

Sport



Relevance of gender in the policy area

The term ‘sport’ implies two different perspectives that are increasingly considered at EU level: professional sport, and sport as a leisure activity. While, in professional sport, athletes receive annual salaries plus incentives tied to individual and team performance, amateur athletes are not paid for their athletic performances. In addition to amateurs, an increasing number of women and men are choosing sport as a leisure activity, mainly for recreation and health benefits.

In both cases, sport represents a large and fast-growing sector of the economy and makes an important contribution to growth and jobs. This is particularly true of professional sport, where economic aspects play an important role. However, it is also true of the sport and leisure industry, which covers a wide range of areas such as sport and recreation, health and fitness, outdoor pursuits and gaming.

Traditionally, sport has been dominated by men, both in terms of participation and governance. Worldwide, women’s participation rates in sporting activities are lower than

men's. Yet over the last 20 years significant changes have occurred and the difference in involvement between the genders is becoming narrower.

From a gender perspective, sport exemplifies a societal and cultural process in which the social construction of femininity and masculinity plays a key role in influencing behaviours and approaches.

Sport is traditionally associated with 'masculine' characteristics, such as physical strength and resilience, speed and a highly competitive, sometimes confrontational spirit. In many societies, women who engage in sports are perceived as 'masculine', while men who are not interested in sports are considered 'unmanly'.

However, sport can also be used as a means to achieve gender equality through the establishment of general values such as fair play, non-discrimination and teamwork. It can also be used to increase opportunities for girls, if local contexts and gender relations are taken into account and addressed. Sport can give women and girls access to public spaces where they can gather, develop new skills, gain support from others and enjoy freedom of expression and movement. It can promote education, communication, negotiation skills and leadership, all of which are essential to women's empowerment. Sport can also increase women's and girls' self-esteem and enable them to make choices about their lives. Moreover, sport can provide a channel to inform girls and women about reproductive health and other health issues.

Nevertheless, a number of practical barriers to women's participation in sport still exist.

Gender inequalities are evident across the sports sector, from representation at decision-making levels and media coverage, to participation in sports activities including coaching. Women may also face a general lack of safe and appropriate sports facilities, potentially exposing them to physical and/or verbal sexual harassment and assault. They may also experience additional physical constraints, lack of time and/or lack of childcare facilities.

Establishing gender equality in sports policy will involve action in the following areas:

- increasing women's participation in sports activities
- attaining equal representation and gender sensitivity in decision-making
- achieving gender equality in sports coaching and teaching
- eradicating gender-based violence in and through sport
- eliminating gender stereotypes in sport and in media coverage of sport.

Gender inequalities in the policy area - Main issues

Women's participation in sports activities

Women's participation in sports activities continues to rise. However, significantly fewer women than men include sport among their leisure pursuits.

According to the Eurobarometer survey of 2014, men are more likely than women to exercise or play sport: 45% of men do so at least once a week, compared with 37% of women. Meanwhile, the survey found that 37% of men never exercise or play sport, compared with 47% of women.

The difference between women and men is strongest in the younger age groups: 74% of men aged 15–24 exercise or play sport at least once a week, compared with 55% of women in the same age group. The gender gap is narrower for older age groups, with men exercising or playing sport only slightly more than women in the 40–54 years and 55+ age groups. The same pattern applies when it comes to regular physical activity (defined as an accumulation of 30 minutes or more of moderate exercise performed on at least 5 days each week): the gap between women and men is significant in the youngest age group (15% compared with 8%), but then narrows in the older age groups.

While gender inequalities in participation rates are an issue for all sports, this is particularly true of certain sports that are traditionally associated with men. For example, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has 5.4 million registered men football players in Germany, compared with 0.8 million registered women players. In England, the figures are 1.3 million registered men football players and 98,000 registered women players, while in France the figures are 1.7 million and 49,000 respectively.

In the Olympic Games of 1900, held in Paris, 22 women (out of a total of 997 athletes) participated in 5 sport disciplines. Since then there have been gradual changes in women's involvement at all levels of the Olympic Movement. The London Olympic Games in 2012 were the first in history where women competed in every sport. Furthermore, since 1991, all new sports wishing to be included on the Olympic programme must also feature a women's event.

In spite of their increased participation in sports activities at various levels in different sectors, women remain underrepresented in the decision-making bodies of sporting institutions at local, national, European and global levels.

