

Strasbourg, 8 September 2022

MSL17(2022)9rev

17th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport

Rethinking sport for all: a unique boost for
one's health, life and dreams

Antalya, Türkiye
26 October 2022

**REFERENCE DOCUMENT
ON THEMES 1 AND 2**

Prepared by

The Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) - which brings together 41 countries committed to advancing a sport which is ethical, inclusive and safe through policies and their implementation - organises a conference of Council of Europe Ministers responsible for Sport every two years. This conference also brings together representatives from organisations active in the sport sector which are EPAS's interlocutors and partners.

The 17th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport will be held on 26 October 2022 in Antalya (Türkiye). It will highlight the importance of the recent revised European Sports Charter as an instrumental response to emerging challenges to sport policies, and a solid basis for the promotion of a value-based sport for all.

The European Sports Charter will serve as common thread underpinning all of the Conference's thematic debates.

Article 2, paragraph 1:

“sport” means all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organised participation, are aimed at maintaining or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competitions at all levels.

The overarching theme which will guide the exchanges and discussions of the Conference will be:

Rethinking sport for all: a unique boost for one's health, life and dreams

I - Sport for all: uniting us for stronger societies

(See Article 1, paragraph 1, Article 6, paragraph 2 and Article 10 of the revised European Sports Charter)

The revised European Sports Charter firmly recalls *“that access to sport for all is considered to be a fundamental right”* and that all human beings have *“an inalienable right of access to sport in a safe environment”*, as essential for their personal development and instrumental in the exercise of the rights to health, education, culture and participation in community life.

The revised European Sports Charter furthermore states that no discrimination shall be permitted in the access to sports facilities or to sports activities.

Despite the existence of standards guaranteeing the principle of equality and the right for everyone to participate in sport, a gap still persists between standards (*de jure*) and practice (*de facto*) and discrimination cases are still numerous.

This first theme will be addressed under three main angles:

a) Gender equality – ensuring women's equal participation and involvement

Sport is a universally recognised means of empowerment, in particular also for women and allows them to remain physically healthy and contributes to their mental health and well-being.

In terms of gender equality and in particular on ensuring women's equal participation and involvement in sports (in leadership roles notably), despite a Council of Europe Recommendation on gender mainstreaming in sport (2015) and a joint EU/Council of Europe project "All In" from 2018-2019, gaps on the ground remain wide in terms of practice of sport, participation in decision-making in sport governing bodies, income from professional sport activities, balanced representation and coverage in the media.

Change is therefore still necessary to break down the existing barriers, in order to reduce the differences in treatment, combat discrimination and encourage women to partake in sport on an equal footing and to be part of sport leadership.

To ensure gender balance is achieved in sport, and to enable sport to become a real and powerful driver for women's and girls' empowerment, multiple actions have to be undertaken and sustained, now!

To this end, the revised European Sports Charter notably prompts the implementation of strategies on gender mainstreaming in sport.

Participants who so wish are invited to answer one or more of the following questions, taking into account a maximum speaking time of 3 minutes:

What are the obstacles that still exist and that constitute barriers to women's participation in sport or its leadership and what measures should governments and EPAS take to increase equal access to the practice of sport and to sport leadership positions? What have you done to implement the recommendation on gender mainstreaming in sport? How can the development of indicators and the systematic gathering of data be supported? Do you have illustrative projects or examples of good practice in your countries/organisations?

b) Sport as a means of inclusion: its role for disadvantaged groups

Sport enables a sense of community within a team a group, etc. irrespective of e.g. status, age, race, disability, gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation.

By practising a sport, competing, playing a game, people feel valued and by getting involved in the life of a sporting community, they can express themselves, learn competencies, feel better and enjoy unique moments of well-being.

Sport can be used to promote diversity and mutual understanding, it can also foster social cohesion and integration, facilitating change and boosting people's capacities and/or reducing different forms and manifestations of pain and trauma.

Positive experiences highlighting the potential of sport for promoting the Council of Europe's fundamental values of human rights should be shared widely.

Participants who so wish are invited to answer one or more of the following questions, taking into account a maximum speaking time of 3 minutes:

What measures should governments and EPAS take to allow disadvantaged groups to have equal access to the practice of sport and to sport leadership? What have you done to promote diversity in sport? How can the development of indicators and the systematic gathering of data be supported? Do you have examples of inclusive projects or practices in your countries/organisations that could serve as examples?

c) Sport for children: education, safeguarding and development

Sport can in particular have an essential benefit for children: enabling them to play and enjoy friendships, whilst developing their physical and motor skills, acquiring non-formal skills, nourishing their dreams and learning ethical behaviours and essential societal values and principles.

Physical activity and sport are essential to the development of children and their empowerment as individuals. Practicing sport, from the school sport activities to the club and associations programmes, also comprises a valuable educative component and enables children to acquire social skills and learn about important values and principles. The impact of this education is maximised due to its tailored-made design according to their age groups.

As great as sport is for children, they can unfortunately be at risk in certain sporting environments. Physical and verbal abuse and violence in all its forms against children in sport happens far too often: in all countries, in all sports, at all levels from grassroots to elite sport – with a devastating and long-lasting impact. This situation is based on various risk factors in sport, such as e.g. authoritarian training methods, *de facto* dependent relationships between coaches and athletes, scandal avoidance tendencies, a male-dominated gender ratio and the existence of reward structures. These negative trends can nevertheless be addressed and prevented, to ensure that sport remains a safe, healthy and positive environment for children.

