

## RISE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT

# ASSESSMENT OF SENSITIZATION AND AWARENESS NEEDS AND MAPPING OF GOOD PRACTICES FOR PREVENTION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SPORTS



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## THE 'RISE EMPOWERED ABOVE SEXUAL VIOLENCE' PROJECT

The 'RISE Empowered Above Sexual Violence in Sports (RISE)' represents a pioneering and innovative project addressing prevention of sexual violence in Sports. Sexual violence is considered among the most serious social phenomenon, occurring against any person, regardless gender, age, race at any place, at any time. It is well acknowledged that the more people become sensitized and aware of the ruinous consequences caused to victims by any form of sexual violence, starting from traumas, even leading to death, and the more primary prevention actions are adopted, chances of combating it increase tremendously. The duration of the project is 36 months and is co-funded by the European Union.

Throughout its duration the project suggests innovative and effective activities which contribute towards combating all forms of sexual violence in sports. Different forms of sexual violence include among others sexual harassment, sexual abuse of children, rape or attempt for rape, dissemination of naked photos/videos without consent, catcalling, gaslighting, digital sexual violence, indecent exposure and others. During the implementation of activities other related forms of violence will be tackled as well including psychological, physical and verbal violence, which in most cases co-exist with sexual violence incidences.

### RISE Project Aims

- a) to develop and promote a comprehensive set of policies, guidelines and tools for prevention of sexual violence, to be adopted by different Sport Stakeholders, building on existing practices developed under previous EU projects and on authentic data and information gathered during research studies conducted during this project
- b) to sensitize, raise awareness and enhance knowledge, know-how and skills on all related to sports either as individuals or as entities, on sexual violence prevention methods and tools. Thus, contributing to ensuring a safe and sexual violence-free sport environment for all and at the same time intervening in time to prevent sexual violence acts,
- c) to raise awareness among young people related to sports, especially athletes, on the phenomenon of sexual violence, risk indicators, prevention techniques, reporting and getting support actions in case of victimization.

### RISE Beneficiaries/Target groups

Athletes, Sports Professionals (coaches, sport leaders, sport managers, PE teachers), Sport Academics and Trainers in Sports, Sports Stakeholders (Sports Governing Authorities, Sports Organizations, Sports Clubs), Sport Policy-makers and Policy Experts, Sport Administrators, NGOs and government departments involved in sexual violence prevention and sport fields.

### RISE Project Activities

- Research Studies conducted to identify and assess the needs of key sports stakeholders in terms of knowledge, skills, sensitization and awareness regarding prevention of sexual violence in sports, and to measure the prevalence of the different forms of sexual violence in sports.

- Development of Protocols, Guides, Handbooks.
- Development of an Educational and Training Programme on Prevention of Sexual Violence in Sports, published on an E-Learning Training Platform
- Educational and Training Actions for Enhancement of Knowledge, Practical Skills and Know-how, as well as Sensitization and Awareness Raising on Prevention of Sexual Violence and development of Educational, Sensitization and Awareness-raising Audio-visual Tools and Materials
- Dissemination and Exploitation of results.

### RISE Project Outputs

Project outputs include publication of comprehensive research reports, protocols, policies, guides, national and transnational learning and training programmes, an E-learning and Training Platform, awareness raising campaign and promotional material, including videos, organization of a European Forum and national Info Days.

### MORE INFORMATION

**Website:** <http://rise-project.org>

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## 1. Introduction

### Background and Context

While sports are often celebrated for their physical, psychological, and social benefits (Eime et al., 2013; Oja et al., 2015), they also have significant negative impacts on participants. Over the past 25 years, research has illuminated issues such as harm from participation, intense pressure faced by young athletes, maltreatment, and marginalization based on factors like class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or disability (David, 2005; Stirling, 2008; Killick, 2009). Competitive youth sports, in particular, have been criticized for failing to respect children's rights, with the hierarchical nature of sports often discouraging athletes from voicing concerns (Farstad, 2007; Mountjoy et al., 2016). For some, the trauma inflicted by these negative experiences leads to a departure from sports entirely, depriving them of the many benefits that participation can provide. Among the most concerning issues is sexual violence, which began receiving attention in the late 1980s (Brackenridge, 2001). Despite growing recognition, this topic remains under-researched and largely taboo (Parent & Fortier, 2017; Parent & Vaillancourt-Morel, 2021), highlighting the need for greater exploration and action to address this problem in sports.

Sexual violence in sports is a pervasive and deeply rooted issue that affects individuals across all levels of athletic participation. It undermines the integrity of sports environments, disrupts the development of trust, and significantly compromises the safety and well-being of participants. Furthermore, sexual violence is a broad term that encompasses a range of behaviors, from harassment without physical contact (e.g., inappropriate messages) to transgressive acts and physical sexual violence (e.g., unwanted touching, rape) (Gaedicke et al., 2021; Wagner & Rulofs, 2023). These behaviors are often rooted in the exploitation of power dynamics and sexuality, resulting in profound intimidation and trauma for victims (Brackenridge, 2001; Ohlert et al., 2018). Additionally, systemic and structural power imbalances within sports organizations create environments that enable such misconduct (Fasting & Brackenridge, 2009). Factors such as isolation, hierarchical structures, and entrenched systemic issues further heighten the risk of abuse in sports settings (Roberts et al., 2020). Furthermore, while close relationships between coaches and athletes are often regarded as essential for athletic success, they can also foster unhealthy dependencies, breaches of trust, and opportunities for exploitation (Gaedicke et al., 2021; Farstad, 2007). Regrettably, the culture of concealment in sports perpetuates a "wall of silence," allowing abuse to persist and shield perpetrators (Kerr & Stirling, 2019). In addition, the advent of technology, particularly social media, has significantly broadened the opportunities for grooming and exploitation, with youth and children being especially vulnerable to these tactics (Murphy, 2019; Sanderson & Weathers, 2020). This modern dimension of abuse underscores the evolving and multifaceted nature of the issue, requiring vigilance and adaptability in prevention efforts.

Amid these challenges, research highlights the alarming prevalence and severity of sexual violence in sports, shedding light on the widespread and systemic nature of the problem. A survey in the Netherlands and Belgium found that sexual violence committed by coaches was significantly more severe than that perpetrated by peer athletes or others (Vertommen et al., 2016). In Germany, a study

revealed that 37.6% of elite athletes had experienced sexual violence in organized sports, with coaches and supervisory staff responsible for 63% of cases involving physical contact (Rulofs, 2015; Ohlert et al., 2018). Globally, sexual violence in sports is estimated to range from 2% to 48%, with higher rates among elite athletes due to early specialization and dependence on coaches (Marks et al., 2012). In Europe, the prevalence ranges from 5% to 17%, with women and girls being disproportionately affected (European Commission, 2016). In France, a 2021 investigation uncovered over 400 suspected perpetrators across 48 sports federations, with most victims under 15 years old (Charlton, 2024). Despite these alarming findings, many cases remain unaddressed, further highlighting the systemic nature of the issue.

However, raising awareness alone is insufficient. Addressing sexual violence in sports requires more than isolated interventions or reactive measures. A holistic, multifaceted approach is essential, encompassing three interconnected pillars: sensitization, awareness, and prevention. These pillars are foundational to fostering a safe, inclusive, and supportive culture in sports. Together, they address the root causes of sexual violence, empower individuals to take action, and establish protective mechanisms to prevent future incidents. Efforts to prevent sexual violence in sports must prioritize both individual and systemic change. Helping behaviors can take proactive forms, such as seeking knowledge about sexual violence, or reactive forms, such as intervening in high-risk situations (McMahon & Banyard, 2012) and contemporary strategies, such as bystander intervention, aim to elevate awareness of sexual violence as a societal issue (Tredinnick & McMahon, 2021). In addition, leadership is pivotal in fostering awareness, promoting engagement in prevention initiatives, and setting a tone of accountability across organizations (Banyard, 2014; McMahon, 2015). Effective prevention also requires robust policies, clear and accessible reporting mechanisms, and stringent enforcement to ensure accountability and deter misconduct (Parent & Demers, 2011). Tailored education and training for all stakeholders—including coaches, medical staff, athletes, and policymakers—are critical to establishing a culture of safety and accountability. By integrating awareness initiatives with actionable measures, empowering bystanders, and fostering proactive engagement, the sports community can address the pervasive issue of sexual violence and create an environment where all participants feel protected and valued.

### Sensitization: Building Empathy and Understanding

As highlighted earlier, an essential component of this proactive approach is sensitization, which focuses on fostering empathy and understanding among all stakeholders in sports. Sensitization goes beyond merely disseminating information—it aims to cultivate a mindset that recognizes the seriousness of sexual violence and the collective responsibility to act. This process challenges harmful norms, such as the normalization of inappropriate behavior or the belief that abuse is an inevitable aspect of sports culture. For example, through workshops and training sessions, participants learn about the impact of power imbalances, the damaging effects of victim-blaming, and the importance of speaking out against misconduct. By humanizing the issue and encouraging empathy for victims, sensitization lays a crucial foundation for cultural transformation in sports.

## Why Sensitization Matters

1. **Addressing Stigma and Taboo:** Sexual violence is often a difficult topic to discuss (Parent & Fortier, 2017; Parent & Vaillancourt-Morel, 2021), particularly in sports where hierarchical relationships and close-knit team dynamics prevail. Sensitization breaks down barriers by normalizing conversations about consent, boundaries, and abuse.
2. **Empowering Stakeholders:** Educating coaches and administrators about the psychological and emotional impact of sexual violence enables them to identify and respond to potential issues more effectively (European Commission, 2016). Sensitized individuals are better equipped to support victims and advocate for safer environments.
3. **Challenging Cultural Norms:** Many sports cultures tolerate or normalize behaviors that contribute to sexual violence, such as hazing, inappropriate jokes, or exploitation of power dynamics. Sensitization creates awareness of these behaviors and helps to dismantle harmful traditions.

By fostering a sense of shared responsibility, sensitization ensures that everyone in the sports community recognizes their role in preventing sexual violence and supporting survivors.

### Awareness: Knowledge as a Catalyst for Action

While sensitization builds emotional understanding, awareness equips individuals with the knowledge and tools to recognize, respond to, and report sexual violence. Awareness campaigns highlight the prevalence of sexual violence in sports, its various manifestations, and the ways in which it can be addressed. As such, this knowledge empowers individuals to identify red flags and seek help when necessary. For example, effective awareness efforts often include distributing materials that explain what constitutes sexual violence, providing examples of unacceptable behavior, and outlining steps for reporting incidents. In addition, public campaigns can further amplify these messages, reaching broader audiences and encouraging collective responsibility. In the sports community, awareness initiatives are particularly vital for educating young athletes about their rights and creating safe avenues to voice concerns without fear of retaliation.

## Why Awareness is Critical

1. **Recognizing Warning Signs:** Many incidents of sexual violence could be prevented if stakeholders were more aware of red flags, such as grooming behaviors, boundary violations, or inappropriate power dynamics (Murphy, 2019; Sanderson & Weathers, 2020). Awareness campaigns provide the knowledge needed to identify these signs early.
2. **Empowering Victims:** Athletes, particularly younger or marginalized individuals, often lack awareness of their rights or may feel uncertain and hesitant about reporting abuse. Awareness initiatives play a critical role in addressing this gap by educating athletes about their rights, available resources, and reporting mechanisms, while also emphasizing the support and protection they can expect throughout the process. As such, by empowering

athletes with this knowledge, these initiatives help foster a sense of confidence and agency, enabling them to take action against abuse.

3. **Destigmatizing Reporting:** Fear of retaliation or judgment often deters victims from reporting abuse, creating a culture of silence that allows misconduct to persist. Awareness campaigns aim to break this cycle by normalizing the act of reporting, emphasizing the confidentiality of the process, the availability of survivor support, and the critical role accountability plays in fostering a safe and inclusive environment. As such, by addressing these fears, such campaigns empower victims to come forward and contribute to a culture of transparency and justice.
4. **Creating Informed Bystanders:** Awareness not only benefits potential victims but also empowers bystanders to intervene. For example, training programs can teach coaches, teammates, and even spectators how to recognize and respond to potential abuse effectively.

It can be argued that an informed community is better prepared to uphold safety standards and respond promptly to incidents, ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable, and victims receive the care they need.

#### Prevention: Establishing a Protective Framework

Finally, prevention focuses on proactively reducing opportunities for sexual violence and creating a structured framework that safeguards all participants. It involves implementing clear policies, enforcing codes of conduct, and fostering an environment where accountability is a priority. In particular, prevention strategies often include training for coaches and administrators to recognize signs of abuse, the adoption of child safeguarding programs in youth sports, and the use of bystander intervention techniques to address potentially harmful situations. An effective prevention framework also considers environmental factors, such as ensuring transparency in interactions between coaches and athletes, avoiding isolated one-on-one meetings, and modifying physical spaces to reduce risks, and these measures not only protect participants but also promote a culture of mutual respect and safety.

#### Why Prevention is Essential

1. **Mitigating Opportunities for Abuse:** Prevention measures, such as background checks for coaches (European Commission, 2016) and transparent policies for interactions with athletes, reduce the likelihood of incidents occurring. For example, avoiding one-on-one situations between coaches and minors can deter abuse.
2. **Establishing Accountability:** Prevention frameworks include clear codes of conduct and reporting protocols that ensure accountability at all levels of the organization (European Commission, 2016). This transparency creates a culture of trust and safety.
3. **Protecting Vulnerable Groups:** Youth athletes, women, and individuals with disabilities are often at greater risk of abuse. Prevention programs that include child safeguarding policies, gender-sensitive training, and accessible reporting systems address these vulnerabilities.

4. **Promoting Long-Term Change:** Effective prevention is not a one-time effort; it involves building a culture of safety that becomes ingrained in the values and operations of sports organizations. Regular training, policy reviews, and community engagement sustain these efforts over time.

Prevention measures not only reduce the risk of sexual violence but also build trust among athletes, parents, and stakeholders, reinforcing the credibility and inclusivity of sports organizations.

#### The Synergy of Sensitization, Awareness, and Prevention

The three pillars of sensitization, awareness, and prevention are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing, forming the foundation of a comprehensive strategy to address sexual violence in sports. Sensitization fosters empathy and understanding, encouraging individuals to engage with awareness initiatives. These initiatives, in turn, equip stakeholders with the knowledge and confidence to take action against sexual violence, while prevention transforms these efforts into systemic safeguards that deter perpetrators and protect vulnerable individuals. For example, a sensitized sports administrator may implement awareness programs that inspire the adoption of robust prevention policies, creating an environment where sexual violence is actively prevented rather than reactively addressed. Similarly, a coach who has undergone sensitization training is better prepared to recognize the impact of sexual violence, advocate for awareness initiatives, and support the implementation of clear reporting protocols and safeguarding measures within their team. While challenges like resistance to change and resource limitations may arise, this holistic framework addresses sexual violence with urgency and thoroughness. Through education, cultural shifts, and policy development, the sports community can create inclusive environments where everyone is protected and empowered to thrive.

#### Objectives of the Study

Sexual violence in sports is a pervasive issue that necessitates comprehensive, informed interventions to foster safe and inclusive athletic environments. Effectively addressing this challenge begins with assessing stakeholder needs and mapping existing practices to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement. This approach was central to the RISE (Rise Empowered Above Sexual Violence in Sports) project, which brought together partners from Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Bulgaria, Italy, and Austria. United by a shared commitment, these collaborators embraced the mission of creating a framework to combat sexual violence and promote a culture of safety and empowerment in sports. The objectives of these processes include improving knowledge, enhancing preventive measures, fostering collaboration, and ensuring the sustainability of initiatives aimed at eliminating sexual violence in sports.

#### Understanding Stakeholder Needs

A primary objective of assessing stakeholder needs is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the specific requirements and priorities of key groups, including athletes, coaches, and administrators.



These stakeholders each play unique roles in the sports ecosystem, and their perspectives are critical to addressing the issue of sexual violence effectively. For instance, coaches may need training on fostering safe environments and identifying early signs of abuse, while athletes might require guidance on recognizing and reporting misconduct. Administrators, on the other hand, need insights to develop robust policies and create accountability mechanisms. By identifying these specific needs, strategies can be tailored to align with the unique challenges and responsibilities of each group. This approach ensures that interventions are practical, relevant, and impactful, resonating deeply with those directly involved in sports and fostering a culture of safety, awareness, and proactive engagement.

### Identifying Knowledge and Awareness Gaps

Many stakeholders in sports, including athletes, coaches, and administrators, may not fully understand what constitutes sexual violence, its various forms, and the warning signs that precede it. This lack of awareness can perpetuate a culture where inappropriate behaviors are overlooked or normalized, leaving individuals vulnerable and incidents unreported. Additionally, many may be unaware of existing mechanisms for reporting or intervention, leading to a critical gap in addressing and preventing sexual violence effectively. By identifying these gaps through needs assessments, sports organizations can design tailored educational and training programs to address these specific deficiencies. For example, training programs can focus on equipping stakeholders with the ability to recognize early signs of abuse, understand reporting procedures, and foster supportive environments that prioritize safety. Such targeted interventions empower stakeholders with knowledge and tools, building a proactive community where prevention and accountability are prioritized, ultimately creating a safer and more inclusive sports environment.

### Tailoring Interventions to Stakeholder Roles

In the sports ecosystem, different stakeholders play unique and critical roles, each with distinct responsibilities and challenges. Athletes, often the most vulnerable group, may require specialized training on recognizing signs of abuse, understanding their rights, and navigating reporting mechanisms. This empowers them to identify and act against inappropriate behavior confidently. Coaches and team staff, who interact closely with athletes, need education on fostering safe environments, recognizing red flags, and intervening effectively to prevent misconduct. Administrators, on the other hand, play a structural role, requiring robust policies, procedural frameworks, and accountability mechanisms to handle incidents swiftly and fairly. Assessing these diverse needs is crucial for tailoring interventions that address the specific gaps and challenges faced by each group. This personalized approach strengthens the overall effectiveness of efforts to combat sexual violence in sports.

### Mapping Effective Practices

Mapping existing prevention and intervention strategies is essential for effectively tackling sexual violence in sports. This process helps identify successful practices, providing a roadmap for reducing risks and offering robust support to victims. By analyzing strategies like bystander intervention, child

safeguarding policies, and digital reporting tools, stakeholders can replicate or adapt them to various sports contexts. A centralized repository of best practices guides organizations, policymakers, and educators in developing tailored programs, ensuring consistency, quality, and efficiency. Mapping also reveals gaps, such as inadequate training or inconsistencies in policy implementation, which can undermine protective measures. Barriers to reporting, like stigma or fear of retaliation, further discourage victims from coming forward. By addressing these limitations—through improved training, uniform policies, and anonymous reporting systems—stakeholders can enhance intervention effectiveness. This ongoing process fosters a proactive response, strengthening both immediate capabilities and long-term prevention efforts, and ultimately building a safer, more accountable sports culture globally.

### Learning from Successful Interventions

Building on the previous discussion of mapping existing strategies, by analyzing successful initiatives from other contexts, stakeholders can identify models that are adaptable and impactful. For instance, child safeguarding policies have proven essential in protecting young athletes through clear protocols and accountability measures. Similarly, bystander intervention training provides individuals with practical skills to recognize and interrupt harmful behaviors, fostering a culture of proactive prevention. Digital reporting tools have been effective in increasing reporting rates by offering confidential, accessible channels for victims to report incidents. These insights allow stakeholders to avoid reinventing the wheel, ensuring resources are directed toward refining and implementing proven strategies rather than duplicating efforts. By focusing on scalability and adaptability, stakeholders can allocate resources more efficiently, making sure interventions are not only effective but also sustainable across diverse sports environments. This comprehensive approach strengthens both immediate response capabilities and long-term prevention efforts.

