

Fight against hate speech in sport

An OMC Group report

A report by the OMC Group
Fight against hate speech in sport
2026

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Introduction

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group on “Fight against hate speech in sport” was established under the EU Work Plan for Sport 2024–2027 within the priority area “Integrity and values in sport.” Its mandate focused on addressing two interrelated dimensions: 1) the growing influence of social media and the prevention of online verbal abuse, and 2) the manifestations of verbal and physical violence during sporting events. The OMC Group was tasked with producing non-binding recommendations aimed at Member States and relevant stakeholders, with the objective of reducing hate speech in sport through enhanced cooperation, policy analysis, and the exchange of good practices.

The mandate reflects the recognition that sport plays a central role in promoting European values such as tolerance, equality and solidarity, while also acknowledging that hate speech increasingly undermines these values. The phenomenon affects not only elite athletes but also participants at grassroots level, where children and young people are particularly exposed. Hate speech manifests both online and offline, often combining discriminatory language with forms of verbal aggression that can escalate into physical violence, thereby affecting the integrity of sport and its broader social function.

To fulfil its mandate, the OMC Group adopted a structured and collaborative working method over a period of approximately 20 months. The process combined evidence gathering, stakeholder consultation and comparative analysis across Member States. An initial survey collected information on national frameworks and practices. The collection was subsequently deepened through the collaborative work of four thematic working groups addressing legal and policy frameworks, data collection, good practices and preventive measures. Regular meetings brought together Member State representatives, European institutions, international organisations and sport stakeholders, allowing for the integration of diverse perspectives and expertise.

This report highlights that hate speech in sport is a complex and systemic phenomenon that operates across multiple environments and governance levels. One of the central findings is the increasing interconnection between online and offline contexts. Incidents occurring during sporting events are rapidly amplified through social media, while online abuse frequently translates into tangible consequences for athletes, officials and supporters. This dynamic has significantly increased both the scale and the impact of hate speech, requiring responses that can address its hybrid nature.

Due to the severe consequences of hate speech, this report invites increased political attention to this topic, including further and deepened cooperation with the sports movement, taking into account its autonomy. It also stresses that hate

speech is in direct conflict with EU values; therefore, it is important to address hate speech in sport as part of the work to strengthen the European Sport Model.

This report highlights the need to prevent and protect children and young people from the harm of hate speech in sport, as they are particularly vulnerable to it. It also stresses the value of working on this from a gender perspective, focusing on how both women and men are affected.

A further key conclusion concerns the fragmented nature of the legal and policy framework across the European Union. There is no harmonised definition of hate speech in sport, and most Member States rely on general legal provisions relating to incitement to hatred, discrimination or violence. As a result, responses vary significantly across jurisdictions, leading to inconsistencies in enforcement, legal uncertainty in cross-border cases and unequal levels of protection for victims. This fragmentation is particularly problematic in the digital environment, where harmful content often circulates across borders and legal systems.

The report also identifies a multi-layered system of enforcement combining criminal, administrative and disciplinary mechanisms. Criminal law is reserved for the most serious forms of conduct, while administrative measures and disciplinary procedures within sport organisations allow for more immediate and flexible responses. However, coordination between these layers remains uneven, and gaps persist in the overall effectiveness of enforcement. In particular, the expansion of online hate speech presents significant challenges related to anonymity, jurisdiction and the rapid dissemination of content, limiting the capacity of existing frameworks to respond effectively.

Another major finding concerns the lack of reliable data and the widespread underreporting of incidents. Many cases of hate speech, especially at grassroots level, remain unreported due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust in reporting mechanisms or normalisation of abusive behaviour. This significantly limits the ability of policymakers and organisations to assess the scale of the problem and to design targeted interventions. At the same time, support systems for victims remain uneven and often insufficient, particularly outside high-profile contexts, which further discourages reporting and undermines effective response.

The analysis underscores that legal and enforcement measures alone are insufficient to address hate speech in sport. The phenomenon is deeply embedded in broader cultural and social dynamics, including supporter behaviour, media narratives and online interaction patterns. Preventive approaches, including education, awareness-raising and the promotion of inclusive values, are therefore essential components of a comprehensive strategy. These measures are particularly relevant in grassroots and youth sport, where early intervention can contribute to long-term cultural change.

In light of these findings, the report emphasises the need for a coordinated and multi-level response involving public authorities, sport organisations, international institutions and digital platforms. Strengthening cooperation across these actors

is essential to ensure coherent and effective action. Greater alignment of legal definitions and enforcement thresholds would improve consistency and predictability, while enhanced implementation of digital regulation—particularly under the Digital Services Act—would contribute to more effective management of online hate speech.

The report also highlights the importance of improving data collection systems and establishing accessible and confidential reporting mechanisms, enabling a more accurate understanding of the phenomenon. At the same time, reinforcing victim support services is essential to ensure that individuals affected by hate speech receive adequate protection and assistance. Within the sport sector, organisations are encouraged to strengthen their disciplinary frameworks and governance structures, ensuring accountability and consistency in addressing abusive behaviour.

Overall, the work of the OMC Group demonstrates that combating hate speech in sport requires a holistic and sustained approach that integrates legal, policy, educational and cultural dimensions. The recommendations put forward in the report contribute towards a structured and adaptable framework for Member States and stakeholders to enhance cooperation, strengthen existing mechanisms and promote a sporting environment that is inclusive, respectful and aligned with fundamental European values.

Context, mandate and role of the OMC Group

Sport can contribute to social integration and promote its values such as tolerance, equality, fair play and solidarity. These values, and those enshrined in article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), that uphold pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men are shared by the Member States (MS).

Hate speech can seriously affect sports people and their entourage at any level and undermine the integrity and positive values in sport and society. In recent years online hate speech in sport has increased considerably, facilitated by the increased use of social media platforms. It is thus important to address the increasing prevalence of hate speech in sport, not only in professional sports, but also in grassroots sports, where children and young people are often particularly affected by hate speech.

Hate speech can manifest online and at sport events. It is understood to include discriminatory language, derogatory comments or threats based on various factors, including race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. Attention is needed for the combined impact of verbal violence during sport events and online in sport that can aggravate the impact of hate speech. On some occasions, verbal violence during sport events degenerates into physical violence involving supporters, thereby disrupting sport events themselves. For instance, it can lead to fans being denied access to sport events altogether.

Despite an increased awareness about hate speech, public authorities as well as sports clubs and organisations face considerable challenges when trying to address it, such as lack of awareness about the impact of hate speech, prevention strategies, clear definitions and challenges with regards to sanctioning unacceptable behaviours.

The EU Work Plan for Sport 2024-2027 under priority area 1 “Integrity and values in sport”, Key topic “Fight against hate speech”, envisages work on two themes: 1) “Influence of social media and prevention of online verbal abuse” and 2) “Manifestations of verbal and physical violence during sport events”.

As a working method, the EU Work Plan for Sport foresees the creation of a dedicated Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group “Fight against hate speech in sport”. The scope of the OMC Group is further defined in a mandate.

The work of the OMC group will provide a framework for cooperation, exchange and sharing of good practices among MS and relevant stakeholders allowing for the development of non-binding recommendations for MS and relevant stakeholders in and outside sport.

In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity and in full respect of MS competences in the field of sport policy as laid down in the EU Treaties, the OMC

Group should investigate how to tackle hate speech in sport, online and at sport events, taking into account that verbal abuse may incite physical violence.¹

The key objective of this OMC Group is to make non-binding recommendations to relevant actors to enhance cooperation in this field, in view of reducing occurrences of hate speech in sport, based on policy analysis, examples of good practices and evidence on awareness raising on hate speech in sport; and on preventing and sanctioning actual occurrences of hate speech in sport.

Related to this OMC group on the fight against hate speech in sport, it should be mentioned that the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Action plan against cyberbullying "Safer online, stronger together" issued on the 10th of February 2026 recognises that this OMC *"is working on recommendations for Member States and stakeholders for the sport environment at large, including online. Its report is expected by the end of 2026 and will include recommendations to counter cyberbullying"*².

¹ The mandate can be found in Annex I of this report.

² eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52026DC0071

Method of work and decisions adopted by the OMC Group

The following meetings and actions took place during the approximately 20 months of duration of this OMC Group:

- *First meeting.* November 2024.

Spain and Italy were elected as chair and vice chair of the meeting. MS identified several potential permanent observers, and it was decided to launch them invitations to join the OMC Group in the referred status.

- *Launch of the first survey assessment to MS.* December 2024.

The chair and vice chair decided to launch a first assessment survey to MS to gather information from them related to hate speech in sport and advance on a future report.

- *Answers to the first survey assessment by MS.* February-March 2025.

Answers to the survey were provided by MS and compiled in a document drafted by the chair and vice chair. The document was distributed to all MS and observers before the second meeting of the OMC Group³

- *Second meeting.* April 2025.

Besides a presentation carried out by the Commission related to the Digital Act Service and an EU-level response to hate speech: legal framework, policy tools and the role of social media platforms, the main decision adopted by the OMC Group was the creation of the following 4 Working Groups (WG) to expand on the results of the initial survey:

1. Legal and policy framework WG.
2. Collection and analysis of data WG
3. Best practices available which can serve as a starting point WG
4. Future actions and the prevention of recidivism WG.

By collecting further information and data, each WG was asked to come up with a document that could contribute to the final report

- *Third meeting.* October 2025.

³ The questions posed in the assessment survey can be found in this [CircaBC folder](https://link.europa.eu/7CPJhk):
<https://link.europa.eu/7CPJhk>

The Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) presented the United Against Online Abuse (UAOA) campaign, founded in response to the pervasiveness of online abuse and harm within sport. Besides the presentation the OMC Group adopted relevant decisions related to the working methodology and timeline for drafting the OMC Group final report and its structure.

- *Fourth meeting.* March 2026.

The main decision of the OMC group was to create a drafting group formed by 5 representatives of MS. This group had the task of drafting a final document to include the 4 documents produced on the 4 different WG as well as an introduction chapter and a final one foreseeing a list of recommendations for MS and relevant stakeholders as set out in the EU mandate.

- *Final drafting group meeting.* April 2026.

A drafting group formed by Spain, Italy, Finland, France and Portugal worked on a final draft document in an in-person meeting that lasted 2 days. After the meeting a first final document was produced and distributed to the OMC members and observers before the final meeting of the group held in May.

- *Fifth meeting.* May 2026.

The OMC took the decision of adopting the draft final report, subject to a final editorial review.

Participants

The following Member States (MS), permanent observers and other institutions played a role or contributed in the works carried out by the OMC or attended meetings during its mandate:

- **MS:** ES (Chair), IT (Vice Chair), AT, BE, CY, DE, DK, EL, FI, FR, HR, HU, IE, LT, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, and SK.
- **Permanent observers:** Council of Europe, United Nations Counter Terrorism Office, FIFPRO, European Olympic Committee, European Leagues, Football Supporters Europe, UEFA and EU Athletes.
- **Other institutions or organisations:** European Commission (DG JUST), FIA.

Definitions of hate speech in sport for the purposes of this report

Hate speech in sport cannot be reduced to a single, universally accepted definition. As highlighted in Chapter 1, legal systems generally address hate speech through broader categories such as incitement to hatred, discrimination or violence, without developing sport-specific legal definitions. At the same time, policy frameworks, particularly those developed within the Council of Europe, adopt broader conceptual approaches that encompass a wider range of harmful expressions.

For the purposes of this report, we will adopt the definition put forward by the Council of Europe, which appears to be the most complete one, and which defines hate speech as *“the advocacy, promotion or incitement, in any form, of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well as any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat in respect of such a person or group of persons and the justification of all the preceding types of expression, on the ground of “race”, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics or status. It also recognizes that it may take the form of the public denial, trivialisation, justification or condonation of crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes which have been found by courts to have occurred, and of the glorification of persons convicted for having committed such crimes”*⁴

This approach allows the analysis to capture both conduct that may reach the threshold of criminal liability and conduct that, while not necessarily unlawful, is incompatible with the values of sport and has significant negative effects on individuals and communities.

⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-15-on-combating-hate-speech/16808b5b01>

1. Institutional context, legal framework and policies

1.1. Introduction

Within the overall architecture of the report, this chapter provides the legal and policy framework necessary to understand how hate speech in sport is currently addressed at international, European and national levels. It maps the principal normative instruments, institutional actors and policy tools, and identifies the main structural features of the current response.

To ensure conceptual clarity and avoid overlapping across chapters, a clear functional distinction is maintained throughout this report. This chapter focuses on the legal and policy architecture in which hate speech in sport is defined, assessed and addressed. The concrete manifestations and recurring patterns of hate speech in sport are examined in chapter 2, while chapter 3 presents a structured collection and analysis of operational practices and measures implemented in practice, finally chapter 4 shifts the focus from diagnosis to prospective action, trying to translate the analytical findings of the report into strategic visions for future policies and practices, with a particular emphasis on sustainability and long-term impact. Together, the four chapters provide a coherent progression from framework, to phenomenon, to response and foresight. The recommendations from the working groups are presented in the last chapter of this report, clustered by a functional and intervention-oriented logic.

The legal and policy environment addressing hate speech in sport is characterised by a high degree of fragmentation across jurisdictions, regulatory levels and institutional actors. There is no harmonised or universally accepted concept of “hate speech in sport”, and most Member States of the European Union (EU) rely on general criminal law provisions addressing incitement to hatred, discrimination or violence, rather than on sport-specific criminal norms. As a result, the regulation of hate speech in sport is embedded within broader legal frameworks, including anti-discrimination law, criminal law, victim protection regimes and digital regulation.

At a European Union level, the core legal and policy architecture is composed of a combination of binding and non-binding instruments. Central elements include the Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law, the Digital Services Act, the Victims’ Rights Directive, and a wide range of complementary policy initiatives, notably those developed within the High-Level Group on combating hate speech and hate crime. These instruments are supported by strategies, funding programmes and institutional mechanisms that contribute to shaping a coordinated response at EU level.

This EU framework is complemented and reinforced by standards, recommendations and monitoring mechanisms developed by international organisations, particularly the Council of Europe, the United Nations and OSCE/ODIHR. Among these, the Council of Europe has developed one of the most comprehensive normative approaches, combining human-rights standards, sport-specific instruments and case law from the European Court of Human Rights. These instruments provide both conceptual guidance and practical orientation for Member States and stakeholders in addressing hate speech, including in the specific context of sport.

Across these different levels, the report identifies three main types of regulatory and enforcement response: criminal, administrative and disciplinary. Criminal law addresses the most serious forms of conduct, particularly incitement to violence or hatred, and is subject to strict evidentiary thresholds and safeguards linked to the protection of freedom of expression. Administrative measures, such as stadium bans, exclusion orders and supervisory mechanisms, allow for more immediate and preventive intervention, especially in high-risk sporting environments. Disciplinary mechanisms operated by sports federations and governing bodies provide an additional layer of enforcement, often enabling more rapid and flexible responses through internal rules and sanctions. A central structural feature of the current system is therefore the interaction between public law and the self-regulatory frameworks of the sports movement.

One of the most significant challenges identified in the current framework concerns digital enforcement. The expansion of online hate speech targeting athletes, officials and supporters has introduced new complexities related to anonymity, jurisdiction, scale and speed of dissemination. The Digital Services Act represents a major step in addressing these challenges by introducing due diligence obligations for platforms and mechanisms such as trusted flaggers. At the same time, sports organisations are increasingly engaging in monitoring, reporting and cooperation with digital service providers. However, the effectiveness of these measures remains constrained by factors such as data protection requirements, cross-border enforcement difficulties and persistent underreporting.

1.2. International legal framework and legislation

1.2.1. European Union legal and policy framework

Criminal law within the European Union is only partially harmonised and remains primarily within the competence of the Member States. The Union may establish minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions only in areas of particularly serious crime with a cross-border dimension, and within

the limits set by the Treaties and by the obligation to respect fundamental rights and national constitutional traditions.

In this context, although the European Union has developed a wide range of legal and policy instruments relevant to hate speech, it has not adopted legislation specifically dedicated to hate speech in sport. As a result, sport-related hate speech is addressed through broader legal frameworks, including anti-discrimination law, criminal law, victim protection and digital regulation.

1.2.1.1. Constitutional framework and fundamental rights

The Treaty on European Union (TEU), the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union constitute the core constitutional framework within which hate speech is addressed.

Article 2 TEU establishes that the Union is founded on respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society characterised by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men.

Article 3 TEU further provides that the Union shall combat social exclusion and discrimination and promote equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and the protection of the rights of the child.

Article 6 TEU recognises the rights, freedoms and principles set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, giving them the same legal value as the Treaties.

At the level of the TFEU, Article 10 requires the Union, in defining and implementing its policies and activities, to aim at combating discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Article 19 provides a specific legal basis for adopting measures to combat discrimination. Article 67(3) establishes that the Union shall endeavour to ensure a high level of security through measures to prevent and combat crime, racism and xenophobia, including through coordination and cooperation between national authorities and, where appropriate, approximation of criminal laws.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights makes these principles directly operative within the EU legal order. Article 20 establishes equality before the law, while Article 21 prohibits discrimination on a wide range of grounds, including sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, language, religion or belief, membership of a national minority, disability, age and sexual orientation. Article 22 requires respect for cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, and Articles 25 and 26 recognise the rights of the elderly and persons with disabilities.

Taking together, these provisions provide the normative basis for addressing hate speech as incompatible with the Union's fundamental values and legal order, while also requiring that any restriction on expression be carefully balanced with

the protection of fundamental rights.1.2.1.2 *Criminal law instruments and developments*

Within this constitutional framework, the Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law remains the central EU legislative instrument addressing hate speech.

The Framework Decision requires Member States to ensure that intentional conduct consisting of public incitement to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group, defined by reference to race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin, is punishable as a criminal offence. It also covers related conduct such as the dissemination of racist and xenophobic material.

Although not specific to sport, the Framework Decision provides the essential legal basis for addressing the most serious forms of hate speech occurring in sporting contexts, where the relevant criminal thresholds are met.

In parallel, the European Commission has sought to strengthen the EU criminal-law framework through its Communication “A more inclusive and protective Europe: extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime” (COM/2021/777 final). In this Communication, the Commission proposed that the Council identify hate speech and hate crime as an additional area of crime under Article 83(1) TFEU, thereby enabling the adoption of minimum rules on their definition and sanctioning at EU level.

The Commission argued that hate speech and hate crime meet the criteria of particularly serious crime with a cross-border dimension, due to their impact on fundamental rights and their capacity to undermine the foundations of the Union. While this initiative has contributed to raising political awareness and framing the debate, its legislative implications are still evolving, and no amendment to the list of EU crimes has yet been adopted.

1.2.1.2. Digital regulation and online hate speech

The regulation of online hate speech has become a central component of the EU framework, reflecting the increasing prevalence of abuse targeting athletes, officials and supporters in digital environments.

The Digital Services Act (DSA) introduces a comprehensive regulatory framework for digital services, including obligations for online platforms to address illegal content. These obligations include due diligence requirements, transparency obligations, risk assessments and mitigation measures, as well as mechanisms such as trusted flaggers to facilitate the identification and reporting of illegal content.

In parallel, the Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online, originally established in 2016 as a voluntary agreement between the European

Commission and major IT companies, has played a significant role in shaping cooperation between public authorities, platforms and civil society. The Code aims to ensure the rapid assessment and removal of illegal hate speech, improve reporting mechanisms, enhance transparency and strengthen cooperation with civil society organisations. It has subsequently been integrated into the broader regulatory environment shaped by the DSA.

Despite these developments, significant challenges remain. The effectiveness of online enforcement is affected by factors such as anonymity, the scale and speed of content dissemination, jurisdictional complexity and data protection constraints. These challenges are particularly relevant in the context of sport, where online abuse often targets high-profile individuals but may also affect grassroots participants and vulnerable groups.

1.2.1.3. Victim protection and access to justice

The Victims' Rights Directive (2012/29/EU) establishes minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime across the European Union. It ensures that victims receive appropriate information, support and protection and can participate effectively in criminal proceedings.

Although not specific to hate speech or to sport, the Directive is directly relevant in cases where hate speech constitutes a criminal offence or generates comparable protection needs. It plays a key role in ensuring that victims of hate speech in sport are recognised, supported and protected within the criminal justice system.

1.2.1.4. Policy initiatives and strategic frameworks

In addition to binding legal instruments, the EU framework is supported by a wide range of policy initiatives and strategic documents.

The High-Level Group on combating hate speech and hate crime, established in 2016, provides a key platform for cooperation between Member States, EU institutions, civil society and international organisations. Its work focuses on developing practical guidance, facilitating the exchange of good practices and strengthening capacity at national and local levels. It has produced, among other outputs, guidance on the application of the Framework Decision and principles on victim support, reporting, data collection and cooperation between authorities and civil society.

The Joint Communication “No place for hate: a Europe united against hatred” (December 2023) represents a further step in strengthening the EU’s response. It promotes a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach, including stronger action against online hate speech, enhanced protection of vulnerable targets, and the mobilisation of sectors such as sport, culture and media. The Communication highlights the role of sport, and football in particular, as a platform for promoting

inclusion and countering racism and antisemitism, and encourages the use of major sporting events as opportunities to convey these values.

The Union of Equality: Anti-Racism Strategy 2026–2030 further emphasises the centrality of combating hate speech and hate crime within the EU’s anti-racism agenda. It identifies sport, alongside culture and education, as a key arena for promoting inclusion, equality and social cohesion.

The European Parliament has also contributed to shaping the policy framework through several resolutions. These include the resolution of 8 March 2022 on the role of culture, education, media and sport in the fight against racism, the resolution of 10 November 2022 on racial justice and anti-racism, and the resolution of 8 February 2024 on the implementation of the LGBTIQ Equality Strategy. These resolutions call for preventive measures, effective sanctions, support for victims and the promotion of safe and inclusive environments in sport and related sectors.

1.2.1.5. Institutional actors and cooperation mechanisms

The EU framework is further supported by a range of institutional actors and cooperation mechanisms.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) plays a key role in collecting and analysing data on hate crime and hate speech, providing evidence-based advice to EU institutions and Member States, and supporting improvements in reporting and data collection systems. It also coordinates the EU Working Group on hate crime recording and collaborates with organisations such as OSCE/ODIHR.

Cooperation with the sports movement is also an important dimension. The Arrangement for Cooperation between the European Commission and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) provides a framework for promoting equality, diversity and inclusion and for combating discrimination in football, recognising the role of sport as a vector for social change.

More broadly, cooperation between the European Union and the Council of Europe is particularly relevant in this field. The joint project “*Combating Hate Speech in Sport*” illustrates the growing importance of multi-stakeholder approaches combining legal expertise, policy development and practical implementation support.

1.2.1.6. Funding instruments and capacity-building

The EU framework is complemented by funding programmes that support the implementation of policies and the development of practical responses.

The Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) (2021–2027) aims to promote fundamental rights, equality, democratic participation and the rule of

law. It supports civil society organisations, public authorities and local actors, with a strong focus on grassroots initiatives, democratic resilience and the promotion of Union values.

