



PLAYING IT SAFE

*A glimpse of the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur
on the sale and sexual exploitation of children*



UNITED NATIONS
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¹ A/HRC/40/51, 27 December 2018, available at <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/40/51>

WELCOME

Dear Reader,

From very young ages children take to a playing field, dive into a pool, tumble on a floor mat, run on a track ...in pursuit of fun, fitness, companionship and comradery. Sport, for many, will remain a lifelong interest. For a few there will be dreams of greatness and glory – of becoming a champion, an Olympian, a Commonwealth Games medalist, or a player in the World Cup. Whether the dream is big and life-changing, or simply the joy of everyday sport, the life of a child is forever altered if that child experiences sexual abuse or exploitation. Dreams are shattered, joy eroded, hearts and minds and bodies destroyed.

There are roughly 2 billion children in the world.² Many – if not most – of them are engaged in sport at various levels. While a small percentage emerge as elite athletes, the majority of children in sport are amateurs ...they are children playing. Whatever their degree of achievement they come in contact with coaches, teachers, trainers, referees, umpires, and in some cases agents and traders. In sport at all levels, children have a right to be safe and secure. And most children are.

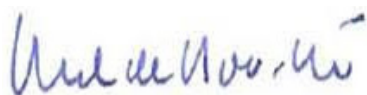
However, my 2018 report on the sale and sexual exploitation of children in sport indicates that many children, the world over, are unprotected in their sporting activities. Children are most at risk in such situations as the locker-room, the playing field, trips away, the coach's home or car and social events. Irrespective of race, colour, nationality, religion or belief, social origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ability, children are most at risk of being sold, trafficked, sexually exploited and otherwise violated in the very spaces they should be safe, enabled and empowered.

My report found that sexual abuse of children in sport is rife. This same report showed that many other human rights violations continue, including trafficking of young players between clubs, child labour (in particular during the build-up to major sporting events), child abuse and economic exploitation. The fear of being outed, shamed, disbelieved or blamed keeps victims silent. Others are simply not able to recognise abusive relationships. Child athletes' aspirations are ruptured by the life-crippling trauma of sexual abuse. Frequently, it's the power dynamics and the lack of independent oversight inherent in the sporting industry that render children vulnerable to the horrific tragedy of child abuse.

This publication is designed to bring my report home to those who are in one way or another responsible – directly or indirectly – for children experiencing sport. The findings of the report may be disturbing. However there are good examples of the 'world of sport' taking action to protect children and to remedy the harms that have already been done to them. These examples can be taken to scale. It's vital that sports organisations put in place measures to identify, prevent, mitigate and address such abhorrent crimes. There are concrete recommendations for further actions that can be taken by government officials, as well as by coaches, parents, member of a club or team, and sport leaders.

It is time to break the silence and end impunity. No sports setting should be immune from scrutiny and accountability for committing heinous crimes against children. At the same time, my report is an urgent call to end denial and take action now.

Sincerely,



Maud de Boer-Buicchio
UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children



2 <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/vacs/index.html>

MAIN FINDINGS AND KEY MESSAGES

The UN Special Rapporteur's Report confirms that most children do play safely in their sporting activities. It also clarifies, based on available data, that children are exposed to violence and exploitation in sport. Two highlights:

