

*Data extracted in May 2021
Planned article update: September 2022*

This article analyses the trends in sport employment over the last few years, assesses its contribution to total employment and presents some of its characteristics - both at [European Union \(EU\)](#) and at country level.

In recent years, sport has acquired a significant profile in a number of [European strategies and programmes](#) . Sound, comparable statistics on the economic and social significance of sport in the EU are therefore needed to provide the foundation for evidence-based policies in the field.

To achieve this objective, [Eurostat](#) , together with DG Education and Culture, has launched a plan for the regular collection and dissemination of statistics on sport. Eurostat's sports statistics reflect the multidisciplinary nature of sport and try to take into account its importance in various fields: employment, trade, social cohesion and personal well-being.

Employment in sport represents 1.3 million people in the EU, 0.7 % of the total employment

In 2020, 1.3 million people were employed in the field of sport in the EU. Regarding gender balance, men (57 %) outnumbered women, a percentage which is higher than the one observed in total employment (see Table 1). The picture becomes more specific when considering age groups: in sport employment, the share of young people aged 15-29 was 33 % - almost twice the share observed in overall employment, while the 30-64 age group accounted for 64 % (16 percentage points less than the share reported for total employment).

Regarding the educational attainment level, 48 % of persons employed in sport had a medium educational attainment level (ISCED levels 3-4), followed by 39 % with a high level (ISCED 5-8) and 13 % with a low level (at most ISCED level 2). These percentages are rather close to the proportions observed for overall employment: around three percentage points (p.p.) less as concerns low educational level and three p.p. more for high educational level.

Employment in sport, EU, 2020

Socio-demographic characteristics		Number of persons employed in sport (thousand)	Distribution of persons employed..	
			...in sport	...in overall employment
			(%)	
Total		1,312.5		
Sex	Women	570.2	43.4	46.0
	Men	742.3	56.6	54.0
Age group	Aged 15-29	433.3	33.0	16.8
	Aged 30-64	844.0	64.3	80.6
	Aged 65+	35.2	2.7	2.6
Educational attainment level	Low (ISCED 0-2)	176.3	13.4	16.6
	Medium (ISCED 3-4)	626.0	47.7	47.5
	High (ISCED 5-8)	507.4	38.7	35.7

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: sprt_emp_sex, sprt_emp_age, sprt_emp_edu, ifsa_egan and ifsa_egised)

eurostat 

Table 1: Employment in sport, EU, 2020 Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_sex), (sprt_emp_age), (sprt_emp_edu), (ifsa_egan) and (ifsa_egised)

In 2020, in the EU, the number of people in sport employment grew by around 100 000 more in comparison with 2015, equivalent to an overall increase of 8.4 %. This rise was also observed in relative terms, with sport employment representing 0.68 % of total employment in 2020, up from the 0.64 % in 2015 (see table 2). The number of people employed in sport increased in 21 out of 27 EU Member States between 2015 to 2020. Four Member States accounted for more than half of the total increase in EU sport employment during the five-year period under consideration: Italy, Spain, Greece and Germany.

