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Implementing a safeguarding protocol in the Latvia sports system

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List of abbreviations:

CASES – Child Abuse in Sports: European Statistics
COE – Council of Europe
CPSU – Children Protection in Sport Unit
EOC – European Olympic Committee
EU – European Union
FIFA – International Federation of Football Association
IFs – International Federations
IOC – International Olympic Committee
LAB – Latvian Antidoping Bureau
LFF – Latvian Football Federation
LOC – Latvian Olympic Committee
LOC AC – The Latvian Olympic Committees Athletes Commission
LOC EC – The Latvian Olympic Committees Ethics Commission
LSA – Latvian Sailing Association
NFs – National Federations
NOCs – National Olympic Committees
NSPCC – National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
UEFA – Union of European Football Association
UK – United Kingdom
UNESCO – The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF – The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
USA – United States of America

Abstract

This paper concentrates on safeguarding, specifically, the necessary steps in developing a safeguarding protocol in the Latvian sports system.

Although the International Olympic Committee and European Union organizations have encouraged the National Olympic Committees to develop and implement a national safeguarding policy, the majority of National Olympic Committees, including the Latvian Olympic Committee, have not been successful at this task.

To solve the issue of the missing safeguarding regulation in Latvia, the topic has been addressed to the stakeholders of the Latvian Olympic Committee, the government of Latvia, and the National Olympic sports federations.

This paper aims to start the process of developing a safe and positive sports environment in Latvia.

Cette thèse se concentre sur le sujet de la protection, plus précisément sur les étapes nécessaires au développement d'un protocole de protection dans le système sportif letton.

Bien que le Comité International Olympique et les organisations de l'Union Européenne aient encouragé les Comités Nationaux Olympiques à développer et mettre en œuvre une politique nationale de protection, la majorité des Comités Olympiques, y compris le Comité Olympique Letton, n'ont pas réussi cette tâche.

Pour résoudre le problème de l'absence de réglementation en matière de protection, le sujet a été adressé aux parties prenantes du Comité Olympique Letton - le gouvernement de la Lettonie, les fédérations nationales des sports olympiques.

L'objectif de ce document est de lancer le mécanisme et le processus de développement d'un environnement sportif sûr et prometteur en Lettonie.

1. Introduction

From ancient times, sport has been the main field of inspiration for all ages and groups of people and, today, a platform of influence of exemplary behaviour from well-known coaches to top-level athletes and teams. This paper will address the topic of safeguarding in sport, safeguarding regulation, and the implementation of safeguarding in the Latvian national sport system.

Safeguarding is the protection of children and adults who could be easily hurt emotionally and physically.¹ Safeguarding in sports is the protection of children from harm during training and competition. During that time, children are deemed the responsibility of the organization, and care is taken to manage the environment and those with contact with the child during this time. It focuses on the matters that are influenced or can be influenced by sport.²

Almost 24 hours a day, children and adults participate and compete in sports, some at the amateur level and some at more professional levels. During training and competition, it is necessary to protect athletes from any abuse, either physical or non-physical (mental and emotional).

Miguel Nery, Peter K. Smith, Melanie Lang, Mike Hartil, and Anthony Hedges have stated that safeguarding in sports was actualised and brought to light at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century when abuse in sports has been an issue for at least twenty years. In the United Kingdom (UK)³, the problems of safeguarding in sports were tackled 22 years ago in 2001.⁴ Countries have acted upon this issue differently, but the goal has been the same – the protection of athletes from abuse.

Parents, coaches, National Federations (NFs), and International Federations (IFs) are responsible for the protection and safety of athletes of any age.

Safeguarding in the field of sport has been a global issue for some time. It has been dealt with at the international and national level legislation most appropriately. Not only the International Olympic Committee (IOC) but also the Council of Europe (COE) have stated in their messages that safeguarding in sports, especially in the Olympic movement, is needed because of the regular and continuous abuses against children and young people. The IOC has stated in the Olympic Agenda 2020+5 that all International Federations and National Olympic Committees (NOCs) are encouraged to establish a safeguarding officer position.⁵ According to Margo Mountjoy, Kirsty Burrows, and Susan Greining, the safeguarding of athletes is embedded in the overreaching fundamental principles of Olympism found in the Olympic Charter.⁶

One of the pioneers in safeguarding in sports is the UK organisation – Sport England, established by the Royal Charter in 1996. Sport England works in the fields from the funding process of sport organisation towards the equality and diversity of sport organisation.⁷ In 2002, in the UK, the Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport were established, including the reporting mechanism and information about children's rights.⁸

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/safeguarding>

² Rhind, Daniel, and Frank Owusu-Sekyere. *International Safeguards for Children in Sport Developing and Embedding a Safeguarding Culture*, Routledge, London, 2018, pp. 16–16

³ “Safeguarding in Sport.” Blackstone Chambers, www.sportslawbulletin.org/safeguarding-sport/. Accessed 16 Oct. 2023.

⁴ “History of Child Safeguarding in Sport and Development.” Sportanddev, www.sportanddev.org/thematic-areas/child-safeguarding/history-child-safeguarding-sport-and-development. Accessed 16 Oct. 2023.

⁵ IOC. “IOC Releases Olympic Agenda 2020+5 Midway Report Highlights.” International Olympic Committee, IOC, 9 Oct. 2023, olympics.com/ioc/news/ioc-releases-olympic-agenda-2020-5-midway-report-highlights. Accessed 16 Oct. 2023.

⁶ Lang, Melanie, *Routledge handbook of athlete welfare*. Routledge, 2021. P 351

⁷ Randhawa, Rohan, and Niall Judge. “Uniting: The: Movement.” Sport England, 7 Nov. 2023, www.sportengland.org/.

⁸ Lisa Bode a, et al. “Safeguarding the Young Athlete in Sport.” *Sports Orthopaedics and Traumatology*, Urban & Fischer, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0949328X23001242?via%3Dihub.

In 2017, the U.S. Centre for Safe Sports was created in the United States of America (USA) as a response to act upon one of the most infamous abuse cases in sports – the abuse of Larry Nassar to at least 300 gymnasts. The establishment of the Centre for Safe Sports was created upon the passing of the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017. As Gretchen Kerr and Ashley Stirling, in their 2019 publication, write: “One could argue that the U.S. gymnasts who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of Larry Nassar, and who worked with sport psychologists, also reached the pinnacle of performance success, but at what cost.”⁹ The organisation main purpose is to address abuse towards the young athletes in the United States Olympic and Paralympic sports movement.¹⁰

As previously mentioned, the IOC has encouraged the leading international and national sports organisations to have an implementation process for safeguarding. In the context of European countries, it is necessary to see the impact of the European Olympic Committee (EOC) regulations on safeguarding. Also, it is necessary to have an approach to the international regulations and legislation provided by the European Commission and Council of Europe in the scope of safeguarding and the appropriate tactics to address these matters.

In the case of Latvia, safeguarding in sports has had a minimal approach. It is important to understand Latvia's legal system to find the correct approach to safeguarding implementation.

The Latvian Sports Law has been in force since 2002. The purpose of the law is to specify a general and legal basis for sports organisations and development, mutual relationships of sports organisations, State and local government institutions, and basic tasks in sports development, and the basis for the financing of sport, and the principles that shall be followed when taking part in the international sports movement.

Regarding the safety and protection of athletes, the Latvian Sports Law states the following:

Article 3.3. Safety principle requires that sports events and sports training (lessons) occur in a safe environment and are organized and managed by qualified sports personnel.

The Law on the Protection of Children's Rights, in force since 1998, aims to set out the rights and freedoms of a child and their protection, therefore considering that a child as a physically and mentally immature person needs special protection and care. Also, the law governs the criteria by which the behaviour of a child shall be controlled. The liability of a child shall be determined, governs the rights, obligations, and liabilities of parents and other physical persons and legal persons, and the State and local governments regarding ensuring the right of the child, and determines the system for the protection of the rights of the child and the legal principles regarding its operation. Protection of the child's rights is an integral part of State policy. The State and local governments shall organise and monitor the protection of the child's rights throughout the territory of the State.

Article 4.5. The rights of the child are protected to achieve goals such as the safety of the child, as well as the maximum protection of his health and life, paying special attention to this when attending a public event or visiting public entertainment, **sports**, or recreation **places accessible to children**, armed conflicts, fires or other emergencies at a time.

Article 13. part 3: The child has the **right to participate** in self-government in education, culture, and **sports**. In any other areas affecting the child's interests, the child's opinion shall be considered according to the child's age and maturity.

Article 50.² The child's safety is ensured at public events in which **children participate**, or at places of public entertainment, **sports**, or recreation accessible to children.

⁹ Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2019). Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1559255> p 379

¹⁰ “Preventing and Addressing Abuse: U.S. Center for SafeSport.” SafeSport, 18 July 2023, uscenterforsafesport.org/.

The paragraph above indicates that the actual Latvian legal acts don't contain regulation and/or protection for the abuse of a young athlete in sports or a safeguarding regulation system.

The Latvian Olympic Committee (LOC) was founded in 1922 and had an action gap for almost 50 years. It regained its full Olympic legal rights and obligations in 1991. From the perspective of the athlete's well-being and protection, the LOC has provided the athletes with few "tools" to protect them indirectly, but not in a full capacity. The Statutes of the LOC point 2.2.11. states that the LOC has the task of promoting and supporting activities related to athletes' health and medical care. This means the LOC must use its legal rights to protect athletes' physical and mental health from harm.

There are two LOC-established commissions that are appropriate for the topic of this paper: the LOC Athletes Commission (LOC AC) and the LOC Ethics Commission (LOC EC).

The LOC AC, whose members are active athletes and Olympians, like the IOC Athletes Commission, with its Regulation of the Athletes Commission, has the main task of representing athletes, expressing and defending their collective opinion towards LOC.

The main competences are:

- Examine issues related to athletes and provide relevant opinions to LOC institutions and officials,
- Active involvement in projects and initiatives that defend and support "clean" athletes both within and outside of competitions,
- Representing the rights and interests of athletes and providing relevant recommendations, including the appointment of members of the International Sports Arbitration Council,
- Maintaining contacts with the Athletes Commissions of the International Olympic Committee and the European Olympic Committee.

