

RISE PROTOCOL

IDENTIFICATION REPORTING AND SUPPORT TO VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SPORTS



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1. Introduction, Purpose and Scope

This Protocol provides operational guidelines for the detection, identification, holistic multidisciplinary support, and protection of victims and survivors of sexual violence in sports.

It is designed for any individual involved in sports, including athletes (of any age), coaches, sports staff, medical staff, sports administrators, sports organisations, authorities and others.

The core purpose of the Protocol is to foster a survivor-centred and intersectional approach, prioritising their rights, needs, and desires, ensuring they feel believed, acknowledged, safe, empowered and practically supported.

The successful implementation of this Protocol requires concerted European action and effective partnerships for knowledge generation and sharing of best practices across all levels of the sports ecosystem.

2. Legal and Ethical Foundations

The Protocol aligns with and builds upon international and European standards, recognising sexual violence as a severe health issue and human rights violation which also occurs in sporting environments:

- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989:** Outlines the rights of all children and young people, including protection from all forms of violence.
- **Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention) 2007:** Provides guidelines for member states to prevent sexual assault, protect child victims, and convict offenders.
- **Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence:** recognizes gender-based violence as a human rights violation and requires member states to take measures in prevention, protection, and prosecution.
- **EU Directive 2011/93/EU on combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography:** Includes provisions for checking criminal records during recruitment for activities involving children.
- **EU Directives on Victims' Rights and Child Protection Policies:** Ensures victims' rights are upheld.

- **Brunel Declaration of Principles 2014 / Safe Sport International Declaration of Principles:** Underpins the protection of all athletes, including young athletes, from all forms of violence in sport.
- **International Olympic Committee (IOC) Consensus Statement: Harassment and Abuse in Sport (2016):** Strengthens guidance to International Federations (IFs) and National Olympic Committees (NOCs) on safeguarding athletes from non-accidental violence, including psychological, physical, sexual, and neglect-based abuse in sports.
- **International Safeguards for Children in Sport (2014):** Defines core components of safeguarding to protect children and young people from all forms of violence in and through sport, including policy, response procedures, training, communication, equality, listening to children, safe recruitment, monitoring and evaluation.

3. Definition of Sexual Violence in Sports

Sport operates within a complex ecosystem shaped by factors such as power imbalances, a relentless “win-at-all-costs” mentality, and limited transparency. The Protocol acknowledges these risks and supports a comprehensive, sport-specific, intersectional, and evidence-informed approach.

Sexual Violence is considered as an ‘*umbrella term covering different forms of sexual offences*,’ (Dibia, Esom, Abbah and Ononuju, 2023, p. 65). Recognising and understanding these forms is considered crucial for prevention. International organizations and other stakeholders are specifying and identifying more and more forms of sexual violence.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) provides a definition of sexual violence, which is designed in such a way that a) it covers all recognised and unrecognised forms and b) is considered more inclusive and interdisciplinary:

“Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work”.

WHO has identified a wide range of different forms of sexual violence, including rape by strangers, rape by a partner/friend/close person, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, sexual abuse of persons with mental and/or physical disabilities, verbal harassment through inappropriate sexually suggestive comments, jokes, or messages (including on social media), human trafficking, denial of contraception, digital sexual violence (including assault), female genital mutilation, forced abortion, forced marriage and others.

Sexual violence in sports can occur by any person and may affect any person despite gender, age, disabilities, financial and other background.

It can happen in various sports settings, during practice, medical examination, locker rooms, during trips, or even online.

Sexual violence within sports can take various forms of the above, also including **unwanted and inappropriate touching or physical acts** during practice, competitions, medical examinations, or sports events. It can also manifest through coercion, exploitation, or harassment by individuals in positions of authority or influence.

Sexual violence may coexist with other forms of abuse in sports, such as:

- **Psychological manipulation**, including coercion, intimidation, or emotional abuse to exert control over the victims.
- **Abuse of power**, where coaches, staff, or peers manipulate or coerce athletes or others, fostering dependency or fear.
- **Physical violence**, such as aggressive behavior, punishment, or harm inflicted under the guise of discipline.
- **Financial exploitation**, including withholding financial support, misusing athletes' earnings, or pressuring them into financial dependence.
- **Discriminatory violence**, where individuals face abuse based on gender, race, sexual orientation, or disability.
- **Social isolation**, where athletes or other victims are deliberately cut off from support networks to make them more vulnerable to exploitation.

4. Key Principles and Commitments for Sport Stakeholders

Sport Stakeholders (individuals and organisations) should commit to the following preventive principles to ensure a safe and respectful sporting environment:

Primary preventive interventions - Preventing violence before it occurs by promoting a culture of safety, respect, acceptance, inclusivity and accountability.

