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**Comprehensive strategies for crime prevention  
towards social and economic development**

## **Outcome of the expert group meeting on integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies**

### **Report of the Secretariat**

#### *Summary*

The present report contains the key conclusions and outcomes of the expert group meeting on integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies, held in Bangkok from 16 to 18 December 2019, pursuant to General Assembly resolution [74/170](#), entitled “Integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies”. The meeting brought together experts from various regions of the world. The experts examined effective ways and means of integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies, plans and programmes, identified emerging good practices and emphasized the need for robust evaluations of those programmes in order to enhance understanding of the impact of sport-based crime prevention interventions. The report contains suggestions and recommendations for action by Member States and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

\* [A/CONF.234/1](#).



## I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [74/170](#) on integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies, the General Assembly encouraged Member States, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, to use sport-based activities more widely to promote primary, secondary and tertiary prevention of youth crime and the social reintegration of young offenders, as well as to prevent recidivism by them, and in this regard, to promote and facilitate effective research, monitoring and evaluation of relevant initiatives, including gang-related initiatives, to assess their impact. The General Assembly also requested the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to convene an expert group meeting, in close coordination with Member States and in collaboration with all relevant United Nations entities, in particular the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, the institutes of the United Nations crime prevention and criminal justice programme network and sports organizations, to examine effective ways and means of integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice, building upon its existing programmes and taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals and other relevant United Nations action plans, standards and norms, with a view to analysing and compiling a set of best practices that cater to various stakeholders and enhance system-wide coordination, and to present a report to the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice for consideration at its twenty-ninth session, as well as to the Fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice for its information.

2. As part of its efforts to implement the aforementioned resolution, UNODC held an expert group meeting on integrating sport into youth crime prevention and criminal justice strategies. The meeting was hosted by the Government of Thailand and held in Bangkok from 16 to 18 December 2019. It was attended by 46 experts from various regions of the world, in their individual capacity, including government experts in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice, representatives of civil society organizations working in that field and representatives of sports organizations, academia, international organizations and relevant United Nations entities.

3. Against the backdrop of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution [70/1](#)), the United Nations Action Plan on Sport for Development and Peace ([A/73/325](#), chap. VI, sect. A) and the Kazan Action Plan, adopted on 15 July 2017 at the Sixth International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport of UNESCO,<sup>1</sup> a range of stakeholders, from grassroots organizations to international bodies, recognized the potential of sport-based programmes to achieve positive social developmental outcomes in a variety of contexts, including crime prevention.

4. The objectives of the expert group meeting were to identify good practices from around the world on the use of sport in the context of youth crime prevention and criminal justice, provide recommendations on how sport and sport-based programmes could be integrated into relevant strategies in a manner that catered to various stakeholders and enhanced system-wide coordination, and contribute to a community of practice on sport-based interventions to prevent youth crime in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the United Nations Action Plan on Sport for Development and Peace.

5. The opening ceremony of the meeting was presided by Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha Narendiradebyavati and included presentations by the Minister of Justice of Thailand, Somsak Thepsuthin, the Executive Director of the Thailand Institute of Justice, Kittipong Kittayarak, the Deputy Director of the Division for Operations of UNODC, Candice Welsch, and a Member of the International Olympic Committee, Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul.

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<sup>1</sup> Document SHS/2017/5 REV, annex I.

## II. Summary of deliberations

6. At the meeting, the expert group noted the widespread acknowledgement that crime prevention contributed to sustainable development and that sport was a tool that had been used as a vehicle for social change and crime prevention, including in connection to violence and crime-related targets under Sustainable Development Goals 5, 11 and 16.

7. The expert group emphasized the importance of identifying and addressing the known risk factors associated with crime and victimization, promoting protective factors, supporting conflict resolution activities and initiatives to redress marginalization and exclusion, and using education and public awareness strategies to foster a culture of lawfulness and tolerance.

8. In line with the Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime (Economic and Social Council resolution 2002/13, annex), experts reiterated the importance of involving all levels of government in order to create, maintain and promote an environment within which relevant governmental institutions, civil society and the private sector could contribute to the prevention of crime.

