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

**on the implementation and relevance of the European Union Work Plan for Sport 2021-  
2024 and on the Recommendation on promoting health-enhancing physical activities  
across sectors**

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Since the Council adopted the 4<sup>th</sup> European Union Work Plan for Sport (2021-2024)<sup>1</sup>, sport has continued to live up to its role as part of Europe's culture, history and traditions. Its unique and unifying power in our societies comes with a great responsibility as an enabler of change through societal progress, economic activity and healthier, more cohesive communities.

The current EU Work Plan focuses on integrity and values in sport, the socio-economic and environmental aspects of sport and the promotion of participation in sport, as well as health-enhancing physical activity.

The context in which this plan was implemented was complex and challenging. The sporting world had to grapple with the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which blended in with Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and the ensuing period of inflation, high energy prices and geopolitical tensions influencing sports competitions. Management of challenges in relation to these developments comes on top of work on underlying priorities, such as promoting health, equality and safety. Legal challenges before the European courts have increased the visibility and salience of the European dimension of sport. In particular, the debate on the European Sport Model has intensified, capturing the public imagination.

Throughout this period, the EU Work Plan for Sport has been an anchor to ensure focus on the core sports policy priorities, while addressing the recovery and resilience needs of the sports sector.

The EU Work Plan is the basis for dialogue and cooperation between the Member States, the Council and the Commission. As set out in the EU Work Plan, the Council invites the Commission to submit a report on its implementation and relevance. This forms part of the basis for the preparation of the next EU Work Plan, to be adopted during the first half of 2024.

This report is informed by a wide consultation. An online public consultation survey allowed Member States and stakeholders to give written feedback. A total of 72 replies came from Member States, international and European sports institutions, National Olympic Committees, National Anti-Doping Organisations and other relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, the Commission hosted a meeting to receive additional qualitative feedback from the respondents.

This report is based on an assessment of progress made in the EU Work Plan's key policy areas. It reviews the implementation of planned activities, looks at the effectiveness of the tools and working methods. It includes recommendations for future actions and cooperation in the field of sport. This report also evaluates the implementation of the Recommendation on health-enhancing physical activity across sectors<sup>2</sup>.

## **B. EVALUATION/REPORTING**

### **1. Working methods**

The EU Work Plan for Sport was implemented through several established working formats and reporting mechanisms, which have been refined and elaborated in the last three years.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 419, 04.12.2020, p.1–11.

<sup>2</sup> OJ C 354, 04.12.2013, p.1-5.

These included Council Conclusions, debates, expert groups, peer-learning activities, conferences and seminars, meetings of the EU Directors-General for sport and studies.

Two **expert groups** were set up on **green sport** and on the **recovery and the resilience** of the **sports sector during and after the COVID-19 pandemic**. These groups, chaired by the Commission, with active participation by Member States' authorities, as well as observers and experts from the sports movement. They delivered reports and recommendations and provided a platform for exchanging expertise and best practice.

**Peer-learning activities** for Member States to exchange information and experiences on specific topics, significantly developed over the period of the EU Work Plan. **High-level meetings** and conferences such as informal meetings of the EU Directors-General for sport, along with the policy debates in the Council played a key role in advancing policies on common challenges.

The Commission carried out **studies** on topical issues and continued to develop **initiatives and campaigns**, such as the EU Sport Forum, the European Week of Sport, the HealthyLifestyle4All campaign and the SHARE initiative. These studies and campaigns aimed to help Member States and other stakeholders develop and pursue sport policies and activities.

**Sports federations, associations and other sports stakeholders** have a key role in implementing sport policy and their views form a crucial part of policy discussions. In this spirit, the sports movement took an active part in the annual EU Sport Forum and other conferences. It also followed the expert groups with a keen interest.

The Commission also cooperated with **international governmental and non-governmental organisations**, such as the Council of Europe (CoE), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

These working methods have helped strengthen the cooperation between Member States, the Council, the Commission and sports stakeholders. They have improved EU coordination and enabled the exchange of valuable expertise and experience, in advancing the EU Work Plan. At the same time, some adjustments in how actions are designed may be needed to ensure more regular communication of results and ensure outputs that are easy to replicate.

