



UEFA PRACTICAL GUIDE TO SUPPORTER LIAISON

Editor: Tony Ernst/SD Europe
Photo credits: Jaroslav Appeltauer, Bildbyrå, Nicholas Carlie, Victor Dahling, Stuart Dykes, ESSMA, Tony Ernst, French Football League, Getty Images, Lena Gustafson Wiberg, Antonia Hagemann, Graeme Hart/Perthshire Picture Agency, Carsten Heidmann, Robert Hendel, Simon Larsson, Portuguese Football Federation, Professional Football League, Christofer Nordström, Andy Svensson, Michel Tonneau

Foreword	5
Executive summary by SD Europe	6
1. The role and purpose of an SLO	8
2. The SLO's position within a club	22
3. A week in the life of an SLO	26
4. Impact for club management	30
5. Impact for supporters	34
6. Impact for safety and security officers	40
7. Impact for the police	44
8. Case studies	50
Case study 1 – Improving the fan experience	50
Case study 2 – Supporting diversity and inclusion	53
Case study 3 – Communicating with fans	56
Case study 4 – Deploying SLO resources effectively	59
Case study 5 – Combining the SLO role with other functions	62
Case study 6 – Applying the SLO role in smaller countries	66
9. Impact for governing bodies	70
10. National team SLOs	74
11. The SLO education programme at the UEFA Academy	78
12. The role of the SLO coordinator	82
13. The European SLO network	88
14. European supporter organisations and NGOs	90
15. Legislation, regulations and recommendations on the SLO role	92



Foreword



The foreword to the UEFA Supporter Liaison Officer Handbook published in 2011 began with the words, "Supporters are the lifeblood at the very heart of professional

football," a sentiment that has perhaps never been more relevant. Recent events have underlined the predominant and central role played by fans and the importance of ensuring their voices are heard, which is why we are looking at better ways to involve fans at UEFA.

In recognition of the need to build and maintain constructive and fruitful relationships between clubs, governing bodies and fans, teams competing in UEFA competitions have been required to appoint supporter liaison officers (SLOs) under Article 35 of our Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations since the start of the 2012/13 season. SLOs provide an important link to supporters at club and, increasingly, national team level. They create the platforms for dialogue and communication between stakeholders, which helps to build trust.

Another way UEFA has demonstrated its commitment to developing the SLO role has been by co-funding SD Europe's Erasmus+ projects LIAISE and TRANSFER, which continue to bring together national associations, leagues, clubs and supporter organisations, as well as non-football stakeholders such as the Council of Europe

and the European Group of Safety and Security Experts. Projects such as these help to make football better, not only by promoting dialogue and communication between the various actors in football right across Europe, but also by strengthening the cooperation between SLOs and safety and security officers at the operational level.

We still have work to do to ensure the SLO function becomes fully established, but we are determined to do all we can to develop and professionalise it. With this in mind, I'm delighted that UEFA and SD Europe were able to launch an SLO education programme, which has been offered through the UEFA Academy since early 2020 and has met with an excellent response from national associations and the SLOs who have already taken part. This training is vital, as it can help to raise standards, enhance cooperation, improve matchday operations and break down mistrust and prejudices among the various stakeholders.

This practical guide to supporter liaison is another contribution we are making to improve knowledge of the SLO role and disseminate best practice for the good of the game. I hope you will find it useful and wish you a pleasant read!

Aleksander Čeferin
UEFA President

Executive summary by SD Europe



Welcome to the UEFA Practical Guide to Supporter Liaison! It has been a long time coming, but we hope it has been worth the wait. So much has happened since the UEFA

SLO handbook was published in 2011. Back then, the SLO role was still very new in most European countries. Some ten years on, thanks to the adoption of Article 35 of the UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations and its replication in the domestic regulations of many national associations and leagues, we have upwards of 1,000 SLOs working in European football.

It is unclear where the SLO role originated, though the German Bundesliga club Borussia Mönchengladbach can likely lay claim to this legacy with the appointment of Theo Weiss in 1989. Initially, few clubs followed the lead taken by the club's president, Helmut Grashof, in deploying an SLO to engage with fans, which meant the role remained largely unknown for several years. Soon, however, the public and football authorities, faced with the growing problem of violence in and around football grounds, began to embrace the dialogue-based approach to dealing with supporters.

The profile of the SLO rose to such an extent after the turn of the century that full-time SLOs became a mandatory requirement in the German Football League's licensing regulations in 2010.

In the same year, the UEFA Executive Committee, on the recommendation of the fan organisation SD Europe, voted to make the SLO role a mandatory requirement for clubs in UEFA competitions from the start of the 2012/13 season onwards. Simultaneously, UEFA engaged SD Europe to help national associations implement the new rule.

According to Lars-Christer Olsson, the former UEFA chief executive and chairman of the Swedish Football League, the adoption of the SLO requirement in the UEFA club licensing regulations was a landmark development:

"The SLO initiative was an important UEFA decision. It gave the federations, leagues and clubs an opportunity to enhance communications between fans and the football bodies via a link that could act in a less formal way and reduce the traditional friction between the decision-makers and the fans. The SLO position is probably one of the most difficult ones in a club and the pressure on the individuals concerned is sometimes extremely high. They have shown that it works, and Swedish professional club football has gained a lot of respect from society and institutions for the work we are doing together."

Another landmark development for supporter liaison was the adoption of the Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events in 2016. There can be

no doubt that the convention and the accompanying recommendations for its implementation have placed the SLO role at the centre of discussions into safety, security and service in sport.

With this in mind, the time was ripe for a follow-up to the SLO handbook. Given the newness of the role, the handbook was primarily a theoretical document that aimed to provide a framework for national associations, leagues and clubs, to help them understand and develop the function. Ten years later, SLOs are an integral part of the football family, though much work remains to be done, of course. From our discussions with the many different stakeholders who come into contact with the function, it became clear that a practical guide was required to complement the theoretical nature of the handbook. This guide seeks to build on the handbook, which very much remains the go-to publication for SLO theory and guidance, by documenting the views and experiences of governing bodies, clubs, fan organisations, supporters and other interested parties such as the police, the Council of Europe and the European Group of Football Safety and Security Experts, through a series of interviews conducted with key players. Six case studies offer additional in-depth insights into the diverse topics covered.

This guide also serves as a reference document for SLOs taking part in the SLO education programme offered through the UEFA Academy. This four-day

training course, which was developed in conjunction with SD Europe, can rightfully be described as the third landmark development in the short history of the SLO function. We urge all 55 UEFA member associations to consider signing up to this programme to help drive forward the professionalisation and raising of standards in the field, a goal to which SD Europe remains passionately committed.

All that is left for us to say is that we hope you enjoy reading this guide and will be able to draw inspiration from it, whether you are an SLO yourself, a stakeholder who works with SLOs, a supporter, or simply someone interested in learning more about this truly fascinating role.

Stuart Dykes
Head of SLO Development

The role and purpose of an SLO

“As an SLO you’re a mediator, you’re a translator, and you work in prevention.”

Lena Gustafson Wiberg, lead SLO at Djurgårdens IF and head of SLO training at SD Europe

Working as a supporter liaison officer in the football environment is like no other job. The demands placed on SLOs are extremely high. As service providers, mediators, conflict managers and communicators, they have to understand the needs and wants of the different stakeholders, such as the club board and staff, the fans, the police, stewards and transport companies. It is therefore important that SLOs have the

trust, confidence and acceptance of these stakeholders. They should also possess a thorough insight into the various supporter and spectator groups and their concerns. Despite needing to maintain close links with the target audience, SLOs should also keep a certain distance to maintain their integrity and avoid the risk of becoming too emotionally involved.

The skill set required by an SLO is thus very varied. Social skills, such as the ability to interact with people from all sections of society, are essential. Mediating between stakeholders can be an arduous task, making this a position for a born diplomat. Having a workplace that alternates between the office and the stadium requires flexibility, resilience and good organisational and time-management

skills. SLOs also need to understand and master the various communication channels, in particular social media. Away from matchdays, they have to develop and manage long-term strategic plans and projects in areas such as anti-discrimination and social responsibility, as well as organise events aimed at and involving supporters, such as Q&A sessions with players and club staff, exhibitions and information evenings.

Given the complexity of the task, it is vital that national associations and leagues do everything in their power to raise the level of professionalisation of club staff working in the SLO field and develop ways to ensure they are fully integrated into the activities of other club departments, in particular matchday operations, communications and safety and security, but also marketing, merchandising and ticketing. The SLOs should be the first point of contact in all matters relating to supporters. They are employed, or at least appointed, by the club and should be included in its organisation chart with unambiguous lines of reporting and responsibility.

Clubs also need to provide their SLOs with all the support they need to perform their often delicate role as mediators and relationship-builders between the various stakeholders. This also means striving not to put them in the awkward position of having to communicate management decisions that will be seen as controversial by supporters. Integrating SLOs into decision-making processes to ensure the views of fans are considered appropriately

will not only prevent such situations arising but may also improve the quality of the decisions eventually taken.

Clubs should provide their SLOs with the resources, tools and equipment they need to do their job. This will include a dedicated office or, in the case of part-time or volunteer staff, temporary workspaces with the requisite equipment, such as a mobile phone and access to a vehicle. In ideal cases, SLOs will have their own budget to manage and be able to take full advantage of the club facilities for the staging of events or to help supporters to prepare matchday activities, for example.

The first impression stakeholders have when they read or hear about the work of SLOs is often linked to security. All too often, we hear “SLOs are there to stop violence”. And sometimes those of us who work in the field are guilty of making the same mistake. SLOs do work with the club’s safety and security team and the police in the area of violence prevention, of course, but this is far from being their only role. In essence, SLOs are service providers, and their function is interdepartmental, meaning that they should have the freedom to interact with every section of the club to ensure the matchday experience is as enjoyable as possible for all involved, whether they are attending the game as a spectator or working as a police officer or a medic.

As mentioned in the executive summary, the SLO role first emerged in Germany



SLOs at work in their natural habitat

Lena Gustafson Wiberg, here seen working as SLO for the Swedish national team during Euro 2020

in 1989. By the time the UEFA Executive Committee adopted the SLO licensing requirement in 2010, the function had spread to only a few countries, chiefly Austria and Switzerland, with sporadic appearances in various guises in Belgium, England and the Netherlands. Understanding that it would be impossible to simply transport the German model to the rest of Europe, UEFA decided to lay down some basic principles to guide the development of the SLO function in each national context, with due regard for the local fan culture, structures and traditions.

In 2011, a working group comprising representatives of UEFA, governing bodies, clubs and supporter organisations agreed the following standard definition of the SLO role:

- Supporter liaison officers (SLOs) are a bridge between the fans and the club and help to improve the dialogue between the two sides.
- Their work is dependent on the information they receive from both sides and the credibility they enjoy with all parties.
- The SLO informs fans about relevant decisions made by the club management and, in the other direction, communicates the points of view of fans to the club management.
- The SLO builds relationships not just with various fan groups and initiatives but also with the police and security officers.

- The SLO engages with SLOs of other clubs before matches to contribute to supporters behaving in accordance with security guidelines.

In the SLO handbook, UEFA set out minimum requirements for SLOs:

- The SLO must be available as the main point of contact at the club for supporters.
- The SLO manages the information flow/communications/dialogue between the fans and the club.
- The SLO liaises and builds relationships with the various supporter groups, other liaison officers, the football association, league, police, etc.
- The SLO must be credible with fans and therefore should have experience and contact with the networks in the club's fan base.
- The SLO gathers feedback, and monitors and evaluates the project.

In the area of violence prevention, [EU Council Resolution 12792/16 on police liaison with supporters](#) provides further guidance and lists the following SLO tasks:

- 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 matchday 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.

KEY POINTS

1. The SLO role is chiefly about creating platforms for dialogue between the different stakeholders and quality-assuring that dialogue.
2. It is vital that SLOs are provided with the tools and resources to do their job and, given the interdepartmental nature of the role, consulted in all matters regarding fans.
3. Maintaining the trust of all stakeholders is an essential part of the SLO job.
4. Professional training is indispensable to equip SLOs with the skills needed to perform this demanding task.
5. Used properly, SLOs will not only improve relations between fans and the other stakeholders, but also improve decision-making, enhance matchday operations and save time and money.

Interview with Lena Gustafson Wiberg, lead SLO at Djurgårdens IF and head of SLO training at SD Europe

The *SLO handbook* gives a full description of the SLO role, which remains essential reading. In keeping with the practical nature of this guide, we do not intend to expand on the theory behind the function here. Instead, we wish to illuminate some of the main aspects of supporter liaison through conversation with an experienced practitioner. For this insight, we spoke

to Lena Gustafson Wiberg, lead SLO at Swedish top-division club and 2019 Allsvenskan champions, Djurgårdens IF. Lena is the most experienced SLO in Sweden, having worked in the role since it was introduced in 2012. She is also the head of SLO training at SD Europe, where she devised and developed the [SLO education programme](#) launched by the UEFA Academy in February 2020 (see The SLO Education Programme at the UEFA Academy from page 78).



Lena at work as the Swedish national team SLO, seen here with Adrian Dinca of the Romanian police

Lena, perhaps the most difficult question of all is, “What does an SLO do exactly?” Asked to sum up his role in just three words, one German SLO said: “Talking, talking, talking”. How would you describe what you do to someone who is unfamiliar with the function?

First, while I would agree that we do a lot of talking, the SLO role also involves a lot of listening. The main thing we do is to quality-assure the dialogue between the different stakeholders in football, primarily between the supporters and the club and between the supporters and the authorities. On top of that, we also create platforms for that dialogue to take place.

People may be familiar with the term ‘quality assurance’ from industry, meaning ensuring a product meets certain quality requirements, but what does it mean in terms of dialogue?

For me, it means listening carefully and making sure people understand each other. In this environment, there are a lot of preconceptions and prejudices between stakeholders, in all directions. This raises the question of what language skills a successful SLO needs. Obviously, English is helpful if you’re going to work in a European competition, but you also need to be able to understand the different stakeholder ‘languages’, those spoken by supporters, clubs, the police, local authorities, stadiums and so on. Once you master that, you can perform proper quality assurance on the dialogue. Many

of the issues we face and incidents that occur are the result of misunderstandings or prejudices.

When you go abroad, you’re also presumably a cultural translator, given that fan culture differs from country to country?

Exactly, you’re a cultural translator working in the field of diplomacy. I was once in a car with an FA representative on the way to the airport, and after listening to what I had to say about the SLO role, he said something very interesting: “In a perfect world, then, the United Nations will be built by SLOs in 20 to 30 years’ time.” OK, you might laugh, but as an SLO you’re a mediator, you’re a translator, and you work in prevention. It may be an exaggeration, but it does make sense if you put it like that.

We also hear the word ‘bridge’ being used to describe the role of an SLO. What does that mean in practice?

In practice, I tend to use the word ‘messenger’ rather than ‘bridge’. When I took the SLO job in 2012, I pretty much gave up the right to my own opinion, something which is often misunderstood by various stakeholders. As an SLO, I usually convey someone else’s opinion rather than my own, and it’s important for my colleagues and the stakeholders I work with to understand the difference. It’s down to me to explain it, of course, but it also requires them to put in some effort to understand the SLO function because it has so many layers and is rather

complex. Essentially, what we try to do is transfer messages between the different stakeholders in a way they can understand.

How important is trust in all this?

Trust is essential because if you don't have the trust of the supporters, the club, or the other stakeholders, there's no way you can do your job. When you receive information, you often have to weigh up what you need to keep to yourself (to help you understand the situation) and what needs to be conveyed to somebody else. So, the most important thing for me in this job is not breaking anyone's trust.

You talked about your role as a communicator of messages, but does it really work in practice? Some fans are sceptical about their views being heard when carried back to the club board by the SLO.

It depends on how established the SLO role is and how well the SLOs operate. In some places, it works very well, while in others, it doesn't work at all. So, that's why we're trying to help with the implementation of the role. When the role is implemented correctly, SLOs will be involved early on in decision-making processes and will be able to offer advice about which other stakeholders to involve in the discussion, depending on the situation.

You talked about relationship-building – how effective is it when dealing with the police, for example?

Again, this will depend on the context. In

general, I think we tend to be met with quite a bit of scepticism at first, because we are seen merely as fans and not as employees of our clubs, but once you manage to build a working relationship with the police that's based on mutual respect, it can be remarkably effective.

Turning to your counterparts at other clubs, how important is the cooperation with them? In some countries, clubs are still saying that they already have staff working in this area and so they don't need SLOs. How does it affect your preparations for a game and your work in general if the club you're dealing with doesn't have an SLO?

There may well be people at a club doing the things an SLO does. The work is probably divided between several people, however, and rather than being their core task, it's simply an 'add-on'. By implementing the SLO role, you create a single point of contact for all of these things, which means SLOs can be the interface with the club. Some of the questions that come in can be dealt with straight away by the SLO, while others might need to be passed on to someone else within the club. But the SLO will know which person to forward the question or the task to, which means it won't get passed around, and in that sense SLOs save time and money. On the other hand, if there are no SLOs at the other club, then I, as an SLO, will probably have to interact with at least three people in order to obtain the information I need to

prepare for the match. The contact I have with my counterparts at other clubs is therefore extremely important. It definitely saves time. It's also important on non-matchdays that I have a point of contact who understands the role and in whom I feel a level of trust, so I can discuss issues and situations with them and get their feedback.

We know you're a remarkably busy person and wear lots of different hats. In your role as head of SLO training at SD Europe, you were the driving force behind the SLO education programme launched by the UEFA Academy in early 2020. Why is training so important to you?

I always say the SLO has one of the loneliest roles in football. There's always someone upset with you for some reason. Your club colleagues expect you to be available at all times during normal office hours, just like everyone else, but you're also in demand from supporters, whose activities normally take place during the evening, at night and at the weekend. So, you need to have the proper tools at your disposal to manage your time and stress levels to ensure your communication skills and all the other attributes you need in this field are up to scratch.

SLOs also need to have a good understanding of who they are themselves as people: what are your strengths, what are your weaknesses and how can this be applied to your role as an SLO? So, training,

as is the case in any job, is essential. Having the opportunity to attend training with your fellow SLOs from other clubs is important because it gives everyone the same foundation from which to work. You also see that there are other people in the same boat as you who you can share experiences with and learn from. I often say within the SLO group that there's never a new problem: someone has already been there or done that before you. Training also helps to build trust, so you can share insights with each other and improve your working relationships.

In your presentations for the UEFA Academy, you say that one of your main tasks is to provide all stakeholders with an 'up-to-date analysis' of the situation. What do you mean by that exactly?

For me, an up-to-date analysis often means I'm able to paint a picture of the current mood within the fan base, of what's hot and what's not. In this business, we often say we don't like surprises – except when we win a game we weren't expecting to win! Supporters don't like surprises from the club or from the police on matchday, the police don't like surprises from the supporters, and so on. Whatever we can do in the planning of the logistics to help eliminate the element of surprise will help to create a better understanding, and if we can provide the up-to-date analysis we've been talking about, we can also ensure that people have the right expectations. There might be a reason why the mood in the fan base is mellow, for example, but if we



SD Europe's SLO team: Tony Ernst, Lena Gustafson Wiberg and Stuart Dykes

don't inform people accordingly, it could be misinterpreted and taken for something else, especially by the authorities.

In view of all the information being exchanged, many fans across Europe think SLOs are simply security officers in disguise. Isn't that the case?