The Justice Programme (2021–2027) supports judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters, promotes mutual trust between legal systems and facilitates access to justice. Its activities include training for legal professionals, support for the digitalisation of justice systems and the strengthening of cross-border cooperation mechanisms.

In the context of hate speech in sport, these programmes contribute to building institutional capacity, supporting preventive initiatives and enhancing the effectiveness of legal and policy responses across Member States.

1.2.2. Council of Europe

The Council of Europe provides one of the most developed and conceptually structured normative and policy frameworks for addressing hate speech, including in the context of sport. Its approach combines human-rights standards, sport-specific instruments and judicial interpretation, offering both a broad conceptual definition of hate speech and concrete guidance for its prevention and sanctioning.

A key reference point is the definition adopted by the Committee of Ministers, according to which hate speech encompasses all forms of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination against a person or a group of persons, or that denigrate them, based on real or attributed personal characteristics or status. These characteristics include, among others, race, colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation.

This definition is broader and more elaborated than many criminal-law definitions used at national level. It plays a central role in policy development, standard-setting and awareness-raising, and provides a conceptual framework within which sport-related hate speech can be identified and addressed, even where criminal thresholds are not met.

1.2.2.1. Early sport-specific standards

The Council of Europe's engagement with hate speech in sport predates the consolidation of the concept in its current form. Recommendation Rec (2001)6 of the Committee of Ministers on the prevention of racism, xenophobia and racial intolerance in sport provides an early and detailed framework addressing conduct that would today fall within the notion of hate speech.

The Recommendation calls on member States to ensure that legislation proscribes as criminal offences all acts and expressions, including the display of banners or symbols and the use of insults or chanting that incite violence or

discriminatory behaviour against racial, ethnic or religious groups or their members. It also encourages governments to work closely with sports organisations and clubs to ensure that internal regulations and stadium rules clearly prohibit racist slogans, symbols, gestures and chanting.

The measures envisaged include a range of sanctions, such as expulsion from stadiums, cancellation of season tickets, bans on future access, matches played behind closed doors and, where necessary, the interruption or discontinuation of sporting events. Although the Recommendation does not use the term “hate speech” in the same way as later instruments, it provides a comprehensive and operational approach to addressing discriminatory and inciting expression in sport.

1.2.2.2. The Saint-Denis Convention and the integrated approach

A central instrument in the Council of Europe framework is the Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events (the Saint-Denis Convention). This is the only legally binding international instrument specifically addressing safety, security and service in the context of sports events.

The Convention requires Parties to ensure that stadium management arrangements are comprehensive and coordinated, including effective cooperation between police, emergency services and other relevant actors. It also requires that policies and procedures address a wide range of risks, including violent behaviour, the use of pyrotechnics and racist or discriminatory conduct.

A distinctive feature of the Convention is its integrated three-pillar approach, combining safety, security and service. This represents a shift from a purely security-oriented model towards a broader framework that also considers spectator experience, prevention and engagement. Within this framework, the conduct of players, coaches and other representatives is also recognised as relevant, as their behaviour can influence that of spectators and contribute either to escalation or to de-escalation of tensions.

1.2.2.3. Thematic recommendations and specific forms of hate speech

The Council of Europe has developed a series of thematic recommendations addressing specific forms of discrimination and hate speech, many of which are directly relevant to sport.

Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)¹ on preventing and combating sexism identifies sexism and sexist hate speech in cultural and sporting environments as a significant concern. It encourages member States to promote zero tolerance

towards such conduct and to involve prominent figures in sport in challenging sexist assumptions and behaviours.

Recommendation CM/Rec (2022)¹⁶ on combating hate speech provides a comprehensive and updated framework, distinguishing between different categories of hate speech and encouraging member States to adopt effective legal and policy measures addressing both offline and online contexts.

Recommendation CM/Rec (2010)⁵ on measures to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity makes clear that homophobia, transphobia and related forms of discrimination in sport are unacceptable. It calls for sport to be accessible to all without discrimination and for effective measures to prevent, counteract and sanction discriminatory insults and behaviour. It also emphasises the importance of dialogue with sports associations and fan groups and the role of awareness-raising activities.

Taken together, these instruments illustrate the Council of Europe's approach of addressing hate speech not only in general terms but also through targeted measures responding to specific forms of discrimination and vulnerability.

1.2.2.4. The European Court of Human Rights and freedom of expression

The European Court of Human Rights plays a central role in defining the legal boundaries between freedom of expression and the prohibition of hate speech.

Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees the right to freedom of expression, which constitutes one of the foundations of a democratic society. However, this right is not absolute and may be subject to restrictions that are necessary in a democratic society for the protection of the rights of others.

Article 17 of the Convention prevents the abuse of rights and has been used by the Court to deny protection to expressions that seek to spread or justify hatred, discrimination or violence, particularly where such expression undermines the values of the Convention.

The Court has not developed a single, unified definition of hate speech. Instead, it has elaborated a body of case law identifying criteria for assessing when expression falls outside the protection of Article 10 or may legitimately be restricted. These criteria include the content and context of the expression, the intent of the speaker, the status of the person targeted and the potential impact on public order and the rights of others.

The Court has also clarified that criminal laws addressing certain forms of expression, such as the denial or minimisation of genocide or crimes against humanity, are compatible with the Convention under certain conditions. At the same time, it consistently emphasises that any restriction on expression must be proportionate and justified.

This jurisprudence is directly relevant to hate speech in sport, where the need to address discriminatory or inciting expression must be balanced with the protection of freedom of expression, including in emotionally charged environments such as stadiums and online platforms.

1.2.2.5. Relationship with the European Union and multilevel governance

The Council of Europe framework operates in close interaction with that of the European Union, contributing to a multi-level system of governance in which legal standards, policy initiatives and practical measures are developed across different institutional contexts.

Cooperation between the two organisations is particularly visible in joint initiatives such as the project “Combating Hate Speech in Sport”, which combines EU support with Council of Europe expertise in human rights, sport governance and standard-setting. This type of cooperation reflects the growing recognition that addressing hate speech in sport requires coordinated action across legal, policy and operational dimensions.

More broadly, the Council of Europe’s role in defining standards and providing guidance complements the EU’s regulatory and policy instruments, contributing to a coherent, though complex, framework in which Member States, international organisations and non-state actors all play a role.

The analysis of the European Union framework and the Council of Europe standards highlight several structural features that characterise the current response to hate speech in sport. These features reflect the complexity of the phenomenon and the need to address it through a combination of legal, institutional and operational tools.

1.2.3. United Nations

The United Nations defines hate speech as any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group based on religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or another identity factor. Within the UN system, the response to hate speech is rooted in international human-rights law, especially the prohibition of advocacy of hatred that incites discrimination, hostility or violence.

Two treaties are central in this regard. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1965 prohibits discriminatory speech and action and requires States to criminalise certain forms of hate speech, as well as the commission of or incitement to violence against any race, group of persons of another colour or ethnic group. It also obliges States to prohibit organisations and propaganda activities that promote and incite racial

discrimination. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides, in Article 19(3), that freedom of expression may be subject to restrictions where necessary for respect of the rights or reputations of others, and Article 20(2) requires prohibition by law of any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. These provisions form the core universal legal basis for addressing hate speech, including hate speech linked to sport where it reaches the relevant threshold.

It is important to also highlight broader UN political action. In July 2021, the UN General Assembly expressed concern over what it described as the exponential spread and proliferation of hate speech around the world and adopted Resolution 75/309 on promoting inter-religious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech. The resolution recognises the need to counter discrimination, xenophobia and hate speech and calls on all relevant actors, including States, to intensify their efforts in line with international human-rights law. It also proclaimed 18 June as the International Day for Countering Hate Speech, building on the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech launched on 18 June 2019.

Within the UN entities, UNESCO is particularly relevant to sport, education, digital governance and long-term prevention. Through the International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport, UNESCO affirms that access to sport is a fundamental right that must be exercised without discrimination. Although the Charter is not legally binding, it influences national sport policies, public funding frameworks and governance standards adopted by sports federations and ministries. In the logic of this chapter, that principle is important because it frames sporting environments, from grassroots to elite level, as places where dignity and equality must be protected.

Beyond sport-specific instruments, UNESCO has taken a leading role within the UN system in relation to hate speech and harmful digital content. Its work on digital governance, including the Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2021), promotes transparency, accountability and human-rights safeguards in online environments. Since a significant proportion of sport-related hate speech now occurs on social media, these standards are directly relevant to the sport context. UNESCO's approach gives priority to prevention through media and information literacy, counter-narratives and multi-stakeholder cooperation. Education is central to UNESCO's mandate and particularly relevant to long-term cultural change in sport. By promoting values-based education, intercultural dialogue and anti-discrimination training, UNESCO encourages sport to function as a vehicle for social inclusion rather than division. Integrating human-rights education into sport systems, especially youth sport, is presented as a way of increasing resilience against discriminatory ideologies and reducing tolerance for hate speech.

The Kazan Action Plan, adopted in 2017 under UNESCO's auspices, is also a strategic framework linking sport policy to the Sustainable Development Goals. It embeds principles of inclusion, equality and integrity into national sport strategies

and aligns sport governance with goals relating to reduced inequalities, peaceful societies and social cohesion. The Plan strengthens the expectation that discriminatory practices and rhetoric are incompatible with sustainable sport development. It also underlines the importance of governance and integrity systems in sport, including transparent decision-making, ethical codes and monitoring mechanisms, as institutional capacities that can help address misconduct such as racist or xenophobic speech.

The United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism a complementary preventive dimension. While UNOCT's mandate is primarily focused on counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism, it recognises sport as a strategic platform for resilience-building and youth engagement. Programmes supported by UNOCT use sport to promote social inclusion, positive identity formation and community cohesion. This is relevant because sustained discriminatory rhetoric can contribute to polarisation and, in extreme cases, to radicalisation. By strengthening community resilience and countering extremist narratives, UNOCT initiatives may therefore also address vulnerabilities that facilitate hate speech. UNOCT also supports Member States in the security planning of major sporting events. Although that work is centred on counter-terrorism preparedness, it enhances inter-agency coordination, risk assessment and strategic communication capacities that may also strengthen responses to organised hate campaigns or extremist mobilisation linked to sport. Its emphasis on strategic communications and counter-narratives is likewise relevant to efforts to challenge racist or xenophobic discourse circulating online in connection with sporting events.

1.2.4. OSCE – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, through its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, contributes to international efforts addressing hate crime and hate speech, including incidents connected with sport. ODIHR's role is centred on legal guidance, data collection, institutional capacity-building and policy development among participating States. This makes it particularly relevant in a field where one of the major challenges lies in distinguishing between offensive expression, discriminatory abuse and conduct that meets the threshold of criminal liability.

ODIHR has developed guidance clarifying the distinction between hate crime and criminalised hate speech, including practical considerations relating to bias motivation, evidentiary standards and prosecutorial practice. This guidance is relevant in sport, where discriminatory abuse directed at athletes, officials or supporters may raise questions about the boundary between offensive or unacceptable speech and punishable conduct. ODIHR promotes legal clarity and

consistency in the application of bias indicators, while emphasising respect for freedom of expression and due process guarantees.

Another key aspect of ODIHR's work concerns hate-crime data collection and monitoring. It supports participating States in improving recording systems, statistical reporting and victim-support mechanisms. Reliable and comparable data is essential for assessing the scale and nature of discriminatory incidents, including those linked to sporting events or online commentary related to sport, since underreporting and inconsistent recording continue to obscure the real scale of the phenomenon.

ODIHR also provides training and technical assistance to law-enforcement authorities, prosecutors and civil-society organisations. These capacity-building activities aim to strengthen the identification, investigation and prosecution of bias-motivated offences. Through policy dialogue and the exchange of good practices, the OSCE framework helps facilitate cooperation between public institutions and non-governmental actors. In the context of sport, this is especially relevant where effective response requires coordination between criminal-justice institutions, regulators, event organisers, sports bodies and civil society.

1.3. Sports organisations

Sports organisations constitute a central pillar in the overall system for addressing hate speech in sport. Alongside criminal and administrative law frameworks, they operate as autonomous regulatory actors capable of adopting and enforcing rules governing conduct within competitions, events and affiliated structures.

International sports governing bodies such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), International Paralympic Committee (IPC), FIFA, UEFA, the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), World Rugby or World Athletics, among others, have developed internal regulatory frameworks addressing discrimination, abusive behaviour and hate speech. These frameworks typically include codes of ethics or conduct, disciplinary regulations, sanctioning mechanisms and, increasingly, monitoring and reporting systems.

Disciplinary mechanisms within sport often allow for more rapid intervention than criminal or administrative proceedings, as they are not subject to the same evidentiary thresholds and procedural constraints. Sanctions may include fines, suspensions, exclusion from competitions, stadium bans, points deductions or matches played behind closed doors. In some cases, these measures can be applied preventively or in response to behaviour that does not meet the threshold of criminal liability but nevertheless undermines the integrity of sport or the dignity of participants.

The autonomy of sport enables organisations to adopt context-specific rules tailored to the particularities of each discipline and competition environment. At the same time, this autonomy is not absolute. It must be exercised in a manner consistent with fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, non-

discrimination and due process. This creates an ongoing need to balance internal regulatory flexibility with alignment to broader legal standards.

Sports organisations also play a preventive and educational role. Many federations and governing bodies have developed awareness-raising campaigns, diversity and inclusion strategies, and training programmes aimed at players, coaches, officials and supporters. These initiatives are intended to shape behaviour, reinforce shared values and reduce tolerance for discriminatory or abusive conduct.

At the same time, the effectiveness of these measures varies across sports, levels of competition and national contexts. The cases examined in Chapter 2 illustrate that, particularly at grassroots level, enforcement and prevention mechanisms may be uneven or insufficiently developed. This highlights the importance of strengthening governance structures, ensuring accountability and promoting consistency across the sports movement.

1.4. Trusted flaggers

The evolution of the digital environment has created new challenges for addressing hate speech in sport, particularly in relation to content disseminated through social media platforms. Within this context, the concept of “trusted flaggers”, introduced and reinforced under the Digital Services Act, has gained particular relevance.

Trusted flaggers are entities recognised for their expertise and reliability in identifying illegal content online. They are granted a privileged status in the reporting process, allowing their notifications to be prioritised by digital platforms. This mechanism is intended to improve the speed and effectiveness of content moderation, particularly in areas where rapid response is critical.

Sport organisations, including federations, leagues and clubs, are increasingly positioned as potential actors within this system. Due to their proximity to events, participants and supporter communities, they are often among the first to become aware of abusive or harmful content linked to sporting activities. Their involvement can therefore enhance detection and reporting capacity.

At the same time, effective participation in trusted flagger systems requires appropriate resources, expertise and coordination. Organisations must be able to identify content that meets the threshold of illegality, distinguish it from lawful but potentially harmful expression, and engage with platform procedures in a consistent and legally sound manner.

Cooperation between sport organisations, public authorities and digital service providers is therefore essential. Such cooperation can facilitate information-sharing, improve reporting mechanisms and support the development of common standards. It can also contribute to bridging the gap between online and offline

environments, ensuring that incidents occurring in connection with sporting events are addressed in a coherent and integrated way.

The relevance of these mechanisms is confirmed by the patterns described in Chapter 2, where online abuse often accompanies or amplifies events occurring in physical sporting contexts. Strengthening the role of sport organisations within digital reporting frameworks is therefore a key component of the broader response to hate speech in sport.

1.5. National legal framework and policies

1.5.1. EU Member States

At a national level, the legal and policy frameworks addressing hate speech in sport are characterised by significant diversity. Most EU Member States do not have sport-specific criminal provisions targeting hate speech. Instead, they rely on general criminal-law provisions addressing incitement to hatred, discrimination or violence.

These provisions typically require that a conduct reaches a certain threshold of seriousness, such as public incitement or the likelihood of provoking harm. As a result, many forms of abusive or discriminatory expression encountered in sport environments may fall outside the scope of criminal law, even where they have a significant impact on individuals and communities.

In addition to criminal law, many Member States have developed administrative measures aimed at preventing and responding to misconduct in sport settings. These may include stadium bans, exclusion orders, financial penalties, obligations to perform community service or other forms of administrative sanction. Such measures allow for more flexible and preventive intervention, particularly in contexts where rapid action is required to ensure safety and public order.

National policies may also include specialised bodies or coordination mechanisms involving ministries, law-enforcement authorities, sport organisations and civil society actors. These structures are often designed to address violence, racism and disorder in sport, particularly in football, but may also encompass broader issues related to hate speech and discrimination.

Despite these mechanisms, differences in legal definitions, enforcement practices and institutional capacity create inconsistencies across Member States. These differences can affect both the effectiveness of responses and the comparability of data. They also complicate cross-border cooperation, which is increasingly important in the context of international competitions and online environments.

1.5.2. Third countries

Approaches to hate speech in sport outside the European Union also vary widely, reflecting different legal traditions, constitutional frameworks and policy priorities. Some countries rely primarily on criminal law, while others emphasise administrative or regulatory approaches, including strong involvement of sports governing bodies.

In certain jurisdictions, specific legislation addressing violence, discrimination or misconduct in sport may exist, including provisions related to hate speech or discriminatory behaviour in stadiums and at sporting events. In others, general legal frameworks are applied in a manner similar to that observed in EU Member States.

These variations underline the absence of a unified global approach and highlight the importance of international cooperation and exchange of good practices. They also reinforce the need for flexible and context-sensitive policy responses that can accommodate different legal systems while promoting shared standards of protection and inclusion.

Across both EU and non-EU contexts, a common challenge remains the gap between formal legal provisions and their practical application. As illustrated in Chapter 2, many incidents occur in environments where enforcement is limited, reporting is incomplete and cultural norms may tolerate or normalise certain forms of abusive behaviour. Addressing these gaps requires not only legal tools but also effective governance, coordination and prevention strategies.

1.5.3. Legal and policy analysis

1.5.3.1. Criminal, administrative and disciplinary actions

Combating hate speech in sport requires a structured response that reflects the different layers of accountability available within legal and regulatory systems. Criminal law, administrative enforcement and disciplinary mechanisms each play distinct but complementary roles, while broader social and cultural measures contribute to long-term prevention. The interaction between these layers is one of the defining structural features of the current response to hate speech in sport.

- *Criminal law responses*

Criminal law represents the most severe form of intervention against hate speech connected to sport. Criminal proceedings are generally reserved for conduct that reaches a defined legal threshold, such as incitement to hatred, harassment, threats or communications that intentionally promote hostility against protected groups. In this sense, criminal law serves not only a punitive function but also a deterrent one, while affirming the protection of fundamental rights and the equal dignity of those targeted by discriminatory abuse.

A central feature of criminal proceedings is the burden and standard of proof. Authorities must demonstrate that all legal elements of the offence are satisfied, including intent, context and the harmful nature of the expression. The prosecution must establish guilt to a high evidentiary standard, reflecting the presumption of innocence. This requirement is essential from the perspective of the rule of law, but it also creates practical challenges in cases where language is ambiguous, rapidly disseminated, context-dependent or disguised behind irony, coded expression or mass online behaviour.

The expansion of social media has increased the relevance of criminal investigations in sport-related hate speech. Digital evidence, including publicly accessible posts, videos and private or semi-private messages where lawfully obtainable, frequently forms the basis of prosecutions. Investigators must ensure proper preservation and verification of online material and may need to rely on open-source intelligence, platform cooperation or forensic examination of electronic devices. Cross-border data storage and jurisdictional limitations can delay proceedings and complicate attribution, making international cooperation increasingly important.

Comparative examples outside the EU illustrate the range of criminal-law approaches. In the United Kingdom, hate speech and hate crime are addressed through existing public order and communications legislation, supported by detailed prosecutorial guidance issued by the Crown Prosecution Service. That guidance clarifies the distinction between hate crime and hate speech, the elements of offences, the burden of proof and applicable standards, and also provides operational instructions for digital evidence gathering and documentation of online material. In practice, UK authorities have prosecuted individuals for online racist abuse directed at professional football players following high-profile matches, using digital evidence such as social media posts, witness reports and forensic analysis of devices. Courts have imposed suspended custodial sentences, community orders, fines and compensation, and sentence uplifts have been applied where racist hostility has been established. The UK framework is also supplemented by regulatory oversight of online platforms under the Online Safety Act.

Other third-country models illustrate how differently national systems calibrate the relationship between freedom of expression and anti-hate-speech enforcement. In Canada, criminal liability for public incitement or wilful promotion of hatred requires a public communication and a high threshold of intent or likelihood, interpreted in the light of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In the United States, constitutional protection under the First Amendment significantly narrows the scope for criminal hate-speech laws, leaving only direct incitement to imminent lawless action, true threats or harassment outside protection. In Australia, federal and state legislation prohibit certain forms of racial vilification and offensive conduct through a mix of civil and criminal measures. In South Africa, constitutional law excludes advocacy of hatred constituting incitement to cause harm from freedom of expression protections, while the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act enables civil remedies

through equality courts. These examples show that criminal-law intervention in hate speech is deeply shaped by constitutional culture, legal tradition and the way each system balances expressive freedom with equality and protection against harm.

- *Administrative law responses*

Administrative responses operate at an intermediate level between criminal prosecution and internal sporting discipline. Public authorities may adopt regulatory or preventive measures aimed at maintaining public order, protecting athletes, officials and spectators and reducing risks within sporting environments. These measures can include exclusion orders, restrictions on attendance at events, monitoring obligations and administrative sanctions imposed without the need for full criminal proceedings. This makes administrative law particularly relevant in stadium contexts and other settings where timely intervention is essential.

Administrative enforcement typically relies on lower evidentiary thresholds than criminal law, allowing authorities to intervene more rapidly where risks are identified. This flexibility is especially important when authorities must prevent escalation, respond to disorder in progress or protect a targeted individual or group before harm deepens. Even so, procedural safeguards remain necessary to ensure proportionality, legality and respect for fundamental rights. Administrative convenience cannot justify arbitrary intervention.

Comparative references across European jurisdictions show uneven development in administrative responses. Available evidence suggests that administrative convictions connected specifically to online hate speech related to sport remain relatively rare, whereas administrative sanctions are more commonly applied to incidents occurring in sports venues. In some EU countries, studies have highlighted a significant gap between the occurrence of online hate speech and formal reporting or enforcement, indicating that administrative systems are still more adapted to physical event management than to digital environments. This asymmetry points to the need for stronger reporting pathways and closer cooperation between authorities responsible for public order and those engaged in digital regulation.

Some systems establish specialised administrative entities to address misdemeanours related to intolerance, hate speech and violence in sport. These bodies operate under public law with powers to initiate proceedings, impose fines, order stadium bans and adopt preventive measures. Their specialised mandate enables them to develop expertise in sport-related risk factors, including organised supporter groups, repeated misconduct and high-risk fixtures, while coordinating with police, sport federations and venue operators. By situating some forms of hate-related conduct within an administrative offence framework, these systems create a flexible enforcement mechanism that complements both criminal prosecution and sporting discipline.

