

When sport becomes part of preparedness

Children, young people and the next role of community sport in Norway and Europe

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Sport organisations have a decision to make as preparedness enters their policy environment: which responsibilities can they carry well, and what must partners provide? For children and young people, the answer could shape access to safe places, supportive relationships and practical learning during disruption.

The European Preparedness Union Strategy, issued on 26 March 2025, explicitly includes youth and sport organisations in its invitation to seek support for preparedness through programmes such as Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps. The Erasmus+ 2026 work programme carries preparedness into the horizontal priorities listed under sport partnerships. This establishes a policy and programming connection; it does not demonstrate that a particular club has funding or that a programme improves children's crisis responses. [European Preparedness Union Strategy, action 16](#); [Erasmus+ 2026 work programme, sport partnerships](#).

The current Programme Guide also confirms that preparedness remains in the horizontal priority. [Current Erasmus+ cooperation guidance](#).

Our proposed interpretation is that sport could become a more explicit part of local civilian preparedness. Its contribution will depend on adult capacity, children's trust and the continuity of ordinary participation. A programme that increases confidence without improving the relevant skills or preserving access could still leave important vulnerabilities untouched.

This report helps municipal sport and youth leads, federation managers and their education and preparedness partners consider decisions in 2026 to 2028. Its main population is ages 10 to 18. Research involving younger children or adults is identified separately. Three conditional futures look towards 2030 to 2035; they describe different institutional choices rather than forecast a crisis.

The emerging connection is concrete, but uneven

In an account dated 29 May 2026, Norway's sports confederation NIF highlights a speaker's argument that sport contributes to total preparedness. This is evidence of sector leadership positioning, rather than evidence that new responsibilities are resourced across clubs. [NIF, "Idretten – en del av totalberedskapen"](#).

A more operational example comes from Aurskog-Høland. In a municipal notice updated on 7 September 2026, the municipality describes a formal cooperation agreement with its sports council. Potential roles include information points during extended electronic communication failures and use of sport facilities

as centres for evacuees and families. Support is voluntary and does not transfer emergency-service duties to clubs. The notice also reports earlier cooperation with clubs during incidents. The signal is formalisation; the notice does not measure how much capability is new. It supplies no evaluated exercise results or child-level preparedness outcomes. Its update date should not be mistaken for the agreement's signing date. [Aurskog-Høland municipality](#).

Norway's total-preparedness white paper also states an intention to maintain meeting places for sport, culture and volunteering as far as possible during crises and war. This gives continuity a policy foundation, although it does not establish that clubs have the capacity to deliver it. [Meld. St. 9 \(2024–2025\), section 6.4.2](#).

Together these observations suggest a possible shift from treating sport mainly as a participation and wellbeing service towards explicitly considering its relationships, facilities and volunteers in preparedness planning. The evidence supports an emerging hypothesis. One municipal agreement cannot establish nationwide adoption, and organisational advocacy may reflect competition for recognition and resources.

Education offers a different institutional route. The 2026 Eurydice report maps preparedness in early childhood and primary education using voluntary responses from 32 national units about the 2025/2026 school year. It describes systems and policies, rather than evaluating sport or children's demonstrated emergency behaviour. Its focus on younger ages and exclusion of separate special-needs programmes limit its transfer to this report's whole population. [EACEA/Eurydice, Preparedness education in Europe 2025](#).

Policymakers could therefore build preparedness primarily through schools, with sport offering additional practice and relationships. A sport-first strategy needs to justify what its setting adds and how it reaches young people who do not participate in organised sport.

Four outcomes need different evidence

Psychosocial wellbeing, practical preparedness, organisational continuity and community coordination are related but separate. Enjoyment and supportive relationships can be valuable outcomes in themselves. A child knowing how to seek help during a disruption is another outcome. A club maintaining contact with families, or a municipality activating an accessible facility, requires different people and capabilities.

