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BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING IN GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL IN CATALONIA

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PROLOGUE



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First Vice President of
FC Barcelona and
First Vice President of
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Committed to coexistence and respect

Every child has the right to enjoy a safe and healthy environment. Despite this, bullying occurs not only in classrooms, but also on the playing field. At Barça Foundation we identify and combat peer harassment through a targeted programme of training and intervention in sports. The playing field should be a space where everyone can feel happy and be treated with respect.

Football is one of the most widely played and followed sports in Catalonia, benefiting both the physical and emotional development of the children who play it. At the same time it helps them put into practice important values such as effort and determination. Playing sport enhances a child's social and cooperation skills in the service of a common goal. Physical activity is also a means to enhance self-esteem, empathy and resilience to frustrations.

Bullying annuls all these rights, negating the positive values of the game and replacing them with fear, shame and intimidation. Feeling threatened harms a child's performance on and off the pitch, impacting their school and family life, as well as their physical and mental health. Preventing and dealing with harassment between peers on the sports field is a task that involves children, young people, families, coaches and spectators.

Given the absence of national and international benchmarks on bullying in sports, Barça Foundation wants to ensure the continual development of knowledge by leading this research. As such, the Foundation presents the following analysis of the prevalence of bullying in grassroots football in Catalonia and to share inspirational experiences to help reverse this problem.

Football cannot tolerate abusive behaviour - it goes against the sport's ethos. Barça Foundation is committed to ensuring children's rights while promoting peaceful coexistence, open dialogue and clean play. We want boys and girls to grow with equal opportunities, building a society where respect and empathy towards others are the foundation for all interactions.



BULLYING AND SPORT

WHAT IS BULLYING IN SPORT?

Bullying or harassment between peers can be understood as aggressive behaviour on the part of one or more children with the intention of harming another. It is repeated over time, and characterised by a power or strength imbalance between participant(s) and victim(s).

(Olweus & Limber, 2010)

In the field of sports in particular, bullying should not be confused with situations such as altercations or aggressively competitive actions during normal play without apparent intent to do harm, such as kicking, pushing, etc.

The level of motor skills of a player may increase or decrease the risk of their being bullied in high-level sport.

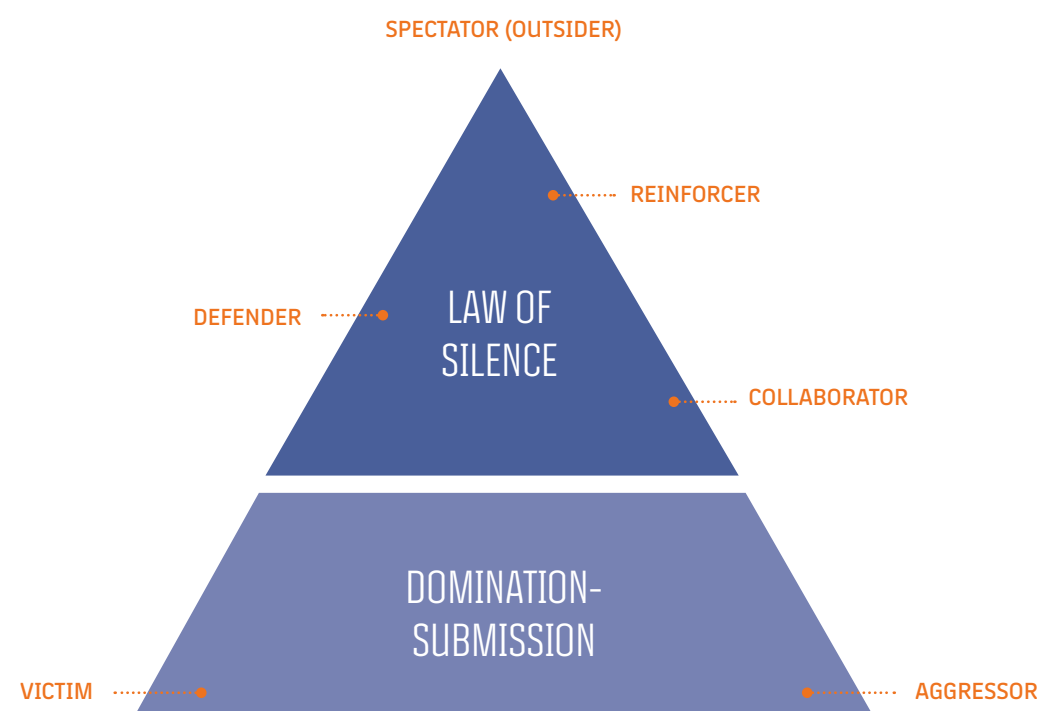


"This season I have a boy who is well below the average level of the team, and the best players neither look at him nor greet him: they just ignore him."

Coach



WHO IS INVOLVED IN BULLYING?



Harassment is a social phenomenon, and must be treated as such. It is not necessary to focus exclusively on the victim and the aggressor, since the spectators also play important roles in sustaining or breaking the harassment between peers



A child in the **role of aggressor** will find it difficult to change if observers continue to support, or even fail to actively condemn, their actions.

"Sometimes the witnesses are afraid of the aggressor and do not want to get involved. He is the king and the others do not want to contradict him." Player

Despite the belief among **observers** and spectators that bullying is wrong, they tend to excuse small initial actions like barbed jokes, misguided comments or pointed nicknames.

"The joking begins with a clip behind the ears one day, then another... or when he runs they trip him up" Coach

If left unaddressed, the chances are that bullying **victims** will end up leaving the club and giving up sport. They can also suffer serious consequences on both a personal (anxiety, depression, etc.) and social level (reduction of social interactions).

"As a child, I suffered from bullying and that's why I gave up football. They teased me." Coach

"Outside school it happens less, because children have the freedom to choose who they play with and who they don't. When they are at school, they are in the classroom and they have to be there - they have no choice" Family

Victims of bullying on the sports field tend to manage the situation by staying silent, adding to the lack of accountability the perpetrator faces.