No, it definitely isn't the case. Obviously, there are clubs where, for financial reasons, the SLO role is taken on by existing staff with other duties, but in my opinion the one role you can't combine with the SLO

function is that of the security officer. When you work in security, you often have to employ repression or enforcement measures, but SLOs work in the area of prevention. We work to reduce undesirable behaviour with dialogue, not bans. As an SLO, you obviously have to have a good working relationship with the security officer. You also have to make sure the security officer fully understands your role, so they know what to expect from you. And you have to make sure the fans understand that you're not there as a runner for the security officer. You're there

for the club and for the supporters, not to perform security tasks.

Prevention is another buzzword. It's important for people to understand what you mean by that because different people understand different things. On the security side, prevention might also involve arresting people or imposing stadium bans, but when you talk about prevention on the supporter liaison side, you mean something different, don't you?

For me, prevention is about making enough information available to supporters as possible, especially on matchdays. The more they know, the more welcome they will feel going to the stadium, home or away, and the lower the risk of problems arising. The biggest 'weapon' in prevention terms is information, information, information. It works both ways. The better the information you supply to stadium managers, security staff and the authorities about the plans of supporters, the better the level of service they can provide. And if you do have to deal with so-called risk

supporters, it's always good to remember that it's the behaviour we're trying to isolate, not necessarily the individual people. We want as many people as possible to come to the games and have a good time, but we also want them to be positive supporters, if you see what I mean.

Laudable aims, of course. Everyone wants people to come to the stadium and conduct themselves appropriately, and you would hope that SLOs can exert a positive influence on the fan base. However, sceptics might say it's impossible for SLOs to have a positive influence on hardcore supporters and so-called risk fans. How realistic are these aims in practice?

Well, even if it's true that I can't influence certain people, what I can do is make them aware of the consequences of their actions, so at least they make an active choice to do or not do something. I make it clear to them that I am not the one banning them, I'm just explaining the rules, which apply to everybody, and the potential consequences of not following them. Simply for information, nothing else.

We used to talk about self-policing but self-regulation is the preferred term now. If the ultimate aim of an SLO working in the area of prevention is self-regulation, how achievable is it and what does it look like in practice?

It's definitely realistic, as long as you remember that the work of an SLO is

not done overnight. It's not the case that an SLO swishes through the stands and everything is fine. SLOs work in the long term because achieving self-regulation can take a lot of time. Processes need to be put in place, but once again it's about being informative, truthful and respectful to supporters because there's no way I, as an SLO, can go in and tell one of the more influential fans what to say to somebody else. It needs to come from them, so we work with core values because the spirit of the club is important. We have to start working with the younger generation in order to achieve this, so everyone takes joint responsibility.

There seems to be a general tendency to frame dialogue between fans and the authorities and clubs mainly in terms of security – to the detriment of the service aspects of the role. Tell me a bit more about your work in this area.

For me, it's clear that if we don't pay sufficient attention to service, there's no security either. If you get the service right, the security will hopefully be much easier, so the two go hand in hand. As SLOs, we focus very much on service because that comes with dialogue. We work hard on matchday logistics, for example, by providing as much information as possible to fans to make it easier for them to attend the game. We want the matchday experience to be positive, easy-going and 'light'. We do a lot of preparation with the supporters to tend to their needs

and wants, such as helping out with tifo arrangements and any match-specific requests. At my club, this is a task for the two full-time SLOs, but on matchdays we also deploy one or more matchday SLOs to provide the best possible service to as many supporters as possible.

To give an example, we have a kids' stand on matchdays, which is a section for children aged between 7 and 14, with no parents allowed. It's been really successful. We have dedicated service hosts there who liaise with the kids and hang out with them. We work a lot on our core values in that stand and we want them to feel what it's like to be a part of the Djurgården family. It's also where we grow the new supporter base who are going to take over one day. We do other things, of course, and each club will have its own approach, but we've decided to place a lot of focus on the individual. If there's anything anybody wants help with, they can ring one of the SLO team. We try to be available 24/7 and our aim is always to return a call within three hours, especially during working hours.

What kind of problems do fans contact the SLO team about?

When you're working with people, you're confronted with all sorts of issues and so we decided to set up a network to help us. If someone wants to break a destructive habit such as an addiction, they can give us a call and we have people we can refer them to at any time of the day or night. This has been extremely helpful for us and

for a lot of people and I'm really proud that this is something we can do as a football club. I should add that it's not just fans who call us but also parents. They often have questions about the football environment and we're more than happy to speak to them about it. If they're open to the idea, we invite them to a match so we can show them how we work. It's important for parents who might not be as familiar with the football scene as we are to see all the positive sides that exist, which helps to give them a better understanding. In fact, we've had several examples where parents have enjoyed it so much that they have become season ticket holders themselves, albeit in a different section to their kids, of course!

From what you've described, the role of an SLO is very varied. You're doing a lot of different things with different people that require different skills and capabilities. What kind of profile does a typical SLO have in your experience, or what kind of profile should an SLO have in your opinion?

When you recruit an SLO, the process should be the same as for any other position within the club. If you recruit a marketing manager, you look for a marketing professional, and the same goes for communications. You want experts, especially on the football side of things. When it comes to SLOs, it can be especially useful, and also shortens the settling-in period, if you recruit from within your fan base. No one else is fluent in the language of supporters from the start. As a

supporter, you know your club, you know the vibe, so for me, that's the best way to go. Are there other ways of going about it? Absolutely, there are many good SLOs who haven't come directly from the stands, but it usually takes them a lot longer to acclimatise. Whoever you take on, it's essential to offer them appropriate training to allow them to develop all the personal skills they need. Quite often, though, clubs do not have a fixed job description for SLOs, which is something that we're trying to change, via the education done through the UEFA Academy.

Learning by doing presumably plays a big role here, so how important is it for SLOs to exchange experiences and information with each other, both at the domestic and the European level? What are the advantages?

It's vital to have the networks to do that. I'm in my ninth season now and I would never have survived without my fellow SLOs. In this job, no man is an island. You can get a curve ball thrown at you at any time and so you need colleagues you can trust, people you can speak to and exchange experiences with. It's good to have someone with an outside perspective to help you think, not just at domestic level but also when you're playing in Europe. During the season, I speak to my colleagues in the European SLO network several times a month. We discuss everything, from sharing contacts to exchanging information about clubs others have already played at – things

like ticketing issues, logistics, and how to deal with the authorities in that country. If someone has a good local contact, it can be really useful. It's important for us to help each other. Every SLO will experience a feeling of being isolated at some point. There's always somebody upset with you or angry because you haven't met their expectations, so to have the support of your colleagues is essential.

One of the questions we're most frequently asked is where the SLO fits into the club's organisation chart. Which department do you work in and what would you recommend?

For various reasons, I actually work in the security department! Normally I would say any department but security, but it just works at our club, mainly because the security officer also has a fan background, having once been the chairman of the supporters' club, which means he has an excellent understanding of my role. Elsewhere, it's a very mixed picture. We see SLOs in the marketing department, in the communications department and even in the corporate social responsibility department. In an ideal world, every club would have a dedicated supporter relations department where the lead SLO is the focal point.

We also get a lot of questions from new SLOs unsure about how to get started. Some SLOs are thrown in at the deep end without any induction training. What would your advice be

to them? How should they approach their first month in the job?

Number one is reach out to your fellow SLOs. Meet up with them, pick their brains. Take the ideas you like and think about how to tailor them to your club. Second, identify the key points of contact within the club, the fan base and the authorities and start working on your network because your network is like your desk in that sense. Speak to as many people as possible in the first month to make sure they understand what you will be doing as an SLO and what the benefits are for them. And make sure you're around the supporters on matchday!

We've covered a lot of bases in this interview, Lena. Is there anything you'd like to add that we haven't had a chance to talk about?

I think it all comes down to one thing. My message to clubs is use your SLOs, trust your SLOs. If you utilise your SLOs in the right way, there's a lot of time, grief and money to be saved. SLOs are often involved at such a late stage that they can't influence anything, and in the worst-case scenario you end up being the bad person hitting the stop button or saying no, which could probably have been avoided if you'd been consulted early enough. It can be anything from a marketing campaign to merchandise releases. SLOs are there to enhance things. And if you're a supporter, trust your SLOs. If they themselves don't have the answer, they can always find out and get back to you.

Thank you, Lena!

The SLO's position within a club



"SLO departments are a necessity and there is no logical alternative."

Marc Francis, head of fan relations and lead SLO, Eintracht Frankfurt

One of the questions most often asked by clubs developing the supporter liaison officer role is which department is the most appropriate for their SLOs. The simple answer is that there is no simple answer. Historically, SLOs have found themselves working in many different departments – from membership and marketing to communications and security. If fan relations had previously been the domain of the director of communications, for example, a club might feel this is the right area for their SLOs to operate in. Other clubs might place the focus on security or be more interested in membership development.

However, as the function grows in significance in European football, clubs are increasingly taking the view that a separate SLO department is the right solution if the role is to reach its full potential. Two of the main reasons for this are that a separate department highlights the need for professionalism in SLO work and raises the profile of SLOs to the same level as other specialists working for the club.

One club that has long taken this approach is German Bundesliga outfit Eintracht Frankfurt. Now employing a team of seven

SLOs – five full-time and two part-time – the Eagles established their own SLO department more than 15 years ago. Marc Francis, head of fan relations and lead SLO, is very positive: "I believe this is the best and most productive way to handle supporter-related topics and implement a fan-focused strategy within the club structure, especially since SLOs, as experts on these matters and the club's fan base, are the logical choice."

It can be argued that the status of the SLOs at a specific club is reflected in the level at which they operate – SLOs working in a dedicated department clearly occupy a prominent position at their clubs. Marc agrees and elaborates: "I believe every professional club should have more than one full-time SLO, and it makes total sense to have departments in the club that are solely focused on fan-related work and run by the SLOs. But I also believe it's even more important that clubs, and especially the board members, appreciate that fans are the most valuable, consistent and long-lasting assets a club can have. If they do, they will always understand the importance and value of entrusting fan-related matters to SLOs, and they will always want to have the SLOs report straight to them. They will also help to implement a fan-friendly culture at the club."

Eintracht Frankfurt are well known for their vocal and colourful support, including impressive tifo displays. They may have only one Bundesliga title to their name, but they continue to pull in the crowds, year in, year out. The average attendance at Frankfurt Stadium in the 2019/20 season was close

to 50,000. Dealing with this volume of supporters makes having a dedicated SLO department extremely beneficial. "As far as our department is concerned, I can say that in recent years my colleagues and I have been considered an essential part of the club strategy," says Marc. "We are fully involved in the decision-making processes and our expertise is valued and requested by many departments. But every SLO should bear in mind that things change! Board members might change, colleagues might change, people working for the police might change and even the fan base can change, and you will find yourself having to constantly explain the importance of SLO work, adapt to new situations and change your approach."

The key to success is focusing on structures rather than individuals, ensuring the organisation doesn't suffer when certain people disappear. Marc clarifies: "Building frameworks for cooperation with different key players and developing and implementing ways to work together can make your life a lot easier. It will also make it a lot harder for a single person to change everything. This can be a lot of work, but if you believe in the concept, it's definitely worth the effort."

Having a dedicated department means that the Frankfurt SLOs answer directly to the club board, which is something Marc considers essential: "In Germany, SLOs are called *Fanbeauftragte*, which can be translated as 'fan appointees', meaning we are appointed by the board to represent the club in all fan-related matters. And since we're appointed by the board, we

have to report back directly to the board. This has proved quite helpful because the board members now have to engage in fan-related matters, and we have the opportunity to brief them on all relevant topics. As a department, however, we answer to our section manager on matters such as budgets, infrastructure, wages or any kind of structural decision."

In the past, many clubs across Europe have been tempted to nominate their safety and security officers as SLOs, but Marc is quite firm about the difference between the two functions: "SLOs should not do security-related work because it contradicts their role as SLOs. Sure, as an SLO you do fall within the scope of security, but your approach is different because it's focused on prevention rather than enforcement. SLOs build relationships – not only with the fans, but also with the police, the stewards, the clubs, etc. – based on trust, de-escalation, mediation, reliability and confidentiality. It's not the SLO's job to investigate or apprehend anyone."

The Eintracht SLO department has its own office with regular 9–5 working hours during the week. But how do the seven SLOs fill their working week? "In addition to the routine office work, such as answering emails, and standard SLO tasks, such as preparing upcoming games and communicating with fans, my team and I work on many different things. One of my colleagues, for example, is responsible for all matters relating to fans with special needs. His main focus is on finding better ways for them to enjoy the game. I would say he spends 90% of his time acting

as the disability access officer (DAO), but when needed, he does SLO work as well. We offer a special audio-description programme for our partially sighted and blind fans and are now working on a new project for supporters who are deaf or hard of hearing."

Having seven SLOs in the department also allows Marc and his colleagues to work on issues that fall outside the usual matchday operations, such as community and education projects: "Two of my colleagues have just organised a series of events for fans about the history of our club during the Nazi era, concluding with a visit to a concentration camp," he explains. "We strongly believe it is important never to forget what happened, and we have to do our bit to make sure it never happens again. We're also about to host the Fantastic Females exhibition, which outlines the vital role women play in football, including as SLOs. Another thing we do is organise events allowing fans and supporters clubs to meet our players, have a chat, take selfies with them and get their autographs. We also go to schools and police academies to talk about fan culture and the job of an SLO."

For the fans of Eintracht Frankfurt, the SLO department has been part of the furniture for almost two decades. But what matters most to the fans is that the SLOs exist, not how they fit into the organisational structure: "It's more important to our fans that the club SLOs are people they know, people they can trust and rely on, people who are familiar with the club's fan culture and are integrated into the club structure and decision-making processes," says Marc. "It's also important for people to be able to contact and approach the SLOs at any time.

Fans want to be heard and understood. They want to be taken seriously and be seen as an integral part of the club's culture. And they want to know that the SLOs are taken seriously by the board. This is most important to the fans. Having said that, I believe that SLO departments are a necessity and there is no logical alternative."

Obviously, not every club will have the resources or even the desire to have a dedicated SLO department. So, to figure out where to place the SLOs in the organisation chart, clubs need to look at what they hope to achieve with the role. One particularly innovative solution can be found at Belgian top-division outfit Standard de Liège, one of the biggest clubs in Belgium in terms of support, with an average attendance of just over 23,000 in the 2019/20 season, the second highest in the Jupiler Pro League. The Reds, who hold the record for the longest uninterrupted period in the top flight (since 1921), employ one full-time SLO, **Quentin Gilbert**, whose role is perhaps unique among European SLOs in that it is combined with the position of strategy officer, in which he develops the strategic direction of the club.



What might seem an unusual configuration at first glance makes perfect sense on closer examination. As the following chapter illustrating a typical week in the life of an SLO shows, supporter liaison officers interact with every department of the club when carrying out their tasks, which offers them unrivalled insights into the workings of the organisation as a whole. This did not escape the attention of the Standard CEO, as Quentin explains: "I did

an internship at Standard a couple of years ago. I worked with the CEO and shadowed him. After the internship ended, he called me and said, 'I want to hire you'. I had studied business strategy and he asked me to do a report on the club and how I viewed it. He wanted me to go further and asked me to develop a strategic vision for the club, but this did not require a full-time job. At the time, SLOs were recommended practice and the CEO was interested in the function. He knew I was a Standard fan and that I attended every game, so he hired me to take on both functions. I really like it because the SLO role is about talking to and meeting people, being on the ground, going to the games, while the strategic function is about reflecting on the club and its functions, its processes, how we do things, how we can help. You could say my strategy officer function is in line with my academic qualifications, while my SLO function is in line with my supporter background."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Quentin is another SLO who answers directly to the club's CEO, a relationship that benefits both of them: "I let him know about my work and the initiatives that have been set up on a regular basis. We exchange a lot: he helps me to grow in my function and I share inputs with him from the fan base about the general atmosphere, the actions that will take place during games, etc. My work is made easier by the fact that my CEO is always open to discussion and, above all, is a keen fan himself."

So where will we find Quentin in the club's organisation chart? "On paper, I'm within the security department, but in reality, I am more next to it," says Quentin. "I have

a great relationship with our director of security, and we operate alongside each other, each respecting the other's area of work." Quentin is also familiar with the set-up at Eintracht Frankfurt after the two clubs met in the UEFA Europa League in 2019/20, and he likes what he saw there: "For me, the ideal situation for SLOs would be to operate in a dedicated department rather than as part of another one. This is because SLOs are by nature the bridge between the club and the fans, and this independent nature is essential."

KEY POINTS

1. The position of the SLO within the club's organisation chart will depend on local factors and what the club wants to achieve from the role.
2. Clubs are increasingly creating supporter relations departments managed by their SLOs.
3. SLOs benefit from having a close reporting relationship with the club CEO.
4. SLOs develop frameworks and lasting ways to cooperate with all key players.
5. SLOs have unique insights into the workings of the club as a whole because they interact with all the different departments and act as the bridge between the club and the fans.

A week in the life of an SLO



"Ongoing conversations with fans through chats and private message boards"

Simon Vangsgaard Jensen,
Aalborg BK SLO

The SLO role is one of the hardest football jobs to explain to someone who is unfamiliar with it. There are so many things happening, so many jobs to do, all the time. Everyone knows instinctively what a taxi driver does, but an SLO? The name itself gives us a clue as to the core concept behind it – liaising with supporters – but it involves so much more than that. SLOs work closely with all the departments at their club, from ticketing, security and membership to marketing and communications. They also cooperate with non-football stakeholders, such as transport companies and the police.

The 2011 UEFA SLO handbook, which remains essential reading, provides a detailed overview of the theory behind the

SLO function, but what does the role look like in practice? In this chapter, we look at an average week in the life of an SLO. If there is such a thing as an 'average' week. What meetings and activities might fill an SLO's diary? The following example gives an insight into how a typical SLO manages their diverse responsibilities. Perhaps it will serve as inspiration for others.

Aalborg BK, or AaB, are one of the more successful clubs of the modern era in Denmark, with two Superliga titles to their name in the new millennium, including the double in 2013/14. Their average home attendance at Aalborg Stadium, at the very north of Jutland, was just under 6,000 in the 2019/20 season.

AaB have one full-time SLO. His name is Simon Vangsgaard Jensen, and he joined the club in 2017, operating from the marketing and experience department. Here, he gives us an overview of a 'normal' week in his life as an SLO. We start on the Monday, assuming AaB have just played an away game on the Sunday, with a home game awaiting on the following Saturday.

Monday

- Follow up on the previous day's away match with the relevant internal stakeholders (club president, safety and security officer, etc.).
- Provide an evaluation of the away section experience for the home team's SLO and safety and security officer. This is done over the phone. We don't use data, instead we talk about our observations, things that went well, etc. I always take notes so I know if there are things I can use to prepare for the next game.
- Have telephone meeting with the police officer responsible for football in my police district, including an evaluation of the previous day and preparation for the forthcoming match at the weekend.
- Enter the number of away fans and buses, and whether a supporter train was deployed for the game, in a spreadsheet to provide a more accurate assessment of the number of fans expected to travel the next time we play the same opponents.
- Have ongoing conversations with fans through chats and private message boards.

Tuesday

- Attend internal meetings with relevant colleagues from the sales, ticketing, and marketing and experience departments about the forthcoming home games.
- Talk to the SLO of the visiting team about their expectations at the weekend.
- Send all matchday information to the visiting SLO, such as getting to Aalborg by bus, the stadium food outlets, etc.
- Talk to colleagues in the ticketing and security departments about the expected number of away supporters to ascertain the number of staff needed to secure a smooth matchday experience for the visiting fans.
- Have ongoing conversations with fans through chats and private message boards.



Wednesday

- Recap with the SLO of the visiting team about their final expectations.
- Attend meeting with colleague to discuss new merchandise and share knowledge about the latest trends within the fan base.
- Attend meeting with colleagues from the ticketing and marketing departments to discuss the club's ticketing and season ticket strategy, both short and long-term.
- Complete various marketing tasks.
- Have ongoing conversations with fans through chats and private message boards.

