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To cite this article: Robert L. Rauch & Tetiana Kropyvnytska (10 Dec 2025): Sport system and policy in Ukraine, International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, DOI: [10.1080/19406940.2025.2599140](https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2025.2599140)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2025.2599140>



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Published online: 10 Dec 2025.



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## Sport system and policy in Ukraine

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### ABSTRACT

This country profile provides a comprehensive overview of the sport system and policy environment of Ukraine, with a focus on institutional structure, governance practices, and policy evolution since independence in 1991. Ukraine's sport system reflects both the enduring legacy of Soviet-era administrative models and the country's shifting political, economic, and social context – including its European integration aspirations and the profound impacts of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. The article details historical development of sport in Ukraine, describes the various primary actors within the ecosystem and how they interrelate, outlines the mechanisms by which sports activities are funded, and comments on the public health and physical activity issues. Particular attention is given to the fragmented nature of institutional responsibilities, and challenges in implementation and funding, with Ukraine's Ministry of Youth and Sports and National Olympic Committee operating within a context shaped by geopolitical tensions, limited resources, and competing national priorities. The current war has intensified existing pressures, resulting in the destruction of facilities, interruptions in training, and the diversion of resources away from sports to the war effort. These factors have further strained the already limited budget and hindered the implementation of proposed reforms needed to achieve the dual goals of elite sport (Olympic) performance and mass participation. Despite a growing consensus on the need to transition towards a European model of sport, which could potentially address many of these systemic issues, the article suggests that such reforms will be challenging to implement until hostilities cease and societal stability is restored.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 23 December 2024  
Accepted 25 November 2025

### KEYWORDS

Ukraine; sport policy; governmental policy; country profile; post-Soviet sport system; mass participation

## Introduction

Ukraine is the second-largest country in Europe after Russia and the third poorest country, with a 2023 real GDP per capita (PPP) at US\$15,900 (CIA 2025). It has a 2024 population of approximately 35.7 million, down 22% since 2010 primarily from migration due to the war (Naumenko 2024, CIA 2025). It is administratively divided into 24 oblasts and one autonomous republic, with Kyiv as its capital. Ukraine has a high literacy rate, a strong

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tradition of state-supported education and physical culture, and a legacy of Olympic achievement dating back to the Soviet period. Since gaining independence in 1991, the country has sought to build democratic governance and public service systems that reflect both national identity and international integration – goals that extend into the realm of sport policy and administration (Borysova and Kropyvnytska 2021)

Ukraine's sport system is shaped by its Soviet history, with centralised governance traditions still visible in the roles of key actors such as the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the National Olympic Committee, and sport federations. At the same time, recent reforms – particularly in decentralisation and education – have sought to shift responsibility for sport development to local governments and schools, often without adequate coordination or resources. This fragmentation has contributed to uneven access to physical activity opportunities, inconsistent support for grassroots initiatives, and an overemphasis on elite sport as the primary driver of national sport prestige (Krugliak *et al.* 2020).

There are two main goals of Ukraine's sport policy, mass sport participation and elite competitive performance (MYSU, 2019). Increasing physical activity would have significant value for public health, social cohesion, and national identity, but there is virtually no budget dedicated to it and sports facilities are often not available for public use. Moreover, Ukraine's performance at recent Olympic Games has fallen short of expectations, prompting public concern and institutional debate about the effectiveness of the current elite sport system. This underperformance has contributed to broad calls for reforms aimed at both strengthening the broader domestic foundation for sport development and restoring international competitiveness, without recognition of how the two policy objectives are connected. The onset of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022 has presented new challenges for sport reforms, but many of the system's core weaknesses – a rigid, centralised system catering mainly to a pyramidal elite focus combined with funding constraints – precede the war.

While there has been significant research previously on specific aspects of the Ukrainian sports system and policies (Krugliak *et al.* 2020, Borysova and Kropyvnytska 2021, Ivanovych 2023), there has not been a study that focused on a holistic description of the entire system. This country profile will cover the history of government involvement in Ukrainian sport, the primary actors within the system and how they interrelate, the financing of sports activities, the public health and physical activity issues, the key policies in place and the key divergent positions on required reforms, and the impact of the current war on sports in the country. By outlining Ukraine's institutions within the broader framework of national sport systems, this profile provides an objective perspective from which further research can be pursued.

## Historical context

To understand the current system of organising sport in Ukraine, it is necessary to consider the historical background that shaped its peculiar development

Physical activity in the pre-Soviet sphere of influence has its roots in the Western concepts of Swedish and German gymnastics, English games, and the Czech 'Sokol' movement. In Ukraine, the first gymnastic societies emerged at the end of the 19th century in the western regions of the country which were part of the Austro-Hungarian

Empire. By the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of sport had spread into Russian controlled territories and sports clubs were created in large cities for football, gymnastics, cycling and others (Martsinkovskyi 2023). Participation was mainly limited to the nobility, bourgeoisie, and intelligentsia, although 'spontaneous sports clubs' for the working class also appeared.

