



Upskilling Volunteer Managers in Sport | UVMIS

State of the Art report



Topic ID: ERASMUS-SPORT-2024-SCP

Project Number: 101184773

Version: v1

WP2. D2.1 D3

Output #1 State of the Art report on Sports Volunteer Manager in Europe

Deadline: 30.04.2025

The 'Upskilling volunteer managers in sport' (UVMIS) project aims to set a new standard and lay the foundations for transforming the supply of qualifications for volunteer sports management in Europe by creating a comprehensive curriculum at the higher education level, detailing what and how professionals need to learn, in order to meet critical contemporary and future challenges.

The project is led by the Rotterdam School of Management of Erasmus University in cooperation with partners such as the Centre for European Volunteering, the Dutch Hockey Association, ENGSO, NR Sports Volunteering Solutions, IGNITX, the French Federation Sport and Leisure Profession, CSV Trentino and Vytautas Magnus Univers



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 EACEA can be held responsible for them.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Table of Contents

The need for a State-of-the-Art report on volunteer management training	2
The Evi-Dems and UVMIS projects	2
The Methodology of this Report	2
Sports Volunteering Contexts	3
<i>The current issues and needs in Europe on volunteer management in Sports</i>	3
<i>Recommendations for Progress</i>	5
<i>Country Reports</i>	6
Italy	6
Lithuania.....	7
The Netherlands.....	9
France.....	10
Germany.....	12
Sweden.....	13
Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, Denmark	15
<i>Conclusion</i>	16
<i>Bibliography</i>	16

The need for a State-of-the-Art report on volunteer management training

The European sports landscape is fundamentally supported by volunteer participation, with sports being the largest voluntary, non-governmental organisational effort in Europe. Research has consistently shown that the involvement of volunteers is a key factor in the success and long-term sustainability of sports clubs, organisations, and events across the continent (Elmose-Østerlund et al., 2021; Koutrou & Kohe, 2021;2025; Nichols, 2017; Wicker & Breuer, 2013). Recent reports by the European Observatory on Sport and Employment (EOSE), as part of the V4V project (<https://www.v4v-sport.eu/>) have provided comprehensive insights into the current state of European and global sport volunteering, highlighting both challenges and opportunities in this sector. Despite this essential role, sports organisations often lack structured approaches to volunteer management, limiting their potential impact and effectiveness. Research examining barriers to sports volunteering has identified that structural obstacles, including education, training and occupation rates, can significantly reduce volunteering opportunities. Additionally, studies exploring volunteer experiences during international sporting events have revealed persistent challenges that occur at various stages of the volunteer lifecycle. Community sports associations (CSAs), which represent a major context for sports volunteering across Europe, encounter particular difficulties in volunteer retention and management due to their often-informal organisational structures. This report aims to examine the current challenges and opportunities around sports volunteer management (education) in Europe and to provide a platform for the further products created during the “Upskilling Volunteer Managers in Sport” (UVMIS) project.

The Evi-Dems and UVMIS projects

The “Enhancing Volunteer Impact – Developing European Management Standards” ([EVI-DEMS](#)) Erasmus+ project was a precursor to the current project: [UVMIS](#), and focused on enhancing volunteer impact by increasing opportunities for existing and future volunteer managers to receive proper training. The project aims to ensure that volunteers across Europe are managed in a more ethical way and more effectively through properly trained and qualified managers. Its main result was a European full master level pre-experience curriculum on volunteer management, providing a clear foundation for professionals in the field. The UVMIS project extends this work by specifically focusing on how to improve and expand the quality of volunteer management in sports organisations through post-experience learning materials. UVMIS seeks to identify concrete ways to enhance volunteer management quality across the diverse landscape of European sports organisations and events.

The Methodology of this Report

In order to create an image of the current offering and needs within Europe around volunteer manager training in sports each partner has conducted desk research, looking into the formal and non-formal offering within their own (or other relevant) countries, this includes Higher education- and post-experience (bachelor’s/ masters), Volunteer centres and other infrastructure parties, sports federations and umbrellas and private trainers. This examination was used to create the various country reports found in this report. In order to contextualise their findings and to assess the issues and needs around volunteer management in sports and the necessary training offering and developments, each partner conducted a focus group with 10 participants representing relevant stakeholder groups such as sports

federation presidents, sports event experts, current volunteers, volunteer managers etc. The insights generated from these events, were used to write the European level analysis of this report. All the collected data will be made available on the UVMIS website.

Sports Volunteering Contexts

The sports volunteering world is highly diverse due to the variety in sports, societal roles it takes on and country modalities. How sports are organized determines the involvement of volunteers. Based on internal project consortium dialogues and confirmed by the focus groups held by partners, four main sports volunteering contexts were determined, as seen in the figure below. Based on the work of Meijs & Hoogstad (2001) we distinguish between programme management and member management. Programme management is typical for managing volunteers when organizing one off or recurring events as a dedicated organization. Member management is seen in sports club or associations, where the daily running of the organisation or event organisation is conducted, using their members. Both contexts come with different dynamics, skills and training needs. Managing volunteers in a member management context differs from managing them in a programme management context. Sports event organisers tend to be more professionalized, more often requiring pre-set protocols and strict organisation. Clubs need training in continuity, onboarding, and volunteer coordination. Events, among other things, need training for quick role fulfillment and volunteer logistics.

Programme Management	Member Management
Large one-off itinerant events Mega-event organization (MEO)	Running a local sports club
Community one-time/ recurring events Community event organization (CEO)	Events organized by local sports club

The current issues and needs in Europe on volunteer management in Sports

The comprehensive analysis of volunteer management education across multiple European countries reveals a critical systemic gap in the professionalisation and formal recognition of sports volunteer management, despite volunteers constituting the backbone of European sports organisations and events.

