European Sport Model 2030: Who Pays for Solidarity?

Sport Singularity · Strategic Foresight Series Version 0.4 · Evidence cutoff: 12 September 2026 · Approved publication edition

Europe's debate about sporting solidarity needs a more precise account of who pays, who receives and what participation becomes possible. Money can move from a major competition to a smaller professional club without reducing the cost of a child's weekly training. A municipal facility can support several sports without receiving professional competition revenue. Both can matter; they answer different questions.

Our central proposition is that, by 2030, the credibility of solidarity arrangements may depend increasingly on demonstrating how resources reach intended beneficiaries, alongside defending the principle of redistribution. This is a foresight interpretation, not an established Europe-wide trend. The evidence does not support a general claim that solidarity funding is disappearing.

This report addresses a national federation board and finance director preparing funding agreements and participation commitments for 2027 onwards. Ministries, leagues and municipal partners are secondary readers. The decision is which commitments the federation can sustain, with which partners, while preventing uncovered costs from being passed invisibly to participants or volunteers. The 2030 horizon reaches into the next EU programme period and gives different contractual arrangements time to affect local delivery.

The policy window is open; the funding settlement is unresolved

The Commission's consultation update says its strategic sport document is expected by the end of 2026. It identifies revenue distribution and grassroots sustainability among the issues raised. The European Parliament's resolution, adopted on 7 October 2025, calls for stronger solidarity links between professional and grassroots sport. These are policy direction and political demands, rather than evidence of a new funded entitlement. Commission consultation update, Parliament's official resolution summary.

The current EU Work Plan for Sport runs from July 2024 to December 2027; participation in its working formats is voluntary. Article 165(4) TFEU provides for incentive measures while excluding harmonisation under that competence. Neither instrument alone establishes a compulsory European solidarity levy. This observation does not exempt sporting economic activity from other EU law. Council work plan, Article 165.

Post-2027 EU funding also remains a negotiation. The Council's May 2026 Erasmus+ position excludes financial and horizontal issues; the Parliament's procedure record still showed the committee-decision stage when checked on 12 September. The proposed €40.8 billion concerns the programme as a whole, not a settled sport allocation. A federation should therefore keep prospective EU grants separate from committed recurring income. Council negotiating position, Parliament procedure record.

An older legal development sharpens the question of proof. In C-333/21, the Court considered solidarity arguments concerning centralised football rights sales, but required concrete benefits to users to be substantiated. Paragraphs 236 to 238 leave assessment to the referring court, including financial and accounting evidence. The ruling neither automatically validates redistributive rules nor abolishes them. Its specific football context matters. Our inference is that credible beneficiary evidence could strengthen negotiations about institutional legitimacy; this is not a forecast of another court's decision. Final judgment, 21 December 2023.

Follow the money without combining unlike flows

Four observations challenge a simple story of declining redistribution.

UEFA's Financial Report 2024/25 records €308 million paid to non-participating men's clubs, compared with €178.5 million in 2023/24. Its July 2026 scheme explanation identifies eligible top-division clubs as the principal recipients. This is material redistribution within professional football; it is not a measurement of support reaching every amateur club or household. The figures concern reported payments, not an independent tracing of each recipient's expenditure. UEFA financial report, p. 26, current eligibility explanation.

UEFA's separate HatTrick VI programme has a €935 million budget for July 2024 to June 2028. National associations can receive development and infrastructure support, operating support and incentives, including grassroots activity. It is neither an annual figure nor a fund devoted exclusively to mass participation. Outside a single-sport structure, the IOC's Olympic Solidarity plan has a USD650 million development and assistance budget for 2025 to 2028. That is a global programme budget, not a European allocation or observed expenditure. HatTrick programme, IOC plan hosted by United World Wrestling, pp. 8 to 9.

Public allocation provides another route. Norway's 2026 allocation from Norsk Tipping surplus totals approximately NOK4.116 billion for sport, including NOK535 million for local clubs and associations. This is an announced allocation, not verified expenditure or total Norwegian sport finance. Norway is a European comparator outside the EU. Its mechanism shows why the financing question cannot be confined to the distribution of commercial football income. Norwegian government allocation, 7 May 2026.

France's 2026/27 pass Sport provides €50 towards registration, with one eligibility route covering ages 6 to 17 under a CAF/MSA family-quotient ceiling of €699. Other disability and student categories also exist. This is participant-directed support, distinct from a transfer between sporting institutions. The announcement establishes programme design; it does not establish take-up, reimbursement performance or remaining family costs. French ministry announcement, 29 August 2026.