9. The expert group was of the view that crime prevention considerations, as set out in the Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime, should be integrated into all relevant social and economic policies and programmes and that cooperation and partnerships should be an integral part of effective crime prevention, given the wide-ranging nature of the causes of crime and the skills and responsibilities required to address them. In that context, the expert group noted that the integration of sport into youth crime prevention strategies presupposed the establishment by Governments of a crime prevention plan with clear priorities and targets, the existence of clear responsibilities and goals for the organization of crime prevention, including through sport-based activities, the establishment of centres or focal points with expertise and resources, and the creation of linkages and coordination mechanisms between relevant government agencies, non-governmental organizations, the private and professional sectors and the community.

10. The expert group noted that crime prevention encompassed a wide range of approaches and acknowledged the importance of preventing the involvement of children and young people in criminal activities by supporting their development and strengthening their resilience to antisocial and delinquent behaviour, and of supporting the rehabilitation and social reintegration of children and young people in conflict with the law. Noting the continued relevance of the United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (General Assembly resolution 45/112, annex, paras. 2–3), the expert group emphasized that the successful prevention of juvenile delinquency required a child-centred orientation as well as efforts on the part of all of society to ensure the harmonious development of adolescents, including by recognizing the right of children to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to their age.<sup>2</sup>

11. The expert group agreed that the concept of “sport” should be understood in a broad sense, on the basis of the definition of the term in the Kazan Action Plan, namely, as “comprising sport for all, physical play, recreation, dance, organized, casual, competitive, traditional and indigenous sports and games in their diverse forms”.<sup>3</sup>

12. The expert group recommended that crime prevention programmes adopt a view of sport beyond competitive activities, noting the importance of physical activities programming that engaged young people in a way that respected their cultural backgrounds.

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<sup>2</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 31, para. 1.

<sup>3</sup> SHS/2017/5 REV, annex I, para. 1.

13. The expert group acknowledged that, while sport-based prevention programmes and practices, often borrowed from the broader field of sport for development, were still evolving, crime prevention interventions with a focus on sport and physical activities had the potential to contribute to crime prevention at many levels. In that regard, the expert group acknowledged that the concept of sport-based crime prevention would benefit from the development of standardized definitions, including operational definitions of what constituted a sports or sport-based programme other than the idea that the programme included a sport-related element.

14. The expert group recognized the usefulness, for the purposes of programme design, delivery and evaluation, of distinguishing between three complementary levels of crime prevention programming (primary, secondary and tertiary). The primary level involved initiatives that addressed conditions of the physical and social environment that provided opportunities for or precipitated criminal behaviour; the secondary level involved initiatives that targeted populations at risk, focusing on risk and resilience factors at the individual level; and the tertiary level represented a more targeted and tailored set of interventions for those individuals already in conflict with the law.

15. The expert group concluded that, although there was limited evidence of a causal link between participation in sporting activities and the prevention of crime and recidivism, there was evidence that sport could be an effective tool for delivering and increasing or sustaining participation in crime prevention interventions.

16. The expert group observed that there were many different types of sport-based programmes that, depending on their respective goals and design, could help to divert young people from crime and other problematic activities, including those in groups difficult to reach, offer a link with other interventions and services, and embed or be embedded into specific interventions to address risk factors for crime, in order to achieve certain social objectives and positive personal developmental outcomes. It was noted that sport could contribute to positive youth development and skills training and provide young people with positive role models and access to prosocial networks. The expert group stressed that crime prevention required the promotion of inclusion and social cohesion and that sport could play a unique role in that respect by generating social capital and helping to mobilize communities and promote social inclusion and solidarity. It was noted that, in some instances, sport could positively contribute to neighbourhood transformation.

