

# **ENGSO Policy Programme**

From grassroots to societies: sport as  
an agent for a more active and healthy  
Europe

**Adopted by ENGSO General Assembly**

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## Foreword

Dear reader,

In December 2019, the European Union celebrates the tenth anniversary of the signature of the Lisbon Treaty. The event marks an important milestone for organised sport, as for the first time, the European Union formally recognised the importance of sport for the citizens' wellbeing and the full development of their capacities. The Lisbon Treaty has thus helped build the political dimension of sport at an EU level.

Well before 2009, ENGSO was already calling for Europeans to pay attention to the importance of practice of sport at all levels of society. By that time, ENGSO had become *the* voice of grassroots sports and one of the most appreciated, respected and leading stakeholders. ENGSO has the tradition of issuing sport policy documents since those very early times, and with their help, ENGSO has been able to leave a recognisable fingerprint, shaping European sports.

You are holding in your hands the ENGSO Policy Programme, the first of its kind. It is a strategic document that takes ENGSO's policy-shaping activities yet another step further, setting new, more ambitious goals. The document states the positions of ENGSO and its member organisations, which are national sports confederations and National Olympic Committees, and guides the work of ENGSO for the years to come.

Covering topics ranging from health-enhancing physical activity to good governance, and Erasmus+ funding to the European model of sport, the document is proposing actions mainly to the EU institutions, the Council of Europe and decision-makers on a European level.

Basing on the existing position papers, the ENGSO Policy Programme *From grassroots to societies: sport as an agent for a more active Europe* has been drafted by our staff, volunteers and political leadership, in consultation with our members, in order to give us a strong mandate to represent and advocate for sports clubs and grassroots sports in the years to come.

The ENGSO Policy Programme serves as a handbook for our positions, and we welcome you return to it whenever you wish to consult the opinion of the grassroots sports movement.

Carlos Cardoso  
ENGSO President

Stefan Bergh  
ENGSO Secretary General

# 1. EU's competence and the role of sport

With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, the EU was granted a competence to operate a “direct” sports policy for the very first time. In an economic context, sport policy had been guided by the judgments of the Union courts since the 1970's. Moreover, sport had become associated with a large number of other EU policy areas including public health, education, training, youth, equal opportunities, employment, environment, media and culture.

Even though sport remains in the competence of the Member States to a great extent, EU sport policy today coordinates, supplements and supports their actions. It also provides direct funding to sports-related activities through the Erasmus+ programme 2014–2020, which has been warmly welcomed by the sports movement. As the programme draws closer to its conclusion, it is essential to safeguard a new sports funding programme.

Sport remains affected by other, central EU policy fields, such as competition law. It is vital to take into account the “specific nature of sport”, as mentioned in the Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

## EU Work Plan for Sport

### Background:

In May 2017, the ministers of EU Member States responsible for sport adopted the Resolution on the European Union Work Plan for Sport for the years 2017–2020. In this EU Work Plan for Sport – third of its kind – the Member States agreed on three sports policy priorities: integrity of sport, economic dimension, and sport and society. The Work Plan also defined some principles related to the working methods, structures and reporting, stating e.g. that “The Commission will ensure the most appropriate and effective participation of experts from different fields including public administration and sport stakeholders.” The Council Resolution on further developing the EU structured dialogue on sport from November 2017 further proposes to invite the sport movement to all relevant meetings, including Sport Directors meetings of each Presidency.

### ENGSO believes that:

- For a successful EU sport policy and its implementation, it is crucial to **invite the relevant representatives of the organised sport movement to all EU meetings**, whether it is formally in the framework of structured dialogue, or for instance the Sport Directors meetings.
- Both elite and grassroots sports need to be **represented by the organisations that have the mandate to do so, such as ENGSO for grassroots sports**. Furthermore, taking to account the nature of each meeting, **the right experts and representatives should be invited** in order to guarantee the ideal outcome of the meeting.

