
POLICY

ENGSO

Policy Programme

From grassroots sport to society:
Advocating for sustainable
and inclusive communities

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Foreword

Dear Reader,

Organised sport at the European Union level dates back to the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) in which sport and its added value for citizen's well-being was formally recognised within the EU acquis for the first time. The European Parliament report on EU sports policy: assessment and possible ways forward, published in 2021, is the latest report to provide a comprehensive overview of the European Union's view of sport and its ability to play an important role in the development of our society.

ENGSO has been raising awareness and actively advocating for the acknowledgement of the importance of sport at all levels since before the Treaty of Lisbon. Our work, as the trusted and knowledgeable voice of grassroots sport of the European Union institutions and other sport stakeholders, leaves a recognisable fingerprint on shaping the EU sports policy and European sport for the benefit of our societies.

You are holding in your hand the updated version of the ENGSO Policy Programme. This document follows a user-friendly and cohesive structure and includes links to the full position papers, allowing readers to go beyond the comprehensive summary if a topic is of particular interest. Additionally, for the first time, ENGSO presents a definition of organised grassroots sport, therefore providing a clear framework of reference to the positions outlined in the document.

The ENGSO Policy Programme acts as a comprehensive summary of all positions ENGSO has developed throughout the years in consultation with its members, staff, volunteers and political leadership. It creates a common ground for all people in the ENGSO environment, sets out the direction of ENGSO's advocacy work, and aims to be an entry point for everyone in the ENGSO network wishing to engage with a specific topic.

The issue of sustainability in sport is high on the agenda. The main topics presented in this policy document are all highlighting various ways in which grassroots sport contribute to sustainability in society. ENGSO will continue to develop our policy in this field, in close dialogue with our members and expert partners.

We invite you to return to the ENGSO Policy Programme whenever you wish to consult on the opinions of the grassroots sports movement. Moreover, the ENGSO Policy Programme will be regularly updated to reflect our newly developed Position Papers and the contents of this document in relation to our advocacy work and member organisations. The ENGSO Policy Programme will continue to be a relevant document within the context of the current EU Work Plan for Sport and the Multi-Annual Financial Framework.

Stefan Bergh



ENGSO President

Sara Massini



ENGSO Secretary General

Definition of organised grassroots sport

The ENGSO Policy Programme is a comprehensive collection of all ENGSO positions developed with its members from the European grassroots sport movement. Before delving into the individual positions, it is important to outline ENGSO's understanding of organised grassroots sport:

“Organised physical and sport activity practiced by people of all ages at a non-professional level and regardless of skills and ambitions. The activities are carried out on a regular basis for health, educational, social purposes and the enjoyment of movement and sense of belonging.”

List of contents

1. European Sport Model	5
1.1 Structured dialogue with sport	6
2. Societal Role of Sport	7
2.1 Youth	7
2.2 Education and Employment	8
2.3 Volunteering	9
2.4 Accessibility	10
2.5 Psycho-social health	11
3. Equality	12
3.1 Gender Equality	13
3.2 Socioeconomic status	14
3.3 People with Disabilities	14
3.4 People with diverse SOGIESC	15
3.5 Racial discrimination, ethnicity, migration, and Human Rights	16
4. Organisation and Good Governance	17
4.1 Funding	17
4.2 Sustainability	18
4.3 Good Governance	19
4.4 Safeguarding	19
4.5 Children Safeguarding	20
4.6 Sustainable Management	21

1. European Sport Model

The European Sport Model helps to understand how sports are organised and governed in Europe. It has to be noted though, that there is no single authoritative definition of the Model, but rather widely recognised key features. Based on ENGSO's and its members' sound experience and understanding, the key features of the European Sport Model are its pyramidal structure, the solidarity mechanism which redistributes revenues created by profitable top sports, volunteers as its workforce, the autonomy of clubs and federations to self-govern, the openness of competition based on merit and the fundamental values of inclusion, education, democracy, and fair play.

Especially among the grassroots sport movement, the foundational level of the European Sport Model, the financial solidarity mechanism is considered crucial to ensuring its viability.

The recently revised European Sports Charter ([2021](#)), the Council Resolutions ([2021](#)), and the EU Parliament report on EU Sports Policy: assessment and possible ways forward ([2021](#)), take note of the increasing threat that the commercialization and development of closed-league formats pose to the established function and role of sport in Europe.

Yet, sport is a strong advocate and driver to promote values such as democracy, human rights, and equality and thus can have a great social and educational capacity in supporting communities and societies at large.

