



15th edition

Reviving European Social Dialogue in the sport sector.

EASE

European Association of Sport Employers

With the participation of our members



CONFEDERAZIONE DELLO SPORT



This EASE Talk is based on the intervention of Mr. Oliver Liang (Head of Public and Private Services Unit at International Labour Organization) and Kaarel Nestor (Advisor in the Sports Department at Estonian Ministry of Culture). EASE also thanks all of its members for their feedback and insights during the presentation of this EASE Talk.

An overview of the state of European social dialogue in sports

Social dialogue is essential in a globalized world, helping to build consensus and reduce conflicts between employers and workers. It strengthens democratic participation by improving the legitimacy of public decisions. It refers to negotiations and exchanges between governments, employers, and employees on shared economic and social issues.



Article 152 TFEU

The Union recognises and promotes the role of the social partners at its level, taking into account the diversity of national systems. It shall facilitate dialogue between the social partners, respecting their autonomy.

European social dialogue can take the following forms:

bipartite: involving only the social partners—employers' organizations and workers' organizations (unions)

tripartite: involving the social partners and EU institutions



What about sports ?

On the employers' side, EASE currently represents 11 members based in **8 member states** : Sweden, France, The Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders), Slovakia, Italy, Finland, Slovenia. It is representative of not-for-profit sport, professional sport and active leisure.

On the employees' side, EU Athletes is the leading European multi-sport federation of athlete and player associations (sports trade unions) with 28 members in **15 member states**.

Next step in the development of a EU social dialogue in sport

EASE is working to build genuine representation for sports employers across the EU: **a unified sector bringing together non-profit sport, professional sport, and active leisure**, with the goal of fostering meaningful dialogue with employee representatives.

What is the state of social dialogue in sports in the EU member states?

We identify five levels in the development of social dialogue within the Member States:

- **Global system:** A collective agreement that covers the three identified sub-sectors of sport (not-for-profit sport, professional sport, and active leisure).
- **Fragmented system:** Three different collective agreements covering the three identified sport sectors.
- **Partial system:** Different collective agreements in at least two of the identified sectors.
- **Reduced system:** A single collective agreement in one of the identified sectors.
- **Empty system:** No collective agreement specific to any of the three identified sport sub-sectors.



Sweden (global system) → There is a national collective bargaining agreement covering the entire sports sector or its segments, sometimes incorporating collective agreements specific to certain of these segments. Arbetsgivaralliansen is representing professional and non-for profit sport. Employers in active leisure sports sector are affiliated with the trade sector organization.



Portugal (in transition) → Social dialogue is well established at national level, but remains underdeveloped in the sport sector. Recent progress (notably the creation of a Ministry of Sports in 2025 and the growing role of the Confederação do Desporto) reflects a transition toward a more structured and institutionalised system, although sector-specific collective bargaining is limited.



Estonia (empty system) → There appear to be no collective agreements in the identified sectors. Social dialogue remains limited, and there are no established employer or employee organizations in the sport sector or related areas. This is notably due to a relatively weak tradition of social dialogue in the country, as well as significant fragmentation within the sport sector.

What actions can be taken at the supranational and European levels?



ILO Guidelines for the promotion of fundamental principles and rights at work and the prevention and elimination of violence and harassment for professional athletes

- Athletes must enjoy the same fundamental labour rights as other workers.
- Promote social dialogue: Cooperation between governments, employers and athletes is essential.
- Equal treatment, including equal pay and gender equality, must be guaranteed.
- Guarantee a safe and healthy environment: Athletes must be protected physically and mentally at work.
- Prevent violence and harassment: Strong measures must be in place to eliminate all forms of abuse.
- Child labour must be prohibited and children must be safeguarded.

Supra-national initiatives in social dialogue: the case of European professional football

Professional football is the first and only sport to establish a structured social dialogue at EU level.



The EU Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee (ESSDC) for professional football was officially launched in July 2008. It is composed by :

Employers' side:
EPFL: European Professional Football Leagues
ECA: European Club Association

Workers' side:
FIFPRO

Special role (chairs the ESSDC):
UEFA

What criteria for the recognition of social partners?

1. To be composed of organizations that are themselves recognized as an integral part of the social partner structures of the Member States
2. To have the capacity to negotiate agreements
3. To be representative across all Member States (or at least an important representation in several of them)