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UAOA

UNITED AGAINST ONLINE ABUSE

FACILITATOR HANDBOOK

DESIGN AND DELIVER A WORKSHOP ON ONLINE ABUSE IN SPORT



United Against Online Abuse in Sport:
Educational Workshop Toolkit

SENSITIVE TOPIC NOTICE

This handbook covers topics that some readers may find difficult or upsetting. Facilitators are encouraged to work through the material at a pace that feels appropriate and to access support where needed.

DISCLAIMER

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Assumption of Risk and Facilitator Responsibility

As a future facilitator, you assume full responsibility for the adaptation, delivery, and outcomes of these activities. You are responsible for:

- Assessing the appropriateness of the exercises for your specific audience.
- Ensuring a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all participants.
- Adhering to local laws, institutional regulations, and safety guidelines during the training sessions that you intend to organise in future.

LIMITATION OF LIABILITY

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This toolkit has been reviewed and is supported by Peace and Sport.

Programme Overview

The **United Against Online Abuse (UAOA)** workshop programme equips participants across the sport ecosystem with the knowledge and tools to recognise and combat online abuse and hate speech. Grounded in a coalition-based model bringing together over 80 national governments, sporting bodies, regulatory institutions, academics and companies, the programme operates on the premise that meaningful and lasting change requires coordinated action across institutional, community, and individual levels.

LEARNING GOALS

By the conclusion of the workshop, participants will be able to:

1. **Define online abuse** and distinguish between its various forms, recognising which individuals and groups face disproportionate risk.
2. **Understand the impact of online abuse** on their specific community and sporting environment, drawing on evidence relevant to their context.
3. **Explain how digital platforms and artificial intelligence** both amplify and, where properly governed, help mitigate online abuse.
4. **Apply knowledge of reporting procedures** to report abusive content safely and effectively across major social media and gaming platforms.
5. **Take informed action,** individually and collectively, as advocates within their communities and sporting environments.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Every audience brings different levels of knowledge, experience, age, and comfort when discussing online abuse. Facilitators should take time to consider who will attend and what they may need from the workshop to make the learning experience engaging and relevant. You may need to narrow the content, adjust examples, change the pace, or spend more time on particular topics.

Interactive activities can help participants connect with the material, test their understanding, and reinforce key concepts. We provide Activity Sheets, but we also encourage facilitators to adapt the recommended activities into formats that are appropriate for the audience's age, community context, and digital familiarity.

To prepare your materials for the workshop, consider:

AGE: Adapt the language, examples, scenarios, and activities to participants' age and developmental stage. While this workshop is designed for older audiences (18+) ready for complex scenarios, reflection, and open discussion, we encourage using simplified language, shorter activities, or tailored content when presenting the workshop to younger groups.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: Consider local cultural norms, values, family structures, gender expectations, and attitudes towards technology, privacy, relationships, and online behaviour. Examples that are appropriate or familiar in one context may not translate well to another. We strongly encourage facilitators to adapt recommended modules, scenarios, and terminology to reflect the participants' social and cultural context.

GROUP SIZE AND SETTING: Consider how the size and structure of the group will affect participation. Larger groups may benefit from quick polls and knowledge checks, while smaller groups may allow for more discussion, reflection, and scenario-based activities.

MIXED AUDIENCES: When participants have different ages, levels of experience, or backgrounds, use broadly relatable scenarios and offer multiple ways to participate. Avoid assuming that everyone has the same level of digital familiarity or comfort discussing online abuse.

MAKE YOUR WORKSHOP UNFORGETTABLE

Active learning does not need to mean adding more content. Short activities throughout the workshop can help participants **pause, reflect, check their understanding, and apply what they have learned.** We recommend adapting the Activity Sheets and other workshop activities to the technology available in the room.



LEARNING WITHOUT COMPUTERS

When participants do not have computers but can use their phones, use activities that can be projected from the facilitator's screen while participants respond from their phones. Platforms with pre-designed activity formats include **Kahoot!, Mentimeter, and Poll Everywhere.**

Adapt the content of the workshop to these platforms to add quick knowledge checks, anonymous responses, polls, or opportunities for reflection.



LEARNING WITH COMPUTERS

When participants have their own computers or tablets, facilitators can incorporate more individual exploration, reflection, and collaborative activities. Platforms such as **Nearpod, Quizizz, and Padlet** can provide interactive opportunities through participants' screens, allowing their responses and ideas to become part of the workshop alongside the UAOA content.



KEEP INTERACTION SAFE AND INCLUSIVE

Because the workshop addresses online abuse, facilitators should design activities that encourage participation without requiring personal disclosure.

Instead of asking,

"Has this ever happened to you?"

ask questions such as:

- *"What would you do in this situation?"*
- *"Which response would be safest?"*
- *"What warning signs do you notice?"*
- *"What could a bystander do?"*

The goal is to create opportunities for participants to practise recognising, responding to, and preventing online abuse while maintaining a respectful and psychologically safe learning environment.

IMPORTANT: *When working with children or participants under 18 years old, check local requirements regarding parental or guardian consent before delivering content about online abuse or other sensitive topics. Requirements may vary by country, institution, and setting.*

How to Use This Handbook

This programme was designed to provide an introduction to online abuse that can be adapted to a variety of audiences, such as young people, sport professionals, and the broader sport ecosystem including federations, media, and fan communities. The language is direct, accessible, and respectful. Facilitators should match that tone throughout: confident, informative, and always leaving space for participants to think, question, and respond.

FOR SLIDE DECK DEVELOPMENT

The handbook is structured into two modular sections, one with the **core foundations** of the workshop, and another with **customisable content.** Each module links directly to the workshop slide deck through subsection.

