Of course, these are the bedrocks, but we really need to change the dynamic, develop education, help better inform athletes and all participants of their rights, and ensure that they all have access to recourse and remedy. We know, for example, in cases of child sexual abuse, it is 17 years on average for somebody to disclose. The onus should not be on the people who have been harmed to speak up and we recognize this. And that is why what we need to do is to reduce the risk of harm before it occurs; foster psychologically safe athletic environments, ensure access to trained safeguarding personnel. Understanding safeguarding, it is clear to see that by the time the harm has happened the barrier to reporting and preventing further harm to others is already too high. And reporting to someone far away, who does not understand your situation, language or culture should be a very last resort. It is extremely difficult for victims to speak up. We need to reduce those barriers to reporting by developing local trusted specialist systems. There is currently a lot of work that is being done in terms of bystanders; helping people to understand and recognize the signs and symptoms of abuse whether it is happening within the context of sport or within the context of other areas of society. This is an essential aspect of prevention, as is building independent systems to improve access to recourse, remedy, and support.

We also recognize that this is not strictly another or an additional integrity topic. We recognize that safeguarding is often placed under integrity, but we are not talking about the integrity of sport here, we are talking about the well-being of people within sport. And that, I think, is a fundamental difference. What we need to see is actual people feeling able and empowered to come forward in their context, in their culture.

We need to recognize that there is a high prevalence of abuse within the context of sport, though lower levels than are found in society, but still extremely prevalent. A recent study found minimum prevalence rates of 13% of contact sexual violence in sport. So, what we also need to do is ensure that we have systems in place that recognize that and are able to develop approaches which follow safeguarding led guidance, and that recognize the need for collective action and collective responsibility.

Within sport, we can implement, we can develop, we can put in place educational programmes...we can really work together. And there is a huge recognition in sport of the importance of this topic and our duty of care to act. Some sports bodies are required to implement safeguarding practices in order to receive state funding, which is an important and positive action. But sport cannot do this alone. Many cases do not just breach sports ethical and safeguarding policies, they breach criminal law. Here we also see challenges: to feeling safe; to report; to trauma informed recourse and remedy; to support; and to access to justice. This is a topic which is not easy to appropriately address in any sector of society, but it is one we must all face, together, understanding the specialized approaches required. It needs collective action, collective responsibility. If we do this right, we can lead the way to safeguard people in, through, and around sport. Thank you very much.

Ms Logan gave the floor to Mr Simon Mason, Head of Sport Strategy, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, United Kingdom. She asked what the assessment of the Department of Sport of the problem of violence in sport as perceived in the UK was and what were its causes and needs.

Mr Mason's speech is below.

"As the UK Government we fully recognise the value that sport plays across our society, we are a nation of sport lovers with millions of people participating and watching sport every week. Whilst the vast majority of participants enjoy a very positive experience of playing sport we can't escape the fact that violence exists within sport.

There is no doubt that sport can create conditions where harm can thrive:

- imbalances of power in terms of age and status
- high stakes, with significant reward for success,
- expectations of long hours/sacrifice
- focus on competition and constant improvement.

Over recent years we have also seen societal changes that have shifted how we think about violence and harm within sport:

- decreasing trust in established organisations
- scandals around non-recent abuse in a range of organisations
- greater discussion around mental health
- expansion of existing inequalities
- power imbalances and abuse.

We have seen some notable examples in sport in the UK in recent years (eg gymnastics, football) - these incidents have come to the fore and into public attention thanks to the bravery of the survivors in coming forward and making sure that their voices are heard. Rightly this has made sports bodies ask themselves the hard questions that are needed to improve the culture and safety for everyone who participates in sport.

As a result we are seeing real change being driven through the sport sector whether that be through the Whyte Review or the Sheldon Report to improve practices for the future.

There is no doubt that the survivors deserve better. But also these kinds of behaviours and experiences rightly damage trust and confidence in our sports and the wider sports system.

As Government We want to create safe, fun and fair environments for where people can play sport and be physically active, that is a central part of our ambition to get the nation as active as possible.

In order for us to do that we are clear that we need to address underlying issues around culture and misconduct to achieve those aims."

Ms Logan asked Mr Evra about his experience with athletes discussing the problem of violence between themselves.

Mr Evra confirmed this remained taboo and shared a story about the police who called him following some complaints from other children against his abuser. He lied to the police and denied that something had happened to him too and ever since he regretted letting those children down. He condemned a culture of toxic masculinity, where players could not talk about these things or show any emotion or weakness.

Ms Logan opened the floor for questions to the first panel.

Ms Antoniazzi used to play rugby for Wales and was part of a group of women that exposed 's sexism, misogyny and bullying at the Welsh Rugby Union. As a parliamentarian, she had heard some whistleblowers' stories, but people were ashamed and did not want to report violence, and the Government was not reacting proactively. She thanked FIFA for this important initiative and asked who was holding governing bodies to account.

Ms Cook confirmed that more and more international sports federations, and FIFA itself, were being called upon by victims as a matter of last resort as the judicial systems in the respective countries were not yet effective or trusted. Investigative journalism was incredibly important. FIFA was working hard to put a system in place at national level, over the next 10 to 15 years, to make a real impact across the world, and in the meantime provide an international independent and impartial solution, which had to be separate from the sports themselves.

