



# PlanetGoals

*Capacity Building Course  
for Professionals*

PlanetGoals

# MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION TO SUSTAINABILITY IN FOOTBALL-RELATED ENTITIES - PLANET GOALS

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The PlanetGoals project is an ambitious initiative aimed at transforming the football sector across six European countries—Greece, Spain, the UK, the Netherlands, Croatia, and Italy—by integrating environmental and social sustainability into football-related entities' operations and governance. The project seeks to foster a holistic transformation that promotes climate neutrality, social inclusion, and healthy lifestyles within football-related entities. Through targeted capacity-building efforts, the initiative aims to equip professionals working within football organizations with the necessary tools, knowledge, and skills to implement sustainable practices that address both environmental and social challenges.

## PURPOSE

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At its core, PlanetGoals focuses on two main priorities identified by the Erasmus+ Programme: environmental sustainability and inclusion. The project aligns with the EU's goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050, as outlined in the European Green Deal, by encouraging football entities to adopt climate-friendly practices. This includes reducing carbon emissions, improving waste management, and promoting energy efficiency in stadiums, travels, and operations. By educating football professionals on these matters, the project aims to make the sector more sustainable and set an example for other industries to follow.

The football sector has a significant environmental footprint, with the organization of matches, stadium operations, and travels generating substantial carbon emissions. For instance, the European football industry produces approximately three million tons of carbon emissions annually, driven by factors such as player travels, stadium maintenance, and energy consumption. Despite this impact, few football-related entities report on their environmental performance, particularly at the grassroots level. This project seeks to fill that gap by offering tailored educational programs and best practices to help football

organizations reduce their carbon footprint and operate in a more environmentally conscious manner.

In addition to addressing environmental concerns, PlanetGoals places a strong emphasis on social sustainability. Football, as a global sport, serves as a platform for promoting inclusion and diversity. The project aims to make football entities more socially inclusive by encouraging the participation of individuals from all socioeconomic backgrounds, including vulnerable and marginalized groups such as people with disabilities, older adults, refugees, and ethnic minorities. By creating more equitable opportunities for participation in football and other physical activities, the project supports the EU's priorities regarding social inclusion, diversity, and health promotion.

To achieve its objectives, PlanetGoals will implement a range of activities designed to raise awareness and build capacity among professionals working within football-related entities. These activities include the creation of a comprehensive handbook of best practices, a capacity-building course, an e-learning hub, and a self-assessment tool. These tools will enable distance learning and provide professionals with the resources they need to integrate sustainability into their organizations' operations and governance. In addition to educational resources, the project will host community engagement events and organize climate-friendly football activities, helping to foster a more sustainable and socially inclusive football culture at the local, regional, and European levels.

## STRENGTH POINTS

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One of the project's strengths is its focus on collaboration and knowledge exchange between partners and stakeholders. By involving a diverse consortium of organizations—including grassroots sports clubs, NGOs, professional football clubs, and academic institutions—the project ensures that a wide range of expertise is brought to the table. This collaborative approach will not only enhance the quality and relevance of the project's outputs but also help to ensure that its impact is felt across the participating countries and beyond. Furthermore, the involvement of a variety of organizations ensures that the project's activities are inclusive and tailored to the needs of different communities.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

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The expected outcomes of PlanetGoals are significant, both in terms of the number of reached people and the depth of the transformation within the football sector. The project is set to directly benefit approximately 60,000 people, including football professionals, fans, and community members. It will also contribute to the creation of twenty-one best practices for sustainable football governance, the delivery of 10 training sessions with 100 participants, and the assessment of sustainability levels within 50 football-related entities. Additionally, the project will organize fifteen community engagement events, produce six educational videos on sustainability, and conduct an online awareness-raising campaign.

By the end of the project, it is anticipated that football-related entities across Europe will be better equipped to address the environmental and social challenges they face, contributing to the EU's broader goals of creating a climate-neutral, more inclusive, and healthier society. Through the promotion of sustainable practices in football, the project will not only help reduce the sector's environmental impact but also foster a culture of social responsibility and healthy living within the communities it serves.

PlanetGoals represents a forward-thinking approach to sustainability in sport, recognizing the potential of football to drive positive change both within and beyond the sport itself. Through its comprehensive and collaborative strategy, the project aims to create a more sustainable future for football entities and the communities they serve.

## SUSTAINABILITY

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Sustainability, at its core, refers to the ability to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. It is a concept deeply intertwined with environmental, social, and economic factors, requiring a holistic approach to managing resources, operations, and impacts. For football-related entities—whether clubs, leagues, associations, or governing bodies—sustainability is not merely an abstract ideal; it is a practical, strategic imperative that can profoundly affect their long-term success, reputation, and operational efficiency.

In a football context, sustainability can be broken down into three key pillars: environmental, social, and economic. The environmental pillar focuses on minimizing the negative impacts of operations on the planet, such as reducing carbon emissions, waste, and water consumption. The social pillar concerns the well-being of stakeholders, including employees, players, fans, and communities.

This can include promoting diversity and inclusion, ensuring fair wages, and giving back to local communities. The economic pillar emphasizes the need for financial viability and responsible management, ensuring that football organizations can continue to operate effectively and grow in the long term.

Implementing sustainability in football-related entities is crucial for several reasons. First, it is becoming an expectation from stakeholders, including fans, sponsors, governments, and even players. In recent years, there has been a global shift towards sustainability, with increasing awareness about climate change, social justice, and economic inequality. Football, being one of the most visible and influential sports worldwide, is expected to set as an example. Fans, especially younger generations, are more environmentally and socially conscious than ever before. They want to support organizations that align with their values. Thus, football entities that fail to prioritize sustainability may face reputational risks, potentially losing fans, sponsorships, and partnerships.

Second, sustainability can lead to significant cost savings and operational efficiencies. For instance, by adopting energy-efficient technologies, such as LED lighting in stadiums or solar panels, football clubs can reduce their energy consumption and lower their utility bills. Similarly, implementing waste reduction and recycling programs can cut down on disposal costs. Sustainable resource management is not just about saving the planet; it's also about optimizing resources, cutting unnecessary expenses, and making the organization more resilient to fluctuations in resource availability and cost. Additionally, sustainable practices can help football organizations comply with increasingly stringent regulations regarding environmental and social responsibility, avoiding fines and other legal consequences.

Moreover, sustainability is tied to risk management. Football entities operate in a dynamic and often unpredictable environment. Climate change, for example, can directly impact the operations of clubs and events. Extreme weather conditions, such as floods or heatwaves, can disrupt matches, damage infrastructure, and create unsafe conditions for players and fans. By embracing sustainability, football organizations can mitigate these risks by investing in resilient infrastructure, developing contingency plans, and reducing their overall environmental footprint.

The social aspect of sustainability is particularly critical in football. As a sport that reaches billions of people globally, football has the power to influence societal norms and behaviours. By promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within their organizations, football entities can become leaders in advancing social justice. Ensuring that football is accessible and welcoming to all, regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic background, strengthens the sport's universal appeal. Additionally, football clubs and organizations have a responsibility to their local communities. Many fans view their local club as a pillar of the community, and clubs that engage in community outreach, support

local initiatives, and promote social causes are more likely to foster strong, loyal fan bases. This social responsibility can also enhance the mental and physical well-being of fans and the wider community, making football more than just a sport but a force for good.

From an economic perspective, sustainability is not only about being financially responsible but also about ensuring long-term viability. Football organizations that invest in sustainable practices are better positioned to thrive in an evolving global economy. Sponsors and investors are increasingly prioritizing sustainability in their partnerships. Companies are looking to associate themselves with organizations that share their values and commitment to environmental and social causes. As a result, football clubs that embrace sustainability may find it easier to attract high-profile sponsorship deals and investment opportunities, providing them with additional revenue streams and competitive advantages.

In conclusion, sustainability is not just a trend but a fundamental shift in how football-related entities must operate. By embedding sustainability into their strategies, football organizations can not only contribute to a more sustainable world but also enhance their reputation, reduce costs, mitigate risks, and secure long-term success. The sport's unique global influence means that football can serve as a powerful platform for promoting sustainable practices and inspiring change both within the industry and beyond. In an era where environmental, social, and economic challenges are becoming more pressing, football must rise to the occasion and lead by example.

## SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

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Social sustainability refers to the ability of an organization or community to support and promote the well-being of its stakeholders while fostering inclusivity, equity, and justice. In the context of football-related entities, social sustainability encompasses a broad range of initiatives and policies that ensure the sport serves as a positive force in society. It involves creating environments where players, fans, employees, and local communities can thrive while addressing issues such as diversity, inclusion, human rights, and fair treatment. Social sustainability requires football organizations to balance the demands of their business and performance objectives with their responsibility to contribute to social progress.

Football entities play a crucial role in promoting social sustainability due to their broad influence across different societal strata. For instance, a key aspect of social sustainability is ensuring equal opportunities within the sport, both on and off the field. This includes breaking down barriers for marginalized groups,

whether they represent women, racial and ethnic minorities, or individuals from lower-income backgrounds. Football clubs, associations, and governing bodies have the power to challenge systemic inequalities by creating pathways for underrepresented groups to participate in the sport, from grassroots to professional levels. This could take the form of programs that promote youth development in disadvantaged areas, scholarships for aspiring players from underprivileged backgrounds, or policies that ensure diverse hiring practices across coaching, management, and executive roles.

Beyond promoting diversity and inclusion, social sustainability also encompasses the health and well-being of all those involved in football. For players, this involves creating safe working conditions, offering adequate health and safety measures, and ensuring their physical and mental well-being. For example, clubs should be vigilant about addressing mental health issues, providing counselling services, and fostering a culture where players feel supported both on and off the field. The importance of player welfare became especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when issues such as burnout, mental health struggles, and the pressures of performing in empty stadiums came to the forefront.

Social sustainability also extends to how football-related entities engage with their surrounding communities. Football clubs, especially local ones, often serve as social hubs for their communities, and their success is closely intertwined with the well-being of the local population. A socially sustainable football club actively engages with its community through outreach programs, charity work, and local partnerships. These initiatives can include providing free or discounted access to matches for disadvantaged groups, using stadiums for community events, or promoting social causes such as anti-racism campaigns, anti-bullying programs, and mental health awareness. Furthermore, clubs can support education by establishing partnerships with schools or offering training programs in management, sports science, and coaching for young people. When clubs positively contribute to their communities, they foster loyalty and a stronger sense of belonging among their fans, leading to more meaningful and lasting relationships between the sport and its supporters.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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Environmental sustainability in football-related entities refers to minimizing the sport's ecological footprint by adopting practices that reduce resource

consumption, decrease pollution, and mitigate climate change. With millions of fans attending matches, consuming merchandise, and engaging in football-related activities, the sport's environmental impact is significant. For football organizations, environmental sustainability involves implementing policies and procedures that not only reduce their immediate environmental impact but also contribute to broader global efforts to combat climate change and protect natural ecosystems.

One of the key areas where football-related entities can make a significant environmental difference is in stadium operations. Stadiums are energy-intensive facilities that consume copious amounts of electricity, water, and materials during construction and operation. By investing in energy-efficient technologies, football clubs can drastically reduce their carbon emissions. This could include installing solar panels or wind turbines to power stadiums, using LED lighting to reduce electricity usage, and upgrading heating and cooling systems to be more energy efficient. Furthermore, clubs can implement water-saving measures, such as rainwater harvesting systems or water recycling programs, to reduce their reliance on fresh water, which is particularly important in regions facing water scarcity.

Waste management is another critical aspect of environmental sustainability. Football matches generate substantial amounts of waste, from food packaging to discarded promotional materials. To address this, clubs can adopt waste reduction and recycling initiatives. This could involve collaborating with vendors to eliminate single-use plastics, promoting the use of reusable or biodegradable packaging, and setting up comprehensive recycling programs within stadiums. In some cases, clubs have even taken steps to achieve zero-waste matches, where nearly all waste is recycled, composted, or repurposed. Additionally, clubs can encourage fans to adopt sustainable behaviors, such as using public transportation or carpooling to matches, by providing incentives or making eco-friendly travel options more accessible.

Beyond operational changes, football organizations can also contribute to environmental sustainability by raising awareness and leveraging their platform to promote environmental causes. Given the sport's global reach and the passion of its fan base, football has a unique ability to influence attitudes and behaviors related to environmental issues. Clubs can partner with environmental organizations to launch awareness campaigns about climate change, conservation, or sustainable living. For instance, campaigns could encourage fans to reduce their carbon footprints or participate in community-led environmental initiatives. By using their influence to promote environmental responsibility, football organizations can help foster a culture of sustainability that extends beyond the sport.

Lastly, environmental sustainability is increasingly becoming a financial consideration for football entities. As environmental regulations become stricter,



clubs that fail to adopt sustainable practices may face fines or penalties. Moreover, investors and sponsors are increasingly aligning their portfolios with environmentally conscious organizations, meaning that clubs with strong sustainability credentials may have a competitive edge in securing lucrative deals. By embracing environmental sustainability, football-related entities not only contribute to the global fight against climate change but also ensure their own long-term financial viability and operational resilience in an evolving world where sustainability is becoming a necessity rather than an option.

#### EXAMPLES

**AC Milan** is the first elite European football club to introduce a formal maternity policy for female players, addressing gender equality and well-being. **Key Features:**

**Contract Renewal:** Automatic one-year contract extension with the same terms during pregnancy.

**Childcare and Travel Support:** Assistance with childcare during training/matches; travel costs covered for the player's children and a companion.

