

Report on the Youth Policy Dialogue with Commissioner Glenn Micallef, European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport

Title of Youth Policy Dialogue: European Sport Model

Date: 26 May 2026

Location: Joseph Marien Stadium, Brussels, Belgium

Introduction

The Youth Policy Dialogue on the European Sport Model took place as part of the consultation phase organised by the European Commission to prepare for the upcoming Communication on “A Strategic Vision for Sport in Europe: Reinforcing the European Sport Model”.

On 26 May, 25 young people gathered with the European Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, Glenn Micallef, at the stadium of Royale Union Saint-Gilloise (USG). Participants came from all over Europe, namely from 16 different countries. While having various educational and professional backgrounds, they shared a common passion for sport. The group included athletes, para-athletes, coaches, volunteers, students of sport management and development studies as well as youth organisations active in sport, also with a specific inclusion perspective.

The dialogue aimed at gathering views of young people on priorities that the European Commission should address in its future strategic document on the future of sport in Europe. Its objective was also to understand challenges faced by young people regarding sport in a range of contexts, including as a hobby at grassroots level; as sports students or professionals; or as athletes or para-athletes, and discuss possible solutions to be undertaken at EU level.

Beyond the dialogue itself, participants enjoyed a full day of activities. Following the exchange with the Commissioner, they took part in sport activities, visited the Union Saint-Gilloise stadium as well as the House of European history.

Summary of the Youth Policy Dialogue (In person-meeting)

The discussion focused on the following three key themes:

1. Increasing physical activity among young people and encouraging more active lifestyles, particularly in light of the positive effects of sport on physical and mental health,
2. The role of elite athletes and para-athletes in society, and the support measures needed to safeguard their wellbeing and ensure opportunities beyond their sporting careers,
3. Making volunteering in sport more attractive and accessible.

Main takeaways

During the discussions, the young participants brought forward concrete and elaborated proposals of potential ways of actions to be undertaken at EU level.

1. Promoting physical activity among young people

Participants stressed the importance of embedding physical activity throughout the entire education pathway, from early childhood education to higher education levels. Schools were seen as a crucial setting for developing healthy habits and positive attitude towards physical activity, tackling sedentary lifestyles and preventing young people from dropping out of sport. For the latter, promoting and recognising university sport was seen as a key enabler. The need for daily movement and physical activity was raised eg for one hour per day, beyond traditional physical education classes

Several participants stressed the value of stronger partnerships between schools and local sport clubs, citing successful examples from Belgium and Finland. The development of coaches' skills was also identified as essential to creating welcoming, inclusive and safe environments that encourage long-term participation.

Youth representation in sport governance emerged as another important topic. A recurring argument was that, despite being the most active participants in sport and the backbone of many clubs and activities, young people continue to be under-represented in the bodies that shape and govern sport. Participants thus argued that young people should play a greater role in sport decision-making structures to ensure that practices and priorities of sport organisations remain responsive to their needs and expectations. Finally, participants underlined the importance of accessible and inclusive infrastructures, urban planning and active mobility design. Particular attention was given to ensuring that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as persons with disabilities, can fully benefit from sport and physical activity opportunities. Adequate funding was identified as fundamental in this regard.

2. Supporting athletes and para-athletes

Participants highlighted the important role elite athletes and para-athletes can play as ambassadors for sport and physical activity. Many athletes expressed a willingness to engage directly with young people through school visits and awareness-raising activities. Additional support, including through Erasmus+, was suggested to facilitate such initiatives. Nonetheless, participants also stressed that such opportunities should come in complement of structural support to promote sport and physical activity participation.

The discussion also focused on athletes' safety and wellbeing, notably in light of the growing expectations they can face. Participants emphasised the need to better recognise the pressures faced by athletes,

including performance expectations, injuries, mental health challenges and career uncertainty. Athlete representation within governance structures was considered important to ensure that these concerns are adequately addressed.

Strong support was expressed for comprehensive support systems covering psychological assistance, healthcare services, career guidance and dual-career opportunities. Such measures were seen as essential both during and after sporting careers. Continuous education and professional development opportunities for coaches were also identified as a priority.

3. Encouraging volunteering in sport

Participants consistently highlighted the personal, social and professional benefits of volunteering. Volunteering was described as a powerful tool for developing skills, strengthening active citizenship, building community ties and gaining valuable experience that can support future employment opportunities.

To increase participation, participants suggested strengthening recognition mechanisms, including certificates, diplomas and micro-credentials that formally acknowledge skills acquired through volunteering. Such recognition could also help broaden access to volunteering opportunities including those with fewer opportunities to engage.

The discussion further emphasised the importance of providing clear incentives, such as free access to sporting events or activities, while reducing administrative burdens and unnecessary barriers to participation. A particularly interesting example was shared from Malta, where a local bank offers dedicated volunteering leave to employees, recognising both the societal value of volunteering and its contribution to employees' personal and professional development.

Annex

For the occasion of this Dialogue, several communications activities were organised, including the publication of a [Daily News](#) article and of a social media post on [Instagram](#).