Critical gaps in educational framework - Sports volunteer management education suffers from several critical structural deficiencies that undermine professional development in this field. No examined country offers comprehensive, long-term educational programmes exclusively focused on volunteer management within the sports sector. Instead, relevant skills are typically embedded within broader sports management frameworks or addressed through short-term, project-based training initiatives that lack continuity and depth. **The resulting knowledge fragmentation prevents the development of a cohesive body of professional expertise, as volunteer managers must piece together relevant skills from disparate sources without clear educational pathways.**

Regional disparities and inconsistencies - Significant variations exist in the availability and quality of volunteer management education across different European regions. Northern European countries like Belgium and Denmark possess a relatively richer offering and more advanced educational frameworks with some specialised components, though still lacking formal certifications for volunteer management. Eastern and Southern European nations, including Bulgaria, Spain, and Portugal, show more pronounced gaps, relying heavily on project-based learning and informal knowledge transfer. This **uneven development creates inequitable access to professional development opportunities** and contributes to varying standards of volunteer management practice across the continent.

The need for a shift from tactical to strategic thinking and acting – Clubs often need a significant shift in mindset—from **simply addressing short-term needs to fostering long-term volunteer value**. This involves moving beyond traditional focuses like recruitment and retention, and instead embracing the concept of the volunteer journey, including an understanding of different life phases. Equally important is recognizing that value creation must be mutual; what volunteers gain is just as critical as what clubs receive. Embracing the "open club" concept, organizations are encouraged to connect externally and reimagine their operational models. However, implementing such strategic changes requires training in change management, which presents a challenge—many volunteer-led clubs face significant capacity barriers, often lacking the time or personnel needed to drive these shifts forward.

Prevalence of non-formal learning - Prevalence of Non-Formal Learning The absence of structured formal education has created a dependency on non-formal and informal learning pathways for acquiring volunteer management competencies. Sports organisations frequently develop internal training programmes to address immediate operational needs, while project-based initiatives funded through temporary grants provide additional educational opportunities. While valuable, these approaches are characterised by:

- **Inconsistent quality** and content across different organisations and regions.
- **Limited recognition** of acquired competencies beyond the specific organisational context.
- **Sustainability challenges** due to reliance on short-term funding mechanisms.
- **Difficulty in establishing professional standards** without recognised educational frameworks.
- **Challenges in Professional Recognition.**

The lack of structured education directly impacts the professional recognition of volunteer management as a distinct discipline requiring specialised knowledge and skills. Across multiple European countries, sport **volunteer coordinator roles often lack formal recognition in professional classification systems**, undermining their perceived importance and limiting career development opportunities. Without standardised certification processes or recognised qualifications, sport volunteer managers struggle to validate their expertise and secure appropriate professional positioning within organisational hierarchies.

Funding and sustainability issues - Educational initiatives targeting volunteer management frequently suffer from precarious funding arrangements that undermine long-term sustainability. Many identified training programmes operate on project-based funding cycles from sources including Erasmus+ or European Social Fund grants, creating inherent instability in the educational infrastructure. This **funding uncertainty discourages substantial investment in curriculum development**, limits

program expansion, and creates a cycle of discontinued initiatives that prevents the establishment of consistent educational pathways.

Opportunities for standardisation - The identified gaps present **significant opportunities for developing standardised educational frameworks** that could enhance volunteer management professionalisation across Europe. **Creating a European-wide competency framework specifically tailored for sports volunteer management would provide a foundation for consistent education and training.** This standardisation could facilitate the development of recognised certification pathways, allowing sport volunteer managers to demonstrate their qualifications across organisational and national boundaries while establishing clear professional development trajectories.

Technology-enhanced learning potential - Digital transformation offers promising avenues for **addressing geographical and resource-based disparities** in volunteer management education. Online and blended learning approaches could democratise access to specialised training across regions with varying educational infrastructure development levels. Virtual communities of practice could facilitate knowledge exchange between experienced sport volunteer managers and newcomers to the field, creating informal mentoring relationships that supplement formal education. These **technological solutions present cost-effective approaches to scaling educational provision while maintaining quality and relevance.**

Collaborative development opportunities - Enhancing volunteer management education requires **coordinated action between multiple stakeholders across the European sports ecosystem.** Educational institutions, sports organisations, volunteer associations, and policymakers must establish collaborative frameworks to develop relevant, practice-oriented training pathways. Such **partnerships could facilitate the co-creation of curricula that balance theoretical foundations with practical application,** ensure alignment with sector needs, and create sustainable educational models that transcend individual organisational capabilities.

Recommendations for Progress

Addressing the identified gaps requires systematic intervention at multiple levels of the European sports education landscape. Key recommendations include:

- **Developing specialised modules** within existing sports management programmes that provide focused volunteer management education.
- **Creating standalone certification programmes** that offer accessible professional development pathways for practicing volunteer managers.
- **Establishing validation systems** for skills acquired through informal and non-formal learning to recognise existing expertise.
- **Securing sustainable funding** mechanisms that support long-term educational infrastructure development beyond project cycles.
- **Fostering cross-border knowledge exchange** between countries with more developed systems and those with significant gaps.
- **Integrating sport volunteer management competencies** into national and European qualification frameworks to enhance recognition.

- **Developing a comprehensive higher education level curriculum** in order to consolidate existing knowledge, address current and future needs, and provide a European platform.

The systematic development of structured volunteer education represents an essential investment in the future of European sports. By professionalising volunteer management through comprehensive education, the sector can address current challenges in volunteer recruitment, retention, and coordination while building sustainable frameworks for engaging the voluntary workforce that remains vital to European sports delivery.