The LOC AC has the right to provide opinions and recommendations to the LOC institutions and officials, in which the LOC AC decisions are only advisory and serve as a basis for further consideration of issues by the LOC Board or the LOC Executive Committee or as informative material for further action.

The LOC EC competencies are:

- Submission of proposals and participation in the improvement of the LOC Code of Ethics,
- Consideration of ethical conflicts,
- Examination and evaluation of applications,
- Providing opinions to the members of the LOC Board and the LOC Executive Committee on ethical issues and/or disputes if relevant orders have been received or such a need has arisen during the examination and evaluation of the submissions received,
- Sports organisations, athletes, and/or other physical or legal persons involved in sports who have violated the provisions of the IOC Code of Ethics or have not complied with the anti-doping regulations of the Olympic Committee, the World Anti-Doping Agency, the International Sports Federations, acted contrary to the principles of fair play established by the IOC Statutes or the Olympic Charter or violated other requirements of sports ethics evaluation of committed violations.

The LOC EC has the rights to:

- Within the scope of their competence, request and receive information from persons involved in sports to whom the LOC Code of Ethics applies,

- Invite persons involved in sport, to whom the LOC Code of Ethics applies, to a Commissions meeting for the provision of information and proposals in the field of ethics,
- Decide on proposals for the development and improvement of internal regulatory acts regulating ethics,
- Depending on the nature of the violation, apply on the LOC Board or the LOC Executive Committee with a proposal for the application of sanctions to a person involved in sports to whom the LOC Code of Ethics applies and who violated the LOC Code of Ethics norms.

The LOC Code of Ethics contains chapter Four - Adult responsibility in Sports, which states the following:

1. Take care of the health, safety, and well-being of children and young athletes, not about personal achievements, raising the prestige of the school, sports club, coach, or parents, or making a profit at the expense of the athletes,
2. Inform and follow up so that young athletes know and comply with anti-doping regulations,
3. Pass sports experience to children, infuse in them a desire for healthy physical activities and a love of sports,
4. Don't perceive children as "small adults"; always consider physical and psychological changes in children's development and their impact on athletic growth,
5. Never ask a child what he is not capable of,
6. Put the joy of sports in first place; do not forcibly force children to participate in sports lessons and competitions,
7. Pay equal attention to both gifted and less able students, praise and appreciate their work, not limited to times of increased mastery, personal growth, or achievements in competitions,
8. Encourage young athletes to come up with their types of competition and their rules, to take on the role of not only a participant but also a coach, match manager, or referee, as well as express appreciation for fair behaviour and decide the punishment for inappropriate behaviour and take responsibility for it,
9. Maintain close contact with parents or legal guardians of children and young people and educational institutions, inform them about all issues related to the young athlete, allowing them to be fully aware of both risk opportunities and possible success in sports, to make the best choice about young person's future in sports and life.

In the past years, there have been at least three LOC AC and three LOC EC meetings¹¹, but in none of the meetings, a case, question, or discussion about the abuse towards the athletes has been brought up. The conclusion of these meetings was, supposedly, that either there are no abuses against the athletes or that there is abuse against athletes but:

- A. they are afraid to talk about it because, either way, it will impact their athlete's career.
- B. the system used now has no direct impact on the protection of athletes, or the abuser will not have the proper sanctions.

However, despite there have been no actual cases of abuse reported at the LOC Commissions, there have been cases of abuse in the Latvian sports community that the media have reported:

¹¹ Meetings were held at 2022,2023 they were attended by the author of this paper, not published, because the protocols of the meetings contain confidential information by the LOC.

1. The most recent case happened at the beginning of September 2023 in Murjani sports gymnasium. Four older luge athletes from the gymnasium attacked a younger luge athlete. The systemic abuse of one of the newcomers was a kind of initiation. The four luge athletes have been suspended from the training process and participation in the national team. There have been initiated four administrative violation proceedings for emotional and physical abuse of other students. The gymnasium director gave an interview stating that this is not a new situation; the previous initiations were more aggressive toward the newcomers to the gymnasium.¹²
2. Another case is the case of a Latvian Basketball coach who has been intimate with his student, aged 14, who later became the wife of the same coach. As has been mentioned in the interview, the first harassment and sexual abuse took place while the team that the student played, and the coach were in basketball tournaments outside Latvia. The police received a Latvian Basketball Society application. Considering that such information can be fully verified only by criminal procedural methods, a criminal trial was initiated under the Criminal Law section for criminal offenses against morality and sexual integrity.¹³
3. At the beginning of June 2023 in Tallinn (Estonia), the U15 Baltic Basketball Cup took place. The Latvian U15 boys team participated in this Cup. During the “celebration” after the games, the young athletes satisfied themselves, and one of the athletes took a video of the process. The detailed circumstances are not clear, for example, whether any of the young athletes did not want to participate in the process of the “celebration”. This situation is not unique because, at the end of last year, a video in which two floorball players were seen during an intimate contact began to spread actively among young Latvian floorball players. One of the floorball players was an adult, and the other was not even 16 years old. As a result, the adult player was later arrested and spent several months in custody. Meanwhile, the Latvian Floorball Union cancelled the player’s license.¹⁴

Despite the responsibility given to the LOC Commissions, Latvian athletes are not protected. The previously mentioned list of the LOC “tools” doesn’t contain any “real” and functioning system in place to protect athletes from any sort of abuse, which, from the listed cases, is happening frequently. Both LOC Commissions are doing their assigned tasks well, but from the view of actual athlete protection, they both are formal commissions without any actual impact on the protection of athletes.

Putting together the Latvian legislation with the LOC legal acts, it can be understood - that there are no implications for the abuser and no reporting procedure in place, and this is the fundamental reason to establish a well-working safeguarding system in Latvia while taking the best experiences from other countries.

39 Olympic NFs, members of the LOC, oversee and control their sports in Latvia. Most of the Olympic NFs have their code of ethics. Only two of the 39 Olympic NFs have regulating normative acts in the field of child protection and safeguarding towards them, and nine have a code of ethics.

The Latvian Sailing Association (LSA) is the first Olympic NF to have developed the Child Safety and Protection Guidelines in force since 2020.

¹² Rudzāts, Raimonds. “Skolēnu Vardarbībai Murjāņu Sporta Ģimnāzijā Pievērsās Policija; Problēmai Skolā Senas Saknes.” *LSM*, LSM, 9 Oct. 2023, www.lsm.lv/raksts/sports/citi/09.10.2023-skolenu-vardarbibai-murjanu-sporta-gimnazija-pieversas-policija-problemai-skola-senas-saknes.a527004/.

¹³ Rudzāts, Raimonds. “Basketbola Trenera Stelmaha Lieta: Pušu Versijas Par Iespējamu Pavedināšanu Būtiski Atšķiras.” *LSM*, LSM, 2 May 2023, www.lsm.lv/raksts/sports/basketbols/02.05.2023-basketbola-trenera-stelmaha-lieta-pusu-versijas-par-iespejamu-pavedinasanu-butiski-atskiras.a507100/.

¹⁴ TVNET Sports, LETA, et al. “Biedrība: Nav SKAIDRS, VAI U15 BASKETBOLISTU Ģērbtuvēs Tiešām Notikusi Seksuāla Vardarbība.” *Basketbols*, SIA TVNET Grupa, 17 Nov. 2023, sports.tvnet.lv/7843892/biedriba-nav-skaidrs-vai-u15-basketbolistu-gerbtuves-tiesam-notikusi-seksuala-vardarbiba.

The Latvian Football Federation (LFF), with the influence and direct support from the International Federation of Football Association (FIFA), has developed the LFF Children's Rights protection guidelines. These guidelines have been developed based on the Child Safeguarding Policy adopted by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA). The five goals of these guidelines are:

- Creating the foundations of child protection,
- Ensuring organizational preparedness and preventive action,
- Promotion of understanding,
- Collaboration with others and reporting of the problems,
- Evaluation of progress in the field of child protection.

Based on the lack of regulation of the safeguarding system for athletes in Latvia, there is a need to implement a safeguarding policy to protect the athletes, raise awareness, and establish a system to report abuse.

Like Gretchen Kerr and Ashley Stirling in the article written in 2019 (Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice) argue – “the recent athlete maltreatment cases clearly indicate that sport also has the potential to be a very harmful, even devastating, experience for individual victims, sport in general, and society.”¹⁵

This paper aims to resolve the problem of the missing safeguarding regulation in the Latvian sports system, answering the following research question: How can a safeguarding protocol be implemented in the Latvian sports system? Should it require passing new legislation or amending the current sports law?

Following this introduction, a review of existing knowledge will be presented, showing the history of safeguarding in sports and the implementation process in other countries. After that, the methodology will be shown in detail. Then, there will be a discussion comparing the existing knowledge with the key findings of the research. Lastly, this paper aims to recommend how to implement a safeguarding protocol in the Latvian sports system.

The LOC would benefit from implementing a safeguarding protocol in the Latvian sports system to protect athletes, their most valuable asset, and to promote both physical and mental health.

¹⁵ Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2019). Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1559255> p 378

2. Existing knowledge

To establish a solid background and understand the actual situation in the field of safeguarding, the author will review already published papers, authors, and research works on safeguarding in sports topics, focused on the USA and the UK.

The research question is: How can a safeguarding protocol be implemented in the Latvian sports system? Should it require passing new legislation or amending the current sports law? In a 2014 publication, Anthony Hedges writes, “It is a fundamental principle that everyone has a duty to share in the safeguarding and the welfare of vulnerable groups regardless of their role or responsibility.”¹⁶ This statement insists that the whole community of sports and outside of sports should maintain a safe environment for the athletes.

