



CYPRUS NATIONAL REPORT

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WP2_D2.23_CARDET_Cyprus



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Author

Dr Eliza Patouris, CARDET, Cyprus

Acknowledgements & Disclaimer

This document was produced within the framework of the ACTIVE project: *Focus on Children; Strengthening Policies in Sports and Leisure Activities*, and is funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (REC 2014-2020) under the number 856826.

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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 effectively CARDET implemented a needs assessment concerning the implementation of child protection policies, ethical guidelines and codes of conduct in the work of professionals working in sports clubs and organisations, extra-curricular activities and/or leisure/recreation clubs/organisations for children. This was conducted through interviews and focus groups with the involved stakeholders.

The objectives of the needs 4assessment are:

- 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.
- To identify gaps and enable more strengthened child protection structures and systems in this field.



- 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 July 2014 the Cyprus House of Cyprus Representatives passed The Prevention and Combating of Sexual Abuse, Sexual Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography Law 91 (I) / 2014 (the "Law"), the provisions of which in essence harmonised Cypriot law with European Directive 2011/93 / EU and the Lanzarote Convention. As a result the republic of Cyprus passed the National Strategy and Action Plan to Combat Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography (NS) 2016-2019. The elaboration of the NS was decided by the Council of Ministers on 13/7/2015 and for this purpose an Inter-ministerial Committee has been established, comprising the Ministers of Education and Culture, Labour, Welfare and Social Security, Justice and Public Order and Health. The National Strategy and Action Plan to Combat Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children and Child Pornography 2016-2019, seeks to recognise the scope and scale of this social problem, to identify the priorities for addressing it properly and to determine the necessary actions and policies in order to achieve the primary goal which can be described as follows: *"All children should have the opportunity to grow up in conditions of security, equipped with all the tools that would allow them to develop healthy relationships, without having to face any form of sexual exploitation or abuse, free from all forms of sexual injury"*

One of the objectives of the National Strategy is to reduce abuse and exploitation incidents through prevention strengthening, informing and educating children as well as professionals who have contact with children (i.e. sport agents). The Cyprus Sports Organisation (CSO), as the Higher Sports Authority in Cyprus, provides services through its National Schemes, to sports federations, sports clubs and citizens, aiming to promote extra-curricular physical education and healthy living as well as all sports in Cyprus. Some 16,800 children, boys and girls, participate in these schemes, either at the level of mass sports (4-18 years - "Sport for All" Programme with of total of 8,200 minors), or at the level of competitive sports (12 to 18 years; "National Sport Development Support Scheme "and the "Talent Scheme" with a total of 8,600 minors). It is clear that the inclusion of the CSO in the National Strategy for the protection of children from sexual exploitation, sexual abuse and child pornography is not only deemed necessary, but is of crucial importance as research has illustrated that cases of sexual violence may emerge in sport, both at European and global level (Kirby, 2018). Undoubtedly, Sport is a mean of intrapersonal and interpersonal development and empowerment for children and young people. As a result, any form of experience in this field acquires particularly positive and / or negative connotation, especially if these have to do with emotional, physical and sexual violence and / or harassment, which can undoubtedly play a key role in the proper psycho-physical development of children and can sometimes even lead to long-term unpleasant consequences for victims. The CSO has indicated its willingness to be included in the NS and has undertaken to do the following:



- To request from any employee whose work entails frequent contact with children (schools, sports clubs etc.) to have a clear criminal record certificate in respect of these offences, and to be forbidden from working if the employee does not produce such a certificate
- To prepare a manual that will be distributed to employees and those supervised by the Cyprus Sports Organisation to help identify incidents of abuse and exploitation, to identify children who are likely to be at increased risk of suffering some form of sexual abuse and exploitation and to explain the procedure of tackling these incidents (this falls under the "Voice"¹ 2016-2019 programme).
- To cooperate with the "Voice" for the design and promotion of programmes / training seminars for adults dealing with children through the sports, focusing on coaches who usually have a closer relationship with the children.
- To send a wide information campaign to the Sports Federations on their legal obligations, for example, on the need for federal and association coaches to produce a clear criminal record certificate in respect of sexual offences against children and the obligation of any person concerned to report to the competent authorities when he has been informed, or was a witness in an incident of causing 'harm' to a child.

(Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance, 2020)

Furthermore, the Cyprus National Committee of UNESCO in cooperation with the Cyprus Sports Organization organised a "Break the Silence and the Concealment", a Conference on "Fighting Sexual Violence against Children: The Role of Athletes in the Prevention and Management of the Phenomenon". In the field of sport, it is important to keep in mind that specific structures, values and cultural practices could create favorable conditions for abuse of power and confidence and the manifestation of sexual harassment and exploitation. Therefore, preventive strategies to ensure the protection of children and young people from such experiences are now a priority for the sports community.

As Chroni and Papaefstathiou note, "while awareness is growing that child protection is an issue for sport, developments to protect youth athletes have been minimal" (Chroni, Papaefstathiou: 2015, 64) there are neither targeted policies nor procedures to protect children participating in sports, which involves an absence of codes of conduct for coaches and education on child protection as well as identifying signs of abuse.

¹ Committee which will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the strategy, providing support to the institutions and designing concrete actions.