Thursday

- Attend weekly meeting of a working group made up of communications and marketing staff plus supporters to go over the current week and prepare communications, matchday operations and events for the next few weeks.
- Attend meetings with the police and the security department to provide a safe, welcoming and well organised matchday for both home and away fans.
- Follow up on ideas from the sales department about fan-friendly partnership deals.
- Produce social media communications for the club and SLO accounts on various channels.
- Have ongoing conversations with fans through chats and private message boards.

Friday

- Analyse ticket sales for the weekend game to communicate of the expected number of away fans to the SLO of the away team.
- Listen to fan or football marketing podcasts while doing ad hoc tasks.
- Scan the official message board for fans to see if anything relevant regarding the club comes up, without focusing on the game itself.
- Have ongoing conversations with fans through chats and private message boards.

Saturday (matchday)

- Attend pre-match organisation/ security meeting, providing last-minute updates on the SLO side of things.
- Complete analysis of ticket sales for the match. I check ticket sales to get a feel for how many fans will be coming. This also means I can tell the SLO of the away team how many fans they will have coming. In Denmark, a lot of tickets are sold on the day of the game, so I always try to keep the away team's SLO updated.
- Complete ad hoc tasks before fans arrive at the stadium.
- Meet with supporters and grant selected fans access to the stands to prepare for the match before the gates open.
- Engage in ongoing dialogue with fans.
- Ensure maximum visibility and availability throughout the game: being present in the fan zone before the game; watching the game from each stand to sample the matchday experience from all vantage points; being present at sales/refreshment outlets at half-time, etc.
- Note down observations throughout the match, which can be anything from the volume of pre-match music and level of pushing in refreshment queues to defective light bulbs in the toilets.
- Have quick debrief with colleagues about matters that cannot wait until next week.

Impact for club management



"You need an SLO who can manage not only the still waters but also the wild waterfalls."

Niclas Carlnén,
Malmö FF CEO

Even the most capable SLOs will not make a success of the job if they do not have the backing of the senior executives at their club. With SLOs tasked with building and nurturing relations with the fans, involving them in the management of a club is a question of good governance, not merely a 'nice-to-have'. No matter where the SLOs are placed in the club's organisation chart, it is important for senior management to understand the significance of the function and take responsibility for it. Increasingly, this is a role being assumed by the CEO or president, as is the case at Malmö FF.

Malmö FF is the most storied club in Swedish football. At European level, they were 66th in the UEFA club coefficient rankings at the end of the 2019/20 season. The club also has its own stadium, Malmö New Stadium, which has a capacity of 22,500. In 2019, the average attendance was 16,500.

Malmö FF first appointed an SLO back in 2009, with the current incumbent, Pierre Nordberg, joining the club in May 2014. Pierre is employed full-time and

is immensely popular among the various supporter groups. As was the case of Standard de Liège explored in Chapter 2, Niclas Carlnén, as Malmö FF CEO, took direct responsibility for recruiting Pierre, underlining the importance the club attaches to the SLO role. "The function is so important to us that I don't want any filters between me and the SLO," says Niclas. "Pierre reports directly to me. He's placed straight under me in the organisation chart and has no other line manager."

Pierre's role as the link to the club's supporters takes on extra significance given the Swedish 50+1 rule, under which the members of the club enjoy majority control. Niclas expands: "Our fans and members are our base. Everyone who works for the club answers to the members, and it's on their mandate that we act. And since the SLO is in direct contact with the supporters and the members, it's vital the SLO reports straight to the CEO."

Another factor is the expanding fan base within Swedish football over the last 20 years, including ultras, tifo groups and regular supporters. Increasing attendances add focus to the SLO role, and Malmö FF are no exception, as Niclas explains: "The need for effective communication has grown on every level and the SLO function is really well suited as a tool to allow us as an organisation to understand our supporters better."



Pierre Nordberg, the SLO of Malmö FF, keeping his cool during a Europa League match



Pierre Nordberg in front of the Malmö FF crowd

Strong networking skills are crucial, then, and everyone at Malmö FF knows Pierre. He enjoys a prominent status within the club and the trust of both the operational staff and the elected officials. For Niclas, this is vital: “Everybody who works for Malmö FF, whether it’s the board, the players or the staff, holds our SLO in high regard. They trust him, and this is down to Pierre himself. He’s earned the confidence they have in him.”

This underscores the need for SLOs to have the professional and social skills needed to gain the trust of all the stakeholders, both football and non-football, and the ability to balance all the demands of their work. Keeping everyone happy – the police, the club board, the fans – is no easy task. Different people want different things and often have conflicting interests. “I’ve said before that the best thing I’ve done as Malmö CEO was to hire Pierre,” says Niclas, “and I still stand by that statement. He’s extremely important for us. Our SLO is the kind of person who deals with the routine day-to-day work just as well as the more serious situations and crises that occur. You need an SLO who can manage not only the still waters but also the wild waterfalls.”

Pierre had to adapt quickly, as Malmö FF qualified for the UEFA Champions League group stage for the first time in their history just a few months after he started as SLO. According to Niclas, however, the club had no concerns: “We adopted the

same approach whether we were playing a smaller team in the Allsvenskan or Juventus or Atlético Madrid in Europe. There were more fans and more things happening, of course, and the international aspect was another factor. This is where I think the personality of the SLO comes into play, and Pierre manages to balance all the demands of the work really well.”

Today, Malmö FF play in UEFA club competitions almost every year. This has created the need for the club to expand on all levels, which in turn has shaped the way the club thinks about how it is structured. “You have to create an organisation that divides up responsibilities very clearly and then delegates the tasks to the different individuals, which means operational plans and job descriptions must be in place,” says Niclas. “We’ve grown as a club, and we’ve grown fast, so no single person is in a position to have control over the club at all times anymore, and Pierre, as our SLO, is the main link inside the club and between the club management and our supporters. Pierre is always there and always in the right place. He stands for reliability. For me, one of the most important aspects of the SLO role is having someone who helps you see how everything is connected. You need a person who has a good overview but also understands the different parts.”

The SLO role in Malmö FF is in safe hands, then, even in these dire times of pandemic and economic anxiety. Niclas

fully understands the significance of the SLO, an appreciation that extends to all departments of the club: “I can’t see a time where the SLO role won’t be an important factor for Malmö FF,” he concludes. “On the contrary, we’re looking into how we can expand the function and the way it’s organised.”

KEY POINTS

1. Ideally, SLOs should report directly to the CEO/club president.
2. The SLO role is a tool for understanding the club’s supporters.
3. SLOs must be known throughout the club and maintain excellent contacts with all stakeholders.
4. Operational plans and job descriptions must be in place.
5. SLOs must understand how everything is connected and be able to balance all the different elements.

Impact for supporters



“Everything in football is a supporter issue.”

**Beverley Mayer,
St Johnstone FC SLO**

The SLO role is a bridge between the club and its supporters. It can provide the club with information and experience from the fan base, and at the same time ensure that supporters' voices are heard within the internal structures of the club. Supporters follow their club through thick and thin, and the SLO role was initially designed as a tool to help them express their passion and to facilitate dialogue with the powers-that-be at their clubs.

In this chapter, we will look at how the SLO role has changed some supporters' lives for the better. First, from the perspective of an SLO who has been involved in her club, in some capacity, for many years, and second from the perspective of a fan who is on the board of one of the most important supporter groups in European football. They both offer important and interesting insights.

Beverley Mayer is the SLO at St Johnstone Football Club in Scotland. She's been working in the position since 2016 and is employed full-time. She also holds the position of disability access officer (DAO), as the club quickly realised there was a crossover between the two roles. Ideally, the two functions should be kept separate,

as they require different skill sets, but at some smaller clubs one person may be able to manage both workloads. Having said that, as most SLOs can testify, it's important not to underestimate what the role entails: “My other duties include running our club shop (both at the stadium and online), assisting in the ticket office, and coordinating our Junior Saints Supporters' Club, ball attendants and matchday mascots,” says Beverley. “I also work closely with our communications department and I organise and run the club's official coach travel to away games.”

Beverley's ties with the club go back a long time, something she's benefited from in her work as an SLO: “I started working for St Johnstone back in 2012 and was initially brought in to run the club's lottery and our matchday bar. I had been a season ticket holder for over 20 years prior to that and had also been involved in organising buses to away games for around the same length of time. I had attended various meetings with the club as a supporter representative during that time and built up a network of excellent relationships with people at the club and with other supporter groups and individual supporters. I'm also a keen supporter of our national team and a well-travelled member of the Tartan Army, which has enabled me to make connections and build friendships with supporters of other clubs around Scotland.”

In Scotland the SLO role is growing, and Beverley is optimistic for the future: “The

SLO function in general is becoming more widely known and understood in Scotland, and a lot of that is down to the development and support offered by SD Scotland and SD Europe. Clubs themselves have recognised the value in having an SLO and have widely embraced the function. We've built up a good network of Scottish SLOs, offering support and advice to each other and sharing best practice.”

At St Johnstone, the role is well known, and the supporters are familiar with Beverley and her work: “In terms of me specifically and the SLO role at St Johnstone, in the most recent national football supporter survey carried out in 2019, when asked ‘Does the club you support have a supporter liaison officer?’, 87% of St Johnstone supporters answered ‘yes’, compared with the national average of 65%. On this basis, and judging by my email inbox, I feel confident that my role is well recognised and established at St Johnstone now, although I am working awfully hard to increase that figure to 100%!”

Based in Perth in the east of Scotland, St Johnstone have never won the league title but did finish third in the Premiership as recently as 2013 and completed a domestic cup double in 2021. In 2019, the average attendance was just over 4,000, with around 1,800 season ticket holders and loyal away support of around 500–600. Beverley explains their supporter culture: “We have two main supporter groups that organise events and run buses

to every away game, and around a dozen other recognised groups – most of whom are based locally – with a couple of exile groups supporting us from afar.”

The recent growth in the ultras movement in Scotland has also reached Perth and Beverley's club: “Yes, St Johnstone FC has a large group of active supporters, consisting mainly of young adult males, who bring atmosphere, colour, flags, tifos, noise, and of course, support to McDiarmid Park. We've held several meetings with this group's representatives to offer them support and to see how we can work together to develop and enhance their ideas and suggestions about supporting the team and creating a positive atmosphere within the stadium on matchdays. Although they prefer to remain autonomous, we have a good relationship with this group, and dialogue is regular and direct via links with both the club hierarchy and me.”

St Johnstone may not attract the biggest crowds, but the fans of the club are passionate. This means that Beverley speaks to them often. How often? “Every day is the simple answer! I am happy to make myself available outside office hours, responding to email correspondence, tweets and direct messages, phone calls and texts etc., at any and all hours of the day and night, be that midweek or at weekends. I also attend all our matches, home and away, so fans know they can seek me out for a chat on matchdays. I travel to most away games on a supporters' bus and sit with fellow supporters at

matches. At the end of the day, I am a fan myself, so I'm familiar with topical issues which may be affecting supporters, and I keep myself up to date with the mood of the fans and with fan culture. My role exists as a conduit to enable fans to make representations to the club, but my job is also to protect the club. I have heard it said that an SLO has the loneliest job in football! That may be true, but it is also an extremely rewarding job."

Asked to provide concrete examples of things the club has done via the SLO role to make it easier for the fans, Beverley fires away. This is clearly something that is close to her heart: "I have for many years, prior to being an SLO, been providing a ticket purchase service at away games for supporters who have decided to attend a match at the last minute but where the host club does not provide such a facility. At one such ground recently, I sold over

100 tickets on the day. That's over 100 fans who would not otherwise have been able to attend the match."

Beverley has a lot of these heart-warming stories to share: "It was brought to my attention recently that an elderly supporter who had moved 45 miles [70km] away from Perth had been forced to give up driving due to health issues. His daughter contacted me to see if there was anything I could do to help get him back to McDiarmid Park to support his team. Through my network of supporter groups and contacts, I was able to get in touch with a season ticket holder living in the same town as him who very kindly offered to provide him with transport to and from Perth on matchdays. This enabled a fan to continue supporting his team, as well as preventing social isolation, which often goes hand in hand with the loss of one's independence as we get older. This for me

is a great example of how rewarding my role can be: a small, quiet 'win' under the radar, but a particularly important win all the same."

Stories like these indicate the diverse nature of the SLO role, something that takes on another dimension when fans travel abroad for European competition games, where flexibility and the ability to find quick solutions are key assets: "A supporter contacted me when we were in Lithuania for a Europa League match in 2017. He had run short of the local currency and had travelled without a bankcard. The local currency exchange wouldn't accept his Scottish notes, so I drew my own cash out of the bank and gave it to him in exchange for his Scottish notes. It's all about finding solutions, whether that be as a currency exchange, banker, travel agent, babysitter, ticket sales provider, taxi service, or anything else, you need to be able to wear many different hats as an SLO!"

It is safe to say that Beverley is truly invested in her role as SLO at St Johnstone. For the future, she wants to be able to do even more for the club's supporters: "First and foremost, I am very keen to undertake the new SLO education programme in order to acquire more tools and skills relevant to my job, and to enhance my knowledge of the role. At one of our recent development days, one of my fellow SLO colleagues asserted that 'everything in football is a supporter issue'. This is so true! So many issues surrounding football

are interlinked and connected, however tenuously. Every day is different as an SLO, with new queries being raised by supporters, ad hoc issues being brought to our attention after matches, ground regulations being updated, and laws being changed, not to mention the continuous development of differing fan cultures, with the introduction of safe standing areas being a topical issue in Scotland at present."

Despite the myriad of challenges, Beverley has no concerns for the future. On the contrary, she is looking forward to it: "The more we are challenged as SLOs, the more we will learn and develop in our role, ergo the better placed we will be to assist supporters and to help maintain the strong bonds that exist between fans and their clubs."

Having heard about how the introduction of the SLO function by UEFA has positively affected fans from a club SLO's perspective, we now turn to a representative of a supporter group for their point of view. Founded in 2014, Association Nationale des Supporters (ANS) is a national supporter organisation representing 35 local groups across France. ANS campaigns for greater fan dialogue and acts as a voice for organised fans. Its members come from clubs from the first to the fifth tiers of French football. We asked Mathilde Mandelli, who has been a member of the ANS board since 2018, to explain the organisation's *raison d'être*.



St Johnstone fans with a tifo display at McDiarmid Park in 2014

Beverley Mayer in the supporter march at a European away game at Lithuania

“We follow one principle at all times: our role is not just to criticise what’s wrong in France, but also to be proactive so we can share ideas with the authorities,” says Mathilde. “We realised that we wouldn’t be understood properly until we began to make suggestions and give examples of things that were working well.”

This constructive approach has brought some meaningful rewards, as Mathilde explains: “Our first big battle was against a law introduced in France in 2016. This law was quite repressive but by making our case we managed to get some positive elements included. For example, the SLO role became mandatory for professional sports clubs under this law, which was a huge achievement. The law also created a national body called the Instance Nationale du Supportérisme (INS), which brings together public and football authorities, i.e. the ministry of sport, the ministry of justice, the French Football Federation (FFF) and the French Football League (LFP), along with supporter organisations from football and other sports, SLOs and other stakeholders. Thanks to this body, we’ve been able to work on developing the SLO role and other topics such as safe standing, and the ministry of sport and the LFP recently announced that a pilot project will be launched next season to examine potential solutions regarding the use of pyrotechnics.”

France was the first country in Europe to introduce legislation requiring clubs to appoint an SLO, an exceptional step that

Mathilde believes has been a success: “The law really helped us in our struggle to convince the authorities that we needed a tool to improve the situation in France. We had reached a point where dialogue barely existed at the national level, and only to varying degrees at the local level. The law required the LFP to make the SLO a mandatory function in each club’s organisation chart, giving it an additional means of exerting pressure on clubs that wouldn’t respect the licensing requirement. The LFP created a new position dedicated to implementing the SLO function and it’s a great thing for everyone.”

Mathilde points to some examples of how the introduction of the SLO role in France has had a positive effect: “I think it’s made things better for active fans travelling to away games and for supporter groups on matchdays. France does have issues related to the relationship between some club owners and supporter groups, and the SLO role has provided fans with points of contact who are neutral, even though they’re employees of the club. Another tangible change is the fact that SLOs are now being invited to the pre-match security meeting with the authorities. The information they provide has made it possible for travel bans to be avoided in some cases. We’re still at the first stage of SLO implementation, so we can’t really draw any conclusions yet, but the big difference is that now most fan groups and all individual supporters have a contact person at the club, someone dedicated to them if they need help or information. In

my view, this is the best way to start and maintain dialogue and then build a great relationship.”

As with any new position, SLOs will need time to bed in and develop their skills and knowledge. Doubts about the effectiveness of the role will have to be overcome, and fans can often be the biggest sceptics. According to Mathilde, active supporters in France are familiar with the SLO role and what it entails but work still needs to be done to raise awareness among average football fans. “It can also depend on the club,” she adds. “Some do a great job; others are less enthusiastic. It’s difficult to talk about the ‘French’ situation because it really depends on the local situation.”

This awareness will no doubt increase as the benefits become more apparent and supporters gain a better appreciation of the SLO function and the broader principle of engaging in dialogue with the authorities. For the future, Mathilde would like to see the law and its implications really take hold across the country: “Now SLOs are working as best they can, and the situation is different at every club. I think we need greater awareness about the role so SLOs can be taken more seriously by the authorities at both the national and local level. When taken seriously, they are an asset to everyone, not just fans, but also clubs and the authorities. Some clubs still don’t have a professional SLO and that’s a problem, but we hope to have ‘real’ SLOs at every club very soon. To make our lives easier, however, they need to have enough

influence to affect decisions, for example, on travel bans. Greater awareness of the SLO role among individual fans is also important, as SLOs are not just there for the active fan groups. They also need to be heard inside their clubs when it comes to certain essential issues, such as communications, business decisions, ticketing, merchandising, etc. They’re the ones who know best what fans need and want.”

KEY POINTS

1. Combining the SLO role with other roles can be a great way for smaller clubs to implement it. To offer fans and other stakeholders the optimum service, however, SLOs should perform only SLO tasks on matchdays.
2. Developing and maintaining strong networks within the fan base is an essential part of the SLO job.
3. SLOs need to be versatile in finding solutions for fans.
4. Supporters can make a valuable contribution to developing the SLO role.
5. SLOs are there for every supporter, not just the active fan groups.

Impact for safety and security officers



“SLOs are a real asset to safety and security staff.”

**Florian Charrel, former
Olympique Lyonnais safety
and security officer**

One of the most persistent misconceptions regarding the SLO role is that it is a security position. This is simply not the case. Yes, SLOs do venture into the security sphere, but the role is much more complex than that and encompasses areas such as membership, marketing, strategy development and, most important of all, dialogue and communication between the various football and non-football stakeholders. Werder Bremen SLO, Julia Düvelsdorf, put it this way: “As supporter liaison officers we are part of the security architecture, though we tend to see ourselves as an alternative method”.

The two functions should be kept separate, then. Indeed, the [UEFA Safety and Security Regulations](#) require all clubs to appoint designated safety and security officers with responsibility for developing, implementing and reviewing safety and security policy and procedures.

Florian Charrel was safety and security officer at French top-division club Olympique Lyonnais up until late 2020, with a special focus on supporter relations. He now works at the Olympique Lyonnais Academy. Lyon, or simply OL, as the club

is commonly known, came into their own in the early 2000s. Having not won a single Ligue 1 title until 2002, OL then claimed seven in a row, breaking all records. Today, they are one of the biggest clubs in France, participating in European competitions almost every season.

