



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Education and Culture

Youth, Sport and Relations with the Citizen  
Sport

## **Expert meeting on ‘Equal Opportunities through and in Sport’ (Brussels, 24 October 2005)**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the framework of its dialogue with the Sport Movement, “The EU and Sport - Matching Expectations”, the Commission organised a consultation conference in June 2005 in Brussels which included a workshop on the Social Function of Sport. The report from this conference was distributed to the Expert meeting on Equal Opportunities through and in Sport on 24 October 2005 and can be downloaded from the sport unit’s website<sup>1</sup>.

At the conference workshop representatives of the European Sport Movement - organisations, elite and mass sports, academics and NGOs active in the field of sport - discussed the social function of sport. As a result, it was suggested that the European Commission should:

- fight actively on a European level against barriers limiting access to sport, in order to maximise the inclusion of excluded groups;
- exchange, foster and spread good practices and experiences throughout Europe (e.g. the European Year of Education through Sport - EYES 2004);
- promote the importance of the social function of sports among Member States;
- promote partnerships to make sure that the target groups are involved in projects from the beginning;
- maintain the dialogue, which should be continued and deepened, with the Sport Movement.

As part of its ongoing consultation process in the area of sport, the Commission has launched a series of Expert meetings with Member States’ representatives. The second of these meetings was held in Brussels on 24 October under the title ‘Equal Opportunities through and in Sport’. The meeting was divided into two working sessions involving experts designated by Member States. The first session was devoted to ‘Equal Opportunities through and in sport for people with disabilities’, while the second session’s main topic was ‘Equal Opportunities through and in sport from a gender perspective’.

This report presents the working method of the meeting and a summary of the discussions. Although a number of recommendations and expectations were formulated during the meeting, this report does not contain any policy statement. It simply reflects the positions expressed by the experts designated by Member States during the meeting.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://europa.eu.int/comm/sport/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/sport/index_en.html)

## **2. WORKING METHOD:**

The Commission invited Member States ministries to nominate representatives to attend the Expert meeting on Equal Opportunities through and in Sport. Following this invitation, a questionnaire was sent to the representatives asking them for initiatives and good practices to share with their colleagues during the meeting.

The October meeting was the Member States' opportunity to present their current actions in the field of 'Equal Opportunities through and in sport' and to express their opinions and expectations. The Commission had received 19 contributions from Member States which were merged in a document which was used to lead the discussion and exchange of good practices.

The representatives nominated by their ministries were mostly, but not exclusively, civil servants; experts working in academia and NGO's had also been nominated by Member States. The Commission had invited two experts as speakers who contributed with their experience in the area. In addition to the formal participants, a number of observers from the civil society had also been invited to the meeting, including members of the Sport Movement and NGO's active in the field of sports and Equal Opportunities e.g. Special Olympics, ENGSO (European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation), EOC (The European Olympic Committees), EASPD (European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities) and the EU Office of German Sports. Observers were also identified using the database 'Consultation, the European Commission and Civil Society (CONECCS)'. The European umbrella organisations among the observers took active part in the meeting both through written contributions and taking the floor during the discussions.

External experts on the integration of people with disabilities through and in sport were Mr Sánchez Guijo, President of the EPC (European Paralympic Committee) and a Paralympic athlete himself and Mr Stirton, member of the EPC and a specialist in the field. The experts on integration of gender through and in sport were Professor Doll-Tepper and Ms Radtke, who are active researchers on gender in sport at the Freie Universität Berlin, in the department of Inclusive Education, Physical Activity and Sport.

Both sessions were organised along the same lines: after a short introduction from the Commission, the speakers introduced the topic and a discussion followed, based on a *tour de table* and interventions from the participants

The Commission fulfilled its role of facilitating exchange and dialogue between the participants by providing a common framework for discussion and taking the lead in helping Member States to exploit the integration possibilities of sport through giving national initiatives visibility at EU level.

## **3. THE QUESTIONNAIRE SENT TO MEMBER STATES**

As a preparation for the meeting a questionnaire was sent to Member States asking the following questions:

### **Gender issues**

1. Are there specific national programmes leading to a better integration of women through and in sport in your country? Please give general figures on the budget allocated to these programmes, as well as examples of implementing activities.
2. Present briefly results of activities implementing programmes to integrate women through/in sport. Is there any dimension in your programme which concerns ethnic minorities?

