



Plenary sitting

B9-0115/2021

4.2.2021

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

further to Question for Oral Answer B9-0000/2021

pursuant to Rule 136(5) of the Rules of Procedure

on the impact of COVID-19 on youth and on sport
(2020/2864(RSP))

Sabine Verheyen

on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education

B9-0115/2021

European Parliament resolution on the impact of COVID-19 on youth and on sport (2020/2864(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Articles 165 and 166 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union and to Protocol (No 2) to the Treaties on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality,
 - having regard to Article 14 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
 - having regard to its resolution of 17 April 2020 on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 8 July 2020 on the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities and their families in the COVID-19 crisis²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 17 September 2020 on the cultural recovery of Europe³,
 - having regard to its resolution of 8 October 2020 on the Youth Guarantee⁴,
 - having regard to its resolution of 22 October 2020 on the future of European education in the context of COVID-19⁵,
 - having regard to the question to the Commission on the impact of COVID-19 on young people and on sport (O-000074/2020 – B9-0000/2021),
 - having regard to Rules 136(5) and 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the motion for a resolution of the Committee on Culture and Education,
- A. whereas according to the International Labour Organization⁶, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is hitting young people disproportionately hard and they are likely to suffer severe negative and long-lasting effects to their economic circumstances, health and well-being, including missing out on education, volunteering and training opportunities

¹ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0054.

² Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0183.

³ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0239.

⁴ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0267.

⁵ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2020)0282.

⁶ Global report, *Youth & COVID-19: Impacts on jobs, education, rights and mental well-being*, 11 August 2020.

at a crucial stage of their development;

- B. whereas the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of EU youth and education programmes on youth work and volunteering, on the national education systems, on employment and income, and on civil liberties is exacerbating inequalities, as illustrated by OECD statistics, which show that only around half of school students are able to access most or all of the curriculum, in spite of countries' efforts to provide online learning solutions; whereas this situation is making the consequences of the digital gap more severe and hindering the development of the necessary digital skills, while access to school curricula does not always mean that students in difficulty are able to learn;
- C. whereas young people have been at the heart of solidarity-motivated activities to respond to the needs of their communities in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, from leading awareness campaigns to working on the front line as part of the European Solidarity Corps, to other volunteering initiatives;
- D. whereas the negative effects of the pandemic are so far-reaching that they have further contributed to shrinking civic space in Member States across Europe, with many youth work and sporting organisations facing the prospect of having to close down, which would have a negative impact on the established structures of European and international cooperation and substantially limit civic engagement;
- E. whereas the psychosocial effects of COVID-19 affect young people's mental health and ability to socialise owing to both immediate and longer-term factors; whereas the lack of leisure activities and social constraints have a disproportionate effect on children and young people with disabilities;
- F. whereas the COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on sport and related sectors and industries; whereas the economic impact on professional sport has been enormous, as revenues have plummeted owing to numerous events at all levels having to be cancelled or held without spectators;
- G. whereas the ongoing impact of the pandemic on semi-professional and grassroots sport and recreation is devastating, with many sports clubs facing an existential threat as they are inherently non-profit and work mostly on a voluntary basis, and therefore operate without any financial reserves;
- H. whereas the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of sufficient possibilities for regular training and practice in physical contact sport are detrimental to athletes' progression and development;
- I. whereas sport is an important economic sector that accounts for 2.12 % of total GDP and 2.72 % of total employment in the EU and represents an estimated 5.67 million jobs;
- J. whereas sport fulfils important societal functions, by for example promoting social inclusion, integration, cohesion and values such as mutual respect and understanding, solidarity, diversity and equality, including gender equality; whereas sport and associated voluntary activities can improve physical and mental health and the

employability of young people in particular, as well as help steer young people away from involvement in violence, including gender-based violence, crime and drug use;

Youth

1. Is concerned that owing to the particular sensitivity of the youth labour market to economic cycles and economic crises, youth employment is hit harder by the fallout from the current pandemic, amplifying the negative trends of a sector largely dominated by unstable, low-paid, part-time jobs with weaker legal protections and social security standards;
2. Underlines the particularly acute impact the current pandemic has had on young people not in education, employment, or training (NEETs) and highlights the need to tackle the problems faced by young people from vulnerable groups; stresses the need to take into account the considerable gender disparities in relation to the proportion of NEETs;
3. Underlines that labour-intensive sectors often characterised by low pay, such as wholesale and retail, accommodation, tourism and food services, which typically employ low-skilled young workers and working students, have been most dramatically affected; notes that youth unemployment and poverty have risen steadily since the outbreak of the pandemic; believes that it is likely that youth unemployment will rise further in the short term and may stay above pre-pandemic levels in the long term;
4. Urges the Commission and the Member States to take all the necessary measures to counter the disastrous effects on youth employment, including through macroeconomic (fiscal and monetary) policies that direct public expenditure towards the provision of subsidies for recruitment or youth guarantees in support of tailored schemes for job retention and creation and for the upskilling and reskilling of young people, as well as investment in economic sectors that have the potential to absorb young jobseekers, by offering quality jobs and decent working and remuneration conditions;
5. Recalls the role of volunteering in developing life and work skills for young people; considers that financially-backed volunteering has the potential to help unemployed young people to withstand the economic shock of the COVID-19 crisis while contributing to society and gaining valuable experience that facilitates their transition to long-term regular employment; considers that the European Solidarity Corps can help young Europeans to broaden their opportunities beyond their local realities; urges the Commission, in this respect, to provide clarity and uniform guidelines for implementing programmes in crisis situations and removing barriers to participation caused by, inter alia, the lack of flexibility in funding, reductions in funding, increased restrictions on the granting of visas to volunteers from partner countries, and the failure to ensure the legal status of young people as volunteers;
6. Stresses the vital importance of informal and non-formal learning, the arts, sport, volunteering and social activities for encouraging youth participation and social cohesion as tools that can have a huge impact on local communities and can help address many of today's societal challenges;
7. Highlights that with the agreement it struck on 21 July 2020, the European Council should have been more ambitious in its support for the young generations – the future of

