

# Upskilling Volunteer Managers in Sport | UVMIS

**Guide on the role of Sports volunteer managers in facilitating inclusive sports volunteering to facilitate culturally sensitive and inclusive sport engagement**



## 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.

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## Introduction to UVMIS and this Guide:

This guide has been developed as part of the “**Upskilling Volunteer Managers in Sport**” (UVMIS) Erasmus+ project. It belongs to a series of four complementary guides developed to support sports volunteer managers across Europe:

- 1 - European Code of Ethics for Sports Volunteer Managers
- 2 - Guide to Sport Volunteering, Solidarity and European Values
- 3 - Guide on the Role of Sports Volunteer Managers in Facilitating Inclusive Sports Volunteering to Facilitate Culturally Sensitive and Inclusive Sport Engagement
- 4 - Guide on Volunteering in Sports Events.

At the core of UVMIS lies the idea that addressing the sports volunteer management issues of tomorrow requires a better trained, qualified and recognised volunteer manager. A professional that can think and act strategically and is equipped with the latest skills and scientific concepts to organise effectively. Through the state-of-the-art report, it was found that there is an overall lack of resources throughout Europe for training sport volunteer managers to this level.

UVMIS contributes to closing the gap between European countries and addressing the overall need by creating new training opportunities and resources which raise the capacity of sports organisations and communities to offer competitive and noncompetitive sports. The main results, consisting of higher education curriculum aimed at experienced sports volunteer managers and four practical guides on ethical codes, EU values in volunteering, inclusive volunteering and event volunteering addresses the needs of volunteer managers and sports organisations in acquiring the necessary skills and insights and sets a high standard for future resources and qualifications for sport volunteer managers. Through the state-of-the-art report and policy brief (forthcoming in 2026), it is shown the need in Europe and provides recommendations for decision makers to improve policies around sports volunteer management training and qualifications.

Read more about UVMIS and find project results [here](#).

The guides take into consideration two distinct approaches to volunteer management (Meijs, Hoogstad, 2001):

- **Membership Management (MM)** describes organisations like local sports clubs where volunteers are a cohesive, existing group with a strong, shared culture. Expectations are often implicit, recognition is based on long-term service, and volunteers often dedicate many hours.
- **Programme Management (PM)** is used for specific, time-limited projects, such as large or smaller scale sporting events. This model involves recruiting volunteers for defined roles, tasks and responsibilities.

This **Guide on the role of Sports volunteer managers in facilitating inclusive sports volunteering to facilitate culturally sensitive and inclusive sport engagement** is designed for sports volunteer

managers who want to strengthen their ability to create inclusive environments for volunteers within their sports organisations.

The objectives of the guide are therefore to:

- **Clarify what inclusion means** in the context of sports volunteering.
- **Show why inclusion is essential** for organisations, volunteers, and society.
- **Highlight both the opportunities and the challenges** of inclusive practices.
- **Provide practical strategies and recommendations** that can be adapted to different contexts.
- **Inspire managers** through real stories of volunteers and volunteer managers across Europe.

This guide is meant as a flexible resource, offering frameworks, principles, and practical ideas that managers can adapt to their own national, cultural, and organisational contexts. In line with European values such as equality, human dignity, and solidarity, it encourages reflection on how sport can be a space where everyone feels welcome and empowered to contribute.

Finally, in this guide, there is a section that will showcase real-life examples from volunteers and volunteer managers across Europe and they will be highlighted in **green** for easier detection. Throughout their experiences, you will discover practical solutions, strategies, and approaches that have been successfully implemented, offering inspiration and ideas that can be adapted to their own organisations.

## Understanding inclusion in sports volunteering

### Inclusion, diversity and participation

#### What does it mean?

According to the **European Charter of the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers**<sup>1</sup> inclusive volunteering is based on essential practices such as the **recognition of volunteers' diversity** (age, background, disability, etc.), **equal access** to volunteering opportunities, and the **active participation** of volunteers in decision-making.

Building on this European approach, inclusive volunteering can be understood through **three complementary pillars**:

**Diversity** refers to the variety of individual characteristics and backgrounds – such as age, gender, ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic situation, or life experiences. **It reflects the richness of society and the multiple perspectives that strengthen collective action.**

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, *European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers*, 2012, available online: [https://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/volunteering\\_charter\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/pdf/volunteering_charter_en.pdf).

