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Children's Council Consultation on child safeguarding in sport

A Report for the
'Start to Talk' (Bulgaria) Project

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The opinions expressed in this report are the responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Council of Europe.

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Contents

1. Context for the Project	3
1.1. ‘Start to Talk’	3
1.2. Child and Youth Participation	4
1.3. The Lundy Model of Participation	6
1.4. Dimensions of Participatory Practice	8
2. Methods	10
2.1 The Children’s Council	10
2.2 Data Collection Tools	11
2.3 Content of the Consultation	12
2.4 Ethical Considerations	14
2.5 The Online Focus Group	15
2.6 The Padlet Online Survey	16
2.7 Feedback	17
3. Appendix	18
3.1 The Online Survey on the Padlet Platform	18
3.2 The Online Focus Group Schedule	19
3.3 Information Sheet for Children and Young People	20
3.4 Information Sheet for Focus Group Facilitator	23
3.5 Child Consultation Feedback Survey	27
3.6 Useful Child Participation Tools	29
4. References	30

1. Context for the Project

1.1. ‘Start to Talk’

“Start to Talk” was launched by the [Council of Europe’s Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport \(EPAS\)](#) in 2018 as a follow-up to two successful Pro Safe Sport projects that were co-funded by the Council of Europe and the European Union and implemented by EPAS. “Start to Talk” aims to protect children in sport by eliminating all forms of violence and abuse against them.

Its objectives are to:

1. Draw attention to the prevalence and impact of child abuse in sport;
2. Recall the international standards that must be applied to prevent abuse, protect children, and fight impunity;
3. Provide guidance on how to concretely implement those standards through:
 - a. the strengthening of legislations, policies, and services,
 - b. capacity building, awareness raising and training,
 - c. exchanges of good practices from public authorities and the sport movement;
4. Mobilise public authorities, the sport movement, and the media, triggering action and partnerships at international, national, and local levels.

In working towards these goals, the “Start to Talk” project provides technical support and safe sport materials to organisations responsible for sport (*i.e.*, governments; sports clubs, associations, and federations) and individuals involved in sport (*i.e.*: coaches and athletes) to assist them in the implementation of child safeguarding policies, awareness-raising campaigns, and training of relevant stakeholders.

As part of its latest activities, “Start to Talk” is assisting its stakeholders in the production of country-specific roadmaps for the effective development and implementation of child safeguarding in sport policies, including steps for establishing Child Safeguarding Officer (CSO) roles in sport. Each roadmap is designed with the support of international and local experts in child safeguarding in sport and follows the roadmap methodology developed within the European Union (EU)–Council of Europe (CoE) joint project ‘[Child Safeguarding in Sport](#)’ (CSiS).

Through this, “Start to Talk” is providing support to the Bulgarian Ministry of Youth and Sports. Preparations for the development of the roadmap in the Republic of Bulgaria (hereafter referred to as Bulgaria) began in late 2021. In early 2023, “Start to Talk” began pursuing ways of effectively incorporating the views of children and young people into the development of the roadmap for Bulgaria, with the support of one of

their partner organisations, the State Agency for Child Protection in Bulgaria. This report provides an overview of the process used to gather the opinions of children and young people as part of this initiative.

1.2. Child and Youth Participation

Child/youth participation refers to the involvement of children and young people in decision-making processes on issues that affect their lives. It recognises children and young people as active contributors and rights-holders rather than passive recipients of decisions made by adults on their behalf. According to the CoE, child participation means that children, defined as any person under the age of 18 years old, individually or in groups, have “the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, to be heard and to contribute to decision making on matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity” ([CoE, 2012](#), p. 6).

The United Nations (UN) [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC) (UN General Assembly, 1989) provides a legal imperative for gathering the views of children¹ and young people² in matters that affect them and, wherever possible, incorporating these into policy and practice. While sport is not specifically mentioned in the UNCRC, the rights enshrined within the UNCRC are applicable to all settings, including sport (David, 2005).

Article 12 (1) states that:

“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”.

The UN also notes that the participation of *all* young people, not only children aged under 18, in matters that affect them is key to youth well-being and empowerment and to sustainable development (see, UN Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, 2018):

“The capacity for progress of our societies is based, among other elements, on their capacity to incorporate the contribution and responsibility of youth in the building and designing of the future. In addition to their intellectual contribution

¹ The UNCRC defines children as below age 18 unless the age of majority is earlier within signatories’ domestic law.

² The UN defines young people/youth as those aged between 15 and 24 (UN General Assembly, 2007).

and their ability to mobilise support, they bring unique perspectives that need to be taken into account”.

(UN General Assembly, 1996, Article 104)

Importantly, the participation of children and young people “plays a fundamental role in realising all the rights in the Convention for all children” (UNICEF, undated). In other words, other rights enshrined in the UNCRC cannot be realised without the actualisation of children’s participation rights. Consequently, the UN has made effective participation of youth one of its 10 priorities (UN Secretary General, 1996) and advocates the incorporation of contributions from children and young people into all aspects of life.

Despite this, and despite a substantial growth in awareness of and developments to prevent violence and abuse against children in sport globally in recent years, incorporating the views of children and young people into policy and practice developments remains rare in sport (Lang, 2022a). Indeed, children and young people are still largely excluded from decision-making at all levels of governance in sport globally due to traditional assumptions that position them as vulnerable, dependent, incapable, and inferior in knowledge and competence compared with adults (Lang, 2010, 2022a; Uprichard, 2008).