- With regards to implementing the EU Work Plan, **the Council Presidencies and the European Commission should listen to the real needs of the organised sport movement.** This can be achieved through a constant informal dialogue, alongside the more structured engagement envisaged under the Work Plan.
- The EU should promote **structured dialogue on EU sport policy between government representatives and the sport movement also at a national level.**

## Erasmus+ and sport funding programme post-2020

### Background:

The multi-annual financial framework (MFF) 2014–2020 saw the first sports related projects directly funded by the EU, thanks to the Erasmus+ Programme and its sport funding chapter. ENGSO played an active role in the realisation of the funding programme, and has since been involved in many successful initiatives funded by Erasmus+, including SCORE (Strengthening Coaching with the Objective to Raise Equality) and ASPIRE (Activity, Sport and Play for the Inclusion of Refugees in Europe). ENGSO is of the opinion that it is utmost important to safeguard a new funding programme for sport, as well as secure more long-term funding opportunities for sports organisations that are committed to implementing EU sports policy objectives, such as good governance, social inclusion, equality, etc. The best way to ensure long-lasting results and the widest possible impact is to finance initiatives by sports organisations, which have the benefit of established structures and a wide reach. To ensure a most efficient use of EU funds, the impact of projects should be measured and monitored on a consistent basis to inform future policy development and also future funding decisions.

### ENGSO believes that:

- **The successful Erasmus+ Programme should have a similar successor, including a specific sport chapter.**
- **Operating grants should be made available** for organisations which have the mandate to represent grassroots sports, as well as **extended support for projects that have been proved successful**, with the purpose of increasing the impact, spreading best practices and monitoring results.
- **Earmark a portion of funding available for the use of organised sport**, which represents the civil society movement of sport.
- Budgetary priorities should be **flexible and reactive to the shifting needs of organised sport and the society, as well as the popularity of different topics.**
- In order to make EU funding more accessible to grassroots sports, **administrative burdens of applicants and beneficiaries should be reduced.** Funding should be extended to **not-for-profit sports events**, which are at the core of sports clubs.
- **Non-EU countries should have the opportunity to participate.**

## 2. The societal role of sport

Sport and physical activity have a well-documented effect on the individual in terms of physical, psychological and social well-being. To a growing extent, it is also recognised for its impact on communities and the society at large, with regards to e.g. public health, social inclusion, and learning and capacity building. Lifelong learning through sport and volunteering can be helpful in tackling the serious problem of youth unemployment persistent in many areas of Europe. The job market of the future requires that individuals develop skills such as decision-making, collaboration and social skills. Volunteering and other sporting activities can play a vital role in teaching these skills to people of all ages. Furthermore, grassroots sports as part of civil society empowers individuals and communities to take responsibility and organise, contributing to stronger citizenship and democracy.

### Health-enhancing physical activity

#### Background:

According to the 2018 Special Eurobarometer on Sport and Physical Activity, nearly half of Europeans never exercise or play sport, and the proportion has increased gradually in recent years. Physical inactivity has been identified as the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. Physical activity generates significant savings in terms of reduced healthcare spending, boosts economic productivity by reducing sickness and workplace absence, and leads to a healthier and more social working environment, which positively impacts individuals, businesses and the society. Sport and health-enhancing physical activity as preventive measures are a sustainable and cost-effective way to improve public health.

#### ENGSO believes that:

- **Schools and other educational institutions have an important role in engaging children, youth and young adults in physical activity.** The learning environment should encourage pupils and students to be physically active also outside of the physical education classes and reduce the amount of static sitting. **Cooperation between schools and sport clubs** should be strengthened and offered public funding and other support, such as educating teachers, in order to activate the learning environment.
- **Accessible and adequate sport facilities at a local level are key to engaging citizens in physical activity.**
- Attention should be given to **families' ability to encourage their children's participation in sport and physical activity**, given the fact that an (in)active lifestyle is transmitted from parents to children.
- Employers should be encouraged to **facilitate the access of their employees to sport and physical activity**, by e.g. offering vouchers and the opportunity to practice sport during working hours. Cooperation between workplaces and sport clubs should be strengthened.
- **The life-long learning approach** should be applied in sport as well, ensuring a physically active and healthy life from toddlers to seniors.

- Increasing physical activity of citizens needs to be taken into account **in all policy sectors, ie. applying cross-sectorial approach**, and stakeholders in the health sector need to be engaged as partners.

## Sport and social inclusion

### Background:

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, and the ability of sport to bring together people in spite of their differences and create a platform for common understanding and shared joy. Demonstrated by numerous initiatives that incorporate sport with e.g. peace building efforts or the integration of migrants, sport does have the power to change the world.

