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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Reinforcing the European Sport Model

{SWD(2026) 343 final}

1. PURPOSE AND VISION

Sport is a European strategic asset. European sport is recognised and admired around the world, attracting unmatched worldwide audiences and investment. That global interest in the top level of European sport is drawn directly from the history, tradition and the strength of grassroots sports. Across Member States, sport clubs serve as social hubs anchored in the heart of our communities and cities, villages and regions. It is a core part of European identity.

Whenever our European Sport Model is challenged, undermined or unduly influenced from the outside, it is our common responsibility to respond. This Communication proposes a vision to strengthen our European Sport Model to face the challenges of today's world.

WHY NOW

This Communication responds to calls from the European Parliament, the Council, Member States and sport stakeholders for a more coordinated European approach.

Setting a **strategic vision for sport in Europe**, it aims to achieve two overarching priorities: supporting a **stronger, sustainable and well-governed European sport ecosystem**, and **placing sport at the heart of the European way of life**.

Reinforcing the European Sport Model means supporting people in sport and organisations protecting the values and integrity of European sport, strengthening its economic and social contribution, and ensuring that it continues to thrive and play a role in Europe and the world.

WHY EUROPEAN SPORT MATTERS

Today, European sport is an example of global excellence, with its athletes, leagues, clubs and teams playing a leading role across many sports. It provides pathways for talent development, competition and achievement, inspires millions of citizens and strengthens Europe's presence on the international stage.

Generating around 3.4% of EU GDP and supporting around 6 million jobs, sport also has a significant economic weight. Every euro invested in sport is estimated to generate around €1.7 in gross value added across the wider economy[1]. Investment in sport infrastructure also supports territorial development, strengthens local communities and improves access to opportunities, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Sport is essential to Europe's health[2] and well-being. Regular physical activity can reduce the risk of major chronic diseases by around 30% and contributes to better mental health. Yet, almost 40% of Europeans still never engage in sport or other forms of exercise[3]. Increasing physical activity to the WHO-recommended levels could prevent 10.000 of premature deaths per year in the EU and save billions in health-care spending[4].

Sport also contributes to education, skills and children's development. In a time of technological transformation with increasing exposure to content online and falling educational performance, sport and physical activity represent alternatives to counter excessive screen time,

[1] EU Sport Satellite Account (2025)
[2] The Safe Hearts Plan, adopted in 2025, supports Member States and stakeholders in reducing the significant burden of cardiovascular diseases.
[3] Special Eurobarometer survey on Sport and Physical Activity (2026)
[4] OECD/WHO (2023), Step Up! Tackling the Burden of Insufficient Physical Activity in Europe

compulsive social media use and digital distraction, and are supporting educational achievement and basic skills. **It fosters inclusion and equal opportunities, tackling** wider societal challenges, including racism, discrimination, social exclusion and inequality.

Finally, sport has an important role to play in Europe's place in the world. In a time of geopolitical competition and tensions, disinformation and growing polarisation, sport can help to build bridges. This is particularly the case with Europe's closest partners, the enlargement countries and the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood. Through sport diplomacy, Europe can counter political instrumentalisation of sport and strengthen its role as a global advocate for international cooperation, democratic values, and the rules-based international order.

2. THE EUROPEAN SPORT MODEL

Since the adoption of the 2007 'White Paper on Sport'[5], EU institutions have gradually developed and consolidated the concept of the European Sport Model. The establishment of a specific Treaty basis for sport, taking into account the specific nature of sport in Union's primary law[6], supported this. In 2021, the Council identified the key features of a European Sport Model and in 2025 the European Parliament called on the Commission to present a long-term strategy on sport.

The case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has also contributed to shaping the European Sport Model. The Court has recognised the specific nature of sport and the autonomy of sport organisations, while consistently holding that sporting rules and practices must comply with EU law, in particular internal market and competition rules.

