

# NATIONAL SPORTS GOVERNANCE OBSERVER



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This leaflet is based on the final report of the international project 'National Sports Governance Observer', which is coordinated by Play the Game.

Read more about the project and download the full report at [www.playthegame.org](http://www.playthegame.org)

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## New insights into sports governance

With constantly accelerating speed, the issue of good governance has climbed to the top of the sports political agenda over the past few years. Not only have specific case stories and police actions against international sports federations drawn worldwide public and political attention, there is also a growing awareness that the failures of international sports governance are long-lasting and systemic.

This realisation comes at a time when the European and international sports sectors are subject to great changes and challenges. At the grass-roots level, local, regional, and national sports organisations all over Europe are increasingly expected to deliver on larger societal objectives. Good governance in national sports organisations is key to enabling the organisations to deliver on sport for all, elite sport as well as larger societal objectives.

And how is European sport equipped to tackle all these challenges? Are the governance standards adequate for bringing the traditional sports federation model well into the future?

This leaflet and the full report of the 'National Sports Governance Observer'-project do not pretend to give a final answer, but they do raise a lot of political perspectives and specific information needed by those who wish to set the course for sport in the years to come.

Governance research does not give us the full picture of the reality of sports organisations. The impact of rules and regulations depends at the end of the day on the human beings that administer them. But without good rules and regulations, the risk of sport being abused is much higher, as we have seen too often in the past years.

*Jens Sejer Andersen, international director, Play the Game*

You can find the full report on Play the Game's theme page:  
[www.nationalsportsgovernanceobserver.org](http://www.nationalsportsgovernanceobserver.org)

## About the NSGO project

The National Sports Governance Observer is a project coordinated by Play the Game/Danish Institute for Sports Studies, which brought together academics and sports leaders from nine European countries as well as Brazil. The project has received a 383,000 euro grant from the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union and further support from the Danish Parliament and the Council of Europe.

The main aim of the project was to assist and inspire national sports federations to enhance the quality of their governance by measuring governance and building capacity.

In order to do so, the researchers led by Arnout Geeraert from KU Leuven and Utrecht University first developed the National Sports Governance Observer tool. It consists of **274 single indicators** describing **46 governance principles** within **4 governance dimensions**:

- **Transparency** enhances trust and incentivises staff and officials to perform better.
- **Democratic processes** allow for more effective policies because stakeholders contribute specialised knowledge to the decision-making process.
- **Internal accountability and control** stimulates learning and decreases the likelihood of power imbalances, abuses of power and unethical conduct.
- Demonstrating **societal responsibility** has a positive impact on legitimacy because it enhances external audiences' trust

Read more about the project on the project website:  
[www.nationalsportsgovernanceobserver.org](http://www.nationalsportsgovernanceobserver.org)

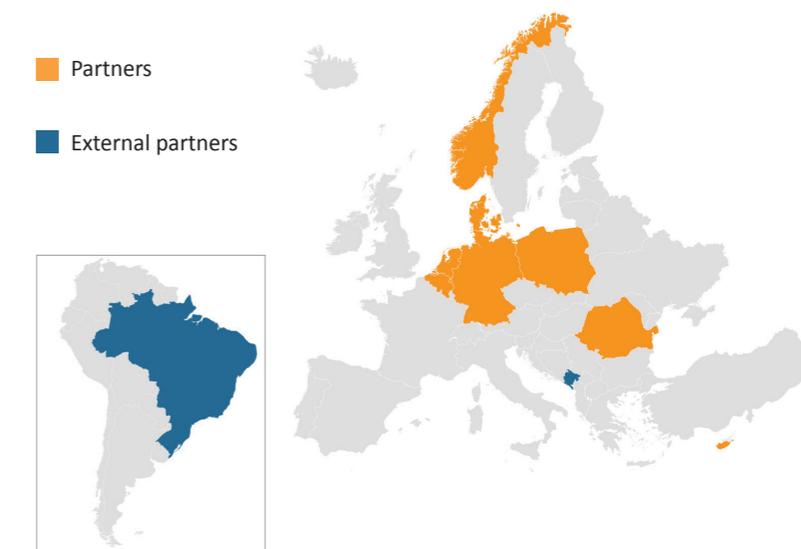
The tool was applied to eight or more sports federations in the individual countries. The NSGO research partners included the same five types of federations in their sample of (at least) eight federations.