A problem also flagged by the European Commission in its 'Study on gender-based violence in sport' which notes the absence of investigation on the conditions of children's participation in sports, as well as children protection actions and the training of coaches in relation to gender-based violence. Research and reporting on the extent of the aforementioned incidents and problems of violence in children's sporting and leisure events in Cyprus are relatively limited. Thus, in the absence of research of violent behaviors in sports we may take into account the findings of the Ministry of Education's Observatory for Violence in Schools report of 2011 which documented that 10% of the students - a limited but not negligible percentage - of elementary and secondary schools reported witnessing instances violent behaviors in school grounds. Moreover, in a study conducted in 2013 by the Hope for Children 20% of the respondents aged 12 to 18 stated that they had experienced physical abuse. Consequently, we expect similar, if not greater - due to the parameters noted above-, levels of violent behaviors -incidents in sporting and leisure events for children (Chroni, Papaefstathiou:2015). However, it is important to highlight the need for further research to be carried out on the field as the absence of studies limits our comprehension of current realities and problems and most importantly the capacity to design and undertake structured and comprehensive responses to address and uproot such problems.

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3. Methodology

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

- Focus groups involving children and families and professionals.
- Interviews with stakeholders (including relevant professionals working in sports/leisure / recreation organisations).

3.1. Focus groups

For the needs assessment it was necessary to carry out four focus groups with sports clubs and organisations and/or leisure activities organisations in the two biggest cities of Cyprus. Two focus groups were carried out with the participation of professionals (managers, coaches, trainers, volunteers, other professionals); one in Limassol and one in Nicosia, and two focus groups with children and parents; one in Limassol and one in Nicosia.

Below are the three main targets of the focus group participants:

- Children / young people, participants in sports activities.
- Families of the children participating in sports activities.
- Professionals working in the organisations involved in the project.

The strategy is underpinned by Lundy's Model of Participation, which is grounded in the UNCRC and focused on a rights-based approach to involving children in decision-making, through the provision of: SPACE: Children given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view; VOICE: Children facilitated to express their view; AUDIENCE: Children's view listened to; and INFLUENCE: Children's view acted upon, as appropriate.

In order to comply with the Ethics guidelines of our organisation we ensured that children would participate only with their parents' written consent and presence during the focus group.

3.2. Interviews

In Cyprus CARDET carried out ten interviews key relevant stakeholders (i.e. child protection actors, policy makers, managers, coaches, trainers) to also get their views on the existing gaps in the national system. The



involvement of the target groups in the focus groups and interviews was ensured by the wide networks and contacts already established by the project partners in the framework of their activities.

3.3. Methodological difficulties

It was foreseen in the project that children must be accompanied by relatives. This means that children and families participated in the same group. In this case, it was important to pay attention to the dynamic in the group to allow children to have real opportunities to express their own perspectives and points of view. CARDET overcame this by initially creating a safe and friendly environment for the children. As an icebreaker the focus group began by asking the children a question in order to get their voices heard from the beginning of the session. Also children were encouraged to comment on their parents' responses, even if they had a different opinion to children's perspectives.

Another challenge was with regards to recruiting and coordinating the participants for the focus group of children and parents. Although CARDET could gain access to these groups it was difficult to ensure attendance by all given their different and busy time schedules. This was overcome by contacting key gatekeepers such as the two biggest football and basketball teams in Cyprus in order to ask them to gather these participants at the sport organisation facilities. The managers of these teams were able to recruit and gather the participants which made it possible for CARDET to carry out the focus group sessions.

Finally, in order to ensure attainability of data in the given timeframe, CARDET used the method of telephone interviewing to carry out most of the interviews. This arrangement proved to be more convenient for the participant as they preferred it over a face-to-face interview.



4. Participants' characteristics

4.1. Interview participants

There was a total of ten participants interviewed including sport managers, coaches, trainers, freelance sport instructors and organisers of leisure activities for children. All were interviewed with the purpose of obtaining their views on the existing gaps in the national system. As mentioned earlier seven out of the ten interviews were carried out through the telephone while the remaining three were carried out in a face-to-face environment. Out of the ten participants 70% were from Limassol while 30% were from Nicosia.

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

Table 1: Demographics of Interview participants

Interviewee no.	Gender	Job title	Organisation represented	City
1	Male	University Sports Worker	University of Cyprus	Nicosia
2	Male	Judo coach and Manager	<i>N/A (the name of the organisation is not included as it contains the name of the participant. To ensure anonymity of the participant we have omitted this for data protection)</i>	Limassol
3	Female	Freelance Instructor children	<i>N/A (as above)</i>	Limassol



4	Male	Swimming Instructor and Manager	<i>N/A (as above)</i>	Limassol
5	Male	Director of Nautical Club	Limassol Nautical Club	Limassol
6	Female	Basketball Coach	APOLLON Limassol	Limassol
7	Female	Organiser of leisure activities for children	<i>N/A (as above)</i>	Limassol
8	Male	Organiser of theatre activities children	<i>N/A (as above)</i>	Nicosia
9	Male	Organiser of well-being activities for children	<i>N/A (as above)</i>	Limassol
10	Female	Organiser of painting activities for children	<i>N/A (as above)</i>	Nicosia

4.2. Focus Group participants

There was a total of 39 participants in the focus groups: twelve children, eleven parents, and sixteen professionals. Amongst the children there was a total of five males (all from Nicosia) and seven females (all from Limassol) taking part, all between the ages of 10-15 years old. The average age of parents was 51 and there was a total of six fathers and five mothers participating. A total of 45% of the parents were from Limassol while 55% were from Nicosia. The average age of professionals was 40.37 and there were a total of 15 male and 1 female sport professional participating. Out of the sixteen professionals, 37.5% were from



Limassol while 62.5% were from Nicosia. Table 2 demonstrates the demographics of the focus group participants.