Public authorities, the sport movement and other stakeholders have to take the necessary prevention and protection measures to stop forms of violence or abuse and ensure the safeguarding of children.,.. This also includes building partnerships amongst sectors to reach those important aims. Governments, sports clubs, associations and federations, educational institutions, as well as athletes and coaches all have their role to play in taking and implementing concrete measures to prevent and respond to abuse in sport.

Participants who so wish are invited to answer one or more of the following questions, taking into account a maximum speaking time of 3 minutes:

What measures are in place in your country/organisation that could serve as a best practice to prevent any form of physical or mental abuse of children? Are international initiatives such as “Start to Talk” been supported by your country/organisation? How can access to physical education, facilities and sport equipment be enhanced and how can the coordination between schools, clubs or associations be facilitated? Are the potential risks to health and wellbeing arising in the context of excessive training and competition of children addressed?

II - Rethinking sport: leading the way for a healthy and sustainable future

(See Articles 1, 10.1, 12.1 17.2, 20.3 of the revised European Sports Charter)

The positive effects of sport and physical activity on people's lives are widely recognised; they include benefits for our health, development, education, well-being and societies.

However, today these positive aspects seem to be challenged by increasingly sedentary lifestyles and by the prevalence of the use of digital tools and devices in our lives, and in the

lives of children in particular. A trend that has unfortunately been observed and reinforced with the COVID-19 pandemic.

How can we reverse this trend, and how can the COVID-19 pandemic become a catalyst for sport, boosting access to sport for all, enhancing individual practice at grass-roots level and ensuring that people return to sporting activities? The COVID-19 pandemic has very clearly demonstrated the need for physical activity and the importance to provide the possibility to practice sport for everyone. These trends also became apparent via the implementation of recovery plans for sport, at different levels in many countries.

For this reason, sport and physical activities must be supported to become an integral part of today's way of life, practiced either in an organised or individual manner, from school sport and clubs to company sport, finding the means to make its multifarious benefits thrive in the years to come.

Furthermore, emerging challenges be they legal, financial, organisational, societal or environmental must be addressed in order to lead the way for a healthy and sustainable future, with health and environmental objectives becoming components of sport policies and practice.

Coming back to the times where the multiple individual and social benefits of sport are an essential part of our lives will not only require the stimulation of horizontal and vertical coordination, as supported by the revised European Sports Charter, but further the strengthening of links and cooperation between public and private stakeholders in sport, enhancing its sustainability.

This second theme will be addressed under the following three main angles:

a) addressing the emerging challenges to sport policies

(See the revised European Sports Charter: developing participation (Article 12) / Information and Research (Article 17) / Monitoring of the Charter (Article 20)

Among the multifarious challenges that sport faces and which have to be addressed are challenges to the governance and organisation of sport: for instance, tackling the excessive commercialisation of sport, questionable governance or adapting to more individualistic and consumerist sports practices. Challenges linked to the rights of individuals also arise, for instance, the need for greater consideration of human rights in sport and workers' rights during the organisation of major sport events, ensuring that the voice of athletes - as key actors in sport – can be expressed, and heard, the consequences of sedentary and "unhealthy" lifestyles addressed,

There is certainly also an urgent need to reconsider the way we learn and practise sport and how major sporting events should be organised with regard to sustainability, taking into account that climate change has already had a significant impact. No segment of activity can shield itself from its responsibilities for future generations, even more so for fields of activity that can inspire environmental awareness and action. The sustainability of sports events has become an important element to take into account.

Participants who so wish are invited to answer one or more of the following questions, taking into account a maximum speaking time of 3 minutes:

What more can be done to protect human rights in sport? How to support the human rights of athletes (both grassroots and elite ones)? How can economic sustainability and good governance be best enhanced? What can be done to ensure that environmental sustainability is taken into consideration in a sporting context? How can sport and physical education serve in awareness-raising on sustainability?

b) facilitating access to sport and encouraging practice as part of a healthy lifestyle

(see Articles 2, 10, 11 and 12 of the revised European Sports Charter)

Article 11 of the European Social Charter provides for the right to protection of health and states that “Everyone has the right to benefit from any measures enabling him [or her] to enjoy the highest possible standard of health attainable.”

Sport and physical activity are essential elements of good health, physical fitness and mental well-being, as demonstrated during the pandemic when the practice of sport and physical activity was curtailed.

Moreover, sport is an important tool for the development of children, contributing to a healthy lifestyle and supporting their development. The COVID restrictions have demonstrated the particular role played by schools and clubs in the possibility of practicing sport in a supervised and regular manner.

Sport can be part of a global therapeutic response by preventing certain chronic diseases, reducing their aggravation as well as stress levels.

Participants who so wish are invited to answer one or more of the following questions, taking into account a maximum speaking time of 3 minutes:

What can be done to ensure that sport and physical activity are included in the priorities as public health objectives and to enable a sustained exercise of the right to sport, as a component of the right to health? How can public authorities work together to ensure that sport is seen as a preventative means of maintaining good health? What can be done to support sport organisations to promote health and well-being?

c) boosting the return to sport activities and events

Sport and especially organised sport has been put on a standstill for over two years, with the postponement and cancellation of many major sport events, training sessions, and the closure of sport clubs and sport centres in many countries in Europe.

The reduction of sponsorship, membership, training programmes etc. have all had major financial impacts on the sport ecosystem.

Participants who so wish are invited to answer one or more of the following questions, taking into account a maximum speaking time of 3 minutes:

How can we promote and encourage the sponsoring of sport activities and events? How can public funding be ensured for sporting activities enabling a return to pre-pandemic levels across the board? What can be done to ensure that major sports events regain their former levels of attendance whilst protecting the spectators and participants? What are the measures taken in your country to support the return to

sport that could provide examples of good practices and are such measures likely to be repeated in the long term?