Employment in sport

Statistics Explained

Data extracted in May 2025 Planned article update: July 2026

Highlights

Employment in sport in the European Union grew by 6.5% between 2023 and 2024. In 2024, 36.8% of people employed in sport in the EU were aged 15-29 years, which is more than double the percentage of overall employment for the same age group.

This article analyses employment in the sports industry over the past few years, assesses its contribution to total employment numbers 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 support evidence-based policies in sport.

To do this, Eurostat, together with the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, has decided to carry out the regular collection and dissemination of statistics related to sport. These statistics reflect the multidisciplinary nature of sport and try to take into account its importance in various areas: employment, international trade, social cohesion and personal well-being.

Employment in sport - developments between 2021 and 2024

Employment in sport represents 1.6 million people in the EU, 0.8% of total employment

In 2024, 1.6 million people were employed in sport in the EU. Men (56.3%) outnumbered women with a slightly narrower gender gap in sport employment than observed in total employment (see Table 1). Looking at employment by age, most people employed in sport belonged to the age group 30-64 years old. It is notable that the share of young people aged 15-29 years employed in sport was more than twice the share of total employment. This contrasts with 30-64 year olds, whose share was 20.4 percentage points (pp) less than the numbers for total employment.

At the level of educational attainment, 43.6% of people employed in sport had a medium educational attainment level (International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 3-4), followed by 40.7% with a high level (ISCED 5-8) and 15.6% with a low level (at most ISCED level 2). These percentages are close to those observed for overall employment: 1.6 pp less for medium, and 2.0 pp more for high levels of educational attainment.

Employment in sport, EU, 2024

		Number of people	Distribution of people employed		
Sociodemographic characteristics		employed in sport	in sport	in total employment	
		(thousand)	(%)		
Total		1 648			
Sex	Women	721	43.8	46.4	
	Men	927	56.3	53.6	
Age group	Aged 15-29	607	36.8	17.3	
	Aged 30-64	976	59.2	79.6	
	Aged 65+	66	4.0	3.1	
Educational attainment level	Low (ISCED 0-2)	257	15.6	16.0	
	Medium (ISCED 3-4)	718	43.6	45.2	
	High (ISCED 5-8)	670	40.7	38.7	

Source: Eurostat (online data codes: sprt_emp_sex, sprt_emp_age, sprt_emp_edu, lfsa_egan and lfsa_egised)



Table 1: Employment in sport, EU, 2024 Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_sex), (sprt_emp_age), (sprt_emp_edu), (lfsa_egan) and (lfsa_egised)

Significant increase in sport employment in 2024 compared with 2023

In 2024, the number of people employed in sport in the EU increased by around 100 000 compared to 2023 (up by 6.5%), with the share of people employed in sport stable at 0.8% in the total employed population.

