

Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport

A Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners



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Let's knock violence against women and girls out of the park!

Violence against women and girls continues to be one of the most pervasive human rights challenges in the world, with one in three women being a victim of violence. In sports, women and girls are faced with particular risks, combined with ineffective or inexistant prevention and response mechanisms.

Yet, sport holds enormous potential to drive gender equality by improving the well-being of girls and women, and boosting their confidence and leadership skills. This handbook aims to create a shared understanding of the problem and support the development of effective policies to tackle violence against women and girls in sport.

The subject matter includes:

- A presentation of the prevalence and scope of the issue, and an analysis of the structure and key characteristics of the sports ecosystem
- Testimonies from survivors and examples of abuse illustrating the depth of the problem and the urgent need for action
- Case studies and tailored recommendations for key stakeholders on how to prevent violence, protect survivors and end impunity

21%
of females
(compared with 11% of males)
experienced a form of
sexual abuse at least
once as a child in sport

This handbook is addressed primarily to policy makers and sports practitioners, as well as sports journalists and civil society organizations who want to do more to ensure that women and girls across all social groups can practice sports safely.





Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport

A Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners

Foreword



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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Ramos'.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Hendriks'.

One in three women - a staggering 736 million worldwide - experiences some form of physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. In the world of sport, the risk of violence against women and girls is unacceptably high. Nearly 21% of professional women athletes have experienced sexual abuse as a child in sport - almost double the rate of male athletes. Across the globe, police reports of domestic violence rise with depressing predictability during mega-sporting events such as the World Cup - in some communities increasing by more than a third. Women athletes were the targets of 87% of all abusive Twitter posts during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games. From grassroots sport to the professional arena, women and girls experience violence as athletes, coaches, reporters, therapists, referees and fans.

Shocking revelations such as the 2016 USA Gymnastics sexual abuse scandal, as well as increasing harassment cases in sport worldwide, have helped break the silence on male violence against women and girls in sport. Survivors, whistleblowers and journalists have demonstrated time and time again that perpetrators have used their positions of power to act with impunity, while sport federations have prioritized economic profit and public image over the well-being of sport participants.

Press coverage and public outcry have combined to create a watershed moment for sport and society at large. In some cases, this has catalysed the introduction of new legislation to combat violence against women and girls through prevention measures and improved accountability.

However, few countries have such specific legislation in place, and most sports organizations do not have adequate policies or response systems to prevent and address violence when harm occurs.

The time has come for policy makers and sport practitioners to work together to implement laws, policies and practices that prevent violence, hold perpetrators of violence accountable and support survivors. Rather than broad promises to do better, we need clear and binding mechanisms to hold perpetrators and organizations accountable, ensure safe reporting and offer survivors effective remedy.

Tackling violence against women and girls is central to realizing the human rights of all women and girls worldwide. The sports ecosystem has a key role to play in this process, and the Beijing Platform for Action explicitly references sport as a means to advance gender equality. In addition to policy action, it is critical that we connect our efforts to tackle gender-based violence in sport to evidence-based strategies for eradicating such violence throughout society. Indeed, many of the root causes of violence against women and girls in sport directly reflect the causes of gender-based violence in our societies at large: gender inequality, discrimination and harmful socio-cultural norms. Yet as this handbook reports, the sports sphere also has unique characteristics that increase risks to women and girls. Policy makers need to better understand and tackle these conditions, and sport practitioners must increase their efforts to create an equitable culture within the sports world.

This is why UNESCO and UN Women have partnered to develop this handbook for decision-makers: we urgently need comprehensive, sport-specific, intersectional and data-informed policies not only to improve violence prevention, but also to identify, report and tackle violence against women and girls when it occurs. Sport holds enormous potential to multiply the impact of gender equality strategies. We know that sport can improve the physical, mental and emotional well-being of girls and women, and that it can boost their confidence and leadership skills. But we need to do more to ensure that women and girls across all social groups can practice sports safely and reap these benefits over a lifetime.

This handbook offers policy makers across continents a powerful tool to better understand and tackle violence against women and girls within the complexities of the sports ecosystem. Not only does it document important policy gaps that have been overlooked for years, but it also makes the case for harnessing the power of sport to promote positive social change in the wider community, from elite competition to community-based sport.

UNESCO, as the guardian of the [International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport](#), is well positioned to contribute to global efforts to eradicate violence against women and girls in and through sport. Advancing gender equality is not only part of the UNESCO mandate, it is one of the organization's two global priorities. [Fit for Life](#), UNESCO's sports flagship, is specifically designed to advance gender equality and tackle violence against women and girls in and through sport. Its data-driven approach aims to activate the full transformative potential of sport by pooling inter-sectoral knowledge, supporting transformative policy design, harnessing sport's visibility to promote positive messages and empowering grassroots actors to deliver outcome-oriented programmes on the ground.

UN Women takes a comprehensive approach to tackle violence against women and girls across the violence continuum, including through legal reforms, data collection, primary prevention measures, essential services for survivors and strengthening women's rights organizations. With its strong partnerships with the most important sport organizations in the world, combined with proven programming across multiple countries, UN Women is working to prevent such violence by building a generation of confident and informed girls as positive agents of change.

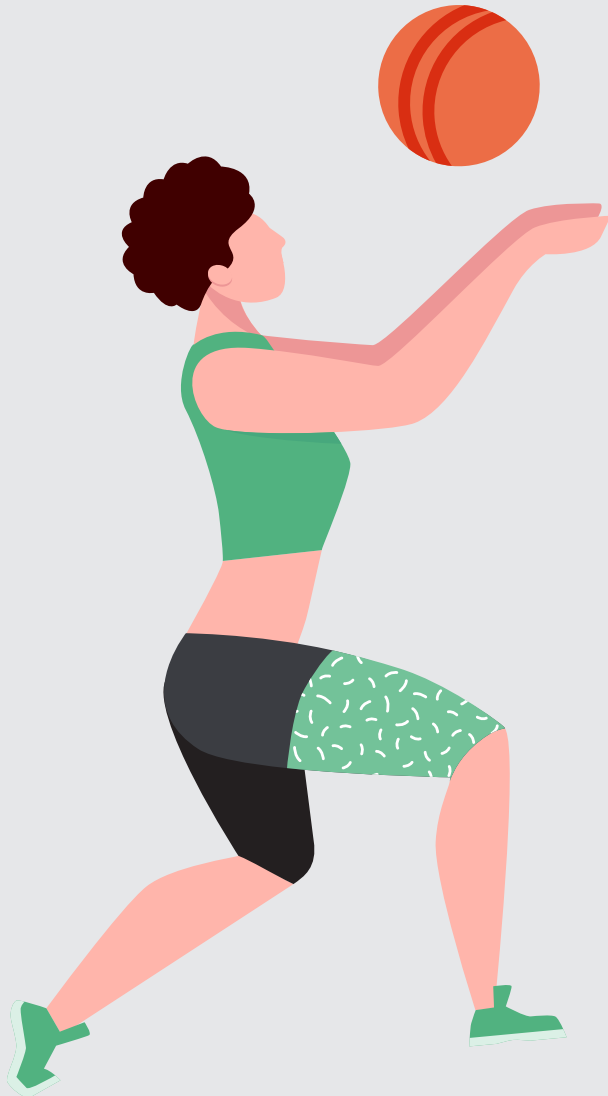
The reach of sport is immense and unparalleled. In 2022, over 5 billion people engaged with the Men's FIFA World Cup across one month of tournament and the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup reached a combined 1.2 billion viewers. The Summer Olympic Games typically reach half the planet. We need to empower professional athletes to use their influence to speak up against violence against women and girls and for gender equality. We need to ensure that high-level sport events leave positive social legacies. And we need to create more opportunities for girls around the world to play and realize the lifelong benefits that sport brings.

Let's get to work!

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Last but not least, we would like to thank all the survivors of violence and activists who are working to tackle violence against women and girls in and beyond sport, many of whom are featured in this publication. Your bravery and your commitment to advance gender equality and safeguarding policies to enable all girls and women to practice sports safely are an inspiration to us all.

Contents

- 06 Foreword
- 10 Introduction

Part I: The Warmup

- 17 Chapter 1: Understanding Violence Against Women and Girls
- 25 Chapter 2: Understanding the Sports Ecosystem

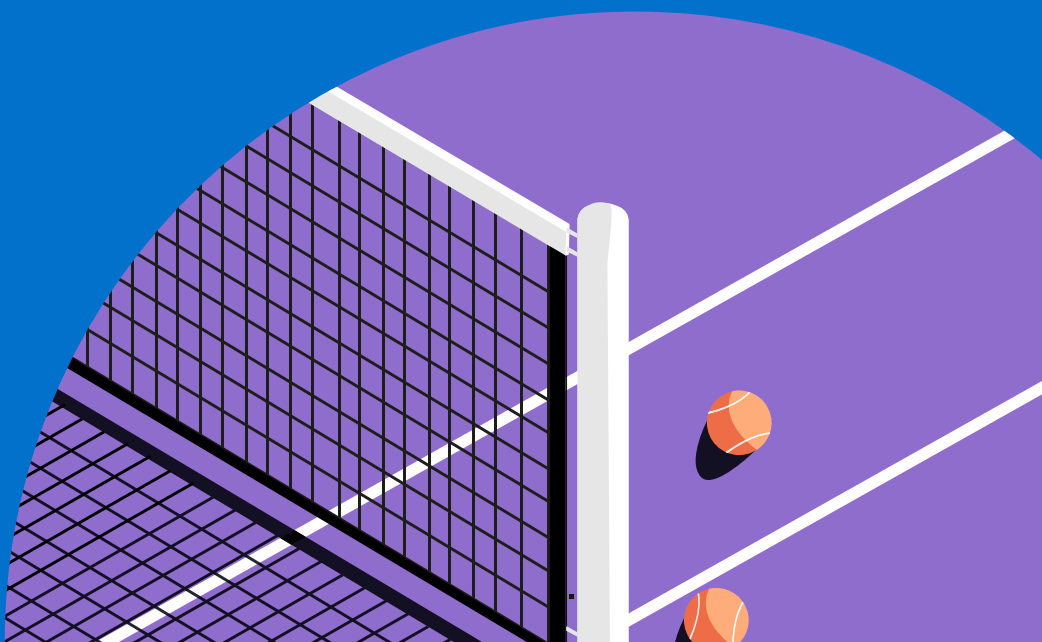
Part II: The Playing Field

- 35 Chapter 3: Manifestations of Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport
- 58 Chapter 4: Laws, Policies and Initiatives Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport

Part III: Game Time

- 73 Chapter 5: Prevention and Education
- 82 Chapter 6: Reporting and Resolution

-
- 94 Conclusion
 - 96 Epilogue: Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls Through Sport



Introduction

Why do we need a Handbook on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in and through Sport?





Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive human rights challenges in the world today. One in every three women experiences some form of physical or sexual violence in her lifetime.¹ According to the World Bank, violence against women and girls is estimated to cost countries up to 3.7% of their GDP - about as much as most governments spend on primary education.²

Violence against women and girls is rooted in gender inequality, discrimination, and harmful cultural and social norms that emphasize men's superiority over women, normalize violence toward women and allow perpetrators to act with impunity. Women of colour, indigenous women, LGBTQIA+ women, women with disabilities, women living with HIV/AIDS, and women living in areas of conflict or extreme poverty are especially vulnerable to violence.

Sport has been an environment for some of the most shocking cases of sexism and violence against women and girls (see [Box 1](#)). And despite considerable advances in sport participation of girls and women, the sport ecosystem remains dominated by men, particularly in positions of leadership. This male-dominant culture of sport, coupled with a lack of transparency and a prioritization of sport's integrity and profit over the individual, has fostered an environment that can give rise to violence against women and girls (see [Box 2](#)).

A lack of effective reporting mechanisms, protective measures for survivors and sanctions for offenders leave survivors with no clear route to remedy. In many cases, they have left the sport entirely, unable to continue their careers or pursue their passion for sport independent of the people and institutions that perpetuated violence.

Yet sport has also demonstrated tremendous potential to foster gender equality and dismantle the root causes of violence against women and girls by promoting inclusivity, reshaping attitudes, addressing impunity, breaking down barriers and championing female athletes as role models.³ Ultimately, violence against women and girls is a profound problem in both sport and in the world at large. One cannot tackle violence against women and girls in one domain without tackling it in the other.

Violence against women and girls is a complex and multifaced problem; sport represents a complex ecosystem. To tackle violence against women and girls in sport, both policy makers and sports practitioners must work together. UN Women, UNESCO and the Spotlight Initiative have developed this Handbook to facilitate informed and constructive conversations about how we can work together to tackle violence against women and girls in sport. This Handbook aims to create a shared understanding of the problem, offer practical tools for tackling violence against women and girls in sport and propose areas for effective collaboration.

The Prevalence of Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport

It is difficult to assess the full scope of violence against women and girls in sport. This is due to a lack of standardized and internationally compatible data. It is also because violence against women and girls is vastly underreported. Yet a number of recent studies and reviews offer insight into the scope of the problem, and demonstrate the disproportionately higher rates of violence experienced by girls and women.

World Players Association 2021 Census of Athlete Rights Experiences (CARE)⁴

21%

of female respondents (compared with 11% of male respondents) experienced one form of sexual abuse at least once as a child in sport.

29.7%

of female respondents (compared with 6.1% of male respondents) said that they had been looked at in a way that made them feel uncomfortable.

31.8%

of female respondents reported being punished with excessive training or exercise, 10.6% were beaten with an object, 7.6% were forced or knocked to the ground. (For male respondents, these numbers were 26.0%, 6.5% and 7.4%, respectively.)

World Athletics Studies of Online Abuse

87%

In a study of online abuse directed toward athletes on Twitter during the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, female athletes were the targets of 87% of abuse. 63% of identified abuse was directed at just two athletes - both black and female.⁵

40%

A follow-up study of Twitter and Instagram conducted during the World Athletics Championships Oregon22 found that 40% of abusive posts were sexualized or sexual abuse, overwhelmingly directed at women.⁶

Interpersonal gendered violence against adult women participating in sport: a scoping review⁷

1/3

Approximately one third of female athletes in India experienced sexual abuse, harassment or inappropriate behaviour by a male coach.

14%

of Israeli athletes experienced sexual harassment by a male coach.

64%

In one study of female university student athletes in Kenya, 64% reported experiencing sexual harassment.

Male Domination of Sport

Despite the significant gains that girls and women have made in sport participation, sport remains largely dominated by men, particularly at the elite levels. This prevalence of men extends to nearly all dimensions of the sport ecosystem, including coaching, journalism, sponsorship and funding. Not surprisingly, numerous studies have shown a significant decline in girls' participation and engagement with sport as they get older.⁸

Coaching

40%

In the US about 40% of women's college teams are coached by women. Only about 3% of men's college teams are coached by women.⁹

13%

At the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, just 13% of coaches were women.¹⁰

<10%

Fewer than 10% of registered football coaches around the world are female.¹¹

Sports journalism

<10%

In a content analysis of sports coverage in across several countries between 2006 and 2020, fewer than 10% of articles named female reporters.¹²

16.7%

14.4%

17.8%

A 2021 sports media 'report card' of the Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE) gave gender hiring a failing grade, noting that only 16.7% of sports editors, 14.4% of reporters and 17.8% of columnists were women.¹³

Funding

2x

In 2019, the NCAA budgeted nearly twice as much for the 2019 US college men's basketball tournament as it did for the women's: a \$13.5 million discrepancy.¹⁴

<3%

For the 2023 Women's World Cup, German broadcasters only offered €3 million to show the tournament - less than 3% of the amount they paid to broadcast the last two men's World Cups. Offers in France amounted to less than 5% of the €130 million they paid to broadcast the men's World Cup in Qatar the previous year.¹⁵

<5%

Zero

Prize money for women football players in the UK trails significantly behind that of men. For example, awards in the FA cup amounted to £1.5 million for male winners, £5,000 for female winners. In the Premier League, men received £97.5 million. There was no prize money for female players.¹⁶



Who should read this Handbook?

This Handbook is aimed at policy makers and sports practitioners wishing to tackle violence against women and girls in sport. Throughout this publication, the term ‘sports practitioners’ is defined broadly to include not only coaches and athletes, but all participants in the sports ecosystem, including but not limited to physicians and trainers, parents of child athletes, organizers of athletic events and the sports media. The term ‘policy makers’ encompasses all actors who are in a position to develop, influence and enforce policies and laws that combat violence against women and girls within and beyond sport, including federal ministers, local governments and grassroots organizations mobilized to combat violence against women and girls. Certain sections of this Handbook will also be of particular interest to violence against women and girls practitioners including social workers, mental health specialists, legal advocates, members of law enforcement and others whose professional role is in violence against women and girls advocacy, prevention and response and/or survivor support.

Even though the most high-profile incidents of violence against women and girls in sport have occurred at the elite level, violence against women and girls can take place in any sporting context, regardless of the level of organization or competition. This Handbook is therefore aimed at sports practitioners and policy makers at all levels of play, from recreational and school sport to international competition. Even if most examples and case studies are drawn from professional sports, the basic principles and recommendations in this Handbook should be relevant across the entire spectrum of sports, including grassroots.

How to use this Handbook

This Handbook is divided into three parts, each with two chapters. Readers may choose to skip certain chapters to focus on the content most relevant to their needs and interests. The beginning of each chapter clearly indicates its intended audience, purpose and key takeaways.

While the main focus of this Handbook is on combatting violence against women and girls in sport, it is important to recognize that sport can play an important role in combating the root causes of violence against women and girls, particularly gender stereotypes and attitudes that validate violence against women. The **Epilogue** to this handbook provides an overview of successful initiatives and recommended good practices to tackle violence against women and girls through sport - both on and beyond the playing field.

Scope and limitations

This Handbook is intended to be a practical and accessible tool. But tackling violence against women and girls in sport is a complex area. It is beyond the scope of this Handbook to tackle all potential audiences in every scenario in a comprehensive manner. Nevertheless, we hope it will provide a valuable resource to those seeking to have constructive discussions and plan impactful projects that will enable women and girls to enjoy sport in safety.





Part I: The Warmup

The Warmup provides background information and context to sports practitioners and policy makers, each of whom may need more information about the domain of the other.

Chapter 1: Understanding Violence Against Women and Girls is aimed specifically at sports practitioners and policy makers, who may be less familiar with the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls.

Chapter 2: Understanding the Sports Ecosystem offers policy makers a broad overview of how sport is organized and governed, where key decisions are made and the best entry points for engagement.

Part II: The Playing Field

The Playing Field offers two perspectives on the intersection of violence against women and girls in sport.

Chapter 3: Manifestations of Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport explores the specificity of violence against women and girls within sport and the unique factors in the sporting world that can foster violence against women and girls. It also includes case studies illustrating the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls in sport.

Chapter 4: Laws and Policies Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport aims to create a sharper awareness of existing policies and laws, and offers readers guidance for identifying potential partners for initiatives targeting violence against women and girls in sport.

Part III: Game Time

Game Time focuses on specific, actionable measures that tackle violence against women and girls in sport.

Chapter 5: Prevention and Education reviews and discusses good practices for prevention and safeguarding.

Chapter 6: Reporting and Resolution focuses on actions and mechanisms for tackling violence against women and girls once it has taken place, including the development of safe reporting mechanisms and the implementation of a survivor-focused approach to resolution.

Part I:

The Warmup



Chapter I: Understanding Violence Against Women and Girls

Who?

This chapter is directed at sports policy makers and sports practitioners: coaches, athletes, agents, parents of child athletes, the sports media and anyone else who is directly employed by or engaged with the sports ecosystem. Readers will benefit from a deeper understanding of how violence against women and girls occurs, the different forms it can take and evidence-based methods to tackle it. This foundational knowledge will help sports policy makers and practitioners identify and tackle violence against women and girls both on and off the playing field.

What?

- Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation and a public health crisis. It is rooted in gender inequality and discrimination and facilitated by an unequal distribution of power and resources.
- Violence exists in multiple and often intersecting forms. It includes sexual, physical, psychological, and economic abuse; online or digital violence; and bullying and microaggressions.
- Violence against women and girls can occur between people involved at any level of sport, in any part of the world. Women and girls who are disadvantaged due to their race, ethnicity, migration status, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status and/or religion are especially at risk of violence.
- Many established international frameworks for tackling violence against women and girls can be readily applied to the sports ecosystem. Frameworks such as [RESPECT Women](#) and the [Essential Services](#) package offer a number of good practices for preventing and responding to violence against women and girls.

Why?

Training for coaches and other sports practitioners often leaves out broad-based knowledge and education on violence against women and girls, leaving them ill-equipped to recognize and tackle situations when they arise. Moreover, leaders in the sports world have done little to ensure that practitioners can adequately recognize and respond to such violence. In order to tackle violence against women and girls, sports practitioners and policy makers need a basic understanding of the prevalence, severity, causes, manifestations and consequences of violence against women and girls in society today.

Forms of Violence



Sexual Abuse



Psychological Abuse



Online or Digital Violence



Physical Abuse



Economic Abuse



Bullying and Microaggressions

What is violence against women and girls, and why does it occur?

Sexual abuse and violence against women and girls in sport has received much attention in recent years; and the courage of survivors has both inspired and shaken the industry.¹⁷ This focus and public roll call is critically important, not least because of the devastating impacts on the lives of all affected.

According to the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993), Violence Against Women and Girls refers to 'any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women or girls. It can include threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.'

Such violence is perpetrated against women and girls specifically because they are women and girls. Violence against women and girls exists in multiple, interrelated and sometimes recurring forms, and it is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women.

Intersectionality refers to the way in which different forms of discrimination and disadvantage combine and overlap. Characteristics such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity, geography and socio-economic status can intersect with each other, causing multiple levels of disadvantage and marginalization.¹⁸

Violence against women and girls is human rights violation. It affects women and girls disproportionately and prevents them from enjoying the same freedoms and rights as men.

Violence against women and girls is also a public health crisis, with repercussions for women's physical, sexual, mental and psychological health. Survivors of male violence against women and girls are at an increased risk of early and unwanted pregnancies, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, pain and gastrointestinal problems, homicide, and suicide.

Violence against women and girls does not impact all women and girls equally. We know that women and girls facing multiple forms of disadvantage are also at a higher risk of violence. Understanding and tackling violence against women and girls requires an intersectional lens that takes into account multiple identities and experiences, including those who come from rural and/or indigenous communities, women of colour, those living in poverty, women living with disabilities and those who are (or who are perceived to be) LGBTQIA+.

Coercive control refers to an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim. This controlling behaviour is designed to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of independence and regulating their everyday behaviour.¹⁹



Violence against women and girls occurs in many forms: it can be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and/or economic. It can take place in the physical world or in the digital world. Violence against women and girls often involves coercive control, in which an abuser exerts a number of controlling behaviours that erode the autonomy and self-esteem of the survivor. Because all kinds of violence are rooted in gender inequality and an imbalance of power and resources, these types of violence can coexist and are often intertwined. Violence can also exist on a continuum, in which seemingly minor incidents or patterns of abuse, such as threats, humiliation and other kinds of intimidation, can escalate to extreme violations or have devastating detrimental effects on physical and mental health and well-being over time.

It is therefore important for sports practitioners to be aware of the different types of violence they or the athletes under their management, care or responsibility may encounter both on and off the playing field. We cannot tackle what we cannot recognize or identify. UN Women has catalogued a number of different types of violence against women and girls, and this Handbook has largely adopted the definitions established by UN Women (see '[Learn More](#)' at the end of this chapter). While some types of violence are especially prevalent in the context of domestic or intimate partner violence, they can also occur in the sporting world.

// The abuse started from the age of 11 when I started being told to reach out a hand whenever I made mistakes. On especially bad days, I would get hit more than 10 times in a row until my skin was raw. When I was 14 and going through puberty, I started to struggle with my jumps because I was gaining weight. I was called over and kicked on the bone of my shin with a toe-pick of a blade and made to try again. I wasn't allowed to limp or cry. Most of the time such abuse happened in front of other skaters in the rink. I didn't tell any of my friends, adults at school or my federation, because I was incredibly humiliated. I was made to feel so small. It was dehumanising. **//**

Chinese world
championship figure
skater, Jessica Shuran Yu²⁰



Sexual Abuse

Sexual violence refers to any sexual act committed against the will of another person, either when this person does not give consent or when consent cannot be given because the person is a child, has a mental disability, or is severely intoxicated or unconscious as a result of alcohol or drugs.

- **Rape** is any non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of another person with any bodily part or object.
- **Sexual harassment** encompasses non-consensual physical contact, like grabbing, pinching, slapping, or rubbing against another person in a sexual way. It also includes non-physical forms, such as catcalls, sexual comments about a person's body or appearance, demands for sexual favours, sexually suggestive staring, stalking and exposing one's sex organs.
- **Sexual exploitation** (or 'sextortion') involves any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes.



Physical Abuse

Physical violence involves hurting or trying to hurt someone by hitting, kicking, burning, grabbing, pinching, shoving, slapping, hair-pulling, biting, denying medical care or forcing alcohol and/or drug use, or using other physical force.



Psychological Abuse

Violence can be **emotional** (undermining a person's sense of self-worth through constant criticism, belittling one's abilities, name-calling or other verbal abuse) or **psychological** (causing fear by intimidation, threatening physical harm, 'mind games', or forcing isolation from friends, family, school and/or work). **Stalking** involves any pattern of behaviour that serves no legitimate purpose and is intended to harass, annoy or terrorize the victim. Typical stalking activities include repeated telephone calls, digital stalking, unwelcome letters or gifts by mail, and surveillance at work, home and other places that the victim is known to frequent.



Online or Digital Violence

Online or digital violence refers to any act of violence that is committed, assisted or aggravated by the use of information and communication technology (such as mobile phones, social media, computer games, text messaging, or email). Online violence can include **cyberbullying** (sending intimidating or threatening messages), **non-consensual sexting** (the sending of explicit messages or photos without the recipient's consent) and **doxing** (the public release of private or identifying information about the victim).



Economic Abuse

Violence can also be **economic**: making or attempting to make a person financially dependent by maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding access to money or forbidding attendance at school or employment. And because violence can exist on a continuum, some abusers take advantage of an athlete's economic vulnerability to commit other forms of violence.



Bullying and Microaggressions

Other types of violence that can occur in sport include the following:

Bullying is defined as intentional and aggressive behaviour occurring repeatedly against a victim where there is a real or perceived power imbalance, and where the victim feels vulnerable and powerless to defend herself.

Microaggressions are everyday verbal and nonverbal expressions of racism, sexism, homophobia and other types of discrimination. They can be intentional or unintentional. Examples of microaggressions include homophobic jokes, racist nicknames, or requiring uniforms that inhibit the full participation of particular racial or ethnic groups (such as bans on swim caps designed for Black hair).

Playing a sport can also entail **accidental violence**: unintentional violence that occurs through sport, particularly contact sport. This Handbook is concerned chiefly with intentional, non-accidental violence.