3. If there is a regulation concerning sport federations or sport activities in your country, does this regulation differentiate between professional and non-professional sport? If so, is there a specific provision concerning gender issues?
4. Please identify any representative / active players in civil society among stakeholders, regional entities or others with whom your administration is developing a partnership to promote equal opportunities for women.

#### **People with disabilities**

1. Are there specific national programmes leading to better integration of people with disabilities through/in sport in your country? Please give general figures on the budget allocated to these programmes as well as examples of implementing activities. See attached paper.
2. Present briefly the results of activities implementing programmes to integrate persons with disabilities through/in sport. Is there any dimension in your programme which relates to ethnic minorities?
3. If there is a regulation concerning sport federations or sports activities in your country, does this regulation differentiate between professional and non-professional sport? If so, is there a specific provision concerning issues for people with disabilities?
4. Please identify any representative/active actors in civil society among stakeholders, regional entities or others with whom your administration is developing a partnership to promote equal opportunities for people with disabilities.

In the annex you will find the answers of 19 Member States that contributed to the preparatory document for the meeting. Member States identified different issues and different approaches for dealing with Equal Opportunities through and in Sport. The solutions vary from no structure at all for developing a policy to a consistent allocation of funds from the national budget.

## **4. SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION**

### **4.1. Equal opportunities through and in sport for people with disabilities.**

Mr Sánchez Guijo introduced the issue with a presentation on the difference between Equal Opportunities *through* Sport and Equal Opportunities *in* Sport for people with disabilities. Using examples from his own experience, both as an athlete and as an economist and manager in the European Paralympic Committee, he prompted Member States' representatives to take the floor and respond spontaneously.

According to Mr Sánchez Guijo's presentation, Equal Opportunities in sport is a right, as all citizens should have access to all community activities. Within these activities, people take part in sport both as spectators and as players, and people with disabilities should be granted access. Thus, essential aspects of Equal Opportunities in Sport for people with disabilities that must be granted are a) accessibility to sport premises as sportspeople, b) accessibility to sport premises as spectators and c) support for people with disabilities who are willing to practise sports (cost of equipment is e.g. an obstacle to practising sport). His conclusion is: Sport is a right.

As regards Equal Opportunities *through* Sport, Mr Sánchez Guijo explained that sport is a huge mass phenomenon, the most widespread phenomenon of our era. Sport is a very powerful tool to push for new ways of thinking that are inclusive of all members of society. Athletes with disabilities show society that they are still able to compete and provide high-ranking performances. Sport is a very positive propagator of a message and it should be taken into account across the board in employment, integration, culture and education policies. Through sport, exclusion situations have been reversed and athletes with disabilities have even come to be regarded as local idols. Conclusion: Sport is not

only a right in itself; rather it is a cross-cutting means of achieving other fundamental rights.

A number of issues were raised for discussion and comments: the relationship between sport organisations and governments with special emphasis on the importance of the local level; the wider concept of physical activity which includes sport and health for all; the new concept of temporary disability which includes sick and elderly people within the scope of positive actions; the inclusive approach in opening access to sports for excluded people; the public interest of NGOs working on the integration of people with disabilities, thus allowing governments to save resources.

On the issue of people with disabilities taking part in sport, participants agreed that concerns can be summarised as follows:

- a) Poor general awareness of the importance of taking into account the need for people with disabilities to participate in sport activities
- b) Poor accessibility to sport premises as sportspeople,
- c) Poor accessibility to sport premises as spectators,
- d) Lack of support to people with disabilities wanting to practise sports (e.g. cost of equipment),

Throughout the debate, participants identified a number of key issues:

1. Need for better **awareness** raising;
2. Need for better **data** collection and availability;
3. Improve **government influence** under EU coordination and with EU support,
4. Establish better **monitoring** and **mentoring**,
5. **Exchange** good initiatives through an appropriate platform,
6. Use the opportunities offered by future **European Years**: European Year of Equal Opportunities for all 2007 (managed by DG EMPL) and European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 (managed by DG EAC).

The participants highlighted the need for the EU to promote and facilitate the exchange of good practices at local level, since this is the key administrative level for sustainable actions to integrate people with disabilities. The need for the Member States to advance towards common objectives set at EU level for integrating people with disabilities was also mentioned.