Country Reports

Italy

Project Partner: Non-Profit Network-CSV Trentino (CSV Trentino)

The training and validation of volunteer managers in Italy, in the sports sector, involves a combination of formal education, informal training and certification processes. At a general level, however, **there is a lack of specific and comprehensive training that allows the subject of sports volunteer management to be explored in depth**, except for a few cases (e.g. Sport Federations). As already emphasized, the **current training proposals only deal with the topic in a transversal and optional manner within the courses, failing to provide the right knowledge and tools**. Moreover, the focus is often on the management of human resources in sports without going into the specifics of the figure of the volunteer or – in the other hand – the focus is on the volunteer without being specific on sports.

The materials produced by the UVMIS project could be used in all areas presented. With universities it would entail a more institutional dialogue, and it is more difficult for them to be integrated into university curricula, we see it more feasible to use the materials in more local contexts, through the intermediary of national Volunteer Centres (CSVs) or other sport voluntary associations. From the analysis conducted, the training for the management of sports volunteers in Italy presents a combination of formal and informal education courses:

Higher education - Italy offers training through various programmes:

- **Bachelor's Degree Programmes:** The Bachelor's Degree in Management of Sport and Sports Events at LIUC University (Carlo Cattaneo University) provides fundamental knowledge in sports management, social sciences and organisational behaviour. There is no specific focus on volunteer management, but it is an issue that can be covered in some courses in a transversal way. Another example is the Bachelor's Degree in Tourism, Sport and Event Management at the University of Bozen/Bolzano.
- **Master's Degree:** The Master's Degree Course in Management of Sport and Sporting Activities at the Pegaso Telematic University provides a cultural background and skills for planning, conducting and managing sporting activities. Also in this case, the management of volunteers or voluntary organisations is not provided on a specific course but only through transversal insights. A more specific example is the Master in Management of Sport and Sports Events (MASPES) at the University of Milan-Bicocca which offers advanced studies in specialised areas such as sports management and the management of non-profit organisations. Another similar

example is the Master in Sport System Management at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

Validation and certification in higher education is generally achieved through the accumulation of CFUs (University Educational Credits), equivalent to ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). Successful completion of courses, internships and a final thesis leads to certification.

One aspect to be emphasized is the fact that there are no long-term courses on volunteer management in sports. There are only courses that are often optional or only a few hours long. Furthermore, it is possible to find courses on human resources management in the field of sport, but in many cases, they concern operational staff, without making a distinction between operators and volunteers.

National Volunteer Support Centres - The Volunteer Support Centres (CSV) play - nationwide, divided by territories - a crucial role in informal training and support for volunteer managers, in every sector, including sport. They offer workshops, seminars, mentoring programmes and training that focus on practical skills such as team management, conflict resolution, event planning and people-raising (®, 2024). Certification is often provided through certificates of attendance or badges that recognise the completion of specific training modules. **Again, however, these courses are of short duration and organised at the discretion of the organisation.** There are some CSVs that decide to not organise trainings with a focus on the management of volunteers in sports.

Sports federations - The Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI), and various national sports federations offer targeted training programmes for sports volunteer managers. These programmes include coaching courses, leadership training and workshops on sports governance. Certification is generally awarded through official diplomas or nationally and internationally recognised licenses (olimpica, 2025).

CONI Trento's Academy of Sports Volunteering is a specific example of how sport and volunteer management are explored as closely related topics. The Accademia del Volontariato Sportivo was created with the aim of: creating a stable body for the education and training of sports volunteers to offer support for the organisation and dissemination of sports activities at all levels; preparing seminars, programmes and actions to encourage, coordinate and manage the inclusion of volunteers within the world of sport; and giving recognition to the mentality of volunteering as an opportunity for personal and social growth (Mora, (n.d.)).

Lithuania

Project Partner: Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas

Sport volunteering in Lithuania remains underdeveloped and fragmented (Čingienė, 2019). While examples of effective practice exist, particularly around major sporting events, **the lack of strategic leadership, consistent funding, and institutional support has prevented the emergence of a stable and professional volunteering infrastructure** (discussion, 2025). The sector continues to function in an ad hoc manner, reliant on short-term projects and isolated initiatives.

Evolution and Early Development - Lithuania's sport volunteering sector has evolved unevenly over the past two decades. A degree of momentum was generated in the early 2000s with the founding of the Lithuanian Sports Volunteers Association and Lithuania's involvement in hosting international competitions. These events elevated public awareness and encouraged broader participation. However, **no long-term frameworks were developed to sustain this engagement** beyond specific events.

Current Formats and Organizational Structures - Currently, sport volunteering in Lithuania is largely driven by two formats: large-scale sporting events and club-based initiatives (Krajňáková, Šimkus, Pilinkienė, & Grabowska, 2018) (Mikalauskas, Šimkus, & Brusokas, 2016). Major events such as marathons or international tournaments tend to be well-organised and attract numerous volunteers. These roles are typically structured and include basic training, but **volunteer engagement often ends once the event concludes, leaving little lasting organisational capacity** (discussion, 2025). Meanwhile, sports clubs—especially in basketball and football—offer more continuous involvement but often rely on a small group of dedicated individuals, usually supporters or local organisers, rather than formal volunteer structures.

Volunteer Demographics and Motivation - The demographic profile of volunteers is dominated by secondary school students, who participate to fulfil mandatory civic engagement hours. This results in a high turnover and raises questions regarding motivation and the depth of civic commitment. Older volunteers are present but remain a minority, typically those with longstanding connections to specific clubs or events.

Institutional Support and Policy Framework - Institutional engagement with sport volunteering remains limited. Although the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport has shown occasional interest, its involvement is generally restricted to guidance and temporary funding opportunities. Broader legislative developments concerning volunteering are shaped by civic or social policy actors, with little consultation from the sports sector (discussion, 2025). **As a result, sport volunteering remains peripheral to national volunteering strategies.**

Funding Challenges and Sustainability - Funding continues to be one of the sector's most pressing issues. Many initiatives are dependent on short-term grants, particularly from European Union programmes. **These provide immediate benefits such as the development of training schemes or digital tools for volunteer management but do not lead to systemic or sustainable change.** When project cycles end, so too does the organisational knowledge and infrastructure associated with them.

