In collaboration
with Oliver Wyman

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Sports for People and Planet

INSIGHT REPORT

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Contents

Foreword

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Sport is one of humanity's most powerful social and economic forces – shaping culture, health and community life across the globe. It evokes a multitude of images: watching athletes at the Olympic and Paralympic Games, a weekend hike in the mountains or a childhood ball game with friends. Few fields have such a profound influence on culture and community, uniting people across borders and backgrounds.

Today, the sports economy is a fast-growing, multitrillion-dollar ecosystem powering global sporting mega-events, adventure tourism, sporting goods and equipment, and active lifestyles. It unlocks business opportunities, drives trade, creates jobs and enhances workforce productivity. This potential is especially significant in emerging markets, where sport serves as a catalyst for economic and social development. For millennia, sport has connected humanity and nature – on fields, in oceans and atop ski slopes. Far beyond entertainment and elite competition, it is a vital force for health, inclusion and connection: a microcosm of the systems that shape how societies thrive. Yet rising health and environmental risks, from sedentary behaviour and extreme heat to air and water pollution, threaten not only the growth of this dynamic economy but also its positive impact on people and communities.

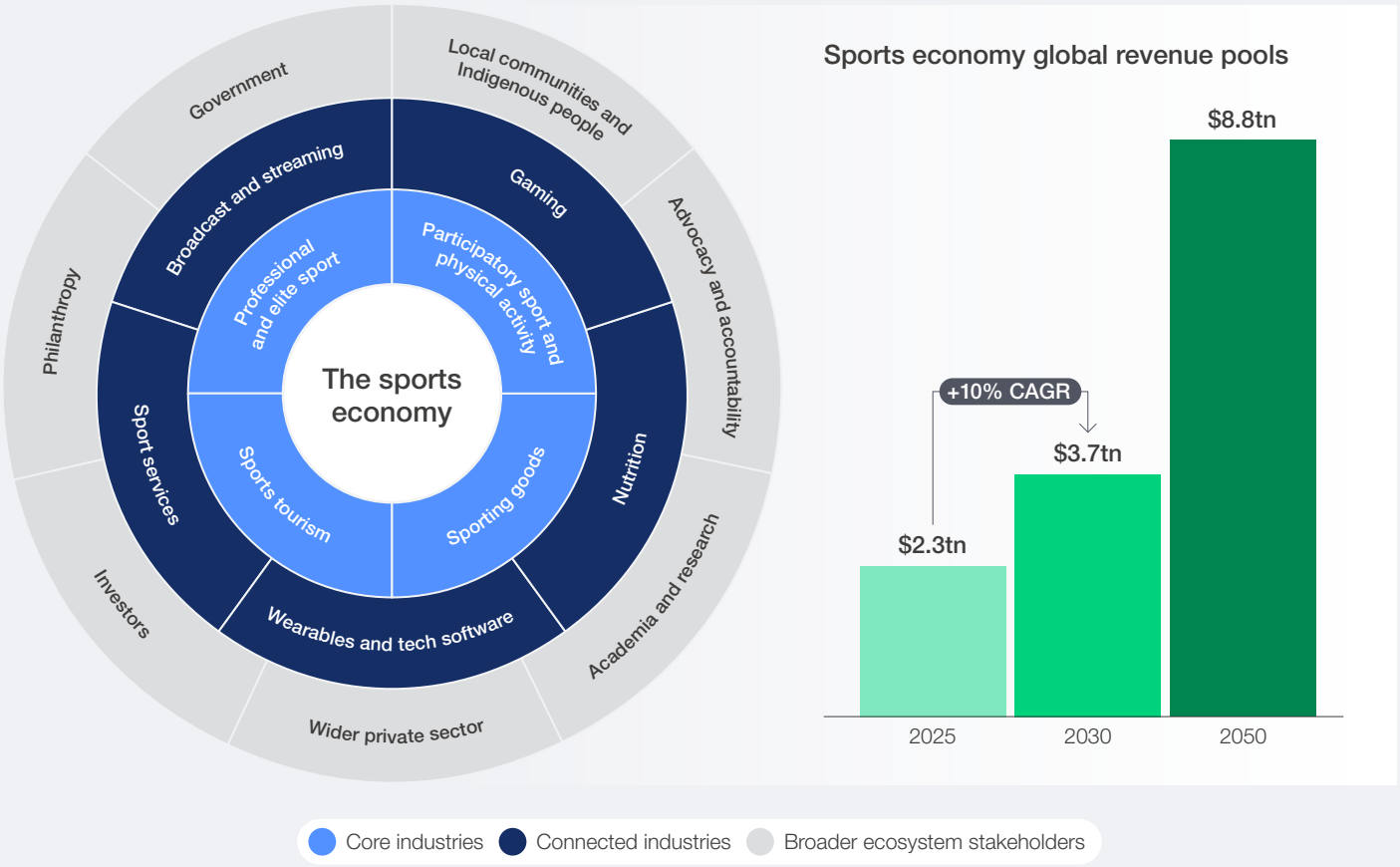
A thriving sports economy is inseparable from a thriving natural environment; the two are fundamentally intertwined. The ability of sport to inspire, unite and drive well-being depends on the health of the environments in which it takes place. At the same time, the sector faces a double imperative: to safeguard the natural systems that make play possible and to reduce its own footprint, from carbon emissions and resource use to waste generation, so that its growth reinforces rather than depletes the foundations on which it relies.

At this pivotal moment, sport has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to redefine prosperity by integrating financial performance with societal health and environmental well-being. It is for this reason that the World Economic Forum, with the support of Oliver Wyman, has developed *Sports for People and Planet*. This report underscores the critical importance of public–private collaboration and cross-sector leadership to future-proof sport – showcasing innovative case studies and examples of partnerships that enhance industry resilience, and pathways that actively shape the conditions needed to create more active societies and thriving natural ecosystems. Together, we can ensure that the future of sport is not only competitive and inspiring, but also sustainable, inclusive and resilient – for people and planet alike.

Executive summary

Sport is projected to become an $8.8 trillion economy by 2050, but physical inactivity and environmental risks could cut annual earnings by $1.6 trillion by mid-century.

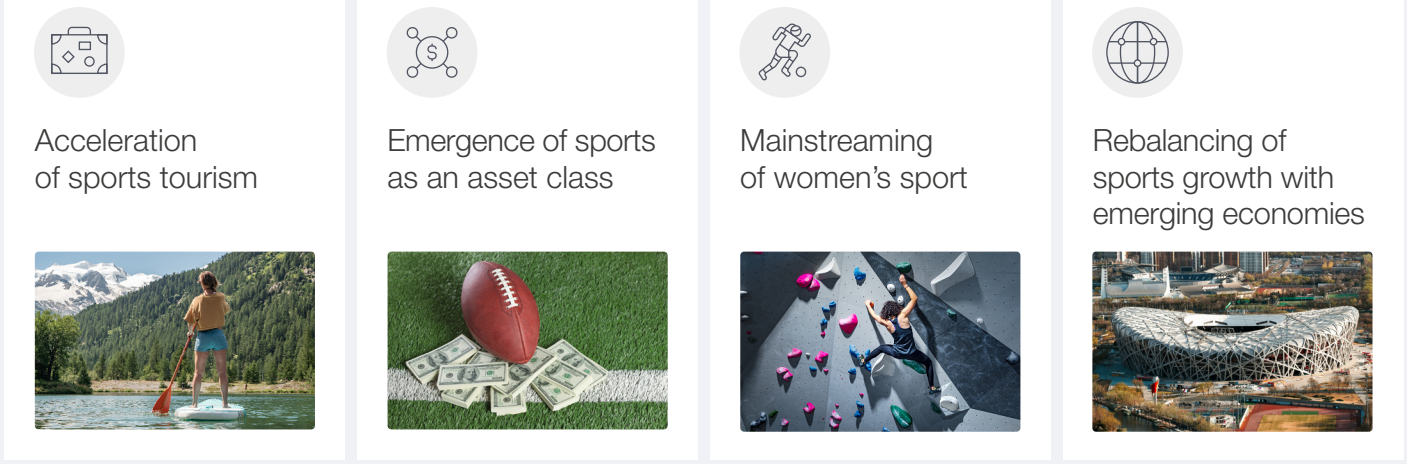
FIGURE 1 **Sports economy global revenues**



Source: World Economic Forum analysis

Sport is a major global economic driver, generating $2.3 trillion annually in total revenues. With projected compound growth of 10% over the next five years, the sector is expected to reach $3.7 trillion by 2030, with long-term forecasts indicating expansion to $8.8 trillion by 2050. The sports economy comprises more than 15 distinct stakeholders across the public, private and civil society sectors, anchored by four core industries and supported by five connected industries. There are four key growth drivers shaping the future of the sports economy.

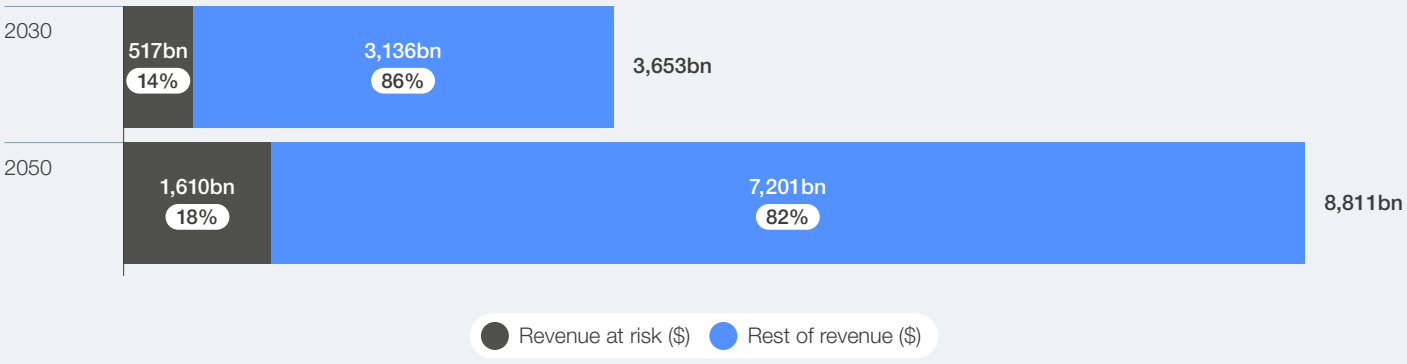
FIGURE 2 **Growth drivers shaping the future of the sports economy**



Source: World Economic Forum analysis

However, the sector's long-term growth is increasingly at risk due to converging health and environmental challenges. Rising levels of physical inactivity, especially among youth, risk undermining grassroots participation and eroding the future fan and consumer base that sustains revenues across apparel, elite events, tourism and fitness. Simultaneously, escalating environmental risks such as heat stress, extreme weather and pollution are disrupting competitions, diminishing spectator experiences, limiting community well-being and affecting the supply chains and operations that underpin the broader sports economy. The sector also contributes to these pressures through the resource-intensive nature of events, sporting goods, infrastructure and travel, resulting in significant carbon emissions, water use and waste generation. These dynamics are mutually reinforcing; environmental degradation discourages physical activity, while less active populations are more susceptible to climate-related health impacts. This negative feedback loop threatens to dampen long-term demand, resilience and the sector's ability to deliver positive social and economic outcomes. If left unaddressed, the combined impacts of rising physical inactivity, accelerating climate change and nature loss could result in the sports economy losing up to 14% ($517 billion) of its annual revenue by 2030, with losses projected to increase to 18% ($1.6 trillion) annually by 2050.

FIGURE 3 **Revenue impact of physical inactivity, climate change and nature loss**



Source: World Economic Forum analysis

> Sport can position itself as a powerful catalyst for global prosperity, advancing high-quality growth that benefits both people and the planet.

Sport is not alone in facing these dual challenges; addressing them demands urgent, systemic, multistakeholder collaboration. The future of global prosperity hinges on stakeholders coming together to prioritize healthy societies and resilient natural ecosystems alongside financial returns and job creation. This report positions the sports economy as a pivotal force in this transformation, using its economic scale and cultural influence to drive positive cross-sectoral change. Developed through consultations with more than 125 organizations and an extensive review of over 130 sources, it proposes three multistakeholder pathways with key actions designed to drive systemic change across the sports economy. The three pathways are:

Championing resource stewardship: Strengthening business resilience through integrated water stewardship, scaling circular business models to enhance value creation and reduce environmental impact, and harnessing sporting events as testbeds to pilot and scale sustainable materials and responsible consumption models.

Placing sport at the heart of cities: Integrating sport and physical activity into sustainable urban design, using green and blue spaces as active sporting assets, developing sporting infrastructure that prioritizes community well-being and environmental resilience, and advancing sustainable and activemobility systems.

Catalysing purpose-driven capital flows: Mobilizing coordinated investment across the capital ecosystem to drive shared impact, strengthening public–private–philanthropic partnerships, and activating purpose-led sport sponsorships to accelerate social and environmental outcomes across the sport value chain.

Together, these pathways form a coordinated transformation funnel, driving change from within the sector outwards. Through bold leadership, cross-sector collaboration and strengthened governance, the sports economy can reinforce the socio-environmental systems it depends on, boost profitability and participation, and reduce its environmental footprint. In doing so, the sector can position itself as a powerful catalyst for global prosperity, advancing high-quality growth that benefits both people and the planet.

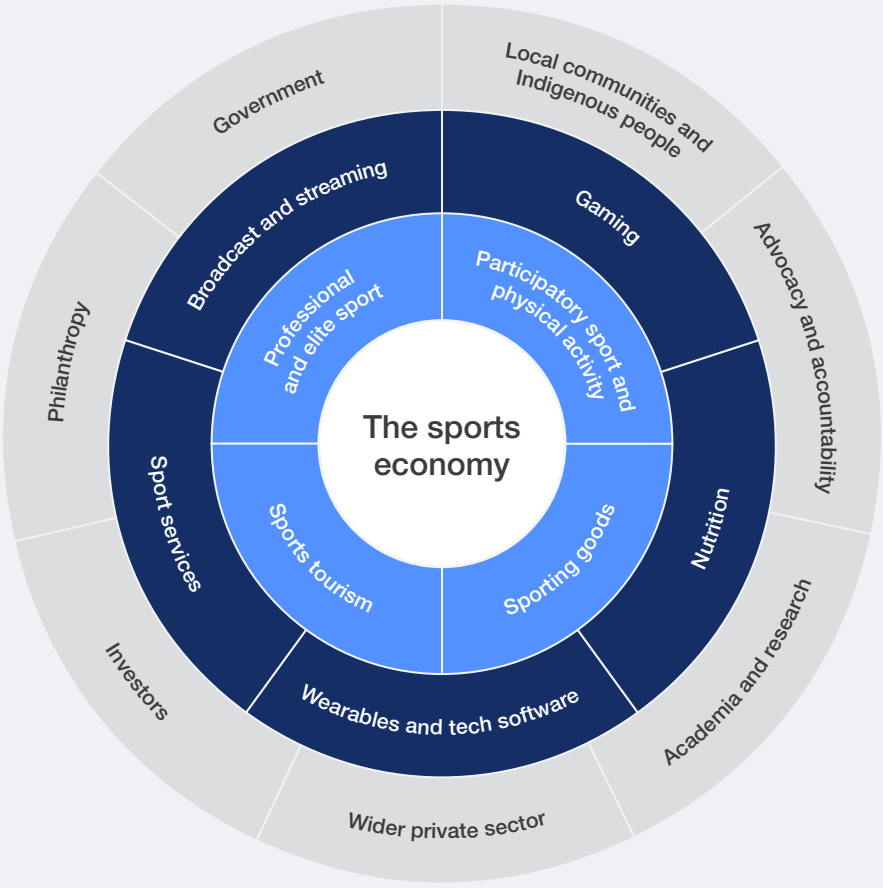
1 Setting the context – the sports economy today

Mapping the scale, structure and interdependencies of the global sports economy underpins coordinated action and a more prosperous future.