"I think sometimes at that age it's hard to tell their parents or coaches, it's like they're ashamed of it... And there's fear, because they believe that if they say something, they will receive even more." Family

"Obviously insults are a problem ... my son believed them and even saw himself as fat. His self-esteem came crashing down. And I said to myself: what's wrong with this child who has stopped eating... The problem is I'm fat, he said. Well no, you're not fat." Family

Promoting respect for differences and a culture of inclusion where everyone has a place in the team minimises the possible impact of bullying.

"Whether they are better or worse than the other players plays a big part... But, above all, it's if there is something that makes them different: they wear glasses or braces on their teeth, etc." Family

Remember that bullying is a dynamic process, so the roles are not fixed and can vary depending on the circumstances. Anyone can be the victim, aggressor or observer at different times in their lives. Therefore, we should not associate certain personal or social characteristics with each of these roles.

"Some members of the team stay silent to avoid being expelled from the group, so the situation of bullying is maintained thanks to the passiveness of the team."

Ortega, 2008

"Any difference in the victim can be used by the team to justify harassment. Physical appearance, obesity, size and body strength, lack of ability (especially motor skills), low perception of competition and body image, disability, different sexual orientation, etc."

Martínez Baena, Faus-Boscà, 2018

WHAT DIFFERENT FORMS OF BULLYING ARE THERE?

Direct form

Explicit contact between victim and aggressor (face-to-face)

Hitting, pushing...

PHYSICAL

Insults, nicknames...

VERBAL

Exclusion from participating in activities

SOCIAL

Uploading personal photos or videos without permission or making derogatory comments

CYBERBULLYING

(through technological means, social networks, etc)

Indirect form

Subtle forms, difficult for the victim to identify

Hiding, stealing, breaking personal objects...

Spreading false rumours

Denigrating, ignoring, excluding

Not letting individuals join a WhatsApp group

WHERE DOES BULLYING HAPPEN IN SPORT?

In the sporting context, as in education, bullying occurs at **times and in spaces when there are few adults present**. This, among other things, makes detection difficult.



"I think children know when to bully and when not to... when a boy really wants to hurt someone, he makes the comment when the coach is not there." Coach

It is in the **sports club itself**, during **training sessions** and especially in the changing rooms where bullying situations occur **more frequently**.



"They threw things at my brother in the shower, they threw his boots in the toilet and pulled the chain." Coach

WHAT DO THE EXPERTS SAY?

There is extensive research on bullying in the school environment, where prevalence is estimated to be at 10%¹. **Few studies** have attempted to analyse its prevalence in sport, however.

The data obtained by Nery, Neto, Rosado and Smith (2018) after observing players of different sports suggest that **10% of athletes have been bullied and 34.7% have witnessed acts of bullying**.

¹ "I don't play like that" report by Save the Children 2016



PROGRAMMES OF PREVENTION AND/OR PROTOCOLS OF INTERVENTION ON BULLYING IN SPORT

This section provides documents related to **anti-bullying prevention policies in sport or protocols of intervention** made internationally by federations or sports clubs, public administrations, etc.

1. MANUAL ANTI-BULLYING - NA FORMAÇÃO DESPORTIVA

Nery, M., Neto, C., Rosado, A., & Smith, P. K.
Manual-Programme | 2017 | Portugal | No results

A research project that raises the awareness of bullying in educational and sports communities, promoting direct intervention.

The theoretical description is accompanied by action guidelines for athletes, parents, entrepreneurs and sports leaders to help them deal with situations of interpersonal violence in this context more effectively.

2. ANTI-VILIFICATION PROGRAMS IN ADOLESCENT SPORT

Mattey, E., McCloughan, L. J., & Hanrahan, S. J.
Manual-Programme | 2014 | Australia | Results provided

A programme that is specifically aimed at homophobic bullying in a volleyball organisation. It offers a detailed workshop programme for players to which parents and trainers do not have access.

3. BULLYING IN SCHOOL SPORT

Noret, N., Smith, A., Birbeck, N., Velija, P., & Mierzewski, M.
(*The Ben Cohen - Standup Foundation*)
Report | 2015 | UK | No results

A report organised from three projects:

- **Project A:** a review of current research identifies 14 studies and reports that explore the nature and/or prevalence of bullying in school sports.
- **Project B:** the results of a four-year study about bullying in school sports drawn from the participation of 15,023 primary and secondary school students.
- **Project C:** a research review draws together interventions to tackle bullying in school sports.

Finally, there are some conclusions from the whole report.

4. CHILD PROTECTION IN SPORT UNIT (CPSU)

NSPCC, Sport England, Sport Northern Ireland and Sport Wales
Website | 2017 | UK | No results

Videos, publications and good practices on curbing violence (including bullying) in the world of sport.

- *Anti-bullying activities* to help young people in a club understand the negative implications of bullying.
- The *CPSU sample anti-bullying policy* shows how to raise the awareness of a club about bullying, how to intervene and support children and young people.
- *Sample online safety and social media policy:* a guide on the use of the internet and social networks.
- *Making a noise about bullying in sport:* a presentation to help children and young people talk about bullying and cyberbullying.
- *Empowering sport to tackle bullying:* a case study on bullying in sports, as well as recommendations around the roles that coaches should take.

5. BULLYING IN SPORT AND PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGY

Fisher, L. A., & Dzikus, L.
Scientific article | 2017 | USA | No results

An article that includes a theoretical approach to bullying in context, including a discussion of bullying among athletes, intimidation by coaches and homophobic bullying, among others. Includes recommendations on what sports institutions can do to create inclusive sports climates, and a series of practical tips for preventing, and intervening against, bullying in sports.

6. EDUCATING COACHES ON THEIR ROLE IN THE PREVENTION OF HOMOPHOBIA

McCloughan, L. J., Mattey, E. L., & Hanrahan, S. J.
Scientific article | 2015 | Australia | Results provided

An article showing how the presence of homophobic bullying is increasing, together with an example of a programme designed to prevent this through workshops for trainers. Emphasis is placed on the role of coaches in the prevention of bullying.