### ENGSO believes that:

- **Everyone should have the access to sport – including facilities, activities, education programmes, events, etc. – but more so those that benefit from the physically, psychologically 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 sport and physical activity as well.
- The use of **sport as a tool for social inclusion, equality and peace building** needs to be further strengthened by supporting sports organisations active in this area and identifying how sport can be used to meet the wider policy goals of the Commission in terms of e.g. integration, social inclusion and sport diplomacy.
- Sport should be **a safe environment, free from bullying, discrimination, harassment and sexual violence.** The EU and the Council of Europe has 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, the joint EU-CoE Pro Safe Sport projects as well as through projects funded by the Erasmus+ programme. Such measures should be strengthened and increased.
- The EU can play an ever greater role in **identifying and spreading innovations that increase the inclusion in and through sport** through initiatives such as the European Week of Sport, as well as providing sustainable funding for organisations with the aim of promoting social inclusion in and through sport.

## Gender equality

### Background:

In order to develop “sport” into “sport for all”, both women and men need to be engaged in all roles and at all levels of sport: in governing bodies, as coaches, in administrative and decision-making and other leading positions. To support this development, both the EU and CoE, as well as NGOs, need to focus on action-oriented recommendations for change. Since the 1990’s, the sports movement in Europe has worked with actions to enhance the possibility for women 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) as the regional body, and appoint the regional representative for Europe in IWG.

### ENGSO believes that:

- The **“EU Strategic Proposals for Gender Equality in Sport, 2014–2020”**, as well as the **Council of Europe “Recommendation on Mainstreaming in Sport”**, is a basis for the work marking the GO policy position in the area of gender equality within sport. However, it is important that **they initiate the work, and invite ENGSO and other experts, to develop next steps to improve gender equality also post-2020.**
- The EU and the Council of Europe should continue playing an important role in developing tools to follow up with the current **situation on gender equality with facts, indicators and to present it regularly, with fact, indicators and figures.**
- Examples of good practises, where solutions have been found, should be spread through different communication channels, seminars and meetings, both by the EU and the Council of Europe, as well as ENGSO and other NGOs.
- **The EU and its Member States should continue to finance projects 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 secure continuously Erasmus+ funding. It is necessary that the EU also initiates 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.

## Youth development and involvement

### Background:

Young people have been identified as pillars of a change among leading agendas globally (EU 2020, IOC 2030, UN Agenda 2030, CoE Youth Policy, etc.) Within sports, youth represent a large resource and sector, mostly by being involved either as athletes, or as volunteers. Established 15 years ago, ENGSO Youth Committee advocates for youth role and voice within/across sports, alongside promoting and raising awareness on the recognition and benefits of volunteering. *“Give youth a real*

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*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 and its Youth Committee believe that:

- Sport can lead the way in terms of **civic engagement of youth**, by e.g. involving young people directly in decision-making processes and offering training that increases youth participation.
- Fostering the institutionalised role of youth within decision-making processes across sports should be done through opening those processes to young people by creating an advisory role – including youth voice within European expert group meetings.
- It is vital to create a **permanent consultative and partnering role of youth in European sports matters as EU-Youth Sport Envoy** as an example of UN Youth Envoy
- The European Commission should secure their **support and acknowledgment for the biannual organisation of the European Youth Sport Forum and the implementation of the Pink Paper Recommendations.**
- **Youth entities should be mandated within sports systems** (establishment of youth councils within sports committees, international umbrella organizations; NOCs, federations and confederations, i.e.)
- **The active participation of sport’s youth, including young athletes, should be guaranteed in the democratic structures and processes** (e.g. the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities) and other structures that can use sport and physical activity for their goals, also within non-EU countries.
- Innovation, the use of new media and technologies and **inclusion of many and for all can be secured through promoting and fostering active roles for youth and children with skills and/or empowering NEETs (youth outside education, employment and training) and investing in the future of (youth) sport leadership.**
- Education and leadership through sport should be included and transformed on a regular level within each of the sports and educational entities.

## Education, training, employment and volunteering

Background:

Sport is the biggest sector of volunteering in Europe, and its structures are based on voluntary activity. The economic contribution of sport volunteering is significant – sport volunteers generate billions of euros of value for member state economies by supporting the provision of grassroots sport 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 wellbeing, self-confidence, teamwork, and transmitting values. Sport volunteers also help others become more active and, in this way, help to boost social and community cohesion. Volunteering in a sport club is also a great way to acquire new skills that are transferable to the job market and may help one to find a job. By encouraging the culture of volunteering, it is also possible to increase participation in sport throughout society.