17. The expert group considered the experience accumulated through several programmes that pursued the general goal of diverting young people from crime or achieving developmental outcomes, and observed that, unfortunately, many of them tended to have vague rationales and overly ambitious objectives or to be based on simplistic understandings of the multiple and complex causes of youth crime. The expert group observed that it was often too quickly assumed that what young people learned when they participated in sporting activities, including in terms of values and skills, would necessarily be transferred to non-sport contexts in their lives. However, the expert group also identified some programme features and delivery strategies that could potentially aid such transfer, including: creating conditions prior to the intervention that enhanced transfer; mentoring; organizing peer discussions; providing opportunities for reflection after programme activities; and follow-up experiences to enhance and reinforce learning. The expert group concluded that there remained a need for further research on the cognitive processes through which skills acquired by participating in sporting activities could be effectively transferred to other aspects of the participants' lives.

18. The expert group cautioned that the root causes of youth crime, whether understood at the individual or societal levels, could not reasonably be expected to be single-handedly addressed by the provision of sports opportunities. The power of sport to produce social change should not be overestimated and sport should not be seen as an alternative to public investments in education, access to employment,

social services, access to justice and rehabilitation programmes, but rather as a complement thereto.

19. The sports environment is widely seen as an important learning ground for adolescent development. The expert group observed that, at the primary level of intervention, several sport-based programmes had been conclusively shown to contribute to positive youth development, through the young person's emotionally interactive engagement and the development of personal skills or assets, including cognitive, social, emotional and intellectual qualities necessary to function normally and constructively in society. Such programmes, particularly when they were adequately individualized and flexibly delivered in a culturally relevant manner, could engage young people in opportunities that prepared them for a successful and law-abiding future. However, the expert group also noted that, on balance, research on the relationship between sport and youth development had led scholars to conclude that the relationship was contingent and that, by itself, the participation in sporting activities did not lead to regularly identifiable developmental outcomes. Positive outcomes were dependent on a combination of factors, including the type of sport played, one's peers, parents and coaches, and the norms and cultures associated with various sports or sporting experiences.

20. The expert group noted the potential of sport-based interventions to enhance gang and gang-violence prevention programmes designed to prevent the recruitment of young people into gangs, offer them a way out and facilitate their social reintegration. Sport-based interventions might potentially offer an opportunity to engage young people involved in gangs in positive transitional experiences, alternative identity construction and desistance actions. In this regard, it was noted that the role of group dynamics in helping young people to develop a positive identity was particularly important when working with those involved in gangs and should be carefully considered in delivering sport-based interventions. The management of group processes was an important aspect of the role of sports coaches and facilitators.

21. The expert group was very mindful of the fact that access to sport was representative of wider social inclusion and that social marginalization and discrimination often resulted in lower access to and participation in sporting activities. This included access to sports facilities and spaces, which were often lacking in areas of low resources or had access restrictions. At the secondary level of intervention, young people identified as "at risk" must be able to participate in sport and physical activities in settings where they felt physically safe, personally valued, morally and economically supported, personally empowered and hopeful about their own future. In view of the potentially stigmatizing effect of targeting individuals from various at-risk groups for intervention, the expert group recommended that flexible, individualized, strength-based approaches to programming be preferred to deficit-based approaches.

22. The expert group noted that sport could be integrated into the criminal justice system as part of efforts to strengthen community-police relations, diversion, alternatives to imprisonment, probation and the rehabilitation and social reintegration of offenders. The expert group was aware of examples of police engagement in successful primary and secondary sport-based crime prevention interventions, provided that the police were locally considered as legitimate and trustworthy actors. This kind of police engagement in sport-based programmes could take many forms, including as part of community policing initiatives, and could contribute to improving police-community relations and respect for the law by young people.

23. The expert group recognized the rehabilitative potential of sporting and physical activities in reducing recidivism and improving a wide range of psychological, physical, educational and social outcomes for young people who were already in contact with the criminal justice system, including those in detention. The expert group agreed that sport-based programmes, delivered either in the community or, when detention was considered necessary, in an institutional setting, had the potential to contribute significantly to the rehabilitation and reintegration of young offenders.

Specific attention should be given to supporting and rehabilitating young offenders outside of correctional institutions through sport-based interventions that reduced negative behaviour and encouraged desistance from crime. The expert group also noted that children and young people in detention were generally less likely than their peers in the community to participate in sufficient physical activities and that sport within a detention context could be either beneficial or problematic, depending on how the activities were structured, delivered and, ultimately, experienced by young people. The expert group suggested that more research was needed on young offenders' desistance from crime and how sport could be an effective tool in that process.

