



Playing safe: Protecting Europe's children from abuse in sport

Briefing and Recommendations

Seminar:

23rd October 2007, 14:00 – 15:00

European Parliament, Strasbourg, LOW N3.4

The NSPCC is the UK's leading NGO specialising in Child Protection.

Child abuse in sport

The Citizens of the European Union and Sport survey (Eurobarometer, 2004) found that "some 60% of European citizens participate in sporting activities on a regular basis within or outside some 700,000 sporting clubs in Europe".

29% of those surveyed cited the sexual abuse of children as the main negative aspect associated with sport. Indeed, while most children enjoy themselves in safety doing sport, a small number are at risk of abuse from individuals who choose sports work to gain access to children.

Sport can make a significant contribution to children's well-being, offering opportunities for personal development and friendship. An experience of sexual, physical or emotional abuse during sport is likely to reverse these benefits and have long-lasting and damaging effects on the child.

Renewing the discussion on the prevention of child abuse in sport

In 2002, the NSPCC and Chris Heaton-Harris MEP, Chair of the Sports Intergroup hosted a reception on Child Abuse in Sport in the European Parliament. This meeting recommended that the European Commission draw up a Communication on Child Protection in Sport to provide a framework for co-ordinated policy and action at a European level. Five years on, an EU-wide initiative to combat child abuse in sport is still lacking.

There are now new opportunities for the EU to support change in this area. In February 2007 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) adopted a consensus statement on "Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport" which aims to promote effective preventive policy and increase the awareness of these problems. In July, the European Commission published a White Paper on Sport which recognises the need to protect the "moral and physical integrity of young people" in sport.

The NSPCC believes that the EU can play a key role in ensuring that this issue is given adequate attention in Europe, for example by supporting exchange of experience and expertise on this issue, raising awareness of the challenges, or by helping the development of recognised policies and procedures for preventing child abuse in sport in order to implement the IOC statement.

Addressing the needs and interests of children within EU work on Sport is given extra impetus by the Commission Communication 'Towards a European strategy on the Rights of the Child' of July 2006, which commits to mainstreaming children's rights throughout EU legislative and non-legislative activities.

Preventing child abuse in sport

The NSPCC runs the Child Protection in Sport Unit (<http://www.thecpsu.org.uk>) in partnership with Sport England, SportScotland, Sports Council for Northern Ireland and The Sports Council for Wales. The Unit has a wealth of experience and expertise regarding the prevalence of abuse of children in sporting activities, and how to protect children from abuse in sport.

One of the activities of the Unit is to develop and promote standards for child protection procedures and training in sport¹. In our experience it is crucial that sports organisations, however large or small, are aware of the risks and have the necessary standards to minimise the risks of abuse in sport.

This is recognised in the International Olympic Committee's statement which recommends that all sport organisations should:

1. Develop policies and procedures for the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse;
2. Monitor the implementation of these policies and procedures;
3. Evaluate the impact of these policies in identifying and reducing sexual harassment and abuse;
4. Develop an education and training program on sexual harassment and abuse in their sport(s);
5. Promote and exemplify equitable, respectful and ethical leadership;
6. Foster strong partnerships with parents/carers in the prevention of sexual harassment; and abuse; and
7. Promote and support scientific research on these issues.

A huge amount of work needs to be done across Europe to make organisations aware, and in most EU countries minimum standards for child protection in sport do not exist. The IOC recommendations provide a useful structure for the European Union to follow if they are to prevent child abuse in sport.

The Commission White Paper commits to proposing that Member States and sport organisations cooperate to protect young people through the dissemination of information on existing legislation, establishment of minimum standards and exchange of best practices. This indicates that European institutions are starting to address this issue but it is important that words are put into practice.

Recommendations

- All EU Member States need to ensure that proper procedures for safeguarding children in sporting organisations are in place. This must include

¹ In the UK minimum operating standards exist in relation to safeguarding and protecting children within sports clubs. The 'Every Child Matters' agenda in the UK encourages all organisations involved with providing services to children to work together and is supported by legislation and Government guidance. Section 2.8 of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to interagency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children' (HM Government, 2006) outlines the statutory duties, roles and responsibilities of all organisations that provide activities or services for children and young people.

pre-employment checks on those applying to work with children. Supervision, short-listing, referencing, evaluation, training, policies and ethical principles are also required if children are to be protected effectively.

- The Commission should promote the development of EU common standards for creating safe environments for children. The recent recommendations for sporting organisations on “Sexual harassment and abuse in sport” from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would be a good basis for this and should be pursued in the follow-up to the Commission’s White Paper on Sport.

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