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Reinforcing the European Sport Model

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Executive summary

This staff working document summarises the consultation process and main findings of the Commission Communication on “Reinforcing the European Sport Model”. Over 2025-2026, the Commission gathered input through a public consultation, a call for evidence and targeted stakeholder meetings and engaged with stakeholders from grassroots to elite sport, public authorities, EU institutions, athletes, federations, businesses, researchers and citizens. The consultations showed broad support for EU action to strengthen and modernise the European Sport Model while preserving its core values.

1. Sport governance. Consultations highlighted strong interest in stronger monitoring of governance standards, clearer guidance on the application of EU law to sport, and more structured dialogue among institutions, federations, athletes and other actors. There was also broad support for promoting transparency, accountability, democratic decision-making, athlete representation, safeguarding, inclusion and sustainability as shared standards across the sport sector.

2. Sustainability and solidarity. Stakeholders underlined that solidarity and sustainability are under pressure. They pointed to the piracy of live sport events, opaque and inadequate redistribution mechanisms, growing financial disparities and threats from breakaway or closed competition formats. At the same time, many pointed to opportunities to improve environmental sustainability, support volunteers more effectively, and strengthen competitive balance, so that the benefits of sport continue to be shared widely across communities and levels of practice.

3. Sport and society. Consultations affirmed sport as a public good with major benefits for health, education, inclusion, wellbeing and social cohesion. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of accessible infrastructure, stronger investment, better data, support for Erasmus+ Sport and the European Week of Sport, lifelong physical literacy, dual careers and safeguarding.

Overall, the consultations showed a shared expectation that EU sport policy should reinforce the social, educational and economic role of sport while adapting the European Sport Model to new governance, financial, social and environmental realities.

1. Introduction

The European Sport Model is a cornerstone of EU policy, promoting values such as fairness, inclusivity, and solidarity while addressing the evolving challenges facing sport in Europe. The model's principles which are rooted in open competitions, financial sustainability, and grassroots development help to shape policies that balance economic realities with the social and educational role of sport.

In recent years, Member States, EU institutions and key stakeholders, including sport federations, athlete representatives, and civil society, have emphasised the need to strengthen and future-proof the European Sport Model. In February 2024, 26 Member States signed a declaration supporting the European Sport Model[1]. The 2025 European Parliament Resolution on the role of EU policies in shaping the European Sport Model[2] highlighted growing pressures, from commercialisation and financial disparities to governance concerns and the rise of new technologies.

European Commission President von der Leyen's mission letter to Glenn Micallef, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, highlighted the importance of developing a more strategic and resilient approach to sport policy. The letter called for reinforced cooperation between Member States, sport organisations, and EU institutions to safeguard the European Sport Model's core values while adapting to modern realities. This includes ensuring fair competition, sustainable financing, and broader societal benefits, from health and social cohesion to Europe's global sporting influence.

At the 2025 EU Sport Forum, Commissioner Micallef announced the preparation of a future Commission Communication on 'Reinforcing the European Sport Model'. To this end, a broad consultation was undertaken with Member States, EU and international institutions and the sport movement, from grassroot to elite levels.

This staff working document accompanies the Commission Communication and provides a comprehensive overview of the processes and results of the consultation activities conducted during the preparation of the strategy. The document summarises the public consultation activities, interservice consultations and targeted stakeholder consultations.

[1] https://www.sports.gouv.fr/declaration-des-ministres-des-sports-europeens-pour-un-modele-sportif-base-sur-la-solidarite-le

[2] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52025IP0212

2. Overview of consultation activities

Over a period of one year, from spring 2025 to spring 2026, a comprehensive consultation strategy was executed and engaged a diverse group of stakeholders to ensure a balanced, inclusive and evidence-based approach when preparing the strategy. Throughout the consultation phase, hundreds of stakeholders shared their views and opinions with the Commission through dialogues, meetings, conferences, questionnaires, and position papers. To ensure broad representation, three complementary consultation methods were used:

- A **Public Consultation** through the 'Have Your Say Portal' (15 September- 8 December 2025) which took the form of a questionnaire. Factual summary report accessible here.
- A **Call for Evidence** through the 'Have Your Say' portal (19 May 2025 – 11 August 2025), which allowed stakeholders to give feedback via open text input and gave the opportunity to attach a position paper. All contributions and position papers are available via this link.
- **Targeted stakeholder consultations** in the form of workshops, in-person and online meetings, to gather more specific evidence, sectoral expertise and practical feedback from actors across the sport ecosystem. Consultations included: EU institutions, international organisations and representatives from the grassroots sport sector to professional and elite levels (athletes and athlete representative bodies, European and national Olympic committees, sport federations, Erasmus+ beneficiaries in the field of sport, the sporting goods industry, businesses, self-organised and non-organised sport communities, grassroots sport organisations, academics and researchers, and sport fans. A youth check was also performed, with young people helping shape the initiative notably through a dedicated Youth Policy Dialogue[3]).
- Ad-hoc contributions were also received via email from stakeholders.

