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Subject: The educational potential of sports: helping disadvantaged youth find their
place in society
- *Policy debate*
[Public debate pursuant to Article 8(2) CRP [proposed by the Presidency]]

Following consultation of the Working Party on Sport, the Presidency has drawn up the attached discussion paper as the basis for the policy debate at the EYCS Council meeting on 23-24 November 2015.

By way of preparation for the debate at Council, the Presidency has collected best practices from Member States and intends to distribute a compendium of the contributions received to all delegations well in advance of the Council meeting. In this way, Member States will be able to focus on the identification of synergies and European cooperation during the debate.

The educational potential of sports: helping disadvantaged youth find their place in society

Introduction

More than 120 million people in the EU, representing 25% of the EU's population, were registered at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2013¹. Moreover, the reduction of the number of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the EU is one of the key targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Most affected are women, children, single parent households and young people, with almost a third of young men and women experiencing poverty and social exclusion². In this context, a target group of "disadvantaged youth" has been defined, referring to young people with fewer opportunities, that are socially disconnected and vulnerable.

With 81% of the 689,000 people formally applying for asylum in EU countries this year (through August) being younger than 35 years old³, and young non-EU born people having a higher rate of being at risk of poverty or social exclusion (49.3 %) than their foreign-EU-born counterparts (32.2 %) ⁴, the integration of young migrants in society represents one of the major challenges of the EU for the years to come.

¹ Eurostat newsrelease 168/2014 4 November 2014

² EU-28, Eurostat, 2012

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/asylum-and-managed-migration/data/database>

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_integration_statistics_-_at_risk_of_poverty_and_social_exclusion

Keeping in mind that sport can play a genuine educational role and promote social links, sport is not only considered a fun, healthy and beneficial activity, but also a central component of social integration policies. Sport activity can indeed create a sense of cohesion and solidarity and contribute to skills⁵ and self-development outside traditional institutions such as school, work, or family. Private actors including sport clubs and associations can thus play an essential role in this regard, being the most relevant category of private organisations in Europe (more than 700,000 in 2009)⁶ and generally welcoming a very young audience (22% of the 15 to 24 y.o.)⁷. A majority of Europeans (81%) also perceive sport as an essential element to develop dialogue between different cultures coexisting within the EU⁸. All these assertions reflect the huge expectations on the potential of sport for fostering integration of disadvantaged youth from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

Fostering interpersonal and leadership skills

Sport activities can be designed to create opportunities for positive peer interactions and successful community integration experiences. These experiences are vital for young people at risk of social exclusion as they live in social environments in which these opportunities are scarce, given that traditional socialisation structures such as schools and family may not be playing such a prominent role. In sport, the notion of fair play embodies a number of values that are fundamental not only to sport but also to everyday life: team spirit, fair competition, and respect for written and unwritten rules such as equality, integrity, solidarity and tolerance are the building blocks of fair play that can be experienced and learnt through sport.

⁵ Council conclusions on maximising the role of grassroots sport in developing transversal skills, especially among young people, 18-19 May 2015.

⁶ The Helsinki Report on Sport (COM(1999) 644 final, 10.12.1999).

⁷ Eurobarometer survey n°412, 2014, “Sport and physical activity” (Point 2.2. “Club membership”).

⁸ Eurobarometer survey n°213, 2004, “The citizens of the European Union and Sport” (Point 3.2. “Sport as a vector of integration and equality”).

Physical activity at the same time helps young people develop effective leadership skills. In a number of sport disciplines, especially collective ones, leadership training programmes involve the identification of potential leaders and leadership qualities, as these skills are essential to a winning team. The experience of these well-functioning cooperation structures further have a beneficial impact on young athletes' community life and thereby make a fundamental contribution to the integration of disadvantaged youth. Cooperation and flexibility are indeed skills which have become increasingly vital in modern-day life and work.

Building up self-esteem and self-control

Sport activity also confers a range of essential personal skills on young people, which are beneficial to building up their personalities and subsequently allowing them to take up positions of responsibility in their communities.

First, young people at risk of social exclusion are often characterized as having low levels of self-esteem and confidence, which often leads to poor social and lifestyle choices. According to experts, high self-esteem is the mainspring that slates every child for success as a human being. Self-esteem comes from learning to accept who we are by seeing the insufficiencies and still choosing to like ourselves. In this respect, sport activities make a person's strengths and weaknesses clearly visible and thus raise their awareness of their own qualities, allowing them to find their suitable place in a team.

Furthermore, social acceleration and the high-speed society lead to diminishing attention spans which make it difficult for individuals to focus on long term goals. The ability to maintain the focus and determination to complete a course of action despite difficulties encountered along the way can be defined as mental strength. It involves being able to turn down immediate pleasure and instant gratification in favour of gaining the long-term satisfaction and fulfilment from achieving more meaningful goals. By training people to set goals and control their impulses and emotions, sports are an excellent way to enhance self-discipline. In the same vein, the mental strength developed when pushing your limits in sport can be integrated into everyday life.

Boosting active citizenship in multicultural societies

As sport activities have the potential to unite people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, they provide a unique opportunity to build bridges by engaging these people in actions of common active citizenship. In this sense, sport activities and education not only need to focus on their core disciplines, but also on involving young people actively in organisation and management of sport activities from a young age. In this way, young people can learn to contribute to the functioning of sport associations and to take responsibility for the well-being of their communities.

Conclusion

We are coming to realise that sport can motivate young people from a variety of cultural backgrounds and help them to develop skills which are essential to their social integration. Sport also contributes to boosting school achievements and preparing young people to the labour market. This potential is especially important with regards to helping disadvantaged young people, and in particular migrants, to find their place in society, as they face the highest risk of social exclusion. Nevertheless, sport does not automatically promote positive values or foster social integration: for sport to develop this potential, active commitment and willingness of all stakeholders, be they private associations or public institutions, is essential.

Ministerial debate

The Presidency would like to make further progress in identifying necessary political steps to enhance the potential of sport to foster the integration of disadvantaged young people, including migrants. In this context, Ministers are invited to reflect on the following questions:

- 1. Is there sufficient awareness of the educational potential of sport, especially for disadvantaged young people, including migrants?**
- 2. How can governments support the active commitment of both public and private entities in supporting the potential of sport to foster the social integration of disadvantaged young people and migrants? Taking into account best practices previously submitted by Member States, which necessary synergies need to be identified in cross-sectorial cooperation in order to maximise the impact of sport with regards to social integration?**

In order to ensure an interactive, free-flowing debate, the Presidency has invited two prominent external speakers:

- Mr Edwin Moses (Chairperson of the USADA⁹ Board of Directors) who will provide his unique insights and perspectives on this issue;
- Mr Richard Allicock (Project Manager, Tottenham Hotspurs FC)

In their interventions, Ministers should be guided both by the questions set out above, and by the presentations of the external speakers. Ministers will be encouraged to **intervene freely** in response to the speaker, **without scripted interventions**, by asking questions or commenting. The Presidency will also invite the external speakers to respond to the debate as it unfolds, and reflect on points made by the Ministers.

⁹ The United States Anti-Doping Agency

In order to give all Ministers an opportunity to contribute, interventions will be restricted to **two** **minutes** maximum.

The Presidency's aim is that Ministers leave the discussion with one or two practical ideas which they can take back to their capitals for discussion.
