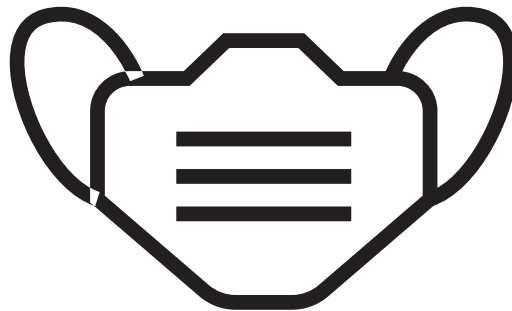




#StandUp4Equality

Sport and LGBTQI+

EQUALITY IN SPORT



The legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic

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Sport and the LGBTQI+ community

The legacy of the covid-19 pandemic

It is proven that minorities (for example, people with a lower socio-economic status, ethnic minorities, gender/sexual minorities) suffered disproportionately harder from the restrictions and implications of the pandemic compared to the rest of the population (1). LGBTQI+ people, representing this minority, are more prone to carry extra burdens, such as lower income, higher unemployment rate and precarious jobs (1), in addition to the psychological and economic burden of the crisis. The lower health outcomes of LGBTQI+ (1,2), a compromised immune system (2) as well as intersex people's transition-related medical care scheduled as non-urgent and postponed (1,2), higher rates of homelessness (2) mark the discriminating circumstances that LGBTQI+ have had to face during the pandemic. Social distancing is especially hard when one is rejected by your family (1) and young people were, and are, at risk of loneliness as they rely more on family ties as adult LGBTQI+ (1). In addition to all these personal life factors, the crisis was used by politicians to blame LGBTQI+ and thus further steer hatred against the minority LGBTQI+ (1,2). In contrast to this, in order to acknowledge and embrace gender diversity and sexual orientation and as a reaction to the pandemic, experts recommend putting in place a number of measures. These include: Giving visibility to LGBTQI+ in public policy; deconstructing stigma and protecting LGBTQI+ persons from violence and discrimination; designing State responses based on evidence; and involving LGBTQI+ organisations (3).

A survey from the UK (555 answers from LGBTQI+) revealed that 42% wished to receive support for their mental health in April/May 2020 and that 25% would like to receive support to reduce their isolation. 16% were unable to access health care and another 34% have had medical appointments cancelled. 37% of respondents stated that decreased mental wellbeing was one of their top three concerns at this time (4). Similar problems were reported by the LGBT Foundation: From 16th March to 5th April 2020 the LGBT Foundation's helpline registered 13% more calls about mental health compared to the period 24th February to 15th March 2020 (5). Another study, comprising 310 answers of LGBTQI+ people, revealed high perceived stress and high levels of depressive symptoms during the pandemic. For those who experienced discrimination, perceived stress and symptoms of depression were higher, compared to those who did not, thus underlining the negative impact of discrimination on mental health (6).

Regarding physical activity levels, 55% of GBT men, 56% of LGBT women and 64% of non-binary people are not active enough to maintain good health, compared to 33% of men and 45% of women in the general population. Physical inactivity is responsible for up to 40% of many long-term conditions, among which some are known to increase the risk of being severely



affected by covid-19. Thus, taking exercise can make it less likely that people will need intensive care with a covid-19 infection (5).

The report on “covid-19 and the human rights of LGBTI people” names in its key action recommendations that shelters, and support services should take steps to include the LGBTQI+ community (2). Sport organisations could be such a shelter and provide a safe space and place of feeling belonging, which is of special importance during a crisis such as the covid-19 pandemic. The aim of the following data collection was to investigate the impact of covid-19 on sport in the LGBTQI+ community, as there is not much data available, yet.

Literature:

- 1: ILGA Europe (2020): COVID-19 and specific impact on LGBTI people and what authorities should be doing to mitigate impact
- 2: United Nations (2020): Covid-19 and the human rights of LGBTI people – What is the impact of covid-19 on LGBTI people?
- 3: UN independent expert (2020): Report to the UN General Assembly: The impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the human rights of LGBT persons
- 4: LGBT foundation (2020): Hidden figures – The impact of the covid-19 pandemic on LGBT communities in the UK.
- 5: LGBT foundation (2020): The Essential Briefing on the Impact of COVID-19 on LGBT Communities in the UK
- 6: Kneale D (2021): Discrimination as a predictor of poor mental health among LGBTQ+ people during the COVID-19 pandemic: cross-sectional analysis of the online Queerantime study



The following data derives from two online questionnaire surveys (one for coaches, one for athletes) and from structured interviews (with athletes) that ENGSO's EWS committee conducted in July - August 2022. The questionnaire was distributed in 13 languages (Albania, English, French, Finnish, German, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish).