Employment in sport, 2021 to 2024

	Number (1 000 people)					Share of total employment (%)			Change in 2022		Change in 2024 compared to 2023
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2021	2022	70) 2023	2024	compared to 2021	compared to 2022	compared to 2023
EU	1 370	1 517	1 547	1 648	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8	10.7	2.0	6.5
Belgium	26	30	33	33	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.7	17.5	7.9	1.5
Bulgaria (°)	10	9	11	13	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.4	-9.8	19.6	17.3
Czechia	30	30	30	25	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	1.7	-2.3	-17.2
Denmark (5)	28	35	38	42	1.0	1.2	1.3	1.4	24.0	9.0	11.7
Germany	223	239	239	261	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.6	7.5	0.0	9.1
Estonia	5	7	7	7	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.0	42.9	-2.9	5.9
Ireland	20	23	27	28	0.8	0.9	1.0	1.0	12.3	16.2	5.7
Greece	23	34	26	29	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.7	47.6	-22.1	12.3
Spain	220	232	245	253	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.2	5.2	5.6	3.4
France	279	313	289	311	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.1	12.3	-7.9	7.6
Croatia (1)(2)(4)(5)	7	8	8	11	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.6	13.2	7.8	26.5
Italy	104	135	162	176	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.7	30.3	19.5	8.7
Cyprus	4	4	3	4	0.9	0.8	0.7	0.7	-10.0	-13.9	12.9
Latvia	6	5	5	5	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5	-13.3	-5.8	-8.2
Lithuania	7	8	7	8	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	15.2	-13.2	22.7
Luxembourg (4)(6)	2	2	3	2	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.7	37.5	13.6	-12.0
Hungary	27	28	26	31	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7	5.2	-8.5	18.5
Malta (1)(4)(6)	1	2	2	2	0.3	0.7	0.6	0.6	137.5	-10.5	5.9
Netherlands	82	89	96	100	0.9	0.9	1.0	1.0	8.0	8.6	3.5
Austria	26	29	33	29	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.6	10.4	13.9	-11.6
Poland	68	72	75	82	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	5.3	5.2	9.0
Portugal	39	43	45	51	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.0	10.2	2.8	15.2
Romania	12	16	22	16	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.2	35.5	31.7	-25.0
Slovenia	8	9	7	8	0.8	0.9	0.7	0.8	7.6	-17.6	8.6
Slovakia (1)	10	11	10	13	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	13.0	-8.0	24.0
Finland	33	32	30	31	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.2	-3.0	-6.2	1.7
Sweden	71	73	71	80	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.5	-1.8	12.1
Iceland	5	6	6	7	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.8	7.4	-1.7	14.0
Norway	31	32	32	36	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.2	2.9	1.9	10.8
Switzerland	49	45	44	50	1.0	0.9	0.9	1.0	-8.6	-1.3	13.2
Serbia (°)	15	15	16	19	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.7	1.3	4.6	22.0
Türkiye	67	87	117	111	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.3	29.4	34.2	-5.2

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Table 2: Employment in sport, 2021 to 2024 Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_sex)

Employment in sport continued to grow in 2024 for the third year in a row; a positive trend which started with the marked increase in 2022 that was attributed to the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. The previous years, from 2020 to 2021, were characterised by fall in the number of people employed in sport in several countries due to the decrease in the number of people taking part in organised sport. In 2022, employment in sport rose in 23 EU countries compared to 2021. Malta (+137.5%), Greece (+47.6%) and Estonia (+42.9%) recorded the highest increases, while 4 countries still had a negative balance compared to 2021, namely Latvia (-13.3%), Cyprus (-10%), Bulgaria (-9.8%, note a break in the time series in 2022) and Finland (-3.0%). In most of these countries, the number of people employed in sport is low, meaning that even a small variation could lead to a sizeable increase or decrease in the percentage (see Figure 1).

In 12 EU countries employment in sport continued to grow between 2022 and 2023, following an increase from 2021 to 2022, while Bulgaria was the only EU country to grow in 2023 after a decrease in 2022. The biggest increases were in Romania (+31.7%), Bulgaria (+19.6%) and Italy (+19.5%). By contrast, 13 EU countries saw a decrease in employment in sport in 2023, most notably Greece (-22.1%), Slovenia (-17.6%) and Cyprus (-13.9%).

In 2024, employment in sport increased in 22 EU countries compared to 2023, with Croatia (+26.5%), Slovakia (+24.0%) and Lithuania (+22.7%) recording the highest increases. After 2 years of growth, Romania (-25.0%), Luxembourg (-12.0%) and Austria (-11.6%)

saw significant decreases, while Czechia (-17.2%) and Latvia (-8.2%) continued the negative trend of previous years.

⁽¹) 2021: low reliability. (²) 2022: low reliability. (³) 2022: break in time series. (¹) 2023: low reliability.

^{(5) 2023:} break in time series.

^{(6) 2024:} low reliability.