**Holistic Support:** Access to in-house specialists (psychologists, nutritionists, physiotherapists) and external experts if needed.

**Inclusive Policy Development:** Players were consulted through surveys and discussions.

**Additional Well-being Initiatives:** Work-life balance programs, digital welfare platforms, and employee wellness activities (e.g., dedicated gym).

**Takeaway:**

A forward-thinking policy that sets a new standard for gender equality, player welfare, and family support in football organizations.

<https://www.acmilan.com/en/news/articles/club/2024-08-02/ac-milan-introduces-maternity-policy-for-female-players-and-staff>

## MODULE 2: SUSTAINABILITY IN FOOTBALL-RELATED ENTITIES' GOVERNANCE

Football-related entities and sports entities in general, along with their values, are an inherent part of the social aspect of the human being. This means that sport and related entities are commonly related to topics such as politics or economics, for example. Aspects such as the one to be discussed below are also related to sport: Sustainability. From the perspective of sustainability, the activity of organizations is evaluated for their environmental and social impact, according to good governance patterns, which entities have the option of bringing to the sports world. This module provides brief notions about the role of leaders and boards in promoting sustainability; the necessary support and infrastructure required to develop a strong sustainability program; Developing a sustainability strategy and action plan and Implementing sustainability practices in decision-making processes.

# 1. THE ROLE OF LEADERS AND BOARDS IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABILITY; THE NECESSARY SUPPORT AND INFRASTRUCTURE REQUIRED TO DEVELOP A STRONG SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM

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## 1.1. EU regulations and the role of Leaders and Boards

Although there is a general consensus on the need for companies to pursue sustainable value creation and there exist regulations by the European Union regarding the presentation of sustainability information by companies, in practice, companies face a number of challenges with this approach. **Leaders and boards play a crucial role in setting the vision for sustainability within football-related entities.** They must advocate for sustainable practices and ensure that there is adequate support and infrastructure for these initiatives.

The **Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)** is a significant piece of legislation adopted by the **European Union** aimed at enhancing and standardizing sustainability reporting among companies. This directive builds upon the existing Non-Financial Reporting Directive (NFRD) and is designed to improve transparency regarding environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors, thereby promoting accountability and sustainable business practices across the EU.

**Company leaders** play a crucial role in the successful implementation of the CSRD. They are expected to **actively promote a culture of sustainability within their organizations.** This involves integrating sustainability into the company's core values and strategic objectives, ensuring that all employees understand its importance. Moreover, they must **ensure that their organizations comply with these regulations.** This includes understanding the data needed for reporting and establishing processes to gather and verify this information.

Leaders also must **incorporate sustainability considerations into strategic decision-making.** This means evaluating the long-term impacts of

business operations on environmental and social factors and making informed choices that align with sustainability goals. To meet CSRD requirements, leaders should **allocate resources to develop the necessary infrastructure for sustainability reporting**. This may involve investing in technology, training programs, and dedicated teams focused on sustainability initiatives. Everything together supposes that leaders are responsible for fostering an environment of accountability, where sustainability performance is regularly communicated to stakeholders and integrated into business operations.

The EU **CSRD** represents a **significant shift toward enhanced transparency in corporate sustainability practices**. The active involvement of company leaders is crucial for meeting the directive's requirements and driving meaningful change within organizations. By championing sustainability, ensuring compliance, and fostering stakeholder engagement, leaders can position their companies for success in an increasingly sustainability-focused business landscape.

Sustainability reporting is essential for companies as it enhances transparency about their environmental and social impacts. Key benefits include:

1. **Building Trust:** It helps avoid accusations of greenwashing by providing evidence of genuine sustainability efforts, fostering trust among stakeholders.
2. **Regulatory Compliance:** Many industries now mandate sustainability reporting, ensuring companies meet legal requirements.
3. **Identifying Improvements:** Reports allow companies to pinpoint areas for enhancement and set measurable sustainability goals.
4. **Performance Enhancement:** Commitment to sustainability can lead to operational efficiencies and cost savings.

## EXAMPLES

**Real Betis Balompié launched its first Sustainability Action Plan in 2020.** This plan is part of its commitment to environmental, social and economic sustainability, and seeks to promote responsible practices in all its activities. It includes initiatives related to waste management, energy efficiency and the promotion of sustainable mobility, among other aspects. Since 2020 they have been developing a sustainability platform called Forever Green with which they have carried out a large number of actions to help the environment. This effort also reflects the growing importance of sustainability in sport and the need to align with regulations such as the CSRD.



### **1.2. The necessary support and infrastructure required to develop a strong sustainability program**

Developing a robust sustainability program requires a comprehensive support system and infrastructure within an organization. This entails not only the commitment of leadership but also the establishment of frameworks, resources, and practices that enable effective implementation and continuous improvement. A successful sustainability program can enhance a company's reputation, drive efficiency, and contribute to long-term viability, aligning with both regulatory requirements and stakeholder expectations.

It is important to set roles and, if necessary, incorporate more talent into the workforce of the sports - entity so that the company will meet the sustainable goals through the following key points:

- 1. Leadership Commitment and Vision:** leaders and boards must champion sustainability initiatives to create a culture that prioritizes sustainable practices. They need to set clear sustainability goals aligned with the organization's mission and help in communicating the importance of sustainability to all employees.

2. **Dedicated Sustainability Team:** A specialized team is essential for coordinating sustainability efforts and ensuring accountability. This team should include experts from various departments (e.g., operations, finance, marketing) to integrate sustainability across the organization.
3. **Training and Capacity Building:** Training staff at all levels is essential to raise awareness and develop skills related to sustainability practices. Regular workshops, online courses, and hands-on training sessions can help employees understand their roles in achieving sustainability goals.
4. **Robust Data Management Systems:** Effective sustainability programs rely on accurate data collection and analysis to measure performance and track progress. Implementing advanced data management systems enables sports entities to monitor key sustainability metrics, such as energy consumption, waste management, and carbon emissions.
5. **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engaging stakeholders (including employees, customers, suppliers, and the community) is essential for aligning sustainability goals with stakeholder expectations. Regular feedback mechanisms and dialogue can foster a collaborative approach to sustainability challenges.
6. **Financial Resources and Investment:** Adequate funding is crucial for implementing sustainability initiatives and ensuring their success. Entities should allocate budgetary resources specifically for sustainability projects and explore external funding opportunities.
7. **Continuous Improvement Framework:** A framework for continuous improvement enables organizations to adapt and enhance their sustainability practices over time. Regular assessments and updates to sustainability strategies should be conducted to incorporate new technologies and practices.

**An example of the importance of finding allies and companies that can help a sports entity to be more sustainable:**

Real Betis Balompié measures its carbon footprint annually through a detailed analysis of its emissions in areas such as energy consumption, waste management and fan travel. To do so, an external company audits it, Ecoterrae. Through this annual audit, the club offsets its carbon footprint and invests in reforestation and renewable energy projects, which allows them to neutralize their emissions. This strategy not only contributes to environmental sustainability, but also reinforces the club's commitment to social and ecological responsibility.



## 2. DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

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Before starting to develop your entity's sustainability strategy, it is important to conduct a **sustainability assessment**. This process involves evaluating current practices across various operational areas, including resource consumption, waste management, and social responsibility initiatives. By systematically analyzing existing practices, organizations can identify key areas for improvement and establish a baseline for future efforts.

A useful tool in this phase is the SWOT analysis, which examines the organization's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats related to sustainability. This framework helps organizations leverage their strengths, such as existing green initiatives or engaged employees, while addressing weaknesses, such as inadequate resource management or lack of awareness among staff. Additionally, understanding stakeholder expectations (ranging from customers and employees to local communities and investors) provides valuable insights that can shape the sustainability agenda.

Another key point has to do with **stakeholder engagement**. Engaging stakeholders throughout the sustainability strategy development process is vital for ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered. This involvement fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders, which can lead to increased buy-in and support for the initiatives. Various methods can be employed to engage stakeholders, such as surveys, alliances, workshops, and focus groups.

For example, a workshop might bring together employees from different departments to discuss sustainability challenges and brainstorm solutions. Similarly, alliances with sustainability related companies can be used to reduce the organization's environmental impact. By incorporating feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, organizations can create a more inclusive and effective sustainability strategy.

The last step in developing a sustainability strategy is **crafting** a comprehensive **action plan**. This plan should outline specific initiatives, timelines, and responsible parties for each sustainability goal. For instance, initiatives could include reducing carbon footprints through energy efficiency measures, enhancing community engagement via outreach programs, or promoting diversity and inclusion within the workforce.

Each initiative should be supported by clear actions and defined metrics for success. For example, if the goal is to reduce carbon emissions, the action plan might specify the implementation of energy-efficient technologies, staff training sessions on sustainable practices, and the establishment of partnerships with renewable energy providers.

Additionally, the action plan should include a timeline that outlines when each initiative will be implemented and who will be accountable for its success. Regular reviews of the action plan are essential to assess progress and adjust as needed.

## 2.1. DEVELOPING A SUSTAINABILITY ACTION PLAN FOR FOOTBALL ENTITIES: STEP BY STEP

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The parts mentioned before (sustainability assessment, setting measures and engaging stakeholders) are the first and crucial steps before taking any action.

From now on, we are introducing the necessary steps a football entity needs to take from the moment that actions are implemented.

### **Step 1: The actions**

This comprehends the specific actions the entity is going to take, things that have been targeted to change and improve. This means outlining initiatives for each target. For example:

- **Carbon Emissions Reduction:**
  - Implement energy-efficient lighting in the stadium.
  - Transition to renewable energy sources for club facilities.

- **Waste Management:**
  - Introduce a comprehensive recycling program at the stadium.
  - Partner with local organizations for composting organic waste.
- **Community Outreach:**
  - Launch youth engagement programs focusing on sustainability education.
  - Organize community clean-up events in collaboration with local NGOs.

Each action needs to be found in a detailed action plan with initiatives, timelines, responsible parties, and required resources.

### **Step 2: Implementation**

Assign responsibilities to specific teams or individuals within the organization for each action. Schedule the implementation of initiatives with clear deadlines and milestones. It is crucial to have a project timeline and assigned roles for effective execution.

### **Step 3: Monitoring and Measuring progress**

Key performance indicators (KPIs) need to be established for each target (e.g., energy consumption data, waste diversion rates). And there have to exist regular progress reviews (e.g., quarterly) to evaluate effectiveness and make adjustments as needed. As a result, the entity can obtain periodic sustainability reports that track progress against established targets.

### **Step 4: Reviewing and Adjusting**

Analyzing and monitoring data and stakeholder feedback to assess the impact of initiatives and identifying any barriers to success and adjust strategies accordingly is necessary. This step results in an updated action plan that reflects lessons learned and adjusts targets or initiatives based on performance.

### **Step 5: Communicating Results and Achievements**

Nowadays, if we do not communicate what we are doing it is like it hasn't existed. As being sustainable is good for our club reputation, sharing sustainability progress and achievements with stakeholders through newsletters, social media, and press releases is necessary. The entity should celebrate milestones with events or recognition programs for employees and fans as well. It will result in more awareness and engagement around the club's sustainability efforts, fostering a culture of sustainability among stakeholders.



# IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES IN DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

In recent years, the importance of sustainability has permeated various sectors, with sports (particularly football) emerging as a key player in the global push toward environmentally and socially responsible practices. Implementing sustainability practices in decision-making processes within football-related entities is not just an ethical imperative; it is increasingly seen as a strategic advantage. This chapter explores how football organizations can integrate sustainability into their decision-making frameworks, the benefits of doing so, and practical steps for implementation.

Integrating sustainability into decision-making processes allows football entities to align their operational goals with broader societal values. This alignment can enhance brand reputation, attract sponsorships, and foster loyalty among fans. Moreover, the shift towards sustainable practices can mitigate risks associated with regulatory changes and environmental challenges, such as climate change.

## EXAMPLES

The UEFA and FIFA have set precedents by emphasizing sustainability in their operations, from waste management to energy efficiency. As these organizations lead by example, clubs at all levels can leverage their frameworks to develop their sustainability strategies



### **Framework for Implementing Sustainability Practices:**

A successful sustainability initiative begins with a clear vision and policy that outlines the organization's commitment to sustainable practices. This policy should articulate the importance of sustainability in the club's identity and operations, including specific goals related to environmental impact, community engagement, and social equity.

For instance, a club may adopt a policy that commits to reducing its carbon footprint by 50% over the next decade. This policy can serve as a guiding principle in all decision-making processes, ensuring that sustainability is not an afterthought but a foundational element of the club's strategy.

Stakeholder engagement is critical for effective sustainability integration. Football entities must involve a diverse range of stakeholders, including players, fans, staff, local communities, and sponsors. This engagement can be achieved through surveys, focus groups, and collaborative workshops.

By incorporating feedback from stakeholders, clubs can develop initiatives that resonate with their community and enhance support for sustainability efforts. For example, fans may express interest in recycling programs or sustainable transportation options for match days, which can be integrated into the club's broader sustainability strategy.

To implement sustainability practices effectively, football organizations must rely on data. This includes assessing current environmental impacts, setting measurable targets, and tracking progress over time. Clubs should invest in data management systems that can collect and analyze information related to energy consumption, waste generation, and carbon emissions.

For example, a football club might track its energy use in the stadium and training facilities and compare it against industry benchmarks. By understanding their current footprint, organizations can make informed decisions about where to invest in improvements, such as energy-efficient lighting or renewable energy sources.

Establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) specific to sustainability allows football entities to measure their success and make adjustments as necessary.

By regularly reviewing these metrics, decision-makers can assess the effectiveness of their sustainability initiatives and adapt their strategies accordingly.

For sustainability practices to thrive, they must be ingrained in the club's culture. This involves training staff at all levels to recognize their role in promoting sustainability. Football clubs can conduct workshops and training sessions focused on sustainability practices, providing employees with the knowledge and tools to make informed decisions.

Additionally, clubs can celebrate sustainability achievements, such as reaching waste reduction targets or successfully launching a community program. Recognizing and rewarding sustainability efforts fosters a culture of responsibility and encourages continued commitment to sustainable practices.

## **Case Study: The Real Betis Balompié Approach**

Real Betis Balompié serves as an exemplary case of integrating sustainability into decision-making. The club has established a comprehensive sustainability policy that emphasizes environmental responsibility, social engagement, and economic viability.

Through partnerships with organizations Real Betis has developed a detailed sustainability action plan that includes, for example, measuring its carbon or water footprint and implementing initiatives to offset emissions. By engaging stakeholders (ranging from fans to local communities) the club has created a sense of ownership and support for its sustainability efforts.

Moreover, Real Betis has committed to regular reporting on its sustainability performance, allowing for transparency and accountability. This approach not only enhances the club's reputation but also sets a benchmark for other football entities aiming to incorporate sustainability into their governance frameworks.

## CONCLUSIONS

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Sustainability in football-related entities requires a comprehensive governance approach that encompasses leadership, infrastructure, strategy, and decision-making. Leaders and boards play a pivotal role in championing sustainability, setting a vision that aligns with the organization's core values and ensuring the necessary support and resources are in place. This includes establishing dedicated teams and robust data management systems to monitor sustainability metrics.

Developing a sustainability strategy involves conducting assessments to identify areas for improvement, setting measurable targets aligned with frameworks like the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and engaging stakeholders to foster ownership and collaboration.

Finally, integrating sustainability into decision-making processes is essential for aligning operational goals with broader societal values. By embedding sustainability into their governance frameworks, football entities can enhance their reputation, mitigate risks, and contribute positively to their communities while achieving long-term viability in a competitive landscape.

## MODULE 3: SUSTAINABILITY IN FOOTBALL-RELATED ENTITIES

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Welcome to this learning session on Sustainability in Football. In this programme, we will explore how football organisations can integrate sustainable practices into their operations to reduce their environmental impact and in doing so become leaders in the area.

By the end of this session, you will have an understanding of key sustainability areas and practical steps to implement within your organisation.

### WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN FOOTBALL?

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It is estimated that the global football industry produces more than 30 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, roughly the equivalent of the total emissions generated by Denmark. According to the European Union, the average European football match generates 0.8 kg of waste per spectator, which corresponds to an average of 4.2 tonnes of waste per match.

In 2023 the four professional divisions of English football saw 34 million people attend matches. This suggests the scale of carbon emissions as people travelled to matches - but also the opportunity; if football can reduce its impact, we are in turn able to affect large numbers of people and influence other industries.

Many activities involved in professional sport rely on the use of precious and limited commodities belonging to the earth's eco-system. This might be the travel needed to get to match, or the water that is used to maintain training pitches, or the electricity that we use to power stadiums, and the packaging around food and drink that is consumed in stadiums.

There are numerous ways in which football can be seen to be taking a profligate approach to the climate: by being slow to address impact, through unnecessary travel and increased development, new stadiums, new tournaments, and the inconvenient scheduling of matches.

Environmental sustainability in sports contexts refers to the practices and initiatives aimed at minimising the negative environmental impacts of sporting activities, events, and infrastructure.

It involves integrating eco-friendly measures to reduce carbon footprints, manage resources efficiently, promote long-term ecological balance, and ensure future viability.

Guided by the need to save natural resources and to minimise damaging carbon impact the key areas to address include waste reduction, water conservation, sustainable transportation, energy and production and the use of eco-friendly materials. This applies to the day to day running of organisations, our offices and headquarters, training centres, stadiums and team and fan travel.

The impact can also be felt through more structural issues in football - the way that we organise matches and structure competitions at all levels. More international competitions mean more matches which means a larger carbon footprint. The timing of matches is also significant; timed wrongly games can result in non-sustainable travel, people travelling by car rather than public transport.

## WHY SHOULD FOOTBALL ORGANISATIONS DEVELOP AN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY APPROACH?

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Sustainability applies to every aspect of the operations and business of football and involves integrating measures that reduce our carbon footprint, manage resources efficiently and promote ecological balance within our industry.

In working on the climate crisis, we have the opportunity to engage players, supporters, sponsors, media and others to whom we can give a lead in understanding their own environmental impact and how to reduce it.

Alongside the need to reduce impact, football can bring about cost savings and enhance reputation and brand. Supporters, consumers and the media are very interested in how football is responding to the global climate crisis. In the age of cause marketing and ethical alignment, sponsors will be more attracted to football organizations that are putting in the hard yards required to be on a journey to net zero.

And as our examples will show clubs and football associations that are effectively reducing impact are being seen as leaders in the field.

Another emerging factor is the increasing pressure to do more from regulators, through requirements set down by governments and others. Being ahead of the game helps us to avoid such pressures.

In summary, we act on environmental sustainability to reduce our environmental footprint, to initiate long-term cost savings and ensure future

viability, to enhance our reputation and engage with supporters, the media and wider society, to ensure current and future regulatory compliance, to give leadership in our own sector and beyond, and to support broader global social goals.

## ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGY AND POLICY ON SUSTAINABILITY

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To effectively implement sustainability, it should be embedded into the core strategy of your organization. This starts with developing a clear sustainability policy.

A good policy should include your vision, mission, and objectives related to sustainability. Many clubs and organizations have successfully aligned their sustainability goals with their overall objectives. This alignment helps ensure that sustainability becomes part of daily operations rather than an afterthought.

To help you understand the field you can familiarize yourself with the key sustainability frameworks and standards. Those relating to football will be mentioned later in this training.

As with all strategies it is common to understand and prioritize the most important sustainability challenges for your business and stakeholders. In sustainability a common way to do this is to develop a materiality analysis. This can be achieved by developing a chart or grid that lists which sustainability topics are most relevant to your organization. This will also be a crucial feature of your sustainability action plan to be covered in a later section.

Align your sustainability and organizational goals. Every element of your organizational strategy and action should have an element of sustainability, discuss this with internal colleagues. As part of your strategy you will be talking to all relevant stakeholders, including your colleagues and external partners such as supporters, sponsors, suppliers, and relevant local authorities.

Setting targets and performance indicators for action by the organization which also align with the goals of a member of the senior leadership team and/ or CEO is important to ensure action is mainstreamed internally.

A couple of tasks for you to think about. Task one: Does your club already have a sustainability policy? If not, what would be the first steps in creating one? Brainstorm for a few minutes.

Task two: After this session conduct a materiality analysis to determine which sustainability topics are most relevant to your organization. Review the results of the materiality analysis to define the scope of your strategy.

## DEFINITIONS OF KEY AREAS IN ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

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There are a number of definitions that are relevant to the field, they will become a key part of the language of your work. The concepts and your understanding of them will become more complex and detailed as you progress on your sustainability journey .

Three of the key concepts are:

**Carbon footprint:** The total amount of greenhouse gases, particularly carbon dioxide, that an organization emits directly or indirectly.

**Resource conservation:** The practice of managing resources such as water, energy, and raw materials to avoid waste and ensure availability for future generations.

**Sustainable sourcing:** Procuring goods and services in a way that considers their environmental and social impact.

The Planet Goals project has produced a handbook of terms as part of this training. Use this as a reference, share with colleagues and add to with more concepts and ideas as you develop your work.

## IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN EVENT MANAGEMENT AND FACILITY MANAGEMENT

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We can identify two key aspects of football where we should look to integrate an environmental sustainability approach: the events we hold - from hosting matches to the management of big events – and the management of facilities that support those matches.

Your materiality analysis will inform you about many of the areas that you prioritize.

For events these priorities may be:

**Waste reduction strategies:** The high impact approach here is to ban single-use plastics and alongside this measure implement recycling programs for everything else. The plethora of advice and experts on waste reduction means this is a tried and tested area for you to implement.

**Energy efficiency:** This has two elements, that of developing usage and equipment solutions such as using LED lighting, and other energy-efficient technologies, and using renewable energy sources - of which there are a fast-growing number of suppliers in every market. These actions are at the core of some of the best practice examples of sustainability in sport.

**Sustainable sourcing:** This action touches on the consumption of football supporters and the opportunity to develop eco-friendly merchandise, with a wider range of food and beverage options, and associate packaging involved.

**Transport and logistics:** Promoting public transport, bike-friendly venues, and low-emission travel options should accompany an approach that also looks at the timing and numbers of matches to allow for the use of sustainable transport.

In facility management the issues are more structural and concern the design and construction of stadiums.

This means adhering to green building standards, using cutting-edge sustainable materials, and drawing on new resource materials to minimize environmental impact.

**Construction:** The construction development of stadia and other venues contributes to emissions and uses valuable resources that need to be considered

Water management issues include rainwater harvesting, greywater systems, and efficient irrigation for pitches.

Use of solar panels, energy storage systems, and smart building technologies are part of the energy management measures most used to conserve and use natural resources

**Resource conservation and maintenance:** Refers to the need for routine audits, efficient heating/cooling systems, and sustainable landscaping to maintain a sustainable football facility. In short, a green facility requires maintenance to keep peak performance.

## CARBON FOOTPRINT AND LIFE CYCLE

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As you move towards developing action to reduce your carbon footprint there are a few key principles to understand and implement that help to measure, assess and act.

There is now a methodology to calculate the carbon footprint of events, travel, and facility use, these resources help you to understand the scale of your impact. Many of the most sustainable organizations in football set the ambitious target of zero emissions and develop a road map to achieve it.



A life cycle analysis is a methodology that evaluates the environmental impact of a product, service, or system over its entire life cycle. It is known as a "cradle-to-grave" analysis. This can be critical to know what the future impact is as part of your calculations and targets to reduce carbon.

Once the measurement activities have been actioned, carbon reduction and carbon offsetting initiatives come into play. In the past carbon offset measures have taken the form of reforestation projects, investment in green technologies, etc. The expertise and debates around offsets are developing fast and different approaches are taking hold, keeping up to speed with these developments.

*Are you tracking your carbon footprint? What challenges have you faced in understanding it and reducing it?*

## SUPPLY CHAIN AND SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT

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Sustainable procurement means sourcing products and services that have minimal negative environmental and social impacts. Football organisations rely on a complex supply chain, from stadium developers to tech suppliers, to merchandise producers. When engaging with suppliers, do your due diligence by asking questions about their sustainability approach, specifically,

**Their environmental impact:** Do they use renewable materials or energy? Do they follow fair trade and ethical practices?

**Product life cycles:** Are their products recyclable or made from sustainable materials?

**Supplier commitment:** How committed are parts of your supply chain to reducing their carbon emissions? It may be helpful to produce your own green procurement guidelines to help suppliers understand your rationale.

Engaging with suppliers to raise issues of concern and to improve their sustainability practices enhances your organization's environmental footprint but also supports sustainable industries.

*Question: How can you engage your current suppliers to adopt more sustainable practices?*

# CASE STUDIES AND BEST PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE FOOTBALL

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Let's look at some case studies of football organizations that have made progress in sustainability.

The bar is set high by Forest Green Rovers, a club in England, has been called the world's greenest football club. Rovers use 100% renewable energy, rainwater nourishes pitches, they provide plant-based food options to supporters and players, and their stadium is made of sustainable materials.

FC Barcelona's Espai Barça project holds a BREEAM certification for sustainable building design, in addition the club has made progress in energy efficiency through the use of LED lighting and renewable energy sources. Barcelona have set out a public commitment to reducing energy consumption, water use, and waste production across its facilities. <https://espaibarca.fcbarcelona.com/en>

Bundesliga Club, VfL Wolfsburg is a leader in sustainability. They have joined initiatives such as the UN's 'Race to Zero' to achieve net-zero emissions by 2025. Among the sustainability measures they have implemented are LED stadium lighting and electric vehicle charging stations. Uniquely they collaborate with startups to track and reduce carbon <https://www.vfl-wolfsburg.de/en/newsdetails/news-detail/detail/news/sixth-sustainability-report-published>.

In 2023, the English Football Association launched its Playing for the Future strategy, which focuses on reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2040. This includes investments in sustainable infrastructure, including eco-friendly pitches, and efforts to reduce energy consumption at its venues, including Wembley Stadium.

The Europa Park Stadium, the home of SC Freiburg in Germany, has a solar power plant on the roof of the stadium. The 2.4-megawatt system is one of the world's largest solar roofs in a stadium and generates enough electricity to power the stadium, making it energy neutral.

*What lessons can we learn from these case studies? How could similar practices be implemented in your organization?*

# DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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Developing a sustainability plan follows the development of an overarching sustainability strategy and policy.

The plan should be an ongoing process to be seen as a roadmap.

Any successful strategy in football will require Board level buy-in and agreement amongst the senior executive team. This gives your strategy impetus and helps to define responsibility for action.

A baseline assessment, or materiality analysis, of where you are now and what is relevant to your organisation

The setting of clear sustainability goals and targets, such as reducing energy use by 20% or switching to 100% recyclable materials, net zero targets, etc.

Engaging stakeholders such supporters, players, sponsors, internal colleagues and Board members, and suppliers in your sustainability journey. Use an internal cross-departmental working group if necessary to support implementation.