1.1 Defining the sports economy

The sports economy is a dynamic, interconnected ecosystem encompassing more than 15 stakeholder groups that collectively drive its activities, supporting active lifestyles and delivering sporting events and experiences at both elite and grassroots levels.

FIGURE 4 **Sports economy map**



Source: World Economic Forum analysis

At its core, the sports economy is underpinned by nine industries that together generate approximately $2.3 trillion in annual global revenues. By 2030, this market is projected to reach $3.7 trillion, representing a shift to a double-digit annual growth rate, compared to the 7% growth observed over the past decade.

Four core industries generate the majority of this revenue ($2 trillion):

- **Professional and elite sport:** Includes leagues, clubs and governing bodies, with income driven by sponsorships, media rights and event revenues[1]
- **Participatory sport and physical activity:** Encompasses recreational activities and grassroots events such as running, cycling, swimming or team sports, fitness centres and mindful movement practices such as yoga and Pilates
- **Sporting goods:** Covers manufacturers, brands and retailers of sport apparel, footwear and equipment[2]
- **Sports tourism:** Involves travel and accommodation for both spectators and participants in sporting events, as well as adventure tourism

In addition, five connected industries, though not primarily focused on sport, collectively generate approximately $300 billion in annual sport-related revenue and benefit significantly from the sector's ongoing growth:

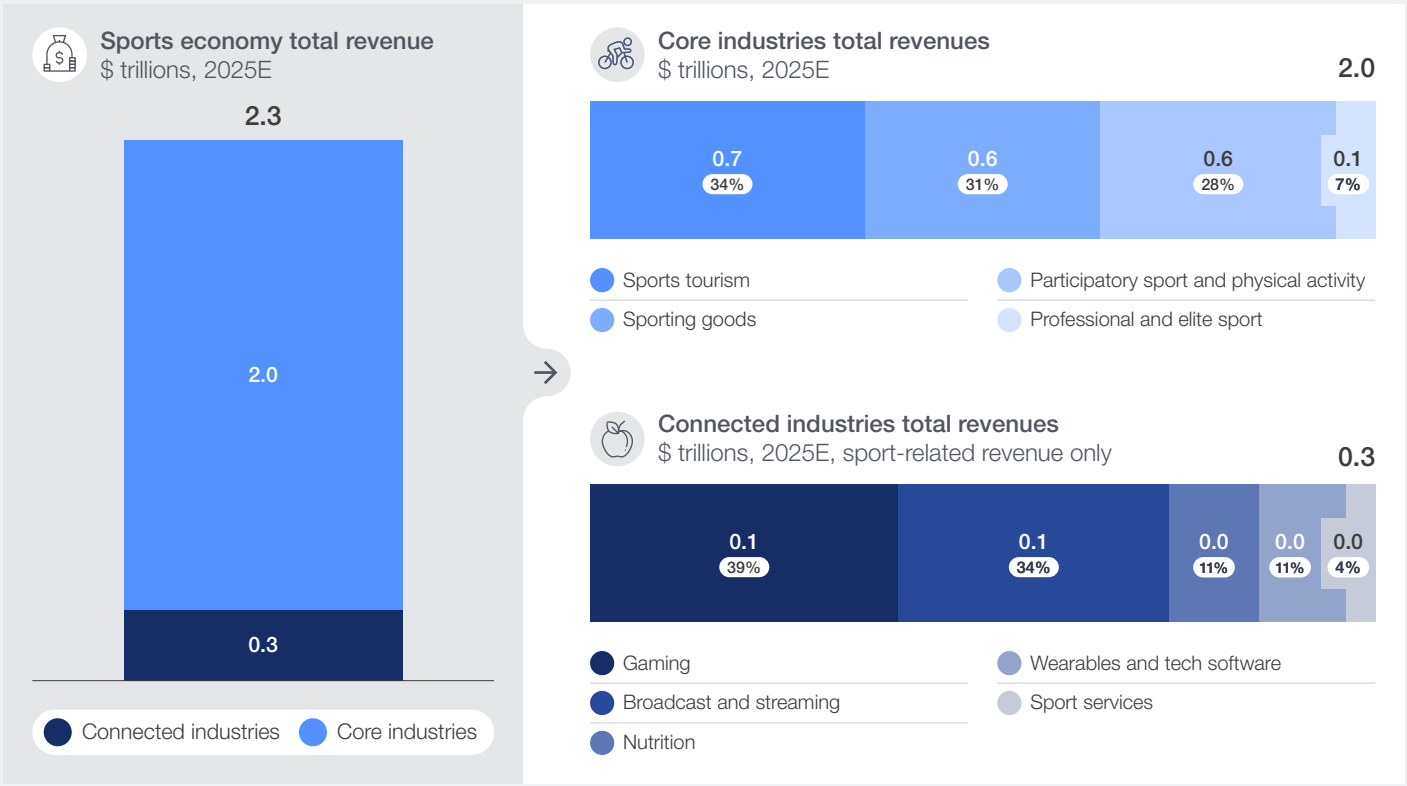
- **Broadcast and streaming:** Includes television and online sport broadcasting, advertising and subscriptions
- **Gaming:** Encompasses sport-themed video gaming and sport betting
- **Nutrition**: Covers sport protein and non-protein products for muscle repair or energy boost
- **Wearables and technology software:** Includes fitness wearables and sport-related experiential technology such as artificial intelligence (AI), global positioning system (GPS) and virtual reality (VR)
- **Sport services:** Includes agencies and insurance companies providing sport-related solutions.

FIGURE 5 **Sports economy market sizing**

Sports economy global revenue pools ($, 2025E)

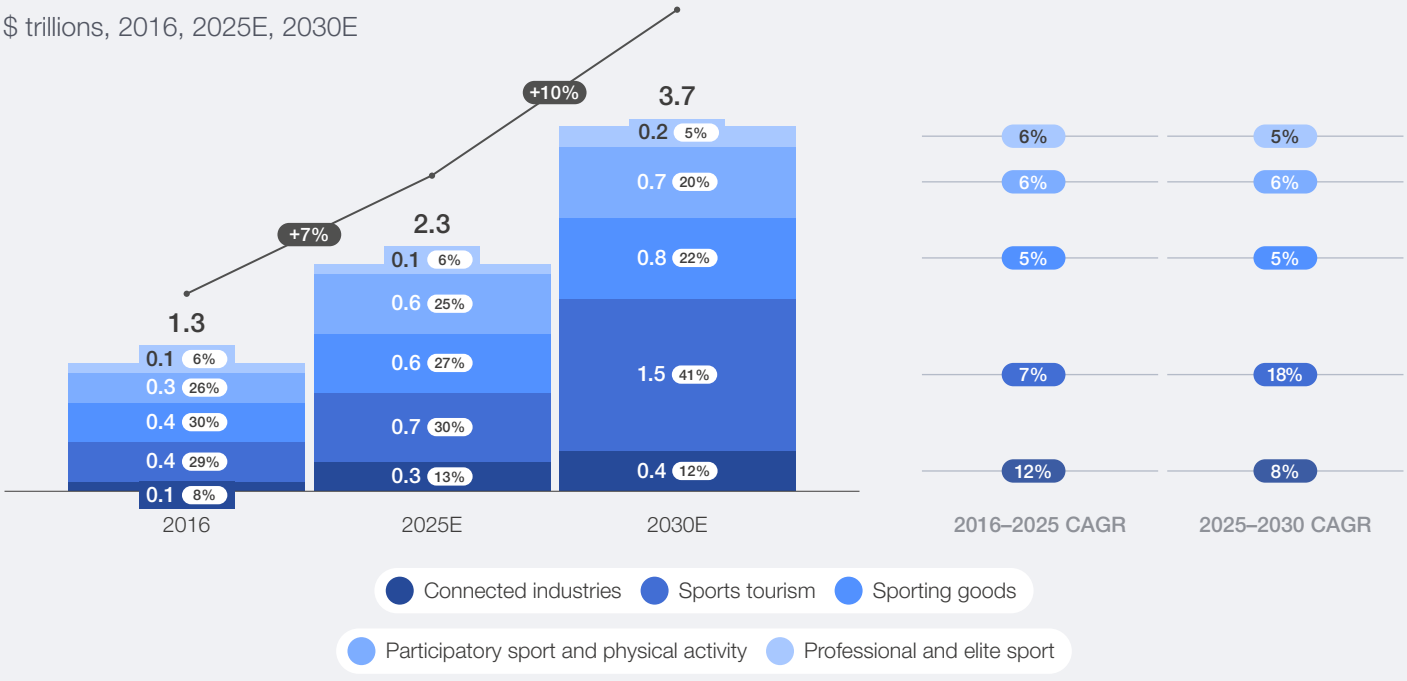
Source: Off the Pitch, Sportsvalue, UEFA, Statista, Forbes, Sports Business Journal, SportsPro, Global Data, Euromonitor, Global Wellness Institute, UN Tourism, Censuswide, Expedia, Adventure Travel Trade Association, Global Market Insights, Omdia, 1000IQ Market Research, Newzoo, Fortune Business Insights, Business Research Insights, Marsh, World Economic Forum analysis

FIGURE 6 | **Sports economy market sizing segmentation**



Source: Off the Pitch, Sportsvalue, UEFA, Statista, Forbes, Sports Business Journal, SportsPro, Global Data, Euromonitor, Global Wellness Institute, UN Tourism, Censuswide, Expedia, Adventure Travel Trade Association, Global Market Insights, Omdia, 1000IQ Market Research, Newzoo, Fortune Business Insights, Business Research Insights, Marsh, World Economic Forum analysis

FIGURE 7 | **Sports economy market sizing – historical evolution and forecast**



Source: Off the Pitch, Sportsvalue, UEFA, Statista, Forbes, Sports Business Journal, SportsPro, S&P Global, Global Data, Euromonitor, Global Wellness Institute, UN Tourism, Censuswide, Expedia, Adventure Travel Trade Association, Global Market Insights, Omdia, 1000IQ Market Research, Newzoo, Fortune Business Insights, Business Research Insights, Marsh, Global Data Route Analytics, World Economic Forum analysis

In mature sporting markets, sport contributes between 2% and 4% of GDP and supports approximately one in every 25 full-time jobs.

The sports economy is powered by dynamic interactions between the core and connected industries. Growth or innovation in one area often accelerates progress in others. For instance, major sporting events stimulate demand for sports tourism, while grassroots sports and sports tourism drive sales of sporting goods. In turn, the popularity of sporting goods brands fuels sponsorship revenues for elite sport, often surpassing income from ticket sales. Media coverage and digital technologies further amplify these effects by expanding audience reach, enhancing fan engagement and creating new revenue streams. These synergies and interdependencies among actors create a virtuous cycle, amplifying the overall impact and value of the sports economy, not only driving economic development, such as job creation and infrastructure investment, but also providing a platform for broader community and corporate engagement.

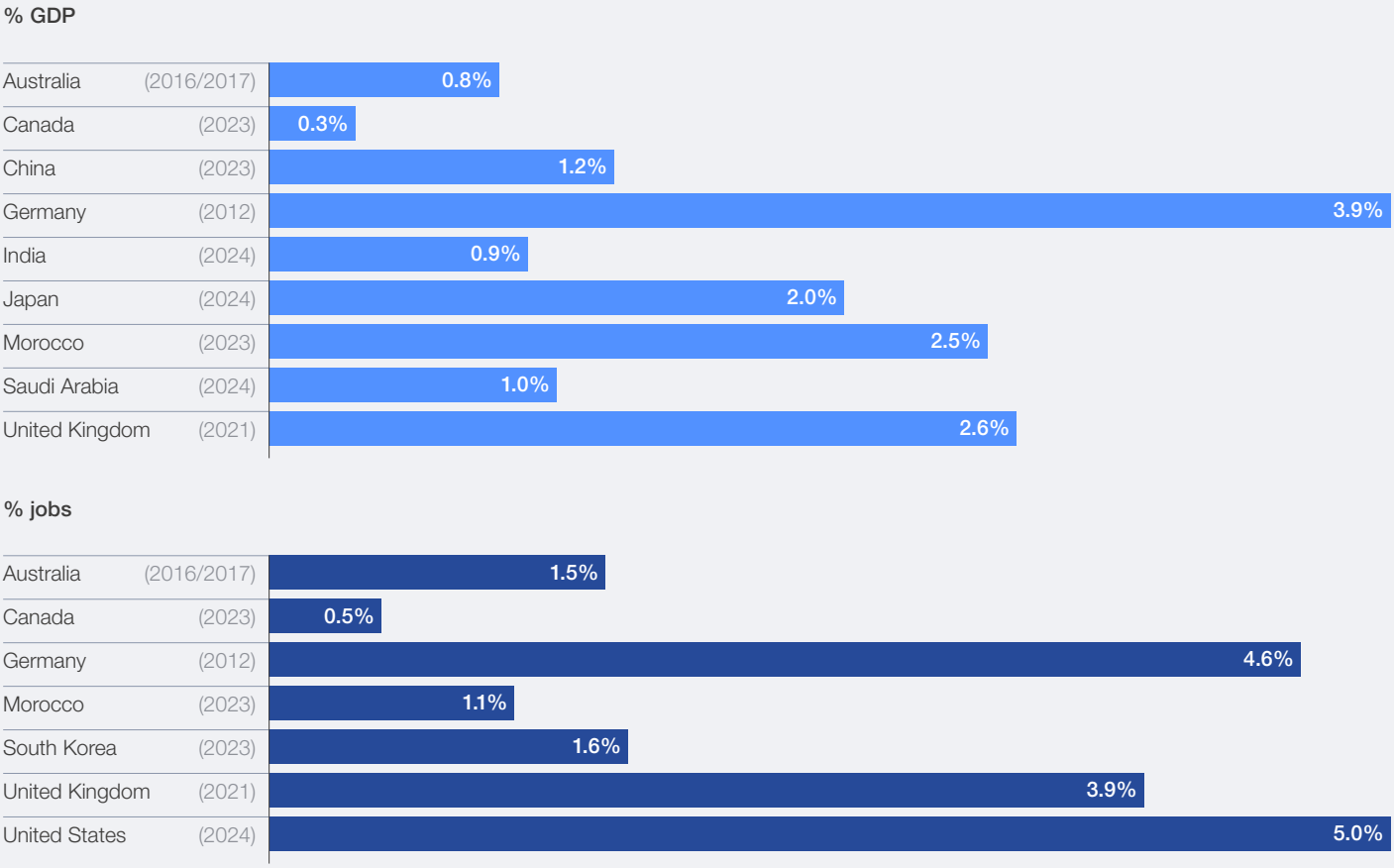
The broader stakeholder ecosystem benefits from these industries and is also vital to facilitating their growth and development. For example, governments interface with the sports economy through multiple ministries, including those responsible for sport, health, trade, investment and tourism, highlighting sport's significance and complex, interwoven relationship with national economies and their development priorities.