- Children are particularly comprised, in terms of contracts, in football. From not having contracts at all, to relying on intermediaries, to issues with transferring players, children are exposed to exploitation. In athletics, transfers and the absence of contracts, has also resulted in the exploitation of child athletes. Third-party ownership has been banned in football/soccer; however, the practice continues and, again, exploitation is a potential outcome. Football academies for child athletes in some parts of the world are sites of child abuse where children are commodified, have little say in their destinies. Finally, there are reported incidents of child trafficking in sport. The data is incomplete but what exists is cause for concern, from basketball to baseball to football. Their youth, their desire to play their sport, familial hopes for them and potentially a better life abroad render these athletes as potential prey to traffickers.
- Every month new stories emerge about the sexual abuse and exploitation of young people in the very spaces they should have no fear - their playing fields, their athletic centers, their hockey and skating rinks, and their swimming pools. Yet the UN Special Rapporteur's report found that children are sexually abused by coaches, team doctors, and others who are in contact with them. This abuse spans full spectrum of sport, and has no gender or geographic boundaries. Child athletes are, it seems, especially at-risk of sexual violations in locker rooms, on trips away, in the home or car of a coach, or on trips away. What makes athletes vulnerable? Adults have access to them in private spaces, children are keen to please coaches, parents and other authority figures, and children are afraid to report for a range of reasons. In many cases there is no safe way to tell anyone ...and of course there is shame.





Many of us are parents or caregivers or just people who care about children. That alone should be a reason to make sure children are safe in sports activities. However, the UN report and its recommendations are nested in a framework of laws and policies that derive their legitimacy from existing norms and standards that are being put into practice. Those laws stem from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to International Labour Organization (ILO) standards, as well as international statutes pertaining to trafficking, organized crime and tourism ethics. Some of these international treaties bind governments as well as private entities, and they are often translated into national statutes so they can be readily applied. Regional laws also apply to the protection of children in the context of sport. Europe is noteworthy for a treaty that specifically mentions the protection of those involved in sport. In short, there are laws on the books and they apply to everyone.

In addition to laws, there are principles to be implemented when it comes to the safety and security of children in sport. 2011 ushered in specific principles related to business and human rights. These are principles for countries to adhere to, for businesses to recognize and act on. Uniquely, they also mention remedies for those who have been harmed. For private enterprises, be they sport organizations or producers of sports equipment, this is a clarion call to assess the extent to which they are adhering to international human rights principles and to take action where there are gaps. Importantly, businesses are also responsible for remedying situations where human rights – including and especially the human rights of children – have been violated. While principles are not legal instruments, they are a powerful incentive for everyone involved in sport, public and private, to do some stocktaking, and make some changes in the interests of children.

Safeguards and standards are other means of protecting children in sport. For example, in 2014 the International Safeguards for Children in Sport were launched. This tool helps guide those involved in sport for children as they promote safety and security. Use of these measures is effective.



The International Safeguards for Children in Sport

The Safeguards aim “[to] create a safe sporting environment for children wherever they participate and at whatever level, [to] provide a benchmark to assist sports providers and funders to make informed decisions, [to] promote good practice and challenge practice that is harmful to children, and [to] provide clarity on safeguarding children to all involved in sport”.³ Importantly, the Safeguards should be implemented and evaluated with the participation of children at the institutional level of the sport organizations.⁴ A Self-Audit Tool has been developed to monitor the impact of the Safeguards.

Key findings: Sports organizations understand the need for child safeguarding measures and the value of engaging in the process; and the individual awareness of the importance of safeguarding has increased.

³ <https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/International-Safeguards-for-Children-in-Sport-version-to-view-online.pdf>

⁴ https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Implementation-Guide-for-organisations-who-work-with-children-A5-version-re.pdf?_ga=2.49850278.1085384475.1540217687-453417853.1532081316













HERE'S WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Keeping children safe - in whatever sport they play - requires urgent and decisive action. There are things for governments, public and private organizations, as well as individuals to do. A summary of government/state action is found directly below. This is followed by a summary for sporting organizations, coaches and parents. Further details and examples of effective action form the final part of this document. More details can be found in the full UN Special Rapporteur's report.














A SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATES

Governments and States should take steps to:

1. RATIFY and put in place international laws that protect children 
2. HAVE clear and sweeping national laws that protect children from sale and sexual exploitation in all settings 
3. MAKE sure sports organizations are liable entities when children in sport are violated – sanction and end impunity 
4. PUT laws in place to have mandatory background checks of any individual working directly with children 
5. INVESTIGATE, prosecute swiftly all who are responsible 
6. PROVIDE child victims all-encompassing care, recovery and rehabilitation services and consult with them in the rollout of such services 
7. CREATE commissions to look into historic cases 
8. VICTIMS – help them and make sure harms are ‘repaired’ 
9. PUT human rights at the core of bids for major sporting events and look into their impacts 
10. STATES hosting major sporting events should engage with children so they can genuinely participate; provide reporting systems for violations; make sure there are laws to deal with traveling offenders 
11. SUPPORT data collection 
12. LAUNCH and support awareness raising campaigns on safe sports and on how to prevent child rights violations in the practice of sports 

A SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS TO SPORTING ORGANISATIONS

Sporting organisations should take steps to:

1. GET INFORMED about the laws that are already on the books to protect children 
2. CONDUCT background checks for anyone in your sport who will have access to children 
3. HAVE awareness raising events regarding the protection of children, and include children and parents 
4. DEVELOP ethical codes of conduct – include everyone involved, including parents and young athletes 
5. MAKE sure your actions connect with local and national child protection systems 
6. UNDERSTAND responsibilities to report violations at the individual and organizational level 
7. BECOME aware of child safeguarding – what it means and how to train everyone in your sport 
8. PUT safe reporting systems in place and tell parents, children and anyone involved in the sport how to access them 
9. REMOVE barriers to children who have been violated accessing justice 
10. HELP child victims – believe them, remove blame and shame 
11. MAKE sure internal reporting systems link to official/national systems of law enforcement and justice 

Entities and individuals in the sporting worlds of children are **governed by the laws** of the country in which you are active. All involved in sports with children **need** to know what the laws are, and to know these laws will be enforced. Those laws must call for background checks for anyone working directly with children in sport.

NO IMPUNITY. NO ONE WILL GO UNPUNISHED.

Sports organizations should be aware that they will be subject to laws that investigate, punish and redress abuses. Further, if sporting organizations allow or participate in the sale or sexual exploitation of children, they will be held accountable. Knowledge building and awareness raising activities for those involved in sport for and with children are so important.

Ethical codes of conduct should be developed within all sporting organizations. There are several examples of these that can guide those who are new to protecting children. Sporting organizations must also set up a way for cases of violations to be reported. These must be accessible to children, and provide support. However, these should be closely linked to child protection networks and legal frameworks that exist in the country and/or local area. Obligations to report must be well understood by everyone involved with children in sport – no one and no entity is exempt.





Ethical Codes of Conduct

An ethical code of conduct should be written with the reader in mind. It should be clear and comprehensive. Leadership needs to be fully supportive, engaged and committed to the development of and adherence to the code of conduct.

Several sports federations have adopted codes of conduct that offer some form of protection to children. For example, numerous institutions have incorporated the same language as that contained in the **International Olympic Committee (IOC) Code of Ethics**, including the **Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB)** and the **World Squash Federation (WSF)**.⁵ The **International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)** and the **International Boxing Association (AIBA)** both supplement their respective Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics with policies on sexual harassment.⁶ Additionally, the **Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA)** has adopted a Code of Ethics that includes an ethical principle on dignity prohibiting all forms of harassment, be they physical, psychological, professional or sexual.⁷ The **International Cricket Council (ICC)** has similar provisions in its Code of Ethics, as does the **International Handball Federation (IHF)** in its Ethics Code.⁸ Moreover, the **International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF)** includes in its Code of Ethics the prohibition of all forms of physical, verbal, mental or sexual harassment in athletics.⁹

Ethical codes of conduct need to be put in practice. This often takes on the form of 'safeguarding' and it is increasingly being used in the world of sport and children. There are many examples of safeguarding training that must be rolled out for, by and within sporting organizations. There are professionals in many parts of the world prepared to assist with the development of ethics codes of conduct and safeguarding training.

