

Dual Career Management Handbook

Supporting Athletes' Career Transitions
(Erasmus+ Sport – Small-Scale Cooperation Partnership)



Building Bridges for
Dual Career Success



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1. Introduction

The transition from an active sporting career to professional life beyond competitive sport represents one of the most critical and vulnerable phases in an athlete's life course. Although sport enables the acquisition of key transversal competences such as discipline, perseverance, teamwork, leadership, and goal orientation-many athletes encounter structural barriers when accessing education, vocational training, and sustainable employment after retirement from competitive sport. These challenges are further exacerbated by the ongoing digital and green transitions, which increasingly require continuous upskilling, digital literacy, and adaptability in line with evolving labor market needs.

Within the framework of European Union policies, the promotion of dual careers for athletes has become a strategic priority, reflected in EU Council Conclusions, the European Sport Model, and the Erasmus+ Programme priorities. The dual career approach supports the balanced and parallel development of athletes' sporting pathways alongside formal education, non-formal learning, and professional careers, in line with the principles of lifelong learning and social inclusion. The present handbook has been developed as a practical and policy-aligned instrument to reinforce this approach and to facilitate sustainable career transitions for athletes across different sporting contexts.

Despite increased policy attention, the implementation of dual career strategies at national and local levels remains uneven. Athletes often face limited access to structured career guidance services, fragmented cooperation between sport organizations, education providers, and employers, and insufficient recognition of competences acquired through sport. This situation frequently results in unplanned career transitions, skills mismatches, and reduced employability, undermining both individual well-being and long-term social and economic participation.

The Athletes Beyond Sport (ABS) project responds directly to these challenges by contributing to Erasmus+ Sport objectives related to good governance in sport, social inclusion, and the employability of athletes. The handbook adopts a holistic, learner-centered, and competence-based approach, aligned with EU instruments such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), Europass, and the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. It aims to strengthen athletes' capacity for self-directed career management while supporting key stakeholders—including coaches, sport managers, educators, career counselors, and policy makers—in developing coordinated and sustainable support mechanisms.

Special attention is given to transferable skills development, dual career planning, and the enhancement of employability in a rapidly changing labor market. The handbook also integrates cross-cutting Erasmus+ priorities, including digital transformation, equal opportunities, and the promotion of inclusive and resilient career pathways. By doing so, it contributes to the creation of enabling environments that support athletes' long-term personal and professional development beyond competitive sport.

Ultimately, this handbook seeks to operationalize the dual career concept by bridging the gap between sport, education, and employment. Through evidence-based guidance, good practices, and actionable recommendations, Athletes Beyond Sport supports the European objective of ensuring that athletes' careers extend beyond sport in a sustainable, inclusive, and future-oriented manner.



1.1. Purpose of the Handbook

The purpose of this Dual Career Management Handbook is to serve as a core intellectual output of the Athletes Beyond Sport (ABS) project, developed under the Erasmus+ Sport – Small-Scale Cooperation Partnership (Key Action 2). The handbook is conceived as a transferable, scalable, and practice-oriented resource that supports the effective implementation of dual career policies and contributes to the employability, social inclusion, and long-term well-being of athletes.

As a key project output, the handbook translates European strategic priorities in sport, education, and employment into concrete tools and methodologies that can be applied by organizations and professionals working directly with athletes. It responds to identified needs at partner, national, and European levels, particularly the lack of structured, accessible, and sustainable support mechanisms for athletes' career transitions beyond competitive sport.



Expected Outputs

The handbook delivers the following tangible outputs:

- a structured dual career management framework, aligned with Erasmus+ and EU policy priorities, adaptable to different sports disciplines, organizational capacities, and national contexts;
- a collection of transferable good practices, methodologies, and tools for career planning, competence development, and transition management;
- practical guidelines for integrating digital tools, digital competences, and technology-based solutions into dual career guidance and mentoring;
- modular content that can be used for training, capacity-building activities, and awareness-raising actions targeting athletes and key stakeholders.

These outputs are designed to be openly accessible and reusable, ensuring broad dissemination and uptake beyond the project partnership.



Target Groups

The handbook addresses a wide range of stakeholders within the dual career ecosystem, including:

- sports organizations, federations, and clubs responsible for athlete development and safeguarding;
- coaches, sport managers, and technical staff influencing athletes' career decisions and environments;
- career counselors, psychologists, mentors, and dual career coordinators providing guidance and support;
- educational and training institutions offering flexible learning pathways and competence recognition;
- policymakers and public authorities involved in sport, education, employment, and social inclusion policies.

By targeting both practitioners and decision-makers, the handbook supports multi-level and cross-sectoral cooperation.



Expected Impact

The handbook contributes to both short-term and long-term impact at individual, organizational, and systemic levels:

- at athlete level, it enhances career awareness, self-management skills, employability, and preparedness for post-sport transitions;
- at organizational level, it strengthens the capacity of sport and education organizations to design and implement structured dual career support services;
- at system level, it supports policy coherence and contributes to the development of more inclusive and sustainable dual career ecosystems.

In line with Erasmus+ impact logic, the handbook supports behavioral change, improved practices, and stronger cooperation between sport, education, and the labor market.

Sustainability and Transferability

Sustainability is embedded in the design and structure of the handbook. The content is modular, adaptable, and applicable across different institutional and national contexts, enabling continued use beyond the project lifetime. The handbook supports integration into existing organizational strategies, training programs, and policy frameworks, ensuring long-term relevance and ownership by stakeholders.

Transferability is ensured through the use of competence-based approaches, alignment with EU frameworks, and a focus on practical implementation. As an open educational resource, the handbook facilitates replication and upscaling by other organizations, networks, and Erasmus+ projects, contributing to the long-term sustainability and European added value of the Athletes Beyond Sport initiative.

1.2. Project Context: Athletes Beyond Sport (ABS)

The Athletes Beyond Sport (ABS) project is developed in response to a persistent and structural challenge identified across European sport systems: the insufficient and uneven preparation of athletes for life, employment, and social participation after the end of their competitive sporting careers. Despite growing policy recognition of dual career pathways, many athletes across Europe continue to face significant barriers in accessing education, employment, and career guidance that are compatible with the demands of high-performance sport.

At European level, evidence from sport organizations, education providers, and labor market stakeholders indicates that athletes frequently encounter:

- ♦ limited access to flexible, athlete-friendly education and vocational training pathways that allow for the combination of sport and learning;
- ♦ insufficient opportunities to acquire work experience outside the sport sector during their active careers;
- ♦ gaps in digital competences and limited exposure to digital tools increasingly required in the modern labor market;
- ♦ an absence of structured and forward-looking career planning mechanisms during their active sporting years.

These challenges often result in unprepared and abrupt transitions out of sport, increasing the risk of unemployment, skills mismatch, financial instability, and social exclusion. The ABS project directly addresses these needs through a preventive, systematic, and competence-based approach to dual career management.

Challenges Addressed by the Project

Within the framework of Erasmus+ Sport (Key Action 2), the ABS project seeks to respond to clearly identified needs by:

- developing structured, coordinated, and transferable support mechanisms for athlete career transitions that can be implemented at organizational and national levels;
- contributing to the prevention of social exclusion, unemployment, and psychological vulnerability associated with voluntary or involuntary retirement from sport;
- supporting the practical implementation of the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, updating and operationalizing them in line with digital transformation, labor market evolution, and technological change;
- promoting lifelong learning, adaptability, employability, and self-directed career management as core competences for athletes.

By addressing these challenges, the project strengthens the link between sport, education, and employment, in line with EU priorities on social inclusion, skills development, and sustainable growth.

Transnational Partnership and Partner Countries

The ABS project is implemented through a transnational partnership involving organizations from:

- Bulgaria
- Germany
- Croatia
- Slovakia



This partnership structure reflects the core KA2 objective of fostering cross-sectoral and cross-country cooperation. It enables mutual learning, exchange of experience, and transfer of good practices across different institutional, cultural, and labor market contexts. At the same time, the project design allows for flexibility and adaptation to national specificities, ensuring relevance and applicability in diverse sport systems.

