



EUROPEAN LEAGUES STRATEGY 2026-2027

Setting the principles to drive European football's development

The European Leagues represent 40 professional leagues, covering more than 1000 clubs across 34 countries.

We believe professional football has been one of the great European success stories that over generations has attracted millions of spectators every week, hundreds of millions of fans from around the world and thousands of players. This success has been built on the foundations of domestic league pyramids that bind together all levels of the game starting at the grassroots and leading to the opportunity for clubs to represent their countries in UEFA Club Competitions (UCC).

In recent years, at a time of rapid technological change and globalisation, the expansion of international football risks throwing this carefully developed system terminally out of balance.

To maintain a complementary balance that can help the professional game to continue to serve fans and players, European Leagues believes in the following principles:

- Open competitions based on annual sporting performances and promotion and relegation
- Results at national level always determining qualification for the UCCs
- Retaining domestic football's longstanding position in the calendar, with weekends reserved for national league matches
- Enhancing solidarity mechanisms to promote competitive balance and support sustainability throughout the pyramid
- Protecting the social function of football in supporting communities across Europe





Five core pillars define European Leagues Strategic Priorities for 2026-2027

1

Tackling financial and sporting polarisation – the key to safeguarding football’s ecosystem

The rapid expansion of international football cannot come at the expense of domestic leagues which are being undermined by growing polarisation threatening competitive balance.

2

Governance models require change to become fully inclusive

Domestic football must have a formal role in decision-making to best serve the interests of the game at all levels.

3

Piracy – the enemy of football

The time for impactful EU legislation to combat piracy is now.

4

Social Dialogue - an arena for positive outcomes

By working together, employers and employees, can advance common interests to better develop the game.

5

Strengthening the European Sport Model to sustain football’s well-being

The model’s timeless values should continue to provide the bedrock of European football’s future prosperity.

National football's development - key to ensuring the wider game's future success

Domestic leagues have always provided the foundations for football and together with UEFA Club Competitions our leagues have helped to put Europe at the centre of the global game.

I am proud to lead one of these leagues and in my role as President of European Leagues, to represent the interests of so many domestic competitions of different sizes and cultures across the continent. We all make football what it is.

In parallel, the football ecosystem benefits from the aspiration that successful UEFA Club Competitions, collectively developed by the National Associations, can provide. But their ongoing expansion risks undermining the professional system they are built on.

Simply put the impact of a weakened domestic professional game will be felt from the international stage down to the grassroots if we do not start addressing some of the worrying trends of over-saturation and polarisation that we are witnessing.

So, we are calling on the National Associations, UEFA and FIFA to take these trends seriously and bring together all stakeholders across the game, including fans, clubs, players, and leagues to ensure we can find a balance that will keep football thriving.



Claudius SCHÄFER
European Leagues President

Setting European Leagues strategic priorities and focus

1 Addressing growing polarisation across the game to preserve competitive balance

Recent years have seen a concentration of financial wealth and player talent in an increasingly limited number of clubs. This trend has threatened competitive balance across many domestic leagues which risks undermining fan interest and subsequently reducing revenue. International club competitions - that compete with domestic leagues in broadcast markets - and their revenue distribution models, that reward past performances, have been leading to a small number of clubs securing revenue levels that make it harder than ever for non-UCC clubs to challenge them on the pitch. This dynamic undermines competitive balance and erodes the legitimate aspirations of millions of fans across Europe who wish to see their clubs progress and achieve sporting success.

European Leagues will seek to engage with governing bodies and other stakeholders in a constructive manner to evolve existing international distribution models for 2027-31 cycle. This should be undertaken alongside continued discussions relating to the implementation of enhanced cost control mechanisms aimed at reducing inflationary pressures within the game.

2 Re-enforcing governance as a means to deliver optimal decision-making

EU law mandates that football governing bodies have a responsibility to govern in a neutral, unbiased, objective and inclusive manner for the good of the game as a whole. The ability of governing bodies to meet these responsibilities has come under increasing pressure as they seek to fulfil dual roles, as regulators and rights-selling competition organisers. This has led to decision-making on critical matters such as the International Match Calendar (IMC) favouring the needs of international team and club competitions. In this competitive environment, FIFA's approach to decision-making is increasingly discarding the voice of domestic football and other critical stakeholders such as players and fans. European Leagues and FIFPRO believe this violates certain aspects of EU law which led to the lodging of a complaint against FIFA with the EU Competition Authorities in October 2024.

European Leagues believes that systemic governance changes are needed to provide domestic leagues with the powers and influence required to defend and promote their interests. The European Commission is urged to formally open an investigation into the Complaint relating to FIFA practices in setting the IMC as a means to bring about this change.

3 Enacting a legislative framework to combat piracy

The most significant threat to football's commercial model comes from the online piracy of live content. As most sports rights owners predominantly drive their revenues from the sale of broadcast rights, the economic damage suffered due to the theft of their content limits their ability to further invest in the pitch and redistribute funds down through the sports pyramid. This is particularly damaging in the sports sector as the almost exclusive value of the content rests in its live nature. This means that acting to remove infringing content immediately, and no later than the end of the live event is imperative as a means for domestic leagues to enforce their rights.

At present, the legal instruments available at EU level to live content / sports rightsholders to tackle online piracy do not able fast enough action to address the scale of the theft.

It is therefore critical for the European Commission to act, through impactful legislation, to address this threat to our sector.

4 Strengthening industrial relations through an ongoing commitment to the Social Dialogue

As a founding partner of the EU Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Professional Football (EU SSDC), European Leagues champions the strengthening of relations between employers and employees across the game. The EU SSDC already has a proven track record and is now focusing on matters including diversity, equality and inclusion, the evolution of the transfer system (in light of the recent ECJ "Diarra" ruling), and player health and safety issues caused by the congested calendar.

On all these matters European Leagues fully endorses the concept of subsidiarity and the need for any agreement to be reached within the setting of the Social Dialogue. Such agreements come about through detailed negotiations between partners representing employers and employees both at European and when necessary global level and must be applied in countries in a manner that aligns with national law and/or collective bargaining agreements that may exist.





5 Securing the European Sport Model's future

Key to delivering on these strategic priorities is the need to secure the future of the European Sport Model which over recent years, has faced increasing threats and challenges. The Model has provided the bedrock on which European football's prosperity was designed and on which its future success depends. This timeless concept of open competitions, sporting merit and solidarity is coming under increasing pressure from wealth polarisation, driven by access to UCCs, which risks locking-in the established order and dampening club aspiration and fan interest.

Beyond its sporting relevance, the Model protects and fuels the powerful social function the game can offer in delivering impactful and much-needed benefits to communities across Europe acting as a powerful force in strengthening social cohesion.

Next Steps

- Developing a detailed European Leagues proposal for a new revenue distribution model for 2027-31 alongside a review of the existing calendar of the UCCs through constructive engagement with UEFA and fellow stakeholders
- Pursuing efforts to have the European Commission open a case investigating the IMC decision-making while maintaining open lines of dialogue with FIFA in the development of the post 2030 IMC.
- Deepening advocacy to demand the EU address piracy through meaningful legislation.
- Positioning Social Dialogue as the starting point for all regulatory frameworks covering labour market matters at European and global level.
- Advocating for the introduction of guardrails needed to ensure the European Sport Model and its core functions and values continue to define the game's future.