



Erasmus+ project addressing the problem of spectator violence in European football through improved cooperation between club supporter liaison officers and the football and public authorities

Liaison-based Integrated Approach to Improving Supporter Engagement (LIAISE)

Action Plan: Czechia

The purpose of this Action Plan is to support the football and public authorities in Czechia through the provision of suggested actions, customised to meet national needs and circumstances, designed to enhance the role of Supporter Liaison Officers (SLOs) in developing effective communication and dialogue with supporters as part of a wider and comprehensive multi-agency approach to the planning and organisation of safety and security in connection with international and domestic professional football matches held in Czechia.

Project Aim: *"Tackle cross-border threats to the integrity of football and other sports (where appropriate) posed by spectator violence, other criminality and prohibited behaviour, and all kinds of intolerance and discrimination by:*

- *encouraging and supporting the football authorities and partner agencies to recognise the value of enhanced dialogue and communication between club supporter liaison officers (SLOs) and the football and public authorities through better understanding, awareness and implementation of established SLO good practices."*

Action Plan: The content within is based on discussions and observations undertaken during LIAISE project activities, in particular a programme of research exchange visits undertaken in 2019. It is recognised that there may be some misinterpretation in translation or explanation. It is also recognised that consideration of the recommended actions is the preserve of public and private entities in Czechia and that the suggestions are intended solely to aid discussion within and between the relevant agencies.

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For ease of reference, the seventeen recommendations are presented under five inter-related thematic headings:

- (i) developing the SLO concept in Czechia;
- (ii) supporting the SLO role and network (as set out in the European Union Council Resolution Handbook on Police Liaison with Supporters¹);
- (iii) building trust and cooperation between SLOs and the police;
- (iv) facilitating the work of SLOs in the community; and
- (v) creating a managed, safe and secure environment in which SLOs can function effectively.

Each Recommendation, or grouping of related recommendations, is accompanied by a summary explanation of its intended purpose.

¹ Adopted at the 3490th meeting of the Council of the European Union (JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS - HOME AFFAIRS ISSUES) held in Luxembourg on 13 October 2016. A copy can be obtained from the Council Register of publicly available documents (available in all the official languages of the EU) on <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/public-register/> by inserting the following document reference number 12792/16.

Theme 1. Developing the SLO Concept in Czechia

Recommendation One: The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, in partnership with the Ministry of Interior, to consider if it should be a legal requirement for all professional football clubs competing in the Fortuna Liga to employ a dedicated SLO.

Recommendation Two: The LFA and FACR, in partnership with the national SLO coordinator, to use their offices to promote and publicise the important role which SLOs can play in helping to generate a positive spectator experience and help reduce football related criminality and misbehaviour, facilitating more effective dialogue between the clubs, police and supporters, and promoting wider community interest in participating in the football experience.

Explanation: The SLO network in Czechia has made great strides in recent years largely because of the efforts of the national SLO network coordinator and the promotion of the concept by the Czech Football League (LFA) and Football Association (FACR). However, it remains work in progress. To date, most of the SLOs appointed by football clubs have been existing club employees designated to undertake the additional SLO role. That said the current SLOs met during LIAISE visits are committed and, notwithstanding limited time and resources and their multi-functional club status, are confident that they are able to:

- engage with supporters;
- act as a conduit between club and supporters (though senior management in at least one club tend to liaise directly with supporters); and
- in the case of Bohemians, interact effectively and influence supporter behaviour.

Clearly the circumstances in Czechia (and many other European States) are far removed from the model set out in the SLO Handbook and in European guidance. In effect, the few clubs with SLOs have tended to customise the concept and role to fit their specific circumstances and imperatives. This is understandable, and by no means unique to Czechia. Moreover, it is a reflection of issues raised during the LIAISE visits, including limited financial capacity within many professional clubs, low attendances, lack of awareness among clubs and supporters regarding the potential benefits to be obtained by the appointment of an SLO.