When building slides, treat each subsection's heading as a slide title and each paragraph as the speaker notes or talking point behind it. Do not transfer full paragraphs onto slides. You can summarise content or make illustrations or other relatable content (e.g. images or GIFs that are relatable to the targeted audience). The handbook includes the content that needs to be presented in the workshop to achieve the learning goals.



KEY PRINCIPLES TO FOLLOW

ONE IDEA PER SLIDE.
If a subsection contains multiple concepts, split them across multiple slides.

PRIORITISE VISUALS.
The handbook provides the narrative, while the slides should carry images, diagrams, statistics, and quotes that make that narrative more visible and relatable.

STATISTICS DESERVE THEIR OWN SLIDE.
Numbers lose impact when buried in text. Each key data point should stand alone with enough context for the participant to understand it at a glance. Make an impactful visualisation on what the data represents in real life.

EMBRACE THE AUDIENCE.
Use emotional anchors the group will recognise, such as photographs of respected athletes, role models, or sport-specific references (a swimmer's training routine, the smell of chlorine). Where relevant to the topic, these anchors can open and close the presentation and carry through the storytelling.

For Facilitators

This handbook is a guide, not a script. Facilitators are encouraged to use it as a reference point and adapt the language, examples, and pace to the specific audience in the room.

BEFORE THE SESSION

Read the full handbook before facilitating. Understanding how the modules connect is essential to achieving the learning goals effectively and opening the conversation about online abuse.

Identify which examples and statistics are most relevant to your audience, particularly in the customisable modules. **A group of young participants will connect differently to the material than a group of sports professionals or educators.**

Review the safeguarding section carefully. This programme addresses sensitive topics including neglect, sexual abuse, and mental health. Know your organisation's safeguarding protocols before the session begins and have contact details for national / local accredited support services ready.

Visit the **UAOA Website** to find upcoming training webinars, watch past recording and find academic resources.

Workshop timeline. The workshop is designed to be adaptable to different educational settings. The timeline below shows two suggested programme formats, 30 and 40 minutes, and maps each segment to its content type using the handbook's colour system. Use it as a planning guide to select the combination of module content and activities that best fits your session and audience. We recommend keeping the Cards in all formats, as they are essential for participants to recognise what online abuse looks like in real settings.

CORE FOUNDATIONS
- Programme Identity
- Understanding Online Abuse
- Routes to Action

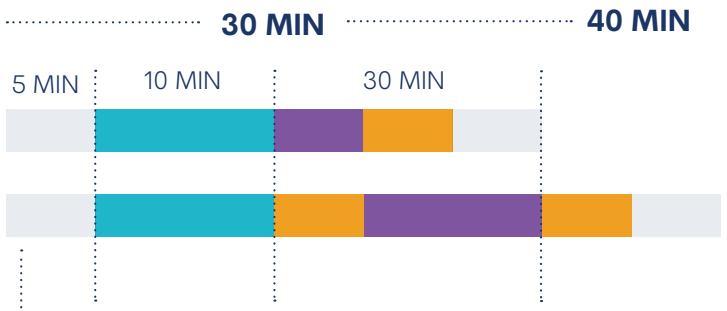
CUSTOMISABLE CONTENT
- Community-Derived Track
- Sport-Specific Track

Pick the track that matches the room.

ACTIVITIES
- Knowledge Reinforcement
- Programme Satisfaction Surveys

Works with every format.

PLAN THE WORKSHOP USING THE RECOMMENDED **30 AND 40-MINUTE FORMATS**



Give time for surveys at the beginning and end of the workshop. Leave room to think, question, and respond.

BEFORE THE SESSION

The hook at the opening of Module 1 is designed to invite personal reflection. Give participants a moment to sit with the question before moving on. This handbook proposes two 'knowledge reinforcement' activities. In general, encourage participants to share their own observations without pressuring anyone to disclose personal experiences.

Some sections may open discussion points of view about free speech and other rights. Acknowledge when situations about speaking up can feel risky, validate those concerns, and try to stay close to the practical guidance without elevating the tone of discussions.

AFTER THE SESSION

Ensure participants know how to access accredited/certified support if the session raises anything personal for them.

COLLECTING FEEDBACK AND DATA

To allow for the review of your workshop's impact and to support programme evaluation, we recommend facilitators to utilise the provided pre- and post-workshop survey template.

These can be printed or used to create a digital survey. Alternatively, UAOA may be able to provide you with a digital template of each survey to customise. If you wish to discuss this or to share your anonymised workshop data to support UAOA in measuring impact, improve its resources and build the evidence base for combating online abuse in sport, please email uaoa@fia.com.

Before administering to participants, facilitators should remind them that participation is voluntary and briefly reinforce the data use and de-identification information provided above.

PRE-SURVEY

POST-SURVEY

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CORE MODULES

Module 1:
Programme Presentation

Have You Ever Seen Someone Getting Attacked Online for Playing Sport?

- Maybe it was a player you follow.
- Maybe it was a referee after a controversial call.
- Maybe it was someone who looked like you.
- Online Abuse happens often.
- And it's a growing concern in sport.

WHO WE ARE

United Against Online Abuse (UAOA) is a global coalition that brings together over 80 governments, sporting bodies, researchers, and technology platforms to tackle online abuse within the sport ecosystem. **Founded in 2023 by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA)***, the governing body for world motor sport and the federation for mobility organisations globally, to foster safer, more inclusive digital spaces for competitors, officials and volunteers, industry professionals and fans.

"Online abuse has become a blight on our sport. The level of sustained toxicity has reached a crisis point. It is time for all of us to unite and to act."

***H.E. Mohammed Ben Sulayem, President of the FIA and UAOA Founder**

WHY THIS MATTERS

Sport genuinely brings people together across different languages, identities, and countries, breaking down barriers and giving people something to believe in.

Online abuse puts these communities at risk.