The SLO department at OL consists of two SLOs, both working full-time. Florian holds them in high regard: “I think SLOs are an essential link within a club,” he says. “SLOs are a route of information from the club to its supporters, but also from the supporters to the club. They allow you to maintain a constant link with the most loyal and passionate fans, who are sometimes the most difficult for a club to host in the stadium. SLOs can also play a mediatory role, depending on the situation.”

In the 2019/20 season, OL registered an average league attendance of 49,079 at Parc Olympique Lyonnais, placing them second in France, just behind Olympique Marseille. This makes the collaboration between the SLOs and the safety and security officers not merely a luxury but a necessity, according to Florian: “Because the SLOs are in constant contact with the most loyal supporters, they’re able to convey the mood of the fans to our director of safety and security. The SLOs allow her to communicate with supporters and thus promote dialogue as our first priority. We’re often able to prevent incidents by engaging in dialogue through the SLOs instead of conducting a security intervention.”

The Lyon SLOs are integrated into the security department, ensuring there is constant interaction between the two functions, as Florian explains: “The exchange of information between the club’s safety and security management and the SLOs takes place daily. The SLOs’ tasks are predefined. Three to four days before the game, they inform the director of safety and security what’s happening within the fan base, the type of tifo material and equipment they want to use, the time it will arrive at the stadium and the nature of any requests from the supporters. This means she has all the information she needs relating to the actions of supporters at the stadium before the game and can organise her security procedures and inform the public authorities accordingly. It also allows us to anticipate any problems.”

A high degree of mutual trust is required for this system to function effectively, and Florian acknowledges that managing the SLO role can be tricky. “The most difficult thing is not turning the SLO into a security guard. SLOs have to maintain the confidence of supporters. As soon as dialogue breaks down, it is up to the director of safety and security to protect the SLOs and their credibility with supporters by asking them to withdraw before ordering the security staff to intervene. You also need to know how to handle certain requests conveyed by an SLO on behalf of supporters in order to strengthen the SLO’s position in the eyes of the fans.”

Another crucial factor is awareness of the SLO function, as Florian points out: “SLOs must be known to everyone, both supporters and club staff, to do their job well. They have to know how to channel requests from supporters, which means they have to build relationships with all the different parties. Fans must be able to contact them directly, so we have an email address just for supporters on our website. This is their gateway to the club.”

Lyon is unique in France, and probably in most of Europe, in that their SLOs have two first teams to take care of. They are also responsible for Olympique Lyonnais Féminin, the famous six-time UEFA Women’s Champions League winners. The average attendance in the highest women’s league may be lower than the men’s equivalent, but Olympique Lyonnais Féminin can easily attract crowds of up to 25,000 for big games. “It makes total sense for our SLOs to be responsible for both teams,” says Florian. “They accompany the fans when they go to the match no matter which team is playing. We have two official supporter associations for the women’s team, and so we work with both. For sure, most of the time the focus is on the men’s team, but we have to be with our women’s team too, especially for the big matches. Another reason we do this is because we want to show our fans that they have a privileged status at the club and that there’s always someone they can contact.”

Asked what can be done to improve the SLO function, Florian replies: “In France, the

SLO role is still not well known at certain clubs and bodies. SLOs are not always listened to, when in fact they are often the people best placed to anticipate events because of their detailed knowledge of the supporter environment and the club strategy."

And his advice to safety and security officers on working with SLOs? "SLOs are a real asset to safety and security staff," he replies. "They can be their eyes and ears during a match. SLOs can pass on messages, lead dialogue, alert and inform. They're a great help for the club in general and help to maintain a relationship of trust between us and our supporters."



Kai Ruben is head of stadium and matchday security, and the chief safety and security officer at Borussia Dortmund, one of Germany's biggest clubs. BVB, as the club is informally known, are ranked 12th in Deloitte's annual Football Money League 2019, a listing of the world's richest clubs. They are perhaps most famous for their passionate and numerous supporters. With an average attendance of around 80,000, they are the most watched team in the world.

With so many fans, who also travel to away games in their droves, the Dortmund SLO team is larger than most. At the time of writing, it has nine full-time plus two part-time staff members, an indication of

the esteem attached to the function in Germany these days. "The SLOs are among the most important players in our security organisation," says Kai. "They work very closely with our safety and security officers to ensure information is exchanged with the right person at the right moment. SLOs play a special role in this respect. It's vital they enjoy the trust of all the stakeholders and maintain their credibility, which sometimes means they cannot divulge information of a sensitive nature. It can be difficult for an SLO to know how to share information they may receive from supporters or other stakeholders such as the police with other parties without losing the confidence of any of them."

The collaboration between SLOs and safety and security officers is vital, according to Kai. "It's so important. A good relationship between these two functions is one factor that can make a difference in the success of an event. Along with the police, SLOs are the most important dialogue partners for a safety and security officer. This is why our safety and security staff are in constant contact with the SLO team during a normal week, in fact we interact almost every day. We speak about the last match and the next match, about supporter behaviour and risk fans, about travel arrangements, about supporter materials, such as drums, flags and megaphones, about choreographies, and so on. The list of topics is endless."

Since the SLO role is a tricky one when it comes to handling information, there are bound to be situations when differences

of opinion arise between safety and security officers and SLOs. Kai agrees and considers this the most difficult aspect of the working relationship: "Transfer of information can be an issue, without a doubt. And unfortunately, some SLOs, mostly from away teams, don't always have a neutral perception of the home team and the police. This can create problems for us."

Nevertheless, when asked about the standing of the SLO team at Dortmund, Kai answers like a shot: "Status: essential! Germany was the first country where the SLO role really took hold, so I'm quite sure our SLOs are well known among the fans. Most of our fans are aware of what the role entails by now. The SLOs are accepted. With this in mind, it's difficult to know how to improve things, but if I had to pick one thing, I would say it would be good if SLOs thought a bit more outside the box, so to speak. Sometimes they need to have a better feel for the functions of the safety and security officers and the police. That said, if I had to offer one piece of advice to safety and security officers at other clubs across Europe about working with SLOs, it would be this: make sure you integrate your SLOs into security matters!"

KEY POINTS

1. Used correctly, SLOs are a genuine asset to safety and security staff.
2. SLOs should focus on dialogue and communication, prevention and encouraging a positive fan culture. They should not carry out security tasks.
3. SLOs facilitate a constant flow of information between clubs and supporters, helping to improve relations, but also helping clubs to identify potential problems before they arise.
4. Maintaining trust and credibility is essential when exchanging information.
5. Clubs who integrate SLOs into safety and security matters will provide a better service and thus achieve better outcomes.

Impact for the police

“When we have police training, there is genuine interest in the SLO role.”

David Bohannon, chairman of the European Group of Safety and Security Experts

The police are one of the main non-football stakeholders in any club. For a game in any European country to run smoothly, it needs to be policed appropriately. The relationship between the police and the SLOs is therefore of the utmost importance. In this chapter, we examine how police and SLOs are working together in practice with the help of two experienced experts.

We first spoke to David Bohannon, the chairman of the European Group of Safety and Security Experts (also known as the European Think Tank)¹. As the SLO role is still relatively new to the football world, we wanted to find out how well known it is among rank-and-file police officers around Europe.

“There’s a wide and sometimes confused range of perspectives among ordinary police officers,” David explains. “In countries

where the SLO role is established, the term is recognised but not always fully understood. Suspicion and misconceptions continue to a degree, especially among policing practitioners who wrongly perceive SLOs to be mouthpieces for the risk groups that have posed major challenges to the police for decades. It’s still a work in progress, but the climate is changing. This inaccurate narrative is beginning to be replaced by positive experiences in places where SLOs have made an impact and also by growing interest in the idea of the SLO among football policing policymakers, strategists, tacticians and other practitioners across Europe.”

David and his Think Tank colleagues are very much at the forefront of getting the SLO concept established among police forces across Europe: “It’s about us giving information to the police at European level. It’s about having champions within the police force in each country, and that’s why we use the NFIP network². They are the experts in football policing operations and are incredibly supportive. Most of them are aware of the SLO role and embrace it.”

Relations between football supporters and the police can be subject to tension and suffer as a result of mutual prejudice, disrespect and distrust, but David is

optimistic for the future. “There’s an awareness that the police need to do something different,” he explains. “There’s pressure from all the European institutions that inclusion is a key element in that, and that the SLO role presents a unique opportunity to take that forward in a structured way. We need to make the police understand that this is not a ‘soft’ option – it’s a more difficult option, but one that can also be much more productive. It will make their job a lot easier.”

So how important has the SLO role been in influencing football policing in Europe over the last ten years? David begins by explaining why this is a difficult question:

“There isn’t just one institution out there, there are many different police forces around Europe. Each country is different, with different legal frameworks, etc. There’s a lot of history, heritage, cultural factors and challenges involved in this. For decades, the police have viewed football matches as public order operations, but we’ve moved on from that. It’s a quickly evolving landscape. Now we have harmonised good practice and a harmonised approach. There are still problems with getting the trust of frontline police officers, but these barriers are starting to break down. When we have police training, at either a national or pan-European level, there is genuine interest in the SLO role.”



David Bohannon of the European Think Tank (top right) at a meeting of the LIAISE Erasmus+ project

¹ The European Group of Safety and Security Experts (Think Tank) is an informal body comprising governmental, policing and other experts of the European Union with extensive experience in preventing and combating football-related violence and minimising football safety and security risks. The group is linked with the Council Law Enforcement Working Party (LEWP).

² Each EU member state is required to set up or designate a national football information point (NFIP) of a police nature to act as the direct, central contact point for exchanging relevant information and for facilitating international police cooperation in connection with football matches with an international dimension.

With some football governing bodies claiming that SLOs have had a significant impact in terms of reducing violence and disorder at football matches, we wanted to know whether there was any data to back this up. David treads carefully: “Notwithstanding positive anecdotal feedback, available police data does not indicate any significant reduction in incidents. That said, it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure the impact of preventative measures and successful mitigation initiatives. How do we quantify the impact of an SLO having an effective meeting with the local police and explaining issues that need resolving? You can’t measure that. The most important thing for me is that the match commander will know if something went better than they feared.”

This ties in with the testimony of other experts in the field. SLOs are often frustrated when asked to prove the effectiveness of their preventative work. How do you measure things that do not happen? Given the lack of empirical evidence, the perception that SLOs are making a useful contribution is often all we can fall back on. Yet there appears to be little doubt that progress is being made, as David explains: “On a positive note, there is growing recognition within policing agencies that the adoption of effective police and SLO liaison, and communication with supporters generally, can play a key role in reducing the influence of any individuals and groups who seek conflict.”

Asked to summarise the most important changes that the SLO function has brought about since being introduced on a European level by UEFA, David points to three key elements: “First, SLOs are providing the police and other stakeholders with a structured approach to implementing the inclusion concept. Second, they are dispelling any lingering perceptions that communication is a soft and weak option rather than an integral component of effective crowd management preparations and operations. And third, they are evidencing the need for mutual trust and respect between all parties in order to provide a safe, secure and welcoming environment for everyone involved in the football experience.”

With the foundations now in place, what remains to be done to build on the progress already made? David lists some key points: “We need to clarify the role and remit of SLOs on matchdays. Some football policing practitioners’ knowledge of the SLO role is limited. We also need the parameters for information exchange to be clear and mutually accepted. We need maximum possible liaison with SLOs when it comes to matchday planning and preparations. We need greater emphasis on the role of SLOs in terms of identifying preventive measures. And we also need greater understanding, by both parties, that SLOs should act as an interface between the police and all supporters, not just ultra or risk groups.”

On a final note, David outlines his vision for the integration of the SLO role into football policing: “First of all, we’re on better terms right now than ever before. The role of SLOs is potentially an important and integral component of an evolving football safety and security landscape across Europe. The barriers to dialogue with supporters are beginning to be dismantled within the police and there is growing interest in the possibilities associated with the structured approach to inclusion provided by the SLO concept. In essence, the way forward centres on building bridges and trust at local as well as at national level, and in developing joint training for SLOs and key police personnel designed to raise awareness of the mutual benefits of good liaison.”

In recognition of this need for training, SD Europe and the European Think Tank collaborated in an Erasmus+ project (LIAISE) to submit a draft resolution concerning good practice guidance in respect of police liaison with SLOs for adoption by the Council of the European Union. The draft resolution urges EU member states to enhance police cooperation through measures to improve liaison with SLOs. If adopted, the two organisations will develop training designed to promote cooperation between the police and SLOs. Furthermore, serving police officers are regularly invited to join parts of the UEFA SLO education programme to exchange views on the SLO role with SLOs directly. This is proving highly successful and is much appreciated by both parties.

For additional insights into the police perspective, we spoke to the vice-chairman of the European Think Tank, **Adrian Dinca**, who also works at the Romanian NFIP. As a serving police officer, Adrian is more than qualified to speak on this issue, but he is also a member of the Romanian delegation to the Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events. In this capacity, he is currently chairing the new Committee on Safety and Security at Sports Events.



We began by asking Adrian for his thoughts on the impact of SLOs on football policing: “As someone who is still involved in the practicalities of police work, I think it’s a big advantage when speaking about strategies to harmonise police perspectives and policies around Europe. SLOs have entered this arena and produced some positive results, but we have to remember that there is no uniform approach to the SLO concept across Europe at the moment. We need to promote the role more, especially in eastern Europe, but this will come in the future, I’m sure of that.”

Asked about the most important factors for a successful working relationship between SLOs and the police, Adrian says: “The key is communication: communication between SLOs and the police, but also communication between SLOs, the fans

and the police. I'm aware that SLOs have an extremely sensitive role when it comes to information, so it needs to be done properly. Besides communication, I think that it's important to have standards and job descriptions for SLOs, and we also have to invest heavily in their training."

Adrian believes the SLO role is now widely known among police forces across Europe. "We are working hard to promote this concept," he explains. "We hold regular police training activities in which we try to raise awareness by inviting representatives of SD Europe, for example, to explain the role. I believe in this idea, and I think it can bring added value. We intend to continue partnering with SD Europe to promote the supporter liaison concept."

Looking ahead, Adrian envisions big things: "The SLO requirement has to be fully implemented in the 55 UEFA member associations. In many countries, we don't have well-established fan organisations. I think SLOs will help to build the organisational capabilities of the fans. In eastern and central Europe, fan organisations are rare, which means the police lack supporter representatives to talk to. We need the fans to designate spokespersons, and I think SLOs will be able to help in this respect."

We concluded our conversation by turning to the 2016 [Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events](#). The convention

builds on the work done internationally since the adoption of the European Convention on Spectator Violence in 1985 and aims to move from a violence-focused approach to the organisation of sports events towards an integrated approach based on safety, security and service. The convention also established a standing committee to monitor its application and make recommendations on measures for its implementation to the signatories.

As Adrian explains: "As we speak, there is a process of transition under way, from the old to the new convention. We will have a new committee and have decided to refine the composition of the delegations to it. The recommendation is that each national delegation is formed of one representative of the ministry of the interior, relevant police force or NFIP, a second representative from the ministry of sport, and now also a third representative from the service pillar. At the moment, we have security, in the form of the police, and safety, in the form of the ministry of sport or other relevant organisation, but we lack service, which mostly covers the fan experience." The first meeting of the new committee took place in April 2021. At the time of writing, 38 countries had signed the new convention, of which 21 have ratified it.

The standing committee does a lot of important work in the field relating to football, fans and SLOs. Adrian explains: "Besides monitoring the implementation of the convention, the standing committee is responsible for a series of projects,

including one on international cooperation on safety, security and service, and also drafting of the relevant legislative framework." Another key task is to prepare practical guidance: "Besides the general principles set out in the convention, we have associated recommendations for its implementation based on the three pillars of safety, security and service. These recommendations are very extensive and were updated in 2019. They provide examples of best practice to help the member states implement the convention."

The work of the committee is enhanced by the presence of various football stakeholders, including supporters, in the

role of observers. "We have a series of observers to the standing committee which are organisations with an interest in this field," says Adrian. "The football observers include FIFA, UEFA and, on the supporter side, SD Europe, FSE, CAFE and Colour Blind Awareness."

There can be no doubt that the 2016 convention is playing a vital role in promoting a harmonised and integrated approach to safety, security and service at football matches and will continue to raise the profile of SLOs as key players in establishing structured dialogue and communication between the various football and non-football stakeholders.

KEY POINTS

1. Inclusion is not a soft option, but rather a key component in the policing of football matches in Europe. SLOs offer a structured approach to facilitating dialogue and communication between the police and supporters.
2. Effective police and SLO liaison, and communication with supporters in general, can play a key role in reducing the influence of any individuals and groups who seek conflict.
3. SLOs help to build mutual trust and respect between all parties providing a safe, secure and welcoming environment for everyone involved in the football experience.
4. Cooperation between the police and SLOs is being enhanced by targeted training and awareness-raising initiatives.
5. The 2016 Council of Europe convention promotes cooperation between all public and private stakeholders, including supporters, to enhance the environment at football matches and other sports events.

Case studies

Case study 1 – Improving the fan experience

“The role of an SLO is to provide added value for the club by creating a stronger bond between the fans and the club.”

Lasse Bauer, lead SLO at Brøndby IF, 2014-19

The SLO role encompasses many different areas, making it difficult to define in a job description. Yet this versatility also means it can be used in new and creative ways to benefit the club and its supporters. One example of this is a joint initiative between the SLOs and the marketing department at Brøndby IF, one of the biggest clubs in Denmark. Its SLOs used their insights into what was lacking in the matchday experience to create an attractive fan-driven facility next to the stadium, known as the ‘fan zone’, which today attracts between 1,000 and 1,500 supporters before games.

Lasse Bauer was the lead SLO at Brøndby IF between 2014 and 2019. He still plays an active role as chairman of the Brøndby Supporters Trust and board member of SD Europe, but no longer works for the club. He remembers the start of the fan zone project vividly: “Our head of marketing had wanted to improve the fan experience at the stadium for a long time. We were all discussing how to turn some of the

provisional arrangements we had into something more concrete and permanent. The cooperation between the SLOs and the marketing department had the best of both worlds. The SLOs knew what the fans wanted, and the marketing department set the financial goals. The SLOs were a key resource in the transformation of Brøndby Stadium between 2016 and 2019. The main result was the new fan zone.”

It took a lot of planning and research before work on the fan zone could begin. “We SLOs used our contacts,” Lasse explains. “I got in touch with other SLOs through the European SLO network set up by SD Europe, for example, to find out what their clubs had. We also went on trips in search of inspiration, both to Germany for football-related ideas and to non-football places, such as food markets and festivals.”

Involving the supporters was an essential part of the planning process, says Lasse: “We had surveys done on what the fans lacked the most at the games, and it soon became clear that they wanted to fix the entrances, freshen up the toilets and have a better food experience. And of course, the club wanted to create opportunities for the fan culture to grow.”

The whole set-up took six to nine months to build, plus a few modifications. Now Brøndby IF have one of the best fan zones in Europe, just behind the south entrance to their ground. There is space for between 1,000 and 1,500 people to eat, drink and

get ready for the upcoming game: “It’s been a huge success,” says Lasse. “The opening day exceeded all our expectations, and the club has recorded a higher percentage of satisfied fans. Supporters arrive earlier at the stadium and, of course, it generates more revenue on matchdays for the club.”

Lasse leads us through the fan zone: “As we get closer to the stadium, we have three or four food trucks with different types of food for every game. There are also two big outdoor bars with beer and water, and a place with a big grill. We also have a small merchandise shop. We wanted to create an environment which draws people in, with nice food, small streets, live music and heated areas for colder days. It’s more of a place to stay and linger, than to just pass

through quickly to buy something like at most stadiums.”