5 http://www.fivb.org/EN/FIVB/Document/Legal/FIVB_Disciplinary_Regulations_2018_20180504.pdf; <http://www.worldsquash.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Code-of-Ethics-V2.3-Inc-Appendices-Clean.pdf>

6 <https://www.iihf.com/IIHFMvc/media/Downloads/Regulations/2018-IIHF-Code-of-Conduct.pdf>; https://d152tffy3gbaeg.cloudfront.net/2018/07/AIBA-Conduct-policy_Final.pdf

7 http://www.fina.org/sites/default/files/logo_fina_code_of_ethics_as_approved_by_the_ec_on_22.07.2017_final_0.pdf

8 https://www.ihf.info/sites/default/files/2019-06/0_0_Ethics%20Code_GB.pdf

9 <https://www.iaafethicsboard.org/Content/downloads/Code-of-Ethics-Revised-26November2015.pdf>



What is safeguarding?

Child safeguarding is defined as the responsibility that rests with organisations and professionals whose work either brings them into contact with, or has an impact on, children to safeguard them from harm and promote their welfare.

Child safeguarding commits organisations to considering how their programmes, operations and funding may lead to the abuse and exploitation of children. It requires organisations to risk assess their work and put in place a variety of measures which can help prevent abuse and exploitation. It also compels all concerned to respond when violations have occurred.

Safeguarding provisions have to include secure ways for children and others to report violations and concerns. There are many examples of how this can be done. Importantly, children should not be re-victimized by having to tell of their experience multiple times when they come forward to report. Appropriate linkages need to be made to local law enforcement and child protection actors. Parents and caregivers need to be part of this process. Education of parents in the context of sport is extremely important. Where the tendency may be to neglect reporting for fear the child will be forced out of his or her sport sporting organization. Sporting leaders need to inform parents about mandatory reporting. Adults, including parents, coaches and others, must report if they suspect there has been any harm to a child.

Access to justice is crucial for children who have experienced violations. All barriers, human, financial and other, should be addressed by leadership in sport. To the maximum extent possible sporting organizations should offer their cooperation and support to victims.

NEW IOC INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE HOTLINE FULLY OPERATIONAL



OPEN TO ATHLETES, COACHES, REFEREES AND THE PUBLIC, THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE (IOC)'S INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE HOTLINE IS NOW FULLY OPERATIONAL. THE WEB-BASED HOTLINE, WHICH WAS LAUNCHED LAST APRIL, OFFERS A NEW REPORTING MECHANISM FOR POTENTIAL CASES OF COMPETITION MANIPULATION AS WELL AS OTHER VIOLATIONS OF THE IOC CODE OF ETHICS. REPORTS CAN BE MADE ANONYMOUSLY, AND ALL INFORMATION RECEIVED IS DEALT WITH CONFIDENTIALLY.

Internal Reporting Mechanisms – the International Olympics Committee (IOC) example

Violations of code of conducts or ethics have to be reported through internal mechanisms and will be referred to ethics or disciplinary commissions and boards. Where children have experienced violations and where these are governed by national law they **must** also be officially reported.

The IOC has an Ethics and Compliance Hotline and complaints may be referred to the Ethics Commission.¹⁰ The Youth Olympic Games Framework for Safeguarding Athletes also provides reporting obligations and guidelines. All reporting mechanisms need to be legitimate, accessible, predictable, equitable, transparent, rights-compatible and a source of continuous learning.

Leaders in sport have a big impact on improvements in the safety and security of children. Sporting organizations are encouraged to have greater gender equality at all leadership levels. And leaders need to speak up about the protection of children in the world of sport. Their voices resonate powerfully. This is part of awareness raising, of changing minds and hearts.