ENGSO believes that:

- The development, recognition and validation of the skills and competences 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 to the European skills agenda is needed, as well as for a study on the contribution of sport to the employability of young people.
- **Volunteering in sport should be promoted through** relevant EU Funding programmes such as Erasmus+ etc., also for non-EU countries.
- **Training programmes for volunteers** should be supported, e.g. through EU funding, to ensure that the skills and qualifications of volunteers match with the requirements.
- **Bureaucratic burdens of the not-for-profit organisations should be reduced** as much as possible not to impede volunteers in their work.
- The knowledge, skills and competences that a young individual can develop through practicing and volunteering in sport, shall be in 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.
- **Visa and insurance practices should be established for volunteers** coming from third countries to ensure that people are able to travel for volunteering in the EU.

### 3. Organisation and financing of sport

The functioning of grassroots sports is guaranteed by a unique combination of sources of funding and other resources. Sports organisations rely on the input of their volunteers, as well as public funding and funds generated by sports betting and other lottery activities. The solidarity mechanism within the European Sports model ensures the fact that revenues created by elite sports also benefit grassroots sports. A large proportion of sporting activities are not-for-profit and do not constitute an economic activity, thus enjoying VAT exemptions. While many of these benefits are still in place, grassroots sports is facing difficulties in adjusting to a more competitive environment, where commercial actors are winning ground. The sports movement is looking into different ways to modernise itself. Good governance projects have achieved reassuring results, when conducted by the sports movement itself. Sport and its structures vary from country to country, and thus there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. When observing the worrisome figures depicting e.g. physical activity, social inclusion and youth employment in Europe, grassroots sports defends its place as a solution that responds to several societal problems at once.

#### Creating a modern, safe and sustainable funding of sport

##### Background:

During the past years, sports organisations have demonstrated an ability to responsibly and cost-effectively implement EU sports policy through EU-funded projects. Within some of its core competences, the EU can make a great difference in securing sustainable financing of grassroots sports by e.g. allocating operating grants to sports organisations, and by securing tax exemptions to not-for-profit organisations and activities. ENGSO is a committed supporter of state-owned and licensed lotteries as our stakeholders, which contribute enormously to the resourcing of grassroots sports and act as accountable operators in the field of gambling. The possibilities that crowdfunding, as well as partnerships with the private sector basing on the principles of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), may offer to sport need to be explored.

##### ENGSO believes that:

- **VAT exemptions and other tax incentives** for sports organisations should be defended in order to support sport 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.
- **Mainstreaming of sport** to the EU funding programmes should be guaranteed in the implementation of e.g. education and youth chapters of Erasmus+, Structural Funds, Health and Europe for Citizens programmes, as well as operating grants funded from the EU budget.
- Where possible, EU funding should also incentivise the modernisation of sport, especially at grassroots level, to ensure its long-term sustainability.

## Safeguarding the European model of sport

### Background:

Article 165(1) TFEU states: “The Union shall contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity and its social and educational function”. The recent developments regarding the commercialisation of sport as well as the presence of larger numbers of private actors as organisers of sport activities and competitions, raise the question: how to guarantee the sustainable financing of grassroots sport? The sport governing bodies have in place the solidarity mechanism with the redistribution of money from the elite level to grassroots sport, which is crucial for the funding of grassroots sport. This solidarity mechanism is guaranteed by the European model of sport, which should be safeguarded.

### 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 possible unintended **consequences on sport** should be considered when developing policy and approving all relevant European legislation.
- **Sport organisations should always be consulted** when questions affecting sport are at issue.
- **European sport model** solidarity mechanisms, which ensures income generated at the elite level being reinvested in the development of grassroots sport, should be safeguarded.
- **Structured dialogue in the future** should include inviting the organised sport regularly into relevant meetings, and the constant consultation of organised sport.

## Ensure diversity in the good governance of sport

### Background:

In the recent years, there have been major positive developments in European sports organisations’ governance – partly for successful projects funded by the European Union such as S4GG (Sport 4 Good Governance) and SIGGS (Support the Implementation of Good Governance in Sport). However, the need to improve governance persists. Sports organisations are working with stakeholders, including national governments and athlete representatives, to ensure that sport adapts to the changing landscape, and that stakeholders’ voices are considered. Good governance is the basis for the autonomy of sport. Furthermore, it is also a way to strengthen and develop the organisation itself, e.g. through better inclusiveness, transparency, efficiency and social responsibility.

ENGSO believes that:

- The EU should support the current developments of the sport movement to improve good governance, by e.g. **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 sports 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, as suggested by the SIGGS project final report.
- It should be recognised that there is **no “one size fits for 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 in boards**, while still respecting the autonomy of sport.