



*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: Republic of Poland**

The intention of this Action Plan is to support the football and public authorities in the Republic of Poland through the suggested adoption of established good practices, customised to meet national needs and circumstances. The primary focus is on the desirability of 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 football matches held in Poland.

**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 of this Action Plan 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 explanations. It is also recognised that consideration of the recommended actions is the preserve of public and private entities in the Republic of Poland and that the suggestions within are intended solely to support discussion within and between the relevant agencies.

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

- (i) facilitating and supporting the delivery of SLO functions (as set out in the European Union Council Resolution Handbook on Police Liaison with Supporters<sup>1</sup>);
- (ii) facilitating the work of SLOs in the community; and
- (iii) creating a safe and secure environment in which SLOs can function effectively;

Each Recommendation is accompanied by a summary explanation of its intended purpose along with an indication of the entity or entities considered to be well placed to lead on consideration of the suggested action.

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<sup>1</sup> 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. Facilitating and supporting delivery of SLO functions**

**Recommendation One:** PZPN and professional football clubs in Poland to provide their SLO with additional personnel, either in a paid or voluntary capacity, who are adjudged to have the appropriate competences and communication skills, to assist the SLO undertake as effectively as possible their wide range of current and potential strategic and operational activities with supporters generally, organised groups, local communities and, importantly, the police.

**Explanation:** As discussed above, the LIAISE project highlighted that SLOs have an extensive and sometimes extremely demanding series of important functions to deliver which can only be effectively achieved if the SLO has access to a team of trained assistants (paid or voluntary) who possess the competence and character necessary to deliver their allotted tasks effectively.

The absence of support 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. The degree of difficulty can be compounded if the SLO is employed on a voluntary or part-time basis, or in a dual or multi-capacity by the club.

Moreover, the absence of an SLO support team can 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 working without support 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.

**Recommendation Two:** professional football clubs and PZPN to ensure that SLOs are provided with a comprehensive job description setting out the core functions based on those set out in European guidance.

**Recommendation Three:** PZPN to take full advantage of the SLO Education Programme available through the UEFA Academy by hosting an event in Poland.

**Explanation:** the SLO role is a potentially crucial one in helping to generate a positive experience at football matches and, in so doing, help to prevent and counter unacceptable supporter behaviour, through facilitating effective two-way communication between supporters, their club, police and other stakeholders. It is considered essential, therefore, for

every SLO to be provided with a job description which will not only provide clarity on what is expected of an SLO but also act as an aid in assessing performance. Applying to host a UEFA Academy SLO Education Programme event in Poland can add value to this process.

**Recommendation Four: professional football clubs and PZPN 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.**

**Explanation:** the role of SLOs as stressed in European guidance highlights that 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"* is a core SLO activity. This needs to be an ongoing process and not one limited to risk or conflict scenarios.

To undertake this key function 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.

It is important, however, for the police to recognise that SLOs can be placed in a difficult position, and their influence on some supporters undermined, if they are perceived to have a close relationship with the police. It is desirable, therefore, if any public contact between SLOs and the police to be discrete wherever possible.

In parallel, PZPN should ask the Ministry of Interior and Administration to encourage the police in districts hosting professional football matches to designate a police contact with whom SLOs can liaise on a regular basis.

**Recommendation Five: football clubs and the police to engage with SLOs in respect of operational planning and risk assessment processes.**

**Explanation:** Whilst some risk assessment and operational planning information is likely to 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 2. Facilitating the work of SLOs in the community.**

**Recommendation Six: the Ministry of Sport to liaise with PZPN about building upon impressive social/fan projects already underway in Warsaw and other districts, through the provision of increased funding to enable more SLOs to participate in developing or expanding a range of social and fan projects, designed to enhance community life and influence the behaviour of young supporters, in partnership with local public and community agencies/groups.**

**Explanation:** the LIAISE project highlighted some impressive local social/fan projects, involving football clubs and SLOs which appeared to be delivering successful results in demonstrating awareness of the importance of clubs and their SLOs 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 the negative publicity regarding football and football fans in Poland; and importantly; and
- helping to dispel the potential allure among young supporters for risk and/or some ultra groups who disproportionately appear to dominate the crowds at some Polish football stadia.