Sport employment, 2015 and 2020

	Number (1 000 persons)		Share of total employment (%)		AAGR 2015-20 (%)	
	2015	2020	2015	2020	Sport employment	Total employment
EU	1,210	1,312.5	0.6	0.7	1.6	0.8
Belgium (*)	19.4	27.7	0.4	0.6	7.4	1.1
Bulgaria (*)	10.6	13.3	0.4	0.4	4.6	0.6
Czechia	27.3	29.3	0.5	0.6	1.4	0.8
Denmark (*)	28.6	26.8	1.1	0.9	-1.4	1.0
Germany (*)	224.2	233.8	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.8
Estonia	4.9	4.5	0.8	0.7	-1.7	0.5
Ireland (*)	18.5	21.1	0.9	0.9	2.7	2.2
Greece	15.5	25.5	0.4	0.7	10.3	1.4
Spain	186.6	199.7	1.0	1.0	1.4	1.5
France	175.1	183.7	0.7	0.7	1.0	0.4
Croatia (**)	4.8	6.0	0.3	0.4	4.6	0.9
Italy (*)	117.5	137.6	0.5	0.6	3.2	0.4
Cyprus	1.9	3.6	0.5	0.9	13.6	3.1
Latvia	5.4	6.8	0.6	0.8	4.7	-0.1
Lithuania	6.8	5.5	0.5	0.4	-4.2	0.3
Luxembourg	1.7	2.0	0.8	0.8	3.3	2.6
Hungary	18.7	26.0	0.4	0.6	6.8	1.2
Malta	1.1	1.4	0.5	0.5	4.9	5.7
Netherlands	73.7	77.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.5
Austria	35.9	30.0	0.9	0.7	-3.5	0.7
Poland	57.8	64.7	0.4	0.4	2.3	0.4
Portugal	38.9	38.1	0.9	0.8	-0.4	1.1
Romania	12.3	19.3	0.1	0.2	9.4	0.0
Slovenia	5.4	4.7	0.6	0.5	-2.7	1.3
Slovakia	11.2	11.6	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.9
Finland	30.7	34.1	1.3	1.4	2.1	0.7
Sweden (*)	75.9	78.0	1.6	1.6	0.5	0.9
Iceland (*)	3.6	4.2	2.0	2.2	3.1	1.2
Norway	25.8	33.1	1.0	1.2	5.1	0.5
Switzerland	48.6	55.2	1.1	1.2	2.6	0.7
Montenegro (**)	-	1.6	-	0.7	-	-0.2
North Macedonia	2.2	2.1	0.3	0.3	-0.9	2.4
Serbia	15.2	12.2	0.6	0.4	-4.3	2.4
Turkey	82.2	66.0	0.3	0.3	-4.3	0.1

(*) Break in time series.

(*) 2020: provisional data with low reliability.

(*) 2015: low reliability.

(*) 2020: low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: sprt_emp_sex and ifsa_egan)

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Table 2: Sport employment, 2015 and 2020 Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_sex) and (ifsa_egan)

In the EU, between 2015 and 2020, employment in sport rose by 1.6 % in terms of [annual average growth rate \(AAGR\)](#), in comparison with 0.8 % registered for total employment (see Table 2 and Figure 1). The largest increases in EU Member States were observed in Cyprus (AAGR +13.6 %), Greece (+10.3 %), Romania (+9.4 %) and Belgium (+7.4 %, note a break in series). On the other hand, six countries recorded a negative AAGR for sport employment despite a positive one for total employment; Lithuania (-4.2 % for sport employment and +0.3 % for total employment), Austria (-3.5 % and +0.7 % respectively) and Slovenia (-2.7 % and +1.3 %

respectively) were the EU Member States with the biggest decreases in terms of sport employment AAGR.

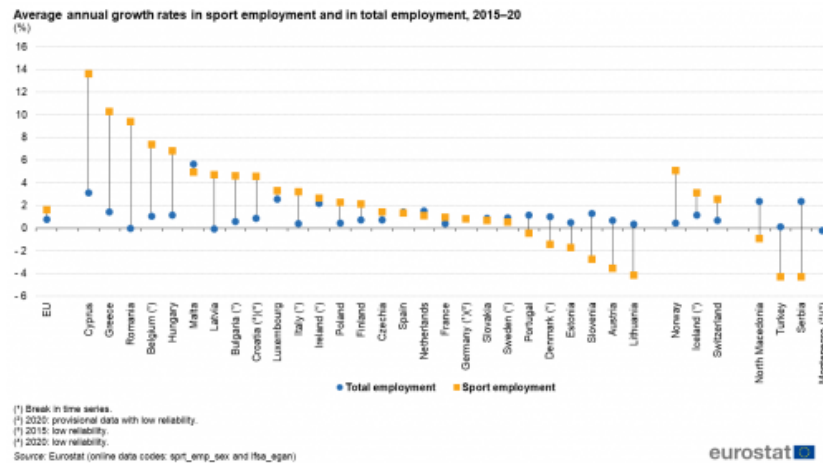


Figure 1: Average annual growth rates in sport employment and in total employment, 2015–20 (%) Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_sex) and (lfsa_egan)