They administer the following sports:

- Athletics
- Football
- Handball
- Swimming
- Tennis

## Partner countries

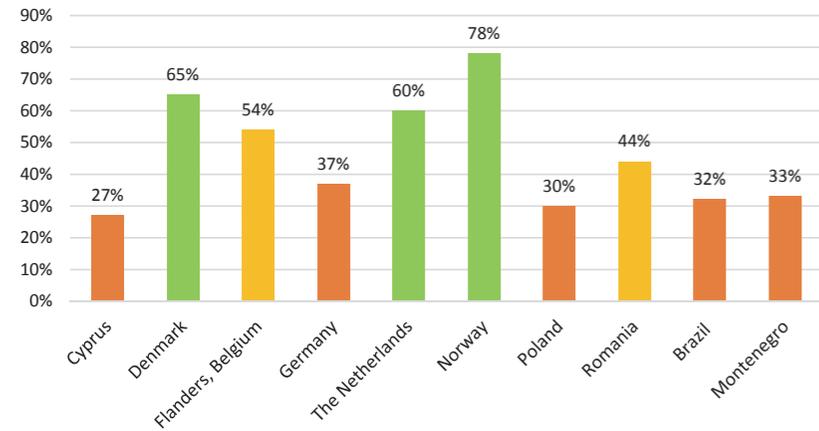
The countries involved are Cyprus, Denmark, Belgium (Flanders), Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, and Romania plus Brazil and Montenegro as associated external partners.



## Overall score

The degree of good governance in sports federations varies considerably depending on the home country.

Overall NSGO index scores – all countries



The average score of the NSGO country indexes of the nine European countries is 47%, which corresponds to a 'moderate' scoring label. Sports federations in Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands mostly achieve 'good' to 'very good' scores. Flemish federations generally achieve average to good scores. The federations in the other countries achieve mostly average to 'weak' scores.

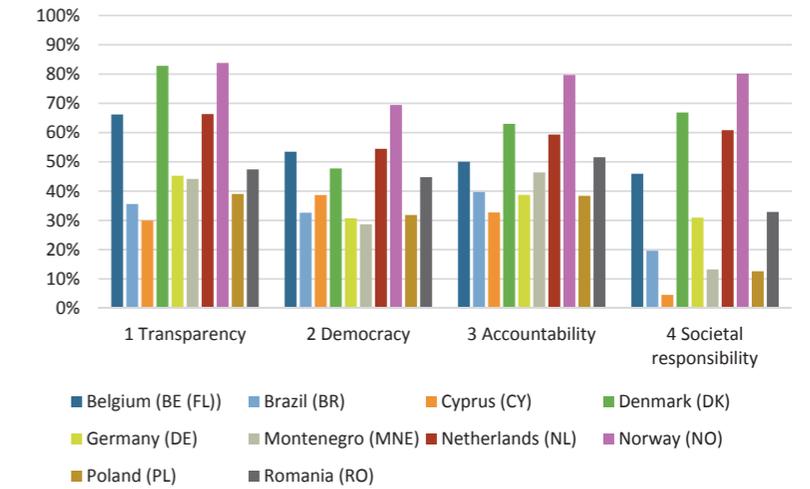
## Scoring

A label and corresponding traffic light colour was assigned to each of the 46 principles on the basis of the federations' scores on these principles.

Not relevant	Not fulfilled	Weak	Moderate	Good	Very good
	0-19 %	20-39 %	40-59 %	60-79 %	80-100 %

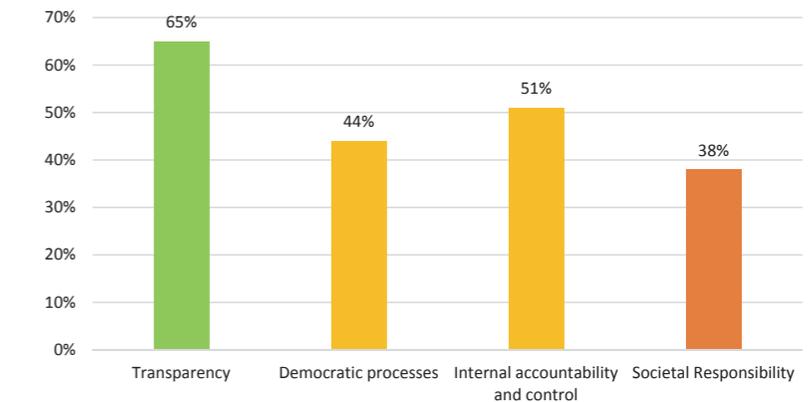
When looking at the average dimension scores, it is clear that Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands consistently come out on top. Cyprus, Montenegro, and Poland score particularly low in the societal responsibility dimension.

