EU Microplastics Restriction: Guidance for UEFA member associations

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Contents

Introduction

This document is intended to provide useful information for UEFA member associations who are seeking to understand the implications of the EU's restriction on intentionally added microplastics, which includes polymeric infills for artificial turf.

The restriction came into force in October 2023. For synthetic turf surfaces, there will be an eight-year transition period to attempt to avoid serious negative sporting, social and economic impacts. Artificial pitches are crucial for local communities and grassroots football across Europe, so it is imperative that the transition is carried out in a way that supports important European environmental objectives whilst safeguarding social, public health and sports access for all at national and local level.

Throughout its preparation, adoption entry into force, the resolution and its implications have been discussed by UEFA, national associations, various other football stakeholders, industry partners and EU and national government officials. These discussions have enabled us to share important concerns about the potential impacts of the restriction and the transition period for football across Europe.

UEFA and its member associations are committed to implementing the EU restriction and introducing alternative artificial pitch technology. However, alternatives to microplastics are currently limited in availability, are low in scalability, generally have poorer durability and life expectancies than polymeric infills, and are much higher in cost. In addition, some alternatives are not yet sufficiently tested or suitable, particularly in relation to differing environmental conditions across Europe.

It is vital to manage this period of complex and costly transition in line with football development and social objectives, while supporting environmental protection objectives and pitch technology innovation. UEFA has been asked to provide its member associations with this guidance on various key topics relating to the restriction and the transition period. It is to be emphasised that this document is not a procurement reference document or tool for national associations or other stakeholders to assess potential pitch systems or infill products.

Further information on the artificial turf industry can be found on the website of the European Synthetic Turf Council (ESTC). The ESTC Knowledge Centre (see here) contains valuable information and resources that cover most areas within the synthetic turf industry, from choosing a synthetic surface right through to care and maintenance, as well as advice and information from some of the leading manufacturers in the industry.

The European Commission also has a webpage with FAQs about the restriction, along with links to further information.

Legal scope and application

What is the EU restriction and when does it apply?

- The EU restriction on intentionally added microplastics came into force on 17 October 2023.

- The adoption of the restriction had previously been announced by the European Commission on 25 September 2023.

- The restriction was adopted under the EU's regulation on the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals (REACH). REACH restrictions are *"regulatory measures to protect human health and the environment from unacceptable risks posed by chemicals. Restrictions may limit or ban the manufacture, placing on the market or use of a substance."*[1]

- The restriction uses a broad definition of microplastics: it covers all synthetic polymer particles 5mm in length or less that are non-organic and insoluble and resist degradation.

- The restriction specifically includes the granular rubber (polymeric) infill material used in artificial sports surfaces. According to the EU (see, for example, the European Commission press release here), this infill is the largest source of intentionally added microplastics in the environment.

- The restriction will ban the sale ("placing on the market") of polymeric infill materials after the transition period, but it does not prevent their use. More details on the transition period can be found below, under What is the transition period?.

Who is affected by the restriction?

- The restriction is directly applicable in all countries where the EU REACH regulation is in force.

- This means all EU member states, plus EEA states Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

- Notable areas that are not covered by the restriction are:
  - Switzerland
  - the Faroe Islands
  - England, Scotland and Wales, as the UK is no longer in the EU
  - Gibraltar: the restriction does not formally apply, but it will be important to consider EU-UK negotiations on a proposed agreement on Gibraltar's relationship with the EU, which might affect the situation in the future

[1] https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/chemicals/reach/restrictions_en

- The terms of the Northern Ireland Protocol (part of the Brexit arrangements) state that Northern Ireland remains subject to EU REACH regulations, so Northern Ireland is affected.

- While this restriction is an EU measure, it is also relevant to non-EU national associations, because it is anticipated that it will have knock-on effects on the potential development of national and local regulations and the development of the artificial turf market throughout Europe.

- The information above is subject to change as new regulations or market dynamics are introduced in different countries and regions. As a result, it is advisable to keep track of relevant existing and potential regulatory and market rules in your jurisdiction.

What if my country is not part of the EU?