**Participation** means the meaningful involvement of all volunteers, not only in activities but also in decision-making. Inclusion is not just about “opening the door”; **it is about guaranteeing that each person has a real voice in shaping the life of the organisation.**

**Inclusion** is about creating conditions that allow diversity to flourish. It goes beyond simple representation: inclusion ensures that every volunteer feels legitimate, respected, and empowered to contribute fully. **It involves practices, culture, and attitudes that create spaces where everyone can thrive.**

In the field of sport, these three dimensions are particularly significant. A **sports club** that values diversity, adapts to the needs of its volunteers, and fosters active participation becomes more than just a place of practice: **it becomes a driver of social cohesion, fairness, and community wellbeing.**

**Two complementary concepts** help to understand inclusion in volunteering: volunteerability and recruitability.

- **Volunteerability** is an individual’s capacity to volunteer, including their willingness, capacity, and availability (Haski-Leventhal, Meijs & Huskins, 2010).
- **Recruitability** is the organisation’s capacity to reach, attract, and engage volunteers (Hustinx, Cnaan & Handy, 2010)

**Inclusion depends on both sides: supporting individuals to participate and ensuring organisations are open and ready to recruit inclusively.**

## Why is it essential?

Inclusive volunteering is not just a moral or ethical choice; it is a strategic approach that benefits volunteers, organisations, and society as a whole. Its importance can be understood across three interconnected dimensions:

### For volunteers

Inclusion is not only **beneficial for the organisation** — it also **transforms the volunteer experience** itself. When people feel welcome and respected, volunteering becomes a powerful driver of personal development:

- Ensure **meaningful participation** and opportunities to contribute, **regardless of background or ability.**
- Access **personal development, training, and leadership** roles.
- Build **social networks** and **transferable skills.**
- Experience a sense of **purpose, belonging, and empowerment.**
- Transform volunteering into a pathway for **personal and collective growth.**

### For organisations

By **welcoming people from diverse backgrounds, clubs, federations and event organisers** gain far more than additional volunteers. **Inclusive practices enhance the organisation’s ability to innovate, respond to challenges,** and thrive in a changing environment:

- Broaden the pool of **potential volunteers** by welcoming diverse backgrounds, ages, abilities, and experiences.
- Strengthen **resilience, creativity, and problem-solving** through different perspectives.
- Better reflect the communities they serve, enhancing **credibility** and **trust**.
- Improve **reputation, attracting partners, sponsors, and funding**.
- Be better equipped to **adapt, respond to challenges**, and **sustain long-term volunteer engagement**.

### For society

The impact of inclusion goes **beyond clubs and individuals**: it also strengthens the social fabric. Sport becomes a lever for integration, equality, and wellbeing in communities:

- Strengthen **democracy, solidarity, and social cohesion**.
- Challenge stereotypes and foster **mutual understanding**.
- **Reduce social barriers** and promote active citizenship and equal opportunities.
- Transform sports clubs and events into **spaces of social integration, health, and wellbeing**.
- Contribute to building fairer, more **resilient societies**, in line with **European values**.

## Challenges to consider as a volunteer manager

While the benefits are clear, inclusion is not automatic. Sports organisations may face **several obstacles** when putting inclusive principles into practice:

**Resistance to change:** attachment to traditions or fear of disrupting established practices.

**Unconscious bias:** stereotypes influencing recruitment, task allocation, or recognition of volunteers.

**Limited resources:** lack of funds, facilities, or training to adapt.

**Difficulties of communication and integration:** differences in language, culture, or social background can hinder inclusion if not addressed.

**Lack of training and awareness:** managers and coordinators may not have the tools or skills to implement inclusion effectively.

These challenges should **not discourage organisations**. On the contrary, **they are opportunities to grow**, provided they are addressed with openness, gradual steps, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

## From theory to practice: stories of inclusive sports volunteering

This guide is designed to be practical, offering clear steps to help volunteer managers make sport more inclusive. To support this, three current volunteer coordinators and previous sports volunteers themselves, shared their experiences and tips. The stories of **Claudia, Habib, and Alina** show how

volunteering can foster **personal growth, community engagement, and social inclusion**. Building on their experiences, the next sections provide concrete **tools and strategies** to help apply principles of **diversity and inclusion** in everyday volunteer recruitment and management.

### Discover the interviewees:

**Claudia**, from Austria, is a five-time Paralympian in Alpine skiing and currently works as a project manager for international sporting events. Although she first experienced volunteering through her professional role, she quickly developed a strong commitment to engaging and supporting volunteers. Claudia now coordinates teams for major events, combining the skills she acquired through her experiences as an elite athlete, volunteer, and professional.