- **Mandatory Strategies and Policies Against Sexual Violence:** Develop, adopt and apply Strategies, Policies, Practices and Measures preventing sexual violence, within the sporting environment.
- **Mandatory Safeguarding Training:** Ensure all staff, coaches, trainers, administrators, athletes and volunteers undergo comprehensive, mandatory, and continuous safeguarding and other related training.
- **Bystanders' Training:** Ensure the adoption of structured, evidence-based bystander intervention training programmes across all sporting levels. These programs will equip athletes, coaches, volunteers, and staff with the knowledge, confidence, and practical tools to safely challenge or interrupt harmful behavior when witnessed. Encourage the development of team cultures that promote shared responsibility, normalize speaking up, and dismantle the silence that enables abuse.
- **Cultural Shift:** Foster a fundamental cultural shift from a "win-at-all-costs" mentality to one that prioritises the overall well-being and safety of all individuals in sport.

Promote equitable attitudes and behaviours, actively acknowledge and respect diversity, dismantling male-dominated cultures and addressing gender inequalities.

- **Zero-tolerance policy:** Establish and enforce a strict zero-tolerance policy on all forms of violence, including sexual, ensuring instant action against misbehaviors regardless of the perpetrator's status or position.
- **Open Communication and Reporting Mechanisms:** Actively encourage, adopt and facilitate open communication and ensure safe and trustworthy reporting mechanisms for minors and for adults. This includes establishing clear, accessible and confidential pathways for disclosure.
- **Intersectional Approach:** Recognise and address the vulnerabilities of diverse groups, including LGBTQIA+ athletes, athletes with disabilities, and those from disadvantaged racial, ethnic, migration, and/or socioeconomic backgrounds, by promoting inclusive policies and applying the appropriate practices and tools for support based on their specific needs.
- **Organisational Accountability:** Hold sports organisations and their leadership accountable for failing to implement policies, respond adequately, or for prioritising image or economic profit over individual well-being. Actively work to end the "culture of immunity" and lack of transparency.
- **Codes of conducts:** Establish codes of conducts including a) avoiding private interactions with athletes unless multiple people are present or there is explicit agreement from parents (if minors) or sports management, b) maintaining professional boundaries to prevent situations that could lead to misconduct or misinterpretation and c) ensuring gender representation in support networks to foster a safe environment.
- **Inclusive Focus on Grassroots and Community Sports:** Recognize the unique challenges faced by grassroots and community-level sports organizations, including limited resources and capacity. Create simplified and scalable safeguarding measures specifically tailored for smaller, community-based organizations to ensure accessibility and ease of implementation. Encourage partnerships with local groups, schools, and community organizations to reinforce safeguarding practices at the grassroots level. Provide practical toolkits with templates for safeguarding policies, codes of conduct, and reporting procedures designed for smaller-scale settings.

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toolkits with templates for safeguarding policies, codes of conduct, and reporting procedures designed for smaller-scale settings.

Secondary preventive interventions - Intervening early when risks or incidents arise to minimize harm and support those affected.

- **Recognizing Signs of Abuse:** Foster and or ensure or even make obligatory for athletes, coaches, sports administrators and other sport stakeholders, to receive proper training and knowledge on how to recognize signs of abuse, including a) Behavioral changes (withdrawal, anxiety, depression, fear of training sessions), b) Unexplained injuries or reluctance to discuss personal issues and c) Reports of inappropriate conduct from teammates or staff.
- **Survivor-Centred Approach:** Prioritize the rights, needs, and desires, and if possible, involvement, of victims and survivors throughout all processes. Ensure that strategies and resources account for the diverse vulnerabilities of participants, including those in underserved or less-professionalized sports environments. Ensure they feel believed, acknowledged, safe, protected, supported and empowered. The burden of seeking justice rests with the public and state relevant authorities, not the survivor of violence.
- **Trauma-Informed Practices:** Adopt and integrate trauma-informed approaches when establishing prevention policies and in all interactions with victims and survivors. Ensure these principles are upheld throughout investigation procedures and support services to prevent re-victimization and acknowledge the profound impacts of trauma.
- **Confidentiality and Victim Safety:** Maintain strict confidentiality of reports and personal information, disclosing only when necessary to protect someone from harm or with prior consent, or if a potential criminal act is identified. Prioritize the safety and security of victims above all else.

5. Reporting Mechanisms

Effective reporting mechanisms are crucial for identifying and addressing sexual violence within sports.

- **Mandatory Reporting Obligations:**
 - ✓ All sports professionals are legally and ethically obligated to report suspected or disclosed cases of violence to designated authorities.
 - ✓ Sport organizations must follow national and European legal frameworks on mandatory reporting.
 - ✓ Sport organisations must cooperate fully with criminal investigations. However, they must also have a duty to act even if national crime agencies fall short or do not pursue a case.