When athletes, personnel, officials, volunteers, and fans are targeted with hate, people get hurt, careers get damaged, and the message sent is that it is acceptable to spread hate, and that voices can be silenced.

Online abuse is a growing threat to sports across the world that we must combat together.

WE FIGHT BACK THROUGH THREE PILLARS

STRONGER TOGETHER
Success is dependent on a united ecosystem and the UAOA Coalition provides a powerful and consistent presence that aligns partners around evidence, shared standards and practical action.

EVIDENCE-BASED
Through academic collaborations with global universities, and the UAOA International Research Network, UAOA conducts leading research into online abuse in sport, including fully funding six Master's programmes and its flagship annual Barometer reports.

COMMITTED TO ACTION
UAOA is dedicated or committed, through work with international partners, to pioneer initiatives that develop and bridge access to solutions that ensure sport remains a source of unity and inspiration.

Module 2:
Understanding Online Abuse

What Is Online Abuse?

Online abuse is an umbrella term broadly understood as any harmful behaviour directed at a person or group through digital platforms.

For the purposes of this programme, we treat online abuse as a spectrum, from hate speech on one end to digital hostility on the other.

This is our working definition, not a legal one. Legal systems and institutions around the world classify and handle this spectrum differently, and this workshop does not take a position on any of these approaches.

Our focus stays on how these messages impact the person receiving them, and our goal is to raise awareness of how online abuse affects people in sport and to help reduce the risk of harm to athletes and everyone around them in online spaces. This makes sport more enjoyable for everyone.

Ultimately, we aim to build a community of support that helps prevent online abuse in sport.

Online abuse targets people because of who they are: their race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. These are called protected characteristics, which also include age, pregnancy status, and marital status (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2021).

Online abuse can take different forms.



THINK OF IT AS AN UMBRELLA COVERING
THREE CONNECTED BEHAVIOURS:

OFFENSIVE SPEECH is the use of language targeting someone's identity, appearance, or performance in ways designed to humiliate (Almagro et al., 2022).

DIGITAL HOSTILITY is a general climate of aggression directed at a person or group online and emerges from the build-up of repeated negative interactions that cause harm (Cover, 2023).

For instance, it can be the pile-on after a match, the relentless negativity flooding a player's comments section, the coordinated mass reporting designed to silence an account or criticise the opinion of a sports person.

HATE SPEECH is hostile, malicious language directed at someone specifically because of a protected characteristic. Examples of hate speech are racial slurs, sexualised threats, or homophobic comments (Siegel, 2020).

Which forms of online abuse are considered illegal depends depends on a country's legislation.

In sport, these forms rarely appear in isolation. A single abusive post can combine harmful language and personal threats.

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

Knowing the difference between



OFFENSIVE SPEECH



OFFENSIVE SPEECH



HATE SPEECH

determines whether an individual is able to recognise what is happening to them or those around them, and they can begin to consider taking action and reporting it. More importantly, putting a stop to hate helps create a safer online environment for everyone.

IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE

Understanding how online abuse can impact the people who experience it is an important part of addressing the issue. This understanding builds empathy for those affected and encourages people to respond with care and respect.

The effects of online abuse show up consistently across research, and they reach every level of sport. Among athletes, exposure to social media hostility is linked to anxiety, sleep disruption, reduced self-confidence, and lower satisfaction with sport participation (Faustin et al., 2022). Sports officials face similar pressure. Social media abuse is documented as one of the primary sources of role-related stress for officials, alongside the verbal and physical abuse they encounter in person (Lishman et al., 2025).

These effects are not limited to elite competitors. Studies of young athletes report that online abuse and negative social media exposure are associated with reduced perceived wellbeing and performance confidence, even outside professional sport (Hughes et al., 2026; Tooth et al., 2026). The pattern is clear: no group is immune, and the psychological toll is real at every level.

GROUP ACTIVITY

Facilitators: Help participants classify the context in each card, one by one, and allow them to briefly comment on why they think each scenario belongs to one category or another.

Hide the correct response and show it after the discussion of each card. You can use the following script as an example:

Here are some fictional scenarios. Let's read each card and decide whether it represents Offensive Speech, Hate Speech, Digital Hostility, or a combination of more than one category.

Be prepared to justify your reasoning if you feel comfortable doing so.

CARD A

"A tennis player announces she will skip press conferences during a Grand Slam to protect her mental health, then withdraws from the tournament entirely after being fined. A prominent media commentator publishes a column calling her spoilt and accusing her of using mental health as an excuse to avoid scrutiny. The column is shared widely and draws further criticism from the public."

OFFENSIVE SPEECH

IMPACT

The target is the disclosure of mental health care, reframed publicly as manipulation or weakness. The combination of a personal character attack from a high-profile figure and the public fits the definition of Offensive Speech.

Following the media criticism, other commentators later pushed back, arguing that public criticism of an athlete's personal decisions should not be treated as a routine part of media coverage.

CARD B

"A national team captain scores the winning goal in a World Cup match. Afterwards, a sitting member of the opposing country's government posts a lengthy public statement attacking his heritage, education, and appearance in explicitly racist terms."

HATE SPEECH

IMPACT

The remarks directly invoke the player's race and national origin, meeting the Hate Speech threshold. The abuse originates from one identifiable public figure rather than a broad, coordinated wave of online users, so Digital Hostility does not apply here.

Following the statement, the player publicly condemned the remarks. His response included included official statements along with an investigation opened by prosecutors in the player's country, and the senator's own government and legislative leadership publicly distanced themselves from the comments.

CARD C

"After losing in the first round of a Grand Slam tournament, a professional tennis player receives a coordinated wave of hostile and threatening messages on social media. Many come from people who lost money betting on her match."