- *Disciplinary mechanisms within sport*

Disciplinary systems established by sport governing bodies form another essential layer of response. Federations, leagues and clubs possess regulatory authority to sanction players, officials, supporters or affiliated entities whose conduct breaches codes of ethics, statutes, competition rules or disciplinary regulations. These mechanisms are part of a form of “soft law” within sport, designed to preserve integrity, safety, respect and inclusiveness. They are especially significant because they can address conduct that is harmful and discriminatory even when it does not meet the formal threshold of criminal liability or does not trigger administrative intervention.

Disciplinary procedures generally apply standards of proof lower than those required in criminal courts and, in many cases, lower than those used in administrative proceedings. This enables quicker decisions and preventive action. Sanctions may include fines, suspensions, points deductions, closed-door matches, stadium closures, exclusion from competitions or bans from participation or attendance. Because disciplinary bodies are embedded within the sporting structure, they can often react promptly and are able to consider the specific context of sport, including the symbolic effects of certain acts on athletes, teams, supporters and competitions.

Country experiences demonstrate the importance of coordination between disciplinary and legal systems. In some contexts, clubs and football authorities have actively supported investigations by encouraging reporting and cooperating with police authorities. More broadly, legal debates and court decisions concerning online hate speech, even outside sport, have influenced expectations regarding platform responsibility, user accountability and the institutional duty to respond. These developments indirectly shape disciplinary approaches within sport and reinforce the need for consistent interpretative standards. Sporting bodies, when designing and applying their disciplinary frameworks, should therefore align their procedures with principles of legality, proportionality and transparency. This includes setting clear thresholds, ensuring fair process and avoiding both arbitrariness and passivity.

At the national level, the creation of independent and centralised disciplinary systems for serious ethical violations in sport could be considered a structural best practice. Establishing an autonomous disciplinary body, supported by a specialised investigative unit and an independent appeals mechanism, can lower reporting thresholds, enhance impartiality and ensure more professional handling of racism, harassment and degrading conduct.

- *Interaction between legal regimes and the autonomy of sport*

The interaction between these regimes raises important questions of coordination, consistency and proportionality. It also reflects the broader principle of the autonomy of sport, whereby sports organisations retain regulatory and disciplinary powers, while operating within the limits set by national and European law.

- *Broader preventive and contextual considerations*

Formal sanctions alone are insufficient. Hate speech in sport must be understood within a wider social and cultural context in which abusive behaviour often arises from the interaction of competitive pressure, opportunity and rationalisation. Emotional intensity, group dynamics and perceived anonymity, especially online, may normalise conduct that would otherwise be regarded as unacceptable. This point will be discussed on Chapter 2, where normalisation and passive acceptance emerge as enabling conditions rather than neutral background factors.

Multiple actors shape these dynamics, including media organisations, sponsors, digital platforms and supporter communities. Educational initiatives, awareness campaigns and inclusive communication strategies can influence behavioural norms and reduce tolerance for discriminatory expression. Comparative research and international initiatives underline the growing role of sport governing bodies and intergovernmental organisations in promoting education, reporting tools and athlete protection strategies. For this reason, effective responses cannot be confined to punishment after the fact; they also require preventive environments that reduce the likelihood that hate speech will be tolerated, repeated or normalised.

The distinction between hate speech and hate crime remains an ongoing legal and social challenge. It requires careful balancing between freedom of expression and protection against discrimination, together with coherent interpretative guidance and better digital governance. In practice, cooperation between sport institutions and public authorities remains an essential condition for effective policy.

1.5.3.2. Fragmented legal definitions across EU Member States

Fragmented legal definitions of hate speech remain a structural barrier to coherent enforcement across Europe. Although Member States are bound by common EU instruments and by the European Convention on Human Rights, national criminal codes define incitement, hostility, discriminatory speech and protected characteristics differently. Some jurisdictions criminalise degrading speech that undermines dignity, while others require more explicit incitement to violence, public disorder or serious hostility. These differences affect not only the existence of offences, but also thresholds of proof, available sanctions and the categories of persons or groups protected.

In sport, this fragmentation leads to inconsistent responses. Conduct that may trigger criminal prosecution in one jurisdiction may result only in an administrative sanction or an internal sporting measure in another. Cross-border competitions, international tournaments and online abuse further complicated matters by

blurring jurisdictional clarity and multiplying the legal standards that may apply. Athletes and other participants in international sport may therefore experience unequal protection depending on where an incident occurs or where a harmful communication is deemed to have been made, received or stored.

The absence of a harmonised definition also affects digital moderation. Platforms operating across multiple jurisdictions must interpret and apply divergent national standards, increasing the risk of both over-removal and under-enforcement. Greater alignment, particularly concerning thresholds of incitement, contextual assessment and the identification of protected characteristics, would improve predictability, reinforce deterrence and reduce inconsistencies in sport-related cases.

1.5.3.3. Traditional media and social media

Traditional media and social media play distinct yet interconnected roles in shaping the spread and impact of hate speech in sport. Traditional media outlets, including television, radio and print journalism, operate within established regulatory frameworks such as the Audiovisual Media Services Directive and national press laws. These frameworks prohibit incitement to hatred and impose forms of editorial accountability. Responsible reporting can reduce amplification of discriminatory narratives and contextualise incidents in ways that discourage imitation, escalation or the legitimisation of abusive discourse.

Social media platforms, by contrast, enable instantaneous, borderless and direct dissemination of content. Athletes may be targeted personally through public posts, replies, comment sections and direct messages. This directness increases both the intensity and the personal impact of abuse. The Digital Services Act introduces obligations requiring platforms to remove illegal content and conduct systemic risk assessments, but effective implementation depends heavily on platform compliance, reporting systems and the capacity to identify and document relevant content in real time.

The interaction between traditional and social media may intensify harm. Media coverage of controversial sporting moments can trigger waves of online abuse, while social media trends influence mainstream reporting, framing and agenda-setting. Sport-related hate speech can therefore move rapidly between regulated editorial spaces and less controlled user-generated environments. A coherent strategy must address both domains at once, combining regulatory oversight, platform accountability, journalistic ethics and media-literacy initiatives. The practical importance of this interaction is confirmed by the patterns described in Chapter 2, where online abuse frequently follows particular performances, match incidents or broader public visibility.

1.5.3.4. Balancing expression and protection

Balancing freedom of expression with protection from discrimination remains one of the most sensitive dimensions of regulating hate speech in sport. Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights protects freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference. However, this protection is not absolute. Restrictions are permitted where they are necessary to safeguard the rights and dignity of others. The challenge is therefore not whether expression can ever be restricted, but how to identify legitimate limits in a manner that is proportionate, foreseeable and rights compliant.

Sport introduces specific complexities into this balancing exercise. Supporter culture often includes provocation, rivalry-based rhetoric, satire and emotionally charged expression. Distinguishing between protected expression and unlawful hate speech requires contextual analysis, considering intent, content, audience impact, historical patterns of discrimination and the concrete social meaning of the expression used. Restrictions that are too broad may undermine democratic debate, supporter autonomy and legitimate criticism, while insufficient intervention may normalise racist, sexist, homophobic or other exclusionary conduct.

The jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights indicates that identity-based attacks on individuals or groups may fall outside the core of protected expression when they promote hatred or discrimination.

1.5.3.5. Underreporting in sport

Underreporting significantly weakens efforts to combat hate speech in sport. Many incidents, particularly at grassroots, youth and amateur levels, remain undocumented. Victims may fear retaliation, social exclusion, reputational harm or damage to their sporting careers. In some settings, discriminatory behaviour has become so normalised within fan, club or team culture that affected persons do not expect effective follow-up and may not even identify certain conduct as reportable.

Institutional barriers further aggravate the problem. Clubs and federations and public bodies may lack confidential reporting channels, independent support structures or clearly communicated procedures. Without systematic data collection, public authorities and sport governing bodies cannot assess trends accurately, compare risks across settings or allocate resources on an evidence-based basis. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has emphasised that reliable recording is essential for effective policy, and the same logic clearly applies in the sport context. These structural barriers are reflected in the manifestations described in Chapter 2, particularly in grassroots, youth and highly normalised sport environments.

Improving reporting therefore requires more than encouraging victims to come forward. It requires confidential mechanisms, whistle-blower protections, transparent follow-up and visible institutional accountability. Changing the reporting culture is inseparable from changing the organisational environments in which silence has become routine. *1.5.3.6 Digital enforcement limitations*

The increasing prevalence of online hate speech represents one of the most significant challenges for the current framework. Digital environments have transformed the scale, speed and reach of abusive expression, allowing it to spread rapidly across borders and platforms.

Hate speech targeting athletes frequently originates from anonymous, pseudonymous or cross-border accounts. Jurisdictional complexity, encrypted messaging services, rapid content deletion and the technical difficulty of preserving digital traces all complicate investigation and prosecution. The Digital Services Act introduces important tools to address these challenges, including obligations for platforms to assess and mitigate systemic risks, mechanisms for reporting illegal content and the role of trusted flaggers. However, the effectiveness of these tools depends on their implementation in practice and on the capacity of different actors to cooperate effectively.

Automated moderation tools also face serious limitations. They often struggle to detect context-dependent language, coded expressions, local slang and sport-specific hostile discourse. At the same time, algorithmic overreach may remove lawful expression and create concerns about censorship and proportionality.

Sports organisations are increasingly involved in monitoring and responding to online abuse, often in cooperation with platforms, public authorities and civil society organisations. Despite these developments, underreporting remains a persistent issue, particularly at grassroots level, where awareness, resources and reporting mechanisms may be limited.

Smaller federations and grassroots organisations often lack dedicated digital-monitoring capacity and may depend on voluntary reporting by athletes, officials or supporters. The result is a structurally uneven capacity to respond to online abuse across sports and levels of competition.

The evidence emerging from the sport field confirms the scale of the problem. Monitoring programmes are showing large volumes of abuse directed at athletes, coaches, team accounts and referees during major tournaments, together with broader large-scale analyses of online sports debate indicating that a substantial proportion of comments consist of direct linguistic attacks rather than legitimate criticism. Football-related debate appears especially exposed to hostile and aggressive language. At the same time, platform action rates show that reporting and moderation mechanisms can have practical impact when monitoring systems are in place. These patterns reinforce the need for stronger evidence preservation, coordinated engagement with platforms and better training for law-enforcement and sport officials dealing with cyber-enabled abuse.

A sustainable approach to digital enforcement therefore requires coordinated platform engagement, improved procedures for preserving and authenticating digital evidence, better training in cyber-investigation techniques and closer integration between online and offline reporting systems. The online abuse patterns described in Chapter 2 confirm the urgency of these challenges and show that digital hostility is often not separate from sport itself, but an extension of the same rivalries, exclusions and hierarchies visible in physical sporting environments.

1.5.3.6. Victim support gaps

Effective responses to hate speech in sport require not only enforcement mechanisms but also robust systems for victim protection and support. The existing legal framework, particularly through the Victims' Rights Directive, provides a basis for ensuring that victims are informed, supported and protected. However, the practical accessibility of these protections varies, and in many cases, victims face barriers to reporting, accessing support services or obtaining effective remedies.

Victims may experience a range of impacts, including psychological harm, reputational damage and exclusion from participation in sport. Their support remains uneven across Member States and across sporting organisations. Athletes subjected to hate speech may suffer psychological harm, reputational damage, social isolation and reduced willingness to participate in sport. Youth athletes are particularly vulnerable, but the same is true for referees, officials and other individuals who may be repeatedly targeted in public or online settings. While high-profile cases sometimes attract institutional backing, victims at grassroots often depend on informal networks or receive no meaningful support at all.

Few sport organisations maintain structured forms of psychological counselling, legal assistance or media-advisory support for affected individuals. This gap undermines both welfare and reporting incentives. If victims do not believe that support will be available, they are less likely to report, and institutions remain less likely to understand the scope and consequences of abuse. International human-rights standards emphasise the obligation to protect the dignity of victims and ensure access to remedies, but operational implementation in sport remains inconsistent.

The cases and patterns analysed in Chapter 2 show that support needs may be especially acute for women athletes, young people, [persons with disabilities](#), referees and persons exposed to repeated online targeting. This highlights the need for sport-specific support models that do not depend solely on the visibility of a case or the status of the person affected. Effective victim support should be accessible, trusted, timely and linked to reporting, safeguarding and follow-up

mechanisms rather than treated as an optional add-on after sanctions are imposed.

In the context of sport, additional challenges may arise from the specific dynamics of sporting environments, including power relations, public exposure and the role of clubs or federations. Addressing these challenges requires coordination between legal systems, sports organisations and support services, as well as increased awareness among stakeholders.

1.5.3.7. Prevention, education and cultural change

While legal and enforcement mechanisms are essential, there is a need to also highlight the importance of preventive approaches aimed at addressing the underlying causes and cultural dynamics of hate speech in sport.

These approaches include educational initiatives, awareness-raising activities and efforts to promote inclusive values within sporting environments. They are particularly relevant in grassroots and youth sport, where early intervention can contribute to shaping attitudes and behaviours over the long term.

Preventive measures are closely linked to broader issues such as supporter culture, social norms and the role of influential actors within sport, including athletes, coaches and clubs. They also intersect with digital literacy and the ability of individuals to recognise and respond to harmful content in online environments.

The relevance of these elements is further illustrated by the patterns and dynamics analysed in Chapter 2 and by the practical initiatives presented in Chapter 3, which demonstrate how preventive and educational approaches can be implemented in different contexts.

1.5.3.8. Data collection

A recurring structural issue across the different frameworks is the lack of reliable, comparable and disaggregated data on hate speech in sport. This limitation affects the ability of policymakers, law enforcement authorities and sports organisations to assess the scale of the phenomenon, identify trends and design effective responses.

Data collection is complicated by several factors, including differences in legal definitions, variations in reporting systems and the reluctance of victims or witnesses to report incidents. Underreporting is particularly significant in contexts where hate speech is normalised or where victims lack confidence in the effectiveness of reporting mechanisms.

Efforts at EU level, including those led by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, as well as initiatives within the Council of Europe framework, have sought to improve data collection and comparability. However,

significant gaps remain, highlighting the need for more consistent methodologies, better coordination and increased investment in data systems.

2. Manifestations of hate speech in sport

2.1. Introduction

This chapter examines how hate speech manifests itself in the context of sport, focusing on its forms, contexts and underlying dynamics. While Chapter 1 has outlined the legal and policy framework within which hate speech is addressed, the present chapter adopts an analytical and descriptive perspective, aiming to identify how the phenomenon occurs in practice and how it is experienced by those involved.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the empirical reality of hate speech in sport. The findings presented here provide the basis for understanding the structural challenges highlighted in Chapter 1 and for interpreting the operational practices examined in Chapter 3.

The analysis is based on the material collected within the OMC framework, including national contributions, survey results and expert discussions. It reflects a cross-cutting perspective that considers different sporting contexts, levels of participation and categories of actors.

2.2. Scope of the analysis

The analysis in this chapter covers both offline and online environments, recognising that the boundaries between them are increasingly blurred. Incidents occurring in stadiums or during competitions may be recorded, shared and amplified online, while online abuse may have direct consequences for individuals' participation and well-being in offline sporting contexts.

The chapter therefore considers a broad range of settings, including:

- stadiums and sports venues;
- training environments and grassroots sport;
- institutional settings, such as clubs and federations;
- digital platforms and social media;

It also considers different categories of actors, including:

- professional and amateur athletes;
- coaches, referees and officials;
- supporters and spectators;
- staff and volunteers within sports organisations.

This broad scope reflects the need to capture the diversity of situations in which hate speech may occur, as well as the different forms it may take depending on context and actors involved.

2.3. Analytical dimensions

To structure the analysis, the chapter is organised around several interrelated dimensions.

First, it examines the different forms and manifestations of hate speech in sport, including verbal, symbolic and digital expressions.

Second, it considers the context in which hate speech occurs, distinguishing between different environments and levels of sport.

Third, it explores the underlying dynamics that shape the phenomenon, including issues such as normalisation, underreporting and the vulnerability of specific groups.

2.4. Relationship with subsequent analysis

The findings presented in this chapter are directly connected to the structural issues identified in Chapter 1 and to the operational responses examined in Chapter 3.

In particular, the analysis of online hate speech, underreporting and the vulnerability of specific groups helps to explain why certain legal and policy challenges arise, including those related to enforcement, data collection and victim protection. At the same time, it provides the context for understanding the practices and measures developed by stakeholders, as presented in Chapter 3.

By focusing on the manifestations and dynamics of hate speech in sport, this chapter serves as a bridge between the normative framework and the practical responses, ensuring that both are grounded in an accurate understanding of the phenomenon.

2.5. Describing forms and manifestations of hate speech in sport

Hate speech in sport manifests itself through a wide range of expressions that vary in form, and context. These manifestations may differ depending on the setting, the actors involved and the context through which they are conveyed. However, certain recurring patterns can be identified across different sports and levels of participation.

The analysis distinguishes between verbal, symbolic/behavioural expressions, online hate speech while recognising that these categories often overlap and reinforce each other in practice.

2.5.1. Verbal expressions

Verbal hate speech represents one of the most visible and immediate forms of the phenomenon. It includes insults, slurs, chants and other forms of spoken or written language targeting individuals or groups because of specific characteristics.

In stadium environments, verbal abuse often takes the form of collective chanting with racist, homophobic and/or sexist undertones, which may amplify the impact of discriminatory or offensive content. Such chants can be directed at opposing players, referees or supporters and may target characteristics such as race, nationality, religion or sexual orientation. The collective nature of chanting can contribute to a sense of anonymity and reduce individual accountability, facilitating the expression of content that might not be articulated in other contexts. There have been several incidents recent years in football where the referee has interrupted the match due to racist shouting. The Finnish Football Association has a three-stage system to intervene. First the spectator is told that if such behaviour continues, the match will be interrupted. If shouting continues match will be interrupted and if it does not help, match will be cancelled.

At the level of individual interaction, verbal abuse may occur between players, between players and officials, or between participants and spectators. As a recent example, in August 2025, racist incidents occurred during the men's DFB Cup (an annual German football Cup), when player Christopher Antwi-Adjei was racially abused from the stands in the early stages of the match between Lokomotive Leipzig and Schalke 04. In these cases, hate speech may be embedded in moments of conflict, competition or frustration, but can nevertheless reflect broader patterns of discrimination.

Verbal hate speech is also present in media coverage and public discourse surrounding sport. Statements made by commentators, journalists or public figures may contribute to the dissemination or normalisation of stereotypes, particularly when they rely on generalisations or implicit bias.

2.5.2. Symbolic, visual expressions, behavioural and collective manifestations

Symbolic and visual forms of hate speech include the display of banners, flags, symbols, gestures or other visual elements that convey discriminatory or exclusionary messages.

In stadiums and other sporting venues, such expressions may take the form of banners or flags displaying racist, xenophobic or otherwise offensive content.

Gestures, including those with widely recognised discriminatory connotations, may also be used to target players, officials or other participants.

Symbols may carry specific historical, political or cultural meanings, and their interpretation may vary depending on context. However, their use in sporting environments can contribute to the creation of a hostile atmosphere, particularly when directed at identifiable individuals or groups.

Visual expressions may also be disseminated through digital media, including images, videos and memes, which can extend their reach beyond the immediate sporting context and contribute to their wider circulation.

Collective manifestations may include coordinated actions by groups of supporters, such as organised chanting, repeated use of symbols or targeted actions against specific individuals or teams. These behaviours may be planned or may emerge spontaneously, but in both cases, they can reinforce group identity and contribute to the normalisation of discriminatory expression.

For example, during the Spanish First Division football match Granada CF SAD-Cádiz CF SAD, at the Nuevo Estadio de los Cármenes, in Granada on 28/02/2022, a visiting player has been substituted during the match, when a fan in the stands uttered racist insults, making monkey sounds while gesticulating in imitation of a monkey. Fans surrounding the offender recriminated his actions and he stopped. This behaviour was caught on camera. The player reported the incident to the delegate of the visiting team, who informed the referee of the match, which was recorded in the referee's minutes. The Security Coordinator, with the collaboration of Granada CF, managed to identify the fan. He was summoned a few days later and appeared voluntarily, and the corresponding Sports Show Incident Report was drawn up.

In some instances, hate speech is closely linked to broader patterns of misconduct, including harassment, intimidation or exclusion. For example, repeated targeting of a player or group may create an environment in which participation becomes difficult or unsafe.

These behavioural dimensions highlight the importance of understanding hate speech not only as isolated acts of expression but also as part of broader social dynamics within sporting environments.

2.5.3. Online hate speech

Digital environments have become a central space for the expression and amplification of hate speech in sport. Online abuse often follows matches, individual performances or high-visibility sporting events, and may involve large volumes of messages directed at athletes, teams or officials.

Olympic water polo player Paula Leitón has also been targeted online with body-shaming comments focusing on her physical appearance. Similarly, French judoka Romane Dicko has reported receiving repeated sexist, racist and body-related insults on social media, including comments questioning her physical condition and legitimacy as an elite athlete.

We can also mention the FIFA U-17 World Cup in 2023 where players from the German national team were subjected to racist abuse on social media following a match. In some cases, the comments were examined by authorities to determine whether they constituted criminal offences.

In Sweden, players from a club competing in the Damallsvenskan (the highest women's football league) were subjected in 2024 and 2025 to repeated hate speech and threats, including death threats communicated via email and social media. Some of these threats were linked to specific matches and rivalries. In response, the club adopted precautionary measures, including limiting players' media exposure and closing certain training sessions to the public.

More broadly, hate speech linked to major sporting events, including international competitions such as the Olympic Games, has been observed to generate large volumes of abusive content within short periods of time. This content may include coordinated or repeated messages targeting individuals or groups.

The prevalence of online hate speech has prompted some major sporting event organisers to carry out studies designed to measure and analyse this phenomenon. This is the case, for example, with UEFA who set up an online abuse monitoring programme "which covers all UEFA finals and final tournaments, including youth competitions"⁵, through a partnership with various social media platforms. The findings of the 2025 Women's Euro study highlighted in particular the groups targeted by this online violence: Of the flagged posts, 67.3 % were directed at individual players, 5.3 % at coaches, 25.6 % at team accounts and 1.8 % at referees. During the 2024 Men's Euro, 72.5 % of flagged posts were directed at individual players, 15.5 % at coaches, 6 % at team accounts and 6 % at referees.⁶

2.5.4. Specific targeted individuals and groups

Hate speech in sport frequently targets specific categories of individuals or groups, reflecting broader patterns of discrimination present in society.