Table 2: Demographics of Focus Group participants

	Parent/Child/ Professional	Gender	Age	Education background	Work position	City
1	Parent	Male	52	University	Private sector	Nicosia
2	Parent	Male	48	University	Senior Worker	Nicosia
3	Parent	Male	50	University	Judge	Nicosia
4	Parent	Female	48	University	Educator	Nicosia
5	Parent	Male	51	University	Educator	Nicosia
6	Parent	Female	52	University	n/a	Limassol
7	Parent	Female	53	University	Private sector	Limassol
8	Parent	Female	49	High school	Bank	Limassol
9	Parent	Male	50	University	Private sector	Limassol
10	Parent	Male	53	High School	Public sector	Limassol
11	Parent	Female	55	University	Public sector	Limassol
12	Child	Male	10-16	-		Nicosia
13	Child	Male	10-16	-		Nicosia



14	Child	Male	10-16	-		Nicosia
15	Child	Male	10-16	-		Nicosia
16	Child	Male	10-16	-		Nicosia
17	Child	Female	10-16	-		Limassol
18	Child	Female	10-16	-		Limassol
19	Child	Female	10-16	-		Limassol
20	Child	Female	10-16	-		Limassol
21	Child	Female	10-16	-		Limassol
22	Child	Female	10-16	-		Limassol
23	Child	Female	10-16	-		Limassol
24	Professional	Male	46	University	Football Coach	Nicosia
25	Professional	Male	34	University	Football Coach	Nicosia
26	Professional	Male	35	High School	Football Coach	Nicosia
27	Professional	Male	37	University	Educator of Development in Football	Nicosia
28	Professional	Female	30	University	Sport Psychologist	Nicosia
29	Professional	Male	41	University	Football Coach	Nicosia
30	Professional	Male	37	High school	Football Coach	Nicosia



31	Professional	Male	27	University	Physical Conditioning Trainer	Nicosia
32	Professional	Male	36	University	Football Coach	Nicosia
33	Professional	Male	27	University	Football Performance Analyst	Nicosia
34	Professional	Male	55	High school	Coach for young athletes	Limassol
35	Professional	Male	46	High school	Coach for academies training young athletes	Limassol
36	Professional	Male	47	Military Academy	Sports Trainer	Limassol
37	Professional	Male	41	High school	Goalkeeper Coach	Limassol
38	Professional	Male	60	High School	Sport Academy Trainer	Limassol
39	Professional	Male	47	High school	Coach for young athletes	Limassol

4.3. Focus Group Evaluation

Evaluations were carried out with the focus group participants (professionals and parents). Evaluation was centred on four aspects:

- a) The contents of the workshop were interesting
- b) The contents of the workshop were useful



- c) The level of interaction was appropriate
- d) Overall satisfaction

Out of the 11 parents that completed the evaluation, 100% rated the content of the workshops as interesting with a green face, meaning they were happy with this aspect. Similarly, 100% of the parents were happy with the content of the workshops and thought they were useful. 91% of participants were happy with the level of interaction while 9% remained neutral. Finally, all parents were overall satisfied with 100% rating this aspect as green (i.e. happy).

Out of the 15 professionals that completed the evaluation, 100% rated the content of the workshops as interesting with a green face, meaning they were happy with this aspect. Similarly, 100% of the professionals were happy with the content of the workshops and thought they were useful. All professionals were happy with the level of interaction with 100% rating this as green (i.e. happy about it). Finally, all professionals were overall satisfied with 100% rating this aspect as green (i.e. happy).



5. Results

The results are divided into five categories:

1. *Perspectives on violence in sports and against children*
2. *Existence and characterisation of practices preventing violence against children in sports*
3. *Existence and characterisation of practices preventing discrimination against children in sports*
4. *Existence and characterisation of practices promoting the participation of children in sports*
5. *Existence (and consistence) of child protection policies*
6. *Changes that can be introduced*



5.1. Perspectives on violence in sports and against children

In Cyprus there was no mention of sexual and/or physical violence against children in sports. There was however an overall consensus that the forms of violence in sports and against children are centred on a) *Verbal violence occurring on the sport field*, b) *Psychological pressure from parents* and c) *Psychological aggression from coaches* as well as d) *Physical violence between the athletes*

Verbal violence

“Football is an intense and dynamic game. So, during training there may be tension experienced.” (Football coach, Nicosia)

“I have noticed in other organisations that verbal violence (i.e. swearing) is a daily phenomenon. Especially during games this is something that I witness almost every time.” (Young athletes’ trainer, Nicosia)

Similar experiences of verbal violence were shared amongst several parents who explained that swearing can sometimes be so aggressive that it affects their child’s emotional and psychological health.

“When there is a game there is unfortunately a lot of swearing that takes place on the stands. Also, during time-out the coach may swear at the young athletes for something that maybe did not go as planned during the game. And then you may also hear the young athletes swearing at one another on the field” (Parent, Limassol)

“There are some coaches that actually encourage swearing. When a coach, during the break of a game, starts swearing at the children because of their game performance, it triggers swearing between the children, on the stands and to opposing team members!” (Parent, Limassol)

“There used to be a coach who used to shout and swear at children for their performance. It would really affect my child’s psychology and I complained about it to the management” (Parent, Limassol)

“Coaches shout during training maybe because children start at a very early age the championship route. And this pressure of winning creates a lot more intensity that the coaches’ approach is no longer about teaching them how to play the game, but more about winning that trophy which I believe is wrong- especially for younger age groups” (Parent, Limassol)



Psychological aggression from coaches

A theme that evolved was one in relation to the pressure related to 'focusing on the win' approach. Both coaches and parents mentioned that there is high level of aggressive practice that comes with the 'we have to become champions' mindset.

