

RISE COMPREHENSIVE REPORT

PREVALENCE 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: <https://rise-project.org/>

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1. Introduction

Context and Background

Sexual violence in sports is a critical issue that profoundly undermines the safety, well-being, and trust of athletes. While sports are often celebrated as environments that foster growth, teamwork, and achievement, they can also create conditions where power imbalances and abuse thrive (See for example, Fasting., Chroni, and Knorre, 2014). Research on this subject, conducted across various countries, highlights the global nature of the problem. However, significant differences in methodologies—such as definitions of sexual violence, target populations, perpetrator profiles, or factors that contribute to it—have resulted in widely varying prevalence rates. Furthermore, speaking of sexual violence perpetration patterns, these vary within sport; some studies indicate teammates or other athletes as perpetrators (Basile et al., 2020; Cheever & Eisenberg, 2020) while other studies indicate coaches, teachers, or instructors as perpetrators (Brackenridge et al., 2008). Research by Alexander et al. (2011) highlights differences in perpetrator roles: at lower levels of competition, offenders are often peers, while at higher levels, coaches are more frequently identified. In addition to that, recent findings suggest that peer athletes may play a larger role in abuse dynamics than previously recognized (Bjørnseth & Szabó, 2018).

Factors contributing to sexual violence in sports vary widely as well and are influenced by cultural and contextual elements. In Greece, for instance, socio-cultural dynamics create an environment that enables such violence. Chroni and Kavoura (2022) highlight how subtle manifestations of patriarchy and collectivism foster a culture of silence, which discourages victims from speaking out and perpetuates underreporting. Furthermore, sexual violence against children in sports is particularly alarming, with girls disproportionately affected, minority groups at heightened risk, and athletes in higher levels of competition more vulnerable to grooming (Bjørnseth & Szabó, 2018). Other studies have found that female sports students experience high levels of sexual harassment, with slightly higher rates reported in educational settings (38%) than in sports settings (34%) (Fasting et al., 2014). This finding challenges the assumption that sports environments are the primary venues for such incidents, emphasizing the need for enhanced prevention strategies in educational institutions as well.

The very nature of sports—often hierarchical, high-pressure, and tightly knit—can exacerbate vulnerabilities. Sports settings frequently involve unique risk factors, such as close-knit relationships, intense physical contact, and isolated training environments and these conditions can make younger athletes particularly vulnerable. For instance, physical contact between coaches and child athletes, a routine part of professional responsibilities, can blur the lines between appropriate and abusive behavior. This gray area is suggested to be highly problematic and may contribute to underreporting and leads to lower prevalence estimates ranging from 2% to 8% (Parent & Hlimi, 2012). The limited availability to date, of quantitative studies on sexual violence in sports, particularly among children, further complicates the understanding of the issue, thereby hindering the feasibility of investigating this thematic topic with full scrutiny. Many studies rely on small samples, often from elite sports

contexts (McPherson et al., 2016). However, a large-scale retrospective study by Alexander et al. (2011), involving over 6,000 undergraduate students, revealed that 29% experienced sexual abuse during their time as child athletes. These findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive research and targeted interventions on an international platform.

Research focusing on the lifetime prevalence of sexual violence in athletes, incorporating experiences within and outside of sports, remains scarce. A notable exception is a study by Ohlert et al. (2020), conducted in collaboration with the German Olympic and Paralympic Committee. This study surveyed 1,529 elite athletes, revealing that 54.2% had experienced sexual violence in their lifetime, with 20.6% reporting severe incidents. While incidents were more common outside sports, 48% of victims reported experiencing abuse in both contexts, underscoring significant overlap and the pervasive nature of the issue. Another recent European study surveying over 10,000 young adults across six European countries revealed concerning findings about sexual violence in organized sports. In Flanders (Belgium), 32% of respondents reported experiencing at least one form of non-contact sexual violence, while 20% reported at least one instance of contact sexual violence within the context of organized sports before the age of 18 (Hartill et al., 2021; Vertommen et al., 2021). Notably, these incidents were often not isolated events but repeated occurrences that spanned extended periods.

These findings underscore the critical need for greater awareness, robust prevention strategies, and targeted research to comprehensively address sexual violence in sports, and sport governing bodies play a pivotal role in addressing challenging issues like sexual violence in sports. As key stakeholders, they possess the authority, resources, and reach necessary to promote awareness, implement preventive measures, and influence cultural change within the sports ecosystem and their involvement in research on sensitive topics such as sexual violence is crucial for several reasons. First, the sport governing bodies can facilitate access to athletes, coaches, and other key participants, enabling researchers to gather robust data that accurately reflects the realities of the sports community. Their established networks allow for comprehensive studies that span various levels of competition and diverse populations, ensuring that findings are inclusive, transparent, and representative. Second, their endorsement of such research lends credibility and legitimacy to the efforts, encouraging greater participation and fostering trust among stakeholders. When governing bodies champion these studies, it signals a commitment to transparency and accountability, which are essential for addressing systemic issues.

Understanding how widespread sexual violence is in sports is critical. Without clear and robust data, it is impossible to grasp the full scale of the issue or to know who is most at risk, when, and where: Researching its prevalence allows organizations and policymakers to see the bigger picture as it shows patterns, highlights problem areas, and helps identify the athletes and sports settings that need the most attention. Armed with this knowledge, organizations can develop thoughtful policies and programs that address and prevent these challenges directly, offering meaningful support and practical solutions to those affected. Beyond statistics, studying the prevalence of sexual violence

sends a strong message: this issue matters, and it won't be ignored. Uncovering the reality of what athletes face as challenges, the silence that often surrounds these experiences and can give survivors the courage to come forward and demand change, knowing they are not alone. In the long run, this research isn't just about fixing the present; it's about reshaping the future. It pushes sports organizations to take responsibility and build systems that prioritize safety, fairness, and respect. By addressing the root of the problem, we can ensure that sports remain a place where people can grow, achieve, and thrive—free from fear or harm. Such issues have indeed been addressed in the literature (see for example, World Health Organization Report, 2014) and yet have scarcely been incorporated and implemented globally in relation to sexual violence in sports.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to shed light on the prevalence of sexual violence in sports within the partner countries of Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, and Spain. The RISE research team aims to provide a clear, evidence-based understanding of how widespread sexual violence is in various sports contexts, and across various European countries. Accurate data on prevalence is essential to break the silence surrounding the issue, challenge assumptions, and create an informed foundation for effective interventions. The RISE research study seeks to go beyond just measuring prevalence by also identifying patterns and risk factors associated with sexual violence in sports. Understanding who is most affected—whether it's specific age groups, genders, or types of sports—provides critical insights. For example, younger athletes may be particularly vulnerable due to power imbalances, while certain sports structures may inadvertently foster conditions where abuse is more likely to occur, and identifying these patterns allows for targeted strategies to mitigate risks and protect those most at risk, as well as identifying particular societal constraints that may hinder effective interventions.

Another key objective of the study is to uncover regional and cultural differences across the partner countries, as these distinctions can significantly shape how sexual violence is experienced, reported, and addressed. The RISE research team argues that cultural norms, societal attitudes, and legal frameworks vary widely between countries, influencing both the prevalence of abuse and the willingness of survivors to come forward. For example, in some countries, the stigma surrounding sexual violence might discourage reporting, while in others, well-established support systems might facilitate disclosure and intervention. By analyzing these country-specific differences, if existing, the RISE research study aims to identify unique contextual factors that either exacerbate or mitigate the issue. This includes examining the role of gender norms, the level of awareness and education about sexual violence, and the extent to which sports organizations implement safeguarding policies. At the same time, the research will explore cross-country similarities, such as common patterns of power dynamics or risk factors inherent to sports environments. Understanding these shared aspects can inform best practices that are adaptable across borders.

Ultimately, these findings have the potential to empower policymakers, sports organizations, and other stakeholders to take decisive and meaningful action. By shedding light on the prevalence, patterns, and risk factors of sexual violence in sports, the RISE study provides a critical foundation for implementing comprehensive prevention strategies and intervention measures. These insights can guide the development of policies aimed at safeguarding athletes, promoting survivor support systems, and cultivating training programs that address abuse awareness and prevention. Furthermore, this research serves as a call to action for fostering safe and inclusive environments where athletes can thrive free from fear, harm, or exploitation. The RISE research team argues that by emphasizing the importance of accountability, transparency, and respect, it contributes to the larger goal of transforming sports culture. This is not merely about addressing individual incidents but about creating systemic change that ensures all participants—regardless of age, gender, or level of competition—are protected and valued. This represents a significant step toward building a sports culture rooted in integrity, trust, and dignity for all.

Scope of the Study

This RISE study focuses on understanding the prevalence of sexual violence in sports across six partner countries: Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, and Spain. These nations represent diverse cultural, social, and institutional landscapes, providing an opportunity to explore both shared and unique challenges within sports environments. By spanning multiple regions, the study aims to deliver a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the issue across varying contexts. Demographically, the study targets key groups within the sports ecosystem, with a particular emphasis on young athletes aged 18 to 30 years. This age group is considered especially vulnerable due to their stage of psycho-social development, reliance on authority figures, and, in many cases, limited awareness of their rights or how to report misconduct. Young athletes often operate within power structures where coaches, trainers, and administrators wield significant influence, making this group a focal point for both understanding the prevalence of sexual violence and developing protective measures. In addition to athletes, the RISE study encompasses sports professionals, such as coaches, trainers, and other staff involved in the direct delivery of sports activities. These individuals are critical not only as potential respondents regarding prevalence but also as key stakeholders in implementing preventive measures and fostering safer sports environments. Furthermore, administrators, including those in managerial and decision-making roles within sports organizations, are also included as their perspectives are vital for understanding institutional challenges, gaps in safeguarding measures, and opportunities for systemic improvements. By examining these groups in different geographic and cultural contexts, the RISE study captures a holistic view of the issue. It provides insights into how sexual violence manifests across various roles, settings, and countries, ensuring that the findings and subsequent recommendations are relevant, inclusive, and actionable for all stakeholders in the partner nations.

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.

The RISE research team utilized desk research to leverage existing literature, reports, and data, providing a foundational understanding of the topic. This approach allowed the study to draw on previous findings, identify gaps in current knowledge, and establish a broader context for the issue of sexual violence in sports. By synthesizing insights from multiple international and empirical sources, the RISE research team ensured that the study was informed by a wide range of perspectives, contributing to the overall depth and breadth of analysis. Furthermore, the RISE research team also recognized the importance of primary research in generating original data that captures the lived experiences and nuanced perspectives of the participants. In addition, by directly engaging with experts, the primary research provided firsthand insights into the prevalence, patterns, and risk factors of sexual violence in sports. This method enabled the study to explore varied aspects that may have been underrepresented or absent in existing literature, thereby adding unique and critical value to the research.

It can be argued that the integration of these two methods ensured both breadth and depth as desk research established a solid theoretical and contextual framework, while the primary research delved into the specific, lived realities of the issue. Together, they allowed for a comprehensive and well-rounded investigation, enhancing the study's validity, reliability, and applicability. In addition, the RISE research team's use of a mixed-methods approach underscored the importance of methodological rigor in addressing complex and sensitive topics like sexual violence. This ensured that the research was 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. This includes studies, policy documents, best practice frameworks, and statistical data available in the partner countries—Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, and Spain. By collating and synthesizing this information, the RISE research team aimed to establish a baseline understanding of how sexual violence has been documented and addressed in different contexts. It also identifies gaps in current knowledge, highlights successful prevention and intervention strategies, and serves as a foundation for developing the research tools used in the primary research phase.

Identifying Relevant Sources

The first step in the desk research process is to identify and collect relevant literature and resources. This includes peer-reviewed journal articles, reports from sports organizations, national and international policy documents, and case studies highlighting prevention and intervention strategies. Sources are drawn from diverse databases, libraries, and official government or non-governmental organization (NGO) archives to ensure comprehensive coverage. Special attention is given to identifying gaps in the literature, such as underrepresented demographics, unexamined sports settings, or limited regional data, whilst acknowledging critical legal frameworks that may exist within professional and amateur sport settings.

Cross-Country Comparisons

The desk research also emphasizes regional diversity by comparing findings across the European 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 project, that included findings from Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, and Spain.

Output and Application

The insights derived from the comprehensive desk research inform the development of methodological tools for the primary research phase, such as focus group guides and survey questions. By establishing a solid knowledge base, the desk research ensures that the study is both contextually grounded and capable of addressing real-world challenges in preventing sexual violence in sports.

Primary Research

The primary research focuses on collecting original, first-hand data through two key activities: focus group discussions and an online survey. 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 always adhering to ethical and legal standards. Specifically, these discussions delved into participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding the prevalence of sexual violence and the effectiveness of existing prevention measures. Additionally, an online survey was conducted to quantify the prevalence of sexual violence in sports across the partner countries. This survey, conducted over a chronological timeframe of approximately 1 month, 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. By combining desk research's broad, contextual insights with primary research's targeted, stakeholder-driven data, this approach ensured a nuanced understanding of the issue and supported the development of actionable recommendations for prevention and intervention.

