

A COALITION TO PROTECT ATHLETES AGAINST SEXUALISED VIOLENCE IN SPORT

The Regional Sports Federation of North-Rhine Westphalia (Landessportbund Nordrhein-Westfalen, LSB NRW)

This description comes from the study commissioned by the European Commission on gender-based violence in sport ([Mergaert L., & al., Study on gender-based violence in sport – final report, European Commission, 2016](#)). It was updated within the framework of the European Union-Council of Europe joint project [Pro Safe Sport + “Put an end to sexual harassment and abuse against children in sport”](#), by collecting more recent information from the organisation responsible for the project.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Background

With 17.8 million citizens, the region of Nordrhein-Westfalen is the most populous German state. It is also a 'sport intensive' state with 19,000 sports clubs with over 5.1 million members.

The sport federation of the region of Nordrhein-Westfalen (Landessportbund Nordrhein-Westfalen, LSB NRW) can be considered a trailblazer in the prevention of sexualised violence in German sport. Following the results of the first German qualitative study on sexualised violence in sport in 1998,¹ the LSB NRW started its campaign 'Silence protects the transgressors'. It has been continued throughout the last 18 years. Currently, the campaign includes several activities and tools aimed at combatting sexualised violence in sport: the publication of guidelines for sport organisations, leaflets for girls and boys, brochures for parents, and an educational package for trainings in this field. The campaign has been evaluated twice by the German Sport University in 2004 and 2010. The findings of the evaluation showed a general buy-in to the campaign and an emerging sensitisation about sexualised violence in sport. Moreover, attitudes about the responsibility of sport in relation to the prevention of sexualised violence improved over the years. Unlike 2004, interviewees in 2010 believed that the prevention of sexualised violence represented an important and explicit responsibility of sports organisations and stated they were more inclined to break the silence around sexual violence in sport. The evaluations of the campaign also allowed for improvements in its activities throughout the years. Finally, the evaluations provided evidence that the campaign has problems to reach sports clubs and its members. Since most of the sport clubs in Germany are based on voluntary work, many clubs claim to be overstrained with implementing an encompassing prevention strategy. This need for reaching out to sports clubs was the starting-point of the North-Rhine-Westphalian 'coalition for protection against sexualised violence in sport'.

Co-operation and monitoring

A coalition was initiated by the LSB NRW and receives financial support from the Regional Ministry for Youth, Sport and Culture in North-Rhine-Westphalia. The LSB NRW convened a steering group consisting of stakeholders from the fields of sport, child protection, youth work and academia. The following organisations are members of this steering group: the LSB NRW, the local sport federations of Cologne and Dortmund, the North-Rhine-Westphalian association for child protection, the North-Rhine-Westphalian Ministry for Youth, Sport and Culture, the North-Rhine-Westphalian network for child and youth protection and the German Sport University.

¹ Klein, M. and Palzkill, B. (1998) *Violence against girls and women in sport*, Düsseldorf: Ministry of Women, Youth, Family and Health, North Rhine-Westphalia.

One of the first tasks of the steering group was to define necessary actions to prevent sexualised violence in sport clubs. After several steering group meetings and an intense process of discussion, a set of 10 actions were defined to be undertaken by sport clubs if they want to join the coalition.

The steering group meets regularly to monitor the enlargement of the coalition. Furthermore, the two local sport federations in the city of Cologne and Dortmund received the status of regional coordination centres for supporting the clubs in the regions of Rhineland (close to Cologne) and Westphalia (close to Dortmund). The German Sport University was commissioned to evaluate the two years' pilot phase that started in 2013. The pilot phase was initiated in order to assess the efficacy and practicability of the 10 actions on the basis of club level sport.

Recruiting sport clubs to join the coalition

In 2013, the LSB NRW and the two local sport organisations communicated about the initiative via the websites of the LSB NRW as well as the regional sport federations in Cologne and Dortmund. A specific logo was created to brand and give visibility to the initiative, as well as to ensure a consistent communication.