Continuous improvement through monitoring progress through KPIs and adapting your strategy as needed as you move through your achievements.

Publicise and reward: Transparency is important in the field of sustainability, so be open about your plans, targets and methodologies. It will be regarded as progressive and creditworthy. At the same time do not be shy about celebrating your successes when you reach milestones and targets. Internal rewards to be acknowledged and celebrated by the whole organisation play an important motivational role.

# MODULE 4: ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL GOVERNANCE (ESG) STRATEGY IN FOOTBALL-RELATED ENTITIES

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Sustainability and responsible governance gain more and more ground when it comes to business investing and operations across all industries, including football-related entities whose potential social and cultural influence is well-established as football is the most popular sports in the world with millions of supporters and fans, employees and engaged parties. Football clubs, associations, federations, and organizations can be vehicles for positive societal and environmental changes, but they also need to address challenges and opportunities in relation with the international nature of the sport and the socio-environmental impact of their operations.

In this sense, the adoption of **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)** practices by football-related entities can assist them in boosting their reputation, creating stronger ties with their respective communities and fan bases, improve their competitiveness, and mitigate the risks that their operations pose. Designated ESG strategies enable football to foster social inclusion and integration, minimize the environmental footprint, and establish governance structures that are centered around transparency and accountability.

This module begins with presenting certain fundamental aspects of ESG, focusing on the benefits of ESG adoption by football-related entities, exploring existing frameworks that guide sustainability strategies, and emphasizing on the significance of measuring any progress via Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

## 1. DEFINITION OF ESG AND ITS BENEFITS FOR FOOTBALL-RELATED ENTITIES

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### 1.1 What is ESG?

**Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)** is a set of standards for how organizations, businesses, and industries operate in regard to the planet and its people as well as to their internal structures, aiming at formulating a holistic approach that incorporates sustainability and balances profit with purpose. ESG criteria could ensure the positive contribution of such actors

towards society and the environment and their transparent and ethical governance.

When it comes to football, ESG covers a wide range of activities:

**Environmental:** Reducing the environmental impact of sports infrastructures (e.g., with the sustainable construction of new or the renovation of existing facilities), adopting energy-saving and sustainable waste management solutions, and minimizing mobility emissions.

**Social:** Focusing on community engagement, enhancing inclusion of vulnerable groups of people in football activities, and fostering gender equality among participants and supporters.

**Governance:** Incorporating transparency in decision-making, ethical business conduct, accountability, anti-corruption policies, and stakeholders' engagement.

Football-related entities can lead by example demonstrating how popular organizations with massive operations can balance sustainability with the pursuit of growth.

## 1.2 The Benefits of ESG for Football-Related Entities

ESG practices can benefit football-related entities both **directly** and **indirectly**, from cost saving and maximizing operational efficiency to improving fan engagement and building a good reputation. Below a short elaboration on these benefits follows, classified in three categories, **financial**, **social**, and **environmental**, with all three contributing to the desired long-term competitiveness.

### 1.2.1 Financial benefits

The financial benefits of adopting ESG strategies in football may include a more efficient operational capacity that leads to cost saving, revenue growth from new business opportunities, attracting sustainable investment, and improved risk management.

1. **Cost saving through enhanced efficiency:** Sustainable energy practices, like the installation of energy-efficient lighting systems in football infrastructures can ensure important cost savings. For instance, FC

Barcelona will use smart lighting in the future Camp Nou stadium, reducing its energy consumption<sup>1</sup>. Usually, operational costs are reduced in the long run for clubs that adopt sustainable waste management, energy and water use optimization schemes, and recycling programs.

2. **Revenue growth:** Supporters and sponsors tend to provide more support for football-related entities that demonstrate strong ESG credentials, and financial partnerships that take into account ESG concerns are more appealing to conscious consumers.
3. **Risk management:** Risks that relate to environmental and societal factors are more and more common in the football world, requiring designated ESG strategies that can safeguard the adopting actors. For instance, clubs that implement climate adaptation practices can achieve operational continuity in extreme conditions that otherwise would affect their schedule.
4. **Attracting sustainable investment:** Investment into sustainable organizations goes in high numbers in this era and football-related entities which are in-line with ESG standards can access such kind of funding either for sustainable infrastructure projects or for community-engagement initiatives.

### 1.2.2 Social benefits

By deploying ESG strategies, football-related entities can lead to an improved public health, foster diversity and inclusion, and boost community engagement.

1. **Public health improvement:** Football clubs are ideal to promote physical and mental health via their popular platforms. **Barcelona Foundation**, for example, implements projects targeting underprivileged youth (e.g., refugee children, unaccompanied minors, etc.) and aiming at improving their overall well-being with an emphasis on physical and mental health.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the sustainability strategy that accompanies Barcelona's planning for the new Camp Nou are available here: <https://www.fcbarcelona.com/en/card/1651903/sustainability-future-camp-nou>.

<sup>2</sup> As per the official Barcelona Foundation's website: "We want to improve the physical, mental and emotional health of children and young people through programs to facilitate access to medical emotional and psychosocial care both in the hospital and the

2. **Inclusion and diversity:** Football-related entities that prioritize inclusivity and diversity (e.g., through anti-racism and gender equity campaigns or grassroots programs for vulnerable groups) can achieve a remarkable social impact. For example, UEFA, the governing body of European football, has developed the **#EqualGame** campaign to promote “the vision that everybody should be able to play football”.
3. **Community engagement:** Football entities exercise a significant influence to their communities, especially at local and national levels, thus enhancing their community bonds and improving their public image when implementing outreach programming that benefits the locals. **FC Everton's “Everton in the Community”** initiative, which includes activities with regards to education, health and employment for the underprivileged communities of Liverpool, is a perfect example in this field.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.2.3 Environmental Benefits

Football-related entities are involved in huge operations that have a strong environmental impact to be mitigated by ESG practices, thus contributing to environmental sustainability through carbon emissions reduction, sustainable waste management, water saving, and environmental education.

1. **Carbon footprint reduction:** Clubs and associations can reduce their carbon footprint by prioritizing renewable energy solutions, promoting smart mobility, and eliminating paper waste. The “world’s greenest football club”, **Forest Green Rovers**, powers its stadium exclusively by renewable sources and uses an organic turf without any use of fertilizers and pesticides, bringing sustainable innovation to the world of football.
2. **Waste management:** More and more football clubs deploy strategies for the reduction of waste, for the elimination of single-use plastics, or for the

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community. Likewise, we strengthen the prevention of diseases that affect children in vulnerable situations at the local and international levels, and we work to mitigate the impact of disorders that may represent a limitation for the proper development of children and young people”.

Available in <https://foundation.fcbarcelona.com/en/our-work/programs-and-methodologies>.

<sup>3</sup> More information about the Everton's initiative could be found in this link: <https://www.evertoninthecommunity.org/>.

promotion of recycling across all their activities, contributing to an eco-friendly stance towards the environment.

3. **Water saving:** Football turfs require huge amounts of water for their irrigation and innovative water recycling solutions can effectively reduce water consumption, mainly by making advantage of rain water.
4. **Environmental education:** Football-related entities usually have powerful platforms and loyal fan bases to be used for the promotion of environmental education and advocacy. Campaigns that include popular footballers to promote environmental awareness tend to be very effective.

#### 1.2.4 Long-term competitiveness

Beyond the above-mentioned benefits, alignment with ESG frameworks improves the long-term competitiveness of football-related entities. ESG strategies usually ensure the adopting actors' compliance with state-driven environmental regulations, enhance their chances of being benefited by fan engagement and gathering the top talents, in terms of staff and players, and make them attractive for sponsors that count sustainability as an important factor when deciding their resources allocation.

#### EXAMPLES

- [Barcelona Foundation](#) with regards to social sustainability projects focused on underprivileged individuals' well-being.
- [Everton in the Community](#), FC Everton's sustainability project that seeks to improve the well-being of the local community's underprivileged persons.
- Forest Green Rover's [Eco Park](#), the world's future greenest stadium.
- UEFA's "[Equal Game](#)" initiative for the promotion of inclusivity and diversity across European football.
- [Sports Positive League](#) initiative that ranks the sustainability initiatives of professional football clubs.



## 2. ESG FRAMEWORKS

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Integrating **ESG strategies** to football world is not always easy and globally recognized frameworks with which football-related entities could be aligned can be proven crucial in maximizing the effectiveness of such initiatives, by providing structured models for tracking the ESG activities as well as for ensuring continuity and accountability. For the purpose of this study, some of most popular ESG frameworks are briefly described and presented in relation to football operations.

### 2.1 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** are a set of 17 global goals established in 2015, aspiring to address significant environmental and social challenges by 2030. These goals are well-known as a universal framework for all sectors when it comes to sustainability promotion. Regarding football, SDGs can be helpful in identifying key areas for intervention and they provide guidelines on how to measure and report any progress.

Certain SDGs can be relevant to football operations:

- **Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being:** As it was also analyzed above, football-related entities are ideal candidates to engage their communities for the promotion of physical and mental health. Mental health campaigns for sportspersons are getting extremely popular these days as well as programs which seek to improve fans' fitness level.
- **Goal 5: Gender Equality:** Gender inequality is a long-standing issue across football operations, which is somehow mitigated by the promotion of women's football or the deployment of women in leadership positions.
- **Goal 13: Climate Action:** Football clubs, associations, and federations can be pivotal in raising awareness towards climate change consequences and leading by example in the forms of reducing their carbon emissions or adopting sustainability projects.
- **Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities:** Sustainable infrastructures can reshape the cities and communities where they are located, for instance by creating green, public spaces around the football stadiums, by promoting public transportation to reduce traffic congestion during match days, and by producing less waste.

### 2.2 The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards

ESG is not only for implementing sustainability initiatives but comes also with accountability and reporting responsibilities and the **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)** is one of the most popular, relevant frameworks, providing

extensive guidelines for organizations to report their economic, environmental, and social impact in a transparent manner.

Football-related entities can adopt the GRI set of standards to ensure comprehensive reporting on their ESG activities. Key benefits may include:

- **Transparency:** GRI's reporting guidelines provide a clear structure for the disclosure of ESG performance, ensuring transparency with fans, sponsors, investors, and competent, regulatory bodies.
- **Engagement:** GRI assists the football-related entities' engagement with stakeholders and demonstrates their commitment to sustainability.
- **Benchmarking:** GRI enables football-related entities to benchmark their sustainability efforts in relation to global standards, identifying areas for improvement and aligning their efforts with international best practices.

### **2.3 Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB)**

The **Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB)** is a non-profit organization that provides industry-specific standards to help organizations report on sustainability, specializing on financial performance. SASB is particularly beneficial for football-related entities that wish to communicate their ESG performance to investors and sponsors.

SASB standards for the sports sector may emphasize metrics related to climate risk, energy consumption, waste management, and social inclusivity and football-related entities that adopt SASB standards can benefit from:

- **Investor confidence:** By reporting on financial ESG issues, football clubs can attract socially responsible investors and demonstrate their commitment on mitigating long-term risks.
- **Sector-specific relevance:** SASB's industry-specific standards support the football-related entities' reporting to be aligned with the adopted business model.

### **2.4 Other Relevant ESG Frameworks**

While the SDGs, GRI, and SASB are among the most widely adopted frameworks, football-related entities may also consider other relevant set of standards for their strategies:

- **Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD):** The TCFD was established by the Group of 20 and the Financial Stability Board in 2015 to provide recommendations for disclosing climate-related risks and opportunities. TCFD could be extremely valuable for football clubs or federations that face climate risks.

- **ISO 20121 – Sustainable Event Management:** For football entities, especially governing bodies such as FIFA and UEFA, that host large-scale events, **ISO 20121** can be used for seeking guidance on making events and competitions more sustainable by reducing environmental impact, adopting best practices regarding resources management, and ensuring that environmental concerns go hand-by-hand with inclusion and diversity.

#### EXAMPLES

- United Nations' [platform](#) for the global football community to engage with and advocate for the Sustainable Development Goals.
- UEFA's [Sustainability Strategy](#).
- FIFA's [Sustainability Strategy](#).
- Tottenham Hotspur's [sustainable stadium](#).

## 3. MATERIALITY ASSESSMENT FOR PRIORITIZING RIGHT ACTIONS

### 3.1 What is a Materiality Assessment?

A **materiality assessment** is designed to assist organizations in identifying, understanding, and prioritizing the most relevant ESG topics for them, as not all of them have the same impact across the various sectors and specific conditions. Materiality assessment enables football-related entities to focus their efforts on the most significant ESG issues, ensuring the more effective and impactful resources allocation, and optimizes their decision-making ensuring that the sustainability initiatives will become an integral part for the organization's mission and internal operations. In addition, the involvement of stakeholders increases transparency, keeps the fan engaged, and builds trust. resources are allocated where they will have the most impact. By conducting regular materiality assessments, football clubs can ensure that their ESG strategies remain relevant, targeted, and effective.

### 3.2 Steps in a Materiality Assessment

1. **Stakeholder engagement:** Each stakeholder usually has different priorities so engaging with them is crucial in order to identify the needs and potential areas of intervention.
2. **Identifying ESG Issues:** This step should include reviewing industry trends, regulatory frameworks, and internal capacity to ensure a comprehensive view of potential ESG issues.
3. **Prioritization:** Evaluation of potential ESG issues with regards to their impact on the organization's operations and the their significance for the stakeholders and prioritization of those of them that can be more impactful for both the organization and the stakeholders.
4. **Strategic integration:** Integration of the prioritized ESG topics into the club's strategic plans, operations, and reporting processes.