The above examples illustrate the prevalence of certain forms of discrimination, particularly racism and sexism. We can also mention the Sweden's defeat to

⁵<https://www.uefa.com/womenseuro/news/029b-1e5dc122e073-6ebb21c97df2-1000--tackling-online-abuse-at-women-s-euro-2025-insights-from/>

⁶<https://www.uefa.com/uefaeuro/history/news/028f-1b6d62565cc8-f81d3365b52e-1000--tackling-online-abuse-at-uefa-euro-2024-insights-from-the-en/>

Germany in the 2018 FIFA World Cup, where a player from the Swedish national team was subjected to a wave of racist and sexist abuse on social media. The abuse included threats directed at the player and his family. The case received significant public attention and led to both institutional responses and legal action against at least one individual involved. Individuals belonging to ethnic or religious minorities, or example, are frequently targeted, particularly in contexts where racial or cultural differences are made visible. In these cases, hate speech may intersect with broader patterns of racism or xenophobia.

Women in sport, may also be exposed to sexist hate speech that combines gender-based discrimination with other forms of abuse, including comments on appearance or competence. Similarly, LGBTIQ+ individuals may face homophobic or transphobic expression, which may discourage participation or visibility. World Athletics, the global governing body for athletics, has published a study⁷ on hate speech on social media during the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris. The study is the fourth of its kind published by World Athletics in the past four years, covering the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, the 2022 and 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest. The study analysed the social media accounts of more than 1,917 Olympic participants, totalling around 355,873 posts and comments. Of these, about 0.2 percent contained serious insults and hate speech. According to the researchers, racism (18%) and sexualised abuse (30%) continue to be the biggest issue, making up more than 48% of the total detected abuse, while general abuse* makes up 32% of the total detected abuse.

People with disabilities may be subject to derogatory language or exclusionary behaviour, reflecting persistent stereotypes and barriers within sport. Young participants, particularly in grassroots or educational settings, may be especially vulnerable due to their stage of development and the influence of peer dynamics. Analysis of sports-related public debate shows that women, LGBTQ+ persons, and individuals with ethnic minority backgrounds are overrepresented among targets of hate and discriminatory language, particularly in the form of sexualised, racist, and identity based attacks (Hate and Attacks in the Sports Debate 2024, Chapter 2).

This pattern is mirrored within organised football. According to Diversiteten i dansk fodbold 2024:

- 35% of women report hearing discriminatory language related to gender, compared to 15% in the overall respondent group.
- 21% of participants with an ethnic minority background report exposure to discriminatory language related to ethnicity.
- 40% of homosexual respondents report frequent discriminatory language related to sexual orientation.

Thus, certain groups appear to be particularly vulnerable to hate speech, including women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, persons with disabilities and individuals

⁷ <https://worldathletics.org/news/press-releases/study-online-abuse-athletes-paris-2024-olympic-games>

belonging to ethnic or religious minorities. In these cases, hate speech may intersect with multiple forms of discrimination, amplifying its impact.

As for the status of those targeted by this violence, athletes are among the most visible targets, particularly in professional sport, where their public profile increases exposure to abuse. High-profile athletes may be targeted based on race, nationality, religion or other characteristics, both in stadiums and online. Referees and officials are also frequent targets of verbal abuse, which may include discriminatory elements, particularly in situations of perceived unfairness or conflict during competitions. Supporters themselves may be targeted, especially in the context of rivalries between teams or communities. In such cases, hate speech may draw on regional, national or cultural identities.

2.5.5. Contexts and levels of sport

The manifestation of hate speech varies significantly depending on the level and context of sport.

In professional sport, high visibility and media coverage can amplify the impact of incidents, while also increasing scrutiny and potential consequences. Hate speech targeting professional athletes may receive widespread attention and may have broader social implications.

In grassroots and amateur sport, hate speech may be less visible but no less significant. In these contexts, incidents may be less likely to be reported or documented, and the absence of formal structures may limit the availability of response mechanisms. At the same time, grassroots sport often involves young participants, making exposure to hate speech particularly concerning in terms of long-term socialisation and inclusion.

Educational and youth sport contexts raise specific issues, as they involve minors and are often linked to schools or community programmes. In these settings, hate speech may have significant developmental and psychological impacts.

The diversity of contexts highlights the need to consider how manifestations of hate speech differ across levels of sport, while recognising that similar underlying dynamics may be present.

2.6. Analysing the structural dynamics shaping hate speech in sport

The manifestations of hate speech in sport cannot be fully understood without considering the underlying dynamics that shape its occurrence, visibility and impact. Beyond individual acts of expression, hate speech reflects broader

structural, cultural and institutional factors that influence how it emerges, how it is perceived and how it is addressed.

The analysis identifies several interrelated dynamics, including underreporting, processes of normalisation, the vulnerability of specific groups and the influence of cultural and institutional contexts. These dynamics interact with each other and contribute to the persistence and complexity of the phenomenon.

2.6.1. Counter normalisation and underreporting

One of the most significant challenges in understanding hate speech in sport is the gap between the actual occurrence of incidents and the number of cases that are reported, recorded or formally addressed.

One of the most persistent drivers of hate speech in sport is normalisation. When degrading language is framed as humour, passion, or “part of the game”, it becomes socially acceptable and institutionally invisible. Over time, this erodes boundaries, discourages reporting, and shifts responsibility away from organisations and leaders. Passive acceptance therefore functions as an enabling condition for hate speech rather than a neutral stance.

Qualitative and quantitative analysis of sports-related debates shows that a substantial proportion of linguistic attacks are framed as jokes, emotional outbursts, or legitimate criticism, despite containing degrading, sexualised, or dehumanising language⁸. This framing contributes directly to the normalisation of abusive language and lowers the likelihood of intervention by peers or moderators.

Within organised football, *Diversiteten i dansk fodbold 2024* document⁹ shows a clear gap between exposure and response. While 15–35% of specific groups (women, LGBTQ+ persons, ethnic minorities) report frequent exposure to discriminatory language, the majority of those affected do not formally report incidents. The most common reasons include perceptions that such language is “part of the culture”, doubts about follow-up, and fear of negative consequences.

Underreporting may result from a range of factors. Individuals who are targeted may be reluctant to report incidents due to a lack of trust in reporting mechanisms, fear of negative consequences or the perception that reporting will not lead to meaningful outcomes. In some cases, victims may consider certain forms of abuse to be an inevitable part of sporting environments and therefore not worth reporting.

At the level of organisations, inconsistencies in reporting systems, lack of standardised procedures and limited resources may further contribute to the

⁸ Hate and Attacks in the Sports Debate 2024, Chapter 4 -

<https://www.andnumbers.com/publications/angreb-had-i-sportsdebatten-paa-sociale-medier>

⁹ <https://dbujylland.dk/media/f0bhbzjo/diversiteten-i-dansk-fodbold-2024.pdf>

incomplete recording of incidents. Differences in definitions and thresholds also affect what is recognised and recorded as hate speech.

As a result, available data often provide only a partial picture of the phenomenon. This limited visibility has implications for policy development, enforcement and prevention, as it constrains the ability of stakeholders to assess the scale and characteristics of hate speech in sport.

2.6.2. Processes of normalisation

Normalisation can occur through different mechanisms. Collective behaviours, such as chanting or the repeated use of certain expressions, may reinforce the perception that such conduct is acceptable or unavoidable. The absence of visible consequences or sanctions may further contribute to this perception.

In some cases, normalisation is linked to broader cultural narratives, including stereotypes or attitudes that are present in society at large. Sporting environments may reflect and reproduce these narratives, rather than acting as spaces in which they are challenged.

The normalisation of hate speech has significant implications, as it can reduce the likelihood of reporting, discourage intervention by bystanders and create environments in which discriminatory behaviour is more likely to occur.

2.6.3. Vulnerability of specific groups.

As we have seen before, hate speech in sport does not affect all individuals equally. Certain groups are more frequently targeted and may experience more severe or cumulative forms of abuse.

These patterns of vulnerability highlight the importance of considering the intersection of different forms of discrimination and the cumulative impact of repeated exposure to hate speech.

2.6.3.1. Gender-related and overall power relations of hate speech

Women athletes are frequently exposed to forms of abuse that differ in content and tone from those directed at men. These may include sexist and sexualised comments, body-shaming, and language that questions competence, legitimacy or physical suitability for sport.

Many studies have analysed the structure of the sporting environment from a gender perspective, highlighting the power dynamics that still exist today between women and men. The presence of women in traditionally male-dominated sports contexts may trigger hostile reactions rooted in broader patterns of exclusion. Supporter culture, media representation and institutional practices can all

contribute to shaping these dynamics. I (2019) shows that *“women are more likely to experience gender-based violence in male-dominated fields, including sport. This may be due to ideas women are taking up space in a ‘man’s world’ or are not meeting ‘male standards’ (Kavanagh, Litchfield and Osborne 2019). There is also an assumption of male superiority in sport (for instance through dichotomous gender categorisations) exacerbated by the media (evidenced through sports coverage which trivialises women athletes), which may result in misogynistic tendencies towards sportswomen (Kenneth Merrill, Aidan Bryant, Emily Dolan and Siying Chang 2015)”*¹⁰

Online environments appear to amplify these dynamics. Female athletes may be targeted by large volumes of comments focusing on appearance rather than performance, often combining multiple forms of discrimination. This intersectional dimension is reflected in cases where sexist, racist and body-related insults are directed simultaneously at the same individual.

If we look at the causes of hate speech and its origins, some articles mention the role played by what could be called “toxic masculinity”: *“Chants and discourses among supporters normalized and valorised violent behaviors as a way to demonstrate masculinity, honor, and belonging to the fan community”.* (HUDDLESTON, 2022)¹¹

More generally, sport is an environment in which power dynamics play out, based in particular on discriminatory criteria such as gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, and so on.

2.6.3.2. Children and young people

Children and young people represent a group that is particularly vulnerable to the effects of hate speech in sport. In youth sport environments, abusive language may take the form of insults, humiliation, bullying or aggressive criticism, often linked to performance expectations or competitive pressure.

Such behaviour may originate from multiple sources, including peers, coaches, parents or spectators. In some cases, it may be normalised as part of training culture or competitive intensity. However, its impact can be significant, affecting confidence, wellbeing and continued participation in sport.

Young referees and officials are also frequently exposed to verbal abuse, particularly in amateur and youth competitions. The combination of limited

¹⁰ PHIPPS, Catherine, 2023. “You belong in the kitchen”: social media, virtual manhood acts, and women strength sport athletes’ experiences of gender-based violence online. *Feminist Media Studies*. 17 novembre 2023. Vol. 23, n° 8, pp. 4221 4237. DOI 10.1080/14680777.2022.2158898.

¹¹ ARDIYANTO, Syaifullah Yophi, HB, Gusliana, NURKADRI, Nurkadri, NOVITA, Novita, BAHRIYANTO, Ahmad, SETYAWAN, Hendra, PUTRO, Baskoro Nugroho, HARMANTO, Harmanto, DARMAWAN, Arief, LATINO, Francesca et TAFURI, Francesco, 2024. Legal and social perspectives on the phenomena of supporter violence in sport. *Retos: nuevas tendencias en educación física, deporte y recreación*. 2024. N° 60, pp. 232241.

authority, high expectations and emotionally charged environments can increase vulnerability. As indicated in earlier sections, such abuse is not always systematically addressed.

The effects of hate speech on children and young people may be long-term, influencing not only their sporting experience but also their broader development and perception of social interaction.

2.6.3.3. Power dynamics and dependency relationships

In certain sport contexts, hate speech and abusive language may be embedded within relationships characterised by authority and dependency. Athletes, particularly at a young age, may depend on coaches or other figures for training, selection and progression. This creates an imbalance of power that can facilitate abusive conduct.

The case involving a gymnastics coach described earlier in this chapter illustrates how degrading and humiliating language can become part of a broader pattern of behaviour within training environments. Such conduct may be difficult to challenge due to the hierarchical structure of sport organisations and the dependence of athletes on those in positions of authority.

These dynamics highlight the importance of considering not only isolated incidents but also the structural conditions that may enable or sustain abusive behaviour.

2.6.4. Role of the sports culture

The manifestation of hate speech in sport is shaped by the specific characteristics of sporting environments. Sport is a highly visible and emotionally charged domain, characterised by strong identification with teams, athletes and communities. These features can amplify both positive and negative forms of expression.

Competitive dynamics, group identity and supporter culture may create conditions in which discriminatory or hostile expressions are normalised or trivialised. Collective behaviours, such as chanting or the display of symbols, can reinforce group cohesion but may also facilitate the spread of exclusionary or offensive messages. Rivalries between teams or groups may provide a framework within which hostility is expressed, sometimes crossing into discriminatory or offensive behaviour.

At the same time, sport occupies a prominent place in public life and media coverage. High-profile events and athletes attract significant attention, which can increase both the visibility and the impact of hate speech. This visibility may contribute to broader social dynamics, including the reproduction of stereotypes or the escalation of tensions beyond the sporting context.

The specificity of sport also lies in its multi-layered structure, encompassing professional competitions, grassroots activities, educational settings and informal participation. Hate speech may manifest differently across these levels, affecting a wide range of actors, including athletes, coaches, referees, supporters and volunteers.

Media representations and public discourse surrounding sport may also contribute to shaping attitudes and expectations. The use of certain narratives, stereotypes or framing can influence how individuals and groups are perceived and treated.

These implications do not constitute policy recommendations as such but rather reflect patterns and considerations emerging from the empirical and analytical findings presented in this chapter. They contribute to a better understanding of the challenges addressed in the legal and policy framework outlined in Chapter 1 and help contextualise the operational responses examined in Chapter 3.

2.6.5. Particularities of online hate speech

The examples we mentioned above demonstrate that online hate speech is often persistent, highly visible and capable of reaching wide audiences. It may combine multiple forms of discrimination and can extend the impact of incidents beyond the original sporting context. While hate speech has long been present in sporting environments, digital platforms have altered the conditions under which it is produced, disseminated and experienced. The characteristics of online communication - such as immediacy, wide reach and the possibility of anonymity - contribute to new patterns of behaviour that differ from those observed in traditional settings.

One of the defining features of online hate speech is its capacity for rapid and large-scale dissemination. Content produced in relation to sporting events—such as comments targeting athletes, referees or supporters - can be shared, reposted and amplified across multiple platforms within a very short time frame. This amplification effect increases the visibility and potential impact of abusive content. Incidents that might previously have been confined to a specific venue or audience can now reach global audiences, exposing individuals to sustained and widespread harassment.

Online environments often allow users to interact under conditions of anonymity or pseudonymity. This can reduce perceived accountability and contribute to what is commonly described as a disinhibition effect, whereby individuals are more likely to engage in aggressive or offensive behaviour than they would in face-to-face interactions. In the context of sport, this dynamic is particularly relevant given the emotional intensity associated with competition, identity and rivalry. Online platforms may therefore become spaces in which hostility is expressed more freely, including in forms that would be less likely to occur in physical settings. At the same time, anonymity can complicate the identification of perpetrators and

contribute to a perception that abusive behaviour is widespread and difficult to control.

Furthermore, the distinction between offline and online hate speech in sport is increasingly blurred. Incidents occurring in stadiums or during competitions are often recorded and shared online, extending their reach and impact. Conversely, online abuse may spill over into offline contexts, affecting individuals' participation, well-being and sense of safety. For example, a discriminatory chant or gesture in a stadium may be captured on video and circulated widely on social media, attracting additional commentary and abuse. Similarly, targeted online harassment may influence how athletes, officials or participants experience training environments or competitions. This continuity highlights the need to consider hate speech in sport as a phenomenon that operates across interconnected environments rather than as separate offline and online domains.

Digital platforms facilitate highly targeted forms of hate speech. Athletes, referees and other individuals involved in sport often maintain public profiles on social media, which can be used as direct channels for abuse. This personalisation of hate speech can increase its intensity and psychological impact. Individuals may be exposed to repeated and coordinated attacks, including messages sent directly to them or posted in public spaces where they are likely to be seen. The targeting of individuals may also be linked to specific events, such as a controversial decision or performance, but can quickly take on discriminatory dimensions, drawing on broader stereotypes or prejudices.

3. Collection and analysis of best practices on hate speech in sport

3.1. Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to show the most relevant best practices¹² related to the prevention and tackling of hate speech in sport, including those concerning sanctioning measures. It focuses on identifying concrete initiatives, tools and approaches implemented by public authorities, sports organisations and other stakeholders, with the aim of illustrating how hate speech is addressed in practice across different contexts.

To ensure a comprehensive and structured approach best practices identified have been grouped into four main thematic areas:

- promoting inclusion and access to information;
- raising awareness and fostering educational initiatives;
- addressing online hate speech;
- advancing legislative and enforcement-related practices, including sanctioning measures.

Best practices reflect a diversity of approaches, ranging from preventive and educational initiatives to monitoring tools, reporting mechanisms and sanctioning models.

The analysis of these practices complements the legal and policy framework presented in Chapter 1 and the examination of the phenomenon provided in Chapter 2.

3.2. Practices related to promoting inclusion and access to information

3.2.1. Scope and analytical framing

Practices aimed at promoting inclusion and access to information play an important role in addressing hate speech in sport, primarily through preventive and structural approaches. Rather than targeting hate speech directly, these initiatives seek to create inclusive environments, strengthen social cohesion and

¹² While this chapter shows the most relevant practices, Annex III to this report foresees a collection of best practices related to the four thematic areas identified.

reduce the conditions under which discriminatory or hostile expression may emerge.

Such practices typically involve a wide range of stakeholders, including public authorities, sports organisations, civil society organisations and local communities. They focus on facilitating participation of vulnerable groups in sport such as children, young, women, elderly people, people with disabilities, migrants, refugees and on promoting values such as respect, diversity and equal opportunities.

Other best practices related to inclusion target teachers, school leaders and public authorities and promote ethical approaches and equal access for all to sport.

From an analytical perspective, these initiatives can be understood as contributing to the prevention of hate speech in sport by addressing its underlying social and cultural drivers. By fostering interaction between different groups and promoting inclusive practices, they may help counteract stereotypes, reduce exclusion and create environments less conducive to discriminatory behaviour.

3.2.2. Examples of relevant selected practices

The following examples illustrate a range of initiatives implemented across different countries and contexts. Action/target	Institution / Country / Period	Content
"Sport 4 Empowerment" / General inclusion - link	Sport Ireland Ireland 2021–2027	This programme supports innovative approaches to addressing social challenges through sport and physical activity. It uses design thinking methodologies to develop user-centred solutions, with the aim of engaging target communities and promoting inclusion through tailored initiatives.
"Ich will da rauf!" / Children with and without disabilities - link	Private Union Germany Since: 2008	This programme involves inclusive climbing groups in which children with and without disabilities participate together. It promotes mutual responsibility and challenges stereotypes through shared activities. The initiative also includes workshops for companies and volunteers aimed at fostering inclusive attitudes.
IGETS/ Inclusion & Gender Equality Through Softball - link	Croatia, Malta and the Netherlands 2017–2018	This initiative focuses on promoting gender equality in sport through cooperation between softball clubs in different European countries. It supports the exchange of best practices and raises awareness of gender imbalances in sport.
"OldStars"/Elderly people - link	Dutch National Elderly Foundation Netherlands 2024	The OldStars programme enables elderly people to participate in sport, engage socially and remain active within sports clubs. Participants may take on roles such as trainers, group leaders or volunteers. The initiative emphasises social interaction, autonomy and well-being, contributing to inclusion and community engagement.
ASPIRE – Activity, Sport and Play / Inclusion of refugees in Europe - link	Financed by the European Union 2017–2019	ASPIRE explores how sports clubs can support the inclusion of migrants and refugees by providing opportunities for participation in sport and community life. It includes the development of specialised training modules aimed at making sports environments more inclusive.
"Not Only Fair Play"/ Teachers - link	European Union. Erasmus + 2015–2016	This project promotes the role of sport in schools by strengthening the integration of physical education into curricula and emphasising its contribution to social inclusion. It targets teachers, school leaders and public authorities and promotes ethical approaches to sport and equal access for all students

3.3. Raising awareness and fostering educational initiatives

3.3.1. Scope and analytical framing

Awareness-raising and educational initiatives represent a key dimension of efforts to address hate speech in sport, particularly in relation to prevention and cultural change. These practices focus on influencing attitudes, increasing understanding of the impact of discriminatory behaviour and promoting values such as respect, inclusion and fair play. addressing social issues such as racism, inequality and homophobia.

Unlike regulatory or enforcement measures, these initiatives operate primarily at the level of communication, education and engagement. They aim to reach a broad range of audiences, including athletes, supporters, coaches, young people and the general public, often through campaigns, training activities and educational tools.

From an analytical perspective, such initiatives contribute to shaping the social and cultural environment in which sport takes place. By increasing awareness and fostering critical reflection, they may help challenge stereotypes, reduce tolerance for discriminatory behaviour and encourage more inclusive forms of participation.

3.3.2. Examples of relevant selected practices

The following examples illustrate different types of awareness-raising and educational initiatives implemented in the field of sport:

UEFA “Outraged” programme

https://editorial.uefa.com/resources/0282-1841268013dc-20d29d898383-1000/outraged_toolkit.pdf

Institution: UEFA

Year: 2020 (ongoing developments)

The “Outraged” initiative began with a documentary highlighting the experiences of professional football players facing discrimination. It has since developed into a broader programme including thematic video content and educational materials.

UEFA has produced a structured educational toolkit targeting different audiences, including children, young people, parents, coaches and team staff. The toolkit provides guidance for training sessions, discussion activities and feedback mechanisms, supporting its use in educational and sporting contexts.



Country: France

Period: 2015-2018

In 2015, 2016 and 2018, the Ministry set up two communication campaigns (The first, entitled #CoupDeSifflet was dedicated to homophobia in 2015 and racism in 2016. The second, entitled Ex-Aequo was dedicated to preventing and combating all forms of discrimination in 2018).



“Sport is respect”

Country: Greece

Year: 2024

In June 2024 a campaign named “sport is respect” was launched according to the guidelines of the joint programme of European Union and Council of Europe “Combating Hate Speech in Sport”. The “Sport is Respect: moto was presented

during the international basketball tournament “Acropolis”, a very popular sport event in Greece, especially during this period when the Qualification tournament for Paris 2024 was just a few days ahead in the same place (SEF stadium in Piraeus) and all the stars -like Giannis Antetokounmpo- were present.

In addition, interviews with the Secretary general of Sport and elite athletes (programme ambassadors) were shown in the National Broadcasting Channel (ERT), see e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0EZHwkm82w>



3.3.3. Analytical observations

The most relevant practices presented in this section illustrate the diversity of approaches used to raise awareness and promote education in the context of hate speech in sport.

They show that awareness-raising initiatives often combine multiple elements, including public campaigns, educational resources and engagement with different stakeholders. They also demonstrate the importance of visibility, particularly in high-profile sporting contexts, where messages can reach large audiences.

At the same time, the examples highlight the role of partnerships between sports organisations, public authorities and civil society in designing and implementing

effective initiatives. These partnerships contribute to extending the reach of campaigns and ensuring their relevance across different contexts.

3.4. Practices addressing online hate speech

3.4.1. Scope and analytical framing

This section presents best practices and tools developed to address hate speech in online environments in the context of sport. It focuses on operational approaches implemented by public authorities, sports organisations and other stakeholders to prevent, detect, report and respond to abusive content. It also highlights concrete measures and initiatives that illustrate how different actors engage with the challenges posed by digital environments.