Source: Eurostat (online data code: sprt_emp_sex)

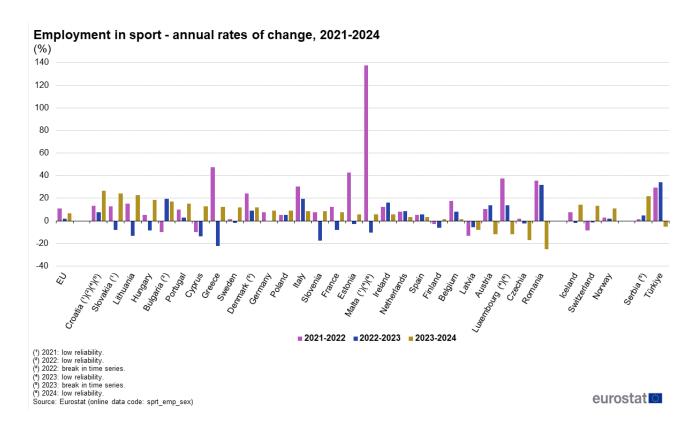


Figure 1: Employment in sport - annual rates of change, 2021-2024 Source: Eurostat (sprt emp sex)

The gender gap in sport employment has widened since 2011 (see Figure 2)

- Men's employment in sport grew steadily from 583 100 people in 2011 to 746 400 in 2019. There was a small drop by 5 200 people in 2020, before increasing again in 2021 (+9 000, corresponding to a 1.2% increase), 2022 (+80 300, 10.7%), 2023 (+24 600, +3.0%) and in 2024 (+72 200, +8.4%).
- The number of women employed in sport dropped in 2013 (-29 700 compared to 2012). Then, a few years of continuous increase in women's employment in sport brought the number up to 623 900 people in 2019, before dropping again in 2020 (-50 000, -8.0%). Since 2021, the number of women employed in sport has been increasing, reaching in 2024 the highest level at 721 100 (+29 100, +4.2% compared to 2023).

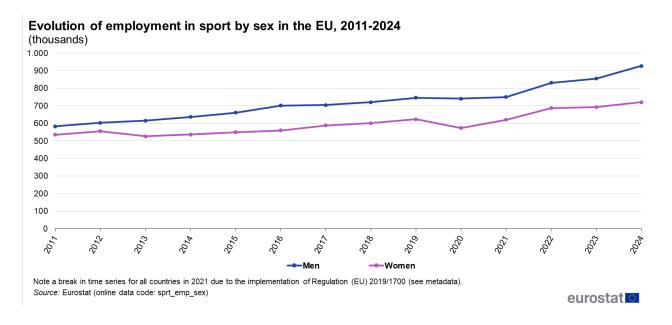


Figure 2: Evolution of employment in sport by sex in the EU, 2011-2024 Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_sex)

Characteristics of employment in sport in 2024

Employment in sport as a share of total employment

In 2024, employment in sport represented 0.8% of total employment in the EU, ranging from 0.2% in Romania to 1.5% in Sweden (see Figure 3). In Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Estonia, Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal employment in sport accounted for at least 1% of total employment. At country level, the contribution of employment in sport to total employment increased in 22 of the 27 EU countries during 2021-2024.

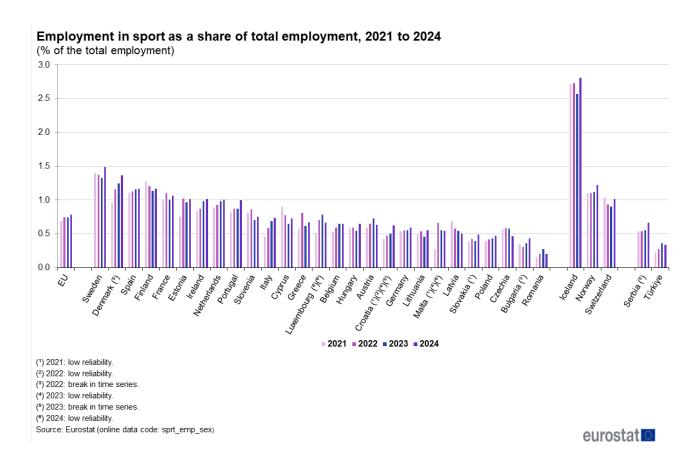


Figure 3: Employment in sport as a share of total employment, 2021 to 2024 Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_sex)

