



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

IRISH SPORTS MONITOR 2024

SPOTLIGHT ON COACHING



B&A







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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Volunteering for Sport	6
Involvement in Coaching	7
Support for Coaches	9
Increasing the Number of Coaches in Ireland	10
Policy Implications	12

Executive Summary

- » Almost 3 out of 10 adults (29%) have engaged in coaching at some point in their lives, with 7% currently active, equating to roughly 268,000 individuals, while 22% have coached in the past.
- » Notable gender differences exist with men almost twice as likely as women to have been involved in coaching. Coaching involvement fluctuates significantly across age groups with those aged 16-24 (12%), 35-44 (11%) and 45-54 (9%) most likely to be currently coaching. Other age groups (25-34 and over 55s) are much less likely to be currently coaching at 2-3%.
- » The majority of coaches (64%) primarily focus on coaching children, with a significant portion working with primary school-aged children.
- » While a substantial 42% of current coaches anticipate continuing for more than a decade, a considerable 22% foresee ceasing their involvement within the next two years. The primary reason for individuals discontinuing coaching is a lack of time due to work or study commitments.
- » Most coaching is done on a voluntary basis, with 84% of coaches receiving no payment for their time, contributing almost 1 million hours per week. While most current coaches feel adequately skilled, a portion express a desire for further support and training, and a majority hold relevant coaching qualifications.
- » A significant opportunity exists to re-engage former coaches, as 45% (approximately 380,000 individuals) would consider returning to coaching. Furthermore, among those who have never coached, 22% (around 600,000 individuals) identify a sport they believe they could coach. The main obstacles preventing first-time involvement are time constraints, never being asked to coach, and a perceived lack of sufficient skills.



Introduction

Coaches play a crucial role in sport at all levels across both adult and children's sports. Sport Ireland has a lead responsibility for developing and supporting coaches across all sports and levels. Its mission is to ensure every participant has access to a qualified coach by providing relevant training, qualifications, and support, while upholding national standards for coach education. In doing so it strives to elevate the standard and recognition of coaching, offer accessible learning opportunities, and act as a leader in sports education and training.

The ISM captures information in relation to coaching when asking respondents about their volunteering roles in sport. This includes information on the type of sport coached and the number of hours invested into their coaching role during the previous 7 days.

Additionally, a separate module was included on the ISM survey for two months during 2024 to provide additional depth on the nature of the coaching role of both current coaches and those who previously coached but no longer do so. The questionnaire explored several key areas.

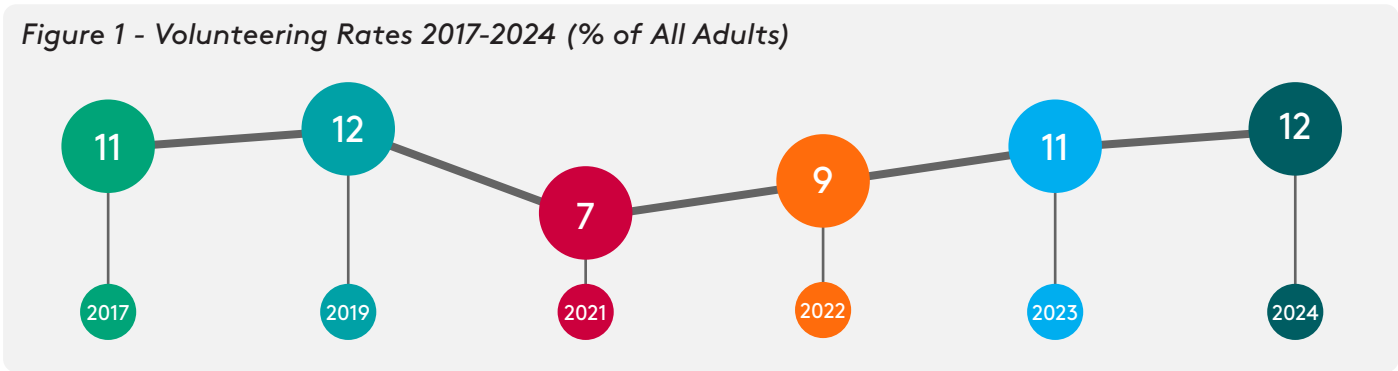
Firstly, it identified individuals currently involved in coaching and those who had coached in the past. The survey then captured data on the age coaches began and, where applicable, finished coaching, as well as the age groups they coached (primary school, post-primary school, adults). It also investigated the time commitment involved in coaching, including hours spent per week and anticipated coaching duration. The survey further explored coaches' perceptions of their own expertise, the support and training they received, and their coaching qualifications. Finally, it delves into the reasons individuals chose to coach, the factors that led them to stop coaching, and the potential for returning to coaching.

