

ENGSO POSITION PAPER ON

# EU Work Plan for Sport 2024-2027

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# ENGSO Position Paper on EU Work Plan for Sport 2024-2027 (full-length)

## Introduction

In a time of multiple crises, Europe is being challenged by a variety of threats to physical, mental and social wellbeing, youth, resilience, inclusion and cohesion, employment, environment, economy and security. While these partly overlapping crises persist and emerge, the potential role of sport in addressing these topics remains untapped at the European level.

The work to mainstream sport across different policy areas has been underway. However, we still are missing **a breakthrough moment where we finally understand the basic need of humans to be active and the negative impact of physical inactivity to our future.**

In order to fully understand this vast challenge, it is crucial to invite the relevant representatives of grassroots sport in dialogue, to guarantee relevant and impactful policy outcomes.

## EU Strategy on Sport and Physically Active Lifestyle

Since the introduction of sport in the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 and the emergence of Erasmus Sport in 2014, the momentum of the European Dimension of Sport has waned. We need to rebuild momentum, to prioritise sport as a tool to strengthen the EU and its values, and to mainstream the positive impact of sport across all EU policy sectors.

In order to do this, **the next Commission's Work Plan should include an EU Strategy on Sport and Physically Active Lifestyle.**

This EU-level, cross-cutting strategy should be formulated through a multi-phase, multi-stakeholder dialogue involving all EU institutions, Commission DGs, and representatives of the organized sport movement, including grassroots sport, at all stages of the process.

An **EU Sports Dialogue** should be initiated to facilitate discussions about the needs and objectives of grassroots sports clubs, both in drafting, implementing and evaluating the EU Strategy.

## EU Work Plan on Sport

So far, Sport Work Plans have been the method of structuring, planning and coordinating the work of the European Commission and Member States. While the Work Plans have been successful in laying out the topics and actions, there is a clear need for a more strategic approach and longer perspective. Future Work Plans should be connected to the implementation of the proposed EU Strategy on Sport and Physically Active Lifestyle.

However, it is realistic to expect that the upcoming Work Plan will be a document very similar to the previous Work Plans. Thus, ENGSO proposes the following priorities and actions to be included in the EU Work Plan for Sport 2024–2027.

### Proposed actions:

#### 1.1 The role of grassroots sport

Sport is the biggest civil society movement in Europe – and voluntary-based grassroots sports clubs are its backbone. The importance of sport and physical activity for our health and wellbeing and its positive impact for society and communities have become more imminent than 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.

It is thus vital that the upcoming European Union Work Plan for Sport maintains grassroots sport as a priority area. The topics and actions of the programme should have relevance for grassroots sport, and the representatives of grassroots sport should be heard in decision-making processes. Enhanced support for grassroots sport should be enabled.

#### 1.2 Study on grassroots sports' societal role and economic impact

After being acknowledged in 2017–2020 work plan, grassroots sport has suffered neglect in political recognition. Multiple crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis, continue to have a negative impact on sport. Understanding the economic and social significance of organised voluntary-based sport, through a thorough evaluation of the social and economic impact of sport, can encourage investment and help create informed policies that support grassroots sport.

#### 1.3 Youth Sounding Board

Taking inspiration from the Youth Sounding Board established by DG INTPA, this group of young people would advise the Commissioner and the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) on youth participation and empowerment in sport. This allows young people to have a say on EU's Sport policy and also reach out to young people within and beyond their networks to gather their views and ensure effective and meaningful youth participation in sport.

## **1.4 Study and policy recommendations on mental health, sport and physical activity**

The impact of physical activity on mental health (and health in general) is widely acknowledged in the academic world. Within EU health policy, this connection is not evident. The impact of organised sport is much less researched, yet there are great opportunities for sport clubs and coaches to enhance the mental wellbeing of young people and the population at large.

### **1.4 (1) Policy recommendations on mental health, sport and physical activity**

In order to put in practice the findings of the research review, policy recommendations should be adopted by the Council of the EU.

## **1.5 Policy debate on accessibility, impact, effectiveness and mainstreaming of EU funding for grassroots sport**

We call on EU institutions to establish clear rules and mechanisms that secure at least the 70% of funds earmarked for sport at grassroots level through, for instance, limiting the number of actors outside the sport movement per project proposal. Moreover, we propose the establishment of a specific operating grant for sport networks at EU level pursuing general European interests by building the capacity of the sport movement at the grassroots level.

## **1.6 Conference on the recognition of skills and competences acquired in and through sport**

In order to evaluate a dual career of young athletes and the recognition of the skills acquired within sport, the Commission and Member States should facilitate the creation of a framework for a European Athlete Diploma. This process should be done in exchange between Member States, sports organisations, educational institutions, employers and athletes, and with reference to the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

## **1.7 Study on the impact and possibilities of digitalisation & esports on sport and physical activity**

Within grassroots sport there is a growing divide between those that have the resources to benefit from the benefits of digitalisation and those that are left behind. There is a clear need to accelerate the digital and technological integration of the grassroots sports sector in Europe. The benefits are numerous for all, starting from participants to administrators as well as national sport bodies.

## **1.8 Strategic grant for accelerating the digitalisation of grassroots sport**

The EU should set up a long-term strategic grant to ensure that even the smaller clubs can benefit from digital tools and keep relevant.

The application procedure should be made accessible to all grassroots sport clubs, through e.g. a simplified process or using national sport organisations as intermediators for large-scale impact.