Brøndby Stadium has a capacity of 28,000 and the average attendance in the 2019/20 season was around half that, making Brøndby IF the best-supported club in the country. Most of the other clubs in the Danish Superliga are smaller, but they can still learn from what Brøndby have done. “I think it can serve as a great example for others,” Lasse says. “Other clubs’ SLOs have been here many times looking for inspiration.”

The creation of the fan zone at Brøndby could be regarded as falling outside the normal duties of an SLO, but Lasse strongly disagrees. “The role of an SLO, among other things, is to provide added



Brøndby IF's fan zone, with room for between 1,000 and 1,500 people to eat and drink before games

Brøndby fans warming up before a game

value for the club by creating a stronger bond between the fans and the club. The fan zone has really shown how close collaboration can contribute to this, with amazing results. It's all about looking at the work of the SLOs with the fans and the club as something broader than just matchday activities."

For Lasse, this is especially important and something he strongly believes in: "The SLOs, together with the club's administration, have been able to make sure that long-term development incorporates all the positive things that an active fan scene brings. You have to do more than just security and ticketing. For us, the fan zone was the icing on the cake. We also managed to build a family lounge where the youngest fans can play video games and table football on matchdays, as well as a dedicated lounge for long-standing season ticket holders."

When Lasse looks at the fan zone at Brøndby Stadium today, he is both happy and proud. "It was a superb team effort from the start," he says. "And we've made it clear that we don't simply talk about the supporters at Brøndby, we listen to them and take them seriously."

KEY POINTS

1. SLOs with long-standing experience of attending matches as fans are uniquely placed to feed into projects designed to improve the matchday experience.
2. Supporters should be involved in this process – things should not be decided over their heads.
3. It is a good idea for clubs to create offerings for all sections of the fan base. Using the stadium facilities to the full will help to grow revenues and strengthen the bond between the fans and the club long term.
4. Fans should be regularly surveyed about the quality of the matchday experience and their input sought on how to improve it.
5. It is important not to forget to include away fans in the above processes. Over the season, many supporters from other clubs will visit the stadium.

Case study 2 – Supporting diversity and inclusion

////////////////////
"Our group wouldn't exist without the support of our SLO."

Peter, chairman of Proud Hornets,
 Watford FC's LGBT fan group

Supporter liaison work is often focused on matchday issues, which is only natural, as matchday is when supporters meet up, and SLOs need to liaise with them. For many SLOs, however, the role extends into many other territories. One example of this can be found at Watford FC, where Dave Messenger, the club's SLO, has helped to create a welcoming environment for LGBT fans.

Lifelong Watford supporter Peter is the chairman of the Proud Hornets, the club's own LGBT fan group. He thinks it is essential to bring this subject to the forefront of the football world: "Most of the LGBT community have a very negative image of football," Peter says. "A lot of people like me turn away from the game, as it doesn't seem to fit with their life. Our role at the Proud Hornets is to change that image. It's about showing that you can be a football fan and be LGBT. It's not only about football fans being comfortable to come out as LGBT, it's just as much about allowing the LGBT community to 'come out' as football fans. We've had lots of members join that say, 'I used to be a fan

but when I came out, I stopped going to games.' Our group aims to make the fight against homophobia just as important as the fight against racism."

The Proud Hornets work closely with Watford FC and are not afraid to speak up in all matters LGBT. "The club have been very supportive to a point, but we always push for more," Peter explains. "A lot of how we work with the club goes unseen. We can advise or raise issues without having to seek publicity. A good example is that the club's standard online form used to only have options for male or female, so we pointed out to the club that it needed an 'other or rather not say' option so as not to discriminate against trans fans. This was changed with no fuss or publicity."

The Watford SLO has helped the Proud Hornets with many things over the years and Peter holds him in high regard: "Our group wouldn't exist without the support of Dave Messenger, our SLO," Peter explains. "It was Dave who encouraged us to form a group. He's helped us throughout and puts us up front in many things. With games being played behind closed doors, he designed the seat coverings and made sure we have a huge flag in a very prominent position, which has caught the eye of many other groups around the country. He also supports our group in matters like group tickets for away matches and makes sure we are represented on fan forums, etc. I think the role of the SLO is extremely important. It acts as a buffer between fans and the club. He enables people to



Peter with his Watford shirt in front of Vicarage Road



Proud Hornets with Watford's SLO Dave Messenger



The mosaic tifo that the Proud Hornets arranged for a home game at Vicarage Road

get involved in the club, especially if they have unusual circumstances, which might make it difficult to go through the normal channels."

One of the Proud Hornets' proudest moments was at a Premier League game in 2018 when they arranged a big tifo, a rainbow mosaic, at Vicarage Road, Watford's home ground. Peter explains: "The mosaic came about from a chance conversation with The 1881 group. They are the core fan group at Watford and have worked hard to improve the support at the club. Originally, we had thought it would be hard to persuade them to support our group, but it was their suggestion to do something to mark Rainbow Laces. We used their experience at creating mosaics to plan the event and then we spent several weeks rolling up the 7,000 pieces of paper needed. They then helped us lay them out in the stand the night before the match.

We were worried that people wouldn't hold them up and the display wouldn't work, but it looked amazing."

With the Premier League being such a widespread phenomenon, the Proud Hornets achieved the exposure they wanted: "The response shocked us," says Peter, "not only from people in the ground who were complimenting us, but also the media reaction around the world. The next day I was at home expecting a relaxing day, but instead I found myself fielding questions from around the world and doing interviews for around ten different countries. There were also negative homophobic comments, of course, but what was great was that we didn't need to respond, as other Watford fans were calling them out."

The atmosphere at Watford has massively improved in recent years, according to

Peter. And once again, it is the SLO at the club who has been working hard: "The 1881 group have worked closely with Dave to introduce a singing section, mosaics, flags and banners," Peter says. "I don't think Watford ever felt very uninclusive, as it always tried to be the family club. In recent years, though, I think it has worked hard to promote an inclusive image, with disability access, the sensory room, as well as very prominent campaigns against racism and homophobia. We talk regularly with other teams' groups and the common message we hear is that they like away days to Watford because of the atmosphere."

Asked about England as a whole, Peter thinks that grounds around the country are getting more inclusive, but some more so than others: "There are clearly clubs that will 'tick the box' but not really care about it," he says. "In talking with other groups, it's clear that some have a difficult

relationship with their club and find it hard to achieve anything. There are, however, clubs that work even more closely with their LGBT groups and give them access to higher levels within the club like managers and directors. Some clubs have gone as far as sponsoring their local LGBT pride events, which makes a massive statement to the LGBT community as a whole. There are LGBT fan groups at over 50 clubs now in the UK. I think the perception here is that the rest of Europe is behind the UK in fighting homophobia in football. It varies between countries, of course, but we see homophobic banners on display in some countries with nothing done to remove them."

KEY POINTS

1. Anti-discrimination work should be at the heart of everything an SLO does.
2. As the principal point of contact, SLOs are a key interface with the club for fans.
3. Encouraging the formation of official supporter groups creates lines of communication with the fan base and strengthens relations.
4. SLOs can facilitate supporter requests inside the club.
5. SLOs can contribute to the atmosphere at home games by assisting fans with tifos, banners, displays, etc.

Case study 3 – Communicating with fans



"I try to consider the things I would like to know when going to a match."

John Paul Taylor, SLO at Celtic FC

John Paul Taylor, or JP to his friends, is the SLO at Celtic FC. He's been in the role for seven years, after previously spending 15 years as the manager of the club's ticketing operations. The SLO job at Celtic is challenging, and at times stressful. "It's certainly demanding," JP admits. "It never stops, you're always working. As Celtic is such a big club, there's always something happening, and you have to try to be aware of all aspects that affect and impact our supporters. Even on time off, you're always watching the news, email and social media to see if there's anything going on that you should be aware of."

Celtic are one of the big two clubs in Scotland and in the 2019/20 season won their ninth league title in a row. The average attendance at Celtic Park that season was close to 60,000. Lots of work for an SLO, then, but for JP, working for the club that is close to his heart is an honour more than anything else: "I think it's a privilege to hold the position and although it's a difficult job, it's still very

different to many other jobs because it has a great deal of variety. I've been a Celtic fan all my life, so to get the chance to work for the club is just fantastic. I've also been very interested in football fan culture since I was young, so this role is perfect for me, as it allows me to see all the various styles of support and backing that the club gets from across the fan base. It's interesting to see and understand the different approaches."

We've chosen to feature JP here not solely because he is the SLO of a big club with massive support, with all the unique work that entails, but also because he is known throughout the SLO world for his impressive use of social media. He uses Twitter as his main communication platform: "I sometimes use Instagram but not often," he explains. "I find Twitter to be the most effective in terms of getting messages out to fans quickly and it's useful for responding to any major talking points. It only allows short messages but is very dynamic and gets information out to a mass audience very quickly. The club has a number of different accounts which communicate football news, but I try to stay away from that and focus more on fan-related issues."

Managing the Celtic SLO social media channels takes up a lot of JP's time, but he feels it is more than worth the effort. Asked to explain what the work entails, he says: "When we have fans at matches, it's mostly related to travel, access, local information, and essentially all you need to know as a

fan travelling to a match. Besides that, I try to deal with service issues and provide additional information that I think is relevant to supporters. I try to consider the things I would like to know when going to a match at home or abroad. I spend a lot of my day monitoring my Twitter account, as I don't like to miss any questions. Obviously, it's not possible to answer everything, some things have to be kept private, and it's best not to talk about opposition clubs. I try to focus on Celtic only and provide information and assistance that I think benefits our fans."

Spending all this time on social media for the benefit of the fans is hard work, but it is also rewarding. JP believes the fans appreciate the time he puts in: "I think they do, there's always good banter with the fans through the social media, but I also get a lot of correspondence through

email and telephone, so it feels like there are a number of fans who see a value in the service we provide."

JP is the club's sole SLO, with his colleague Alexis working as the disability access officer (DAO), but he hopes to add to the numbers in the future once the COVID-19 crisis is over. He spends approximately 8 to 10 hours on social media per week, but this fluctuates, of course, depending on what is taking place: "After the season is over, our workload does tend to drop slightly," says JP, "but not as much as people would think. This is when there is a season ticket renewal campaign which generates a lot of correspondence and enquiries. Although this is predominantly managed through our ticket office, it still creates a lot of interest, as fans want to know if they can buy, when they can buy, where they can buy, if they can change seats, etc. Then, of course, we



JP Taylor, in the middle, at a European away game in Astana, Kazakhstan

JP in the thick of it during a European away game

hit the European qualifiers and it all starts up again very quickly.”

Asked when his social media work has really paid off for the fans, JP talks about big games and European nights, both home and away, as this is when things tend to go from ordinary to extraordinary. “I think we see the biggest benefits when we’re hosting a big match and there are changes to the standard matchday routine,” JP says. “These changes can have a big impact on safety and security at matches, so it’s important to get the communication right. We also find that when we play away matches in Europe, it’s essential that we give fans the correct information about the local area and customs. Where necessary and practical, we provide transport for fans in Europe, so information on where to find this, along with the scheduling, is vitally important. This all seems to work well, and we receive a lot of positive feedback from the fans who use these services, as they can very often make a big difference to their trip.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the work JP does on social media, of course, but his workload has not decreased. Quite the opposite: “I would say that more fans are using social media as a means of communication during this time. The volume of communication has definitely increased. I think with so many changes and, of course, the fact that fans aren’t able to attend matches, there is a greater demand for content and information from the club, as fans still wish to be part of it

but can’t come to the stadium. It’s up to the club and people like me to try to help to fill the gap by answering questions and providing as much information as possible. I hope it won’t be for much longer and that we’ll soon see fans returning to football. It’s simply not the same without the fans.”

KEY POINTS

1. SLOs should always make sure they are up to date on matters affecting and of concern to supporters.
2. Social media can be a highly effective tool for getting information out to supporters quickly.
3. Great care is needed when using social media. SLOs should stick to providing factual information and answering related questions.
4. Offering opinions or commenting on other clubs should be avoided.
5. Social media communications can help a game run smoothly, especially when safety and security measures or other arrangements change at short notice.

Case study 4 – Deploying SLO resources effectively



“Increasingly clubs are realising that they can benefit from having free-standing SLOs”

Julia Düvelsdorf, head of fan coordination, Werder Bremen

SLOs can be found working in many different departments at European clubs. Increasingly, however, clubs are realising that they can benefit from having free-standing SLOs. One such place is German club Werder Bremen, where they have a department entirely devoted to fan support. Julia Düvelsdorf, who is head of fan coordination at the club, explains how this came to be: “Four years ago, we were called Fan and Member Support, even though we weren’t part of the membership department. The previous head wanted to show that we were also responsible for member issues. That led to a lot of misunderstanding, so we changed the name to Fan Support. That doesn’t mean we aren’t committed to membership issues. It simply signals that we operate separately from the membership department.”

Julia, a lifelong Werder fan who first visited the Weserstadion as a five-year-old, has worked as an SLO for the club since 2010. She does not work alone:

“My team consists of three full-time SLOs, three disability access officers (part-time and voluntary), and four additional SLOs who work on matchdays,” she says. “The club employs so many SLOs because of the intensity of the job. This means we can share the weekend and evening appointments, and also do justice to the diverse nature of the tasks and target groups. We don’t just handle matchday and the related preparation, follow-up, admin tasks and fan club support. Work related to important topics such as combating discrimination, the qualitative development of fan work and supporting people with disabilities is also important to us. The work at federal level and on committees is also high on our agenda. A well-staffed team is the basic requirement to ensure high-quality, strategic performance without the risk of burnout.”

Julia is aware that the SLO role is often seen as a security role in many parts of Europe, but for her there is a key distinction: “It is important to differentiate between the fan department and the security department without jeopardising the close cooperation and communication needed between us, which has to be based on trust. It’s an extremely sensitive topic, as there are several issues that the two departments have different points of view on. Members of both departments must be aware of their respective roles in order to come up with appropriate solutions. That requires a lot of empathy on both sides. As fan support, we are part of the security architecture but also a driver of alternative options and



The SLO team at Werder Bremen

solutions with the ultimate goal of finding a compromise that is satisfactory to all the parties involved.”

Werder Bremen has quite a large ultra scene, which is a challenge for the SLO team. “In total we have seven ultra groups,” Julia says, “Infamous Youth, Wanderers Bremen, UTB, L’Intesa Verde, Caillera, HB Crew and Ultra Boys. We have been supporting the active fan scene for over ten years now. There are always ups and downs but the basic cooperation in terms of matchday preparation, etc. is going very well. Social and anti-discrimination projects also connect us, although we don’t currently have as much regular contact as usual due to COVID-19.”

There are also differences between the club’s views and those of the ultras. “The ultras’ activities include criticising the commercialisation of football. As the club is part of a system within the football world, the intermediary role of the SLOs is extremely sensitive and can sometimes reach breaking point. As an example, the club changed their stadium sponsorship in 2019 and with that the name of the stadium. This has led to a halt in dialogue between the club and the ultras, which makes our role as mediators almost obsolete. On the other hand, other mutual activities, such as the work against racism and discrimination and the leading role the ultras have assumed by organising workshops, events and panel discussions ensure we still cooperate on a regular basis.”

One important aspect of the department’s work is when Werder Bremen play away: “Werder fans have been among the league’s most frequent travellers for years,” Julia explains. “At away games you’re first and foremost a guest, meaning your work has a completely different basis than at home games. You’re dependent on the local conditions and your direct counterpart at the other club. On the one hand, there are colleagues with whom we have excellent relationships due to the nationwide network of SLOs. On the other, there are also police and security teams on-site whose personnel change quite frequently, which can be a problem. Our main priority at away games, therefore, is to gather reliable information and pass it on to our fans as quickly as possible.”

At home games, Werder fans are familiar with their own ground and the surroundings, which makes the work of the SLOs much easier. “They only need to be informed if something changes. From an organisational perspective, we provide support and assistance for big choreographies and matchday events, but we also give our utmost attention to the fan community of the visiting club. Our main focus at home games is on making sure the away SLO team get all the information they need when they need it.”

The recent pandemic has affected the work of the SLOs, of course, and Julia longs for football to return to normal. “We miss the everyday routine with the fan community. The things that define our work – talking,

laughing, crying, arguing, discussing, singing and sometimes staying silent – no longer exist due to COVID-19. You have to think of new ways to re-establish contact with the fans slowly but surely. I’m really looking forward to being at the stadium and travelling across the country with them again. That’s why we love this job!”

KEY POINTS

1. The SLO role is broad and complex, so it’s best to build a team wherever possible.
2. Deploying matchday SLOs helps SLOs to deal with increased demands on their time and extends the physical area they can cover.
3. It is important for SLOs to maintain contact and cooperate with supporter groups even if dialogue breaks down over a particular issue.
4. Information provided to fans must be accurate and up to date, especially at away matches.
5. SLOs should seek to provide the best possible service to away supporters. Next week, their club will be the away club.

Case study 5 – Combining the SLO role with other functions



“Even if a club lacks the capacity to engage a full-time SLO, they can still find someone who is able to fulfil the role.”

Tomaš Čarnogurský, SLO at FC Slovan Liberec and SLO coordinator for the Czech Football League.

Though the SLO role has been mandatory across Europe since the start of the 2012/13 season, work remains to be done to fully implement the licensing requirement. Yet, even in countries that were slower out of the starting blocks, there are still valuable lessons to be learned. In the Czech Republic, for example, the SLO function has been introduced in the top two divisions, albeit on a smaller scale and still requiring adjustments. Here to tell us all about it is Tomáš Čarnogurský, SLO at FC Slovan Liberec and SLO coordinator for the Czech Football League (LFA).

Tomáš has worked at Slovan Liberec for 11 years, but his love for the club goes back much further. “My father took me to my first match in 1993, when I was 11 years old,” he says. “Very soon I became part of the active fan scene. For 15 years, I went to almost every home and away game. I was one of the leaders and I also started a fan

project focused on violence prevention and combating racism.”

While following his club, he also obtained a university degree in sociology, specialising in football and fan-related topics, which brought him to the club’s attention. “Yes, that’s how I got into the SLO business,” Tomáš confirms. “I started working for the club in 2009. At that time, the SLO role was unknown. It wasn’t easy in the beginning, as not everyone was convinced, but it became easier when the role received the official support of UEFA.”

Slovan Liberec are a mid-sized club with about 15 employees. They were founded in 1958 and have won three titles since the Czech Republic was established in 1993. Slovan take part quite regularly in European competition, and play their home games at Stadion u Nisy, which has a capacity of almost 10,000. Their average attendance is around 4,000 spectators, and they are accompanied to away games by anything from 20 to 300 supporters. Tomáš is the club’s only SLO, as he explains: “I work full-time for the club, but the SLO function is just one part of my job. During a normal week, I mainly do standard PR and marketing tasks, but I’m also responsible for preparing for matches as the SLO, which means I liaise with the opposition club and the police, organise away travel and manage the ticketing. During matches, I work closely with volunteers from the fan base. It’s not an ideal model, but for us it’s the only way to maintain the SLO function. There are lots of disadvantages in

being alone and having many duties, but sometimes you can turn your disadvantages into advantages. I can, for example, solve many issues quite easily myself, as I don’t have to consult anybody else.”

Apart from operating as a club SLO, Tomáš also serves as the SLO coordinator for the LFA, a role he has performed for the last three years, and as the main point of contact for the national association (FAČR). “Since I was the most experienced SLO in the Czech Republic and also had close links with SD Europe, the LFA decided that I should help them to coordinate the development of the SLO work,” he explains. “Our biggest achievement to date was our involvement in the LIAISE project run by SD Europe. Sharing experiences with other countries and organising our part of the project was a big help to us.”

