

HUMAN RIGHTS, CHILDREN AND SPORT*

In July 2017 the Kazan Action Plan (KAP) was adopted "to facilitate international and multi-stakeholder policy convergence, ease international cooperation and foster capacity-building efforts of governmental authorities and sports". Since then, the sports sector globally is unifying and advancing its human rights activities considerably. The UNESCO Chair, IT Tralee, is coordinating efforts in this domain. We are involved in building mechanisms based on the SDG mantra of 'no-one left behind, starting with the most vulnerable' in the aspiration that policy and investment decisions can be evidence-based, rights-based and led from areas of the most need.

Participation in sport has numerous benefits including promoting health and mental well-being. Being physically active helps to prevent serious conditions, such as type-2 diabetes and obesity. Participation in sports also increases confidence, self-esteem and social skills such as teamwork, leadership and discipline. Studies have shown that those who play sports do better in school [1]



Several United Nations human rights treaties contain articles recognizing sport as a human right, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). They also contain rights which are necessary for the full enjoyment of the right to sports, such as child protection and education including physical education, and rights which participation in sports can contribute to, such as health. These rights also link to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 19 - Right to freedom from violence, injury, abuse, neglect and exploitation



Article 23 - Rights of children with disabilities to special care, and to education, health care, training and recreation



Article 24 - Right to health



Article 31 - Right to play and recreational activities



Article 28 and 29 - Right to education, including physical education



When something is a human right it means that everybody is entitled to it, simply by virtue of them being human. However, not everybody is always supported to enjoy these rights equally. Approximately 15% of the world's population experience some form of disability [2] and children with disabilities are 4.5 times less active than their peers without disabilities[3]. Gender stereotypes and cultural practices can also hinder access. For example, in the UK 38% of 7 year old girls achieve the daily recommended amount of physical activity, compared to 63% of boys. [4] For many children when intersecting identities such as gender, disability, race, income, sexuality, minority status, location, migrant status, etc., combine, participation can be harder.

The UN "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework's guiding principles recognise: (a) States' obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and fundamental freedoms; (b) the role of business enterprises as specialized organs of society, required to comply with all applicable laws and to respect human rights; (c) the need for rights and obligations to be matched to appropriate and effective remedies when breached. In order to promote the protection and respect of human rights in and through sports, tools on engaging with the UN treaties, including CRC, are being prepared for states, National Human Rights Institutions, and civil society organisations, including sports organisations. These tools aim to raise awareness of sport as a human right, to encourage states to take stock of where their policies are and share good practices, and to empower civil society in advocating for sports as a human right.



*"Sport" is being used to reflect physical education, physical activity and sport in this note.

1) Barbara Kotschwar (2014) Women, Sports, and Development: Does it Pay to Let Girls Play?, Peterson Institute for International Economics available at <https://www.piie.com/sites/default/files/publications/pb/pb14-8.pdf>

2) World Bank Group available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disability>

3) Sagas, M. and Cunningham, G.M. (2014). Sport Participation Rates Among Underserved American Youth. Aspen Institute's Project Play: Reimagining Youth Sports in America. Available online:

https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/education/Project_Play_Underserved_Populations_Roundtable_Research_Brief.PDF

4) Lucy J Griffiths et al, (2013) How active are our children? Findings from the Millennium Cohort Study. Epidemiology, Vol. 3, No. 8