



Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Voice of the Coach in the European Social Dialogue

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Introduction – Project CoachForce21

CoachForce21 (CF21) is a three-year Erasmus+ co-funded project led by Leeds Beckett University (UK) and the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) with another seven partners: Trainerakademie Köln (Germany), Czech Olympic Committee (Czech Republic), Hungarian Coaching Association (Hungary), Polish Institute of Sport (Poland), Coaching Portugal (Portugal), Professional Coaches of Finland (Finland) and the Hellenic Federation of Sports Coaches and Trainers (Greece).

CF21 has two main objectives:

- 1 Strengthening coach representation at national and European level through the provision of guidance and support for existing and developing Coaches' Associations (Coaches' Associations) in the EU.
- 2 Bringing the Voice of the Coach to the fore of the Social Dialogue in Sport to foster Good Governance in the Sector.

To achieve the above, the partners will:

- 1 Develop a baseline picture of the current coaching landscape across the 27 Member States.
- 2 Map the current impact of Coaches' Associations in the 27 Member States.
- 3 Create guidance tools and resources for current and prospective Coaches' Associations in relation to the convening, governance, relevance and impact of this type of organisations.
- 4 Effectively engaging with coaches on the frontline, employers (i.e. clubs; local authorities; leisure providers, etc), national and international sporting organisations (i.e., federations) and national and international policy bodies (i.e., government departments; European umbrella bodies).

This **Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Voice of the Coach in the European Social Dialogue** is the seventh output from CF21. This IO will propose recommendations to enhance the representation, involvement, and influence of coaches in the existing social dialogue in sport.

1. Review of Key Project Intellectual Outputs

Previous CF21 intellectual outputs (IOs) have already explored coach representation and paved the way for this final document. These are briefly summarised below allowing stakeholders to view the different steps taken towards strengthening the voice of the coach across all these research and guidance documents.

IO2 – European Coaches Associations Map 2020: Presence and Impact

Intellectual Output 2 addressed one of the main goals of project CoachForce21: to map the current impact of Coaches' Associations in the Member States of the European Union. Drawing on the conclusions of projects such as CoachNet (2013), its goal was to paint a detailed picture of the status of Coaches' Associations throughout the EU. To achieve this, it focused on mapping the different types, roles, and goals of coaches' associations to understand the reach and impact of the Voice of the Coach in Europe.

The European Coaches' Associations Map gathered data from 17 of the member states. Coaches' Associations are present in the majority of European countries. However, they fulfil varying roles and are structured in specific ways which condition the impact they have on coaches. While all of the associations were clear on the role they had with regards to coaches, less than half of them were able to express their mission and vision clearly. In fact, the findings showed a slight overlap between roles, vision and mission of the associations making it difficult to establish how the associations help in promoting the Voice of the Coach. Although a majority of respondents stated that the Voice of the Coach was indeed present in their country, there were significant variations in the way and quality in which this occurs.

Despite some seemingly positive trends, this output discovered some potential weaknesses within coaching representation in Europe. Some clarification is needed in the terminology and concepts within the coaching system in different countries. Denominations such as Association and Union are used interchangeably in some countries, while in others they have clear differences between them. Another area for improvement determined by this output (adding to the findings of IO1) is data collection. The absence of answers from 11 countries, as well as inconsistent data from others, indicates that coach representation might not be as expanded or as important as initially thought. Lastly, when asked about the impact of the coaches' associations a majority of respondents were unable to articulate it, and those that did were not

able to properly differentiate between deliverables, goals, aspirations and organizational missions.

Overall, Intellectual Output 2 highlights the fact that, even though coach representation appears to be making progress in several countries, there is still considerable margin for improvement across the EU.

Findings suggest that data is more easily and clearly obtained in countries with a strong sport coaching infrastructure in place which, in most cases, includes a multi-sport coaching association. These findings are a key component of coach representation and in the journey towards enhancing the Voice of the Coach in Europe's social dialogue.

