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From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: Conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on sustainable and accessible sports infrastructure

Delegations will find attached the abovementioned conclusions as approved by the Council (Education, Youth, Culture and Sport) at its meeting on 28-29 November 2022.

Conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on sustainable and accessible sports infrastructure

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES MEETING WITHIN THE COUNCIL,

RECALLING THAT:

1. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of December 2006 promotes action to enable persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in sporting activities and invites States Parties to take appropriate measures to allow such possibilities.
2. The European Commission's July 2007 White Paper on Sport calls for using the potential of sport for social inclusion, integration and equal opportunities and invites Member States and sports organisations to adapt sports infrastructure in line with the needs of people with disabilities.
3. The Council conclusions of June 2018 on promoting the common values of the EU through sport stress that 'all people should be free to practise sport and to feel part of society, and different sectors related to sport can do what is in their capacity to foster integration as well as to provide equal opportunities to engage in sport and avoid discrimination and social exclusion'.
4. In the key findings of the December 2018 report to the European Commission entitled 'Mapping on Access to Sport for People with Disabilities', good personal health, individual development and social well-being are listed as benefits of sport participation for people with disabilities.

5. The Council conclusions of June 2019 on access to sport for persons with disabilities emphasise that persons with disabilities have a higher probability of being subject to socioeconomic disadvantages and invite Member States to ‘take action to ensure access of persons with and without disabilities to sports infrastructure, including attendance at sports events, training or participation in sports’.
6. The SHARE Initiative report of February 2020 by the European Commission on the ‘Contribution of sport to regional development through sport 2021-2027’ insists on quality infrastructural and spatial development of sport infrastructures as drivers for urban regeneration, employment multiplier and social inclusion.
7. The Council Resolution of December 2020 on the European Union Work Plan for Sport for the period from 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2024 includes, as a guiding objective, awareness of the important contribution that sport can make to Europe’s socially and environmentally sustainable growth.
8. The Council conclusions of June 2021 on Sport innovation recognise that innovative sport infrastructures, and the processes for their construction and maintenance, can, among other things, provide better and safer conditions for sport and physical activity, while being more sustainable, environmentally friendly, accessible and energy efficient.
9. The Council of Europe Revised European Sports Charter of October 2021 calls for economically, socially and environmentally sustainable behaviour as well as for the responsible practice of indoor and outdoor sports activities. Owners of sports infrastructure are called on ‘to act proactively to identify the effects and consequences of their facilities, avoid potential damage to nature and, where necessary, take counter- and protective measures against such risks’.

10. The Council conclusions of December 2021 on lifelong physical activity emphasise that ‘disadvantaged groups¹ across all age groups are often insufficiently physically active due to fewer opportunities and limited access’.
11. The Council conclusions of April 2022 on ‘sport and physical activity, a promising lever to transform behaviour for sustainable development’, highlight the importance of minimising ‘the negative impact of all types of sports activities on biodiversity, the environment, and the dynamics of the ongoing process of climate change’ and the need ‘to ensure that the sports sector makes its contribution to the European Union’s climate and environmental objectives, as set out in the European Green Deal’.

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT:

12. Sports infrastructure, as a place for practicing sports and physical activities, can contribute to enabling the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)² in various areas. These include environmental, social and economic sustainability goals.
13. Sport and sports infrastructure affect and are also affected by climate change. The effects of climate change can lead to damage to buildings and other sports infrastructure owing to phenomena such as violent storms or floods, damage to playing surfaces caused by extreme weather conditions, coastal erosion, or lack of snow as a result of rising temperatures associated with global warming. This leads to a decrease in the number of locations for sports practice³ and a reduced availability of the remaining sports infrastructure.

¹ Definition according to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE): ‘groups of persons that experience a higher risk of poverty, social exclusion, discrimination and violence than the general population, including, but not limited to, ethnic minorities, migrants, people with disabilities, isolated elderly people and children’.

² United Nations, Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, A/RES/70/1.

³ UN Sports for Climate Action Framework, 2018.

14. The construction, renovation, maintenance, and use of sports infrastructure also have deteriorating effects on the environment and the climate since they directly or indirectly generate greenhouse gas emissions over its entire lifecycle⁴. The overall sustainability of sports infrastructure can be most affected by planning⁵.
15. The planning process for sustainable and accessible sports infrastructure be it in the construction of new infrastructure, the renovation of existing infrastructure, or its operation and maintenance, should primarily reflect ways to maximise its capacity and energy efficiency, including the concept of ‘active design’⁶, barrier-free access, and the reuse or recycling of materials and equipment. Multi-purpose infrastructure with year-round use, particularly outdoor sports infrastructure, brownfield redevelopment and the conversion of existing non-sports infrastructure into sports infrastructure, should be preferred.
16. As only 12 % of materials used in construction in the EU are currently recycled⁷, support for the reuse of materials is needed. As sports infrastructure is a major consumer of energy and other resources the adoption of modern, highly energy-efficient solutions for sports infrastructure not only contributes to the conservation of resources but can also lead to economic savings as a potential positive side effect.
17. The current energy crisis triggered, inter alia, by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, poses significant and serious challenges to sports infrastructure. Rising energy prices compromise sports infrastructure’s operations and the opportunities and conditions for practicing sport and physical activity. This further highlights the importance of sustainable, energy-efficient solutions and practices in relation to sports infrastructure.

