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# National Report

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# 1. Introduction

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“Corporate Social Responsibility and basically covers all ‘the good’ a company can do as part of their everyday business” (Hallback: 2019). Specifically, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) involves all the actions that companies are taking to address issues and challenges within society in a bid to have a meaningful social contribution. Its focus is wide-ranging, covering a great deal of fields and actions, and has become an integral part of the work of companies and institutions, seen as a process through which they ‘give back’ to their community and champion causes. At the same time CSR actions offer a very important tool for brand awareness and brand identity as well as a way for firms to enhance their connection with their audience and the community.

In recent years we have observed innumerable companies rolling out CSR activities and work covering a multitude of fields, ranging from the provision of support to people in need to environmental actions and the promotion of human rights. Evidently, sport, through its standing and reach in the community, is another sector in which such actions are being carried out both by private companies promoting their causes via actions or collaborations in sports or by sport organizations/clubs themselves organizing and undertaking CSR campaigns and activities.

Being an issue of growing importance in the field of sport and recognizing the prospects CSR in sport unfolds as well as the meaningful impact it can have to society, the consortium of the GoSport project set out to study and assess the work sport organizations conduct in the field along with the challenges and shortcomings they face in the process. Namely, the consortium carried out a study involving both desk and field research to examine how organizations interpret, manage and prioritize social responsibility issues and how organizational governance influences social responsibility and vice versa.

The present paper documents the findings of both the desk and field research carried out in Cyprus that, along with similar reports drafted for Bulgaria, Italy, Croatia and Greece, will be used for the compilation of a comparative report documenting a comparative analysis and recommendations drawn from all the aforementioned countries. To that end, the National Report for Cyprus is comprised of the Desk Research section presenting the information collected via the Desk Research conducted and the Field Research Section laying out the information shared with the research team by representatives of 20 sport organizations in Cyprus. Finally, the information drawn from both the desk and field research are evaluated to put forward the key conclusions and a list of recommendations.

A key objective of the report is to help guide both GoSport’s project team in developing its learning material to support sport professionals to elevate their knowledge and skills as well as researchers and

stakeholders to attain a better conception of the realities as to the undertaking of CSR activities in sport in Cyprus.

## 2. Desk Research

### Introduction

The research team carried out its desk research in a bid to document and examine the legal framework in Cyprus against discrimination and in promotion of inclusion and gender equality in sports as well as examples of actions carried by sports organizations and stakeholders on social responsibility issues. As part of this process it mainly relied on available secondary resources.

Thus, this section of the national report provides a concise presentation of Cyprus' National framework in regards to discrimination/violence and human rights in sports and then delves into the policies, work and actions of sports organizations and stakeholders. It concludes with a short evaluation of the findings that were then further discussed and explored during the fieldwork that followed.

#### A. National Framework

The study conducted on Cyprus' National Framework in regards to discrimination/violence and human rights in sports illustrated the lack of specific, structured and comprehensive legislation to address these issues in the field of sports.

An exception to that is the issue of violence in sports. Due to the heightened problem of incidents of disorderly behaviour in Cyprus' sports grounds, the Republic introduced in 2008 the Law on the 'Prevention and Fight against violence in sports venues'. Said legislation sets specific parameters sports venues and authorities should abide to ensure the safety of the spectators. It also lays out a series of violence retention measures. The law also puts forward a list of punishable actions and decrees as an offence punishable with fine and imprisonment the unlawful statements that encourage the use of violence or incite prejudice and racism. Moreover, it prohibits the use of racist or abusive slogans, symbols and gestures in sports grounds (Cylaw:2008).

Certainly, that does not signify a lack of interest or action by the Republic of Cyprus on the highly important issues of discrimination, gender equality and social inclusion. Though these issues and their appearance in sports are not covered with specific legislature, the Republic has in place

legislature and institutions to address them whose authority and clauses also apply in the field of sports.

The Republic of Cyprus introduced in 2004 the Law to Combat Racial and other forms of discrimination. The law prohibits any discriminatory action or behaviour exhibited in the form of injustices or prejudice towards an individual on the basis of its race, community, language, colour, religion, political and other views or nationality. Thus, it wishes to safeguard the rights and inclusion of all individuals in Cyprus in all aspects of their private or public life in the island, which includes participating in or following sports (Cylaw:2004).