Average scores of the surveyed European countries and Brazil on the NSGO dimensions



The average transparency index of the nine European countries scores the highest of the four, namely 65% (good). The average democracy and accountability indexes stand at 44% and 51%, respectively. The average NSGO societal responsibility index is 38%, the lowest of the four indexes. On average, the surveyed European federations thus have the most deficits in the democracy and societal responsibility dimensions.

Average score – all countries – on the four NSGO dimensions



## Dimension 1: Transparency

		BE (FL)	BR	CY	DE	DK	MNE	NL	NO	PL	RO	Avg
Transparency	1. Legal and policy documents	Green	Yellow	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	2. General assembly	Green	Green	Orange	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green
	3. Board decisions	Green	Red	Orange	Red	Green	Green	Orange	Green	Orange	Orange	Yellow
	4. Board members	Yellow	Orange	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Green	Orange	Orange	Yellow
	5. Athletes and clubs	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green
	6. Annual report	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange	Green	Green	Orange	Orange	Yellow
	7. Remuneration	Orange	Red	Orange	Red	Green	Red	Orange	Green	Red	Orange	Orange

### Scores on selected principles

The surveyed European countries achieve high average scores on the principles relating to the publication of legal and policy documents (81%) and reports about their member clubs and athletes (76%). The most problematic (34%) is the principle on the publication of information about board members' and

management's remuneration and the applicable remuneration policies. In addition, the countries registered a particularly low average score (41%) on the principle concerning the quality of the published information about board members.

### Selected examples of individual indicators

#### Strengths

- 96% of the surveyed federations in nine European countries publish their statutes on their website.
- 94% of the federations publish their sports rules on their website.
- 77% of the federations publish internal regulations on their website.
- 92% of the federations list the names of the current board members on their website.
- 74% of the federations provide an annual report to their internal stakeholders.

#### Deficits

- 15% of the federations publish information on the professional background of individual board members.
- 11% of the federations publish an (anonymised) overview on the declarations of conflicts of interest and the decisions in which conflicts of interest were involved.
- 33% of the federations report on board decisions and give an explanation behind the rationale of key decisions.
- 20% of the federations publish information on other positions in sport organisations held by the board members.
- 36% of the federations publish a risk analysis as part of the general report.

Not relevant	Not fulfilled	Weak	Moderate	Good	Very good
	0-19 %	20-39 %	40-59 %	60-79 %	80-100 %

## Dimension 2: Democratic processes

		BE (FL)	BR	CY	DE	DK	MNE	NL	NO	PL	RO	Avg
Democratic processes	8. Elections of board members	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	9. Policy for differentiated board	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Orange	Orange
	10. Nomination committee	Orange	Red	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Green	Red	Orange	Orange
	11. Quorums	Green	Red	Green	Orange	Orange	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow
	12. Term limits	Green	Yellow	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Green	Orange	Red	Red	Orange
	13. Member representation	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Green
	14. Regular board meetings	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
	15. Athletes' participation	Red	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Yellow	Red	Orange	Orange
	16. Referees' participation	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
	17. Coaches' participation	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Yellow
	18. Volunteers' participation	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Green	Red	Orange	Green	Red	Red	Orange
	19. Employees' participation	Yellow	Yellow	Orange	Red	Green	Red	Green	Green	Red	Orange	Orange
	20. Gender equality policy	Red	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Red	Orange	Green	Red	Red	Orange

### Scores on selected principles

The surveyed European countries achieve a particularly high average principle score (87%) when it comes to the election of board members. The principle with the second highest average score (73%) pertains to the representation of members via a general assembly with annual meetings.

The lowest average principle scores relate to policies to achieve a differentiated composition of the board (24%), the implementation of term limits (31%), the involvement of athletes in policy processes (30%), and the implementation of a gender equality policy (23%).

### Selected examples of individual indicators

#### Strengths

- 97% of the surveyed federations in nine European countries have formal procedures for the appointment and reappointment of the members of the board.
- 91% of the federations have formal rules on people qualified to vote.
- 93% of the federations have the majority of their board members elected by the general assembly.
- 69% of the federations elect board members through secret ballots.
- 89% of the federations have a general assembly that (indirectly) represents all affiliated members.

#### Deficits

- 36% of the federations have a document establishing the desired profile of board members.
- 22% of the federations have a nomination committee that searches for candidates for vacant board mandates.
- 28% of the federations establish term limits for board members.
- 22% of the federations have a formal policy that outlines objectives and actions aimed at involving athletes in their policy processes.
- 27% of the federations have a formal gender equality policy.

