

June 25, 2024

To:

Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls

From:

Stichting Women Win

Follow up to the expert consultation on violence against women in sport

This input is a follow up to the expert consultation on violence against women in sport, held online on June 14, 2024. Women Win had the pleasure of being invited and participating in this consultation, which we would like to follow up with some additional input and views that we believe lacked representation during the consult.

We call for inclusion of more diverse voices and organizations in this and similar invite-only consultations. We find concerning the number and proportion of single-issue organizations invited to the consultation, ones that focus their work exclusively on advocating for single-sex spaces in sport and otherwise, by exclusion of trans, non-binary, intersex, and gender non-conforming people. While there were a number of participants advocating for gender-based inclusion in sports, we were surprised to find that ILGA World – a prominent human rights global organization which advocates for inclusion of all LGBTI peoples – was not. Women Win, as well as several other organisations, received support from ILGA in submitting the original input on violence against women and girls in sport, alongside ILGA submitting their own input. ILGA hold valuable knowledge and relevant perspective on inclusion of trans, non-binary, intersex, and gender non-conforming people and should thus be included in consultations on these matters.

Violence against women and girls in sport is a real and pressing issue, one that will not be solved by exclusion of trans, non-binary, intersex, and gender non-conforming people, but by addressing safeguarding mechanisms and imbalanced power structures that allow real perpetrators of violence to shape women's and girls' experiences in sport. We therefore appeal for more targeted gathering of insight from organizations addressing gender-based violence in sport.

Furthermore, we want to emphasize how the exclusion of groups from sport and other spaces, based on their gender and other identities, is a dangerous precedent that will affect more than just the spaces in which it is set. As a global multi-dimensional women's fund established in 2007 to address the enormous lack of girl-centred sports programming, Women Win has been fortunate to walk side-by-side with our partners and co-design innovative sports initiatives that empower girls. From our very beginning, we have committed to partnering closely with local organisations to shape inclusive and responsive sports programmes unique to the needs of each community. Women Win has worked in 100+ countries across all continents. In 2023, we regranted over EUR 6 million

to 240 grassroots groups and collectives, registered and unregistered organisations, individuals, activists, and social enterprises in 87 geographies. These partners work to advance gender justice through diverse approaches, including, but not limited to, sports and play-based methodologies.

In our partners' and our own work, we witness sports not only having positive outcomes for individuals, but also being proven means to social inclusion and a successful strategy to achieve gender equity, serving to dismantle prejudice and stereotypes, while building social cohesion and solidarity. Proactively including trans, non-binary, intersex, and gender non-conforming people into sports does not just benefit them, but also their teammates and their communities. Such intentional inclusion can encourage individuals to speak out against discrimination, lead to a more reflective understanding of gender, and foster a more welcoming and safer environment that inevitably translates to attitudes held by wider communities and the society.

In contrast, fear-based campaigns aiming to exclude trans women and girls from sports have violent real-life consequences and threaten the safety of trans, non-binary, intersex and gender non-conforming people, and fail to address the real threats to the safety of cisgender women and girls. These campaigns are fuelled by misinformation and anti-gender actors, while ignoring the needs and experiences of trans people. In a Europe-based survey on experiences related to sexual orientation and gender identity within sport, more than half of the trans participants reported feeling excluded or at one point having to stop participating in sports due to their gender identity. Trans women reported the highest percentage of negative experiences, including verbal threats, physical violence, cyberbullying, and discrimination, with a significant percentage of perpetrators being coaches.¹ Exclusion from sports and other spaces based on gender identity denies individuals and groups their right to sport, and thus justifies and increases overall discrimination and violence towards already vulnerable groups.

While the conversation during the expert consultation on violence against women in sport steered primarily toward the professional and competitive sport, it is the amateur and recreational sport that engages most people actively. As the discussion of fairness and inclusion in professional sport unfolds (addressing the much pressing questions of forced hormone testing and unnecessary medical therapies), it is pertinent to remember that any precedent set in professional sports will cascade to amateur sport and to communities where recreational sport is practiced. If professional sport excludes groups based on their gender identity, it justifies all sport and our societies to do the same. When this precedent is set, it has consequences that reach far outside of sport.

Without the intentional inclusion of girls, women, gender non-conforming, non-binary, and trans people, these groups face a range of serious human rights violations in sports,

¹ Menzel, T., Braumüller, B. & Hartmann-Tews, I. (2019). The relevance of sexual orientation and gender identity in sport in Europe. Findings from the Outsport survey. Cologne: German Sport University Cologne, Institute of Sociology and Gender Studies.

including documented instances of sexual violence perpetrated by cisgender male coaches, trainers, sponsors, and others. It is crucial to focus on these real and pervasive issues rather than diverting attention by inaccurately portraying trans women as a threat. Such diversions not only misrepresent the situation but also undermine the experiences of survivors of sexual violence in sports. Women Win remains committed to tirelessly working in partnership towards a sports world that champions equality and honours all identities.