On average in 2015, only 14% of all top decision-making positions in sports federations in Member States were occupied by women, ranging from 3% in Poland to 43% in Sweden. In the majority of countries the share of women in decision-making positions was below 20%.

Figure 1 Proportion of women among all decision-making positions in national sport federations in the EU-28, 2015



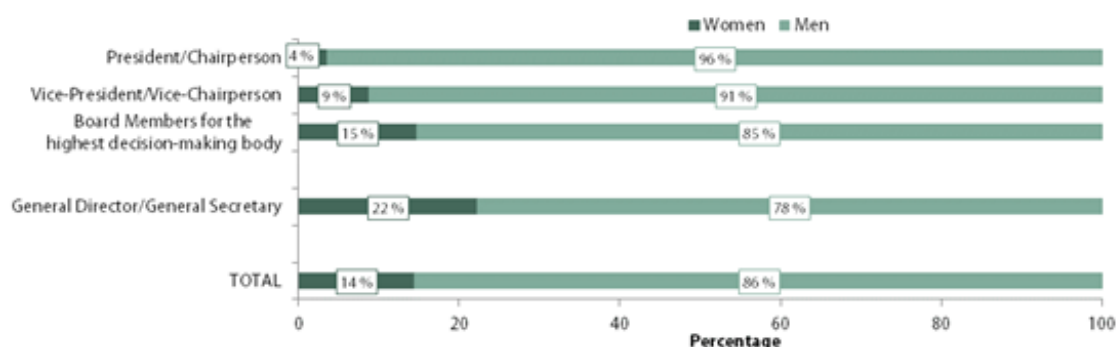
Source: Data were collected from the 10 popular national sport federations in all 28 Member States (280 in total), between May and June 2015.

Note: The following positions are included: president/chairperson, vice-president/vice-chairperson, general director/general secretary and other board members. To avoid double counting, each person is counted only once, even if (s)he occupies several positions.

Similarly to other areas of decision-making, vertical segregation is visible in decision-making in sports: the gender gap widens as the seniority of the position increases. While overall women made up 14% of decision-making positions, they represented only 5% of the total number of presidents.

On average, at **European level**, women made up 14% of decision-making positions in the continental confederations of Olympic sports in Europe in 2015. Only 4% of the presidents or chairpersons (i.e. only one out of 28) and 9% of vice-presidents (i.e. eight out of 91) were women. The share of women among board members was 15%.

Figure 2 Proportion of women and men in decision-making positions in continental confederations of Olympic sports in Europe, 2015



Source: Data were collected from all 28 continental confederations of Olympic sports in Europe (May–June 2015).

Note: Board members include the president and vice-president(s), and where stated in the confederation statute/constitution, the general director/general secretary. To avoid double counting, each person is counted only once in the total, even if (s)he occupies several positions.

When data were collected, 9 of the 28 European confederations (32%) had a gender quota for the highest decision-making body (executive committee, presidium, board of directors) and only one failed to meet this quota, i.e. had no women in top decision-making posts. In 4 of the remaining 19 European confederations without a gender quota, women were absent from the highest decision-making body.

Within the International Olympic Committee (IOC), progress has been made, yet it remains slow. There were no women on the committee between 1896 and 1981, while in 2014 there were 24 women IOC members out of a total of 115 (women therefore occupied fewer than 25 % of the places on the committee). Moreover, fewer than 20% of the members of the governing bodies of affiliated bodies, such as the National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC), are women. Europe has the lowest representation of women on the NOC General Assembly, which is structured into five geographical regions: Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Oceania.

Similar patterns can also be found in other European and/or national sports organisations. The barriers women face in taking on decision-making and management positions can partly be explained by the different values, attitudes and behaviours historically associated with women and men, but also by the masculine connotations found in sport.

The phenomena of horizontal and vertical segregation are also influencing decision-making, with women being recruited to less prestigious and lower-paid leadership positions in sports organisations. Furthermore, procedures for election or nomination to leadership positions do not usually consider gender criteria.

Gender equality in sports coaching

Sports coaching suffers from a gender gap, with women being underrepresented at all

levels of competition, from the local level to the international arena.

As a profession, sports coaching is dominated by men. Based on figures in 7 EU Member States, it is estimated that only 20% to 30% of all sports coaches in Europe are women. However, these figures are lower for the number of women coaches with a coaching qualification. For example, at the most recent women's football FIFA World Cup and UEFA European Cup, there were 3 male team coaches for every woman.