**Recommendation Seven: SLOs, football clubs and public and voluntary community groups to jointly consider the scope for building upon the excellent initiative in Wroclaw regarding the empowerment of disabled supporters through facilitating their active participation in the football experience.**

**Explanation:** the LIAISE project also highlighted a truly inspiring initiative in Wroclaw in which the SLO was playing a supportive role in the development of a pro-active and entrepreneurial initiative, led by and designed for disabled supporters, to facilitate attendance at matches and otherwise proactively participate in the football experience. The initiative provides a model which should be expanded across Poland and Europe generally. The initial aim should be for the Polish SLO network to promote the initiative ever more effectively and engage with specialist community groups and disability experts to determine how comparable projects can be encouraged and supported.

**Theme 3. Creating a safe and secure environment in which SLOs can function effectively**

**Recommendation Eight: Government (Ministry of Interior and Administration and Ministry of Sport, police, PZPN, and the professional football leagues to work together in reviewing the current arrangements for ensuring that all spectator areas in stadia (hosting professional football matches) are managed effectively and capable of providing a safe, secure and welcoming experience for all spectators.**

**Recommendation Nine: In parallel, the Ministry of Interior and Administration and police to review the effectiveness of the current exclusion options and arrangements in order to ensure that individuals who cause or contribute to criminal and prohibited activity are subject to effective exclusion from the football experience in a manner that will help transform behaviour and rehabilitate offenders.**

**Explanation:** to an external observer, there appears to be a need for a multi-agency review of the current stadium management arrangements, and the associated role of the police in supporting these arrangements, in order to:

- counter the negative publicity regarding football matches in Poland and Polish football supporters;
- generate an environment in which the football experience in Poland is safe, secure and welcoming for all current and potential spectators; and
- provide an operating climate in which SLOs can focus effectively on all their wide-ranging functions (see below).

Observations during LIAISE project visits suggested that there appears to be an absence of effective safety management in those areas of football stadia where ultra groups gather. Such areas are often perceived by supporter groups as belonging to them whereas legal responsibility and liability for the safety of spectators in all areas of a stadium, without exception, 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). Moreover, European experience suggests that unmanaged supporter areas can be a major contributory factor in prompting prohibited activity, such as use of pyrotechnics which can pose health and safety risks for other spectators and, in extremis, security risks if the devices are used in an overtly criminal way.

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

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. However, to be perceived by football supporters and the wider community as an appropriate and proportionate response to football related criminality, the exclusion process should be targeted, open and transparent, and involve a judicial or administrative process.

In reviewing the current exclusion options, consideration could also be given to providing incentives (such as early provisional removal of enforcement of the exclusion measure in exchange for continued positive behaviour) and/or participation in educational and social initiatives in the wider community.

The review should also recognise that 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.

**Recommendation Ten: Government to encourage the police, public authorities, football clubs, SLOs and others engaged football event planning and operations (inside and outside of stadia) to participate in the pre-match meetings held at Voivodship level and to recognise the benefits for all parties in adopting a fully integrated, multi-agency approach.**

**Explanation:** The pre-match voivodship-hosted safety and security meetings provide an ideal opportunity for all parties engaged in football safety and security planning and operations (inside and outside of stadia) to:

- facilitate the development of a partnership approach towards making football experience safe, secure and welcoming for all supporters;
- provide reassurance and closer links with resident and business communities located in the vicinity of the stadium and beyond;
- tackle any existing or emerging frictions or misunderstandings between the respective parties;
- empower and enhance the trust accorded to SLOs; and
- 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 and Administration and PZPN 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 SLOs and the police in each area hosting professional football matches and raise awareness of the mutual benefits for both sides.

**Explanation:** to obtain widespread awareness of, and trust in, the important role which SLOs can play in respect of professional football clubs and in helping to prevent and counter significant levels of criminality and prohibited behaviour by some supporters, it would seem prudent to first raise awareness and enhance recognition of the SLO concept and its potential value at a national level.

**Recommendation Twelve:** PZPN, in partnership with the national SLO coordinator and professional football leagues to use their offices to promote and publicise the important role which SLOs can play in helping to generate a positive experience at football matches through facilitating more effective dialogue between the police and supporters.

