



National Report – Italy

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1. Introduction

The research was carried out between **January and April 2020**, as part of the ACTIVE project and was supported by telematic tools that allow remote communication and coordination, i.e. **telephone interviews and online questionnaires**.

The report includes a brief outline of the policies for the protection of minors in the national context, the description of the methodology used to conduct the research, details on the profile and characteristics of the interviewees, the results of the analysis of the data collected by thematic areas, conclusions in the light of the data collected and suggestions for the implementation of the next activities of the project.

2. National framework on violence against children; violence in sports and violence against children in sports

2.1 Legal framework

According to the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture, **EU Member States do not have any sport-specific legal framework to prosecute gender-based violence happening in sport activities**. Usually, sport legislation, in countries where it is provided, refers to the promotion of ethical values and fair play, and the fight against violence and harassment, and promotes measures to prevent and combat (all forms of) violence. This is true for the laws regulating sport in nine of the EU Member States: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Romania, and Slovenia. Some States among the abovementioned, delegate the implementation of specific measures regarding the sport legislation to different actors. For example, in Italy the **Italian Olympic Committee (CONI)** is responsible for actions against all forms of (discrimination and) violence in sport, while **UISP** is the Italian

Association of Sport For All and it has the aim to spread the right to sport to all citizens, and it is officially recognised by CONI.¹

Like in other EU Member States - such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, and the UK - Italy provides two child protection legal provisions generally aimed at protecting children and young people from sexual violence: assessing the suitability of employees and/or volunteers to perform roles with children (Decree of the President of the Republic 14/11/2002 n° 313, art 25 bis) – which involves checking the criminal history of employees, especially for those who will need to work in contact with children - and prevent convicted or suspected offenders from undertaking such roles (prosecuting them under the Penal Code Artt. 600-bis, 600-ter, 600-quater, 600-quater.1, 600-quinquies e 609-undecies).²

2.2 Data and knowledge on the phenomenon

According to both CONI and UISP, Italy still **lacks aggregated data and reports** on violence against child abuse in sport, making difficult to show the size of the phenomenon. Indeed, the UN Committee regrets that Italy hasn't developed a national system to collect data on the phenomenon.³ Nevertheless, this issue is of paramount importance since there are many cases where sport coaches, doctors, or other technical staff have been accused of abusing young athletes (both male and female), and this is known only from **news on TV and newspaper**. According to the former **General Sport Attorney of CONI**, since 2014, the office dealt with 47 cases concerning violence and abuses against minors. Unfortunately, the problem is worsened by **high underreporting rate**.⁴

In Italy, a period of growing attention was seen in the years immediately following the adoption of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**, with a more precise definition of abuse and after the proclamation of

¹ Study on gender-based violence in sport – Final report, European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016, 22, 66

² *Ibi*, 25

³ Diritti dei minori: ancora molte disuguaglianze in Italia. Articolo Uisp Nazionale, 17/11/2019 <http://www.uisp.it/nazionale/pagina/diritti-dei-minori-ancora-molte-disuguaglianze-in-italia>

⁴ <https://www.coni.it/it/news-ss/14118-fikkfdff.html>

2004 as the year of Education through Sport launched by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe.⁵

2.3 Awareness raising campaigns

Although Italy has still shown gaps in reporting cases of abuse or collecting data on the phenomenon, both private and public organisations and authorities has implemented several **initiatives to raise awareness on the presence of violence in sport**, with focus on gender-based violence through campaigns, courses, conferences, or events, but in most cases the initiatives promoted have been short duration initiatives; however, one good practice that shows efforts to ensure sustainable initiatives: a **Memorandum of Understanding**, signed in 2013 between the **Ministry for Equal Opportunities, Sport and Youth Policies and CONI**, establishing an annual ‘sport week against gender-based violence in and through sport’.⁶

The following is a list of relevant good practices and campaigns:

- UISP and the Italian Sports Centre (CSI) joined the Save the Children campaign, **Adults in Place**⁷, by adopting a **policy for the protection of children in sport**. This policy provides: 1) specific criteria for recruiting appropriate staff, 2) the adoption of a Code of Conduct that is recognised and signed by all adults working with children, 3) awareness campaigns about the rights and protection of children, and 4) an assessment of the risk of abuse in sport activities. Also, UISP has developed the **“UISP Policy to protect Children and Adolescents”** that includes duties of the association, its employers and employees, a definition of abuse, UISP standards on prevention and protection. Whenever UISP intends to work in collaboration with other partners, it **first verifies that they have a Policy** and it may also ask them **to comply with the principles of UISP policy**. UISP also ensures that the work in partnership **leads to the definition of their internal policy**.⁸ UISP is composed by 1,335,000 people associated, 18,020,046 sports clubs (2015 data) and it has a presence

⁵ Policy UISP per la Tutela di Bambine/i e Adolescenti, 2015,

http://www.uisp.it/nazionale/aree/poeducative/files/Policy%20uisp_modificata%2029%20gennaio%202015.pdf

⁶ Study on gender-based violence in sport – Final report, European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016

⁷<https://s3.savethechildren.it/public/files/uploads/pubblicazioni/adulti-posto-un-sistema-di-tutela-di-bambine-bambini-e-adolescenti-da-maltrattamenti-abusi-o.pdf>

⁸ Policy UISP per la Tutela di Bambine/i e Adolescenti, 2015,

http://www.uisp.it/nazionale/aree/poeducative/files/Policy%20uisp_modificata%2029%20gennaio%202015.pdf

in every regions and provinces in Italy, in many cities, through 157 local committees and 25 Leagues and areas of activity.⁹