[3] https://youth.europa.eu/events/youth-policy-dialogue-european-sport-model_en

3. Main findings from the consultations

a. Sport Governance

According to the European Sport Model, sport federations have autonomy to independently govern their sport within the limits of EU law and guided by the principles of good governance, as self-regulation ensures fairness, integrity and competitive spirit.

Across consultations (public consultation, call for evidence, targeted consultations), stakeholder groups converge to point to systemic governance challenges. They called for EU action to strengthen good governance, primarily by clarifying how EU law applies to sport; establishing social dialogue; and monitoring the implementation of good governance standards.

i. Application of EU law to sport

One major issue raised across consultations and stakeholder groups concerned the perceived lack of clarity in the application of EU law to the sport context, impeding its development. A consensus expressed across stakeholder groups concerned the call for the EU to help interpret how EU competition law applies to sport.

Specifically in the call for evidence, most academics and some NGOs including federations referred to Court of Justice of the European Union rulings in the field of sport which confirmed that sport governing bodies may continue to regulate their sports, but only within a framework of transparent, objective, non-discriminatory and proportionate rules, while also clarifying that Article 165 TFEU does not create a general exemption for sport from EU internal market or competition law. Nonetheless, there continues to be a lack of clarity and contributions highlight the need to assist sport governing bodies in developing adequate governance frameworks. While different views expressed on how far the EU should go (soft-law response such as guidance, structured dialogue, technical assistance and targeted funding; or enforcement of higher standards through binding EU legislation e.g. based on Article 114 TFEU to impose minimum governance, solidarity and athlete-protection standards), stakeholders tended to agree in advocating for more predictable interpretation and application of EU law to sport.

ii. Structured (and social) dialogue

Throughout consultations, stakeholders (academics, EU representatives of the Olympic movement, NGOs including federations, grassroots organisations, Erasmus+ beneficiaries) expressed the need for a reinforced dialogue between decision-makers and sport stakeholders at EU-level. NGOs representing the grassroots sector stressed the need to ensure that European policies are grounded in the realities of everyday club work and to establish mechanisms to better translate European policies into national and local practice (including clearer communication, capacity building and systematic follow-up of implementation).

On athletes' rights specifically, their representatives called for social dialogue on the basis of labour standards to enable structured negotiations, consultation or exchange of information between workers' organisations and employers' organisations; underlining athletes' rights to protection associated with worker status under EU law (irrespective of their formal contractual classification), including freedom of association, collective bargaining, and occupational health

and safety. This position is consistent with the International Labour Organization Guidelines[4] on the promotion of fundamental principles and rights at work for professional athletes (March 2026), confirming that fundamental rights at work, including freedom of association, collective bargaining, non-discrimination, and safe and healthy working conditions, apply to all athletes regardless of their employment classification, and do not depend on formal employee status or remuneration.

Some stakeholders namely a trade union argued that technical sport directors should also be part of such a dialogue. Stakeholders (academics, EU institutions, NGOs, sport employers' organisations) echoed athletes' representatives by calling to promote social dialogue as a pillar of the European Sport Model, as it represents a tool for good governance, conflict prevention and sustainable development of sport. Many stakeholders called to build on the example of the EU Sectorial Social Dialogue in professional football[5].

iii. Governance challenges and EU support

While sport governing bodies' autonomy should be based on good governance principles, there was broad recognition that existing governance arrangements are increasingly strained by globalisation and commercial concentration. In the public consultation, the area that respondents found the most important to be tackled out of the six in question was "challenges in governance and integrity". The two highest scoring were challenges regarding "Unethical behaviours, corruption, and conflicts of interest in sport governance" (84%) and "Lack of transparency and accountability in sport governance" (74%).

While some progress was also occasionally mentioned, numerous contributions emphasised widespread and systemic governance challenges, such as opaque decision-making, weak accountability, lack of representativeness, commercial concentration, and human rights concerns across major sports organisations. These shortcomings shed light on the complexity and possible limits of sport's autonomy. Furthermore, the topic of athletes' representatives was brought up, with some stakeholders calling to confine its application to technical rules and exclude athletes' rights, working conditions, representation, and health and safety. Stakeholders pointed to the practices of some Member States (e.g. FR, ES, PL) having introduced regulatory responses, although mentioning that these remain fragmented and are often constrained by resistance from international federations invoking concerns over political interference. Highlighting the principle of responsible autonomy, federations generally cautioned against excessive state intervention in sport governance, particularly in relation to anti-doping.