Compared with 2019, in 2020 (with the Covid-19 pandemic), sport employment in the EU decreased by 54 000 persons. It was a fall of 4 %. For comparison, the decrease in total employment at that time amounted to 1.3 %. The decrease in sport employment has been influenced by gender and it accounted almost entirely for women, who dropped by over 52 000 persons compared to 2019 (-8.4 %), compared to only 1 900 men workers less than in 2019 (-0.3 %) - see Figure 2.

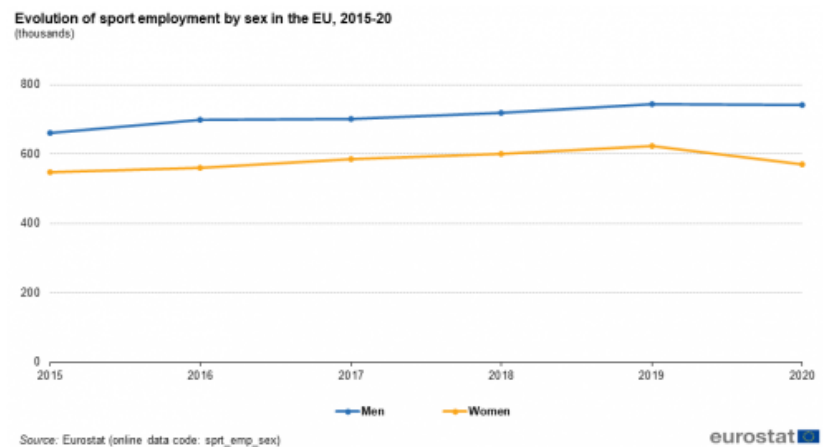


Figure 2: Evolution of sport employment by sex in the EU, 2015-20 Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_sex)

Employment in sport as a share of total employment

In 2020, employment in sport represented 0.7 % of total EU employment, ranging from 0.2 % in Romania to 1.6 % in Sweden, noting also 2.2 % in Iceland (see Figure 3). For the majority of EU Member States, these shares did not reach the 1 % threshold; in addition to Sweden, only in Finland, Spain and the Netherlands sport employment recorded at least 1 % of total employment. Jobs in sport account for a relatively small share of total employment, but their contribution has increased in 15 of the 27 EU Member States during the 2015-2020 period.