- UISP has promoted the so-called 'healthy' sport, which involves events against gender-based violence in sport, e.g. 'Bike in Pink', 'Take the Field against Homophobia', and 'Running Hearts'.¹⁰

- **Offside: sport against violence. Information and training initiatives for sport instructors:** Mal.Ab Group (Expert Inter-Institutional Group against severe Maltreatment and Child Abuse), **CONI** of Trieste and Regional School of Sport Representatives developed and delivered a **training course** for coaches and sports instructors to raise awareness on the fight against bullying, violence, maltreatment and sexual abuse of children in sport and other community environments. The training course covered several themes, among them the consequences of violence, abuse, bullying and homophobia on children, but also referral mechanisms for reporting and managing incidents of violence and abuse against children; and information on services for child protection in Italy.

- **Sport respects your rights – empowering young Europeans in sport for a culture of respect and integrity against sexualised violence and gender harassment (SRYR):** transnational **EU-funded project to prevent and combat gender-based violence in youth sport**, giving young people aged 16-22 years old the opportunity to design their own online campaigns through a platform developed by partners. The campaigns served the purpose of making youngsters promoters of social change through reflection and peer learning against gender-based violence.¹¹

3. Methodology (including difficulties and strategies to overcome these difficulties)

3.1 Recruitment

The recruitment of the individuals to be involved in the research started with the involvement of people from sports and recreational organisations and stakeholders **already known to CESIE for previous project collaborations**, to which additional ones have been added, thanks to the **mapping in the cities of Palermo, Rome and Milan**. In this context, challenges have been encountered in contacting stakeholders in Rome and Milan, given the geographical distance. The challenge was amplified with the closure of public offices ordered by the Decree of March 9 2020, to limit the spread of Covid-19. Professionals and families (with at least one child involved in sports or recreational activities) have been involved starting from individuals suggested by sports organisations, up to individuals belonging to the same circle of knowledge responding to the profile,

⁹ UISP Sportpertutti, <http://www.uisp.it/progetti/pagina/whats-uisp>

¹⁰ Study on gender-based violence in sport – Final report, European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, 2016, 63

¹¹ *ibidem*

via telephone contacts provided by the formers. Recruitment was initially carried out via e-mails and then telephone calls in order to explain in depth the project's objective and give the possibility to express any doubts and concerns, and to agree on a phone interview. An email was sent to any of the interested person to confirm date and time of the interview.

3.2 Data collection

The research originally included two methodologies for data collection: the implementation of individual interviews with stakeholders, 2 focus groups involving professionals and 2 focus groups dedicated to minors and their parents. Due to the Covid-19 emergency, it was not possible to carry out the research face-to-face, thus only phone interviews were conducted. In the case of families, the questions were asked to the child and the parent at the same time in speakerphone mode.

The interviews were conducted in **semi-structured mode**, following a predefined list of questions; questions were not always asked in the same order, but would vary according to the answer given. Often, in fact, the interviewees anticipated answers to questions that would be posed later.

During interviews, some questions have been reworded, adapting them to the most appropriate linguistic register to be proposed to each of the different target groups (formal language with stakeholders and professionals, simplified and less technical language for minors and parents).

Almost all telephone interviews were recorded, with the consent of the participants, to facilitate the transcription process. Where participants did not agree to the recording of the interview, notes were taken. After any interviews, the researchers wrote down the full transcription, preferably at the end of the telephone call itself, to facilitate the immediate recalling of perceptions and interpretations based on aspects of paralinguistic communication such as tone of voice, rhythm and silence.

Difficulties were faced in both reaching stakeholders from Milan and Rome and with getting consent forms signed. For these reasons, the researchers proceeded by creating online questionnaire and consent forms for the processing of personal data.

3.3 Data analysis

During this phase, transcripts were consulted in depth, analysing the respondents' statements. Each response was then brought back to the thematic area of reference. Subsequently, similar responses were aggregated in order to count respondents who felt the same way or had the same experience and finally derive a percentage. After finding the prevalence of certain responses, these responses and the personal data of the respondents were combined in the sample (disaggregating the data by age, gender, level of education, years of experience in sports organisations and geographical location).

The interpretation has often been facilitated also by further questions, not included in the setlist, which have been asked for clarification purposes in case of poorly understood statements or misunderstandings. Through a better understanding of the contents, the disadvantage of not being able to meet and to make use of non-verbal communication aspects, such as facial expressions and movements included in gestures, was also overcome.

4. Characterization of the participants in the needs assessment

4.1 Stakeholders

Stakeholders, i.e. those who have an interest and are involved in the protection of minors or in the management and coordination of sports and recreational organisations attended by children. The research plan envisaged the following stakeholders' profiles:

- National or/and local scope.
- Child protection actors.
- Policy makers, in the fields of: education, child protection system, youth policies, sports activities...
- Responsible for federations / associations of sports organisations.
- Municipalities.
- Relevant professionals and/or leaders of sports organisations to be involved.
- Others with relevant influence on the child protection system and / or in sports and leisure times activities.

Almost all stakeholders involved live in Palermo, while only one stakeholder in Rome.