As the SLO coordinator for the Czech Republic, Tomáš acts as the focal point for SLOs across the country. “I’m in touch with the other SLOs on a weekly basis,” he says. “We’ve created an informal group of active club SLOs, and we meet regularly to share our experiences and discuss important news. We also update our SLO Twitter account. Once a year, we organise workshops for all SLOs in cooperation with the LFA. I also present on the SLO role to other stakeholders, such as the police, safety and security officers, and the media.”

The SLO coordinator role is a demanding one, especially given that Tomáš also works full-time for his club. “I wish we had the capacity to do more to help the clubs to develop the SLO role,” he says. “Unfortunately, we can’t do much more at the moment because my colleagues and I are busy working for our clubs. In the future,



FC Slovan Liberec at their home ground, Stadion u Nisy

Tomáš Čarnogurský (far right) at work as an SLO

we definitely need someone who can invest more time in the coordination as their primary task. We need someone who can be in touch with all the clubs and explain all the possibilities of the SLO role to them.”

The situation today in the Czech Republic is not ideal, with obstacles and problems still to overcome, but through determination and a flexible approach, progress has been made. Tomáš remains positive and optimistic for this reason. “The clubs that take part in the UEFA competitions have seen the experiences of other European clubs and the benefits of having an SLO, so they were proactive even before the FAČR and the LFA introduced requirements for SLOs. Those clubs realised that having an SLO could actually help them. The three Prague clubs, for example, Sparta, Slavia

and Bohemians, all found and hired SLOs. No Czech club has a full-time SLO, though. All the active SLOs have other duties in the club management. Unfortunately, we still have a few clubs whose SLOs appear to exist just on paper, but we started from nothing, so it’s definitely an improvement.”

Asked what other countries in the same position can learn from the Czech Republic, Tomáš says: “Even if a club lacks the capacity to engage a full-time SLO, they can still find someone who is able to fulfil the role, ensuring that the club gets the basic SLO work done, which is better than having no one there at all. Taking part in international projects such as the ones organised by SD Europe also helps to broaden your knowledge base and professionalise the work.”



With his experience at national level, Tomáš has identified which areas need improvement and is working with both football and non-football stakeholders to address them: “At the moment, all the key stakeholders know about the role, from the governing bodies and the clubs to fans and the police. They know me and they know my fellow SLOs. They also know the SLO role can benefit them. What we need now is to find a way to fund an employee to develop and improve our work. I’m happy that FAČR will take part in SD Europe’s upcoming TRANSFER project designed to facilitate the transnational exchange of staff, ideas and good practices within European football. This underlines their commitment to further developing the SLO role.”

Thinking about the future, Tomáš has a clear idea of where he wants Czech football to be in a few years: “I want to see every club in the top division deploying active SLOs. I also hope that SLOs will be taking part in the decision-making processes of the LFA. Another of our aims for the next few years is to improve conditions for away fans and facilitate and improve communication between the active fan groups at the clubs and the football authorities.”

KEY POINTS

1. Clubs without the resources to employ full-time SLOs can combine the role with other positions.
2. Clubs can create a matchday SLO team using volunteers from the fan base to increase their reach.
3. Governing bodies can make good use of club SLOs to help them roll out the licensing requirement.
4. Organising an SLO network can facilitate the sharing of good practice, provide mutual support and serve as a line of communication between the football authorities and club SLOs.
5. SLO development is not simply a task for the football authorities but should form part of a multi-agency approach involving all the key stakeholders.

Case study 6 – Applying the SLO role in smaller countries



"There's no reason why a smaller federation shouldn't have well-educated SLOs. The SLO role is really important."

Andrea Vidal Santin, SLO coordinator, Andorran Football Federation

Clubs and national associations around Europe may differ immensely in size, but no matter how big or small, they can all use the SLO role as a force for good in the football community. A common misconception is that some clubs are too small to deploy the SLO function in an effective way. That is by no means the case, however. In this case study, we look at one of the smallest governing bodies, the Andorran Football Federation (FAF), to see how they tackle the challenge of implementing the SLO licensing requirement.

Covering an area of just 468km² and with a population of just over 77,000, Andorra is the sixth smallest nation in Europe. Its capital city, Andorra la Vella, has fewer than 23,000 inhabitants. The FAF was founded in 1994 and became a member of UEFA and FIFA two years later. It organises the top division, the Primera Divisió, which started in 1995, and the Andorran national

team. The SLO coordinator at the FAF is Andrea Vidal Santin, who is every bit as passionate about her work as anyone from the bigger federations. "I've been working for the FAF for 13 years, the last seven of which as the licensing manager and SLO coordinator. I'm also the assistant match manager for international games, focusing primarily on home matches. These are my main roles at the federation."

The size of the country means the Andorran league set-up differs greatly from most European leagues, as Andrea explains: "There are just eight teams in the top division, and all eight play at the same stadium. There are four games every Sunday for which no tickets are required and entry is free. On a normal Sunday, there are between 200 and 400 spectators inside the ground."

Contrary to what one may think, every club in the Andorran first division has an SLO, although it is not their only role. "All eight clubs have SLOs, that's correct," says Andrea "For us, it's important that they can speak English so they can communicate with the visiting team at European games. But to give them the best possible start, one of the first things we did was to translate the UEFA SLO handbook into Catalan, which is the official language of Andorra. We also developed a toolkit for them to use, especially at European games. Sometimes the away team has more fans here than the home team. It's so different from an ordinary league game."

Andrea takes great pride in her work, and the FAF's hands-on approach to implementing the SLO licensing requirement can serve as a model for other European countries. "We have an annual meeting with the SLOs where we go through the handbook and the toolkit and where everyone shares their experiences," she explains. "Most of the work for the SLOs comes after the UEFA Champions League draws, when the teams who are playing in Europe know which teams they are facing. I help the SLOs to prepare for these matches. Our main objective is for them to manage the work themselves, but sometimes they do need a little assistance."

One of the busiest times for Andrea is when the national team play at home against one of the bigger European nations. "When we played France and Portugal in the EURO qualifying competition, for example, we had a full house both times, mainly with away fans. The task then is to organise the two sets of supporters in a sensible way. I establish contact with the SLO coordinator of the away team, the ticketing manager and, of course, the security officer. It's teamwork. When France were here, they wanted a fan zone in the city where their fans could drink beer and sing, so we set one up with the help of the Andorran police. When we played Portugal, they brought four or five of their own stewards with them, and that helped a lot."

Perhaps the biggest challenge in recent times came in October 2017, when Andorra managed a surprise 1-0 home win over Hungary in a World Cup qualifier. As Andrea recalls: "It was an incredibly good night for our fans, of course, but it created tension among the Hungary supporters, who were really angry with their team. They refused to leave the stadium and demanded that the captain and the coach came and explained themselves. It was tough, but by working together we were able to keep the situation under control."

This close cooperation is one advantage of being a smaller federation. The SLO, the security officer and the police function as a tight-knit unit. "We're more like a family," says Andrea with a grin. "When the national team play at home, we all know each other extremely well. We work very closely and stay in constant contact. Some of the bigger European countries bring a lot of people with them when we play, and sometimes they don't seem to know each other so well or don't communicate with each other as well as they could do. You have to speak to ten different people before you get the right answer. Their workflow is more complicated. It's quite the opposite with us, where everyone knows each other and can help out, and it's this familiarity and flexibility that I think the bigger federations can learn from the smaller ones."



The Andorran under 21 national team celebrating a goal in front of a banner with digital fans during the pandemic

Size, then, is no reason why a national association cannot implement the SLO function. Despite making good progress, Andrea is not about to rest on her laurels. She wants to develop the role even further across the board: “We already have more stringent criteria than the UEFA regulations, since our SLOs have to take part in our annual meeting to obtain their credentials. Their attendance is mandatory because if their team qualifies for Europe, they need to be familiar with all the information in the handbook and the toolkit as well as the latest knowledge. There’s no reason why a smaller federation shouldn’t have well-educated SLOs. The SLO role is really important.”

KEY POINTS

1. Smaller federations can implement the SLO licensing requirement just as well as larger ones.
2. It is important for smaller clubs and countries to have SLOs in place, especially when hosting big games with large influxes of visiting fans.
3. SLOs should receive all the necessary training materials in their native language, but they also need to be able to communicate in English to facilitate dialogue and understanding at European matches.
4. The club SLO network needs to be nurtured through hands-on support.
5. Lines of communication between stakeholders should be as simple and flexible as possible so that matchday operations go smoothly.

Impact for governing bodies



“You need all the stakeholders to believe in it.”

Mats Enquist,
general secretary, Swedish
Football League

In this chapter, we look at Sweden and Portugal – two countries that have witnessed positive change as a result of introducing the SLO role, albeit at different paces. Learning good practice from our European neighbours inspires and promotes the transfer of knowledge between governing bodies. We begin with Sweden, one of the first countries in Europe, outside Germany, to harness the potential of the SLO role.

Mats Enquist is the general secretary at the Swedish Football League (SEF). He remembers the start of the 2012 season very well, when all 16 clubs in the highest division, the Allsvenskan, had to appoint their own SLOs. A national SLO coordinator took charge of implementing the licensing requirement at SEF: “At that time, no one saw the SLO function as a serious tool to improve relations between the stakeholders. What happened was a combination of quite a few things. First of all, at SEF we concluded that supporters were key stakeholders and thus a top priority. Instead of threatening them with bans, travel restrictions and the like, we resolved to listen to the supporters. The tone of the football authorities changed.”

In Sweden, the SLO role began life as part of a pilot scheme initiated at five clubs with funding from a group of private sponsors, but SEF soon became involved when it realised the potential. Mats remembers vividly: “It was really important for SEF to show goodwill. We really wanted to have a better relationship with our supporters and the SLO role seemed perfect for achieving that, but I also have to praise those clubs that took the leap of faith and entered uncharted waters. Another important factor was the patience shown by all the partners. No one refused at the first hurdle. I also think the timing was right.”

Around the same time, the relationship between the authorities, SEF and the fans took a big step forward with the creation of a national supporter organisation, the Swedish Football Supporters Union (SFSU), which encompasses almost all the supporter groups in the top two divisions. “This was huge,” says Mats. “Suddenly, we had an official representative of the fans to speak to, the SFSU chairman, who had the authority and a mandate from the membership. I don’t think we would have had the same impact otherwise. All in all, I think we collectively created an environment where showing respect to the supporters became accepted.”

Today, the SLO role has taken root in Sweden. Club SLOs are well-known figures, internally and externally, and their remit has been extended to include the national team. Most of them have gained the confidence of their club and the

supporters, though Mats would still like to see more progress: “It’s not fully established everywhere yet. All the clubs have started to implement the function, but they’re at different stages. To my mind, the SLO role should be considered one of the most important at every Swedish club. It’s getting better and better, and their standing is improving rapidly. This is partly because the clubs have come to appreciate the worth of the SLOs, but it’s also because the SLOs themselves have grown in stature.”

When Mats became SEF general secretary back in 2012, relations between the clubs and the supporters were not good, to put it mildly. Today, it is a different story – a

success story. Asked if he has any advice for leagues that are still working on relations and implementing the SLO role, Mats says: “You need all the stakeholders to believe in it. That’s the one crucial point. SEF believed in it, and we wore down the resistance. The fans believed in it, too. They saw it could be an important tool and helped us out when problems arose. And, slowly but surely, the clubs believed in it, too, which meant we had the support of everyone in the football family. When complications occurred, as they always do, we were able to come together and drive things forward. What’s more, as I said before – and it needs to be hammered home – you have to persevere.”



Mats Enquist in discussion with Sofia Bohlin, chair of the SFSU

With so much achieved already, Mats is looking forward to what is to come: “I have high hopes that we’ll be able to create even greater confidence in the role. Dialogue between the stakeholders in the football community is the way forward. We’ve seen that we get lots of good advice from supporters via the SLO role that we can then weave into our decision-making processes and policies. The opposite is also true, in that supporters now understand why some things just aren’t possible. Our SLOs are fundamental for the understanding between SEF, the clubs and the supporters.”

Portugal was a bit later to the party than Sweden, and the SLO role is not as established, but the last few years have seen some interesting developments within the Portuguese football community. **Jorge Silvério** is the SLO coordinator at the Portuguese Football Federation (FPF). He started in 2012, having previously performed the role of supporter ombudsman at the Portuguese Football League: “I participated in the expert group that UEFA put together in 2010 to produce the SLO handbook. After that, the FPF president, Fernando Gomes, invited me to take on the role of SLO coordinator in Portugal.”

Jorge adopted a gradual approach to implementing the licensing requirement rather than trying to push everything

through straightaway, understanding that a period of grace was necessary for the clubs to become accustomed to the new position: “My first task was to talk to all the Portuguese clubs to explain the purpose of this new function and ask them to nominate at least one SLO. My second task was to explain the role to the SLOs appointed by the clubs and help them to do their job.”

The journey to where Portugal is now has not been an easy one. A lack of knowledge about the SLO role and the reasons for its introduction was the first obstacle to surmount, and others soon followed. “I had to establish and maintain contact with all the stakeholders, be it the government, the police, the clubs, the public, and so on, in order to explain what an SLO is and what they do,” says Jorge. “Another significant hurdle was the creation of the conditions necessary for the SLOs to work.”

Steady progress has been made in Portugal since then, and though there are still stumbling blocks to overcome, Jorge is optimistic: “The most important accomplishment of the SLO role in Portugal is that it is helping to solve problems for supporters and make them feel welcome at the stadium. This is something we strive to achieve at every game.”

The status of the SLO role is improving, as the stakeholders become familiar with it and what it can mean for Portuguese football, as Jorge explains: “It’s much better than at the beginning, when knowledge

of the role was non-existent among the stakeholders, but we still have a lot of work to do to offer supporters safety, security and service in accordance with the 2016 Council of Europe convention. The public and the various stakeholders in the football community hold the SLOs in higher regard than they did before, and the SLOs themselves have also come to understand the importance of the job they do, but this process is still ongoing.”

To ensure the SLO role in Portugal continues its steady rise, Jorge has taken part in several pan-European projects over the years to learn as much as possible from the experience of other countries. One such initiative was **LIAISE**, an Erasmus+ project run by SD Europe in 2018/19 with funding from the European Commission and UEFA, about which Jorge is full of praise: “I learned so much from the other European experiences, but, most significantly, how important it is to engage the stakeholders in dialogue in order to provide supporters with the best possible service.”

As a result of all this, all 36 teams in Portugal’s top two divisions, the Primeira Liga and the Segunda Liga, now have at least one SLO. In his capacity as SLO coordinator at the FPF, Jorge is in constant contact with SLOs across Portugal. “I speak to them whenever they need help,” he says. “I also try to visit each one of them at least once a year. We also get together once a year to discuss the main issues of the season. The main task now is to consolidate what we have already achieved

in Portugal and improve the quality of the training we offer to SLOs with the help of the UEFA Academy and the two sessions of the SLO education programme that we have scheduled for 2021, so that every supporter feels welcome and well treated at every stadium!”

KEY POINTS

1. Ensuring that everyone understands and buys into the SLO role is essential.
2. It is important for stakeholders to persevere when setbacks occur and stay true to the principle of maintaining dialogue.
3. SLOs can be a vital communication channel between stakeholders.
4. SLOs need to be patient but resolute. Rome was not built in a day!
5. Pan-European projects can be an enriching learning experience.

National team SLOs



"We have fewer games than the league clubs, but ours are often bigger."

Anders Hagen, Danish Football Association SLO

SLOs at national team level are a relatively new phenomenon. Until recently, the focus was mainly on club competitions, but more and more football associations are introducing national team SLOs as appreciation grows among stakeholders of the benefits of supporter liaison in the context of the integrated approach to safety, security and service at football matches espoused by the 2016 Council of Europe convention (see page 94). We would therefore like to provide some insights into the challenges involved and explain how it differs from the role of the club SLO by way of three examples. In doing so, we will focus on how the use of national team SLOs in the run-up to EURO 2020 had a positive impact in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

Essentially, there are two ways to approach the SLO role at national team level, and we will shed light on both. One option is to use existing club SLOs and deploy them whenever the national team is playing. This usually fits nicely into the match calendar, as the leagues take a break when the national team plays. Having experienced and trained SLOs working at the games is an additional benefit.

The second option is for football associations to employ full-time SLOs who work solely with the national team, which

is what the Danish Football Association (DBU) has done. Anders Hagen was given the job after a lengthy application process. "I was invited to two separate interviews," Anders recalls. "At the second interview, I had to present solutions to a set of tasks I had been given." Anders had no previous experience as an SLO and was working as a sports journalist for national radio when he applied for the job. His academic background includes a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Copenhagen. He did have a season ticket for his club team, though, and had travelled to away games frequently, so he was familiar with the SLO function. Today, Anders maintains close contact with the Danish club SLOs, and swaps notes with them regularly. He also took part in the SLO education programme alongside them.

The most palpable difference between national team SLOs and their club counterparts is the number of games they have to cover. Anders admits there is less practical work during a regular season but there are other factors that might not come into play at club level, such as the size of the crowds and the number of teams he looks after: "We do have fewer games than the league clubs, but ours are often bigger. We also have a national team supporters club with more than 20,000 members, so I spend a lot of time working on events for them 'off-season'. I also help out with Denmark's women's team, and every now and then the Under-21 teams."

One of his main duties is to develop the fan base for the national team. This encompasses all manner of tasks. "I participate in the national team podcast,

deliver lots of content through various channels and communicate with the fans," Anders explains. "I take part in all the relevant internal DBU meetings and I'm sent all over to listen to the fans' views. I'm also the primary contact person for the Danish police when it comes to the home games for the national team."

Turning to the practical aspects of his work, Anders describes his mission as follows: "Essentially, I try to create the best possible fan experience at national team matches. For away games, this means lots of different things. I give out information before the games, help with ticketing and tifos, and organise fan zones and marches. And for the home games in Copenhagen, I've helped to develop a new fan stand known as the Red Wall. On top of this, I'm involved in our new ticketing strategy, where we've started a subscription-based system for the national team. I also try to bring the players closer to the fans. At a recent away game in Gibraltar, for example, I arranged for the national team player Thomas Delaney to give a talk to the fans before the game."

To keep track of how the fans are responding to the SLO work at national team level, the DBU runs surveys after every game. The results are encouraging. "A lot of people rate my work highly, which makes me happy, of course. I was employed around the same time as the launch of the DBU's new fan strategy, so I've become a kind of poster child for that."

Moving on from Denmark, a different approach to the national team SLO role has been adopted in neighbouring

Sweden and Norway, where the strategy has been to engage club SLOs to work at international games. For the Swedish Football Association (SvFF), the principal aim was to make use of existing expertise by recruiting a pool of SLOs from different clubs in the top division. There are some important differences between the work at club and national team level. Supporters of the national team are made up of fans who follow different clubs, of course, and some may not even have a favourite club. There may also be differences as far as fan culture is concerned, with contrasting demographics among matchgoers.

So how does it work in practice? Let's start with Sweden, where **Fredrik Nilsson** is the lead SLO at Allsvenskan side IFK Norrköping and a member of the SLO team that rotates at national team matches. "This group is made up of SLOs from five top-tier clubs – IFK Norrköping,



Djurgårdens IF, Hammarby IF, AIK and IFK Göteborg," he explains. One question that springs to mind immediately is how his own club and principal employer views his additional work for the national team. "At my club, they see it as a good thing that will help me in my professional development," Fredrik replies. "A lot of management and medical personnel from the club have helped the national team over the years. Sometimes when I've worked a lot at club level, I can take time off in lieu and work for the national team, and thus it doesn't cost the club any money."

