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Manual for the Improved Implementation of Athletes' Social Protection

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Assessing, Evaluating, and Implementing Athletes' Social Protection in Olympic Sports

Erasmus+ SOPROS
(Project 101090790)

SOPROS

Erasmus+ Assessing, Evaluating, and Implementing Athletes' Social Protection in Olympic Sports (SOPROS) (Project 101090790)

Manual for the Improved Implementation of Athletes' Social Protection

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1. Context and Recognition

The social protection of elite athletes is an important human rights concern that has long received insufficient attention in international sport. Recent academic work highlights a persistent gap between the athlete-centred social rights outlined in international frameworks and the actual implementation of social protection measures at the national level. Comparative cross-national analyses further show that significant protection gaps exist even in European countries with relatively advanced welfare and social security systems (Fiege 2025; MISSOC 2024; Mittag et al. 2025). The situation is likely even more challenging for athletes in less developed welfare states. Given this discrepancy between normative commitments and empirical realities, we argue that improving social protection for elite athletes is essential to uphold the universality of human rights and to ensure equal opportunities within elite sport.

Against this backdrop, this Manual offers:

- a **nuanced conceptual approach** to athletes' social protection as a **human right** (see Chapter 2);
- a **practical definition** of the **target group** of athletes and **guiding principles** for the effective implementation of athletes' social protection (see Chapter 3); and
- a call to action, including actor-specific recommendations (see Chapter 4).

The Manual was jointly developed by the partners to the Erasmus+ SOPROS Project and formally adopted by the Boards of the three policy partners, namely the European Athletes and Players Association (EAPA), the European Association of Sport Employers (EASE) and the European Olympic Academies (EOA), on 24 November 2025. Thereby, it complements the "SOPROS Declaration Athletes' Social Protection and SOPROS Partners' Commitments" that outlines the individual and joint commitments by the project partners (see Annex 1).

2. Concept: Athletes' Human Right to Social Protection

> Social protection is a human right to which "all elite athletes are entitled, irrespective of their specific legal and social status under a contract or national law, their nationality, or their gender" (Mittag et al. 2025, p. 8).

Following the notion that "social rights are human rights" (Council of Europe 2024, p. 1) and the principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunities (cf. UN General Assembly 1966), we argue that the same protection rights and standards should apply to all groups of elite athletes, as they do for any other citizen, resident, or worker within a given country or political community. Ensuring access to adequate social protection measures consistent with the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Social Model is essential for promoting athletes' active inclusion in society (Council of the EU 2019; 2023).

We note not only that adequate protection is important for enabling elite athletes' sporting performance – and thus for ensuring returns on investment for funders of national elite sport (development) programmes. In line with the principles of interrelatedness and indivisibility in human rights law, we further recognise that social protection is a crucial enabler of other fundamental athlete rights, including their effective political participation in the governance of their sport (cf. Cronert and Hadenius 2021; OHCHR 2012). For example, adequate protection underpins athletes' rights to unionise, to secure independent representation, and to engage in collective bargaining based on the principle of freedom of association.

Overall, consistent with international social protection frameworks adopted by the International Labour Organisation (2012) and the European Union (2021), we maintain that, at a minimum, elite athletes should have access to ten (10) statutory state provisions and three (3) additional athlete-specific measures to ensure adequate coverage (see Table 1).

Table 1 Fundamental social protection provisions and measures for elite athletes.

Mode	Component
Statutory (state) provisions	Child and family benefits
	Maternity/paternity benefits
	Unemployment support
	Employment injury benefits
	Sickness benefits
	Health protection/insurance (incl. maternity)
	Old-age benefits/pensions
	Invalidity/disability benefits
	Survivors' benefits
	Minimum income
Athlete-specific measures	Special accident/injury insurance
	Special pregnancy and maternity protection
	Athlete pension or retirement funds
	"Other" measures (e.g., liability, travel, legal expenses)

3. Scope and Approach of this Manual

3.1 A Diverse Athlete Population: Terminological Ambiguity and Legal Uncertainty

In line with the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Technical Brief and its Classification of Occupations[1], we maintain that the category of **professional athletes** includes not only elite athletes with regular employment relationships, as is common in many team sports.

