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M\_Coach

# Change your mind, coach



**POLICY  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

English

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## Change your mind, coach

Policy Recommendations

Work Package 6 | Intellectual Output 6: Task 2

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### Consortium

<p>Slovenian University Sports Association SUSA</p> <p>Slovenia</p>	<p>Hrvatski narodni sportski savez</p> <p>Croatia</p>	<p>NOVEL Group</p> <p>Luxembourg</p>	<p>LITHUANIAN SPORTS UNIVERSITY</p> <p>Lithuania</p>
<p>symplexis</p> <p>Greece</p>	<p>Município de lousada</p> <p>Portugal</p>	<p>idea</p> <p>Ajuntament d'Alzira</p> <p>Spain</p>	<p>CARDET CENTRE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH &amp; DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY</p> <p>Cyprus</p>



## 1. Why Policy Recommendations?

This document was developed in the context of the holistic strategy of the **CHANGE YOUR MIND COACH** project (**M\_Coach**), which was funded by the EU and co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union. The **M\_Coach** project developed an online platform for sport agents with the objective of identifying discriminatory behaviours expressed by athletes between 16 and 21 years of age.

As part of the communication and knowledge transfer strategy, this document has the objective to inform policy makers and decision makers at all levels, from local to regional to trans-national, about key conclusions of the project. Based on the feedback collected, the policy recommendations should be taken into consideration from policy makers, sport organizations/ clubs, local authorities and the general public on how to better manage diversity and what needs to be done in sport to improve the added value it has in our lives. The purpose of the policy recommendations is to compile the feedback received on how sports can significantly contribute to the change in the mentality of young adults and promote a society of tolerance, acceptance to diversity and inclusiveness.

### FACTS AND FINDINGS

*“There is persuasive evidence that racism and racial discrimination in sport goes beyond the individual or collective behaviour of fans or isolated cases of racist gestures and remarks made, for example, by athletes, coaches or club managers. In fact, institutional racism is also at work in the field of sport.”*

*“Initiatives for combating racism in sport have often mainly concentrated on fan behaviour and more in particular on hooliganism, even if not all hooligans or members of radical fan groups are necessarily racist. It is important to acknowledge that racist acts are also perpetrated by athletes, coaches and other sport staff, as well as ordinary fans.”*

Explanatory Memorandum to ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 12

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/>

To find out more about MIND COACH project please visit the project website:  
<https://www.changeyourmindcoach.eu>



## 2. About the M\_Coach Project

The M\_Coach Project aims to develop a training course for sports agents (coaches and technicians) with the aim of identifying discriminatory behaviours expressed by athletes between 16 and 21 years of age.

The project developed the appropriate tools and methodologies so that sports agents can, through the use of appropriate and targeted examples, be aware when one of their athletes shows intolerance and non-acceptance, which can lead to the marginalization of their peers, and introduce sports-related practices/activities/tasks they engage in in order to address this behaviour.

The project ran from January 2020 to December 2022 (there was a one-year extension due to the Covid-19 pandemic).

Eight partners organizations from eight European countries collaborated in the project:



### 3. Discrimination in sports

The European Union’s fundamental values are respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law. These values unite all the member states – no country that does not recognise these values can belong to the Union. The EU protects all minorities and vulnerable groups and stands up for the oppressed. Regardless of a person’s nationality, gender, language group, culture, profession, disability or sexuality, the EU insists on equal treatment for all. In addition, the EU has been investing a significant number of resources in working towards an inclusive society for all, fostering acceptance, tolerance and trust. Building on the existing legal framework, the EU has introduced and initiated a broad range of measures to better prevent and combat racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. These measures are aimed at supporting national authorities and civil society in stepping up efforts to prevent and counter the spread of intolerance and hatred, better enforce laws on discrimination, hate crime and hate speech, provide victims with the necessary support and assistance, raise awareness, improve data collection and the monitoring of trends.



Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done to achieve the objectives set. Across all life spheres there are repetitive and important cases of violation of human rights, expressions of marginalization and violence, exclusion, less opportunities, and discriminative behaviours. The field of sports is no exception. In many sports across the European Union, minorities and migrants are underrepresented, particularly in the management positions of sport organizations. Women and girls with a minority or migrant background are particularly underrepresented. In some countries, social exclusion and geographical isolation can lead to

low participation levels of Roma and Travellers in sport. Unavailability of sports facilities in certain areas also reduces participation levels of some groups.

The EU Work Plan for Sport 2017-2020 Adopted by the Council of Ministers sets out the key topics which Member States and the Commission should have prioritized until 2020: integrity of sport will focus on good governance, safeguarding minors, fighting match fixing, doping & corruption; economic dimension focussing on innovation in sport, and sport & digital single market; sport & society focussing on social inclusion, coaches, media, environment, health, education & sport diplomacy. In particular, when it comes to the societal role of sports, the EU has set as priorities (among others):

- ✓ to foster a sense of social inclusion and integration through sport, particularly for marginalized groups.
- ✓ to eliminate racism and xenophobia and to create gender equality through sport.