## 4. MEASURING PROGRESS AND SUCCESS: ESG KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIs)

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### 4.1 Measuring ESG Progress

ESG strategies should be accompanied with regular progress tracking according to certain **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** that provide measurable metrics to assess the organization's performance in achieving the set ESG goals. KPIs ensure accountability and transparency and foster continuous improvement. Football-related entities should establish systems for regularly monitoring and reporting on KPIs, including setting up **sustainability committees** that oversee ESG practices, working with external auditors to verify progress, and publishing annual sustainability reports. Some of the most common KPIs regarding sustainability that could be proven useful for football-related entities may be found below.

#### Environmental KPIs:

- **Carbon emissions:** Tracking the total emissions from events operations, clubs' and fan's transportation.
- **Energy consumption:** Monitoring the total energy consumed during operations in stadiums and training facilities as well in football-related entities' HQs.

- **Water consumption:** Monitoring the amount of water consumed in stadiums and training facilities.
- **Waste management:** Monitoring the amount of waste produced, recycled, or composted, and setting targets for reducing waste.

#### **Social KPIs:**

- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Tracking the percentage of women and underprivileged groups of people in leadership roles and coaching positions within football-related entities.
- **Community impact:** Measuring the number of community-based activities and programs, the individuals reached by them, and the outcomes achieved.
- **Players and staff's well-being:** Tracking the mental health support, injury prevention, and wellness programs offered to players and staff.

#### **Governance KPIs:**

- **Transparency in decision-making:** Tracking the percentage of decisions made with stakeholder input taken into account and number of governance reports that are accessible to the public.
- **Code of Ethics:** Tracking incidents related to corruption, discrimination, or misbehavior, and the effectiveness of mitigation initiatives and practices.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Tracking the frequency and outcomes of community-based activities that target supporters and fans, sponsors, staff members, and the community per se as well as the number of actions taken based on stakeholders' feedback.

## CONCLUSION

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Incorporating **Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)** strategies has become essential for football-related entities in order to ensure their long-term competitiveness, environmental and social impact, and overall success. By understanding the frameworks guiding ESG practices, conducting materiality assessments, and measuring progress through KPIs, football clubs, organizations, and associations can lead by example towards a more sustainable and socially responsible future. Football entities are in a unique position to not only reduce their environmental footprint but also to act as catalysts for positive social change. Through strategic ESG integration, football can continue to inspire millions while making tangible contributions to a more sustainable and inclusive world.

## MODULE 5: SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY – PROMOTING HEALTHY LIFESTYLES THROUGH FOOTBALL

### FOOTBALL BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER

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Research interest on physical activity and health dates back all the way to 1950s, the breakthrough in the scientific evidence on health benefits of physical activity largely took place during the 1980s and 1990s. There is a great amount of scientific evidence on the positive effects of sport and physical activity as part of a healthy lifestyle. The positive, direct effects of engaging in regular physical activity are particularly apparent in the prevention of multiple chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, hypertension, obesity, depression and osteoporosis.

The benefits of football for well-being and health are enormous. In addition to improvements in bone health, muscle strength, coordination, cognitive skills and confidence building, football also affects impressively to mental health. Participation in football regularly has been shown to improve mental health by lowering stress, easing anxiety and reducing feelings of loneliness. Football brings people together: regardless of different backgrounds.

### FOOTBALL HELPS TO STAY ACTIVE

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Practicing football regularly provides people, male and female, of all ages and conditions, including persons with disability with wide range of physical health benefits. It interacts positively with strategies improve diet, discourage the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, helps reduce violence, enhances functional capacity and promotes social interaction and integration. Physical activity is for an individual: a strong means for prevention of diseases and for nations a cost-effective method to improve public health across the population.



## STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING HEALTHY LIFESTYLES AND REDUCING SEDENTARY BEHAVIOR

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With sufficient and versatile exercise, one can overcome the disadvantages of sedentary behavior. It is necessary to make people aware of the health benefits of physical activity. Promoting a healthy lifestyle and reducing sedentary behavior involves a combination of strategies aimed at increasing physical activity, improving dietary habits, and encouraging overall wellness. The key strategies are:

### 1. PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

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Use media, social platforms and community programs to spread awareness about the benefits of physical activity and the risks associated with sedentary behavior. Promote stories and testimonials of individuals or public figures (e.g. role models) who have adopted healthier lifestyles. Communicate simple, actionable advice, for example “Move more, sit less” or “30 minutes of activity a day.”

## 2. CREATING SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

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Ensure that parks, gyms and recreational facilities are easily accessible and affordable. Develop urban spaces that encourage walking, cycling and other forms of active transportation. Introduce standing desks, walking meetings and active breaks in workplaces.

## 3. POLICY AND REGULATION

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Implement physical education and active play in schools as a mandatory part of the curriculum. Encourage or mandate regular breaks or movement in the workplace.

## 4. INCORPORATING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INTO

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Promote walking or cycling to work instead of driving. Encourage people to take stairs instead of the elevator or to walk short distances instead of driving. Provide resources and guidance for home-based exercises for those who cannot access gyms.

## 5. TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

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Use apps that track activity levels, set goals and provide reminders to move. Encourage the use of fitness trackers and smartwatches that monitor physical activity and provide feedback. Offer virtual exercise classes to make exercise accessible at home.

## 6. COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS

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Organize community events, for example fun runs, group fitness classes or dance lessons to make exercise social and enjoyable. Create or join support networks that encourage accountability and motivation. Partner with local organizations to develop programs tailored to the community's needs such as walking clubs or family fitness challenges.



## 7. HEALTHY EATING INITIATIVES

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Teach the importance of balanced diets and how to make healthy food choices. Increase access to fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables in all communities, particularly in food deserts. Provide workshops on preparing healthy meals at home.

## 8. TARGETING SPECIFIC GROUPS

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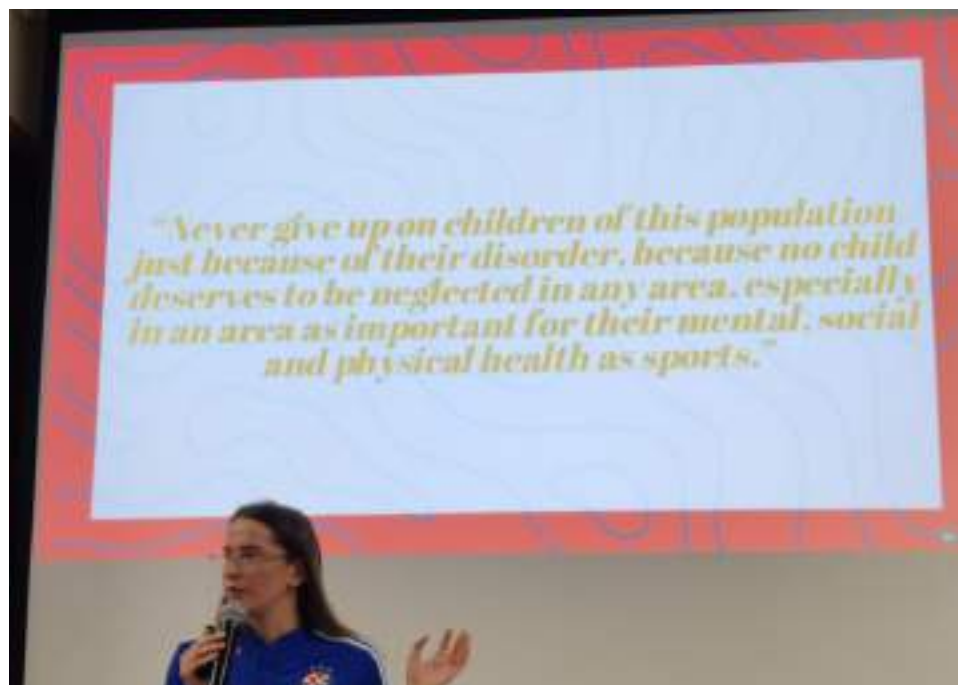
Children and adolescents: focus on reducing screen time and increasing outdoor play.

Elderly: Promote low-impact activities like walking, swimming or yoga that improves mobility and overall health. At-risk populations: Tailor interventions to groups with higher risks of sedentary lifestyles, such as those with chronic conditions or those living in urban areas.

## SUMMARY

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Encourage incorporating physical activity into daily life, create supportive environments, be supportive and encourage the whole community to participate in making better choices for their health. Spread awareness, in this area it is impossible to be too loud.



## SUPPORTING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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Football-related entities, such as clubs, leagues, associations, and community organizations, have a significant role in promoting physical activity for all, including under-represented groups. This is how football-related entities can ensure that physical activity through football is accessible to everyone, regardless of background or ability, thereby fostering a more inclusive and active society.

**Grassroots programs:** Develop and fund grassroots football programs that are aimed at all age groups, genders and abilities. These programs should be accessible and affordable, especially in underprivileged areas.



**Targeted outreach:** Create specific initiatives aimed at under-represented groups such as women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged communities. For example, women's football leagues, walking football for older adults, or adaptive football for people with disabilities.

**Cultural sensitivity:** Design programs that respect and incorporate cultural differences. This includes offering women-only sessions in communities where cultural norms may restrict mixed-gender activities.

**Adapted facilities:** Ensure that football facilities are accessible to also people with disabilities. This includes wheelchair-accessible changing rooms, pitches, and viewing areas.

**Representation in Decision-Making:** Ensure that under-represented groups are included in decision-making processes within foot-ball related entities. This can be achieved through advisory boards, committees or direct consultation.

**Anti-Discrimination Policies:** Enforce strict anti-discrimination policies within all football-related activities, ensuring a safe and welcoming environment for all participants.

**Social media:** Use media platforms to showcase stories and successes of under-represented groups in football, challenging stereotypes and encouraging wide participation. Ensure that promotional materials are inclusive in both language and imagery, representing a diverse range of participants. Utilize social media to reach and engage with under-represented groups, using platforms they are active to share opportunities and success stories.

**Events and tournaments:** Organize football events that are specifically designed to include under-represented groups, such as women's tournaments, disability-friendly matches, or community festivals. Break down barriers and promote inclusivity by hosting events that encourage mixed-gender or mixed-age participants to participate. Integrate football activities into broader cultural festivals that celebrate diversity, using the sport as a tool for community building.

#### EXAMPLES

- Health Life Academy - <https://healthlifeacademy.com/#>
- World Health Organization and FIFA - <https://www.who.int/news/item/04-10-2019-who-and-fifa-team-up-for-health>
- FIFA Grassroots Program and Forward Program - <https://www.safa.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Grassroots.pdf>
- UEFA Grassroots Charter and Women's Football Development Program - <https://www.uefa.com/development/grassroots/>
- Special Olympics - <https://www.specialolympics.org/>

## ENGAGEMENT

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Engage the community by being active and make the actions visible, so they will be remembered. Don't take anything for granted and remember to keep up with today's changing world.

**Arrange a wide range of activities** that aim to different age groups, fitness levels and interests such as walking clubs, yoga classes, dance lessons and sports leagues. Variety ensures that there is something for everyone. Also, create programs that involve the whole family, such as family exercise days or parent-child classes. This encourages participation across generations and builds a culture of physical activity within households. Ensure that these programs are inclusive of all abilities and backgrounds. This includes offering adaptive sports for people with disabilities and culturally sensitive programs that respect the traditions and preferences of different ethnic groups.



**Community needs assessment.** Conduct surveys and focus groups to understand the community's current level of physical activity, interests, and barriers to a healthy lifestyle. Remember to involve community members in this process to ensure that the programs are relevant and tailored to their needs. Engage local leaders, including religious leaders, teachers and community organizers to gain insights into the community's need and to build trust.

**Partner with schools, local businesses, healthcare providers, and non-profits to create a network of support for healthy living**

**initiatives.** For example, local businesses can sponsor community fitness events. Also, work with health agencies to align community programs with broader public health goals and to access resources, such as funding, training, and educational materials. Collaborate with local sports clubs and gyms to offer discounted or free access to facilities and classes. They can also provide expertise in designing effective physical activity programs.

**Spark the interest of the audience.** For example, run campaigns that educate the community about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and the importance of physical activity. Use various platforms, such as social media, newspapers, radio and community bulletin boards to reach different demographics. Share success stories of community members who have improved their health through physical activity. These stories can serve as powerful motivators and show that change is possible.

**Track participation and progress:** use sign-ups, attendance records and participant feedback to track the success of programs and identify areas for improvement. Regularly check what is working and what is not and be willing to adapt programs based on this feedback. Involve the community on how programs can be improved or expanded.

**When designing programs, keep sustainability in mind.** Ensure that they can continue beyond initial funding or enthusiasm. This might include training local volunteers to lead activities or establishing partnerships that can provide ongoing support. Encourage community members to take ownership of programs by involving them in leadership roles, decision-making and volunteer opportunities. When they feel involved, they are more likely to stay engaged and promote the program to others.

#### EXAMPLES

- Nike: Free app with variety of workouts - <https://www.nike.com/hr/ntc-app>
- Coca-Cola Foundation's Healthy Active Living Programs, Get active programs - <https://www.coca-colacompany.com/media-center/healthy-fun-in-the-summer-sun-coke-supports-active-healthy-lifestyles-and-military-heroes>
- YMCA: Health and Fitness Programs, Chronic Disease Prevention Programs - <https://www.ymca.org/what-we-do/healthy-living/fitness>
- Aktivna Hrvatska (Active Croatia) - <https://www.aktivnahrvatska.hr/>
- Finnish Schools on the Move - <https://schoolsonthemove.fi/about-us/>
- UKK Institute - <https://ukkinstituutti.fi/en/>

## GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

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It is important to give back to the community of their volunteering, free time or participation. When they feel seen and heard they more likely will stay engaged. Giving back to the community helps to unite the community and bridge some of the social, economic and political gaps.