Design, development, and implementation of the questionnaire

The questionnaire that was used in the online survey was designed to measure the prevalence of sexual violence in sports and to identify associated patterns and risk factors. The process began with defining clear objectives, ensuring the questionnaire focused on key areas such as experiences of sexual violence, awareness of reporting mechanisms, and relevant demographic factors. Researchers from Greece (ACG-RC), who led the research component, developed a comprehensive and culturally sensitive tool, inviting feedback from partner organizations in Cyprus, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, and Spain. During the development phase, particular attention was paid to drafting questions that were clear, neutral, operationally defined, and designed to elicit accurate responses. The questionnaire combined closed-ended questions to generate quantifiable data with open-ended questions to capture nuanced, and elaborative qualitative insights. Before full implementation, the questionnaire underwent a pre-test with a small, representative sample (ten individuals that matched the criteria) from partner countries. This phase evaluated question clarity, cultural appropriateness, and the overall length. Feedback from respondents informed revisions, ensuring questions were easy to understand and elicited accurate responses.

To maximize accessibility and inclusivity, the questionnaire was translated into the primary languages of the partner countries—English, Greek, Bulgarian, German, Italian, and Spanish. This multilingual approach facilitated broad participation and ensured that language barriers did not hinder respondent engagement. The survey was distributed online, providing a convenient and confidential means for participants to contribute their experiences and insights. Prior to the distribution of questionnaires, the prospective study and instruments were subject to approval by the International Review Board (IRB) of the American College of Greece (2024). Each partner country was subsequently tasked with collecting responses from up to 150 participants. Despite the combination of careful planning, thoughtful question design, iterative testing, and accessible implementation, partners did not manage to collect the full targeted responses to this highly ambitious and sensitive study.

Ethical considerations

Ethical integrity was prioritized throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their rights, and the voluntary nature of participation. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, with all personal data anonymized during analysis and reporting. Informed consent was obtained for participation and recording sessions during the focus group discussions. Sensitive topics were addressed with care to minimize discomfort, and resources for support were shared with

participants if needed. Participation in the online survey was also 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.

Organizing Expert Focus Group Discussions: Process and Methodology

The focus group discussions with experts in sexual violence prevention formed a pivotal component of the study's primary research. These discussions were designed to provide in-depth insights into the prevalence of sexual violence in sports and to explore effective prevention strategies. The process began with identifying and recruiting experts from the partner countries (Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, and Spain), including psychologists, legal advisors, researchers, and other professionals specializing in sexual violence or sports integrity. A carefully defined selection process ensured a diverse group of participants with varied expertise, fostering a comprehensive and balanced perspective.

To standardize the discussions across countries, the RISE research team developed a structured discussion guide which featured open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their experiences, observations, and recommendations. The discussion topics included identifying risk factors, assessing existing intervention strategies, and exploring potential areas for improvement and the sessions with the aforementioned experts were scheduled at mutually convenient times. Prior to the sessions, all participants received detailed information about the purpose, format, and confidentiality of the discussions to ensure transparency and comfort. Across all partner organizations, each focus group was co-facilitated by trained moderators, who created an open and respectful environment conducive to candid dialogue. With the participants' written/verbal 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.

Furthermore, the process of summarizing findings from the partners' reports on the focus group discussions with the experts involved a combination of content analysis and descriptive analysis to ensure clarity and actionable insights. In particular, the RISE research team employed a thematic content analysis to systematically review the reports generated by project partners, identifying recurring themes, patterns, and key areas of focus. Complementing this, descriptive analysis was used to distill the findings into concise summaries, presenting the most pertinent points in a clear and accessible format. The RISE research team believed that this step was crucial in ensuring that complex information was effectively communicated to all stakeholders, including project partners, policymakers, and the broader audience. By combining these methods, the research team for the RISE Erasmus+ project was able to create a structured synthesis of its findings. The content analysis ensured a thorough understanding of the data collected during the project, while the descriptive analysis transformed these insights into actionable outcomes. This dual approach facilitated informed decision-making and guided the development of targeted strategies and recommendations.

aligned with the project's objectives. By engaging a diverse group of experts and employing a standardized yet flexible approach, the focus group discussions provided critical qualitative insights that enriched the study's understanding of sexual violence in sports and informed strategies for its prevention.

3. Desk Research Findings

1. Legal Frameworks

All six countries have established legal frameworks to address sexual violence in sports, focusing on the protection of children and vulnerable groups and ensuring accountability for perpetrators.

- **Criminalization of Sexual Violence:** Each country criminalizes sexual violence under its penal codes, ensuring that perpetrators face significant legal consequences. For instance:
 - **Cyprus:** The legal framework includes laws such as Law 91(I)/2014 for child sexual abuse prevention and the National Strategy for Combating Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (available at [Cyprus Law Archive](#)).
 - **Greece:** Laws such as Law 4326/2015 and others on violence in sports provide comprehensive protections.
 - **Italy:** Italy's legal frameworks include Laws 145/2005 on sexual harassment, Law 66/1996 on sexual violence, and Law 86/2019 on sports reforms to safeguard minors ([Gazzetta Ufficiale](#)).
 - **Austria:** Austria addresses sexual violence through its criminal code, sports organizations' regulations, and a specific national action plan on gender equality in sports ([Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior](#)).
 - **Spain:** The Sports Law 39/2022, Law 8/2021 on comprehensive child protection, and laws against violence, racism, and intolerance in sports, in addition to the Lanzarote Convention tackle sexual abuse and harassment in sports ([BOE](#)).
 - **Bulgaria:** The Penal Code and the Child Protection Act specifically address sexual violence in sports ([Lex.bg](#)).

- See table below

Country	Law	Links
Cyprus	Cyprus has several laws addressing sexual violence in sports. Notable ones include: 1) The Cyprus Sports Organization Law (1969) 2) Law 91(I)/2014 - Prevention and Combating Sexual Abuse, Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography 3) Law 115(I)/2021 - Prevention and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence 4) Law 112(I)/2017 - Combating Sexual Abuse of Children 5) National Strategy for Combating Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. http://cylaw.org/nomoi/arith/1969_1_041.pdf 2. http://cylaw.org/nomoi/arith/2014_1_091.pdf 3. https://www.foni.org.cy/uploads/Ethniki-Stratigiki/71be99ae97.pdf 4. https://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2017_1_112/full.html
Greece	Greece has laws such as: 1) Law 3488/2006 - Sexual Harassment Law 2) Law 3896/2010 - Protection Against Sexual Violence 3) Law 4326/2015 - Measures Against Sports Violence 4) Law 2725/1999 - First Law on Violence in Sports	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/1589654529 2. https://justice.government.bg/home/normdoc/2134925825
Spain	Spain's legal framework includes: 1) Law 39/2022 - The Spanish Sports Law 2) Organic Law 8/2021 - Comprehensive Protection Against Violence for Children and Adolescents 3) Law 19/2007 - Against Violence, Racism, Xenophobia in Sport	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=9a690c06-7398-46da-b396-fd505b875275 2. https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2021-9347
Italy	Italy has various laws such as: 1) Law 145/2005 - Sexual Harassment Law 2) Law 66/1996 - Law Against Sexual Violence 3) Law 69/2019 - Safeguarding Victims of Domestic and Gender Violence 4) Law 86/2019 - Sports Reform Including Sexual Harassment Guidelines 5) Legislation 39/2021 - Child Protection in Sports	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2005/07/27/005G0169/sg 2. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1996/02/20/096G0073/sg 3. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2019/07/25/19G00076/sg 4. https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2021/03/18/21G00043/sg

Bulgaria	<p>Bulgaria's legal framework includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Bulgarian Penal Code - Addresses various forms of sexual violence, including in sports contexts 2) Child Protection Act - Mandates reporting and intervention in child abuse cases 3) Domestic Violence Protection Act - Provides measures for victims of violence, including sexual abuse 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) https://lex.bg/laws/ldoc/1589654529 2) https://justice.government.bg/home/normdoc/2134925825
Austria	<p>Austria's legal framework includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Provisions in the Austrian Penal Code - Addressing sexual violence including in sports 2) Child Protection Act - Ensures the protection of children from abuse, including sexual violence 3) 100% Sport association - Focused on preventing violence in sports 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) https://bmi.gv.at/211/files/Plattform_Sicherheit_Sport/165_2023_Kurzfassung_Plattform_Sicherheit_und_Sport_ENGLISCH_V20230705_webBF.pdf

While all six countries have legal measures to address sexual violence, they differ in specificity, implementation, and scope.

- **Cyprus:** Has a comprehensive set of laws directly addressing sexual violence in sports, including the National Strategy and Action Plan for Combating Child Sexual Abuse ([CyLaw](#)). These laws provide detailed guidelines and an overarching framework for prevention, intervention, and protection.
- **Greece:** Focuses on broad anti-violence laws, such as Law 4326/2015, & Law 2725/1999, but lacks specific regulations for safeguarding minors in sports environments, leaving significant gaps in enforcement.
- **Spain:** Sports-specific laws like Law 39/2022 incorporate detailed mechanisms for combating sexual violence and promoting gender equality in sports ([BOE](#)). Spain also leverages international treaties like the Lanzarote Convention for its legislative framework.
- **Italy:** The legal framework is diverse, with laws like 86/2019 requiring national sports federations to create safeguarding policies, but implementation varies significantly between regions and federations ([Gazzetta Ufficiale](#)).
- **Austria:** Lacks mandatory national safeguarding policies, relying instead on voluntary guidelines by organizations like Sport Austria ([Sport Austria](#)). This creates variability in protection standards.
- **Bulgaria:** Implements general legal protections under the Penal Code and Child Protection Act but has limited enforcement mechanisms specifically tailored to the sports context ([Lex.bg](#)).

2. Policies and Guidelines

Each country has specific policies and guidelines targeting the prevention of sexual violence in sports, however, the scope and comprehensiveness of these policies differ significantly across the partner countries. In particular, in:

- **Cyprus:** Policies like the "Code of Conduct on Gender-Based Violence in Sports" provide structured, mandatory guidelines for sports organizations ([ReactActPrevent](#)).
- **Greece:** Policies are fragmented, with initiatives like the "Start to Talk" campaign providing broad guidelines but limited actionable steps specific to the sports sector.
- **Spain:** Detailed policies include protocols for handling abuse cases established by the High Council for Sports ([CSD](#)). Spain's highly systematic approach focuses on reporting mechanisms and educational materials for sports organizations.
- **Italy:** CONI's Safeguarding Policy mandates organizations to implement frameworks for safeguarding minors, but compliance varies ([FIGC Safeguarding](#)).
- **Austria:** Policies like Sport Austria's five-point program are voluntary and emphasize prevention, leaving a gap in mandatory safeguards for sports federations ([Sport Austria](#)).
- **Bulgaria:** Relies heavily on international guidelines, like those from the IOC, with less emphasis on locally tailored policies ([Bulgarian Olympic Committee](#)).



- See table below:

Country	Policy Name	Brief Description	Source Links
Cyprus	Welfare and Protection Guide for all Participants in COA Sport	A guide published by the Cyprus Sports Organization aimed at minimizing risks in sports by offering guidelines and support for federations and clubs to ensure athlete welfare and protection.	https://foni.org.cy/uploads/Ethniki-Stratigiki/71be99ae97.pdf
Greece	National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Sport	A national action plan developed in response to the European Commission's proposals focusing on gender equality in sport, including measures for prevention and response to sexual violence in sports.	https://www.sportministerium.at/en/national-action-plan-gender-equality-sport
Spain	Spanish Sports Law (Law 39/2022)	Spain's comprehensive sports law includes provisions for the protection of athletes, with a focus on gender equality, anti-violence measures, and the rights of athletes in the sports ecosystem.	https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx?g=9a690c06-7398-46da-b396-fd505b875275
Italy	CONI Safeguarding Policy (2023)	The Italian National Olympic Committee's Safeguarding Policy aimed at preventing abuse, violence, and discrimination, ensuring all athletes and sports organizations adhere to safeguarding standards.	https://www.coni.it/it/
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Olympic Committee (BOC) Policies	Policies and guidelines enforced by the Bulgarian Olympic Committee for the prevention of sexual violence, including background checks, codes of conduct, and mandatory training for coaches and sports staff.	https://bgolympic.org/
Austria	Sport Austria's 5 Programs for Prevention of Sexual Violence	Sport Austria's comprehensive prevention program which includes training for sports clubs, networks for trained confidants, and developing recommendations for action for trainers to safeguard against sexual violence.	1,2) NATIONAL ACTION PLAN: AUSTRIA'S APPROACH TO FIGHT SEXUALISED VIOLENCE IN SPORT 3) 5-Punkte-Programm von Sport Austria zur Prävention sexualisierter Gewalt 2019 : Sportaustria 4) https://cases.univie.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_cases/CASES_ProjectReport_2021.pdf 5) Joint Programme Child Safeguarding in Sport

3. Reporting Mechanisms

Each country emphasizes reporting mechanisms that ensure confidentiality and victim support. The mechanisms for reporting abuse differ in terms of accessibility and effectiveness:

- **Cyprus:** Provides centralized reporting through police hotlines and specialized units for child protection ([Cyprus Police](#)).
- **Greece:** Reporting relies on informal mechanisms, with public cases like Sofia Bekatorou's story highlighting systemic gaps.
- **Spain:** Structured reporting pathways are implemented nationally, with protocols supported by La Liga and other sports organizations ([La Liga](#)).
- **Italy:** Offers detailed reporting procedures through sports federations like FIGC, but challenges remain in implementing these at grassroots levels ([FIGC](#)).
- **Austria:** Offers anonymous reporting tools and online platforms, and the reporting is decentralized, relying on sports organizations and voluntary trust persons ([Sport Austria](#), <https://100prozent-sport.at> and <https://vera-vertrauensstelle.at>).
- **Bulgaria:** Provides national hotlines for victims of violence but lacks sport-specific reporting channels ([Animus Hotline](#)).