7. PLAY BY THE RULES - MAKING SPORT INCLUSIVE, SAFE AND FAIR

Kate Jenkins (Co-Chair), Janet Schorer, Merrilee Barnes, Phillip Leslie (Co-Chair), Megan Mitchell, Dr Niki Vincent, Justin Burney & Peter Downs
(*South Australian Department for Sport and Recreation*)
Web page | - | Australia | No results

An educational and informative web page on discrimination, harassment and child protection in sport. A bank of all kinds of resources for managing conflicts in a sports club, inclusion in the world of sport, issues of sexual abuse in sport, bullying in sport, etc.

8. TRUE SPORT

True Sport
Website | 2016 | USA (Colorado) | No results

A website that provides educational tools to promote a positive sporting experience for all young people. It highlights the true essence of sport: integrity, respect, teamwork, courage and responsibility.

There is a Bullying Prevention section with different resources such as articles and videos.

- *Ways coaches can prevent bullying*
- *Warning signs of bullying in youth sports*

9. VERYWELL FAMILY

Sherri Gordon
Website | 2018 | Broadway | No results

A website where there is the publication *Dealing with bullying in youth sports teams*, giving advice or strategies for parents.

10. STOMP OUT BULLYING - CHANGE THE CULTURE

STOMP Out Bullying - Change The Culture
Website | 2019 | USA | No results

A website that includes one section, Bullying and Sports, investigating the fine line between competitive games and bullying.

This includes parenting tips designed to find out whether a child is suffering from bullying.

11. HOW TO STOP BULLYING IN YOUTH SPORTS - PROTECTING YOUR CHILD FROM ABUSE IN ATHLETICS

Frank L. Smoll Ph.D. (Coaching and Parenting Young Athletes)
Web page publication | 2013 | - | No results

A publication on the website of Psychology Today presenting a theoretical approach to bullying followed by tips for what parents can do to prevent bullying or what to do if their child is an aggressor.

12. CONSEJOS PARA MANEJAR EL "BULLYING" O ACOSO EN UN EQUIPO DEPORTIVO MENOR (TIPS ON MANAGING BULLYING OR HARASSMENT IN AN UNDERAGE SPORTS TEAM)

CAFA Group
Web page publication | 2018 | Latin America | Produces no results

A publication which, in part, shows how to avoid and prevent bullying or harassment in a team, aimed at parents.

13. ANTI-BULLYING ACTIVITIES - EXERCISES TO UNDERTAKE WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT YOUR SPORTS CLUB

Horse Sport Ireland
Manual | - | Ireland | No results

A manual of activities to carry out with children and young people in a sports club around the subject of bullying.

14. ANTI-BULLYING POLICY FOR SPORTS CLUBS

Cornwall Sports Partnership
Manual | - | Ireland | No results

A manual aimed at the clubs. Signs and symptoms of bullying are exposed, followed by a series of procedures to be carried out in the event of this occurring. Finally, a section on prevention is also given that proposes a code of conduct.

15. BULLYING PREVENTION IN SPORTS

Alberta Government
Manual | 2015 | Alberta (Canada) | No results

A manual that explains types of bullying. One section shows what parents/adults can do, what coaches and volunteers can do, and what can be done by the players.

Bullying

16. PREVENTING BULLYING: WHAT GREAT COACHES NEED TO KNOW

Prevent Child Abuse America and US Center for Safesport - Champion Respect. End Abuse Manual | - | USA | No results

A manual designed to train trainers about the nature of bullying and its impact on children and young people, as well as the role of trainers in preventing its appearance in teams. Directed at coaches that work with athletes aged between 6 and 18. The manual is divided into 4 parts:

1. Understanding the behaviour of bullying, with special attention to vulnerable populations
2. Strategies to avoid bullying behaviour
3. Strategies to respond to bullying behaviour
4. Potential bullying scenarios to be used in team discussions

17. ANTI-HARASSMENT PROTOCOL IN SPORTS - PROTOCOL OF ACTION AND PREVENTION OF HARASSMENT IN SPORT

Consultora KPMG
Manual-protocol | 2017 | Basque Country | No results

A protocol for the Bera Bera club (Basque Country) through the KPMG consultant. The scope of the Protocol includes the administration and service staff (monitors and trainers) and sports people. A procedure and guidelines for action are set out.

18. PROTOCOL OF ACTION IN SITUATIONS OF HARASSMENT IN SPORTS CONTEXTS IN NAVARRE

INDJ Sports Mediation Office
Manual-protocol | - | Navarre | No results

Protocol of action for possible harassment on the sports field. It has two aspects: one preventive and the other favouring guidance over intervention. A chronological diagram of the action protocol is presented, together with that of the INDJ.

19. CAMPAIGN "STOP BULLYING. THERE'S NO WEAKNESS IN A TEAM"

Federación Andaluza de Baloncesto
Campaign | 2017 | Andalusia | No results

A campaign of the Andalusian Basketball Federation promoting the "Stop Bullying" campaign. A video is presented that features interviews with children, players, parents and trainers about the bullying that some children suffer in different educational and sports centres. However, it does not propose any strategy or action to take against the phenomenon.