Rewarding is a great way to show gratitude for choosing healthier lifestyles. Implement reward programs where participants can earn points or receive incentives for engaging in physical activity or attending health-related activities or events. For example, rewards could be discounts at local stores, free fitness gear, or vouchers for healthy meals. Organize celebration days like community runs, sports tournaments or fitness challenges to celebrate the community's commitment to a healthy lifestyle. These events can be combined with awards and recognition for participants.

Use health-related events to raise funds for local causes, such as building new recreational facilities, supporting local schools, or helping community members in need. This connects the idea of health with broader community well-being. Also use your time to volunteer at local events even if the program is finished. Offer your time and expertise to support local health and wellness events, such as marathons, health fairs or school wellness days. Your involvement can help ensure these events are successful and impactful.



**Special Power League Rovinj 2024**

Partner with mental health organizations to offer free or subsidized counseling services, stress management workshops or mindfulness classes in the

community. Remember to promote mental health awareness: organize campaigns that raise awareness about mental health and encourage open discussions. Host events or create materials that educate people on the importance of mental well-being alongside physical health.

#### EXAMPLES

- Ben & Jerrys, Social Justice and Environmental cause - <https://www.benjerry.com/values/issues-we-care-about>
- Johnson & Johnson, Global Health and Wellness - <https://www.jnj.com/global-health-equity>
- New Balance, Youth Fitness and Community Health - <https://www.newbalance.co.uk/nbgivesback/>
- The North Face: Outdoor Exploration and Environmental Conservation - <https://www.thenorthface.com/en-us/sustainability>
- Podravka, Food and Nutrition - <https://www.podravka.hr/>
- Polarv Health and Fitness Technology - <https://support.polar.com/welcome>

## FUTURE TRENDS IN FOOTBALL AND HEALTH

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As previously mentioned, football has multiple positive effects to mental health. There is likely to be an increasing emphasis on mental health in football, with clubs investing in mental wellness programs, mindfulness training and psychological support. Mental resilience and emotional intelligence may become as important as physical fitness in player development. As a part of this holistic approach future football programs might integrate education on nutrition, sleep, and overall lifestyle management, ensuring that players maintain health beyond their careers.

International collaborations may grow with football being used as a tool for promoting health and well-being in underserved communities worldwide. These efforts might include building facilities in remote areas, providing coaching resources, and integrating football into public health campaigns.

The focus will be on youth and grassroots programs. The future may see a stronger focus on integrating football into curriculums and youth development programs to instill healthy habits from a young age. Programs will emphasize fun, participation, and long-term engagement over competition. Grassroots football clubs could partner with local health organizations to deliver community-based health initiatives, using football as a vehicle to promote physical activity, healthy eating and mental well-being.

**Handball tournament in Rovinj**



**International Youth Sport Camp Rovinj**



## GLOBAL HEALTH CHALLENGES AND FOOTBALL'S ROLE

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Football will be seen as a health ambassador. Clubs or players will take greater roles as ambassadors for health, using their platforms to advocate for healthy living, vaccination campaigns and global health awareness. Football can be used to educate people about global health challenges such as pandemics, climate change and health inequalities. Schools and youth programs can incorporate football-based curricula that teach both the importance of physical activity and broader health concepts. As the sport continues to evolve, its role in global health will likely expand, offering new opportunities to impact communities worldwide positively.

## SUSTAINABLE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY CONCIIOUS PRACTICES

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Football clubs may increasingly adopt sustainable practices, from building eco-friendly stadiums that use renewable energy to implementing waste reduction and recycling programs. This could also encourage fans to adopt more sustainable behaviors. Football-related entities might promote active transportation options such as walking or cycling to matches as part of broader efforts to reduce carbon footprints and encourage physical activity among fans.



## Special Power League Rovinj 2024



### EXAMPLES

- Mateo Kovačić Foundation, Football ambassador - <https://healthlifeacademy.com/ambassadors/>
- Juventus - Juventus Academy - <https://www.juventus.com/en/academy/>
- StreetFootballWorld - <https://www.sportanddev.org/network/organisation-directory/streetfootballworld-0>

## MODULE 6: SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY – PROMOTING PARTICIPATION IN FOOTBALL AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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Sports may significantly contribute to a better holistic development of one's self (Eime et al., 2013), with the benefits of sport and physical activity participation not only focusing on physical and mental well-being (Ketteridge and Boshoff, 2008) but also referring to social inclusion and cohesion (Bailey, 2006). Although the benefits of sport participation have been widely acknowledged by the academia and the practitioners, nonetheless there is a long way to go until we are sure that every person can overcome the barriers that undermine their participation. In order to achieve that, a number of strategies might be deployed in different levels of society from intervening at individual level to establishing national and European policies (Kilanowski et al, 2017).

### UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN FOOTBALL AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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As the society makes huge steps in the technological progress, it is believed that the people are becoming less and less physical active generation by generation, with that physical inactivity being responsible for 1 per 6 deaths according to the UK National Health System (2019).

The reasons that prevent someone from sport participation are covering a wide range such as unwillingness to participate in sports, lack of interest for physical activity or lack of knowledge about the benefits of sports and physical activity. However, a good percentage of the global population cannot participate in sports despite their willingness and interest in doing so because of the social, economic, environmental and cultural barriers that arise. These barriers are going to be discussed below.

The social barriers that undermine participation in sports and physical activity refer to any kind of social discrimination that someone might face in the social context. Although one's focus might concern more gender and racial differences,

when it comes to discrimination this might concern any social difference that makes someone feel as a minority.

1. **Gender inequality** does exist in any given social context and concerns the limited opportunities provided to the females instead of the males. In most cases, this lack of opportunities, which does not only limit in sports, refer to less accessibility in sport clubs and sports facilities (e.g. no female sport clubs in some areas), less media coverage of the female sport events, less presentation of female athletes who could act as role models for younger generations and less support from the community to female athletes for chasing their dreams (Sport England, 2019).
2. **Ethnic and racial discrimination** prevents people from different ethnic backgrounds to participate in sports. This barrier might concern not only racist behaviors but also an economic discrimination, which will be discussed in the next paragraph. Racist behaviors might come from the coaches, the teammates, other people around the team (e.g. teammates' parents) or the opponents (Theberge, 2000).
3. **Language difficulties** is also a social barrier that can arise for people from different ethnic backgrounds. In many occasions the universal language of sports is not enough to bridge the communication difficulties for newcomers in a country. This barrier becomes even stronger when the coaches or other sportspersons do not have any fluent in foreign languages and the clubs are not in the position to hire people who could work as a cultural mediator between the club and the people (Bauman et al., 2012).
4. **Age discrimination** discourages more and more people from remaining physically active. Age discrimination refers to the difficulties that someone faces to reach sport opportunities as the years go by. The older someone gets the more difficult becomes to find organized sport opportunities. What it means is that, in most cases, sport clubs are constructed in a way to promote the better ones to progress in their sport participation. As an example, it is estimated that only 0.01% of young children playing football in any football club will go on to become professional football players while the others will hear at some stage that they are not good enough to stay with the club. These players, those who are “not good enough”, are more likely to find themselves out of sports and physical activity (Brown & Potrac, 2009).
5. **Economic constraint** is an important aspect of sports and physical activity participation, and it cannot be overlooked. Doing sports and being physically

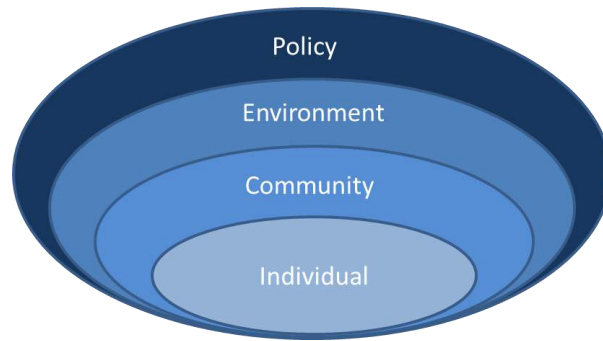
active costs much more than not doing sport and being physically inactive, therefore the economic constraint that someone faces might be a huge barrier. When it comes to sports participation, a person has to pay for the sports equipment, the membership fees, the club's uniforms and, in later stages, has to pay travel expenses for competitions or trainings. All these costs might be unbearable for individuals coming from lower-income backgrounds that will result in physical inactivity (Humphreys & Ruseski, 2010).

6. **Accessibility issues** might keep people out of sports and physical activity contexts. This matter is twofold. On the one hand, the accessibility issue might refer to people with disabilities who encounter physical and logistical barriers that make it difficult for them to participate in sports. These barriers concern inadequate facilities, a lack of adaptive equipment, or limited coaching expertise. On the other hand, this accessibility issue might concern the lack of reachable facilities in a reasonable timeframe for any interested individual because of the lack of means of transportation, the limited time slots for many individuals, and the lack of sports facilities per se in some rural areas (Darcy & Dowse, 2013).
7. **Lack of information** is, also, a twofold barrier. Lack of information might refer to the lack of information about the offered sports and physical activity opportunities provided in the area. This lack of information might keep an interested individual away from an activity that could be enjoyable and useful. Also, lack of information concerns the lack of knowledge about the benefits of a physically active lifestyle. These benefits, as discussed in the first paragraph, concern physical and mental well-being as well as social inclusion and holistic personal development (Eime et al., 2013).

## STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN FOOTBALL AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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In order to encounter all the aforementioned barriers to one's sport and physical activity participation, there is a good number of strategies that could be employed in different levels. These levels concern from the individual ones to the community and national levels such as policies for enhancing physical activity levels.



**Socio-ecological model; Kilanowski et al., 2017**

We are going to discuss in the following paragraphs the different levels of strategies and interventions that could foster participation and engagement in football and physical activity.

1. **Individual level:** The strategies structured on an individual level concern addressing the barriers and the reasons that make an individual to not have adequate levels of physical activity.

- *Focus on the individual:* Except for the strategies that concern mass outreach to the community, it is useful to examine the different reasons that keep someone out of sports and physical activity. It is said that every person likes some kind of physical activity, if this is true then a focus on the reasons keeping someone away from physical activity might be an efficient intervention. These reasons might concern economic constraints, unwillingness to participate, lack of available time, other duties during the day (work, family etc.) or any other reason that makes the individual not to prioritize sports and physical activity (Baumann et al., 2012).

2. **Community level:** These strategies concern the actions and the interventions that can be made at the community level to foster participation and engage the community citizens, including youth, elderly, women, and any minority group, in structured sports and physical activity programs. The community level might concern a municipality, a school, a sport club, a non-profit organization, or any other entity operating at a local level. In the principle of offering more inclusive activities, an effective strategy is to offer sport activities that are adapted to the needs of the target group and that might enable potential participants to engage and become more active (Casey et al., 2009).

- *Activities for different age groups or different sports/physical activity levels:* An intervention that takes into consideration the different needs of each age group might offer the opportunity to people who cannot find an organized sports activity to do so. For instance, popular sports (e.g. football or basketball) are offered only in a competitive way rather than an inclusive

- one that could allow people from different age or different sport level to take part (Bailey, 2006).
- *Activities designed for women:* A strategy that could promote female participation would concern creating “safe” environments for women to participate in sports and physical activity. Offering childcare during the sessions or offering exclusive women sport activities might contribute to the increase of women’s participation (Theberge, 2000).
  - *Activities designed for people with disabilities:* A strategy that offers sport programs for people with different kinds of disabilities might create an inclusive environment for people who are often overseen in the community, and which have the lowest levels of physical activity in EU level (Darcy & Dowse, 2013).
  - *Creation of partnerships:* Local sponsors could facilitate the engagement of the community in sports and physical activity by providing financial support to the organizations offering the activities or by covering financial expenses (e.g. sport equipment or membership fees) for people who cannot afford those expenses (Green, 2005).
  - *Raise awareness activities:* Raise awareness activities could work twofold. On one hand, a raise awareness activity can inform the community about the benefits of sports and physical activity, which can foster sport participation. On the other hand, a raise awareness activity could concern bringing the community closer to the sports activities by providing some open days where interested individuals could join and get to meet different sports or discuss with the club’s sportspersons about their potential involvement (Eime et al., 2013).
  - *Use of technology:* Technology can be a useful ally towards engaging people in sports and physical activity. Again, it can work in a twofold way. Technology (e.g. social media, website banners) can promote the sport programs and make the potential participants more prone to participate in sports. Also, technology can work in a way to promote physical activity remotely either because of unprecedented reasons (e.g. pandemic) or personal reasons (e.g. difficulties in transportation, not available time) (Foster et al., 2010).
3. **Environment level:** The strategies regarding the environment concern the creation of facilities that are accessible, affordable, and open to every person interested in taking part in sports and physical activities. The creation of such infrastructure could provide space for people who live in overcrowded or rural areas to gain access to sport activities. Except for the sport infrastructure, providing an environment for sports and physical activity means that there are free open spaces, parks, or any other kind of environment where people could meet and practice (Biddle et al., 2011).