While views diverge on the degree of regulatory intervention required, a vast majority of stakeholders call on the EU to strengthen good governance. One proposed area of intervention included the development of common standards and monitoring tools. Proposed topics for minimum standards covered transparency, accountability, democratic decision-making, sound financial management, athlete rights and wellbeing and continuous/dual education, gender balance, inclusion (socio-economic, disability equality, anti-racism etc.), safeguarding, sustainability (environmental, social, economic), digital accountability, and the meaningful representation in governance structures for stakeholders such as athletes, coaches, fans, women and young people.

[4] https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/ilo-guidelines-promotion-fundamental-principles-and-rights-work-and

[5] https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies-and-activities/eu-employment-policies/social-dialogue/cross-industry-and-sectoral-social-dialogue/professional-football-sectoral-social-dialogue_en

Some stakeholders such as academics or public authorities suggested embedding these indicators in EU funding priorities (e.g. Erasmus+, Horizon Europe).

Specifically on athletes' representation, views differed between athletes' associations and federations. The former argued that athletes should be represented through independent associations, which they see as essential for meaningful participation and for safeguarding athletes' wellbeing and rights. The latter also recognise the importance of athlete representation within governance structures but pointed instead to athletes' commissions as an effective mechanism to strengthen participation and foster social dialogue in sport governance.

Other proposed EU actions included supporting national-level regulation, education and training opportunities to address the challenge of a lack of skilled staff, digital tools facilitating implementation, and creating financial incentives, including through Erasmus+ priorities.

b. Sustainability and Solidarity

Solidarity and sustainability are central to the European Sport Model, underpinning fair redistribution, broad access and long-term resilience across the sport ecosystem. However, several challenges threaten these foundations in different ways.

i. Piracy of live sport events

According to many stakeholders consulted, sport is an important economic driver for the EU's competitiveness, generating substantial financial revenues, supporting jobs and growth in many sectors. Live sport events are seen as playing a key role in this ecosystem by generating significant value across media rights, sponsorship, ticketing, tourism and local commerce, while helping to finance sport at all levels. Across submissions, stakeholders linked broadcasting revenues of live sport events directly to the financial sustainability of sport organisations and, indirectly, to solidarity-based mechanisms supporting grassroots and amateur sport.

Stakeholders' views (public authorities, EU institutions, business associations, companies, NGOs) converged around the idea that piracy is detrimental and leads to substantial revenue losses; some pointed to the reduction of media rights' value, the impact on employment, taxable income and content reinvestment, also undermining intellectual property rights. Piracy is thus considered to weaken the economic foundations of the European Sport Model, affecting redistribution mechanisms to the detriment of broad participation. All these stakeholders therefore called for further action at EU level.

While the current EU regulatory framework namely the Commission's Recommendation on combating online piracy of sports and other live events[6] was welcomed, stakeholders characterised it as insufficient to address the scale and speed of online piracy of live events, partly due to its non-binding nature. Therefore, stakeholders (particularly business associations, companies, EU institutions, leagues) argued that a harmonised legislative European framework allowing to rapidly remove infringing content should be introduced; some pointed to the need for immediate removal of unauthorised content, along with harmonised and real-time automated blockings, trusted flaggers status for broadcasters and rights holders, strengthened obligations for online intermediaries and systematic EU-wide data collection on financial losses, enforcement gaps and grassroots impacts.

Additionally, some stakeholders drew attention to the lack of sufficient public availability of live sport events and the need for affordable and fair commercial practices. Some further warned that the growing concentration of media rights revenues in a small number of major leagues risks widening competitive imbalances across Europe, and therefore advocate for the stronger protection of local markets, legally defined protected slots for domestic competitions, and a better balance between commercial broadcasting interests, live attendance and grassroots participation. From the perspective of business associations, they defended territorial licensing systems as economically necessary for market segmentation and revenue maximisation across diverse national media landscapes for the benefit of smaller leagues, clubs and territories. They also pointed to the added value of tailoring content to fans' and media partners' preferences across Europe, consequently calling to maintain the scope of the Geo-blocking Regulation excluding audio-visual content.