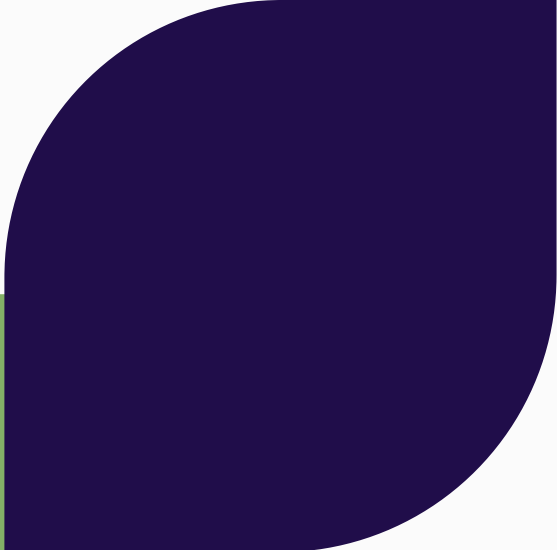
The diversity of partner countries strengthens the robustness and transferability of project results, while ensuring that outputs are not context-specific but applicable at European level.

European Dimension and Added Value

The European added value of the ABS project lies in its capacity to combine national expertise into a coherent, European-level response to dual career challenges. The handbook developed within the project:

- reflects shared European values such as equal opportunities, social inclusion, gender equality, and sustainable development;
- integrates national good practices, policy experiences, and innovative approaches from all partner countries into a single, coherent framework;
- places strong emphasis on innovation, employability, digital readiness, and future-oriented skills, aligned with Erasmus+ horizontal priorities;
- contributes to the development of long-term, sustainable policies and support mechanisms for athletes, beyond the duration of the project.

Through its transnational cooperation, transferable outputs, and policy alignment, the Athletes Beyond Sport project delivers clear European added value and supports the strategic objectives of Erasmus+ Sport by strengthening dual career ecosystems across Europe.



2. Understanding Dual Careers in Sport

The concept of dual careers has become increasingly important within European sport policy and practice, reflecting the need to support athletes not only as performers but also as individuals preparing for life beyond competitive sport. A well-managed dual career enables athletes to balance sporting excellence with education, employment, and personal development, thereby ensuring long-term well-being, employability, and sustainable professional integration.

At European level, dual careers are understood as a structured and coordinated approach that allows athletes to pursue high-performance sport in parallel with formal education, vocational training, or employment. This approach recognizes that athletic careers are time-limited and often end at a relatively young age, making early preparation for post-sport life essential. Dual career support therefore represents both a preventive and empowering strategy, reducing the risks associated with unplanned retirement from sport.



In practice, the implementation of dual careers requires the active involvement and coordination of multiple stakeholders, including sport organizations, educational institutions, employers, public authorities, and career support professionals. A successful dual career pathway depends not only on individual athlete motivation, but also on the availability of flexible learning arrangements, supportive working conditions, tailored guidance services, and institutional commitment to athlete-centered development. Without such coordinated support, athletes are often forced to prioritize sport at the expense of education or professional experience, increasing their vulnerability during career transitions.

The concept of dual careers has evolved in response to changes in both sport and society. The increasing professionalization of sport, higher training loads, and intensified competition place significant demands on athletes' time and energy. At the same time, rapid digitalization and labor market transformation require continuous skills development, digital literacy, and adaptability. Dual career approaches must therefore integrate digital tools, flexible learning formats, and innovative guidance methods that reflect contemporary realities and support athletes in managing complex life trajectories.

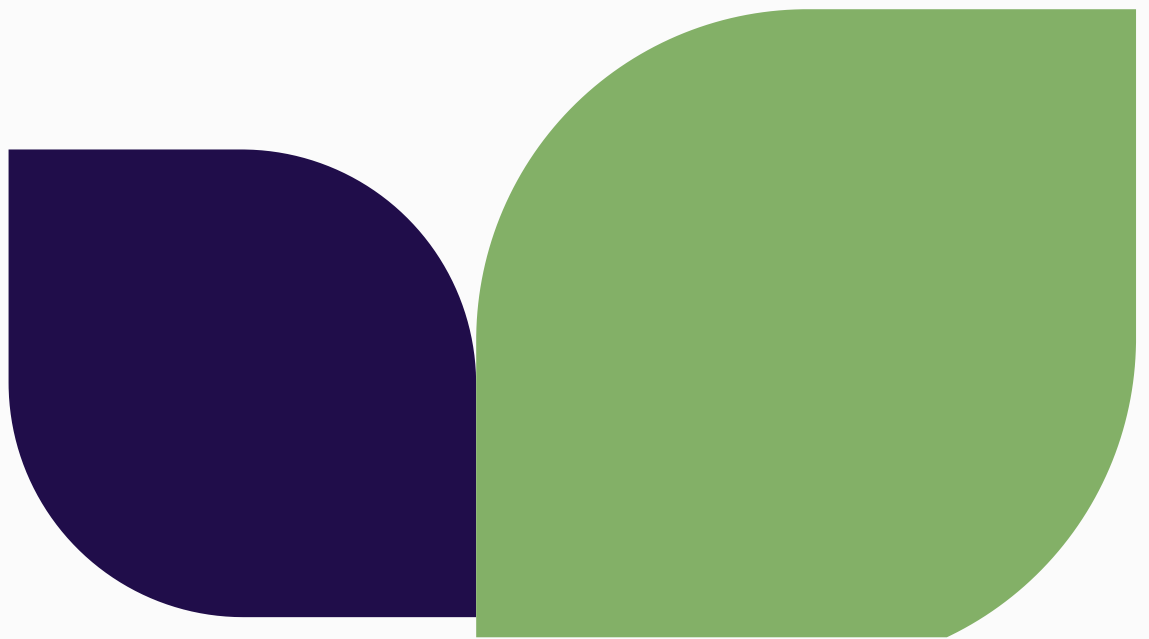
Within the framework of Erasmus+ Sport, dual careers are not seen as an individual responsibility alone, but as a shared responsibility of systems and institutions. Supporting dual careers contributes to good governance in sport, promotes social responsibility, and enhances the societal value of sport by ensuring that athletes remain active, employable, and socially included beyond their sporting achievements.



2.1. Definition of Dual Career

A dual career refers to the structured combination of high-level sport participation with education and/or employment, enabling athletes to pursue sporting performance while simultaneously developing competences beyond sport. This approach allows athletes to acquire formal qualifications, work experience, and transferable skills during their active sporting years, thereby increasing their employability and ensuring sustainable professional pathways after the end of their competitive careers.

Within European sport policy and practice, dual careers are understood as an integrated and long-term process rather than a short-term or transitional measure. They are designed to support athletes throughout their entire sporting lifecycle, from early talent development to elite performance and post-sport transition. By embedding education, training, and career planning into the athlete pathway, dual careers reduce dependency on sport performance alone and mitigate the risks associated with sudden or unplanned retirement from sport.



In the contemporary European context, the definition of dual careers extends beyond the traditional balance between sport and formal education. Dual careers increasingly encompass:

- continuous competence and skills development throughout the athlete's lifecycle, in line with lifelong learning principles;
- digital literacy and technological competences, which are essential for effective participation in a rapidly evolving and digitalized labor market;
- adaptability, resilience, and career self-management skills, enabling athletes to respond proactively to changes driven by digitalization, automation, and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence.

A key principle underlying dual careers is a holistic and athlete-centered understanding of development. Athletes are recognized as complete individuals with educational, social, cultural, and professional aspirations, rather than solely as sport performers. This perspective supports:

- long-term personal and professional development beyond sporting success;
- social integration and active participation in society during and after sporting careers;
- smoother and more sustainable transitions between different life phases, including education, employment, and post-sport professional reintegration.



From a systems perspective, dual careers require coordinated action by sport organizations, education providers, employers, and public authorities. Effective dual career pathways are characterized by flexibility, accessibility, and recognition of learning outcomes acquired in sport contexts, including non-formal and informal learning. When supported by appropriate policies and institutional frameworks, dual careers contribute to more resilient, inclusive, and future-oriented sport systems.

By integrating education, employability, and personal growth into the athlete's career pathway, dual careers create added value not only for athletes, but also for sport organizations and society as a whole. They enhance the sustainability of sport systems by ensuring that athletes remain skilled, employable, and socially engaged beyond the end of their competitive sporting careers.