- While the restriction is part of an EU regulation, it will affect all UEFA member associations, for two main reasons:
  - The artificial turf industry as a whole will likely move away from producing polymeric infills, therefore sourcing such materials will likely become significantly more challenging and expensive.
  - Non-EU countries (e.g. including EU candidate and accession countries) may decide to introduce legislation that replicates the EU's environmental protection standards. It is therefore important to monitor policy developments in your region and country.

How can I check if my organisation is affected?

- If you have questions about the applicability and impact of the restriction in your region or country or would like to understand the potential for future regional or national government regulation, it is recommended that you contact your relevant national ministry or environmental protection agency.

What is the transition period?

- The restriction provides a transition period of eight years for polymeric infill for artificial turf. This means the ban on selling polymeric infill will only fully come into force in October 2031.

- The EU had previously considered an immediate ban and much shorter transition period. However, European and national policy makers saw the need for a longer transition period to reduce the negative consequences on football development and social objectives across Europe.

- The transition period has been granted to allow time for the industry to adapt and bring to market suitable alternatives at the required scale, and to enable as many existing pitches as possible to be correctly maintained so they reach their anticipated end of life (10 to 12 years).

- Despite this transition period, measures have already been introduced in some areas that ban or restrict the sale and even the use of polymeric infill materials. It is therefore important to monitor policy developments in your region and country.

How will the restriction be enforced and what are the penalties for non-compliance?

- The regulation itself does not lay down any penalties: the EU's member states are responsible for enforcing the regulation and penalising any breaches. Penalties therefore depend on national laws, they may vary with the severity and frequency of the breach, and they may take the form of fines, product withdrawals, sales bans or even prison sentences.

- The European Commission will monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the restriction and report on it regularly.

- Further information on the national inspectorates for EU countries can be found on the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) website.

Technical scope and application

What is the impact on existing pitches with polymeric infill?

- There is no immediate impact on existing pitches. Under the terms of the EU restriction (and unless other rules applicable to your jurisdiction say otherwise), polymeric infill can still be bought and sold, and existing pitches with polymeric infill can still be maintained, until October 2031.

- Maintenance is a key issue for existing pitches. With proper maintenance, most pitches should have a lifespan of 10 to 12 years. Without proper maintenance, the performance of the field will deteriorate, its lifespan will shorten (meaning less return on investment) and players will be less safe. This poses a particular concern for fields that are used for competitive matches that require certification as part of the FIFA Quality Programme for Football Turf or national associations' own certification programmes.

- As the restriction only applies to the "placing on the market" of polymeric infills, owners of pitches that will still be in operation after the transition period may purchase and stockpile the infill material required to allow adequate maintenance until the turf reaches the end of its life (see below, under Is stockpiling of polymeric infill permitted?).

- Competition organisers and pitch operators should therefore monitor potential operational and commercial impacts, such as changes in the cost and supply levels of polymeric infill that could make pitch maintenance more difficult or costly.

- For UEFA Competitions, the UEFA Stadium Infrastructure Guidelines and various club and national team competition regulations will continue to apply the FIFA Quality standards as a condition for use of artificial turf pitches when announcing venues. Existing pitches may fail the FIFA testing process as a result of a lack of available infill for maintenance, so even a pitch that has previously been used in a UEFA competition may not be accepted for future competitions.

Can new pitches with polymeric infill be built during the transition period?

- Under the terms of the EU restriction (and unless other rules applicable to your jurisdiction say otherwise), new pitches can still be built using polymeric infill until October 2031.

- However, the restriction will make it harder to make a case for investment in new pitches that use polymeric infill in markets that will be affected by the restriction.

- The key point to note will be the planned lifespan of any such pitches (i.e. if the availability of enough polymeric infill for maintenance can be guaranteed throughout the lifespan) and how that fits into the business model of the national association or club. The points above under What is the impact on existing pitches with polymeric infill? regarding the maintenance and lifespan of existing pitches should also be taken into account for any new pitches.

- The transition period is not intended by the European Commission to encourage ongoing and further investment in pitches using polymeric infill, nor the building of new pitches of this type, as it will no longer be possible to buy the banned infill when the transition period ends, making pitch maintenance difficult if not impossible.