ENGSO believes that:

- The specific nature of sport, which is vital for grassroots sport, especially through its structures based on volunteering, should be respected and the possible unintended consequences on sport should be considered when developing policy and approving all relevant European legislation.
- It's important that public decision-makers acknowledge sport as a singular autonomous sphere of society that is of crucial importance.
- Actors within organised sport are encouraged to recognise the value of enablers, partners, and competitors and, when possible, create strategies that move the sport forward with the support or inspiration of these stakeholders.
- All stakeholders should acknowledge the negative impact of disruptors to the European Sport Model, and work together to limit the damage through dialogue, and, if necessary, through other, more strict measures.
- The solidarity mechanism is an important tool to ensure that a wide array of sports are being offered, including those with lesser commercial potential.

Read more in the [ENGSO Position Paper on the European Sport Model](#).

1.1 Structured dialogue with sport

A successful EU sport policy and its implementation is strongly related to the involvement of expert voices from the field and the involvement of all the actors of the sport movement from the grassroots to the elite level. The European Commission initiated several structured dialogue processes in the past years eg the Structured Dialogue with Civil Society on Culture, the Structured Dialogue on the security of medicines supply and the Structured Dialogue on Youth. The main objective was to provide a framework for discussion between the relevant EU civil society stakeholders and the European Commission in the respective sectors. The aim of the structured dialogue process is to strengthen the advocacy capacity of the different sectors of society in policy debates at the European level, while encouraging them to work in a more collaborative way.

Sport entities at the EU level and national authorities have also had a fruitful dialogue within the European Commission. However, the civil society of sport/grassroots sport entities have had very few opportunities to access this dialogue and, too often, have limited opportunities to exchange ideas with the decision makers, thus enabling the development of policy that can be initiated, understood, and implemented from the bottom of the pyramidal structure of the EU sport model.

Therefore, ENGSO is encouraging EU decision-makers to establish a structured framework, the EU Sport Dialogue, by setting up a few coordinated actions which allows the grassroots sport movement, from all the EU member countries, to actively participate and contribute to democratic life and foster debate around the major issues affecting the sport.

The EU Sport Dialogue should be composed of three steps:

- Set up a fixed dialogue panel session every year during the EU Sport Forum to discuss the needs and objectives of the European sport movement, following a similar structure as the EU Youth Dialogue.
- Support the activation of national, transnational, or international meetings or seminars that allow for information, debate, and dialogue between grassroots sports entities and decision-makers.
- Hold national, transnational, or international meetings or seminars that prepare the ground for the official panel session during the EU Sport Forum.

The EU Sport Dialogue ought to have a system that foresees incentives and resources to ensure that the discussions pass from the EU level, through the national to the grassroots level and back and that these actively and meaningfully involve all concerned actors within, and affiliated to, the European sport movement from the EU to the grassroots levels.

ENGSO believes that:

- Sports organisations should always be consulted when questions affecting sports are at stake.

- It is crucial to invite the relevant representatives from the targeted level, to guarantee the ideal outcome of the meeting, for instance, ENGSO at the European level for the grassroots sport movement.
- Structured dialogue should go beyond inviting representatives from organised sport regularly into relevant meetings, but rather constantly consult organised sport on its needs and also the progress of implementation.
- The EU should promote structured dialogue on EU sport policy that starts from the relation between government representatives and the sport movement at a national level and ends at the EU level.

Societal Role of Sport

Sport breaks down barriers and builds bridges where boundaries usually exist. As such, sport is underpinned by the respect of fundamental values, such as Human Rights, democracy, solidarity, social inclusion, gender equality, development of youth, rights of the child, and education in and through sport. Moreover, sport and physical activity have well-documented effects on the individual in terms of physical, psycho-social, and mental well-being, and additionally being recognised for their impact on communities and society at large, with regard to e.g. public health, social inclusion, and education. The European Year of Youth 2022 highlighted the importance of youth to build a greener, more inclusive, and digital future. Lifelong learning through sport and volunteering can be helpful in tackling the serious challenges of youth unemployment persistent in many areas of Europe. In this regard, grassroots sports as part of civil society can empower individuals and communities to take responsibility and develop the necessary skills and competencies to tackle future challenges, therefore contributing to stronger citizenship and democracy in ever-changing environments.

2.1 Youth

Young people have been identified as pillars of change among leading agendas globally ([EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#), [IOC Olympic Agenda 2020+5](#), [UN Agenda 2030](#), [CoE Youth Strategy 2030](#)). Within sport, young people represent a key stakeholder, mostly by being involved either as athletes, as volunteers or as members of sports clubs. Since 2001, the Eurobarometer surveys on the topic of “youth participation” has systematically shown that sports clubs are by far the preferred space for young people’s participation. Moreover, when analysing the several Eurobarometer surveys on “sport and physical activity” conducted since 2010, all of them systematically show that young people are the most likely to exercise or play sport with some regularity, being the most active segment of our population within the sport. Nevertheless, the youth voice within the sports sector remains largely unheard.