OFFENSIVE SPEECH + DIGITAL HOSTILITY

IMPACT

The messages targeted this athlete's performance and the outcome of the match rather than a protected characteristic, so this falls short of Hate Speech under the workshop's definition. It is worth noting however, that women may receive a greater volume of online abuse as a result of their gender, even when the abuse does not reference this protected characteristic.

Following the messages, the athlete publicly shared examples of abusive messages she recieved after a loss, describing the impact as damaging and noting that the players are often already emotionally affected after a tough loss when the messages arrive. She and other players linked the pattern to sports gambling and called for stronger platform accountability.

CARD D

"A gymnast withdraws mid-competition from a major international final, citing an inability to trust her body in the air and a need to protect her mental health. In the days that follow, many people embrace her bravery, while others publicly label her as a quitter and an embarrassment to her country, questioning whether she should be allowed to compete in the national team again."

A related but distinct pattern is **abuse aimed at athletes who withdraw from competition** to protect their mental health. This is an important context to discuss because everyone has the right to choose for themselves and make the decisions that better protect their health and career.

OFFENSIVE SPEECH + DIGITAL HOSTILITY

IMPACT

The abuse targets the decision to stop, framing self-protection as a character failure. That combination of public character attacks and a sustained pile-on fits the definition of Offensive Speech and Digital Hostility.

The gymnast described the backlash as one of the hardest periods of her career, saying it left her afraid to leave her house and disconnected from her own body and mind.

FACILITATORS: FIND YOUR OWN EXAMPLES

Facilitators are encouraged to look for additional cases that are relevant to their sport, region, or community. Local and lesser-known cases often land better with participants than global headlines, because participants can identify with them more easily.

Not every case you find will have a clearly reported effect on mental health or performance. The goal is not to only use cases where an athlete has spoken publicly about the impact, but to help participants notice the point at which reading abusive comments becomes harmful for anyone, whether or not that harm was ever reported in the press.

Athletes tend to be more exposed to this kind of harm because of the visibility of their bodies, their performance, and their public decisions. But online abuse is not limited to elite athletes. Coaches, officials, volunteers, grassroots players, fans, and social media influencers can all be targeted, and the same categories and effects apply to them.

NOTE: Always verify current events and sources before using the examples in a session, since circumstances can change or be corrected over time.

TWO CONNECTED PROBLEMS

FIRST, real-life hostility can translate into the digital world.

SECOND, social media platforms may amplify hate targeting individuals such as athletes, fans, officials, media representatives.

Many of the online abuse examples do not start online. They start on the pitch, on the court, or in the stands, and only escalate once hostile content is uploaded, liked, and shared.

Here are three identifiable examples that can increase the chances of online abuse:

ON-FIELD CONFRONTATIONS. Physical or verbal clashes between players, coaches, or officials during an event tend to generate a second wave of hostility online, often directed at whoever is seen as responsible.

LOSSES AND ELIMINATIONS. A perceived poor performance, an actual loss, or a withdrawal or disqualification from a tournament are common triggers for online abuse.

GAMBLING-RELATED LOSSES. When a result affects a person's money on a bet, the online response frequently escalates faster and further than ordinary performance criticism.

EXAMPLES TO CONSIDER

Facilitators: *Choose examples to illustrate the two connected problems.*

- **PHYSICAL CONTACT DURING PLAY.**
  Contested physical plays, like hard fouls or aggressive contact, are often reshared online and can trigger sustained hostility towards the sportspeople involved, sometimes fuelling longer-term rivalry narratives.
- **POST-MATCH CONFRONTATION.**
  Confrontations between sportspeople after a match ends spread quickly once filmed, often drawing public mockery or condemnation online before any official response.
- **POLITICAL OR PROVOCATIVE GESTURES.**
  Gestures or statements perceived as political during public sporting moments can escalate into online conflict between opposing fan bases, sometimes extending into broader national or cultural tension.
- **OFFICIATING DECISIONS.**
  Confrontations with sport officials over disputed calls are often filmed and circulated, making the official a target of online abuse disproportionate to their role in the decision.
- **CONTROVERSIAL CALL ESCALATION.**
  Disputed decisions, combined with confrontations between teams or supporters, can escalate rapidly from an in-person dispute into large-scale online conflict between fan bases.

Platform Dynamics and Online Abuse

Every platform works differently, with differences in design shaping how abuse spreads.

SUGGESTED SELECTION BY AUDIENCE TYPE:

- **YOUNGER OR GENERAL AUDIENCES:**
  TikTok and Instagram tend to be the most familiar and most discussed.

- **COMMUNITY OR FAN-BASED GROUPS:**
  Twitch and Discord tend to resonate most, since both are organised around ongoing relationships between creators, streamers, and their communities. Reddit may also be appropriate for groups with strong interest in online forums or fan communities.

- **BROADER OR MIXED-AGE AUDIENCES:**
  Meta platforms (Instagram, Facebook) and YouTube tend to be the most widely recognised and used across age groups.

Facilitators: *Please select up to two platforms to discuss based on what is most relevant to your audience. You do not need to cover every platform listed below.*

Please note that each platform's design, from anonymity settings to how content spreads, shapes the kind of abuse that tends to appear there.

Facilitators are encouraged to adjust their examples and reporting guidance based on direct knowledge of their participants and the platforms most relevant to that group.

References to specific platforms are included for illustrative purposes only and should be presented as neutral, factual examples without making normative statements about specific brands or companies.

INSTAGRAM

Instagram is built around visibility and image sharing. Because users are encouraged to post photos of themselves, sportspeople who share celebration or training images can become more exposed to commentary about their physical appearance.

TIKTOK

TikTok is built around rapid content discovery through its recommendation algorithm. Short videos are easy to produce and share, and content can reach large audiences quickly. For younger users especially, this format often shapes early impressions of sportspeople and sports culture, since opinions and reactions can circulate widely within a short period of time.