The Project has identified the types of discriminatory behaviours in the participating countries in all their expressions and the reasons for which they are expressed, it will systematize them and methodologies for dealing with them will be proposed.

The consortium members when talking about discriminatory behaviour include all possible triggers, from racial/ ethnic reasons, to gender, to religion, and even underperformance. The M\_Coach project has equipped the trainers/ coaches with the appropriate tools to address and tackle any form of discriminatory behaviour, irrespectively of whether it is based upon societal differences, or peer pressure stemming from underachievement, given that, ultimately, the reason behind intolerance and unacceptance is not really what matters so much; it is the inclination of certain individuals to adopt such behaviours and acting on them.

#### European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) useful links

- ✓ ECRI General Policy Recommendation No. 12: Combating racism and racial discrimination in the field of sport <http://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng?i=REC-12-2009-005-ENG>
- ✓ ECRI revised General Policy Recommendation No. 2: Equality Bodies to combat racism and intolerance at national level <http://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng?i=REC02rev-2018-006-ENG>
- ✓ European Sports Charter <https://rm.coe.int/16804c9dbb>
- ✓ European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events <https://rm.coe.int/168007a086>

## 4. Policy Recommendation address

The Policy Recommendations are divided by the themes of the modules that make up the online course, that is, there are six themes and in each of them there are recommendations that we strongly propose to be adopted by clubs and/or local sports associations in each of the municipalities/cities where the partners entities are located. These recommendations aim to provide sports agents with tools to know how to identify and correct discriminatory acts regardless of their origin or target.

Themes of the Modules of On-line Training Course	
1	Stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination
2	Diversity and Inclusion
3	The source of prejudice and the effects
4	Inclusive leadership and mentoring
5	Diversity management
6	Managing challenges and inclusive approaches

*Nota 1 - Policy recommendations are not prioritized*

## 4.1. Stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination

Sports clubs/associations...

- ✓ They should allow the same opportunities for participation regardless of the athlete's gender, creating training teams for both sexes and when the number of athletes does not allow it, incorporating female athletes into male teams or vice versa.
- ✓ They must encourage and provide conditions so that there are more female members in their management and technical teams.
- ✓ They must not make any kind of differentiation/discrimination regardless of the athlete's gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin.
- ✓ They must, through workshops, webinars, practical and theoretical activities, raise the awareness of club coaches and managers, parents and their athletes about incidents involving stereotypes, prejudice, bias and discrimination in youth sport.
- ✓ It must eliminate any kind of prejudice existing in the group of athletes and work to eradicate the idea/opinion through awareness-raising actions.

## 4.2. Diversity and inclusion

Sports clubs/associations must...

- ✓ Increase awareness and sensitivity of athletes/ coaches/ parents/ officials and all entities related to the club/association on issues related to diversity, inclusion and equity.
- ✓ Become a safe space for people to have the opportunity to get involved, be themselves and stand out individually.
- ✓ Create a solid understanding of the positive change that inclusive sports for development can bring.
- ✓ Develop an inclusive environment where differences in ethnicity, sex, age, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, education and religion are appreciated, valued and respected.
- ✓ Using inclusion and diversity in sports clubs as tools to prevent violence and intolerance.
- ✓ Be equipped with practical tools to help manage diversity issues in sport.

## 4.3. The source of prejudice and the effects



Sports clubs/associations must...

- ✓ Make known to the sports community (coaches, managers, athletes, parents, etc) the manifestations of prejudice in sports.
- ✓ Encourage the analysis of situations in which preconceived notions arise and develop a comprehensive and effective strategy to prevent the emergence of aggressive behavior;
- ✓ Try to create a balanced sports team, avoiding aggression, discriminatory behavior and thus creating a good environment. Encouraging the involvement not only of the family, but also of the entire community.
- ✓ Learn to recognize the manifestations of prejudice in various sporting activities: observe competitions (behavior of supporters, spectators), judge, comment and conduct sporting events.

#### 4.4. Inclusive leadership and mentoring

Sports clubs/associations...

- ✓ They have a duty to understand the coach(s) role as natural-born leaders. The coach's role has different dimensions and tasks. Being a leader is one of the most important roles of the coach and being an inclusive leader, respecting all team members, regardless of their characteristics, is fundamental.
- ✓ The coach must recognize which style is appropriate, be it authoritarian, democratic or *laissez-faire*. The way he leads is extremely important.
- ✓ The coach uses empathy, active listening and assertiveness to motivate athletes. One of the most important functions of leadership is to create the will among team members to perform to the best of their abilities. Therefore, the role of a leader is to encourage motivation to perform in the interest of achieving their personal and team goals.
- ✓ Create a culture of inclusion and develop diversity. Diversity is important because it promotes creativity, unique perspectives and new opportunities. A common characteristic that we see developing in athletes as a result of diversity is good sportsmanship.

