



# THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT AND CARE FOR WOMEN VICTIMS OF SEXIST AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE THROUGH SPORT: A NATIONAL ANALYSIS (LUXEMBOURG)



# LUXEMBOURG REPORT



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## RESEARCH & ANALYSIS



# IMPRINT

This document has been written by the SAFE Consortium, led by the Alice Milliat Association, project focused on the recovery of women survivors of sexual abuses through the practice of trauma-informed fencing.



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# BRIEF

SAFE is a European project that focused on the **recovery of women survivors of sexual abuses through the practice of trauma-informed fencing**. For this purpose, the SAFE consortium works on the development of a **European protocol of fencing therapeutic workshops** for women survivors of sexual assault. The first phase of the project is dedicated to research and analysis works (a literature review, national, a European sectoral analysis and a webinar) and the training and guidance of fencing supervisors to the trauma-informed approach.

## RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (2025)

### Literature review



#### 30-page public report

State of play “reconstruction of women victims of gender-based and sexual violence through sport and especially fencing”

### National sectoral analysis



#### 10-page public report by country (National Sectoral Analysis)

Collection of information from your country on existing good practice for women victims of violence, including treatment through sport and consideration of body therapy & production of a 10 pages national report that will gather data valuable

### European analysis & synthesis



#### D2.3: European synthesis of the national sectoral analysis

A summary of all the national reports that have been produced will be written to gather all the data and information collected and compiled.

### European workshop



#### D5.5: Online European Workshop

- A conference: presentation of the study results
- A presentation of the fencing therapeutic protocol



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## PURPOSE

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**A national analysis of therapeutic support and care for women survivors of sexual violence through sport in Luxembourg**

### Objective of the research

- Identify the **consideration** and **specificities** of “sport for health” in each country involved in the project;
- Research focuses on the interest of **trauma- and violence-informed physical activity** (TVIPA) programs as healthcare & knowledge about this approach
- **Safe conditions of practice:** guarantees for welcoming and supporting sensitive publics, in particular women victims of GBV and sexual abuses in sport area;
- European perspective thanks to national analysis, with a special **focus on fencing organisation and practices.**

### Methods

In each country of the consortium, **a qualitative analysis** was conducted by the partners involved in the project to **study the consideration of health-related sports at the national and local levels**. A particular **focus** was placed on projects related to **fencing**.

At the same time, an **online questionnaire** was distributed. The aim was to gauge the **level of commitment and awareness** regarding these issues (sport for health, TVIPA approach, consideration of women survivors of SV) **in sports federations and clubs, particularly in fencing.**

### DATAS FROM THE SURVEY

*An online self-administered questionnaire was conducted. It was aimed at coaches and managers of French sports clubs and federations between July and October 2025. Specific targeting was carried out towards those involved in fencing.*

**Responses to the survey for Luxembourg : 4** (2 explicitly in fencing)



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## INTRODUCTION

### Sexual abuses in Europe. A health & political priority

At world scale, one in three women experiences sexual violence during her lifetime (Borumandnia et al., 2020). **In the European Union, one in three women (30.7 %) have experienced sexual threats and/or physical violence over their lifetime.** More precisely, 17.2 % of women experienced sexual violence (including rape and other unwanted sexual acts) (Eurostat, FRA, EIGE, 2024).

The spread of these violences - as shown by the diversity of the spheres concerned with these violence, both in private and public settings, and their high prevalence - emphasizing **the structural nature of violence against women as gender-based violence.**

**Sexual violence lead to serious consequences** has been widely demonstrated with particularly high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Despite consideration of these impacts, **care strategies remain limited and insufficient** to date.

### Physical exercise as space for healing

**Physical exercise** is an effective, low-cost, cross-diagnostic health promotion strategy that benefits physical, mental, and psychosocial health (Nyberg et al., 2025). Physical exercise programs could thus be **a promising option for helping women survivors of SV in their recovery.**

The SAFE project therefore aims to study the consideration of health-related sports and the provision of physical exercise programs for women survivors of sexual violence in four countries (France, Belgium, Portugal, and Luxembourg). SAFE will also directly respond to this issue by offering a space for healing sexual trauma through the practice of adapted fencing.