Men outnumber women in employment in sport

In 2024, men accounted for 56.3% of people employed in sport in the EU (see Figure 4), reflecting the structure of the total employed population. In most EU countries, fewer women than men were employed in sport, with the biggest gaps in employment between men and women (at least two thirds of people employed in sport were men) in Cyprus (69.4% were men) and Belgium (66.8%). However, more women than men were employed in sport in Latvia (53.3% were women), Sweden (51.4%) and the Netherlands (50.8%), while in Denmark women accounted for half of the people employed in sport.

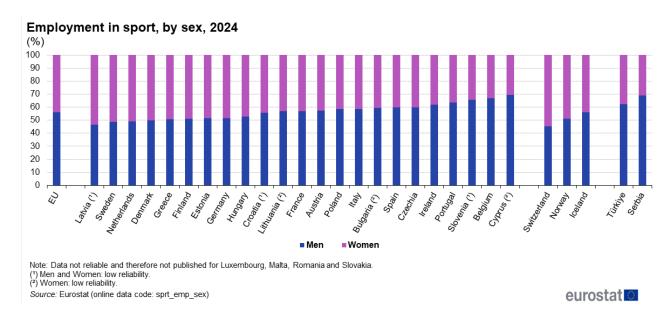


Figure 4: Employment in sport, by sex, 2024 Source: Eurostat (sprt emp sex)

36.8% of people employed in sport are aged 15-29 years

Compared with the age structure of the total employed population (see Figure 5), young people accounted for a relatively large share of people employed in sport: in 2024, 36.8% of people employed in sport in the EU were aged 15-29 years. This is twice as much as in total employment (17.3%). In all countries for which data are available, except in Croatia, the proportion of young people employed in sport outnumbered the proportion recorded in total employment. The difference was particularly significant in Bulgaria and Spain, where the proportion of young people employed in sport was respectively 3.2 and 3.0 times higher than in total employment. This was also the case for Sweden and Finland (2.6 and 2.5 times higher).

In 7 EU countries, at least 40% of people employed in sport were young people: Denmark (52.7%), Finland (49.7%), Sweden (49.2%), the Netherlands (46.3%), Belgium (43.5%), Spain (43.5%) and Ireland (43.2%). At the other end of the spectrum, those aged 15-29 years accounted for less than 30% of people employed in sport in only 8 countries, with the lowest percentage in Croatia (16.2%).

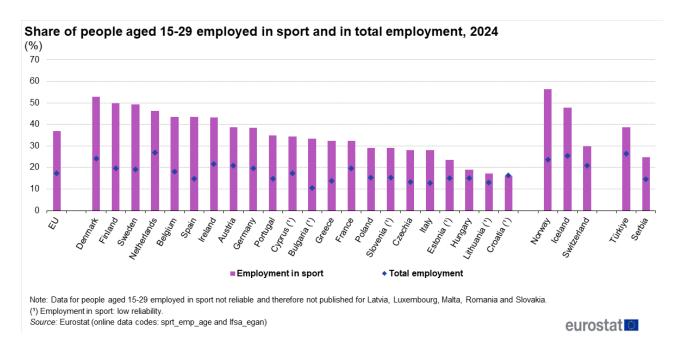


Figure 5: Share of people aged 15-29 years employed in sport and in total employment, 2024 Source: Eurostat (sprt_emp_age) and (lfsa_egan)

40.7% of people employed in sport have completed tertiary education

In terms of the educational background of people employed in sport in the EU in 2024, 40.7% had completed tertiary education (see Figure 6). This figure was slightly higher than the proportion of tertiary education graduates in total employment (38.7%). In 3 EU countries, at least two thirds of people working in sport were tertiary education graduates: Cyprus (74.3%), Lithuania (71.6%) and Greece (66.6%). In another 6 EU countries, this proportion was over 50%. Of the 24 EU countries with reliable data, 9 had a lower proportion of tertiary education graduates employed in sport than the EU average of 40.7%, with the lowest percentages in Finland (23.5%) and Czechia (23.7%).