In the circumstances, and to move to the next level, it is almost certain that it will take a major top down initiative to expand upon the current embryonic community of part time SLOs. It is recommended, therefore, that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Interior jointly consider if it should be a legal requirement for all professional football clubs competing in the top two leagues to employ a dedicated SLO, and to supplement that with a series of requirements as set out under the next section.

In parallel, there appears to be a self-evident need to raise awareness among public and private entities, football supporters, and the wider community, both at national and local level, regarding the important role which SLOs can play in respect of helping to generate a

positive, safe and welcoming environment for all spectators and help prevent criminality and prohibited behaviour by some supporters, and make the football experience safer, more secure, welcoming and, importantly, more attractive to potential supporters in the community. Key issues which could be highlighted include:

- the role of SLOs facilitating the development of a partnership approach towards tackling any existing or emerging frictions or misunderstandings between the respective parties;
- the role of SLOs in encouraging supporters to help identify solutions to current problems; and
- the role of SLOs in generating a sense of community pride in local football clubs and encouraging more active support for local football clubs.

Theme 2 Supporting the SLO Role and Network

Recommendation Three: In circumstances where an SLO is appointed by a professional football club whilst also engaged in other club duties, the SLO to be allocated at least 50% of his or her time to SLO functions.

Recommendation Four: All professional football clubs in the Fortuna Liga to provide their SLO with a comprehensive job description setting out their core functions based on those set out in European guidance.

Recommendation Five: FACR to take full advantage of the SLO Education Programme available through the UEFA Academy by hosting an event in Czechia

Recommendation Six: All professional football clubs in the Fortuna Liga, to provide their SLO with additional support personnel, on match days, either in a paid or voluntary capacity.

Recommendation Seven: Professional football clubs in the Fortuna Liga to provide their SLO with a direct channel of communication with senior club management.

Recommendation Eight: The LFA or FACR to employ the national SLO coordinator on a full- or part-time basis given the importance, extent and demands of the role, rather than on a voluntary basis as at present.

Recommendation Nine: The FACR to consider if the national team SLO is resourced sufficiently to undertake effectively their core SLO duties in respect of international matches at home and abroad.

Explanation: the above recommendations are intended as an aid to further developing a relatively sophisticated SLO network (by European standards) through providing SLOs with the status, support and resources necessary in order to undertake effectively their extensive range of challenging preventative SLO functions as set out in European guidance, namely:

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- acting as an interface and communicating between fans, security officers, stewards and the police, etc. before, during and after matches;
- providing detailed information for fans attending matches to facilitate match day travel and logistics and removing the potential for misunderstandings;
- providing input at security meetings before home games and high-risk away games;
- explaining the actions of fans to police and stewards and vice-versa to break down barriers and misconceptions;
- attending "concourse meetings" inside the stadium with club security officers, stewards and the police an hour or so before kick-off to evaluate the situation;
- working to prevent disorder by exerting a calming and de-escalating influence on fans and other stakeholders, mediating in conflict situations, and encouraging a positive supporter culture;
- attending debriefing meetings after matches;
- contributing to police training;
- participating in local sport and security committees, etc.
- building an effective communication structure with fans, clubs, security staff, police, local and national government, other SLOs, transport companies, etc.

This represents an extremely demanding menu of strategic and operational activities, especially if an SLO is working in isolation, or is employed on a voluntary or part-time basis, or in a dual or multi-capacity by the club.

Indeed, the task becomes almost impossible if an SLO is not provided with sufficient time, along with human and other resources, to deliver their core functions effectively. It is important. therefore, for clubs to provide their SLO with:

- a job description, supplemented for SLOs performing other club functions with a commitment to allocate at least 50% of their time on SLO activity, and
- access to a team of trained assistants (paid or voluntary) adjudged to have the appropriate competences and communication skills, to assist the SLO in undertaking their wide range of strategic and operational activities with supporters generally, organised groups, local communities and, importantly, the police.

In addition, given the impact which a wide range of club policies and procedures can have on supporters, all SLOs should be provided with opportunity to make this impact clear to senior decision makers within the club.