Ukrainian Oleksiy Butovsky, an IOC member (1894–1900) and an associate of Pierre de Coubertin, sought to create the Olympic Committee of Russia, but the imperial government was not ready to accept progressive Olympic ideas (Draga 2018). The 1908 Olympic Games, which formalised team competition, accelerated the sports movement and led to the First All-Russian Olympiad in Kyiv in 1913 (Bubka and Bulatova 2013).

After the creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1917, sports became a tool for building a society where every citizen could join the ranks of the army in the event of war already having some military training (Tretyak 2010). In the early 1930s, the 'Ready for Work and Defence' complex (GPO) was introduced. During this time, physical culture and sports associations (FST) were created, – some of which still exist – and first Sports Institute for the coach training was launched. After the USSR team was invited to participate in the 1952 Olympic Games, sports became an arena of fierce political confrontation and competition with the West and propaganda promoting the socialist system. In pursuit of medals, a powerful organisational system of Olympic preparation was developed, with specialised schools, voluntary sports societies of the trade unions, and Olympic training centres. Athletes from the Ukrainian SSR commonly made up 8–25% of the Soviet national team and secured 25–40% of all points and medals (Krugliak *et al.* 2020). In football, Dynamo Kyiv won two European Cup Winners Cups (1975 and 1986) as well as the UEFA Super Cup in 1986.

The Soviet era also produced extensive sports infrastructure. By 1980, the Ukrainian SSR had 911 stadiums, more than 20,000 football fields, 8500 shooting ranges, 274 swimming pools, 13,750 gyms, and 311,000 additional facilities. The annual allocations for health care and physical education in the state budget increased from 6.9 billion rubles (US\$7.7 billion) in 1966 to 17.5 billion rubles (US\$23.1 billion) in 1986. Annually, trade unions allocated about 600 million (US\$790 million) rubles for these purposes (Krugliak *et al.* 2020).

Following independence in 1991, the Ukrainian sports structure needed to be reconfigured on a standalone basis, along with the political system and most other social and cultural organisations. Much of the Soviet structure remained intact, adapted to the new national context. Consequently, sport in Ukraine continues to be dominated by government or intermediary organisations under strong state influence but without the Soviet-era funding. Unlike the European club model emphasising sport for all, or the US model with a broad reliance on physical education access through general public education, private activity is quite limited and receives very few resources (Danyliuk 2023). Since independence, these structural and ideological patterns have largely endured, and this Soviet legacy permeates Ukraine's present sport framework and policy.

### **Current administrative structure**

Ukraine maintains a centralised sports system based on the Soviet model (Borysova and Kropyvnytska 2021). Most of this top-down system is supported by and reports to the

Ministry of Youth and Sports, with oversight from the Parliament, its Committee on Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Education and Science, and Center ‘Invasport’ with their regional departments. These departments function hierarchically under national government oversight. Meanwhile, local sports clubs and professional leagues operate largely in the private sector. Much of Ukraine’s sports ecosystem – including the National Olympic Committee, Sports Committee of Ukraine, National Committee of Disabled Sports, national federations, sports societies, and sports schools – falls within an ‘Intermediary Structure’ category. Although technically autonomous, these entities are significantly directed and funded by national or regional governments. The relationship is symbiotic, with ministries offering guidelines and funding these organisations. The structure of the Ukrainian sport system is summarised in Figure 1 with the key organisations described in more detail thereafter.

The **Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine** was established on 6 June 1991, as the successor to the Soviet State Committee of the Ukrainian SSR for youth and sports. The Ministry allocates most of the State funds for sports, predominantly going to Olympic sports. It is the most important sports body in Ukraine, and sports ‘federations may not