- Municipalities and public procurement bodies may also seek to move away from funding or co-funding the use of polymeric infill.

Is stockpiling of polymeric infill permitted?

- Stockpiling of infill material to extend the lifespan of a field is permitted under the restriction. The European Commission considers it likely that owners of artificial sports surfaces will stockpile to ensure their pitches can be maintained after the transition period.

- However, the European Commission does not and will not encourage stockpiling, nor will they provide guidance on stockpiling, as this practice is not regulated in the restriction.

- Should pitch owners decide to stockpile, the European Commission encourages the safe and environmentally conscious storage of any stockpiled infill material, i.e. storage conditions that do not result in emissions of infill material into the environment

- Stockpiling large quantities of infill material would require the correct planning to be put in place, particularly with regards to safe storage to avoid theft, damage or accidental leakage.

- The challenges and risks that stockpiling would present are a particular concern at the lower end of the football pyramid, where local clubs might not have the finances or facilities to stockpile properly and safely.

- In all cases, it is advisable to thoroughly check the applicable rules on stockpiling. For example, based on current understanding, and subject to change, stockpiling can be carried out off-site (e.g. by a maintenance contractor), providing the infill is purchased by and clearly identified as belonging to the pitch owner.

- While the industry evolves during the transition period, the cost and availability of polymeric infill to stockpile is difficult to predict and therefore factor into long-term planning. For example, companies may reduce or cease production of the polymeric infill completely as the European market comprises the bulk of the demand.

What alternatives to polymeric infill exist in the market?

- To help to inform this guidance document, UEFA asked the European Commission whether, as part of the scientific, research or legislative processes to develop the restriction, the Commission or its agencies conducted any research overview and/or performed any comparative review of alternative infills or pitch systems.

- The Commission answered that the ECHA had collected information on infill alternatives when drafting the restriction dossier and during opinion making. Information on alternatives was also provided by stakeholders (including UEFA) during the call for evidence and the two public consultations.

- The annexes to the background documents to the ECHA Risk Assessment Committee (RAC) and Committee for Socio-Economic Analysis (SEAC) opinion include a section on infill material, including the assessment of available alternatives (see Annex D.13). This information was assessed by RAC and SEAC and informed their final opinion (see, for example, page 134 of the opinion). The European Commission says that, when drafting the decision, it also took into account the information UEFA had provided, including an assessment of the existing alternatives and their technical performance.

- Feedback from across European football remains that alternatives to polymeric infill are currently limited in availability, are low in scalability, generally have poorer durability and life expectancies than polymeric infills and are much higher in cost. Many of the alternatives are not yet sufficiently tested to prove their long-term suitability, particularly in relation to differing environmental conditions across Europe.

- FIFA's definitions of the different types of infill materials are:
  - **Polymeric infill:** Systems with non-biodegradable polymeric infill (polymer as per the ECHA definition).
  - **Biodegradable infill:** Systems with biodegradable polymeric infills (polymer as per the ECHA definition) without non-biodegradable polymeric infill.
  - **Natural infill:** Systems containing non-chemically modified natural organic material infill without polymeric infill or biodegradable infill.
  - **Mineral infill:** Systems filled with only solid, non-organic infill without any polymer added.

- The list of natural infills made up of modified natural vegetal material is constantly evolving as the industry looks to produce alternative systems to fill the void created by the restriction, therefore the list below is non-exhaustive but represents the current landscape:
  - **Granulated cork:** Cork infill is produced from a by-product of the cork industry. The properties of the cork granules depend on the quality of the raw material, as well as the crushing, sieving and processing to which it is subjected. Due to this treatment, cork infill may have different densities, particle sizes and properties, and this must be taken into account when selecting infill. Cork infill has low density, meaning it can float. Therefore, if a field with cork infill is subjected to heavy or persistent rain, significant movement of the infill can occur, resulting in substantial additional maintenance or topping of the infill, or indeed both.

