

Ice & Safety – SAYES Conference

19 September 2023 – Budapest

An important day to discuss the prevention of violence toward children in the sports sector!

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On the 19th of September, the SAYES team made a stop in Budapest, Hungary to organise the 3rd national conference in the framework of the project before the launching of the ISU Junior Grand Prix of Figure Skating Budapest 2023. The day was opened by **Lajos Kósa, President of the Hungarian National Skating Federation**. He underlined the necessity and willingness of the Federation to change the mentality and adopt new training methods focused on positivity and motivation.

These opening words were followed by a presentation of the results of the survey conducted by **Philippe Liotard, Professor at the University of Claude Bernard Lyon 1**. The main objective of this study was to evaluate the specificities of ice sports regarding sexual violence and the ability of ice sports organisations to protect their young participants through a survey carried out and interviews conducted with ice sports leaders, coaches or members of the medical staff of 4 countries (Netherlands, Hungary, France and Switzerland). Several lessons can be taken from this survey.

First, there are some differences between the intervention and prevention of sexual violence toward young skaters in the 4 countries. These differences do not mean that nothing is done by federations and governments. All countries studied have a national plan, more or less formalised, to prevent violence in sports. However, it reveals that procedures to report and sanction sexual violence are not always known by each segment of the staff of the federation. The results depict a situation at a given moment. However, it is worth mentioning that things are quickly changing. Therefore, new processes or rules can be introduced in the following months.

Second, if no specificities of ice sports regarding sexual violence were identified in the interviews conducted, some characteristics of ice sports can contribute to creating an environment in which such violence may occur. It can be, for instance, the early sport specialisation as figure skaters start to train very young; mistreatment and bullying that can exist especially in the coaching culture; or sexism that can be experienced by athletes, especially girls or women.

Finally, the study conducted by the University Lyon 1 concluded that a specific action plan needs to be developed in each federation to prevent and fight sexual violence. 4 levels of action were identified:

1. A public and formal document signed and supported by the top management.
2. Some dedicated human resources and specific funds (not only ethics) targeting the prevention and fight against sexual violence.
3. Data collection and monitoring conducted in each federation.
4. Training and capacity building dedicated to coaches, medical staff, governing bodies...etc.

To answer the issues underlined by the study, the SAYES project will develop e-learning modules. The contents will be delivered through a mini-game with several scenarios and questions to answer.

Rebecca Cairns, Executive Assistant to the Director General and Development Program Director at the International Skating Union and Simon Latournerie, Deputy Director of Colosses aux pieds d'argile presented these modules. They will be available in 4 languages (French, English, Hungarian, Dutch) in mid-2024. Rebecca Cairns also underlined that these modules represent only a part of the ISU's involvement in safe sport. ISU already created some materials and has now a Safeguarding Officer, available for any athlete or ISU member federation.

This presentation was followed by several examples of how a sports organisation can deal with and prevent sexual violence. **Corien Mostert and Martine Margadant of the Royal Dutch Skating Federation** therefore presented the existing procedure in the Netherlands. In 2016 the NOC NSF (National Olympic Committee) requested an independent survey on sexual violence in sport. Following the results and conclusions, the Centrum Veilige Sport Nederland (CVSN) was created. It acts as an independent organisation for reporting sexual violence in sport.

The CVSN also provides awareness-raising activities and training on sexual harassment or violence. Furthermore, it can be mobilised as a mediator between athletes, parents, coaches or managers for instance. Furthermore, the Skating Federation also created its own specific task force dedicated to this issue.

Emese Danks, Child Safeguarding Officer at the Hungarian Swimming Federation insisted on the need for changing mentalities to implement an efficient safeguarding programme inside a sports federation. The swimming federation created a safeguarding children programme. Codes of conduct dedicated to coaches, athletes but also parents were set up as well as a report system. The Swimming Federation also has a Safeguarding Children board composed of a psychologist, sociologist, parent, sports expert and a lawyer. This council is in charge of further developing the safeguarding programme of the federation and investigating complaints and problematic cases. Emese Danks also insisted on the importance of communication to prevent this violence. To raise awareness about children's protection, the Swimming Federation communicates through several ambassadors and influencers.

Gréta Mészáros from the NGO Women for Women Together Against Violence Association highlighted in her speech the importance of NGOs working on preventing and fighting sexual violence. The Women For Women Together Against Violence Association (NANE) was established in 1994 with the aim of fighting violence against women and children in Hungary. NANE offers a helpline for victims. They also have a working group dedicated to child abuse. She emphasised the need to teach the child body awareness and to offer them the possibility to express through words what can happen to them.

At a broader level, **UNICEF** appears as a major actor in child rights and protection. **Borbála dr. Nagy-Balás** presented the guidelines of UNICEF for preventing and acting against child abuse. She also presented the [HelpAPP](#) application, where children can find some help for any kind of violence or abuse they could suffer.

Following this intervention, **Doctor Ilona Bodnár, Safeguarding Officer and Sociologist** emphasised the concept of the intimate zone and human touch. Human touch does not have only one expression. It is a way of communicating that can be seen as a positive gesture but also can express power and domination. As a consequence, human touch in sports especially between coaches and young athletes should be used in a defined way, explained and discussed between coaches, children and parents. It also needs to be adapted depending on the age of athletes.

Finally, the event ended with a panel discussion on how to recognise and manage conflicts between athletes. The panel was composed of **Viktória Faludi, Sports Psychologist; Kata Stáhly, Child Psychologist and Professional Leader of the Nemecek Program of the Hintalovon Foundation; Andrea Kollár-Keszler, Olympian Short Track Speed Skater and coach and Erika Kendelényi-Gulyás, National Team Synchronized Skater, Head Coach**. They insisted on the role of the coach and staff in creating an atmosphere of trust and a safe comfort zone for athletes. Although an important part of the job for a coach is about physical training, the mental and psychological parts should not be neglected. To do so, communication between children their parents and the coach is identified as a key point to discuss and define the physical touch but also to handle potential conflicts.