



Committee of the Regions

**ECOS-IV-014**

**71st plenary session  
10-11 October 2007**

**OPINION  
of the  
Committee of the Regions  
on  
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND SPORT**

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS ISSUES THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Sport can be used to address discrimination and inequality within sport and in the wider society, and can promote social values, such as cooperation, tolerance and solidarity.
- Local and regional authorities should plan, develop and promote equality through their sports provisions and services.
- Certain societal groups tend to participate less in sport, are poorly represented in decision-taking and are excluded from some sporting facilities; in many countries, sports administration does not reflect the diversity of the community that it serves.
- Local and regional authorities should encourage participants and spectators from all communities to sporting events and protect them from abuse and harassment; make available without discrimination sporting facilities that they own, operate, finance, or licence; encourage individuals from all communities to become involved at all levels of sports administration, management and coaching – these functions should become an indicator of local and regional authorities' overall performance.
- Local and regional authorities should learn from the experiences of other authorities across Europe and world-wide, and promote good practice locally and regionally.
- The EU should establish benchmarks in the promotion of equal opportunities in sport and sporting provision. In this connection CoR has established a "Charter for equality in sport".

Rapporteur:  
Peter Moore, Member of Sheffield City Council (UK/ALDE)

*“Sport has the power to unite people in a way little else can. Sport can create hope where there was once despair. It breaks down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of discrimination. Sport speaks to people in a language they can understand.”*

Nelson Mandela

*“The hidden face of sport is the thousands of enthusiasts who find in their football, rowing, athletics and rock-climbing clubs, a place for meeting and exchange, but above all the training ground for community life. In this microcosm, people learn to take responsibility, to follow rules, to accept one another, to look for consensus, to take on democracy. Seen from this angle, sport is par excellence the ideal school for democracy.”*

Daniel Tarschys

Secretary-General Council of Europe

## **I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

### THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

#### *General remarks*

1. Considers that sport, like other domains of social life, can both unite and divide society.
2. Believes that discrimination and inequality exists in sport, but that sport can be used to address these issues within sport and in the wider society, and can promote social values, such as team spirit, fair competition, cooperation, tolerance and solidarity.
3. Equal opportunities for all societal groups within and through sport can best be achieved through joint and complementary efforts by all spheres of governance: local and regional authorities have a key role to play.
4. Welcomes the designation of 2007 as the European year of equal opportunities for all. Regrets that the CoR and some Member States have not participated as fully as possible, whilst considering this opinion to be a contribution towards the Year.
5. Recalls the declaration of the Nice European Council in 2000 which called on the EU to take account of the specific characteristics and the social, educational and cultural functions of sport. Recalls that the social significance of sport is the subject of Declaration No 29 appended to the Amsterdam Treaty. Welcomes the European Commission's White Paper on sports, published on 11 July 2007, and calls on it to address the issues of equality of opportunity mentioned therein.
6. Supports the Council of Europe definition of sport as being "all forms of physical ability which, through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical

fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels".

7. Believes that the pursuit of equality is not just about tackling unlawful discrimination where it exists, it is also about being proactive in changing perceptions and attitudes to dispel ignorance and prejudice, and making the best of our communities' talents and allowing everyone to realise their own potential.
8. Recognises that discrimination exists in many forms: direct and indirect; institutional and individual; overt and subtle; plays a part in reducing (or increasing) the access, opportunities and life chances of sectors of society in social, political and economic life.
9. Recognises that, for differing reasons, certain societal groups tend to participate less in sport, are poorly represented at decision-making levels and for a variety of reasons are excluded from some sporting facilities. Recognises that as a consequence some of these communities experience disproportionately high levels of illness associated, for example with sedentary lifestyles.
10. Recognises that in many countries, sports administration does not reflect the diversity of the community that it serves. Considers that this issue should be addressed by local and regional authorities, including appropriate training for administrators to ensure that discriminatory practices – whether deliberate or unwilling – are identified and addressed.
11. Recalls the work of the EU Monitoring Centre on Racism & Xenophobia (EUMC), in conjunction with Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) and UEFA, in the area of combating racism in football. Welcomes the creation of the European Fundamental Rights Agency which brings with it the opportunity to broaden the scope of their work. Calls on it to include equal opportunities and sport as part of its remit. Requests it to report to CoR on an annual basis on this matter.
12. Calls on the organisers of major international sporting events (a) to raise the issue of equal opportunities in their sport; (b) to organise seminars in parallel to the event to discuss equalities issues relevant to the sport, and to include the local and regional dimension.

#### *Age*

13. Whereas sports policy is largely addressed towards younger people, for understandable reasons, recognises that participation in sport declines significantly as people get older, even though participation in sport can increase longevity and quality of life in older age.
14. Considers that for older people, sport provides an opportunity for lifelong learning, both through developing skills and competence as a participant, and more widely through lifelong involvement including qualifications in coaching, sports leadership and administration.