Ms Helleland asked what would be the most efficient way to work on this issue, such as an independent oversight, monitoring and reporting system or education and awareness programmes. How could members contribute at the political level?

Mr Evra stressed the need to raise awareness, as he was doing with his EVRA foundation (Evra Violence Raised Awareness), which also focused on racism. The media had a massive role to play because storytelling changed lives and football was a powerful platform. The issue was urgent, and millions of children needed protection. In 24 hours, sport organisations were able to shut down the Super League project and the same energy was now needed to protect children.

Ms Jasriel argued that any good plan needed implementation to create trust between the victims and federations. She was currently dealing with almost 1,400 cases and appropriate reporting mechanisms were needed where victims were believed. She reported her story two weeks after being raped and was disbelieved by her own mother and father who testified against her in court. She stressed that reporting mechanisms were needed for victims to feel comfortable and treated with respect. They were not lying until proven otherwise.

Ms O'Loughlin stressed that victims needed to have that support to become survivors, to empower them, understand them, listen to them, believe them. There was a big difference between professional sport and amateur sport and protection was needed at all levels. There was a gang mentality and bystanders and witnesses were afraid to speak up against somebody in authority or in governance, so they should be supported as well. She asked whether the Council of Europe, in its monitoring efforts, should also look into this sort of abuse.

Ms Cook argued that it would help to work with national governments to ensure mandatory vetting and screening of any volunteers or individuals, employees, coaches, etc, who were going to work with children. This was not something that sports organisations could do on their own and needed judicial systems at national level as they built and strengthened the multi-sport environment frameworks. When a perpetrator was banned from a sport, the criminal justice system should follow up.

Ms Burrows regretted that when there was an investigation of abuse, forensic medical evidence was very rarely available. The ratio between conviction versus prevalence rate of abuse and sport was very poor. Some recent research found that coaches would intervene in abusive behaviour if they considered that other coaches would as well. It was important to understand bystanders' behaviour, to set the tone, to set expectations across all levels of sport. They saw huge cross-victimisation as well, whether the abuse happened in sports, at home or at school and the judicial aspect was a crucial element.

Mr Jensen regretted that sport was only associated with fan groups fighting each other, with little awareness of abuse among youngsters and children. Testimonies and visibility were the strongest tool, but we also needed facts and statistics and policymakers could give more resources to research.

Ms de Boer Buquicchio acknowledged the need for further research and evidence of violence, not only in elite sport but also in everyday practice of sport. There was no proper access to reporting mechanisms and research, mostly focused on sexual violence, was mostly undertaken in the global north, and had to be extended to other areas. A UK analysis, including 6 EU countries plus the UK, showed that the prevalence of interpersonal violence against children inside sport was slightly lower than outside sport, and higher for boys than girls and for children belonging to ethnic minority groups. Research should include the global south as many boys and girls were being moved to the global north as victims of trafficking, under the pretext of a future career in sport, and ended up in sex trafficking circuits. The fight against sexual abuse and exploitation in travel and tourism had been very successful and eventually led to the adoption of a code for hotels and tourist locations.

Mr Valentin focused on best practices to fight child abuse and asked which kind of safeguarding procedures and background checks worked.

Mr Thórarinnsson asked whether Mr Evra considered that it was possible for a player of a national team to reveal that he had experienced sexual violence or harassment and what would happen if he did.

Mr Evra believed that abuse in the football world was considered a weakness and the person would be rejected automatically and would not survive. Bullying and jokes were considered normal and that had to be stopped through education and a safe environment in sport, as a matter of priority for millions of children.

Baroness Sater referred to a 2017 independent report on the duty of care and sport in the UK, which must become a political priority. All members of the committee should create a timetable for change in their member States.

Ms Burrows pointed to a research fund focusing on prevention of harassment and abuse in sport and mental health and sport, and other areas. An evidence-based, public health approach was important as there was no one size fits all solution. Athlete vulnerability, a perpetrator with high motivation to harass or abuse and low protection mechanisms were all risk factors. She pointed to key measures such as education on recognising signs and symptoms of abuse, criminal records checks, mandatory disclosure documents, recruitment policies and practices. The IOC would continue to look at what worked and ensure dissemination across the Olympic Movement.

Ms Cook referred to FIFA's safeguarding journey, beginning in 2019 across the 211 member associations. They commissioned Loughborough University to undertake an extensive study to see how effective the FIFA Guardians programme was. More trained safeguarding officers were necessary along with a collective effort, which included the "Start to talk" campaign at the Council of Europe. FIFA was beginning to embed obligations into their development funding programme, their competitions and their codes of conduct but also needed independent checks and balances.

Ms Jasriel argued that laws in many countries stated very clearly that not reporting child abuse would mean facing criminal charges, but those laws were not implemented. She should have had the entire tennis community protecting her when they knew but nobody had the gumption. Talking about her experience was a secondary trauma for her, which was not fair on her nor on millions of children.

