

Strasbourg, 30 September 2026

MSL19(2026)4

19th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport

Monaco
3-4 November 2026

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

prepared by

Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport

Accord partiel élargi sur le sport

1. Context: safer and healthier sport for all children

Sport can make an important contribution to the physical and mental health, social development, inclusion and education of children and young people. It can promote social cohesion, mutual understanding, equality and diversity, while helping children and young people to develop skills such as leadership, teamwork and resilience.

These benefits cannot, however, be taken for granted. Sport can also expose children and young people to violence, abuse, discrimination, neglect, excessive pressure, substance abuse and other practices that may harm their physical or mental health. Risks may be increased by power imbalances, poor governance, toxic organisational cultures, impunity and the absence of appropriate reporting, investigation and redress mechanisms.

The 19th Conference of Ministers Responsible for Sport, organised by the Council of Europe and due to take place in Monaco on 4 November 2026, will address the key policy challenge of ensuring that children and young people can participate in sport in safe, inclusive, empowering and rights-respecting environments.

2. Purpose of this background document

This background document is intended to assist Ministers and participants in preparing their statements and contributions to the 19th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Sport. It explains the overall focus of the Conference, the purpose and expected content of its two sessions, and the main issues that Ministers and participants may wish to address in their interventions.

The Conference will provide an opportunity for Ministers and participants to exchange political views, share national experience and identify practical measures to make sport safer, healthier, more inclusive and more respectful of children's rights.

The draft ministerial resolution proposes commitments for the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, member States, the sports movement, the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) and the Saint-Denis Committee. It therefore provides an important framework for delegations preparing their statements and contributions.

3. Conference theme and sub-topics

The Conference's theme is "Safer and Healthier Sport for All Children", and is divided into two interrelated sub-topics. The first concerns the prevention, detection and response to violence and abuse. National authorities and sports organisations should establish comprehensive safeguarding procedures, including safeguarding plans, codes of conduct, safer recruitment, case management, training and awareness-raising. These policies should adopt a human rights-based approach, ensuring the inclusion and protection of vulnerable groups and reflecting equality and diversity. Children and young people should also be involved in developing relevant policies.

Clear safeguarding roles and responsibilities are essential. Safeguarding officers, coaches, referees, doctors, administrators and other sports professionals should receive appropriate training to recognise all forms of violence and abuse. They should also know how to respond to and report concerns to the appropriate authorities in a trauma-informed manner. In addition, guidelines and good practices on recruiting, training and supporting staff and volunteers should be shared, including the lawful and rights-compliant exchange of information on criminal and disciplinary records.

The second sub-topic would focus on sport's role in protecting and promoting children and young people's physical and mental health and well-being. Although sport can encourage achievement and excellence, the pressure placed on child and young athletes must be balanced against their need for enjoyment, fulfilment and psychological well-being. Excessive pressure, harassment or unrealistic expectations may contribute to harmful behaviours, including the abuse of substances.

Finally, sport should be promoted as a safe and inclusive environment for all children and young people, including those from vulnerable groups. Sport policies should adopt an intersectional approach that recognises and address the heightened risks of harm or barriers to participation in sport for these groups.

4. Practical information for the preparation of Session I

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.

Session I will start with a panel on the themes of the draft ministerial resolution. For further information on the speakers, please consult the Conference programme. The panel will be co-moderated by Matthias Kloth, Head of the Department of Digital Governance and Sport of the Council of Europe, and Maren Mildestvedt, Project Manager at Safe Sport, Norwegian Sports Confederation; and young delegate to the Norwegian Delegation.

The panel will be followed by the statements by Heads of Delegation to express their political priorities, national experience and expectations for future Council of Europe and EPAS action.

Statements shall have a duration of a maximum of 3 minutes in total. Delegations may wish to organise their statements around the following structure:

- Political commitment: briefly state the delegation's commitment to safeguarding children's rights and promoting safe, healthy and inclusive sport.
- National situation: identify the main risks and challenges facing children and young people in sport in the country.
- Measures already taken: present two or three concrete measures, policies or programmes, explaining their scope and the organisations involved.
- Evidence of impact: where possible, indicate how the measures are monitored or evaluated and what results have been observed.
- Remaining challenges: identify implementation gaps or areas requiring further action.
- International co-operation: explain what experience the delegation can share and what support or co-operation it would welcome from the Council of Europe, EPAS and other partners.

