

How can we ensure a safe, secure and welcoming environment at football matches and other sports events in Europe and around the world? Let us explore the response provided by the Saint-Denis Convention with its integrated multi-agency approach.

The Saint-Denis Convention: a global reference framework

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The Council of Europe, the main intergovernmental human rights organisation on the European continent, is a key international player in the world of sport, not only because of its geographical size - 46 member states, including all 27 members of the European Union - but also because of the richness and variety of its texts adopted over the past seven decades: the European Sports Charter, the Anti-Doping Convention, the Convention on Spectator Violence, the Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions and the Convention on an Integrated Approach to Safety, Security and Service at Football Matches and Other Sports Events.

As early as 1983, the fight against violence in sport was the subject of an initial recommendation by the Parliamentary Assembly. The following year, the Committee of Ministers recommended a series of measures to reduce spectator violence at sports events, particularly in football. Many Europeans were concerned about the sport-related violence and its repercussions. A European response to the phenomenon of hooliganism and other sport-related violence was expected, and it was a football match that sped things up...

Revival in Europe in the wake of the Heysel tragedy: a first convention on spectator violence

It was in the context of the Heysel disaster in Brussels in May 1985 and the political and social pressure that ensued that a first convention was set up in order to prevent a recurrence of such a tragedy. In record time, the European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events, in particular Football Matches (ETS No. 120) was opened for signature on 19 August 1985 and entered into force on 1 November 1985.

The Convention aimed to prevent and respond to violence and excesses in and around stadiums, as well as to deter potential perpetrators of violence. Its content inevitably reflected the views and practices of the time and provided for a set of security measures designed primarily to control crowds.

Over the past 30 years, as the world of football has changed a lot, it has become increasingly clear that the content of the 1985 Convention is no longer fit for purpose and that a different response needs to be made to the new challenges. Thus, in 2016,

the Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events (Saint-Denis Convention - CETS No. 218) was born.

A response adapted to the challenges of the twentieth century: the Saint-Denis Convention

The Saint-Denis Convention is therefore the culmination of three decades of work carried out at the international level since the adoption of the 1985 Convention. It was opened for signature on 3 July 2016 at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis for the UEFA EURO 2016 quarter-final match. To date, it has 29 States Parties that have ratified the Convention and 10 States that have signed it, in addition to States and sports, police, athlete and fan organisations that have observer status.

This Convention is the only legally binding international instrument that establishes institutional cooperation between all stakeholders involved in the organisation of football and other sporting events.

- **An innovative integrated approach**

The aim of this Convention is to move from a traditional approach, focused on the management of violence and spectator excesses, to an integrated approach based on three interdependent pillars - security, safety and service - and multi-agency, i.e., one that encourages cooperation between all stakeholders, public and private - including the local population and fans -, involved in the organisation of safe, secure and welcoming sporting events.

It prescribes measures based on the highest standards developed in Europe. Its scope covers all measures to ensure appropriate safety, security and service conditions for all participants at sports events, including fans, stadium safety personnel, police, firefighters, medical staff, players, referees, journalists, volunteers and communities and businesses surrounding the stadium that are affected by the sports event.

- **Main provisions of the Convention**

The Saint-Denis Convention is based on and oriented towards human rights. It is an open convention, i.e., any non-member state of the Council of Europe can accede to it.

The Convention has only 22 articles, including the following 11 policy articles:

Article 1 (Scope) states that the Convention applies only to the national territory, professional football clubs and national teams, although States may apply it to other sports, including amateur sport, where appropriate.

Article 2 (Aim) sets the goal of ensuring a safe, secure and welcoming environment at football matches, by setting out the following positive obligations for Parties: adopt an integrated multi-institutional approach, based on partnership and cooperation, from local to international; ensure coordination among all stakeholders; and take into account good practices.

Article 3 (Definitions) sets out the key definitions of the Convention, including safety, security and service.

Article 4 (Domestic coordination structures) requires Parties to establish national and local coordination structures, including to identify and assess risks; coordination structures of public and private bodies; adopt national and local strategies; and establish legal frameworks with clear missions and responsibilities of the different parties.

Article 5 (Safety, security and service at sports stadiums) obliges Parties to adopt regulations for the licensing and certification of stadiums; encourage inclusive policies in stadiums; ensure operational liaison and clear procedures between private security, police and emergency services; ensure that safety and security personnel are qualified and equipped; and to encourage players, coaches and other team members to act as role models for spectators.

Article 6 (Safety, security and service in public places) obliges Parties to encourage collaboration between local authorities, police, the public, local businesses, supporter representatives, clubs and national associations; and that the risk assessment takes into account the journey to and from the stadium.

Article 7 (Contingency and emergency plans) requires Parties to have these multi-agency plans in place and to conduct regular joint exercises.

Article 8 (Relations with supporters and the local population) obliges Parties to encourage a communication policy with these actors as well as multi-agency socio-educational projects.

Article 9 (Police strategies and operations) obliges Parties to ensure the adoption of compliant policing strategies in accordance with good practices, as well as partnership with organisers, supporters and the local population.

Article 10 (Prevention and sanction of offending behaviour) requires Parties to have effective exclusion policies, and to cooperate to ensure that sanctions are applied for offences committed abroad, including the possibility of imposing travel restrictions abroad.

Finally, Article 11 (International cooperation) requires the Parties to establish a National Football Information Point (NFIP) of a police nature, which functions as a source of expertise; and that they cooperate in the exchange of good practices on prevention, information and partnership projects.