One coach in particular explained that:

"I have seen that many coaches/trainers apply quite a lot of aggression to push children towards winning. It's more about the winning mindset than about making sure children are safeguarded." (Judo Coach, Limassol)

Another coach expressed the importance of subjective perception in relation to the pressure that is applied, such that it is up to the parents' judgment whether the pressure is perceived as aggressive or not:

"It is again subjective as to whether there is violence or not. If someone wants to follow the championship it becomes a different story. I tell them that if they want to move to further serious levels, then they will experience shouting and more pressure. If the parent considers this as violence, then this will be considered violence, but it's subjective to the perception of the parent and/or young athlete. Of course, there are more clear forms of violence, but it usually is dependent on the over-protection of parents." (Swimming instructor for children, Limassol)

On another note, a coach from a major football organisation jokingly mentioned that there needs to be a 'Sports Police' set in place to control the aggressive attitudes that takes place on field:

"Last week there was a coach from another football organisation who started shouting aggressively at the coach from the opposing team and then to an athlete who was playing at the time. There is nowhere to report this and have something done about it. If there was, they should have removed his license to work as a coach!" (Football performance analyst, Nicosia)

"I can understand that during training coaches may shout in order to put that extra bit of pressure on children to develop their skills further. BUT during the game, coaches tend to cross the line completely. Ideally, they should be sitting calmly and noting the mistakes to improve further. Instead, they are so focused on winning that they lose the point!" (Parent, Limassol)

Despite wide acknowledgement of psychological pressure to push for higher performance, one of the directors of a nautical club in Limassol explained that this is becoming less intense. The introduction of



psychology to sport management has lessened the pressure that coaches exercise in some other fields of sports:

“It’s much less than what it used to be because coaches changed mindsets. Science has entered sport, and this has worked positively. Now you have a sport psychologist who will motivate a child instead of forcing or pressuring them.” (Director of nautical club, Limassol)

Another form of aggressive practice as reported by a parent was the pressure applied by the coach to her daughter in relation to her weight gain. This was a matter that was not handled in the right way and which caused great amounts of distress to her daughter:

“It was obvious that she gained weight and till this today she is constantly obsessed about her weight gain. She comes home with negativity about her body instead of feeling good after her practice” (Parent, Limassol)

The parents focused on the importance of having an independent sport psychologist that can monitor and guide the young athletes. This was shared also by the young athletes who explained that in having a psychologist they would feel more open to express their concerns.

Psychological pressure from parents

It was interesting to note that when talking to coaches about potential forms of violence in sports against children, their main comments were addressed to parents. Although parents believe that most pressure directed towards children come from coaches, most of the coaches and trainers believe that most pressure comes from the parents of the children:

“Based on my experience, the pressure that children receive is 90% from parents and 10% from coaches. Believe me, the pressure children feel from parents is a lot. A parent will push their child to become a football player or to be the best in the group, etc. And it’s funny because a lot of these parents have no idea about sports!” (Football coach for 8-12-year olds, Limassol)

“If it was possible, parents should be forbidden from attending training sessions and games!” (Coach for young athletes, Limassol)

“I have noticed on many occasions that the first thing a parent asks their child after a game is ‘Did you win?’ ‘How many points did you score?’, ‘Why did you lose to so many goals?’ instead of asking ‘Did you have a good time?’. A parent should really not be asking anything else.” (Trainer for young goalkeepers, Limassol)



“The kind of pressure that children receive from their parents is enough to determine whether the child will continue the sport or stop it altogether. That’s how important a role it plays in the child’s psychology” (Young footballers’ manager, Limassol)

Physical violence between the athletes

Physical violence between the athletes was another form of violence described by coaches as existent in Cyprus, especially in the field of football.

“I believe that its unavoidable. Football is an intense game so at some point there will be conflict between the team players. But it is your responsibility as a coach to make note of it and to do something about it” (Football coach, Nicosia)

“Sometimes you are not aware of potential physical violence that takes place. You may find out about it much later” (Football coach, Nicosia)

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

Organisation-specific practices

The participants agreed that there are few practices in place to prevent violence against children in sports. Each sport club has their own specific practices which are however not standardised or regulated by CSO. Some athletic academies, but not all, implement both their own child safeguarding practices and policies:

“We have our own child safeguarding policy which coaches sign, and which clearly states the punishments, consequences, and with whom they should communicate in the case of a reported case of any form of violence” (Director of nautical club, Limassol)

Additionally, some football organisations mentioned that they maintain their own strict practices in relation to preventing violence against children in sports:

“We have red lines when it comes to behaviour. We make sure that violence is punished and that we all comply with these internal rules. Rules on how to react to a referee who may be totally unfair, or on how to speak with other colleagues in the field, or on how to interact with athletes from the opposing team.” (Technical director of football organisation, Nicosia)



“In our academy the young athletes know they should not cross the red lines. These are our internal rules and the kids here know them” (Sport psychologist, Nicosia)

“We are all very careful in terms of what we say and how we say it. We are humans and can make mistakes. But it is up to our discretion to make sure that violence is not permitted” (Football coach Nicosia)

Overall, there was an agreement of practices that ought to be in place for the prevention of violence against children in sports. For instance, a coach in the field of Judo explained that when it comes to weight and body adjustments there needs to be a same-sex trainer who conducts this process with the young athletes. In Cyprus there are no formalised practices to ensure the prevention of sexual violence in this field of sports.

