

ENGSO Position and Recommendations on the

Future EU Work Plan for Sport post-2020

Adopted by ENGSO Executive Committee on 24 June 2020 in their online meeting

Summary

ENGSO, the European Sports NGO, proposes the following key recommendations for the future EU Work Plan for Sport post-2020:

A. Dialogue, representativeness and diversity

It is vital that the special status of organised sport as a privileged discussion partner is acknowledged, and that the opinion of those that represent grassroots sport is heard in EU decision-making processes from the earliest stages, in order to ensure the relevance of EU sports policy initiatives and to foster commitment to their implementation. The EU should employ the 'nothing about us without us' approach and ensure diversity and gender balance at events.

B. Policy priorities: autonomous sport that scores for society

ENGSO raises voluntary-based grassroots sport and the societal role of sport as areas of particular importance for the next EU Work Plan for Sport. The potential of sport for promoting European values, fostering positive change and engaging citizens needs to be further explored and utilised. Through its initiatives, the EU can help sport in levelling up its efforts to enhance sustainability and protect the environment and climate, as well as to promote health, inclusion, education, employment, youth involvement, equality and diversity. The European Union can further support the development of good governance and integrity within sport, while respecting the autonomy of sport. Modern, safe and sustainable funding of sport is vital in order to maintain a thriving voluntary-based sports sector, especially while recovering from the COVID-19 crisis – and to reap the benefits that sport has for society. In order to appreciate the full economic dimension of sport, a comprehensive understanding of the economic and social impact of voluntary-based sport should be developed. It is important to continue the work to mainstream sport in other policy fields, for example through promoting the usage of structural funds and other tools to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 crisis. Sport is an indivisible part of the European way of life, and the European Sport Model and the values of sport should be considered as part of our cultural heritage.

C. Actions for a thriving civil society of sport, efficient policy implementation and lasting impact

In order to foster a sustainable impact, selected methods and outputs of the Work Plan should match with the real needs of sport, and provide the sports movement with incentives and support that ensure the long-term commitment to the implementation of EU sports policy. ENGSO is proposing actions within the field of sport as well as mainstreamed measures, for example:

- ***Ensuring the eligibility of sport for general support measures to mitigate the negative economic impact of COVID-19***

- *Complementing the work done on the Sport Satellite Accounts by conducting a **study on the economic and social impact of voluntary-based sport***
- *Enhancing the evidence-base of European sports policy with a complete **study on the societal role of voluntary-based grassroots sport***
- *Anchoring sport into cohesion policy by **producing guidelines for using EU funding for sports facilities***
- ***Reviewing the progress on and update the EU Proposals for Strategic Actions on Gender Equality 2014–2020, and ensure their implementation***
- ***Discussions at the highest political level** between EU decision-makers and the organised sport movement on the **European Sport Model** in order to safeguard the specificity of sport*
- ***Stock-taking exercise, report and subsequent recommendations** on the legal forms of support and sustainable funding for sport*
- *Begin the preparations to support the **implementation of EU policy through operational grants** for organisations representing voluntary-based grassroots sport*
- ***Providing earmarked financial incentives to the organised sports movement** within the Erasmus+ Sport context to facilitate the **implementation of Council Conclusions, recommendations and other EU policies***
- *Enhancing the resilience of sports clubs and encourage innovation in grassroots sport by setting up a **High-level Group on innovation in sport clubs** to discuss and propose measures*

Introduction

Sport is the biggest civil society movement in Europe – and voluntary-based grassroots sports clubs are its backbone. According to the [Special Eurobarometer 472](#) (2018), 40% of Europeans practice sport and physical activity, making sport one of the most popular leisure time activities and a Europe-wide phenomenon. ENGSO, the European Sport NGO, is the leading voice for voluntary-based grassroots sport in Europe. Through our members – National Sports Confederations, National Olympic and Paralympic Committees from 33 European countries – we represent at least **453,000 sports clubs** in Europe (ENGSO Member Survey 2019). These clubs engage at least **70.9 million members** and at least **16.5 million volunteers**. Furthermore, sport **employs 5.67 million people** ([Study on the economic impact of sport through sport satellite accounts](#), 2018).

During the first three EU Work Plans for Sport, ENGSO has actively contributed to EU sports policy. ENGSO has been an active and successful counterpart in proposing priorities and actions. Furthermore, ENGSO has played an important role in their implementation, being part of several Expert Groups, participating in the drafting of core documents, and actively participating in meetings and events.