In mature sporting markets such as the US, the United Kingdom and the European Union (EU), sport contributes between 2% and 4% of gross domestic product (GDP) and supports approximately one in every 25 full-time jobs. Major events such as the Boston Marathon drive significant economic benefits, including increased tax revenues and vendor activity, with the 2024 edition generating $500 million for Massachusetts.[3] Sport also contributes to more productive workforces, with corporates investing in enhanced employee well-being strategies including physical activity having the potential to generate up to an additional $11 trillion in economic value.[4]

This strong foundation of the sports economy sets the stage for its rapid evolution. Emerging trends, particularly in sports tourism, are driving new opportunities for growth and reshaping how people engage with sport.

FIGURE 8 **Indicative comparison of sport economy's contribution to GDP and employment**

Select nations and time frames, %



Note: Figures for GDP and employment are based on reported sport satellite accounts, except USA (Mercer indicative analysis); employment figures are based on headcount, except for AUS (FTE).

Source: UK Government, European Commission, Canadian Heritage, Stat Canadian Government, Aspen Institute, Care Ratings, Korean Government, Astro Labs, Dubai Sport Council, Fédération Marocaine des Professionnels du Sport, World Economic Forum analysis

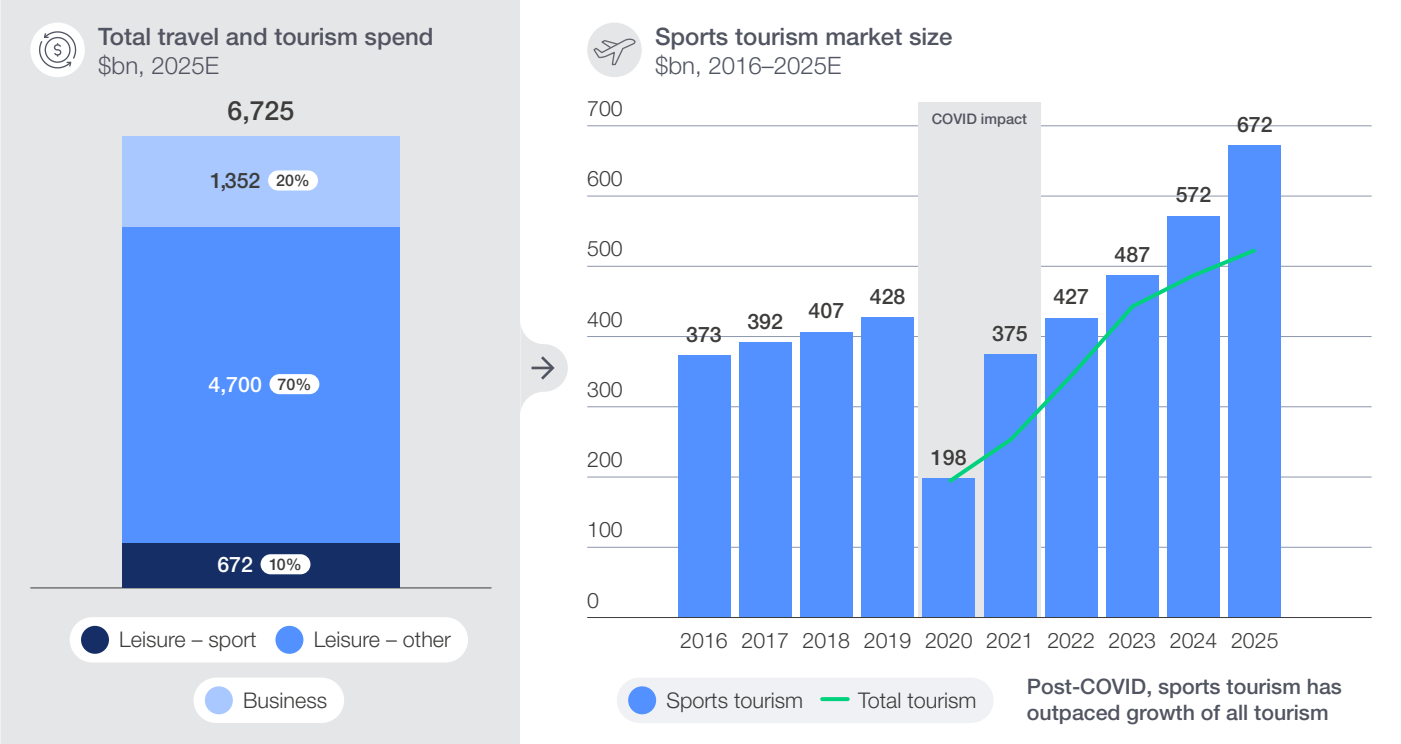
1.2 Growth drivers shaping the future

The future growth of the sports economy is being driven by several trends that are redefining how sport is played, consumed and valued globally. Four key drivers are: 1) the acceleration of sports tourism; 2) the emergence of sport as an asset class; 3) the mainstreaming of women's sport; and 4) the rebalancing of sport growth with emerging economies.

The acceleration of sports tourism

The rapid growth of the sports economy is being led by the rise of sports tourism – forecast to account for 60% of total sports economy revenue growth until 2030. It has also become the fastest-growing segment of the global tourism industry, consistently outpacing broader travel trends since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2025, sports tourism accounted for 10% of global travel expenditure, with revenues growing at a compound annual rate of 28% since 2020, above the 22% growth seen across all tourism (see Figure 9). This momentum is expected to continue, with a projected annual growth rate of 17.5% through 2030.[5]

FIGURE 9 **Sports tourism – a detailed look**



Note: 2016–2019 historical growth based on US sports tourism for spectating major events.

Source: UN Tourism, Censuswide, Expedia, Adventure Travel Trade Association, Global Market Insights, World Travel Tourism Council, World Economic Forum analysis

In 2025, sports tourism accounted for 10% of global travel expenditure, with revenues growing at a compound annual rate of 28% since 2020.

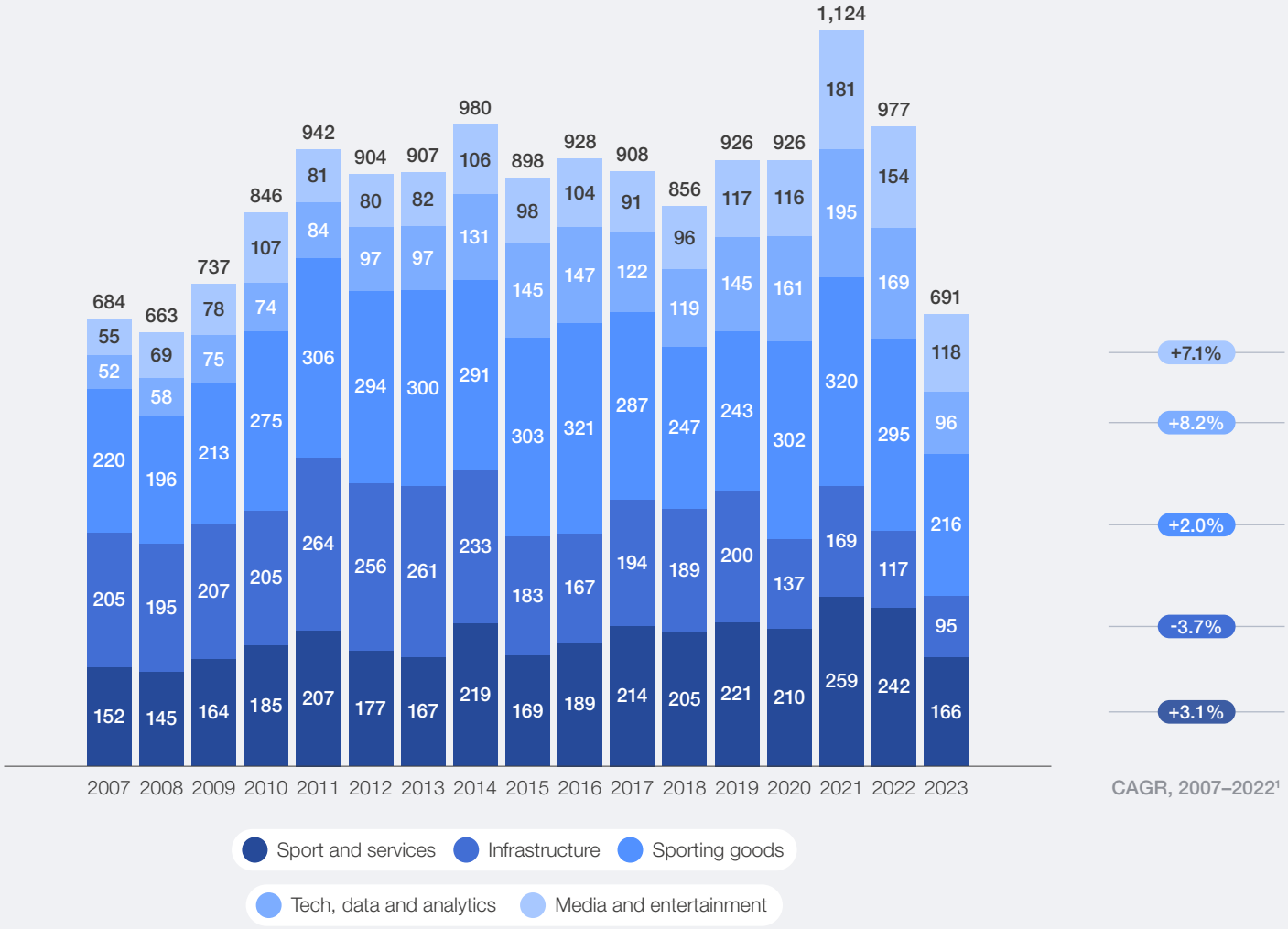
The rapid growth of global sporting events and the expansion of tournament offerings are driving heightened demand, particularly in sports such as cycling and golf.[6] This trend is also reflected in developments such as a record 351 medal events planned for the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games[7] the introduction of new formats such as the FIFA Club World Cup, alongside enriched fan experiences including half-time shows, fan zones and integrated "play-and-watch" travel packages. Endurance-based experiences and holidays in both urban and nature-based settings are increasingly popular. For example, the 2024 New York Marathon drew more than 17,000 international runners from 137 countries,[8] while entries to events such as UltraSwim 33.3 in Croatia, the Marathon des Sables in Morocco and Nordenskiöldsloppet cross-country skiing in Finland sell out within minutes.[9]

The emergence of sport as an asset class

Investor interest in sport assets, particularly in professional and elite sports in mature sporting markets such as the US, has reached record levels, with more than a thousand global deals closed in 2021 and landmark transactions such as the $10 billion valuation of the NBA's[10] Los Angeles Lakers in 2025,[11] the record high team sale in North American sports history. This surge is driven by the potential of significant asset appreciation, new ownership models, improved financial regulations and the convergence of sport with media, entertainment and technology.[12] The investor base has expanded well beyond its traditional boundaries. What was once the exclusive domain of high-net-worth individuals is now attracting institutional investors, sovereign wealth funds, venture capital firms, entertainment companies and professional athletes.

FIGURE 10 **Sport transaction count**

2007–2023, n=23,781, announced transactions



Notes: 1. Excluding 2023 in account of market-wide capital constraints from interest rate hike; CAGR = compound annual growth rate; ~5,000 transaction are omitted due to unavailable mapping.

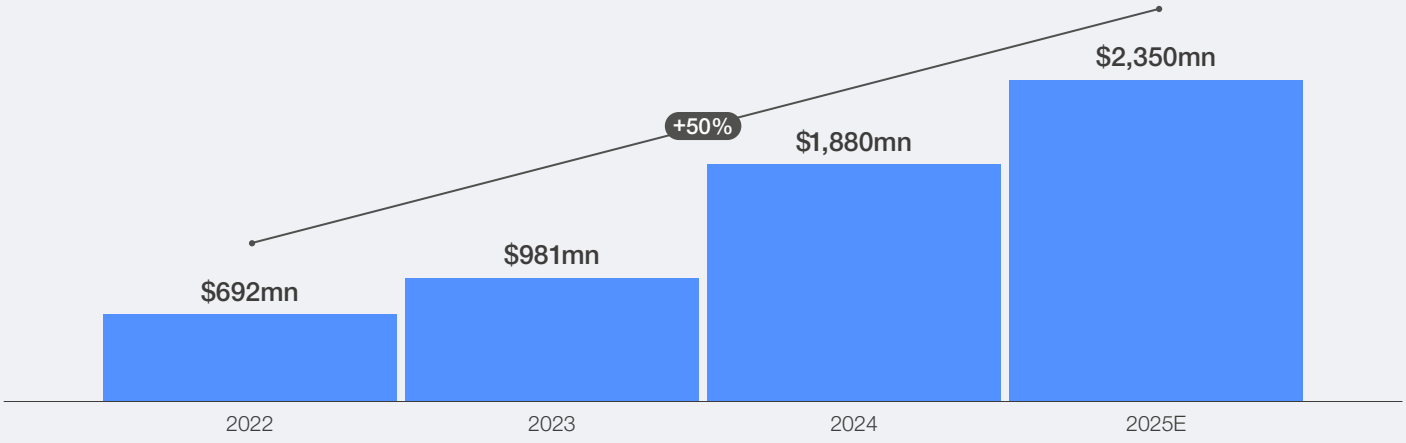
Source: CapIQ – all transactions with "sport" in CIQ industry classification, data extracted April 2024, Oliver Wyman analysis

The mainstreaming of women's sport

Women's professional sport is experiencing unprecedented growth, with revenues projected to reach $2.35 billion in 2025, more than triple the 2022 figure.[13]

Association football and basketball account for 80% of this income,[14] driven by governing bodies such as FIFA[15] and UEFA,[16] fuelling visibility on media platforms and landmark events. The 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand, underscores this trajectory, attracting more than 2 billion viewers,[17] delivering substantial economic benefits and stimulating a rise in football participation in the host countries.

FIGURE 11 **Women's sport revenue growth**



Source: Deloitte

FIGURE 12 **Impact of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup**

Source: WTO, FIFA

Other sports are also gaining momentum: the Paris 2024 Olympic Games marked the first time in history with full gender parity on the field of play and introduced a more balanced schedule to ensure primetime coverage for women's competitions.[18]

Investor interest in women's sport is also significant. Monarch Collective, a $250 million fund, is the first exclusively dedicated to investing in women's sport,[19] with a current portfolio that includes three National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) teams. In cricket, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) organized a landmark bidding process for five franchises in the Women's Premier League in 2023, raising $572 million from private investors.[20]

The rebalancing of sports growth with emerging economies

Sport is becoming a powerful engine of growth in emerging regions, extending well beyond mature markets such as the US and the United Kingdom. Across Africa, Asia and Latin America, sport stakeholders are increasingly creating jobs, promoting health and stimulating infrastructure development. Latin America, Africa and the Middle East are among the fastest-growing markets for sporting goods, with double-digit annual growth expected over the coming decade.[21] Tourism is also a key catalyst in this transformation, with countries such as Morocco,[22] Thailand[23] and Brazil[24] actively bidding to host large-scale sporting events that attract global attention and investment. Nations such as Rwanda[25] are building comprehensive sport ecosystems, encompassing academies, venues and employment opportunities, through partnerships with international bodies such as the NBA and FIBA[26] via the Basketball Africa League. These efforts are being reinforced by support from development banks, private investors[27] and philanthropic foundations across Africa.