Europe – not least by including greater support for young people in the recovery plans by allocating 10 % to education and earmarking a 20 % contribution to the European Digital Strategy and the achievement of a digital single market; underlines, in this context, that sectoral programmes that have a direct focus on youth, such as Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, the Youth Guarantee and the Child Guarantee, or that have the potential to support the transition towards a fairer and more socially and environmentally sustainable Europe, have to be mobilised in such a way as to achieve their full potential, as they risk missing their ambitious targets, which would be bitterly disappointing for young people and future generations;

8. Underlines that the current pandemic has exacerbated the digital gap in the EU and, as such, highlights the urgent need to promote digital literacy for all and to encourage the widespread use, recognition and validation of alternatives, including informal and non-formal learning opportunities, such as online and digital learning and training; calls, in particular, for a strong focus and support for young learners who experienced a loss of income in technical, dual education and vocational education and training, and for the development and extensive use of quality digital tools, teaching and learning materials and content, in order to prevent people from dropping out of education and ensure a smooth and effective school-to-work transition; stresses that notwithstanding the specific context of COVID-19, it is important to maintain in-person learning to ensure that no one is left behind, in particular young children, vulnerable groups and young people from difficult socio-economic backgrounds without technological means or skills;
9. Urges the Commission and the Member States to increase investment in digital solutions and literacy for the development of practical skills, competences and qualifications, to make access to digital literacy available to all, and to promote the development of independent, multilingual, inclusive and free online learning tools in order to improve the overall level of digital skills and competences as part of the implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027); stresses the need to develop competences among teachers, trainers, head teachers, parents and managers with a view to improving the provision of online, distance and blended learning with a particular focus on skills development programmes;
10. Is concerned that the COVID-19 crisis has increased anxiety and fear among young people, which risks having a considerable impact on their lives and their school-to-work transition; calls for the wide use of tailored mental health services, psychosocial support and sporting activities, whether as standalone or modular measures, and for scaled-up mental well-being support in training and education institutions in order to ensure that the pandemic does not produce long-lasting psychological effects; highlights the impact of the pandemic on young people with disabilities and young people living in rural and remote areas and calls on the Commission and the Member States to pay particular attention to the needs of this group by adapting the available support measures and services;
11. Calls for a rights-based approach, rooted in the principles of non-discrimination and equality, to be taken to the various policies in order to tackle the multiple forms of discrimination suffered by young people during the COVID-19 crisis, and reminds the Commission and the Member States of the need for a special approach to supporting

and protecting vulnerable groups, such as young people with disabilities, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and at risk of domestic violence, young migrants and refugees, and young members of the LGTBIQ+ community; stresses the importance of free access to quality information on COVID-19 the pandemic as a whole, adapted to young people's needs;

12. Points out that sport and youth work activities in all their diversity are at particular risk throughout Europe, which is resulting in the shrinking of civic space, and urges the Commission and the Member States to take measures to preserve structures and ensure diversity of supply in the fields of youth and sport; recalls the need for the close involvement of local authorities, civil society organisations and social partners in the implementation of solutions designed to support young people and youth and sport organisations; highlights the importance for social cohesion of organised sport and youth organisations;