Benefits of sport psychology

The use of a sport psychologist was another practice that helps prevent violence against children in sports. It was clear that the use of a sport psychologist is still at its early stages in sports and indeed there is a need to have one in each sport club/academy.

“Children know that they can come to me and speak up for whatever they are experiencing. Although there is no formal procedure in place to inform them of their safeguarding, children know that they can meet with me once a month to discuss anything they feel like” (Sport Psychologist, Nicosia)

“It would be good if we had a sport psychologist that knows about basketball so that I can openly talk to him/her about the pressure or stress I may be feeling, either in relation to the game or not. She would understand the psychology of this field.” (Young basketball female athlete, Limassol)

Implementing respect in sports

Another theme that emerged was that of respect. Some coaches explained that when they themselves treat the children with respect, this will make them feel respected and the children will respect other players too.

“When you respect yourself, you respect the game” (Sport Academy Trainer, Limassol)

“From the moment that you are responsible for a child in any profession, you need to respect this duty. If you do, and you are professional about it, then there is no way you will exercise any form of violence against them.” (Football coach, Nicosia)



“We are humans, and so even if we do at some point lose our temper and shout at a kid who is on field, I will always speak with him after the end of the session. I will try to make him understand what I was trying to communicate earlier. It is a matter of respect both in terms of my profession and of the relationship that I have developed with the child” (Football coach for +15-year olds, Nicosia)

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

Organisation-specific practices

Regarding practices preventing discrimination against children in sports it has emerged that there are only a few guidelines from CSO but with no standardised tools offered from the responsible body.

“There are no objective tools to prevent discrimination. There are general guidelines and recommendations by the National sports body, but it’s up to every coach/academy to see how to implement this.” (Coach, Nicosia)

The members of one a major football organisation in Cyprus explained they adopt practices to prevent discrimination against children in sports. One of the examples they gave is to adopt fairness and quality within the team. mentioned that they apply ‘equal-play’ time for all young athletes as a set rule that all coaches within the organisation follow:

“We comply with this rule and try to make sure that all children have the opportunity to play. Of course, we cannot prevent a good player from becoming better.” (Football coach, Nicosia)

“As a coach if you prioritize equality in a team, then this will be spread between the team members. If you see something that goes against this principle, it is your responsibility as a coach to point it out so that discipline is applied” (Football coach, Nicosia)

A basketball coach for young females explained that their organisation deliberately develops practices to incorporate participation of all athletes:

“For instance we have some processes that enable children who are perhaps obese to be more involved. We will bring two coaches to create more encouragement for them more through training until they gain confidence. And we arrange friendly games between the athletes of our organisation and guarantee a win so that they gain more confidence.” (Basketball coach for young females, Limassol)



Some coaches explained that the organisation may not have such rules in place, but they nonetheless follow their own tactics to secure equal participation of children in sports:

“When the children are playing, I always have in mind to make sure that all get the chance to play, irrespective of their level. For instance, I will place two ‘weak’ players alongside three strong because I don’t want to make any child feel marginalized” (Football coach, Limassol)

“When we recognise that a child is not satisfied with his/her game time we will put the effort to explain our reasons for it. We want to make it clear to them so that they are not left in the unknown. We also go through evaluations with them twice a year.” (Technical Director of football organisation, Nicosia)

“I am absolute on this. In my field it is a must to have discipline and respect. I am very careful to not let discrimination happen. I have it as a rule that we are all equal and all the same. There is no space to allow for anything else. I had a situation where racism took place and I sat down with them for an hour to explain to them why this was wrong and the importance of equality.” (Judo trainer for children, Limassol)

Parents and children dissatisfaction about discriminatory prevention practices

On the other hand, parents and children talked about the dissatisfaction of sport clubs to prevent discrimination. These usually take the form of not giving the child the opportunity to play equal time as the others or receiving exaggerated punishments for wrongdoings.

“The child does not have the chance to express him/herself with regards to any discrimination he may be feeling in terms of not playing equal time as the others” (Parent, Nicosia)

“I believe children are scared to express any discrimination they may be experiencing” (Parent, Nicosia)

“When I feel discriminated, I feel I can express myself only to certain trainers, not all. Others just have their own way of doing things and won’t listen to what I have to say.” (Young footballer, Nicosia)

“I feel it is very risky for me to speak up to a coach about a discrimination I may be experiencing, such as ‘why did I not play in this game’. It’s risky for me because the coach may take it negatively and then will treat me negatively too. So, I prefer not to be the one who takes such a risk. If others choose to speak up, maybe I will too. But I won’t risk it alone” (Young footballer, Nicosia)



In terms of exaggerated punishment one parent mentioned:

“My child experienced a very prolonged punishment for something that was not that serious. And he experienced discrimination from the club because of this. They sent a letter saying they will change the numbers of their t-shirts, and they changed only his. Who are you to take this away from him after 7 years? And why only from him?” (Parent, Nicosia)

It was clear that for children there is a feeling of ‘risk’ that comes with reporting discrimination. Coaches, on the other hand, believe that they ensure open communication channels with their athletes to ensure that they can speak to them about what they may be experiencing and are not afraid in doing so:

“The child has channels to communicate anything they may be experiencing. He may do so with the gymnast, or with the sport psychologist, or with whomever they feel comfortable. Usually they will tell their parents and the parents come and tell us. So the channels of communication are open” (Technical director of football organisation, Nicosia)

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

Communication between Organisation and Athlete

Some organisations in Cyprus adopt open communication practices with their young athletes, such as providing a sport psychologist and/or directly asking them about their concerns. This gives the children the opportunity to express their opinion, thus enabling their participation:

“At my academy I always urge children to come and talk to me about whatever is going. I tell them If I do something that you don’t like please tell me. It’s so important to have an open and honest communication to take on critical feedback. We as Cypriots don’t usually take on critical feedback. It’s a mind-set- they don’t see what the right policies in place are.” (Judo trainer for children, Limassol)

A good practice implemented by a sport psychologist was the administration of questionnaires for children to express their opinions anonymously:

“I took their opinions into consideration and I have started to slowly implement these changes. I have informed coaches about the findings, and I will keep doing so” (Sport psychologist, Nicosia)



Communication between Parent and Organisation

Most of the responses demonstrated that children's participation in sports mainly comes through the involvement of the parent:

"It always happens through the parent. A 7-year-old will express whatever disappointment through the parent. Maybe it's our fault as a society, to teach children to be more expressive and to stand up for their need or complaint" (Parent, Nicosia)

"We know if children are satisfied or dissatisfied from the parents. And from some children who are mature and who talk to us directly. We don't give them this right to judge the coaching. We explain to them what is going. If they are not satisfied we explain what we are doing and why. But we have to place a limit to what they are allowed to express" (Basketball Coach for Young females, Limassol)

Communication between children and Organisation

Some children expressed that 'being heard' is not always achievable. Although they understand that the coach is the decision-maker they would like to have more channels of communication with regard to game-related decisions

"There were occasions where I and some other team members made a complaint to not play with older age groups because it was too tiring for us. But this was not heard." (Young female athlete, Limassol)

"They make us play with older age groups due to lower number of players available- I understand why they do it. But our performance and psychology does get affected. I think if they had a rotation approach which would prevent us going through this on a weekly basis; it would lower the emotional pressure and stress that we feel." (Young female athlete, Limassol)

5.5. Existence (and consistence) of child protection policies

Lack of child protection policy

The national sports federation does not have a formal child protection policy for children in sports. As mentioned by a sport psychologist and a coach for young athletes:



“We are still far from having such a formal process in place. We created our own policy. We have a process that we started preparing called ‘Internal rules’. Both the children and the coaches are aware as to what their limits are” (Football manager, Nicosia)

“No, there are no standard practices in place. It’s up to the judgment of the coach. If children feel the need to report anything to their parents/coaches.” (Coach for young athletes, Nicosia)

“Generally I have not been sent this process. I go based on what I believe as a coach and as a pedagogue. There is no law stating, ‘if you want to train here you have to follow these rules” (Basketball Coach for Young females, Limassol)

“Any professional that works with children either in the sports or leisure activities sector should be formally obliged to have some sort of pedagogical training. This should be part of a child protection policy which I believe is currently absent in our country” (Theatre activities’ organiser for children, Nicosia)

Similarly, a Yoga instructor for children explained that:

“It would be nice if the national sport federation made it obligatory that each sport organisation has sport psychologist that deals directly with the psychological support of children. It is a field that exist abroad, but is just not practiced in Cyprus” (Yoga Instructor, Limassol)

These comments were reiterated also by a Swimming coach for children who explained that the Cyprus Sport Organisation (CSO) should amend their procedures and add focus also on personality assessments of trainers who work with children and not just their certificates:

“No there is no such thing. But I imagine it falls under the general laws of child safety in any environment. Cyprus Sport Organisation gives permissions based on the building, plus a few other things like CRB checks and diplomas of the trainers. They may look at the papers, but not their characters.” (Swimming coach for children, Limassol)

Importance of implementing supervision and regulations

Furthermore, when asked about the existence of child protection policies there was also mention of the role of referees. For example, some participants mentioned that if a referee hears swearing taking place between the athletes on field, they should be punished, which is not what happens in reality:



“Perhaps referees don’t have rules in terms of verbal violence. But perhaps it’s the coach that should have the responsibility to make a warning to the athlete that is swearing.” (Parent, Limassol)

There is a lack of child protection policy which means that the children’s safeguarding is at risk. Some children mentioned that one of the things that is lacking in terms of child protection policy is a rule that ensures their playing times and processes are balanced:

“I love basketball but sometimes being in training daily, and then also playing on both Saturdays and Sundays can make the whole experience quite stressful. It becomes less of a hobby. Maybe it would be better if the national sport federation recommended fixed weekly hours and shift-playing to ensure a more balanced routine for every young athlete.” (Young basketball female athlete)

“I would recommend there being rules in terms of what ages we can play with. For example, I’m 13 years old and I sometimes play with 17-year-old girls who are obviously stronger than me. This is something that needs to change because it puts us at risk of physical injury and lowering our confidence as they will win” (Young basketball female athlete)

5.6. Changes that can be introduced

The changes recommended by managers, parents and children were centred on a) Implementing a child safeguarding policy in sports, b) Implementation of inclusive practices, c) safety checks, d) training to coaches, parents and children.

Implementing a Child safeguarding policy in sports

One of the major themes that emerged was on the importance of the Cyprus Sport Organisation implementing a state-wide child safeguarding policy and ensuring strict adherence to it:

“a declaration document of a league, an organisation that covers for children rights and safety. This is the first and foremost thing that needs to take place.” (Parent, Limassol)

“the state needs to generate guidelines and policies that then the academies and organisation will have to adopt because they will be obliged to do so. This must form part of the National Strategy.” (Sport club director, Limassol)



“The central sport organisation should have a policy to regulate who is allowed to train and come in contact with children. Then, they need to have a policy on the behaviour of those in the stands. Rules need to be placed on referees’ behaviours- they need to be more than anything pedagogues. Currently they do not place fines or punishments. Some trainers should have their diplomas taken away.” (Basketball coach for young females, Limassol)

Implementation of inclusive practices

A common theme that emerged was from some of the managers who reported that the Cyprus Sports Organization should incorporate more inclusive practices for athletes. For example, some athletes in Cyprus undergo psychological marginalization due to their lower financial capacity which prevents them from entering international competitions.