## Dimension 3: Internal accountability and control

	Principle	BE (FL)	BR	CY	DE	DK	MNE	NL	NO	PL	RO	Avg
Internal accountability	21. Supervision of board	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Green	Green	Orange	Green	Yellow
	22. Board resignation procedures	Yellow	Orange	Yellow	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Orange
	23. Board eligibility rules	Green	Green	Orange	Orange	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Green	Orange	Yellow
	24. Clear governance structure	Green	Yellow	Green								
	25. Supervision of management	Orange	Orange	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green	Green	Orange	Yellow	Yellow
	26. Audit committee	Yellow	Green	White	White	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Green	Orange	Green	Green
	27. Financial controls	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Orange	Yellow	Green	Orange	Yellow	Yellow
	28. Board self-evaluation	Red	Red	Orange	Orange	Orange	Green	Orange	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange
	29. External audit	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Orange	Green	Green	Green	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
	30. Code of conduct	Yellow	Yellow	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green	Red	Orange	Yellow
	31. Conflict of interest procedures	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange
	32. Complaint procedure	Orange	Orange	Red	Red	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Yellow	Yellow	Yellow
	33. Appeal procedure	Yellow	Green	Red	Green							
	34. Board meeting schedule	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Yellow	Yellow

### Scores on selected principles

The surveyed European countries achieve high average principle scores with regard to adoption of a clear governance structure (75%) and a procedure for appealing decisions (69%).

The principles that score the lowest on average pertain to organising board self-evaluations (35%) and the adoption of conflict of interest procedures (36%).

### Selected examples of individual indicators

#### Strengths

- 88% of the surveyed federations in nine European countries formally ensure that the general assembly approves the annual financial statements.
- 92% of the federations formally define key board positions.
- 79% of the federations formally define the delegated tasks of each of the standing committees.
- 80% of the federations have their financial statements and accounting records reviewed by an independent auditor.
- 80% of the federations outline the responsibilities and competences delegated to management.

#### Deficits

- 32% of the federations had their annual policy plan approved by the general assembly.
- 28% of the federations have a code of conduct applicable to board members that contains rules on gifts.
- 24% of the federations have conflict of interest rules that ensure that particular conflicts must be submitted to the general assembly.
- 27% of the federations have formal procedures ensuring that conflicts of interest are listed and recorded in a registry.
- 17% of the federations formally ensure that no person who, in good faith, reports a concern shall be subject to retaliation or negative consequences.

## Dimension 4: Societal responsibility

	Principle	BE (FL)	BR	CY	DE	DK	MNE	NL	NO	PL	RO	Avg
Societal responsibility	35. Governance consulting	Green	Red	Red	Orange	Green	Red	Green	Green	Red	Orange	Yellow
	36. Mitigating health risks	Yellow	Red	Red	Red	Green	Yellow	Green	Green	Red	Orange	Yellow
	37. Combating sexual harassment	Yellow	Orange	Red	Orange	Green	Red	Green	Green	Red	Orange	Orange
	38. Anti-doping	Green	Yellow	Orange	Green	Green	Orange	Green	Green	Yellow	Green	Green
	39. Social inclusion	Yellow	Orange	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Green	Green	Red	Orange	Orange
	40. Anti-discrimination	Orange	Orange	Red	Orange	Yellow	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Yellow	Orange
	41. Gender equality	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Yellow	Red	Orange	Green	Red	Orange	Orange
	42. Anti-match-fixing	Orange	Red	Red	Orange	Green	Red	Yellow	Green	Orange	Orange	Orange
	43. Environmental sustainability	Red	Red	Red	Red	Yellow	Red	Orange	Yellow	Red	Orange	Red
	44. Dual careers	Yellow	Red	White	Red	Green	Red	Green	Green	Red	Red	Orange
	45. Sport for all	Green	Orange	Red	Yellow	Green	Red	Green	Green	Orange	Green	Yellow
	46. Athletes' rights	Green	Orange	Red	Red	Orange	Green	Yellow	Green	Red	Orange	Orange

### Scores on selected principles

The surveyed European countries achieve a good average score on the principle concerned with assessing anti-doping policies (64%). They achieve average to weak scores on all other societal responsibility principles. The principles that achieve the

lowest average scores pertain to environmental sustainability (19%), athletes' rights (29%), gender equality (24%), anti-match-fixing (34%), and dual career (34%) policies.

### Selected examples of individual indicators

#### Strengths

- 68% of the surveyed federations in nine European countries provide consulting to member organisations in the areas of management or governance.
- 88% of the federations implement disciplinary rules to combat doping in conformity with the World Anti-Doping Code.
- 71% of the federations undertake actions aimed at promoting sport for all.
- 65% of the federations cooperate with other organisations with a view to improving the social, cultural, educational or psychological circumstances of marginalised and/or fractured communities through sport.
- 77% of the federations have a formal policy outlining objectives and actions aimed at combating doping.