### **1.9 (1) Recommendations on digitalisation and grassroots sport**

The Council of the EU should adopt policy recommendations in order to reduce administrative burdens and digitalise sports administration in the public and not-for-profit sectors.

### **1.9 (2) Capacity building for modern sports clubs**

Developing and adopting innovation in sport clubs should be a priority for Erasmus+ Sport, supporting e.g. projects that organise online coaching courses and training for digital club administration.

### **1.9 (3) Study on the impact and possibilities of esports and gaming on youth**

E-sports and gaming are a fast-growing segment of the sport sector largely played by young people. The study would outline the opportunities and risks concerning e-sports, including reaching out to NEETs, physical inactivity, mental health, security, misinformation/disinformation, media literacy, violence, equality, and hate speech online.

## **European Sport Model**

The European Sport Model helps to understand how sports are organised and governed in Europe. 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. Due to recent and ongoing developments, some of the key features of the European Sports Model are under threat of being undermined.

Further information: [ENGSO Position on the European Sport Model](#)

### **Proposed actions:**

## **2.1 EU Sport Dialogue**

We are calling for EU decision-makers to establish the EU Sport Dialogue, eventually connected to the creation and implementation of the EU Strategy on Sport and Physically Active Lifestyle, to set up a structured dialogue to discuss the needs and objectives of grassroots sport.

We are calling for the establishment of a system for this EU Sport Dialogue that foresees incentives and resources which ensure that the discussion may pass from the EU level through the national to the grassroots level and back to actively and meaningfully involve all concerned actors within and affiliated to the European sport movement from the EU level to the grassroots level.

## **2.2 Expert Group on mainstreaming sport**

The next EU Work Plan on Sport should pave the way for an EU Strategy on Sport and Physically active lifestyle by constructing an Expert Group for the purposes of dialogue, exchange of good practices and supporting the Commission in the process to construct the Strategy.

## **Equality, diversity, inclusion and safety in sport**

According to the World Economic Forum Gender Gap report 2022, “at current rate of progress, it would take 132 years to close the gap between men and women around the world”. Sport would benefit greatly from closing the gender gap within sport, and becoming more inclusive to different minorities. For the time being, men (16%) are more likely than women (10%) to be members of a sports club (Eurobarometer 525, European Commission, 2022). In addition to gender, many other factors determine the likelihood of a person engaging in sport. People from low income households or low level of education are significantly less active. Factors such as place of birth, family circumstances, and urban versus non-urban residence, have considerably high impact on a healthy and active lifestyle. Finally, 75% of Europeans agree that gender-based violence in sports deserves more attention (Eurobarometer 525). In order to be an inviting and safe environment for all, sport needs continued support for physical accessibility, geographical accessibility and socio economic accessibility.

ENGSO endorses the Council Conclusions on accessible sports, yet more is needed to guarantee equal access to sport. Gender Equality needs to stay on the agenda, requiring action on High-Level Group's gender equality recommendations.

There is an abundance of data, but change is coming about slowly. The European Union needs to step up its efforts and put forward ambitious actions and funding that help create more equal and safe sport.

### **Proposed actions:**

#### **3.1.0 Recommendations for removing barriers to participating in grassroots sports**

A set of recommendations should be built, in cooperation with grassroots sports organisations and basing on existing evidence on the topic, to encourage all stakeholders to work towards more inclusive grassroots sport.

### **3.2 European check system to safeguard children**

Step up the safeguarding work by facilitating the creation of an EU-wide system for checks to prevent convicted perpetrators from working or volunteering with children and youth in the sport setting in another EU Member State.

### **3.3 Mainstreaming equality and diversity in EU Sport policy and funding**

All EU actions within sport should include a gender test and evaluate the impact of policy on equality and diversity. For example, EU should implement steering mechanisms in Erasmus+ Sport to ensure that grassroots clubs and other sports organisations implement gender equality plans. Inclusion and diversity need sustained prominence within Erasmus+, dedicated space for grassroots is vital to: build capacity, share, and network in this area. Communities need to be involved and heard as part of EU sports policy, in particular left-behind minorities such as refugees.

## **Sustainable grassroots sport**

Sport is connector to several of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, starting with health. In everyday language, sustainability is often understood as environmental sustainability. Broadly speaking, sustainability consists of three dimensions: environmental, social and economic sustainability. In order for grassroots sport to function in a sustainable manner, all three dimensions need to be addressed. Sustainability must remain a critically important matter for the foreseeable future.

### **Proposed actions:**

### **4.0 Sustainable and accessible sport facilities**

In order to promote physical activity and reduce the impact of sport on climate, the EU should fund the construction and renovation of sport facilities. The funding should come from a variety of EU programmes, including ESF+ and CAP, 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.

## ABOUT ENGSO

*The European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO) is a not-for-profit organisation that acts as the umbrella organisation for National Olympic Committees and National Sports Confederations responsible for grassroots sports in 33 European countries.*

*With this Position Paper, ENGSO wants to draw the attention of European decision-makers, from all Member States, the European Commission and the European Parliament, to the importance of grassroots sport for wellbeing and resilience, and propose ideas that enable untapping sport's full potential for individuals, communities and society.*

*During the first four 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 that reflect the needs of grassroots sport. Furthermore, ENGSO has played an important role in Work Plan implementation, being part of several Expert Groups, participating in the drafting of core documents, and actively participating in meetings and events*



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