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(Resolutions, recommendations and opinions)

RESOLUTIONS

COUNCIL

Conclusions of the Council and the representatives of the governments of the Member States on 'Sport and physical activity, a promising lever to transform behaviour for sustainable development'

(2022/C 170/01)

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

NOTING THE FOLLOWING:

1. There is increasing recognition that the practice and role of sport and physical activity are important to fulfil the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (¹).
2. The international and scientific community have gained awareness of and integrated the possible benefits and positive externalities of sport and physical activity as well as organizing sports events in diverse fields (²): (³) improving the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals, economic benefits, education, empowerment of women and young people, emergence of fairer, more peaceful, sustainable, inclusive and open societies, inclusion of people with disabilities and with fewer opportunities as well as learning about tolerance.
3. Climate change and other environmental threats can have a negative impact on sports practices and stakeholders in sport (⁴) - notably by impacting the health of practitioners. Appropriate sports practices require a healthy environment to practice in, but the current climate and environmental conditions are becoming less conducive to several sports practices and physical activity.
4. The consequences of climate change – such as rising temperatures, extended periods of drought, and increased flooding – place increasing limitations on the spaces and time available for sport practice, thus, constituting a source of great disruption to the functioning and organisation of the global sports ecosystem – in particular of outdoor winter sports and some nautical activities (⁵).
5. Like other human activities, certain aspects of sport and the organisation of sports events can contribute to degrading the environment and changing the climate, by directly or indirectly generating greenhouse gas emissions and by contributing to damaging the various natural environments where the sports take place – marine, forest and mountain environments in particular.

(¹) United Nations, A/RES/70/1, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015 (§37).

(²) World Health Organisation, The global action plan on physical activity 2018-2030.

(³) 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) (2020/C 419/01).

(⁴) WWF France, 2021.

(⁵) WWF France, 2021.

6. Some aspects of sport can be sources of greenhouse gas emissions and may also have negative impacts on the environment: sports tourism, the unsustainable production and consumption of sports equipment or derived goods and services, the spread of micro plastics, sports facilities with high consumption of resources (energy and water especially), the increasing number of sports events of all levels (including training, large delegations, and the building of dedicated temporary infrastructure), as well as free sports practices in natural environments.
7. The return of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to Europe, the commitment the Paris 2024 Organizing Committee has taken on environment and carbon neutrality, as well as the commitments taken by the organizers of the European Football Championship 2024 in Germany can encourage all stakeholders to commit to sustainably building tangible and intangible heritage to promote Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 17, at all levels and in all territories.

CONSIDERING THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

8. As an important provider of informal and non-formal learning, sport is a great means of showcasing exemplary behaviour and, as such, of disseminating social responsibility, allowing the involvement of all, particularly of young people ⁽⁶⁾ as actors of change. It has also a communication function to sensitize citizens about the importance of preserving ecosystems, making harmonious and sustainable use of natural resources, and mitigating climate change.
9. Integrating Sustainable Development Goals in sport could attract people to join sports and continue practising them, especially young people, as many of them may show particular interest and involvement in these issues ⁽⁷⁾.
10. The popularity of top-level athletes, their growing awareness of the climate emergency and their engagement and advocacy can be very effective in promoting the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals in sport.
11. The European Union and its Member States can set an example by hosting or co-hosting sustainable major sports events ⁽⁸⁾ that take into account the requirements of ecological, social, economic and civic responsibility, including circularity, use of plastics or water, carbon footprint, good governance, human rights, reliability and fair play.
12. A strengthened sensitivity within the population regarding the economic and environmental impact, direct or indirect effects induced as well as the protection of human rights, should be paid special attention to when organizing sports events. This can have a positive impact on public acceptance for hosting events.
13. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an increased interest in sports activities at home, outdoor individual and free activities and active mobility. These trends reflect a growing need for nature ⁽⁹⁾, non-organised sport activities and accessible urban spaces ⁽¹⁰⁾.
14. Physical activity and sports, particularly those that take place outdoors or in natural environments (e.g. forests, mountains, oceans, rivers and lakes), can contribute to improving citizens' environmental literacy, as well as raising awareness for the need to protect the environment, and mitigate climate change.