#### 4.5. Diversity management



Sports clubs/associations must...

- ✓ Team coaches, managers and other entities with the ability to master conflict management strategies.
- ✓ Be able to know the special characteristics of their teams.
- ✓ Be able to spot coaching opportunities and understand which style to use.
- ✓ Be able to make decisions including the various needs of the group.
- ✓ Being able to learn to gather and manage conflicts in a team and to assess the consequences and impact of ideas, opportunities and actions.

#### 4.6. Managing challenges and inclusive approaches

Sports clubs/associations must...

- ✓ Understand relevant anti-discriminatory provisions.
- ✓ Know the possibilities and procedure (when and how) to report a discriminatory incident.
- ✓ Learn the tools and procedures to face discrimination and overcome challenges caused by cultural differences.
- ✓ Learn useful strategies for managing the effects of bullying and harassment on the victim.
- ✓ Know and understand inclusive approaches - related to discrimination in sport and leadership through hate.
- ✓ Learn about equal opportunities programs, training programs for trainers and families and other related projects.

### 5. Lessons learned at national level



## 5.1. Slovenia

Participants of the M\_Coach project presentations and courses in Slovenia were very pleased that that kind of educational content about prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination was available for them. During live educational courses and workshops many of them realized what the term discrimination really means in a wide sense and that it is not only talking about different skin color and ethnicity in the highest ranking of sport competition. They learned about different reasons and consequences so they understood the whole problem of discrimination. They were encouraged lots of times to tell their opinion, debate about the topic and give feedback also out of the official M\_Coach Pilot Phase Questionnaires - all with the purpose of making that kind of educational process more effective and useful - we think that regular feedback is urgent in any educational process so the topics and methods can be modified and adapted to the listeners. Our listeners liked practically oriented workshops with their active role more than just “one-way” lectures without discussion and participation.

Many of the attendees told us that we are talking about important topics, which are important to everyone who works with athletes, especially with younger ones. Maybe the most important step would be, if the educational content will be available to all coaches and sport experts and even obligatory for them. This would be an effective way to achieve the goal that even coaches, who think they know enough, have doubts about discrimination phenomena or they are involved in discrimination events, would learn the basics and they will slowly implement the anti-discriminative content, behavior and tools into their practices. And the most important is that they have the knowledge on how to prevent discrimination events. The content should become an important part of long-term sport strategy. Because of the usefulness of the written Didactic Manual and eLearning Platform an organized educational workshop and also web based educational process is applicable even to the people in the areas that are not directly connected with sport (for example: teachers, parents, employees and their superiors ...).

## 5.2. Croatia

The conclusions of the M\_coach implementation in Croatia showed that the topic of discrimination in sport is not tackled and discussed enough in Croatia.

A lot of the participants said that they didn't know that some practices that are normally used in everyday interactions in sport might be discriminatory. On the other hand certain discriminatory practices were recognised by the coaches as not a real issue. For example a lot of them said that in their clubs they never came across discrimination in terms of any kind of physical or mental impairment. And this is due to the fact that in the Croatian sport system people with impairments train in sport clubs that work specifically with those people. On the other hand the discussion recognised that this approach of the Croatian sport system might

be discriminatory from the start because people with impairments might be discriminated against in terms of not being able to be a member of any sport and club they wanted.

Another thing that was recognised by the coaches is that anti discrimination policies on club level don't exist or if they do, they are not really communicated to the coaches and club members.

To conclude, the topic of the project and the educational program was found to be interesting, it gave insight to the coaches how to recognise, report and deal with discrimination. Through the project activities additional topics/problems in terms of discrimination in sport and how to create systems to tackle it in the best way were recognised.

### 5.3. Luxemburg

First of all, while working on the Mind\_Coach project, our organization became much more aware of how and to what extent discrimination affects the field of sport. Through our involvement in the project, the project outputs' added value not only served as a knowledge hub for us to gain more understanding on this very important issue, but they will also serve as a resource to be used for our activities in vocational education and training and as a reference for other projects.

Furthermore, through the pilot phase and the multiplier events/workshop organized, the final beneficiaries of the project (coaches, trainers of coaches, sports stakeholders) stressed the fact that discrimination in sports is widely under discussed and that there is a pressing necessity to raise more awareness about this issue, which happens more frequently than one would think. According to the stakeholders, it is also evident that there are many things still little known to them about discrimination in sports and the different ways it manifests, thus there is an alarming need for coaches to be trained on this matter, not only when they're already working as coaches, but most importantly while they are still coaching students, so future coaches gain an understanding on discrimination early on, before they start coaching.