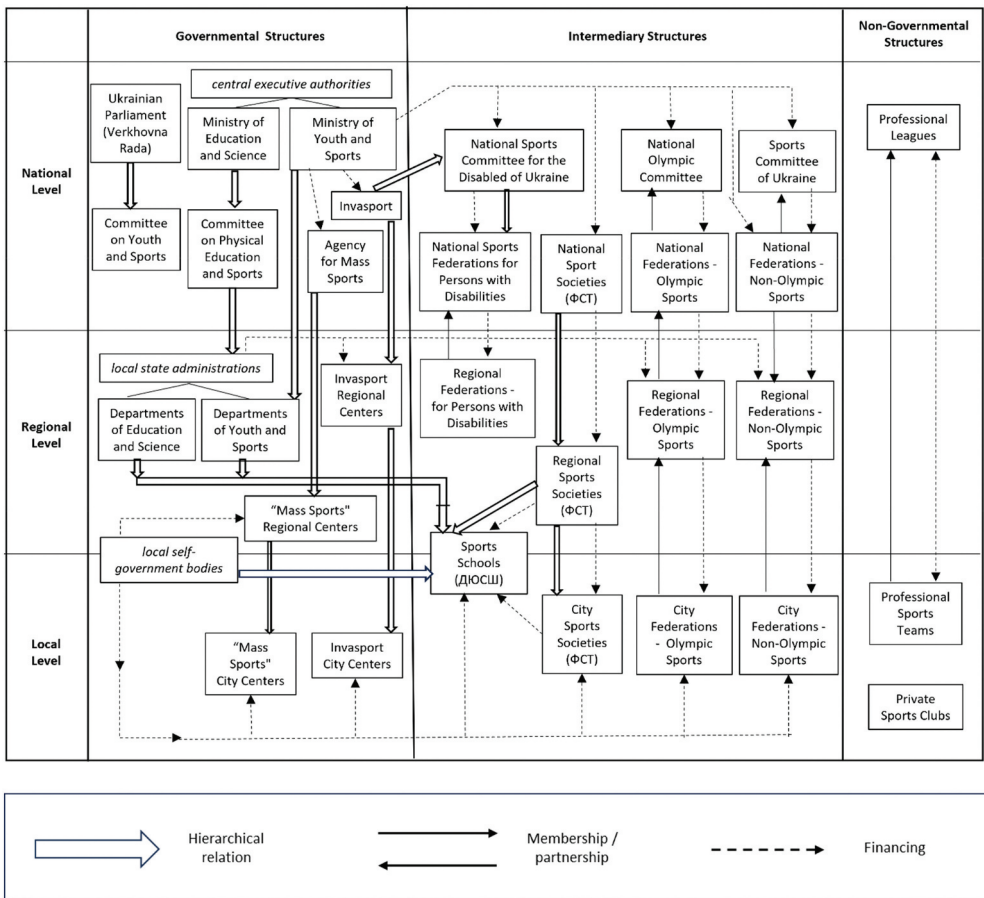


Figure 1. National sports structure of Ukraine (adapted by the authors from Hallmann and Petry 2013).

hold any competitions or bring the rules of the sport in line with changes in international sports federations without the consent of the ministry' (Borysova and Kropyvnytska 2021, p. 279). Additionally, 47.5% of all sports schools are indirectly subordinate to it through local state administrations' physical culture and sports divisions (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine MYSU 2023).

The **Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine** is the central body of executive power in the field of science and education, and 41% of all sports schools are subordinate to it. This body also coordinates the development of school and university sports (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine MYSU 2023).

**Center 'Invasport'** was created in accordance with Article 17 of the 1993 Law of Ukraine On Physical Culture and Sports (Verkhovna Rada 2009) by the Ministry of Youth and Sports for the organisation of physical culture and sports activities of persons with disabilities. In accordance with the Regulation on the Ukrainian Center for Physical Culture and Sports of Persons with Disabilities 'Invasport' (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2021), it is a specialised state institution that is subordinate to the National Committee for Sports for the Disabled and the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

The **Ukrainian Parliament**, or **Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy**, is the unicameral legislative branch of government which establishes the laws and regulations underpinning sport in Ukraine. Its eight-person Committee on Youth and Sports plays a crucial role in preparing and reviewing legislation related to youth, sports, and physical education.

**National Olympic Committee of Ukraine (NOCU)** is a non-profit public organisation with the exclusive right to represent Ukraine in the Olympic Games and other competitions of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Ukrainian athletes took part in the Olympic Games in 1896 (Mykola Ritter) and 1900 (Petro Zakovorot) but, after the revolution of 1917, Ukraine was not involved with the Olympic movement until 1952 XV Olympiad in Helsinki as part of the USSR. The 22nd of December 1990 is stated to be the date of foundation of the NOCU, and it was permanently recognised by the IOC in September 1993. The NOCU consists of 154 members, including two representatives from each of the National Federations, 15 athletes, a representative of the Olympic Academy of Ukraine, a representative of each of the six recognised sports societies, and other Olympic representatives (National Olympic Committee of Ukraine NOCU 2024).

While the NOCU is formally independent from the government, there are significant ties with the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The first NOCU president, Valeriy Borzov, currently an IOC member, served from 1990 to 1998 while simultaneously serving as Minister of Youth and Sport. Viktor Yanukovych, the pro-Russian politician who was Prime Minister of the country from 2002 to 2007 and President of Ukraine from 2010 to 2014, served as NOCU President from 2002 to 2005. After a long stint at the NOCU helm by Olympic champion (and Ukraine's second IOC member) Sergei Bubka, Vadym Gutzeit was named NOCU President in 2022 while concurrently serving as Minister of Youth and Sports from March 2020 through November 2023 (National Olympic Committee of Ukraine NOCU 2024).

Given the policy focus on medals and elite performance, the recent Olympic medal count rankings have been much discussed. From the 1996 Games in Atlanta through London 2012, Ukraine came in between 9th and 14th place in the gold medal count for Summer Games (except for 21st in Sydney 2000). The ranking has slid since then to a 31st in Rio 2016, 44th in Tokyo 2020/21, and 22<sup>nd</sup> in 2024 in Tokyo (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Medal count at the olympics and Paralympic Games (International Olympic Committee (IOC) 2024, International Paralympic Committee (IPC) 2024).