### Enhancing Advocacy, Policy Development and Capacity Building

A strong evidence base is crucial for effective advocacy and policy development in combating sexual violence in sports. By providing concrete examples of successful strategies, evidence-based approaches enable stakeholders to advocate for change with compelling data. Reliable data and proven best practices form the foundation for impactful policies, ensuring they are both practical and effective. For example, evidence supporting bystander intervention training or digital reporting tools can shape guidelines and funding priorities, leading to broader adoption. Additionally, building an evidence base helps identify gaps in knowledge, skills, and resources that hinder prevention and response efforts. Addressing these gaps allows sports organizations, coaches, administrators, and athletes to act confidently. Tailored training programs, resource allocation, and awareness campaigns can then be developed to close these gaps. This process fosters a proactive culture, equipping stakeholders with the tools to combat sexual violence. Ultimately, evidence-based advocacy and policy development create a cycle of continuous improvement, leading to safer and more resilient sports environments.

### Scope of the Study

The study within Work Package 2 (WP2) of the RISE project takes a comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing sexual violence in sports by focusing on three critical stakeholder groups: athletes, sports professionals, and administrators. These groups are integral to the sports ecosystem, and understanding their needs, challenges, and perspectives is essential for designing effective prevention, intervention, and support strategies. By examining these stakeholders across multiple partner countries—Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, and Spain—the study ensures a diverse and representative analysis of the issue, tailored to varied cultural and organizational contexts.

#### Athletes: Empowering Vulnerable Participants

Athletes, particularly those aged 15–30, form the core focus of the study as they are often the most directly impacted by sexual violence in sports. This demographic includes individuals navigating critical stages in their athletic and personal development, making them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. However, due to stringent regulations governing the inclusion of minors in research in some partner countries, the focus was adjusted to participants aged 18–30 years. Despite this adjustment, participants were asked to recall and report incidents that may have occurred when they were under the age of 18, ensuring that the study captures experiences from their childhood and adolescence while adhering to ethical and legal standards. The study explores their awareness of sexual violence, their ability to recognize warning signs, and their understanding of reporting mechanisms. Through focus group discussions and surveys, the research aims to assess the specific needs of athletes, including the resources required to foster a safe and supportive environment. By collecting data on their experiences and perspectives, the study identifies gaps in education, knowledge, and support systems. This focus ensures that athletes are not only protected but also empowered to advocate for their rights and well-being within the sports community.

#### Sports Professionals: Building the First Line of Defense

Sports professionals, such as coaches and trainers play a pivotal role in shaping the culture and environment of sports. They often serve as mentors and authority figures, which positions them as both protectors and potential risks in cases of power imbalance. The study delves into their understanding of sexual violence, their ability to recognize and respond to incidents, and the adequacy of their training in safeguarding practices. By organizing focus groups and collecting survey data, the research evaluates the effectiveness of existing educational programs and identifies areas for improvement. It examines how sports professionals perceive their responsibilities in preventing sexual violence and supporting victims, as well as the challenges they face in fulfilling these roles. This focus ensures that sports professionals are equipped with the tools, knowledge, and confidence needed to act as a first line of defense against sexual violence.

#### Administrators: Strengthening Institutional Frameworks

Administrators, including sports organization leaders and policymakers, are responsible for creating and implementing the structural and procedural frameworks that underpin safe sports environments. The study investigates their role in developing policies, enforcing codes of conduct, and ensuring

accountability within their organizations. It evaluates their awareness of best practices, the consistency of policy implementation, and the challenges they face in addressing sexual violence effectively. It also explores the resources and training they require to strengthen institutional responses to sexual violence. By focusing on administrators, the study aims to enhance organizational accountability and ensure that preventive and responsive measures are embedded within sports governance.

### Cross-Country Analysis for Broader Impact

The RISE research team highlighted that by examining athletes, sports professionals, and administrators across the six partner countries, the study encompasses a diverse array of cultural, organizational, and policy contexts. This cross-country approach provides valuable insights into common challenges and effective practices, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing. The findings will inform tailored interventions that respect the unique needs of each group while promoting consistency in combating sexual violence across Europe. Ultimately, this comprehensive focus ensures that all stakeholders are engaged in creating a safer, more inclusive sports environment, aligning with the overarching goals of the RISE project.

## 2. Methodology

Selecting an appropriate methodology is a cornerstone of effective research, as it ensures that the study's objectives are met with precision and credibility. In this RISE study, a two-pronged approach—combining desk research and primary research—has been employed to comprehensively examine the prevalence of sexual violence in sports and to identify associated patterns and risk factors. This dual-method strategy is critical for achieving a balanced understanding of the issue. On the other hand, primary research is essential for generating original data that captures the lived experiences and nuanced perspectives of participants. By directly engaging with athletes, coaches, or other stakeholders, primary research provides firsthand insights into the prevalence, patterns, and risk factors of sexual violence in sports. This method enables the study to explore aspects that may be underrepresented or absent in existing literature, adding unique value to the research. On the other hand, desk research establishes a solid theoretical and contextual framework and together, they allow for a comprehensive and well-rounded investigation, enhancing the study's validity, reliability, and applicability. Furthermore, employing a mixed-methods approach underscores the importance of methodological rigor in addressing complex and sensitive topics like sexual violence. This ensures that the research is not only robust but also sensitive to the diverse contexts and populations involved, enabling the development of tailored recommendations for policy and practice.

### Desk Research

The desk research phase involves reviewing existing literature, data, and reports on sexual violence in sports from both academic and institutional sources across the partner countries—Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, and Spain. This includes peer-reviewed journal articles, reports from sports organizations, national and international policy documents, case studies on prevention and intervention strategies, and available statistical data. By synthesizing this information, the desk

research aims to establish a baseline understanding of how sexual violence has been documented and addressed in various cultural, organizational, and policy contexts. Additionally, this phase identifies gaps in current knowledge, highlights successful strategies, and provides a foundation for developing the research tools used in the primary research phase. Special attention is given to underrepresented demographics, unexamined sports settings, and limited regional data to ensure comprehensive coverage. Sources are gathered from diverse databases, libraries, and official government or NGO archives, ensuring a thorough and well-rounded review of the topic.

### Cross-Country Comparisons

The desk research also emphasizes regional diversity by comparing findings across the partner countries. This enables the study to highlight commonalities and differences in how sexual violence is addressed within various cultural, legal, and institutional frameworks. For this RISE project, that included findings from Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, and Spain. The insights derived from the desk research informed the development of methodological tools for the primary research phase, such as focus group guides and survey questions.

### Primary Research

The primary research focused on collecting original, first-hand data through two key activities: focus group discussions and surveys. Focus groups were organized with diverse stakeholders, including athletes (aged 18-30), sports professionals (e.g., coaches), administrators, and experts in sexual violence prevention. For the athlete cohort, the initial target age group for the study was set at 15–30 years, however, due to stringent regulations governing the inclusion of minors in research in some partner countries, the focus was adjusted to participants aged 18–30 years. Despite this adjustment, participants were asked to recall and report incidents that may have occurred when they were under the age of 18, ensuring that the study captures experiences from their childhood and adolescence while adhering to ethical and legal standards. Additionally, an online survey was conducted to quantify the prevalence of sexual violence in sports across the partner countries. This survey incorporated demographic and thematic questions and was translated into multiple languages to ensure accessibility. A pilot phase ensured that the questions were clear and culturally sensitive. In addition, ethical considerations were central to the design of the RISE research. Confidentiality was ensured through anonymous participation in the questionnaire and secure handling of all recorded focus group data. Participation in both components was entirely voluntary, with participants receiving clear information about the purpose and scope of the research and the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Informed consent was obtained for participation in the focus group discussions and recording sessions. Sensitive topics were addressed with care to minimize discomfort, and resources for support were shared with participants if needed.

### Organizing Stakeholders' Focus Group Discussions

The focus group discussions were designed to offer comprehensive insights into assessing sensitization to sexual violence in sports and to explore effective prevention strategies, and the



particular process began by identifying and recruiting athletes, coaches, and sport administrators from partner countries. Participants included active and retired athletes and professionals working in the sports industry as coaches or administrators. A carefully defined selection process ensured diverse participants with varied expertise, fostering a comprehensive and balanced perspective. The RISE research team decided to standardize the discussions across countries, and as such, they developed a structured discussion guide. This guide featured open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their experiences, observations, and recommendations. Discussion topics included defining what constitutes sexual violence within the context of sports, drawing on participants' definitions and experiences, and examining instances of observed or experienced behavior that could be categorized as sexual violence. Furthermore, the participants discussed their familiarity with training or education on sexual violence prevention, their knowledge of reporting procedures within their organizations, and their preparedness to support teammates or athletes who may have experienced such incidents. Other topics addressed included their comfort levels in reporting sexual violence, strategies to enhance prevention, and evaluations of current awareness and education on sexual violence among athletes within their organizations. For administrators, discussions explored the existence, review frequency, and efficacy of organizational policies and procedures aimed at preventing and addressing sexual violence whereas, the coaches discussed strategies for addressing suspected or reported sexual violence, educating athletes on appropriate physical contact, managing misconduct, and identifying additional resources needed to address sexual violence effectively within their teams and organizations.

Sessions were scheduled at mutually convenient times, and all the participants received detailed information about the purpose, format, and confidentiality of the discussions to ensure transparency and comfort. Each focus group was co-facilitated by trained moderators selected by the partner organizations. With the participants' consent, sessions were either video recorded or audio recorded, ensuring the accuracy of transcription and analysis. In addition, the focus groups were conducted in person or virtually, depending on local circumstances. The collected data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, emerging trends, and unique insights. This analysis ensured that the collective expertise of the participants informed the study's findings and recommendations in a comprehensive and meaningful way, enriched the study's understanding of sexual violence in sports, and assessed the level of sensitization.

### 3. Desk Research Findings

#### Awareness Campaigns

Raising awareness is a cornerstone in combating sexual violence in sports. However, awareness campaigns vary in reach, funding, and alignment with broader national strategies. In particular:

- Cyprus: Nationally coordinated campaigns like "Play Equal" integrate social media challenges and documentaries to raise awareness, reaching diverse audiences (Play Equal).

- Greece: Campaigns are reactive, driven by events like the Sofia Bekatorou case. Awareness efforts such as "Your Voice, Your Life, Your Truth" focus on personal testimonies and survivor narratives.
- Spain: Campaigns like #SeAcabó and "Women are Worth Gold" emphasize public visibility and media engagement, often tied to high-profile cases (Spanish Olympic Committee).
- Italy: Campaigns like "Giochiamo d'Anticipo" focus on practical tools for preventing abuse and involve collaboration with multiple stakeholders (Safe Play).
- Austria: Awareness efforts are linked to broader gender equality initiatives, with materials like Sport Austria's handbook targeting sports clubs and federations.
- Bulgaria: Campaigns such as "Fair Play" and "Stop Sexual Aggression" are more localized, often funded by EU initiatives (Fair Play Project).

### Training Programs and Interventions

All six countries have established training programs designed to educate sports professionals and athletes about preventing and addressing sexual violence. However, the availability and focus of training programs show stark differences:

- Cyprus: Offers comprehensive e-learning platforms like "React Act Prevent Sexual Violence," targeting a wide range of stakeholders, including educators, parents, and sports professionals (ReactActPrevent).
- Greece: Training focuses on community-level interventions, with limited institutionalized programs for sports professionals.
- Spain: Nationally coordinated interventions include guidelines and tools for sports professionals, ensuring uniformity in training across the country (CSD).
- Italy: Programs like "Battiamo il Silenzio" offer free e-learning courses to sports educators and parents, emphasizing international, European, and national regulations (Safe Play).
- Austria: Training programs are often limited in scope, relying on voluntary participation. Initiatives like PREVEX focus on empowering youth through emotional and sexual education (PREVEX).
- Bulgaria: Programs like "One in Five" emphasize child autonomy and prevention but lack integration with national sports policies (Animus Association).

## Best practices

Country	Name of Best Practice	Short Description	Source Link
Cyprus	National Strategy and Action Plan for Combating Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation	Comprehensive policy document guiding actions to combat sexual abuse, exploitation of children, and child pornography.	<a href="https://foni.org.cy/uploads/Ethniki-Stratigiki/71be99ae97.pdf">https://foni.org.cy/uploads/Ethniki-Stratigiki/71be99ae97.pdf</a>
Cyprus	Play Equal Research Report	Explores attitudes of football players and stakeholders on gender stereotypes and violence.	<a href="https://www.familyplanning.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Research-Report_GR-1.pdf">https://www.familyplanning.org.cy/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Research-Report_GR-1.pdf</a>
Spain	Protocol Against Sexual Violence	High Council of Sports protocol to address and combat sexual violence in sports.	<a href="https://www.csd.gob.es/en/csd/protocol-against-sexual-violence">https://www.csd.gob.es/en/csd/protocol-against-sexual-violence</a>
Spain	Women Are Worth Gold	Digital initiative promoting female athletes' visibility and equality in sports.	<a href="https://www.iberdrola.com/press-room/news/detail/iberdrola-spanish-olympic-committee-coe-sign-cooperation-agreement-boost-equality-sport">https://www.iberdrola.com/press-room/news/detail/iberdrola-spanish-olympic-committee-coe-sign-cooperation-agreement-boost-equality-sport</a>
Austria	SportAustria's 5 Programs for Prevention of Sexual Violence	Includes measures like informing associations, supporting implementation, and strengthening cooperation.	<a href="https://cases.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_cases/CASES_ProjectReport_2021.pdf">https://cases.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_cases/CASES_ProjectReport_2021.pdf</a>
Austria	VOICE Project	Erasmus+ project to amplify the voices of sexual violence survivors in sports.	<a href="https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/voice">https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/voice</a>
Greece	Start to Talk	A campaign to raise awareness about sexual child abuse and maltreatment in sports through videos and public engagement.	<a href="https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/start-to-talk">https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/start-to-talk</a>
Greece	ACTIVE Project	Focuses on embedding child protection policies in sports and leisure	<a href="https://active-sport.eu/">https://active-sport.eu/</a>
Italy	Safe Place Safe Play	Policy creating safe environments for minors in sports with comprehensive safeguarding measures.	<a href="https://safeplay.it">https://safeplay.it</a>
Italy	Battiamo il Silenzio	E-learning course to train sports staff on safeguarding policies and promoting safe	<a href="https://www.sport.governo.it/it/attivita-nazionale/">https://www.sport.governo.it/it/attivita-nazionale/</a>
Bulgaria	Fair Play Project	Addresses gender-based violence and discrimination in sports through education and policy initiatives.	<a href="https://fairplay-project.eu/en/project-fairplay/">https://fairplay-project.eu/en/project-fairplay/</a>
Bulgaria	One in Five Campaign	Teaches children about bodily autonomy and how to refuse inappropriate	<a href="https://sapibg.org/bg/campaign/kampaniya-1-ot-5">https://sapibg.org/bg/campaign/kampaniya-1-ot-5</a>

## Interventions

Country	Name of Intervention	Short Description	Source Link
Cyprus	React Act Prevent Sexual Violence E-Learning Platform	Comprehensive series of E-Learning training modules addressing sexual violence in youth work and sports.	<a href="https://canvas.instructure.com/enroll/M38Y6L">https://canvas.instructure.com/enroll/M38Y6L</a>
Cyprus	Play Equal Training Guides	Guides for addressing masculinity and gender-based violence for boys and coaches.	<a href="https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/projects-details/43251589/101049293/CERV">https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/projects-details/43251589/101049293/CERV</a>
Spain	Guide for Prevention of Sexual Harassment in Sports	80-page booklet providing guidance and action plans for preventing harassment and abuse in sports.	<a href="https://www.emakunde.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/publicaciones_guias2/es_emakunde/adjuntos/29.guia.deporte.pdf">https://www.emakunde.euskadi.eus/contenidos/informacion/publicaciones_guias2/es_emakunde/adjuntos/29.guia.deporte.pdf</a>
Spain	Protocol Against Sexual Violence	Established by the High Council of Sports to address and combat sexual violence within sports.	<a href="https://www.csd.gob.es/en/csd/protocol-against-sexual-violence">https://www.csd.gob.es/en/csd/protocol-against-sexual-violence</a>
Austria	PREVEX Project	Training programs to enhance emotional and sexual education for Austrian youth.	<a href="https://cases.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_cases/CASES_ProjectReport_2021.pdf">https://cases.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_cases/CASES_ProjectReport_2021.pdf</a>
Austria	100% Sport Training Platform	Focuses on raising awareness and training sports organizations to prevent sexual violence.	<a href="https://www.100sportaustria.at">https://www.100sportaustria.at</a>
Greece	Law 4326/2015 Supporter's Club Interventions	Introduced control methods for sports clubs, including measures to prevent and sanction violent crimes in sports.	<a href="https://active-sport.eu/">https://active-sport.eu/</a>
Greece	ACTIVE Project Training Programs	Training programs to embed child protection policies in sports and leisure activities.	<a href="https://active-sport.eu/">https://active-sport.eu/</a>
Italy	Battiamo il Silenzio	E-learning formative course to train sports staff on safeguarding and promoting safe environments.	<a href="https://www.sport.governo.it/it/attivita-nazionale/">https://www.sport.governo.it/it/attivita-nazionale/</a>
Italy	STePS Project	Training and capacity building for professionals to prevent child abuse and mistreatment in sports.	<a href="https://www.safeplay.it">https://www.safeplay.it</a>
Bulgaria	National Programme for the Prevention of Violence and Abuse Against Children	Comprehensive program providing education and training to prevent violence in sports.	<a href="https://sacp.government.bg/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8/%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-8">https://sacp.government.bg/%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B8/%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-8</a>
Bulgaria	#ThinkBefore Campaign	Prevents sexual exploitation and abuse among teenagers through education and awareness.	<a href="https://www.pomislipredi.net/">https://www.pomislipredi.net/</a>
Bulgaria	One in Five Campaign	Empowers children to assert bodily autonomy and respond to inappropriate contact.	<a href="https://sapiibg.org/bg/campaign/kampaniya-1-ot-5">https://sapiibg.org/bg/campaign/kampaniya-1-ot-5</a>

## 4. Focus Group Discussion Findings

### 1. Policies and Procedures for Preventing and Addressing Sexual Violence in Sports: Insights from Sport Administrators Across Partner Countries

#### Cyprus

Sports administrators in Cyprus argued that while larger sports federations and the Cyprus Sports Association (CSA) have established policies and procedures, smaller federations lack comprehensive frameworks due to limited resources and volunteer-driven operations. The CSA has developed guidelines, handbooks, and training workshops, but their effective implementation at the federation and club levels remains inconsistent. They also highlighted that policies are updated periodically to incorporate legislative changes and best practices. However, they emphasized the critical need for mandatory policy integration at all organizational levels, alongside practical tools like centralized reporting mechanisms and simplified educational resources.

