



Strasbourg, 7 October 2025

EPAS(2025)74

**Mapping of sports facilities:
Meeting 4 – “Social sustainability and sports facilities –
best practice and policy developments”**

Organised jointly by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS)
and the Mulier Institute

Friday 12 September
9.30am – 12.30pm

Hybrid meeting:
Strasbourg, Council of Europe, meeting room No.8 and online

MEETING REPORT

Introduction

The fourth meeting in the series of collaborative events between the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) and the Mulier Institute was held on 12 September 2025 in Strasbourg in a hybrid format, with participants attending both in person and online. The meeting focused on the theme of **social sustainability and sports facilities**, building on the momentum of earlier sessions dedicated to the mapping of sports facilities across Europe. This event brought together researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners with the shared aim of strengthening the evidence base for policy development and fostering inclusive, accessible, and sustainable sport.

Opening the proceedings, *Francine Hetherington Raveney* (FHR), Deputy Executive Secretary of EPAS, underlined the distinctive nature of these meetings, which combine the perspectives of both policy and research. She recalled that the vocation of EPAS is to build bridges across sectors and to provide a platform where intergovernmental collaboration meets the insights of the academic and research community. She thanked Prof. dr *Remco Hoekman* (RH), Director of the Mulier Institute and co-facilitator of the event, for authoring the [White Paper on Social Sustainability and Sports Facilities](#), which formed a key reference point for the discussions.

FHR reminded participants that the [Revised European Sports Charter](#) (2021) provides the fundamental policy framework for the Council of Europe's work in sport. She drew attention specifically to Article 9, which establishes that all sporting activities must be economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable. While previous meetings had emphasised environmental and economic dimensions, this event was devoted to the social angle of sustainability. FRH stressed that the Charter sets out important guidance on how sustainability should be understood in sport, pointing both to the positive impacts of sport on the global economy and to the responsibility of the industry to integrate practices that are socially responsible and environmentally sound.

FRH also connected the day's discussions to the [EPAS Strategy for 2024-2025](#), under which one of the deliverables was precisely the above-mentioned White Paper. She noted that this work contributed directly to the Strategy's first strategic objective, which is to envision sport as accessible for all. As she explained, EPAS operates on the values of inclusive, ethical, and safe sport, and the focus on social sustainability speaks directly to the inclusive dimension of this mission.

Following FRH's introduction, RH reiterated the importance of bringing together research and policy in a collaborative framework. He observed that while researchers are driven by curiosity and the development of knowledge, policy-makers are concerned with addressing specific societal problems. By engaging in dialogue, both sides could ensure that research addresses pressing policy challenges, while policies themselves are grounded in robust evidence. He reminded participants that the format of the meeting was intended to be interactive and invited them to contribute perspectives, share examples, and provide documentation both during and after the meeting so that collective knowledge on the topic could continue to grow.

Keynote Presentations

Presentation of the White Paper on Social Sustainability and Sports Facilities

RH presented the recently published White Paper on Social Sustainability and Sports Facilities, commissioned by EPAS as part of the ongoing work on mapping. He began by defining social sustainability as the health, well-being, and quality of life of communities and their ability to adapt effectively in the future. The study sought to link this concept to sport participation and the role of sport facilities, with the central question being how facilities can enhance community resilience and cohesion.

For the purposes of the study, sport facilities were defined as indoor or outdoor spaces planned, designed, and used specifically for sporting activities. This definition excluded general public spaces such as roads, which may be used for cycling or running but are not primarily designed as sport facilities. This definitional clarity was particularly important for the development of databases, since choices must be made about what to include and exclude.

The research aligned the notion of social sustainability with existing policy frameworks. At European level, the Revised European Sports Charter identifies sport as an enabler of sustainable development, while the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an overarching framework linking sport to broader objectives of health, equality, and resilience. RH highlighted specific SDGs with particular relevance to sport facilities: SDG 3 on healthy lives and well-being, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 10 on reducing inequality, SDG 11 on inclusive and sustainable cities, and SDG 13 on climate action. He stressed that while the White Paper focused on social sustainability, environmental and economic dimensions remain closely interconnected, for example in the energy efficiency of facilities.

