



Needs Assessment – Portugal National Report

National Report_CESIS_Portugal



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KMOP – Greece

CARDET – Cyprus

CESIE – Italy

CESIS – Portugal

Children 1st – United Kingdom

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1. Introduction

ACTIVE is a project co-financed by the European Commission / DG-Justice on behalf of JUST/2018/Action Grant.

ACTIVE (SEP – 210562280) is a transnational project coordinated by KMOP (Greece) with the involvement of CARDET (Cyprus), CESIE (Italy); CESIS (Portugal) and Children’s 1st (Scotland). The overall aim of this project is to promote the embedding of child safeguarding policies across different sports clubs and organisations, extra-curricular activities and/or leisure/recreation clubs/organisations for children. Sports activities play an important role in child development. Through sports children can also learn and experience important values and social skills being tolerant, knowing how to work in group and accept defeat with fair-play. But sport can also be a context of/for violence. A former Secretary of the Committee on the Rights of the Child of the United Nations estimates that of all children involved in “competitive sports”, 10% have undergone human rights abuse and another 20% are at risk.

The scope of the ACTIVE project is not only competitive sports organisations but includes also other organisations that at a local level and / or in a more informal environment are developing leisure sports activities. One of the main purposes of this project is to improve data collection and knowledge on child protection policies in sports and leisure activities field by identifying gaps and providing recommendations based on best practises. To do so the different partners implemented a needs assessment process by conducting interviews, focus groups and also by launching an online questionnaire.

In its initial phase of needs assessment the main objectives were:

1. To improve data collection and knowledge generation on existing child protection policies in sports and organisations, extra-curricular activities and/ or leisure / recreation clubs / organisations for children.
2. To identify gaps and enable more strengthened child protection structures and systems in this field.
3. To analyse and recommend the most effective ways to prevent the phenomenon of violence against children and recommendation on the implementation of best practices.





2. National Framework

In Portugal the 1976 Constitution recognised that the child has the right to the society and the State's protection with regard to his/her integral development.

Ensuing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), of which Portugal was one of the first subscribers, during the second half of the 1990s a thorough reform was carried out concerning the rights of the child where it was sought to place the child's higher interest at the centre of a legal model founded upon three basic laws: the Law on Educational Jurisdiction (*Lei Tutelar Educativa*) - Law 166/99 of 14 September¹ that recognised that a child between the ages of 12 and 16 was a subject with judicial rights; the Law for Protection of Children and Young People at Risk (*Lei de Protecção de Crianças e Jovens em Perigo*) - Law 147/99 of 1 September² that ruled on the State's intervention in promoting and protecting the rights of children at risk when the parents or the legal guardian or whoever had the tutelage placed the child's safety, health, education and development at risk; and the Decree-Law 98/98 of 18 April setting up the National Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People at Risk (*Comissão Nacional de Protecção das Crianças e Jovens em Risco*)³, which had the task of planning the State's intervention and coordinating, following-up and evaluating the activity undertaken by public bodies and the community when protecting children at risk, particularly when this happened at local level and involved the local committees for protecting children and young people.

The child-protection system, in terms of the *Law for the Protection of Children and Young People at Risk (Lei de Protecção de Crianças e Jovens)*, is based on the concept of children at risk, as those who: have been abandoned or live upon their own means; suffered physical or psychological abuse or are the victims of sexual abuse; who have failed to receive the affection and care that is proper to their age; who are obliged to work excessively or inappropriately for their age; are directly and indirectly subject to behaviour that seriously affects their safety and emotional

¹ Portugal, Decree-Law 323-E/2000 that regulates Law 166/99 of 14 September, approving the Law on Educational Tutelage (Decreto-Lei n.º 323-E/2000 que regulamenta a Lei n.º 166/99, de 14 de Setembro, que aprova a Lei Tutelar Educativa), 20 December 2000, available at: <https://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/2000/12/292A03/00450049.pdf>.

² Portugal, Law 147/99, Law for Protection of Children and Young People at Risk (*Lei n.º 147/99, Lei de Protecção de Crianças e Jovens em Perigo*), 1 September 1999, available at: <http://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/1999/09/204A00/61156132.pdf>.

³ Portugal, Decree-Law 98/98 that creates the National Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People at Risk (*Decreto-Lei n.º 98/98, que cria a Comissão Nacional de Protecção das Crianças e Jovens em Risco*), 18 April 1998, available at: <https://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/1998/04/091A00/17111713.pdf>.



balance; who have started behaving in ways that seriously affect their own health, safety, training, education or development. The system, therefore, is geared as much to prevention as it is to intervention. The power to prevent in first places falls to the parents/ legal representative /*de facto* guardian. In the event that prevention does not happen due to impossibility or incapacity, it falls to the public and non-profit-making private agencies working in the field of children and young people, to launch interceptive measures in order to correct / invert the risk situations in which the child find him/herself.

