

## **FEPSAC Position Stand: Culturally competent practice in sport and exercise psychology**

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FEPSAC works for the development of the field of sport and exercise psychology from the European perspective. Europe embraces different countries and cultures as well as multiculturalism within each country. Sport and exercise psychology practitioners (SEPPs) can be exposed to work in diverse contexts which implies their necessity to acknowledge cultural differences and to respect them in applied practice.

Thus, the standpoint of the following text is to provide guidance for SEPPs on how to conduct culturally competent practice in sport and exercise psychology. These principles are intended to ensure the dignity and welfare of all groups, organisations and individuals with whom SEPPs may interact with and provide professional services to. The terms “culture”, “multiculturalism” and “diversity” in this document are used in a broad sense encompassing aspects of identity related to age, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, ethnic/ racial heritage, language, disability, socioeconomic status, education, level of achievement, religious/ spiritual orientation, and other cultural dimensions.

The goals of these guidelines are:

- 1) to emphasize the importance of multicultural awareness and diverse client group inclusion into sport and exercise psychology services;
- 2) to provide SEPPs basic guidelines and key points in working with culturally diverse populations.

It needs to be noted that these guidelines should be followed in accordance with FEPSAC ethical principles and existing national guidelines or recommendations.

***Principle 1: Increase self-awareness of one's cultural background and its implications on one's professional interactions***

Sport and exercise psychology, just like any other branch of psychology, is characterised by interactions between individuals or groups that represent cultural contexts. SEPPs come to professional interactions with their own cultural background and multiple identities that encompass historical heritage, belonging to ethnical/ racial group, national origin, religious/ spiritual preferences, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation and intrapsychic cultural representations such as beliefs, attitudes, values, biases, assumptions and stereotypes of others and themselves. SEPPs therefore are encouraged to be aware of their own cultural context (e.g. of their own culturally constituted beliefs, values, attitudes, and any hidden philosophical assumptions) and its potential representation in their behaviour and interactions.

Attention should be drawn to the fact that above mentioned cultural representations are not always apparent. Stereotypes, biases, attitudes, beliefs and other phenomena are often unconscious and automatic. These unconscious phenomena can become more apparent by the means of self-reflections and self-awareness.

SEPPs should be cognizant that as any other human being he or she might be prone to categorize people and to assign stereotyped attributes to that category. Another threat is a tendency to favour in-group members over out-group members. SEPPs should seek to decrease the negative effect that categorization might have on professional interactions.

***Principle 2: Be conscious of client's cultural context***

SEPPs should be well aware of the cultural background of their client to the extent that the client is willing to disclose. As stated before, these backgrounds shape interactions, expectations and behaviours of the client. In some cases, it may cause miscommunications or misunderstandings, when practitioner and client represent different cultural backgrounds. It can influence client's adherence to the program, drop out, emotional, cognitive and behavioural reactions, and many other aspects of interaction. SEPPs who are aware of the unique experiences that a client's cultural context embraces can better manage these reactions and ensure a more effective interaction. Cultural competence starts with considering athletes,

exercisers, coaches, and sport psychology professionals as cultural beings with their distinctive and individual, but always contextually contained backgrounds and experiences.

***Principle 3: Adopt multicultural approaches and appreciate human diversity***

SEPPs should adopt multicultural approaches, acknowledge cultural differences and appreciate diversity. This can be achieved by increasing contacts with certain groups or seeing individuals as individuals rather than group of individuals. This should be followed by an effort put into familiarizing with different cultural aspects by the means of enhancing knowledge, skills and competencies to increase mutual understanding and consequently to make professional interactions more effective. Effort should be invested to create culturally safe athletic environments in which athletes could express and would not need to hide parts of their identity.

***Principle 4: Engage in ongoing education that involves enhanced understanding and development of competencies related to multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion***

SEPPs are encouraged to recognize in what ways culture can shape an individual's worldview. In line with Principle "Competence" of the FEPSAC Ethics Principles, which states that practitioners and researchers should maintain the highest standards in their work and engage in an ongoing education, practitioners are called to increase their knowledge about culturally different groups and to further develop their understanding about psychological consequences and possible concerns that cultural background brings. This includes but is not limited to understanding of issues of concealment, intolerance, discrimination, oppression, devaluation and social inequalities brought by ethnicity/ race/ national origin, gender, sexual orientation, religious/ spiritual preferences, disability, etc.

