

Conclusions of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Member States meeting within the Council on Access to sport for persons with disabilities

(2019/C 192/06)

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

WHEREAS:

1. By 2020, the EU is expected to have 120 million people with disabilities. The EU promotes equality of opportunity and accessibility for people with disabilities. A fundamental part of its strategy involves working towards a barrier-free Europe (¹).
2. The general principles set out in Article 3, the definition of universal design as set out in Article 2 and the specific provisions on participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport set out in Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (²) are particularly relevant for the participation in sport activities of persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others.
3. In the EU, disability and illness are often cited as reasons for not participating in sport and physical activities (³).
4. Sports can be specifically designed for persons with disabilities or adapted in order to enable access for persons with disabilities regardless of the type of impairment, be it physical, intellectual or sensory. In certain conditions, sports for persons with disabilities can be practised alongside those without disabilities, which demonstrates sport's inclusive nature.
5. Sport's values in relation to social inclusion, and in particular the role of sport in promoting and achieving the integration of minority and marginalised groups, are broadly recognised.
6. Major sport events for persons with disabilities have grown in popularity, as shown by the most recent Summer and Winter Paralympic Games which drew a mass audience of TV viewers worldwide and by the continuing practice of organising major international events for persons with disabilities.

EMPHASISES THAT:

7. Persons with disabilities have a higher probability of being subject to socioeconomic disadvantage such as poverty and low-income rates, social isolation, discrimination, limited access to the labour market, limited access to transport, fewer educational opportunities and health-related aspects. These issues negatively impact the possibilities of a person with disabilities to participate in sport.
8. Directly related to a sport context, persons with disabilities may have to overcome challenges such as:
 - a) The severity of an impairment may restrict mobility and even cause physical pain in certain sports training or playing situations. This, combined with various barriers, can be compounded by a negative or limiting perception of one's own disability, in particular a lack of confidence in one's ability to play sports.
 - b) The need of specialised skills and knowledge regarding disability amongst those working with persons with disabilities in a sport-related physical activity setting, in particular physical education teachers, sports coaches and other sports staff.
 - c) The availability of accessible sports infrastructure in relation to sports training or attendance facilities, sports facilities in which sports for persons with disabilities are practised, or sport events in which persons with disabilities can participate.
 - d) The additional financial costs related to the acquisition of specialised sports equipment or support services, without which training or playing a sport would not be possible.

(¹) <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1141#navItem-3>

(²) <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

(³) TNS Opinion & Social (2018); Sport and physical activity, Special Eurobarometer 472; Survey requested by the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture and coordinated by the Directorate-General for Communication Disability; Fieldwork, December 2017.

9. Participation in sport should be considered from the perspective of practising sports as a form of physical activity and from the perspective of participating in social activities, for instance attending sport events or being active in a sports community as a volunteer, a member of a sports club or a fan club.
10. Participation in sport can contribute to improving the well-being of persons with disabilities as well as their physical and mental health, while increasing personal mobility and autonomy and promoting social inclusion.
11. Practising sports from an early age entails added benefits for persons with disabilities, owing to the positive effect on motor skills development, which is key to improving a person's overall quality of life.
12. Increased media attention given to elite level sport for persons with disabilities events or athletes with disabilities can inspire persons with and without disabilities to take up sports. In order to increase the attractiveness of sport for persons with disabilities, efforts should be made to ensure that grassroots-level sport receives adequate levels of media attention, without prejudice to the freedom of the media.
13. Assistive technology can be important in helping persons with disabilities participate in sport activities, both at grassroots and elite levels. However, its widespread availability and affordability can be a concern.
14. Implementing and complying with rules on anti-doping and rules designed to combat match-fixing, as well as ensuring accurate disability assessment and the fair use of assistive technology are key to promoting the sustainable development of sport for persons with disabilities.
15. Voluntary work is critical to the support of the sports sector, including to sport for persons with disabilities.
16. It is important to include a gender perspective in strategies and policies aimed at increasing participation of persons with disabilities in sport.
17. Sport can provide an arena for social interactions between persons with and without disabilities, which makes sport a valuable tool for promoting inclusion and mutual understanding.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES, IN LINE WITH THE SUBSIDIARITY PRINCIPLE AND AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVELS, TO:

18. Support social awareness and educational campaigns for family members, legal guardians, personal assistants, physical education teachers, coaches, sport staff and other relevant actors in the sporting community, with or without disabilities, with a view to promoting an open and welcoming approach for persons with disabilities as well as an appropriate understanding of the opportunities and benefits of participation in sport activities for all, including children and adults with disabilities. Where appropriate, offer assistance to family members and legal guardians of persons with disabilities, with a view to fostering the latter's participation in sport.
19. Support the further education and training of physical education teachers, coaches, other sports staff and volunteers in general, with or without disabilities, by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, specific skills and appropriate competence recognition to enable them to include persons with disabilities in different physical education or sports settings. Such training programmes should take into account the differences between the needs of participation-oriented and performance-oriented persons.
20. Take action to ensure access of persons with and without disabilities to sports infrastructure, including attendance at sports events, training or participation in sports. Measures can comprise developing or enhancing accessibility standards within sports facilities, providing individualised human support, making funds available, increasing awareness among sports organisations at national, regional and local levels of existing EU funding opportunities, or facilitating as appropriate the participation of representatives of athletes with disabilities in relevant bodies of sports organisations.
21. Where appropriate in the national school systems, promote inclusive sport and physical education programmes, in order to meet the needs of children with disabilities, with a view to offering equal opportunities for all children by stimulating their participation in sports-related physical activities and encourage their interest in sport.

22. Use existing channels of cooperation between Member States so as to promote the exchange of expertise and good practice with a view to improving access to sport for persons with disabilities.