// He would lock the door, pet my head, kiss my neck and threaten my scholarship... If he tells you to come to his office, you go. He's in charge of your scholarship... I wanted to leave [the University of Texas], and I realized I had to ask for his permission to transfer. I had to ask my abuser for permission so I could leave and go somewhere else. //

Middle-distance runner Londa Bevins, on her abuse by coach John Rembao at the University of Texas²¹

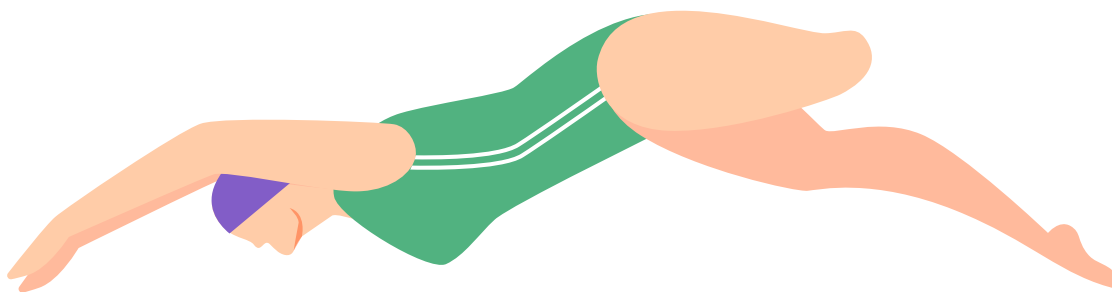
Tackling violence against women and girls: Basic principles and good practices

To a large extent, the root causes of violence against women and girls in sport mirror the root causes of violence against women and girls in society. Discrimination against women and inequalities in the distribution of power and resources are both prominent in sport. Violence against women and girls experts outside of sport have already undertaken research and developed effective good practices, much of which could be readily mainstreamed into the day-to-day operating of sport. The final part of this chapter offers some basic principles for tackling violence against women and girls in society as a whole, which will serve as a basis for the sport-specific guidance in the later chapters of this Handbook.

Preventing violence against women and girls: RESPECT Women

Over the last decade, a tremendous body of evidence on violence against women and girls prevention has been compiled and presented by experts in the field. Building on the [UN Prevention of Violence Against Women Framework, RESPECT Women](#) (2019) provides a set of seven interrelating evidence-based strategies to help policy makers design, plan, implement, monitor and evaluate violence against women and girls programmes. All of these strategies, which encompass societal, community, interpersonal, and individual risk factors and protective factors, could be readily mainstreamed into the sports ecosystem. These strategies are shown in [Box 3](#).

RESPECT Women also frames violence against women and girls prevention as a continuum that includes (1) preventing new cases of violence against women and girls; (2) preventing the recurrence of violence; and (3) preventing or limiting the impacts of violence against women and girls through short- and long-term care and support.



RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence Against Women Framework

Relationship skills strengthened

Strategies aimed at individuals or groups of women, men, or couples to improve interpersonal communication, conflict management, and shared decision-making skills

Environments made safe

Efforts to create safe schools, public spaces and work environments, etc.

Empowerment of women

Economic empowerment, including inheritance and asset ownership, microfinance; plus gender and empowerment training interventions, collective action, creating safe spaces and mentoring to build skills in self-efficacy, assertiveness, negotiation, and self-confidence

Child and adolescent abuse prevented

Establishing nurturing family relationships, prohibiting corporal punishment, and implementing parenting programmes

Services ensured

A wide range of services, including police, legal, health, and social services provided to survivors

Transformed attitudes, beliefs, and norms

Strategies that challenge harmful gender attitudes, beliefs, norms, and stereotypes that uphold male privilege and female subordination, that justify violence against women, and that stigmatize survivors

Poverty reduced

Strategies targeted to women or the household whose primary aim is to alleviate poverty, ranging from cash transfers, microfinance loans, labour force interventions, etc.

Essential services for survivors

The [Essential Services Package](#) (2015), launched by United Nations Joint Global Programme on Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence, is a modular guidance tool identifying the essential services to be provided to all women and girls who have experienced gender-based violence, including services that should be provided by the health, social services, police and justice sectors. It also provides guidelines for the coordination of these services. While this package aims to support countries as they work to design, implement and review services for all women and girls who are survivors of violence, the content is highly relevant to all sports practitioners and policy makers.

The Essential Services Package identifies the following principles as underpinning the delivery of all essential services and coordination of those services:

- **A rights-based approach:** Recognition that violence against women and girls is a violation of human rights. Services must treat women and girls with dignity, respect and sensitivity and offer the highest standards of health, social justice and policing services.
- **Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment:** Recognizing that violence against women and girls is rooted in gender equality and discrimination, services must be gender sensitive and gender responsive, and they must promote women's agency to make their own decisions – including decisions that refuse essential services.
- **Culturally age appropriate and sensitive:** Services must take into account age, identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity and language preferences, and they must respond appropriately to women and girls facing multiple forms of discrimination.

- **Survivor centred approach:** Services must place the rights, needs, and desires of women and girls at the centre of focus of service and delivery.
- **Safety is paramount:** Services must prioritize the safety and security of users and avoid causing future harm.
- **Perpetrator accountability:** Essential services must hold perpetrators accountable while ensuring fairness in justice responses. Services must support and facilitate the victim/survivor participation with the justice process while ensuring that the burden or onus of seeking justice is not placed on her but on the state.

As we will see in [Chapter 6](#), these principles are also at the core of some of the existing good practices for reporting and responding to violence against women and girls in sport.

Conclusions

Violence against women and girls is a complex human rights and public health problem, mired in gender inequality and exacerbated by poverty, racism and unequal power relations. Sport is not immune to the conditions that give rise to violence against women and girls. Both those responsible for policy development and those responsible for quality delivery must recognize the fundamental social, physical, psychological and economic costs of violence against women and girls – costs borne not only by individual survivors, but also by the vast ecosystem of sports practitioners. In [Chapter 3](#), we will examine the specific manifestations of violence against women and girls in sport.

Chapter I Recommendations

Take Action

- Keep informed about the various types of violence against women and girls as described in this chapter. If you cannot name it, you cannot tackle it. (Some key resources are included in the [‘Learn More’](#) section below.)
 - Reflect on the presence of violence against women and girls in sport, particularly your own sports experience. Some questions to consider:
 - Have you encountered violence against women and girls in sport, either on or off the playing field? How were these incidents tackled and what was the impact?
 - What assumptions do you have regarding violence against women and girls in sport?
 - Who in your sports community might be particularly vulnerable to experiencing violence against women and girls?
 - Are there any particular types of violence that seem to be especially prevalent?
 - Familiarize yourself with the relevant local offices and organizations that can provide you with support and resources to tackle violence against women and girls, including law enforcement, social services and medical treatment.
 - Increase coordination and collaboration across sporting codes and national sporting organizations to establish a common understanding and approach to tackle violence against women and girls and gender inequality through sport at all levels of play.
- When and where possible, produce or support high impact, national or international advocacy and social norm change communications campaigns. Make sure these campaigns permeate all levels of society and sport to advance all women and girls’ leadership in sport and promote their participation.

Learn More

- United Nations General Assembly (1993), [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#)
- UN Women, [Frequently Asked Questions: Types of Violence Against Women and Girls](#)
- UN Women (2015), [Essential Services Package for Women and Girls Subject to Violence](#)
- UN Women (2019), [RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence Against Women](#)
- UN Women (2020), [RESPECT Women: Preventing Violence Against Women - Implementation Package](#)
- World Health Organization (2021), [Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018](#)



Chapter 2: Understanding the Sports Ecosystem

Who?

This chapter is directed at policy makers and violence against women and girls practitioners who wish to learn more about the sporting world. With a richer understanding of the sports ecosystem, readers will be able to identify key stakeholders, potential partners and effective pathways to tackle violence against women and girls in sport.

What?

- The sports industry is a complex ecosystem that includes a wide range of stakeholders, from athletes, coaches and clubs to commercial sponsors, event venues, journalists, supply chain providers and fans.
- Sport is organized in a number of different ways: by level of participation, by geography and by sport or discipline.
- Sport is not governed by a single centralized framework or set of rules. Different sporting disciplines have their own rules and regulations set by different national and international governing bodies, as well as their own courts and arbitration mechanisms. Yet sport is still required to respect human rights and follow national laws with respect to anti-discrimination and abuse.
- Many key organizations in sport have already demonstrated great capacity to tackle violence against women and girls, including the Olympic movement, International Federations (IFs), leagues and clubs, professional unions and commercial entities.

Why?

It is challenging to tackle violence against women and girls in sport without understanding the complex and interconnected levels of sporting structure, organizations and governance. To choose the best entry points for engaging the sporting world, it is critical to understand where, why and how key decisions are made.





Why is it important to understand the sports ecosystem?

This chapter is aimed at policy makers and violence against women and girls practitioners who are unfamiliar with sport as an industry. It offers a broad overview of how sport is organized and governed.

An understanding of the sports ecosystem and its governance structures provides important groundwork for tackling violence against women and girls. Such knowledge will make it easier to challenge the problematic aspects of sport while making the most of its strengths. With a good grasp of the industry, it is possible to identify opportunities for collaboration and to reach wider audiences. Familiarity with the sports ecosystem will also make it possible to understand the barriers and facilitators to change within sport.

Box 4

An industry steeped in Eurocentricity

The dominant sports model is deeply Eurocentric and focusses on those disciplines made popular through major sporting events, such as the Olympics and World Cups. Similarly, with many of the most powerful sports bodies located in Switzerland, and people (especially men) from the Global North disproportionately represented in those bodies, there is a lack of diverse thought and input into sports governance. Indigenous sport, for example, and the associated international events such as the World Indigenous Games (which features both competitive and non-competitive aspects that demonstrate the respect of heritage²²), should not be ignored when contextualising this guidance. And every opportunity to diversify thought leadership in sport should be welcomed.

Stakeholders in and around sport

Sport as an industry has a huge reach and engages a wide range of stakeholders. [Figure 1](#) below, designed by the Centre for Sport and Human Rights as part of its Convergence 2025 strategy, provides a valuable overview of these stakeholders. It shows the rights holders in the field of sport in the centre of the diagram, and the duty bearers, institutions and businesses with a responsibility to respect human rights on the outer rings. These are the potential allies and audiences who can play a part in efforts to achieve positive change in and through sport.

-  People and communities whose human rights must be protected and respected
-  States and government bodies that have a duty to promote, protect and fulfill human rights
-  Institutions and business actors who have a responsibility to respect human rights

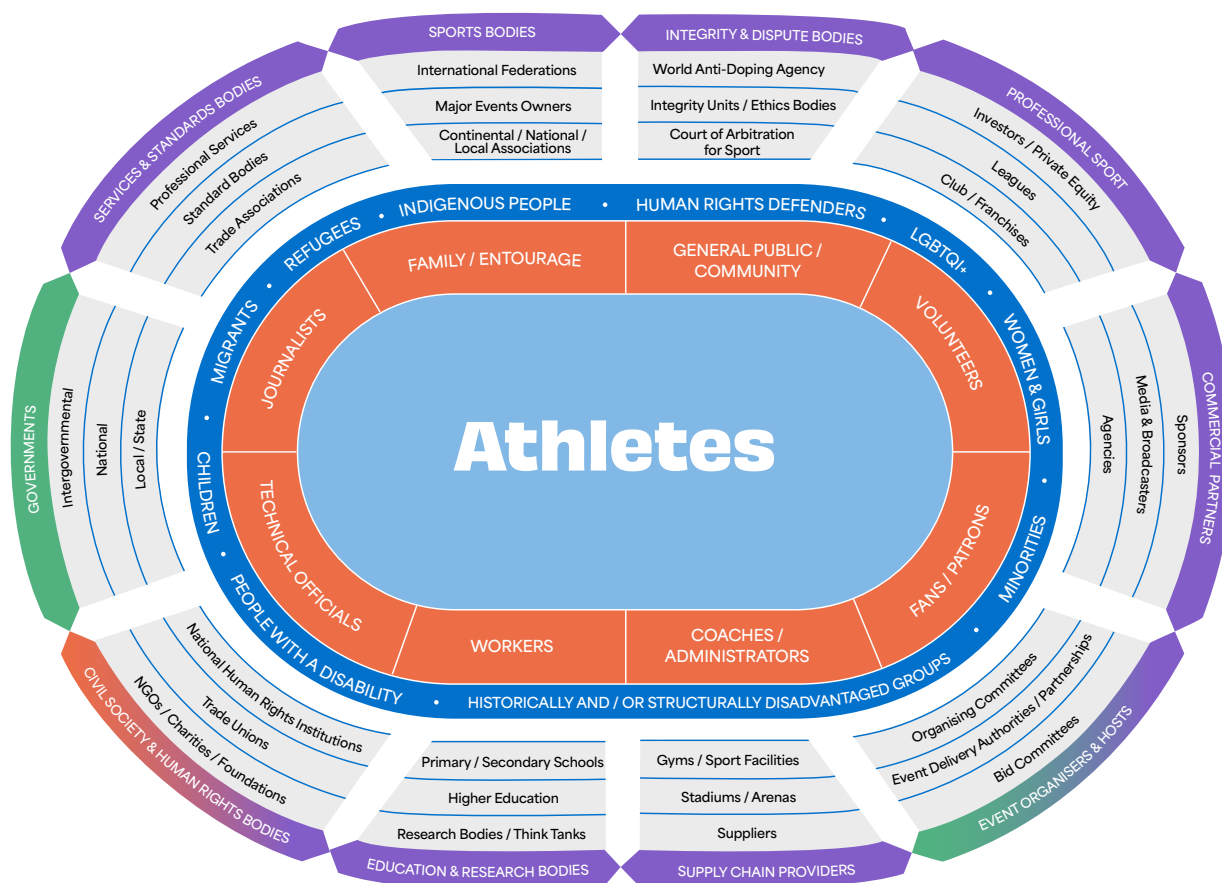


Figure 1: The Sports Ecosystem

The complexity of working within the sports ecosystem

Sport is not governed by a single centralized framework or set of rules. Instead, sport involves multiple, interconnected hierarchies. Policy makers and violence against women and girls practitioners should be mindful of these different approaches to organization, each of which offers particular challenges and opportunities. Because violence against women and girls can happen in any sport, at any level and between anyone in the sports ecosystem, it is critical to tailor approaches appropriately.



Figure 2: The Sport Pyramid

Level of participation

One view of sport involves the level of participation, best shown as a pyramid structure in which participants engage at different levels according to their desire, ability or opportunity (Figure 2). The largest number of participants will engage at the base of the pyramid. Those wishing to compete progress through the ranks and, if successful, reach the pinnacle of elite competition.

Each level of the pyramid carries its own challenges and risks for participants. Furthermore, different entities are responsible for managing the risks at different levels of play. For example, school sport and physical education might fall under the remit of a department for education. In the same country, a local club will be regulated by the national sport governing body.

Geography

Sport can also be organized by geography - typically by country and, in some cases, by city, state, or region. Most countries have regional representatives of the various sporting disciplines, with separate national sports bodies regulating the delivery and governance of organized sport. In any given country there could be dozens of disciplines with national bodies, from cycling to chess and hockey to handball. For example, Brazil has no fewer than eighteen national sports governing bodies, the majority of which are sport-specific. Similarly, Switzerland has 21 national sports governing bodies, most of which are also sports specific.²³

These entities are often complemented or coordinated by a government or non-departmental body, typically a Ministry of Sport. Frequently, sport is combined in a mixed portfolio that includes other cultural sectors, gender or youth. These bodies broadly focus on issues like increasing community sport participation, developing sports policy and growing pathways to elite sport. Most countries have a dedicated Ministry of Sport; the United States is one prominent exception.

Sport or discipline-specific

Finally, the regulation of sport occurs at a transnational and global level. This again can be portrayed in a pyramid structure with an international federation (IF) overseeing the global game and integrity of their sport on the international level. IFs are usually non-governmental organizations, most registered as legal entities in Switzerland. IFs then delegate responsibilities to regional and national federations further down the pyramid. This hierarchy is shown with the example of football (soccer) in [Figure 3](#).

In this pyramid, FIFA (the *Fédération Internationale de Football Association* or International Federation of Association Football) is the highest governing body of football. Among many other responsibilities, FIFA organizes the World Cup and Women's World Cup. Below FIFA sit six continental confederations, whose responsibilities include organising continent-wide competitions such as the Copa America, and a further 211 national associations, which regulate the game nationally and are responsible for a country's national team and, sometimes, the national league. The national association will also regulate local and grassroots football, sometimes through its regional limbs.

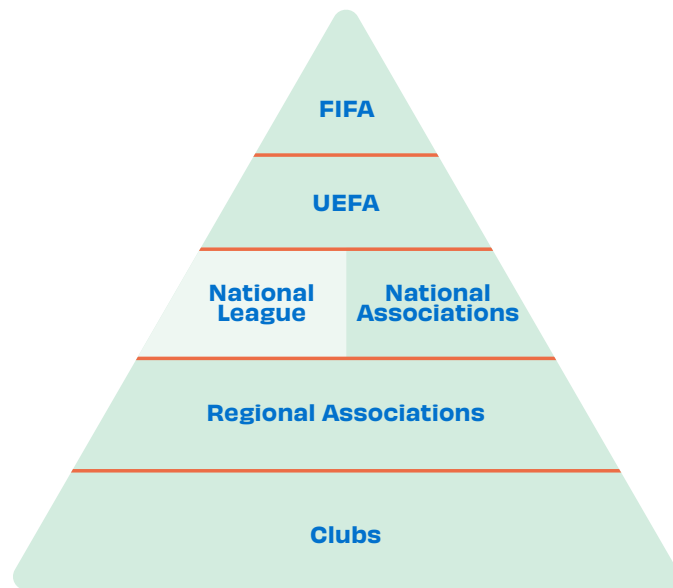


Figure 3: The organization of a specific sport at a global level

Applicability of laws and the autonomy of sport

Due to the different levels of sports organization, it can be challenging to understand what frameworks and principles persuade sports bodies to act. Most sports governing bodies operate as not-for-profit entities and are not directly bound by the major human rights instruments. Simultaneously, in recent years sports bodies have accumulated varying degrees of power and wealth and have established a parallel system of quasi-autonomous governance. Many states opt for minimal interference with sports governance. Consequently, sport sometimes operates with very little accountability: it has not benefited from the same degree of mainstreaming of human rights obligations as, for example, the business sector.

Sport has not universally accepted or adopted language around gender equality and violence against women and girls, and not all sports bodies acknowledge that they have a duty to respect human rights. This means that sometimes it is difficult to identify which laws and frameworks can be used to change standards and behaviour in sport.

This does not, of course, mean that sport is not required to respect human rights, and the rights of girls and women more specifically. National frameworks such as anti-discrimination legislation still apply. States that host national and international sporting bodies are obligated to ensure that there is adequate protection of individuals within their territory, including those affected by the actions of sport.

Partners and stakeholders

The final section of this chapter examines some key stakeholders in the sports ecosystem, the challenges and opportunities in partnering with them and the steps they have already taken to tackle violence against women and girls.

The Olympic Movement

The Olympic Movement offers an important infrastructure for sport. It is constituted by 206 National Olympic Committees (NOCs), whose mission is to develop, promote and protect the Olympic Movement in their respective countries, and IFs, who have national federations administering those sports. The Olympic Movement is governed internationally by the IOC (International Olympic Committee), whose responsibilities include organising the Summer, Winter and Youth Olympic Games. In 2018, the IOC developed their Athletes' Rights and Responsibilities Declaration, which calls for the ability to 'practice sport and compete without being subject to discrimination', 'fair and equal gender representation', and 'the protection of mental and physical health'. In 2018 the IOC launched its Gender Equality Review Project, and in 2020 it published recommendations for an IOC human rights strategy, which included multiple references to gender equality.

International Federations (IFs)

IFs play a central role in determining the rules on and off the field of play; their financial resources differ greatly but can amount to billions. These factors undoubtedly make IFs one of the most important stakeholders in sport. Although many IFs have faced significant criticism over the years on issues pertaining to violence against women and girls (see [Chapter 3](#)), much positive change has also been made. For example, FIFA has led the way in adopting human rights policies in 2017 with explicit reference to 'promoting gender equality and preventing all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment'.²⁴ And in October 2021, the International Gymnastics Federation launched its '10 Golden Rules of Gymnastics' campaign, a code of conduct outlining what behaviour is acceptable in gymnastics and what is not.²⁵ IFs therefore remain a primary audience and potentially valuable partners for any international efforts to combat violence against women and girls in sport.

Professional unions

Athletes' unions and professional unions represent the interests of sports professionals and have been especially active in advocating for survivors of violence against women and girls. (It is worth noting that formal unions for non-athletes remain scarce, though professional associations for coaches and referees provide some support to sports professionals.) The global representative body of unionized athletes, the World Players' Association (WPA), brings together 85,000 players across professional sport through more than 100 player associations in over 60 countries. In 2017, the WPA developed a Universal Declaration of Player Rights, which states that players are entitled to pursue sport 'free of discrimination, harassment and violence'; and affirms that the rights of children to 'pursue sport in an inclusive, adapted and safe manner, and to have his or her rights as a child protected, respected and guaranteed.' While these provisions are not binding, they exemplify how broader human rights can be mainstreamed into the sporting context. They also remind us of the importance of engaging with and building upon the work of athletes at the heart of the sporting infrastructure.

Clubs

Clubs and leagues can also have huge resources and have played an important part in the fight against violence against women and girls in sport. For example, USA Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association issued in 2018 a policy stating that any players suspected of domestic abuse, sexual violence or child abuse can be suspended without pay. The amount of leverage a club or league may have will depend in part on whether they are professionalized or not. Major professionalized leagues, and the clubs within those leagues, will be harder to access but also carry the most weight. For example, the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) is the highest tier of men's professional basketball in China, which means it will attract bigger sponsors, superstar athletes and viewing figures. Engaging the league or a club within that league will be a more impactful, but laborious, effort than working with an amateur local club.

Commercial entities

Sponsors, sports brands, broadcasters and other commercial entities can be powerful and affluent stakeholders in sport. Many of these stakeholders have already demonstrated an interest in social issues and great scope for influencing positive change, and they therefore can offer considerable potential to combating violence against women and girls in sport when offered technical and contextualized expertise.

Major sponsors have significant leverage over sports bodies, as their financial support makes major competitions possible. Aston Villa, for example, stated in January 2023 that they had no choice but to accept sponsorship from the Malaysian online casino BK8 despite backlash due to their need for funding, and the readiness of the brand to contribute twice as much financially in comparison to other firms.²⁶ Different sponsors tend to invest in different events and sporting disciplines, but apparel brands (such as Adidas, Nike and Reebok), soft drink companies (such as Coca Cola, Gatorade, Pepsi and Red Bull) and sponsors from the financial sector (such as Credit Suisse, UBS and Visa) have all shown a long-term interest in the exposure and social capital associated with sport.

Many of these corporations have become accustomed to the expectation that they monitor and justify their own human rights impact, and they will be familiar with the concept of human rights due diligence. This is, in part, because consumers and fans have demonstrated that they expect sponsors, brands and broadcasters to take a stand on issues which they care about. Corporate partners could therefore be valuable allies in helping sport better meet the social expectations it increasingly faces, for example by demanding greater equality in representation and funding, or by investing in grassroots sport programmes to combat violence against women and girls.

Adidas, for example, recently commissioned an international survey of women and found that 92% feared for their safety while running (compared with 28% of men), and more than a third experienced unwanted physical or verbal harassment while running. In response to these results, the company launched a new campaign to help women feel safer while running, which includes a playbook aimed at educating male allies on the issue.²⁷

Conclusions

The scale and complexity of the sports ecosystem may seem daunting, but it also provides multiple opportunities for collaboration and engagement. As we have seen, sports bodies at all levels are increasingly aware of the need to combat violence against women and girls and are making clear commitments to protecting the rights and safety of women and girls in sport. All these entities present opportunities for engagement to combat violence against women and girls. Yet even those organizations with the best of intentions do not always have the internal expertise to bring about meaningful change.

For this reason, it is critical for policy makers and violence against women and girls practitioners to consider carefully potential paths toward fruitful collaboration,

while remaining focused in purpose and realistic in expectations. This chapter shows that you can take any number of approaches according to your individual assessment of risks and opportunities.

Building relationships with stakeholders, especially larger corporate sponsors and federations, can take time and effort. Invest in cultivating these contacts well in advance of any specific event or initiative to see if there is scope for collaboration. Often these stakeholders will be looking for opportunities to demonstrate positive social impact, and they will be more responsive to trusted organizations with whom they have a track record.



Chapter 2 Recommendations

Take Action

- Before embarking on a project which engages sport, think carefully about the purpose and identify the best audience in the sports ecosystem for that engagement. Allow time to map the key actors, bearing in mind that you may need to bring together multiple stakeholders to achieve change.
- Decide on your target sport(s), location(s) and audience. You may find it helpful to consider the following factors:
 - Position in the sports ecosystem (athletes, coaches, broadcasters, sponsors, etc.)
 - Level of participation
 - Geography
 - Sport or discipline
- Identify key stakeholders. Which potential partners already have a track record of supporting causes of gender equality and tackling violence against women and girls? Where is there room for growth? Who are allies and who are opponents?
- Build timely and targeted relationships with stakeholders, recognizing that building relationships is an ongoing process and cannot be reduced to a single meeting or event.
- IFs, national and regional groups can all be important partners. Before reaching out, consider the level of effort you can make and what your expectations for impact will be. IFs ultimately have the top-level power to create new rules and procedures that may reduce violence against women and girls in sport, and also allocate resources needed for work to ‘trickle down’ to regional and national levels. Yet partnering with more local groups will likely require less effort and yield quicker results.

Learn More

- Al Hussein, Zeid Ra’ad and Rachel Davis (2020), [Recommendations for an IOC Human Rights Strategy](#)
- Centre for Sport and Human Rights, [Convergence 2025 Strategic Plan](#)
- International Olympic Committee, [IOC Athletes’ Rights and Responsibilities Declaration](#)
- International Olympic Committee (2018), [Gender Equality Review Project](#)
- Major League Baseball USA (2018), [Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Policy](#)
- World Players’ Association (2017), [Universal Declaration of Players’ Rights](#)

Part II:

The Playing Field



Chapter 3: Manifestations of Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport

Who?

This chapter is aimed at sports practitioners and policy makers seeking a deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls in sport. Policy makers and leaders in the sports world will acquire the background information and context necessary to tackle the root causes and specific risks of violence against women and girls in sport. And by understanding the specific risks, manifestations and impacts of violence against women and girls in the sporting world, all readers will be empowered to tackle the problem and advocate for positive change.

What?

- Across sports and continents, women and girl athletes face significant risks of abuse or violence. Women engaging with sport in other capacities are also at risk. For example, in the Netherlands and Belgium, female athletes reported twice the rate of sexual violence as men in sport during their childhood. Overall, 17% of the females reported experiencing sexual violence whilst playing sports, in comparison to 11% of males.²⁸
- Risks of abuse are especially high for those facing other forms of disadvantage, such as race/ethnicity, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation and/or socioeconomic level.
- There are many factors that contribute to violence against women and girls in sport. These include imbalances of power, the promotion of abusive practices as part of a 'no pain, no gain' approach, the normalisation of harmful gender stereotypes, the male-dominant culture of the sports sector and the poor governance of sporting structures that enables power dynamics to become entrenched.²⁹



- Case studies from around the world demonstrate that reporting abuse can be difficult, traumatising and often precarious for survivors and whistle-blowers. Even when abuse is reported, sports leaders and organizations have often failed to act, thus normalizing and enabling abuse to continue.
- The sports ecosystem presents many barriers to tackling violence against women and girls, including a lack of accountability, transparency and a defensive mindset. Many sports federations have prioritized the integrity of the sport's image and economic profit over the individual, leaving survivors with no clear route to remedy.

