



Federation of the European  
Sporting Goods Industry

FESI Position Paper

# Strategic Vision for Sport in Europe: Reinforcing the European Sport Model

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## Summary:

1. Promoting an **inclusive and accessible sport ecosystem**
2. Recognising sport as a **public health priority**
3. Ensuring **sustainable funding** and **economic resilience**
4. Strengthening evidence-based sport policy through an **EU Sport Observatory**

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## Introduction

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The Federation of the European Sporting Goods Industry (FESI) warmly welcomes the European Commission's forthcoming Communication on a "*Strategic Vision for Sport in Europe: Reinforcing the European Sport Model*". We strongly support this timely initiative and look forward to contributing to the reflections that will shape the next phase of EU sport policy.

As the voice of the sporting goods industry in Europe, FESI represents a sector that plays a central role in promoting sport participation and physical activity, driving innovation, and fostering healthy and active lifestyles. In 2022, approximately 5,400 EU-based sporting goods manufacturers generated €2.5 billion in value added, with total turnover reaching around €8.3 billion<sup>1</sup>. Beyond its economic weight, our industry is also a key enabler of physical activity, providing the products and innovations that empower millions of Europeans to engage in sport every day.

We are convinced that a strong, sustainable, and inclusive EU sport policy can deliver major benefits for public health, economic growth, and social cohesion. The need for such a policy has never been greater, as Europe faces overlapping crises: wars on its borders, a worrying physical inactivity crisis (affecting 31% of adults and 81% of adolescents, in line with WHO data<sup>2</sup>), rising mental health challenges, and broader social strains. In this context, FESI would like to share the following key recommendations to inform the upcoming Communication.

### a. Promoting an inclusive and accessible sport ecosystem

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Enterprises\\_in\\_the\\_sports\\_sector](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Enterprises_in_the_sports_sector)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/26-06-2024-nearly-1.8-billion-adults-at-risk-of-disease-from-not-doing-enough-physical-activity>

FESI believes that sport and physical activity must remain a right accessible to all European citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic status, gender, or physical ability. Too many barriers to participation persist, especially in rural or disadvantaged regions where infrastructures and programmes are limited, and when inadequate urban design and transport systems discourage active mobility. The EU sport policy should therefore **reinforce investment in grassroots sport, school sport, outdoor activity and community-led initiatives** that ensure equal opportunities to participate in physical activity at all levels.

Special attention should be given to the **professional development of coaches and physical education teachers**, ensuring -centered, inclusive, representational diversity of coaches and culturally responsive practices across all programs. This includes standardised coach education with dedicated modules for children, girls, LGBTQ+ athletes, and vulnerable groups, supporting pathways for underrepresented coaches, recognising all developmental coaching roles, and tracking progress with a coaching equity index.

A stronger focus must also be placed on the **promotion of safe, inclusive, affordable, climate-friendly and equitable sport infrastructures – both for organised and self-organised sport, that are accessible to all citizens**, regardless of their age, gender, physical condition, disability or background. This includes stepping up investment in and accessibility to public sports facilities, as well as environment for self-organised sport and outdoor activity<sup>3</sup> at all levels, making full use of EU instruments such as the European Regional Development Fund, with particular attention to rural areas and disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods where access remains uneven.

#### **b. Recognising sport as a public health priority**

Physical inactivity remains one of the most pressing public health challenges in Europe, costing healthcare systems an estimated €80 billion annually<sup>4</sup>. Sport and physical activity should therefore be recognised not only as leisure but also as a cornerstone of preventive healthcare, helping to combat non-communicable diseases, promote mental well-being, and reduce healthcare costs. FESI therefore urges the Commission to set a **European Physical Activity Target to reduce inactivity rates by 15% by 2030**, aligned with WHO recommendations<sup>5</sup>.

**Physical activity should also be promoted within the workplace**, through economic incentives and tax benefits for companies to invest in workplace physical activity and initiatives for their employees, such sport infrastructure, active commuting, walking or cycling outdoors, regular exercise breaks, and workplace well-being programmes<sup>6</sup>. Consideration should also be given to providing tax incentives for employees and consumers investing in their own and their children's physical activity and sports.

