

**COMMITTEE ON SAFETY AND SECURITY
AT SPORTS EVENTS (T-S4)**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONVENTION ON AN INTEGRATED
SAFETY, SECURITY AND SERVICE APPROACH AT FOOTBALL
MATCHES AND OTHER SPORTS EVENTS

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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ANNUAL/SEASON
MONITORING QUESTIONNAIRE
OF THE SAINT-DENIS CONVENTION
2022- 2023 SEASON / YEAR 2023

Executive summary

1. General overview

The Saint-Denis Convention aims at promoting a safety, security and service multi-agency integrated approach at football matches and other sports events, and providing standards based on the highest safety, security and service good practices developed across Europe, building upon the work done internationally since the adoption of the European Convention on Spectator Violence in 1985. It also promotes cooperation between all relevant public and private stakeholders, including supporters and local communities, intending to provide a safe, secure and welcoming environment at football matches and other sports events.

This 2022 – 2023 Season / Year 2023 edition follows partially the framework of the 2022 pilot edition, but benefits from the questionnaire revision that was carried out in the second half of 2023.

The general idea behind monitoring is to typify the status of compliance of States Parties – and Observer States, on a voluntary basis - with each provision and standard of the Convention, seeking to understand:

- (i) whether there are differences in the extent to which provisions/standards are complied with, and identify which provisions/standards are more complied with and which ones are less complied with;
- (ii) the implementation stage of the provisions/standards (more advanced or delayed) of the different countries; and
- iii) which provisions/standards and countries require greater attention from the Committee.

It should be clear that there is no intention to create a ranking of countries (from the most to the least compliant), i.e., that these results should not be interpreted as such. The monitoring goal is solely to help States better implement the Convention and not to set up a reward system or, by opposite, a sanctioning one. In fact, by including countries that have not signed or ratified the Convention (Observer States - OS), the ranking that would result would not make sense. For those countries, the results may be helpful to understand the areas where more effort is needed to better meet the Convention's provisions/standards.

Regarding the 2023 edition of the monitoring survey, it should be stressed that:

1. Taking into account the last three annual monitoring processes, this was the first in which all the States Parties took part (n= 28), excluding the Russian Federation. Other 8 Observer States participated. making a total of 36 countries.
2. A detailed analysis of the results shows that a significant number of countries still lack the necessary systems to collect the requested information or do not have access to it (in case of existing such gathering).

3. Information was collected from late November 2023 to the end of February 2024, like last year.
4. Responders privileged the football season 2022/2023 as the period of reference instead of the Year 2023 (78% vs. 22%).
5. The respondents were mainly Heads of the National Football Information Point (NFIP) in their countries.
6. All these procedures resulted in a data set of quantitative data and a very rich corpus of information (on legislation, good practices, and projects, among others).

2. Main issues

The report of the monitoring survey covers the following issues:

- SUBSET A - Country & respondent's information, including the profile of NFIP;
- SUBSET B - Saint-Denis Convention: the current state of progress in each country;
- SUBSET C - Statistics & Figures of incidents and judicial orders; and
- SUBSET D - Best practices, new legislation, challenges & comments

Indicators were produced for each of these issues, complemented with an exhaustive description of the answers obtained with the open-ended questions, and in some cases seeking some kind of comparison with the results of the previous year:

- The 2023 monitoring questionnaire respondents' performance;
- The multi-agency integrated approach of the Convention;
- Evaluation of the three risks identified in the Convention;
- Evaluation about the situation inside and outside stadia;
- Capacity-building and modes of social action to prevent and protect;
- Police strategies and operations;
- Prevention and sanctioning of offending behaviour; and
- International cooperation and NFIPs.

3. Main results

To assess the current level of implementation of the Saint-Denis Convention by States, the monitoring report presents the main results according to the "compliance index.

3.1. The Saint-Denis Convention compliance index

The Saint-Denis Convention's Compliance Index measures the degree of implementation of the Convention's provisions and standards (at the end of the season 2022/2023 or year 2023), according to the responses collected. A significant part of the questionnaire is dedicated to this subject (compliance with the Convention).

The different levels of compliance are very positive and should be emphasised as such. This monitoring highlights a significant change, which begins with an indicator of the number of countries that have already ratified the Convention, as already highlighted. The high compliance levels should reassure us of the Convention's effectiveness, and the progress being made on the different issues that the Convention addresses is a cause for optimism.

