



BeST  
Inclusion  
Better Sport Through Inclusion

***AGE-INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT IN THE  
SPORTS SECTOR: EXPLORING BARRIERS, BEST  
PRACTICES, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND  
WORKFORCE STATISTICS***



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## Abstract

The sport sector in Europe witnessed remarkable growth over the years, encompassing various domains as a result, it has emerged as a significant contributor to job creation, particularly for the younger generation. However, youth employability in the sport sector is not without its challenges. The demand for sports-related jobs often exceeds the available opportunities, leading to intense competition. Furthermore, the sector is susceptible to economic fluctuations, which can impact employment stability. Limited access to formal training and qualifications specific to the sport industry also poses a barrier to entry for many young individuals seeking employment. To enhance youth employability in the sport sector, various strategies can be implemented. Firstly, there is a need for collaboration between educational institutions, sports organizations, and industry stakeholders to design and deliver specialized training programs and certifications tailored to the diverse career paths within the sector. These programs should focus on equipping young individuals with both practical and theoretical knowledge, ensuring they possess the necessary skills to meet the evolving demands of the industry. The present paper investigates the employability of young people in the sport sector in Europe with the aim of providing an overview of good practices and developing useful recommendations to improve the recruitment of young people in the world of sports labour market.

## Introduction

The sport sector is a dynamic industry encompassing a wide range of disciplines, activities and organisations. From professional sports teams and leagues to sports marketing agencies, fitness centres and sports media, the job opportunities in this sector are diverse and constantly evolving. In recent years, the global sports industry has experienced unprecedented growth due to technological advances, increasing consumer demand, and the globalisation of sports. This expansion has not only opened new opportunities for athletes, but also created a range of employment opportunities for those who are passionate about the sport and not necessarily athletes.

In this regard, the Better Sport Through Inclusion project (BeST Inclusion) is a 3-year initiative (2022-2025) aimed at promoting inclusivity in the European sports industry workforce. This project was developed after the ESSA-Sport project findings from the European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE), which highlighted the need to address this issue. The European Association of Sport Employers (EASE), a non-profit organization and independent membership association of national sport and active leisure employer organizations, is leading the initiative and aims to enhance the representation of sport employers and promote social dialogue in Europe.

The overall objective of BeST Inclusion is to create a guide of best practices and recommendations that can be applied across the European Union to improve inclusivity in the sports sector workforce. The focus will be on three aspects: gender, age, and disability. To achieve this objective, the project brings together sports employers, research and academic institutions, and expert partners.



The project aims to promote the exchange of knowledge and good practices by bringing together experts, researchers, and sports employers. **Each partner will provide their own perspective to enhance inclusivity in the sports sector, contributing to the development of best practices and recommendations as needed.**

A working group has been established for each topic covered in the project. Initially, the partners were tasked with organizing **3 European roundtables** to assess the current state of inclusivity in sports. Then, **3 studies** have been conducted on the inclusivity of the European sports sector workforce, each overseen by an academic partner.

The next step involves organizing **9 national roundtables** to identify inclusive national best practices. Based on the results of these roundtables, the expert partners will create **a guide to best practice**. Finally, a set of recommendations for a more inclusive workforce across the sports industry will be presented for trial and review by sports employers.

The present paper focuses on the age aspect by analysing and commenting on the employment data, using the numbers reported by Eurostat 2021. Additionally, it explores and highlights good practices that have been proven to be successful and develops recommendations based on the main findings.

## Employment and Age in EUROPE<sup>1</sup>

Employment is the continuous working of the country's current workforce in economic activity. Employment has two main purposes: economic and social purpose. The economic purpose is to organise and increase production, and the social purpose of employment is to guarantee a job for citizens, to increase productivity, and to balance labour demand and supply.

From an economic standpoint, employment plays a pivotal role in organising and optimising the productive capacity of a sector. By harnessing individuals' skills, talents, and expertise, employment facilitates the efficient allocation of resources, fosters technological advancements, and drives innovation across various sectors. This concerted effort towards increasing production not only bolsters economic growth but also contributes to the overall prosperity and competitiveness of the country on a global scale.

On the other hand, the social purpose of employment encompasses a broader set of objectives aimed at improving the welfare and well-being of individuals and society. By guaranteeing job opportunities for its citizens, employment ensures a sense of security, dignity, and social inclusion. Gainful employment provides individuals with a means to sustain themselves and their families and fosters personal growth, self-esteem, and a sense of purpose.

Moreover, employment catalyses enhancing productivity. Engaging individuals in productive endeavours, it enables the development and utilisation of their skills and abilities. Through job-specific training, professional development, and experiential learning, employment promotes acquiring new knowledge and competencies, ultimately leading to improved productivity levels. Increased productivity, in turn, fuels economic growth, raises living standards, and generates higher incomes for individuals and households.

Youth employment is crucial for a sustainable economic and social structure and social welfare. In this regard, in recent years, youth unemployment has emerged as a pressing economic and societal issue in many European countries. The European Union (EU) has recognised the importance of addressing this challenge and has been actively supporting its Member States in reducing youth unemployment and inactivity. By investing in the potential of young people, the EU aims to shape the future of the EU and drive forward digital and green transitions.

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<sup>1</sup>All the references used for the development of this paragraph are shown on the last page.