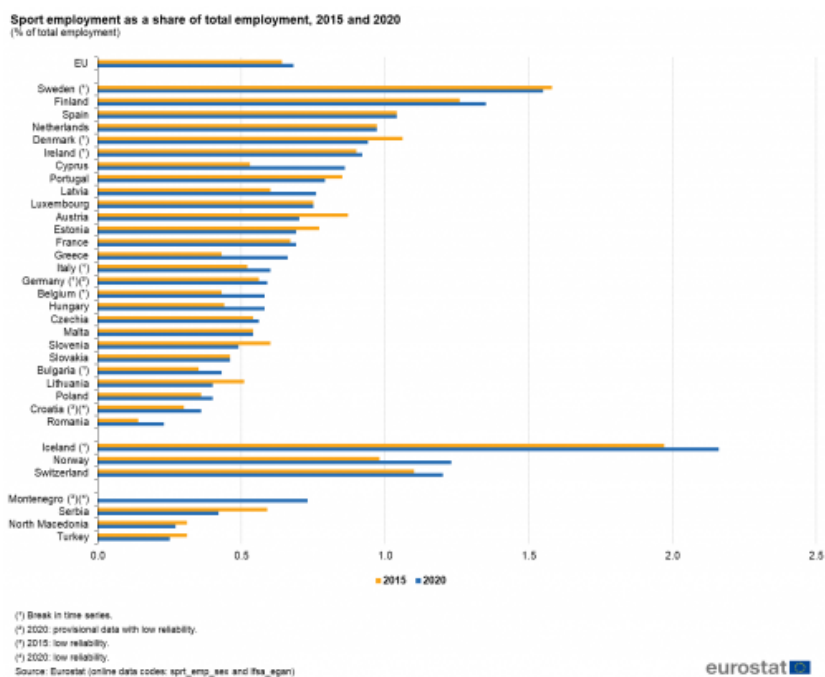


Figure 3: Sport employment as a share of total employment, 2015 and 2020 (% of total employment) Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_sex)

Men outnumber women in sport employment

In 2020, men accounted for 57 % of sport employment in the EU (see Figure 4), reflecting the structure of the total employed population. In a majority of EU Member States, fewer women than men were employed in sport, with the highest differences (where at least two thirds of employed people were men) observed in Croatia (73 %), Slovakia (71 %) and Bulgaria (67 %). On the other hand, more women than men worked in sport in Lithuania (60 % of women), Sweden (56 %), Finland (55 %) and the Netherlands (51 %).

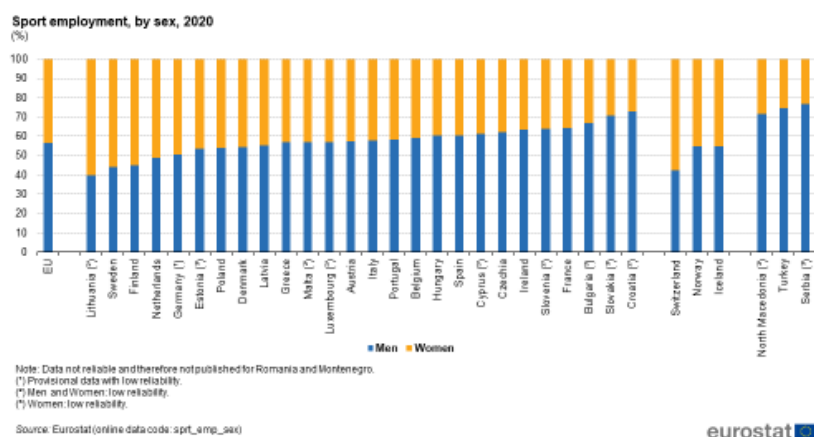


Figure 4: Sport employment, by sex, 2020 (%) Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_sex)

33 % of workers in sport employment are aged 15–29

Compared with the age structure of the total employed population (see Figure 5), it is noticeable that young people accounted for a relatively large share in sport employment: in 2020, 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 the total employment (17 %). In all countries for which data are available, the proportion of young people in sport employment outnumbered this share recorded in total employment. The difference was particularly significant in Spain and Slovakia, where the percentage of young people employed in sport was 2.6 times higher than the

share of young people in total employment, as well as in Greece (2.5 times higher) and in Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, Hungary and Slovenia (2.4 times higher). Six Member States recorded at least 40 % of young people employed in sport: Denmark (56 %), Finland (45 %), Sweden and the Netherlands (both 42 %), Slovakia (41 %) and Hungary (40 %). At the other end, only five countries had less than 30 % of young workers in sport, with the lowest share observed in Czechia (25 %).