This section delves into the detailed findings from each of these areas, providing a comprehensive overview of the nature of coaching and further opportunities to elevate the standard of coaching and increase the number of coaches in sport.

Volunteering for Sport

Volunteering encompasses any supportive role undertaken to facilitate adult or children’s sport or recreational physical activity. This includes, but is not limited to, coaching, providing transportation, food, equipment, or sportswear, fundraising, or fulfilling any official capacity associated with sport or recreational physical activities. All activities undertaken during the previous 7 days are measured by the survey.

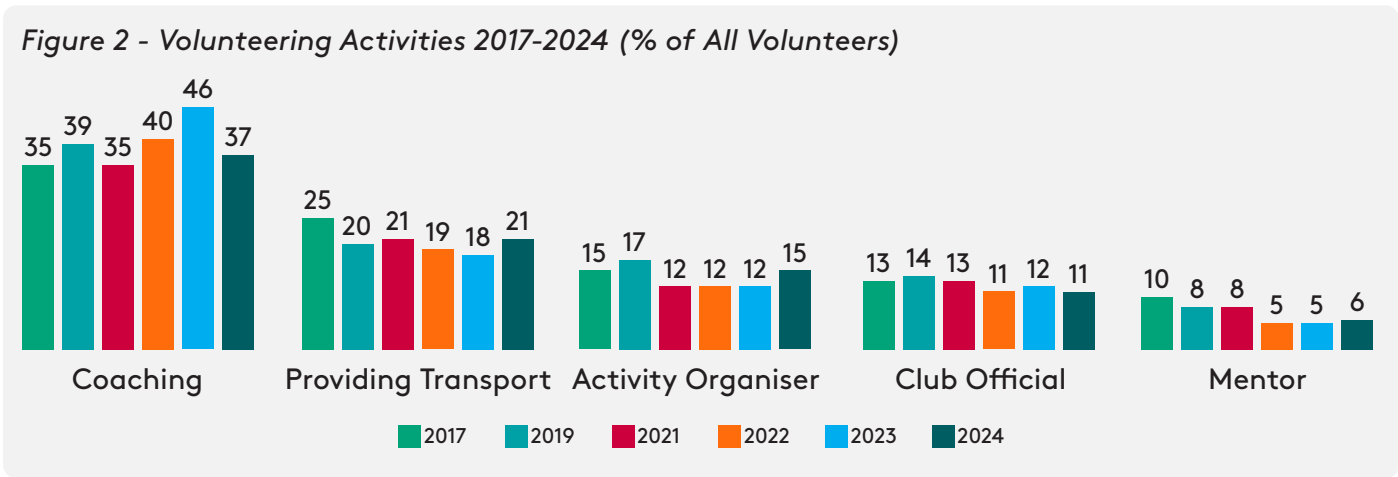
Mirroring the trends observed in other forms of participation, 2022 and 2023 witnessed a gradual resurgence in volunteering rates. In 2024, 12% of respondents reported engaging in volunteer activities regularly.



This figure aligns with the pre-pandemic level of 12% observed in 2019. However, when population growth is considered it means that the number of volunteers has increased from 460,000 in 2019, to 500,000 individuals volunteering in sport in 2024.

