



Policy Recommendation Report on Dual Career

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Introduction

SERVE is a project in the field of dual careers that focuses on the integration of volleyball players into the labour market, showing the importance of thinking in advance about the life that follows the sport. SERVE project believes that could influence the Policy-Makers through the Policy Recommendations on Dual Careers. It will be done by providing policy-makers with a collection of best practices and a set of reports and recommendations on increasing the knowledge of DC and planning how to integrate volleyball athletes into the labour market. Actually, through the networks established in the project, it is possible to involve policymakers in the design of the strategies for promoting the issues after the project ends. By influencing policy and practice, the SERVE consortium may be able to embed results in institutional strategies, training systems, educational practices, clubs, and sports organization works.

Athletes frequently encounter obstacles when balancing their athletic pursuits with education or employment. Striving for excellence in sports demands rigorous training and participation in competitions, both domestically and internationally. This can pose challenges when trying to harmonize these commitments with the constraints and demands of the educational system and job market. It requires not only a high degree of motivation, commitment, resilience, and responsibility from the athletes themselves but also necessitates specialized arrangements to prevent scenarios where talented athletes are compelled to choose between their athletic ambitions and their educational or professional aspirations.

These arrangements, commonly known as "dual career" initiatives, should serve several purposes: supporting athletes in their sporting endeavors, facilitating their pursuit of education or employment, fostering the transition to a new career after their athletic career ends, and safeguarding the athletes' positions. Dual career programs should be designed to provide athletes with the necessary resources and support to excel in both their athletic and academic or professional pursuits, ensuring that they can pursue their goals without sacrificing one for the other.

Dual career programs play a crucial role in enabling athletes to excel in their sports at an international level, consequently reducing the dropout rate of talented athletes. Additionally, these programs address the demand for skilled professionals in the job market. It is imperative for elite athletes to have a well-

rounded and sustainable athletic career, followed by effective support post-retirement to ensure that talent isn't lost and investments aren't squandered. Facilitating athletes' reintegration into education and the workforce is essential. Moreover, a balanced dual career trajectory not only maximizes athletes' contributions to society by leveraging the skills they've honed but also prepares them to serve as positive role models.



The term “dual career” for elite sports persons by definition includes engagement in the areas of sport and work (professional education or employment), education, and healthcare ("EU Guidelines on Dual Careers of Athletes", DC4AC, 2016; ISBN: 978-92-79-31162-8; doi: 10.2766 / 52 683), EU document published in 2013). Having in mind the target group of the project (15 to 19-year-old talented athletes), a dual career is understood as the opportunity to reconcile/combine active sport practice with quality education.

The concept of "dual careers" in sports encompasses the necessity for athletes to manage both their elite sporting pursuits and their educational or professional endeavors throughout their lifetime. This includes integrating into society, securing financial stability, forging personal identities, and cultivating relationships. Typically spanning 15 to 20 years, dual careers consist of various developmental stages, ranging from initial engagement in a sport to talent cultivation, mastery of performance, and transition into a new career post-sporting retirement. The duration of each stage varies based on factors like the nature of the sport, gender, and individual abilities. Specialization often occurs during adolescence, particularly in sports with early specialization such as gymnastics, figure skating, and swimming. However, not all athletes progress through every stage, as many may drop out during the developmental or mastery stages.

Project summary

SERVE is a joint idea of leading European stakeholders in sports and education inspired by the common will to strengthen the recovery and support crisis resilience of the sports and education sectors during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. SERVE is Smart Education Resources in the Volleyball Environment. The project is ingrained into the general needs of the project participating countries (PPC) volleyball environments, calling for new policies, practices, and actions for sustainable and perspective volleyball development. The main objective of the project SERVE is to promote education in and through sports and encourage dual career (DC) of athletes by setting up a Trans - European network of three national volleyball sports federations and two leading sports science Universities from 4 European countries to develop, elaborate, test and evaluate a sustainable European educational and training model in Volleyball. The aim of the project SERVE is to increase skills in grassroots sports, school education, and recreational family sports and provide a new dual career path for sports talents.

SERVE's new model includes elaborating a brand new European sports federation-based comprehensive eLearning program and a mobile application on How to play Volleyball as a hybrid digital tool based on VOLLEY science, data, and media. SERVE program targets grassroots sports club athletes, including 300 children and adolescents 9-19 years of age, 30 volleyball coaches, PE teachers, and students, as well as recreational volleyball players. SERVE includes volleyball sports people from different ages and from diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds living in remote areas or facing socio-economic difficulties whereas social inclusion and gender equality principles are embedded in all project activities. SERVE is designed fully in line with the European green policies as foresees the green approach to be applied during the whole project lifecycle.

SERVE is a project with two general objectives - creating skills in sports and education and supporting dual career athletes. The two strands are interlinked, with the common idea of promoting education in and through sport. All planned activities are accessible to all people regardless of their gender and socio-economic background, including those from remote and poorer communities. All phases of the project include green practices. All activities related to the platform and data collection (e.g. user profiles, emails, etc.) will be fully GDPR compliant. GDPR is the regulation that governs data protection for citizens

living in the European Union, which came to unify each of the data protection laws of each EU country.