The research is based on the testimony of **10 stakeholders**, including **4 women and 6 men** between the **ages of 28 and 69**. Their level of education includes a **diploma and a degree**, with the latter prevailing; only **two** people have obtained a **master's degree**. It has been possible to identify a higher level of knowledge, especially regarding more technical and formal aspects, on younger interviewees, due to the growing attention on child-friendly approaches and on raising awareness on childhood issues within recent university study paths. Among the interviewees: **a psychologist at a non-profit organisation, 5 presidents of amateur sports associations of different sports disciplines (football, volleyball, kung fu / capoeira and fencing), one owner of a postural gymnastics center, a vice-president of an association that deals with orienteering, a social worker of a sport association, one Ombudsperson for Children and Adolescents.**

The interviewees have been involved in the organisations/institutions they represent for a period of time between 2 and 12 years, so they have a good level of experience in their field.

4.2 Professionals

Collecting data provided by professionals in sports was important for their direct involvement in sports and recreational activities with children. Professionals have the manifold task of **training and educating children through sport**, making them learning healthy habits, good values and overcoming their limits. It should not be forgotten that they are also part of the staff of organisations and therefore subject to formal or informal rules to be followed, and these include **respect and promotion of children's rights, the elimination of forms of discrimination in order to promote inclusion and sport for all**.

The **professionals involved in the research are 12, mostly male (8 men and 4 women)**. They range from **24 years of age from the youngest to 42 years of age**. Among the participants **6 have a secondary school diploma, 2 of which are currently studying for a degree; 4 have a master's degree, one has a bachelor's degree and another has a five-year degree**. Interviewees includes:

- A trainer and educator involved in school projects and a mini-basketball coach;
- 4 football school coaches;
- A gym education teacher at school and coach in various sports centres;
- A gym owner and physical education teacher at school;
- One fitness and postural gymnastics instructor working both in a gym and in projects at school;
- A worker for a dance school;
- A social worker for a sport organisation and school teacher;
- A gym instructor;
- A karate teacher.

The above-mentioned professionals carry out their activities in Palermo and in the neighbor municipalities; one coach works in Genoa.

4.3 Parents and children

Families are the main users of sports services, so they were interviewed to find out their views on the safety of their children. Gymnasiums, playgrounds, swimming pools are the places where children spend most of the weekly hours immediately after school.

Families were selected in Palermo and its proximity, those who have agreed to collaborate are 13. Most of the participants were mothers, except for 4 cases in which the father participated. Regarding children, CESIE interviewed **6 girls and 7 boys aged between 4 and 16 years**. The daily activities they attend are quite variegated:

- **5 dance school participants (2 of whom are ballet dancers);**
- **5 children attending karate school;**
- **1 child attending swimming course - who has currently quit to attend a couple dancing course;**
- **1 football and volleyball player;**

- **1 capoeira practitioner.**

The level of education of the participating parents is mainly the secondary school **diploma; only 4 participants have graduated (2 Bachelor's and 2 Master's degrees).**

The majority of parents have the following professions: **employee (5), nurse, teacher, psychologist. 5 parents declared that they do not work outside the household .**

5. Results of the needs assessment

5.1 Perspectives on violence in sports and against children

Through interviews with the target groups - stakeholders, professionals, families- it was possible to identify the perception of the possible presence of violent behaviour within sports and recreational contexts attended by children.

- Starting from the **information provided by stakeholders**, on the one hand, the majority of them assured the **absence of forms of violence within the organisations they represent or know** (9 out of 10). The **presence of violence**, on the other hand, can be found in the **football sector**: it has been reported both by internal members of football schools and by external members, who have paid attention to this phenomenon in their experience as spectators of football matches played by underage players. It is more about **verbal violence** perpetrated by **parents** who attend sports matches and strongly encourage their children to win by leading them more to a **tough competition** than to strengthen team spirit or respect their opponents. Participants agree that sometimes children tend to be **violent both physically and verbally towards their teammates or opponents, reflecting the behaviour of their parents** both inside and outside the sports context.

Only **2 interviewees talked about psychological violence** perpetrated by the **professionals towards the minor**, by undermining their self-esteem, not respecting their times of learning and abilities. According to the interviewees, this behaviour would make children give up sports but it does not have serious repercussions on them.

According to **10 out of 12 professionals**, there are **no cases of violence during their training sessions**. They report **insults or small fights between children**, but these episodes are not considered alarming. Professionals also talk about football in reference to physical or verbal violence, having witnessed **insults against referees and coaches from parents**. The only **4 professionals who have heard or witnessed forms**

of violence refer mainly to **verbal violence**, only **one of them** talked about harassment in a karate school in the North of Italy, **information read from the newspapers**.

- All the **parents** interviewed **excluded the presence of any forms of violence within the sports organisations** attended by their children. This statement is supported by the fact that the **children interviewed expressed their joy in attending the activities**. Also, the two minors who decided to give up karate and swimming pool, also put forward different reasons far from mistreatment or unpleasant events. In particular, the thesis concerning violence in football was also confirmed by one parent and the child, even if not practicing.

- In all interviews (stakeholders, professionals and families) it was stated that **sports organisations provide a safe environment for children**. Only one stakeholder complained about **the lack of architectural barriers to isolate children during sports and recreation, probably referring to the ease of access by external people**.

5.2 Existence and characterisation of practices preventing violence against children in sport

The focus of the following section will be on **prevention practices implemented within sports organisations**.

