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Project

Upskilling Volunteer Managers in Sport

ERASMUS-SPORT-2024-SCP

Project life (2024-2026)

<https://www.europeanvolunteercentre.org/uvmis>



Co-funded by
the European Union

Introduction

The European sport sector is fundamentally sustained by volunteers, making sport the largest hub of voluntary engagement across the continent (Eurobarometer, 2018). Despite this, many organisations lack structured and professional approaches to volunteer management, which limits their efficiency, sustainability, and ability to respond to emerging challenges.

Research from the V4V project, has highlighted persistent difficulties, including structural, financial, and organisational barriers that undermine volunteering in sport. Community sports associations (CSAs) face particular problems, as their informal structures and limited management capacity make volunteer recruitment and retention highly challenging. In this context, the UVMIS project, funded by Erasmus+ sport, and coordinated by the Rotterdam School of Management, was established.

The project seeks to explore new approaches to strengthening volunteer management and aims to design post- experience learning resources to support its professionalisation.

Objectives

- To examine the current state of volunteer management across different European contexts.
- To identify challenges and needs in volunteer recruitment, retention, and training.
- To propose pathways for strengthening volunteer management through education, systemic support, and professional development..

Methodology

A qualitative research design was employed: Desk research was first conducted in participating countries to map higher education offers, volunteer centres, sports federations, and other infrastructures, providing an overview of existing opportunities for training.

This was complemented by focus groups in each country with around ten participants, including volunteer managers, administrators, academics, and civil society representatives.

Data from Italy, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Lithuania were synthesised into a European-level analysis, together with data from the European Non-Governmental Sports Organisation (ENGSO), and the Centre for European Volunteering (CEV) European networks.

Results

Findings revealed persistent challenges in sustaining motivation, particularly among younger generations, balancing economic pressures.

Volunteer managers often act as unpaid staff, overloaded with administrative responsibilities, while skills gaps exist in areas such as inclusivity, conflict resolution, and burnout prevention.

Training opportunities remain fragmented, inconsistent, and poorly integrated into higher education. Structural obstacles, including bureaucracy and limited institutional support, persist.

Nevertheless, successful models were found in large-scale events like the Paris 2024 Olympics and in structured grassroots initiatives.

Conclusions

The study concludes that systemic investment in education, modular certification, cross-sector collaboration, and greater recognition of volunteer managers are essential to strengthening the resilience and sustainability of sport volunteering in Europe.

References

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