10 <https://www.olympic.org/news/new-ioc-integrity-and-compliance-hotline-fully-operational>



Gender in Sport

More women in leadership positions in sport will directly impact child protection. Gender discrimination is especially evident at the governance level in sport. For example, the European Institute for Gender Equality noted that on average women make up 14 per cent of decision-making positions in the continental confederations of Olympic sports in Europe. Of particular concern, only 20 to 30 per cent of all sport coaches are women.¹¹ The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has adopted Gender Equality Recommendations that include five specific recommendations related to governance. Importantly, one calls for “ensuring that women have roles of influence and decision-making responsibilities in the organisation’s administration and governance.”¹² The International Football Federation (FIFA) also adopted a Women’s Football Strategy that includes the pledge to broaden female representation in football decision-making at the highest levels. It aims to have, by 2022, at least a third of women as FIFA committee members and to increase the number of qualified female coaches.¹³ An increase in the number of female referees would also be a positive step for the sport, and for the protection of children.

None of this is to suggest that men and boys are immune from sale and sexual exploitation in sport, of course! All children – irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, or indeed any other attribute – should be safe from harm in sport.

11 <https://eige.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/mh0215937enn.pdf>

12 <https://www.olympic.org/-/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/News/2018/03/IOC-Gender-Equality-Review-Project-Recommendations-Overview-March-2018.pdf>

13 <https://resources.fifa.com/image/upload/women-s-football-strategy.pdf?cloudid=z7w21ghir8jb9tguvbcq>

When involved in major sporting events these same sport leaders must never lobby for weaker protections where children are concerned. Human rights, including the rights of children to play safely, are increasingly part of bidding for major sporting events and this trend needs to continue.

2026 FIFA World Cup Bid

The bidding process for the 2026 incorporated an assessment of human and labour rights risks, including for children. This was an historic 'first' and an important step forward in the protection of children in major sporting events.

Wherever possible sporting organizations and all those involved should contribute to data on children in sport. A solid evidence base helps investigators and those providing help to children whose rights have been violated. A data base will also, over time, demonstrate that things are improving, that organizations and individuals are steadily getting better at protecting children as they play and develop in their sport. There are ways to do this within a particular sport, and in partnership with academic institutions and a variety of other actors.

ACTION FOR CHILDREN

Cricket – West Indies Cricket (WIC) supported awareness raising activities for young female cricketers, coaches, managers and officials about exploitation and abuse in their sport. They developed measures to be taken in the case of abuse. The training and awareness raising continues during major regional tournaments.

Gymnastics – Following a large scale case of child sexual abuse in USA gymnastics, legislation was passed by the Congress of the USA to address the sexual abuse of minors and amateur athletes. It requires prompt reporting to law enforcement authorities. Furthermore, the US Center for Safe Sports was tasked to become the reporting mechanism for allegations of sexual abuse.¹⁴

Football – In 2017 in Melbourne, Australia, the Football Federation of Victoria (FFV) issued a tool called 'Child Protection and Football – a guide for FFV clubs'. Comprehensive and clear, the guide makes specific reference to the legal framework that governs the safety and protection of children in and out of sporting contexts. It commits clubs to take specific action to implement what is prescribed in the guide.

Multiple Sports – In countries across the world there have been national initiatives to protect athletes and children. Among these: the Child Protection in Sport Unit in the UK,¹⁵ the U.S. Center for SafeSport,¹⁶ the Child safe sport framework in Australia,¹⁷ the Contre les abus sexuels dans le sport programme in Switzerland,¹⁸ and the #AbusoFueradeJuego campaign in Spain.¹⁹

Swimming – The Canadian Amateur Swimming Association developed procedure and guideline for the protection of children in swimming. These include guidance on referrals, investigations, a code of conduct, and information on prevention. The guideline also refers to a reporting line, and the role of child welfare officers.

14 https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/19d733f8-a241-4c15-8c9a-af3aa943c0e8/314646DC3794D40C9B08B BE92E6B1784.thune-feinstein-ans-to-s534.pdf

15 <https://thecpsu.org.uk/>

16 <https://safesport.org/>

17 https://www.sportaus.gov.au/integrity_in_sport/child_safe_sport

18 <https://www.swissolympic.ch/fr/federations/prevention/contre-les-abus-sexuels.html>

19 <http://www.csd.gob.es/csd/promocion/abusofueradejuego/>

MORE ACTION FOR CHILDREN

The **Commonwealth Games Federation** has Child Rights and Safeguarding in the host bid criteria for both the 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games and 2022 Commonwealth Games, where the Host City Contract includes specific clauses addressing child rights. Also, the CGF put safeguarding policies and processes in place at its last Youth Games in Samoa (2015) and the Bahamas (2017). The Commonwealth Games Association Roles and Obligations provisions agreed in 2018 for its national affiliate bodies to also include commitments for the implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and child safeguarding.

