

2021-2026 Developmental Evaluation

Executive Summary

August 2026

Amsterdam, August 31, 2026

Re. Management Letter in Response to 5-years Developmental Evaluation

Dear Board Members, dear partner organisations,

Our five-year Developmental Evaluation offers a clear picture of the world we are working in: human rights under pressure, civic space closing and discriminatory policies that we once thought were behind us are now returning. The Evaluation confirms that our four pillars – Policies, Events, People and Movement – remain the right foundation for our work.

While institutions like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA often retreat from their responsibilities, our collective efforts have helped secure meaningful advances in policy development: the IOC's Strategic Framework on Human Rights, the Olympic Charter's human rights amendment, and survivor-centered participation in UNESCO's Global Safe Sport Policy Standards. These gains reinforce a core truth: affected people are not just "stakeholders," they are the ones who must show us the way. This Evaluation also shows how sustained pressure around mega sporting events can lead to real-world change – from labour reforms to safeguarding and improved access to remedy. We must continue to act early and strategically to meet what lies ahead.

Across the People pillar, the Evaluation highlights how our support has been described as a "game-changer," how we have helped make voices heard, and how we stepped in where others couldn't. Our greatest impact comes when we centre those most harmed by sport's failures and help create the conditions for them to lead. The launch of the Athletes Network for Safer Sports is described as "one of the best examples of a survivor-led initiative" – showing what is possible and that we're on the right track.

The Evaluation also shows how our Movement has grown – becoming an independent legal entity, expanding our global reach, and earning recognition as a "single, credible gateway" for sports bodies. It challenges us to deepen institutional engagement, broaden global representation, and maintain the independence that underpins our credibility. We strongly believe that access must never become a substitute for accountability.

Looking ahead, this Evaluation highlights important opportunities to strengthen our capacity, sharpen our prioritisation, and further develop our Lead Partner model. As we enter the 2026–30 Strategy cycle, we will build on these lessons to focus our efforts where they can have the greatest impact, deepen our global representation, and continue to protect the independence that defines us.

I take the opportunity to thank our partners and colleagues for the invaluable inputs you have provided in this process, and your continued support. The result of this Evaluation belongs to all of us.



Andrea Florence
Executive Director

Sport & Rights Alliance

Executive Summary

“If we want to fundamentally change the system in sport, there’s power in numbers.” — SRA Core partner

I. Purpose and methodology

This developmental evaluation was undertaken to assess the impact and added value of the Sport & Rights Alliance (SRA) over the five years from 2021 to 2026. It examined the effectiveness of its working methods, the outcomes achieved, and drew lessons that should inform the development of the 2026–2030 Strategy. The evaluation draws on a detailed literature review and 28 interviews with Core Partners, Strategic Partners, members of the SRA Athletes Network Advisory Council, external partners and representatives of sports governing bodies. It builds on a previous developmental evaluation conducted in 2020, allowing for a direct assessment of progress.

II. A changed world

There have been dramatic changes in the external environment during the review period. Outside sport, the Covid-19 pandemic, geopolitical instability, global political crisis, the re-election of US President Trump, rising authoritarianism and a wider breakdown of international cooperation have all had direct consequences for rights in the sporting world. Dramatic cuts in USAID funding and the closing of civic space have had real impacts on civil society in a number of contexts.

Within sport, the rapid emergence of Saudi Arabia as a sporting superpower, the election of a new IOC President, and a dramatic reversal of rights for transgender and intersex athletes have reshaped the sports landscape. The USA advanced preparations to host the world’s two biggest sporting events in the coming years while simultaneously waging an aggressive assault on human rights.

Internally, the SRA has itself undergone significant change - most notably becoming a legally independent entity registered in the Netherlands in 2025, broadening its funding base, and launching the Athletes Network for Safer Sports in May 2024. Reporters Without Borders and Building and Wood Workers International (BWI) strengthened our coalition by joining us as Core Partners.

Against this backdrop, the evaluation finds an organisation that has grown substantially in confidence, capacity and credibility, achieving significant impact and winning the respect of members, partners, sports bodies and donors alike.

III. 2021-2026: 5-year Impact

The evaluation looked at the impact of the SRA in the four key pillars of its strategy. In each area, the SRA is widely recognised by internal and external partners as having had a significant positive impact in promoting human rights in and through sport, with tangible outcomes both for affected people and for members of the coalition. It is clear that the SRA is succeeding in galvanising the collective power of its partners to be ‘more than the sum of its parts’.

