



*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: FRANCE**

The purpose of this Action Plan is to support the football and public authorities in the French Republic 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 the French Republic.

**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 France 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 16 recommendations are presented under 3 inter-related thematic headings:

- (i) 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) building trust and cooperation between SLOs and the police;
- (iii) facilitating the work of SLOs in the community; and

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

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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. Supporting the Delivery of SLO Functions**

**Recommendation One: The Ligue de Football Professionnel (LFP) and partner agencies to consider options for raising awareness of the role and value of SLOs in respect of LFP clubs who have yet to fully embrace the SLO concept.**

**Explanation:** LIAISE project visits to the French Republic highlighted the immense progress that has been achieved since it became a legal obligation for every professional football club in France to have a designated SLO. Observation of match operations revealed that the SLOs appeared to be fully integrated within the organisation of their club and accepted by supporters as a trusted contact and liaison point. The SLOs also confirmed that their relationship with the police was positive and productive, and that whilst direct public contact with the police was discrete, information channels and responsibilities were clear, and a high degree of mutual trust had been established.

The LFP national SLO coordinator (*Supporterism Project Manager*) has the benefit of a strong nucleus of clubs who understand the SLO concept and support their respective SLOs. This has greatly assisted the development and training of the French SLO network, not least in the sharing of experience and good practices, whilst the SLO peer group support process is also developing apace.

Whilst the French fan associations continue to have a range of grievances, notably in respect of supporter group travel bans imposed by either Prefectural decree or by the Minister of Interior, the good relationships between the LFP, clubs and police assists the parties to identify and tackle the various challenges in a generally effective manner. Supporter and wider public awareness of the SLO role is high by European standards largely because the positive relationship between the LFP, public authorities and the police facilitates promotion and explanation of the SLO role via various media channels.

Notwithstanding this high level of success in a short period of time, there remain significant challenges to overcome. Discussions during the LIAISE visits highlighted that some clubs, primarily but not exclusively in Ligue 2, have yet to be convinced that the employment of an SLO is necessary, often because they have a small fan base and consider that their existing approach to supporter liaison is working well without an SLO. This is often accompanied by a tendency to appoint a notional SLO from among their existing staff and be reluctant to resource them sufficiently to undertake all the core SLO duties as set out in European guidance.

**Recommendation Two: 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. This recommendation applies for football clubs which number of fans gathered in associations require a lot of worktime by the SLO.**

**Recommendation Three:** If not already in place, all professional football clubs to provide their SLO with a comprehensive job description setting out their core functions based on those set out in European guidance or in other European or French football clubs. A job description gathering all good practices must be updated in the next edition of LFP's Guide de l'Accueil du Public dans les stades.

**Recommendation Four:** Professional football clubs to provide their SLO with additional support personnel, either in a paid or voluntary capacity, especially on matchdays (home and away), if needed by the SLO. This can lead to the creation of a matchday SLO team.

**Recommendation Five:** Professional football clubs to consider how best to identify and recruit SLOs and support team members (depending upon the circumstances). The SLOs and support team members may have a great knowledge of fan culture and be legitimate in the eye of the football club and fan groups, and thus have a better understanding of the stakes and importance of the SLO role.

**Recommendation Six:** Professional football clubs to ensure that their SLO or SLO team members (depending upon the circumstances) travel with supporters to away fixtures, except in duly justified circumstances. This must be specified in the SLO job description.

**Recommendation Seven:** Professional football clubs to highlight in SLO job descriptions and annual objectives that their core role is to liaise with supporters, and act on behalf of the football club, for all supporters, not just organised ultra groups.

**Recommendation Eight:** Professional football clubs to provide their SLO with a direct channel of communication and efficient link with senior club management, especially when dealing with supporterism issues.

**Recommendation Nine:** Professional football clubs to make full use of modern communication methods like social media, to communicate with their fans. Thereupon, it is highly recommended to clubs to create a Twitter account 'SLO+ club name', as well as a generic email address on club's website ('slo@fcxxx.com').

**Recommendation Ten:** The French Football Association (FFF) to take full advantage of the SLO Education Programme available through the UEFA Academy by hosting an event in France. The training of four days may be divided in two sessions of two days.

**Recommendation Eleven:** the FFF to appoint and resource a national team SLO to undertake core SLO duties in connection with international matches played at home and abroad.

**Explanation:** the above recommendations are intended as an aid to further developing an advanced and relatively sophisticated SLO network (by European standards) in France through providing SLOs with the status, resources, guidance and support 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 local police trainings;
- 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. 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.

For many SLOs, the absence of sufficient 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, this can restrict the potential for SLOs to engage with other supporters of their club. 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 2. Building Trust and Cooperation between SLOs and the Police.**

**Recommendation Twelve: As shown by the Nivel project, the Ministry of Interior and LFP to jointly consider at national level how best to encourage and intensify 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:** At a national level and in some cities hosting Ligue One matches, relations between the SLO network and the police appear to be positive and involve effective dialogue and information exchange. Inevitably, however, this is not yet the case in all cities hosting professional football matches. The aim of the recommendations, therefore, is to prompt further consideration at a national level of how the local police and SLOs can enhance their cooperation and levels of mutual trust, with the ultimate aim being the development of a partnership approach towards generating a positive atmosphere at all matches and tackling any existing or emerging frictions or misunderstandings between the respective parties.