24. In view of existing international guidance on the provision of physical activities and exercise opportunities in places of detention,<sup>4</sup> efforts must be made to ensure that young people in custodial care had access to sport and physical activities. The expert group noted that there were specific challenges in developing sport-based programmes in the context of places of detention, including safety and security issues and the lack of adequate facilities. Nevertheless, the expert group expressed the view that sport-based programmes in detention settings, especially when linked to community-based resources and interventions, could directly support the social reintegration of those leaving custody, for instance in using sport as a way of promoting engagement with through-the-gate wrap-around services and in supporting former offenders into education and employment opportunities.

25. With respect to programmes delivered in prison settings, the expert group emphasized the importance of adopting a person-centred approach and ensuring equity of access to physical and sports activities. The provision of sport needs to be responsive to individual needs, with a focus on health, well-being and rehabilitation. Sport, it was noted, could facilitate meaningful interactions between prisoners and members of the community and facilitate their reintegration. The expert group stressed the importance of the role of prison staff in facilitating transformation, as well as the need to strengthen their capacity to deliver effective sport-based programmes.

26. With respect to the type of sport used for crime prevention purposes, the expert group agreed that, in the right context and with careful programming, any sporting or physical activity could be used. However, the expert group also noted that the use of unsuitable activities might have a detrimental effect. Some types of sport-based programmes, for example programmes involving combat sports, martial arts or weight lifting, while positive in certain contexts, might cause some implementation challenges and, unless used with care, were sometimes seen as contributing to a hierarchical and violent culture. The expert group recommended the use of sports activities that de-emphasized rules of specific sports and winning, and instead emphasized choice for participants and the tailoring of programmes to suit individual needs and provide positive feedback.

27. Furthermore, the expert group considered that, in sport-based programmes with wrap-around services such as mentoring and other forms of individual support, the sporting activities might not be of primary importance as long as they served as a "hook" for attracting young people to a stimulating field and engaging them in programmes where additional teaching or interventions were provided. The expert group observed that the success of any sport-based intervention might be determined much more by the strength of parallel interventions or the non-sport aspects of the programme, including the charisma, experience and engagement techniques of the programme delivery staff, than by the choice of sport or the extent of participation in sporting activities. It was therefore critical to choose the right activities and have the right personnel delivering sport-based interventions.

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<sup>4</sup> See the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty, the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders) and the revised European Prison Rules.

28. The expert group stressed the crucial importance of the role of sports coaches, facilitators and volunteers in ensuring the success of sport-based crime prevention interventions and programmes, including their role in recruiting and motivating young people, providing role models, keeping participants engaged in the programme and providing a safe and caring environment. The expert group also stressed the importance of mutual relationships between practitioners and young people in sport-based crime prevention programmes and the importance of authenticity, trust and respect in those relationships. The expert group emphasized the importance of capacity-building and the need to invest in developing and supporting those key human resources.

29. The expert group was very mindful of the increasing concern regarding threats to the integrity of sport that could undermine the potential of sport to contribute positively to a culture of lawfulness, social inclusion and specific crime prevention objectives.

30. After considering several recent experiences in implementing sport-based crime prevention initiatives in a variety of contexts, including those carried out in connection with the UNODC Global Programme for the Implementation of the Doha Declaration, the expert group observed that programme designs and practices varied considerably and involved various types of organizations, but that the most effective sport-based crime prevention interventions tended to be those that were part of programmes that:

(a) Were institutionalized as part of a holistic crime prevention approach linked to a national crime prevention framework or specific crime prevention objectives;

(b) Were strategically designed on the basis of a clear and credible theory of change that was explicit about what in the chosen sporting activities could lead to prevention outcomes, and intentionally structured to address a wide range of risk factors;

(c) Built on what was already known to work in crime prevention, were tailored to the local context and the young people's interests and cultural backgrounds and favoured a developmental approach over diversionary approaches;

(d) Addressed the local crime situation and responded to local crime prevention goals and priorities, including those identified through participatory crime diagnosis;