#### Deficits

- 39% of the federations have a formal policy that outlines objectives and actions aimed at mitigating the health risks of sporting activities.
- 36% of the federations have a formal policy that outlines objectives and actions aimed at combating discrimination in sport.
- 27% of the federations undertook actions aimed at raising awareness for discrimination issues.
- 39% of the federations have a formal policy that outlines objectives and actions aimed at combating match-fixing.
- 20% of the federations have a formal policy that outlines objectives and actions aimed at promoting environmental sustainability.

## A small selection of challenges identified in the project

**Transparency:** Less than a third of the national federations publish information on the remuneration of board members and top executives.

43% do not publish an annual financial report on their website.

**Democracy:** Few federations have policies to achieve a differentiated composition of the board (24%), term limits (31%), the involvement of athletes in policy processes (30%), and a gender equality policy (23%).

**Societal responsibility:** Few federations score well with regard to environmental sustainability (19%), athletes' rights (29%), gender equality (24%), and dual career policies (34%).

**Accountability:** Whistleblowers enjoy very little protection in national federations. Only 17% of the federations formally ensure that no person who reports a concern shall be subject to negative consequences.

**Accountability:** Conflicts of interest are largely neglected. For example, only 27% of the federations have formal procedures ensuring that conflicts of interest are listed and recorded in a registry.

**Societal responsibility:** Match-fixing seems to be ignored in most federations, except in football. 39% have a formal policy aimed at combatting match-fixing.

## Using the NSGO tool

It is important to stress that NSGO scores reflect the proportion of good practices implemented and federations should not be expected to implement all NSGO indicators. Federations may develop their own good practices and they may have valid reasons for doing things differently.

The NSGO tool should therefore be used as a starting point for discussions about deficits and the policies aimed to address these. In other words, an assessment based on the NSGO provides a valuable first step for improving federations' governance.

Download the final report and the appendix-report with guidelines for how to use the tool at [www.nationalsportsgovernanceobserver.org](http://www.nationalsportsgovernanceobserver.org)



### What the NSGO provides

- Benchmarking that serves as an ideal starting point for a discussion on good governance policies.
- A reliable and clear assessment through dichotomous (yes/no) indicators that use clearly defined minimum criteria.
- An objective external assessment via a standardised data gathering process and clear, detailed measurement instructions.
- A holistic overview of strengths and weaknesses via the use of 46 principles and 274 indicators, dispersed over 4 dimensions of good governance.
- A barometer that quickly and accurately communicates strengths and weaknesses through a traffic light scoring system.
- An overview of good practices and why they are important.
- An indication of risks.

### What the NSGO does not provide

- A definitive set of good governance principles.
- A definitive measurement of good governance.
- A direct measurement of effectiveness, legitimacy, and ethical conduct.
- A blueprint that sports federations can implement as such.

## The project partners

The following original full project partners conducted the academic research and produced national reports in their respective countries.

- Danish Institute for Sports Studies/Play the Game
- German Sport University Cologne
- KU Leuven
- Molde University College (MUC)
- University of Bucharest
- University of Warsaw
- Utrecht University

The associate partners gave advice and assisted with the development and implementation of the indicators.

- Cyprus Sports Organisation (CSO)
- Danish Football Association (DBU)
- Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS), Council of Europe
- European Association for Sport Management (EASM)
- Flemish Sports Confederation (VSF)
- International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE)
- Norwegian Football Association (NFF)
- Polish Golf Union (PGU)
- Romanian Football Federation (FRF)

In addition, thanks to earmarked subsidies from the Danish Parliament to support the work of Play the Game in the field of good governance, the following partners voluntarily joined the project and engaged with the research process.

- Sou do Esporte (Brazil). Supported by Sport Intelligence Project of the Federal University of Paraná /Sport Ministry and Demarest
- Marko Begovic, private researcher (Montenegro). Supported by the Council of Europe
- University of Central Lancashire and Molde University College (MUC)



**Is your country in need of better sports governance? Then you can become an NSGO Partner.**

Responding to massive interest from around the world, Play the Game invites new countries to join its National Sports Governance Observer (NSGO) project.

New partners will be authorised to collect sports governance data in their home country, and in return get access to a pool of international data – allowing for comparisons between individual sports, countries and between the national and international level. Find more information about how to apply at [www.nationalsportsgovernanceobserver.org](http://www.nationalsportsgovernanceobserver.org)