- *Infrastructure development*: The creation of suitable infrastructures could give the opportunity to individuals to practice sports in an organized and proper way. Providing different kinds of infrastructure (e.g. gym, football field, basketball or tennis court) could give the chance to the interested ones to get to know each different sport and find what could engage them more (Spaaij, 2009).
  - *Accessibility*: The created infrastructure should be easily accessible by the individuals. The issue of accessibility is a matter that might keep people out of sports and physical activity. The accessibility might concern building the infrastructure at some central point or providing transportation (e.g. bus or tickets for public transportation) to those who cannot reach the infrastructure otherwise (Foster et al., 2010).
  - *Creation of open spaces and parks*: Physical activity and sports cannot only be practiced in sports infrastructure. The creation of open spaces and parks could better promote and engage individuals who would like to practice. Such areas allow individuals or groups of friends to practice out of the specific timeslots of an organized sport activity (Bauman et al., 2012).
4. **Policy level**: The strategies at policy level concern the actions that can be taken at a regional, national or international level in order to better promote sport participation and engagement in physical activity. These strategies refer to the creation of policies that might encourage people to become more physically active not only by participating more in sport activities but also by adapting to a healthier and more physical active lifestyle (Craig et al., 2009).
- *Coaching and mentoring programs*: A very important aspect of sports participation is the person delivering the session. It is a matter of a policy strategy to ensure that the coaches or any other sportspersons have the capacity and the knowledge to efficiently deliver the sessions not only in terms of technique and teaching the drill but also in terms of communicating with the participants, being aware of the individual differences and promoting an inclusive environment (Green, 2005).
  - *Campaigns for healthier lifestyles*: A campaign that focuses on how an individual could adapt an in-total healthier lifestyle can be much more efficient than different campaigns focusing on different matters such as being physical active or quitting smoking or targeting obesity (Craig et al., 2009).

# THE ROLE OF FOOTBALL-RELATED ENTITIES IN CREATING INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS. PROMOTING PARTICIPATION IN FOOTBALL BY INTRODUCING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION POLICIES

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Football-related entities can have a crucial role to play when the conversation comes to the promotion of social inclusion (Kassimeris, 2008). Football is the most popular sport in the EU as well as in the most parts of the world (European Commission, 2018). Having said that, football-related entities are in a position to influence their fans, followers, spectators, and any other person keen on football activities (Poulton & Durell, 2014). Major football events organized by UEFA (e.g. Euro, Champions League etc.) are capturing the eyes of millions of people around Europe, creating a scene where inclusivity, diversity and acceptance can be fostered (UEFA, 2020). Added to that, when talking about football in smaller scales like community level, it can be seen as an arena where clubs, schools, municipalities, non-profit organizations, governing bodies and any other football-related entity can promote the aforementioned values in an everyday setting (FIFA, 2019). The ways to do so are numerous as discussed below.

- 1. Football clubs:** The role of a football club is of high importance as it is an entity with direct influence and impact on multiple audiences (Giulianotti, 2005). A football club that brings the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in its core philosophy can shape the values of players, coaches, staff and, of course, fans and followers (Cleland & Cashmore, 2014). The fans' connection with a football club, called team identification in the literature, indicates that a football fan is prone to adopt values and principles fostered by the football club (Wann & Branscombe, 1993). A football club can take different initiatives as presented below.
  - a. Inclusive policies:** A football club can establish policies to ensure the equal treatment of its all members including players, staff and fans coming from diverse backgrounds and the promotion of acceptance of diversity (Bradbury, 2013).
  - b. Anti-discrimination initiatives:** The initiatives focusing on anti-discrimination might refer to raising awareness campaigns for the fans or training for the staff (Hylton, 2015).



- c. *Inclusive programs:* Football clubs can implement programs focusing on including different minorities in their activities. There are examples of football clubs creating teams with players with intellectual disabilities or financing activities through their foundations for minorities such as refugee populations and the LGBTQ+ community (Stone, 2007).
  - d. *Accessible infrastructure:* Football stadiums are the arena where fans can enjoy watching their favorite team compete or even compete themselves. Thus, it is important for any interested individual to be in a position of having access in the facilities without any kind of impairments keeping them out of the field (Thomas & Smith, 2009).
- 2. Football associations and organizations:** The role of a football association, such as a national federation of UEFA, should be to set the tone of promoting the values of equality, diversity and diversity in its associated members like football clubs and players' associations or the fans themselves (Bromberger, 1995). These associations can initiate collective actions that could make an impact on local, national and international level (Haynes, 1999).
- a. *Educational activities:* Football associations can promote educational activities to foster knowledge and awareness in their members by bridging the gap between football clubs, academia and organizations working on diversity and equality matters (Levermore & Beacom, 2009).
  - b. *Advocacy initiatives:* Due to their wide impact at the national or EU level, football associations might make the voice of the unheard ones to be heard by bringing to the table matters that might be overlooked. Group minorities could find a powerful ally to such an association for putting in-the-spot matters of equality and diversity (Cleland & Cashmore, 2016).
  - c. *Partnerships and collaborations:* Football associations can bridge different stakeholders to better achieve a creation of inclusive sport and football environments. Different stakeholders can make different contributions by adding value through knowledge, resources, impact and outreach when and if their powers are working together (Sugden & Tomlinson, 2002).
- 3. Football governing bodies and leagues:** These entities are responsible for setting the scene for regulations and establishment of a code of conduct among the associations, the football clubs and the players. These entities are the ones that can employ the policies and oversee the actions of the other entities such as federations and clubs (Holt, 2009).

- a. Regulations and code of conduct:** The football governing bodies can establish rules, measurements and punishments that enhance the promotion of diversity, equality and inclusion. Each league is responsible for taking action when its rules are violated. A monitoring of the rules can ensure that the values are respected (García & Welford, 2015).

**Public campaigns:** The football governing bodies and the leagues can use their competition as a platform to promote campaigns and messages for inclusion, diversity and equality. These campaigns might refer to actions taken as part of the main football events or as events (e.g. festivals, tournaments) that are taking place alone. Also, the campaigns might have a digital form through social media and other communication channels (Harris, 2010).

## EXAMPLES

### 1. Barcelona – Barca Foundation

FC Barcelona has been a predominant football club in terms of promoting initiatives focusing on the promotion of diversity, inclusion and equality through the activities taken mainly action through its foundation, called Barca Foundation.

*The Refugee Program:* Barca Foundation has invested many resources on promoting sport for all activities focusing on marginalized populations, namely refugee populations in EU but also worldwide. Barca Foundation is collaborating with numerous partners globally in order to promote inclusion, equality and diversity through its educational sport programs.

*Anti-discrimination Activities:* FC Barcelona is implementing a number of campaigns focusing on the promotion of tolerance and acceptance of diversity through its members and its community with the main activities implemented under the campaign "We Play Together".

### 2. FARE Network

FARE Network is an umbrella organization of entities focusing on using sport for inclusion, with the support of several football clubs and sportspersons. FARE network's main purpose is to promote equality, diversity and inclusion policies through Europe by partnering and supporting entities doing so.

*Raise awareness campaigns:* FARE network implements numerous campaigns in order to promote inclusion and diversity around the EU. Their main annual campaign is called "Football People" week with its main purpose being to engage football entities around Europe to promote inclusion and diversity through their activities such as festivals, panels and tournaments.

*Community engagement and grassroots programs:* FARE network supports and funds grassroots and community programs in an attempt to promote football activities for marginalized populations such as refugees and people with disabilities.

### 3. Real Betis Balompié

Real Betis Balompié is a football club from Spain that is taking numerous actions in order to promote an inclusive environment at their community, mainly through their foundation called Real Betis Foundation. Their activities are mainly based at their region with their activities focusing on using football as a tool for inclusion.

*Inclusive policies and initiatives:* Real Betis Balompié is implementing numerous social programs within their community that aim to promote equal opportunities to their members. The club implements the "Forever Green" program that focuses on sustainability.

*Accessible infrastructure:* Real Betis Balompié is offering equal accessibility to all individuals by providing accessible infrastructure for spectators in first team's football matches. Their stadium, the Estadio Benito Villamarín, offers accessibility to every individual including people with physical impairment.

## MODULE 7: MEASURING AND REPORTING ON SUSTAINABILITY

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In recent years, the importance of sustainability has grown significantly within contemporary sport, reflecting a broader shift in the sport's industry. Sports-related entities, from clubs to governing bodies, are now expected to develop sustainability strategies, implement initiatives but also measure and transparently report their progress. This expectation is driven by the growing demand from stakeholders; including employees, executives, and investors (see Daddi et al., 2021) for accountability and transparency in how these organizations manage their environmental and social impacts.

While significant progress has been made, as seen in the increasing number of organisations adopting sustainability practices, there remains a notable disparity in the level of commitment across different organizations. Research has revealed that while a few national football associations across Europe have developed sustainability strategies, others are still lagging behind, often engaging in sustainability initiatives in an ad-hoc or uncoordinated manner. In a recent study, for example, this disparity was underscored, highlighting that many national football associations remain at a basic or unorganized level of sustainability implementation (see Konstantopoulos and Manoli, 2024)

This uneven progress is particularly concerning given the growing regulatory demands in the field of sustainability. Major sports policy makers, including the IOC, UEFA, the UN, and the EU, have been issuing regulations and promoting initiatives to enhance sustainability in sports and recreational activities. A decade ago, sustainability reporting was largely voluntary, with only a few

pioneering organizations disclosing their environmental and social impacts. Today, however, the landscape has shifted dramatically. Regulatory frameworks such as the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) are setting new standards, making sustainability reporting mandatory for a broad range of organizations, including approximately 150 football clubs across Europe (Campelli, 2024). These regulations require detailed disclosures on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) aspects, compelling clubs to not only implement sustainability measures but also to systematically report on their progress.

The introduction of regulatory requirements marks a significant evolution in how sustainability is managed and reported in the football industry. Where once sustainability was seen as an optional or secondary consideration, it is now a critical aspect of organizational strategy, directly tied to compliance and financial performance. This shift is reflected in UEFA's updated Club Licensing and Financial Sustainability Regulations, which now mandate clubs to establish and implement sustainability strategies in line with broader European goals. The Bundesliga's integration of sustainability into its licensing requirements and the Premier League's Environmental Sustainability Commitment are further examples of how football leagues are embedding sustainability into their core operations, ensuring that all clubs adhere to these growing expectations (see UEFA, 2024).

Aligned with those efforts, over 300 sports organizations, including numerous football clubs, have joined the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework. As signatories, these organizations have committed to the annual reporting of their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and are working towards reducing their emissions by 50% by 2030 (see UN, 2022).

As the regulatory environment continues to tighten, the gap between those organizations that have embraced sustainability and those that have not is likely to widen. For those still lagging behind, the pressure to catch up is intensifying, driven not only by regulatory compliance but also by the growing expectations of fans, sponsors, and other stakeholders who increasingly view sustainability as a key indicator of a club's long-term viability and ethical standing (see Daddi et al., 2021). The transition from voluntary to mandatory sustainability reporting represents a new era in sports, where transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in sustainability practices are no longer optional but essential for success.

## UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING

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As outlined above, sustainability reporting has emerged as a crucial practice for sports organizations. It involves the systematic disclosure of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) impacts, enabling organizations to communicate their sustainability efforts to stakeholders, including fans, investors, regulators, and the broader community. For sports-related entities, sustainability reporting serves multiple purposes: it satisfies stakeholder demands, ensures compliance with regulatory requirements, enhances brand reputation, and can even serve as a powerful marketing tool that differentiates a club or organization in a competitive marketplace.

## SCOPE 1, 2, AND 3 EMISSIONS FOR SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS

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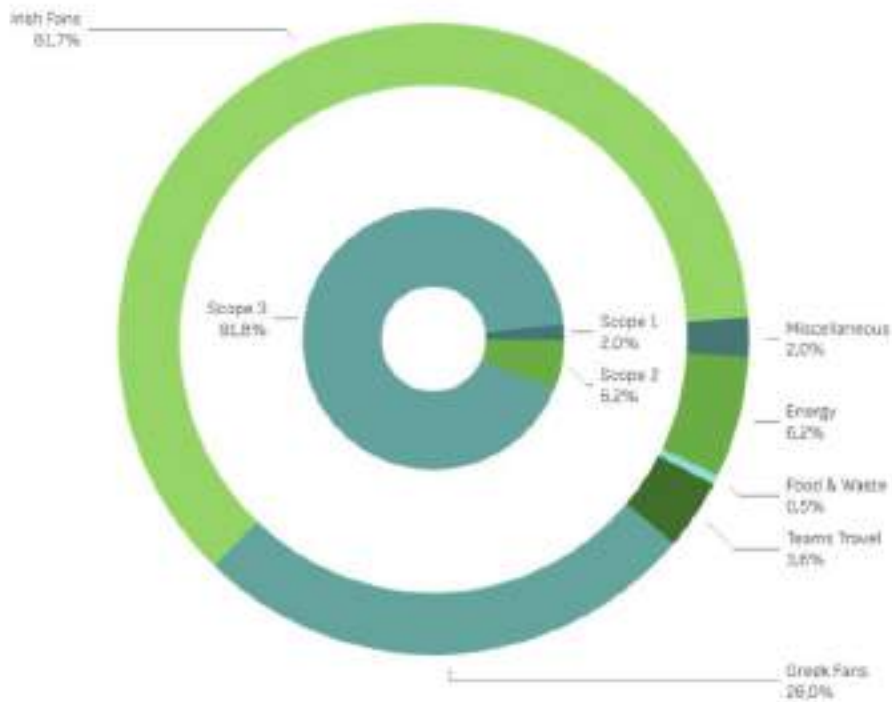
Understanding and reporting on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is a core component of sustainability reporting, particularly in the context of the sports industry. GHG emissions are categorized into three scopes:

**Scope 1:** Direct emissions from sources owned or controlled by the organization. For sports organizations, this includes emissions from fuel combustion, such as those from stadiums, training facilities, and team vehicles.

