

IAAF Position Statement on Safeguarding athletics by protecting athletes from harassment and abuse

Purpose

This Position Statement confirms IAAF's commitment to Athletics being a sport which is free from harassment and abuse. It also sets out the steps IAAF will undertake to give effect to this Position Statement.

This Position Statement is intended to guide Area Associations, Member Federations, athletes, staff, IAAF sponsors, partners and meeting organisers, to understand the IAAF's expectations regarding harassment and abuse, and actions to both prevent and address them. It also defines the expected standards of behaviours described in Article 6.3 of the IAAF Integrity Code of Conduct.

The IAAF, Area Associations and Member Federations may establish and implement Rules to give binding legal effect to the expectations set out in this Position Statement.

Introduction

Psychological, physical and sexual harassment and/or abuse have devastating effects on a person's self-worth, mental and physical wellbeing; they undermine human dignity and deeply compromise everyone's right to enjoy athletics. They undermine the IAAF's object to promote the sport of Athletics and its ethical values as an educational subject, life affirming and life enhancing activity. These behaviours represent only a portion of the many discriminatory actions that might take place in the sport context as in everyday life.

Background

Harassment and abuse can occur within an organisational culture that ignores, denies, fails to prevent or even tacitly accepts such opportunities. Risks of harassment and abuse are greater when there is a lack of protection or implementation of policies, codes of conduct, whistleblowing channels and response mechanisms. The risk is further increased by high perpetrator motivation, such as being in a leading position, and high athlete vulnerability, especially with young athletes or those coming from a socially disadvantaged background. Several research studies have investigated this area and have shown that harassment and abuse involve all sports, at all levels. Data published have demonstrated that prevalence is higher in elite sport (1-3). These behaviours can be anticipated by a manipulative conduct set out by the perpetrator, defined as "grooming". In this process the perpetrator prepares and desensitises the victim, enticing him/her to submit, usually through isolation or continuous pressure (4,5).

The impact of harassment and abuse on the victims is devastating. The consequences for the victim include sports drop-out, psychosomatic illnesses, disordered eating, anxiety, depression, self-harm and, in worst cases, suicide (6-8). Consequences for the perpetrators are also very serious. They can be of a legal nature, since most jurisdictions classify abuse and harassment as a crime; reputational with a lasting negative effect on the person's social status; professional due to sanctions leading an ineligibility to work in the field; and personal with a severe impact on family life.

Research has also demonstrated the connection between harassment/abuse and an increased risk of injury/illnesses. Having experienced some form of maltreatment, especially at younger age, compromises the individual's risk assessment capacity. As a result, victims tend to adopt riskier behaviours, in and out of the sport environment (e.g. training when ill or injured, overtraining, alcohol, doping and consumption of prohibited substances) (9, 10).

Harassment and abuse have also a deep impact at sport and organisational levels. The integrity of Athletics, the IAAF and all Member Federations are at stake and will be damaged, resulting in public disaffection, athletes' dropout and depletion of talent pools, loss of medal chances and sponsorships.

Prevention of all forms of harassment and abuse represent a major public health priority and the prevention of these behaviours within Athletics is a major concern for the IAAF.

Scope and purpose

This Position Statement applies to the IAAF, Area Associations, Member Federations, athletes and staff. Everyone has the responsibility and ethical obligation to ensure that the athletic environment is respecting the right to safely take part in and enjoy the sport (11).

This Position Statement defines harassment and abuse, and outlines the process IAAF is implementing, to prevent and respond to these forms of behaviours. This document aims to guide Area Associations, Member Federations, athletes, staff and all those involved in the Athletic movement, to:

- Detect and recognise harassment and abusive behaviours
- Report and respond to harassment and abusive behaviours

Recognise harassment and abusive behaviours

Harassment and abusive behaviours referred to in this Position Statement are defined below.

Definition of harassment

Harassment relates to unwanted attention or conduct, the violation of dignity and/or the creation of a threatening, hostile, intimidating, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It includes gender harassment, and sexual harassment. Harassment can be perpetrated also through cyber mechanisms and social media, when communicating with peers and fans.

Definition of gender harassment

Gender harassment consists of derogatory treatment of one gender or another, which is systematic and repeated but not necessarily sexual.

Definition of sexual harassment

Sexual harassment refers to behaviour towards an individual or group of a sexualised nature, which is unwanted, exploitative, degrading, coerced, forced and/or violent. Such behaviours may be verbal, non-verbal and/or physical. It is based upon an abuse of power and trust and is considered by the victim or a bystander to be unwelcome or intimidating (13).

Examples of sexual harassment include unwanted or degrading intimate questions relating to body, clothes or one's private life, jokes with a sexual innuendo, and proposals or demands for non-consensual sexual acts. These may also be in the form of unwanted telephone calls, letters, text messages or other communication with a sexual content.

Example of non-verbal sexual harassment and abuse include staring, gestures, showing pictures or objects with sexual allusions.

Examples of physical sexual harassment and abuse include unwanted, unnecessary or forced physical contact of a sexual nature, such as pinching, pressing oneself onto the body of others, attempting to kiss or caress another person.