IO4 – Statement on the Professionalisation of Sport Coaching

The aim of Intellectual Output 4 was to review the existing 2011 ICCE position statement on “Sport Coaching as a Profession”. Over the last decade, policymakers have increasingly recognized the importance of sport coaches in European society (Council of the European Union, 2017; 2020). Sport coaching is no longer exclusively associated with professional and Olympic sport, and it is regularly proposed as an activity that contributes to the development of individuals, communities, and society.

The 2011 position statement (Duffy et al., 2011) determined that sport coaching was not fully aligned with the more traditional professions. It lacked clear boundaries between categories (volunteers, part-time and full-time) and domains (youth sport, adult participation, high performance), as well as needing more clarification in areas such as common purpose, knowledge base, representational organization, right to practice provision and ethical practice. The authors thus advocated for a “blended professional area”.

The 2021 position statement takes into account policy, practice, and research developments over the last decade to propose a way forward for sport coaching. Despite some concerns from academics, research and practical experiences working with governments and national and international federations indicates that positive steps are indeed a valid aspiration. However, to accommodate the previous idea of “blended professional area” and the negative comparison against more traditional profession traits, a change of focus is proposed in the way professionalization is understood.

This positions statement proposes a shift in professionalization from an “all or nothing” approach to a more continuous, long-term occupational improvement based on system development (North et al., 2019). Research shows that there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution for sport coaching and that countries, and sports, are at different stages along this journey and that the process is highly dependent on context (Moustakas et al., 2021). The notion of professionalization has thus evolved to encompass not only the regulation of the right to practice and the remuneration status of sport coaches, but their recruitment, education, development, employment, and recognition.

Advancing sport coaching as a profession is thus a complex and challenging proposition which requires carefully contextualized solutions. Organizations and individuals interested in driving this process must engage and influence all relevant stakeholders, including the coaches themselves. The statement emphasises that to strengthen the role sport coaches play in society, their voice must be heard in the decision-making process.

IO5 – Principles and Guidelines on How to Set Up a Coaches’ Association

The goal of Intellectual Output 5 is to provide a guide on how to set up a Coaches Association. This guide is built on best practices and principles that show the basic building blocks of strong coach representation. Coaches’ representation and participation in the decision-making processes is central to the improvement of the sport coaching profession. Over the last decade a number of European projects have focused on developing and improving sport coaching in areas such as coach education, coaching qualifications and coach representation. One of these projects, CoachLearn (2017), developed the European Sport Coaching Framework (ESCF; Lara-Bercial et al., 2017a). Relevant to the purpose of project CoachForce21, the ESCF clearly stated the very important role of coaches’ representation (mainly, but not exclusively, through Coaches’ Associations) in the creation of successful and inclusive coaching systems.

This output first establishes the purpose of a Coaches’ Association, be it sport-specific or multi-sport. Although the reasons for establishing Coaches’ Associations may be very similar for all countries and sports, the specifics will vary depending on the context and culture of each situation. These reasons can be summarized into two areas: promoting the profession by increasing representation, and offering several services and support (legal, educational).

For Coaches' Associations to promote the Voice of the Coach and fulfil their purposes there are a series of actions and tasks they need to undertake. This output explains several areas that are paramount to the set-up of a coach association, such as member types, tasks, operation, financing and constitution steps. Furthermore, several examples of best practices are added to this document as they offer additional information on how to set up a coaches' association.

IO6 – Principles and Guidelines for Good Governance in Coaches' Associations

Intellectual Output 6 aims to provide a comprehensive description of the principles of good governance of sport organisations as they apply to Coaches' Associations. It introduces aspects of good governance in Coaches' Associations and offers guidelines as to how they can act in a sustainable way throughout the EU. Through its Sport Unit, the European Commission developed the Principles of Good Governance in Sport (European Commission, 2013). An important part of this document is to include coaches in all decision-making as key stakeholders in the sector. One of the ways in which Good Governance has improved, and that directly affects coaches, is through social dialogue. The value of social dialogue is to include the people who are on the ground, in this case the coaches, in the discussions regarding policy-making and social well-being, among other things.