- Among the most widespread preventive actions, there is certainly the **transmission of values to minors by professionals**. Therefore, in addition to learning specific techniques of sports activities, children have the opportunity to learn values such as: loyalty, respect, understanding, mutual aid, acceptance of defeat. These values can be traced back to the principle of "Fair Play". The aim of the transmission of values is to translate them into concrete attitudes and behaviour of the youngsters not only during training and competitions, but also in daily life, leading them to a positive adulthood. The means used to achieve this goal are **dialogue between professionals and students and within the group or team** about behaviours considered incorrect. This is the shared opinions of **4 stakeholders out of a total of 10, 7 professionals out of a total of 12 and 4 families out of a total of 13**.

- **Four stakeholders** said their organisations prefer to reduce the possibility of dealing with violence by **inviting parents to meetings** where they are informed of any misbehaviour of their children or by sensitizing them to take a different attitude when they attend sports competitions. For example, those who attend football matches are asked not to incite violence to children on the field and to avoid fights

with their peers. Also, parents have the opportunity to have **group or individual interviews with the sports psychologist**. The intent of the organisations is to encourage communication with parents and guardians of children, in order to limit and prevent aggressive behaviour and to act as positive models for their children. This strategy is implemented by three organisations among those involved in the research and in one of them adopt both methodologies.

- One stakeholder and one professional referred to the **monitoring of children's behaviour as a preventive practice**. Therefore, it would be the coaches who would pick up any warning signs before aggressive behaviour occurs, through their experience and intuition.

- A case of preventive practices was highlighted by several families within the same dance school, i.e. the ability of the teacher to scold their students when appropriate and of raising awareness through a **dance recital performance on the fight of violence against women**, aimed at sensitizing dancers and spectators who attended. Instead, a karate teacher reported to have witnessed a case of a teacher inciting a child to incorrectly behave with the opposing team; the interviewee said he/she directly intervened by stopping the conversation. Other significant prevention experiences concern the **participation of a sport organisation in social initiatives** in the area and the practice of actively involving children who are used to bullying by entrusting them with responsibilities during group activities and avoiding in every way to isolate them; in this way, it is possible to keep them engaged and eliminate negative behaviours.

One parent and two stakeholders reported a **lack of knowledge about the prevention practices implemented in their respective sports associations, while in two gyms no preventive measures are taken because they are not considered necessary**.

- The recruitment of staff within sports and recreational organisations working with minors should include a check of the criminal record. One of the data provided is the **superficiality of the moment of recruitment** regarding this aspect: according to participants attention is paid to skills in the professional and sports field, but little importance is given to the human and psycho-pedagogical skills (response provided by 3 out of 10 stakeholders). Three other presidents of sports organisations said they have already created a consolidated group of members and professionals they have known for several years and with whom they have established a **relationship of trust**. In addition, two of them have also checked **criminal records of their employees**. Finally, four interviewees said the recruitment of professionals takes place in full respect of the protection of minors and their rights.

- After recruiting the professionals, **monitoring of the activities with children should be foreseen**. Stakeholders who have reported a superficial recruitment of staff, report also **a lack of monitoring** during work; the same thing happens in organisations where employers and staff have established a professional relationship based on trust, but here sports are played through **open doors trainings and matches**, giving parents the opportunity to monitor. Among the people who confirmed the respect for the protection of minors, one also confirmed the monitoring of the work of professionals; two stakeholders did not find any form of monitoring and affirmed that the deficiency is due to the fact that the organisation already selects personnel carefully and because the organisation concerned is **small and professionals are often part of the board of direction**; only one interviewee admitted his/her lack of knowledge on the subject.

- Another aspect that needs attention and that can significantly reduce the occurrence of violence is certainly the **training of professionals**, therefore a work of information and awareness raising aimed at adopting appropriate ways of approaching children. In this regard, from the interviews emerged that **most sports and recreational organisations do not regularly promote training for professionals on children's rights and violence prevention**. For some participants, the reason is that professionals **acquire this knowledge during their university path or the discipline they practice already includes these teachings** and values, as in the case of karate. One instructor reported that he/she did not receive such training because it was **not required in the sport training environment**, which is the fitness room. Only four of the organisations involved offer **professional update courses focused on the psycho-pedagogical aspect**; one stakeholder said that he/she feels not sufficiently informed about this aspect and another said that all organisations should offer this type of training especially when dealing with children.

- Regarding the **implementation of Code of Sports Conduct**, a set of rules that members, professionals and athletes of sports organisations are required to comply with, and its knowledge by stakeholders: 5 stakeholders affirmed their organisations do **not require a Code of Conduct and base their trust on common sense** and the indications are given to professionals informally; three others **do not know anything about the Code**; one stakeholder in Rome answered referring to a "**Manifesto of Values**" that concerns rules of conduct and their impact on all children. **This manifesto is shared**, through a Memorandum of Understanding, with other sports clubs, which propose their own. One stakeholder confirms the **presence of a code of conduct within its own association**.

