

# Analytical Study on Measures for the Protection of Minors during Sports Competitions

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**Abstract:** *In general, child protection is a responsibility of everyone individually, respectively, children can have an essential role in ensuring their protection and of the other children, but the main responsibility rests with adults. Thus, child protection measures must have a complex and non-discriminatory character, if we refer to the fact that in some cases disabled minors may be subject to greater risks of abuse. As practice shows, currently the main forms of work in this field are the organization of contests, posters, stands, presentations and essays, as well as classes, debates and trainings on topics related to the protection of minors during sports competitions. Minors can be involved in sports activities, in order to prepare them to participate in various sports competitions on different sports events. In this context, coaches are responsible for the actions of minors during training or sports events, including the proper management of their competitive activities, in the direction of achieving sports results. Transparency and openness are essential to ensure child protection during sports events, as the risks or degree of abuse, harm can be increasingly identified among employees, volunteers, children, families and even the sports community. In the Codes of ethics, of professional conduct, sports entities must provide explicit requirements with reference to the protection of children during sports events (organized and carried out), as well as principles that establish the behavior expected from each participant (children and adults) and the prohibited ones. One is also important to establish in these codes, the method and the specific requirements regarding the collection of anti-doping samples from minors that must be strictly followed during the testing procedure. Moreover, it is a right for minor athletes to be informed of their selection for doping control, especially in the presence of an adult, so that they can request to be accompanied by a representative of their team during the sample collection procedure. The regulation and correct application of measures for the protection of minors during sports competitions must be a national priority with the reflection of this issue in state policy documents.*

**Keywords:** *protection; minors; measures; specific conditions; abuse; damages.*

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**The main purpose of the study** is to present a set of concrete and necessary measures to ensure the protection of minors, the prevention of violence, exploitation and abuse against them during competitions or sports activities. The measures identified in the analytical study are based on data accumulated in research through the use of **methods** in this sense, as follows: analysis of specialized literature and normative acts in the field, sociological questionnaire, interview, interpretation method, which generated a wide range of participants opinions and interested parties from the Republic of Moldova and Romania during an extended period of time, quantified at about two years.

*The measures to prevent and protect minors in sports competitions* can be defined and conceptualized by substantiating and relating them to a system of professional communicative and normative competences, to a base of receiving indicators ways, signs that can alert/inform adults about the existence of acts (abuse, violence, neglect) already committed or in the process of being committed against minors, and which would give them the opportunity to act accordingly. These measures can take the form of *ameliorative scenarios for prevention, protection and support*, the effectiveness of which is certified by:

- their scientific and practical argumentation from the perspective of communicative and normative skills of teachers, coaches, sports managers, etc.;
- establishing the methodological and reference framework necessary for the reception of measures at the institutional level and their application as appropriate;
- the reliability of the measures approved and applied at the level of the sports organization, the ameliorative didactic and training scenarios for protection and support actions in this direction.

**The hypothesis of the research:** it was assumed that a good knowledge of the protection, prevention and support measures for minors during sports competitions and their application in sports and training activities will improve the competence of their reception on the part of the personnel involved, thus obtaining superior results in the direction of ensuring and developing children's health, personality and self-esteem.

Every year, millions of children and young people around the world participate in sports, recreation and entertainment activities (Ministry of Education, 2013). The others may participate in sports programs in order to develop their health, personality, discover their talents and abilities, formed through programs and participation in sports competitions (Manolachi, 2019). Their rights are established by the UN Convention on the Rights of

the Child (1989). The child protection policy in sport must guarantee their right to practice sport in effective security conditions, free from any acts of violence (physical, psychological, sexual or neglect). Thus, all the main actors who ensure the organization and conduct of sports activities must possess professional skills and capabilities that will allow them to identify any action, sign or indicator of any type of violence that would endanger their life, health or safety. The scope of this policy is reflected on all those involved in sports activities, from organizers, teachers, coaches, to sports entities and their affiliates, whose basic mission must also include elements of preventing violence against children.

By violence is meant the phenomenon established in the UN Convention as: "any form of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, abandonment or neglect, ill-treatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse". In the Republic of Moldova, the normative acts in force regulate this phenomenon and define it as those "forms of ill treatment applied by parents/ legal representatives/ the person in whose care the child is or by any other person, which cause actual or potential injury on his health and endanger his life, development, dignity or morality, which include the types of violence defined in art. 2 of Law no. 45-XVI of March 1, 2007 regarding the prevention and combating family violence (art. 3, Law no. 140 of 14.06.2013 on the special protection of children at risk and children left behind) (Republic of Moldova Parliament, 2007).