The Council of the European Union has collected information on examples and practices about safeguarding sports and safe sports in different sport organisations, starting from the Albanian Football Association and moving up to the IOC. As Louis Moustakas, Lisa Kalina, and Karen Petry mention in their 2022 paper, the Council of Europe initiated the development of a safeguarding in sport self-assessment tool to assist national sports authorities in this crucial area.¹⁷ The IOC, the International Safeguarding Children in Sport Working Group, and the researchers have addressed the lack of safeguarding policies in European countries. According to Melanie Lang, the European Commission enrolled the fight against sexual violence and harassment in sports as one of the highest priorities for the cycle 2014 to 2020.¹⁸ Not more than three years ago, in 2020, the IOC developed a framework for safeguarding athletes and other participants from harassment and abuse in sports (Games Time Period Framework).¹⁹ The Framework applies during the period of each Olympic Games to all the participants and the alleged incidents of harassment and abuse. The IOC Framework would help as a guideline for the LOC's safeguarding protocol. The Framework includes information about the types of abuse against athletes and other people during the Olympic Games and the proper procedure of the reporting system in a situation of abuse towards an athlete. The mentioned Framework also includes a reporting procedure - how to report a case of abuse and to whom to address the abuse to review it. Another IOC source in safeguarding is the 2017 IOC Toolkit for IFs and NOCs – Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport.²⁰ The focus of this toolkit was to assist the IFs and NOCs in developing safeguarding procedures and the needed policies.²¹ Both IOC sources contain the needed information about implementation and steps to develop a safeguarding policy with the prevention mechanisms of abuse and how to oversee the cases of abuse against young athletes.

“Gender-based Violence in Children’s Sport”²² by Gretchen Kerr mainly focuses on the gender-based violence between young athletes on sexual, physical, and psychological abuse during sports. In 1964, UNESCO stated that there was a problem with overtraining and early

¹⁶ Hedges, A. (2014). Safeguarding in sport. *Sport in Society*, 18(5), 614–625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2014.976010> p7

¹⁷ Moustakas, L., Kalina, L. & Petry, K. The Development and Validation of a Child Safeguarding in Sport Self-assessment Tool for the Council of Europe. *Int. Journal on Child Malt.* 6, 109–118 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-022-00131-y> p1

¹⁸ Lang, Melanie, *Routledge handbook of athlete welfare*. Routledge, 2021. p17

¹⁹ “Strategy and Policy Frameworks - Child Safeguarding in Sport.” *Child Safeguarding in Sport*, pjp eu.coe.int/en/web/pss/strategy-policy-frameworks. Accessed 21 Nov. 2023.

²⁰ “Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport : IOC Toolkit for IFS and Nocs : Related to Creating and Implementing Athlete Safeguarding Policies and Procedures / International Olympic Committee.” *Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport : IOC Toolkit for IFs and NOCs : Related to Creating and Implementing Athlete Safeguarding Policies and Procedures / International Olympic Committee - Olympic World Library*, library.olympics.com/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/171450/safeguarding-athletes-from-harassment-and-abuse-in-sport-ioc-toolkit-for-ifs-and-nocs-related-to-cre?_lg=en-GB. Accessed 8 Dec. 2023.

²¹ Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2019). Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1559255> p 372

²² Kerr, Gretchen. *Gender-Based Violence in Children’s Sport*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2023.

specialization (professional athletes) for children. The next big step in the direction of children's protection was the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child with four principles:

1. non-discrimination,
2. best interests of the child,
3. right to life, survival, and development,
4. right to express views freely in matters that affect them.

This source also states that competitive sports with the part of children's participation is the only field where international child rights are not embedded.

This book would help this paper in the way of defining what is a child athlete and what types of abuse (physical, psychological, sexual, and neglect) mainly occur and have occurred towards young and unprotected athletes from other athletes, peers, and coaches. How the different types of abuse impact the performance and well-being of a young athlete, and that the abuse is a direct nuisance to achieving high results in sports. And where to put the main attention in the possible direction towards abuses to the children in sport.

“Safeguarding, Child Protection and Abuse in Sport International Perspectives in Research, Policy and Practice”²³, edited by Melanie Lang and Mike Hartill, concentrates on the development of safeguarding in sports from a global perspective. It includes information about child protection in sports in different countries, for example – England, the USA, and Canada. This resource contains information about the international development of safeguarding in sports, such as the interactions and cooperation between organisations like UNICEF and IOC. It also provides information about how countries have tackled the problem of abuse in sports and the process of developing a safeguarding system and how the countries have implemented a safeguarding policy.

Specifically, the chapter about England that starts with a brief history of the child protection system and the framework established with the help of “The Children Act of 1989”. An important step towards protecting children in sports was “The Children Act 2004.” This Act included the need to develop child protection officers and a reporting system in case of children's welfare problems. Because of the sports' autonomy in England, sports institutions were not included in the process of legislation on welfare and child protection. There was a time when NGBs were denying that there were cases of abuse in sports, but there were actual abuses against young athletes from coaches, mainly in karate, football, diving, gymnastics, and swimming. The Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), created by Sport England and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), developed the Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport.

The chapters about the USA and Canada contain similar information about the development of safeguarding systems in the mentioned countries. However, the child protection system in the USA is mostly reactive, not preventive. The main organization in Canada that oversees the sports environment is Sport Canada. Already in 2001, the Canadian Sport Policy was established with the main task of enhancing ethical conduct in all-around sports in Canada. Another type of prevention of abuse in the Canadian sports environment is training and education programmes.

The “International Safeguards for Children in Sport Developing and Embedding a Safeguarding Culture”²⁴ by Daniel Rhind and Frank Owusu-Sekyere mainly concentrates on

²³ Lang, Melanie, and Mike Hartill. *Safeguarding, Child Protection and Abuse in Sport: International Perspectives in Research, Policy and Practice*. Routledge, 2015.

²⁴ Rhind, Daniel, and Frank Owusu-Sekyere. *International Safeguards for Children in Sport: Developing and Embedding a Safeguarding Culture*. Routledge, 2018.

the overall knowledge and information about safeguarding in sport and developing international safeguarding in sport for children and young athletes. In 2012, the Founder Group was founded, inspired by UNICEF and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). The Founders Group members are from sport-related and non-sport-related organisations worldwide, from UK Sport to the Caribbean Sport for Development Agency.

In 2012, Corinne Davey (Keeping Children Safe) and Anne Tiivas (NSPC Child Protection in Sport) prepared a draft of International Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport.²⁵ The draft included standards that were a proposition to sports organizations for a bare minimum towards implementing safeguarding standards in those organizations. The eleven international standards included existing information and standards, from the good practices of safeguarding standards to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the publication of these standards, there were about 50 sports organizations from different parts of the world and different levels of impact in sports administration who represented diversity in all aspects.

The 11 standards were:

1. A written policy to keep children in sports safe,
2. Operational procedure in the sport organization, roles of personnel and the recording system,
3. Minimize the risk and possibility of children abuse in sports,
4. Written standards of behaviour with children in sports,
5. Equity between all children in sport,
6. Communication with all the involved organizations,
7. Education and training on safeguarding and children protection,
8. Unlimited support and advice to the safeguards and children,
9. Promotion of safeguarding standards to partners and other organizations,
10. Taking information from the source – the children,
11. Monitoring the safeguarding system and evaluating it.

In 2016, The Founder Members took the next step. They used the existing knowledge from the 2012 draft of International Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport and transformed it into the International Safeguards for Children in Sport (Toolkit).²⁶ The Toolkit has a guideline on how to start the development of safeguarding. The first step is the need to acknowledge safeguarding the children in sports and raise awareness in society and organizations about abuse in sports. The next step is preparing to implement the safeguarding procedure, defining where the sports organization is in the field of child protection. The third step is the development of an organization's safeguarding system that applies to the exact organization's essence. The fourth step – after the development process of safeguarding follows the implementation process of the safeguarding system in the sports organization. The final step is the embedding phase of the safeguarding system in the sports organization.

To check the sports organisation's knowledge of safeguarding and the applicable procedures, NSPCC has developed a self-assessment information pack with chapters from

²⁵ Draft International Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children ..., www.sportanddev.org/sites/default/files/downloads/draft_international_standards_for_safeguarding_and_protecting_children_in_sport_au_g.pdf. Accessed 15 Dec. 2023.

²⁶ International Safeguards for Children in Sport - Sportanddev, www.sportanddev.org/sites/default/files/downloads/international-safeguards-for-children-in-sport-version-to-view-online.pdf. Accessed 16 Dec. 2023.

safeguarding policy application to the chapter about communication with the responsible person for safeguarding.²⁷

Child Abuse in Sport: European Statistics (CASES) from 2021²⁸ prepared a General Report about the prevalence and characteristics of interpersonal violence against children inside and outside sports in six EU countries. This report can help to clarify the actual amount of abuse in sports towards young athletes and children and highlight the need for the establishment of a safeguarding policy at the national level.

The focus groups, from the perspective of UNICEF, who can have a direct impact on the safeguarding process of young athletes are the following – International and national organizations, parents and caregivers of the children, coaches, peers of the children, physical education teachers, medical/psychological/scientific staff and sport managers, referees, officials. From a global perspective, there was no international child protection reporting system. This is a big flaw in the safeguarding field, and it needs to be monitored and controlled by UNICEF, the IOC, and the European Union Commission. Lisa Bode indicates that no global system in place would be like the working model of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) regarding measures of athlete protection from abuse.²⁹

The LOC is not the first, and not the last NOC that must deal with the problems of abuse in sports and establishment of safeguarding in sports system. A 2011 study from the UK shows a terrifying “picture” of abuse in sports, where 34% of respondents from 6’000 had experienced harmful practices in sports. Whereas other countries, like Denmark, Netherlands, and Belgium, responded similarly to abuse in sports.³⁰

The LOC has not completed a self-assessment tool provided by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS).³¹ The self-assessment tool provides good practices, safeguarding policy guidance, and self-evaluation procedures. The EPAS-developed self-assessment tool indicates the top priorities - developing a safeguarding policy and education and training framework.

In this chapter of the paper, the mentioned sources and the contained information can help the LOC implement a safeguarding system in sports in the national legislation, taking the experience from other countries and institutions who have tackled the same problem and have found the most applicable solutions.

²⁷ “Safeguarding and Child Protection Self-Assessment Tool.” NSPCC Learning, www.learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-self-assessment-tool/. Accessed 17 Dec. 2023.

²⁸ Author Michael Harthill, Bettina Rulofs. “Child Abuse in Sport: European Statistics.” *ChildHub*, childhub.org/en/child-protection-online-library/child-abuse-sport-european-statistics. Accessed 10 Dec. 2023.