The Europe 2020 Strategy (2010) has set smart, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth goals. Young people are at the heart of the strategy. Quality education, successful integration into the labour market and increasing youth mobility are key to unlocking the potential of all young people and achieving the goals. More recently, The Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) represented one of the main EU financial resources to support the implementation of the Youth Guarantee to ensure that all young people under the age of 30 receive a good quality offer of, employment, continued education, apprenticeship, and traineeship. With Youth Guarantee implementation, the number of NEETs (not in employment, education, or training) aged 15–29, has decreased, from around 14 million during the 2008–2013 crisis to 9.3 million in 2019 (12.6%).

Young people face specific challenges in the labour market, such as a high unemployment rate, employment, and working conditions worse than their elders.

While the Youth Employment Support package provides a framework for addressing youth unemployment, it is important to acknowledge that there are no quick fixes. Effective policies require forward-looking structural reforms that address the root causes of youth unemployment and inactivity. By implementing comprehensive policy measures, investing in skills development, creating quality job opportunities, and supporting vulnerable groups, the EU and its Member States can foster an environment where young people can thrive and contribute to the future prosperity of Europe.

On the other hand, older workers in the sport sector can play valuable roles across various aspects of the industry. Their experience, knowledge, and dedication can contribute significantly to the development and success of sports organizations, events, and initiatives. The European Union employs a variety of strategies to address a wide range of issues, although there is no specific European strategy for older workers in the sport sector, the EU does have broader initiatives and policies that could indirectly benefit older workers in various sectors, including sports. These initiatives aim to promote active aging, combat age discrimination, and support lifelong learning and employment opportunities.

**European Social Fund (ESF):** The ESF provides funding to support employment and social inclusion across the EU. Some programs funded by ESF may target older workers, including those in the sports sector, by offering training, reskilling, and employment supportS.

**Erasmus+ Program:** While mainly focused on education and training, Erasmus+ supports initiatives that promote lifelong learning and skills development, potentially benefiting older workers seeking to update their skills for roles in the sports sector.



## FOCUS ON THE SPORT INDUSTRY

The sport industry has experienced significant economic growth, encompassing multiple sectors, thereby establishing itself as a remarkable economic entity. This industry is characterised by its rapid expansion and is anticipated to generate substantial employment opportunities. To comprehend the scope of this industry, it is essential to differentiate between "sport activities" and "sport-related activities." The former pertains directly to the core sport sector, whereas the latter encompasses a broader spectrum, including activities closely associated with the sport sector, collectively constituting the "sport industry."

The sport industry is structured into various organised sectors that provide diverse services, catering to various consumer needs and preferences. These organised areas within the sport industry offer specialised services, each distinct from one another in terms of their nature, focus, and target audience. By segmenting the sport industry, it becomes possible to discern the individual contributions of these sectors, thus facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the intricate network of services it encompasses.

*Professional sports* are an economic subsector within the broader sport industry that encompasses organised, competitive activities involving highly skilled athletes who are compensated for their performance. It primarily revolves around sports leagues and teams that operate professionally, competing against one another in various sporting disciplines.

The economic significance of professional sports stems from its ability to generate substantial revenues through various channels. These include ticket sales, broadcasting rights, sponsorship and endorsement deals, merchandise sales, and licensing agreements. The demand for professional sports arises from the passion and enthusiasm of fans, who are willing to pay for the experience of watching elite athletes compete at the highest level.

*Competitive association* sport forms an original and still dominant structure in the field of sports. It comprises associations, which in turn come together in sports federations, providing its members with training and competitive sporting activities. Volunteers run it and are witnessing increasing professionalisation of its human resources (coaches, managers, hospitality, and maintenance staff).

*Sporting leisure* pursuits occupy a growing place in the sports sector. They are organised either by associations (an increasing number of which are also present in the competitive sports sector), or by businesses, often very small ones. Each sporting leisure field (fitness, horse riding, sailing, winter sports, racquet sports, etc.) has its own features and its own identity.

There is also a full range of professions that, although they belong to other large occupational groups, require a high level of specific skills in the field of sport. As for sport-related activities, the European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE) has tried to give as exhaustive a list as possible of these professionals who, to be identified as involved in a “sport-related profession”, must show certain characteristics of institutionalisation (professional trade unions, specific training, recognised designations, etc.). These professions are classified in the order of ISCO 88:

- Professional managers of sports or sports-related organisations;
- Sports doctors;
- Physical education and sports teachers in the school environment;
- Sports journalists and other specialists in communication through or on sport;
- Physiotherapists specialised in sport;
- agents or promoters of events or professional sportspersons;
- Sellers of sports goods;
- Caretakers of sports facilities and other reception staff;
- sports facilities maintenance workers.

In 2021, the EU sports sector employed approximately 1.37 million people, accounting for 0.7% of total employment in the EU<sup>2</sup>. After experiencing a dip during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, the number of people working in the sports sector has recovered to its pre-pandemic level of 1.37 million. This indicates the resilience and potential for growth in this sector.

The EU countries with the highest percentage of people engaged in sports were Sweden (1.4% of total employment), Finland (1.3%), Spain and France (both 1.1%). While the EU countries with the lowest shares of people working in the field of sport were reported as Romania (0.2% of total employment), Malta (0.3%) and Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Poland (all 0.4%).