⁽⁶⁾ <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c2c8d076-0a04-11ec-b5d3-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁽⁷⁾ https://eeb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/IPSOS-Multi-Country-Report-complete.FINAL_.pdf

⁽⁸⁾ The EU Expert Group on the Economic Dimension of Sport defines a 'major sporting event' as an event organised by one or several host countries, regions or cities and attended by different international delegations with the aim of practising one or several sports. Such events are often characterised by major and logistical challenges. Major sport events have a high international media profile, welcome several thousands of people, including supporters, journalists, technical teams and officials, and are often organised over several consecutive days.

⁽⁹⁾ <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/abb396/pdf>

⁽¹⁰⁾ <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0249268>

15. The Erasmus+ Sports programme is supporting the exchange of knowledge and best practices, notably with respect to Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13 and 17. These good practices may be taken into consideration when organizing sports activities and events.
16. Sport can contribute to economic growth and can provide an added-value to the economic sector.

HIGHLIGHTING THE FOLLOWING:

17. It is important to minimize the negative impact of all types of sports activities on biodiversity, the environment, and the dynamics of the ongoing process of climate change. It is important that all stakeholders, from public and private entities to citizens, to be aware of their individual and collective responsibility, as well of the consequences of their actions when practising or organising sports.
18. It is relevant 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. To do this, various types of support are needed to enable the sports sector to make the transition towards more responsible practices.
19. In order to build an inclusive, healthy society, it is essential to enable every individual to regularly practice sports and physical activity in a healthy and safe environment, regardless of their age, gender, mental and physical condition, socio-economic background or geographic origin.
20. It is important to take into account the issues of good governance in sport, integrity, equal access to sport, respect for human rights, reliability, fairness and sustainability. This should be done at all levels, such as clubs, leagues, national and international federations, non-governmental organisations, economic operators, organisers of major sports events, businesses or media.

INVITE THE MEMBER STATES TO:

21. Align and coordinate public policies and strategies covering sport with the Sustainable Development Goals, and with the associated targets.
22. Provide access for citizens to safe, inclusive and sustainable sports practices and events according to their needs, as for example through environmental-friendly local sports facilities accessible by infrastructure for active mobility.
23. Explore ways to equip the relevant national authorities with tools to observe the impacts of climate change on sport in order to develop strategies to anticipate, adapt and support the sports ecosystems that will be most impacted by climate change in the long term, for example by seeking transition to more resilient and responsible practices and by engaging in dialogue with the sport movement to enhance more appropriate calendars.
24. Make sure that organizers of major sports events carry out environmental and carbon impact assessments and encourage them to measure how their events contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12 and 13.
25. Work with major sports events organisers to establish mitigation mechanisms for the damaging environmental impact of their events, appropriate to the damage caused and with the view to reaching carbon neutrality.
26. Encourage sports organisations and educational institutions to include, where appropriate, in their training programmes for educators, sports staff, athletes and sports facilities managers, issues and actions related to the ecological transition and sustainable development.
27. Sustain a growing investment in innovation and research to support and contribute to the transition towards greener and more sustainable physical activity and sports practices.

28. Strive to include environmental criteria and commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals in the assessment process for public funding and support, for the organisation of sports events at all levels, sports activities as well as construction, renovation, maintenance and use of sports facilities. Promote the inclusion of such criteria in the evaluation of these activities.
29. When contracting with economic partners in organising major sports events, constructing, renovating and maintaining sports facilities or producing sports equipment, strengthen the integration and the weighting of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) ⁽¹¹⁾ criteria in the contracts.
30. When appropriate, promote the use of EU funds – including cohesion funds (ERDF, ESF+), RRF, Erasmus+ or LIFE programme – to develop initiatives that foster green and sustainable physical activity and sports practices and those aiming at fostering the alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals.
31. Prioritise or encourage the development of smart and green cities with eco-responsible infrastructure and appropriate urban planning, in line with the spirit of the New European Bauhaus initiative, so as to offer a more-human centred living environment where citizens have access to sustainable sports facilities and can adopt a healthier, more active and more environmentally-friendly lifestyle.
32. Make use of diplomatic networks to promote a common European approach to improve the consideration and integration of the Sustainable Development Goals in sport, within the European Union as well as in their external actions and development assistance programmes.
33. Consider designating on a voluntary-basis Green Sport Ambassadors, whose role would be to promote the further integration of the Sustainable Development Goals in sport.
34. Encourage partnerships between sports sector, formal education, non-formal and informal learning, socio-educational activities, youth organisations and the private sector in order to develop transverse, coordinated and complementary ways of raising awareness and promoting expertise on environmental and climate change issues.
35. Promote energy efficiency and circular economy in the construction, renovation, maintenance and utilisation of all sports facilities.

INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

36. Ensure that the work done by the Expert Group on green sport is focused on building common standards at European Union level, identifying criteria and objectives for the organisation of green and sustainable physical activity and sports practices. Promote these criteria and objectives when Member States develop national sports policies.
37. Within the context of the Expert Group on green sport, pursue the collection of relevant evidence and examples of good practices on how sport can reduce its impact on the environment and contribute to mitigating climate change.
38. Include the issues of sustainable development in the discussions about the key features of a European Sport Model.
39. Promote the use of European Union funds to facilitate the construction and renovation of sports facilities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, carbon footprint and energy consumption as well as the negative impact of climate change on sports practices.
40. Take better account of sport in the public policies developed at EU level, and particularly the environmental policies and initiatives.
41. Continue to assess the eco-friendly design of projects and the incorporation of green practices when evaluating and awarding Erasmus+ grants in the field of sport, as outlined in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide.

⁽¹¹⁾ <https://www.unido.org/our-focus/advancing-economic-competitiveness/competitive-trade-capacities-and-corporate-responsibility/corporate-social-responsibility-market-integration/what-csr>

42. Ensure and promote the possibility to develop projects on green sport and green skills in the Erasmus+ Sports programme.
43. Encourage the exchange of knowledge and best practices among Member States in the field of green sport, as set out in the EU Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024.
44. Encourage the sharing of best practices among actors committed to transforming behaviour in sport in view of the environmental and societal challenges we are facing at all levels, i.e., through the SHARE or the HealthyLifestyle4All initiatives.

INVITE THE SPORT MOVEMENT AND ALL RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS TO:

45. Align the organisation of physical activity, sports practices and sports events with the Sustainable Development Goals, the European Green Deal, the Paris Climate Agreement, the Kazan Action Plan, the International Charter for Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport and the Sport for Climate Actions Framework.
46. When creating strategies and programmes, take special account of the issues of reducing resource consumption (especially water, energy), eliminating food wasting, recycling waste and reusing sports equipment, preserving biodiversity and air quality, reducing carbon footprint and, more generally, of how sport is organised to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.
47. Explore the possibility to appoint a dedicated individual or structure responsible for carrying out environmental strategies and programmes.
48. Find ways to promote sustainable development education and the construction of a sense of environmental and civic responsibility among sports clubs, federations and other stakeholders in the field of sports.
49. Integrate, where appropriate, contents on environmental issues into the training programmes of sports volunteers and professionals.
50. Inspire and encourage athletes with media visibility, high popularity and credibility to promote ethical, green and sustainable sports practices.
51. Pay particular attention to ecological, social and democratic issues, transparency as well as protection of human rights ⁽¹²⁾ in the process of attributing major sports events and attributing funding or sponsoring to organisers of these events.
52. Develop or use appropriate tools to measure the social and environmental impact of sports activities, in particular organising major sports events, and take into account the social and environmental legacy of these activities in the assessment process.
53. Promote sustainable and short supply chains and where possible prioritise local economy when organising sports events, constructing, renovating and maintaining sports facilities or producing sports equipment.
54. Promote and encourage the integration of issues of ethical, democratic, social and environmental responsibility into audio-visual sport programming and sports events broadcasting, while fully respecting media freedom.
55. Make partners, suppliers, sponsors and fans aware of environmental requirements, which should be duly taken into account by them.

⁽¹²⁾ https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_EN.pdf

ANNEX

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