Coming back to the Portuguese Constitution, Article 79 (2) mentions that the State, in cooperation with schools, sports associations and clubs, should promote, stimulate, orient and support the sports and physical activities and prevent violence in sport.

Within the spirit of the Portuguese Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, from the years 1990's until present, several important changes occurred in the legislation concerning child rights and protection against violence. Important developments also took place in the domain of ratifying international Conventions. We underline below the most important concerning the protection of children against violence:

- I. In 2003, the Presidential Decree 14/2003⁴ ratifies the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography that was open for signing in New York on 25 May 2000.
- II. In 2009, Law 113/2009⁵ establishes protection measures for children in conformity with Article 5 of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.

⁴ Portugal, Presidential Decree 14/2003 that ratified the Optional Protocol to The Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, open for signature in New York, 25 May 2000 (*Decreto do Presidente da República n.º 14/2003 que ratifica o Protocolo Facultativo à Convenção sobre os Direitos da Criança Relativo à Venda de Crianças, Prostituição Infantil e Pornografia Infantil, aberto para assinatura em Nova Iorque em 25 de Maio de 2000*), 5 March 2000, available at: <https://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/2003/03/054A00/14921492.pdf>.

⁵ Portugal, Law 113/2009 establishing measures to protect children, in accordance with Article 5 of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual and the second amendment to Law 57/98 of 18 August (*Lei n.º 113/2009 que estabelece medidas de protecção de menores, em cumprimento do artigo 5.º da Convenção do Conselho da Europa contra a Exploração Sexual e o Abuso Sexual de Crianças, e procede à*



- III. In 2012, the Presidential Decree 90/2012⁶ ratifies the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, signed in Lanzarote on 25 October 2007.
- IV. In 2012, where violence perpetrated by or against children in a school environment is concerned, Law 51/2012 should be mentioned. The duty to respect the physical and psychological integrity of members of the education community is also included whereby no violent deeds may be committed that go against anyone's physical and moral safety. The law also lays down disciplinary measures and raises civil and criminal liability when the deeds constitute a crime (Article 38).⁷
- V. In 2013, the Presidential Decree 13/2013⁸ ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, adopted in Istanbul on 11 May 2011.
- VI. In 2013, Law 60/2013⁹ passes the Penal Code (*Código Penal*), which includes crimes such as child abuse (Article 152-A).

In any of those legal documents the context of sports activities as a potential context for violence against children, in different forms, is mentioned.

segunda alteração à Lei n.º 57/98, de 18 de Agosto), 17 September 2009, available at: <https://dre.pt/application/dir/pdf1sdip/2009/09/18100/0662006621.pdf>.

⁶ Portugal, Presidential Decree 90/2012 ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, signed in Lanzarote on 25 October 2007 (*Decreto do Presidente da República n.º 90/2012 que ratifica a Convenção do Conselho da Europa para a Proteção das Crianças contra a Exploração Sexual e os Abusos Sexuais, assinada em Lanzarote em 25 de Outubro de 2007*), Diário da República, 1ª Série, n.º 103, 28 de Maio de 2012, available at: <https://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/2012/05/10300/0278602786.pdf>.

⁷ Portugal, Law 51/2012, approves the Statute of Student and School Ethics (*Lei n.º 51/2012, aprova o Estatuto do Aluno e Ética Escolar*), 5 September 2012, available at: <https://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/2012/09/17200/0510305119.pdf>.

⁸ Portugal, Presidential Decree 13/2013, ratifying the Convention of the European Council for the Prevention and Fight against Violence against Women and against Domestic Violence (*Decreto do Presidente da República n.º 13/2013, procedendo à ratificação da Convenção do Conselho da Europa para a Prevenção e o Combate à Violência contra as Mulheres e a Violência Doméstica*), 21 January 2013, available at: <http://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/2013/01/01400/0037700377.pdf>.

⁹ Portugal, Law 60/2013, the 30th amendment to the Criminal Code (*Lei n.º 60/2013 que procede à 30.ª alteração do Código Penal*), 23 August 2013, available at: <https://dre.pt/pdf1sdip/2013/08/16200/0508805090.pdf>.



In what concerns violence at sports there is also specific legislation regarding racism and xenophobia (Law 39/2009, amended by Decree Law 114/2011 and republished by Law 52/2013).¹⁰

Preventive measures in the professional contact with children were established under Law 103/2015.¹¹ The law mentions that in recruitment for occupations, jobs, functions or public activities whose exercise involves regular contact with children, the recruiting entity is obliged to ask the candidate to present a criminal record certificate. After recruitment, the employer or person in charge of the activities is obliged to ask the person who carries on the job or the activities referred to above, for a criminal record certificate and to take it into account in the assessment of suitability for the performance of the duties.