Women coaches are more often found in sports that have a high proportion of women participants (e.g. dance, gymnastics, figure skating and equestrian sports) and they predominantly work with women, adolescents or children who compete at local and regional levels. However, the number of women coaches in almost all sports seems to be disproportionately low in relation to women's overall membership of the sport. This means that the representation of women coaches in many sports is much more sporadic than the overall numbers indicate. It also means that many men are coaching women and girls, even in women-dominated sports, and very few women are coaching men. At the elite level, the number of women coaches is very low and, in cases where women coaches work with athletes at higher performance levels, they typically occupy assistant coaching positions, supporting male head coaches.

Gender-friendly guidance and coaching may reduce the high dropout rate of girls and women from sport, while also tackling sexist gender stereotypes in sport and creating a positive social and educational climate for all. Gender-friendly guidance and coaching also feed into the EU Dual Careers strategy and in particular to offering better support to young women and young men when implementing 'dual careers arrangements which allow them not to be forced to choose between education and sport or work and sport'.

Gender-based violence in and through sport

Gender-based violence is present in sport. A combination of media coverage and research has gradually changed the attitude of sports organisations, which now acknowledge that gender-based violence in sport cannot be denied.

Prevalence data for gender and sexual harassment in sport vary between 14% and 73% in the 9 European countries that have undertaken empirical studies in this area. It is thought that gender and sexual harassment occur in all sports. The experience of sexual harassment increases as one moves from the recreational to the elite level. Verbal sexual harassment seems to be the most frequent form of harassment in sport.

Gender-based violence in sport includes abuse and sexual harassment inflicted by male coaches on women and girls. Some environments (especially those traditionally labelled as 'masculine') are characterised by misogyny and homophobia. Gender-based violence is also particularly related to issues of intersectionality, with disabled women suffering from more episodes of violence than other women. In 2007 the European Parliament urged Member States to 'identify best practices in the fight against sexual harassment and abuse in sport'. However, action and evaluation varies by sport and by country.

Gender stereotypes in sport and the role of the media

The relationship between sport and the media is complex as the revenue from broadcasting rights is critical to the commercialisation of sport. Gender stereotyping of athletes by the media is also well documented, and women athletes are often sexualised.

Sports are predominantly divided into 'male' and 'female' domains and in many sports mixed gender participation is not accepted. In many cases, sports governing structures and the media have send messages that confirm these divisions rather than challenge them. Moreover, the portrayal of women and men athletes by the media reinforces stereotypical perceptions of gender roles. Women athletes are still depicted in a way that contributes to the marginalisation of women's achievements in sport, due to the emphasis placed on femininity and sexual attraction instead of strength and skills. The presence of this type of coverage devalues women's accomplishments. Despite the considerable increase in girls' and women's participation in sport and a growing audience interested in women's elite sport, there are still significant differences in the media coverage of women and men's sports, with men's sports receiving far more media coverage than women's sports.

A further aspect that needs to be considered is the lack of women in sports journalism. Internationally, women represent only 10 % of positions in print media and media production. At the 2012 London Olympics, only 15% of the journalists and photographers were women. Gender inequalities extend into media organisations, where women hold only 27% of senior management positions.

Existing policy objectives at EU and international level

EU level

As a policy area, the sports sector is gaining more attention in the EU because it intertwines with education, health and business policies.

European Council

Following the Lisbon Treaty which came into force on 1 December 2009, sport has become a competence of the European Union and consequently, the European dimension in sport is to be further developed, taking particular account of the social and educational function of sport.

The EU coordinated activity on gender equality in sport policy started in 2010 when the EU Council, in its Conclusions on the role of sport as a source of and a driver for active social inclusion, introduced the objective of encouraging gender equality in sport. This especially concerns access to sport and representation on decision-making bodies, and including active measures against gender stereotyping. In the same Conclusions, the Member States and the Commission are invited to promote actions related to the mainstreaming of gender equality issues into sports related activities. In particular, this should include equal gender access to decision-making positions, as well as address sport in connection with gender roles as set out in the strategy for equality between women and men 2010 – 2015.

Following this first Conclusion, in 2014 the UE Council adopted specific Conclusions on gender equality in sport, education, youth, culture and sport.