A randomised trial published in 2025 evaluated Game Connect, a 16-week sport-for-protection programme in Uganda, among displaced and host-community participants aged 15 to 24 with at least mild anxiety and/or depression symptoms. Its results table describes 834 participants who completed the study; the article inconsistently labels this total in its abstract, so the initial allocation total remains unresolved here. It reported larger immediate reductions in those symptoms than a waiting-list comparison. This is encouraging, context-specific evidence; it includes young adults and does not establish a lasting improvement in disaster preparedness. The comparison also cannot isolate physical activity from the programme's wider support. [Latimer and colleagues, 2025](#).

An earlier study in post-conflict Gulu provides important counterevidence. In its randomised comparison among boys aged 11 to 14, participation in a competitive football-based programme was associated with worse depression-like and anxiety-like symptom outcomes than waiting-list allocation. Girls were

assessed through a different, non-randomised comparison and had no significant improvement. This does not show that competition itself caused the result, or that sport generally harms children. It does overturn an assumption of automatic benefit. [Richards and colleagues, 2014](#).

These studies concern different programmes, populations and periods. Their contrast cannot identify which design element explains the difference. It supports testing a programme as delivered, including unintended effects. Neither study demonstrates that ordinary sport participation transfers into effective behaviour during war, evacuation or disaster.

For preparedness learning, define the skill first. A proposal might test whether young people can recognise an official instruction, identify a trusted adult, cooperate in an accessible activity or explain a family communication arrangement. Qualified local partners would select appropriate content and assessment. Feeling more resilient should not substitute for observing the chosen skill, and attendance should not substitute for retention.

Before a crisis, sport can be considered as a setting for safe, explicit learning. During disruption, continuity, protection and contact with trusted people become central. After displacement or disaster, adapted activity may support recovery alongside relevant services. These phases should have separate goals; a recovery finding cannot simply be relabelled prevention evidence.

The sporting mechanism also needs to be specific. Cooperative team games could provide repeated opportunities to practise clear communication and asking for help. Supervised outdoor route planning could support orientation and shared decisions. Adapted movement sessions could make participation possible for children excluded by a competitive format. These are candidate activities for co-design and testing, not proven crisis interventions. A federation should choose them for a defined learning goal and check whether a simpler classroom, youth-work or family activity delivers it better.

The hazard changes the content. Heat, flooding, loss of communication and displacement do not require identical skills or the same setting. Outdoor activity itself may need to stop in unsafe conditions. Facility upgrades, heating, transport and alternative venues also carry financial and environmental costs. Prefer locally suitable, accessible arrangements that preserve participation without creating avoidable travel or dependence on a single building.

The main dependency may be around the child

Our causal hypothesis starts with a safe and accessible setting. Repeated participation may enable relationships; relationships may support help-seeking and communication; purposeful learning may build selected skills; coordination with adults and institutions may make those skills usable during disruption. Each step can fail independently.

A club can teach cooperation while lacking an adult activation plan. A municipality can designate a building while overlooking transport, accessible information or how ordinary youth activity will continue. A coach may be trusted in training yet unavailable during a regional emergency because their own family needs help.

Inclusion changes the design, rather than simply widening an invitation list. UNICEF's emergency guidance highlights accessible communication and the involvement of children with disabilities and their caregivers in programme decisions. Its principles support testing formats and access with affected users; they are not evidence that one sporting intervention solves those barriers. [UNICEF, children with disabilities in emergencies](#).

The least visible groups may be the most informative: non-members, children who have stopped attending, displaced families who distrust institutions, disabled participants and volunteers unable to accept additional duties. None was directly consulted for this draft. The absence limits conclusions about feasibility and acceptability.

There is also a trust risk. The Commission's August 2026 guidance on safe, inclusive and resilient sport discusses extremist attitudes and recruitment risks within sporting environments. Its subject is prevention of radicalisation, not evidence for disaster-readiness training. It nevertheless challenges any assumption that sporting settings are automatically protective. [DG HOME, 31 August 2026](#).