3.2. Disruptive occurrences (incidents and arrests)

It's important to highlight that the number of incidents reported (28.340) is likely an underestimation due to the number of missing data. This underscores the need for improved reporting and data collection, as mentioned above.

In the data, the use of pyrotechnics stands out, as it did the previous year. The use of pyrotechnics in football venues has grown popular for enhancing match atmospheres but can significantly impact the feeling of security at sports events. Fireworks and flares can create excitement and foster a sense of community among fans. However, they also raise health and safety concerns, such as fire hazards and potential disruptions during the game. For instance, due to heavy smoke created using pyrotechnics, some games must be interrupted for a while, jeopardizing the competition.

Additionally, if there are any incidents related to the use of pyrotechnics, it could create a lasting impression that diminishes trust in the event organisers' ability to ensure safety, ultimately affecting attendees' enjoyment and peace of mind.

The 'violent behaviour' category remains one of the most important. Sporting events can sometimes become flashpoints for violence due to factors such as intense rivalries, alcohol consumption, and large gatherings of passionate fans. Incidents of violent behaviour at these venues can include fights among spectators, vandalism, and in some extreme cases, assaults. These situations can lead to serious safety concerns for attendees and require event organizers to implement stringent security measures.

Understanding the dynamics of these incidents contributes to developing strategies to mitigate violence in such environments. This aligns with the idea that a growing diversity in the types of incidents may necessitate the creation of new categories for effective analysis and response. The questionnaire applied did it.

The diversity of situations that occurred justifies the percentage of the 'Other incidents' category, which has the second highest. What could be the interpretation to the fact that more than 1/5 (21%) of the incidents do not fit into the seven categories identified? Is the reality becoming more diverse and is it necessary to find other categories?

With regard to the use of pyrotechnics and the throwing of missiles, which together account for around half of the incidents reported, is it realistic to think about tighter controls on the sale of these products, requiring the personal identification of those who buy them, and is there any room for strengthening controls at stadium entrances?

About the number of arrests related to professional football matches, we highlight the following:

- The total number of arrests, a considerable figure of almost 15.000, underscores the relevance of this police procedure.
- Most arrests (accounted) occur in the 'Top Tier League Matches'. Overall, they account for almost 64 per cent of arrests.
- However, it's important to note that many countries either did not submit data (using code '9999') or reported 0 arrests.

In respect to legal consequences of disturbances, it can be said that there is an overwhelming preponderance of banning orders (69 per cent) over other procedures. According to the comments collected, travel and/or exit bans pose problems in some legal systems. A huge difference in terms of convictions and banning orders between countries signalised, probably, different approaches in European countries, which explanation is beyond the respective legal frameworks.

It should not be overlooked, however, that the State Parties are at different stages in applying the Convention's principles, as emphasised in the Report. The experience resulting from the time that has passed since it entered into force and the current situation, coupled with the very differences that always exist between the social realities of the countries, may explain why the results are different. However, this does not jeopardise the assumption that the path that has been learnt is beginning to be progressively similar.

Regarding the challenges in order to implement the principles and provisions of the Saint-Denis Convention, the data gathered allow us to propose a new framework supported in four types:

Macrosystemic challenges - include calling for legislative initiatives, improving sports management processes, and empowering the actors involved by strengthening their professionalism. These challenges are at the level of sports policy and affect the management processes of sporting activity.

Exosystemic challenges - calling for the practices of stakeholders and cooperation between them (interaction level), for the assumption (attitudinal level) of the principles of the Saint-Denis Convention that create a culture of safety and security extended to all sports (not just football). It also includes the financial and material (building and venues) issues that foster (or hinder) the quality of sporting activity.

Mesosystemic challenges - concern the involvement of supporters, their organisations or associations, and the operational stakeholders responsible for organising the spectacle, creating a social atmosphere of order, respect, and fair play, and complying with the law.

Microsystemic challenges - concern the control of individuals who commit offences, specifically the challenges that lead to on-site prevention, the restoration of order in critical situations, and compliance with sanctions applied (for example, compliance with bans). In other words, all aspects

that relate to direct social interaction with the public and offenders, in a logic of close proximity to the people who attend a sporting event.

The distribution of challenges, by type, indicated by the respondents (according to the codification we made) is relatively equivalent, with a slight prevalence of mesosystemic challenges (28%) over the others. It is expected that the meso challenges could have a slice prominence since they are, in some, the daily life of those who have the responsibility to work out the sports activity.