²⁹ Lisa Bode a, et al. “Safeguarding the Young Athlete in Sport.” *Sports Orthopaedics and Traumatology*, Urban & Fischer, 2 May 2023, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0949328X23001242?via%3Dihub.

³⁰ Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2019). Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1559255> p 370

³¹ Moustakas, L., Kalina, L. & Petry, K. The Development and Validation of a Child Safeguarding in Sport Self-assessment Tool for the Council of Europe. *Int. Journal on Child Malt.* 6, 109–118 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-022-00131-y> p3

3. Methodology and Data Collection

This chapter describes the methodology used to collect the data, which was gathered from three questionnaires and one in-depth interview with the chairman of the Sports Subcommittee of the Latvian Parliament (Dāvis Mārtiņš Daugavietis).

These methodologies were chosen to answer the initial research question of how to implement a safeguarding protocol in the Latvian sports system. Should it require passing new legislation or amending the current sports law?

Questionnaires are an effective tool for data collection as they allow for efficient gathering of information from many respondents. They provide standardized data that can be easily compared and analysed.

The LOC EC and the LOC AC members were asked to complete the questionnaires, which consisted of ten questions each. A separate ten-question questionnaire was conducted for the Olympic NFs of Latvia, which the President, Secretary general, or board member of the Olympic NF filled out.

The use of questionnaires enabled the collection of diverse perspectives from key stakeholders who are directly involved in and knowledgeable about the Latvian sports community and the development of the sports system.

The interview aimed to better understand the legislative aspects and expert opinions regarding implementing a safeguarding protocol in Latvian sports.

The three questionnaires and the interview were addressed for these specific respondents because they are in direct contact with the Latvian sports community and the development of the sports system and are experts in the field.

This paper uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative insight from the interview. It ensures a comprehensive understanding of the topic by leveraging the strengths of both methodologies.

The quantitative data from the questionnaires offered a broad overview of opinions and attitudes within the sports community. In contrast, the qualitative data from the interview provided context and depth, enhancing the overall understanding of the research question.

4. Results

This chapter presents the findings from the data collected through three questionnaires and one in-depth interview conducted as part of this study on implementing a safeguarding protocol in the Latvian sports system.

Together, these results form a comprehensive understanding of the current landscape and inform the recommendations for establishing an effective safeguarding protocol in Latvian sports.

4.1 Results of the questionnaire to the LOC EC

For Q1, the members of the LOC EC were asked if they knew what safeguarding is.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
Yes	5	100%
No	0	0%

In Q2, the respondents were asked if they were aware of the latest and loudest cases of abuse in sports that the media have brought up.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
Yes, I am aware of the cases of abuse in sports.	4	80%
No, I am not aware of the cases of abuse in sports.	1	20%

In Q3, when asked where the respondents would feel safer, 100% of respondents agreed that they would feel safer in a community that has a safeguarding protocol.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
In an environment with an existing safeguarding protocol.	5	100%
In an environment without an existing safeguarding protocol that handles the cases internally.	0	0%

Q4: When asked about the role of the represented Commission in the development of the safeguarding protocol, the respondents delivered different answers.

Written responses:	Themes:
Since the Commission works with issues of an ethical nature, the Commission's focus on the safeguarding protocol should be on the ethical side of violations and threats.	Ethical questions/consultative function.

The Commission is essentially a group of experts who can have both competence and experience in solving safeguarding issues. I believe that the Commission could support those in charge of the administration in developing the safeguarding protocol.	Support.
I think that the Commission has a very important role in safeguarding issues. Commission would have the right to evaluate every case related to Code of Ethics violations. Safeguarding goes hand in hand with ethical and moral principles, behavioural norms, professional behaviour norms, attitudes, actions.	Support.
When dealing with cases of violations, preventive, explanatory work, emphasizing attention to the creation of a safe environment for athletes.	Support.
The Commission has a more consultative function in its current scope, but it could also be more expressed.	Ethical questions/consultative function.

Q5: Respondents were asked if they thought their Commission should play an important role in protecting the athletes.

Written responses:	Themes:
Not sure.	Uncertain.
The normative acts could include this topic more thoroughly, and the Commission could more fully consider applications of this type.	Higher input from the Commission.
I am not sure if this would be possible with the current model of the Commission. The Commission does not have any “power of action”; it can only give recommendations. If the Commission becomes independent in the future and can make decisions and actions according to the regulatory framework, then this would be possible.	Higher input from the Commission.
Yes, in the relevant basic documents of the organization, the Statutes directly define the role and place of the Commission in the context of the safety of athletes and issues of jurisdiction.	Guidance to the athletes.
The Commission should be more significant in explaining and enlivening moral and ethical norms in the sports industry and beyond. However, this should not happen from sanctions or other positions of power but rather by awakening the conscience of the affected parties.	Guidance to the athletes.

In Q6, when asked about whether a safeguarding protocol would stop the potential abusers – 40% agreed that a safeguarding protocol would stop the abusers, and 60% disagreed with this opinion.

Answer	Response	Percentage
Yes, a safeguarding protocol could stop the potential abusers.	2	40%
No, a safeguarding protocol would not stop the potential abusers.	3	60%

When asked in Q7 if a safeguarding protocol would help in the prevention – protection and the safety of athletes, 100% said yes.

Answer	Response	Percentage
Yes, a safeguarding protocol would help in the prevention – protection, and safety of our athletes.	5	100%
No, a safeguarding protocol would not help in the prevention – protection, and safety of our athletes.	0	0%

Q8: Respondents were asked to share personal experiences or if they knew information about someone who had been a victim of abuse.

Written responses:	Themes:
I have heard about cases of physical violence that the victims did not disclose to me directly but to close colleagues.	Experience of known people.
I have not suffered myself, but people I know have. More of the attitude of aggressive sports workers in training and education.	Experience of known people.
I don't know personally.	No experience.
Yes, I have suffered from violence.	Personal experience.

In Q9, 0% of respondents gave a positive answer that they are aware of any abuse cases with athletes that have not been reported.

Answer	Response	Percentage
Yes	0	0%
No	5	100%

Q9.1. was aligned with Q9 and asked the respondents to answer why the victims didn't report the case of abuse.

Written responses:	Theme:
I was confident that I would handle it myself.	Personal experience.

Q10: The respondents were asked to add comments, concerns, or suggestions regarding safeguarding.

Written responses:
There should probably be a broader explanation of the planned security protocol, which would increase understanding of the order of things, possible risks, situations, and actions, allowing athletes to look at and evaluate the situations they have experienced and prevent future risks.
I think this issue should be directed/supported by the leading sports organizations (LSFC, LOC) and, the Ministry of Education and Science. There must be an understanding of what this safeguarding protocol entails, how it will be implemented in the sports world, who will monitor it.
I believe it is possible to lead people to good without repressive methods. It is a matter of morals, ethics, humanity, and education.

4.2. Results of the questionnaire to the LOC AC

For Q1, the members of the LOC AC were asked if they knew what safeguarding is.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
Yes	7	100%
No	0	0%

In Q2, the respondents were asked if they were aware of the latest and loudest cases of abuse in sports that the media have brought up.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
Yes, I am aware of the cases of abuse in sports.	6	86%
No, I am not aware of the cases of abuse in sports.	1	14%

In Q3, when asked where the respondents would feel safer, 100% of respondents agreed that they would feel safer in a community that has a safeguarding protocol.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
In an environment with an existing safeguarding protocol.	7	100%
In an environment without an existing safeguarding protocol that handles the cases internally.	0	0%

Q4: When asked about the role of the represented Commission in the development of the safeguarding protocol, the respondents delivered different answers.

Written responses:	Themes:
I think it would be very desirable to get involved in such a process. In my opinion, it would be important to adopt the best foreign practices and IOC guidelines and to organize Latvian institutions that protect the rights of children and young people.	Support.
It should likely be consultative, monitoring, communication should be systemic and regular to make sure that the safeguarding protocol is full-fledged and appropriate.	Support.
The Commission would be where athletes could safely express various problems, including violence in sports. Sometimes athletes are better able to tell/listen to each other. Accordingly, the Commission would contact the relevant authorities to help the athletes.	Listening and advising the athletes.

The Commission should participate in the development of guidelines related to safety issues, including risk assessment, preventive measures, and action plans for crisis situations. It should also be responsible for educating and training athletes, coaches, and staff regarding security, identifying and preventing violence, illegal conduct, or other risks. The Commission should provide counselling and support to athletes who have suffered violence or other illegal conduct, ensuring access to appropriate resources and support services.	Support/ Listening and advising the athletes.
For the validation of the safeguarding protocol, from the athletes' perspective and Commission. If necessary, for supplementation and making proposals to improve the protocol. The role of maintaining and renewing the protocol in the future.	Listening and advising the athletes.
Educating athletes, providing information on where to turn in relevant cases, as well as listening to the athletes.	Listening and advising the athletes.
Consultative assistance, exchange of ideas, experience and compilation of athlete's opinions on the issue of safeguarding.	Listening and advising the athletes.

Q5: Respondents were asked if they thought that their Commission should play an important role in protecting the athletes.

Written responses:	Themes:
Yes, I think the role should be bigger, but the main initiative should come from the leading sports organizations. We believe that each of them should have developed a safeguarding strategy and protection mechanism.	Higher input from the Commission.
I think that the security of athletes should be implemented and functioning in every sports federation, guaranteeing the possibility of protecting athletes if one of the cases mentioned in the security protocol occurs. If these protocols are not followed, then the Commission could act as a third party, which listens and addresses the problem to higher authorities.	Guidance to the athletes.
I believe the Commission should take some role because we communicate directly with the athletes, but I don't know if the Commission should do it.	Guidance to the athletes.
Yes, I believe that the Commission should play a more important role in protecting the athletes. In today's sports environment, there are many challenges and risks that athletes can face, from	Guidance to the athletes.

violence and discrimination to physical and emotional negations. Therefore, it is important that the Commission be actively involved in this area and ensure that athletes are properly protected and supported.	
Yes, as representatives of the Commission, we represent the opinion of Latvian athletes in communication with sports and state institutions. In my opinion, athletes' safety and protection are part of the basic principles for safe sports in Latvia, which should be emphasized when expressing the interests and safety of athletes.	Higher input from the Commission.
I don't think that the Commission is the place that everyone should go through, but we should always support the athletes.	Guidance to the athletes.
The Commission is the voice of the athletes. A Commission that acts in the interests of athletes and serves as an intermediary between athletes and sports bodies. The Commission operates within its limits; if resources exist, more issues could be controlled and gathered. At the given moment, even though the Commission is active, it is more recommendatory, and it cannot influence anything very much.	Guidance to the athletes.