It is important for clubs to bear in mind, that whilst the absence of sufficient SLO time and resources is especially noticeable on match days, when SLO activities range from strategic liaison and information exchange with club, police and other contacts (where in place) to

operational interaction with organised groups and, importantly, other supporters of their club, it can also restrict the potential for SLOs to:

- work on an ongoing basis with supporters in promoting positive behaviour;
- identifying potential solutions to existing or emerging safety and security challenges/problems; and
- participating/facilitating/supporting football related projects and initiatives in local communities.

The current reality for some SLOs is that their wider role appears to be constrained by having to focus almost exclusively on responding to actual or potential conflicts or frictions before, during and after football matches. This represents a lost opportunity for SLOs to play a pivotal role in making the football experience safe, secure and welcoming for all current and potential spectators.

Theme 3. Building Trust and Cooperation between SLOs and the Police.

Recommendation Ten: The Ministry of Interior and the LFA to jointly initiate a meeting at a national level to bring together experienced SLOs and policing football decision makers to discuss how best to encourage and facilitate effective communication between the police and SLOs in each locality hosting professional football matches and to raise awareness of the mutual benefits for both sides.

Explanation: a crucial pre-requisite to developing the trust of, and developing effective liaison with, the police, centres on dispelling any perception that SLOs are little more than quasi representatives of risk and ultra groups and/or, in some cases, apologists for unacceptable manifestations of supporter behaviour. Such perceptions are almost inevitable, given that the role of SLOs includes performing an "*intermediary role with external stakeholders, such as the police and stewarding services, communicating the needs and wants of each side and acting as a translator in the event of misunderstandings or erroneous interpretations of behaviour*". However, there needs to be an ongoing dialogue with the police: one which is not limited to risk or conflict scenarios on match days.

The aim of the recommendation is to prompt a national debate between key agencies on how to enhance trust and communication at a local level in order to:

- facilitate the development of a partnership approach towards tackling any existing or emerging frictions or misunderstandings between the respective parties;
- empower SLOs;
- increase awareness that supporters can help provide solutions to current problems; and

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- highlight the positive role that SLOs can play in the community in terms of generating a sense of community pride in local football clubs and encouraging more active support for local football clubs.

Recommendation Eleven: The Ministry of Interior to encourage the police in all localities hosting professional football matches to proactively seek to engage with SLOs as a means for developing effective and trusted channels of communication.

Recommendation Twelve: The LFA and FACR to encourage all professional football clubs to facilitate, support, and, encourage SLOs to seek to identify key contacts in the police with whom they can develop a discrete but meaningful dialogue in order to build trust and mutual understanding of their respective roles.

Recommendation Thirteen: The Ministry of Interior and professional football clubs to engage with club SLOs in respect of operational planning and risk assessment processes.

Explanation: irrespective of the outcome of the national review, steps should be taken to develop effective liaison between the police (possibly within the anti-conflict teams) and SLOs at a local level. The reality is that to effectively deliver their core functions requires all SLOs to strive to identify and develop communication channels with a police contact capable of influencing policing football risk assessments, strategies and tactics. It is only through developing such contacts that trust can be developed and maintained.

In parallel, the Ministry of Interior should encourage the police in localities hosting professional football matches to designate a police contact with whom SLOs can liaise on a regular basis. Whilst some risk assessment and operational planning information will remain sensitive, and not for wider dissemination, police engagement with SLOs should help in assessing the mood, wishes and concerns of supporters and assist decision makers in developing and adopting operational strategies and tactics which are likely to be perceived by supporters as appropriate and proportionate.

Theme 4. Facilitating the Work of SLOs with Supporters and the Wider Community.

Recommendation Fourteen: The LFA and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, along with other governmental and public bodies and NGOs, to explore the potential for providing additional funding to enable SLOs to work with local public and community agencies/groups in developing or expanding a range of social and fan projects designed to enhance community life and influence the behaviour of young supporters.

Recommendation Fifteen: SLOs, professional football clubs and public and voluntary community groups to jointly consider the scope for supporting the empowerment of disabled supporters through facilitating their active participation in the football experience.