Between 2019 and 2020, 16 of the 27 EU member states experienced a decline in sports employment, with Croatia, Latvia, Estonia, and Malta recording the largest declines (more than - 20%). Four of the 11 countries with positive change (Romania, Luxembourg, Greece, and Cyprus) increased employment in sports by at least 20%. In most of these countries, the number of people engaged in sports is relatively small, so even small fluctuations can result in large percentage increases or decreases, additionally evidences collected by EOSE suggests that some of these increases are a result of previously undeclared workers declaring themselves in order to access government support packages Employment in sport differs more from total employment in age groups: in 2021, the proportion of

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<sup>2</sup> Eurostat Statistics Explained. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/> accessed on 20 June 2023.

young people aged 15-29 employed in sport was 32 %, almost twice the proportion observed in overall employment (all industrial sectors), while the 30-64 age group accounted for 65 % of employees in sport.

In 2021, sports sector employment reached or exceeded 2019 levels in nine EU countries, including Slovenia (+65%), France (+54%), Cyprus (+27%) and Hungary (+21%). Malta, Latvia and Croatia all recorded a decline of more than -30% in 2021 compared to 2019. In 2021, five EU member states were still affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but there was a positive change compared to 2020.

National strategies are important for employment and skills in sports and physical activity. Sports strategy measures set directly by governments or state-supported and funded sports organisations can directly impact the profession. Drawing sports staff skills from paid staff and volunteers, especially if the strategy has public support in terms of funding sources.

The educational background of individuals employed in the EU sports sector provides valuable insights into the skill sets required in this field. Almost half (47%) of sports employees have a medium level of education (ISCED levels 3-4). Additionally, 40% of sports employees have tertiary education (ISCED 5-8), which is 3 percentage points higher than the proportion in total employment. Furthermore, individuals with lower education levels (ISCED 0-2) account for 13% of employment in the sports sector (It must be highlighted that in Europe the educational level varies according to age groups. In 2022, 81.9 % of 25-54-year-olds in the EU obtained at least secondary education, the corresponding number among 55-74-year-olds was 68.4%. Those with tertiary educational attainment amounted to 37.7 % of those aged 25–54 years and 22.7 % of those aged 55–74 years<sup>3</sup>. These findings emphasise the importance of both practical and theoretical knowledge in sports-related occupations.

Employability in the sport sector for youth can vary depending on several factors such as: skills, qualifications, experience, and the specific segment of the sport industry. There are some points to consider:

***Education and qualifications:*** educational backgrounds can greatly enhance employability in the sport industry. Pursuing a degree or certification in sports management, sports science, physical education, or a related field can provide a solid foundation for a career in sports. The share of tertiary education graduates employed in sport increased every year from 2011 to 2021 (with the exception of 2020

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<sup>3</sup> Eurostat Statistics Explained. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational\\_attainment\\_statistics#Educational\\_attainment\\_levels\\_vary\\_between\\_age\\_groups](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_attainment_statistics#Educational_attainment_levels_vary_between_age_groups). Accessed on 12 September 2023

only), going from 28.5 % in 2011 to 39.6 % in 2021, with an increase of almost one pp in the last year alone.

*Skills development:* developing a diverse skill set is crucial in the sport sector. Beyond sporting abilities, other valuable skills include communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, critical thinking, and organisational skills. Participating in sports clubs, volunteering, and taking on leadership roles help develop these skills.

*Experience and internships:* gaining practical experience through internships, volunteer work, or part-time jobs in the sport sector can significantly improve employability. Seek opportunities to work with sports organisations, community programs, or sports events to gain hands-on experience and make industry connections.

*Networking:* building a strong professional network is essential in the sport industry. Attend industry events, conferences, and seminars to meet professionals in the field. Joining relevant sports associations, clubs, or organisations can also provide networking opportunities.

*Industry knowledge:* staying updated with the latest trends, regulations, and developments in the sport sector is crucial. Read industry publications, follow sports news, and engage with online communities to stay informed and demonstrate your knowledge during job interviews.

*Specialisation:* the sport sector offers a wide range of career paths, including coaching, sports management, sports marketing, sports journalism, sports science, and sports medicine, among others. Consider specialising in a particular area of interest to stand out in the competitive job market.

*Adaptability and flexibility:* the sport industry can be highly dynamic, with varying job opportunities and demands. Being adaptable, open to change, and willing to work irregular hours, including evenings, weekends, and holidays, can increase employability.

*Professionalism and work ethic:* demonstrating professionalism, a strong work ethic, and a genuine passion for sports are highly valued qualities in the sport sector. Employers seek individuals who are committed, reliable, and willing to go the extra mile.

*Technology skills:* in today's digital age, having proficiency in technology and digital tools relevant to the sport sector is becoming increasingly important. Familiarise yourself with sports analytics software, social media platforms, and other digital tools commonly used in the industry.

*Continued learning:* the sport sector constantly evolves, so a commitment to continuous learning is vital. Stay updated with industry trends, seek additional certifications or advanced degrees, and embrace lifelong learning to enhance your employability.

The occupational integration of young people in sports companies and associations often occurs under difficult conditions. Young people finishing university courses are generally ill-prepared to exercise a profession in a sports organisation. The unemployment rate among such graduates is too high in certain EU Member States, and the proportion of young people trained in sport science and working in the sector is too low. On the other hand, the sports movement rarely has the means to provide the training to meet the needs. The result is that the number of people engaging in a profession in the sports sector without suitable training is very high in most EU Member States. Better adaptation of training to employment in a sector of very small enterprises entails systematic development of schemes combining training and work, defined, and negotiated with the social partners. Although it corresponds to general principles common to all services sectors, respect for the social functions assigned to sport must lead to the development of employment in the sports sector according to its specific character.