The statement may cover the two sub-topics of the Conference and should preferably include at least one concrete example from grassroots sport and, where relevant, one example from high-performance or professional sport.

Delegations are invited to send their written statements to the EPAS Secretariat at sport.epas@coe.int, to allow the interpreters to receive the information in advance.

5. Practical information for the preparation of Session II: The way forward towards safer and healthier sport for all children

Session II will move from political commitments to the practical implementation of the draft ministerial resolution.

The session will consist of a panel on inspirational practice on implementation of measures that enable safer and healthier sport for all children. For further information on the speakers, please consult the Conference programme. This will be followed by an interactive session with Ministers and participants where they will be invited to share existing good practices, challenges and to discuss how future measures could be implemented and monitored, and how national authorities and the sports movement can overcome common obstacles to enable efficient and effective collaboration. Ministers are invited to reflect on how national systems can strengthen child safeguarding, health and well-being in and through sport, and how good practices can be shared across borders.

Specifically, Ministers and participants will be invited to answer to one or more of the following guiding questions:

A. Governmental and inter-governmental cooperation:

- What **role should governments play** in creating the conditions for safer and healthier sport for children, both nationally and internationally?
- What forms of **collaboration** between sport, education, health, social affairs, justice and law enforcement **ministries** have proven most effective in creating safer and healthier sporting environments for children, and what resources are required for them to succeed?
- How can **governments work together across borders** to address safeguarding, child protection and well-being challenges in sport, and how can **international collaboration** be strengthened to address shared challenges affecting children in sport?

B. Governmental-sport cooperation:

- How can member States best define and coordinate **responsibilities** between sport organisations, public authorities and specialist services to ensure children are effectively protected and **trust** in sport's institutions is ensured?
- How can member States contribute to ensuring access to **sport for all** children and young people, particularly those from vulnerable or marginalised groups?
- What examples of success have you seen in **state and sport cooperation** to address issues in sport, and what barriers still need to be overcome?

C. Resources and support for safer and healthier sport:

- How can governments and sport organisations work together to ensure all children, particularly those from vulnerable or marginalised groups, have **safe, inclusive and equitable access** to sport and physical activity?
- What **resources, expertise and support mechanisms** are most needed to strengthen **safeguarding and child well-being** systems in sport, particularly at community and grassroots level?
- What measures are being taken to address wider **health and well-being** issues affecting children in sport, particularly **elite sport**, including mental health, overtraining, injury and concussion prevention, body image concerns, pressure to achieve results, and doping? What child centred good practice examples to address such issues can be shared?

- When something goes wrong, what are the key features of a **trusted, child-centred reporting and referral system**, and how can States ensure that every child knows where to turn for help and receives appropriate support?
- **Independent and effective responses** What principles should guide the investigation and management of safeguarding concerns to ensure trust and confidence in the system?
- What **evidence, indicators and monitoring systems** should Member States and/or sports use to assess whether children are becoming safer, healthier and better protected through sport, and how can lessons learned be shared across countries?

Interventions should be a maximum of 1.5 minutes, but Ministers and participants may contribute in response to several questions. Delegations are encouraged to connect their national examples with the commitments set out in the draft resolution. Delegations are also invited to ask questions to the panellists or react to their interventions.

Delegations wishing to respond to one or more of the guiding questions are invited to contact the EPAS Secretariat at sport.epas@coe.int so that the information can be provided to the moderator and the interpreters in advance. Spontaneous questions and answers will also be welcome during the session.

6. Relevant EPAS projects and resources

The Conference provides an opportunity to take stock of existing Council of Europe work and to identify future priorities.

EPAS supports child safeguarding and sports governance through the “[Start to Talk](#)” project and the [Pool of International Experts on Safe Sport](#). The work is complemented by tools and standards including the [HELP Module on Child Safeguarding in Sport](#), [Guidelines on Safer Recruitment](#), the [Glossary on Safe Sport](#) and a toolkit on the prevention and reaction to child sexual abuse in sport (to be published soon on the [Start to Talk](#) webpage).