Explanation: the two inter-related but distinctive recommendations above are based on LIAISE project discussions and observations which, amongst other things, highlighted some impressive local social/fan projects, involving football clubs and SLOs (notably but not exclusively in Poland) which appeared to be delivering successful results in demonstrating awareness of the importance of clubs, SLOs and supporters participating in social responsibility initiatives in order to:

- provide reassurance to local communities;
- build closer links between clubs, fans and local residents and businesses;
- counter any negative publicity regarding football and football fans in Czechia;
- help dispel the potential allure among young supporters for participating in negative activity of risk and/or some ultra groups in Czechia;
- promote the role of SLOs in communities hosting professional football matches; and, importantly
- encourage passive and potential supporters to attend matches.

Theme 5. Creating a Safe and Secure Environment in which SLOs can Function Effectively

Recommendation Sixteen: The Ministry for Interior, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, FACR and LFA to work together in reviewing the current arrangements for ensuring that all spectator areas in stadia are managed effectively at all professional football matches.

Explanation: in order to provide an operating climate in which SLOs can focus effectively on all of their wide ranging functions, the key governmental and football agencies should review the current safety management arrangements in stadia hosting professional football matches to ensure that all spectator areas, including those areas where home and visiting risk or ultra groups gather, are managed effectively and consistently in all professional football stadia.

Observation of match operations revealed that spectator areas where risk or ultra groups gather were not always managed effectively by stewards, private security or the police, presumably on the expectation that such proactive deployment would be provocative. However, European experience evidences that lack of effective crowd management can exacerbate the potential for misunderstanding, conflict and unacceptable behaviour and, in some cases, conflict between supporters and clubs (and ultimately, in extremis, the police). The reality is that whilst some supporter groups may perceive their designated area as belonging to them, legal responsibility and liability for the safety of spectators in all spectator areas of a stadium rests firmly with the event organiser (unless responsibility is formally handed over to the police or other emergency service in the event of a major safety or security scenario). To expect any SLO to undertake their intermediary role or to negotiate with supporter groups in an unmanaged area is not only extremely challenging but can also put their health and safety at risk.

Recommendation Seventeen: In parallel, the Ministry of Interior, and police to review whether the current legislation is being uniformly implemented effectively, and in manner that will help transform behaviour and rehabilitate offenders.

An inter-related issue appears to centre on the desirability of reviewing implementation of the current exclusion arrangements to consider if they are effective in dealing with individuals who organise or contribute to criminal or other prohibited misbehaviour both inside and outside of football stadia.

The public authorities in Czechia recognise that effective exclusion, targeted at offenders, can: deter criminal and prohibited activity; prevent re-offending; and transform behaviour; and can often be perceived by football supporters and the wider community as an appropriate and proportionate response to football related criminality, especially if the exclusion arrangements are open and transparent and involve a judicial or administrative process.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that whereas the criminal or administrative process is intended to penalise offenders, the principal aim of exclusion is to transform behaviour and rehabilitate the individuals concerned, in addition to deterring criminal and prohibited activity and preventing repeat offending.

Moreover, targeted exclusion is widely perceived by supporters as being preferable to collective (indiscriminate) punishments which impact on supporters irrespective of whether or not they have engaged in any criminal or prohibited behaviour, particularly if accompanied by good communication with supporters and incentives designed to promote and facilitate positive behaviour.

In essence, it could be of value for the key public and private authorities to consider whether a combination of effectively managed football stadia and an ethos of evidence-based targeted exclusion, would:

- enhance the football experience generally for all supporters;
- enable SLOs to undertake their varied tasks within a more positive supporter environment; and, in time,
- help to build an effective bridge between supporters, the police, and football clubs and/or the football authorities.