#### Greece

Sports administrators in Greece argued that most organizations lack formal policies and procedures to address sexual violence. Even where frameworks exist, implementation is inconsistent. In addition, the Greek administrators highlighted a significant gap between global standards and local practices and emphasized prevention through leadership responsibility and athlete monitoring, but noted challenges in fostering institutional accountability. Furthermore, they argued that the cultural reluctance to report cases and the absence of independent oversight exacerbate the problem. The importance of evolving norms, especially regarding consent and power dynamics, was acknowledged, but Greece remains behind in formalizing comprehensive policies.

#### Italy

In Italy, sports administrators discussed that many organizations have begun developing policies and frameworks, driven by increasing societal awareness and national mandates. Some organizations already have clear safeguarding measures, including designated officers, ethics codes, and anonymous reporting mechanisms. In addition, the administrators emphasized periodic reviews and updates to these policies, noting gaps in smaller organizations due to limited resources. They also stressed the importance of embedding safeguarding within organizational contracts and highlighted ongoing efforts to raise awareness through training and cultural shifts, involving families and young athletes.

#### Spain

Similarly, sports administrators in Spain argued that their organizations are working to establish and refine policies addressing sexual violence, with annual reviews being a common practice and acknowledged that outdated policies pose risks, particularly concerning power dynamics and consent involving minors. The emphasis on prompt complaint processing and preventing organizational pressures from hindering action was underscored. Spanish administrators stressed the value of regular training and a supportive culture to ensure the effective implementation of these policies.



## Bulgaria

Furthermore, sports administrators in Bulgaria highlighted that their organizations often lack structured policies or procedures explicitly targeting sexual violence prevention. While some initiatives exist to promote safe environments, they are frequently symbolic or politically driven, failing to reach athletes and coaches effectively. Administrators in Bulgaria expressed a need for clear frameworks, emphasizing the involvement of experienced sports educators and the establishment of concrete mechanisms for reporting and prevention. They highlighted the lack of systematic updates or reviews, underscoring the need for more proactive and inclusive strategies.

## Austria

Lastly, sports administrators in Austria argued that most organizations have implemented child protection guidelines and prevention concepts, which are regularly reviewed and aligned with best practices. Administrators stressed the importance of continuous education, mandatory training, and accessible communication channels for policy dissemination. In addition, they argued that the inclusion of athletes in developing protection practices and the presence of designated prevention officers were noted as key strengths. However, administrators in Austria acknowledged underreporting as a significant challenge, often linked to the lack of robust reporting systems.

## Comparative Observations

Across the six countries, varying levels of policy development and implementation were observed:

- Cyprus and Austria exhibit more structured approaches, with established policies, regular updates, and strong central organizations leading these efforts. However, smaller federations in Cyprus face barriers to implementation due to resource constraints.
- Spain and Italy are actively refining policies and emphasizing awareness and training. Their challenges include addressing outdated frameworks and ensuring smaller organizations keep pace with larger, better-resourced entities.
- Greece and Bulgaria show significant gaps in formal policies, with fragmented efforts at prevention and reporting. Administrators in both countries stressed the importance of evolving cultural attitudes and building systematic approaches to address sexual violence comprehensively.

## Recommendations

- **Strengthening Institutional Frameworks:** All countries must mandate comprehensive, enforceable policies across all sports organizations, ensuring consistency in addressing sexual violence.
- **Improving Awareness and Training:** Regular, mandatory training for all stakeholders—including administrators, coaches, athletes, and families—can help embed a culture of safety and respect.
- **Enhancing Reporting Mechanisms:** Establishing centralized and independent reporting systems will encourage victims and bystanders to come forward without fear of retaliation or bias.

- Resource Allocation: Governments and central sports authorities should provide financial and human resources to smaller organizations to implement and maintain safeguarding measures.
- Periodic Reviews: Annual updates to policies are essential to align with evolving norms, legal changes, and best practices.

## 2. Training and Awareness on Sexual Violence Prevention: Insights from Sport Administrators Across Partner Countries

### Cyprus

Sports administrators in Cyprus discussed the efforts of the Cyprus Sports Association (CSA) to lead training initiatives. CSA organized workshops and seminars, including a three-day training program for safeguarding officers under the European Sports Committee's Start2Talk campaign. These programs aimed to build awareness among sports federation representatives and safeguarding officers. However, the administrators in Cyprus noted that smaller federations often lacked the resources and personnel to implement these measures effectively. The CSA's guidebooks and handbooks provided valuable frameworks, but consistent application at the federation and club levels remained a challenge. In addition, they emphasized the importance of ensuring that all stakeholders, from athletes to coaches, were well-informed of the policies through accessible training materials and regular workshops.

### Greece

Sports administrators in Greece argued that training on sexual violence prevention and reporting was limited and inconsistently implemented. While some organizations facilitated workshops or informal discussions on gender-based violence, comprehensive training for athletes and staff was largely absent. One administrator highlighted a workshop aimed at setting boundaries for athletes and coaches, which marked a preliminary step in raising awareness. However, they acknowledged that Greece is behind in providing structured training programs. Challenges included the lack of resources and centralized oversight. Administrators in Greece also emphasized the need for independent monitoring systems and external oversight to ensure that athletes and staff were adequately trained and aware of their organization's policies.

### Italy

Sports administrators in Italy highlighted a growing commitment to conducting training and raising awareness about sexual violence prevention. Many organizations had initiated both formal and informal training sessions for athletes, coaches, and staff. Specific examples included ethics codes integrated into contracts, mandatory safeguarding training, and anonymous reporting mechanisms. One women's volleyball organization designated a psychologist as a referral officer and conducted surprise checks during training sessions. Despite these advances, administrators recognized that smaller organizations struggled to afford in-house psychologists or comprehensive training programs. They also highlighted the need for cultural shifts, starting from schools and involving families, to create a more informed environment for athletes.

### Spain

Sports administrators in Spain emphasized the importance of regular training for athletes, coaches, and staff to ensure awareness of organizational policies. They discussed workshops and orientation sessions as critical avenues for training, with a focus on making policies transparent and easy to understand. In addition, they highlighted the necessity of involving all stakeholders—athletes, families, and support staff—in training programs. While some organizations had formal training measures in place, there was concern about outdated policies and their alignment with evolving societal norms. Lastly, the Spanish administrators stressed that training responders, such as HR personnel and psychologists, was critical for handling cases professionally.

### **Bulgaria**

Sports administrators in Bulgaria argued that while some initiatives aimed at promoting safe environments existed, specific training on sexual violence prevention and reporting was largely absent. The lack of structured frameworks and clear implementation plans hindered efforts to raise awareness effectively. In addition, the administrators mentioned symbolic or politically driven initiatives that often failed to reach athletes and coaches. They stressed the need for targeted educational initiatives developed in collaboration with experienced sports educators to create practical and impactful training sessions. Consistent efforts were required to build awareness among stakeholders and ensure understanding of their rights and responsibilities.

### **Austria**

Sport administrators in Austria discussed their organizations' strong emphasis on mandatory training and education for all staff interacting with children. Training sessions focused on ensuring athletes, coaches, and staff were familiar with child protection guidelines and prevention concepts. Administrators highlighted the importance of using age-appropriate language to engage young athletes and ensure they understood the policies in place. Clear communication platforms and regular updates helped reinforce awareness of these policies. Designated prevention officers and trust persons were central to creating an environment where athletes felt comfortable seeking help. Administrators also noted that involving children in the development of protection concepts improved their effectiveness.

### **Comparative Observations**

#### **1. Structured vs. Informal Training:**

- Austria, Spain, and Cyprus displayed stronger efforts in structured training programs, with Austria particularly emphasizing mandatory education and clear communication strategies.
- Italy and Greece showed growing initiatives, though the implementation remained inconsistent and often informal.
- Bulgaria lagged behind, with limited structured training and significant gaps in reaching athletes and coaches effectively.

#### **2. Role of Safeguarding Officers and Psychologists:**

- Countries like Italy and Austria integrated psychologists or safeguarding officers into their training frameworks, ensuring athletes had clear points of contact for support.

- In contrast, Cyprus and Spain relied on broader organizational frameworks but struggled with consistent implementation across all levels.
- 3. Involvement of Stakeholders:
  - Spain and Italy highlighted the importance of involving families, educators, and broader societal influences in training programs.
  - Other countries, such as Bulgaria and Greece, noted limited stakeholder involvement due to resource constraints.
- 4. Cultural and Resource Challenges:
  - Cyprus and Greece faced challenges related to resource limitations and the volunteer nature of smaller federations.
  - Bulgaria struggled with symbolic initiatives that lacked tangible impact or consistent follow-through.
- 5. Emphasis on Awareness:
  - Across all countries, administrators agreed that raising awareness among athletes, coaches, and staff was critical. However, the effectiveness of these efforts depended on the availability of resources, institutional commitment, and external oversight.

### Recommendations

- **Standardized Training Programs:** Implement mandatory, standardized training sessions across all sports organizations, focusing on clear, practical guidance tailored to each country's cultural and organizational context.
- **Resource Allocation:** Provide financial and logistical support to smaller organizations, enabling them to access professional trainers and safeguarding officers.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Broaden training efforts to include families, schools, and community leaders, fostering a supportive and informed environment for athletes.
- **Monitoring and Accountability:** Establish independent monitoring bodies to ensure consistent implementation and evaluation of training programs.
- **Cultural Shifts:** Promote cultural changes that prioritize safety, respect, and open communication within sports environments, leveraging national campaigns and educational initiatives.

By addressing these challenges and implementing these recommendations, sports organizations across these countries can significantly improve their training efforts and policy awareness, ultimately fostering safer environments for athletes.

### 3. Promoting Safe and Respectful Sports Environments: Initiatives from Sport Administrators Across Partner Countries

#### Cyprus

Sport administrators in Cyprus discussed several initiatives led by the Cyprus Sports Association (CSA) aimed at fostering a safe and respectful sports environment. They highlighted CSA's role in implementing programs such as the "SafeSportsAllies" project, which provided step-by-step guidance for recognizing and addressing sexual violence. Other efforts included the appointment of

safeguarding officers in larger federations and workshops to educate stakeholders about rights and responsibilities in sports settings. Administrators also mentioned the introduction of ambassadors for children's rights and the integration of online reporting systems. Despite these efforts, smaller federations struggled with resource constraints, limiting their ability to adopt similar measures.

### **Greece**

Sport administrators in Greece argued that initiatives to promote safe sports environments were fragmented and inconsistent across organizations. While some federations had begun exploring programs focused on gender-based violence and athlete well-being, these efforts were not widespread. Administrators highlighted the importance of embedding psychologists within teams to monitor behavioral changes in minors and detect early signs of abuse. They also emphasized the need for proactive measures, such as fostering open communication and creating environments where athletes feel empowered to report misconduct. However, a culture of silence and a lack of resources remained significant barriers to the successful implementation of these initiatives.

### **Spain**

Sport administrators in Spain highlighted specific initiatives designed to ensure a safe and respectful sports culture. These included hiring team therapists and mental health professionals who offered private consultations for athletes, as well as designating safe spaces for reporting issues without fear of judgment. Administrators stressed the importance of open communication and transparency in fostering trust among athletes, coaches, and staff. Programs also focused on educating all stakeholders, including families, about recognizing and addressing inappropriate behavior. While progress had been made, administrators recognized the need for sustained efforts to address systemic issues and power imbalances within sports environments.

### **Italy**

Sport administrators in Italy discussed various initiatives aimed at creating safer sports environments, with a strong focus on integrating safeguarding practices into organizational structures. Specific measures included the use of ethics codes, the appointment of safeguarding officers, and the provision of anonymous reporting channels. In women's volleyball, administrators described protocols such as restricted access to changing rooms and surprise inspections during training sessions. These efforts were complemented by workshops on conflict resolution and consent, which aimed to foster a culture of respect. However, administrators acknowledged the financial strain on smaller organizations, which often struggled to implement similar measures without external support.

### **Bulgaria**

Sport administrators in Bulgaria argued that while there were positive initiatives aimed at promoting safe sports environments, many were symbolic or politically motivated, lacking practical impact. Administrators noted that some programs existed on paper but failed to reach athletes and coaches effectively. They stressed the importance of consulting experienced sports educators and practitioners to develop actionable and impactful strategies. Efforts to establish clear guidelines and



communication channels were highlighted as key steps toward creating a respectful and safe sporting community. However, the lack of institutional oversight and resources hindered the long-term success of these initiatives.

### Austria

Sport administrators in Austria highlighted robust programs designed to promote a safe and inclusive sports culture. These included mandatory training for all staff interacting with children, the involvement of youth in developing protection concepts, and the designation of prevention officers and trust persons. Administrators emphasized the use of age-appropriate language in communicating safety protocols and the integration of feedback from athletes to refine existing programs. The focus on proactive measures, such as visible communication platforms and continuous education, helped ensure that athletes and staff were aware of their rights and responsibilities. Despite these strengths, administrators acknowledged the need to address underreporting through more accessible reporting mechanisms.

### Comparative Observations:

1. Institutional Leadership:
  - Cyprus and Austria demonstrated strong leadership through central organizations like [Cyprus Sports Organization](#) and [Safesport.at](#), which provided clear frameworks and resources.
  - Bulgaria and Greece struggled with fragmented efforts and limited institutional support, leaving individual organizations to shoulder the burden of promoting safe environments.
2. Stakeholder Involvement:
  - Austria, Spain, and Italy emphasized the importance of involving stakeholders, including athletes, families, and support staff, in the development and implementation of initiatives.
  - Cyprus and Bulgaria noted gaps in engaging smaller federations and clubs, which often lacked the capacity to participate fully in these programs.
3. Focus on Prevention:
  - Austria and Spain prioritized proactive measures, such as creating safe spaces, employing therapists, and integrating athlete feedback into program designs.
  - Other countries, like Greece and Bulgaria, highlighted the need for early detection mechanisms but lacked the resources to implement them effectively.
4. Challenges in Implementation:
  - Across all countries, administrators identified financial constraints and resource limitations as major barriers, particularly for smaller organizations.
  - Cultural issues, such as the reluctance to report misconduct or challenge authority figures, were significant obstacles in Greece, Cyprus, and Bulgaria.

### Recommendations

- Centralized Support: Establish national bodies to provide resources, training, and oversight, ensuring consistency across sports organizations.

- **Inclusive Program Design:** Involve athletes, coaches, and families in developing and refining initiatives to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
- **Sustainability:** Secure funding for smaller organizations to implement long-term programs, reducing reliance on symbolic or short-term efforts.
- **Enhanced Reporting Mechanisms:** Create accessible, independent systems for reporting misconduct to address underreporting and build trust.
- **Ongoing Education:** Promote continuous education on respect, boundaries, and communication, targeting all levels of sports organizations.

By building on these initiatives and addressing gaps in implementation, partner countries can create safer and more respectful environments that empower athletes and promote a culture of accountability.

#### 4. Handling Reported Cases of Sexual Violence: Insights from Sport Administrators Across Partner Countries

##### **Cyprus**

Sport administrators in Cyprus discussed the presence of reported cases of sexual violence, emphasizing the role of the Cyprus Sports Association (CSA) in responding to these incidents. Administrators noted that CSA had handled reports promptly by referring them to the police within 48 hours. However, many cases, particularly those involving minors, often did not progress to legal proceedings due to parental withdrawal of complaints. A large-sized federation highlighted incidents of psychological and verbal violence, with administrators advocating for clear protocols to address such issues comprehensively. Smaller federations, constrained by resources, lacked formal mechanisms for managing cases, often relying on ad hoc responses. CSA's trauma-informed approach and collaboration with external stakeholders were praised as steps toward addressing these challenges.

##### **Greece**

Sport administrators in Greece argued that reported cases of sexual violence were often underreported or mishandled, reflecting broader cultural and systemic barriers. Administrators noted instances of minors facing abuse but emphasized that societal and organizational pressures frequently suppressed such cases. A prominent example involved a high-profile case in the sailing community, where legal limitations prevented justice despite the survivor's courage in coming forward. Administrators identified the lack of independent oversight and victim-centered support as key challenges. They emphasized the need for swift and decisive action in reported cases, alongside education for athletes and staff on recognizing and responding to abuse.

##### **Spain**

Sport administrators in Spain highlighted the challenges of handling reported cases of sexual violence, focusing on organizational pressures and authority dynamics that often discouraged athletes from coming forward. A specific instance involved a female athlete who hesitated to report a coach's abuse due to his influential position. Administrators emphasized the importance of ensuring anonymity and psychological support for survivors, while also addressing systemic delays in complaint processing.

They advocated for dedicated points of contact within organizations to handle cases sensitively and transparently, with ongoing efforts to strengthen reporting mechanisms and ensure accountability.

### Italy

Sport administrators in Italy discussed their experiences with reported cases, noting that while incidents were relatively rare, they were often handled on an ad hoc basis due to the absence of formal guidelines. For example, one organization reported two cases in the past 25 years, both resolved through individualized approaches rather than systematic protocols. Administrators highlighted the importance of integrating ethical standards into contracts, ensuring consequences for misconduct, and providing anonymous reporting options. They stressed the need for cultural shifts to encourage openness and proactive intervention in addressing abuse, particularly in smaller organizations with fewer resources.

### Bulgaria

Sport administrators in Bulgaria argued that while no cases had been reported within their organizations in the last 12 months, accusations in other clubs had surfaced, often targeting coaches. These accusations, frequently dismissed as attempts to tarnish reputations, underscored the challenges of verifying and addressing allegations without clear frameworks. Administrators acknowledged a general lack of awareness and structured support systems, which hindered the effective handling of potential cases. They emphasized the importance of establishing transparent reporting mechanisms and fostering a culture of accountability to prevent and address abuse.

### Austria

Sport administrators in Austria highlighted that although no formal cases had been reported within the last 12 months, broader awareness was raised following public disclosures by a well-known former athlete. This case helped illuminate systemic issues and encouraged organizations to reassess their reporting and handling procedures. Administrators noted that incidents of harassment and grooming, such as inappropriate compliments or gestures, were sometimes reported informally by coaches rather than athletes. They emphasized the importance of clear case management systems, including protocols for addressing criminal behavior and boundary violations, to create a safer environment. Austria's focus on involving external support services and ensuring visible communication of available resources was commended.

### Comparative Observations

#### 1. Frequency of Reporting:

- In countries like Cyprus and Spain, incidents were reported but often did not progress due to systemic challenges, such as withdrawal by victims or delays in processing.
- Austria and Greece noted significant underreporting, with cases often surfacing informally or through public disclosures rather than official channels.

#### 2. Handling Mechanisms:

- Cyprus demonstrated a relatively structured approach, leveraging trauma-informed procedures and collaborations with police and external stakeholders.

- Other countries, such as Italy and Bulgaria, relied on ad hoc measures, highlighting the need for formalized guidelines and transparent processes.
- 3. Cultural and Systemic Barriers:
  - Across countries, administrators identified cultural stigma, fear of retaliation, and authority dynamics as major barriers to reporting and addressing cases of sexual violence.
  - Spain and Greece emphasized the critical role of education and independent oversight in overcoming these barriers.
- 4. Support for Survivors:
  - Austria and Spain underscored the importance of providing psychological and legal support, while Cyprus emphasized trauma-informed approaches.
  - Limited survivor support mechanisms were noted in Bulgaria and Greece, reflecting gaps in resources and organizational commitment.