(e) Employed a flexible approach capable of responding to changes in the local context and the challenges that inevitably arose during programme implementation;

(f) Recruited and engaged young people from vulnerable and at-risk groups without stigmatizing them, recognizing that vulnerable groups were far from homogeneous and that each group presented peculiarities that must be considered during the planning and delivery of interventions;

(g) Were founded on a strength-based approach aimed at enhancing protective factors and mitigating risk factors, and provided young people with opportunities for success and recognition;

(h) Offered intensive and long-lasting interventions through sustained delivery mechanisms that engaged young people in the long-term and enabled lasting relationships;

(i) Downplayed the competitive elements of the sporting activities and emphasized internal motivation and individualized standards of success in a task-oriented setting;

(j) Engaged qualified trainers, sports coaches and facilitators trained to deliver effective interventions to address risk factors and build the young people's resilience to crime and victimization;

(k) Engaged family members, supported positive interactions between the young people and key social agents (peers, parents, sports coaches and facilitators), and integrated family, school and community efforts;

(l) Promoted meaningful interactions between young people and interested and caring adults, fostering a sense of acceptance and belonging, placing value on individual achievement, encouraging a positive attitude to the future and helping young people to develop an ability to work with others and resolve conflicts;

(m) Were part of a multi-agency approach, including schools, sports organizations, crime prevention specialists and, where relevant, the police and criminal justice agencies.

31. The expert group emphasized the importance of gender-responsive sport-based crime prevention programmes and the need to provide a wide range of safe and accessible sports programmes to women and girls that were also respectful of cultural differences. This, the expert group suggested, could be facilitated by: consulting with women and girls during the programme design, implementation and evaluation; drawing on existing expertise from organizations already involved in promoting the participation of women and girls in sporting activities; applying safeguards and “trauma-informed” strategies and practices for women and girls in sport-based interventions; ensuring that interventions addressed the risk and protective factors that were most salient for each gender group; recruiting female sports coaches and facilitators; and developing capacity among sports coaches, facilitators, trainers and sports leaders to both act as positive role models and challenge gender stereotypes, norms and attitudes that condoned or justified gender-based discrimination and violence.

32. The expert group emphasized that sport-based interventions must always follow the “do no harm” principle and that the safeguard of participants must guide the design, implementation and evaluation of all sport-based crime prevention programmes and interventions. This included ensuring non-discriminatory access for all to sporting activities and access to safe sports spaces, and ensuring that interventions targeting at-risk groups or young offenders were “trauma-informed” and did not contribute to their stigmatization or social exclusion. Recognizing that children and young people participating in sport, especially girls, were sometimes particularly vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and violence because of their reliance on the support of coaches and others in positions of influence, the expert group recommended the adoption of specific policies and structures to prevent and respond to abuse and violence against children and young people in sport.

33. The expert group recognized that the sports experiences of socially vulnerable young people were not always positive and supportive. Participating in sporting activities could have integrative aspects (friendship, trust and social cohesion) but also entail opposite effects. For some individuals, such participation might be associated with experiences of personal failure and disappointment, bullying or exclusion. In some instances, participation in organized sporting activities during adolescence might also be associated with poor health outcomes, such as increased alcohol use. Some sporting activities might ritualize or even legitimize violence and confrontation in connection with certain ideals of masculinity. The expert group therefore emphasized the importance of ensuring that sport-based programmes did not encourage toxic masculinity, confrontations, violence or gender-based violence.

34. The expert group noted the challenges often encountered when planning sport-based interventions in a disadvantaged urban context and suggested that tensions from the community, such as territorial battles between gangs, could affect the interventions. The expert group also observed that it was crucial to consider the social and power structures responsible for the exclusion of certain young people from healthy sports and physical activities. More specifically, the expert group observed that sport-based crime prevention programmes designed for young people at risk were in fact often targeting marginalized, disaffected young people who could be difficult to locate and even more difficult to engage. The expert group also noted that current

recruitment strategies, often relying on sports clubs and volunteers, sometimes overlooked young people whose social exclusion was more complex or acute, and who, most likely, were in greater need of intervention support. Therefore, programmes should be specifically designed to address known obstacles to participation encountered by different vulnerable groups (such as migrants, children of incarcerated parents, street children and young people involved in gangs) and seek to involve young people and community members in the recruitment process, the choice of the sporting activities and the design of the programme.