Despite the differences in the fan bases, Fredrik believes the processes are quite similar whether he is working for his club or for the national team. "Around the games, it's pretty much the same. We attend the pre-match meetings, we help the fans with tifos, we try to organise the supporter gatherings – things you could call basic SLO work really," he says. "The big difference for me is that you don't get as close to the fans as you do at your club, where the contact is constant all year round." This also means that national team supporters are not as accustomed to the SLO role as club supporters. "The national team attracts fans who are less acquainted with the SLO function, so on matchday, it can become more of a service point, where we help people find the right entrances and things like that."

Even though the SvFF role is not a year-round job, there is still work to do during the close season, as Fredrik explains: "We've had development days with Camp Sweden, the official Sweden supporters organisation, as well as with the national

team tifo group, where we've discussed what we can do to improve the atmosphere at games".

As in Denmark, the response from the fans has been positive. "As a club SLO, you're always available and ready to answer the phone 24 hours a day," says Fredrik. "And now the national team supporters have cottoned on to this as well. A lot of fans find it easier to contact the SvFF through the SLOs. I also think the SLO group has brought some new perspectives to the SvFF, which is benefitting the other work they do."

Now on to the Football Association of Norway (NFF), which took its first tentative steps towards introducing the SLO role at national team level at a game against Sweden in early 2019. **Matijas Loeb**, who served as the SLO at Vålerenga from 2017 to 2020, remembers the occasion well. "I was hired as a national team SLO for the game against Sweden at Ullevaal Stadion. Sweden travelled to Oslo with two SLOs and in the run-up to the game, they expressed their surprise that Norway did not have any SLOs, as it was a big game with a big crowd expected. The NFF then asked me to work for them at the game. The cooperation with the Swedish SLOs was really good." This positive experience convinced the NFF to continue with the SLO experiment for the rest of Norway's EURO qualifiers.

At club level, the Norwegian SLOs are organised via a steering committee composed of three experienced SLOs. The NFF has selected these three SLOs to work



for the national team. According to Matijas, there are differences between the two jobs: "As a national team SLO you have to find meeting places for the fans at the away games, you have to deal with ticketing issues, you have to secure the dialogue with all the relevant stakeholders, and so on, and you do that on a game-by-game basis, whereas at club level, it's an ongoing dialogue with your own supporters."

Matijas points to the impact the SLOs had at the two Sweden games in 2019 when asked what he considers good practice at national team level. "Norwegian football supporters had very rarely been met by football association staff looking after their interests at international games before. Our presence prevented many minor hiccups at both games, and our fans were really happy with the arrangements. The excellent cooperation with the Swedish SLOs meant that we found perfect meeting points for our fans and had good transport and smooth access to the stadium."

The response from the Norway supporters has been positive as a result, and Matijas definitely feels that the work he and his colleagues do is valued. "We've had a lot of good feedback, especially at away games. Supporters travelling to another country really appreciate all the information you can give them. It's made the fans feel safe and secure when we've given them details of meeting points, contact information, ticketing arrangements, the stadium layout, etc. It's fairly small and simple tasks we're talking about, but it can make a tremendous difference."

As such, Matijas says there was no conflict between his job at Vålerenga and the work for the national team. "The two

commitments are totally separate from each other. The work for the national team has been by assignment and with a token fee. It has centred on matchdays, with some extra work before and after the game, whereas at my club, I had a contract as a full-time employee working with the fans on an ongoing basis."

KEY POINTS

1. As understanding of the benefits of supporter liaison grows, more and more football associations are appointing SLOs at national team level.
2. Football associations can either appoint their own national team SLOs or deploy a fixed or rotating team of existing club SLOs.
3. National team SLOs help to improve relationships with a diverse fan base and also look after the needs of visiting supporters, creating a positive matchday experience for all.
4. SLOs can offer an easy way for supporters to contact national associations. Their insights into the fan base enhance their work at national team matches.
5. Fans appreciate the support they receive from their national team SLOs, especially when travelling to away games.



Fredrik Nilsson in the middle of things

The SLO education programme at the UEFA Academy

“In partnering with SD Europe, we want to take SLO training to the next level.”

Thomas Junod, head of the UEFA Academy

In the football world, there is now broad consensus on the importance of:

- the early exchange of information between the various football stakeholders;
- an integrated partnership approach to match organisation;
- greater use of the experience and knowledge of SLOs and supporter groups as part of match preparations;
- increased implementation by countries of the 2016 Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events.

Against this background, increasing demands are being placed on SLOs by a host of stakeholders, all with different needs, wants and expectations. Negotiating these different aspirations to the satisfaction of all, often at a moment's notice, is an extremely difficult task and one which requires an adequate level of training to equip SLOs with the necessary knowledge, expertise and skills.

To address this need, UEFA and SD Europe joined together in 2020 to create an

education programme specifically for SLOs. The SLO education programme was developed to offer SLOs the knowledge, skills and tools they need to thrive in this challenging position. Combining the technical expertise and quality assurance of UEFA with the experience and practical skills of SD Europe, the programme began with two pilot versions organised in conjunction with the Danish Football League and the Football Union of Russia. Building on the experience gained in the two pilot versions, which received a big thumbs up from the participating SLOs, the programme was officially launched, with sessions in Germany, Belgium, France and Portugal in 2021 and more countries in the pipeline.

“I would like to express our sincere appreciation for being the first country to take part in the programme. The training delivered concrete tools and inspiration to all the participating SLOs, resulting in even better trained SLOs. We value education very highly at the Danish league and I hope we'll be able to work together again in the future.”

Kasper Kragh, head of safety and security at the Danish Football League

As a modular programme, the SLO education programme can be delivered in one workshop of up to four days or two workshops of two days each. This flexibility enables national associations to

cater to the needs of their local context. Part of the course can be delivered over the weekend to allow part-time and volunteer SLOs to balance it with their professional obligations.

The first day, which is dedicated to the SLO environment, is mandatory. The host national association can then choose between one and three themed days: communication with stakeholders; working with fans; and SLO soft skills.

The national association selects the participants, with a recommended total of 12–24 to ensure the sessions are interactive and practical. Most of the speakers are from the host country and speak the local language, which promotes interaction and trust. This is also what makes the

“The Football Union of Russia is proud to have hosted a pilot of this new programme from the UEFA Academy and SD Europe. Both sessions were a success and our club SLOs particularly enjoyed mixing theory with practice and having the opportunity to engage with their counterparts from other clubs.”

Nikolay Shiryayev, senior expert in the safety and security department of the Football Union of Russia



Danish SLOs at the opening pilot session

programme unique: the topics might be the same, but the approach and the takeaways vary greatly depending on the local context. Delivering the content in the local language ensures the participating SLOs benefit to the full.

The main benefits of the programme are:

- a deeper understanding of the SLO role and responsibilities;
- tools and techniques for working with each stakeholder;
- an understanding of the importance of a strong SLO network at domestic level;
- conflict management and leadership skills;
- media training.

The programme can be organised at national level at the request of a national association, either alone or in collaboration with the professional league. Up to six sessions can be held each year. Requests should be sent through the national association to the UEFA Academy: academy@uefa.ch

“The first session of the programme was a very interesting experience of sharing and exchange among SLOs. Learning from experienced SLOs is a great opportunity and I am looking forward to the next session, hopefully face-to-face.”

Pierre Gasté, SLO at Angers SCO

“The SLO training organised by the UEFA Academy was very interesting and a great way to exchange ideas and experiences with SLOs from other clubs. Since the SLO function has not existed in Belgium for very long, the training provided a good insight into the SLO’s job description.”

Wim Verbelen, SLO at KV Mechelen

“The programme held in conjunction with the French Football League was a great opportunity for SLOs to exchange and learn from our French and European counterparts, especially for a young SLO like me. We discussed many topics related to the role of the SLO in our clubs and national associations and it was an enriching experience.”

Paul Defoix, SLO at Amiens SC



SLO training with the Russian SLOs

Preparatory meetings are held with the national association, SD Europe and the UEFA Academy to tailor the programme to the national context and the specific needs of the SLOs in that country. UEFA and SD Europe have a budget for expert speakers, while the national associations are responsible for covering the costs of the venue, catering and any overnight accommodation for participating SLOs. They also need to coordinate the session’s logistics with the UEFA Academy.

“The SLO function has grown continuously since it first came on to the scene. Step by step, its importance is being recognised by the multiple football stakeholders. Establishing a common understanding of the function is key to securing the place of SLOs in the football environment. By offering targeted training through workshops, lectures and the exchange of best practice, the UEFA Academy programme has brought tremendous added value to the development of the role. The first part of the programme was just great, and I am already excited about attending the second.”

Quentin Gilbert, SLO at Standard de Liège

The role of the SLO coordinator



“As the full-time SLO coordinator, my remit is to provide support, tools and advice to SLOs at all 40 professional football clubs in France.”

Mael Garde Provansal, SLO coordinator, French Football League

The SLO role has been in place across Europe for a decade now. On adoption of the UEFA licensing requirement in 2010, each governing body appointed an SLO coordinator to oversee its implementation and develop the function. Their role is perhaps even harder to define than that of the SLOs, but it is no less important. We spoke to SLO coordinators in two countries where the SLO role is at different stages of development.

We begin with France, where Maël Garde Provansal is the SLO coordinator for the French Football League (LFP). France is almost unique in that it is one of the few countries to have the SLO role mandated by law (see pages 92 to 97 for legislation, regulations and recommendations on the SLO role). Enacted in 2016, the French law requires professional clubs in five sports (football, rugby, basketball, handball and volleyball) to appoint an SLO.

Maël begins by telling us why he holds the role in such high regard: “SLOs are a key stakeholder and an essential link in the

dialogue between clubs, supporters and the local ecosystem. They’re the central point of contact between fans and the football club, and if the trust is there, SLOs can only improve the relationship fans have with their club. They play a major role in the life of a club, especially on matchdays (home and away), but not only then. It’s a full-time mission that requires a lot of energy and passion.”

For the LFP, the implementation of the SLO role has been extremely important, as Maël explains: “So many benefits have emerged along the way, and we’re still discovering new ones. From the perspective of the football clubs and the LFP, the SLO role has triggered a new approach to internal structures. Local supporter matters are now handled by SLOs, which hasn’t always been the case. Football club staff know they have someone to go to about fan matters, which makes internal coordination easier. There’s someone ‘on the ground’ on matchdays, as close as possible to the fan experience and where fans might need support. This has nothing but positive effects on the clubs, especially where SLOs have been given the opportunity to embrace the role to the full. SLOs provide useful insights and fresh points of view on the fans, the fan experience and the coordination of fan groups.”

The improvements witnessed since the roll-out of the SLO role in France are appreciated not only by the league, the clubs and the authorities, but also by the supporters. “I think the benefits for the

fans are much the same,” says Maël. “The cases where fans don’t want an SLO as a link between them and the club are getting rarer, which is extremely positive to see.”

Having established the importance attached to the SLO function in France, Maël then walked us through the job of SLO coordinator at the LFP: “My role can be divided into two parts. On the one hand, I’m in charge of building, developing and coordinating the French SLO network, and on the other, I’m in charge of everything supporter-related from a league perspective on all levels (league projects, national projects, European projects such as LIAISE, etc.).”

One of Maël’s key tasks is to ensure SLOs feel they have the support of the LFP: “As the full-time SLO coordinator, my remit is to provide support, tools and advice to SLOs at all 40 professional football clubs in France. Essentially, this involves being at their disposal at all times, answering any questions, resolving queries, preparing and debriefing games, when needed, and sharing good practice across the network. Over and above these recurring tasks, coordinating the network means making sure all clubs have at least one SLO and that they have everything

they need to do the job in the best possible way. It also means organising seminars and training events for SLOs to maintain the network, dialogue and constant exchange of good practice.” But that’s not all!

“Finally, my job is also to visit the SLOs on matchdays, which has the double benefit of developing my knowledge and experience and giving the SLOs tips and examples of good practice, especially new SLOs.”

As already mentioned, the SLO role is a mandatory requirement under an amendment to the French sports law adopted in May 2016. It took the clubs a while to adjust to this new reality, but once they had, progress was rapid. “First, and I’d say this is the case any time there is change to an organisation, the SLOs had to find their place in the club’s organisation chart,” Maël explains. “The law states that the SLO must be a different person from the security officer, which wasn’t the case at most clubs before the law was introduced. This process



Maël Garde Provansal at work

took a bit of time at certain clubs and is still ongoing at some. The ultimate goal is to have at least one SLO working permanently in close cooperation with the security officer."

Coming a little late to the SLO party also meant that the French league initially suffered from a shortage of personnel with the necessary attributes: "Yes, another challenge we faced on a national level was a lack of experienced SLOs who could have provided much-needed support in developing the role from 2016," says Maël. "Exchanging good practice is still the best way for SLOs to gain experience and credit, and now that we have many experienced people, this challenge is progressively being overcome."

This is reflected in the growing status of the SLO role in France since the new legislation came into effect, as Maël explains: "Back in 2016, only a few clubs had full-time SLOs with a large portfolio of responsibilities. This has rapidly grown into a significant number of clubs who have introduced the function not simply because of the law, but also because of the many benefits it brings. I think it's fair to say that France today has its own way of handling and developing the SLO role, but the way the LFP has helped the clubs to shape this implementation has been guided by what we've learned from abroad, especially by participating in the LIAISE project run by SD Europe. We've had a law to push us forward, of course, but it's still a great pleasure to see where we are today."

The rapid advancement of the SLO role in France is thus a source of great satisfaction for Maël, but what does it mean in practice? "At the end of the 2019/20 season, fewer than five clubs out of 40 had yet to appoint an SLO, whereas almost half the clubs were without one at the start of the 2017/18 season," says Maël. "Even more important, however, is the fact that the SLO function has undergone tremendous professionalisation throughout this period. Most Ligue 1 clubs have made it a full-time job, and some Ligue 2 clubs are following their lead. Some clubs even have two or more SLOs, which was unthinkable a few years ago. Almost every French SLO now has two or more seasons of experience, more than 50% have a supporter background, and an increasing number are working at away games. That's the landscape we have today and we're proud of it, given how fast things have gone. There's still a lot of work to do to achieve greater public recognition, but most of the local stakeholders are aware of the SLO function and its benefits."

Despite the progress made, Maël is not about to rest on his laurels. Quite the opposite: "We're close to getting there and it will be of immense professional and personal satisfaction when it happens," he says. "We shouldn't forget, however, that quality, not quantity, is what drives us. And quality comes with everything I've already mentioned: training, networking and exchanging good practice. We need to anticipate the fact that SLOs will come and go, and we have to be ready to

help the clubs face that challenge. The SLO role requires constant energy and dedication; it's a really tiring mission. We know from other countries that SLO turnover is an important factor to take into consideration, so we need to ensure that any transition that takes place at a club is a success."

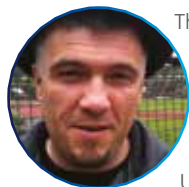
Something else Maël has learned from other European countries is that having SLOs accompany supporters to away games has been a factor in creating a safer and more relaxed stadium experience. In France, however, this has been an issue that has affected the development of the role. "We know that part of the greatest added value in having SLOs is what they contribute on an away day," Maël says. "The number of SLOs travelling to away games is growing fast, but not yet fast enough. This is a huge challenge that we're constantly addressing by demonstrating with actual examples how crucial it is for a club to have someone on the ground for an away game."

With all the work being done, some things have to be pushed to the back of the queue, mostly because of a lack of time, yet Maël remains determined to press on: "Though we have enough challenges still to overcome, I believe that a strong SLO network is essential for the overall success of the job. Building this network is no easy task and it's something that develops over time with the patience and support of every stakeholder. We're getting there and trying to improve year after year, and I'll

keep trying my best to maintain this rhythm despite the current situation."

By that he is referring to the COVID-19 pandemic, with football just one of the many sectors to witness dramatic and drastic change. "The biggest ongoing challenge may be ensuring that the SLO concept isn't weakened by the pandemic crisis, both locally and nationally. SLOs are one of the keys to finding a positive escape route from the crisis, especially regarding the conditions for the return of the public to the stadiums."

To conclude our conversation, we asked Maël what advice he would give to other SLO coordinators working at national associations and leagues: "I'd say that one of the most important steps when implementing the SLO function is to look at what other countries are doing and learn how they have developed the role over time. Anyone familiar with the SLO work in France will know that part of our inspiration and motivation comes from positive European examples, such as in Germany, Sweden and Portugal. It is extremely important for each country to build its own model, but it is equally important to seek advice and inspiration from what's working elsewhere. In the end – and this is what UEFA and SD Europe are working towards – we have to achieve this common goal of building a global and European network of SLOs, always bearing in mind that exchanging good practice is the best way for everyone to improve."



The second SLO coordinator we spoke to was **Dariusz Łapiński** of the Polish Football Federation (PZPN), who was appointed to the role in 2013 following UEFA EURO 2012. Poland has implemented its SLO licensing requirement in the top three tiers, meaning there is no shortage of work for Dariusz to do, not least when you consider the differing needs and challenges faced by the 52 clubs involved. So how does he go about promoting and developing the SLO function?

“My first focus is on recruitment,” Dariusz explains. “I took it upon myself to visit every single club and talk to supporters, safety and security officers, and club presidents to convince them of the need to appoint an SLO and help them find the right person for the job, a task that continues to take up a lot of my time. Another priority has been the organisation of training and development events with the whole SLO group (one general meeting and three divisional meetings every year) and providing individual support to new SLOs. I’ve also dedicated time to developing the role of the SLO in safety and security arrangements for football matches; in other words, their participation in matchday organisation meetings, communication with match delegates, tasks relating to away supporters, participation in annual workshops for match delegates and safety and security officers, etc. Finally, I cooperate with

international partners, for example, at UEFA conferences or in the LIAISE project run by SD Europe.”

Dariusz believes the SLO role offers a structure for dialogue that is important for all the game’s stakeholders but is not fully appreciated by some of them: “It’s a good way of institutionalising communication patterns that already existed in a very informal way, but all too often it’s underestimated by stakeholders who are not directly involved in matchday organisation. The SLO role has been implemented from the top down, but its status grows from the bottom up. Generally, fans and safety and security officers attach the greatest importance to the SLO role, but there is still work to be done to convince the other stakeholders of its benefits, especially the police. This is perhaps because around 90% of Polish SLOs are volunteers. Most of them want it this way so they can be formally independent of the club management. They focus on match organisation and do not work for their clubs on a day-to-day basis. Independence of the role is important, of course, but we need to improve here.”

Is the lack of understanding of the SLO role the biggest challenge he faces? “I would say so, yes, and it extends to my role, too, by the way. If everything is OK, SLOs aren’t needed, but if something goes wrong, it’s their fault. I see a general lack of understanding here – football isn’t an entertainment factory that can

be compared with cinemas, theatres and concerts; it’s a social phenomenon that has to be managed in a professional way. Working with people who do not share this philosophy is a challenge, one set against the backdrop of an underlying conflict of interest between clubs (money), the state (security) and fans (active support). This means we still have police officers who don’t understand fan culture, club presidents who nominate the wrong people as SLOs, and fans who want active hooligans to represent their interests as SLOs. Nevertheless, I’m convinced a compromise between these conflicting interests is possible and a solution can be found to the problems we face. The progress we are making in Poland may be slow, but it’s progress.”

Not surprisingly, given the above, Dariusz has plenty of ideas for improving the SLO role: “Club SLOs should acknowledge that it’s a full-time job that should be properly remunerated. And they shouldn’t focus on matchdays only. They should spend every day trying to build bridges between the club and its community, such as the city, the local culture scene, disabled fans, amateur football, schools, etc. They should pay more attention to our coordinating activities (such as workshops, training events, reporting systems and international projects), even if the outcomes of such actions do not appear straightaway.”

