

TOWARDS THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SUPPORTER LIAISON OFFICERS



TPDS

Roadmap for the Professionalisation of SLOs in South America



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Professor Aage Radmann, Malmö University, Sweden

Tony Ernst, Football Supporter Europe, FSE

Road Map for Introducing the Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO) Role in South America: A Conceptual Framework

1. Introduction

The Supporter Liaison Officer (SLO) role represents a critical innovation in modern football governance, aimed at fostering structured dialogue between clubs and their supporter communities. Originating in Europe, Germany and Sweden, and later as part of UEFA's regulatory framework, the SLO concept has demonstrated significant potential in enhancing safety, security, and service standards within football environments. This text outlines a roadmap for introducing the SLO role in South America, beginning with Brazil, while drawing on lessons learned from the European experience.

2. Defining the SLO Role

The SLO serves as an institutional intermediary between football clubs and their supporters. The primary function of the SLO is to facilitate communication and trust among stakeholders, including clubs, fans, law enforcement, security personnel, and governing bodies. Key characteristics of the role include:

- **Trust and Credibility:** The SLO must maintain integrity and transparency, ensuring that information disseminated is accurate and reliable. While sensitive information may occasionally be withheld, deliberate misinformation is incompatible with the role.
- **Preventive Orientation:** The SLO operates within the security ecosystem but is not a security officer. The emphasis lies on prevention through dialogue rather than repression through enforcement.
- **Embeddedness in Supporter Culture:** Ideally, the SLO possesses deep knowledge of the supporter base, often originating from the stands, while maintaining professional independence as an employee of the club.

3. The European Model: Evolution and Institutionalization

The formal introduction of the SLO role in European football occurred in 2011, with UEFA incorporating the position into its Club Licensing Regulations (Article 35, later Article 45) from the 2012/13 season onward. This regulatory requirement catalyzed widespread adoption across UEFA's 55 member associations. Key milestones include:

- **National Integration:** Several countries have embedded the SLO role within domestic licensing frameworks, and in some cases, national legislation.
- **Best Practice Examples:** Germany, Sweden, and Denmark exemplify advanced implementation, featuring full-time SLOs and multi-person SLO teams.
- **Policy Frameworks:** The 2016 Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches positioned the SLO as a cornerstone of holistic match-day governance.

- **Capacity Building:** Since 2019, UEFA, in collaboration with Football Supporters Europe (FSE), has delivered structured training programs through the UEFA Academy, educating approximately 500 SLOs across 24 countries.

Despite these advances, disparities persist, particularly in less-developed football markets, underscoring the need for context-sensitive strategies in new regions.

4. Rationale for Introducing the SLO Role in South America

Contemporary football dynamics increasingly recognize supporters as central actors within the sport's socio-cultural and economic ecosystem. Their expectations regarding transparency, participation, and service provision necessitate institutional mechanisms for structured engagement. The SLO role offers a proven model for:

- **Conflict Mitigation:** By institutionalizing dialogue, the SLO reduces tensions between stakeholders.
- **Safety and Security Enhancement:** Effective communication contributes to preventive strategies, reducing the likelihood of disorder.
- **Governance Modernization:** Aligning with global best practices strengthens the legitimacy and professionalism of South American football governance.

5. Contextual Adaptation: South American Specificities

While the European experience provides valuable insights, direct transplantation of the SLO model is neither feasible nor desirable. South American football exhibits distinctive characteristics, including:

- **Supporter Culture:** Highly organized and passionate fan groups (torcidas organizadas) exert significant influence, often intersecting with socio-political dynamics.
- **Institutional Frameworks:** National federations (e.g., CBF) and continental bodies (CONMEBOL) must play a central role in regulatory design and enforcement.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Collaboration with national supporter organizations, such as ANATORG in Brazil, is essential for legitimacy and effectiveness.

Recommended strategies include:

- Incorporating the SLO role into licensing requirements for clubs participating in national and continental competitions.
- Developing tailored training programs reflecting regional cultural and security contexts.
- Establishing pilot projects in Brazil as a precursor to broader continental rollout.

6. Implementation Roadmap

The introduction of the SLO role in South America should proceed through a phased approach:

1. **Needs Analysis:** Comprehensive assessment of supporter dynamics, security challenges, and institutional capacities.
2. **Stakeholder Consultation:** Engagement with clubs, federations, supporter organizations, and public authorities.

3. **Regulatory Integration:** Inclusion of the SLO role in licensing frameworks at national and continental levels.
4. **Capacity Building:** Development of training curricula in collaboration with UEFA and FSE, adapted to South American realities.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establishment of performance indicators and feedback mechanisms to ensure continuous improvement.

7. Resources and Reference Materials

- UEFA Supporter Liaison Officer Handbook
- UEFA Practical Guide to Supporter Liaison
- Occupational Standards for the SLO Role
- Best Practice Reports from European SLOs
- Academic Literature on Sport Governance and Fan Engagement

8. Conclusion

The SLO role represents a transformative instrument for enhancing governance, safety, and stakeholder relations in football. Its introduction in South America, beginning with Brazil, offers an opportunity to align regional practices with international standards while respecting local cultural specificities. A structured, participatory, and context-sensitive roadmap is essential for successful implementation.