> We argue that Olympic elite athletes should also be regarded as "professional" workers and therefore covered by basic social protection provisions.

Most athletes do in fact **receive remuneration** and frequently operate under atypical employment arrangements (including non-employment) in situations of **subordination and**

[1] According to the ILO's (2024, p. 1-2) Technical Brief, a "professional athlete" can be defined as "an athlete who gains income through competitive sports and whose activities are controlled by a sports organization, such as a club or federation". This would include "athletes whose only professional activity is sport, either as employees or as contract players of sports clubs" and those "who may have other jobs but who spend significant time training and competing in sports competitions from which they derive income." Moreover, the ILO states that while "being celebrated competitors and symbols of national/local pride and identity, professional athletes are also workers in the world of sports."

external direction, thus meeting the standard criteria to assess worker status (cf. European Commission 2010; O'Leary et al. 2024).

Although professional team sport athletes may also experience inadequate social protection, **Olympic elite athletes** are particularly vulnerable and may face precarious socio-economic conditions during and after their sporting careers. In practice, this group includes nationally supported elite athletes who are integrated into national cadre and support systems, or, where applicable, hold a specific legal or social status as "elite athlete" under national law or sport policy (cf. ILO 2024; Mittag et al. 2022). For these athletes, the Olympic Games typically represent the pinnacle of international sport, and the commercial use of their performance and image is central to generating revenue for the Olympic movement.

At the **national level**, however, it is difficult to resolve all terminological and legal ambiguities due to the limited harmonisation of social and sport policies across EU Member States, among other factors. We therefore suggest that the precise scope of the elite athlete population to be covered by this Manual should be further defined by relevant sport actors within domestic contexts. Potential differences across types of sport, age categories, and functionally equivalent arrangements related to the effective implementation of social protection measures should be carefully examined.

For the remainder of this Manual, the term "athlete" refers to the target population defined above.

3.2 Guiding Principles: Shared Responsibility and Duty-bearing

Based on the principle of shared responsibility, this Manual applies to all actors involved in or affected by issues of athletes' social protection. It also acknowledges the diverse roles and functions assumed by various actors, including legislative, judicial, regulatory, financial, and educational or communicative functions.

Overall, we suggest that a range of pathways and actor constellations may contribute to fulfilling athletes' human right to social protection, depending on national socio-political circumstances and the characteristics of particular sports. To ensure that different implementation approaches are effective and mutually reinforcing, a high degree of multi-level coordination and clearly assigned responsibilities is essential.

Against this backdrop,

1. Firstly**,** governments and public authorities must develop a **national protection framework** in which public and private policies and measures complement each other effectively to ensure the highest possible level of social protection for athletes.

2. Secondly, states and private actors must act in accordance with the **UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP)** and their underlying "**Protect, Respect and Remedy Framework"** (United Nations 2011):
    a. **States** must protect against human rights violations committed by third parties, including businesses, through appropriate laws, policies, and judicial mechanisms.
    b. **Private and other corporate actors** involved in exploiting the economic value of athletes must contribute a proportionate share to funding and implementing relevant social protection measures in line with the principle of corporate responsibility. They must also conduct human rights due diligence to prevent negative impacts on athletes' right to social protection and, where violations occur, adopt effective measures to remedy them.
    c. **Affected athletes** must have access to effective remedies – both judicial and non-judicial – without interference in their right to seek redress before public courts.
3. Thirdly**,** forms of **social dialogue and collective bargaining**[2], based on mutual recognition and equitable negotiation between sport-specific social partners, must play a central role in improving the social protection of athletes. Evidence from other economic sectors and from certain (team) sports demonstrates that collective governance – grounded in the recognition of professional athletes as workers and their effective co-determination – can achieve higher levels of social protection than unilateral decision-making by SGBs (Fiege & Seltmann 2024, ILO 2024, World Players Association 2024).