• **See table below:**

Country	Reporting Mechanism Name	Brief Description	Source Links
Cyprus	Police Emergency Lines and Reporting Services	Cyprus provides multiple reporting options, including police emergency lines (112/119) and dedicated channels for child abuse cases through the Special Divisional Unit for Domestic Violence.	https://www.police.gov.cy/
Greece	National Reporting Channels for Abuse in Sports	In Greece, informal reporting mechanisms exist, but high-profile cases like the Sofia Bekatorou incident have raised public awareness and led to the introduction of more formal reporting systems.	
Spain	Spanish National Reporting System for Abuse	Spain features several reporting mechanisms, including a system within sports organizations, as well as police channels for victims of sexual violence, with active national efforts for abuse prevention.	https://www.boe.es/
Italy	FIGC Reporting Mechanism for Abuse in Football	The FIGC (Italian Football Federation) provides an established reporting mechanism for abuse in football, including both internal and external reporting systems to safeguard minors and athletes.	https://www.figc.it/media/210673/87-linee-guida-figc-per-le-politiche-di-safeguarding.pdf
Bulgaria	National Helplines and Reporting Systems	Bulgaria has established national helplines for victims of all forms of violence, including child abuse, with specialized services for reporting sexual exploitation and trafficking.	https://www.demetra.bg/
Austria	Internal and External Reporting Systems in Sports Organizations	Austria provides a combination of internal reporting systems in sports organizations, external police reports, and confidential helplines to ensure that sexual abuse cases are reported and handled appropriately.	https://bmi.gv.at/

4. Support Services

Support **systems** for victims of sexual violence is a shared priority. However, these services vary significantly in availability and scope:

- **Cyprus:** Offers comprehensive services through organizations like SPAVO, which provide psychological and legal support for survivors ([SPAVO](#)).
- **Greece:** Has limited formal support structures, relying on NGOs and informal networks.
- **Spain:** National initiatives include robust collaborations with sports federations and NGOs to provide comprehensive survivor support ([La Liga Safeguarding](#)).
- **Italy:** Services like Vademecum for minors aim to create safe environments, but regional disparities affect access ([Safe Play](#)).
- **Austria:** Violence Protection Centers offer psychological and legal support for various forms of abuse, but sports-specific services are limited ([Gewaltschutzzentren](#), <https://vera-vertrauensstelle.at> and <https://100prozent-sport.at>).
- **Bulgaria:** Centers like "Vselena" provide counseling and dedicated spaces for recovery but are concentrated in urban areas ([Vselena Center](#)).

5. Shared Challenges

Despite their efforts, these countries face similar challenges:

- **Implementation Gaps:** While many policies exist, ensuring their consistent application remains an issue.
- **Cultural Barriers:** Societal norms in some regions may hinder the reporting of sexual violence.
- **Limited Data:** Research on the prevalence of sexual violence in sports is scarce across all six countries, with only isolated studies conducted.
- **Lack of Transparency:** in reporting sexual violence across all European Countries investigated.

It can be argued that the partner countries of Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy, Austria, and Bulgaria demonstrate shared commitments to preventing and addressing sexual violence in sports through robust legal frameworks, awareness campaigns, and support services. However, ongoing challenges highlight the need for greater implementation efforts, cultural change, and comprehensive research. Collaborative initiatives like Erasmus+ projects and EU-funded programs offer promising avenues for progress. For further exploration, you can access more detailed information via the following links:

- **Cyprus React Act Prevent Sexual Violence:** [ReactActPrevent](#)
- **Austria's Sport Prevention Programs:** [Sport Austria](#)
- **Italy's Safeguarding Policy:** [FIGC Safeguarding](#)
- **Bulgaria's Violence Protection Centers:** [Vselena Center](#)
- **Spain's Sports Legislation:** [BOE](#)

Summary of secondary data

While these six countries share a commitment to addressing sexual violence in sports, their approaches vary considerably across key dimensions such as legal frameworks, policies, awareness campaigns, training programs, reporting mechanisms, and support services. **This diversity reflects differences in national priorities, resources, and institutional capacity, underscoring the need for tailored strategies and cross-border collaboration to address these challenges effectively.** However, it should be noted that such limitations have been duly recognised and amplified in the literature, and over a substantial period of time (see for example, Alexander et al, 2011). For example, legal measures are foundational to any country's ability to combat sexual violence in sports. Spain and Italy stand out with their robust legislative frameworks that integrate specific provisions for safeguarding athletes. Spain's Law 39/2022, for example, explicitly addresses sexual harassment in sports, establishing strict compliance measures for sports organizations. Italy's Law 86/2019 requires sports federations to implement safeguarding policies, ensuring a systemic approach to prevention. In contrast, Austria and Bulgaria rely heavily on general criminal codes and international conventions like the Lanzarote Convention. This reliance results in less comprehensive protections within sports contexts, as specific national policies are often lacking. Cyprus and Greece fall somewhere in between, with general laws addressing violence but fewer provisions tailored to sports. In particular, Greece focuses on broad anti-violence legislation such as Law 4326/2015, but lacks specific regulations for safeguarding minors in sports environments, leaving significant gaps in enforcement, whereas Cyprus' National Strategy on Child Sexual Abuse Prevention, which has yet to see full enforcement.

Spain and Italy also excel in **policy implementation, with comprehensive national strategies** to safeguard minors in sports. Spain's High Council for Sports has developed clear protocols for abuse prevention and reporting, ensuring uniform application across the country. Italy's Safeguarding Policy, adopted by organizations like FIGC, mandates codes of conduct and training for all stakeholders, creating a robust framework for compliance. In contrast, Austria's voluntary five-point program and Bulgaria's reliance on international guidelines like those of the IOC result in uneven adoption across sports organizations. Cyprus' Code of Conduct on Gender-Based Violence in Sports and Greece's involvement in the "Start to Talk" project show promise but remain fragmented, requiring stronger integration at the national level to ensure broader applicability.

Regarding **reporting mechanisms**, these also differ significantly in accessibility and efficiency. Spain and Italy provide structured, easily accessible reporting systems through federations and dedicated channels. Spain's collaboration with organizations like La Liga ensures mechanisms are uniformly applied, while Italy's FIGC policies mandate clear reporting protocols. Cyprus and Greece rely more on general hotlines or police reporting systems, which may not be sport-specific or adequately equipped to handle such cases. Austria's decentralized approach, depending on voluntary trust persons, can create inconsistencies, while Bulgaria's national hotlines, though accessible, are not sufficiently sport-specific to address unique challenges in the field.

Similarly, support services also reveal stark differences. Italy and Spain excel with comprehensive, multi-stakeholder collaborations that provide counseling, legal support, and recovery programs. Italy's "Safe Place Safe Play" initiative integrates public and private efforts to safeguard young athletes. Austria and Bulgaria offer valuable resources like Violence Protection Centers and the "Vselená" Center, but these are often underfunded or regionally concentrated. It is worth noting that in Austria highlight that the available resources are stretched thin in meeting the considerable needs of their communities, plus the lack of awareness regarding how to request support from these centers, further limits their impact. Cyprus and Greece have limited institutional support, with services relying heavily on NGOs like SPAVO.

One can argue that the differences between these six countries underscore the need for tailored strategies that respect national contexts while fostering cross-border collaboration. Countries like Spain and Italy can serve as models for structured, nationwide approaches, while Austria and Bulgaria might benefit from integrating mandatory policies and expanding their institutional capacity. Cyprus and Greece, with promising initiatives, require stronger enforcement mechanisms and broader integration to ensure comprehensive protections. Addressing these disparities is crucial for building a unified European framework that ensures safety, dignity, and justice for all athletes. This cross-country analysis serves as a foundation for continued collaboration and the development of effective strategies to combat sexual violence in sports.

4. Focus Group Discussion Findings

The experts were asked the following six questions:

1. Based on your expertise, how prevalent is sexual violence in sports, and how has this prevalence evolved over recent years?
2. What are the most common forms of sexual violence encountered within the sports community, and do they vary by sport or level of competition?
3. Are there specific risk factors or characteristics of sports environments that contribute to a higher prevalence of sexual violence?
4. How do cultural and societal factors influence the prevalence of sexual violence in sports, and have these factors changed in recent times?
5. Can you share insights on the underreporting of sexual violence cases in sports and the challenges in obtaining accurate prevalence data? Additionally, are there notable differences in the prevalence of sexual violence between male and female athletes or across different age groups within sports?
6. How has the #MeToo movement and heightened media attention impacted awareness of sexual violence in sports, and in your view, what key strategies and interventions can be implemented to reduce its prevalence?

Following is the summary of their insights:

1. Prevalence and Evolution of Sexual Violence in Sports: A Comparative Perspective

Sexual violence in sports remains a pervasive issue across all countries discussed, with variations in prevalence and reporting influenced by cultural, societal, and systemic factors. While the visibility of sexual violence has increased in recent years, thanks to global movements like #MeToo and heightened media attention, the actual prevalence is difficult to quantify due to underreporting and a lack of comprehensive data. Partner countries Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, and Austria illustrate both shared and unique challenges in addressing this issue.

Cyprus

In Cyprus, sexual violence in sports is underreported, with limited statistical data available. Police archives since 2019 show only 13 cases involving minors, reflecting a broader societal and institutional reluctance to recognize and report such incidents and the experts noted that survivors often face stigmatization, threats, and pressure to withdraw their cases, leading to a culture of silence. Historically, gender stereotypes and a lack of procedural safeguards compounded the issue. However, the experts argued that there has been notable progress in recent years, including the development of policies, guides, and handbooks aimed at preventing sexual violence in sports. The #MeToo movement has inspired survivors to come forward, though systemic and cultural barriers persist. Furthermore, the introduction of training for police and sports stakeholders has helped raise awareness, but underreporting remains a critical challenge.

Greece

In Greece, sexual violence in sports is widespread but significantly underreported. The experts highlighted that only approximately 19 studies in Europe between 2006 and 2023 have explored this issue, highlighting a lack of comprehensive research. In addition, the experts attribute underreporting to societal taboos, stigma, and the normalization of abusive behavior within sports cultures. Movements like #MeToo have increased visibility, but systemic barriers and possible cultural barriers remain, including a slow judicial process and insufficient victim support. Furthermore, the experts argued that younger athletes and those in individual sports are particularly vulnerable due to close relationships with authority figures, such as coaches. Taken together, such contributing factors render the overall underreporting of sexual violence a significant problem that needs to be immediately examined. Experts stressed the need for cultural change, improved reporting mechanisms, and legal, political and social reforms to address the prevalence and enable better support for survivors. Recent shifts in societal awareness indicated some progress, but tangible change is slow and severely under par.

Spain

In Spain, sexual violence in sports is acknowledged as a longstanding issue, with younger athletes and female participants most affected. The prevalence is attributed to power imbalances, normalized inappropriate behaviors, and the hyper-sexualization of athletes, particularly females. The country has seen increased awareness, driven by media coverage and advocacy movements, but underreporting remains a challenge. In addition, the experts emphasized the role of peer dynamics, cultural factors, and systemic weaknesses in enabling abuse. For instance, certain sports cultures tolerate inappropriate behaviors, making athletes more vulnerable. Furthermore, the experts argued that recent efforts included education and prevention strategies targeting younger athletes and stakeholders, however, societal norms and fear of retaliation still hindered progress, with male victims facing additional stigma.

Italy

In Italy, sexual violence in sports is recognized as a multifaceted issue, involving not only overt acts of abuse but also verbal and psychological harassment. Experts highlighted the pervasive "culture of silence" within sports organizations, where victims fear retaliation or career repercussions. Furthermore, the experts argued that the rise of awareness campaigns and legislative changes has prompted a shift in attitudes, with more cases being reported. However, systemic issues persist, including inadequate education on abuse prevention and a lack of clear reporting mechanisms. According to the experts, female athletes are disproportionately affected, with societal attitudes and media hyper-sexualization contributing to their vulnerability. They also argued that education and cultural change are seen as essential to addressing the issue.

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, the prevalence of sexual violence in sports has decreased over recent years due to increased awareness campaigns and educational programs and the experts attribute this progress to proactive measures by sports organizations, such as the introduction of "Call4Girls/Call4Boys" helplines and the implementation of a "Code of Ethics" in 2015. In addition, the experts discussed that despite these advancements, the hierarchical nature of sports and cultural norms that discourage open discussion about sexual misconduct continue to hinder reporting and that younger athletes and those at amateur levels are particularly vulnerable due to insufficient oversight and education on safeguarding. The country's focus on prevention and systemic reforms marks a positive trend, though challenges remain.