23. Address the issue of high-level and high-performance athletes in the context of equal opportunities and non-discrimination of persons with disabilities, and foster cooperation and exchange of best practices in this regard between the bodies responsible for sports in the Member States.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION, IN THEIR RESPECTIVE AREAS OF COMPETENCE, TO:

24. Consider offering financial support for organisations specifically dedicated to promoting sports for persons with disabilities and for conventional sports organisations that develop sports activities for persons with disabilities, inter alia, with a view to bringing the two sporting communities closer together.

25. Promote and support actions, where appropriate at EU level, related to the regular collection of statistics and development of indicators regarding sport and disability, such as sports participation rates, barriers to participation, the numbers of persons with disabilities who are registered with sports clubs or the level of interest in sport⁽⁴⁾.

26. Consider addressing, in the work of relevant expert groups, the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in sport, including the specific skills and training needed with regard to the coaching of persons with disabilities⁽⁵⁾.

27. Make use of the sports-related funding part of Erasmus+ to promote sport among persons with disabilities and the exchange of good practices and policies between Member States and stakeholders; of the European Social Funds for professional training of sport staff or for inclusion through sport activities; of the European Regional Development Funds to address accessibility of sport infrastructures; and use research results of projects funded via Horizon Europe as appropriate to foster innovative solutions in order to get persons with disabilities involved in sports.

28. Where appropriate, promote such funding opportunities and the results of the financed projects among persons with disabilities, sports organisations and other relevant non-governmental actors.

29. Raise awareness on the positive outcomes arising as a result of the work being done in the area of sport for persons with disabilities, including on the positive impact that sport has in terms of social inclusion of persons with disabilities.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

30. Continue including sport in future key actions that will support future disability policies by building on the experience to date in the implementation of the current European Disability Strategy,

31. When sport topics are discussed with social partners in EU-level social dialogue processes, include EU policies and measures that address the needs of persons with disabilities and foster the participation of persons with disabilities and their representative organisations⁽⁶⁾.

32. Take the opportunity of the European Access city Award to give visibility to cities facilitating access to sport facilities for persons with disabilities, and assess how the experience of the European Disability Card can contribute to increasing the attendance levels at sport events also by persons with disabilities.

33. Mainstream sport for persons with disabilities in various sport issues addressed at EU level such as dual careers of athletes or Health Enhancing Physical Activity (HEPA)⁽⁷⁾.

⁽⁴⁾ In line with Article 31 of the UN CRPD.

⁽⁵⁾ In line with Article 30 of the UN CRPD.

⁽⁶⁾ In line with Article 4(3) of the UN CRPD.

⁽⁷⁾ <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/disease-prevention/physical-activity/activities/hepa-europe>

INVITES THE SPORT MOVEMENT TO:

34. Promote, in close cooperation with persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, the participation of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels ⁽⁸⁾, with a view to contributing to the successful fulfilment of sport's social and educational function.
35. Make use of existing solidarity mechanisms, in particular at professional sport level, so that sport for persons with disabilities can be adequately funded.
36. Adopt an inclusive approach when designing sports competition systems or promoting sports participation in general by encouraging measures such as holding competitions and award ceremonies for athletes with and without disabilities at the same time and in the same venue. In the same spirit, facilitate where appropriate the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the training sessions or teams of persons without disabilities.
37. Ensure that training, sports and hospitality facilities are accessible ⁽⁹⁾, and that reasonable accommodation is provided ⁽¹⁰⁾ to address the needs of persons with disabilities.
38. Increase awareness among persons with disabilities with regard to existing sports practising and training opportunities that respond to their needs.
39. Build partnerships with relevant institutional actors that are from the private or public sector and which are active in the disability sector, in order to better understand the needs and interests of persons with disabilities and encourage increased participation in sports programmes ⁽¹¹⁾.

⁽⁸⁾ In line with Article 30(5) of the UN CRPD.

⁽⁹⁾ In line with Article 9 of the UN CRPD.

⁽¹⁰⁾ In line with Article 5(3) of the UN CRPD.

⁽¹¹⁾ In line with Article 4(3) of the UN CRPD.

ANNEX

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

1. Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (¹), that underlines the social and educational function of sport.
2. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (²), to which the EU is a party, and which recognises, for instance, the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport.
3. The European Commission Communication on a European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: a Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe, which with regard to sport, emphasises the need to improve accessibility to sport, promote participation in sports events and encourage the organisation of disability-specific sports events (³).
4. The Council Conclusions on the support of the implementation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (⁴).
5. The Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of 11 December 2013 establishing 'Erasmus+': the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport and repealing Decisions No 1719/2006/EC, No 1720/2006/EC and No 1298/2008/EC (⁵).
6. The Council Resolution on the European Union Work Plan for Sport (2017-2020) (⁶), which places particular emphasis on social inclusion.
7. The Council Conclusions on the role of sport as a source of and a driver for active social inclusion (⁷).
8. The Council Conclusions on the contribution to sport to the EU economy, and in particular to addressing youth unemployment and social inclusion (⁸).
9. The Council Conclusions on sport as a platform for social inclusion through volunteering (⁹).
10. The Council Conclusions on the role of coaches in society (¹⁰).

(¹) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12008E165>

(²) <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

(³) Doc. 16489/10 — COM(2010) 636 final.

(⁴) OJ C 300, 11.10.2011, p. 1.

(⁵) OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 50.

(⁶) OJ C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 5.

(⁷) OJ C 326, 3.12.2010, p. 2.

(⁸) OJ C 32, 4.2.2014, p. 2.

(⁹) OJ C 189, 15.6.2017, p. 40.

(¹⁰) OJ C 423, 9.12.2017, p. 6.