This output adapts the European Commission's "Principles of Good Governance in Sport" report with two added frames of reference, inspired by the work of the Sustainability Programme of Finnish Sports Community: "Social responsibility of coaches' associations in sports communities" and "Coaches' Associations responsibility to promote good coaching".

Adopted from the examples, this document presents 11 principles for good governance of Coaches' Associations: **(1) Clarity of Purpose and Objectives, (2) Stakeholder Identification and Roles, (3) Democracy and Minimum Standards, (4) Delegation and Committees, (5) Management, (6) Juridical/Disciplinary Procedures, (7) Inclusivity and Young Coaches' Engagement, (8) Statutes, Rules and Regulations, (9) Accountability and Transparency, (10) Code of Ethics and (11) Social Responsibility and Promoting Good Coaching.**

Also included in this document are some best practice examples from Coaches' Associations and similar institutions.

2. The Voice of the Coach

Having determined the importance of including the coaches in the decision-making process of the issues that affect them, Intellectual Output 7 is concerned with providing guidelines and principles to strengthen the Voice of the Coach in the European social dialogue.

Despite the numerous policy publications (Council of the European Union, 2017; 2020; European Commission, 2016) and conclusions of previous projects (CoachNet, 2013; CoachLearn, 2017) which stated the importance of the Voice of the Coach, there still seem to be barriers which prevent it from reaching the policy circles where decisions are made. The inclusion of coaches in the social dialogue at national and European level, as well as their relevance and importance in consolidating Good Governance structures, are still far from optimal (CoachNet, 2013).

Research shows that this problem originates both at the ground level (i.e., coaches' lack of disposition to be part of Coaches' Associations and to self-organise) and at the institutional level (i.e., governments and federations unwillingness to share control) (Lyle & Cushion, 2017). To eliminate these barriers there needs to be significant cooperation between associations and federations. CoachNet (2013) concluded that there was a need for a more considered approach to the representation of coaches, and to their involvement in decision-making, and recommended the development of more coherent structures for the engagement of coaches in each sport and country. However, the study cautioned against the realisation that coaches are individual decision-makers who operate in a wide variety of contexts, many of whom do not show a propensity for involvement in formal 'representative' structures.

2.1. The Lundy Model

A model of coach participation in decision-making does not exist. To overcome this barrier and achieve the goal of strengthening the Voice of the Coach in the EU, CoachForce21 has adopted and adapted the Lundy Model of Child Participation to the context of sport coaching (Lundy, 2007; Figures 1 and 2). The Lundy Model is a rights-based approach to children's participation based on Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that:

- ① *“States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*
- ② *For this purpose the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.”*

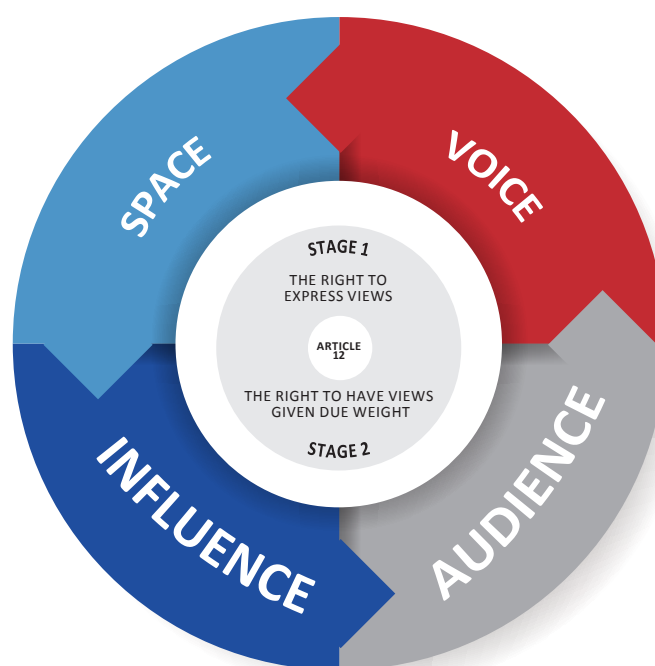


Figure 1. Lundy's Model of Participation as included in Ireland's National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making

This model provides the necessary aspects that must be present in any process in order for children to have a meaningful voice. The four elements that must be in place for children's voices to be heard are Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence. These will be further explained and explored in the following paragraphs, but they are briefly introduced below for clarification purposes.