Austria

In Austria, sexual violence in sports is a significant concern, though comprehensive data on its prevalence is lacking and the experts identified verbal harassment, inappropriate comments, and

grooming as common forms of abuse, whereas, power imbalances, especially between male coaches and young athletes, exacerbate the problem. Austria has implemented several initiatives to address the issue, including helplines, the establishment of "Trust Persons," and advanced education for coaches. In particular, the introduction of a "Code of Ethics" in 2015 represents a proactive step towards fostering safer sports environments. Despite these efforts, cultural stereotypes and inadequate reporting systems continue to pose challenges and the experts advocated for stronger institutional frameworks and increased accountability.

Key Themes Across Countries

1. **Underreporting:** The fear of stigmatization, career repercussions, and inadequate support systems are common barriers. These barriers manifest differently across countries, reflecting societal norms and systemic weaknesses. For example, in Greece, cultural taboos heavily deter reporting while in Bulgaria, hierarchical power dynamics within sports organizations remain a significant issue.
2. **Cultural Norms:** Patriarchal values, societal taboos, and normalized aggression in sports contribute to the persistence of sexual violence. The degree to which these norms influence reporting and intervention varies by region. In Italy and Greece, the "culture of silence" is particularly pronounced, making it challenging to address these issues comprehensively. Austria has seen progress with the implementation of ethical codes, though cultural stereotypes persist.
3. **Power Dynamics:** The close relationships between athletes and authority figures create opportunities for abuse, particularly in individual sports. This dynamic is a recurring theme across all countries, with younger athletes being especially vulnerable due to dependency on coaches and mentors. Austria and Spain both highlight how these imbalances perpetuate systemic abuse.
4. **Systemic Challenges:** The lack of robust reporting mechanisms and insufficient education on abuse prevention hinder progress. For instance, while Cyprus has made strides in training police and stakeholders, the absence of widespread educational initiatives limits the broader impact. Similarly, Bulgaria's efforts are promising but need to address gaps in safeguarding policies.
5. **Progress:** Awareness campaigns, education programs, and legislative changes have led to increased visibility and modest social-psychological improvements in safeguarding measures. Examples include Austria's "Trust Persons" initiative and Bulgaria's helplines. However, sustained efforts are needed to build on these successes, as challenges like underreporting and systemic inertia remain significant.

2. Common Forms of Sexual Violence in Sports: A Comparative Analysis & Finding Common Denominators.

Sexual violence within the sports community manifests in various forms, including verbal harassment, grooming, inappropriate touching, and outright sexual assault. The prevalence and type of abuse often depend on the cultural and organizational structures of the sports environment, as well as the level of competition. Across Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, and Austria, experts have highlighted shared challenges and country-specific nuances that influence the nature and reporting of these incidents.

Cyprus

In Cyprus, the experts argued that sexual violence in sports is characterized by physical and psychological abuse, often perpetrated by authority figures like coaches. Participants noted instances of inappropriate physical contact, such as touching that crosses boundaries under the guise of training or guidance. Verbal abuse, including sexualized comments, is also prevalent. Furthermore, they argued that the lack of oversight and accountability in sports environments exacerbates the issue and that incidents involving digital sexual violence, such as online harassment, have also increased, reflecting broader societal trends. In addition, the experts emphasized that the risk of abuse is heightened in environments where clear guidelines on appropriate conduct are absent. Additionally, cultural factors, including a reluctance to challenge authority figures, further enable the persistence of abuse.

Greece

In Greece, the forms of sexual violence commonly reported include verbal harassment, gender-based harassment, inappropriate physical contact, and grooming. As such, the experts highlighted that verbal sexual harassment often involves comments about an athlete's body or unwelcome sexual advances and that grooming by coaches or authority figures is a particular concern in individual sports, where close, one-on-one relationships provide opportunities for exploitation. They also noted a troubling normalization of inappropriate behavior within sports environments, such as comments framed as "banter" or culturally accepted gestures that breach personal boundaries. Some of them argued that the exposure of athletes' bodies in sports like gymnastics and swimming further complicates the issue, contributing to objectification and an increased risk of abuse.

Spain

According to experts, Spain's sports community experiences a range of sexual violence, including verbal harassment, grooming, and inappropriate physical contact, and they highlighted that female athletes are disproportionately affected, often targeted by degrading remarks or unwelcome advances. However, male athletes are not immune, particularly in sports where hyper-sexualization

is prevalent. They also discussed that a notable issue in Spain is the use of digital platforms to perpetrate abuse and that social media interactions between athletes and authority figures have created new avenues for harassment. Additionally, they argued that the hyper-sexualization of female athletes, especially in sports like beach volleyball, has drawn criticism for perpetuating a culture of objectification.

Italy

The experts in Italy highlighted that verbal and psychological abuse are prevalent forms of sexual violence in sports. These include inappropriate comments, suggestive jokes, and verbal attacks that demean or objectify athletes, and they argued that physical abuse, such as unwanted touching or overly invasive "medical" examinations, also occurs. They also discussed that a "culture of silence" within sports organizations contributes to the persistence of these issues, as victims are often discouraged from reporting incidents, whereas the media-driven hyper-sexualization particularly of female athletes, further exacerbates the problem. Lastly, the experts emphasized the need for education and clear guidelines to address the blurred lines between acceptable behavior and abuse.

Bulgaria

According to the experts in Bulgaria, verbal harassment and inappropriate comments are the most frequently encountered forms of sexual violence in sports, who also noted that these behaviors often go unchallenged, especially in environments lacking robust oversight. As such, physical abuse, including inappropriate touching, is less frequently reported but remains a concern in certain sports. They argued that systemic efforts, such as the introduction of "Codes of Ethics" and helplines, aim to address these issues. However, hierarchical power dynamics within sports organizations often discourage athletes from reporting abuse, perpetuating a cycle of silence and normalization. In addition, they discussed that the emphasis on prevention through education is a positive development, though more is needed to tackle deeply ingrained cultural norms.

Austria

In Austria, sexual violence manifests in verbal harassment, inappropriate physical contact, and grooming, with the experts highlighting incidents of derogatory comments, especially towards female and LGBTQ+ athletes, as common. They also argued that physical abuse, though less frequently reported, often involves inappropriate touching disguised as training practices. In addition, they discussed that the hierarchical nature of sports organizations, combined with inadequate oversight, creates environments where abuse can thrive. Furthermore, they argued that verbal abuse, particularly online harassment, is a growing concern, and efforts to address these issues include implementing trust persons and ethical guidelines, though challenges remain in changing entrenched cultural attitudes.

Key Themes Across Countries

1. **Verbal Harassment:** Sexualized comments, inappropriate jokes, and degrading remarks are widespread across all partner countries. These behaviors often serve as precursors to more severe forms of abuse.
 2. **Inappropriate Physical Contact:** Under the guise of training or medical care, authority figures exploit their positions to cross personal boundaries. This is particularly prevalent in individual sports, where close relationships between athletes and coaches provide opportunities for abuse.
 3. **Grooming:** Grooming by coaches or other authority figures is a significant concern, especially in sports with younger athletes. This involves building trust to exploit athletes emotionally and physically.
 4. **Digital Abuse:** Increasingly, digital platforms are being used to perpetrate sexual violence, with online harassment and inappropriate messaging reported in countries like Spain and Austria.
 5. **Hyper-sexualization:** The objectification of athletes, particularly females, is a pervasive issue. Media portrayals and certain sports' uniform requirements exacerbate this problem, as seen in Spain and Italy.
 6. **Cultural and Structural Barriers:** Across all countries, cultural norms, hierarchical structures, and inadequate reporting mechanisms hinder efforts to address and prevent sexual violence in sports.
 7. **Lack of Awareness:** Lack of Awareness of Human Rights/Equality to encourage transparency, appropriate channels of reporting, and the absence of codes of conduct and professional standards.
3. Risk Factors and Characteristics of Sports Environments Contributing to Sexual Violence: A Comparative Perspective

Sexual violence in sports environments is perpetuated by specific risk factors and structural characteristics that create conditions for abuse. Across Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, and Austria, cultural, systemic, and interpersonal dynamics significantly influence the prevalence of sexual violence. Factors such as power imbalances, inadequate oversight, and entrenched societal norms emerge as critical elements in understanding the risks.

Cyprus

Regarding this question, the experts in Cyprus identified that the close relationships between athletes and coaches often lead to blurred boundaries, creating opportunities for abuse. In addition, they argued that the long training hours, overnight stays during competitions, and inadequate safeguards within sports facilities heighten the risk. They also emphasized that traditional coaching methods, authoritarian dynamics, and a lack of awareness among athletes, coaches, and parents exacerbate

the problem. Additionally, societal taboos surrounding sexual violence discourage open discussions, leaving victims unsupported and the absence of specialized facilities and protective mechanisms, coupled with normalized gender stereotypes, further contributes to the persistence of sexual violence. The experts also noted that survivors often fear being accused of acting out of spite, particularly in elite sports environments where competition is fierce.

Greece

Greece faces similar issues, as highlighted by the experts who discussed that entrenched power imbalances between coaches and athletes were a significant risk factor. Individual sports, which foster one-on-one relationships, are particularly vulnerable and the experts noted that athletes often depend heavily on their coaches for career progression, making it difficult for them to report abuse, and that inadequate supervision in high-risk spaces such as locker rooms and shared accommodations during competitions further exacerbates the problem. They also identified cultural factors, including patriarchal values and societal stigma, to reinforce the silence around sexual violence. Tight-knit communities, and even lack of parental awareness of critical issues makes the highly sensitive topic difficult to assess and reveal. Furthermore, it was evident from the analysis conducted, that sexual violence within the sports context is a highly complex and intertwined issue, reflecting a complex multitude of social, cultural, and individual factors. Lastly, they highlighted that the lack of proper training for sports staff and officials on safeguarding contributes to an environment where abuse can go unchecked.

Spain

The experts from Spain argued that the hierarchical power dynamics within sports organizations are a key risk factor where coaches and authority figures often wield significant influence over athletes, particularly younger ones and that this dynamic is compounded by a lack of oversight and ineffective reporting mechanisms. They also identified that certain environments, such as locker rooms are highlighted as high-risk areas. The normalization of inappropriate behaviors within specific sports cultures, coupled with societal tolerance for "banter," allows harmful conduct to persist. Furthermore, they argued that the hyper-sexualization, particularly of female athletes, also creates conditions conducive to abuse. Additionally, digital platforms have introduced new risks, with online harassment and grooming becoming increasingly common.

Italy

In Italy, the "culture of silence" within sports organizations remains a major risk factor and the experts emphasized that power imbalances, particularly between male coaches and young female athletes, are deeply entrenched. These dynamics are reinforced by societal attitudes that often blame victims and discourage reporting, and identified environments such as training camps, overnight stays, and unsupervised coaching sessions as high-risk. In addition, the lack of structured safeguarding policies

and insufficient education on appropriate conduct further contribute to the problem. Similarly, they argued that the hyper-sexualization of female athletes by media and sports organizations increases their vulnerability to abuse.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria's sports environment is marked by hierarchical structures, as pointed out by the experts, where coaches and officials hold substantial power over athletes. As such, they argued that the lack of formalized training on safeguarding and the absence of oversight mechanisms allow abuse to go unchallenged. In addition, they highlighted that cultural norms discouraging open discussions about sexual misconduct contribute to underreporting. Experts also pointed out that younger athletes and those in amateur sports are particularly vulnerable due to inadequate awareness and education. While initiatives such as codes of ethics and helplines represent progress, systemic issues within sports organizations still pose significant risks.

Austria

In Austria, the experts identified power imbalances between athletes and coaches as a significant risk factor, particularly in individual sports where one-on-one interactions are common, where verbal harassment and inappropriate physical contact are more likely in environments with insufficient oversight. Furthermore, the experts identified specific high-risk spaces such as locker rooms and overnight accommodations during competitions. Cultural stereotypes and inadequate training on safeguarding also contribute to the problem. Despite progress in implementing ethical guidelines and establishing a trust person, the systemic normalization of harmful behaviors persists.

Key Risk Factors Across Countries

1. **Power Imbalances:** Across all partner countries, the hierarchical nature of sports organizations and the dependency of athletes on authority figures create opportunities for abuse.
2. **Inadequate Oversight:** A lack of supervision in high-risk areas, such as locker rooms, shared accommodations, and training sessions, facilitates inappropriate behavior.
3. **Cultural Norms:** Patriarchal values, societal taboos, and normalized aggression within sports cultures discourage reporting and allow abuse to thrive.
4. **Lack of Safeguarding Education:** Insufficient training for athletes, coaches, and staff on appropriate conduct and safeguarding contributes to the persistence of sexual violence.
5. **High-Risk Environments:** The training camps, overnight stays, and other unsupervised settings present significant risks, particularly for younger athletes.
6. **Hyper-sexualization:** The media-driven objectification of female athletes exacerbates their vulnerability to abuse, as seen in Italy and Spain.

7. **Digital Risks:** The rise of online platforms introduces new avenues for harassment and grooming, particularly in Spain and Austria.

4. Cultural and Societal Influences on Sexual Violence in Sports: A Comparative Analysis

Cultural and societal factors significantly shape the prevalence and dynamics of sexual violence in sports. Across Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, and Austria, entrenched norms, taboos, and evolving societal attitudes influence both the occurrence and reporting of abuse. While there has been progress in addressing these issues, many systemic and cultural barriers persist. It is imminent that such problems need to be addressed, as one may suggest that a whole societal and systemic failure abides, leading to sexual violence manifesting, and within a framework of cultural and societal barriers making victims unable and unwilling to report incidents of sexual violence.