### Recommendations

- **Standardized Protocols:** Develop comprehensive, enforceable guidelines for reporting and handling cases, ensuring consistency across all organizations.
- **Survivor-Centered Support:** Establish dedicated support systems, including psychologists and legal advisors, to assist survivors throughout the reporting process.
- **Independent Oversight:** Implement external monitoring bodies to ensure impartial handling of cases and build trust among athletes and staff.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Promote education on recognizing, reporting, and addressing abuse to break cultural stigmas and empower victims to come forward.
- **Resource Allocation:** Provide funding and training for smaller organizations to build capacity for managing cases effectively.

By addressing these challenges and implementing robust measures, sports organizations in these countries can enhance their ability to manage cases of sexual violence, fostering a culture of accountability and safety for all athletes.

## 5. Supporting Survivors of Sexual Violence: Insights from Sport Administrators Across Partner Countries

### Cyprus

Sport administrators in Cyprus discussed the limited but significant steps taken by the Cyprus Sports Association (CSA) and some large sports federations to support survivors. Administrators highlighted the CSA's trauma-informed approach, which includes guidance on reporting incidents and connecting survivors with professional help. The CSA's collaboration with police and external stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations, ensures that survivors receive multidisciplinary support. However, administrators acknowledged gaps in smaller federations, which lack resources and mechanisms to provide comprehensive support. They stressed the need for centralized support systems, including access to psychologists and legal assistance, to address survivors' needs effectively.

## Greece

Sport administrators in Greece argued that sports organizations had taken minimal steps to support survivors, reflecting broader challenges in addressing sexual violence. While some organizations expressed the importance of victim support, practical measures were often lacking. Administrators emphasized the role of psychological support and proposed involving external professionals, such as psychologists or social workers, to offer assistance. They also discussed the cultural reluctance to acknowledge sexual violence, which limits survivors' willingness to seek help. Suggestions included integrating survivor support into broader organizational frameworks and fostering a more open and supportive culture.

## Spain

Sport administrators in Spain highlighted several measures aimed at supporting survivors, including providing access to team therapists and mental health professionals. They stressed the importance of safe spaces and clear reporting channels, where survivors can feel comfortable discussing their experiences without fear of judgment or retaliation. Administrators also emphasized ongoing training for staff and athletes to help them recognize and support survivors effectively. However, they noted challenges in ensuring that survivors receive timely and adequate support, particularly in cases involving minors or those intimidated by authority figures.

## Italy

Sport administrators in Italy discussed various approaches to supporting survivors, focusing on the integration of psychologists and safeguarding officers within organizations. They described protocols such as anonymous reporting mechanisms and designated personnel for handling complaints sensitively. Administrators highlighted examples of organizations conducting post-incident evaluations to identify gaps and improve future responses. Despite these efforts, they acknowledged resource constraints in smaller organizations, which often struggle to offer long-term psychological or legal support to survivors. The importance of embedding survivor support within ethical and operational frameworks was emphasized as a priority for future initiatives.

## Bulgaria

Sport administrators in Bulgaria argued that while there were no reported cases within their organizations, broader discussions revealed a lack of structured support mechanisms for survivors. Administrators acknowledged that efforts to establish support systems had been minimal, often hindered by limited resources and awareness. They stressed the importance of creating clear guidelines and access to professional support services, including legal and psychological assistance, to ensure survivors are adequately supported. The absence of institutional frameworks was identified as a key barrier to implementing effective survivor support strategies.

## Austria

Sport administrators in Austria highlighted a robust framework for supporting survivors, including access to internal and external support services such as sports psychologists and counselors. Administrators emphasized the importance of visible communication about available resources, ensuring that survivors are aware of the help they can access. They discussed initiatives to create safe



environments, such as involving prevention officers and trust persons, who act as points of contact for athletes. Administrators also noted efforts to involve survivors in developing reporting systems and safe spaces, ensuring their experiences inform future improvements.

### Comparative Observations

#### 1. Trauma-Informed Support:

- Cyprus and Austria have implemented trauma-informed approaches, integrating multidisciplinary support systems to address survivors' needs.
- Spain and Italy focus on providing access to psychologists and safeguarding officers, though resource limitations often hinder smaller organizations.

#### 2. Psychological Assistance:

- Psychological support is a recurring theme, with Austria and Spain emphasizing the availability of mental health professionals and safe spaces for survivors.
- Greece and Bulgaria identified gaps in psychological assistance, reflecting broader systemic challenges.

#### 3. Institutional Challenges:

- Smaller organizations in Cyprus, Italy, and Bulgaria struggle to establish structured survivor support systems due to financial and logistical constraints.
- Greece and Bulgaria also noted cultural and organizational reluctance to address sexual violence openly, limiting survivor support.

#### 4. Proactive vs. Reactive Measures:

- Austria and Spain emphasize proactive measures, including the development of safe spaces and training programs to support survivors.
- Other countries, such as Greece and Bulgaria, focus on reactive measures, addressing survivor support on a case-by-case basis.

### Recommendations

- **Centralized Support Systems:** Establish national frameworks to provide consistent access to psychological, legal, and social support for survivors.
- **Awareness and Education:** Conduct training programs for staff, athletes, and administrators to recognize, report, and support survivors effectively.
- **Resource Allocation:** Provide funding and logistical support for smaller organizations to build survivor support mechanisms.
- **Survivor-Centered Policies:** Develop policies that prioritize the needs of survivors, including confidentiality, accessibility, and multidisciplinary assistance.
- **Cultural Shifts:** Promote openness and accountability within sports organizations to reduce stigma and encourage survivors to seek help.

By addressing these gaps and building on existing initiatives, sports organizations in these countries can create a safer and more supportive environment for survivors of sexual violence. These steps are essential for fostering a culture of accountability and respect within the sports community.

## 1. Training on Recognizing Signs of Sexual Violence: Insights from Coaches Across Partner Countries

### Cyprus

Coaches in Cyprus discussed that most of them had not undergone formal training on recognizing signs of potential sexual violence among athletes. While some had been exposed to general awareness initiatives, they emphasized a lack of practical, in-depth education. One safeguarding officer noted that the Cyprus Sports Association (CSA) had introduced protocols and a guidebook against sexual harassment, but these were not widely disseminated or adopted at the grassroots level. Coaches expressed a need for more structured and accessible training sessions, supplemented by audiovisual tools and interactive seminars to enhance understanding. Without this, many coaches felt unqualified to identify or handle such cases.

### Greece

Coaches in Greece highlighted that no formal or structured training had been provided on recognizing signs of sexual violence. They acknowledged that some courses on gender equality and child protection were offered as part of broader coaching certifications but noted that these were more informational than practical. Coaches reported relying on personal research or informal discussions for knowledge on this subject. They underscored the need for professional training programs that go beyond raising awareness to include actionable steps, such as recognizing behavioral changes and responding appropriately to suspected abuse.

### Spain

Coaches in Spain argued that training on recognizing signs of sexual violence should be mandatory across all sports organizations. Participants agreed on the importance of equipping coaches with the skills to identify subtle behavioral changes, such as withdrawal or distress, that might indicate abuse. While some had participated in general awareness programs, they emphasized the need for consistent, formal training to ensure a uniform understanding among coaches. Coaches also noted the challenges posed by power dynamics and stressed the value of open communication and inclusivity to build trust within teams.

### Italy

Coaches in Italy discussed that none of them had undergone specific training to recognize sexual violence in sports. They noted that while they try to create open environments for athletes to share their concerns, the absence of formal education left them unprepared for identifying or addressing such cases. Coaches emphasized the importance of setting examples through positive behavior, avoiding inappropriate jokes, and addressing boundary-related issues proactively. They highlighted the need for external resources, such as psychologists or dedicated safeguarding officers, to support both athletes and coaches in handling sensitive situations.

### Bulgaria

Coaches in Bulgaria highlighted that only a few had received specialized training on recognizing sexual violence, primarily through mandatory courses at the Vasil Levski National Sports Academy. These courses focused on general child psychology and pedagogy rather than specific strategies for

identifying sexual violence. Coaches expressed a desire for more targeted training and resources to bridge this gap. They also noted that many organizations had reporting channels in place, but awareness and utilization of these systems were limited. Comprehensive education programs and regular workshops were suggested as ways to improve the situation.

### Austria

Coaches in Austria discussed that some had undergone detailed training on recognizing sexual violence, including how to identify behavioral changes such as mood swings or withdrawal. These training sessions emphasized the importance of creating supportive environments where athletes feel comfortable expressing their concerns. However, they acknowledged that not all coaches had equal access to such programs, with those in larger organizations benefiting more than those in smaller, resource-limited settings. Coaches stressed the value of continuous education and the inclusion of psychologists to provide professional support.

### Comparative Observations

1. Training Availability:
  - Austria and Spain showed a stronger commitment to providing training, although accessibility varied.
  - Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Bulgaria lacked consistent or comprehensive programs, leaving coaches to rely on informal knowledge or personal initiatives.
2. Barriers to Implementation:
  - Resource limitations and the absence of mandatory training requirements were common barriers across Cyprus, Greece, and Bulgaria.
  - Italy highlighted cultural reluctance and a lack of external support as additional challenges.
3. Emphasis on Professional Support:
  - Coaches in Italy, Spain, and Austria stressed the need for external professionals, such as psychologists or safeguarding officers, to complement their efforts.
  - Bulgaria and Greece noted a lack of institutional support for integrating professional expertise into sports settings.
4. Uniformity in Training:
  - Coaches in Spain and Austria emphasized the importance of standardized training to ensure all coaches have the skills to recognize and address sexual violence effectively.
  - Other countries lacked uniform approaches, with significant disparities in training availability and quality.

### Recommendations

- **Mandatory Training Programs:** Develop and implement compulsory, standardized training for all coaches, focusing on practical strategies for recognizing and responding to sexual violence.
- **Enhanced Resources:** Provide funding and logistical support to ensure smaller organizations and individual coaches can access training and professional support.

- Regular Refreshers: Offer ongoing education through workshops, seminars, and digital tools to reinforce knowledge and adapt to emerging challenges.
- Integration of Experts: Incorporate psychologists and safeguarding officers into sports organizations to support coaches and athletes in managing sensitive situations.
- Cultural Shifts: Promote awareness campaigns to reduce stigma, encourage reporting, and foster a culture of openness and respect.

By addressing these gaps and building on existing initiatives, partner countries can empower coaches to create safer sports environments and ensure athletes receive the protection and support they deserve.

## 2. Awareness of Reporting Channels for Sexual Violence: Insights from Coaches Across Partner Countries

### Cyprus

Coaches in Cyprus highlighted a general lack of awareness regarding formal reporting channels within their organizations. While a few coaches were familiar with external resources, such as hotlines operated by the Association for the Prevention and Handling of Violence in the Family, most admitted that their federations had not provided clear guidance. Coaches noted that although the Cyprus Sports Association (CSA) had introduced protocols for handling sexual violence, these were not widely disseminated or enforced. Many coaches expressed frustration with the absence of structured support systems and emphasized the need for federations to actively promote reporting mechanisms and educate stakeholders about their availability and use.

### Greece

Coaches in Greece argued that formal reporting channels within sports organizations were either non-existent or poorly communicated. They described a reliance on informal mechanisms, where athletes often confided in trusted coaches rather than using official systems. Coaches attributed this to the absence of dedicated departments or guidelines addressing sexual violence within federations. They emphasized that athletes were frequently unaware of their rights and the steps to report abuse, with federations focusing on logistical and operational priorities instead. To address this gap, participants suggested establishing specialized units or pillars within sports organizations to handle sensitive issues like sexual violence.

### Spain

Coaches in Spain discussed the uncertainty surrounding existing reporting channels, with many questioning their accessibility and effectiveness. Participants expressed concerns that some mechanisms, such as direct complaints to club presidents, were inadequate and potentially intimidating for survivors. They advocated for more structured and transparent systems that prioritize confidentiality and provide clear steps for athletes to report incidents safely. Coaches also suggested including external services, such as social workers, to ensure survivors receive professional support. The lack of formal communication about reporting channels was identified as a key barrier to encouraging athletes to come forward.

## Italy

Coaches in Italy highlighted that there were no official reporting channels within their organizations for athletes experiencing sexual violence. Instead, coaches shared practical methods they personally employed to support athletes, such as being accessible outside training hours and fostering open communication. While these efforts were commendable, they relied on individual initiative rather than institutional support. Coaches emphasized the importance of establishing formal systems that ensure survivors can report incidents discreetly and without fear of retaliation. They also noted that involving external experts, such as psychologists or safeguarding officers, could improve trust and accessibility within the reporting process.

## Bulgaria

Coaches in Bulgaria argued that while many sports organizations had reporting mechanisms in place, awareness and utilization of these systems were limited. Coaches indicated that reporting channels were often not communicated effectively to athletes or staff, leaving them unaware of their existence. They suggested that federations should implement comprehensive education campaigns to ensure all stakeholders understand the reporting process. Coaches also emphasized the importance of creating safe environments where athletes feel comfortable disclosing incidents of sexual violence without fear of judgment or repercussion.

## Austria

Coaches in Austria discussed that most were aware of reporting channels within their organizations, which included direct communication with coaches and anonymous reporting systems. They praised the transparency and accessibility of these mechanisms, noting that they encouraged openness and trust among athletes. However, some coaches highlighted disparities in awareness and access across different sports organizations, with smaller clubs often lacking the resources to implement similar systems. Coaches stressed the need for ongoing education to ensure that all athletes and staff are informed about reporting options and feel confident using them.

## Comparative Observations

1. Awareness Levels:
  - Coaches in Austria and Bulgaria were relatively more aware of reporting channels, though disparities in communication and access persisted.
  - Cyprus, Greece, Spain, and Italy reported significant gaps in awareness, with many coaches relying on informal mechanisms rather than structured systems.
2. Barriers to Reporting:
  - Across all countries, cultural stigma and fear of retaliation were common barriers that discouraged athletes from reporting incidents.
  - Coaches in Spain and Greece highlighted the inadequacy of existing systems, which often lacked confidentiality and accessibility.
3. Reliance on Informal Mechanisms:



- In the absence of formal systems, coaches in Italy and Cyprus relied on personal initiatives, such as being accessible and fostering open communication.
  - While these efforts demonstrated individual commitment, they underscored the lack of institutional support.
4. Need for External Support:
- Coaches in Spain, Italy, and Greece emphasized the importance of involving external professionals, such as psychologists or social workers, to handle sensitive issues effectively.
  - Bulgaria and Austria advocated for integrating professional guidance into existing systems to enhance their effectiveness.

### Recommendations

- **Standardized Reporting Mechanisms:** Establish clear, accessible, and confidential reporting channels across all sports organizations to ensure uniformity and reliability.
- **Education and Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct regular training sessions for athletes, coaches, and staff to familiarize them with reporting processes and their rights.
- **Integration of External Professionals:** Involve psychologists, social workers, and safeguarding officers in the reporting and support process to provide professional assistance.
- **Enhanced Communication:** Promote the visibility of reporting mechanisms through workshops, informational materials, and digital platforms.
- **Focus on Smaller Organizations:** Allocate resources and support to smaller clubs and federations to ensure they can implement and sustain robust reporting systems.

By addressing these gaps and promoting a culture of accountability, sports organizations in these countries can empower athletes to report incidents and create safer environments for all stakeholders.

### 3. Fostering Respect and Communication: Insights from Coaches Across Partner Countries

#### Cyprus

Coaches in Cyprus highlighted the importance of discussing boundaries with athletes at the beginning of each season. Female coaches, in particular, reported taking the initiative to foster open communication, often based on personal knowledge and experience rather than formal guidelines. They shared how they actively encourage athletes to voice their concerns and respect each other's personal choices. However, most coaches acknowledged the lack of structured training or resources provided by their federations to support these efforts. They suggested that sports authorities should develop interactive tools, such as games or audiovisual materials, to help coaches create more engaging and educational environments.

### **Greece**

Coaches in Greece argued that fostering respect and communication begins with building genuine relationships with athletes. Coaches emphasized the need for open dialogue to address boundaries and personal choices. They noted that trust plays a crucial role in helping athletes feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues. Coaches also suggested using team-building exercises and structured discussions to encourage mutual respect among athletes. Despite these efforts, they admitted that institutional support and formal training on this topic were lacking. Many coaches highlighted the need for federations to take a more active role in promoting respectful communication within sports settings.

### **Spain**

Coaches in Spain discussed strategies for fostering an environment of respect and communication, emphasizing the importance of starting these conversations early in an athlete's training. They advocated for involving external services, such as social workers, to address issues related to boundaries and personal choices. Coaches shared how they encourage athletes to express their concerns and respect others' limits through team discussions and inclusive activities. Additionally, they highlighted the role of female coaches in creating comfortable spaces for athletes to discuss sensitive topics. Despite these efforts, participants noted that more comprehensive support and training are needed to ensure consistency across organizations.

### **Italy**

Coaches in Italy emphasized that leading by example is critical to fostering respect and communication. They shared strategies such as addressing inappropriate jokes or comments immediately and modeling positive behavior to set the tone for respectful interactions. Coaches also highlighted the importance of maintaining open communication with athletes, asking for consent during physical interactions, and creating opportunities for athletes to voice their boundaries. Participants noted that fostering mutual respect involves understanding the power dynamics between coaches and athletes and ensuring that all athletes feel safe and valued. However, they acknowledged the lack of formal training or institutional guidance on implementing these practices.

### **Bulgaria**

Coaches in Bulgaria highlighted the use of educational programs and team-building activities to promote respect and communication among athletes. They stressed the importance of creating a supportive atmosphere where athletes feel comfortable discussing their boundaries. Coaches also shared how they integrate lessons on consent and respect into regular training sessions, using practical examples to illustrate appropriate behavior. Despite these efforts, participants noted that the absence of structured resources and guidance from federations limits the effectiveness of their initiatives. They called for federations to provide clear codes of conduct and regular workshops to reinforce these values.

## Austria

Coaches in Austria discussed the critical role of open communication and mutual respect in creating a positive sports environment. They emphasized team meetings and discussions as key strategies for ensuring athletes feel heard and respected. Coaches shared how they establish clear rules about personal boundaries and use team-building exercises to reinforce these principles. Some participants also highlighted the importance of involving athletes in decision-making processes, which fosters a sense of ownership and accountability. While many coaches had undergone formal training, they noted disparities in resources between larger and smaller organizations, which affected the implementation of these practices.

## Comparative Observations

1. Focus on Open Communication:
  - Across all countries, coaches emphasized the importance of fostering open dialogue to build trust and encourage athletes to express their boundaries and concerns.
  - Coaches in Greece, Spain, and Austria specifically highlighted team discussions and activities as effective tools for promoting respect.
2. Role of Coaches as Leaders:
  - Italy and Cyprus emphasized the role of coaches in setting examples through their behavior, with a focus on addressing inappropriate conduct immediately and modeling positive interactions.
  - Bulgaria and Austria highlighted the need for coaches to act as facilitators, guiding athletes to understand and respect personal boundaries.
3. Educational Tools and Resources:
  - Cyprus and Bulgaria called for the development of structured resources, such as games, audiovisual tools, and codes of conduct, to support their efforts in promoting respect and communication.
  - Austria noted disparities in access to resources, with smaller organizations struggling to implement these practices effectively.
4. Involvement of External Stakeholders:
  - Coaches in Spain and Italy suggested involving external professionals, such as social workers and psychologists, to enhance support for athletes and create more inclusive environments.