<sup>3</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52024XG03809>

<sup>4</sup> [https://inactivity-time-bomb.nowwemove.com/download-report/The%20Economic%20Costs%20of%20Physical%20Inactivity%20in%20Europe%20%28June%202015%29.pdf?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://inactivity-time-bomb.nowwemove.com/download-report/The%20Economic%20Costs%20of%20Physical%20Inactivity%20in%20Europe%20%28June%202015%29.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity>

<sup>6</sup> <https://activeworkplacecertification.eu/>

**Sport prescriptions**, where healthcare professionals can prescribe physical activity as a preventive treatment, should as well be incentivised at the national level with EU guidance, funding support, and recognition for both public and private sector initiatives that integrate movement into daily life.

### c. Ensuring sustainable funding and economic resilience

Sport is not only a cultural and social good but also an economic powerhouse, contributing 2.12% to the EU's GDP and providing jobs for 5.67 million people<sup>7</sup>. To safeguard this contribution, the EU sport policy must be backed by **sustainable funding streams that support infrastructure, digital transformation, environmental sustainability and innovative start-ups**.

We recommend establishing a dedicated Sport Chapter in the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to ensure long-term funding security for sport. In line with the European Commission's proposal, the **Erasmus+ Sport budget should be doubled for 2028–2034**, with a particular focus on **grassroots sport and inclusive participation for vulnerable groups**. To strengthen the sport ecosystem, tailored **access-to-finance instruments for sport-related SMEs** should be created under InvestEU to support innovation, competitiveness, and sustainability. Additionally, greater synergies should be promoted between Erasmus+, the European Social Fund+, the Cohesion Fund, and other relevant programmes and EU funding instruments to maximize impact and ensure coordinated support for sport across the Union.

Finally, the EU Sport Policy should benefit from the sustainability regulatory framework to promote circular and accessible sports products. For sport products, and therefore physical activity to be financially accessible to all, circularity should be a strategic driver through **incentives for second-hand, reuse, repair and rental**.

### d. Strengthening evidence-based sport policy through an EU Sport Observatory

Sport is not only a social and health asset but also a significant economic driver in Europe. Unfortunately, sport-for-development initiatives often lack robust evaluation frameworks and realistic impact models. To maximize its social and economic impact, the EU sport policy should be grounded in robust data and evidence. We recommend the creation of an **EU Sport Observatory** to systematically collect, analyse, and disseminate data on sport participation, infrastructure, accessibility, and social inclusion across Member States. Such an observatory would provide policymakers with the tools to identify gaps, measure progress, and design targeted interventions, particularly for vulnerable groups, grassroots sport initiatives, and innovative infrastructure projects. By supporting research, monitoring, and benchmarking, the Observatory would also foster synergies between EU programmes, inform best practices, and strengthen the impact of EU funding on inclusive, sustainable, and evidence-based sport policies.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/865ef44c-5ca1-11e8-ab41-01aa75ed71a1/language-en?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/865ef44c-5ca1-11e8-ab41-01aa75ed71a1/language-en?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

FESI also recommends **aligning monitoring frameworks with Eurobarometer, WHO, and national indicators** to enable consistent cross-country comparisons and facilitate evidence-based policymaking.

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## **Conclusion**

FESI strongly believes that the future of EU sport policy must be underpinned by a clear, ambitious, and well-funded strategy. Sport should remain a priority in EU policies and funding frameworks, not only as a driver of economic resilience, but also as a powerful lever for public health, sustainability, and social inclusion.

The sporting goods industry stands ready to work hand in hand with EU institutions and stakeholders to shape a future-oriented and impactful EU sport policy that benefits citizens across Europe.

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## **About FESI:**

Founded in 1960 FESI, the Federation of the European Sporting Goods Industry, is the unique pre-competitive platform representing the interests of the sporting goods industry in Europe, advancing its members' priorities and promoting initiatives that benefit the sector, EU citizens and the society as a whole. FESI represents the interests of approximately 1.800 sporting goods manufacturers (85% of the European market) through its National Sporting Goods Industry Federations and its directly affiliated member companies. 70-75% of FESI's membership is made up of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises. In total, the European Sporting Goods Industry employs over 700.000 EU citizens and has an annual turnover of some 81 billion euro.

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