35. Because sport-based interventions that produced crime prevention outcomes in a certain context could not necessarily be assumed to be immediately transferrable to a different context, intervention models applied in a different context must be developed locally or adapted to the new context. In this regard, the expert group emphasized the importance of decentralized programmes and participatory approaches to programme design that involved the intended beneficiaries and their community in the planning process and took local needs and assets into consideration.

36. The expert group noted that major sporting events might offer the opportunity to raise awareness of and support for crime prevention. In addition, such events sometimes required new infrastructure that could later be repurposed for broader youth engagement activities. The expert group also noted the frequent use of sports celebrities, local sports figures and champions as role models, ambassadors and motivators in support of positive youth development initiatives. However, the expert group observed that the role of those individuals was not always sufficiently clear, and it advised caution in the choice of potential role models or ambassadors, due diligence during their recruitment, care in shaping the message to be conveyed and the training of such individuals, as necessary.

37. Cooperation and partnerships had long been recognized as an integral part of effective crime prevention and, like other types of crime prevention activity, sport-based crime prevention programmes required coordination and partnerships among various sectors and levels of government and community organizations. The expert group noted that partnerships could be an important tool to address limited resources when scaling up crime prevention activities, for example in the context of service provision, viability of infrastructure and facilities. The expert group agreed that the sharing of good practices and the establishment of communities of practice were necessary to support such partnerships and cooperation, including at the regional and global levels.

38. The expert group referred to the need for local approaches to crime-related problems, as emphasized in the guidelines for cooperation and technical assistance in the field of urban crime prevention adopted by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1995/9. The importance of promoting and facilitating the use of sport for local or community-based crime prevention initiatives was noted in this regard, including through funding, supportive regulation, the planning of publicly accessible and safe spaces, the development of sports infrastructure and the marshalling of community support. For that reason, the expert group also mentioned the importance of national and local crime prevention action plans that took into account, inter alia, factors that increased the likelihood of crime occurring in certain populations and places in a comprehensive, integrated and participatory manner, and the importance for such plans to be based on the best available evidence and good practices.

39. Most notably, the expert group affirmed the crucial importance of partnerships between schools and community organizations in addressing student engagement issues and even arresting school dropout through community-based sport-focused initiatives. Partnerships between schools and community leaders could help to engage young people in school objectives and in remaining committed to them. The expert group emphasized the role of schools in cooperation with community agencies in fully realizing the potential of structured sporting activities, together with or independently from other educational activities, and contributing to the engagement of young people

in schools, student retention and academic achievement, all of which were known to be powerful resilience factors and social integration vehicles.

40. The expert group also highlighted the importance of partnerships with sports clubs and sports organizations that could provide trained coaches, intentional programming, physical and emotional safety, strong administration and context in sport-based crime prevention programmes. Many national sports federations and their local member clubs had either delivered their own sport-based initiatives or worked in partnership with non-governmental organizations to do so. The expert group observed that sports organizations at all levels had valuable expertise in the development and promotion of sport that could be applied to crime prevention objectives, although there could be challenges in some instances in aligning competitive and selective notions of sports development and performance with more inclusive approaches that used sport in the pursuit of crime prevention objectives.

41. The expert group observed that public-private partnerships might increase the opportunities and sustainability of sports programmes and open some creative and sustainable funding opportunities.

42. The expert group also noted the growing international interest in the potential role of sport as an effective tool for preventing violent extremism. Notwithstanding the limited evidence of the effectiveness of sport-based programmes in preventing violent extremism and the need for more research, analysis and guidance on how sport could be used in that context, experts acknowledged that sport and sport-based interventions could serve as an effective vehicle to address the ideologies and root causes of violent extremism by engaging young people, communities and marginalized populations, including women and girls.<sup>5</sup>

43. The expert group expressed its concern about the lack of robust evaluation and monitoring of the use of sporting and physical activities in crime prevention programmes and interventions, an issue also prevalent in programmes and policies that used sport for development purposes. In that regard, the expert group noted some of the challenges in measuring the impact of crime prevention programmes in general, and more specifically sport-based prevention programmes, including the practical and methodological challenges in evaluating collective impact projects (for example, where more than one project was simultaneously pursuing the same goal, such as reducing recidivism). Since sport-based interventions were expected to be but one aspect of a broader crime prevention strategy, it was sometimes impossible to disentangle their impact from that of other elements of the prevention strategy. Finally, the expert group noted the challenge of convincing stakeholders, including donors, to fund and conduct evaluations.

