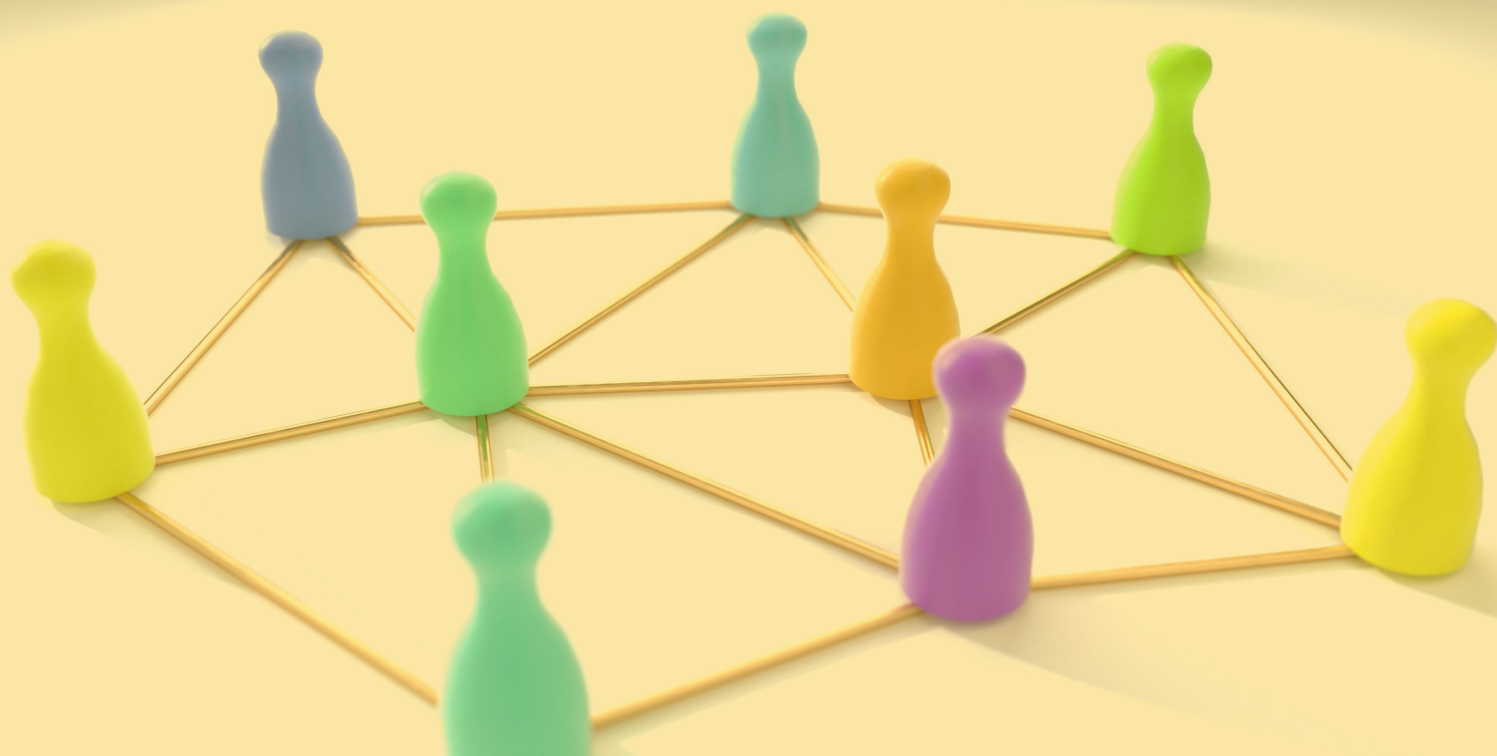


# ACTIVE

Engage, Connect, Empower EU Youth  
through sustainable, inclusive and  
democratic Sport

Recommendation document  
for local/regional policymakers



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**ACTIVE**  
European Youth Together

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ASSIST Associazione Nazionale Atleti – Italy