In 2024, Romania had the highest proportion of tertiary education graduates employed in sport compared to total employment figures (with a ratio of 2.2), followed by Greece (1.7) and Croatia (1.6). In 9 EU countries, the proportion of tertiary education graduates in employment in sport was lower than in total employment.

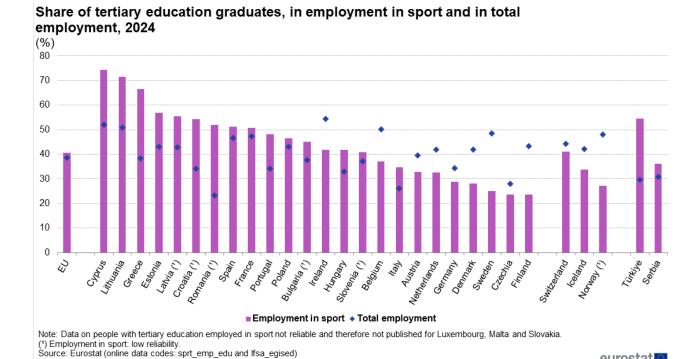


Figure 6: Share of tertiary education graduates, in employment in sport and in total employment, 2024 Source: Eurostat (sprt emp edu) and (Ifsa egised)

Focus on young and tertiary educated people

After two years of increase, the share of young people employed in sport declined in 2024, while the proportion of tertiary education went over 40% in 2024

Different trends can be seen between 2011 and 2024 in the two socio-demographic characteristics analysed in the previous sections, the age group 15-29 years old and tertiary education (see Figure 7)

- The share of young people employed in sport fell by 1.8 pp between 2011 and 2013, before increasing to almost 35% in 2017. It then dropped significantly from 2019 to 2021, by 2.7 pp. In 2022, it started to increase again, reaching 37.4% of all people employed in sport in 2023, before decreasing to 36.8% in 2024.
- · Conversely, the share of people employed in sport, who were tertiary education graduates, increased every year from 2011 to 2021 (except in 2020), rising from 28.5% in 2011 to 39.6% in 2021, stabilising in 2022 (39.4%) and 2023 (39.6%) and overcoming 40% in 2024 (40.7%).

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Evolution of share of people aged 15-29 and of tertiary education graduates in employment in sport in the EU, 2011-2024

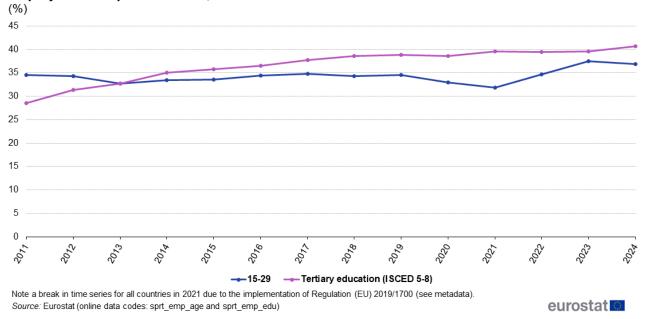


Figure 7: Evolution of share of people aged 15-29 years and of tertiary education graduates in employment in sport in the EU, 2011-2024 Source: Eurostat (sprt emp age) and (sprt emp edu)

Source data for tables and graphs

• Employment in sport: tables and figures

Data sources

As there is no Eurostat data collection specifically for sport, sport statistics are derived from existing EU data collections. Employment statistics related to sport are extracted from the results of the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) — the main source of information on the EU labour market and employment trends.