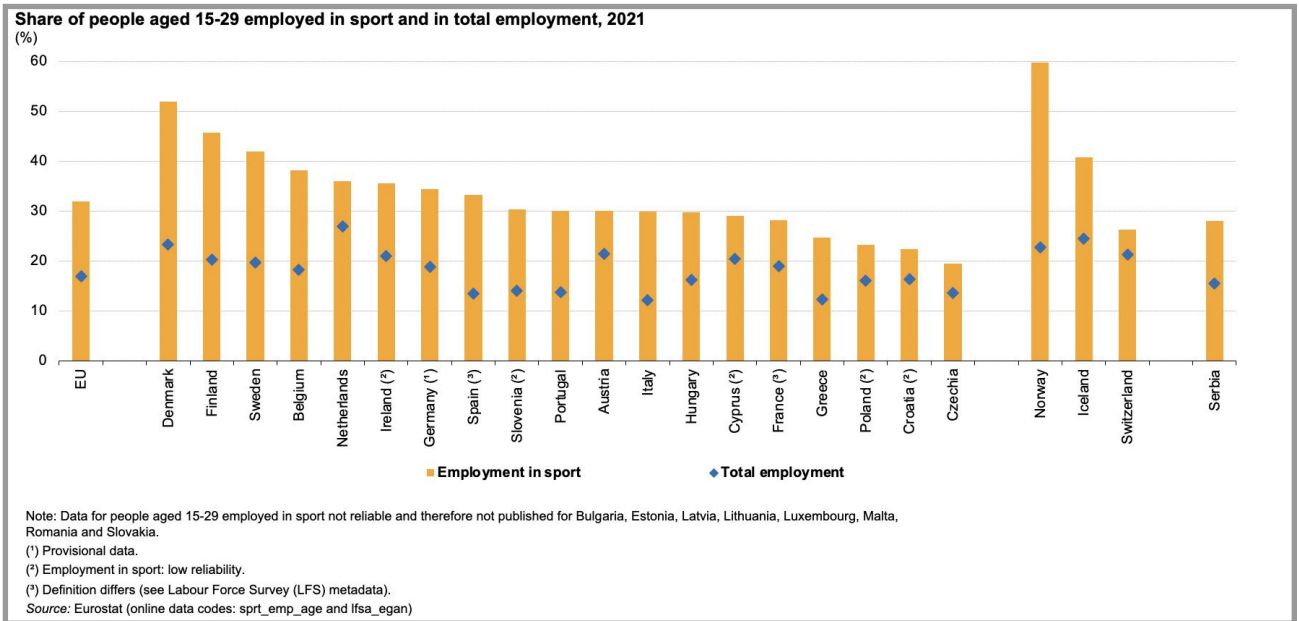
## Sport Employment and Age - statistics and comments<sup>4</sup>

The age distribution among individuals employed in the EU sports sector reveals interesting insights. Approximately 32% of those employed in this sector are young people aged 15-29. In 2019, the rates in overall employment for young people aged 15-24 years was 33.4 % and 74.6% for young people aged 25-29 years. On the other hand, people aged 30-64 represent 65% of sports employment, which is 15 percentage points less than the share reported for total employment. These statistics highlight the significant role of young individuals in the sports sector and the need to support their participation. Furthermore, the necessity to retain young people in the labour market can not be overstated as their continued presence is essential for fostering a thriving and resilient workforce.