Sovereign wealth funds from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates are investing directly in global sport properties and organizations,[28] while India is accelerating investment commitments at both central and state government levels, helping drive the value of its sport sector towards an estimated $130 billion by 2030.[29] Meanwhile, in early 2025 China issued new guidelines encouraging lenders and local authorities to finance sport-related projects through long-term instruments, including corporate bonds for stadiums, sport parks and fitness trails,[30] supporting its ambition for the domestic sport sector to reach a value of approximately $985 billion by 2030.[31]

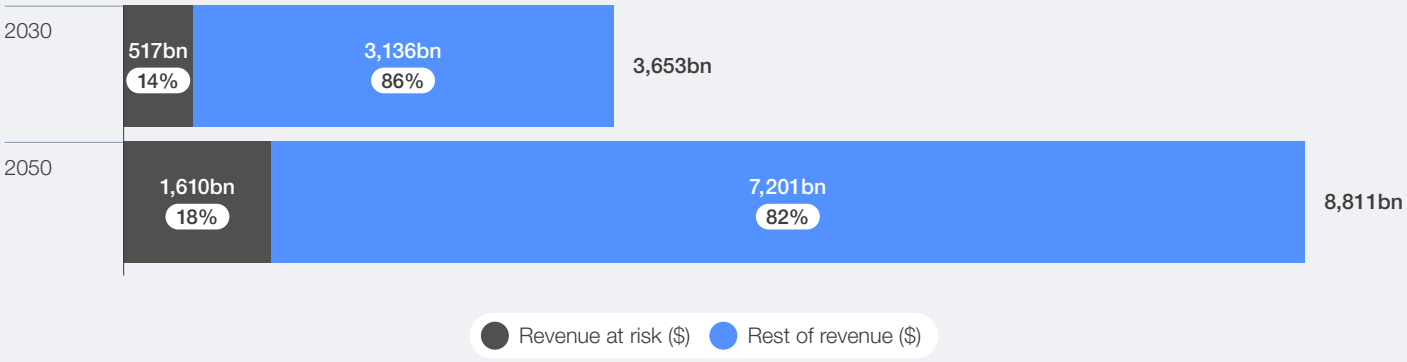
1.3 **Converging risks to the sports economy's growth:** Health and environment

Rising physical inactivity and accelerating environmental degradation threaten both the demand base and the operating foundations of sport.

The sports economy at an inflection point

Despite the remarkable momentum generated by new growth drivers and commercial innovation, the sports economy now stands at a critical inflection point. Rising physical inactivity and accelerating environmental degradation are emerging as interconnected systemic risks that threaten both the demand base and the operating foundations of sport. These forces are not isolated trends; they reinforce one another through feedback loops that weaken participation, disrupt supply chains, undermine investment confidence and erode long-term revenue potential. Under current trajectories, the combined impacts of worsening physical inactivity, climate change and nature loss could reduce the sports economy's annual revenue by up to 14% ($517 billion) by 2030, rising to 18% ($1.6 trillion) by 2050.

FIGURE 13 | **Revenue impact of physical inactivity, climate change and nature loss**

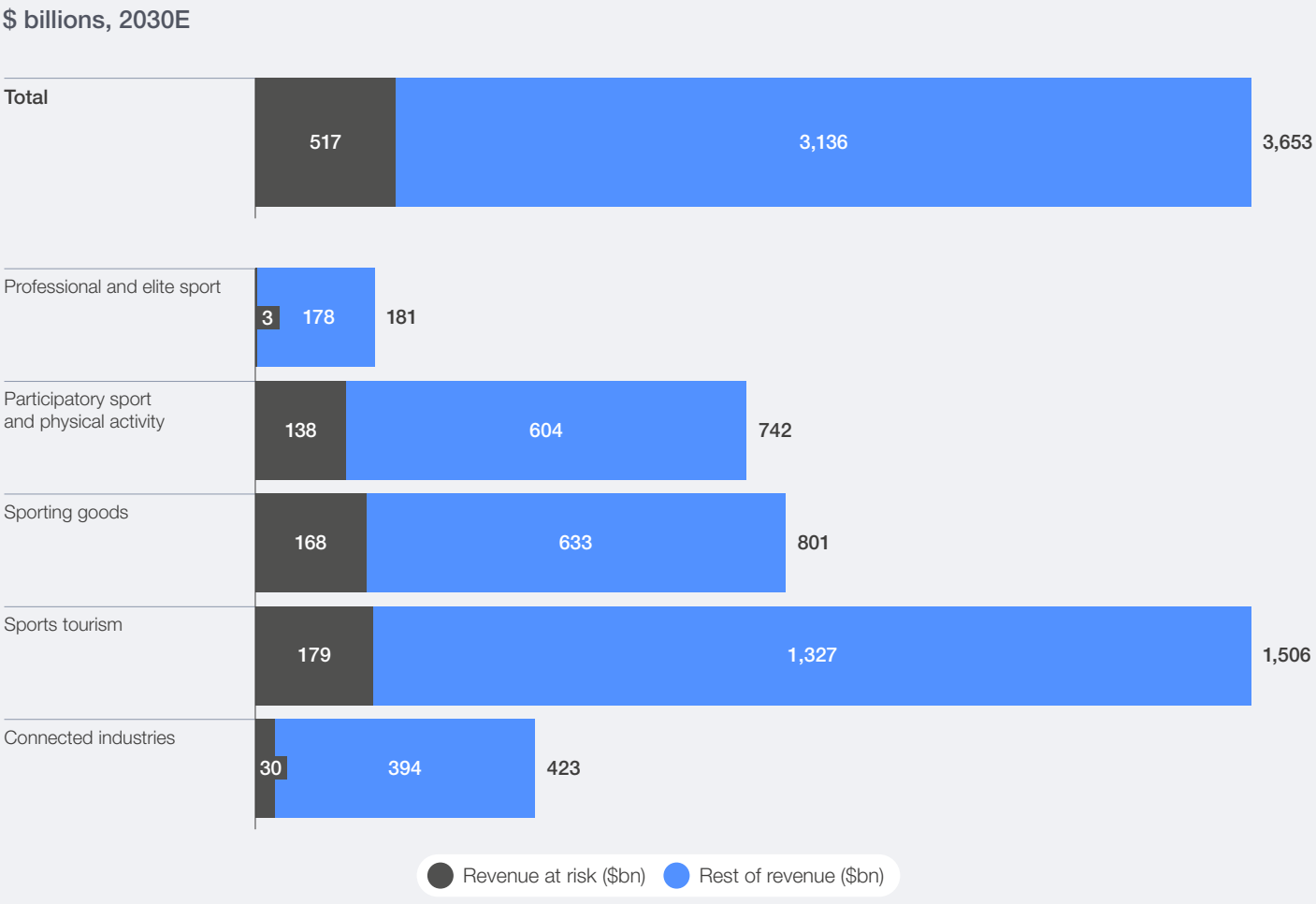


Source: World Economic Forum analysis

At the same time, the expanding footprint of the sports economy is intensifying pressures on the natural systems upon which it depends, including through high resource consumption, carbon emissions, waste generation and land-use impacts.

This places the sector in a dual-risk position: it is increasingly vulnerable to health and environmental deterioration while simultaneously contributing to the degradation that undermines its own future viability.

FIGURE 14 | **Size of 2030 revenue affected by physical inactivity, climate change and nature loss by industry**



Note: Figures may not equate to totals because of rounding issues.

Source: World Health Organization, Wordometer, Routledge, World Economic Forum analysis

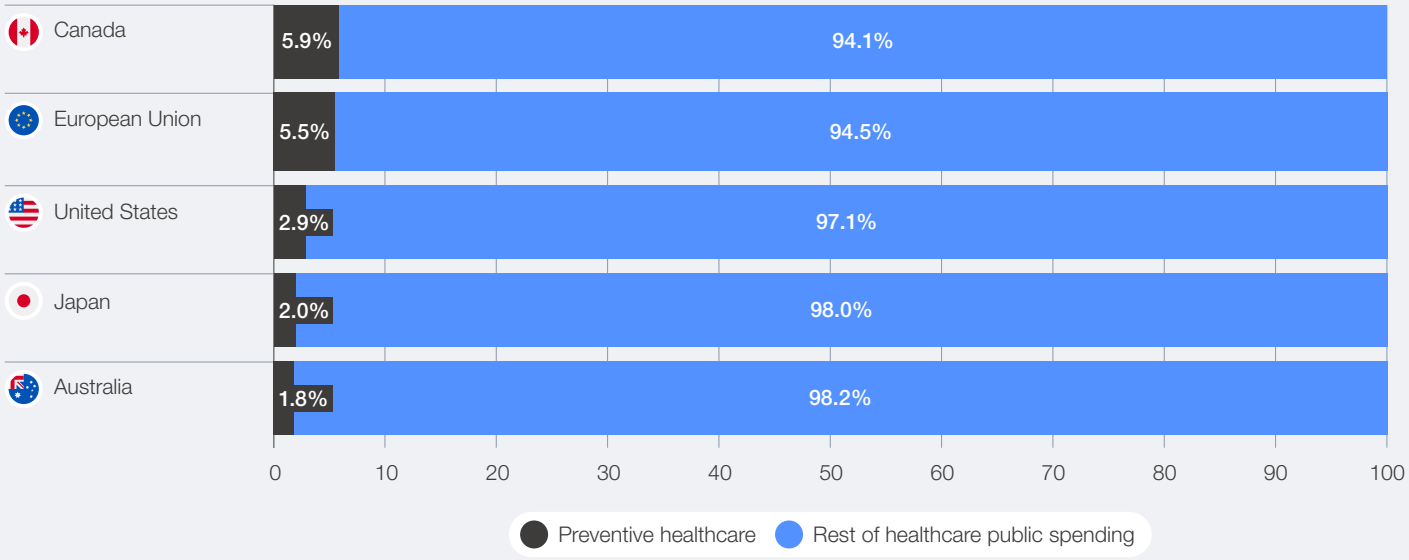
> The greatest exposure to physical inactivity and environmental risks lies in sports tourism, sporting goods and participatory sports.

Analysis of 2030 revenue projections indicates that the greatest exposure to physical inactivity and environmental risks lies in sports tourism, sporting goods and participatory sports; sectors that rely most heavily on active populations and stable environmental conditions. While professional sport faces comparatively lower direct exposure, its investment case is increasingly vulnerable as investors integrate rising climate risks into valuation and capital allocation decisions. Heightened risk perception may result in deferred or withdrawn investment, higher insurance costs, reduced coverage availability and more conservative asset valuations. These dynamics undermine the traditional economic rationale for hosting major sporting events. Benefits such as tourism growth, visitor spending and local economic stimulus are becoming less predictable and more susceptible to external shocks. This creates a structural tension: the very arguments used to justify major event investment are becoming increasingly uncertain, threatening the long-term viability of both elite and participatory sport models under current growth paradigms. These risks are particularly acute in emerging sport regions, where infrastructure deficits intersect with high exposure to climate hazards. As regions such as Asia Pacific host a significant share of global sporting goods manufacturing, environmental stress heightens the likelihood that supply chain disruption and resource shortages could further elevate financial risk and constrain future growth potential. Together, these dynamics underscore the urgency of transitioning towards strategies that simultaneously expand participation, strengthen climate resilience and reduce environmental harm, safeguarding the long-term economic and social value of the sport ecosystem.

Physical inactivity as a constraint on demand and growth

Rising physical inactivity is a public health concern, but it is also becoming a structural brake on the future growth of the sports economy. Nearly one-third of adults and up to 80% of young people do not meet recommended physical activity guidelines,[32] contributing directly to the global increase in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cardiovascular disease, obesity and type 2 diabetes, which account for 74% of global deaths.[33] Despite the World Health Organization's target to reduce global inactivity to 22% by 2030 under the Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (GAPPA), global rates have continued to rise, increasing from 26% in 2010 to 31% in 2022, with projections suggesting they could reach 35% by 2030.[34] This would equate to up to 800 million fewer active individuals than anticipated, shrinking the foundational consumer base that underpins participation, sports tourism, merchandise sales and long-term fan engagement. The economic burden of inactivity is already substantial. Between 2020 and 2030, physical inactivity is projected to cost healthcare systems approximately $300 billion,[35] placing growing strain on government budgets. Across selected G20 economies, preventive health measures, including the promotion of physical activity, currently account for less than 6% of total health expenditure.[36]

FIGURE 15 **Preventive healthcare expenditure as a share of total health spending, selected countries/regions**

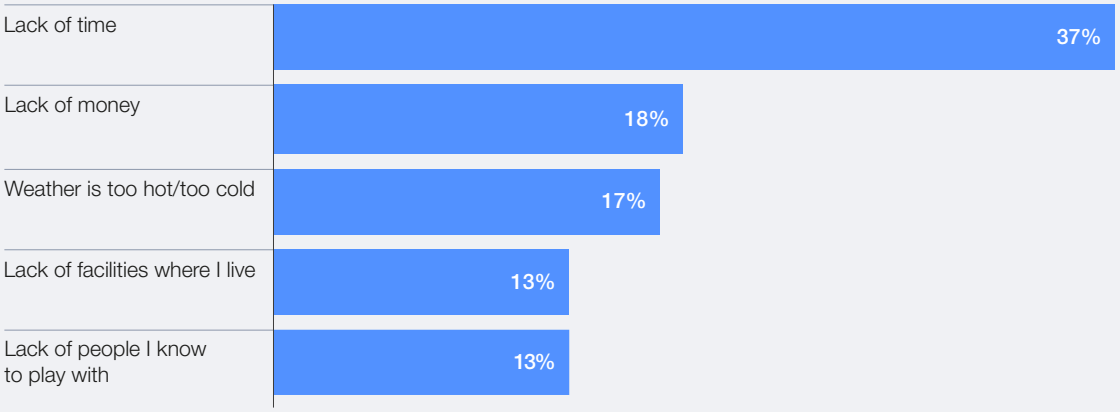


Source: Eurostat, Health System Tracker, World Economic Forum analysis

As fiscal priorities shift towards acute healthcare, defence and crisis response, funding for prevention and community sport initiatives risks further erosion.[37] Demand is also constrained by persistent socioeconomic and cultural barriers. A global survey in 2021 found that while over half of individuals wish to engage in more physical activity, they face obstacles including a lack of time, financial limitations, inadequate facilities and unfavourable weather conditions.[38]

FIGURE 16 **Top five barriers people face to practising sport as much as they would like to (% of respondents)**

2021, 29 countries surveyed



58%
would like to do more sport

1.5 hours
more time per week spent by men vs. women on physical activity

Source: IPSOS

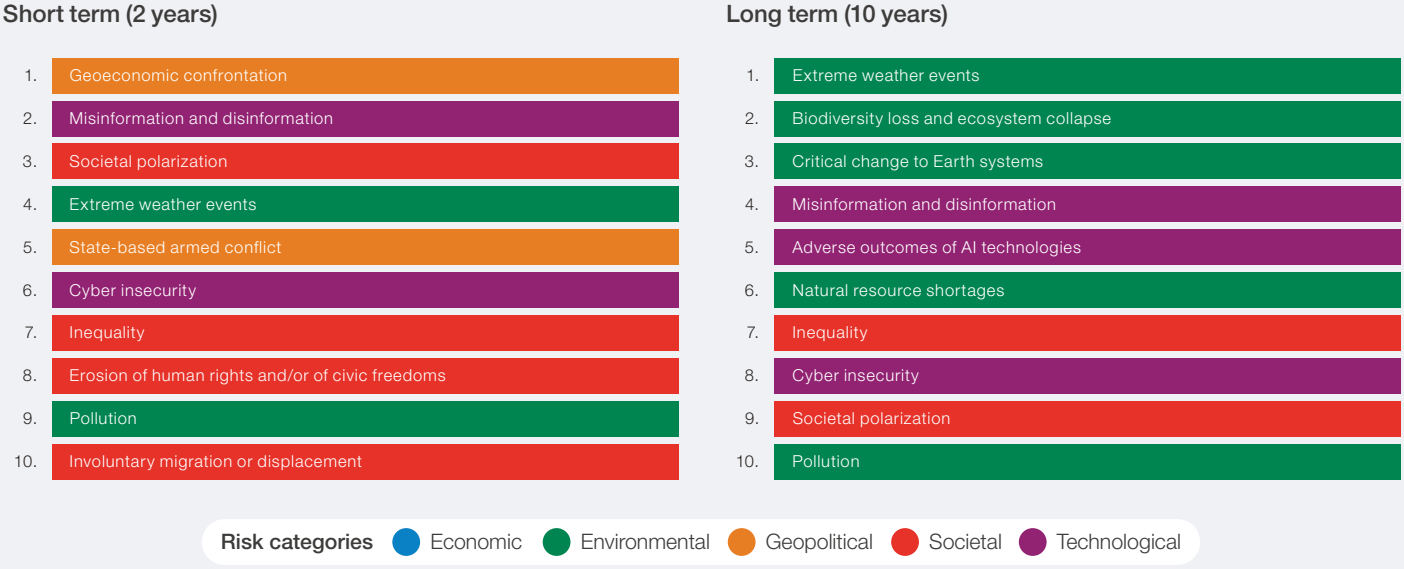
Participation gaps further constrain growth potential. Girls and women comprise only 37% of sport participants in the EU,[39] rising to 40% in the US[40] and 45% in Canada.[41] People with disabilities are twice as likely to be inactive,[42] with limited opportunities for engagement, training and competition, inadequate accessible transport and a widespread lack of understanding and awareness of inclusive practices.[43] Without deliberate intervention to close these gaps, the sports economy risks perpetuating structural exclusion and forfeiting significant future growth opportunities.