Why?

To tackle violence against women and girls in sport, it is necessary to be sensitive to its particular risk factors and manifestations of violence within the sporting world.



A fundamental factor: gender inequality in sport

As discussed in [Chapter 1](#), violence against women and girls is rooted in gender inequality and perpetuated by an inequitable balance of power and resources. It is therefore unsurprising that many examples of violence against women and girls in sport share characteristics with publicized incidents of violence against women and girls in other domains of society, such as film and media, religious institutions and the domestic sphere as intimate partner violence.

// ... my rights as a girl child were not protected. The national team environment was highly sexualized, they were all male coaches. That environment was very negative. //

Female International Athlete³⁰

Here, it is worth calling attention to the considerable advances in gender equality within sport over the past several decades. Much of the progress was a direct result of national legislation: For example, the United States' landmark gender equality law known as Title IX (1972) banned sex discrimination in federally funded education programmes. Since then, the number of girls participating in high school sport nationwide has risen elevenfold, and women now make up 44% of all college athletes (compared with 15% in 1972).³¹ As recently as March 2023, the UK Government announced a £600M package to create equal school sport opportunities for girls, following a campaign by the World Champion Lionesses (football) squad.

Despite this progress, sport remains in many respects a male-dominated realm, and women (especially women of colour) are underrepresented in leadership roles. Many leaders in sport played sport at a recreational or professional level, meaning that they have the potential to perpetuate gender stereotypes that they were exposed to themselves. As a gender-segregated industry, sport is not only bound up with hierarchical conceptions of gender, but also has a strong cultural association with men and masculinity. This, in turn, plays a central role in reproducing ideas of masculine superiority.³² Put simply: as an industry, sport sometimes displays a deep cultural resistance to gender equality.

Gender stereotypes contribute to young women dropping out of sport participation because women in sport are often seen as being non-feminine. Similarly, men who do not fulfil the "masculine" stereotype have reported feeling intimidated and excluded from sports participation.

Clearinghouse
for Sport³³

In general terms, women's sport and women athletes are still considered 'second class' in relation to men's sport: women professional athletes are paid less, provided with fewer equipment and resources than their male counterparts, and receive smaller amounts of prize money for events such as the World Cup. For example, FIFA Women's World Cup prize money was \$30 million in comparison to \$400 million for Men's World Cup in 2018.³⁴ Similarly, in 2017, England's women's cricket team won US\$660,000 from a total prize pot of US\$2 million, in comparison to the US\$4 million from a total pot of US\$10 million that the men's team won in 2019.³⁵ Women athletes are also subject to perceptions that they can bring in less revenue through advertising and ticket sales.

Sport has also served as an arena for perpetuating sexist stereotypes. While many sports promote positive perceptions of women, others contribute to the sexualization

and subordination of women through roles such as cheerleaders and ring girls. Women athletes themselves are exposed to particular scrutiny for their physical form and adherence to (typically Eurocentric) standards of beauty. Athletes who do not conform to these standards are at particular risk of physical, emotional and/or psychological violence. For example, gymnasts routinely face body shaming and deprivation of food to conform to certain standards.³⁶ One study has shown that more than 60% of female elite athletes reported pressure from their coaches regarding body shape, potentially increasing their risk of eating disorders.³⁷

Sport-specific risk factors

While the root causes of violence against women and girls in sport are often familiar, sport also has unique characteristics that increase or alter the risk to women and girls in the sector. Familiarity with these contextual differences is important.

A better understanding of the particular risks within sport will assist policy makers and sport leaders in building systems that better prevent and respond to violence against women and girls.

Extreme power dynamics coupled with a lack of transparency and accountability

The realm of sport provides an active setting for relationships formed between an athlete and those in positions of power who are gatekeepers to opportunities and success. Recent years have seen many examples of coaches, clinicians and senior federation staff abusing their trust, power and position. [Case Study 1](#) describes two examples of the abuse of power in the highest levels of leadership in football. With very little power vis-a-vis their coach or other senior sporting professionals, athletes may be reluctant to risk losing their chances of advancement by blowing the whistle on harassment and abuse by authority figures.

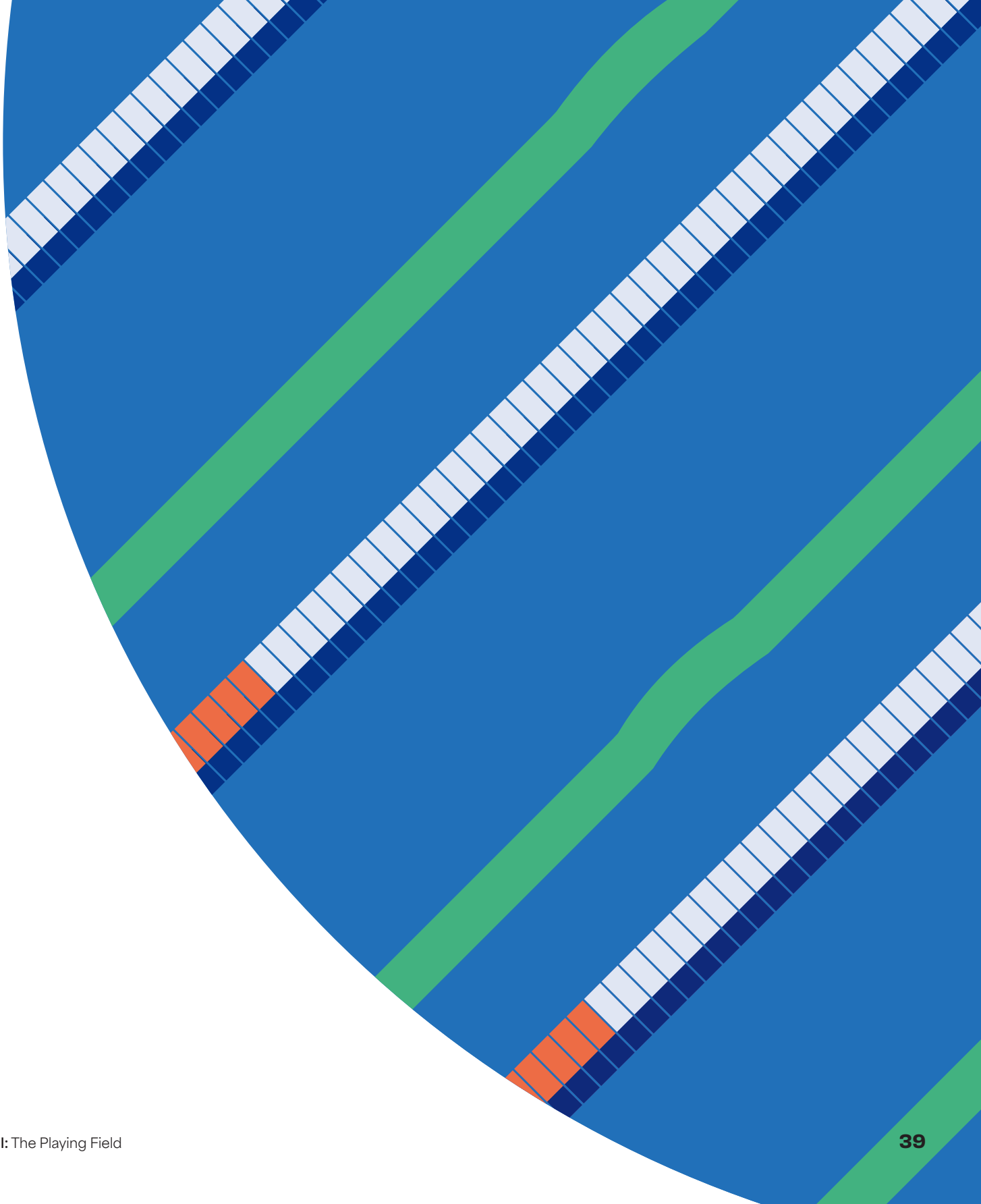
// Everywhere I went while I was at swimming, I wasn't safe. I was always running, I was always on high alert, and watching where he was. Anywhere I went - the changing rooms, the board room, the toilets, his office, on training camps, trips away, competitions - if he called me, I knew it was coming. If he got me in a room on my own, he would either lock the door or jam the door, but I wasn't able to get out. He would do what he wanted to do to me until he was finished, as he would say, "checking my body". He said it was all to do with the progression of my swimming and I was stuck there until he would tell me to leave. He just had total control over my whole life. Everything he said went and you did it, because if you didn't, you knew you were gone, you were out. //

Irish swimmer Karen Leach, on the abuse she suffered between the ages of 10 and 17 from former Irish Olympic swimming coach Derry O'Rourke³⁸

The dynamics of secrecy and deference are further amplified by a culture of 'star maker' coaches who are idolized by athletes, other coaches and many responsible adults in their immediate surroundings - a situation that in some cases has led to decades of silence, with sexual predators abusing multiple generations of athletes.

In a similar manner, the high-profile status and celebrity treatment of male university and professional athletes can contribute to a sense of entitlement and lack of accountability for their actions off the field. Teams, schools and sports organizations have sometimes minimized, turned a blind eye or covered up bad behaviour to avoid negative publicity that could harm the reputation of athletes, teams or schools and lucrative sports programmes. For example, in January 2023, a female student-athlete at Houston Christian University in the US reported that the institution didn't respond adequately to her allegations of sexual assault and grooming by her track coach. This lack of accountability reinforces notions of toxic masculinity and the entitlement of men to women's bodies.





Sexual abuse and abuses of power in women's football

Perhaps more than any other sport, football has been plagued with abuse cases in both the men's and women's game. The volume of cases does not necessarily mean that football has a particular problem with abuse, but is rather a likely reflection of the popularity of the sport, the promise of significant financial reward for those who achieve professional status, the public scrutiny from civil society including journalists, and the overall wealth and power of the sport.

Since 2018, women's professional football has seen sexual abuse scandals in countries including Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Canada, Cameroon, Congo, Colombia, Haiti, Mongolia, New Zealand, Sierra Leone, Spain, the United Kingdom, the USA and Zambia.

While most of these cases involved coaches, several of the above cases implicated presidents of national federations and administrators in confederations and reflect the disproportionate power of those running footballing bodies.³⁹ In Afghanistan, Football Federation President Keramuudin Kareem was also a former warlord. After Kareem (who physically and sexually abused many players)⁴⁰ was banned by FIFA and global pressure mounted, Afghan crime agencies sought to arrest Kareem. However, he was able to flee to his home province of Panshir and hold off national enforcement agencies.⁴¹ The case also implicated Sayed Ali Reza Aghazada, the former secretary general of the Afghanistan Football Federation and member of the Asian Football Confederation, for failing to report the abuse. FIFA imposed on Aghazada a 5-year ban on all football-related activity and levied a fine of 10,000 Swiss Francs.

In Haiti, federation President Yves Jean-Bart is alleged to have raped countless girls and women over decades, and enabled many other abusers to use the footballing infrastructure (and the residential centre built with FIFA funding) to do the same. Data gathering and reporting by FIFPRO, the global players' union, identified thirty-four alleged victims by 10 possible perpetrators and accomplices, including Jean-Bart. These decades of abuse were facilitated by Jean-Bart's extraordinary tenure as President of the Haitian Football Federation: he was allowed to remain in power for 20 years, as acknowledged by FIFA, despite the fact that its statutes recommend that federation presidents serve a maximum of three terms.⁴² FIFA banned Jean-Bart from football in 2020, but the case has remained in the spotlight: the ban was overturned by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) in early 2023; around the same time, Jean-Bart filed a defamation lawsuit in the Court of Paris against the French independent journalist who originally reported on the allegations.⁴³





The concentration of power in the hands of these footballing figures also presents a significant disincentive to players to report. In both the Afghanistan and Haiti cases, victims, survivors and whistle-blowers faced physical and legal threats and professional retaliation. Those who reported abuse had to flee the country and leave their families and playing careers behind; others remained silent for fear of facing the same fate. For many players, the trauma of experiencing abuse was compounded by reliving the abuse through the reporting process.

FIFA has faced considerable criticism from victims, survivors and whistle-blowers for its handling of these cases. But it is also leading the global discussion on the establishment of an international, multisport Safe Sport Entity and has introduced processes that many consider ground-breaking in sport. It has put in place a minimum care package for survivors and committed to taking a trauma-informed approach. While the detail and implementation of these approaches is yet to be evaluated, the establishment of the principle is an important step forward when tackling male violence against women and girls in football.

Case Study 2

A 'No Pain, No Gain' culture, with child welfare taking a backseat

Sport culture is premised on a level of deprivation or pain. In this context, perpetrators who claim to know best can mask violence with the claim that it is 'just part of the game'. (See [Case Study 2](#)) The recent disclosure of abuse across multiple sports in Canada has demonstrated that the culture of sport exacerbates silence even when the repercussions are not physical. For example, Dr. Laura Misener, professor and director of the School of Kinesiology at Western University, said the nature of gymnastics as a sport, where adults control how young women eat, take care of and think about their bodies, lends itself to a potentially problematic environment.

// I think there is generally a culture of silencing in sport where coaches and administrators have a lot of power and control over their athletes. (...) It creates a culture where when individuals come forward and make allegations or talk about wrongdoing, often that voice is silent because it's considered to be part of the sport, and that's the part that perpetuates that toxic culture. (...) When we value excellence over everything else, when we sit back and we count medals on a regular basis, that's going to lead to a toxic environment because that's what organizations are going to push for. //

Dr. Laura Misener⁴⁴

Japan: 'I was hit so many times I can't count'

.....

In 2020, Human Rights Watch produced a report into physical, sexual and verbal abuse of child athletes in Japan, entitled 'I was hit so many times I can't count.'⁴⁵ The report examines the experience of both girl and boy athletes, but highlighted the specific and tragic experiences of girls in a number of contexts. For example, a 15-year-old junior high school table tennis player committed suicide in 2019, citing her coach's abuse as a reason for her death. Her suicide note mentioned that her coach had threatened 'to kill' or 'punch' her.

The report states that '[p]hysical violence as a coaching technique has a long tradition in Japanese sport, often seen as essential to achieving excellence in competition and in personal character.' Abusive coaching practices include hitting children with bats and bamboo kendo sticks, slapping children across the face, and holding children's heads underwater to simulate drowning. Experiences of verbal and sexual abuse are also documented.



The report also describes several factors making the eradication of physical abuse especially difficult, noting that coaches are not the only ones to believe that physical violence helps achieve sporting excellence. 'Parents, and even some players hold onto the mistaken belief that physical abuse in sport has value.'

Child abuse is illegal in Japan, with a total ban on corporal punishment. However, the lack of victim support infrastructure means athletes wishing to report abuse have little help to do so. The report states that 'Sports federations and organizations appear to have done little to publicize and make available resources to support child athletes who have been victims of abuse in sport.'

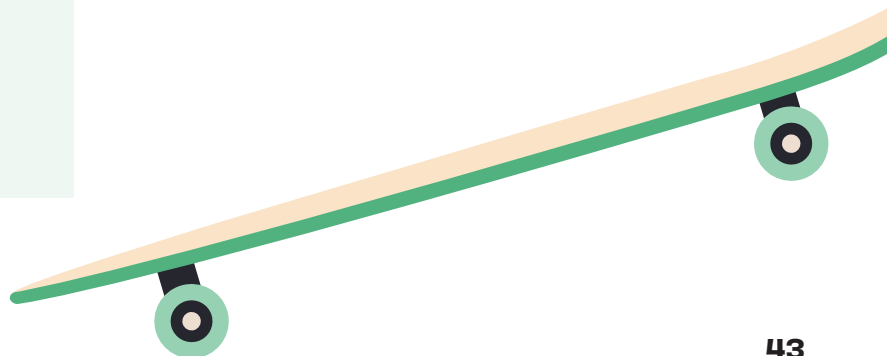
The report makes a series of recommendations targeted at different stakeholders, including government and sports bodies. It calls on the Japanese government to specify that legal prohibitions on child abuse and corporal punishment extend to the world of organized sport, and include references to child abuse in sport in existing legislation. It also calls for the strengthening of child protection in sports organizations so that there are enforceable and binding provisions to ensure compliance.

Normalisation of harmful gender stereotypes and attitudes

Some sports contexts promote (or at least maintain) harmful, toxic, or negative masculine stereotypes and provide a vehicle to allow harmful masculine behaviours. From a young age, sport often teaches boys to suppress vulnerability and harness aggression and dominance.⁴⁶ Many perpetrators of abuse in women's sport, such as coaches and administrators, grew up in this environment and go on to replicate those harmful attitudes in their professional positions of power. Men's team sports in particular, can encourage a form of 'hegemonic masculinity' that includes sexist and misogynistic attitudes toward women.

// Systematically failing to identify or respond to a pattern of sexual violence by a student athlete, to team cultures that objectify women or use sexual violence as a hazing ritual, the sport community has been complicit in supporting behaviours that allows sexual violence to occur. //

Raiance, national partnership dedicated to ending sexual violence in one generation⁴⁷





Case Study 3

USA Gymnastics sexual abuse

In 2016 The Indianapolis Star reported on an investigation into widespread abuse in gymnastics, which eventually saw over 350 people alleging sexual abuse by coaches, gym owners, and staff across the country.⁵⁰ Among the victims and survivors were multiple USA Gymnastics national team members, including Olympic gold medallists.

Civil suits dating as far back as 2013 show that USA Gymnastics routinely dismissed warnings about coaches and often did not report concerns to police. This included a case where the coach eventually pleaded guilty to molesting gymnasts, secretly videotaping girls changing clothes, and posting their nude images on the Internet. The Indianapolis Star also found that some coaches were fired at one gym only to be rehired at others, without being flagged by USA Gymnastics or losing their membership with the organization. Amid the abuse scandal, USA Gymnastics, who faced criticism from survivors and civil society, lost several major sponsors.



Who is at risk?

Youth

Much abuse of female athletes begins when the athletes are young girls and frequently continues throughout their athletic life, sometimes prompting them to stop training and competing.⁴⁸ Young athletes are particularly vulnerable to violence due to the unique characteristics of the sports environment, such as the importance placed on the coach-athlete relationship, intensity of youth sport, demands of competition, interest of the media in young athletes, time spent in distant training centres, recruitment procedures of young athletes and the distance from home or school environment. The incidence of sexual abuse in USA Gymnastics, discussed in [Case Study 3](#), is a particularly extensive and shocking example of violence against women and girls in this context.

This environment lends itself to the grooming of child athletes, where predators normalize abusive behaviour as being acceptable, often in the presence of other trusted adults who are deferential and do not object.⁴⁹ Sport offers many opportunities for common forms of grooming, including special attention (for example, a coach offering specific praise), isolating a child from the team, friends or family (for example, by providing individual coaching or emotionally isolating an athlete) and increased physical touch and proximity.

USA Gymnastics national team doctor Larry Nasser was the most prolific among many abusers. Taking advantage of his authority as a senior official, Nasser sexually abused girls and young women for at least 14 years under the pretence of providing medical treatment. Athletes were forced to submit to pelvic exams, including in mandatory training camps where they were isolated and subjected to abuse.

Yet as journalist Sally Jenkins noted, USA Gymnastics 'not only allowed serial paedophile Larry Nassar unsupervised access to the scores of girls in its charge over 30 years, it required them to submit to him and his utterly unjustifiable vaginal examinations. Olympic medallist Aly Raisman recalled, 'I had to see him. There was no choice... because if you didn't, then it would be reported that we didn't see him - and if you had a bad practice the next day, we'd get in trouble for not being 'disciplined' and not getting treatment from him.'⁵¹

Subsequent investigations have shown that athletes were not only driven into the hands of a serial abuser who was allegedly protected by sport, but repeatedly failed by authorities outside of sport. The FBI has now been conclusively found to have responded inadequately to reports, leaving complaints unanswered while Nassar's sexual abuse continued. An investigation by the United States Department of Justice exposed multiple failures of the FBI, including that the local FBI office had violated numerous FBI policies.⁵²

The USA Gymnastics scandal was a watershed moment for sport. Gymnasts across the globe, including the United Kingdom and New Zealand, spoke out about abuse and mistreatment. The extensive media coverage of the survivors courageously speaking out about their abuse, as well as the failures by USA Gymnastics and other institutions to act, has inspired many subsequent disclosures and campaigns across sporting disciplines.

The case also gave rise to changes in law that will benefit child victims of trafficking and abuse outside of the sporting realm. US Senator Diane Feinstein introduced a bill to require national governing body members overseeing Olympic sports to immediately report sexual assault allegations to law enforcement or designated child-welfare agencies. In 2022 a bipartisan group of senators introduced new legislation aimed to improve the way law enforcement agencies interact with underage victims and witnesses in sex abuse and trafficking cases.

As a direct result of the case, the US Center for SafeSport was set up in 2017 under the auspices of the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017. SafeSport is specifically charged with tackling the problem of sexual abuse of minors and amateur athletes in sport. In 2018, Larry Nassar was sentenced to 175 years of jail time.

An intersectional approach to abuse

All women and girl athletes are susceptible to violence, but LGBTQIA+ athletes, athletes with disabilities, and athletes from disadvantaged racial, ethnic, migration, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds are at particular risk. It is important to acknowledge the intersectional vulnerabilities of women and girls and guarantee the specific prevention measures they need. Anecdotal evidence from recent cases suggests that prevention efforts would also benefit from an intersectional analysis of wider factors.

Such an approach is needed not only in identifying risks and developing prevention frameworks, but also in establishing whether those frameworks are keeping all women and girls safe.

Women and girls of colour

As noted above, the sports environment already imposes intense control over the bodies of women and girls, particularly with respect to weight and body type. Such coercive control is often exacerbated for athletes of colour, with natural Black hair serving as a particular focus of violence and control. For example, Canadian sprinter Crystal Emmanuel, a two-time Olympian, was told by her coach that her natural hair was the reason that she was not attracting sponsors.⁵⁴ The challenges facing women and girls of colour are also manifest in explicit rules and rigid stipulations, such as the international Swimming Federation's ban on swim caps designed for natural Black hair⁵⁵ or more pernicious and subtle forms of discrimination.

Other athletes of colour have experienced more severe forms of racism. In a 2020 Survey of elite female athletes, one in five reported having witnessed or experienced racism in their sport.⁵⁶ A study of online abuse conducted by World Athletics indicate that one fifth of all abuse during the World Athletics Championships Oregon22 was racial.⁵⁷ And as shown in Case Study 4, not even the most celebrated players are immune to racial abuse – or to the fallout of being a whistleblower.

// I remember one of my coaches at Indiana State did ask, "Why is your hair doing that? What's going on with your hair?" and "Can you do something with your hair post-match before an interview? Because it looks kind of crazy right now." //

Canadian entrepreneur Sasha Exeter, on her experience playing collegiate tennis⁵³

LGBTQIA+ athletes

80%
witnessed or
experienced
homophobia
in sport

18%
of lesbians
reported
being bullied

16%
received
verbal threats

9%
had been
physically
assaulted

LGBTQIA+ athletes at all levels of play have widely reported discrimination and abuse. In one international survey of nearly 9500 gay and straight people, 80% of participants had witnessed or experienced homophobia in sport, with homophobic language the most common. 74% of lesbians are completely or partially in the closet whilst playing youth sport, and not without reason: 18% of lesbians reported being bullied, 16% received verbal threats and 9% had been physically assaulted.⁵⁸

Discrimination has also been found directly in recruitment practices and employment contracts that reflect stereotypes that lesbian athletes are predators and a threat to heterosexual female athletes – such as the Italian coaching contract for volleyball player and lesbian Manuela Benelli.



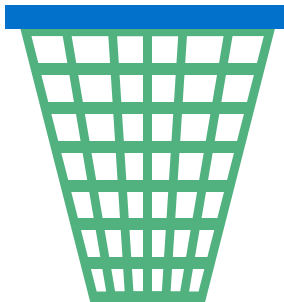
Case Study 4

Eni Aluko and racism in British football

British-Nigerian footballer Eni Aluko is one of the most decorated athletes in British football, scoring more than 30 goals in 102 appearances for England. As a member of the England Women's senior team, Aluko began to experience bullying and racism from coach Mark Sampson and other coaches from around 2014. Sampson, for example, made comments that her family visiting from Nigeria could be infected with the Ebola virus; another coach would affect a Caribbean accent when speaking with her. On one occasion, Sampson asked teammate Drew Spence - the only other woman of colour - how many times she had been arrested. (Spence had never been arrested.)

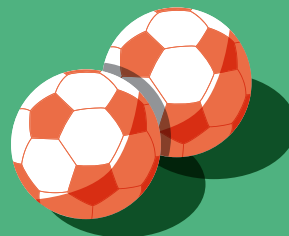
Aluko described these experiences to the Football Association during a confidential 'culture review' in May 2016. Twelve days later, she was informed by Sampson that she was being dropped by the British team for 'un-Lionness behaviour' and a bad attitude.

Aluko, who also has a law degree, filed a grievance shortly after, but an internal investigation by the FA, and then a second one, cleared Sampson and his staff of any wrongdoing. It was only after Aluko told her story to The Guardian in August 2017 - prompting the Professional Footballers Association to accuse the FA of holding a 'sham' investigation - was there a third investigation. In October 2017, barrister Katharine Newton for the FA concluded that Sampson had racially abused Aluko and Spence. Both the FA and, eventually, Sampson, apologized to Aluko and Spence.⁶⁰



Italian
volleyball
coach
Manuela
Benelli⁵⁹

// The contract I have signed said that if I bothered one of my players, I would be immediately removed. While a man manager or coach who tries to flirt with a woman in his team... usually gets a pat on the back. Do you think there has ever been a mention like mine in a man's contract in Italy?//



// My experience as a queer woman in sports is tainted by both positions – being queer and a woman. Being a woman meant being less than the men, which on the whole meant getting less experienced coaches, worse practice times, less money, less respect and interest from the community/club ... Being a queer woman was at times shrouded in silence, with people either not daring to discuss queerness or discussing it in very strange (and demeaning) ways, e.g., calling my female partner and I, sisters or pals. Also hearing (after the fact) that certain team members were uneasy about showering with me (and my partner) and knowing that the men's teams pornified my position as a queer woman. //

Athlete from
Iceland⁶¹

Ability

Research has shown that women and girls living with disabilities are at a significantly higher risk of violence, and these findings can be observed in the sports context again and again. One study has shown that up to 93% of women with disabilities do not participate in sport.⁶² Bullying poses a particular problem in youth sport, driving girls and women with disabilities to drop sports activities entirely. Other athletes with disabilities have described excessive overtraining to the point of injury or exhaustion.⁶³ At the elite level, paralympic athletes experience sexual violence at nearly triple the rate of able-bodied athletes.⁶⁴

Transgender, nonbinary and DSD athletes

The gender-segregated nature of the sports sector connects to its struggles to take a balanced and evidence-based approach to the inclusion of athletes with differences of sexual development (DSD), transgender girls and women, and non-binary athletes. The failure to provide consistent guidance has resulted in a number of injustices and serious abuses. A 2020 survey conducted by the US Center for SafeSport, for example, found that gender-nonconforming athletes experienced even higher rates of psychological harm and neglect than women and men.⁶⁵ [Case Study 5](#) outlines the experience of Kristen Worley and the suffering she experienced when trying to establish her right to compete. Additional resources to support transgender, nonbinary and DSD athletes are provided at the end of this chapter.



