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PCSOS PILOT STUDY RESULTS



PROTECTING CHILDREN IN SPORT: DEVELOPING SAFE AND INCLUSIVE SPORT ORGANIZATIONS





Effectiveness of Child Protection Programs in National Sports Federations: A Comparative Study Across Croatia, Serbia, Turkey, and Romania

1. Introduction

Sports significantly impact children's development (Eime et al., 2013) and are crucial for enhancing their physical, social, and emotional abilities (add source). However, one of the key points for benefiting from these positive effects of sports is ensuring children's participation in a safe environment. In this context, the effective implementation of child protection programs by major sports organizations, such as sports federations and clubs, is very important (Holt et al., 2011).

Sports organizations and their administrators play significant roles in protecting children. These roles involve establishing and implementing policies and procedures necessary to respect children's rights and protect them from potential dangers. Moreover, these obligations are moral, ethical, and legally secured (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin, 2005). However, current literature reviews indicate that sports organizations are slow in this regard and do not sufficiently support the welfare of children (add source). Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of protecting children from the dangers they encounter while participating in sports and reports that sports organizations need to take more responsibility (Lang and Hartill, 2014; Agergaard, Redelius, and Strandbu, 2024). Although it is legally stated that sports organizations must actively implement child protection programs in the context of local and international responsibilities, research on how much these are practically applied is very limited.

This research aims to investigate whether national sports federations in four countries (Croatia, Serbia, Turkey, and Romania) have a child protection program and how effectively they utilize these programs.

2. Method

Research Group: This study, supported by the European Union's Erasmus+ Sports program under the PCSOS project, examined the national sports federations of four different countries: Turkey, Serbia, Romania, and Croatia. In this context, a total of 280 national sports federations





Were studied, including 63 from Turkey, 100 from Serbia, 83 from Romania, and 44 from Croatia.

This pilot study aims to assess the current status of child protection programs within the national sports federations in Turkey, Serbia, Romania, and Croatia. The primary objective of the research is to determine the extent to which national sports federations disseminate information about child protection procedures, training programs, the presence of protection boards, and complaint lines.

Data were collected from each federation's official website and social media platforms, which serve as the primary channels for publishing information to the public. The federations included in the study were classified into Olympic and non-Olympic categories. The selection of federations was based on their national-level operations and their representation of sports that directly interact with children. The websites and social media accounts of the federations were systematically examined, and published content related to child protection was recorded. Information regarding child protection procedures, training programs, the presence of protection boards, and complaint lines was gathered.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed separately for each country and according to categories (Olympic and Non-Olympic). The presence and absence of publications related to the federations' child protection programs were quantitatively assessed through a proportional analysis. The data obtained were used to reveal the prevalence of child protection practices and the differences between federations.





3. FINDINGS

Table 1. Information about national sports federations on child safeguarding programs in sport

Country	Information of federations' websites and social media	Statue	
		Olympic	not Olympic & Other
Türkiye	Child Protection Procedure Published on Website	3/37	0/26
	Child Protection Training for Personnel (Coaches, Referees, etc.)	0/37	0/26
	Presence of Child Protection Board	3/37	1/26
	Reporting/Complaint Hotline for Child Protection Program	0/37	0/26
Serbia	Child Protection Procedure Published on Website	0/45	1/55
	Child Protection Training for Personnel (Coaches, Referees, etc.)	0/45	0/55
	Presence of Child Protection Board	0/45	30/55
	Reporting/Complaint Hotline for Child Protection Program	0/45	29/55
Romania	Child Protection Procedure Published on Website	1/37	0/46
	Child Protection Training for Personnel (Coaches, Referees, etc.)	6/37	0/46
	Presence of Child Protection Board	0/37	0/46
	Reporting/Complaint Hotline for Child Protection Program	0/37	0/46
Croatia	Child Protection Procedure Published on Website	0/41	0/3
	Child Protection Training for Personnel (Coaches, Referees, etc.)	0/41	0/3
	Presence of Child Protection Board	0/41	0/3
	Reporting/Complaint Hotline for Child Protection Program	0/41	0/3

As shown in Table 1, the information published online (websites, social media) related to child protection programs in sports by 63 national federations from Turkey, 100 from Serbia, 83 from Romania, and 44 from Croatia has been analyzed. This table displays the status of child protection programs of national sports federations in Turkey, Serbia, Romania, and Croatia. For each country, the publication status of child protection procedures, training programs, the presence of protection boards, and complaint lines through websites and social media have been evaluated.



In Turkey and Romania, the majority of federations show significant shortcomings in publishing child protection procedures and training programs. In both countries, only a few Olympic sports federations have published such information.

Serbia, in comparison to other countries, has shown notable progress, particularly among non-Olympic federations, regarding child protection boards and complaint lines. This is evidenced by the presence of child protection boards and complaint lines in the vast majority of non-Olympic federations. However, it is important to note that there are still serious deficiencies.

Unfortunately, in Croatia, none of the federations have published their child protection procedures, training programs, protection boards, or complaint lines. This situation indicates a significant gap in child protection among sports federations in the country.

