

# Closing the Gap: Final Reflections and a Vision for the Future

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## Closing the Gap: Final Reflections and a Vision for the Future

The Sport GVP (Preventing Gender-Based Violence in and through Sport) project concludes its comprehensive two-year initiative, delivering on its mission to prevent and tackle pervasive gender-based violence (GBV) within sports environments. This article provides a final summary of the project's findings, evaluates the impact of its strategic interventions, and outlines the critical next steps for achieving a truly safe and equitable sporting culture.

### *Final Reflections*

The comprehensive desk and field research conducted within Work Package 2 (WP2) of the Sport GVP project confirms a pervasive and under-reported prevalence of GBV across European sports systems, validating the urgent need for targeted intervention. The desk research revealed significant gaps in existing institutional policies. At the same time, the field research identified specific cultural and organisational barriers—such as the 'win-at-all-costs' culture and lack of clear reporting mechanisms—that perpetuate harm. Consequently, the project's success lies in directly addressing these deficits. The pilot phase demonstrates that professionals, when equipped with comprehensive and tailored resources like the e-learning platform and toolkit, are willing and ready to challenge the status quo. This suggests that the primary obstacle is not a reluctance to change, but rather a previous lack of knowledge about GBV, as well as access to evidence-based capacity building.

Reflection on the project's implementation highlights the crucial role of strategic adaptability in tackling a sensitive issue across diverse cultural contexts. Overcoming obstacles such as navigating bureaucratic complexities and ensuring the relevance of multilingual resources underscores the value of the collaborative, multi-partner approach. The resulting Sport GVP methodology—an adaptable set of tools—is therefore complete and transferable. The project's lasting legacy extends beyond prevention; it provides a critical framework for institutional accountability. The challenge moving forward is for national sports bodies to fully embed these materials, transforming them from a valuable resource into a mandatory component of professional governance, thereby ensuring a sustained and proactive commitment to building a truly safe and equitable sporting environment for all.

### *Vision for the Future*

The long-term vision of the Sport GVP project is grounded in the recognition that safeguarding in sport must become a practice rooted in real-world experience, embedded in the daily realities of training sessions, competitions, and interactions between athletes, coaches, families, and communities. As highlighted in recent European policy frameworks, safeguarding is most effective when it is operationalised at the grassroots level and reinforced through continuous capacity building (European Commission, 2021). Therefore, moving forward, Sport GVP prioritises practical implementation and the deepening of field-based competencies that ensure safeguarding is enacted consistently and effectively across diverse sport environments. A central pillar of this future direction is strengthening applied learning. Research has consistently shown that safeguarding training must go beyond theoretical knowledge and equip practitioners with skills that can be applied immediately in real-world situations (UNESCO, 2023). In line with this evidence, the project envisions expanding scenario-based training, experiential learning formats, and real-case simulations that reflect the complex dynamics of sport.

Another long-term priority involves embedding safeguarding mechanisms into the operational structure of clubs, schools, and community organisations. Institutionalising safeguarding requires

clear reporting pathways, defined referral procedures, and staff who are trained and appointed as dedicated safeguarding focal points. Such mechanisms align with international guidance emphasising that safeguarding must be integrated into organisational governance to ensure consistency, accountability, and sustainability (UNICEF, 2019). Sustaining these efforts also requires strengthening local ecosystems of support. Evidence from WHO confirms that community-wide collaboration, including links between educators, sport staff, psychologists, and youth workers, significantly enhances the capacity of local environments to prevent violence and respond effectively when it occurs (World Health Organisation, 2021). Sport GVP, therefore aims to encourage the creation of community safeguarding networks that share knowledge, coordinate responses, and support smaller or resource-limited clubs in implementing protective measures.

Digital innovation will further reinforce practical implementation. Studies emphasise the importance of accessible, user-friendly digital tools in sustaining capacity building, especially in resource-limited environments (UN Women, 2020). The next phase of Sport GVP foresees expanding microlearning units for coaches, interactive decision-making tools that simulate real safeguarding dilemmas, and digital resources tailored for young athletes to help them identify unsafe behaviour and understand their rights. Ensuring continuous quality and accountability is another central aspect of the project's future vision. Safeguarding cannot be a static achievement, it requires ongoing monitoring and adaptation. Sport GVP intends to strengthen mechanisms such as regular follow-up visits to clubs, implementation audits, and confidential feedback loops involving athletes, parents, and staff. These measures correspond to European recommendations for maintaining high safeguarding standards through iterative evaluation and transparent governance (Council of Europe, 2021).

Young people themselves must remain at the forefront of practical implementation. Research across Europe demonstrates that youth engagement significantly enhances the effectiveness of safeguarding initiatives, as young people offer insights into the lived realities of sport environments (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021). The future vision of Sport GVP, therefore emphasises youth participation in co-designing codes of conduct, contributing to awareness campaigns, and serving as ambassadors for safe and respectful behaviour. Empowering youth in this way ensures that safeguarding systems remain responsive and relevant and encourages cultures of mutual responsibility within teams and communities. The project also envisions closer cooperation with municipalities, national federations, and regional authorities to integrate safeguarding expectations into funding criteria, club accreditation processes, and event licensing procedures.

To conclude, the future of Sport GVP is one in which safeguarding exceeds policy documents and becomes a dynamic, practice-based reality lived by coaches, athletes, administrators, and a broader community. Through applied capacity building, strengthened local ecosystems, sustained monitoring, and institutional recognition, the project aims to create sport spaces where GBV is not only addressed but actively prevented through daily, conscious, collective action.

## References

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