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Borumandnia, N., Khadembashi, N., Tabatabaei, M. et al. (2020). The prevalence rate of sexual violence worldwide: a trend analysis. *BMC Public Health*, 20. DOI: 10.1186/s12889-020-09926-5.

Eurostat, FRA, EIGE. (2024). EU Gender-based violence survey. Key results. DOI: 10.2811/6270086. [Link](#)

Nyberg ST, Frank P, Pentti J, et al. (2025). Health benefits of leisure-time physical activity by socioeconomic status, lifestyle risk, and mental health: a multicohort study. *Lancet Public Health*, 10(2).

## KEY DEFINITIONS

### Gender-based violence (GBV)

“**Violence** directed against a person **because of that person’s gender** (including gender identity/expression) or violence that affects persons of a particular **gender disproportionately**” (European Commission, 2014, p.47). It may include physical violence, verbal violence or hate speech, psychological violence, sexual violence, socio-economic violence, intimate partner violence, and/or harassment and sexual harassment (Council of Europe, 2023).

### Sexual violence (SV)

“**Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances**, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality **using coercion**, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including at home and at work. **3 types of sexual violence are commonly distinguished**: sexual violence involving intercourse (i.e., rape), contact sexual violence (for example, unwanted touching, but excluding intercourse), and non-contact sexual violence (for example, threatened sexual violence, exhibitionism, and verbal sexual harassment)” (WHO, 2014, p. 84). The term can encompass child sexual abuse. (Glossary on safe sport, Council of Europe, 2024)

### Physical exercise (PE)

Exercise is a **planned, structured, repetitive, and targeted physical activity** in which the improvement or maintenance of one or more components of physical fitness is the goal. Physical exercise (PE) is a set of body movements performed repeatedly over an extended period of time **for the purposes of health, performance, and physical fitness**.

### Trauma- and violence-informed physical activity (TVIPA)

A trauma- and violence-informed physical activity is a **sport environment adapted to peoples victims of trauma and violence**. There are 4 principles:

- Trauma awareness;
- Safety and trustworthiness;
- Choice and collaboration;
- Strengths-based and capacity building.



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# HEALTH-ENHANCING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN FRANCE

## ***A global apprehension of “sport for health”***

### **— Definition and apprehension of *sport for health* in Luxembourg —**

On a high-level overview Luxembourg's sport is organised based on **3 pillars, the Ministry of sports, the national olympic committee and the national federations**. To be recognized as an official sport federation an entity must be recognized by and registered with the national olympic committee.

**Sport for health** is not specifically apart but **is embedded in the general framework**.

### **Ministry of Sports**

The Ministry of Sports in Luxembourg is responsible for **developing and managing sports policies nationwide**. It supports both amateur and professional sports and delegates the authority to organize and promote different disciplines to national sports federations. The ministry also fosters local-level sports promotion and physical activity through various programs and initiatives.

### **Luxembourg Olympic and Sports Committee (COSL)**

The Comité Olympique et Sportif Luxembourgeois (COSL) is the **umbrella organization for private organized sports in Luxembourg**, acting as the National Olympic Committee. Founded originally in 1912 (as the Luxembourg Olympic Committee) and transformed into COSL in 1974, it represents all Olympic and non-Olympic sports federations. COSL's roles include developing sport and physical education, uniting sports organizations, organizing participation in the Olympic Games and other events, and promoting Olympic values and social benefits of sport. COSL works closely with the Ministry of Sports and partners like the “Œuvre Nationale de Secours Grande-Duchesse Charlotte” to promote physical activity throughout the country.

### **National Sports Federations**

Luxembourg has around **60 recognized national sports federations** grouped under the COSL. These federations represent both Olympic and non-Olympic sports and cover a wide range of athletic activities. Each federation is structured as a non-profit association responsible for organizing national competitions and activities within its discipline. The federations play a key role in grassroots development, elite sport, and certification processes in their respective sports.