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULT

This research, supported by the European Union's Erasmus+ Sports program under the PCSOS project, has been conducted to evaluate the extent to which the Child Protection in Sports Program (CPS) is implemented in national sports federations in Croatia, Serbia, Turkey, and Romania. In this context, important elements such as child protection procedures, training programs, the existence of protection boards, and complaint lines have been considered. Findings indicate that child protection programs are generally insufficient across the studied countries. Notably, none of the federations in Croatia have implemented measures such as child protection procedures, training programs, protection boards, or complaint lines. In Serbia, non-Olympic federations implement these elements somewhat better; however, significant deficiencies are observed across all countries. These deficiencies may stem from various barriers faced by sports administrators and leaders within national sports federations. These barriers include limited resources, resistance to change, low levels of education and awareness, and cultural and linguistic differences. These factors complicate the effective implementation of child protection programs and hinder safe participation in sports for children.

The implementation process of the Child Protection in Sports Program (CPS) identifies potential difficulties that sports organizations and administrators may encounter, and providing solutions to these identified challenges is crucial for maintaining an effective program. Resistance to change, resource management and optimization, education, and awareness

raising, as well as cultural and linguistic differences, can be considered potential challenges for sports organizations and administrators.

Resistance to change is a common challenge in entrenched institutional structures. Organizational change is regarded as an effective process in addressing security deficiencies in organizations and ensuring their sustainability (Grama and Todericiu, 2016; Balcı and Yıldız, 2022). Resistance to change is often observed during the process of intended changes in organizations and is defined as any opposition or systematic response to altering a particular situation (Grama and Todericiu, 2016; Balaman and Baş, 2021). This resistance typically manifests as a reluctance to alter existing conditions and routines. In one study, it was noted that sports administrators need to be equipped with the skills and competencies to adapt their sports organizations to the changes and developments required by modern times. In this context, it is important for sports federations and clubs to effectively sustain child protection programs, especially by sports administrators identifying the causes of resistance to change and increasing activities to improve the current situation (Güçlü et al., 1996; Balcı and Yıldız, 2022).

Resistance to change in organizations is addressed in a multidimensional attitude across emotional, cognitive, and behavioral contexts, highlighting the necessity to evaluate the situation from each individual's perspective (Piderit, 2000; Oreg, 2003; Szabla, 2007). Changing existing policies and procedures in implementing child protection programs is a time-consuming and challenging process for individuals to adapt. Sports administrators and staff should support the adaptation process to these new policies through education and information and by enhancing trust in the processes and new norms.

Resource management and optimization are critical for the successful implementation of child protection programs in sports organizations. The limitations of human and financial resources can negatively impact the program implementation process. Ineffective use of existing resources can also stem from managerial problems. In a sports organization, synchronizing and implementing all programs and focusing employees on the organization's goals is a key factor in sustaining target programs (Doherty, 1998; Chirila, 2009). Sports administrators often struggle to allocate sufficient funding for child protection programs while supporting various programs and activities within the existing budget. This can pose a larger problem, especially for small or resource-limited sports clubs. Effective resource management involves wisely



using the existing budget and seeking additional funding sources if necessary. Moreover, the effective use of existing staff for training and other resources needed for program implementation is also crucial. In this context, it is essential for human resource managers in sports organizations to

Conduct a detailed analysis of management policy, staff organization, training design, budget management, motivation management, and performance management for child protection programs (Koca, 2008; Özsarı, 2024).

A sufficient number of trained personnel is required to implement child protection policies, but training and managing this personnel is costly. Sports administrators must assess how to use existing personnel more efficiently and how to provide the necessary training cost-effectively. In one study, performance-focused and career-oriented training in human resource practices were reported as predictors of innovativeness (Aman et al., 2018). Additionally, technology and automation can make processes more efficient, reduce the burden on staff, and facilitate program management. A comprehensive resource management strategy implemented by sports administrators and staff in sports organizations will effectively integrate and sustain child protection programs.

Sports is a sociocultural institution capable of conveying and sustaining cultural values. Every individual in a society is a member of that society and interacts reciprocally with their cultural structure. Sports possess a sociocultural structure that influences the formation and maintenance of many social values. Culture and sports are interrelated phenomena (Başoğlu, 2022). In the global and multicultural structure of sports organizations, cultural and linguistic differences in societies can pose particular challenges. For effective implementation of CPS, understanding this diversity and developing approaches suitable for each culture are necessary. Child-rearing methods, behavioral norms towards children, and their legal frameworks can vary significantly across different cultures. Therefore, for a child protection program to be successful, a multilingual and culturally sensitive approach must be adopted, considering these differences. While designing child protection programs, materials appropriate to each country's language and cultural sensitivities should be prepared. Promotion and training materials should be presented in local languages and in a manner that is understandable to each culture. Additionally, collaborating with local community leaders and families during the





implementation of these programs can increase the program's acceptance rate. Respecting the beliefs and values of local communities when implementing child protection policies will enhance the program's effectiveness and encourage widespread adoption. Overcoming cultural and linguistic differences is a critical step in ensuring the global success of child protection programs. Properly understanding these

Differences and shaping programs accordingly will enable sports organizations to be more effective and inclusive in child protection.

This research examined the effectiveness of CPS in Croatia, Serbia, Turkey, and Romania, identifying the challenges sports organizations and administrators may face in implementing these programs and offering practical solutions to these challenges. Resistance to change, resource management and optimization, education, and awareness raising, and cultural and linguistic differences have been identified as challenges for sports organizations and administrators. In conclusion, it is recommended that the adaptation process of sports administrators and employees to CPS policies should not only involve education and information methods but also measures to enhance trust in these processes and new norms.

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