1. Pillar I: Policies

In the period under review, the SRA contributed meaningfully to two major achievements at the IOC: the publication of the [IOC’s Strategic Framework for Human Rights](#) in September 2022, and the amendment of the [Olympic Charter in October 2023](#) to include the IOC’s responsibility to respect internationally recognized human rights — both long-standing objectives of the Alliance. The SRA also actively defended the [IOC Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-Discrimination](#), seeking to preserve human rights principles and bring transparency to a process initiated by newly-elected IOC President Kirsty Coventry that, unfortunately, eventually led to a severe reversal of rights in the face of a stronger wave of political pressure.

In the area of safe sport, the [SRA Athletes Network led a global consultation](#) of survivors on behalf of UNESCO, engaging 138 athletes, whistleblowers and advocates from 24 countries and across 17 sports to inform [UNESCO’s Global Policy Standards for Inclusive, Equitable and Safe Sport](#). The Standards are due to be approved by Member States in 2027 during the 8th International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VIII). The SRA has been engaged with the IOC’s safe sport unit since its inception and has consistently advocated for FIFA to launch a survivor-led, trauma-informed approach to safeguarding. FIFA ultimately launched [YourSide](#) — an initiative that provides triaging and support, but not investigations.

The Network has also published an exploratory research in collaboration with [Thomas More University of Applied Sciences](#) addressing the complex ethical dilemma surrounding the eligibility and accreditation of athletes with prior criminal sexual convictions at the highest levels of competition, titled: *[“No one wants to talk about it”: Voices of impacted people on the participation of athletes convicted of sexual offenses at mega sporting events.](#)*

The SRA has also engaged positively with several UN mechanisms. The UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights described the SRA as “very important” in shaping her landmark report on the right to participate in sport, and a significant number of the SRA’s recommendations were included in the [UN Human Rights Office’s report on racism in sport](#). The SRA also worked with partners to respond to [consultations by the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls](#), seeking to combat myths about transgender and intersex athletes and defend an inclusive vision for sport grounded in human rights standards.

2. Pillar II: Events

The SRA has sought to embed how human rights are considered in the awarding, planning and delivery of a significant number of mega-sporting events over the period. At the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, the SRA played a key connecting role, linking HRW with Japanese players' unions in a campaign that ultimately achieved a [revision of Japan's Basic Law on Sport to outlaw abuse](#), and contributed to a law to better protect LGBTI people. At the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, partners used coordinated outputs and rapid advocacy to ensure human rights concerns - from the [repression of Uyghurs](#) to [censorship](#) and the [treatment of Peng Shuai](#) - were repeatedly raised in international coverage, countering the IOC's insistence that sport and politics could be kept separate. The 2023 Women's World Cup provided an early model of undertaking a collaborative human rights risk assessment, with the SRA engaging both FIFA and national human rights institutions ahead of the tournament, while also using the event to highlight issues including [pay equity](#) and [abuse](#) in sport.

In relation to the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, Core Partners can point to significant and tangible [real-world impacts](#) - including the introduction of a minimum wage, improved health and safety legislation, reforms to the Kafala system and improved access to justice for migrant workers - achieved through sustained pressure over many years. A [FIFA legacy fund](#) of \$50 million was also established, though the call for workers' compensation ultimately [did not succeed](#), despite generating widespread support. While these successes are real and the SRA provided a forum for connection and amplification, it was also recognised that the SRA did not play as central a role in bringing partners together in joint strategies compared to other SRA campaigns, in part due to Core Partners' pre-existing relationships and strategies, lack of funding and differing approaches.

Importantly, the need for greater and earlier coordination and alignment was learned and reflected in the SRA's work on both the bidding processes for the [2030](#) and [2034](#) FIFA Men's World Cups, and the [2026 FIFA Men's World Cup](#). For the bidding processes, the SRA co-published with Amnesty International a comprehensive risk assessment, '[Playing a Dangerous Game](#)', co-hosted a press conference, and coordinated a [joint civil society response](#) on the day Saudi Arabia's 2034 bid was confirmed. The work was widely described as "well-researched, balanced, powerful and effective," and importantly provides a common platform for future work. The SRA has also played a key role in bringing Core Partners together around the common platform of "[Keep the World in the World Cup](#)" for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, ensuring alignment, joint actions and better coordination of partner activities.

At UEFA EURO 2024, the SRA played what UEFA described as a "pivotal role", contributing to the tournament's [Human Rights Declaration](#), shaping an independent grievance mechanism and introducing a Rapid Response Mechanism for match-day issues - described by external stakeholders as "impressive and groundbreaking." These initiatives were replicated for the Women's EURO 2025, proving they need not be a one-off. While some interviewees raised questions about the risk of becoming too close to UEFA, those inside the process attested to the SRA playing a "challenging but constructive" role, including setting boundaries.

