

YOUTH INTEGRITY

ambassadors programme



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE YOUTH PARTICIPATORY MECHANISM



Project Result n°4

YIAP partners

- RF (Sweden) – Coordinator
- ENGSO (Sweden)
- SO Europe Eurasia Foundation (Ireland)
- EUSA Institute (Slovenia)
- Confederação do Desporto de Portugal (Portugal)

- LIETUVOS SPORTO FEDERACIJU SAJUNGA (Lithuania)
- OPES (Italy)
- RF-SISU Småland (Sweden)
- Associated partners** • European Lotteries • GLMS



Introduction

YIAP is a project co-funded by Erasmus+ Capacity Building for Youth of the European Union.

Thirty-six youth participants from nine different countries did training through which the partners (ENGSO – SOEE – EUSA – PSC – RF SISU – LSFS) provided the tools to be actors of a positive change in the sports world.

Specifically, the training focused on the following topics: integrity in the sport; tools to design and create local activities to promote and defend integrity; tools and strategies of communication to expand the message also on online channels.

At the end of this process, the youth participants realized one or more activities in their local contexts, involving over than 300 people (in each country).

The youth integrity ambassadors recognized the challenges faced within their organisation and proposed realistic solutions, as actors of their own projects. These solutions had the objective to lead to a better youth participation at the local, national and European level.

At the final stage of the project, a representative group of youth integrity ambassadors were involved in an Evaluation course.

During this activity, they shared their experiences, reflected on their actions, and identified transferable learnings – gathered in a comprehensive educational toolkit and a set of recommendations addressed to sport organisations for sustainable youth participatory mechanisms. The following recommendations are structured around five key topics: safeguarding, bad management, match-fixing, doping, and discrimination/inclusion. The overarching objective of the recommendations is to better enable youth participation in sports organizations while taking into account issues highlighted in the five key topics and findings and feedback extrapolated from the reflections on their local activities.

The youth workers (facilitators/educators) facilitated the process.

Lastly, sport organizations are invited and encouraged to establish meaningful youth participation mechanisms within their respective organizations, particularly considering establishing youth advisory bodies and/or designated persons responsible for youth matters.

Safeguarding

A safe and protective environment in sport is crucial for fostering a place where every young athlete feels welcomed. Organizations from various countries have expressed the importance of developing an internal child and youth protection policy on safety and protection. Moreover, guidelines may already exist at the national and/or European level established by the government, which makes abiding by existing regulations equally important. Apart from internal or external regulations, adhering to values such as respect, tolerance, and fair play may assist in creating a safe and protective environment within sport organizations. In addition, regular education on these issues and monitoring of progress help keep track of the status quo at any given moment. More concretely, establishing an internal code of conduct that sets clear expectations for athletes, coaches, parents, and spectators facilitates the work towards the goal of creating a safe and protective environment for youth. It is noted that the wellbeing of young athletes is not restricted to physical state but also involves comprehensive mental health, which is maintained by providing access to qualified medical professionals and mental health resources. Lastly, an environment supportive of physical and mental wellbeing may be further advanced by actively cultivating a positive internal atmosphere where youth feel valued, supported, and encouraged to reach their full potential. A positive atmosphere is inseparable from recognizing and celebrating the achievements and efforts of youth athletes through awards, scholarships, and opportunities for advancement.

A pivotal role in the organization is played by the contact person responsible for a safe environment for youth. This role may be explicitly defined or, in smaller organizations, the tasks may be assigned to the most relevant person. However, all organizations participating in the YIAP project consent to and see the need for the contact person, or in some instances referred to as Child Welfare Officer or Safeguarding Officer, who is tasked with ensuring a safe environment and overall wellbeing of young athletes. This role should be assigned to a person of outstanding reputation with necessary expertise and background in the field of youth, protection, and compliance. Therefore, relevant

tasks include, but are not limited to, policy development and implementation, training and education, reporting, support, collaborating with authorities, and documentation and record-keeping. The main responsibilities, however, pertain to serving as the main point of contact for reporting concerns or incidents related to the safety and wellbeing of young athletes. Monitoring compliance with child protection policies and procedures, including conducting regular reviews and assessments of practices and protocols, is also crucial to maintaining the relevance of the contact person responsible for safeguarding. On the other hand, responding to current needs and practices captures only a fraction of the responsibilities - identifying areas for improvement and recommending changes to enhance the safety and wellbeing of youth athletes ensure that the organization is looking ahead to the future and likely risks that may arise. In conclusion, by fulfilling these responsibilities, the designated contact person plays a critical role in creating and maintaining a safe and supportive environment for youth athletes within the sports organization. Proactive efforts help to prevent and address issues of abuse, misconduct, and negligence, ensuring that young participants can enjoy sports in a secure and nurturing setting.