## **2. Actions and outputs**

### **2.1. Expert groups**

The report on **green sport** from the expert group<sup>3</sup> examined how the European sporting system could best promote environmental sustainability and set out recommendations addressed primarily to the public authorities and national sports organisations. These included an invitation for sport and sustainability champions to promote green sport, the establishment of knowledge-sharing bodies, and for funding at national and European level to support the transition to greener sport. The report showed that sport depends highly on other sectors, with

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<sup>3</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0e76da18-9e26-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1>

its primary impact on the climate centred around the travel of fans and participants to competitions.

The expert group report on **recovery and resilience**<sup>4</sup> outlined the significant impacts of COVID-19 felt across the sports sector. The report also showed the impact of subsequent crises, particularly related to Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and rising energy costs. Aside from the direct crisis impact and response, the report looked at how this interlinked with wider issues such as sustainability and governance. The report thereby emphasised the importance for sports organisations to adopt risk strategies and contingency planning.

## 2.2. Presidency events and peer-learning activities

Member States holding the EU presidency organised conferences, seminars and meetings of the EU Directors-General for sport. These events delivered a wealth of expertise and policy orientations in areas such as sports diplomacy, innovation, sustainability, integrity and equality.

In addition, **peer-learning activities** have proven to be an increasingly popular method for Member States to organise and share knowledge in more specific fields in an in-depth manner.

A full list of **presidency events** and other activities can be found in Annex I. While the period of the EU Work Plan is still ongoing, nearly all activities and events set out in this Annex have been carried out successfully. This collective achievement reflects the strong commitment of the Member States, the presidencies, the Council, the Commission and all other stakeholders to contribute and collaborate under the EU Work Plan.

## 2.3. Further initiatives in support of the EU Work Plan

To increase the impact of the priority areas and achieve the guiding objectives of the EU Work Plan, the Commission carried out various relevant activities to complement the actions and purposes.

One of the plan's guiding objectives is to intensify dialogue and cooperation. The **EU Sport Forum** is the main public platform for policy dialogue among sports stakeholders on key challenges and areas in which cooperation is ongoing as part of the EU Work Plan. Taking place annually, it attracts up to 400 participants each year from across Europe, drawn from sports federations, clubs, national and regional authorities, academics, athletes and NGOs.

Furthermore, in 2020, the Commission launched the **High-Level Group on Gender Equality in Sport** with 15 experts from different backgrounds beginning their work in 2021. The report on gender equality in sport produced by this group<sup>5</sup> included an action plan with recommendations addressed to the Commission, Member States, national and international sports bodies and grassroots organisations across various thematic areas, such as sports participation, equal treatment, leadership and measures to ensure safe sport.

Contributing to the priority area of increasing participation in sport and health-enhancing physical activity, the **HealthyLifestyle4All** campaign, which ran from 2021 to 2023, promoted healthy lifestyles across all generations and social groups, by linking sport and

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<sup>4</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a482583b-b3a7-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1>

<sup>5</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/684ab3af-9f57-11ec-83e1-01aa75ed71a1>

active lifestyles with health, food and other policies. This initiative invited contributions and in response received 102 pledges from sports stakeholders. These included the Commission itself, Member States, local authorities, sports federations, grassroots sports and civil society organisations. A mapping on healthy lifestyles provides an overview of results and offers a funding guide for projects<sup>6</sup>.

**The European Week of Sport**, another tool to mobilise efforts to foster participation in sport, has gone from strength to strength and allows sports organisations, communities and others from across the EU and its neighbourhood to promote participation in physical activity and sport among the general public. The week is the central part of the Commission's yearly #BeActive campaign that promotes the EU Work Plan and sport widely throughout the EU. The activities have continued despite the COVID-19 pandemic with its #BeActive@Home component. The 2022 edition was a bumper year for events with more than 13 million participants in 40 countries and regions. In 2023, there were 36 000 events involving nearly 11 million people. Since 2022, as part of the campaign, the Commission has handed out the **#BeActive Awards**, in four categories, namely education, work, local hero and across generations.