The institution in charge of safeguarding the respect and adherence to the principles of this legislation is the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights who is also the National Authority against Discrimination. The Commissioner has the power to intervene in relation to incidents or acts of discrimination in the areas of employment and occupation, vocational training, education, social protection, social security and health care, and access to goods and services. This includes incidents or operations that constitute discrimination in the field of sports. A right and obligation that the Office has exercised in specific cases. Namely, the Commissioner has taken steps to address, in February 2020, the exclusion of women's volleyball team from participating in an international contest that the respective men's team has been supported to take part in and in March 2020 a racist episode against a football player in a minor league game (Ombudsman.gov.cy).

Moreover, with a law voted in 2011, Cyprus ratified Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Thus, among others, it recognized the right of individuals with disabilities to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport on an equal basis. In that regard it also pledged to take all appropriate measures to ensure that people with disabilities participate on an equal basis with others in sporting activities (Cylaw:2011) . Apart from that, in 2018, the 1<sup>st</sup> National Strategy for People with Disabilities (2018-2028) was introduced which set as a strategic goal the promotion of their participation in cultural life, entertainment, leisure activities and sport (Mlsi.gov.cy: 2018).

Lastly, issues of Gender are overseen by the Commissioner for Gender Equality who the undertaking of initiatives, actions and campaigns to promote equal opportunities between men and women and to safeguard Women's Rights ([Institutionofgenderequality.gov.cy](http://Institutionofgenderequality.gov.cy)). It is also important to note that the Cyprus Sports Organization (a public body established by Cyprus Government in 1969 to promote and regulate sport in the island), following the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport has introduced a Committee on 'Sport and Women' to promote the action to make sport and physical activity fully inclusive of women and girls ([Cyprus Sport Organization](http://Cyprus Sport Organization)).

## A. Projects and Policies on Social Responsibility Issues by Sport Organizations and Stakeholders

### Overview

CSR as a practice is rising in prominence in Cyprus as more organizations, corporations and institutions are introducing it into their work and functions, rolling out CSR schemes and programmes. The same applies for sport organizations and stakeholders, with many of the professional teams and sport associations taking action on social affairs, utilizing their activities and reach within the community to raise awareness about issues and support vulnerable groups or individuals. However, though our desk research has allowed us to gather multiple examples from various organization of initiatives and actions on social responsibility, most of them have not made their CSR policies and plans available to the general public.

Thus, we have collected and lay down the findings of our desk research. It is important to note the the projects and actions presented below are mere examples of the work of sport organizations and stakeholders in Cyprus. We are presenting our findings from the Sport Associations that have made their strategic plans that consist of their goals in terms of social responsibility available online and the most popular sports clubs in the island in a bid to give readers an indicative idea of the scope and approach of their work in the field.

#### ➤ Cyprus Olympic Committee (NOC)

In its Strategy Plan for the period 2019-2021 (NOC:2018), presented in May 2018, Cyprus' Olympic Committee illustrated its strategic objectives for the time-span setting concrete multidisciplinary goals that also include social affairs. Namely, the Committee stipulates its intention to promote the Olympic Ideals and values as well as to take action to help tackle social inequalities.

This involves the following actions for each of the aforementioned goals:

- **Promotion of Olympic Ideals and Values**

The Olympic Committee will develop and disseminate Educational Material on the Olympic ideals to stakeholders including the Cyprus Sport Organization, the Ministry of Education and National Association. Moreover, it is to organize workshops and conferences on the field and will develop a Sport library.

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- **Tackling Social Inequalities**

The Olympic Committee will design and implementation of programmes and actions to address social inequalities and to confront any form of discrimination and violence. As part of this objective, it has increased the number of women in its Executive Board and Working Groups, and is organizing seminars, workshops and events. It is also involved in a process of exchanging and transferring of good practices with the Cyprus Sport Organization, the Ministry of Education and Sport Associations.

