

## Key Findings from Research

# Building European Safe Sport Together: Safeguarding amongst European Sports Organisations

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# Key Findings of the Safeguarding Statuses Amongst European Sports Organisations and Event Organisers

The Building European Safe Sport Together (BESST) project focused on the assessment of the Safeguarding statuses amongst European Sports Organisations, namely National Olympic Committees (NOC), National Federations (NF), Clubs and Event Organisers.

For the assessment of status, the following methodologies were used:

- Desk research
- Survey questionnaires with NOCs and NFs
- Interviews with NOCs, NFs and Event Organisers representatives

The key findings are in no specific order across all the methodologies and organisations are:

## 1. Safeguarding Still in an Infancy Stage

The number of sports organisations and event organisers that have safeguarding in place is still very low. Even those that demonstrate having some actions on the subject are aware that the process is not yet effective in protecting the sport participants. This situation indicates that the European sports organisations are currently in the initial stage of development.

## 2. Diversity of Legislative Frameworks

The current landscape of safeguarding in sports is marked by a lack of uniformity in legislative frameworks, practices, and sanctions. This diversity hampers the effectiveness of safeguarding measures. Organisations call for the establishment of an overarching governing body. Such a body would set the pace and standardise policies across different jurisdictions and organisations, ensuring a cohesive approach to safeguarding in sports.

## 3. Terminology Confusion

In addition to the existing frameworks, organisations also use diverging terms to refer to safeguarding in sports. Terminology such as harassment and abuse direct the thought in many cases to the sexual type of behaviours alone and safe sport is often identified with the safety of the sport itself. Other terminologies such as non-incidental violence make it difficult to understand what is exactly being discussed. To add to this confusion, the term safeguarding, in itself, is not easily translatable to other languages.

## 4. Lack of Understanding of Safeguarding Need

Many sports organisations and event organisers fail to recognize the importance of implementing safeguarding policies and procedures, often believing that transgressive behaviours are not a concern within their organisations or events, that these types of behaviours only happen to others. This lack of understanding of the impact on fundamentals of

sport and of the need for preventive measures, places safeguarding initiatives and even discussion low in the priority list of the sports organisations.

## 5. Lack of Funds

Financial constraints are a major barrier to effective safeguarding in sports. Many organisations lack the necessary funds to implement comprehensive safeguarding measures, provide training, and support investigative processes. Many sport organisations and sport events are run by volunteers who already have too big of a workload and no specific training or expertise..

## 6. Need for Educational and Training Programs

There is a pressing need for educational and training programs at all levels within sports organisations. Organisations identify the need to raise awareness, educate stakeholders on safeguarding practices, and provide the skills necessary to identify and address safeguarding issues. Comprehensive training is essential for creating a culture of safety and protection in sports.

## 7. Online Transgressive Behaviour

The digital world has merged with the physical world. Online transgressive behaviour has become a reality not only for high-profile sports events, but for small grassroot clubs as well. With the rapid expansion of internet access, the proliferation of social media platforms, the anonymity they provide, and the rise of online sports betting, online abuse has become the most prevalent form of transgressive behaviour.

## 8. Limited Data

The availability of hard data on safeguarding initiatives, processes and issues is limited, and information is often perceived differently by various organisations. The lack of reliable data hinders the evaluation of policy development stages and measures within organisations, limiting the ability to deliver accurate information needed to shape safeguarding practices and effective policymaking.

## 9. Lack of Formal Structure

Safeguarding efforts are often led by volunteers or added to the responsibilities of already overloaded staff. This lack of formal structure undermines the effectiveness of safeguarding measures. Very few organisations have a dedicated department for the topic, many add safeguarding to existing structures or roles.

## 10. Focus on Athletes and Entourage

Current regulations tend to focus primarily on athletes and their entourage, leaving other groups, such as staff and volunteers, vulnerable.

## **11. Ineffective Safeguarding Processes**

While reporting mechanisms for safeguarding issues exist, the follow-through in terms of investigation and adjudication is mostly inadequate. The diversity and ineffectiveness of these processes result in a lack of accountability and justice. Where policies are in place, these go on without review or adjustments, becoming a simple check on an ever-growing list of items. Finally, subjective and cultural aspects add complexity, making it challenging to establish an effective and universally compliant safeguarding process.

## **12. Presence of Safeguarding/ Welfare Officer at Events**

An increasing number of sports events are mandating the presence of a designated Safeguarding or Welfare Officer. However, the clarity of the role, the procedures to follow and the adequate training/ preparation of the person are still not at the necessary level.

## **13. Partnerships and Capacity Building**

Partnerships with law enforcement, security services, and non-profit entities (e.g., legal aid, child protection, psychological support) assist event organisers to handle cases, if necessary, as their professionals are trained in trauma-informed practices, including interviewing vulnerable groups such as children, ensuring safe spaces, and understanding national legal procedures.

## **14. Need for Independence**

To maintain the integrity and effectiveness of safeguarding measures, organisations identify the crucial need to ensure the independence of safeguarding bodies. This independence is necessary to avoid conflicts of interest that could compromise the protection of all stakeholders. Safeguarding bodies must operate without undue influence from organisations that may have vested interests.

## **15. Accountability of Non-Members**

Holding non-members accountable poses a significant challenge in the absence of recognized contractual agreements. For example, athletes typically sign a registration agreement when becoming a member of a club or elite athletes have contractual obligations with their clubs, but volunteer coaches in minor leagues often do not. This disparity highlights the lack of standardised processes that encompass all individuals involved in sports, to ensure everyone is held to the same safeguarding standards.

## Project BESST – Building European Safe Sport Together

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The project aimed:

1. To develop a modern definition of transgressive behaviour in sport, with an extensive literature review of the most recent studies.
2. To assess the statuses level of European sports organisations and event organisers.
3. To develop legal frameworks with policies and procedures proposal for European sports organisations.
4. To provide an awareness and education tool kit, facilitating the entities to use their communications channels to educate their communities about transgressive behaviour.

### All materials

#### 1. Modern definition of transgressive behaviour:

- [Conceptual Framework of Transgressive Behaviour](#)

#### 2. Assessment of level of organisations' Safeguarding:

- [Key Findings of the Safeguarding Statuses Amongst European Sports Organisations](#)
- [Assessment of Safeguarding Policies and Procedures Implemented in European Sports Organisations](#)
- [Assessment of Safeguarding Policies and Procedures Implemented in European Event Organisers](#)
- [Assessment of Safeguarding Statuses Amongst European National Olympic Committees](#)
- [Assessment of Safeguarding Statuses Amongst European National Federations](#)

#### 3. Legal framework for policies and procedures:

- [Safeguarding Legal Framework for NOCs and NFs](#)
- [Safeguarding Legal Framework for Clubs](#)
- [Safeguarding Legal Framework for Event Organisers](#)

#### 4. Awareness and Education toolkit:

- [Full Toolkit](#)