- **Crushed olive stones:** Olive stones are a by-product of the olive oil industry and have various uses, one of which is now infill for artificial turf surfaces. Olive stone particles have a higher density than water and can improve resistance to compaction. The properties of the particles come from the crushing, sieving and processing to which they have been subjected. Olive stone infill has good durability compared to some other vegetal infills, but this means players may find it more abrasive.

- **Corncobs:** Corncobs are the woody interior of the maize ear to which the corn grains are attached. After harvesting, the grains are separated from the cob. The cobs are then shredded, ground up, sifted and separated to obtain the desired quality and different sizes of granules. The use of corncob infill is relatively new, so long-term experience is not yet available, but feedback to date is generally positive.

- **Wood particles:** The wood particles used as infill for artificial turf come from waste from the timber industry. Only certain types of timber are suitable, and the infill is produced using a specific set of processes, one of whose aims is to reduce the abrasiveness of the wood by eliminating long fibres that could become splinters. As the infill absorbs moisture, it becomes denser than water when it rains, meaning it does not float.

- **Pine-cone particles:** These are produced from pinecones, a secondary raw material, that have been carefully selected and have undergone specific processing.

- **Combined organic materials:** Various combinations of the options above and others are not only the sum of the individual properties of each component material, but can even offer better performance. For example, cork might be combined with coconut fibres to improve stability. Some of these mixes need to be kept moist to prevent them drying out and dispersing through wind erosion.

- **Non-filled systems** have also been on the market for a number of years and provide a system with no infill material, with the exception, in some cases, of sand to help to stabilise the system. Non-filled systems often use a shockpad to meet the performance requirements and mitigate the loss of the shock absorption that infill materials provide. Currently the FIFA Quality Programme states: *"Mineral-infill stabilised, mineral-infill filled and non-filled systems are currently under development for football and are not yet approved by FIFA. As a result, fields that feature these systems cannot be awarded FIFA Quality or FIFA Quality Pro certification."* This means that such fields would currently be unsuitable for installation in venues looking to stage matches that require FIFA certification as part of the competition regulations.

- When evaluating alternative infill materials, consider the following questions:
  - Does the infill have sufficient durability to sustain the anticipated levels of use for at least ten years, without the need for significant replacement due to breakdown or deterioration, etc.?
  - Will the infill's particle size distribution impede the turf's drainage properties?
  - Will the infill float if the field is subjected to heavy or persistent rain?
  - Will the infill need irrigating in dry conditions?

Can a different infill be used on a pitch with polymeric infill?

- The difficulties involved in the practical transition from existing pitches with polymeric infill (such as crumb rubber, also known as SBR) to alternative infill materials should not be underestimated.

- Artificial pitches are constructed using a complex system of components that are engineered to work together from the stone base up. These will often include shockpad underlayers, stabilising infill (sand) and performance infill (e.g. crumb rubber), plus various turf pile heights and tuft densities, which are selected to provide the requisite playability and safety standards.

- It is therefore not possible to simply remove the existing infill material and replace it with an alternative, as this would alter the entire performance of the surface. It would also invalidate any FIFA field certification and manufacturer's warranties.

What has the EU said about risk management measures?

- While the restriction does not contain specific provisions in relation to risk management measures, such measures were the subject of extensive discussions between EU and national policymakers and ECHA experts, also with input from UEFA and member associations. It became clear in these discussions that the European Commission preferred an outright ban with a transition period rather than no ban and mandatory risk management measures.

- UEFA has previously asked the European Commission whether it has a position on the use of risk management measures. The Commission answered that *"the restriction lays down a ban on the placing on the market of microplastic infills after an eight-year transitional period, as we consider this is the most effective measure to curb microplastics emissions in the long term. This means that Member States cannot impose other RMMs [risk management measures] for pitches (e.g. barriers, brushes, etc). However, those RMMs can be placed on a voluntary basis. It is also possible for UEFA (who is not a Member State) to include such measures in its guidelines."*

- The European Committee for Standardization (CEN) Technical Report on surfaces for sports areas (TR 17519) offers guidance on how to minimise infill dispersion into the environment. Detailed information on these methods, which studies have shown to be effective, can be found in FIFA Test Manual I – Test Methods (October 2025 edition).