2.2. Why Dual Career Management Matters

Despite their talent, motivation, and high levels of commitment, many athletes face significant structural, organizational, and personal challenges that can negatively affect their long-term development and post-sport prospects. These challenges are often systemic in nature and require coordinated, forward-looking responses rather than ad hoc or individual solutions.



During their active sporting careers, athletes frequently encounter:

- limited time and flexibility as a result of intensive training regimes, competition calendars, and travel requirements, which restrict access to education and work experience;
- early specialization and sustained performance pressure, often leading to a narrow focus on sport and reduced opportunities for educational attainment and career exploration;
- an increased risk of educational dropout caused by incompatible schedules, lack of flexible learning arrangements, or insufficient institutional support;
- identity-related challenges following retirement from sport, particularly when athletic performance has been the primary source of self-definition and social recognition;
- difficulties in identifying, articulating, and translating transferable competences acquired through sport-such as teamwork, discipline, leadership, problem-solving, and stress management-into formats and language recognized by employers;
- insufficient digital and technological competences, which are increasingly required across all sectors of the labor market and are essential for long-term employability.



In the absence of structured, coordinated, and future-oriented dual career management systems, these challenges often accumulate and intensify during the transition out of competitive sport. As a result, athletes may experience:

- high levels of career uncertainty and prolonged periods of unemployment or underemployment;
- financial instability and reduced economic security after retirement from sport;
- psychological distress, loss of self-confidence, and increased vulnerability to mental health issues;
- social marginalization, reduced civic participation, and difficulties in maintaining active engagement in society.

Effective dual career management plays a crucial role in mitigating these risks and in generating sustainable benefits at individual, organizational, and societal levels. By integrating education, skills development, and career planning into the athlete pathway from an early stage, dual career management supports proactive rather than reactive transitions.



Benefits of Effective Dual Career Management

When dual career management is embedded within sport systems and supported by appropriate policies and practices, it contributes to:

- smoother, more predictable, and more successful transitions from sport to education, vocational training, or employment;
- improved psychological well-being, self-esteem, and sense of agency, enabling athletes to maintain control over their personal and professional futures;
- enhanced long-term employability, particularly in a digital, knowledge-based, and rapidly evolving economy;
- increased social inclusion, active citizenship, and sustainable participation in the labor market beyond sport.

From a European policy perspective, effective dual career management supports key Erasmus+ and EU objectives related to social inclusion, skills development, mental well-being, and sustainable growth. It also strengthens the societal role of sport by ensuring that athletic careers contribute to broader life outcomes and long-term value creation.

By addressing both the risks and the benefits associated with career transitions, dual career management emerges as a critical investment in athletes' futures and in the sustainability of European sport systems as a whole.

3. Key Stakeholders and Their Roles

Effective dual career management requires coordinated action and shared responsibility among multiple stakeholders operating across the sport, education, employment, and public policy sectors. No single actor can address the complex challenges faced by athletes throughout their sporting lifecycle. Instead, sustainable dual career systems rely on structured cooperation, clearly defined roles, and long-term institutional commitment.

Each stakeholder group plays a distinct but interconnected role in creating supportive environments that enable athletes to successfully combine sporting excellence with education, career development, and long-term employability. From a European policy perspective, dual career management is a multi-level and cross-sectoral process that links athlete development in sport with lifelong learning, labor market integration, and social inclusion.

3.1. Sports Organizations and Clubs

Sports organizations and clubs play a central and strategic role in creating a dual career-friendly environment. As the primary institutional settings in which athletes train and compete, they are uniquely positioned to influence athletes' attitudes toward education, career planning, and personal development.

Key Responsibilities

Sports organizations and clubs are responsible for:

- promoting education-friendly and digitally supported training schedules that allow athletes to combine training, competitions, and learning activities;
- fostering an organizational culture that values long-term development beyond sporting success, including employability, mental well-being, and social integration;
- cooperating with schools, universities, employers, vocational training providers, and digital learning platforms to ensure coherent and coordinated support pathways;
- appointing dual career coordinators or dedicated contact persons to guide athletes and facilitate communication with external stakeholders.

Good Practices

Examples of effective practices implemented by sports organizations and clubs include:

- the development of individual athlete development plans integrating sporting objectives with educational and career goals;
- the establishment of mentoring systems involving former athletes who can provide guidance based on lived experience of career transitions;
- the organization of career awareness activities and workshops, including sessions on digital literacy, emerging professions, and labor market trends;
- the use of digital tools to monitor progress, coordinate schedules, and facilitate communication between athletes, coaches, and support staff.

By embedding dual career principles into their organizational culture, sports clubs contribute significantly to athletes' long-term success, employability, and social inclusion.



3.2. Career Counselors and Support Professionals

Career counselors, psychologists, mentors, and other support professionals play a key facilitative role in helping athletes navigate complex career transitions in a labor market increasingly shaped by digitalization and technological innovation.

Core Competences:

Effective dual career support professionals should possess:

- specialized career guidance methodologies tailored to the specific needs of athletes, including time constraints and performance pressures;
- in-depth understanding of labor market trends, emerging digital professions, and future skills requirements;
- capacity to provide psychological support during transition phases, addressing identity change, stress, and uncertainty;
- expertise in competence mapping, validation, and translation of sport-acquired skills into labor market-relevant language.

Tools and Methods

Commonly used tools and approaches include:

- structured career interviews, coaching, and mentoring sessions;
- development of competence portfolios documenting formal, non-formal, and informal learning outcomes;
- transition readiness assessments evaluating preparedness for post-sport careers;
- use of digital and AI-supported self-assessment, profiling, and career exploration tools.

Through personalized, evidence-based, and athlete-centered support, career professionals empower athletes to make informed, realistic, and future-oriented career decisions.



3.3. Educational Institutions

Educational institutions are essential partners in dual career systems, as they provide the learning opportunities that enable athletes to acquire qualifications and competences alongside their sporting commitments.

Support Mechanisms:

To effectively support athletes, educational institutions can offer:

- flexible learning pathways and modular education programs aligned with training and competition schedules;
- distance, blended, and fully online learning solutions supported by digital learning platforms;
- micro-credentials and digital certifications recognizing short learning units and specific skill sets;
- adapted examination and assessment arrangements, including flexible deadlines and alternative exam dates.
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By adopting inclusive, flexible, and digitally enabled learning models, educational institutions help reduce dropout risks and ensure equal access to education and lifelong learning for athletes.

3.4. Policymakers and Public Authorities

Policymakers and public authorities play a foundational role in shaping the structural, legal, and financial framework for dual career development at local, regional, national, and European levels.

Policy Actions

Key policy measures include:

- development and implementation of national dual career strategies aligned with EU priorities, Erasmus+ objectives, and digital transformation agendas;
- legal recognition of athlete status, ensuring access to tailored educational, employment, and social support measures;
- allocation of public funding for career transition programs, counseling services, and digital upskilling initiatives;
- support for innovation, data-driven solutions, and AI-based guidance systems that enhance the quality, accessibility, and efficiency of career services.

By creating enabling policy environments and promoting cross-sectoral cooperation, public authorities contribute to sustainable, inclusive, and future-proof dual career systems across Europe.

4. Athlete Career Transitions

Athlete career transitions represent critical turning points that can significantly influence long-term well-being, employability, and social integration. Such transitions occur at multiple stages of the sporting lifecycle and may be either planned or unplanned, voluntary or involuntary. Effective dual career systems recognize career transitions not as isolated events, but as dynamic and multidimensional processes that unfold over time and require continuous, personalized, and often technology-supported interventions.

From an athlete-centered perspective, transitions may include progression from junior to senior level, movement between amateur and professional sport, changes in performance level due to injury or deselection, and the final transition out of competitive sport. Each of these phases involves changes in identity, routines, social networks, and expectations, which can create both opportunities and vulnerabilities. Without adequate preparation and support, transitions can negatively affect athletes' mental health, educational trajectories, and labor market integration.

A key challenge in managing athlete career transitions lies in their unpredictability. While some transitions-such as planned retirement-can be anticipated and prepared for in advance, others-such as career-ending injuries, loss of funding, or non-selection-occur abruptly. Dual career systems must therefore combine long-term planning with flexible and responsive support mechanisms capable of addressing sudden changes in athletes' circumstances.

Effective transition management is grounded in early intervention and continuous career planning throughout the athlete's active sporting years. By embedding career awareness, skills development, and employability planning into the athlete pathway, dual career systems reduce dependency on sporting performance as the sole source of future security. This preventive approach aligns with European priorities on lifelong learning, mental well-being, and social inclusion.