Drawing on data from multiple countries, the study examined access to and use of sport facilities, as well as their management and sustainability. Eurobarometer data was also consulted to explore citizens' satisfaction with opportunities for physical activity in their local areas, revealing significant variation across countries.

The study found that sport facilities are essential enablers of sport participation and can significantly contribute to social sustainability by strengthening cohesion, enhancing inclusion, and providing spaces for interaction. However, their impact does not occur automatically.

Accessibility remains a critical issue, encompassing geographical proximity, affordability, inclusivity, and a sense of welcome. Data on accessibility for people with disabilities remains especially scarce, despite the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

RH also stressed that the use of facilities is often poorly monitored. While some countries have data on usage patterns, many do not, making it difficult to assess their social value. Similarly, while facilities can serve broader community functions beyond sport, such as acting as meeting places in rural areas, this dimension is seldom measured or recognised. On the question of sustainability, the study found that many facilities remain energy-inefficient and that existing

subsidies for improvements are often limited to measures such as solar panels or LED lighting, which may not suffice to achieve substantial environmental impact.

In conclusion, RH presented several recommendations. Continued mapping of facilities across Europe is essential, with more robust calculations needed of their social value. Policy-makers should pay particular attention to the views and needs of vulnerable groups to ensure inclusivity. Good practices linking facilities to the SDGs should be collected and shared more widely, and initiatives such as the SHARE platform could be used to raise awareness of the role of facilities in local and regional development. Ultimately, facilities must be managed in ways that ensure affordability, accessibility, and inclusivity, while also pursuing financial and environmental sustainability in the long term.

UEFA's Approach to Social Sustainability

The second keynote was delivered by *James Ogilvie (JO)*, Head of European Affairs at UEFA. He opened his intervention recalling his own childhood experiences of playing sport in community facilities and the formative role that such spaces had in shaping his development. This illustrates the profound impact that accessible and safe sport environments can have on individuals, which in turn underscores the importance of the work currently being undertaken on social sustainability.

JO outlined UEFA's ambition to become a recognised leader in the area of social sustainability in sport. He explained that UEFA has been investing in the development of models of social value to quantify and communicate the positive impacts of football. These models are linked to a growing body of benchmarks that measure areas such as community engagement, equality initiatives, and grassroots participation. By applying these benchmarks, UEFA is able to monitor the social return on investment of its activities.

A distinctive element of UEFA's approach is its reliance on innovation and data-driven methods. JO described how UEFA is making use of satellite mapping technology to support the creation of a detailed geospatial database of football facilities. This innovative tool allows UEFA to visualise the distribution of infrastructures, to identify areas of oversupply or undersupply, and to cross-reference facility data with demographic and social indicators. The satellite-based mapping enables UEFA to assess accessibility more precisely, for example by examining whether disadvantaged communities have adequate proximity to facilities or whether there are significant gaps in provision. In parallel, UEFA is compiling a database of social impact indicators, drawing together information from member associations and community projects. The ability to connect satellite mapping with impact data provides a powerful evidence base for decision-making and allows UEFA to monitor the effectiveness of its policies over time.

Collaboration with researchers and local stakeholders was presented as another central pillar of UEFA's approach. By engaging with experts at national and community level, UEFA ensures that its programmes are informed by the latest knowledge and tailored to local realities.

JO concluded by emphasising that UEFA's commitment to social sustainability extends aims to ensure that the benefits of football are accessible, equitable, and demonstrably valuable to communities across Europe.

National and Institutional Case Studies

Estonia

The first national contribution came from Estonia, where *Kairis Ulp* (KU), Head of the Estonian Sport Register, presented the country's comprehensive system for mapping and monitoring sports facilities. She introduced the Estonian Sports Register, which has been in operation since 2011 and which now contains data on more than 4,100 facilities. The Register is part of a broader information system composed of six interlinked sub-databases covering sports organisations, facilities, results, and other elements of the national sports structure. The existence of such an integrated register provides Estonia with a robust evidence base to guide planning and policy decisions at both national and local level.