Working with children and young people who participate in sport is crucial to ensure that research and the policy and practice developments recommended as a result are meaningful and relevant to children and young people and lead to more child/youth-centred sporting environments. Including children and young people in sport strategy development, decision-making, and research is also central to democratising sport and realising safe sporting environments. As well as highlighting the value that an organisation places on children and young people, involving children and young people can break down power imbalances between adults and children/young people in sport; support the early identification of potential concerns, including safeguarding concerns; and build trust, which can encourage abuse disclosures (Lang, 2022a; Mountjoy et al., 2020). It can also shape the development of innovative and more child/youth-centred sporting spaces that better meet children/young people’s needs and encourage long-term healthy sport engagement (Lang, 2022a). This is vital given studies repeatedly indicate a high prevalence of violence and abuse against children in sport (Pankowiak et al., 2022; Vertommen et al., 2016) and that formal routes for disclosing allegations are either unusual or not recognised by athletes (Mountjoy et al., 2020; Parent, 2011). As such, engaging children and young people in meaningful ways in safe sport developments has significant benefits and “is recognised as fundamental to their human dignity and healthy development” (CoE, 2016).

The Council of Europe has a rich tradition of promoting and advocating for children’s rights (see, Council of Europe, 1996, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2016, 2021; Fernandes Guerreiro & Sedletzki, 2016) as well as in actively engaging children and young people

in the development of policies and strategies that relate to their lives (see, CoE, 1996, 2012; Parodi & Costella/Defence for Children International Italy, 2022; Verweijen-Slamnescu, 2023). Indeed, children's participation has been a priority in the CoE's Strategy for the Rights of the Child since at least 2007, and giving a voice to every child remains a priority in its latest strategy ([CoE, 2022](#)). Some useful CoE tools to support organisations in advancing child participation are included in the Appendix.

The [European Convention on the Exercise of Children's Rights](#) (CoE, 1996) recommended children's views be taken into account in matters that affect them in the mid-1990s, and its [Recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18](#) (CoE, 2012), which was developed with the direct involvement of children, became part of the Council of Europe legal framework in 2012. Furthermore, the Council of Europe [Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse](#) (CoE, 2007), which underpins the Council's work to prevent violence and abuse in sport, includes a mandate to involve children in both developing and implementing initiatives to protect children from sexual abuse. This Convention, which is more commonly known as 'the Lanzarote Convention' after the city where it was opened for signatures in 2007, was the first international treaty to specifically address child sexual abuse. Article 9 (1) states:

“Each Party shall encourage the participation of children, according to their evolving capacity, in the development and the implementation of state policies, programmes or other initiatives concerning the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children.”

(Council of Europe, 2007)

EPAS was keen to continue this work for this phase of the “Start to Talk” project by involving children and young people in the development of the roadmap and incorporating their views on what could be done to prevent violence against children in sport.

1.3. The Lundy Model of Participation

The Lundy model of child participation was developed by Professor Laura Lundy, professor of children's rights at Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, and professor of law at University College Cork, Ireland. It offers a way of conceptualising children's right to participation as laid down in Article 12 of the UNCRC by helping decision-makers identify the distinct but interrelated elements of this. It has become the most widely used approach for ensuring the principles of children's participation rights as enshrined in the UNCRC are put into practice. The model has four elements:



DIAGRAM 1: THE LUNDY MODEL OF CHILD PARTICIPATION (reproduced from Ireland Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015)

In brief, these are:

SPACE – Children must be given the opportunity and the (physical and metaphorical) space to express their views;

VOICE – Children must be facilitated to express their views, whether in writing, verbally, or through another mode of expression. This also recognises that, in some cases, children will need the help of others in order to form a view;

AUDIENCE – Children’s views must be listened to and accessible by those with the power to effect change;

INFLUENCE – Children’s views must be acted upon (as appropriate), and feedback must be provided as to why action was taken/why no action was taken.

As well as providing a useful heuristic for understanding how to turn children’s right to participate into effective participatory practice, this model also illustrates that participation is a staged *process* whereby children are enabled to give their opinions, are listened to, and are able to influence decisions about their lives to bring about

change. It thus makes clear that gathering children's views is *not* analogous with participation: as Lundy (2007, p. 927) herself states, "'voice' is not enough". Meaningful participation does not simply mean children and/or young people 'taking part' or 'being present' but includes them having a genuine influence over decisions.

The Lundy model, alongside the checklist developed by Lundy and colleagues in 2015 to support its implementation (Ireland Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015), underpinned planning for and engagement with children and young people for this project.

1.4. Dimensions of Participatory Practice

Alongside the Lundy model of child participation, six dimensions to child/youth participation identified by Lang (2022b) and adapted from Lundy (2007) and Kenna et al. (2017) were considered in the planning stages. Attention to these dimensions can help those planning child/youth participation activities to better understand the different forms of participation and the strengths and limitations of these, thus encouraging alternative ways of engaging with participatory practice to ensure it is as effective and inclusive as possible (Lang, 2022b). The six dimensions of participatory practice considered were:

- Dimension 1 relates to the kind of decisions we are asking children/young people to be involved in. Are the decisions we are asking them to be involved in *public decisions* that will impact groups of or many or perhaps all children in sport (*i.e.* about the hiring of a particular coach or the creation of a particular policy that will affect groups of children in the sport), or *personal decisions* that are specific to them (*i.e.*: a decision about their training or competition schedule, about their individual involvement in the sport);
- Dimension 2 encourages reflection on whether the approach proposed to involve children is the most appropriate for the particular situation. There are many different approaches to eliciting children's opinions. Some may be more *formal*, such as the use of established youth panels or dissemination of online surveys/questionnaires, whereas others may be more *informal* in nature, such as chatting with children during or after training or competition;
- Dimension 3 relates to the *frequency of engagement*. Are we expecting to engage children and young people once, or are we hoping to engage them repeatedly? If so, how frequently? It is also important to note that children and young people's participation "is a right (not a duty)" (Lundy, 2007, p. 934); they do not *have* to participate and may, at any stage in the process, decide to opt out. This is in itself an active decision and must be respected;

- Dimension 4 relates to the *level of participation* expected from children and young people. Participation takes place on a spectrum:
 - It may be *consultation-focused* – conferring with children in order to inform, often involving one-off events, similar to market research;
 - It may be *participation-focused* – aiming for more active engagement from children and young people to *influence* decisions, often for a time-restricted period, and/or on a specific issue, and perhaps accessing the voice of a sample of children/young people;
 - It may be *child/youth-inclusive* – where children and young people’s perspectives are central to *all* practice and a participatory culture is developed.