Football stakeholders (particularly fans and athletes' representatives) raised concerns over rising ticket prices, including the use of dynamic pricing and the growing cost of tv-

[6] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reco/2023/1018/oj/eng

subscriptions which are making it difficult and expensive for fans to follow sport. They argued for action to be taken to ensure that sport in Europe is accessible to everyone regardless of income.

ii. Financial solidarity and sustainability

Throughout all consultation activities, solidarity mechanisms - particularly financial - are highlighted as an essential feature of the European Sport Model. Redistributing resources more fairly from elite to amateur levels or across sports helps to sustain various grassroots structures, widen access, strengthen social inclusion, nurture youth development, train coaches and referees and support the long-term viability of clubs and communities. While some good practices were presented, many stakeholders pointed to the implementation gap and highlighted the need for more evidence, greater accountability and transparency. Numerous stakeholders (including sport governing bodies, fans, athletes' representatives) supported the European Parliament's call on the Commission to present a study mapping existing financial solidarity mechanisms and redistribution schemes[7].

In the call for evidence, academics underlined that a reasonable share of the commercial income derived by the professional level should be redistributed to the amateur level, which warrants a review of the current solidarity mechanisms to ensure its continued effectiveness. This was echoed by public authorities, who highlighted that in practice resources are pooled at the professional level, which in return risks the marginalisation of amateur and grassroots initiatives. EU citizens and local sport clubs further supported this, arguing that grassroots sport functions largely without solidarity-based funding, calling existing frameworks inadequate and unsuccessful - or 'aspirational rather than operational'. On the other hand, federations presented existing challenges to solidarity-based funding models, namely piracy and breakaway competitions identified as structural threats. As a solution, companies, inspired by the U.S. system, proposed a redistribution system where revenues from media rights and merchandising are pooled and shared collectively.

Other consultations such as with the grassroots sport sector and dual career' advocates underlined existing good practices at national levels including redistribution of broadcasting revenues or national lotteries, social support schemes for families and solidarity initiatives driven by the private sector. Athletes' representatives stressed that financial redistribution mechanism must also go beyond clubs, federation, leagues and governing bodies, to directly include athletes through fair compensation, revenue sharing, welfare protections and minimum standards.

Furthermore, a broad range of stakeholders (including sport federations, leagues, academics and governing bodies) highlighted that financial sustainability must be a key priority. Persistent structural deficits, growing reliance on debt, and wider financial instability expose European sport clubs and federations to heightened insolvency risk, reduced resilience, and weakened capacity to sustain sporting and social objectives. Promoting sound financial management should therefore not be viewed only as a matter of economic efficiency, but as a key to safeguarding the European Sport Model.

A few stakeholders (including federations and a union) mentioned that the protection and proper governance of sport data must be ensured. Sport data is becoming increasingly valuable as results and statistics, generated at all levels of various competitions, are commercialised by

[7] Report on the role of EU policies in shaping the European Sport Model | A10-0157/2025 | European Parliament

private companies. They argued that it should be protected to safeguard a fair financial redistribution back into the industry.

iii. Competition formats

Contributions pointed to other structural changes in European sport ecosystem namely new competition formats which challenge its sustainability and weaken merit-based competition, a fundamental feature of the European Sport Model.

Open competitions are based on sporting merit, ensuring that performance rather than financial status or commercial interests determine clubs and athletes' qualifications; which preserves competitive balance, the integrity of sport and maintains the interconnected pyramid linking grassroots, national and elite sport. Consultations reiterated concerns expressed following recent proposals for closed or semi-closed breakaway competitions, with stakeholders (academic and research institutions, NGOs including federations, fans, leagues and public authorities) strongly defending open competitions. NGOs including federations and some public authorities firmly opposed breakaway competition formats, as they undermine merit, solidarity structures and threaten the (governing) role of federations.

Building on this, several stakeholders stressed the need to strengthen competitive balance. As a core feature of the European Sport Model. Stakeholders emphasised that excessive financial disparities between clubs or teams can undermine fair competition, reduce opportunities for sporting mobility and weaken fan engagement. Measures that promote solidarity mechanisms, equitable revenue distribution and investment in grassroots and youth development therefore play a crucial role in safeguarding competitive balance and ensure that the benefits of elite competitions strengthen the wider sporting pyramid, thereby reinforcing the social and sporting values that distinguish the European Sport Model.

Some public authorities also nuanced this by recognising some benefits of closed competition models namely some guaranteed financial stability for clubs and consolidating entrepreneurial and local ecosystems; while pointing the need to impose strict conditions regarding level-playing field and solidarity duties for all competition organisers, and to ensure the protection of sporting merit, redistribution to the grassroots level and athletes' rights. In other words, to ensure the sustainability of the European Sport Model and its key features, including open competition formats. Echoing and adding to this, academic contributions acknowledged that sport governing bodies may impose prior authorisation requirements for new competitions, provided that such procedures are based on transparent, objective, proportionate, and non-discriminatory criteria. They also stressed the importance of meaningful consultation with affected stakeholders including athletes, clubs and fans.

