

UPSKILLING VOLUNTEER MANAGERS IN SPORT | UVMIS

Policy Brief (Policy Recommendations)



ENGLISH

“Upskilling volunteer managers in sport” (UVMIS) project aims to set a new standard, and to lay the foundation for transforming the offering of sports volunteer management qualification in Europe, by creating a full Higher Education level curriculum, detailing what and how professionals need to learn, to tackle contemporary and future critical challenges.

The Project is led by Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University in collaboration with partners including Centre for European Volunteering, Dutch Hockey Association, ENGSO, NR Sports Volunteering Solutions, IGNITX, French Federation Sport and Leisure Profession, CSV Trentino, and Vytautas Magnus University.

UVMIS POLICY BRIEF

About the UVMIS Project

Upskilling Volunteer Managers in Sport (UVMIS) is an Erasmus+ project that aims to boost the quality and recognition of volunteer management by creating advanced training and learning tools tailored for those already active (or formerly active) in the field.

Definition of Key Terms

Professionalisation

This is a process of ensuring that individuals performing volunteer management functions have access to appropriate knowledge, skills, support, and recognition to raise standards of sport volunteer management practices and capabilities of those practicing sport volunteer management.

Recognition

This is acknowledging the importance of sport volunteer managers and valuing their contribution, expertise, responsibilities, and impact to communities through formal qualifications, certifications, career pathways, awards, organisational status, peer recognition, or public acknowledgement.

1. UVMIS project partners note that:

With reference to the [UVMIS State of the Art Report on Sport Volunteer Management](#);

1.1. The Role and Importance of Volunteers in European Sport

- 1.1.1. The European sports sector is fundamentally supported by volunteer participation, making it the largest voluntary, non-governmental organisational effort in Europe.
- 1.1.2. Solidarity is a key motivator for volunteering in sports, fostering unity and a shared goal among volunteers.

1.2. Volunteer Managers Education in Europe: Current State and Regional Disparities

- 1.2.1. There is a lack of structured education for sport volunteer managers in Europe. Some of the existing education courses are short-term, informal, event-focused

or they are a part of a sports management major programme where volunteer management is only passively addressed.

- 1.2.2. Sport volunteer management training or education varies across Europe. The Northern European countries like Belgium and Denmark have relatively advanced frameworks while in Eastern and Southern Europe, training is mostly informal and project based.
- 1.2.3. Existing disparities in sport volunteer management training across Europe are due to the differences in welfare systems, public funding models, volunteering cultures, legal frameworks, and sport governance traditions that exist in each country.
- 1.2.4. Cross national differences in the scale and intensity of sports volunteering also affect the need for structured sport volunteer management training as well as the institutional capacity to develop and sustain it.
- 1.2.5. No European country currently offers comprehensive, long-term educational programmes exclusively focused on volunteer management within the sports sector; relevant skills are often embedded in broader sports management frameworks or short-term initiatives.
- 1.2.6. The high dependency of sport volunteer managers on non-formal learning and training programmes leads to a lack of consistency, recognition and sustainability.
- 1.2.7. There is an overall lack of resources throughout Europe for sport volunteer managers training. Therefore, such training programs often depend on short-term project-based funding, leading to instability and limited curriculum development.

1.3. Gaps in Volunteer Managers Professionalisation

- 1.3.1. There is a critical systemic gap in the professionalisation and formal recognition of sports volunteer managers across Europe.
- 1.3.2. The absence of formal education and certification pathways limits professional recognition and career opportunities for individuals pursuing careers in sport volunteer management.

1.4. Opportunities Through Technology

- 1.4.1. Technology enhanced learning may provide a useful complement to sport volunteer management training particularly in widening access and supporting knowledge exchange. However, it should not be treated as a universal solution

since the development of volunteer management competences often also requires practice-based interactive, and context-responsive forms of learning.

1.5. European Values in Sports Volunteering

- 1.5.1. The six core European values (respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights) are foundational to both the EU and the practice of sports volunteering.
- 1.5.2. Threats to European values in sports volunteering include discrimination, lack of transparency, exclusion, and breaches of privacy or dignity.
- 1.5.3. The implementation of European values in volunteer management strengthens solidarity and motivation among volunteers.