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***Actions developped in the country***

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## ***Lëtzebuerg lieft Sport (LLS)***



Lëtzebuerg lieft Sport (LLS) is a new sports philosophy supporting both the development of elite athletes and a strong base of participants of all levels, ages, and physical activities. The dynamic connections between GOOD PEOPLE, GOOD PROGRAMS, and GOOD PLACES enable tailored achievement of these goals.

### ***GOOD PEOPLE***

GOOD PEOPLE refers to athletes and active individuals practicing physical activity, as well as all stakeholders who contribute to making sport possible.

### ***GOOD PROGRAMS***

The programs help Good People reach their goals by providing ongoing support. Within the Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) framework, GOOD PROGRAMS are adapted to ambitions, interests, and needs.

### ***GOOD PLACES***

Sport's diversity requires high-quality, accessible facilities essential for implementing a wide range of programs. These local, regional, and national infrastructures are called GOOD PLACES.



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*Is sport for health an **identified priority at national level?***

***At regional scale?***

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Sport for health is seen in general as important and has hence been integrated in the general program LLS defined above.

However several, more health focused entities use sport in various programs. Most of the more substantial programs are operated by FLASS.

FLASS is the organisation that resulted from a common desire of several associations to raise the topic of sport and health on the political agenda.

*Legislation and laws about “sport for health”*

In Luxembourg there is **no specific law about sport for health**. Sports is governed by one specific framework law that has been revised in 2024.

See more on : <https://legilux.public.lu/eli/etat/leg/loi/2005/08/03/n2/consolide/20240101>

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*Is sport for health **identified as priority***

***for the national fencing federation?***

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Safe is basically the **second project in fencing in Luxembourg focusing specifically on health**.

The first ever project focusing on patient's post treatment after **breast-cancer therapy**.

*Women in fencing (national and local level)*

**Women in fencing is not specifically addressed.**

The board of the Luxembourg Fencing Federation has for decades known a large number of **women participating covering every position including the presidency**.



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**Specific health projects around sports**

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**Sports for Mental Health**

Many of Luxembourg's sports-health initiatives, notably those under the Sport-Santé/FLASS umbrella and municipal offerings, integrate therapeutic physical activities designed to benefit psychological well-being and mental health. **FLASS (Fédération Luxembourgeoise des Associations de Sport de Santé) coordinates these efforts**, supporting activities for people with chronic illnesses but also contributing to prevention and management of mental health conditions through movement and social participation. **The City of Luxembourg's 'Sport for All' and 'Fit60+' programs** also offer wide-ranging classes targeting mental well-being in various age groups. The **Ligue Luxembourgeoise d'Hygiène Mentale runs programs like 'PSSM Teen,'** which teaches teenagers mental health first aid to help peers recognize and respond to mental health challenges, promoting a culture of support and early intervention in schools. Elite sports initiatives also acknowledge athlete mental health, with **the Luxembourg Institute for High Performance in Sports (LIHPS) prioritizing physical and psychological wellbeing** for top-level athletes.

**Prevention of Violence and Sexual Violence in Sport**

To be noted that **these programs turn around violence within sport rather than using sport as a vector of prevention or therapy.**

Violence prevention, particularly regarding sexual violence, is actively promoted by public authorities. The Ministry of Sports works jointly with judicial and police authorities to ensure cases of maltreatment or sexual abuse in sport are reported and managed according to established procedures—emphasizing awareness, protection, and victim support. Special training for investigators in child and youth protection, as well as collaboration with relevant organizations, is in place to guarantee victims receive appropriate help. Research programs, notably from the Centre Hospitalier de Luxembourg, examine risk factors for sexual abuse among youth athletes, highlighting continued engagement on the issue from healthcare and sports organizations. **Multidisciplinary approaches to sexual violence in sport are present in academic and expert circles**, providing education, research, and recommendations for safeguarding within the sport sector.



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**Specific health projects around sports**

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***Safeguarding and Inclusion Initiatives***

The country **supports several inclusion-promoting and anti-discrimination programs** linked to sport. Activities aimed at changing societal attitudes towards vulnerable groups (e.g., **Special Olympics Luxembourg** for people with intellectual disabilities) and events like the **Luxembourg Pride Run, Girls Foot Day**, and others are held to foster intercultural understanding, integration, and equal participation in sport. These programs often combine physical wellbeing with social and psychological health promotion.

