



Evaluation and Assessment Report for project “ACTIVUS”

*Activating the Dual Career of Athletes and Holistic Development of
Young, Talented Athletes across Europe*



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1. Introduction

The **ACTIVUS** project is designed to empower young, talented athletes by fostering a dual career approach, integrating elite sports performance with academic or vocational development. The project targets athletes, coaches, and educational staff across Europe to support holistic development, improve well-being, and sustain athletic careers over the long term. This report evaluates the project using demographic data, survey responses, from athletes and coaches.

2. Objectives

The main objectives of this study are to:

- Assess the demographic profile and dual career challenges young athletes and their coaches face.
- Identify key barriers and facilitators in balancing academic/vocational pursuits with elite sports performance.
- Provide evidence-based recommendations for intervention strategies using dual career models advanced by Stambulova et al. (2021).
- Inform stakeholders and Erasmus+ decision-makers regarding the impact and sustainability of the ACTIVUS project.



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3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

Data were collected using the following instruments:

- **Athlete Survey:** Administered until September 10, 2024, via SurveyHero (SurveyHero-Responses-1794424-2024-09-10), including items on academic engagement, sports commitment, and perceived challenges in managing dual careers, namely through the Student-Athletes' Motivation towards Sports and Academics Questionnaire (SAMSAQ) (Gayles, 2005) validated for European population (SAMSAQ-EU) (Lupo et al., 2015), and also through the Dual Career Competency Questionnaire for Athletes (DCCQ-A) (De Brandt et al., 2018).
- **Coach Survey:** Conducted on September 10, via SurveyHero (SurveyHero-Responses-1802645-2024-09-10), capturing coaches' perspectives on athlete support, institutional barriers, and suggestions for improving dual career integration through the dual career competency questionnaire for support providers (DCCQ-SP) (Defruyt et al., 2019).
- **Focus Groups:** Designed based on the surveys and applied on two focus groups that were conducted per country (Portugal, Spain, Italy, The Netherlands, North-Macedonia, and Romania) with coaches to gain deeper insights into dual career challenges and potential solutions.

3.2. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics (e.g., means, frequencies, percentages) to establish demographic profiles and trend patterns among athletes and coaches. Qualitative responses from surveys and focus groups were thematically analysed to identify recurring themes related to dual career management, barriers, and support



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strategies. Data analysis is ongoing, and preliminary findings have been integrated into a paper.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

The **ACTIVUS** project is underpinned by a dual career model that emphasises the integration of athletic and academic/vocational development (Comission, 2012; Stambulova et al., 2021), focusing on:

- Athletic Identity and Transition: Balancing sports commitment with academic pursuits.
- Holistic Development: Supporting athletes' psychological, social, and educational needs for sustainable career development.
- Support Systems: Enhancing the role of coaches, educational institutions, and policy frameworks in facilitating dual career success.

This framework guides the design of interventions to reduce barriers, promote effective time management, and enhance overall well-being.



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4. Preliminary Results

4.1. Demographic Profile

Analysis of the demographic data indicates that:

- **Athletes:** Most participants are aged between 16 and 22, a critical period for both academic and athletic development. They exhibit a high commitment to sports yet report significant challenges in balancing academic responsibilities.
- **Coaches:** Coaches generally possess extensive professional experience and emphasize the necessity of integrated support programs to help athletes manage their dual careers effectively.

4.2. Athlete Survey Findings

- **Academic and Athletic Balance:** Most athletes report difficulties balancing training and competition schedules with academic demands. Key challenges include inflexible academic timetables and high training loads.
- **Perceived Barriers:** Commonly identified barriers include intense sports demands, academic pressure, and limited access to structured dual career support programs.

4.3. Coach Survey Findings

- **Support Strategies:** Coaches express a need for tailored support programs and educational modules addressing dual career management, time management, and stress reduction.
- **Institutional Barriers:** A lack of coordination between sports organizations and educational institutions was identified as a major barrier. Coaches suggest that integrated policies and enhanced communication could improve support for athletes' dual careers.