- ✓ Sport organizations must develop and adopt strategies, policies and undertake safeguarding practices and measures for prevention of sexual violence.
- **Safe and Accessible Reporting Channels:**
 - ✓ Establish anonymous, trustworthy and confidential reporting channels, such as dedicated hotlines, digital reporting tools, and designated safeguarding officers. Ensure these tools are known to all stakeholders within the sporting environments, are user-friendly, easily accessible, and available to all participants, including those in grassroots sports.
 - ✓ Develop awareness campaigns to normalize reporting and address the stigma that often surrounds disclosures.
 - ✓ Highlight stories of action and improve visibility around the value of reporting to foster a sense of safety and support.
 - ✓ Ensure clear and indicated pathways for victims, survivors and whistleblowers to seek remedy, legal or/and psychological or/and other support aid, if possible at no cost.
 - ✓ Reporting processes should follow clear steps: Responding to the disclosure calmly and reassuring the individual; Recording the relevant information accurately using specific forms/templates, without re-victimizing people, focusing on facts and observations; and reporting information to the appropriate designated person or statutory agencies.
- **Protection Against Retaliation:**
 - ✓ Implement whistleblower protection policies, according to national legislation.
 - ✓ Ensure victims, survivors and reporters face no discrimination, exclusion, or negative consequences for coming forward. Reporting abuse is often difficult and precarious due to the power dynamics involved.

6. Comprehensive Support and Protection Strategies, Policies and Measures

Immediate and long-term support and protection for victims and survivors is paramount.

- **Immediate Response and Crisis Intervention:**
 - ✓ Ensure immediate access to comprehensive essential services, including medical treatment (physical, psychological, and mental health care).
 - ✓ Provide crisis counselling, information helplines, and safe housing/shelters if needed.
 - ✓ Offer or suggest legal guidance on victim rights and assistance in navigating legal processes, ensuring accompaniment to services if required.
 - ✓ Establish safe spaces for affected individuals within the sports environment.

- **Long-term Support:**

- ✓ Assign trauma-informed counsellors and experts and provide rehabilitation programmes specifically tailored for affected athletes.
- ✓ Offer career support and reintegration programmes to ensure survivors can continue their passion for sport or find new pathways if needed.
- ✓ Services must be rights-based, gender-sensitive, culturally and age-appropriate, and paramount in ensuring safety. They should promote women's agency to make their own decisions.
- ✓ Acknowledge that external support services - including those specialising in gender-based violence, health, psychology, and legal assistance - are often under-resourced and overburdened. Sports organisations should actively map available services, build collaborative relationships, and take initiative to identify and address any gaps in support provision to ensure timely and effective care.

- **Restorative Justice and Survivor Influence:**

- ✓ Adopt a restorative justice approach, focusing on the impact of harm on individuals rather than on law violations.
- ✓ Ensure victims and survivors are heard in safe spaces and their pain and suffering is acknowledged, including an apology for sport's role in causing or failing to prevent harm.
- ✓ Provide space for affected people to be part of solution-building and influence the design of remedy processes and follow-up recommendations, recognising their unique "expertise by lived experience". This expertise should be appropriately remunerated when sought beyond direct evidence provision.
- ✓ Mechanisms for reparations and compensation for harm suffered should be in place.

7. Coordination and Accountability Mechanisms

- **Multistakeholder and Multi-disciplinary Cooperation:**

- ✓ Foster active collaboration between sports organisations, law enforcement, child protection agencies, social services, and medical authorities.
- ✓ Define clear roles and responsibilities for all involved institutions and ensure clear delineation between internal sports governance systems and national criminal justice systems.

- **Cross-Border Coordination:**

- ✓ Ensure compliance with international child protection frameworks and standards.

- ✓ Facilitate cooperation between national, European and international sports bodies and relevant national ministries.
- **Internal Safeguarding Committees:**
 - ✓ Appoint dedicated safeguarding officers in all sports organisations. These officers should be suitably qualified and regularly be trained with expertise in sexual violence, the different forms, trauma-informed investigations, and gender-based violence.
 - ✓ Conduct regular policy reviews and risk assessments of reporting and support mechanisms.
- **Accountability for Organisations:**
 - ✓ Apply required mechanisms to hold public and private sports organisations and their leadership accountable for failures.
 - ✓ Consider creating public registries of convicted or under investigation individuals for violence maltreatment in sport, to prevent perpetrators from moving between organisations or locations. This will enhance transparency and accountability.
 - ✓ Investigations should be as open and transparent as possible, without compromising integrity or safety. This includes clarity on purpose, powers, funding, publication of outcomes, survivor input, and anticipated timeframes.
 - ✓ Address the issue of lack of independence in internal investigations by considering external oversight where appropriate.