- Finally, some proposals of the target groups regarding the **methods that should be applied to ensure a safer environment free of violent behaviour**: more **specific training for professionals**; the organisation of **meetings with parents** to encourage them to pay more attention to the behaviour and risks of their children; greater **awareness raising for children** on which behaviours to avoid; inviting

parents, coaches, educators and stakeholders in sport to **be positive role models for the youngest children through their behaviour; curbing the competitive spirit and encouraging them to play a happy and satisfying team game; introducing a person to supervise children's changing rooms; using a box to collect complaints; greater involvement of the children in decisions.**

5.3 Existence and characterisation of practices preventing discrimination against children in sports

One of the topics discussed with the stakeholders concerned the **respect of the right to non-discrimination within organisations**; in 9 cases (out of 10), the interviewees responded that in general, in sports, action is taken by **promoting inclusion, openness and non-discrimination**; one of the stakeholders emphasises that the **principle of non-discrimination** is of paramount importance for them and they try to promote it among children and young people. In two interviews, episodes related to discrimination conduct **between children** (acted by the child towards his/her peer, for reasons related to the different skin colour) were reported and, promptly, blocked and discouraged through the intervention of adults (in one case, considered particularly serious, through the intervention of the coach, with a "sports" warning to the child; in another case the solution was found with the involvement of parents to solve the issue through dialogue). From another interview it emerges a significant consideration, i.e. how some sports of "foreign" origin and practiced throughout the Italian national territory, such as capoeira and kung fu, implicitly **promote openness, inclusion and equality** because those who practice them (perhaps without being fully aware of it), are willingly accepting this inherent "diversity".

Regarding the knowledge of interviewees on **measures to promote openness and inclusion of groups of marginalised children**, as a form of "positive discrimination", the totality of the stakeholders interviewed suggests that this is an aspect that, culturally and practically, is **getting stronger** and more and more affirmed; this is also verified by the reported participation of the organisations involved (in the ACTIVE research), through its managers and / or directors, in various initiatives - in five cases out of ten, it was found the '**adherence to sports event that allows and promotes dialogue between different ethnic groups and matches organized against bullying, racism, violence against women, adherence to multi-ethnic integration projects and projects aimed at people with physical or cognitive deficits**'. Among other practices used to prevent discrimination against children in sports activities, in one case, it emerges the importance of explaining that there are no substantial differences between human beings and that existing ones should not lead to value judgments of the person. In two cases, sport is mentioned as a tool for inclusion, in itself a bearer of positive values. One of the stakeholders was keen to point out

that its club was born as a Paralympic sports club and over time, it has also opened an Olympic sector, implementing what is referred to as a "**reverse inclusion**", within which it encourages comparison and aggregation between young people with and without disabilities through, for example, common training.

Therefore, a homogeneous picture emerges: **more and more opportunities for dialogue in sports environment are widespread**, thanks also to the great presence of people of foreign origin in sports environment, and an attitude of openness and inclusion by organisations. More specifically, there is a variety of answers to how this value can be guaranteed. One of the professionals interviewed reports that their organisation participated in a project titled "Extra", giving the possibility to 10 non-EU youngsters who, for economic reasons, cannot afford to pay a football school, to **become members for free**, allowing them access to sports activities. He/she also says that actions like the one just described were easier to pursue, as nowadays the current bureaucratic practices have, in fact, limited the access of many children to different sports organisations. It happened, in fact, that foreign minors *sans papiers* could not be allowed to access sports organisations, as it became difficult to produce the necessary documentation for sports activities, leading organisations to an "**involuntary discrimination**" against foreign children and youngsters.

The majority of professionals says that their organisations respect and promote diversity; some of them by **organising specific events on dialogue between different cultures and ethnic groups**, using sport as a tool for the promotion and dissemination of this message; others affirm that the **attitude to include people of different genders or skin colours is intrinsic in their daily work** without any specific actions, expressing as a proof the presence in their organisation of foreign children, children with disabilities as well as LGBT teachers ; someone affirms that when something wrong is perceived in this regard, professionals try to discourage the discriminatory behaviour, intervening with dialogue and communication.

Regarding the specific topic of possibilities and methods of **access guaranteed to children with disabilities** within the various sports/recreational organisations, in general, all participants confirm a good level of openness in sports organisations: in 7 cases out of 12 the professionals report that they have had direct experience and that they have not found any particular difficulties, neither in the sense of values nor with regard to the practical/managerial aspect of the issue; four of them report they have never worked with boys/girls with particular disabilities or special needs, but who would not have anything against the possibilities of access to the organisation where they work; one of the interviewees (with a specialisation in motor activity adapted to disability) recognizes an objective difficulty, in some disciplinary areas, to follow, from a technical-sporting point of view, children with specific disabilities,

maybe linked to an **insufficient attention to the specificity of the problem**, a **lack of professional and technical skills** in this regard and a lack of receptive capacity of sports-recreational organisations.

In detail the following emerges: one of the professionals states that, although there is openness towards the topic of inclusion for children with disabilities, they are not attending the organisation, but the professionals would be ready to welcome them, mentioning events or projects (e.g. "Football for everyone") organised by their Federations that address children with disabilities. Another professional affirms that his/her organisation is also attended by children and boys / girls affected by autism and declares, with pride, that the discipline practiced is karate and this has produced great benefits in them, has given excellent results in terms of improvements and progress made, even at the behavioural level; another states that the access of children with disabilities is guaranteed, specifically, with children with motor deficits and others with autism; another that the training of children with disabilities is guaranteed as long as one parent or tutor is present; there are those who say that access to all is guaranteed also to disabled people (without specifying in what way) and, as mentioned above (with regard to the right to non-discrimination) someone has found respect for diversity within their organisation, given the presence of children with disabilities; one of the professionals, with his testimony, highlights and emphasizes the virtuous reality of which he/she is part, i.e. an association in which the protagonists are boys and girls with disabilities.

In addition to affirming that access to people with disabilities is absolutely guaranteed and that it is possible to practice sports such as **wheelchair basketball, basketball and football for boys/girls with intellectual and relational deficits**, some professionals say that there is also an incentive for **integration and inclusion between children with and without disabilities, together in common training**.