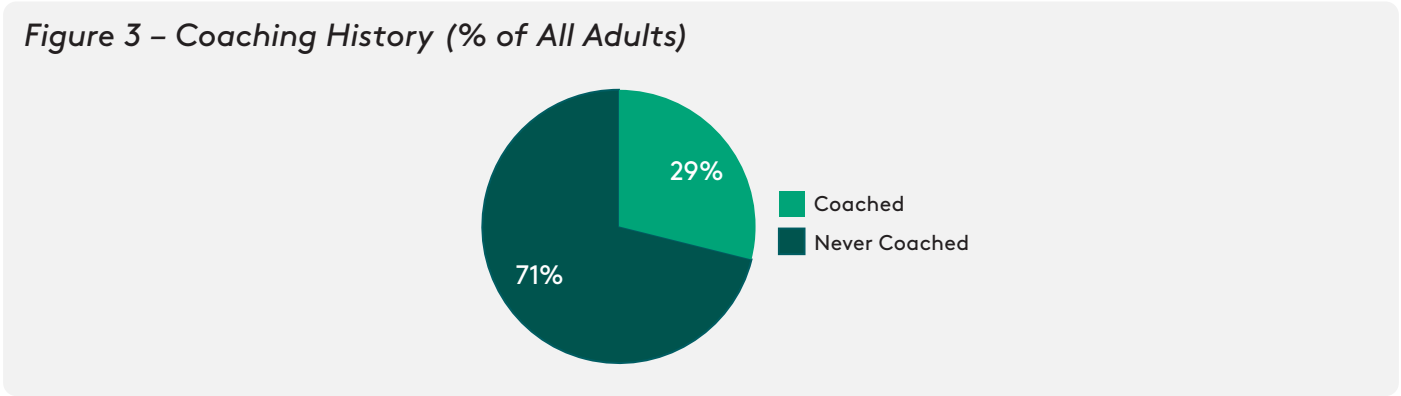
The most popular sports for volunteering are Gaelic football (4%) and soccer (3%), with all other sports having volunteer rates of 1% or less. A large majority, 82% of volunteers are active in a voluntary role within one sport, with 18% volunteering for multiple sports.

Respondents are asked to identify the nature of their volunteering role, with coaching (37%) the most popular form of voluntary activity. As a proportion of volunteers this is lower than measured in both 2022 and 2023. However, this is more likely reflective of the increases in other forms of volunteering with the actual number of coaches remaining broadly unchanged.



Involvement in Coaching

Almost 3 out of 10 adults (29%) have been involved in coaching at some point during their lives, with 7% currently coaching and a further 22% having previously coached but no longer doing so. This equates to roughly 268,000 current coaches and 843,000 people having previously coached.



A strong gender divide exists with almost twice as many men as women reporting a current or historic involvement in coaching (38% and 20% respectively). This is replicated across both current coaching (10% and 4% respectively) and historic coaching (29% and 16% respectively).

Table 1 - Coaching History by Gender And Age (%)

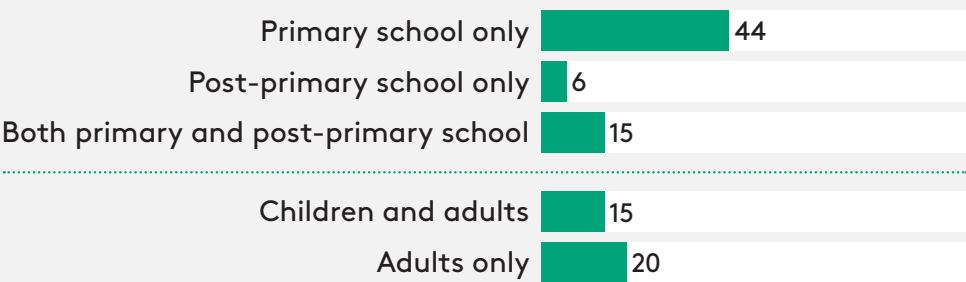
	Total	Male	Female	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Ever Coached	29	38	20	35	26	28	32	28	26%
- Current Coach	7	10	4	12	3	11	9	3	2
- Former Coach	22	29	16	23	23	16	22	25	23
Never Coached	71	62	80	65	74	72	68	72	74

Notably the incidence of having ever coached is broadly stable across the life course. It is highest among 16-24 year olds with just over a third (35%) in this age group having coached at some point. It then declines to 26% of 25-34 year olds, and remains generally stable at this level, with the same proportion of those aged 65 and over having coached. This could be pointing to an increase in coaching rates amongst the youngest cohort.