In Q6, when asked about whether a safeguarding protocol would stop the potential abusers – 100% agreed that a safeguarding protocol would stop the abusers.

Answer	Response	Percentage
Yes, a safeguarding protocol could stop the potential abusers.	7	100%
No, a safeguarding protocol would not stop the potential abusers.	0	0%

When asked in Q7 if a safeguarding protocol would help in the prevention – protection and the safety of athletes, 100% said yes.

Answer	Response	Percentage
Yes, a safeguarding protocol would help in the prevention – protection, and safety of our athletes.	7	100%
No, a safeguarding protocol would not help in the prevention – protection, safety of our athletes.	0	0%

Q8: Respondents were asked to share personal experiences or if they knew information about someone who had been a victim of abuse.

Written responses:	
I have not encountered any serious violations of rights but contact with the violation of private boundaries in sports can be observed very often, which may indicate that crimes remain latent.	No experience.
I have seen a trainer terrorize and manipulate students, which had serious consequences on the psyche of the students.	Experience of known people.
I don't know, and I haven't heard that the sports environment was like that for me.	No experience.
I am aware of several cases of physical and mental abuse by coaches. I believe that a very important issue is the education of coaches and athletes in matters of security so that there are as few such cases as possible.	Experience of known people.
They have spoken unpleasant words about the relationship between the coach and the athlete in sports, leading to mental breakdowns or even the end of the athlete's career.	Experience of known people.
Yes, mostly moral abuse and using your superior status to manipulate the athlete.	Experience of known people.
Yes, unfortunately, there are athletes who face this during their careers. I also had the experience of suffering from mental abuse in sports without realizing it myself, and I thought that this kind of attitude in sports is a normal phenomenon.	Personal experience.

In Q9, 43% of respondents gave a positive answer that they are aware of any abuse cases with athletes that have not been reported.

Answer	Response	Percentage
Yes	3	43%
No	4	57%

Q9.1. was aligned with Q9 and asked the respondents to answer why the victims didn't report the case of abuse.

Written responses:	Theme:
He doesn't want the people around him to know, and he also doesn't want to damage the coaches' reputation because he is a "good coach".	Other persons' experience.
Fear of the higher authority.	Other persons' experience.
Because she herself believes that it is a part of the training process.	Other persons' experience.

Q10: The respondents were asked to add comments, concerns, or suggestions regarding the topic of safeguarding.

Written responses:
Athletes often do not speak because they fear they will lose their place in the national team, or their funding will be taken away. They believe that the athlete's voice is not considered.
In my opinion, a safeguarding protocol is very necessary in Latvian sports culture to encourage the sports community to be open, supportive, and respectful as soon as possible so that the people involved are not afraid to speak up so that the sports community can operate in a protected and supportive environment.
Educate coaches more about the effects of mental abuse.

4.3. Results of the Questionnaire to the 37 Olympic sports federations

For Q1, respondents were asked if they knew what safeguarding is.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
Yes	29	78%
No	8	22%

In Q2, the respondents were asked if they were aware of the latest and loudest cases of abuse in sports that the media had brought up.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
Yes, I am aware of the cases of abuse in sports	29	78%
No, I am not aware of the cases of abuse in sports	8	22%

Q3: When asked about the three main “tools” to prevent abuse in sports, the respondents delivered different answers.

Written responses:
Education , reporting, and punishment.
It cannot be prevented. If a person has problems, he solves them on others, in this case on his students. Trainers must be in a happy marriage, then the problems will also disappear.
The correct answer is to introduce a security policy in the federation and clubs.
Information, an institution to turn to, an unfailing punishment.
Education , the image created by the media, and the normative basis.
Availability of information, knowledge , and recognition.
Rules, awareness, and supervision.
Preventing violence in the country and raising the standard of living in the country.
1) regular informative content in the media 2) seminars, and lectures with specialists in a specific field 3) closer cooperation and involvement with the State Police, IKVD, etc.
Education .
Anonymous questionnaires with specific cases for law enforcement agencies, simple questions that can be answered to understand the signs - for a victim, an opportunity for a qualified person to observe the situation from the outside for a long time.
Educational courses, seminars for athletes, regulatory acts that determine the responsibility of coaches, and involvement of parents and families in education to prevent violence early.
Know your rights (coach, athletes, grandparents), respect each other, and work together.
Educational seminars for coaches and athletes, development and application of codes.
Update this topic more and more often, both in the form of "informative seminars" and in printed form, which would be available in every sports infrastructure object. Create an easily accessible and usable "website" for everyone to report on observed or experienced incidents. Here, however, an important factor is the ability of the "recipient" to process the submitted "complaints" quickly enough, as well as to be able to take appropriate "measures".
Safe environment, education , and explanation.
Reasonable instructions and immediate action in case of precedent.

Actively updating the problem, availability of support staff, place to report the relevant case.
Children's trust in their parents. Model trial. Education of new trainers on such situations, respect from other colleagues and prevention.
The possibility to speak anonymously, to inform the responsible authorities, mandatory courses for trainers on psychological impact and offense, to send coaches to check-ups with a psychotherapist in order of draw.
Educating and informing the public about "safeguarding" issues. System creation and monitoring. Providing psychological support to athletes and coaches to reduce the risk of violence.
Coach/Athlete education and implementation of a single whistle-blower system in the sports industry.
Control, awareness, education .
Education , Opportunities to report cases and receive advice/help safely and anonymously.
Preventive action, perform explanatory work with coaches and parents and talk with athletes.
Personnel selection, creating a safe classroom environment, and promptly identifying problem situations.
Lectures and courses , disqualification, independent monitoring (like a "fake buyer").
To inform about the possibilities to report cases, to improve the operational response and the protection of the injured parties.
Education on this topic from an early age. Involvement of others. Coach education .
Prevention and educational measures, Incident reporting, and Criminal liability.
Knowledgeable , correct, and adequate trainers.
Transparency, publicity, control.
Communication, Education and Management's involvement in processes.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A clear definition of violence in sports (emotional violence/mobbing, physical violence, sexual violence, economic violence, etc.) - at the national level (not every organization defines its own criteria). 2. Clear penalties, according to the law, especially if children are involved. 3. Clear reporting system for athletes/coaches (ensure confidentiality). 4. Mass media's interest in informing about violence in sports. 5. In federations, clear guidelines in case of relevant actions. 6. Fostering trust, encouraging postmen and trainers to speak immediately, preventively, before committing a crime. 7. In families, schools, and sports schools, to provide information from a young age, to tell, talk, and show according to age how everyone can protect themselves, what is allowed, what is acceptable, what is not allowed, what is unacceptable. 8. The interest of the federations is to protect both athletes and coaches because the experience of the last years shows that coaches are also vulnerable, especially from the accusations of parents.
Being able to see it, end it at the very beginning, to inform athletes about types of violence, reporting, solving.
Guidelines, Education (prevention), Reporting mechanism.
Education process, information, control.

In Q4, the respondents were asked if they were familiar with the IOC guidelines for safeguarding (Athlete365).

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
Yes, I am aware of the IOC guidelines and our federation uses the guidelines.	6	16%
Yes, I am aware of the IOC Guidelines, and our federation does not use these guidelines.	10	27%
No, I am not aware of the IOC guidelines and our federation does not use these guidelines.	21	57%

In Q5, the respondents were asked if they were familiar with the informing process that is included in the IOC guidelines in the case of abuse.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
Yes, I am aware of the informing process in the situation of abuse	12	32%
No, I am not aware of the informing process in the situation of abuse	25	68%

When asked in Q6 if the respondents have international experience with the safeguarding process in the sports system, 78% said no, while 22% said yes.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
Yes	10	22%
No	29	78%

Q6.1. was aligned with Q6 and asked the respondents to explain the international experience with the safeguarding process briefly.

Written responses
We are members of World Athletics and European Athletics, we had to create and implement a safeguarding policy by the end of last year.
Our federation has already introduced the Safe Sports Policy for a few years.
In the international competition, the coach hit the athlete on the cheeks. As the coach said: he brought the athlete to his senses because the athlete was confused. They asked me to testify that I had seen the athlete being beaten.
I have encountered various integrity violations in hockey and I am familiar with the international federation's principles of action in solving such cases. If we have to evaluate the created system in terms of its essence, then I would like to say that it is very logical, understandable, and well "packaged", but the terms of its implementation tend to stick

together, as well as not all persons who may be the perpetrator of a violation may be subjected to some punishment measures unless it is not an offense that the police can punish.
One of the vice-presidents of our federation is also the vice-president of the International Fencing Federation (FIE), who accordingly participates in all seminars, including on security, accordingly; this information is then passed on to the Latvian Fencing Society through seminar presentations and local seminars, where this issue is included on the agenda.
The EHF organizes various events where safeguarding is also discussed. In January 2024, the EHF Grassroots Convention 2024 took place in Munich, Germany, during which safeguarding current affairs in Europe were discussed. The EHF has developed the Respect Your Talent platform, including Safeguarding training.
The LFF has a specialist in the protection of the rights of young children/ there are guidelines/ the development of this area is being worked on. We use UEFA recommendations, and I do not rule out that they are closely related to IOC security.

In Q7, respondents were asked to rank from one (most important) to five (least important) the mechanism that would help the athletes gain more protection against abuse.

Athlete's protection mechanism:	Importance ranking:
Existing safeguarding system in the Latvian sports environment.	1.
Well-developed safeguarding protocol.	2.
The presence of a safeguarding officer during the training session and competition.	5.
Input from the national sports federations on the matter of athlete's protection.	4.
Regular seminars and courses on the topic of safeguarding.	3.