Nonetheless, EU citizens, sport clubs and athletes' representatives expressed concerns about the continued expansion and commercialisation of competitions focused on short-term economic interests. Despite the direct impact these decisions have on athletes and players' working conditions (determining e.g. athletes' workload, recovery time, injury risk and income), their representatives pointed to a lack of meaningful involvement of athlete and players' associations.

On the other hand, commercial stakeholders placed greater emphasis on the global competitiveness and commercial growth of European sport, arguing that European sport

organisations must expand their global fanbases to remain economically competitive. On the particular issue of club ownership structures or event locations, they expressed the view that these should not unnecessarily constrain market development. On the other hand, EU citizens and NGOs argued that a code of ethics should be introduced in relation to foreign club ownership.

Overall, contributions revealed a fundamental tension between upholding solidarity-based competition structures and expanding the commercial reach of European sport. Preserving the heritage of domestic competitions while ensuring sufficient flexibility to innovate, in consultation with key stakeholders including athletes and players, seem essential to maintain their relevance and sustainability in the future.

iv. Environmental sustainability in sport

Environmental sustainability was stressed as an important dimension in sport, and climate change affects all levels from elite athletes to grassroot participation. Stakeholders (particularly NGOs and public authorities) called for action and adaptation not only of sports infrastructure and the organisation of major sporting events, but also for environmental considerations to be embedded at all levels of sport governing bodies' operations and practices, as an integral part of good governance principles.

A broad consensus expressed across all consultations concerned the need for sustainable infrastructure (including the construction, renovation and management of sports facilities as well as transition to renewable energy), which can contribute to reducing emissions, improving energy efficiency and ensuring the long-term viability of local sport environments. At the same time, stakeholders agreed that major sporting events must adopt more sustainable approaches through responsible planning, resource management, transport solutions and the reduction of environmental impacts. In this regard, many stakeholders called for setting European standards for facilities and events. Some insisted on the need for targeted funding, dedicated support and awareness-raising, also pointing to the viability of certain sport disciplines directly impacted by the effects of climate change such as outdoor and water sports.

Several stakeholders supported the European Parliament's call to the Commission and Member States to encourage environmental responsibility and climate adaptation in sport[8], including sustainable equipment and sport infrastructure management, carbon-responsible event organisation and environmental education through sport.

By promoting greener infrastructure, more sustainable event models and adopting climate adaptation measures, the sport sector can contribute to Europe's climate objectives while preserving the accessibility, social value and long-term sustainability of sport.

v. Volunteers

All consultations and stakeholders group agreed on the fundamental role of volunteers, as the backbone of sport in Europe. They unanimously pointed to the declining number of volunteers heavily affecting sport and particularly grassroots participation but not limited to it, as mentioned by fans representatives. Furthermore, 89% of respondents in the public consultation identified the declining participation of volunteers in sport as an important challenge to be

[8] Report on the role of EU policies in shaping the European Sport Model | A10-0157/2025 | European Parliament

tackled. Strong calls were made to raise the attractiveness of volunteering including through recognition measures, skills development, appropriate resources and funding. 86% of respondents signalled that valorising and incentivising volunteering in sport should be undertaken at European level.

Concrete solutions were proposed by the grassroots sector and public authorities, who suggested to make use of micro-credentials and ECTS credits to recognise the experience and skills developed through sport volunteering. Public authorities emphasised a European Volunteer Passport or hybrid models (e.g., sport + life skills) in Erasmus+ Sport and other EU funding streams and called for further research on volunteering's societal and financial impact. Some NGOs proposed to strengthen links with the European Skills Agenda or the #BeActive Awards. Other proposals concerned holiday allowances or tax incentives, which are already in place in some national contexts. Finally, administrative burden is presented as an important challenge affecting volunteers and local sport clubs' capacities. Stakeholders widely called to reduce reporting burdens and administrative duties including through digitalised processes.

c. Sport and Society

Stakeholders across all consultation activities unanimously recognised sport and physical activity as a public good, contributing not only to economic competitiveness but also to delivering positive societal value such as health (physical and mental health), education, skills development, inclusion, wellbeing, promoting community building and social cohesion.

Despite all these benefits and efforts undertaken to widen participation, most stakeholders drew attention to the persistent barriers and unequal access to physical activity opportunities (that are particularly pronounced for citizens from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, for certain age ranges, and for those living in rural and disadvantaged areas or urban settings that lack adequate infrastructure for active mobility).