At the **core of the European Sport Model is organised sport and the sport governing bodies**. They exercise regulatory, organisational and disciplinary functions. These functions should be exercised responsibly, together with leagues, clubs, athletes' associations, and supporters' organisations, upholding the key principles of sporting merit, open competition and solidarity across levels and categories of competition.

Athletes are the cornerstone of the sport ecosystem. Their performances inspire participation, unite communities, and drive the cultural and social relevance of sport at all levels. Beyond competition, athletes are role models who embody values such as commitment, fairness, and resilience, shaping younger generations and society at large. Better recognition of professional athletes safeguards their well-being and rights while strengthening the integrity, sustainability, and long-term success of the entire sporting landscape. This concerns athletes' status as workers where an employment relationship exists under Union and national law[7], including their rights to fair working conditions and engaging in social dialogue. **Sport coaches** and **sport professionals** are also essential to the European Sport Model, supporting participation, athletes' development and the transmission of core sporting values. The experiences and perspectives of athletes and coaches are vital in shaping sport policies and governance.

[5] White Paper on Sport (COM(2007) 391 final)
[6] Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
[7] ILO Guidelines for the promotion of fundamental principles and rights at work and the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment for professional athletes | International Labour Organisation

The sport ecosystem is sustained by the efforts of **volunteers**[8] and **local actors**, including community-based organisations, schools and local and regional authorities whose contribution is essential to ensuring access to sport across Europe.

At the same time, **the way Europeans engage with sport is evolving**. Informal, self-organised and digitally enabled forms of recreational sport and physical activity are expanding alongside traditional club-based structures. Sport policies and funding frameworks should better recognise these forms of participation. While the pyramidal structure of sport[9] remains central to organised competitive sport, it does not necessarily apply when sport is practised as an active lifestyle or for the purposes of recreation or health.

The European Sport Model is **a living and evolving framework**, that must be responsive to new realities. Organised sport is part of **a wider European sport landscape** in which sport also serves social, economic and cultural purposes. It brings together local actors, civil society, private bodies, public authorities and educational institutions.

These two dimensions – organised sport and the wider European sport landscape - are closely connected. Together, they form the European Sport Model and reflect the specific nature of sport in Europe.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">European Sport Model
Key features and principles</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">▪ Specificity of sport[10]
▪ Values: fairness, integrity, openness, equality, good governance, respect for fundamental rights
▪ Sport for all: affordable, local, grassroots sport opportunities
▪ Education through sport and physical literacy: opportunities for all Europeans to acquire skills, confidence, and sustain motivation to remain active throughout life</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sport for performance and competition:</td><td>▪ Responsible autonomy of sport governing bodies
▪ Open competitions with promotion and relegation / sporting merit
▪ Pyramidal structure of competitive sport
▪ Solidarity
▪ Sport governing bodies, leagues, clubs, athletes, coaches and other sport professionals
▪ Supporters</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">▪ Volunteering
▪ Other actors (civil society, private bodies, public authorities and educational institutions)</td></tr>
</table>

[8] 2026 Eurobarometer shows that more than one in ten Europeans is engaged or plans to engage in voluntary work that support sporting activities in the following two months

[9] Interdependence between sport at local, regional, national and international levels, culminating in elite sport at the top of the pyramid. Each level reinforces the other.

[10] White Paper on Sport COM/2007/0391 final; Mapping and analysis of the specificity of sport (2016); Study on the European sport model (2022)

3. PRESSURES AND CHALLENGES

The growing pressure between commercial interests and the social and community-oriented dimension of sport affects decision-making, reshapes the sport landscape and risks undermining the stability of Europe's sport ecosystem. Despite its strengths, the European Sport Model faces pressures that challenge its balance, integrity and long-term sustainability.