Abuse of minors can be reflected in the excess, excessive or inappropriate use of a certain thing or inaction that causes harm or the risk of harm to the child, which could affect their development. The notion of "Abuse" established by the World Health Organization (WHO) corresponds to the notion of "Violent" in national legislation, namely that regulated by Law no. 140/2013 regarding the special protection of children at risk and children left behind.

During sports competitions, minors can be subjected to acts of psychological violence, through the exercise by coaches, teachers of actions in order to impose will or personal control, by causing certain states of tension or mental suffering. Also, these facts can take the form of: "offenses, mocking, swearing, insulting, nicknames, blackmail, demonstrative destruction of objects, through verbal threats, neglect, involvement in personal life, intentional deprivation of access to information or other actions with similar effect" (Republic of Moldova Parliament, 2007). During sports activities/competitions, certain cases of physical and sexual violence against minors can be identified, highlighted by acts that can cause intentional injury to the bodily integrity or health of children, through

actions of hitting, punching, slapping, pulling hair, stabbing etc. Acts of sexual violence against minors involve "any sexual violence or any illegal sexual conduct within these activities or in other interpersonal relationships, sexual harassment; any unwanted, forced sexual conduct; forcing the practice of prostitution; any illegal sexual behavior in relation to a professor, coach or any other person involved in such activities (including by caressing, kissing, taking pictures to children and by other unwanted touches with a sexual tone; other actions with a similar effect)" (Republic of Moldova Parliament, 2007).

The impact or negative consequences of such actions on the child can be highlighted in causing damage or injury directly or indirectly to the parents/guardians. Guarantees and safeguards should not be seen as an end, but rather as guidelines to provide sports organizations with the necessary support to move towards actions to prevent, protect or support minors as appropriate.

Thus, they are in the situation of:

- organize and train the human resources involved in sports activities that fall under the authority of the entity as organizers, volunteers, affiliates regarding the proper fulfillment of the responsibilities they have regarding the protection of minors during the events and competitions held;
- establish and maintain a sporting, educational, training and competitive environment where children feel safe, should be encouraged to express their point of view and are listened to;
- ensure and make available to minors information regarding their protection and safeguarding throughout these activities (and not only), including also the existence of responsible persons, adults ones whom they may call if necessary;
- promote activities that contribute to the development in minors of the necessary skills to counteract and protect themselves from abuse or violence of any kind;
- organize and carry out activities that form and develop in minors responsible attitudes for adult life, including parenting and childcare skills;
- to establish effective collaborative relationships with any person involved in such actions or in daily life.

At an international level, these guarantees indicate what organizations that host sporting events for children and young people must do, being reflected in declarations, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, relevant legislation, government recommendations, existing child protection standards, including good practices.

## Results and interpretations

Sports managers are responsible for approving/implementing at the level of the sports entity a representative culture of professional ethics corresponding to the field in which they operate, as well as a series of concrete measures to prevent, protect and offer support to minors, as beneficiaries of sports services (Popescu & Dorgan, 2017). Stimulating the development of institutional and procedural mechanisms in this direction, for assurance, control and prevention must constitute essential priorities of managers. Thus, we made a series of findings at the level of sports entities in the country (sports clubs, sports schools and federations, sports high schools) in Romania as well, obtaining data referring to the existence of prevention, protection and necessary support policies minors in sports competitions, respectively over 50% of those surveyed gave affirmative answers. Starting from this factual situation, we can say that it is required that all organizations that propose to work with children and young people to develop and implement at an institutional level their protection policy, it would be desirable. This prerogative is necessary as it helps to create a safe and positive environment for children and reflects the fact that the organization takes seriously its responsibility to protect children.

Among the key issues of the development of this policy by sports institutions, we note the following:

- description of the damage and establishment of its forms in the context of acts of abuse, violence and neglect of minors, participants in sports activities;
- the commitment of the sports organization reflected in its concrete actions to ensure the protection of children participating in sports competitions;
- materializing children's rights through their participation in sports events and making them aware through different means of communication;
- stating the equality of rights for all children involved in these activities;
- the policy must be signed and assumed by the management of the sports institution;
- it would be desirable for all employees, volunteers, people involved in these sports activities to adhere to the provisions of the institutional policy in the field of reference.