Cyprus

In particular, in Cyprus, societal taboos surrounding sexual violence are deeply rooted, creating significant barriers to disclosure and intervention. The experts argued that cultural stigmas discourage survivors from speaking out, particularly in a tight-knit community where fear of judgment and retaliation is prevalent. In addition, they pointed out that traditional gender roles also play a role, as female athletes are often perceived as more vulnerable and less credible than their male counterparts. They also acknowledged that recent societal changes, such as the influence of the #MeToo movement, have brought some attention to the issue and some awareness campaigns and policy reforms within sports organizations are signs of progress. However, they argued that deeply ingrained cultural attitudes continue to hinder the effectiveness of these measures.

Greece

In Greece, the experts highlighted that patriarchal values and societal silence around sexual violence contribute to its persistence in sports and that power imbalances, particularly in individual sports, are exacerbated by cultural norms that discourage challenging authority figures. In addition, they pointed out that the prevalence of victim-blaming further discourages reporting, creating an environment of fear and mistrust. They also acknowledged that the #MeToo movement has sparked a cultural shift, with high-profile cases inspiring survivors to come forward. However, experts noted that while awareness has increased, tangible societal and institutional changes remain limited. The judicial system's slow pace and societal reluctance to fully confront these issues underscore the challenges of achieving lasting reform.

Spain

In Spain, cultural factors such as the normalization of inappropriate behavior in certain sports environments significantly contribute to sexual violence. The experts argued that peer dynamics and

hierarchical structures often discourage athletes from reporting abuse, in addition to the hyper-sexualization of female athletes in media and sports culture which reinforces harmful stereotypes and objectification. Furthermore, they discussed that societal attitudes are beginning to shift, driven by media coverage of abuse cases and advocacy efforts. Younger generations show greater awareness of the issue, and campaigns targeting athletes, coaches, and sports organizations have gained traction. However, they pointed out that societal tolerance for "banter" and dismissive attitudes towards verbal harassment remain obstacles to meaningful change.

Italy

In Italy, the "culture of silence" within sports organizations reflects broader societal norms that prioritizes reputation over accountability, as pointed out by the experts. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often place the burden of proof on survivors, discouraging them from coming forward, whereas female athletes, in particular, face challenges stemming from media-driven hyper-sexualization and societal objectification. Despite these challenges, they argued that awareness campaigns and legislative reforms have prompted some cultural shifts and that the rise of advocacy movements and public discourse around sexual violence has encouraged more survivors to share their experiences. However, they pointed out that systemic and cultural inertia still hinder the creation of safer sports environments.

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, cultural norms that discourage open discussions about sexual violence contribute to its underreporting, with the experts arguing that hierarchical structures within sports organizations often reflect broader societal power dynamics, with authority figures exerting disproportionate influence over athletes. As such, younger athletes, particularly those in amateur sports, are especially vulnerable. In addition, the experts identified that positive changes include the implementation of codes of ethics and educational programs aimed at raising awareness. While these measures indicate progress, societal taboos and a lack of robust reporting mechanisms continue to undermine their effectiveness and emphasize the need for a cultural shift that encourages open dialogue and challenges entrenched power dynamics.

Austria

The experts in Austria, argued that the societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality play a significant role in shaping the prevalence of sexual violence in sports, with traditional stereotypes and a lack of awareness about appropriate behavior creating environments where abuse can thrive. They also identified that LGBTQ+ athletes and female participants are particularly vulnerable to verbal harassment and objectification. In addition, they highlighted that efforts to address these issues include the establishment of ethical guidelines and the promotion of awareness campaigns. However, societal norms that tolerate or normalize aggressive behavior in sports remain a significant

barrier. The experts advocated for increased education and cultural change to address these deeply rooted issues.

Key Themes Across Countries

1. **Patriarchal Values and Gender Norms:** Across all partner countries, traditional gender roles and patriarchal attitudes contribute to the vulnerability of female athletes and discourage reporting.
2. **Victim-Blaming:** Societal tendencies to blame survivors for their abuse are pervasive, creating an environment of fear and silence.
3. **Normalization of Aggression:** Aggressive behavior and "banter" in sports are often normalized, masking abusive conduct and discouraging intervention.
4. **Hyper-sexualization:** Media and societal objectification of athletes, particularly females, reinforce harmful stereotypes and increase vulnerability.
5. **Power Dynamics:** Hierarchical structures in sports reflect broader societal inequalities, enabling authority figures to exploit their positions.
6. **Progress and Awareness:** While societal awareness has increased due to movements like #MeToo and media attention, tangible cultural and institutional changes remain limited.

5. Underreporting of Sexual Violence in Sports: Challenges and Demographic Disparities

The experts argued that underreporting of sexual violence in sports is a significant challenge across Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, and Austria. This pervasive issue is influenced by cultural, societal, and systemic factors, resulting in limited data on prevalence, and the differences in reporting between male and female athletes, as well as across age groups, further complicate efforts to understand the scope of the problem.

Cyprus

In Cyprus, the experts argued that underreporting is driven by fear of stigmatization, societal taboos, and inadequate support systems, where survivors, particularly minors and women, are often reluctant to come forward due to concerns about retaliation, judgment, or being accused of acting out of spite. Additionally, they pointed out that a lack of awareness about reporting procedures and safeguarding mechanisms exacerbates the problem. Furthermore, they highlighted that any data that exists is incomplete and skewed, with only a few reported cases involving minors being officially documented. Experts emphasized that fear of reprisal and lengthy legal processes discourage victims from pursuing justice. While initiatives like the development of guides and handbooks aim to improve awareness, they highlighted that the entrenched culture of silence poses significant challenges.

Greece

In Greece, the experts argued that societal norms and patriarchal values contribute to a widespread underreporting of sexual violence in sports and that survivors often face victim-blaming and social ostracism, which dissuade them from coming forward. Furthermore, and of critical importance to note is that the majority of the athletes who have experienced sexual violence, either in the form of non-contact sexual violence (NCSV), or contact sexual violence (CSV), are unwilling to disclose their experiences due to psychological pressure, and the negative feelings of shame, guilt, and lack of confidence permeating. It was also highlighted that the judicial process is notoriously slow and cumbersome, which further discourages survivors from seeking justice. Taken together, a lack of trust, either in the system, or embedded in the culture of this country, results in such problems not being addressed and tackled. One may even suggest that sexual harassment in this country may be treated as a societal taboo, and the occurrence of it in sports is often regarded with disbelief and irony. In addition, the experts noted a lack of standardized data collection methods, resulting in significant gaps in understanding the prevalence of sexual violence. As such, younger athletes and those in individual sports are particularly vulnerable, with power dynamics between coaches and athletes creating environments where abuse is underreported. Although movements like #MeToo have prompted more survivors to speak out, they argued that systemic and cultural barriers remain significant obstacles.

Spain

In Spain, underreporting is influenced by peer dynamics, cultural acceptance of certain behaviors, and fear of retaliation. In particular, the experts argued that male athletes are particularly unlikely to report abuse due to societal stigma and concerns about their reputation, whereas, younger athletes often lack the knowledge or confidence to recognize and report abuse, especially when the perpetrator is a trusted authority figure. In addition, they pointed out that digital harassment, such as grooming and inappropriate messaging, has added another layer of complexity. While media coverage and advocacy efforts have raised awareness, the normalization of verbal harassment and "banter" within sports cultures continues to hinder accurate reporting. Comprehensive educational programs targeting athletes, parents, and coaches have been suggested by experts as a way to address these challenges.

Italy

The experts argued that Italy's "culture of silence" within sports organizations mirrors broader societal attitudes that prioritize reputation over accountability. In this notion, the survivors face significant challenges in reporting abuse, with many fearing career repercussions or social ostracism, and female athletes are particularly affected, as societal norms and hyper-sexualization amplify their vulnerability. Furthermore, they highlighted that the lack of comprehensive reporting mechanisms and standardized data collection has created a fragmented understanding of the issue. Experts also noted that sexual violence is more likely to be reported when it involves overt acts like rape, whereas verbal and psychological abuse often goes unrecognized. Lastly, they argued that while recent

advocacy efforts have prompted some survivors to share their experiences, any systemic change remains slow.

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, underreporting is exacerbated by hierarchical power dynamics within sports organizations and cultural norms that discourage open discussion of sexual violence. As such, the experts identified the younger athletes, particularly in amateur sports, to be especially vulnerable due to limited awareness and inadequate safeguarding measures. They also highlighted that efforts to address underreporting may include the introduction of helplines and codes of ethics, which aim to provide safe spaces for disclosure. However, these initiatives face significant barriers, including a lack of trust in the reporting process and fears of retaliation, and experts stressed the importance of creating anonymous and accessible reporting mechanisms to improve data collection and support for survivors.

Austria

In Austria, societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality contribute to the underreporting of sexual violence in sports. In particular, the experts identified that male athletes and LGBTQ+ individuals face additional challenges, as societal stigma and fear of judgment discourage them from speaking out. In addition, young athletes are particularly vulnerable due to their dependency on authority figures and lack of awareness about their rights. Despite progress in implementing ethical guidelines and trust persons, the experts argued that reporting remains inconsistent. The absence of comprehensive data collection systems and the normalization of verbal harassment further obscure the prevalence of abuse and they emphasized the need for systemic reforms, including improved education and robust reporting frameworks.

Key Themes Across Countries

1. **Fear of Retaliation and Stigmatization:** Survivors often refrain from reporting abuse due to fears of career repercussions, social judgment, or retaliation.
2. **Cultural Barriers:** Patriarchal values, societal taboos, and victim-blaming attitudes discourage survivors from coming forward.
3. **Inadequate Reporting Mechanisms:** The lack of anonymous, accessible, and standardized reporting systems undermines data collection and support for survivors.
4. **Age and Gender Disparities:** Female athletes and younger participants are disproportionately affected by sexual violence, while male survivors face additional stigma that hinders reporting.
5. **Normalization of Harmful Behavior:** Verbal harassment, "banter," and other forms of abuse are often normalized within sports cultures, masking the severity of the issue.

6. **Digital Harassment:** The rise of online platforms has introduced new challenges, with grooming and inappropriate messaging becoming increasingly prevalent.
7. **Underdeveloped Policies:** Underdeveloped or non-existent policies and practices, and lack of EU directives with appropriate Governing bodies, does not allow the prevention of sexual violence in sports to abode.

6. Impact of the #MeToo Movement and Media on Awareness of Sexual Violence in Sports: Strategies and Interventions

The #MeToo movement and increased media attention have significantly heightened awareness of sexual violence in sports across Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, and Austria, as discussed by the experts. While these developments have encouraged survivors to come forward and spurred policy changes, they argued that challenges remain in addressing systemic issues and cultural norms that perpetuate abuse. Key strategies and interventions are essential for reducing the prevalence of sexual violence in sports.

Cyprus

In Cyprus, the #MeToo movement has inspired survivors of sexual violence in sports to come forward, particularly following high-profile cases in neighbouring countries like Greece. In particular, the media coverage of these cases according to the experts has helped challenge societal taboos and shed light on systemic shortcomings. However, they noted that the movement's impact is limited by cultural stigmas and a slow judicial process. Furthermore, they pointed out that strategies to reduce sexual violence should include comprehensive training for coaches and sports officials, the development of safeguarding policies, and public awareness campaigns. Although the experts argued that the Cyprus Sports Association's efforts to create guides and handbooks on preventing abuse are a step in the right direction, its implementation and enforcement remain critical challenges.

Greece

The #MeToo movement gained traction in Greece following high-profile disclosures by athletes, including the Olympic medallist, Sofia Bekatorou. In particular, her testimony about enduring sexual abuse catalysed a national conversation and encouraged other survivors to share their experiences, and media coverage amplified these voices, leading to policy discussions and heightened public awareness. Despite this progress, the experts argued that systemic barriers persist and that victims often face stigmatization and lengthy legal proceedings, which deter reporting. In addition, they discussed that key strategies include legislative reforms to expedite justice, mandatory training on sexual violence prevention for sports organizations, and the establishment of independent bodies to handle complaints. Lastly, they pointed out that awareness campaigns targeting athletes, coaches, schools/educational establishments, and parents are also crucial to fostering a culture of accountability and support.

Spain

According to the experts in Spain, the #MeToo movement and media attention have played a pivotal role in raising awareness of sexual violence in sports and some high-profile cases have sparked public debate and prompted sports organizations to review their policies. However, experts noted that societal tolerance for certain forms of abuse, such as verbal harassment, remains a challenge and they proposed interventions such as integrating sexual violence prevention into broader educational initiatives, implementing anonymous reporting mechanisms, and promoting gender equity in sports leadership. They added that media campaigns highlighting the impact of sexual violence and celebrating the courage of survivors can further shift societal attitudes.