In a time when our societies are stepping out of the COVID-19 crisis, the sheer necessity of sport for our overall wellbeing and its positive impact for society and communities have become more

imminent that ever. Grassroots sport carries with it enormous potential in terms of health and disease prevention, but also social inclusion and cohesion, civic engagement and democracy, skills and employment, regional and local development, and growth. Furthermore, Europe will be hosting Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris in 2024, giving the European Union a unique momentum for strengthening its links with grassroots sports organisations in order to achieve common objectives.

It is thus vital that the upcoming European Union Work Plan for Sport:

- ***maintains grassroots sport as a priority area***
- ***proposes actions that have relevance for organised sport, and***
- ***acknowledges the special status of organised sport as a privileged partner whose opinion is heard in EU decision-making processes***

A. Dialogue, representativeness and diversity

The current Work Plan (2017–2020) emphasises the role of sport stakeholders for participation, and for the sake of coherent, relevant and effective EU sports policy, this should be the case also in the upcoming Work Plan. The dialogue between organised sport and EU decision makers has been satisfactory during the current Work Plan, both formally and informally. However, there is room for further improvement. The [Council Resolution from 2017](#) on further developing the EU structured dialogue on sport proposes to invite the sport movement to all relevant meetings, including Sport Directors meetings of each Presidency.

To maximise the impact of initiatives during the next Work Plan, the **organised sport movement needs to be closely involved from the earliest stages, in order to foster commitment to implementing the EU sports policy initiatives.**

Furthermore, the **EU needs to recognise the relevant sports stakeholders that have expertise and represent the organised sports movement** – such as ENGSO, representing voluntary-based grassroots sport. Organised sport needs to be invited as experts and speakers at groups, seminars and hearings in order to contribute to the discussion, and to ensure representativeness. **Structured dialogue at a national level should also be encouraged** in order to bring the voice of the sport movement in each country in the EU Member States' positions and ensure the implementation of the EU policies at a national level.

Engaging organised sport in a constant and timely dialogue at different levels greatly enhances the implementation of EU policies, as initiatives will be more relevant for sport and have the “ownership” of the sports movement, when topics are addressed together.

In general, the EU should employ the ‘**nothing about us without us**’ approach when discussing topics such as sport and the social inclusion of different minorities and disadvantaged groups. For example, youth representatives (e.g. from ENGSO Youth) should be invited to discuss youth sport matters. **The European Commission and EU Presidencies need to work actively to ensure diversity (in terms of e.g. gender, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, ethnic group, race, age or economic status) and gender balance at their events and meetings.**

ENGSO stresses that:

- *For a successful EU sport policy and its implementation, **the Council Presidencies and the European Commission should listen to the real needs of the organised sport movement and invite the legitimate representatives of sport to EU meetings where matters concerning organised sport are discussed.** This can be achieved through implementing the recommendations of the Council Resolution on further developing the EU structured dialogue (2017), and a constant formal and informal dialogue beyond the Resolution*
- *Both elite and grassroots sports need to be **represented by the organisations that have the mandate to do so, such as ENGSO for grassroots sports***
- ***Dialogue needs to be considered at all levels, from working level to political.** Dialogue should be extended from EU Sport Forum, Expert Group meetings, Sports Directors meetings and Council meetings to e.g. Working Party meetings – whenever decisions concerning sport are being drafted and discussed. The top political leaders from the EU and the sports movement also need to convene regularly in order to ensure proper coordination of policies*
- *The organised **sports movement should be heard from the very beginning of each process**, e.g. when defining the priorities of the Work Plan post-2020*
- *The EU should promote a continued, systematic and timely **structured dialogue between government representatives and the sport movement also at a national level**, including formal consultations and regular meetings*
- *Furthermore, the EU should employ the **‘nothing about us without us’** approach and consider **involving young people within sport**, especially in the area of youth sport, in order to give the youth a real say in matters that concern them*
- ***Gender balance and diversity** of speakers and participants of EU sport meetings and events must be ensured*

B. Policy priorities: autonomous sport that scores for society

ENGSO agrees that the topics of the current EU Work Plan have been mostly relevant. Unfortunately, the opportunities for flexibility within the Work Plan were not fully utilised (to address e.g. the climate crisis) until the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This flexibility allows possibilities for discussing and addressing current topics that are relevant for sport.

ENGSO is of the opinion that it's absolutely vital that the future Work Plan policy priorities are relevant for organised sport at the European level. This way the EU sports policy tools can help sport solve issues, both within sport as well as in society. Clear links between the sport actions and general EU priorities would facilitate making more visible the role that sport plays for reaching EU goals and promoting European values.