Bad Management

Sport organizations may be conducive to practices that fall short of good governance requirements. This phenomenon is associated with a lack of accountability mechanisms, pervasive lack of transparency in decision-making processes, and lack of representativeness. Thus, one of the ways to improve governance within sport organizations at all levels is implementing a robust code of behavior, which is essential for protecting sport organizations from mismanagement. The code of conduct is an evolving point of referral, which may consist of professionalism standards that ensure that all activities are conducted with the highest level of professionalism and integrity. Transparency in, among others, financial transactions, decision-making processes, is also key to guaranteeing high levels of professionalism within the organizations. Moreover, good governance requires that conflict of interest situations are handled with

proper care and accountability. It is essential to disclose and avoid conflicts of interest that may compromise impartiality. Employees of the sport organizations shall refrain from engaging in activities or relationships that may create situations whereby perceived or actual conflicts of interest may arise. Furthermore, as a baseline, the organization is legally or ethically obliged to comply with all relevant laws pertaining to good governance that are applicable at the domestic and/or European level. Yet, while codes of behavior and laws are necessary to maintain accountability and establish norms of behavior, the organization achieves all of the above and beyond if it is guided by the inherent value of democracy. That is, democratic leadership, which involves all interested parties and ensures meaningful participation in the decision-making processes, is a crucial component towards the path of good governance. Incorporating youth perspective into sport organizations may bring added value to significantly improving management. For instance, fresh insights brought by drawing from the experience and expertise of youth can lead to the development of innovative practices that resonate with younger generations better. Youth are also, in general, more tech-savvy, adept at navigating the complex digital world, allowing for fostering innovation and creativity within the organization. More importantly, involving youth in the management of the organization is a value in and of itself, promoting greater representation and inclusivity, which in the end promotes the long-term sustainability and relevancy of the organization in question. Youth and youth perspective are indispensable in order to achieve good governance and minimize the risks associated with it. However, conditions for creating the necessary environment for youth and their participation in sport organizations are oftentimes lacking. For this purpose, several improvements could be made in an aim to promote the best interests of the young sport participants. For example, enhanced child protection measures shall be put in place to guarantee safety for the most vulnerable sport participants. Age-appropriate, skill-based, and focused on holistic development training programs create a supportive learning environment. Most importantly, many organizations are lacking sufficient youth participatory mechanisms in decision-making, which makes it necessary to remedy this

situation by establishing youth advisory committees. These committees help to give young athletes a voice in decision-making processes and empower them to provide input on program design, organizational policies, and initiatives that directly impact their experiences in sports.

Match fixing

The issue of match fixing is pervasive not only in professional/elite sports but also can exist at lower levels of competition, taking various forms and shapes. Match fixing may hinder effective youth and general population participation in sport organizations. Match fixing incidents may also erode trust in the integrity of sport organizations. Thus, manipulation of sport competitions is related to negative consequences on youth:

- Negative examples may tarnish the reputation of sport organizations, resulting in negative perception and lower levels of participation
- Manipulation of sport competitions may have an impact on young sport participants' psychological well-being, potentially leading to disengagement from sport participation
- Match fixing scandals can undermine the social cohesion and camaraderie that are integral to team sports participation. Suspicion and distrust among teammates, coaches, and competitors can fracture team dynamics and diminish the sense of belonging and community among youth participants
- Youth athletes may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation by match-fixing syndicates seeking to manipulate outcomes for financial gain. Young participants may be coerced or manipulated into participating in match-fixing schemes, risking their reputation, future career prospects, and personal safety

There are many solutions to the multifaceted problem of match fixing which aim to minimize and eventually eradicate the issue. However, without addressing the root cause of the phenomenon, these measures would only deal with a fraction of the

challenge ahead. For this reason, it is imperative to begin with education and awareness-raising campaigns aimed at implementing comprehensive education and awareness campaigns targeting athletes, coaches, officials, parents, and the broader sports community.