From 2014 to 2017 the V National Action Plan Against Domestic Violence and Gender Violence¹² was in force, where children were mentioned as victims of domestic violence. The National Strategy for Equality and non-Discrimination 2018-2030 (*Estratégia Nacional para a Igualdade e Não Discriminação 2018-2030*, ENIND)¹³, that includes the 2018-2021 Action Plan to Fight Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sexual Characteristics, recognises the existence of added difficulties for women, particularly for those of vulnerable groups, in the access to sports as well as in terms of discrimination in what concerns sexual orientation. Therefore, one of its strategic aims is to fight against prejudice and discrimination and prevent all forms of violence against LGBTI persons in public activities such as sports.

Since the launching of the Programme "Building a Europe for and with children", in Monaco in 2006, the Council of Europe has encouraged the Member States to develop national strategies for the rights of the child. The existence of a National Strategy for the Rights of the Child (NSRC) in

¹⁰ Portugal, Law 39/2009, amended by Decree Law 114/2011 and republished by Law 52/2013 establishing the legal regime for combating violence, racism, xenophobia and intolerance in sports shows, in order to enable them to be held safely (Lei nº 30/2009, Decreto-Lei nº 114/2011 e republicada pela Lei nº 52/5013 que estabelece o regime jurídico do combate à violência, ao racismo, à xenofobia e à intolerância nos espetáculos desportivos, de forma a possibilitar a realização dos mesmos com segurança), 25 July 2013. Available at: <https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/498756>

¹¹ Available at: https://dre.pt/home/-/dre/70086390/details/maximized?p_auth=HJevB5JJ-

¹² See: Commission for Citizenship and Equality <https://www.cig.gov.pt/siic/2014/10/planos-nacionais-violencia-domestica-e-de-genero/>

¹³ Resolution of the Council of Ministers 61/2018 (Resolução do Conselho de Ministros Resolução do Conselho de Ministros n.º 61/2018), 21 May 2018. Available at: <https://dre.pt/application/conteudo/115360036>.



Portugal for the period until 2020 is mentioned in the *Fifth and sixth periodic report of Portugal* (Reporting period: January 2014 – September 2017) of the European Committee of Child Rights but this national strategy was never made public. However, in November 2019 a public consultation was launched in order to receive comments and contributions for a new Strategy for Children Rights 2019 – 2022.¹⁴ One of the priorities of the Strategy will be the prevention and fight against violence addressed to children and young people. One of the activities foreseen in this domain is the elaboration of didactic materials about sexual violence in sports activities against children and young people.

A few other programmes can be mentioned in Portugal:

- In 2017, a campaign was launched on 17 May (international day against homophobia and transphobia) to raise awareness against homophobia and transphobia in sports (among other activities, more than two thousand athletes used rainbow laces during their matches);
- In 2019, the European Council campaign “Start to Talk” was launched. This campaign is addressed to public authorities and to sports movement and draws attention to child sexual abuses in sports. One of the outcomes of this programme is a *Training Kit* to support those who have influence on decision making and practices in sports in what concerns the prevention of sexual abuses.
- In 2019 was also launched the national campaign “Zero Violence”¹⁵. This is an awareness raising campaign with the slogan: “There are moments in sport that we remember for ever... do not let that violence will be one of these” (“*Há momentos no desporto que marcam para sempre... Não deixe que a violência seja um deles*”). This campaign is part of the National Plan for Ethics in Sports (*Plano Nacional de Ética no Desporto*).

In Portugal there is a relatively good system for the registration of crimes. On the other hand, it is possible for the National Commission for the Promotion of Rights and the Protection of Children and Young People to know the number of children and young people who are in danger

¹⁴ Available at: https://www.consultalex.gov.pt/ConsultaPublica_Detail.aspx?Consulta_Id=115.

¹⁵ Available at: <http://www.idesporto.pt/noticia.aspx?id=848>.



concerning their rights according to the Law for Protection of Children and Young People at Risk (*Lei de Protecção de Crianças e Jovens em Perigo*) - Law 147/99). However, the information available does not show how many children are (or have been) victims of any form of violence when practicing sports.

The only reference found is a study about bullying in sports, carried out in 2016 under a PHD thesis, covering a sample composed by 1,458 athletes in training in nine different sports activities in the all country. The results of the study show that 10% of the respondents report having been victimized; 11.3% were participants in bullying episodes as bullies; 34.6% were bystanders.¹⁶

¹⁶ Nery, Miguel (2016), *Bullying no contexto da formação desportiva em Portugal. Estudo exploratório a nível nacional de modalidades individuais, colectivas e de combate.*) Available at: <https://www.repository.utl.pt/handle/10400.5/13034>.