A notable recent development has been the integration of parameters relating to accessibility for people with disabilities. KU explained that indicators concerning disability access are progressively being built into the system, enabling a clearer picture of inclusivity and ensuring alignment with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Proximity data also forms a key component of the Register: the most recent analysis revealed that approximately 94% of the Estonian population lives within three kilometres of a sports facility. This finding highlights the relatively high level of geographical accessibility across the country, although KU acknowledged that proximity alone does not equate to full accessibility, as social and financial barriers may persist.

The Register is used extensively by local authorities for urban planning and decision-making. For example, municipalities consult the database to assess the distribution of facilities, identify gaps, and prioritise investments. The data is also used by emergency services, illustrating the wide-ranging utility of comprehensive facility mapping. In addition, the Register feeds into national statistics and contributes to quality-of-life indicators at municipal level, underlining the broader social relevance of access to sport infrastructure.

KU highlighted several good practices that illustrate the link between facilities and social sustainability. The "*open schoolyards*" initiative seeks to increase the availability of facilities by encouraging public access to school sports grounds outside of school hours. This initiative has proven particularly effective in extending opportunities to local communities, especially in areas where dedicated public sports facilities are limited. Another example is the "*ball boxes*" campaign, which has seen footballs and basketballs placed in secure but easily accessible boxes in public spaces for free community use. These measures directly enhance opportunities for spontaneous physical activity and reinforce the role of facilities as hubs for inclusion and participation.

Denmark

The Danish contribution was presented by *Evald Bundgaard Iversen (EBI)*, Associate Professor, Head of Centre, University of Southern Denmark, who addressed the question of facility use and public value. He explained that Denmark benefits from extensive data collection, which provides insights into how sports facilities are booked and actually used. The research shows a mismatch: while sports halls are booked roughly 80% of the time during peak hours, they are only used about 60% of the time. This leaves around 40% of the capacity unused, even though many clubs report waiting lists and difficulties securing access. The problem is not merely inefficiency but one of equity, since facilities are frequently monopolised by organised groups. This dominance of clubs and federations creates barriers for more spontaneous, informal, or non-traditional users, who often find themselves excluded despite the existence of available space.

EBI noted that researchers in Denmark are beginning to explore how facility use links to energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. A new doctoral research project will examine whether optimising utilisation rates can lower the relative environmental footprint of facilities, ensuring that energy consumption generates maximum societal benefit. This points to the interconnected nature of social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

He also explained that Denmark is developing a cross-sectoral network to encourage dialogue between actors from sport, urban planning, and environmental policy. The goal is to create a framework where facilities are both more monitored. More data available on sport facilities will improve use, inclusivity and sustainability. EBI concluded that the core challenge lies in not just building new infrastructure but in rethinking management systems so that existing facilities are genuinely accessible to all sections of society.

Italy

Flavio La Porta (FLP), Official of the Department for Sport of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers presented Italy's efforts in mapping facilities and promoting social sustainability through targeted funding programmes. He explained that Italy has developed a national database of sport facilities, which is continuously updated and provides detailed information on infrastructure across the country. This database is key in identifying areas of need and in guiding investment decisions.

A central element of Italy's approach is the "Sport e Periferie" (Sport and Suburbs) fund, a programme that allocates significant resources to the construction, renovation, and improvement of facilities, with a particular focus on disadvantaged areas. FLP emphasised that the fund operates on the principle of equity, aiming to ensure that all communities, regardless of socio-economic status, have access to adequate sport infrastructure. The programme has been especially important in addressing regional disparities, as well as in supporting the regeneration of urban areas where access to sport has historically been limited.

He also noted that accessibility is a core criterion for funding, with projects required to demonstrate how they will contribute to inclusivity and community use. By linking financial support to such criteria, the Italian government is embedding social sustainability into facility

development. FLP underlined that mapping is essential for the effective functioning of this programme: only with accurate and up-to-date information on existing facilities can investments be targeted where they are most needed.

