**Government of Republic of Serbia**

Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue

Belgrade, 8.04.2024.

*Response of the Republic of Serbia to the Questionnaire of the UN Special Rapporteur for Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the UN General Assembly on violence against women and girls in sport*

*Unofficial translation*

The problem of violence in sports has been the subject of research, analysis and professional gatherings of the athletes themselves, sports workers and various experts (psychologists, pedagogues, sociologists and others). Serbian Boxing Federation recently suspended and convicted for doping and abusing girls minors in Republic of Serbia two boxing coaches (Aprile 2022).

Research shows that 40% of young athletes recognize and report violence by another athlete, and 63% by coaches. Pointing to the forms of violence that occur, as well as the frequency, we can say that in addition to those visible forms, there are also those that are harder to see and covert, and very serious forms of violence against children in sports.

The part of the research that related to reactions in the case of violence showed that as many as 35.1% of respondents accept the violence of teammates as inevitable and are ready to endure it (of which 14.9% feel bad in such a situation), while the rest declare that violence does not bother them. About 16% of those who experienced peer violence retaliated to it in the same way. A very small percentage of athletes seek the protection of adults (4.3%) or friends (6.6%). In the case of violence by coaches, children turn to their parents more often - 40% of those who complained about violence to someone. During the study, the question arose as to whether children understood which events the word violence referred to, so we have to start from the assumption that the awareness of what is allowed/not allowed is still relatively low.

Research shows that locker rooms are the places where violent behavior most often occurs, and where, unfortunately, coaches commits some form of violence against a female athlete - physical, psychological, sexual. Recently, female athletes, like all other women, have dared to report sexual violence, which is significant in the process of systemic protection against violence.

According to research, violence can leave the following consequences: Physical: bruises, scratches, various injuries, unusually frequent injuries; Physiological: problems with eating (reduced/increased appetite), headache, stomach pain, increased pressure, arrhythmia, sugar problems, sleep problems (insomnia, increased sleep); Psychological: fear, anxiety, concentration problems, aggressiveness, irritability, anger, uncontrolled expression of emotions, reduced self-confidence, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideas - in the last situation, suicide; Increase in risky behaviors: use of alcohol and/or psychoactive substances, stimulants - doping, self-injury; Difficulties in communicating with others: withdrawal, isolation, frequent conflicts, "quarrelsomeness", blaming others for every slightest failure and others; Worse results: achievements in sports activities, leaving sports earlier, resistance to going to training, children's academic success declines.

Two recommendations of the Committee for the Rights of the Child were introduced into the Law on Sports from 2016, but it is necessary to additionally build a protection system on those bases. In Article 4 the Law stipulates that, in the field of sports, any type of malpractice, abuse, discrimination and violence towards children is prohibited.

In terms of the obligation to protect children, as a mamber of Convention for the Rights of the Crihld the Republic of Serbia passed/amended a number of laws in various areas, and the system of coordinated protection was established by the General Protocol for the Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect. Child protection from abuse and neglect is ensured through the Criminal Code, the Family Code and the Social Protection Act. The Law on the fundamentals of the education system introduces a full ban on any form of violent behavior towards children, strengthened by the ban on discrimination in educational institutions. In order to better operationalize the aforementioned legal norms, a separate by-law was adopted - the Rulebook on the protocol of behavior in the institution in response to violence, abuse and neglect.

Until the adoption of the Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence for the period from 2020 to 2023, sport was not even recognized as an area in which it is necessary to provide children with protection. The Strategy aims to ensure a continuous comprehensive response of society to violence against children through an improved system of prevention, protection, and support. Strategy envisages the inclusion of children in the creation of programs for the prevention of violence against children from the earliest age, as well as in their reporting to the Working Group for monitoring the implementation of this Strategy.

General Protocol for the Protection of Children from Violence (2022) defines more than 20 forms of violence against children. Local agreements/protocols on intersectoral cooperation in the process of protecting children from violence, abuse, and neglect have been adopted in 39 municipalities in Serbia, clearly demonstrating significant progress.

