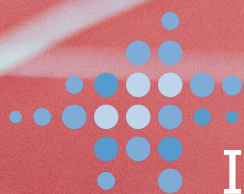


A person is seen from behind, holding a large flag of the Faroe Islands. The flag features a white field with a red cross and blue borders. The person is standing on a red running track. The background is a clear sky.

ELITE SPORT IN THE FAROE ISLANDS

August 2026 / Rasmus K. Storm & Klaus Nielsen



Idrættens
Analyseinstitut

ELITE SPORT IN THE FAROE ISLANDS

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Finally, we thank the Faroese Confederation of Sports and Olympic Committee for assigning us the task of conducting the evaluation.

June 2026, The Danish Institute for Sports Studies, Aarhus,

Rasmus K. Storm & Klaus Nielsen

Executive summary

Introduction

This study is commissioned by the Faroese Confederation of Sports and Olympic Committee (ÍSF) to evaluate the current elite sport system in the Faroe Islands.

The study's conceptual framework draws on the SPLISS framework (De Bosscher et al., 2006, 2015), which outlines the key characteristics of elite sport systems across nine pillars: funding, governance/sport policies, mass participation, talent identification and development, training facilities, coach development and supply, support for athletic and post-athletic careers, access to national and international competitions, and scientific research.

A thorough examination of these pillars yields a coherent picture of the Faroese elite sport system and its strengths and weaknesses. Based on this, the evaluation can serve as a political tool, enabling the planning of necessary initiatives and, if desired, the allocation of appropriate financial resources to strengthen the sector.

Below are the main conclusions of the evaluation. This is followed by a set of recommendations for the future development of Faroese elite sport. The results and recommendations are further argued in the final sections of the report.

Results

The Faroe Islands are doing very well in international elite sport. The improvement of international competitiveness in some sports has been huge in recent years. Dedication, cultural traits, and growing wealth make it attainable to perform even better despite the low population size, though aspirations should remain realistic given available monetary resources.

At the time of writing, the Faroese elite sport system is undergoing significant development, characterised by increasing institutionalisation and strategic awareness. In recent years, following the establishment of a more formalised elite sport framework, the system has shifted from a largely ad hoc, individual-oriented model to a more coordinated, deliberate, policy-driven approach.

While these developments mark significant progress, the system remains fundamentally constrained by macro-structural factors including a small population, geographical isolation and restricted access to the Olympic movement due to a lack of IOC recognition.

Despite these issues, the report's output section finds that the Faroese elite sport system produces international results that exceed those expected of a microstate. In football, recent developments among national teams point to clear progress. At the club level, Faroese teams have also advanced significantly, as illustrated by improved UEFA coefficient rankings and the historic qualification of KÍ Klaksvík to the group stage of a European competition.

In handball, the performance trajectory is even more remarkable and constitutes perhaps the strongest example of elite sport success in the Faroese context, with qualification for major European and World Championship. Even more striking are the results at youth and junior levels, where Faroese teams have achieved top-10 placements and, notably, secured a bronze medal at the World Championships.

Beyond team sports, the Faroe Islands also perform strongly in multi-sport and individual contexts. In the Island Games, the Faroe Islands have consistently ranked among the top performers and, in 2025, achieved first place in the medal table. The swimmer Pal Joenson won several medals in World and European Championships, and the rower Sverri Nielsen won the European Championship. In athletics Jónas Isaksen won the European U20 Championships. Christina Næss won medals including a gold medal in the Paralympics, and Faroese athletes have won several medals at the Indoor Rowing World Championships.

The Faroese system is characterised by a strong grassroots foundation, extensive volunteer engagement, and a cultural mindset built around resilience, adaptability, and collective identity. These factors contribute positively to both athlete development and performance outcomes.

At the same time, they also create tensions with the increasing demands of elite sport, which require clearer prioritisation, professionalisation, and strategic focus. The central conclusion is therefore that the Faroese elite sport system has reached a stage where further development depends on a shift from improvisation and adaptability towards consolidation, strategic investment, and institutional strengthening.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, a set of recommendations for improving the Faroese elite sport system centres around the following areas.

Raise funding

A substantial increase in elite sport funding is essential if the Faroese system is to progress further. Current funding levels are insufficient to support the ambitions that have emerged within the system, limiting federations' abilities to plan and invest in long-term development. A shift towards multi-year funding frameworks could create predictability and enable strategic planning.

Increased funding should also be more targeted, ensuring that resources are allocated to support performance priorities and address structural cost drivers, such as international travel. Without a significant strengthening of the financial base, the system will struggle to convert existing potential into improved performance outcomes.

Establish a national elite sport centre

The establishment of a national elite sport centre represents a critical step in strengthening the Faroese system's performance infrastructure. Such a centre would function as a shared

hub for high-performance services, including strength and conditioning, physiotherapy, medical support, sport psychology, and scientific testing.

By pooling resources and expertise across sports, the centre would compensate for the limitations of scale and create synergies that cannot be achieved within individual federations. It would also facilitate knowledge sharing, improve coordination, and provide athletes with access to integrated support services that are currently fragmented or unavailable.

Strengthen management and administration

The advantages of a more professional administration/management of federations and clubs are likely to be significant. Currently, federations and especially clubs rely heavily on voluntary work. In addition to the variable quality of administrative work, this makes federations and clubs vulnerable to shifts in personnel, and valuable experiential knowledge is often not transferred.

Improve the education of coaches

Investing in coaching education is one of the most effective ways to improve performance in a small system. The Faroese system requires a more comprehensive and structured approach to coach development, including expanded training programmes, continuous professional education, and improved support for coaches at all levels. Particular attention should be given to youth coaching, where the foundations for elite performance are established. At the same time, the strategic use of foreign expertise should be strengthened to ensure that external knowledge is effectively integrated into the Faroese context.

Keep exploring the possibilities of IOC recognition

Efforts to achieve recognition by the International Olympic Committee should continue as part of the long-term strategic agenda. While acknowledging the political complexities involved, such recognition would provide important benefits, including increased access to funding, enhanced visibility, and strengthened national identity in international sport. Even if membership remains uncertain in the short term, continued engagement with international organisations and strategic positioning on this issue is considered essential.

Reduce dropout and support women's sport

Faroese children are very physically active, but the dropout from sports activities among adolescents is significant. Further, the dropout rates are especially high among young women, and the impacts are greater than elsewhere in sports where a high share of the active children and youngsters are female.

Addressing dropout and strengthening women's sport is crucial for expanding and sustaining the talent base. Measures should be implemented to reduce dropout during adolescence by creating more flexible and inclusive development pathways and by supporting late specialisation and multi-sport participation.

Improving retention will increase the effective talent pool and enhance long-term performance potential.

Strengthen research and diversify educational opportunities

The integration of sport science and research into practice should be strengthened across the system. This involves expanding existing research capacities, improving coordination between academic institutions and sports organisations, and ensuring that knowledge is systematically applied in training and development.

At the same time, educational opportunities related to sport should be expanded within the Faroe Islands. This would reduce the need for outward migration and strengthen the domestic knowledge base. Dual-career support should also be extended to higher education levels, enabling athletes to combine sport and education more effectively.

Establish a strategic cooperation with Danish stakeholders and Team Danmark

As is clear from the sections on macro-level background and population input, Faroese society has developed a migration culture while at the same time maintaining a strong Faroese identity.

This 'societal model' helps ensure that educational capital, other resources, and various cultural inputs enter Faroese society. For a small society, the inflow and outflow of people help Faroese society survive and adapt to its position as a small nation isolated in the North Atlantic, yet capable of standing tall and achieving more than expected.

In relation to the development of talent and elite athletes, this model could serve as a fruitful template for the future development of the Faroese elite sport system.

In accordance with the Faroese migration culture, ÍSF should initiate a cooperation with Team Danmark and other stakeholders to help the best Faroese elite athletes move to Denmark to develop their talent when the domestic environment becomes insufficiently supportive of further development.

Naturally, this step would require a significant financial investment and may not be the first recommendation to implement. However, it would be a highly relevant step if Faroese athletes are to reach higher levels of international competitiveness in the future.

Introduction

This study, commissioned by the Faroese Confederation of Sports and Olympic Committee (ÍSF), evaluates the current elite sport system in the Faroe Islands. The findings aim to inform future Faroese elite sports policy and include recommendations for its development.

The report is organised as follows: first, the evaluation's analytical framework is presented, followed by a description of the materials and methods used. The Faroese elite sport system is then assessed using the framework.

Where relevant, the Faroese system and its performance are compared with those of other countries – primarily small states and other Nordic nations.

The final sections summarise and discuss the findings, outline implications and potential future directions for Faroese elite sport, and present the report's recommendations.

Analytical framework

This evaluation applies the *Sports Policy Factors Leading to International Sporting Success* (SPLISS) framework (e.g. De Bosscher et al., 2006, 2008, 2015) to structure and guide the research process and data collection, serving as both the analytical foundation and the theoretical basis of the study.¹

The SPLISS studies use an extensive data-driven approach to compare elite sport systems internationally. A full implementation of the SPLISS framework would require information on 96 Critical Success Factors and 750 subfactors. It would also incorporate input from athletes, coaches, and performance directors regarding the elite sport system under review – elements that lie beyond the resources available for this evaluation.

This study does not use such an extensive data set, but rather relies on extensive interviews and available quantitative and qualitative information. Nevertheless, the framework and its pillar structure is used to organise and steer the work, linking the collected materials (see the materials and methods sections) to form a coherent picture of the Faroese elite sport system and its performance. This approach offers several advantages.

First, the SPLISS framework is a state-of-the-art, widely used approach to analysing how nations achieve international sporting success. Second, the authors of this report have previously applied the framework successfully in evaluations of elite sport in Denmark (Storm et al., 2016), Finland (Storm & Nielsen, 2022) and Greenland (Storm & Nielsen, 2023). Second, it has also been used specifically to examine Swedish elite sport (Norberg, 2012; Riksidrottsförbundet [Swedish Sports Confederation], 2020; Storm et al., 2024).

Third, using this framework makes it possible to analyse the structural, cultural, and societal factors that shape the Faroese elite sport system, its functioning, and its outcomes. The approach offers a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the performance of the Faroese system than an evaluation focused solely on the organisational structure.

In short, the SPLISS approach is based on the anticipation that determinants of international sporting success can be found on three distinct levels: the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels (De Bosscher et al., 2010).

Macro-level factors refer to national characteristics that shape a country's capacity to compete in the global sporting arms race but are difficult to alter in the short term. Cultural traits, societal structures, economic resources, population size, population density and political conditions – all of which influence a nation's international elite sporting competitiveness – represent macro-level conditions that can only be changed over a longer time horizon.

¹ Some parts of the following sections repeat text from previous works by the authors, however, reformulated using MS Copilot. This is mainly the case in the short introductions in each of the pillar sections that repeat the overall relevance of assessing the respective pillars from Storm & Nielsen (2024; 2022).

However, these factors are essential to building national medal capabilities. According to De Bosscher et al. (2006) and Storm and Nielsen (2010), they account for roughly 50% of the differences between the medal portfolios of nations (for further discussions, see Storm & Jakobsen, 2024).

Meso- and micro-level factors include determinants of success that are not captured by macro-level conditions. At the micro level, athletes' immediate environments (e.g. social and economic backgrounds and family relations) and individual characteristics shape their potential to win medals. At the meso level, the specific features of a nation's elite sport policies influence its performance capacity. Within the SPLISS model, the meso-level factors – or pillars – include:

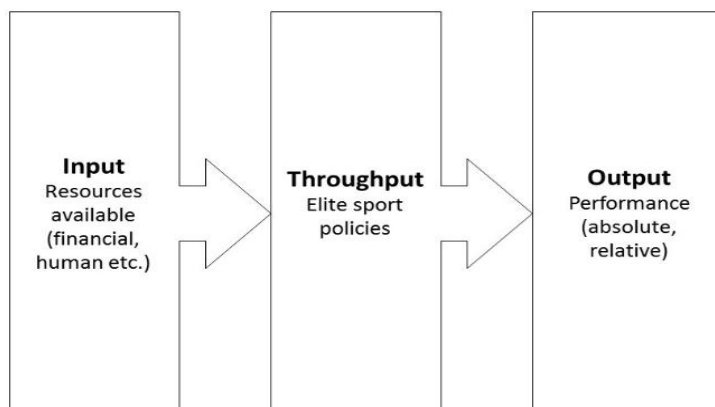
- Pillar 1: Direct national financial input into the system
- Pillar 2: Organisation and structure of elite sports policies in the nation
- Pillar 3: National mass sports participation levels and foundation
- Pillar 4: The national talent identification and development systems
- Pillar 5: The national support of athletes' career and post-career
- Pillar 6: Training facilities
- Pillar 7: Coaching provision and coach(ing) development
- Pillar 8: Access to national and international competitions for athletes
- Pillar 9: Scientific research programmes on and innovation of elite sport

According to De Bosscher et al. (2015), the importance of the meso-policy level has been increasing in relation to international sporting success over the years.

Assessing the elite sport system in the Faroe Islands

By examining and assessing the macro-, meso-, and micro-level components of the Faroese elite sport system, it is possible to construct an understanding of the system as a whole, assess it, and subsequently compare it with international trends and other nations. For the purposes of this evaluation, the report follows the model presented in figure 1.

Figure 1: Model for assessing the performance of the Faroese elite sport system



Source: The model is reproduced from Storm et al. (2016).

As shown, nations achieve success in international elite sport when various forms of input – ranging from macro-level resources such as societal wealth and population size to micro-level factors such as talented athletes – are transformed through system throughputs into outputs, namely medals and podium results at international competitions. The model's throughputs comprise a nation's elite sport policies and structures, situated at the meso level.

The report is organised according to the logic of figure 1, beginning with an examination of inputs at the different levels, followed by analyses of the throughput processes and, finally, the resulting outputs.

Limitations of applying the SPLISS approach

Despite the clear advantages of the SPLISS approach, some limitations should be noted. First, it is important to emphasise that SPLISS is primarily designed to analyse the Olympic Games and the factors that drive success within Olympic disciplines.

Although many of these factors are likely relevant across other sports, the framework tends to downplay organisational issues, challenges, and sports that fall outside the Olympic programme.

Furthermore, the SPLISS-model pays limited attention to the world's most commercialised sports – most notably football – and the mechanisms related to elite sport development at play in these sports. The output section draws on a broader set of sports to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Faroese elite sport.

In addition, throughout the analysis, we incorporate considerations relevant to both commercial sports and smaller, less prominent disciplines when appropriate. These aspects will be discussed further in the subsequent sections.

Second, it is important to acknowledge that while the SPLISS framework is highly useful for developing a comprehensive understanding of how contemporary elite sport systems operate, it does not sufficiently account for contextual and historical factors in the respective nations (Henry et al., 2020).

Elite sport systems evolve within specific historical, cultural, and national settings, and these dimensions must be considered to understand their current form and guide future development.

Consequently, this report begins by outlining key macro-level historical developments and cultural characteristics that are essential for interpreting the strengths and weaknesses of the Faroese elite sport system before proceeding to analyse its present-day inputs, throughputs, and outputs. The cultural and historical dimensions are considered part of the macro-level analysis.

The macro-level analysis, together with the examination of the nine meso-level pillars, follow the presentation of the materials and methods used in this evaluation.

Materials and methods

Desk research and literature review

The project is primarily based on existing materials and interviews. Much of the analysis is conducted as desk research, drawing on and reviewing existing research literature and available data.

The main sources include published academic book chapters and journal articles on the Faroe Islands and its sports and elite sport system, along with research reports, policy documents, and government bills. The literature covers recent decades to ensure the most up-to-date analysis possible, while parts of the study also trace developments back to the end of the Second World War.

The complete list of literature used can be found in the references at the back of the report.

Online interviews

In addition to the use of published materials, online interviews (via MS Teams) have been conducted to gain deeper insights into the elite sport system in the Faroe Islands. The interviewees include stakeholders in Faroese sport and elite sport. The interviews lasted 60-90 minutes, and all were recorded and used as background information for the analysis. All interviews were conducted from early February to late April 2026. In total, five people were interviewed online.

Research visit to the Faroe Islands

In addition to the online interviews, a range of interviews with key stakeholders in the Faroese elite sport system (eight interviews with 23 persons in total) were conducted during a five-day research visit to the Faroe Islands from 8-12 March 2026.

All the interviews – except one with a single interviewee – had a workshop format with two to five stakeholders from or related to the Faroese elite sport system (for example, sports federations, high schools, and researchers) and the Danish authors of this report as participants. All interviews have been recorded and used as background information for the analysis.²

Besides doing interviews, the authors of this report visited a range of facilities to get an impression of the sporting infrastructure in the Faroe Islands.

The use of interview data in the report

Insights from the interviews about the Faroese elite sport system provide essential information that helps the analysis develop a comprehensive understanding of the key issues. It is, however, important to recognise that some interviewees are themselves part of the system, meaning their reasoning may be influenced by particular interests. This is evident, for

² All interviews were conducted with informed consent.

example, when some argue that the system lacks sufficient funding or that certain initiatives are required if the Faroe Islands are to remain competitive in future international elite sport.

Although stakeholder perspectives are not necessarily incorrect, they can stem from narrow viewpoints that may not always withstand closer, more objective examination. From a critical academic standpoint, such statements must therefore be carefully assessed and interpreted.

To account for this, in this report, we make it clear when statements reflect stakeholders' views. This approach clarifies how the interviews contribute to our analysis, the main conclusions, and the resulting recommendations.

Objective data

To assess the performance of Faroese elite athletes, objective data on historical results from an extensive range of disciplines are deployed. Specifically, we look at the results of Faroese athletes and teams in international competitions.

First, the focus is on the performance of national and club teams in international competitions in the three big Faroese team sports (football, handball and volleyball). Second, the performance of Faroese athletes in multi-sport events, in particular the results in the biennial Island Games, is examined. Third, we examine the results of athletes competing in international competitions in individual sports.

The examinations is conducted in the output section following the analysis of each of the SPLISS pillars and a section with specific details about the most popular Faroese sports.

It is important to add that this report uses a broad definition of elite sport. In some contexts, elite sport is defined as the highest tier of sporting competition, comprising world-class or high-performance athletes. This is far too narrow to make sense in the context of this study. We rather consider the best-performing Faroese athletes in each sport to be elite athletes engaging in elite sport.

The external view and its implications

The perspective adopted in this report is explicitly the external view, which carries specific implications for the analysis conducted.

First, the research centres on recent and current challenges identified through the collected data and materials. The report addresses broad, system-level issues that characterise the Faroese elite sport system as a whole, as they appear from an external perspective. It does not pursue in-depth examinations of sport-specific matters or detailed historical developments unless such elements are essential to understanding the findings or underpinning the conclusions.

Second, and in connection with comparisons to other nations, it is important to emphasise that the report focuses on broad similarities and differences. This focus is partly shaped by the resource constraints under which the study has been conducted. Consequently, the report presents only those issues and challenges that emerge from the available data, interviews, and materials (including reports and academic publications). Other challenges may exist that were not captured during the research process and may warrant further investigation in the future.

Although a range of stakeholders was interviewed, the data collected does not represent a complete sample, nor has it allowed for an in-depth examination of all components of the Faroese elite sport system or its historical development. Furthermore, only a few athletes were interviewed, meaning that issues related specifically to their conditions and experiences may not have been appropriately identified. This constitutes a limitation of the evaluation.

Nevertheless, through the inclusion of interviews with researchers, academic literature, objective data, and analyses of relevant policy documents, we are confident that the analysis addresses the most significant issues and challenges facing Faroese elite sport today.

The evaluation does not consider Paralympic sport specifically, only in minor passages in the section on the Faroese output performance. However, in cases where parasport differs from how the systems work in general, it is reported in the other respective sections.

Macro-level background: A brief overview of the development of the elite sport system in the Faroe Islands

Research literature on the Faroese elite sport system and its organisational structure, foundations, and resources remains scarce. However, some materials exist and, supplemented with the conducted interviews, reports, and grey literature, a consistent picture can be given.

In this section, we briefly describe the overall development of the Faroese (elite) sport system. Further, we aim to understand the cultural and societal issues that underpin the Faroese (elite) sport system and determine its functioning.

We briefly touch upon organisational issues in this section, only to return to examine them more thoroughly in the section on pillar 2: Governance, organisation, and management of elite sport.

Overall development of the (elite) sport system in the Faroe Islands

The Faroe Islands are an archipelago of 18 islands (Satchwell & Wagner, 2020, p. 270) with a population of approx. 55,000 inhabitants. The sport system is modelled on the Danish system, including a national umbrella organisation – Ítrottasamband Føroya (ÍSF) – and various sport federations as its members.

In 2026, 18 federations and eight development federations (with only a few clubs and members) were members of ÍSF. Local sports clubs are part of this system, each with its own members. In 2026, these memberships aggregated to roughly 23,000, according to ÍSF. ÍSF regulates all (traditional) sporting activities in the Faroe Islands that are part of a tournament system, as is the case in Denmark.