5.4 Existence and characterisation of practices promoting the participation of children in sports

Regarding the space given to children's opinion and the related activities and methods, all stakeholders interviewed, while recognizing the importance of children's opinion and their involvement, affirmed diversified opinions on what happens in reality, however, showing a **trend towards their constant involvement**.

In detail, it is noted that: one of the stakeholders believes that the child, in general, is listened to and considers useful his/her direct involvement in decision making to better understand him/her, also paying attention to the meanings behind the evidence of manifest behaviour, inviting professionals to go beyond the oral expression and read all the signals; another believes that young people, within their own sports club, **are always involved** because professionals tend to explain them what they are going to do and why before the training activities; another interviewee says that it is good to listen to them and take their opinion into account also in order to **better adapt to their needs and make them feel good**; yet, there are those who believe that listening and the involvement of the child are aspects entrusted to the choice of the coach; another believes that the child is **less involved in "more structured" and big organisations** and more listened to in more informal aggregative situations; one stakeholder affirms that the **level of involvement depends on the age of the child** and therefore increases during their growth; and finally, another interviewee, in general, often finds, in reality, a sort of imposition of the adult's will on the child in a relationship, not exactly on an equal footing. Only one stakeholder states that engagement and active listening sometimes happen, other times not, without leaning towards one or the other hypothesis; finally, one interviewee thinks there is not **enough involvement in decisions and listening to the minor**.

On the adoption of **procedures aimed at assessing the degree of satisfaction of the child for the services** of which he or she is the recipient, almost all the interviewees (8 out of 10) state that they do not adopt any of them. Similarly to what emerged for the previous question, each organisation, in a diversified way, seems to use different indicators (but never explicit with those directly involved) to implement a sort of "self-assessment" on its own work: one claims **not to be aware of procedures in this regard**; two others say that level of satisfaction of children is proportional to **how regularly they attend their organisation or practice the chosen sport**; on the contrary, there are others who believe that the **indicator of frequency is not sufficient** because children often tend to change their mind or want to experiment other sports, thus justifying inconstant behaviour and, probably, even giving up that sport (with parents/children not even wondering if this is linked to the behaviour of professionals); in another case it is stated that the "evaluation tool" used is the **dialogue with the parents** (who often give positive feedback on the work of the sports organisation); in one case where the activities are carried out in the school environment, it is stated that **evaluation tests are taken by the teacher** (in case the number of children is too high) or the level of satisfaction is measured through **drawings and inscriptions left by children** on a sheet at the end of the project, so as not to bore them in filling in questionnaires; only in one case (out of 10), one sports ONLUS from Rome defined its **own monitoring method** which is welcomed and applied by individual organisations.

When it comes to professionals, ten of the twelve people interviewed, say that there is **great consideration for the opinion of the youngest** and that this aspect is encouraged through the constant

dialogue with the child. In another case the professional gives an ambivalent answer: on the one hand, he/she affirms that there is a **high attention to take into account children's opinions** - for example, the choice of the colour of the uniforms or the steps to be included in the choreography -, on the other hand, sometimes, **parents do not follow the same attitude**, making decisions for the children and not taking into account their opinion or consulting them (even on issues that may be relevant and important, such as participation in the final dance recital because they are considered too small to understand the meaning of the performance). In the latter case, the members of the organisation, while believing and tending to the maximum involvement of the children, find themselves limited by the parent's choices and unable to give "space" to both the children and parents' opinions and wishes. In this regard, the professionals were asked **if minors are informed (and in what way) of the decisions concerning them**. Apart from the last two answers above, the other ten interviewees stated that they tend to involve the children when it comes to explain practical aspects of sports activities, i.e. explaining "technically" what kind of exercises they are doing, or, when facing the willingness of some children to do other types of training, explaining why certain practices are not suitable for their age, involving them with respect to tournament times, or verifying their willingness to participate in events; there are also those who argue that more information could be provided on the matter. As far as the **participation of children in the elaboration of the rules in force in the organisation**, almost all the interviewees do not specify any position - five of them suggest that there is a tendency to the constant involvement of the smallest ones; another one that, although there is the willingness to listen to their expectations, it is not always possible to take into consideration the opinions of all people involved; Similarly, one of the professionals who works with very young children recognises the importance of the rules for them but stated that due to their age there is a "natural difficulty" to participate in the decisions of adults; two professionals, stress that parents and children are informed, always and immediately, on the rules in force within the organisation.

On the use in organisations of **procedures aimed at assessing the degree of satisfaction of children** for the activities carried out, it emerges that **none of the interviewees use "ad hoc" tools** or procedures aimed at measuring this data: in 7 cases out of 12, the information in this sense is collected through the direct action of dialogue (with parents and children); in 5 cases (out of 12) they tend to deduce the degree of satisfaction of young people from attitudes and behaviours such as **smiles, passionate and happy looks, emotions expressed, enthusiasm shown**, but also from the **level of attendance** and the number of children giving up disciplines during the sports season.

On the topic of the **promotion and participation of children in sport, parents and their children** were also involved in the research. In particular, parents were asked whether they consider the environment to be inclusive and welcoming, a space in which, together with their child(ren), they have the opportunity to express their opinions and concerns. All the interviewees describe the sports

organisations attended as welcoming and inclusive places; in 11 cases out of 13, it is considered that sufficient space is given to express opinions. In only 2 cases the interviewees' opinions were more negative: although we refer to the same discipline (dance), in one case the severity of the teacher is justified for reasons related to "class containment", in the other case too much rigor is criticized because the choice to make your child practice dance spurs from the desire to encourage socialisation with other children, who become reluctant to socialise in class due to the teacher's severity.