France

The French contribution, delivered by *Canelle Daniel* (CD), Project Manager at Technological Innovations, Centre for Resources, Expertise and Sporting Performance (CREPS), Pays de la Loire (France), focused on the vulnerability of facilities to climate change and its social consequences. She referred to the WWF report *Climate Change: The World of Sport at +2° and +4°*, which projects that with a rise of 2°C in global average temperatures, there could be 24 additional days per year when sport cannot be safely practised due to extreme heat. At 4°C, this figure rises dramatically to 66 days. These scenarios underline the scale of the challenge.

CD stressed that France counts around 30,000 indoor sports facilities, the majority of which were not built to withstand the higher temperatures now becoming common. Renovating them to meet new climate conditions would require massive investment, yet grassroots clubs, which are the backbone of community sport, often lack the financial capacity to adapt. This creates a double vulnerability: facilities are becoming increasingly unfit for purpose just as the communities most reliant on them have the least means to intervene.

In response, France has introduced measures linking public subsidies to compliance with environmental criteria. New or renovated facilities must meet sustainability standards, for instance by connecting stadiums to electrical grids rather than using diesel generators, or by adopting biodiversity-friendly practices in the maintenance of pitches. These requirements represent a significant policy shift, embedding sustainability into funding decisions.

However, CD cautioned that technical measures alone will not suffice. What is required is a cultural change in how facilities are conceived and managed, with sustainability integrated into their identity from the outset rather than treated as an afterthought. Without this transformation, she warned, facilities risk becoming socially and environmentally obsolete, threatening both participation and inclusion.

Discussion

The discussion segment of the meeting provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the presentations and to draw connections between the different national and institutional examples.

A recurring theme was the need for harmonised and reliable data. While Estonia, Denmark, and Italy presented examples of national registers or databases, it was acknowledged that many European countries still lack systematic data collection on facilities. Participants agreed that harmonisation of definitions and indicators is necessary to ensure comparability across contexts. The recent work of the European Task Force on Harmonised Sports Statistics was highlighted as an important step, but gaps remain, particularly in the measurement of

accessibility for people with disabilities and in the systematic collection of data on facility usage.

The discussion also underscored the complex nature of accessibility. Proximity to a facility, while important, was not considered sufficient on its own. Participants highlighted barriers related to affordability, inclusivity, and the cultural and social dimensions of access. For example, facilities may be located nearby but still feel unwelcoming or unsafe for certain groups. The importance of integrating the perspectives of vulnerable groups into policy and facility management was emphasised repeatedly. Without their input, accessibility risks being understood only in abstract terms rather than as lived experience.

Another strong theme concerned the balance between societal value and financial management. Local authorities often face difficult trade-offs between maximising revenues from facilities and ensuring inclusivity. Some facilities are financially successful but serve only a narrow section of the population, while others may appear under-used in commercial terms but provide significant societal value, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Participants agreed that a more sophisticated understanding of social value or societal return on investment is needed to inform decision-making.

Environmental considerations were also woven into the discussion, even though the primary focus was on social sustainability. The Danish example of linking utilisation rates to energy efficiency illustrated how social and environmental objectives can intersect. Similarly, France's presentation on climate risks demonstrated that social sustainability cannot be considered in isolation from environmental realities. The group acknowledged that future work would need to continue addressing these interconnections.

Finally, participants reflected on the importance of facilities as community hubs. Beyond their function as sites for physical activity, facilities were described as places where people meet, build relationships, and strengthen community identity. This dimension is particularly visible in rural areas, where sports facilities often double as social gathering points. Recognising and enhancing this role was seen as central to advancing social sustainability.

Conclusions

The meeting concluded with a recognition that sport facilities are indispensable for advancing the objectives of social sustainability, but that their positive impact cannot be taken for granted. The evidence presented demonstrated that facilities can strengthen communities, foster inclusion, and provide equitable opportunities for participation, but only when they are accessible, affordable, welcoming, and well-managed.