3. Methodology

According to the project proposal, the needs assessment should create the opportunity to organise:

- 10 to 15 interviews with stakeholders (including relevant professionals working in sports/leisure / recreation organisations);
- Four focus groups: two involving professionals and two involving families and children.

The needs assessment should focus in two biggest cities in each country. The project aims the implementation of the activities in two biggest cities and according to methodology proposed the selection of cities should take into consideration the following criteria:

- The strategic importance of the cities in each country – it can be important to implement the project in the capital cities.
- The relation with important stakeholders and their geographical influence.
- The placement of key organisations for the project development (sports clubs; leisure organisations ...) with those partners can have already former positive relations.
- The placement of possible facilitators for the project development process.
- The placement of organisations with recognised good practice.
- Time consumption and travel costs in order to implement the activities.

In what Portugal is concerned, the cities included were Lisbon (in the large sense of the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon) and Matosinhos. If Lisbon, the capital, is an obvious choice, Matosinhos was chosen due the fact that CESIS has a good and longstanding relation with the Municipality and with some of the local organisations, which can facilitate the implementation of the project activities.



Matosinhos is a municipality located in the north of the country, by the Douro river mouth. In 2018 there were 174,382 inhabitants, 18.3% aged less than 18 years old. In the last decades Matosinhos did not suffer the impact of immigration and the importance of foreign people in its population is residual (2.2%).

Lisbon Metropolitan Area is the biggest region in the country which includes Lisbon, the capital of the country. There are 2,846,332 people living there; 21% have less than 18 years old. Lisbon is one of the most attractive regions in the country for immigrants, who represent 8.5% of the total residents, making Lisbon a multicultural city.

3.1 Interviews

In order to conduct the interviews, and in addition with the networks and contacts already established by CESIS, we did some research in order to identify the most important stakeholders in the field of sports and child protection. A total of 53 entities and/or professionals were identified and contacted in accordance with the criteria previously defined: having a national and local scope; being child protection actor; being policy makers, in the fields of: education, child protection system, youth policies, sports activities (3 interviewee); being responsible for federations/associations of sports organisations (6 interviewee); being members of municipalities (3 interviewee); being relevant professionals and/or leaders of sports organisations to be involved or others with relevant influence on the child protection system and/or in sports and leisure times activities (9 interviewee).

From this initial list of 53 people it was possible to conduct 12 interviews, which allowed accomplishing the most part of the criteria referred above. It was our intention to conduct all the interviews using the face-to-face method but several reasons led us to use other strategies. First it was very difficult to schedule the interviews for a precise time of the day: in some cases we had to invest the all afternoon, or evening, in order to wait and talk to the interviewee; in other situations, at the last minute the interview was rescheduled by the respondent. Finally, the sanitary situation imposed by COVID-19 caused a significant delay in the conduction of some the interviews, especially in Matosinhos, one of the first places to be most affected by the pandemic in Portugal. Therefore, we conducted seven face-to-face interviews; four by phone and one in a written form.



3.2 Focus group

In order to create a more participative approach the needs assessment foreseen the realization of four focus groups: two with the professionals (managers, coaches, trainers, volunteers, other professionals); and two focus groups with children and parents.

In Portugal three focus groups were organised: two with parents; one with children. All of these focus groups took place in Lisbon. Unfortunately, the other focus groups were rescheduled several times and for different reasons; at the end, due to the State of National Emergency, it was not possible to implement them. In Lisbon, it was impossible to find a good time for every professionals invited for participation; in Matosinhos, it was very difficult to involve both parents and professionals in this kind of activities since, as already said, the North of the country was the first region to be affected by COVID-19 and in an earlier stage any group activities were stopped.

Given these difficulties, and with the agreement of the project coordination and of the European Commission, we decided to promote the participation of children, professionals and families by responding to an online questionnaire (see 3.3).

The focus groups organised involved 14 adults. These participants are parents of children who attend sports activities in two different sports organisations with different characteristics. One of the organisations is very recent and specialised in one sport (skating); the other one is an older and prestigious sports organisation in Lisbon, with different gymnastics activities.

The group with children was composed with the agreement of the parents who gave their written consent. The participants were six girls, aged between 9 and 16; they practice staking in the same organisation. Children's parents were also participants in one of the focus groups.

3.3 Questionnaires

As already mentioned, the project launched an online questionnaire, based on the guiding question for the focus group. Three invitations were sent to three different organisations: one located in Matosinhos and two other located in Lisbon.

The questionnaire was available to be filled between 26 March and 6 April 2020.





4. Participants' characteristics

Among the 12 interviewees there are eight men and four women, aged between 33 and 77. The average age of the participants is 52. Most part of them has higher education. Only three participants have secondary or the 3rd cycle educational levels.

