



Introduction

Article 19 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*¹ (hereinafter CRC) stipulates that States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

*The Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS)*², conducted in the Republic of Moldova in 2019 showed that two out of five girls (36.8%) and two out of five boys (37.8%) were subjected to some type of violence, while one out of seven girls (14.4%) and one out of twenty boys (5.3%) were subjected to sexual violence until the age of 18. According to the UNICEF Global Report “An everyday lesson: #ENDviolence in schools”³ more than half of pupils in Moldova are subjected to violence in schools. According to global data, Moldova has one of the highest rates of peer violence in the region, occupying the 3rd position in the ranking after Lithuania and Latvia: 57% of children aged 13-15 participated in a fight at least once in the last year and / or say that they have been harassed at least once in the last few months. The 2019 Report developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research showed that in 2019 education employees identified 8220 suspected cases of physical, emotional abuse, neglect, labor exploitation, sexual harassment and bullying of which 1688 (20.5%) suspected cases of violence against children reported by educational institutions to the child protection authorities⁴.

Moldavian Football Association (FAM) in partnership with Terre des hommes Moldova, implemented the Football Social Responsibility project “**Safe football for children in Moldova**”, financed by the UEFA⁵ within the corporate social responsibility programme and HatTrick assistance programme. The aim of the project is to provide a safe and protective environment for all children practicing football in Moldova, presupposing, first of all, that the adults involved in sport are required to possess relevant knowledge on abuse, on methods for identifying and reporting the cases of violence. In this context, FAM aims to ensure that all professionals are well informed and equipped to prevent violence, but also to intervene in certain situations of risk.

¹Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 22 November 1989, the Republic of Moldova acceded to the Convention by Parliament’s Decision no. 408-XII of 12 December 1990, <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/media/1401/file/Conventia-cu-privire-la-drepturile-copilului.pdf>, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx> (the English version)

² <https://msmps.gov.md/comunicare/comunicate/lansarea-studiului-privind-violenta-impotriva-copilor-si-tinerilor-vacs/>

³ <https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/everyday-lesson-endviolence-schools>, 2018

⁴ https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/tabel_2_0.pdf

⁵ The umbrella organisation for 55 national football associations, <https://www.uefa.com/>

The National Mapping Study of Football Key Actors and Analysis of both Regulatory and Policy Framework governing the Protection of Children in Football in the Republic of Moldova

From May to August 2020, *the National Mapping Study of Football Key Actors, their commitments regarding the protection of the child in football, as well as the analysis of both regulatory and policy framework governing the protection of children in football in the Republic of Moldova* has been conducted in the country. Mapping was carried out in the frame of the project named **“Safe football for children in Moldova”** implemented by the Moldovan Football Federation in partnership with Terre des hommes Moldova with the financial support of UEFA. The study comprises two research components: analysis of the regulatory framework governing the protection of children taking part in sport, particularly football and mapping of organizations where children practice playing football.

The analysis of both international standards and national regulatory framework showed that important actions have been taken at legislative level in the Republic of Moldova to bring the national regulatory framework into line with international standards, a regulatory framework governing the protection of the child against any form of violence, abuse or neglect, determining the specialists responsible for interfering in these cases and intervention procedures has been developed to this end. Starting from the premise that football in the Republic of Moldova is played by children within educational institutions (sports schools, sports clubs, etc.) regulations governing the protection of the child in football have been analyzed in the light of the provisions of the Education Act and regulatory and policy acts governing the protection of the child in educational institutions. However, football activity, or sporting one, in general, requires carrying out specific activities, different from those carried out by an institution providing general education. Trainings entail physical contact between the child and coaches, for which specific rules should be imposed. The study showed no such specific rules.

The mapping approach detected loopholes in implementing both national rules and international standards at club level. Even though the national regulatory framework establishes the obligation to develop and approve a Child Protection Policy at club level, half of the clubs participating in the study had not approved such a Policy, also the very same half of the clubs had approved no Employee Code of Ethics/Code of Conduct, and only ¼ of the clubs participating in the study designated a Child Protection Coordinator. In addition, clubs have no effective hiring procedure ensuring that applicants who might pose a risk to children are identified and prevented from working with them.

The study showed that the child’s opinion matters to the club, 89% of the clubs participating in the mapping reported that they seek for the input of the child on the atmosphere within the club, relations with both staff of the institution and colleagues, problems, which are being encountered in the institution, and half of them involve children in the development, implementation and review of policies and procedures, which directly concern them.

