



13th edition

Attractiveness, Framework and Valorisation of Volunteering in European sports



EASE
European Association of Sport Employers

With the participation of our members

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Sport volunteering in the EU: an essential component of the European sports model



Volunteering is defined as all forms of voluntary activity, whether formal or informal. **Volunteers** act under their own free will, according to their own choices and motivations and do not seek financial gain.

A 2023 Erasmus+ funded sport volunteering report found from EOSE show that there is **≈12 million EU citizens volunteer in sport** every year, giving about 97 million hours of time (equivalent to ~600 000 full-time jobs).

%

An observation shared by sports employers: the decline of volunteers in the sports sector



Why volunteering is central to the European model of sport ?

Volunteers are the backbone of European grassroots sport: coaches, referees, club officials, organisers. The European sports model is based on non-profit clubs, local engagement and solidarity rather than commercial logic. Without volunteers, mass participation sport cannot function, especially at local and amateur level.

According to Eurostat data, the share of adults in the EU participating in formal voluntary activities fell from 18.9 % in 2015 to 12.3 % in 2022. This represents a significant decline in formal volunteering over that period.



Decline in sports volunteering: Practical consequences

While sports participation and events continue to grow, the number of committed volunteers is declining. Occasional engagement remains common, but long-term roles involving responsibility are increasingly difficult to fill, particularly in small, local and amateur clubs. Shortages of coaches, referees and club officials, combined with rising administrative and legal demands, weaken daily club operations. As a result, training sessions and competitions are reduced, events are cancelled, and some clubs face closure or forced professionalisation, while grassroots sport is far more affected than major sporting events.

Attractiveness of volunteering and valorisation of volunteer experiences

In a European sports model that relies heavily on volunteers, recognising volunteer engagement is essential to preserving grassroots sport.

Make volunteering attractive by recognising it as a real learning experience

Volunteering develops concrete skills (organisation, leadership, teamwork, responsibility) that are transferable to professional, educational and social contexts. Valuing these skills transforms volunteering from a purely altruistic commitment into a formative and empowering experience, encouraging longer and more engaged participation.

Value volunteering academically and professionally, especially for young people

Volunteers are often very young, and recognition must therefore operate within education systems and career pathways. Academic validation (such as recognition in school or university admissions) and professional recognition (in CVs, training rights or recruitment) increase the perceived value of volunteering and make commitment more sustainable.

The solution: Develop structured recognition tools at national and European level

National initiatives:

 **France** : The higher education guidance platform **recognises volunteer activities** carried out by high school students. In addition, the **“service civique”** offers young people a state-supervised framework to engage in missions of general interest and is highly valued in professional careers.

 **Luxembourg**: A dedicated **volunteer agency** helps people access volunteering opportunities, including a voluntary service that allows young people under 30 to engage in projects of general interest.

What about the European level ? Sports employers agree on the need to develop a **European-level tool** to recognise and highlight volunteer commitment. It would help make volunteering more visible,. Such a mechanism would increase the visibility, transferability and attractiveness of volunteering by formally documenting missions, skills and responsibilities, and ensuring recognition across education, training and labour markets. By turning volunteer experience into a credible asset for professional careers, this tool would strengthen the value of volunteering and encourage greater engagement.

What legal framework for volunteering?

The central role of volunteering in Europe raises important legal questions. At EU level, there is no single legislative act harmonising volunteering law; instead, the framework is based on programme law, soft-law instruments and policy documents, alongside recognition and funding mechanisms. Most Member States similarly lack a comprehensive statute on volunteering. Volunteers are not employees and do not receive remuneration, but host organisations remain responsible for ensuring respect for health, safety, dignity and physical or moral integrity. Where specific legislation exists, the rules governing volunteering and its conditions vary widely across the EU.



Lithuania: A Law on Volunteering was adopted in 2011, which sets out the basic principles of voluntary work, the rights and duties of volunteers and organisers, as well as rules on insurance and reimbursement of expenses. The law avoids overly detailed regulation in order to preserve flexibility.



Finland: Volunteering is widely supported and funded but is not regulated through a single unified legal framework. Instead, certain aspects of volunteering, such as health and safety, may fall under general labour or occupational safety legislation when specific conditions are met.



France: Volunteering is legally recognised but not governed by a single comprehensive statute. It is defined primarily through case law as an activity carried out freely, without remuneration and without a relationship of legal subordination. As a result, volunteers do not benefit from labour law protection, and no employment contract exists in principle.



A great initiative example for a European harmonization of the legal status of volunteers: The European Youth Forum led to the adoption of the European Charter on the Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteers, which recognizes and protects volunteering at the European level.