At the 2024 Paris Olympics, the SRA played a central role supporting [Basket Pour Toutes \(BPT\)](#) in their challenge to France's hijab bans - coordinating partners, mobilizing and connecting the group to UN bodies and the IOC, and working behind the scenes to enable

one Olympian to compete. The work drew on various partners' strengths – Amnesty issued a detailed [research report](#), World Players' Association facilitated connections with basketball player unions, and Athlete Ally helped mobilise [a letter from over 80 professional basketball players](#). The ban was not overturned, but it made further regression more difficult and BPT praised not only the SRA's actions, but the manner in which they felt respected and supported as partners.

“They helped us speak internationally... they helped make our voice heard... The fact that people in the SRA are athletes or have experience working with grassroots organisations — they knew, not just by theory but by experience.” — Basket Pour Toutes

The coalition also responded to the harassment of boxers [Imane Khelif and Lin Yu-Ting](#), and opposed the disqualification of [Manizha Talash](#).

3. Pillar III: People

The most widely cited impact of the SRA's work in this pillar was the progress made in securing FIFA's support for an Afghan Women's National Football Team (AWNT) in exile, who played their first international tournament in November 2025 and were [officially recognized by FIFA](#) at the FIFA Congress in April 2026. While the campaign was led by the players themselves, the SRA's sustained advocacy, including a [major published report](#) and intensive engagement with FIFA, was described by the team's leadership as a “game-changer.” Critically, the SRA provided leadership without taking over.

“The success of the campaign was because of those who joined it... It gave us hope... a boost that we are not alone... We felt empowered, we felt supported... we felt it was our campaign, guided by our players.” — Afghan Women's National Team

Previously, the SRA also sought to galvanise support for women wrestlers in India campaigning for accountability for the abuse they had suffered for decades in the hands of the Indian Wrestling Federation. For the first time, in July 2024, the Athletes Network produced its own original research, publishing testimonies of wrestlers, parents, coaches and witnesses. While there were different views on the timeliness of the intervention, it succeeded in bringing international attention to what had been considered a local issue. The campaign brought together athletes and Reuters, AFP and India Today amplified the findings, prompting engagement from the National Human Rights Commission of India; however, the key campaign ask, for the IOC to establish a robust and independent safeguarding hotline, was not met.

In Mali, the SRA supported [Human Rights Watch's exposure](#) of years of sexual abuse within the Malian Basketball Federation, helping to coordinate advocacy with the World Players Association and the US Women's National Basketball Players Association (WNBPA), [providing guidance to players, and connecting survivors with legal and psychological support](#) in Bamako. Interviewees said the SRA “stepped in where others couldn't.” The campaign resulted in [a lifetime ban for the perpetrating coach and sanctions for four officials](#) — though survivors have not received adequate remedy, retaliation persists, and the federation's new president is a close ally of the one removed.

4. Pillar IV: Movement

Across interviews, there was a strong and consistent sense of an organisation that has grown — in confidence, in credibility, and in its ability to shape the field.

The development of the SRA into a legally independent entity, registered in the Netherlands in 2025 with its own governance and diversified funding base, was widely welcomed as a significant marker of maturity. From a position in 2020 when the SRA was largely dependent on funds from the World Players' Association and a single foundation, the SRA has since secured grants from the adidas Foundation, the Nebula Fund, the Swedish Postcode Lottery, Women Win, UNIFOR Social Justice Fund, the European Commission, the Open Society Foundations and a renewed grant from Oak Foundation. The secretariat has also invested in an internal Wellbeing Programme, reflecting a commitment to practising internally the values the SRA advocates for externally. As one interviewee put it: "the organisation is at a point of evolution and maturity." Greater clarity around organisational mandates has also helped both the SRA and the Centre for Sport and Human Rights work more effectively and collaboratively.

The [creation of the Athletes Network for Safer Sport](#) has been described across interviews as not only innovative but transformative. Expert practitioners described it as "one of the best examples of a survivor-led initiative - nuanced, trauma-informed, politically intelligent." The Network has provided a rare and needed space for survivors to organise, support each other and influence policy - with power coming from survivors "speaking with authority and strength rather than with shame and stigma." Its Emergency Fund has distributed EUR 88,000 to 44 individuals from 2024-2026, with recipients describing an experience that is "easy, simple and non-judgemental": "I think it's amazing, and I wish everyone could have access to that." Beyond direct support, the Network also organised capacity-building workshops on [media engagement](#), [advocacy](#), [gender-based violence](#) and led the UNESCO survivor consultation. Institutional actors confirmed that hearing from survivors directly shapes policy discussions in ways professional reports alone cannot.

The SRA's visibility has grown substantially. Sports governing bodies - including the IOC, FIFA and UEFA - now recognise the SRA as the primary civil society interlocutor, providing "a single, credible gateway." At the start of the period the SRA had no website and no social media presence; it is now a recognised reference point at major global conferences, increasingly quoted in international media, and more empowered to issue rapid reactive statements. The network of strategic partners — now including organisations in Mali, France, the USA, Iran, Belarus and Afghanistan - has significantly broadened the SRA's global reach.