Digital tools and technology-based solutions play an increasingly important role in supporting athlete career transitions. Online self-assessment tools, competence mapping platforms, digital portfolios, and AI-supported guidance systems enable athletes to reflect on their skills, explore career options, and access personalized support regardless of geographical or time constraints. Such tools enhance accessibility, continuity of support, and data-informed decision-making.

In addition to individual-level support, successful transition management requires coordinated action among sport organizations, education providers, employers, and support professionals. Clear referral pathways, information-sharing mechanisms, and defined roles contribute to smoother transitions and reduce fragmentation of services. Particular attention should be given to vulnerable groups, including athletes with lower educational attainment, those in less commercialized sports, and athletes facing involuntary career termination.

By treating career transitions as structured processes rather than end-of-career interventions, dual career systems contribute to more sustainable athlete pathways. Well-managed transitions enhance employability, psychological resilience, and social participation, while reinforcing the broader societal value of sport. Within the Erasmus+ Sport framework, effective athlete career transition support represents a key investment in human capital and in the long-term sustainability of European sport systems.

4.1. Types of Athlete Career Transitions

Athlete career transitions occur at different moments throughout the sporting lifecycle and vary in intensity, duration, and impact. Understanding the different types of transitions is essential for designing timely and appropriate dual career support measures.

Common types of athlete career transitions include:

- developmental transitions, such as progression from junior to senior level, or from amateur to elite sport, which require adaptation to increased performance demands and expectations;
- performance-related transitions, including changes in competitive level, team transfers, or deselection, which may affect motivation, income, and identity;
- injury-related transitions, particularly long-term or career-threatening injuries that disrupt sporting continuity and accelerate career reconsideration;
- organizational and contextual transitions, such as changes in coaching staff, funding structures, or institutional support;

- exit transitions, referring to the transition out of competitive sport into education, employment, or alternative career pathways.

Each type of transition presents specific challenges and opportunities. Effective dual career systems acknowledge this diversity and tailor support measures accordingly, rather than applying one-size-fits-all solutions.

4.2. Planned vs. Unplanned Transitions

Athlete career transitions can be broadly categorized as planned or unplanned, with significant implications for the type and intensity of support required.

Planned transitions typically include voluntary retirement from sport, gradual reduction of competitive involvement, or a strategic shift toward education or employment. These transitions allow for anticipatory planning, skills development, and informed decision-making. Dual career systems play a key role in supporting planned transitions by providing early career guidance, competence assessment, and access to education and work experience.

Unplanned transitions, by contrast, are often sudden and involuntary, resulting from injury, deselection, financial constraints, or external life events. Such transitions are associated with higher levels of psychological stress, identity disruption, and career uncertainty. In these cases, rapid-response mechanisms, psychological support, and flexible learning or employment options are particularly important.

Effective dual career management seeks to minimize the negative impact of unplanned transitions by promoting continuous career preparedness, resilience, and adaptability throughout the athlete's active career.

4.3. Risk Factors and Protective Factors

The outcome of athlete career transitions is influenced by a combination of risk factors and protective factors operating at individual, organizational, and systemic levels.

Risk factors may include:

- strong athletic identity with limited exploration of alternative roles;
- low educational attainment or early educational dropout;
- lack of digital and transversal competences;
- insufficient social and professional networks outside sport;
- absence of coordinated institutional support.

Protective factors, on the other hand, enhance transition success and include:

- early and continuous dual career planning;
- access to flexible education and lifelong learning opportunities;
- recognition and validation of competences acquired through sport;
- psychological resilience, self-efficacy, and adaptability;
- availability of mentoring, counseling, and peer support.

Dual career systems aim to reduce exposure to risk factors while strengthening protective factors through structured interventions, guidance services, and supportive environments.

4.4. Role of Digital Tools in Transition Management

Digital tools and technology-based solutions play an increasingly important role in supporting athlete career transitions, particularly in contexts characterized by time constraints, geographical mobility, and diverse support needs.

Key digital applications include:

- online self-assessment and career exploration tools supporting informed decision-making;
- competence mapping platforms and digital portfolios documenting formal, non-formal, and informal learning outcomes;
- e-learning and micro-credential solutions enabling flexible and modular skills development;
- AI-supported guidance systems that personalize recommendations and identify suitable education or employment pathways.

Digital tools enhance accessibility, continuity, and scalability of dual career support services. When combined with human guidance and ethical safeguards, they enable more proactive, data-informed, and individualized transition management.

Within Erasmus+ Sport cooperation frameworks, the integration of digital solutions contributes to innovation, sustainability, and transferability of dual career systems, ensuring that athletes receive continuous support throughout all phases of their career transitions.



4.5. Risks During Transition

Without adequate preparation and structured support, career transitions can expose athletes to a range of interrelated risks. Common risks include:

- unemployment or underemployment, particularly in the period immediately following retirement from sport;
- mismatch between athletes' existing skills and labor market demands, often due to lack of formal recognition of sport-acquired competences;
- digital skill gaps, which limit access to modern employment opportunities and career pathways;
- mental health difficulties, including stress, anxiety, depression, and loss of self-esteem;
- financial instability, especially for athletes without savings or alternative income sources;
- loss of social identity and status, as sport often represents a central component of personal and social identity.

These risks can have long-lasting consequences if not addressed in a timely and coordinated manner, underscoring the importance of preventive and proactive dual career strategies.



4.6. Protective Factors

Research and practice demonstrate that several protective factors can significantly reduce transition-related risks and improve outcomes for athletes. Key protective factors include:

- early and continuous career planning, beginning during the active sporting career and evolving over time;
- access to education, recognized qualifications, and digital learning opportunities, enabling skill diversification and lifelong learning;
- availability of mentoring, career counseling, and psychological support services, tailored to athletes' specific needs;
- personalized, AI-supported career guidance, offering data-driven insights, skills matching, and labor market information;
- strong family, peer, and social support networks, providing emotional stability and encouragement during transition phases.

By strengthening these protective factors, dual career systems can transform career transitions from periods of vulnerability into opportunities for growth, reinvention, and long-term success.

5. Digital Tools and Practical Methodologies for Dual Career Management

Digital tools can play an important supporting role in dual career management by improving accessibility, flexibility, and continuity of support for athletes. For small-scale sport organizations and local stakeholders, the focus is not on complex or costly technological solutions, but on practical, easy-to-use, and low-resource tools that can be integrated into existing structures.

Within the context of an Erasmus+ Sport Small-Scale Cooperation Partnership, digital solutions are primarily used to complement human support, simplify coordination, and ensure that athletes can access guidance and learning opportunities despite intensive training schedules and mobility demands.

5.1. Added Value of Digital Tools in Small-Scale Dual Career Systems

In small-scale sport environments, digital tools contribute by:
enabling flexible access to guidance and learning activities;
supporting continuity of career planning alongside training and competition;

facilitating communication between athletes and support persons;
reducing administrative burden for clubs and coordinators;
improving documentation and follow-up of dual career activities.
Digital tools therefore enhance feasibility and sustainability without requiring major investments or advanced technical infrastructure.

5.2. Practical and Low-Threshold Digital Tools

5.2.1. Simple Competence Mapping and Career Reflection Tools

Athletes can use basic digital templates or online forms to:

- reflect on skills acquired through sport (e.g. teamwork, discipline, time management);
- link sport experiences to potential career paths;
- document learning activities and achievements.

These tools can be implemented using common platforms (shared documents, online questionnaires) and do not require specialized software.

5.2.2. Online Career Guidance and Self-Assessment Resources

Freely available online tools can support:

- basic self-assessment of interests and strengths;
- exploration of education and training options;
- initial career orientation beyond sport.

Such tools help athletes develop awareness and motivation for career planning, particularly at early stages.

5.2.3. Digital Learning and Micro-Learning Opportunities

Digital learning formats suitable for SSCP contexts include:

- short online courses or webinars;
- recorded learning sessions that athletes can access asynchronously;
- introductory modules on digital skills, employability, or career planning.

These solutions support lifelong learning while remaining compatible with training schedules.