3.1. **Governance-related challenges** remain in parts of the sport sector. While many sport organisations have strengthened transparency, accountability, integrity and stakeholder participation, challenges persist, including concentration of decision-making, lack of women in leadership positions, conflicts of interest and limited representation of athletes and other stakeholders. In some cases, commercially driven decisions, including proposals to stage domestic or European competition matches outside Europe, may weaken links between sport organisations, athletes, fans and local communities, while adding to pressures on athletes and competition calendars. The growing commercialisation of decisions on sporting events also risks prioritising financial interests over sporting and public interests, undermining the accessibility and affordability of live sport[11]. Challenges relating to safeguarding, anti-doping, working conditions, education and dual careers, as well as equal opportunities further underline the importance of good governance. Strengthening it together with transparency, accountability and stakeholder participation is important to maintaining trust in sport and supporting the autonomy and responsible self-regulation of sport organisations.

3.2. The **piracy of sport content continues to erode revenues** across the sector. Illegal streaming is estimated to affect millions of users and cause significant financial losses for rights holders[12], limiting capacity to reinvest in sport development.

3.3. **Unclear revenue distribution mechanisms:** there is a need to improve transparency and clarity on how financial resources are generated, allocated and redistributed among governing bodies, leagues, clubs, athletes and grassroots organisations. This would strengthen accountability and help in assessing whether funding is distributed fairly and efficiently. Greater revenue-sharing across the sport pyramid could support competitive balance and the long-term development of sport.

3.4. The sustainability and resilience of sport structures is increasingly affected by **declining rates of volunteering within sport clubs and insufficient recognition of volunteers' contributions**, despite their role as the backbone of community-based sport. While sport remains one of the largest areas of volunteering in Europe, surveys indicate a gradual decline in engagement[13].

3.5. **Integrity of competitions**: doping, the manipulation of sport competitions and corruption remain threats at all levels of sport. Professional football clubs and agents will come within the scope of the EU anti-money-laundering obligations under Regulation (EU) 2024/1624. At the same time, sport should be **safe and inclusive**.

[11] For instance, by using not fully fair and transparent dynamic ticket pricing practices.

[12] Ampere Analysis, Pricing Piracy: The Value of Action, commissioned by Synamedia, 2021, estimating up to 28 billion € in potential additional annual revenue globally from reducing sports piracy.

[13] Seippel, Ø., Breuer, C., Elmose-Østerlund, K., Feiler, S., Perényi, S., Piątkowska, M. & Scheerder, J. (2023), "In Troubled Water? European Sports Clubs: Their Problems, Capacities and Opportunities."

Abuse, harassment, violence including gender-based, hate speech and discrimination also exist in sport environments, and victims do not always have access to effective reporting and support.

3.6. **Structural changes in the European sport ecosystem:** new ownership models, including multi-club ownership and state-linked investment, the emergence of initiatives seeking to establish closed competitions with participation detached from sporting merit, and opaque financial flows can pose risks to financial stability, competitive balance and trust in sport governance[14]. These developments have drawn attention to the need to protect the European Sport Model, a concern echoed in the reactions of fans, leagues, clubs and players alike.

3.7. **Participation patterns vary considerably.** While overall physical activity levels are already insufficient across the EU, certain groups face additional barriers. Participation declines sharply during adolescence, particularly among girls and young women, and decreases progressively with age among adults. Barriers linked to socio-economic status, disability, geographic location or time constraints continue to limit access to sport and physical activity.

3.8. Access to **sport infrastructure and facilities remains uneven** across regions and population groups, often concentrated in larger urban and more developed areas. Many facilities face challenges related to availability, affordability, accessibility, modernisation and compliance with quality and safety standards. Public authorities and organisers should build on good practices from recent major sport events, to avoid leaving behind a problematic infrastructure legacy. Addressing these legacy challenges requires stronger long-term planning and better governance from the outset. Investments in sport infrastructure and in the promotion of physical activity need to be increased to promote healthy lifestyles among Europeans.

3.9. **Employment in sport has distinctive characteristics**, including relatively short careers, diverse contractual arrangements and considerable physical and psychological demands. Professional athletes, coaches and other sport professionals would benefit from better access to social protection and support for professional transitions and dual careers. Particular attention is needed for young athletes and professionals in less commercially developed sports.

