

RECOVERING BETTER: SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE

Reopening, Recovery and Resilience Post-COVID-19



Recovering Better: Sport for Development and Peace Reopening, Recovery and Resilience Post-COVID-19

An advocacy brief by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN Women, World Health Organization, UN Office for Drugs and Crime, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, International Labour Organization, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, UN Children's Fund, UN Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Violence Against Children, UN Climate Change, UN Environment Programme and the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism



Foreword



The multifaceted and unprecedented impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have torn at the already fraying social fabric, deepening inequalities, sharpening divides and heralding a need for transformative change.

The world of sport was among those sectors most visibly affected -- hard and early. Already a pioneer and promoter of inclusive and sustainable development in an unstable and unequal world, the sporting world must now redefine and redesign itself, not only to improve its resilience to future shocks, but to broaden its contribution to the world's efforts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

Sport has often helped to create spaces for dialogue, advance gender equality, promote social inclusion and tackle discrimination against vulnerable groups. It has played this role at all levels of society, from the smallest communities to the global village. It has provided avenues for improving individual health and community well-being. We continue to count on sport to provide this space.

The professional and elite sport world should also be recognized for its significant contributions during the pandemic period. These have included the offering of sports stadiums as medical facilities, including for storing medical supplies, carrying out COVID-19 testing and serving as temporary hospitals or as potential "surge sites," when the number of patients exceeds hospital capacity. Sports stadiums have also been offered as polling locations, to provide venues for safe and socially distanced voting.

This advocacy brief hopes to provide Member States and the sporting world with the information that they need to approach reopening, recovery, resilience and transformation in a collaborative way. This can help ensure that the world of sport continues to make its vital and valued contributions to building a better future for all.

- Secretary-General António Guterres



Introduction

Sport is about participation. It brings individuals, communities and countries together and, in doing so, often bridges cultural, ethnic and national divides. But the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll on the world of sport, both in the professional and in the recreational spheres.

Many sporting events were postponed or cancelled due to the risk of mass gatherings¹ amplifying the transmission of the virus, as well as risks to athletes and professionals supporting these players and events. It was many months into the crisis before, with much innovation and collaboration, athletes began to return to arenas, in most cases, with fans still absent, and with varying consequences for the athletes and their families.

Just as professional and elite sport has been heavily impacted by COVID-19, sport for all and sport for development organizations, as well as sport within the education sector and recreational sphere, have also been hard hit. Lockdowns, imposed for safety, saw many communities without the sporting activities that had kept them moving pre-crisis, with many children out of school and community-based sport programmes unable to hold in-person activities as gyms, fitness studios, pools and many other spaces became not safely accessible to the public. In some parts of the world, where transmission rates have dropped or the safety situation has otherwise improved, some spaces and activities are slowly re-emerging, drawing from various pockets of information and experience to create the protocols and practices to serve safely.

These piecemeal efforts will not be enough to bring back sport and physical activity at the scale required to ensure its much needed contribution to human well-being. The present brief sets out a vision to support the reopening, recovery and resilience of sport. The brief first highlights critical intersects between sport, physical activity, SDG

¹ See, for example: <https://www.aljazeera.com/sports/2020/9/20/coronavirus-what-sporting-events-are-affected-by-the-pandemic>

achievement and COVID-19 impact, the consequences of these intersects for our individual and collective wellbeing and ideas for addressing these consequences. It then presents critical actions or issues to be addressed across four key areas - promoting human rights and combatting discrimination; ensuring equal access to sport and physical activity; safeguarding participants; and ensuring integrity in sport- seeking to imagine the necessary course adjustments for bringing the sporting world safely back into full operation with renewed and refocused vigor.

The vision presented is a multistakeholder and multilateral vision, requiring collaboration between Member States, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, to maximize the contribution of sport to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. It draws from normative frameworks and sport-policy instruments including the UN Action Plan on Sport for Development and Peace; the Kazan Action Plan; the Global Action Plan on Physical Activity 2018-2030 as well as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant conventions, declarations, resolutions and principles.² It is also based on the experiences of UN entities, in their work with experts, partners, government officials and other stakeholders in related fields.