Understanding cultural heritage and background can help to increase understanding of the ways that a client is presenting him/-herself, reacting to and behaving in certain situations. An extension of knowledge, development of culture-centred skills and non-traditional methods can broaden the current set of the practitioner's skills and ensure a more effective interaction.

Focusing exclusively on a majority-centred worldview might limit work with other cultural groups as it may lead to mislabelling or misdiagnosing problems and interventions.

Therefore, SEPPs are recommended to invest into developing/increasing their cultural competence. This can be accomplished by increasing cultural knowledge (e.g. understanding of cross-cultural psychology, cultural psychology, and cultural praxis as well as of other paradigms), and training of cultural skills (e.g. cultural reflexivity, culturally informed communication, and interventions).

### ***Principle 5: Be sensitive to linguistic requirements***

Relevant, information provided to clients should be presented in a way that is most convenient to the individual or group client. First of all that refers to the language in which all communications are conducted. In relevance to Principle “Consent” of the FEPSAC Ethics Principles, which requires researchers and practitioners in the field of sport and exercise psychology to obtain informed consent from all clients before undertaking any work, it should be advised that such documents are provided in the client’s preferred language or additional time is devoted to ensure all information is understood correctly.

In addition to that, practitioners are encouraged to respect the client’s language preferences in applied work. That imposes a need for additional skills for the practitioner that imposes a need for additional skills for the practitioner, such as being fluent in several languages or being able to work within a network for referral to a different partner.

### ***Principle 6: Assist clients in understanding issues of multiculturalism, cultural diversity and inclusion***

In a broad sense, SEPPs act in a role of educator teaching individual and group clients as well as students about cultural diversity. They can be mentors and teachers who help to enhance athletes’ or coaches’ understanding of their environments and possible concerns that arise due to cultural differences and human diversity, and the way that these affect interactions.

In the role of educators, SEPPs should be prepared for potential resistance to multicultural approaches as it challenges clients’ negative stereotypes and assumptions. This, however, should not become a reason to ignore the topic of cultural diversity. Instead, it should call for

increased efforts to create safe learning environment, to help clients to go beyond their biases and to manage emotions associated with this path.

***Principle 7: Strive to increase access to services for diverse client groups on an equal basis***

SEPPs should be aware of possible preferences to work with some groups of clients over others and to ensure that equal opportunities to access service are available to all sport participants, regardless of cultural background. Special effort needs to be made towards availability of sport and exercise psychology services to minority or marginalised groups. In other words, various minority groups should be presented with an equal possibility to access quality sport psychology services.

When decisions to favour some client groups based on level of achievement, national origin, religious preferences, sexual orientation, level of ability/ disability or any other criteria is made on an organisational level, SEPPs should draw organisational attention to these injustices and invest effort to eliminate them.

***Principle 8: Act as agents of change in the environment and organisation***

SEPPs are encouraged to be active agents of change, delivering messages of tolerance, equity, justice, letting go of negative biases and stereotypes, and promoting understanding and appreciation of different cultural backgrounds and contexts. In the same vein, they are invited to be aware of their responsibility as well as personal and professional roles that they play in sport community that lead to changes that embrace multicultural acceptance and inclusivity.

In certain cases, they can be role models for athletes, coaches, families and organisations by showing an example of treating culturally diverse or minority clients and students as individuals with their specific needs, or on an equal basis as majority group, when this is relevant.

SEPPs should also be well aware of organisational policies related to multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion, and to suggest relevant changes when these are allowed by their position and are deemed necessary.

SEPPs should work on prevention of all forms of racism, discrimination, marginalisation, and stigmatisation.

*These guidelines are based on APA Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists (2002), BPS Division of Clinical Psychology Inclusivity strategy 2016-2018 (2016), APA Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients (2012), ISSP Position Stand: Culturally competent research and practice in sport and exercise psychology (Ryba, T. V., Stambulova, N. B., Si, G., & Schinke, R. J. , 2013), ISSP Position Stand: Transnationalism, Mobility, and Acculturation in and through Sport (Ryba, T., Schinke, R., Stambulova, N. & Elbe, A.-M., 2017).*

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