Year	Edition	Location	Olympic games			Paralympic games		
			Medals*	Total	Rank	Medals*	Total	Rank
1994	Winter	Lillehammer	1 : 0 : 1	2	13	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1996	Summer	Atlanta	9 : 2 : 12	23	9	1 : 4 : 2	7	44
1998	Winter	Nagano	0 : 1 : 0	1	18	3 : 2 : 4	9	14
2000	Summer	Sydney	3 : 10 : 10	23	21	3 : 20 : 14	37	35
2002	Winter	Salt Lake City	0 : 0 : 0	0	n.a.	0 : 6 : 6	12	18
2004	Summer	Athens	8 : 5 : 9	22	13	24 : 12 : 19	55	6
2006	Winter	Torina	0 : 0 : 2	2	25	7 : 9 : 9	25	3
2008	Summer	Beijing	7 : 4 : 11	22	12	24 : 18 : 32	74	4
2010	Winter	Vancouver	0 : 0 : 0	0	n.a.	5 : 8 : 6	19	5
2012	Summer	London	5 : 4 : 10	19	14	32 : 24 : 28	84	4
2014	Winter	Sochi	1 : 0 : 1	2	20	5 : 9 : 11	25	4
2016	Summer	Rio de Janeiro	2 : 5 : 4	11	31	41 : 37 : 39	117	3
2018	Winter	Pyeongchang	1 : 0 : 0	1	21	7 : 7 : 8	22	6
2020	Summer	Tokyo	1 : 6 : 12	19	44	24 : 47 : 27	98	6
2022	Winter	Beijing	0 : 1 : 0	1	25	11 : 10 : 8	29	2
2024	Summer	Paris	3 : 5 : 4	12	22	22 : 28 : 32	82	7
TOTAL			41 : 43 : 76	160			695	

\*Medal Count: #Gold : #Silver : #Bronze; ranking based on gold medals won.

The **National Sports Committee for the Disabled of Ukraine (NSCDU)** was created by three federations (for people with hearing, vision and locomotor disabilities) in 1992. This public organisation was recognised by the International Paralympic Committee in 1995 and has represented Ukraine at the Paralympics since 1996 and at the Deaflympics since 1993. The organisation has been headed since it was formed by Valery Sushkevich, a former disability swimmer turned politician and member of Parliament. In the last twenty years, Ukraine has been a Paralympic powerhouse (Knapp 2021, O'Halloran 2022) and, since the Summer Games in Athens 2004, Ukraine has ranked between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> in both Summer and Winter Games medal counts.

The **Sports Committee of Ukraine**, established in 2005, is responsible for the oversight and development of non-Olympic sports and coordination of the activities of the relevant federations that promote these sports (Borysova and Kropyvnytska 2021). It also oversees sports that represent Ukraine at the World Games (per article 25 of the Law of Ukraine 'On Physical Culture and Sports').

**National Sports Federations**, according to Article 20 of the Law of Ukraine 'On Physical Culture and Sports', are public associations of physical culture and sports orientation. They can have all-Ukrainian or local status, as well as the status of a national sports federation (granted to only one sports federation per sport).

National status may be granted to both Olympic and non-Olympic federations. To be recognised as a national federation, a sports federation must be legally registered, have 'All-Ukraine' status (with regional associations in at least half of the recognised oblasti), and belong to a world federation recognised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. National status enables federations to receive government funding for official national and international championships; allows national team athletes to obtain permits to travel abroad during the war; and entitles winners of major competitions to receive sports titles (e.g. Master of Sports of Ukraine), which carry financial benefits. Recognition also allows for the

creation of a sports department in a children's and youth sports school. National status requires a written agreement with the government obliging the federation to comply with Ministry reporting requirements (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2012).

There are currently recognised 41 Olympic federations. In addition, there are 88 non-Olympic federations, from sports on The World Games programme, other globally practiced sports, as well as national sports and four national federations for persons with disabilities (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine MYSU 2024a).

In Ukraine, **Children's Sports Schools** (DYuSSH) are a legacy from the Soviet era and offer specialised training in various sports disciplines, aiming to identify and nurture talent from an early age. They are located in most cities and towns, and the largest cities will have numerous such schools. These schools typically specialise in specific sports, although many offer multiple sports, and serve as the basis for the formation of the future national teams in elite competitions (Krugliak *et al.* 2020). As required by the Law of Ukraine 'On Physical Culture and Sports', Decree of the CMU of 2 July 2014 No. 220, the Ministry of Youth and Sports maintains an updated list of all Sports schools. In a dataset updated 4 March 2024, the Ministry reported that there were 1087 DYuSSH and 27 ShVSM schools (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine MYSU 2024b), around a 25% reduction from 2013 (Podobied-Frankivska *et al.* 2023). In an analysis of the data, the breakdown of ownership/control was as follows: municipalities (593, or 55% of the total), regional/oblast (139, 13%), villages (122, 11%), Ministry of Education ('Osvita') (113, 10%), sport societies ex Osvita (94, 9%), others/private (26, 2%).

Sports schools can be state, communal, or privately owned. Regardless of the form of ownership, general rules and standards apply to youth sports schools and training programmes must be approved by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The transfer of pupils of the sports school to the next stage is carried out on the basis of the fulfilment of sports standards (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2008).

There are three specialised sports universities – the National University of Ukraine on Physical Education and Sport (Kyiv), Lviv State University of Physical Culture, and Kharkiv State Academy of Physical Culture – and more than 50 other universities that have corresponding faculties.