The brief concludes by homing in on the role of the UN system in this multilateral, multistakeholder re-envisioning of sport as both an end and a means in the recovery from the impacts of COVID-19.



² These include the United Nations Convention against Corruption and related resolutions; Human rights conventions and instruments including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); General Assembly resolutions 73/24 on sport as an enabler of sustainable development and 74/170 on integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies; Children's Rights in Sport Principles (UNICEF); Sport for Generation Equality Principles; the World Summit for Social Development (also includes the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development; Sport for Protection Toolkit (UNHCR, IOC, Terres des Hommes); and Points of Consensus, adopted by the ILO's tripartite constituents at the Global Dialogue Forum on Decent Work in the World of Sport 2020.



Sport, COVID-19 and the SDGs

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes sport as an important enabler of sustainable development. It highlights the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect. Member States, the United Nations system, international sport federations and other stakeholders have been establishing guiding normative frameworks and frameworks for collaborative action on sport, physical activity and active play that use sport as a platform for achieving wider development outcomes. COVID-19 has added a new urgency to such efforts, as data indicates that COVID-19 has and will further increase inequalities, discrimination and marginalization.³

As countries around the world grapple with the many harmful impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the sport community can redouble its efforts to contribute to SDG achievement, particularly in the areas of health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, decent work and employment, reducing inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, responsible production and consumption, climate action and peace, justice and strong institutions, all with attention to building strong and inclusive partnerships for the goals.



SDG 3: Good health and well-being: Community lockdowns have been a widely used tool in the response to COVID-19 pandemic across the globe, affecting people's access to physical activity, with potential short and long-term physical and mental health consequences. Prolonged physical inactivity could lead to an increase in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases as well

³ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020:
<https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/publication/sustainable-development-goals-report-2020>

as heighten the need the need for mental health services, given the role of physical activity in regulating stress and other dangers to mental health.

In the response to COVID-19, it is therefore important to ensure safe access to regular physical activity and mental health services, in line with the WHO's recommendations.⁴ During the pandemic period, governments should work collaboratively with health care services, the sporting community and other stakeholders to support physical activity at home or in safe environments, with appropriate public health protocols and social measures in place.

Capacity-building of coaches and educators can be effective in managing mental health issues and can help to provide psychosocial support services, especially when linked to referral networks of health and social services. It is critical to consider the gender dimensions of these services, especially regarding domestic and gender-based violence survivors. Considerations for other vulnerable groups, such as those affected by conflict will also require specific protocols.

Sports-based programmes can also be vehicles to develop and bolster the social and emotional skills in children and young people, needed to address the vulnerabilities that are the direct consequences of stress caused by the health impacts of COVID-19, the policies associated with COVID-19 prevention (including physical distancing), and/or the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. In addition, athletes and sport programmes can play a powerful role, as major catalysts for promoting positive behavioural changes, public health practices and social safety measures, and for de-stigmatization of mental health issues.



SDG 4: Quality education: Access to quality education, of which sport and physical activity plays an essential part, has been significantly impacted by COVID-19.⁵ Existing inequalities in access have also been amplified, with further exclusion of those without online access or without the means to pay for private instruction for their children, where public provision is deemed inadequate. The implications of such inequalities are felt not only in the present but may also manifest over the longer term for those

who are excluded.

Sport can teach values such as fairness, teambuilding, equality, discipline, inclusion, perseverance and respect, and has the power to provide a universal framework for learning values, thus contributing to the development of soft skills needed for responsible citizenship. It can also provide pathways into education for some of the marginalised young people such as refugees and the communities that host them, who frequently lack education opportunities. As schools reopen, sports and physical activity education

⁴ <https://www.who.int/ncds/prevention/physical-activity/global-action-plan-2018-2030/en/>

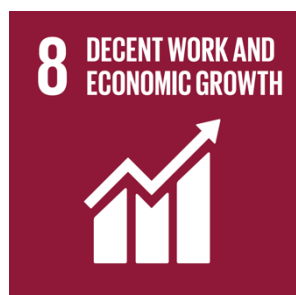
⁵ <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse>

should be championed to meet the holistic needs of all children and youth. There will also be an urgent need to step up support to ensure equal opportunities for learners from typically excluded populations, including girls, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, stateless people, migrants, internally displaced people, and refugees, to benefit from sport in schools, as well as through community-based programmes. Engagement in active, values-based life and social skills learning either in formal educational settings (e.g. physical education classes) or nonformal/ informal educational settings (e.g. in the community or in sports clubs) should also form part of the approach in mainstreaming sport in national development in the post COVID-19 era.