Violence against transwomen in sport through sex testing

In 2003, the IOC adopted a policy recommendation to allow gender-transitioned athletes to compete in the Olympics if they could provide legal proof of their completed sex change (the Stockholm Consensus).

Kristen Worley sought to represent Canada at the Olympics and, as the first-ever gender-transitioned Olympian, Kristen was the first athlete to go through the IOC's untested review process. As a result, Kristen was subjected to gender testing on two occasions. In the first incident, in 2005, nine men were given the authority to assess and verify her gender even though none of them had any formal expertise to do so.

In addition, Kristen's health was severely damaged because the permitted levels of synthetic testosterone were inadequate to support her XY physiology, causing her to be put into a 'severe post-menopausal state' and making it impossible for her to participate in high performance cycling.

Kristen fought tirelessly to establish fairer and more inclusive guidance. She challenged the lack of scientific evidence supporting permitted testosterone levels, including in the later IOC guidance (see 2015 'IOC Consensus meeting on Sex Reassignment and Hyperandrogenism'). She successfully argued that the Court of Arbitration in Sport (CAS) did not have jurisdiction over her case, so that her case was heard instead in the Canadian domestic courts. This was the first time an Olympic-chartered sport and its policies were put under scrutiny in a court of human rights - in this case, the Tribunal for Human Rights in Toronto. The IOC tried to claim that Canadian courts had no jurisdiction, but Kristen's case was still heard by the Tribunal.

In the Tribunal for Human Rights in Toronto, Kristen alleged that she was being discriminated against by the policies of the Ontario Cycling Association (OCA), Cycling Canada Cyclisme (CCC), the

Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI), the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). She also claimed that she was discriminated against as a result of the application in her case of the IOC's Stockholm Consensus, which makes recommendations regarding the participation in sport of individuals who have undergone sex reassignment.

Kristen's human rights application was settled with CCC, the OCA and the UCI. The parties agreed to enter into mediation and reached an agreement in 2017. Kristen has been deeply damaged by the experience of sex testing and the institutional responses to her efforts to compete.

Since Kristen's case, Human Rights Watch has consistently called for an end to the abusive sex testing of athletes. In 2022 it called procedures that seek to verify the gender of DSD athletes 'flagrant human rights violations because they are stigmatizing, stereotyping and discriminatory'.⁶⁶

Socioeconomic disadvantage

The vulnerabilities of being young and female can be further compounded in the context of socioeconomic deprivation. In some cases, parents gamble on their child's athletic success to lift the family out of poverty; reporting abuse can therefore come at a financial cost to the family. In elite sporting setups in particular, parents will often cede much control and decision making to coaches and other sporting staff, causing a rift between athletes and their parents. At this level there is also often an increased associated cost: there will be requirements for equipment and potentially a need for additional training or coaching. The combination of entry point competition and limited resources has seen much poor practice (albeit some of it well-intentioned), like coaches giving athletes lifts on their own.

Tackling the risks of violence against women and girls beyond athletes

While this chapter has focused on athletes, risks to women and girls exist throughout sport, including risks to girls in cities hosting mega sporting events and risks to other women employees and contractors, such as referees and physiotherapists. Because they stand outside the athletes' spotlight and lack the protection of unions, these girls and women need to be better acknowledged and protected in a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to safe sport.

Risks to women working in sports bodies, directly with athletes and as officials

As a male-dominated sector, many women have struggled with discrimination and abuse in sport. Often lacking the protection of unionisation, these women face

the closed, arbitrary and relational promotional structures of sport, as well as a culture where sport is quick to rally around itself to protect its image rather than tackle a problem. For example, Miguel Macedo, the head of the star-studded FIFA Legends programme, was found by both an internal human resources panel and an outside mediator to have sexually harassed a subordinate in 2019, but to date has remained in his position; the employee eventually left FIFA.⁶⁷

Women physiotherapists and massage therapists are also vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse from players.⁶⁸ And women who seek to advance in other sport professions face sextortion and abuse, including women referees from El Salvador to Zimbabwe (see [Case Study 6](#)). Clearly, there is a gap in support and representation that must urgently be filled if these women are to be protected.

... 'Like "you can't see" and stuff like that. And they said my eyes were creepy, and I was young... When kids do that to me today, now I'm older, I don't really take it that seriously, but when I was younger I did!'

Para athlete, on the bullying she experienced as a child⁶⁹

Case Study 6

Sextortion of referees in Zimbabwe

In 2020, allegations emerged in local Zimbabwean media that women referees were being sexually harassed by officials from the national footballing federation, ZIFA. Victims reported feeling 'humiliated, intimidated and degraded' by the unwanted sexual advances, with perpetrators explicitly or implicitly using their power to award lucrative officiating roles as additional pressure to offer sexual favours.

The victims complained to ZIFA, but no action was taken. The allegations were also sent

to FIFA, the Confederation of African Football (CAF), and the Council of Southern Africa Football Associations (COSAFA).

Victims reported experiencing negative professional repercussions for reporting, including not officiating since making the complaints and feeling 'emotionally drained' by the negative experience. One victim expressed deep disappointment in football's authorities' failure to respond: 'ZIFA is a huge disappointment. I've told myself I can never rely on them. I had high hopes that

FIFA would intervene and fight to defend us female referees but they let me down as well. My question is why would FIFA go silent? I'm not saying they have to rush and make my case a first priority but at least show me that you're keen to assist me.'

After international reporting by The Guardian, the case received greater scrutiny. FIFA banned the main perpetrator from the sport for five years and fined him 20,000 Swiss francs for sexually harassing three female referees.⁷⁰

Risks to women and girls at mega-sporting events

Mega-sporting events (MSEs) carry significant human rights risks, and girls and women are disproportionately affected by those risks, including trafficking and prostitution, harassment and violence from visiting spectators, and discriminatory treatment of women fans. Yet MSEs also have significant potential to advance human rights. A 2022 report from the

Centre for Sport and Human Rights and global law firm Clifford Chance examines the successful United Bid of Canada, Mexico and the United States for the 2026 Football World Cup.⁷¹ This bidding process saw FIFA, for the first time in its history, ask prospective hosts to respond to detailed human rights requirements.



Conclusions

Violence against women and girls in sport affects women and girls across all cultures and societies. Violence against women and girls manifests in many forms of abuse and can occur between peer athletes, coaches and athletes, or other personnel within the sports entourage (such as managers, officials, doctors, physiotherapists) and athletes. The case studies discussed in this chapter not only illustrate the conditions within sport that can foster violence against women and girls, but also the barriers to tackling violence against women and girls within sport. Such barriers include the following:

→ **A lack of accountability and transparency:**

As discussed in [Chapter 2](#), sport as an industry is regulated largely through a closed, self-governing network. Proponents of this autonomy argue it allows sport to operate free from political interference. Critics say it causes a profound lack of accountability and transparency.⁷² States are reluctant to interfere with sport, and few countries have developed specific national policies to tackle forms of gender-based violence in sport.⁷³ (Notable exceptions will be discussed in [Chapter 4](#).) Sport, in turn, has not always prioritized the issue of violence against women and girls and often lags behind wider society while benefiting from very little external and independent scrutiny.

→ **A defensive mindset:**

To date, sport has too often prioritized protecting the industry and its reputation over helping survivors, who have reported profoundly defensive reactions to their disclosure and being re-harmed in the remedy process.⁷⁴ Industry experts have urged leading sports bodies to 'move from a model based on legal liability and control to one based on responsibility and leverage'.⁷⁵ There are important opportunities to work with sports bodies and help them improve how they respond to concerns raised around violence against women and girls, which will be the focus of [Chapter 6](#).



→ **No clear route to remedy:**

Sport's complex governance structure is not unified across disciplines and jurisdictions, and there remains considerable uncertainty regarding the alignment of sport's own laws with established human rights frameworks. Consequently, there is no clear and signposted pathway for those whose rights have been violated to seek remedy, legal aid, or pastoral care. It is also difficult for survivors to balance the risk versus reward, especially where the decision to challenge sport's power brokers can entail losing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to compete.

→ **Prioritizing the integrity of sport over the integrity of the individual:**

Sports governing bodies are explicitly tasked with maintaining the integrity of their sporting discipline. In the case of abuse, they will typically rely on their own disciplinary procedures, which grant the power to suspend, ban or fine abusers. But there are few provisions that enable sport to tackle the harm done to victims and survivors. For example, in the two major sexual abuse cases in football which have seen substantial fines levied against the perpetrators (see [Case Study 1](#)), these fines did not translate into any reparations to the people affected.

→ **A lack of credible data:**

For an industry obsessed with targets, sport is paradoxically poor at measuring impact and tracking change. There is very little data available, especially from a global perspective and an intersectional perspective, about the challenges, opportunities, and effective good practices when it comes to violence against women and girls in sport. Initiatives like Sport for Generation Equality call for better commitments to monitor and publicly report on progress on an annual basis.



Chapter 3 Recommendations

Take Action

For sports practitioners and leaders in the sports world:

- Go beyond non-binding suggestions for child protection and develop binding obligations with clear mechanisms for ensuring compliance and appropriate remedy.
- Enact and support athlete and survivor-centred policies and processes for reporting violence against women and girls, which focus on protecting survivors rather than the preserving the reputation of sport (see [Figure 4](#)).
- Recognize that significant support needs to be in place to facilitate safe reporting. Reporting abuse is incredibly difficult, traumatising and often precarious for victims, survivors and whistle-blowers. Perpetrators often have considerable power over the career of a victim and within sports leadership structures.
- Create a ‘safety net’ reporting structure and response process to ensure that all violence against women and girls claims are tackled. While national federations and associations may, in principle, be the starting point for an investigation, ensure that there is a process in place in the event that national or regional bodies fail to act or are complicit in the abuse.
- Coordinate and cooperate with criminal investigations. The parallel sports governance system and its interoperability with domestic laws can be complicated for victims and survivors. Sport needs to ensure that survivors understand the difference between the systems so they can navigate them in an informed manner. A failure to do so further disempowers and damages victims and survivors.
- Do not rely solely on national crime agencies. Sometimes they lack the power to act against powerful sports administrators. Sometimes, as in the case of the FBI, they simply failed to follow their own procedures. Sport still has a duty to act, even if national crime agencies fall short.
- Hold perpetrators accountable. Sports organizations and agencies must end the impunity by holding perpetrators to account. An example of this might be the creation of public registries of those who have been found to have committed violence against women and girls in sport, or abuse in sport generally, and the sanctions imposed upon them. This would allow other countries and sports to determine whether individuals have been sanctioned. The US, for example, has a Safe Sport sanction registry.⁷⁶
- Create an inviting and safe environment for girls and women to practice sport.
- Promote an equitable culture by encouraging and rewarding equitable attitudes, behaviours and practices within sports organizations, and put in places policies and initiatives to protect athletes from harassment, abuse and discrimination.
- Learn about successful good practices in prevention, reporting, and response in [Chapters 5](#) and [6](#).

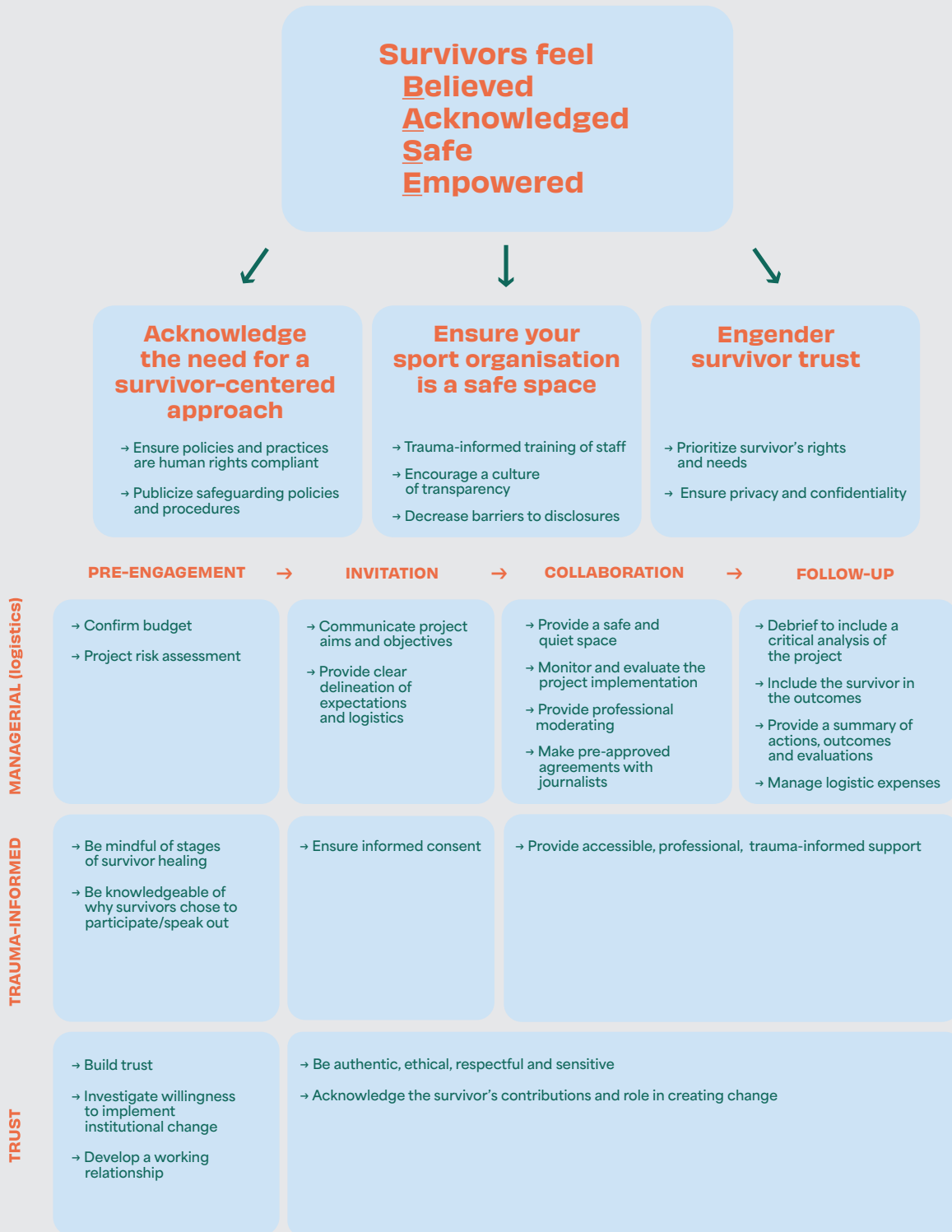


Figure 4: Survivor-centered policy approaches

For policy makers

- **Facilitate the process of prosecuting violence against women and girls in sport.** National laws prosecuting abuse are an important starting point, but sport-specific laws or laws that explicitly mention abuse in sport, are also needed.
- **Collect and report data on violence against women and girls in sport.** Increased accountability of the justice sector can be achieved by developing a safe, ethical and confidential administrative data system aligning global good practices and related standards on violence against women and girls.⁷⁷
- **Perform, monitor and use violence against women and girls data trend analyses to inform policy and practice.**
- Learn about other successful legal mechanisms to tackle violence against women and girls in sport in [Chapter 4](#).

For sports journalists, media stakeholders and civil society organizations

- Be aware of the crucial role that you play in tackling violence against women and girls in sport by bringing public scrutiny to the problem, including through independent, professional and fact-checked reporting and investigating. Continue to draw attention to the problem through detailed and rigorous research and public reporting.
- Contribute to the change by ensuring that your media coverage of violence against women and girls is respectful to survivors and challenges gender stereotypes.
- Whether it be in information media, entertainment or advertising, represent women and female athletes as leaders and give visibility to positive role models which promote gender equality and healthy, safe and respectful relationships between women and men.
- Commit to more research and investigative journalism to report freely on root causes of injustice in women's sport, including with a rights-based and gender-responsive approach.
- Contribute to a safe working environment for sports journalists, with a focus on the specific threats facing women journalists and increasing the representation of female media workers in the profession more broadly and sports journalism specifically.⁷⁸



Learn More

- United Nations General Assembly (1993), [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#)
- Canadian Women & Sport, Same Game: [A Step-by-Step Toolkit to Bring your Gender Equity Vision to Life](#)
- Carney, A., Gender Equality Beyond the Binary: [Transgender and non-binary inclusion in sport for development](#)
- Clifford Chance and Centre for Sport & Human Rights, '[The Promise of a Positive Legacy: The 2026 FIFA World Cup Host City Candidates' Human Rights Plans](#)'
- Council of Europe, [Fact Sheet: Gender-Based Violence in Sport](#)
- ILGA Europe (2021), LGBTI women in Sports: [Violence, Discrimination and Lived Experiences](#)
- Mountjoy M., Brackenridge C., Arrington M., et al. (2016), [IOC consensus statement: harassment and abuse \(non-accidental violence\) in sport, British Journal of Sports Medicine](#)
- Nike, Made to Play Coaching additional resources:
 - [Coaching for Belonging](#)
 - [Sports Bra Playbook](#)
 - [Hijab Playbook](#)
- International Olympic Committee (2021), [IOC Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-discrimination on the basis of gender identity and sex variations](#)
- Charles Malveaux, W.,(2022), '[Black Women in Sport and the Weaponization of Beauty Standards](#),' Psychiatric Times 39:4
- World Players Association (2021), [Census of Athlete Rights Experiences: 2021 Report](#)
- [UNESCO, Safety of Women Journalists](#)
- [UNESCO, Selected Resources on Safety of Women Journalists](#)
- UNESCO and UN Women (2019), [The Big conversation: handbook to tackle violence against women in and through the media](#)

Chapter 4: Laws, Policies and Initiatives

Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in Sport

Who?

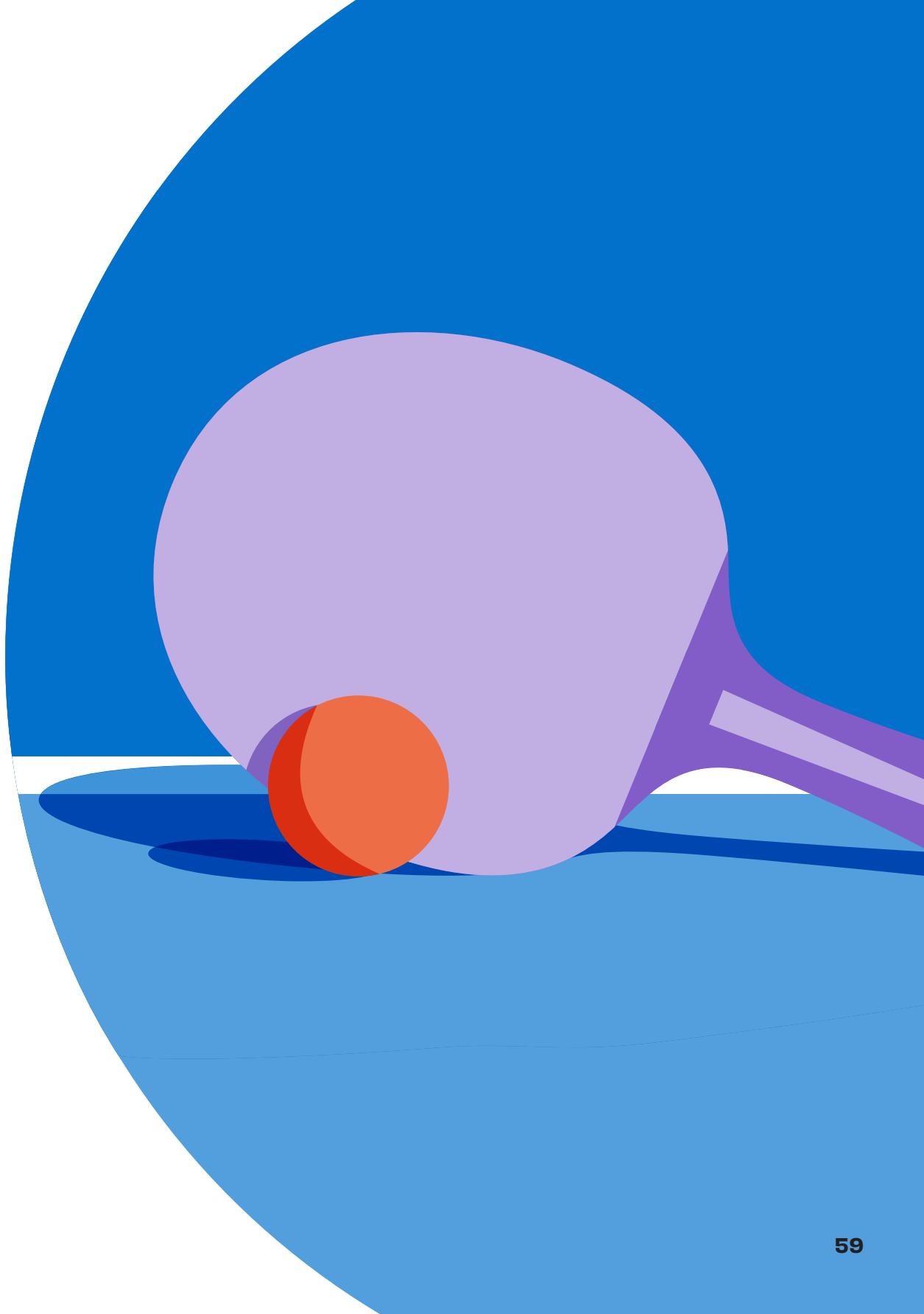
This chapter is aimed at policy makers and sports practitioners who wish to learn about existing initiatives and identify potential partners to tackle violence against women and girls in sport collectively. Armed with knowledge of existing laws and policies, readers will be able to build on past successes and more effectively collaborate across sectors - thus bridging the divide between the policy and sports worlds.

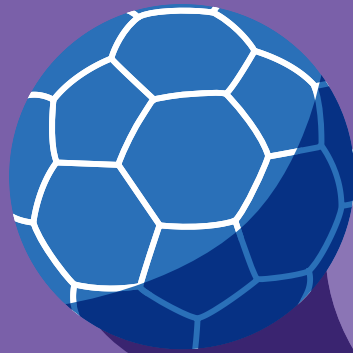
What?

- [Intergovernmental bodies and regional commissions](#) provide strong and unequivocal support for fostering gender equality and combatting violence against women and girls in sport. Through statements, policy papers, and toolkits, they offer fundamental credibility and resources to organizations wishing to tackle violence against women and girls in sport.
- Many states have implemented [national legislation](#) tackling violence against women and girls in sport. These efforts include: (1) building on general laws on violence against women and girls to explicitly include the sporting context; (2) introducing laws that specifically tackle potential scenarios for violence against women and girls in sport; and (3) responding to cases of violence against women and girls in sport through enacting laws that will benefit women and girls beyond sport.
- Sports organizations at the international level have the authority to determine the 'Rules of the Game,' which include rules prohibiting violence and harassment, as well as procedures for investigating and sanctioning complaints.
- Many national sports organizations have initiatives targeting violence against women and girls through education, empowerment and prevention. Some national organizations have also implemented systems to register and track sex offenders in sport. Such initiatives can serve as models for other sports organizations, regardless of location or level of play.
- Non-profit organizations, foundations and NGOs dedicated to combatting violence against women and girls in and through sport offer a range of resources, including data collection and reporting, support and advocacy for survivors, and education and prevention. In addition to serving as critical partners in tackling violence against women and girls, most of these organizations offer data and practical toolkits that can be implemented by sports organizations.

Why?

There is already a wealth of valuable information, actionable ideas and potential partners to tackle violence against women and girls in sport. A clear understanding of existing laws, frameworks and initiatives tackling violence against women and girls in sport will make it easier to identify potential partners for collaboration and to build on existing momentum to create positive change.





International and regional frameworks tackling violence against women and girls in sport

A number of regional and intergovernmental agencies, including many UN bodies, have recognized the importance of fostering gender equality and combatting violence against women and girls. Through statements, policy papers, and toolkits, they set international standards for gender equality and combatting violence against women and girls, and they offer fundamental credibility and support to organizations wishing to tackle violence against women and girls in sport. As demonstrated by one recent collaboration between FIFA and UN Women, they can also be important collaborators for IFs and other international or regional initiatives.

While these frameworks and statements vary in their specific details and perspectives, all take as a starting point the need to foster gender equality in sport through greater access, participation and leadership by women and girls. A summary of these organizations is included in [Box 5](#); additional resources are provided at the end of this chapter.



International and Regional Organizations Tackling Violence against Women and Girls in Sport

UNESCO tackles violence against women and girls both in and through sport with its global sports flagship Fit for Life, the Kazan Action Plan, International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS), and the Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport (CIGEPS).

UN Women has also conducted ground-breaking work in sport. Its Sport for Generation Equality initiative offers basic principles to advance gender equality in and through sport, including promoting women's leadership, closing funding gaps, and preventing and responding to violence against women and girls.

After the **UN Human Rights Council** passed Resolution 40/5 on the elimination of discrimination against women and girls in sport in 2019, the **Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)** released a report on the Intersection of Race and Gender Discrimination in Sport. Its Sport for Protection Toolkit, created in collaboration

with the IOC and Terre des Hommes, provides guidance on programming for young people in forced displacement settings and tackles gender-based violence and discrimination.

The **International Labour Organization (ILO)**, as part of its commitment to ending gender-based discrimination, was a founding member of the Centre for Sport and Human Rights and works closely with athlete unions to promote gender equality.

The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has been an important voice with respect to the physical activity space, where it has called for greater gender equality in sport participation, for example, in its 2021 advocacy brief, Fair Play: Building a strong physical activity system for more active people.

The **African Union Commission** developed the Policy Framework for the Sustainable Development of Sport in Africa, which recognizes the capacity of sport to promote economic and social development and offers multiple strategies to promote gender equality through sport participation, representation, employment, and leadership.

In 2022, the **European Commission** published 'Towards more gender equality in sport: recommendations and action plan from the High Level Group on Gender Equality in sport'. The recommendations tackle six thematic areas of engagement, one of which is gender-based violence, and provides clear and actionable recommendations to the European Commission, member states, sports federations, and grassroots entities wishing to combat violence against women and girls.

The **Commonwealth** has produced a set of measures, or indicators, to help countries and sporting bodies monitor and evaluate the contribution of sport, physical education and physical activity to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 5: Gender Equality. In 2020 it produced the Sport & SDG Indicator Toolkit that both outlines a set of indicators for SDG 5 and mainstreams gender equality throughout the indicators for other SDGs.