Clear information on the consequences of match fixing, ethical principles of fair play, and the importance of integrity in sports are also important parts of the education process. The second step involves developing and implementing a code of conduct that is widely distributed to the sports community, particularly the youngest sport participants in the organization. This code of conduct should explicitly prohibit match fixing and other forms of unethical behavior on and off the field of play. Equally important, the addressers must understand their responsibilities and obligations to uphold fair play and integrity in sport. Furthermore, other preventative and reactive measures encompass whistleblower protection mechanisms that allow individuals to report suspicious activities or submit evidence of match-fixing incidents confidentially and without fear of retaliation. The sanctions for breaching the code of conduct or other applicable regulations must be proportionate to the breached norm, transparent, and consistently applied to maintain the credibility of anti-corruption efforts. Without support for vulnerable young athletes, the sanctions may not be a sufficient deterrent to discourage participation in illegal match manipulation activities. Thus, sports organizations are encouraged to provide adequate support services and resources to protect the welfare and mental health of athletes who may be susceptible to threats and manipulation by match-fixers. Forging partnerships with responsible public authorities also helps to forge effective and multi-faceted collaborations to address the issue.

A top-down approach when it comes to engaging youth in addressing the issue of match fixing is not likely to deliver long-lasting and effective results. Instead, a bottom-up approach can be a more efficacious solution, such as youth engagement initiatives engaging young athletes early in their careers through age-appropriate educational activities, mentorship programs, and leadership opportunities. This helps foster a culture of integrity and sportsmanship among young participants by promoting positive

values and ethical conduct from the grassroots level. Youth advisory committees within sports organizations may also provide opportunities for youth representatives to actively participate in discussions, contribute ideas, and offer input on policy development and enforcement strategies related to match-fixing prevention. Additionally, youth ambassador programs can complement the above-mentioned solutions – appointing exemplary athletes or leaders for sports integrity who raise awareness, promote positive values, and mobilize their peers to take action against match-fixing in their sports community.

The methods presented in this chapter on tackling match-fixing are by no means exhaustive. Nevertheless, by implementing these strategies, sports organizations can foster a culture of inclusivity, empowerment, and shared responsibility, where youth participants play an active role in shaping policies and initiatives aimed at preventing match-fixing and preserving the integrity of sports.

Doping

Doping, alongside match-fixing, is the problem that all too often plagues all levels of sport, including amateur and grassroots. The use of performance-enhancing substances can manifest in various manners, which may not be considered doping in the strict sense by the general public. As with match-fixing, addressing the root cause by educational and awareness-raising programs is essential. Namely, interactive workshops and seminars specifically focused on anti-doping education for youth athletes, coaches, parents, and officials, which cover essential topics such as the risks and consequences of doping, prohibited substances and methods, therapeutic use exemptions (TUEs), and the role of anti-doping agencies. Education on doping in sport can take place not only in physical format but also online by making easily accessible online learning platforms, brochures, pamphlets, posters, and other online resources. On the other hand, peer-to-peer learning education involving active or retired athletes who can act as goodwill ambassadors for anti-doping initiatives proves to be highly

efficient. Leaders within specific sport organizations or the sport community can also be empowered to serve as peer educators and role models. Empowering a leader or goodwill ambassador to lead by example contributes to creating an atmosphere and culture of clean sport, which is an important factor in setting standards within sport organizations. Creating an inclusive environment that encourages open dialogue between different stakeholders, such as coaches, administrators, decision-makers, and youth, helps to further minimize the risks associated with the use of performance-enhancing substances and methods. In particular, open dialogue is achieved by promoting an internal culture of respect and trust, where all voices are heard and welcomed. In the same vein, sport organizations can reap the benefits of collaborative decision-making processes that involve input from various stakeholders, including youth participants, in shaping policies and programs related to fair play and anti-doping efforts. When a culture of collaboration and open decision-making is fostered, stakeholders have a perceived sense of ownership in maintaining and strengthening doping-free sport. In addition, other internal values that should guide organizations towards achieving clean and fair sports are diversity and inclusion, leading by exemplary and ethical behavior, and regular evaluation of the progress made thus far. Apart from youth playing a fundamental role in the decision-making and collaborative processes involved in tackling the issue of doping, youth can also facilitate essential cooperation between public institutions and sport organizations to this end. For its part, youth sport participants can be effective in disseminating messages through awareness-raising campaigns targeted in schools, communities, and on social media platforms. Similarly, youth can actively engage in educational initiatives and peer-to-peer outreach programs aimed at educating their peers about anti-doping principles and the importance of competing drug-free. In general, young people have the potential to significantly strengthen collaboration between public institutions and sports organizations in addressing doping issues. They can do so by championing the cause of fair play, raising awareness through education, actively contributing to policy formation, conducting