- Dimension 5 relates to the *form of participation*. We may aim to access children and young people’s opinions from them *directly*, or *indirectly*, such as by asking them via an intermediary (i.e.: a parent or carer), depending on their age/capabilities;

- Dimension 6 relates to *who is participating*: whose opinions are we asking for and is this sufficient? Are we engaging only children of a certain age and, if so, why? Or only children at a certain level of performance, or in a certain region, and why? It is important to consider how representative the views being gathered are.

The Lundy model of child participation and the above dimensions of participatory practice were considered when planning how best to gather children and young people’s views on the roadmap design and shaped the activities planned with them for the project.

2. Methods

The [State Agency for Child Protection](#) in Bulgaria collaborated with EPAS in planning and coordinating a consultation with children and young people on the development of the country-specific roadmap. The EPAS Secretariat employed a child participation in sport expert, Dr Melanie Lang, Director of the Centre for Child Protection and Safeguarding in Sport (CPSS) at Edge Hill University, UK, to support the design and organisation of the consultation. This section describes the process undertaken.

2.1 The Children’s Council

The State Agency for Child Protection has a well-established [Children’s Council](#), which was formed in 2003 to “promote children and young people’s participation in policy-making and decision-making processes in matters that affect them” (see [here](#)). Members of the Children’s Council regularly take part in consultations and interact with state and non-governmental organisations at national and regional level in Bulgaria.

The Children’s Council comprises 61 male and female child and youth members aged between 13-18 years old – two members from each of the 28 provinces of Bulgaria (totalling 56 members), plus four members who serve as special representatives of children/youth from vulnerable groups, and one who serves as a special representative of children/youth who have received international protection in Bulgaria. All members have volunteered to be part of the Council and receive training on the UNCRC and their participation rights as part of their membership. Members decide which consultations they wish to take part in and receive certificates for each activity they contribute to.

At the time of this consultation, all members had been involved in at least one prior consultation activity through the Council. Prior consultations with Council members have involved a variety of methods, including online and in-person focus group discussions, online surveys, and printed questionnaires, so members are familiar with a range of approaches.

As the focus of the “Start to Talk” consultation involved some knowledge of or engagement in sport, the State Agency for Child Protection first asked Children’s Council members for expressions of interest in taking part in a consultation on the topic of violence prevention in sport. As a result of this, 10 members volunteered.

2.2 Data Collection Tools

Two approaches were taken to gathering views from children and young people: an online focus group and a self-administered online survey using the web-based platform Padlet. Online approaches were considered appropriate to allow as many of the Children's Council members as possible to take part given their geographical spread across the country (Gaiser, 2008). Internet access is widely available in public settings, schools, and homes in the country (Kanchev et al., 2017), and 93% of those aged 9 to 17 years old in Bulgaria use the internet daily (Kanchev et al., 2017).

An online focus group was selected as it offered an effective way of generating rich data from multiple participants (Liamputtong, 2011) while also helping to reduce participants' inhibitions and promote group interaction (Hennessey et al., 2022), resulting in more interactions between and among participants and more 'easy' and 'natural' discussion. This is especially useful when working with children and young people who may sometimes be more reluctant to speak in group settings. Focus groups can also be useful when discussing sensitive topics because they facilitate the establishment of rapport and allow the facilitator to monitor engagement (Heath et al., 2018). Krueger & Casey (2000) recommend between 5-10 participants per focus group to generate discussion and facilitate group management. As 10 Council members showed an initial interest in participating, it was decided that one focus group event would be sufficient for the project.

To elicit the views of as many children and young people as possible, the Children's Council members who had volunteered to participate in the online focus group also consulted with their peers on the roadmap proposal and what could be done to prevent violence against children in sport before the online event. These views were then passed on by Council members during the online focus group.

In addition, to offer an alternative way for children and young people to provide their views, the focus group was supported by a short online survey on the web platform Padlet. Online surveys, especially when they allow anonymous comments as used here, are effective when gathering the views of children and young people as they allow engagement at the time and pace of the user (Kleine et al., 2016) and can enhance feelings of anonymity among participants. Padlet was selected as the preferred platform as it is easy to use, even accessing it on a mobile phone, and can be tailored in appearance with different colours and backgrounds, making it engaging and appealing to young people.

The platform was set up with a series of open-ended questions relating to the roadmap design and ways that sport could be made safer for children (see Appendix 3.1). The Children's Council members who had volunteered for the online focus group were provided with a QR code that took users directly to the Padlet survey page, which was

designed to be compatible whether viewed on a PC/laptop or a mobile phone. They shared this QR code with any peers who preferred to provide their views in writing rather than by talking to the Council member. The page was only accessible through this QR code; it was not searchable through an online search engine. Once on the page, participants could anonymously type their answers to the questions posed. The Padlet survey went live 10 days before the focus group and could be added to until two weeks after the completion of the focus group, at which point the page was closed to new entries.

The team involved in planning the consultation considered ways of ensuring the four interrelated aspects of Lundy model were integrated into the process throughout. The steps taken are identified in Table 1 on the page below. Similarly, the six dimensions of participatory practice (Lang, 2022b) were considered when planning the project. The project involved asking children and young people on the Council about public *decisions* that have the potential to impact all children involved in sport (dimension 1) in a *formal* way (i.e.: through engagement with the Children’s Council) (dimension 2). Due to the nature of the activity – the development of a policy framework for the prevention of violence in sport – engagement with Council members was singular rather than ongoing in nature (dimension 3). Since the activity was time-bounded and allowed children and young people to have an influence on the content of the policy framework, it was participation-focused (dimension 4), and it involved direct participation from children and young people themselves rather than through an intermediary (dimension 5). Finally, significant effort was made to encourage engagement from as many members of the Council as possible and to encourage those members who took part to also get the views of their peers for feeding into the activity to make the activities as representative of as many children and young people’s views as possible (dimension 6).