## Recommendations

- **Formal Training Programs:** Develop and implement standardized training for coaches on fostering respectful communication and understanding personal boundaries.
- **Accessible Resources:** Provide educational materials and tools, such as interactive games and guidebooks, to help coaches effectively promote these values among athletes.

- **Team-Building Activities:** Encourage the use of structured activities and workshops to reinforce mutual respect and communication within teams.
- **Institutional Support:** Ensure federations take an active role in promoting these values by offering clear codes of conduct and regular training sessions.
- **Engagement of Professionals:** Involve psychologists and social workers to provide additional support and address complex issues related to boundaries and respect.

By addressing these gaps and building on existing initiatives, sports organizations can create environments where athletes feel valued, respected, and empowered to communicate openly. These efforts are crucial for fostering a culture of mutual respect and safety within sports communities.

#### 4. Discussing Appropriate Physical Contact in Sports: Insights from Coaches Across Partner Countries

##### Cyprus

Coaches in Cyprus highlighted that discussions about appropriate physical contact with athletes are rare and often left to the discretion of individual coaches. Female coaches were more likely to address this topic, with one coach emphasizing the importance of distinguishing technical touches from inappropriate behavior. Some participants shared their personal efforts to communicate with athletes about boundaries, but they acknowledged the lack of formalized guidelines or institutional support. Coaches expressed concern over potential misinterpretations of physical contact and called for standardized training and clear protocols to ensure all coaches and athletes understand acceptable practices.

##### Greece

Coaches in Greece argued that discussions on appropriate physical contact are not systematically addressed in their organizations. While some coaches expressed awareness of the importance of the topic, they relied on informal approaches, such as maintaining open communication and observing athletes' reactions during training. Participants acknowledged the cultural sensitivity surrounding physical contact in sports, especially when working with minors, and stressed the need for structured training to equip coaches with the skills to navigate these situations appropriately. They suggested that federations develop comprehensive policies to guide coaches and athletes on maintaining respectful and professional interactions.

##### Spain

Coaches in Spain discussed the critical role of regular education and communication about physical contact in creating a safe environment for athletes. Participants emphasized that sexual violence is often under-discussed in sports, making it essential to break stigmas and promote openness. Coaches shared examples of how they approach the topic, such as conducting annual training sessions and using real-life scenarios to illustrate appropriate behavior. They also highlighted the benefits of having female coaches, who are often perceived as more approachable and trustworthy, particularly by

younger athletes. Despite these efforts, coaches noted the need for additional resources and institutional support to ensure consistency across all organizations.

### Italy

Coaches in Italy highlighted the importance of seeking athletes' consent before engaging in any physical contact during training. Participants shared how they proactively ask athletes if they feel comfortable with specific actions, such as physical guidance during exercises. They noted that understanding the distinction between technical and inappropriate touch is crucial, especially given the power dynamics in coach-athlete relationships. Coaches also acknowledged the challenges of addressing inappropriate behavior when it occurs, emphasizing the need for clear protocols and professional support to handle such situations effectively.

### Bulgaria

Coaches in Bulgaria argued that discussions about appropriate physical contact often occur during training but are not formalized or systematically addressed. Coaches shared their strategies for educating athletes about boundaries, such as providing examples of acceptable supportive gestures like patting on the back. They also emphasized the importance of reinforcing respect for personal space and consent in all physical interactions. Participants noted the absence of institutionalized training on this topic and called for regular workshops and education programs to ensure a unified approach to promoting safety and well-being in sports.

### Austria

Coaches in Austria discussed how they integrate conversations about physical contact into their regular training sessions, using clear guidelines to educate athletes on what is acceptable. Participants emphasized the importance of age-appropriate communication, with younger athletes receiving more general instructions and older athletes engaging in detailed discussions about consent and boundaries. Coaches also highlighted the need for continuous education to adapt to evolving societal norms and ensure athletes feel comfortable and respected. Despite these proactive measures, participants noted disparities in the availability of training resources, particularly in smaller organizations.

### Comparative Observations

1. Frequency of Discussions:
  - Austria and Spain demonstrated a stronger commitment to regular and structured discussions on physical contact, incorporating them into their training routines.
  - Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Bulgaria lacked formal approaches, with discussions occurring sporadically or at the initiative of individual coaches.
2. Use of Consent-Based Practices:
  - Italy and Austria emphasized the importance of seeking athletes' consent and ensuring they feel comfortable during physical interactions.



- Coaches in Spain also highlighted the role of education in helping athletes understand and assert their boundaries.
- 3. Barriers to Implementation:
  - Coaches in Cyprus, Greece, and Bulgaria noted the absence of institutional support and standardized guidelines as significant obstacles.
  - Spain and Austria identified resource disparities and cultural stigmas as additional challenges.
- 4. Role of Gender Dynamics:
  - Coaches in Spain and Italy discussed how the presence of female coaches often creates a safer environment for younger athletes to discuss sensitive topics.
  - This dynamic was less emphasized in other countries, reflecting cultural differences in perceptions of authority and trust.

### Recommendations

- **Standardized Training Programs:** Develop mandatory training modules for coaches on appropriate physical contact, emphasizing consent, communication, and respect.
- **Clear Guidelines and Protocols:** Establish and disseminate comprehensive policies to guide coaches and athletes in understanding acceptable physical interactions.
- **Regular Education Sessions:** Conduct annual workshops and seminars for athletes, coaches, and staff to reinforce the importance of maintaining professional and respectful boundaries.
- **Resource Allocation:** Provide funding and support for smaller organizations to implement these practices consistently.
- **Inclusive Approaches:** Encourage the inclusion of female coaches and diverse perspectives to create a more approachable and balanced coaching environment.

By addressing these gaps and implementing these recommendations, sports organizations can foster a culture of safety and respect, ensuring that athletes feel secure and empowered in their training environments.

## 5. Addressing Sexual Violence in Sports: Insights from Coaches Across Partner Countries

### Cyprus

In Cyprus, the approach to suspected or reported sexual violence is still developing. Coaches largely depend on personal judgment and informal protocols due to the lack of structured training or standardized reporting channels. Some female coaches emphasize consulting survivors, encouraging them to report to the police, and fostering trust by discussing boundaries at the start of the season. However, many expressed uncertainty about their role, often feeling unqualified to identify or handle such cases. Strategies to create a safe environment include raising awareness through practical tools and games, though implementation remains inconsistent.

### Greece

Greek coaches highlighted the absence of formal training or established reporting mechanisms. Their knowledge often comes from personal research rather than institutional support. Trust-building is a central strategy, achieved through consistent communication, empathy, and genuine care for athletes. Coaches stressed the importance of fostering respect through proactive discussions about boundaries and using team-building exercises. They also emphasized the need for professional training to equip them with tools to address sexual violence effectively and advocated for systemic changes, such as counseling services and tailored reporting structures.

### **Spain**

In Spain, participants agreed that formal training and accessible reporting channels are crucial but noted gaps in their availability. Coaches emphasize open communication, involving families, and creating an inclusive environment where athletes feel supported. To address sexual violence, they prioritize breaking the stigma through regular discussions and training. Female coaches are often perceived as more approachable, which can foster a safer space for athletes to share concerns. Strategies include encouraging mixed-gender team participation to challenge stereotypes and introducing yearly workshops to educate athletes and coaches.

### **Italy**

Italian coaches lack formal mechanisms or training to address sexual violence. Instead, they rely on fostering trust by being available to athletes and maintaining respectful communication. They focus on observing behavioral changes and discussing appropriate physical contact openly. Preventative measures, like setting examples and using critical thinking to challenge inappropriate jokes or behaviors, are emphasized. Coaches believe external professionals, such as psychologists, are crucial for supporting athletes and handling reports of sexual violence objectively.

### **Bulgaria**

In Bulgaria, most coaches have not received targeted training on sexual violence but are aware of confidential reporting mechanisms in their organizations. Coaches advocate for structured workshops and team-building exercises to promote communication and respect. Protocols for addressing reported cases involve involving trained professionals and maintaining confidentiality. Additionally, anonymous reporting channels and education on safe interactions are prioritized to create a supportive environment.

### **Austria**

Austrian coaches benefit from comprehensive training, equipping them to recognize signs of sexual violence and establish transparent reporting processes. They foster safe environments through open communication, team-building activities, and setting clear rules on respecting boundaries. Coaches emphasize the importance of immediate action when concerns arise, ensuring athletes feel safe and supported. Regular training for coaches and anonymous reporting mechanisms further strengthen their ability to address these issues effectively.

## Comparative Observations

### Training and Awareness

- Cyprus, Greece, and Italy: Coaches generally lack formal training on identifying and addressing sexual violence. Their knowledge often stems from personal research or informal discussions, which limits their effectiveness in handling sensitive cases.
- Austria: Coaches undergo comprehensive training that equips them with practical tools to recognize signs of sexual violence and address these issues systematically.
- Spain and Bulgaria: While formal training is emphasized as important in Spain, it is inconsistently implemented. Bulgaria offers some training through general courses but lacks a specific focus on sexual violence.

### Reporting Channels

- Cyprus, Greece, and Italy: Reporting mechanisms are underdeveloped, with coaches and athletes relying on informal or ad-hoc processes. Trust in individual coaches plays a significant role in disclosures.
- Austria and Bulgaria: These countries have clearer and more accessible reporting systems, including anonymous channels, ensuring a safer environment for athletes to report incidents.
- Spain: Participants expressed skepticism about existing reporting procedures and called for more formal and effective systems.

### Creating a Safe Environment

- All Countries: Coaches across countries emphasize the importance of fostering trust, communication, and respect among athletes. Open dialogue and proactive discussions about boundaries are common strategies.
- Austria and Bulgaria: Structured activities like workshops and team-building exercises are used effectively to promote mutual respect and awareness.
- Italy, Spain, and Greece: Coaches focus on observational skills and personal relationships to maintain a safe environment but lack formal frameworks to ensure consistency.

### Role of External Professionals:

- Italy and Spain: Both countries highlighted the need for external professionals, such as psychologists, to provide unbiased support and assist in handling sensitive cases.
- Austria and Bulgaria: Coaches noted the value of trained professionals but have some access to these resources through existing systems.
- Cyprus and Greece: External support is rarely integrated, leaving coaches to navigate these challenges independently.

### Cultural and Institutional Support

- Austria and Bulgaria: Institutions provide relatively more structured support, with codes of conduct and clear guidelines in place.
- Cyprus, Greece, and Italy: Institutional efforts are minimal, with federations often neglecting the issue of sexual violence in favor of logistical priorities.
- Spain: Cultural norms and biases sometimes hinder open discussions, although mixed-gender team settings help challenge stereotypes.

## Recommendations

### Implement Comprehensive Training

- Develop standardized, mandatory training programs across all countries, focusing on recognizing signs of sexual violence, effective intervention, and fostering trust. Austria's model can serve as a benchmark.

### Establish Clear Reporting Channels

- Create accessible, anonymous, and confidential reporting systems in all sports organizations. These should be clearly communicated to athletes, coaches, and families.

### Enhance Institutional Frameworks

- Sports federations and governing bodies must prioritize athlete protection by introducing policies, codes of conduct, and dedicated departments to address sexual violence.

### Leverage External Expertise

- Integrate psychologists and legal experts into sports systems to provide specialized support for athletes and coaches. These professionals should be available at both organizational and grassroots levels.

### Promote a Culture of Respect and Awareness

- Conduct regular workshops and team-building exercises to teach respect and consent. Mixed-gender team activities and discussions can be leveraged to break down stereotypes and encourage inclusivity.

### Monitor and Evaluate Progress

- Establish a system for regular evaluation of policies, training programs, and reporting mechanisms to ensure they remain effective and relevant.

### Secure Funding and Resources

- Allocate funding for training, psychological support, and infrastructure development. Seek government or organizational grants to sustain these initiatives.

### Tailor Approaches to Context

- Consider the specific cultural and structural challenges of each country and sport when designing interventions, ensuring relevance and effectiveness.

## 6. Handling Behavioral Concerns and Addressing Misconduct: Insights from Coaches Across Partner Countries

### Cyprus

Coaches in Cyprus highlighted a lack of formal guidance and resources for handling behavioral concerns or misconduct related to sexual violence within their coaching staff. Participants noted that they often relied on personal judgment in dealing with such issues, citing uncertainty about the correct procedures or authority to report to. Some coaches stressed the importance of fostering a culture of accountability and transparency, suggesting that federations develop clear guidelines and provide ongoing training. They also emphasized the need for psychological support services and legal resources to assist both coaches and athletes when addressing such concerns.

### **Greece**

Coaches in Greece argued that systemic gaps in federations left coaches without adequate support for handling misconduct related to sexual violence. Participants highlighted the absence of clear codes of conduct or disciplinary processes for addressing inappropriate behavior among coaching staff. They expressed concerns about the lack of external oversight, which often resulted in misconduct being handled informally or ignored altogether. Coaches suggested that federations establish dedicated committees to investigate and resolve complaints and called for the inclusion of external experts to ensure unbiased decision-making. They also emphasized the need for accessible resources, such as legal advisors and mental health professionals, to support both the victims and those handling the cases.

### **Spain**

Coaches in Spain discussed the challenges of addressing misconduct, particularly in cases where hierarchical or interpersonal dynamics complicated the resolution process. They stressed the importance of immediate intervention when inappropriate behavior occurs, advocating for zero tolerance toward sexual violence. Coaches also highlighted the risks of misconduct being underreported due to fear of retaliation or stigma. They suggested establishing anonymous reporting channels and mandatory training programs to educate staff about acceptable behavior and the consequences of violations. Participants identified the need for external safeguarding officers and psychologists to provide impartial support and guidance in handling these cases.

### **Italy**

Coaches in Italy emphasized the critical role of education and awareness in preventing and addressing misconduct within coaching staff. They highlighted the importance of setting clear expectations for behavior and consistently enforcing codes of conduct. Coaches shared examples of how they intervene when misconduct is suspected, such as having direct conversations with the individuals involved and seeking to mediate conflicts. However, they acknowledged the challenges of addressing systemic issues without institutional backing. Participants called for the development of formalized reporting systems and the inclusion of external professionals to provide expertise and ensure accountability in resolving cases.

### **Bulgaria**

Coaches in Bulgaria highlighted that many sports organizations lacked structured processes for handling misconduct related to sexual violence, leaving coaches to manage these issues informally. They emphasized the importance of implementing clear codes of conduct and rigorous investigative procedures to address such concerns. Participants called for more robust support systems, including access to trained professionals and legal advisors, to assist in managing these cases effectively. They also stressed the need for regular training and education to equip coaches with the skills to recognize and address inappropriate behavior proactively.

### **Austria**



Coaches in Austria discussed a proactive approach to handling behavioral concerns, emphasizing adherence to established reporting procedures and the involvement of external experts. They shared examples of how they maintain transparency and accountability by reporting incidents promptly and ensuring they are handled professionally. Participants highlighted the value of consistent education and the integration of psychologists into coaching teams to provide ongoing support. However, they acknowledged disparities in the availability of resources across smaller organizations, which limited their capacity to implement these practices effectively. Coaches called for increased funding and centralized support to bridge these gaps.

### Comparative Observations

1. Informal vs. Formal Approaches:
  - Austria and Spain demonstrated more structured approaches, with mechanisms like anonymous reporting channels and the inclusion of safeguarding officers.
  - Cyprus, Greece, and Bulgaria relied on informal strategies, underscoring the need for institutionalized processes and clear guidelines.
2. Role of Education and Training:
  - Across all countries, coaches emphasized the importance of regular training to raise awareness about acceptable behavior and equip staff with the skills to address misconduct.
  - Italy and Greece highlighted the need for tailored training to address systemic issues and power dynamics within coaching environments.
3. Support Systems:
  - Austria and Spain emphasized the integration of psychologists and legal advisors as essential components of their support systems.
  - Coaches in Cyprus and Bulgaria called for greater institutional investment in resources to assist in managing cases effectively.
4. Accountability Mechanisms:
  - Greece and Italy noted the absence of external oversight and called for independent committees to ensure unbiased handling of complaints.
  - Spain and Austria focused on transparency and adherence to established protocols to foster accountability and trust.

### Recommendations

- Establishment of Reporting Mechanisms: Develop formal, anonymous reporting systems to ensure athletes and staff feel safe reporting misconduct without fear of retaliation.
- Regular Training Programs: Provide mandatory, ongoing education for all coaching staff on recognizing, preventing, and addressing sexual violence and misconduct.
- Integration of Professionals: Include safeguarding officers, psychologists, and legal advisors in sports organizations to offer specialized support in managing cases.

- Clear Codes of Conduct: Enforce comprehensive behavioral guidelines with clear consequences for violations to promote a culture of accountability.
- Institutional Support: Allocate resources to smaller organizations to implement these measures effectively, ensuring consistency across all levels of sports.

By addressing these gaps and fostering a proactive approach, sports organizations can create safer environments where athletes and coaching staff are protected and supported. These efforts are crucial for building a culture of respect, accountability, and trust within sports communities.

### 1. Defining Sexual Violence in Sports: Insights From Athletes Across Partner Countries

The focus group discussions with athletes were intentionally divided by gender to ensure a safe and comfortable environment where participants could freely express their views on sexual violence without fear of intimidation. This approach aimed to make athletes of both genders feel respected, heard, and free from judgment, especially if their perspectives differed from those of the opposite gender. Regarding the reporting, some partners submitted separate reports for male and female athletes, while others opted for a unified report covering both sexes. Consequently, the summaries of these reports will be presented inclusively, reflecting the insights of all athletes per partner country.

#### Cyprus

In Cyprus, female athletes defined sexual violence in sports as a spectrum of behaviors ranging from physical contact, such as inappropriate touching during massages, to non-physical acts like lewd comments, visual exploitation, and catcalling. The discussions emphasized the role of context and personal boundaries, where the same action might be perceived differently based on individual traits or upbringing. They also highlighted the psychological impact of such incidents, particularly when victims feel silenced by societal taboos or fear of judgment. Athletes underscored the lack of clear boundaries in sports and the difficulty in addressing misconduct when trust between athletes and coaches is exploited. Despite acknowledging progress in societal awareness, participants felt there remains insufficient education and preventative measures within the sports system. Notably, no male-specific perspectives were available in the reporting, leaving a gap in understanding potential differences in experiences or definitions between genders.

#### Greece

Greek athletes identified sexual violence in sports as a combination of physical, verbal, and non-verbal actions that violate consent and personal boundaries. Verbal harassment, such as inappropriate jokes, and coercive behaviors tied to power dynamics, were highlighted as common forms. Female athletes particularly stressed the progression of such violence, often starting as minor comments and escalating over time. They also pointed to the normalization of such behaviors in sports culture, where inappropriate actions are overlooked or dismissed as harmless. Power imbalances, especially involving younger athletes and male coaches, were identified as major enablers of abuse. Male athletes, while not central to this report, were acknowledged to face unique challenges, including

societal hesitance to recognize them as potential victims. Both genders emphasized the need for better education and clear reporting mechanisms to address these systemic issues effectively.

### **Spain**

Spanish female athletes described sexual violence as extending beyond physical harassment to include misogynistic comments, coercion, and exploitation, often rooted in systemic gender inequality. Examples included inappropriate relationships between coaches and minors, as well as normalized actions like massages, that crossed boundaries. They underscored the lack of gender education in sports and the societal trivialization of such issues. Male athletes focused on gender discrimination and highlighted verbal harassment and "strange behaviors" as manifestations of sexual violence. They noted that cultural shifts in tolerance toward misconduct have brought attention to these issues, with incidents like the Luis Rubiales controversy sparking debates about consent and power. Both groups emphasized the importance of educating coaches and athletes to prevent abuse. Female athletes stressed the lasting impact of sexual violence, while male participants focused on accountability and addressing cultural biases in sports.