An under-recognised but consistently valued contribution is the SRA's role as a shared learning space, enabling partners to engage on issues well beyond their traditional remits. As one core partner put it: "Being part of the SRA helps us learn more about other issues... it allows us to be better human rights advocates and to think much more broadly." Another added: "Every time there's a sport hook... the knowledge within the SRA helps me craft a response." The SRA has not only expanded the movement's size but its capacity — enabling partners to act collectively with far greater confidence.

IV. Strengths

“It’s the best coalition we’ve been part of.” — Core Partner

Partners consistently describe the SRA as a coalition that functions well because of its culture, leadership, breadth of expertise and the quality of its relationships. The secretariat — a team of four — is widely described as “punching above its weight” and is the subject of genuine admiration.

The coalition’s internal culture — feminist, trauma-informed, collaborative — shapes both how the group works internally and how it advocates externally. Several interviewees highlighted the sense of mutual respect, trust and genuine enjoyment.

“It’s really fun working in this group — serious, knowledgeable people with no competitiveness.”

The SRA’s survivor-centred approach is seen as a defining and distinguishing strength — not simply as a value but as a practical methodology that shapes research, advocacy and coalition relationships. The Athletes Network is the clearest expression of this, but the approach runs through the SRA’s work more broadly, from how cases are handled to how partners are supported to engage on safeguarding issues.

The quality of the SRA’s research and documentation has also been consistently highlighted as a core asset, with key reports cited demonstrating an ability to produce credible, evidence-based outputs that command attention from media, institutions and partners alike. The SRA’s investment in real-life testimonies and documented cases - rather than abstract analysis - has been specifically noted by UN bodies and sports governing bodies as adding distinctive value.

The breadth of the coalition - bringing together human rights organisations, trade unions, LGBTI groups, journalists, survivor-led organisations, safe sport specialists and fan representatives - is seen as a further defining strength, “bringing credibility and expertise into the room.” Sports bodies value the collective engagement, with one describing it as bringing together “the most prominent organisations in human rights and sport” through a single route.

Perhaps the most distinctive strength identified across interviews is the SRA’s positioning: “unapologetically activist and evidence-based”, bridging insider and outsider approaches without compromising its independence. The SRA is “trusted enough to get access, but still independent” — able to engage constructively with FIFA, the IOC and UEFA while retaining the credibility and freedom to criticise. That institutional recognition has translated into genuine standing: FIFA, the IOC and UEFA all engage directly with the SRA. This balance — diplomacy in the room, watchdog outside it — is seen as essential to protect.

V. Areas for Development

The most consistently raised concern is prioritization, and a sense that “we can’t do everything.” There is a strong and repeated call not to expand the scope of work without a corresponding expansion in resources. Building on the existing Lead Partner model, the coalition should make more disciplined choices about where to focus.

The debate around the balance between insider and outsider strategies is live and must continue to be a constant subject of discussion to ensure the right balance is struck. Most interviewees felt the SRA currently does this relatively well - “trusted enough to get access, but still independent” - but some warned against the risk of becoming too close to sports governing bodies in case it limited the space to criticise. There is a clear consensus that independence must never be compromised.

“It’s unapologetically activist but still evidence-based. That’s rare and it’s one of its great strengths... It should stay that way — the watchdog, not the insider.”

Interviewees also highlighted the need for Core Partners to continue to deepen their organisations’ institutional engagement with the SRA to ensure long term support that goes beyond individuals, as well as to continue to diversify representation of the Core Partner group. Continuing to ensure that the SRA is fully global should be an intentional strategy involving choices about what to focus on, where to work, who to work with, and who is at the table.

While there was universal praise for the progress made by the Athletes Network and support for the autonomy of the network within the SRA, interviewees did recommend more could be done to share knowledge, information and plans between the Network and Core Partner group. Since the evaluation was completed, a member of the Network Advisory Council joined the SRA board, better supporting this integration.

On communications, the SRA has made substantial progress but should continue to work with Core Partner communications teams to bolster visibility, as well as identify ways of increasing visibility in non-English speaking markets.

VI. Looking ahead

“SRA should be able to set and raise expectations on what’s possible in sport.”

Despite the challenges ahead, the evaluation finds an organisation that has made remarkable progress in five years and is well placed to meet the moment. The current four pillars — policies, events, people and the movement — remain well-suited to structure the next strategy.

Continuing to develop the Athletes’ Network, strengthening secretariat capacity, pursuing greater global representation, and maintaining strict independence from advocacy targets are all identified as priorities. Above all, there is a clear call for discipline and focus: not to stretch the organisation further without the capacity to match it, and to be confident in the SRA’s distinctive role.

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