

INFORMS

Innovative Forms of Employment in Sport



GUIDE TO USING PLATFORM WORK IN SPORT

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IN-FORMS – Improving employability in sport through investigating, promoting and supporting innovative forms of employment in Europe

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INTRODUCTION

The guide you are about to read introduces platform work, a flexible form of employment that allows sports organizations to engage external expertise for specific or intermittent needs, while broadening employment opportunities for skilled staff. It has been developed as part of the first European initiative focusing on new forms of employment in the sports sector and their potential to address challenges faced by employers.

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This initiative is implemented through the [INFORMS](#) project, funded by the Erasmus+ Sport programme and running from January 2024 to December 2026.

The guide is designed as a **practical** and **accessible** step-by-step **guide**, aiming to help readers understand how this innovative form of employment operates in practice and how it can be implemented in real organisational settings. It focuses on operational decision-making, legal and regulatory considerations, and day-to-day implementation, rather than on abstract or purely theoretical concepts.

This guide is part of a series of three distinct guides, each addressing a different innovative form of employment relevant to the sports sector:

- > employee sharing
- > permanent intermittent contract
- > platform work

Sport employers and employees in Europe, these guides aim to provide you with a clear and accessible introduction to each employment model. By combining explanations, points to consider, and illustrative scenarios, the guides seek to support informed decision-making and to stimulate further reflection on how these forms of employment can be responsibly and effectively implemented in different sport sector contexts.

If you would like to explore these forms of employment in more depth, including the underlying theoretical concepts and further analysis, please refer to the [European research report on employment challenges and innovative forms of employment in sport](#).

Platform work is the matching of demand and supply of paid work through an online platform using an algorithm. Three parties are involved in the matching process: the client demanding work, the platform which manages the algorithm and the person who provides the work through the platform.

In the sports sector, platform work can involve, for example, booking qualified fitness instructors, coaches, or other professionals through an online platform to deliver specific sessions or activities. This model is mainly used when organisations need flexibility and cannot guarantee continuous or stable working hours. For this reason, this form of employment mainly targets organisations looking to cover one-off sessions on a temporary basis.

In the European sports context, platform work usually takes place through:

- > **Digital labour platforms** that connect organisations with individual workers;
- > **Online marketplaces** specialised in sport or physical activity services.

In these arrangements, the platform acts as an intermediary, while the worker typically operates with a high degree of autonomy and limited employment protection.

In a survey of 2 264 sport organisations which INFORMS carried out in 2024, we discovered platform work was relatively new in the sector. Only 4.4% of organisations were using it. Of these:

- > 75.9% would recommend it to other employers in the sector;
- > 64.9% agreed that it allowed them to easily and quickly identify the skilled workers they needed.

Of those who had not tried platform work, 29% saw it a viable option. Only 21% thought that this form of employment would not benefit their organisation.



“Technology and digital transformation are reshaping our industry. Digital skills are crucial to stay competitive, with organizations investing in training. E-commerce and online platforms create new models and job opportunities offering growth potential but require workforce adaptation.”

The secretary general of an Albanian sport federation

PART 1: GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

- | The research revealed the following advantages of platform work and some important points to consider.

Advantages and points to consider for employers

ADVANTAGES

High flexibility in staffing

The employer can access a platform worker according to demand but has no ongoing commitment. This could be especially attractive to smaller sport organisations who lack expertise in human resource management.

Rapid access to qualified professionals

The platform provides ready access to the skilled labour they need. Skilled workers can be hired from platform which guarantees their qualifications and skills.

Reducing administrative burden

The platform or the platform worker is responsible for tax and social security issues.

Ability to respond to fluctuating demand

To address an unexpected need (for example, the demand for a new type of fitness class) or a small package of coaching hours.

POINTS TO CONSIDER

Limited control over worker availability and commitment

The platform worker will work for a range of other organisations. Difficulty in integrating into the receiving organisation may also create conflict with workers who are permanently based in the receiving organisation.

Platform fees and variable costs

The employer only pays for the hours the platform worker works. However, the platform will charge an additional service fee.

Lower integration into organisational culture

The platform worker may be also working for competitor organisations such as other sport clubs or gyms. This potentially raises conflict of interest issues in the mind of the employer.

Potential quality and continuity issues

The platform worker can choose assignments which fit their own circumstances.



