

ANNEX II:

Youth, Sport, Security and Development: Leveraging Sport for Prevention of Violent Extremism

08 April 2026, 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM,
CR 11, United Nations Headquarters, New York

Background

Across many regions, young people living in conditions of poverty, marginalization, and limited access to education and employment remain particularly vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist groups and involvement in crime and violence. These structural conditions, compounded by social exclusion and lack of opportunity, create environments where youth may be drawn toward destructive pathways, with implications for peace, stability, and sustainable development.

In this context, sport has emerged as a practical and effective tool for prevention. Beyond physical activity, sport fosters discipline, teamwork, resilience, and a sense of belonging. It provides safe spaces, positive role models, and structured engagement that can redirect at-risk youth away from violence and toward constructive life choices. As such, sports development should be viewed not only as a social or cultural intervention, but as **a strategic investment in peacebuilding and prevention.**

There is increasing recognition within the United Nations system of the role of sport in advancing peace and security objectives, including in preventing violent extremism and promoting social cohesion. Well-designed sports programs can strengthen community resilience, support youth engagement, and contribute to addressing root causes of instability.

A powerful illustration of this transformative potential is the life of Emmanuel “Manny” Pacquiao. Born into poverty in General Santos City, Philippines, and exposed at an early age to hardship and limited opportunities, he could have easily been drawn into cycles of violence or vice. Instead, through sport, he forged a different path - one defined by discipline, perseverance, and purpose. Boxing became not only a means of personal upliftment, but a platform through which he **elevated his family, inspired a nation, and contributed to global efforts promoting peace and opportunity.** His journey underscores how sport can serve as a decisive turning point in the lives of at-risk youth, offering a pathway away from vulnerability and toward leadership and positive societal impact.

This event will examine how sports development initiatives can be leveraged more systematically as part of broader strategies for youth empowerment, prevention of violence and extremism, and the promotion of inclusive and peaceful societies. It will provide a platform for Member States and stakeholders to exchange experiences, highlight best practices, and explore opportunities for strengthened partnerships.