[2] For the purpose of this Manual, social dialogue is defined as a process of negotiation by which social partners, representing workers and employers, reach agreement to work together on economic and social policies based on freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (cf. ILO 2022). The European Commission's (2011, p. 12) Communication on Developing the European Dimension in Sport highlighted that social dialogue in the sport sector is a "cornerstone of the European social model". And more recently, the European Parliament (2021, p. 7) called on the European Commission "to extend its scope to all professional sports."

4. Recommendations and Guidelines for Stakeholders

Preamble: Recognition and Commitment

The roles and responsibilities acknowledged by the members of the SOPROS consortium as such do not suffice to realise a comprehensive social protection coverage for athletes.

> A joint effort by the entire stakeholder community is essential.

We envision that the commitments of the project partners enshrined in the "SOPROS Declaration Athletes' Social Protection and SOPROS Partners' Commitments" (annexed to this Manual) inspire other responsible actors to themselves commit to contributing to an improved implementation of athletes' social protection. This presupposes fulfilment of two important conditions: Above all, it is key that the involved actors commit to promote, protect, respect, and remedy all internationally recognised athletes' human rights, including their right to social protection, in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP). In addition, where an athlete's sporting activity falls within the realm of the definition of a professional athlete outlined above, they must recognise athletes as workers and the labour rights attached to this status.

The following **actor-specific recommendations** and **call to action** which are formulated along different governance *levels* and interrelated *areas for improvement* shall navigate enhanced stakeholder engagement. The former reflect the global sport governance architecture of the Olympic system and comprise the **international, European, and national level**. The latter comprise four (4) interrelated **core areas** in which action and adjustments are indispensable to improve athletes' social protection coverage across the benchmarked statutory (state) provisions and complementary athlete-specific measures (see Chapter 2). These include:

1. **FUNDING**
2. **LEGISLATION AND POLICY MAKING**
3. **COORDINATION AND INTERACTION**
4. **EDUCATION**

Firstly, **long-term funding** from public (incl. taxpayers' money) and private (e.g. commercial revenues) sources and effective redistributive mechanisms within and beyond the elite sport sector are pivotal.

Secondly, we hold that the design and consolidation of robust **legal and policy frameworks** – into which also related funding streams are integrated – are key to ensure the respect, protection, and remedy of athletes' right to social protection (see UNGP and their Respect, Remedy, and Protection Framework). With "full respect of freedom of association and collective bargaining" (ILO 2021, p. 2), effective participation of those athletes for whom related

social protection schemes are designed shall be guaranteed in related legislative and/or policy making processes.

Thirdly, more formal and regular ways of **interaction and coordination** across governance levels and actor groups are needed to guarantee effective monitoring, reporting, and accountability mechanisms.

And, fourthly, progress for the good of athletes in these three areas shall be guided and driven by more comprehensive **educational activities** and information-sharing by the involved actors. As such, the below recommendations must not be seen as isolated claims, but rather as being mutually interdependent and reinforcing.

Expanding upon the project partners' responsibilities and in line with the conceptualisation and scope of application presented above, **we call on**:

4.1 FUNDING

International

International Olympic Committee (IOC)

- to contribute to the funding of statutory (state) provisions and athlete-specific social protection measures by national SGBs in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP) and the ILO's Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.
- without conceding to replace other athlete-centred funds, to bound the redistribution of funds (from its commercial revenues, like broadcasting rights and sponsoring) to its constituencies to the implementation of, among others:
  - special accidence/injury insurance;
  - special pregnancy/maternity protection;
  - athlete pensions / retirement funds; and educational programmes for athletes.
- in its role as event organiser, to fund NOCs providing athletes with special accidence/injury and travel/repatriation insurance for the time they participate in the Olympic Games and for any travels to/from the event location.

International Federations (IFs)

- to contribute to the funding of athlete/sport-specific social protection measures by NFs in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP).
- in their role as event organisers, to fund NFs providing athletes with special accidence/injury and travel/repatriation insurance for the time they participate in major international sport events and for any travels to/from the event location.