Similarly, parents were asked if they perceive that **there is consideration and listening for their child's point of view** and opinions, and they all answered **yes** (a mother believes, however, that more attention is paid to adults than to children). In one case it is believed that the consideration given to the youngest is only **apparent**.

Moreover, all children were explicitly asked if **during the sport activity, they are free to talk**: 11 (out of 13) answer **no**, many of them adding that they have to pay attention to the teacher, two of them answer **yes**.

5.5 Existence (and consistence) of child protection policies

The **stakeholders** involved, with reference to the **existence of a child protection policy in sports organisations**, showed opposing views: one of them believes that there is a **growing attention to the issue especially at managerial level** of sports organisations and that, within their own society, **parents take a look at the internal codes and rules**, when subscribing their children; on the contrary, there are those who claim the opposite, i.e. that **a code does not exist at all**, that everything is left to the choice of the individual professionals within the organisation, who can decide to apply good practices in this regard. The adoption of a Child Protection Policy by some sports organisations has also revealed **gaps**: in almost all cases (8 out of 10), stakeholders say that they **do not have a Code of conduct**; there are those who believe that it is more likely to be found in more structured sports (such as martial arts), those who refer to their Code of Ethics, those who make up for the lack of internal regulations by relying on moral and human values and by educating people to respect the rules (such as being on time and arriving at lessons on time), or even those who have chosen to carry out training with the doors open and, if necessary, by having their parents to assist, and finally some of the stakeholders consider it sufficient to rely on the common sense of individual sports coaches. Only in one case (Rome) is it declared that the organisations have a code of conduct, thanks to the provisions of **Memoranda of Understanding**

between one association and individual organisations, promoting the adoption of a formal act (Manual of Values).

Professionals were expressly asked whether, within the sports organisation where they work, they know about the existence of a policy for the protection of minors, what it is about and, if it is missing, how they justify its absence: **4 of them state that it exists but without specifying its content**; 2 of the 3 interviewees state that practices for the protection of minors are intrinsic in their organisations; 2 say that there is no real policy - in one case, for the same reason described above, in the other case, the professional believes that organisation cannot provide a protection policy because there are no particularly qualified professionals who can write it; the last two interviewees do not exactly know about a Code in their organisations; one says that the knowledge of Child Protection rules should be linked to the personal study path and training of the professionals.

In addition, with reference to the **possibility of reporting any episodes of violence**, the **professionals** involved were asked if there is a member of their staff tasked with the role of receiving reports of violence, to whom children can refer, who this person is and whether minors and their families are aware of it. Out of 12, 8 of the interviewees assert that there is a member of the staff with such role: in two cases, the **president of the sports association** is indicated as the contact person; in the other six cases, this role is identified in the **teacher or coach**, suggesting that there is a tendency to establish a confidential relationship based on trust; in one of these cases, it is stressed that one of the priorities of the sports organisation is to make the teacher known to the child and the respective parent. 2 of the 12 professionals claim that, in the organisations to which they belong, there are **no specific members of staff qualified to perform this role**. In only one case the interviewee indicates the figure of the **sports psychologist**, more often found only in big organisations.

With regard to the **protection of personal data and the right to privacy of the child**, the **professionals** were asked if, in the organisations where they work, these aspects are respected and in which way. The totality of the interviewees answered affirmatively, claiming that they **respect confidentiality and privacy**; two of the professionals stated that any **dissemination of images** (e.g. in the various networks), **is always authorized by the parent with written consent**; two of the respondents specify that the organisation has a special archive to which only authorised personnel have access; one of the professionals emphasises that there is a strong willingness to protect the right to privacy of parents and children and they strictly respect privacy rules; another one of the interviewees, giving a concrete example during the interview, claims that the maximum respect and confidentiality of situations concerning children is respected (information concerning the personal, social and family sphere is never disclosed).

Regarding the **parents' opinion** on the same issues, interviewees answered **they do not know anything about any Child Protection Policy in the organisations attended by their children**. In details: three of the interviewees answer that they do not know about it; another one says that they do not exist; two respondents do not consider them necessary in the environment frequented by their child(ren), mentioning, in this sense, that they rely on the care of teachers; three of them answer that they do not know what a Child Protection Policy is; the others discuss on the possible implementation of practices for the protection of minors from any form of violence. Regarding **other forms of protection from any form of violence**, four of the interviewees believe that they are **not necessary** (in the organisations attended by their children); five of them state that **they exist but without further specification**; two of them trace them in the rigour and **discipline implemented by the teacher** during the lessons; someone reports an **insufficient control/supervision on the children**.

Again, with respect to a reference figure to **whom it is possible to report cases of violence**, divergent positions have emerged: in one case it is believed that there is no one to take that role; in two cases the parents report that **they do not know who to refer to**; in one case the **owner of the sports organisation** is mentioned and the rest of the interviewees (nine) identify the **teacher/coach or the manager** of the organisation as the reference figure for the above mentioned eventuality.

6. Changes that can be introduced

Finally, stakeholders were asked to propose **possible changes to be introduced to the current sports system and organisations** as perceived in their experience.

Three of the ten professionals interviewed stressed the importance of **targeted training within sports clubs** but which can be pursued through different strategies: on the one hand, **the training of professionals in the protection of minors** is proposed; on the other hand, the possibility of providing **qualified support to professionals**, e.g. by flanking psychologists who can help them, concretely and practically, in managing situations of discomfort or facing certain behaviours or particular situations.