At the local government level, there are 29 municipalities in the Faroe Islands (Thøgersen et al., 2022), with Tórshavn as the largest city and the capital. The Faroese welfare system follows the Nordic (universal) model (Esping-Andersen, 1990b, 1990a) with generous subsidies for leisure and sports activities. Facilities are constructed and supported by municipalities, with some of the largest supported by the state as well (Thøgersen et al., 2022).

At the state level, the elite sport system has existed since 2014, initially based on individual support to selected athletes. During 2023-2024, a new elite sport model was developed and formally adopted, replacing the earlier athlete-based approach with a broader, more systematic framework. By 2025, the current elite sport system was fully operational, including structured support services and a fixed annual allocation of elite funding to national federations (more on this later).

Cultural and societal issues: a small state standing tall in the Atlantic

To understand the Faroese (elite) sports system, it is essential to understand the broader cultural and societal foundations of Faroese society. According to Henry et al. (2020), cultural issues are often overlooked when elite sport systems are analysed. However, as shown by Storm & Nielsen (2022), elite sport systems – and their ways of functioning – are significantly affected by contextual and cultural factors, as they evolve within specific historical and national settings that need to be considered for understanding their current form and future development.

The end of the Second World War (WWII) marks a relevant starting point for understanding modern Faroese development and context. As argued by West (2024), WWII and the settlement that followed formed a major critical juncture in Faroese political history, culminating in the Home Rule model of 1948.

While the Home Rule model did not produce full independence from Denmark, it altered the political framework within which Faroese society developed after 1945. Rather than remaining only a peripheral Danish county – as was the case prior to the introduction of the Home Rule model – the Faroe Islands became a self-governing political community within the Danish realm ('Rigsfællesskabet') (Adler-Nissen, 2014).

The later political and cultural developments have largely unfolded along the path of increasing independence, however, with strong ties to Denmark in several respects. This goes for the elite sport system as well, which – according to several interviewees – has drawn significant inspiration from the Danish system, but also upholds its own distinctive characteristics, including drawing on inspiration from other nations, such as Iceland.

Postwar Faroese history is best understood not as a simple movement from dependence to sovereignty, but as a long process of negotiated autonomy in which questions of culture, welfare, migration, and external relations are increasingly drawn into the politics of self-government. Developing an independent yet similar elite sport system (as the Danish one) can be seen as an expression of this.

This postwar settlement also shaped the larger political issue that continues to define Faroese public life: the relationship between national distinctiveness and incomplete statehood, which continues to raise concerns in Faroese society, including in relation to elite sport.

For example, as mentioned in the analytical framework section, there are significant issues for Faroese athletes related to Olympic participation under the Faroese flag (Krieger, 2025). Even though most sports in the Faroe Islands are members of their international federations and eligible to compete in international tournaments, such as European and World Championships, the IOC does not recognise the Faroe Islands as an independent state.

Because the Faroe Islands are considered a part of the Danish realm, Faroese athletes are not allowed to compete (with the exception of parasport; more on this later) unless they do so as part of the Danish team – as was the case with Sverri Nielsen (rowing, 2020 and 2024),

Pál Joensen (swimming, 2012, and 2016), Katrin Olsen (rowing, 2008), Jóhan á Plógv Hansen (handball, 2020) and Sára Maria Johansen (rowing, 2024).

The issue raises significant concerns among many of the interviewees, and it is clear that competing under the Faroese flag – also at the Olympics – is important to them. In some sense, the issue expresses the Faroese situation of not being a fully independent state; however, insisting on being recognised as such to stand as a nation in its own right.

Adler-Nissen (2014) argue that the broader Faroese case is not just a local constitutional matter but part of a broader postcolonial dynamic. According to her, Faroese autonomy has expanded over time, yet debates about sovereignty have increasingly been reframed in relation to the EU, the UN, and wider international politics.

The result is a political field in which separation from Denmark and integration into wider (international) structures can occur in parallel. Faroese politics has therefore been shaped both by internal institution-building and by the increasing presence of external actors and norms in domestic debates (Adler-Nissen, 2014; West, 2024).

Culture has been central to this process, and language has been one of its most important symbolic and practical arenas. Leonard (2011) argues that the Faroese language survived because it was tied to a strong oral culture and to a relatively protected social sphere in which Danish did not fully displace local language practices.

This matters because postwar political development and cultural nation-building were mutually reinforced by the survival of the Faroese language. In this way, Faroese self-government was not only administrative; it rested on a prior and continuing effort to define Faroese society as culturally distinct (Leonard, 2011).

Postwar Faroese society has, put shortly, strengthened its own institutions and symbols, but it has done so under conditions of practical openness, external education, media exposure, and intense contact with Denmark and the wider world. Cultural resilience in the Faroe Islands has depended not on isolation, but on the ability to preserve Faroese cultural identity while adapting to multilingual everyday life (Knudsen, 2010; Leonard, 2011).

The social side of postwar Faroese development is equally marked by this combination of inwards orientation and outward movement. As will be clear from the later section on national wealth and population, there is a significant migratory pattern in the Faroe Islands, with people moving abroad, primarily to Denmark, to study or settle for extended periods.

According to Hayfield (2017), Faroese youth see migration not merely as an economic response to limitations in the Faroe Islands, but as part of a culture of migration institutionalised in the Faroese society. Faroese young people often develop a transnational perspective even before they themselves move abroad. Hayfield (2017) argue that migration is a deeply embedded part of the transition to adulthood and, in effect, a defining characteristic of growing up in the Faroe Islands.

At the same time, these movements do not imply weak national attachment. According to Hayfield (2017), the Faroese have a strong national (island) identity, even if their lives are shaped by repeated movement to and from Denmark (and other places).

This is one of the clearest features of Faroese social development since 1945: modernisation and mobility have not erased national identity, but they have changed the way that identity is lived and reproduced (Hayfield, 2017). Seen in a broader perspective, this important feature has helped Faroese society to develop despite all of its obvious constraints.

Put differently, postwar Faroese society has been shaped by a double imperative: to remain open enough for people to circulate, yet cohesive enough for them to remain Faroese while doing so (Hayfield, 2017; Knudsen, 2010). Further, one side (the international side) of the imperative has benefited Faroese society by enabling access to external resources (e.g., education and cultural input) that would not have been possible in a closed, self-referential society. The other side (the independent nationalistic one) has worked to secure that outside inspiration and resources return to the home country. This is a highly effective adaptation approach given the Faroe Islands' geographical and cultural position.

Elite sport serves a function in this regard because it is calibrated with – and international sporting performance expresses – broader Faroese culture. The success of Faroese athletes symbolically reinforces national independence and identity by showing that even a small state can conquer the world. In a broader perspective, this also motivates the use of international pathways and inputs as a foundation for future success.

The double imperative can be considered a strength of Faroese elite sport, specifically because it opens pathways to stronger training environments and expertise while, at the same time, enabling a clear attachment to Faroese identity and pride when athletes succeed on the international stage.

A conservative society

At the same time, the collected interview data portray Faroese society as relatively conservative, particularly compared with Iceland. This affects young people's choices and motivations. Many young Faroese, especially women, leave to study abroad to experience a more open and diverse social environment, even though they often express a desire to return later.

Religious and conservative norms have been more prevalent in the Faroe Islands than in other Western European countries, although the country is on a path of catching up in this respect. An example of recent changes to a persistent conservative attitude is the decision in 2025 by the Faroese parliament to legalise abortion until the end of the 12th week of pregnancy, overturning a decades-old law that prohibited abortions in most cases.

However, according to some of the interviewees, traditional gender norms still matter in Faroese society. One of its impacts in the field of sport is that boys have stronger role

models in sport, while girls are more often encouraged to prioritise education over elite sport, although some of the interviewees argue that recent successes by some women's national teams are beginning to challenge this pattern.

If performance output is to be enhanced in the future and more resources are needed to achieve this, it is very important to understand these (cultural) mechanisms, because they are not only institutionalised, but they also enable development pathways that could become a future strength of the Faroese elite sport system.

As attachment to the homeland remains strong, there is potential to support migrant athletes abroad in ways that align with broader cultural patterns. There might also be opportunities to better support the development of female athletes. We will return to these issues later in the concluding sections.

Adaptability and 'doing more than expected' as a cultural trait

In the collected interview data, there appears to be a prevailing narrative of 'doing more than expected' despite being a small nation in the North Atlantic, and – as mentioned earlier – success in areas such as sport is seen as a symbol of broader Faroese capabilities. A central cultural trait related to this is 'adaptability'. Historically rooted in a society dependent on weather and shifting (environmental) conditions, adaptability continues to characterise modern Faroese life.

In practice, adaptability means that plans can change quickly, people are used to improvising, and there is generally a low tolerance for rigid bureaucracy. Further, Faroese culture is strongly associated with resilience and hard work to stand up to – and counter – constraints and unexpected circumstances. These elements are seen as extensions of everyday life and working culture among many interviewees.

In sport, this creates an environment where ideas can be tested rapidly, logistics can be rearranged on short notice, and challenges are handled pragmatically through readiness, mental toughness, and a willingness to train hard.

Many athletes combine sport with full-time work or education, train under challenging conditions, and demonstrate a high level of commitment. In the collected data, this Faroese mentality is widely perceived as a competitive advantage, particularly in international contexts.

Training in modest environments, travelling long distances, and competing against much larger nations are seen as normal conditions. This appears to sustain a culture in which athletes become accustomed to rough challenges and are mentally prepared to 'train around' limitations rather than expecting optimal conditions.

At the same time, however, some interviewees note that flexibility can also be a weakness. While adaptability enables quick action and creative problem-solving, it can also clash with

more rule-based or tightly planned approaches, particularly when foreign coaches or managers with other cultural backgrounds enter the Faroese elite sport system.

Some interviewees describe how non-Faroese coaches sometimes struggle with a culture in which schedules are more fluid and punctuality norms are looser. This cultural mismatch is identified as a recurring challenge when expertise from more hierarchical or bureaucratic sporting cultures is imported to the Faroese elite sport system.

Close social networks, volunteering, and strong communities

Another key element of Faroese culture highlighted in the interview data is the close proximity of people. Social networks are dense, and many individuals are connected through family, friendship, or long-standing community ties.

This is reflected in statements by many interviewees emphasising a high level of community engagement and voluntary involvement. Sport is not merely an organised leisure activity; it can also be a central social institution within Faroese villages, towns, and everyday life. There is a widespread sense of responsibility that if individuals do not contribute, nothing happens.

Because of the density of social bonds, decisions regarding sport rarely affect just a few individuals; their consequences ripple through families and local communities. As a result, many Faroese people place strong emphasis on inclusion, respectful treatment, and long-term relationships. Excluding or marginalising a player is not seen as a neutral sporting decision but as something that can weaken the broader social fabric around a club or federation.

However, the downside is that it is difficult to enforce hard priorities, sanctions, or consequences in the elite sport system. When decisions are shaped by personal relationships and goodwill rather than strict performance criteria, the consequence is what some interviewees describe as a largely 'consequence-free' culture in sports governance. For instance, failure to live up to expectations has little impact on decisions about future support. According to some interviewees, this can hinder the effective development of performance outputs. We will discuss this further later in the report.

The Faroese collective mindset

Many of the interviewees point to a collective mindset in which identity, belonging, and mutual responsibility play significant roles. Some interviewees describe sporting environments as family-like, with an expectation that everyone contributes and feels valued, regardless of playing level.

This cultural orientation underpins the insistence on caring for the entire player group, not just the top performers. It also explains why some interviewees frame development broadly: a player who does not become a national team athlete may still become a coach,

referee, volunteer, or supporter whose contribution is vital to mass participation and sport's overall survival in a small society.

As will be clear in a later section, some of the interviewees further argue that, due to the above cultural issues, an inclusive sports policy is necessary for developing elite sport because a small society like the Faroese cannot afford (early) selection and drop-out among large groups of sports participants. As competition between sports for the same talented children and adolescents grows, this issue has, according to these interviewees, become more important over time.

A strong (mass) participation base is extremely important to the Faroe Islands because the total talent pool is so limited, it is argued. This position can be seen as parallel to (or a variant of) the social network density argument, in that it has significant consequences for society when people are excluded. This issue and its consequences regarding performance output will be discussed later.

The advantages of a collective identity and mindset

The collected data reveal a distinctive Faroese mentality that combines strong ambition with an awareness of limitations. Some interviewees describe a recent shift away from a historical underdog mindset focused on avoiding heavy defeats, towards a culture that openly believes in the possibility of winning, even against much larger nations.

This belief is framed by the interviewees as a deliberate cultural choice: success is understood as staying true to shared values of effort, courage (i.e., standing tall), and trust, rather than adjusting expectations downward. In this sense, Faroese culture is presented as both grounded in realism and driven by aspiration, with sporting ambition integrated with collective identity and self-understanding.

Some interviewees describe this development as the coexistence of a self-awareness of being small, along with enough courage and ambition to conquer the world and strive for success (also outside the Faroe Islands).

A recurring theme among the interviewees is strong local loyalty and national identification linked to sport. Clubs represent towns and villages, not only sporting interests. This creates deep-rooted attachment, pride, and loyalty.

International sporting success – for example, in handball and football – is described as having a clear impact on national self-perception because success on the international stage reinforces the belief that the Faroe Islands 'belong' in international sport, strengthens collective pride and visibility, and has symbolic and political implications, including greater attention to international recognition and representation.

Sport, therefore, extends beyond performance, contributing directly to national self-understanding and identity. As mentioned earlier, success mirrors and stimulates the Faroese

people's self-understanding as a small nation capable of standing tall in the windy North Atlantic while still conquering the world stage.

Not being fully recognised within the Olympic family is a significant issue that is seen to undermine the Faroese athletes' full potential and identity as an independent microstate standing in its own right. Overcoming this issue is highly relevant and important to many of the interviewees.

Summing up

In this section, we have delved into the historical and cultural backdrop of Faroese society and its relation to the development of the Faroese elite sport system. It is clear that Faroese society has developed in an increasingly independent direction while still debating how to relate to the outside world and how to adapt to the challenges of being a small nation in the North Atlantic, striving for greater independence and national self-identity.

A distinctive (recent) Faroese tendency is to reframe limitations as strengths. Structural constraints, such as a small population with limited resources and geographical isolation, are widely acknowledged, but there has also been a shift in perception, treating these constraints as forces that can drive positive behaviours.

In this way, constraints are transformed into guiding principles that emphasise adaptability, 'training hard despite obstacles', and inclusion, shaping a sporting culture that favours sustainable development over rapid selection and short-term results.

Some interviewees do see the current elite sport system developing in the wrong direction, moving away from inclusion, social belonging, and collective identity, with a clear reluctance to adopt systems that select athletes too early or define success and failure too sharply.

In this perspective, elite sport is most culturally legitimate when it is perceived as emerging naturally from the broad sporting environment, rather than being imposed through rigid, top-down structures.

Still, a majority of the interviewees agree that the direction of the current development of the elite sport system is appropriate and necessary, and some even argue that deliberate choices and a better connection between results and the prioritisation of resources are necessary if Faroese elite sport is to develop even further in the future.

In the coming section, we look at the macro- and meso-level inputs to understand what resources are available to the Faroese elite sport system.

Macro- and meso-level input: Resources available to the Faroese elite sport system

Introduction

On the input side of any national elite sport system, resources play a crucial role in producing satisfactory outcomes. In essence, the resources available largely determine how successful a nation can be in achieving international sporting success (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

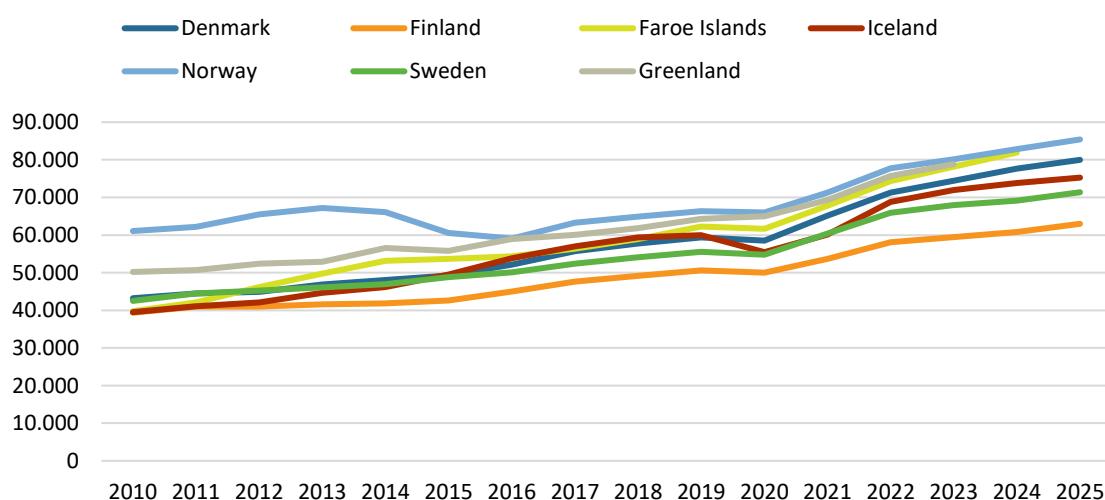
Following our analytical framework, we examine the resources available to the Faroese elite sport system to assess the level of performance that can reasonably be expected. Later, these expectations will be compared with the actual (objective) output to evaluate whether resources are being used efficiently and whether there is potential for improvement.

Resources can take on many forms, but in elite sport, the two most important categories are financial resources and human capital. Based on this, we operationalise the question of inputs by analysing macro-level resources - national wealth and population size - as well as the direct and indirect financial resources available to the Faroese system. Where data permits it, we also compare the level of available resources with those of other relevant nations.

National wealth and population

In short, the Faroe Islands is a wealthy nation, also when compared to its Nordic counterparts. This is shown in figure 3, which displays GDP (PPP) per capita for the Nordic countries. As can be seen, the Faroe Islands is the best performing Nordic nation along with Norway.

Figure 3: GDP/Cap (PPP) for the Nordic Countries 2010-2025



Source: WorldBank.org. and IMF.org. GDP, (PPP) (values are displayed in current international \$; missing data for some country years).

The Faroe Islands have experienced strong economic development in recent years, with very low unemployment figures (around 1%) and an influx of foreign workers. However, this development remains highly dependent on a narrow export base. The Faroese economy is best understood as a small, open, and relatively undiversified economy in which fisheries, aquaculture, and marine processing continue to generate the vast majority of the export revenue.

According to Christensen & Yordanova (2026), the Faroese economy is one in which growth has been driven mainly by the fishing and aquaculture industries. At the same time, exports remain sensitive to global conditions and (future) international fishing regulations. This represents a significant weakness of the Faroese economy.

However, the business and economic landscape is described by the interviewees as having undergone a significant transition. While the fishing industry historically dominated and was largely male-oriented and resource-exploitative, it has become more knowledge-based and technologically advanced.

At the same time, aquaculture and tourism have expanded, creating new types of jobs, including many that appeal to women and people with higher education. This diversification has helped attract and retain talent, although it has not eliminated the large outflow of young Faroese who pursue higher education abroad.

Much of the highly educated workforce, particularly those with university degrees, is trained in Denmark, which creates both opportunities and challenges: Faroese society benefits from skills acquired abroad, but also faces the risk that many do not return because of stronger career prospects or personal ties elsewhere (more on this later).

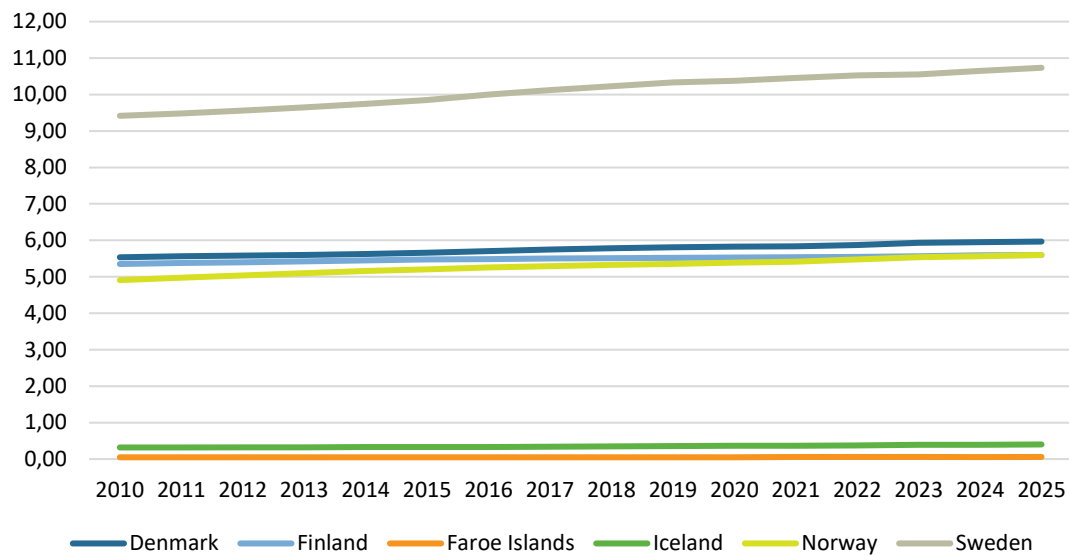
Overall, Faroese economic development may be described as successful with tendencies towards more diversification, including higher degrees of technological skills and knowledge. Still, the Faroese wealth is based on a structurally narrow economic sector. While the economy has developed a highly productive and internationally competitive export sector, this dominance also creates significant vulnerabilities. Despite these weaknesses, the high GDP per capita suggests a high level of elite sport performance output.