ENGSO raises voluntary-based grassroots sport and the societal role of sport as areas of particular importance for the next EU Work Plan for Sport.

Sport depends on its volunteers, who administer sports clubs, organise events, coach people of all ages and from all backgrounds, and consequently create value for whole communities. The voluntary nature of sport is also acknowledged in the Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU): *The Union shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social and educational function.* Organised sport, especially at a grassroots level, has the potential to engage and empower citizens and communities, promoting European Union's fundamental values such as respect for human dignity and human rights, democracy, and equality.

In many European countries, grassroots sport is the largest civil society organisation. Local clubs often are the first place youth and children get acquainted with the concept of representative democracy, as club leaders are elected by their membership. The European Union needs to **recognise the role that grassroots sport has in strengthening democratic institutions and raising democratic citizens.** The potential of sport for **promoting European values, fostering positive change and engaging citizens** needs to be further explored and utilised.

According to the [Study on the economic impact of sport through sport satellite accounts](#) (2018), sport accounted for 2.12% of the total GDP in the EU in 2012 – or €279.7 billion. The value of the entire sports sector is estimated to be far more extensive, when taking into account e.g. the value created by sports volunteers, or the public savings created by health enhancing physical activity or social inclusion. For the moment being, we do not have a full picture of the contribution that sport makes for society. **A comprehensive understanding of the economic and social impact of voluntary-based sport can help promote national and local investment in grassroots sport.**

Sustainability, equality and integrity are some of the most burning issues within our societies today. It is important that these issues are kept on the agenda of the EU, also in relation with sport, in order to **help sport to level up its efforts to promote sustainability, environment and climate, as well as employment, equality and diversity.** There is also the continued need for the European Union to support the development of **good governance within sport**, while respecting the autonomy of sport.

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, sport events, facilities and clubs were amongst the first to be impacted, resulting in vast losses for organised sport at all levels. **Modern, safe and sustainable funding of sport is vital in order to maintain a thriving voluntary-based sports sector and promote innovation in sport clubs, and to reap the benefits that sport has for society.** Funding can also be used to incentivise integrity measures – moreover, sustainable funding is a precondition to keep sport prioritising actions that lead to better governance.

As sport does not exist in a void, but in interaction with the other sectors of society, it is important to continue the work to **mainstream sport in other policy fields.** For example, the promotion of the usage of **structural funds for sport** should be continued, as well as promoting the eligibility of sport to benefit from other **EU tools aimed at mitigating the negative impact of COVID-19 crisis.** The role of sport as an employer and the potential of sport to boost skills development for all people, especially youth and the NEETs¹ in particular, should be recognised e.g. within the European Employment Strategy and included in the reflection on adapting the Youth Guarantee.

¹ Not in Education, Employment or Training

Inter- and intrainstitutional cooperation is also needed to ensure that the principle of **Specificity of sport**, acknowledged by the Treaty of Lisbon, is understood and properly implemented by all EU institutions and bodies. Sport is not a mere economic activity, and should not be considered as such. **Sport is an indivisible part of the European way of life and our cultural heritage**, and the **European Sport Model**, characterised by its solidarity mechanism and values, its pyramid structure that ensures the right and the ability of sports federations to govern their sport, and the voluntary-led grassroots clubs as its basis, should be recognised as such.

ENGSO proposes the following as priorities for the upcoming EU Work Plan for Sport:

- **The societal role of sport and grassroots sport** should remain core topics also in the next Work Plan. Sport promotes European values and generates value for Europe through multiple areas, in which the role of sport could be further strengthened, including:
 - social inclusion and cohesion
 - physical, mental and social wellbeing; health-enhancing physical activity
 - education, training, employment and volunteering in and through sport
 - democracy and civil society
 - sport diplomacy
 - youth development and involvement in sport
- The economic dimension of sport as topic should be further extended through exploring
 - the **social and economic impact of voluntary-based sport**
 - solutions that create **modern, safe and sustainable funding** for sport and strengthen the funding base for voluntary-based grassroots sport, including funding for sport clubs and infrastructure
- The principle of specificity of sport should be properly implemented and the **European Sport Model** should be recognised as part of European cultural heritage
- EU can help sport level up its efforts on **sustainability; environment and climate; equality and diversity** as well as **good governance and integrity in sport**
- It's important to enhance the work done across silos, within and outside of the EU institutions, and keep on promoting the **mainstreaming of sport** into relevant policy areas

C. Actions for a thriving civil society of sport, efficient policy implementation and lasting impact

During the current Work Plan for Sport, ENGSO has welcomed the **cohesion between different measures** as a positive development that should be continued. ENGSO's assessment is that more attention could have been paid to the **sustainability** of the actions.