National partners, legislation and policies

As noted in [Chapter 2](#), most countries have ministries responsible for oversight of sport, often combined with other domains such as youth, gender, or culture. Other ministries, such as Health, Education, and Human Rights are also worth engaging. They will likely understand that sport and physical activity are closely related to health and education, and may benefit from further information about the opportunities of tackling violence against women and girls in and through sport. Ministries of Human Rights will likely understand violence against women and girls but may not have considered the risks and opportunities presented by sport. This point is illustrated by a recent cross-ministerial analysis regarding physical activity in Finland: The Ministry of Justice identified ‘gender equality and tackling gender diversity in sport and physical activity’ as a development need, while the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health identified gender equality as one of its key relevant responsibilities in the physical activity space.⁷⁹

Governmental authorities can, and should, draw from existing international standards to develop their own national legislation and policies. Such provisions in the law can serve as tools for sporting organizations to support their internal policies to prevent and respond to violence.

Those wishing to bring about change through legal frameworks already have a number of successful models to consider. Some states have implemented legislation aimed specifically at sport. For example, in 2017 Tunisia adopted a comprehensive law on violence against women and girls that highlighted the commitment of the state to develop national policies, strategic plans and programmes to eliminate violence against women and girls in different settings, including in sport. In other cases, such as in Spain (2007) and France (2013), violence against women and girls is tackled through legislation originally designed to prevent and respond to any kind of violence and discrimination in sport.



Another successful tactic is to modify existing laws on violence against women and girls to tackle explicitly the sports context, which sometimes exists as a legal loophole. For example, in the United Kingdom, Baroness Grey-Thompson, a politician and Paralympic Gold Medallist, conducted in 2017 a powerful independent review into the Duty of Care in Sport. The review highlighted a legal loophole in the UK's Positions of Trust legislation: while the law recognized a need to regulate sexual relationships between adults and children who were over the age of consent, it was not illegal for sports coaches to have sex with 16 and 17-year-olds under their care. Following the review, a landmark law change in 2021 has extended the Sexual Offences Act to cover any adult who has regular and direct contact with children and is in a position of authority over them.

A third approach involves introducing and/or strengthening enforcement of laws on all violence against women and girls, regardless of the context in which it takes place. This approach has been especially effective in the aftermath of high-profile cases of abuse in sport. For example, in response to the USA Gymnastics abuse scandal (see [Case Study 3 in Chapter 3](#)), a bipartisan group of US senators introduced in September 2022 the Respect for Child Survivors Act, which aimed to improve the way law enforcement agencies interact with underage victims and witnesses in sex abuse and trafficking cases. The bill requires appropriate use of multidisciplinary teams for investigations of child sexual exploitation or abuse, the production of child sexual abuse material, or investigations of child trafficking conducted by the FBI.

It is also important to recognize that many countries already have laws that outline the legal process and treatment of victims of violence against women and girls, regardless of context - and which could be mainstreamed into sport's existing infrastructure. For example, in 2018 Brazil passed Law No. 13,431, which provides for a protection system from the report moment until case closure. This law requires coordination of efforts on the treatment of victims, tackles the creation of specialist organizations, and emphasizes the significance of certain procedural requirements, such as maintaining confidentiality throughout the process.



Sports federations' commitments, provisions, and initiatives

International frameworks and the Rules of the Game

As outlined in [Chapter 2](#), sport is organized in a pyramidal structure, in which general principles and broad rules are mandated from the top of the sport governance structure through International Federations (IFs). Significantly, many international organizations, including the IOC and FIFA, have explicitly embedded human rights principles into their rules and regulations. In fact, in 2019 FIFA and UN Women publicly signalled their common goal of gender equality by signing a Memorandum of Understanding – the first ever of its kind. While the precise regulations and frameworks vary by organization, all explicitly recognize the rights of women and girls, the need to foster gender equality, and the right to participate in sport free of non-accidental violence.

While each IF establishes and enforces its own rules, often referred to as the 'Rules of the Game', there are commonalities across the different sporting disciplines.

The rules typically define what behaviour is expected and outline that a breach of the rules amounts to a disciplinary offence that can result in a disciplinary process. The Rules also describe how its judicial bodies function, and what disciplinary or ethics procedure will be followed in the case of a breach of rules. Yet as we have seen in several case studies in [Chapter 3](#), these internal rules and policies have not always been sufficient in tackling cases of violence against women and girls.

All IFs have some type of substantive rules prohibiting abuse and harassments, and most have a specific safeguarding or abuse policy in place. These rules will usually cover all participants which will include athletes, officials and coaches. It is important to note that the grievance mechanisms within sports federations operate in parallel to state judicial systems.

// I firmly believe that sport is one of the most powerful platforms for promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls. //

IOC President Thomas Bach⁸⁰





National sports initiatives


At the national level, several sports bodies have implemented programmes aimed directly at combatting violence against women and girls – programmes that can serve as models and/or partners for sports organizations operating at the national and local levels. For example, both the Czech and Croatian Olympic Committees established special commissions focused on women and gender equality, which have offered conferences, workshops, and other educational opportunities aimed to raise awareness of violence against women and girls in sport.

To protect child athletes, regulations from the Danish Olympic Committee and the Sports Confederation of Denmark prohibit and/or severely limit individuals accused or convicted of sexual offences against people under age 18 to have any contact with youth athletes. Since 2013, the General Assembly of the Dutch Olympic Committee and Sports Federation and its affiliated sports federations have used a registration system to register information about offenders

in sport. Similarly, the coaching code of ethics issued by the Hungarian Coach Association, which is sponsored by the Hungarian Olympic Committee and the Ministry of Human Resources, states that coaches should avoid intimate relationships or bodily contact with athletes to prevent sexual harassment. Most Hungarian sports federations have adopted this code and include it on their websites.

Another concrete supportive action has been taken by the German

Olympic Committee, which initiated a campaign called ‘Strong Networks against Violence’ to promote a culture of zero tolerance of violence. Through teaming up with several martial arts associations, the campaign offers self-defence classes and assertiveness training to women and girls to build self-confidence through sport and raise awareness of violence in sport. The campaign also offers counselling and advisory services to those affected by violence in sport and promotes various preventive measures.



Efforts, provisions and frameworks by other actors in sport

In addition to efforts by states and sports governing bodies, several key actors in the sport and gender equality space have established a range of initiatives, collaborations and non-binding guidance. Particular areas of focus include data collection and reporting, support and advocacy for survivors, and education and prevention. In addition to serving as partners in tackling violence against women and girls, most of these organizations offer key data and practical toolkits that can be implemented by sports organizations. Additional information is provided at the end of this chapter.

Beyond serving as a source of data and good practices, many of these organizations present an opportunity for collaboration – either by expanding on existing programmes or planning a new initiative. Many of these organizations understand the importance of solidarity and collaboration. They will likely have existing networks that you can tap into, and will be grateful for any additional technical expertise or visibility that you can bring to the issue.

Players unions

Athlete unions and representative bodies have led the way in initiatives to raise awareness and support athlete survivors of abuse. FIFPRO, for example, has not only represented many women footballers who experienced abuse, but has also hosted workshops to national unions worldwide on how to safely facilitate reports of abuse. In 2021, the World Players Association conducted the CARE Report (Census of Athlete Rights Experiences), a pathbreaking global study on the rights of child athletes, which contains unprecedented insights into abuse in sport.

Fans

Fans and fan groups, including Football Supporters Europe, have various advocacy initiatives around gender equality.

Sports media

Journalists and investigative media outlets have proven key in supporting victims and survivors in unearthing some of sport's darkest secrets. Online newsletters, such as the Women's Sports Business Newsletter, promote visibility of women in sport by reporting on developments and current affairs. Other sports media outlets have used their reach to spread awareness of violence against women and girls, particularly through male allies. For example, BT Sport's Hope United campaign tackles online hate and misogyny by leveraging male ambassadors to engage and educate male audiences on how to prevent and report online sexism. UNESCO's resources for maintaining journalist safety when reporting on trauma and for countering hate speech are included at the end of this chapter.

Survivor groups

Survivor groups such as the Army of Survivors and Belgium's Voices in Sport Foundation play a critical part both in highlighting the problems and building solutions with those most directly impacted to abuse in sport.

Nonprofit organizations focusing on sport and human rights

Established women and sports organizations, including Women Sport International (WSI), the International Working Group (IWG) on Women & Sport, and the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW), have been at the forefront of tackling gender equality and violence against women and girls for decades, conducting highly-respected independent and expert research, advocating for key industry change and convening major gatherings. Other important partners include:

- Global Observatory for Gender Equality and Sport, which collects, organizes and disseminates international research and expertise on gender equality and sport.
- Centre for Sport and Human Rights, which produces regular and in-depth expert content on sport and human rights, and acts as a convenor of the many stakeholders in the sports ecosystem.
- The Sport and Rights Alliance, which aims to bring together civil society groups, trade unions, and global sports bodies to promote the rights of everyone engaged with sport.



Conclusions

Despite the pervasive presence of violence against women and girls in sport, we already have a wide range of protocols and good practices for tackling violence against women and girls at all levels and from all directions. A small but growing number of legislative initiatives demonstrate the significant untapped potential for policy makers to sharpen laws tackling violence against women and girls in sport – and for sports bodies to better align their Rules of the Game with existing legal frameworks. The efforts of sports bodies on the national level also illustrate the importance and impact that sports practitioners can have on minimizing risks of violence against women and girls – for example, by enacting and enforcing rules that minimize inappropriate contact between coaches and youth athletes. Civil society organizations and the media play an especially important role through education, data collection, independent reporting, and advocacy.



For all

- **Support and collaborate with existing civil society efforts.** Do your research to find the initiatives that share your mission, vision, and goals. Reflect on where you can add value, and reach out to organizations to see if you can partner and complement each other's work.
- **Support general legislative action tackling violence against women and girls,** such as laws tackling the reporting process, survivors' rights, and the responsibilities of law enforcement. Recognize that any laws combatting violence against women and girls in society will help tackle violence against women and girls in sport.

For sports practitioners

- **Stay informed about existing national and local legal frameworks** related to violence against women and girls and/or sport, and explore synergies between legal frameworks and the Rules of the Game. Work with violence against women and girls experts to translate these legal frameworks into practices for sports organizations.
- **Reach out to potential partners in government,** particularly at the ministry level - but don't restrict your focus to the Ministries with the most explicit sporting remits. Sport may present a valuable and untapped opportunity for other Ministries to advance their strategic priorities. A simple briefing highlighting the key information in this Handbook might help them connect workstreams or open up new funding opportunities.

For policy makers

- **Take action to ensure that national laws and regulations** that specifically tackle violence against women and girls also **explicitly reference the risks within and opportunities arising from sport.**
- **Investigate and close legal loopholes** that have left athletes, and particularly child athletes, vulnerable to violence against women and girls.
- **Provide violence against women and girls training at all levels within the health, media, police and justice system** (journalists, data clerks, judges/magistrates, support personnel, nurses, doctors...), with specific modules on the specificities of the sports world and its associated vulnerabilities associated.

International and regional frameworks and resources

- [UNESCO, Fit for Life](#)
- [UNESCO \(2017\), Kazan Action Plan](#)
- [UN Women, Sport for Generation Equality Framework](#)
- UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020), [Intersection of race and gender discrimination- in sport](#)
- World Health Organization (2021), [Fair Play: Building a strong physical activity system for more active people](#)
- UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2018), [Sport for Protection Toolkit: Programming with Young People in Forced Displacement Settings](#)
- International Working Group on Women and Sport (2014), [Brighton plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration on Women and Sport](#)
- African Commission (2008), [Policy Framework for the Sustainable Development of Sport in Africa \(2008-2018\)](#)
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022), [Towards more gender equality in sport: recommendations and action plan from the High Level Group on Gender Equality in sport](#)

- European Commission (2016), [Directorate-General for Education and Culture and Yellow Window: Study on gender-based violence in sport](#)
- The Commonwealth (2020) [Measuring the contribution of sport, physical education and physical activity to the Sustainable Development Goals: Sport & SDG Indicator Toolkit](#)
- [Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson \(2017\), Duty of Care in Sport Review](#)
- [UNESCO \(2022\): Safety of journalists covering trauma and distress 'Do no harm'](#)
- [UNESCO Resources for countering hate speech](#)

Sports federations

- [FIFA \(2017\), FIFA's Human Rights Policy](#)

Other organizations

- World Players' Association (2017), [Universal Declaration of Players' Rights](#)
- World Players Association (2021), [Census of Athlete Rights Experiences: 2021 Report](#)
- Women Win, [International Guide to Addressing Gender-Based Violence Through Sport](#)



Part III:

Game Time



Chapter 5: Prevention and Education

Who?

This chapter is aimed at sports practitioners at all levels of play, particularly coaches and others in leadership positions. They will benefit from an in-depth understanding of safeguarding practices and acquire practical tips for effective implementation. This chapter will also be of interest to violence against women and girls practitioners wishing to engage the sporting world: violence against women and girls practitioners have considerable knowledge and expertise with respect to violence prevention, and sport safeguarding can be a rich arena for effective collaboration.

What?

- In recent years, sports organizations have created programmes and guidance on 'safeguarding' or 'safe sport', which are focused on ensuring the safety of all who participate in sport.
- Prevention efforts require effective leaders to create a culture of safety and well-being, and to champion the importance of preventing and eradicating abuse. Such an approach recognizes that violence against women and girls results from systemic problems and cannot be reduced to the individual actions of isolated 'bad actors.'
- Typical components of safeguarding policies tackle codes of behaviour for coaches, the process for reporting abuse, recruitment of coaches and other child-facing staff, social media and online violence, use of images and recordings, transportation and overnight travel. Such policies also include guidelines intended to minimize private, unobserved contact between an athlete and person in authority.
- There is no need to reinvent the wheel: many successful models for safe sport initiatives already exist. These can be readily modified and implemented to meet the needs of a particular organization.

Why?

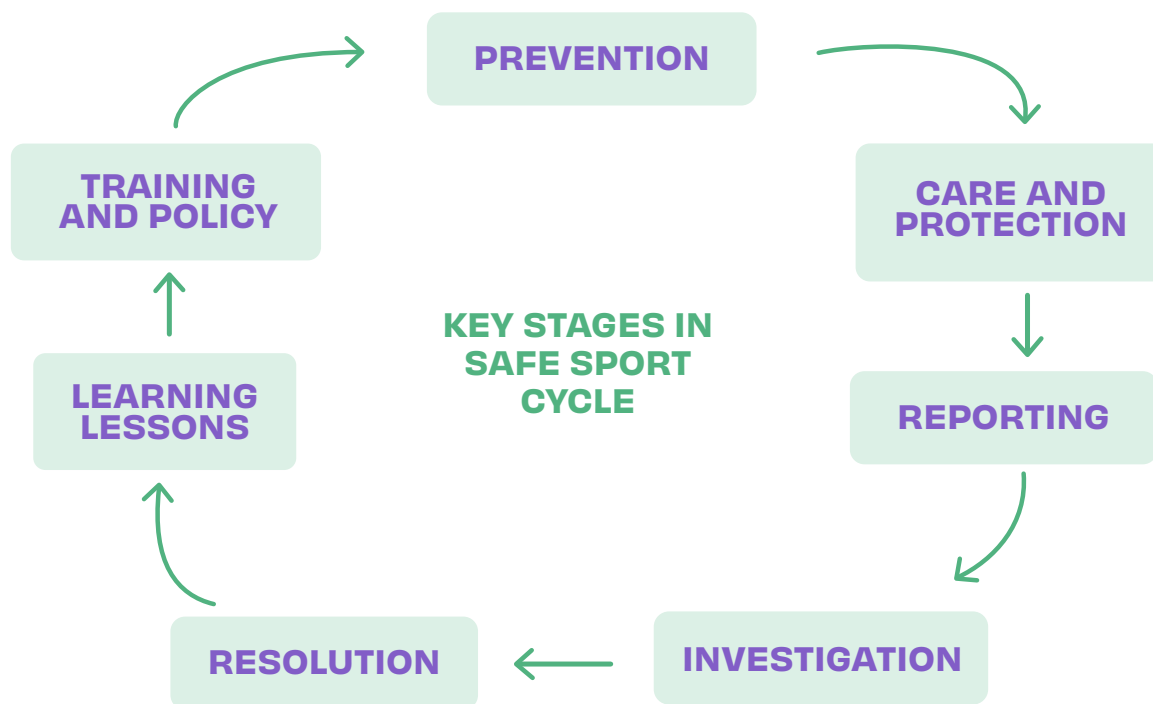
The successful prevention and eradication of abuse and harassment in sport requires a cultural shift away from a win-at-all-costs mentality to one that focusses on the overall well-being of all individuals who are at risk of abuse of power.



Designing a system to stop violence against women and girls

Tackling violence against women and girls is key to ensuring that the human rights of women and girls are realized. To end violence against women and girls, we need to both stop violence against women and girls from occurring in the first place and build response systems to disrupt cycles of violence. To build such systems, we need to make sure that we are willing to examine how harm occurred when our systems fail. That, in turn, means we need to do everything we can to identify when violence against women and girls has taken place through reporting systems that enable victims, survivors and whistleblowers to safely bring concerns to the attention of those authorities who can take action, without fear of retaliation.

[Figure 5](#) illustrates the interrelationship between three key elements of prevention, reporting and resolution. This chapter will focus on prevention of violence against women and girls in sport. The following chapter will examine the processes of reporting and resolution.



Safe sport

Sport has focussed extensively on preventative measures in recent years, with a host of new guidance and templates emerging under the moniker of 'safeguarding' or 'safe sport'. Many safeguarding initiatives seek to amplify protective factors while combatting risk factors. Sport's focus on prevention comes, in part, through learning from its anti-doping efforts that an over-reliance on deterrence and punishment paradigms does not necessarily work.⁸³

Instead, other fields outside of sport have established that prevention through education and positive reinforcement of good behaviour has helped achieve positive culture change. The work done by sports federations to put in place safeguarding policies marks significant progress. However, abuse is still occurring, in part due to inconsistent application and implementation of policies.

Safeguarding refers to the process of protecting children and adults from harm by providing a safe space in which to play sport and be active.⁸¹

Building a systematic safeguarding culture through effective leadership

The successful prevention and eradication of abuse in sport requires a cultural shift away from a win-at-all-costs mentality to one that focusses on the overall well-being of all individuals who are at risk of abuse of power in the sector. As Daniel Rhind and Frank Owusu-Sekyere have argued, there is also a need to look 'beyond perpetrator, victim and abuse to focus on the development of a systematic safeguarding culture'.⁸² Progress in keeping women and girls safe will rely, to a significant degree, on leadership within international and national sports organizations, as they have the power and jurisdiction to

tackle some of the key organizational factors contributing to violence against women and girls in sport. There is also an opportunity to help sport understand that behaviour change does not start and end with creating and implementing prevention policies. For example, school environments and formal education systems have a key role to play in this behavioural change, by creating a culture of equality and respect, in and through school-based sports, but also beyond (see '[Learn More](#)' for additional resources on the subject).

Elements of safeguarding

Official safeguarding policies differ by sport, location and audience. While many policies focus on child safeguarding, other organizations have extended their purview to women and other groups that may be at particular risk of violence. Despite some variations in the details, most safeguarding policies share a number of components, all of which are intended to reduce some of the greatest risks to athletes such as those discussed in [Chapter 3](#):

- Codes of behaviour for coaches, staff and other adults
- Reporting structure and process
- Recruitment of child-facing roles
- Guidelines for dressing rooms, showers and other common spaces
- Guidelines to minimize private, unobserved contact between an adult and child
- Social media and online violence
- Use of images and recordings
- Transportation
- Overnight travel



Putting safeguarding into practice: Examples

Advocacy for safe sport and other preventative measures can take a number of different forms. This section provides examples from several different types of actors: international policy makers, international and national federations, non-profit organizations.

European Commission: Safeguarding as a key component of gender equality in sport

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture published a comprehensive set of recommendations in March 2022 to achieve gender equality in sport. The report offers recommendations intended to cut across all aspects of sport, including gender mainstreaming, intersectionality, gender budgeting and men as allies.

But the report also dedicates particular attention to gender-based violence and provides specific recommendations to the European Commission, government, sports bodies and grassroots entities. As shown in [Box 5](#), the majority of recommendations to sports organizations - as well as to grassroots organizations - involve instituting and reinforcing basic safeguarding practices. Although these recommendations are derived from research focusing on the European context, they likely also offer useful insights that can be applied more broadly, provided they can be suitably tested and contextualized.

International Federations: Setting global standards

An increasing number of International Federations have taken the lead in developing sport-specific safeguarding policies and providing guidance and education to member associations. For example, in October 2020 the FIG (Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique) invited national Gymnastics federations and other stakeholders to an online conference that ultimately resulted in a new Code of Conduct and Safeguarding Working Group.

World Athletics, the international governing body for track and field and running disciplines, also provides its members with extensive resources on safe sport, including toolkits and a 'starter pack' for organizations wishing to craft a new safeguarding policy.

A more extensive initiative can be seen in the FIFA Guardians program, launched in 2021. The programme aims to provide practical guidance to support the 211 FIFA member associations (MAs) in reviewing their existing safeguarding measures, to help prevent any risk of harm to children in football, and to appropriately respond if concerns arise. The online toolkit is based on five principles that are underpinned by recognized international standards and good practice in child safeguarding across sport, and its guidance is organized around five basic steps that any organization should take when they develop and implement a safeguarding policy.

These five steps (See [Box 6](#)) are relevant to any sport organization, at any level. The latter part of the toolkit offers practical guidance and support materials to individual programmes and teams wishing to establish their own safeguarding policies. The initiative shows great progress, and it is clear that confederations are following suit. For example, the Asian Football Confederation launched its own Child Safeguarding Policy in January 2022. The impact of FIFA Guardians also goes beyond football: for example, at the time of this writing, the International Cricket Council's own safeguarding website explicitly refers to the FIFA Guardians toolkit.

Box 6

European Commission recommendations to tackle gender-based violence (GBV)

.....

- Develop comprehensive policies and programmes, including for education, screening, reporting and mediation and services for victims, whistle-blowers, those accused and witnesses.
- Develop a safeguarding strategy for competitions.
- Appoint safeguarding officers holding appropriate certification.
- Share practices and build partnerships inside and outside sport.
- Provide mandatory training for everyone in sport who works with children, women and high-level athletes.
- Educate witnesses on signs of and responses to GBV, and their responsibility to report and intervene.
- Educate athletes and their entourages on how to recognize signs of and report GBV, and inform them about where to get help and support.
- Propose educational programmes and initiatives during sports events to promote safe sport among athletes and their entourages.
- Commit to zero tolerance of GBV in sport.
- Practice moral leadership to prevent and tackle GBV in sport.
- Acknowledge that all forms of GBV, including online, occur in sport and can harm all members of the sporting community.
- Develop standards, in line with international practices, to help sports clubs develop and implement safeguarding policies.
- Enlist athletes and other prominent figures to act as role models as part of prevention strategies.
- Raise awareness of GBV in sport, paying special attention to vulnerable subgroups: LGBTQI+ athletes and athletes with disabilities, from immigrant backgrounds or on developmental pathways.

National innovations from sports federations

At a national level, the Norwegian Olympic Committee has long been praised for its innovative approach on and off the field of play.

The organization has translated into English its guidelines to prevent sexual harassment and abuse in sport. One of its frequently cited and most practical provisions is Rule 6, which standardizes good practice of 'Avoid(ing) contact with the athletes in private spaces unless there are several persons present or in agreement with parents/guardians or the sports management.'

Such guidance squarely places the responsibility to avoid risks onto persons regulated by the federation. But it also has a positive implication for investigations (discussed more below), in that it effectively shifts the expectation of an explanation onto the person in a position of power by asking the question: 'why were you alone with this athlete, and what if any inference should be drawn from it?'

Research and advocacy organizations: Evidence-based expectations

Research and advocacy organizations have also played a key role in evidence-based training and tools for prevention and safeguarding. The US Center for Safe Sport, an independent nonprofit organization, offers the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAP), a framework intended to set clear standards for adult/minor interactions and prevent abuse and misconduct. The US Center for Safe Sport provides MAAP resources and training to a range of stakeholders in sport, from parents and athletes to coaches and administrators. The US Olympic and Paralympic Movement requires participating sports federations to adopt the MAAP. Similarly, the Universal Code of Conduct to prevent and tackle Maltreatment in Sport (UCCMS) is a guide for behaviour which will not be tolerated in sport in Canada, and indicates potential sanctions and considerations for cases of maltreatment.

The UCCMS applies to all national governing bodies of sport in Canada, and applies to all those who participate in sport, including women and children. Canada also has an Abuse Free Sport programme, which is an independent system for the reporting of an investigation or sanctioning of maltreatment in sport in Canada, and is mandated for all federally funded sport programmes.

Box 7

FIFA Guardians: 5 Steps to developing safeguarding policies and procedures

.....

1. How are children involved in our game and what safeguards already exist?
2. Set out and define your safeguarding policy
3. Develop procedures and guidelines to implement your policy
4. Communication and education
5. How will you monitor, evaluate and review your policies, procedures and guidelines?



Conclusions

Despite this progress, there remain many opportunities for improvement when it comes to preventing violence against women and girls in sport. The following are examples of potential areas where violence against women and girls experts might add value.

- **Tackling the risks of violence against women and girls beyond athletes:** Most developments in safeguarding in sport focus on the athletes, as there is clear evidence that elite athletes face an increased risk of abuse.⁸⁴ However, the risks to women and girls exist across the spectrum, from risks to girls in cities hosting mega sporting events, to risks to other women employees and contractors such as referees and physiotherapists. They stand outside the spotlight that sport places on athletes and do not have the protection of unions, so these girls and women need to be better acknowledged and protected in a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to safe sport.
- **Moving beyond a Eurocentric model of sport to contextualize safeguarding:** Statistics on violence against women and girls in sport are predominantly from the Global North and, whilst this data is still valuable, it is cannot replace global datasets on violence against women and girls in sport which offer insights into geographic and demographic patterns of violence and feed into contextualized and localized implementation. Furthermore, the spotlight is often placed on initiatives to end violence against women and girls in sports which are developed and delivered in the Global North. There is a significant risk that this can contribute to the erasure of experiences from certain athletes and deepen inequalities by disproportionately diverting attention, resources, and funds to the Global North. It is equally important to amplify and support the initiatives that take place in the Global South:
 - The African Union Sports Council is highlighting the need for further development and implementation of safeguarding policies.

- The Safeguarding in Sport and Sport for Development (S4D) Contexts in Africa: A Practitioner's Guide from Policy to Action offers a comprehensive handbook that gives a step-by-step approach on how to implement safeguarding measures in sport.
- In 2022, the African Women's Development Fund funded the Safeguarding In Sport Training For Organizational Focal Point Persons, facilitated by Game Mothibi at Botho University, Botswana.

There is opportunity for greater recognition of and investment in regional efforts outside of Europe and North America.

- **Understanding abuse as a continuum:** Sport would benefit from a deeper understanding of the correlation between sexual, physical and psychological abuse. Further research is needed into the particular characteristics in sport that increase the risk of psychological or emotional harassment, particularly since nearly any kind of abuse will have psychological roots. Sports research into this form of interpersonal violence would benefit from further attention, since most research in this area focuses on the parent-child relationship rather than the sports context.
- **Understanding prevention as a continuum:** Sport would benefit from understanding prevention as a continuum that begins with preventing violence before it occurs (that is, preventing 'new cases' of violence against women and girls), and continues to preventing recurrence of violence, and finally to preventing or limiting the impacts of violence against women and girls through the provision of short- and long-term support. Sport has traditionally focussed most on the first of these stages.