National

Governments / Public Authorities

- to contribute to the long-term funding of statutory (state) provisions and athlete-specific measures for an adequate social protection coverage for athletes through their available financial means.

Sport Governing Bodies (SGBs)

- to contribute to the funding of statutory (state) provisions and athlete-specific measures for an adequate social protection coverage for athletes through their available financial means.
- to fund athlete-specific measures for those athletes with whom they have a contractual relationship.

4.2 LEGISLATION / POLICY MAKING

International

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

- to specify athletes' right to social protection and related provisions/measures as part of its Guidelines on Sport Integrity.

IOC

- to stipulate athletes' right to social protection in its human rights strategies and athlete rights frameworks by:
  - expanding and specifying athletes' right to social protection and applicable provisions/measures in its Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance (Principle 5), including especially:
    - special accidence/injury insurance during competition and training;
    - special pregnancy/maternity protection; and
    - athlete pensions and retirement benefits.

Independent Athlete Organisations

- to negotiate with international SGBs or other entities with whom athletes have a contract and/or agreement, enhanced social protection standards for athletes.
- to monitor and to consider to take action in case of any alleged violations of athletes' rights (as workers) under applicable law.

European Union (EU)

- Within its competence, to clarify the legal/social status of athletes without regular employment contract(s) by:
    - *European Commission*: applying existing EU (social policy) legislation to athletes to prevent and combat disguised employment; including:
        - investigating and clarifying whether related Directives (e.g. on platform workers and solo-self-employed) may equally encompass athletes; and,
        - in the event athletes are not protected under the existing legal framework, consider amendments to ensure their effective protection.
    - *European Commission, European Parliament and Council of the EU:* adopting new (sector-specific) legislation on athletes' social (protection) rights, such as Parliamentary / Council Resolution(s), or Directives.
- to stipulate athletes' human right to social protection as a "key feature" of the European Sport Model in applicable EU sport policy frameworks (incl. Parliamentary / Council Resolutions, and Communication(s) by the Commission).
- to draft and adopt specific recommendations on improving athletes' athletes' social protection coverage in the scope of the Open Method for Coordination (OMC) Group on "Promoting Athletes' Rights within the Context of Good Governance in Sport".

Council of Europe

- to adopt resolutions and recommendations that support the implementation of athletes' human right to social protection based on Article 6 ("Human Rights") of the European Sport Charter.

Independent Athlete Organisations

- to negotiate with European SGBs or other entities with whom athletes have a contract and/or agreement, and in cooperation with the

responsible public authorities, enhanced social protection standards for athletes.

- to monitor and to consider to take action in case of any alleged violations of athletes' rights (as workers) under applicable law.

National

Legislators and Public Authorities

- to shape and adopt athlete-centred legislative acts and (sport) laws which:
  - recognise athletes' human right to social protection;
  - do not interfere with the recognition of athletes as workers and/or undermine their rights as workers, particularly their right to organise and collectively bargain;
  - develop employment and/or civil service opportunities and foster dual career pathways, including transitional funds for retiring athletes;
  - ensure long-term (institutional) funding of related provisions and measures, e.g., through a dedicated household budget;
  - exempt financial benefits paid for specific sporting achievements (e.g., for winning a medal at the Olympic Games) from applicable national income tax;
  - integrate all athletes into the overarching (statutory) accidence, unemployment, health, and pension insurance systems (with minimum and income-related contributions paid by the state and/or responsible employer/contractor, like a club or SGB) for the time of their active career;
  - establish and promote entities, monitoring, and dispute resolution instruments for the effective remedy and enforcement of related rights with the support of independent athlete organisations;
  - to ensure that these instruments are accessible and that no financial costs for athletes filing a complaint/case incur; and
  - recognise the autonomy of (sport-specific) social partners to negotiate enhanced social protection measures for athletes and involve them in the design of related acts/laws.
- to extend the duration of athletes' contracts or civil service agreements, as well as related selection/recruitment policies from

which relevant social protection entitlements arise to no less than one Olympic cycle (i.e., four years).