As mentioned earlier, human resources is essential to success in international elite sport. The Faroe Islands is a 'micro-state' (Satchwell & Wagner, 2020) with around 55,000 inhabitants (2025). This creates significant challenges in relation to establishing and maintaining sport at the highest international level.

Figure 4 shows the size of the Faroese population compared with those of the other Nordic countries during 2010 - 2025.³

³ These are most recent figures available from the included sources.

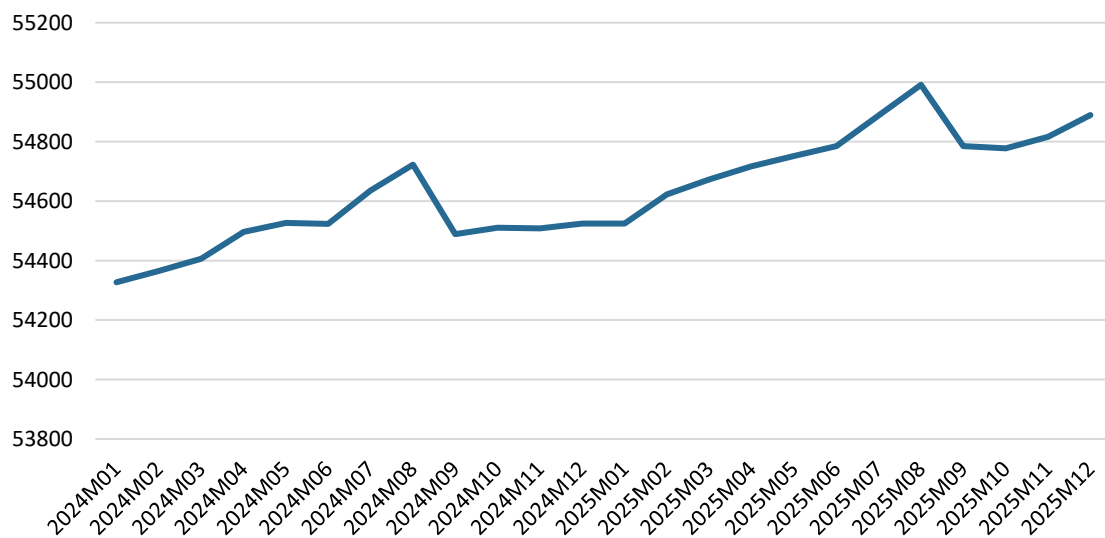
Figure 4: Population size in the Nordic countries⁴



Source: WorldBank.org. IMF.org. Total population in millions, 2010-2025.

According to the conducted interviews, the demographic development of the Faroese population is a challenge. There are several issues related to population growth and inbound and outbound migration. As can be seen from figure 5, population growth in the Faroe Islands is positive; however, according to Statistics Faroe Islands, population growth has faded. It began accelerating in 2014 and peaked in 2019 (not shown).

Figure 5: Monthly population development in the Faroe Islands, 2024-2025



Source: Statistics Faroe Islands.

⁴ Greenland is not included in the figure. The Faroe Islands and Greenland have close to the same population size.

Net-migration and (excess of) births (over deaths) accounted each for half of the population growth (approx 0.6%) in 2025.⁵

A major issue centres around fertility rates, according to Statistics Faroe Islands.⁶ While fertility rates have historically been high in the Faroe Islands, they have dropped below two in recent years. In 2024, it increased slightly to 1.91 from 1.86 in 2023. This matters because fertility below replacement level (replacement level should equal 2.1 if a population aims to sustain itself) increases the demographic importance of inbound migration to sustain and/or increase the population.

Another major issue is outbound migration among young adults, especially those moving to other countries (such as Denmark) to pursue higher education. According to Statistics Faroe Islands, roughly 40% of a Faroese cohort moves abroad in their twenties, while only half of them return. This equals one in five Faroese people leaving the home nation for good.⁷

Women are more likely to be outbound than men, with around 40-50% of a cohort living abroad, compared to 30-40% of men. Even though many women return later, this imbalance affects partnership formation, the local birth base, and the composition of the labour force in the Faroe Islands.

In elite sport, outbound migration can be both a positive and a negative factor. In many sports, the local level of competition is not high enough to sustain the continuous development of talent, at least not beyond a certain age. This means that athletes must leave to train and compete in other countries, such as Denmark, to further develop their talent.

For some elite athletes, the large share of a cohort leaving creates an opportunity to connect with other Faroese people abroad to ensure a sense of belonging in another country. This is known to positively affect performance. On the negative side, some athletes start competing for the Danish national teams, giving less back to the elite sport system in the Faroe Islands. Also, this might further integrate them into Danish society, making it less likely they will return.

In total, the Faroe Islands face a structural demographic challenge. The central problem is that many young people leave during a decisive life phase, not all return, fertility has dropped below replacement level, and future population stability increasingly depends on whether new inbound migrants remain and become integrated.

In relation to the Faroese elite sport system, the central problems are the low fertility rate and the small population. Issues related to outbound migration may be a concern, although this migration also serves to improve performance. We will return to discuss this in more detail later. Now we turn to look at the direct financial input into Faroese elite sport.

⁵ <https://hagstova.fo/en/news/population-was-54903-1-may-06-year-year>

⁶ <https://hagstova.fo/en/news/fertility-rate-improves-slightly-remains-below-2>

⁷ <https://hagstova.fo/en/news/one-five-each-generation-lives-abroad>

Pillar 1: Financial investments

While the general wealth of a nation and the population size are essential macro-structural determinants of international sporting success, it is the direct and indirect financial resources allocated out of the total national wealth that matter most. The higher the absolute amount of funding allocated to elite sports, the higher the probability of winning medals.

As will be stressed later, this doesn't mean that other issues don't matter. They do. For example, organisational and managerial problems are essential, and correcting those – i.e. implementing good management – can compensate for lower direct or indirect financial input. However, higher investment in elite sport correlates significantly with international sporting success.

In the SPLISS framework, this issue is captured in pillar 1, which “... examines public expenditures on sport and elite sport at national level by government, lotteries, NOCs and nationally co-ordinated sponsorship” (De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 109).⁸

In the SPLISS studies, only nationally coordinated funding from government, lotteries, and the national Olympic committee (NOC) is included in this pillar.⁸ Other funding streams – be they public (for example, provided by municipalities) or private (for example, provided by sponsors) – which (potentially) increase the chances of international sporting success are not part of the pillar.

This section mainly focuses on the nationally coordinated funding from the Faroese government. It is tricky and nearly impossible to get a coherent picture of other revenue streams, such as funding by municipalities, private sponsorships, media rights, and other funding generated by the federations or the clubs. It requires a high level of data detail, which is difficult to achieve within the resource constraints of this evaluation.

However, a few indicators of these types of funding will be included to provide the best possible picture of the available resources. To some extent, international sport federations also fund Faroese elite sport, and data about the funding of the football federation and clubs by UEFA/FIFA is also included.

National level funding

ÍSF and elite sport in the Faroe Islands receive state funding (Thøgersen et al., 2022). More specifically, in the 2025 Faroese state budget (Løgtingsfíggarlóg: Tekstur Og Viðmerkingar, 2025), funding for sports is grouped under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Culture (from 2026, the Ministry of Children, Education, Research and Culture) and set out in Section 12.24.6, “Ítróttur” (Sports). This budget item amounts to DKK 31.6 million.

Funding is distributed through grants and supports both organisational activities and major sports infrastructure projects. The largest allocation is to ÍSF, which receives DKK 17.7 million, including funding for grassroots sport, elite sport and parasport, followed by DKK

⁸ Expenditures for paralympic sports are included.

1.3 million for Hugasamband Føroya (an umbrella organisation for youth and leisure activities), supporting youth and grassroots sports.

A significant component of the 2025 allocation is a DKK 10.0 million capital grant to Stórhøllin í Hoyvík (Føroya Arena), representing the final annual instalment of a broader multi-year public funding program. Over the period 2022–2025, the Faroese government has contributed DKK 30 million to the construction of the arena, supplemented by an additional DKK 30 million from the Danish state, underscoring the project's national and strategic importance.

The remaining budget allocations include DKK 100.000 to support the construction of rowing boats and DKK 2.5 million in preparatory funding for the 2027 Island Games to be held in the Faroe Islands.

Dedicated state funding for elite sport has existed since 2014, with a budget of DKK 800.000. Whereas this state budget amount has remained constant since then, ÍSF has allocated an increasing share of its funds to elite sport. Of the total ÍSF funding, ÍSF earmarked approximately DKK 2.25 million for the organisation's elite sport section, 'Úrval', in 2025. Of this amount, around DKK 1.6 million is distributed directly to national sport federations as elite sport grants, primarily based on international results, competitive level, and documented performance potential (more on this in the section on governance, organisation and management).

The remaining funds are used to finance the administration and coordination of the elite sport system, including a part-time elite coordinator and the provision of shared elite support services such as physiotherapy, strength and conditioning, mental training, dietitians, and medical support.

In addition to this core funding, elite sport may indirectly benefit from occasional political or public investments in major sporting events or facility development, such as arenas and training centres. For example, some sports facilities have been funded through state-level subsidies, while municipalities are usually the main financial providers in this regard. However, the justification of these investments is typically that they also serve the wider sports community and the general population, rather than elite sport alone.

The Faroese elite sport system suffers from insufficient funding. While the current DDK 2.25 million in funding represents an increase compared to the levels of support a decade ago, several interviewees underscore that public funding levels are inadequate to meet the ambitions that federations increasingly have, particularly at the elite level.

While funding has been relatively stable in recent years, it is still perceived as too unpredictable and insufficient to support long-term planning. Ambitions and expectations in many sports resemble those of larger nations, but the financial base does not according to several interviewees.

Further, some of the interviews reveal a concern that annual budget negotiations with the elite sport section in ÍSF make the federations vulnerable, as they cannot plan elite projects over several years with financial certainty.

This insecurity is especially problematic for smaller federations that depend almost entirely on public funding. In contrast, football and handball generate higher commercial income, such as sponsorships and media rights, which makes them less dependent on public subsidies.

However, a major structural shift has taken place in recent years, moving from a system in which funding was allocated directly to individual athletes to one in which funding is channelled through national federations. This change was motivated by concerns about sustainability and long-term impact, as funding tied to individual athletes could disappear once they retired or were injured. This change – which is inspired by the Danish model – is argued to benefit the elite sport system as a whole. See more about this in the section about pillar 2.

Still, according to some interviewees, funding is clearly prioritised for Olympic sports and international results, which creates tensions for smaller, non-Olympic sports, including some that perform (relatively) well internationally. Some of the interviewees made it clear that this issue is a particular problem for women's sport more generally, even though the criteria for allocating support are the same for men and women.

Other interviewees emphasise that financial resources are insufficient to adequately support all promising athletes, and difficult trade-offs – or prioritising between federations – are unavoidable if international competitiveness is to be improved (more on this later). Several interviewees also point to the need for more stable, long-term financing and discuss the potential benefit of salaried elite athletes as a future development.

The costs of transportation

Transport costs represent a significant and unavoidable financial burden due to the Faroe Islands' geographical location. Participation in international competitions typically requires air travel, which is substantially more expensive than in mainland nations. This reality magnifies funding gaps and limits international participation for some sports.

In general, the interviewees argue for more predictable, multi-year funding agreements with ÍSF. Such frameworks are seen as essential for maintaining the current performance levels and developing sustainable elite sport environments, including coaching staff, international competition exposure, and athlete support services.

The question of targeted funding

One interviewee argues that funding is too thinly spread across many sports, clubs, and federations, resulting in an insufficient critical mass anywhere outside football. Municipal funding is distributed politically rather than strategically and does not reflect costs, performance, or development pathways. According to the same interviewee, elite sport cannot

progress without a significant increase in targeted, strategic funding and clearer prioritisation of the available funds.

Commercial sources of revenue

Reliable data on the commercial revenue sources of Faroese clubs and associations are in short supply. According to the interview data, the Faroese context faces significant structural limits on sponsorship and commercial revenues, regardless of the ambition or effort of athletes, clubs, or federations.

With a population of roughly 55,000 and a highly concentrated business sector, the commercial market is both small and heavily saturated. A large number of sports federations, clubs, and events compete for support from the same limited group of companies, which quickly exhausts sponsorship potential. As a result, most sponsorships are modest, short-term, and driven by local loyalty rather than by strategic marketing value.

However, it is also clear from the conducted interviews that, at the federal level, football and handball have developed substantial commercial revenue streams through sponsorships, media rights, betting-related income, and distributions from international governing bodies.

While in football, professionalisation has been high in the Faroe Islands for many years, in handball, commercial income has grown dramatically recently, representing a major share of the federation's budget alongside public funding.

The scale of commercial income enables the handball and football federations to employ staff, maintain stable administrations, and invest in development and international participation. For football specifically, men's football has seen increasing revenues, resulting in greater professionalism. However, some interviewees argue that this money rarely trickles down into systematic talent development or women's programmes.

They emphasise that the challenge lies in how resources are prioritised: at the club level, additional commercial revenues often increase salaries or short-term competitiveness, such as assembling competitive squads for European qualification, rather than being systematically reinvested in long-term organisational or developmental capacity, infrastructure, or youth. In women's football, athletes still need to combine sport with work or education, which shapes career length and commitment.

In handball, the recent successes of the national men's team have benefited clubs through local interest, sponsorships, and media exposure. Matches are broadcast domestically via internet streaming, and the finals are shown on television, creating visibility that sponsors find attractive. This allows some clubs to generate meaningful commercial revenue, particularly at the top level. The budget for the Faroese handball federation has increased manyfold during the last decade. It was DKK 1.5 million in 2012, but is now ten times higher, with about DKK 5.5 million from sponsorships. However, it is still much smaller than the football federation's budget, which is approximately DKK 80 million.

For other sports, like volleyball, rowing, and swimming, commercial sponsorship money is scarce and much more fragmented. Further, central-level sponsorship often competes directly with clubs for the same small group of potential donors.

This being said, smaller and medium-sized companies tend to feel a strong social responsibility toward their local areas, often supporting individual athletes, sports clubs, and community activities not for commercial visibility but rather to show commitment to employees and the surrounding community. Personal connections and local loyalty often drive this, according to the interview data.

The interviewees also highlight that Faroese businesses generally view sport positively, both as a source of national pride and as a tool for social development. However, there is a limited tradition of companies supporting centralised elite systems.

Larger national companies, such as banks and insurance firms, are seen as having the potential to contribute more strategically to elite sport. Still, uncertainty about visibility, structure, and outcomes has so far limited their engagement.

Other forms of funding

In addition to funding from the state, municipalities and sponsorships, football has a highly valuable additional revenue stream. As in other member countries, football benefits from UEFA/FIFA solidarity payments and prize money, providing a strong financial base. The Faroe Islands Football Federation receive development grants from FIFA/UEFA (e.g., FIFA Forward, UEFA HatTrick). The following amounts are recorded by the Faroe Islands Football Association in its audited accounts for the last two calendar years:

- 2024: UEFA: DKK 24,036,485, FIFA: DKK 11,958,556
- 2025: UEFA: DKK 23,912,603, FIFA: DKK 9,776,411

In addition to this development and solidarity funding, UEFA pays prize money to clubs participating in the UEFA Champions League, Europa League and Conference League. UEFA does not pay prize money to clubs that are eliminated in the qualifying rounds of these tournaments. Instead, prize money is allocated based on the performance of the participating clubs in the group and knock-out rounds.

KI Klaksvik was the first Faroese club to qualify for the group stage in any of the tournaments. In 2023/24, the club qualified for the group stage of the third-tier European club tournament (the Conference League), where it won one match and drew another, earning around DKK 27 million in prize money. That amount is more than 20 times higher than the total state funding for elite sport through the elite sport entity under ÍSF. This illustrates the wide split between football and other sports in relation to the availability of financial resources.

Summing up

Public subsidies fund elite sport in the Faroe Islands. In 2025, ÍSF have earmarked DKK 2.25 million covering subsidies to the federations and grants to athletes and employees in ÍSF. In addition to this core funding, elite sport benefits indirectly from occasional political or state-level investments related to major sporting events or facility development, even though municipalities are the main providers in this regard.

Commercial sponsorship and revenues from broadcasting and other commercial sources are structurally limited and benefit mainly football and handball. Football has a major additional revenue stream in the form of money from UEFA/FIFA.

Meso-level throughput: Resource management

In the analytical framework for this evaluation, the national elite sport system is located and also evaluated at the meso-level. This level comprises national sport policies and initiatives that can be changed in the short run to create competitive advantages for the nation in question.

As mentioned earlier, population size and national wealth factors (measured by GDP/cap) are macro-level characteristics, which are essential to international sporting success. Still, they can only be changed in the long run. To improve international performance sports managers, politicians, and stakeholders responsible for national elite sport must therefore focus on the meso-level.

In this section of the evaluation, we assess pillars 2 to 9 of our analytical framework to get a coherent picture of how well the Faroese system manages its available resources. Later, in the discussion section, the results of this assessment will be related to the output of the Faroese system to understand the causes of the current level of performance.

Pillar 2: Governance, organisation, and management of elite sports policies

The need for control and coordination is more pronounced in elite sport than in other sports settings. This can be achieved through proper structures and processes for the governance, organisation, and management of the elite sport system.

According to the SPLISS study, there is a significant correlation between medal performances and the score on this pillar. A key finding in the first SPLISS study was that:

“(...) countries with only one national coordinating body responsible for elite sport (and not sport for all), such as UK Sport or Olympiatoppen in Norway, have an advantage over countries where decision-making responsibilities are split between different organisations.”

(De Bosscher et al., 2008, p. 135)

This conclusion is modified in the second study. Instead, it is concluded that “it is not the countries with the most centralised approach that perform best, but rather those who best coordinate activities and collaborate with different partners” (De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 135).

Essentially, having an organisational setup that ensures efficient coordination of tasks and clear responsibilities across the national elite sport system – and that is understood by its stakeholders – significantly improves the chances of achieving international sporting success.

In the Faroe Islands, there are issues related to efficiency, coordination, and cooperation among stakeholders and organisations, which need to be addressed.

Results

The Faroese elite sport system is relatively young and still evolving. In 2016, ÍSF got its first general secretary. Prior to that, it relied on voluntary work rather than professional administration. In 2022, ÍSF approved a strategy for 2022-26, which included an increased emphasis on elite sport support.

The development of an entity within ÍSF working on elite sport support followed the approval of the strategy document, so this is a relatively recent phenomenon. The entity is equivalent to UK Sport (United Kingdom), Team Danmark (Denmark), and Olympiatoppen (Norway), and aims to professionalise elite sport support in the Faroe Islands.

The entity (Úrval) is (quasi) independent with its own board (five board members and one half-time employee). The organisation is partly inspired by Team Danmark. However, it is not fully autonomous as it is formally part of ÍSF, whereas Team Danmark operates as a fully independent public organisation established through the statutory Danish Act on Elite Sport (Lov om eliteidræt, eller "*Eliteidrætsloven*").⁹

In 2016, the funding from the state budget allocated to Úrval was DKK 800.000. This is still the case. However, with additional funding from ÍSF, the budget of Úrval has increased to DKK 2.2 million in 2025. This total amount has increased significantly, but it remains very small compared with the needs and wishes of sport federations and clubs.

Prior to the new system, the support for elite sport was targeted at individual athletes. It was based on past results and given for one year at a time. The money went to individuals, mainly to pay for participation in competitions and training camps. The sport federations were not involved, and it included no proactive, structural, or long-term perspectives. The problems with this system were reflected in a high share of the money being unused. Unrealistic individual plans and injuries, etc., meant that, on average, 31% was unused and therefore handed back to ÍSF during the period 2014-2022.

The new system allocates most of the elite sport funding (at the time of writing, DKK 1.6 million of a total of DKK 2.2 million) to the sport federations based on measurable objective criteria (results). There are five levels of federation support, depending on performance level, with ceilings for teams and individuals. Currently, the annual ceiling (maximum support) at the highest level (level 1) is DKK 300.000 for individual athletes and DKK 150.000 for each player in teams. At level 4, the ceilings are DKK 20.000 and 10.000, respectively, while support at level 5 is discretionary.

Objective criteria determine the level at which a federation is placed following the matrix displayed in table 1.

