



SDG Striker

Scoring Goals for Sustainability



With the collaboration of



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Three European football federations lead the way towards a more sustainable sport

The future EU prohibition on the use of rubber on artificial grass pitches is forcing sports organisations to look for new sustainability strategies.

The SDG Striker project, with the participation of the Scottish, Norwegian and Portuguese football and funded by the EU, presents materials and success stories for adapting to the changing regulations and motivate the sustainable development goals also in the sport sector.

At a situation of climate and environmental crisis, the European Union has announced adaptation and mitigation measures for a new reality affecting all socioeconomic sectors, with the sports sector as one of the most affected.

In the last few years, in an attempt to reduce plastic pollution and its effects on terrestrial and marine ecosystems, as well as on human health, the EU has been deliberating [the prohibition of the use of rubber in artificial grass in sports facilities and other microplastic-generating materials](#). The decision has sparked controversy as it comes at a time when viable and sustainable alternatives are still in their early stages of development. Additionally, experts argue that the prohibition would hinder the reuse of tires that could otherwise be recycled into rubber, leading to potential incineration or exportation to countries with less severe environmental regulations, contributing to a [greater environmental impact](#). On April 26th, [the initiative received a further push](#) for approval with the favourable vote by the European Committee for the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH).

SDG Striker: solutions to improve sustainability in sports organisations

In this context, initiatives are appearing, not only to mitigate plastic pollution, but also to improve sustainability at a global level, in its environmental, social, economic and environmental pillars. European football federations and their affiliated clubs are taking important steps toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Norwegian, Scottish and Portuguese federations are a successful example through their participation in the [SDG Striker project](#), funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Programme, which aims to promote the SDGs in the football and sport sector.

In this regard, the [Norwegian Football Federation](#) has set up a pilot to be used as a benchmark for the adaptation to possible rubber prohibitions and aims to demonstrate the viability of organic alternatives to plastic turf infill in cold climates. Meanwhile, the [Portuguese Football Federation](#) has showcased the positive impact of the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through the installation of photovoltaic panels at Benfica's stadium. The [Scottish Football Association](#) has shown equally successful results in sustainable development and environmental impact reduction by implementing energy efficiency measures and raising awareness about energy poverty. Those are measures that are crucial in the current geopolitical situation of energy crisis and escalating prices.

These are success stories that can serve as inspiration for other European clubs and federations to adopt similar sustainability measures, preparing them for the upcoming changes in the sports sector. Changes such as the prohibition on the use of rubber in artificial grass, which has a transition period of 8 years, and the effects of the energy crisis and the climate crisis. To make it easier for sport organisations to embrace change, the SDG Striker project provides a series of

[manuals that include a step-by-step guide on how to replicate the pilots](#) of the Scottish, Norwegian and Portuguese federations, providing advice and lessons learned to overcome the obstacles that have been identified. The project also provides public [manuals on the evaluation of the pilots](#) and [a guide to the sustainability solutions](#) currently available and especially oriented to sports organisations.

Sports organisations are preparing for change

The project results and outcomes, as well as its case studies, have been presented in several multiplier sport events and break-out sessions around Europe, in front of audiences that included project managers, CSR managers, CEOs and event coordinators from European and international clubs and federations. Hence, it has been an opportunity to disseminate the project results and provide valuable information to key decision-makers, enabling them to take action towards achieving the SDGs.

The session shed light on the barriers that clubs face when implementing sustainable measures, while also, it raised awareness among attendees about the environmental and social issues within the sport sector. In addition, it contributed to identify a lack of knowledge and resources to face these challenges, exposing the need for educational and awareness projects such as SDG Striker. Such projects provide sport organisations with the necessary tools and knowledge to identify and address sustainability issues.

It is important to note that a significant number of clubs are already taking action towards energy efficiency and solar energy, yet only a few are willing to transition to more sustainable alternatives for artificial grass. While the first factor might be related to the high availability of renewable energy technology and the increasing prices of gas and petroleum energy, the second factor could be a response to the lack of available options in the market for artificial grass replacement and the slow development of performative and viable solutions.

The lack of funding and the lack of commitment from the boards of the sport organisations are the two main barriers identified in replicating the pilots. Addressing these limitations is key to promoting the implementation of the SDGs in sport organisations. Projects aimed at raising awareness among directors, managers and other key stakeholders of sport organisations are useful in overcoming the barrier of lack of commitment, which is often directly related to the lack of knowledge about the topic and the steps to be taken for implementing the measures. On the other hand, there are funding calls organised by the European Union and national and regional governments that can help to overcome financial limitations. For more information on funding, please refer to the [3rd edition of the SDG Striker magazine](#).

If you are a relevant actor within the sports sector, you can participate in an [anonymous survey](#) designed to assess the current state of sustainability measures in football clubs and federations across Europe. The survey aims to gather insights on how the SDG Striker project can contribute by disseminating and communicating its outputs. Your valuable input will help us understand the needs and opportunities for promoting sustainability in football.

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