The Chairperson thanked Ms Logan for the excellent moderation and all the panelists for their impressive contribution. The PACE's Sub-Committees on Children and on Education, Youth and Sport had worked out an action plan against sexual abuse of children with ten steps which she had been using in her parliament. She gave the floor to Lord Foulkes, moderator of the second session.

Session II. Addressing violence in sport: responses at national and international level

Lord Foulkes stressed that, while the first session had dealt with identifying the problems and the current state of play, the second panel would look at solutions. He started with follow-up questions to the two witnesses about priorities for action by governments and sports associations and authorities, as well as ways to involve more children in this debate.

Ms Jasriel pointed to comprehensive legislation that specifically addressed safe sport and criminalised different forms of abuse, with reporting mechanisms, consequences for perpetrators, provisions for prevention education and victim support services. Funding education and prevention programmes was a big challenge in South Africa. Through her association, she recently obtained the conviction of a man with 740 accounts of abuse against him, which had little coverage in the media. Victims needed to know that reporting structures were safe and effective, and the media could help with that.

Ms Jasriel's speech is below.

“Survivors of violence in sport should be actively involved in the next steps of combatting these issues, ensuring their voices are heard and their experiences shape the design, implementation, and evaluation of measures taken. Their involvement should extend to governance structures as well. Here's a description of a positive experience that illustrates the importance of survivor consultation, specifically mentioning a consultation with FIFA:

In order to create a comprehensive and survivor-centred approach to combatting violence in sport, it is crucial to involve survivors at every stage of the process. This means including them from the design phase of interventions, through implementation, and all the way to the evaluation of the measures taken. Their unique perspectives and lived experiences provide valuable insights that can guide the development of effective policies and programs.

An excellent example of survivor involvement can be seen through a consultation process with FIFA, the international governing body of football. Recognizing the significance of survivors' voices, FIFA proactively engaged with survivors of violence in sport to ensure their experiences informed decision-making. This consultation involved survivors as key stakeholders, empowering them to contribute to the development of policies, protocols, and support mechanisms.

During the consultation, survivors were given a platform to share their stories, insights, and recommendations. They provided valuable input on how to prevent violence, improve reporting mechanisms, enhance accountability, and support survivors in their healing journey. Their contributions played a pivotal role in shaping FIFA's approach to addressing violence in football, ensuring it was survivor-centered and comprehensive.

By involving survivors in governance structures, such as advisory committees or task forces, they have the opportunity to directly influence policy-making and hold sport organizations accountable. This involvement helps ensure that survivor perspectives are integrated into decision-making processes, creating a more inclusive and effective approach to combating violence in sport.

Survivor involvement brings authenticity, credibility, and a deep understanding of the issues at hand. It helps to build trust between survivors and sport organizations, fostering a collaborative environment that acknowledges survivors' expertise and respects their rights. It also sends a powerful message that their voices matter and their experiences are instrumental in effecting meaningful change.

In conclusion, survivors of violence in sport should be involved in the next steps of combatting these issues, from design to implementation and evaluation, as well as in governance structures. Their involvement brings essential perspectives and insights, ensuring survivor-centred approaches and policies. By actively engaging survivors, such as through the positive example of a consultation with FIFA, we can collectively work towards a safer and more inclusive sporting environment.”

Lord Foulkes asked Mr Evra how to mobilise different actors. UEFA and FIFA had got rid of the super league for a combination of vested interests. What could parliamentarians do to have things organised in the right way?

Mr Evra stressed the need to prioritise this issue and to raise awareness at all levels, also via the media. This might take 10, 15 years and it was already late.

Lord Foulkes argued that poverty was getting worse in many countries. Marcus Rashford identified the issue of free school meals and took it up, so the Government had to act. He asked whether Mr Evra could do that for the issue of violence in sport.

Mr Evra was ready to do more and dedicate his life and energy to this issue via his platform, which was more important than winning the champions' league.

Lord Foulkes thanked him for his strong commitment and gave the floor to Mr Bell, Deputy Secretary General of FIFA. He would discuss FIFA's progress in setting up an international safe sport entity, and any difficulties they might be experiencing.

Mr Bell's speech is below.

“We are very grateful for this invitation to participate in heals of FIFA at this hearing on how to tackle problems of abuse, exploitation and harassment in sport. It’s logical that FIFA would come together with the Council of Europe to address these topics as they are closely related to overarching areas of our cooperation and common interest: corruption, ethics and governance, child protection and human rights more generally.

FIFA has been on something of a governance journey itself in recent years, emerging from a difficult past and determined, under the leadership of the President, to put good governance firmly at the top of our agenda. Tackling the problem of abuse and harassment in football falls squarely within these key policy objectives.

Why did FIFA support the creation of an international multi-sport “safe sport entity”? Why would it add value? Well, we see reports of abuse and incidences of abuse across the whole spectrum of sports, from gymnastics to tennis to cycling to swimming to football and so on. What we also see are common themes in these cases of abuse: cover ups, failure to take victims seriously, fear of speaking up, lack of political will to tackle the issue. These are institutional systemic failings.