Ukraine has six non-governmental **Sports Societies** which are recognised by the NOCU and work with government institutions. They were created during the times of the Soviet Union, when the idea of the development of the workers' sports movement – compulsory sports for all segments of the population – was implemented. These include the Central Sports Club of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (CSK ZSU), Dynamo (law enforcement agencies), Kolos (agricultural sports association), 'Osvita' (a subset of the Ministry of Education and Science), Spartak (the Ukraine chapter of the international trade union group), and Ukraine (formerly Avanhard and other trade unions). All of them have their representation in all regions of Ukraine providing their facilities and training to athletes (National Olympic Committee of Ukraine NOCU 2024). These sports societies control certain sports schools and the training facility infrastructure they hold as well as sponsor sports clubs on a professional and amateur basis (Borysova and Kropyvnytska 2021).

In **Professional Leagues**, football is the most popular sport and is governed by the Ukrainian Association of Football (UAF), with a competitive structure inherited from the Soviet Union. The Ukrainian Premier League (UPL, or Vyscha Liha) was launched in 1992 and has 16 teams. There are also two lower leagues with a relegation and promotion

system. Andriy Shevchenko, current UAF President and the most recognisable among Ukrainian footballers, is the all-time top scorer for the Ukraine national team with 48 goals and winner of the Ballon d'Or in 2004 (Ukrainian Association of Football UAF 2024). The Ukrainian Women's Professional Football League, WFPL, was founded in 1992 and consists of two divisions, the 12-team Top League (Vyshcha Liha) and the First League (Persha Liha). Ukraine had co-hosted with Poland the UEFA European Football Championship in 2012. Besides football, the other major professional sports in Ukraine are basketball and ice hockey, and Ukrainian basketball players were among the decisive factors for the success of the USSR national basketball team up until independence.

**Private sports clubs** (running clubs, ice skating groups, etc) are ignored and have little to do with the local Sports Committees that direct municipal resources, as, generally, decision makers focus only on the organisations that belong to government – federations and sports schools. There are few programmes for strengthening sports clubs or to give them grants or to provide discounted or free access to public sports facilities. There has been little discussion about cooperation of public and non-profit sector in sports as the State sports system and civil society exists in two separate worlds (Danyliuk 2023). Out of almost 2000 sports clubs, the large majority of them are in private/corporate ownership, although there are also communal (10%) and state (1.4%) clubs (Ministry of Youth and Sports MYSU 2023).

## The funding of sport in Ukraine

An important part of the Olympic training system for Soviet athletes, including those in the Ukrainian SSR, involved the construction of integrated and specialised bases for the Olympic training of national teams in all Olympic sports in the 1970s funded by the government. Within these bases, the conditions were created for training, accommodation, proper nutrition, medical and scientific services.

With independence came the need for an abrupt shift in the model for financing sport. Unlike several other former USSR satellites such as Baltic countries which adopted a more decentralised model patterned after European countries, Ukraine maintained the very centralised Soviet approach but had to marshal resources from the newly independent country's own limited budget (Danyliuk 2023). The State budget for physical culture and sports in 1994, for example, was only the equivalent of US\$29.8 million. This figure increased over time, especially in years leading up to the Olympic Games, but was far less than the resources that had been provided in Soviet times and accordingly there has been a significant deterioration in infrastructure and venues due to a lack of maintenance funding (Krugliak *et al.* 2020).

After the events related to the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) and the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, the Ukrainian government's finances came under significant pressure and it was forced to restructure government debt with private creditors. As part of its arrangement with the IMF in return for support in the process, Ukraine initiated a political decentralisation process to shift more decision-making and financial responsibility to the local level (Nikitenko 2017). Decentralisation was effected not through a federalisation structure but through the consolidation of small municipalities into amalgamated territorial communities, or ATCs, with a reallocation of political, administrative and financial competencies to these merged and enlarged local communities

(hromady). ATCs received considerable rights in respect of tax collection, self-government and public policy, but also had to take on significant new burdens for the provision of services, including for sport (Romanova and Umland 2019), as the financing requirements for the DYSSH schools that had been funded by the Social Insurance Fund were largely shifted to the oblast or municipal level (Danyliuk 2023).

The impact of this shift can be seen in the consolidating budget for sports in 2017–2024 as published by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and summarised in Table 2. In 2024 the State covered 41% of the total sports funding burden, while 59% was covered at the regional and local levels. Reflective of the sports policy priorities, an overwhelming percentage of the total programme expenditures are directed to elite sports activities: 33% to the sports schools, 30% to high-performance sports (Olympic, non-Olympic, Paralympic, and Deaflympic movements), 33% to infrastructure (sports facilities and bases for Olympic and Paralympic training and sports schools), and 2.4% to reserve sport. In keeping with the decentralisation push, over 90% of the burden of the sport schools is now funded at the regional and local levels. The remaining balance of 2.2% is allocated to (1) Public Physical Activity (1.3%); (2) offering sports services (0.6%); (3) army sports (0.3%); and (4) promotion of healthy lifestyle among the general population (0.02%) (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine MYSU 2024c).

**Table 2.** Ukrainian sports program budget 2017–2024: funding sources (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine MYSU 2024c).