2.3 Content of the Consultation

The consultation aimed to gather the views of children and young people who are engaged in sport (whether as active participants or as spectators) on the prevention of violence in sport to support the development of a roadmap for safeguarding in sport in Bulgaria. The child participation in sport expert, in consultation with members of the State Agency for Child Protection and the Senior Project Officer of the “Start to Talk” project, designed a schedule of questions and discussion topics for use during the focus group (see Appendix 3.2), along with an information sheet about the event for the children and young people (see Appendix 3.3) and an information sheet about the event for the lead facilitator of the focus group (see Appendix 3.4). Meanwhile, the Padlet survey used the questions from the focus group schedule but excluded the discussion topics.

The focus group schedule, Padlet questions, information sheet, and online survey were designed in English and translated into Bulgarian by an independent native Bulgarian speaker to ensure accuracy. Meanwhile, documents for the lead facilitator were produced in English as she had a good understanding of this. All translated documents were then checked by the lead facilitator of the focus group, a native Bulgarian speaker, for accuracy and nuance. The interview schedule, online survey questions, and information sheet for Children’s Council members were written in child-friendly, accessible language and using terminology appropriate for the Bulgarian context. For example, the terms *abuse* and *safeguarding* are not commonly used in the country; rather the term *violence prevention* is more common, so this language was used in documentation for participants.

TABLE 1: STEPS TAKEN TO APPLY THE LUNDY MODEL TO THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

SPACE	VOICE	AUDIENCE	INFLUENCE
<i>Children must be given the opportunity and the space to express their views</i>	<i>Children must be facilitated to express their views</i>	<i>Children’s views must be listened to and accessible by those with the power to effect change</i>	<i>Children’s views must be acted upon (as appropriate), and feedback must be provided as to why action was taken/why no action was taken</i>
<p>The Children’s Council is a well-established safe space for child and youth members to express their views and to represent the views of their peers who are not Council members. Council members are familiar with the Council’s purpose and how it operates and have taken part in previous Council consultations.</p> <p>All 61 members of the Council were invited to take part in the event. Those who agreed were also asked to seek the views of their peers to feed further young people’s opinions into the event.</p> <p>An experienced facilitator who was known to the members was selected to run the event to help</p>	<p>Those involved were given information about violence in sport, the roadmap plan and the questions/topics that would be covered in advance and had opportunities to ask questions.</p> <p>Members of the Children’s Council were informed that participating in the event was voluntary and there would be no consequences for non-engagement.</p> <p>Options were provided for children and young people to give their views – live verbally during the online event, providing their views verbally or in writing to a Children’s Council member to feed into the live online event, and in writing through an anonymous online platform (Padlet) that remained open for 4 weeks.</p>	<p>The process for communicating the children and young people’s views to those involved in drafting the roadmap was established prior to the event: a member of the EPAS Secretariat and the ‘Start to Talk’ project team in Bulgaria attended the live online focus group, and the anonymised views of the children and young people were presented to the Steering Committee working on the development of the Bulgarian national roadmap.</p> <p>The Child Council members were informed in writing and verbally who their views would be communicated to, how their views would be used, and how these would be used.</p>	<p>The views of the children and young people and ways of integrating these into the roadmap design were discussed in project meetings by those drafting the roadmap for Bulgaria.</p> <p>All views provided in the online event and online platform were treated equally and discussed in project meetings.</p> <p>The Children’s Council secretary passed written feedback on the outcome of their discussions from the project team to Child Council members, with concrete examples of how their views were incorporated into the roadmap design provided. In a handful of instances, where the views expressed were unworkable, the</p>

<p>members feel comfortable during the event.</p> <p>An online event was selected to facilitate free and open discussion.</p> <p>Council members were informed of the support in place for them and that all opinions on the topic were important.</p>			<p>reasons for this were explained in the feedback to Council members.</p>
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The questions in the focus group schedule were open-ended to elicit as much discussion as possible and began with questions of a less sensitive nature (i.e.: What do you enjoy most about sport?) to help participants relax and get used to speaking in the group (Brandl-Bredenbeck & Kämpfe, 2012). The focus group schedule also incorporated themed discussion topics related to the prevention of violence in sport to allow for more free-flowing discussion.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The State Agency for Child Protection has substantial experience in running consultation events with children and young people, including those on sensitive topics such as violence prevention, and has established safeguarding protocols that are aligned with Bulgarian child protection legislation. Agency staff agreed that the proposal to hold a consultation on the roadmap and violence prevention in sport should be presented to Children’s Council members so they could decide whether or not to take part. The Agency’s safeguarding procedures were followed throughout.

Although participants were not asked about their personal experiences of violence inside or outside sport at any time during the consultation activities, given the sensitivity of the topic, it was recognised that discussing the topic may be upsetting for some. To mitigate this, Council members were informed in advance about the topic and content of the online focus group and Padlet survey. The contact details of the Council’s designated safeguarding officer were provided to them in the information sheet and email correspondence from the Agency about the event.

Council members were informed about the purpose and estimated duration of activities and about what would happen to their contributions and who their views would be shared with. They were also informed that all their contributions would be anonymised in any notes, publications, and discussions to protect their identities, that they could not be identified through the Padlet online survey, and that the online focus

group would not be audio or video recorded.