Final remarks

1. The task of monitoring the implementation of the Saint-Denis Convention is largely based on the participation of representatives from the member States of the Council of Europe that ratified the Convention and in which it has entered into force (States Parties). Plus, there are Observer States, which have either not signed the Convention yet or have already signed but not ratified it and, consequently, it has not entered into force. This year, the former accounted for 78% of all respondents and it was possible to get everyone to take part (apart from Russian Federation).
2. Considering the ongoing monitoring of the Saint-Denis Convention, which has been conducted on an annual basis for the past three years, using a standardised methodology and a questionnaire that has undergone minor alterations, it is useful to undertake a comprehensive understanding (i.e. beyond the crudeness of numbers) of the obtained results. The team of data analysts has been the same for all three years and is able to develop a more across-the-board view of this monitoring.
3. The variation in the number of countries responding each year/season, does not allow us to draw a consolidated profile of responses, since not everyone always responds. But it does allow us to identify some trends. First, and perhaps most importantly, there is a tendency for countries, both States Parties and Observer States, to converge in their compliance with the provisions of the Convention. This convergence means that there is a change taking place that is bringing countries closer together to tackle safety/security problems, which are mostly alike.
4. The second trend is the recurring lack of data on occurrences (incidents, arrests, and convictions), both in relation to football and especially in relation to other sports. This reality is somewhat at odds with the media coverage of the cases, which tends to make them headlines and breaking news.
5. We believe that there are other channels of communication and information that could be further used by the NFIPs. More data is undoubtedly needed, and so is the confidence in it. In terms of empowering the national structures that monitor the Saint-Denis Convention, a significant contribution would be to provide some analysis of sources and their cross-checking in terms of the facts that need to be monitored. Under the CoE's aegis, data collection and handling training could be beneficial.
6. It's challenging to sustain that the antisocial events associated with sporting events are replicas of each other, in different countries, regions, tiers of competition and sport seasons. Still, there are common aspects, and a strategic guideline for tackling them, as the Convention aims to be,

can be extremely useful. This convention proposes an intervention model that acknowledges the complexity of the phenomenon, emphasizing the need for cooperation between governments, sporting organizations, and local communities.

7. The similarity of occurrences in different countries, both in the processes and the consequences, suggests that the root of the problems may no longer be local, and sport events may just be the pretext and the context. Violence gradually moves from being instrumental to becoming symbolic and endemic.
8. The challenge of collecting data on antisocial behaviours in sporting events highlights the inherent difficulties in sociologically understanding this phenomenon. The fragmented and (sometimes) inconsistent nature of this data reveals a reality in which violent behaviour is often underestimated, made invisible, or misunderstood. This is precisely the case when at some levels of competition, more national or more regional and local, less competitive, information is no longer collected.
9. This difficulty is not merely technical; it reflects the complexity of the social relations involved. On one hand, definitions of what constitutes antisocial behaviour vary significantly, shaped by cultural and legal norms that differ from one country to another, but specially within different sporting subcultures. On the other hand, the reluctance to report incidents of violence is an expression of underlying power dynamics, where victims and witnesses often feel powerless or fearful of the social consequences of reporting such acts.
10. The mediatization of violence seems to keep a more conventional type of audience away from the sporting spectacle, namely families, older people and many others who don't want to experience violence and tension at sporting events and immediate environments. The broadcasting of sporting events (open broadcast systems or by cable) ends up splitting the public that aims to watch sport, and this is a recent phenomenon that should be noted.
11. Violence in sport, particularly in European football, should not be seen merely as an issue of safety/security or public order; rather, it reflects the social tensions, power dynamics, and divisions present in contemporary society. From a sociological perspective, violence in sport is a multifaceted phenomenon deeply rooted in the social, cultural, and political contexts that shape human interactions. Politically, it's something that needs to be tackled and regulated as best as possible. On behalf the Council of Europe, the Saint-Denis Convention is one of the instruments, and perhaps its best reference, along with the legislation of the countries, geared towards preventing violence in sports.
12. Football-related violence is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader pattern of antisocial behaviour that manifests in different social contexts. The analysis of patterns of violence in sporting events reveals that certain factors, such as the importance of the match, historical rivalries, and the presence of alcohol or drugs, significantly increase the likelihood of violent occurrences. Sometimes the mere outward identification of belonging (flags, clothes, chants, use of pyrotechnics) is enough to ignite a direct conflict between people who have gathered to attend a match.