1.6. Volunteer Management Models and Practices

- 1.6.1. Volunteer management in sport operates under two main models: Membership Management (MM) and Programme Management (PM), each with distinct challenges and opportunities.
- 1.6.2. Volunteer recruitment in sport is often informal and relies heavily on personal networks, which can limit diversity and reach.
- 1.6.3. Effective volunteer management is essential for the success and legacy of sport events, requiring strategic planning from recruitment to post-event engagement.
- 1.6.4. Legacy planning for volunteer programmes is often overlooked, leading to a loss of momentum and community benefit after events conclude.

1.7. Recognition and Retention

- 1.7.1. Recognition and meaningful appreciation of volunteers are critical for retention and long-term engagement.

2. UVMIS project partners understand that:

2.1. Professionalisation of Sports Volunteer Managers

- 2.1.1. Professionalisation of sport volunteer managers should not be understood only as training or certification. It also requires organisational systems, clear role descriptions, decision-making authority, ethical standards, supervision, resources, and institutional recognition within sports organisations.



- 2.1.2. Addressing future challenges in sports volunteer management requires - better-trained, qualified, and recognised volunteer managers who can act strategically and ethically.
- 2.1.3. Volunteer managers in sports require both theoretical knowledge and practical soft skills, including strategic thinking, change management, and the ability to balance professional boundaries with volunteer engagement.
- 2.1.4. There are opportunities to develop standardised educational frameworks and competency models at the European level, which would enhance professionalisation and mobility for volunteer managers across member states and regions.

2.2. Comprehensive Training and Development

- 2.2.1. Comprehensive training and development, including orientation, role-specific, and inclusive training, are necessary so that volunteer managers are able to prepare volunteers for their roles and foster a sense of belonging.
- 2.2.2. Volunteer managers should have the capacities to ensure that the volunteer journey is considered holistically, with clubs and organisations moving from tactical, short-term approaches to strategic, long-term value creation for athletes, communities, volunteers and organisations.
- 2.2.3. Collaborative development involving educational institutions, sports organisations, volunteer associations, and policymakers is essential for creating relevant and sustainable training pathways for volunteer managers.
- 2.2.4. Regional, European and national-level approaches to sport volunteer management training can provide common standards while remaining adaptable to local contexts, which is particularly important for regular sports events.
- 2.2.5. The European competency framework should be accompanied by national and local implementation pathways. Sport volunteer management depends strongly on national volunteering cultures, legal frameworks, funding systems, education systems and sport governance traditions, so European standards should remain adaptable to different contexts.

2.3. Promoting and Safeguarding European Values

- 2.3.1. Volunteer managers play a crucial role in promoting and safeguarding European values within their organisations by developing codes of conduct and fostering inclusive environments.



- 2.3.2. The size, structure, and diversity of volunteer groups influence the strategies needed to uphold values such as dignity, freedom, and equality.
- 2.3.3. Transparent communication, clear policies, and inclusive decision-making processes are essential for upholding democracy and the rule of law in sports organisations and volunteer managers need to be provided with a clear understanding of this.
- 2.3.4. Discrimination and exclusion can be both explicit and implicit, often rooted in unconscious biases or structural practices and volunteer managers should have access to training opportunities to better understand this.
- 2.3.5. Volunteer managers should be empowered with tools to foster human rights, freedom and equality, understanding that volunteers are more likely to remain engaged when they feel their voices are heard and their rights are protected.

2.4. Volunteer Motivation, Retention, and Value Creation

- 2.4.1. Volunteer energy is a vital resource that can be strategically harnessed and converted into sustainable commitment, supporting both individual growth and organisational success and volunteer managers need capacity building opportunities in this respect.
- 2.4.2. Volunteer managers should find ways to enhance the benefits of volunteering for individuals to increase motivation and lower barriers to participation, leading to stronger volunteer retention.
- 2.4.3. Volunteer managers should create and fairly distribute value for all volunteering stakeholders, including the organisation, volunteers and beneficiaries.
- 2.4.4. It is important that volunteer managers match the diverse volunteer motivations through good quality volunteer management processes, with organisational needs through personalised, benefit-focused recruitment and role design.
- 2.4.5. Volunteer managers should actively engage corporate partners and sponsors involved in sports events to support volunteer programs through resource sharing and legacy projects, while strengthening long term volunteer engagement.