**Habib** is the founding president of Profession Sport et Loisirs Mayotte (France). In a territory marked by significant immigration, particularly from the Comoros, the association promotes sport as a tool for social and professional inclusion, especially for young people furthest from employment. Deeply involved in local community life, Habib has also served as a delegate to the International Council of the Games of the Indian Ocean Islands.

**Alina** first discovered volunteering through a national multi-sport event in Romania, where she assisted with logistics and accreditation. Over time, as she took part in various sporting events as a volunteer, her curiosity and dedication led her from basic volunteer tasks to coordinating teams and managing events. Today, she combines her volunteer background with professional roles in sports event management.

## How can volunteer recruitment become more inclusive?

The European Union promotes inclusive recruitment through a framework of equality and anti-discrimination laws, ensuring fair access to opportunities for everyone. **The EU's approach, based on the principle of equal treatment, prohibits discrimination on grounds such as religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation in areas including employment, education, and access to goods and services.**

Becoming more inclusive often means rethinking the very nature of volunteering. **Different volunteers seek different kinds of benefits:** for some, it is a sense of belonging and community; for others, it may be skills development, social connection, or pathways to employment. **Inclusive volunteer management acknowledges this diversity** of motivations and ensures that the benefits of volunteering are not uniform but tailor-made.

In the context of sports volunteering, this means **creating recruitment practices that are open, transparent, and accessible to all**. Organisations should focus on volunteers' interests, potential, and skills rather than personal characteristics, removing barriers that might prevent people from minority groups or with specific vulnerabilities from participating.

To turn inclusive principles into practice, volunteer managers can follow these **key steps in their recruitment process**:

### Plan your recruitment strategies to ensure accessibility



Develop recruitment processes that consider the different needs, profiles, and capacities of potential volunteers. This can include:

- **Design a diversity charter<sup>2</sup>**
- **Outreach to diverse volunteer sources<sup>3</sup>**
- **Design applications that encourage volunteers to share not only their needs but also their skills, experiences, and motivations.**

#### Claudia's tips:

- Create accessible and appealing **recruitment materials using clear language, inclusive visuals, and tools like QR code.**
- **Use volunteer platforms** to facilitate contact and management of new volunteers. It simplifies communication and helps match volunteers' interest and abilities with available roles.

**Claudia:** *"We use a QR to connect with potential volunteers and follow up with a phone interview to better understand their interests and availability".*

*"For managing new volunteers and assigning roles, we use the Rosterfy platform, where volunteers can express their preferences and expectations".*

## How can women be encouraged to step into leadership roles in sports volunteering?

When it comes to volunteering, **women face additional barriers**. Gender stereotypes, particularly in traditionally male-dominated sports, can discourage them from stepping forward or taking on leadership responsibilities. **The scarcity of visible female role models in leadership and volunteer positions also makes it harder for women to envision themselves** in these roles or aspire to higher responsibilities. Many women additionally face **time constraints** due to balancing other personal or family commitments, which can limit their availability for volunteering or leadership tasks.

**Alina:** *"At first, I was just helping. Then, step by step, I started coordinating logistics, working with companies, and managing volunteers. The organisers trusted me and it changed everything for me".*

**Sports organisations can contribute to meaningful change by understanding the barriers women face and adjusting volunteering opportunities within their clubs accordingly.** At the same time, they can engage in broader, strategic thinking to review and transform their practices, fostering an environment where women are encouraged, supported, and empowered to take on leadership and decision-making roles.

To foster inclusion and empower women in your organisation, you can:

<sup>2</sup> Have a look at the [EU Platform of Diversity Charter](#) for inspiration

<sup>3</sup> Connect with schools, special schools, social centers, and other civic groups to identify and approach new potential volunteers



- **Improve flexibility in roles and schedules:** Offer shorter shifts or divide responsibilities
- **Develop a gender chart:** Outline commitments to equality and define clear procedures to prevent discrimination<sup>4</sup>
- **Challenge gender stereotypes:** Encourage women to coordinate events or to take on additional responsibilities
- **Highlight female role models:** Showcase female volunteers through your communication channels

**Alina** to women thinking about volunteering: *“Start small, but start. Volunteering is a door: it can open to friendship, learning, and even a career. Don’t worry about not knowing enough, you’ll learn by doing”.*

**Alina:** (As a volunteers manager): *“Even when I was in charge, I stayed on the same level as everyone else. Volunteers felt like part of the team, not above it”. (...) “Through sport, people connect, learn, and grow and everyone, including women, can step forward and lead”.*

## How can sports volunteering become a driver of integration for refugees and migrants?

**Habib:** *“The most vulnerable young people, often migrants or undocumented, are the ones most in need of support and more eager to engage as volunteer”.*

Sports volunteering can play a **powerful role in fostering social connection, language learning, confidence building, and mutual understanding between refugees, migrants, and local communities.** However, newcomers often face multiple barriers to participation: language differences, unfamiliarity with local systems, cultural misunderstandings, lack of information about opportunities, or even legal and administrative obstacles. These challenges can lead to their underrepresentation in volunteering or to them being given only limited, peripheral roles.

