



ESOM

ENHANCING SPORT ORGANISATIONS
AND MANAGEMENT

ESOM Research Report: Analytical Insights and Methodological Approaches



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STUDENT SPORTS ASSOCIATION OF MONTENEGRO



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Introduction

This report, *European University Sports: Analytical Insights and Methodological Approaches*, builds upon the findings presented in the *ESOM Research Report: European University Sports at a Glance*. The original report provided a comprehensive overview of university sports in Europe, including student participation rates, gender distribution, sports diversity, and funding mechanisms across various countries.

Our objective here is to further analyse those findings, expand on the methodology, and incorporate relevant academic references to contextualize the data. By doing so, we aim to provide more profound insights into the landscape of university sports in Europe and offer recommendations for stakeholders to improve engagement, inclusivity, and sustainability in their sports programs.

Methodology

The *ESOM Research Report* employed a detailed survey distributed to 47 national university sports associations (NUSAs) across Europe, 24 of which participated, representing approximately 50% of the membership. The survey was designed to collect information on several key aspects of university sports, such as staff composition, student participation, sports diversity, and funding structures.



Map of participating and non-participant members of the EUSA

(not showing Russia for map visualization simplification)

List of member countries of the European University Sports Association with participating countries in the 2023 survey

<i>Albania</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>
<i>Armenia</i>	<i>Norway</i>
<i>Austria</i>	<i>Poland</i>
<i>Azerbaijan Republic</i>	<i>Portugal</i>
<i>Croatia</i>	<i>Romania</i>
<i>Cyprus</i>	<i>Slovenia</i>
<i>Czechia</i>	<i>Spain</i>
<i>Hungary</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
<i>Italy</i>	<i>Switzerland</i>
<i>Latvia</i>	<i>Türkiye</i>
<i>Liechtenstein</i>	<i>Ukraine</i>
<i>Montenegro</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>

Data Collection Process

To ensure consistency and reliability, the survey collected quantitative data, including the number of universities per country, student enrolment, and participation in sports activities. In addition to quantitative measures, qualitative feedback was collected to understand better the variations in university sports management across countries.

Challenges encountered during this process included discrepancies in how different countries define "student participation" and differences in funding structures. These variations were addressed through clarifications with NUSAs and the provision of a standardized survey structure.

Survey Structure

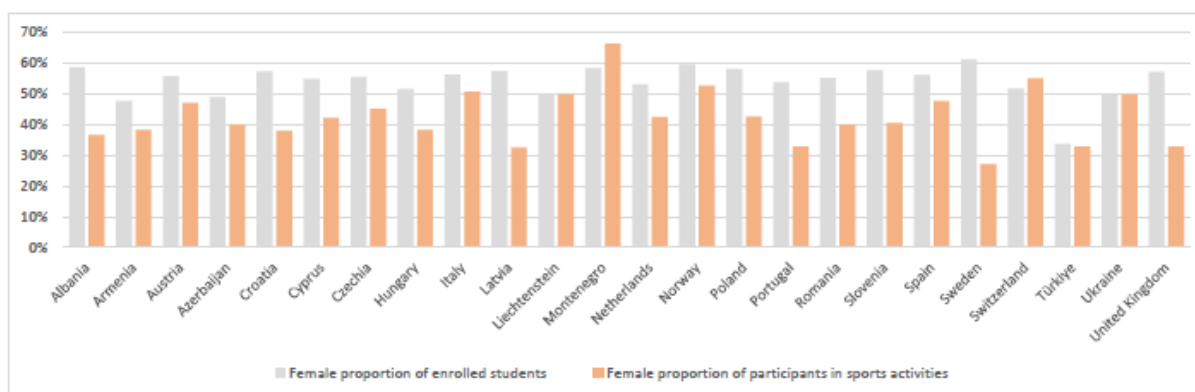
1. *Country*
2. *Name of your NUSA*
3. *NUSA Statistics*
 - a. *How many people are employed full time in your NUSA?*
 - b. *How many people are employed part-time in your NUSA?*
 - c. *How many Vice-Presidents are in your NUSA?*
 - d. *How many Executive Committee members does your NUSA have?*
 - e. *How many Committee Chairs does your NUSA have?*
4. *How many universities are there in your country?*
5. *Number of students enrolled in higher education.*
6. *Number of students participating in sport activities in higher education at national, inter-regional and regional level (national focus)*
7. *Which national championships are organized, with an estimate of participants (annually)?*
8. *What is the number of men and women as directors of academic sport services /University sport facilities in your country?*
9. *What is the number of men and women working as physical education teachers/coaches at academic sport services / University sport facilities in your country?*
10. *Number of coaches and technical officials contributing in your national championships?*
11. *Please estimate the percentage of your average annual funding from the following sources (...)*

