**FIFPRO Contribution**

**Call for input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the UN General Assembly on violence against women and girls in sport**

**Introduction**

As the worldwide representative organization for 65,000 professional footballers, our scope - and therefore our below responses - is mostly focused on the professional football sector. The football sector being a worldwide labour market, there is a vast disparity in the financial and working conditions experienced by footballers. Women’s football is going through constant growth, and we are observing worrying trends that need to be tackled collectively by all relevant actors.

**Reponses to Questions**

1. In professional football, women experience all forms of violence. Non-payment of salaries is unfortunately common practice in football, which is a form of economic violence. To illustrate this observation, two FIFPRO reports can be used. According to a global survey led by FIFPRO in 2017[[1]](#footnote-1), USD 600 is the average salary in women’s football. According to a recent FIFPRO Women’s World Cup survey[[2]](#footnote-2), 49 percent of players participating in the World Cup said they earned less than $50,000 from their club and national team in the last year; six percent earned less than $10,000 and eight percent earned less than $5,000. Fifteen percent, meanwhile, had an income of over $150,000 – the highest bracket in the survey.

Other forms of abuse are also commonplace. Training alone to force a player to accept a termination of employment contract is a form of psychological violence and coercive control that employers rely upon in particular when the end of a registration (transfer) window is coming. Online violence is also not unusual, especially during large competitions with increased media visibility[[3]](#footnote-3).

1. Several articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) are breached when it comes to professional footballers. Article 2 for instance, according to which everyone is entitled to all the rights without discrimination. This is not the reality of all footballers. For instance, not all professional athletes have an equal right to access to justice, let alone to independent, impartial and trained judges. And this widely depends on their nationality since access to justice in sports is heavily reliant on the national football federations governance, many of them offering either no justice body or no right for athletes to file any grievance. On top of that, statutory dispositions of national federations often prohibit and/or limit access to national courts for their members. This also violates articles 8 and 10 of the UDHR. Another illustration is the violation of several parts of article 23 of the UDHR. Many professional footballers experience obstacles to freely move to find new employment, under the justification of the so-called “transfer system”. The right to freedom of assembly is also often breached, as players’ associations are regularly bullied by clubs and federations and no voice is too often given to them in sports governance structures (Article 20). The right to social security (Article 22) is also regularly breached, with employers not providing any medical insurance to players. One last example is the question of equal pay for equal work (Article 23), which is far from achieved in football.
2. Clubs and National Federations are mostly responsible. Clubs as the entity training young girls and employing women footballers. National Federations as the entity in charge of national team gatherings and competitions, but also as governing bodies of domestic football, with the financial and regulatory means and thus responsibility to create safe spaces for girls and women to perform their passion, education and work. Too often these entities do not have any background checks, let alone the absence of proper reporting and safeguarding mechanisms. The same holds true to a lesser degree for continental and international federations.
3. One of the principal causes is the dependence/subordination relationship between federations/ clubs’ officials and women and girls. Be it in an amateur or professional setting, the influence of some coaches and officials on an athlete’s future places them in a vulnerable environment. On top of that, most clubs and federations do not have safeguarding mechanisms to educate and prevent violence, and do not have independent and impartial disciplinary mechanisms to sanction violences. It therefore creates a climate of impunity where violence can thrive. The case of sexual violence in Haitian football provides for a concrete example of such systemic dynamics[[4]](#footnote-4).
4. It is difficult to identify a group in particular, as past cases of violence demonstrated the diversity of groups having experienced violence. Groups from lower social backgrounds with limited income and minorities are more exposed since the perpetrators can assert even more power over their career.
5. There should be full responsibility both of State and non-State actors. Violence is a crime that is penalised in most of the criminal codes of the countries, so States should have the measures to sanction it.

Regarding non-state actors, sports organisers should take this responsibility very seriously, in the prevention, in the process of reporting and in the sanctioning. The protection of the victims and whistle-blowers should be guaranteed and the whole process should be followed with a victim-centred approach. There should be funds allocated to conduct proper investigations, where rumours can be investigated by knowledgeable persons, and the persons in charge of taking a decision should be specifically educated in abuse, and should be diverse in terms of gender, ethnic background, etc.

Non-State actors will be able to sanction within the sport, but this is already of huge value, because it separates the predators from other possible future victims. This is both positive for the sport, and for the victim or whistleblower, as action is seen, and trust is put in the system. Moreover, as the burden of proof is lower in an administrative case (so within the sport’s governing body), it will be easier to sanction the abusers by removing them from the sport at least for a certain period. This raises awareness, provides an example, and encourages other victims to report.

