



Extending the Anti-Money Laundering Regime to Professional Football: (A)nother Case of Symbolic Legislation?

Sofie Gotelaere, Gema Souvenir,
Letizia Paoli, Annick Willem

Purpose of the study

In 2020, Belgium became the first country to subject its professional football sector to preventive anti-money laundering (AML) legislation. This study pursues three aims. First, it investigates the reasons behind the introduction of AML legislation in the Belgian professional football sector. Next, the article identifies the official and latent goals that this legislation serves, according to the stakeholders. Lastly, it discusses the stakeholders' assessment of the implementation and effect of the legislation within the football sector in light of the identified official and latent goals.

Methods used

This study employed two qualitative methods: a desk-based legal and regulatory research and semi-structured expert interviews with ten key stakeholders (two with state actors and eight with representatives from the football sector).

Key Findings

In addition to the official goals of protecting the legal economy and targeting underlying criminal activities, the extension of the AML legislation to professional football serves five latent goals: enhancing the sector's image; facilitating relationships with financial institutions; improving ethical decision-making; encouraging transparency; and promoting professionalism. However, our study also identified several factors that hinder the AML regime's effectiveness in light of these official and latent goals.

Practical implications

To enhance the reach and effectiveness of the AML regime in football, we propose to:

- Address the factors that hinder achieving the official and latent goals;
- Engage with the latent goals of the actors affected by the regulation; and
- Understand how criminals launder funds and how they respond to regulatory controls in football.

Contact

Sofie.Gotelaere@kuleuven.be
www.sportmanagementugent.com/PROFS