For the online focus group, Council members were advised that they should join the event from a quiet place where they would not be interrupted or overheard. They were required to keep their camera on at all times throughout the event to facilitate openness and so the facilitator could see if anyone showed signs of distress. Most joined from a quiet place in their home showed signs of becoming upset. The Council secretary, an adult, also followed up with Council members shortly after the focus group took place to check if any had any concerns or needed any additional support. There were no reports of support being needed.

2.5 The Online Focus Group

The online focus group took place from 10:30am (Eastern European Time) on 30th May 2023, which was during the school year for most school grades in Bulgaria. Six Children's Council members joined the online consultation event, four girls and two boys aged between 15 and 18 years old. All played or followed sport. The event was not audio or video recorded for anonymity and safeguarding reasons, but the facilitator and child participation expert kept anonymised hand-written notes to aid recall after the event.

Consideration was given to the timing of the online focus group so as not to clash with members' schooling. Nevertheless, deadlines built into the "Start to Talk" project meant it was not possible to delay the data collection beyond May 2023, so while the consultation took place outside of compulsory schooling time for most pupils in the country, it did fall within the exam period for pupils in some provinces. This may explain why although 10 Council members had initially agreed to take part in the event, only six joined the online event.

The event was facilitated by Petya Dimitrova, an expert in child protection and national consultant at the "Start to Talk" project and an experienced facilitator for the Children's Council. The event was also attended by the Senior Project Officer for the "Start to Talk" project, Elena Casero, and the child participation expert, Dr Melanie Lang. The latter both introduced themselves to Council members in English at the start of the event, with live translations of this provided to the Council members, but they took no further part in the focus group. Their cameras and microphones were turned off during the event to minimise disruption and mitigate Council members' feelings of being observed. The consultation itself took place in Bulgarian, with 'behind the scenes' live translation provided by the EPAS Secretariat so the two non-Bulgarian speaking observers could follow the discussion.

Next, the facilitator introduced herself and explained the background to the project, why the consultation was taking place, how long the focus group would last, and how

the young people's views would be used. The young people were also reminded they could share their views using either the chat function on Zoom or on the Padlet survey, and they were given an opportunity to ask questions. At this point, one Council member commented that he thought the topic was important and he was glad to be asked to give his views.

Following this, the facilitator reiterated key information from the information sheet, including that all views were welcome, that participants should keep their cameras on throughout, that the event was not being recorded but that anonymised written notes would be made, and that Council members would be provided with feedback on how their views had been incorporated into the creation of the Bulgarian roadmap to prevent violence against children in sport. A reminder of who Council members could contact if they had any concerns or became upset as a result of the topics being discussed was also provided, as was information on how to use Zoom, although all Council members noted they were already comfortable using the platform.

The facilitator then began the focus group, starting with asking the Council members to introduce themselves and their interest in sport. The event lasted for around 70 minutes in total, around 50 minutes of which comprised the focus group discussion with and between Council members. Council members were allowed to speak freely with as little interruption from the facilitator as possible. For a few minutes at the start, one Council member struggled to access the sound feed so could not take part but this was quickly fixed. Following this, all Council members in attendance spoke during the event, with five of the six speaking repeatedly and at length in response to the questions/discussion topics. One was quieter but still contributed following questioning from the facilitator. At several points throughout the discussion, Council members noted that they had spoken with peers (i.e.: friends, members of their school class) about the consultation topic and passed on these views to add to the discussion.

The event ended with the facilitator, the Senior Project Officer of the "Start to Talk" project and the child participation expert thanking the Council members for their contributions. Once the Council members had logged out of Zoom, the facilitator and child protection expert cross checked the notes they had each taken – one set taken in Bulgarian based on the children and young people's responses, and one set taken in English using the live translation – to assure the quality of the simultaneous translation. No significant differences between these were identified.

2.6 The Padlet Online Survey

A short online survey on the web platform Padlet was created to offer an alternative way for members of the Council and other children and young people who were not members to contribute their views. However, no contributions were made on this during the four weeks it remained open for comment.

According to the State Agency for Child Protection Children’s Council secretary, Council members had not used the Padlet platform before and it was not common practice for members to be offered several ways to contribute to a consultation. This may explain why the online survey was not used. It may also be that the young people were not comfortable with the platform or preferred to be able to give their and their peers’ views verbally in person as this allows for more nuance and contextualising information to be provided.

2.7 Feedback

Several days after the online focus group took place, the Children’s Council secretary contacted Council members to ask them to provide feedback on the consultation activities to help the “Start to Talk” team learn from the event. A brief anonymous online survey with seven open-ended questions was prepared in English and translated into Bulgarian and emailed by the secretary to the young people who had taken part (see Appendix 3.5). Written feedback was received from one participant. The participant reported being pleased with how the event went and did not make any suggestions for ways the session could have been improved. Qualitative comments included:

“...to me the most important thing was that we got the right to vote! I liked that we all heard each other and were shown that our opinions mattered. Thanks”