Member States, UE Commission and Sports organisations are called for, inter alia:

- developing and maintaining national action plans or strategy on gender equality in sport, in close cooperation with the sport movement
- mainstreaming the gender perspective in all aspects of sport policy and promoting the elimination of gender stereotypes at all levels
- highlighting the value of diversity and gender balance in sport administration and promoting gender equality in decision-making at all levels and in all fields of sport
- increasing gender balance on executive boards and committees in the area of sports, as well as in management and coaching and try to remove non-legislative obstacles preventing women from taking up such functions
- launching, in cooperation with the international sport bodies, a 'pledge board' on gender equality in sport

- developing educational materials for the training of decision-makers and coaches in sport to promote gender equality at all levels of education and sport training
- including gender equality objectives as a condition for the granting of public funding to sport organisations.

In 2014, the EU Council under the Greek EU presidency (first semester of 2014) promoted a seminar, Gender-based Violence in Sport: Protection of Minors which was held on 20 March in Athens. This event called for the addressing and regular monitoring of gender equality in sport at all levels and fields of sport, and for the assessment of the nature and extent of gender-based violence in sport, focusing in particular on elite sport, the coach-athlete relationship, the entourage around the sport-athlete relationship and the peer athlete-athlete relationship. It was also emphasised that sufficient support tools (e.g. support services, counselling and telephone hotlines) need to be developed for the athletes who have suffered sexual harassment or violence in sport.

European Commission

In its Communication on the development of the EU dimension in sport from 2011, the Commission proposed actions focusing especially on access of women to decision-making positions, the fight against gender stereotypes, and access to sport for immigrant women and women from ethnic minorities.

Following this, it called on a group of experts to develop a proposal for strategic and specific actions on gender equality in sports for the period 2014 – 2020. The experts identified a number of priority areas: gender equality in decision-making, coaching, media coverage and putting an end to gender-based violence in sports. These priorities were well received at an EU conference on gender equality in sport of 3 – 4 December 2013 in Vilnius, which helped put the topic back on the political agenda of Member States and sports organisations.[25] International, European and national stakeholders examined possible strategic actions with a view to reaching gender equality in sport by 2016 – 2020 and called on the Commission, Member States and the sport movement to develop a plan of strategic actions in this field.

The EU Work Plan for Sport (2014 – 2017) foresees the preparation of Expert Group recommendations or guidelines on gender equality in sport, possibly followed by a pledge board by the end of 2015.

The Erasmus+ funding programme started in 2014 and has a sport component that promotes voluntary activities, social inclusion, equal opportunities and awareness of health-enhancing physical activity through increased participation.

European Parliament

The European Parliament addressed the issue of gender equality in sport policy in its 2003 Resolution on Women and Sport. The Resolution recognises the importance of sport as one of the main cultural activities among Europeans, and stresses the practice of sport as a fundamental right and as a means of self-expression and fulfilment, as well as a force for citizenship and solidarity, and finally as a means for improving physical and mental health. On the other side, the Resolution considers the strong disparities in access to sport activities between women and men and also between women themselves as a relevant issue of equity among women and men. Moreover, it stresses the presence of gender-based stereotypes in sport where dominant models of masculinity and femininity are reproduced. Finally, it recognises the under-representation of women in technical and medical staff, as well as in decision-making of the sector. As a consequence it affirms, among other things, the need for actions to guarantee women and men equal access to sporting activities at all levels. In particular, to:

- abolish the distinction between male and female discipline in top-level sport
- take action for improving women's participation in technical roles and in decision-making
- take action for protecting the health of women athletes
- adopt measures for the prevention and elimination of sexual harassment and abuse.

EP also referred to gender issues of sport in relation to education in its 2007 Resolution of the role of sport in education. The Resolution recognised the importance of the full participation of girls and women in sporting activities at all levels, and considered gender equality and non-discrimination to be objectives that form an integral part of sport's educational and social functions. It stressed the need to ensure equal access and participation for women and men, boys and girls at all levels and in all functions and areas of sport, irrespective of their social background. This should pay attention in particular to people with disabilities, given that disabled women can face double discrimination. Moreover, it urged the Commission to identify best practices in the fight against sexual harassment and abuse in sport.

