

The importance of football in Europe

Football is by far the most popular sport across the European continent. Over the 2019-2020 season, football matches attracted over 150 million spectators to stadiums. In Europe, it is the United Kingdom that leads attendance rate, with more than 32 million spectators over this period, despite being impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Germany, with almost 20 million fans over the same season, is the second European country to attract a large number of spectators to its matches.

These impressive figures prove the importance of football in the world and especially in Europe. With so many people gathered in stadiums or in their vicinity, there are risks of incidents. Football, but also sport in general, must therefore face certain challenges in order to prevent and combat sport-related violence.¹

Incidents at football matches

In Europe, each country has its own definition of an incident. This is why it is difficult to collect comparable information, as each country has its own criteria of seriousness of incidents. The European categorisation uses a 3 layer scale to measure the severity of incidents: very serious, serious and non-serious incidents. For the period 2019/2020, 1% of incidents recorded by the police were assessed as being very serious, 11% serious and 88% non-serious.

Among the most frequent incidents recorded are acts of violence, threatening behaviour, public disorder, the use of pyrotechnics, racist and discriminatory behaviour and hate speech. Recent observations show that these incidents are slightly increasing, by 5,5% compared to the 2018/2019 sport season.

1. This factsheet is based on figures contained in the 2019/2020 Annual/season report on violence, disorder and other prohibited activity. This report summarises the responses of 38 European States to an online questionnaire. It was published as part of the European Union/Council of Europe joint project entitled ProS4+.



Football matches attract over 150 million spectators across Europe every year

In Europe, incidents are recorded in 42% of football matches, giving an average of 0,63 incidents per match. There is also a shift in incidents from the inside to the outside of stadiums. This concerns official public areas where fans gather ("fan zones"), public broadcasting venues, city centres and strategic points of travel to the stadium, such as railway stations, airports and public transport. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these incidents, as most of the venues in Europe were closed for spectators as a precautionary measure to prevent the outspread of the virus.

Prevention and co-operation between all stakeholders in a sports event must be strengthened in order to respond to this increase of incidents. These are two key notions of the multi-agency integrated approach and can have an impact on incident reduction policies. Education and communication with supporters are also essential and necessary to move towards a more effective exchange of information and dialogue between the different stakeholders in a sporting event.

Existing exclusion procedures

In order to punish the anti-social behaviour related to sports events, banning orders are imposed by the authorities. There are three types of banning orders:

- ▶ Judicial bans
- ▶ Administrative bans
- ▶ Civil (sport authorities) bans.

■ In the period 2019/2020, 11,300 banning orders (an increase of 3% compared to the previous season) were applied following incidents that occurred in football stadiums, of which 70% following judicial proceedings, 20% as part of an administrative procedure and 10% that were imposed by the football authorities.

■ Travel bans can also be imposed: of the 11,300 banning orders, more than 600 were travel bans.

■ It should be noted that football is not the only sport affected by these incidents and that similar measures are also adopted in other sports to prevent and combat all types of violent behaviour.

■ Football matches and the incidents that can occur in that context are often the subject of extensive media coverage, yet other sports can attract large numbers of spectators to the various competitions (e.g. basketball, handball, volleyball, ice-hockey and rugby), with similar associated risks. These challenges need to be taken into consideration by all stakeholders in the sports sector and should be addressed through an integrated multi-agency approach.

” Most European countries apply banning orders, including travel bans, mostly of a judicial nature

Some examples of good practices

■ In order to reduce the risk of incidents at sports events, it is necessary to implement policies to prevent and combat violence in stadiums that should be complemented with subsequent legal provisions for sanctioning this kind of antisocial behaviour. Some European countries have developed various measures to reduce incidents, some of which have proved to be effective. These good practices are diverse and varied. They include:

- ▶ Use of dedicated law enforcement personnel, as spotters and football intelligence officers;
- ▶ The establishment and work of the National Football Information Points (NFIPs), who act as a national pool of expertise in this regard;
- ▶ Exclusion of troublemakers from the football experience, using banning orders;
- ▶ Intelligence-led policing;
- ▶ Risk-based deployment;
- ▶ Proportionate intervention;
- ▶ Effective dialogue with supporters;
- ▶ Training courses for police officers regarding communication with supporters;



Deploying an appropriate number of well-trained, suitably equipped and well supervised stewards is essential for the safety of football matches

- ▶ Policies of dialogue to improve relations between the organisers of a sporting event, the police, the private security services and the supporters;
- ▶ The widespread introduction of zero-tolerance policies on the use of pyrotechnics;
- ▶ The development of greater co-operation between football authorities, public authorities and supporters' organisations to promote the exchange of information and advice; and/or
- ▶ The establishment of adult education programs for perpetrators of minor offences or incidents at a sporting event.

To remember

The increase in football incidents shows that it is essential for European countries to continue working on measures and policies to reduce the risks associated with violence at sports events. In order to ensure the safety and security of sporting events, there are more and more tools available to promote a peaceful atmosphere in stadiums.

Sporting events are privileged moments, where the conviviality between spectators must not be compromised by acts of violence or discriminatory behaviour.

” States should ensure a balance between prevention policies and repressive measures



” The Saint-Denis Convention is the only legally-binding international instrument on safety, security and service at sports events

The Saint-Denis Convention

The Council of Europe Convention on an integrated approach to safety, security and service at football matches and other sports events was opened for signature on 3 July 2016 in Saint-Denis (France), on the occasion of the UEFA EURO 2016 championship. It entered into force on 1st November 2017 after 3 ratifications – France, Monaco and Poland – and now has a large number of [States Parties](#).

It promotes an integrated multi-agency approach, covering three complementary and interdependent pillars: safety, security and service. It is the only legally-binding international instrument establishing institutional co-operation between all relevant stakeholders to make football matches and other sports events safer, more secure and more welcoming.

Useful links

1. [Saint-Denis Convention](https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/safety-security-and-service-approach-convention)
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/safety-security-and-service-approach-convention>
2. Recommendations T-S4:
 - i. Rec(2021)1: Recommended good practices on safety, security and service
 - ii. Rec(2022)1: Model structure of a national strategy on safety, security and service
 - iii. Rec(2022)2: Model national legislative and regulatory framework on safety, security and service<https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/t-s4-recommendations>
3. To learn more about the Convention and Recommendation Rec(2021)1, you can register for the following open online courses:
 - i. MOOC on Human Rights in Sport (available in English, Russian, Slovak and Spanish)
<http://help.elearning.ext.coe.int/course/index.php?categoryid=590>
 - ii. MOOC on Safety, Security and Service at Sports Events (available in English, Polish and Portuguese)
<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/security-safety-sport/pros4-e-learning-enrolment-form>