3.10. The European Sport Model operates in an **increasingly competitive global environment**. The race to host sport competitions and events is intensifying, with growing financial and geopolitical rivalry. Without stronger coordination and strategic investment, Europe risks losing ground in attracting and delivering major events.

4. REINFORCING THE EUROPEAN SPORT MODEL

This strategy identifies three key and interrelated thematic areas for action: **governance, solidarity and sustainability,** and **society.** Together, they provide a coherent framework to strengthen the integrity, resilience and contribution of sport to Europe's society.

[14] A clear example was the aborted project for a breakaway closed football league in April 2021 as well as the emergence of closed or semi-closed competition formats in other sports.

EU funding and policy instruments play a crucial role in advancing this agenda. In particular, the Erasmus+ programme[15] is central to strengthening the sport ecosystem in Europe, by encouraging mobility and transnational cooperation, driving innovation and capacity-building across all levels of sport. It also plays a key role in promoting sport as a vehicle for inclusion, participation, education, active citizenship and community-building, while encouraging the exchange of good practices and the development of grassroots initiatives. These efforts are complemented by other EU instruments. These include EU4Health[16], Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF)[17] and cohesion policy funds[18] which further support health-enhancing physical activity, social cohesion, innovation, and the development of sustainable and accessible sport infrastructure.

EU instruments will continue to support national efforts where European cooperation brings clear added value. Sport-related investments will continue to be supported under the forthcoming Erasmus+ programme and may be complemented by targeted contributions from other instruments.

Reinforcing these areas of action requires collective and coordinated action from all stakeholders. **Member States are invited to continue to develop and implement sport policies and sustainable funding schemes** at national, regional and local levels that recognise and support sport. Such policies should ensure a balanced approach between the development of competitive sport and the promotion of sport and physical activity in their broader societal role, as drivers of participation, recreation, health, education, social inclusion, wellbeing, healthy lifestyles for all and territorial development.

4.1. Sport governance

Effective, inclusive, transparent and accountable governance is a cornerstone of a credible and sustainable European Sport Model. Sport governing bodies are expected to operate in line with the principle of '**responsible autonomy'**, grounded in democratic decision-making, clear accountability and ethical leadership. This implies participatory governance, involving all partners, notably leagues, clubs and athletes' and supporters' associations.

Strong integrity frameworks are essential to address risks and safeguard trust in sport. The Commission will continue to support cooperation between Member States, sport organisations, and other actors in this respect. While governance challenges are often global, European sport organisations have at times helped promote good practices and standards with international reach.

Sport organisations need to strengthen administrative capacity, professionalism and skills, including in areas such as integrity, digitalisation and sustainability. Erasmus+ sport actions will continue to support this.

Within its competences, the EU will continue to promote high standards of governance by encouraging cooperation, facilitating the exchange of good practices and supporting capacity-building across the sport ecosystem. It will also promote a model of responsible autonomy,

[15] Erasmus+ EU programme for education, training, youth and sport
[16] EU4Health programme 2021-2027 – a vision for a healthier European Union
[17] Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (2021-2027)
[18] Cohesion Fund; European Regional Development Fund; European Social Fund Plus.

under which the regulatory independence of sport organisations is exercised in line with transparency, fundamental rights and EU law.

In this context, the Commission will take the following actions:

1. Establish an independent "**EU Sportwatch"**, to promote transparent, financially sound, accountable and democratic governance structures within sport federations and other sport governing bodies. The main deliverables of the EU Sportwatch will be to publish a regular 'Report on the State of Sport in Europe' and an 'EU Sport Scoreboard', presenting comparative analyses and recommendations, and monitoring governance practices (Q3 2027).
2. Continue to promote **structured dialogue** in sport between the European Commission and sport stakeholders, to jointly cooperate in strengthening the European Sport Model principles (Q2 2027). In addition, further develop **social dialogue** in sport, including through financial support, to build and strengthen the representativeness and capacity of sport social partners, beyond professional football (Q3 2027).
3. Provide a **steer on the application of EU law to sport**, through an annex to this Communication, in light of the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union, that clarifies how to reconcile the specific nature of sport with compliance with internal market and competition rules.