Several structural factors contributing to these barriers were identified, namely underinvestment and uneven access to quality infrastructure or sport offers/programmes, limited focus on physical literacy and weak links between sport and education, insufficient and fragmented data, along with the need to advance European values through sport, ensure safe and inclusive environments for all, and better promote active lifestyles and grassroots participation including through public policies.

i. European Sport Model framework

A significant share of stakeholders supported the European Commission's action to develop a strategic vision for sport in Europe and reinforce the European Sport Model. Numerous stakeholders pointed to the added value of the European Sport Model framework, while some stressed the diversity of approaches across different national and local contexts. In general, consensus was observed among stakeholders believing that the European Sport Model must be firmly grounded in values-based sport, promoting human rights, human dignity, integrity, fair play equality and respect, in line with the European Sport Charter of the Council of Europe[9]. This was also highlighted by the responses in the public consultation, where 89% of respondents indicated 'Democracy and Values' as a European Commission priority that sport could contribute to, the highest rate of any priority.

Contributions consistently identified grassroots sport as a central pillar of the European Sport Model and driver of public European sport policy. Grassroot organisations were identified as essential to the social infrastructure and key contributors to developing physical literacy, confirming the relevance of the model. Nonetheless, further improvements are suggested to better reflect current realities. Given recent multi-sectorial efforts to promote health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA), numerous stakeholders called for its greater integration into the European Sport Model framework. This was also underlined in the public consultation, where the integration of HEPA and physical literacy as part of the European Sport Model emerged as the top priority with 72% of respondents calling for it. Additionally, stakeholders drew attention to the growing importance and impact of self-organised sport, which should equally be recognised as a critical part of the model. In the call for evidence, commercial actors proposed a stronger focus on HEPA and fitness-oriented grassroots sport, outside of traditional sport structures, driven by the diversification of demand, with increasing preferences for flexible, non-club-based forms of exercise. Similarly, EU citizens connected HEPA and non-organised individual movement to urban planning, calling for stronger reinforcement of public infrastructure such as bike lanes, walking paths, or parks. Furthermore, both commercial actors and NGOs were proponents of physical activity prescriptions by healthcare professionals as a

[9] https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/esc

preventative treatment of vulnerable groups. Lastly, stakeholders, including NGOs and grassroots representatives, called for a more structural evolution of the European Sport Model, evolving beyond a pyramidal model to put greater emphasis on the central role of grassroot sport and self-organised sport for the society and comparatively less to elite sport, as it concerns only a small share of the population. On the other hand, stakeholders such as federations strongly defended the pyramidal model.

ii. Sport and physical activity data and strategic investments

Throughout consultations, stakeholders (including EU institutions, Erasmus+ National Agencies, academics, business associations, NGOs and citizens, dual career advocates, SHARE 2.0 members) underlined the importance of establishing an evidence base at European level supported by quality data, comparable indicators and statistics. While they welcomed current available data, they pointed to persisting fragmentation. Some initiatives such as the Council Recommendation on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity was praised, while the need to update the indicators was expressed. Moreover, improved data collection was mentioned as essential for monitoring development not only in governance but also regarding financial sustainability, participation, integrity and the broader societal impact of sport. Enhanced indicators on areas such as volunteering (e.g. societal and financial impact), health, gender equality, grassroots participation and sport's economic value and social return on investment were identified as support for more informed and targeted decision-making at both EU and national levels. To strengthen evidence-based policymaking in sport, stakeholders therefore called to invest in sport statistics and research. In particular, some academics stressed the need to include sport and physical activity in European Research Council nomenclature to further develop research activities.

iii. Sustainable funding

Sustainable financing is fundamental to the European Sport Model, particularly in ensuring the long-term viability of grassroots sport and its contribution to society. Local clubs, volunteers and community-based organisations are at the heart of the European sporting pyramid. As these organisations often rely on limited resources, continued public investment at all levels remains essential. Given sport's incomparable role in society and persisting challenges identified, there was broad consensus of the need for significantly increased funding at all levels (EU, national, local as well as from the private sector). A primary area of concern remained sport infrastructure, federations, representatives of the Olympic movement, academics and NGOs including from grassroot sector stressed the crucial role of dedicated EU funding programmes primarily the European Regional Development Fund. National authorities also underlined the need to leverage private investment for sport infrastructures, including by better understanding drivers for investment.

iv. Accessible infrastructure

Access to quality infrastructure to participate in sport and physical activities was seen as critical across all major stakeholder groups (EU institutions, national and public authorities, citizens, academics, NGOs including federations, grassroots representatives, companies, the Olympic and Paralympic movements, etc.), who strongly emphasised inclusion. While sport can foster inclusion and equality, unequal access and opportunities persist in the sport movement. Many pointed to the lack of infrastructure particularly in disadvantaged or rural areas. In the public

consultation 94% of the respondents identified, a lack of, and inadequate access to infrastructure as an important challenge. Further to that, 90% of respondents answered that promoting environmental sustainability in sport and giving incentives to build sustainable sport infrastructures in Europe should be supported through action at European level.