Space (1): children and young people must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views

Voice (2): children and young people must be facilitated to express their views

Audience (3): the views must be listened to

Influence (4): the views must be acted upon, as appropriate

As the model shows, focusing only on the voice might be a limiting view. Professor Lundy explains in her model how the four interrelated elements must be in place for the children's voice to be truly represented. The model shows that the elements are interrelated and that there is a chronological order to them. The first stage is ensuring the child's right to form and express a view, and the second stage is their right to have that view given due weight (Lundy 2007).

Although not a UN declaration, all the research and policy documentation analysed for the purpose of project CoachForce21, and as seen in previous outputs, points to similar needs for coaches. Extending the analogy, in terms of representation on decision-making bodies, it could be argued that coach representation is in its infancy in most countries and sports globally. Coaches, therefore, need to be guaranteed a space, a voice, an audience, and influence in order to participate in the decision-making process.

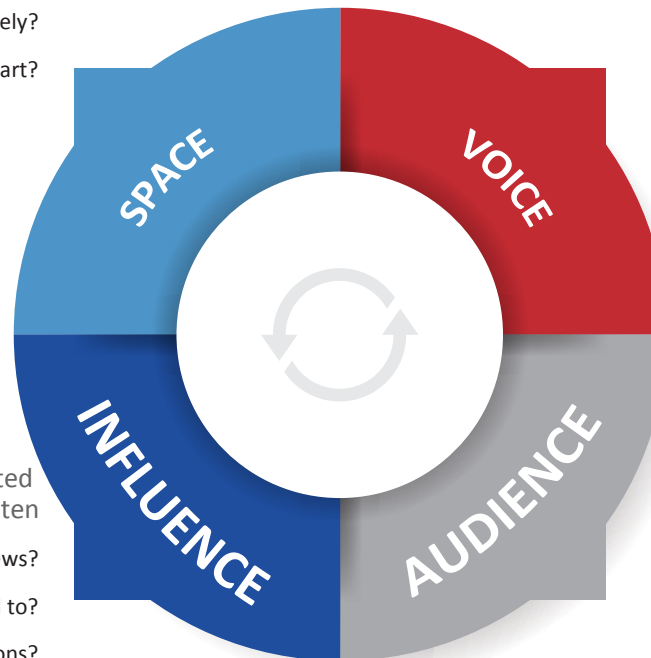


How: Provide a safe and inclusive space for coaches to express their views

- Have coaches views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which coaches can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all coaches can take part?

How: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of coaches' views

- Have coaches been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do coaches know that they do not have to take part?
- Have coaches been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?



How: Ensure that coaches' views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating coaches' views?
- Do coaches know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

How: Ensure that coaches' views are taken seriously and acted upon, when appropriate

- Were the coaches views considered by those with the power to affect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the coaches views have been taken seriously?
- Have the coaches been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

Figure 2. Adopted and adapted from Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation as included in Ireland's National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020

In addition to Lundy's model of participation, this output will also adapt a series of checklists developed by Professor Lundy in cooperation with the Government of Ireland in their National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making. This model seeks to provide the relevant stakeholders and decision-makers, including Coaches' Associations, with guidance on the steps to take in order to strengthen the Voice of the Coach.

The following sections explore in detail each of the elements of the model.

2.2. Space

Coaches must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views. These opportunities begin with a space in which coaches are encouraged to express their views. They usually take the form of a Coaches' Association, but depending on the country and the sport, it might be linked to other organizations. Nevertheless, the goal is for Coaches' Associations to not only be a recipient of opinions, but to actively seek and motivate coaches for their input and to allow them to feel safe to express their views without any type of fear.