Respondents were also asked what age they first began coaching with 18% reporting that they did so when aged under 16, and a further 43% first getting involved between the ages of 16 and 34. This clearly shows the importance of engaging people in coaching at an early age in order to support the development of coaching into the future. However, opportunities do exist among older ages with the average age of a first-time coach being 29 years old.

The proportion currently involved in coaching shows greater volatility than lifetime involvement. Current coaching is most prevalent in youth and middle age. While 12% of those aged between 16 and 24 report that they are currently coaching, only 3% of 25-34 year olds say they are currently involved. It rises again to 11% of those aged between 35 and 44, before declining in older age groups, with 2% of those aged over 65 currently coaching.

Figure 4 - Ages of Individuals Coached (% of All Current Coaches)



This may be explained when looking at the age groups of those being coached. Almost two-thirds of coaches (65%) report that they are coaching children only, with 44% coaching children in primary school only. A further 15% coaching both children and adults, and 20% coach adults only.

This may be suggestive of a fluid nature in coaching with individuals getting involved at different points during their life. The peak in coaching among the youngest age group may suggest an involvement in youth sport as these individuals share their skills with younger participants as they progress, before ceasing coaching during their mid-to-late 20s and recommencing coaching again when they themselves have children. However, the lower percentage of coaches coaching post-primary school children may be a point of concern as sporting organisations aim to reduce drop out in sports participation in the teenage years.

Notably though a large proportion of current coaches expect to continue coaching for the long-term, with 42% of current coaches expecting to do so for more than 10 years or as long as possible. However, there are a sizeable number of coaches expecting to cease their involvement within the next 2 years, with 10% (roughly 27,000 coaches) planning on stopping in the next year and a further 12% (roughly 32,000 coaches) reporting that they will stop in 1 to 2 years time.

Looking at the types of sports coached it is clear that two sports – Gaelic football and soccer – dominate the coaching landscape. Just over a quarter (26%) with either a current or historic involvement have coached Gaelic football with a fifth (20%) having coached soccer. Those who have coached Gaelic football are more likely to be currently involved, with this sport accounting for 30% of those currently coaching, compared to soccer which accounts for 11% of current coaches.

Table 2 - Sports Coached (% of All Coaches)

	All who ever coached	Current coaches	Former coaches
Gaelic Football	26	30	25
Soccer	20	11	23
Hurling	6	4	6
Basketball	4	3	4
Swimming	3	2	4
Rugby	3	-	4
Badminton	3	3	3
Running	2	2	2
Youth sports	2	-	3
Horse riding	2	1	2