**Erasmus+ Sport Actions** promote participation in sport, physical activity and voluntary activities. Through their financial support, these actions provide a substantial basis for furthering European cooperation. They are designed to tackle both societal and sports-related challenges and their priorities<sup>7</sup> are well aligned with those of the EU Work Plan. The budget has doubled compared to the previous programming period, now amounting to EUR 470 million for the period 2021-2027. The opportunities to engage in partnerships are increasingly popular and the introduction of small-scale partnerships enabled more grassroots organisations to engage in cooperation. For example, in 2023 the Commission received a record-breaking 1 500 proposals, an increase of 17% compared to 2022. In 2023, for the first time, learning mobility projects for sports coaches were made possible.

The Commission was also involved in other areas promoting the mainstreaming of sport and physical activity. On 30 May 2023, it held a **Sport and Innovation Summit** to bring together researchers, companies and policymakers to discuss opportunities and create new partnerships on athlete performance, sustainability and digitalisation. The **#BeInclusive EU Sport Awards** recognise organisations using sport to increase social inclusion. Since 2022, the categories have recognised projects that show how barriers can be broken, promote gender equality and showcase the value of sport to promote EU values and peace, such as integrating refugees from Ukraine.

As part of the EU Work Plan, the Commission contributed to evidence-based policies by gathering data through studies and surveys, including the 2021 study on the **fight against anabolic steroids and human growth hormones in sport within the EU**<sup>8</sup> and the 2022 study on the **European Sport Model**<sup>9</sup>. In 2023, a study on **athletes' rights in and around major sports events** was launched with a final report planned in 2024. Moreover, the **Eurobarometer Survey on Sport and Physical Activity 2022**<sup>10</sup> provided quantitative data

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<sup>6</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3c4366d4-89b5-11ee-99ba-01aa75ed71a1>

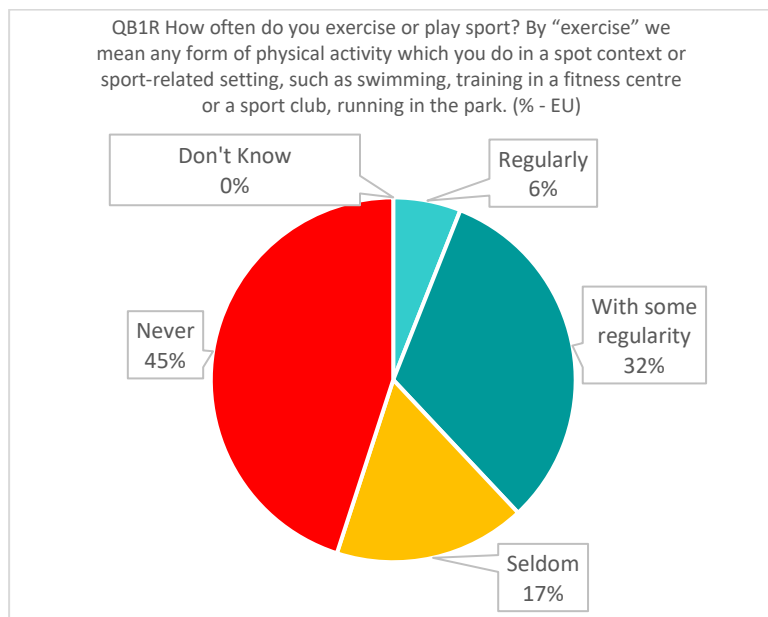
<sup>7</sup> Sports-specific priorities include: i) encouraging healthy lifestyles for all; ii) promoting integrity and values in sport; iii) promoting education in and throughout sport; iv) combating violence and tackling racism, discrimination and intolerance in sport; and v) tackling violent radicalisation.

