

Official Submission of the International Olympic Committee

Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls

1. Introduction

Sport is recognised as an important enabler of sustainable development¹. Sport-based programmes have been demonstrated to empower women and girls in tackling gender-based violence and ensuring more inclusive, equitable and healthy communities.²

Violence and abuse affect societies world-wide across sectors and population groups, with women and girls among the most affected groups. As a reflection of society, sport is not exempt from this phenomenon, and indeed has been argued to enable violence and abuse via organisational practices and structures. Research, primarily from Europe and North America, reveals that up to 64% of women and girls in sport experience some form of gender-based violence (GBV), predominantly in the form of sexual harassment³. This issue spans all levels and disciplines of sports and affects participants globally. Among LGBTQI+ communities, transgender women and women with natural sex variations are reported to be amongst the most vulnerable to violence and abuse, due to high levels of stigma and lack of organisational support⁴. There are also concerns regarding prevalence among young elite athletes, though recreational and lower-level competitors may also face abusive behaviours, especially from peers.

Efforts to address violence against women and girls in sport must prioritise inclusivity, safety, and rigorous oversight. It is crucial to recognise that GBV and abuse in sport can extend beyond girls and women athletes to include women coaches, support staff, officials, and journalists, as well as boys, men and nonbinary persons. To address these challenges within the Olympic Movement, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) seeks to address systemic

¹ United Nation (2015). Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>

² UN Women (2016). One win leads to another: Empowering women and girls through sport. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/News%20and%20events/Stories/2016/One-Win-Leads-to-another.pdf>

³ Brackenridge CH, Fasting K (2002). Sexual harassment and abuse in sport: The research context. *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 8(2): 3–15.

⁴ Karkazis K, Carpenter M (2018). Impossible "choices": The inherent harms of regulating women's testosterone in sport. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 15: 579–87; Hartmann-Tews I, Menzel T, Braumüller B (2021). Homo- and transnegativity in sport in Europe: experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in various sport settings. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 56: 997–1016. Hargie ODW, Mitchell DH, Somerville IJA (2017). 'People have a knack of making you feel excluded if they catch on to your difference': Transgender experiences of exclusion in sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 52: 223–39; Hamdan JL, Shipper AG, Roth S, et al (2023). Disparities in sport participation of transgender women: A systematic and scoping review protocol *BMJ Open*, 13: e074054; Human Rights Watch (2020). They're Chasing Us Away From Sport. Available at: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/12/lgbt_athletes1120_web.pdf; Ipsos (2023). Une majorité de Français considère les milieux sportifs comme étant homophobes, 6 September. Available at: <https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/une-majorite-de-francais-considere-les-milieux-sportifs-comme-etant-homophobes>; Rapport Trans & Sport (Charlie Fabre, Raphael Szymanski, 2022) : https://drive.google.com/file/d/14vExDnvMEVKdVDMYvI5dg19nkWGmB_vw/view?usp=drive_link; LGBTQphobies dans le sport, (FSLGBT+ IPSOS, 2023) : <https://www.sports-lgbt.fr/perceptions-et-experiences-de-lhomophobie-et-de-la-transphobie-dans-le-sport-et-attentes-pour-lutter-contre/>; Enquête interne sur les LGBTQphobies dans le sport (FSLGBT+, 2023) : https://drive.google.com/file/d/1cTDgLG8gSzFPp302SErteDKugAkaoyVr/view?usp=drive_link



issues that make women and girls in all their diversity particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence and abuse, while leveraging on the important role of sport as an enabler of women and girls' empowerment.

2. Sport as a human right

The IOC aims to promote health and wellbeing for all, by providing safe and inclusive sporting environments within the Olympic Movement. The practice of sport is a human right, as enshrined in the Olympic Charter. So, too, is non-discrimination a defining value of Olympism. To ensure the human rights ambitions of the Olympic Charter are reflected in the practice of sport, concerted efforts are required. Actions to support inclusion, non-discrimination, safety, respect for basic needs and a healthy environment are outlined in the [IOC Strategic Framework on Human Rights](#), through which the IOC supports all members of the Olympic Movement to uphold internationally recognised human rights.

The IOC Strategic Framework on Human Rights, which is aligned with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, informs the IOC's work on the pursuit of gender equality and safeguarding. It outlines several cross-cutting principles that apply to the protection of all women and girls in sport, including:

- **Equality and non-discrimination:** referring to any form of distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference which is based on personal characteristics that are protected under international human rights law. Personal characteristics include age, race or ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, national or social origin, political or other opinion, religion or other status.
- **Safety and well-being:** Everyone is entitled to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, and sport can be a key contributor to physical, mental and psychosocial well-being. This also requires taking active steps to prevent harm – whether from harassment and abuse or from unsafe working conditions.
- **Voice:** Everyone has the right to freedom of speech, freedom of association and peaceful assembly. More broadly, where decisions may affect people's lives or well-being, the perspectives of those who could be affected should be taken into account through meaningful engagement.