2.5. Volunteer Recruitment Strategies and Engagement

- 2.5.1. Effective recruitment relies on volunteer managers understanding multiple dimensions of recruitability and using a smart mix of strategies to attract and retain volunteers.
- 2.5.2. Collaboration across sectors such as with employers (employee volunteering) is especially important for recruiting volunteers for large events.
- 2.5.3. A volunteer-friendly environment is crucial for making volunteers feel welcome, involved, and appreciated, which directly supports the organisation's mission and volunteer managers should be trained in how to create this.
- 2.5.4. Volunteer managers should employ adaptive volunteer management strategies to address the continuous changes in the demographic profile of sports volunteers.
- 2.5.5. Sport volunteer managers should take advantage of technology to create platforms such as volunteer portals to streamline recruitment, selection, and management, improving efficiency and volunteer experience.
- 2.5.6. Ongoing feedback, evaluation, and adaptation are necessary to continuously improve volunteer management practices.

3. UVMIS project partners ask that:

3.1. Collaborative Development and Investment in Sport Volunteer Managers Training

- 3.1.1. European stakeholders such as education institutions, sports organisations, policy makers collaboratively create, run and promote certified sport volunteer managers training programmes meeting the industry demands.
- 3.1.2. All stakeholders invest in the systematic development of structured volunteer manager education as an essential investment in the future of European sports.
- 3.1.3. Validation systems be established for sport volunteer managers for skills acquired through informal and non-formal learning, to recognise and accredit existing expertise.
- 3.1.4. Sport volunteer management competencies be integrated into national and European qualification frameworks to enhance recognition and career progression.
- 3.1.5. Standalone certification programmes be created to offer accessible professional development pathways for practicing volunteer managers.

- 3.1.6. Organisations provide accessible, inclusive, and flexible training opportunities for their volunteer managers, ensuring recruitment across diverse backgrounds and regularly evaluate training effectiveness through feedback and skills assessments.
- 3.1.7. Sport volunteer management be recognised as a stand-alone profession deserving of a European-wide competency framework and recognised certified courses.

3.2. Strategic Volunteer Management and Value Creation

- 3.2.1. European sport organisations build capacities in their volunteer managers to move away from tactical and short-term volunteer recruitment to long term volunteer value creation emphasising on mutual benefits for volunteers and organisations.
- 3.2.2. Volunteer managers know how to ensure that legacy planning is embedded from the outset, with clear post-event pathways, sustained investment, and knowledge transfer mechanisms to ensure ongoing community benefit.
- 3.2.3. Volunteer managers are empowered to engage with all stakeholders to collaborate to remove barriers to volunteering in sports, including financial, logistical, and informational obstacles, and actively promote inclusion and accessibility.
- 3.2.4. European institutions, sport governing bodies, educational providers, and national stakeholders collaboratively develop a European framework for Sport Volunteer Management competencies, training, and recognition.
- 3.2.5. A European level approach should promote consistency, mobility, mutual recognition, and knowledge exchange across Europe while respecting local adapting to local contexts and needs.
- 3.2.6. The European framework should clearly define minimum competency areas for sport volunteer managers, including strategic planning, recruitment, selection, training, inclusion, safeguarding, communication, conflict resolution, motivation, retention, recognition, data management, evaluation, and legacy planning.

3.3. Leveraging Technology and Knowledge Exchange

- 3.3.1. Volunteer management training providers take advantage of the technological advancements in delivering flexible online programmes and distance learning

through established educational institutions to address geographical disparities.