An example of good practice would be the “Paralympic school day”, a day for increasing awareness in all schools with the aim of explaining differences and human dignity and contributing to the broader concept of citizenship by including people with disabilities.

The representative of the European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD) submitted a document with recommendations and offered to make their expertise in this field freely available to the Commission and to the Member States.

Mr Sánchez Guijo summarised the discussion by stating that a major cause of concern was lack of awareness: citizens who are not directly involved in initiatives for people with disabilities are unaware of the implications and the importance of these actions. Raising awareness should be a priority for all levels of decision-making as social integration is something that could be accomplished through sport. In his opinion, one way to manage programmes and campaigns for people with disabilities would be to transfer this responsibility to sports federations. Sports federations have know-how and

high-level expertise concerning participation in sports for both people with disabilities and women. He ended by making it clear that a great deal still remains to be done. Hence, participants should not underestimate the importance of drawing conclusions and take them back to the national ministries in order to open new doors.

The Commission closed the working session mentioning the current problematic situation caused by the non-ratification of the Constitutional Treaty. Nevertheless, the Commission is working on mainstreaming sport within other EU policies. A number of EU policies were mentioned as examples: Health, Research, Education, Employment, etc. Finally, the Commission invited Member States to submit further contributions, opening up the opportunity for continued knowledge sharing.

#### **4.2. Equal Opportunities through and in Sport; gender issues.**

The Commission introduced Professor Doll-Tepper and her assistant, Ms Radtke, also a researcher.

Professor Doll-Tepper mentioned the Atlanta Women's Leadership Exchange in which she had actively participated. She emphasised the fact that the United Nations had declared 2005 as the International Year of Sport and Physical Education.

In her presentation she gave the example of German society which could be applied to other EU Member States in identifying structural, factual, and legal obstacles to the full participation of women in social life, as identified through field research. According to Prof Doll-Tepper, inequities still exist within sports at many levels, e.g. access to sports, participation and leadership. Leadership is still a level that is not easily accessible to women within sports organisations, even when they are well represented as members and coaches of these organisations.

Ms Radtke described the aims of her research, notably: to generate information about gender participation in leadership positions in sports organisations and the reasons for the lack of women; to increase the number of women in leading positions in sport; to offer equal access to women at decision-making levels; and to benefit from the wealth of women's experience and competence.

As researchers, the two experts suggested the EU and the Member States to take the following actions:

- Celebrate success of women in leadership positions,
- Strengthen partnerships with all stakeholders willing to integrate a gender perspective in their daily actions
- Take into account a gender-global approach when developing action plans;
- Promote and share information at all levels of society,
- Support women as leaders until inequities are removed,
- Promote grassroots involvement in order to create a bottom-up trend;
- Promote positive media portrayals in order to raise citizens' awareness;
- Offer safe, supportive environments;
- Recognise differences and diversity,
- Encourage government support,
- Give access to assistance programmes,

- Increase the number of female researchers and encourage relevant research

According to the experts, this call for action could be translated, for instance, into a study at EU level, a compendium of “success stories” and good practices and be used for strengthening partnership with stakeholders who are active in the field of sports and gender. Professor Doll-Tepper recommended the Commission and the Member States to use the “Key for Success” to put in place mentoring and monitoring systems, as only systematic and strategic planning will ensure successful implementation of Equal Opportunities policies.

The Member States reacted very positively to the presentations and contributed actively by raising different issues, e.g. women should be better represented at decision-making level; further research on women’s attitudes to leadership would be very useful; women leaders have managed to change working methods and structures; the ratio of women being elected and co-opted should be growing; the importance of volunteering is essential in sport leading positions; The role of education from primary level onwards was stressed as well as the importance of educating girls to become leaders.