FARE Network Stichting – The Netherlands

KMOP Social Action and Innovation Centre – Greece

DOTS Cooperativa de Inovação Educativa para a Transformação Social– Portugal

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## Introduction

On November 26, 2018, the Council Resolution led to the creation of the European Youth Strategy 2019-2027, constituting the most recent framework for the European youth policy. The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027 recognises the value of young people's active participation in their societies, at all levels: local, national and European, along with the challenges they face in their daily life, challenges that often derive from global and societal phenomena (e.g., war, financial crisis, globalisation, populism, discrimination, social exclusion)<sup>1</sup>. In this regard the Strategy focuses on three core areas of action, around the three keywords: a) *Engage*, b) *Connect* and c) *Empower*, to promote youth participation in democratic life, support social and civic engagement and ensure that every young person has the necessary tools to participate in society<sup>2</sup>. In line with this rationale, the *6th cycle of the EU Youth Dialogue - Youth in Europe: What's next?* taken place in 2017-2018 allowed young people, decision-makers, researchers and other stakeholders to contribute to the Strategy's development, leading to the introduction of 11 European Youth Goals.

The *11 European Youth Goals* sums up the issues that young people in Europe face and the political priorities that are significant to them. These Goals are in fact goals to achieve a youth-friendly Europe of the future and cover a range of topics in key areas such as connecting the EU with youth (Goal 1), equality of all genders (Goal 2), inclusive societies (Goal 3), information and constructive dialogue (Goal 4), mental health and wellbeing (Goal 5), moving rural youth forward (Goal 6), quality employment for all (Goal 7), quality learning (Goal 8), space and participation for all (Goal 9), sustainable green Europe (Goal 10), and youth organisations and European programmes (Goal 11). The *ACTIVE! Engage, Connect, Empower EU Youth through sustainable, inclusive and democratic Sport*, the EU programme in the context in which this document is produced works towards this direction.

Aiming to promote interest and engagement about European Youth Goals and future EU youth policies, the *ACTIVE! Engaging, connecting, empowering young people in the EU through sustainable, inclusive and democratic sport (ACTIVE!)* programme puts in the spotlight the less

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<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union, Representatives of the Governments of the Member States (December 18, 2018). Resolution of the Council of the European Union and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council on a framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027. *Official Journal of the European Union*, 61. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2018:456:FULL&from=EN>

<sup>2</sup> The European Youth Portal (n.d.). *EU Youth Strategy*. [https://youth.europa.eu/strategy\\_en](https://youth.europa.eu/strategy_en)

active youth and the youth risking marginalization based on potential sources of discrimination in Italy, the Netherlands, Greece, Portugal, Austria and Germany with its main tool being sports and sports activities. This is achieved by creating a network to enhance connection and engagement of less active young people in Europe around the European values and EU Youth Goals through sport; strengthening the capabilities of young coaches and athletes to increase the active engagement on EU topics of their peers, with particular attention to the ones with fewer opportunities, through international training and exchange; promoting inclusive and sustainable sport events and activities as a powerful tool to increase active engagement and participation of youth to EU issues; and fostering networking, capacity building and mutual cooperation among youth organizations and sports organizations that work with youth around Europe to improve their impact on EU policies and effective engagement of youth on EU issues.

On May 6, 2022, the European Commission issued a press release<sup>3</sup> commenting on the hopeful youth engagement results based on the data derived from the Eurobarometer on the European Year of Youth. The said results depict a raised interest of youth in civic and political issues in 2022, compared to the relevant data from 2019 (↑17%). Furthermore, the most common expectation of young people for the European Youth Year 2022 was that decision-makers listen and act on their demands and support their personal, social and professional development (72%). Working in line with this demand, the present document aims to provide suggestions and ideas for policy reform at both EU and national level based on the findings of the ACTIVE! research.

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<sup>3</sup> The full press release can be found here: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_2774](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_2774)

## Methodology

Field research was conducted in Italy, the Netherlands, Greece, Portugal, Austria and Germany to investigate the knowledge and awareness of EU youth goals among sports coaches, athletes and activists, and map the existing good practices in the partner countries. The research was organised in two phases: the first phase of interviews and focus groups with key actors in the area was implemented during the period August - October 2021; the second phase of distributing a questionnaire that reached different sports and association contexts was in place during the months November-January 2022.