From the White Paper presented by RH, it was clear that there is still a need for more robust and comprehensive data. Mapping initiatives must be expanded, and greater attention should be paid to accessibility, facility usage, and sustainability measures. The role of vulnerable groups must be prioritised in both research and policy, ensuring that their perspectives shape decision-making processes.

Participants agreed that the way forward should include:

- continued and harmonised mapping of facilities across Europe with alignment between countries on e.g. indicators for accessibility of sport facilities;
- systematic efforts to measure social value, including societal return on investment;
- advancements on the measurement of usage of sport facilities with attention for user groups and the opportunities offered by technology and AI;
- stronger involvement of local authorities as the primary actors in facility management;
- targeted support for vulnerable groups to ensure true inclusivity;
- and ongoing platforms for exchange of good practices, such as the series of meetings co-organised by EPAS and the Mulier Institute.

The session closed with the shared understanding that future meetings would continue to build on this foundation, with accessibility identified as a likely focus for upcoming discussions. EPAS and the Mulier Institute reiterated their commitment to sustaining this collaborative process and to ensuring that the insights generated are translated into meaningful policy and practice across Europe.

In particular FHR explained that in 2026, EPAS would put the spotlight on the White Paper during the EPAS May plenary sessions, and other occasions to ensure its promotion, and would organise a fifth technical meeting focusing on accessibility of sports facilities. RH noted that the focus on accessibility of sports facilities fits well with the outcome of this meeting and first insights offered on this topic within the national examples. In 2027 the aim of EPAS would be to support the development of indicators in collaboration with the Mulier Institute and organise a webinar on environmental sustainability and sports facilities as set forth in the EPAS 2026-2027 Strategy. RH agrees that this topic is of relevance as well to the Mulier Institute and within the Dutch policy arena and suggested that this aligns also with the cross-sectoral network that the Danish colleagues are setting up that by then might have gained some traction.

Appendix 1: Agenda

- 9.30-9.40am* *Opening words* (Remco Hoekman and Francine Hetherington Raveney)
- 9.40am-10.20am* *Reflections on social sustainability and sports facilities*
- Presentation by *Remco Hoekman* on the “White Paper and Social sustainability of sport facilities”
 - Presentation by *James Ogilvie*, Head of European Affairs at UEFA, on “UEFA experiences and initiatives: social sustainability and sports facilities”
- 10.20-10.40am* *Questions and answers*
- 10.40-10.55am* *Break*
- 10.55am-11.55am* *Best practice examples of mapping of sports facilities and social sustainability*
- Presentation by *Kairis Ulp*, Head of the Estonian Sport Register (Estonia) *preceded by a short video clip*
 - Presentation by *Evald Bundgaard Iversen*, Associate Professor, Head of Centre, University of Southern Denmark (Denmark)
 - Presentation by *Flavio La Porta*, Official of the Department for Sport of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Italy)
 - Presentation by *Canelle Daniel*, Project Manager - Technological Innovations, Centre for Resources, Expertise and Sporting Performance (CREPS), Pays de la Loire (France)
- 11.55am-12.20pm* *Questions and answers*
Sharing good examples, best practices and ongoing work from other countries (round the table and online participants).
- 12.20pm-12.30pm* *Conclusions and information about follow-on work and the next online meeting in 2026 on equal access to sports facilities*

(Remco Hoekman and Francine Hetherington Raveney)

Appendix 2: List of participants and speakers

Speakers

Remco Hoekman
Managing Director
Mulier Instituut (The Netherlands)

James Ogilvie
Head of European Affairs
Union des associations européennes de football (UEFA)

Kairis Ulp
Head of the Estonian Sport Register (Estonia)

Evald Bundgaard Iversen
Associate Professor, Head of Centre
University of Southern Denmark (Denmark)

Flavio La Porta
Official of the Department for Sport
Presidency of the Council of Ministers (Italy)

Canelle Daniel
Project Manager - Technological Innovations
Centre for Resources, Expertise and Sporting Performance (CREPS), Pays de la Loire (France)

Participants

Maximilian Schubiger
Project Director
National Sports Facilities Concept (NASCO), Sports policy unit (Switzerland)