Environmental breakdown as an operational and financial risk for sport

Environmental risks, driven by climate change and nature loss, dominate the global risk landscape for the coming decade, and represent an escalating operational and financial threat to the sports economy.[44]

FIGURE 17 **Global risks ranked by severity over the short and long term**

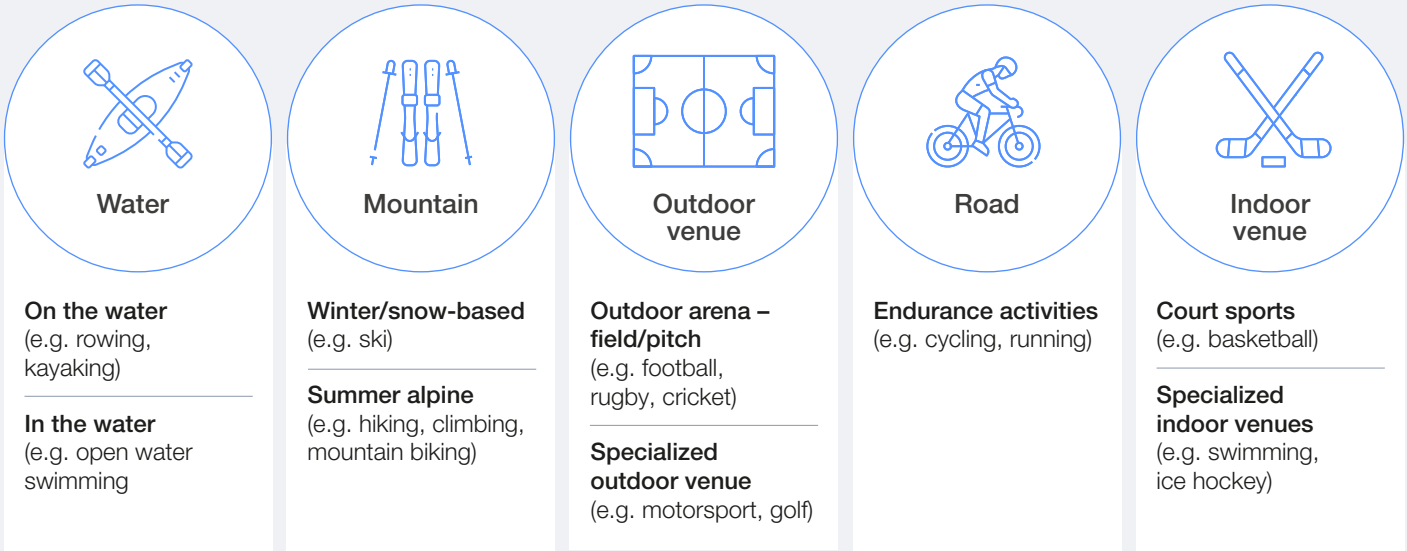
"Please estimate the likely impact (severity) of the following risks over a 2-year and 10-year period."



Source: World Economic Forum Global Risks Perception Survey 2025-2026

FIGURE 18 **Settings for sport and physical activity**

Settings for sport and physical activity (non exhaustive)



Source: World Economic Forum analysis

> Over 90% of media rights and 76% of sponsorship revenues in professional sport are linked to outdoor activities.

The sports economy is highly dependent on stable environmental conditions. Over 90% of media rights and 76% of sponsorship revenues in professional sport are linked to outdoor activities,[45] placing core revenue streams at direct risk from environmental disruption and the loss of visual appeal related to degradation. Climate and nature-related impacts are already materialising across the sector, including:

- **Operational disruption and revenue loss:** Extreme weather events such as heatwaves, flooding, storms and wildfire smoke are increasingly forcing event cancellations, rescheduling and venue closures. In the UK, adverse weather conditions result in approximately £320 million annually in lost income and maintenance costs for community sport.[46] These disruptions erode ticket sales, reduce broadcast value, diminish sponsor exposure and weaken fan engagement, while increasing insurance premiums and reducing coverage availability.[47]
- **Health and participation impacts:** Environmental degradation directly undermines both elite performance and community participation. Heat stress, air pollution and water contamination are escalating health threats that undermine athletic performance, with emerging evidence indicating that climate change will increasingly limit the conditions required for record-breaking athletic achievements.[48] Climate stressors disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, widening inequalities and compounding existing barriers for women, young people and people with disabilities.

FIGURE 19 **Examples of the impact of environmental risks on sport**

Fluvial flooding

1 in 5

Stadiums in the United Kingdom affected by 2050

Decreased snowfall

10

Countries with the ability to host the Winter Olympics and Paralympics by 2040

Extreme heat

40%

Percentage of participants failing to to complete the World Athletics Championships women's marathon in Qatar

Air pollution

3

American leagues (MBL, WNBA and NWSL) had to cancel games in affected areas during the Canadian wildfires in 2023

Source: World Economic Forum analysis

> Sport's core industries generate an estimated 400–450 million tonnes of CO_2e annually.

Sport as a driver of health and environmental risks

While sport is increasingly affected by environmental and health risks, it is also a significant contributor to these pressures. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle in which growth that is not decoupled from high emissions, intensive resource use and significant waste generation progressively undermines the environmental and social conditions essential for the sector's long-term viability. Key impacts include:

- **Emissions and energy use:** Sport's core industries generate an estimated 400–450 million tonnes of CO_2e annually, comparable to the national emissions of major industrialized economies.[49] These emissions stem primarily from energy-intensive venues, including the significant embodied carbon associated with construction,[50] extensive travel by teams and spectators and carbon-intensive supply chains for merchandise, apparel and equipment. As sports tourism accelerates as the fastest-growing segment of the industry, a focus on low-carbon mobility and sustainable event models becomes imperative.

- **Resource intensity and waste:** Sport venues and supply chains involve significant environmental trade-offs across materials, water use and waste. Turf management illustrates this tension: natural grass requires substantial water and chemical inputs for maintenance,[51] while artificial turf is associated with risks including high manufacturing emissions and microplastic pollution from synthetic materials.[52] Beyond venues, sporting events and the production of sporting goods are highly resource-intensive, generating substantial waste streams ranging from single-use plastics to discarded equipment and apparel. In the United Kingdom alone, an estimated 100,000 tonnes of sporting goods are sent to landfill each year, equivalent to approximately 950 shirts per minute.[53] Apparel and footwear manufacturing further intensify environmental pressures. Textile dyeing and finishing processes can consume between 100 and 150 litres of water per kilogram of fabric, while inadequate wastewater treatment frequently results in the discharge of toxic dyes and chemicals into surrounding water systems. Performance fabrics such as polyester also shed plastic microfibres throughout their life cycle, contributing to an estimated 500,000 tonnes of microfibres entering the oceans annually,[54] contaminating water, soil and air, and posing growing risks to human health.

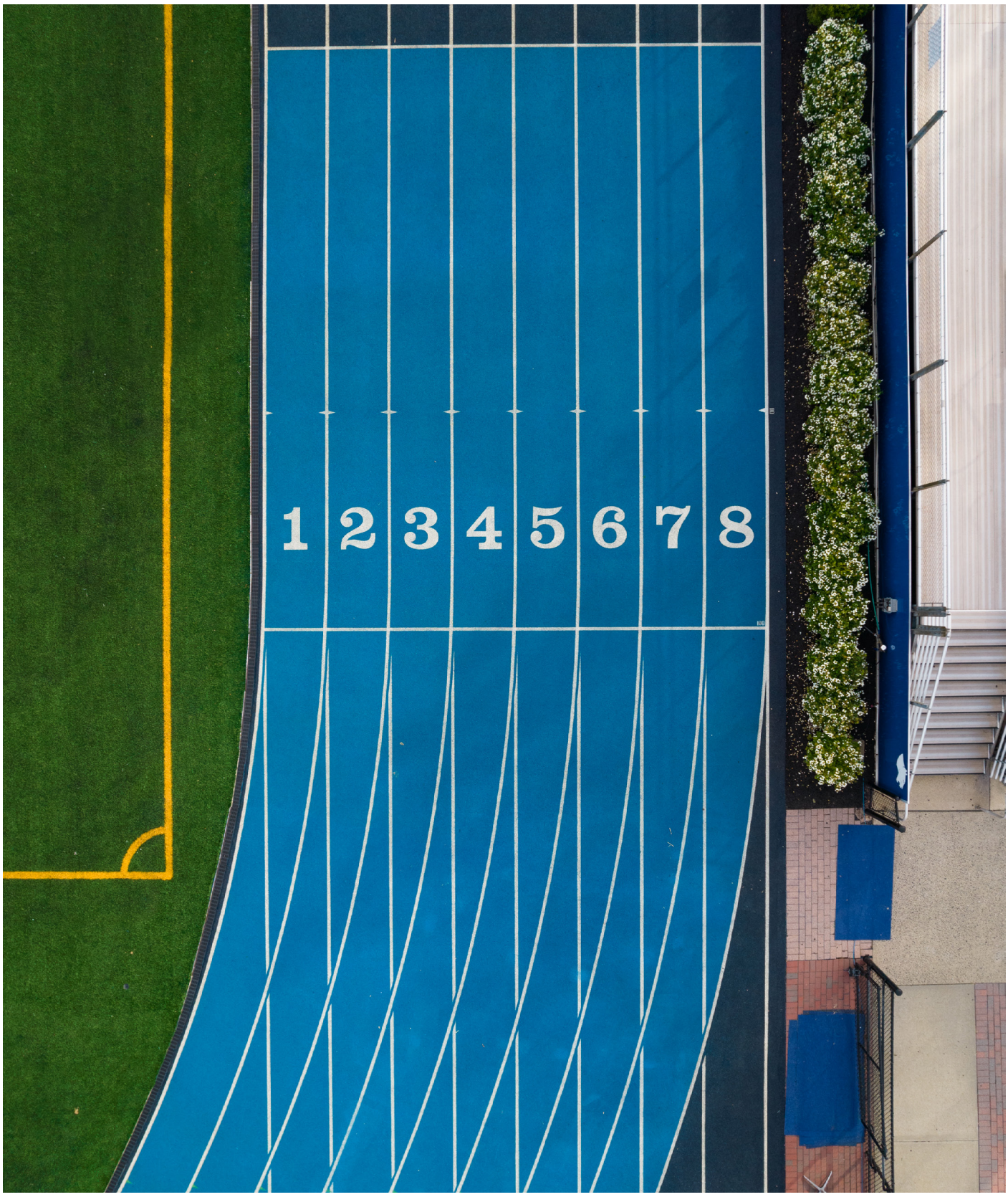
- **The impact of sporting conventions:** Regulatory standards can further drive resource use. For example, professional tennis produces approximately 325 million tennis balls annually, with over 95% discarded after limited use.[55] This highlights the scale of material turnover embedded in modern sport, and the importance of sport governing bodies in setting standards that incentivise durability, reuse and circular material practices.

The need for integrated action and a new model of prosperity

These interconnected risks underscore a fundamental reality: the long-term success of the sports economy is intrinsically linked to the well-being of both people and the planet. Achieving genuine prosperity – economic, social and environmental – will require a shift towards integrated, systems-based solutions that address the sector's dependencies and impacts. Momentum is building through initiatives such as the Sports for Climate Action[56] and Sports for Nature[57] frameworks, which are establishing sustainability guidelines and standards for both grassroots and elite sport. At the same time, the World Federation of the Sporting Goods Industry (WFSGI), in collaboration with the World Health Organization, is advancing research and best practices to promote physical activity globally.[58] However, efforts across the sports economy remain fragmented, often limited to specific industries or geographies. Achieving meaningful progress will require coordinated global action with stakeholders across the sports economy.

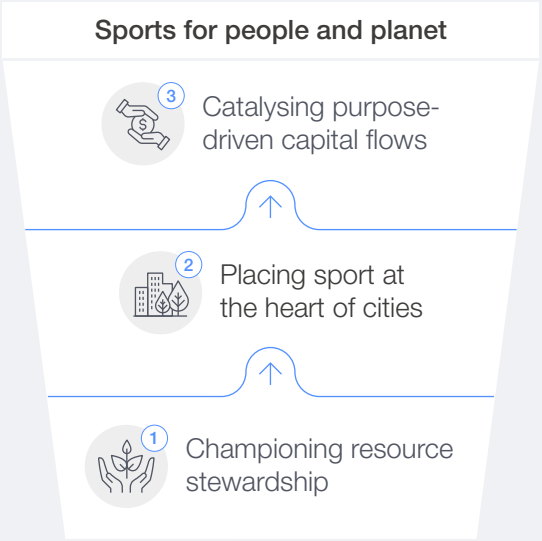
2 Pathways to prosperity

Three distinct multistakeholder pathways show the sports economy the way to a more prosperous future.



Building on the opportunities and challenges outlined in Section 1, this report sets out three multistakeholder pathways and associated action areas to help the sports economy lower barriers to participation in a sustainable manner, while shaping a more prosperous future for both people and planet, where profitability and growth align with healthier societies and thriving natural ecosystems. Although each pathway can be advanced independently, they are presented as a progressive funnel to illustrate a transformation from the inside out. Delivering progress across these pathways will require strengthened governance and capable leadership to navigate the complexities of effective multistakeholder collaboration. If successfully implemented, the pathways will reinforce one another, fostering a resilient and inclusive sports economy that serves as a catalyst for long-term global prosperity.