Established in 2002, the ENGSO Youth Committee advocates for the role and voice of youth within/

across sports, alongside promoting and raising awareness on the recognition and benefits of volunteering. “Give youth a real say in sports” stands as ENGSO Youth’s mission to give young people a chance of participating actively in the decision-making processes across European sports. ENGSO Youth believes in the utmost importance of the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) and the European Youth Goals defined within the [EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#), is committed to contributing to their fulfillment, and remains determined to use sport as a tool in their achievement.

ENGSO and its Youth Committee believe that:

- Having a “real say in sports” is having an equal opportunity in decision-making that concerns youth within the sports sector.
- Sport and the social, educational, and cultural dimensions it espouses, guide and allow the human being the realisation of several rights and liberties while working to build cohesive societies.
- Young people, as essential stakeholders in sports clubs and organisations, must be empowered with the internationally recognised right to participation. They must be given the space, the opportunity, and the responsibility to meaningfully participate within the decision-making bodies of the sports structures they proactively engage with.
- The creation of meaningful youth participation mechanisms and organisations ensures the needs of young people and causes are properly addressed, fostering intergenerational equality and promoting sustainable development, thus leading to more cohesive societies. Therefore, they should be further promoted and developed.

2.2 Education and Employment

Education, as a lifelong process, enables the continuous development of a person’s capabilities as an individual and as a member of society and can take different forms. The sport sector and the learning that happens by practising sport can be placed under the informal and non-formal education spectrums. The methods used within sports are very diverse and are mainly based on creating healthy environments of trust and sharing experiences, leadership, communication, and problem-solving. By practicing sports, the competencies gained provide added value for young people, the economy, and society in terms of capacity building of clubs, organisations, systems, and institutions. This education takes place in a diverse range of environments and addresses specific target groups and subjects, facilitating the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.

Education and employability in and through sport are one of ENGSO’s main focal areas, in which we aim to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities. Within the sports sector, there is a lack of a clear system for the recognition of learning and competence development through sports. By system, it is meant that there is a policy – and preferably an inclusive one – as well as a vision, a culture of recognition of the learning and competencies development through sports, and a holistic approach to the process.

ENGSO believes that:

- The life-long learning approach should be applied in sports as well, ensuring a physically active and healthy life for toddlers to seniors.
- Sport practices should be better recognised as a tool to gain soft skills, to advance the employability, health, and social inclusion of young people currently outside education, employment, or training.
- Non-formal education-based sports initiatives are the best way to involve and empower young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Formal recognition should be strengthened, meaning the “validation” of learning outcomes and the “certification” of a process within the sports practice by issuing certificates or diplomas which formally recognise the learning achievements of an individual.
- Political recognition should be fostered, meaning the recognition of the skills and competencies gained through sport in different policy strategies, and the involvement of sports providers in these strategies.
- Social recognition should be promoted, meaning that social players acknowledge the value of competencies acquired in sport settings and the work done within sporting activities, including the value of the sports’ clubs and organisations providing this work.
- Self-recognition needs to be acknowledged, meaning the assessment by the individual athletes or coaches of their learning outcomes and the ability to use these learning outcomes for future employment and in other fields.

2.3 Volunteering

Volunteers are often the greatest asset of sports clubs. They create value for the whole society by strengthening social cohesion and providing skills for future employment.

Grassroots sport is the biggest sector of volunteering in Europe, and its structures are based on voluntary activity. The economic contribution of sports volunteering is significant – sport volunteers generate billions of euros of value for member state economies by supporting the provision of grassroots sports across the EU. Evidence shows that educational training and volunteering in sport can bring significant benefits to individuals in terms of their physical and mental well-being, self-confidence, teamwork, and conveying values. Sport volunteers also help others become more active and, in this way, help to boost social and community cohesion. Volunteering in a sports club is also a great way to acquire new skills that are transferable to the job market. By encouraging the culture of volunteering, it is also possible to increase participation in sports through society.

ENGSO believes that:

- The development, recognition, and validation of the skills and competencies of volunteers, as well as informal and non-formal learning in and through sport, should be supported in the [European](#)

[and National Qualification Frameworks](#) or by promoting the [European Skills Passport](#). Follow-up for the inclusion of sport in the European skills agenda is needed, as well as a study on the contribution of sport to the employability of young people.