Sport Governing Bodies (SGBs)

- to design (new) employment schemes for athletes in compliance with the ILO's principles on decent work in sport.
- to advocate and share knowledge with national governments/legislators in the process of shaping and adopting legislation and policies, for example, in relation to sport-specific requirements.
- to develop athlete-specific social protection policies and measures which:
    - account for the specific risks associated with a given (type of) sports and sporting activity; and
    - are not limited to the most successful athletes and/or medallists.
- to provide comprehensive injury/accidence, travel/repatriation, and legal expenses insurance, as well as a minimum income for the time athletes with whom they have a contract and/or agreement participate in international sport events.
- to extend the duration of athletes' contracts, as well as related selection/recruitment policies from which relevant social protection entitlements arise to no less than one Olympic cycle (i.e., four years).

Independent Athlete Organisations

- to negotiate with SGBs or other entities with whom athletes have a contract and/or agreement, and in cooperation with the responsible public authorities, enhanced social protection standards for athletes.
- to advise national governments/legislators in the process of shaping and adopting athlete-centred social protection legislation and policies, for example, in relation to athletes' rights, their individual/collective needs, and any associated protection and enforcement/remedy gaps.
- to monitor and to consider to take action in case of any alleged violations of athletes' rights (as workers) under applicable law.

4.3 COORDINATION AND INTERACTION

International

UNESCO

- to coordinate multilateral government action and cooperation on athletes' social protection in the scope of its Global Sports Conference – MINEPS.

IOC

- to promote through its regulations and guidelines athletes' integration into statutory social protection systems of their countries beyond the time of international sporting events (i.e., for an entire Olympic cycle).
- to oblige NOCs to ensure the integration of all athletes participating in the Olympic Games into statutory social protection systems of their countries.
- to coordinate NOCs' provision of special accidence/injury and travel/repatriation insurance for athletes for the time they participate in Olympic Games.

IFs

- to coordinate NFs' provision of special accidence/injury and travel/repatriation insurance for athletes for the time they participate in international sport events.
- to negotiate with independent athletes' organisations and to make binding for their member federations common social protection standards for athletes as part of their international frameworks (e.g., transfer and licensing regulations).

International Labour Organization (ILO)

- to coordinate governmental action and social partners' activities at the transnational and national level in the scope of its Global Dialogue Forum on Decent Work in the World of Sport, with greater focus on athletes without regular employment.

Independent Athlete Organisations

- to negotiate with IFs common social protection standards for athletes as part of IFs binding international frameworks (e.g., transfer and licensing regulations).
- to build capacity and establish networks among their members that enable them to promote and negotiate enhanced social protection standards for athletes across different governance levels and types of sports.

Civil Society Bodies

- to increase cooperation and capacity-building with national (human rights) institutions and athlete (rights) organisations.
- to contribute to the development of (anonymous) reporting, monitoring, and remedy mechanisms dedicated to redress potential violations of athletes' social protection rights.

EU

- to promote the recognition of all athletes as workers and rights-holders across all Member States.
- to promote athletes' social protection as a key subject matter of future attempts to revitalise (sport-specific) sectoral social dialogue at EU and domestic level.
- to develop (new) forums for improved horizontal coordination about matters of athletes' social protection within and across leading EU institutions (e.g. between the Commission's different DGs).
- to foster convergence of social protection provisions/measures for athletes across its Member States through, for example, use of the Open Method for Coordination (OMC), including:
    - the establishment of national expert groups and action plans;
    - monitoring and reporting mechanisms; and
    - identification and exchange of good practice.

European

Council of Europe

- to promote its collective complaints procedure (administered by the European Social Committee) as an accountability and remedy mechanism to communicate and redress potential violations of athletes' social protection rights based on the European Social Charter and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).
- within its competence enshrined in Article 20.3 of the European Sport Charter, to review, report on progress, and to support the implementation of athletes' social protection through the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS).