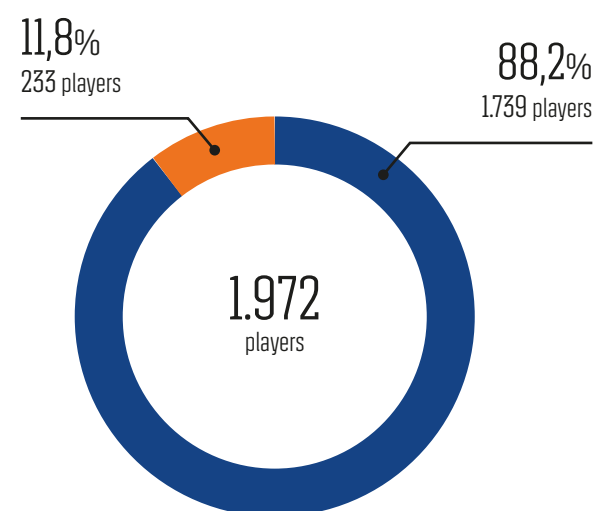




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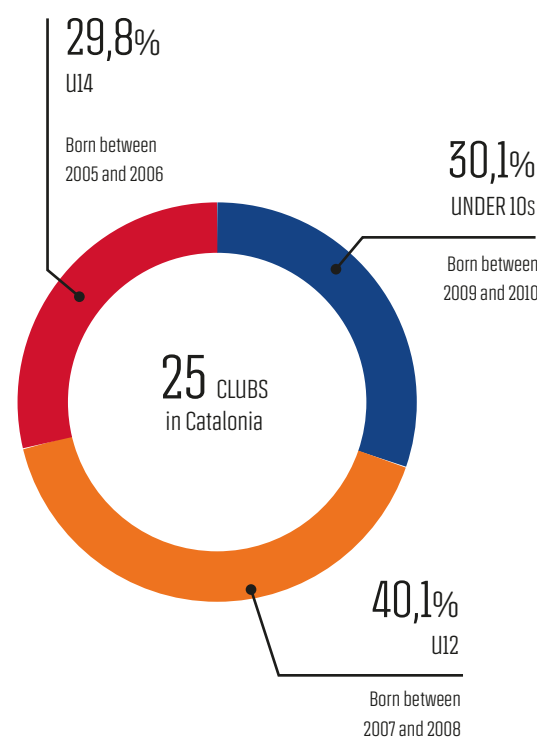
EVALUATION METHOD



The study aimed to take representative samples of licenced players from 7-a-side and 11-a-side football in Catalonia. Clubs were selected to ensure diversity around size, geographic location, economic and social levels, etc.

Out of the total sample, 91.6% of the players and players were **born in Catalonia**, 29.8% said that they had been **playing football for one season** and the vast majority (96.7%) **trained between two and three days a week**. Regarding the competition level, 6.2% played in *Preferent*, 17.8% in the First Division, 33.2% in Second and 35.2% in Third.

The questionnaire was **prepared** in dialogue with leading research in the field (Adler, 2014; Martínez, 2016; Nery, Neto, Rosado and Smith, 2018). **Seven specialists approved the content** before it was administered.



QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

With the aim of achieving a more global view of the bullying problem in the field of grassroots football, **9 focus groups** with three profiles were selected, grouped according to three profiles: **families, players and coaches**.

The focus groups came from different club environments. Each group comprised of 10-15 people from a diversity of backgrounds: different ages, social and economic status, clubs, years of training experience, etc. Despite the attempt to seek equal representation among players and coaches, it is important to note that only one female coach and one female player participated in the respective focus groups.

MAIN RESULTS

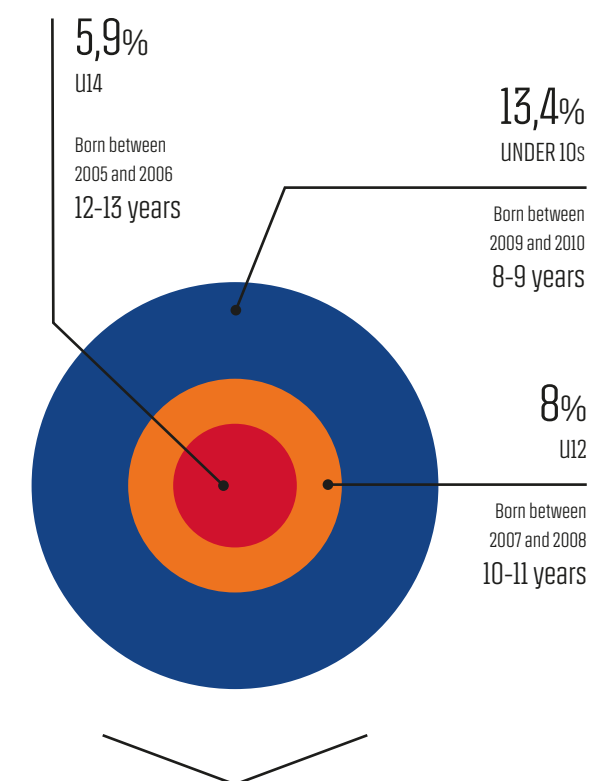
VICTIM

PREVALENCE

9% reported experiencing bullying during the current or previous season.



There are no differences between male and female players.



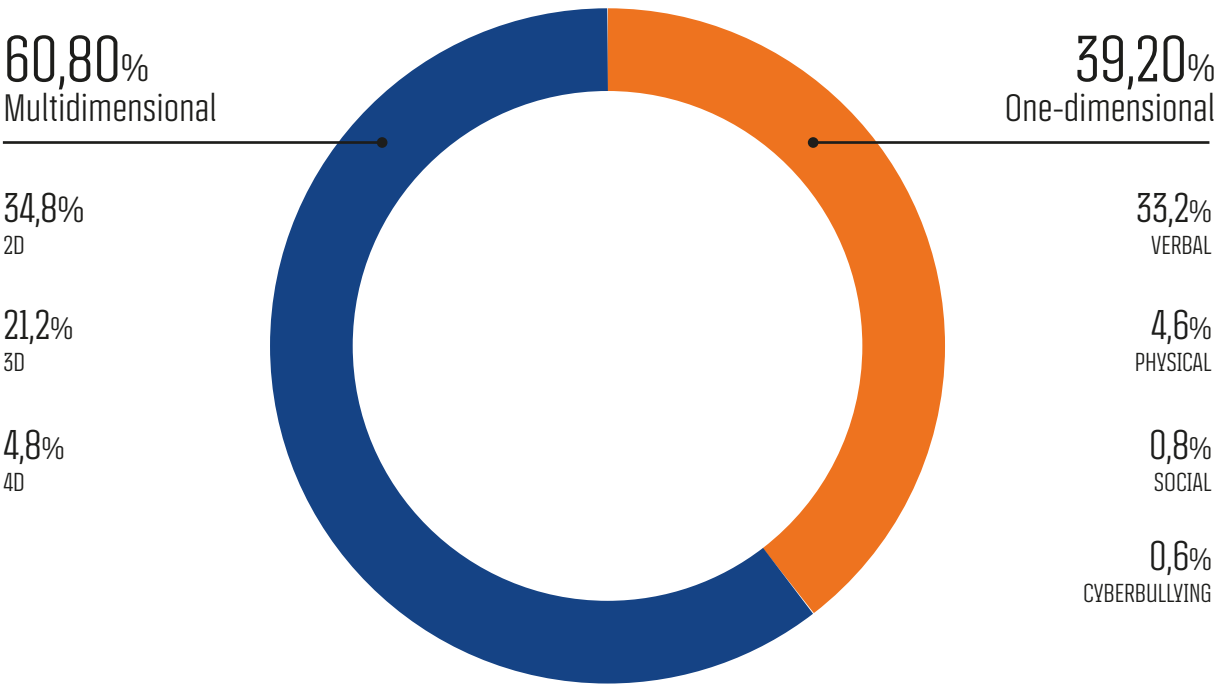
The U10 category experienced the highest levels of bullying, followed by the U12 and finally the U14 category.