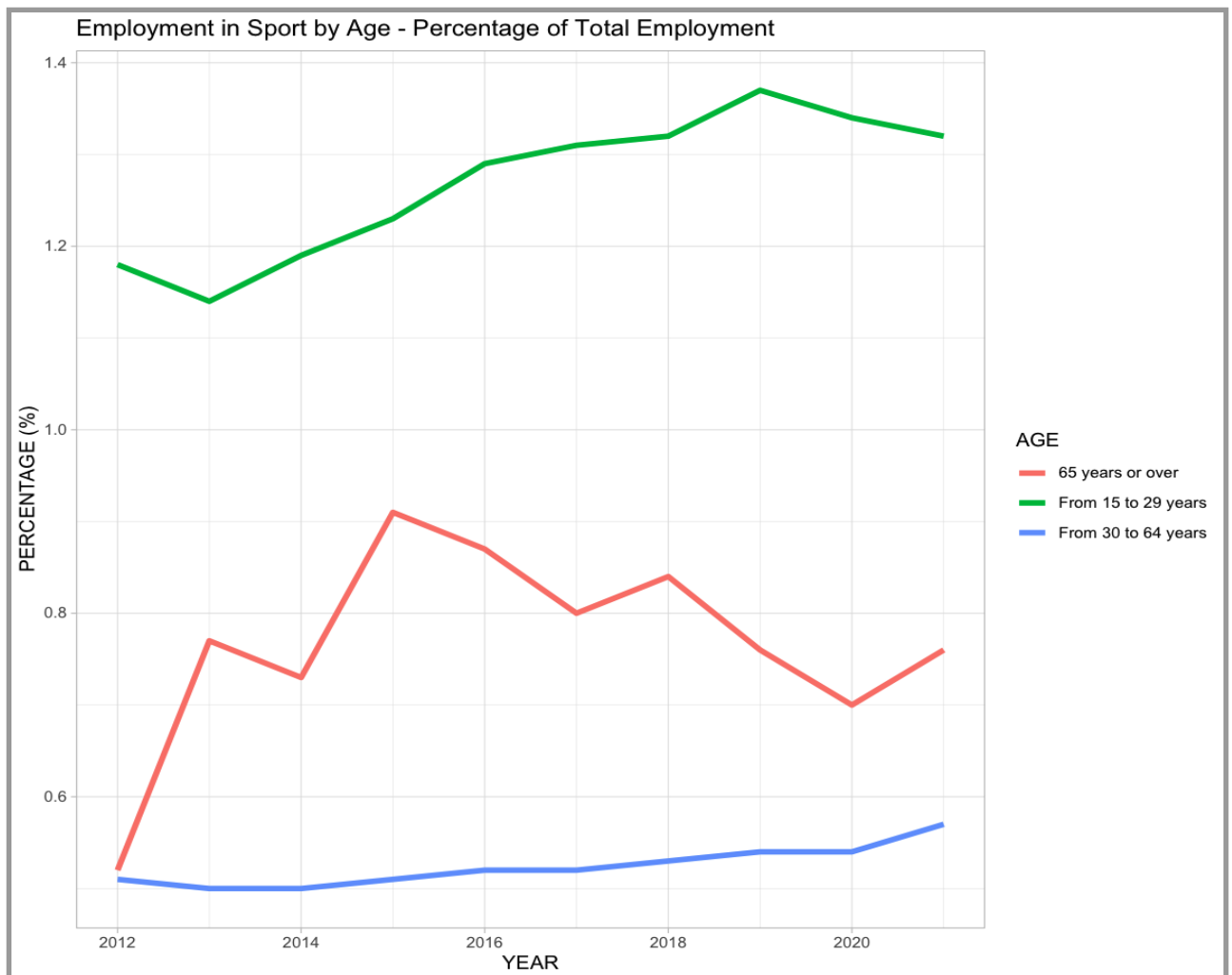
Compared with the age structure of the total employed population, young people accounted for a **relatively large share** of people employed in sport: in 2021, around one-third of people employed in sport in the EU were aged 15-29. This is almost twice as much as the contribution of this age range to total employment (17 %). In all countries for which data are available, the proportion of young people in employment in sport outnumbered the one recorded in total employment. The difference was particularly significant in Spain and Italy, where the percentage of young people employed in sport was 2.5 times higher than in total employment, as well as in Denmark, Finland, Slovenia, and Portugal (in each of these countries, the percentage of young people employed in sport was 2.2 times higher than in total employment). This data suggests that employment opportunities in the sport sector are more skewed towards young people than other economic sectors. This figure might be related to different factors such as their engagement in sports, skill development, flexibility, and technological proficiency. On the other hand, it must be considered that young people could leave the industry prematurely due to poor progression opportunities, unsocial hours and low salaries.

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<sup>4</sup> All the references used for the development of this paragraph are shown on the last page.



Graph 1.

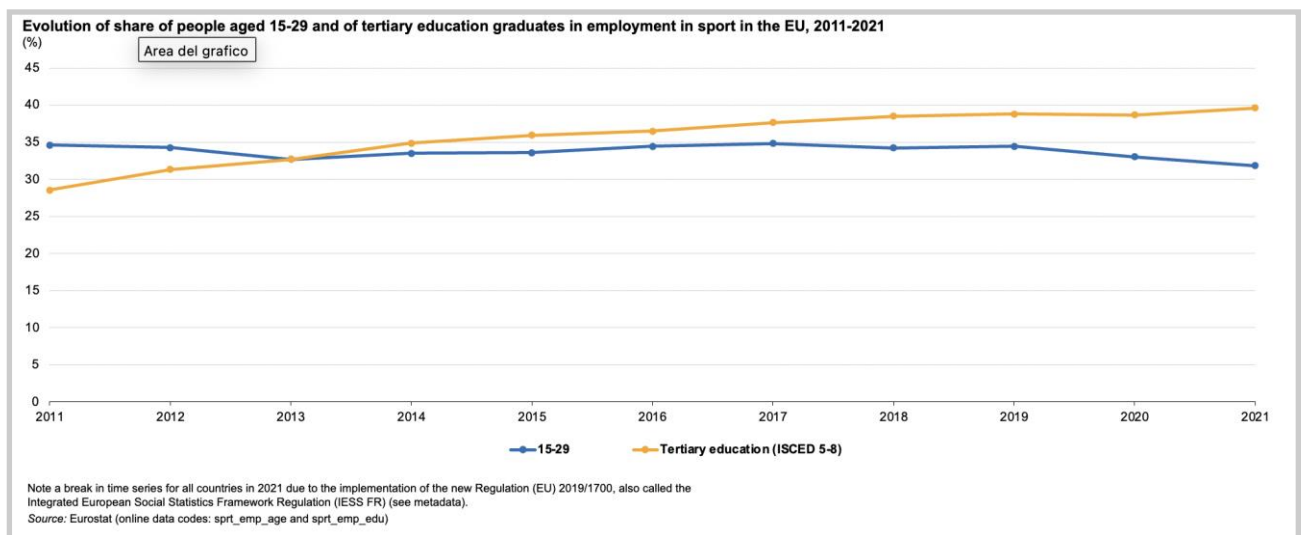


Graph 2.

Considering a longitudinal perspective, it can be noted that the employment rate of young people in the field of sports has shown a declining trend (Graph 3.), whereas the proportion of individuals with tertiary education continues to rise steadily. Examining the period spanning from 2011 to 2021 and focusing on the two sociodemographic characteristics (age group 15-29 and tertiary education), distinct patterns have emerged:

Between 2011 and 2013, there was a notable decrease of 1.9 percentage points in the share of young people employed in sport. However, this trend reversed, leading to a subsequent increase to nearly 35% in 2017 – almost returning to the 2011 level. There was then a significant decline from 2019 to 2021, resulting in a decrease of 2.6 percentage points.

