

FORMS

Enabling Forms of Employment in Sport



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» ABOUT THIS REPORT «

This report is the first of its kind to explore the potential of new forms of employment to address some of the recruitment and retention difficulties which European sport organisations face.

The research was carried out by partner sport organisations based in five EU countries – Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Netherlands and Portugal over a two-year period (2021-2022) and was coordinated by the European Observatoire of Sport and Employment (EOSE). It was co-funded by the EU Erasmus+ Sport programme.

The report builds on work done by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) which has been tracking and studying the emergence of new forms of employment across the EU since 2015. Eurofound looked at a number of industrial sectors, but not sport. Aware of the possibility that traditional forms of employment may be contributing to recruitment and retention problems in sport, the partners agreed to look more closely at employment in the sector and explore the possibility that new forms of employment could address at least some of these problems.

The report adopts the definition of ‘new forms of employment’ provided by Eurofound (2020):

“Relationships between employers and employees that are different to the established one-to-one employment relationship.”

The new forms of employment which the report covers are those categorised by Eurofound (2020) as follows:

- > **Employee sharing** – a group of employers hires out workers and is jointly responsible for them
- > **Job sharing** – one employer hires several workers to jointly fill a full-time position
- > **Voucher-based work** – an employment relationship and related payment are based on a voucher (generally acquired from a third party such as a government authority) rather than an employment contract
- > **Interim management** – a form of employment in which a company ‘leases out’ workers to other companies temporarily and for a specific purpose
- > **Casual work** – a type of work where the employment is not stable and continuous, and the employer is not obliged to regularly provide the worker with work but has the flexibility of calling them in on demand.
- > **ICT-based mobile work** – the employee or self-employed worker operates from various possible locations outside the premises of their employer (for example, at home, at a client’s premises or ‘on the road’ supported by modern technologies such as laptop or tablet computers
- > **Platform work** – the matching of supply and demand for paid labour through an online platform or app.
- > **Portfolio work** – small scale contracting by freelancers the self-employed or micro-enterprises who work for a large number of clients
- > **Collaborative employment** – a specific form of cooperation or networking among the self-employed that go beyond the traditional supply chain or business partner relationships.

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» CONTEXT FOR THIS REPORT «

The sport sector in Europe faces a number of opportunities and challenges in relation to employment and skills.

In recent years there is a growing recognition at European and national levels that sport can be a major contributor to wider goals in areas such as public health, social inclusion, education, employment and economic growth. Growing participation in health enhancing physical activity (HEPA) in particular is seen as an important priority by the European Commission and national governments.

There is a real opportunity for sport to establish itself as a strategically important player, but there are challenges. The European sport labour force needs to *grow* in response to these expectations and to *professionalise*. Sport organisations need more skilled and motivated staff. In an increasingly competitive labour market, potential recruits need to see working in sport as an attractive option which offers stable and financially rewarding employment, flexibility to meet personal circumstances, career progression and the continuous development of skills and competencies.

There is statistical evidence from EOSE's ESSA-Sport project (2019) that the European sport labour force has grown, but sport employers continue to emphasise the difficulties of recruiting and retaining *appropriately skilled staff*. In EOSE's 2018 European Employer Skills Survey, less than one third of employers reported that it was easy to recruit people with the right skills. Retaining staff was equally problematic. 44% indicated that staff were attracted away from their organisations by offers of better pay; 30% identified lack of career progression opportunities as a disincentive to retention; a further 30% felt lack of financial stability in their organisation made it difficult for them to offer workers traditional full or part-time contracts.

Through discussions with sector stakeholders, it became apparent that *traditional forms of employment* may be acting as a brake on workforce development and professionalisation, and more flexible and innovative approaches may be needed. Through the Eurofound reports, EOSE became aware that new and more flexible forms of employment were emerging across Europe. Predominantly, these have had an initial impact in sectors other than sport and therefore it was important to examine these new forms of employment and begin to evaluate their relevance to sport and the potential benefits and risks associated with them.



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» FORMS AIMS AND ACTIVITIES «

EOSE and the five national partners, therefore, established FORMS as a small collaborative transnational project with the following aims:

- > Analyse these new forms of employment in greater detail
- > Investigate their potential to address some of the challenges facing sport employers
- > Examine their advantages and disadvantages for employers, employees and consumers

The research consisted of the following activities:

- > Statistical analysis of the European sport labour market, its realities, tendencies and characteristics to identify factors relevant to new forms of employment **(Section 2)**
- > A detailed examination of new forms of employment and their possible application to the sport sector **(Section 3)**
- > Desk research into legal and regulatory frameworks and existing forms of employment in the five countries, emerging new forms of employment, the characteristics of the organisations and workers involved, reasons for adopting new forms of employment, their advantages and disadvantages and likely skills implications for employers and employees **(Section 4)**
- > National roundtable consultation workshops which gathered major sport sector stakeholders in the five countries to review the desk research findings, explore the employment difficulties they face, evaluate the potential of new forms of employment to resolve these difficulties and point to new employment practices emerging in their countries **(Section 5)**
- > Research and development of 12 case studies of emerging new forms of employment in sport and other sectors which illustrate why and how they were developed and the benefits and risks they present to employers and employees **(Section 6)**
- > Conclusions and recommendations **(Sections 7 and 8)**

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MAIN FINDINGS ON THE SPORT LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT



When considering all the findings from the desk research, the national roundtables and case studies, the FORMS partners have drawn the following main conclusions.