When asked in Q8 if a safeguarding protocol would stop the potential abusers and work as a safety mechanism for the athletes, 62% said yes, and 38% said no.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
YES, it would stop the potential abusers and work like a prevention – protection, safety mechanism for athletes.	23	62%
NO, it would not stop the potential abusers, and it would not work as a prevention – protection, or safety mechanism for the athletes.	14	38%

In Q9 the respondents were asked if the athletes' voices would help implement the safeguarding protocol.

Answer:	Response:	Percentage:
YES, the athletes' voice would help implement the safeguarding protocol in the Latvian sports system.	29	78%
Highly doubtful that the voice of the athletes would help in implementing the safeguarding protocol in the Latvian sports system.	8	22%

Lastly, in Q10, the respondents were asked if they would be ready to make changes starting with their represented federation; 86% said yes, and 14% said no.

Answer	Response	Percentage
YES, I would be ready to make the first step towards a better future for our athletes with the necessary input from my federation.	32	86%
NO, I am not ready to be the first to make the changes needed to develop a working safeguarding system.	5	14%

4.4. Results of the interview with the chairman of the Sports Subcommittee of the Latvian Parliament

In the first question, the chairman was asked about his awareness of the current situation regarding athletes being subjected to abuse or being potential targets of abusers. He acknowledged his awareness of the situation of abuse in the Latvian sports system, emphasizing the absence of a reporting mechanism and the lack of legal provisions to regulate safeguarding issues in sports.

The second question addressed the absence of a safeguarding protocol in the Latvian sports system. The chairman explained that during the formulation of the existing Sports Law in Latvia, the social values and perceptions at the time did not prioritize the issue of abuse in sports as they do today. He assured that the forthcoming sports law would include a chapter on safeguarding in the sports system.

In the third question, the interviewer asked why a system to protect athletes from abuse had not been established despite Latvian athletes competing internationally for over a century. The chairman cited a lack of political initiative and the sports community's failure to recognize the necessity of addressing athlete protection. Recent media attention has prompted the government to acknowledge the need for a modern sports law encompassing comprehensive athlete protection measures.

For the fourth question, the chairman was asked to give the reasons behind the absence of a safeguarding system in Latvia. He identified neglect of the topic due to factors such as dislike, the complexity of the issue, denial, and an unwillingness to expose the severe and pervasive abuse in sports, which is often perceived as a normative practice within the Latvian sports system.

The fifth question explored whether a safeguarding protocol could ensure a safer environment for the athletes. The chairman affirmed that such a protocol could be beneficial but added that social perceptions of right and wrong must also change. The safeguarding protocol should be introduced alongside an educational program on appropriate behaviour within the sports environment.

In response to the sixth question about whether a safeguarding protocol alone could protect athletes from abuse, the chairman emphasized that while a protocol is crucial, there must also be a broader shift in the accepted norms within the sports system.

The seventh question asked for the best approach to establishing a safeguarding protocol. The chairman argued against amending the existing sports law, advocating instead for the introduction of a new sports law incorporating most of the submitted recommendations from the involved parties. This law, reviewed by a working group consisting of members from Latvian sports organizations and the government, should be overseen by the Latvian Antidoping Bureau, which, after its transformation into the Integrity Centre, would handle safeguarding issues within the Latvian sports system.

The eighth question asked the interviewee about the steps required to pass the new sports law. The Ministry of Education and Science has committed to submitting the draft of the new sports law to the Latvian Parliament by September 2024. The draft will undergo three readings in the Latvian Parliament and the responsible legal committee. If it passes these

readings during the autumn session, the law will be forwarded to the President of Latvia for proclamation by January 2025.

For the ninth question, the chairman was asked who should govern safeguarding processes in Latvia. He suggested the Latvian Antidoping Bureau, as an independent organization within the sports sector, yet without direct ties to the sports federations or governing bodies, thus ensuring impartiality.

Finally, in the tenth question, the chairman provided recommendations for the paper on safeguarding. He emphasized the need to develop a safeguarding protocol, highlighting political interest in resolving abuse issues in sports. He suggested allocating a position in the next year's budget for the LOC to focus on society's education. The LOC, the primary sports organization in the country, should lead this initiative.

5. Discussion

Due to the lack of regulation of a safeguarding system for athletes in Latvia, there is a need to implement a safeguarding policy to protect the athletes, raise awareness, and establish a system to report abuse. This paper aims to answer the research question of how to implement a safeguarding protocol in the Latvian sports system. Should it require passing new legislation or amending the current sports law?

The discussion will be divided into three topics: the improvement of the national sports system, education about safeguarding measures in sports, and the legislation process in Latvia.

The discussion for this paper will be held based on the information gathered from the existing literature, the publicly available and shared experiences of other countries, and the results of the conducted questionnaires and interviews.

5.1. Improvement of the National Sports System

The collected data from the research on the matter of the experiences of abuse show an unflattering picture of the sports environment in Latvia, whether a person has had a personal experience or has heard about the experience of abuse from other people. This is reflected in one of the case studies, which shows that $\frac{3}{4}$ of more than 10,000 interviewed athletes have experienced interpersonal violence in sports before reaching the age of 18.³² As the chairman of the Sports Subcommittee of Latvia answered in the interview – “during the training and competition, the abuse was considered a norm.” In their research, Gretchen Kerr and Ashley Stirling have also addressed this attitude from the athletes as an acceptance of the broken system as a regular norm in a sports environment. – “As athletes, we are socialized to accept these practices as normal for sport and athletes’ development.” The emphasis on the athlete’s performance in competitions encourages a culture of mental toughness and resilience, but these “qualities” can promote the tolerance of abusive environments.³³

As Lisa Bode, in her 2023 publication on safeguarding the young athlete in sports, mentions – “Such results seem to indicate a vicious circle of verbal and physical violence in sports that needs to be broken to stop ongoing interpersonal violence.”³⁴

As mentioned in the article of Gretchen Kerr and Ashley Stirling, research shows that the athletes have been too scared for their position in the team or have been intimidated by the persons in charge who uphold the position of power. In fact, it is common for athletes to deny any wrongdoing because they fear the repercussions.³⁵ Another example of abuse is the experienced yelling or personal criticism from the coach.³⁶

The same type of information was received from the members of the LOC EC and the LOC AC on why the victims did not report abuse. One of the additional commentaries also implied that the athletes are afraid to talk about abuse because they think that they will be withdrawn from the national team, or the funding will be taken away.

³² Lisa Bode a, et al. “Safeguarding the Young Athlete in Sport.” *Sports Orthopaedics and Traumatology*, Urban & Fischer, 2 May 2023, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0949328X23001242?via%3Dihub.

³³ Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2019). Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1559255> p 374

³⁴ Lisa Bode a, et al. “Safeguarding the Young Athlete in Sport.” *Sports Orthopaedics and Traumatology*, Urban & Fischer, 2 May 2023, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0949328X23001242?via%3Dihub.

³⁵ Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2019). Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1559255> p376

³⁶ Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2019). Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1559255> p 374

Lisa Bode suggests that “Most evidence available on adults in sports deciding not to report child abuse emphasizes the toxic culture of silence in sports”.³⁷

The chairman also indicates a lack of a legal system that would regulate the safeguarding system in Latvia. The lack of a national safeguarding system was explained by a simple explanation that the sports community did not address the issue, and the politicians were not aware of the actual issues of abuse in sports, like the experiences of the USA and the UK.

The European and International resolutions (European Sports Charter and the EPAS self-assessment tool) have encouraged member states and sports organization to develop procedures on keeping the athletes safe in sports – policies and protocols.³⁸ Although the IOC has encouraged the NOCs to adapt safeguarding policies and protocols in their legislature, the NOCs have been passive in this task.³⁹

As mentioned in the publication of Louis Moustakas, Lisa Kalina, and Karen Petry, over the past decade, the world’s leading sports organisations have tried to tackle the problem of the lack of a national safeguarding policy.⁴⁰ The issue of lack of national safeguarding policy has been supported by other authors (Lisa Bode, Tine Vertommen, and Christian Nuhrenborger), who agree that the IOC's attempt to guide the NOCs and NFs with the Safeguarding Toolkit on the implementation of safeguarding policies, did not succeed in the intended amount.⁴¹

To start with the improvement of the system in Latvia, it is necessary to inform society about the matters of safeguarding and the existing problem of abuse. The questionnaire for the NFs indicated that 1/5 of the respondents from the NFs did not know what safeguarding is, which indicates a disturbing situation in the sports community. Anthony Hedges states, “Raising the awareness is a turning point in sport to get everyone involved in safeguarding”.⁴²

As Donna A. Lopiano and Connie Zotos in their publication discuss - coverage of high-profile cases of abuse and harassment in sport has increased public awareness of the problem.⁴³ Anthony Hedges agrees with the statement and introduces his 2014 publication with, "High-profile cases have raised public awareness of the importance of safeguarding and the need to report concerns.”⁴⁴

The gathered information about the recent cases of abuse in the Latvian sports community, together with the cases in other countries, promotes the necessity of the improvement in athletes’ protection from abuse. The issues of abuse in sports in the EU, North America, and other countries have been highlighted by the media.⁴⁵

As the chairman mentioned in the interview, the government of Latvia has also acknowledged that there is an existing problem of abuse in the Latvian sports community, and they are already working on a new sports law, which should regulate the existing problem of lack in the safeguarding aspects of the athletes.