⁹ <https://www.teamdanmark.dk/ansvarlig-eliteidraet/lov-om-eliteidraet>

Table 1: Support levels for Faroese federations

Level	Sporting requirements	Administrative requirements
Level 1	Top 16 at Olympic Games/Paralympic Games/World Championship/European Championship, or equivalent international result. Sport must be IOC/IPC-recognised. Results within the last two years, or four years for OG/PG.	The federation must appoint a person responsible for elite sport, have and follow an elite plan, fund at least 25% of its own elite activity, represent the Faroe Islands, enter a two-year agreement with Úrval, and meet all support terms and expectations.
Level 2	Top 32 at Olympic Games/Paralympic Games/World Championship/European Championship, or equivalent international result. Sport must be IOC/IPC-recognised or have at least 40 registered nations with elite activity in the international federation. Results within the last two years, or four years for OG/PG.	Same as level 1.
Level 3	Top 32 at Olympic Games/Paralympic Games/World Championship/European Championship, or equivalent international result. No IOC/IPC-recognition or nation-count requirement. Results within the last two years, or four years for OG/PG.	Same as level 1.
Level 4	Participation at World Championship /European Championship, or equivalent international result, or in the strongest European/world competition, such as World Cup or European Cup. No IOC/IPC-recognition or nation-count requirement. Results within the last two years.	Same as level 1, but with a one-year agreement with Úrval.
Level 5	For promising athletes/teams likely to reach Levels 1–4 within three years. They must show strong development and performance potential at WC/EC/PG/OG/Nordic Championships or other major international events, have competed internationally with good results, and represent the Faroe Islands. No IOC/IPC or nation-count requirement applies. Results must be from within the last two years, or four years for OG/PG. The federation must document the athlete/team's potential, prepare a performance plan, evaluate how support was used, enter a one-year agreement with Úrval, and meet all support terms and expectations.	

In athletics and swimming, times and distances may also be taken into account. Junior and youth athletes may get level 5 support. The five-level support system is inspired by a similar system developed in Iceland.

The amount granted to the federations is based on an approved plan describing a project for their respective athletes and the federation. The plans cover two-year periods. Levels 1 and 2 are exclusively for Olympic sports, whereas levels 3-5 are available to non-Olympic sports as well.

Funding can be used for training camps, participation in competitions and various strategic initiatives. It is not possible to use the funding to 'buy' athletes out of work commitments so that they are able to be professional athletes on a full- or part-time basis. It is the hope that this will be possible in the future.

The support system is designed to work proactively with federations to develop elite sport in their respective areas. This is, in large part, implemented, especially for the higher levels of funding. In the funding application, the federations include an 'elite plan' describing how the funds are to be used. There are exceptions for federations with weak administrations that receive funding from level 5.

There is no ongoing system-wide follow-up with consequences if the federations do not allocate the funds according to the plan and with the expected impacts. The system is, in large part, built on trust in this regard. However, it is checked whether the funding is used broadly in accordance with the elite plan. There is one central criterion that says that the funding from Úrval must go directly to the national team or in other ways directly towards attaining the best results at major competitions. If the federations do not show in their annual accounts (årsregnskab) that the funding went towards 'elite activities', which mostly are expenses for the national team, they are asked to pay back the differential.

The new system has generally worked well without major disagreements and conflicts, although federations experiencing reduced funding have raised complaints. Further, the inclusion of football – e.g. financial support for a federation and clubs that are significantly richer than other sports – has been controversial.

The organisation is also involved in planning the establishment of a national elite sport centre with expert services such as testing and physiological, psychological, and dietary support.

The elite sport organisation has another task as well. Elite sport athletes attending secondary school (gymnasium) or other youth education have the option to be part of a scheme that allows them to adapt attendance, deadlines for written work, and the timing of exams to the requirements of competitions and training. Each individual wishing to be part of this scheme must apply to ÍSF's elite sport organisation, which only approves the application if the student athlete meets the criteria for being an (aspiring) elite sport athlete.

According to the interviewees, the establishment of a structured elite sport system has had a strong impact. It is stressed that simply having an elite sport system has raised ambitions, legitimised elite pathways, and encouraged athletes to pursue international goals that were previously considered unrealistic.

Some of the interviewees argue that, despite the small size of the Faroese sports system, the relations between clubs, sports, institutions, and initiatives are characterised by significant fragmentation. Competition for resources hinders collective development to some extent.

Stronger cross-sport and cross-sector collaboration is identified as a potential key structural improvement.

The low organisational capacity is a core problem in many federations. Most rely on volunteers and lack full-time professional staff. In recent years, the situation has improved in many federations. The figures in the appendix show that in 2026, only two of the 18 federations are without professional administrative staff. However, only football, handball, volleyball and parasport have full-time managers/administrators (35, 7, 2 and 1, respectively), and the staff in most federations consists of part-time administrators working only three to four hours a week.

The federations are highly vulnerable to changes in leadership/administration – for example, when a chair or key volunteer steps down. In these cases, federations often ‘start from zero.’ The absence of a professional administration undermines continuity, planning, and accountability. Further, the system is described as largely *consequence-free*, with weak incentives and few sanctions for underperformance or inactivity. This is an issue we will return to later in the report.

Other interviewees note that the shift from an individual-athlete focus to federation-based responsibility requires organisational competencies that some federations are only beginning to develop. There is a clear desire for stronger coordination across sports and shared support structures that could reduce fragmentation within the system.

Still, many interviewees describe governance and organisational development as key drivers of the recent success of certain sports. For instance, since the early 2010s, handball has adopted a long-term strategic approach, which is seen as critical in transforming previously unstable results into sustained elite progress.

ÍSF and the elite sport organisation play a central coordinating role, including the formulation of minimum requirements concerning the governance of federations. According to some interviewees, the employment of a professional administration (general secretary) in addition to a national coach should be a minimum standard. ÍSF sets formal criteria that the (currently eight) development federations must meet in order to become recognised as full federations. These criteria include minimum numbers of clubs and members, structured governance, youth activity, national competitions, and international engagement. Beyond formal requirements, considerable emphasis is placed on administrative competence, responsiveness, transparency, and the ability to deliver on agreed tasks.

The lack of managerial resources is a major constraint on the development of a professional elite sport system. On the other hand, the small size of the Faroese elite sport system is also to some extent an advantage. Decision-making processes are flexible, communication between clubs and federations is direct, and rule changes or structural adjustments can be implemented quickly. This organisational closeness allows for experimentation and rapid adaptation that would be difficult in larger systems. It also avoids inefficiencies related to

bureaucracy, unclear division of tasks, and 'turf wars' that characterise the governance of elite sport systems in many larger countries.

The question of international recognition

15 of the 18 Faroese sport federations, such as football, handball, and swimming, are members of the respective world and continental associations of national federations (i.e. the International Handball Federation and the European Handball Federation in handball).

Three federations – gymnastics¹⁰, athletics and basketball – are not members of the international federations for their sport. Faroese athletes in these sports can only participate in world and continental championships if they qualify as part of the Danish team rather than representing the Faroe Islands.

Three of the eight development federations (udviklingsforbund) are also not members of the international federations of their sports. This is the case for billiards, golf and sport climbing.

The constraints on participating in international championships are a problem for these sports (Krieger, 2025), although there are other competitions open for participation of Faroese athletes, such as Nordic championships, Island Games and championships for small or emerging nations. In some sports, such events are more appropriate competitions, given the level of the Faroese athletes.

The most crucial issue in relation to the recognition of the Faroe Islands as an independent nation state is about membership of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The Faroe Islands is not a member of the IOC, and Faroese athletes are unable to qualify for the Olympics. This is partly a politically charged issue, but it is seen by the interviewees to significantly limit athletes' access to international championships, hampering the development of Faroese elite sport.

There are ongoing efforts in ÍSF and in several federations to obtain formal international recognition and membership in the IOC and in the international federations where the Faroe Islands has not (yet) been recognised as a member.

The issue of IOC membership has become a more urgent issue with the recent rise of the national Faroese handball team in international championships. It is no longer unrealistic that the Faroe Islands would qualify for the Olympic qualification tournament as a result of its ranking in the European championships.

¹⁰ However, gymnasts from the Faroe Islands are able to participate in world championships in aesthetic team gymnastics, which is a prominent discipline in Faroese gymnastics. This discipline is organised internationally outside the federation for the Olympic gymnastics disciplines (World Gymnastics) and recognises the Faroe Islands as an independent federation.

However, according to current rules, the team would then be banned from participating even if the Faroe Islands may have the required results to qualify. According to some interviewees, such an eventual development is likely to mobilise strong emotions that might have severe impacts, also politically, in relation to the issue of national sovereignty.

The IOC has consistently declined to consider Faroese membership in line with its policy to only recognise members of the United Nations (UN), and it does not seem likely that the organisation will change its course. The policy does not reflect a resistance to Faroese membership as such, but rather a reluctance to open the door to IOC membership for other autonomous and semi-independent regions within the UN member states, such as Scotland, the Basque Country and New Caledonia.

However, the fact that the Faroe Islands applied for membership before this policy was formally adopted is highlighted as a cause for an exemption. Further, the IOC's decisions are not fully consistent with its policy. For instance, Palestine is a member of the IOC, even if it is not a full member of the UN but rather a 'non-member observer state'. Also, Scotland and Wales took part in the Rugby 7s World Series and the European Grand Prix Series that served as one of the qualifying tournaments for the 2016 Olympics.

The issue of participation in the Olympics by entities other than UN-recognised member states has received more attention recently, prior to the forthcoming Olympics in Los Angeles. One of the new sports is lacrosse, where the Haudenosaunee Confederation is a major force (ranked no. 3 in the last three men's world championships). The Haudenosaunee Confederation is a historic and ongoing alliance of indigenous nations in northeastern North America, which is considered one of the oldest participatory democracies in the world.¹¹

Both the US and Canadian governments have appealed to the IOC for an exemption of the membership rules to allow the Haudenosaunee Confederation to participate in the Olympic lacrosse competition, but the IOC has so far rejected the appeal. If it changes course, it might open the door for change regarding Faroese membership in the future.

Some of the interviewees argue that, in relation to participation in international competitions, Faroese elite sport policy has been unclear, inconsistent, and reactive, with limited mechanisms in place to distinguish between symbolic participation and meaningful elite sport development. Some international appearances are valued politically or symbolically despite poor competitive standards. Athletes are sometimes sent to events without a realistic performance justification.

Future Faroese elite sport policy needs sharper criteria, a clearer performance logic, and stronger alignment between ambition, selection, resources, and results. There have been significant positive changes over the years, and the current system is working much better, but the focus needs to be sharpened.

¹¹ <https://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.com/who-we-are/>

Summing up

The Faroe Islands benefit from being a small and relatively coherent system. However, governance capacity is low. Many key roles in the federations are held by the same individuals who often work on a voluntary or part-time basis alongside other jobs. This makes the system vulnerable to burnout and shifting personal choices.

It also creates bottlenecks in decision-making, limits strategic follow-up, and constrains the absorption and institutionalisation of knowledge brought in by foreign coaches or experts. The new system for allocating elite sport support is a clear improvement compared to the previous system. However, the connection between results and the allocation of resources is contested and not yet clear.

On the positive side, the Faroese system avoids duplication of organisations. It benefits from what you may call small-scale advantages. Larger Nordic countries, in particular Finland and Sweden, suffer from double administration, inter-organisational disputes and unclear division of labour (Storm et al., 2024; Storm & Nielsen, 2022), which does not seem to exist in the Faroese system. The human resources required to professionalise governance have increased significantly in recent years, and most federations have now employed administrators. However, it is still insufficient in a large share of the federations, according to several interviewees.

In recent years, there have been significant improvements in many areas, and the governance of the system is generally in good condition. However, there is room for improvement. Some of the interviewees believe that Faroese elite sport is culturally '10–15 years behind' larger countries in terms of athlete welfare, coaching, and organisational sophistication.

Pillar 3: Sport participation and foundation

A high level of sports participation and physical activity among a nation's population is important because it builds a (potential) talent pool from where (future) athletes can be recruited. Other things being equal, this enhances the chances of international sporting success (De Bosscher, 2007).

Results

The section on sports participation and foundation is rather brief, but this does not mean that it is less important in this context than the other sections. Grassroots sports and the contributions of volunteers in training, competitions, administration, and management are not only valuable in themselves but also important in relation to the identification and development of talents and many other aspects of the elite sport system.

This section is brief because of the existence of another recent report by the Danish Institute for Sports Studies about leisure activities and mass sport in the Faroe Islands (Thøgersen et al., 2022). We assume that the current situation is not substantially different from when this

report was prepared. A brief review of some of the main results from the 2022 report follows below.

“65 per cent of Faroese children and young people engage in sport and exercise. More boys (68 per cent) than girls (62 per cent) participate in sports. Sports participation declines with age, and girls opt out of sport and exercise at an earlier age than boys. Participation is higher in towns (69 per cent) than in villages (60 per cent).”

(Translated from Thøgersen et al., 2022, pp. 11–12)

“49 per cent of Faroese adults engage in sport and exercise. More women (51 per cent) than men (47 per cent) participate in sport and exercise. Participation declines with age – although there is a small uptick among adults over 70. Participation is – as with children – higher in towns (51 per cent) than in villages (46 per cent). Participation is lower among adults with a short education than among those with a long education. The inclination to take part in sports activities is also higher among adults who are employed - full-time or part-time - than among adults who are unemployed or on leave. Participation is highest among students.”

(Translated from Thøgersen et al., 2022, p. 14)

Another report may supplement this by adding a temporal dimension. The report *Hvussu hefur tú tað?* (“How are you” (Heilsustýrið, 2025)) have figures for sport activities participation in 2015, 2019 and 2023. The respondents are 18 years and older. They are asked, among other things, if they are active in competitive sports. An increasing share of men indicate that they are (2015: 8.6%, 2019: 9.9%, 2023: 13.2%). The same is true for women (2015: 4.6%, 2019: 6.3%, 2023: 6.8%), although the trend is not as pronounced as for men.

Unfortunately, comparable quantitative data on sports participation in other Nordic and European countries do not exist. The data in a recent report from European Commission (2022) seemingly cover the same issues, but even though the survey questions are similar, they are different enough to make direct comparisons unreliable.

However, a qualitative comparison based on the available data, supplemented with interviews and observations, leads to the conclusion that sport participation and physical activity for both children, youth, and adults is very high in the Faroe Islands and only marginally different across genders, geographical locations, and social groups.

According to Green et al. (2020), some of the highest rates of participation are found in the Scandinavian and Nordic countries with the Faroe Islands being at the same level as those. Faroese children are often members of several sports clubs. It is not unusual to be a member of a swimming club as well as football and handball clubs.

The Faroe Islands display a strong volunteer culture, community cohesion, and national identification with sport. Participation rates are high, especially among children, access to facilities is open, and sport plays an important role in local identity.

The societal impacts of sport and physical activity go beyond the impacts on health, quality of life, and social connectivity. The interviewees emphasise that vandalism is very rare in the Faroe Islands and that the high sports participation rates are an explanatory factor.

Another impact of grassroots sports is a strong foundation for elite sport. Although there is no causal relationship between a country's participation rate and its elite sport performance (Storm et al., 2018; Storm & Denstadli, 2024; Storm & Holum, 2021), there is no doubt that one of the factors behind a thriving elite sport system is a solid foundation in the form of high participation in combination with good facilities and coaches.

The role of volunteers is crucial to maintaining high participation rates, especially among children and young people. In total, almost 40% of the adult population volunteers with sports clubs and federations. This is a very high percentage and likely to be higher than anywhere else.

Some interviewees expressed doubts regarding the sustainability of such a high degree of voluntary activity. The time spent transporting children to various sports activities and the time spent on voluntary coaching and running sports clubs add up to a substantial number of hours per week. Especially parents of children playing several sports at the same time feel significant time pressure.

However, the problem is probably more pronounced in relation to the many administrative tasks involved in running a sports club. There are signs that voluntary stewards of clubs become involved in a lot of activities and consequently experience burnout. The vacancies following burnout are not only difficult to fill but also hamper the transfer of experiential knowledge.

Another problem is the dropout from sport in late adolescence, particularly among women, due to education, work, and life transitions. This issue will be covered later.

For many interviewees, maintaining high participation rates and high levels of voluntary activity underpinning the system has clear priority over other concerns. This causes a potential, and sometimes actual, conflict with the demands of elite sport. A fundamental theme is the distinction between *sport* (competition, performance, selection) and *physical activity/grass roots sport* (movement, participation, social belonging, and lifelong engagement).

Some of the interviewees argue that Faroese sport has increasingly become more narrowly focused on competitive sport at the expense of broader physical activity. This is seen as contributing to youth dropout, particularly in late adolescence, due to the absence of meaningful non-elite pathways.

These interviewees see elite sport as something that should emerge organically from a strong, diverse sporting culture, rather than being pursued as an isolated objective. Measuring success solely by international medals or rankings is seen as inappropriate. Instead,

success should encompass progression, quality of environments, athlete well-being, and sustainability.

Other interviewees acknowledge that elite sport requires distinct support measures and express views similar to those put forward by proponents of elite sport support in other countries. So far, open conflicts between such opposing views have been avoided.

The decisions leading to the new strategy programme, including the new structure around elite sports and the increased funding for elite sport, have been consensual, but the contrasting views may surface if the demand for financial support for elite sport increases substantially, which is likely. This is especially so in the case of emerging problems or significant new demands in relation to physical activity/grassroot sports and voluntary support.

Summing up

The Faroe Islands has a strong sports movement with a high share of the population, in particular children, being members of sports clubs and often active in many different sports simultaneously. The activities are backed up by a very high level of voluntary activity underpinning the system through coaching, transport, leadership, and administrative tasks.

There are problems with dropout from sport by young people, and the high demands for volunteer activity may result in burnout. There is also a potential future conflict between elite sport and grassroots activities if conflicting demands shatter the consensus that seems to have characterised Faroese sport politics and management until now.

Pillar 4: Talent identification and development

“National strategies towards the identification of young talents and how talent development is facilitated in (...) different nations have crucial impacts on elite sport competitiveness”.

(De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 198)

Talent identification and development are essential, especially for small countries such as the Faroe Islands, because the talent pool is comparatively smaller than in nations with large populations. The high level of memberships in sports clubs (grassroots sports) and fitness centres, and the generally high level of physical activity in the Faroe Islands compared to most other countries, create a good foundation for a successful talent identification and development system.

However, the Faroe Islands is a very small nation, so keeping up competitiveness in an international context requires a permanent focus on this pillar. This raises the question of selectivity: how many sports can be expected to reach a reasonable level of competitiveness given the population size? We will return to this question later in the report.

Results

Whereas talent identification is not a problem in the Faroese elite sport system, talent development is a major issue. Talent development is an issue for each sports federation and

the clubs. Talent development is generally late, inclusive, and rooted in clubs, supplemented by federation-run training sessions.

Talent development in the Faroe Islands is difficult for several reasons. There are very few athletes in each age group, so early talent identification often focuses on individual stand-outs rather than broad cohorts. This creates vulnerability, as the absence of a second or third promising athlete increases the risk of burnout, injury, or stagnation among those with the highest talent.

Some interviewees point to early dropout – particularly around ages 12 to 14 – as a cause of limited competitive environments and, consequently, poor talent development. Volleyball, for example, attracts many children of school age, but struggles to retain them as the sport becomes more technical. In both football and volleyball, the lack of volume means that leagues and national tournaments can have only a few teams that are truly competitive. This weakens developmental pressure on the best talents.

Paradoxically, some sports suffer from a talent dropout despite excellent recruitment potential. Learning to swim is culturally and socially important in the Faroe Islands. However, retention collapses during adolescence. Key reasons include competition from other sports, early specialisation, high training intensity, high parental time demands, and lack of attractive development environments for teenagers, including limited competitive depth and progression pathways.

Dropping out of competitive sport can have many reasons. Physical and mental changes in adolescence are one of the reasons for dropout everywhere. Competing demands and ambitions are another. Lack of qualified coaches may also cause dropout. The fact that many 14-16-year-olds take up part-time jobs is a contributing factor in the Faroe Islands. There is a discussion on the importance of early specialisation versus diversified sporting backgrounds.

Some of the interviewees find that talent identification and specialisation occur too early in the Faroe Islands, especially given the small population size. Early selection unnecessarily excludes many potential athletes and hampers both overall grassroots sports and elite sport development.

These interviewees emphasise that small nations cannot afford to rely on early talent identification and selection. To them, a much better strategy would be to prioritise late specialisation and multi-sport participation, as well as the long-term development of sports participation and athletes. Because athletes cannot be easily replaced, development must accommodate non-linear progress, setbacks, and late bloomers.

According to these interviewees, the development is currently going in the wrong direction, though there are differing positions on this issue. While the pressure for early development is high in football – due to its commercial attractiveness – there is a strong awareness across sports that early selection is risky in a very small population.

In practice, however, there is a pressure toward early specialisation, even if this is not the intention.