On the contrary, the proportion of tertiary education graduates employed in the sports sector has witnessed a consistent upward trajectory from 2011 to 2021, except for the year 2020. This figure rose from 28.5% in 2011 to 39.6% in 2021, with a notable increase of nearly one percentage point in the most recent year alone.



Graph 3.

Broadly, the sport sector in the European Union (EU) demonstrates a lack of age discrimination. When considering the age group from 15 to 29 years, the share of total employment has shown a consistent upward trend since 2012, with a minor decline observed in the period from 2019 to 2021 (Graph 2.). However, the overall share has remained stable above 1.3%. Conversely, for individuals aged 65 years or older, there was a decrease in employment from 2018 to 2020, followed by an increase from 2020 to 2021 (Graph 2.).



To successfully harness the potential of a multigenerational workforce, it is imperative to eliminate age bias in recruitment practices and foster age-diverse cultures within organisations. This ensures that all employees feel valued and appreciated regardless of age.

According to estimates by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2022, developing multigenerational workforces and providing older employees with increased work opportunities could lead to a 19% rise in GDP per capita over the next three decades. The implications of strong demographic changes, including population ageing and technological advancements, have been intensifying in recent years, contributing to skill deficits and shortages.

In conclusion, the sport sector in the EU demonstrates a notable absence of age discrimination, with employment opportunities for individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 (when compared to the overall workforce in all sectors). However, there has been a fluctuation in employment levels for those aged 65 years and older. It is crucial to implement the right policies and practices to harness the potential of a multigenerational workforce and address the demographic changes, skills deficits, and shortages arising from population ageing and technological advancements.

When considering the multi-generational picture, we should note that according to e.g., the EOSE SKILLS report for 2021 (which covers up to 2020), there is a much lower percentage of those aged 50+ (24.7%) when compared with the overall EU workforce (32.2%). This is evidence of a less multi-generational workforce, and all the advantages OECD predicts.

## European roundtable about the barriers to employment in the sport sector in terms of age

The BeST Inclusion project organised three European roundtables, each focusing on a specific topic: disability, age, and gender. The European Roundtable on Sport Workforce & Age was conducted virtually on the 8th of November 2022, from 16:00 to 18:00 CET.

The session comprised 14 participants and commenced with an introduction to the BeST Inclusion project by EASE. This was followed by a presentation on the designated topic of discussion, "Sport Workforce & Age," delivered by UNICAS. Subsequently, the participants were divided into smaller breakout sessions, where they engaged in discussions centred around the theme. Four key questions guided these discussions:

- 1) Age discrimination and bias in the labour market:** The participants deliberated on the prevailing situation concerning age discrimination and bias within the sport sector.
- 2) The necessity of a specific strategy in Europe to enhance work attractiveness for all sports employees, regardless of their lifecycle stage:** The focus here was to explore the potential need for a targeted strategy that promotes inclusivity and attractiveness in sport employment across various lifecycle stages.
- 3) Strategies for maintaining skills throughout the employee's lifecycle:** Participants exchanged ideas on approaches to ensure the continuous development and preservation of skills among individuals employed in the sport sector throughout their professional journey.
- 4) Identification of good practices within the EU for promoting an age-inclusive workforce:** The breakout sessions aimed to uncover exemplary initiatives and practices from across the European Union that contribute to fostering an age-inclusive workforce within the sport industry.

By structuring the session in this manner, the roundtable facilitated productive and focused discussions on the specific topic of Sport Workforce & Age, enabling participants to share insights, experiences, and best practices.

The main results discussed by both groups aggregated by question:

## Age discrimination and bias in the labour market: what's the situation in the sport sector?

The duration of young people's stay within the sport sector varies depending on their specific position or work type. While some young individuals may choose to pursue long-term careers in the sport industry, not all view it as a viable career path.

One significant factor contributing to young people leaving sport-related jobs is the industry's unconventional working hours. Sports-related roles often extend beyond the typical 9-to-5 schedule, which can discourage some young individuals from committing to such positions in the long-term.

To foster inclusion and empower young people, investing in their education and providing opportunities for skills acquisition is crucial. Equipping them with the necessary knowledge and abilities can make them better prepared to thrive within the sport sector.

It is worth noting that when discussing the involvement of young people in the sport sector, the numbers may not provide a clear picture due to the inclusion or exclusion of volunteers. Many young individuals contribute to the industry through volunteer work, further blurring the statistics.

Regarding legislation, Italy has recently introduced a new law that raises concerns about the assurance of quality education. Further details on this law's specific provisions and implications would be beneficial.

In France, there is legislation in place that sets a minimum age limit for holding senior positions. Conversely, older individuals often remain in the same position for many years, indicating a lack of upward mobility for younger individuals.

Governments in various countries strive to provide support through traineeship programs, offering financial contributions to organisations that hire young students. This initiative aims to provide valuable practical experience and enhance career prospects for young individuals.

In Estonia, volunteering holds a distinct concept where individuals are not merely acting as volunteers but are actively encouraged to acquire qualifications. This approach highlights the visibility of young people within the sport sector in Estonia.

In Hungary, young people have opportunities for involvement, often starting with volunteering roles. Mandatory volunteer work is a requirement to complete secondary school, and internships are also obligatory during university years. Senior positions in Hungary are frequently closely connected with political influence.