What is the impact when pitches with polymeric infill reach the end of their life?

- An added challenge that has been flagged and needs further consideration is the facilities and capacity across Europe for managing the end of life of existing pitch systems and their components (infill, yarn, shockpads, etc). At present, experts suggest that the recycling capacities in Europe are not fit to meet the demand that the restriction will lead to over the next decade.

- In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of companies offering recycling services for artificial pitches at the end of their life. Nonetheless, given the impending impact of the EU restriction, the volume of surfaces that will require removal and disposal or repurposing will be significant.

- Recycling of an artificial pitch is currently a complex process that involves the separation of the individual elements such as the carpet backing, the stabilising and performance infill and the fibres themselves.

- An overview of the companies currently providing recycling services in Europe and an overview of the topic in general can be found on the EMEA Synthetic Turf Council website.

Are any UEFA regulations or policies affected?

- The UEFA Stadium Infrastructure Regulations and the various regulations governing club and national team competitions will continue to apply the standards of the FIFA Quality Programme as the benchmark for artificial pitches used in UEFA competitions.

- At the time of writing, this would mean that pitches with non-filled systems would not be able to host UEFA matches, as currently no such systems meet FIFA standards.

- However, if pitches that include intentionally added microplastics such as crumb rubber (SBR) or EPDM granules, pass the required FIFA testing process during the transition period, then such venues would be eligible for use in the relevant competition.

- For the impact on the UEFA HatTrick VI Regulations, see below under How does this affect UEFA funding for pitches?.

What impact will the restriction have on the FIFA Quality Programme?

- FIFA operates a Turf Advisory Group (TAG) that comprises stakeholders from across the artificial turf industry, including a number of UEFA member associations, FIFA Preferred Producers of turf surfaces and shockpads, and continental governing bodies such as UEFA.

- The Quality Programme standards, manuals and test methods are regularly reviewed by FIFA with input from the TAG. As a result of new products coming to market, there may be changes to their criteria in the future that would allow new products such as non-filled systems to achieve FIFA certification, but at the time of writing there are no agreed plans to significantly alter these parameters.

Are there any developments in official European standards to be aware of?

- The European Committee for Standardization (CEN) is currently preparing a new standard on infill materials for artificial turf. It is hoped that this standard, EN 15330-5, will be published in early 2025. Once

published, it will automatically become a national standard in all countries whose national standards committees are a member of CEN.

- The new standard will:
  - specify minimum performance and durability requirements for performance infill materials used in artificial turf;
  - describe how the performance of an infill should be measured, and the results classified;
  - specify the physical and chemical properties of an infill that are to be declared in a manufacturer's product declaration;
  - specify the minimum production control tolerance to ensure consistency of infill materials between production batches;
  - describe how reclaimed infill should be tested to assess its suitability for use.

- Once this standard is published it is recommended that only infills that have been tested and shown to comply with the criteria and appropriate classifications for the intended use be used.

- In addition to the quality and performance of all types of infill material, their environmental impact should be considered. This includes how their production, use and end-of-life impact may adversely affect the environment. Working with the European Commission, the EMEA Synthetic Turf Council has developed recommendations on how the product environmental footprint (PEF) of sports that use artificial turf should be calculated. PEF is a method of life cycle assessment developed by the Commission, which looks at 16 key environmental impact categories.

- The PEF procedures developed by the EMEA Synthetic Turf Council can be applied to a full artificial pitch, but also the main components from which it is made, including the infill material. The European artificial turf industry is now undertaking PEF analysis on its products, allowing consumers to compare the environmental impact of products and make informed decisions when selecting a sports surface. Further details can be found here.

Financial considerations

What are the cost implications?

- According to the European Commission, the restriction's biggest financial impact will be on football. Indeed, the Commission has previously estimated the cost to football of the transition to be €9.6bn. The methodology for this estimation can be found on pages 119 to 121 of the RAC and SEAC opinion. Additional information can be found in Annex D.13 of the annexes to the background document to the opinion. For a summary, see Table 39 in the background document.

- It has been consistently communicated to EU and national policymakers that this restriction could also have negative effects on access to sports facilities and corresponding healthy lifestyles and sports participation levels, especially for young people, with related public health costs.