Independent Athlete Organisations

- to negotiate with European Federations common social protection standards for athletes as part of federations' binding international frameworks (e.g., transfer and licensing regulations).
- to build capacity and establish networks among their members that enable them to promote and negotiate enhanced social protection standards for athletes across different governance levels and types of sports.

National

Legislators and Public Authorities

- to investigate whether existing EU-legislation applied to specific categories of workers (e.g., Directives on platform workers and solo-self-employed) may equally encompass athletes in their respective country.
- to coordinate and ensure an adequate share of public and private funding of provisions/measures for athletes' social protection.

4.4 EDUCATION

IOC

- to inform IFs, national SGBs, and athletes about athletes' human right to social protection and to provide international guidance, including:
  - the development and dissemination of educational programmes and material on its own measures and activities; and
  - the utilisation of Athlete 365 for education on social risks and social protection.

IFs

- to inform NFs about athletes' human right to social protection and to provide international guidance, including the development and dissemination of (sport-specific) educational programmes and material on its own measures and activities.

ILO

- to educate and consult with national governments and sport-specific social partners about the use of social dialogue in enhancing athletes' social protection coverage (in the scope of its Global Dialogue Forum on Decent Work in Sport).

Independent Athlete Organisations

- to educate athletes and their member organisations about athletes' human right to social protection; and
- to educate athletes and their member organisations about the effects of their personal career choices/pathways on their personal social protection situation during and after their time as an active athlete, and to provide needs-based guidance and advice on, for example, contractual matters and working conditions.

Civil Society Bodies

- to investigate and raise awareness about persisting protection gaps.

- to shape (further) the conceptualisation and recognition of athletes' social protection as a human right.
- to increase cooperation, and knowledge exchange with academic institutions and strategic alliances with social partners (i.e. unions).

European

EU

- to support capacity-building and exchange of best practices in relation to the education of athletes and stakeholders about social protection (e.g. through its programmes and agencies).

Independent Athlete Organisations

- to educate athletes and their member organisations about athletes' human right to social protection; and
- to educate athletes and their member organisations about the effects of their personal career choices/pathways on their personal social protection situation during and after their time as an active athlete, and to provide needs-based guidance and advice on, for example, contractual matters and working conditions.

National

SGBs

- to inform athletes about the effects of their personal career choices/pathways on their personal social protection situation during and after their time as an active athlete.
- to acknowledge and make athletes aware of their social (protection) rights.

Independent Athlete Organisations

- to educate athletes about their human right to social protection; and
- to educate athletes about the effects of their personal career choices/pathways on their personal social protection situation during and after their time as an active athlete, and to provide needs-based

guidance and advice on, for example, contractual matters and working conditions.

National Olympic Academies

- to contribute to the design and implementation of educational activities on athletes' social protection for SGBs (mainly NOCs).

Civil Society Bodies

- to educate athletes about the effects of their personal career choices/pathways on their personal social protection situation during and after their time as an active athlete.
- to increase cooperation, and knowledge exchange with academic institutions and strategic alliances with social partners (i.e., unions).

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DECLARATION ON ATHLETES' SOCIAL PROTECTION AND SOPROS PARTNERS' COMMITMENTS

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Assessing, Evaluating, and Implementing Athletes' Social Protection in Olympic Sports

Erasmus+ SOPROS
(Project 101090790)

SOPROS

EUROPEAN ATHLETES & PLAYERS ASSOCIATION

EASE
European Association of Sport Employers

EUROPEAN OLYMPIC ACADEMIES

Erasmus+ Assessing, Evaluating, and Implementing Athletes' Social Protection in Olympic Sports (SOPROS) (Project 101090790)

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1. Declaration on the Human Right to Social Protection of Athletes

Preamble

Recognising that social protection is a universal human right, and acknowledging that implementation gaps persist even in Member States with advanced welfare and social security systems, we emphasise that enhanced multi-stakeholder cooperation is indispensable for ensuring equal opportunities and adequate protection for all elite athletes.