Asking coaches which matters they believe have an effect on them and their occupation is an important first step in strengthening the Voice of the Coach. Similarly, a key question to ask coaches is how, or whether, they would like to be involved in influencing the outcome of the decision. The process by which this consultation will be done is something that each organisation must consider beforehand. They can be one-on-one interviews, online or in-person surveys, organisational meetings, and many other options, but creating a safe space and environment can also be achieved simply by engaging with coaches in casual conversations.

The following checklist will guide decision-makers on how to listen to coaches and involve them in the process.

- How will you ensure that coaches are involved as early as possible?

- How will their involvement be sustained?

- How will those who have been, or may be, directly affected by the topic be involved?

- What steps will be taken to ensure the process is inclusive and accessible?

- How will they be supported to feel safe and comfortable expressing themselves?

- How do you make sure that all coaches are heard?

- How can coaches feel safe to express their views?

- Have you allowed enough time to listen to and hear their views?

- What support will be provided to those who become anxious, upset or uncomfortable?

2.3. Voice

Once there is a safe space guaranteed for coaches, decision-makers must provide appropriate information to allow them to form a view and facilitate its expression. This right is not exclusive to this model but is actually afforded to all human beings through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19) as well as in several other international human rights instruments.

Similarly to how the goal is not only to “be available” for coaches, but to actually and actively seek their participation out, the goal is not to just believe they will know and be informed about the variety of topics that concern them, but to actually help them gain that knowledge. Organisations representing coaches can use the following checklist to reflect on how to listen to coaches and involve them in the process.

- Have you made a clear list of the topics on which you want to hear the views of coaches?
- How will you ensure that the key focus of the process stays on the topics you identified?
- How will they know that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time?
- How will you support them in giving their own views, while including appropriate information?
- How will you ensure that they are given a range of ways to express themselves that best suits their needs and choices?
- How will the process allow them to identify topics they want to discuss?
- How are coaches provided with the support they need to give their views and be heard?
- How can they raise the things that matter to them?
- How are they offered different ways of giving their views?

2.4. Audience

The second stage of the Lundy model focuses on how views are given due weight. Coaches must therefore not only be given a voice, but this must be listened to. As mentioned previously, having a voice is not enough. The goal is for that voice to be heard by the appropriate people. While multiple human rights instruments offer human beings a right to express their views, they do not necessarily mention the right to have those views being listened to. In adapting the Lundy Model and its focus, we want to make sure that coaches have a right to have their views listened to by stakeholders involved in the decision-making processes within the coaching system they contribute to.

A key aspect of this process is to ensure that coaches have the opportunity to communicate their opinions to an identifiable individual or body with the responsibility to listen. While this step does not guarantee specific outcomes, it is important to define the formal channel of communication by which it takes place. Here is a list on how decision-makers can reflect on offering a good audience for coaches.

- How will coaches know to whom, how and when their views will be communicated?
- How will you show your commitment to being informed and influenced by their views
- How will you identify and involve relevant decision-makers (those responsible for influencing change)
- How and when will a report of their views be compiled?
- How will you ensure that they are given an opportunity to confirm that their views are accurately recorded
- What plans are in place to support them to play a role in communicating their own views?
- How do you show that you are ready and willing to listen to coaches' views?
- How do you make sure they understand what you can do with their views?

2.5. Influence

The final step in this model is to ensure that decision-makers take coaches' views seriously and they act on them, where appropriate. Depending on the chain of communication, coaches' views will first have to influence people in their Coaches' Association, but at a later stage they will have to reach decision-makers at higher levels as well (i.e., federations, government, etc.). The term "where appropriate" references the fact that other factors might come into play and coaches might not be aware of all of them. It is the decision-makers' job to make this understood by coaches and give them as much information on the process as possible.

Stakeholders can use the following checklist to make sure all aspects of influence are considered.