"In this town the school group is the same as the recreational group, the same as the football group. The problems on the playground are transferred to football, to recreation time... because they are the same children and everyone goes to the same places. So they transfer the problems from one place to another." Family

"Many kids go to the same school and bring issues here to the club. Perhaps they have fought at school and keep doing it here." Coach

WHAT TYPE OF HARASSMENT IS SEEN?



TYPES OF BULLYING

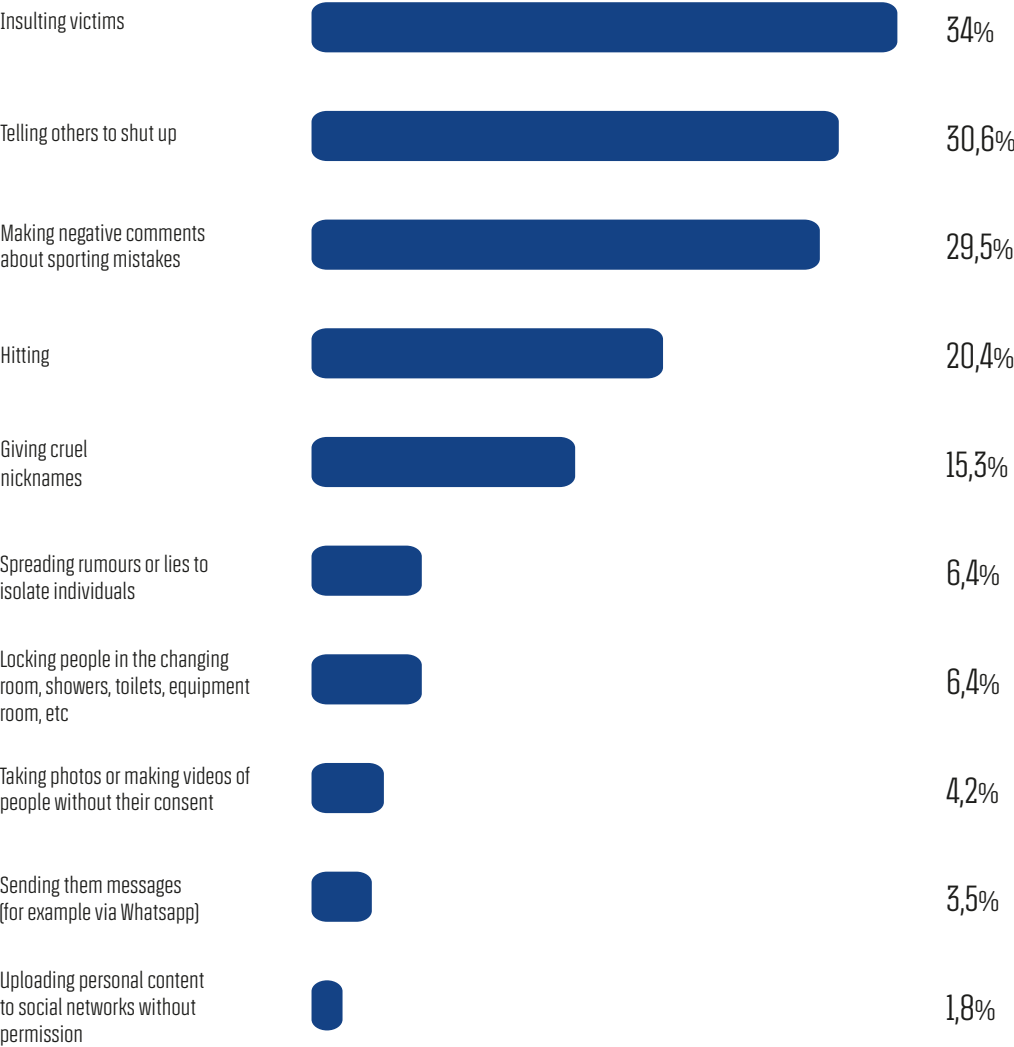
ONE-DIMENSIONAL BULLYING
A single type of bullying (verbal, physical, social or cyberbullying) occurs.

- MULTIDIMENSIONAL BULLYING**
- **FOUR-DIMENSIONAL BULLYING**
All four types occur.
 - **THREE-DIMENSIONAL BULLYING**
A combination of three of the existing types.
 - **TWO-DIMENSIONAL BULLYING**
Primarily a blend of verbal and physical.