And since we are crossing the boundary here into not just unethical behavior but also criminal conduct, there needs to be close cooperation and information exchange between sports authorities and state law enforcement and civil society. An independent multi-sport entity would be best placed to forge these links.

It’s also worth emphasizing just how challenging these abuse case investigations can be for sports bodies, and sometimes also in lawless parts of the world. At FIFA we had cases involving Afghanistan and Haiti which are just two examples which were extremely challenging and it was largely after these experiences that FIFA and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime declared their intention to work together to create a global safe sport entity which could provide trusted reporting lines and a global network of investigators who could collaborate with local law enforcement and with Interpol to tackle these cases.

What we see from various reports and investigations into different sports across the world is a collection of common themes and often common failures. Surely it would be worthwhile to try to learn from these experiences and pool expert knowledge in an international cross disciplinary entity?

The creation of an independent multi-sport global entity would be a sign of determination from the entire sporting world to tackle the problem of abuse. It would raise the profile of the problem and put greater focus on it. We believe the consultation process conducted thus far has been valuable and we can apply some of the learnings from it, including with regard to international definitions of abuse and so on. This is useful even if the entity is not going to be established just yet. But we do believe the creation of such an entity should be the way forward.

We also know, from wider experience outside sport, how difficult it is to prosecute crimes of sexual and physical and mental abuse. Conviction rates are notoriously low and victims are often reluctant to come forward. So, it seems to us to be an area where a sharing of knowledge and experience would be obviously beneficial.

In the meantime, at FIFA we did not stand still. We launched the Guardians in Sport Diploma in 2021, with almost 2,000 participants in the first course. Our aim is to embed relevant safeguarding expertise across all 211 Member Associations of FIFA. We now have almost 200 trained safeguarding officers across our members and these courses we have established are available for not only football but also for the wider sporting community as well. The courses have been developed in cooperation with UNICEF and are delivered together with the Open University. As of May 2023, more than 6,500 learners have completed course one.

At FIFA we have also embedded safeguarding policy into our operations, coaching programmes and youth tournaments. And we have also amended and updated our Code of Ethics, so that since 2023 there are greater protections for victims of abuse. For example, there is no limitation period for prosecuting those who have engaged in any form of abuse; there are procedural rights for victims of abuse (appeal, participation in proceedings); and we also oblige all of our member associations to notify FIFA of any national decisions taken on such matters.

Finally, we have also developed a minimum Package of Care for victims and survivors of abuse so they can receive appropriate assistance and support, especially if they are involved in FIFA Ethics proceedings.

We are determined to help eradicate this problem, we have been stepping up our internal resource and networks to deal with it and we are very open to participating in constructive dialogue on this matter which we believe really calls for collective action.”

Lord Foulkes thanked him and gave the floor to Ms Ashley Ehlert, Deputy Secretary and Legal Director of the International Ice Hockey Federation, who had organised an integrity awareness week in December 2022 and could report on the outcomes.

Ms Ehlert's speech is below.

"Effectiveness of the IIHF Integrity Awareness Raising Week:

- a) Objective: Ice Hockey represents a sport that has a significant power imbalance between players and their coaches / GM. This can result a toxic culture. The IIHF initiated the IIHF Integrity Awareness Raising Week to ensure that players, coaches, GM and all persons operating within the ice hockey ecosystem under that the IIHF will not allow this type of behavior in ice hockey. The IIHF wanted all persons to know the rules and for players to understand that they have a safe place to come, report and seek help.
- b) Effectiveness: what the IIHF really realized was many of the current holes or gaps in the system, particularly with respect to reporting. Persons either do not know where to report or are scared to report. We also realized that the IIHF does not have the resources in house to deal with many of the issues that it will face in the near future. We are not just speaking about financial resources but really human resources, particularly with the expertise to conduct trauma informed investigations when reports are received and ensure that victims have appropriate care and support.

The IIHF commends both what the IOC and FIFA are attempting to accomplish; FIFA with a global sport entity and IOC with his goal to implement local recourse, but strongly believes that both are not mutual exclusive and to truly fight this issue we must have both.

IIHF strongly supports a universal code that provides consistency not horizontally between various sports but also vertically between the national and international level. The result will be fighting the issue from both a top down and bottom-up approach. The simplest item such as a common understanding of what is harassment is necessary to globally fight this issue.

To have an effective approach, we must engage survivors, and have their voice and thoughts intertwined in all aspects, including awareness raising, education, rules and trauma informed investigations.

To have any chance for International and National sport to deal with the issue of abuse and harassment, we must pool our resources and work together."

Lord Foulkes appreciated the reference to all other sports and gave the floor to Mr Kit McConnell, Sports Director, International Olympic Committee (IOC) to bring in the IOC's perspective, complementing the previous presentation and including his views on FIFA's idea of a safe sports entity.

Mr McConnell's speech is below.

"Let me first start by officially thanking the Council of Europe on behalf of the IOC as well as myself. It is incredibly important, and we will come back to this, the spirit of partnership and action. And these meetings are incredibly important, bringing us together as sport; but equally, together between public authorities and sport, because we cannot do it independently of each other. I think everyone has heard that very clearly, in different ways and in different voices this morning, but for us, that is the key moving forward. As you said, George, I am the IOC Sport Director and I think this morning's conversation has been incredibly helpful for us. Olivia, Patrice, thank you so much for being so open. It puts on not only a face, but the real experience around this and in the context of how we move forward – and that is absolutely critical.