5.2.4. Communication and Coordination Tools

Simple digital communication tools (email, messaging apps, shared calendars) can be used to:

- coordinate training, learning, and guidance activities;
- schedule counseling or mentoring sessions;
- maintain regular contact between athletes and support persons.

Such tools strengthen coordination without increasing complexity.

5.3. Practical Methodologies Supported by Digital Tools

5.3.1. Blended Guidance Approach

In SSCP contexts, effective support is achieved through:

- periodic face-to-face or online guidance sessions;
- simple digital tools for reflection and follow-up;
- continuous informal communication between meetings.

This approach ensures personal support while maximizing flexibility.

5.3.2. Individual Dual Career Planning

Digital templates can support the development of:

- individual dual career plans combining sport, education, and career objectives;
- short- and medium-term goals;
- identified support needs and follow-up actions.

Such plans help athletes and organizations maintain a structured yet realistic overview of career development.

5.3.3. Peer Learning and Mentoring

Digital tools can support:

- online mentoring sessions with former athletes or professionals;
- small peer groups sharing experiences and advice;
- informal learning through discussion and reflection.
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Peer-based approaches are particularly suitable for small-scale partnerships.

5.4. Implementation Principles

To ensure feasibility and sustainability, digital tools should:

- be low-cost or free and easy to use;
- rely on existing platforms and familiar technologies;
- be integrated into daily practice rather than added as separate systems;
- support inclusion and equal access for all athletes.

Capacity-building for staff should focus on practical use rather than technical expertise.

5.5. Sustainability and Transferability

The digital tools and methodologies presented in this handbook are designed to:

- remain usable after the end of the project;
- be easily replicated by other clubs and organizations;
- adapt to different sports and local contexts;
- complement, rather than replace, human support systems.

By prioritizing simplicity, practicality, and accessibility can be achieved meaningful and lasting impact in dual career management without requiring extensive resources.



6. Dual Career Support Models and Good Practices

Dual career support models implemented across Europe demonstrate that effective athlete career management relies on structured cooperation, institutional commitment, and practical, context-sensitive support mechanisms. Good practices consistently show that combining sport, education, employment, and appropriately selected digital tools leads to more sustainable athlete career pathways and smoother transitions beyond competitive sport.

Rather than applying a single standardized model, successful dual career systems adapt common principles-such as flexibility, early planning, and coordinated support-to national, regional, and organizational contexts. This chapter presents European-level and national good practices that illustrate how dual career support can be implemented effectively within small-scale and resource-conscious environments.

6.1. European-Level Good Practices

At European level, several transferable models and approaches have emerged, illustrating how dual career support can be implemented across diverse sport systems and institutional frameworks.

Case Study 1: National Athlete Career Centers (Multi-service Model)

In several European countries, national athlete career centers operate as centralized hubs providing integrated and multidisciplinary services for athletes throughout their sporting lifecycle. These centers typically offer:

- career counseling and structured transition planning;
- education and training guidance;
- psychological and well-being support;
- coordination with employers, public employment services, and educational institutions.

Impact:

This model reduces fragmentation of services, ensures continuity of support, and provides athletes with a single access point for career-related assistance. It is particularly effective for elite athletes facing complex transitions.

Case Study 2: University–Sport Dual Career Partnerships

A widely applied European model involves formal cooperation between universities and sport organizations, enabling athletes to combine elite sport with higher education.

Key features include:

- flexible study schedules and adapted assessment methods;
- academic mentoring and tutoring for student-athletes;
- use of digital and blended learning environments to accommodate training and competition demands.

Impact:

This model improves educational attainment, reduces dropout rates, and strengthens long-term employability, while remaining compatible with high-performance sport.

Case Study 3: Digital and AI-Supported Career Guidance Platforms

Across Europe, digital career guidance platforms are increasingly used to support athletes' career development, particularly in contexts with limited access to in-person services.

Typical components include:

- online self-assessment and skills mapping tools;
- digital competence portfolios;
- AI-supported career recommendations and labor market insights.

Impact:

Digital solutions increase accessibility, scalability, and personalization of career support, especially for athletes with limited time availability. In context of ABS project, simplified and low-threshold digital tools are particularly relevant.

6.2. National Case Studies from ABS Partner Countries

Bulgaria – Emerging and Project-Based Models

In Bulgaria, dual career support is largely driven by project-based initiatives and cooperation between non-governmental organizations, sport federations, and educational institutions.

Case Study 1: NGO-Led Dual Career Support Programs

NGOs implement initiatives offering:

- career counseling and mentoring for active and former athletes;
- workshops on transferable skills and employability;
- introductory digital skills training.

Case Study 2: Federation–University Cooperation Initiatives

Selected sport federations collaborate with universities to provide:

- flexible enrollment and attendance arrangements;
- recognition of athletes' competition schedules;
- distance and blended learning options.

Case Study 3: Pilot Digital Career Guidance Activities

Pilot initiatives introduce:

- online career orientation sessions;
- CV and digital profile development workshops;
- basic e-portfolio tools for athletes.

Germany – Structured and Institutionalized Models

Germany demonstrates one of the most advanced and institutionalized dual career systems in Europe.

Case Study 1: Olympic and Elite Sport Support Centers

Athletes receive coordinated support including:

- integrated career counseling and education planning;
- psychological and social support;
- cooperation with labor market institutions.

Case Study 2: Dual Career University Programs

Universities partner with sport institutions to offer:

- flexible curricula for elite athletes;
- academic tutors and mentors;
- digital learning platforms supporting mobility.

Case Study 3: Digital Labor Market Integration Tools

Athletes access:

- online skills assessment tools;
- digital career planning platforms;
- transition readiness evaluations linked to public employment services.



Croatia – Federation- and Club-Based Approaches

Croatia shows growing institutional commitment to dual career support, particularly at federation and club level.

Case Study 1: Dual Career Coordinators within Sport Federations

Coordinators:

- support athletes in education and career planning;
- act as intermediaries between clubs, schools, and employers.

Case Study 2: University Partnerships for Student-Athletes

Higher education institutions offer:

- flexible study pathways;
- adapted assessment methods;
- distance learning solutions.

Case Study 3: Employability and Career Awareness Workshops

Athletes participate in workshops on:

- transferable skills identification;
- career planning beyond sport;
- preparation for labor market entry.



Slovakia – University-Centered and Digital Models

Slovakia has developed several university-centered dual career approaches with increasing use of digital tools.

Case Study 1: University-Based Dual Career Units

Universities provide:

- tailored academic support for elite and junior athletes;
- tutoring and counseling services;
- coordination with sport clubs.

Case Study 2: Targeted Support for Junior and Elite Athletes

Programs combine:

- education flexibility;
- career orientation activities;
- early transition planning.

Case Study 3: Digital Learning and Online Education Tools

Athletes benefit from:

- e-learning platforms;
- online examinations and assessments;
- digital micro-credentials.

6.3. Added Value, Transferability, and Lessons Learned

The European and national case studies demonstrate that:

- no single dual career model fits all contexts, but core principles are widely transferable;
- early intervention and institutional cooperation are critical for successful transitions;
- digitalization enhances accessibility and continuity of support, particularly in small-scale systems;
- project-based innovation can inform long-term institutional and policy development.

For SSCP projects, these good practices show that meaningful impact can be achieved through pragmatic cooperation, low-threshold tools, and gradual capacity building, rather than complex or resource-intensive systems.

The exchange and adaptation of these practices within the Athletes Beyond Sport project supports mutual learning, strengthens stakeholder capacity, and contributes to the development of more inclusive, resilient, and future-oriented dual career support systems across Europe.



7. Practical Tools for Dual Career Management

Effective dual career management requires structured, adaptable, and athlete-centered tools that support both sporting performance and long-term employability. Within the Athletes Beyond Sport (ABS) project, practical instruments are designed to empower athletes, coaches, counselors, and sport organizations to plan, manage, and monitor career pathways throughout the entire sporting lifecycle, with particular focus on transitions beyond competitive sport.

The tools presented in this section are intentionally low-threshold, flexible, and scalable, making them suitable for small-scale sport environments and diverse national contexts. They support individualized planning, informed decision-making, and evidence-based evaluation, while integrating digital solutions and aligning with European priorities on employability, lifelong learning, mental well-being, and social inclusion.