Data Validation

Efforts to validate the data included cross-referencing statistics with publicly available national data and following up with participating NUSAs for clarification where necessary. This process was crucial in ensuring the data accurately reflected the university sports landscape across Europe.

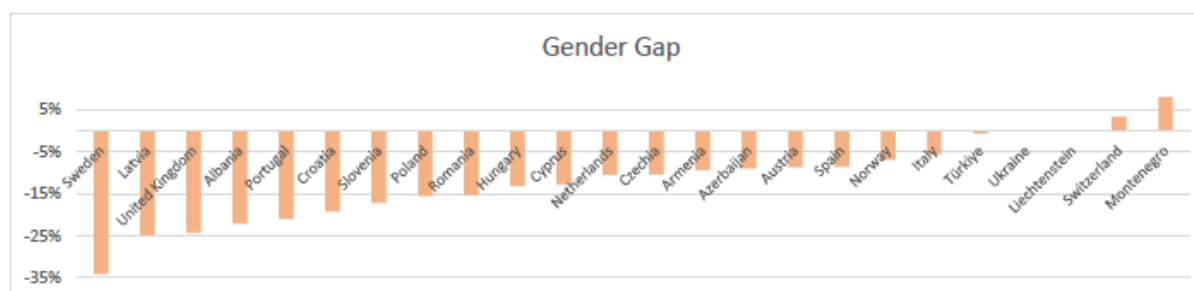
Literature Review and Academic References

University sports are increasingly recognized as vital to student development, offering numerous physical, mental, and social benefits. According to Deliens et al. (2015), physical activity enhances academic performance and promotes mental well-being among students. In the European context, fostering inclusivity and broadening participation in university sports remain critical goals, as evidenced by the gender disparities reported in the ESOM survey.



Gender distribution per country on students enrolled in higher education and students participating in university sports activities at the national, interregional, and regional level.

Gender equality in sports has been a long-standing challenge. Despite progress, many countries still report a significant underrepresentation of women in sports, particularly in traditionally male-dominated fields like football and basketball (Women in Sport, 2019). This underrepresentation is evident in the ESOM report, where female participation in sports activities lags behind male participation in most countries.



Gender gap in enrolled students vs participating students. Negative (positive) percentage means female (male) gender is under-represented.

Moreover, funding mechanisms vary widely, with some countries relying heavily on public sources, while others have diversified their income streams (Green, 2007). Ensuring sustainable funding models for university sports is crucial, especially given the economic challenges faced by educational institutions. As Anderson & Taylor (2018) highlight, diversifying funding sources—through sponsorships, memberships, and partnerships—can enhance financial sustainability.

Key References:

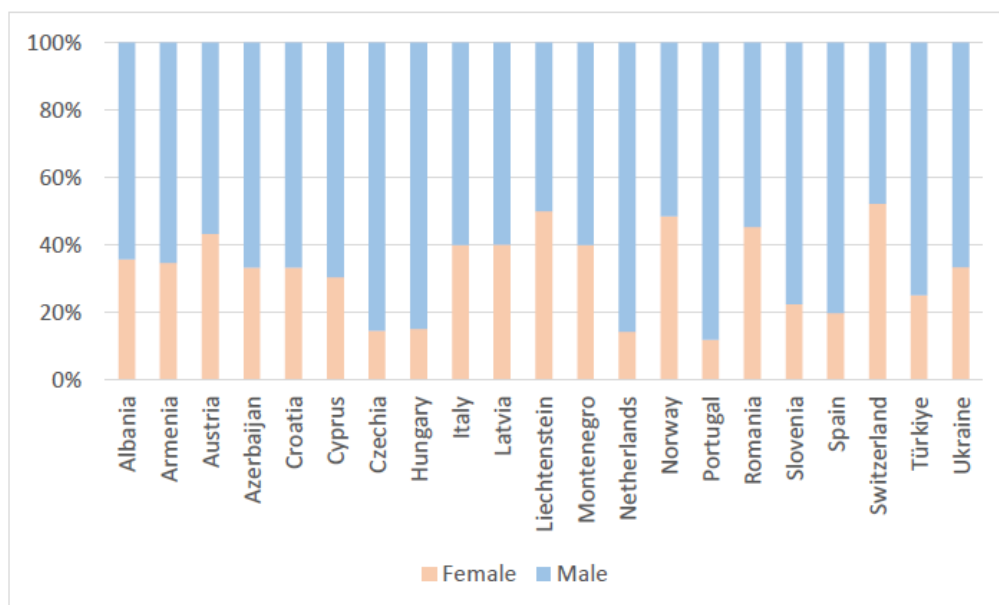
- Deliens, T., Deforche, B., De Bourdeaudhuij, I., & Clarys, P. (2015). Physical activity and its association with academic performance in university students. *European Journal of Sport Science*, 15(3), 206-212.
- Women in Sport. (2019). *Levelling the Playing Field: The Impact of Gender on Sports Participation*.
- Green, M. (2007). *Sport Development: Policy, Process, and Practice*. Routledge.
- Anderson, P., & Taylor, J. (2018). Sustainable Funding Models for University Sports: Challenges and Solutions. *Journal of Sports Management*, 32(4), 409-421.

Further Analysis of Findings

Participation Rates

The *ESOM Research Report* revealed a total of 2081 universities in the surveyed countries, with an average of 50% female participation in university sports. However, the overall gender gap indicates that female students are underrepresented in many countries, with Montenegro and Switzerland being rare exceptions.

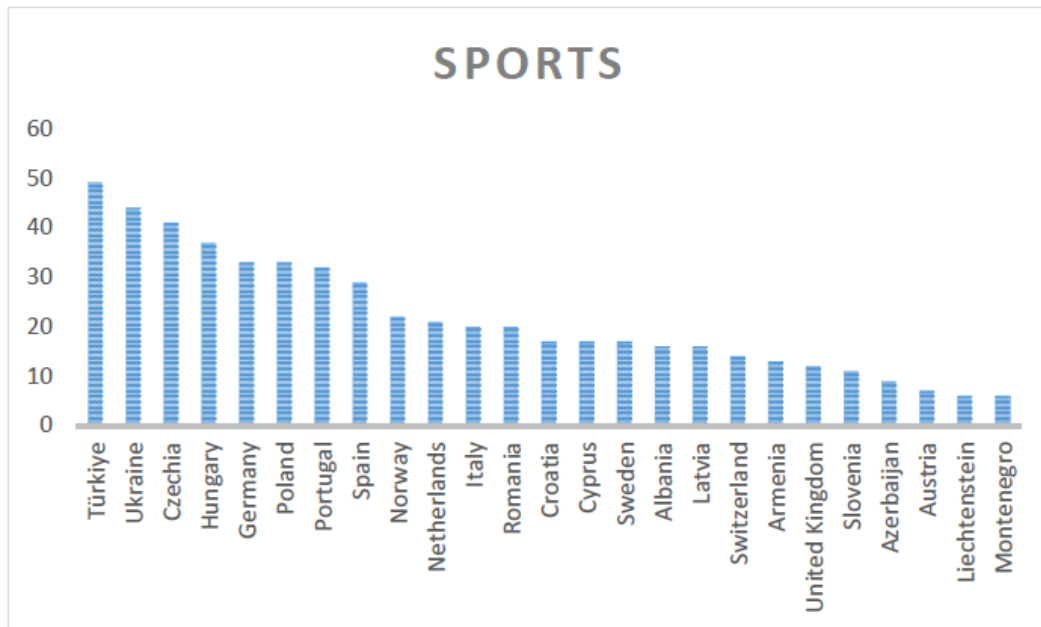
To address this gap, universities can adopt measures that specifically target female students. Initiatives like female-only sports leagues, flexible training schedules, and the promotion of female role models have proven effective in increasing female sports participation (Sabo & Veliz, 2016). Additionally, fostering a culture of inclusivity and reducing barriers to entry for women in male-dominated sports such as football and basketball can help bridge this gap.



