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CALL TO ACTION

TOWARDS A SAFER PLAYING FIELD

TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORT



Women and girls play a critical role in sustainable development. Their safety, empowerment, political participation, access to education and healthcare benefit entire communities and national economies.

Gender-based violence, however, **directly undermines opportunities, development and human rights** — including the right to safely participate in and enjoy sport.

In the world of sport, women and girls face heightened risks of violence and ineffective or inadequate prevention and response mechanisms. A staggering 21% of female athletes report experiencing a form of sexual abuse as children in sport, and studies consistently show higher rates of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, harassment and cyber abuse, among women and girls compared to men and boys.

Too often, these abuses go unreported. And while some progress has been made in safeguarding policies, significant legislative gaps remain globally. This enables continued patterns of inequity, injustice and impunity for perpetrators.

This Call to Action builds on the recommendations outlined in the UNESCO-UN Women Handbook on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport, published with the support of **UN Spotlight Initiative**.

These were further developed during UNESCO's Fit for Life Policy Roundtable, "Towards a Safer Playing Field", which gathered stakeholders to identify the priority actions needed to tackle root causes of violence, support survivors, and hold perpetrators accountable.

1. DEVELOP A CENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Advocate for the creation of a global normative instrument to ensure the development of needs-based, harmonized and interoperable standards for safeguarding in sport across Member States, and commit to their effective implementation at national and local levels.

“

***It is time to change.
Maybe this is a safeguarding convention—some kind of international collaboration that UNESCO can lead—as UNESCO is in the unique position to bridge the gaps that exist between states and sport, and to help navigate the complex landscape that sport occupies.***

”

KAT CRAIG

FOUNDER & CEO, ATHLEAD



Out of the 18 countries surveyed in a 2018–2019 European Union–Council of Europe joint data collection exercise...

Only **25%**

of their sport federations reported having policies or action plans for preventing and combating gender-based violence in sport.



2. ESTABLISH AND ENFORCE COMPREHENSIVE REGULATIONS

Create and strengthen safeguarding standards, laws and legal frameworks to prevent violence, hold perpetrators accountable and provide remedy for survivors. Put in place measures and safeguards to ensure that these are fully enforced at all levels of practice, across both sports organizations and educational institutions.

3. STRENGTHEN JUDICIAL PROCESSES

Collaborate with the Ministry of Justice and other relevant institutions to enhance judicial infrastructure and develop sport-specific legal statutes which streamline and strengthen the prosecution process of perpetrators of violence, recognizing the need for these laws to navigate the complexities of sport and national law integration.

“

There is abuse in every sport, at every level.

If complaints are not coming in, there is a problem with your reporting system and you need to look into that. Why aren't survivors coming forward, and what can you do to protect and encourage them?

”

JOANNA MARANHÃO

NETWORK COORDINATOR, SPORTS & RIGHTS ALLIANCE



In more than of **75%** cases of gender-based violence,

the accused athletes or coaches were permitted to stay on their teams and continue to compete... regardless of whether they were charged, arrested or convicted.

4. BOLSTER REPORTING MECHANISMS AND SURVIVOR SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Develop independent, transparent, anonymous, and straightforward abuse reporting systems within sports organizations, empowering survivors and whistle-blowers to come forward without fear of retaliation. Simultaneously, strengthen support services to meet the immediate and ongoing needs of survivors, ensuring these systems are comprehensive and adequately resourced.

5. BUILD SAFEGUARDING CAPACITIES

Develop and mandate comprehensive and periodic trainings for coaches, educators, and other grassroots sports actors on recognizing, preventing, and responding to violence, ensuring they are equipped to safeguard athletes effectively.

“

We need to acknowledge that effective safeguarding doesn't end at policymaking—it needs to be implemented.

And to implement it effectively, we need to train and monitor impact.

”

CECILIA SAFAEE

FOUNDER, FUTEBOL DÁ FORÇA FOUNDATION

When you base your policies on data, this allows you to be more effective, and you can have governments channel their investments in a targeted way. If that approach has worked for education, why don't we apply it to sports?

LOMBE MWAMBWA

RESEARCH DIRECTOR, GLOBAL OBSERVATORY
FOR GENDER EQUALITY & SPORT

6. **STRENGTHEN RESEARCH AND DATA**

Systematically gather, report, and analyze harmonized, sex-disaggregated data on gender-based violence in sport and on the impact of violence prevention strategies. Collate data across sectors and at national, regional, and global levels. Fund additional research on gender-based violence in sport to create up-to-date and relevant knowledge to inform policy and intervention strategies.

7. INCORPORATE SURVIVOR VOICES

Take survivor-centered approaches and actively involve survivors, through compensated roles, in shaping all aspects of safeguarding and accountability processes. Ensure that policies and mechanisms fully consider their insights, experiences, safety, and informed consent.

“

We have to understand that people affected by trauma in sport must be part of the solution. Engaging these people is honouring their story, their expertise—it is fundamental.

And there is no way forward if we do not address power imbalances and lack of trust.

”

JOANNA MARANHÃO

NETWORK COORDINATOR, SPORTS & RIGHTS ALLIANCE



According to a recent FIFA survey, only:

12% of member association executives are women.

9% of referees are women.

5% of coaches are women.

8. CHAMPION INCLUSIVITY, ACCESSIBILITY AND DIVERSITY

Ensure that policies and measures to protect athletes are intersectional, incorporating and respecting the diverse identities of athletes and the full spectrum of gender-based violence and discrimination. Actively work to address under-representation and disparities in research, policy, and practice.

9. PROMOTE EQUAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Advocate for equitable media coverage and representation of female athletes and women's sport, and support initiatives that increase the representation of women in sports journalism, as well as capacity-building on inclusive reporting for journalists.

“

As journalists, we need to change the way we report on women.

Comment on their performance, not on their body or outfit.

”

ANNE-LAURE BONNET

INDEPENDENT SPORTS JOURNALIST & TV HOST

Female athletes receive only **5%** of all sports news coverage.

My greatest privilege as a man is my silence. We don't have to talk about this—I am the only man in this panel. I don't have to be here. Nobody here would notice if I weren't here.

And this is part of the true problem—our silence in this conversation.

DON MCPHERSON

FORMER NFL AMERICAN PLAYER & AUTHOR

10. USE SPORT TO CHANGE MENTALITIES

Recognize and utilize the potential of sport to address and combat the root causes of gender-based violence, both within the sporting world and in broader society. Harness the visibility of major sport events to promote equality and inclusivity in and around sport and encourage the involvement of male athletes and sports figures as allies to promote equality and behavioral change.

DISCOVER THE HANDBOOK

*EXPLORE STRATEGIES, CASE STUDIES AND GOOD PRACTICES
IN TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORT*



Scan the code to access the **Handbook on Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport**, co-published by UNESCO and UN Women with the support of **UN Spotlight Initiative**.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ROUNDTABLE

DISCOVER KEY INSIGHTS AND DISCUSSIONS



Scan the code to read more about the discussions held during UNESCO's April 2024 Fit for Life Policy Roundtable, **“Towards a Safer Playing Field”**.