- **Establishment of international best practices**

The Convention is supplemented by three recommendations, still adopted by the Committee on the Safety and Security of Sports Events (also known as the "Saint-Denis Committee"), which develop its standards in detail:

Recommendation T-S4 Rec(2021)¹, adopted by the Saint-Denis Committee, explains how to implement the Convention in great detail and by presenting recommended good practices.

Recommendation T-S4 Rec (2022)¹ presents a model for the structure of a national strategy on safety, security and service at sports events. Structured in 10 points, it aims to facilitate the implementation by States Parties of their obligation to develop national and local strategies.

Recommendation T-S4 Rec (2022)² proposes a model national legislative and regulatory framework for safety, security and service. It includes a model law on safety, security and service at football matches and other sports events (Annex 1), as well as a model regulation on stewarding and private security at such events (Annex 2).

- **Monitoring at the service of States**

Monitoring is a central activity of the Saint-Denis Committee. It aims to provide a regular review of the implementation of the Convention's standards by States Parties. It includes questionnaires and annual reports as well as monitoring visits at the request of States, including when they are the organisers of a major event. This was the case with the Committee's first monitoring visit, which took place in Germany in November 2023, as part of the preparations for UEFA EURO 2024.

- **A unique platform for cooperation**

The Saint-Denis Committee is the body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention. It brings together delegations from States Parties - 29 Parties as of 1 February 2024 - as well as numerous States and non-governmental organisations with observer status, including police organisations (INTERPOL), sports organisations (FIFA, UEFA and Confederation of African Football), representative of supporter organisations (Football Supporters Europe, Centre for Access to Football in Europe and Colour-blind Awareness) and professional football athletes (FIFPRO).

With this multi-agency and integrated composition, the Committee reflects the philosophy of the Convention and constitutes a unique global platform for standard setting, monitoring, exchange of good practices and technical assistance.

The Committee meets twice a year, in its full format. It also includes a Bureau, which ensures its continuity, as well as three advisory groups – monitoring, standard setting and legal issues, and international cooperation. It regularly sets up ad hoc working groups to monitor the state of preparations for major sports events, such as the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, the current group for UEFA EURO 2024 in Germany and, in the future, the FIFA World Cup 2026 (Canada, USA and Mexico).

- **Training and awareness tools**

Free online training is available to learn about all facets of the Convention and its recommendations. Another course is also available to learn about the links between human rights and sport (see useful links below).

A web page presents the Convention and the Committee, where you can find several showcase tools, such as a toolkit composed of sixteen factsheets, as well as leaflets, country profiles to better discover national policies, evaluation reports and reports of monitoring visits (see useful links below).

Challenges and future developments

- **Strengthening the safety and service pillars**

As part of regular cooperation with the European Union, a joint project was launched on 1 January 2024 to support Member States in strengthening the Safety and Service pillars, ensuring the necessary balance with the Security pillar, which has always been more developed. This project includes a diagnosis of the situation in Europe, awareness-raising and training activities as well as the development of guidelines.

- **Expanding international cooperation**

Today, the Committee brings together a large number of States and non-governmental organisations, both in Europe and outside Europe. Bearing in mind the philosophy of the Convention, which aims to protect all participants at sports events, the Committee aims to include more European and non-European states as well as international organisations representing other relevant actors, such as referees, sports journalists or stadium safety officials.

- **Responding to new challenges**

The Committee faces new opportunities in responding to the challenges facing our societies, including: issues of inclusion, diversity and spectator accessibility to sports venues; the specificities of organising women's sports events; legal and illegal use of pyrotechnic devices; issues of licensing, certification and inspection of sports facilities; or the impact of technology on the security of these events.

To conclude

Finally, it should be remembered that each season professional football matches attract an average of around 150 million spectators to stadiums across Europe, involving around 2 million police and security personnel.

Incidents are reported on average in around 43% of professional football matches, not to mention incidents that are increasingly occurring outside stadiums.

Recent major incidents and near misses, such as serious violence resulting in the death of supporters, a sharp increase in racist insults and incidents on the field against players and referees, show that there is still a long way to go in the implementation of the principles and standards of the Saint-Denis Convention.

National governments and European and national football authorities have a responsibility to learn from this and do everything possible to prevent major incidents from happening again in the future.

Useful links on the Saint-Denis Convention:

[Sports website, page dedicated to the Saint-Denis Convention](#)

[Text and explanatory report to the Convention](#)

[Status of signatures and ratifications of the Convention](#)

[Three recommendations adopted by the Committee](#)

[Country profile of States Parties](#)

[Toolkit of 16 factsheets to promote the Convention](#)

[Two free online courses \(MOOCs\) on sports:](#)

- The Convention of Saint-Denis (EN, PL, PT)
- Human Rights and Sport (EN, FR, RU, SP)

[Case Law of the European Court of Human Rights \(sport\)](#)

(Inset)

Better understand the three S's of the Convention

The Convention establishes definitions to help better understand the concepts of safety, security and service:

- The concept of safety covers all measures aimed at preventing people from being injured or exposed to risks to their health or well-being during sports events. These measures include stadium infrastructure and certification, emergency plans, and rules on alcohol consumption. Security measures are also used to protect individuals when moving to the event and in public broadcasting venues outside the stadiums.
- The concept of security includes all measures designed to prevent, reduce the risk and punish any violence or disorder during football matches or other sporting events, both inside and outside stadiums. These measures include risk

assessment, cooperation between the police and other relevant agencies, and the introduction of sanctions.

- The concept of service includes measures aimed at making football matches and other sporting events enjoyable and welcoming for all, in stadiums but also in public spaces where spectators and supporters gather before, during and after matches. This concept includes material elements such as catering and sanitary facilities; but above all focuses on the way in which spectators are welcomed and treated throughout the event.

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