Italy

According to the experts in Italy, the #MeToo movement has had a mixed impact. While it has encouraged more survivors to share their stories, the entrenched "culture of silence" within sports organizations limits its reach. In particular, some of the media coverage of abuse cases often focuses on sensationalism rather than systemic change, which can undermine efforts to address the root causes of violence. To combat this, experts recommend the establishment of safeguarding officers within sports organizations, mandatory training on recognizing and preventing abuse, and the creation of clear, enforceable codes of conduct. They also added that public awareness campaigns that challenge societal norms and highlight the importance of accountability are also essential.

Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, the #MeToo movement has had a relatively limited impact, partly due to cultural norms that discourage open discussions about sexual violence. However, international attention to the issue has spurred some progress, including the adoption of ethical guidelines and educational programs within sports organizations. The experts emphasized the need for targeted interventions, such as anonymous reporting systems and the integration of sexual violence prevention into coaching curricula. They argued that public education campaigns can help challenge societal taboos and encourage survivors to come forward and that collaborative efforts with international organizations can also bring additional resources and expertise to address these issues.

Austria

According to experts in Austria, the #MeToo movement and media attention have raised awareness of sexual violence in sports but have also highlighted systemic gaps in addressing the issue. However, the survivors often face stigma and a lack of trust in reporting mechanisms, which hinders progress. The experts discussed strategies to address these challenges which included increasing the representation of women in sports leadership roles, establishing independent bodies to handle complaints, and conducting regular audits of safeguarding policies. They also pointed out that media

campaigns that emphasize the importance of safe sports environments can further encourage cultural change.

Key Strategies and Interventions

1. **Comprehensive Education and Training:** Educating athletes, coaches, and officials about recognizing and preventing sexual violence is critical. Training should emphasize consent, boundaries, and appropriate behavior.
2. **Robust Reporting Mechanisms:** Establishing anonymous and accessible reporting systems can empower survivors to come forward without fear of retaliation.
3. **Legislative and Policy Reforms:** Implementing clear laws and organizational policies that address sexual violence, coupled with strict enforcement, is essential.
4. **Independent Oversight:** Creating independent bodies to handle complaints and oversee safeguarding measures ensures accountability and impartiality.
5. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Media campaigns that challenge societal norms and celebrate survivor courage can foster cultural change and reduce stigma.
6. **Increased Representation of Women:** Promoting gender equity in sports leadership roles can help create a culture of respect and inclusivity.
7. **Collaborative Efforts:** Partnering with international organizations and leveraging global best practices can enhance local efforts to prevent and address sexual violence.

5. Questionnaire Findings

Sexual violence within sports contexts remains a critical yet underexplored issue, reflecting a complex interplay of systemic, cultural, and individual factors. This section of this report investigates the prevalence and forms of sexual violence experienced or witnessed by athletes across six countries, utilizing a robust survey methodology. More analytically, the development of the questionnaire was informed by key sources in the literature, with its key structure, content, and scoring being drawn from the Violence Toward Athletes Questionnaire (Parent et al., 2019), which served as a foundational framework. Additionally, insights were drawn from research on interplay violence in sports (Jolly & Decamps, 2006); Marsollier et al., 2021), and further, on data on child abuse within sports context across Europe (Lang et al., 2021). These references, taken together, provided the basis for designing a tool that captures the complex experiences of sexual violence in sports. Taken together, and through quantitative and qualitative analyses, the findings illuminate the widespread nature of non-contact sexual violence (NCSV) and contact sexual violence (CSV), while also exploring athletes' awareness of such incidents. By integrating cross-country comparisons and demographic insights, the report offers an in-depth understanding of the risk factors, systemic shortcomings, and cultural influences contributing to this pervasive issue. The study aims to not only identify patterns of sexual violence in sports but also to provide actionable recommendations for fostering safer environments. By focusing on both individual and team sports, and examining variations across age, gender, and geographic

location, this report contributes valuable data to the ongoing discourse on athlete safety and well-being.

Sample

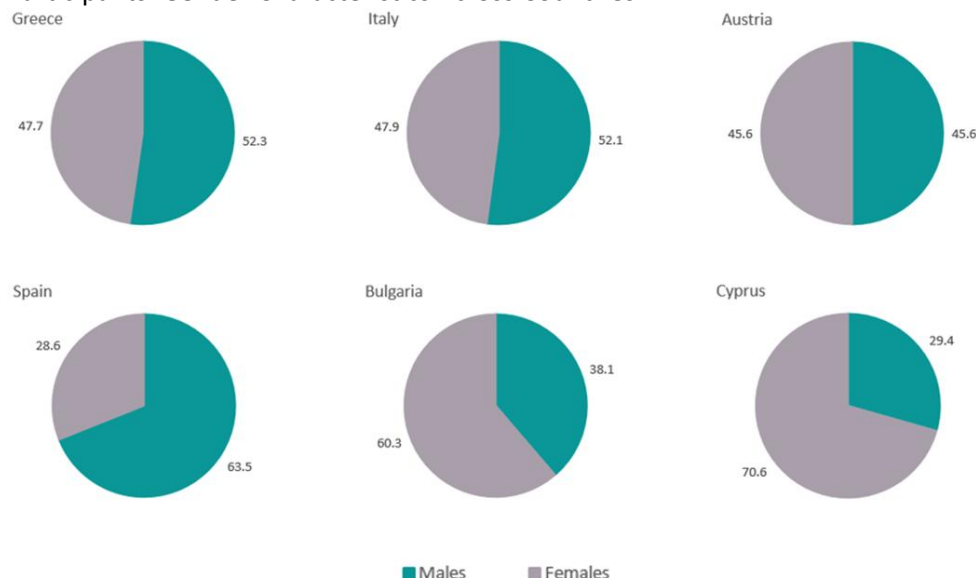
The study involved 462 athletes coming from six different countries, including Greece (n = 111, 24.0%), Italy (n = 96, 20.8%), Austria (n = 90, 19.5%), Spain (n = 68, 14.7%), Bulgaria (n = 63, 13.6%), and Cyprus (n = 34, 7.4%). Their ages ranged from 16 to 75 years (M = 29.92, SD = 9.81). Of the total athletes, 48.8% were males (n = 223) and 48.1% were females (n = 220), thereby allowing for an almost equal gender divide, engaging in individual sports (n = 250, 54.9%) or team sports (n = 195, 42.9%). Only participants from Spain reported engaging in both types of sports (2.2%). Additionally, respondents from Italy reported participation only in individual sports. Overall, participants aged 16-24 had greater engagement in individual sports (69.7%) compared to team sports (26.5%), with a similar trend evident for those aged 45-54 (individual sports: 54.1%; team sports: 45.9%). Conversely, participants aged 25-34 engaged more in team sports (51.7%) than individual sports (46.0%), with the same pattern being observed in those aged 35-44 (team sports: 52.9%; individual sports: 47.1%), and those above the age of 55 (team sports: 55.6%; individual sports: 44.4%). For more cross-country comparative information on participant's demographic characteristics refer to Table 1, and Figures 1 and 2.

Table 1
Cross-Country Comparison of Participants' Age and Gender Characteristics

Age	Gender	Country											
		Greece		Italy		Austria		Spain		Bulgaria		Cyprus	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
16-24	Male	3	37.5	33	48.5	7	50	23	67.5	8	38.1	1	14.3
	Female	5	62.5	35	51.5	7	50	11	32.5	13	61.9	6	85.7
25-34	Male	35	61.4	11	61.1	20	44.4	11	73.3	11	40.7	2	20
	Female	22	38.6	7	38.9	25	55.6	4	26.7	16	59.3	8	80
35-44	Male	14	48.3	0	0	7	46.7	4	80	3	27.3	3	50
	Female	15	51.7	0	0	8	53.3	1	20	8	72.7	3	50
45-54	Male	6	37.5	3	50	3	75	0	0	0	0	4	50
	Female	10	62.5	3	50	1	25	0	0	0	0	4	50
55 <	Male	0	0	1	50	2	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Female	1	100	1	50	0	0.0%	0	0	0	0	3	100

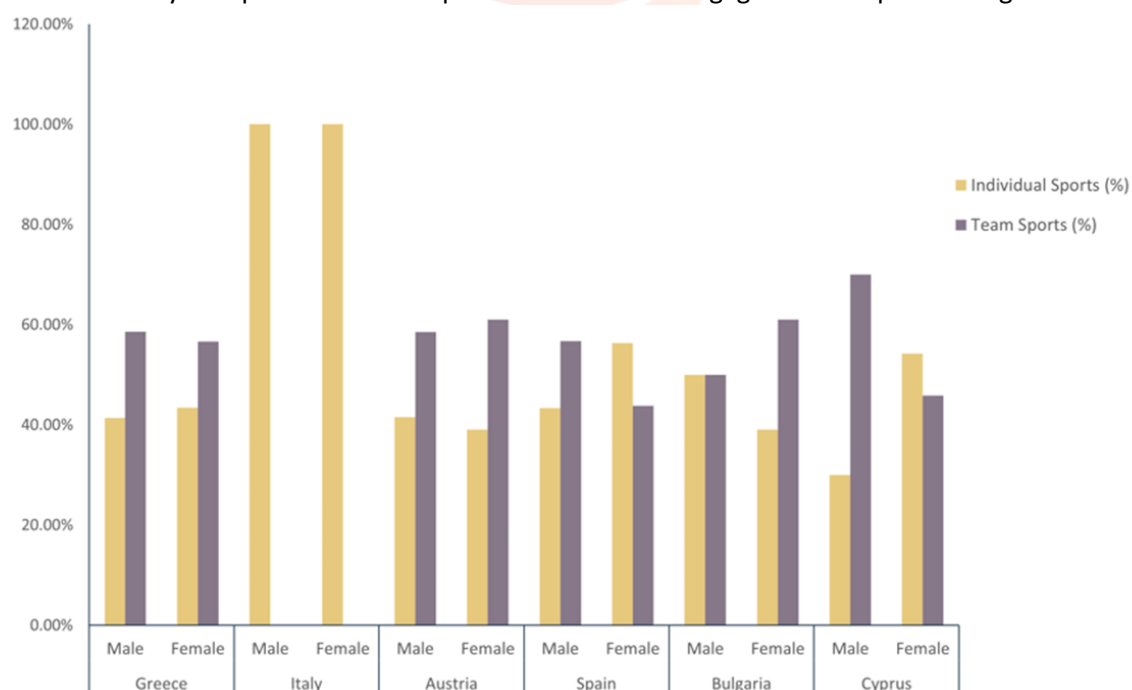
Note. N = 462

Figure 1
Participants' Gender Characteristics Across Countries



Note. The pie charts depict participants' genders across the different countries. Percentages are reported.

Figure 2
Cross-Country Comparison of Participants' Genders and Engagement in Sports Categories



Note. The figure illustrates cross-country comparisons of the sport categories participants engage in based on their genders.

Results

According to descriptive analyses, 69.3% of the athletes reported that they had experienced NCSV within the sports context at least once in their lifetime. The most frequent experiences of NCSV included receiving sexual comments, jokes, or gestures (54.1%), unwanted sexual behaviors leading to discomfort (45.2%), and unwanted sexual conversations (39.0%). Additionally, 16.0% of the athletes reported having experienced at least one incident of CSV, with the most common CSV experiences involving non-consensual touching of non-genital areas (13.4%) and attempts for non-consensual sexual intercourse (6.0%). Most participants responded that they had these experiences approximately 2-5 times (41.0%) in their lives, with 59.7% having experienced CSV at least once before the age of 18, and 31.6% reporting that their experiences began before the age of 13. Most respondents noted that the perpetrators were males (80.6%), being either their teammates (34.4%) or their coaches (32.8%). In most cases, the CSV incidents occurred in sports club or local sports (27.9%), and recreational sports (24.6%) settings, most commonly in the locker rooms (30.5%) and the sports field/court (28.8%). Of the total athletes, only 14.3% disclosed their experienced CSV, with most of them (44.4%) disclosing to their friends, whereas only one participant referred to counseling for support. Approximately 85.7% of the respondents neither disclosed their experienced CSV nor sought support, most commonly due to feelings of shame, guilt, and lack of confidence or because they were not aware of their experience as an incident of sexual violence. One participant (46 years old, female from Greece) mentioned “I did not feel strong enough to share it”. Another participant (32 years old, female from Cyprus) noted “Sexual assault by peers is considered to be an acceptable behavior and no one takes that into account”.