Best practices and tools identified reflect a variety of approaches, including monitoring and reporting mechanisms, cooperation with platforms, support measures for individuals targeted by online abuse and initiatives aimed at strengthening digital literacy and responsible behaviour.

Several initiatives focus on producing reports, guidelines and analytical tools that support the understanding and management of online hate speech in sport. These resources often provide:

- evidence-based analysis of trends and patterns;
- practical guidance for organisations and individuals;
- recommendations for improving monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Other practices focus on improving the detection and reporting of online hate speech, as well as strengthening cooperation between different actors involved in addressing it. These include:

- the development of reporting tools that allow users to flag abusive content;
- mechanisms for facilitating communication between sports organisations and digital platforms;
- cooperation frameworks involving public authorities, law enforcement and civil society organisations.

Cooperation between stakeholders is a recurring element in these practices. Partnerships between sports bodies, platforms and public authorities contribute to more coordinated responses, particularly in cases involving high-profile incidents or repeated patterns of abuse.

Sports organisations and governing bodies play an increasingly active role in addressing online hate speech. Their involvement reflects both the impact of

online abuse on athletes and the broader responsibility of sport to promote safe and inclusive environments. Practices in this area include:

- the adoption of codes of conduct addressing online behaviour;
- the establishment of internal procedures for monitoring and responding to abuse;
- collaboration with external partners, including platforms and specialised organisations.

These measures are often integrated into broader strategies on integrity, safeguarding and inclusion within sport. They may also involve awareness-raising activities and training for athletes, staff and other stakeholders.

A further group of practices focuses on providing support to individuals who are targeted by online hate speech, particularly athletes and officials. These initiatives may include:

- psychological support and counselling services;
- guidance on managing online presence and responding to abuse;
- assistance in reporting incidents and accessing available remedies.

Such support measures recognise the personal and professional impact of online hate speech and aim to mitigate its effects on well-being, performance and participation.

A different group of practices focus on strengthening digital literacy and promoting responsible behaviour online. These initiatives aim to equip individuals with the skills and awareness needed to navigate digital environments and to recognise and respond to harmful content. They may involve:

- educational programmes targeting young athletes and supporters;
- training for coaches, staff and volunteers;
- awareness campaigns addressing online conduct and its consequences.

These approaches complement monitoring and enforcement mechanisms by addressing the underlying behaviours that contribute to the spread of hate speech online.

Finally, in addition to institutional measures, some initiatives involve community-based approaches that encourage participation by supporters, fans and online communities. These may include:

- fan-led moderation or reporting initiatives;
- campaigns promoting positive engagement and respectful behaviour;
- collaborative efforts to counter harmful narratives and support affected individuals.

Such approaches highlight the role of communities in shaping online environments and in contributing to more inclusive forms of interaction.

3.4.2. Examples of relevant selected practices

A. Reports / white papers / guides		
Action-Country-Date	Sports involved	Content
„Barometro dell’odio nello Sport” - link Germany, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom	Basketball Football Formula 1	The research report analyses the prevalence and nature of hate speech in sports-related conversations on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter The findings underscore the pervasive nature of hate speech in online sports discussions, emphasising the need for strategies to foster a more respectful online environment. Overall Presence: Hate speech is a consistent element across all teams and sports, with significant percentages indicating a widespread issue. Call to Action: The data highlights the urgent need for measures to combat hate speech and promote inclusivity in online sports discussions.
FIA „Review of scholarly publications on online hate in sport” - link Germany, Spain, France, Hungary Italy, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom.	Basketball Football (Soccer) Formula 1	The document is a review of scholarly publications on online hate speech in sports, analysing research trends, themes, and gaps in the literature. It aims to inform future studies and interventions to combat online hate. The report outlines several recommendations to enhance research on online hate in sports: • Include a wider range of sports and levels of play. • Expand the focus to under-researched types of hate speech. • Increase the diversity of geographic and cultural contexts in research. Develop interdisciplinary collaborations and secure funding for comprehensive studies,
FIA „A strategic response to online hate speech in sport – White paper” - link Germany, Spain, France, Italy, United Kingdom	Basketball Football (Soccer) Formula 1	The 2023 White Paper is a strategic response to the increasing prevalence of online hate speech in sport. The document acknowledges that online abuse directed at athletes, officials, volunteers, and personnel has become a critical threat to the integrity and inclusiveness of motor sport and, by extension, the wider sporting environment. The FIA emphasises that sport must remain an open and free setting where all individuals can participate safely, and that the persistence of toxic online behaviour undermines this principle. In this context, the FIA commits to moving beyond symbolic gestures, instead adopting sustained, evidence-based, and collaborative measures to combat the issue.

A. Reports / white papers / guides

		Mobilising its 241 affiliated organisations in 146 countries, the FIA seeks to drive a collective campaign that involves media, teams, drivers, and fans in rejecting online hate. The White Paper contextualises online hate speech through academic research. Definitions by scholars such as Castano-Pulgarin, Kilvington, and others describe it as violent, aggressive, or discriminatory language directed at individuals based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or disability. Empirical studies show its widespread prevalence—80% of EU respondents reported encountering online hate, with 40% describing feelings of fear or threat. The anonymity provided by digital platforms contributes to the escalation of abusive content, and high-profile events often trigger surges of hate speech.
FIFPRO, the National Basketball Players Association (NBPA), and the Women's National Basketball Players Association (WNBPA) “Decoding Online Abuse of Players: Collective Responses by Players and Unions” - link France, United States, United Kingdom	Basketball Football	The report 'Decoding Online Abuse of Players: Collective Responses by Players and Unions' was jointly produced by FIFPRO, the National Basketball Players Association (NBPA), and the Women's National Basketball Players Association (WNBPA). It is the world's first multi-market, multi-sport AI-driven analysis of targeted online abuse faced by athletes. Using Signify Group's Threat Matrix machine learning tool, the study analysed Twitter data across football and basketball, covering both men's and women's competitions between May and September 2021. The focus was on posts directed explicitly at players through account handles, thereby ensuring that the abusive content reached them personally. The findings demonstrate that online abuse poses a severe threat to athletes' mental health, workplace environment, and family life Ultimately, the report frames online abuse as both a workplace safety crisis and a societal problem. It is not limited by geography, sport, or gender and requires coordinated, multi-level solutions. Athletes, while highly visible, are also highly vulnerable, and their protection is a shared responsibility among unions, employers, platforms, sponsors, and governments. The report concludes that ensuring dignity, safety, and mental well-being in the digital sphere is not just about protecting players but about safeguarding the future of sport itself.

B. Executive actions		
Action	Tools	Content
Identify hate speech early, track its spread, and enable timely intervention. These practices focus on identifying hate speech in real time and understanding its patterns.	AI-Powered, NLP-Based Detection Systems and Automated Classification Models Use machine learning and NLP to detect hate speech in sport-related social media posts and flag abusive content.	FIA's scoping report highlights the use of machine learning to detect abusive patterns in sport-related discourse. UEFA's partnership with Twitter and Facebook during Euro 2020 to monitor and remove racist abuse targeting players like Rashford, Sancho, and Saka. FIFPRO's partnership with data firms to track abuse targeting athletes during major tournaments.
	Real-Time Sentiment Analysis Monitor emotional spikes during matches or athlete announcements, tools analyse emotional tone to flag potentially harmful content.	FIFPRO's "Decoding Online Abuse" project tracked abuse patterns during major tournaments and revealed peak toxicity after missed penalties. The Italian Barometro dell' Odio uses sentiment tracking to monitor spikes in hate speech during major sporting events.
	Hashtag and Keyword Surveillance Track sport-specific hashtags to identify coordinated hate campaigns.	Italian watchdogs monitored #BLM and #Euro2020 hashtags for spikes in racial slurs and xenophobic content.
	Cross-Platform Abuse Tracking, DSA mandates platforms to disclose moderation practices and systemic risks, including hate speech.	FIA White Paper shows how abuse migrates across platforms.
	Early Warning Systems and Safeguarding Risk Mapping Proactive monitoring during high-risk events and identify vulnerable groups and online abuse triggers.	The Council of Europe recommends to use early warning systems. The Safeguarding Guide outlines how to identify vulnerable groups and online abuse triggers.
	Digital Literacy and Counter-Speech Training Educating athletes, fans, and youth on recognising and responding to online hate, equip sport communities with tools to respond to hate speech with facts and empathy.	Council of Europe's "Bookmarks" and "WE CAN!" campaigns provide counter-narrative toolkits for schools and sport clubs. Campaigns in UK football clubs teaching players how to report abuse and protect their digital presence.
Building resilience, promoting respectful discourse, empower athletes, fans, and youth to respond constructively and prevent escalation.		

B. Executive actions		
	Athlete Empowerment and Mental Health Support Empower athletes to respond. Safeguarding Guide emphasises trauma-informed care and athlete empowerment.	WNBPA's mental health resources for players facing online abuse. FIA White Paper calls for athlete-centred support systems, including psychological care and digital literacy.
	Athlete-Led Advocacy Encourage athletes to speak out against hate and model inclusive behaviour.	Marcus Rashford's public response to racial abuse after Euro 2020 sparked national dialogue on racism in sport and policy review.
	Public Awareness Campaigns Use infographics, videos, and testimonials to highlight the impact of online hate.	Barometro dell'Odio visualises hate speech trends during Serie A matches and national events.
<i>Establish legal and institutional frameworks to prevent and penalise online abuse.</i>	National Legislation and Reporting Mechanisms Laws that criminalise online hate and provide pathways for victims to report abuse.	Italy's legal framework supports prosecution of hate speech, with data from Barometro dell'Odio informing policy.
	Sport Federation Codes of Conduct Include online behaviour clauses in disciplinary rules.	FIFA and UEFA codes sanction discriminatory online actions by players, officials, and fans. FIA recommends federations include online behaviour clauses in disciplinary codes.
	Multilingual Reporting Mechanisms Create accessible tools for victims to report abuse.	The UK's Kick It Out app allows anonymous reporting of online abuse in multiple languages. CoE calls for accessible, victim-centred reporting tools. EU guide recommends accessible reporting tools and victim support
	Platform Accountability under DAS Enforce EU Digital Services Act obligations for transparency and moderation. Pressuring tech companies to enforce anti-hate policies and improve moderation.	Platforms like Meta and TikTok publish systemic risk assessments and moderation data under DSA compliance. UEFA's collaboration with Twitter and Facebook to remove abusive content during tournaments.
<i>Foster inclusive environments and mobilise stakeholders to co-create solutions. These practices build resilience and solidarity within sport communities.</i>	Fan-Led Moderation and Charters Supporter groups co-develop anti-hate pledges and self-moderation guidelines. Training fan groups to self-moderate and promote respectful discourse.	Premier League clubs work with fan associations to promote respectful discourse and report abuse.

B. Executive actions		
	Inclusive Campaigns and Media Representation Highlight diverse athletes and stories to normalise inclusion. Campaigns that highlight diverse athletes and stories.	BBC Sport features athletes with disabilities and LGBTQ+ athletes to challenge stereotypes. Campaigns like “Kick It Out” and “No Room for Racism” that highlight minority voices in sport.
	Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Build partnerships between sport bodies, tech firms, academia, and civil society. Cross-sector partnerships to study hate speech trends and share mitigation strategies, collaborative research and data sharing.	The EU-funded “RESPECT” project brings together federations, universities, and NGOs to develop anti-hate education modules. CoE and FIA call for partnerships between sport bodies, tech firms, academia, and civil society.

3.4.3. Analytical observations

The practices presented in this section illustrate the diversity of approaches used to address online hate speech in sport.

They show that effective responses often combine multiple elements, including monitoring and reporting mechanisms, support for targeted individuals and preventive initiatives aimed at influencing behaviour. They also highlight the importance of cooperation between different actors, particularly in the context of complex and rapidly evolving digital environments.

At the same time, these practices reflect the challenges identified in Chapter 2, including the scale, persistence and visibility of online hate speech, as well as issues related to underreporting and the vulnerability of specific groups.

3.5. Sanctioning and enforcement-related practices

3.5.1. Scope and analytical framing

This section presents best selected practices related to sanctioning and enforcement in the context of hate speech in sport. It focuses on concrete mechanisms and approaches used by public authorities, sports organisations and other stakeholders to address abusive behaviour through disciplinary, administrative or legal means and highlights how different actors implement rules, procedures and sanctions in practice, illustrating a range of approaches across contexts and levels of sport, partly because of the lack of a

The practices presented reflect the diversity of enforcement mechanisms, including disciplinary measures within sports organisations, administrative

actions linked to sporting events and, in some cases, the interaction with legal systems.

Sports federations, leagues and clubs often establish internal disciplinary frameworks to address hate speech and discriminatory behaviour. These frameworks are typically based on codes of conduct, regulations and ethical guidelines that define acceptable behaviour and provide for sanctions in case of violations. Practices in this area include:

- the adoption of explicit rules prohibiting discriminatory or abusive expression.
- the establishment of disciplinary procedures for investigating incidents.
- the application of sanctions such as fines, suspensions, exclusions or other measures affecting participation.

These mechanisms allow sports organisations to respond directly to incidents occurring within their jurisdiction, often with greater speed and flexibility than formal legal processes. They also play a role in setting standards of behaviour and reinforcing the values associated with sport.

A second category of practices concerns measures applied in relation to sporting events and venues, particularly in response to behaviour by spectators or other participants. These measures may include:

- exclusion from stadiums or sports venues;
- restrictions on access to events;
- measures targeting specific groups of supporters in cases of repeated misconduct;
- actions affecting the organisation of events, such as matches played under restricted conditions.

Such measures are often preventive as well as reactive, aiming to reduce the risk of further incidents

In many contexts, enforcement practices involve cooperation between sports organisations and public authorities, including law enforcement agencies. This cooperation may take different forms, such as:

- the reporting of incidents to competent authorities;
- the exchange of information between sports bodies and law enforcement;
- coordinated responses in cases involving serious or repeated incidents.

These practices illustrate the interaction between disciplinary mechanisms within sport and broader legal and administrative systems, particularly in cases where behaviour may fall within the scope of criminal or administrative law.

Some further practices focus on the development of procedures for handling incidents of hate speech in a consistent and transparent manner. These may include:

- the establishment of clear reporting and complaint mechanisms;
- procedures for investigating alleged incidents;
- safeguards to ensure fairness and proportionality in decision-making;
- mechanisms for reviewing or appealing decisions.

Such procedural elements contribute to the legitimacy and effectiveness of enforcement measures, as they help ensure that actions are perceived as fair and consistent.

In addition to punitive measures, some practices incorporate educational or restorative justice elements into sanctioning approaches.

These may include:

- training or awareness programmes for individuals subject to sanctions;
- initiatives aimed at promoting understanding of the impact of discriminatory behaviour;
- measures designed to encourage behavioural change rather than solely imposing penalties.

These approaches reflect an understanding of sanctioning as part of a broader strategy that includes prevention and education and may be particularly relevant in contexts such as youth or grassroots sport.

The practices presented in this section highlight significant variation in how sanctioning and enforcement are implemented across different contexts.

Professional sport may benefit from more developed disciplinary systems, greater resources and higher visibility, which can influence both the application and the impact of sanctions. In contrast, grassroots sport may face constraints related to resources, organisational capacity and access to formal mechanisms.

These differences affect how enforcement measures are designed and applied and illustrate the importance of considering context when analysing sanctioning practices.

3.5.2. Examples of relevant selected practices

Action – institution - country	Legal instrument	Content
Legal definition and measures to combat hate speech in sport. Council of Europe	Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on combating hate speech (Adopted on 20 May 2022 at the 132nd Session of the Committee of Ministers). https://search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680a67955	As hate speech covers a range of hateful expressions which vary in their severity, the harm they cause and their impact on members of particular groups in different contexts, Member States should ensure that a range of properly calibrated measures is in place to effectively prevent and combat hate speech. Such a comprehensive approach should be fully aligned with the European Convention on Human Rights and should differentiate between: a) i. hate speech that is prohibited under criminal law; and ii. hate speech that does not attain the level of severity required for criminal liability, but is nevertheless subject to civil or administrative law; and b) offensive or harmful types of expression which are not sufficiently severe to be legitimately restricted under the European Convention on Human Rights but nevertheless call for alternative responses. For the purposes of the recommendation, hate speech is understood as all types of expression that incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination against a person or group of persons, or that denigrates them, by reason of their real or attributed personal characteristics or status such as “race”, colour, language, religion, nationality, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation. The aim of the recommendation is to assist member States and other relevant stakeholders in preventing and combating hate speech in a comprehensive way, including in the online environment, to ensure effective protection against hate speech within the framework of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This includes sport where the recommendation is fully applicable.
Legislative protection. Physical violence against referees. France	Article L223-2 - Code du sport - Légifrance (legifrance.gouv.fr) Article L332-6 - Code du sport - Légifrance (legifrance.gouv.fr)	Provisions of a law addressing the acts of violence committed against referees (Act no. 2006-1294) were incorporated within the French Sport Code. It improves their protection and increases the sanctions towards those who committed the acts of hatred as the referees are now “considered to be entrusted with a public service mission” (article L223-2 of the French Sports Code). Thus, they benefit from specific protection under criminal law for certain acts of violence committed against them. This regime of sanctions adds to another provision of the French Sports Code (article L332-6) which punish any incitation to hatred towards referees, sports judge, players or any

Action – institution - country	Legal instrument	Content
		other person or group of persons during a sport event/broadcast.
Law enforcement through sanctions. Accessory measures to a pecuniary sanction. Spain	Articles 24.2.3.4 and 5 BOE-A-2007-13408 Ley 19/2007, de 11 de julio, contra la violencia, el racismo, la xenofobia y la intolerancia en el deporte	Spanish administrative legislation containing accessory sanctions to pecuniary fines. Context and objectives: Provisions of a law containing different sanctions: (i) to organisers of sports events: disqualification from organising sporting events temporary closure of the sports venue and (ii) to physical persons; carrying out social work in the sports field, the prohibition of access to any sports venue or the obligation to publish, at their own expense, in the same media that reported their statements and with at least the same scope, public rectifications or, alternatively, at the discretion of the resolving body, advertisements that promote sportsmanship and fair play in sport.

3.5.3. Analytical observations

The practices described in this section illustrate a range of approaches to sanctioning and enforcement, reflecting different institutional arrangements and levels of sport.

They show that enforcement mechanisms often combine disciplinary, administrative and, where relevant, legal elements, and that cooperation between actors plays a significant role in addressing incidents effectively.

3.6. Cross-cutting observations from the collected practices

The practices presented in this chapter provide a structured overview of how different stakeholders address hate speech in sport in operational terms. While these initiatives vary significantly in scope, context and level of intervention, several cross-cutting observations emerge from their analysis.

3.6.1. Complementarity of approaches

The practices illustrate that responses to hate speech in sport are rarely based on a single type of intervention. Instead, they tend to combine multiple approaches, including inclusion-oriented initiatives, awareness-raising activities, monitoring and reporting mechanisms and enforcement measures.

This complementarity reflects the multi-dimensional nature of hate speech identified in Chapter 2 and the diversity of instruments described in the legal and

policy framework outlined in Chapter 1. It also highlights the need to consider how different types of action interact and reinforce each other in practice.

3.6.2. Central role of prevention and education

A significant number of practices focus on preventive and educational approaches, particularly through initiatives aimed at promoting inclusion, raising awareness and strengthening digital literacy.

These approaches address the underlying social and cultural factors that contribute to the emergence of hate speech, including stereotypes, exclusion and lack of awareness. They are particularly relevant in grassroots and youth sport, where early intervention can influence attitudes and behaviours over the long term.

The prominence of such practices reflects the importance attributed by stakeholders to prevention as a key component of broader responses to hate speech in sport.

3.6.3. Importance of reporting and support mechanisms

Many practices emphasise the development of reporting tools and support systems for individuals affected by hate speech.

These mechanisms aim to facilitate the identification of incidents, improve access to assistance and reduce barriers to reporting. Their design often considers issues such as accessibility, user-friendliness and the need to build trust among users.

The emphasis on reporting and support reflects the challenges identified in Chapter 2, particularly in relation to underreporting and the impact of hate speech on individuals and communities.

3.6.4. Growing relevance of the digital dimension

The practices analysed in this chapter confirm the increasing importance of the digital dimension in addressing hate speech in sport.

A wide range of initiatives focus on online environments, including monitoring tools, cooperation with platforms, digital literacy programmes and support for individuals targeted by online abuse. These practices reflect the transformation of the phenomenon described in Chapter 2 and the regulatory developments outlined in Chapter 1.

They also highlight the need for approaches that are adaptable to rapidly evolving digital contexts.

3.6.5. Role of multi-stakeholder cooperation

A recurring feature of many practices is the involvement of multiple stakeholders, including public authorities, sports organisations, civil society and, in some cases, private actors such as digital platforms.

This cooperation takes different forms, including partnerships, joint initiatives and coordinated responses to specific issues. It contributes to pooling resources, sharing expertise and enhancing the effectiveness of interventions.

The importance of multi-stakeholder approaches reflects the complexity of the phenomenon and the range of actors involved in addressing it.

3.6.6. Variability across contexts and levels of sport

The practices presented also highlight significant variation in approaches depending on the context and level of sport.

Professional sport often benefits from greater visibility, resources and institutional capacity, which can support the development of structured initiatives and enforcement mechanisms. In contrast, grassroots sport may rely more heavily on local initiatives, community engagement and volunteer-based approaches.

This variability suggests that responses to hate speech in sport are shaped by contextual factors and that different approaches may be appropriate in different settings.

3.6.7. Link with the broader framework of the report

The observations emerging from the practices analysed in this chapter are closely connected to the broader framework developed in the report.

They reflect the structural challenges identified in Chapter 2, including the complexity of the phenomenon, the role of digital environments and the impact on vulnerable groups. They also illustrate how the legal and policy instruments described in Chapter 1 are translated into practice by different actors.

By bringing together these elements, the chapter contributes to a comprehensive understanding of how hate speech in sport is addressed across different levels, from normative frameworks to practical implementation.

4. Future actions and prevention of recidivism

4.1. Introduction

Building on the legal and policy framework outlined in Chapter 1, the manifestations analysed in Chapter 2, and the practices and measures presented in Chapter 3, this chapter focuses on future-oriented actions and operational priorities aimed at strengthening the overall response to hate speech in sport.

The purpose of this chapter is not to redefine the phenomenon or to restate the existing regulatory framework, but rather to identify the structural conditions, policy directions and practical tools required to prevent hate speech, reduce its recurrence and enhance the capacity of stakeholders across the sports system. In this perspective, prevention, operational coordination, technological adaptation and institutional capacity-building are treated as interdependent components of a coherent and sustainable strategy.

