Panel Discussion – Session 1

4th November 2026

Session I aims at establishing a shared political commitment to:

- **safeguarding children and young people's rights in sport;**
- **preventing violence, abuse and discrimination;**
- **protecting physical and mental health and well-being;**
- **ensuring access to safe and inclusive sport;**
- **strengthening accountability and co-operation; and**
- **giving children and young people a meaningful voice in matters affecting them.**

Dia dhaoibh a chairde,

Good Morning colleagues.

And Merci à His Serene Highness Prince Albert II et Alan Berset for the warm welcome.

I am delighted to be here with you all today in Monaco to discuss the vital importance of the safeguarding of children in Sport and how we can work together to make Sport, as a whole, a safe and inclusive space for young people to play, grow and excel.

Reaffirming our shared commitment to the rights and wellbeing of young people is essential. From an Irish perspective, Sport Ireland, which is our state agency in charge of sport development in Ireland, works to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our children as they participate in sport.

This is underpinned by the Sport Ireland Act 2015 which sets our Sport Ireland's statutory remit. Alongside a role in increasing participation in sport and supporting excellence, Sport Ireland also develops and shares guidelines and codes of practice that promote best practice for the protection of children in sport, ensuring everything we do is fully consistent with child protection legislation and best practice.

To bring this work to life, Sport Ireland engages directly with over 60 autonomous National Governing Bodies of Sport. Together, they work to raise awareness of and promote positive behaviors that uphold good practice and fair play across all sports. Sport Ireland also partners with 29 Local Sports Partnerships across the island of Ireland to achieve this at a deeper community level.

For the Irish Government, the safeguarding of children in sport is of paramount importance and this can be seen from our continued investment and support of the work of Sport Ireland. The

priority here being to ensure children and young people's experiences of sport are fun, enjoyable, safe and always conducted in the spirit of fair play.

Strengthening accountability also requires strong cross-sector co-operation. Sport Ireland works closely with Tusla, Ireland's Child and Family Agency, to ensure the sport sector is informed and kept up to date regarding their legal obligations under the Children First Act 2015 and the 2017 National Guidance. In practice, Tusla's Children First Information and Advice Officers are involved in the delivery of training to Sport Ireland's own safeguarding tutors.

This also allows for clear and accessible reporting pathways. If anyone has grounds for concern that a child has been harmed, they can contact Tusla Child and Family Agency via their online portal or directly report it to the Designated Liaison Person within the sports club or relevant service provider.

Of course, true safeguarding in sport also means ensuring it is open to everyone and that barriers to participation are actively removed. To this point, in 2024 Sport Ireland made Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and Anti-Racism workshops available to over 60 National Governing Bodies of Sport, the 29 Local Sports Partnerships and a number of other recognised bodies in the sector.

In addition to this training provision, in 2025, €2 million was awarded to Ireland's National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships as part of an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Fund. This investment directly supports projects, including relevant training that is designed to remove barriers to participation in sport for young people from diverse and underrepresented communities.

Ultimately, sport should be something that connects us all. Whether it is the celebrations of a 90th minute goal, the final throw in a basketball game, beating your personal best in the 50 metre breaststroke or simply managing one more rep than you could the week before. It must never be something that comes at the risk of a young person's safety or to the detriment of their mental health.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh, go léir.
Thank you.