YOUTUBE

YouTube is defined by permanence. Comment threads under sports videos can remain visible for years, long after the original context has faded. Most major platforms, including YouTube, invest in moderation tools such as automated detection, user reporting, and human review. Live-streamed content on YouTube presents a distinct challenge, since real-time chat can move faster than moderation systems can respond. Long-form videos can also create lasting attention around an individual, and highly engaged audiences may continue discussing a person well after the original event.

DISCORD

Discord is organised around private and semi-private communities called servers, many of which are built around shared interests, like sports themes or athletes. Because many servers are not publicly visible or searchable, content moderation depends largely on individual server owners rather than platform-wide oversight. Such digital structure allows close-knit communities to form quickly, and group-based commentary can develop and circulate within these spaces with poor content moderation control.

REDDIT

Reddit is organised around public interest-based communities called subreddits, usually open for anyone to view and participate in. The subreddit structure allows large communities to connect with others through their topics of interest, including individual athletes or sports performance.

What is unique to Reddit is its digital structure that creates a sense of anonymity and often unmoderated subreddits around specific group identities may engage in abusive behaviour, hate speech, or harassment. "Snark" subreddits have become commonplace as well - these are subreddits dedicated entirely to documenting and hating individuals as named in the title of the subreddit (e.g. Racer2Snark).

Even though Reddit implements content moderation via automated systems and manual reporting by volunteer moderators (mods) and paid employees (administrators/ admins), when a subreddit is removed for violating platform guidelines, similar communities can sometimes re-form under a new name, which is a known challenge in community moderation more broadly.

TWITCH AND KICK

Combine real-time interaction with close relationships between streamers and their audiences. While Twitch has more extensive moderation tools and stricter rules, Kick operates with less restrictive moderation, giving streamers greater latitude in their content and behaviour to attract attention.

Viewers feel a personal connection to streamers, and that closeness can build strong, supportive communities, but it can also intensify reactions during live broadcasts, since viewers feel personally connected to the person on screen. Coordinated group actions targeting a single streamer's channel, sometimes called hate raids, have been reported on live-streaming platforms[1] and have disproportionately affected women and people of colour.

Overall, what connects all of these platforms is algorithmic amplification. Content that generates strong reactions, including anger and outrage, is often shown to more people because these reactions tend to be associated with higher engagement. As a result, content does not always stay limited to its original audience. It can reach a much broader group than initially intended.

[1] Han, C., Seering, J., Kumar, D., Hancock, J. T., & Durumeric, Z. (2023). Hate raids on Twitch: Echoes of the past, new modalities, and implications for platform governance. Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, 7(CSCW1), Article 133.

ONLINE HATE MAY MIRROR REAL LIFE

Online abuse may have roots in real life.

The language and attitudes people express online are often shaped by what they have been exposed to in real life, at home, in their communities, and in the cultural narratives they grow up with.

Abuse can take many forms and does not always look the way we expect. It can be loud and explicit, but it can also be subtle, disguised through humour, coded language, emojis, or other strategies designed to seem harmless while still causing harm. Remind participants that if any examples discussed in the workshop resonate with them personally, support is available and they do not have to navigate it alone.

Facilitators: Before the session, research local helplines, youth organisations, and safeguarding agencies relevant to the community participating in the workshop. Make these available to participants in print if possible, so those who need them can access support discreetly.

Module 3:
Ready to Take Action!

Collective Responsibility

Change happens when we act together.

Standing up against online abuse requires collective action: every person who refuses to share abusive content, every teammate who speaks up in a changing room, and every fan who safely challenges hate contributes to a more positive sporting environment for everyone.

Your community is your power.

FROM DATA TO INFORMED DECISIONS

Understanding the scale of online abuse is the first step in tackling it. Data-driven research helps identify where abuse is most prevalent, who is most at risk, and what interventions actually work.

WE ALREADY KNOW THAT



30% **of female athletes have been trolled**
(BBC Sport, 2015)

The abuse increased by +20%



in the UK during the pandemic
(Ditch the Label, 2021)



71% **of female athletes have witnessed gendered abuse**
(Sheffield Hallam University, 2025)

Recently, sportspeople at the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup were **69%** **more likely to be targeted with online abuse than those at the 2023 Men's Rugby World Cup**
(Telfer, 2026)



More importantly, studies have found that hate is not always explicit.



29% **of racially abusive posts analysed were delivered through emojis and altered spelling**
(Professional Footballers' Association Charity & Signify Group, 2020)

COMMITMENT TO ACTION

Responsible action starts at an individual level

There are simple steps anyone can take to reduce exposure to online abuse and protect their digital wellbeing, as outlined in the UAOA Safeguarding Guide:

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

1. Consider the benefits of keeping your social media profile private, and review your privacy and safety settings
2. Be selective about who can comment on or interact with your content
3. Mute, block, and report accounts that engage in harmful behaviour
4. Avoid pages or communities known to spread hate
5. Assess the threat and check in with your own wellbeing

COMMUNITY ACTIONS

1. Check in on family, friends and teammates who may be affected
2. If safe and appropriate to do so, challenge discriminatory language when you encounter it, online or offline
3. Support organisations and initiatives committed to tackling abuse seriously



Social responsibility does not require a platform or a position of power. It requires the decision to act when something is wrong, and the commitment to keep those around you safe.

REPORTING: LOSING THE FEAR OF SPEAKING UP

Reporting online abuse and hate in the right way is an important action for both individuals and the collective effort.

HERE IS HOW YOU CAN DO IT:

1



Assess the threat and collect evidence (e.g. screenshot, screen recording)

2



Use anonymous reporting where possible.

3



Report to the platform privately, not publicly. Sharing abuse content can be counterproductive and amplify it further.

4



Within sport organisations, welfare officers and safeguarding leads are trained to handle reports confidentially and without judgement.