Challenges faced by athletes in balancing their sporting careers with education or other professions

Main challenges of athletes in Dual Careers at the European level

The idea of Dual Careers for athletes has been embraced as a priority within the European Union's strategy for 2021-2024. This concept involves supporting athletes in pursuing both their athletic endeavors and educational or professional aspirations simultaneously. By integrating Dual Careers into its strategy, the EU aims to address various objectives, such as reducing early school dropout rates, increasing the number of graduates in higher education, and improving overall employability.

The European Union recognizes that promoting Dual Careers aligns with broader goals outlined in its strategy, including social inclusion, education, and economic growth. By supporting athletes in balancing their sporting commitments with education or career development, the EU seeks to enhance the efficiency of its sports policies while retaining talented athletes within the sports system.

Through initiatives like the SERVE project, the EU intends to stimulate and inspire the dual careers movement across Europe. This involves providing support and resources to young, talented volleyball athletes, as well as their coaches/trainers and sports organizations. By fostering awareness, providing training opportunities, and disseminating best practices, the EU aims to create a sustainable impact and ensure that athletes can pursue their athletic dreams alongside their educational and professional goals.

A dual [career is the successful combination of education, training, or work with sport to enable an individual to reach his / her full potential in life. It is estimated that currently, across the EU, about 120.000 young individuals are in a 'situation' of dual career.](#)

It is important to invest in a dual career because only 30% of high-potential athletes develop into an elite athlete. Only half of the elite athletes are satisfied with dual career support in the combination of elite sports and a study.

Approximately 1 in 6 athletes still stop practicing elite sports because of study commitment. 1 in 5 participants in the Youth Olympic Games opts for a lower level of education because of their elite sports practice. The average dual career of elite athletes starts when they are 12 years old. Research shows that over 50% of elite athletes experience difficulties during their transition to a new career.

Only 1 out of 10 sports coaches feel solely responsible for the sports performance of sports talents. Sports talents often experience difficulty in the transition from secondary education to higher education.

The growing trend of athletes frequently training and/or competing internationally adds complexity to combining these activities with academic pursuits.

Tailoring individualized educational pathways or engaging in distance learning becomes challenging, while extended absences pose issues in the job market. Athletes often find themselves at a disadvantage compared to other workers, facing difficulties in adapting to changing employment needs throughout their careers. Concerns about the quality of education and support services for young elite athletes in Europe have been highlighted by governments, organizations, and athletes themselves.

Key challenges include:

- Ensuring the holistic development of young athletes, particularly children specializing in sports at an early age, youth involved in vocational education and training, and athletes with disabilities.
- Striking a balance between sports training and education, and later in life, balancing sports training with employment.
- Managing the transition out of athletic careers, especially for those who leave the system earlier than anticipated.

The importance of supporting athletes in their dual careers for their long-term well-being and personal development

Athletes engaged in dual career programs, in contrast to those experiencing a lack of coordination between sport and education, enjoy several well-documented advantages as highlighted in sports research:

- Improved health - these programs promote a balanced lifestyle, leading to reduced stress levels and increased overall well-being.
- Developmental advantages - athletes in dual career programs have better opportunities to develop life skills applicable to sports, education,

and other aspects of life. This includes the development of personal identity and enhanced self-regulation abilities.

- Social benefits - participation in dual career programs fosters positive socialization effects, including expanded social networks, stronger social support systems, and improved peer relationships.
- Transition support - these programs assist athletes in planning for athletic retirement and adapting to life after sports, resulting in better career and retirement planning, shorter adaptation periods, and prevention of identity crises.
- Enhanced employment prospects - athletes engaged in dual career programs generally have higher employability and access to well-paid jobs in the future.

Furthermore, the broader society and the sporting community stand to gain from the positive image of educated athletes. Such individuals serve as compelling role models for young people, making sports more appealing, and emphasizing the value of excellence in society.

Needs for Policy Recommendation Guidelines

From an innovative point of view, SERVE combines several components which have never been combined before and reflects a lifetime cycle for personal development through sport. SERVE model is a mix between sport /physical, tactical, mental training/, knowledge, education, digital, social skills and competencies, inclusiveness, validation of skills and experiment in real-time and set up of guidelines forming a draft of a policy recommendations report for further implementation and dissemination. Basically, the lifetime cycle includes: Volunteering coaches - >Athletes 9 – 14 -> Athletes 15 – 19-> model implemented in sports clubs - > dual career path in outdoor education management - >testing and validation of skills - > model implemented in secondary schools-> policy recommendation report. The main European added value of the SERVE project is the greater effectiveness and complementarities of the new GRASSROOTS VOLLEYBALL MODEL. SERVE project will reflect broader European relevance and significance to present a model and mechanism of training and education in volleyball that can be applied not only nationally and regionally but also EU widely.