Asked for his advice to other SLO coordinators, Dariusz is in no doubt:

“Never lie. Never tell anyone things they want to hear. Do not promise too much. Be aware that there may be no ‘lasting peace’ between fans, clubs and the police. Understand that every compromise and every solution has an expiry date. Try to find friends who share your philosophy among fans, clubs and the police. And above all, be patient!”

KEY POINTS

1. Promoting awareness of the SLO role among all stakeholders is of prime importance and not solely the responsibility of the football authorities.
2. Organising regular training events and SLO meetings will raise standards.
3. Building a strong SLO network is essential for the success of the job. These SLOs should work full-time, where possible.
4. Site visits, not only on matchdays, help to build relationships, develop knowledge and disseminate good practice.
5. Seeking advice and inspiration from other countries is fundamental.

The European SLO network

The SLO role can be lonely. Striking a balance between the conflicting needs and wants of clubs and supporters can be very exacting. Often, your only allies may be your fellow SLOs. It is therefore important for SLOs to have a forum where they can meet and exchange views on a regular basis. SLO networks have been established in many countries, and, in 2016, SD Europe decided to launch a European SLO network with the support of UEFA.

The European SLO network was created for two principal reasons: (i) to facilitate the exchange of information and experience on a transnational level, and (ii) to provide UEFA with feedback on the state of play across Europe with regard to the implementation of the SLO role. Regular meetings also provide an opportunity for network members to raise questions and propose improvements in conversation with representatives of various UEFA departments and external stakeholders such as the European Group of Safety and Security Experts and the NGO Colour Blind Awareness. Over the years, the network has evolved into an interlocutor for UEFA in a range of areas.

Today, the European SLO network comes together in two ways. First, there is a WhatsApp group to which SD Europe grants access to one SLO from each participating country. Second, there are physical meetings, of which five have taken place since the launch in 2016. The SLO representatives in the WhatsApp group bring in questions from their fellow SLOs, for example, and relay all the key information from the network discussions back to their colleagues. Any SLO who needs help can contact the

network representative for their country to ask questions, request information and share best practice. If their country is not represented in the network, they can contact SD Europe for more information.

The inaugural meeting for the European SLO network took place in Stockholm in May 2016, when a symbolic 11 club SLOs from 11 countries were invited to exchange best practice and discuss the challenges they face. Further meetings were held in Gelsenkirchen in June 2017, Rotterdam in June 2018, Brøndby in October 2018 and Watford in October 2019. Meetings were paused in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

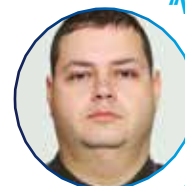
At these five meetings, the network representatives discussed a wide range of topics and learned a lot from each other. At the time of writing, SLOs from 21 countries have participated: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Scotland, Slovakia, Sweden and Switzerland.

"I think the SLO network is important and useful. We often exchange information with colleagues, share news, and ask and answer questions. We have discussed legislation and the work with fans in different countries."

Ivan Ulanov, SLO at CSKA Moskva from 2008 to 2020



It should also be said that the European SLO network has been instrumental in providing the content for this guide. This is a direct outcome of many years of discussions and sharing of best practices among seasoned SLOs. There is also a Facebook group and other digital platforms where SLOs from across Europe can meet and chat.



"What I have learned during the meetings of the European SLO network has helped me a lot in my daily work, such as how to defend supporter and club rights in certain situations before and during football matches. It has also helped our fans with regard to safe and trouble-free travel and access to the stadium at away matches."

Andrey Kyuchukov, SLO at FC Dunav Ruse

Besides the European SLO network, SD Europe facilitates 'bilateral' meetings between SLOs all over Europe before UEFA Champions League and Europa League matches. These meetings can take various forms, from short talks in a bar or cafe to exchange information, to bigger events at the stadium, such as workshops or conferences, with many people in attendance.

The first bilateral meeting took place in Nicosia in 2013 when Eintracht Frankfurt visited APOEL FC. It was born out of the idea of taking advantage of the presence of away team SLOs in European competitions to organise formal training sessions or informal Q&As with local stakeholders. For the home national association or league, bilateral meetings are a low-cost, environmentally friendly way of facilitating the exchange of information and best practice and thus increasing the knowledge of their SLOs, as they do not have to fly in any guest speakers from abroad. These meetings are easy, cheap and immensely popular with the local SLOs.



Bilateral meeting before the game between FC Porto and Eintracht Frankfurt

European supporter organisations and NGOs

It is often said that football without fans is nothing, a phrase most commonly attributed to the legendary Celtic manager Jock Stein, who often referred to the crucial role supporters play in the game's rich culture. It is a quote regularly taken up by fans, who have a long tradition of organising themselves in supporters clubs and other independent groupings, not simply to watch games together, but also to draw attention to issues impacting the game and the way they experience it. In this chapter, we take a look at the five main supporter organisations and NGOs operating on a pan-European level.



SD Europe

Active in over 50 countries across Europe and further afield, Supporters Direct Europe (SD Europe) is a continental organisation that represents grassroots and national supporter organisations as well as amateur and professional member-run football clubs. SD Europe is a non-profit, democratically representative body. It supports the implementation of the SLO licensing requirement on behalf of UEFA and has observer status with the Council of Europe's Committee on Safety and Security at Sports Events. In 2020, SD Europe partnered with the UEFA Academy to provide and lead on the innovative new SLO education programme.

Established in 2007 with support from UEFA, the organisation also advises clubs on their ownership and governance structures and works with football governing bodies, leagues, confederations and European institutions. Its mission is to get more football clubs into supporter



Football Supporters Europe

Football Supporters Europe (FSE) was founded in July 2008 at the first

European Football Fans Congress. It is an independent, democratic and non-profit association of football fans with members in over 45 countries represented within UEFA and is considered to be a legitimate partner on fan issues by institutions such as UEFA and the Council of Europe.

FSE aims to represent the interests and address the concerns of European football fans, from individuals and club-level groups to national organisations and fan embassies. It is opposed to any form of discrimination, rejects violence, both physical and verbal, and is committed to the empowerment of grassroots football supporters and the promotion of a positive football and fan culture, including values such as fair play and good governance.



CAFE

Centre for Access to Football in Europe (CAFE) was founded in 2009 with the aim of improving the matchday experience of disabled football fans across

Europe. CAFE works with disabled fans and stakeholders, empowering them to take centre stage in live sport as fans, employees

and leaders, and to make positive and inclusive change in their local clubs, national leagues and global tournaments.

CAFE partners with organisations across live sport, from smaller leagues through to national associations and international bodies, supporting them to put access, opportunity and experience for every single disabled person at the centre of what they do.

CAFE's vision is a world where disabled people are a key part of a global sporting landscape that is accessible, inclusive and welcoming and provides equal opportunities for all to contribute.



Colour Blind Awareness

Colour Blind Awareness (CBA) is a UK-based NGO that raises awareness of the impact of colour blindness on everyday life, providing support to colour blind people and consultancy advice to businesses and education, as well as lobbying governments and promoting awareness through the media.

Colour blindness is a condition that affects enjoyment of and participation in sport for 1 in 12 males (8%) and 1 in 200 females (0.5%). It also has a negative impact on players and fans, due to kit clashes, and on clubs and venues, when fans experience problems buying tickets and merchandise or understanding wayfinding and safety information.

In addition to undertaking stadium audits of UEFA match venues, CBA was consulted on the UK Sports Ground Safety Authority's latest Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds. It

also has observer status with the Council of Europe's Committee on Safety and Security at Sports Events.

CBA works in partnership with national associations, leagues, governing bodies and clubs across Europe and is a UEFA football and social responsibility partner. It was responsible for developing the first guidance document on colour blindness in football for UEFA and the English FA. It is also part of a collaborative partnership that successfully secured Erasmus+ funding in 2020 for a three-year project, Tackling Colour Blindness in Sport.



Fare

The Fare network is an umbrella organisation that brings together individuals, informal groups and organisations driven to combat inequality in football and use the sport as a means for social change.

Fare's commitment to tackling discrimination is based on the principle that the game, as the most popular sport in the world, has the power to propel social cohesion and inclusion. Fare combats all forms of discrimination, including racism, far-right nationalism, sexism, trans- and homophobia and discrimination against disabled people.

Fare has grown in numbers to become an international organisation with more than 150 members in nearly 40 European countries. Many more groups and activists join its activities, campaigns and events throughout the year.

Legislation, regulations and recommendations on the SLO role

UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations

Article 35 of the [UEFA Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations](#) governs the club SLO role in European football. Adopted by the UEFA Executive Committee in 2010, Article 35 made the role mandatory for clubs from the start of the 2012/13 season.

Article 35 is brief and to the point, consisting of just two sentences:

1. The licence applicant must have appointed a supporter liaison officer to act as the key contact point for supporters.
2. The supporter liaison officer will regularly meet and collaborate with the relevant club personnel on all related matters.

Being a UEFA regulation, it applies to clubs applying for a licence to compete in UEFA club competitions (currently the Champions League, the Europa League and the Europa Conference League). At the national level, most football licensing bodies (the relevant football association or, in a few cases, the league association) have incorporated Article 35 into their domestic licensing regulations. Overall, the SLO requirement applies to top-division clubs in most of the 55 UEFA member associations and, in many cases, to clubs in the second tier as well. In a few countries, it extends to clubs in the third tier (Poland) and even the fourth (England). As such, the SLO licensing

requirement today extends to more than 1,000 clubs across Europe.

UEFA adopted Article 35 following intense lobbying by SD Europe for meaningful supporter involvement in the running of football clubs and the sustainable development of the game as a whole. The aim was to require clubs to ensure a proper and constructive discourse with their fans. In 2010, UEFA appointed SD Europe to facilitate the implementation of Article 35 on its behalf.

Article 35 pursues the following aims:

- To establish networks of SLOs at a national and European level to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practice and to improve the relationships between the various stakeholders, in particular the relationship between supporters and club directors/owners and safety and security organisations.
- To provide some guarantee that a minimum level of communication occurs between clubs and their supporters and hence reduce the likelihood of supporters becoming disenfranchised.
- To better align the ability of supporters to feed into club decision-making with their massive importance to the club.
- To provide incentives for largely unorganised club supporter bases to come together and voice their beliefs. A better organised fan base will add power to its voice and the SLO will improve the opportunities for this voice to be heard.

EU Football Handbook

Other regulations relating to fan dialogue and the SLO function can be found at the European institutional level. At the 3,490th meeting of the Council of the European Union held in Luxembourg on 13/14 October 2016, the Council adopted a resolution concerning an updated handbook (the [EU Football Handbook](#)) with recommendations for international police cooperation and measures to prevent and control violence and disturbances in connection with football matches with an international dimension, in which at least one member state is involved.

As the resolution points out, police liaison with supporter groups at national and local level can have a major impact in minimising safety and security risks at football matches. Working closely with designated club SLOs is identified as one of the main means of achieving this.

EU Handbook on Police Liaison with Supporters

Additional guidance on this matter was subsequently provided in the resolution adopted in 2016 by the Council of the European Union concerning a new handbook (the [EU Handbook on Police Liaison with Supporters](#)) with recommendations for preventing and managing violence and disturbances in connection with football matches with an international dimension, in which at least one member state is involved, through the adoption of good practice in respect of police liaison with supporters. This

handbook is complementary to the EU Football Handbook and is designed to ensure that police commanders and partner agencies can benefit from good practices in developing and refining national and local football policing strategies.

While this document highlights the “positive impact that a service-based approach can have on football-related events, not least on reducing safety and security risks”, as evidenced by a series of international tournaments and high-profile Champions League and Europa League finals, it also calls attention to the fact that the “extent to which the service concept has been embraced for individual international and domestic football matches remains variable for a number of reasons, not least because of a lingering perception that the ethos of service is supplementary, rather than integral, to multi-agency planning and delivery of football safety and security operations”.

The handbook explains that a “service approach involving effective communication and supporter liaison can help to generate high levels of compliance and in encouraging self-regulation among fans. Supporters who feel respected and appreciated will often be less tolerant of violent, discriminatory, and other anti-social behaviour. This, in turn, can help to marginalise, identify and exclude individuals who act in a criminal manner in connection with the event.” The handbook further points out that the “adoption and application of a service ethos to the policing

of football events, for example, will not only be welcomed by supporters but can also significantly help to reduce the need for major public order operations and help to reduce levels of football-related criminality”.

In this respect, consultation with national association and club SLOs is considered crucial. The document also recognises that SLOs can greatly assist the process of preparing dynamic risk assessments, especially at matches involving teams from different countries. In particular, SLOs can play an important role in independently communicating relevant information in a language tailored to their peers to ensure that it is received by all supporters (including any risk supporters) from a trusted source. This can have a positive impact on behaviour, given that supporters may often be sceptical and mistrust official sources of information.

Draft Resolution on Police Liaison with Supporter Liaison Officers

While the EU Handbook on Police Liaison with Supporters contains an outline of the SLO function as one dialogue option open to match commanders, further detail is needed on the opportunities and benefits of a close working relationship between the police and SLOs. This was the objective of LIAISE (Liaison-based Integrated Approach to Improving Supporter Engagement), an Erasmus+ project launched by SD Europe on 1 January 2018. A key outcome of this project was the submission of a new Draft Resolution on Police Liaison with

Supporter Liaison Officers to the Council of the European Union for consideration in 2020/21.

Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events

Of further relevance to this field is the new Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events (CETS No. 218). This convention builds upon the work done internationally since the adoption, in 1985, of its predecessor, the European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events and in particular at Football Matches (ETS No. 120). In the intervening period, it had become increasingly clear that the 1985 Convention, with a repressive, violence-based approach adopted in the wake of the Heysel Stadium disaster in 1985, was no longer fit for purpose. Reflecting the latest evidence-based expertise in the organisation of sports events, the new convention promotes an integrated, multi-agency approach based on three pillars: safety, security and service.

The new convention was opened for signature on 3 July 2016 at a ceremony held at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis, Paris, during UEFA EURO 2016. Now also referred to as the Saint-Denis Convention, it came into force on 1 November 2017 upon ratification by three member states. As of 30 June 2021, it had been ratified by

21 member states and signed, but not yet ratified, by another 17.

In the [Explanatory Report to the new convention](#), the service pillar is defined as follows:

“Service measures comprise all measures designed to make football and other sports events enjoyable and welcoming for all, not only in stadiums but also in public spaces where spectators gather, either at organised events or in a spontaneous manner. This incorporates key elements like good catering and toilet facilities but also the way they are greeted and treated throughout the event experience.”

This third pillar is another key part of the work of the SLO. Article 8 of the convention (‘Engagement with supporters and local communities’) states:

“The Parties shall encourage all agencies to develop and pursue a policy of proactive and regular communication with key stakeholders, including supporter representatives and local communities, based on the principle of dialogue, and with the aim of generating a partnership ethos and positive cooperation as well as identifying solutions to potential problems.”

Guidance for national governments implementing the Saint-Denis Convention is provided by [Recommendation Rec \(2015\) 1](#), which was originally published in 2015 by the Council of Europe standing committee set up to monitor the implementation

of the convention, and revised in 2019. Rec (2015) 1 states that it “highlights the importance of all agencies developing effective supporter liaison strategies: a process often labelled as ‘dialogue’. In terms of football club engagement with supporters, designated supporter liaison officers can play a key role in this area.” This is because SLOs, in their position as the ‘bridge’ between clubs and supporters, and supporters and the police, are ideally placed to facilitate and participate in this dialogue.

To monitor the parties’ compliance with the provisions of the convention and to give them support and advice in implementing its provisions, the convention also established the Committee on Safety and Security at Sports Events. The committee is made up of representatives of leading governmental agencies with responsibilities for sport safety and security and from the respective national football information points. Observers from sport organisations are also welcomed and include UEFA, European Leagues, FIFA, Football Supporters Europe, SD Europe, CAFE and Colour Blind Awareness.

At the request and invitation of Council of Europe member states, the committee also makes consultative visits to monitor the safety, security and service arrangements for football. The status of the SLO work in the host country is monitored during the visit at meetings with club representatives, including the safety and security officer, the stadium manager and the SLO. After each visit, a report is prepared by the committee

including an assessment of the supporter liaison measures in place in that country.

National legislation

The impact of UEFA introducing the SLO requirement has been such that parliamentarians in three European countries – France, Belgium and Portugal – have considered it necessary to enact legislation further defining the role or requiring clubs to appoint SLOs.

France

In France, Law No. 2016-564 Strengthening Dialogue with Supporters and the Fight Against Hooliganism was enacted on 10 May 2016. Noting that “supporters and supporter organisations, through their behaviour and activity, play a part in the smooth running of sports events and competitions and help to promote the values of sport”, the law:

- provides for the creation of a national body chaired by the sports ministry to promote dialogue with supporters and coordinate all supporter-related matters;
- requires supporter organisations wishing to participate in this dialogue to seek ministerial approval;
- makes it mandatory for all professional clubs in five sports (football, rugby, basketball, handball and volleyball) to appoint an SLO to facilitate this dialogue.

Section 2 of the decree implementing the law of 10 May 2016 governs the appointment of SLOs by professional clubs

in the five sports. Reflecting the mediatory role played by SLOs, the decree prohibits clubs from appointing as SLOs any member of one of their supporter organisations or any person responsible for security at sports events and competitions for or on behalf of the club.

The appointment of SLOs is rightly the prerogative of each club, but good practice dictates that clubs should consult their fans in any recruitment process. This is particularly important given the need for SLOs to have the trust of the fan base to perform their tasks effectively. Accordingly, the decree requires clubs to seek the opinion of approved supporter organisations by registered letter. The supporter organisations then have 15 days to express an opinion on the appointment. No procedure is specified in the event of a supporter organisation refusing to accept the SLO, and to date there have been no cases of refusal. This system appears to be working well in practice.

The decree briefly describes the function of the SLO:

“The supporter liaison officer facilitates dialogue between all the club or sports company’s supporters and supporter organisations. The SLO advises and informs the management of the club regarding any supporter or supporter organisation questions or requests. The SLO also engages in dialogue with the SLOs of the other clubs of the professional league and with the state representative, and, in

Paris, the police commissioner, as part of the preparations for sporting events and competitions. The SLO mediates, where appropriate, between supporters, supporter organisations and the club in the event of any conflict.”

In addition, the decree requires clubs, in association with the professional leagues, to ensure that SLOs attend training sessions periodically.

Belgium

On 3 June 2018, the Belgian parliament adopted an amendment to the Law of 21 December 1998 relating to Security at Football Matches. The amendment added the following definition:

“Supporters liaison officer (SLO): the person appointed to ensure communication between the club, the supporters and the administrative authority.”

The amended law was later supplemented by a royal decree outlining the requirements and tasks of Belgian SLOs.

Portugal

On 11 September 2019, Portugal became the third European country to enact a law regulating the role of the SLO when the Portuguese parliament adopted Law No. 113/2019. The law establishes the legal regime for security and combating racism, xenophobia and intolerance at sports events. It amends Law No. 39/2009 of 30 July 2009, making two important additions:

Article 3(s)

Supporter liaison officer (SLO): The representative of sports clubs, associations or companies participating in sporting competitions of a professional nature, responsible for ensuring effective communication between supporters and the sports company, other sports clubs and companies, the organisers of competitions, security forces and private security, with the purpose of facilitating the organisation of games and the movement of fans and preventing deviant behaviour.

Article 10(b)

Supporter liaison officer:

1. The promoter of the sports event is responsible for designating and communicating an SLO to the Authority for the Prevention and Combating of Violence in Sport (APCVD) and the sports competition organiser.
2. The sports competition organiser is responsible for developing the SLO regime provided for in this law.



UEFA
Route De Genève 46
CH-1260 Nyon 2
Switzerland
Telephone: +41 848 00 27 27
UEFA.com

WE CARE ABOUT FOOTBALL