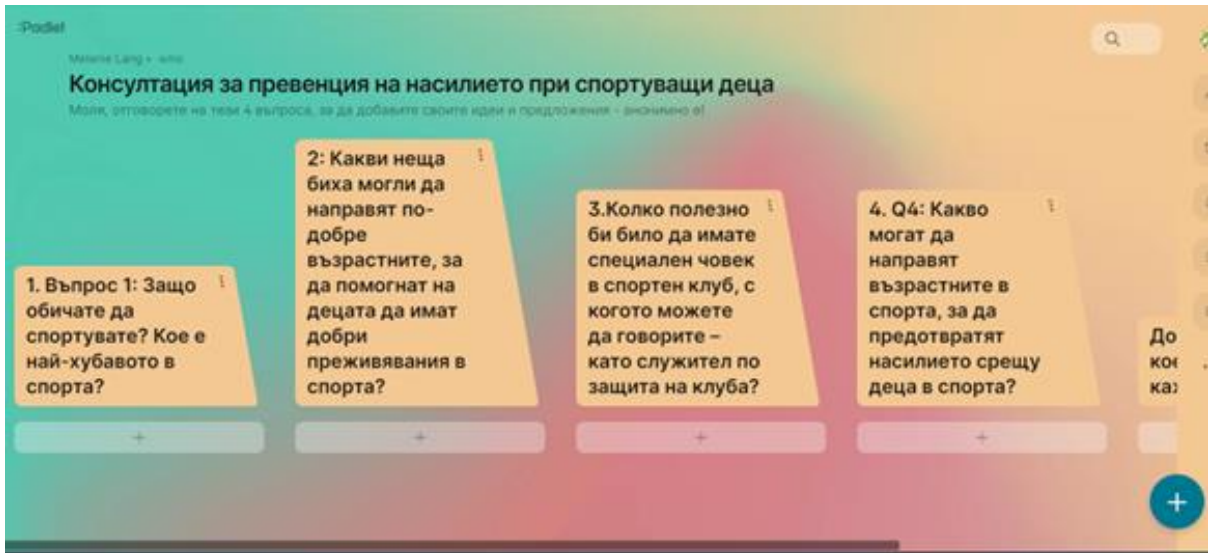
“I liked the opportunity to express our opinion and experience, because only with joint efforts can we stop bullying and abuse in sports.”

The participant also noted they had gathered the views of around 20 of their peers for feeding into the consultation event.

In addition, the Secretariat of the “Start to Talk” project in Bulgaria provided feedback to the State Agency for Child Protection Children’s Council secretary on how the children and young people’s views were used in the development of the roadmap on violence prevention in sport for the country. This was fed back to Children’s Council members.

3. Appendix

3.1 The Online Survey on the Padlet Platform



3.2 The Online Focus Group Schedule

Why do you like sports? What's the best thing about sport?

What things could adults do better to help children have good, positive experiences in sport?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: Peer-to-peer bullying in sport.

Bullying sometimes happens in sport. Bullying is *unwanted, aggressive behaviour among children and young people. It is often repeated over time. Bullying can include things like making threats, spreading rumours, physically or verbally attacking someone, or excluding someone from a group on purpose.*

- Why do you think bullying sometimes happens in sport?
- What could adults do to stop it?
- *What do you think children should do if they see someone being bullied in a sports club?*
- If you had a problem with being bullied in a sports club, what would you do?
- Who would you tell about it?

What about rules for sports clubs on preventing violence - how useful is it to have rules set by government for sports to follow?

- Why/why not?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: Psychological/ emotional violence from adults such as coaches.

Psychological/ emotional violence is things like being repeatedly shouted at, threatened, humiliated, or purposefully ignored. It could also be if a coach behaves in an intimidating way, like punching a wall or breaking sports equipment because they're disappointed or angry.

- Why do you think this sometimes happens in sport?
- What could adults do to stop it in sport?
- If you had a problem with this from a coach in a sports club, what would you do?
- Who would you tell about it?

How useful would it be to have a special person in a sports club who you could go to if you had a problem with bullying or any kind of violence – like a Club Safeguarding Officer?

- Why?/ Why not?
- Can you think of any problems with having a CSO?

What's the best way for adults in sports clubs to tell children about their rights and any measures in place to prevent violence in sport? How would you like to be informed?

If you were in charge of a sports club, what would you do to prevent violence against children in sport?

Do you have any other ideas for how adults could make sport safer for children?

3.3 Information Sheet for Children and Young People

Information for Child Council Members

The “Start to Talk” Project:

Child Council Consultation

Who are we?

We are members of a project called [‘Start to Talk’](#). The project is run by a group called [EPAS](#), which is part of the [Council of Europe](#) (CoE) – Europe’s leading human rights and democracy organisation. EPAS has members from around the world and aims to make sport safer and open to all. The Bulgarian State Agency for Child Protection, which runs your Child Council, is collaborating with us by organising a child consultation on how to prevent violence against children in sport.

What is the “Start to Talk” project?

“Start to Talk” is a project that aims to prevent violence against children in sport. By violence, we mean things like:

- **Physical violence** like being deliberately punched, hit, or kicked. When playing sports, being forced to compete when you are injured is also a type of physical violence;
- **Psychological/ emotional violence** like being repeatedly shouted at, threatened, humiliated, or purposefully ignored. It could also be if a coach behaves in an intimidating way, like punching a wall or breaking equipment because they’re upset;
- **Neglect** like when an adult doesn’t protect you from danger or doesn’t support your basic needs. This could be by not giving you food or water or not taking you to the doctor if you are sick. In sport, it could include things like not providing you with the proper safety equipment, like a shin guards in football, or not checking the pitch or sports equipment is safe to use;
- **Sexual violence** such as any kind of sexual activity with a child, including taking and sharing explicit images of children.

The “Start to Talk” project is helping devise ways of preventing violence against children in all kinds of sport and at all levels, from local clubs to national teams.

Some countries have made sport safer for children by creating stronger laws for sport on violence prevention, training adults on violence prevention in sport, and establishing ways in sport that adults and children can report concerns they have about a child. Some countries, like the UK, have trained specialist people in sports clubs who are responsible for preventing and managing violence against children. These are usually called Child Safeguarding Officers, or CSOs. CSOs make sure clubs are following the law on preventing violence against children. They also train adults on violence prevention in sport and support children if they need help.

Why sport?

Millions of children take part in sport every day and most have a great experience. But, sadly, sometimes violence against children happens in sport like it does in other walks of life. Sport doesn’t always have the right things in place to protect children. We’re trying to change that.

How can you help?

We think children and young people will have good ideas and suggestions for what could be done to prevent violence against them in sport so we can try to make sport safer and a more positive experience for all. You don't have to play lots of sport or be a brilliant athlete to be involved – just some interest in sport is enough.

What will you be asked to do?