Tomas Fibek
Sport Policy Unit, National Sports Agency (Czech Republic)

EPAS(2025)74

Liz Clarke
Head of the Global Institute of Sport, Sport England (United Kingdom)

Beck Jeffs
Sport England (United Kingdom)

Robert Holt
Strategic Planner
Sport England (United Kingdom)

Benny Cullen
Director of Research and Innovation
Sport Ireland (Ireland)

Jens Høyer-Kruse
Project Manager, Scientist
The Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Sports Science and Clinical Biomechanics
Research Unit of Active Living, University of Southern Denmark (Denmark)

Jonnie Nordensky
Project Manager Place for Sports
Swedish Sports Confederation (Sweden)

Jonas Knutsson
Swedish Sports Confederation (Sweden)

Anna Vilanova
Catalan Sports Observatory
National Institute of Physical Education of Catalonia (INEFC) (Spain)

Daniel Glimvert
Operations Coordinator, sport and outdoor facilities
The Swedish Research Council for Sport Science (Sweden)

Tapani Laakso
Project Manager, Lipas-project
The Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences, University of Jyväskylä (Finland)

Nils-Olof Zethrin
Senior Advisor Sport and Leisure
Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (Sweden)

Vilma Čingienė
European Reform University Alliance (ERUA) (Lithuania)

Sören Wallrodt
Hochschule Koblenz (Germany)

Rémi Dhalluin
Centre for Resources, Expertise and Sporting Performance (CREPS), Pays de la Loire (France)

Laurynas Zibolis
Ministry of Education, Science, and Sport (Lithuania)

Aleix Sans Brial
Sports Adviser
Government of Andorra (Principality of Andorra)

Anna Mazarska
Ministry of Youth and Sports (Ukraine)

Julia Schreiner
Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport (Austria)

Bálint Dolnegó
Assistant lecturer
Department of Sport Management (Hungary)

Botond Papp
Ministry of Defence / State Secretariat for Sport (Hungary)

Susana Monserrat-Revilla
Lecturer in Sport Management
School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University (United-Kingdom)

Duarte Lopes
Chief of Cabinet to the Secretary of State for Sport (Portugal)

Filipa Cavalleri
Deputy to the Secretary of State for Sport (Portugal)

Ioanna Paraskevopoulou
European and International Affairs Officer
Cyprus Sports Organisation KOA (Cyprus)

Óskar Þór Ármannsson
Head of Unit
Ministry of Education and Children (Iceland)

Örvar Ólafsson
Senior Adviser
Ministry of Education and Children (Iceland)

Jana Voboril
Federal Office of Sport (Switzerland)

Jürgen Tömördy
Coordination contribution for training companies and competitive sport (Liechtenstein)

Khoren Zargaryan

EPAS(2025)74

Director of the Sports Management Centre
Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (Armenia)

Mads Fabricius Grand
Ministry of Culture / Sport Unit (Denmark)

Marco Bürgi
Sports policy expert
Federal Office of Sport (Switzerland)

Margus Klaan
Head of Sports Department
Ministry of Culture (Estonia)

Marija Petronijevic
Ministry of Sports (Serbia)

Masa Starcevic
Ministry of Tourism and Sport (Croatia)

Mikko Helasvuo
Ministry of Education and Culture (Finland)
Division for Sport

Monika Adomaitiene
National Sports Agency (Lithuania)

Oliver Vanges
The Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities (Denmark)

Sarah Denys
Sport vlaanderen (Belgium)

Susana Vale
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport (Portugal)

Perényi Szilvia
Associate Professor
University of Physical Education and Sports Science, Department of Sports Management
(Hungary)

Žiga Vrevc Žlajpah
Senior Advisor, Sports Directorate
Ministry for Economy, Tourism and Sport (Slovenia)

EPAS Secretariat

Francine Hetherington Raveney
Deputy Executive Secretary

Caroline Larghi
Administrative Assistant

Emma Zanichelli
Communications Officer

Marco Rizzi
Junior Assistant