SDG 5: Gender equality: Girls and young women are suffering multiple burdens under COVID-19 containment measures. Increased gendered care responsibilities in the home, alarming rates of domestic violence, and economic insecurity are among the consequences.⁶ While girls and young women remain disproportionately excluded from sport practice on a large scale, some gains have been made in recent years to heighten awareness of the important benefits of equal access to and treatment of women and girls in sport and physical activity.⁷ The sporting world has increasingly tapped its media reach, fan base, and the power of both male and female role models, to promote gender equality on and off the playing field. Yet, more can be done to eliminate harmful gender stereotypes, promote equal sharing of care responsibilities, and raise awareness to reduce gender-based violence, within and beyond the COVID-19 context.

There is a further risk that the professional and elite sport world, facing reduced resources and revenues, may default to earlier models that privileged investment in men's sport. This threatens to erase the recent and accelerating gains for women in sport. Sponsors, media, professional and elite sport organizations should continue to step up their support to expand women's opportunities as athletes, professionals and leaders across the sport ecosystem.⁸



SDG 8: Decent work and employment: In the face of COVID-19, many millions of jobs are at risk globally, not only for sports professionals but also for those in related retail and sporting services industries connected with leagues and events, which include travel, tourism, infrastructure, transportation, catering and media broadcasting, among others. Sporting activities and competitions will need to reopen after COVID-19 under safe conditions with proper risk assessment and clear protocols in

⁶ UN Secretary-General's policy brief: The impact of COVID-19 on women: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/04/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women#view>

⁷ A/HRC/44/26 - Intersection of race and gender discrimination in sport; Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

⁸ UN Women. COVID-19, women, girls and sport: Build back better: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/brief-covid-19-women-girls-and-sport-build-back-better>

place. If not effectively done, this may affect employment in all of these related sectors. The promotion of decent work in sporting activities and sports related activities is central⁹ and sport organizations must ensure that they continue to protect the rights of athletes, including in relation to challenges faced in exercising social dialogue, freedom of association and collective bargaining, discrimination, violence and racism against players, risk to young athletes, risks to the health and safety of athletes, including long-term physical and mental health issues, and difficulties maintaining employability after a career in sports.

Measures should be taken to address new challenges arising from COVID-19, for example ensuring that no athletes are forced to sign insurance liability waivers and that all safety and health precautions have been taken when activities resume. Representation is necessary to guarantee freedom of association and collective bargaining. Promoting SDG implementation and international human rights standards should be part of bidding, planning and running mega-sporting events. Additionally, Governments, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders, such as workers organizations, must also ensure to combat child labour and trafficking in persons, particularly in the context of mega-sporting events and sporting goods manufacturing, but also more broadly across the sport ecosystem.



SDG 10: Reduced inequalities: Athletes and sport organizations have at times throughout history played significant roles in drawing attention to social inequality and injustice. The pandemic has demonstrated and further exacerbated both, deepening the existing vulnerabilities faced by many social groups such as children, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, ethnic and racial minorities, indigenous peoples, stateless and displaced people, persons deprived of liberty, as well as those living in poverty. In addition to the example of access to education, earlier addressed, in some contexts, significantly higher death rates have been reported for indigenous peoples and racial and ethnic minorities than for the general populations in which they live.¹⁰ Factors contributing to such tragic outcomes can be complex, including discrimination and its consequences, economic inequality and lack of equitable access to services such as health care and sanitation, and unequal access to safe working conditions and decent housing, among others. It is also foreseen that COVID-19 will reverse some gains that have been made in recent decades in terms of the eradication of poverty, with some 71 million people anticipated to be pushed back into extreme poverty in 2020.¹¹

⁹ The international labour standards and in particular the fundamental principles and rights at work that are enshrined in the eight ILO core Conventions and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 1998, provide a legal framework and guidance for concrete action.

