World Gymnastics: Our Safeguarding Journey and Ongoing Commitment

Background and Development

World Gymnastics recognises the serious concerns raised by survivors and safeguarding advocates regarding the protection of gymnasts and the need for meaningful and lasting change across the sport. Safeguarding requires sustained attention, practical action and accountability at every level.

World Gymnastics' safeguarding framework supports safe and respectful participation in gymnastics, with attention to participants' physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. It combines regulatory requirements, independent reporting and disciplinary procedures, education, and support for Member Federations.

These elements have developed over several years and provide the foundation for the current safeguarding programme and priorities through 2028.

Safeguarding has been a priority under the leadership of President Morinari Watanabe since the early years of his presidency, which began in 2017. He has advocated an athlete-centred approach to governance, emphasising that all stakeholders, including the Federation's leadership, should work to support athletes. The adoption of the safeguarding framework in 2018 and the establishment of the independent Gymnastics Ethics Foundation in 2019 marked important early steps in this work.

In 2018, the FIG Congress approved a safeguarding policy setting out the organisation's framework for addressing harassment and abuse.

The Gymnastics Ethics Foundation (GEF) was established in January 2019 as an independent foundation under Swiss law to handle disciplinary and integrity matters, with a particular focus on safeguarding. Its responsibilities include receiving reports, assessing concerns, conducting investigations where appropriate and bringing matters before its Disciplinary Commission. These functions are separate from World Gymnastics' day-to-day sporting administration.

The creation of the GEF was a pioneering step in international gymnastics governance, establishing a dedicated structure independent of the Federation to receive and handle safeguarding and integrity concerns, including through independent disciplinary bodies. To date, it remains the only International

Federation to have adopted such a structure, which sets the highest standard of independence in the handling of safeguarding concerns.

Since its inception, the GEF has handled nearly 500 reports and has intervened on several occasions to restore safeguarding standards and protect athletes.

A reporting mechanism is readily accessible through the "Report a case" section of the World Gymnastics safeguarding webpage, directing individuals to the GEF Helpdesk. Concerns can be submitted confidentially through an online reporting form, including anonymously, or via telephone or WhatsApp.

The GEF regularly publishes annual activity reports providing transparency on its work, including the handling of reported cases, disciplinary proceedings and other safeguarding-related activities. These reports are publicly available on the GEF website and provide further information on the operation of its independent reporting and disciplinary mechanisms.

Awareness and standards of behaviour

Alongside the development of formal safeguarding arrangements, discussions involving athletes, coaches, sports administrators and other stakeholders contributed to initiatives addressing behaviour and culture within gymnastics.

A preliminary safeguarding working group was established in 2021. The 10 Golden Rules of Gymnastics, launched that year, communicate principles relating to enjoyment, personal goals, health, respect and integrity.

In 2022, the Safeguarding Commission was formally established to support safeguarding education, awareness and policy development. The Commission has an international and multidisciplinary composition, bringing together members from Europe, Asia, Oceania and the Americas, with perspectives from federation leadership, coaching and former elite gymnasts. This diversity ensures that different experiences and perspectives from across the gymnastics community are taken into account.

The FIG Code of Conduct was also adopted in 2022, setting out standards of behaviour expected of participants in the sport.

World Gymnastics has also promoted international exchange and dialogue through two Safe Sport Symposiums, held in Liverpool in 2022 and Antwerp in 2023. The second symposium, "Our Safe Sport Journey", brought together 458 participants in person and online, representing 60 National Federations, to share experiences and practical approaches to safer gymnastics.

The 10 Golden Rules have been supported by dedicated communication and educational materials, including videos and posters, and have attracted interest from the IOC and UNESCO.

These initiatives serve complementary purposes: regulatory documents establish formal standards and responsibilities, while the Golden Rules support awareness and discussion about everyday practice.

Current developments in 2026

The current programme brings together updated regulations, dedicated safeguarding capacity, education and support for national-level implementation.

In January 2026, World Gymnastics strengthened its safeguarding capacity by appointing a full-time Safeguarding Manager to further coordinate and develop its safeguarding activities.

Consultation with the Athletes' Commission, Safeguarding Commission, Medical and Mental Health Commission, GEF and other stakeholders informed the safeguarding strategy and Roadmap 2028.

Updated regulatory framework

Two developments in 2026 are the revised Code of Discipline and the updated Safeguarding Policy.