- Cyprus Football Association (CFA)

The National Football Association of Cyprus, in its strategy for 2019-2024 (CFA:2019), signifies as its core values trust, transparency, collaboration, integrity and responsibility. More importantly it lists the increase of women and girls' participation in football and the promotion of social inclusion and responsibility among its key objectives.

As a result it is undertaking the following actions:

- **Increase of women and girls' participation in football**

To fulfil this objective, CFA carries out actions in schools to train girls, it organizes school football championships and it is offering trainings to school teachers. Moreover, it provides incentives to clubs to create girls teams, participate in the national women championship and to hire female coaches. Additionally, CFA is designing and running promotional campaigns on gender inclusion while it is offering live coverage of women's football matches. Finally, the Association offers coaching courses to women for free.

- **Social Inclusion and Social Integration**

In its bid to contribute to social inclusion and integration, the Football Association is planning on organizing a football championship for prisoners. It is also running a project entitled 'All Different, All the Same' (Όλοι Διαφορετικοί, Όλοι Ίσοι) that seeks to support through sports vulnerable and marginalized children and youth as well as tackle prejudice and discrimination.



➤ **Goal in Life (Γκολ στη ζωή)**

Goal in life is a charity organization founded by current and ex-Footballers. The organization commenced its work in 2017 and as it highlights in its website wishes to utilize footballers' capacity to have a positive influence in the society, empower people in need and send positive messages to all directions ([Goalstizoi.org.cy](http://Goalstizoi.org.cy)). Over the course of the three years of its operation, the organization has run multiple awareness activities against discrimination, racism and bullying along with action to promote volunteerism. It has also run campaigns for cancer awareness and recycling while it has also organized charity actions, events and tournaments to support individuals and non-profit organizations as well as visits to the children hospital to give gifts to children patients.

➤ **AEL FC**

The club, via its online website, expresses its dedication in (company) social responsibility highlighting its commitment in undertaking collective action to identify and address needs and social problems at a local and national level. A special focus is being placed in utilizing sports to promote collaboration between young people and tackle discrimination and prejudice ([AELFC](#)). As part of this commitment the club has arranged visits to local schools to raise awareness against bullying and racism, it has organized and supported charitable actions and undertakes efforts to contribute to the promotion of cultural events. In the past, it has also hosted refugee families that are residing in Cyprus in its games ([Kerkida.net: 2015](#)).

➤ **Anorthosis FC**

Anorthosis is, in recent years, exhibiting has developed an expansive number of social responsibility initiatives and actions. The main focus is on charitable issues with the club supporting money raising efforts of philanthropic institutions and/or causes. Additionally, it is regularly organizing blood donation events. Most importantly, the club is participating in international campaigns against racism and discrimination such as the #morethanfootball campaign of the European Football for Development Network (EFDN) and the [Eleven Campaign](#) ([anorthosisfc.com.cy](http://anorthosisfc.com.cy)).

➤ **APOEL FC**

The Club, in its website ([apoelfc.com.cy](http://apoelfc.com.cy)), highlights its wish to support and promote social causes and it is organizing multiple actions and initiatives to do so. In the past, the team supported

ActionAid Hellas' mission to build a school in Mozambique by sending signed footballs for the children. It also participated in Fare Network's 'Football People' campaign against discrimination and racism while it has also run awareness campaigns for issues such as Cancer, Leukaemia and the promotion of organ and blood donation. Apart from that, the Club supported actions and campaigns by the Hope for Children, a non-profit organization for the promotion and safeguarding of children's rights, to support children. Lastly, in 2016, APOEL instead of having a main sponsor in its jersey it had a partnership with the 'Baby Miracles' organization to contribute to its work in supporting babies born prematurely and help raise money to buy equipment, maintain facilities and create a new department for treating premature new-borns.

➤ **Apollon FC**

The Club has publicly pledged its commitment in supporting charitable organizations and causes. Thus, it regularly takes action and organizes events to address and contribute to social issues. It has also set as a priority to raise awareness in tackling racism, violence and drug use while it organizes visits to schools and institutions supporting individuals with special needs ([apollonfc: 2018](#)). It is also worth highlighting that the Club's project "Together we can Achieve More" that run in the season 2017-2018 involving actions to raise awareness and educate school children on the issues of racism and bullying as well as the promotion of equal rights for individuals with special needs was shortlisted for the European Clubs Association' 'Best Community & Social Responsibility Programme Award 2018' ([ECA: 2018](#)).