Support technical staff distribution by country and gender.

Diversity of Sports

The diversity of sports offered across European universities is another key finding of the original report. Türkiye (49 sports), Ukraine (44), and Czechia (41) lead in offering a wide range of sports at the national level. Popular sports such as volleyball, basketball, and futsal are widely organized, with many countries featuring these as part of their university sports programs.

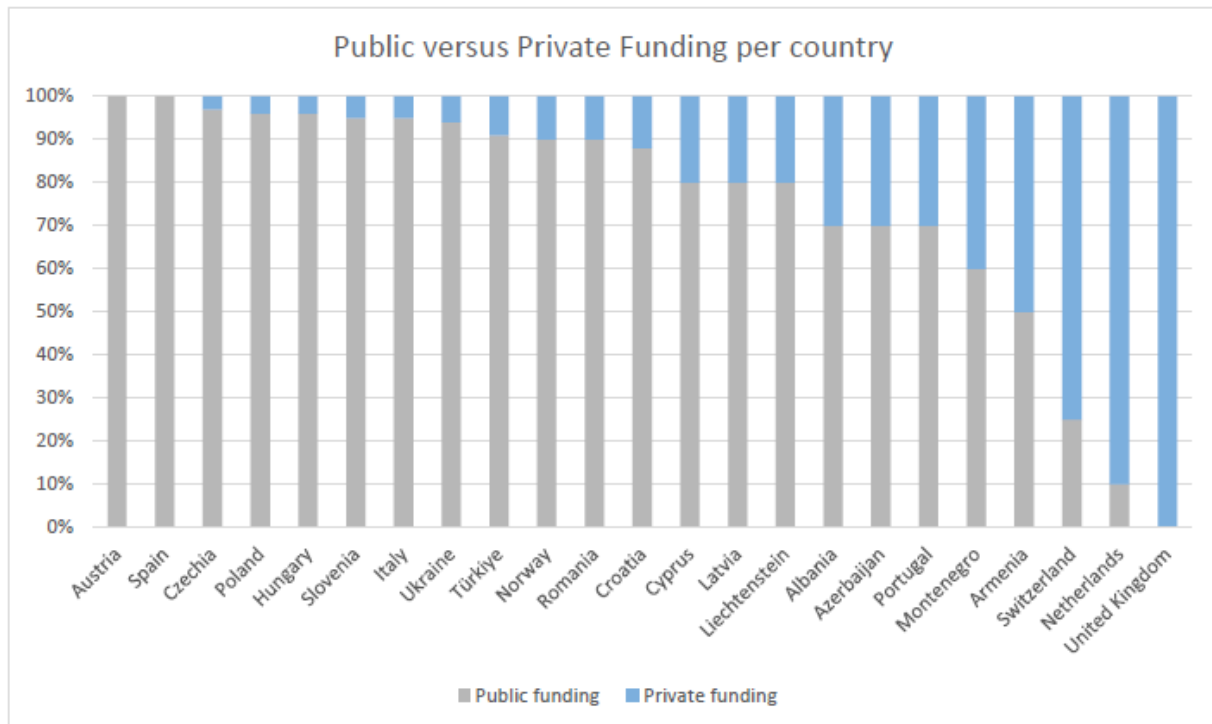


Number of sports organized per country.

However, several emerging sports, such as swimming, chess, and triathlon, though not part of the 2023 EUSA program, have gained substantial traction. These sports present opportunities for universities to diversify their offerings and attract students who may not be interested in traditional team sports (Cooky et al., 2013). Universities should consider expanding their portfolios to include such sports, fostering greater participation and engagement.