⁴ Notably construction, operation, maintenance and also demolition of infrastructures

⁵ German Federal Institute of Sport Science, Guidelines for Sustainable Sports Facility Construction, Criteria for the Construction of Sustainable Sports Halls, 2021.

⁶ In the context of these Council conclusions, ‘active design’ means: a set of building and planning principles that promote physical activity.

⁷ EUROSTAT 39/2019, Record recycling rates and use of recycled materials in the EU.

18. Given the cost of construction and renovation of sports infrastructure, multi-source financing can support its modernisation, in particular with regard to environmental sustainability and the protection of resources. Available funds through EU programmes – notably the ERDF, ESF+ and RRF – can contribute to the construction or renovation of sports infrastructure while fulfilling their objectives as ‘greener, low-carbon Europe’.
19. The accessibility of sports infrastructure is a key factor in providing equal and inclusive access to physical activity. Physical activity and sport can lead to a wide range of benefits for individuals, communities and society at large by contributing to participants’ physical literacy, well-being, mental and physical health and ability to develop social skills, and by improving people’s role in society. Physical activity and sport bring benefits not only to individuals but also to society as a whole⁸.
20. Non-discriminatory access to sports infrastructure and the practice of physical activity and sport is a fundamental right regardless of disability, age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property or any other basis.
21. The availability of accessible sports infrastructure can contribute to the development of parasports on a local, national and international level.

⁸ UNESCO, The International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport, SHS/2015/PI/H/14 REV, 2015.

22. The accessibility of sports infrastructure can sometimes be limited for athletes, coaches, fans and other persons to use sports infrastructure without the help of a third party. This should be addressed by relevant policies and criteria: accessibility policies and criteria need to be formulated by stakeholders involved in the process, such as local, regional and national public authorities, as well as the sports movement and persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, to ensure that all persons with disabilities have equal opportunities and equal access to participate in society and the economy⁹.
23. The location of sports infrastructure plays a vital role in terms of accessibility. Lack of sports infrastructure and information about opportunities to practise sports act as barriers to sports practice.¹⁰ People in certain rural, insular, or remote areas, such as the EU's outermost regions, may have fewer opportunities to practise sports owing to the limited sports infrastructure available to them. This can also be the case in highly dense urban areas due to waiting lists and under-capacity of sports infrastructure owing to the lack of space to build new infrastructure. Placement should be planned based on the needs and demand of society, the suitability of a location and its accessibility by means of public transport or active forms of mobility (such as walking or cycling) which can contribute positively to health and the environment.

⁹ European Commission, Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, 2021.

¹⁰ European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture Mapping of innovative practices in the EU to promote sport outside of traditional structures. Final report to the European Commission, Publications Office, 2021.

HIGHLIGHTING THE FOLLOWING:

24. In view of the ambitious goals set in the European Green Deal and the UN SDGs, it is necessary to ensure that sport and sports infrastructure contribute to social, economic, and environmental sustainability, social interaction, and inclusion. To achieve these goals, cross-sectoral cooperation, and consultation with relevant stakeholders such as persons with disabilities, through their representative organisations, is needed, together with common action and responsibility taken by all relevant stakeholders, when planning, constructing, renovating, maintaining, and using sports infrastructure.
25. A key goal in improving the sustainability of sports infrastructure is to reduce the negative impact on the environment and biodiversity during all phases of its lifecycle and adapt the locations of sports infrastructure to climate threats.
26. Faced with the need to modernise sports infrastructure and implement sustainable, energy-efficient and low-carbon solutions and accessibility measures, it is necessary to identify sources of funding for the construction and renovation of sustainable sports infrastructure. The promotion of the benefits of implementing sustainable solutions can generate motivation and momentum for change; these benefits are often highlighted during the hosting of major sport events. Multi-source funding, including the use of existing EU funds, can be an effective way of contributing to these objectives.

27. Ensuring access to sports infrastructure is essential for the inclusion of persons with disabilities and from different backgrounds, ethnicities, gender, persons with a different sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin and can also create a sense of community.
28. It is important to enable barrier-free access to sports infrastructure and participation in sporting and physical activities, in particular for persons with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups, so that as many persons as possible can enjoy the benefits offered by sport.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES, AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL, TO:

29. Support equal access for all citizens to sustainable, aesthetic and inclusive sports infrastructure to serve sports activities and also communities and society as mentioned in the core values of the Commission's New European Bauhaus initiative¹¹.
30. Consider establishing policy frameworks, guidelines, roadmaps and incentives to ensure that private and public sports infrastructures become more sustainable and accessible to everybody.
31. Include parameters¹² for adequate physical and sensorial accessibility to sports infrastructure in policies in order to design sports infrastructure that provides barrier-free access to sports for citizens with specific physical accessibility requirements.
32. Consider developing systems of environmental criteria to monitor the impact of the climate on sports infrastructure over its life cycle, while taking the scale of each piece of sports infrastructure into account.