FIGURE 20 **The pathways to prosperity**



PATHWAY 1 Championing resource stewardship. Key action areas:

- Implement water stewardship to strengthen business resilience
- Scale circular business models
- Harness sporting events to pilot and scale sustainable materials and consumption models

PATHWAY 2 Placing sport at the heart of cities. Key action areas:

- Leverage green and blue spaces as sporting assets
- Design sporting infrastructure for community well-being and environmental resilience
- Advance sustainable mobility

PATHWAY 3 Catalysing purpose-driven capital flows. Key action areas:

- Activate shared impact through strategic sponsorships
- Mobilize investment partnerships across the capital ecosystem

Source: World Economic Forum

PATHWAY 1

Championing resource stewardship

The continued growth and prosperity of the sports economy can be achieved only within the limits of the planet. Currently, humanity consumes natural resources at a rate 1.8 times faster than the Earth can regenerate.[59] As a result, sport requires coordinated action across the public and private sectors to address its own environmental footprint through innovations in resource use, materials and circularity. This transformation not only mitigates negative impacts but also unlocks new opportunities for sustainable products, services and fan experiences. Meaningful progress will depend on collaboration among governing bodies, sporting organizations, brands, manufacturers, venue operators, fans, policy-makers and infrastructure providers. By championing resource stewardship, the sports economy can turn resource constraints into catalysts for innovation, resilience and inclusive growth. In doing so, it can strengthen competitiveness while creating long-term sustainable value. Three action areas within this pathway are:

1 **Implement water stewardship to strengthen business resilience**

2 **Scale circular business models**

3 **Harness sporting events to pilot and scale sustainable materials and consumption models**

1 Implement water stewardship to strengthen business resilience

Fresh water is a vital global resource on which the sport sector both depends and exerts substantial pressure. From manufacturing sporting goods to maintaining fields and venues, the sports economy relies on predictable access to clean water. Yet by 2030, global demand for fresh water is expected to exceed supply by 40%, a gap exacerbated by climate change, shifting precipitation patterns and increasingly frequent droughts.[60] This imbalance will significantly deepen local communities' vulnerability to inadequate access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Water stress not only threatens access to and participation in water-based sports such as swimming and rowing but also jeopardizes the sporting goods industry's ability to maintain production.

This imbalance poses growing risks to production continuity, operational costs and community livelihoods. The challenge is particularly acute in the Asia-Pacific region, which accounts for approximately 80% of sporting goods and equipment manufacturing and where physical water risks are intensifying rapidly.[61] By 2050, major textile clusters in countries such as India and Pakistan are expected to face severe water-related disruption, threatening both supply chain stability and social cohesion.[62] To respond, sport organizations must move to adopt proactive water stewardship approaches that align business resilience with watershed resilience, beginning with comprehensive water risk assessments across owned operations and supply chains, particularly within high-risk basins.

Such a transition also requires targeted investment in water-efficient technologies, closed-loop reuse systems and sustainable drainage solutions across manufacturing facilities and venues, alongside collective action to restore and protect shared watersheds through basin-level partnerships with local governments and communities. Such interventions move water stewardship beyond compliance towards long-term resource security and operational continuity.

Improving water efficiency not only conserves scarce resources but also delivers operational savings. For example, PUMA's water roadmap, implemented in 2021, enabled the company to reduce its water usage by more than 2.4 million cubic metres annually by 2023, equivalent to the yearly consumption of approximately 50,000 people.[63] Such outcomes demonstrate the commercial viability of integrating water stewardship into core business strategy.

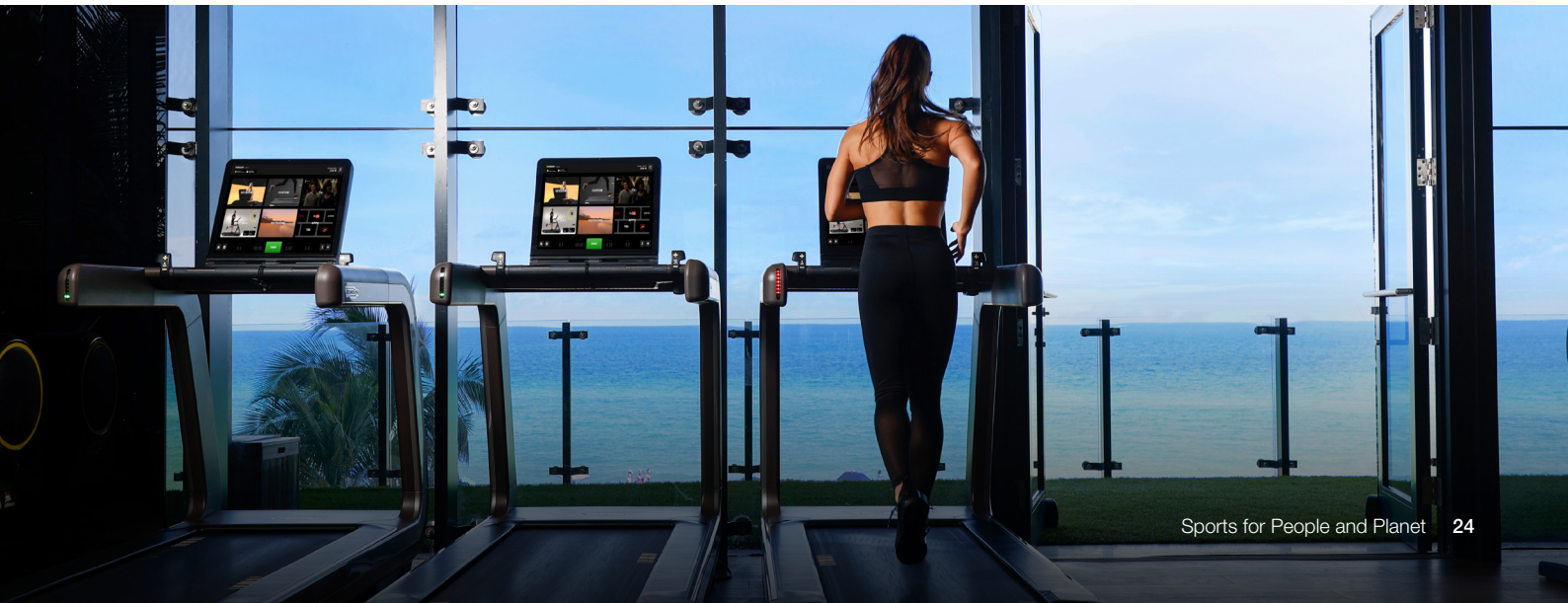
Water stewardship must therefore become a governance priority across the sports economy, integrated into risk management frameworks, supplier engagement strategies and long-term infrastructure planning. Clear leadership, supported by robust guidance and multistakeholder collaboration through global initiatives such as the Water Futures community, will be essential to drive consistent, scalable action throughout the sector.

2 Scale circular business models

The traditional linear model of take-make-dispose is increasingly incompatible with the sport sector's environmental responsibilities and growth ambitions. Sport intersects with four of the world's most resource-intensive value chains – food, energy, infrastructure and fashion, which together account for approximately 90% of nature loss.[64] Circular business models offer the opportunity to decouple growth from resource depletion while enhancing affordability, innovation and resilience. By embedding practices such as reuse, repair, rental, refurbishment and recycling, companies can reduce waste, extend product life cycles and unlock new revenue models that broaden access to sport. Circularity is also a critical lever for emissions reduction. Analysis of four materials central to the sports economy – plastic, aluminium, cement and steel – shows that circular approaches could decrease emissions from new production by up to 40%.[65]

To realize this potential, stakeholders must shift how products are conceived, used and recovered. This includes redesigning sport products with durability, repairability and recyclability as core

> By 2030, global demand for fresh water is expected to exceed supply by 40%, a gap exacerbated by shifting precipitation patterns and increasingly frequent droughts.



> In the US, sales of used sporting equipment are projected to grow at double-digit rates in 2025, reflecting changing attitudes towards ownership and product lifespan.

design principles; introducing usage-based and service models such as rental, subscription and pay-per-use; and expanding structured take-back programmes, resale platforms and repair services that keep equipment and apparel in circulation for longer. Investment in life-cycle tracking systems and material traceability will be essential to guide decision-making, while increasing the proportion of recycled and regenerative materials within product portfolios will further reduce environmental impact and strengthen supply chain resilience.

Progress is already under way, with more than half of companies in the sporting goods industry now implementing life-cycle tracking and operational improvements, including redesigning products to enable circularity as a core pathway for CO_2 reduction.[66] The expansion of recycled material use is also accelerating throughout the sporting goods industry. In 2023, Adidas achieved its target of sourcing 99% of its polyester from recycled content and in 2024 began transitioning from recycled plastic bottles to recycled textile waste as feedstock, with a target for 10% of its polyester volume to come from textile waste by 2030.[67] Similarly, Decathlon has recorded a sixfold increase in sport rentals revenues over three years, with sales reaching €36 million ($41.5 million) in 2024.[68]

In a tightening economic climate and with growing demand for affordable products, circular models present a timely and scalable solution that lowers barriers to participation and broadens access to sport. In the US, sales of used sporting equipment are projected to grow at double-digit rates in 2025, nearly twice the pace of 2024 and 30% higher than in 2022, reflecting changing attitudes towards ownership and product lifespan.[69] Policy interventions, such as tax incentives and extended producer responsibility frameworks, will be critical to scaling these models across markets.

Collaborative initiatives such as Nike and Ant Group's Move to Zero programme demonstrate the power of cross-sector partnerships in accelerating circularity while advancing physical activity. More than 430,000 pairs of shoes have been recycled through the programme in two years, contributing to the creation of 50 Nike Grind sport courts in China.[70]

Scaling circularity will require systemic change in design, manufacturing, retail and consumer engagement. A key priority for public–private collaboration is accelerating the deployment of infrastructure for the collection, sorting and recycling of waste materials, particularly textiles. This must be supported by coordinated action among financial institutions, governments, industry leaders and solution providers to unlock the investment needed for system-wide transformation. Companies that lead this transition will be better positioned to secure long-term economic advantage and build more resilient participation ecosystems. Sport stakeholders interested in advancing circularity are invited to join ongoing multistakeholder efforts, such as the Circular Transformation of Industries initiative to help drive collective progress.

3 Harness sporting events to pilot and scale sustainable materials and consumption models

Sporting events occupy a unique position as highly visible platforms capable of influencing both industry innovation and consumer behaviour at scale. From global tournaments to local competitions, events can serve as "real-world laboratories" for testing sustainable materials, operational models and fan engagement strategies. By integrating emerging innovative materials into uniforms, equipment and venue infrastructure, sporting events can accelerate the commercialization of sustainable alternatives. Formula E provides a compelling example, using its platform to advance electric vehicle technologies that now influence broader consumer markets, including battery performance and energy efficiency.[71]

To fully harness this potential, stakeholders can actively use elite competitions to pilot sustainable uniforms and equipment materials, while simultaneously reforming regulations that drive regular replacement cycles and also embedding circular policies for team apparel and merchandise. Developing fan engagement programmes that incentivize sustainable consumption, from responsible purchasing to reuse and recycling behaviours, is also critical to shifting demand patterns and reinforcing long-term cultural change. These efforts should be complemented by the integration of reusable systems for food, beverage and hospitality operations to reduce single-use waste and strengthen circular delivery models at scale.

Current practices contribute significantly to waste. Professional sport teams routinely refresh kits, training wear and branded apparel each season, resulting in large volumes of surplus, unsold and decommissioned garments, while fan purchasing influenced by seasonal merchandising further accelerates material consumption and short product life cycles. Innovations in venue operations demonstrate the feasibility of sustainable event hospitality management in practice. Levy's introduction of seaweed-based biodegradable packaging across sport venues in the United Kingdom and Germany reduced CO_2 emissions by 39% compared to standard packaging and eliminated 2.5 tonnes of plastic in 2024 alone.[72] Beyond venues, sporting precincts can further support circularity by establishing collection hubs for used equipment, partnering with recyclers and local social enterprises, and facilitating redistribution to grassroots and youth programmes, strengthening both environmental outcomes and inclusive access to sport.

Sporting events represent powerful platforms for shaping sustainable norms, accelerating innovation and redefining how fans produce, consume and engage with sport in a low-carbon, circular economy.

CASE STUDY 1

International Hockey Federation (FIH)

The International Hockey Federation (FIH), the global governing body for field hockey, is embedding sustainable innovation and resource stewardship at the core of its growth strategy. As a signatory of the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework,[73] FIH has positioned itself as a leading actor in the sport ecosystem, employing high-profile partnerships throughout the sports economy to drive positive environmental and social impact.

Field hockey is well established in mature markets such as the UK, continental Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and is experiencing robust growth in emerging regions across Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Asia-Pacific region is projected to remain the largest market through 2030, with India playing a pivotal role in audience engagement and commercial revenues, driven by a passionate domestic following, innovative event formats, national team success and renewed investment in professional leagues. Parallel growth is evident in countries including Pakistan, Malaysia,[74] Argentina,[75] Chile,[76] South Africa,[77] Egypt[78] and Oman.[79]

With much of field hockey's expansion occurring in regions facing acute climate and nature risks, FIH is proactively collaborating throughout the sports economy to pilot and scale solutions that reduce resource consumption and broaden participation. This includes mobilizing sporting goods and equipment innovators, such as turf manufacturers,[80] and working with global governance partners such as the International Olympic Committee.

A major area of innovation is hockey turf technology. Traditionally, water-based hockey pitches require more than 10,000 litres of water per match to maintain optimal playability.[81] Advances in synthetic turf reduced water use by up to 60% between the London 2012 and Paris 2024 Olympic Games.[82] FIH is now driving a full transition to dry or non-irrigated synthetic turfs,[83] already implemented in its Hockey5s format tournaments,[84] which have gained significant popularity in recent years. Scaling this technology across approximately 2,000 water-based pitches worldwide could save an estimated 7.6 billion litres of water annually,[85] enough to supply more than 45,000 households each year.[86] To further accelerate this transition, FIH is piloting self-wetting hockey balls, which are briefly submerged before play and gradually release water during the game, maintaining elite-level performance on dry fields.[87]

While synthetic, plastic-based turf has enabled widespread access to high-quality sport surfaces, its environmental footprint, including resource use and end-of-life disposal, remains a challenge. FIH is actively collaborating with industry partners, researchers and other stakeholders to accelerate the development and adoption of environmentally compatible playing surfaces. This includes supporting the development of environmental footprinting tools by the EMEA Synthetic Turf Council[88] and partnering with turf manufacturer Poligras to deliver the first hockey turf for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games made from waste by-products of the sugarcane industry,[89] a pioneering approach at the elite level.

FIH's leadership in sustainability was formally recognized with the 2024 International Olympic Committee Climate Action Award,[90] underscoring its commitment to driving positive change across the global sport ecosystem.