The analysis of the findings showed that the mapping study provides a number of recommendations both for improving the national regulatory framework and implementing them

along with international standards thereby making football a safe, positive and enjoyable experience for all children.

The National Study of Knowledge, attitudes and practices for safeguarding children in football.

The sociological study named “**Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices for Safeguarding Children in Football**” was *designed* to assess the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) aimed at protecting children involved in football. *The research objectives* have centered on:

- determining the degree of satisfaction of the target groups (children, parents and football experts having direct or indirect contact with children involved in football) with the football club and its work;
- identifying children’s perceptions of the degree of safety within the club/football team;
- determining perceptions of the risks to which children are/may be subjected while playing football;
- identifying the views and attitudes of target groups on safeguarding children in football and the need for the safeguarding measures thereof;
- establishing practices for the information of the target group on measures for safeguarding children in football;
- revealing the practices infringing the rights of the child to enjoy football;
- identifying the level of knowledge about the rights of the child and protective measures in respect thereof;
- establishing the forms of violence and the frequency of their application to children during training sessions;
- determining the means for communicating the infringements of child’s rights between children, parents and experts;
- revealing the knowledge of the target group on reporting the infringements of the rights of the child to enjoy football, including the cases of violence against children.

The Research Methodology

Following the state of emergency declared in the Republic of Moldova in March 2020, due to COVID-19 pandemic, all football clubs shut down for about 5 months. In this context, the research design has been adjusted to the new existing conditions, being determined the need for collecting all the necessary data in online form. Thus, the research has been conducted on the basis of a structured, self-managed **online questionnaire** via the <https://docs.google.com> platform, the research tool being adapted for each category of respondents (child, parent, coach).

The research community/target groups included respondents from both banks of the Dniester/Nistru River, the total number of participants in the study being of 391 individuals, of whom 204 **children** (girls and boys attending local football clubs), 75 **parents** of children attending local football clubs, accompanying their children most frequently (women and men), 57 **coaches** and 55 **managers** of football clubs and sports schools⁶.

Structure of the sample designed for children

The sample was drawn on the basis of existing statistical data on the number of clubs - members of the MFF covering the region and number of children (boys/girls) based on their age. The sample was structured at national level based on the following criteria:

1. The geographical coverage – area of activity/place of residence (North, Centre, South, Chisinau, Transnistria).
2. Gender (boys and girls) and age (year of birth 2002-2010).

Of the 204 children surveyed, 85.3% (174) are male, and 14.7% (30) are female, about 22% are aged 10-11 years, and 31.4% - 12-13 years, children aged 14-15 years are 31.4%, and those aged 16-17 years only 17.6%. Children from urban areas have a higher share – 61.8%, especially from Chisinau municipality - 38.2%, of the other regions of the country the share of children participating in the study is approximately 20%.

Executive Summary

Safeguarding children in football is a priority both at the national and international level and for this reason the need to implement a child protection policy in football is being promoted. In this context, the sociological study named “***Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices for Safeguarding Children in Football***” is the first one covering the evaluation of knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) on safeguarding children involved in football. Given the stage of development of the pandemic and restrictions imposed due to it, including on sports schools⁷ and football clubs⁸, all data have been collected online on the basis of a structured questionnaire, using a sample of a total of 391 individuals from both banks of the Dniester/Nistru River, of whom 204 children (girls and boys attending local sports schools or football clubs), 75 parents whose children participate in local football clubs, accompanying most often their children (women and men), 57 coaches and 55 managers of football clubs and sports schools.

The main findings of the study cover the following aspects:

At foresight level

The vast majority of the children interviewed (99.5%) enjoy playing football, with a higher share among boys. The most important reason to play football is the jam of kicking the ball (44.6% of children and 68.0% of parents). The share of children to whom this type of sport has been imposed

⁶ Throughout the report the term „football club” means football clubs and sports schools where children play football.

⁷ Order of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research no. 375 as of 24.03.2020 approving the “Methodology to resume the remote learning programs in sports schools under quarantined conditions”.

⁸ Order of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research no. 911 as of 02.09.2020 approving the Guidance on how to stop the spread of COVID-19 in sports institutions.

by the family is small (1% of children), although the number of parents stating this fact is higher (6.7%).