More recently, in its Resolution on the European dimension in sport (2012), the EP once again raised the topic of gender issues in sport. In particular it:

- encourages the Commission and the Member States to acknowledge the importance of sport as a means of promoting peace, economic growth, intercultural dialogue, public health, integration and the emancipation of women
- calls on sport organisations to further encourage women's participation in sport and in the governance bodies of sports organisations by guaranteeing equal access to sporting activities, in particular for girls and women from disadvantaged backgrounds, by promoting female participation in sport and giving women's and men's sports and results equal prominence and visibility
- encourages Member States to develop measures enabling female athletes to reconcile their family and professional sports lives and to promote gender equality into governmental policies on sport
- calls on the Commission to encourage the exchange of information and good practices with regard to equal opportunities for people of both genders in sport
- calls on the Commission and Member States to include gender mainstreaming (GM) into all its sports related activities, with a specific focus on access to sport for immigrant women and women from ethnic minorities
- calls on the Commission and Member States to focus on women's access to decision-making positions in sport and media coverage of women in sport in their gender mainstreaming, and to ensure that sport policies and legislation are based upon sex equality
- calls on the Commission and Member States to support and encourage European research into the specific character of female sporting activities, the reasons why women and girls give up sport, and the persistence of inequalities in women's access to sport
- encourages the creation of women's networks in the field of sport to promote exchange of best practices and information.

International level

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe – from its inception – has considered equality between men and women in all spheres of public and private life as a fundamental principle of human rights and democracy.

Promoting gender equality in sport has been a key objective of the Council of Europe from the very outset of its programme in the field of sport. The adoption of the European Sports Charter in 1975 and a number of recommendations has provided a reference for governmental policies in sport and enabled individuals to exercise their “right to participate in sport”. In the field of promoting gender equality, the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014 – 2017 states that the Council of Europe will strive to achieve gender mainstreaming in various policies, among which is sport.

Within the 2007 Council of Europe Recommendation on gender mainstreaming in education, references to sports are also included as follows: (it is recommended) to “promoting gender mainstreaming in sports and leisure activities, where gender-based stereotypes and expectations may affect girls’ and boys’ self-image, identity-building, health, skills acquisition, intellectual development, social integration and gender relations”.

The Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation on gender mainstreaming in sport in January 2015 (CM/Rec(2015)2) covering notably the following fields : **equal participation and power** in all sphere at all levels of sport, **equal** access to and use of sport **resources, equal rights** through the elimination on the ground of sex.

The Council of Europe is currently carrying out the Balance in Sport project co-financed by the European Union, aimed at identifying and testing generally agreed gender equality indicators in sports. It should map the situation of women’s participation in sport including in leadership and coaching, the portrayal of women athletes in the media and the prevalence of gender-based violence.

United Nations

Sport was included in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 and in Beijing +5 in 2000.

In November 2003 UN Resolution 58/5 was adopted which called on governments to use sport as a means to promote education, health and peace. This was followed in 2011 by the follow-up of the UN General Assembly on the Vienna Declaration and the recognition of sport as a human right.

The first World Conference on Women and Sport was held in 1984 in Brighton (UK) and led to the Brighton Declaration in 1994 which was a call for equity and equality in sport from facilities and administration to research and education. In June 2014 at the conference in Helsinki, more than 410 sports organisations signed the Brighton Plus Helsinki Declaration on Women and Sport. Also the UNESCO MINEPS declarations of Athens (2004) and Berlin (2013) called for specific actions to promote equal opportunities in the area of sport.

Starting from 2014, an International Day of Sport for Development and Peace (IDSP) has been established by the UN General Assembly. The adoption of this Day signifies the increasing recognition by the United Nations of the positive influence that sport can have on the advancement of human rights, and social and economic development. In his 2015 speech, the UN Secretary-General highlighted the role sport can play in achieving sustainable progress and change, by defining sport as “a major force in eliminating gender barriers”.

Policy cycle in sport

How and when? Sport and the integration of the gender dimension into the policy cycle

The gender dimension can be integrated in all phases of the policy cycle. For a detailed description of how gender can be mainstreamed in each phase of the policy cycle [click here](#).

Below, you can find useful resources and practical examples for mainstreaming gender into sport policies. They are organised according to the most relevant phase of the policy cycle they may serve.

Practical examples of gender mainstreaming in sport

UK

Working in collaboration with home country sports councils – the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR) and equity organisations – UK Sport developed the Equality Standard for Sport in 2004. The Standard provides a tool for sports organisations to work progressively towards equality by ensuring that equality is integrated into all aspects of sports bodies' operations and services to members, athletes, staff and volunteers.

Finland

Since the late 1990s, the Finnish Government programmes have included explicit gender equality goals. These have included, for example, increasing the proportion of women among decision-makers, narrowing the gender pay gap, more equal distribution of family leave and combating violence against women.

The Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture published Sport and equality 2011: Current state and changes of gender equality in Finland in 2012, with a set of recommendations on how to mainstream gender into the sport. Recommendations included integration of gender considerations into the state administration, municipalities and sport organisations budgets. This is supported by the use of specific indicators that help show how the situation affects women and men and assess the degree of compliance with the equality plans. Other recommendations cover use of gender impact assessments, competence development tools and sharing good practices.

Timeline

The key milestones of the EU policy sport are presented below.

European Sport for all Charter

Read the resolution [here](#).

1976 - 1976

European Sport Charter

Read the recommendation [here](#).

1992 - 1992

Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport

Read the declaration [here](#).

1994 - 1994

Helsinki report on sport

Read the report [here](#).

1999 - 1999

Conclusions of the Nice European Council of 7 – 9 December 2000, Annex IV, Declaration on the specific characteristics of sport and its social function in Europe

Read the conclusions [here](#).

2000 - 2000

European Sport Charter

Read the recommendations [here](#).

2001 - 2001

European Parliament Resolution on Women and sport (2002/2280(INI)), 3 June, 2003

Read the resolution [here](#).

2003 - 2003

White Paper on sport

The 2007 [White Paper on sport](#), in association with the Pierre de Coubertin action plan, became the European Commission's cornerstone for the sport sector. This was followed by a series of plans and funding programmes.

2007 - 2007

European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2012 on the European

dimension in sport (2011/2087(INI))

Read the resolution [here](#).

2007 - 2007

Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty confirmed sport as an EU competence

This meant that an EU sport programme could be developed and supported by a budget. Sport could also be promoted in other EU policy areas such as education and health, and EU sports ministers began having official meetings. Read the article [here](#).

2009 - 2009

Council Conclusions of 18 November 2010 on the role of sport as a source of and a driver for active social inclusion, OJ C 326, 3 December 2010

Read the conclusions [here](#).

2010 - 2010

European Union Work Plan for Sport for 2011 – 2014

Read the plan [here](#).

2011 - 2011

Communication on Developing the European Dimension of Sport

Read the document [here](#).

2011 - 2011

European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2012 on the European dimension in sport (2011/2087(INI))

Read the resolution [here](#).

2012 - 2012

European Union Work Plan for Sport 2014 – 2017

Read the plan [here](#).

2014 - 2014

European Union Erasmus+ funding launched for 2014–2020 includes sport

Read more about European Union Erasmus+ funding [here](#).

2014 - 2014

UE Council adopted specific Conclusions on gender equality in sport, education, youth, culture and sport

Read the conclusions [here](#).

2014 - 2014

Helsinki Declaration on Women and Sport

Read the declaration [here](#).

2014 - 2014

Current policy priorities at EU level

Many of the competences in the area of sport lie with the Member States. However, at EU level there are three core policy areas: the integrity of sport, the economic dimension of sport, and sport in society. Within each area are ongoing and new priorities, all of which are at different stages of planning, activity and evaluation.

The integrity of sport

This policy area has an ongoing commitment to fight doping in sport and supports the Anti-Doping Convention as the international legal instrument, and the World Anti-Doping Agency. Match fixing and corruption in sport is viewed as a serious threat to the integrity of sport, and in March 2013 the [European Parliament adopted a Resolution](#) on these issues. The protection of minors is a key concern for the EU. This includes overtraining, missed education, doping and sexual abuse.

To support and encourage good governance, the EU has set out a series of [principles](#) for sporting bodies at local, national and European levels. The principles include the need for financial transparency, management expertise, stakeholder communications and ethical practices.

The economic dimension of sport

In the areas of sustainable financing, the legacy of major events and economic benefits the EU's priority is to provide guidance on state aid, VAT and structural funds within a framework of sustainable finances. Priority is also given to guidance on commercial property rights and other mechanisms which can protect and encourage grass-roots sport.

Sport and society

Health-enhancing physical activity (HEPA) continues to be a policy priority for the EU. Sport has been identified as a sustainable economic sector which can positively contribute to the delivery of the [EU's Europe 2020 strategy](#) through job creation. One priority is to develop guidelines on dual careers for athletes to prepare them for life after sport. Within society the value of volunteers to sport is critical, and raising awareness and rewarding and recognising volunteering remains an area for continued policy development.

Want to know more?