Definition of abuse

Abuse implies that a person's rights are violated or infringed by another. This is based on an abuse of power and trust. It can take place both on and off the field of play and can include forced or mandated inappropriate physical activity (e.g. age-inappropriate or physique-inappropriate training loads; when injured or in pain); forced alcohol consumption or systematic doping practices. It includes Hazing and Sexual Abuse. It also includes discrimination of any kind whether due to a person's race, sex, ethnic origin, colour, culture, religion, political opinion, marital status, sexual orientation or other difference. In the sport context, it can also involve the manipulation and entrapment of athletes (12).

Definition of hazing

Hazing involves abusive initiation rituals that often have sexual components and in which newcomers are targeted.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing another person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the person is aware of what is happening.

The activities may involve physical contact, including assault by penetration (for example, rape or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts such as masturbation, kissing, rubbing and touching outside of clothing. They may also include non-contact activities, such as involving individuals in looking at, or in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a person in preparation for abuse (including via the internet).

Sexual abuse can be perpetrated by both males and females. It is usually committed by individuals in position of power and trust, such as coaches and members of the athlete entourage, as well as family and friends, peer athletes and sports fans.

Respond to harassing and abusing behaviour

The IAAF will take all reasonable and practicable steps to prevent and treat harassment and abuse within Athletics. The IAAF takes a comprehensive approach to this and wishes to involve the world of Athletics at all levels and engaging everyone. According to previously published strategic policies in this field (14), the set of actions may include:

- assess the prevalence of harassment and abuse in athletics through tailored designed scientific surveys
- integrate a culture of respect and the prevention of harassment, abuse and violence into the organisation's policy plan
- raise awareness for the topic through information sharing
- offer education and training for athletes, coaches and other athletes' support staff of the member federations
- develop procedures for dealing with complaints and concerns
- establish and implement rules for sanctioning people who engage in harassment or abuse
- include standards for safeguarding into recruiting-processes for staff members
- collaborate with other stakeholders from within and outside the sport domain, including law enforcement and entities in charge of the safeguarding of vulnerable populations (children, young women for example)

Responsibilities in preventing and tackling harassment and abuse

Guidelines for Area Associations/Member Federations

- Through the promotion and implementation of this Position Statement, all Area Associations and Member Federations should ensure that all athletes, staff members, officials and any other concerned person are aware of confidential reporting mechanisms to raise their concerns. Disseminating, promoting and explaining rules and practices, setting up whistleblowing channels will decrease the risk of impunity for the perpetrators.
- Everyone who is involved at any level in Athletics has the responsibility to contribute to the creation of a safe and enjoyable environment for others to work, compete, assist and participate in the sport. Everyone contributes to the culture of sport; this includes IAAF staff, Member Federation officials, athletes, coaches, athletes' supporting staff and spectators. Anyone actively involved in Athletics should be aware of the expected standards of behaviour and what to do when they become aware of behaviours that fall short of these expectations.
- Every allegation of harassment or abuse should be properly assessed, and if the case warrants it, investigated and treated. Those responsible for organising athletics competitions, camps, events and opportunities are responsible for providing a safe and inclusive environment, and it must be clear that harassment and abuse will not be tolerated.
- All Members need to be willing to take formal action when informal steps have not worked or are not suitable because of the seriousness of the issue. They also need to be able to provide people with support and by referring them to external support services.

Guidelines for Athletes, coaches, supporting staff, volunteers, officials

- People in positions of trust are responsible for acting as good role models and for recognising and praising positive achievements and behaviours, as well as taking appropriate actions when there are negative behaviours.
- Athletes need to know whom to talk to about any concerns, should feel confident that they will be listened to and actions can be taken. Speaking out can put the athlete at risk of repercussions, both personally and in terms of sport career. Therefore, it is crucial that once this step has been taken, the person reporting on the issue (be it the victim or a witness) feels safe and the response is prompt. Furthermore, they should be assured of a safe environment in which they can carry on practicing athletics and should not feel excluded from the sport at any time.
- Athletes need to know what will happen if they raise a concern and should be supported throughout the process. They should be provided with referrals to support lines and other sources of external help. Victims should be kept informed during the process and the way the issue is dealt with.
- All raised concerns will be investigated to verify their authenticity and to ensure a fair treatment of all parts involved. False accusations made in bad faith will be treated as breaches of the Rules.

Next Steps

To enable it to give effect to this Position Statement, the IAAF will:

1. assess the prevalence of harassment and abuse in Athletics through tailored designed scientific surveys at IAAF competitions;
2. review the IAAF Integrity Code of Conduct to consider whether amendments are required to incorporate harassment and abuse as described in this Position Statement;
3. establish a confidential whistle blowing mechanism for people to raise concerns or complaints about alleged harassment and abuse by people who are subject to the Integrity Code of Conduct, and develop procedures for dealing with such complaints and concerns;
4. raise awareness for the topic through information sharing and education;
5. offer education and training for athletes, coaches and other athletes' support staff of Area Associations and Member Federation;
6. include standards for safeguarding into recruiting-processes for IAAF staff;
7. collaborate with other stakeholders from within and outside the sport domain, including law enforcement and entities in charge of the safeguarding of vulnerable populations (children, young women for example).

This Position Statement shall be considered as a living document. It will be reviewed a year after the development and then every three years afterwards.

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