The trip to the football club is largely made on foot (41.3% of parents), and approximately the fourth part (24.0%) of children are taken to football clubs by car by their parents. Every fifth parent (20.0%) is always taking his/her child to training sessions and less than this (18.7%) is always present there. Approximately 27.0% of parents rarely accompany their child or they don't accompany him/her at all, while 24.0% are rarely witnessing the training session or aren't present there at all. On the other hand, about 46.0% of children are not accompanied by any adults to their training sessions. Most often children are accompanied by the father (22.5%).

The emotional climate within the football team is rated as a positive one. The vast majority of children (89.2%) and parents (86.7%) believe that the coach encourages them, the team is united and friendly and the club creates conditions for practicing football safely.

The work and professionalism of the coaches is appreciated by the majority of the parents and children participating in the study. Only 2.6% of parents disagree on this topic. At the same time, most parents appreciated the fact that coaches are particularly concerned with each child and about 27.0% of children gave preference to coaches.

About a fifth of parents (20.0%) believe that coaches yell at children, and a tenth (10.6%) that they call them bad names. In a proportion of 5.3%, parents agree that some coaches physically punish children.

At the same time, the coach enjoys the highest level of confidence among the children (89.2%), and more than half of them (51.0%) show lots of confidence in the club's management. Over 62.0% of children showed greater confidence in the child protection officer.

The features assigned to the coach by both parents and children frame him as a person who is passionate about football, is friendly, educated, sympathetic, reliable, kind, etc.

The study also revealed a discriminatory attitude towards different categories of children. Thus, aggressive children, those with disabilities, the Roma ones, shy children, those with modest academic achievements are less accepted in football teams. At the same time, football is associated with boys rather than girls.

Children's safety is most often associated with protection during training sessions and matches (40.7%). At the same time, the majority of children (89.3%) feel safe and secure both inside and outside the football club. Though the perception of safety is higher on the territory of the club (stated by 70.1% of children), while the lowest one is in the shower/bath rooms (30.4% of children). The vast majority of parents maintain that the level of safety inside the club is higher (78.8%) than outside it (71.0%), while the coaches think quite the opposite: 75.0% of coaches believe that children feel safer outside the club and 61.8% of them think that children feel safer inside it.

The study data showed that in the last year, 1 out of 10 children felt insecure inside the football club, especially girls, children aged 12-13 as well as children living in the rural areas.

The creation of a nonviolent environment within football clubs is associated by coaches and club management most often with the non-application of physical violence against children; non-

shaming of children, avoiding all types of bullying among children, not allowing comments bearing indecent content about children, not using harsh tones when communicating with children, etc. Compared to club managers, coaches associate the nonviolent environment of the club with the observance of the child protection policy to a lesser extent.

At the level of information on the child protection policy

About 41.0% of the parents and 39.0% of all children participated in information activities relating to the safety and protection in football, more often participating boys, those with a 5-6 years football playing experience and those living in Chisinau municipality. In the case of coaches, more than 71.0% indicated on receiving the information about the safety of children in football, most often at the school of coaches (78.9%) and in the football club (73.7%). At the same time, 10.5% of the coaches never participated in information activities. The management of the clubs organize awareness-raising activities to inform coaches in more than 74.5% of cases, children attending 67.3% of the clubs, parents – 38.2% of all clubs participating in the survey.

The frequency of participation in such activities is several times a year (63.3% of the children who participated, 51.6% of the parents who participated, 47.1% of the coaches), and about 9.0% of the children, 19.4% of the parents and 5.9% of the coaches participated in such activities only when joining the club.

The most frequently topics addressed in the information activities refer to *the way of communication with the coach/child about possible cases of abuse in the club* (20.1% children and 19.0% parents), *the peculiarities of violence and abuse against the child* (45.1% coaches, 19.1% children and 21.0% parents), *ways to protect yourself against abuse* (15.7% coaches, 15.7% children and 17.1% parents), *ways of identifying rights' violations* (14.7% children and 15.2% parents), *reporting cases of abuse* (3.9% coaches, 11.8% children and 13.3% parents), etc.

Such information activities are attended by the coach most of the time (43.8% of children and 39.3% of parents), probably because he/she is often involved in conducting them. In few cases, such information activities were attended by the club's child protection officer (8.5% of children and 4.9% of parents) and independent experts, such as a police officer, psychologist (7.2% of children and 11.5% of parents). At the same time, the coach is the one organizing the information activities (43.8% children). The club's management is engaged in organizing activities intended for children and parents less often (27.5% of children and 32.8% of parents), however as far as the coaches are concerned the latter conduct the aforementioned activities most frequently (over 45.0% of coaches). As for the child protection officer, he/she rarely participates in such information activities (8.5% of children, 9.7 parents and 3.9% of coaches).