The interviews and the focus groups were organised around six thematic units of discussion, which allows participants to express their views on European Youth Goals and the role of sports in promoting them. After introducing themselves, the participant sports researchers, athletes, coaches, volunteers from sports and social associations, and professionals working with different vulnerable groups, discussed the appliance of European Youth Goals in sports activities, focusing especially on Goal 1 (connecting EU with Youth), Goal 3 (Inclusive Societies) and Goal 10 (Sustainable Green Europe). They also shared best practices of organisations which promote EYGs; they talked about the barriers young people face during their access to knowledge of EYGs and programmes and their participation in them, and they were called to think of communication strategies tailored to the youth. In total 67 individuals took part in the interviews and the focus group discussions.

The survey was created and translated through a template co-constructed and shared in all project languages (Italian, Greek, German, English, Portuguese) with the support of all project partners. The survey has mainly two areas, divided into five sections and 14 questions: the first one focused on sport and the role it has in the life of those who fill in the questionnaire. In contrast, the second one focused on the knowledge of youth policies and European programmes to highlight obstacles and possible strategies to increase knowledge. A question for young people concerning the competencies they think a coach should have was also included. The survey was shared on the project website, the partners' social media channels, and other local networks linked to each partner's context. In total, 308 responses were collected.

## Existing needs and gaps

One of the major aims of the *ACTIVE!* project was to reduce the obstacles and complications that specific social groups may have in accessing European programmes and projects, thus their underrepresentation. This aim was fulfilled with the power of sports and sports activities. For the European Union, there are specific situations that prevent young people from participating in work, formal and non-formal education, transnational mobility, active citizenship and society in general. Every young person who faces one or more of these barriers is considered a young person with fewer opportunities. The main obstacles are organised into seven categories: 1) social obstacles, 2) economic obstacles, 3) disabilities, 4) learning difficulties, 5) cultural differences, 6) health challenges, and 7) geographical obstacles. Among the *ACTIVE!* survey participants, the majority declared, through a self-assessment, to not have any disadvantages. However, the ones who mentioned the challenges they face highlighted three main categories.

1. *Social obstacles*: discrimination linked to race, class, gender and vulnerable and marginalised status
2. *Economic obstacles*: low or precarious standard of living and poverty
3. *Geographical obstacles*: distance, lack of connections, and lack of services in rural or peripheral areas of the city

The central part of the survey was dedicated to the knowledge young people had about European policies, the programmes made available by the European Union for young people (European Solidarity Corps, Erasmus +, European youth strategies, EU - Dialogue with young people, Discover EU, #EUYouth4Peace, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, European Year of Youth, Youth Guarantee) and to the 11 European Youth Goals and their relevance to their life and the sport they practice. Young people's knowledge of these issues was meagre and insufficient, and the only better-known initiative (mostly in university circles for academic exchanges) was the Erasmus+ programme. All participants justified this lack of knowledge not to the lack of interest but to the lack of clear and direct information sharing from the competent bodies. The language used was evaluated as too complex and long-winded and the dissemination strategy problematic considering that many respondents declared that they had never heard of the initiatives and did not know where to find the relevant information.

Regarding their personal choices of Youth Goals, in order of importance in one's own life and the sport practised, three Goals were highlighted: Goal 2 (Gender Equality of All Genders), Goal 3 (Inclusive Societies) and Goal 5 (Mental health and Well-being). Although sports were described as a hobby for many participants, for many others sports activities become a form of expression to work in social areas and are connected to the values promoted through the EU Youth Goals.



## Recommendations

The promotion of inclusion and sustainability in sports activities along with European values required a holistic approach which will include effective and innovative measures that are tailored to the existing needs. Drawing from *ACTIVE!* research and their experience in the field of sports and European projects, consortium partners developed a list of recommendations targeted to local/national policymakers and competent authorities, fostering the promotion of human rights, equal opportunities and sustainable sports activities.