Equally, or perhaps even more important than my professional role, is my role as a father. I've got an 11-year-old daughter and a 9-year-old son, and almost every day of the week I put my two kids, Sophia and Toby, in a sporting environment with coaches and managers that I personally don't know, and I am trusting that that environment is safe for my own children.

As an organization, I think many of you are familiar with what we do. We've got a sports organization - an organization of Olympic Games that dates back 3000 years. The IOC as an organization is 130 years old, but we know we don't live in the past. You heard that today. Patrice said it incredibly clearly. It is about prioritization from this point forward. Every single day, we advocate the benefits of sport physically, socially, and mentally, in terms of the individual and of the community. But clearly, sport is not immune from society, and everything that happens in society happens in sport. The good, and as we have heard this morning, also the bad. We have been active, and Kirsty described this as well. For 20 years we've had an active role in this space, as Kirsty highlighted, under the leadership of Prince Feisal of Jordan.

We have set up a dedicated in-house unit of five people; specialists that are driving awareness and change in our own organization to allow us to then drive awareness and change outside as well. We established the first international sport-focused safeguarding officer certification programme two years ago, and by the end of this year we will have 150 internationally recognized, certificate holding safeguarding officers working within sports organizations across 66 countries. As we continue to note the way society is changing, we also continue to provide leadership in other new areas including addressing online harassment and cyber-bullying.

And to make sure that everything we do is informed by our partners, this year we conducted a 46- question survey across all the Olympic Federations, summer and winter and we had a 100% response rate, which allows us to understand the key challenges related to preventing and appropriately responding to harassment and abuse in sport, particularly at the local level, and to move forward with clear information and a clear framework. But while we provide the centralized leadership, coming back to Olivia and Patrice, we know this is not an organizational challenge to tackle as we would other topics related to integrity in sport. Behind every single case of abuse there is a person, and often it is not just one person, it's a group of people that have all suffered in the same and yet different ways, and this means needing specialized approaches, contextualized at the local level where the harm occurs and where local trauma informed responses are required.

And there again we come back to the point that has been raised, which is about central leadership for us in putting in place local protections and local remedies to protect in the first instance and facilitate access to recourse and remedy where abuse happens. We need to act there. So, we have to be leaders in driving that change. In terms of what we are doing, we are very clear that when we say that, that protective environment does not exist for so many athletes in so many sports, in so many countries. And that needs to be the first point of focus. As you have heard, tennis player in South Africa, football player in France, professional football player in many countries, equally exposed.

We have to move forward on this. What we are doing is understanding that, as Alasdair and Ashley so clearly said, federations themselves, be they international or national, are set up for specific things. They are set up to drive development of their sport, promote their sport, run competitions, and increasingly focus on things like anti-doping, but they are not set up as safeguarding bodies in and of themselves. So, we have to use the network of sport but equally provide independent measures to support them at the local level, to act where they can't. And we can understand what happens in a national federation, it was raised in the case of Welsh Rugby, often the people that the complaints are being made against, if that is driven back into a national sports system, those people that are being complained against are often part of that system. The people that are being asked to act on that are either colleague, they are supporters, they know the people personally, they are not independent in their actions or decision making. And Alasdair was also very clear. The mandate of the sport organization can go so far, but it doesn't go into criminal investigation or criminal action, nor are they specialists in victim support and that is where we need to find that balance.

We had a very clear call, not just from individual federations but from the umbrella body of all of the Olympic federations on behalf of all 31 summer Olympic federations to the IOC, very clear, very explicit, that the IOC has to act as a leader, working in partnership with the federations who are also driving for change, but equally acting on behalf of and with every single federation because it cannot just be a sports specific action here. You cannot be in a situation where you are an athlete lucky enough to be in a sport where there is an active national federation or international federation addressing safeguarding at the local level who can access support, or where protective measures are in place, but your brother, sister, colleague is in a sport that is not so advanced in safeguarding. It must be comprehensive. Therefore, acting with the 206 National Olympic Committees who act at a national level, the 40 Olympic sports who act at a sports specific level, we are driving forward a clear action plan focusing on building capacity in prevention, recourse, and remedy, independent but not isolated from sports bodies.

Do we have all the answers now? Clearly not. Do we have all the funding now? Clearly not. But we do have a process to move towards practical change. Just a couple of months ago, our IOC Executive Board confirmed that we were starting to accelerate down this road, building on the clear work that FIFA has done, the IIHF has done. It's not about us versus other sports and what they are doing. It's about bringing everyone together. We have set up a working group that includes FIFA, the IIHF, and athletes - including two athletes who have lived experience of harassment and abuse in sport, who will bring that experience directly to the table to develop a model to strengthen safeguarding at the local level through independent structures and systems.