**Explanation:** LIAISE project activities in Poland appeared to suggest that some SLOs are perceived by some partner agencies to be no more than quasi representatives of risk and ultra groups and/or, in some cases, apologists for unacceptable manifestations of supporter behaviour. Such perceptions, if and where they exist, can severely limit the functions of some SLOs and seriously undermine their capacity to develop effective channels of communication with the police and other safety and security entities.

Irrespective of the validity of the above observation, it would be prudent to highlight the extensive range of challenging preventative activities which the European guidance highlights as being core SLO functions, namely:

- 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;

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- 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 (see Recommendation Six), or is employed on a voluntary or part-time basis, or in a dual or multi-capacity by the club. The degree of difficulty becomes almost impossible if there is an absence of trust among local agencies.

There appears to be a self-evident need to develop an enhanced level of trust among all parties and for influential and decision making national bodies to proactively explain and support the development of more productive relationships, not least by adopting an approach which highlights that communication and dialogue with supporters is itself an aid to reducing the scale of any unacceptable behaviour, both inside and outside of football stadia.

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**ANNEX**

| <b>ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS: REPUBLIC OF POLAND</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                               |                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Recommendation</b>                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                               |                            |
| <b>No</b>                                              | <b>Recommendation</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Accepted<br/>Yes or No</b> | <b>Action and Progress</b> |
| <b>Supporting the Delivery of SLO Functions</b>        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                               |                            |
| 1                                                      | PZPN and professional football clubs in Poland to provide their SLO with additional personnel, either in a paid or voluntary capacity, who are adjudged to have the appropriate competences and communication skills, to assist the SLO undertake as effectively as possible their wide range of current and potential strategic and operational activities with supporters generally, organised groups, local communities and, importantly, the police. |                               |                            |
| 2                                                      | Professional football clubs and PZPN to ensure that SLOs are provided with a comprehensive job description setting out the core functions based on those set out in European guidance.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                               |                            |
| 3                                                      | PZPN to take full advantage of the SLO Education Programme available through the UEFA Academy by hosting an event in Poland.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                               |                            |
| 4                                                      | Professional football clubs and PZPN 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.                                                                                                                                                                                 |                               |                            |
| 5                                                      | Football clubs and the police to engage with SLOs in respect of operational planning and risk assessment processes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                               |                            |
| <b>Facilitating the Work of SLOs in the Community</b>  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                               |                            |
| 6                                                      | The Ministry of Sport to liaise with PZPN about building upon impressive social/fan projects already underway in Warsaw and other districts, through the provision of increased funding to enable more SLOs to participate in developing or expanding a range of social and fan projects, designed to enhance community life and influence the behaviour of young supporters, in partnership with local public and community agencies/groups.            |                               |                            |
| 7                                                      | Football clubs and public and voluntary community groups to jointly consider the scope for building upon the excellent initiative in Wroclaw regarding the empowerment of disabled supporters through facilitating their active participation in the football experience.                                                                                                                                                                                |                               |                            |

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| <b>Creating a Safe and Secure Environment in which SLOs can Function Effectively</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |  |  |
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| 8                                                                                    | Government (Ministry of Interior and Administration and Ministry of Sport, police, PZPN, and the professional football leagues to work together in reviewing the current arrangements for ensuring that all spectator areas in stadia (hosting professional football matches) are managed effectively and capable of providing a safe, secure and welcoming experience for all spectators.        |  |  |
| 9                                                                                    | In parallel, the Ministry of Interior and Administration and police to review the effectiveness of the current exclusion options and arrangements in order to ensure that individuals who cause or contribute to criminal and prohibited activity are subject to effective exclusion from the football experience in a manner that will help transform behaviour and rehabilitate offenders.      |  |  |
| 10                                                                                   | Government to encourage the police, public authorities, football clubs, SLOs and others engaged football event planning and operations (inside and outside of stadia) to participate in the pre-match meetings held at Voivodship level, and to recognise the benefits for all parties in adopting a fully integrated, multi-agency approach.                                                     |  |  |
| 11                                                                                   | The Ministry of Interior and Administration and PZPN 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 SLOs and the police in each area hosting professional football matches and raise awareness of the mutual benefits for both sides. |  |  |
| 12                                                                                   | PZPN, in partnership with the national SLO coordinator and professional football leagues to use their offices to promote and publicise the important role which SLOs can play in helping to generate a positive experience at football matches through facilitating more effective dialogue between the police and supporters.                                                                    |  |  |
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