### **Italy**

Italian athletes emphasized the importance of consent and the power dynamics inherent in sports. Female athletes highlighted how trust in coaches and doctors is often exploited, making it difficult to identify and report sexual violence. They discussed manipulation, where abusers justify their actions as part of training or medical procedures. Male athletes, meanwhile, framed sexual violence as an abuse of power, often involving groping or inappropriate comments, though some categorized verbal harassment as less severe than physical abuse. Both genders agreed that the effects of abuse vary based on the victim's personality and resilience, with societal shame further complicating reporting. Women noted feeling more vulnerable to abuse, especially in environments where they lack institutional support. Both groups recognized a need for systemic changes, with male athletes reflecting on the cultural normalization of jokes and behaviors that perpetuate abuse, while women emphasized empowering victims and establishing trust.

### **Bulgaria**

Bulgarian male athletes defined sexual violence in sports as encompassing both physical and verbal misconduct, including unwanted touching, inappropriate comments, and behaviors that breach personal boundaries. They noted that such actions often create unsafe environments, particularly for younger athletes, and can lead to significant psychological harm. The athletes stressed the subjectivity of the victim's experience, with similar actions being perceived differently depending on personal context. There were no reports from female athletes, leaving an important gap in understanding potential differences in experiences. Participants highlighted the lack of training and formal education on sexual violence within sports, expressing a need for awareness campaigns and proactive measures to prevent misconduct. They also emphasized the role of organizational culture in fostering environments where such actions are neither normalized nor tolerated.

## Austria

Austrian athletes defined sexual violence in sports as any unwanted sexual behavior, ranging from verbal harassment to physical actions like coercion or inappropriate touching. Female athletes particularly noted the exploitation of their bodies in media and sports marketing, citing examples like being pressured to wear revealing uniforms to attract attention. They linked this objectification to broader issues of harassment and exploitation. Male athletes acknowledged that while they are less targeted, they can also experience harassment, though often in less visible ways. Both genders agreed on the critical role of power dynamics in enabling abuse, particularly when authority figures like coaches are involved. Female athletes highlighted grooming practices and the normalization of boundary violations in sports environments. Participants from both groups advocated for stronger reporting mechanisms, better education on consent and boundaries, and a shift in media portrayal to reduce objectification and foster respect.

## Comparative Observations

- Across all countries, sexual violence is defined as encompassing physical, verbal, and non-verbal actions that violate personal boundaries.
- Female athletes emphasize the role of power dynamics and trust exploitation (e.g., Cyprus, Italy), while male athletes sometimes downplay verbal abuse as less severe (Italy, Bulgaria).
- Media and societal factors, such as objectification and normalization of certain behaviors, are prominent concerns in Austria and Spain.
- Female athletes universally report heightened vulnerability due to power imbalances, manipulation, and societal stigma.
- Male athletes focus more on cultural normalization of inappropriate behaviors and accountability for subtle misconduct (Italy, Spain).
- In most countries, there is a significant lack of formal training and education on sexual violence for athletes (Cyprus, Bulgaria, Italy).
- Austria stands out for its efforts to provide training and establish reporting mechanisms, though gaps in their use remain.
- Normalization of verbal harassment and objectification is a shared concern, particularly in Greece, Spain, and Austria.
- Societal attitudes often trivialize or ignore sexual violence, creating barriers to recognition and reporting (Cyprus, Spain).
- Power dynamics between coaches and athletes are a universal enabler of sexual violence, particularly for younger athletes (Greece, Bulgaria, Italy).
- Reporting barriers, such as fear of retaliation, societal stigma, and lack of trust in systems, are prevalent across all countries.

## Recommendations

- Implement comprehensive education programs on sexual violence for athletes, coaches, and staff in all countries.

- Focus on gender-sensitive education to address specific vulnerabilities of female athletes and societal attitudes affecting male athletes.
- Establish clear, confidential, and accessible reporting systems within sports organizations.
- Provide support personnel, such as counselors or advocates, to assist victims through the reporting process.
- Enforce zero-tolerance policies for sexual violence, ensuring accountability at all levels of sports organizations.
- Conduct regular reviews of protocols to ensure they remain effective and adaptable to emerging challenges.
- Foster environments that empower victims to speak out without fear of retaliation or stigma.
- Address bureaucratic challenges that discourage reporting, such as lengthy processes and unclear outcomes.
- Work with media to reduce objectification of female athletes and promote coverage focused on performance rather than appearance.
- Advocate for gender balance in sports coverage to shift cultural narratives and reduce bias.
- Train coaches on identifying and addressing sexual violence, with a focus on understanding boundaries and power dynamics.
- Include younger athletes in prevention programs to educate them on consent, respect, and recognizing abuse early.

## 2. Experiences and Observations of Sexual Violence in Sports: Insights From Athletes Across Partner Countries

### Cyprus

In Cyprus, female athletes recounted incidents of sexual violence ranging from verbal harassment to physical acts, many occurring during their teenage years. A participant shared a personal experience at 13 involving inappropriate physical contact from a stranger, while another described a coach's grooming behaviors escalating over two years. Participants emphasized the difficulty of recognizing and reporting these behaviors due to societal taboos, fear of judgment, and lack of support structures. They reflected on how cultural norms at the time normalized silence, leading many victims to internalize their experiences. Male athletes' perspectives were not detailed in this report, leaving gaps in understanding their experiences as bystanders or victims. Participants collectively acknowledged that progress has been made in awareness but stressed that systemic barriers to addressing sexual violence still persist.

### Greece

Greek athletes shared diverse accounts of witnessing or experiencing sexual violence, highlighting the normalization of inappropriate behaviors in sports. Female athletes discussed verbal harassment, grooming, and coercion by coaches, often starting with minor actions that escalated over time. Younger athletes were noted to be particularly vulnerable due to their lack of experience and fear of



retaliation. Male athletes acknowledged witnessing verbal and psychological harassment, though they perceived it less frequently than their female counterparts. One participant described witnessing a teammate being sexually harassed by a coach but feeling powerless to intervene due to hierarchical power dynamics. Both genders agreed that societal stigma and fear of repercussions deterred victims from reporting incidents. These accounts underline the systemic nature of sexual violence in sports and the challenges in addressing it, particularly for underaged athletes.

## Spain

In Spain, female athletes detailed numerous cases of sexual violence involving inappropriate comments, physical contact, and grooming by authority figures. One participant recounted a volleyball coach peering into changing rooms, while others described harassment by school sports staff. Parents occasionally intervened, but victims often remained silent due to fear and lack of trust in reporting mechanisms. Male athletes acknowledged observing gender discrimination and subtle forms of harassment, such as inappropriate comments during training sessions. However, they seemed less attuned to systemic patterns of abuse compared to their female counterparts. Both groups recognized that such incidents were more frequent in the past but noted lingering cultural barriers to reporting. Female athletes emphasized the long-term emotional harm caused by these experiences, while male participants focused on the need for better institutional oversight and preventive measures.

## Italy

Italian athletes recounted a mix of personal experiences and bystander observations of sexual violence, highlighting differences in how male and female athletes perceived these incidents. Female athletes shared stories of unwanted messages, inappropriate touching, and a coach's intrusive presence near changing rooms. They noted that such behaviors were often normalized during their youth but recognized as abusive in hindsight. Male athletes, meanwhile, emphasized the role of cultural norms in trivializing certain actions, such as jokes or physical gestures, which could escalate to more severe forms of abuse. One male participant described a school assembly where female classmates reported a coach's inappropriate behavior, leading to his dismissal. Both genders agreed that power dynamics and societal stigma create significant barriers to addressing abuse, with male participants reflecting on their role in perpetuating or challenging these behaviors.

## Bulgaria

Bulgarian male athletes described witnessing verbal harassment, inappropriate touching, and other behaviors that created hostile environments, particularly during their teenage years. These incidents often involved authority figures making crude remarks or engaging in behaviors that breached personal boundaries. Female perspectives were absent from this report, leaving an incomplete picture of how women in Bulgaria experience or witness sexual violence in sports. Participants highlighted the normalization of inappropriate actions within sports culture, with younger athletes being especially vulnerable. They noted that while such behaviors were often dismissed as jokes, they had lasting psychological effects on victims. The athletes stressed the need for clearer boundaries and

education to prevent these incidents, emphasizing that the absence of formal training leaves many athletes unprepared to address or report such behavior.

### Austria

Austrian athletes shared varied experiences of sexual violence, with female athletes recounting incidents of objectification, grooming, and inappropriate physical contact. Beach volleyball players highlighted the media's role in perpetuating sexualization, with younger athletes pressured to wear revealing uniforms for attention. Male athletes described witnessing verbal harassment and subtle boundary violations, such as inappropriate jokes or comments by coaches. Both genders noted that younger athletes, particularly those under 18, are disproportionately affected due to their vulnerability and lack of experience. A participant recalled a teammate being pressured to wear smaller uniforms, illustrating the systemic exploitation of female athletes. Despite mandatory training for national athletes, many incidents remain unreported due to stigma and fear of repercussions. Participants emphasized the need for cultural shifts and stronger reporting systems to address these pervasive issues.

### Comparative Observations

- Incidence of Sexual Violence:
  - Across all countries, sexual violence is prevalent in various forms, including verbal harassment, physical contact, and grooming behaviors.
  - Female athletes consistently reported more severe and systemic issues, such as intrusive behavior by authority figures (e.g., coaches, teachers), compared to male athletes.
  - Male athletes were less likely to recognize or report subtle forms of harassment, often normalizing verbal and non-verbal actions as part of sports culture.
- Age and Vulnerability:
  - Younger athletes, especially underaged females, were identified as the most vulnerable group across all partner countries.
  - Power dynamics between coaches and athletes emerged as a universal enabler of abuse, with victims often reluctant to report due to fear of retaliation or stigma.
- Normalization and Cultural Factors:
  - Inappropriate behavior is frequently normalized in sports environments, particularly among male athletes who regard jokes or gestures as harmless (e.g., Italy, Bulgaria).
  - Media representation in countries like Austria exacerbates sexualization, particularly of female athletes, contributing to an exploitative culture.
- Barriers to Reporting:
  - Across all countries, societal stigma, lack of trust in institutions, and fear of retaliation or exclusion discourage victims and bystanders from reporting incidents.
  - Male athletes often expressed uncertainty about recognizing and addressing misconduct compared to their female counterparts.

## Recommendations

- **Awareness and Education:**
  - Develop mandatory training programs for all athletes and staff, focusing on recognizing, preventing, and addressing sexual violence.
  - Tailor programs to address gender-specific vulnerabilities, such as power imbalances and societal stigma faced by female athletes.
- **Strengthening Reporting Mechanisms:**
  - Establish accessible, confidential, and victim-centered reporting systems within sports organizations.
  - Introduce designated officers or support personnel trained to guide victims through the reporting and recovery process.
- **Cultural and Institutional Change:**
  - Address normalization of sexual violence through systemic changes, including zero-tolerance policies for harassment and abuse.
  - Shift media narratives to focus on athletic performance rather than physical appearance, particularly for female athletes.
- **Targeted Support for Vulnerable Groups:**
  - Provide additional protections and resources for underaged athletes, such as monitoring interactions between coaches and young athletes.
  - Offer gender-sensitive psychological support to help victims cope with trauma and build confidence in reporting incidents.
- **Community and Peer Accountability:**
  - Encourage bystander intervention training to empower athletes to recognize and address misconduct among peers or authority figures.
  - Promote team-based discussions to foster a culture of respect and mutual accountability within sports environments.

## 3. Training and Awareness on Sexual Violence in Sports: Insights From Athletes Across Partner Countries

### Cyprus

Cypriot athletes, particularly females, unanimously reported a lack of formal training or education on sexual violence in sports. Participants noted that organizations and federations have not prioritized educating athletes about sexual violence, boundaries, or reporting procedures. While there are scattered initiatives, such as workshops or information campaigns, these are in early stages and lack consistency or depth. Female athletes highlighted the absence of clear reporting mechanisms, relying instead on general knowledge or informal networks for support. They stressed the need for structured education and practical tools to empower athletes, particularly younger ones, to identify and address sexual violence. Male perspectives were not detailed in the report, leaving a gap in understanding their experiences or access to training. Overall, the lack of institutionalized training reflects broader systemic challenges in addressing sexual violence within the Cypriot sports environment.

## Greece

Greek athletes indicated that training and education on sexual violence in sports are almost nonexistent. Female participants reported receiving little to no guidance from their organizations, relying on personal experiences or informal learning to navigate issues related to sexual violence. They expressed frustration at the lack of structured reporting mechanisms and the absence of dedicated personnel to handle such cases. Male athletes, while also untrained, were more focused on the cultural shifts prompted by high-profile cases like that of Sofia Bekatorou, which have spurred informal discussions but little institutional action. Both genders emphasized the importance of integrating formal education programs within sports organizations to address this gap. Female athletes particularly stressed the need for education at the grassroots level to build awareness and trust, while male athletes suggested creating transparent reporting systems to foster accountability and safety.

## Spain

In Spain, athletes reported inconsistent access to training on sexual violence in sports, with female participants emphasizing the lack of structured education within their organizations. Some universities and schools provide mandatory sessions on violence prevention, but these efforts are not replicated within sports clubs or federations. Male athletes mentioned occasional workshops or discussions on gender and discrimination, but these were limited in scope and often not tied to actionable reporting mechanisms. Female athletes expressed frustration at the systemic failures of reporting procedures, describing bureaucratic hurdles and lack of institutional support as significant barriers. Both groups acknowledged the growing public awareness spurred by societal movements like #MeToo, but they emphasized the need for tailored education programs within sports organizations. Recommendations included creating clear, accessible reporting channels and integrating gender and violence education into the training of athletes, coaches, and staff.

## Italy

Italian athletes across genders reported minimal training on sexual violence in sports and inconsistent familiarity with reporting procedures. Female athletes highlighted the complete absence of workshops or preventive education in their clubs, relying instead on personal intuition or public awareness campaigns to navigate these issues. Male athletes echoed similar sentiments, with one coach sharing his experience of seeking guidelines for managing athlete-coach dynamics but receiving insufficient information. Both groups noted a lack of clarity in reporting mechanisms, with only a few participants aware of national helplines like 1522. Female athletes expressed distrust in internal reporting channels, citing bureaucracy and stigma as major deterrents. Male participants reflected on the need for more proactive measures, such as clear protocols and supportive training for both athletes and staff. The consensus underscored the urgent need for systemic interventions to educate, empower, and protect athletes from sexual violence.

## Bulgaria

Bulgarian athletes, particularly males, reported a complete absence of formal training or education on sexual violence in sports. Participants noted that no structured programs or workshops exist within their sports organizations to address this issue. Reporting procedures are also unclear, with most athletes relying on informal methods or external channels to seek help. Male athletes emphasized the need for proactive education on boundaries, consent, and recognizing inappropriate behavior, particularly for younger athletes. Female perspectives were not included in the reporting, leaving an incomplete picture of their experiences. Participants stressed that the lack of institutionalized training creates a significant barrier to addressing sexual violence, as athletes are neither equipped to recognize misconduct nor confident in how to report it. Recommendations included establishing mandatory training sessions and accessible, confidential reporting systems tailored to the needs of both male and female athletes.

### Austria

Austrian athletes reported mixed experiences with training on sexual violence in sports. Female athletes highlighted occasional access to workshops and resources from organizations like VERA, which provide information on reporting mechanisms and distribute materials at sports events. However, they noted that these efforts are sporadic and not uniformly implemented across clubs. Male athletes, particularly those in volleyball, mentioned receiving basic guidance on recognizing and addressing harassment, but they described it as insufficient for handling complex situations. Both genders emphasized the importance of accessible reporting procedures, with female athletes highlighting the need for stronger support structures to address grooming and exploitation. Male participants called for increased awareness among coaches and staff to prevent misconduct. Despite some progress, athletes stressed the need for comprehensive, standardized training programs and better integration of educational efforts into sports organizations to ensure consistency and effectiveness.

### Comparative Observations

- Lack of Formal Training:
  - Across all countries, athletes report minimal or no formal training on sexual violence in sports, highlighting a systemic gap.
  - Female athletes frequently emphasize the absence of structured education, which leaves them reliant on personal experience or informal networks for guidance (e.g., Cyprus, Spain, Italy).
  - Male athletes, where their perspectives are available, often mention sporadic or basic training but note its insufficiency for complex situations (e.g., Austria, Spain).
- Awareness of Reporting Mechanisms:
  - Reporting procedures are poorly understood across most countries, with few athletes familiar with formal channels or national hotlines (e.g., Italy, Bulgaria).
  - Female athletes are often more vocal about the distrust of internal reporting systems, citing bureaucracy and stigma as barriers (e.g., Italy, Spain).



- Some countries, like Austria, have limited awareness campaigns (e.g., through VERA), but implementation remains inconsistent.
- Cultural and Institutional Barriers:
  - The absence of formal education on sexual violence leads to a lack of awareness about boundaries, consent, and recognizing misconduct (e.g., Greece, Bulgaria).
  - Societal stigma and cultural norms discourage athletes, particularly females, from speaking out about sexual violence (e.g., Spain, Italy).
- Gender-Specific Challenges:
  - Female athletes face systemic barriers like lack of institutional support and a higher burden of navigating unsafe environments (e.g., Cyprus, Spain).
  - Male athletes often fail to recognize the severity of certain behaviors due to cultural normalization or insufficient training (e.g., Italy, Austria).

### Recommendations

- Mandatory Training Programs:
  - Introduce standardized, comprehensive training for athletes, coaches, and staff on sexual violence, focusing on consent, boundaries, and recognizing misconduct.
  - Tailor training to address gender-specific vulnerabilities and empower athletes with actionable tools.
- Enhanced Reporting Mechanisms:
  - Establish accessible, confidential reporting systems within sports organizations, with designated personnel to assist victims.
  - Ensure that athletes are familiar with national hotlines and reporting channels through consistent awareness campaigns.
- Cultural and Organizational Change:
  - Implement zero-tolerance policies for sexual violence, accompanied by regular reviews of organizational practices.
  - Shift institutional focus to fostering a culture of respect and safety, ensuring that female athletes, in particular, feel supported.
- Support for Athletes:
  - Create gender-sensitive support structures, such as counselors or advocates, to guide victims through reporting and recovery processes.
  - Encourage team-based discussions to destigmatize conversations around sexual violence and promote collective accountability.
- Regular Monitoring and Evaluation:
  - Conduct periodic evaluations of training programs and reporting mechanisms to ensure their effectiveness and adaptability to new challenges.
  - Involve athletes in the development and refinement of policies to align interventions with their needs.
- Targeted Awareness Campaigns:

- Collaborate with organizations like VERA to expand educational efforts, ensuring consistent access to resources for athletes at all levels.
- Use public awareness campaigns to challenge societal stigma and normalize reporting of sexual violence.