- Volunteering in sport should be promoted through relevant EU Funding programs such as Erasmus+ etc., also for non-EU countries.
- Training programs for volunteers should be supported, e.g. through EU funding, to ensure that the skills and qualifications of volunteers match the requirements.
- Bureaucratic burdens of the not-for-profit organisations should be reduced as much as possible so they do not impede volunteers in their work.
- The knowledge, skills, and competencies that a young individual can develop through practising and volunteering in sport, shall be the focus of developing sport-based employability programs. These interventions shall address young disadvantaged people not in employment, education, or training (NEETs) and displaced youth.

2.4 Accessibility

The ethical aspect of sport extends far past the professional game, touching upon the subject of equal access to sport and physical activity regardless of gender, ethnic background, or other barriers based on discrimination. In addition, recognition of the ability of sport to bring together people despite their differences to create a platform for common understanding and shared joy should be developed.

Accessibility of, and to, the infrastructure of sport is of immense importance, taking into account that the provision of sport facilities offers much more than opportunities for participation and the physical health benefits of participation. Sport facilities play a role in being the social anchor within communities and in increasing social capital. This is especially notable for rural areas where the sport is seen as a vehicle for the development of social capital. There are three dimensions of accessibility to consider which are physical, geographical and socioeconomic accessibility.

ENGSO believes that:

- Making sports' facilities accessible, bringing sports' infrastructure close to residential areas both in metropolitan and rural regions, and providing increased opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds is the way forward to making Europe the most sportive and healthy continent globally.
- Key factors to engaging citizens in physical activity are needs-centered, accessible, and context-specific sports facilities and that information about those sports opportunities has to be widely disseminated in order to attract citizens.
- Everyone should have access to sport – including facilities, activities, education programs, events, etc. – but more so those that benefit from the physical, psychological, and socially positive effects

of sport. Special attention must be given to the fact that people marginalised due to social status, disability, gender, ethnic background, migrant or refugee status etc. tend to be excluded from sports and physical activity as well.

- All three dimensions of accessibility benefit from the exchange of good practice and collaboration between sports' governing bodies, practitioners, and EU Member States.
- Existing infrastructure can be transformed to serve multiple purposes, including sport. Besides understanding the added value of investments in new accessible infrastructure, an understanding of responsible maintenance has to be developed to ensure longevity and accessibility.

Read more in the [White Paper on the Importance of Accessible Sports](#).

2.5 Psycho-social health

While evidence suggests that regular physical activity improves mental health, overall well-being, can reduce the risk of depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, and other mental health problems ([WHO, OECD 2023](#)), the level of physical inactivity continues to remain 'alarmingly high' ([Special Eurobarometer 525](#)). The percentage of physically active Europeans stands at 44%. On the other hand, the rate of physical inactivity has risen to 45%. Sedentary lifestyles and physical inactivity have long been established as risk factors for non-communicable diseases. In order to enhance physical activity levels and enable people to access the health-related benefits associated with physical activity, participation patterns have to be shared and comprehensive national policies and strategies set up. It is known that [active sports club membership](#) contributes to inclusion in society, boosts self-confidence, and has positive effects on well-being and mental health. Sport and physical activity act preventively, strengthening people's resilience to mental and physical stress, therefore reducing the burden on healthcare systems and the public expenditure addressing healthcare problems that could be prevented by an active population. On the other hand, sport and physical activity are crucial to help tackle mental distress. Consequently, ENGSO/ENGSO Youth call for sport, health-enhancing physical activity, and its providers such as sports clubs to be widely recognised and supported, both at the EU and national level, and across sectors, as crucial determinants and cost-effective tools in addressing and improving the mental health of our population.

ENGSO believes that:

- Families, employers, and peers ought to be involved in awareness raising of the risks of sedentary lifestyles.
- Increasing citizens' physical activity needs to be considered in all policy sectors, i.e. applying a cross-sectoral approach, and stakeholders in the health sector need to be engaged partners.
- The ideal model of support for people's mental health involves a holistic system of support that works collaboratively with each other, from sports organisations, mental health services, education institutions, local authorities, and the civil society sector.

- Sports clubs have the potential to provide benefits for mental health via the social support and resources they offer to their members.
- The importance of mental health and well-being should be prioritised over performance in grass-roots sports.
- It is crucial to develop strategies, policies, and action plans in the field of sport that prioritises mental health and well-being at all levels, and specifically mentioning the crucial contribution of sport and physical activity within existing strategies on mental health and well-being.
- Enhancing the skills development and training in mental health of sports coaches and other sports professionals is crucial to develop a positive and supportive environment for the development of participants.
- Coach education programs frequently prioritise the physical health aspects and delivery methods of sport activities, while insufficiently addressing mental well-being. To promote overall well-being, it is recommended that coach education programs give equal priority to mental health promotion. Coaches, as influential figures in sports participants' lives, should set a positive example in this regard.

