

Keeping Young People in Sport: Lessons from the STAY! Project

Policy Brief | 5-2025



The Challenge

Across Europe, too many teenagers—especially girls—are leaving sport. Academic pressure, rigid expectations, and a lack of alternative roles mean that once young people stop competing, they often leave altogether.

This dropout not only affects individual well-being—it weakens local sport ecosystems, reduces diversity in leadership, and contributes to long-term physical inactivity.

30–50% of young people drop out of organised sport during adolescence	Up to 60% of girls aged 15–18 stop participating in club sport activities	40% of youth cite academic pressure as a main reason for dropping out
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------

> 70% of youth who stop competing do not stay involved in sport clubs	> 25% of European adolescents are physically inactive, risking long-term health issues
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The STAY! Solution

STAY! is an Erasmus+ project (2023–2025) that tested new ways to retain young people in sport—especially those who no longer see themselves in high-performance pathways. It focused on volunteering, youth leadership, flexible engagement, and non-competitive roles.

What Worked

STAY! pilot actions were diverse but shared key enablers:

- Youth-centred roles: Assistant coaching, jury table work, social media management
- Recreational pathways: For girls stepping back from competition but wanting to stay active
- Tutoring and school-life balance: Including parent- or peer-led academic support
- Flexible expectations: Allowing youth to change roles instead of quitting



Key Insights

- Small, low-cost changes (e.g. recognition, flexibility) made a big impact on retention.
- Youth want to contribute—not just train. Responsibility increases engagement.
- Dropout prevention works best when families, schools, and sport staff coordinate.
- Listening and adapting are not optional—they are essential.

Recommendations for Policymakers

1. Recognise dropout prevention as a strategic priority in national and EU sport policies.
2. Fund local actions focused on inclusion, volunteering, and recreational engagement—not just competition.
3. Promote tools like the STAY! e-learning platform for coaches and staff training.
4. Include youth retention indicators in sport development frameworks.
5. Celebrate innovation through awards and integration into coach education.

Our Vision

A Europe where every young person has a place in sport—whether as an athlete, a volunteer, a mentor, or a creator.

The STAY! approach is scalable, inclusive, and ready to be adopted. What's needed now is action.



STAY! Decreasing teenage dropout in sport | 12-2022 – 5-2025 | Ref. N: 101091037 | Contact: [insert your email / partner info]
For access to the full report, tools, and e-learning platform | stay.multisportclubs.eu | studia.multisportclubs.eu/classes/stay/