The demographics of the interview participants are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographics of Interview participants

Participant [code]	Sex	City	Age	Level of education	Occupation / Position in the organisation	Seniority (years)
1	male	Matosinhos	37	High	Senior technician in the municipality department of sports and youth	3
2	male	Lisboa/Amadora	73	High	Fencing master	15
3	male	Lisboa/Amadora	77	3rd cycle of basic education	President of the organisation	26
4	female	Lisboa	54	High	Physical education teacher and gymnastic trainer	5
5	female	Lisboa/Amadora	43	High	Physical education teacher and basketball trainer	25
6	male	Lisboa	72	Secondary	President of the organisation	10
7	male	Lisboa	39	High	Accounting technician President of the organisation and futsal trainer	9
8	female	Lisboa	42	High	Analyst Swimming trainer and founder of the organisation	2
9	female	Lisboa/Amadora	42	High	Municipality councilwoman of Sports and Youth	2
10	male	Lisboa	69	High	Swimming trainer	22
11	male	Lisboa	33	High	Municipality political advisor on Social Rights	3
12	male	Matosinhos	45	Secondary	President of the organisation	10



Regarding the focus groups there was a total of 14 adults involved, mainly women (10 women; 4 men). All these people are from Lisbon. Since it was not possible to collect information for the characterisation in one of the groups, we can only present information about the second group of participants: five women and three men, aged between 41 and 49. The average age of the participants was 44. Most part of them has higher education. Only two participants have secondary educational level. All of them are working.

Twelve more parents participated in the online questionnaire. Due to the nature of the questionnaire it was not possible to collect personal data. All the respondents are from Matosinhos.

In total the project involved 26 family adult elements.

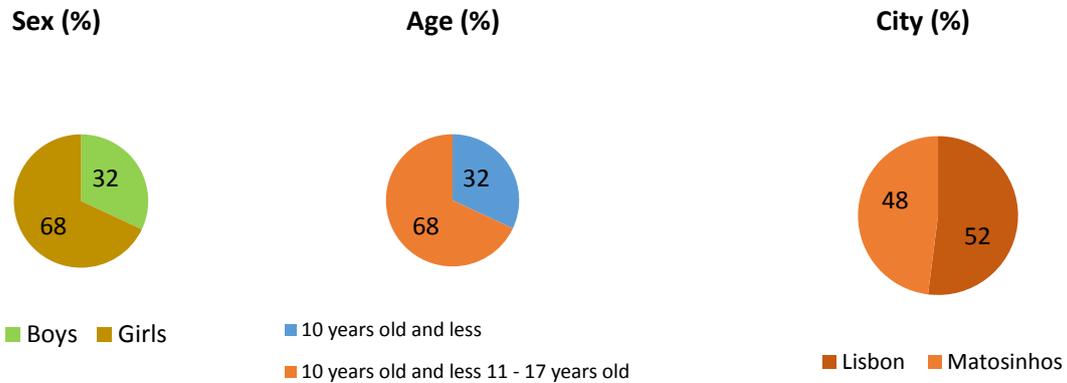
In what regards children, the six participants in the focus group are all girls, aged between 9 and 16, and living in Lisbon. The average age of the participants was 13. It was possible to improve the participation of children in the project with the launch of the questionnaire. In the specific questionnaire addressed to children there were 19 respondents: eight boys; 11 girls. They are aged between 8 and 17 years old. Seven are from Lisbon; 12 from Matosinhos.

We tried to involve children from different economic backgrounds. As to those who participated in the focus group, their parents are working and the most part of them has a higher education degree. Part of the children respondents to the questionnaire, mainly those living in Lisbon, are coming from poor backgrounds since our contact was a social intervention project in a social housing neighbourhood.

In total the project in Portugal involved 25 children. Some demographics of children are shown below in Table 2.



Table 2: Demographics of children (participants in focus group and in the online questionnaire)



As said above, it was not possible to organise a focus group with professionals; thus their participation only occurred by the online response to the questionnaire. Three professionals responded: two women and one man. All of them are working in Matosinhos as sport trainers and they deal with small children (aged less than 7 years old). Their activities are: martial arts and gymnastics.

It is also important to note that the different data collection instruments used in the project allowed for involving and consulting people working or practicing different sports activities: gymnastics; martial arts; skating; football; ballet; basketball; fencing; futsal, dance and handball.



5. Results

5.1. Perspectives on violence in sports and against children

In spite of being an issue in awareness campaigns in Portugal, there was no mention to sexual and/or physical violence against children in sports neither in the interviews nor in the focus groups or in the

In spite of being an issue in awareness campaigns in Portugal, there was no mention to sexual and/or physical violence against children in sports neither in the interviews nor in the focus groups or in the questionnaires.