Read more in the [SPIRIT Toolkit](#) and the [ENGSO Youth Policy Recommendations on Mental Health and Youth Sport](#).

Equality

Sport should be a safe environment for everyone participating. This includes both the absence of bullying, discrimination, harassment, and sexual violence and the active implementation of inclusion and diversity, which enables all individuals to feel part of a community and to access the benefits associated with sport.

The EU and the Council of Europe have an important role in providing and promoting increased knowledge and exchange of good practice, through measures such as the European Commission's Study on Gender-based violence in sport (2016), the joint [EU-CoE Pro Safe Sport](#) projects as well as through projects funded by the Erasmus+ program. Such measures should be strengthened and increased.

When addressing equality, we should consider the overlap of spheres of discrimination such as race, socio-economic background, sexual orientation & gender identity, and disability, resulting in multiple layers of disadvantage. Using a collective lens like this, recognising that everyone brings their own unique sets of overlapping experiences and discrimination, offers a deliberate approach to addressing the reality of inequality.

ENGSO has been at the forefront of the work to foster equality, guided by annual ENGSO Equality Action Plans ([2022-2025](#)) and translated into practical toolkits via Erasmus+-funded projects such as [EQUIP](#).

3.1 Gender Equality

In order to develop “sport” into “sport for all”, everyone needs to be engaged in all roles and at all levels of sport: at the participation level; through the work of governing bodies; as coaches; in administration and decision-making; and other leadership positions. To support this development, both the EU and the Council of Europe, as well as NGOs, need to focus on action-oriented recommendations for change. Since the 1990s, the sports movement in Europe has taken action to enhance the opportunity for all women and people with diverse SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics) to participate in sport. Great progress has been made in many areas, especially concerning grassroots sports and female athletes participating in championships and Olympic Games. However, there are still many challenges, which need to be addressed, and the pace of progress is slow. ENGSO continues to be involved in the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) and appoints the regional representative for Europe on IWG. Additionally, as a signatory of the [Brighton plus Helsinki Declaration on Women and Sport](#), ENGSO is committed to advocating for and practicing equal opportunities and fair allocation of resources, power, and responsibility.

ENGSO believes that:

- The EU and the Council of Europe should continue to play an important role in developing tools to follow the current situation on gender equality and to establish facts and indicators (i.e. [“ALL IN: Towards gender balance in sport”](#) initiative from the Council of Europe) and to present them regularly.
- The EU, the Council of Europe, ENGSO and other NGOs should actively communicate existing good practices, where solutions have been found through various channels, seminars and meetings
- The EU and its Member States should continue to finance projects, such as [SWING](#) or [SCORE](#), with the aim of promoting gender equality, in particular with regards to equality in decision-making bodies, as well as promoting gender diversity and reversing harmful gender stereotypes, and securing continuous Erasmus+ funding.
- The Member States should adopt national laws promoting the representation of women and gender-diverse people in sports governing bodies
- The EU should initiate the work to review the long-term impact of Erasmus+ projects, both finished and new to be started, with the support of expert organisations such as ENGSO.
- Cross-sectoral cooperation should be encouraged with organisations and stakeholders beyond the sports sector since the implication and solutions go beyond the sports field.

Read more in the [ENGSO/EWS Position Paper on Gender Equality](#).

3.2 Socioeconomic status

The socioeconomic status of an individual is determined by a combination of social and economic factors such as income, amount and kind of education, type and prestige of occupation, and place of residence.

Low socioeconomic status is considered a barrier to participation in community life. For instance, the [Special Eurobarometer 525](#), national sport satellite accounts, and the experience of local clubs and federations from the ENGSO network show that the most economically disadvantaged individuals and communities are likely to experience discrimination when accessing sport. However, it is crucial to understand the local context and population with its needs to create effective measures and inform the target group about opportunities to engage.

ENGSO believes that:

- Breaking down the socio-economic barriers of grassroots sport will build stronger communities.
- Sustainable and successful initiatives to overcome socio-economic barriers are built on the collaboration of different stakeholders in one local landscape: municipalities, regions, clubs, and other sports and social actors.
- The creation of an institutional framework to address socio-economic barriers to sports participation is imperative for promoting the development and growth of underprivileged populations. Such a framework should be established both within and outside of sports structures, with the aim of providing a comprehensive and structured approach to supporting these individuals
- Facilitating the participation of underprivileged individuals in sport necessitates prioritising the addressing of cultural and socio-economic obstacles. To this end, it is vital to enhance access to affordable sports infrastructure and to develop culturally sensitive programs that cater to the specific needs of the target population.