4.2. Sustainability and Solidarity

Solidarity is a defining feature of the European Sport Model and key for its long-term sustainability. Effective financial redistribution mechanisms are essential to maintain competitive balance, support talent development and ensure broad access to sport and physical activity. Ensuring that revenues generated at the top level of sport are transparently reinvested in grassroots sport, youth development and local infrastructure is essential.

Safeguarding the economic sustainability of sport requires protecting its legitimate revenue streams. In particular, the online piracy of live sport events significantly affects the financial capacity of sport organisations to reinvest across the sport ecosystem. At the same time, rights holders and broadcasters should ensure affordable access to sport events for all fans and the availability and attractiveness of the legal commercial offer.

Sustainability must also be understood in environmental and social terms. Sport infrastructure and events need to adapt to climate and energy challenges[19], improve resource efficiency, support destination management[20] and ensure accessibility for all, including persons with disabilities. This calls for greener, low-carbon, sustainable and climate-resilient facilities, with a focus on reusing and renovating existing venues. Sport events should minimise carbon emissions and waste, while promoting environmental education across sport. Volunteers must also be better supported, recognised and retained.

In this context, the Commission will take the following actions:

[19] Including by taking into account the future temperature reference scenario set out in the EU Framework for Climate Resilience

[20] In line with the EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy and Council Conclusions on sport tourism as a contributor to sustainable development (9012/2026)

4. **Fight against online piracy of live sport events[21]:** within the framework of a future initiative on copyright[22], and building on the assessment of Recommendation (EU) 2023/1018 improve the enforcement remedies against online piracy of live and time-sensitive content to help safeguarding the sustainability of the sport and creative sectors. This will contribute to protect the value of live sports events and promote legal access to content (Q2 2027).
5. **Strengthen EU consumer protection rules** through the Digital Fairness Act[23], including regarding **unfair price marketing** practices, having impact also in the field of sport. These include lack of transparency in offering event tickets for which consumers are required to wait in virtual queue whilst the ticket prices are increasing (Q4 2026).
6. Propose a **Council Recommendation on volunteering in sport**, to support Member States in strengthening the recognition, validation and development of sport volunteering, including through skills frameworks and lifelong learning pathways and reducing the administrative burden on volunteer-run clubs (Q4 2028).
7. Launch a **study on financial distribution mechanisms in sport**, to map revenue flows between elite and grassroots levels and among sports, and to assess their effectiveness in ensuring competitive balance, sustainability, talent development and participation. (Q1 2027).

4.3. Sport and society

The European Sport Model recognises the importance of promoting inclusive, accessible and sustainable **'sport for all'**. It identifies the essential role of sport and physical activity in promoting physical and mental well-being, education, youth development, active ageing, social inclusion and the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Sport is an investment in Europe's people: in their health, skills, confidence and social connections.

Ensuring safe, inclusive and accessible environments for all participants is fundamental to preserving the integrity and social value of sport. At the same time, sport also contributes to economic and territorial development. Sport-related activities and events support local economies, including small and medium-sized enterprises, promote innovation and tourism, and strengthen social ties in both urban and rural areas. Broadening participation requires stronger support for grassroots sport, volunteering and non-organised physical activity, as well as the promotion of physical literacy throughout life and acting on the barriers Europeans themselves report: lack of time, motivation and, for lower income groups, cost.

In this context, the Commission will take the following actions:

8. Propose a **revision of the Council Recommendation on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity** (Q1 2027) supporting the establishment of **Sport and Physical Activity Data Hubs** in Member States, building on the national HEPA points, responsible for collecting and coordinating data on sport and physical activity at national level, based on indicators and monitoring frameworks agreed at European level. These Hubs would

[21] Recommendation on combating online piracy of sports and other live events
[22] Commission seeks views on the review of EU copyright rules
[23] Digital Fairness Act

strengthen Member States' capacity[24] to promote and monitor physical activity policies across health, education and community settings (Q4 2027).