To tackle this, **Habib explains that small changes and some preparation make a huge difference.** Indeed, various studies show that many asylum seekers and refugees volunteer because it gives them meaningful activity, helps them feel part of society, and fosters social connection. They may also **bring skills developed in their home countries** that can benefit the sport sector in Europe. Moreover, **volunteering in sport can serve as a pathway to employment, offering practical experience, professional networks, and transferable skills.**

**What better sector than sport to combine community integration, personal development, and professional opportunities for refugees and migrants.**

To do so, **your organisation can:**

<sup>4</sup> Useful guideline document here:

<https://www.iwqinsighthub.org/insight/guidelines-for-gender-responsive-sports-organizations>

- **Learn about volunteers' cultural backgrounds:** Be aware of holidays, religious practices, or dietary restrictions and be flexible with rules and routines and respect different communication styles. Example: Some cultures value direct feedback, others prefer more subtle approaches.
- **Use simple words and short sentences:** Avoid acronyms, jargon, or idioms. Example: "Hand out a water bottle to each player" instead of "help with refreshment".

#### Habib's tip:

- **Empower volunteers through gradual responsibility:** Start with simple, achievable tasks. Example: Assign small, manageable roles that allow them to contribute immediately
- **Gradually increases responsibility**
- **Recognise and celebrate contributions.** Example: Offer opportunities to represent your organisation at external activities

**Habib:** *"We've built a team of young, talented people who have never held responsibilities before. Seeing them speak in front of decision-makers is my biggest pride".*

*"Opportunities like attending events in mainland France give them new horizons, build their self-esteem, and strengthen their connection to society".*

## How can volunteer roles be adapted to the abilities of people with disabilities?

**Claudia:** *"Before each event, I meet the volunteers to understand their expectations and needs. We adapt the roles to their wishes and skills".*

Inclusion of people with disabilities in sports volunteering means recognising them as valued contributors, not just participants or beneficiaries. Yet many face structural barriers: inflexible role descriptions, inaccessible facilities, limited transport, lack of assistive tools, and organisational cultures that underestimate their skills. These barriers often lead to exclusion or to disabled volunteers being given only peripheral roles.

True inclusion means moving beyond one-size-fits-all models. **Organisations should take an individualised approach, focusing on each person's abilities, interests, and support needs.** This can involve adapting tasks, offering flexible scheduling, providing assistive technologies, or redistributing responsibilities.

When volunteer roles are meaningfully adapted, disabled people can contribute to fully strengthening team dynamics, enriching the volunteer community, and building a more equitable sporting environment.

To create better environment and opportunities for people with disabilities, volunteer managers can:

- **Ensure physical accessibility:** Review and adapt facilities, equipment, and workspaces to accommodate mobility aids or other requirements
- **Be creative with role design:** Adapt tasks to individual needs, such as shorter shifts, flexible scheduling, or the use of assisting technologies

- Focus on abilities, not limitations

## Practical Scenarios

### Scenario 1

**Andrea manages volunteers at a local sports event and wants to include Tomas, who uses a wheelchair.**

She reviews the tasks and identifies that Tomas can help at the registration desk, handing out schedules and directing participants. Claudia ensures the desk is accessible, provides a raised table, and gives Tomas clear instructions on handling peak times. She pairs him briefly with an experienced volunteer for guidance during the first shift. By making these small adjustments, Tomas can work independently, contribute meaningfully, and feel fully included in the team.

### Scenario 2

**Lucas coordinates volunteers at a local sports club and wants to include Sara, who has visual impairment, as a regular volunteer.**

He starts by discussing with Sara to understand her needs, skills, and interests. Together, they identify that Sara can take charge of managing the weekly volunteer schedule, coordinating communication between coaches and volunteers, and mentoring new volunteers. Lucas ensures Sara has access to accessible digital tools, such as a screen-reader-friendly scheduling app, and provides her with a quiet workspace near the club's office for focused tasks. He pairs Sara with an experienced volunteer for the first few weeks to help her get acquainted with the club's routines and team dynamics. By making these adjustments, Sara can contribute consistently, build strong relationships within the club, and feel fully integrated as a valued member of the team.