In the call for evidence, most stakeholders recognised the ongoing challenges and called for further infrastructure development at EU-level. Urban planning and additional means for supporting sustainable and active mobility were also proposed. Specifically, public authorities highlighted the need for shared-use facilities and argued that schools and regions with fewer opportunities should be prioritised. EU citizens called to ensure equal access to sport regardless of age, gender, socio-economic background or ability. NGOs advocated for prioritising investment in modern, accessible, and energy-efficient sport facilities; grassroots sport organisations called for a shift in funding priorities from stadiums and elite performance toward public spaces and health-focused initiatives. Some NGOs specifically highlighted barriers faced by those with physical disabilities such as physical access, adapted materials, affordability, mobility to and from venues and a lack of awareness of coaches. They noted that it should be explored how digital websites and tools enable or exclude participation, and whether personal data and privacy are safeguarded. Business associations suggested economic incentives and tax benefits for companies which invest in workplace physical activity programmes and sport infrastructure. An interest group argued that companies should be financially incentivised to distribute social vouchers to their employees that promote the access to sport.

v. Inclusion and equality

EU citizens, unions and NGOs identified that despite progress being made in European sport, there are still several significant shortcomings on inclusion and equality. Barriers related to gender, disability, socio-economic background, age, ethnicity and sexual orientation can still limit access, participation in sport and physical activity and a sense of belonging. In elite sport, inequalities persist in areas such as representation, visibility, leadership, pay and working conditions, and underrepresented groups continues to face discrimination and abuse. While many efforts are proposed to address these shortcomings across the European sport community, stakeholders claimed that a sustained collective action is needed to ensure that sport genuinely safe, accessible and welcoming for all. The theme was also identified as a top priority in the public consultation as 65% noted it as a key area for EU-level action.

vi. Erasmus+ and the European Week of Sport

A broad range of stakeholders (including sport federations, NGOs and public authorities) emphasised the great added value of the Erasmus+ Sport actions, supporting grassroots initiatives, capacity building, volunteering, cross-border cooperation, mutual learning and structured dialogue among a wide range of stakeholders, helping sport organisations strengthen their resilience and maximise their social impact. Stakeholders called for an increased budget for Sport (several specifically advocating for at least 5% of the programme's total budget) to enable more grassroots sport organisations, volunteers and local communities to benefit from European cooperation and capacity-building initiatives. They argued that it would strengthen the ability of sport organisations to promote inclusion, health, education, equality and active citizenship, while supporting innovation and good governance across the sector. Expanding investment in Erasmus+ Sport would therefore reinforce the societal dimension of the European Sport Model and increase the positive contribution of sport to communities across Europe. Moreover, some stakeholders asked to increase the opportunities for organisations with

limited capacity. This would require making application procedures more accessible as they argue that the current ones are overly complex and administratively burdensome for certain structures.

On the other hand, stakeholders highlighted the need to further amplify the impact of current and past Erasmus+ projects by improving the dissemination and uptake of results (for instance during the European Week of Sport), while strengthening pathways from project development to wider-scale implementation, including through EU seed funding aimed at connecting promising initiatives with private investors.

Regarding the European Week of Sport, stakeholders cited it as a well-established and flexible EU initiative that succeeds in mobilising millions of European citizens and a wide range of actors involved in physical activity and sport every year. Multi-stakeholder cooperation between ministries, municipalities, schools, sport organisations, health and education actors, companies and private partners was presented as a core strength of the initiative. There was broad consensus on the initiative's ability to bring sport closer to citizens and to bring EU-level actions closer to local communities. Nonetheless, ideas were presented for further upscaling the concept by expansion, improving visibility and investing in more activities at local and regional level. The need to continue reaching less-active groups was highlighted by National Coordinating Bodies, who stress the importance of increasing the involvement of schools, municipalities, and other local multipliers. Sustained communication efforts over longer periods were also seen as possible way to maximise visibility and engagement.

vii. Education and learning

Educating citizens to be physically active in a lifelong perspective was seen as fundamental to increase participation in sport and physical activity and identified as a collective responsibility including for public authorities given the health, educational and social benefits. The need to develop physical literacy[10] from the youngest ages was identified as a key area for action by a large share of stakeholders (EU institutions, public authorities, EU representatives of the Olympic movement, Erasmus+ National Agencies and beneficiaries, citizens, young people active in sport, NGOs including grassroot sector).