However, especially the children, both in the questionnaires and in the focus group, mentioned the existence of forms of violence in sports activities addressed to children that often are not seen as violence by the organisations, by the trainers and even by the families. It is frequent the use of the word bullying to talk about **verbal violence** which in practice can be translated into mocking, making jokes, insulting ...

The authors of this verbal violence can be the **children themselves against other children**.

“Of course that in our area, in the heat of the game, children sometimes turns against each other...” (Interviewee)

Parents in the focus group mentioned the existence of verbal violence based on gender stereotyping: girls cannot be fat or if they have a certain physical appearance they are particularly mocked; boys cannot complain, they have to be strong.

This kind of attitude is often seen as “normal”, “as part of the childhood behaviour and kids should learn how to solve this among each other” (Interviewee).

Still, the most experienced situation refers to the **verbal violence** (and sometimes physical aggression) **from trainers or coaches addressed to the children or young people**. All of the children participants in the focus group mentioned that they experienced this form of violence in a former club they used to attend; five out of the 19 (26%) questionnaire’s respondents answered



that they know about unpleasant situations in the club where they are trained. These unpleasant situations are mainly violence towards some of their colleagues by coaches:

“I saw other children been pushed, slapped and shacked by trainers.” (Respondent to the questionnaire)

“The use of an aggressive language is common.” (Interviewee)

Verbal (and physical) violence cannot be separated from **psychological violence**. Some words are seen as humiliation of the young athletes. This was particularly mentioned by the children at the focus group regarding their previous club:

“In the days that things didn’t go well, she (the coach) said: *you are a stupid, an idiot, you have Down's syndrome...* The former coach liked to humiliate young girls in public. In one occasion one of us was not being able to perform a jump and she stopped the training, called everyone into a small circle and said: *You don’t know how to do anything. This was not what I had taught you. You are stupid.*” (Girls in the focus group)

One of the children even mentioned that she saw some of them getting out of the training crying.

Parents at the focus group confirmed those attitudes from the coach and in this particular case they decided to leave the club. “*The pressure towards the athletes was exaggerated by this violent behaviour of the coach*” (Parents at the focus group).

Somehow the existence of verbal (and sometimes physical) violence perpetrated by coaches against children is seen by an old school of less qualified coaches “*as a way to children prepare themselves to future difficulties and to learn how to defend themselves, even by some parents*” (Professional respondent to the questionnaire). On the other hand, some parents at the focus group argument that violence in sport also comes from the pressure of getting the best results and the responsibility of those best results is the coach responsibility.

“It is a very hard sport and she [the coach] wants to transmit this idea to the children. The problem is that there is no limit. Harshness, if not dully managed, becomes an



insult. (...) She [the former coach] is protecting herself. With that behaviour she was blaming the children for their bad results.” (Parents in the focus group)

“There are coaches who are looking for results regardless of the athletes’ ages. Therefore they forget about the child’s age. (...) What is important for them is the sports performance, the results, so that they can continue to perform their functions.” (Interviewee)

However, the main finding of the needs assessments refers to **parents and their exercise of pressure**, as a form of violence, towards children and also to coaches. From the words of the interviewees, parents see sports not as an activity to promote their children’s development (physical, social and emotional) and wellbeing but mainly as an activity that creates winners, social visibility and recognition. With this perspective comes the pressure towards the children and even to the coaches, contributing in this way for a violent environment where psychological violence is imposed.

“Violence in sports with children always shows in the form of psychological violence, typically inflicted by parents. The demand for being the best, an unhealthy competitiveness is the reason for a lot of pressure inflicted to children in sports.” (Interviewee)

“Today a 12 years old child can earn a lot of money in some sports. Therefore parents are the ones to say to them that they can become rich. There is a lot of pressure and parents are the ones exercising that pressure. I know that there are parents who punish their children for not being like Ronaldo.” (Interviewee)

“Parents want to be winners; they want that their children are the athletes that they could not be. Here is the problem.” (Interviewee)

“They call names to children of the other teams and to coaches. On the other hand they punish their children when school results are not so good by keeping them out from sports activities. (...) This is also violence.” (Interviewee)



“Parents are colluding with this situation [violence]. The child is there to win medals and therefore everything can be said to him/her. The coach can speak, can shout because what it matters is the medal.” (Interviewee)

“Parents put a lot of pressure on the coach’s shoulders. Sometimes coaches try not to pass this to the children. They try to bring joy and modesty to their activities.” (Interviewee)

“The requirement for being the best; the unhealthy competitiveness causes too much pressure on children who practice sports.” (Interviewee)

From the Interviewees perspective, there are sports most competitive than others: football and others like gymnastic and skating are seen as the highly competitive. In these sports the parents’ pressure is stronger – “They want their children to win medals, they want them to be champions” (interviewee) – therefore more violence in its different forms tends to occur.