3.3 People with Disabilities

The [Special Eurobarometer 525](#) mentions disability in its section on barriers preventing sports participation. It can be hypothesized that this shows that there is a willingness to participate in sport but that opportunities do not meet the needs of people with disabilities. ENGSO is a firm advocate of “nothing about us, without us” and applies this across all areas. Consequently, ENGSO is collaborating with the European Paralympic Committee as well as Special Olympics Europe/Eurasia and is engaging in projects aimed at raising awareness and providing the knowledge for successful and equal inclusion of people with disabilities ([Come In](#), [Step in for Inclusion](#), [iSport](#), [Youth Integrity Ambassador Programme](#)). Moreover, ENGSO is aligning with the [EU Strategy for the Rights of People with Disabilities 2021-2030](#) in striving to ensure that people with disabilities in Europe, regardless of their sex, racial or

ethnic origin, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation, enjoy their human rights, are provided with equal opportunities, have equal access to participation in society and economy, are able to decide where, how and with whom they live, can move freely in the EU regardless of their support needs and no longer experience discrimination.

ENGSO believes that:

- It is time to move one step forward from allowing people with disabilities to be included in actions/ activities and programs designed by others for them, to creating policies and spaces that enable people with disabilities to lead, design, and participate in programs, actions, and decisions across all levels of sport and society.
- Inclusion and involvement also include volunteering, coaching, and officiating which in turn will help create role models.
- Commitment to the inclusion of people with disabilities is needed at national, regional, and local levels to create enabling policies and fit-for-purpose measures.
- There is a strong need for European communities to create concrete frameworks for children with disabilities to have the same programs/opportunities for practicing sports at the grassroots level.
- Raising awareness and education of coaches, officials, families, and peers is still required to shape an understanding of the range of programs that are needed. This includes sport for people with disabilities, inclusive mainstream activities, “reverse” inclusion - where people without disabilities take part in adapted activities and sports, independent activities, and where a person can require one or more types of engagement to unlock sports’ full potential.
- By making sports facilities disability-friendly, Europe will become the most active and healthy continent globally.

3.4 People with diverse SOGIESC¹

There is a long way to LGBTQI+ equality in Europe. As the Commission’s Gender Equality Strategy [2020-2025](#) reveals 45% of LGBTQI+ people reported being discriminated against in 2019. The European Commission, in its broader move towards a Union of Equality, introduces four targeted actions across four pillars to tackle discrimination against LGBTQI+ people in the European Union. The sport was named under the first pillar as having an important role to play in changing attitudes and challenging gender biases.

A [survey commissioned by the Equality Within Sport Committee](#) and ENGSO supported the findings from the [OutSport survey \(2019\)](#); it exposed the rate of LGBTQI+ participating in organised sports and found that 1 out of 5 dropped out of sports activity due to hostile environments. To this end, ENGSO works on and contributes to the Commission’s strategy on equality and advocates for the instrumental use of sport to counteract social and physical barriers in order to create a safe sports environment for all.

¹Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sex Characteristics

ENGSO believes that:

- Sport has the potential to build stronger and more inclusive communities. Therefore ENGSO advocates for transparency and dialogue to carve a path toward full inclusion, fairness, and safety.
- The creation of safe environments in sport also requires early and informal education about gender diversity and sexual orientation to tackle misconceptions and breakdown barriers.
- Giving a voice to LGBTQI+ people is imperative in creating diverse representation and enabling equal opportunities for all.
- LGBTQI+ rights are human rights that call on relevant European institutions to monitor the observance of non-discrimination and equal treatment laws and if needed, to improve the legal protection of especially vulnerable minority groups.
- The implementation of anti-discriminatory measures needs continuous reassessment to ensure effectiveness.
- National and international sports governing bodies shall empower grassroots sports organisations to increase the level of sport participation of the LGBTQI+ community by providing all relevant assistance.

3.5 Racial discrimination, ethnicity, migration, and Human Rights

Sport is known to have the ability to facilitate the inclusion and integration of people into the local community. However, it can be a sensitive field to navigate, whether it is by refugees, first-generation migrants, third-generation migrants, or forcefully displaced people. Sport clubs can play an important role in the social inclusion of those arriving and fostering the socialisation of people in the receiving countries. The European Commission created specific legislation against Racism and Intolerance (EU Anti-racism Action Plan [2020-2025](#)) and set out [recommendations](#). ENGSO addresses the topic through different perspectives: sport as a Human Right as well as the use of sport to promote Human Rights." ENGSO Youth contributed to raising awareness on Human Rights education through sport and published a Position Paper "[Sport as a Human Right](#)"

ENGSO believes that:

- Physical activity and play provide ways of promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding and can ease the transition process, alleviate trauma and support the psychological and social well-being of individuals in marginalised traumatised or other at-risk groups.
- Sports can help host and integrate communities to overcome differences and familiarise themselves with each other in two-way processes.
- Competitiveness is inherent to sport and can cause exclusive behaviour. Therefore, facilitators should be qualified and equipped with tools to intentionally create inclusive sports.
- Diversity develops and enriches sports clubs, and provides new target groups – as participants

and volunteers alike! Clubs working locally reach out to refugees, collaborate with organisations from other sectors and encourage local authorities to provide support.