44. Notwithstanding those evaluation challenges, the expert group emphasized that a commitment to evidence-based crime prevention programming dictated that more robust evaluations of sport-based programmes be conducted. It noted that programmes required solid process assessments to ensure fidelity to programme implementation methods, as well as impact assessments using both quantitative and qualitative data. This was necessary to help to identify the added value of sport as a tool in crime prevention, especially when sport-based interventions were delivered jointly with other types of interventions, as they frequently were. Monitoring and evaluation were crucial to identifying effective practices and failed approaches, as well as to ensuring sustainability in terms of policy support and programme funding.

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<sup>5</sup> See also United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Desk Review on Sport as a Tool for the Prevention of Violent Extremism* (December 2018).

### III. Conclusions and recommendations

45. In view of the foregoing, the expert group provided the following recommendations for consideration and possible endorsement by the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice at its twenty-ninth session.

46. In the use of sport in the context of youth crime prevention and criminal justice, Member States should:

(a) Carefully integrate sport-based interventions into crime prevention and criminal justice strategies and programmes, with a view to strengthening known protective factors and addressing risk factors of crime and victimization;

(b) Adopt sports policies and programmes that are inclusive, promote the participation of women and girls in sporting activities and encourage the cooperation of multiple stakeholders;

(c) Support and encourage local and municipal governments in creating safe spaces for sporting and physical activities and providing equal access to sports facilities to all young people;

(d) Support knowledge dissemination and exchanges about successful sport-based programmes and help to build capacity in sports organizations with respect to crime prevention;

(e) Adopt specific policies and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, exploitation and violence against children and young people in sport, and ensure that the necessary safeguards for participants are included in the design and implementation of sport-based crime prevention initiatives;

(f) Support sustained, intensive and longer-lasting sport-based initiatives built on proven crime prevention methods and co-designed with or in consultation with the target population;

(g) Invest in enhancing the capacity of sports coaches and facilitators to deliver sport-based interventions;

(h) Support crime prevention partnerships and cooperation and support a multi-agency approach, including schools, sports organizations, crime prevention specialists and, where relevant, the police and criminal justice agencies;

(i) Promote and facilitate effective research in and monitoring and evaluation of relevant initiatives to broaden the evidence base of crime prevention interventions that use sport, including solid process assessments to ensure programme fidelity and impact assessments using both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as studies aimed specifically at identifying the added value of sport as a tool in crime prevention and quantifying the unique impact of sport within multicomponent crime prevention programmes.

47. The expert group also recommended that UNODC, in collaboration with other organizations and agencies, continue to support the development of a community of practice in relation to sport-based crime prevention interventions and programmes and consider establishing or supporting a process or mechanism to encourage and monitor evaluations of crime prevention programmes relying in whole or in part on sport-based interventions.

48. The expert group further recommended that UNODC and its partners consider developing and making available additional guidance and practical tools for crime prevention practitioners on various aspects of the integration of sport into crime prevention and criminal justice strategies, including:

(a) Guidance on how to implement sport-based interventions effectively in the context of the rehabilitation and social reintegration of offenders, in particular in custodial settings;

(b) Guidance on the effective use of sport-based interventions in preventing violent extremism and violence against women and girls;

(c) Evaluation and assessment criteria to examine sport-based crime prevention programmes, policies, leadership and the physical and social environments in which they are implemented;

(d) The identification of opportunities for embedding specific sport-based interventions into local crime prevention plans and strategies;

(e) Guidance on how organizations involved in sport-based crime prevention programmes can review their operations, set goals and proactively engage women and girls as participants and leaders.

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