Chapter 5 Recommendations

Take Action

- Assess the current safeguarding policies and practices in your sport or sporting context.
 - Does your organization have a safeguarding or safe sport policy?
 - Is your policy clearly communicated to coaches and other staff?
 - Does your policy simply exist as a theoretical document, or do coaches and other staff actively integrate it into their daily work?
- Offer regular mandatory trainings and continuing education opportunities to coaches and other staff. Require all new hires to receive training in safe sport.
- If you hold a leadership position in a national or regional context, take steps to ensure that national safeguarding policies are being implemented consistently at a local level.
- Review your safeguarding policy through an intersectional lens:
 - Does this policy ensure safe sport for all athletes and tackle the particular considerations for groups such as women and girls of colour, women and girls from rural or indigenous communities, athletes with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ athletes?
- Ensure that your policy tackles digital and online violence (see '[Learn More](#)' for additional resources on the subject).
- Review the toolkits and online resources created by other organizations.
 - Are there any elements that you could integrate into your organization's existing policies?
- Support continued investment in programmes that target positive attitude and behaviour change towards women and girls in sport from players, coaches, administrators, management, family members and spectators.
- Advance and institutionalize safe-guarding and safe sport mechanisms, including risk mitigation efforts such as provision of transportation; water, health and sanitation; and quality training and sports grounds, protocols for disclosures of violence, referrals and mechanisms to tackle violence against women and girls when it occurs.

Safeguarding policies and toolkits

- Asian Football Confederation (2022), [AFC Child Safeguarding Policy](#)
- FIFA Guardians (2019), Up to Us: [Child Safeguarding Toolkit for Member Associations](#)
- Goodpush Alliance, [Child Protection 1: An Introduction](#)
- Play by the Rules and Sport Integrity Australia, [Child Protection and Safeguarding Course](#)
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Chapter 6: Reporting and Resolution

Who?

This chapter is aimed at sports practitioners at all levels of play, with a particular focus on coaches and others in leadership positions. It provides sports practitioners with practical guidance for developing and implementing an effective survivor-centred response to violence against women and girls.

This chapter will also be of interest to violence against women and girls practitioners, including social workers, criminal justice officers and others who work with survivors of violence against women and girls. They will learn about existing reporting and resolution practices within sport, the particular needs of survivors of violence against women and girls in sport and the potential role that non-sport entities can play in supporting survivors.

What?

- Whereas sport has invested in preventative and safeguarding initiatives, it has struggled to develop adequate and survivor-focused response and remedy mechanisms.
- Violence against women and girls in sport remains significantly underreported, due largely to a lack of clear reporting processes, concerns of retaliation and an absence of trust in existing response processes.
- Some sports organizations have effectively tackled these challenges by establishing safe, confidential and survivor-focused mechanisms for reporting abuse.
- Many organizations have effectively shifted their approach to one of restorative justice - that is, focussing on how people have been impacted by the crime or harm, rather than on the question of whether a law was violated.
- High quality, survivor-centred, comprehensive services are essential for survivors of abuse. Essential services include not only health care, but also social legal services and assistance in navigating the legal system.

Why?

To tackle violence against women and girls after it has occurred, sports organizations must shift to a survivor-centred approach that prioritizes restorative justice. Sport must urgently improve how it responds to cases of abuse: if affected persons and whistle-blowers cannot trust the remedy process, this impacts not only their right to remedy - it also prevents sports bodies from learning from mistakes and improving their prevention systems.



Introduction

Whereas sport has invested significantly in developing safeguarding initiatives in recent years, it has struggled to develop adequate, survivor-centred response and remedy mechanisms for violence against women and girls. This has become particularly apparent in recent years, after sport governing bodies initiated a range of investigations, enquiries and disciplinary processes in response to abuse scandals, and often faced extensive criticism from survivors and civil society groups for their shortcomings.

This is a complex area of work, sitting at the intersection of various technical areas of expertise including sports governance, law, and health and well-being. As such, progress has been slow, but interest in this space is building. The detail of developing effective remedy mechanisms in sport is outside of the scope of this Handbook, but several organizations have sought to map structural inadequacies in and propose solutions for sport's remedy processes.

In this chapter, we highlight a few of these initiatives and examine some key challenges around reporting and investigating violence against women and girls in sport. We conclude by looking at the need for improved efforts to prevent or limit the impacts of violence against women and girls, through the provision of short- and long-term care and support for victims and survivors.

// So it was strange, but nobody never really said anything. There were others who seemed uncomfortable sometimes when they witness this stuff, but nobody really said anything because the culture was this is the best coach in the club. He was the best athlete as well. He must know what he's doing. People didn't want to get into the business of trying to interfere. **//**

Female Olympian, CARE Report

Reporting abuse

As with gender-based violence more generally, **there is a significant problem of underreporting** of cases of gender-based violence in sport.⁸⁵ Victims, survivors and whistle-blowers are often reluctant to report for fear of retaliation to themselves and their families or professional repercussions.⁸⁶ For example, the aforementioned CARE Report found that 'athletes who experienced sexual abuse emphasized challenges related to disclosing their experiences at the time, particularly the problem of not being selected.' Other cases highlight the extreme repercussions of reporting, including death threats and serious violence.⁸⁷



// I had built the courage to engage with [my abuse] through therapy... and as time went by I told relatives, close friends, and national squad teammates. By the beginning of 2008, I felt safe bring it up publicly, as I knew doing so would be important to combat paedophilia. [...] I felt hatred towards [my abuser] and those who doubted what I was saying. I've been accused of exposing [my abuse] to attract media, and I was sued by [my coach]. Those were dark times where I thought that it would've been better had I never touched this subject. But things started to make sense as his other victims came out and gave testimony alongside me. //

Brazilian Olympic Swimmer and sexual assault survivor Johanna Maranhão⁸⁸

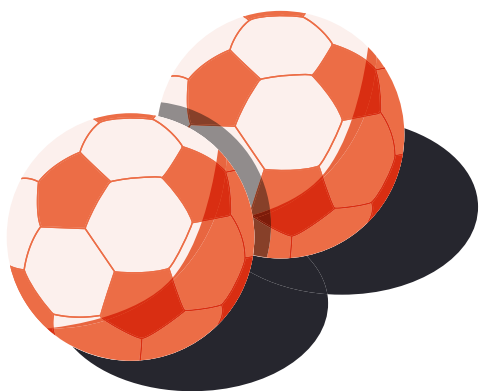
Research also shows that **there is a lack trust in the existing reporting mechanisms** and lack of faith that reporting abuse will deliver the justice or remedy that they wish to bring about. This results in a lack of buy-in from victims, survivors and whistle-blowers, which can be fatal to an effective reporting process.

Elements of effective reporting mechanisms

In recent years, a number of sports organizations and violence against women and girls practitioners have produced toolkits and guides outlining the key features of effective reporting mechanisms. The '3 Rs' approach in the Safeguarding policy of the European Cricket Board (ECB) and discussed in the Voice Good Practice Guide: Supporting individuals affected by sexual violence in sport (see '[Learn More](#)' at the end of this chapter) outlines the key elements of an effective reporting process:

- 1. Responding to the disclosure/suspicion and/or allegation:** Stay calm, listen carefully, keep an open mind, and reassure the child [or survivor] while stressing that they are not to blame.
- 2. Recording the relevant information:** The ECB, like many sports organizations, offers a specific form and template for all necessary information to be recorded, including details of the allegation, details of the reporter and the alleged perpetrator, a description of any injuries and any witnesses to the event.
- 3. Reporting the relevant information:** A detailed description of the reporting structure and framework for the ECB - that is, a clearly outlined list of people and/or offices responsible for receiving and responding to the report.

It also important to recognize that there are several examples of sport making concerted efforts to overcome or circumvent the cultures of silencing victims and survivors of violence. Two of these examples, from the national and international Olympic movement, are outlined in [Box 8](#).



Helplines and Reporting Structures in Olympic Sports Governance

2018 Youth Olympic Games

In recognition of the particular vulnerabilities of child athletes, the IOC introduced a number of safe sport initiatives at the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Buenos Aires, including those that would facilitate safer reporting and better case management of incidents including violence against women and girls.

The IOC then changed how it handles abuse violations, decentralising how cases are heard and decided. It delivered on-site information by experts about child athlete rights and protections, and placed an IOC safeguarding officer in the Youth Olympic Village.

The NOC*NSF helpline

The Netherlands is the first country worldwide to create a helpline uniquely designed to support victims and alleged perpetrators involved in incidents of sexual harassment and abuse in sport.

The NOC*NSF (Netherlands Olympic Committee and the Netherlands Sports Confederation counsellors are specially trained in supporting victims and alleged perpetrators, taking into account the specific circumstances of the sports context. They are familiar with sport-specific risk factors, and they are aware that sport can be a breeding ground for the onset and maintenance of sexual and gender harassment and abuse.

The added value of this helpline is that it is embedded in a project with many other policy instruments for the prevention of sexual harassment in sports, including a code of conduct, safe sport trainings and toolkits, and a registration system or 'blacklist' for perpetrators convicted by a disciplinary committee.



Effective response

Even when abuse is reported, sports leaders and organizations have often failed to act, thus normalizing abuse and enabling it to continue. This failure to act causes a deep distrust in sport's ability to respond appropriately to abuse allegations, which in turn disincentivizes reporting.

Sports institutions face the difficult task of balancing multiple competing interests and sometimes face factors outside their control, such as when working with criminal justice processes. This can create delays and lead to complex evidential interactions which need to be clearly communicated to victims and survivors, and better navigated by sports bodies.

One of the most common criticisms of investigations is a lack of independence of the investigation process. This is a significant challenge that almost inevitably emerges from sport's determination to self-regulate.

An effective response to violence against women and girls in sport should be as open and transparent as possible, without compromising the integrity of an investigation or safety of the survivors and whistleblowers. [Box 9](#) includes sample questions that any institution conducting or commissioning an investigation should consider to ensure transparency about the independence of any investigation, as well as any steps taken to ensure the safety of those being asked to give evidence.

Box 9

Building Trust with Victims and Survivors

Victims and survivors of abuse in sport often lack trust in the investigatory mechanisms. Here are 10 questions that any investigation should tackle, openly and simply, to build trust:

1. What is the purpose of the investigation?
If the allegations are found to be true, what will the outcome be?
2. What powers does the investigation have?
3. Who has commissioned the investigation?
4. Who is funding the investigation, and what is the total budget allocated?
5. Does a provisional sanction or measure need to be imposed whilst the investigation is being carried out?
6. Will the outcome of the investigation be published in full (subject to any redactions required to protect the identity and safety of victims, survivors and witnesses)?
7. What input, if any, was sought from survivors or survivor groups in determining the scope or desired outcomes of the investigation?
8. Who is conducting this investigation, and what are their qualifications and expertise (in particular, what expertise do they have in sexual abuse, grooming, trauma-informed investigations, and gender-based violence, relevant sporting or cultural technical expertise)?
9. What is the anticipated timeframe for the investigation? What, if any, interim reports do you intend to publish?
10. What situational risk assessment have you made in relation to the participation of victims, survivors and witnesses? What are the key types of risk identified?
11. What risk management plan is in place to help victims, survivors and witnesses be aware of and manage those risks?



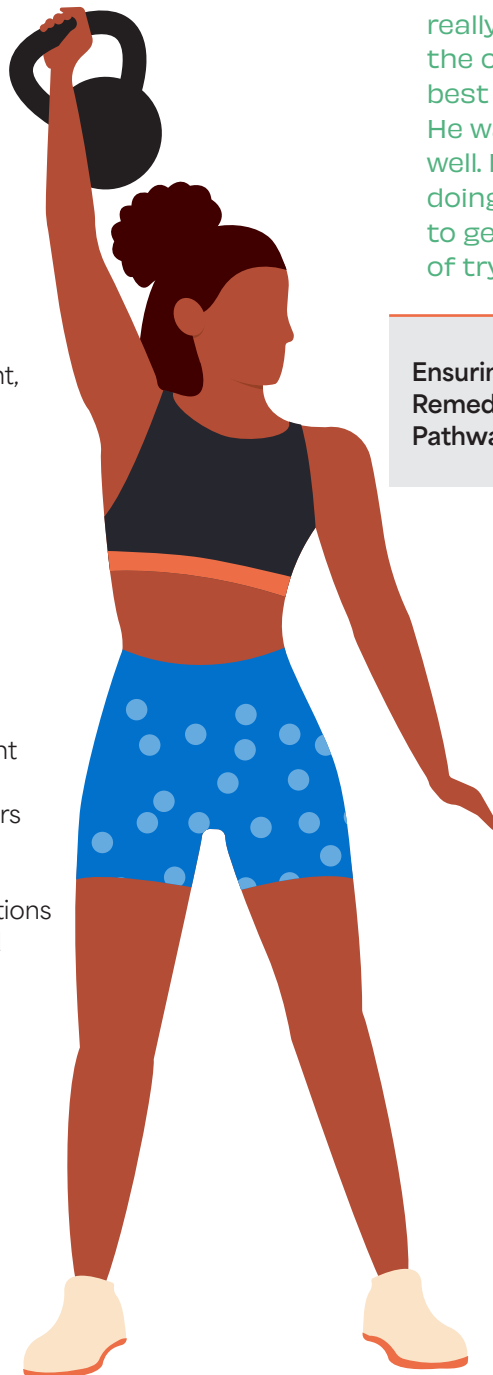
Putting the survivor first

As noted in [Chapter 3](#), many official responses to violence against women and girls in sport have focused on protecting the integrity of sport and punishing perpetrators. This focus has come at the expense of supporting and protecting survivors. In November 2021, the World Players Association (WPA) published a report entitled 'Ensuring Access to Effective Remedy - The Players' Strategic Pathway to Justice.'

The report, which is essential reading for anyone seeking to understand remedy in sport, includes an analysis of the barriers to achieving effective remedy in sport, and it calls on sport to change its approach to one of restorative justice - that is, focussing on how people have been impacted by the crime or harm, rather than on the question of whether a law was violated. This would be a significant shift for sport: at present, most violence against women and girls in sport is typically approached from the perspective of a breach of the disciplinary code or code of ethics.

The WPA's call for survivor-centred response mechanisms has been amplified by FIFPRO, the international football players' union and member of WPA. In the last five years, FIFPRO has repeatedly intervened to enforce the rights of players to participate in an environment free from sexual misconduct, harassment and abuse. In 2021, FIFPRO produced a succinct and important report entitled 'No More Silence,' which builds on FIFPRO's first-hand experience supporting survivors of abuse in football. Noting that abusive practices are not acted on, or are acted on with too much leniency, the report makes practical recommendations including, for example, the use of trauma-informed practices in investigations.

The Centre for Sport and Human Rights has also centralized the voices of survivors of sexual abuse in sport in its work and at its annual flagship event, the Sporting Chance Forum. In a 2021 session on safeguarding the remedy, leading global experts discussed what effective remedy means, and how it can be safely achieved. The session identified several key components of effective remedy, which have been included in [Box 10](#).



// So it was strange, but nobody never really said anything. There were others who seemed uncomfortable sometimes when they witness this stuff, but nobody really said anything because the culture was this is the best coach in the club. He was the best athlete as well. He must know what he's doing. People didn't want to get into the business of trying to interfere. //

Ensuring Access to Effective Remedy: The Players' Strategic Pathway To Justice

What does response entail for survivors of violence against women and girls in sport?

Most response mechanisms in sport enforce disciplinary standards by fining or banning perpetrators, thus removing them and protecting the integrity of sport. This is just one important aspect of remedy. The following list includes a range of additional elements that may offer effective remedy to survivors, recognising that each individual's experiences and needs will be unique.

- 1. Offering survivors an opportunity to be heard in a safe space:** Where sport has failed women and girls, it must create safe and (where appropriate) confidential spaces where those affected can be heard. This must not be solely about obtaining the information needed by a sport body to assess whether sanctions will be handed down, and instead be about ensuring that those affected have an opportunity to speak their truth and articulate what they want to happen next.
- 2. Acknowledging the pain and suffering of affected persons:** Response is in part about being believed. An effective remedy process must recognize the gravity and depth of harm caused. This includes an acknowledgment of the wider impact of traumatic events both on and off the field of play. This can range from a loss of opportunity to compete to a loss of trust in authority and systems within and outside of sport. This acknowledgment must also include an apology for the part sport has played in causing or failing to prevent the harm.
- 3. Wider accountability of those who allowed harm to occur:** Remedy goes beyond recognising that harm was caused and asks questions about why persons were not protected when they should have been. It means that sport, in answering those questions, must ensure in the broadest sense that all those whose job it was to protect women and girls are held responsible and are either removed or given the tools to do better in the future.
- 4. Creating space for affected persons to be part of the solution-building:** Many survivors of violence against women and girls in sport have identified that one of the most significant aspects of remedy is a reassurance that others will not suffer as they have, and being able personally to feed into those necessary improvements. This goes far beyond simply informing affected persons of the work undertaken, or occasionally asking for their input. Instead, restoring power is a critical part of effective remedy, and this means that survivors should have a degree of influence over the design of the remedy processes and any follow up recommendations.
- 5. Valuing expertise by lived experience:** Following on from (4) above, sport needs to better recognize that survivors of abuse have a unique expertise that sports bodies need in order to understand what went wrong and prevent harm from reoccurring. If their expertise is sought, this needs to be accommodated at a time and place that is safe for them. Where this expertise does not relate to the direct provision of evidence, it must also be appropriately remunerated, like any other expertise.
- 6. Reparations and compensation:** Shocking human rights violations cannot be quantified in financial reparations. Nevertheless, women and girls who have suffered violence in sport deserve to be compensated by those responsible. Mechanisms need to be in place to facilitate this.

Survivor-centred essential services

Sporting institutions often entail exaggerated hierarchies and cultures of silence that protect perpetrators, particularly those in positions of authority. It is therefore especially important to have strong support services for survivors. Some international and national sports bodies have started to acknowledge that there should be a tailored minimum care package made available by sport to any victims or survivors who come forward. But there is no consensus or cohesion across the industry, and overall support services for victims of gender-based violence in sport are scarce.

The Voice Good Practice Guide, a joint project involving four European sports federations, seven European universities and one victim-support organization, provides guidance to practitioners and volunteers in sports organizations, clubs and federations in supporting any child or adult who may disclose an experience or incident of sexual abuse. It is especially aimed at those with responsibility for managing, organizing and delivering sporting activities (in its broadest sense) to children, young people or adults, including those who oversee and manage sporting facilities.

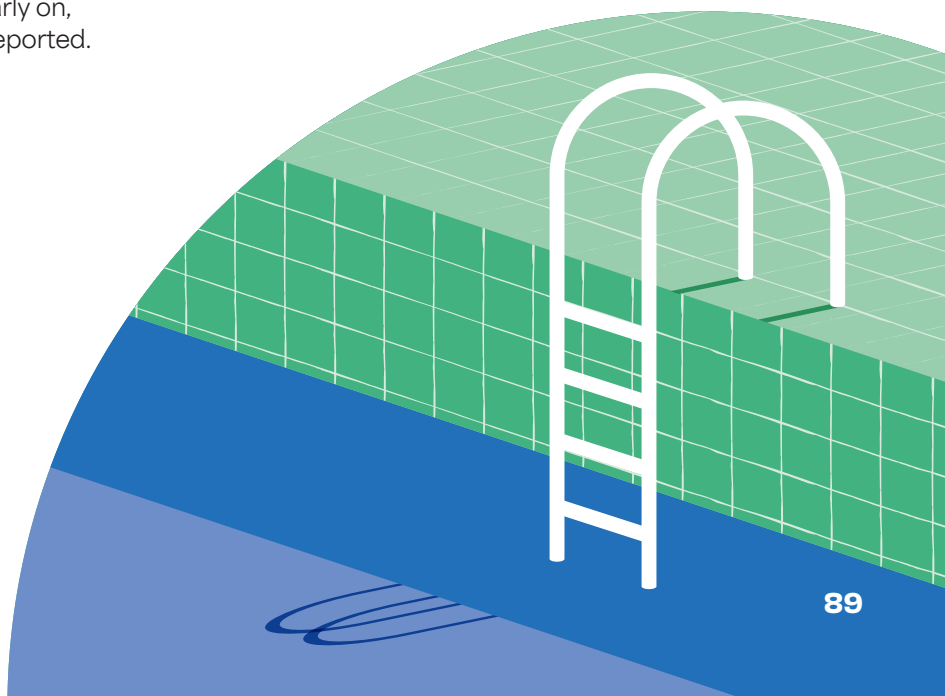
Noting that ‘any sport organization must understand both how they can support a victim within their sphere of responsibility, and also the limits of what they can do,’ the guide urges sports organizations to familiarize themselves with existing resources and external agencies early on, rather than wait until a case of abuse has been reported.

In particular, the guide recommends facilitating discussion of the following:

- therapeutic support
- legal services
- financial support
- meeting with and sharing experiences with fellow athletes or other members in the club engaging with the umbrella agency (such as a national governing body)
- an official acknowledgement or apology from the organization

High-quality, survivor-centred health services in line with WHO guidelines (see ‘[Learn More](#)’ at the end of this chapter) are vital for survivors requiring access to medical treatment, including survivors psychological and mental health care. Social services support the well-being, health and safety of survivors of violence through a number of different activities, including crisis counselling, information and assistance helplines, accompaniment to services, safe housing and access to shelters, provision of financial support, and advice about and support accessing legal and rights information and assistance. Most victims and survivors have to navigate this system without independent and confidential legal advice or pastoral support. Unions can plug these gaps in some cases, but many athletes (including children) do not benefit from being unionized.

Here, it is worth pointing out that the Voice guide – as well as many other sports organizations – assume a certain degree of reliance on existing services specialising in gender-based violence, health, psychology and law. However, these services are vastly oversubscribed even in the most affluent countries, and the quality, reliability and accessibility globally cannot be relied upon. It is therefore the responsibility of a sport organization to familiarize itself with existing resources, and then make a concerted effort to tackle any existing gaps or shortcomings in support that survivors may face.



Survivor Testimonial

Joanna Maranhão, Brazilian swimmer and Olympic champion, opens up about the sexual assault she endured as a child from her former swim coach, starting when she was only 9 years old:⁸⁹

'I couldn't tell them what happened. That's what I told my mother: "I think he tried to give me a kiss". I started having panic attacks, I couldn't stay alone in my room anymore. Every night my great-aunt came into the room with me, laid down and cuddled me until I fell asleep. [...] But when she left, I would wake up. Then I would run to my parents' room. I kept on sleeping between my parents for five years, or until I was 15.'

Later on in her life, Joanna went to therapy, which helped her reverse the amnesia caused by the trauma: 'This therapy went deep, and there were events that I could no longer remember. I remembered one or two events, but [the sexual assault] happened many times. When I started remembering everything, I started thinking, "Oh my God, how did I manage to hold all this in for so long?"

And at that point I started punishing myself. I started drinking heavily, vodka with energy drinks, I went to parties, I didn't finish a whole week of training, I started to hate swimming. I kept swimming just because I was paid and because I couldn't say "I want to stop". My results dropped and the press was asking: "What is happening to you?", "Joanna is gone!", "She can't take the pressure anymore". I was not feeling well with myself. Nothing was fitting, you know? And it was only after I started this therapy and went very deep that I said: "Well, there is a light". [...] It took time. To say "I was sexually abused" is very difficult.

Or: "He [the swim coach] put his hand inside my swimming costume", or "he ejaculated on me"... When I brought this up in 2008, it was because I was starting to find peace [with what happened]. [...] I used to be very angry with him. Like: "Look what you did to me". Not only for the abuse, but for the consequences. It messed with my profession, with my relationships, with my mother... A lot of people said that I was lying.'

The former coach sued Joanna for defamation. The lawsuit was suspended indefinitely by the Pernambuco court, in Brazil. In 2012, President Dilma Rousseff sanctioned the Joanna Maranhão Law, which changes the statute of limitations for sexual crimes committed against children and adolescents. Joanna evoked her experience coming face-to-face with her abuser: 'The moment he crossed paths with me I went back to being a little nine-year-old girl; I collapsed.

I was holding my ex-husband's hand and my mother's hand, and I couldn't look him in the eye, I just kept crying. It didn't make sense, I thought, because many years had passed, he wasn't going to do that to me anymore, but I didn't have the strength. My mother said: "You are not coming to any more hearings with him. You will sign a power of attorney and you will no longer cross paths with this man".

And that was the best thing. To get to the point of feeling sorry for him it was necessary not to cross paths with him anymore.'

An independent international entity?

In response to the increasing number of abuse cases reported in sport around the world and reflecting a global commitment to help prevent abuse in sport, support victims and prosecute perpetrators, FIFA has called for the establishment of a new international entity, in cooperation with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, that will offer a survivor-centred approach to case management and investigations.

The principal objectives of the entity will be to establish:

- A trusted and accessible, confidential reporting line for victims of harassment and abuse in sport
- An extensive global pool of local experts who can be promptly mobilized to provide specialist case management and care support to victims, witnesses and whistleblowers and to investigate a case locally (on behalf of a sport), as needed
- The development of due diligence screening processes of those working or intending to work in sport, including the development of an international and public registry of individuals who have been sanctioned for abuse or maltreatment in sport.
- The identification of good practices and knowledge sharing e.g. survivor-centred case management, safeguarding/preventative measures, recommendations for sanctioning etc.

The concept has gained much attention since its announcement. However, sport and human rights experts have made it clear that, to adequately deal with the abuse crisis in sport, the proposed multi-sport entity must be independent, transparent, and adequately funded.⁹⁰

Given FIFA's own track record of inadequate response to violence against women and girls, both FIFPRO and Human Rights Watch have questioned whether FIFA is the best sport organization to lead these efforts.⁹¹ At the time of this Handbook's publication, the entity has not yet been established.

Conclusions

It is critical that sports organizations offer strong support services for survivors, alongside accessible, confidential reporting mechanisms without fear of retaliations. Together, these measures mitigate an increased risk of violence and abuse. Coupled with robust mechanisms to remove perpetrators from positions of authority or from the institution, trust can be rebuilt.

It is critically important that sport improves its technical expertise about how violence against women and girls occurs, what its impact is, and how this creates specific challenges to investigating violence against women and girls in sport. For example, sport needs to mainstream a trauma-informed approach to investigating reports of violence against women and girls. It also needs to develop a wider range of tools to overcome some of the evidential challenges that frequently arise in sexual abuse cases, such as an absence of corroborating evidence. Investigating abuse as both a crime against the person and a crime of corruption may present sport with a wider range of opportunities to hold perpetrators to account.

Part of the lack of trust in sport's ability to respond flows from an actual or perceived leniency towards abuse by sport's power brokers. Sport therefore needs improve at promoting and demonstrating zero-tolerance by acting on all concerns raised and imposing remedial or disciplinary measures, regardless of the perpetrator.