Whole-of-school approaches were recommended, to educate children to be active not only through physical education classes but embedded throughout the whole school day and even beyond, for instance with active learning, play, extracurricular activities, active travel and engagement with families and communities. Beyond health and wellbeing benefits, sport and physical activity were described as critical for supporting the learning process including at cognitive level, improving concentration and overall academic achievement, as well as for skills development (civic engagement and active citizenship, soft skills such as resilience, collaboration and teamwork, communication, leadership). Specifically, it was raised that sport and physical activity represent an extremely valuable alternative to the increasing screen exposure and all the more for excessive use and social media addictions, promoting health (both physical and mental) and wellbeing, especially for young people. In this regard, stakeholders mainly called for reinforcing cooperation between schools and sport clubs. Some also suggested increasing physical education classes, implementing whole-of-school approach for promoting physical activity and appropriate teacher training, supporting active mobility and further implementing the shared use of infrastructure. Importance was also given to ensuring

[10] Referring to the knowledge, ability and confidence needed to participate in regular physical activity and live healthy lifestyles.

positive and enjoyable experience of exercising at schools, as opposed to approaches focused on performance.

Moreover, stakeholders including public authorities drew attention to the challenge of youth drop-out, as large numbers of young people stop participating sport during adolescence – which particularly affects teenage girls. Stakeholders also pointed to a progressive decline in opportunities for physical activity across education levels: from primary to secondary and then to upper secondary education, physical education and other structured opportunities to be active tend to become less frequent or less strongly prioritised, which can contribute to lower participation levels. At higher education level, the place of sport and physical activity is often even less consistent, as provision depends on the individual institution and may in some cases be offered only as an optional subject carrying ECTS credits, while in others it may not be recognised within the curriculum at all. Young athletes and athletes' representatives referred to the important role they can play as ambassadors and role models, particularly for young people. While athletes' associations stressed the need to protect athletes' freedom to choose when and how to engage in public debates. Individual young athletes expressed interest in establishing a young athlete ambassadors' scheme at EU-level, which could support voluntary school visits to promote sport and physical activity amongst children and adolescents.

On athlete education, stakeholders (namely federations, dual career advocates, citizens) drew attention to the need for flexible education pathways for young athletes at all levels. In a higher education context, good practices were presented such as dedicated programmes with personal guidance, support schemes including mentoring, administrative assistance and access to training facilities (e.g. AU Elite sport programme at Aarhus University (DK)) or generally promoting the use of micro-credentials. Dual career advocates stressed that continuous education alongside sporting career is a fundamental human right. They drew attention to the challenges former athletes can face during post-competitive career transitions, calling for tailored support.

Beyond its role in fostering participation and supporting athletes, education is also seen as a key lever for improving governance in the sport sector. Stakeholders (public authorities, federations, Erasmus+ beneficiaries) highlighted persistent shortages in skills and staff to implement governance reforms, therefore called for strengthened good governance through enhanced education and training programmes, notably at higher education levels.

viii. Safeguarding athletes and people including children in sport

As sport reflects society more broadly, risks such as (online) harassment, abuse and other harmful behaviours can also arise in sporting environments, especially where power imbalances persist. Subsequently, stakeholders underlined the need to strengthen the capacity of the European sport movement to prevent and respond effectively to safeguarding concerns and violations. Federations and civil society actors stressed the importance of fostering a lasting culture of safeguarding in sport, supported by stronger governance frameworks and by a diverse, inclusive community of practice bringing together various stakeholders. These efforts should be complemented by training, guidance and awareness-raising initiatives at both national and European level. Academic and research institutions called for clearer obligations regarding safeguarding policies, gender equality, athlete protection mechanisms and a strong anti-doping framework. Several citizen contributions emphasised issues such as data privacy, access to sport psychologists, and the independence of supervisory and complaint mechanisms.

A recurring criticism by citizens and civil society organisations was that in both elite and grassroots sport, actors such as alcohol brands, ultra-processed food producers, sugary drink companies, and betting operators are highly visible, often through sponsorship arrangements. Parents in particular viewed this as a risk for children and adolescents involved in sport, as these environments, intended to promote healthy lifestyles, instead expose them to and normalise harmful behaviours. Therefore, they called for a ban on advertising that promotes unhealthy behaviours surrounding (youth) sport events. On the other hand, business associations argued that the majority of grassroots sports clubs are dependent on sponsorship allowing them to lower membership fees making sport more accessible.