Successful Models and Best Practices - Despite these challenges, some promising examples exist. Notably, events like the Lithuanian Velomaratonas (Vilnius Urban Cycling Marathon) **employ experienced volunteer managers and operate within structured frameworks**, ensuring a more consistent volunteer experience (discussion, 2025). Some clubs have also begun to integrate volunteers more fully into their daily operations, encouraging long-term engagement and community involvement. However, these remain isolated cases and are not yet representative of broader sectoral practice (Šimkus, Alekrinskis, & Bulotienė, 2012).

Educational Institutions and Professional Development - Higher education institutions have started to play a role in volunteer development, primarily through sport management and event

planning programmes. **However, there is no standardised curriculum for volunteer coordination, and content varies widely depending on institutional priorities. The role of the volunteer coordinator is not formalised in most organisations, and those performing such functions often do so without dedicated training or formal recognition.**

Cross-Sector Collaboration and Coordination - Another notable gap is the lack of coordination across sectors. **Sports organisations, educational institutions, NGOs, and government agencies operate largely in isolation.** This has hindered the development of shared standards, consistent training practices, and effective evaluation mechanisms (discussion, 2025). Promising grassroots and youth-led initiatives exist but are rarely scaled or embedded within broader policy frameworks.

Future Outlook and Development Needs - In sum, sport volunteering in Lithuania exhibits clear pockets of promise but lacks the cohesive infrastructure required for long-term development. Without stronger institutional support, consistent funding, and cross-sector collaboration, the sector will likely continue to rely on fragmented and temporary initiatives.

The Netherlands

Project Partner: The Dutch Hockey and Association (KNHB) & Rotterdam School of Management Erasmus University

The Netherlands lacks dedicated training programmes specifically for volunteer management in sports organisations, despite volunteers' essential role in this sector. Existing educational offerings from higher education institutions address volunteer management only as a component within broader sports management curricula. This gap reflects the ongoing professionalisation of Dutch sports organisations since the early 2000s (Hoeijmakers, 2022), with emerging roles like club managers beginning to address this need. Courses from sports bodies like NOC*NSF primarily target volunteer recruitment rather than management. **Industry professionals identify a need for specialised training combining theoretical knowledge with practical soft skills**—particularly balancing strategic thinking with execution while maintaining professional boundaries when working with volunteers. As sports organisations continue to professionalise, **this training gap represents a significant opportunity for educational development.**

Current State of Volunteer Management Training - In the Netherlands, various institutions offer training programmes related to the education of volunteer managers. However, **there is no training or course that explicitly focuses on managing volunteers.** This is part of the curriculum of these offered training programmes and courses, but the emphasis is generally more on managing a sports organisation, whether voluntary or professional. The focus here is on offering and facilitating sports activities, where volunteers are needed and deployed to carry them out. How management subsequently deals with volunteers is a point of attention and thus forms one of the components of the curriculum of the training programmes and courses offered in the Netherlands. However, it is (almost) never the main issue of the training or course.

Educational Institutions and Programme Types - Looking at the institutions that provide the current offerings, it can be concluded that these are mostly higher education institutions responsible for this. Almost all higher education institutions facilitate the bachelor's degree in Sports Science (Studiekeuze123.nl, (n.d.)), and a few also offer an associate degree (HAN, Associate degree sport –

buurtsportcoach deeltijd, (n.d.)) (Hanze, (n.d.)) (Windesheim, (n.d.)) or a minor (HAN, Ontwerpen impactstrategie Sport en Bewegen, (n.d.)) (HAN, Evenementenmanagement, (n.d.)). These programmes are followed by individuals who often have little to no work experience as professionals within the Dutch sports context and follow this program precisely to secure a place in the labour market within the sports context. This is the sports context in a broad sense. It can range from volunteer organisations, government institutions to professional commercial organisations.

Historical Development of Sports Management Education - The development of the Dutch training offerings is related to the professionalisation of the sports context, a trend that started around the turn of the century. During this period, more attention was paid to managing and organising sports because sports were increasingly seen as a means rather than an end (Hoeijmakers, 2022). To manage and organise sports properly, these training programmes were developed. Previously, there was already the training for physical education, the ALO.

Short-Term Courses by Sports Organisations - In addition to the offerings provided by educational institutions, organisations related to sports also offer training programmes, courses, and workshops. Think of the umbrella organisation NOC*NSF (Clubbase, (n.d.)), but also sports federations and regional or local organisations (Bunschoten, (n.d.)). The offerings they provide mostly consist of short-term courses or workshops that are offered several times a year. The emphasis here is mainly on recruiting new volunteers and not so much on managing current volunteers.

The Emergence of Association Management Roles - Because the role of professional volunteer manager within the context of the sports association is not yet standard, there is no specific training offering. A role that is increasingly standard within sports associations, however, is that of club manager. That this is a more common function within the sports context is reflected in the fact that a training programme has been developed for this (Verenigingsmanagement, (n.d.)).

An exception within the current offerings is the Club Coach training offered by NOC*NSF (Clubbas, (n.d.)). In this training, the professional is prepared to manage (voluntary) trainers and how to guide them in their development. The development of this training and the shaping of the Club Coach function align with the desire to further professionalize the sports (club). Looking at this further professionalization of sports, there is an increasing need for professionals in volunteer organisations in the sports context. These professionals lead volunteers within sports clubs but are also an executive force within these clubs and must comply with various increasing laws and regulations.