In general, ENGSO would like to stress that the **selected methods and outputs of the Work Plan should match with the objectives as well as the needs of organised sport**. Furthermore, the Work Plan should put more focus on the implementation of EU sports policy, and **provide the sports movement with the proper incentives and support that ensure the active commitment to deliver a lasting impact**. ENGSO is proposing actions and methods within the field of sport as well as mainstreamed measures that require collaboration with other sectors.

EU actions and funding programmes should strive for **lasting impact and sustainable change**. To this objective, many important past initiatives urgently need follow-up, such as the high-level group on Grassroots Sport, the European Year of Volunteering (2011), the Study on the funding of grassroots sports in the EU (2011), and the Proposal for Strategic Actions in Gender Equality in Sport for 2014–2020.

For ensuring the sustainable impact of the EU actions and **a proper follow-up and implementation** from the side of organised sport, **operational grants for European sports organisations that promote and represent grassroots sport** should be considered. ENGSO is of the opinion that preparations for facilitating this type of funding should begin during the next Work Plan. Additionally, a part of the **Erasmus+ Sport funds should be earmarked for common projects that aim at implementing particular EU policies**, such as Council Conclusions, in collaboration between the organised sports movement and public authorities.

During the current Work Plan, the conducted studies have provided valuable contribution to the evidence-base for the following actions and the overall debate, especially the study on safeguarding children on sport. **Evidence-based sports policy that involves organised sport in the process from the beginning** is essential for the success of the Work Plan and for the successful implementation of EU policies. During the next Work Plan, further **research, data collection and analysis** are needed especially in the areas of **grassroots sport, equality** and the **economic and social impact of sport**.

To continue the work of the Austrian presidency on the economic dimension of sport, **a complete study on the social and economic impact of volunteering and voluntary-based sport** should be conducted, and the results should be widely disseminated and discussed, in all member states and up to the highest level of decision-makers.

The **exchange of good practices** is an important method for encouraging EU member states to implement EU policies in the field of sport, and disseminate good ways to support sport at a national level. Exchange can also be facilitated amongst sports organisations, as it has happened during Erasmus+ **Cluster Meetings** that have proved to be a positive context for sharing ideas between project leaders and conveying messages to the Commission.

The purpose of **Expert Groups** and similar instances, such as high-level groups, should not be solely to exchange best practices, but to use the expertise of the experts and observers to **contribute to different reports, recommendations, guidelines and strategies**. Groups should have their **scope and objectives clearly outlined with an adequate amount flexibility** to be able to react to needs arising during the Work Plan period. In order for the groups to work properly, it's important to **invite the right people to the right meetings**. In order to get ideal outcomes and outputs that have true relevance for the sport movement, it's important to engage observers from the relevant – and perhaps fewer – stakeholders. This would also facilitate better resourcing so that the key people are able to participate. The Expert Group **composition** – the type of experts involved – should be considered **in relation with the objectives of the Expert Group**. Sometimes sports organisations have the best expertise on a certain topic, and not government officials, in line with the 2017 Council Resolution on further developing the EU structured dialogue on sport. **Accessible meeting venues with good connections** (e.g. Brussels) and **digital meeting methods** would also better facilitate the participation of the right experts.

In addition to actions in the field of sport, **inter- and intrainstitutional cooperation** across sectors and **mainstreamed actions** is needed to promote e.g. sports diplomacy, volunteering, sustainable funding of grassroots sport, and the specificity of sport, in order to ensure the cohesion between the policies and actions of different DGs, units and Working Parties.

Sport is amongst those first hit during the COVID-19 crisis, and the EU and its Member States need to ensure that proper **financial and other support mechanisms are available for sport clubs and umbrella sports organisations** within the organised sport movement. In order to promote **modern, safe and sustainable funding for sport** and strengthen the funding base for voluntary-based grassroots sport in the long term, it would be important to foster discussion, gather and share best practices, and give recommendations among EU Members States on how to utilise e.g. fiscal tools to support voluntary-based grassroots sport – building upon and updating the 2011 study on the funding of grassroots sport. Actions to ensure the better utilisation of EU funds for renovating, greening, and building sports infrastructure should be conducted. In order to strengthen the **modernisation and resilience of sport clubs**, innovation in its broadest sense needs to be encouraged, including digital tools as well as social innovation.