Information about safeguarding matters and the approach in cases of abuse would be the first step in developing a working safeguarding system. It would be followed up by the

³⁷ Lisa Bode a, et al. “Safeguarding the Young Athlete in Sport.” *Sports Orthopaedics and Traumatology*, Urban & Fischer, 2 May 2023, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0949328X23001242?via%3Dihub

³⁸ Moustakas, L., Kalina, L. & Petry, K. The Development and Validation of a Child Safeguarding in Sport Self-assessment Tool for the Council of Europe. *Int. Journal on Child Malt.* 6, 109–118 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-022-00131-y> p1

³⁹ Lisa Bode a, et al. “Safeguarding the Young Athlete in Sport.” *Sports Orthopaedics and Traumatology*, Urban & Fischer, 2 May 2023, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0949328X23001242?via%3Dihub p150

⁴⁰ Moustakas, L., Kalina, L. & Petry, K. The Development and Validation of a Child Safeguarding in Sport Self-assessment Tool for the Council of Europe. *Int. Journal on Child Malt.* 6, 109–118 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-022-00131-y> p2

⁴¹ Lisa Bode a, et al. “Safeguarding the Young Athlete in Sport.” *Sports Orthopaedics and Traumatology*, Urban & Fischer, 2 May 2023, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0949328X23001242?via%3Dihub

⁴² Hedges, A. (2014). Safeguarding in sport. *Sport in Society*, 18(5), 614–625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2014.976010> p7

⁴³ Lang, Melanie, and Mike Hartill. *Safeguarding, Child Protection and Abuse in Sport: International Perspectives in Research, Policy and Practice*, Routledge, London, 2015, p99

⁴⁴ Hedges, A. (2014). Safeguarding in sport. *Sport in Society*, 18(5), 614–625. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2014.976010> p1

⁴⁵ Moustakas, L., Kalina, L. & Petry, K. The Development and Validation of a Child Safeguarding in Sport Self-assessment Tool for the Council of Europe. *Int. Journal on Child Malt.* 6, 109–118 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42448-022-00131-y> p1

necessary changes made at the NFs – the developments of safeguarding policy, written standards for contact with children in sports, communication with associated organizations, and others.⁴⁶

The representatives of the NFs ranked the most appropriate mechanisms for the protection of athletes, prioritizing the creation or development of an existing safeguarding system in the Latvian sports system, periodical seminars and courses on safeguarding were voted in the middle. The needed informing process about the safeguarding issues must be included in the education and training process.

When asked to rank the most appropriate tools for a safe environment in the sports community, the respondents ranked a safeguarding protocol as the most important tool, and the presence of a safeguarding expert was the least voted tool.

The gathered responses from the questionnaires indicated that a community with a safeguarding protocol in place would improve the sense of security for the athletes. However, the chairman of the Sports Subcommittee of the Latvian parliament expressed his doubts that a safeguarding protocol would be the only mechanism that would stop the perpetrator from abusing the athletes. The members of the Commissions partially agree with the statement that a safeguarding protocol would stop the abusers. Lisa A. Khil, in her paper on the recommended systems for promoting and safeguarding sports integrity, outlines the two major aspects of the development of a safer environment for the athletes, the implementation of good governance principles and the development and implementation of different policies.⁴⁷

The members of the Commissions have divided opinions on their represented Commission role in the protection of the athletes; one part of the respondents insist on a higher input from the Commission, and the other part leans towards the guidance to the athletes on their protection.

To make the necessary improvements and changes in the existing sports system in Latvia and solve the lack of a safeguarding mechanism, the system needs to be built on the existing base of experiences and knowledge. Representatives from the NFs show that some of them have the necessary knowledge of the IOC guidelines for safeguarding and the informing process, which gives the option to develop the safeguarding protocol based on the IOC guidelines and toolkit, as it was originally thought. As the representatives from the NFs answered, they are ready to start the changes from their NFs.

⁴⁶ NSPCC Standards for Safeguarding and protecting the Children in Sport

⁴⁷ Geeraert, A., & van Ekeren, F. (Eds.). (2021). *Good Governance in Sport: Critical Reflections* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003172833> p169

5.2. Education about safeguarding measures in sports

Education has been named as the most effective way towards change.⁴⁸ Most respondents from the Commissions' questionnaires mentioned more than once that the education aspects need to be considered while developing the safeguarding protocol. As the IOC developed a toolkit, the education process is one of the highest priorities, and it is included in the implementation process of safeguarding.⁴⁹

LOC's stakeholders agree that education is important for the reporting system. The IOC toolkit and the guidelines prepared by NSPCC support the education process.

Representatives from the NFs emphasized that the leading "tool" for preventing abuse in sports should be the education process on safeguarding. The chairman of the Sports Subcommittee of the Latvian Parliament added that a safeguarding protocol would work for the benefit of the protection of athletes only in situations where the safeguarding protocol is introduced at the same time or later as the educational programme for the society.

The example from Canada shows that the prevention of abuse starts with education and an explanation process on safeguarding matters.

Society needs to advance in accepting social norms within the sports community. Only then will a safeguarding protocol be effective in the favour of the athletes. The target audience for the education process in safeguarding would be the athletes, the athletes' entourage, volunteers, administrative personnel, and other people (family, friends, etc).⁵⁰ As Gretchen Kerr and Ashley Stirling outline in their 2019 publication, practitioners must be educated about maltreatment and safeguarding methods to fulfil their responsibilities to protect.⁵¹ This source describes the duties of a sports psychologist, but they must be applicable to other sports-related persons. Gretchen Kerr and Ashley Stirling also mention a lack of education on maltreatment and safeguarding.

The chairman of the Sports Subcommittee also addressed the topic of education starting from home because the parents are the ones the children look up to and learn about the right and wrong perceptions of the world. Munro and Parton have given their perspective on the role of parents in the matters of safeguarding as it would help to solve the existing problems in the family and would be a support for the parents in the fight against abuse.⁵² Camilla J. Knight, Oliver Y. Rouquette, and Maita G. Furusa emphasize that parents are uniquely positioned to be key actors in safeguarding their children from potential physical, psychological, or sexual harm that may arise due to their sports participation.⁵³

As Mountjoy indicates, it is necessary to educate the parents on athlete safety for a simple reason: the young athletes are turning to their parents as one of the few persons to address the issues of abuse or the feeling of insecurity.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Lang, Melanie, and Mike Hartill. *Safeguarding, Child Protection and Abuse in Sport: International Perspectives in Research, Policy and Practice*, Routledge, London, 2015, p17

⁴⁹ "Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport : IOC Toolkit for IFS and Nocs : Related to Creating and Implementing Athlete Safeguarding Policies and Procedures / International Olympic Committee." *Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport : IOC Toolkit for IFs and NOCs : Related to Creating and Implementing Athlete Safeguarding Policies and Procedures / International Olympic Committee - Olympic World Library*, library.olympics.com/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/171450/safeguarding-athletes-from-harassment-and-abuse-in-sport-ioc-toolkit-for-ifs-and-nocs-related-to-cre?_lg=en-GB. Accessed 8 Dec. 2023.

⁵⁰ "Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport : IOC Toolkit for IFS and Nocs : Related to Creating and Implementing Athlete Safeguarding Policies and Procedures / International Olympic Committee." *Safeguarding Athletes from Harassment and Abuse in Sport : IOC Toolkit for IFs and NOCs : Related to Creating and Implementing Athlete Safeguarding Policies and Procedures / International Olympic Committee - Olympic World Library*, library.olympics.com/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/171450/safeguarding-athletes-from-harassment-and-abuse-in-sport-ioc-toolkit-for-ifs-and-nocs-related-to-cre?_lg=en-GB. Accessed 8 Dec. 2023.p75

⁵¹ Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2019). Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1559255> p 374

⁵² Lang, Melanie, and Mike Hartill. *Safeguarding, Child Protection and Abuse in Sport: International Perspectives in Research, Policy and Practice*, Routledge, London, 2015, p4

⁵³ Lang, Melanie, *Routledge handbook of athlete welfare*. Routledge, 2021. p303

⁵⁴ Lang, Melanie, *Routledge handbook of athlete welfare*. Routledge, 2021. P307

The CPSU has a strong attitude toward the education process, they have defined that everyone affiliated with the sports environment must complete a safeguarding training course every three years.⁵⁵

Also, the chairman emphasized that the LOC should focus on public education on the topics of safeguarding and the concerning matter of abuse.

In 2010 the USOC reported about the recommendations for a safe training environment. In this report, one of the recommendations was the development of an educational resource for the sports community providing available resources online.⁵⁶ In the conclusion of the paper of Gretchen Kerr and Ashley Stirling, both authors propose graduate education programs, practitioner certification, and research in sports psychology as necessary steps in the measures of athlete safeguarding.⁵⁷

The IOC gives a remarkable example to all NOCs on solving safeguarding issues. In addition to the educational and research initiatives listed previously, the IOC has furthered the protection of the athlete by developing policies to outline procedures that guide conduct relating to athlete health.⁵⁸

The authors of the book “Safeguarding, Child Protection and Abuse in Sports” mention that the education process on safeguarding for all persons involved in sports should be strongly encouraged and promoted.⁵⁹

While the ranking of the importance of education and training may vary, research consistently shows that every organization and working group views education as a critical step toward creating a safer sports environment for athletes.

⁵⁵ Lang, Melanie, and Mike Hartill. *Safeguarding, Child Protection and Abuse in Sport: International Perspectives in Research, Policy and Practice*, Routledge, London, 2015, p17

⁵⁶ Lang, Melanie, and Mike Hartill. *Safeguarding, Child Protection and Abuse in Sport: International Perspectives in Research, Policy and Practice*, Routledge, London, 2015, p101

⁵⁷ Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2019). Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1559255> p 380

⁵⁸ Lang, Melanie, *Routledge handbook of athlete welfare*. Routledge, 2021. P359

⁵⁹ Lang, Melanie, and Mike Hartill. *Safeguarding, Child Protection and Abuse in Sport: International Perspectives in Research, Policy and Practice*, Routledge, London, 2015

5.3. Legislation process in Latvia

In Latvia, changes to the legal framework governing sports can occur through one of two avenues: amending the existing sports law or enacting a new sports law. During the interview, the chairman of the Sports Subcommittee of the Latvian Parliament assured that there would be a new sports law that would address the matters of local safeguarding issues in the country. The chairman argued that there is a need for a new sports law that will incorporate all the proposed amendments to the current sports law, which has been in force since 2002. The working group, with members from the government, LOC, and sports organizations, is working on the content and structure of the new sports law. Although this paper asks if there should be amendments to the existing sports law or if there should be a new sports law, the answers from the interview with the chairman of the sports subcommittee clearly explain that there will be a new sports law.