A civilian programme should protect children's agency, enjoyment and ability to decline an activity. Toughness rankings, loyalty tests or frightening simulations could work against those purposes. These are design boundaries proposed by this report, not an allegation that current Norwegian or EU programmes use such methods.

Three futures for 2030 to 2035

These futures vary who carries responsibility and how resources follow it. Each has current evidence anchors and uncertain developments. They can coexist across regions.

1. Local preparedness partnerships. Municipalities fund coordination and agree limited roles with clubs, schools and civil preparedness services. Children help shape accessible activities; adults handle activation and operational responsibility. Repeated exercises expose gaps, leading to changes in transport, communications and alternative venues.

The Aurskog-Høland arrangement and EU programme direction make this a plausible development, but durable funding and tested capacity remain assumptions. Clubs gain support and a recognised community role. The main costs are staff time, facilities and coordination. Better-resourced municipalities could progress faster, widening geographical differences. This future becomes less plausible if agreements repeatedly lack budgets, exercises or volunteer participation.

Here, a club-based learning pilot can make sense alongside organisational preparation. Investment should follow evidence that responsibilities and inclusion arrangements work.

2. Schools anchor preparedness; sport complements it. Education authorities lead age-appropriate preparedness learning and assessment. Municipalities use schools and youth services to provide broad access, while clubs offer selected activities, trusted relationships and continuity. Federation resources concentrate on coach support and referral links rather than a separate preparedness curriculum.

The European education mapping supports considering this route, although it does not establish that schools are uniformly ready. This future assumes education partners can carry coordination without overloading staff. Young people outside clubs have a clearer route into provision. Clubs retain their primary participation role, while school absence and exclusion still require targeted action.

Here, duplicating an entire curriculum in sport wastes scarce capacity. Shared modules and access partnerships offer more value. Evidence of education-sector inability to coordinate, or a clear retained-skills advantage from a complementary sport setting, would change that balance.

3. Responsibilities outgrow capacity. Preparedness becomes a visible label in strategies and projects, but budgets, adult roles and long-term support remain fragmented. Clubs add activities to satisfy expectations; documentation grows faster than dependable capability. Some volunteers withdraw, and children encounter uneven provision.

This is a possible implementation failure, not a description proven across Norway or Europe. The gap between an announced arrangement and demonstrated capability makes it a necessary test. Well-resourced clubs may manage new work while others lose participation time. A programme can survive through short grants even when nobody owns its continuity.

Here, broad rollout is a poor choice. A small organisational audit, explicit limits on duties and a decision to wait for resources are more defensible. Recurring funding with clear responsibilities and credible exercise results would weaken this future.

A wildcard to test the shared dependency

Consider a compound disruption: a communications failure coincides with evacuation, and the designated sport facility is unavailable or occupied for another emergency function. This is an **unsignalled stress test**, not a discovered event or a probability forecast. It breaks the assumption that trusted networks and their usual meeting place remain reachable together.

The consequence could be simultaneous loss of family contact and ordinary youth activity precisely when both matter. Preparing a second accessible venue, an agreed offline communication route and a continuity arrangement tests more than a classroom lesson. Plans should examine whether the same adults are assigned to several critical roles.

An upside possibility is that young people's involvement reveals accessible routes and informal networks that existing plans missed. Treat that as a hypothesis to investigate through actual participation, rather than claim an observed local benefit.

Choices for the next planning cycle

The following comparison is the report's judgement under stated assumptions. "Useful" means a reasonable contribution within that future, not guaranteed effectiveness.