186 athletes and 42 coaches filled out the online questionnaire, respectively, and 6 interviews were conducted with athletes during the EuroGames 2022 as well as online.

Sample characteristics are displayed in the appendices of this factsheet.

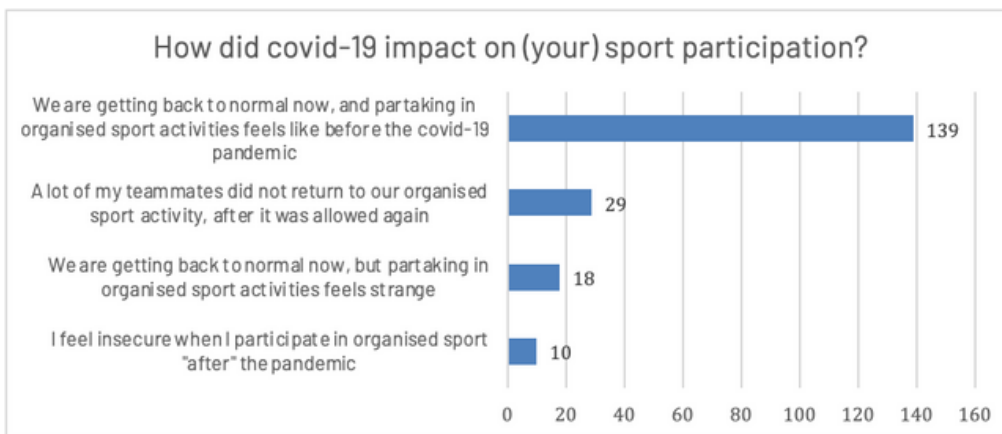


Figure 1. Answers of Athlete Questionnaire. Numbers are displayed in absolute numbers. Multiple answers could be selected, and it was optional to also answer in a free-text field.

Table 1. Athlete answers from the optional free text field

| How did covid-19 impact on (your) sport participation? |
|---|
| Everything is normal and just as it was before covid |
| It had no impact on getting back to normal |
| It is worse in handball than paddle |
| No impact, except maybe there are less spectators at games |
| One of my sessions could not restart until next month so it was a challenge |
| Unfortunately, covid has not disappeared |
| During the pandemic I started to do more sport and I took a course as a paddle coach |
| Covid has made people more egoistic. "Only my problems, not the general public...". See this poll. who asks if straight people are discriminated against whether male or female? None.... |
| We need to work on our teamwork in the sports club and within our team, because this was interrupted as we did not see each other for a long time during the lockdown |