Regarding the implementation of the policy for the protection of minors during sports competitions, by the entities, we can mention the fact that the majority of organizations (over 70%) have specific procedures that

concretely establish the necessary processes in this direction, being determined the instructions to act and proceed step by step in different situations. The procedures describe the roles, responsibilities and channels of communication, including the conditions for the effective operation of the system for receiving and handling complaints or inquiries from children/parents/tutors, so as to provide adequate support to all victims of violence, abuse or neglect committed by any person, as required. Also, the entities monitored and involved in the research, developed and implemented procedures, even on the already existing systems, and each adult was able to understand his role in the protection and safeguarding of minors, in relation to the systems and national legislation in force. Furthermore, for protection to be effective, the procedures implemented must inspire confidence in children. In this context, we can note that the system procedures contribute to complying with the measures formulated and implemented at the institutional level and to comply with the legal framework in force regarding the issue addressed in the research. Child abuse causes suffering and can be difficult to deal with, which is why sports organizations have an obligation to ensure that people who can provide advice and support are available to protect minors. We could observe that only a few sports entities employed a psychologist who could promptly act accordingly and in compliance with the situation created by some employees. However, children and young people receive advice on how to get the necessary support, as well as contacts at national and/or local level with competent child protection authorities, NGOs and communities who can support them in this regard. The safety and well-being of minors must be ensured by determining concrete actions in this direction embodied in a plan approved at the institutional level (actions that can be exercised both within the organization and outside it). At the same time, we can state that most sports entities have systems to ensure work security, including the respective measures, as important parts of the system as a whole. It is important to note that minors receive useful advice to protect themselves in certain situations that could create personal harm to them and indirectly to their parents/tutors (who in turn can receive information, advice and support regarding child protection, as a participant in sports activities).

Another important aspect that must be monitored by sports organizations is the minimization of risks for children that may occur in the case of carrying out sports activities in less safe environments for them or in cases where they are asked to participate in activities inappropriate for their age (for example excessive preparation and compliance with unrealistic requirements). These risks can be minimized by: using protective measures,

appropriate means of transport and managed by qualified personnel (experienced ones), by using accommodation units and appropriate spaces, which can ensure the conditions for participation in sports competitions and without endangering life, health, personality or self-esteem. Accordingly, sports organizations must identify the risks to which minors are exposed, assess them and provide training opportunities for staff and volunteers to recognize the additional risks that some children may face due to race, gender, age, religion and disability (Potop et al., 2020).

Rules of conduct that establish acceptable standards of behavior to minimize risks to minors encourage existing positive practices and may generate more sustainable ones. Moreover, in competitions and sports events for minors, fair play, tolerance must prevail and there must be a safe, supportive and encouraging atmosphere, and the standards of conduct must set an acceptable model for all participants.

In **conclusion**, we present the set of concrete and necessary measures to ensure the protection of minors, the prevention of violence, exploitation and abuse against them during competitions or sports activities:

- ✓ creating the foundations for ensuring the protection of children during sports competitions and ensuring institutional training and preventive measures;
- ✓ the development and implementation at the level of the sports entity of a policy for the protection and prevention of illegal acts that can be committed against children during sports events;
- ✓ the policy should be based on certain universally valid principles and accepted by all participants in sports activities;
- ✓ protective measures to be observed by all employees, volunteers and/or any person participating in such actions, as well as by persons who temporarily provide services and come into contact with children (for example drivers of transport means, canteen staff , parents, trainers, partners, donors, media representatives, etc.);
- ✓ the protection policy must be approved at the institutional level and brought to the attention of all persons who fall under the scope of the provisions and regulations established in this direction;
- ✓ to establish at the institutional level the general and specific responsibilities in matters related to the protection and prevention of children as participants in sports competitions;
- ✓ to ensure an efficient management of human resources on the dimensions of personnel recruitment and selection, risk management, assessment of situations that may generate personal or institutional harm;

- ✓ to provide the necessary support and counseling in case of identifying unpleasant situations, resulting from acts of violence, abuse or neglect of children during sports competitions;

- ✓ sports organizations have professional ethics codes that provide for such measures and sanctions as appropriate;

- ✓ it would be desirable for sports entities to organize information programs, promotion and development of prevention and protection, communicative and normative skills in this direction for both teachers, coaches, children and parents/tutors;

- ✓ to establish the methods for reporting cases of child abuse, including those for their effective resolution with the specialized support provided by the competent bodies in the field;

- ✓ to contribute to increasing the level of awareness of human resources within the sports entity;

- ✓ to evaluate the performances in the field of child protection during sports events.

These measures can be completed at an institutional level, in the context of the identification of serious cases of violence or abuse against children during sports competitions and which must aim to minimize the likelihood of harm, as well as the exercise of prompt intervention actions, thus sports entities can ensure that potential problems are dealt with in an appropriate and timely manner.

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