Proposed choice	Local partnerships	School anchor	Capacity gap	Main trade-off
Map club continuity, access and adult responsibilities with municipal partners	Useful foundation	Useful for complementary roles	Useful if proportionate	Takes adult time before a visible youth programme appears
Test a small, co-designed learning module with qualified partners	Conditional on staffing and protection	Conditional on integration with schools	Defer unless dedicated capacity exists	Learning value must justify time taken from ordinary activity
Expand a federation-wide preparedness curriculum	Consider only after relevant evaluation	Usually duplicates the lead system	Likely to fail without resources	Commits training and expectations before transfer is established
Maintain ordinary participation while preparing referral and coordination links	Necessary alongside new duties	Strong fit	Protects core provision	May miss an opportunity to develop selected skills sooner

A practical first step is a bounded mapping exercise: identify one local hazard, the responsible public partner, the club's realistic contribution, access barriers and what happens to ordinary activity if facilities change use. The proposed owner is a municipal sport/youth lead working with the preparedness coordinator and a club representative; nobody has accepted that role for this pilot.

A school or municipal youth-service partner would need to take responsibility for a route that requires no club membership, including appropriate informal play and activity. Test that route with non-members before describing the offer as community-wide. If a willing partner or accessible route is absent, narrow the intended reach explicitly; a club programme cannot stand in for provision to all young people.

A subsequent learning experiment could use two willing settings over eight weeks, with an appropriate comparison activity and a four-week retention check. These are proposed design choices, not externally validated thresholds. Children and families should help select the format; consent, assent and safeguarding arrangements belong with the accountable delivery organisation.

Choose two observable, age-appropriate skills before starting. Record baseline and follow-up observations alongside accessibility, attendance, distress and adult workload, keeping ordinary activity available. With only two settings, differences between sites, staff and participant groups cannot be separated reliably from programme effects. Skill changes and retention would be exploratory observations. The experiment tests feasibility and whether a stronger evaluation is worth commissioning; it cannot establish effectiveness or readiness for real war.

Before starting, agree practical criteria for delivery within the available workload, accessible participation and completion of the proposed measurements. Progress to a larger evaluation only if those conditions are met and no unresolved adverse pattern appears. Pause on a serious safeguarding concern or an unresolved increase in distress. A small or undetectable skill change at this stage is inconclusive; use it to refine the design, not to claim either benefit or ineffectiveness. Decisions to stop can still follow unacceptable delivery costs, access barriers or safety concerns.

What would change the assessment

What to watch	Current reading	Change that matters	Proposed owner and next check
Preparedness programme implementation	EU programming link verified; no specific award evaluated here	Named resources and outcome requirements; a resourced school/youth-service learning lead with suitable age and access coverage favours integration over a separate sport curriculum	Federation policy lead, unassigned; 12 December 2026
Municipal sport agreements	One concrete Norwegian notice inspected; no national prevalence estimate	Exercise records resolve adult roles, access, facility continuity and volunteer availability	Municipal preparedness partner, unassigned; 12 December 2026
Added learning value	Selected studies address other outcomes and contexts	Credible retained-skill evidence for comparable ages/settings with an alternative activity comparison	Evaluation lead, unassigned; 12 December 2026
Trust, inclusion and capacity	No field baseline obtained	Children report exclusion or distress, duties exceed capacity, or participation drops after introduction	Youth/inclusion lead, unassigned; establish baseline before any activity

Review sooner if a relevant evaluation, funded programme decision or serious incident changes these conditions. This is a proposed responsibility map; monitoring has not been commissioned.

Evidence and method

This focused scan combines Norwegian and European primary policy material with selected original evaluations, accessed by 12 September 2026. Documented observations support explicit hypotheses, alternative futures and proposed choices. It is not a systematic review or a record of consultation.

Humanitarian research informs caution and mechanism questions; it does not directly validate Norwegian implementation. Public institutions and well-documented projects are more visible than informal practice. Actual costs, local capacity and children's perspectives remain material gaps.

Sport Singularity could have a commercial interest in future advisory work. The evidence does not establish demand for a purchasable solution. The immediate issue may be authority, staffing or continuity rather than a missing report or training product.