Additionally, the IOC has released the [IOC Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-discrimination on the basis of Gender Identity and Sex Variations](#). The Framework recognises that both transgender athletes and athletes with sex variations face unique risks of harm, both through the practices associated with eligibility rules and through unsafe and unwelcoming sporting environments.⁵ Through this Framework, the IOC aims for the Olympic Movement to be safe for and inclusive of all women, regardless of their transgender status or presence of sex variations.

3. Challenging systemic gender-related factors that enable violence and discrimination

Sport can serve as a powerful tool for challenging societal norms, by actively combating violence against women and girls and by challenging stereotypes, providing safe spaces, and engaging men and boys in prevention efforts. However, it can also be a potential environment for all types of interpersonal violence.

The IOC adopts the socioecological model for interpersonal violence in sport, which allows for the systematic consideration of how personal, interpersonal, organisational, community, institutional, and societal factors intersect to create the conditions under which harassment and abuse occurs. By bringing a gendered lens to the

⁵ Martowicz M, Budgett R, Pape M, *et al.* (2023). Position statement: IOC Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity and Sex Variations. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 57: 26–32.



socioecological model, the IOC considers how gender-related factors in sporting environments influence violence and abuse.

In addition to safeguarding-specific interventions (see section 3), IOC efforts to address violence and abuse in sport encompass wider actions to tackle structural challenges to the pursuit of gender equal and safe sport. The IOC's [Gender Equality and Inclusion Objectives 2021-2024](#) focus on participation, leadership, safe sport, resource allocation and portrayal. In what follows, we highlight the importance of (1) advancing gender equality across all levels of sports participation and decision-making, and (2) addressing gender stereotypes in the portrayal of women and girls.⁶

Advancing gender equality across the Olympic Movement

The IOC has been advancing gender equality at Games time by allocating – for the first time in Paris 2024 – an equal number of qualifying places to men and women athletes, encouraging joint flagbearers since Tokyo 2020 and ensuring a gender balanced sports programme. Nonetheless, women in sport continue to face widespread underrepresentation on and off the field of play. In the NOCs delegations to Tokyo 2020, women held only 20% of chefs de mission and 13% of deputy chefs de mission positions. Similarly, women represented only 13% of coaches. The average NOC Executive Board is composed of 73.7% men versus 26.3% women and only four IFs are led by a woman. In response, in 2022, the IOC enshrined the principle of a balanced representation of genders (minimum of 30% of each gender) within its [Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance](#), applicable to Olympic Movement stakeholders.

To reinforce the impact of this work, the IOC supports NOCs, IFs, and local communities through a range of [Olympic Solidarity assistance programmes](#)⁷ and [Olympism 365](#) programmes improving equality, diversity and inclusion across communities⁸. These initiatives increase opportunities for under-represented groups to benefit from sport, promote gender equality in and through sport and support programmes that use sport to challenge discrimination.

In parallel, NOCs are actively working to increase the representation of women and girls through the development of targeted gender equality strategies. According to the 2023 NOC Survey, 90% of NOCs have a gender equality action plan. Numerous leadership trainings are also organised at the national level to empower women to break the glass ceiling.

The gender stereotypical portrayal of women and girls in sports plays an important role in normalising harassment and abuse⁹, as demonstrated by studies linking gender stereotyped media with greater tolerance for harassment and violence¹⁰. According to a [2018 UNESCO study](#), only 4% of sports media is dedicated to women. The low representation of women and girls in sports media is compounded when coverage reinforces gendered stereotypes and biases, such as via the sexualisation of women athletes. In response, the IOC's [Portrayal Guidelines](#) promote the gender-equal, fair and inclusive representation of women and girls by NOCs, IFs and sports media. The IOC is also increasing the number of women in the Olympic Broadcasting Service team. By increasing the positive visibility of women in all their diversity on and beyond the field of play, sports coverage can minimise representations of gender that contribute to violence and abuse.

⁶ For more details, see [Gender Equality in Sport \(olympics.com\)](#).

⁷ See, for example, [WISH programme: Empowering female coaches on the road to Paris 2024 \(olympics.com\)](#)

⁸ See in particular the "Gender equality through sport Bridging Project and Sport, Equality, and Inclusive Communities Impact Network." Available at: <https://olympics.com/ioc/olympism365/sport-equality-inclusive-communities>

⁹ Santoniccolo F, Trombetta T, Paradiso MN, Rollè L (2023). Gender and media representations: A review of the literature on gender stereotypes, objectification and sexualization. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20(10): 5770.

¹⁰ Galdi, S., Maass, A., Cadinu, M. (2014). Objectifying media: Their effect on gender role norms and sexual harassment of women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 38(3): 398-413.



4. Safe Sport for Women and Girls

Prevention and response: a shared responsibility

Violence against women and girls in sport is a worldwide concern, needing a globally coordinated effort with local solutions. Responsibility for action lies with both governments and public authorities and sport organisations. As the leader of the Olympic Movement, the IOC promotes and helps facilitate cohesive strategies to prevent violence in the context of sport, including at the national level. Collaboration across sectors is essential to prevent violence within and beyond sports, with opportunities to improve safeguarding within sport and integrate sport into national prevention plans.