Sport

13. Is deeply concerned about possible lasting damage to the sports sector, not only in economic and employment terms, but also for society as a whole;
14. Underlines that sport and physical exercise are particularly important under the circumstances caused by the pandemic, since they strengthen physical and mental resilience; welcomes the fact that, according to the data, the lockdowns have led some people to practise certain individual sports more frequently and actively; is concerned, on the other hand, about the lack of physical activity observed among many young people during the lockdowns and the consequences this could have for public health;
15. Stresses that the European sport model needs to be preserved and promoted, as solidarity, fairness and a value-based approach will be more important than ever for the recovery of the sports sector and for the survival of grassroots sport;
16. Recalls that sport promotes and teaches values such as mutual respect and understanding, solidarity, diversity, fairness, cooperation and civic engagement and fosters cohesion and the integration of migrants and refugees; emphasises that sport knows no borders and unites people from different socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds; considers that grassroots sport in particular plays an essential role in promoting the social inclusion of people with fewer opportunities, people belonging to vulnerable groups and people with disabilities; calls on the Commission, in this regard, to strengthen inclusion through sport and to explore new avenues in order to maximise its impact and reach; calls for increased support to be provided to low-income families in order to enable their children to take part in sport and other leisure activities;
17. Underlines that disabled people face considerable financial and organisational challenges in accessing sport, both in the context of grassroots activities and at professional level, which have been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore urges the Commission to address this problem specifically in its upcoming disability strategy;
18. Stresses that the COVID-19 pandemic is having devastating consequences on the entire sports sector at all levels, especially on sporting organisations and clubs, leagues, gyms

and fitness centres, athletes, coaches, staff, and sport-related business, including sports event organisers and sports media; considers that the road to recovery will be challenging and underlines the need for targeted relief measures;

19. Considers that general recovery instruments adopted by the EU in response to the crisis must help support the sports sector in the short term and urges Member States to ensure that national support funds, the structural funds, and national recovery and resilience plans benefit the sports sector despite its specific characteristics and organisational structures;
20. Stresses the importance of rescue packages targeting all sports; highlights that while major spectator sports have often been the hardest hit financially, they should not be the only ones to qualify for financial aid or be given priority for it;
21. Believes that existing financial support may not be sufficient and calls on the Commission to explore all possible avenues for delivering additional targeted support for both amateur and professional sports with the aim of increasing the viability of the whole sector;
22. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to strengthen the recovery and crisis resilience of the sports sector in general, and grassroots sport in particular, through the EU programmes available and for which the sector is eligible, including the Erasmus+ programme and the European Solidarity Corps, and to ensure full access for sport to the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the European Regional Development Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund Plus and EU4Health; underlines that the incorporation of sport into the respective regulations and the removal of all obstacles in the application process at national level are key in this regard;
23. Invites the Commission to thoroughly assess the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sport across the Member States and, on the basis of the results of this assessment, develop a European approach to coping with the challenges and mitigating the possible consequences;
24. Calls for a structured and systematic exchange of best practices between Member States in dealing with the effects of the crisis on sport and for a systematic analysis of data and information on sporting participation and the impact of COVID-19; considers it useful to explore the development of new ways of practising sport in situations requiring physical distancing;
25. Is of the opinion that broad cross-sectoral cooperation is urgently needed in order to overcome the challenges that have emerged in the sports sector as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; underlines, in this regard, that collaboration at all levels, including all those involved in sport, the sport-related business sector and other relevant stakeholders, should be further encouraged;
26. Notes that the use of digital solutions such as sports apps has increased during the crisis; considers that the further digitalisation of the sports sector will increase its resilience in any future crises; calls for the development of digital tools enabling the financing of sporting activities during the pandemic;

27. Calls on the Commission to coordinate all measures taken to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on sport in a dedicated EU action plan;
28. Urges the Council to prioritise measures and actions aimed at helping the sector cope with the consequences of the pandemic in the short and long term in the forthcoming EU Work Plan for Sport;
29. Considers that for as long as the pandemic continues to evolve, it will be necessary to engage in coordinated dialogue between European and international sporting federations and the Member States in order to discuss the possibilities for the safe continuation of major international sporting events and competitions; urges the Member States and the Commission to strive for a coordinated approach as regards attendance at stadiums, travel restrictions and COVID-19 testing to enable the effective planning and responsible organisation of pan-European sporting competitions;
30. Calls for measures to strengthen doping prevention during and after COVID-19 lockdowns to promote athletes' health and fair play in European sport;
31. Considers that different sports have been affected to different degrees and that within certain sports, smaller clubs, lower-division competitions and grassroots activities have suffered, owing in particular to their economic dependence on small sponsors or on the athletes' own quotas; emphasises that amateur sport is the basis for sport at a professional level, as small, grassroots sports clubs make a significant contribution to the development of young athletes and mostly work on a voluntary basis; underlines the importance of solidarity within the European sporting community across and within different sports, and calls for increased support to minority and grassroots sport in the light of the economic difficulties in maintaining their activities;
32. Points out that the constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of sufficient possibilities for regular training and practice in sports that require physical contact have been detrimental to the progression and development of athletes; considers that event organisers, trainers and the athletes themselves should be made aware of the possible implications of the prolonged lack of intensive training; asks for cooperation among sporting institutions and organisations in supporting projects and concepts whose focus is on regaining lost capabilities;
33. Considers that arenas and stadiums are at the core of the social fabric of sport and cultural ecosystems in our societies; recognises that enabling venues to reopen is essential for the health and well-being of our citizens and for economic recovery, both now and in the future;
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34. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council, and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.