Future Needs for Volunteer Management Training - So, there is no training in the Netherlands that fully focuses on managing volunteers. During conversations with professionals in sports, it emerged that such training should focus on knowledge about clubs and soft skills. The former refers to the theoretical foundation of volunteer organisations and the motivation and activation of volunteers. The soft skills mainly concern the skills needed to function in such a situation. This includes the duality between strategic thinking and practical execution. It also involves the skills that are important for safeguarding one's own function. That you work with volunteers but do not become a 'super volunteer' yourself and that you are directed by volunteers but are still a professional in the organisation.

France

Project Partner: French Federation Sport and Leisure Profession

Sports volunteering in France shows shifting demographics: declining participation among over-65s alongside increased engagement from under-35s. The typical sports volunteer today is male, university-educated, and around 30 years of age. **Key challenges include time constraints, increasing regulatory requirements, and balancing these demands with volunteer motivations. The French state supports volunteer development through initiatives addressing attractiveness and skills recognition.** Three tiers of training exist: higher education programmes, short, certified courses for volunteer leaders, and mentor-specific training. These developments reflect the ongoing professionalisation of volunteer management in French sports organisations.

Current trends in sports volunteering - The prevalence of volunteering in sports should be viewed in the context of recent developments that impact on the ways in which volunteers give time to associations. Indeed, while the number of volunteers remains stable (despite a decline during COVID (INJEP, Les bénévoles des associations sportives : plus souvent des hommes jeunes et des parents, N°71, 2023)), the profile of volunteers is changing.

The proportion of volunteers aged over 65 continues to decline (IGÉSR, 2024), although they are generally committed on a regular basis to their volunteer activities (at least eight hours per month). Some perceived constraints are inherent to sports volunteering and can negatively impact engagement, particularly among those over 65. These include time investment, increased legislative and regulatory requirements, and access to new leisure activities. As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult to balance these constraints with the motivations of volunteers (Saurois & Viollet), the most frequently cited of which are meeting new people and sharing convivial moments (INJEP, Les bénévoles des associations sportives : plus souvent des hommes jeunes et des parents, N°71, 2023).

However, various available studies also show a **growing trend in the number of volunteers under the age of 35 in sports**. To confirm this trend, it is also observed that sport is the sector where young people remain the most engaged in the long term (mostly those occasionally engaged) (INJEP, Etat d'esprit et engagement des jeunes en 2024, 2024). Today in France, **the most common characteristics of sports volunteers are as follows: male, higher education graduates, and around 30 years old.**

Issues and Public Priorities in the Management of Sports Volunteers - In France, the state has historically supported volunteering, particularly in sports. The issue is multifaceted, but **two key aspects can be highlighted:**

1. **the attractiveness of sports volunteering and**
2. **the recognition of volunteers' skills (sport)**

These two challenges align with the need to improve the volunteer management skills of sports organisations.

At the same time, we find it important to mention that in the context of Major International Sporting Events, the Ministry of Labour defines one of the fundamental principles of volunteering as the rejection of all forms of discrimination and the prevention of any moral and/or sexual harassment (Ministère du Travail, 2022).

It is also recommended that, when a new volunteer joins an association, a written formalisation of expectations and all relevant information be provided. This allows the volunteer to commit with full awareness and helps prevent potential disappointments once the engagement begins. We conclude this focus by highlighting that public authorities consider that "the Paris 2024 Games have demonstrated that sports are a strong driver of engagement." (Ministère des sports, 2025)

Strengthening Volunteer Management Skills: What Training Programmes Are Available? In France, there is a wide range of training programmes that include a module on volunteer management in a sports context. These training programmes can be categorized into three distinct groups: 1) Higher education programmes, 2) Short courses, sometimes leading to certification, and 3) Training programmes for volunteer mentors.

Higher Education Programme - Higher education training programmes are offered by universities or private schools that provide *sports management* courses. These programmes include Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees, or University Diplomas designed for future professionals in the sports sector (such as managers or directors). They last several months or years and typically include a training module on Human Resources in sports, which covers volunteer management.

Short and Sometimes Certified Training Courses - These courses target leaders of sports organisations who do not have professional management skills in running a sports association. These leaders are usually elected volunteers responsible for managing other volunteers. The duration of these training sessions varies but tends to be a few hours or days to fit participants' personal and professional schedules. ***The Certificate of Training in Associative Management (CFGa), for example, includes a module on "Taking into account the specificity of the various stakeholders involved in associations and encouraging volunteer participation."***

Training for Volunteer Mentors - Mentor-specific training is slightly different. It is aimed at mentors who support volunteers on assignments (such as those in the *Service Civique* program). Unlike other volunteers, these individuals may receive a mission allowance or sign a commitment contract. Mentors are required to undergo training in volunteer support, which includes the "*Discovering Your Role as a Mentor*" module, lasting eight hours.

Training in sports volunteer management is essential to ensuring effective supervision and enhancing volunteer engagement in associations. Whether through university programmes, short courses for association leaders, or specific modules for volunteer mentors, these initiatives help professionalize volunteer management. **By strengthening these skills, sports stakeholders promote a structured and sustainable volunteer system, ensuring a lasting positive impact.**

Germany

Project Partner: NR Sports Volunteering Solutions

Germany's robust sport volunteering culture, engaging over 16 million people, represents a significant civil society asset. However, **the lack of professional recognition and standardised training for volunteer managers undermines this potential.** Despite supportive legal frameworks and institutional backing, **the field suffers from fragmented development pathways and inconsistent practices across**

regions. To capitalise on its strong foundation, **Germany must invest in structured training programmes, establish clear professional pathways for volunteer managers, and address demographic challenges in recruitment.** With targeted improvements, Germany can transform its already impressive volunteering infrastructure into a model of excellence for sport volunteer management.