Thirty-five sport clubs took part in an application procedure, containing basic descriptive information about the club, and were invited by the LSB NRW to join an official event launching the start of the coalition. At this event, the procedures and actions were presented to the clubs to ensure transparency in the process right from the beginning. The event launching the network was communicated via press releases to the broader public in North-Rhine-Westphalia. Following this event, the 35 clubs were encouraged to start implementing the 10 actions established by the steering group.

Actions to prevent sexualised violence in sport²

The 10 actions to prevent sexualised violence in sport at club level comprise:

1. The club board should meet with the regional coordinators to receive information on the actions that need to be put in place, as well as on the development of a club-specific plan to prevent sexualised violence in the club.
2. The initiative should be presented and discussed at the club's general assembly so that they can vote on participating in the initiative.
3. A reference to the prevention of sexualised violence should be included in the club's statutes. As an example, a reference could be: 'The club commits itself to take actions in order to protect children in sport, and to prevent and intervene in case incidents of sexualised violence occur'.
4. A responsible officer/person for the prevention of sexualised violence in the club should be nominated. This person must participate in a two-day educational training, specifically developed for local prevention officers. The training is regularly offered by the LSB NRW to meet the needs of sports clubs because of their high turnover of personnel.
5. All staff members, including voluntary staff, submit a certificate of good repute (police record check) to the club board.
6. All staff members, including voluntary staff, subscribe to a code of honour. Clubs can write their own code of honour, or can sign up to the federation's code.

² https://www.lsb-nrw.de/fileadmin/global/media/Downloadcenter/Sexualisierte_Gewalt/10_Punkte_Aktionsprogramm.pdf

7. All staff members, including voluntary staff, participate in a one-day educational training on the prevention of and intervention in sexualised violence. LSB NRW offers this training to club staff on a regularly basis and free of charge.
8. The club should raise awareness of all club members (including children and their parents) on the prevention of sexualised violence in sport via seminars, brochures or the club's website. The club can use the educational materials offered by the LSB NRW.
9. The club should develop and implement an intervention guideline to handle cases of sexualised violence, including concrete actions for grievance procedures.
10. The club should promote young club members' participation in the initiative by organising specific events targeted at them (e.g. self-assertiveness trainings, discussions on the topic, etc.).

The implementation and follow-up process

The implementation of the above 10 actions was supported by the regional coordinators in Cologne and Dortmund. They closely monitored the progress of each club in their respective region and helped them to implement the actions. The regional coordinators supported the clubs in scheduling trainings, while LSB NRW appointed the qualified instructors/trainers to deliver the trainings at the clubs. Each club has initiated specific communication procedures to inform the members and the general public about the newly adopted prevention measures.

Involving and raising awareness of young club members about sexualised violence in sport

In order to support the clubs in involving young club members in the initiative, the LSB NRW created a specific theatre play on the topic of sexualised violence in sport. This play, which was performed by a professional theatre pedagogic institution, was put on stage in all participating clubs. This event was accompanied by a workshop for the young club members with the purpose to discuss what they had experienced in the theatre play and how to deal with problems of sexualised violence in everyday situations.

Finalisation of the pilot phase and plans for the establishment of the coalition

In the summer of 2015, when the first three clubs finished the implementation of the 10 actions, a press conference was organised and the clubs were officially welcomed into the coalition. They received an official certificate as well as a roll-up banner. The latter represents their membership and allows for communication actions to their target audiences and partners. At the end of 2016, the pilot phase was ended. A conference was organised to present the evaluation results, as well as plans for the expansion and establishment of the coalition.