In 2023, the ministries in charge of sports, internal affairs, justice and health developed the Draft Special Protocol for the Protection of Children from Violence in Sports and Sports Activities and the Manual for the Implementation of the Special Protocol, which, with the expert support of the civil society organization - Užice Center for Children's Rights in the reconciliation process. The basis for drafting the Special Protocol has already been adopted, which is in accordance with the General Protocol for the Protection of Children from Violence.

The activities take place through the project "Support to the sports sector in the prevention and protection of children from violence" implemented with the support of the European Union as part of the "Dialogue of Change" and in partnership with the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue, the Republic Secretariat for Public Policies of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the University of Belgrade. Sports federations, civil society organizations, experts from the world of sports participated in the drafting of the Protocol. One of the participants of the focus group was the Football Association of Serbia, which answered the submitted questions within the framework of its jurisdiction.

The Мanual for the implementation of the Special Protocol for the Protection of Children from Violence in Sports and Sports Activities is intended for all organizations in the field of sports; associations that achieve the goals and contents of their work in the field of sports, to all persons who participate in the work of those organizations, regardless of the basis on which they are associated with the organization; to children engaged in sports and sports activities, their parents and guardians, as well as to all those interested in the well-being of children, their upbringing without violence and the development of positive, humane values in society.

In accordance with the Law on the Police, the police have an obligation to investigate cases of abuse and neglect of children, as well as to undertake all necessary activities in terms of preventing violence against them. The Ministry of Internal Affairs adopted a Special Protocol on the behavior of police officers in the protection of minors from abuse and neglect. In the institutional system for the protection of victims from all forms of violence against women/girsl, regardless of age, social status, education and other differences, the police has the ability to temporarily prohibit the perpetrator of violence from approaching the victim and contacting her, as well as to temporarily remove the perpetrator from their place of residence, which empowered victims to report violence. The Ministry of Interiror has opened a free-of-charge available 24/7 a telephone line 0800 100 600, for the purpose of reporting incidents of violence. Registration of violence can be performed anonymously. In addition to the powers in the sphere of criminal protection, the public prosecutor can initiate a total of 11 protection measures.

By applying the Law on social protection establishes numerous measures to support the victims of violence - immediate help and protection are primarily provided by Centres for Social Work (141); provision of counselling-therapeutic and socio-educational services, SOS telephone service providers for women and girls who are victims of violence, financed by the local self-government, which is still insufficient.

The Government Coordination Body for Gender Equality is established with the mandate to coordinate the work of government bodies and other institutions in order to improve gender equality and the position of women and girls in Serbia.

The Ministry of Tourism and Youth participates in the implementation of the Integrated Response to Violence against Women and Girls project, which is jointly implemented by UNDP, UNICEF, UN WOMEN and UNFPA, with key ministries. From January 2024, this project entered a new phase, which will last three year, 2024-2026, ander a new title „Endig violence-empowering change“. The project "Safety of Women and Girls in Public Spaces" is helping to conduct national survey on the topic of safety of women and girls in public spaces. #*SafeEverywhere*. The Project "Integrated Response to Violence Against Women and Girls in Serbia III" is also being implemented.

With the support of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry of Education, one of the most successful female basketball coaches, Marina Maljković, has been implementing programs to popularize and destigmatize women's sports since 2015. In addition to sports activities, psychological educational and creative workshops are held within the program as a response to the increasing presence of violence in society, especially the increase in peer violence, as well as the fact that 60% of girls aged 7 to 14 do not play sports due to poor financial conditions and poverty of parents and guardians. In September 2020, the "Institute for Women's Sports" was founded, which with an inclusive approach at the end of 2023 included over 7,000 girls who train 20 current sports for free in 55 locations. The year-round sports program, which is held in 20 Serbian cities and smaller local communities, is carried out with the professional support of more than 50 top sports experts. The Institute for Women's Sports has a medical team consisting of 2 doctors, 2 psychologists and 1 physiotherapist. Accordingly, the engagement of our professional team is on a daily level, within the framework of individual interactions, or group activities.