Talent development in the Faroe Islands is strongly shaped by the country's small population. Talented athletes often reach the top levels early and compete against the best senior athletes, receiving significant responsibility at a young age. This may have a positive impact on talent development. For example, in handball, this means that teenagers frequently play key roles in top domestic leagues, gaining experience that would be difficult to access abroad at the same age.

Transitioning abroad for further talent development is described by many interviewees as a critical and complex phase. Around the ages of 20–21, many athletes move to Denmark or elsewhere for education, training, or stronger competition.

Some interviewees argue that effective talent development does not necessarily require early migration. Handball players, in particular, can reach a high level while remaining in the Faroe Islands, supported by strong club environments, meaningful competition, and substantial media attention. This domestic visibility is seen as beneficial for motivation and identity. The same applies to football players.

Whereas the decision by Faroese elite athletes to move abroad is often linked to sporting ambitions, it is also, and sometimes more so, motivated by educational and career concerns. The athletes typically move to Denmark to study at the university and afterwards find employment in Danish companies or public organisations.

This shift from being a leading athlete in a small environment to an ordinary athlete in a larger elite system can be psychologically demanding and does not automatically translate into improved performance. There are examples of stalled development among talents moving to Denmark despite improvements to the competitive environment and better access to coaches and expert resources.

Many athletes choose to end their careers as elite athletes in the new environment. There may be complex reasons for this. Sometimes, it is because they prefer to engage fully in life as a student and do not want to spend as much time on sports as is required. They may also experience difficulties in fitting into the new environment, including finding an appropriate club. There are examples of coaches and clubs that help with this adjustment, such as Sävahof (Sweden) and GOG (Denmark) in handball. A more systematic approach in this respect, covering all talents, would strengthen talent development.

Summing up

The challenge is not talent entry, at least not in the major sports. In the more remote areas (bygder), only a few sports are available to children, so talent identification beyond these sports is difficult. However, high participation rates and well-functioning grassroots sports ensure that talent identification is no problem. However, talent retention and progression

from adolescence into elite stages are major problems because of weak domestic environments, lack of targeted support, dropouts, outward migration, etc.

Many athletes move abroad in their early 20s for better educational opportunities and/or to satisfy sporting ambitions. In some cases, this is a crucial step in the development of potential talent, but this is far from guaranteed and various measures to support Faroese athletes abroad could improve talent development.

Pillar 5: Athletic (dual) career and post-career support

“Pillar 5 deals with the support services athletes receive once they start to perform at the senior level and how they are prepared for life after sport.”

(De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 135)

When athletes reach the stage in their careers when they are on the verge of developing their full talent (typically between the ages of 20 and 30), they begin competing in major international tournaments and devoting a substantial – and increasing – amount of time to their sport (Schubring et al., 2022).

At the same time, athletes undergo significant identity-related developments as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. They also experience shifts in their social networks, face challenges in balancing sport with education or work, and ultimately encounter the transition from an athletic career into post-career roles (Storm & Eske, 2022).

Addressing these issues is essential. Countries that support athletes both during and after their competitive careers tend to achieve higher levels of success (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

Dual-career programmes provide additional benefits by enhancing athletes' well-being, reducing stress, and improving general health and social support networks. In the long term, such programmes also facilitate smoother transitions into life after elite sport (Bankel et al., 2018).

Many countries support talent development and provide targeted assistance to top-level athletes during their elite careers. Others adopt a broader and more holistic approach, offering support to a wider range of athletes at different stages of their careers, including the post-career phase. In this section, we examine the Faroese approach to supporting athletes during their sporting careers and in their transition to life beyond elite sport.

Results

Athletic career support is present but limited in the Faroese elite sport system. Faroese elite athletes generally do not receive direct personal financial support. Instead, assistance is provided through federations and primarily covers the costs of training camps, competitions, and international travel.

Apart from football players, Faroese athletes generally rely on informal flexibility, personal relationships, and goodwill from parents, acquaintances, and employers to balance sport with education or work.

Athletes training abroad, particularly in Denmark, can benefit from advanced support systems such as national training centres. These provide access to professional facilities, strength training, sports science testing, physiotherapy, and nutrition guidance. However, this support does not include financial assistance, and athletes must typically rely on education grants, part-time work, minor sponsorship income from Faroese companies, or personal resources to make a living when migrating to Denmark.

It is essential for Faroese athletes to go abroad to improve and develop their talent, as the domestic level of competition is insufficient in the long run. However, there is no structured effort to support these athletes when they leave.

The decision to move abroad is often motivated mainly by educational and career concerns. Several athletes choose to leave the Faroe Islands not only for sport but also to pursue higher education, which sometimes leads to international transitions even when domestic sporting development would still be viable.

Migrating can also mean that some potential elite athletes stop their athletic careers, because it is too difficult for them to make their way in another country with its own elite sport development pathways.

Some fail to improve due to cultural shock, inappropriate training environments, or a lack of structured support. The impression from the collected data is that dual-career planning is weak and that returning athletes can sometimes struggle to reintegrate after the end of their sporting careers.

Formal dual-career support is available in the Faroe Islands at the upper secondary school level. The scheme allows elite athletes to be absent from school for training and competitions without academic penalty. According to some interviewees, the presence of dedicated school-based advisors is crucial to making this system work.

The interviewees argue that flexibility and daily support within standard educational structures are working well. High school years are identified as a particularly critical period for building elite culture, identity, and peer networks.

The interviewees describe it as a well-functioning system in which elite athletes can receive formal recognition, flexible attendance arrangements, rescheduled exams, and adapted teaching when representing national teams. Evidence shows that elite athletes do not perform worse in academic subjects than their fellow students.

This cooperation between schools, federations, and authorities is perceived as a clear success and a 'win-win' model: Athletes stay motivated academically, and schools see that elite athletes generally perform well and plan their time effectively.

However, this dual-career support system is not implemented at the university and vocational education level, where elite sport status provides no formal rights to adapt study work to the demands of an elite sporting career.

Some students have followed the four-year upper secondary school model, similar to the system promoted by Team Danmark. However, this is not seen as a success as the athletes experience social isolation in the fourth year of study.

Summing up

The new elite sport support system provides Faroese elite athletes with good conditions as far as support for training camps and participation in competition is concerned. However, there is no financial support for athletes to make it possible for them to pursue their sporting ambitions full-time or part-time.

This is different from most well-performing national elite sport systems, reflecting the modest monetary resources available within the system. With the exception of top football players, elite athletes have to rely on informal flexibility, personal relationships, and goodwill to balance sport with education or work.

There is a well-functioning system for upper secondary school-level students providing flexibility in schoolwork for elite athletes. There are no similar structures for other students, including university students, at the moment.

Pillar 6: Sports facilities

"Pillar 6 is about national coordination and planning of elite sport facilities and the network of high-quality national and regional facilities."

(De Bosscher et al., 2015, p. 262)

The availability and quality of training facilities – and facilities in general – are important for elite sport success. Studies show that a high score on this pillar correlates significantly with international sporting success, particularly in summer sports (De Bosscher et al., 2015).

Results

Sport facilities in the Faroe Islands are generally good in terms of quantity and accessibility. Football and handball facilities, together with swimming pools, are well distributed in all municipalities, and recent investments have significantly improved the swimming infrastructure.

Also, relative to population size, sports facilities in the Faroe Islands are of high standards. Access to facilities in the Faroe Islands is not a limiting factor for elite development in

many sports. Facilities are widely accessible and support activities well, especially for children and youth. Together with high levels of access, this contributes to early skill development and high volumes of informal training, which is a good platform for elite sport development.

On the other hand, the system lacks some specialised elite facilities, particularly in football (e.g. fully covered turfs or winter facilities). This is recognised politically but competes with other priorities, such as the education of coaches.

Further, some of the interviewees argue that facilities are mainly strong in established team sports (notably football and handball) but weak in other sports and outdoor activities such as cycling. According to the interviewees, athletes face serious safety challenges due to traffic conditions and a lack of dedicated cycling infrastructure. These conditions have pushed the sport towards alternative formats, such as mountain biking, and away from public roads for training. Efforts are ongoing to develop safer training environments, but the infrastructure remains a constraint for endurance sports dependent on outdoor spaces.

Further, some interviewees argue that investments in facilities tend to reinforce existing sports rather than diversifying opportunities, limiting both participation and talent transfer across disciplines.

Some interviewees highlight other issues. Many facilities are designed primarily for training and lack the conditions required for elite presentation, spectator engagement, sponsorship activation, and television production. This limits both the commercial potential and the visibility of elite sport and needs to be improved to establish the foundation for future elite sport development.

The new multi-sports hall 'Við Tjarnir' in Tórshavn (opened in 2025) goes some way toward alleviating this problem and is a much-needed venue for major matches, such as European qualification tournaments in handball. The stadium has a capacity of 2,200 seated and 500 standing spectators for handball matches. According to some interviewees, there are still issues with presentations for media and sponsors. However, it fills a void with a high-standard facility.

There is a strong interest among many interviewees in creating shared elite facilities, often described as an 'elite house'. Such a national centre – or hub – would bring together strength training, physiotherapy, testing, sports psychology, nutrition counselling, and performance services across sports. Participants see this as a way to compensate for the limited scale by pooling expertise and resources.

The new multi-sports hall has equipment for physical training and could be expanded into a national elite training centre. It requires investment not only in equipment but also in a new building and transport links, but it is not an unrealistic project, and the returns on the investment may be significant.

In connection with this, many of the interviewees mention the possibility of easily gathering athletes and communities because of the shorter geographical distances and the well-established infrastructure with connecting tunnels between the islands, which provide easy access to all villages and towns.

There is a potential issue in relation to the corporate structure of the multi-sports hall. It is organised as a business, which affects the cost of access to the training facilities. While it is not a problem in itself that pricing follows a business logic, it is worth considering how this may derail the whole project. The experience of the Swedish development centre in Bosön may serve as a warning.

The centre in Bosön has the potential to serve as an important training centre with high-quality specialist expertise in sports physiology, medicine, and psychology, as well as testing expertise and equipment. However, the training facilities are only moderately used. The centre is not used much for training camps, which was part of the original rationale for the centre. There are other reasons for that, but it is mostly because it is expensive to stay there. It is expensive because the centre is run like a business, and prices are raised to compensate for low demand, creating a vicious cycle of rising prices and reduced demand among the intended customers. Many federations choose to hold training camps abroad instead, and Bosön seeks other revenue sources that differ from the centre's original purpose.

The multi-sports centre and a prospective national training centre in the Faroe Islands are unlikely to fall into vicious cycles to the same degree. However, insisting that the facility's revenues fully cover its costs could undermine its intended contribution to a flourishing elite sport system. Proper management is essential, but if the venue is to fulfill its purpose some deficits should be expected, and the state must be prepared to help cover them.

Objective data

The impressions from the collected interview data can be assessed in the light of the results from a recent report by Thøgersen et al. (2022), which includes a facility mapping and coverage assessment of the Faroese sports facilities.

The report's facility mapping identifies 22 facility types across the Faroe Islands, including 16 sports facilities and six types of leisure facilities, thereby capturing both conventional sport infrastructure (e.g., halls, pitches, pools, fitness centres) and a set of non-sport venues that also function as leisure 'meeting places' within local communities.

The report characterises the overall situation regarding facilities as relatively good in terms of geographic coverage, while noting that certain types of facilities are not universally present across municipalities, necessitating travel in order to participate in some forms of organised activity. That said, the Faroe Islands are well served by roads and transportation infrastructure and short distances between villages and towns.

The sports facilities that accommodate the indoor sports most frequently practised by Faroese residents include large sports halls (used for handball, volleyball, indoor football, etc.), 11-a-side football pitches, swimming pools, and fitness facilities.

According to Thøgersen et al. (2022), six municipalities have all of these facilities: Klaksvík, Runavík, Tórshavn, Tvøroyri, Vága, and Vágur.

In general, municipalities with large populations have a wider range of sports facilities. Expensive-to-operate facilities or privately run facilities are also more common in municipalities with many inhabitants.

This applies, for example, to swimming pools and fitness centres, which are mainly found in larger municipalities and are not registered in municipalities with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants (except for the fitness centre in Hvannasund Municipality).

At the time of writing, Thøgersen et al. (2022) found that across the Faroe Islands, an average of 2,646 inhabitants share a large sports hall (>800 m²). This indicates that, overall, provision of sports halls is significantly better than in Denmark (3,514 inhabitants per hall) and slightly better than in Greenland (2,953 inhabitants per hall).

Swimming facilities are another type of facility with high coverage. There are only 2,785 inhabitants per swimming facility in the Faroe Islands, compared with 14,975 in Denmark and 18,705 in Greenland (Thøgersen et al., 2022). The high coverage of such facilities is highly beneficial to the elite sport system.

Another structurally important feature of the Faroese facilities - particularly for football - is the predominance of artificial turf surfaces (kunstgræs). Thøgersen et al. (2022) state that football provision is overwhelmingly based on artificial turf.

From an elite sport perspective, this points to strong potential for year-round training continuity in a climate where the reliability of natural grass can be constrained.

The mapping further emphasises the diffusion of 'multibaner' (multi-use courts), described as one of the most widespread types of facilities. In small systems, such low-threshold, local facilities can serve as enabling infrastructure for early-stage skill acquisition and broad participation. This can support future talent development.

Since the publication of the report by Thøgersen et al. (2022), several additional sports facilities have been built or initiated. These include a 50-metre swimming pool with ten lanes in Tórshavn, opened on 28 October 2024, with a construction cost of at least DKK 148 million. In addition, the above-mentioned multi-arena 'Við Tjarnir' in Thorshavn was completed on 15 February 2025 at a cost of approximately DKK 250 million.

Further developments include the planning of three new indoor football halls, with construction expected to commence before the end of 2027. These comprise a hall in Norðagøta

(70 × 50 metres) with financial support of DKK 10 million, a hall in Giljanes (60 × 40 metres) with financial support of DKK 6 million, and a hall in Trongisvágur (50 × 30 metres) with financial support of DKK 4 million. The Faroese Football Association provides the stated funding contributions through the FIFA Forward 3.0 programme, while the remaining construction costs are financed by the municipalities.

Regarding accessibility for elite athletes specifically, there is no available data. However, the interview data do not indicate major issues in this regard.

Summing up

Overall, the collected data show that the Faroe Islands have a high level of sports facility provision compared with Denmark, with football, handball, and swimming facilities well distributed across municipalities, and recent investments improving swimming infrastructure.

Relative to the small population, the overall provision is strong, and access to facilities is not seen as a key barrier to elite sport development; open, widespread access supports youth participation, early skill development, and large amounts of informal training. However, interviewees note gaps in specialised elite facilities – especially football options suited to winter or fully covered training.

The new multi-sport arena in Thorshavn is an important venue that caters to major indoor sporting events. It could be developed into a much-needed national elite sport centre. In order to ensure that the venue has the intended effect, it is important to develop an adequate corporate structure and appropriate financial support.

Several interviewees also argue that the current facilities mainly benefit established team sports, while there is a lack of facilities for other sports, outdoor activities, cycling, and self-organised physical activity. Cycling is highlighted as constrained by traffic safety and limited dedicated infrastructure.

Another concern is that many venues are built for training rather than elite presentation (spectators, sponsorship, TV), limiting visibility and commercial potential. Many of the interviewees also support an ‘elite house’ that pools performance services across sports, aided by short travel distances and strong inter-island connectivity.

Pillar 7: Coaches and coach development

“There are strong and significant correlations between the overall quality of coaching provision in the sample nations and medal-winning success in Olympic sports.”

(De Bosscher et al., 2015)

Results

The interviewees emphasise that an adequate number of coaches and the quality of coaching are the single most important factors in successful athlete development within a small

system. It is also a recurring theme in the interviews that there is a shortage of qualified coaches (and specialist support staff) in the Faroe Islands.

The figures in the appendix show that all federations (apart from the Equestrian federation) employ national coaches. The same applies to three of the development federations. However, the vast majority of coaches are in football and handball, and together with volleyball and gymnastics, these are the only federations with coach provision corresponding to two or more full-time coaches. The national coaches in other federations are employed for only a minor share of a full-time coach.

In many sports, coaches are former athletes or parents who contribute for a limited period before moving on. This makes it difficult to retain institutional knowledge and to establish consistent training approaches. The importance of retaining knowledge and consistency is exemplified by the experience in swimming, where one highly competent and well-matched coach can elevate an athlete to an international elite level despite limited structural support.

At the same time, coach turnover is identified as a weakness by many interviewees. Changes in coaching personnel can disrupt training continuity and negatively affect athlete performance. Some federations struggle to recruit qualified coaches or to retain them long enough to build stable environments.

Furthermore, coach education and systematic coaching development are rudimentary and vary substantially between the federations. ÍSF has a structured training programme for coaches similar to what is offered by the National Olympic Committee and Sports Confederation of Denmark (DIF), but with only one level, whereas DIF has three. Some federations have additional courses.

Coaching in youth sport is largely managed by parents and volunteers with limited formal training. While commitment is high, this limits the quality and continuity. There is a growing acknowledgement of the need for better-qualified coaches in youth development. The interviewees call for greater professional competencies, coordination, and support roles, especially in early development stages, rather than relying solely on voluntary effort.

Elite sport coaches are also mainly volunteers, although many federations now have professional coaches for the national teams. Most coaches are generalists without in-depth specialised knowledge. To improve the quality of coaching, foreign coaches are often recruited to national teams. However, this has not always been a success as they find it difficult to adapt to the Faroese mentality, as mentioned earlier.

Often, expectations clash with reality when foreign coaches expect centralised national training facilities, support staff, sports science, and structured daily environments, but instead encounter more limited access to sports halls than expected, limited equipment quality, and a lack of integrated performance services.

In many sports, there are cultural differences related to effort, too. Athletes are used to training two or three times a week, whereas international standards require four to six sessions, which clash with work, school, and family life.

It is an issue common to all Nordic countries, and beyond, that for domestic coaches, there are practically no options for a full-time career. At best, coaches may construct portfolio careers in which sports coaching is supplemented by other forms of coaching and by teaching sport in schools.

The absence of a national high-performance centre is identified as a major barrier to consistently raising elite standards.

However, the Faroe Islands has an advantage over countries with more dispersed populations. It is easy to organise training camps because of the short distances in terms of travel times. It is also easy to bring elite athletes from different sports together for cross-sport learning sessions.

Summing up

In short, coach education and professional coaching support in the Faroe Islands are insufficient to achieve improved performance. Many coaches lack up-to-date training knowledge, and there is limited access to continuing education.

Some interviewees argue, however, that modest investments in strength training, injury prevention, and qualified support staff have produced noticeable improvements at the club level in some sports.

Still, due to the limited size of the Faroe Islands, coach provision and development remain an issue. The import of foreign coaches appears essential to sustaining and developing performance at the highest level.

Pillar 8: National and international competition/events

“Pillar 8 is concerned with the number of international events organised, the strategic planning behind it, the opportunities for athletes to participate in international competition and the national competition level.”

(De Bosscher et al., 2015)

Competing in national and international tournaments is essential for athletes' development and success. A key component of an effective elite sport system is therefore its capacity to organise and structure a well-designed competition schedule. Regular participation at the highest possible level enables top athletes to gain critical experience, refine their performance, and prepare effectively for future competitions. In many sports, participation in specific tournaments is also necessary to accumulate ranking points and qualify for major international championships.

Hosting international events is an integral component of this pillar (De Bosscher et al., 2015). Numerous studies have shown that staging sporting events provides athletes from the host nation with a competitive advantage (Bernard & Busse, 2004; Scelles et al., 2020). Consequently, improving a nation's international sporting performance can, to some extent, be pursued strategically through hosting international competitions. For athletes, competing in familiar and supportive home environments can facilitate their development, enhance confidence, and strengthen their preparation for future challenges.

Results

The small population size and geographical location pose challenges for Faroese elite sports with respect to participation in adequate competitions. First and foremost, domestic leagues and national competitions in several sports suffer from a lack of qualified opponents, predictable outcomes, few meaningful matches, and limited progression pressure.

For elite development, players need frequent high-stakes competitions, which is currently only achieved when athletes move abroad, typically to Denmark.

Further, geography remains a constant constraint. Domestically, travel is quite easy, but travelling outside the Faroe Islands is expensive and time-consuming, thereby raising participation costs and reducing competitive flexibility.

There is agreement among the interviewees that more systematic pathways for international exposure – short-term placements, cross-border leagues/competitions, or stronger regional collaboration could significantly improve athlete development.

While international competition is a decisive factor in elite development, it is also one of the most difficult areas for smaller Faroese sports. International competition is essential for elite progression, but difficult to access regularly. Performance gaps between domestic competition and the international level are large, and travel can be costly. Still, in most sports, Faroese athletes have relatively good access to international tournaments.

Further, Faroese athletes often benefit from competing at the highest domestic level at an early age, taking on early responsibility, gaining exposure, and receiving extensive media coverage. This is especially the case in handball, where structured participation in youth tournaments and gradual entry into senior international competition can build long-term success, overcoming the constraint of population size and geography.