9. Establish a **Coalition for Strategic Investments in Sport**, an opportunity for collaboration to advance towards a harmonised approach in measuring the economic and social value of sport across the EU. The Coalition will support Member States and the Commission in defining evidence-based sport investment strategies to support territorial development, mapping sport infrastructure, and exploring innovative financial mechanisms to boost private and public investments in sport. Its work will help identify investment priorities at the territorial level, thus contributing to a more effective use of available EU and national funding opportunities, including by facilitating awareness of the possibilities offered by the EU State aid framework for supporting investment in sport infrastructure and activities (Q4 2027).

Sport is a powerful vehicle for conveying EU values and unifying messages to millions of people across Europe and beyond[25], shown by the initiatives and events organised to mark the European Week of Sport or Europe Day. Such initiatives should be further encouraged and promoted, also building on successful Team Europe approaches to host joint events.

In this context, the Commission will take the following actions:

10. Strengthen the links between sport and education through the implementation of the **Education Package**[26]. In particular, recognise the importance and value of physical activity and sport in school education and ensure young people have access to healthy offline alternatives (Q4 2026). Besides, promote sport-related joint higher education programmes, including through European Universities alliances, and sport activities and facilities in higher education settings, to foster excellence in and increase the attractiveness of sport-related studies, while supporting the development of a highly skilled workforce for the European sport ecosystem (Q2 2028).
11. Activate Europe through sport by **scaling-up the European Week of Sport** to promote more extensively active lifestyles across Europe and beyond[27], by improving long-term planning, introducing administrative simplification, mobilising sport initiatives organised at grassroots level and better involving local actors such as schools, municipalities and sport associations (Q3 2027). Also, **celebrate the EU and its values through sport events**, by supporting initiatives that raise awareness about the EU through sport during Europe Day or at specific events identified at national or European level (Q2 2027).
12. Set up a **High-Level Group on safeguarding people in sport**, to promote a coordinated approach to preventing abuse, harassment, violence, racism, hate speech and discrimination and to ensure safe sport environments across Europe, with a view to proposing common safeguarding guidelines for sport organisations[28] (Q3 2027).

[24] In line with the Council's Lipica Conclusions - Measuring the Impact of Sport: From Economic to Social Perspectives (2026)

[25] Including for enlargement countries and the neighbourhood, for which sport can serve to bring people closer to the European countries in support of their European path or their ambitions for closer cooperation

[26] See in particular: Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Stronger education foundations for all in the age of AI

[27] This also extends to enlargement and Neighbourhood countries.

[28] In line with the Union of Equality Strategies' objectives, Commission Recommendation on integrated child protection systems and relevant EU acquis such as the Child Sexual Abuse Directive.

The consistent implementation of the actions set out in this Communication will be ensured through regular **interdepartmental coordination,** led by the Commission's services in charge of sport.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This Communication reaffirms the Commission's commitment to protecting, strengthening and future-proofing the European Sport Model.

At a time of profound societal change, strengthening the European Sport Model means preserving what makes European sport unique, while ensuring that it continues to respond to the needs and aspirations of future generations. Sport is much more than a game, competition or economic activity: it is an essential part of our European way of life.

The ambition is to recognise sport as a strategic asset for Europe and harnessing its full potential across our social, economic, educational and diplomatic agendas. For that, it is essential that European sport remains open, fair, inclusive, rooted in its values and aligned with EU law, while being equipped to innovate, to generate growth, adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Realising this ambition requires a collective effort. The Commission therefore calls on Member States, regional and local authorities, the sport movement, educational institutions, social partners and civil society to promote and sustain sport and physical activity for all in Europe, and to integrate sport more systematically into a wider stream of public policies.

Reinforcing the European Sport Model means securing the future of European sport and strengthening its contribution to a more cohesive, resilient and competitive Europe.