¹⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25916>

¹¹ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/publication/sustainable-development-goals-report-2020>

Professional athletes and sport organizations can use their voices to raise awareness regarding the need to overcome the inequalities both demonstrated and exacerbated by COVID-19, as well as regarding the types of measures that will need to be taken to do so. A recent study revealed that 72% of fans believe that athletes provide unique views and are an important influence.¹² As sport will also benefit from an expanded audience due to increased internet access, the sport world can also advocate and contribute to reducing the digital divide.

UN entities, intergovernmental organizations and Member States could increase efforts to integrate athletes and other role-models with significant exposure into organization-led efforts aimed at spreading positive messages on health and wellbeing, child protection and development, gender equality, refugee inclusion, peacebuilding, conflict resolution and the prevention and countering of violent extremism.

As athlete activism rises, efforts should be dedicated to make athletes aware of their potential as role models and their responsibility as individuals with such far-reaching platforms. This requires that stakeholders keep athletes informed about these key sport-related issues and seek their involvement and to help develop the appropriate frameworks to support and benefit from the rise of athlete activism.



SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities: COVID-19 has raised health-related concerns about sports, recreation and play spaces. Too often public facilities for sport are developed without regard to the various gendered and disability dimensions of access and safety, calling for greater consultation with equality advocates in their design. This includes creating equal access for girls and women, who are too often excluded from community spaces for sport practice, due to harassment, risks of violence, and social norms that discourage them from being in public and/or playing sports. In recovering better, spaces and facilities for sport and active recreation should be designed to offer not only safety but also accessibility for all, including athletes, employees and fans. Several cities have, in response to COVID-19, already developed adaptation strategies and plans to improve and diversify recreation and mobility options, as well as reclaim public spaces for sport, wellbeing and leisure activities in line with SDG target 11.7.¹³

¹² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/afdelaziz/2020/08/31/a-moment-of-awakening-has-sport-finally-found-a-higher-purpose-beyond-entertainment/#790f677e5958>

¹³ https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=126_126769-yen45847kf&title=Coronavirus-COVID-19-Cities-Policy-Responses



SDG 12: Responsible production and consumption: Sporting events, particularly mega events, can present a range of environmental challenges, including in relation to production and consumption of materials and generation of waste, such as single-use plastic. Sport stadiums and arenas are some of the largest consumers of energy, materials and water. Momentum has been building within the sporting community to address negative environmental impacts of the industry and increase the contributions of sport to the achievement of relevant SDGs.

As sporting events resume in the post-COVID-19 period, sports organizations may need to contend with many changes wrought by the virus, including to supply chains and manufacturing. Approximately 70 per cent of the global sporting goods industry, for example, faced supply chain disruption, as demand for sporting goods decreased worldwide.¹⁴ In the face of these, sports organizations may wish to reaffirm or strengthen commitments to ensuring that future events will contribute to environmental sustainability.



SDG 13: Climate action: Humanity is facing an immediate and urgent threat from COVID-19. Yet climate change remains the biggest threat facing humanity over the medium and long term and, as observed by the Secretary-General, even during the COVID-19 pandemic, “the heating of our planet and climate disruption has continued apace.”¹⁵ While COVID-19 and climate change are different in many ways they share the concept of solutions requiring humanity to work collectively towards a common goal for the benefit of all people. This decade will determine the fate of humanity with respect to climate change. Science indicates that if emissions are not halved by 2030, it will be too late. But never has there been a greater disconnect between the need for action and reality. It is important for influential sectors such as sport to lead the way in making carbon zero lifestyles a norm.