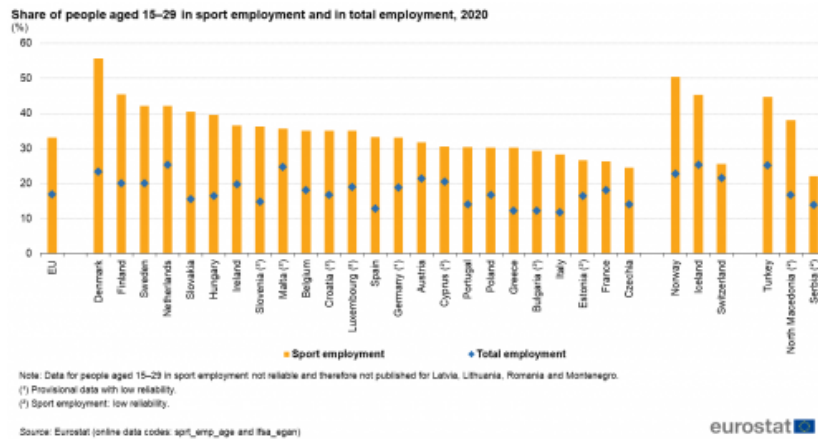


Figure 5: Share of people aged 15–29 in sport employment and in total employment, 2020 (%)
Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_age) and (lfsa_egan)

Between 2015 and 2020, in the EU, the percentage of young people employed in sport has slightly decreased (by one p.p.) - from 34 % to 33 % (see Figure 6). Among the EU Member States with reliable data, ten countries recorded an increase of the percentage of young people in sport employment between both years, three remained at the same level and additional nine countries recorded a decrease. Slovakia had the largest increase of 16 p.p., followed by Croatia (+ 14 p.p.). Cyprus recorded the largest decrease - by 17 p.p..

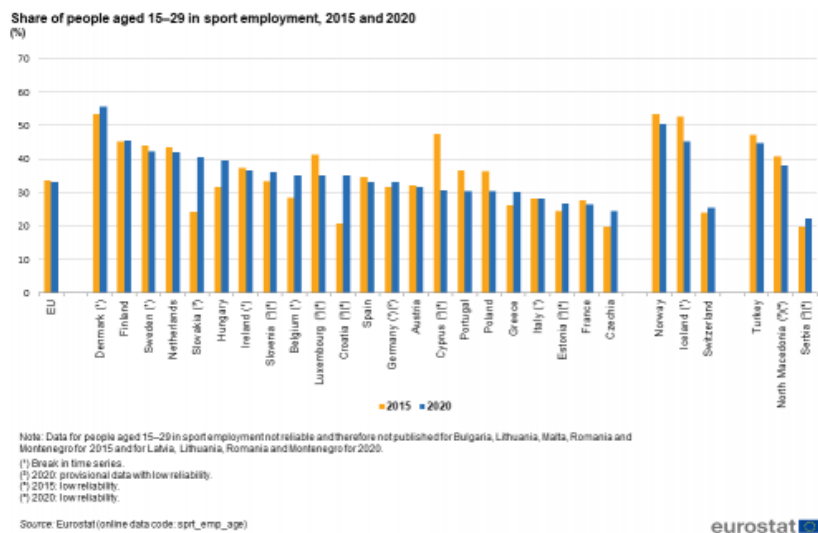


Figure 6: Share of people aged 15–29 in sport employment, 2015 and 2020 (%)
Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_age)

Almost 40 % of people employed in sport completed tertiary education

Considering the educational background of persons employed in sport in the EU in 2020, 39 % had completed tertiary education (see Figure 7). This figure was slightly higher than the share of tertiary graduates in total employment (36 %). In six EU Member States, at least half of those working in sport were tertiary graduates:

in Greece (64 %), Cyprus (61 %), Lithuania (58 %), Latvia (56 %), Spain (54 %) and Bulgaria (50 %). Out of the 25 EU Member States with reliable data, 12 registered a share of tertiary education graduates lower below the EU average (39 %), with the lowest percentages observed in Czechia (20 %) and Denmark (24 %).

In 2020, in comparison with total employment, Romania had the highest proportion of sport workers with a tertiary education (ratio of 1.8), followed by Greece (1.7) and Portugal (1.6). On the other hand, in 13 EU Member States, the share of tertiary graduates in sport employment was lower than that in total employment.