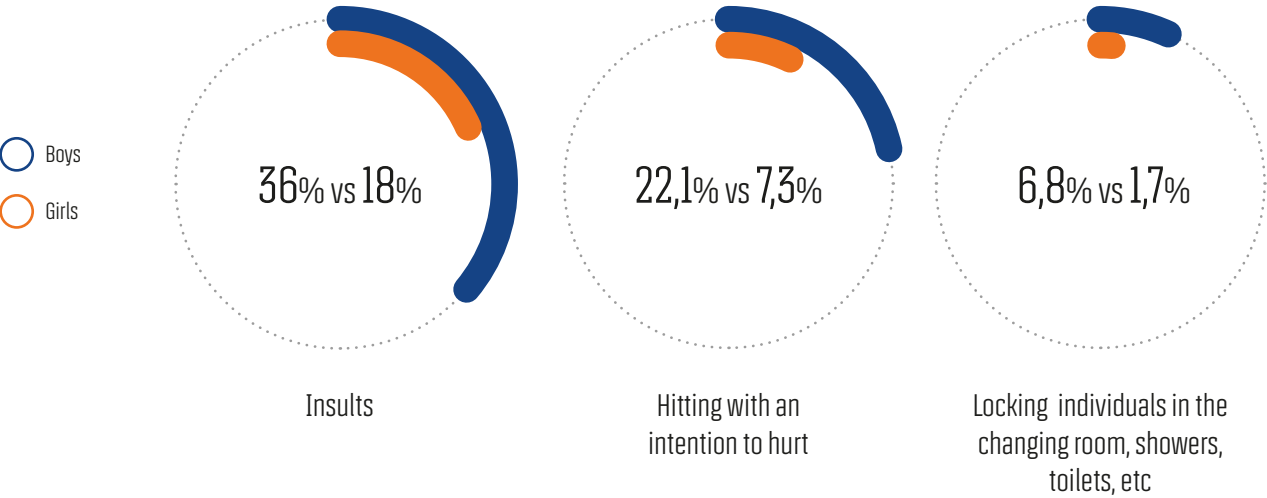
Bullying situations are mostly multidimensional, combining verbal bullying with physical, social and/or cyberbullying.



Common behaviours



Types of behaviours by gender

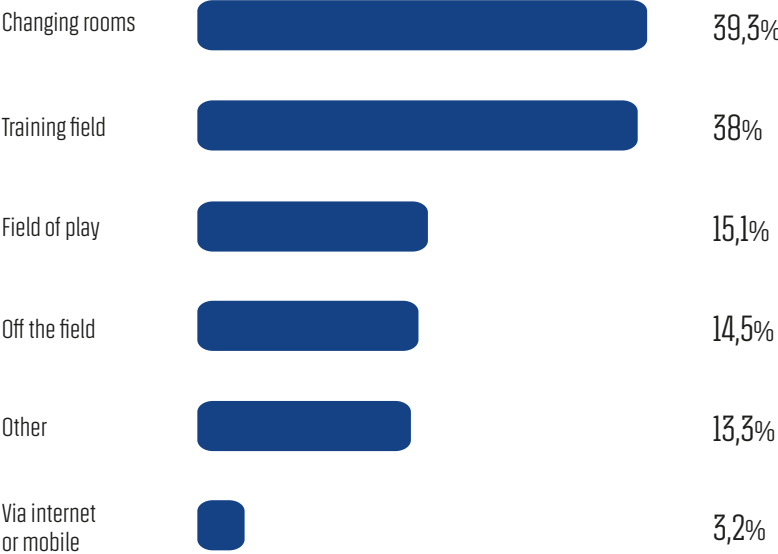




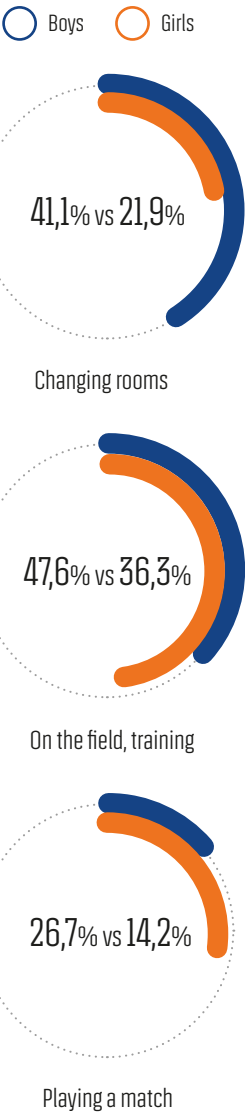
COMMON LOCATIONS OF BULLYING AND THEIR REGULARITY

(Multiple answer)

There are differences between boys and girls:



When it comes to cyberbullying, no differences in occurrence between the genders are reported.