These amounts should not be added together: their currencies, periods, geographical coverage and accounting status differ. Nor should a grant be counted again as new money when it appears in a recipient's accounts.

The board needs a map organised around purpose, with an explicit boundary between transfer and outcome:

Purpose	Immediate recipient or resource	Question that the transfer alone cannot answer
Competitive balance	Professional clubs outside leading competitions	Does competition become more sustainable or accessible?
Sporting development	Associations, coaches, training programmes and facilities	Which groups gain usable opportunities?
Community provision	Local clubs, shared venues and operating capacity	Are suitable sessions available at affordable total cost?
Participation support	An eligible participant's registration bill	Do transport, equipment, timing or exclusion still prevent attendance?

This is an analytical map, not a reconciled European balance sheet. Talent development and competitive balance are legitimate objectives. Calling them participation subsidies without checking the connection obscures the choice between objectives.

The costs that disappear from institutional accounts

German evidence provides an important brake on crisis language. In the Sport Development Report's 2022 accounts, membership fees were the largest income category and 72.7% of clubs reported balanced or positive accounts. In its 2023 survey, 62.4% used municipal facilities. These are different reference periods within one study, not observations of September 2026 conditions. Municipal use does not mean that all access was free. Breuer and Feiler, national report, pp. 39 to 43, study methods.

Financial balance can coexist with a capacity problem: 17.5% of German clubs regarded recruiting or retaining voluntary officeholders as an existential concern in the 2023 evidence reported by DOSB. This is a club-reported concern, not a bankruptcy rate. It is also the same underlying study, not an independent corroborating survey. DOSB account of the findings.

The mechanism to test is straightforward. If a club's affordable offer costs more than its reliable income, someone must cover the difference, services must change, or reserves must absorb it. A fee increase transfers cash cost to participants. Extra unpaid administration transfers time cost to volunteers. Reducing sessions transfers the burden into lost opportunity, particularly for people with few alternatives. This is conditional reasoning; the research has not measured the size of those transfers across Europe.

Money is not the only possible constraint. The Commission's account of the 2022 Eurobarometer identified insufficient time as the main reported barrier to being active. It is dated background, not a current participation estimate. Even well-targeted funding can disappoint if session times, transport, safety or social belonging remain unsuitable. Commission survey summary.

Two feedbacks deserve attention. More reporting can help justify support, but excessive reporting can consume the capacity it intends to protect. More competition income could enlarge a distributable surplus, but pursuing it through additional events could also increase travel, staffing and environmental costs. Neither relationship should be assumed positive without examining the actual arrangement.

Alternative organisers also belong in this negotiation. The NBA and FIBA's December 2025 announcement included an intention to support Europe's basketball ecosystem. That commitment was an expressed intention, with no payment established in the announcement. Joint announcement. By July 2026, NBA officials reported receiving final franchise bids. NBA update. A proposed competition can therefore advance while the distribution question still needs separate verification. The useful signal is a potential change in who negotiates solidarity, not evidence that a new organiser must destroy it.

The emerging hypothesis concerns negotiation over **beneficiary scope and enforceable responsibility**. Its temporal element needs a separate test from the adequacy of local provision. For the focal federation, first establish what evidence its funders currently require and what they say influences agreement terms. At the next funding renewal, compare like-for-like requirements and documented decision reasons. Stronger requirements that demonstrably affect terms would support the hypothesis locally. Unchanged requirements, with decisions demonstrably governed by other considerations over the agreed comparison period, would weaken its local relevance. Inaccessible records remain a gap, not disconfirmation; one federation cannot establish a European trend.

A different observation would change the case for local intervention: existing arrangements providing predictable, fairly distributed access with little hidden household or volunteer burden. Evidence that timing and belonging dominate local barriers would instead favour service design. The eight-week exercise tests the usefulness of tracing a local funding route; it does not test whether accountability demands are increasing across Europe.

Three plausible arrangements in 2030

The futures below are conditional constructions, not predictions or probability estimates. They vary in who controls allocation, whose needs count and how dependable commitments become. Different sports and countries could occupy different futures simultaneously.

A. A renewed redistribution agreement

Commercial competitions retain enough value and institutional support to sustain multi-year transfers. Federations, leagues and public partners agree clearer beneficiary categories, payment schedules and proportionate evidence requirements. By 2030, a board can connect an incoming agreement to funded local services rather than repeatedly relying on discretionary annual awards.

Rights holders and public partners carry a larger explicit financing commitment; federations carry coordination and accountability costs. Participants could gain predictability if agreements protect affordable provision. Smaller clubs could nevertheless lose out if eligibility and reporting favour organisations with professional staff. Informal participants remain vulnerable unless explicitly represented.