Note: If you ever feel unsafe or fear retaliation, tell someone you trust before taking any further action. You should always escalate to your relevant local authorities if you feel there is a threat to your safety.

Disclaimer: Any commentary, content or other information referred to in these resources is not intended to be considered as either legal advice generally or as legally reliable advice in your country. Please visit the UAOA Safeguarding Guide for a further disclaimer.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: PART OF THE PROBLEM, PART OF THE SOLUTION

The recommendation algorithms (often called 'for you' pages) that decide what appears on your feed are designed to maximise engagement and spread content, particularly content that provokes strong emotional reactions, including anger and outrage. This means abusive content can be actively amplified because it keeps people scrolling.

At the same time, online abuse is constantly evolving. As detection systems improve, people looking to abuse others adapt in response, shifting towards irony, cultural references, or visual content like memes and emojis to avoid detection. A racial slur written plainly may be caught. The same idea expressed through a widely shared image or an in-group reference is harder to catch and often changes faster than moderation systems can adjust.

HOW AI CAN HELP

The same technology also offers real opportunities: AI-powered tools are increasingly used for early detection of abusive content, automated flagging before content reaches large audiences, and identifying patterns of coordinated harassment that human moderators would miss. Some platforms are developing AI systems designed to support victims, providing real-time guidance on reporting and safety options when abusive content is detected.



REGULATING AI: THE EUROPEAN UNION AI ACT

As AI becomes more central to content moderation, governments are beginning to regulate how it can be built and used. The main regulation is the ***European Union Artificial Intelligence Act (Regulation EU 2024/1689),*** which applies to organisations operating AI systems that are used by people in the EU (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2024).

The EU AI Act is relevant to online abuse in sports because AI is increasingly used to create safer digital environments.

Sports organisations and platforms use AI-based systems to identify abusive language, threats, hate speech, and coordinated harassment at scale. However, these systems must balance effective protection with transparency, accuracy, and fairness, as automated moderation can incorrectly remove legitimate speech or fail to detect context-dependent abuse.

A risk-based approach helps determine what safeguards are needed depending on how much an AI system affects individuals and their rights.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: PART OF THE PROBLEM, PART OF THE SOLUTION

The Act sorts AI systems into four risk tiers

with obligations that grow stricter as the risk to people increases:

MINIMAL RISK

AI tools that help analyse general social media trends, summarise fan sentiment, or visualise patterns of online engagement.

Example: A sport federation analysing overall levels of online engagement after a tournament without having to make decisions about individual users.

LIMITED RISK

AI systems that interact directly with users or generate content.

Example: AI chatbots used by sports organisations to inform users that their content may violate community guidelines.

UNACCEPTABLE RISK

AI systems that manipulate or exploit individuals in harmful ways.

Example: Generative AI tools that can be prompted by users to create sexualised or explicit deepfake images and videos of athletes without their consent, particularly where the tool lacks safeguards to detect or block this kind of misuse.

HIGH RISK

AI systems that make or support decisions affecting individuals.

Example: An AI moderation system used to identify accounts for sanctions, restrict participation, or prioritise threats, often requiring human intervention.

Multiple organisations around the world are already building governance structures that reflect this kind of risk-based thinking.

The limits of AI regulation

The most used platforms are commercial businesses, and engagement drives revenue. Internal research from Meta, Facebook's parent company, reportedly showed that its own algorithms were amplifying divisive and hateful content, and that leadership was aware of the harm being caused (Ciulla, 2026; Haugen, 2023; Wynn-Williams, 2025).

When profit depends on keeping users active and reactive, the incentive to fully suppress the content that provokes the strongest reactions is limited.

This is why individual reporting and platform-level AI tools, while important, are not enough on their own.

Holding platforms legally and financially accountable for the content they amplify is a fundamental piece in stopping online abuse, and it is one of the reasons why regulatory action beyond community level remains essential.

REINFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

How Would You Fight Back?

Facilitator note: The following framework can be used independently of context to structure group discussion. Participants are invited to reflect on which parts of the community bear responsibility for online abuse, who is most affected, and what actions can be taken in response.

Ask participants to complete the worksheet individually first, then discuss in small teams of four to five, depending on total group size. To close, invite one representative per team to share the key outcomes of their discussion with the room.

1 THE SITUATION

Read together, then underline any words or moments that stand out to you.

A female athlete wins a big race. Within hours, many congratulate her but she also receives thousands of public hateful messages through social media, targeting how she looks, where she is from, and her gender. The athlete goes silent online. The platform removes some posts, but most stay up.

2 WHO IS MOST RESPONSIBLE, AND WHEN?

5 = VERY RESPONSIBLE 4 = SOMEWHAT 3 = NEUTRAL 2 = NOT VERY 1 = NOT AT ALL

	Posting Hate Online	Spreading Posts	Reporting Abuse	Silencing the Athlete
Online Community				
Media Platforms				
Sports Organisations				

3 WHO ELSE GETS HURT?

Beyond the athlete: who else is affected by online abuse and why?

4 WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE FIRST?

Pick one: a behaviour, a social activity, or a law, and explain why it matters to stop online abuse.

5 YOUR POSITIVE ACTIONS

You have one action and 30 seconds. You can be the platform, the team, the federation, the government, or a fan.

What do you do?

REINFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

Where Can We Stop Online Abuse?

Online abuse does not happen in isolation. It travels through a system of people, platforms, and actions before it reaches its target and creates harm.

Understanding that system is the first step to interrupting it. In this activity, you will build a flow model and ask yourself: where can online abuse be stopped?

Use the following elements to construct your map:

ENTITIES
(who is involved)
- Fans
- Online community
- Media platforms
- Sports organisations

CONTENT
(what travels through the system)
- Hate speech
- Offensive speech
- Digital hostility

ACTIONS
(what happens at each point)
- Attend
- Engage
- Report
- Spread
- Block
- Harm



WHO STARTS?