➤ **Omonoia Nicosia**

The club takes an active stance in social affairs undertaking numerous actions and initiatives to support charitable causes in support of individuals in need and philanthropic organizations. It is also supporting actions and projects for environmental awareness such as events for the promotion of recycling and tree plantation. Moreover, in multiple occasions it has taken the initiative to invite its fans to make donations of clothes and material in support of disadvantaged groups such as poor students and refugees. Aside from that, Omonoia has taken part in multiple international campaigns against racism and discriminations run by the FARE Network and European Club Association (#morethanfootball) and supported Hope for Children's effort to build its "Field of Hope" (a football ground) in its shelter of unaccompanied minor migrants ([omonioafc.com.cy](#)).

## B. Evaluation – Observations on the CSR Policies & Actions in Cyprus Sports

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Through examination and the study conducted for the needs of the desk research and the evaluation of the examples presented in this report, it is safe to deduce that sports organizations and stakeholders in Cyprus exhibit an interest in becoming active and contribute in social affairs. This is quite evident by the volume of actions identified and concisely presented. It is also encouraging to observe that their work and objectives are fairly diverse and they try to take action in a wide array of fields, and all of the clubs and associations presented have taken steps to raise awareness and tackle discrimination and racism.

Another encouraging fact is that the sports organizations in Cyprus are undertaking their social responsibility work in collaboration and/or in support of local organizations and institutions. At the same time, they have already allied themselves with international associations and took part in international campaigns and initiatives. The former can ensure a greater understanding of local issues and can pave the way for more effective actions and initiatives at a local level while the latter can help them further increase their conception of social issues, transfer best practices and emulate successful efforts and actions.

However, and despite their noticeable and commendable efforts to have a positive contribution in the social affairs of the island, it is important to note that our desk research has not identified any comprehensive and longstanding CSR programmes. Nor have they have set separate departments or foundations for such action as other clubs in other countries.

Consequently, though they organize and undertake a wide array of initiatives and actions to support the local community and raise awareness on important issues, these activities and initiatives appear to be short-term and to some extent. They do not appear to follow a long-term strategy with clearly laid out objectives that would safeguard a longstanding multiplying effect. This is of especially important when seeking to tackle discrimination and racism that require continuous efforts and an everlasting dedication that needs to be exhibited in all aspects of the work and activities of a sports club.

Thus, sports clubs in Cyprus need to be encouraged and provided support so to build on their current work and take the next steps towards developing structured responses to societal problems in a manner that will ensure a longstanding and multiplying positive effect. That process may involve the training and education of their staff and executives as well as the provision of relevant tools and best practices to move their work to their next stage.

## 3. Field research

### Methodology

The Field research in Cyprus was carried out following the guidelines and instructions provided by the research framework put forward by KMOP, the organization in charge of the oversight and undertaking of the research of the GoSport project. Thus, per the requirements put forward by the research guide developed by KMOP, twenty (20) semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of sport organizations.

Specifically, the research team in Cyprus carried out 10 interviews with representatives of not-for-profit organizations active in sports and ‘amateur’ sport clubs and 10 interviews with representatives of professional sport organizations, sport clubs and federations. Due to the limitations imposed as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the vast majority of the interviews were conducted via online communication platforms (zoom and google meet) while a limited number of interviews (3) was carried out in person. To arrange said interviews, the research team either contacted by phone selected organizations or when possible their representatives directly informing them about the project and the scope of the research before asking them whether they would be interested to participate. In most of the cases, a supplementary email was sent out providing recipients with additional information about the project, the research and its key objectives.

All individuals interviewed for the needs of the research granted their permission, via signed consent forms, for the information they shared to be used in the report anonymously. Most of them also agreed for their interviews to be recorded for further analysis while for those that did not the interviewer was taking thorough notes.