The IOC safe sport activities, underpinned by a public health approach and applying the socioecological model described in section 2, address multiple dimensions of violence and abuse.

- 1) Regional safeguarding hubs.** The IOC recently allocated a \$10 million fund to establish independent safeguarding systems and structures at regional, national, and local levels focused on response. This includes the establishment of pilot regional safeguarding hubs in Southern Africa and the Pacific Islands, building on existing initiatives as a proof of concept, and the groundwork for a European hub. These hubs aim to foster collaboration between the world of sport, governments and civil society, as well as to facilitate access to care and support locally individuals harmed by interpersonal violence in sport, coordinating trained investigators and safeguarding officers and highlighting gaps in sporting and non-sporting safeguarding ecosystems.
- 2) Education and capacity-building initiatives.** The IOC Certificate “Safeguarding Officer in Sport” program educates individuals worldwide, with a total of 252 students from 84 countries set to graduate by May 2024. Moreover, training is provided to the IOC Athletes’ Commission members as Safeguarding Focal points and to wider networks of Athletes Commissions around the world, creating additional safe sport ambassadors globally. The recurrent IOC Safeguarding Needs Assessment Tool helps IFs gauge and monitor their status in installing trauma-informed reporting mechanisms, investigative mechanisms and disciplinary sanctioning systems. While this work is ongoing, 85% of Olympic IFs now have a reporting mechanism in place to receive safeguarding concerns in and/or outside of their sporting events. In addition, Olympic Solidarity funding supports NOCs and national sport federations to strengthen safeguarding policies and practices at the local level¹¹. Safeguarding and prevention of harm and abuse are also integral parts of Olympism 365 strategy, with direct investment in programs ensuring access to safe and inclusive sports for all.
- 3) Olympic and Youth Olympic Games.** The IOC provides various tools to raise awareness, educate, support, and share good practices with all participants. Tailored safeguarding education programs for Olympic athletes have been developed and tested during the past three Youth Olympic Games. The data show: high

¹¹ Within the framework of the Olympic Solidarity 2021-2024 Plan, under the Olympic Values programme, a total of around 150 NOC projects have included objectives relating to safeguarding. At the time of the last data export at the end of October 2023 the exact number was 136. Out of these 136 projects, 15 were focused exclusively on safeguarding in sport or had a very strong safeguarding component. Olympic Solidarity also financially supported 102 NOC scholarships toward the IOC Safeguarding Officer in Sport Certificate Course, with the candidates representing 71 NOCs. In addition, using the Athletes’ Commission (AC) grants, in 2023 a total of 19 different NOC ACs delivered an activity that included safe sport. In 2022, there were 15 NOC ACs and in 2021 there were 11 NOC ACs delivering such activities.



appreciation of the IOC educational tools, an increasing number of athletes (+70%) being aware of support services offered during the Youth Olympic Games, and +80% of athletes feeling comfortable reaching out to an IOC Safeguarding Officer in case of a safeguarding concern. Currently, an AI-supported monitoring tool to identify online abuse targeting athletes is being tested. Following a successful pilot during Olympic esports week in June 2023, the system will be implemented during the Olympic Games Paris 2024 and the Paralympic Games Paris 2024.

- 4) **Transgender athletes and athletes with sex variations.** The IOC Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity and Sex Variations supports Olympic Movement stakeholders to hear directly from transgender athletes and athletes with sex variations, identify harms that can occur to such athletes in the context of sport and develop policies that support their health and wellbeing. Through the Framework and supporting tools and resources, IFs can avoid making assumptions about an athlete simply because they are transgender or have sex variations. IFs are also supported to identify how, from the grassroots to the elite level, stigma compromises the ability of such athletes to access sporting environments. For example, studies show that trans athletes often do not feel safe in changing rooms.¹² The IOC opposes practices of sex testing, which create harmful environments for all women and girls.¹³
- 5) **Research** – IOC prioritizes strengthening the evidence base on interpersonal violence in sport by providing research grants and convening world leading academics in consensus meetings. The upcoming IOC consensus statement on safeguarding athletes—anticipated during the second half of 2024—will translate scientific knowledge into actionable insights for sports organisations.

¹² Jones BA, Arcelus J, Bouman WP, Haycraft E. (2017). Sport and transgender people: A systematic review of the literature relating to sport participation and competitive sport policies. *Sports Medicine* 47(4): 701-716.

¹³ Hamdan JL, Shipper AG, Roth S, *et al* (2023). Disparities in sport participation of transgender women: A systematic and scoping review protocol. *BMJ Open* 13: e074054; see for example Ingle S (2023). Sweden players had to show their genitalia at 2011 Women's World Cup, says Nilla Fischer. *The Guardian*, June 12. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2023/jun/12/sweden-players-had-to-show-their-genitalia-at-2011-womens-world-cup-says-nilla-fischer>