Some federations are prevented from competing at the highest international level because they lack formal recognition by international federations. Some of the interviewed stakeholders consider this a major structural barrier that stalls development, regardless of domestic quality or ambition.

Although participation as an independent country in the Olympic Games would no doubt bring advantages, not least economic ones, the exclusion from the Olympics does not in itself hinder Faroese athletes' participation in relevant international competitions. With

athletics and gymnastics as the major exemptions, most sports are members of their international federations and can participate in competitions at the highest level (World and European championships).

In addition, there are other possible competitive outlets that are often more relevant to Faroese athletes, such as special competitions for small states and regional competitions, including Nordic championships and second-tier European competitions. In terms of the exposure to a relevant competitive learning environment, such competitions are probably more useful than participation in world championships, where Faroese athletes in many sports are far from competitive.

The Faroe Islands benefits especially from the Island Games, which provide an appropriate competitive level in some sports and strong motivational value in a broader range of disciplines.

Island Games is a major multi-sports event in terms of participants (approximately 4,000), sports (14), and islands (25). The Faroe Islands is hosting the Games for the second time in 2027, which has a significant impact on the mobilisation of political, economic and social support for elite sports.

This follows a boost in interest in the Island Games after a significant improvement in the performance of Faroese athletes in recent years, with the Faroe Islands on top of the medal table in 2025.

Summing up

The collected data paints a picture of a small but ambitious elite sport system in terms of reaching a high level of competitiveness. At the same time, there are persistent structural weaknesses related to national competitive depth, which limit the transition from potential to sustained international performance. Participation in relevant international competitions compensates, to some extent, for the impact of these weaknesses, as does international inspiration and cooperation.

Some sports, especially handball, have overcome these problems and stand out with impressive results when the limited Faroese population is taken into account. We will return to this in more detail in the performance output section and later in the discussion and conclusion.

Pillar 9: Sport science support, scientific research, and innovation in elite sport

The application of scientific research to enhance performance in elite sport has gained increasing international attention over the past decades. This is an area in which targeted improvements can significantly strengthen a nation's international competitiveness, as highlighted in the SPLISS study:

“The best-performing nations in summer sports and winter sports generally score well in scientific research and innovation. They have a national sport research centre, and coordinate, disseminate and communicate scientific information well.”

(De Bosscher et al., 2015)

Results

The University of the Faroe Islands (established in 1965) has a Faculty of Science and Technology and a Faculty of Health Science. There are 18 first-degree (bachelor's) courses and nine master's degree courses, but no degree specialised in sport. However, within the Faculty of Health Science, there is a professor in exercise physiology and a research group of ten people, including PhD students.

The research is strong in specific areas, especially in the application of physiological research to football. The capabilities for using research in practice are well developed. Compared to larger countries, it is relatively easy to apply research results in practice and to share new knowledge.

Sport science resources exist (e.g., testing equipment and university collaborations with selected sports). However, apart from football, they are severely underutilised, often due to a lack of personnel or coordination.

High-level sports science exists in silos and is not systematically translated into training practice, except in football and to some extent in handball. Training and coaching in the majority of sports is largely based on experience, intuition, and informal knowledge rather than structured evidence. This limitation is recognised by the stakeholders, but it is also acknowledged that a limited scale and resources make systematic application of formal research difficult.

Testing, data analysis, and specialist services are still limited and uneven, mostly concentrated in football and often ad hoc. There are ideas – and also plans – for establishing a national elite sport centre, or a ‘sports hub’, with interdisciplinary support services, including physiotherapy, medical services, testing, and performance analysis – and maybe also kinesiology and psychology.

The most acute problem currently in relation to such expert resources is the lack of physiotherapists with specialised knowledge of sports. There are many physiotherapists in the Faroe Islands, but none with this specialisation. Currently, Danish physiotherapists are used instead in football and handball.

It is suggested by some of the interviewees that a shared national elite sport centre could help overcome scale limitations by allowing athletes from different sports to train together and by pooling expert resources and support staff from various areas. At the time of writing, first steps have been taken, but these ideas remain strategic intentions rather than operational realities.

There is growing interest in sports science and testing, but the organisational structure is still too weak, the funding is limited, and it is unclear how to implement and use these resources in a broad set of sports.

Without qualified personnel and clear and systematic integration into coaching and development systems, sport science risks becoming symbolic rather than impactful for sports other than football and handball, which have the resources to make a difference in this regard.

Summing up

An extension of the University of the Faroe Islands would have clear advantages for elite sport, particularly if it involved establishing an academic sports degree. It would mean that fewer young people would feel the need to travel abroad to satisfy their educational aspirations. It would also mean that homegrown knowledge in sports science and its organic application in practice would increase.

An increase in expert resources is much needed. A properly resourced national elite sport centre can be expected to be much used, given the easy travel across most of the Faroe Islands.

It would enhance learning processes across sports, potentially providing a significant comparative advantage for Faroese elite sports. An early beginning is the test centre at the new multi-sport hall. Such an elite sports centre can be expected to have major impacts on the quality and competencies of Faroese elite athletes. Funding is crucial, and there are many competing needs. However, the costs of a national elite sport centre are likely to be relatively modest.

Specific issues for selected sports

The previous sections of this report mostly cover issues of general relevance to Faroese elite sport. However, there are also problems and needs that are sport-specific. The interviews uncovered several such issues. This section is a summary of the specific problems, needs and wishes raised by selected sports, in particular the two big team sports, football and handball, but also swimming and a number of other individual sports.

Football

There is a wide gap between football and other sports in the Faroe Islands in relation to available financial resources. This has impacts on all aspects of the sport, from the payment of players to facilities and the degree of internationalisation.

Football clubs and the football federation have far better resources than other sports: more active players, more local support, more funds from sponsorships, and better facilities across the islands. However, it is the funding from UEFA/FIFA that lifts football into a league of its own.

The funding spills over into improvements of facilities, expert services and equipment. It is also used to engage professional coaches, often from abroad. However, the most substantial impact of the relative abundance of resources is increased payment of players. Whereas the squad of the national team that defeated Austria in 1990 consisted mostly of amateur players, the squad now consists mostly of full-time professional or semi-professional players on all the major club teams.

There are also many foreign professional players in the best Faroese football league. In May 2026, there were 44 players from countries other than the Faroe Islands in the best domestic football league (ten from Denmark, seven from both Norway and Sweden, one from Iceland, six from other European countries, five from Ghana, five from other African countries, and one each from Argentina and the USA).

The inflow of money is mainly used to boost player salaries, which are relatively high, not only for imported foreign players but also for domestic players. According to the interviewees, Faroese players can earn more playing in the domestic league than in the Danish 1st division (the second tier), and they can supplement this with extra incomes from second jobs. The monetary incentive to go abroad and play in lower leagues is relatively low. According to some interviewees, this is good for the Faroese league, but it may hamper the development of the quality of Faroese football.

On the other hand, other interviewees find it problematic that very young (16-17-year-old) players are picked up by academies in Denmark. They believe that it would be better both for Faroese football and the young players themselves if their talents were nurtured in Faroese clubs a little longer.

The Faroese experience of steeply rising revenues being almost exclusively used to raise player salaries, with salaries often rising more than total revenues, is not unique for the Faroe Islands, far from it. This is the case everywhere in European football. Clubs compete for sporting glory by expanding player salary budgets to the extent that profits disappear.

In the sport economics literature, this is called win maximisation under a balanced budget constraint. However, in many cases, it ends with deficits because clubs overinvest in players (Storm & Nielsen, 2012, 2015). This does not yet seem to be a major problem in the Faroe Islands, but it may arise in the future as Faroese football is increasingly drawn into the development logic of European football. The enormity of the prize money won by KI Klaksvik by qualifying for the group play in the Conference League gives clubs a strong incentive to invest everything, and a little more, in improving the quality of the squad.

In the Faroe Islands, there are 17 football clubs divided into two leagues. The level of competition is relatively low, with a wide gap in performance level between the best clubs and the rest. There is strong local support for the local clubs, but according to the interviewees, such local patriotism is on the decline.

The facilities of Faroese football clubs are generally of very good quality. Access to expert services such as physiotherapists, medical doctors, and advanced testing equipment is much better than for other sports. However, there is an unsatisfied demand for indoor facilities with a full-size football field.

The football federation is keen to be part of existing elite sport support schemes and any future facilities, such as a national elite sport centre. In spite of the abundance of resources, there is a need for external support, especially for youth and women's football.

Handball

Handball has been played in the Faroe Islands since the 1940s. The Faroe Islands became a full member of the IHF (International Handball Federation) in 1974. There was a significant rise in activity in the 1970s and 1980s. From 2012, the Faroese Handball Federation has developed and implemented long-term plans based on clear goals. In 2015 and 2017, the Faroe Islands won the IHF Emerging Nations, but has since grown out of this group of handball nations.

Qualifying for the final tournaments at European and world championships was seen as crucial for further development, and the men's European championship in 2020, in which the number of countries in the final tournament was extended from 16 to 24, was successfully targeted. Since then, the Faroese national teams have experienced remarkable success in both men's and women's teams, at both senior and youth levels.

According to the interviewees, there are several reasons for this exceptional success. First, the training culture is strong and deep-rooted. The players are used to training hard in the evening after a full day's work. The Faroese culture of resilience, hard work, and 'standing tall' in a tough natural environment is seen as an important factor behind the success. Second, with short transport distances, it is easy to gather players based in the Faroe Islands for national training camps, which are held three to four times annually.

Third, training camps, including foreign-based players, are much appreciated by the players. An atmosphere of camaraderie and a friendly local community make this attractive. The players stay at home rather than use hotel accommodation, as football players do on similar occasions. Fourth, the best Faroese players hone their skills in top European clubs. Often, talented youth players move abroad, especially to Denmark, Norway, or Sweden, before reaching the senior level. Other players move abroad slightly later to play in foreign clubs while studying. The effect is a relatively low-quality domestic league internationally, but also much inspiration and learning from top leagues abroad.

Fifth, the Faroese Handball Federation is praised for efficient resource management and planning. It has used funds wisely to improve expert services, such as two full-time physical coaches, and its own media platform helps to promote the sport and to increase revenue. Finally, the Faroese national teams have been good at developing and nurturing a playing style that plays to the strengths of the Faroese players.

The success of Faroese handball has had wider impacts beyond sport. More than 10% of the population travelled abroad to watch and support the Faroese teams in recent tournaments. The widespread enthusiasm spills over into politics and the national self-image. The ingrained feeling of being small, far away, and inferior has been challenged and modified, and increased political support for elite sport has followed and may have longer-term impacts on monetary and material support.

It is characteristic that the handball federation is very clear and detailed about its wish list and future plans. Much of it has to do with expert services. A national training centre is seen as crucial for moving to a higher level. Better testing, physical training, physiotherapists with a speciality in sport, and access to medical support are considered important steps in order to lift standards further. Other wishes are club facilities for meetings and socialising, visual improvements of sports halls to better attract sponsors, and more and better time slots for elite team training. Further, raising the performance level of the lower-ranked domestic clubs to decrease the gap between clubs and to have more competitively meaningful matches in the domestic league is considered essential, but there do not seem to be plans to achieve this.

The handball federation looks beyond the domestic league to improve the standards of the national teams. It is seen as an important step to increase the number of players playing in top-quality foreign leagues, and in the very best clubs in the EHF Champions League, for instance. On the other hand, it is also seen as important to raise domestic training and competitions to a level that enables talented 15-16-year-old handball players to stay longer in the safer social environment in the Faroe Islands without compromising their optimal path for talent development. For youth players who move abroad early, it is important to facilitate the transfer through satellite clubs.

Swimming

Swimming has traditionally been a big sport in the Faroe Islands, with many participants, good facilities, and strong performances by elite swimmers in international competitions. However, in recent years, swimming has been surpassed by team sports as the most popular sport in the Faroe Islands. Dropout from swimming clubs is significant in early adolescence, but the sport still has a strong foundation, as the participation rate among children is very high. In addition, swimming benefits from a dense coverage of swimming pools. There are more than five times fewer inhabitants per swimming facility in the Faroe Islands than in Denmark. Moreover, many of the facilities are new and well-equipped.

Some of the interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the impact of the new elite sport support system on the amount allocated to the swimming federation. The actual reduction from 2024 to 2025 was DKK 24.000, but this could be due to fewer athletes or worse results rather than an effect of the implementation of the new system. The interviewees identified several needs which will be difficult to satisfy without more support. There is a need for physiotherapists and kinesiologists, but, most importantly, more and better coaches for children and young people.

There are many coaches in swimming clubs or employed by municipalities. The swimming federation has also employed a national coach with the main responsibility for elite swimmers. This has not always been a success. Conflicts and dissatisfaction with a foreign coach's attempts to implement new methods led to a notice of dismissal. On the other hand, the most successful Faroese swimmer developed his skills in a 25-meter pool on the isolated (by Faroese standards) southern island of Suduroy in cooperation with a local coach. He reached his peak performance level in these environments and did not improve when he later moved to Denmark to become part of Team Denmark's much more sophisticated support and organisational set-up, including better-trained coaches. It shows that the qualifications of coaches are sometimes less important than enthusiasm, interpersonal fit, and understanding.

Rowing

Rowing is another individual sport with a strong tradition in the Faroe Islands. This is reflected in the fact that three of the five Faroese athletes who have participated in the Olympic Games (as part of the Danish team) are rowers. However, more significant is the popularity of the annual competition between local communities in specially designed boats adapted to the difficult conditions for rowing in the sea around the islands.

The history of rowing in the Faroe Islands is deeply intertwined with the islands' history and culture. Rowing was essential for survival due to the islands' geography and the need for skilled seafaring. Over time, it evolved into a competitive sport with formalised races and established rules. Some of the interviewees even suggested that millennia of unique life conditions have made the Faroese population uniquely genetically fit for rowing.

There is no doubt a significant pool of rowing talent in the Faroe Islands. This could have resulted in strong performances at international outdoor competitions. However, the rough seawater around the islands is not suited to rowing in the low-lying, narrow boats used in international competitions such as the Olympics and World Championships. This means that the most talented Faroese rowers need to move abroad if they want to be competitive in outdoor rowing.

However, many talented Faroese rowers choose to compete in non-Olympic indoor rowing competitions instead, which has resulted in many top performances, including world championships.

Gymnastics

The Faroese gymnastics federation is the third-largest among the sport federations in terms of membership. There are two gymnastics clubs in Tórshavn alone. Most members are children, but there are also elite athletes performing at a relatively high level. Athletes in artistic gymnastics benefit from the engagement of a foreign coach. The Faroese gymnasts do very well at the Island Games and also regularly participate in Nordic championships. The Faroese gymnastics federation is not a member of World Gymnastics (formerly the

International Gymnastics Federation) and cannot take part in World and European championships in Olympic gymnastics disciplines on behalf of the Faroe Islands.

However, the Faroe Islands has a strong position in a non-Olympic gymnastics discipline: aesthetic group gymnastics. This is not organised by World Gymnastics but rather by the International Federation of Aesthetic Group Gymnastics. The Faroe Islands is a member of this federation and regularly takes part in its world championships. In 2015, it even hosted the annual championships with 13 participating nations, with the best Faroese senior team being ranked in a respectable position as no. 11 among 23 national teams.

Other sports

Many children are active in gymnastics, athletics, or volleyball clubs, but all three sports experience a big drop in membership when children reach adolescence. The dropout tendency is especially pronounced among young women and has a significant impact on volleyball, which is a big sport, especially among girls and women in the Faroe Islands. In local communities, indoor team sports are often gender specific; boys typically play handball, whereas girls play volleyball.

Cycling is a relatively small sport with five clubs and 150 members, with special problems linked to the geography of the islands. The tunnels are not suitable for cycling, and although cycling in the tunnels is not forbidden, it is (seen as) dangerous for children and young people. Apart from that, there are very few cycle paths, and parents are understandably hesitant to let their children take part in competitive road racing. With no indoor tracks in the islands, gravel and mountain bike are the disciplines that best fit the Faroese condition. The building of a mountain bike track is a relatively low cost project that would much improve the environment for competitive cycling in the Faroe Islands.

Output: The performance and competitiveness of the Faroese elite sport system

Results in international competitions are not the only way to measure elite sport success, but it is an important one. It can be seen as a crucial part of the output of an elite sport system. It shows how the system transforms the combination of inputs at macro-, meso- and micro-levels into measurable performance and competitiveness.

This chapter analyses the output of the Faroese elite sport system. It looks at the results of Faroese athletes and teams in international competitions. First, the focus will be on the performance of national and club teams in international competitions across the three big Faroese team sports (football, handball, and volleyball). Second, the focus shifts to the performance of Faroese athletes in multi-sport events, in particular the results at the biennial Island Games. Third, we look at the results for individual sports with athletes participating in international competitions.

In sports where Faroese athletes and teams compete as representatives of the Faroe Islands, we look at the results in World and European championships. Where relevant, we also include results in Nordic championships and special competitions for second-tier or small countries. Regarding the Olympic Games and sports, in which the Faroe Islands are not members of the international federations, we look at the results of athletes from the Faroe Islands who represent Denmark. The analysis mostly focuses on the senior level, but we also include results at the junior and youth levels to some extent.

Football

Football is by far the biggest sport in the country in terms of both participation and economic strength. It is also the sport where Faroese athletes first caught the attention of the international media. In autumn 1990, the Faroe Islands played its very first tournament match in a qualifying group for the UEFA Euro 1992. Lacking stadia that satisfied UEFA criteria, they had to play the home match against Austria abroad in Sweden, but the amateur Faroese team sensationally won 1-0.

Since then, the Faroe Islands has participated in the qualification rounds in all FIFA and UEFA national championships (including UEFA Nations League). The Faroe Islands has mostly ended last or second last in their groups. In total, the national team has played 110 tournament matches (26 wins, 26 draws, 58 losses). The best results, apart from the win against Austria, are two wins against Greece (2-1 home, 1-0 away) in the Euro 2016 qualifying, a home win over Turkey in the 2022-23 Nations League, and a home win over the Czech Republic (2-1) in the most recent tournament (FIFA World Cup qualifying 2026). Other big results are draws against Scotland (twice) and Hungary. Table 2 shows the countries against which the Faroe Islands has won or drawn matches.

Table 2: Results of the Faroe Islands in qualifying for either FIFA World Cup, UEFA Euro or UEFA Nations League, 1992-2026

Country	Wins	Draws	Defeats
Albania	0	1	1
Andorra	3	1	0
Armenia	1	1	0
Austria	1	1	6
Azerbaijan	0	0	2
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	1	1
Czech Republic	1	0	9
Cyprus	0	1	3
Estonia	1	0	3
Gibraltar	2	0	0
Greece	2	0	2
Hungary	0	1	3
Kazakhstan	0	1	1
Kosovo	0	1	1
Latvia	1	4	1
Lithuania	2	2	6
Luxembourg	2	1	1
Malta	5	2	1
Moldova	1	2	1
Montenegro	1	0	1
North Macedonia	0	1	1
Northern Ireland	0	2	4
San Marino	2	0	0
Scotland	0	2	8
Slovenia	0	1	1
Turkey	1	0	1
Total	26	26	58

Source: UEFA statistics

Until recently, the Faroe Islands had not been close to qualifying for the FIFA World Cup or the UEFA Euro. However, in the most recent qualifying tournament, the Faroe Islands raised its level significantly. For the first time, it won more than two group matches (four wins and four defeats in eight matches), had a chance to gain a play-off spot and ended third in a group of five countries. In the UEFA Nations League in 2020-22, the Faroe Islands won its group in the lowest tier of the competition (group D). In the two subsequent tournaments, it managed to avoid relegation from the third tier (group C) to group D.

The recently improved standing of the men's national team of the Faroe Islands is reflected in FIFA's official ranking (2023: 135, 2024: 137, 2025: 125, 2026: 123). However, the ranking was significantly higher in the years 2015-18, during which the Faroe Islands was ranked

among the top-100 countries, with its highest rank to date as no. 74 in October 2016 (above Norway, Bulgaria, and Israel).

The Faroe Islands performs very well in comparison to other countries when population size is taken into account. The national team has won all matches against countries with smaller populations and has achieved the same or more tournament points against countries with larger populations (Andorra, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, and Montenegro).

Many players on the Faroese national team now play professionally for clubs in foreign leagues. All eleven players of the team that defeated Austria in 1990 were amateurs or semi-professionals playing for clubs in the domestic league. However, of the 24 players called up for the friendly against San Marino in March 2026, ten play for professional clubs abroad.

Despite the exodus of Faroese players to leagues in other countries, the Faroese clubs have done well in European club tournaments in recent years. This is reflected in UEFA’s coefficients, which rank national federations based on clubs’ performances in European competitions over the last five seasons (see table 3).