- To make the most of the potential of sport to bring people together, policymakers should allocate resources towards developing training programs that focus on sensitization and cultural awareness for trainers and coaches in the sports industry. These programs should equip facilitators with the knowledge and skills to create an inclusive environment for people of migrant backgrounds
- Decision-makers and European institutions should develop funding opportunities for programs that use sport to promote Human Rights

Organisation and Good Governance

The functioning of grassroots sport relies on diverse funding sources. Volunteers are often the greatest asset of sports clubs and donate many working hours. Public funding, and funds generated by lottery and sports betting activities, provides earmarked funding and other funds that are available for free use. The solidarity mechanism within the European Sport Model is an important tool to ensure that a wide array of sports are being offered, also those with a lesser commercial potential, by redistributing revenues created by elite sports to benefit the grassroots sport.

Considering that a large proportion of sporting activities are not-for-profit and do not constitute economic activity and thus enjoy VAT exemptions. Nonetheless, grassroots sport is facing difficulties adjusting to a more competitive environment with commercial actors. It has become a necessity to explore ways to modernise the organisation of sports. Good governance projects have achieved reassuring results when intrinsically motivated and conducted by the sports movement itself. Sports and their structures vary from country to country, and thus there are no generalisable solutions but purposeful practices acknowledging the sports and country's specificities.

4.1 Funding

The [multi-annual financial framework 2021-2027](#) came into force on 1 January 2021, after long negotiations that had been intensified by the Covid-19 pandemic. A notable change from the previous programme period is the increase in the overall Erasmus+ budget and the full integration of sport into it. Additionally, the mobility and international dimension in the Erasmus+ sport is a key aspect for increasing opportunities for sports activities to receive funding.

ENGSO has been actively involved in many successful initiatives funded by Erasmus+, including CHAMP (Clubs for Health-enhancement, Activation, Modernisation and Participation), SPIRIT (Sport & Psycho-social Initiative for Inclusive Training), and as part of the new Capacity-building program with the Western Balkans, Call the project Sports as Value.

ENGSO believes that:

- Sport clubs can effectively benefit from funding schemes, when public authorities make funding accessible and substantial, lift unnecessary fiscal or administrative burdens, and secure funds earmarked for sport by considering sports organisations a vital part of the application and consortium.
- A minimum of 70% of funds earmarked for grassroots sport should be allocated directly to sport delivery agencies/activities, with clear and transparent criteria and application processes.
- In order to ensure long-lasting results and the widest possible impact, initiatives by sports organisations that have the benefit of established structures and a wide reach ought to be financed.
- Budgetary priorities should be flexible and reactive to the shifting needs of organised sport and society.

4.2 Sustainability

Sport and physical activity are considered meaningful and cost-effective tools to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals ([Global Agenda 2030](#)). In general discussions sustainability is often used in close connection to the preservation of a particular resource, however, broadly speaking, there are three dimensions that make up sustainability, namely the environmental, the social, and the economic. To have a thriving sports movement in the long term, sustainability in all its dimensions has to be considered as they are interlinked and interdependent. The grassroots sport sector with its large base of participants can act as an agent of change and create positive and lasting impact by serving, for instance, as a platform for raising awareness and educating the public about the importance of sustainability.

ENGSO acknowledges that:

- While sport cannot provide all the answers, sport entities can play an important role. When considering sport as a tool, it is important to realize its potential when used in combination with other tools to educate on different topics and advocate for sustainability.
- Sport is uniquely placed to lead by example as it re-examines its own practices and policies to move fans and society towards a more sustainable future within and beyond the sporting field.
- All mechanisms aimed at the holistic understanding of sustainability should include dedicated funding, institutional integration, working space, mandates, recognition, and training to ensure the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Read more in the [White Paper on Sustainability](#).

4.3 Good Governance

Sport organisations are granted substantial autonomy to run and regulate themselves. The basis for this is good governance. However, the need to improve governance persists. Sport is played and watched by people all over the world. Beyond its health-related benefits, it also has social, educational, and cultural functions. Furthermore, it conveys positive values like solidarity, inclusion, respect for others, fair play, and team spirit. All in all bad governance compromises the positive impact of sport in spreading these values.