The analysis is therefore organised around several areas that have emerged as particularly relevant in light of the evidence collected in the previous chapters. These include the strengthening of preventive policies, the role of traditional media, the management of hate speech in digital environments, the use of artificial intelligence, the development of decision-making capacities and the consideration of social impact as a driver of public intervention. Each of these elements is addressed with the aim of supporting the development of effective, proportionate and context-sensitive policies, consistent with the fundamental values underpinning the European sports model.

4.2. Awareness and prevention

Preventive action represents a central operational priority in addressing hate speech in sport and should be conceived as a structured and continuous process, rather than a set of isolated initiatives. Without stable and coordinated preventive measures, regulatory, disciplinary and technological interventions risk producing only partial or short-term effects, without addressing the underlying dynamics that allow hate speech to emerge and persist.

An effective preventive approach requires educational, cultural and organisational interventions capable of influencing individual and collective behaviour before hate speech becomes recurrent or systemic. Such interventions should be developed through a multilevel and intersectoral perspective, involving public authorities, sports organisations, educational institutions, media actors and civil society. The objective is to ensure that prevention is embedded across the entire sports ecosystem and not confined to specific contexts or actors.

At a structural level, prevention should be based on the definition of common minimum standards capable of ensuring a consistent level of awareness and competence across different national and sporting environments. These standards should make it possible to recognise the various forms of hate speech, including those that emerge in digital contexts, to understand the relevant legal and regulatory frameworks, and to clarify individual and collective responsibilities. They should also provide guidance on reporting procedures and on the appropriate responses to incidents, ensuring that preventive action is closely connected to operational practices.

A further key dimension concerns the integration of prevention into formal education systems. The inclusion of content related to digital citizenship, responsible communication, respect for diversity and the values of sport within school curricula can contribute to creating continuity between educational environments and organised sport. In this way, prevention is not limited to reactive measures but becomes part of a broader process of cultural formation.

Alongside structural measures, training plays a decisive role in translating general principles into effective practice. Training programmes should be tailored to the specific roles and responsibilities of the actors involved, recognising the diversity of context within the sports system. Athletes, coaches, referees, managers, match officials and volunteers are all exposed to different forms of risk and require differentiated tools to address them. A uniform approach would not adequately reflect these differences and would risk limiting the effectiveness of training initiatives.

Training should provide practical capacities, enabling individuals to identify problematic situations in a timely manner, to react in a proportionate and appropriate way, and to engage with reporting mechanisms. It should also include a clear understanding of online hate speech, of the risks associated with digital environments and of the basic principles of data protection and digital security. To remain effective over time, training should be conceived as an ongoing process, regularly updated in light of technological and social developments.

Public communication represents another essential component of prevention. Awareness-raising campaigns can contribute to shaping attitudes and behaviours, provided that they are designed as coherent and sustained strategies rather than as occasional initiatives. Their effectiveness depends on their capacity to reach different audiences, to combine traditional and digital communication channels and to integrate visibility with educational content. The involvement of athletes and public figures can strengthen the impact of such campaigns, but only when it is embedded in structured communication strategies capable of producing lasting effects.

The involvement of civil society and local communities further strengthens preventive action. Local actors, including third-sector organisations, universities, anti-discrimination bodies and local authorities, can contribute to identifying risk situations at an early stage and to developing responses that are adapted to specific contexts. Cooperation between these actors and sports organisations

should be encouraged through structured partnerships and shared operational tools, allowing for a more responsive and context-sensitive approach.

Finally, prevention requires robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The systematic assessment of preventive initiatives makes it possible to understand their effectiveness, to identify areas for improvement and to adapt interventions over time. This process should combine qualitative and quantitative elements and should be understood as a tool for institutional learning rather than as a purely formal requirement. Ensuring the sustainability of preventive policies also requires long-term planning and the mobilisation of adequate financial resources, in a way that supports continuity and avoids fragmentation.

4.3. Involvement of traditional media

Traditional media play a central role in shaping public discourse on sport and in influencing how athletes, competitions and social groups are represented and perceived. Through the selection of news, the use of language and the construction of narratives, media actors contribute to defining cultural models that can either reinforce or counter discriminatory attitudes. For this reason, their involvement in preventing hate speech should be understood in terms of professional responsibility and of the broader social impact of communication.

Strengthening professional standards in sports journalism is an essential step in this direction. Ethical codes and editorial guidelines should explicitly incorporate principles related to inclusivity, respect for diversity and awareness of the impact of language. In practice, this requires that such principles are not limited to formal declarations, but are integrated into editorial processes through regular updates, internal dissemination and the development of practical guidance for journalists. At the same time, these measures must remain consistent with editorial autonomy and avoid prescriptive approaches that could interfere with freedom of expression.

The quality of sports communication can be further improved through structured training and continuous professional development. Journalists and media professionals should be supported in developing a deeper understanding of issues related to discrimination, gender equality, inclusive language and the social impact of media narratives. Such training should be integrated into existing professional development frameworks and developed in cooperation with academic institutions, public authorities and sports organisations. In this way, it contributes not only to preventing problematic communication, but also to strengthening the credibility of sports journalism.

Beyond the prevention of harmful narratives, it is equally important to promote positive and inclusive representations of sport. Media actors can play a proactive role in highlighting diversity, showcasing inclusive practices and presenting sport as a space for social cohesion. Public service broadcasters, in particular, are in a position to set high standards and to develop content that reflects these values,

thereby contributing to shaping broader communication practices across the sector.

Monitoring communication dynamics represents an additional tool for improving media practices. By analysing recurring narrative patterns and audience reactions, it becomes possible to identify areas where communication may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes or exclusionary attitudes. Such monitoring should be conceived as a means of supporting editorial reflection and accountability, rather than as a mechanism of control, and should be based on cooperation between media organisations, public institutions and other stakeholders.

Finally, effective media engagement requires structured forms of cross-sector cooperation. Partnerships between media actors, sports organisations, public authorities and civil society can facilitate the exchange of experiences, the development of shared guidelines and the dissemination of good practices. This cooperative approach helps to reduce fragmentation and supports the development of a more coherent response to hate speech within the broader sports ecosystem.

4.4. Hate speech and social media: prevention, responsibility and operational levers

Within digital environments, hate speech in sport is amplified by the speed of communication, the scale of dissemination and the mechanisms that govern the visibility of content. These characteristics, combined with the high level of emotional engagement that typically accompanies sporting events, create conditions in which hostile or discriminatory expressions can spread rapidly and reach wide audiences. At the same time, the increasing interconnection between online and offline environments means that digital abuse can have direct consequences for participation, well-being and the overall integrity of sport.

In this context, the management of online hate speech should not be treated as a purely technical or communication issue but should be fully integrated into the safeguarding frameworks already in place within sports organisations. This integration allows for a more coherent approach, ensuring that online abuse is addressed in connection with broader protection policies and that individuals affected by hate speech receive appropriate support.

A central operational priority concerns the strengthening of reporting mechanisms and cooperation with digital platforms. Sports organisations should be equipped with clear internal procedures that allow incidents of online hate speech to be reported, documented and followed up in a structured manner. The designation of responsible contact points, capable of managing cases and maintaining communication with platforms, is essential to ensure continuity and effectiveness. In contexts such as major sporting events, the establishment of pre-defined

channels of cooperation with platforms can significantly reduce response times and limit the amplification of harmful content.

Where incidents reach the thresholds established by national legislation, it is also necessary to ensure that appropriate procedures are in place for the preservation and transmission of evidence to competent authorities. This requires a careful balance between operational effectiveness and compliance with legal and data protection requirements.

Alongside reporting and enforcement, digital education represents a key pillar of prevention. Participants in the sports ecosystem, including athletes, supporters, managers and professionals, should be supported in developing an understanding of how online environments function and how certain forms of content are amplified. This includes the ability to recognise harmful behaviour, to use available tools for protection and reporting, and to engage in responsible and respectful communication. The adoption of digital codes of conduct by sports organisations can further contribute to establishing shared standards of behaviour within online communities.

Effective action in this area also depends on a clear distribution of roles and responsibilities. European institutions are responsible for defining the general regulatory framework and promoting coordination, while Member States ensure implementation and enforcement. Digital platforms play a central role in content moderation and risk management, whereas sports organisations are primarily responsible for prevention, reporting and support. Clarifying these roles helps to reduce overlaps, strengthen coordination and ensure that interventions are proportionate to the specific challenges of the digital environment.

Finally, experience shows that certain operational conditions are essential for ensuring the effectiveness of responses. In particular, the availability of recognised reporting channels, the capacity to document and monitor cases internally, and the integration of digital education into preventive strategies represent minimum requirements. Without these elements, interventions risk remaining fragmented and insufficient, regardless of the broader regulatory context.

4.5. Artificial intelligence: responsible use, limits and operational directions

Artificial intelligence is increasingly used in systems for monitoring, analysing and moderating online content, including communication related to sport. In the context of hate speech, these technologies can provide significant support, particularly in relation to the scale of digital environments, the speed of content circulation and the need to identify patterns that would be difficult to detect manually. At the same time, their use raises complex questions regarding reliability, transparency, accountability and the protection of fundamental rights.

An effective approach to artificial intelligence in this field cannot be limited to recognising its potential advantages. It requires the definition of clear conditions for its use, ensuring that technological tools remain supportive of human decision-making processes rather than replacing them. The objective is to avoid forms of automation that could lead to disproportionate or opaque decisions, particularly where such decisions may affect the rights and interests of individuals.

Within the sports context, the most appropriate use of artificial intelligence lies in its capacity to support preliminary and analytical functions. This includes the identification of potentially problematic content, the analysis of communication trends related to sporting events and the management of reporting flows. Artificial intelligence can also contribute to evaluating the impact of preventive measures, for example by analysing how communication patterns evolve following awareness campaigns or policy interventions.

However, the use of these tools is subject to significant structural limitations. Automated systems often struggle to interpret context-dependent language, including irony, sarcasm or culturally specific expressions, which are common in sports communication. This can result in both false positives, where legitimate content is incorrectly flagged, and false negatives, where harmful content is not identified. Additional concerns arise from potential biases embedded in training data, as well as from the opacity of certain models, which makes it difficult to explain how specific outputs are generated.

For these reasons, human oversight remains an essential component of any system involving artificial intelligence. Decisions that have legal, disciplinary or reputational consequences should never be taken solely because of automated processing. Instead, hybrid models should be adopted, in which artificial intelligence supports the identification and organisation of relevant information, while final assessments are carried out by individuals with the necessary contextual and professional expertise.

The use of artificial intelligence must also be fully aligned with the applicable European regulatory framework, including data protection requirements and emerging rules on artificial intelligence. As further detailed in Section 10, this implies that any use of automated tools must be proportionate to the objectives pursued, based on clearly defined purposes and accompanied by appropriate safeguards. Sports organisations and public authorities should therefore carefully assess the necessity and proportionality of such tools before adopting them, avoiding solutions that may be technically available but not justified in practice.

Ensuring responsible use also requires the development of adequate internal capacities. Organisations intending to rely on artificial intelligence should be able to understand the functioning and limitations of the tools they use, to monitor their performance and to identify potential risks. Without such capacities, there is a risk of over-reliance on external providers and of reduced control over decision-making processes.

More broadly, the approach developed in this context can serve as a model for the governance of emerging technologies in other areas related to sports integrity. By combining analytical support with human supervision and regulatory compliance, it is possible to harness the benefits of technological innovation while maintaining consistency with fundamental rights and ethical standards.

4.6. Strengthening decision-making capacities as an enabling condition

The increasing complexity of hate speech in sport, particularly in digital and technologically mediated environments, requires decision-making capacities that can address rapidly evolving and interconnected dynamics. Strengthening these capacities should not be seen as a corrective measure in response to individual shortcomings, but rather as a structural condition for ensuring the effectiveness, coherence and sustainability of public and sports policies.

Decision-making in this field involves the interaction of multiple dimensions, including fundamental rights, digital regulation, sporting autonomy and social dynamics. The quality of the policies adopted depends on the ability to interpret these interactions correctly and to translate them into measures that are proportionate, feasible and adapted to specific contexts. Without adequate decision-making capacities, there is a risk that policies may become fragmented, difficult to implement or insufficiently coordinated across different levels of governance.

In order to address these challenges, it is necessary to promote a basic level of decision-making literacy among those responsible for designing and implementing policies. This does not imply advanced technical expertise, but rather the capacity to understand the essential functioning of digital platforms, the potential and limitations of artificial intelligence tools and the key elements of the relevant regulatory framework. Such knowledge enables decision-makers to assess risks more effectively and to make informed choices that are consistent with both operational needs and fundamental rights.

These capacities should be supported through structured and continuous tools. Training programmes for public officials, regulators and sports managers should be integrated into existing professional development frameworks and updated regularly to reflect technological and social changes. In addition, the establishment of interdisciplinary support structures within institutions can facilitate access to specialised expertise, bridging the gap between technical knowledge and policy design.

The integration of impact assessment into decision-making processes represents another key element. By systematically evaluating the potential effects of proposed measures, including their implications for fundamental rights, organisational structures and technological systems, it becomes possible to anticipate critical issues and to adapt policies before they are implemented. This

contributes to making interventions more robust and to strengthening trust in institutional action.

Institutional continuity and the management of knowledge also play a crucial role. Documenting decisions, preserving experience and ensuring the transfer of expertise across different policy cycles allow institutions to build on previous work rather than starting from scratch. This is particularly important in a context characterised by rapid change, where the ability to learn and adapt over time represents a key asset.

Overall, strengthening decision-making capacities should be understood as a strategic investment. It enhances the ability of institutions and sports organisations to respond effectively to complex challenges, reduces the risk of systemic weaknesses and supports the development of coherent and credible policies aimed at promoting safe and inclusive sporting environments.

4.7. Social impact of hate speech in sport and criteria for public intervention

Hate speech in sport generates effects that extend beyond individual incidents and affect the broader functioning of sporting environments and communities. Its impact can influence participation levels, perceptions of safety and inclusion, and the degree of trust in both sports organisations and public institutions. These effects are not uniform, but vary depending on the context, the characteristics of the groups involved and the level of exposure of specific sporting activities.

Repeated exposure to hostile or discriminatory language can lead to reduced participation, particularly among individuals or groups that are already vulnerable to discrimination. Young people, women, persons belonging to minorities and individuals with disabilities may be particularly affected, as the perception of hostile environments can discourage engagement and lead to forms of self-exclusion. In this way, hate speech undermines the social function of sport as a space for inclusion, education and well-being.

In considering these impacts, it is important to distinguish between conduct that reaches the threshold of criminal relevance and conduct that, while not necessarily unlawful, nevertheless produces significant negative effects on individuals and communities. A substantial portion of harmful communication falls into this second category. In such cases, relying exclusively on repressive or regulatory tools is insufficient. Instead, responses must integrate preventive measures, support mechanisms and safeguarding approaches capable of addressing the broader consequences of harmful behaviour.

The social impact of hate speech is also shaped by territorial and organisational factors. Certain contexts may be more exposed to risk, including areas characterised by socio-economic vulnerability, sporting environments with limited organisational capacity and competitions with high levels of media and digital

visibility. These differences require a differentiated approach to public intervention, avoiding uniform solutions that do not consider local specificities.

In order to translate the analysis of social impact into operational policy tools, it is necessary to define clear criteria for prioritising interventions. These criteria should consider the frequency and repetition of incidents, the presence of vulnerable groups, the level of exposure to media and digital environments and the organisational capacity of the contexts concerned. By combining these elements, it becomes possible to identify situations that require more intensive and immediate intervention, as opposed to those where lighter or more targeted measures may be sufficient.

Such criteria can also guide the allocation of resources. Contexts characterised by repeated incidents, high exposure and limited capacity may require integrated interventions combining prevention, training, monitoring and institutional support. In other situations, where the phenomenon is less widespread or where organisational structures are stronger, support may focus on reinforcing existing practices and ensuring their sustainability over time.

By adopting a structured approach based on social impact, public authorities and sports organisations can better align their interventions with actual needs, ensuring that resources are used effectively and that policies contribute to strengthening inclusion, participation and trust within the sports system.

4.8. Related digital harms and the protection of minors and vulnerable groups and individuals

While hate speech remains the central focus of this report, it is necessary to acknowledge that, within digital environments, it often intersects with other forms of harmful behaviour, particularly those affecting minors and vulnerable groups and individuals. Among these, cyberbullying represents a relevant phenomenon, not because it coincides with hate speech, but because it shares similar dynamics, channels and impacts, especially in the context of sport.

In digital sporting environments, the distinction between hate speech and other forms of online abuse may be blurred in practice. Individuals may be exposed to repeated hostile interactions that combine discriminatory elements with personal targeting, harassment or exclusion. This is particularly significant in the case of young athletes and participants in grassroots or educational sport, where exposure to harmful communication can have lasting psychological and developmental consequences.

For this reason, the management of hate speech in sport should be embedded within broader safeguarding frameworks that also take into account related risks, including cyberbullying. This does not imply expanding the scope of policy beyond its core focus but rather recognising that effective protection requires an integrated approach capable of addressing the realities of digital interaction.

In operational terms, this requires that sports organisations adopt clear procedures for reporting, managing and following up on cases involving minors and vulnerable individuals. These procedures should ensure that incidents are not treated in isolation, but are assessed in their broader context, considering patterns of behaviour, potential escalation and the need for appropriate support.

Support mechanisms are particularly important in this area. Individuals affected by repeated online abuse may require not only formal responses, but also access to guidance, reassurance and, where appropriate, psychological support. Ensuring that such mechanisms are accessible and adapted to the needs of minors and vulnerable groups is a key component of effective safeguarding.

Preventive measures should also be strengthened through targeted digital education. Young participants, as well as those responsible for their training and supervision, should be equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to recognise harmful behaviour, to respond appropriately and to seek support when needed. This includes awareness of the risks associated with digital exposure, as well as the ability to use platform-based protection tools.

By situating hate speech within a broader understanding of digital risks, without diluting its specific focus, it becomes possible to develop responses that are both more realistic and more effective, particularly in contexts where the boundaries between different forms of harmful behaviour are not always clearly defined.

4.9. Recidivism and the effectiveness of responses

The recurrence of hate speech incidents represents a key indicator of the effectiveness of existing responses and an essential dimension for the development of future policies. Addressing individual incidents is necessary, but not sufficient if underlying dynamics remain unchanged and similar behaviour continues to reappear over time.

Recidivism should therefore be understood not as a separate category of intervention, but as a cross-cutting criterion for assessing the impact of preventive, disciplinary and regulatory measures. Persistent or repeated incidents may signal weaknesses in the implementation of policies, gaps in coordination between actors or insufficient attention to the behavioural and cultural factors that sustain harmful conduct.

The effectiveness of sanctions plays an important role in this context. While disciplinary and legal measures are necessary to address specific behaviours, their impact depends on their capacity to produce lasting change. This requires that sanctions are not only proportionate and enforceable but also integrated into broader strategies that include awareness-raising, education and follow-up measures. Without such integration, there is a risk that sanctions remain isolated responses, with limited long-term effect.

Monitoring systems are equally important in identifying patterns of recurrence. The ability to track incidents over time, to analyse their frequency and to identify recurring contexts or actors provides valuable information for adapting policies and targeting interventions more effectively. This requires a minimum level of internal documentation within sports organisations, as well as mechanisms for information sharing, in compliance with applicable legal frameworks.

At the same time, preventive approaches must be designed with recidivism in mind. This includes targeted interventions for individuals or groups that have been involved in repeated incidents, as well as the development of educational and restorative measures aimed at addressing the underlying causes of behaviour. In this perspective, prevention and enforcement should not be seen as separate domains, but as mutually reinforcing components of a coherent strategy.

Recidivism also has implications for governance. Persistent incidents may indicate the need for stronger coordination between sports organisations, public authorities and other stakeholders, as well as for clearer allocation of responsibilities. Addressing recurrence therefore contributes not only to reducing the frequency of incidents, but also to improving the overall effectiveness and credibility of the system.

By integrating the analysis of recidivism into policy design and implementation, it becomes possible to move from a reactive approach, focused on individual cases, to a more strategic and forward-looking perspective, capable of addressing structural weaknesses and promoting sustainable change.

4.10. Data protection as a cross-cutting safeguard

The development and implementation of policies to prevent and combat hate speech in sport must be consistently aligned with data protection principles and with the broader framework of fundamental rights. In a context characterised by increasing reliance on digital tools, data collection, monitoring systems and technological solutions, data protection should be understood not as a constraint, but as a structural safeguard that ensures the legitimacy and sustainability of interventions.

Measures aimed at addressing hate speech often involve the processing of personal data, for example in the context of reporting mechanisms, monitoring activities or the use of technological tools. These processes must be based on clearly defined purposes and must respect the principles of necessity and proportionality. The collection and use of data should be limited to what is strictly required to achieve legitimate objectives, avoiding practices that could lead to excessive or unjustified interference with individual rights.

Transparency represents a further essential element. Individuals should be adequately informed about how their data are used, for what purposes and under what conditions. This contributes to strengthening trust in reporting mechanisms

and in institutional responses more generally, particularly in contexts where underreporting may already represent a significant challenge.

Data protection considerations are particularly relevant in relation to the use of digital tools and artificial intelligence, as discussed in previous sections. The integration of such tools into policy frameworks requires careful assessment of their impact on fundamental rights, including the risk of automated decision-making or profiling. As a result, any technological solution should be accompanied by appropriate safeguards, including human oversight, clear accountability structures and mechanisms for contesting decisions where necessary.

The management of data also has implications for cooperation between actors. Information sharing between sports organisations, public authorities and, where relevant, digital platforms can enhance the effectiveness of responses but must be conducted within clearly defined legal frameworks. Ensuring that such cooperation respects data protection requirements is essential to avoid legal uncertainty and to maintain the legitimacy of interventions.

At the same time, data protection should not be seen as an obstacle to effective action. On the contrary, the adoption of well-designed data governance frameworks can facilitate the development of reliable monitoring systems, support evidence-based policymaking and contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon. By ensuring that data are collected and used in a consistent and responsible manner, it becomes possible to reconcile operational effectiveness with the protection of individual rights.

Ultimately, integrating data protection as a cross-cutting safeguard strengthens the overall quality of policies to combat hate speech in sport. It contributes to building trust, ensuring accountability and supporting the development of responses that are both effective and fully consistent with the fundamental values on which European action is based.

4.11. Concluding synthesis and implementation priorities

The analysis developed throughout this chapter highlights that the prevention of hate speech in sport and the reduction of its recurrence require a coherent and coordinated set of actions that go beyond isolated measures. Building on the legal and policy framework outlined in Chapter 1, the manifestations analysed in Chapter 2 and the practices identified in Chapter 3, this chapter has identified several interrelated priorities that define the conditions for effective and sustainable intervention.

A first set of priorities concerns the structural strengthening of preventive policies. Prevention must be understood as a long-term investment, embedded within the organisational and cultural fabric of sport. This requires the definition of common standards, the systematic integration of training and education, and the development of awareness-raising strategies capable of influencing behaviour

across different contexts. The effectiveness of these measures depends on their continuity, their adaptability to local specificities and their capacity to reach both professional and grassroots environments.