### Education & Training

1. Implementation of a series of seminars/workshops on inclusion in sports and sustainability for coaches and athletes, volunteers for coaches and representatives of sports associations. The organisers should take into account the specifics of their trainees by implementing the seminars/workshops for example on weekends.
2. Promotion of collaboration and exchanges with sports organisations and experts within the field of inclusion in sports via round tables dedicated to the topics of inclusivity, engaging youth with the EU, and sustainability.
3. Support the educational exchanges for athletes and coaches.
4. Creation of a monthly initiative dedicated to inclusiveness in the sport, such as that every first Sunday of the month the municipality in partnership with a different sports association can propose a session on an inclusive sport.
5. Updates on the Municipality's website to provide accessible and free educational resources.
6. Creation of a working group composed of members of the institutions (EU/local municipality/region) and external experts who will be dedicated to the development of inclusive and sustainable policies and guidelines for sports activities.
7. Promotion of courses and upskills on diversity management for coaches, (sports) teachers, and whoever works with children and youth during their tertiary education.
8. Implementation of a series of seminars for physical education teachers in primary and secondary school.
9. Enrichment/Optimisation of the subjects of History and Civics in mandatory education with the inclusion of EU-related lessons (citizenship, opportunities, etc.)

10. School sports should be taught in lockstep with other subjects like ethics or nutrition in a holistic approach to human wellness.
11. Organisation of debates between schools around social issues/youth issues and production of recommendation documents targeting local and EU policymakers.
12. Creation of round table discussions at high schools with local politicians to discuss issues on sports education for youth with the youth.

## Research

1. Support the research with young athletes with migrant backgrounds and coaches by fostering cooperation between migrant associations and local sports associations for the exploration of the ways cultural differences affect sports practice.
2. Research the financial aspect of sports and their impact on local societies.
3. Research the current gaps and needs of the local sports organisations/clubs and their members.
4. Supporting the research on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis and the ongoing energy crisis on sports and sports organisations as well as inclusion and sustainability in sports.
5. Mapping of the existing European projects inside the sports associations.
6. Mapping of CSOs and sports organisations/associations/academies at municipal and regional level (who they are, number of staff and beneficiaries, programmes/initiatives/activities, interest in participation in EU-funded projects).
7. Mapping of the sports facilities and equipment available in local sports organisations/associations/academies/unions in terms of sustainability and respect for diversity.
8. Collaboration with universities and entities to increase expertise on the topic under discussion and the research methodologies.
9. Find a 'niche' to attract independent researchers, e.g., ethnic minority women in sport or environmentalism and young people
10. Monitoring that the implemented research is conducted by and reaches a diverse audience in terms of demographic characteristics and experiences.
11. Deploy a range of research methods, from focus groups and interviews to surveys and analysis of the already existing resources.

12. Fostering the connections between the university/scientific research and the municipality and sports clubs by promoting scholarships and research on sports.
13. Fostering closer cooperation between education policy-makers and decision-makers, such as Education and University Ministries, and sports decision-makers, as Sports Ministries and their executive agencies, could offer a more synergic planning and more effective data and an evidence-based approach to using sport as a tool to promote and strengthen EU values.
14. Supporting the conservation of the archives and the previous research attempts.

## Funding

1. Simplifying the application process for sports organisations to apply for Erasmus+ and other programmes opportunities.
2. Promotion of open calls for financial aid for buying sports equipment tailored to the special needs of people with disabilities.
3. Introduce scholarships to cover the costs of sports activities for young people with fewer financial possibilities
4. Provision of local funding and scholarships for coaching opportunities for women in training and sports management.
5. Prioritization of funding opportunities at a national and European level that promote diversity and inclusion initiatives.
6. Fee reduction or scholarship provision for disadvantaged individuals, considering also the introduction of the “green bottle model”, where people pay what they can afford.
7. Financial aid to sports associations/unions/academies and schools during their participation in EU opportunities/initiatives.
8. Financial support of sports organisations/associations for using and advertising ethical and sustainable brands in sports training sessions and sports events.
9. Money allocation for municipal-level sports calls, even small grants for clubs.
10. Sports governmental institutions as well as private donors in the field of sports should support a more equal sport system because it would benefit everyone and all sports stakeholders. Therefore, sports institutions and decision-makers should consider these goals of equality, sustainability and inclusion as priorities in their activity of planning

policies and creating the operational tools of policies through calls, financial support instruments, and operational plans.

11. Provision of micro-grants for grassroots sports clubs to develop local actions and campaigns against discrimination and promote bottom-up awareness of EU values.
12. Earmarked grants from the national, regional or municipal budgets could be made available to insurance companies to encourage their clients with financial incentives to become members of relevant sports organisations/clubs and regularly participate in sports.
13. Caveats in public funding ensuring inclusivity and sustainability of public sports events.
14. Monitoring of private funding for sports by an independent watchdog organisation for preventing corruption, and conflicts of interest as well as influencing peddling (such as oligarchs or authoritarian states).
15. Public support and funding for the development of non-commercial and popular sports.

