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Conclusions of the Council and of the representatives of the governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the contribution of self-organised sport to supporting active and healthy lifestyles in the European Union

(C/2024/3809)

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

RECALLING:

1. Article 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which grants the European Union competence to carry out actions in the field of sport to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States, as well as Article 165, according to which the Union shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity, and its social and educational function.
2. The European Union Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024 ⁽¹⁾ and the priority area on promoting 'participation in sport and health-enhancing physical activity', as well as the guiding objective of increasing 'participation in health-enhancing physical activity in order to promote an active and environmentally friendly lifestyle, social cohesion and active citizenship'.
3. The Council Recommendation on promoting health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) across sectors ⁽²⁾, which stresses that the benefits of physical activity throughout life, including regular sporting activity and exercise, are paramount.
4. The results of the Special Eurobarometer 525 on sport and physical activity, which concludes that there is still a strong need to promote sport and regular physical activity, particularly among citizens over the age of 24, whose regular physical activity tends to decline with age ⁽³⁾.
5. The revised European Sports Charter of the Council of Europe, which aims to enable every individual to participate in sport and notably to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to take part in sport in a safe, secure and healthy environment ⁽⁴⁾.
6. The European Parliament resolution on an integrated approach to sport policy: good governance, accessibility and integrity ⁽⁵⁾, in particular paragraph 75, which calls on Member States to allocate more funds to open public sports grounds and playgrounds in order to enhance easy accessibility to grassroots sports.

NOTING:

7. For the purposes of these conclusions, self-organised sport is considered to be all forms of physical activity that can occur in informal settings, generally during leisure time, that do not follow strict formal sporting rules, and that do not necessarily involve a competitive format. These activities can take place in local and informal settings, such as parks and neighbourhoods, but also in sport infrastructures, either individually or collectively, such as with friends, colleagues and family members.
8. The increasing tendency of the population of the European Union to engage in physical activity in a variety of spaces, and to turn more towards informal settings, such as parks, other outdoor areas or the home, in order to engage in sport and physical activity at a certain point in their lives ⁽⁶⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on the European Union Work Plan for Sport (1 January 2021 — 30 June 2024), OJ C 419, 4.12.2020, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ Council Recommendation of 26 November 2013 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors, OJ C 354, 4.12.2013, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 525, 'Sport and Physical Activity (2022)', 2268/SP525, Full report, p.6, September 2022.

⁽⁴⁾ Revised European Sports Charter Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)5. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 October 2021 at the 1414th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, Article 1(1)(b).

⁽⁵⁾ European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2017 on an integrated approach to sport policy: good governance, accessibility and integrity (2016/2143(INI)), OJ C 252, 18.7.2018, p. 2.

⁽⁶⁾ European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 525, 'Sport and Physical Activity (2022)', 2268/SP525, Full report, pp.35-38, September 2022.

9. One in three European adults does not meet the World Health Organization (WHO) physical activity guidelines and almost half never exercise or do sport, with lower rates among women, elderly people and lower socio-economic groups ⁽⁷⁾.
10. The results concerning sedentary lifestyles show that almost 40 % of Europeans sit for more than five and a half hours a day, with higher rates among white collar workers, managers, students and unemployed people ⁽⁸⁾.
11. The main obstacles to practising sport, as identified by various studies, are a lack of time to devote to it, a lack of motivation, costs, health problems and not enjoying competitive activities ⁽⁹⁾. Self-organised sport may also help to overcome some of these obstacles and encourage participation in sport as it provides valuable options for participation in terms of the necessary time, commitment, equipment, infrastructure and cost.

EMPHASISING:

12. That self-organised sport, along with organised sport, can also play a positive role in increasing sports practice and health-enhancing physical activity in order to promote an active, healthy and sustainable lifestyle, as well as social cohesion and active citizenship.
13. That different forms of sports activities, namely organised and self-organised sport, need to be considered as complementary in supporting active and healthy lifestyles, with significant potential to be mutually beneficial.
14. That there is a lack of European studies and data available specifically on the participation of citizens in self-organised sport.
15. That investment in any form of sport participation can generate a positive social return on investment (SROI) ⁽¹⁰⁾.
16. That the practice of a self-organised sport should be safe and accessible for everyone; it should be an environment where everyone can exercise safely — regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, physical condition, disability or background.
17. That digital solutions can play an important role in enhancing participation and promoting physical activity; they provide valuable support for sports practice, and they can help public authorities and sport organisations to gain deeper insight into and provide support for individuals involved in self-organised sport.
18. That individuals involved in self-organised sport should be able to benefit from adequate guidance and information to help them better leverage the available resources and tools, such as social media and digital applications and tools related to health, sport and fitness.