### Results

In a bid to have a more representative sample and conception of the realities on the ground, the research team tried to talk to people from a wide array of organizations active in many different sports. Thus, it carried out interviews with representatives of professional football clubs, basketball clubs, runners’ associations, sport federations and not for profit organizations that work for social causes. Specifically, it interviewed 8 Football Clubs (professional and amateur), 4 Federations of different sports, 2 Basketball Clubs, 2 Runners associations/clubs and 4 NGOs active either directly

or indirectly in the field of sports. The overwhelming majority of those interviewed were male and are based in Nicosia.

During the interviews, the following main views were expressed in each of the themes covered by the interview.

### Knowledge, views and attitudes on CSR

Throughout the interviews conducted, it became evident that, with the exception of 2 or 3 respondents from professional high-ranking clubs and the representatives of federations of popular sports, the overwhelming majority of respondents had limited understanding of the term 'Corporate Social Responsibility' or did not have a concrete definition of what it entails. Despite that, all of them concurred that sport organizations have an important role to play in addressing societal issues and causes and expressed the belief that their organizations need take firm steps to make social contribution. In other words, despite not having a clear conception of the term, they exhibited a keen support for the development and undertaking, by their organizations and sport institutions in general, of actions and campaigns that fall under this category.

Moreover, all the respondents noted that social contribution is and should be an important pillar of the work and operations of sports organizations. In fact, most of them noted that social contribution is directly linked to the mission and values of the organization they represent. However, their interpretation of what this social contribution is varied and was directly linked to the history of their organization or the fields it operates in. Namely, representatives of sport organizations from the now occupied areas of Cyprus noted that it is important for their team to act as an institution that unites displaced people from their cities. Others, highlighted that an important aspect of their activities is to encourage citizens to get involved in physical activity or to bring people from the two main communities in Cyprus (Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots) closer and to contribute to tackling discrimination. Additionally, members sports organizations that claim to represent a defined political ideology, argued that their operations and actions extend beyond sport and cover social issues for the promotion of political views and social ideals.

Regardless though of their interpretation of CSR and the manner and type of social actions they pursue, they all agreed that sport organizations can reap many benefits by developing and pursuing such initiatives. Asked to identify such benefits, the majority of the respondents noted that such

actions help elevate the image of their organization and also present an opportunity for their organization to better connect with the local community and the society in general. Furthermore, the representatives of professional organizations, namely those of high-ranking football clubs, noted that such activities present opportunities for them to extend their collaboration with sponsors and corporate supporters as well as attract new ones.

## Actions and initiatives on CSR

The interviewees stipulated view that social contribution is and should be an important pillar of the operation and mission of a sport organization was also reflected in the examples of actions of their organization they referred to during the interviews. Regardless of the size, sport or type of the organization they represent, all interviewees presented examples of such actions noting that they try, to the best of their capacity and capabilities, to contribute to the community and support those in need.

Overall, said actions cover a multitude of fields ranging from tree planting actions, visits to children hospitals and pensioners houses to awareness raising actions and the support of fundraising initiatives to aid individuals in need (in most cases individuals with health issues raising money for treatment/operation). However, it is important to note that apart from the representatives of two of the high-profile professional football teams interviewed, the response of the interviewees to the question whether they have a CSR strategy was negative. Instead, most of such actions are either being carried out ad-hoc or are reactive, in response to a request or when made aware of a problem that has arisen. Apart from that, it is also important to note that most of the actions given as examples of their work in their field were charitable in nature; in a way reflecting prominent stances and interpretations of civic participation and social contribution of the Cypriot society in general. Additionally, due to the lack of a structured plan, it became evident that CSR actions by sport organizations are often isolated or are not being followed up.