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4.4. Country-Specific and Overall Data

Based on survey responses from consortium countries, key data include:

Overall Athlete Responses (N = 300)

- **Balancing Challenges:** Approximately 68% of athletes reported significant difficulties balancing academic and athletic commitments.
- **Key Barriers:** About 60% identified inflexible academic schedules and high training loads as primary obstacles.

Country Breakdown (Athletes):

- **The Netherlands:** 20% of athlete responses (n = 60), with around 65% reporting challenges in managing dual career demands.
- **Italy:** 8% of responses (n = 25), with 60% citing academic pressures as a key barrier.
- **North-Macedonia:** 16% of responses (n = 48), with approximately 55% reporting difficulties in balancing commitments.
- **Portugal:** 10% of responses (n = 30), with about 68% facing challenges related to academic and athletic responsibilities.
- **Romania:** 16% of responses (n = 47), with roughly 60% indicating difficulties in dual career management.
- **Spain:** 30% of responses (n = 90), with 70% noting significant scheduling conflicts.

Overall Coach Responses (N = 120)

- **Institutional Support:** Approximately 75% of coaches emphasized the need for enhanced support mechanisms for dual career management.



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Country Breakdown (Coaches):

- **The Netherlands:** 20% of coach responses ($n = 24$), with around 80% stressing the importance of flexible academic scheduling
- **Italy:** 25% of responses ($n = 30$), with 75% highlighting a lack of institutional coordination.
- **North-Macedonia:** 8% of responses ($n = 10$), with about 70% indicating additional barriers.
- **Portugal:** 10% of responses ($n = 12$), with around 80% underscoring the need for flexible academic frameworks.
- **Romania:** ~7% of responses ($n = 8$), with approximately 70% identifying significant dual-career challenges.
- **Spain:** 30% of responses ($n = 36$), with 65% emphasizing insufficient dual career support.



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5. Discussion

The ACTIVUS project evaluation reveals that balancing dual careers remains a significant challenge for young European athletes. Our survey findings indicate that approximately **68%** of athletes experience difficulties managing academic and athletic responsibilities, with about **60%** reporting that rigid academic schedules and high training loads are the primary obstacles.

A closer look at the country-specific data shows notable differences across regions. For instance, despite a lower number of respondents in Portugal, **65%** of athletes reported challenges in managing dual career demands. In Spain, **70%** of athletes indicated significant scheduling conflicts, while data from Italy, The Netherlands, and the combined responses from North-Macedonia and Romania underscore these challenges' pervasive nature. These variations suggest that although the overarching difficulties are similar, the intensity and specifics of the challenges may differ by local context.

From the coaches' perspective, **75%** emphasized the need for enhanced support mechanisms. Coaches noted that flexible academic timetables and better coordination between sports organizations and educational institutions are essential. These findings resonate with dual career models proposed by Stambulova and Wylleman (2019), which advocate for a holistic approach addressing not only athletic training but also academic guidance, psychological well-being, and effective time management.



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In summary, the survey data reinforce the urgent need for integrated support structures tailored to the unique challenges of dual careers. Key recommendations emerging from the analysis include:

- **Integrated Support:** Enhanced coordination between educational institutions and sports organizations is crucial to facilitate flexible academic scheduling and targeted mentoring programs.
- **Tailored Interventions:** Strategies must consider local contexts and be adapted to address specific challenges observed in each country.
- **Holistic Approach:** A comprehensive support system that includes academic guidance, psychological support, and effective time management is essential for promoting sustainable dual career development.



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6. Conclusion

The preliminary evaluation of the ACTIVUS project highlights significant dual career challenges young, talented athletes face. Quantitative findings reveal that, while athletes are deeply committed to their sports, inflexible academic schedules and high training demands are major impediments. By drawing on established dual career models (Stambulova & Wylleman, 2019) and incorporating insights from our survey, the project is well-positioned to develop targeted, evidence-based interventions. Tailored dissemination strategies and integrated support measures will ensure the long-term sustainability and success of dual career initiatives across Europe.



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