The Landscape of Sport Volunteering in Germany - Germany has a long-standing tradition of civic engagement and volunteering, particularly within the field of sport, where more than 16 million people are actively involved in various roles. The country's robust network of sports clubs, supported by national federations and regional organisations, forms the backbone of this culture. Volunteering in sport is widely acknowledged as a pillar of civil society and is particularly prominent in amateur and grassroots sports. The environment is further sustained by favourable national policies, public funding schemes, and institutional support. However, despite the strong foundation, **the role of the sport volunteer manager is not yet fully recognized as a distinct professional profile.** Existing educational pathways and training initiatives only partially cater to the specific competencies required for effective volunteer coordination in sport (Freiwilligensurvey, 2014) (DOSB, Engagiert: Das Ehrenamt im Sport, 2020) (ZiviZ, 2021) (Hallmann & Fairley, Sports Volunteers Around the Globe. , 2018).

Educational Pathways for Volunteer Managers - While several German universities and vocational institutions offer programmes in sports management, nonprofit administration, and volunteer coordination, there is a notable absence of dedicated curricula tailored explicitly to sport volunteer managers. Training in this area is often embedded in broader educational offerings or handled informally at the club level, relying on experienced volunteers and ad hoc workshops organised by regional federations. Although this approach has worked historically, it lacks the consistency and professional structure necessary to elevate volunteer management to a higher standard across the country (University, n.d.) (e.V., 2022).

Legal and Policy Framework - The legal and policy framework in Germany provides important support for volunteers, including insurance coverage, tax incentives, and public recognition mechanisms. The German Olympic Sports Confederation (DOSB) plays a significant leadership role in shaping national strategies for volunteer engagement, while federal and state ministries contribute to funding sport-related initiatives. **Nonetheless, there is no standardized certification for volunteer managers,** and the development of professional pathways in this area remains fragmented and inconsistent (DOSB, Volunteer Strategy and Support Initiatives, (n.d.)) (Günther, Themistoklis, Kleissner, & Papić, 2022).

Challenges and Development Needs - Germany faces several challenges in upskilling volunteer managers, including the lack of a clearly defined professional identity for this role, inconsistent coordination practices across regions, limited access to context-specific training, and demographic imbalances in club membership and volunteer recruitment. Addressing these challenges requires the professionalisation of the role, the creation of structured training and certification programmes, and enhanced collaboration among universities, federations, and NGOs to co-design relevant curricula. Furthermore, stronger strategies for volunteer retention, generational renewal, and recognition are essential for long-term sustainability (Hallmann, Decision to Volunteer in Sport Organizations, (in press)) (Youth, 2022).

Future Potential - With its existing infrastructure, institutional capacity, and strong civic culture, Germany is well-positioned to become a leader in the field of sport volunteer management. Realizing this potential will require targeted investments in training, clearer career pathways, and comprehensive systems of support and recognition for those who manage and coordinate volunteer efforts in sport.

Sweden

Project Partner: European Non-Governmental Sports Organisations (ENGSO)

The Swedish sports sector is heavily reliant on volunteers, with much of its infrastructure sustained by their efforts. While a wide range of formal and non-formal institutions offer sport-related education, **there is currently a notable gap in structured, dedicated training for volunteer management** within the formal education system (Hult & Confederation, 2022). Volunteer board members of sport clubs do receive training, often organised on demand through the non-formal sector, but specific **modules or courses on volunteer management in sport are not widely available or formally documented**. Mentions of the voluntary sector may appear within broader sport-related courses, but concrete evidence of comprehensive training opportunities remains limited. Nevertheless, **Sweden's strong tradition of civil society engagement and government funding aimed at upskilling non-profit organisations presents an opportunity to develop targeted educational resources for sport volunteer managers**. Programmes like those offered by the Nordic Academy for Volunteer Management, the REPLAY 2.0 project, and EU-funded initiatives contribute valuable tools and frameworks that can be adapted to the sports context.

Given the critical role volunteers play in maintaining and advancing the Swedish sport sector—particularly in initiatives promoting sport for social change, **it is imperative that more structured efforts are made to build the capacity of sport volunteer managers**. Investing in tailored training and education will not only strengthen organisational effectiveness but also foster more inclusive and sustainable volunteer engagement in sport.

The Swedish Sporting Landscape - Sweden's sport system is built on a strong non-profit foundation that evolved alongside its welfare state. The Riksidrottsförbundet (RF-SISU) serves as the umbrella organisation responsible for coordinating the entire sport movement, distributing approximately SEK 2 billion yearly across 71 sports federations and over 20,000 clubs nationwide. This democratic structure has fostered impressive participation rates, with 41% of Swedes being sport club members and 90% of those under 20 having participated in at least one club (Fahlén & Stenling, 2016).

Swedish sports clubs operate primarily through volunteer efforts, with parents and trainers typically contributing their time without compensation. Each club belongs to one of the national Special Sport Federations based on the activities they offer, collectively organizing over 250 different sports. At the national level, the sport confederation, Swedish Sport Education (SISU), Swedish Olympic Committee, and special sport federations provide on-demand training for clubs, associations, and volunteer board members (Platform, 2024).

Training and Development Opportunities - RF-SISU, Sweden's dedicated sports education organisation, employs innovative methodologies like study-circles where club members follow a syllabus and share knowledge under peer leadership rather than formal instruction. SISU also functions as an

internal consultant for federations and clubs, publishes educational materials through SISU Sports Books, and manages the Bosön Education Centre—the heart of Swedish sports training and development (Lüdecke & Andersson, 2022).

The Bosön centre on Lidingö offers comprehensive educational programmes on sports leadership, coaching, and health management. While not explicitly focused on volunteer management, its courses incorporate relevant leadership principles applicable to volunteer coordination. Additionally, the Nordic Academy for Volunteer Management provides adaptable methodologies originally developed for cultural organisations that can benefit the sports sector.