“Some athletes feel marginalized because they may not have the money to get in competition to get the belt. There is no financial assistance from CSO to help poor young athletes feel supported and included. Parents sacrifice a lot to send their children abroad to get those extra points so that they can proceed in their sport field and to not feel neglected” (Judo instructor for children, Limassol)

“My brother used to be an exceptional football player, but my mother could not afford to push him further. So, it’s a shame that the national sports federation doesn’t give these children the chance for equality and fairness. Through the budget it is important to establish safety and non-discriminatory practices, and this can happen when the resources are available. So, it starts from top-down.” (Yoga instructor for children, Limassol)

Safety and regulation measures

There was consensus that one of the changes that need to take place is that of putting in practice more safety and regulation measures. The Cyprus Sport Organisation should ensure that independent controllers are sent to monitor, supervise and advice sport organisations.

“There needs to be changes in the sports field. It would be good for there to be more safety checks in place. But we live in small society so by word of mouth the bad cases (i.e. coaches that don’t comply with the rules) eventually come out. That may help as it keeps children away from coaches who are ‘unsafe’. But what we need is an independent controller ensuring regular safety checks.” (Swimming coach for children, Limassol)

“Regulation and punishment. The central sport organization should be sending more regularly independent controllers to control and monitor what is happening. And they should



be aware that even if they do send someone, it's likely that the coach may intervene and tell him not to omit certain things. We need to accept as professionals that it's not bad to make a mistake. But in Cyprus there is no fair and objective procedure that takes place" (Basketball coach for young females, Limassol)

Training to coaches, parents and children

There was a general agreement that sport clubs and organisations should offer lectures and training to coaches, parents and children:

"If you inform children of 10 things, and they take in 2, that's still okay. But this training of their rights, needs to happen on a consistent basis. Children need to have more critical thinking when it comes their rights." (Sport club manager, Limassol).

"As part of your degree you are obliged to attend a seminar on matters related to the sport you are coaching but it only happens once every two years. There is no obligatory continuing professional development courses/training in place specifically targeting these topics of violence and child safeguarding. There really should be! (Sport psychologist, Nicosia)

"There should be more training, for the right pedagogy between coach and athlete. There should be training towards coaches and also evaluation towards coach. A clear CRB check is not enough. Young athletes should be informed about sexual/physical violence so that they can identify this when it happens otherwise they are totally ignorant and will think this is the way it occurs. As it stands now, some may just accept it just because they are not aware that they should be reporting it or because previously it was just accepted." (Judo trainer for children, Limassol)

Nonetheless, some sport club managers reported that they currently offer training courses/lectures to children and parents on topics like healthy eating and psychological abuse.

Parents explained the importance of coaches being trained on child psychology and child pedagogy as a compulsory practice that should be adopted:

"It should be compulsory for a sports coach who works with children to receive consistent training on pedagogical matters and on psychology. They are first and foremost pedagogues and then sport coaches." (Parent, Limassol)

The role of the Cyprus Sports Organisation is important in ensuring that such consistent trainings take place and that resources are provided to fund these trainings.



Renewing the National Sport Federation strategy

One of the major changes that need to be introduced is in relation to the operating mechanisms of the National Sport federation, such that new members should be introduced to allow for innovation to happen:

“We need radical and significant changes. The national sports association need to give space to younger and more objective people to take charge and make some changes. As it stands now, there are people in the organisation that have been in the same position there for years without making much difference. Somebody who is more than 15 years in the same chair, needs to leave and allow new ideas to be brought in. Especially in sports it’s so important to bring in innovative aspects.” (Yoga instructor for children, Limassol)

Similarly, another suggestion was to put in place a more formal and unitary protection body that specifically deals with child protection in sports:

“In Cyprus there are relevant authorities that deal with child welfare and protection. But in sport organisations this does not exist. Some sport club committees try to implement fairness, and antidiscrimination but this needs to be something that comes from the top. It is the responsibility of Cyprus Sport Organisation to do this. They just do recommendations. They don’t use guidelines that all should follow.” (Young Athletes’ Trainer, Nicosia)

“No person from the national sports federation has the knowledge to check for previous sexual offences or potential unsafe personalities. In the federation they hire people who take some decisions, and don’t actually get trained or are informed to be able to check this in the right manner.” (Judo trainer for children, Limassol)

“There need to be stricter internal rules in place and a very clear communication plan between parent and organisation, between athlete and academy...direct communication can solve many issues. The Cyprus Sport Organisation is trying to create a respective unit to take on complaints and investigate these further. In any case, there should be clear and transparent rules in case of law violation related to violence in sports against children” (Director of nautical club, Limassol)



6. Conclusions

The results from our research in Cyprus indicate that there are indeed many gaps in the national system regarding both practices and policies to prevent violence against children in sports.