7.1. Individual Dual Career Plan (IDCP)

The Individual Dual Career Plan (IDCP) is a core instrument for personalized and structured dual career management. It enables athletes to align sporting commitments with education, skills development, and professional preparation in a coherent and realistic manner, taking into account personal circumstances, performance level, and long-term aspirations.

The IDCP is designed as a living document, developed collaboratively and reviewed on a regular basis with the support of coaches, career counselors, mentors, or dual career coordinators. Rather than serving as a rigid plan, it provides a flexible framework that evolves alongside the athlete's sporting and personal development.

The main purpose of the IDCP is to:

- ensure balance between sporting performance and non-sport development;
- encourage early and continuous career planning;
- reduce uncertainty, stress, and risk during key transition phases;
- strengthen athlete autonomy and ownership of career decisions.

Key components of the IDCP include:

- Sport objectives, defining short-, medium-, and long-term performance goals, competition timelines, training intensity, and recovery needs;
- Education and employment goals, outlining formal education pathways, vocational training, certifications, internships, volunteering, or part-time employment opportunities compatible with sport;

- Digital skills development needs, identifying current competence levels and priority areas for upskilling, such as digital literacy, online collaboration, information management, and basic data skills;
- Risk assessment, addressing potential challenges including injury, burnout, deselection, early retirement, or employability gaps, and identifying preventive or mitigating actions;
- Transition timeline, mapping key milestones before, during, and after retirement from sport, including preparation activities, decision points, and post-transition follow-up support.

By promoting proactive planning and shared responsibility among stakeholders, the IDCP contributes to more resilient career pathways and smoother transitions beyond competitive sport.



7.2. Career Transition Toolkit

The Career Transition Toolkit complements the Individual Dual Career Plan by offering a structured set of practical resources that support athletes in preparing for, managing, and reflecting on career transitions. The toolkit is designed to encourage early awareness and gradual adjustment, rather than reactive responses to the end of a sporting career.

The toolkit can be used flexibly and selectively, depending on the athlete's age, career stage, and specific needs.

Core elements of the toolkit include:

- Self-assessment questionnaires, enabling athletes to reflect on interests, values, motivations, strengths, and transferable competences developed through sport;
- Career diagnostics and guidance tools, including simplified digital or AI-supported elements, offering insights into career options, skills gaps, and possible education or employment pathways (adapted to SSCP contexts);
- Transition checklists, guiding athletes step by step through key phases such as education enrollment, job search preparation, CV development, financial planning, and well-being considerations;
- Mentoring guidelines, supporting structured mentor–athlete relationships focused on role modeling, experience sharing, emotional support, and professional networking.

Together, these tools support a proactive, holistic, and athlete-centered approach to transition management, combining reflection, planning, and action in line with European dual career principles.

7.3. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are essential for ensuring the quality, relevance, and impact of dual career support measures. Within the ABS project framework, systematic monitoring supports continuous improvement of tools and services, while also providing evidence for institutional learning and future policy development.

Given the small-scale nature of the project, monitoring approaches are designed to be simple, feasible, and meaningful, avoiding unnecessary administrative burden.

Key indicators for monitoring and evaluation include:

- Educational attainment, measuring participation in and completion of formal, non-formal, or informal learning activities;
- Employment outcomes after sport, assessing successful entry into employment, further education, or self-employment following retirement from competitive sport;
- Digital skills acquisition, tracking progress in basic and intermediate digital competences relevant to employability and lifelong learning;
- Athlete satisfaction, capturing perceptions of support quality, accessibility, relevance, and personal empowerment;
- Prevention of dropout and exclusion, evaluating the effectiveness of support measures in reducing social, economic, or professional marginalization.

Data collected through these indicators support evidence-based decision-making, transparency, and sustainability. They help organizations adapt their support models to athletes' real needs and demonstrate the added value of dual career initiatives within different national and sporting contexts.

8. Sustainability, Transferability and Future Perspectives

Ensuring sustainability and transferability is a core objective of the Athletes Beyond Sport (ABS) project and a key requirement of Erasmus+ Sport – Small-Scale Cooperation Partnerships. The tools, models, and methodologies developed within the project are designed to generate impact beyond the project duration and to remain usable, adaptable, and relevant for a wide range of stakeholders and sporting contexts.

Rather than relying on complex structures or high-resource solutions, the ABS approach emphasizes simplicity, flexibility, and institutional ownership, enabling long-term use and replication by sport organizations, educational institutions, and support professionals across Europe.

8.1. Sustainability of Project Results

Sustainability is embedded in the design and implementation of all ABS outputs. The handbook, tools, and good practices are intended to be integrated into existing organizational routines and support systems rather than functioning as stand-alone project products.

Key sustainability factors include:

- low-threshold and cost-effective tools, which can be maintained and used without additional funding or advanced technical infrastructure;
- modular structure, allowing organizations to apply selected tools (e.g. IDCP, transition checklists, mentoring guidelines) according to their capacity and needs;
- capacity building of staff and stakeholders, ensuring that knowledge and competences remain within organizations after the project ends;
- alignment with existing policies and frameworks, enabling integration into national sport, education, and employment strategies.

By focusing on practical usability and organizational embedding, the ABS project supports long-term continuity of dual career support activities.



8.2. Transferability and Replication Potential

The ABS handbook and tools are designed to be transferable across different sports, performance levels, and national contexts. Transferability is supported by the use of common European principles, competence-based approaches, and adaptable methodologies.

Transferability is ensured through:

- generic and flexible tool design, allowing adaptation to different age groups, sports disciplines, and institutional settings;
- use of widely available digital solutions, avoiding dependency on proprietary platforms;
- clear documentation and guidance, enabling other organizations to replicate tools with minimal support;
- focus on principles rather than rigid models, allowing contextual adaptation while preserving core objectives.

The exchange of practices among partner countries demonstrates that, while national systems differ, shared challenges and solutions make mutual learning both feasible and valuable.

8.3. European Added Value and Policy Alignment

The ABS project contributes to European added value by addressing a common challenge across Member States: supporting athletes' transitions beyond competitive sport in a sustainable and inclusive way.

The handbook and tools align with European priorities related to:

- dual careers of athletes;
- employability and lifelong learning;
- social inclusion and mental well-being;
- digital skills development.

By translating European policy objectives into practical, small-scale solutions, the ABS project bridges the gap between strategy and implementation and supports the uptake of dual career principles at grassroots and organizational levels.

8.4. Future Perspectives and Development Opportunities

The ABS project provides a foundation for further development and scaling of dual career support initiatives. Future perspectives include:

- gradual expansion of digital components, where appropriate and feasible;
- stronger involvement of employers and local labor market actors;
- development of follow-up projects or networks focused on specific target groups (e.g. youth athletes, athletes in less commercialized sports);
- integration of ABS tools into national training programs for coaches and sport managers.

Small-scale projects such as ABS demonstrate that meaningful impact can be achieved through targeted, realistic, and cooperative approaches. By prioritizing athlete-centered design, cross-sectoral cooperation, and practical implementation, the ABS project contributes to the long-term sustainability of dual career support systems and to the broader social value of sport in Europe.

9. Recommendations and Policy Guidelines

The following recommendations are addressed to key stakeholder groups involved in dual career management. They are designed to support the practical uptake of the Athletes Beyond Sport (ABS) handbook and to facilitate the integration of dual career principles into everyday practice, organizational strategies, and public policies. In line with the Erasmus+ Sport Small-Scale Cooperation Partnership approach, the recommendations emphasize feasibility, coordination, and sustainable implementation.

9.1. Recommendations for Sports Organizations and Clubs

Sports organizations and clubs are encouraged to strengthen their role as facilitators of holistic athlete development by embedding dual career support into their organizational culture and daily practice.

Key recommendations include:

- institutionalize dual career policies and practices by formally recognizing education, employability, and career planning as integral components of athlete development;

- integrate dual career planning into talent development pathways, using simple tools such as Individual Dual Career Plans and regular review meetings;
- train coaches and technical staff in career awareness and basic digital literacy, enabling them to support balanced decision-making and identify early risk signals;
- allocate dedicated resources, even on a small scale, for career counseling, mentoring, and coordination activities;
- use accessible digital tools for communication, planning, and follow-up, ensuring continuity of support despite training demands and mobility.

By taking these steps, sports organizations can contribute to improved athlete well-being, reduced dropout, and more sustainable post-sport outcomes.