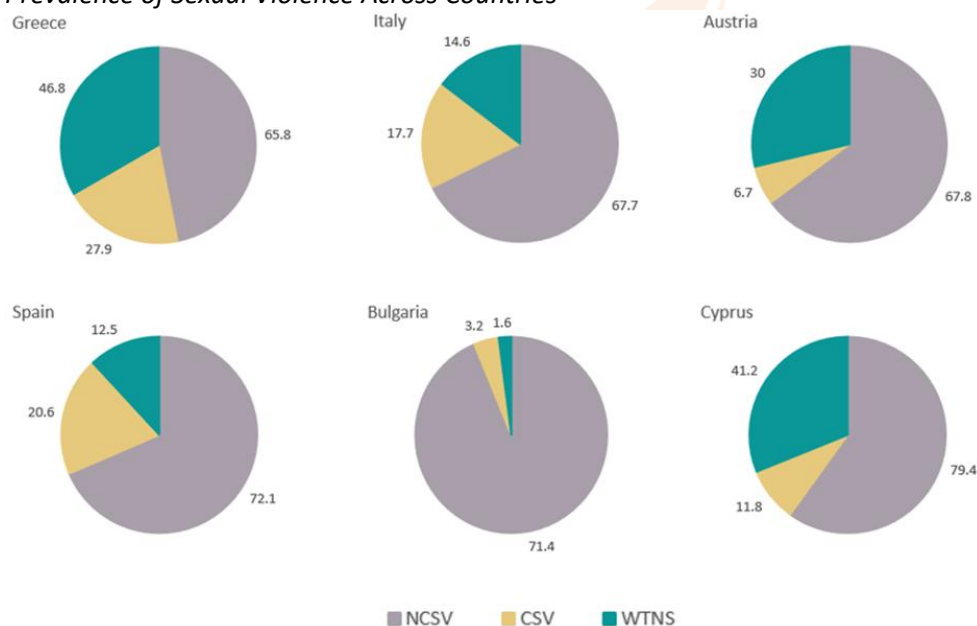
When it comes to the prevalence of witnessing sexual violence in the sports context, 74.7% of the athletes reported being aware of at least one incident that had happened to their fellow sportsmates, with 87.7% being aware of NCSV, 8.0% being aware of CSV, and 4.3% being aware of both. In 50.0% of the cases analyzed, the perpetrators witnessed were coaches, whereas most of the witnessed CSV incidents occurred in national (34.7%), and local (27.1%) sports settings, most commonly in the sports field/court (41.1%). According to the witnesses, 25.2% of the CSV experiences were reported, most of the time by the victim (55.6%), leading to the team administrations either conducting internal investigations (36.1%) or ignoring/dismissing the allegations (27.8%). In some cases, the perpetrators were punished (33.3%), whereas in others they received no consequences (20.5%). Further descriptive analyses revealed that of all athletes participating in the study, 61.4% of the males reported having experienced at least one form of sexual violence in the sports context, with 59.6% having experienced NCSV and 14.3% having experienced CSV. Greater prevalence rates of experienced sexual violence were observed among female athletes compared to males, with 79.5% of them reporting at least one experience with sexual violence; 79.5% experienced NCSV and 17.8% experienced CSV. Likewise, females (34.4%) were more likely to witness sexual violence towards one of their fellow sportsmates compared to males (15.9%). Additionally, greater prevalence of experienced NCSV was reported for athletes engaged in individual sports (71.6%) compared to those engaged in team sports (66.0%), whereas the opposite trend was evident for incidents of experienced CVS with athletes engaged in team sports (16.4%) showing greater prevalence rates than those

engaged in individual sports (15.2%). Athletes engaged in individual sports (75.9%) were also more likely to witness sexual violence compared to those engaged in team sports (72.4%).

When it comes to cross-country comparisons, prevalence rates of overall experienced sexual violence were the highest in Cyprus (79.4%), followed by Spain (73.5%), Bulgaria (73.3%), Austria (67.8%), Italy (67.7%), and Greece (67.6%). Specifying for experienced NCSV, similar patterns were observed with prevalence rates being again the highest in Cyprus (79.4%), followed by Spain (72.1%), Bulgaria (71.4%), Austria (67.8%), Italy (67.7%), and Greece (65.8%). Yet, specifying for experienced CSV we observed different patterns. Specifically, the greatest prevalence rates of experienced CSV were observed for athletes in Greece (27.9%) compared to the other countries, followed by Spain (20.6%), Italy (17.7%), Cyprus (11.8%), Austria (6.7%), and Bulgaria (3.2%). Furthermore, athletes from Greece (46.8%) had the greatest prevalence of witnessing sexual violence occurring to their fellow sportsmates, followed by athletes from Cyprus (41.2%), Austria (30.0%), Italy (14.6%), Spain (12.5%), and Bulgaria (1.6%). Among all countries, respondents from Italy had the highest prevalence of witnessing NCSV (93.7%), whereas respondents from Greece had the highest prevalence of witnessing CSV (12.6%) or both forms of sexual violence (14.4%). For more information see Figure 3.

Figure 3

Prevalence of Sexual Violence Across Countries



Note. The pie charts depict the prevalence of the different forms of sexual violence experienced by athletes in the sports context across countries. NCSV = non-contact sexual violence; CSV = contact sexual violence; WTNS = witnessing sexual violence occurring to a fellow sportsmate. Percentages are reported.

Overall, female athletes were more likely to have experienced NCSV compared to males in all countries except for Spain, in which 63.4% of male athletes reported having experienced NSCV over 36.6% of females. Female athletes were also more likely to have experienced CSV compared to males in Italy and Austria, male athletes were more likely to have experienced CSV compared to females in

Greece and Spain, whereas prevalence of experienced CSV was identical for athletes from Bulgaria and Cyprus (See Table 2). Female athletes had also greater prevalence of witnessing sexual violence compared to males across all countries, except for Spain where identical prevalence was demonstrated for both genders. Cross-country comparison also revealed that only in Bulgaria, there was no male athlete that reported having witnessed sexual violence happening to their sportsmates. Moving forward, all participants from Cyprus reported having experienced CSV during childhood and/or adolescence, with the second highest prevalence being demonstrated for participants from Greece (71.4%), followed by Austria (22.2%), Italy (12.5%), and Spain (12.5%). No incidents of sexual violence during childhood or adolescence were reported by participants from Bulgaria.

Table 2
Cross-Country Comparison of Experienced Sexual Violence and Participants' Gender

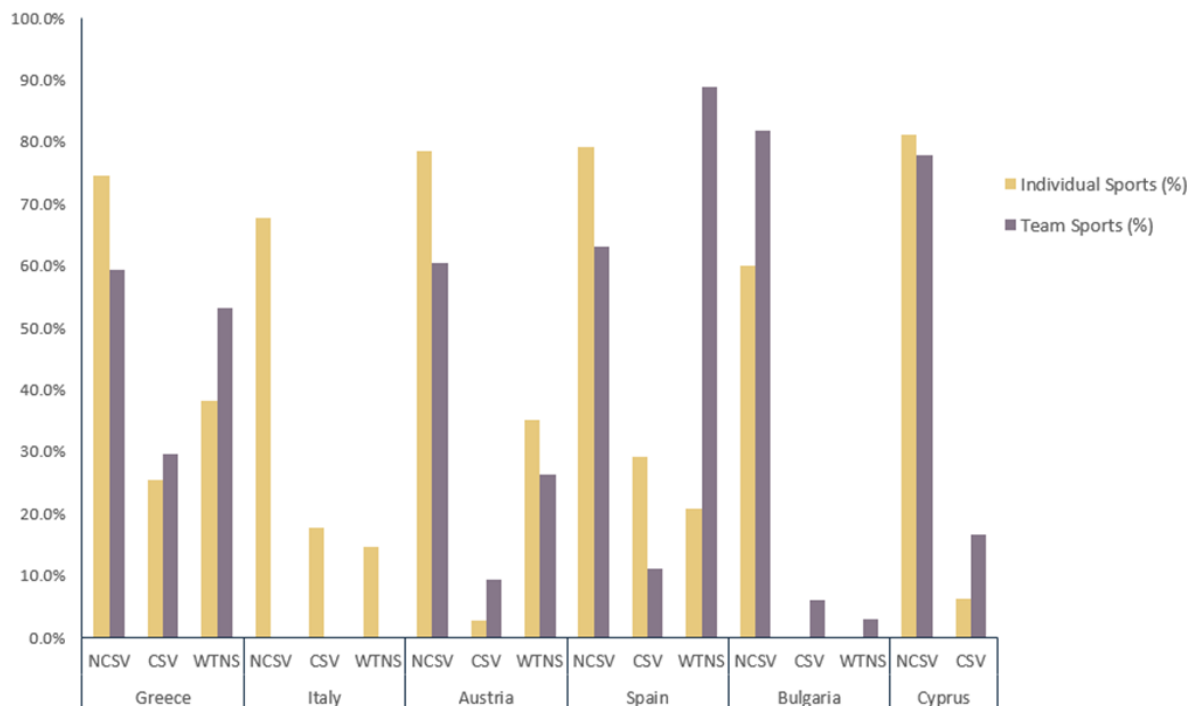
Sexual Violence	Gender	Country											
		Greece		Italy		Austria		Spain		Bulgaria		Cyprus	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
NCSV	Male	33	45.2	28	43.1	24	42.1	26	63.4	14	31.1	8	29.6
	Female	40	54.8	37	56.9	33	57.9	15	36.6	31	68.9	19	70.4
CSV	Male	16	51.6	4	23.5	2	33.3	7	63.6	1	50	2	50
	Female	15	48.4	13	76.5	4	66.7	4	36.4	1	50	2	50
WTNS	Male	23	44.2	1	7.1	6	25	3	50	0	0	2	14.3
	Female	29	55.8	13	92.9	18	75	3	50	1	100	12	85.7

Note. *N* = 462. NCSV = non-contact sexual violence; CSV = contact sexual violence; WTNS = witnessing sexual violence occurring to a fellow sportsmate.

Furthermore, athletes engaged in individual sports from Cyprus had the highest prevalence of experienced NCSV (81.2%) compared to athletes from the other countries, with the lowest prevalence being demonstrated among respondents from Bulgaria (60.0%). Conversely, athletes engaged in team sports from Bulgaria had the highest prevalence of experienced NCSV (81.8%) compared to athletes from the other countries with the lowest prevalence being found among respondents from Greece (59.4%). Similarly, athletes participating in individual sports from Spain had the highest prevalence of experienced CSV (29.2%) compared to athletes from the other countries, with no participant engaged in individual sports from Bulgaria reporting incidents of experienced CSV. When it comes to athletes participating in team sports, respondents from Greece had the highest prevalence of experienced CSV (29.7%), with the lowest prevalence being demonstrated among respondents from Bulgaria (6.1%). Lastly, athletes engaged in individual sports from Cyprus had the highest prevalence of witnessing incidents of sexual violence (62.5%), with no participant engaged in individual sports from Bulgaria reporting any incident of witnessing sexual violence. Likewise, respondents engaged in team sports from Greece had the highest prevalence of witnessing sexual violence in the sports context (53.1%), with no participant engaged in team sports from Spain reporting any incident of witnessing sexual violence. For additional cross-country comparisons refer to Figure 4.

Figure 4

Cross-Country Comparison of Experienced Sexual Violence Across Sports Categories



Note. The figure depicts cross-country comparisons of the different types of sexual violence experienced by the participants based on the sports category they engage in. NCSV = non-contact sexual violence; CSV = contact sexual violence; WTNS = witnessing sexual violence occurring to a fellow sportsmate. Percentages are reported.

Implications of Findings

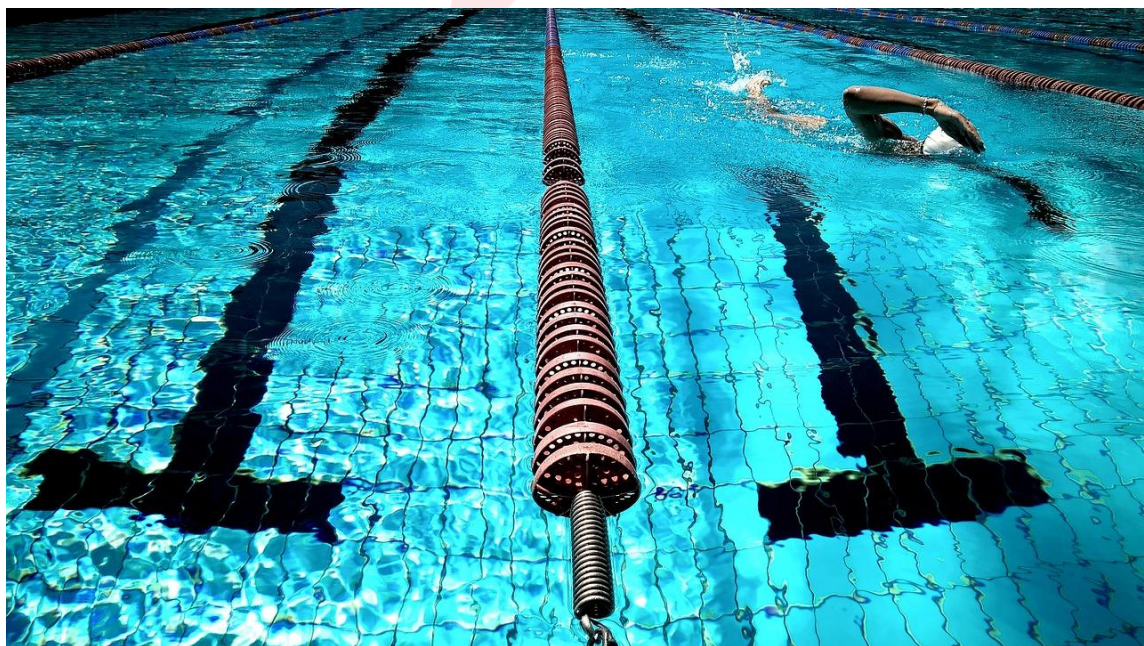
The present report provided important insights into the phenomenon of sexual violence among athletes in sports contexts, focusing on three forms of sexual violence; (a) NCSV; (b) CSV; and (c) witnessing sexual violence, while assessing participants from six different countries including Greece, Italy, Austria, Spain, Bulgaria, and Cyprus. The results showed an increased prevalence of experienced sexual violence among athletes across all countries. Descriptive analyses implied various noticeable risk factors and systemic issues that could have enabled or failed to address the higher prevalence of experienced sexual violence by athletes.