The legislation procedure for developing the safeguarding protocol would have to contain the support and opinion of the Commissions. When asked about the input on the development of the safeguarding protocol, the representatives from both LOC Commissions gave their answers as - consultative functions, support, and listening and advising the athletes, which indicates that the LOC Commissions would be further useful as a support in the working group of the development of the safeguarding protocol.

Regarding the governing body of safeguarding issues in Latvia, the chairman addressed this topic with confidence that the Latvian Antidoping Bureau (LAB), after the transformation to the Integrity Centre, would be the most appropriate institution to oversee and regulate the safeguarding issues regionally because the LAB is an independent organization.

The IOC guidelines for safeguarding insist that the national governing body must be an independent organization. For example, based on the legal acts, the USA and UK have created independent national governing bodies that regulate the integrity and safeguarding of matters nationally.

The LAB should take the example of CPSU, the country's main organization that helps sports entities with safeguarding matters and developing a safeguarding policy.

The CPSU works with sports organisations to provide safeguarding support, guidance, resources, training, and advice to help them develop and implement policies and procedures to safeguard and protect children and young people.⁶⁰

Anne Tiivas, the director of CPSU, has stated that a wealth of evidence shows that adopting the Safeguarding standards and implementation have played a significant part in ensuring that sports organisations have appropriate safeguards in place.⁶¹

Most respondents from the questionnaire for the NFs agree with the statement that the voice of the athletes would help in the development of the safeguarding protocol. However, one of the members of the LOC Athletes Commission outlined that the voice of athletes is not considered.

The interview with the chairman of the sports Subcommittee of the Latvian parliament explained the legislation procedure for a new law. Like the UK and the USA, a new law would allow the development of a safeguarding protocol that an independent integrity organization would be monitoring, in this case, the LAB. There must be a transformation for the existing LAB, taking the experience from Scandinavia (Estonia and Finland). As Lisa A Khil mentions in her paper on the Sport integrity system, Finland has adopted specific sport integrity

⁶⁰ NSPCC Standards for Safeguarding and protecting the Children in Sport P3

⁶¹ NSPCC Standards for Safeguarding and protecting the Children in Sport P3

initiatives, although the Finish Centre for Sports concentrates on anti-doping, match-fixing and fair play topics.⁶²

As the chairman explained, the Ministry of Education and Science has committed to submit the new sports law to the Parliament by this year's September, where it will have three readings and, if it is passed as adequate from the legal aspects, then it will be proclaimed from the President of Latvia by the beginning of the next year.

⁶² Geeraert, A., & van Eekeren, F. (Eds.). (2021). *Good Governance in Sport: Critical Reflections* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003172833> p169

6. Limitations

The limitations of this paper are as follows:

1. Although the time for this paper was equally distributed throughout the development process, a longer research time and the availability of the persons for the interviews would have helped. Due to the tense schedule of the representatives of the government (Prime minister and ministers) of Latvia, interviews could not have been held. With the additional interviews, the author would have gathered more information for the research paper and the visions for the future of the sports environment in Latvia.
2. Broader access to all European National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and their safeguarding approaches would have allowed for a more extensive exploration of the topic. This wider perspective could have enriched the research and provided a more comparative analysis.
3. The existing literature is more about the safeguarding process and the actual cases of abuse. In contrast, the needed information for this paper was oriented toward developing a safeguarding system from the ground up.

In summary, while greater access to data and availability of interviewees would have enriched the depth of this paper, the information gathered and available was sufficient to effectively address the main research question.

7. Conclusion

Although Latvia has an existing sports law regulation and the LOC has developed internal regulations, the current legal framework does not adequately protect athletes from abuse. However, the information received from the chairman of the Sports Subcommittee of the Latvian Parliament provides hope for a new sports law that will include safeguarding regulations.

The research question has been answered: there will be, indeed, a new sports law with a specific chapter on safeguarding. Unfortunately, the new sports law will not immediately eradicate abuse in sports. The LOC must take a proactive role as the lead organization in promoting and developing a safe environment for the athletes, beginning with promotional and educational activities starting this September.

The LOC should work as the umbrella organization, where the NFs promote the safe sports movement in their clubs, training facilities, and even at meetings with family members and friends (entourage). Through education, the LOC can raise awareness about the disturbing aspects of abuse in sports and the necessity of a robust safeguarding system. Change must start at the grassroots level, influencing the minds and attitudes of those within the sports community.

The answers to the questionnaires, sourced locally, align with international perspectives on the necessity of an educational process for safeguarding. The improvements to the existing legal system may be the first step towards a safer environment for athletes. The policy or the safeguarding act will be only the beginning of developing a safer environment, followed by a practical approach, which will be challenging work for the LOC.

The scope of authority of the Commissions should be wider, with a much deeper impact on the integrity of the athletes. The IOC has developed standards for protecting children in sports. Considering the developed standards, the LOC could improve the protection of athletes by developing a safeguarding protocol.

In conclusion, the Latvian sports system is just a moment away from the necessary changes towards a safer sports environment for athletes. The need for a safeguarding system has been recognized not only by athletes but also by the national media and the Latvian government. Improvements to the sports governance system, the development of a safeguarding protocol, and the education process should be carried out simultaneously to ensure a broad impact across Latvian society and the sports community. The development of the safeguarding protocol should be coordinated by the LOC and supported by a working group comprising members from all national sports organizations.

Gretchen Kerr and Ashley Stirling have brought up a specific conclusion - The occurrence of athlete maltreatment in sports has stimulated widespread concern and questions about how so many athletes could have experienced abuse over so many years.⁶³ To protect the athletes from abuse, there must be significant changes in the mindset and attitudes toward the sports environment, particularly from the athletes' perspective.

⁶³ Kerr, G., & Stirling, A. (2019). Where is Safeguarding in Sport Psychology Research and Practice? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 31(4), 367–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10413200.2018.1559255> p 379

8. Recommendations

The gathered information from the media about the cases of abuse in the Latvian sports community and the shared experiences of LOC AC members and the chairman of the Sports Subcommittee of the Latvian Parliament confirms the suspicion about the “real” situation of abuse towards the athletes. To solve the existing problem, the author offers these recommendations, which are being prepared only for the development of a safeguarding protocol and the protection of athletes.

1. **Develop and Enact a Comprehensive Safeguarding Chapter in the New Sports Law:**

- **Action:** LOC is a member of the working group, that currently works on the new sports law. LOC can help to reinforce the legislative process to ensure that the new sports law, which includes a dedicated chapter on safeguarding, is passed and enacted promptly.
- **Outcome:** Establish a first legal framework that clearly defines safeguarding standards and responsibilities across all levels of sports in Latvia.
- **Timeline:** The first reading of the new sports law - September 2024, second reading - November 2024, and third reading - December 2024. Proclamation of the new sports law – January/February 2025.

2. **Strengthen the Role of the LOC as the Lead Organization for Safeguarding:**

- **Action:** The LOC should actively lead the promotion, development and awareness of safeguarding initiatives, serving as the central authority in coordinating efforts across the sports community.
- **Outcome:** A unified approach to safeguarding, ensuring consistent application of policies and practices across all sports organizations in Latvia.
- **Timeline:** The promotion of safeguarding thru the LOC social media platforms must be done simultaneously as the new sports law is being passed at the Parliament – September 2024/October 2024.

3. **Launch an Immediate Educational Campaign:**

- **Action:** Begin a comprehensive educational campaign starting in September 2024, targeting athletes, coaches, parents, and other stakeholders. This campaign should include workshops, seminars, and distribution of educational materials. LOC has a system in place to address the sports community and start to educate them about safeguarding.
- **Outcome:** Raise awareness about the risks of abuse in sports and the importance of safeguarding, fostering a culture of safety and respect. Educate the sports community about safe sports, eventually, change the perception about the sports environment
- **Timeline:** Promotion of the educational program will start in September 2024. A fully working campaign with educational materials for different age groups should be launched in January 2025.

4. **Expand the Authority and Scope of the LOC Commissions:**

- **Action:** Broaden the mandate of the LOC Commissions to include a more significant role in safeguarding, with specific powers to enforce policies and monitor compliance.
- **Outcome:** Ensure that safeguarding protocols are effectively implemented and that there is accountability within the sports community.
- **Timeline:** Presentation to the LOC Board in September 2024, approval by the LOC Executive board October/November 2024.

5. Develop a Robust Safeguarding Protocol:

- **Action:** The LOC should work on the creation of a comprehensive safeguarding protocol, modeled on international standards, such as those developed by the IOC. This protocol should include clear guidelines for preventing, reporting, and addressing abuse.
- **Outcome:** Provide a structured and consistent approach to safeguarding that can be applied across national sports organizations.
- **Timeline:** Presentation of the international standards to the LOC Board October 2024. Translation of the international standards and first draft of the safeguarding protocol - December 2024. Publication immediately after the approval of the safeguarding protocol at the LOC General assembly April 2025

6. Establish a National Working Group for Safeguarding:

- **Action:** Form a working group consisting of members from all national sports organizations to collaborate on the development and implementation of safeguarding protocols.
- **Outcome:** Foster collaboration and ensure that safeguarding measures are integrated across the entire sports system.
- **Timeline:** Address the sports organizations and ask them to nominate representatives for the working group – October 2024. First meeting and establishing the role of the working group – November 2024. Monthly meetings to develop the safeguarding protocol.

7. Engage with International Partners for Best Practices:

- **Action:** Collaborate with international organizations and other NOCs to gather best practices and learn from their experiences in safeguarding.
- **Outcome:** Enhance Latvia's safeguarding protocols by incorporating proven strategies and solutions from other sports systems.
- **Timeline:** Initiate communication with other NOCs - Autumn 2024. Collect the data on best practices on safeguarding and implement them in the safeguarding protocol – December 2024/January 2025.

8. Monitor and Evaluate the Impact of Safeguarding Initiatives:

- **Action:** Implement a system to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding measures, including regular online feedback from athletes, coaches, and NFs.
- **Outcome:** Improve the safeguarding protocol and address any gaps or weaknesses in its implementation.
- **Timeline:** The audit of safeguarding measures should be done frequently, every six months.

By implementing these recommendations, LOC can establish a robust safeguarding system that protects athletes from abuse and promotes a culture of safety within the sports community.

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