



ENGSO Position on the European Sport Model

While some distinctive characteristics of the way that sport is organised are widely recognised, there is no single, authoritative definition of the European Sport Model. The discussions around the model have been very active lately. ENGSO welcomes the debate and hopes that it will further enhance the understanding of sport's value for society and help find new solutions to current and future challenges. This document highlights ENGSO's understanding of the European Sport Model and proposes steps forward.

A. Definition of the European Sport Model

Basing on ENGSO's and its members' sound experience and understanding, we recognise the following principles and characteristics as fundamental for the European Sport Model:

- The **pyramidal structure**, sports clubs being its solid basis, ensures the coherence of rules and schedules.
- The **solidarity mechanism** redistributes the revenues created by financially profitable top sport.
- **Volunteers** ensure the day-to-day running of sport clubs as well as competitions
- Sport that is **based on values**, such as inclusion, education, democracy, and fair play, supports **communities and societies** at large.
- **Autonomous** clubs and federations select their own leaders in democratic procedures, without interference from governments.
- **Openness of competition** ensures that teams or athletes compete at a certain level based on their merit.

B. Sport clubs – the bedrock of the European Sport Model

Grassroots sport clubs are where the journey starts. Young athletes get their first taste of success and disappointment during practice and local tournaments, paving the way for perhaps one day competing at the highest level. For those that participate in sport for fun or health reasons, the impact of sport can also be significant. **Sport clubs are venues for friendships, inclusion, democracy, education and lifelong learning.** Volunteers are often the greatest asset of sport clubs. **Volunteers and clubs create value for the whole society.** ENGSO believe the ESM solidarity mechanism is an important tool to ensure that there is a wide array of sports being offered – also sports with a lesser commercial potential. It is also a tool to ensure that marginalized groups in society, such as disabled persons and refugees, can take part in sports at grass roots level.

The current **solidarity practices** enable federations to provide quality training for coaches and referees, also benefiting the grassroots level of sport. The development work done by federations at the national, European and global levels – on e.g., sustainability, equality, inclusion, child protection, integrity and good governance – also helps sport clubs develop. While direct subventions to the grassroots level are rare, some good practices do exist. In

Denmark, football and handball federations have decided that a 5% share of the media rights revenue shall be distributed to grassroots sport. In the UK, sport federations sign up to a voluntary code, reinvesting 30% of TV rights revenues into grassroots sports.

C. Recommendations for keeping the European Sport Model relevant in a changing world

While we see the European Sport Model, as defined above, as the best way for sport clubs and federations to organise, some challenges call for solutions. Our proposals address three core issues and help protect and enhance the European Sport Model.

1. Look outside of the pyramid

The European Sport Model is a simplified description of how sport clubs, national federations and international federations are organised. A vast world of stakeholders, some of them commercially oriented, exists outside of the model. The relationships between these actors in **the wider sport sector** and organised sport can be roughly classified as follows:

- **Enablers** create and fund the environment and tools that are vital to sport, such as gear manufacturers, sponsors and municipalities.
- **Partners** in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors bring added value and help us achieve our common goals.
- Profit-seeking leisure activity providers are **competitors** to sport clubs, providing challenge but sometimes also boosting development.
- **Disruptors** such as private, closed commercial leagues feed on the value created by clubs and federations but, in the worst cases, prohibit the best athletes from participating in open competitions such as World Championships. Disruptors pose actual threats to the very existence of the European Sport Model.

Recommendations:

- We encourage clubs, federations and other actors within organised sport to recognise **the value of enablers, partners and competitors**, and, when possible, **create strategies that move sport forward with the support of or inspiration from these stakeholders**.
- We call on all stakeholders to **acknowledge the negative impact of disruptors** to the European Sport Model, and **work together to limit the damage** through dialogue, and, if necessary, through other, more strict measures.

2. Support and solidarity for sport clubs

The pandemic caused by covid-19 hit clubs and federations hard, as the most basic actions such as sport practices and competitions have been severely restricted for long periods. Sport plays an important role in the recovery from the crisis, healing bodies and minds, and bringing joy and people back together. Unfortunately, many participants, coaches and

volunteers seem to have quit sport for good. Right now, sport clubs are more needed than ever, but also they need support, including strengthened funding.

Recommendations:

- We call on public authorities at all levels to ensure that **sport clubs can benefit from funding schemes, make funding accessible and substantial, lift any unnecessary fiscal or administrative burdens, and create partnerships with sport** to recover from the pandemic and build resilience.
- We encourage all sports rights owners to create **fair, concrete and credible solidarity schemes that redistribute funds directly to sport clubs** to help them draw more participants, volunteers and staff, and develop better strategies and activities.

3. Improved dialogue between sport and decision-makers

While organised sport and other European stakeholders in the wider sport sector are being regularly invited to meetings, hearings and seminars by decision-makers, grassroots sport clubs have only made occasional single appearances at such platforms. In order to have EU sports policy based on evidence and a real, credible dialogue between organised sport and decision-makers, sport clubs need to be regularly and widely consulted through a structured process that from the grassroots, through national and European sport platform will reach the EU institutions. These consultations would help assess the viability and needs of voluntary-based sport clubs, and thus help protect the European Sport Model and the common values of sport and the European Union and create more effective strategies and policies for sport movement.

Recommendations:

- We are calling for EU decision-makers to establish the **EU Sport Dialogue** by setting up a fixed dialogue panel session every year during the European Sport Forum to discuss needs and objectives of the European sport movement, following a similar structure as the EU Youth Dialogue.
- In this process of dialogue, the **national organisations representing voluntary-based sport - National Sports Confederations or Olympic Committees together with national sport government authority, would ideally serve as National Working Groups** by working all year long to collect and analyze data from federations and sport clubs and being able to better shape the policy at EU level with the support of a specific funds similar to the former KA3 of Erasmus+ program.