In **safeguarding democracy and the rule of law** in Europe, sport is an untapped resource. Supporting local sport clubs can help strengthen local democracy by giving citizens a platform for civic action and empowerment, and teaching children the basics of democracy in action. This should be recognized at the European level by involving sport in **conversations related to the UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**. Sport brings together Europeans in spite of their differences and engages them in common activities in unique ways, offering solutions to bridging the gap between the EU institutions and European citizens. For example, sport can be used as an effective tool in **involving EU citizens in the Conference on the Future of Europe**.

With the above principles in mind, ENGSO is proposing the following actions to be included in the future fourth EU Work Plan for Sport:

1. *Measures in the field of sport*

- *Complementing the work done on the Sport Satellite Accounts by conducting a **study on the economic and social impact of voluntary-based sport**, outlining a return of investment model for sport*
- *Enhancing the evidence-base of European sports policy with a complete **study on the societal role of voluntary-based grassroots sport**, including social inclusion, the civil society, democracy, fostering peace, fighting prejudice and preventing radicalisation*
- ***Reviewing the progress on and update the EU Proposals for Strategic Actions on Gender Equality 2014–2020**, and ensure their implementation through e.g. actions that enhance the commitment of the EU member states (e.g. **exchanging best practices; recommendations**) and the sports movement (e.g. **financial incentives through targeted measures funded from the Erasmus+ Sport**)*

- **Stock-taking exercise, report and subsequent recommendations** for the European Union institutions and EU Member States on the legal forms of **support and sustainable funding for sport** clubs and other organisations within the civil society of sport, mapping good practices and building upon the study on the funding of grassroots sports in the EU (2011)
- Beginning the preparations to support the **implementation of EU policy through operational grants** for organisations representing voluntary-based grassroots sport that promote the European values within and through sport and implement EU policies, for example in the form of pilot actions
- **Providing earmarked financial incentives within Erasmus+ Sport** to facilitate the **implementation of EU policies by the relevant stakeholders**, such as National Sports Confederations and NOCs together with public authorities
- Enhancing the resilience of sports clubs and encourage innovation in grassroots sport by setting up a **High-level Group on innovation in sport clubs** to discuss and propose measures
- Ensuring the **expansion and continuity of the data collection on equality** within sport together with the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), Eurostat, ENGSO Equality Within Sport (EWS) Committee, the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG), the UN Observatory on Women and Sport and other relevant stakeholders
- **Facilitating a proper and unified system for the regular collection of data** on e.g. sport participation and club membership
- Establishing **internal sustainability requirements for actions within the EU Work Plan for Sport**

2. Mainstreamed measures together with sectors where sport can be used as an efficient tool

- **Ensuring the eligibility of sport for general support measures to mitigate the negative economic impact of COVID-19** through a coordinated collaboration between the sports movement, the EU institutions and EU Member States
- Anchoring sport into cohesion policy by **producing guidelines for using EU funding for sports facilities**, in order to promote better circumstances for inclusive sports clubs
- **Discussions at the highest political level** between EU decision-makers and the organised sport movement in order to safeguard the specificity of sport and **defining the key characteristic of the European Sport Model in cooperation with organised sport**
- **Recognise and include organised sport in the process to implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals**, especially in relation to SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and strong Institutions and SDG 13 on Climate Action.
- **Anchoring sport in the implementation of the Green Deal**, and providing support and proposing incentives, in collaboration with the organised sport movement
- **Utilising sport organisations in engaging citizens in the Conference on the Future of Europe**, and expressly mentioning sport among the stakeholders to be involved in the preparation process

- *Together with DG EMPL, including grassroots sports organisations in the **Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative** in order to use sport to access those NEETs that remain unreachable*
- ***Considering grassroots sports organisations as key stakeholders when it comes to fighting any form of inequality**, especially as regards youth, migrants and minorities. By reaching out to those that are disconnected from the labour market, grassroots sports organisations can **boost their skills and access to employment***
- *Raising awareness on the **European Solidarity Corps (ESC)** amongst sport organisation and **facilitating the access of sport organisations to the ESC** in its implementation*
- *Follow-up on the **European Year of Volunteering 2011***

ENGSO is the European Sports NGO and the leading voice for voluntary-based grassroots sport in Europe. Together with our 37 members – National Sports Confederations, National Olympic Committees and other sports organisations from 33 European countries – we form a network that brings together people of different ages and backgrounds that share a passion for sport. We aspire to grassroots sport that promotes stronger communities, with the mission to represent, develop and advocate for voluntary-based sport in Europe – guided by our values: democracy, equality, inclusion, sustainability, integrity and education.