PATHWAY 2

Placing sport at the heart of cities

Approximately 80% of factors affecting societal health originate outside the healthcare system,[91] underscoring the critical role of physical surroundings in quality of life and longevity. As cities generate 80% of global GDP and are projected to house nearly 70% of the world's population by 2050,[92] sustainable urban design is essential for inclusive growth and sporting opportunity. Cities offer unique potential for large-scale impact, as their population density and concentration of infrastructure both enable active lifestyles and generate significant ripple effects on surrounding natural and rural environments, influencing air quality, pollution levels and resource use. Emerging sport regions, such as Africa, where two-thirds of urban infrastructure that will be needed for 2050 is yet to be built,[93] present significant opportunities to embed sport and physical activity into city planning. A multistakeholder approach is vital to address barriers to sport and physical activity, such as lack of time and adverse weather. Ensuring accessible spaces near homes and workplaces, whether purpose-built facilities, open areas or mobility networks, can promote active lifestyles and productivity. Urban planning disparities can lead to a difference in daily physical activity among neighbourhoods of up a 90 minutes,[94] highlighting the impact of city design on public health. Three action areas within this pathway are:

1. **Leverage green and blue spaces as sporting assets**
2. **Design sporting infrastructure for community well-being and environmental resilience**
3. **Advance sustainable mobility**

1 Leverage green and blue spaces as sporting assets

Cities can unlock powerful sporting, social and economic value by actively restoring and reimagining green and blue spaces as core sporting assets. When deliberately designed to promote physical activity, parks, rivers and waterfronts shift from passive amenities into active infrastructure, driving healthier lifestyles, and enhancing their appeal for sporting events. Beyond sport, nature underpins the productivity and liveability of cities by delivering critical ecosystem services such as clean air, water regulation and temperature moderation. Restoring these ecosystems also directly supports global climate objectives, with nature-based solutions capable of delivering up to 37% of the emissions reductions needed by 2030 to keep global warming below 2°C.[95] As key community convenors, professional and grassroots sport organizations can unite stakeholders, including city planners, environmental agencies and private developers, to transform urban green spaces and waterways into high-performing assets that strengthen climate resilience, attract investment and increase property values. In addition, efforts to transform degraded or polluted sites into safe, multifunctional sporting precincts, or integrating sport and movement corridors into ecological restoration programmes can create tangible win–win outcomes for both the sport sector and wider society. Evidence consistently links urban greenery with reduced sedentary behaviour.[96] Blue spaces present an equally significant yet underused opportunity. With approximately 80% of the world's 50 largest cities located along major waterways and home to around 600 million people,[97] primarily in high-growth regions such as Asia-Pacific, Africa and Latin America, rivers, lakes and coastlines offer immense potential to expand participation and drive sustainable growth in the sports economy.

Major sporting events can accelerate this transformation. The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, for example, triggered a €1.4 billion investment in stormwater and wastewater infrastructure to revitalize the River Seine.[98] As a result, sections of the river are reopening to public swimming for the first time in more than a century, repositioning the Seine as a lasting community sporting asset and climate-resilient refuge during heatwaves.[99]

> Integrating sport and movement corridors into ecological restoration programmes can create tangible win–win outcomes for both the sport sector and wider society.

2 Design sporting infrastructure for community well-being and environmental resilience

The global expansion of sporting infrastructure presents a defining opportunity to align future development with health, equity and climate resilience. Over the next decade, more than 300 major stadiums are expected to be constructed worldwide, with half located in emerging economies.[100] In addition to stadiums, the development of outdoor sporting precincts is accelerating, exemplified by China's plans to open 100 outdoor sport precincts in the five years leading

> Climate-resilient infrastructure can function as vital community lifelines during extreme events, offering shelter, cooling and flood mitigation when natural disasters strike.

up to 2030.[101] Sustainable sporting infrastructure must move beyond iconic or event-driven design to prioritize long-term social value, adaptability and environmental performance. These facilities should serve as multi-purpose community hubs supporting diverse users year-round. Construction is among the most carbon-intensive sectors, and achieving net-zero trajectories will require technology innovations yet to reach commercial scale. Sport organizations and infrastructure developers can help catalyse these markets by participating in collaborative demand-side initiatives such as the First Movers Coalition (FMC), which commits to sourcing low-carbon construction materials, by helping to create early market demand and accelerate the commercialization of solutions for hard-to-abate sectors. Current FMC commitments generate a $19 billion annual demand signal and support potential reductions of 26 million tonnes of CO_2e by 2030.

As climate risks intensify – amplified by urban heat island effects that cause built environments to heat up nearly 30% faster than surrounding areas[102] – climate-resilient infrastructure will become essential to safeguard athlete well-being and ensure operational continuity. This risk is already evident: 10 of the 16 host venues for the 2026 FIFA World Cup in North America face very high exposure to extreme heat stress, nearly 90% of host stadiums will require adaptation measures and one-third are projected to experience water demand that meets or exceeds supply by 2050.[103] In response, integrating nature-based solutions such as heat-reflective surfaces, green roofs and vertical gardens that support local biodiversity will be critical to cooling venues, reducing risk and maintaining performance conditions. In addition to safeguarding sporting operations, climate-resilient infrastructure can function as vital community lifelines during extreme events, offering shelter, cooling and flood mitigation when natural disasters strike.

Innovatively integrating physical activity into everyday environments beyond conventional sport venues expands opportunities for citizens to lead more active lives. Initiatives such as mall-walking programmes in Riyadh[104] and Bahrain[105] demonstrate how high-footfall spaces can be repurposed to promote inclusive physical activity, particularly in climates where outdoor exercise is constrained. Equally important is community co-design, which ensures that infrastructure reflects local needs, builds legitimacy and supports long-term viability. The Paris 2024 legacy approach illustrates how inclusive planning can deliver highly accessible neighbourhoods[106] and facilities for participants and spectators[107] that remain functional and valuable well beyond major events.

3 Advance sustainable mobility

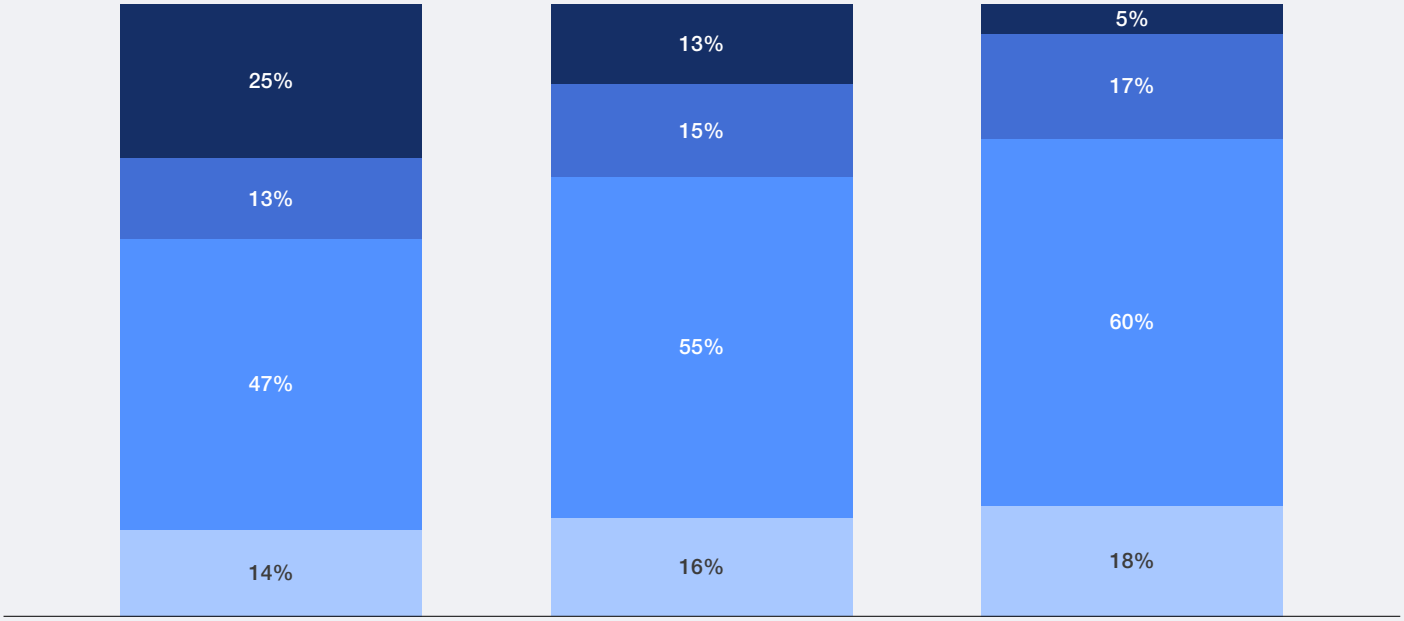
Mobility is a defining interface between cities, sport and climate impact. The movement of athletes, spectators, tourists and urban residents represents a significant portion of the sports economy's emissions profile. Transport strategies must address both mega-events and everyday mobility patterns.

Aviation emissions represent a substantial share of sport-related travel. During FIFA World Cup 2022, international air travel accounted for 57% of total event-related emissions,[108] highlighting the urgency of coordinated action. While the development of sustainable aviation technologies is typically led by fuel producers, airlines and equipment manufacturers, airports serve as critical urban levers for accelerating the deployment of low-emission solutions, including hydrogen, electric propulsion and sustainable aviation fuels (SAF). Collaboration among airports in cities seeking to scale sustainable sporting events and tourism, supported by global initiatives such as Airports of Tomorrow, can accelerate this transition through coordinated action and shared investment. This collective approach strengthens airport readiness for low-emission infrastructure and technologies, enabling impact at a scale that no single city could achieve independently.

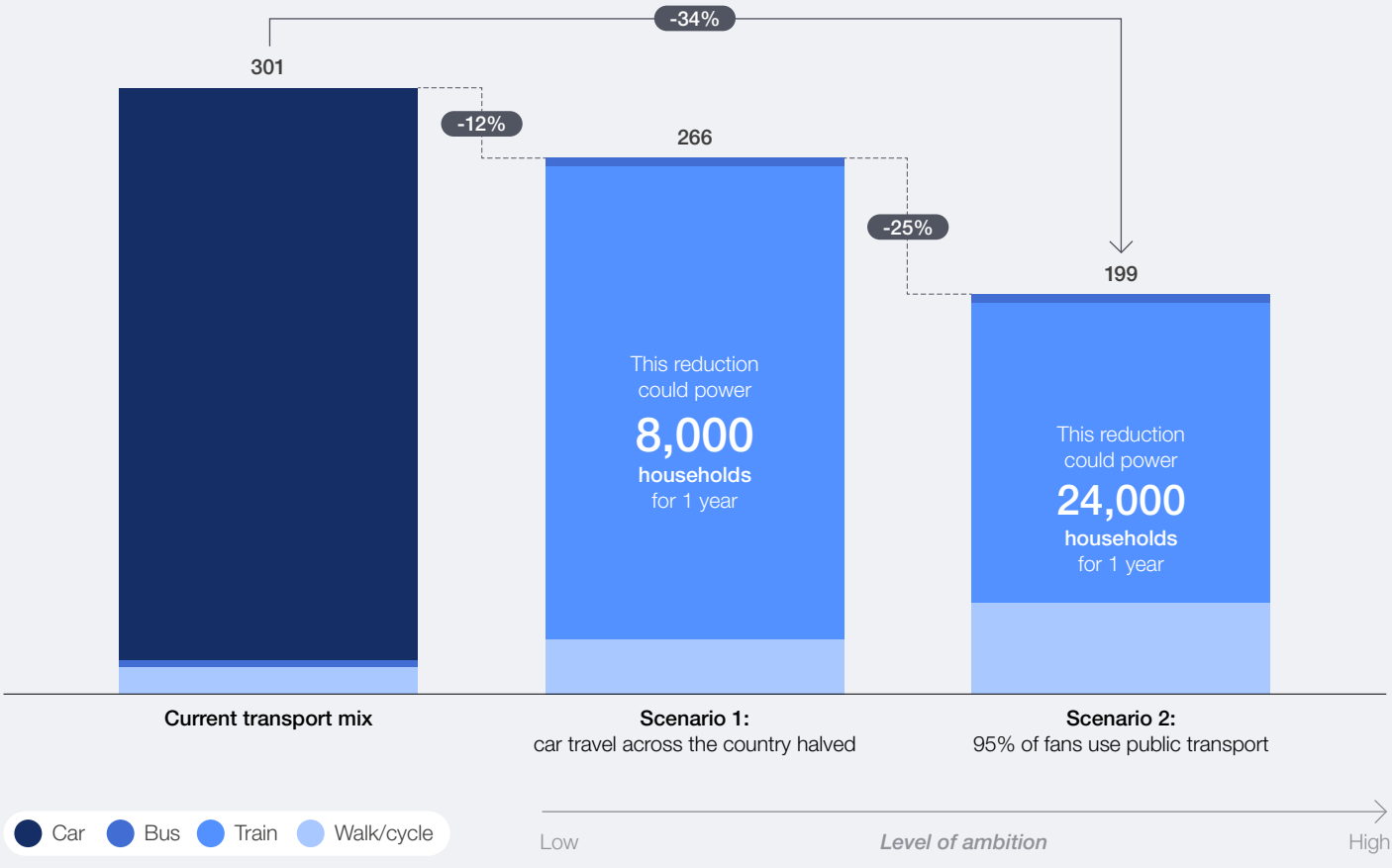
Beyond aviation, transforming spectator mobility depends on strengthening sustainable public transport systems through public–private collaboration. For EURO 2024, UEFA's partnership with Deutsche Bahn to offer free public transport and discounted inter-city travel to ticket holders resulted in 81% of attendees using public transit and a 25% reduction in travel emissions compared to previous tournaments.[109] Similar gains are possible elsewhere: modelling suggests that travel emissions in the English Premier League (EPL) could decrease by 34% if only attendees travelling more than 250 miles used personal vehicles, while the National Football League (NFL) could reduce emissions by up to 30% by shifting towards transport mix of to the EPL (25% car usage).