- How will coaches be informed about the scope they have (including the limitations) to influence decision-making?
- How will they be given appropriate and accessible feedback at key points during the development of a service or policy?
- What are your plans to make sure that coaches' views have an impact on decisions?
- How will you explain the reasons for the decisions taken?
- How will you ensure that they are given opportunities to evaluate the process throughout?
- How will they be given appropriate and accessible feedback explaining how their views were used and the reasons for the decisions taken, in a timely manner?

2.6. Additional Considerations

The Lundy model reminds stakeholders that giving a voice is not enough, and that the whole process must be complete for coaches to really play a meaningful part in the development and improvement of coaching systems. Coaches must be given a space, a voice, an audience, and influence. As with many of the outputs of this project, what this model looks like in each country and sport will surely be very different.

One of the difficulties of this model is that the initial goodwill can dissipate when things have to be put in practice. This is especially true when it means challenging the dominant thinking, generating controversy or providing adequate funding (Lundy, 2007). Therefore, special care should be taken when introducing this model to prevent negative reactions. As seen previously in the introduction to section 2 of this document, this can occur both at the coaches' level (i.e., not wanting or not being able to self-organize) and at the governing bodies' level (i.e., not wanting their authority undermined).

However, it is difficult to imagine breaches in coaches' rights in situations where they have been fully involved from the beginning (Lundy, 2007). Whether these breaches come from coaches or from the organizations, when coaches have been involved in determining the outcome of those possible breaches, it is less likely to happen. Likewise, when coaches have been a part of the process of determining their obligations and the repercussions, they are more likely to maintain their obligations. It would seem then that a collaborative, systems approach to strengthening the Voice of the Coach would allow more accountability from both sides.

The goal of this model, and this output, is to guarantee that the Voice of the Coach is heard in the decision-making processes by listing a series of crucial elements and ideas. These elements should be seen as whole process and not individually. While it is important for all stakeholders to know that this model does not guarantee any outcomes, we believe it is a necessary step to be taken in the long-term occupational improvement of the sport coaching profession.

3. Conclusions

Intellectual Output 7 shows the value of purposefully planning to effectively engage coaches in the social dialogue. All the different outputs in this project considered together point towards the need to increase coach representation in order to strengthen the Voice of the Coach. This can take different shapes in different countries and sports based on context, culture, history, etc. However, research from this and previous projects points towards the importance and value of representing and reaching to as high a number of coaches as possible.

In this sense, a possible long-term goal for strengthening and representing the Voice of Europe's Coaches could be to enhance the representation, involvement, and influence of coaches involving all parts at international and national level. This would imply the creation of national, multi-sport coaching confederations in order to represent all coaches, as opposed to just giving voice to a particular sport/region.

The details of how this could become a reality fall outside the scope of this project. However, the first steps towards that goal start with the implementation of the knowledge, tools and guidelines derived from CoachForce21. Where no associations exist, it is vital to set them up. And where they do exist, it is important to improve them. The broader coach representation becomes, the stronger the Voice of the Coach will become. How that could look at a pan-European level could be the focus of future projects.

4. Proposed Readings

Social dialogue

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=329>

Funding for social dialogue

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1492&langId=en>

About sport in the EU

<https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sport-in-the-eu>

Dialogue with member states and sport organisations

<https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sport-in-the-eu/dialogue-with-ms-and-organisations>

About sport initiatives

<https://sport.ec.europa.eu/sport-in-the-eu/about-sport-initiatives>

Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

https://ec.europa.eu/info/departments/education-youth-sport-and-culture_en

Sport

https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/sport_en

EU Work Plan for Sport (2017-2020) <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9639-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

EU Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024) <https://www.ecos-europe.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Workplan-UE-sport-2021-2024.pdf>

Sport

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/143/sport>

World Players Association and video

<https://uniglobalunion.org/about/sectors/world-players/>

THE WHITE PAPER ON SPORT (2007):

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52007DC0391>

Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on empowering coaches by enhancing opportunities to acquire skills and competences 2020/C 196/01

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020XG0611%2801%29>

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