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

19. As regards health, well-being and social inclusion,
 - a) promote and support policies that foster the practice of self-organised sport as a means of encouraging lifelong physical activity and sport and promoting their benefits for well-being and for physical and mental health among the population ⁽¹¹⁾;

⁽⁷⁾ OECD/WHO (2023), Step Up! Tackling the Burden of Insufficient Physical Activity in Europe, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 25.

⁽⁸⁾ European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 525, 'Sport and Physical Activity (2022)', 2668/SP525, Summary report, p.31, September 2022.

⁽⁹⁾ European Commission, Special Eurobarometer 525, 'Sport and Physical Activity (2022)', 2668/SP525, Summary report, p.18, September 2022.

⁽¹⁰⁾ OECD/WHO (2023), Step Up! Tackling the Burden of Insufficient Physical Activity in Europe, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 3.

⁽¹¹⁾ Particularly among women, children, young people, elderly people, isolated people, people with disabilities or chronic diseases, inactive people, people with limited financial resources and minorities.

- b) encourage self-organised sport also as a means of preventing non-communicable disease-related risks and promoting HEPA, for instance in schools, in healthcare facilities (including nursing homes), in the workplace and through open community-based ⁽¹²⁾ events;
- c) promote participation in sport in informal settings among urban and rural citizens living in areas lacking sufficient sports facilities and public spaces appropriate for sports practice;
- d) explore the potential of prescribing physical activity as a way to promote sport and physical activity in organised and informal settings ⁽¹³⁾. Health professionals can play a key role in recommending and encouraging engagement in sports or physical activities appropriate to each individual's health status, in close cooperation with qualified sports professionals.

20. As regards sports practice,

- a) support policy initiatives, measures and public campaigns that promote the benefits and accessibility of sport and physical activity, including in informal settings, among the population, at national, regional and local level;
- b) where appropriate, produce and disseminate guidelines, in collaboration with the sport movement, on ways to engage in self-organised sport, for example on training and safety routines;
- c) promote the development, where possible, of tools that allow individuals who practise a self-organised sport to easily find guidance and identify qualified staff, particularly coaches ⁽¹⁴⁾, who have undergone certified training;
- d) promote and support community-based initiatives that encourage participation in sport in informal settings in collaboration with education and training institutions, youth organisations, sports clubs, fitness clubs, associations for elderly people and neighbourhood associations;
- e) where appropriate, cooperate with the sport movement to develop or expand the range of recreational physical activities offered within sport clubs;
- f) raise awareness of the potential risks ⁽¹⁵⁾ associated with using social media and digital applications and tools related to health, sport and fitness, for instance through information campaigns. Such social media and digital applications and tools can nevertheless also be useful in motivating and sustaining physical activity among the population.

21. As regards skills development, non-formal and informal learning, and volunteering,

- a) strive to provide quality and recognised skill-building opportunities for trainers, coaches and volunteers, including those working in informal settings, with an emphasis on movement skills, safety and enjoyment;
- b) consider creating incentives for coaches and volunteers from organised sport to contribute to a range of sporting practices and recognise their efforts where appropriate, for example through honorary certificates, awards, or public acknowledgments;
- c) encourage the practice of self-organised sport in non-formal and informal learning settings, in particular among children and young people who can learn new skills through recreational physical activities, develop the basic skills needed to go on to participate in organised sport, and learn how to practice a sport safely.

⁽¹²⁾ An activity that is organised and takes place locally.

⁽¹³⁾ Such initiatives can also be co-financed through the European Social Fund+ and EU4Health.