8. Special Provisions for Minors

Children and young people require additional safeguards due to their unique vulnerabilities in the sports environment.

- **Child-Centred Support Services:**
 - ✓ Provide age-appropriate psychological support and other services.
 - ✓ Offer specialised child-friendly reporting mechanisms.
- **Parental and Guardian Involvement:**
 - ✓ Ensure transparent communication with legal guardians and provide specialised support for families.
 - ✓ Encourage parents to ask about coach qualifications, staff experience, and background checks.
 - ✓ Offer targeted training sessions for parents to build awareness of safeguarding standards and promote a clear understanding of safety protocols within sporting environments.

- ✓ Equip parents with the knowledge to recognize risks, reinforce protective practices at home, and actively contribute to creating safe sport communities.
- **Safe Environments and Prevention Strategies:**
 - ✓ Implement thorough and mandatory background checks, including criminal record screenings, for all staff and volunteers working closely with children. While these measures are essential for safeguarding, recognize their limitations in preventing first-time offenders and consider the ethical implications involved in their application.
 - ✓ Implement comprehensive codes of conduct that clearly set out acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for adults and young people, both on and off-line, and address boundary setting and inappropriate physical contact.
 - ✓ Conduct regular training on child protection policies, specifically addressing grooming behaviours which can be difficult to distinguish from trusted relationships.
 - ✓ Address the "no pain, no gain" culture in sport, as this can mask violence and needs to be challenged.
 - ✓ Provide practical guidelines for minimising risks in specific environments like changing rooms, showers, carpooling, and overnight stays during training camps or competitions.
 - ✓ Recognise the risks from sexually harmful behaviour among young people themselves, including initiation or 'hazing' rituals, and ensure adults are aware of signs and how to respond.

9. Monitoring, Training, and Prevention

Continuous improvement is driven by ongoing learning and adaptation.

- **Safeguarding Training for Sports Professionals:**
 - ✓ Ensure mandatory, ongoing training for all coaches, trainers, and staff.
 - ✓ Conduct annual refresher courses on safeguarding, including emerging issues like online abuse or homophobic bullying.
 - ✓ Training should cover understanding different forms of violence (physical, psychological, sexual, neglect), recognising signs of abuse, appropriate response protocols, clear reporting procedures, bystander intervention techniques, and boundary setting.
 - ✓ Training should be tailored for specific roles (e.g., coaches, administrators, PE teachers, sports policy experts, athletes) and delivered by suitably trained and qualified individuals.
- **Risk Assessments and Audits:**

- 11 -

- ✓ Perform periodic evaluations and assessment of impact of safeguarding policies and implement corrective actions where necessary.
- ✓ Develop and maintain risk registers to identify potential risks of sexual violence and describe controls to minimise or remove hazards.
- ✓ Assess risks presented by individuals as part of recruitment processes or following investigations, to determine suitability to work with children.
- **Awareness Campaigns:**
 - ✓ Develop evidence-based educational programmes for athletes on their rights.
 - ✓ Promote safe reporting practices through high-impact, national or international advocacy and social norm change communications campaigns that permeate all levels of society and sport.
 - ✓ Enlist athletes and other prominent figures as role models in prevention strategies.
 - ✓ Ensure campaigns are designed with expert involvement, are age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and accessible in a safe, supportive environment.
- **Systematic Data Collection and Evidence-Based Policy:**
 - ✓ Implement systematic, ongoing collection and reporting of standardised data on the prevalence and types of sexual violence, reporting rates, perpetrator identity, effectiveness of interventions, and demographic patterns.
 - ✓ Leverage comprehensive analyses of violence data trends to continuously enhance and adapt policies, ensuring they remain grounded in evidence and responsive to emerging challenges. This data should also highlight the challenges, opportunities, and effective good practices.

10. Evaluation and Assessment Mechanisms

- **Responsibilities of public or/and private National Sport Organizations:**
 - ✓ Ensure all sports organisations implement comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures.
 - ✓ Monitor compliance with national, European and international legislation.
- **Continuous Improvement:**
 - ✓ Establish feedback mechanisms from athletes and sports staff.
 - ✓ Adapt policies based on emerging risks and best practices.
 - ✓ Implement a participatory approach involving athletes, parents, coaches, civil society organisations, and other key stakeholders in the development and continuous review

of safeguarding policies. This fosters trust and ensures policies are relevant and effective.

- ✓ Foster or/and provide continuous learning and training programmes on safeguarding standards and prevention of violence in sports, among others.
- **Compliance and Enforcement:**
 - ✓ Conduct regular audits and inspections to ensure compliance with safeguarding standards.
 - ✓ Impose sanctions for non-compliance with safeguarding standards, ensuring consequences are proportional to the severity of the behaviour and consistent with applicable laws.
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 - E-mail: rdc@redeporte.org
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