FIFA sought UN support to develop recommendations on what it means for its organisation to take respect for human rights on board globally. This inspired FIFA to amend its statutes, develop a human rights policy, and establish an Independent Human Rights Advisory Board. While the Board advises on human rights issues broadly it has a special concern for children. Most recently FIFA issued guidance on the safety and protection of children in football.

The **International Association of Athletics Federations** responded to a sharp increase of nationality changes before major competitions by amending, in 2018, the Regulations on Eligibility to Represent a Member in National Representative Competitions. Now athletes must have a genuine connection with the country or territory they represent. Athletes' welfare is protected throughout the transfer of allegiance and young athletes are protected from exploitation.



International Olympic Committee launched in 2017 a toolkit for International Federations and National Olympic Committees on Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport. This document provides detailed examples and recommendations on how to proceed in cases of harassment and abuse.²⁰ The IOC has developed a series of educational tools, including an interactive tool on sexual harassment and abuse in sport. At the 2018 Youth Olympic Games, the IOC raised awareness about its toolkit and directly addressed child athletes to ensure that they were aware about their rights and what constitutes abuse.²¹ In addition, during the 2016 Olympic Games there was an IOC Safeguarding Officer tasked to deal with reports of harassment or abuse.²² As part of its toolkit for International Federations and National Olympic Committees on Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport, the IOC additionally calls for the presence of safeguarding officers during any sport competition.

The **International Netball Federation** put in place a safeguarding officer during the Netball World Youth Cup.²³

The **International Tennis Federation** adopted a Player Welfare Programme in 2007 that included a welfare policy explicitly addressing sexual conduct, prohibiting any sexual abuse or conduct towards a player under the age of 17 or under the age of legal majority.²⁴

World Players Association, which represents organized players from across professional sport, has adopted a Declaration on Safeguarding the Rights of Child Athletes. The Declaration is based on a child rights approach and places the best interests of the child at the heart of any involvement of children in sports. It identifies five actions areas, with one focusing on the recruitment and training of any personnel working with children.²⁵

World Federation of Sporting Goods Industry requires member companies and their suppliers to apply international standards with respect to forced and child labour.²⁶

Protecting children from sale and sexual exploitation in sport will not only keep them safe, but they will also benefit from all that safe sport has to offer. They will enjoy moments of physical excellence, develop team spirit, and experience self-fulfilment. Fair play and freedom from fear and discrimination are what all children need, have a right to, and they are within our reach.

Independence and autonomy in sporting institutions are key principles. But they should not blur responsibility in the sports sector. They need to coexist alongside the safety and security of child athletes.

ACT NOW, BREAK THE SILENCE, LISTEN, SUPPORT, ENCOURAGE, HELP TO HEAL.

20 <https://www.olympic.org/athlete365/safeguarding/>

21 <https://www.olympic.org/news/athletes-engaging-with-safesport-at-the-yog>

22 <https://www.olympic.org/news/ioc-launches-toolkit-for-olympic-movement-to-safeguard-athletes-from-harassment-and-abuse-in-sport>

23 <https://www.olympic.org/athlete365/safeguarding/>

24 <https://www.itftennis.com/media/281615/281615.pdf>

25 https://www.uniglobalunion.org/sites/default/files/files/news/world_players_declaration_on_safeguarding_the_rights_of_child_athletes.pdf

26 <https://www.wfsgi.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/WFSGI%20Code%20of%20Conduct%202016.pdf>