15. Calls on local and regional authorities' sports policies and provision to be balanced across all age groups, and to accord equal value to the less vigorous and non-competitive sports which are more accessible to older people.

*Disability*

16. Recognises that participation in sport is lower for people with disabilities. Steps must be taken to ensure that disabled people of both sexes and of any age can exercise to the full their right to participate in all forms of sport.
17. Calls on local and regional authorities' sports policies and provision to take into account people with disabilities, and to accord equal value to the less vigorous and non-competitive sports which are more accessible to people with disabilities. Calls for special consideration to be given to providing sporting activities and facilities for older people, including the provision of appropriate advice relative to their physical and mental health.
18. Calls on local and authorities to monitor the recruitment of people with disabilities as sports administrators and coaching staff.

*Gender*

19. Recognises that participation in sport in some member states is higher by men than by women, although there is evidence that this gap is narrowing.
20. Calls on local and regional authorities to use their training and education policies, principally, to avoid gender stereotyping in directing girls and boys towards certain sports and away from others. Calls for the same opportunities to be given to boys and girls to engage in whatever kinds of sport they find interesting. Local and regional authorities should use the gender budgeting technique when drawing up draft budgets for sports facilities and planning sports provision.
21. Calls on local and regional authorities to monitor gender balance in the recruitment of sports administrators and coaching staff.
22. Calls for special consideration to be given by local and regional authorities to providing sporting activities and facilities for pregnant women and young mothers, including the provision of appropriate advice relative to their condition; the provision of childcare facilities at sports centres and venues; and the provision of safe, convenient and affordable public transport access to sports centres and venues.

*Race*

23. Recognises that sports such as, for instance, basketball, baseball, running, tennis and volleyball all require similar "bioenergetics"; however there is much to suggest that an individual's choice of sport is more contingent on social and cultural factors than on any physical determinants.
24. Stresses the importance of discrimination-free access to all forms of sporting activity for all sections of the population.
25. Welcomes the European Parliament resolution on football and racism (14.3.2006) which calls on all stakeholders to do more to fight racism in the sport.
26. Considers that the relatively high level of racial diversity in elite sport, notably football, is not replicated in other levels of sporting activity. The emergence of some non-white individuals at the highest level of some sports can give the impression that racism has been eradicated. In truth, professional sport delivers relatively few from social disadvantage. Racism can also occur when non-white players are assigned stereotypical roles.
27. Calls for action to combat any racial stereotype that may exist among teachers and coaches and that may be a contributory factor in channelling particular ethnic minorities into or out of particular sports.
28. Calls on local and authorities to monitor race and ethnic balance in the recruitment of sports administrators and coaching staff.

*Religion or belief*

29. Recognises that all religions and faith groups have specific customs (e.g. single-sex bathing) and practices (e.g. ritual, timing and frequency of prayer) that can lead to unwitting exclusion from sport; thus a ban on the wearing of the Islamic headscarf (*hijab*) creates a potential barrier to the full participation of Muslim women in football. Considers that exclusion of certain groups can also arise from islamophobia, anti-semitism and other phobia or forms of hatred and calls on the EU to address this form of discrimination as for racism and xenophobia. In this connection, the EU should involve Member States and local and regional authorities as infrastructures providers, and citizens and sports organisations as users in promoting and encouraging more fun and spontaneous sporting activity as an area for equal opportunities for all.
30. Calls on local and regional authorities to promote dialogue between these groups and sports organisers to get a shared understanding of the issues and to explore ways of accommodating specific practices and customs in a tolerant and constructive manner, whilst recognising that in some cases a practicable solution might not be possible.

*Sexual orientation*

31. Considers that the treatment of gays and lesbians in sport is a special cause for concern. They are often faced with the stark choice of concealing their sexuality, or creating sports clubs and events solely for gays and lesbians. Recognises that whereas a significant proportion of the European population is homosexual not one current professional footballer is openly gay. Concealment and segregation cannot be a long-term solution: the objective must be to make all men and women welcome in all sports clubs, regardless of sexual orientation.
32. Calls on local and regional authorities to work with local and regional lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups to find ways to remedy these issues.
33. Welcomes the 2006 FARE five-point guide for combating homophobia in football.

*Equal opportunities in sport and sporting provision*

34. Calls on local and regional authorities to challenge and remove discrimination in sport and sporting provision.
35. Believes that greater research should be undertaken on the situation of minorities in sport. Attention should be paid to all forms of discrimination, which can vary from country to country, region to region, and indeed from sport to sport.
36. Calls on EU-wide sporting bodies, notably UEFA, to implement meaningful and effective sanctions in instances of racial and other discriminatory abuse in events within its jurisdiction; calls on UEFA especially to rectify this position and report to CoR after the 2008 European football championships.
37. Calls on local and regional authorities to encourage and welcome participants and spectators from all communities to sporting events, whether or not organised by a local or regional authority, and to protect them from abuse and harassment.
38. Calls on local and regional authorities to make available without discrimination sporting facilities that they own, operate, finance directly or indirectly, or which they licence for sporting activity.
39. Calls on local and regional authorities to encourage individuals from all communities to become involved at all level of sports administration, management and coaching.