The total reduction of emissions across the league (adding all 20 clubs) makes up **84 million kg CO_2e**

Mix of transport type (%)



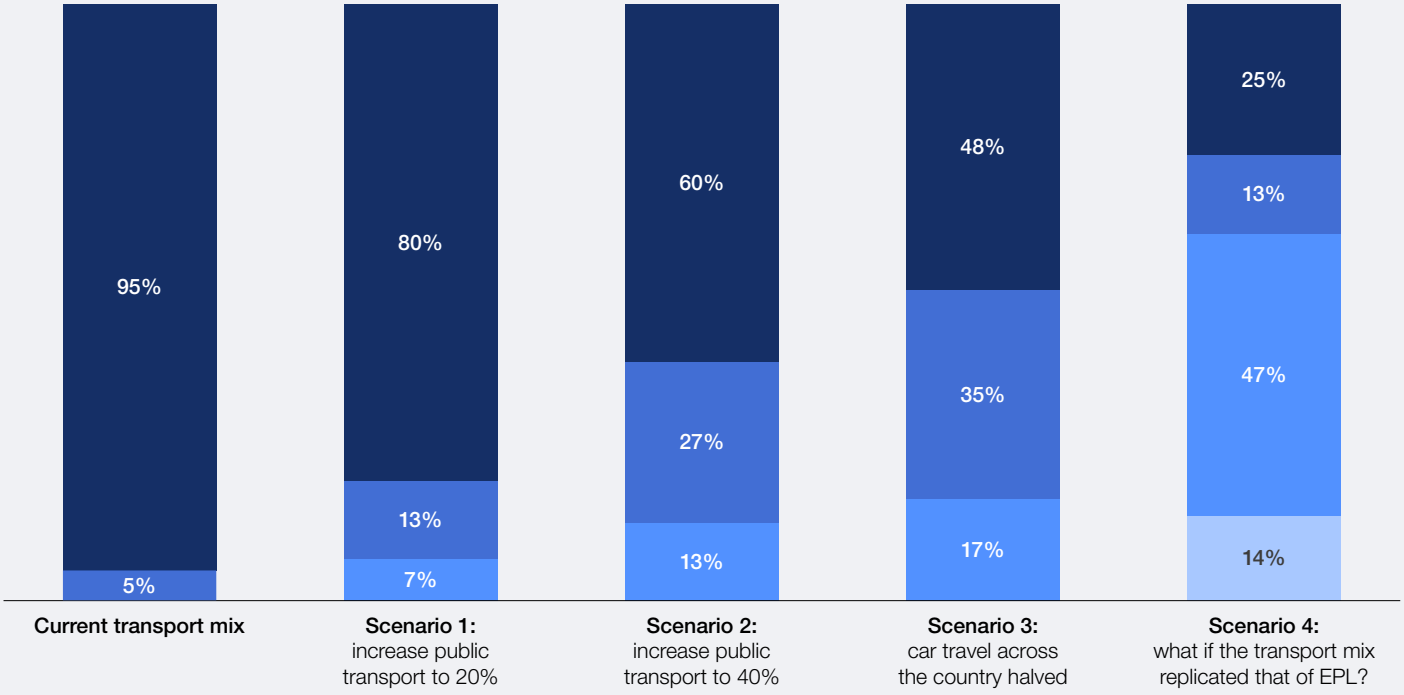
Scenarios (average emissions per fan per season kg CO_2e)



Source: Oliver Wyman, World Economic Forum analysis

The total reduction of emissions across the league (adding all 32 franchises) makes up **419 million kg CO_2e**

Mix of transport type (%)



Scenarios (average emissions per fan per season kg CO_2e)

Source: Oliver Wyman, World Economic Forum analysis

Ultimately, the long-term transformation of sport mobility requires integrated transport systems that prioritize low-emission travel and active mobility, including walking and cycling. Viet Nam's pilot of dedicated cycling lanes, including Ho Chi Minh City's first bicycle-priority corridor connecting key neighbourhoods[110] aims to revive the country's bicycle culture, a mode of transport that predominated throughout much of the 20th century, before motorcycles and cars became prevalent in the late 1990s.[111] This shift also supports sustainable sports tourism, as demonstrated by the 2023 Dutch Formula 1 Grand Prix, where more than 45,000 spectators arrived by bicycle,[112] highlighting the powerful role of active transport in reducing emissions while enhancing the event experience.

CASE STUDY 2

The Wellness Valley by Technogym

Located in Romagna, northern Italy, the Wellness Valley[113] is a pioneering regional ecosystem that places sport and wellness at the core of sustainable urban and rural development. Initiated by sporting equipment and wellness leader Technogym, the Valley brings together more than 400 partners, including public institutions, the private sector, academia and civil society, to encourage active lifestyles, improve public health and stimulate economic growth. This collaborative, multistakeholder approach is rooted in sport and health-centric design, in harmony with one of Italy's most biodiverse environments.[114]

Since its launch in 2003, the Wellness Valley has transformed the region through cycling pathways and walking trails that connect towns and promote sustainable, low-emission transport. These initiatives encourage residents to integrate movement into daily life and enhance access to green spaces. Projects such as Cesena Sport City have upgraded sport infrastructure, providing accessible facilities that encourage active, inclusive lifestyles. Along the coast, the 16 km Parco del Mare in Rimini has been redeveloped as a multifunctional public space with fitness islands, play areas and open-air exercise zones, promoting sport, social engagement and well-being.

Over two decades, the Wellness Valley has shifted the region's culture: Romagna now reports nearly half the percentage of sedentary population compared to the national average (15% vs. 27%), and half the prevalence of older adults at risk of disability (8% vs. 16%). By hosting international sporting events and wellness festivals, the Valley has generated significant economic activity and established itself as a model for sustainable, sport-led urban regeneration. Notable annual events include the Granfondo Nove Colli, Ironman Italy and Wellness Week, a 10-day festival featuring more than 500 public events focused on sport and well-being.

Technogym's production facilities in the Valley support sustainability efforts, operating on 100% renewable electricity. Technogym also embraces circularity, with approximately half of products eligible for the refurbishment process reconditioned, extending their life cycle in line with a growing focus on the circular economy, while 90% of packaging materials are certified for responsible sourcing.

The Wellness Valley's holistic approach has strengthened the local economy, creating a 26% growth in wellness-related enterprises between 2011 and 2024 to more than 4,500 companies and 15,000 employees. It has also attracted 1.72 million sport and wellness tourists in 2024, including more than 200,000 international visitors. The wellness industry in the region grew in value by 68% from 2011 to 2023, driving sustained economic growth.

Its best practices are now being adopted in new initiatives, including Milano Wellness City 2030 and Cortina Wellness Destination, designed to extend the legacy of the Milano-Cortina 2026 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

PATHWAY 3

Catalysing purpose-driven capital flows

Growing investor and corporate interest in the sports economy presents a timely opportunity to reposition capital as a strategic engine for systemic impact. Catalysing purpose-driven capital flows therefore requires a shift from transactional funding to impact-oriented, values-aligned investment strategies. When structured effectively, financial flows into sport can serve not only as drivers of asset growth and commercial performance but also as multipliers for social inclusion, environmental sustainability and long-term community resilience.

Investment across both professional and participatory sport generates powerful positive spillover effects, stimulating the sporting goods industry, strengthening tourism and local economies, and creating pathways for athlete development. Evidence shows that every dollar invested in grassroots sport can generate up to four times the benefit,[115] underscoring the potential of sport to deliver scalable returns across health, social cohesion and economic productivity. This expanding capital base also plays a critical role in advancing global environmental and public health priorities. Investors, sponsors and financial institutions are critical for sporting organizations to align their operations and growth strategies with established frameworks such as the Sports for Climate Action Framework and the Sports for Nature Framework and support momentum on the World Health Organization (WHO)'s Global Action Plan on Physical Activity (GAPPA). Embedding these principles into capital allocation decisions signals decisive leadership, enabling sporting organizations to mobilize investment, accelerate climate action, restore nature and widen equitable access to physical activity. This demands cooperation across the capital stack, clear governance standards, measurable impact frameworks and robust accountability mechanisms. Two action areas within this pathway are:

1 **Activate shared impact through strategic sponsorships**

2 **Mobilize investment partnerships across the capital ecosystem**

1 Activate shared impact through strategic sponsorships

Sponsorship represents one of the most powerful financial levers in sport, accounting for the second-largest revenue stream in professional sport after media rights. The sport sponsorship market is projected to be worth $52 billion by 2025[116] and offers a critical opportunity to reposition brand partnerships as drivers of shared value rather than purely commercial exposure.

In this context, stakeholders must move towards establishing ethical sponsorship frameworks that prioritize alignment with health, climate and social goals, embed sustainability key performance indicators (KPIs) and impact metrics into agreements, co-design activation strategies that encourage positive behavioural change, and mobilize sponsorship funding towards grassroots participation, environmental restoration and inclusive community programmes. Increasing transparency through robust impact reporting and third-party verification is also essential to reinforce credibility and guard against reputational risk[117] in an era of heightened scrutiny around "sportswashing".

At the same time, sport remains one of the most trusted advertising channels, with 81% of consumers viewing sport sponsorship as credible.[118] As public expectations rise, aligning sponsorships with verified purpose has become both a strategic necessity and a competitive advantage. Opportunities for sporting organizations to engage values-aligned corporate sponsors are expanding rapidly, with 84% of sponsors identifying social responsibility as a key factor influencing consumer perception.[119] This momentum is further supported by the accelerating growth of purpose-driven companies in emerging markets across Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America. Notably, 27% of global companies with science-based emissions reduction targets are now based in Asia-Pacific,[120] with the number of such firms increasing by 134% between the end of 2023 and 2025.[121]

To unlock this potential, sporting organizations must move beyond logo placement towards integrated impact partnerships built on shared values, measurable outcomes and long-term alignment. This requires embedding sustainability and social responsibility criteria into sponsorship selection processes, contract structures and performance evaluation frameworks.

Purpose-led sponsorship partnerships already illustrate this shift. Notable examples include DHL's commitment to decarbonization through innovative logistics solutions that enable Formula 1 to adopt multimodal logistics, transition to biofuel-powered trucks and use sustainable aviation fuels;[122]

> Sport remains one of the most trusted advertising channels, with 81% of consumers viewing sport sponsorship as credible.

> Sport assets can function as vehicles for coordinated action, enabling diverse financial actors to pursue aligned priorities while creating shared value.

Schneider Electric's collaboration with the Boston Marathon to measure and reduce its carbon footprint;[123] and Safaricom's targeted support for growth in the number of athletes with disabilities through sponsorship of events such as Deaf Athletics and the Paralympics in Kenya.[124]

Beyond brand exposure, sponsor partnerships can also play a critical role in advancing the corporate sponsor's own environmental and workforce well-being strategies. Through its partnership with The Ocean Race, Volvo leveraged the organization's scientific expertise to support its mangrove conservation and restoration targets, strengthening its broader biodiversity strategy and enabling the launch of two new coastal health initiatives through the Volvo For Life Fund.[125] Similarly, Allianz, as an Olympic and Paralympic sponsor, has used its partnerships to connect employees with elite athletes through athlete-led workouts and engagement sessions, promoting resilience, stress management and mental well-being.[126]

2 Mobilize investment partnerships across the capital ecosystem

The capital ecosystem supporting sport is becoming increasingly diverse, encompassing governments, private investors, philanthropies, multilateral institutions and development finance organizations. This diversity presents significant opportunities to scale innovative financing models that deliver both financial and societal returns. Coordinated mobilization across the capital stack can unlock funding for sport assets and programmes that promote participation, inclusion, infrastructure development and environmental sustainability. Innovative financing approaches, such as blended models that combine concessional capital, public funding, private investment and philanthropic contributions, help de-risk projects, improve bankability and attract larger pools of capital. These models are especially impactful in emerging markets, where access to capital is limited but social and infrastructure needs are greatest. Developing robust project pipelines spanning participatory sport, youth development and community wellness ensures that investment flows to areas with measurable social impact. Beyond blended finance, sport assets can also function as vehicles for coordinated, complementary action among financial actors, enabling diverse stakeholders to pursue aligned priorities while creating shared value. For example, investors can partner with philanthropic organizations to pilot reforestation initiatives within sport precincts, advancing shared biodiversity and community engagement objectives while simultaneously strengthening the asset's long-term resilience and environmental performance.

The co-funded development of Athletic Club's San Mamés Stadium in Bilbao illustrates how shared investment structures can balance commercial imperatives with community benefit. Participation from the Basque government and Biscay provincial council ensured that the facility incorporated broader social value within a sport asset, including public swimming pools, a gym and wellness spaces.[127] Similarly, the Global Sport Impact Fund, launched at the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, illustrates how coordinated investment platforms can mobilize large-scale capital, bringing together public development banks and sport governing bodies to unlock $10 billion by 2030 for inclusive, sustainable and community-led sport infrastructure.[128]

To scale these models effectively, investment partnerships must be reinforced by robust governance frameworks that ensure equitable distribution of revenues, transparency and long-term accountability. Strengthening governance mechanisms and enhancing investor confidence through rigorous impact measurement and reporting systems are critical to sustaining trust and attracting continued capital. Spain's LaLiga[129] governance model demonstrates how regulatory intervention can align capital with development outcomes, requiring clubs to allocate 70% of received funds towards growth initiatives, €1.4 billion ($1.6 billion) of CVC Capital Partners' €2.0 billion ($2.3 billion) investment being directed to youth facilities and renewable energy installations, among other initiatives.[130]

Beyond professional sport, participatory sport, sport media innovation and sports tourism remain undercapitalized despite their vital role in expanding access and strengthening local economies. Unlocking their potential requires tailored investment structures, targeted technical assistance and coordinated policy support aligned with long-term community impact.

CASE STUDY 3

Standard Chartered

Standard Chartered has developed a sport sponsorship strategy that focuses on advancing lasting impact through values-driven partnerships with leaders in the sport ecosystem. Its long-term sponsorship of Liverpool FC has enabled a multi-year collaboration that supports Liverpool's sustainability strategy, "The Red Way".[131] This partnership has helped expand grassroots women's sport and physical activity in emerging markets, where corporate sponsorship and philanthropic initiatives are often essential to advancing sport participation. As of December 2024, more than 10,000 girls in South Africa and Kenya have been trained by local coaches as part of Standard Chartered's "Play On" initiative, following a three-day programme delivered in partnership with LFC's Soccer Schools and Foundation.[132] This "Train the Trainer" programme also addresses the limited prevalence of female coaches and complements the bank's "Play On" social and digital campaigns, which call out the problem of girls dropping out of sport while highlighting the fact that playing sport teaches important life and career skills such as teamwork, resilience and leadership.

The bank also promotes mass participation and healthy lifestyles by sponsoring marathons and races in major cities worldwide.[133] Standard Chartered sponsors 10 marathons/races around the world, plus multiple 10k runs and fun runs for children, helping runners of all levels unlock their potential. These sponsorships provide essential funding for event operations and encourage grassroots engagement and community well-being, thus reinforcing the bank's commitment to using sport as a catalyst for empowerment and social cohesion.

The bank's development of sponsor partnerships is driven by cross-departmental collaboration. While the sponsorship team within the marketing function leads the execution, it consults closely with the sustainability department, to ensure that the marketing strategy enables long-term impact and aligns with the broader organization's sustainability objectives. All new sponsorship opportunities are evaluated by the sponsorship and sustainability teams, using a global framework that integrates rigorous sustainability and social responsibility criteria alongside financial and commercial objectives. This integrated approach positions sustainability and social impact not as an additional cost but as a core element of the bank's partnership model.

In 2025, Standard Chartered also launched a dedicated sport fund,[134] positioning the bank as both a sponsor and a potential owner of sport assets. With major sport leagues and teams seeking alternative capital financing options, the newly launched fund focuses on sport, media and entertainment opportunities, and is targeted at Standard Chartered's ultra-high-net-worth and high-net-worth clients.

Conclusion

As the global sports economy enters a phase of accelerated growth, its long-term success will increasingly depend on the choices made today. Positioned at the intersection of environmental stability and societal health, sport has both a responsibility and a strategic opportunity to lead. Failure to acknowledge this convergence risks overestimating future returns while undervaluing the true economic, environmental and social costs of inaction. Conversely, decisive and integrated investment can safeguard public well-being and reinforce the long-term resilience and competitiveness of the sector.

This report sets out a new vision for sport that aligns financial performance with planetary boundaries and societal well-being. Advancing the three interconnected pathways can transform systemic risks into drivers of innovation, growth and shared value. Delivering this shift will require bold leadership, strengthened governance and deeper collaboration across public, private and civil society actors. Progress must be supported through cross-regional dialogue, targeted pilot initiatives and the cultivation of innovation ecosystems that connect technology entrepreneurs with sport organizations and infrastructure providers to accelerate low-carbon, inclusive transitions.

As an independent and trusted convener, the World Economic Forum brings together diverse stakeholders to advance dialogue, co-create shared principles, and accelerate the adoption of high-impact solutions. Building on this role, the Forum aims to convene key decision-makers across the sports economy regarding the pathways and action areas identified in this report, facilitating the formation of strategic partnerships and supporting the design and implementation of joint initiatives that deliver measurable and lasting shared impact.

With health and environmental resilience as global public goods, all stakeholders throughout the sports economy are called to act. Through sustained collaboration, the sector can help shape a more prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future, one in which sport enhances human well-being while operating within the limits of the planet.

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Endnotes

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2. Not including second-hand and antique items.
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