To provide a better understanding of the type and format of actions Cypriot sport organizations carry out in the field, please see below an indicative list of the examples given:

- Visits of athletes and representatives of sport organizations to children hospitals to give gifts and express their support to children patients

- Educational visits of athletes and representatives of sports organizations to schools to talk to young students against racism and violence in sports.
- Tree planting events
- Road safety awareness campaigns
- Hosting underprivileged children or members of minorities groups (e.g. migrants, asylum seekers, refugees) as guests to their games
- Supporting the fundraising process of initiatives, organizations and institutions working on charitable causes. This may involve the provision of support for the promotion of such causes (sharing information via their social media or by having a banner of the charity/cause in their games and actions), the provision of space in their stadium for the collection of money or by even donating money or material (e.g. signed jerseys) to raise money for a cause through auctions
- Cultural events that seek to bring people from the two communities closer
- Organizing sporting activities and tournaments for the promotion of charitable or social causes
- Making their facilities available for the members of their local community to have a place to exercise
- Offering scholarships for underprivileged children in their academies
- Blood donations and awareness raising actions for health issues
- Visits and donation of material to asylum seekers reception facilities and 'shelters' for unaccompanied minors

## Challenges and Limitations they Face

When asked to make a reference to the challenges or problems they are facing in their CSR or social contribution work, almost all of the respondents mentioned similar issues. Regardless of the status or size of the organization they represent, they all noted that the main restriction they are facing in undertaking such initiatives, actions and campaigns or to further expand them are the financial limitations they have. Due to the lack of funds they stated they cannot invest as much as they would have liked in social work and initiatives. Additionally, they made a reference to lack of staff that would be able to design, organize and pursue such endeavours.

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Evidently, their interpretation of said limitations in funds and staff varied.

In the case of professional sport organizations, their representatives noted that in most of the cases CSR usually falls under the marketing department and it is seen as just another field said department needs to carry out work in. As a result, the staff in charge of developing and carrying out campaigns and actions (in all the cases covered these departments consist of just one person) in the field do not have sufficient time and the flexibility to do as much as they would like. They also have limitations in the funds they can allocate to pursue such endeavours. Interviewees of such organizations made a stark comparison of their working structure with other professional sport entities in other countries that have taken considerable steps and have grown their work in the field exponentially by either creating departments dedicated to CSR or have even taken the step to establish Foundations to carry such actions through them.

On the other hand, the representatives of non-profit or amateur sport organizations presented even greater obstacles. In most cases, said organizations face considerable limitations in terms of their finances and as a result do not have the capacity to organize or take any such actions. Apart from that, they are being run by volunteers or have a limited number of staff members (in most cases one person who is in charge of everything) that do not have the time nor the capacity to undertake any CSR action. As a result they are forced to limit their involvement in the field of CSR or social contribution actions to some sporadic actions that usually are of charitable nature i.e. in support of a person in need, to raise awareness about a noble cause.

In addition to that, all the interviewees noted that there is limited support from the state and national sport authorities to support and encourage sport organizations to take a more active stance and develop their involvement in the field of CSR. They highlighted the absence of grants or funding programmes that would support sport organizations to carry out initiatives to the benefit of their local community or to promote a cause. They also expressed the view, that in the absence of such schemes the state does not utilize the influence of sport organizations and their capacity to have a meaningful impact in society both at their local and at a national level. Most importantly, many of the interviewees, and predominantly those of non-profit/amateur organizations, complained that they do not receive any capacity building support from the state and national authorities so to be in a position to elevate their involvement and work in the field.



## Racism, violence and discrimination in Cyprus Sports

While similar approaches and views were predominantly held in most issues covered by the interviews, different interpretations and perspectives were put forward when the discussion delved into the extent to which racism and discrimination exist in Cyprus. Almost all of the respondents concurred that they have witnessed racism and incidents of discrimination in sport stadiums. They also agreed that Cyprus has experienced problems with violence in sports but due to the introduction of the Fan ID, and to the abstinence of organized groups of supporters as a reaction to its introduction, they have dropped significantly.