This future depends on cooperation being more valuable to the principal funders than retaining or reallocating the money. An expanding upstream fund is insufficient if operating costs rise faster or the eligibility boundary remains narrow. The federation's useful role is to make both delivery and exclusions visible, without treating its own survival as the sole outcome.

B. Commercial islands and the residual payer

Commercial activity remains strong in some competitions, but transfers are selective, conditional or disconnected from a wider participation offer. Public provision differs substantially by place. Some clubs attract partners and prosper; others have to reconcile a social promise with unreliable recurring income.

Where reserves and alternative support are insufficient, households pay higher total costs, volunteers absorb extra work, or provision contracts. This future does not require all commercial revenue or all public spending to fall. Fragmented entitlements and unequal bargaining power can produce it even during aggregate growth.

A federation that guarantees a uniform service using income it cannot enforce becomes exposed. Staged commitments and cooperation with municipalities preserve options, while targeted fee relief needs a funding source of its own. Conversely, a commercial organiser could offer enforceable development support: ownership form alone does not determine solidarity. The relevant test is the obligation and its beneficiaries.

C. A shared participation service

Municipalities, public or lottery funders, federations and community organisations jointly finance access across sports. By 2030, arrangements increasingly purchase usable facility time, inclusive coaching and assistance with participation costs, including some provision outside conventional club competition.

Taxpayers, lottery proceeds and participating organisations fund an explicit service offer. Federations can gain a durable delivery role, but may share allocation power with users and organisations outside their membership. A swimming club, disability organisation and informal activity group could benefit from the same facility agreement without depending on a professional league's success.

This future requires political commitment and competent local coordination. It could fail through unstable public budgets, contested eligibility or an administrative structure that favours large providers. It also raises a distributional question: who bears the wider social costs of the revenue source, including gambling-related costs? Norway supplies a financing example, not evidence that its arrangements are transferable unchanged or free of trade-offs.

Two discontinuities worth preparing for

A major failure or interruption in a rights-payment chain could abruptly expose dependence on one upstream source. The cascade would run through delayed transfers, local liquidity and participation commitments. No imminent failure was established in this scan. Payment delays and deteriorating contractual security are proposed precursors to monitor, not observed warnings.

A durable public access guarantee financed across sports could change the system in the opposite direction, making participation rights more important than institutional affiliation. No Europe-wide guarantee of this kind was established. A funded national or municipal pilot with enforceable access terms would be an informative precursor. Flexible service agreements prepare a federation for this possibility without assuming it will occur.

Decisions a federation can take

The proposed priority is a small exercise tracing one funding route, followed by commitments that the evidence and contractual authority can support. It is not a recommendation to introduce a new universal levy or buy a reporting platform.

Option and accountable role, if adopted	A: renewed agreement	B: commercial islands	C: shared service	Cost, limit and action condition
1. Trace one funding route, led by the finance director with willing clubs	Works: strengthens credible agreement terms	Works: reveals dependency and unpaid gaps	Works: makes partner contributions comparable	Staff time and data access; use existing records, separate overhead from service outcomes. Begin only with agreed access; stop if burden or missing records defeats the decision.
2. Negotiate a multi-year participation commitment, led by the board	Works if funders accept enforceable terms	Conditional: promise only the funded portion	Conditional: needs joint authority and a shared beneficiary definition	Gives predictability but reduces discretion. Do not expand the guarantee before recurring income and delivery capacity are secured; reopen it if either fails.
3. Co-finance shared provision, led by a designated partnership lead	Conditional: avoid duplicate subsidy and incompatible rules	Conditional: helps only where partners can commit	Works if allocation and access are transparent	Coordination and possible loss of unilateral control. Start with one existing venue or service; stop expansion if costs move to families or access narrows.
4. Defer permanent expansion while retaining a funded minimum, led by board and treasury	Conditional: preserves cash but can miss favourable agreements	Works as protection against unenforceable income assumptions	Conditional: may delay valuable shared provision	Waiting sacrifices opportunities and can preserve current exclusion. Set a review date and specify the minimum service; waiting indefinitely is not neutral.

“Works” means useful under the stated assumptions, not guaranteed success. The first option has a role in all three futures, but should be abandoned or redesigned if information costs exceed the likely decision benefit. A federation has authority over its own commitments; it cannot compel a municipality, league or household to accept an allocated cost.

For a small federation, the exercise can fit existing bookkeeping and a few conversations. A larger federation could sample contrasting clubs. Public authorities should examine cross-sport eligibility and assets; professional leagues should distinguish competitive balance from wider participation objectives. These are different decisions requiring different measures.