9.2. Recommendations for Career Counselors and Support Professionals

Career counselors, psychologists, mentors, and dual career coordinators play a critical role in translating dual career principles into individualized support for athletes.

Key recommendations include:

- develop specialized expertise in athlete-specific career needs, including performance pressure, time constraints, and identity transition;
- apply competence-based approaches, recognizing and translating sport-acquired skills into education and labor market language;
- integrate digital tools into guidance practice, such as online self-assessment, competence mapping, and simple e-portfolio solutions;

- use AI-supported or data-informed tools cautiously and ethically, ensuring transparency, human oversight, and athlete consent;
- collaborate closely with coaches, education providers, and employers to ensure coherent and realistic career pathways.

Such practices enhance the relevance, effectiveness, and accessibility of career support services for athletes.

9.3. Recommendations for Policymakers and Public Authorities

Policymakers and public authorities are encouraged to create enabling environments that support sustainable and inclusive dual career systems across sport, education, and employment sectors.

Key recommendations include:

- integrate dual career measures into national and regional sport strategies, ensuring alignment with education, employment, and social inclusion policies;
- support the development and uptake of digital and AI-supported career transition systems, with particular attention to accessibility and ethical safeguards;
- promote cross-sector cooperation between sport organizations, educational institutions, public employment services, and social partners;
- provide targeted funding and incentives for counseling services, pilot initiatives, and digital upskilling programs for athletes;
- encourage data collection and evidence-based evaluation, supporting continuous improvement and policy learning.

Through coordinated policy action, public authorities can strengthen the long-term sustainability and societal impact of dual career support systems.

Taken together, these recommendations provide a practical roadmap for stakeholders seeking to enhance dual career support in a realistic and sustainable manner. By fostering cooperation, investing in people and digital solutions, and embedding dual career principles into policy and practice, European sport systems can better support athletes in building meaningful, resilient, and future-oriented careers beyond competitive sport.



10. Conclusion

Supporting athletes beyond competitive sport should be understood not as an optional complement to sporting success, but as a strategic and long-term investment in human capital, social cohesion, and sustainable development. Athletes acquire a unique combination of transversal skills through sport-discipline, perseverance, goal orientation, teamwork, stress management, and leadership-which represent a strong foundation for successful integration into education systems, the labor market, and civic life. However, without structured support, this potential often remains underutilized.

The Athletes Beyond Sport (ABS) Dual Career Management Handbook has been developed as a concrete response to this challenge. It provides a practical, future-oriented, and scalable framework for building and strengthening dual career systems across Europe, addressing both current needs and emerging trends linked to digital transformation, labor market volatility, and lifelong learning requirements. The handbook translates European policy principles on dual careers into actionable tools, methodologies, and support models that can be adapted to different national, institutional, and sporting contexts.

By combining individualized career planning, digital and AI-supported tools, mentoring structures, and systematic monitoring mechanisms, the handbook supports athletes throughout the entire career cycle—from early awareness during active competition to structured transition and sustainable professional integration after sport. At the same time, it empowers key stakeholders—sports organizations, coaches, counselors, educational institutions, employers, and policymakers—with shared concepts, common language, and evidence-based approaches.

A central strength of the ABS handbook lies in its emphasis on prevention rather than reaction. By encouraging early planning, continuous skills development, and proactive transition management, it helps reduce the risks of unemployment, social exclusion, financial instability, and psychological distress associated with career termination. Moreover, its strong focus on digital skills and adaptability ensures that athletes are better prepared for rapidly changing labor markets and new forms of work.

At European level, the handbook contributes to the implementation and modernization of the EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes, reinforcing key values such as equal opportunities, social inclusion, resilience, and sustainable growth. The transnational cooperation between partners from Bulgaria, Germany, Croatia, and Slovakia further enriches the handbook with diverse perspectives and good practices, while demonstrating the added value of European collaboration.



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In conclusion, the ABS Dual Career Management Handbook serves not only as a guidance document, but as a call for coordinated and long-term action. By investing in structured dual career systems, Europe invests in people, potential, and continuity—ensuring that sporting excellence is matched by lasting personal, professional, and societal success beyond sport.

ANNEXES

Practical Templates for Dual Career Management (ABS)

Annex 1. Individual Dual Career Plan (IDCP) - Template

Purpose:

To support structured, realistic, and flexible planning of the athlete's sporting, educational, and professional pathway.

A. Athlete Profile

- Name:
- Sport / Discipline:
- Age:
- Competitive level:
- Club / Federation:
- Main contact person (coach / counselor):

B. Sporting Objectives

- Short-term sport goals (next 6–12 months):
- Medium-term sport goals (1–3 years):
- Key competitions and training phases:
- Time demands / constraints:

C. Education and Employment Goals

- Current education or employment status:
- Planned education pathway (formal / non-formal / vocational):
- Certifications, internships, volunteering, part-time work (if applicable):
- Compatibility with sport commitments:

D. Digital Skills and Transversal Competences

- Current digital skill level (basic / intermediate / advanced):
- Priority areas for development (e.g. digital literacy, online collaboration):
- Transversal skills developed through sport (e.g. teamwork, leadership):

E. Risk Assessment

- Identified risks (injury, burnout, early retirement, dropout):
- Early warning signs:
- Preventive or mitigating measures:
- Support persons involved:

F. Transition Timeline

- Expected transition phase (short / medium / long term):
- Preparation actions:
- Key decision points:
- Post-transition support needs:

G. Review and Follow-up

- Review frequency:
- Responsible persons:
- Notes and updates:

Annex 2. Career Transition Readiness Checklist

Purpose:

To help athletes and support staff assess preparedness for career transition beyond sport.

A. Awareness and Motivation

- ☐ I am aware that my sporting career is time-limited
- ☐ I have thought about life after competitive sport
- ☐ I feel motivated to prepare for my future career

B. Education and Skills

- ☐ I am currently engaged in education or training
- ☐ I know which qualifications I need for my future plans
- ☐ I have basic digital skills relevant for work or study

C. Employability and Experience

- ☐ I have work or volunteering experience outside sport
- ☐ I know how to prepare a CV and motivation letter
- ☐ I understand what employers value beyond sport performance

D. Psychological Readiness

- ☐ I can imagine myself in a role outside sport
- ☐ I feel confident about adapting to change
- ☐ I know where to seek support if needed

E. Support and Resources

- ☐ I have access to career guidance or mentoring
- ☐ I know which institutions can support my transition
- ☐ I have discussed my plans with someone I trust

Overall readiness level:

- ☐ Low ☐ Medium ☐ High

Annex 3. Athlete Self-Assessment Questionnaire

(Skills, Interests, Values)

Purpose:

To support reflection and informed career decision-making.

A. Interests

- Activities I enjoy outside sport:
- Subjects or fields I am curious about:
- Types of work environments I prefer:

B. Strengths

- My main strengths developed through sport:
- Skills I am most confident using:
- Feedback I often receive from others:

C. Values

- What matters most to me in work and life:
- Importance of stability / flexibility / creativity / social impact:
- Preferred work–life balance:

D. Development Needs

- Skills I want or need to improve:
- Knowledge gaps I have identified:
- Support I would find useful:



Annex 4. Transferable Skills Mapping Template

Purpose:

To translate sport-acquired competences into employability language.

Annex 5. Mentoring Session Guide

Purpose:

To support structured and meaningful mentor–athlete interactions.

Session Structure

1. Check-in (current situation, well-being)
2. Discussion topic (career goals, challenges, decisions)
3. Reflection (lessons learned, alternative options)
4. Action points (next steps)
5. Follow-up plan

Key Principles

- Confidentiality
- Active listening
- Realistic guidance
- Athlete-centered approach

Annex 6. Monitoring and Evaluation - Simple Indicator Sheet

Purpose:

To support SSCP-friendly evaluation without administrative burden.

