



The European Sports NGO

# ENGSO Position on the **European Sport Model**



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*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

Based 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. Nevertheless, varying structures exist across European countries, which makes the pyramid model a point of reference rather than a single unifying organisational structure.
- The **solidarity mechanism** redistributes the revenues created by financially profitable top sports.
- **Volunteers** ensure the day-to-day running of sports 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 and other voluntary sports organisations operating on a not-for-profit basis and open membership policy 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 sports for fun or health reasons, the impact of sports can also be significant. Sport other than being a major promoter of health benefits is a bridging link between the values such as democracy, solidarity, fairness, integrity, and inclusion. Moreover, as acknowledged by the European Court of Justice, sport organisations are in the best position to run their own affairs effectively without undue external influence. Thus, the autonomy of sport is the essential principle of the European Sport Model, although not absolute – conditional on the adherence to good governance.

Volunteers, including coaches and trainers, are often the greatest asset of sports clubs. **Volunteers and clubs create value for the whole society** by strengthening social cohesion and providing skills for future employment. ENGSO believes the ESM solidarity mechanism is an important tool to ensure that a wide array of sports are being offered – also sports with a lesser commercial potential. It is also a tool to ensure that marginalised groups in society, such as disabled persons and refugees, can take part in sports at the grassroots level.

The current **solidarity practices** enable federations to provide quality training for coaches and referees, also benefiting the grassroots level of the sport. The development work done by federations at the national, European, and global levels – e.g. sustainability, equality, inclusion, child protection, integrity, and good governance – also helps sports clubs develop. A purposeful solidarity practice can differ from sport to sport and country to country, acknowledging that the created solidarity practice has to fit the sport's specificities. This gives federations across Europe many examples to consult.

## 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 sports 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 sports 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 sports clubs, providing challenges 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 the 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 essential actions such as sports 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, sports 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 sports clubs can benefit from funding schemes, make funding accessible and substantial, lift any unnecessary fiscal or administrative burdens, secure funds earmarked for sport by considering sport organisations a vital part of the application and consortium and create partnerships with sports to recover from the pandemic and build resilience.
- We call on EU institutions to establish clear rules and mechanisms that secure at least the 70% of funds earmarked for sport at grassroots level through, for instance, limiting the number of actors outside the sport movement per project proposal. Moreover, we propose the establishment of a specific operating grant for sport networks at EU level pursuing general European interests by building the capacity of the sport movement at the grassroots level.
- We invite all sports rights owners to create their own fair, concrete, and credible solidarity schemes that allow the redistribution of funds to the sport clubs on the grassroots level to help them attract and retain more participants, volunteers, and staff, and develop better strategies and activities.
- We call on sports governing bodies alongside monetary assistance, to distribute in-kind and educational support to grassroots sports organisations in order to create sustainable solidarity mechanisms.



### 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 sports 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 sports platforms 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.

#### Recommendation:

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