Athletes are rarely punished for abuse, including the sexual assaults and intimate partner violence that they perpetrate, and tackling this accountability gap is critical. Similarly, popular coaches have been allowed to continue in their roles despite strong evidence of misconduct, or have been allowed to leave their role without any disciplinary action or public sanction. This feeds into a culture of impunity and lack of trust in sport's ability to respond appropriately to allegations of violence against women and girls.

Chapter 6 Recommendations

Take Action

For sport practitioners

- Assess your organization's current state of readiness for managing reports of violence against women and girls. As noted in the VOICE report, 'Given what we now know about abuse and sexual violence in sport, it is no longer acceptable for a sport organization of any size to be unprepared to receive a disclosure of sexual violence.'
- Provide training and support to coaches and staff who may receive reports of violence. Ensure that they are aware of the good practices for listening to and supporting survivors and witnesses to violence, as well as their responsibilities of duty of care.
- Confirm that your organization has a clear protocol for recording incidents of violence. The '[Learn More](#)' section below includes several toolkits with sample forms.
- Establish and communicate a straightforward and transparent reporting process within your organization and, where indicated, to law enforcement.
- Familiarize yourself with local resources for survivors of Violence against women and girls, including services for medical needs, mental health, social services and legal support. Be proactive and build a network with violence against women and girls organizations now so that you can be better prepared in the event that an incident is reported. Identify any gaps or barriers to accessing essential services for survivors. Collaborate with women's rights and civil society organizations that provide essential support and services to survivors.

For policy makers

- At an international level, engage with sports organizations to be sure they are aware of existing good practice regarding the essential services that should be provided to all women and girls who have experienced gender-based violence. This will help organizations implement coherent standards and requirements across their respective sports. See, for example, the Essential Services Package described in [Chapter 1](#).
- At a national and local level, help sport map existing services for survivors of violence against women and girls, and build local partnerships for service provision. If necessary, these services should be funded or otherwise supported to ensure they are able handle any uptick in demand as sport starts to offer these support services.
- At the national level, undertake a periodic review of the legal framework to identify any areas of systemic challenges to survivors seeking justice with recommendations to strengthen laws, policies and outcomes.
- At a national level, the creation of a public registry of sanctioned individuals for abuse and maltreatment in sport will help to prevent the perpetuation of violence against women and girls and others in sport. Such registries would increase the accountability of governing bodies of sport in the fight against violence against women and girls in sport.

Take Action

- At a national level, developing an independent system or pathway for reporting abuse in sport and violence against women and girls in sport will help to improve the trust of survivors and whistleblowers to come forward with allegations by removing the power imbalances of sport organisations versus individuals.
- Advocate for financial resources from governments for ensuring support and services for survivors through national policies and programmes.

Learn More

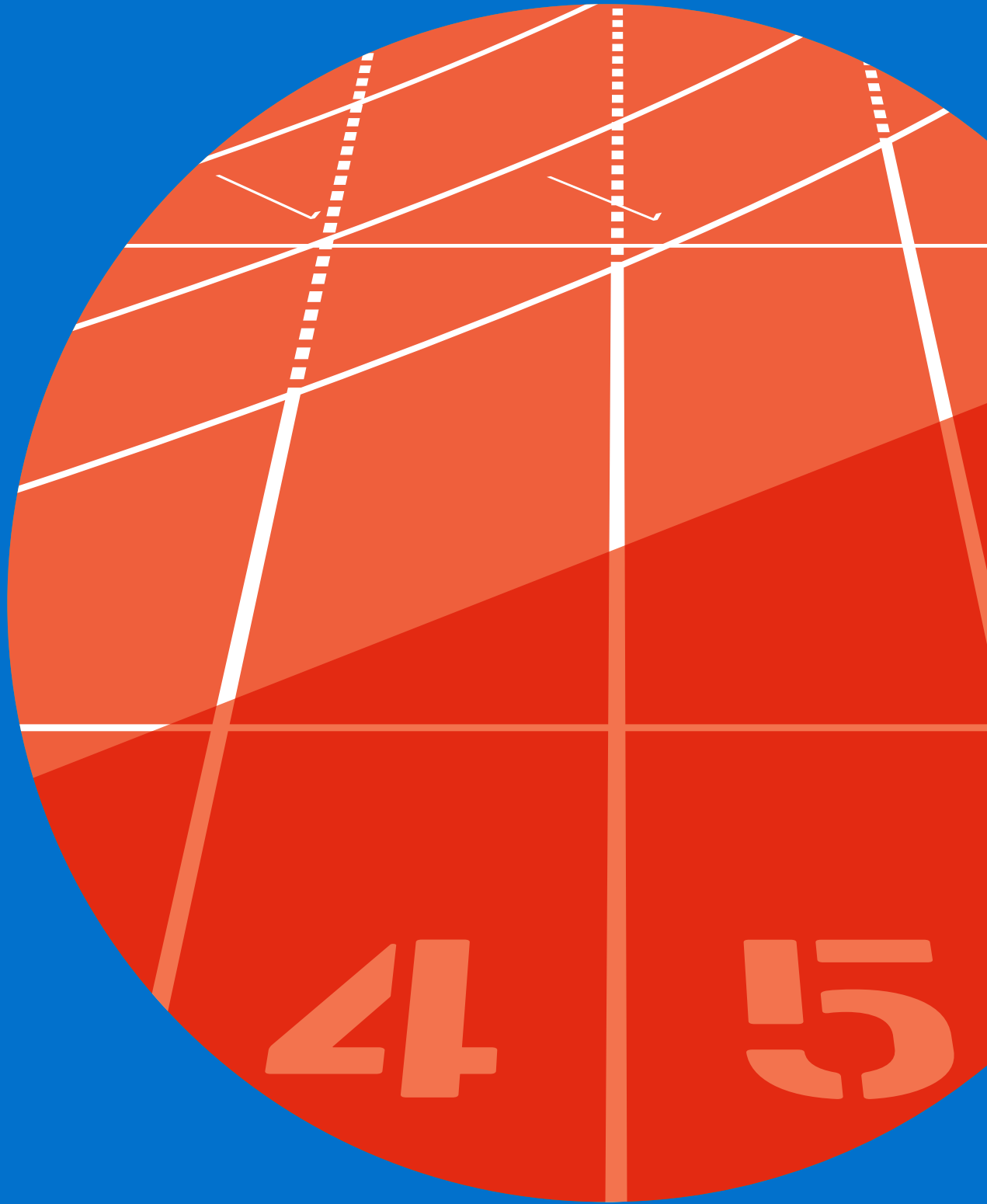
Policies and toolkits for sport

- Centre for Sport and Human Rights (2021), [Safeguarding the well-being of affected persons throughout the remedy process](#)
- FIFPRO (2021), [‘No more silence.’ Abuse in Football: Lessons learned, calls for action, and FIFPRO’s commitment](#)
- Vertommen, et al. (2015), [Sexual harassment and abuse in sport: The NOC*NSF helpline](#)
- VOICE (2019), [Good Practice Guide: Supporting individuals affected by sexual violence in sport - a guide for sports federations](#)
- Players’ Association (2017), [Universal Declaration of Players’ Rights](#)
- World Players Association (2021), [Ensuring access to effective remedy: The players’ strategic pathway to justice](#)
- [World Players Association | Uni Global Union \(2021\)](#)

General guidance

- Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance, [Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment \(SEAH\) Investigation Guide: recommended Practice for the Humanitarian and Development Sector](#)
- UN Women (2021), [Identifying Gender Persecution in Conflict And Atrocities - A Toolkit for Documenters, Investigators, Prosecutors and Adjudicators of Crimes Against Humanity](#)
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Conclusion





Despite the very real problem of violence against women and girls in sport, it is important to recognize the real progress made in recent years, across the board and with the support and engagement of key stakeholders within the sports ecosystem, policy makers, violence against women and girls practitioners, grassroots organizations, corporate partners and sports media. Sport is closing gender gaps on multiple fronts: women's pay has increased, new programmes are building pipelines for women into leadership roles, ground-breaking precedents have been set thanks to courageous survivors of abuse, women's sporting events have seen record attendances and coverage, male allies are using their sporting platforms to challenge gender inequality and call for an end to violence against women and girls, and funding, albeit limited, is being channelled into powerful sport for development programmes that encourage girls to become advocates and leaders in their community. Change is afoot, and it is having an impact well beyond the world of sport.

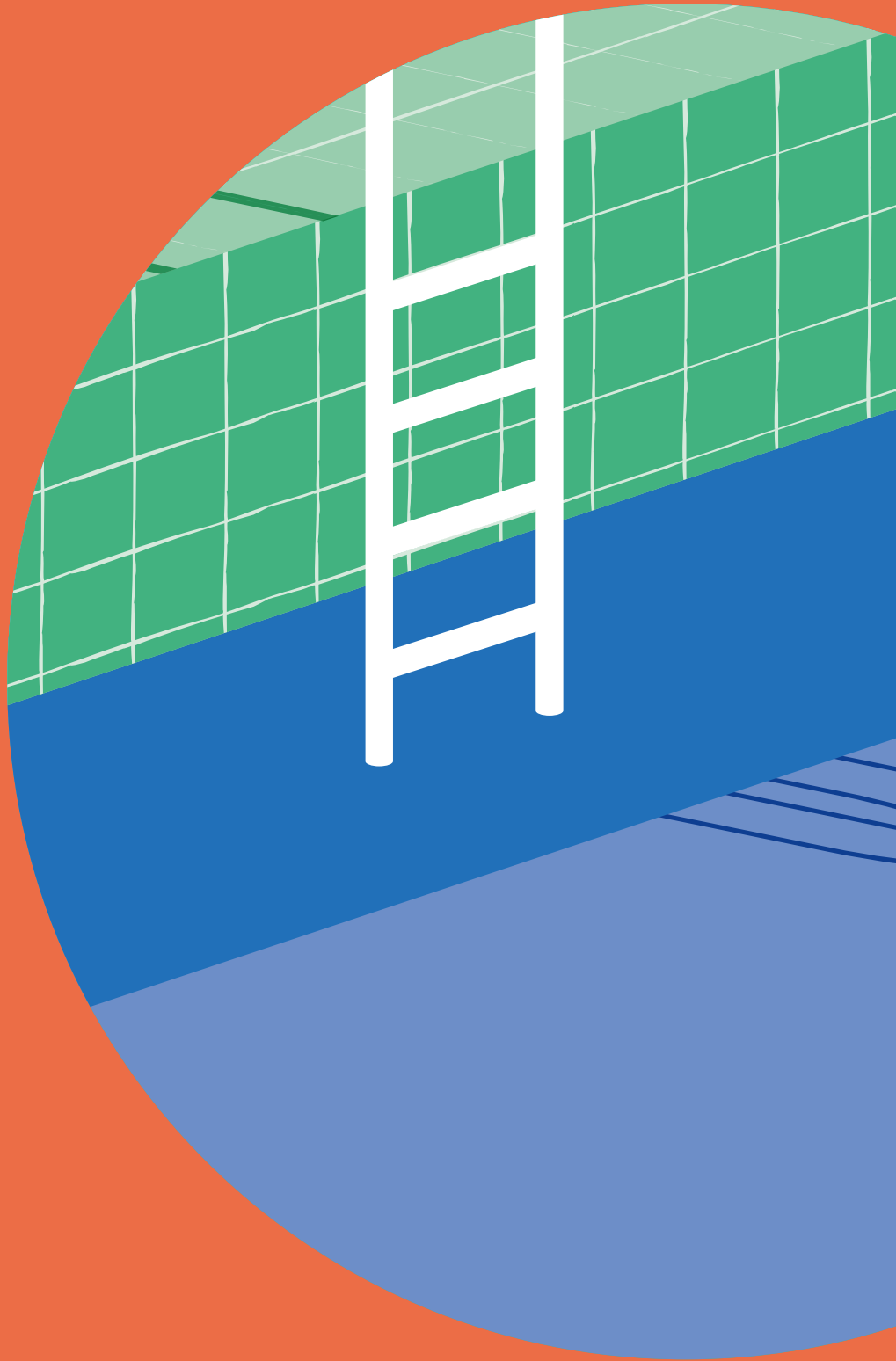
Because tackling violence against women and girls requires the collaboration of stakeholders from sport, policy, and civil society, there is no 'right' or 'wrong' avenue to take other than inaction. It is possible to create change through legislative action at any level of government, through modifications to sport rules at any level of play, and through supporting initiatives in partnership with grassroots and civil society groups. Sport and political leaders play an especially important role by adding their support to any initiative tackling violence against women and girls, both within sport and in society at large. Through these many actions, we can begin to envision a world where women and

girls can participate in sport without fear of violence, and where sport can challenge gender stereotypes and roles, attitudes and behaviours, and encourage respectful, healthy and equal relationships on and off the field.

Tackling violence against women and girls in sport cannot be a short-term or unilateral effort. It requires ongoing and multi-sectoral commitment from governments and other stakeholders, and persistent action to tackle violence against women and girls at its source. Ultimately, it is up to the reader of this Handbook to recognize that every individual has the potential – and the responsibility – to combat violence against women and girls in sport.

It is also key to recognize the power that sport itself can have in combatting violence against women and girls. Across the world, sport has empowered women and girls and advanced gender equality. The transformative power of sports as a tool to end violence against women and girls is highlighted in the way that participation in sports enables women and girls gain confidence, develop leadership skills, challenge gender stereotypes and break barriers. Furthermore, sport provides a platform where women and girls can showcase their abilities, challenge societal norms and demand equal opportunities. Through sports, women, men, and sports organizations can contribute to changing attitudes and behaviours towards gender relations, thus contributing to women's empowerment and the advancement of gender equality on a global scale. The following Epilogue explores these perspectives and provides key insights on the power of sport as a tool to empower women and end violence against women and girls on and off the pitch.

Epilogue





Epilogue: Tackling Violence against Women and Girls Through Sport

Who?

This chapter is aimed at policy makers and sport practitioners interested in harnessing the power of sport to tackle violence against women and girls. They will benefit from a richer understanding of the many ways that sport can tackle gender inequality and learn how they can use their position within sport to take action against violence against women and girls.

What?

- Both elite and grassroots sport can be powerful tools to promote positive social change in the wider community.
- Sport for Development (S4D) programmes use sport as a platform for teaching life skills and combatting gender stereotypes. Coaches, community leaders, peers and other trained professionals can use S4D programmes to tackle the root causes of violence against women and girls and provide positive models for gender equality.
- Mega-sporting Events (MSEs) offer both risks and opportunities for promoting the safety and rights of women and girls.
- Due to their prominence and connection with fans, athletes can play a valuable role in speaking out against sexism and violence against women and girls.

Why?

Sport has shown that it can play an important, perhaps unique role in combatting gender stereotypes and attitudes that foster violence against women and girls. In addition to tackling violence against women and girls within sport, sports practitioners and policy makers can bring about positive change by supporting initiatives that tackle violence against women and girls **through** sport.

Why is sport an important place to promote change?

Both elite and grassroots sport can be powerful tools to promote social change in the wider community. Sport is a key avenue through which men and boys can be reached to promote gender equality, deconstruct toxic masculinities and prevent violence against women and girls. In the elite context, professional athletes can be influential leaders and ambassadors. Sports stars throughout the world are held in high regard by people of all ages and have a huge social media presence. For example, tennis superstar Serena Williams, who has 14.7 million Instagram followers, has frequently used her platform to discuss social issues. Helping athletes and other high-profile sports personalities to speak up on issues of gender equality can have a huge impact on how the general public views these issues.

Sports organizations also provide a powerful infrastructure through which to reach populations, in particular young men. Especially significant is sport viewership: for example, 167 million people watched the 2021 T20 Men's Cricket World Cup Final.⁹² The Men's Football World Cup final in 2022 was watched by 1.5 billion people, and an estimated 5 billion people followed tournament content in some form.⁹³ Although viewing figures for women's sport have historically been significantly lower, this is changing. The 2020 T20 Women's Cricket World Cup became

The term "toxic masculinity" points to a particular version of masculinity that emphasises the worst aspects of stereotypically masculine attributes, such as violence, dominance, emotional illiteracy, sexual entitlement, and hostility to femininity. It shapes sexist and patriarchal behaviours, including abusive or violent treatment of women. Toxic masculinity thus contributes to gender inequalities that disadvantage women and privilege men and perpetuates narrow stereotypical norms that constrain men's physical and emotional health and their relations with women, other men, and children.

the most-watched women's sporting event in history, with a viewership of 1.1 billion through digital channels.⁹⁴ Although global disaggregated data is not available, extrapolating figures from, for example, the US, shows clearly that sport is particularly effective at reaching men: in a 2020 poll, 75% of all men aged 18+ identified as either an avid or casual sports fan (as opposed to 53% of women, only 13% of whom identified as an avid fan).⁹⁵

Considering how many people watch professional sport and how many play amateur sport themselves, it is evident that the sector reaches a significant number of people. Sport plays an important role in many people's lives and offers a different context in which attitudes and behaviours to gender relations can be shaped and changed.

In the participatory sport context, 'Sport for Development' (S4D) or 'Sport for Good' refers to

programming intended not solely to get people to play sport, but also to use that engagement as a vehicle to alleviate or solve a social problem. For example, a boxing club in an area with a high teenage crime rate might teach young people discipline, give them routine and provide access to positive role models.

This epilogue will look at opportunities for sport to promote change in gender equality, attitudes towards women and combating violence against women and girls. First, it examines the part of S4D in promoting positive change for women and girls, including extracting some critical success factors for such programming. Next, it looks at how sport fora and infrastructures can be engaged in the issue. Finally, it looks at some opportunities and challenges in working with athletes as activists and allies.



Using sport programming to challenge violence against women and girls and promote positive change

S4D organizations around the world are already focusing their efforts on sporting programmes aimed at bringing about changes in attitudes towards violence against women and girls. New initiatives are springing up all the time, and funders and other stakeholders now recognize the power that sport has to change the world around us.

In most cases, sport is the hook: it is a way to make learning fun and invite participants to engage. That hook is then used to discuss important issues and develop skills beyond sporting abilities. Some programmes specifically target girls and women, while some specifically target boys and men. Regardless of audience, these programmes build on sport's teachable moments to explicitly tackle gender inequalities and violence against women and girls. Sport provides an excellent opportunity to convey life skills and knowledge of rights through dedicated sessions that also encourage peer-to-peer learning. Through careful programming and trained coaches, sport sessions can be guided to challenge stereotypes and problematic attitudes or behaviours and relate what's going on in a session to other areas of the participants' lives.

However, sport is not a silver bullet to cure all of society's ills. If people exhibit bad behaviours in other areas of their lives, it is likely that they will display those same behaviours on the sporting field; if people have negative or problematic attitudes towards gender-based violence or violence against women, those come out on the field too. That means S4D programmes need to be carefully and intentionally curated to combat these attitudes.

This is particularly important because many sports, particularly those dominated by men, have the potential to reinforce and even deepen negative gender stereotypes. Boys and men are often told to 'man up' or are called negative gender-based slurs like 'puta' or 'bitch' when they show vulnerability or injury.

If we expose young men and boys and girls and women to such toxic and troublesome perceptions of masculinity at an early age through sport, and if sport has a culture of toxic masculinity, abuse and sexism, then how can we expect young men in particular to end this cycle of dangerous and abusive behaviour that contributes to violence against women and girls? The answer is that we need to start by unravelling this toxic culture and change perceptions of what it means to be a man or what it means to be a woman.

Coaches, community leaders, peers and other trained professionals can use S4D programmes to create safe spaces where people can learn about the effects of their behaviour and language, and perceptions can be challenged and changed. We do that not only by building sporting programmes which deliberately create positive environments that promote healthier attitudes towards gender stereotypes and equality, but also by having role models, coaches and teachers who are trained to deal with and combat problematic toxic behaviour and help foster caring and understanding cultures within those programmes.

// 'The fewer prescriptive messages boys hear about what it means to be a man, the less they will feel pressure to live up to certain masculine ideas – and the less they will feel like a failure if they don't. //

Ruben Nieves, National Director of Training, Positive Coaching Alliance⁹⁶

Examples of S4D initiatives tackling violence against women and girls

The S4D sector has been a crucial stakeholder in developing inclusive, innovative and agile initiatives, often co-designed and led by the women and girls impacted by violence in sport and society. S4D initiatives around the world are tackling violence against women and girls in different ways. Many programmes tackle gender inequality and gender stereotypes while attempting to contribute to women and girls' empowerment. However, there is limited existing literature or research specifically on how these programmes tackle violence against women and girls, and the sector would benefit greatly from additional resources to coordinate, identify critical success factors, share learnings and track impact.

There remains limited evidence on what works to use sport as an instrument to create positive social norms to prevent violence against women and girls. It is therefore critical to document experience and evidence of programme results. Other S4D organizations specifically tackle violence against women and girls in their programmes; examples appear in [Box 12](#).

In [Box 13](#), we have extracted some potential learnings and critical success factors for S4D programmes that seek to combat violence against women and girls.

Box 12

S4D Programmes focused on combatting violence against women and girls and fostering gender equality

Note: Internet resources on these programmes are included at the end of this chapter.

Boxgirls Kenya in Nairobi, Kenya:

Boxgirls' motto is 'Strong girls, safe communities.' Using boxing and working with selected schools, Boxgirls trains participants in boxing to break gender stereotypes, promote leadership, and increase personal security.

Futebol dá força (Football gives strength, or FDF):

Founded in Mozambique, FDF is an international foundation and movement that enables football coaches to become catalysts for girls' equal rights and opportunities. FDF works with multiple ministries in Mozambique, the Mozambique football federation and grassroots youth and women's organizations.

La Nuestra Futbol Feminista in Buenos Aires, Argentina:

Through the creation of safe spaces for women, girls and members of the LGBTQIA+ community to play football, La Nuestra opens conversations and community awareness to create strategies to combat the violence that women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people face in their communities.

Fight for Peace in Kingston, Jamaica:

Fight for Peace is a global organization that uses boxing as a tool to work with youth who lack access to basic rights and who face high levels of violence in their communities. In Jamaica, through the Spotlight Initiative, which is part of the Fight for Peace UP Unity & Peace programme, community members have been engaged in sessions aimed at helping to understand gender-based violence and how to design and communicate about it in their communities.

Moving the Goalposts Kilifi in Kilifi, Kenya:

Moving the Goalposts engages girls in football and uses the sport as a tool to help disadvantaged girls and young women to become leaders and create better futures for themselves. Girls receive training and leadership opportunities to organize and run football activities, peer education programmes on sexual and reproductive health, women's rights and economic empowerment.

Maitrayana, India:

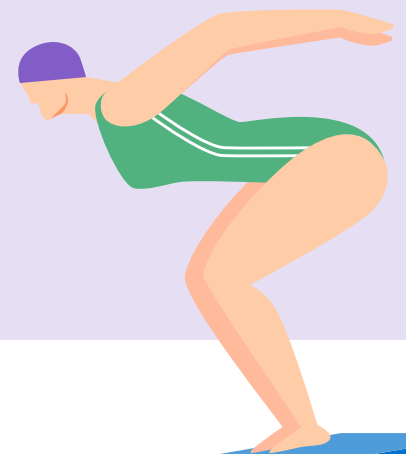
With initiatives throughout India, Maitrayana uses netball as a tool to build girls' perception, attitudes, skills and confidence as well as providing a safe space for girls to play. By building these foundations, the organization supports girls and young women to become community leaders and tackle the underlying issues that lead to violence against women and girls, among other issues for girls and women.

Slum Soccer in Nagpur, India:

Slum Soccer began working with young people living on the streets and in slums around Nagpur in 2001, and created a girls-only program called Shakti Girls in 2014 that has greatly increased female participation and opened pathways to leadership for girls within the organization. The Slum Soccer team and the girls and young women who participate in the programme work together to tackle gender stereotypes and inequalities in their community.

One Win Leads to Another:

One Win Leads to Another (OWLA) is a joint programme between UN Women and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), in partnership with Women Win and the Brazilian Olympic Committee. OWLA uses sport to empower young women and girls. The programme builds the leadership skills of adolescent girls through quality sports programmes, improving their ability to influence decisions that impact their lives at all levels. It creates safe spaces for girls to break social barriers, empowers them, and equips them with basic economic skills, increased knowledge of their bodies, and the confidence to access services in the event of violence.



Critical Success Factors for S4D Programming

Make Community Assessments:

Each community in each part of the world will have different attitudes towards violence against women and girls and different reasons why it may be prevalent in that community. Speak with community leaders, social workers and other gender-based violence organizations to understand the problems you are trying to combat.

Create safe spaces for girls and women to participate in sport without physical or emotional threat:

Creating safe environments and practices will encourage higher levels of participation for girls and women. UN Women recommends single-sex sport practice and female coaches, especially for adolescent girls.

Create safe spaces where boys and men may reflect on their experience and attitudes of violence against women and

girls without fear: It is important that these spaces are without judgement, and that open and honest conversations can take place in order to help participants learn, heal and grow.

Identify a sport that has broad popularity in the targeted communities:

This might be football or another sport, but ideally should have existing infrastructure in the form of teams and pitches that can be leveraged and used to recruit coaches and attract participants.

Carefully recruit, train, and support community coaches to ensure that their values and behaviours are in line with those of the programme:

If coaches cannot live the programme's values, create the right environment and execute the curriculum, then the programme will not have the desired impact.

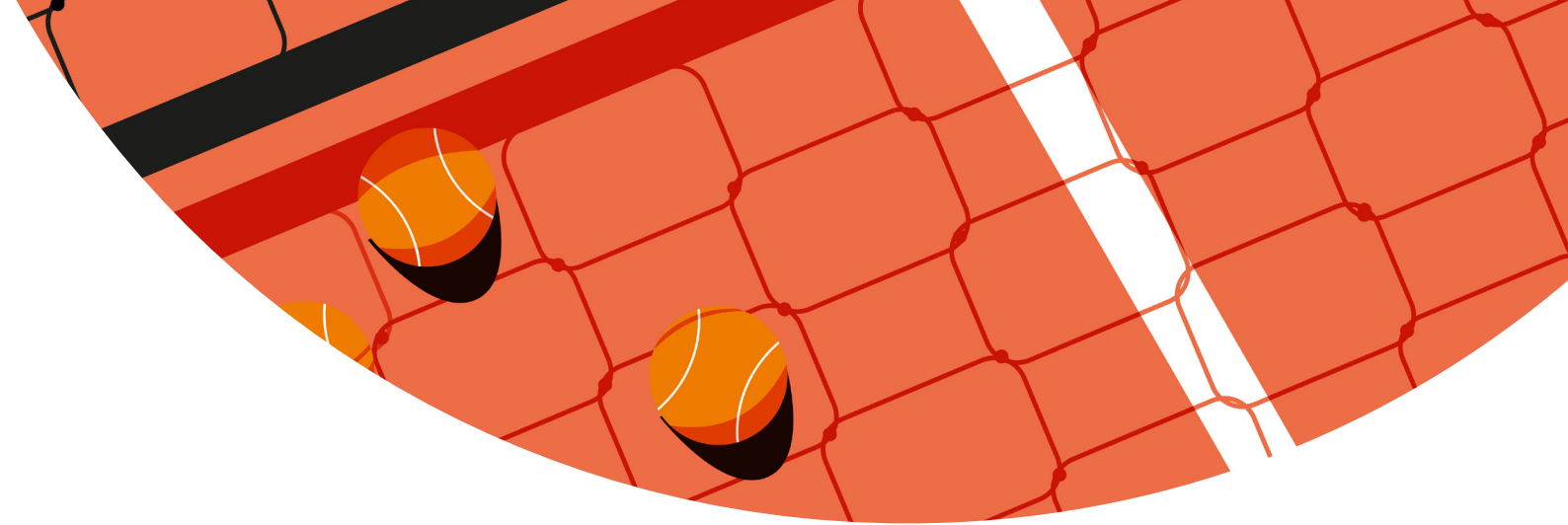
Integrate sports programming closely with thematic content:

An educational component to complement the on-field learning.