However, when we talk about state responsibility, probably the criminal judge will take over, and there the burden of proof is very high. Although we would like to see all abusers in jail, it is important to have the possibility to sanction them only or also within the sport. Sport governing bodies cannot hide behind state responsibility to avoid taking action in cases of abuse.

1. There is not much being done by states nor by non-state actors, but there are very good initiatives from the union player’s side that are shared below.

As an example, 1,100 women’s first division footballers were surveyed from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela by FIFPRO Division America. The results of the research can be found here: resumen-ejecutivo-estudio-nosotras-jugamos.pdf (fifpro.org)

Among other interesting information, this study reveals a huge problem of Sexual harassment and gender-based violence:

73% of women’s football players surveyed said they had been victims of sexual harassment at some point in their sporting career. 42% were afraid of being harassed and 36% had witnessed sexual harassment.

Overall, 85% experienced gender discrimination in their career and 40% feel that football promotes gender-based violence. In addition, 71% believe that there are discriminatory practices in benefits or remuneration.

FIFPRO, the world players union, created a handbook for unions on how to handle cases of abuse and created a report on abuse in football: <https://fifpro.org/media/qxuhr0av/no-more-silence-action-against-abuse.pdf>

The **World Players Association** launched **Establishing Effective Safe Sport Entities**, a guide on the key principles and essential functions of entities established to address and remedy the scourge of abuse in sport. It was developed together with **The Army of Survivors** and the **Sport & Rights Alliance**, the guide provides with a clear benchmark to ensure safe sport entities are able to prevent, investigate and respond to abuse in a manner that protects the safety, humanity, dignity and voice of impacted athletes.

1. They are definitely not involved enough. Most sports governing bodies do not give them any voice or if so, a voice with limited influence within a governance structure controlled by clubs, regional leagues and federations officials. Sports organisations are generally resistant to inclusive and collective governance.
2. In Chile, for example, the player’s union has come up with a Protocol against abuse in football, which was incorporated by the Football Federation: PROTOCOLO-2021-DIAGRAMACION.pdf (anjuff.cl)

FIFPRO’s No more silence report is also a very good educative compilation <https://fifpro.org/media/qxuhr0av/no-more-silence-action-against-abuse.pdf>

1. One of the key issues is that players and their unions need to be involved in the design and implementation process, because when the player’s perspective is not considered, the regulations tend to fail, as some angles will be missing. Also, the reporting mechanisms need to be easy to reach and absolutely confidential: it is not just enough to have a reporting mechanism. Education is key, both for the players to know their rights and learn when and how to set boundaries, and where to report eventually, but also for all the club environments. Everybody needs to know the rules, very clearly and apply them.

If a system of reporting is regulated, it really needs to work well in practice, because otherwise it can put players in danger when they report.

Gender diversity is key as well in the deciding bodies and in the investigation phase. This is both because of the content and the different perspectives that ender give, but also because of the feeling that this gives to the players that report, which should not be underestimated.

1. In order to prevent violence against women and girls the first step is to educate, from a very young age. And to educate the context of the sport that the women and girls (and their parents/tutors) are practicing: the coaches, the personnel, the trainers, the nutritionists, the physios, everyone. This education needs to be continuous and structured.

There should be rules set clearly to prevent a coach, for example, from being alone with a girl, or a female player. Something like the 4-eye principle used in Finance, should be implemented, where there should be always at least 4 eyes, and as much diversity, including gender diversity in the personnel as possible. There should also be rules set on the contact that is allowed, and what is normal and what is not, in terms of a coach for example reaching out on a Friday night to a player, even if it is with the pretext of a match or a training.

Generally, as the No more silence report of FIFPRO states, the following would be the main recommendations:

1. Culture change, from top-down, recentring the players wellbeing, safety and representation at the heart of the sport
2. Zero tolerance commitment through greater understanding and transparency
3. The whole system should be supported by a multi-disciplinary expertise
4. There should be trusted and independent reporting mechanisms
5. There should be an expert and safe investigatory process
6. There should be an educated and diverse decision-making body
1. <https://fifpro.org/media/3eols2ok/2017-fifpro-women-football-global-employment-report-final.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://fifpro.org/en/supporting-players/competitions-innovation-and-growth/global-employment-market-for-women-s-football/four-key-learnings-from-fifpro-s-women-s-world-cup-player-survey> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://inside.fifa.com/social-impact/campaigns/no-discrimination/media-releases/fifa-and-fifpro-release-report-on-the-social-media-protection-service-at-the> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/02/21/haiti-fifa-failing-sex-abuse-survivors#:~:text=%E2%80%9CIn%20Haiti%2C%20FIFA%20and%20the,initiatives%20at%20Human%20Rights%20Watch>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)