Another aspect is the size and the social recognition of the club/organisation:

“Not every coach knows how to deal with parents’ pressures. Unfortunately some coaches give way under parents’ pressure. But this depends on the nature of the club. If it is a great club, with a great past, coaches tend not to bother so much with parents’ pressure, they do not even respond. But if it is a small club, in isolated places, where no alternatives exist, the coaches give up and naturally problems arise.” (Interviewee)

But the size and “name” of the organisation is a controversial issue because in other cases pointed out by the interviewees and parents in the focus group and in the questionnaire, when the sports activity is going on in a very big club the pressure is even greater and coaches have freedom to act in a violent manner pressing children for success.

“Big clubs, in general, make a lot of pressure on athletes; they do not care that much about their human side. They want titles and results. If his mother is an alcoholic, if she has cancer, that does not matter. They can organize a fund-raising but there is no concern about the child, there is no proximity.” (Interviewee)



“The coach of ...[name of an important sport club] is bullying the children and everyone knows about it. But everyone says *ah, she is the ...* [name of an important sport club] coach, so we have to give her an excuse. (...). It seems that parents like the [name of an important sport club] most than their own children. If their child wears the [name of an important sport club] clothes and she/he goes playing representing the club, that is what it matters.” (Interviewee)

At the end, and independently of the type of sports of the size and importance of the organisation, the philosophy and the training of trainers is the most important aspect: “Organisations must ask: children are here to be happy or to win medals?” (Interviewee)

5.2. Existence and characterisation of practices preventing violence against children in sports

In general, the participants think that the organisations try to create a safe environment for children. However, safety – in parents and professionals’ opinion – is seen as physical security which implies good equipment, good infrastructures (shower rooms, for instance) and no other kind of care and concern.

When asked more directly about the prevention of violence, the prevalent opinion is that there has been a positive evolution and, generally speaking, people are more aware of this. The national campaigns were mentioned as good contributions. However, also in general, preventive practices are not always implemented in a consistent and coherent way.

A policy of internal **dialogue** is frequently mentioned. Dialogue between coaches and children and between coaches and parents.

This open dialog is seen as a way to reverse the silence that characterizes the phenomenon of violence in sports (and not only in sports) and its perpetuation - “silence regarding victimization contributes to the perpetuation of bullying” (Professional respondent to the questionnaire). Joint meetings or simple conversations with parents, children and coaches are the most common strategy in order to implement this dialogue.



“The coach talks about this subject [violence] with the athletes.” (Children respondent to the questionnaire)

However, the main issue referred as the most effective to prevent violence is the training and preparation of the coaches.

“The training of coaches in order to know how to deal with conflicts is the most important. This training should address technical aspects but also pedagogical issues.” (Interviewee)

Only one interviewee mentioned the existence of **sports psychologists** in some clubs but this is not a common practice, especially when we are talking about non top-level sports. On the other hand, when they exist this is often considered as “only one more office”.

It can be said that practices preventing violence against children in sports activities in Portugal vary between inconsistency and lack of clear strategic purpose and pure inexistence. The case mentioned in the focus group where unambiguous violence is perpetrated by the coach against young athletes is an evidence of the inexistence of these preventive practices. Here the parents’ knowledge about the situation was totally ineffective as well as their approach to the management of the club. The only solution was to remove the children from there.

“Every one of us ended up taking the same attitude. Instead of getting upset, because we thought that the damages that we were causing to the children were far more serious than any other hypothesis. It was easier for us to leave and look for another place.”

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

For those interviewees who have responsibilities in the management of some sports organisations, sports in general can play an important role in the fight against discrimination. In their opinion more and more sports try to defeat the idea of some sports activities for girls and other for boys. On the other hand, there are sports organisations that have specific programmes



addressed to children of low income families, understanding that belonging to social and economic deprived families means added difficulties in the access to sports.

Families and children in the focus group expressed the opinion that boys and girls are treated differently.

“There is a difference between boys and girls. Coaches for girls use a more emotional approach but for boys the understanding is that they have to be tough” (Parents in the focus group). This difference in treatment of boys and girls would not be necessarily bad if not based on the assumption that, at least, some sports are for “strong people” and boys could be more likely to be physically aggressive. On the other hand, girls are more likely to be subject of psychological violence namely based on the ideal body and physical appearance.

The existence of discrimination based on the skin colour/ethnicity was mentioned by one of the interviewees: “the black kid has to be good in playing otherwise he is going to be marginalized”.