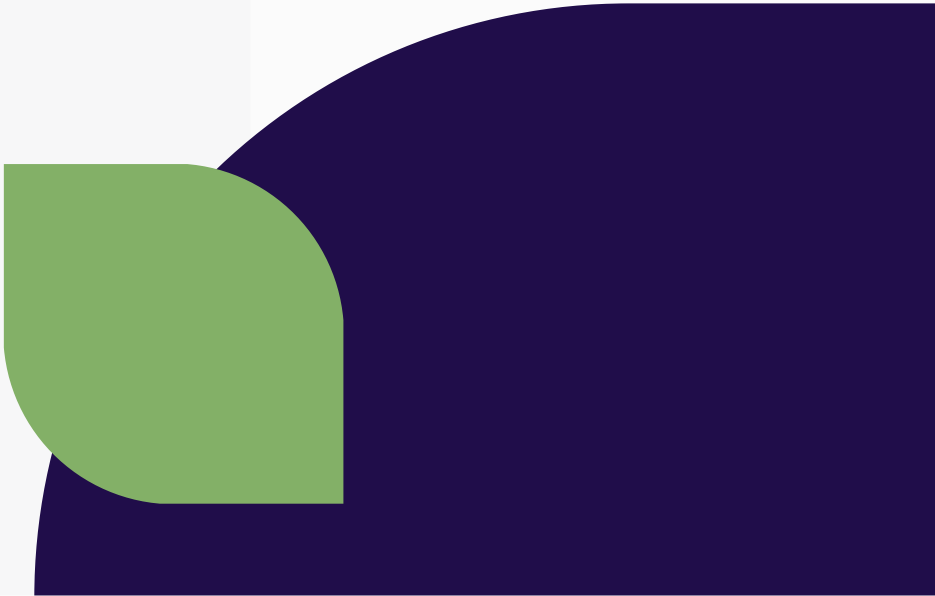
Key Indicators

- Participation in education/training (Yes / No)
- Employment or further study after sport (Yes / No)
- Improvement in digital skills (Low / Medium / High)
- Athlete satisfaction with support (1–5 scale)
- Continued engagement after transition (Yes / No)

Data Collection Method

- ☐ Short surveys
- ☐ Interviews
- ☐ Follow-up meetings

Annex 7. How to Use These Tools

- Tools can be used individually or combined
 - No specialized software required
 - Adapt wording to local context and language
 - Focus on practical use, not formal reporting
 - Review and update tools regularly
- 

Annex 8. Real Project-Based Case Studies on Dual Career Support (Illustrative, evidence-based examples)

Case Study 1 - Olympic Career Support Programmes

Country: Germany

Type: Institutional dual career support initiative

Project Overview

In Germany, elite athletes are supported through structured career support programmes coordinated by Olympic and elite sport support centers. These programmes operate in cooperation with sport federations, universities, public employment services, and social partners.

Context and Rationale

The initiative responds to the need for long-term employability and social integration of elite athletes whose sporting careers are time-limited and highly demanding.

Support Model and Tools Used

- Individual career counseling and transition planning
- Coordination with universities offering flexible study pathways
- Use of digital competence profiling and career planning tools supported by public employment services

Role of Digital / AI-Supported Tools

Digital tools are used to support skills assessment, career orientation, and access to labor market information. AI-supported elements assist in profiling and suggestion-making, while final decisions remain guided by human counselors.

Outcomes and Impact

- Improved continuity of education among elite athletes
- Increased preparedness for post-sport careers
- Reduced transition-related uncertainty

Sustainability and Transferability

The model is institutionalized and publicly supported, making it highly sustainable and transferable to other countries with elite sport structures.



Case Study 2 - University Dual Career Offices for Student-Athletes

Country: Slovakia

Type: University-centered dual career initiative

Project Overview

Several universities in Slovakia operate dedicated dual career support units for student-athletes, providing academic flexibility and targeted guidance throughout the sporting lifecycle.

Context and Rationale

The initiative addresses the challenge of balancing elite or high-level sport with higher education, particularly during competition periods and training camps.

Support Model and Tools Used

- Academic tutoring and counseling services
- Flexible assessment and online examination arrangements
- E-learning platforms and digital learning management systems

Role of Digital Tools

Digital learning platforms enable continuity of education during periods of intensive training or competition abroad. Online self-assessment tools support early career reflection.

Outcomes and Impact

- ♦ Reduced dropout rates among student-athletes
- ♦ Improved educational attainment
- ♦ Stronger integration of education and sport pathways

Sustainability and Transferability

The model is embedded in university structures and can be replicated by higher education institutions across Europe with limited additional resources.

Case Study 3 - Federation-Based Dual Career Coordination

Country: Croatia

Type: Sport federation-led initiative

Project Overview

Several Croatian sport federations have introduced dual career coordinators to support athletes in balancing sport, education, and early career planning.

Context and Rationale

The initiative responds to the need for structured support at federation and club level, particularly for athletes competing nationally and internationally.

Support Model and Tools Used

- Individual guidance sessions coordinated by federation staff
- Cooperation with universities and vocational education providers
- Career awareness workshops and employability seminars

Role of Digital Tools

Digital communication tools and simple online resources are used to coordinate schedules, share information, and support career reflection.

Outcomes and Impact

- Increased awareness of career options beyond sport
- Earlier engagement with education and training opportunities
- Stronger cooperation between sport and education stakeholders

Sustainability and Transferability

The model is scalable and suitable for small and medium-sized federations, making it highly transferable to similar sport systems.



Case Study 4 – NGO-Led Erasmus+ Sport Projects on Athlete Employability

Country: Bulgaria

Type: Project-based initiative (Erasmus+ Sport)

Project Overview

In Bulgaria, non-governmental organizations implement Erasmus+ Sport and youth projects focusing on career counseling, mentoring, and employability skills for active and former athletes.

Context and Rationale

The initiative addresses gaps in structured national dual career systems through targeted, project-based innovation.

Support Model and Tools Used

- Career counseling and mentoring sessions
- Workshops on transferable skills and employability
- Introductory digital skills training and online career orientation

Role of Digital Tools

Online tools are used for self-assessment, CV preparation, and digital profile development, supporting accessibility and flexibility.

Outcomes and Impact

- Improved career awareness among athletes
- Increased engagement in education and training
- Strengthened capacity of NGOs and sport organizations

Sustainability and Transferability

Although project-based, the methodologies and tools are easily replicable and can inform longer-term policy development.



Case Study 5 - University-Sport Cooperation for Flexible Learning

Country: European (multiple Member States)

Type: Cross-sector cooperation model

Project Overview

Across Europe, formal cooperation agreements between universities and sport organizations support athletes through flexible learning arrangements and academic mentoring.

Context and Rationale

The initiative addresses structural incompatibilities between elite sport demands and traditional education systems.

Support Model and Tools Used

- Blended and distance learning formats
- Academic mentors for student-athletes
- Digital learning environments supporting mobility

Role of Digital Tools

Digital platforms enable continuity of learning and assessment regardless of athletes' location or schedule.

Outcomes and Impact

- Higher education participation among athletes
- Improved long-term employability
- Reduced educational dropout

Sustainability and Transferability

This model is widely applicable and compatible with small-scale and institutional contexts alike.

These real project-based case studies demonstrate that:

- effective dual career support already exists across Europe in different forms;
 - digital tools enhance accessibility and continuity without replacing human support;
 - scalable and low-threshold models are suitable for SSCP contexts;
 - existing initiatives can be adapted and replicated by other organizations.
- 

Annex 9. Good Practices / Case Studies - Optional Template

Purpose:

To support the documentation, sharing, and replication of good practices and initiatives related to dual career support for athletes.

This template is optional and intended for organizations wishing to document additional examples in a clear and comparable format.

1. Project / Initiative Title

- Name of the project or initiative:

2. Country and Implementing Organization

- Country:
- Type of organization (e.g. NGO, sport federation, university, public authority):

3. Context and Target Group

- Main challenge addressed:
- Target group (e.g. elite athletes, student-athletes, retired athletes):

4. Description of the Support Model

- Type of support provided (counseling, education, mentoring, digital tools):
- Key stakeholders involved:

5. Use of Digital Tools (if applicable)

- Type of digital or AI-supported tools used:
- Role of technology (supportive, not decision-making):

6. Outcomes and Impact

- Main results achieved:
- Observed benefits for athletes:

7. Sustainability

- Is the initiative ongoing?
- How is it maintained or funded?

8. Transferability

- Which elements can be replicated?
- Conditions for adaptation in other contexts.

These annexes are designed to support practical implementation, institutional learning, and long-term sustainability of dual career support systems within small-scale sport environments. They reflect the core values of the Athletes Beyond Sport (ABS) project: athlete-centered support, simplicity, cooperation, and future-oriented development.



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