Climate change and extreme weather events, particularly rising temperatures, also increasingly place pressure on sporting events, and pose risks to both athletes and the sporting industry. Athletes and sport organizations can have an important role in advocating for climate action and are invited to support and strengthen environmental sustainability and combat climate change. For example, the global sport community can combat climate change, through commitments and partnerships according to verified standards, including measuring, reducing, and reporting greenhouse gas emissions and

¹⁴ <https://wfsqi.org/covid-19>

¹⁵ United in Science 2020: https://public.wmo.int/en/resources/united_in_science

use sports as a unifying tool to federate and create solidarity among global citizens for climate action.¹⁶



SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions: The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the risk of exposure to violence and exploitation and eroded the capacity of services to respond. These challenges are particularly acute in regions already struggling with conflict or other humanitarian emergencies. In addition to the Secretary-General's appeal for a global ceasefire, the General Assembly decided to observe the Olympic Truce throughout the Tokyo Games, now rescheduled for 2021. Sport can

continue to be used to help build bridges between communities in conflict and refugee, internally displaced and host communities affected by displacement as a result of conflict; to create a window of opportunity for dialogue, reconciliation, alternate dispute resolution and informal justice mechanisms aligned with international standards.

Sport also offers an important vehicle for violence and crime prevention¹⁷, supporting peacebuilding and post conflict resolution efforts, as well as for fostering protective and inclusive environments that can contribute to countering and preventing violent extremism.¹⁸ It teaches life skills and values such as tolerance and respect, promotes teamwork, social inclusion and social cohesion, which can empower young participants and create safe spaces for youth to positively interact and develop. Sport can also build the resilience of children and youth in the face of instability, such as that imposed by COVID-19, as well as increase their rejection of violence and crime, and promote conflict prevention and peaceful co-existence. Equal attention should be given to research on sport and its values as tools to complement the above work in efforts to help identify good practices and design evidence-based responses.



SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals: Achieving any and all of the SDGs requires effective and sustainable whole-of-society approaches. Sport can catalyze, build and strengthen multi-stakeholder networks and partnerships for sustainable development and peace goals, involving and bringing together the public, governments, donors, NGOs, sport organizations, the private sector, academia and the media. The presence and diversity of sport and sport organizations on local, national, regional and

international levels can provide effective networks for partnerships and implementation of programmes. Sport can serve as a link between different sectors which can address a wide variety of topics, pool resources and create synergies. The sport, development and

¹⁶ <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/sectoral-engagement/sports-for-climate-action>

¹⁷ <https://www.unodc.org/sports>

¹⁸ UNODC, 2020, Technical Guide on Preventing Violent Extremism through Sport, available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/dohadecclaration/Sports/PVE/Guide_PVE_Ebook.pdf; also see: 'Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events, and Promotion of Sport and Its Values as a Tool to Prevent Violent Extremism' at <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sports>

peace communities can contribute to collaboratively measuring progress of sustainable development by assessing and reporting on the contributions of sport to the SDGs.¹⁹



¹⁹ https://www.un.org/sport/sites/www.un.org.sport/files/ckfiles/files/Sport_for_SDGs_finalversion9.pdf



Adjusting Course and Accelerating Action Through Sport

The intersects of sport, the SDGs and COVID-19 point to four key focus areas for the sporting world in shaping COVID-19 response and recovery: promoting human rights and combatting discrimination; ensuring equal access to sport and physical activity; safeguarding participants; and ensuring integrity in sport.

Promoting Human Rights and Combatting Discrimination

Due to its influence on culture and society, sport can be instrumental in promoting human rights norms and countering discrimination, consistent with the UN Charter's reaffirmation of faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women. The strength of sport as a platform to inspire has been demonstrated in recent highly publicized athlete-led actions to combat racism. The promotion of human rights by the competitive and commercial sports industries, and their efforts to embed these principles in their own work, are also of great importance in the context of the pandemic, which has in some instances, exacerbated racism, hate speech and scapegoating, and been associated with spikes in domestic and gender-based violence, and violence against children under confinement. The role of the sporting community in promoting social inclusion and solidarity and in combating negative stereotypes and abuse, including by speaking out against discriminatory and harmful behavior, is therefore especially needed at this time.

Beyond advocacy, sport for development actors are also highly encouraged to embrace the human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality, as well as provisions contained in relevant human rights instruments regarding the right to play, leisure and sport, indigenous and traditional sport and games, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and sport for well-being; and to promote sports interventions as means to foster social inclusion, social cohesion, protection and skills development.