Sports organisations are working with a variety of stakeholders to ensure that sport adapts to the changing landscape and that stakeholders' voices are considered. The Sports Movement has taken positive developments for enhanced governance through, for instance, projects funded by the European Union such as S4GG (Sport 4 Good Governance, led by the EOC EU Office with ENGSO as partner in [2012-2013](#)) which was one of the first projects to tackle this complex field.

Investing in good governance is a way to strengthen and develop the organisation itself, e.g through ethical behaviour, enhanced inclusiveness, transparency, efficiency, and social responsibility.

ENGSO believes that:

- The EU should support the development of the sport movement to improve good governance by, for example, providing continued project funding in order to spread and implement good practices. Good governance is the precondition of the autonomy of sport.
- It is vital to engage sport organisations directly in the promotion of good governance through the use of project funding or incentives connected to operational grants, in order to implement the results in their day-to-day activities and to use their structures that facilitate the "trickle-down effect" to the grassroots level.
- It should be recognised that there is no "one size fits all" good governance model as sport organisations vary, e.g. with regard to their size and level of professionalisation.
- There is a need to continue the actions to promote increased diversity on boards, while still respecting the autonomy of sports.

4.4 Safeguarding

Participation in sport should bring joy and a positive attitude towards life, as well as developing healthy habits for all. It can boost self-esteem and create a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, in the absence of safeguarding measures or a lack of their enforcement, sport is too often experienced as a place for violence, abuse, and exclusion. It is the shared responsibility of the European sports movement, from umbrella organisations to grassroots clubs, to secure a safe and enjoyable environment for all.

ENGSO believes that:

- Sport clubs should be places where people feel valued, safe, and able to be themselves. Specifically, all women and people with diverse SOGIESC have the right to participate in sport.
- All stakeholders involved should cooperate to create safeguarding programs and reporting mechanisms across all levels, starting at grassroots sports.
- The focus should be placed on raising awareness of the importance of safe reporting channels and better communication about this among athletes, coaches, volunteers, representatives, and staff.

4.5 Children Safeguarding

Physical education and sport are specifically important to ensure the healthy development and well-being of children and young people. Through sport, children and youngsters develop motor skills, learn important values such as tolerance, integrity, or fair play, and make friendships for a lifetime. If used in the right way, sport can contribute to their education, personal/social development, and well-being in general. Despite all the positive social and personal aspects of participating in sport and physical activity, some minors are affected by negative experiences. In the sporting environment, like in any other arena involving close personal relations, but also power imbalances, children may be exposed to particular risks.

ENGSO believes that:

- Any club or institution that offers sport or sport-based activities to minors has a responsibility to safeguard them and make sure they are all kept safe from harm. It is the shared responsibility of the European sports movement, from umbrella organisations to grassroots clubs, to secure a safe and enjoyable environment for all children. These rights are also enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- All sport actors should develop adequate and updated standards for safeguarding children and young people's integrity in sport.
- All children and young people have the fundamental right to enjoy sport and physical activity, free from all forms of abuse, violence, exploitation, and neglect.
- Safeguarding children in sport is a prerequisite for creating a supportive, secure, and joyful environment where children can learn, develop and have fun.
- Decision makers, sports' organisations, sports' staff and volunteers all have a responsibility and duty to protect children from any negative experience and should therefore receive adequate training and awareness raising.
- All children regardless of their cultural or social background, physical and mental status should be equally involved, empowered, and encouraged to fulfil their potential.

4.6 Sustainable Management

With evolving environments, and constantly developing governance structures and requirements for crisis preparedness, sustainable management provides the path to act responsibly and sustainably within the resources available. The concept of sustainable management is about delivering results by maximising organisational effectiveness and recognising that resources are limited and valuable. For the sport sector, this can mean the diversification of funding streams in order to create solidarity mechanisms that are less prone to external risk, or providing education and training to volunteers to retain them in the long term and ensure the continuation of the organisation.

ENGSO believes that:

- For long-term sustainable management, sports rights owners ought to create their own fair, concrete, and credible solidarity schemes that allow the redistribution of funds to the sports clubs at the grassroots level to help them attract and retain more participants, volunteers, and staff and develop better strategies and activities.
- VAT exemptions and other tax incentives for sports organisations should be defended in order to support sports structures based on voluntary activity.
- The current system of public financing of volunteer-based sport through contributions from state-run lotteries and state-licensed gambling bodies should be protected, secured, and promoted at the European and national levels.
- Besides monetary assistance sports governing bodies should distribute in-kind and educational support to grassroots sports organisations in order to create sustainable solidarity mechanisms.