The purpose of these statistics is to highlight the contribution that sport makes to overall employment, and the main characteristics of employment in sport (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 under NACE Rev.2 group 93.1 — Sports activities.

The variable occupation has also been introduced as part of the scope of employment in sport: all jobs in a NACE economic sector and jobs in a sports occupation (ISCO, 'International Standard Classification of Occupations') outside the NACE sport sector are considered simultaneously. In practice, this means that all workers recorded in NACE Rev.2 group 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 sports-related occupation in the sports sector (ISCO-08 code 342*NACE Rev. 2 group 93.1), e.g. professional athletes, professional coaches in fitness centres, etc.;
- in a non-sports occupation in the sports sector (NACE Rev.2 group 93.1), e.g. receptionists in fitness centres;
- in a sports-related job (ISCO-08 code 342) outside the sports sector, e.g. school sport instructors.

NACE Rev.2 group 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, not elsewhere classified.

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

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). The EU-LFS collects detailed information on the economic activity and occupation only for the respondent's main job and therefore omits information pertaining to secondary jobs. As such, these secondary jobs are excluded from the aggregates covering employment in sport. In view of these aspects and the approach adopted, the data are likely to underestimate the true extent of employment in this field.

Time series

Regulation (EU) 2019/1700, which came into force on 1 January 2021, resulted in a break in the EU-LFS time series for several Member States. To monitor the evolution of employment and unemployment despite the break in the time series, Member States assessed the impact of the break in their country and computed impact factors or break-corrected data for a set of indicators. Break-corrected data are published for the EU-LFS main indicators.

More information on the EU-LFS can be found via the online publication EU-LFS, which includes eight articles on the technical and methodological aspects of the survey. The EU-LFS methodology in force from the 2021 data collection onwards is described in the article methodology from 2021 onwards. Detailed information on coding lists, explanatory notes and classifications used over time can be found under documentation.

Context

The multiannual work programme (EU Work Plan for Sport for 2024-2027) agreed by the EU Council, sets the priorities and principles for cooperation on sport between the European Commission and the Member States.

Several expert groups have been set up to achieve concrete results. Among them, the Expert Group on the Economic Dimension of Sport (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 developed an economic definition of sport ('Vilnius definition'), and made progress towards developing Sport Satellite Accounts in some EU countries. XG HEPA is working on implementing the Council recommendations on physical activity adopted in 2013. These include a monitoring framework with indicators both for the level of physical activity and for policies to promote physical activity in EU countries. Eurostat comparable data on international trade, employment in sport, participation in sporting activities, etc. make a valuable contribution to the monitoring and development of the EU's policies in this area.

Explore further

Other articles

· International trade in sporting goods

- · Enterprises in the sports sector
- · Household expenditure on sporting goods and services
- Sport participation practicing sport and physical activity
- · Sport participation attending live sporting events
- Consumer prices of recreational and sporting goods and services
- · 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)

· Labour market (labour), see:

Employment and unemployment (Labour force survey) (employ)

LFS series - detailed annual survey results (Ifsa)

Employment - LFS series (Ifsa_emp)

Thematic section

- Sport
- Employment and unemployment (LFS)

Publications

- Sports statistics infographics 2024 version
- · The economic dimension of sport

Methodology

- Employment in sport (sprt_emp) (ESMS metadata file sprt_emp_esms)
- Employment and unemployment (labour force survey) (ESMS metadata file employ_esms)
- EU labour force survey online publication

External links

- DG Education and Culture Sport policy and programmes
- Erasmus+ Sport
- Special Eurobarometer Sport and physical activity

Legislation

- EU Work Plan for Sport for 2024-2027
- Summaries of EU Legislation: Sport a spur to innovation and excellence
- Regulation (EU) 2019/1700 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 October 2019 establishing a common framework for European statistics relating to persons and households, based on data at individual level collected from samples