## How can structured training and recognition make volunteering more inclusive?

Inclusive volunteering does not happen by chance. It requires preparation, communication, and recognition. **Guidance and recognition are powerful tools that help volunteers feel confident, valued, and part of a team.** By offering learning opportunities before, during, and after their engagement, managers can ensure that everyone, regardless of background or ability, understands their role and feels ready to contribute. Recognition then reinforces this sense of belonging by showing that every effort counts and every contribution matters.

## Preparing volunteers

**Short, structured briefings before events help volunteers understand their roles and feel ready to contribute.** No need for formal training according to Alina. Simple and clear instructions reduce confusion and ensure everyone can participate meaningfully.

**Alina:** *"I always try to organise a short briefing before the event to help everyone feel ready and anticipate needs and questions. It is a way to prevent stress during the event too".*

**Claudia:** *"Before each event, I meet the volunteers to understand their expectations and needs. We adapt the roles to their wishes and skills".*

**Mentoring is a powerful way to prepare volunteers** and make inclusion tangible. Habib often pairs newcomers with experienced team members who can provide guidance, make them feel useful, and allow volunteers to learn on the job.

**Habib:** *"Volunteers are prepared by working alongside experienced team members and receiving instructions from the beginning".*

## Recognition

Recognition is equally important. When volunteers are acknowledged for their contributions — through certificates, verbal appreciation, increased responsibilities, or public visibility — they gain a stronger sense of belonging and purpose. **Volunteers' managers can easily do so offer recognition through certificates, verbal appreciation, increased responsibilities, or public visibility.** Recognition is not just symbolic. For many volunteers, especially the minorities mentioned in this guide, these forms of acknowledgement can have a very tangible impact.

A volunteer certificate, letter of recommendation, or public recognition can strengthen a CV, demonstrate soft skills and commitment to potential employers, or show evidence of integration in the community. For some, this recognition can support job applications, university admissions, or residency procedures. In other words, **recognition transforms volunteering from an informal activity into a visible, valued experience that can open doors to new opportunities for everyone.**

**Alina:** *"We always make sure to thank volunteers. With certificate and with invitations to the award ceremony. It's their moment too".*

**Alina:** *"For many young people, volunteering is also a way to build their CV ; to show what they have done. It gives them something real to talk about in future studies and jobs".*

## Conclusions

Throughout this guide, it has been explored what inclusion means in sports volunteering. Moving from understanding its principles to seeing how they can be put into practice. It has been learned that inclusion is not an abstract concept but a daily commitment: ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, ability, or experience, can find their place and contribute to sport.

The stories shared by Claudia, Habib, and Alina have shown that **inclusion takes many forms and usually requires preparation and very often quite big changes and shifts of mentality are required within the organisation.** Inclusion and good volunteer management are inseparable. When volunteer managers design clear, fair, and supportive systems, they strengthen both the volunteerability of individuals and the recruitability of their organisation. Over time, this dynamic expands the organisation's inclusion potential, allowing more people to participate meaningfully. **Inclusion is therefore not only a goal to pursue but also a natural outcome of thoughtful volunteer management.**

**Remember:** inclusion is not about perfection, but about intention and progress. Each small action (a conversation, an adapted role, or a gesture of recognition) can make a meaningful difference and strengthen both your volunteers and your organisation.

Generally speaking, keep these key takeaways in mind:

- **Lead by example:** foster respect, empathy, and open communication
- **Reflect your community:** ensure your volunteers represent diverse backgrounds and experiences
- **Adapt, don't exclude:** find ways to make every task accessible and meaningful
- **Communicate clearly:** use simple, inclusive language, and other appropriate tools
- **Recognise and celebrate contributions:** every volunteer's effort deserves visibility
- **Create opportunities for growth:** mentoring and training are effective tools
- **Keep learning:** inclusion is a continuous process. Stay curious and ready to evolve

**To conclude,** here are some quotes from the volunteers interviewed that inspire a more inclusive approach to sports volunteering:

**Claudia:** "Adaptability is everything. Meet your volunteers, understand their expectations, and create roles that fit their strengths. Inclusion starts with listening". (...) "I see myself more as a service provider than a boss. Communication and empathy are the keys. Volunteers give their best when they feel heard and valued".

**Habib:** "Volunteering is an act of love and a way to grow personally and collectively. Inclusion is about giving opportunities and watching people rise".

**Alina:** "Through sport, people connect, learn, and grow. It's not just about competition, it's about friendship and belonging. When everyone works toward the same goal, we forget the differences".

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