<sup>8</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/76890558-f016-11eb-a71c-01aa75ed71a1>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d10b4b5b-e159-11ec-a534-01aa75ed71a1>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2668>.

on the prevalence of sport and physical activity in the EU and on several related issues, such as volunteering in sport, sustainability and equality. The frequency that Europeans engage in sport is also used as a key indicator for sport policy.



## 2.4. Cooperation with international bodies

The EU and the **CoE** share common aspirations for sport, specifically for it to be a social good, and a vehicle for human rights and European values. This is the basis for joint EU-CoE projects focused on combating hate speech in sport, child protection and safeguarding, and gender equality.

The Commission cooperates with **WADA** on the fight against doping in sport. The Council Working Party on Sport has continued to prepare the EU's mandate, in accordance with the Resolution of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, on the representation of the Member States in the Foundation Board of WADA and the coordination of Member States' positions prior to WADA meetings. The Council Resolution was updated in 2023, to reflect evolving practices and legal developments<sup>11</sup>.

The Commission and **UNODC** are cooperating on addressing anti-corruption, anti-money-laundering, and asset recovery in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, and at international level to support the review mechanism of the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

The Commission also upholds good relations with the **WHO** and **UNESCO** to achieve the goals of the EU Work Plan. The Commission has also signed formal **Arrangements for Cooperation** with the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA)<sup>12</sup> and the European Olympic Committee (EOC)<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> OJ C 185, 26.5.2023, p. 29–34.

<sup>12</sup> C(2022) 3721 final.

<sup>13</sup> C(2022) 257 final.

## 2.5 Cooperation on health-enhancing physical activity across sectors

The Council Recommendation on promoting health-enhancing physical activity across sectors<sup>14</sup> encourages Member States to develop national strategies and action plans to promote physical activity while cooperating with each other and the Commission. The Recommendation calls for the WHO to be supported in collecting data and gathering country-specific overviews. Progress is monitored based on a framework of 23 indicators.

Overall, the structured cooperation between the WHO and the Commission can be assessed as positive. The implementation results across the 23 indicators attained by Member States increased from 64.7% in 2015 to 74.5% in 2018 and again to 75.7% in 2021. Only two indicators are lagging – indicator 7 (sports clubs for health programme) and indicator 18 (European guidelines for improving infrastructure for leisure-time physical activity).

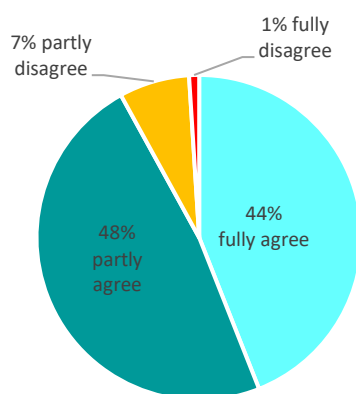
Most Member States and stakeholders consider the Recommendation and its indicators as well as outputs and data as still relevant (details in Annex II).

## 3. Feedback on the implementation of the EU Work Plan for Sport

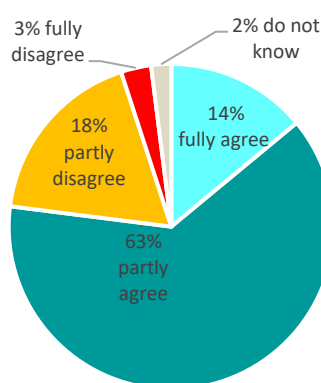
Member States' and stakeholders' feedback on the implementation of the EU Work Plan were collected through an open online survey and discussions at a stakeholders' meeting for respondents.

Analysis showed high levels of approval for the priorities, the exchange of knowledge and experience, and the working methods. A majority found the expert groups, studies and events very appropriate. The peer-learning activities were also evaluated positively.

In your view, has the implementation of the EU Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024 focused on the right priorities (integrity and values, recovery and crisis, participation in sport)?