***Reporting and Resources***

The Ministry of Sports maintains **clear procedures for reporting abuse or maltreatment in sport**, working in collaboration with the Protection de la Jeunesse (Child and Youth Protection) section and police services. Victims are encouraged to access services and legal support, with systems in place for prompt and sensitive handling of cases.

## SEXUAL TRAUMA- AND VIOLENCE-INFORMED FENCING

### ***A safe space of practice***

#### Definition and apprehension of sport for health in Luxembourg

The **SAFE** project is set to be the **first initiative of its kind operated in Luxembourg**, focusing on providing a secure and welcoming training environment for fencing in the north of the country. The Fédération Luxembourgeoise d'Escrime (FLE) has chosen Diekirch as the location for this project, partnering with the Cercle Escrime Nordstad. This club is unique, being the only fencing club in the northern region of Luxembourg, and is one of **five official fencing clubs in the country**.

The club's recently renovated training facility in Diekirch offers a cozy atmosphere. By design it provides privacy and comfort, making it especially suitable for initiatives that benefit from a discreet and supportive environment. The Nordstad club operates with around 40 members and is directly affiliated with the FLE, contributing to the growth and decentralization of fencing opportunities in Luxembourg's northern areas.

Overall, the newly upgraded center at Diekirch with Cercle Escrime Nordstad provides an ideal and innovative setting for the SAFE project, supporting both **development and inclusivity** within the Luxembourg fencing community.



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*The mobilisation of club for safety*

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The early efforts within the SAFE project in Luxembourg have centered on uniting members from three of the five local fencing clubs to establish a cohesive, strong team. This collaborative approach, further reinforced by involving professionals such as physiotherapists and psychologists, exemplifies a comprehensive strategy that extends beyond mere fencing skills to include therapeutic and supportive elements.

Building on the success and insights gained from this initial phase, **there is a clear and optimistic intention to develop and launch additional programs in the future**. These initiatives aim to expand the project's impact, providing more therapeutic, empowering, and inclusive opportunities through fencing, especially for individuals affected by violence or in vulnerable situations.

The strategy emphasizes leveraging existing club collaborations and integrating expertise from diverse sectors, offering a sustainable and scalable framework for ongoing and new endeavors. This holistic approach aims to foster a safer, more supportive environment for all participants while promoting the broader development of fencing in Luxembourg.

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***Specificities of Luxembourg***

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In therapeutic settings, anonymity is widely recognized as a critical enabler of effective care, especially for vulnerable populations such as victims of abuse. Scientific literature highlights that maintaining privacy and confidentiality creates a safe space where individuals feel secure to disclose sensitive information. For instance, Lustgarten (1, 2020) emphasizes that "without privacy and confidentiality, therapy may not be effective," underscoring the foundational role anonymity plays in therapeutic success.

**In small communities like Luxembourg, however, achieving anonymity is especially challenging** due to the tight-knit nature of social networks. Patients often face social stigma and the possibility of being recognized, which can deter them from seeking or fully engaging in therapy. Townsend (2, 2011) notes that in small communities, "maintaining confidentiality is sometimes not merely challenging, but actually impossible," where individuals "may want to avoid the social stigma of seeking mental health care" because "everyone knows everybody". This creates a significant barrier as victims, particularly women who have been abused, may find it harder to "out themselves" or openly seek support compared to metropolises where anonymity is more attainable.



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Research by Simon (3, 1999) further discusses how in small locales, therapists must navigate complex boundaries and confidentiality concerns, which can alter the therapeutic dynamic, sometimes requiring adaptations to traditional practices. Moreover, anonymity not only protects privacy but also fosters openness; Akdag et al. (4, 2024) found that anonymity encourages patients to discuss sensitive topics more freely and honestly, facilitating better therapeutic outcomes.