Further to this, access to sport should be increasingly considered and integrated as a mean to enhance and complement efforts to mitigate and prevent the generation of conditions conducive to violent extremism in all of its forms. In this endeavour, proper attention should be given to ensure that sport and its values are used and tailored to meet the specific needs of each beneficiary community and demographic.



Safeguarding Participants

In their efforts to gradually return to a new normal, or a limited normality, Member States and societies throughout the world are considering or have taken steps to allow the organization of major sporting events. The security of such events, which has historically been a complex and demanding task, has been complicated by the current global health crisis. As such, it is imperative for the

international community, Members States hosting major sporting events, sports federation and private entities and other relevant stakeholders to understand and promptly react to the new implications and challenges to be addressed in the context of the security of sporting events governance.

In the context of COVID-19 health precautions, the WHO has issued guidance for sport, which offers advice on how to organize these events and to apply a rigorous, systematic risk assessment exercise to ensure safety.²⁰ WHO recommends that a risk-based approach should always be used at policy level to facilitate planning of mass gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic, and at the event level to evaluate any associated health risks, put in place measures to decrease such risks, and communicate information on adjustments made to the event and on residual level of risk. While the future is still very uncertain, many sport organizations recognize that the pandemic could cause a widespread change to sports as we know them, and to how events are organized going

²⁰ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/10665-332235>

forward; in this context, it is crucial that standardized and evidence-based approaches are adopted to decide if and how an event should proceed.

In addressing safe participation beyond the professional sphere, it is important to recognise the role of coaches and other sports professionals as significant adults for children, adolescents, youth and others who may be vulnerable to violence, exploitation and abuse – including sexual and gender-based violence. Many of these vulnerable participants have now experienced periods of isolation from the support peer networks had provided, including those adults and coaches who had helped them to navigate the various manifestations of physical, sexual and/or emotional violence and discrimination that, for many, have been compounded under COVID-19.

In this regard, recovering better means stronger engagement with children, youth and participants in vulnerable situations through meaningful consultations and other appropriate mechanisms, to ensure ethical and meaningful participation in decisions that affect them, including standard setting, in line with the Human Rights Based Approach and relevant human rights instruments. Governments and sports organizations, with support from international organizations, should raise standards in child protection and the safeguarding of sport participants, particularly those in vulnerable situations, and those affected by mega-sport events, establish or strengthen accessible reporting mechanisms and invest in awareness-raising.

Ensuring Inclusive Access to Sport and Physical Activity

To address the challenges posed by COVID-19 and related containment measures, members of the sport community have innovated rapidly to consider potential risks and how to mitigate them when organizing sports activities and have developed alternative approaches including online tools for sport practice and physical activity at home.

Sport organizations have also created important virtual networks to engage children, young people, families and communities in staying healthy and active; in the process providing a platform for connection and social support beyond the delivery of sport programmes. Such innovative practices, if maintained post pandemic can expand access to these new learning tools and networks and ensure that the sport for development and peace sector is prepared to adapt again in the event of future shocks.

While these online tools have proven invaluable, COVID-19 has brought to the fore how precarious access to ICTs is in many parts of the world. At the end of 2019, the International Technological Union estimated that around 3.6 billion people remain offline.²¹ The situation is much worse in Least Developed Countries where an average of

²¹ <https://cs.unu.edu/news/news/digital-divide-covid-19.html>

two out of every ten people are online and the majority of the world's refugees and other displaced, now almost 80 million people, are living without reliable internet and mobile connectivity.²² Expanding access will require infrastructure (digital and products) and services (internet) to be put in place and to be accessible, usable and affordable.

In some instances, in-person sport and physical activity events and opportunities continue to be carried out during the COVID-19 period. In such cases, it is critical that organizers take all necessary measures to ensure safety and protect public health, including by conducting risk assessment and putting in place risk mitigation measures. The WHO's guidelines have been used by numerous sport federations to develop guidance for organizing their training and competitions, whether outdoors or indoors. There remains a need, however, for more tailored approaches for different activities, including those carried out at community level.

