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Voices from the Field: Success Stories on the prevention of gender-based violence in sports

Gender-based violence (GBV) in sport is an issue too often hidden behind the glamour of athletic performance and the pursuit of excellence. But in December 2024, UNESCO and the European Union hosted a significant event that brought survivor voices to the fore in a powerful way: a panel discussion and the screening of the documentary *SUITE: Les violences sexuelles dans le milieu de l'athlétisme*. ([UNESCO](#), 2025).

This gathering wasn't just symbolic. It marked a clear turning point in global efforts to build **safe sport ecosystems** — integrating lived experiences into policy, demanding meaningful reform, and pushing institutions to listen, act, and change. In this article, we explore success stories and lessons learned from survivors, advocates, and institutions dedicated to preventing violence in sport.

The documentary, created by the former professional athlete and activist **Emma Oudiou**, gives voice to elite athletes who share painful stories of abuse, while highlighting the courage and strength it takes for them to speak out. Oudiou's own journey, from athlete to advocate, underscores the critical truth: survivor narratives are not merely testimonials — they are encouragement for transformation. She emphasised that integrating survivor perspectives into sports governance helps shape safer, more responsive, and equitable policies.

During the panel, speakers called for systemic reform. They outlined how institutions must prioritise **reporting mechanisms**, **education**, and **accountability** — not just performance. As Emma put it, athletes' well-being must never be sacrificed for winning. Dr. **Yetsa Tuakli-Wosornu**, both a former athlete and academic, stressed the urgency of developing common definitions and concrete data systems: only then can we truly understand the scope of abuse, compare across countries, and craft effective prevention strategies.

Central to this work is **UNESCO's Fit for Life** initiative. Its "[10-point Call to Action](#)" outlines priority areas — from measurement and participatory policy-making to safeguarding, education, and advocacy. The event also resonated with legislative efforts around the world: for example, Brazil's *Lei Maranhão* was praised as a model for increasing survivor reporting and accountability.

It's not just about policy. The power of *SUITE* lies in its humanity: hearing survivor stories disrupts silence, challenges stigma, and builds momentum for change. As one featured athlete, **Sarah Fofana-Koutouan**, said, the film is "a cry of truth, but also a call to action" — urging us to listen not only with our eyes, but "with our hearts and our humanity." By centering survivor voices, *SUITE* does more than recount pain — it becomes a vehicle for transformation.

One core takeaway from the panel and related events is that **prevention must begin with education**. Oudiou and other panellists stressed that all stakeholders — athletes, coaches, administrators, parents — need training and capacity-building to understand what abuse looks like, how to report it, and how to support survivors.

This kind of education also targets **power dynamics**: in many sports, the coach-athlete relationship is deeply imbalanced. The panel called for *safe reporting channels* and *independent mechanisms*, so athletes can speak up without fear of retaliation or retribution.

This multi-stakeholder event points toward a hopeful future: one where institutions partner with survivors, where data informs policy, and where sport becomes a safe field for all. But the journey is far from over. To truly prevent GBV in sport, we must continue to elevate voices, build systems, and demand accountability — together.

References:

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