In your view, has the implementation of the EU Work Plan for Sport 2021-2024 introduced the appropriate working formats (Annex I of the Work Plan)?



At the same time respondents suggested ways to improve the implementation and impact of results, namely to improve the presentation of outputs and flow of information and broaden the opportunities to share experience. Several expressed a preference for in-person contact and networking. Continuity and building upon work done was also stressed.

<sup>14</sup> OJ C 354, 4.12.2013, p. 1-3.

### **Feedback for the future: a snapshot**

Member States and other stakeholders who responded to the consultation emphasised the following topics.

#### **Professional sports – integrity and values in sport**

- Promote and further develop the European Sport Model
- Focus on the values of integrity in sport, anti-doping, anti-corruption and good governance

#### **Socio-economic and environmental dimensions of sport**

- Pursue a more comprehensive approach to equal and fair access to sport
- Continue to promote and improve gender equality and inclusion across the board – from governance structures to grassroots participation
- Focus on sustainability in sports – environmental and economic

#### **Grassroot sports – participation in sport and health-enhancing physical activity**

- Promote participation in grassroot sports and focus specifically on the needs of grassroots and local organisations
- Focus on a holistic approach to healthy lifestyles
- Highlight the importance of volunteering for sports
- Safeguarding young people and minors in sport, including at grassroots level

#### **Tools – working methods**

- Foster in-person meetings and promote exchange of good practice
- Ensure more frequent dissemination of outputs and access to information, data and reports
- Facilitate dialogue and cooperation in a flexible way

## **C. WAY FORWARD**

The Commission welcomes the feedback from the Member States and stakeholders. While implementing the EU Work Plan for Sport, the Commission has generally found the working methods to perform well. The Commission sees a lot of value in continuing to support the exchange of knowledge and experiences and recognises that this is an area where it can play a useful coordinating role. The Commission is ready to address the issues raised in some formats and events and is committed to their continuous improvement.

The overall assessment and feedback from Member States and stakeholders shows that the focus on policy priorities is appropriate but may need to be reviewed against current and future developments such as Russian's war of aggression in Ukraine, EU enlargement or global interest in European sport. There is general satisfaction with the exchange of knowledge and experience and networking. The Commission shares this appreciation.

The report's findings give an outlook on the areas for future attention. In broad terms, these could be grouped into areas such as: i) promoting the **European Sport Model**; ii) shaping value-based sports governance and major events in Europe; iii) financial sustainability; iv) upholding high standards of integrity; v) upholding the rights of athletes pursuing their careers; vi) ensuring equality and representation; and vii) better valuing the role of grassroots sports and volunteering.



There is a clear political will and need to continue the focus on **sustainable development**, looking at economic viability but also the impact of climate change on sport and the green, innovative and inclusive solutions that it can develop. The plan may also need to consider any changes brought on by advances in technology and AI and their impact on sport.

Ensuring **equality and fairness for all people who want to access sport for the purposes of participation** remains high on the agenda, with a clear need to continue addressing the needs and challenges of underrepresented groups in sport including women, people from disadvantaged backgrounds and a growing group of older people and people suffering from chronic disease or disability.

Drawing on the lessons of the wider context in which this EU Work Plan was implemented, a stronger focus on the external and diplomatic aspects of sport, including the promotion of European values, should also be considered.

Underpinning these focus areas is the **importance of upholding and promoting integrity and values in sport**, whether through combating corruption, doping, discrimination, violence and intolerance (e.g. hate speech), or promoting and defending social inclusion, equality, tolerance and human rights. Sport should provide a safe environment, enabling people to learn skills and invest in positive social connections. This is essential in ensuring that sport in Europe can continue to play its full role as a uniting, cohesive and empowering force for our societies, communities and economies.

The European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions are invited to take note of this report.

As part of the next EU Work Plan for Sport, the Council is invited to consider the feedback on priorities for future work and for the working methods identified in this report.

The Presidency is invited to take this report as a basis for the preparation of the next EU Work Plan for Sport during the first half of 2024.