However different opinions were expressed as to how widespread such discriminatory and racist behaviours are in Cyprus sports. Most of the interviewees noted that racism in Cyprus is not as widespread and prevalent as in other countries. They noted that though incidents of racism and discrimination have been observed these have been isolated cases by a small group of individuals and are not examples of a widespread trend or the actions by organized racist or extreme-right groups as it is often the case abroad. This view was not shared by a small group of representatives of sport organizations, especially those with specific political lineage, who expressed the view that racism and discrimination does exist in Cyprus sport and it is being asserted by organized groups of fans and individuals found in the stands. They also argued that such organized groups and the influence they have also limit the extent to which their team/club can take a stand against racism and discrimination as part of a CSR campaign. Finally, representatives from less popular sport organizations, argued that they are observing the existence of such behaviours and stances, as ‘outsiders’, in the ‘more popular’ sports in Cyprus but not in their case. They added that due to the smaller scale and popularity of their activities, the participants and spectators in their games-leagues-activities know each other and operate as a small community.

Asked which, do they think, is the best approach to limit such behaviours and incidents, almost all the participants responded that an investment in education is essential and should be prioritized. They highlighted the need for sport organizations, schools and the state as a whole to organize and carry out campaigns and events to educate young children about diversity and acceptance as well as understand that sports should unite and not be a cause of division. This is a process, many of them added, in which sport organizations and especially well-known and popular athletes can play

a pivotal role and can have a meaningful contribution. Aside from that, they highlighted the need for awareness raising actions, with the involvement of athletes and teams to educate fans on these issues and make it clear that there is not room for racism and discrimination in sport.

## Future plans

As most of the interviewees emphasised, the COVID-19 pandemic is forcing sport organizations to operate, not only in terms of their CSR work but in general, in uncharted waters. Interviewees noted that the present situation poses some serious limitations as to the things they can plan and undertake in terms of their CSR activities. Most importantly, they expect the pandemic to have an adverse impact on Cyprus sports as most of the athletic activities have either been halted or are taking place without spectators causing an important loss of income for sports clubs and organizations.

Aside from that, as it was already mentioned, most sports organizations interviewed for the needs of this project do not operate on the basis of structured CSR plan. Thus, the unfolding situation with the Covid-19 pandemic made it even harder for them to share with the interviewer any future plans. However, even so, all the interviewees expressed their wish and willingness for their organization to continue to carry out, to the extent of its capabilities, actions in support of individuals, groups and causes within society. Only two representatives of the sport organizations, representing two high-profile football clubs, could make a reference to concrete plans and actions underway.

The first one, noted that they plan on building on successful actions carried out in past football seasons, involving the collaboration with Charity organizations and CSOs during their home matches so to support their causes and work. They will also continue to support charitable causes and will also be carrying out informative visits to schools to talk to children about the ideals of sports and against racism. The representative of the second organization noted that they have a concrete CSR strategy, with specific campaigns covering the fields of road safety, actions against racism and discrimination as well as awareness raising initiatives for the environment. Thus, their plan is to carry out the aforementioned actions. Additionally, the representative of the second football club stated that having recognized the limitations of what they can do and achieve under their current structure, the club has as a long-term vision to expand its operations in the field of CSR by either expanding its relevant department and ultimately explore the potential of establishing a dedicated CSR Foundation following the example of other clubs abroad.

## Preferred format of the learning material

In the final part of the interview, the interviewer reiterated that the ultimate objective of the research conducted through the GoSport is to develop learning material and resources that will empower and aid them to further their conception and work in the field of CSR in Sport. Thus, it was fundamental for the research to not only document the work they are doing, their objectives and shortcomings in the field but also to get their insights and views as to the format in which they deem it would be more beneficial for them to access this information. To that end they were asked whether they would prefer to receive the training in the form of online courses and guides, online webinars or in face to face workshops and seminars.

The majority expressed the view that ideally a combination of the aforementioned actions should be pursued but the latter attracted the greatest number of support, with the majority noting that they deem it more beneficial for them to participate in face-to-face learning events. They noted that such events not only present a unique opportunity for them not only receive information on the topics covered by the project but will also grant them a chance to interact with the speakers and the rest of the participants in a process that will allow them to enhance their conception of the issues at hand via the discussions and the exchange of views such workshops give forum too. They pointed out though, that for such actions to be successful they need to be conducted by experienced speakers and facilitators with in-depth knowledge and expertise in the field. Finally, they emphasised the added value of such events as networking opportunities offering them the chance to acquaint themselves with other professionals working in the field as well as representatives of academic institutions and civil society organizations. It is also important to note that the representatives of professional sports clubs, especially those from the well-established football clubs, and federations expressed their willingness to support such actions either by identifying speakers or by helping with their promotion.

