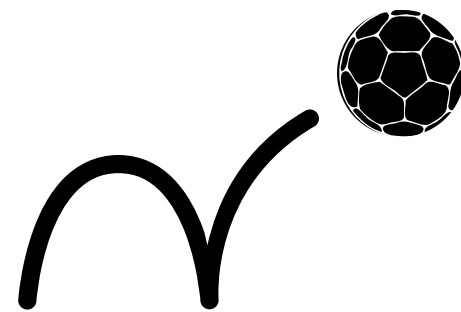


EURO2024:



Green initiatives overshadowed by promotion of big polluters

Fossil Free Football

Game Changer Sponsorship Pledge

Badvertising



In short: EURO 24 is better but nowhere near good enough

The organisers of EURO2024 have taken steps to mitigate carbon pollution but should be doing more to reduce its impact given the threat posed to football by extreme weather and the climate crisis. This briefing lays out what the tournament is doing well, while also explaining how these initiatives are undercut by other choices, especially the promotion of big polluting sponsors. It calls on organisers to ensure that the huge platform provided by the tournament is used to accelerate the shift away from fossil fuels.

A tournament fit for 2024 and beyond must:

- Normalise significant efforts to limit climate impact as much as possible as part of every football tournament.
- Ensure the tournament's massive platform drives the move away from fossil fuels
 - By banning polluting, fossil-fuel dependent sponsors
 - Communicating the climate crisis to drive change

Sustainability initiatives must become standard in subsequent tournaments

Any event consisting of 51 matches, across ten cities, with visitors from at least 24 different countries (plus many non-European fans), will have a deep pollution footprint. However, the tournament will be played in existing stadiums that will continue to be used (unlike the World Cup in 2022). Organisers are also encouraging fans to change their behaviour to lower their pollution impact. They are offering more vegetarian food choices and incentivising green travel by offering match-goers tickets for local public transport (for free) and long-distance trains (at a discount).

Importantly, the match schedule has been developed with consideration of transport pollution. Regionalising the group fixtures

between three geographic zones facilitates sustainable travel by rail and lowers the need to fly. Analysis found that all national teams could reduce their emissions by 95% for the group stage by shifting from air to rail or road. However, only Germany and Switzerland have pledged to avoid flying in the opening phase. Previously, UEFA have not accepted that it is their responsibility to account for the travel of supporters in calculations of the pollution impact of competitions they organise. However, EURO 2024 demonstrates that organisers can make changes to the match schedule to reduce transport pollution. Moving forward, UEFA should apply this principle to scheduling of its other tournaments. Unfortunately, expanding club competitions to add 177 more matches and co-hosting the next European Championship between Italy and Türkiye, means that UEFA is responsible for hundreds of millions of additional air miles.

While EURO2024 could represent a new standard for football to build upon, these decisions indicate that its lessons have already been jettisoned in favour of the characteristic ‘business as usual’ mentality, despite the polluting impact of more and more matches reliant on air travel.

Sponsorship: the tournament is a massive platform for fossil fuels

Trying to reduce the pollution footprint of a brief tournament is good, but thinking more broadly about the messages being sent to the billions watching worldwide would be better. Unfortunately, the reductions in impact through measures highlighted above are overshadowed because the tournament is used to promote fossil fuel companies, polluting car manufacturers, airlines and banks. EURO2024 organisers spoke at COP28 about their support for the UN Sport for Climate Action Framework. However, the sponsors appearing at their tournament appear to contravene their obligation to “promote sustainable and responsible consumption” under this initiative.

Just as we need to urgently move away from fossil fuels, the

corporations who profit from and try to protect the polluting status quo are using advertising in sport to slow change and suppress backlash against their complicity in the climate crisis. In the words of UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, fossil fuel dependent corporations have “shamelessly greenwashed” and using sports sponsorship at major tournaments is key to their strategy. Accordingly, the Secretary-General has recently called for a fossil ad ban.