The revised Code of Discipline updates the framework for disciplinary procedures and safeguarding-related responsibilities, including the relationship between national and international processes. It includes provisions concerning the reporting of national safeguarding decisions, recognition of sanctions across borders under defined conditions, provisional measures and protection against retaliation.

The updated Safeguarding Policy brings the previous safeguarding policy and event framework together in one document. It reflects contemporary safeguarding standards and approaches, drawing on international developments, including the IOC's 2024 consensus statement on safeguarding and interpersonal violence in sport.

The policy now addresses a range of behaviours and risks, including psychological and physical abuse, grooming, bullying, body shaming and online harm. Its guiding principles include athlete-centred, prevention-focused and trauma-informed approaches, with consideration for the additional protection needs of children and adults at risk.

For Member Federations and event organisers, the policy sets out safeguarding responsibilities and requirements covering areas such as designated safeguarding personnel, reporting arrangements, education and procedures for responding to concerns.

Education, national contacts and communication

Education and awareness-raising have been part of World Gymnastics' safeguarding work for several years. In cooperation with its Education Commission, World Gymnastics introduced a compulsory safeguarding course for coaches across all disciplines, supported by educational materials and leading to a safeguarding certificate.

Safeguarding webinars and educational sessions have also been organised in individual disciplines, including Artistic, Rhythmic and Acrobatic Gymnastics, with practical guidance for coaches and other participants.

To support implementation by Member Federations, World Gymnastics has made safeguarding guidelines, policy templates and educational resources available. Its Safeguarding Resource Center brought together practical materials, including webinar recordings.

Practical measures at events have included the presence of designated Safeguarding Officers at FIG competitions and Gymnastics for All events.

Safeguarding modules have been developed and will be included in Olympic Solidarity programmes for Member Federations taking their first steps in developing Gymnastics disciplines within their territories.

Work is underway to review and update safeguarding learning materials and education programmes, with content adapted to the responsibilities of different groups within gymnastics.

World Gymnastics is also identifying national safeguarding contacts to support information sharing and implementation. This work forms the basis for a Safeguarding Leads Network, to be developed through training, resources and regular exchange.

A quarterly safeguarding newsletter was launched on 8 August 2026 alongside World Gymnastics' Safe Sport pledge. It provides updates on safeguarding developments, resources and opportunities to participate in the programme.

Priorities through 2028

The Safeguarding Roadmap 2028 structures the next stages of work around four connected areas: governance and the regulatory framework, prevention and education, the safeguarding network, and strategic communication.

Governance and regulatory implementation

Following the 2026 regulatory updates, the focus is on supporting Member Federations as they review their arrangements and apply the requirements within their national settings.

Planned work includes guidance, practical resources and an updated national federation safeguarding toolkit, taking account of differences in national legal frameworks, organisational structures and available resources.

The Safeguarding Policy provides for compliance monitoring through mechanisms such as documented self-assessments, event safeguarding plans and reports, and periodic reviews.

Prevention and education

Building on the review of existing materials, planned developments include learning opportunities for athletes and safeguarding leads, webinars and other educational activities, and a broader range of role-specific courses.

The aim is to make safeguarding information relevant to participants' responsibilities and support its application in training, competition and organisational settings.

Safeguarding Leads Network

The network will provide a channel for national safeguarding contacts to exchange information, access resources and discuss implementation questions.

The roadmap envisages training, regular meetings, regional development and collaboration with academic partners to support the network's continued development.

Strategic communication and programme review

Communication will support the other areas of work by sharing regulatory developments, educational resources and information about safeguarding arrangements.

The roadmap includes further website development, digital communication and reporting on safeguarding activities. Progress and priorities will be reviewed annually, allowing the programme to be adjusted accounting for implementation experience and emerging developments.

World Gymnastics believes it is essential that everyone involved in the sport is aware of the available resources and how to utilise them.

Creating a safe environment for current and future generations of gymnasts is a responsibility that World Gymnastics takes extremely seriously and shares with all stakeholders across the sport. The Federation remains committed to open dialogue and the exchange of best practices with experts in safeguarding and human rights.

The priority for World Gymnastics is not only to strengthen safeguarding rules and policies, but to ensure that they lead to meaningful changes in everyday practice. Through continued education, cooperation with Member Federations, independent reporting and disciplinary mechanisms, and monitoring of implementation, World Gymnastics is committed to fostering a safer and more respectful environment for everyone involved in gymnastics.

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