Concrete practices preventing discrimination of children in sports were not found. Our understanding is that discriminatory attitudes are not understood as such, they are considered as “normal” and some of them can be seen as positive and respectful of the existing differences.

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

The most part of the children involved in the Active project assessment and all the parents feel that they can express their opinions freely and that they opinions are taken in consideration. Only two out of the 19 respondents to the questionnaire gave a negative answer.

“In [name of the organisation] children are free to express themselves. They are happy children. The space is extremely cosy and has all the necessary tools for teaching and for the wellbeing of all the children.” (Parent respondent to the questionnaire)



“In one situation my daughter did not agree with one change introduced and she was heard; this gave the opportunity to find a different solution, which was more positive to her.” (Parent respondent to the questionnaire)

Communication, dialogue and a close follow up of the children are the examples of practices for the promotion of child participation in sports activities.

However, structured practices of participation and, for example, of evaluation with the participation of the children, were not found. The president of one of the federation of associations mentioned that the promotion of children participation varies from one organisation to another; but in general they are not proactive in this matter and, in most cases, participation happens due to the curiosity of the children and not given the existence of this objective in the organisations.

On the other hand, it was pointed that typically organisations use, as an indicator of satisfaction, the permanence of the children in the organisation. Other indicators or type of evaluation are not valued.

For one of the interviewees the inexistence of measures to promote child participation in sports organisations is linked to the lack of knowledge about the Convention of Children Rights (CCR) and the still dominating notion of childhood which denies to children the status of citizenship.

5.5. Existence (and consistence) of child protection policies

From the information collected it is possible to say that in the most part of the cases there is no formal child protection policy in sports organisations, not even a code of conduct for professionals – actions and attitudes are totally depending on the coach him/herself.

“There is a lot of informality in sports activity. There is no formality, no rules or framework that could guaranty, in any way, this type of things [child protection].”

With the exception of five (out of the 12 parents respondents to the questionnaire), the most part of the parents do not know about the existence of child protection policies in the organisation



where their children are practicing sports. Additionally parents never questioned the organisation about it.

In case of a violent event, coaches and the director, or president, of the organisation is the person identified to report it. However one question is important in these cases – what happens when the bully/aggressor is the coach?

5.6. Changes that can be introduced

The changes proposed may be organised around two topics: sports organisations and society.

Concerning **sports organisations**, parents, children and professionals pointed out the following needs for change:

i) Training

Specific training addressed **to managers** because it is important to know how to manage a sports organisation and specially those who have work addressed to children. Importance should be given to the perspective of the CCR and to the fact that children are subject of rights themselves. Managers should also know how to integrate parents and involve them.

Also mentioned was the training addressed **to coaches**.

“It is important to have a continuous training where child rights should be approached. (...) We need more coaches with specific competences on the training of young athletes.”

Transversal to training is the implementation of child rights in sports.

ii) Promote multidisciplinary work

Organisations should create the opportunity for multidisciplinary work. In this perspective, professionals other than coaches could participate in the training sessions.



iii) Take the evaluation process seriously

Evaluation should be a consistent process involving children and parents. It should also include indicators that could give information not only about results but also about child wellbeing and development through sports.

In what concerns **society**, where parents are included, the attention goes to the need of a new mentality where sports can be seen as more than a competition: “We should insist on the values of sports practice and not in the result *per se*”.



6. Conclusions

The results of the Active needs assessment in Portugal showed several gaps in what concerns both practices and policies to prevent violence against children in sports.

The legislation that protects children from violence has in Portugal a wide scope but the main responsible, at a national level, to accomplish the objective of child protection did not agree to participate in the assessment, arguing for lack of information regarding sports and violence against children. On the other hand, the most recent national campaign implemented by the national authority in sports is addressed to sexual harassment in sports. Without wishing to minimise this crime and the silence that usually exists around it, we now that the most frequent forms of violence against children in sports are the verbal violence, psychological aggression from coaches, and the psychological pressure from parents, which is another way of saying psychological violence.

It is also recognized that those forms of violence are often seen as the way sports are, i.e. as normal behaviours, even if legislation criminalises some of those forms of violence.

Legislation mentions the need for those who are working with children to present their criminal record certification; however it was not possible to understand at what point this is ensured by organisations. We know that codes of conduct are inexistent and professional conduct is the individual responsibility of each one, without any form of supervision.

No information is provided to parents about the existence of a child protection policy, and parents, in general, do not ask for it. Protective environments are seen in the restrictive concept of physical conditions that ensure the physical integrity of the athletes.

Children in sports are seen as someone who should achieve results and give satisfaction, with their sports' results, both to parents and coaches. The idea of sports as promoting wellbeing and the development of some abilities is undermined by the possibility of having a quick success.

Children subject of rights is a notion that is lacking either in the sports organisations or in the families.





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