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forum for anti-doping  
in recreational sport

## European Commitment for Action to Anti-Doping for Recreational Sport



Forum for anti-doping in recreational sport project



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## Introduction

The use of prohibited, banned or illegal performance and/or image enhancing substances which are collectively known as ‘doping’ remains an important threat to all sport. In the context of this Commitment for Action the use of doping substances by athletes is recognised in posing possible serious health hazards that require preventive action. The need for the European recreational sport sector to establish a socially responsible position to promote doping-free environments is clear.

For the purposes of this Commitment the following definition has been used:

Recreational sport is defined as sport, exercise and physical activity which takes place in low-level competitive or non-competitive environments and engages participants/individuals at sport events, fitness centres, sport and leisure clubs, and outdoor-based activities.

This European Commitment for Action in Anti-doping is based on the principle that recreational sport is an opportunity for people to come together to play, compete, have fun, and be socially connected. For millions of people of all ages across Europe playing sport is a significant and meaningful activity that brings joy and helps to enhance healthy levels of physical activity. While recreational sport is of value in itself, it can also improve the physical and mental health of participants. As such, using doping is considered inconsistent with the very idea of recreational sport.

This Commitment is not prescriptive – it is intended as a voluntary commitment for the recreational sport sector to abide by the recommendations and principles stated here. This Commitment (building on the previous FAIR Code of Conduct) for anti-doping in recreational sport, aims to promote a standardised approach across Europe in the fight against doping and the sharing of knowledge that doping practices in recreational sporting environments:

- *Can be harmful to the integrity and perception of recreational sport;*
- *Can be linked to criminal activities such as drug trafficking*
- *Can affect young and other vulnerable people; and*
- *Can threaten the health of individuals who use doping substances.*

By focusing on these four main themes the Commitment to action is intended for sport federations, clubs, associations, sporting and fitness facilities, individual coaches, trainers, volunteers, and instructors and for policymakers across Europe to further develop:

1. *Education to combat and reject doping;*
2. *Food and supplements for sportspeople; and*
3. *Cooperation in anti-doping actions.*

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## 1. Education to combat and reject doping

The use of doping substances for performance enhancement in recreational sport is a unique and newly emerging field of research. Recreational sport is multi-faceted in terms of its populations, its activities, its organisational structure, as well as the objectives and motivations of recreational athletes.

Responding to doping in recreational sport cannot be based exclusively on the detection-and-sanctioning approach that is used in the fight against doping in elite sport. Instead, recreational sport needs appropriately tailored approaches that account for the specific as well as the generic motivations and objectives behind the use of doping substances in recreational sport. It also requires a nuanced understanding of sport-socio-economic conditions (gender, age, experience with sport, level of performance, cultural background, etc.), which are more influential in recreational rather than in elite sport.

Future education for sport coaches, trainers, volunteers, and instructors, together with managers and the athletes themselves should be in balance with enforcements, controls, sanctions or even criminalisation if there is to be a realistic reduction of doping and doping-related practices. Everyone across the ecosphere of recreational sport needs to understand that effective participation in sport does not require the use of banned or prohibited performance-enhancing substances. Education programmes and/or information campaigns on the health consequences of doping will help to establish a better long-term awareness to bring about a change of behaviour.

Managers and administrators of facilities used by recreational athletes should promote a clear anti-doping condition in the contracts or terms and conditions for the use of their facilities which explicitly prohibits the use of any banned, performance or image enhancing substances.

Stakeholders in recreational sport should commit to work with European Agencies and other bodies in anti-doping networks to provide clear information to educate athletes on the harmful effects of taking doping substances including those in supplements and food intended for sportspeople.

Research indicates that while the prevalence for doping use is relatively low, and use varies between sports/activities, many recreational athletes use over-the-counter medications for their performance enhancement. From a public health perspective, it is therefore important that anti-doping education not only focuses on substances found on the list of prohibited drugs, but to also emphasise and educate athletes in the potential risks involved in the non-medical use of legal drugs in sport.

The similarities and differences to anti-doping education in elite sport can be identified and constructively used when developing education for future doping-free recreational sport.

Educational programmes must, therefore, account for this unique diversity if they are to be successful. It will be necessary to support further research programmes that aim to understand the heterogeneity in the rationales behind drug use for performance enhancement in recreational sport. Stakeholders should collaborate with relevant institutions to implement evaluation methods to capture the short-term and long-term effects of education programmes and other prevention efforts.

## 2. Food and supplements intended for sportspeople

The recreational sport sector needs to continue to collaborate with all stakeholders in relation to developing a European framework for the testing and labelling of food and food supplements intended for use by sportspeople. The shared objective of the recreational sport and supplement industry should be to protect the safety of sportspeople and ensure, as far as possible, that these products are free from doping substances and that recommended use is governed by appropriate evidence. Ongoing knowledge-sharing between commercial stakeholders, food standards bodies and anti-doping agencies is key.

## 3. Cooperation in anti-doping actions

At the national level, sporting federations, associations, and stakeholders are encouraged to cooperate with their national anti-doping organisations, Government departments, their agencies, and NGOs to coordinate actions in the prevention of doping in recreational sport.

At the European level, stakeholders with an interest in reducing the prevalence of doping in recreational sport should coordinate actions with the European Institutions to develop appropriate methodologies and evidence-based actions.

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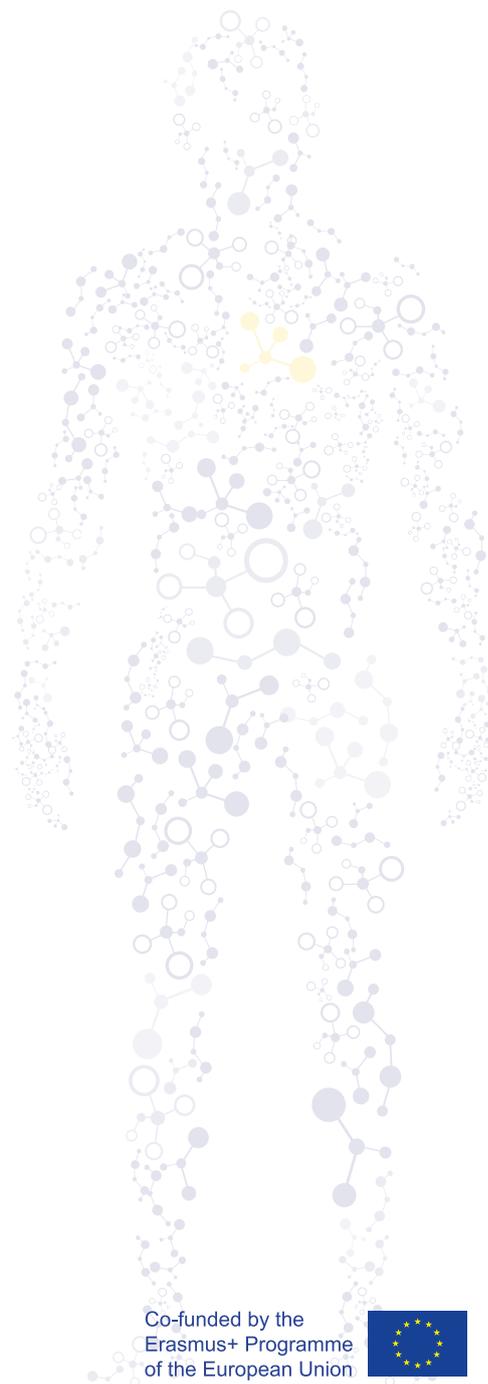
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