



High Level Group on Grassroots Sport

*Second meeting (22 January 2016)
Report by the European Commission*

1. INTRODUCTION

The second meeting of the High Level Group on Grassroots Sports took place on 22 January 2016 in Brussels. The Group is composed of high level members having a great diversity of backgrounds and experiences. It includes current and former athletes, former ministers and politicians, academics, representatives of sport organisations and other high-profile personalities in the field of sport.

In the second meeting 13 Members were present; two were excused.

Sir Graham Watson and Mr Niels Nygaard, co-chairs of the group, welcomed the Group members and opened the meeting. Members were provided with updated information regarding the schedule and the methodology of the Group's work. Following a proposal of the chairmen, the Group agreed to broaden the scope of its work, which had been agreed during the first meeting, so as to include infrastructure and urban planning aspects relating to grassroots sport.

The members of the Group then focused their analyses on two themes related to grassroots sport, namely social inclusion and health.

2. SOCIAL INCLUSION AND THE ROLE OF GRASSROOTS SPORT

The Commission presented its work in the field of social inclusion through sport. Relevant policy documents, the funding opportunities of the Erasmus+ Programme and examples of sport-based projects aiming to foster integration of migrants and other disadvantaged groups were introduced.

An inspiring lecture was then given by Mrs Heike Kübler from the German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB), focusing on the 'Integration through Sports' programme which has been running for more than two decades in Germany. Her comprehensive presentation involved various aspects of the programme from the theoretic basis to the practical implementation. She explained that as a consequence of the considerable number of migrants arrived in 2015 in Germany; the programme was opened for all asylum seekers regardless of their origin or their prospects for remaining in Germany. At last, Mrs Kübler also mentioned the current use of sport facilities as provisional housings for migrants, which had an impact on organised sport in some German regions.

The subsequent discussion focused on the major challenges experienced during the implementation of the presented project. Particular attention was given to the need to address adequate funding of sport, for local sport clubs in particular, to deal with the challenges related to the current migration crisis. While confirming, in this context, that the situation was very different across Europe, the Group noted the need for new networks and additional requirements for clubs to provide more flexible offers. Several members were of the view that in addition to quantitative data, more qualitative data was needed to evaluate whether the integration of migrants was successful and effective in the end. In the discussion, many members mentioned good practices in using sport as a tool for social integration of less privileged groups. In this regard, and in view of the examples mentioned by Mrs Kübler, some aspects of infrastructure and urban planning relating to sport were

brought up. It was also stressed that the social inclusion dimension of grassroots sport cannot be limited to the current migration crisis but must involve also other hard-to-reach groups, such as the elderly, people with a disability or the Roma community.

3. HEALTH AND GRASSROOTS SPORT

The third session focused on health aspects relating to grassroots sport. The Commission presented the state of play regarding the ongoing works at EU level to promote health-enhancing physical activity. This includes a comprehensive policy agenda implemented in cooperation with Member States, the World Health Organization and other relevant stakeholders.

The following remarkable lecture given by Professor Peter Krstrup, University of Copenhagen, presented team sports as prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of non-communicable diseases for individuals across the life span. The presentation provided evidence and gave many inspiring and practical examples of (team) sport activities that are beneficial from an individual health perspective. It was for example mentioned that recent studies had demonstrated that playing football was in some cases more effective than medication, or that the health status of children active in a sport club was better than those who were not regularly engaged in a sport club. During the subsequent lively discussion, the members of the Group considered the situation relating to the presence of adequate physical education time in existing school curricula and expressed the view that grassroots level club sport is most beneficial from a health perspective. The Group also discussed the need for better cooperation with educational institutions in order to develop specific qualifications for coaches, and stressed the importance for sport federations to adapt their offers towards more "health-enhancing" sport for all.

4. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The chairmen proposed that, in order to have final conclusions that could take into account the various ideas and concrete suggestions, a short questionnaire should be sent to the members. It should allow the rapporteurs to progress with their report. The Group unanimously accepted the proposal.

The chairmen then concluded the meeting by proposing three more meeting dates (tentatively set at 16 March, 8 April and 6 June 2016). The next meeting would focus on informal learning, skills development and volunteering. The members of the Group were also invited to participate in the forthcoming EU Sport Forum, which will be held on 9 and 10 March, in The Hague (NL).