Sources of Funding	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Average	%2024
State budget	2,183	2,005	2,061	3,697	8,162	6,841	4,129	7,578	40.13%	40.79%
Municipal budget	2,984	3,278	3,565	5,631	8,634	9,347	6,179	10,287	54.67%	55.38%
Other sources	533	744	694	123	699	725	250	711	5.20%	3.83%
Total Funding (UAH millions)	5,700	6,026	6,321	9,451	17,496	16,912	10,559	18,576	100.00%	
Allocation to Programs	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Average	%2024
Sport schools	2,806	3,128	3,502	4,090	5,081	5,444	5,222	6,065	38.81%	32.65%
High-performance sports	2,061	1,854	1,882	2,658	5,941	4,695	3,606	5,613	31.10%	30.22%
Sports infrastructure	401	548	359	2,066	5,595	5,953	1,068	6,047	24.20%	32.55%
High-performance talent identification	256	273	339	407	402	420	333	446	3.16%	2.40%
Public physical activity	146	167	191	146	291	212	234	237	1.78%	1.27%
Offering sports services	19	45	35	41	140	139	81	114	0.67%	0.61%
Army sports	7	7	7	41	45	48	12	52	0.24%	0.28%
Promotion of healthy lifestyle	5	5	5	3	3	3	2	3	0.03%	0.02%
Total Gov't Budget (UAH Millions)	5,700	6,026	6,321	9,451	17,496	16,912	10,559	18,576	100.00%	
Total Budget (in millions USD, avg FX)	\$214.3	\$221.5	\$244.6	\$350.6	\$641.2	\$522.9	\$288.7	\$462.6		
Year Average UAH/USD Exchange Rate	26.5966	27.2005	25.8456	26.9575	27.2862	32.3423	36.5738	40.1521		

Note: UAH/USD Official Foreign Exchange Rate (per <https://bank.gov.ua/en/markets/exchangerate-chart>).

Supporting this is a policy document called the 'Formula for the distribution of budget funds between sports' which allocates 80% of the federation funding based on results (48%) and number of athletes (32%) in Olympic Games or World/European Championships, 15% distributed in equal shares to all federations, and 5% in support of developing sports. This represented UAH 3.34 billion (US\$102.4 million) of the State's 2022 budget (Stepanov 2023).

With limited resources, policy has prioritised sports most likely to produce medals, such as artistic and rhythmic gymnastics, swimming, cycling, weightlifting, wrestling, fencing, biathlon, and figure skating. Since 1998, sports and athletes have been categorised into three groups: those likely to win medals, those with a small chance of Olympic qualification, and those with little or no competitive prospects. Ukrainian athletes have achieved very limited success in non-prioritised sports, as the focus on select groups has made it virtually impossible for others to compete (Krugliak *et al.* 2020). Resources are not only concentrated on core sports, but the system also rewards only ultimate success: each Ukrainian medal winner at the London and Rio Olympics received \$125,000, \$80,000, and \$55,000 for gold, silver, and bronze, respectively (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine 2010, Krugliak *et al.* 2020).

When it comes to the private sector, the municipal sports infrastructure, such as ice rinks, swimming pools and sports grounds, is provided for use exclusively by the communal DYUSSh free of charge or for 1 hryvnia and private clubs have no rights to access it, except through under-the-table arrangements with the school managers. Alternatively, those looking to pursue sports activities outside of the official sector turn to private sports facilities, which are usually quite expensive and available from less convenient locations or times than the official venues (Danyliuk 2023).

## Public health and physical activity issues

The non-profit Global Wellness Institute, in its October 2019 report, ranked Ukraine 130th out of 150 countries for Recreational Physical Activity by Participation (25.3% of the population engage in one or more of their three physical activity categories at least monthly) and 63rd for Fitness by Participation (3.5% of the population use gym/health club/fitness facilities at least monthly) (Yeung and Johnston 2019). The World Health Organisation (2022), in its Global Status Report on Ukrainian Physical Activity 2022, reported that 71% of boys and 83% of girls aged 11–17 were inactive (not doing at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily) and that 92% of deaths were caused by noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease, cancer, chronic respiratory disease, and diabetes. According to the CIA Factbook (2025), Ukraine's estimated 2023 life expectancy at birth is 69.8 years overall (64.5 for males, 75.4 for females), ranking it 178th globally. These poor indicators explain why promoting sport for health and fitness remains a high government priority in successive sports plans and recent legislation.

Unfortunately, there is limited data that has been gathered by the government on mass sport participation, and there does not appear to be anything on types of sport activity pursued by the general population. According to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the first sport participation survey in Ukraine was conducted in 2023, which showed that only 4.8% of respondents were constantly engaged in sports activity, 10.8% regularly,

22.5% sometimes, 57.9% did not engage, and 3.9% did not answer. In comparison, according to the Eurobarometer SP525 survey, 6% of respondents on average in the EU countries were constantly engaged, 32% regularly, 17% occasionally, and 45% did not engage (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine MYSU 2024d).

In order to increase the participation of the population in mass sports, the 'Healthy Ukraine' programme and the 'Active Parks' project were launched by the government starting in 2021 with the goal to promote active forms of leisure and sports. One project developed a navigation map of free recreational activities organised by the government for the population in parks and squares (Active Parks 2024). It is a very visible programme but does not have the breadth or consistency to have the intended impact. Another initiative was the creation of an electronic register of sports facilities, which provides a photo, its location, contacts, technical characteristics, etc. The Center for Sport for All changed its name to the Agency for Mass Sports of Ukraine in June 2025, but the essence of its activities and website url remained the same.