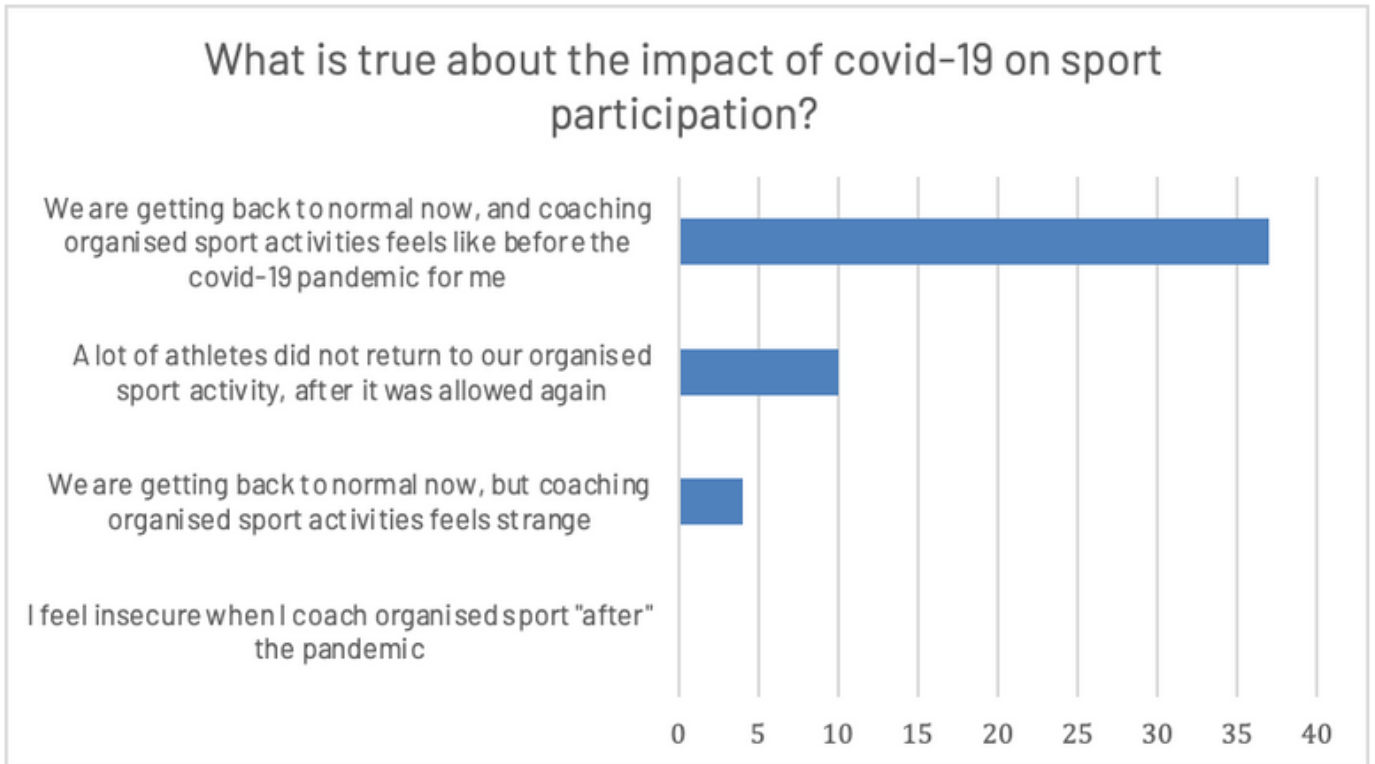


Figure 2. Answers of Coach Questionnaire. Numbers are displayed in absolute numbers. Multiple answers could be selected, and it was optional to also answer in a free-text field.

Table 2. Coach answers from the optional free text field

| What is true about the impact of covid-19 on sport participation? |
|--|
| A certain loss of young athletes is noticeable, but new ones are coming in; what is worse is that fewer coaches are accompanying the growth. |
| There are a lot of new members, which is too much for the coaches |
| Selfishness has increased massively |
| Some "discomfort" still continues. Organised sport activities feel different. |



We also asked the athletes in the interviews about the impact of covid-19 on sport activities. Below are some exemplary statements (direct quotations).

Please share your experience during the covid-19 pandemic with us. Did you find means to “replace” organised sport with other joyful activities that were allowed during lockdown?

“Not really. I was at that point where I just wanted to stay home and wait for this to get over and get fat and unfit or so. Pools were open quite fast again, because they said that high humidity stops the virus from spreading.”

“We had a lockdown. As soon as areas were open again we decided to start half of our activities again. I ensured with my team coordinator that all activities started again according to the rules. We played outdoors a lot. We did the maximum we could.”

“We did not play. But after some months, we started playing again. But because people did not show up, the price increased. I did not want to pay that much for one session, it was way too much for me and not worth it. In summer 2020 I joined again. There are now as many participants as before, even 4-5- new participants. I did some walking and cycling during the lockdown.”

Did you observe lasting negative long-term effects of the pandemic when it comes to sport and sport participation? If yes, please explain them further.

“I would say no. Our swimming training just looks like before. To be sustainable, we need 5-10 people. Maybe it is even slightly more participants now after Corona.”

“No, because we, as a club, even grew after the pandemic.”

“I think not in paddle. Maybe even more positive things, such as washing your hands. And our membership increased.”

“Yes. EuroGames this year: 2047 participants, although 3000 could have come. There was no reason why not to go. People spend their money on different things, or do not have that much money. Covid made people step back and look at their lives differently. And the priorities of their life. Maybe people want to go to bigger multisport events, or on a LGBTQI level, local groups are coming together and it is cheaper that way? Nijmegen might not be attractive enough for some people to go there for social event plus holidays. It might be different in Bern with the Alps and Hiking.”

“No, nothing for Badminton. I am not sure regarding other sports.”

“For me, yes. I need to lose weight and need to do sport again.”



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