Among the main goals of the Institute for Women's Sports is the adoption of useful skills and techniques for overcoming dysfunctional behavior as a way of preventing and reducing the number of cases of peer violence, the development of self-control and the ability to manage emotions, as well as the development of social skills, communication and assertiveness. In 2023, more than 20 group educational workshops were held throughout Serbia, where girls, their parents and coaches were introduced to all forms of violence, including cyber violence, recognition and self-regulation of emotions. During the year, more than 100 individual conversations with parents and children were carried out within the framework of individual psychological assistance and the contribution of personality development and support to girls by associates within the professional body of the Institute.

As part of the celebration of International Women's Day in 2022, the Institute, in cooperation with UN WOMEN in Serbia, launched the campaign # Play Against Stereotypes, which drew attention to the fact that girls who play sports face stereotypes and patriarchal traditions every day, in school, in sports and society. The results of the research, in which female athletes from various sports answered questions about the characteristics of gender stereotypes and the experience of gender discrimination in sports, indicate that stereotypes related to the sports performance of girls significantly violate the dignity of female athletes. The majority of sportswomen who participated in the research believe that sports in which men participate receive more recognition, and a quarter of judges do not believe in the possibility of establishing gender equality in sports.

One of the recommendations of the Institute for Women's Sports is the inclusion of more female coaches. This facilitates better understanding and communication with girls, achieves a higher level of their trust and security. Although there are more male trainers in Serbia, the number of male and female trainers in the Institute is equal, which is justified by the results achieved.

Within the Olympic Committee of Serbia, the "Women and Sports" commission was formed, which regularly meets on various topics about the status of girls and women in sports. One of the topics is violence against girls and women in sports.

**Answers of the Serbian Football Federation:**

1.According to the research conducted by the Serbian Football Federation, violence that women and girls face is present in every possible form. From the football point of view, discrimination is present on every level and for every female involved in football; players, coaches, staff, management, referees, volunteers, journalists.

However, in Serbia, mechanisms are being developted in order to lower the level of issues mentioned above. Therefore, FA of Serbia introduced a massive campaign in 2021 called „Football is for Girls“ trying to showcase all the wonderful ladies in sports but also help future generations feel supported if they choose to chase their dream.

2.Right to Equality as a major Human right has been violated for women and girls in sports. This led the progress of the level of unsafety ladies feel.

3.Fans, parents, coaches, non-supportive environment.

4.Football still being treated as a means sport, predjudices such as they will look like tomboys, become lesbian, etc.

5.Women and girls all ages face violence, mostly verbal one.

6. FA of Serbia together with Ministry of Sports is developing framework, policies and educational material to lower the level of violence and create support system for those facing any issue on this matter.

7.Policies created with relevant State institutions will allow federations such as Football federation of Serbia to have a procedure that will act on reported cases. This has been introduced under the Child Safeguarding program within the FA of Serbia developed by the guideliness by the UEFA.

8.The research that policies are based on were conducted among girls and women in football.

9.Ministry of Sports has created working groups that include actors such as Football Association of Serbia that is directly responsible on working on this matter.

10.Firstly, this is a never-ending activity and something that should be updated regulary. Ministries and sports federations cannot work without the support of Police and Social Services which are procedures now being worked on.

11.Those who are commiting violence needs to be banned from sports for good. There is no greater message and way for the women to feel safe unless they see that someone is watching, reacting and making sure some things never will happen again.

Recommendations of The Government Coordination Body for Gender Equality: As for all other forms of gender-based violence, the areas of prevention should include the necessary mechanisms, from providing a legislative strategic framework, strengthening the capacity of human resources for education on gender-based and sexual violence, awareness-raising campaigns aimed at women, mentoring programs for future women leaders, increase the number of women in management positions in sports to promotion of good practices in media.