Thus, **in Luxembourg's case, the lack of anonymity due to its small population size demands heightened sensitivity and alternative approaches** to ensure safe, confidential therapeutic environments. This context reinforces the importance of designing therapy programs that acknowledge such challenges while striving to create the safest possible spaces for victims to heal.

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1. Lustgarten, S.D., et al. (2020). Digital privacy in mental healthcare: current issues and recommendations for technology use. *Current opinion in psychology*, 36, 25-31. DOI: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.03.012.
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3. Simon, R. I., & Williams, I. C. (1999). Maintaining treatment boundaries in small communities and rural areas. *Psychiatric services*, 50(11), 1440-1446. DOI: 10.1176/ps.50.11.1440.
4. Akdag, M.T., Wahl, N. (2024). Behind the Veil: Exploring Anonymity's Effect in Emerging Metaverse for Mental Health Therapy. *Proceedings of the 57th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 10p.

### **Focus on the Luxembourg survey**

As each national entity engaged in the SAFE consortium, **the Luxembourg Fencing Federation (FLE) distributed a questionnaire nationwide** to gain a better understanding of the commitment of Luxembourg federations and clubs to health and safety in sport, trauma awareness, and actions to support women who are victims of violence (particularly in fencing). **A brief overview** of the data collected is here **proposed by the Alice Milliat Association**.

**Only 4 answers were received**, which may indicate **a lack of engagement in this topic**: a low level of engagement with sport for health in the country, lack of time and/or people's general unwillingness to respond to surveys.

Actions identified by respondents as promoting the creation of a safe space are the existence of ethical charter, a welcoming all without distinction, and specific training. Adapting practices is not indicated here.

To date, **there have been very few initiatives targeting vulnerable groups**. Only one action is identified (for people with reduced mobility). To date, according to the respondents, **no specific actions are offered to women victims of violence and trauma- and violence-informed physical activity (TVIPA) are rarely identified**. 50% of respondents saying they have “no idea” of what TVIPA could mean.

In addition, **very few commitments** are currently made by clubs/federations **to promote inclusion and safety in all the aspects examined**. 0% of club/federations surveyed have training on GBV/sexual trauma ('not at all' for all respondents). Survey responses also point out a **lack of support/measures** for traumatized people; **lack of inclusive language**; a **limited athlete participation** in decision-making, and a **lack of partnerships** (just as well with psychologists and specialized associations).

The key finding is that **50% of respondents believe that fencing could be an “absolutely” interesting activity for women survivors of violence**. One respondent explains that fencing “is fostering self-awareness” while another emphasizes a sport based on making strategies and choices (a key issue since violence is characterized by a lack of consent).

**“** “*Apart from the physical aspect, fencing, as an individual sport, is based on tactical analysis and personal decision-making. Although it is a combat sport requiring speed and skill, violence is not tolerated. On the contrary, it is severely punished.*” **”**

## CONCLUSION

### Using fencing for women victims of sexual abuses in the luxemburg context

This report highlights **Luxembourg's specific characteristics** with regard to the SAFE project (and, more broadly, health-related and safe sports at the national level).

The **issue of sport-for-health is not well developed in the country**, and **the adaptation of practices (to vulnerable groups) still seems marginal today**. Consideration of TVIPA is limited, and **no program aimed at women survivors of sexual violence** appears to be available at present in Luxembourg sports.



The **SAFE project** therefore **seems particularly relevant and important, filling a real locally and nationally gap** in options for women exposed to interpersonal violence in this country.

The **report also highlights the potential difficulties involved in setting up such a program in Luxembourg (or any other small environment)**, particularly **the issue of confidentiality**, but also **the current lack of mobilization on the subject** of reconstruction through sport (and more broadly, the lack of consideration given to women victims of violence at the level of sports federations and clubs).

**The SAFE project is therefore a major pilot project in Luxembourg**, the results of which will undoubtedly **enable further progress in implementing safeguarding policies** in Luxembourg **and provide key feedback** for the implementation of **others post-traumatic reconstruction through sports programs** (TVIPA programs), as well as improving the reception, care, and **activities offered to women exposed to sexual violence** in the country.

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