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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject: Safe Environments in Sport
- *Policy debate*

Following consultation of the members of the Working Party on Sport, the Presidency has prepared the attached background document, which is submitted as the basis for the policy debate at the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council meeting on 23-24 November 2023.

SPAIN 2023 PEUE SPORT
BACKGROUND NOTE FOR THE POLITICAL DEBATE
OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS
24 November 2023

Safe Environments in Sport

Sport is considered to be one of the most beneficial activities for human health, both physical and mental, as well as being important for social integration and inclusion, also encompassing the social, personal, economic and reputational dimension, particularly where competitive sport is concerned.

The European Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, as laid down in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union brings together the most important personal freedoms and rights enjoyed by citizens of the EU in one legally binding document.

In November 2021, a Council resolution set out the key features of a European Sport Model (ESM), such as freedom of association, a pyramidal structure, an open system of promotion and relegation, a grassroots approach and solidarity, a role in national identity, community building, and structures based on voluntary activity. Sport's social educational, cultural and health roles are also recognised, in line with the relevant provisions of EU law. The resolution furthermore calls on the Member States, the European Commission and the sports movement to respect and promote fundamental and human rights in and through sport.

The values of the ESM are directly linked to ensuring a safer sporting environment for all.

Health and safety are essential elements that must be considered in order to realise the full individual and collective benefit of sport. There are a number of factors to consider when it comes to environments for sports, such as technical and logistical issues, social and environmental matters, and the general health of the people involved.

Each of these factors entails significant challenges that will have to be tackled in the near future.

The first of these challenges concerns safe sport infrastructure and facilities, since practising sport should not entail any risk to health and safety. In this respect, there are a number of elements that need to be taken into consideration, such as the age of the participant and the type of sport. When planning, designing and managing sports facilities and spaces, emergency protocols should be a priority, as should accessibility measures, sustainability certification and maintenance reviews of spaces. Addressing these elements in the short, medium, and long term could have a direct and positive impact on individuals, while also promoting supportive and inclusive societies that are committed to the well-being and protection of their citizens.

From a social and cultural perspective, health and safety and the medical and hygiene aspects of mass events and sporting competitions are essential if sport is to be practised in a safe environment. Structural elements, such as the quality of the facilities themselves, have an important role to play in terms of security, as do logistics, organisation and management, where staff and indoor and outdoor spaces are concerned. The involvement of security staff (police and security bodies) is key to achieving secure environments in sport.

In view of the particular legal, judicial, cultural and historical circumstances in each Member State, as well as the specific nature and seriousness of protection and security issues, the approach to secure environments in sport must be comprehensive and holistic. Consequently, effective international, national and local alliances should be forged in order to develop an integrated and balanced multi-institutional approach to ensuring safe environments for sport.

One of the main challenges in this respect is undoubtedly identifying, preventing and responding to racist, xenophobic or hate speech. In addition, sports-related violence can sometimes spread beyond the sporting event itself and present a danger to the wider public. Therefore, it would be highly beneficial if authorities and security staff could exchange information about risk profiles at sporting events. It would also be useful to invest in training courses on crowd control, violence prevention and vandalism to ensure a safe, protective and welcoming environment in sport and at any other mass event.

Sport plays an important role in inclusion and in the promotion of values such as cooperation, solidarity, justice, and democracy. This approach must begin in schools and must be accompanied by adequate and proportional measures, as part of a broad strategy of security and protection, in order to create safe sporting events that are attractive for all.

The public authorities or competent bodies should also adopt standards or implement mechanisms to guarantee the effectiveness of procedures, protocols and protection and security systems.

Health is also an important element in the discussion about safe environments for sport.

Sport brings undisputed health benefits, although it can present a risk to health if it is not practised in a safe environment or if the sport practised is not suitable for the individual, who might be exposed to accidents, injuries, or illnesses as a result. To minimise these risks, a sports medical examination should be carried out before any new sport practice is taken up. This would assess a person's suitability for a particular sport and detect pathologies or any medical condition that could make it inadvisable to practise a particular sport. Such an examination would also reduce sudden death in sport if certain medical conditions were identified in advance. It would be highly recommended for all those who perform a physical activity or who practise amateur sport to undergo a medical assessment and it would be advisable to make this mandatory at the beginning of the season and in order to obtain a licence to practise that sport. For high-level athletes, it would also be advisable to undergo a health monitoring programme. Appropriate medical assistance should also be provided in sports facilities and at competition venues, particularly for big events.

It is equally important to implement minimum requirements for the skills and competences of coaches because they play a key role in changing society. This is why coaches must be held accountable for ensuring that they operate in a safe and ethical manner for the benefit of the participant or athlete.

From a social point of view, we have identified different areas that need work in order to ensure a safe environment for sport.

Firstly, childhood sport is important for the proper physical, social, emotional, and psychological development of children. In cases where there is any hint of abuse, harassment, violence or physical, psychological or social aggression, educators and local authorities must work together to protect children.

The 2019 Commission study on safeguarding children in sport identified two major areas in the field of safeguarding children in sport which require attention: the conceptualisation of violence against children in sport (including issues such as psychological abuse, bullying or over-training that have historically received less attention) and of adequate safeguarding measures; and the development of more consistent safeguarding standards and practices (such as the need for appropriate levels of governance and developing clearer guidance for stakeholders and practitioners).

Secondly, conditions must be such that all persons with disabilities can participate in sport in an equal and safe environment, considering the needs of adapted sport.

The third area concerns the fight against sexual violence against both men and women. In line with the objective of a safe environment for sport, measures must be considered to tackle sexual violence, as well as verbal, physical or psychological abuse and harassment. Sports federations should establish action plans, develop reporting channels, and establish mechanisms to prevent abuse and provide safe environments for every sport.

1. What are the most successful measures that have been taken in your country to promote safe environments in sport?
 2. What measures should be coordinated at European level to promote safe environments in sport?
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