Specifically, and extremely worrying is the evidence which showed that most participants had already experienced at least one form of sexual violence by the time they were 18 years old, indicating that young age might be a risk factor for an athlete to experience sexual violence. An additional risk factor seemed to be gender, with female athletes showing an increased prevalence of sexual violence compared to males, thereby endorsing and echoing what the literature to date generally portrays. Yet, when analyzing the data cross-culturally, various trends emerged, indicating that this phenomenon could also reflect societal attitudes toward sexual violence and gender roles. For instance, males had an increased likelihood of experiencing CSV in Greece and Spain. Prevalence rates

of experienced NCSV were also the highest in Cyprus and the lowest in Greece, yet athletes from Greece had the highest likelihood of experiencing CSV with the lowest likelihood being attributed to athletes from Bulgaria. Systemic issues and cultural differences could also be detected when considering that male athletes from Bulgaria while having a high prevalence of experienced NCSV and CSV, had never witnessed sexual violence occurring to one of their fellow sportsmates.

Moving forward, sports clubs, local sports settings, and recreational settings were demonstrated as the most common environments for sexual violence to occur, with more incidents taking place in locker rooms and sports fields/courts. The role of the perpetrator also seemed to contribute largely to the high prevalence rates of sexual violence, with most participants responding that their coaches or teammates were often the perpetrators, highlighting the part of authority figures, power dynamics, and proximity. Sports type was also found to be a risk factor, with athletes engaging in individual sports showing higher prevalence rates for NCSV and athletes engaging in team sports being more likely to experience CSV. Athletes engaged in individual sports had also an increased likelihood of witnessing sexual violence compared to those engaged in team sports.

Analyses also highlighted that the majority of the athletes having experienced CSV did not disclose their experience due to feelings of shame, guilt, or lack of confidence or because they did not know that their experience was identifiable as a type of sexual violence. This could reflect a systemic failure to foster trust and provide safe spaces for reporting incidents of sexual violence, as well as educating individuals on the different manners in which sexual violence may manifest itself. Besides the underreporting of experiences of sexual violence, systemic barriers can also be identified in the lack of repercussions for the perpetrator when an allegation is made.



6. Comparative Analysis

Synthesis of Findings

This comprehensive report that the RISE research team compiled combines data from secondary research, focus groups, and questionnaires, offering a comprehensive perspective on sexual violence in sports. Secondary research highlights a lack of uniformity in legal frameworks, policies, and reporting mechanisms across partner countries. Some nations, such as Spain and Italy, have robust laws addressing sexual violence, while others, like Bulgaria and Austria, rely more on general criminal codes or voluntary guidelines. Focus group discussions reveal recurring themes: power imbalances, inadequate oversight, and societal taboos, all contributing to the persistence of abuse. Experts emphasize cultural norms and the hierarchical structure of sports as critical enablers of abuse, particularly in one-on-one coaching relationships.

The questionnaire findings quantitatively reinforce these themes, showing that 69.3% of athletes experienced non-contact sexual violence (NCSV), while 16% faced contact sexual violence (CSV). Notably, most perpetrators were males in positions of authority, such as coaches, or peers, with abuse often occurring in informal settings like locker rooms or recreational sports environments. Cross-referencing data sources reveal convergence in recognizing systemic issues like underreporting, societal normalization of abuse, and insufficient safeguarding measures. However, there is a divergence in the perceived effectiveness of interventions: while secondary research suggests progress in countries like Spain, focus group participants often highlight implementation gaps, and survey data reflects low reporting rates (14.3% of CSV cases disclosed). Together, these findings underscore the systemic and cultural barriers to addressing sexual violence in sports, emphasizing the need for comprehensive, context-sensitive interventions that integrate legal, educational, and cultural reforms.

Cross-Country Comparisons

The prevalence of sexual violence in sports varies significantly across the six partner countries (Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, and Austria), influenced by cultural, systemic, and societal factors. Secondary research indicates that Spain and Italy have advanced legal frameworks and policy implementations targeting sexual violence. Spain's Sports Law (Law 39/2022) and Italy's safeguarding initiatives (Law 86/2019) incorporate clear mechanisms for prevention and reporting. Conversely, countries like Austria and Bulgaria rely more on voluntary guidelines, such as ethical codes, resulting in inconsistent protections across sports organizations. Focus group findings further illuminate these disparities. In Greece and Italy, patriarchal norms and a "culture of silence" hinder reporting and intervention efforts, whereas Spain has made strides in raising awareness through media and advocacy campaigns. Austria and Bulgaria face challenges with underreporting due to insufficient training and resources, compounded by hierarchical sports environments. Cyprus, while showing progress with training programs and handbook development, continues to grapple with societal taboos and limited oversight mechanisms.

Furthermore, the survey data corroborates these qualitative insights. Athletes from all countries reported high rates of NCSV (54.1%) and CSV (16%), but cultural influences shaped the type and frequency of abuse. For example, verbal harassment and grooming were prevalent across all regions, but digital harassment emerged more prominently in Spain and Austria. Female athletes faced disproportionate risks in every country, exacerbated by hyper-sexualization in media and sports cultures. These comparisons highlight shared challenges, such as inadequate reporting systems and cultural normalization of abuse, while underscoring the need for tailored, context-sensitive approaches to prevention and intervention.

Implications of Findings

The findings reveal systemic and multiple issues and risk factors that contribute to the prevalence of sexual violence in sports, emphasizing the urgent need for structural and cultural reforms. Across all partner countries, hierarchical power dynamics within sports organizations create environments where authority figures can exploit athletes, particularly younger participants. This is compounded by inadequate oversight in high-risk settings, such as locker rooms and training camps, where abuse is most frequently reported. Cultural norms also play a significant well-embedded role. Patriarchal attitudes, societal taboos, and the normalization of verbal harassment mask the severity of abuse and deter reporting. In Greece and Italy, deeply ingrained gender stereotypes perpetuate a "culture of silence," while in Spain and Austria, tolerance for inappropriate "banter" undermines awareness efforts. Younger athletes and women face heightened risks, as they often lack the knowledge or confidence to recognize and report abuse. The hyper-sexualization of female athletes, particularly in media portrayals, further exacerbates their vulnerability.

In addition, the systemic underreporting of sexual violence, evident in both qualitative and quantitative data, highlights gaps in safeguarding policies and reporting mechanisms. Only 14.3% of CSV survivors disclosed their experiences, reflecting widespread mistrust in current systems. The rise of digital platforms introduces new challenges, as online harassment and grooming become increasingly prevalent and addressing these issues requires comprehensive interventions, including mandatory training on safeguarding, robust and anonymous reporting mechanisms, and cultural shifts to challenge societal norms. By tackling these systemic and cultural barriers, sports organizations can create safer environments that prioritize athlete well-being.

7. Discussion

The RISE research team's findings underscore the profound implications of sexual violence in sports for both the sports sector and broader society. The prevalence of non-contact sexual violence (NCSV) and contact sexual violence (CSV) within sports environments reflects a systemic issue that transcends individual organizations, cultures, and nations. The convergence of findings from secondary research, focus groups, and questionnaires highlights the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in safeguarding policies, cultural attitudes, and systemic accountability mechanisms.

For sports, the implications are far-reaching. Sexual violence undermines the integrity of sports institutions, eroding trust between athletes, coaches, and governing bodies. Athletes, particularly younger ones, often depend on authority figures for career progression, making them vulnerable to exploitation. This dynamic creates environments where abuse is not only possible but is also facilitated by structural inadequacies, such as the lack of oversight in high-risk settings like locker rooms, training camps, and informal gatherings. The RISE research team emphasizes that power imbalances within sports organizations, exacerbated by insufficient safeguarding education and inadequate reporting mechanisms, perpetuate cycles of abuse. The normalization of verbal harassment, inappropriate physical contact, and grooming further compounds these risks, eroding the ethical foundation on which sports are built. Taken together, it appears that sports per se expose the individual and society to positive and encouraging values on the one hand, yet, on the other hand severely bears the potential for harm to arise.

Moreover, the societal implications of these findings cannot be overstated. Sports, as a microcosm of society, reflect and often amplify broader cultural norms and values. The RISE research team highlights how patriarchal attitudes, victim-blaming, and the hyper-sexualization of female athletes create an environment where abuse is not only tolerated but is often invisible. The societal reluctance to confront these issues, coupled with stigmatization and underreporting, contributes to a culture of silence that protects perpetrators and marginalizes survivors. By allowing these dynamics to persist, society risks perpetuating harmful narratives about gender, power, and accountability.

The findings also point to the intersection of systemic inadequacies and cultural barriers, which exacerbate the issue of sexual violence. Across all six partner countries—Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy, Bulgaria, and Austria—the RISE research team observed a common thread of inadequate reporting mechanisms and limited access to support services for survivors. This systemic failure not only discourages survivors from coming forward but also limits the collection of accurate prevalence data, which is essential for designing targeted interventions. It is imperative in the future for all countries to join forces to provide a platform for raising awareness on all levels and provide a social environment in which one can foster, develop and feel psychologically/physically safe in any sport initiative. In addition, the rise of digital harassment introduces a new dimension to the problem, highlighting the need for innovative and adaptive safeguarding strategies that address emerging risks.

The broader societal cost of inaction is significant. Sexual violence in sports has far-reaching consequences for the mental and physical well-being of athletes, affecting their performance, confidence, and long-term engagement in sports. The normalization of abuse also diminishes the potential of sports as a platform for social cohesion, empowerment, and community building. By failing to address these issues, society risks alienating athletes and undermining the positive values traditionally associated with sports, such as respect, fairness, and teamwork. By further addressing social-cultural factors, such as an extension of patriarchal content, sport organizations that may encourage – or allow- macho content attitudes to permeate may unintentionally encourage wrong values and habits to foster. Taken together, one may suggest that such neglect in the sport domain could take various forms, such as educational, psychological, social and physical neglect, thereby leading to the damaging and severe issues to abode.

The RISE research team advocates for a multifaceted approach to combat sexual violence in sports, encompassing education, legislative reforms, and cultural shifts. Public awareness campaigns must challenge entrenched stereotypes and promote a culture of accountability and respect. Moreover, social cultures that embody special social norms will clearly increase the likelihood of interpersonal violence in sports, and immediate interventions are required at all levels, ranging from installing multiple doses of educational activities, to deconstructing social norms, and optimizing social safety policies, regulations, and responsibilities of all parties involved. Sports organizations should prioritize mandatory safeguarding training, independent oversight bodies, and accessible reporting mechanisms. By addressing these systemic and cultural barriers, sports can reclaim their role as a force for good, fostering safe and inclusive environments that reflect the best of society's values.



8. Conclusion and Recommendations

The RISE research team offers a comprehensive set of recommendations to address the pervasive issue of sexual violence in sports. These recommendations emphasize the need for systemic reforms, cultural transformation, and collaborative efforts among stakeholders to create safe and inclusive environments for all athletes.

First, the RISE research team advocates for mandatory safeguarding education for all individuals involved in sports, including athletes, coaches, administrators, and support staff. This training should focus on recognizing, preventing, and responding to sexual violence, with particular emphasis on the power dynamics and vulnerabilities inherent in sports settings. Educational programs should also include modules on consent, boundaries, and the appropriate use of authority, ensuring a clear understanding of ethical conduct. Improving reporting mechanisms is another critical priority. The team recommends the establishment of anonymous, accessible, and sport-specific reporting systems that empower survivors to disclose abuse without fear of retaliation. These mechanisms should be complemented by independent oversight bodies tasked with investigating complaints, ensuring accountability, and maintaining impartiality. Regular audits of safeguarding policies by these bodies can help identify gaps and ensure consistent implementation. Finally, encouraging victims and survivors to seek professional help, to speak up, and to prioritize the self, and by letting go of the in-group loyalty, embedded in a patriarchal value system, should be voiced, encouraged, and disseminated by appropriate policies and laws to protect all athletes. The ongoing societal theme of preserving power must be challenged, and power retained by authority structures and persons should be questioned for the overall psychological and social wellbeing of all athletes on an international platform.

Furthermore, legislative reforms are equally vital. The RISE research team urges governments to strengthen legal frameworks addressing sexual violence in sports, incorporating clear mandates for safeguarding policies, reporting requirements, and penalties for non-compliance. Collaborative efforts between governments and sports organizations can foster the development of context-specific regulations that reflect both local cultural nuances and international best practices. In addition, public awareness campaigns are essential to challenge societal norms that perpetuate abuse. These campaigns can be further strengthened by implementing appropriate social Bystander Intervention Programs which have the potential to intervene and help make the situation better (see for example, the works of Banyard, 2007; 2008; 2018). These campaigns should celebrate the courage of survivors, promote gender equity, and dismantle the stigma surrounding reporting. Finally, the team recommends enhancing representation of women and marginalized groups in leadership roles within sports organizations, fostering diversity and inclusivity. Together, these measures provide a roadmap for creating safer, more equitable sports environments while addressing the systemic and cultural barriers identified in the research.

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