That working group, and it sounds like a very IOC thing, I know, to say we have a working group and we are looking at it, but it has a very clear mandate. And that is to look at how to centralize and coordinate at a global level, which we are, but critically develop models at a local and regional level to have direct impact. Knowing the lingual and cultural differences, knowing the legislative differences, knowing there are different partners in the government and criminal justice systems to work with. We know how hard it is for athletes to disclose an experience of abuse and to do it in a foreign context makes it even more difficult. Athletes rarely reach out to international organizations for help, and if they do it is because they have exhausted all their options in their local context. So, we have to coordinate centrally, drive centrally, but we must make it impactful at a local level to really make a difference for the affected athletes. And that is what our approach will focus on.

We have a clear timeline for that and that is this year. We have to report back in just over two weeks and now I passed the hospital pass back to Kirsty because she is leading that reporting. But we need to have the model in place this year in order to drive that forward. We have 10 million dedicated to that per Olympiad, which is a four-year period building up to each Games. But we know that it is a drop in the ocean, and we know we can't fund everything that is going to be effective at a national level. And that is where we come back to the partnership with you. And I think Alasdair, you answered the question, do we know what works? Not entirely. I think we know some elements, but equally we know what doesn't work and that is where we are now.

And we know the prioritization. There were athletes, young athletes, children that were put in harm's way and suffering abuse yesterday. No doubt there is some suffering today, and there will be some tomorrow. And that highlights very clearly Patrice's words of prioritization. Clearly. We, as the IOC, are not just going to put out a statement and a consensus statement at the end of this process. We know we will be judged by action, and it is not about us responding to judgment. It is about us driving change. And there, over the next couple of months, we will work with the federations directly; with the National Olympic Committees who can have an impact at a national level covering all of the sports; and we will work with them to see the best way we can do that - creating that model centrally, which may be independent of the IOC.

We have heard and understood the need to set up trauma-informed models that can be truly effective at a national level. That can be things like the safe sport code we talked about, which is not only a universal reference point for implementation, but also for assessment and measurement.

Are people implementing that code not only in word but in practice? We also look to all of you. If we say we are committed, we can't do this without you; we have to have partnership inside sport. We have to have partnership with you. You are the ones, as you have heard, that can influence national governments, regional governments, local judicial systems, the people we need to act in addition to sport. So, we are committed to that. We have a very clear timeline.

The prioritization is there. We are athlete-focused, and we know it is a horrific situation that athletes have been in, and some athletes still are in. So, as a leader, we are completely committed, but leadership on our side alone is not going to work. To accomplish this, we have to be partners with you and with other government organizations as well. And that is the commitment we have. We really don't want this to end in 45 minutes or whenever this panel is over, it has to carry on. We can't walk out of this room and say, "That was a great discussion". A great discussion is not enough. We must act and we must act collectively. Thank you very much."

Lord Foulkes thanked him and gave the floor to Mr Mason and asked what he was going to recommend back to his ministers and others in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

Mr Mason's speech is below.

"We have already taken steps over recent years to improve how we handle instances of violence in sport and how we more effectively protect participants:

- Positions of Trust legislation - brought in last year making it illegal for a sports coach to have a sexual relationship with someone they coach who is under the age of 18. This brings it into line with the situation for teachers and social workers, for example.
- additional support for elite athletes in raising concerns, through UK Sport's "Sport Integrity" service, which provides an independent way for athletes or people working at the Olympic or Paralympic level to raise concerns. The service carries out investigations on behalf of sports with appropriately skilled personnel.
- support for sports governing bodies in investigating cases of safeguarding or abuse at the grassroots level, through Sport England's case management support service. This enables funded sports to access help with investigations and complex cases, drawing on a central pool of experienced staff.

We have made good progress in recent years and the actions we are taking are having a real impact on the ground, the vast majority of those involved in sport do so in a safe way, but can't get complacent.

Moving forward as Government we recognise the need to work with the sector to continue to improve processes and practices.

It is clear that a "sticking plaster" approach won't work - and we need to look at the whole system and learn from recent issues to improve our overall processes. For example having a greater focus on identifying low level concerns.

We also need to look at the sport sector itself to ensure that it is as welcoming and inclusive as possible. That means increasing diversity and inclusion across the board - and need to ensure the culture of sport is addressed, and people feel able to speak up.

We will shortly be publishing a new Government sport strategy - which will place integrity of the sport system at its heart."

Lord Foulkes gave the floor to Mr Alexandre Husting, Chair of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) Governing Board, Council of Europe, to bring in EPAS' perspective.

Mr Husting's speech is below.

"Pleasure and honour to be invited as Chair of EPAS to this hearing on violence in sport and safeguarding,

Thank the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe for inviting EPAS to speak on this important topic.

I have to say that of all the topics dealt with by EPAS, the fight against violence and abuse in sport, particularly towards children and women but also towards anyone in a vulnerable situation, is one of the most important. At Council of Europe level, the protection of human rights and respect for the rule of law in sport are among the strategic priorities for the period 2022-2025.