VICTIM'S FEELINGS



32%
ANGER



26%
SADNESS

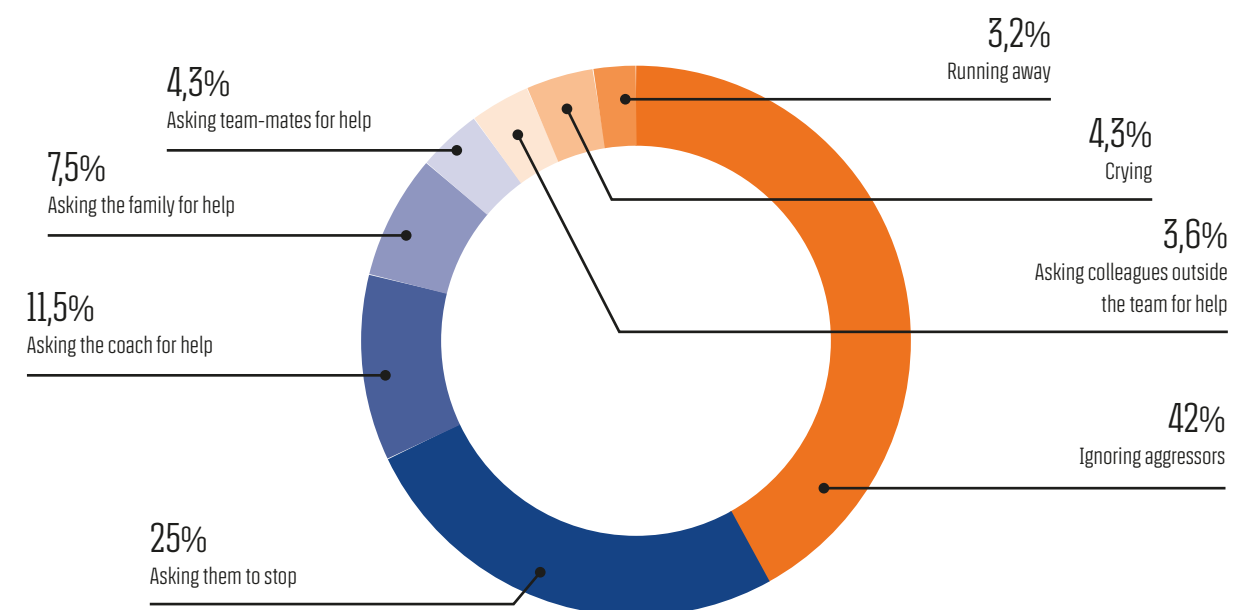


21%
INDIFFERENCE

"She is sad, she cries... she feels disappointed, angry, impotent and scared." Player

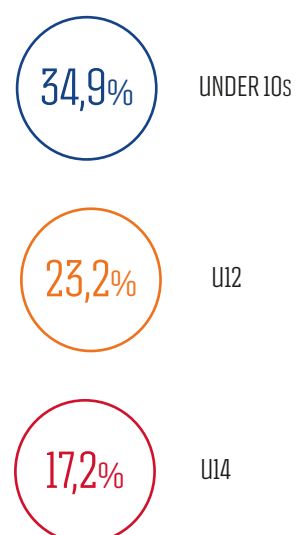
"Self-esteem comes crashing down." Family

RESPONSE STRATEGIES

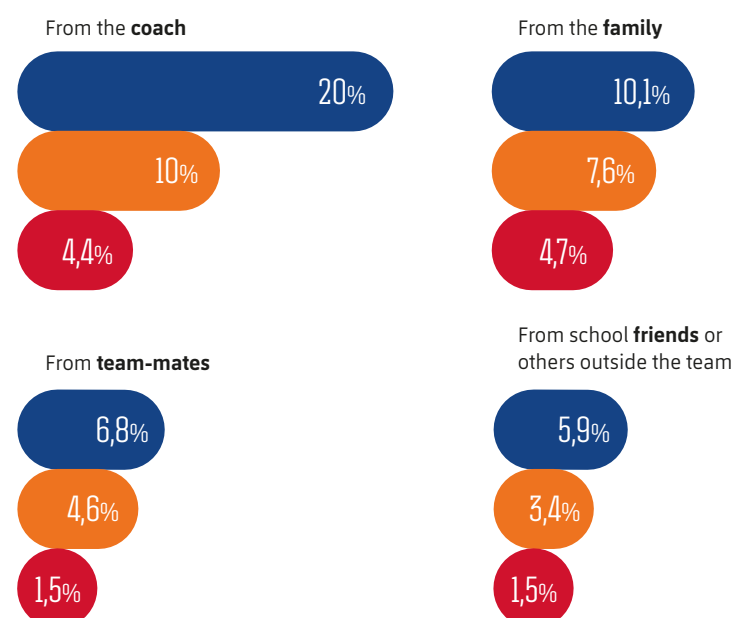


The U10 category is where the majority of actions occur.

Asking them to stop



Asking for help



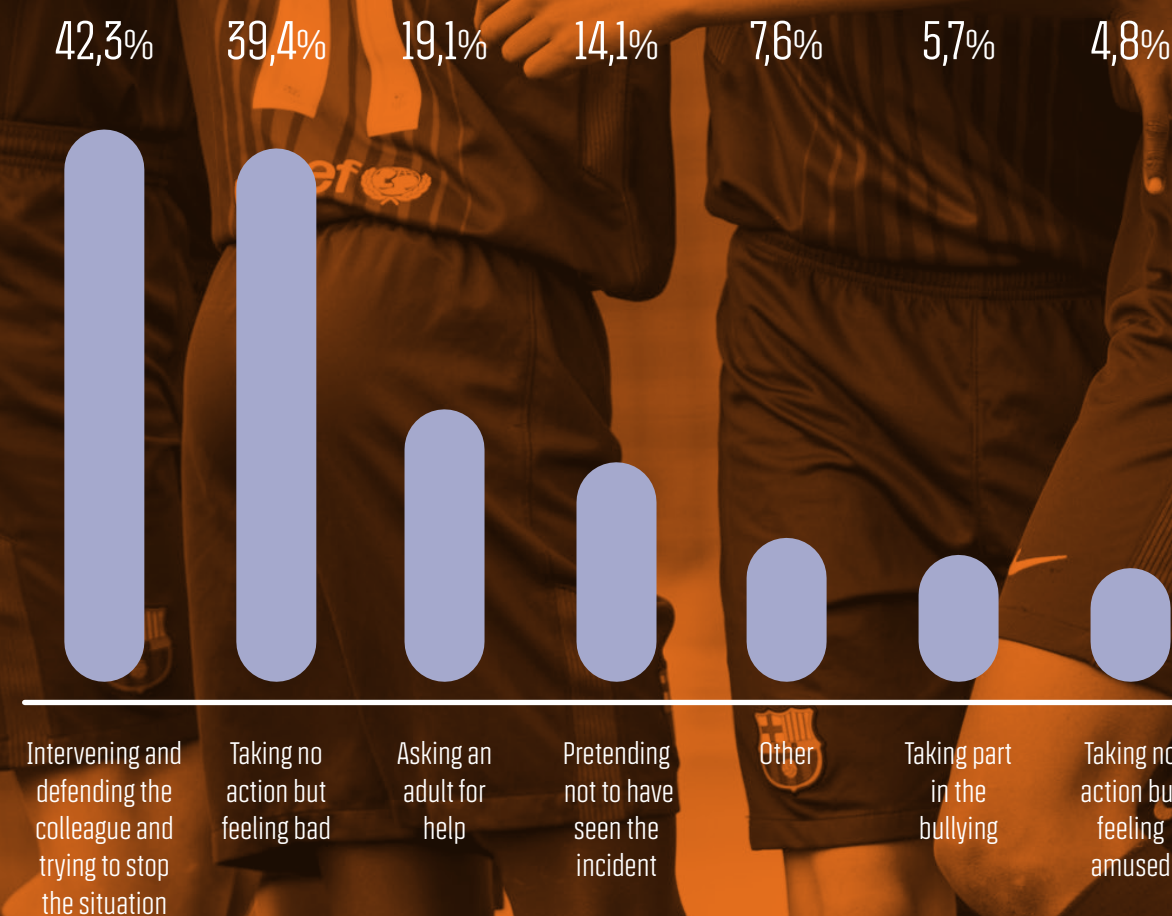
No gender differences were observed.