The commercial market of fitness services in Ukraine is growing but still very small given the size of the population. According to research conducted by the FitnessConnectUA project team, the annual turnover of this market in Ukraine in 2020 was \$201.8 million, and the marketing agency Smart noted that Ukrainians spent about UAH 19.7 billion (US\$ 730 million) a year on classes for fitness (Pavlikha and Tsymbaliuk 2021).

### **Sport policies, priorities, and trends**

In the Ukrainian context, health and sport are considered as interconnected, with umbrella legislation dividing into two separate spheres: health (health care) and sport (physical education and sports). It is based on elements of Article 3 of the 1996 Constitution and provisions in the 2003 Civil Code that guarantee the right to health and life (Bogatyrev *et al.* 2022). Also, Article 36 of the Constitution of Ukraine states that 'citizens of Ukraine have the right to freedom of association in public organisations', and Article 49 'The state takes care of the development of physical culture and sports'. The Law of Ukraine on Physical Culture and Sports No. 3808-XII of 24 December 1993, defines the basic principles of the sports management system. Sport was defined in the legislation as 'the activity of actors of physical culture and sport, aimed at identifying and uniformly comparing the achievements of people in physical, intellectual and other training through sports competitions and appropriate training for them' (Bogatyrev *et al.* 2022, p. 23). Given the centralised nature of sports organisation in Ukraine, there are numerous policy documents and strategic plans that build upon the structure outlined in the 1993 Law that, despite a major rewrite in 2011, remains virtually the same as the original version (Danyliuk 2022). Moreover, it still problematically 'follows the Soviet model of management. Since adoption of the new edition of the Law (2009), it has been amended 24 times. It was rewritten and increased by 50% in size, but the core theses and norms remained unchanged' (Podobied-Frankivska *et al.* 2023, p. 3).

In 2014, in recognition that the administrative-command mechanisms from the Soviet era were not working, the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine launched an active reform of the sports system, reflecting the need for radical changes due to obsolescence and inefficiency of its management mechanisms, lack of globally-

recognised development indicators, and an interest to integrate into the European community (Borysova and Kropyvnytska 2021). In 2015, the then Minister of Youth and Sports Igor Zhdanov outlined a series of proposed reforms to: (1) eliminate redundant functions of the Ministry and to Europeanize them, with a well-defined relations between the state and sports; (2) increase the transparency of the Ministry's activities, abandon manual budget management, and fight corruption among officials; (3) increase the autonomy of national sports federations; and (4) improve national anti-doping legislation (Zhdanov 2015).

Since then, there have been a number of Laws and Orders with amendments addressing these issues. Podobied-Frankivska *et al.* (2023), Borysova and Kropyvnytska (2021), and Melikh *et al.* (2019) highlighted several of the more prominent policy documents, among others: Decree of the President of Ukraine 'On the National Strategy for Physical Activity in Ukraine for the period up to 2025' of 9 February 2016 No. 42/2016; Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine dated 1 March 2017 No. 115 on 'The State targeted social programme for the development of physical culture and sports for the period up to 2020', as amended to 2024; 'The Strategy for the Development of Physical Culture and Sports for the period up to 2028', approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 1089 of 4 November 2020 (amended 19 August 2022); among many others.

The Ministry also published its 'Strategy of development of sports and physical activity of Ukraine until 2032' in 2019. The five main vectors that were proposed in order to create a platform for sporting success and a physically active nation by 2032 and beyond were generally the same as those articulated in 2015 by the Minister: (1) increasing the physical activity of Ukrainians; (2) qualitative changes in sports of higher achievements; (3) development of sports infrastructure according to international standards; (4) regulation of the industry and strengthening of horizontal ties; and (5) creation of the sports industry and a boost to related industries (economic effect, social policy) (MYSU, 2019).

There are two primary and consistent themes across these sports laws and plans: the pursuit of excellence in competition performance, and the increase in mass sports participation to improve the health of the population. Discussions about reforms of various sorts have continued but most have failed to be implemented, certainly in the last 3 years in the current war environment, but even in the period leading up to February 2022. Since 2016, there has been a significant increase in funding for high-performance sports and partly for the youth programme, but this has failed to increase the number of Ukrainians involved in regular physical activity or youth initiatives (Podobied-Frankivska *et al.* 2023).

The government clearly recognises the need for reforms, as the successive strategic plans have not been achieving their goals of medal performance (except for Paralympics and Deaflympics) and of increasing physical fitness and health in the general population. There has been limited international analysis and commentary around potential reforms of the Ukrainian sport system (Krugliak *et al.* 2020, Borysova and Kropyvnytska 2021, Podobied-Frankivska *et al.* 2023) but a significant amount of research has been undertaken by local academics and commentators.