Two of the stakeholders state that it would be important to improve the **promotion and also the practice of sports activities at school**, as an opportunity for the child to develop respect for the other in the relationship and dialogue between peers as well as the internalisation of team dynamics; another stakeholder believes that something more can be done at political level. Someone suggests **a greater involvement of families and children through meetings** and the invitation to non-violence especially in sports contexts.

According to one of the interviewees, it could be appropriate instead, to **clarify to children and parents the true ideal of sport, the goal of making their children practice sport**, believing that if you want to see sport only a way to prevail and prevail over others, sooner or later some form of violence will inevitably come out. Sport should be experienced rather as an opportunity to discover one's own abilities (of which a child might not been aware of) and to obtain results through collaboration with others.

With regard to the **possible desire of professionals to broaden their knowledge/competence on the topics of the promotion of children's rights** and the prevention of violence against children, the majority of the professionals (nine out of twelve) stated that they would like **to have more information or targeted training on the topics of Child Protection** but also on how to approach and manage difficult situations with a valid psychological support; who to refer to in cases of emergency; how to enhance the access of young people with disabilities in sports environments, perhaps through the creation of "integrated classes". Others say they are satisfied with their knowledge on the topics addressed, while some others say that the responsibility of this knowledge should be shared with families.

Parents were asked what **changes they would apply to in order to have a safer environment for their children**. Some of them have decided not to answer; two of them do not have a precise idea; four of them state that due to their experience, they do not consider that major changes are necessary; in three cases, reference is made to the **importance of training sports professionals on trans-cultural aspects**, a requirement for greater attention to children and young people; in three cases there are specific requests related to the personal situation - a few more adults to help the professional to manage the training with children, more protection through interventions on the equipment; someone else refers to the desire for **greater attention to the privacy of minors especially in shared environments** such as locker rooms, proposing to reduce the promiscuity that the situation sometimes forces (even in the sharing of shower rooms, in the presence of older children or adults).

7. Conclusions (Identifications of gaps and suggestions for the project's next activities)

Most of the gaps identified during the research are certainly related to the **lack of existence and implementation of Child Protection Policies in sports organisations** and the lack or scarce knowledge on Protection Policies from the target groups. As highlighted in **paragraph 2.3** it is possible for sports organisation to refer to associations such as UISP for help in the improvement, adaptation or adoption of a Child Protection Policy.

Moreover, there is a possible lack of knowledge or attention regarding two Italian legal provisions provided on the protection of minors, aimed at protecting children and young people from sexual violence: **assessing the suitability of future employees and/or volunteers to carry out activities with minors** - which involves **checking the criminal records of employees**, in particular for those who will have to work in contact with children - and prohibiting suspicious individuals from taking on such roles.

In addition, **monitoring of professionals working closely with children and supervising and training them with the help of a psychologist and/or educator** could be useful in assessing possible signs of child abuse, recognising risks and dealing with situations of vulnerability, as highlighted during some interviews.

In addition, almost all organisations mentioned by the interviewees **do not provide a particular professional figure to refer in case of possible child abuse and/or maltreatment**.

In a view of **future projects and activities**, here some observations and recommendations for improvements:

Having addressed, within the research, **all kinds of sports-recreational activities** and also all age groups of children and young people, has allowed, on the one hand, to collect **diversified information**, but, on the other, it had probably brought **difficulties in analysing the data collected** in a later phase. This could be related to the differences existing between the various sports disciplines considered and the consequent different ways in which sports are experienced according to their specificities and rules; in particular, in some environments, more severe and rigorous behaviours are adopted by teachers, and these behaviours are well tolerated by both children and parents as disciplines requiring more rigid and authoritarian attitudes, such as martial arts and ballet. In addition to the difficulty in analysing data, the wide range of sports and age groups has also made the **categorisation of the problems highlighted challenging**, meaning that some problems are specifically related to some sports sector, as in the football context where sometimes parents are more usually to instigate their children to aggressive attitudes during matches, Narrowing the field would have allowed to better investigate gaps and best practices.

Some parents and professionals have pointed out that the gaps in the preventive and protective field may derive from a **lack of and/or inadequate specific training activity** of sports professionals. At the same time, among the stakeholders interviewed there is a desire to improve the quality of services offered to children and young people and thus the idea of a specific training program for professionals is welcomed. According to the participants, a training course should be based on the specific needs reported which includes: **informal and formal measures – including legal ones - for child protection, prevention of violence against minors in sport, Codes of Conduct and Protection of Minors, privacy of minors, psycho-pedagogical and trans-cultural aspects in training/working with minors, management of difficult situations, evaluation of minors' satisfaction within the sports-recreational activities, management of the relationship with parents and**

involvement of minors in decision-making processes that affect them within the sports organisation. These topics should be considered when designing the **ACTIVE Capacity Building programme.**

In view of the development and implementation of the **ACTIVE online evaluation tool**, aimed to help organisations in self-evaluating their tools and level the safety of minors in sport activities, it is suggested to extend it to families. In this way, a comparison could be made between the data obtained from the self-assessment of the individual sports-recreational organisation and the data from the assessment carried out by the parents or guardians of the minors who attend it. Such a combined action would have the double advantage of avoiding false statements by sports entities and would constitute a form of customer satisfaction evaluator, thus compensating for the lack of tools used to assess children's satisfaction.



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