- Any stakeholder looking to manage existing facilities or planning to construct new artificial pitches should make a cost analysis factoring the restriction and its effects into any decisions they make.

- A significant increase in the cost of constructing a new field using either vegetal infill materials or non-filled systems is expected based on feedback received from the industry at the time of writing, and as witnessed in some UEFA territories where national and regional associations have already begun to install these types of pitch.

- The reduced lifespan of any new fields using polymeric infills should also be considered when planning to construct new pitches during the transition period, as such fields will likely need to be replaced sooner than in the past, as it will sooner be the case that they can no longer be adequately maintained. Alternatively, stockpiling of infill before the end of the transition period must be budgeted for.

How does this affect UEFA funding for pitches?

- Through its HatTrick programme, UEFA redistributes revenue from the men's EURO to each of its 55 member associations for reinvestment in football development projects. These include building football infrastructure such as national stadiums, training centres and pitches, and implementing a range of UEFA standards and initiatives (for elite youth player development, grassroots or women's football, etc.).

- At its meeting of 4 October 2023, the UEFA HatTrick Committee decided as follows:
  - Approve the ongoing use of HatTrick VI investment funding for artificial turf projects with polymeric (microplastic) infills.
  - The UEFA administration will make applicants aware of the limited use of any newly installed artificial pitches with microplastics.
  - The written agreement for artificial pitch construction projects will include a recommendation for risk management measures.
  - The UEFA administration will closely monitor the development of the artificial turf industry.
  - If necessary, the decision above can be reviewed based on future developments in the industry.

What support for R&D and innovation is there?

- The strong geographical and climate-specific issues relating to alternative infills and pitch systems, as well as the different national infrastructure and sport development contexts across the UEFA member associations, mean that it is advisable for national associations to consider cooperating in R&D and innovation on a regional basis.

- Indeed, many national associations and stakeholders are already running impressive pitch testing projects and R&D initiatives.
  - The Nordic national associations are cooperating and targeting different areas of focus. For example, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have run different testing projects until now, but are now looking to create closer links between all projects.
    - Norway is running a test project with a birch infill.
    - Denmark is monitoring 15 pitches with different infills.
    - Sweden was the first NA in the North of Europe to construct test beds in that specific climate and has extensive knowledge in how to approach test beds in future.

- It is important to be aware of European programmes, projects and funding opportunities relating to R&D and innovation. UEFA provides a dedicated service to raise national associations' awareness of such opportunities and to support their funding applications. Is any EU funding available to facilitate the transition? outlines relevant European-level considerations and opportunities.

- It is also clear that national associations can be effective in leveraging public support and unlocking funding for R&D and innovation projects at national level.
  - The Football Association of Norway (NFF) raised awareness at national level about the complexities of the EU restriction, its effects on grassroots football in Norway and the lack of knowledge about suitable alternatives to crumb rubber infill. These advocacy efforts have propelled the NFF to be, in effect, the leader of a structured collaboration between several stakeholders at national and local level (from government to municipalities and football clubs) who are aiming to develop and test new sustainable technologies in Norway. With the approval of the government (the ministries of culture and equality, and climate and environment), the NFF developed an application for public funding for a period of six years from 2024 to 2030. The budget unlocked was NOK 5.5m (approximately €470,000) per year. In 2024 the project funded an assessment of the expected remaining lifespan of pitches with rubber infill and returfing-related costs. In 2025, the budget will fund research activities into the performance of various alternatives to rubber infill, However, the public resources unlocked remain too low to cover further infrastructure development, which emphasises the need for complementary support, such as EU funding.

  - In England, The Football Association has also carried out work relating to testing alternatives to crumb rubber in the UK. A three-year research programme of a total value of £3m started in 2023, with contributions from The FA, the Premier League and the Football Foundation (a joint charity of The FA, the Premier League and the UK government). The programme aims to test the performance of vegetal or mineral infills in seven small-sided artificial pitches. The research will enable The FA to better inform and advise pitch owners regarding future considerations when deciding on the design and

specification of a new pitch. This funding does not relate to a government strategy, but generally aims to develop football facilities, with the added aim of eliminating crumb rubber infills, in line with the EU restriction.