1. The EU and national governments continue to see the sport sector as an important contributor to a number of public health, social and economic goals. This requires the professionalisation of the sport workforce through more stable, paid employment which facilitates clearer career pathways and the continuing development of skills and competencies.
2. Statistical analysis for the whole of the EU sport labour market shows:
 - > The European paid workforce has grown over the last decade, but there is evidence that organisations continue to face difficulties in the recruitment and retention of skilled staff; these problems are likely to have been increased by the impact of the Covid pandemic (during which paid employment in sport declined for the first time); whereas the sport workforce has grown, it may not be growing as much as needed, particularly in the recruitment of skilled and qualified workers
 - > The very high proportion of part-time contracts (almost one half of all paid employees) suggests that paid employment in sport tends to be more precarious or at least a 'side-line' that prevents clear career progression pathways and continuing professional development
 - > The relatively low (compared to all EU industrial sectors) proportions of women, who still take primary responsibility for child-care and other family responsibilities, may suggest that greater flexibility is needed to bring female sport employment in line with European averages
 - > Demographic analysis of paid EU sport workforce (compared to all EU industrial sectors) reveals relatively large proportions of young workers, those with higher levels of educational achievement, and self-employed workers; this suggests sport could be a fertile environment for the uptake of new forms of employment, particularly those which involve the use of new technologies and an entrepreneurial attitude and a skillset to match.



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3. The research carried out in the five FORMS partner countries suggests that one important factor that retards the growth of paid employment (and therefore professionalisation) concerns the particular features of the sport sector which require more flexibility in employment than those offered by traditional practices.
 - > There is a high number of small organisations, especially sport clubs, who have traditionally relied on volunteer staffing which is not governed by employment law and tends to be more flexible; transitioning from flexible volunteer arrangements to less flexible paid employment is a challenge
 - > These small, predominantly volunteer-run organisations often lack the administrative capacity to manage payroll and other human resource functions (e.g., recruitment, interviews, reviews etc.) needed to manage paid workers
 - > Some sport organisations are too unsure about financial sustainability to employ permanent staff
 - > Finding the money for permanent fulltime employment contracts might involve raising membership fees which might in turn reduce participation in sport, especially for economically disadvantaged participants; more cost effective and efficient methods are needed
 - > Work in sport organisations is often intermittent due to school holidays and seasonal sports
 - > Work often takes place in small packages – sometimes only a few hours per week, concentrated in the evenings and weekends
 - > Many specialist staff such as coaches and trainers already have full-time ‘day jobs’ in other sectors which often makes additional paid employment complicated and unattractive
 - > Employment in sport is often not seen as attractive due to the unclear career pathways caused by unstable and precarious work
 - > With European economies returning to ‘normal’ after the Covid pandemic, there is anecdotal evidence from the national roundtable consultation workshops that the labour market has become more competitive for employers and new ways of attracting skilled staff need to be explored.
4. It is also the case that (in the five countries covered by FORMS) some aspects of employment legislation, often rooted in the traditional one-to-one employer/employee relationship, are acting as a brake on new forms of employment, labour market flexibility and the growth of paid employment.
5. However, in the five countries examined by FORMS, it is clear that employment legislation is open to reform, especially when social partners in a sector get together in order to influence government. Therefore, there is the need to bring employers and employees together into a single forum for discussion, debate, strategic planning and lobbying to ensure labour law reform which will benefit both employers and employees.

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- 6.** The desk research, national roundtables and case studies reveal that the new forms of employment identified by Eurofound 2020 have the potential to address many of the particular features and needs of the sport sector above, by introducing greater flexibility in the labour market, and indeed some of them are already being used by sport employers and the self-employed. The Covid pandemic tended to accelerate their uptake in sport and other sectors.
- 7.** However, the five national roundtable consultation workshops (which had very wide coverage of major sport stakeholders in the partner countries) indicate that awareness of the new forms of employment is low and that employers and employees would benefit greatly from more information, clear and practical guidance on new forms of employment, how to select those most appropriate to national and local circumstances and how to go about putting them into practice.
- 8.** In particular the new forms of employment present a number of advantages and disadvantages for employers and employees and that good practice guidance is needed so that the expectations, responsibilities and rights of both sides are properly respected.
- 9.** For new forms of employment to be successfully implemented, there is a need for new approaches to training and developing the workforce which include more emphasis on independent working and the ability of managers to supervise remotely, enhanced skills in micro-entrepreneurship, digital skills, versatility, creativity, problem solving and social skills.



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» THE CASE STUDIES: New Forms of Employment in Sport and Other Sectors – Advantages and Disadvantages «

This preliminary research, in particular the case studies from the five countries, suggest the following new forms of employment have potential to address some of the issues summarised in Main Findings above. The detailed case studies can be found in **Section 6**.

Generally speaking, new forms of employment seem to have the potential to increase paid employment in the sector through more responsive and flexible working arrangements. However, each one has advantages and disadvantages for employers and employees and they need to be carefully evaluated before adopted as a solution. In some countries, existing employment legislation may be an obstacle to their implementation which also requires careful research.