Observers were also given the opportunity to take the floor. The European Paralympic Committee (EPC) explained that five of the nine members of their executive board are women, something that is not very common within sports organisations. When the EPC talks of Equal Opportunities, it means targeting the integration of any underrepresented group. In sports, the key tool for achieving Equal Opportunities in a wider context is the inclusion of athletes in leadership positions. The EPC asked the Commission and the Member States how institutions at the appropriate level can establish a dialogue with organisations in order to promote the inclusion of athletes at all decision-making levels. ENGSO mentioned the importance of promoting mentoring programmes to encourage women to take leadership positions; they wanted to circulate their contribution to attendees and asked Member States to support their EU-wide initiatives. In ENGSO’s view, any EU initiative in the field of sports should be realistic and include a cross-sector approach. The EU Office of German Sports wanted the Member States to take an interest in data collection in order to make a European comparison of the different situations possible. According to the Office’s statement, the EU has an important role in coordinating this quest for data in the Member States by, for example, ascertaining the field of interest, supporting Member States’ initiatives and following up on the exchange of good practices.

The Commission highlighted the results of the questionnaire sent to Member States on the gender issues and invited Member States to submit further contributions, for which it allowed some additional time, and opened a *tour de table* by asking about national programmes and initiatives in Member States.

A number of Member States mentioned that they are active in the field of gender mainstreaming and gender impact assessments when launching legislative or financial initiatives. In some Member States, officials use scientific data and the global gender approach when drafting official documents (in some cases this is compulsory from 2008). Three Member States have a Commission on Women and Sport.

The issue on ethnic minorities was raised and one Member State suggested that the Commission should raise the subject again and ask for data to see if there was also an interest in exchanging more information on this particular aspect.

On the issue of quotas, three Member States were adopting different approaches. The first has established a non-compulsory system of quotas whereby sports organisations should have 40% of women members. Quotas are being reached even without a system of penalties. A second Member State had set a 20% compulsory quota on Management

Boards within sports organisations and there was a penalty which has not been finally applied, since the quota for women's participation is being met. The third Member State has a new law stating that the proportion of women as members of committees must be the same as the proportion of women overall. One Member State reacted by arguing against a system of penalties as it is a negative approach and administrations could avoid this by using different kinds of tools.

Professor Doll-Tepper raised the question of Sport and Development, since "Development through sport: moving to the next stage" was to be the theme for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Magglingen conference as a closing event of the Second World Summit on physical education. Sport could be used as a tool not only in our countries, but also in developing countries, to promote other goals.

The Commission concluded the meeting by identifying the key issues discussed during both working sessions and announcing that the report of the meeting would be published on the website of the Sports Unit. Key issues had been:

- awareness raising;
- data collection;
- government influence under EU coordination and with EU support,
- better monitoring and mentoring,
- need for a good platform for initiatives,
- 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All and 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue would open opportunities to keep working on these issues.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

The aim of this meeting was to present and disseminate examples of good practice in sports participation with regard to gender and people with disabilities, in order to establish a basis for future cooperation between Member States and to identify possible actions at EU level, if and when appropriate. The Commission achieved this overall aim by establishing a dialogue between Member States and promoting the exchange of good practices during the meeting.

Short-term and medium-term objectives had been identified before the meeting and the Commission suggested as a first step that every key stakeholder should support initiatives based on the results of the expert meeting within their field of competences.

Short-term objectives were:

- exchange of good practices of integration through and in sport,
- identification of organised structures to cope with integration and equal opportunities in the field of sport,
- discussion of possible actions to build a European added value into the current national activities (e.g. explore possibilities for reinforcement and development of networking and cooperation with national correspondents for integration and Equal Opportunities in the sports field).

Medium-term objectives were:

- Encouraging the exchange of information on further national actions concerning Equal Opportunities through and in sport,

- Conveying EU information at national level through existing national structures.

By sharing information on their national activities, Member States were able to identify solutions being already applied to problematic social and professional dimensions of sport in other countries at EU level. Providing a common platform to exchange experiences and to discuss the functioning of national structures has in itself constituted an EU added value. Member States representatives confirmed the importance of the Commission's role in establishing the dialogue. The opportunity for Member States to interact and the high motivation of the participants created a fruitful discussion.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations to the EU based on identification of the main needs raised at the meeting:

- To increase knowledge about the level of participation of both disabled persons and women in sports (statistics and polls)
- To provide more information on Member State initiatives and actions so as to facilitate dissemination of good practices,
- To provide better information about EU funding possibilities for integration (and equal opportunities) activities through sport in other ongoing programmes, particularly in education,
- To raise awareness of the added value of sport for people with disabilities in other EU policy areas, including youth and education.