An eight-week learning exercise

The hypothesis is that tracing a real transfer into one defined participation offer will identify a decision-relevant gap or demonstrate that an assumed gap is absent. A proposed finance lead would work with three willing clubs with different income and facility arrangements, plus a municipal counterpart where relevant. No participants or owners have yet been recruited.

Use an existing funding route and existing records. Agree a proposed effort ceiling of two working days per organisation across eight weeks, subject to their acceptance. Record the amount committed, amount received, timing, permitted uses, contribution to an identifiable service, total participation charges and administrative effort. Include a participant perspective; attendance totals alone cannot establish additional access or causation.

Continue to a broader agreement only if the route can be reconciled, a material choice changes or is credibly confirmed, and the information burden stays within the agreed ceiling. Stop or redesign if recipients cannot distinguish overlapping funds, necessary access is unavailable, or the exercise adds administration without helping a decision. A well-supported finding that existing arrangements work is a useful outcome. This is a proposed learning exercise, not an implemented programme or an impact evaluation.

What would change the advice?

All monitoring roles below are proposed and unassigned. Sources and data gaps were checked on 12 September 2026. Future dates are suggested manual checks; no monitoring service has been activated.

Indicator and linked decision	Baseline or gap	Change that warrants action	Proposed role and next check
W1: EU strategic document and funding decisions → agreement design	Strategic document expected; post-2027 allocation unsettled	Published instrument specifies an actor, funding mechanism or beneficiary rule relevant to the federation	Policy lead; 15 December 2026
W2: Transfer terms, evidence requirements and reliability → options 1 and 2; accountability hypothesis	UEFA payment/programme examples; focal receipts, current evidence requirements and decision reasons need a baseline	Missed contractual payment or changed eligibility prompts a commitment review. At the next renewal, compare evidence requirements and their documented influence on terms with the baseline; unchanged requirements with other reasons governing decisions weaken the hypothesis locally	Finance lead; 15 January 2027; contractual dates and next renewal if adopted
W3: Public or participant support delivery → option 3	Norway allocation and French programme design; local disbursement gap	Actual receipt or take-up differs enough from plan to change the service budget	Partnership lead; 15 January 2027
W4: Household and volunteer burden → options 2 and 4	No current baseline for the focal federation	Establish baseline first; then investigate a fee, attendance or hours change that alters the agreed affordable offer	Local delivery lead; 15 November 2026

Indicator and linked decision	Baseline or gap	Change that warrants action	Proposed role and next check
W5: Alternative organiser obligations → funding negotiations	Dated NBA/FIBA intentions and subsequent development steps; no support payment verified	Binding beneficiary terms and payment evidence replace an expression of intent	Policy/finance lead; 15 December 2026

For W4, pre-agree a locally meaningful threshold after the baseline is known; this report does not invent a European fee ceiling. For every indicator, record non-change as well as change. A failed prediction or a functioning existing arrangement should revise the narrative, not disappear from the watchlist.

Evidence, method and limits

This is a bounded desk-based foresight study, combining primary policy and legal sources, institutional financial reporting, programme rules and a national club survey. The source record distinguishes publication, measurement, allocation and payment dates. European institutions and men's football are highly visible in this evidence; their visibility is not their share of all sporting experience. Germany, France and non-EU Norway are contrasting cases, not a representative European sample.

The NBA/FIBA material is retained as a watch signal about alternative organisational arrangements and proposed ecosystem support; its own promoters' intentions are not proof of delivered solidarity. Current source details and dates are in the accompanying evidence register. This signal does not carry the report's central argument.

No new interviews, beneficiary-level financial audit, causal participation evaluation or current Europe-wide household-cost estimate were conducted. Women’s sport, disability sport, rural provision, smaller commercial markets, informal participants and people who have left sport need stronger direct representation. Publicly reported survey respondents are evidence, but they are not participants in this report's production.

The normative preference is affordable, inclusive participation with honest accounting for labour and environmental costs. That is an editorial choice open to challenge. Sport Singularity may benefit from interest in foresight services; no option requires purchasing its services. A simpler existing arrangement may be preferable to a new programme.

Policy, finance and community evidence were researched in three parallel AI-assisted workstreams and integrated by the lead author. These contributions are research, not formal independent review or practitioner endorsement. The original framing and synthesis were accepted on 12 September 2026. Three independent AI reviewers subsequently completed source, analysis and editorial first passes. Two focused clarifications were checked by the original reviewers. The user accepted the revised content and authorised website publication on 12 September 2026. Version 0.4 updates publication status; the substantive content is unchanged from the reviewed revision. The source links above and the accompanying claim register allow each decision-material observation to be checked.