#### 4. Supporting Teammates Who Have Experienced Sexual Violence: Insights From Athletes Across Partner Countries

##### **Cyprus**

Cypriot athletes, primarily females, expressed a willingness to support teammates experiencing sexual violence, emphasizing empathy and creating judgment-free environments. Participants acknowledged their lack of formal training on how to handle such situations, relying on intuition and personal experiences. They noted the importance of listening without judgment, providing emotional support, and respecting the victim's decisions about reporting. However, they also highlighted challenges, such as uncertainty about appropriate actions or available resources. Male athletes' perspectives were not included, leaving a gap in understanding their approach to supporting teammates. Participants underscored the need for structured training and clear guidelines to equip athletes with practical tools to address such issues. The absence of institutionalized support systems in Cypriot sports further complicates efforts to provide effective help to teammates facing sexual violence.

##### **Greece**

Greek athletes emphasized the importance of emotional support and respect when helping a teammate who has experienced sexual violence. Female participants discussed the need to listen without judgment, avoiding questions or actions that might retraumatize the victim. They also stressed the importance of respecting the victim's timeline and readiness to act, rather than imposing decisions on them. Male athletes shared similar sentiments but expressed less confidence in their ability to provide practical assistance. Both genders identified a lack of formal guidance and institutional resources as significant barriers to offering effective support. Female athletes particularly noted the challenges of navigating power dynamics and stigma when addressing such cases. The consensus highlighted the need for structured training to empower athletes with the skills and knowledge to support teammates while respecting their autonomy and emotional needs.

##### **Spain**

Spanish athletes outlined distinct approaches to supporting teammates who have experienced sexual violence, with female athletes focusing on empathy and male athletes emphasizing procedural support. Female participants stressed the need for emotional validation, listening without judgment, and avoiding victim-blaming questions. They also expressed frustration with systemic barriers, noting that victims often feel unsupported by their organizations. Male athletes highlighted the importance of guiding victims to appropriate reporting channels and ensuring confidentiality. Both groups acknowledged their lack of formal training, which leaves them uncertain about the best ways to help. Female athletes emphasized the need for a supportive environment to rebuild trust and confidence, while male participants focused on promoting institutional accountability. The discussions underscored the importance of balancing emotional and procedural support, coupled with the need for organizational reforms to address gaps in training and resources.

## Italy

Italian athletes expressed a strong willingness to support teammates experiencing sexual violence but acknowledged significant gaps in their knowledge and resources. Female athletes emphasized creating safe, judgment-free spaces for victims to share their experiences and underscored the importance of listening without making assumptions. They highlighted the challenges victims face, including distrust in internal mechanisms and the stigma attached to reporting abuse. Male athletes focused on fostering trust and encouraging victims to seek professional help, such as psychologists or legal advisors. Both genders agreed on the importance of acting in the victim's best interests, respecting their decisions about whether to report the incident. However, participants noted the absence of structured training or clear guidelines, which leaves athletes unprepared to navigate these situations effectively. The need for dedicated personnel within sports organizations to handle such cases was a recurring recommendation.

## Bulgaria

Bulgarian male athletes expressed a general understanding of how to support teammates who have experienced sexual violence, prioritizing empathy and emotional reassurance. They emphasized the importance of listening without judgment and encouraging victims to seek professional help or report incidents if they feel comfortable. However, they admitted to lacking formal training or clear protocols to guide their actions. Female athletes' perspectives were not included, leaving an incomplete understanding of their approaches or challenges in providing support. Male participants highlighted that cultural stigma and lack of institutionalized resources often complicate efforts to assist victims. They recommended implementing formal training and accessible reporting mechanisms to ensure that all athletes are equipped to offer effective and meaningful support to their teammates.

## Austria

Austrian athletes demonstrated an awareness of the importance of supporting teammates who have experienced sexual violence, though their approaches varied by gender. Female athletes emphasized creating a safe space for victims to share their experiences, while also advocating for professional psychological and legal assistance. They noted the need for clear, empathetic communication and avoiding any actions that might pressure or retraumatize the victim. Male athletes focused more on procedural steps, such as guiding victims toward formal reporting channels and offering to accompany them during the process. Both genders highlighted the lack of institutional training as a barrier to providing comprehensive support. Female participants were particularly critical of systemic failures that leave victims unsupported. Overall, athletes stressed the need for formal education and the establishment of dedicated support personnel to improve their ability to help teammates effectively.

## Comparative Observations

- Approaches to Support:
  - Across all countries, athletes emphasized the importance of empathy, creating judgment-free spaces, and listening without blame or assumptions.



- Female athletes focused more on emotional validation and rebuilding trust, while male athletes leaned towards guiding victims to formal reporting procedures (e.g., Spain, Austria).
- Both genders expressed uncertainty about how to provide effective support due to a lack of formal training and institutional resources.
- **Lack of Training:**
  - Athletes from all countries reported minimal or no training on supporting teammates who have experienced sexual violence.
  - This lack of structured guidance leaves many relying on personal intuition or informal methods to navigate sensitive situations (e.g., Cyprus, Bulgaria).
- **Barriers to Effective Support:**
  - Cultural stigma and fear of retraumatizing the victim were cited as challenges, particularly by female athletes (e.g., Greece, Italy).
  - Male athletes highlighted institutional gaps, such as unclear reporting channels and limited access to trained personnel (e.g., Austria, Bulgaria).
- **Gender-Specific Perspectives:**
  - Female athletes often expressed frustration with systemic barriers and emphasized emotional support as a priority (e.g., Italy, Spain).
  - Male athletes focused on practical assistance, such as helping victims navigate bureaucratic processes, but showed less confidence in addressing emotional aspects (e.g., Spain, Austria).

## Recommendations

- **Mandatory Training Programs:**
  - Implement structured training sessions for athletes and staff on how to support victims of sexual violence, tailored to address both emotional and procedural aspects.
  - Ensure training emphasizes the importance of respecting victims' autonomy and timeline in reporting incidents.
- **Establish Support Structures:**
  - Create designated roles or personnel within sports organizations to handle cases of sexual violence and provide guidance to teammates on offering support.
  - Develop clear, accessible reporting mechanisms with confidentiality guarantees to encourage victims to come forward.
- **Awareness and Empathy Building:**
  - Conduct workshops to help athletes understand the psychological impact of sexual violence and the nuances of emotional support.
  - Include training on recognizing cultural stigma and avoiding behaviors that might retraumatize victims.
- **Gender-Sensitive Resources:**
  - Develop resources and training materials that address gender-specific vulnerabilities and support needs, ensuring a balanced approach for male and female athletes.



- Encourage open dialogue among teams to foster mutual understanding and collective responsibility.
- Institutional Accountability:
  - Ensure sports organizations take proactive steps to create environments where victims feel safe seeking help.
  - Regularly review and update support protocols to ensure alignment with athletes' needs and evolving best practices.

## 5. Comfort Levels in Reporting Sexual Violence: Insights From Athletes Across Partner Countries

### Cyprus

In Cyprus, athletes expressed mixed feelings about reporting instances of sexual violence in sports. Female athletes were generally hesitant, citing fear of judgment, societal stigma, and distrust in the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms as key deterrents. Many noted that bureaucratic processes often discourage victims and witnesses from coming forward. Participants also emphasized the lack of clear reporting channels within sports organizations, further complicating the decision to report. Male perspectives were not included in the report, leaving gaps in understanding their comfort levels or concerns. Athletes stressed the importance of having dedicated personnel and accessible systems to facilitate reporting, along with assurances of confidentiality and victim protection. Overall, while athletes are aware of the importance of reporting, systemic barriers and cultural attitudes hinder their willingness to do so.

### Greece

Greek athletes revealed significant discomfort in reporting sexual violence, driven by societal stigma and inadequate institutional support. Female athletes were particularly apprehensive, fearing retaliation or being dismissed by their sports organizations. They highlighted the emotional toll of recounting traumatic experiences, which often deters victims from coming forward. Male athletes were more likely to view reporting as necessary but expressed concerns about a lack of trust in reporting systems and fear of being labeled as overreacting. Both genders pointed to the absence of clear procedures and trained personnel within sports organizations as major barriers to reporting. Female athletes stressed the need for a culture shift to ensure that victims are believed and supported. Participants collectively emphasized the importance of education and institutional reforms to build trust and encourage reporting.

### Spain

Spanish athletes exhibited a cautious approach to reporting sexual violence, with female participants citing systemic failures and fear of victim-blaming as major obstacles. They shared experiences of victims being ignored or forced to leave their sport, reinforcing their reluctance to report. Male athletes, while slightly more confident in the process, acknowledged the cultural stigma that discourages both witnesses and victims from speaking out. Both genders expressed a lack of trust in

existing mechanisms, pointing to inadequate organizational responses and a lack of accountability. Female athletes emphasized the emotional burden and potential professional repercussions of reporting, while male participants focused on the need for anonymous systems to protect those involved. The consensus underscored the urgent need for robust, confidential reporting channels and supportive environments to make athletes feel safe in coming forward.

### **Italy**

Italian athletes expressed mixed feelings about reporting sexual violence, with female athletes highlighting significant barriers such as bureaucracy, societal stigma, and fear of not being believed. They noted that the lack of institutional trust and previous negative experiences with authorities often deterred victims and witnesses. Male athletes were more inclined to report incidents but acknowledged the emotional and professional risks involved. They also stressed the importance of respecting the victim's decision about whether to proceed with a formal complaint. Both genders agreed that clear guidelines and designated personnel are crucial for creating safer reporting environments. Female athletes particularly emphasized the need for independent oversight outside of sports organizations to ensure impartiality and protection for victims. Overall, while athletes recognize the importance of reporting, systemic changes are needed to address cultural and procedural barriers.

### **Bulgaria**

Bulgarian male athletes demonstrated a cautious willingness to report sexual violence but noted several barriers, including stigma, fear of retaliation, and lack of trust in organizational responses. Participants acknowledged that reporting is often viewed as a last resort due to cultural attitudes that trivialize such issues. Female perspectives were not included in this report, leaving an incomplete understanding of their comfort levels and specific challenges. Male athletes highlighted the need for anonymous reporting systems and greater institutional accountability to encourage victims and witnesses to come forward. They also emphasized the importance of creating supportive environments where athletes feel safe to speak out. Overall, while there is recognition of the importance of reporting, significant cultural and procedural changes are required to build confidence in the process.

### **Austria**

Austrian athletes expressed varying levels of comfort in reporting sexual violence, with notable gender distinctions. Female athletes were more hesitant, often citing fears of stigma, retaliation, and inadequate organizational responses. They stressed the emotional difficulty of confronting abusers, particularly when they hold positions of power within sports structures. Male athletes were generally more confident about reporting but acknowledged the challenges of navigating unclear procedures and potential backlash. Both genders emphasized the importance of confidentiality and independent oversight in reporting processes. Female participants advocated for the presence of dedicated support personnel to guide victims through the reporting process, while male athletes highlighted the

need for institutional reforms to ensure accountability. Overall, athletes agreed that systemic improvements, such as streamlined reporting mechanisms and protective measures, are essential to fostering a culture of safety and trust.

### Comparative Observations

- **General Hesitation to Report:**
  - Across all countries, athletes exhibited reluctance to report instances of sexual violence due to societal stigma, fear of retaliation, and distrust in organizational responses.
  - Female athletes were consistently more hesitant than their male counterparts, citing emotional toll, fear of judgment, and lack of institutional trust as primary barriers (e.g., Greece, Italy, Austria).
- **Trust in Reporting Mechanisms:**
  - Both genders expressed a lack of confidence in existing reporting mechanisms, highlighting issues such as inadequate support systems, unclear procedures, and perceived inaction by sports organizations (e.g., Spain, Bulgaria).
  - Anonymous reporting and independent oversight were frequently mentioned as critical needs to foster trust (e.g., Austria, Bulgaria).
- **Cultural and Emotional Barriers:**
  - Cultural stigma and normalization of inappropriate behavior were cited as key deterrents to reporting, particularly in countries like Spain and Cyprus.
  - Female athletes emphasized the emotional difficulty of recounting their experiences and confronting abusers, especially those in positions of power (e.g., Austria, Italy).
- **Gender-Specific Perspectives:**
  - Male athletes often focused on procedural challenges and the need for clarity in reporting systems (e.g., Bulgaria, Austria).
  - Female athletes prioritized emotional support, victim protection, and the importance of addressing systemic failures that perpetuate silence (e.g., Spain, Greece).
- **Awareness of Reporting Options:**
  - Many athletes, regardless of gender, were unfamiliar with reporting procedures or the existence of dedicated support channels within their organizations (e.g., Cyprus, Bulgaria).

### Recommendations

- **Enhance Reporting Mechanisms:**
  - Develop clear, accessible, and confidential reporting systems within sports organizations.
  - Introduce anonymous reporting options and independent oversight to ensure impartial handling of complaints.
- **Institutional Reforms:**

- Establish dedicated personnel trained to handle cases of sexual violence, providing guidance and emotional support to victims throughout the reporting process.
- Implement zero-tolerance policies for retaliation against those who report incidents or support victims.
- **Build Trust Through Transparency:**
  - Ensure organizations communicate clearly about the steps taken in response to reports of sexual violence.
  - Regularly review and update reporting procedures to align with best practices and athlete feedback.
- **Cultural Change and Awareness:**
  - Conduct awareness campaigns to challenge cultural stigma surrounding sexual violence and normalize reporting as a necessary step for accountability and safety.
  - Foster team-based discussions to encourage collective responsibility and mutual support.
- **Gender-Sensitive Support:**
  - Provide gender-specific resources and training to address the unique challenges faced by male and female athletes in reporting and addressing sexual violence.
  - Equip athletes with tools to navigate emotional and procedural challenges, balancing empathy with action.
- **Mandatory Training and Education:**
  - Introduce mandatory education programs on recognizing, preventing, and addressing sexual violence in sports.
  - Include training on the importance of reporting and the role of teammates in supporting victims.





## 6. Proposed Measures and Awareness Levels on Preventing Sexual Violence in Sports: Insights from Athletes Across Partner Countries

### Cyprus

Cypriot athletes suggested comprehensive education programs on sexual violence as a crucial step toward prevention. Female participants emphasized the importance of clear boundaries, consent training, and workshops to help athletes recognize and respond to misconduct. They advocated for mandatory education for coaches and athletes, supported by external experts to foster trust. Participants rated awareness levels as low, highlighting that most athletes lack knowledge about what constitutes sexual violence or how to report it. The absence of institutionalized training and visible reporting mechanisms was identified as a major barrier to building awareness. Male perspectives were not included, leaving gaps in understanding their suggestions or assessments. Overall, the athletes called for systemic reforms, including regular awareness campaigns and the integration of sexual violence education into sports curriculums, to create safer and more informed environments.

### Greece

Greek athletes proposed structural and cultural changes to prevent sexual violence in sports. Female participants stressed the need for education programs that address gender dynamics and power imbalances, focusing on early intervention for young athletes. They highlighted the importance of hiring female coaches and providing training on recognizing and addressing abuse. Male athletes emphasized the need for institutional accountability and transparent reporting systems to address incidents effectively. Both genders agreed that overall awareness within sports organizations remains inadequate, with many athletes unaware of their rights or the support available. Participants also identified media as a tool for raising awareness, advocating for campaigns that challenge cultural stigmas around sexual violence. The consensus underscored the need for holistic reforms, combining education, structural changes, and societal shifts to prevent abuse and ensure athlete safety.

### Spain

Spanish athletes recommended increasing education and creating safer environments to prevent sexual violence in sports. Female participants advocated for gender-sensitive training programs starting from youth sports, aimed at fostering respect and understanding boundaries. They also suggested implementing stricter policies to address power imbalances between coaches and athletes. Male athletes emphasized the role of media in raising awareness and proposed anonymous reporting channels to encourage accountability. Both groups criticized the low levels of awareness within sports organizations, with few resources or protocols to guide athletes in recognizing or addressing abuse. Female participants highlighted the need for structural changes, such as hiring more women in leadership roles and revising reporting procedures. Overall, athletes called for a comprehensive approach combining education, policy reforms, and cultural shifts to create a safer sporting environment.



## Italy

Italian athletes proposed a range of measures to prevent sexual violence, emphasizing the need for independent oversight within sports organizations. Female participants highlighted the importance of workshops to educate athletes on consent, boundaries, and reporting procedures. They also called for stronger policies addressing power dynamics and stricter accountability for coaches. Male athletes suggested promoting awareness through regular training sessions and anonymous reporting mechanisms. Both genders noted that awareness levels within their organizations are low, with no structured programs or protocols currently in place. Female participants were particularly vocal about the lack of trust in internal systems, advocating for external experts to handle cases impartially. The consensus was that prevention requires systemic change, including comprehensive education, transparent policies, and accessible resources to support victims and deter misconduct.

## Bulgaria

Bulgarian athletes identified education and awareness as key to preventing sexual violence in sports. Male participants suggested mandatory training for coaches and athletes on recognizing and addressing misconduct, emphasizing the importance of teaching boundaries and consent. They also advocated for anonymous reporting systems to ensure safety and confidentiality for victims. Female perspectives were not included, leaving an incomplete understanding of their recommendations. Awareness within sports organizations was rated as extremely low, with no formal education programs or visible reporting mechanisms in place. Participants stressed that addressing cultural stigma and normalizing conversations about sexual violence are essential for prevention. They called for systemic reforms, including regular workshops, institutional accountability, and the involvement of external experts to build trust and ensure effective prevention measures.

## Austria

Austrian athletes suggested a combination of education, media reforms, and structural changes to prevent sexual violence in sports. Female participants advocated for targeted training programs that address grooming, exploitation, and objectification, particularly in sports like beach volleyball where sexualization is prevalent. They also highlighted the need for female coaches and support personnel to foster safer environments. Male athletes focused on media responsibility, proposing guidelines to shift the narrative from objectification to athletic performance. Both genders agreed that awareness within sports organizations is limited, with existing education efforts insufficient to address systemic issues. Participants emphasized the importance of accessible reporting mechanisms and institutional reforms to build trust. The consensus highlighted the need for a multifaceted approach combining education, policy changes, and cultural shifts to prevent sexual violence and protect athletes effectively.

## Comparative Observations

- **Need for Education and Training:**
  - All countries highlighted the critical role of education in preventing sexual violence, with a focus on consent, boundaries, and recognition of misconduct.
  - Female athletes consistently emphasized the need for targeted, gender-sensitive training programs (e.g., Cyprus, Spain, Austria).
  - Male athletes frequently suggested workshops for coaches and athletes to address systemic gaps in awareness (e.g., Bulgaria, Italy).
- **Awareness Levels:**
  - Across all partner countries, awareness of sexual violence and related reporting mechanisms was rated as low or inadequate.
  - Female athletes often criticized the lack of trust in organizational systems and the absence of visible support structures (e.g., Italy, Greece).
  - Male athletes tended to focus more on procedural clarity and accountability measures (e.g., Spain, Austria).
- **Structural Barriers:**
  - Participants in several countries noted that power dynamics between coaches and athletes are a significant factor enabling abuse (e.g., Greece, Spain, Italy).
  - Reporting mechanisms are either absent or poorly communicated, discouraging victims and witnesses from coming forward (e.g., Cyprus, Bulgaria).
- **Role of Media and Cultural Change:**
  - Media was identified as both a contributor to the problem (through objectification) and a potential tool for raising awareness (e.g., Austria, Spain).
  - Cultural stigma surrounding sexual violence was frequently mentioned as a barrier to prevention and reporting (e.g., Bulgaria, Greece).
- **Diversity in Proposals:**
  - Female athletes often suggested hiring more women in leadership or coaching roles to foster safer environments (e.g., Spain, Austria).
  - Male athletes highlighted anonymous reporting systems as a practical measure to protect victims and ensure accountability (e.g., Bulgaria, Italy).