### Awareness Raising

1. Invitation of communication experts to regular roundtables to get insight from different fields regarding effective dissemination strategies and campaigns.
2. The National Agencies are encouraged to create reel contests (hosted on social media) to be disseminated in the schools, universities and sports organizations, asking the youngsters to share on their social media a picture regarding what the EU Youth Goals represent for them. For higher participation, a reward for the reel with the most impressions can be considered.
3. Collaborations with local influencers recognized by the youngsters to share the on going campaign on their social media. This can help to disseminate the EU Youth Goals among the youngsters of your city.
4. Initiation of social media challenges, involving local sports associations, asking them for example to take a picture at the end of their training or game with a poster mentioning one of the EU youth goals.
5. Organisation/Support of info days with the participation of educators, student representatives, CSOs, and journalists.
6. Optimisation of municipalities' websites to include all the available opportunities for its citizens.

7. Development of promotional events and material (e.g., pamphlets, stickers, and flyers) that will link the EU institutions with the relevant municipal, regional and national ones as part of the EU Youth Strategy. The material will direct stakeholders to the European Youth Portal website and will be used both during the events and after their completion in public offices.
8. Institutional presence in mass media channels promoting the values of inclusion and sustainability in sports practice.
9. Organisation of sports events in ethical/uncontroversial venues which respect human rights and meet sustainability standards.
10. Public and active condemnation of incidents that violate human rights and exclude minorities.

### Environmental Sustainability in Sports

1. Provision of national sports associations/clubs with “*Sustainability Guidelines*” or “*Green Charters*”, encouraging them to adopt them in their everyday practice.
2. Organisation of sustainability workshops dedicated to the “reuse – recycle” principles of sports equipment in collaboration with local sports clubs and their members.
3. Organisation of monthly green activities (e.g., cleaning the beaches, and walking paths, afforestation) in the local community with the close collaboration of the sports associations.
4. Encourage financially the promotion of sustainability in all events that require sponsors.
5. Monitoring the building process of new sports facilities, ensuring that they meet European environmental standards (e.g., solar panels, LED lighting, vegetarian and local food options at the cafeteria, provision of electric car charging stations).
6. Publication of calls for competitions/private donors for the provision of sports academies/associations with sustainable equipment.
7. Mapping of the unused public/private spaces that need to be redeveloped by birthing sports fields accessible to everyone.
8. Adoption and promotion of a circular economy process for sports equipment through a forum for clubs to apply for what they need.
9. Support the production of environmentally sustainable and responsibly produced sports gear in the European Union.

## Inclusion in Sports

1. Establishing inclusive communication standards during the promotion and media coverage of sports events, e.g., the use of gender-neutral language, dissemination via different communication tools such as video, text, and dissemination in different languages.
2. Evaluation of the existing protocols and reporting mechanisms against discrimination in sports.
3. Simplifying the bureaucracy required for sports participation for adult migrants or second-generation migrants.
4. Establishing supporting services at the municipal level that offer support to players with migration background and their clubs.
5. Promoting sports for girls and young women by creating events in neighbourhoods, free and dedicated primarily to women.
6. Public recognition of good practices for inclusion in sports at the local level and establishment of annual awards.
7. Provision of safe spaces for women and non-binary people in sports, such as swimming lessons in the public pool organized for only LGBTQIA+ members.
8. Establish more sports offers for people with disabilities and specifically communicate them to the community.
9. Encouragement of mixed sports and parasport in different kinds of sports, representing women and men equally, proposing non-binary attention and involving minorities in participation, organisation and promotion processes.
10. Public awareness-raising campaigns should gain equal recognition and funding.
11. Accessible and decent sports facilities and opportunities for refugees and asylum-seekers near the places they are housed and in cooperation with local sports organisations
12. Fostering partnerships between civil society organisations and sports organisations that tackle racism, homophobia, misogyny and discrimination in general.
13. Democratic institutions should secure the non-profit status of non-profit sports organisations by imposing sanctions in the form of tax in case of violation of this

status. The tax revenues should be spent to support underserved grassroots sports organisations and inclusive fan projects.



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