- UEFA also encourages national associations to consider the UEFA Research Grant Programme (UEFA RGP) as a possible means for achieving support for R&D and innovation on the transition away from polymeric infill.
  - The UEFA RGP is a prestigious grant programme designed for academics working in partnership with national associations to support visionary research on European football.
  - It is for anyone with or working towards a PhD who is analysing European football from a variety of academic disciplines. Once completed, the research is shared with the 55 UEFA member associations and is used for growth and development purposes.
  - Grant applicants must submit a letter of recommendation written by a president, general secretary or CEO of a UEFA member association, thereby ensuring that their project is relevant to contemporary issues and has the highest practical value possible.
  - In order to foster cooperation between its member associations and European universities, UEFA allows up to three researchers based in the territories of three different national associations to submit joint applications.
  - Each individual project selected by the UEFA Research Grant Jury is eligible for a grant of up to €15,000 and each joint project for a grant of up to €20,000 for a nine-month research period.

- The artificial turf industry also pays an important role in R&D and innovation. Responding to growing environmental awareness and the future polymeric infill restriction, the EMEA Synthetic Turf Council and its members are navigating a route through the conflicting market needs for surfaces that provide good sports performance while being able to sustain prolonged high levels of use and which are still cost-effective and environmentally friendly.

Is any EU funding available to facilitate the transition?

- Current EU funding programmes do not directly address the sport or football sector, nor the transition. However, they are structured to respond to several relevant overarching policy areas that affect a variety of economic sectors.

- As such, the relevant EU funding streams are those supporting research, development and upscaling solutions in the wider context of the transition to a greener, low-carbon economy.

- There are two types of such EU funding streams:
  1. **Centrally managed EU programmes:** Transnational partnerships with a specific EU added value develop a project proposal in response to specific EU-wide calls for applications and submit it to the European Commission for a centralised evaluation across the EU (and beyond in certain cases). Such programmes are very competitive, and the funding that an application can receive depends on the yearly budget allocated by the Commission to the topic in question.

Relevant programmes: Horizon Europe (a research and innovation funding programme) and LIFE (a funding instrument for the environment and climate action).

Opportunities for 2025 to 2027 and beyond: Horizon Europe's strategic plan for 2025 to 2027 foresees support for the development of EU-wide partnerships (including with non-EU countries) on, among other things, the development of innovative materials that are safe, sustainable, circular and traceable, contributing to the reduction of dependencies on certain raw materials. The development of alternatives to plastic infills for artificial pitches is highly relevant for the objectives of this partnership, as it contributes to the implementation of resilient material value chains across sectors that will help Europe to reach its targets for environmental protection and also boost industrial competitiveness. UEFA expects calls for applications on this topic to be published by Horizon Europe starting from mid-2025.

2. **Nationally or regionally managed EU programmes:** Such programmes address specific local socio-economic issues identified by the member state or region who manages them. National associations can directly influence the policy agendas that underpin these funding programmes, as they can argue that the transition period must be facilitated to support the wider development of football in the relevant geographical area. These programmes are less competitive than centrally managed EU programmes, as they are specific to a certain area.

   Relevant programmes: Cohesion Policy funds (specifically, the European Regional Development Fund) and Interreg programmes (for cross-border and interregional collaboration). Usually, calls for applications are not specific, but rather touch on wider policy areas, with increased flexibility on the topic or sector to be tackled.

   Opportunities for 2025 to 2027 and beyond: The midterm review of the EU Cohesion Policy implementation (due by mid-2025) will shed light on the unallocated budgets in each EU member state and on specific challenges still to be addressed by member states at national and regional level. This creates the opportunity for national associations to frame the transition period as a priority for national governments who could leverage remaining Cohesion Policy funding to cater for increased R&D activity at national level. Furthermore, increased synergies with other EU funding programmes will be sought after, including with Horizon Europe.

- UEFA will continue to monitor relevant calls for applications within the above-mentioned programmes and inform its member associations accordingly.

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