In the context of the professional and elite sport world, the return to activity must continue to expand opportunities for participation that are equitable for all. The process of rebuilding can include continuing to close opportunity gaps for groups that have been traditionally excluded from the field of play.²³ The sporting community may reduce these barriers by tailoring appropriate measures to address exclusionary factors such as cultural context, age, gender, and socio-economic considerations, and ensure that sport and physical activity are truly accessible. It is of particular importance to ensure that, in the return to activity, women's sport and disability sport are not side-lined and continue to receive the significant investment experienced pre-COVID-19. Any reduction will represent a retrograde movement, reversing significant gains from a sporting, gender equality and disability rights perspective. Recovering better must also mean stronger support for other sectors of the industry from men's professional sport, to continue to ensure equitable opportunities and growth across the entire eco-system.

Ensuring Integrity in Sport



Ensuring that the integrity of sport is at the center of efforts aimed at “recovering better” is essential for sport to be able to continue advancing the Sustainable Development Goals and to ensure that it emerges from the pandemic as strong as possible. It is therefore important that actions taken by governments, sport organizations and relevant stakeholders are focused on tackling corruption and crime both in and through sport.

²² <https://www.unhcr.org/5770d43c4.pdf>

²³ Including but not limited to persons with disabilities, older persons, LGBTI people, refugees, indigenous peoples, internally displaced people, stateless people and migrants and persons deprived of liberty.

Recommended actions include implementing commitments made through the adoption of relevant resolutions²⁴ and ensuring that resources and support provided to sport during the pandemic are used for their intended purposes and not diverted for illicit gain. Key to this is ensuring that good governance measures are in place in sports organizations in order help reduce corruption risks and associated inequalities and injustices which have been exacerbated by the pandemic.

However, it is equally important to ensure that anti-corruption regulations, policies and legislation are in place and implemented. Relevant national authorities should be provided with the assistance, resources and support required to effectively tackle corruption and crime in sport. To this end, it is key to develop effective cooperation frameworks between law enforcement, criminal justice authorities and sport organizations. Such efforts would be enhanced through the development and implementation of reporting mechanisms in sport, which would also require relevant leadership to act upon reports of wrongdoing when received.

Devoting time and efforts to implementing the above recommendations would represent a major and significant contribution by the international community to strengthening the integrity of sport during these challenging times. This would also contribute to the emerging global framework around enhancing the contribution of sport to development and peace. Furthermore, to strengthen the protection of athletes and promote the ethics of sport, enhancing the integrity of sport requires implementation of commitments to anti-doping.²⁵



Role of the United Nations System

The United Nations system has an important role to play in supporting Member States to best use sport to “recover better” in the context of COVID-19. In 2020 and 2021, many UN

²⁴ <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/safeguardingsport/international-legal-framework.html>

²⁵ International Convention Against Doping in Sport: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/sport-and-anti-doping/convention>

Country Teams will be embarking on new Common Country Assessment and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework processes, which provide the framework for engagement between governments and the UN. The inclusion of sport for development and peace within these could contribute significantly to its increased utilization.

The UN system can further support Member States and other relevant actors by increasing their provision of capacity development and technical cooperation services to support effective leveraging of sport in implementation of the relevant international normative frameworks and policy instruments. Such support can focus on advancing policies, strategies and programmes and data collection for the use of sport as an effective tool to advance sustainable development, promote inclusion, tolerance and respect, and build resilient societies.

UN system entities, within their respective mandates, can also play an important role in raising awareness on the role that sport can play in “recovering better,” including through partnerships with mass media and international sporting bodies with national and international reach. Governments, the United Nations and the sporting community, including the sporting education community, can disseminate WHO and other guidance on individual and collective measures to counter the pandemic. Measures must be taken to reach communities that have limited access to the Internet and social media. Efforts must also be made to reach actors at all levels and across all facets of the sport sector, including in decision-making, sport education professional and community sport, and to support engagement of actors across the sector, and at all levels, to enable effective mechanisms for ensuring needs are identified and that important feedback and information on scalable solutions reach the ears of those who need to hear it.²⁶

For more information on UN publications on sport and COVID-19, as well as UN action plans, initiatives and frameworks related to sport for development and peace please see: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/sport-development-peace.html>.



²⁶ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desapolicy-brief-73-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-sport-physical-activity-and-well-being-and-its-effects-on-social-development/>