**Recommendation Thirteen: As shown by the Nivel project and the circular produced by the Ministry of Interior, 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 Fourteen: Professional football clubs and police to rely on club SLOs in respect of operational planning and risk assessment processes.**

**Explanation:** these recommendations are intended to supplement the above-mentioned national initiative. The reality is that to effectively deliver their core functions requires all SLOs 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 French Football League should ask the Ministry of Interior to encourage the police in localities hosting professional football matches to designate a police contact with whom SLOs can liaise on a regular basis, notably in pre-match planning and risk assessment meetings. 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.

The recommended approach is consistent with the Nivel Foundation Project which aims to implement a policy of a police liaison officers working alongside SLOs in the preparations for away matches and otherwise.

**Theme 3      Facilitating the Work of SLOs in the Community.**

**Recommendation Fifteen:** Public bodies and NGOs, to explore the potential for providing 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 positively the behaviour of young supporters.

**Recommendation Sixteen:** SLOs, 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 LIAISE visits, LFP reported that DNLH (*Division Nationale de Lutte contre le Hooliganism*) was working in partnership with LFP, FFF, ANS and other partners in several community programs and projects. This is an excellent development, but more can and should be done to in respect of local social/fan projects, involving football clubs, SLOs and partner agencies 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;
- help dispel the potential allure among young supporters for participating in criminal and/or other prohibited behaviour;
- promote the role of SLOs in communities hosting professional football matches; and, importantly in the case of recommendation ten,
- demonstrate that football supporters may pose challenges but can also provide solutions to football related problems.

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**ANNEX**

<b>ACTION PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS: THE FRENCH REPUBLIC</b>			
<b>Recommendation</b>			
<b>No</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Accepted Yes or No</b>	<b>Action and Progress</b>
<b>Supporting the Delivery of SLO Functions</b>			
1	The Ligue de Football Professionnel (LFP) and partner agencies to consider options for raising awareness of the role and value of SLOs in respect of LFP clubs who have yet to fully embrace the SLO concept.	<b>Yes</b>	
2	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. This recommendation applies for football clubs which number of fans gathered in associations require a lot of worktime by the SLO.	<b>Yes</b>	
3	If not already in place, all professional football clubs to provide their SLO with a comprehensive job description setting out their core functions based on those set out in European guidance or in other European or French football clubs. A job description gathering all good practices must be updated in the next edition of LFP's Guide de l'Accueil du Public dans les stades.	<b>Yes</b>	
4	Professional football clubs to provide their SLO with additional support personnel, either in a paid or voluntary capacity, especially on matchdays (home and away), if needed by the SLO. This can lead to the creation of a matchday SLO team.	<b>Yes</b>	
5	Professional football clubs to consider how best to identify and recruit SLOs and support team members (depending upon the circumstances). The SLOs and support team members may have a great knowledge of fan culture and be legitimate in the eye of the football club and fan groups, and thus have a better understanding of the stakes and importance of the role.	<b>Yes</b>	
6	Professional football clubs to ensure that their SLO or SLO team members (depending upon the circumstances) travel with supporters to away fixtures, except in duly justified circumstances. This must be specified in the SLO job description.	<b>Yes</b>	
7	Professional football clubs to highlight in SLO job descriptions and annual objectives that their core role is to liaise with supporters, and act on behalf of the football club, for all supporters, not just organised ultra groups.	<b>Yes</b>	

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8	Professional football clubs to provide their SLO with a direct channel of communication and efficient link with senior club management, especially when dealing with supporterism issues.	Yes	
9	Professional football clubs to make full use of modern communication methods like social media, to communicate with their fans. Thereupon, it is highly recommended to clubs to create a Twitter account 'SLO+ club name', as well a generic email address on club's website ('slo@fcxxx.com').	Yes	
10	The French Football Association (FFF) to take full advantage of the SLO Education Programme available through the UEFA Academy by hosting an event in France. The training of four days may be divided in two sessions of two days.	Yes	
11	The FFF to appoint and resource a national team SLO to undertake core SLO duties in connection with international matches played at home and abroad.	Yes	
<b>Building Trust and Cooperation between SLOs and the Police.</b>			
12	As shown by the Nivel project, the Ministry of Interior and LFP to jointly consider at national level how best to encourage and intensify 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.	Yes	
13	As shown by the Nivel project and the circular produced by the Ministry of Interior, 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.	Yes	
14	Professional football clubs and police to rely on club SLOs in respect of operational planning and risk assessment processes.	Yes	
<b>Facilitating the Work of SLOs in the Community.</b>			
15	Public bodies and NGOs, to explore the potential for providing 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 positively the behaviour of young supporters.	Yes	
16	SLOs, 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.	Yes	