- 3.3.2. In addition to enhanced technology learning, sport volunteer management also requires practical (operational) based and interactive learning. Training pathways should include mentoring, peer learning, case studies, simulations, supervised practice, and communities of practice as essential elements of high-quality education for sport volunteer managers.
- 3.3.3. Cross-border knowledge exchange be fostered between countries with advanced systems and those with significant gaps, to promote best practices and mutual learning for sports volunteer management training.

3.4. Sustainable Funding Programmes

- 3.4.1. Secure sustainable funding mechanisms are established to support long-term educational infrastructure for volunteer management, moving beyond short-term project cycles.

3.5. Empowerment of Volunteer Managers

- 3.5.1. Sports organisations and stakeholders empower volunteer managers to act in accordance with European values by providing training, resources, and support.
- 3.5.2. Volunteer managers establish and communicate clear codes of conduct, policies, and procedures to protect human dignity, freedom, and equality.
- 3.5.3. Regular training and awareness sessions on integrity, rights, and responsibilities are organised for sports volunteer managers.

3.6. Fair and Inclusive Volunteer Recruitment and Evaluation

- 3.6.1. Sports volunteer managers are trained to ensure that recruitment and evaluation processes are made public and fair, with active diversity policies and the use of blind recruitment or diverse selection committees where possible.
- 3.6.2. Sport event organisers ensure that their volunteer managers understand and support evidence-based recruitment and selection strategies, including clear role descriptions, structured interviews, and targeted outreach to diverse communities.
- 3.6.3. Volunteer managers understand the importance of implementing transparent decision-making processes, including regular meetings, accessible information, and opportunities for volunteer input.

3.7. Volunteer Protection and Recognition

- 3.7.1. Sport volunteer management training should include duty of care and volunteers' wellbeing as core responsibilities of sport volunteer managers. This should cover safeguarding, legal protection, psychological safety, prevention of exploitation, clear communication channels, access to complaints mechanisms, and appropriate support structures for volunteers.
- 3.7.2. Volunteer management training includes information about the importance of volunteer recognition and validation of learning outcomes that are personalised, timely, and meaningful, incorporating both formal (certificates, references) and informal (daily thanks, public acknowledgment) approaches.

3.8. Impact Measurement

- 3.8.1. Sport organisations, governing bodies, and policy makers should establish common outcome indicators to measure volunteer management practices with regards to volunteer recruitment, retention, satisfaction, diversity and inclusion, volunteer well-being, organisational capacity, event success, and community impact.
- 3.8.2. Sport Volunteer Management policies and programmes should incorporate clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the effectiveness and impact of volunteer management training initiatives, practices and certification programs.
- 3.8.3. Evidence generated through regular evaluation should be used to continuously improve volunteer management standards, demonstrate the value of professional Sport Volunteer Managers, and support investment in their training, recognition, and professional development.

4. Conclusion

Sport volunteering is one of Europe's greatest social assets, promoting the success, sustainability, and inclusiveness of sport at all levels. To address current challenges and realise future opportunities, the UVMIS project partners recommend coordinated action to strengthen the competence, recognition, and professionalisation of Sport Volunteer Managers across Europe. European-level cooperation will critically provide a unique opportunity to facilitate cross-border knowledge exchange, promote common competency and quality standards, support the mutual recognition of skills and certifications, and reduce

disparities in training opportunities between EU member states. By investing in the training and recognition of Sport Volunteer Managers, European stakeholders can strengthen volunteer-led sport, uphold European values, enhance volunteer experiences, and build a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable sporting ecosystem. In this way, contributing to the [European Skills Agenda](#), the [European Work Plan for Sport](#) and the [European Education Area](#) will be strengthened.

For further Reading:

- [Upskilling Volunteer Managers in Sport \(UVMIS\), State of the Art report.](#)
- [Guide to Sport Volunteering, Solidarity and European Values.](#)
- [Guide on the role of Sports volunteer managers in facilitating inclusive sports volunteering to facilitate culturally sensitive and inclusive sport engagement.](#)
- [Guide on Volunteering in Sports Events.](#)
- [European Code of Ethics for Sports Volunteer Managers.](#)
- Course Description Manual, Course Syllabus and Assessment Plan.

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