MODERATOR

AMPLIFIES | REGULATES



WHO GETS AFFECTED?



INPUT CONTENT



OUTPUT CONTENT

CUSTOMISABLE MODULES

Facilitators: *This module has two parts, consisting of a mandatory opening section and a customisable track section.*

The opening section presents a ***global anchor drawn from the 2025 UAOA Barometer Report.*** *(For reference, visit the research section UAOA: unitedagainstonlineabuse.com/uaoa-barometer-2025/).* The content should be presented without modification, regardless of which track or tracks the facilitator selects. The global anchor establishes the international evidence base for online abuse in sport and sets the context for all discussion that follows.

The next section corresponds to the customisable tracks, which are the ***Community-Derived Track*** and the ***Sport-Specific Track.*** Facilitators may choose to teach one or both tracks depending on their audience, learning objectives, and available time.

Both tracks follow a common pedagogical structure. Each opens by situating the evidence of online abuse within a proximate context, whether a local/regional community or a specific sport or group, using familiar references to make the scale and impact of online abuse relevant to participants.

This is followed by an invitation to engage critically with the existing research: what is currently known and what remains unknown, and how participants might contribute to by engaging with relevant organisations developing work in this field of study. Facilitators are encouraged to prepare up to three slides per track and to use the prompts and checklists provided when building these sections.

GLOBAL ANCHOR

The **2025 UAOA Barometer,** the world's most comprehensive industry survey on online abuse in sport, drawing on responses from 18 international sporting federations, establishes the following:

55% of federations report that online abuse in their sport has significantly increased in the past 12 months

50% of all observed abuse is classified as either misogynistic or racist

90% of federations fear that online abuse, left unaddressed, will drive talented athletes out of sport entirely

More than **80%** of federations believe that abuse in languages other than English is systematically underreported, meaning the true global scale of this problem is almost certainly larger than current data captures

These are the numbers we know. Now let us look at what they mean where you live.

Module 4:
Community-Derived Context

The goal of the customisable content is that participants learn about how online abuse impacts their community.

We recommend that facilitators to structure the slides in a thoughtful way, using the following prompt.

PROMPT

1. **LOCAL CONTEXT.** Identify who is most affected by online abuse in your community and why.
2. **CREDIBLE LOCAL SOURCE.** Find a recent, verifiable, national-level statistic and cite the source.
3. **SPORT AS ANCHOR.** Translate the statistics into the most culturally relevant sport in your community. Calculate how many players on the field would be affected. Round to whole numbers (there are no fractions of people).
4. **CLEAR VISUALS**. Design graphics that help participants understand the impact of the problem within their sport and community.
5. **RELATABLE MAGNITUDE.** Use a landmark your audience knows culturally or emotionally to make the national scale easy to understand, learn, and remember.

CHECKLIST FOR FACILITATORS

Before presenting your **community-derived module,** confirm:

- [ ] The statistics come from a verifiable national or regional-level source.
- [ ] The data refers to a clearly defined population.
- [ ] The source is cited exactly, including publication date.
- [ ] The sporting reference uses the correct number of players for that sport.
- [ ] Numbers are rounded to whole numbers.
- [ ] The design facilitates understanding the frequency of online abuse.
- [ ] The landmark is one the specific audience will easily recognise.
- [ ] The landmark makes the scale of the problem tangible.
- [ ] The module reflects online abuse in the community.

See the Finland example below, marked in purple, for a full illustration of this approach.

Local context

Sports as an anchor

Clear visuals

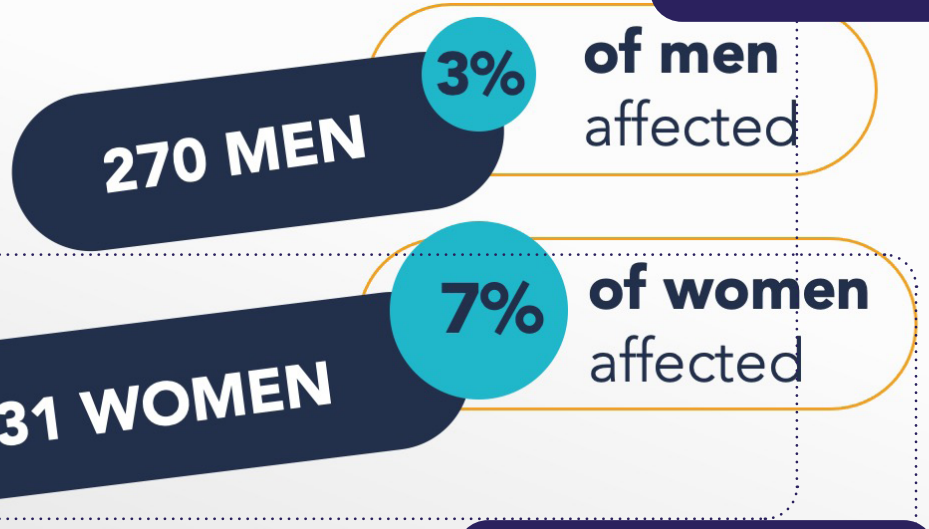
Relatable Magnitude

Credible sources

How common is online e in Finland?

Mirroring abuse in sports, there is an use in online settings, **athletes' increasing visibility in social media.**

Out of **9,018 athletes surveyed,** 5% overall (about 451 people) reported experiencing sexual harassment via social media, the internet, or phone in the past five years, with **women more than twice as affected as men.**



Source: Lahti, A., Kyllönen, M., Pusa, S., Tolvanen, A. & Laakso, N. 2020. Häirintä suomalaisessa kilpaurheilussa [Harassment in Finnish competitive sports]. Suomen urheilun eettinen keskus SUEK [Finnish Center for Integrity in Sports FINCIS].

REINFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

Design Your Own Research

1

Research on online abuse in sport remains an emerging and developing field. Many of the cases we discussed today are undocumented in academic literature. That gap is an opportunity for everyone to contribute to something that makes our communities safer.

Remember that your ideas are the beginning of positive change!

2

Your Research Map

Your research map will help you think intentionally about how you can move from a research question related to a problem you observe in your community, to proposing ways of obtaining answers that ultimately lead to a positive, data-driven change.

Use this map to create your research journey!

- **Time Window:** It can be any segment of time you wish to engage in exploring and implementing your research question.
- **Research Question:** The specific problem or gap you want to understand better. A good research question is focused and simple, yet relevant and grounded in a real situation.
- **Actions:** The specific steps you would take to investigate your question. This could include interviews, surveys, social media analysis, or literature reviews.
- **Resources:** What you would need to carry out your research. This may include financial resources, expertise, and institutional support.
- **Impact:** Who would benefit from your findings, and how could they be used to create change in your sport or community?

Research Question

Plan of Action and Resources

Impact

REINFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

Transform
Your Community

Prompt for facilitators: Adapt the context block to your community using local data. Keep the three steps. Change the groups in Step 1 to reflect the most relevant populations in your sporting or community context.

Online Abuse in Sport — Activity Sheet
Mexico Edition

Context In Mexico: 10.6 million women experience online abuse every year. Yet no data exists on how many of them are athletes.

Core Prompt: How might we better understand and address online abuse affecting athletes in our community?

STEP 1

Pick who is most affected by online abuse in your sporting community?

- Athletes
- Young players
- Referees and officials
- Coaches and volunteers

STEP 2

Choose a research idea

- Awareness: Is the topic being silenced?
- Impact: How does online abuse affect long-term participation in sports?
- Action: What could community-based institutions do to help?

STEP 3

Brainstorm

- What problem are you addressing?
- Who is affected by this problem?
- What sources of data would you need?
- Why does it matter for your community?

Speak Up! Share the idea from your team with the group.

Module 5:
Sport-Specific Risks

The goal of the sport-specific module is that participants understand how online abuse manifests within the culture of their sport, from historical patterns to current cases.

We recommend facilitators structure the slides using the following prompt.

PROMPT

1. **SPORT CULTURE AS CONTEXT.** Identify the specific demands and standards that increase the risk of abuse in your sport and provide that context to participants.

2. **HIGH-VISIBILITY EXAMPLES.** Find well-known cases where those cultural standards became visible to the public. Whenever possible, use images to illustrate the case(s), considering appropriate copyrights and their legal use for educational purposes.

3. **POINT OUT ONLINE HOSTILITY.** Identify a case of online abuse directed at an athlete of your sport.

4. **ROUTES TO ACTION.** Find cases where positive action and change in the sport is possible, whether through institutional campaigns, social media trends, or research initiatives that aim to provide resources for the safety of athletes. Whenever possible, select initiatives that are accessible to participants.

5. **CHOOSE CAREFULLY.** Depending on the sport, some cases may be more difficult or upsetting. Use examples that are relatable to your audience, with appropriate language, and choose those with the lowest risk of negative psycho-emotional effects on participants.

CHECKLIST FOR FACILITATORS

Before presenting your **sport-specific module,** confirm:

- [ ] The opening content clearly conveys the risk of abuse in your sport
- [ ] The examples are well-known and come from verifiable sources
- [ ] Images are cleared for educational use under applicable copyright guidelines
- [ ] Selected cases are appropriate for participants in terms of language and emotional impact
- [ ] The online hostility example connects clearly to the sport's cultural context
- [ ] The routes to action are factual, relevant, and readily accessible to participants
- [ ] The tone and content of all examples are appropriate for the intended audience

REINFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

PLANNING A SAFER FUTURE

The Future of Sports

Throughout this workshop we have explored the current state of online abuse in sport. Now we invite you to look ahead and think collectively about what the future of your sport could look like.

In this exercise, organise your ideas across three horizons:

Now: Actions that could start immediately to address online abuse in your sport.

NOW
What actions should I take now?

Next: Changes that require some planning, resources, or collaboration but are achievable in the short term.

NEXT
What support do I need for short-term plans against online abuse?

Future: Longer-term shifts in culture, regulation, or institutional practice that will take sustained effort over time.

FUTURE
What does my sport look like if collective action is taken today?

Think about how the actions you take today can impact a safer sport tomorrow.

REINFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

Intentions for my Sport

Throughout this workshop we have explored how online abuse affects athletes in sport. Now we invite you to look ahead and think about what could be different.

WHAT COULD I CHANGE?

Sports should be safe for everyone. This activity invites you to identify opportunities to make your sport safer and more supportive for athletes.

INNOVATION:

Something that does not yet exist in your sport. A new tool, resource, or initiative that could protect or support athletes from online abuse.

INTERVENTION:

A direct action known to reduce online abuse.

What would you want younger athletes in your sport to experience differently?

What would success against online abuse look like one year from now?

What is stopping change from happening in your sport right now?

MY CHANGE OF INTEREST:

MY PURPOSE FOR CHANGE:

WRITE YOUR INTENTION OF ACTION IN ONE SENTENCE:

"In my sport, I commit to _____

in order to _____

Thank you!

Thank you for using this United Against Online Abuse in Sport: Educational Workshop Toolkit - Facilitator Handbook.

By delivering workshops, you are not only raising awareness of online abuse in sport but contributing towards the global effort to encourage behavioural change and protect the future of sport from one of its biggest growing threats.

If you would like to share feedback on your experience using this toolkit, or share a case study of your workshop with, with the United Against Online Abuse team,

please email: **uaoa@fia.com**

or visit: **unitedagainstonlineabuse.com**

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