

Planning in advance

Several components need to be discussed and determined before the major sporting event to ensure effective safeguarding at the event/tournament/game. One of the key components is the safeguarding strategy and operational plan; the other is the case management committee.

The organising committee should appoint a competent safeguarding manager in advance of the event to help develop the strategy and plan, and to set up the case management committee and procedures.

Safeguarding strategy and operational plan

The safeguarding strategy is a high-level explanation of the commitment, priorities and approach to safeguarding at the major sporting event, whereas the operational plan outlines how this will be done, by whom and when. The operational plan puts the strategy into action and is practical and detailed. It describes what will happen before, during and after the sporting event. Both the strategy and plan can be put into one document for ease of reference.

A combined strategy and operational plan might be structured in the following way:

1. Background

2. Sporting event context and approach

- ▶ Details on the sporting event
- ▶ Principles
- ▶ Policies
- ▶ Scope

3. Objectives and operational plan

- ▶ Prevention activities
- ▶ Safeguarding risk assessment
- ▶ Development and implementation of procedures
- ▶ Stakeholder mapping and partnerships, including referrals
- ▶ Education and awareness
- ▶ Response activities
- ▶ Reporting and case management system

4. Safeguarding team and stakeholder roles

5. Timelines, resources and budgets

Case management

A major sporting event generally involves different venues, countries, cultures and jurisdictions. When safeguarding incidents occur or disclosures are made during game time, it is crucial they are managed efficiently, diligently and safely in line with the established strategy and guiding principles– especially given the complex and high-pressure environment of competitions.

Case management is the process through which safeguarding complaints or incidents are received, addressed and managed. It includes investigating, documenting and closing safeguarding cases. This process is guided by safeguarding policies and procedures, and/or the organisation's ethics, integrity or disciplinary protocols.

Case management is the responsibility of the case management committee. The general task of this committee is to assess the complaint and any actions undertaken and identify the next steps. If the committee already has a member who is competent and qualified to undertake the investigation, or who can undertake the investigation with the safeguarding manager's support, they should do so. Alternatively, the committee may appoint an investigating officer (this person is to be identified before the event). The findings of the investigation are reviewed, and proportionate actions undertaken.

The case management committee can put in place interim measures such as temporary suspension or change in accommodation as part of risk management, while the investigation is underway.

The case management committee will communicate any issues to the organising committee that need addressing because of the case and make any further referrals. The committee will also ensure that regular risk assessments are carried out, and mitigation strategies applied during management of the case.

Before the major sporting event it is important for the host body and/or organising committee to determine the case management committee members and the process, including which policies govern and support their roles and decisions, and what the terms of their responsibilities are.

Generally, the safeguarding manager would triage reports or concerns according to 'poor practice', 'poor practice with safeguarding concern' or safeguarding incident'. Based on the safeguarding manager's assessment, the matter would be escalated to the case management committee, or the safeguarding manager would attend to it in consultation with the respective workforce managers, team safeguarding officers and/or the organising committee lead.

When an incident is escalated to the case management committee, it needs to make decisions or at the very least make preliminary decisions within hours or a couple of days. Matters of multiple jurisdictions also need to be considered, as visiting teams or officials/athletes may be governed under different policies and people may leave countries once their games or events conclude.

The case management committee should not be large, so as to avoid slow decision-making. It is recommended the committee has between three and five members. These members are to ensure that decisions are coordinated, and the cases are handled in a consistent and fair way, since a major sporting event is likely to have many stakeholders, roles and operational pressures.

At the conclusion of the event, the case management committee will ensure all cases are closed or handed over, closing the loop and ensuring there is accountability, improvement for future events and continuity of care towards affected persons.

It is also important to remember that the case management committee's role is to conduct and manage an administrative investigation into whether an incident violates the safeguarding policies and code of conduct. The standard of proof is that on a balance of probabilities, it is more likely a violation happened than not.



Safeguarding Champion Toluva Keneti at the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023