



Europe, be active!

Goals of the Finnish sports movement for the EU elections 2024

Finland and all of Europe are troubled by numerous crises that challenge our physical and mental wellbeing, economy, resilience, security, democracy, inclusion, climate and youth. Sport can play an important part in solving these crises that partly overlap, however, this potential remain largely untapped. Even though the European Union carries no legislative powers in the field of sport, EU decision in many sectors have an impact on sport and physical activity. Additionally, EU funding has a crucial role for strengthening the funding of sport in the current times.

During the upcoming EU elections, the sports movement of Finland wants to raise the role of sport and physical activity in our society. We remind our decision-makers that co-operation and dialogue helps make better, more impactful decisions that can also increase physical activity. EU decision-makers and the sports movement should search for solutions together to ensure that sport will continue to bring us joy, role models and a sense of community.

Our solutions in a nutshell:

- Building a cross-sectoral, union-wide EU Strategy on Sport and Physically Active Lifestyle
- Continuous dialogue between decision-makers and the sports movement, and together searching for solutions that protect and safeguard the features of the European Sport Model including sports clubs, volunteering, autonomy and values such as responsibility
- Ensuring that sport clubs and other sports organisations do not face unsolicited restrictions, bureaucracy and costs due to decision in different sectors of the EU
- Setting up an EU Sport Dialogue, so that EU decisions genuinely support the work for sport and physical activity
- Including sport and physical activity in EU funding programmes across sectors in the next multiannual financial framework
- Making EU funding more accessible for grassroots sports organisations by e.g. reducing bureaucracy and simplifying application processes and, when necessary, applying quotas
- Directing EU funding for building, renovating and maintaining sustainable and accessible sports facilities



1. Physical inactivity costs too much – let's put sport on the agenda

Physical inactivity is threatening our economy, functional capacity, wellbeing and resilience. Physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyle cost our society more than 4,7 billion euros every year in Finland alone. According to a recent forecast, in 2040 only 2 % of 50-year-olds in Finland will have a good aerobic fitness level. The picture is all the more grim at an EU level, as Finns are nevertheless the most active Europeans according to the Special Eurobarometer on Sport. 45 % of all EU citizens never exercise or play sport.

Aside of sport in the leisure time, we need to add physical activity and movement in all aspects of our lives, starting with our everyday environments such as road infrastructure and urban planning, workplaces and educational institutions from kindergartens to higher education.

Goal: Physical inactivity is recognised in the EU as a serious issue impacting our future, the likes of climate and economy. Physically active lifestyle and sport are promoted in the EU across all sectors.

Solution: The EU shall build a cross-sectoral, union-wide EU Strategy on Sport and Physically Active Lifestyle. It should be ensured that there is at least one Finnish MEP in the CULT committee responsible for sport and in the informal friends of sport group. The word "sport" shall be returned to the title of the European Commissioner responsible for sport.

2. Sport is the largest civil society movement – let's strengthen it with EU funds

Sport is the largest civil society movement in Finland, and autonomous not-for-profit organisations are a central part of our democracy. 1,8 million Finns engage in sport clubs. We have over 9 000 sport clubs, and 500 000 volunteers contribute their time to sport. Voluntary civic engagement in sport provides value worth 700 million euros every year in Finland. Public funding for physically active lifestyle and sport leverages immense benefits for society: wellbeing, community, skills, inclusion, vibrance and resilience. Physical activity and sport can also reduce inequalities, e.g. between regions. During the period from 2014 to 2020, the national EU funding programmes in Finland (European agricultural fund for rural development, European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund) provided funding for sport and physical activity worth 278 million euros.



Due to the current cuts to government spending, the need for EU funding is growing among sports organisations. The possibilities of other legitimate actors that promote sport and physical activity, such as associations, companies, municipalities and educational institutions such as universities, to obtain EU funding should be improved as well.

Goal: EU funds across sectors are channeled more effectively to sport and physical activity.

Solution: Sport and physical activity shall be included in EU funding programmes across all sectors during the next multiannual financial framework, including the European Social Fund, European Regional Development Fund, European agricultural fund for rural development, Cohesion Fund, EU4Health, Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme. The proportion of funds allocated to sport in the Erasmus+ programme shall be increased from 1,9 % to 2,5 %. EU funding shall be made more accessible to grassroots actors by e.g. reducing bureaucracy and simplifying application processes, and, when necessary, applying quotas.

3. European Sport Model – let's safeguard the foundation of sport

The cornerstones of the European Sport Model are sport clubs, volunteers and values, such as fair play and responsibility. One sport is governed by one sports federation. The European Sport Model ensures that everyone plays fair and by the same rules. One enters and wins competitions based on merit. Possible financial gains are used for the benefit of all sport. Sports organisations benefit from wide autonomy, and they hold responsibility for ensuring good governance, responsible and sustainable conduct, and commitment to the World Anti-Doping Code. Within the EU, both [Member States](#) as well as the [European Parliament](#) have taken a stand to protect and strengthen the European Sport Model. The European Commission has published a [study on the topic](#) in 2022.

EU decisions in different sectors often impact sport and physical activity. Occasionally, the decisions bring about unsolicited burden, such as bureaucracy or costs, for sports organisations that often function on a voluntary basis. The unique characteristics of Finland (e.g. geography) are often not recognised from a sport perspective either. For example, the planned led ban would lay excessive demands and costs on sport clubs, even though good practices to effectively manage environmental risks on shooting ranges exist in Finland. Another example is the use of plant protection products on grass fields used for e.g. golf and football. Dialogue from the



earliest stages of decision-making processes ensures the impact assessment as well as being able to reconcile the important EU goals with the needs of sport and physical activity.

Goal: Safeguarding and strengthening the European Sport Model, which is based on voluntary work and sport organisations and federations leading the movement, and taking into account the needs of the Finnish sports movement in EU decision-making processes.

Solution: Decision-makers and the sports movement shall have a continuous dialogue and together search for solutions that safeguard and strengthen the features of the European Sport Model such as sport clubs, volunteering, autonomy and values. The EU shall set up an EU Sport Dialogue as part of the EU Strategy on Sport and Physically Active Lifestyle. It should be ensured that sport clubs will not face unsolicited restrictions, bureaucracy and costs due to decisions made in the different sectors of the European Union.

4. Sport and physical activity for sustainable and greener societies and facilities

Sport and physically active lifestyle have an important role to play in creating ecologically, socially and economically sustainable societies and the green transition. Social sustainability, such as promoting inclusion and participation, is part of our basic activities. In order to produce these benefits for society, sport and physical activity need economic sustainability, including sufficient and predictable funding. The EU can support sport and physical activity by e.g. funding energy efficient sports facilities and increasing its support for walking and cycling. The sports movement in Finland also has good practice on promoting the green transition in an economically and socially sustainable way. The sports movement has a joint [responsibility programme](#) (see English PDF), which all sports have committed to.

Goal: Promoting sustainable and responsible development and the green transition through sport and physical activity, taking into account the needs of sport organisations and disseminating existing good practices. Channeling green transition funding for sport and physical activity.

Solution: EU funding shall be directed towards building sustainable and accessible sports facilities, and renewing and renovating existing facilities. The maintenance debt of sports infrastructure in Finland equals billions of euros.