Up to 15 Child Council members who have an interest in sport will join an online consultation to talk about safe sport, violence prevention, and the role of Child Safeguarding Officers. There are no right or wrong answers – we're interested in your opinions! The consultation will take place on 30th May 2023 at 10:30am EEST and will last between 30-60 minutes.

The consultation will be organised by Maria of the Child Council support team. It will be facilitated by Petya, who can tell you more about the project. There will be some questions and some topics to talk about. These can be found on the next page.

We would like to get the thoughts of as many children and young people as possible – even those who aren't part of the Child Council. We would like you to ask as many friends as possible for their ideas and feedback, then you can pass these on during the consultation. You can also ask them to respond through this webpage if they prefer – it's anonymous:



What will happen during the online consultation?

We recommend you find a quiet place where you won't be overheard so you can talk easily during the consultation. You can hide your background when you are online if you want to but we need you to keep your camera on so we can see you.

The discussion will not be recorded but Petya may write some notes to help her remember what you say. No-one's names will be used in these so what you say will not be linked to you.

We realise we are talking about a sensitive topic. We will not be asking about your personal experiences, only your ideas about how to prevent violence and make sport safer. We want you to feel safe and supported so if you are worried about this topic or anything talked about during the consultation, please contact the Child Council staff (contact details below).

What happens after the online discussion?

Your (anonymous) thoughts and suggestions will be shared with the Bulgarian "Start to Talk" team and other adults on a committee overseeing the "Start to Talk" project. They will create a national plan of actions needed to improve how sport can better prevent violence against children across sport in Bulgaria. We will provide feedback to the Child Council on what happened as a result of the feedback and suggestions you made.

We'd also like you to tell us what you thought of how we managed this consultation – things you liked and ways we could do better. We'll send you a short survey after the consultation.

Thank you for your help with making sport safer!

Child Council staff contact: [details redacted here]

Questions & Discussion Topics for the Consultation

Why do you like sports? What's the best thing about sport?

What things could adults do better to help children have good, positive experiences in sport?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: Peer-to-peer bullying in sport.

Bullying sometimes happens in sport. Bullying is *unwanted, aggressive behaviour among children and young people. It is often repeated over time. Bullying can include things like making threats, spreading rumours, physically or verbally attacking someone, or excluding someone from a group on purpose.*

- Why do you think bullying sometimes happens in sport?
- What could adults do to stop it?
- *What do you think children should do if they see someone being bullied in a sports club?*
- If you had a problem with being bullied in a sports club, what would you do?
- Who would you tell about it?

What about rules for sports clubs on preventing violence - how useful is it to have rules set by government for sports to follow?

- Why/why not?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: Psychological/ emotional violence from adults such as coaches.

Psychological/ emotional violence is things like being repeatedly shouted at, threatened, humiliated, or purposefully ignored. It could also be if a coach behaves in an intimidating way, like punching a wall or breaking sports equipment because they're disappointed or angry.

- Why do you think this sometimes happens in sport?
- What could adults do to stop it in sport?
- If you had a problem with this from a coach in a sports club, what would you do?
- Who would you tell about it?

How useful would it be to have a special person in a sports club who you could go to if you had a problem with bullying or any kind of violence – like a Club Safeguarding Officer?

- Why?/ Why not?
- Can you think of any problems with having a CSO?

What's the best way for adults in sports clubs to tell children about their rights and any measures in place to prevent violence in sport? How would you like to be informed?

If you were in charge of a sports club, what would you do to prevent violence against children in sport?

Do you have any other ideas for how adults could make sport safer for children?

have any other ideas for how adults could make sport safer for children?

3.4 Information Sheet for Focus Group Facilitator

Information for Facilitator:

The “Start to Talk” Project & Our Child Consultation

What is the Council of Europe?

The [Council of Europe](#) (CoE), is an international organisation founded in 1949 to uphold human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in Europe. It established the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights.

What is EPAS?

The [Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport](#) (EPAS) of the CoE is an agreement established in 2007 to provide a platform for pan-European intergovernmental sports co-operation. Using as its basis the CoE’s sports standards, such as the [revised European Sports Charter](#) and the [revised Code of Sports Ethics](#), EPAS also encourages dialogue between these authorities, sports federations and NGOs with the aim of making sport more inclusive, more ethical, and safer.

What is “Start to Talk”?

[‘Start to Talk’](#) is a project run by EPAS that aims to protect children from violence in sport. The project began in 2018 with a focus on preventing sexual violence against children in sport but has since expanded to address all forms of violence against children.

In its latest phase, the project is supporting partners to produce ‘roadmaps’ for the effective development and implementation of policies and practices in their country to prevent violence against children in sport. Effective violence prevention in sport requires the engagement of many actors, including sports organisations, child protection agencies, and public authorities responsible for sport and children’s rights, at many levels of governance (sectorial, organisational, national, local, etc.). This can create challenges in terms of ownership and effective collaboration. The “Start to Talk” project aims to overcome these by developing clearer and more comprehensive guidance on the role of specific actors in supporting effective strategies on violence prevention against children in sport.

As the laws and structure for violence prevention in sport are different in each country, each roadmap will be adapted to the specific national context. Roadmaps will identify the measures needed to advance effective violence prevention against children in sport in the partner country, a timeline for initiating these, the responsibilities of different stakeholders, and the resources required. The aim is to ensure a holistic, systematic approach to combating violence against children in sport that emphasises not only the role played by national governments but also the importance of sports organisations embedding prevention policies and practices.

Roadmaps follow the roadmap methodology developed within the European Union (EU) – CoE joint project [“Child Safeguarding in Sport”](#) (CSiS).

Why Sport?

Sport is one of the most popular activities for children, with millions of taking part each week. However, research indicates that violence against children occurs in sport. Yet sport is often overlooked when it comes to protecting children.