In summary, the duration of young people's engagement in the sport sector varies depending on factors such as job type and position. Efforts to foster inclusion and empower young individuals include investing in their education and skill development. The role of volunteers in the industry may impact the accuracy of statistical data. Legislation and support programs differ across countries, influencing the opportunities available to young people in the sport sector.

**Do we need a specific strategy in Europe to enhance work attractiveness to all sport employees no matter what stage of their lifecycle they have reached?**

A national-level strategy is necessary to address the challenges and opportunities within the sport sector effectively. Such a strategy can provide a cohesive framework for promoting and supporting diverse employment opportunities in sport.

It is crucial to highlight the wide range of employment opportunities available in the sport industry beyond the traditional roles of coaches, fitness trainers, sport and leisure managers, etc. Fields such as inclusion, education, sustainable development, health, and policy offer significant career paths within the sport sector. By showcasing these opportunities, we can attract more individuals and emphasise the multidimensional nature of sport-related employment.

Introducing the broader perspective of sport at the primary school level is essential. Rather than solely promoting it as a health-enhancing activity and the most visible job roles such as professional athletes, we should emphasise the various aspects and potential career paths within the sport sector. Raising awareness early on can inspire young people to consider and explore the diverse opportunities available in sport-related fields.

While statistics indicate that young people are present in the job market, the focus should shift towards ensuring the quality of employment, salary and continuing professional development. Ideally, salaries in the sport sector should be commensurate with individuals' education and skills. By establishing a correlation between educational attainment and compensation, we can promote greater professionalism and attract more talent to the industry.

## **How can we maintain skills over the employee's lifecycle?**

- A more inclusive work environment that supports professional development and provides continuous education is essential. This should be focused on individuals as people, not just employees, fostering personal growth alongside professional advancement.
- Building intergenerational teams where different generations complement each other is crucial. By harnessing the diverse perspectives and skills of individuals from different age groups, teams can benefit from a rich exchange of knowledge and experiences.
- Integrating training as an integral part of work can be highly beneficial. Employees can continually develop their skills and knowledge by embedding learning opportunities within the work environment while actively contributing to their roles. This also raises the importance of mentoring and structured workplace learning.
- Volunteers also deserve consideration when it comes to training and education. Recognizing their valuable contributions, providing opportunities for their personal and professional growth can enhance their effectiveness and satisfaction in their volunteer roles.
- Effective management is pivotal in assessing teams and individuals and providing guidance for their work and education. Managers should be able to understand the team's unique dynamics and guide them in their professional development journeys.
- In France, private schools offer expensive leadership programs for young people. However, there appears to be a disconnect between the demand for such programs and the corresponding job offers. Consequently, educated young individuals are often seen as lacking practical experience.
- Certain roles, such as being a coach, require professionals to renew their licenses periodically in many countries. This ensures that individuals in these positions maintain up-to-date knowledge and skills in their respective fields.
- Non-formal education courses often do not receive sufficient recognition. The European Union could enhance the official recognition and importance of non-formal education, ensuring that it is valued and acknowledged. This also aligns with the new European initiative on micro-credentials.
- Renewing skills should be encouraged for all generations, particularly for individuals who have held the same position for many years. Continuous learning and development can help individuals stay relevant, adapt to changing circumstances, and contribute to their roles effectively.

- In the corporate sector, companies often provide additional courses and degrees for their employees. They bear the cost of studies and establish a specified period during which employees are expected to remain with the organisation and apply their new knowledge to benefit the company's work. Grassroots sport organisations face challenges in competing with such offers due to financial constraints.

### **Do we know any good practices across the EU in terms of promoting an age-inclusive workforce?**

- The WOS organisation is one example, but we have not encountered any organisation that explicitly implements an age-inclusive strategy. It is essential for organisations to prioritise age diversity and create strategies that promote inclusivity across all age groups.

- Currently, most age-related initiatives seem to be limited to governmental programs that support the employment of young people. For instance, countries like France, Italy, and Slovenia subsidise companies that hire young individuals. While these programs are beneficial, a broader focus on age inclusivity is necessary.

- In Estonia, individuals who are enrolled in studies are granted additional vacation days. This recognition of the importance of education and the need for time off to pursue studies can contribute to a more educated and skilled workforce.

- France has successfully implemented a civic service program as a national traineeship initiative. This program offers valuable opportunities for young people to gain practical experience and contribute to the community.

- The European Union operates programs such as the Solidarity Corps and Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs. These initiatives aim to provide young individuals with opportunities for personal and professional growth through volunteering, entrepreneurship, and cross-cultural experiences.

## Good practices<sup>5</sup>

In order to optimise the results in terms of increasing youth's chances of employment, it is essential to implement effective strategies and adopt good practices. This section presents a compilation of key good practices to optimise recruiting young people into the labour market. Many of the best practices mentioned pertain to the broader labor market since there are limited initiatives tailored specifically to the sports sector. However, adopting such approaches could potentially enhance employment within the sports industry.

Monitoring and Evaluation Manual for Sport-for-Employability Programmes - 2019/2021: This project aimed to develop a user-friendly manual to help sport-based organisations increase the employability of young people. The general purpose of the Manual is to provide a framework for thinking about the development, management, delivery and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of sport-for-employability programmes. Specifically, the manual contains a section that reports: a framework for thinking about and establishing programme aims, objectives and related performance indicators; guidance for establishing and implementing a framework for the M&E of programmes; several instruments/scales for measuring particular outcomes; guidance on questionnaire design and data collection; More generally, it describes an approach that empowers organisations to adopt an integrated approach to planning and implementation, facilitating continuous learning and building organisational capacity and effective program delivery.