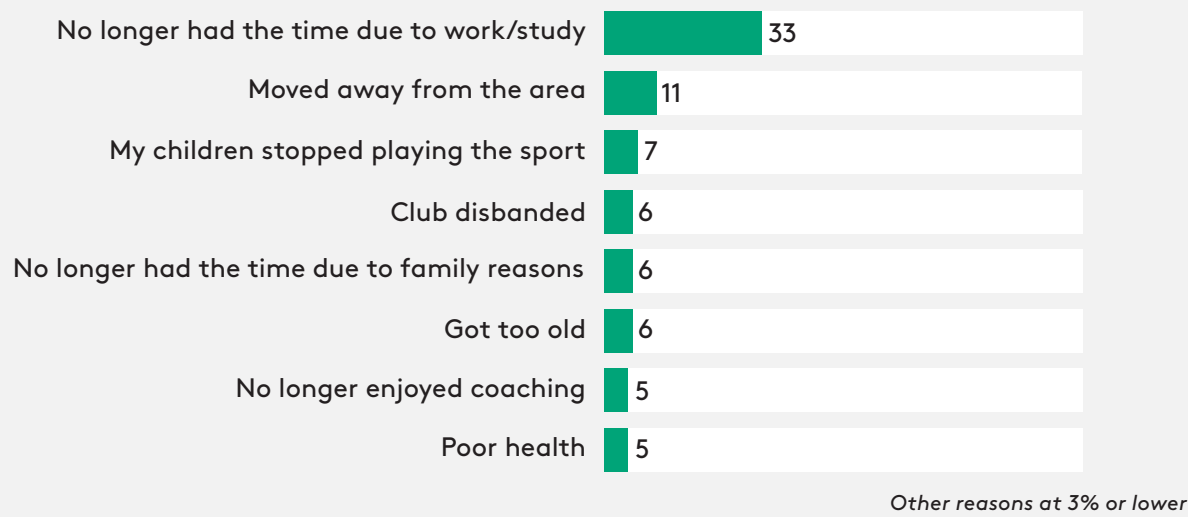
Support for Coaches

Unsurprisingly the vast majority of coaching is done voluntarily with 84% of coaches reporting that they never receive any payment for the time they spend coaching.

This time can be considerable in many cases with coaches spending an average of 5.5 hours per week involved in various activities around coaching, including preparing a session, competition/matches or liaising with other coaches. As a result this means that there are almost 1 million hours invested into coaching in a typical week, almost all of it done on a voluntary basis.

While invaluable to the provision of effective coaching this voluntary time commitment presents a significant challenge to the ongoing delivery of coaching and it is the most common reason given for stopping coaching among those who have previously coached, but no longer do so.

Figure 5 - Main Reasons for Ceasing Coaching (% of All Former Coaches)



Overall, a third (33%) of former coaches say the main reason they stopped coaching was that they no longer had time to coach due to work or study, and a further 6% reported that the main reason was no longer having time due to family reasons. Time restrictions are clearly the key reason for individuals dropping out of coaching, with the next most prominent reason being moving away from the area which is cited by 11% of former coaches as the main reason for stopping coaching. Other reasons include the individual’s children ceasing playing the sport (7%), the club disbanding (6%) or a feeling that they were too old to continue coaching (6%).

More positively, almost three-quarters (72%) of current coaches report that they feel they have a sufficient level of expertise to carry out their coaching role to the expected level of those that they are coaching, with 27% indicating that they would like to access further support and training.

Among current coaches, the majority (60%), report that they have completed coaching qualifications relevant to the sport that they coach. Current coaches seem equally likely to hold foundation, level 1 and level 2 qualifications. Among former coaches only 27% said they completed coaching qualifications relevant to the sport that they were involved in.

Table 3 - Coaching Qualifications Held (% of Coaches)

	Current coaches	Former coaches
Any qualification	60	27
Foundation/ Introductory coach	14	9
Level 1	18	6
Level 2	19	5
Level 3	4	2
Level 4	4	2
Don't know	-	2

The continuous nature of training for coaches is evident through 35% of coaches completing a training course during the previous 12 months, and 63% overall having completed at least one course during the past 5 years. A further 14% completed a course more than 5 years ago, while 19% do not know when they most recently completed a course.

In this respect, three-quarters (75%) feel that they are given sufficient opportunities by the club or organisation they provide coaching for to improve their coaching skills, with 16% reporting that they are not given sufficient opportunities and 8% indicating that they do not provide coaching for a club or organisation.

Increasing the Number of Coaches in Ireland

There are two possible ways to increase the number of coaches active in sport – either re-engage previous coaches or encourage new individuals into coaching.

A key advantage of re-engaging previous coaches is that they come into sport with previous experience, and as noted earlier, in many cases having completed coaching qualifications. When asked whether or not they would consider returning to the sport that they previously coached, 45% of previous coaches said that they would. This equates to approximately 380,000 coaches – more than the number of currently active coaches in Ireland, and a sizeable resource upon which to further develop coaching across many sports.