The sample of players who were not bullied but intended to give up football was 5.7%. By contrast, 31.6% of bullying victims reported an intention to give up the game.

OBSERVERS

34,6% of participants reported having witnessed bullying in football.

More than half of those observers felt sorry for the victim.

ACTIONS FROM OBSERVERS:
(Multiple answer depending on frequency)

There were no differences between male and female players but significant differences between categories. Older players were the most likely to opt to do nothing, but feel bad.

AGGRESSOR

14,8%
of participants say they
have bullied others.



More boys than girls claimed
to have participated in bullying.



Motivations to bully
others because:

39,5%
They feel provoked

19,6%
They feel the recipient
deserves it

Emotional responses:

34%
Feeling bad

28,5%
Feeling nothing

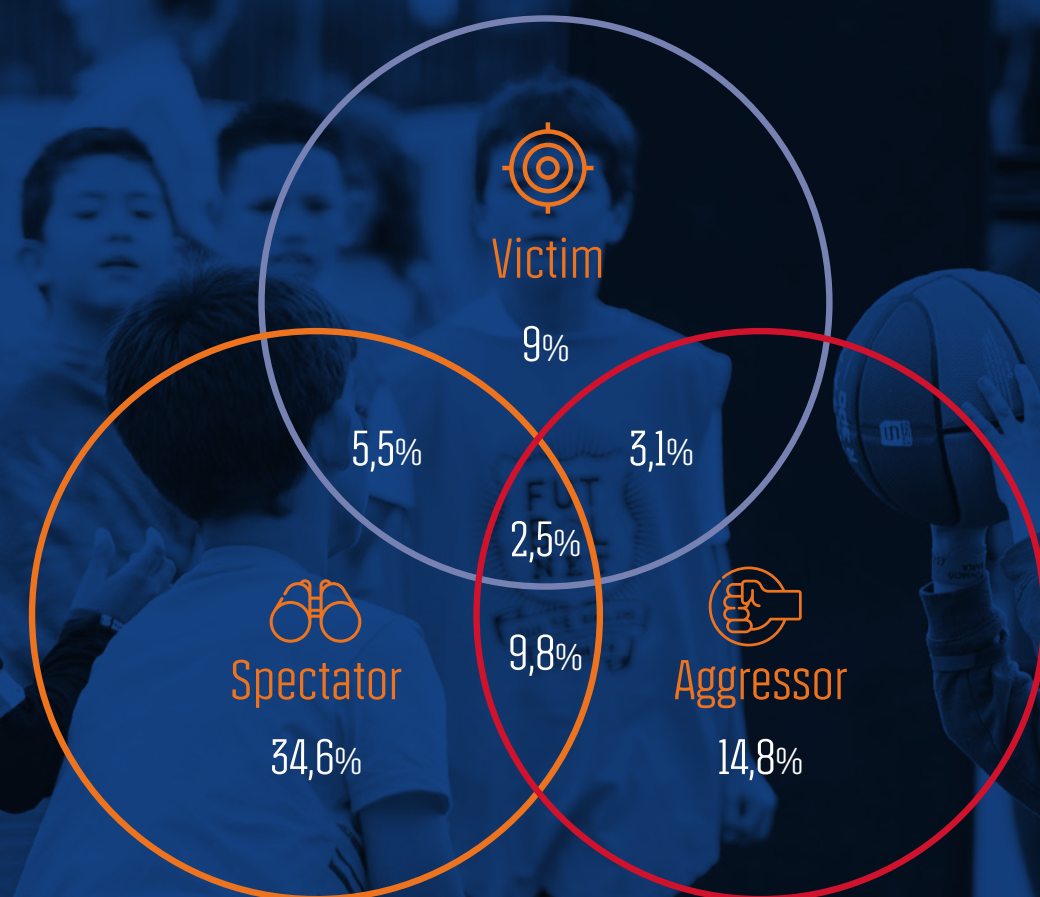
21,3%
Concern about being told off

20,3%
Feeling sorry for the victim



54,4% of reported aggressions were carried
out by a single aggressor.

Finally, taking into account the different roles (victim/spectator/aggressor) that each individual can play,
the results obtained can be represented as follows:



9% were victims,
34,6% spectators and 14,8% aggressors



5,5%
of the sample were both
victims and spectators
of bullying



3,1%
were both victims
and aggressors



2,5%
were victims, witnesses
and aggressors

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Following the interviews and group meetings conducted in this study, families and coaches expressed great concern regarding the difficulty of detecting bullying in football, as well as the lack of effective measures to deal with it.
- At a higher level, there is a simultaneous lack of preventive policies and protocols in sports organisations, and analysis of the few preventive initiatives that are rolled out is almost non-existent.
- Victims and spectators of bullying will be more likely to break their silence when we create positive team climates of player support, motivated and personified by strong coach and club leadership.



"The important thing is that coaches receive training."
Coach

*"We have to try and monitor the relationships
in the team and to become aware before a
serious situation occurs."* Coach

*"Are there guidelines for action? We do not have any.
Children need to know how to act in every situation.
And families too. It is very important. There should be
guidelines for action. From the beginning to the end."*
Families



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This collection explains the projects and the work of the Barça Foundation, and creates a space for study and reflection on social issues. It is one more step in the Foundation's commitment to examine the world in which we live.