## Recommendations

- **Comprehensive Education Programs:**
  - Implement mandatory, gender-sensitive training for athletes, coaches, and staff, focusing on consent, boundaries, and recognizing sexual violence.
  - Begin education at youth levels to instill awareness early, with programs tailored to address specific vulnerabilities of male and female athletes.
- **Strengthening Reporting Mechanisms:**
  - Develop clear, accessible, and anonymous reporting channels within sports organizations.

- Ensure confidentiality and provide trained personnel to guide victims and witnesses through the reporting process.
- Cultural and Structural Reforms:
  - Address power imbalances by establishing independent oversight bodies to handle cases of sexual violence impartially.
  - Promote cultural change through awareness campaigns that challenge stigma and normalize discussions around sexual violence in sports.
- Role of Media:
  - Collaborate with media outlets to shift the narrative from objectification to a focus on athletic performance, particularly for female athletes.
  - Utilize media campaigns to raise awareness about prevention measures and reporting options.
- Institutional Accountability:
  - Enforce zero-tolerance policies for sexual violence and ensure that policies are effectively communicated and implemented at all levels.
  - Conduct regular evaluations of education programs and reporting systems to maintain their relevance and effectiveness.
- Support for Victims:
  - Create support structures, such as counseling and legal assistance, to help victims navigate the reporting process and recover from trauma.
  - Establish a network of female coaches and mentors to provide safer spaces and guidance for young athletes.

## Geographic and Cultural Differences in Stakeholder Needs and Perspectives

### Athletes

Athletes across different countries show varied levels of awareness, comfort in reporting, and experiences with sexual violence in sports. In Cyprus, Greece, and Bulgaria, athletes often exhibit lower awareness of what constitutes sexual violence and how to report it, reflecting the cultural reluctance to acknowledge such issues openly. In contrast, countries like Austria and Spain emphasize education on recognizing signs of abuse, with athletes more likely to report incidents due to better awareness and stronger support systems. Cultural differences shape athletes' comfort levels; in Greece, for example, the societal stigma surrounding sexual violence makes reporting difficult. Similarly, athletes in Bulgaria face challenges due to a lack of institutional support and resources. Countries with stronger reporting mechanisms, like Italy, have athletes who feel more empowered, as they understand their rights and the steps to take in case of an incident.

### Coaches

Coaches' training and awareness of sexual violence prevention and recognition also differ significantly across countries. In Greece, Italy, and Bulgaria, coaches often report a lack of formal training on sexual violence, with many relying on informal sources for knowledge. This lack of structured training is

reflective of a cultural reluctance to discuss sexual violence, which hinders proactive intervention. In contrast, Austria and Spain provide more consistent training programs that equip coaches with the skills to recognize behavioral changes indicating potential abuse. Coaches in these regions stress the importance of creating open communication channels within teams, fostering trust. However, resource disparities are prevalent—coaches in smaller federations in countries like Cyprus and Bulgaria face challenges accessing such training. The power dynamics between coaches and athletes are also more pronounced in countries with less training, making it harder for athletes to come forward.

### Administrators

Sports administrators across countries show differing levels of engagement and resource availability for addressing sexual violence. Administrators in Cyprus and Austria have relatively structured policies, though in Cyprus, implementation is inconsistent in smaller federations due to resource constraints. In countries like Greece and Bulgaria, the lack of formal policies and a strong cultural reluctance to address sexual violence creates a major gap in prevention and intervention. Greece particularly struggles with fragmented efforts and weak institutional support. In contrast, administrators in Spain and Italy emphasize proactive measures like mandatory training and designated safeguarding officers, though challenges remain in ensuring that smaller organizations are adequately resourced. Austria stands out with clear guidelines, trauma-informed approaches, and strong leadership support, creating a more integrated response. These variations show how cultural attitudes toward sexual violence and resources allocated to sports organizations directly affect the effectiveness of policies and training programs.



## 5. Analysis of Stakeholder Needs

Based on the analysis of stakeholder needs, several gaps in understanding and competencies required for the effective prevention of sexual violence in sports emerged, highlighting key areas where improvement is necessary for a more robust, comprehensive approach to prevention. Those are the following:

### 1. Awareness and Knowledge Gaps

- **Lack of Clarity on What Constitutes Sexual Violence:** Athletes, coaches, and administrators in countries like Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus have limited awareness about the full scope of sexual violence, which often prevents the identification and reporting of incidents. There is a need for clear definitions and educational resources on the various forms of sexual violence, from harassment to physical abuse.
- **Gaps in Understanding Reporting Mechanisms:** Many stakeholders, especially athletes and coaches in regions with fewer resources (e.g., Greece and Bulgaria), are unaware of the available reporting channels or feel uncomfortable using them due to fear of retaliation or lack of confidentiality.

### 2. Inconsistent or Insufficient Training

- **Training Deficiencies:** Coaches in Greece, Italy, and Bulgaria report not receiving formal training to recognize signs of sexual violence, with most relying on informal discussions or personal research. There is a need for mandatory, structured training programs for coaches, administrators, and athletes on how to recognize, prevent, and appropriately respond to sexual violence.
- **Limited Focus on Behavioral Indicators:** While some countries like Austria and Spain emphasize recognizing behavioral changes in athletes as signs of potential abuse, many countries still lack targeted programs that train coaches and administrators to detect early warning signs, such as withdrawal, mood swings, or signs of distress in athletes.

### 3. Cultural and Institutional Barriers

- **Cultural Stigma and Silence Around Sexual Violence:** In some countries, particularly Greece and Bulgaria, the cultural reluctance to acknowledge sexual violence as a serious issue creates significant barriers. This stigma hinders open discussions, education, and reporting of incidents. The need for shifting these cultural attitudes through awareness campaigns and leadership training is critical.
- **Power Imbalances:** In countries with hierarchical and authoritarian sports structures (e.g., Cyprus, Greece, and Bulgaria), the power imbalance between coaches and athletes makes it difficult for victims to report abuse or for coaches to intervene effectively. Strengthening policies that encourage open communication, protective measures, and athlete empowerment is essential.



#### 4. Lack of Resources and Institutional Support

- **Limited Resources for Smaller Federations:** Smaller federations in countries like Cyprus, Greece, and Bulgaria often lack the financial and human resources to implement effective sexual violence prevention programs, provide training, and offer support services. Establishing centralized support systems and allocating sufficient resources to all sports organizations, regardless of size, is vital.
- **Absence of Formal Support Systems for Survivors:** In countries like Bulgaria and Greece, survivor support mechanisms are often minimal, and athletes may not have access to the necessary legal or psychological assistance. There is a need for formalized support structures within sports organizations, including access to counselors, legal support, and trauma-informed care.

#### 5. Inadequate Policy Development and Enforcement

- **Fragmented Policies:** Many sports organizations, particularly in Greece and Bulgaria, lack comprehensive policies on sexual violence prevention, and even where policies exist, their implementation is inconsistent. Countries like Cyprus and Austria have more structured frameworks, but smaller organizations struggle with enforcement due to limited resources. Policies need to be standardized, enforced, and regularly updated to reflect best practices and legal standards.
- **Lack of Independent Oversight:** The absence of independent bodies to monitor the implementation of policies and address complaints creates a gap in accountability, as seen in Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus. Introducing external oversight mechanisms would ensure that sexual violence cases are handled impartially and that organizations are held accountable for the safety of their athletes.

#### 6. Improper Handling of Reported Cases

- **Underreporting and Inadequate Case Management:** In countries such as Greece, Cyprus, and Spain, reported cases often do not progress due to cultural stigma, fear of retaliation, and inadequate follow-up. Inconsistent or informal responses to reported incidents further perpetuate the problem. Clear, enforceable case management protocols, alongside trauma-informed response systems, are necessary to ensure that reported cases are treated seriously and that victims receive the support they need.

### 6. Discussion

By addressing these gaps in understanding and competencies, sports organizations across countries can build a more effective, supportive, and responsive framework for preventing and addressing sexual violence in sports. This would ensure a safer environment for athletes at all levels and foster a culture of respect and accountability. In continuation of the above, several areas where sensitization and awareness can be enhanced through targeted initiatives stand out. These areas are critical to

fostering a safer and more inclusive sports environment and can significantly contribute to the prevention of sexual violence in sports and are the following:

### 1. Awareness of What Constitutes Sexual Violence

- **Targeted Sensitization for Athletes and Coaches:** In countries like Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus, there is a significant gap in the understanding of what constitutes sexual violence beyond physical assault, such as harassment, inappropriate comments, or grooming behaviors. Sensitization initiatives should focus on educating athletes, coaches, and administrators about the wide range of behaviors that can be classified as sexual violence, helping to dismantle the normalization of harmful behaviors in sports cultures. This can be achieved through workshops, online training modules, and educational materials that clearly define and explain these issues.

### 2. Cultural Shifts to Address Stigma and Silence Around Sexual Violence

- **Breaking the Silence in High-Stigma Cultures:** Countries like Greece, Cyprus, and Bulgaria have significant cultural barriers where discussing sexual violence is often considered taboo. To enhance awareness, targeted sensitization campaigns should be designed to break the silence around sexual violence. These campaigns can involve high-profile sports figures, media outreach, and community-based initiatives that normalize conversations about consent, boundaries, and abuse. Such campaigns can reduce the cultural stigma, encourage athletes to come forward, and shift societal attitudes towards more open discussions about sexual violence.
- **Engagement with Families and Communities:** In countries where cultural resistance is particularly strong, sensitization initiatives should involve not only athletes and coaches but also families and communities. These efforts can include outreach programs that educate parents, guardians, and local community members about their roles in preventing abuse and supporting affected athletes.

### 3. Improving Knowledge on Reporting Mechanisms

- **Educating on Reporting Channels:** Many athletes and coaches, especially in countries with fewer resources (e.g., Greece, Bulgaria), do not have a clear understanding of available reporting mechanisms or feel that the systems are not safe. Sensitization efforts should focus on making reporting systems more visible, accessible, and trustworthy. Awareness initiatives should include distributing materials and hosting training sessions that explain how to report incidents, the importance of confidentiality, and the protection of victims against retaliation. These efforts would help alleviate fears of reporting and empower individuals to take action.

### 4. Recognition of Behavioral Indicators of Abuse

- **Training Coaches and Administrators:** Many coaches and administrators lack the training necessary to recognize signs of sexual violence or inappropriate behavior in athletes,

particularly in countries like Greece, Italy, and Bulgaria. Sensitization initiatives should focus on helping coaches and administrators identify behavioral changes in athletes that could indicate abuse, such as withdrawal, mood swings, or reluctance to participate in training. By training these individuals to spot early warning signs and encouraging open communication with athletes, sports organizations can intervene early and provide support before abuse escalates.

## 5. Power Dynamics and Safe Sports Environments

- **Addressing Power Imbalances:** In many sports organizations, the power dynamics between coaches and athletes are pronounced, particularly in countries with hierarchical sports structures like Cyprus and Greece. Sensitization initiatives should focus on promoting a culture of mutual respect, emphasizing appropriate behaviors and boundaries, and the importance of professional relationships in sports. Workshops and training programs can teach coaches and administrators to recognize the risks associated with power imbalances and help them foster safer environments where athletes feel comfortable voicing concerns or reporting incidents.

## 6. Empowering Athletes to Speak Out

- **Encouraging Athlete Engagement and Empowerment:** In countries like Cyprus, Greece, and Bulgaria, athletes may not feel empowered to speak out against inappropriate behavior, either due to fear of retaliation or a lack of understanding of their rights. Targeted sensitization campaigns can be aimed at educating athletes about their rights and the resources available to them. These initiatives should empower athletes to take action, seek help, and stand up for their own safety and the safety of their peers. Athlete-led workshops, peer-to-peer education programs, and awareness-raising activities can further foster a culture where athletes are confident in advocating for their own well-being.

## 7. Targeted Education for Administrators and Sports Organizations

- **Improving Institutional Support and Accountability:** In many regions, administrators may not fully understand the importance of comprehensive policies and the role they play in creating a safe environment. Sensitization initiatives should include tailored programs for administrators that explain the importance of developing and enforcing policies to prevent sexual violence. These programs can also highlight the importance of leadership in modeling appropriate behavior, creating clear reporting structures, and ensuring that there is a zero-tolerance policy for abuse. This would help administrators create more supportive and accountable environments within sports organizations.

## 7. Recommendations

### For Sports Organizations

The RISE research team, based on the desk and primary research, argues that to effectively combat sexual violence in sports, organizations must adopt a comprehensive approach combining policy

development, training programs, and awareness campaigns. In particular, those policies should establish clear protocols for reporting and addressing sexual violence. These include developing accessible, confidential reporting mechanisms that ensure the safety of survivors and whistleblowers. In addition, sport organizations must also enforce stringent codes of conduct that clearly outline unacceptable behaviors and associated consequences. These policies should be periodically reviewed to incorporate evolving societal norms, legal changes, and best practices. Furthermore, the RISE research emphasizes that training programs are critical for equipping stakeholders with the knowledge and skills to identify and prevent sexual violence. Regular, mandatory training should target all stakeholders, including athletes, coaches, and administrators. These programs should address recognizing warning signs, understanding reporting procedures, and fostering an inclusive, supportive culture. To compliment these programs, sports organizations should consider enhancing their training by integrating professional expertise, such as psychologists and safeguarding officers, and employing interactive methods like role-playing scenarios.

Lastly, the RISE research team recommends that sports organizations develop awareness campaigns, which are essential to creating a proactive sports culture that prioritizes safety and respect. These campaigns should be designed to educate all stakeholders about the prevalence and impact of sexual violence, emphasizing the importance of accountability and collective action, and by leveraging diverse communication platforms, including social media, print, and workshops, sports organizations can ensure that these campaigns reach a broad audience. In particular, by engaging athletes and families in these efforts, they can reinforce the message and foster a community commitment to eradicating sexual violence in sports. By adopting these measures, sports organizations can create safer environments that empower stakeholders to act decisively against misconduct.

### For Policymakers

The RISE research team recommends that policymakers play a pivotal role in supporting prevention efforts through legislation, resource allocation, and oversight. In particular, by enacting laws mandating that all sports organizations establish safeguarding policies and provide regular training, policymakers make a fundamental step. These laws should include provisions for mandatory background checks for coaches and sports professionals, as well as clear protocols for handling cases of sexual violence, ensuring that organizations remain accountable. In addition, the RISE research highlights that funding is another critical area where policymakers can contribute. Allocating resources to support smaller organizations enables them to implement safeguarding measures effectively, which includes financing training programs, hiring safeguarding officers, and developing confidential reporting systems. Policymakers should also prioritize funding for awareness campaigns and research initiatives to sustain long-term prevention efforts.

Furthermore, the RISE research team argues that establishing independent oversight bodies ensures consistent policy enforcement and addresses systemic gaps. These bodies can monitor compliance, provide guidance on best practices, and handle sensitive cases impartially. Policymakers should also focus on fostering cross-sector collaborations by bringing together sports organizations, educational

institutions, and advocacy groups to create a unified approach to combating sexual violence. Lastly, the RISE research emphasizes that policymakers must engage in public dialogue to promote cultural shifts, reducing stigma and encouraging transparency within sports. Advocacy for legislative measures at the national and international levels will strengthen collective efforts, creating a robust framework that protects athletes and other stakeholders from harm.

### For Stakeholders

The RISE research team argues that fostering a safe sports environment requires the collective effort of all stakeholders, including athletes, professionals, and administrators. For athletes, education on their rights, understanding reporting mechanisms, and recognizing the signs of sexual violence are critical. Workshops and peer-led discussions can empower athletes to voice concerns without fear of retaliation. They should also be encouraged to actively participate in developing and implementing safety measures within their organizations. In addition, sports professionals, such as coaches and trainers, must act as role models, prioritizing respect and accountability. The RISE research highlights that training on appropriate boundaries, recognizing behavioral changes, and responding effectively to reported cases equips them to create inclusive environments. Professionals should also advocate for and participate in awareness campaigns to reinforce a culture of safety and transparency. Lastly, the RISE research team emphasizes that administrators play a structural role, ensuring that policies are comprehensive, enforceable, and consistently applied. Establishing transparent reporting channels, safeguarding officers, and clear disciplinary protocols builds trust within organizations. Administrators must also foster collaboration between stakeholders, promoting shared responsibility in preventing sexual violence. By actively participating in training and awareness initiatives, they demonstrate commitment and reinforce a zero-tolerance stance on misconduct.

### For Future Research

The RISE research team argues that further research is crucial to understanding and addressing the complex dynamics of sexual violence in sports. Longitudinal studies examining the effectiveness of current interventions can provide valuable insights into their long-term impact. In addition, the RISE research highlights that studies should also explore underrepresented areas, such as the experiences of male victims, individuals with disabilities, and athletes from marginalized communities. Understanding their unique challenges can inform the development of inclusive policies and support systems. Furthermore, the RISE research team recommends studies on the role of technology in facilitating or preventing abuse, such as the use of social media for grooming or reporting, to offer insights into the modern dimensions of the issue. Furthermore, future research should be more collaborative, cross-disciplinary, involving psychologists, sociologists, legal experts, and sports professionals which can enhance the depth and applicability of findings. The RISE research team argues for establishing centralized repositories of best practices and evidence-based interventions, allowing organizations to learn from successful models globally. Finally, research focusing on cultural and systemic barriers to reporting and addressing sexual violence can guide efforts to foster transparency and accountability within the sports ecosystem.



## 8. Conclusion

The comprehensive report titled "Assessment of Sensitization and Awareness Needs and Mapping of Good Practices for Prevention of Sexual Violence in Sports" underscores the critical need to address sexual violence within the sports community. In particular, the RISE research team has highlighted the multifaceted nature of this issue, which stems from systemic power imbalances, cultural stigma, and insufficient institutional safeguards. Through extensive desk and primary research conducted across six partner countries—Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Bulgaria, Austria, and Italy—the team has identified significant gaps and opportunities for fostering safer sports environments.

The RISE research team argues for a holistic approach anchored in three interconnected pillars: sensitization, awareness, and prevention. In particular, the team proposes sensitization initiatives that aim to cultivate empathy, challenge harmful norms, and dismantle the culture of silence around sexual violence. Furthermore, awareness campaigns, as the team emphasizes, equip stakeholders with the knowledge to recognize and respond to abuse, empowering victims and bystanders to act. Lastly, prevention strategies, including robust policies, transparent reporting mechanisms, and enforced accountability measures, are essential to establishing systemic change. The RISE research team underscores the importance of involving athletes, coaches, administrators, and families to ensure that efforts are inclusive and sustainable.

While acknowledging the commendable initiatives in some partner countries, the RISE research team highlights disparities in resources, training, and policy enforcement, particularly in smaller organizations. The team recommends standardized policies, mandatory training, resource allocation, and survivor-centered support systems. Additionally, they advocate for fostering cultural shifts, enhancing transparency, and prioritizing education to address sexual violence comprehensively. The RISE research team concludes that coordinated and sustained efforts are essential for building a sports community rooted in respect, accountability, and safety. Through these actions, the sports community can transcend borders and establish environments where all participants feel protected and valued.



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