Of particular note among potential returning coaches is that women who previously coached are as interested as returning to coaching as men (48% and 42% respectively). However, due to a greater number of former male coaches, there is still a gender difference in coaches interested in returning with men accounting for 61% of coaches potentially interested in returning to their coaching role.

Also of note is that older former coaches are less willing to return to the coaching than their younger counterparts. Just under a quarter (23%) of former coaches over the age of 45 report an interest in coaching again. This contrasts with coaches aged under 45, where almost three-quarters (70%) say they would be interested in a future return. This reluctance from the older demographic is a key finding, particularly since they constitute 54% of the total pool of former coaches.

In order to explore the size of potential first time coaches, those who do not currently coach were asked to identify any sports that they have previously played for which they think they may be a suitable coach. Just over 1 in 5 (22%) identified a sport in this regard, equating to a pool of 600,000 potential coaches among those who have never been involved in sport in this way.

Soccer (5%), Gaelic football (3%), basketball, rugby, swimming and hurling (2% each) all featuring prominently among the sports that individuals may be interested in coaching.

Table 4 - Interest in Coaching (% of all who have Never Coached)

	All who have never coached	Men	Women
Previously played a sport that would be interested in coaching	22	30	16
Soccer	5	11	1
Gaelic Football	3	4	2
Basketball	2	1	3
Rugby	2	3	-
Swimming	2	1	2
Hurling	1	3	-
Tennis	1	1	2

Men are almost twice as likely as women to identify a sport that they believe they could coach (30% and 16% respectively), however, the sports identified by each gender differ widely. While three most commonly mentioned sports among men are soccer, Gaelic football and rugby, for women it is basketball, swimming and tennis.

Those who have never previously been involved in coaching were asked what prevents their involvement. Time restrictions (58%) was the main reason, although 12% reported that it was because they had never been asked to coach and 10% felt that they would not be sufficiently good at coaching.

Policy Implications

- » These findings raise a number of policy implications for sports coaching in Ireland, demanding a multi-faceted approach to foster a thriving and inclusive coaching environment.
- » In terms of challenges it highlights an ongoing need to address the persistent gender imbalance within various aspects of sport. Addressing this requires empowering women to continue and enhance their involvement in sport through mentorship, tailored training, and celebrating female role models.
- » A further challenge is the need to combat the trend of coaches ceasing involvement due to time constraints. Beyond financial compensation, policies to overcome this issue must explore support mechanisms such as accessible resources for session planning, and flexible coaching models that facilitate continued involvement in coaching through different lifestages.
- » Reengaging willing former coaches represents a significant opportunity, requiring targeted campaigns, incentives like refresher training, and public recognition. In addition, tapping into the potential of new coaches requires a strategic approach to address barriers to entry.
- » A key opportunity is to re-engage former coaches who are now retired. This group represents a valuable, untapped resource, as they possess key assets of significant expertise and available time. However, to successfully tap into this resource, any initiative must be specifically designed to address a lower willingness to return to coaching.
- » In all cases, prospective coaches will need to be engaged through imaginative outreach programmes supported by accessible training programmes, offered at convenient times and locations, to equip these individuals with the necessary skills and confidence. Proactively promoting the personal and professional benefits of coaching, and encouraging sports clubs to actively recruit and support newcomers, can create a welcoming environment.
- » Finally, recognising the immense voluntary contribution of coaches is paramount. Policies should explore avenues for acknowledging and valuing their efforts, such as national awards programmes beyond individual sports, and public acknowledgment.
- » Through consideration of these implications it is possible to effectively address the challenges, capitalise on the opportunities, elevate coaching standards, and increase the number of coaches in sport, ultimately fostering a more vibrant and sustainable sporting landscape for all.





Sport Ireland,
The Courtyard,
Sport Ireland Campus,
Snugborough Road,
Blanchardstown,
Dublin 15,
D15 EPN4

 +353 1 8608800

 www.sportireland.ie



Ipsos B&A,
Block 3,
Blackrock Business Park,
Blackrock, Co. Dublin,
A94 D5D7

 +353 1 4389000

 www.ipsos.com/en-ie