A second area of priority relates to the management of hate speech in digital environments. The characteristics of online communication, including speed, scale and amplification dynamics, require operational responses that are specifically tailored to the sports sector. The establishment of structured reporting mechanisms, the strengthening of cooperation with digital platforms and the integration of digital education into preventive strategies represent essential conditions for addressing online hate speech in a consistent and effective manner. These measures must be complemented by a clear allocation of responsibilities between institutional levels, platforms and sports organisations, ensuring that each actor can operate within a well-defined framework.

The responsible use of technology constitutes a further key dimension. Artificial intelligence and other digital tools can support monitoring and analysis, but their use must remain clearly framed within systems of human oversight, transparency and accountability. Ensuring that technological solutions are proportionate, understandable and aligned with fundamental rights is essential to prevent unintended consequences and to maintain trust in institutional action.

At the same time, the strengthening of decision-making capacities emerges as a fundamental enabling condition. The complexity of the phenomenon requires that those responsible for designing and implementing policies possess the necessary skills to interpret digital, legal and social dynamics. This includes the ability to assess risks, to integrate impact considerations into policy design and to coordinate actions across different levels of governance. Investing in decision-making capacities contributes to improving the quality and coherence of policies and reduces the likelihood of fragmented or ineffective responses.

The consideration of social impact provides an additional layer for guiding public intervention. By taking into account the effects of hate speech on participation, inclusion and trust, it becomes possible to prioritise actions and allocate resources in a more targeted manner. This approach allows for the identification of contexts that require more intensive intervention, particularly where vulnerability, exposure and limited organisational capacity intersect.

Addressing recidivism represents a crucial element in this overall framework. The recurrence of incidents should be used as an indicator of the effectiveness of policies and as a basis for adapting interventions over time. This requires the development of monitoring systems capable of identifying patterns of behaviour, as well as the integration of preventive, educational and disciplinary measures in a coherent strategy aimed at producing lasting change.

Across all these areas, data protection plays a central role as a cross-cutting safeguard. The collection and use of data must be conducted in a manner that is consistent with fundamental rights, ensuring that measures remain proportionate, transparent and accountable. At the same time, well-designed data governance

frameworks can support more effective monitoring, facilitate cooperation between actors and strengthen evidence-based policymaking.

Within this overall framework, the added value of coordinated European action lies in its capacity to promote coherence, reduce fragmentation and support the development of shared approaches. This includes facilitating the exchange of good practices, supporting capacity-building initiatives, promoting common standards and encouraging cooperation between Member States, sports organisations, civil society and digital platforms. European action does not replace national or local responsibilities but provides a framework within which these can be exercised more effectively and consistently.

Finally, the implementation of these priorities should follow a gradual and adaptive approach. In an initial phase, efforts should focus on establishing the essential conditions for effective action, including the development of minimum standards, the strengthening of reporting mechanisms and the integration of training and education. In a subsequent phase, policies can be further refined and expanded, considering the experience gained and the specificities of different contexts. This progressive approach allows for continuous learning and ensures that interventions remain responsive to evolving challenges.

Taken together, these elements define a comprehensive and forward-looking framework for addressing hate speech in sport. By combining prevention, operational effectiveness, technological awareness, institutional capacity and respect for fundamental rights, it becomes possible to strengthen the integrity of sport and to promote environments that are safe, inclusive and consistent with the core values of European societies.

5. Final recommendations

5.1. Introduction

Hate speech in sport is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon, requiring coordinated responses across legal, institutional, operational and cultural domains. The legal and policy framework outlined in Chapter 1, the manifestations and dynamics examined in Chapter 2, and the practices and measures presented in Chapter 3 collectively demonstrate that no single instrument or actor is sufficient to address the issue effectively.

The following recommendations, having in mind the future actions foreseen in Chapter 4, consolidate and systematise the key policy implications emerging from the report. They are intended as non-binding guidance for public authorities, sport organisations, European and international institutions, digital platforms and civil society actors. Their objective is to support the development of coherent, proportionate and sustainable responses to hate speech in sport, in full respect of fundamental rights.

5.2. Key recommendation areas

5.2.1. Increased political attention and further and deepened cooperation with the sports movement

As demonstrated in this report, hate speech in sport causes severe damage. Such behaviour is in direct conflict with EU values and is contradictory to the European Sport Model, undermining its sustainability, credibility and public support. Given the seriousness of its consequences, greater political attention should be devoted to preventing and countering this phenomenon, which increasingly permeates our societies and risks becoming normalised. Continuous dialogue and cooperation between political institutions and the sports movement, taking into account its autonomy, can help create the conditions for more effective and better-designed measures. Addressing this issue is also essential to strengthening the European Sport Model.

5.2.2. Legal clarity, convergence and enforcement

Hate speech in sport is not an isolated phenomenon but part of broader societal dynamics. The absence of harmonised legal definitions and the diversity of national approaches might create inconsistencies in enforcement and unequal levels of protection.

At European Union level, further development of minimum common standards—particularly under Article 83 TFEU—would reduce inconsistencies in its criminalisation, taking into consideration the division of competences between national and EU level. Clarifying evidentiary thresholds and protected characteristics, while respecting constitutional traditions, would improve legal predictability in cross-border sporting contexts.

Public authorities should work towards a clearer and more consistent understanding of the thresholds for criminal and administrative intervention, particularly in relation to online hate speech and context-dependent expressions typical of sport environments. This includes improving the capacity to distinguish between freedom of speech and unlawful conduct, but also the use of effective sanctions and prevention tools when facing unlawful conduct.

Training and cooperation platforms at international and national level for judges, prosecutors, law-enforcement authorities, administrative bodies and sports organisations should be strengthened, with a specific focus on the identification of bias indicators, the use of digital evidence, the nuances of hate speech in sporting environments and the impact of hate speech on victims in sporting contexts. These measures at the European and national levels would contribute to more consistent enforcement and increased legal certainty.

Sports organisations have a responsibility to align their disciplinary frameworks with national and European legal standards. Internal legal officers and compliance units should be trained to identify cases that warrant referral to criminal and administrative authorities, ensuring that disciplinary, administrative and criminal proceedings complement rather than undermine one another.

Digital service providers, for their part, must cooperate with judicial and other public authorities by preserving and transmitting relevant evidence in accordance with EU data protection and digital regulation frameworks.

Effective harmonisation ultimately depends on structured multi-level coordination. Formal exchange mechanisms between EU judicial networks, national prosecutors, administrative authorities and sports compliance bodies—particularly during international competitions—would promote consistency, rapid information sharing and coherent enforcement.

5.2.3. Governance, accountability and coordination in sport

Sport organisations play a central role in preventing and addressing hate speech and should be supported in developing robust governance and compliance frameworks. Clear codes of conduct, disciplinary regulations and internal procedures should define unacceptable behaviour and establish proportionate and consistent sanctions.

Accountability mechanisms should be strengthened at all levels of sport. Failure to respond to discriminatory conduct should be recognised as a governance issue, as it contributes to normalisation and underreporting. Where appropriate,

the establishment of independent centralised disciplinary bodies may enhance impartiality and trust. All disciplinary procedures should be based on fair trial principles.

Member State authorities need to ensure that anti-hate policies move beyond being merely declaratory and become fully operational in practice. Member States should ensure the adoption of explicit regulations for punishing individual offenders and for establishing the responsibility of organisers and clubs.

Effective responses also require strengthened coordination between sport organisations and public authorities. Clear cooperation mechanisms and referral procedures should ensure that cases are handled at the appropriate level, while enabling disciplinary, administrative and criminal responses to be aligned and mutually reinforcing. In addition, clear mandates for referees, coaches and other sports officials to intervene when boundaries are crossed are important tools.

Understanding the diversity of supporter cultures is essential. Regulatory responses must distinguish between legitimate rivalry-based expression and discriminatory hate speech. Dialogue mechanisms with supporter associations can strengthen legitimacy and improve preventive effectiveness without undermining proportionality principles.

Multi-level governance arrangements, such as memoranda of understanding between public authorities, digital regulators and sports federations, can clarify operational responsibilities and ensure rapid coordinated responses to incidents.

At grassroots level, governance frameworks should place a strong emphasis on preventive action, particularly within lower divisions and district associations, where norms, behaviours and language are first shaped. Hate speech should be formally recognised as a systemic issue, rather than being treated solely as an individual disciplinary matter. Codes of conduct could be applicable to all participants, including players, supporters, volunteers and parents.

5.2.4. Reporting

Underreporting and the lack of reliable, comparable data remain significant obstacles to effective policy development.

Accessible, confidential and user-friendly reporting and whistleblowing mechanisms should be established or strengthened across all levels of sport. Transparent follow-up procedures and clear communication are essential to build trust in reporting and whistleblowing systems. Strengthening reporting mechanisms is also closely linked to improving victim support and addressing the normalisation of hate speech in certain sporting environments.

5.2.5. Data collection

Efforts should be made to develop more consistent methodologies for data collection, including the use of disaggregated data about vulnerabilities where appropriate. Improved coordination between sport organisations, public authorities and international bodies would support comparability and evidence-based policymaking.

Shared standards should be developed for: registering incidents across online and offline contexts; categorising different forms of hate speech and discriminatory language; tracking recurrence, escalation and outcomes.

Aggregated data should be used to inform policy development, education priorities and strategic decision-making.

Impact evaluation, more than a formal requirement, needs to be a tool for institutional learning and continuous improvement. From this perspective, financial support for prevention initiatives should be progressively linked to the demonstration of concrete results and the adoption of evidence-based approaches.

Long-term financial planning is essential to ensure the continuity of actions and avoid fragmentation. The involvement of national and European resources, as well as local authorities, academic institutions and foundations, can help strengthen the sustainability of interventions, provided transparency, consistent objectives and respect for the autonomy of the sports system are ensured.

5.2.6. Monitoring

Effective monitoring mechanisms should ensure that reported cases are systematically tracked, assessed and addressed.

Strengthening monitoring is also closely linked to improving victim support and tackling the normalisation of hate speech in certain sporting environments, by ensuring that incidents are not only reported but followed by visible and consistent action.

Artificial intelligence tools can support the monitoring and detection of hate speech in sport, particularly in digital environments where the scale and speed of content dissemination make manual oversight difficult. These technologies may assist in identifying patterns, flagging potentially harmful content and supporting reporting systems.

However, their use should be carefully designed and implemented, ensuring that automated processes do not replace human judgement. Human oversight remains essential to assess context, avoid misclassification and ensure that

decisions are proportionate and consistent with fundamental rights, including freedom of expression.

The use of artificial intelligence must also be fully compliant with the European regulatory framework, particularly the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the European Regulation on Artificial Intelligence (AI Act). Depending on the characteristics of the system used, automatic hate speech detection applications may be considered high-risk systems, resulting in enhanced obligations regarding transparency, data governance, technical documentation and human oversight.

For sports organisations and public authorities, this implies the need to carefully evaluate the proportionality of the tools adopted and to avoid implementations that may be illegitimate or disproportionate to the objectives pursued.

In the sports context, hybrid models that combine automated tools and human assessment represent the most appropriate solution. Formalising these models through documented procedures and decision logs helps ensure transparency, consistency and accountability, reducing the risk of systemic errors or inadvertent discrimination.

5.2.7. Addressing the digital environment

To ensure safe digital environments, the European regulatory framework, while fundamental, needs to be complemented with operational sectoral measures specifically tailored to the dynamics of sport. The digital dimension of hate speech in sport requires targeted and coordinated responses. Cooperation between digital platforms, public authorities and sport organisations should be enhanced to improve the detection, reporting and removal of illegal content.

At EU level, rigorous enforcement of the Digital Services Act is crucial. Oversight authorities should assess systemic risks associated with major sporting events and require platforms to implement targeted mitigation strategies. EU research and innovation can support the development of multilingual moderation tools capable of detecting context-specific sporting terminology and coded expressions.

Strong and independent Digital Services Coordinators (DSCs) and cybercrime units could play an important role in ensuring effective cooperation with platforms, including in the sports context. Training in digital evidence preservation, cross-border data requests and online hate investigations should become standard within law enforcement agencies.

Mechanisms such as trusted flaggers should be promoted since they can play a significant role in strengthening reporting systems, provided that participating

entities are equipped with adequate expertise, resources and clear procedural guidance. At the same time, efforts should be made to improve the preservation and use of digital evidence in both legal and disciplinary proceedings.

Recognised sports federations and trained club representatives should be formally integrated into trusted flagger systems foreseen under EU digital regulation. Cooperation agreements between platforms, sports bodies and national Digital Services Coordinators could establish rapid escalation channels during major competitions.

Sports organisations should proactively engage in digital monitoring, either through internal units or through structured partnerships with specialised providers. During major competitions, rapid-response protocols should be activated to coordinate with platforms and law enforcement, ensuring timely removal and investigation of harmful content.

Digital service providers themselves should maintain efficient notice-and-action systems, ensure transparency in content moderation decisions, and provide escalation channels for verified sports bodies. To improve their performance in addressing hate speech, platforms should implement proactive protective measures, particularly for vulnerable profiles.

Proactive collaboration, rather than purely reactive removal, is essential to limit viral abuse targeting athletes and officials. Default protective settings, combined with transparent moderation procedures and rapid escalation pathways, would strengthen preventative capacity while remaining consistent with EU digital regulation and data protection principles.

The EU Action Plan against cyberbullying “Safer online, stronger together” should be taken into account when developing sport-specific responses to online hate speech, particularly where children and young people are concerned. The Action Plan recognises that cyberbullying and hate offences may overlap where online abuse is motivated by hatred or targets protected characteristics, and calls for a coordinated EU approach based on prevention, awareness-raising, reporting and support. In the sport context, this means that digital monitoring, reporting channels, trusted flagger mechanisms and evidence-preservation procedures should be designed to address not only illegal hate speech, but also cyberbullying affecting young athletes, referees, supporters and other participants. Synergies should be developed with national measures adopted under the Action Plan, including child-friendly reporting tools, cooperation with helplines and support services, and initiatives promoting safe, respectful and responsible digital behaviour in sport.

All measures in the digital domain should remain proportionate and respect fundamental rights, including freedom of expression and data protection.

5.2.8. Victim support and protection, restorative justice and mediation.

Victim support should be recognised as a central component of any effective response to hate speech in sport. Individuals subjected to abuse should have access to timely, accessible and appropriate support mechanisms. Combating hate speech in sport must extend beyond sanctioning perpetrators to protecting victims. Particular attention should be given to vulnerable groups and individuals exposed to repeated online targeting.

At EU level, victim protection frameworks should explicitly encompass victims of sport-related hate speech, and funding streams should support specialised counselling and legal assistance services linked to sport environments.

Member States must ensure that national victim protection legislation applies equally to incidents occurring in stadiums and online sporting contexts.

Sports organisations bear a direct safeguarding responsibility. Confidential reporting channels, independent counselling partnerships and legal advisory services should be embedded within federation policies.

A special focus should be placed on children, young people and women. This report has shown that children and young people are more vulnerable to hate speech and are subject to hate speech in different ways, both when experiencing it in elite games and when it is used in the context of grassroots sport for children and young people. It is particularly important to protect children and young people from hate speech, both online and offline. Targeted preventive and protective measures are therefore necessary, including safeguarding mechanisms, educational initiatives and awareness-raising actions specifically adapted to youth sport contexts. Adults involved in sport, including coaches, officials, educators and parents, have a particular responsibility to prevent and address hate speech and to act as role models in promoting respectful and inclusive language and behaviour.

The report also highlights that hate speech affects women and men in different ways and may take gender-specific forms. Women in sport are frequently targeted through sexist, degrading or sexualised language, while patterns of abusive behaviour historically associated with certain male sporting environments may increasingly spread into women's competitions and online spaces. Analysing hate speech from a gender perspective is therefore essential to understanding its manifestations and impacts and to designing effective responses. Continuous dialogue with representatives of both women's and men's sport is also important in order to monitor evolving trends and ensure that policies and measures remain adapted to the changing realities of the sporting environment.

The examples in the report also highlight the significance of racism in hate speech. Consequently, an intersectional perspective also appears particularly

relevant for a more effective analysis of hate speech in sport, which often targets people who face multiple forms of discrimination.

Multi-level coordination is essential to ensure continuity of support. Referral pathways connecting sports reporting systems with national victim assistance agencies would guarantee that individuals receive comprehensive protection beyond the sporting domain. Access to psychological support, legal aid, guidance on media and online exposure, and compensation mechanisms should be clear, accessible and free from procedural barriers.

Clear communication strategies must reassure athletes, coaches, referees and supporters that reporting abuse will not result in retaliation or reputational harm.

Digital service providers also play a protective role by offering accessible reporting tools, user-blocking mechanisms and feedback on moderation decisions. Verified athlete and other sports entities' accounts should benefit from enhanced protective filters and rapid review channels.

Damage to victims is usually best addressed through emotional, restorative and transformative support. While the criminal justice system can express society's condemnation of a perpetrator's actions, the harm caused to the victim and their family is unlikely to be fully repaired through criminal law alone.

Restorative justice could be part of the sanctioning procedure, either at the criminal, administrative or disciplinary level, foreseeing sanctions or any other measures beyond a pecuniary fine, such as carrying out social work for the community, voluntary mediation, the prohibition of access to any sports venue, the obligation to publish rectification statements, or attending educational training with a rehabilitation and reparation of the victim approach. In parallel, clear and proportionate pathways for the rehabilitation of offenders should be in place. Rehabilitation should be recognised as a core component of efforts to prevent recidivism.

Trained mediators and educators could form part of a comprehensive response to hate speech in sport. These actors, when integrated into prevention and response systems, facilitate dialogue, de-escalate conflicts and deliver targeted educational interventions. Their role includes raising awareness of the impact of discriminatory language, supporting victims, and working with offenders and communities to foster behavioural change. Such mechanisms can be supported by cooperation with educational institutions, civil society and relevant public authorities.

The effectiveness of sanctions plays an important role in this context. While disciplinary and legal measures are necessary to address specific behaviours, their impact depends on their capacity to produce lasting change. This requires that sanctions are not only proportionate and enforceable but also integrated into broader strategies that include awareness-raising, education and follow-up measures. Without such integration, there is a risk that sanctions remain isolated responses, with limited long-term effect.

5.2.9. Prevention, education, awareness raising and cultural change

Preventive approaches are essential as the first steps in tackling hate speech in sport beyond legal and disciplinary measures. Education, inclusion, rehabilitation of offenders and awareness-raising initiatives should be developed across all levels of sport to promote respect and non-discrimination.

The systematic integration of hate speech prevention into formal education, in synergy with national and regional education policies, by promoting the inclusion of modules dedicated to digital citizenship, responsible communication, respect for diversity and the values of sport in school curricula, can foster educational continuity between school and organised sport.

Long-term change requires preventive and educational strategies addressing the cultural roots of hate speech in sport. The European Union can promote this shift by prioritising inclusive sport projects within Erasmus+ and CERV programmes and supporting cross-border campaigns promoting equality in sport.

Training programmes should include elements relating to the deconstruction of stereotypes and the downgrading of competition factors and athletic performance, while upgrading the importance of the positive inclusion elements related to the core values of sport. This is particularly relevant in the context of youth sport. They should also include, in a proportionate manner, elements relating to the recognition of different manifestations of hate speech, fundamental principles of privacy and digital security, procedures for responding to and reporting incidents, and awareness of the risks associated with the use of digital environments.

These training programmes should target athletes, coaches, referees, officials, media, journalists and supporters, among others, focusing on the identification of hate speech, its impact and appropriate responses. Particular emphasis should be placed on grassroots and youth sport, where early intervention can contribute to long-term cultural change, since they represent privileged places for socialisation and the transmission of sporting values. The design of such education tools should be dynamic, adapted to the audience's age and the specific sport.

Sport should be recognised as a key platform for promoting positive values and social cohesion. Preventive strategies should therefore include not only education but also broader communication efforts and engagement with communities.

National authorities, sports federations and clubs should actively highlight positive examples of inclusive supporter culture and successful anti-hate initiatives. Public recognition of good practices reinforces constructive norms and contributes to cultural transformation. Prevention strategies should combine awareness campaigns, supporter engagement programmes and structured rehabilitation pathways for offenders, including educational workshops and restorative measures where legally appropriate.

Digital service providers can support preventive strategies by promoting counter-speech initiatives, collaborating on digital literacy campaigns for young athletes and amplifying positive role-model messaging during tournaments.

Finally, multi-level governance platforms should facilitate regular exchange of best practices, evaluation metrics and impact assessments. Preventive strategies must be continuously reviewed to ensure they adapt to evolving forms of abuse, both offline and online.

Rewarding best practices supporting the development of tolerance and respect in the sporting sphere could play an essential role not only in helping to prevent episodes of hate speech in sport, but also in the rehabilitation of the image and behaviour of sports organisations and sports individuals.

Best-practice databases should be created and maintained at EU level relating to prevention, education, awareness raising and cultural change; this would be very useful in showing how the different Member States are addressing hate speech in sport.

5.3. Cross-cutting principles

The recommendations outlined above should be implemented in accordance with a number of overarching principles.

First, all measures should respect fundamental rights, in particular freedom of expression, while ensuring effective protection against discrimination and harm. Proportionality and legal certainty should guide both legal and non-legal interventions.

Second, responses to hate speech in sport should be based on a multi-level and multi-stakeholder approach, involving cooperation between public authorities, sport organisations, digital platforms, civil society and international institutions.

Third, regulation and implementation should be sustainable and adaptable, taking into account differences in resources, institutional capacity and sporting contexts. A gradual and evidence-based approach can support effective and lasting change.

Finally, monitoring and evaluation should be integrated into policy responses, ensuring that measures are regularly assessed and adjusted in light of evolving challenges, including those related to digital environments.

Annex I – Mandate



Brussels, 24 October 2024
(OR. en)

14445/24

SPORT 71
SOC 756
JAI 1493
FREMP 391

NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group on "Fight against hate speech in sport" - Mandate

Delegations will find attached the mandate of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group on “Fight against hate speech in sport”, as agreed by the Working Party on Sport on 23 October 2024.

**Open Method of Coordination (OMC) Group on “Fight against hate speech in sport”
set up under the EU Work Plan for Sport 2024-2027
- Mandate -**

A. BACKGROUND

1. The EU Work Plan for Sport 2024-2027¹ under priority area 1 “Integrity and values in sport”, Key topic “Fight against hate speech”, envisages work on two themes:

- 1) “Influence of social media and prevention of online verbal abuse” and
- 2) “Manifestations of verbal and physical violence during sport events”.

As the working method, the EU Work Plan for Sport foresees the creation of a dedicated Open Method of Coordination (OMC) group “Fight against hate speech in sport”. The scope of the OMC group is further defined by this mandate. The work of the OMC group will provide a framework for cooperation, exchange and sharing of good practices among Member States and relevant stakeholders allowing for the development of non-binding recommendations for Member States and relevant stakeholders in and outside sport.