EURO2024’s sponsors include Visit Qatar and Coca-Cola. Visit Qatar’s sponsorship is a problematic example of sportswashing because of the well documented human rights abuses in Qatar, because it’s a petrostate with massive fossil fuel expansion plans and because encouraging intercontinental tourism inevitably drives pollution from flying. For its part, Coca-Cola is the world’s biggest plastic polluter and is known for trying to block action to cut plastic pollution. Plastic is big oil’s ‘back up plan’ and production could double or even triple in the years to 2050.

Many of the competing national teams are also sponsored by companies that will use EURO2024 to promote their brands and clean up their reputation despite the harmful pollution they cause. England and Scotland are both sponsored by Chase, the consumer banking arm of the world’s worst financier of fossil fuels. Banks that provide billions to the fossil-fuel industry are also being promoted by the Netherlands and Belgium (ING, 26th largest financier), France (Crédit Agricole, 24th), Switzerland (UBS, 10th) and Portugal (La Caixa, 47th).

It is vital to consider the role played by banks when thinking about big polluters. Many banks continue to profit from providing the finance that makes burning fossil fuels possible. However, the International Energy Agency has stated that reaching net-zero by 2050 demands an end to new fossil fuel development and more funding for renewables.

Italian sponsor Eni is one of the world's largest oil companies. It was recently accused in court of "using lobbying and greenwashing" to expand fossil-fuels despite understanding the consequences for the climate since 1970. Orlen is the general partner of the Polish football association and a major oil refiner and distributor. Poland has one of the dirtiest and most dangerous energy mixes in Europe. Mol Group is a major Hungarian oil and gas corporation while Petrol group is a major importer and distributor of petroleum as well as Slovenia's largest corporation. Centropol is a major electricity and gas provider in Czechia; a country with only a tiny share of renewables. Czechia are also sponsored by Pepsi, whose parent company is one of the world's largest plastic polluters. Finally, Croatia will also be promoting Petrol group as well as Hep, an energy producer that continues to rely heavily on coal fired power generation.

Airline sponsorship is everywhere in club football and Spain, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland and Croatia are also promoting airlines at EURO2024. These deals are promoting the most polluting form of travel to fans of countries that have generally well-developed infrastructure for more sustainable mobility such as trains. Given there is no low-carbon way to fly, it is vital to lower rather than increase demand for flights. Conversely, boosted by advertising, airline emissions are surging and are on track to eat up a quarter of the global carbon budget by 2050. Flying is an elite activity with an outsized pollution impact that benefits a few but harms everyone by heating the planet. Football should not be used to drive demand for air travel, especially given this clearly contradicts organisers' stated efforts to encourage teams and supporters to lower their transport impact.

Volkswagen will be heavily promoted during EURO2024 as a partner of Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Italy and Switzerland. While this advertising may sometimes refer to electric vehicles (EVs), it is important to note that only 1 in every 8 of Volkswagen's 2023 European new car sales were all-electric. The problem is that even if ads are centred on EV's, they also boost sales of Volkswagen's

polluting fossil fuel cars by fostering positive associations with the Volkswagen brand. More than half of Volkswagen's sales are SUVs, which are more polluting, resource intensive and dangerous than smaller cars while taking up valuable space in congested cities. Aside from its sales strategy focused on fossil fuel cars, Volkswagen has engaged in heavy lobbying against clean air regulations to push back against the coming phase out of fossil fuel cars. EURO2024, especially given its supposed promotion of public transit and clean train travel, is therefore facilitating greenwashing and undermining its attempts at sustainability by allowing big-polluting Volkswagen to promote its brand.

Organisers should look to the history of tobacco sponsorship to understand an alternative to their event being co-opted to sell fossil fuels. Sport was used to promote antisocial, harmful activity before ad bans were finally implemented. The active promotion of smoking in sport is now unthinkable and the world is better off for it. Polluting ads have no place in the 21st century and EURO 2024, UEFA and the German government could all implement a ban to prevent them reaching the massive global audiences watching on.