Table 3: UEFA coefficients 2010-2026

Year	Rank
2010	48
2011	50
2012	51
2013	51
2014	51
2015	49
2016	49
2017	51
2018	51
2019	50
2020	53
2021	47
2022	44
2023	43
2024	38
2025	40
2026	40

Source: UEFA statistics

The table shows that the ranking of Faroese clubs has improved since 2020 and reached a much higher level in 2024-26 than previously. The Faroe Islands is now ranked higher than

much larger countries, such as Albania, Estonia, Moldova, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Northern Ireland, and Wales.

The improved ranking reflects better results for Faroese clubs in general. KÍ Klaksvík became the first Faroese men's club to reach the group stages of a UEFA club competition when it qualified for the 2023–24 UEFA Europa Conference League group stage.

The women's national team has been less competitive internationally than the men's team. The Faroe Islands has participated in UEFA Euro qualifying since the 2009 tournament and in FIFA World Cup qualifying since 2015. The team has played 54 matches in total with ten wins (against Andorra (three), Malta (two), Georgia (two), Lithuania, Montenegro and North Macedonia), three draws, and 41 defeats.

In the qualifying for the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup, the Faroe Islands won its preliminary group, progressed to the main UEFA qualifying groups, but did not qualify for the finals. Contrary to the men's national team, the ranking of the women's team has worsened in recent years. The Faroese team was no. 60 on FIFA's official ranking list in 2009. The lowest rank until 2020 was no. 88 in 2015, but since then it has been lower every year, and its current rank (April 2026) is no. 110.

Almost all players on the women's national team play for domestic clubs. Of the 19 players called up for a tournament in Lithuania in October 2025, only one did not play in the domestic league.

Faroese women's teams have reached the group stage of UEFA women's club competitions in the early 2000s. KÍ Klaksvík's women competed in the group stages of the 2001–2002 and 2002–2023 UEFA Women's Cup (with one win and two defeats each year).

The Faroe Islands has reached the finals in one of the age groups of the UEFA championships for both men and women. In 2017, the men's team qualified for the U17 final after defeating Slovakia and drawing with Cyprus in the qualifying stage, but suffered three clear defeats in the finals. In 2025, the Faroe Islands hosted the finals in the U17 women's European championships. The Faroese team qualified automatically for the finals as the host. The team lost all three matches with an aggregate score of 0–28.

Handball

The Faroe Islands has generally done well internationally. However, handball is by far the team sport in which the Faroe Islands has performed best in international championships. In recent years, the Faroe Islands has regularly been among the countries that qualify for the finals of the senior IHF World Championships and EHF European Championships for both men and women. The Faroe Islands did not qualify for the finals in any of these championships until 2024. However, as documented in table 4, the Faroe Islands has qualified for the finals in all but one of the six major championships since then.

Table 4: Participation and ranking in senior championships (IHF and EHF)

	IHF (men)	EHF (men)	IHF (women)	EHF (women)
2024		20		17
2025	not qualified		17	
2026		13		qualified

Source: IHF and EHF statistics

The men's team has been competitive and has been close to qualifying for the next round in both of the senior European championships it has taken part in. The best result is probably the draw against Norway in 2024. The women's team has even more impressive results with a win against Spain in 2025 and draws against Croatia and Serbia. Results against each nation are listed in table 5.

Table 5: Results for the Faroe Islands in finals at senior IHF World Championships or EHF Euros, 2017-2026

	Men			Women		
	Wins	Draws	Defeats	Wins	Draws	Defeats
Croatia					1	
Denmark						1
Germany						1
Iceland						1
Montenegro	1					1
Norway		1				
Paraguay				1		
Poland			1			
Serbia					1	
Slovenia			2			
Spain				1		
Switzerland		1				1
Total	1	2	3	2	2	5

Source: IHF and EHF statistics

However, the most impressive results by any team from the Faroe Islands is at the World and European championships at the junior and youth levels for men.

In 2017, the junior team (EHF: U20, IHF: U21) was the first Faroese team to qualify for a championship final (see table 6). Six years later, it was the first team to qualify for the quarter-finals (after wins against Denmark, Norway, and Poland), and in 2025, the Faroe Islands sensationally won its first international medal with a bronze medal at the 2025 U21 world championships, defeating Sweden in the bronze medal match.

Table 6: Participation and ranking in Junior (U20/U21) championships (IHF and EHF)

	IHF (men)	EHF (men)	IHF (women)	EHF (women)
2017	16			
2022		10		
2023	7			
2024		18		
2025	3			20
2026		qualified		

Source: IHF and EHF statistics

The men's youth teams ((EHF: U18, IHF: U19)) have also achieved excellent results, finishing no. 9 and 8 at the European and World championships in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Table 7 show that women's junior and youth teams have been less successful than the men's teams, but they have qualified for three of the ten finals at either World or European championships in the period 2022-2026.

Table 7: Participation and ranking in Youth (U18/U19) championships (IHF and EHF)

	IHF (men)	EHF (men)	IHF (women)	EHF (women)
2022		9	19	
2023	8			
2024		15		
2025	19			24
2026		qualified		

Source: IHF and EHF statistics

Table 8 shows how the teams from the Faroe Islands have done (wins, draws and defeats) against opponents in all finals at junior and youth IHF World Championships and EHF Euros from 2017 to 2026. The Faroe Islands men's teams have more wins than defeats, including wins over handball giants such as Denmark, France, Germany, Spain, and Sweden. The extraordinary character of this performance is evident when you compare the most recent figures of the number of registered handball players in these countries (116,000, 603,000, 736,000, 103,000, and 120,000, respectively) with the corresponding figure for the Faroe Islands (4,000).

Table 8: Results for the Faroe Islands in finals at junior and youth IHF World Championships or EHF Euros, 2017-2026

	Men			Women		
	wins	draws	defeats	wins	draws	defeats
Angola	1					
Argentina	1					
Austria	1					
Brazil	1					
Burundi	1					

Chile	1					
Croatia	1		1			
Czechia	1		1			
Denmark	1		3			
Egypt			1			
France	2		2			
Finland				1		
Germany	1	1	1			1
Hungary			2			
Iceland	2	1	1			1
Iran			1			
Italy	1					
Japan	1					
Lithuania				1		
Mexico	1					
Montenegro	2					
Netherlands						2
North Macedonia	1					1
Norway	1		3			1
Poland	1					
Portugal	1		3			
Romania	1					1
Saudi Arabia	1					
Serbia	1		1			1
Slovenia	2		4			1
South Korea	1					
Spain	1		2			1
Sweden	2		2			
Switzerland	1		1			2
Tunisia	1					
Turkey						1
Ukraine	1					
Uruguay	1					
Total	36	2	29	2	0	13

Source: IHF and EHF statistics

The recent successes of the Faroese senior national teams can be partly attributed to the increasing number of their players now playing in some of the world's best leagues.

Eight of the 18 players in the Faroe Islands men's squad at the 2026 EHF European Championships played in Danish clubs, while eight more played in Germany, Sweden, or Iceland. Only two members of the squad played for clubs in the Faroese league.

The women's senior national team is also internationalised as far as club affiliation is concerned, although to a lesser degree. 11 of the 18 players in the women's squad at the 2025 IHF World Championships played for Danish clubs, one played for a Norwegian club, and six played in the domestic Faroese league.

The Faroese successes at the junior and youth levels is much less a result of internationalisation. 12 of the 16 players in the men's squad that won bronze at the 2025 IHF U21 World Championships played for Faroese clubs at the time of the tournament. Two played in Denmark, and one each in Sweden and Switzerland. The performance is a testament to the quality of talent development in the Faroe Islands. However, the performance of one exceptionally talented member of the team (Óli Mittún), who received the tournament's Most Valuable Player award, also played a role.

The domestic Faroese league is relatively weak compared with not only the leagues playing in the EHF Champions League but also with second-tier leagues in Europe. Faroese clubs (both men and women) play in the third-tier European club tournament, the European Cup. Teams like H71 and Kyndil have participated in the men's EHF European Cup (formerly Challenge Cup), often reaching the intermediate rounds (round 3 or the last 16) but not advancing to the final stages. Faroese women's teams have competed similarly, with progression to earlier group rounds of the EHF European Cup/Challenge Cup.

Volleyball

Volleyball is the third most popular sport in the Faroe Islands in terms of participants. It is especially popular among Faroese girls and women. The Faroese Volleyball Association is a member of the European Volleyball Confederation (CEV) and the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB). The Faroese national teams compete in CEV continental competitions.

The men's senior team has played once in EuroVolley (CEV European Championship) qualification. The Faroe Islands took part in the qualifying for the 2023 men's championship but lost all four matches. The women's senior team has not taken part in tournaments at this level.

Both the men's and women's senior teams have entered the CEV European Silver League, a tournament for second and third-tier national teams designed to support emerging national teams in Europe. The Faroese women's team made its Silver League debut in 2023 and recorded a historic 3-1 win over Georgia. In the 2025 men's tournament, the Faroe Islands defeated Iceland 3-2 and won a set against the much higher-ranked Austrian team. The FIVB has supported the Faroe Islands through its Volleyball Empowerment programme (coach support and development) to help the country compete more regularly at the continental level.

Historically, the Faroe Islands has competed in regional/zonal competitions (the CEV Small Countries Association) and NEVZA (North European Volleyball Zonal Association). The CEV Small Countries Association has 15 small European member countries (from Ireland, Scotland and Iceland to San Marino, Greenland and the Faroe Islands). Championship tournaments are held regularly – 14 tournaments starting in the year 2000. The Faroe

Islands have won two silver medals and three bronze medals across the men's and women's teams. NEVZA includes the seven Nordic nations, Greenland, and England. Although the Faroese teams most often lose against the larger countries in NEVZA matches, the matches are competitive and meaningful.

Youth teams also take part in NEVZA and CEV age-group qualifiers (U18/U20). In the most recent age-group NEVZA championships, the Faroese U19 men's team achieved their best result to date, finishing no. 5 out of seven countries, with England and Iceland at no. 6 and 7.

Volleyball is not always on the programme at the Island Games, but the Faroe Islands is most often among the medallists when it is (both men and women)

Apart from football, volleyball is probably the sport where the international competition is toughest. It is not surprising that the Faroe Islands is far from the international top level and seldom qualify for the big tournaments. However, considering the relatively low number of active players, it is remarkable how well it performs at tournaments designed for smaller nations such as the CEV Small Countries Association and the Island Games.

Multi-sport events

As mentioned earlier, the Faroe Islands is not a member of the IOC, and Faroese athletes are not allowed to take part in the Olympic Games under the Faroe Islands' flag. Five Faroese athletes have competed in the Olympics under the Danish flag. The first was the rower *Katrin Olsen*, who qualified for the 2008 Games as a part of the Danish lightweight double scull, ending as no. 7. The second was the swimmer *Pal Joenson*, who took part in two Olympic Games. In 2012, he was ranked no. 10 and no. 17 in the 400 m and 1500 m freestyle, respectively.

In 2016, he was ranked 30th in the 1500 m freestyle. The single sculler *Sverri Nielsen* also competed in two Olympic Games. He narrowly missed out on a medal in the 2020 Games, where he was no. 4 beaten by only 0.15 seconds by the eventual bronze medal winner. In the 2024 Games, he was ranked no 8. *Jóhan á Plógv Hansen* is a Faroese player who chose to play for the Danish national team after having earlier represented the Faroe Islands. He was in the squad that won silver medals in the 2020 Olympics. Finally, the rower *Sára Maria Johansen* participated in 2024 as part of the women's eight, ending as no. 7.

No team representing the Faroe Islands is allowed to participate in the Olympic Games, nor are they able to take part in qualifying tournaments. This has not been an issue so far because the Faroe Islands would have been far from qualifying anyway. However, the recent progress of the Faroese men's handball team has changed this. It is no longer a totally unrealistic prospect that the Faroe Islands could qualify for the Olympics, or at least for the Olympic qualifying tournament if it was allowed to participate. If this should happen and the Faroe Islands was blocked from participating, there would be a 'revolution' in the Faroe Islands, according to one of our interviews. It would, at the very least, initiate strong negative emotions and strengthen political forces working for independence.

Unlike the Olympics, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) recognises the Faroe Islands as an independent nation, and Faroese Paralympic athletes have taken part in all Paralympic Games since 1984, except for the most recent Games in 2024. The Faroe Islands has won 13 medals in total (one gold, seven silver, and five bronze) – all of them in swimming won by four different athletes. In the Seoul Paralympics in 1988, Christina Næss won gold in 100m backstroke C3.

The Island Games is an important multi-sport event for the Faroese athletes. It has taken place every second year since 1985. The Faroe Islands have participated in all 20 Island Games held since then. It hosted the Games in 1989 and will do so again in 2027. 24 islands with populations ranging from 600 (Sark) to 138.000 (Isle of Wight) – some of them independent countries, others semi-independent or part of other countries – take part in the Games. Nine of the participating islands (Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Gotland, Greenland, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Isle of Wight, Jersey and Menorca) have higher populations than the Faroe Islands.

Table 9 shows how many medals the Faroe Islands has won and its ranking in the medal table. The Faroe Islands has gradually improved its standing in the Games. Until 2007, the Faroe Islands had never been among the four best nations in the medals table apart from the home Games in 1989. Since then, the ranking has never been lower than no. 4, apart from 2013, and the Faroe Islands was the best nation in 2009 and the most recent Games in 2025.

Tabel 9: Faroese medals won and ranking in the medal table in all Island Games

Year	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Medals	Ranking
1985	0	2	1	3	10
1987	1	2	5	8	10
1989	13	5	10	28	3
1991	6	10	11	27	8
1993	5	5	13	23	9
1995	10	14	15	39	6
1997	5	10	22	37	8
1999	7	12	9	28	9
2001	15	12	13	50	5
2003	6	10	12	28	8
2005	14	11	20	45	5
2007	24	19	12	55	2
2009	34	23	24	81	1
2011	20	20	15	55	4
2013	10	12	14	36	7
2015	18	18	24	60	4
2017	30	27	30	87	2

2019	22	11	27	60	3
2023	17	21	26	64	4
2025	41	31	23	95	1

Source: Wikipedia websites and data from the International Island Games Association.

NB: The Island Games were cancelled in 2021 because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In terms of total medals won in all Island Games, the Faroe Islands is fourth among all 24 participating islands. Only Jersey, Guernsey, and the Isle of Man have won more medals. In terms of medals per capita, only Guernsey has performed better than the Faroe Islands in all Games since 1985. In the period since 2007, no other island has won more medals per capita than the Faroe Islands.

Table 10 shows that swimming is the sport that has won the most medals in the Island Games for the Faroe Islands. More than 40% of all Faroese medals were won by swimmers. In only three Games (2007, 2009, 2011), they won 54 gold medals.

Table 10: Medals won by different sports in the Island Games

Sport	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Total
Swimming	130	112	119	361
Archery	54	23	26	103
Gymnastics	39	48	36	123
Athletics	16	30	49	95
Judo	15	17	23	55
Badminton	14	10	23	47
Shooting	10	3	7	20
Volleyball	8	11	10	29
Cycling	3	8	8	19
Table tennis	3	4	8	15
Triathlon	2	3	1	6
Football	2	0	0	2

Source: Wikipedia websites and data from the International Island Games Association

However, it may be argued that archery has fared even better in the Island Games, considering the much lower number of disciplines and the fact that archery is not always on the Games programme. The Faroe Islands is most often the best nation in archery, and its share of total medals is higher than the share of Faroese swimmers. The Faroe Islands is also doing very well in gymnastics, particularly given that gymnastics has only been on the Games programme in seven of the last 13 Games. In the last Island Games in 2025, Faroese gymnasts won 15 gold medals alone.

There is no handball tournament in the Island Games; basketball, football, and volleyball are the only team sports in the Games. The Faroe Islands has never taken part in the basketball tournament. It took part in the football tournaments in 1989 and 1991, winning easily

before leaving the Games for more competitive tournaments. However, the Faroe Islands has taken part in the volleyball tournaments in all Island Games. The women's team has been very successful, reaching the final in 13 of 16 tournaments, winning seven of them. The men's team has been medallists in 12 of 17 Games, but has only won gold in the home Games in 1989.

The Faroe Islands has also performed very well in judo. The sport seldom appears on the Games programme, and the Faroe Islands has won 55 medals in only seven Games. Athletics and badminton also contribute significantly to the total medals won by Faroese athletes.

Individual sports – swimming, rowing and gymnastics

Three individual sports have a more prominent status in Faroese elite sport than the rest – swimming, rowing, and gymnastics. Swimming and rowing are the most successful individual sports in terms of results. Faroese swimmers have been a dominant force in the biennial Island Games. The Faroe Islands has been affiliated with FINA (the international swimming federation) since 1981, and swimmers from the Faroe Islands regularly represent their nation in international championships. The most successful individual is Pál Joensen. After winning three gold medals at the 2008 Junior European Championships, he won a bronze medal at the 2012 World Championships (short course) and has won four silver medals at European Championships. He participated in two Olympic Games and won 22 gold medals in the Island Games.

Faroese swimmers have won multiple medals at the Nordic Championships. Swimmers representing the Faroe Islands have frequently secured podium finishes, including gold, across various freestyle, butterfly, and backstroke events. The most recent Faroese gold medal was won by Isaak Brisenfeldt in the men's 200m butterfly at the Nordic Championships in 2024.

Faroese rowers are not allowed to compete in international championships representing the Faroe Islands but may do so as part of the Danish rowing team. Some top Faroese rowers have competed for Denmark. The prime example is Sverri Nielsen. He won a silver medal in single sculls in the 2019 World Championship and became a European champion in 2020, followed by a silver medal in the European championships and a fourth place in the Olympics the year after that. Like other Faroese rowers, Sverri Nielsen moved to Denmark to train and became affiliated with Team Danmark. This move was not only because the athletes are precluded from representing the Faroe Islands, but also because of the benefits of support from Team Danmark, and the fact that rowing with narrow, light boats, as used in competitive Olympic rowing, is not possible in the rough waters around the Faroe Islands.

There is a strong tradition of rowing in the Faroe Islands, partly because it was the only way to get around before the building of bridges and tunnels. At the time of writing, the Faroese Rowing Federation has 1,115 members. Traditional Faroese rowing is in large wooden boats for six to ten people, plus a coxswain, over distances up to 2,000m. Racing

takes place during the summer months, culminating in the finals on the Faroese National Day, 29 July. The regatta is broadcast on TV and radio and attracts huge attention.

While only few Faroese rowers move to Denmark and manage to adapt well to the tricky, fine shells of international outdoor rowing, the strong rowing tradition in the Faroe Islands is primarily reflected in the high standards in indoor rowing as far as international competitiveness is concerned. Multiple Faroese athletes have won medals in world-level indoor rowing competitions. Key medalists include Vár Guriardóttir Hansen (gold medal in the women's 1 minute competition at the 2026 Virtual Indoor Championships), Sarita Kristina Hansen (multiple-time champion, including gold in the lightweight women's 1000m competition at the 2025 World Rowing Virtual Indoor championships), and Jens Kristian Dam (gold medal at the 2018 World Rowing Virtual Indoor Championships). In 2023, a team of six Faroese rowers won nine medals in a single championship (the World Rowing Indoor Championships).

Gymnastics is also a big sport in the Faroe Islands. The Faroese gymnastics federation has the third largest membership among the country's sports federations (approx. 3,400 at the time of writing), and Faroese gymnasts perform very well in the Island Games. In the 2025 Games, they won 15 out of 25 gold medals. The Faroe Islands also regularly participate in Nordic and Northern European championships for both senior and junior gymnasts. The Faroese athletes normally end up among the lowest-ranked participants in these championships, but occasionally they achieve top results.

At the latest Northern European championships in 2025, Rókur Vestergaard was ranked no. 6 on pommel horse, and at the Nordic championships in 2024, Aron Jacobsen won gold in the same discipline.

The Faroe Islands is not a member of World Gymnastics (the international gymnastics federation), and Faroese gymnasts cannot take part in world and European championships. However, the Faroe Islands has taken part in the World Championships in Aesthetic Team Gymnastics. In 2015, the championship was held in the Faroe Islands, where the best Faroese team finished no. 11. In the following four championships, the best Faroese team achieved rankings as no. 20-23 among 30-39 national teams.

Other individual sports

The Faroe Islands has domestic competitions not only in football, handball, volleyball, swimming, rowing, and gymnastics, but also in athletics, badminton, judo, cycling, archery, table tennis, horse riding, shooting, golf, tennis, and triathlon.

Some Faroese athletes participate in Danish championships in sports where the Faroe Islands is not part of international federations.

Faroese athletes have won medals in athletics at almost all Island Games, mostly in throwing disciplines. However, recently the Faroe Islands has become more broadly competitive in this context. In each of the two most recent Games (2023 and 2025), the Faroe Islands

won four gold medals (half the total athletics medals across all 20 Games), and medals were won in all categories (sprint, long-distance running, jumping, and throwing) by both men and women. The most impressive results in athletics was the gold medal won by Jónas Isaksen in 400 m at the 2023 European U20 Athletics Championships.