STEP-BY-STEP IMPLEMENTATION OF A PLATFORM WORKER IN AN ORGANISATION

The following section presents the steps that sports employers should follow to use platform work within their organisations. To illustrate it, we will use a fictional scenario in which a fitness centre wants to use platform work to recruit a qualified fitness instructor.

STEP-BY-STEP IMPLEMENTATION OF A PLATFORM WORKER IN AN ORGANISATION

- Step 1: Identifying the operational need
- Step 2: Define the required profile
- Step 3: Ensure legal and regulatory compliance for platform work
- Step 4: Organise the selection and engagement of a platform worker
- Step 5: Define task delivery conditions
- Step 6: Define remuneration and payment conditions
- Step 7: Monitor and evaluate the outcome

Scenario

Tom is the manager of a fitness centre. One of his regular fitness instructors falls ill and is unable to lead a scheduled group session. As the session cannot be cancelled, Tom needs to find a qualified fitness instructor at short notice to take over the class on a one-off basis.

Please note: In this scenario, we use a fitness instructor purely as an illustrative example. The INFORMS – European research report on employment challenges and innovative forms of employment in sport found that almost 60% of platform workers were engaged as sports coaches.

> Step 1: Identify operational needs

The first step involves identifying operational needs that cannot be adequately met by existing staff. This typically concerns the need for skilled workers who can be engaged quickly and flexibly to deliver a training session normally led by a staff member who is temporarily unavailable or perhaps by an unexpected increase in demand for classes.

In addition, the organisation must assess the required level of continuity. This includes determining whether the role requires a stable and continuous presence throughout the year, or whether it allows for flexible deployment with periods of inactivity. Roles that do not require year-round continuity and can be activated on an as-needed basis are particularly suitable for platform work arrangements.

Scenario: Tom reviews the fitness centre's schedule and immediately identifies an operational gap. A group training session is planned, participants are already registered, and cancelling the class would negatively affect customer satisfaction. However, the regular instructor is unexpectedly unavailable due to illness, and no other qualified staff member within the centre can take over the session at such short notice.

Tom therefore defines a clear and specific operational need: a qualified fitness instructor who is available at short notice, holds the required certifications, and is capable of delivering the scheduled group session according to the centre's quality standards. This need cannot be met through existing staff, making external support necessary to ensure continuity of the service.

STEP-BY-STEP IMPLEMENTATION OF A PLATFORM WORKER IN AN ORGANISATION

> Step 2: Define the required profile

Once the operational need has been identified, the next step for the sport organisation is to clearly define the required profile. This involves specifying the key tasks and responsibilities associated with the role, as well as the level of expertise, qualifications, and autonomy expected from the worker.

By clearly defining the profile and continuity requirements in advance, sport organisations can make informed decisions about the most appropriate form of engagement and ensure that the role can be effectively matched to available workers.

The objective is to determine which roles require a stable and continuous presence within the organisation and which roles can be performed on an on-demand basis through platform work, allowing for flexible engagement and periods of inactivity.

Scenario: Tom specifies the profile of the fitness instructor needed to cover the session. This includes the required qualifications and certifications, experience with group training, availability at the scheduled time, and the ability to deliver the session in line with the fitness centre's standards and training programme. As the replacement is needed on a one-off basis, flexibility and immediate availability are key requirements. Tom can use his existing profiles for fitness instructors as the basis for this.



STEP-BY-STEP IMPLEMENTATION OF A PLATFORM WORKER IN AN ORGANISATION

> Step 3: Ensure legal and regulatory compliance for platform work

Once the operational need has been identified and the role has been defined as suitable for platform work, the sport organisation must assess whether engaging a platform worker is legally and regulatorily compliant. This step is essential, as the use of platform work is subject to national labour law, sector-specific regulations, and, where applicable, collective agreements.

The organisation must verify whether platform-based engagement is permitted for the role in question and under which conditions. This includes assessing the legal status of the platform worker, the degree of autonomy involved, and whether the arrangement may qualify as employment or self-employment under national law. Additional considerations include rules related to working time, remuneration, liability, health and safety obligations, and access to social protection.

Where uncertainty exists, seeking external advice is strongly recommended. Employers may contact sectoral organisations, social partners, or specialised support bodies to obtain guidance on the legal and regulatory implications of using platform work.

You can also find a list of expert organisations from various EU countries at the end of this document.

Scenario: After identifying the need for a qualified fitness instructor and defining the role as suitable for platform-based, one-off engagement, Tom verifies whether using a platform worker is legally permissible within the sports and fitness sector.