EduCluster Case study - Finland: Central Finland has a long history of forming stakeholder groups as a model for communication and entrepreneurship called a Learning Region. The study examined the region's dynamic structures and stakeholder relations to support continuous learning. Central Finland has based its regional development on this connection of learning for ten years in a region concentrated on natural resources and heavy industry. The Learning Region provides a platform to cultivate all capital to create innovation. The main impact has been creating a unique network of education and business, the EduCluster, a cooperation framework for labour models and matching business needs. It has created effective models for business development and is looking at creating learning clusters and business networks.

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<sup>5</sup> All the references used for the development of this paragraph are shown on the last page

Strengthen the Strength Strategy: Securing a skilled labour force - Case study- German: Luckenwalde and Prignitz have experience securing a skilled labour force. This is done partly through a local development strategy in Luckenwalde, a regional economic development company in rural Prignitz and by creating common action plans with all relevant actors. This relates to the metropole region's cluster strategy – Strengthen the Strength – which designated both localities as local growth poles. The study compared the approach to up-skilling in both regions and drew on the rich evidence base for skills which included statistical profiling, surveys of firms and students, and local networks to implement local action plans. It looked at additional activities such as innovation potential analysis and specialised skill services to help companies attract the required skills.

Youth Employment Initiative (YEI): The YEI is a European Union initiative that supports projects across EU regions with high levels of youth unemployment. It aims to provide young people with quality employment, education, and training opportunities.

Youth in Action - European Union: The Youth in Action program, operating within the European Union, supports young people with fewer opportunities by providing funding and resources for training and networking and offering seminars, feasibility visits, evaluation meetings and partnership building.

Glasgow Works Youth Gateway - United Kingdom: Glasgow has re-engineered its approach to supporting youth employability since the mid-2000s. Despite the recession hitting the city's economy hard, NEET figures in Glasgow have not risen dramatically compared to Scottish and UK benchmarks. The study examined the main reasons, particularly the role played by improving the ecology of interventions available, having far-reaching effects in terms of the delivery structures, use of resources, relationships between key players and effectiveness of monitoring. Youth Gateway adopted an innovative approach, pooling the employability expertise from the eight partner authorities and ensuring early engagement with employers as well as an emphasis on providing in-work support to ensure the job is sustained.



## Recommendations

By focusing on financing, skills development, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and promoting digital and green transitions, the EU aims to provide young people with the necessary tools and opportunities for success in the labour market. Collaboration and support from various stakeholders are essential to implement youth employment support measures effectively. With continued efforts and investment, the EU can empower young people to shape the future and drive the region's economic growth.

A collaborative approach involving Member States, businesses, educational institutions, and youth organisations is crucial in addressing youth unemployment. The Youth Employment Support package encourages Member States to utilise resources such as the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI) and the European Social Fund (ESF) alongside national funds. This coordinated effort ensures a comprehensive approach to support young people's transition to employment.

Creating an inclusive work environment prioritising professional development and continuous education, fostering intergenerational collaboration, and integrating training into work processes are vital in the sport sector. It is important to showcase diverse employment opportunities beyond traditional roles, educate young people about the broader perspectives of sport, and ensure fair compensation based on education and skills.

To support youth employment, various measures can be implemented, such as providing start-up grants and loans for young entrepreneurs, establishing mentoring schemes and business incubators, offering bonuses for SMEs hiring apprentices, investing in training programs, strengthening public employment services, integrating career management training into education, and ensuring access to digital learning resources.

With a comprehensive strategy and the active involvement of stakeholders, we can create an enabling environment for young people, equipping them with the skills, support, and opportunities needed to thrive in the labour market and contribute to the overall socio-economic development of the region.

Here are some enhanced examples of how youth employment can be supported:

- 1. Start-up grants and loans:** Provision of financial support to young entrepreneurs to establish their own businesses, enabling them to overcome financial barriers and kick-start their ventures.

- 2. Mentoring schemes and business incubators:** Implementation of programs that offer guidance, mentorship, and resources to young entrepreneurs, fostering their growth and development by providing valuable insights and support.
- 3. Bonuses for SMEs hiring apprentices:** Encouragement of SMEs to create opportunities for young people to gain practical experience and develop essential skills by providing incentives or bonuses for hiring apprentices.
- 4. Training sessions:** Investment in comprehensive training programs designed to equip young individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary for the evolving labour market, ensuring they are well-prepared for employment.
- 5. Capacity-building of public employment services:** Strengthening of public employment services through additional resources, training, and support, enabling them to provide effective guidance and assistance to young job seekers in navigating the job market.
- 6. Career management training:** Integration of career management training into formal education systems, equipping young people with the necessary tools, information, and skills to make informed career choices and successfully enter the job market.
- 7. Investments in digital learning infrastructure and technology:** Allocation of resources to establish and enhance digital learning infrastructure and technology platforms, ensuring that young people have access to the necessary resources and opportunities to acquire digital skills and knowledge that are increasingly relevant in today's digital economy.

By implementing these supportive measures, we can foster an environment where young people are empowered to explore entrepreneurial endeavours, gain practical experience, acquire relevant skills, receive guidance and support, and access the resources needed to thrive in the job market.

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