As noted by the participants there are four main types of violence in sports and against children with these being: a) verbal violence, b) psychological aggression from coaches, c) psychological pressure from parents, d) physical violence between the athletes. These are themes that the project consortium should consider including as part of the WP3 Capacity-Building curriculum. The main gaps that can be identified here are:

- Lack of measures that regulate, monitor and punish those who exhibit verbal violence against children in sports.
- The national sports federation, currently, does not make it obligatory for sport organizations working with children to have a Sport Psychologist. This is something that needs to be implemented to secure the physical, mental and emotional well-being of children.
- There need to be rules related to the extent of involvement of parents in and outside the sport organization. The coaches talked of extreme psychological pressure that is imposed on children by their parents and this is something that needs to be tackled.
- Finally, to address the physical violence between the athletes, child protection policies need to be implemented that punish those exhibiting such behaviour.

In terms of practices preventing violence and discrimination against children in sports the main themes identified for prevention of violence were a) organization-specific practices, b) benefits of sport psychology, and c) implementing respect in sports, while for prevention of discrimination were a)organisation-specific practices and b) Parents and children dissatisfaction about discriminatory prevention practices. The main gaps identified here are:

- Lack of standardized practices by the Cyprus Sport Organization which results in each organization adopting their own practices without compliance to expert guidelines and recommendations. Nation-wide guidelines to all sports organizations are in need to prevent discrimination of violence against children and promote respect in sports
- As mentioned above the national sports federation should make Sport Psychology obligatory for sport organizations working with children.



The main themes identified in relation to practices promoting the participation of children in sports were a) Communication between Organisation and Athlete, b) Communication between Parent and Organisation and c) Communication between children and Organisation. The main gaps identified here are:

- Organisations that have open communication channels with their young athletes should continue doing so but by using standardized guidelines from the national sports federation.
- There is a need to have a mediating body/person that can replace or complement children communication to the sport organisations through their parents.

Major gaps were identified in relation to the existence of child protection policies in Cyprus. The two main themes that emerged through this were a) Lack of child protection policy and b) importance of implementing supervision and regulations. It was clear through the participants responses that the most important step for the Cyprus Sports Organisation is to develop and implement a child protection/safeguarding policy. The main gaps identified therefore are:

- The need for the Cyprus Sport Organisation to develop and implement a child safeguarding policy that will review and implement rules and regulations on violence in sports against children.
- Along with this policy what is also required is consistent supervision and regulation on and off the sports fields as a way of monitoring and preventing potential violence against children. These measures should address all individuals that work with children in the field of sports (coaches, managers, trainers, gymnasts, etc.).

Finally, there were five main changes that should be introduced according to participants responses. These reiterate all the gaps mentioned above but also make specific references to new measures that need to be adopted. The five main changes are a) Implementing a Child safeguarding policy in sports, b) Implementation of inclusive practices, c) Safety and regulation measures, d) Training to coaches, parents and children, and e) Renewing the National Sport Federation strategy. The gaps identified are:

- As mentioned above, the need for the National Sport Federation to implement a child safeguarding policy that also takes into account practices that promote inclusion rather than exclusion.
- There is a need to establish independent monitoring that will regulate and ensure that child safety is prioritized in sport and leisure activities organisations.



- Changes to the national sport association that will promote the welfare and protection of children in sports.
- Training centered on violence and discrimination against children in sports should be obligatory for all professionals working with children, including sport and leisure activities' professionals.
- It is necessary to re-train members of the national sports association and/or to find new members with expertise of child safeguarding. This will ensure sustainability of practices and expert regulation of a potential child-safeguarding policy when implemented.

The gaps identified based on research in Cyprus clearly indicate that the project activities should be centred on awareness-raising of child safeguarding in the field of sports. Although there were some organisations and sport professionals implementing their own practices and measures in relation to the prevention of violence and discrimination against children, the National sport federation has yet to provide standardised and unitary measures for organisations to follow. The capacity building tools that will be developed in the project as part of WP3 will greatly serve to enhance the capacities and awareness competences of sports clubs/organisations and/or leisure activities organisations. For Cyprus the curriculum should be adapted to include mechanisms by which the national sports federation can develop and implement a child safeguarding policy. It should also include specific training to parents in relation to their involvement in their children's sport activities and to coaches in relation to aggressive approaches that come from focusing on the win and not on the game. For Cyprus it is clear that the pedagogical aspect is lacking in the field of sports which is an important factor to consider before any changes take place.



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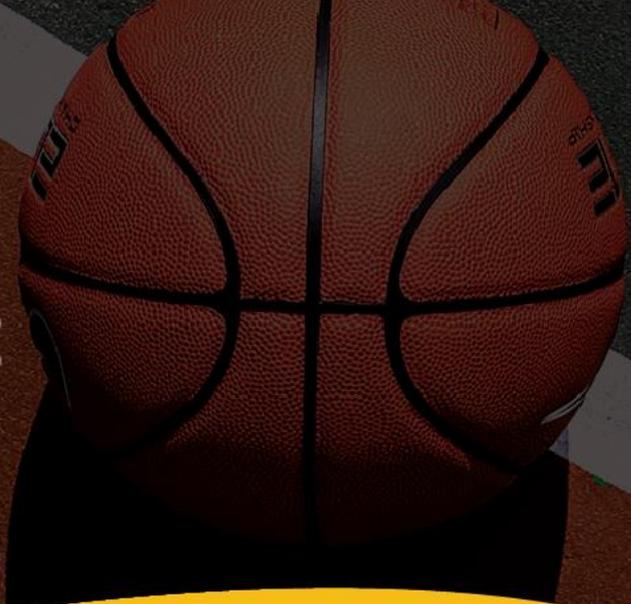
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Project's coordinator: KMOP

Address: 75, Skoufa str. ,Athens, 10680, Greece

Email: active@kmop.eu

Website: www.kmop.gr



Funded by the European Union's Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020)

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