In badminton, the results at the Island Games have improved significantly over the last two Games, with Faroese players winning more gold medals (eight) than in all previous Games. In the 2025 Games, Faroese players won all five individual disciplines and won silver after Greenland in the team competition. The improvement is probably due in part to the arrival of a new national coach. Elite Faroese badminton players also take part in other international competitions: the Small States of Europe Badminton Championships (ranked no. 4 in the 2023 and 2024 championships), the European Badminton Championships, including the European Mixed Team Championships, and previously the BWF Sudirman Cup.

Despite a low number of active athletes (235 members at the time of writing), Faroese judokas have been very successful in the Island Games. The Faroe Islands has most often been the best nation, and in 2019 (the last time judo was part of the Games), the Faroese male judoka performed strongly with gold in five of the nine disciplines. The Faroe Islands takes part in the European Judo Championships of the Small States and also in Nordic championships, with a total of three gold medals, two silver and one bronze in the 2023 and 2024 championships.

Cycling as a sport is facing difficult conditions in the Faroe Islands, with previously disconnected small islands and now tunnels offering little or no access for cyclists. However, national competitions are still held, including the national championships and the annual Tour of Faroe Islands. The most successful Faroese cyclist is Torkil Veyhe, who has eight medals at the Island Games, including two golds in the time-trial competition. He rode for professional Danish teams from 2017 to 2020 and represented Denmark at the European Road Cycling championships in 2017. In the 2025 Island Games, Súsanna Skyllv Sørensen won gold in the women's criterium competition.

Conclusion and recommendations: What can or should be done?

The Faroe Islands is doing very well in international elite sport. The improvement of international competitiveness has been huge in recent years. Dedication, cultural traits, and increasing wealth makes it an attainable goal to perform even better despite the low population size, although aspirations need to be realistic regarding available monetary resources.

The analysis presented in this report demonstrates that the Faroese elite sport system is undergoing significant development, characterised by increasing institutionalisation and strategic awareness.

In recent years, following the establishment of a more formalised elite sport framework, the system has shifted from a largely ad hoc, individual-oriented model to a more coordinated and deliberate policy-driven approach.

While these developments mark a significant progress, the system remains fundamentally constrained by macro-structural factors. These include a small population, limited human capital, geographical isolation, and restricted access to the Olympic Games due to a lack of IOC recognition.

Despite these issues, the output section of this report finds that the Faroese elite sport system produces international results that exceed what would be expected of a microstate.

In football, the national team has historically occupied a lower tier in European competitions, but recent developments point to clear progress. The men's national team has improved its competitiveness in qualification tournaments, achieving more wins, stronger group placements, and maintaining a stable position above the lower tiers of the UEFA Nations League. At the club level, Faroese teams have also advanced significantly, as illustrated by improved UEFA coefficient rankings and the historic qualification of KÍ Klaksvík to the group stage of a European competition.

In handball, the performance trajectory is even more remarkable and constitutes perhaps the strongest example of elite sport success in the Faroese context. The senior national teams have recently qualified for major European and World championship finals, competing against significantly larger nations and in some cases producing highly competitive results. Even more striking are the results at youth and junior levels, where Faroese teams have achieved top-10 placements and, notably, secured a bronze medal at the World Championship. There are reasons to be optimistic about future results.

Beyond team sports, the Faroe Islands also perform strongly in multi-sport and individual contexts. In the Island Games, the Faroe Islands has consistently ranked among the top-performing participants, and in 2025, the country achieved first place on the medal table. When adjusting for population size, the Faroe Islands are the most efficient medal-

producing entity in this context. Swimming, in particular, stands out as a dominant discipline, accounting for a substantial share of total medals, while sports such as gymnastics and archery also contribute significantly.

These outputs can be traced to a unique combination of cultural, social, and organisational features that form the backbone of the Faroese elite sport model. At the core lies a strong foundation of sport participation among both children and adults, combined with a culture of volunteering. This provides a broad base from which talent can emerge.

Sport in the Faroe Islands is deeply embedded in local communities and social life, not only as a competitive activity but also as an institution of social cohesion and identity formation. This foundation is further reinforced by a collective mindset that values inclusion, effort, and mutual responsibility.

The cultural embeddedness translates into a strong sense of national identity associated with sport. International sporting success is important to the Faroese, contributing to a broader narrative of island identity and visibility on the global stage.

At the same time, the Faroese mentality of adaptability and resilience enables athletes and organisations to operate effectively under constrained conditions. Flexibility and readiness to adapt to changing environmental conditions provide an advantage that compensates for the lack of scale.

Further, a strong migration culture, with both inflows and outflows of people, benefits Faroese society by providing resources, including cultural and educational input.

However, when moving from the macro-cultural level to the meso-level of organisation and policy, the weaknesses of the Faroese elite sport system become clear. Although the governance of elite sport has improved in recent years, the system's organisational capacity is still limited.

The sport federations are highly reliant on voluntary labour, which constrains their abilities. The system is characterised by a relatively high degree of fragmentation, limited coordination across sports, and a tendency to distribute resources widely rather than target them.

Financially, the Faroese elite sport system operates within modest means. While the country itself is relatively wealthy, the proportion of resources allocated directly to elite sport is low.

Public funding is the backbone of the system, but in the long run, the current level appears insufficient to meet higher ambitions. Commercial revenues are structurally constrained by the small domestic market and are concentrated in football and, to a lesser extent, handball. As a result, inequalities exist across sports, and many federations lack sufficient development funds.

One of the main challenges identified in the report concerns talent development. Small cohort sizes limit internal competition and increase vulnerability to injury or dropout. In addition, there is a loss of talent during adolescence, particularly among women, and during the transition to adulthood, when competing demands from education, work, and social life become more pronounced.

As mentioned earlier, migration plays a central role. A large proportion of young Faroese leave the country to pursue education and, in some cases, sporting opportunities abroad. While this can enhance individual development, it also creates challenges for the domestic system. There is currently no systematic support structure for athletes who relocate abroad, and the benefits of the Faroese migration culture are therefore not fully captured.

Support for athletes is similarly uneven across different stages of their careers. The dual-career system at the upper secondary level is widely regarded as a success, providing flexibility and allowing young athletes to combine education and sport. However, beyond this stage, support structures are weak.

There is no formal provision for athletes in higher education, and the absence of direct financial support means that most athletes must balance their sporting ambitions with work or study. This limits the time they can devote to training and competition.

In terms of infrastructure, the Faroe Islands is well equipped. Access to sports facilities is good, and recent investments have significantly strengthened this area. However, there is a lack of specialised elite facilities and integrated performance environments that can support high-level training across sports.

The shortage of qualified coaches and support staff represents another issue. Coaching in the Faroe Islands is still largely based on voluntary engagement, and opportunities for professional development are limited. Foreign coaches represent an important correction in this regard.

In relation to sports science, the system is very well off, although somewhat narrowly specialised. Further, some expert services are missing, in particular physiotherapists specialised in sport. The absence of coordinated structures for applying scientific knowledge limits the potential benefits to the biggest sports, such as football and handball.

Finally, the competitive structure of Faroese sport presents additional challenges. Domestic leagues are often too small to provide meaningful competition at the highest level, and international participation is both costly and logistically demanding. That said, Faroese athletes and teams benefit from participation in regional and international competitions, including the Island Games, which serve as an important platform. In several sports, particularly handball and football, recent results demonstrate a significant improvement in international competitiveness, further underlining the system's potential.

Overall, the Faroese elite sport system can be characterised as small but ambitious, having succeeded in translating limited resources into international sporting success. Its strengths lie in its strong cultural foundation, high levels of participation, and collective identity of standing tall despite a demanding environment and small population size.

Its weaknesses primarily stem from limited resources, low levels of professionalisation, and challenges in talent development and retention. Below, we present a set of recommendations that could further advance Faroese elite sport by taking these weaknesses into account.

Recommendations

One of the interviewees concluded that there are three core areas for improvement in the Faroese elite sports system: funding, a national elite sports centre, and organisation and management. If a fourth area (better and more coaches) is added, these cover the most important areas for improvement.

Increased funding

The funding for Faroese elite sport must be increased significantly. Government funding for elite sport was initiated about a decade ago and remains a relatively new phenomenon. It has increased significantly (more than 250%) since the initiation of the new elite sport strategy. However, it is still a very small amount compared to the perceived needs of the stakeholders, and especially in relation to what is required for Faroese athletes to compete on equal terms in international championships.

In most Faroese sports, apart from the most commercially attractive ones, the top athletes are amateurs, funded largely by the national elite sport system. Faroese elite sport does not come close to having the resources necessary to compete on equal terms with larger nations. Other countries also have professional support services of a standard far higher than that in the Faroe Islands.

There may well be unexploited opportunities for sponsorship funding, but the largest share no doubt has to come from the government. Such an increase in funding is always difficult to achieve in situations with many worthy alternative uses for limited public resources.

However, the timing could hardly be better. The Faroese economy seems to be on a stable path of growth, providing the government with a healthy source of increasing revenues. In addition, the recent successes of Faroese sport, especially the national handball teams, but also across sports in the recent Island Games, are likely to increase public and political support for elite sport. The prospects for further success in the Island Games to be held next year in the Faroe Islands may further raise goodwill.

On the other hand, some may conclude that the Faroe Islands do well in international elite sport with the resources already available. An increase in support for elite sport also clashes with a deep-rooted view that grassroots sports and sports for children and youth

are more worthy of government support, and that elite sport should grow organically out of a system with a high degree of mass participation.

The broad consensus about the elite sport support must be maintained. This consensus is behind the high degree of goodwill towards sports in general and the impressive voluntary activity that maintains a system with high grassroots activity and a diversified structure of sports. To maintain consensual support for elite sport, it is important that the justification and broader societal benefits of elite sport are clearly spelt out in public discourse.

ÍSF and the federations play an important role in contributing to public debate and efforts to influence political decision-makers about the rationale of elite sport support. This involves a potential conflict, as elite sport and mass sports have become increasingly different universes. International elite sport is no longer organically linked to the activities and structure of sport in general, and it needs to be supported in specific, often costly ways.

In countries with successful elite sport systems, the discourse about elite sport has shifted in favour of public support for elite sport, based on a realistic conception of what elite sport has become. This has not happened overnight, and this will hardly be the case in the Faroe Islands either. Still, it is crucial to initiate a discursive process that may influence perceptions and move the goalposts in the future, if not now.

Establish a national elite sport centre

Whereas sufficient monetary support for individual Faroese athletes to compete on equal terms with international competitors is beyond what is realistic, at least as far as government funding is concerned, it is more realistic to establish a national elite sport centre with access to expert services such as physiotherapists specialised in sport, physical training, testing, sport psychologists, medical support, etc. This might be developed as an extension of the new national arena on the outskirts of Tórshavn, designed for major international matches and events. Such a centre can be expected to result in significant improvements for elite Faroese athletes across all sports for a relatively modest investment.

In relation to the ownership and corporate form of a prospective national elite sport centre, it is important to identify appropriate solutions. Swedish experience shows that a corporate requirement for revenue to match costs may lead to outcomes that run counter to the centre's overall purpose.

Strengthen management and administration

The advantages of a more professional administration/management of federations and clubs are likely to be significant. Currently, federations and especially clubs rely largely on voluntary work. In addition to the variable quality of administrative work, this makes federations and clubs vulnerable to shifts in personnel, and valuable experiential knowledge is often not transferred.

Improve the education of coaches

There is a need for better training courses for voluntary coaches as well as more professional coaches with expertise in elite sport. This requires a substantial investment, so it has to be gradual. However, it is crucial that this has a prominent place in the long-term planning of elite sport support. To some extent, the import of foreign coaches is a relatively cheap measure that may compensate for the more expensive training of domestic coaches specialising in elite sport. However, this has, in some cases, failed to deliver benefits in the past due to clashes between different elite sports cultures.

Keep exploring the possibilities of IOC recognition

The fact that the Faroe Islands has not been granted membership of the IOC and a few sport federations (athletics, basketball, and gymnastics) is a source of understandable frustration. The visibility and the symbolic importance of Faroese participation in the Olympic Games would be huge. The non-inclusion in the IOC prevents Faroese athletes from representing the country on the largest stage of all.

It also has a significant impact on the monetary resources available for elite sport. IOC member countries receive substantial financial support for training, developing their Olympic teams, and nurturing athletes through the Olympic Solidarity Programme. There is a baseline funding of US\$500,000 for all National Olympic Committees in the current Olympic cycle.

In addition, there is funding for scholarships, team support grants, coaching and administration education, and travel subsidies. If the Faroe Islands had been a member of the IOC, the total support in 2025-2028 can be estimated at \$700,000-\$750,000, or DKK 1.1-1.2 million per year. This would be a 50% increase in annual elite sport funding. Many of the investments in improving the elite sport system mentioned above would be possible with a budget enlarged by IOC support.

For political, symbolic, and economic reasons, it is definitely worth exploring all possible ways to convince or compel the IOC to reverse its decision to deny the Faroe Islands membership. Unfortunately, it appears unlikely that the IOC will change its position, although bowing to pressure from the US and Canadian governments to allow a trans-state Iroquois team to participate in the lacrosse competition at the forthcoming Olympics in Los Angeles may change the situation.

In terms of competitive relevance, Faroese participation in the Olympic Games would not be very important. There are universality places in athletics and swimming, and Faroese athletes may perhaps be able to qualify for the Games in a couple of other sports. However, that would not be a relevant measure of the international competitiveness of the Faroese elite sport. Participation in other competitions, more aligned with the relative strength of Faroese athletes, is far more relevant.

Considering the transportation costs involved and the need for funding of various other worthy purposes, it appears that funds are wasted on participation in competitions such as

world and European championships, where the Faroese participants are far from competitive. Exposure to international competition is important, but other contexts than the big championships are often more relevant.

This is linked to the way support for federations is decided by the elite sport section, 'Úrval', under ÍSF. The allocation criteria are sensible, but they mean that the funding is spread thinly across many sports. This is good practice for retaining support from all stakeholders. However, it may not be the best practice for achieving top-level performance.

Reduce dropout and support women's sport

Faroese children are very physically active, but the dropout from sports activities among adolescents is significant. This is not an issue which is unique to the Faroe Islands or more pronounced than in other countries. However, the small talent pool makes it more of a problem for elite sport in the Faroe Islands than elsewhere, so it needs to be addressed not only because of its impacts on the general population but also in the context of elite sport support.

Some interviewees find that an increasing emphasis on serious, elite-oriented training and less playful social interaction is at least one reason for the high dropout rates. This should be further investigated. One way to ameliorate this problem is to place less emphasis on elite progression in most adolescent sports contexts, emphasising the social, playful, and recreational aspects, while those who are dedicated and talented enough to pursue an elite sport trajectory follow another path. The drawback is that this would create a split between young people of the same age, and some stakeholders may find that this outweighs the advantages.

The dropout rates are especially high among young women, and the impacts are greater in sports where a high share of the active children and young people are female. This is the case for volleyball, which is a popular sport among Faroese girls and young women. Generally, elite sport for women seems to be somewhat underprioritised in the Faroe Islands. Recent performances by the women's national teams in handball and football may change this, but still, some extra funding to stimulate and support women pursuing an elite sport career seems appropriate.

The success of the scheme that provides flexibility regarding attendance, deadlines, and exam timing for young elite athletes in upper secondary schools should be followed up by similar arrangements at the university and in vocational training institutions.

Strengthen research and diversify educational opportunities

Sports research is in a good state in the Faroe Islands. The knowledge base in exercise physiology is very strong, and the future prospects, with investments in PhDs and emerging projects, are promising. However, the specialisation is narrow, which is understandable considering the small scale. Preferably, more resources should be invested in developing more broad-based knowledge, increasing knowledge transfer from abroad, and applying research beyond football and handball.

There is no sports degree at the University of the Faroe Islands, and the introduction of such a degree programme would be an important step towards achieving these goals.

Cooperation with foreign universities, for instance, the Department of Nutrition, Exercise and Sports at the University of Copenhagen, around joint degrees or joint modules, could be instrumental in making this a realistic prospect.

The portfolio of study programmes at the University of the Faroe Islands is, for good reasons, limited. A more diversified programme structure, including a degree in medicine, would no doubt reduce the number of Faroese youngsters moving abroad. However, this is at best a long-term prospect. In addition, there are clear developmental advantages connected with the current Faroese migrant culture.

Establish a strategic cooperation with Danish stakeholders and Team Danmark

As is clear from the sections on macro-level background and population input, Faroese society has developed a migration culture while maintaining a strong Faroese identity.

This 'societal model' helps ensure that educational capital, other resources, and various cultural inputs enter Faroese society. While some Faroese citizens settle abroad and leave the Faroe Islands permanently, the strong national identity endures, leading many outbound migrants to return later in life, benefiting Faroese society.

For a small society, the inflow and outflow of people help Faroese society survive and adapt to its position as a small nation isolated in the North Atlantic, yet capable of standing tall and achieving more than expected.

In relation to the development of talent and elite athletes, this model could serve as a fruitful template for the future development of the Faroese elite sport system. Replicating the model – where people leave to gain education and experience in international environments – would be fully in sync with the overall cultural traits of Faroese society.

Elite sports success supports the national narrative of a small nation standing strong despite challenges and reinforces the strong island identity. When national teams or athletes perform well, the achievement is experienced as a shared national accomplishment. Success reinforces the idea that "we can do this despite our smallness", strengthens national self-confidence, and validates the Faroese national identity.

In combination with the migration culture, this could support a deliberate strategy in which ÍSF cooperates with Team Danmark and other stakeholders to help the best Faroese elite athletes move to Denmark to develop their talent when the domestic environment becomes insufficiently supportive of further development.

So far, some Faroese athletes have been enrolled in Team Danmark's support programmes, while others have managed to succeed to some extent on their own. However, a fully dedicated and tailored approach for Faroese athletes would further enhance performance and

improve future results for Faroese athletes. At present, there is no clear strategy in this regard, and athletes who migrate to advance in their sport largely do so on their own or rely on personal social networks.

Based on this, we suggest that ÍSF establish an agreement with Team Danmark to employ consultants to create stronger talent development pathways in Denmark for Faroese elite athletes and to facilitate their inclusion in Team Danmark's support services. This could be followed up with agreements with satellite clubs in Denmark (and possibly other Nordic countries), as already exists in handball.

Part of this initiative should include developing social networks among (Faroese) elite athletes and helping them integrate into Danish society and training environments. This could also be done in cooperation with Danish clubs.

Of course, this proposal is solely motivated by efforts to improve the Faroese elite sport system. The wider political issue of the prospect of independence is not taken into account. However, strong cooperative links with Denmark and other Nordic countries, such as the proposed arrangements, will no doubt be beneficial to the Faroe Islands, independent of its future status.

Naturally, this step would require a significant financial investment and may not be the first recommendation to implement. However, it would be a highly relevant step if Faroese athletes are to reach higher levels of international competitiveness in the future.

Appendix

Table A1: Faroese sport federations: membership, administration and national coaches (May 2026)

Federation	Members	Administration*	National coach(es)*
Archery	185	0.36	1 x 0.1 (approx.)
Athletics	940	1 x 0.25	n/a
Badminton	610	1 x 0.2 + 1 x 0.1	1 x 0.1 (approx.)
Basketball	234	none	2 x 0.1 (approx.)
Cycling & Triathlon	approx. 150	4 x 0.12	1 x 0.25
Dart	236	none	2 x 0.1 (approx.)
Equestrian	800	2 x 0.1 (approx.)	none
Football	7,911	35 x 1.0	8 x 1.0 + 30 (part-time)
Gymnastics	3,427	1 x 0.25	2 (part-time)
Handball	approx. 4000	7 x 1.0	20 (part-time)
Judo	235	1 x 0.25	1 x 0.1 (approx.)
Parasport	836	1 x 1.0 + 1 x 0.5	n/a
Powerlifting	94	1 x 0.1 (approx.)	1 x 0.5
Rowing	1,115	1 x 0.5 + 1 x 0.3	1 x 0.1 (approx.)
Shooting	320	1 x 0.1 (approx.)	n/a
Swimming	1,288	1 x 0.17	1 (part-time)
Table tennis	80	0.1	2 x 0.1 (approx.)
Volleyball	n/a	2 x 1.0	2.0 **
Billiard *	72	none	none
Boxing *	75	none	n/a
Golf *	93	none	none
Pool *	32	none	1 x 0.1 (approx.)
Sheep dog *	76	none	nne
Sport climbing *	n/a	n/a	none
Taekwondo *	114	none	1 x 0.1 (approx.)
Tennis *	247	none	1 x 0.1 (approx.)

Source: ÌSF. NB: Federations marked with * are developing federations

* The figures show, first, the number of individuals employed in the management/administration of each sport federation, and second, the share of a full-time position. For instance, the rowing federation has two managers/administrators, one of whom is employed half-time, the other at 30% of a full-time position. ** There are several coaches. Their employment shares add up to two full-time positions

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