EURO2024 sponsors	Visit Qatar Coca-Cola
Germany	Volkswagen, Lufthansa
Scotland	Chase
Poland	Orlen
Netherlands	ING, Volkswagen
England	Chase

Slovenia	Petrol
Denmark	Volkswagen
Belgium	ING, BMW, Brussels Airlines
France	Crédit Agricole, Volkswagen
Turkiye	Turkish Airlines, Mercedes Benz
Portugal	BPI (part of La Caixa group)
Czechia	Pepsi, Centropol
Croatia	Petrol, Croatia Airlines, Hep
Italy	ENI, Volkswagen, ITA Airways
Hungary	Mol
Spain	Iberia
Switzerland	UBS, Volkswagen, Swiss international Airlines

*Sponsorships taken from the Sports Business database and further research

Dominated by fossil fuels: but some small signs of change

Fossil fuel companies, airlines and car companies that benefit from the fossil-fuel powered status quo use sports sponsorship to help delay the sustainable change that threatens their business but benefits everyone.

Given the extent of the relationship between football and polluting sponsors, some fans may fear that sport will suffer if fossil fuel cash stops flowing. In fact, the same warnings were given about sport when tobacco sponsorship was banned, but football actually continued to thrive.

The fact that an electric car company is sponsoring this tournament demonstrates that another future without fossil fuel partnerships is possible. This is not an unproblematic company and EV's bring their own set of issues, but it should indicate that football should fear the consequences of inaction more than the economic changes the energy transition brings. Organisers must work to expedite this shift by banning polluting sponsorship.

Organisers are seeking credit for their sustainability initiatives, but is it justified?

It is important to unpack the claim that EURO 2024 is “the most sustainable European Championship of all time”. While positive steps have been taken, football's record on climate is so abysmal that comparison with other tournaments is not a useful way of understanding EURO2024's impact. The previous edition of this tournament necessitated flying many thousands of kilometres because it was held across 11 countries from Spain to Azerbaijan. UEFA and FIFA continue to expand the football calendar across their tournaments. Other football competitions are also deeply tied to

fossil-fuel pollution. For example, FIFA has made a deal to promote Saudi Aramco, the most polluting company of all time, at the next two World Cups and Champions League airline sponsors were responsible for pollution on the scale of a coal power plant last season.

Initiatives that are the 'most sustainable of all time' are making a comparison between where we are now, in 2024, and a history built on fossil fuel pollution. The climate crisis means that seriously limiting environmental impact must be an absolute bare minimum for any football competition, development or policy. As climate action has been so insufficient previously, we have set a trap for ourselves where we have to do more and more over time. If we consider our climate goals, under which the world has to halve emissions before 2030, we realise that since everything has to quickly become much less polluting, we should take for granted that things are improved in relation to the past. The more relevant point of comparison is not with what has gone before, but with where science tells us we need to be, and on that score we are failing badly.

Billions are watching; organisers must harness their huge platform to push climate action.

There is nothing on the planet that focuses people's attention like football. The European Championship is one of the most watched events of the world's favourite sport. It is therefore vital that football not only rejects vested fossil fuel interests who want to slow down change but actively promotes the green transition. Organisers need to consider the messages billions of fans are receiving before they start congratulating themselves on a sustainable tournament.

Organisers must first shut out the fossil fuel industry, its main clients (airlines, cruises and polluting car companies), enablers (banks still

providing finance for fossil fuel expansion) and its petrostate allies. Secondly, they should also communicate the threat that a more extreme and unstable climate poses (to football) and demonstrate an understanding that there can be no more business as usual because of the climate emergency.

The climate crisis is still being poorly communicated; organisers must therefore help convey the gravity of the situation to underline why their sustainability initiatives are so important. The tournament takes place as temperature records are being broken around the world. The planet is the warmest we've seen but the coolest we'll ever see again. The month of May was the hottest May ever, April was the hottest April ever, March was the hottest March ever and so on for 12 months in a row! From flooding in Brazil and host country Germany, to heat waves in 2026 World Cup host cities, more and more deadly extreme weather is harming football and the communities it relies upon.

The final word: despite some positive initiatives, this tournament should be doing more

For football tournaments with huge pollution footprints to justify their existence during a climate emergency, it is vital that they aim higher and broaden their approach to sustainability strategy. Organisers must cut pollution impact, ban polluting sponsorship and speak clearly about why the green transition is fundamental to the future of football and the societies that shape it.