Tom pays particular attention to the classification of the platform worker, the absence of an employment relationship, and the responsibilities of the fitness centre in terms of payment, insurance, and health and safety. To avoid any legal uncertainty, he contacts a support organisation for advice.

With this guidance, Tom confirms that engaging a qualified fitness instructor through a platform for a one-off session is legally allowed, provided that the platform worker operates autonomously and that all legal and regulatory requirements are met. He can now proceed with confidence to the next step.

Please note: This guide does not aim to explicitly describe platform work in each EU country. For this reason, we have listed expert organisations in your country that you can contact to receive specific and appropriate guidance.



Legal check

STEP-BY-STEP IMPLEMENTATION OF A PLATFORM WORKER IN AN ORGANISATION

> Step 4: Organise the selection and engagement of a platform worker

After confirming legal compliance, the organisation proceeds to select and engage a suitable platform worker. This typically takes place via a digital platform that provides access to profiles of qualified workers, including information on skills, certifications, experience, and availability.

Be aware that different platforms may exist in your country; therefore, it is important to select the platform that best fits your needs.

Once the appropriate platform has been selected, the organisation selects a worker whose profile best matches the defined requirements and confirms the engagement through the platform. Clear information about the task, duration, remuneration, and expectations must be communicated in advance to ensure transparency for both parties.

As part of the engagement process, the organisation agrees on the remuneration and payment conditions through the platform. This includes the applicable fee, the payment method, and the conditions under which payment is triggered (for example, upon completion and confirmation of the task). These elements are clearly communicated and formally confirmed before the task is performed, ensuring transparency for both the organisation and the platform worker.

Scenario: Tom accesses a digital platform where qualified fitness instructors have published their profiles. Based on predefined criteria such as required certifications, experience with group training, and immediate availability, the platform identifies a suitable instructor to take over the session.

As part of the engagement process, Tom confirms the assignment through the platform and agrees on the remuneration and payment conditions in advance. The platform clearly specifies the fee for the one-off session, the payment method, and the condition that payment will be triggered upon completion and confirmation of the session. All practical details, including the time, location, and type of training, are communicated to the instructor before the session takes place, ensuring clarity and transparency for both parties.

> Step 5: Define task delivery conditions

After the selection the platform worker carries out the assigned task in accordance with the agreed conditions. During this phase, the organisation ensures that the necessary information, access, and resources are available to enable the worker to perform the task effectively and safely.

While the organisation may define expected outcomes and quality standards, the platform worker typically retains autonomy over how the task is executed, in line with the platform work model.

Scenario: The selected platform worker delivers the group training session as scheduled. Tom ensures that the instructor has access to the facilities and the necessary information to conduct the session safely and effectively. Participants are able to attend the session without disruption.

STEP-BY-STEP IMPLEMENTATION OF A PLATFORM WORKER IN AN ORGANISATION

> Step 6: Remuneration

After the task has been completed, the platform worker is remunerated in accordance with the agreed terms and conditions set out by the platform. Payment is typically processed after confirmation that the task has been successfully delivered. The platform manages the payment process, including invoicing or transaction handling, and transfers the agreed remuneration to the platform worker within the specified timeframe.

Scenario: Following the delivery of the group training session, the platform confirms that the task has been completed as agreed. The platform then processes the payment and transfers the agreed fee to the platform worker. Tom does not handle the payment directly, as this is managed through the platform's standard remuneration process.



Cost overview
table

> Step 7: Monitor and evaluate the outcome

Once the task has been completed, the organisation evaluates the outcome. This may include assessing performance, gathering feedback from participants or clients, and reviewing whether the operational need has been adequately met.

The evaluation can inform future engagements, contribute to quality assurance, and support decisions on whether similar needs can be addressed through platform work in the future.

Scenario: After the session, Tom evaluates the outcome by reviewing participant feedback and reflecting on whether the platform-based solution successfully addressed the staffing gap. The positive experience confirms that platform work can be an effective solution for similar short-notice needs in the future.

SHORT CASE STUDIES FROM THE SPORT SECTOR

While organisational models may differ depending on national frameworks and local needs, **these examples highlight the flexibility of platform work, particularly in enabling sport organisations to access qualified professionals rapidly, adjust staffing to fluctuating demand without long-term commitments, and reduce administrative burdens.** As such, platform work holds significant potential to support the professionalisation and sustainability of sport organisations.