Policy prescriptions generally fall into one of two approaches. The first approach concludes that the shortfalls of the sports system are due to a failure to fully and properly utilise the resources of the structures that currently exist (Prihodko *et al.* 2021). A large focus tends to be on improving elite athlete research and training facilities (Prihodko

and Tomenko 2019, Borysova *et al.* 2020), improving the education of trainers (Lishchuk 2015, Suray 2023), ensuring national sports federations are actually focused on sport according to international standards (Zozulia and Dovgan 2019), and strengthening and providing more resources to the youth and reserve sports schools (Tikhonova 2024).

The second perspective concludes that the Ukrainian system, being based on the Soviet structures of central control and specialised sports schools, is fundamentally flawed and needs to be replaced with the European model of sports (Dorofieieva and Prikhodko 2020, Bilov and Tyshchenko 2023). The European model of sport has five key principles: the pyramidal structure (mass to elite), autonomy, volunteering, competition openness, and financial solidarity (Sennett *et al.* 2022, Stepanov 2023). Regarding elite sports activity, the sports schools – in attempting to identify talent – are seen to merely winnow the initial pool of potential athletes at each stage (Melikh *et al.* 2019). Sports infrastructure is controlled by the schools and largely not available to the public, which discourages mass participation in sport (Danyliuk 2023). Brychko (2023) promotes the opening up of sports infrastructure and provision of more funding for mass sport, and Koshovyi and Krasovska (2016) conclude that an institutional transformation is needed to promote the investment attractiveness of the sport industry to institutional and private investors. Tkalych *et al.* (2020) call for legal and regulatory reforms that promote entrepreneurial activity in the professional sports area.

## Impact of the war

Ukraine declared independence on 24 August 1991 with the Soviet Union's dissolution, initially adopting a neutral stance. At that time, it was the world's third-largest nuclear power, after the US and Russia. Although nuclear weapons were formally controlled by Russia through the CIS, Ukraine agreed in 1994 to dismantle its arsenal and join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In exchange, the US, UK, and Russia pledged security assurances under the Budapest Memorandum, including UN Security Council action in case of aggression.

On 22 February 2014, mass protests ousted the pro-Russian Yanukovych government, leading to a pro-Western administration. Days later, Russia invaded Crimea, annexing it in March, and pro-Russian unrest in Donbas escalated into conflict between Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian forces. Russia launched a full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022, targeting eastern cities and Kyiv, with support from Belarus. With Ukraine's successful defence of Kyiv, the conflict remains a stalemate in eastern Ukraine after more than 3 years with continuing missile and drone attacks across the country, severely impacting Ukrainian sports and infrastructure.

Ukraine's Ministry of Youth and Sports representative reported to the Council of Europe in May 2025 that Russia's actions had killed 595 Ukrainian athletes and coaches and damaged 734 sports facilities, including 18 Olympic training bases, with total infrastructure losses exceeding US\$374 million (Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine MYSU 2025). According to NOCU Vice President at the EOA Congress in Vilnius in November 2023, 323 of 1257 sports institutions suspended activities, 27,294 athletes train abroad, 42,273 cannot continue, and 193,634 remain active out of 422,913 as of December 2021. Of the 13,067 active coaches in 2021, 463 work abroad (234 online), 423

relocated within Ukraine (320 online), 3958 lost jobs, and 5256 continue at their institutions (2,562 online) (Bulatova 2023).

On 28 February 2022, the IOC called for all international federations to not invite or allow the participation of Russian and Belarusian athletes, having already requested that they relocate or cancel sports events planned in those countries, and asked that neither's national flags be displayed nor anthems played. While individual athletes have been since allowed to compete as neutrals, with a limited number approved for the Paris 2024 Olympics, no Russian and Belarusian teams have been permitted (Kobierecki and Pigman 2025). Ukraine continues to press the IOC to maintain its ban on Russian athletes and teams, arguing Russia seeks to use the return of its athletes to major competitions as a soft-power tactic to break its diplomatic isolation and restore its global image (Starcevic 2025).

On 17 March 2022, Ukraine's State Border Service restricted travel for males aged 18 to 60, affecting athletes and officials, complicating international participation. In April 2023, Ukraine barred athletes from events with Russian or Belarusian competitors but revised this in July 2023 to allow participation if their competitors were under a neutral flag (Melkozerova 2023). 'Home' matches in international football games, such as Ukraine playing in the UEFA EURO 2024, have been played outside the country and fans are not allowed to gather in stadiums for safety reasons (Todos 2024, Brennan 2024).

In July 2022, Ukraine developed a 'Draft Ukraine Recovery Plan' for Youth and Sport with five main goals: youth policy, physical culture and sports, national/patriotic education, development of high achievement sports, and rebuilding sport infrastructure to strengthen Ukrainian civic identity (National Council for the Recovery of Ukraine from the Consequences of the War NCRUCW 2022). Two years later, these objectives remain but face greater challenges due to ongoing war (Kuvaldina *et al.* 2024). Current wartime pressures have exacerbated budget constraints, delaying the implementation of well-intentioned policies. Although a shift towards a European model of sport is increasingly favoured (Kropyvnytska and Makarenko 2022), significant reforms are unlikely until cessation of hostilities allows a normalisation of society.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank Prof. Dr. Karen Petry of German Sport University for her advice and encouragement.

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## Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The authors used ChatGPT-4o and ChatGPT-5.1 to review the formatting of citations and references to conform to Harvard style guidelines.

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