We recall that:

- athletes' social protection is essential to their personal well-being, their sporting performance, and the realisation of their broader human rights;
- athletes may be subject to atypical employment relationships and precarious socio-economic conditions that require targeted protection measures;
- shared responsibility among public, private, and civil-society actors is crucial for effective delivery of athletes' social protection.

Declaration

We, the undersigned, endorse the human right of all elite and professional athletes to adequate social protection, and therefore:

1. Recognise that athletes, irrespective of their legal status or contractual form, must be granted access to statutory (state) provisions and athlete-specific measures.
2. Underline that athletes' social protection is an enabling condition for the effective exercise of other fundamental rights.
3. Call on employers, governments, public authorities, sport governing bodies and other relevant actors to assume their proportionate share of responsibility in funding and implementing comprehensive protection measures for athletes.
4. Encourage the development and consolidation of robust legal and policy frameworks that recognise athletes as rights-holders and ensure their integration into statutory social protection systems.
5. Stress the need for enhanced coordination, monitoring, reporting, and accountability mechanisms.
6. Emphasise the importance of education, information-sharing, and capacity-building.
7. Support the strengthening of social dialogue and collective bargaining structures.

2. Commitments by the Project Partners

We, the project partners of the EU-funded “SOPROS” project, acknowledge our different yet complementary roles in contributing to an improved implementation of athletes’ social protection coverage. We emphasize the critical importance of the project outcomes, especially the Manual for the Improved Implementation of Athletes’ Social Protection. We recall that social protection is a human right to which all elite athletes are entitled, and we endorse a shared responsibility and duty-bearing approach in line with EU objectives, ILO standards, and international human rights principles.

Commitments of the Policy Partners

European Athletes and Players Association (EAPA)

EAPA commits to:

- supporting research, evidence-based policy-making, and the exchange of good practices to improve athletes’ social protection;
- engaging in social dialogue and collective bargaining, with full respect for freedom of association, to negotiate enhanced social protection measures for athletes;
- representing athletes’ views and interests in national and European policy-making processes relating to the design, implementation, and monitoring of social protection provisions;
- engaging in cooperation, education, and the sharing of good practices among its members to assess and improve the social protection of athletes and promote it as a human right;

European Association of Sport Employers (EASE)

EASE commits to:

- ensuring that the outcomes of the project are disseminated among sport organisations, employers and policymakers, strengthening their capacity to implement fair, sustainable and coordinated social protection measures for athletes
- engaging in social dialogue and collective bargaining, with full respect for freedom of association, to negotiate enhanced social protection measures for athletes;
- representing the sport employers’ views and interests in national and European policy-making processes relating to the design, implementation, and monitoring of social protection provisions;
- promoting responsible employer conduct and advising sport employers on their duties and responsibilities in the funding and implementation of social protection measures.

European Olympic Academies (EOA)

EOA commits to:

- fostering awareness, education, and cross-border dialogue on athletes' social protection through its network of National Olympic Academies;
- strengthening the link between European policy frameworks and national implementation processes;
- supporting inclusive approaches to social protection that recognise the diversity of athlete pathways and legal statuses;
- contributing to educational and communicative efforts on athletes' human rights, including their right to social protection.

Joint Commitments of the Academic Partners

The academic partners commit to:

- providing comparative research and empirical evidence on the status quo of athletes' social protection coverage across the European continent;
- contributing to clarifying the normative core of social protection as a human and labour right of all professional athletes;
- identifying practical shortcomings and policy reforms aimed at improving the situation for the most vulnerable athletes;
- strengthening capacity-building with policy and social partners at European and national level, including support for emerging forms of social dialogue in elite sport;
- integrating the topic of athletes' social protection into study programmes, teaching curricula, and seminars/workshops for students and stakeholders.

Call for Endorsements

This declaration is open for endorsement by public authorities, sport governing bodies, athlete organisations, employers, civil society, academic institutions, commercial actors, and individual athletes.

The updated list of signatories, as well as guidance on submitting additional commitments, is available on the project website.

Adoption

This declaration and call to action was adopted on the 9th of December 2025, in Brussels, Belgium, in the framework of the Final Conference of the "SOPROS" project.

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