Case study 1 — Referees for amateur competitions

Local amateur football leagues face a chronic shortage of impartial referees for weekend matches. As an alternative to overburdening volunteers or cancelling games, they turned to an online platform that connects qualified independent referees with clubs. Through this service, teams can request a certified referee for a match, and available referees accept assignments as gig work. This solution quickly fills officiating gaps and ensuring games have neutral referees.

Case study 2 — Freelance Coaching for Specialized Training Needs

A small athletics club required occasionally expert coaching for short-term training camps (e.g., a sprint technique clinic). This club book experienced coaches on a per-project basis. Coaches list their expertise and availability on the platform, and the club hires them for specific camps or sessions. This approach gives the club flexible access to high-quality coaching for their athletes when needed, without the expense of maintaining specialized staff year-round.

Case study 3 — Substitute coaches for youth training

A multisport club struggles to replace absent coaches or offer short extra training modules. They use an online platform with certified coaches available for one-off sessions or small packages of hours. Clubs can quickly request a qualified coach based on their needs, and professionals accept assignments flexibly. This ensures continuity in training while maintaining quality standards. The platform removes administrative tasks such as contracting and invoicing. As a result, clubs can easily adapt staffing to short-term or fluctuating demand.

Case study 4 — On-demand matchday support staff

The Basketball federation needs flexible staffing for roles such as first aiders and safeguarding officers during competitions. Through a platform of pre-screened professionals, clubs can request support for specific matches or events. This avoids the need for permanent contracts for occasional roles. Professionals are deployed quickly based on demand fluctuations across the season.

PART 2: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES

Understanding the employment relationships

In a platform work arrangement, services are provided by professionals on demand of sport organisations, typically on a temporary or task-based basis. The nature of the work is therefore often flexible and episodic, allowing organisations to respond to short-term or fluctuating needs without long-term commitments.

A key characteristic of platform work is the triangular relationship between the platform, the platform worker and the client (i.e. the sport organisation). The platform acts as an intermediary, using digital tools and algorithms to match supply and demand, allocate tasks, and organise work schedules. This means that, unlike traditional recruitment models, sport organisations do not directly select or employ professionals, but rather engage them through the platform's matching and allocation mechanisms.

The employment status of platform workers can vary depending on national legislation. In some countries, platform workers are treated as self-employed, while in others they may be classified as employees or assessed on a case-by-case basis through specific legal tests. This has implications for rights, obligations and levels of protection for the worker.

Before engaging in platform work, professionals should therefore ensure they clearly understand:

- their employment status and associated rights and obligations
- the role of the platform in mediating the work relationship
- how tasks are allocated and evaluated (e.g. via algorithms)
- the temporary and on-demand nature of assignments

The research revealed among others the following advantages of platform work and some important points to consider.

PART 2: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES

Advantages and points to consider for employees

ADVANTAGES	POINTS TO CONSIDER
High autonomy and flexibility Greater freedom to choose the type of assignment, working hours and place of work which suits them.	Lack of employment security and social protection Some platforms may offer the worker the opportunity to set pay rates, but in the case of others there may be no discretion available. Workers may feel compelled to accept what is on offer in order to access assignments. There may be ambiguity as to whether the worker is employed by the platform (therefore, the platform is responsible for tax, social security payments, pensions etc.) or if they are self-employed and must look after those issues themselves.
Ability to combine multiple assignments with a potential to build stable employment In a way which delivers the equivalent of a full-time salary. The employee is likely to gain a wider range of skills which could enhance their career development opportunities which appears to be a particular issue in sport.	Income instability There is the danger that platform workers will remain in 'secondary employment', i.e., employment which is on/off and precarious. They may find it increasingly difficult to access 'primary employment' (permanent full-time and part-time) and all the additional benefits which go with this. Platform workers, therefore, could get stuck in this groove.
Easy access to work opportunities The platform provides enhanced access to the labour market through the professional being easily connected with employers who need their skills. This could lead to more stable employment in the future.	Weaker connection to organisations and teams The platform worker will work for a range of other organisations and may spend only short periods of time in each.
Stimulant to self-employment The professional who experiences platform work may begin to realise that they can offer their services directly to sport employers and then move into self-employment or collaborative sport employment with others through a micro-enterprise.	Lower worker motivation due to lack of assignment choice In well-developed digital platforms, task assignments are usually carried out by an algorithm. The platform worker may actually have little choice in the jobs provided to them. Additionally, the volume, variety and intensity of work assignments may lead to higher stress levels and more travel between places of work.



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