EPAS, the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport, is a unique platform for intergovernmental cooperation in the field of sport, created in 2007 to address the challenges sport is facing. EPAS brings together the public authorities of 41 member states and nearly 30 sports organisations and NGOs that are members of its consultative committee. It is an « enlarged agreement », that means that non-member states of the Council of Europe and even outside of Europe can join. EPAS aims to promote, through essentially voluntary standards, guidelines and exchanges of best practice, a sport based on high standards of good governance and ambitious ethical requirements. Protection against all forms of violence and abuse in sport is therefore at the heart of EPAS's activities.

The first standard-setting instrument that constitutes the Council of Europe's "benchmark" for sport is the "European Sports Charter", which was last revised in 2021. This Charter makes numerous references to the protection of children, whether to ensure better coordination of all the public actors involved or to call on all stakeholders to adopt a zero-tolerance policy. A resolution adopted in October 2022 by the sport ministers of the Council of Europe also reiterates their concern about human rights violations in sport, particularly those against children and women. To combat these violations, the ministers gave to EPAS a mandate to continue to support states and sports organisations in defining and implementing policies to safeguard children.

Regarding EPAS's actions in the field, I must of course mention several projects, such as "Start to Talk", a "global" project that brings together a multitude of key actors, both public and private, to prevent child abuse in sport and identify how to respond to it. The project offers awareness-raising campaigns, guidelines, roadmaps, training courses, etc.... to date, 9 countries have launched a national "Start to Talk" campaign. The methodology developed in this project is based on previous projects, in particular "Child Safeguarding in Sport" (CSiS), a joint project with the European Union which aimed to create "Child Safeguarding Officers" in the countries taking part in the project. A Pool of International Experts on Safe Sport, which follows on from the former Pool of European Experts on Sexual Violence in Sport has been set up. This pool is a single point of access to multidisciplinary expertise (researchers, policy makers, specialists, etc.) covering all forms of violence and abuse against children in sport.

Each of these projects brings together public authorities, sports organisations, NGOs, researchers and practitioners in steering committees. This is the strength and advantage of EPAS: it enables all the key actors to be brought together and to develop a horizontal, multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach to make initiatives and actions more effective than isolated actions.

I would also like to briefly mention the more "general" conventions of the Council of Europe, although they do not directly target the topic of sport, they also provide guidelines on the rights and protection of children and women. These include conventions on combating the sexual exploitation and abuse of children, trafficking in human beings, violence against women and domestic violence. I could also mention the Committee of Ministers recommendation in 2009 on integrated national strategies for the protection of children against violence, which states that "it is the responsibility of the State to foster a culture of children's rights and a sense of responsibility towards children among all professionals who come into contact with them".

As you can see, on the basis of these standards, many reference frameworks, guidelines and tools have been developed by EPAS. It is now up to the various stakeholders to take them and implement them with the support of the EPAS.

The Council of Europe also signed memoranda of understanding with FIFA and UEFA in 2018, in particular to continue cooperation on the protection of children's rights. The Council of Europe is also collaborating on the development of the "FIFA Guardians" programme designed to improve child protection standards in football and is also involved in FIFA's project to establish an independent, global body to investigate and follow up cases of abuse. The topic of child protection in sport is becoming increasingly important, both in public debate and in practice, and in this respect I can only welcome the IOC's initiative to allocate a fund of 10 million dollars per Olympic cycle to strengthen the prevention and monitoring of abuse in sport.

I have to say that, at EPAS, we have seen growing interest in recent years on the part of the public authorities and the sporting movement in the work being done on violence and all forms of abuse against children in sport. Six countries (France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Montenegro and Spain) have joined the "Child Safeguarding in Sport and Combating Hate Speech in Sport" project, and 9 have launched a national "Start to talk" campaign (Spain, Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, Finland, France, Croatia, Georgia, Greece). National roadmaps have been put in place in partnership with the sports movement and NGOs. The success of certain projects, such as Start to Talk, and the increasing demands from public authorities for EPAS support, mean that unfortunately we are now looking for sustainable sources of funding to enable Start to Talk to meet all the demands.

I think that today more and more governments have understood the importance and urgency of this issue.

I believe it is essential to engage in a partnership with sports organisations and national public authorities, and that EPAS is the right platform to support various actions and enable us to work together to fill the current gaps in the sports and legal systems, to guarantee appropriate and safe reporting systems that take into account the specific nature of cases of abuse, and to strengthen the confidence of victims and society in a sports justice system. I'll say it again, but the co-construction of policies to combat abuse in sport, bringing together private and public players in the same forum, makes it possible to overcome the usual obstacles of, on the one hand, respecting the subsidiarity of public action in sport and, on the other, the autonomy of sports organisations. EPAS also facilitates the centralisation of tools and the coordination of actions so that each stakeholder can avoid duplication of actions in isolation, and so EPAS can enable complementary actions to be developed.

Violence and abuse in sport are widespread problems that transcend borders and affect all sports at all levels, from professional to grassroots. Possible future actions by EPAS, in conjunction with Start to Talk for example, would be to contribute, together with public authorities, to examining possible loopholes in national legislation and policies, to developing these if necessary and to coordinating the actions of public authorities and sports organisations. It would certainly also be a question of involving parents so that they do not feel that enrolling them in a sports club is putting their children at risk.