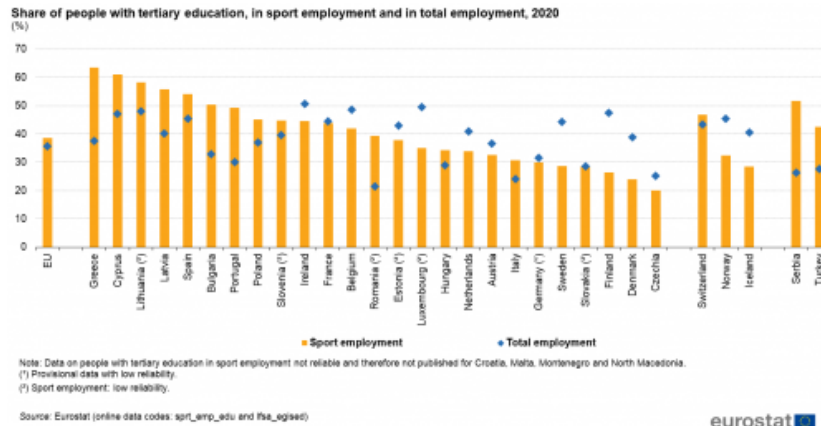


Figure 7: Share of people with tertiary education, in sport employment and in total employment, 2020 (%) Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_edu) and (lfsa_egised)

Between 2015 and 2020 (see Figure 8), the percentage of tertiary education graduates employed in sport rose in the EU as a whole - from 36 % in 2015 to 39 % in 2020. The same trend was observed in 15 out of 23 Member States for which data are sufficiently reliable for both years. In the period 2015–2020, the largest increases in the share of people with tertiary education in sport employment were recorded for Latvia (17 p.p.) and Cyprus (14 p.p.). In turn, for Estonia, Czechia and Lithuania, the share of people with tertiary education employed in sport decreased during this period by at least 10 p.p..

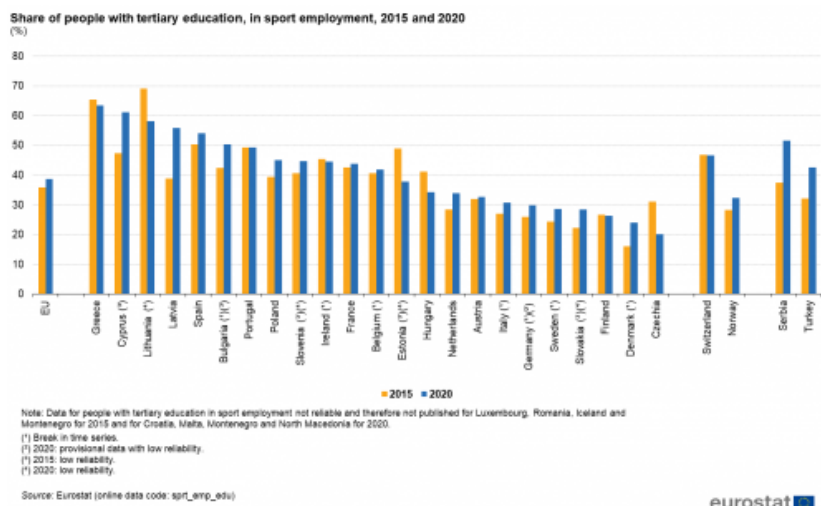


Figure 8: Share of people with tertiary education, in sport employment, 2015 and 2020 (%) Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_edu)

Source data for tables and graphs

- [Employment in sport: tables and figures](#)

Data sources

As no Eurostat data collection is devoted specifically to sport, sport statistics are derived from already existing EU surveys. Sport employment statistics are derived from the results of the [European Labour Force Survey \(EU-LFS\)](#) — the main source of information on the situation of the EU labour market and employment trends.

The purpose of these statistics is to throw light on the contribution sport makes to overall employment and on the main characteristics of sport employment (using variables such as age, sex or educational attainment).

Methodology/Metadata

Employment in sport is measured using the central statistical definition from the 'Vilnius definition' of sport, covering the core sporting activities coded under [NACE Rev.2 class 93.1](#) — Sports activities.

The dimension of occupation has also been introduced within the scope of sport employment. The methodology used is very similar to that used to estimate cultural employment; all jobs in a NACE economic sector and jobs in a sport occupation ([ISCO](#) , 'International Standard Classification of Occupations') outside the NACE sport sector are considered simultaneously.