The child protection policy implemented at the club level is brought to the attention of parents in the proportion of 65.3%, in particular, women, parents residing in villages and in the country's central part getting more information in respect thereof. As far as the coaches are concerned, 97.8% of them were informed accordingly about it, whilst over 96.0% were informed about the Code of Conduct.

The vast majority of football club coaches and managers consider compliance with child protection policies to be of crucial importance.

At the level of knowledge of the rights of the child

Children participating in the study recorded a low level of knowledge of their rights in football: only 25.5% of children possess genuine knowledge, most of whom are children aged 10-11 years. At the same time, children aged 16-17 years and those residing in Chisinau municipality show a low level of knowledge of the rights of the child.

The level of knowledge of violations of their rights is low among both children, parents and coaches. Only 4.9% of **children** were able to correctly identify the 11 situations of violations. About half of the children have an average level of recognition of violations of the rights of the child. At the same time, 4.9% of the children could not identify any of the situations proposed. Of all **parents**, only 8.0% were able to correctly identify the situations thereof out of 14 proposed to them, whilst about half of the parents showed an average level in this chapter. Parents who participated in information activities possess a higher level of knowledge. As for coaches, only 5.3% answered correctly to 16 statements proposed therein. The vast majority of coaches have an average level of knowledge of situations of violations of the rights of the child.

Football clubs are not able to provide favorable conditions for the conduct of football training sessions and activities all the time. 1 of 10 children (10.3%) have no access to changing rooms, while 4 of 10 children (43.1%) are not able to take a shower. At the same time, 1 of 10 coaches (14.0%) work in clubs, which have no hot water, while 31.0% work in clubs, which have no women's rooms inside the club. More than half of the coaches work in clubs providing toilets for both girls and boys outside the institution.

More than 12.0% of coaches and 14.5% of managers believe that there have been cases of discrimination against children within the football club.

There are cases of bullying children in the football clubs, by both coaches and other children, as well as cases when the clubs' coaches or staff is being bullied by children. About 45.0% of children know of cases of physical punishment of children by coaches, about 38.0% have knowledge about cases of verbal violence, over 5.0% have witnessed cases of neglect, shaming of children, and over 11.0% possess knowledge about cases of fear and stress of children during training sessions. Over 9.0% of children have witnessed fights between colleagues and 10.0% know of bullying. About 20.0% of children believe that coaches are being bullied by other children.

The violent behaviour of coaches towards children is also mentioned by coaches and managers. Thus, 7.1% of coaches and about 4.0% of managers stated the use of physical violence by coaches, more than 21.0% of coaches and over 27.0% of managers mentioned the use of verbal violence, about 4.0% of coaches stated the use of isolation of children.

3 out of 10 coaches know the club's child protection officer. About 44% of coaches do not know about the existence of this expert in the club. Coaches ask for the help of the aforementioned expert very rarely. Children mostly associate coaches as being responsible for their safety (47.1%). More than half of the parents know about the existence of the child protection officer within the club, as well as consider his/her activity an important one.

At the level of applicable practices

Each time the children's opinion is consulted with reference to the schedule of the training sessions (82.4% children and 56.2% coaches), and the least with the reference to the choice of the coach (22.5% children and 22.8% coaches).

In order to ensure the protection of children, monthly, coaches communicate with the club's management about the behavior of children (43.9%), carry out activities to inform children about their safety and protection in football (31.6%) and communicate with other experts about the behavior of children (15.8%). Only 9% of coaches hold meetings with parents about child safety and protection measures.

In the case of aggressive behavior of children, regardless of the type of aggression, the parents would address first to the coach, secondly, they would file a complaint with the management of the football club, and thirdly, they would deregister their child from the club. The coaches, in turn, would hold a discussion with the aggressive children, would talk about them with their parents as well as with the child put at risk.

When referring an aggressive behavior on the part of the coaches, the parents would discuss with the coaches, would file a complaint with the management of the football club and the Moldovan Football Federation. At the same time the football club management would talk to the coaches, would discuss with the parents and the child put at risk.

The study highlighted the need for interventions in order to ensure the protection of children in football. Both parents, coaches and managers indicated the need to improve the technical-material base of the club, improve the football infrastructure, strengthen the professional capacities and abilities of coaches, conduct educational activities promoting non-violence for children, etc.

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