EPAS could also invite public authorities to include sport as a key sector in national action plans to prevent violence, with a dual role: prevention WITHIN sport and prevention THROUGH sport.”

Lord Foulkes thanked Mr Husting and opened the floor for questions to the second panel.

Ms Hopsu referred to the Ice Hockey World Championship in Finland with a lot of violence in the rink and the culture of masculinity in sport. She asked whether there was any proposal for changing that culture.

Ms Ehlert replied that that type of dominating culture was starting to change, and players were starting to speak out, including female players. Ice hockey was a very physical and tough sport but that should not extend outside the rink and things were slowly changing.

Mr Bonett asked what governments, parliamentarians and sports bodies could do to get the victims to talk at the right time.

Baroness Sater praised Baroness Gray-Thompson's report, which was a positive step in setting up the sport integrity service and mentioned the possibility of having an independent ombudsman.

Mr Valentin expressed a strong wish for his report to be used and to focus on the important actions to undertake and on best practice. He asked how one could get all stakeholders to talk to each other and make a real impact.

Mr McConnell stressed that FIFA played an integral part in driving communication on this important issue between federations. Ice Hockey had partnered with FIFA in that regard. The IOC will act in parallel with that process, bringing in other federations, sharing best practices and codifying them across the Olympic movement. Consistency was key and the cooperation of governments and national Olympic committees were critical to ensure implementation across different disciplines.

Ms Ehlert pointed to the IHF structures for integrity in sport and encouraged all federations to cooperate and avoid duplications.

Mr Bell confirmed that cooperation was ongoing despite different views. For athletes to come forward and speak, they needed independent and credible institutions which they could trust. A better monitoring enforcement mechanism was needed, probably at the global level.

Mr Evra recalled that his mother had asked him not to talk about the abuse. Trust in institutions was key along with a strong determination to make a difference, as he did as a football player coming from the street. Children who experienced any kind of violence, be it sexual, emotional or physical, would end up being violent, or a drug addict or alcoholic. Leadership was not about advancing one own interests but about creating other leaders and saving millions of children.

Mr Mason pointed to the new UK strategy to improve integrity in the sport system, which was also internationally oriented and hoped that any process would be independent. On the Ombudsman, he stressed the necessity to clearly define roles, processes and responsibilities of all parties involved.

Lord Foulkes pointed to the importance of following up on Parliamentary resolutions, which is why Mr John Howell, Head of the UK Delegation to PACE, had set up a task force in the UK by putting forward parliamentary questions. He called on all members to follow this discussion up with ministers, colleagues, sports associations, and to report back, in honour of all the speakers.

Ms Stevenson, as a member of the Sports Select Committee in the UK, and a proud Wolverhampton Wanderers fan, focused on the role of sporting bodies in educating children and their parents. She thought it would be interesting to compare notes with other countries.

Mr Smoljak referred to cases of emotional abuse in the Czech Republic and coaches being very successful and still representing sports unions. Their priority was success and not a good sports environment, and that had to change.

Ms Hart focused on prevention and education in grassroots sports groups. Primary schools also played a big role in highlighting to children and to parents the issues that might arise. The UK had safeguarding leads in schools.

Mr Husting agreed that good governance in sport should remain a priority for governments, along with sustainability of sport and match fixing. The fight against doping provided a strong model, including as regards a whistleblowing protection system and anonymous denunciations via several organisations and websites. The concerted work of EPAS in these areas was relevant, including the fight against violence in stadiums. Violence and abuse in sport was a cross-border problem and needed greater integration and cooperation at the international level to avoid fragmentation. Sport organisations cared about the autonomy of sport and governments' action was limited by the principle of subsidiarity, and would only finance sport organisations, which is why a platform for cooperation was really important.

Mr McConnell stressed that the human right was not only to practice sport but to practice it in an environment free from harm. There was a collective responsibility to bridge any potential gaps between public authorities and sport. Coordination was fundamental and the only way to be effective centrally and to stop these cases happening at a local level.

Ms Ehler pointed to the International Hockey Federation five- and ten-year plan to tackle this problem, with the deployment of coaching curricula to educate players and new coaches and the removal of bad actors, with a deterrent effect in the IHF ecosystem. She agreed on the need to educate children starting with the school system and to urge other sports to follow this model.

Mr Bell pointed to historic cases of cover-ups, lack of political will, failure to take victims seriously and their lack of confidence in the system. These problems were manifested in every sport and had to be distilled into a coherent table to address them with institutions that were fit for purpose, for athletes and children to have confidence in and trust. This was just a question of whether the sports world saw it as a priority.

Mr Evra regretted the lack of awareness of football clubs' presidents, who tended to push away these kinds of complaints, including LGBTQ discrimination issues. His deep desire was to help people feel safe and help improve the system.

Ms Jasriel pointed to the huge disincentives to dope in anti-doping policies, which should be an example to help set up a system which would incentivise victims of violence to come forward.

Lord Foulkes felt that this had been an effective working meeting and hoped that all participants would follow it up.

The Chairperson confirmed the positive energy expressed by all participants, hoped that the discussion would continue in their capitals and suggested a family picture.