13. However, what is at stake is not just the behaviour of some individuals or groups, but the social structures that fuel and perpetuate these dynamics. Football, as a mass social phenomenon, serves as a mirror of society, reflecting its contradictions, inequalities, and tensions. Violence in and outside stadiums cannot be dissociated from broader social conditions, such as social exclusion, unemployment, economic inequalities, and a lack of opportunities, which create fertile ground for the emergence of aggressive and disruptive behaviours. The idea of belonging (to a specific community of supporters) overcomes the strength of social norms and rules.
14. In response to this issue, the Saint-Denis Convention, promoted by the Council of Europe, represents an attempt to address violence in sport through an integrated approach that goes beyond mere security measures. More than just a repressive response, the Saint-Denis Convention seeks to transform the sports space into an inclusive and safe environment, where participation in sport can occur without fear of violence. In this sense, the approach promoted by the convention aligns with sociological perspectives that advocate for addressing the structural causes of violence, such as social marginalization and discrimination, extreme group identity, the exacerbated 'Us', rather than merely reacting to the symptoms.
15. Furthermore, the evolution of communication technologies and the rise of social media have introduced new dimensions to violence in sport. Verbal abuse and threats, once confined to the physical space of stadiums, now find new ground on digital platforms, where they can be amplified and disseminated rapidly, namely days before the match event occur. This phenomenon, which includes harassment and insult of players, referees, and others involved in sports, demonstrates how structures of violence and power adapt and transform within the context of digital modernity. Thus, the study of violence in sport must also consider these new forms of social interaction, which redefine the boundaries of what we understand as sporting space and antisocial behaviour. Although this following argument does not diminish the seriousness of the facts and does not suggest diminishing the concern of all the stakeholders, it is accepted that many disruptive behaviours may not be malicious in intent but are nonetheless malicious in their consequences. The line between incivilities and crimes is sometimes thin (although it can be legally clarified).
16. A third trend refers to the difficulty of sharing good practices between countries, which is regrettable because it would be an interesting way of trying to understand what works and what doesn't work at all. Collaborative solutions between law enforcement agencies and sports organisers (clubs, federations, other bodies, including supporters' representatives) seem necessary and urgent, but their evaluation (*ex-ante* and *ex-post*) is unavoidable.
17. This 2022 – 2023 Season / Year 2023 edition reinforced these trends and maintained some of the questions that have been posed, benefiting from the questionnaire revision work that was carried out in the second half of 2022. This revision was the result of joint effort by the Advisory Group on Monitoring of the Saint-Denis Committee, the Secretariat of the Council of Europe and the team of consultants. With differences that may be marked between countries, the overall reading is that there is a way to go towards achieving the Convention's goals.

18. Once again, and as wrote last year, we should be cautious in this claim, since the universe of respondents in each monitoring exercise varies, and we do not have an assessment of the entire universe of countries (Parties and Observers). On the other hand, the situation on the ground (social reality and the map of institutional players) is more complex than the reference situation on which the Convention was based. Efforts to produce legislation may be a response to the changes taking place. Share of information and experience could be the trigger to act better and with greater grounds.
19. Even with many gaps in information, the reality is complex in view of the numbers and types of incidents reported, and the number of arrests made. Football is by far the most problematic sport, but there are worrying signs in other sports.
20. In other words, the progress made in terms of legislation, the capacity to organise sports events, the technological advances in the field, do not allow us to consider that the problem of security and safety in mass sports events is solved: far from it. In 2023, both in Europe and the rest of the world, there were too many and too serious occurrences.
21. The aim should be de-radicalise supporter groups, not just those who claim to belong to great clubs, but also those that support teams in lower-level competitions, because the respondents to this questionnaire themselves indicate that the problem could be considered cross-cutting (although the data collection focuses on top-level competitions).
22. "De-radicalise" supporter groups refer to challenging and changing extreme behaviours, whether justified by strong club ties, and to integrate supporters more moderately and peacefully involved with sports. This can require dialogue and support systems and discourage violent or harmful actions associated with radical views. It can also mean not allowing misconduct to escalate, which could mean more intelligence-led policing, situational prevention and capacity to react in the face of challenges to public order.