*Promoting equal opportunities through sport*

40. Calls on local and regional authorities to use sport to promote tolerance and understanding within the context of social inclusion and combating discrimination.
41. Calls on local and regional authorities to become more actively involved in sporting provision.
42. Calls on education authorities to encourage children not only to practice sport, but to appreciate the societal and cultural dimension of sport in all its diversity.
43. Calls on European networks of sports organisers, coaches and administrative sports staff should be encouraged to consider and promote the equalities dimension of their work.
44. Urges local and regional authorities, organisations and clubs to provide training in multiculturalism, non-discrimination and tolerance for their staff and coaches.

*Local and regional authorities*

45. Believes that local and regional authorities have as a core function the provision of sport, leisure and cultural services. These services must be recognised as key tools in the promotion of social inclusion and combating discrimination.
46. Considers that local and regional authorities should plan, develop and promote equality through their sports provision and services, incorporating gender budgeting as well.
47. Considers that the provision of sport, and the equality of opportunity within and through that provision, should become an indicator of local and regional authorities' overall performance.
48. Calls on local and regional authorities to recognise and address institutionalised discrimination in the provision of an appropriate service to people because of their age, disability, gender, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, or sexual orientation, which can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes or behaviour which amounts to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and stereotyping which cause disadvantage to those societal groups.
49. Calls on local and regional authorities to address themselves to three main areas of action:
  - (i) Commitment, policy and planning: demonstrating a commitment to promoting equality through sport by producing written policies and robust action plans, and to monitor and review them regularly.

- (ii) Participation and public image: making every effort to increase the diversity of participants and employees in sports and leisure services, including steps to achieve a positive and inclusive image.
  - (iii) Administration and management: setting up procedures to tackle discrimination and inequality. Local and regional authorities should seek to improve the diversity of representation in sports governance, administration and management.
50. Calls on local and regional authorities to work with civil society, partner associations, sporting associations, local sports clubs and non-governmental organisations to achieve mutual objectives in this area and to exercise political leadership.
51. Recommends that local and regional authorities develop a media strategy to advertise sporting opportunities for target groups with a view to increasing their participation, and to publicise their activities and achievements. Local and regional authorities should work towards eliminating stereotyping, discrimination and racism in sports reporting, including in publications produced or financed by these authorities, for example by reporting on women's football as the norm and not as a novelty.
52. Calls on local and regional authorities to exchange and learn from the experiences of other authorities across Europe and world-wide, and to promote good practice locally and regionally. Calls on the EU institutions to facilitate this exchange of good practice. In particular, the CoR and European associations of local government (CEMR, AER, Eurocities, etc.) should consider how to facilitate the creation of networks of cities, local authorities and regions that have special experience with these activities.
53. Calls on the EU to establish a benchmark for local and regional authorities in the promotion of equal opportunities in sport and sporting provision. In this connection, establishes a CoR Charter for equality in sport:

*CoR Charter for equality in sport*

*“Signatories are committed to using their influence to create a world of sport in which all people can take part without facing discrimination of any kind. Signatories pledge to:*

- *Challenge and remove discrimination in sport*
- *Encourage people from all communities to become involved in sport*
- *Welcome employees and spectators from all communities and protect all employees and spectators from discriminatory abuse and harassment*
- *Encourage skilled and talented individuals from all communities to become involved at all levels of sports administration, management and coaching*
- *Develop the best possible equality policies and practices that are subject to regular review and update*

- *Celebrate diversity in sport.*”

54. Calls on local and regional authorities to sign this Charter and to audit their current approach in respect of the above.
55. Undertakes to establish an annual CoR award for local or regional authorities who best implement the Charter.

Brussels, 11 October 2007.

The President  
of the Committee of the Regions

Michel Delebarre

The Secretary-General  
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

## II. PROCEDURE

<b>Title</b>	Equal opportunities and sport
<b>Reference(s)</b>	
<b>Legal basis</b>	Article 265, 5 <sup>th</sup> al. of EC treaty
<b>Procedural basis</b>	
<b>Date of Council referral/ Date of Commission letter</b>	
<b>Date of Bureau decision</b>	12 February 2007
<b>Commission responsible</b>	Commission for Economic and Social Policy
<b>Rapporteur</b>	Peter Moore, Member of Sheffield City Council (UK/ALDE)
<b>Analysis</b>	15 February 2007
<b>Discussed in commission</b>	28 June 2007
<b>Date adopted by commission</b>	28 June 2007
<b>Result of the vote in commission</b>	Adopted by a majority
<b>Date adopted in plenary</b>	11 October 2007
<b>Previous Committee opinions</b>	Opinion on the Communication from the Commission on Non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all - A framework strategy COM(2005) 224 final, and on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council on the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007) - Towards a Just Society COM(2005) 225 final - 2005/0107 (COD)  CdR 226/2005 fin <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C115, 16.5.2006, p. 65-69.