research, mobilizing communities, developing leadership abilities, and fostering cooperation and partnership initiatives.

Discrimination/Inclusion

Discrimination in all its forms hinders effective participation in sport on an equal footing. Vulnerable groups, including youth, may be at risk of being subject to discrimination in the sport context. In pursuit of a more inclusive, equal, and discrimination-free sport, education in particular can be leveraged to address this issue. Education promotes understanding and empathy by providing opportunities for individuals to learn about the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by marginalized or oppressed groups in sports. Education in various forms also instills fundamental values that prevent discrimination from manifesting: dignity, fairness, equality, inclusivity, etc. Training programs tailored to this end can teach communication techniques, conflict resolution strategies, bystander intervention tactics, and allyship principles that enable individuals to respond proactively to discriminatory incidents and create safer, more inclusive sports environments. Therefore, education should strive to facilitate discussion on related, but no less important topics, such as cultural competency, gender equality, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and disability awareness, ensuring that individuals are prepared to navigate diverse sports environments with sensitivity and respect. Education is not a one-way process; it allows for self-reflection, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and accountability within the sport community. With regard to concrete policies and initiatives that facilitate the creation of a discrimination-free environment for youth in sport, anti-discrimination policies could potentially be particularly effective. However, having in place anti-discrimination policies that prohibit discrimination based on factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or socioeconomic status, is not sufficient. Consistent implementation requires that these policies are effectively communicated to all members of sport organizations and strictly

enforced. The following is a non-exhaustive list of good practices aimed at preventing discrimination with particular emphasis on youth participants:

- Diversity and inclusion training, including trainings and workshops for all stakeholders
- Inclusive recruitment ensuring that youth are recruited from diverse backgrounds
- Developing accessible sport facilities, equipment, and infrastructure
- Leadership and representation opportunities available for youth in sport organizations
- Cultivating a culture of cultural competence and sensitivity
- Embedded mechanisms ensuring continuous evaluation of anti-discrimination initiatives
- Promotion of positive role models

Youth are oftentimes the addressees of anti-discrimination policies, yet they can also be initiators and promoters of such initiatives. Youth play a crucial role in breaking discrimination barriers present in sport through their actions, advocacy, and leadership. Youth may be engaged to champion inclusivity and diversity by establishing youth advisory boards within sport organizations where young athletes can provide input, feedback, and recommendations on issues related to discrimination. These boards can serve as platforms for youth to share their experiences, perspectives, and ideas for promoting inclusion and addressing discrimination within the organization. In addition, sport organizations are encouraged to implement peer education programs whereby youth are trained to serve as advocates and educators on issues of discrimination. These programs can empower young athletes to lead discussions, facilitate workshops, and educate their peers about the importance of respect, acceptance, and inclusion in sports. Other effective strategies to engage youth in dealing with discrimination in sport are collaborative campaigns with non-sport affiliated entities that work on eradicating

discrimination, establishing safe reporting mechanisms for discriminatory incidents, and further advancing inclusive policies.

Get in contact with us!

Did you read something interesting for your organisation? Would you like to implement some of the activities? Are you looking for support in building a hub of young people that can be drivers of positive change when it comes to integrity in sports?

Get in contact with us! You can find us:



Project Results n.4

YOUTH
INTEGRITY
ambassadors programme



Co-funded by
the European Union

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
SUSTAINABLE YOUTH
PARTICIPATORY MECHANISM**