Invest upfront in community sensitisation:

Communication with the community at the start of the programme is required to counter negative perceptions and unrealistic expectations that may come with a S4D programme. Churches, mosques, schools, and community centres are great places to find people who will support these projects.

Choose implementation partners carefully: The programme can face challenges if its choice of delivery partner does not have a permanent presence on the ground in either site. Choosing partners with existing infrastructure has a better chance of promoting longer term sustainability.



Integrate sustainability considerations from the start:

Although the hopes for a programme rest in large part on the coaches and other local champions, it will prove difficult for individuals to carry on activities without structural support or resources. Getting funders and (local) government (as appropriate) on board is key. This will be aided by documenting the results, including baseline and endline to show clear impact.

Employ a flexible and adaptive approach:

Build on available open-source curricula that are based on evaluated evidence. Adapt to local context and allow for small modifications.

Match ambition with resourcing and sustained engagement:

Shifting social norms at a

community level requires your sustained engagement over time. Programmes wishing to shift deeply rooted practices such as violence against women and girls should ideally commit to long-term engagement, to maximize opportunities for sustained change.

Be intentional: Pick the issue you are trying to solve and be clear about how you will deliver it. Create a specific curriculum based around that issue and deliver each session deliberately with a specific outcome you want to see and communicate this with the participants before, during and after the session.

Be trauma-informed: While much S4D violence against women and girls programming seeks to prevent participants

from being exposed to traumatic experiences, some participants in S4D programmes will have already experienced trauma. Coaches should be trained to deal with this possibility, and they should also receive training in dealing with disclosures of violence against women and girls from participants. A proper safeguarding procedure and reporting structure should be in place.

Connect S4D programming to the broader community seeking to combat violence against women and girls

so that S4D initiatives are not isolated, and can be sustainable and reinforced. Referrals, shared expertise and connections to local, national and global strategies will significantly increase the impact of any initiative.



Funders

Funding plays a key role in launching and sustaining initiatives targeting violence against women and girls in sport. Some organizations focus on research and advocacy, others on grassroots programmes and sport-for-development initiatives. When approaching a funding body, it is critical to do advance research on the initiatives they support and tailor your 'ask' to their mission and goals. Examples of key funders include:

- Sport-for-development funders such as Laureus Sport for Good have commissioned important industry research on empowering women and girls through sport for development and transgender and non-binary inclusion in sport.
- Comic Relief's Sport for Change programme has provided 524 Sport for Change projects with over £81.5 million in grant funding since 2002, including several programmes targeting women and girls.
- Women Win is a small but influential funder and capacity builder that has identified girls' rights through sport as an area of focus - particularly girls from underrepresented and/or marginalized groups such as girls of colour, from indigenous communities, and LGBTQIA+ girls

Using Mega Sporting Events to create a lasting legacy

Much of the power and resources from international sporting federations comes from organising competitions. States, cities and regions will compete to host large sporting events like the Olympic Games and the World Cup in numerous sports. The bidding and delivery process can have a considerable impact, both good and bad, on a variety of human rights, including the rights of women and girls. For the 2026 Men's World Cup, FIFA for the first time required a human rights assessment to be conducted to be considered as a host nation.

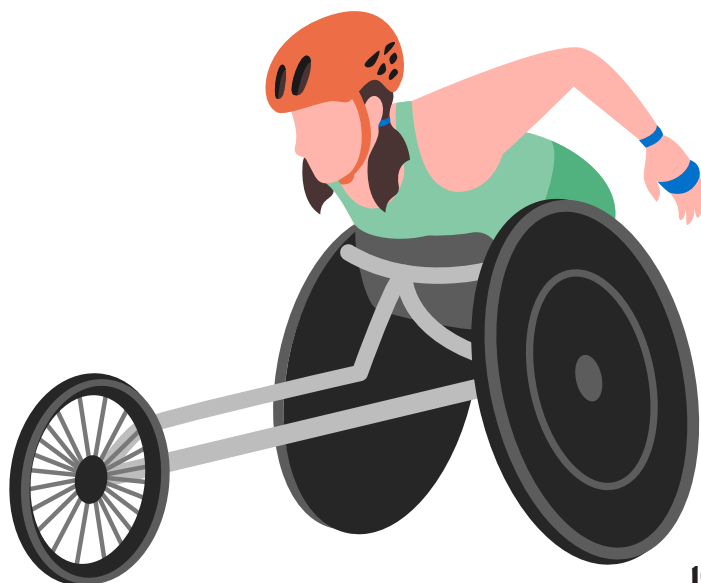
A 2022 report by the Centre for Sport and Human Rights and Clifford Chance shows that in the United States and Canada, who won the hosting bid, preparations for the 2026 World Cup have prompted cities to reflect on issues like gender equity, LGBTQIA+ discrimination, minority owned businesses and migrant rights. For example, the report highlights the following positive initiatives to promote gender equality in the bid:

- The city of Toronto is exploring opportunities to achieve a positive legacy, including by adding gender equity in sport as a theme and developing a sports legacy fund for marginalized youth athletes.
- The city of Los Angeles will encourage contracting with disadvantaged minority groups, minority owned businesses, and women, creating 'new points of entry for women and gender diverse individuals into what has historically been a male-dominated industry.'
- The city of Orlando will train 2026 World Cup workers to prevent LGBTQIA+ discrimination, increase universal restrooms at venues, and have a task force on decriminalizing sex work and supporting transgender people in reporting crimes, with a particular focus on Black transgender women.

The report also identified further opportunities for positive change, for example:

- There is an opportunity to ensure that diverse and representative groups are consulted and that approaches to labour issues are contextualized, including with respect to 2026 World Cup specific procurement.
- Proposals could be further strengthened by including specific consideration of immigrants and migrants and applying gender and child rights lenses for cities to develop and implement these innovations.

However, it is important to recognize that many of these sporting events carry tremendous risks as well. For example, the FIFA World Cup in Qatar in 2022 attracted huge scrutiny for its appalling human rights record and deaths of migrant workers who have built the majority of the stadia and infrastructure.⁹⁷



Box 14

Athlete advocates and allies

The history of sport includes several athletes who used their platform and fame to further the causes of others and bring about positive societal change. Examples range from Jackie Robinson, whose quiet dignity in the face of huge racial abuse and prejudice as a prominent baseball player in the 1940s and 50s helped change the perception of black people in sport, to Billie Jean King, whose fight for women’s rights and victory in ‘The Battle of the Sexes’ over Bobby Riggs helped develop greater respect and recognition for women’s sport.

More recently, athletes like Megan Rapinoe, Marcus Rashford, LeBron James, Serena Williams, Donald McPherson and Castor Semanya have used their platforms, resources and voices to change lives, improve their communities and speak out on social issues from child poverty to gender rights.



Andy Murray: feminist and gender equality ally

British tennis star and three-time Grand Slam winner Murray has proven himself to be a vocal ally. He has advocated for greater prize money and more women in leadership positions including coaching roles.

In 2018, after Norwegian footballer Ada Hegerberg was asked to ‘twerk’ on stage upon receiving the inaugural women’s Ballon d’Or, Murray commented that the incident was ‘another example of the ridiculous sexism that still exists in sport.’ Murray continued: ‘Why do women still have to put up with that s---? I’ve been involved in sport my whole life and the level of sexism is unreal.’⁹⁸

// Men do not just need to stop being violent. The vast majority of men are not violent. But men do need to stop being silent. Calling violence against women, whether street harassment or sexual harassment or rape or murder, a “women’s issue” allows men to ignore it as if we have no responsibility for it or stake in ending it. We all have grandmothers, mothers, sisters, daughters and female friends and colleagues. Our lives are inextricably interwoven; women’s issues of safety and equality directly affect our lives as men. Beyond that, women are humans, with the same rights to safety and freedom as men. It is therefore our moral responsibility to not remain silent or passively on the sidelines, but to be actively engaged in confronting this problem in every corner of homes, communities, and societies. //

Former NFL Player Donald McPherson⁹⁹

The benefits for athletes who become involved with social change movements are significant. They can include a broadening of life skills, the chance to focus on something away from the field of athletics, increasing their profile and, of course, the opportunity to contribute positively to the lives of others.

Many causes seek to enlist the support of high-profile athletes. However, not all such partnerships have been successful, and some can take a huge amount of time to develop. So be mindful of the potential return on investment. As with any partnership, working with an athlete can bring challenges and risks, and it is critical to do due diligence on any partnership. For example, an individual or organization may have been involved in some kind of controversy which may damage the other partner's reputation. In the case of athletes, they may also have personal or club sponsors, or play for teams and organizations which directly contradict your mission. Here are some other important factors to consider when seeking athlete partners and advocates:

Impact

The impact an athlete will have depends your target audience. Many athletes will be happy and confident speaking to fans, but may be more wary of going against structures, organizations, federations and industries. Unions would have more power and influence in challenging these organizations. Global superstars are not always necessary; often local stars can be more accessible and equally influential.

Authentic connections

The best athlete activism occurs when athletes have lived experiences or authentic connections to the cause. Allies can also play an important role here: tennis star Andy Murray, who was raised by his mother Judy, is a strong advocate for equal pay and often corrects journalists when they forget to mention women players' achievements.

Cancel culture

Athletes may be wary of getting involved with certain causes, particularly if they are controversial, as it may damage their marketability. As famously politically neutral Michael Jordan once said, 'Republicans buy shoes too'. Conversely, if athletes are prepared to take on controversial issues, it can raise the profile of the debate: recently, Lewis Hamilton commented on attacks on women's reproductive rights in the United States by saying 'Everyone should have the right to choose what they do with their bodies. We can't let that choice be taken away.'¹⁰⁰

Entourage

Many successful athletes have big teams of agents, employees, family members and friends behind them. Sometimes these entourages, in particular agents, may be resistant to focusing on social issues over financially lucrative opportunities.¹⁰¹ It is important to engage with agents and allay their concerns.

Trends

Who is influential changes very quickly with sporting cycles, so occasionally you can end up investing time and energy in an athlete who has a very short shelf life as a prominent figure.

Timing

Athletes' careers are short. They are also cyclical in that they compete over seasons (for the leagues) or at MSEs (like World Cups and the Olympics). In the runup to these events their focus will often be fully on competing and they are unlikely to have time to work on a campaign. However, big wins also bring big platforms, so it is worth ensuring well in advance that an athlete has talking points, should the camera turn to them and present an opportunity to speak to a global audience.

Recommendations

Take Action

- Familiarize yourself with any existing S4D programmes in your country or region and consider opportunities for collaboration.
- Engage with S4D practitioners to share expertise and centralize learnings. Building communities of learning and practice, and creating spaces for S4D practitioners to share their expertise, have been valuable ways to build capacity and good practice in S4D.
- Provide public support and resources for S4D programmes in your area. Many S4D organizations are profoundly under resourced while also supporting some of the most underserved and marginalized communities in the world. These circumstances make it challenging for them to track, document and share impact, learnings and curricula.
- Make a list of key tournaments and MSEs in your area and engage with organizers to discuss opportunities to promote gender equality, speak out against violence against women and girls and ensure that human rights are protected.
- When engaging with athletes, strive to build a mutually beneficial and long-term relationship. Do your research in advance and find an athlete able to make an authentic connection with your intended audience. Be sure to offer the athlete training and support so that their messages are clear and impactful.

Sport for Development Programmes

- [Boxgirls Kenya](http://www.boxgirls.org)
www.boxgirls.org / Olympics.com
- [Futbol da Força](#)
- [La Nuestra Futbol Feminista in Buenos Aires, Argentina](#)
- [Fight for Peace in Kingston, Jamaica](#)
- [Moving the Goalposts Kilifi in Kilifi, Kenya](#)
- [Maitrayana in India](#)
- [Slum Soccer in Nagpur, India](#)
- [One Win Leads to Another](#)

Foundations and funding agencies

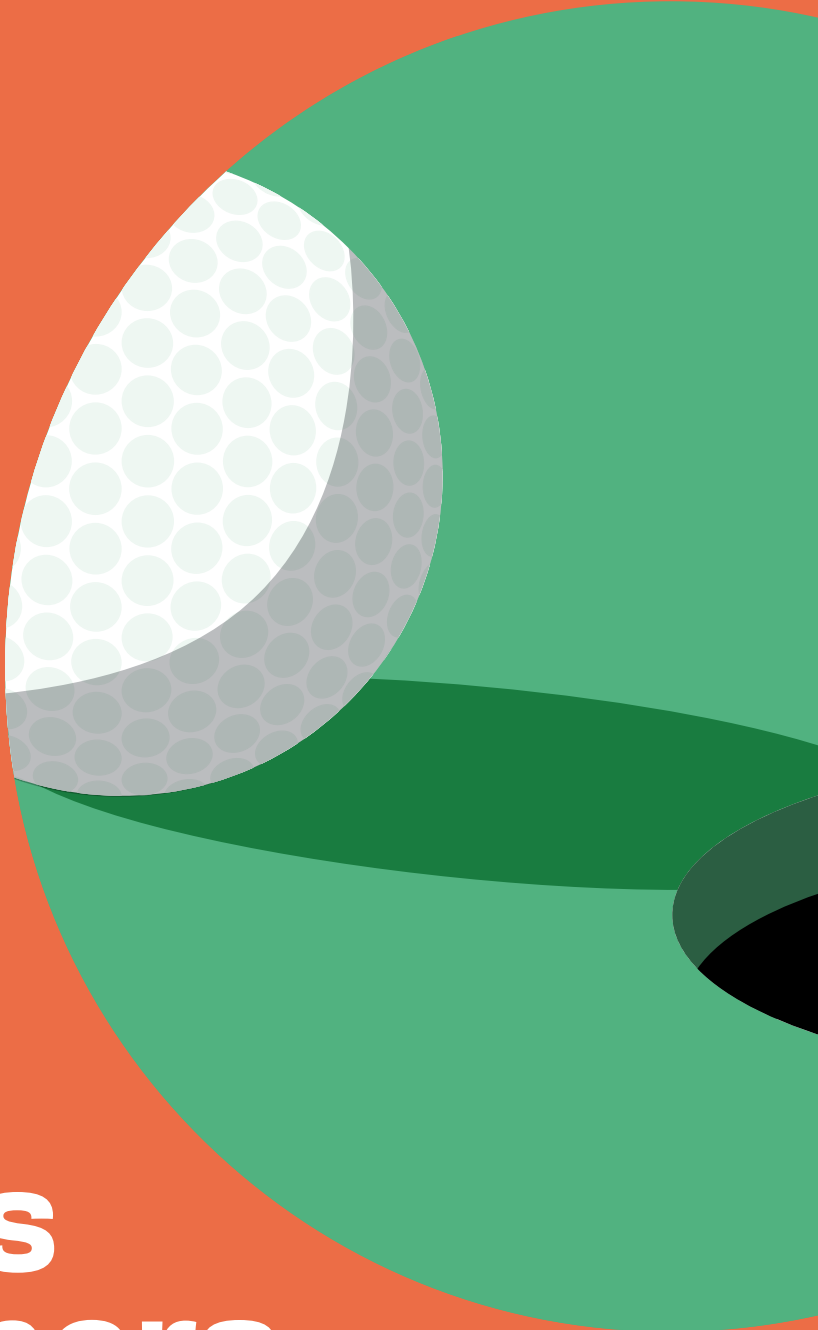
- [Laureus Sport for Good Foundation](#)
- [Women Win](#)

Other Resources

- Meier, M. (2005), [Gender Equity, Sport and Development](#)
- Saavedra, M. (2009), [Dilemmas and Opportunities in Gender and Sport-in-Development](#). In: Levermore, R., Beacom, A. (eds) Sport and International Development. Global Culture and Sport. Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Hayhurst, L., Thorpe, H., and Chawansky, M. (2021), [Sport, Gender and Development: A critical intersection](#)
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- Laureus. (2020). Annual Review 2020, [Fighting Against The Odds](#).

Annex 1

Checklist for Sports Practitioners





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Reflect

- Have you encountered violence against women and girls in sport, either on or off the playing field? How were these incidents tackled and what was the impact?
- What assumptions do you have regarding violence against women and girls in sport?
- Who in your sports community might be particularly vulnerable to experiencing violence against women and girls?
- Are there any particular types of violence that seem to be especially prevalent in your sport?
- What steps are you taking to ensure that women and girls have a safe and supportive environment to practice your sport?
- Does your organization tackle the particular considerations of groups such as women and girls of colour, women and girls from rural or indigenous communities, athletes with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ athletes?
- Assess the current safeguarding policies and practices in your sport. Does your organization have a safeguarding or safe sport policy? Is your policy clearly communicated to coaches and other staff? Does it simply exist as a theoretical document, or do coaches and other staff actively integrate it into their daily work?
- What processes does your organization have in place to respond to reports of violence against women and girls? What training do coaches and other staff in your organization receive, and what mechanisms do you have in place to support survivors?
- What resources are available in your area to survivors of violence against women and girls? (Examples may include medical care, mental health, social services and legal support.) Where can your organization engage existing forms of assistance, and where will you need to develop your own systems of support?



Act

- **Go beyond non-binding suggestions for child protection** and develop binding obligations with clear mechanisms for ensuring compliance and appropriate remedy.
- **Offer regular mandatory trainings and continuing education opportunities** to coaches and other staff.
- **Establish and communicate a straightforward and transparent reporting process** within your organization and, where indicated, to law enforcement.
- **Coordinate and cooperate with criminal investigations.** The parallel sports governance system and its interoperability with domestic laws can be complicated for survivors.
- **Hold perpetrators accountable.** Sports organizations and agencies must end the impunity by holding perpetrators to account.
- **Familiarize yourself and collaborate with local resources for survivors of violence against women and girls,** including services for medical needs, mental health, social services and legal support.
- **Create an inviting and safe environment for girls and women to practice sport.**
- **Promote an equitable culture.** Encourage and reward equitable attitudes, behaviours and practices, and put in place policies to protect athletes from harassment, abuse and discrimination.



Learn

- Canadian Women & Sport, Same Game: [A Step-by-Step Toolkit to Bring your Gender Equity Vision to Life](#)
- Centre for Sport and Human Rights (2021), [Safeguarding the well-being of affected persons throughout the remedy process](#)
- FIFA Guardians (2019), [Up to Us: Child Safeguarding Toolkit for Member Associations](#)
- ILGA Europe (2021), [LBTI women in Sports: Violence, Discrimination and Lived Experiences](#)
- IOC, [Sexual Harassment and Abuse \(SHA\) in sport](#)
- UN Women, [Frequently Asked Questions: Types of Violence Against Women and Girls](#)
- US Center for SafeSport, [Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies \(MAAP\)](#)
- VOICE (2019), [Good Practice Guide: Supporting individuals affected by sexual violence in sport - a guide for sports federations](#)
- Women Win, [International guide to tackling gender-based violence through sport](#)
- World Players' Association (2017), [Universal Declaration of Players' Rights](#)
- World Players Association (2021), [Census of Athlete Rights Experiences: 2021 Report](#)

Annex 2

Checklist for Policy Makers



Reflect

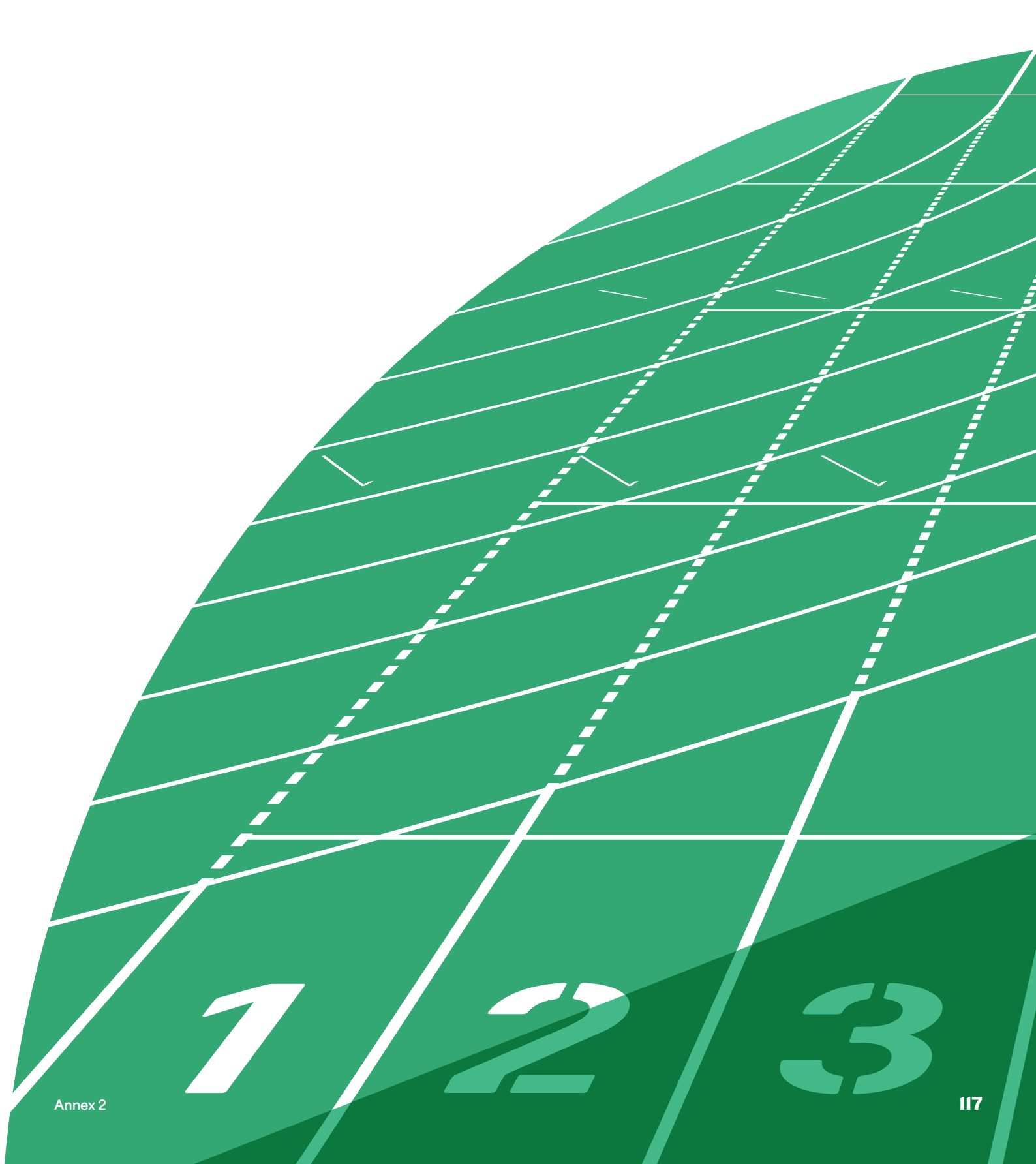
- What assumptions do you have regarding violence against women and girls in sport?
- Sport is a complex ecosystem, and there are many avenues to tackling violence against women and girls in sport. What is your target sport, location and audience? In particular, consider factors such as position in the sports ecosystem (athletes, coaches, broadcasters, sponsors, etc.), level of participation, geography and/or sport or discipline.
- Evaluate potential stakeholders. Who already has a track record of supporting causes of gender equality and tackling violence against women and girls? Where is there room for growth? Who are allies and who are opponents?
- What legal frameworks exist in your area to tackle violence against women and girls within or beyond sport? When are they most effective? What loopholes leave athletes and other sport participants vulnerable to violence against women and girls?

Act

- **Implement laws and develop the judicial infrastructure** necessary to hold perpetrators of violence accountable and support survivors of violence against women and girls.
- **Facilitate the process of prosecuting violence against women and girls in sport.** National laws outlawing abuse are an important starting point, but sport-specific statutes are also needed.
- **Investigate and close legal loopholes** that have left athletes, and particularly child athletes, vulnerable to violence against women and girls.
- At a **national level**, develop an independent system for reporting abuse in sport, which will empower survivors and whistleblowers to come forward.
- **Advocate for financial resources** to ensure support and services for survivors.
- **Collect and report data** on violence against women and girls in sport, and use data trend analyses to inform policy and practice.
- **Build timely and targeted relationships with stakeholders in sport**, recognizing that building relationships is an ongoing process.
- At an **international level**, engage with sports organizations to be sure they are aware of existing good practice regarding the essential services that should be provided to survivors of violence against women and girls.
- At a **national and local level**, help sport map existing services for survivors of violence against women and girls and build local partnerships for service provision.
- **Provide violence against women and girls training at all levels within the police, justice and health care systems**, with specific modules on the specificities of the sports world and its associated vulnerabilities.

Learn

- African Commission (2008), [Policy Framework for the Sustainable Development of Sport in Africa \(2008-2018\)](#)
- Al Hussein, Zeid Ra'ad and Rachel Davis (2020), [Recommendations for an IOC Human Rights Strategy](#)
- Centre for Sport and Human Rights, [Convergence 2025 Strategic Plan](#)
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2022), [Towards more gender equality in sport: recommendations and action plan from the High Level Group on Gender Equality in sport](#)
- ILGA Europe (2021), [LBTI women in Sports: Violence, Discrimination and Lived Experiences](#)
- International Olympic Committee (2018), [Gender Equality Review Project](#)
- UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020), [Intersection of race and gender discrimination in sport](#)
- World Players' Association (2017), [Universal Declaration of Players' Rights](#)
- World Players Association (2021), [Census of Athlete Rights Experiences: 2021 Report](#)
- World Players Association (2021), [Ensuring access to effective remedy: The players' strategic pathway to justice](#)
- Women Win, [International guide to tackling gender-based violence through sport](#)



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Endnotes

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Figure 1: [Centre for Sport and Human Rights](#)

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Figure 5: [Athlead UK](#)



Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport **A Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners**

UNESCO and UN Women's handbook on tackling violence against women and girls in sport is a practical toolkit for policy makers and sports practitioners looking to grasp the scale of this human rights violation and the tools to tackle it effectively. It is the first policy toolkit to consolidate and analyze a wide range of sources to map out the risks, opportunities, governance structures, legal and institutional sport frameworks, as well as the progress made in and around the sport ecosystem to address gender-based violence. It provides much-needed policy guidance by sharing data, impactful testimonies, case studies and detailed recommendations for different key stakeholder groups, including on the design of preventive strategies, regulations, incentives and sanctions to address violence against women and girls in sport. Policy makers and sport practitioners around the world are encouraged to join the movement to tackle and upend this violence by picking up these recommendations and rolling them out in countries and communities around the world.