⁽¹⁴⁾ As defined in the Council conclusions on the role of coaches in society, OJ C 423, 9.12.2017, p. 6.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Examples include inappropriate training methods, the role of sport and fitness influencers, the effect of social media on body image, and the advertising of performance-enhancing products.

22. As regards spatial planning and infrastructure,
- a) support policies that promote the creation of sustainable and accessible public infrastructure, such as parks, trails, playgrounds and active spaces ⁽¹⁶⁾, where it is convenient for the population to engage in self-organised sport;
 - b) promote cross-sectoral cooperation between public authorities, the sport movement and other relevant stakeholders to enhance the integration of sport infrastructure into spatial planning policies, in order to create spaces where all kinds of sport and physical activity can be easily practised and are readily accessible;
 - c) continue to promote active mobility, such as walking, cycling and other forms of active daily travel, as well as the development of bike lanes and pedestrian-friendly routes;
 - d) where possible, help to make public sports infrastructure accessible to individuals involved in self-organised sport;
 - e) encourage the integration of regional sports development, including neighbourhood sports infrastructure, via the European Regional Development Fund.
23. As regards digital solutions,
- a) promote the use digital platforms to better disseminate information about and improve visibility of sporting opportunities and facilities among the population, for example information on availability, condition or occupancy rate;
 - b) explore the collection and use of data to map and assess sporting activities of individuals involved in self-organised sport, as well as their potential needs.

INVITE THE COMMISSION TO:

24. Continue to promote all forms of participation in sport through the European Week of Sport and future awareness-raising campaigns related to the promotion of sport and physical activity.
25. Enable discussions at European level around initiatives and good practices, so that public authorities and sport organisations can engage with individuals involved in self-organised sport.
26. As regards spatial planning and infrastructure,
- a) further promote the use of the existing funding opportunities — notably the ERDF, ESF+, Life and RRF — in order to further develop accessible and sustainable public spaces and sports infrastructure, in line with the European Green Deal;
 - b) raise awareness of the SHARE 2.0 initiative, which aims to structure and strengthen collaboration and exchange of knowledge on access to EU funding, health, innovation and sustainability.
27. As regards availability of evidence and data,
- a) take self-organised sport into consideration in future surveys and studies in order to contribute to the availability of valuable data on current trends and sports practices associated with self-organised sport;
 - b) further build on the 2021 Commission report ‘Mapping of innovative practices in the EU to promote sport outside of traditional structures’ ⁽¹⁷⁾, which provides an understanding of how sports practice is evolving in today’s society and how the sport movement is adapting to this evolution, by considering and monitoring further developments, including in the context of the implementation of the HEPA Recommendation ⁽¹⁸⁾.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Such infrastructure is often characterised by innovation, flexibility and modularity and can be placed in diverse locations based on an individual’s daily routines.

⁽¹⁷⁾ 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.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Council Recommendation of 26 November 2013 on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors, OJ C 354, 4.12.2013, p. 1.

INVITE THE SPORTS MOVEMENT AND OTHER RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS TO:

28. Continue to collaborate with public authorities on designing sport policies that are responsive to all forms of sports practice, including self-organised sport, and adapt the range of sports on offer to recent lifestyle trends and new expectations among the population.
 29. Further cooperate on ways to share resources (facilities and equipment) with non-members of sports clubs, in order to promote participation in sport and physical activity in informal settings.
 30. Arrange sport events at community level which involve both competitions and recreational sports activities, and promote forms of mentoring for individuals involved in self-organised sport by volunteer coaches and athletes (for example on safety or training guidelines).
 31. Encourage sports clubs to incorporate elements of flexibility in order for individuals to practise sport freely without schedules, bookings or needing to be part of a team.
 32. Foster the development of a range of recreational sport activities within sports clubs in order to diversify their activities and attract new participants.
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ANNEX

REFERENCES:

- Council conclusions on the role of coaches in society, OJ C 423, 9.12.2017, p. 6.
 - Council Resolution on the European Union Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024, OJ C 419, 4.12.2020, p. 1.
 - Council conclusions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery of the sport sector, OJ C 214 I, 29.6.2020, p. 1.
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 - Council conclusions on sport and physical activity, a promising lever to transform behaviour for sustainable development, OJ C 170, 25.4.2022, p. 1.
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