After the training course, coaches became more aware of what is defined as a discriminatory behavior and how it can manifest, so that they themselves will be able to, not only notice it in others, but also prevent themselves from adopting such behaviors. Most of them didn't even know that some of their behaviors might be characterized as discriminatory, thus the training course and the awareness raised through it and the didactic manual, will act as a valuable tool for coaches a) to be able to label a behavior "discriminatory" when they see it, even if it's their own behavior, and then b) to develop the required skills so they can make it right. The project website will also serve as a knowledge hub and an awareness tool for discrimination in general, not only in the field of sports, available to the public for free, so more people can learn about this much significant issue, even long after the project's finalization, ensuring the project's outputs' sustainability and longevity.

## 5.4. Lithuania

In this diversified and fast-changing world, there are quite a few issues related to diversity: sports, gender, race, and the like. People like and stay close to this platform due to the fact that the educational material is presented in a relatively simple and clear manner. There are many referrals, interesting surveys. Another point why it is liked by visitors is that the provided educational material is inclusive, encouraging further and deeper interest in the presented problems. It is important that coaches see that the material presented is related to real life and what actually happens in sports. And coaches really need to change their vision and mindset. And not only to achieve sports results, but also to be able to train children successfully.

Another proven aspect is that coach trainers also see their opportunities to adjust coach training programs according to the emerging contemporary situation. Thanks to this project, the participants realized that by preventing the possible consequences of prejudice in teams, sports clubs, it is possible to achieve higher sporting results and avoid aggressive and discriminatory behavior based on racial, social, cultural or ethnic origin.

## 5.5. Greece

The implementation of the M\_Coach project in Greece has contributed in the achievement of the following:

- ✓ Coaches and trainers, but also athletes and other relevant stakeholders gained better understanding of what constitutes discrimination in sports.
- ✓ The project raised awareness on how to identify/acknowledge incidents related to racism and discrimination in sports and explored ways and tactics to prevent such phenomena so as to make sports inclusive.
- ✓ Coaches and trainers who participated in the M\_Coach pilot workshops developed skills to stand up against discrimination in sports and the project provided them with educational tools so as to help young athletes.
- ✓ The project encouraged coaches, players and relevant sport stakeholders to report discrimination when they experience or witness it and motivated sport clubs to focus on inclusion, establish a safe sporting space for young athletes and adopt a “zero-tolerance discrimination policy”.

The main conclusion from the M\_Coach pilot in Greece is that the project’s e-learning platform and didactic manual have been received by the vast majority of the participant coaches and their trainers in an extremely positive way, as a set of easy to understand, innovative and user-friendly materials and tools, which can enable them to identify and tackle discriminatory behavior in their teams, composing primarily of young athletes aged between 16-21 years old. Quoting some of the coaches: “I can now more easily understand if some of

my athletes' words or actions suggest discrimination against their teammates and this is the first step to tackle it” and “I feel more confident in acting against discrimination in my team”.

## 5.6. Portugal

The received feedback from platform users as sports clubs/associations was that in fact they had no real idea of what discrimination in sport was and its different forms of manifestation. The trainers themselves admitted that after taking the course and the knowledge acquired through the project materials, they became aware that certain attitudes and communications they had would not be the most appropriate and would, sometimes, be discriminatory without being unintentionally discriminatory.

Therefore, the platform and the lessons learned throughout the project helped the users to become more aware of the existence of discrimination in sport and subsequently change their attitudes in their day to day job as Sport Agents.

Education and self awareness in a process, the Municipality of Lousada will continue to have as its primary mission make the society and in particular the “Sports Family” an example of respect and tolerance.

## 5.7. Spain

The feedback obtained from the participants gave us several fundamental ideas.

First, they consider that there is still a lack of knowledge on the part of both parents and coaches and trainers of the key concepts of discrimination or the types of discrimination that may exist and that they must face in sports.

Secondly, both coaches and parents are faced with the situation of not knowing or not having the right tools to deal with this problem. In relation to this, parents consider that they also do not have the necessary means to ensure that their children do not suffer this discrimination or even to ensure that they do not participate in it.

On the other hand, as an extract of the realization of this project, from IDEA, local development agency of the city council of Alzira, the following conclusions have been reached.

It has been detected that education is one of the main factors to deal with discrimination, being a failure at the institutional level on how to educate our young people in schools and colleges, both on the issue relating to the concepts of discrimination and the tools to deal with it.

On the other hand, this failure is also believed to affect sports federations, since many times coaches wanting to curb these behaviors, and being accredited and federated as coaches, have not received the necessary training or tools to do so.



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