This preference for face-to-face workshops and seminars was in no way a dismissal of the importance and benefits of online courses and learning material in the field. The respondents merely expressed the opinion that such resources can have a greater impact and effect if they are complementary and supportive of face-to-face events, acting also as go-to resources for professionals and stakeholders alike who want to further their knowledge and skills on CSR in sports.

Lastly, when asked to rate the proposed themes the project is interested in addressing through its learning resources, there was no great distinction between them in terms of preference. The respondents deemed all the proposed themes as either very important or important, a sign of the interest the field attracts among professionals and people involved in sport organizations.

## 4. Conclusions

Through the workings of the field research in Cyprus, it became apparent that there is a significant disparity between professional and amateur sports organization as to their conception, capacity and work in the field of CSR.

Most of the representatives of non-profit organizations conceive CSR merely as initiatives to promote or support charitable causes or to further social initiatives and ideals relevant to their mission and background. To some extent, this mirrors the views and perceptions within Cypriot society as to civic engagement and participation; being understood as merely the backing of charitable organizations and initiatives. Moreover, due to their limited resources and most importantly, the fact that most of such organizations have no or limited staff, their capacity to design, organize and run CSR programmes or actions is restricted. Consequently, CSR is not considered as a priority for the work of such organizations and they do not have a structured plan, involving specific fields of action, priorities and target groups, but instead tend to work on an Ad Hoc basis.

From their part, the representatives of professional sport organizations (top-flight sports teams and federations) exhibited a greater understanding as to the term CSR and the actions, causes and initiatives that it encompasses. Apart from that, even though many of them have undertaken or took part in social actions, the majority of sports organizations do not have a structured, comprehensive plan for their CSR work. They have also noted, during the interviews, that they are experiencing many limitations in regards to the staff and resources they can allocate to the field. It is important to note though that, similarly to the representatives of non-profit sport organizations, many of the interviewees exhibited a limited conception of what does CSR entails and the types of action it involves. Furthermore, despite many of such organizations have developed and are carrying out commendable work in the field, they concede that they consider that CSR is just in its initial stages in Cyprus. It is also observed that despite taking action to promote causes such as the tackling of racist and discriminatory behaviours, they have not taken steps to embed these views in the

aspects of the workings of their club, organization. In other words, they do not see them being integral in the way they operate and engage their supporters and society as a whole.

However, despite differences in the level of understanding and capacity to undertake actions of CSR, throughout the fieldwork, the research team has also observed commonalities of approaches and priorities between sports organizations. Almost all interviewees highlighted the importance of educational activities targeting younger audiences in order for CSR activities to have a heightened longstanding impact in society. Moreover, it is worth noting that although most of them expressed the belief that the sport sector in Cyprus does not face great problems in terms of discrimination and racism, they highlighted the need for actions in that field. Similarly, they supported the need for actions in support of the participation of women in sport, accessibility to sports, social inclusion of marginalized communities and youth engagement.

## 5. Recommendations

Thus, and taking into consideration the main conclusions that derived through the workings of both the desk and field research conducted by the project in Cyprus, the following recommendations are put forward:

- Efforts should be invested in promoting a better understanding of the concept of CSR and the fields, themes and type of activities it entails. As part of this process, it is also important to highlight how important it is for sports organizations to become active in the field as, given their stature in society, they can have a meaningful positive impact as well as the benefits they can reap by becoming invested in such actions
- Sports organizations should be granted support and guidance to be in a position to conceptualize and compile structured plans for their CSR activities in a manner that will allow them to elevate both the extent to which they are working in the field as well as their effectiveness.
- There should be an investment in the promotion of enhanced knowledge and conception of key topics relevant to the CSR priorities of sports organizations, e.g. racism and violence in sport, discrimination and corruption as well as the concepts of civic participation and engagement. By attaining a better grasp of such issues, representatives and officers of sports organizations will be empowered to expand the scope of their CSR activities as well as pursue targeted and effective actions to address the aforementioned themes.

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