Several initiatives specifically support volunteer development in sports. The Re-PLAY 2.0 Project at Umeå University promotes social inclusion through grassroots sports by connecting university students with young volunteer coaches. The V4V Sport Volunteering Tools project offers free online resources to improve recruitment, management, and training of sport volunteers across Europe, which is accessible to potential sport volunteer Managers in Sweden. The Swedish government provides grants for developing volunteer skills and increasing engagement within civil society organisations.

Academic and Community Support - Formal education related to sports management is available through 13 academic institutions in Sweden. Programmes like Malmö University's "Sport in Society" master's programme and courses at the Swedish School of Sport and Health Sciences provide foundational knowledge in sports organisation and leadership. Community initiatives such as Soccer Against Racism in Malmö, Malmöandan, and the Sport Child Right Network offer practical experience in volunteer coordination while addressing social issues.

The "Nordic Figurations of Volunteering" publication further supports volunteer professionalization by exploring volunteerism across Nordic countries, providing valuable insights for organisations seeking to enhance their volunteer management practices.

Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, Denmark

Project Partner: Centre for European Volunteering (CEV)

Volunteer Landscape - Training in sports volunteer management across Belgium, Bulgaria, Spain, Portugal, and Denmark reflects a mix of formal education programmes, short courses, and non-formal learning opportunities. While few programmes are exclusively focused on volunteer management in sports, many include relevant components that equip individuals with transferable skills for coordinating and managing volunteers within sports contexts.

Belgium offers a comprehensive landscape of sports management education. Notably, the Belgian Olympic Academy (BOA) delivers an advanced programme that combines theoretical knowledge with practical applications, including consultancy projects within sports organisations. Other programmes, such as HE VINCI's bachelor for Youth Workers and the Centrum voor Avondonderwijs home-study course, prepare individuals for social, event-based, and administrative roles in sports, often involving volunteer coordination. Advanced options include international and interdisciplinary programmes such as the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Sports Ethics and Integrity, emphasizing global governance, ethics, and anti-doping measures. UCLouvain's Master in Sport Management and VUB's International Football Business programme also offer practical and managerial training within specialized sports fields.

The LUNEX University programme, though located in Luxembourg, is accessible to Belgian residents and focuses on the digitalization of sports management, integrating practical project work and internships.

Bulgaria features formal degrees like the Master's in Sports Management at the National Sports Academy and undergraduate programmes at the New Bulgarian University. While not solely focused on volunteer management, these curricula incorporate event planning and leadership, which are disciplines which can be applicable to volunteer coordination. Additionally, projects like V Sport and Mundus Bulgaria's Volunteering in Sport have developed toolkits and training modules aimed at enhancing the capacity of sports clubs to engage and manage volunteers.

Spain lacks a long-term structured programme dedicated to managing sports volunteers. However, sports management education is available through various institutions such as Universidad Europea, UCAM, and the Johan Cruyff Institute. These programmes mostly address broader aspects of leadership, governance, and human resources in sports. Training for sports volunteers is supported through platforms like the Plataforma del Voluntariado de España, offering non-formal, short-term workshops and certification. Sports federations, including the Spanish Olympic Committee, occasionally provide targeted volunteer training related to event organisation.

Portugal does not offer higher education degrees specifically focused on volunteer management in sports, but several universities, including Universidade de Lisboa, Universidade Europeia, and University of Porto, provide bachelor's and master's programmes in sports management. These curricula emphasize areas like financial analysis, marketing, and strategic leadership. Students often engage with professional sports clubs through internships or fieldwork. Although volunteering is not a core focus, the skills developed are applicable to managing volunteer-based initiatives in the sports sector.

Denmark combines formal university education with vocational and non-formal training. Universities such as University of Southern Denmark, Aalborg University, and Copenhagen University offer programmes in Sports and Health, and Social Sport Sciences, integrating community-focused modules that align with volunteer engagement strategies. Vocational schools and programmes at institutions like University College Lillebælt and Copenhagen Business School also provide practical training. Non-formal education from organisations like Specialsport.dk, GAME Denmark, and national sports federations (DGI and DIF) equips individuals with planning, leadership, and communication skills, especially for those working with youth and vulnerable groups.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while **direct training programmes for sports volunteer management remain limited**, there are numerous opportunities across this sample of European countries for acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills through broader sports management education, hands-on training, and project-based learning. **Belgium and Denmark lead in combining formal and informal pathways**, while **Bulgaria and Spain rely more on project-based and non-formal initiatives**. Portugal, although focused more on general management, still provides strong foundational education relevant to volunteer coordination in sports.

Bibliography

- Elmose-Østerlund, K., Cuskelly, G., Høyer-Kruse, J., & Voldby, C. R. (2021). Building and sustaining organizational capacity in voluntary sports clubs: Findings from a longitudinal study. *Journal of Sport Management*, 35(5), 440-451.
- Koutrou, N., & Kohe, G. Z. (2021). Conceptualising landscapes of learning in the United Kingdom's volunteer football sector. *Sport, Education and Society*, 26(9), 982-997.
- Koutrou, N., & Kohe, G. Z. (2025). Sustainability, the Athens Marathon and Greece's sport event sector: lessons of resilience, social innovation and the urban commons. *Sport in Society*, 28(1), 57-82.
- Nichols, G. (2017). Volunteering in community sports associations: A literature review. *Voluntaristics Review*, 2(1), 1-75.
- Wicker, P., & Breuer, C. (2013). Understanding the importance of organizational resources to explain organizational problems: Evidence from nonprofit sport clubs in Germany. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 24, 461-484.
- Meijs, L., & Hoogstad, E. (2001). New ways of managing volunteers: combining membership management and programme management. *Voluntary Action*, 3(3), 41-61.
- Università del Volontariato®, "UNIVOL.," 2 October 2024. [Online]. Available: <https://www.univol.it/>.
- Formazione olimpica. olimpica, "Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano," 3 March 2025. [Online]. Available: <https://www.coni.it/it/formazione-olimpica.html>.
- Mora, P. "Volontariato sportivo," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://trento.coni.it/volontariato-sportivo.html>.
- Čingienė, V. 2019. "Governance of sports in Lithuania: Empirical findings towards challenging implications," in *Research handbook on sport governance*, Edward Elgar, p. 134–150.
- Focus group discussion, *personal communication, Kaunas, Lithuania (online-form)*. [Interview]. 15 April 2025.
- Krajňáková, E., Šimkus, A., Pilinkienė, V., and Grabowska, M. 2018. "Analysis of barriers in sports volunteering," *Journal of International Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 254-269.
- Mikalauskas, R., Šimkus A., and Brusokas, A. 2016. Sporto vadyba: Nuo sportinės veiklos teorinės paradigmos iki savanoriškos veiklos [Sport Management: from the theoretical paradigm of sporting activity to volunteering]: Monografija.