Concretely, all workers recorded in NACE rev.2 code 93.1 (Sports activities) and/or ISCO-08 code 342 (Sports and fitness workers) fall within the scope of this definition of sport. In other words, employment in sport includes the working population employed:

- in a sport-related occupation in the sports sector (ISCO 342*NACE 93.1), e.g. professional athletes, professional coaches in fitness centres, etc.;
- in a non-sport occupation in the sports sector (NACE 93.1), e.g. receptionists in fitness centres;
- in a sport-related job (ISCO 342) outside the sports sector, e.g. school sport instructors.

NACE Rev.2 code 93.1 includes:

- the activities of sports teams or clubs whose primary activity is participating in live sports events before a paying audience;
- independent athletes who take part in live sporting or racing events before a paying audience;
- owners of vehicles or animals that take part in races (such as cars, dogs or horses) who are primarily engaged in entering them in racing or other spectator sports events;
- sports trainers providing specialised services to support participants in sporting events or competitions;
- operators of arenas and stadiums;
- other activities of organising, promoting or managing sports events, n.e.c.

ISCO-08 code 342 includes sports and fitness workers (athletes, players, coaches, instructors and officials, fitness and recreation instructors and programme leaders).

It is important to bear in mind that the employment figures presented here are person counts, not full-time equivalents. In other words, they include all paid workers in sport-related jobs, regardless of their work pattern (full-time or part-time).

Context

Sport is part of the wider EU policy agenda, which includes achieving the EU's social and economic goals. Since 2011, the Commission and EU countries have worked together on the basis of multiannual work programmes agreed by the Council ([EU Work Plan for Sport 2011–2014](#) ; [EU Work Plan for Sport for 2014–2017](#) ; [EU Work Plan for Sport for 2017–2020](#) ; [EU Work plan for Sport for 2021–2024](#)) which set priorities and define the principles underpinning cooperation.

A number of expert groups have been set up to achieve concrete results. Among them, the Expert Group 'Sport and economics' (XG ECO) and the Expert Group on Health-Enhancing Physical Activity (XG HEPA) play

a key role in implementing evidence-based policies in the sports sector. XG ECO, for example, has produced the economic definition of sport ('Vilnius definition'), and made progress towards developing Sport Satellite Accounts in some EU countries. XG HEPA concentrates on implementing the [Council recommendations on physical activity](#) adopted in 2013. These include a monitoring framework with indicators both on the level of physical activity and on policies to promote physical activity in the EU Member States.

Eurostat comparable data on sport employment, international trade, participation in sporting activities etc. is an important tool to contribute to the monitoring and development of the EU's sport policies.

Other articles

- [International trade in sporting goods](#)
- [Manufacturing of sporting goods](#)
- [Statistics on sport participation](#)
- [Government expenditure on recreational and sporting services](#)
- [Culture](#) (all Statistics Explained articles on culture)

Database

- [Employment in sport \(sprt_emp\)](#) , see:

[Employment in sport by sex \(sprt_emp_sex\)](#)

[Employment in sport by age \(sprt_emp_age\)](#)

[Employment in sport by educational attainment level \(sprt_emp_edu\)](#)

Dedicated section

- [Sport](#)

Methodology

- [Employment in sport \(sprt_emp\)](#) (ESMS metadata file — sprt_emp_esms)

Legislation

- [Resolution of 21 May 2014 of the Council and the Representatives of the Member State Governments, meeting within the Council, on the EU Work Plan for Sport \(2014–2017\) \(2014/C 183/03\)](#)
- [EU Work plan for Sport for 2017–2020](#)
- [EU Work plan for Sport for 2021–2024](#)

Publications

- [Leaflet on sport statistics — 2018 edition](#)

External links

- [DG Education and Culture — Sport policy and programmes](#)
- [Erasmus+ Sport](#)
- [Special Eurobarometer — Sport and physical activity](#)