¹¹ European Commission, New European Bauhaus, COM(2021)573 final.

¹² Such as the parameters mentioned in the International Paralympic Committee Accessibility Guide.

33. Aim to include environmental and accessibility criteria as positive criteria for accessing public funding for the planning, construction and renovation of sports infrastructure and to support measures for energy-efficient solutions as well as the use and reuse of existing infrastructure, resources and circular economy solutions to limit the use of new materials and increase their recycling within the economy.
34. Promote cooperation between relevant sports stakeholders and public authorities, including the managing authorities of decentralised EU funds, to support the construction and renovation of sports infrastructure and explore options to co-finance them.
35. Contribute to the mapping of sports infrastructure, particularly by supporting the development and use of databases containing statistics on sports infrastructure (for example, through an online platform) and building sports infrastructure passports in order to gather information about existing sports infrastructure in the Member States and its characteristics to support the planning and location of sports infrastructure and to maximise its use.
36. Contribute to the establishment of crisis management schemes for sports infrastructure to prevent operational limitations arising as a result of unexpected events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters or energy crises, and to the implementation of safety and security guidelines to protect all users of or visitors to sports infrastructure.
37. Support the identification and elimination of access barriers to sports infrastructure and promote non-discriminatory access for all, regardless of disabilities, age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion or national or social origin, and share best practices with other Member States about sustainable measures.

INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

38. Promote the sharing of knowledge and best practices, exploring new aspects of traditional planning such as transformation and reuse of brownfields and existing buildings in sports infrastructure, foster innovation research to support the implementation of sustainable solutions throughout the lifecycle of sports infrastructure through the Erasmus+ programme and continue support for existing initiatives such as the Expert Group on Green Sport or the SHARE Initiative.
39. Support the exchange of best practices and promote initiatives addressing inclusion and equal opportunities when accessing sports infrastructure.
40. Facilitate the exploring of opportunities for the use of EU funding for sustainable sports infrastructure. Regularly inform Member States and relevant stakeholders about potential EU funding opportunities for sustainable sports infrastructure to facilitate its construction and renovation and improve its accessibility.
41. Consider the work of the Council of Europe on the development of sports databases and registers in the Member States with other relevant actors through best practice and knowledge exchange and the sharing of data, including data on environmental impact, usage, size and accessibility in its initiatives and proposals, including within the Green Sport Expert Group.
42. Take into account equal accessibility to sports infrastructure in accordance with Articles 9 and 30 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)¹³ and the UN SDGs.

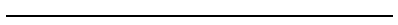
¹³ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs Disability, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006.

INVITE THE SPORTS MOVEMENT AND OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS TO:

43. Take into account sustainability criteria¹⁴, including the expected costs throughout the life-cycle, for the construction, renovation, maintenance and use of sports infrastructure while respecting its various forms, together with the needs of society and the environment and the requirements of each location.
44. Where possible, carry out an environmental impact assessment to evaluate the impact of the construction, renovation and operation of sports infrastructure on the environment.
45. Wherever possible, consider reusing existing infrastructure and resources and using circular economy solutions to limit the use of new materials and increase their recycling within the economy.
46. Use the potential of sports infrastructure and its multi-purpose characteristics to maximise its utilisation for sports and also to serve communities.
47. Promote barrier-free access to sports infrastructure via various modes of transport in cooperation with public authorities, such as public transport or active forms of mobility (for example, walking or cycling).
48. Promote sustainable and short supply chains and sustainable criteria in tenders for contractors to construct, renovate and maintain sports infrastructure.
49. Ensure that universal human and labour rights of all people affected by the construction and renovation of sports infrastructures are respected.

¹⁴ The ‘sustainability criteria’ entail the following indicators: ecological quality, sociocultural and functional quality, economic quality, technical quality, process quality, location quality and sports functional quality.

50. Protect people, fauna and flora and the soil in the vicinity of construction sites of sports infrastructure.
51. Consider incorporating resource and waste management systems to lower the consumption of water, energy and other resources, encourage sustainable and responsible consumption and reduce expenses. Educate users, staff and visitors about the responsible use of sports infrastructure to extend its lifespan and spare natural resources. Promote the benefits of the sustainability measures implemented and the link between saving resources and reducing the impact of sports infrastructure on the environment.
52. Contribute to the establishment of crisis management schemes for sports infrastructure to prevent operational limitations arising as a result of unexpected events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters or energy crises and to the implementation of safety and security guidelines to ensure the safety of all visitors to sports infrastructure.
53. Act responsibly when using sports infrastructure and event-related infrastructure in the course of organising sports events in indoor and outdoor settings by avoiding or restoring environmental disturbances as far as possible.
54. Facilitate access to sports infrastructure for persons with disabilities and follow relevant national and international guidelines and recommendations.
55. Where appropriate, actively use and contribute to sports databases to provide and obtain relevant data on the characteristics and location of sports infrastructure.



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