**Scope 2:** Indirect emissions from the consumption of purchased electricity, steam, heating, and cooling. In sports, this would cover the energy used to power stadiums during matches, training grounds, and administrative offices.

**Scope 3:** All other indirect emissions that occur in the value chain of the reporting organization, both upstream and downstream. This scope is the most extensive and includes emissions from sources such as fan and team travel to matches, procurement of goods and services, to name but a few.

For sports organizations, accurately measuring and reporting on Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions is essential for understanding their total carbon footprint and identifying areas for improvement.



**Figure 1: Decomposition of emissions in the different scopes and the different sources (The Sports Footprint, 2023)**

## SUSTAINABILITY REGULATION - KEY SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING FRAMEWORKS

Sustainability reporting frameworks provide the structure and guidelines necessary for organizations to disclose their environmental impacts comprehensively and transparently. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) is one of the most widely used frameworks, offering a standardized approach to sustainability reporting. GRI covers a broad range of sustainability issues, including economic, environmental, and social impacts, and is applicable across various sectors, including sports. The GRI Standards consist of three parts:

- **GRI 1: Basis:** Defines the requirements that an organization must meet in order to report in accordance with the GRI Standards.
- **Universal Standards:** These standards deal with topics that are relevant to all organizations, such as strategy and governance, human rights, the environment and product responsibility.

- **Topic-specific standards:** These standards deal with industry-specific topics, such as mining, agriculture and forestry or financial services.

In addition to GRI, several other frameworks exist. For example, the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) provides industry-specific standards, focusing on material sustainability factors. Also, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a global blueprint for sustainability, encouraging organizations to align their strategies with broader societal goals (see for example Royal Belgium Football Federation Sustainability Report 2022).

### **Materiality Analysis**

A materiality analysis is a systematic process for identifying and prioritizing topics that are important for a company (or organization) and its stakeholders with regard to sustainability. It is used to determine the most relevant topics for the company's sustainability reporting and strategy.

An internationally recognized method recommended by the European Sustainability Reporting Standard (ESRS), among others, is the double materiality analysis (DWA). This is a concept in the field of sustainability reporting that requires companies and organizations to consider two perspectives when assessing the materiality of sustainability issues:

- **Inside-out-Perspective:** This perspective looks at how the activities of a company or organization affect the environment, society and the economy.
- **Outside-in-Perspective:** This perspective looks at how environmental, economic and social issues can affect the financial situation and prospects of a company or organization.

## EU CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING DIRECTIVE (CSRD)

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Approximately 150 football clubs throughout Europe will soon be mandated to disclose sustainability data under the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), as outlined by the European Club Association (ECA). The CSRD mandates European Union-listed companies, including football clubs, to disclose non-financial information regarding their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance (CSRD, 2024). Key criteria under the CSRD include:

- €40 million in annual turnover
- €20 million balance sheet

- 250 or more employees

For the 2024/25 season, football clubs listed on the stock market will be compelled to release data concerning specific environmental, social, and governance aspects. Conversely, non-listed clubs across the continent will encounter varying levels of disclosure requirements and timelines contingent upon their size and organizational structure. All other clubs meeting two out of three of the following criteria: €40 million annual turnover, €20 million balance sheet, or 250-plus employees – will be mandated to issue a sustainability report by the 2025/26 season (CSRD, 2024). Smaller clubs resembling small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will commence disclosure the subsequent season with less stringent mandates.

Another important aspect when it comes to sustainability regulation and the CSRD, in particular, is multiclub ownership. The landscape of football ownership has undergone significant evolution, marked by the rise of multiclub ownership structures, wherein entities control multiple clubs across diverse leagues and regions, reflecting the sport's commercialization and globalization. These major owners are still subject to the disclosure requirements if at least one of their properties operates within the EU. For instance, City Football Group and Clearlake Capital, the respective owners of English Premier League clubs Manchester City and Chelsea FC, fall under this obligation due to their controlling stakes in Girona FC (City Football Group) and RC Strasbourg (Clearlake) (Campelli, 2024).

Organizations must comply with the CSRD by reporting on sustainability issues that are relevant to them, determined through a double materiality process. This process requires organizations to consider both their impact on the broader environment and society and how environmental and societal issues affect their primary operations. While football clubs have traditionally focused on social issues due to their community-centric nature, they are now also facing the varying impacts of climate change based on their locations.

## GOVERNING BODIES

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Particularly in football, UEFA, the governing body in Europe, has committed to the UNFCCC, collaborated with the European Union on the EU Green Deal, and recently unveiled its sustainability strategy, "Strength through Unity" (UEFA, 2021). This strategy not only encourages but also pressures the European football industry to prioritize sustainability. Additionally, following the launch of the strategy in 2021, UEFA included for the first time, social and environmental criteria on its 2024's "Club Licensing and Financial Sustainability Regulations", which means that all football clubs competing in European competitions namely the Champions, Europa and Conference League



“must establish and implement a social and environmental sustainability strategy in line with the *UEFA Football Sustainability Strategy 2030* and relevant UEFA guidelines, for at least the areas of equality and inclusion, anti-racism, child and youth protection and welfare, football for all abilities, and environmental protection.” (UEFA, 2024)

For the 2023/2024 season, a total of 96 clubs, from 18 different countries, competed in the group stages of the UEFA Champions League, UEFA Europa League, and UEFA Europa Conference League, not to mention those that competed in the qualifying stage of those competitions that still need to acquire license.

Following UEFA, major European leagues, such as the Premier League and Bundesliga, have followed similar paths to include requirements for environmental and social sustainability. Premier League clubs have committed to an “Environmental Sustainability Commitment”, setting a baseline for environmental action across both the clubs and the League (Premier League, 2024). Under the new Premier League Environmental Sustainability Commitment, each club will:

- Formulate a comprehensive environmental sustainability policy by the end of the 2024/25 season.
- Appoint a senior staff member to oversee the club’s environmental sustainability initiatives.
- Create a dataset for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (covering scopes 1, 2, and 3) by the end of the 2025/26 season and work towards a unified approach for measuring emissions across football.
- Contribute to the development of a standardized framework for action through participation in the Premier League Sustainability Working Group (PLSWG).

These measures were developed through extensive consultations with clubs and the Premier League Sustainability Working Group, established last year to guide and improve environmental practices within the League. Additionally, since February 2022, two additional Premier League clubs have joined the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework, increasing the number to seven clubs with net-zero emissions targets. The Premier League itself, along with four clubs, has begun disclosing their carbon footprints (scope 1, 2, and 3), indicating a growing trend toward transparency in sustainability efforts (Sport Positive, 2021).

One of the most prominent examples of sustainability initiatives in football is seen in the German Bundesliga, which mandates sustainability as part of its licensing requirements since 2022 (DFL, 2022). Initially, in early 2023, the Deutsche Fussball Liga (DFL) outlined more than 100 measures that each Bundesliga club was required to implement. These measures included tasks such

as measuring their own energy usage, calculating carbon footprints, appointing a sustainability officer, and drafting a sustainability strategy.

However, in late 2023, the number of required measures was reduced to 54 (Hoy, 2024). Also, under the initial regulations, clubs faced sanctions if they failed to meet all the criteria. However, the revised rules stipulated that clubs would only be penalized for not adhering to nine specific measures.

## TOOLS FOR MEASURING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

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In the effort to accurately measure and manage environmental impacts, football organizations have access to a variety of tools designed to simplify and standardize the process. One of the most prominent is UEFA's carbon calculator, which allows clubs to estimate their carbon footprint across various activities, including travel, energy use, and waste management. This tool is part of UEFA's broader sustainability initiatives, helping clubs align with the organization's environmental goals. Additionally, the Erasmus+ program [GOALS](#) has developed a tool specifically designed for sports organizations to measure and evaluate their environmental impacts. Beyond these, there are numerous other online tools available that provide comprehensive life cycle assessments (LCA) and carbon accounting, enabling clubs to obtain a holistic view of their environmental footprint and make data-driven decisions to reduce their impact.

## COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABILITY

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Effective communication of sustainability achievements is critical for sports entities as it helps build trust, enhance reputation, and engage stakeholders in the organization's sustainability journey. Clear and transparent communication ensures that sustainability efforts are recognized and valued by all stakeholders, including employees, executives, investors, and fans. Given the increasing scrutiny of corporate responsibility, how football organizations communicate their sustainability achievements can significantly impact their credibility and brand image. Importantly, recent EU regulations have tightened the rules around sustainability claims to combat greenwashing, ensuring that organizations must substantiate their environmental and social claims with verifiable data. The European Commission's guidelines on green claims require that any statements regarding sustainability must be clear, accurate, and based on reliable evidence, reflecting a broader regulatory push to ensure that sustainability communication is both honest and impactful.

Tailoring sustainability messages to different stakeholders is essential to maximize the impact of communication efforts. For instance, employees are more interested in how sustainability initiatives align with company values and contribute to a positive workplace culture, while investors may focus on how sustainability efforts reduce risks and enhance long-term financial performance. Executives require data-driven insights that demonstrate the strategic benefits of sustainability initiatives, such as compliance with regulations or cost savings (e.g. from energy efficiency). Fans, on the other hand, are often engaged by how sustainability efforts connect with the community or contribute to the broader good, such as through initiatives that promote social responsibility or reduce the environmental footprint of sporting events.

## CONDUCTING SUSTAINABILITY AUDITS

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Sustainability audits are systematic evaluations of an organization's environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices, designed to assess compliance with sustainability goals and identify areas for improvement. For football-related entities, these audits focus on key areas such as reducing environmental impacts, enhancing social responsibility, and ensuring robust governance practices. Conducting a sustainability audit typically involves several steps:

1. Defining the scope of the audit
2. Collecting and analyzing data on relevant ESG metrics
3. Identifying gaps and opportunities
4. Developing actionable recommendations

These audits not only help organizations measure progress but also ensure transparency and accountability in their sustainability efforts.

With the following three examples—Liverpool FC, VfL Wolfsburg, and Real Betis—we will illustrate various approaches that football clubs are taking to measure, report, and mitigate their environmental impacts.

## EXAMPLES

**Liverpool FC** has demonstrated a robust approach to sustainability through its "The Red Way" strategy. The club has focused on reducing its carbon footprint by addressing Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions comprehensively. Liverpool has successfully reduced its Scope 1 emissions, which are direct emissions from club-controlled sources, from 1,583 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e in the 2019-2020 season to 285 tons by switching to a 100% green gas tariff. Scope 2 emissions, related to electricity consumption, have been reduced to zero through the adoption of 100% renewable energy. However, Scope 3 emissions, which include indirect emissions from activities such as fan travel and the supply chain, remain substantial, with 140,198 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>e reported (LFC, 2024).

**Liverpool Football Club. (2024). The Red Way: Liverpool FC's sustainability strategy. Retrieved**

**VfL Wolfsburg** has similarly taken a leading role in sustainability within professional football, with a focus on transparency and continuous improvement. The club's sustainability report, aligned with the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards, highlights a detailed breakdown of emissions revealing that the club's total CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions amounted to approximately 10,758 tons. Of this, Scope 1 emissions contributed 1,538 tons, Scope 2 emissions accounted for 3,458 tons, and the majority, 5,762 tons, came from Scope 3 emissions, which include indirect sources such as employee commuting and supply chain activities. (VfL Wolfsburg, 2020).

**VfL Wolfsburg. (2020). Sustainability report 2020: VfL Wolfsburg's commitment to sustainability.**

**Real Betis** has taken another approach by conducting a Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) of a football match to understand its environmental impact. The assessment revealed that the majority of the club's environmental impact, 77.2%, is due to mobility, particularly fan and team travel, which falls under Scope 3 emissions. Energy consumption at the stadium and training facilities accounted for 10.2% of the impact, while food and beverage consumption during matches contributed 5%. (Real Betis, 2024).

**Real Betis. (2024) Free Kicks: Life Cycle Assessment of a Football Match.**

Lessons learned from these case studies highlight the importance of focusing on Scope 3 emissions, as they typically represent the largest portion of a sports club's environmental impact. By accurately measuring and reporting these emissions, clubs can identify key areas for improvement, such as transportation and supply chain management. Moreover, the integration of the sustainability report into overall club strategy is crucial for achieving long-term environmental goals. Practical steps for football-related entities looking to enhance their sustainability reporting include conducting thorough audits of Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions, engaging with stakeholders to address indirect emissions, and adopting recognized reporting frameworks. By following these steps, football organizations can build a robust sustainability strategy that not only complies with regulatory requirements but also contributes to broader environmental goals.

## CONCLUSION

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Measuring and reporting on sustainability is crucial for sports organizations as they navigate increasing regulatory demands and stakeholder expectations. By adopting comprehensive sustainability reporting frameworks and focusing on

key areas, sports organizations can significantly reduce their environmental impact while enhancing transparency and accountability. The case studies of Liverpool FC, VfL Wolfsburg, and Real Betis demonstrate the varied approaches that can be taken, offering valuable lessons for the broader football community. As the future of football continues to evolve, integrating sustainability into core strategies will be essential for building a more sustainable and responsible sports industry.

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