2. Sport can contribute to social integration and promote its values such as tolerance, equality, fair play and solidarity. These values, and those enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (“TEU”), are shared by the Member States that uphold values of pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men.

¹ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the European Union Work Plan for Sport (1 July 2024 — 31 December 2027), OJ C, C/2024/3527, 3.6.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/3527/oj>

3. Hate speech can seriously affect sportspeople and their entourage at any level and undermine the integrity and positive values in sport and society. In recent years online hate speech in sport has increased considerably, facilitated by the increased use of social media platforms. It is thus important to address the increasing prevalence of hate speech in sport, not only in professional sports, but also in grassroots sports, where children and young people are often particularly affected by hate speech.
4. Hate speech can manifest online and at sport events. It is understood to include discriminatory language, derogatory comments or threats based on various factors, including race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. Attention is needed for the combined impact of verbal violence during sport events and online in sport that can aggravate the impact of hate speech. On some occasions, verbal violence during sport events degenerates into physical violence involving supporters, thereby disrupting sport events themselves. For instance, it can lead to fans being denied access to sport events altogether.
5. Despite an increased awareness about hate speech, public authorities as well as sports clubs and organisations face considerable challenges when trying to address it, such as lack of awareness about the impact of hate speech, prevention strategies, clear definitions and challenges with regards to sanctioning unacceptable behaviours.
6. In its activities, the OMC Group “Fight against hate speech in sport” will take existing initiatives, policy papers, etc. into account, such as those listed hereunder:
 - The EU-Council of Europe joint project “Combating Hate Speech in Sport” that explored innovative approaches to address hate speech, including online and offered technical assistance to both policymakers and practitioners (2022-2024);
 - The Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law that requires Member States to ensure effective criminal response to hate speech, i.e. the public incitement to violence and hatred targeted at individuals or groups defined by race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin;

- The Guidance Note on the practical application of the Framework Decision by the EU high-level Group on combating racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance; and the complementing paper by the EU high-level group on the 10 key guiding principles for ensuring justice, protection and support for victims of hate crime and hate speech (2017);
- The Commission Communication “A more inclusive and protective Europe: extending the list of EU crimes to hate speech and hate crime” (COM (2021) 777, 9 December 2021) that calls for a clearer, stronger regulatory framework to counter hate speech and hate crime;
- The Joint Communication “No place for hate: a Europe united against hatred” (JOIN (2023) 51, 6 December 2023), adopted by the Commission and the High Representative, which aims to step up EU efforts to fight hatred in all forms, by reinforcing action across a variety of policies and specifies that major sporting events in Europe should be used to raise awareness against hatred and to promote European values.

B. ROLE, SCOPE AND EXPECTED RESULTS OF THE OMC GROUP

1. In accordance with the principle of subsidiarity and in full respect of Member States’ competences in the field of sport policy as laid down in the EU Treaties, the OMC Group should investigate how to tackle hate speech in sport, online and at sport events, taking into account that verbal abuse may incite physical violence.
2. The key objective of this OMC Group is to make non-binding recommendations to relevant actors to enhance cooperation in this field, in view of reducing occurrences of hate speech in sport, based on policy analysis, examples of good practices and evidence on awareness-raising on hate speech in sport; and on preventing and sanctioning actual occurrences of hate speech in sport.

3. To achieve this objective, the OMC Group will:

- a) Identify relevant legal provisions, policy initiatives, frameworks, projects, research, etc.
- b) Discuss and propose ways to raise awareness in Member States about the impact of hate speech surrounding sport events on the sport sector, notably organisers of competitions, athletes, spectators and, more broadly, on EU societies, educational settings and also taking into account the role of the media.
- c) Analyse cases of manifestations of hate speech in sport, both at sport events and online, and how these were addressed, in view of better understanding the challenges and impact. This should include analysing the occurrence of hate speech from a gender equality perspective and from the perspective of children and young people. Elaborate possible measures to prevent and reduce occurrences of hate speech.
- d) Identify, collect and analyse evidence, good practices and data, on local, regional, national and EU level, in view of identifying good examples with the biggest potential to be adaptable to different national contexts and regulatory frameworks and effectively implemented in EU Members States.
- e) Consider ways to prevent persons from reoffending, including in another Member State, while respecting existing legal framework, such as relevant EU and national data protection laws.

C. WORKING APPROACHES AND FINAL OUTPUT

1. The OMC Group will be composed of representatives to be designated by the EU Member States. The Member State representatives should have relevant expertise to address hate speech in sport.
2. The duration of the activities of the OMC Group should not exceed 18 months.
3. The representatives designated by the Member States for the OMC Group will elect a chair and a vice-chair amongst them. The European Commission will act as a secretariat and support the chair and vice-chair.
4. The OMC Group will decide about the frequency of meetings. Meetings will be held in-person, in principle in Brussels, and/or online, as appropriate. Indicatively, three in-person meetings could be foreseen for the duration of the OMC group.
5. Upon request of the Council Presidency, the OMC Group will report on its work to the Council Working Party on Sport.
6. The OMC group may decide to invite experts from third countries, as defined in the EU Work Plan for Sport, as observers.
7. The OMC Group may decide to involve additional external experts as observers or guest speakers, for further inspiration and input, such as:
 - a) Experts from international organisations (e.g. Council of Europe, United Nations, etc.);
 - b) Experts from the sport sector, such as national and international federations, sport clubs, athletes, and supporters; and from other relevant stakeholder groups, including from the scientific world;
 - c) Experts with relevant experience in dealing with awareness-raising, prevention and addressing hate speech, including social media companies, which are signatories to the EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online.

8. The non-binding recommendations, backed by evidence and examples of good practice will be compiled in a final report, drafted by the representatives designated by the EU Member States.
 9. The OMC Group will aim to publish its final report no later than 3 months after the finalisation of works of the group and its last meeting and in due time, in view of providing input for the Commission's report on the implementation of the EU Work Plan for Sport 2024-2027.
 10. The OMC group will adopt Rules of Procedure governing the procedural aspects of the work of the OMC Group.
 11. The work of the OMC group "Fight against hate speech in sport" will be conducted in a transparent manner. The OMC group's secretariat will publish the mandate, Rules of Procedure and composition of the OMC group as well as the agendas and minutes of the meetings on a website.
 12. The OMC group may invite relevant Commission services to participate in the meetings.
-

Annex II – Collection of best practices

COLLECTION OF BEST PRACTICES (INCLUDING SANCTIONING MEASURES) ON HATE SPEECH IN SPORT

1. PRACTICES RELATED TO PROMOTING INCLUSION AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

<i>ACTION/TARGET</i>	<i>INSTITUTION/COUNTRY/ PERIOD</i>	<i>CONTENT</i>
<u>“Sport Inclusive II”/General inclusion</u> https://www.csd.gob.es/es/promocion-del-deporte/deporte-inclusivo-ii	High Council for Sports Spain 2021–2024	This programme supports innovative approaches to addressing social challenges through sport and physical activity. It uses design thinking methodologies to develop user-centred solutions, with the aim of engaging target communities and promoting inclusion through tailored initiatives.

<u>“Together in Sport”/Inclusion of asylum seekers</u> <u>Together in Sport - Phase II - Metadrasi.org</u>	<i>Greece – Germany</i> <i>2022–2023</i>	This project promotes social inclusion and peaceful coexistence by facilitating the participation of asylum-seeking children and young people in organised sport. It enables interaction with local communities and supports the development of social relationships through sport. The initiative is co-funded by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees of Germany and the European Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), and is implemented by METAdrasi in cooperation with the Hellenic Olympic Committee, the German Olympic Sports Confederation and local municipalities.
<u>“DITEAM12”/Education</u> <u>https://www.europaralympic.org/diteam12</u>	<i>European Paralympic Committee</i> <i>Czech Republic, Slovenia, Spain</i> <i>2020-2021</i>	The project aims to provide pedagogical tools for coaches and club directors and to develop support structures for families, including the creation of a “school of parents” within sports clubs. It focuses on inclusion through education and capacity building.

<u>SCORE (Sporting Cities Opposing Racism in Europe)/General inclusion</u> https://scoreproject.net/	<i>EU project</i> <i>Spain, France, Italy</i> 2022–2024	The project aims to establish a coalition of European cities and local entities to promote inclusive sport and prevent racism, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance. It focuses on cooperation between local actors and the development of joint strategies
<u>European Prize for Social Integration through Sport/General inclusion</u> https://knowledge4policy.ec.europa.eu/projects-activities/sport-european-prize-social-integration-through-sport_en	<i>European Union</i> 2015–2016	This initiative promotes the exchange of innovative practices aimed at strengthening communities and conveying messages of respect and non-discrimination through sport. It supports cooperation between municipalities, sport organizations and local services, and encourages the development of local inclusion strategies.
<u>“Not Only Fair Play”</u> https://notonlyfairplay.pixel-online.org/index_nograted.php	<i>European Union. Erasmus +</i> 2015–2016	This project promotes the role of sport in schools by strengthening the integration of physical education into curricula and emphasizing its contribution to social inclusion. It targets teachers, school leaders and public authorities and promotes ethical approaches to sport and equal access for all students.
<u>IRIS – Innovative Learning Resources</u>	<i>Spain, Greece, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary</i>	The IRIS project develops educational tools and resources aimed at

http://iris-sport.eu/es	2015–2016	preventing and addressing discrimination, racism and violence in grassroots sport. It seeks to enhance the capacity of stakeholders and raise awareness among policymakers, supporting the integration of good practices into local and national initiatives.
<u>ATHLISI – Promotion of social integration through sport clubs/Inclusion of children</u> http://www.athlisi.eu/index.php/en/	<i>Italy, Greece, Malta and others</i> 2016–2017	This project promotes the inclusion of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Roma communities and children from low socio-economic contexts, through participation in sport. It includes training for coaches and club representatives and encourages cooperation between sports clubs and local communities.
<u>START – Activating and integrating people with disabilities through adapted sports/Inclusion of people with disabilities</u> https://start.org.pl/the-four-traditional-sport-games-presented-to-people-with-disabilities-from-the-home-for-adults-with-disabilities-kyustendil/	<i>Poland, Bulgaria and others</i> 2017–2018	The project promotes participation in traditional sports and games adapted for people with disabilities. It aims to encourage inclusive participation and interaction between people with and without disabilities in grassroots sport settings
<u>WELCOME – Integration of young refugees through sport activity</u> https://irts.isca.org/	<i>Sponsored by EU, Council of Europe and other international institutions</i> 2017–2018	The project supports the integration of young refugees and asylum seekers through regular sport activities combined with psychological support. It promotes social inclusion, equal opportunities and the

		exchange of best practices among participating organizations.
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2. PRACTICES RELATED TO RAISING AWARENESS AND FOSTERING EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES.

- “Together Against All”

(<https://www.rytasvilnius.lt/lt/naujienos/rytas/n/daugiau-nei-krepsinis-pries-atkrintamuju-startarytas-pradedo-together-against-all-kampanija-1726/>)

Institution: Basketball Club Rytas (Vilnius)

Country: Lithuania

Year: 2023

This campaign, launched by one of the largest basketball clubs in Lithuania, aims to engage players, supporters and the wider community in addressing social issues such as racism, inequality and homophobia.

The initiative extends beyond sport-related activities, involving collaboration with organizations such as the Red Cross and engagement with socially disadvantaged groups, including families, children and elderly people. Campaign messages are visible within the arena and through dedicated communication materials, reinforcing awareness among supporters.



- “TOGETHER! Stop hate. Be a team”

(<https://www.bundesliga.com/en/bundesliga/news/football-promotes-diversity-tolerancecompassion-cohesion-and-respect-31378>)

Institution: Deutsche Fußball Liga (DFL)

Country: Germany

Year: 2025

This campaign is part of a long-standing commitment by the DFL and the DFL Foundation to promote diversity and prevent discrimination in football. It builds on earlier initiatives focused on combating racism and has evolved towards a broader message emphasizing collective responsibility and inclusion.

The campaign is implemented through multiple channels, including stadium visibility, dedicated match equipment, communication materials and media partnerships. It also involves clubs, players and international broadcasting partners, ensuring wide dissemination of the message.



- “Come Together” action plan

Institution: Royal Belgian Football Association (KBVB) and Pro League

Country: Belgium

Year: 2024

This action plan involves coordinated efforts by football authorities and stakeholders to combat discrimination and racism. It includes awareness campaigns, video content featuring players and public figures, and guidance materials aimed at helping individuals respond to online hate.

The initiative also provides practical information for victims, including how to adjust social media settings and how to report hate speech to the police. It reflects cooperation between sports organizations, public authorities and law enforcement bodies.



“Hate is not an option” campaign.

Institution: Hungarian Football Association

Year: 2013

The main message of the campaign is that fans and cheering are above all else, but there is a sharp line between passionate encouragement and hateful behaviour in the stands. Spectators have the right and opportunity to express their opinions alongside cheering, if it does not violate the human dignity of others.

The spots, which were created with the help of top players and former legends and tailored to specific teams, were broadcast by the MLSZ and the campaign's main media partners, MTVA and Sport Televízió.

Sport Televízió, in collaboration with the MLSZ, was searching for the most family-friendly stadium in the country, motivating clubs to create a "fan-friendly" environment. The main protagonists of the campaign are players from leading clubs. The messages formulated jointly by the teams and the association was displayed on flyers in and around stadiums and the commercials were broadcast on the two aforementioned television channels.



-Training “Safeguarding and protecting children and young people in sport”

<https://www.nau.edu.pt/pt/curso/salvaguardar-e-proteger-as-criancas-e-jovens-no-desporto/>

Institution: Institute of Sport and Youth

Country: Portugal

Year: 2025

The Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth has developed an online program “Safeguarding and protecting children and young people in sport”. The course duration is 4 hours. It develops skills to prevent and respond to potential child and youth abuse in sports. The course is aimed at coaches but is open to anyone interested in the topic of prevention and protection of children and young people in sport.



-Project “Hate is not a sport 2”

<https://www.cope.it/en/progetti/ones-2-hate-is-not-a-sport-2/>

Institution: Cooperazioni Paesi Emergenti. (NGO)

Country: Italy

Period: 2022-2024

The project intends to develop the actions of the previous edition and contribute to combating online hate speech related to the sports sector, maintaining the centrality of educational activities to foster young people's resilience in the face of the phenomenon. It is being implemented in 7 Italian regions (FVG, Veneto, Lombardy, Piedmont, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Sicily)

The project includes preliminary research activities on the attitudes and behaviours of young people in virtual relationships containing hate speech and investigations on the trends assumed by the phenomenon in the main social networks and newspapers in collaboration.

These first phases will therefore guide the implementation of training activities for teachers, coaches and other personnel involved in sport.

Finally, some of the young participants in educational courses carried out in classes and amateur sports groups will be involved in the creation of territorial digital activism teams who will have the task of intercepting and countering hate speech related to sport, proposing dissuasive reactions and responses on social media.



-“Let’s Kick Racism out of the Stadiums”

<https://www.nigdywiecej.org/en/projects/against-racism-in-the-stadiums>

Institution: Never again association

Country: Poland

Period: 2005-2007

The “Nigdy Więcej” Association (“Never Again”) conducts activities under the campaign “Wykopmy Rasizm ze Stadionów” (“Let's Kick Racism out of the Stadiums”). Every year, during the biggest open-air free music festival in Europe

Pol'and'Rock, also known as Polish Woodstock, the ‘NEVER AGAIN’ Association organizes a football tournament promoting the message of ‘Let's Kick Racism out of the Stadiums’



-The Fairplay Action Weeks

<https://www.fairplay.or.at/en/projects/action-weeks-2025-violence-is-not-a-game>

Institution: The Fairplay Action Weeks

Country: Austria

Period: Since 2018

The Fairplay Action Weeks for Diversity in Football have been held annually in October since 2001 and are organised by Fairplay Initiative. All clubs are invited to participate in the fairplay action weeks and stand against violence, sexism, and hate. Every club can make a big difference, even with small actions. The clubs get campaign materials, text templates, free workshops and suggestions for actions during this week.



-“You are not alone” service

<https://www.oll.fi/en/oll/intervening-in-harassment/you-are-not-alone/>

Country: Finland

Period: Since 2018

“You are not alone” service is Finland's first targeted support service that people who have been subjected to sexual violence, harassment, inappropriate behaviour, or bullying in their leisure activities can contact to get help. Its goal is to prevent and reduce inappropriate behaviour, bullying, sexual harassment, and all forms of violence, especially in children's and young people's recreational activities. It helps victims of inappropriate behaviour, harassment, violence, or bullying and their loved ones. Service offers free support via telephone and chat.

“You are not alone” organizes training for clubs and organizations and produces information and free, easy-to-use materials. The service has also produced free online training courses that allow participants to update and demonstrate their skills.



3. PRACTICES ADDRESSING ONLINE HATE SPEECH

REPORTS-WHITE-PAPERS-REVIEWS/GUIDES		
Action-Country-Date	Sports involved	Content
„A scoping review of research on Online Hate and Sport” Australia, Brazil, Canada, United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, México, Poland, United States. 2022 A Scoping Review of Research on Online Hate and Sport - Colm Kearns, Gary Sinclair, Jack Black, Mark Doidge, Thomas Fletcher, Daniel Kilvington, Katie Liston, Theo Lynn, Pierangelo Rosati, 2023	American Football, Athletics, Baseball, Basketball, Boxing, Cricket, Football (Soccer), Golf, Gymnastics, Ice Hockey, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), Rugby, Swimming, Tennis, Wrestling	The document discusses the importance of understanding the nature of online hate and highlights methodologies and recommendations for tackling the issue. It emphasizes the need for further research to equip policymakers, sport governing bodies, and grassroots organizations with effective strategies to combat online hate.
„An approach to automatic classification on hate speech in sport domain on social media” Serbia 2023 An approach to automatic classification of hate speech in sports domain on social media Journal of Big Data Springer Nature Link	Football, Basketball, Tennis	The study emphasizes the importance of addressing hate speech targeting athletes on SM and highlights the need for further research in non-English languages like Serbian. It provides foundational resources and insights for developing effective HS detection models in the sports domain.
„Countering and Addressing Online Hate Speech A Guide” Germany, Spain, Hungary, France, Italy Poland Slovakia	All sports	The document, "Countering and Addressing Online Hate Speech: A Guide for Policy

Countering and addressing online hate speech:		Makers and Practitioners," provides a comprehensive framework for tackling online hate speech, emphasizing the importance of international human rights norms and standards. It highlights the alarming rise of online hate speech, its devastating societal impacts, and its role in fuelling discrimination, violence, and atrocity crimes. The guide builds on the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, launched in 2019, which outlines 13 commitments to address hate speech holistically.
<i>Global sports organisations and the EU digital services act 27 member states of the European Union</i> unitedagainstonlineabuse.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/DSA-Documentation_Final_PR_Edition.pdf	All sports	The Digital Services Act (DSA) formally Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 of 19 October 2022 reconfigures the governance of online intermediary services in the European Union by establishing harmonized obligations for the transfer, storage and distribution of data on online

		platforms. Its central policy move is to clarify and, in some cases, extend responsibility for illegal or harmful user-generated content across the intermediary stack, while preserving a tiered framework that calibrates obligations to the nature and scale of the service.
World Athletics 'Online Abuse in Athletics' Germany, France, Italy United Kingdom, United States. World Athletics publishes ground-breaking four-year analysis into online abuse PRESS-RELEASES World Athletics	Athletics	The report 'Online Abuse in Athletics' presents findings from World Athletics' deployment of the Threat Matrix system at the 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest. Developed by Signify Group with support from Quest Global, Threat Matrix employs machine learning and natural language processing to detect abusive and threatening content directed at athletes. This initiative builds on previous studies conducted during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and the 2022 World Championships in Oregon, but the Budapest study expanded

		coverage to include 1,344 athletes across 1,666 active Twitter/X and Instagram accounts, making it the most comprehensive analysis to date
The “Safeguarding Guide” <u>Section 6 - safeguarding in the digital world - Safeguarding The Football Association</u>	<i>Not sport specific</i>	The 'Safeguarding Guide: What to Do If You Experience Online Abuse' is designed to provide practical, user-focused advice for individuals encountering online abuse, particularly in sporting contexts. It acknowledges that while the internet offers unparalleled opportunities for connection and support, experiences of online abuse can be profoundly isolating, damaging to mental health, and threatening personal safety. The guide seeks to empower users by outlining concrete steps to document, assess, and respond to online hostility, while emphasizing the importance of maintaining well-being and self-empowerment.

4. SANCTIONING AND ENFORCEMENT-RELATED PRACTICES

ACTION INSTITUTION- COUNTRY	LEGAL INSTRUMENT	CONTENT
Administrative legislation containing definitions of different behaviours that could be identified with hate speech in sport. Spanish Parliament Spain	Articles 2.1 and a 2.2 BOE-A-2007-13408 Ley 19/2007, de 11 de julio, contra la violencia, el racismo, la xenofobia y la intolerancia en el deporte.	Provisions of a law containing definitions of different behaviours that could be identified with hate speech in sport so that these types of actions could be prosecuted at an administrative level. Definitions of acts or conducts that are violent or incite violence in sport or racist, xenophobic or intolerant acts in sport.
Legislative protection against physical violence against referees. French National Assembly France	Article L223-2 - Code du sport - Légifrance (legifrance.gouv.fr) Article L332-6 - Code du sport - Légifrance (legifrance.gouv.fr)	Provisions of a law addressing the acts of violence committed against referees (Act no. 2006-1294) were incorporated within the French Sport Code. It improves their protection and increases the sanctions towards those who committed the acts of hatred as the referees are now “considered to be entrusted with a public service mission” (article L223-2 of the French Sports Code). Thus, they benefit from specific protection under criminal law for certain acts of violence committed against them.

		This regime of sanctions adds to another provision of the French Sports Code (article L332-6) which punish any incitation to hatred towards referees, sports judge, players or any other person or group of persons during a sport event/broadcast.
Law enforcement through sanctions. Hate speech on-line British Parliament United Kingdom	Online Safety Act 2023 Online Safety Act 2023	The British law foresees new legal duties on online platforms to protect users from harmful and illegal content, including hate speech. It contains provisions placing new legal duties on online platforms to protect users from harmful and illegal content, including hate speech. While hate speech and incitement of racial or religious hatred were already illegal, the act strengthens enforcement by requiring social media companies to act against such content or face significant fines. Platforms must now have systems in place to remove illegal content, such as material that stirs up hatred or promotes violence based on characteristics like race or religion, or face penalties from the regulator Ofcom. This is fully applicable to on-line content related to sport.
Action plan. General instrument to fight against hate speech in sport.	BMI - Publikationen - Rechtsextremismus entschlossen bekämpfen	The Federal Minister Faeser announced an action plan to fight right-wing extremism in her government policy

German Government Germany		statement on 15th March 2022. The action plan sets important priorities for the fight against right-wing extremism during the new legislative term and includes a package of punitive and preventive measures. It includes measures related to rehabilitation of the offenders and a victim's approach.
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