Across Europe, some countries have well-established systems for protecting children in sport, but some do not. A useful approach to preventing and managing violence in sport is to appoint designated people with responsibility for keeping children safe within sports organisations. One objective of the latest phase of the “Start to Talk” project is to provide partner countries with step-by-step instructions for establishing these roles, known as Child Safeguarding Officers. When developing the roadmaps, the “Start to Talk” partners benefit from the expertise of national and international experts on preventing violence against children in sport, including those from countries that already have an established network of Child Safeguarding Officers.

Listening to Children

We recognise that involving children and young people in decision-making is central to achieving children’s legal rights. We also believe it is key to democratising sport and realising a safe sporting environment. Child consultation is an important way of involving children and gathering their insights. Sport does not have a strong track record in listening to children, but we want to change this.

We are pleased to have the Bulgarian State Agency for Child Protection collaborating with the “Start to Talk” project by organising a child consultation. Through their Child Council, we are seeking your help in consulting with children and young people on plans for the Bulgarian roadmap on the development and implementation of strategies to prevent violence against children in sport.

We are following the [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2012\)2 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18](#), as well as the [Council of Europe’s tools and materials on child participation](#).

We are also following the 4-phase ‘Lundy model’ of child participation (Lundy, 2007):

- 1) SPACE - Children must be given the opportunity and (physical and metaphorical) space to express their views,
- 2) VOICE - Children must be facilitated to express their views,
- 3) AUDIENCE - Children’s views must be listened to by those with power,
- 4) INFLUENCE - Children’s views must be acted on (as appropriate) and feedback provided on decisions made.

What Are We Asking You To Do?

Up to 15 members of the Child Council who have an interest in sport have agreed to take part in an online focus group. We will provide you with a series of questions to ask the children and themed topics to elicit their opinions on violence prevention in sport (see page 3). The children will also have been given these questions beforehand so they can seek the opinions of their friends to feed back in the online session. The session is expected to last between 30-60 minutes and will be hosted in Bulgarian. The children will be aged between 14 and 18 years old. Most have been involved in previous consultations as part of the Child Council, though they may not have taken part in an online focus group before.

The consultation will take place on 30th May 2023 at 10:30am EEST. Your role as facilitator is important to ensuring the children feel their opinions are valued, they all have a chance to

contribute, and they feel safe and supported. This may mean you need to answer any questions they have about the “Start to Talk” project, follow up with individuals to check you understand what they are saying or to elicit more detail, and/or ensure everyone gets a chance to speak equally and without being judged for their view. We recognise this is a sensitive topic. If any child becomes distressed or you have any concerns about them, please report this to the Child Council staff (details below).

After the session, we would like you to compile a short (2-page) report detailing the children and young people’s responses, so we recommend you or the person running the online consultation [name redacted] keep notes during the session. The children’s views will be presented to the “Start to Talk” team designing the roadmap in Bulgaria, so their input could influence safe sport developments in their country. We will feed back to Child Council members how their opinions were used and what was implemented as a result of what they said.

Thank you for your help!

Child Council staff contact: {details redacted here}

Questions & Discussion Topics for the Consultation

Why do you like sports? What’s the best thing about sport?

What things could adults do better to help children have good experiences in sport?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 1: Peer-to-peer bullying in sport.

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- Why do you think bullying sometimes happens in sport?
- What could adults do to stop it?
- *What do you think children should do if they see someone being bullied in a sports club?*
- If you had a problem with being bullied in a sports club, what would you do?
- Who would you tell about it?

What about rules for sports clubs on preventing violence - how useful is it to have rules set by government for sports to follow?

- Why/why not?

DISCUSSION TOPIC 2: Psychological/ emotional violence from adults such as coaches.

Psychological/ emotional violence is things like being repeatedly shouted at, threatened, humiliated, or purposefully ignored. It could also be if a coach behaves in an intimidating way, like punching a wall or breaking sports equipment because they're angry or disappointed.

- Why do you think this sometimes happens in sport?
- What could adults do to stop it in sport?
- If you had a problem with this behaviour from a coach in a sports club, what would you do?
- Who would you tell about it?

How useful would it be to have a special person in a sports club who you could go to if you had a problem with bullying or any kind of violence – like a Club Safeguarding Officer (CSO)?

- Why?

Can you think of any problems with having a CSO?

What's the best way for adults in sports clubs to tell children about their rights and any steps in place to prevent violence in sport? How would you like to be informed?

If you were in charge of a sports club, what would you do to prevent violence against children in sport?

Do you have any other ideas for how adults could make sport safer for children?

3.5 Child Consultation Feedback Survey

Introduction

Thanks again for your recent contribution to the online consultation on the prevention of violence in sport for the “Start to Talk” project. We hope you enjoyed the event!

We would like to know what you thought of how we managed this consultation – things you liked and ways we could do better. Please answer the following questions – it's anonymous so we won't be able to link anything you say to anyone and it will take no more than 5 minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers. Your answers will only be used to help us improve how we consult with children and young people in future.

Questions

Q1: What, if anything, did you like about this consultation?

Q2: Why?

Q3: What, if anything, didn't you like?

Q4: Why?

Q5: Did you like using the Padlet? (the online page where you could write your ideas)

Yes

No

I didn't use the Padlet

Q6: About how many other children and young people did you get feedback from for this consultation? (Your best guess of the number is fine)

Q7: How did you try to gather the views of others? What did you do to get other young people's opinions on the topic?

If you have any suggestions for how we could improve future consultations, please add them here:

Finish

Thank you for your suggestions and for your time contributing to this consultation. We know talking about the prevention of violence in sport can be sensitive. We want you to feel safe and supported so if you are worried about anything talked about during the consultation, please contact:
[details redacted here]

3.6 Useful Child Participation Tools

[“Listen – Act – Change”](#): Council of Europe Handbook on children’s participation – For professionals working for and with children

Council of Europe [Child participation assessment tool](#)

[CP4Europe](#) web platform resource centre

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