A. Šimkus, Alekrinskis, A., and Bulotienė, D. 2012. "Savanorių išlaikymo sporto organizacijose veiklos vertinimas [Evaluation of volunteer retention in sports organisations].," *Sporto Mokslas*, vol. 4, no. 70, pp. 29-37.

Hoeijmakers, R. 2022. Sportverenigingen in transitie?: verbreding van diensten, professionalisering en instrumenteel gedrag bij sportverenigingen tussen 2007 en 2021., Mulier Instituut.

Studiekeuze123.nl. "Opleidingen Sportkunde," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://www.studiekeuze123.nl/opleidingen?f=eyJ0ZXh0U2VhcmNoljpbllNwb3J0a3VuZGUiXX0%3D>.

HAN, "Associate degree sport – buurtsportcoach deeltijd," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://www.han.nl/opleidingen/associate-degree/sport-buurtsportcoach/deeltijd/>.

Hanze, "Sport," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://www.hanze.nl/nl/opleidingen/voltijd/associate-degree/sport?tab=tab2>.

Windesheim, "Sport in Zwolle (Associate degree, voltijd).," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://www.windesheim.nl/opleidingen/voltijd/ad/sport?uc=1>.

HAN, "Ontwerpen impactstrategie Sport en Bewegen," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://www.han.nl/opleidingen/cursus/ontwerpen-impactstrategie-sport-en-bewegen/>.

HAN, "Evenementenmanagement," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://www.minoren-han.nl/nl/150-evenementenmanagement>.

Clubbase, "E-learning Vrijwilligersmanagement," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://sportopleidingen.nl/opleidingen/957-vrijwilligersmanagement-online-module>.

Bunschoten, B. "Vrijwilligers vormen de motor van uw vereniging," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://sportplatformbunschoten.nl/sportplatform-biedt-cursus-aan-vrijwilligers/>.

Verenigingsmanagement, "Opleiding Verenigingsmanagement.," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://verenigingsmanagement.com/>.

Clubbas, "Clubkadercoach," (n.d.). [Online]. Available: <https://sportopleidingen.nl/opleidingen/971-clubkadercoach>.

INJEP. 2023. "Les bénévoles des associations sportives : plus souvent des hommes jeunes et des parents, N°71."

IGÉSR. 2024. "Le soutien de l'Etat en matière de vie associative, N°23-24,"

Saurois, A and Viollet, B. 2023. "Associations sportives : en finir avec la promesse de la valorisation du bénévolat ?,"

INJEP. 2024. "Etat d'esprit et engagement des jeunes en 2024,".

Comité National pour renforcer l'éthique et la vie démocratique dans le sport, 2023, "Pour un sport plus démocratique, plus éthique et plus protecteur,"

Ministère du Travail, du Plein Emploi et de l'Insertion. 2022. *“Recourir au bénévolat : Guide pratique à l’usage des organisateurs de grands évènements sportifs.”*

Ministère des sports, de la jeunesse et de la vie associative. 2025. *“Communiqué de presse : Engagement des français : l’impact des Jeux de Paris 2024,”*.

Freiwilligensurvey. 2014. *“Freiwilliges Engagement in Deutschland: Survey Data Report.”*

DOSB. 2020. *“Engagiert: Das Ehrenamt im Sport,”*

ZiviZ Report. 2021. *“Engagementbericht der organisierten Zivilgesellschaft.”*

- Hallmann, K., and Fairley, S. 2018. *Sports Volunteers Around the Globe.*, Routledge.
- G. S. U. Cologne, "Sport Management Programs Overview," n.d..
- SC Göttingen von 1846 e.V. 2022. "Voluntary Services in Sport: FSJ and BFD Training."
- DOSB. "Volunteer Strategy and Support Initiatives," (n.d.).
- Günther, G., Themistoklis, K., Kleissner, A., and Papić, A. 2022. Economic Dimension of Volunteering in Sport in EU-8.
- Hallmann, K. "Decision to Volunteer in Sport Organizations," *Sport Management Review*, (in press).
- German Sports Youth. 2022. "FSJ and BFD in Sport Programmes."
- Hult, A. and The Swedish Sports Confederation. 2022. "Survey Results from Sport Clubs and Volunteers. Volunteer Du Motion project. Proj. Ref: 613323-EPP-1-2019-1-HR-SPO-SPC. Co-funded by Erasmus+ Sport."
- Fahlén, J. and Stenling, C. 2016. "Sport policy in Sweden," *International journal of sport policy and politics*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 515-531.
- National Policies Platform. 2024. "Youth Volunteering at National Level in Sweden," [Online]. Available: <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/sweden/24-youth-volunteering-at-national-level>.
- Lüdecke, S. and Andersson, K. 2022. "Sport for Development in the Swedish Context."