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ANNEX

| <b>ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS: Czechia</b>  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                               |                            |
|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Recommendation</b>                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                               |                            |
| <b>No</b>                                    | <b>Recommendation</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Accepted<br/>Yes or No</b> | <b>Action and Progress</b> |
| <b>Developing the SLO Concept in Czechia</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                               |                            |
| 1                                            | The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, in partnership with the Ministry of Interior, to consider if it should be a legal requirement for all professional football clubs competing in the Fortuna Liga to employ a dedicated SLO.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                               |                            |
| 2                                            | The LFA and FACR, in partnership with the national SLO coordinator, to use their offices to promote and publicise the important role which SLOs can play in helping to generate a positive spectator experience and help reduce football related criminality and misbehaviour, facilitating more effective dialogue between the clubs, police and supporters, and promoting wider community interest in participating in the football experience. |                               |                            |
| <b>Supporting the SLO Role and Network</b>   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                               |                            |
| 3                                            | In circumstances where an SLO is appointed by a professional football club whilst also engaged in other club duties, the SLO to be allocated at least 50% of his or her time to SLO functions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                               |                            |
| 4                                            | All professional football clubs in the Fortuna Liga to provide their SLO with a comprehensive job description setting out their core functions based on those set out in European guidance.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                               |                            |
| 5                                            | FACR to take full advantage of the SLO Education Programme available through the UEFA Academy by hosting an event in Czechia                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                               |                            |
| 6                                            | All professional football clubs in the Fortuna Liga, to provide their SLO with additional support personnel, on match days, either in a paid or voluntary capacity.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                               |                            |
| 7                                            | Professional football clubs in the Fortuna Liga to provide their SLO with a direct channel of communication with senior club management.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                               |                            |
| 8                                            | The LFA or FACR to employ the national SLO coordinator on full or part time basis given the importance, extent and demands of the role, rather than on a voluntary basis as at present.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                               |                            |
| 9                                            | The FACR to appoint and resource as necessary a national team SLO to undertake core SLO duties in respect of international matches.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                               |                            |

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| <b>Building Trust and Cooperation between SLOs and the Police</b>                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--|
| 10                                                                                   | The Ministry of Interior and the LFA to jointly initiate a meeting at a national level to bring together experienced SLOs and policing football decision makers to discuss how best to encourage and facilitate effective communication between the police and SLOs in each locality hosting professional football matches and to raise awareness of the mutual benefits for both sides.          |  |  |
| 11                                                                                   | The Ministry of Interior to encourage the police in all localities hosting professional football matches to proactively seek to engage with SLOs as a means for developing effective and trusted channels of communication.                                                                                                                                                                       |  |  |
| 12                                                                                   | The LFA and FACR to encourage all professional football clubs to facilitate, support, and encourage SLOs to seek to identify key contacts in the police with whom they can develop a discrete but meaningful dialogue in order to build trust and mutual understanding of their respective roles.                                                                                                 |  |  |
| 13                                                                                   | The Ministry of Interior and professional football clubs to engage with club SLOs in respect of operational planning and risk assessment processes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |  |  |
| <b>Facilitating the Work of SLOs with Supporters and the Wider Community</b>         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |  |
| 14                                                                                   | The LFA and Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, along with other governmental and public bodies and NGOs, to explore the potential for providing additional funding to enable SLOs to work with local public and community agencies/groups in developing or expanding a range of social and fan projects designed to enhance community life and influence the behaviour of young supporters. |  |  |
| 15                                                                                   | SLOs, professional football clubs and public and voluntary community groups to jointly consider the scope for supporting the empowerment of disabled supporters through facilitating their active participation in the football experience.                                                                                                                                                       |  |  |
| <b>Creating a Safe and Secure Environment in which SLOs can Function Effectively</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |  |
| 16                                                                                   | Ministry for Interior, Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, FACR and LFA to work together in reviewing the current arrangements for ensuring that all spectator areas in stadia are managed effectively at all professional football matches.                                                                                                                                                 |  |  |
| 17                                                                                   | In parallel, the Ministry of Interior, and police to review whether the current legislation is being uniformly implemented effectively, and in manner that will help transform behaviour and rehabilitate offenders.                                                                                                                                                                              |  |  |