Funding Structures

The funding structure for university sports varies significantly across Europe. As reported in the *ESOM Research Report*, more than half of the surveyed countries rely heavily on public funding, with Austria and Spain relying entirely on state sources. In contrast, the United Kingdom operates primarily on private funding, including sponsorships and donations.



Proportion of public and private funding for the activities in each country.

This heavy reliance on public funding poses risks, particularly during periods of economic instability. Universities should consider diversifying their funding streams to ensure the sustainability of their sports programs. Anderson & Taylor (2018) suggest that universities could explore partnerships with local businesses, expand student membership programs, and offer paid sports services to generate additional income.

Conclusion

This expanded analysis of European university sports highlights key areas where progress can be made to enhance participation, inclusivity, and sustainability. The data from the *ESOM Research Report* reveals both the successes and challenges faced by European universities in fostering a vibrant sports culture.

Addressing gender disparities, diversifying sports offerings, and securing sustainable funding are critical steps toward the continued growth of university sports. By implementing targeted initiatives and fostering partnerships, universities can ensure that sports programs remain integral to the student experience. As we move forward, these insights will serve as a roadmap for stakeholders to make informed decisions, ultimately enriching the lives of students across Europe.

Reflective Insights for Enhancing the Research

As this document reviewed the *ESOM Research Report* and delved deeper into the data, a few ideas began to take shape about how we could take this research even further. Beyond the numbers, there are layers of complexity and opportunity that we can explore to make this report not just an analysis of what *is*, but a roadmap for what *could be*.

1. Bringing in Personal Voices

What if we included interviews or testimonies from the people who live university sports day-to-day? Speaking to sports directors, athletes, and even policymakers could give us a richer understanding of the barriers and successes they encounter. We imagine this would provide a more relatable narrative, turning abstract data into real-world stories.

2. Exploring Regional and Cultural Differences

The diversity within European countries is something hasn't been fully explored in the report. There are such fascinating contrasts between Western and Eastern Europe, or even Northern and Southern Europe, when it comes to how sports are funded, organized, and perceived. Drawing out these differences in a more comparative format could add depth, offering stakeholders a chance to see which models are thriving and why.

3. Looking Back to See Forward

How much has changed in recent years? If we could compare current data with older studies or even anecdotal insights, we might uncover important trends. Are gender gaps closing? Has student participation increased? I think such a retrospective angle could illuminate where we're making progress and where we're still falling short.

4. Championing Mental Health

It's hard to overstate the impact that sports can have on mental well-being, especially in today's stressful academic environments. I believe this could be a major focus area, especially in the post-pandemic world where students are grappling with new challenges. By showing how sports help alleviate stress, build social bonds, and improve academic performance, we could make an even stronger case for investing in university sports.

5. Sustainability in Broader Sense

In not just financial but environmental meaning too - How can universities incorporate eco-friendly practices into their sports programs? Could they use renewable energy in their facilities or cut down on waste during large events? In today's world, aligning sports with broader sustainability goals would show that universities are thinking ahead, not just about their students but also about their responsibility to the planet.

6. Engaging Students Beyond the Field

The idea of student involvement often seems limited to athletic participation, but what if we looked at it differently? What if we empowered students to help organize events, manage sports teams, or volunteer in leadership roles? This kind of involvement could deepen their engagement and turn university sports into a learning experience that goes beyond physical activity.

7. Embracing Digital Transformation

We live in a digital-first world, and I think university sports should embrace that more. From data analytics that help athletes improve performance to online platforms for organizing events, technology offers so many possibilities, we can also imagine virtual sports competitions becoming more mainstream, especially for students who can't always access physical sports venues. It's exciting to think about where this could lead.

8. Collaborating Across Borders

What about the idea of fostering more international collaboration? How powerful would it be to create cross-border sports leagues or exchange programs where athletes could train at partner universities? This kind of initiative would not only improve the quality of sports programs but also strengthen ties between European universities, building a more connected student community.

9. Broadening the Inclusion Conversation

While the report rightly focuses on gender inclusivity, in the future there's more we could explore regarding other underrepresented groups—like students with disabilities or international students. How can we make university sports more accessible to these groups? Tackling this question could help universities create more inclusive environments where everyone feels welcome to participate.