OUTCOMES AND STRENGTHS

A thorough scientific evaluation of the pilot phase of the coalition took place in 2016.³ The evaluation was comprised of a pre- and post-assessment and used a control group. The evaluation showed that the initiative has succeeded in many regards. Club coaches and staff members have significantly changed their attitudes towards the topic and reported that their sensitivity towards problems of sexualised violence has increased over the two years' pilot phase. Furthermore, the results show that they feel significantly more confident to identify sexually aggressive behaviours and to intervene in cases of sexual violence. All in all, the results show

³ See: Rulofs, B., Axmann, G. & Wagner, I. (2016). Zur Steuerung von Kinderschutzmaßnahmen im organisierten Sport – am Beispiel des NRW-Qualitätsbündnisses zur Prävention sexualisierter Gewalt. *Leipziger Sportwissenschaftliche Beiträge*, LVII (1), 69-94.

that the staff members of the participating clubs have increased their knowledge on the topic throughout the pilot phase.

The whole process of initiating a coalition for sports organisations that want to commit to the prevention of sexualised violence in sport seems to have fostered a respectable amount of activities in North-Rhine-Westphalia. At the end of the pilot phase, 26 of the originally 35 clubs signing up to undergo an action-oriented process to prevent sexualised violence in sport completed the whole set of actions or were close to complete them. In October 2016, one club still had to fulfil major parts of the 10 actions programme, but was still committed to the initiative.

One of the strengths of the initiative is its strong network of sport federations, clubs and stakeholders in the field of child protection, youth work and academia. A strong regional network is being built, regional coordinators are appointed for monitoring and providing support throughout the process, and a systematic evaluation is foreseen within the project. Gradual inclusion of other local sport federations in the region will expand and strengthen the coalition. The LSB NRW is currently involving further regional sport federations into the network and offers them training on how to implement the programme in the clubs. The follow-up process allows for redressing problems identified, for learning from clubs' experiences, and for improving the procedures and the support provided by the coordinator.

Furthermore, the initiative facilitates a direct access to sports clubs which are at the basis of sport and thus seem to be best placed to implement a prevention strategy against sexualised violence in sport. By appointing and educating prevention officers at club level, and by offering trainings to all staff members in local clubs, necessary information on the topic is brought directly to the people that work with athletes on a daily basis. Offering clubs a clear 10-steps programme to implement a prevention strategy, including assistance by regional coordinators, will help them to overcome difficulties often faced by voluntary staffed organisations.

LIMITATIONS

Eight clubs quit the attempt to become a member of the coalition. These clubs report that they do not feel able to take all necessary actions in the timespan of two years due to a lack of time and personnel. The programme is strongly dependent on personal engagement in the process. The participation of all club staff members in a specific educational training turned out to be the major challenge for the clubs. In some cases (depending on the size of the clubs), it was necessary to offer several trainings in order to guarantee that all staff members were trained.

This shows that the implementation of the 10 actions is not a self-fulfilling process but rather a challenging and time-consuming step-by-step procedure. The pilot phase shows that the implementation of an encompassing quality programme for the prevention of sexualised violence in sport clubs, which are primarily based on voluntary work, needs time and support of professional stakeholders with expertise in this field. More financial support from the regional government is needed to support clubs in promoting the actions, and to rollout this initiative in the whole region.

LESSONS LEARNT

The set of 10 actions provides a comprehensive framework for prevention, protection and provision of services against sexualised violence in sport. The actions help to raise awareness of all relevant staff levels within a sport club. Thus, a profound process of sensitisation is initiated, a change of attitudes can be seen, and knowledge and competencies are built in favour of preventing sexualised violence in sport. Installing a monitoring and evaluation system from the start of the initiative allows the practice promoter to make necessary adjustments along the way and provides scientific evidence of the practice's effectiveness.

The process of establishing 10 actions to implement a prevention policy at club level has proven to be very demanding. As a consequence, a few sport clubs dropped out during the implementation process. This was discussed by the steering group, who acknowledges the challenges to meet such high standards in relation to the diverse composition and structure of sports clubs. Nevertheless, the steering group decided to hold on to the set of actions listed above, believing that these are minimum requirements for clubs to protect their members. Instead of lowering the bar, more financial support from the regional government is being sought to support clubs to implement the 10 actions to prevent sexualised violence in sport.