The need for sports federations to raise awareness for DC athletes and provide a federation-based DC path for them through preparing them for outdoor education sports managers in EU secondary schools and enforcing them with STEM Volleyball knowledge in designing school sports programs underlines the project-specific objective (specific objective - SO2).

The rationale behind this objective (2) is to support volleyball talents at the age of 15 – 19 with a sports federation-based online DC module including subjects like outdoor education management, basic skills to integrate outdoor education activities in education programs, and life skills through Volleyball. The Bulgarian, Serbian, and Croatian volleyball federations do not offer any dual career program for sports talents who find education and sports difficult to combine especially at the adolescent age. SERVE allows them to be educated in necessary subjects to facilitate their school sports outdoor education management future careers. SERVE dual career module complements the core project eLearning program which will empower the sports talents with additional skills to facilitate their career in Volleyball after the end of their active sports, to gain life skills that could be implemented in their entire life thus raising awareness of sport federations, clubs and members about DC of athletes. Sports organisations should be aware of the fact that athletes are confronted with conflicting requirements and need at different levels of development (athletic, academic, vocational, psychological, psycho-social, social, and financial) throughout each of the stages of a dual career. Some flexibility from sports organisations in working with other stakeholders will enhance further cooperation.

Moreover, recently, the IOC included in its evaluation of international federations an assessment of athletes' career programs, which should integrate the dual career approach. This represents an important step since, as it is identified as a must-do, international federations will have to contribute to the whole process. As such a project focused on DC of Athletes in Volleyball, SERVE lays the basis of sound dual career programs in the future at sports federations and clubs basis increasing their internationalization and better evaluation from IOC and other European stakeholders in sports.

The SPORT EMPLOYMENT DATA FOR 2020 (Q1 and Q2) presented in a workshop follow-up to the ESSA-Sport project stated that across the first two quarters of 2020, total sports employment in EU-28 fell by 3.3% according to official statistics. When looking for specific tendencies in the data, the most striking and significant is the breakdown of figures by gender. By the end of Q2 of 2020, there were 9.6% fewer female sports workers than at the end of 2019, compared to 1.3% fewer male sports workers. The female sports workforce appears to have been much harder hit by Covid-19 than the male sports workforce in the first half of 2020. Another significant finding is the drop in employment of young people in sports (age 15-24). From Q1 to Q2 in 2020,

there was a 17% fall in the employment of young people in this age group, while employment for the age groups 25-49 and 50+ was much more stable or even grew in the same period. SERVE project aims to contribute to the increase of employment of young people in sports at the age groups 15 – 24 and to promote gender equality in the sports sector labour market.

In 2022, 1.51 million people were employed in the sports sector in the EU, representing 0.8% of total employment. This represents an increase of 10.9% in the number of people employed in the sports sector compared with 2021 (1.36 million). The sports sector includes economic activities and occupations such as sports teams and clubs, trainers, independent athletes, fitness centers and activities for the promotion and management of sports events.

Among the EU members, Sweden had the highest share of people working in the field of sport (1.4% of total employment), followed by Finland, Denmark (both 1.2%), Spain and France (both 1.1%). In contrast, the lowest shares of people employed in the sports sector were registered in Romania (0.2% of total employment), Bulgaria (0.3%), Poland and Slovakia (both 0.4%), and Croatia and Lithuania (both 0.5%). In project participating countries of Austria and Serbia, the percentage is average of the above-mentioned figures.

[More than a third working in sports are aged 15-29. Employment in sports differs from total employment in terms of age groups.](#) According to the European statistics, more than one-third (35%) of people employed in sports were aged 15-29, more than twice the share observed in overall employment (17%) in 2022. Almost half (46%) of those employed in the sports sector had a medium level of education (International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 3-4), followed by those with higher (tertiary) education (ISCED levels 5-8) at almost 40%, which is 2.4 pp higher in sport than in total employment. People who achieved lower education (ISCED levels 0-2), accounted for 14% of employment in sport.

[For employment in the sports sector in 2022, more men were represented than women \(55% and 45%, respectively\), leading to a slightly larger gender employment gap compared with overall employment \(54% and 46%, respectively\).](#)

SERVE Unit 1 Module 2 includes STEM Volleyball programs for adolescents. The idea is to raise the athletes' awareness for cross-curricular connections

between Volleyball, science, engineering, arts and math. Through STEM programs SERVE increases the athletes' interest in education which is of primary importance for their future after sports.

Dual Career projects funded by Erasmus Plus

The establishment of the ERASMUS+ program in 2014 and the relevant increase in its overall budget (€11,235,479.19) allocated between 2014 and 2020 to 66 collaborative partnerships surely represents a fundamental driver to nurture transnational initiatives and cooperation between a variety of stakeholders in the field of European dual career, to stimulate the academic dialogue, and to foster the transfer of the theoretical knowledge into concrete actions (Vidal-Vilaplana et al., 2022). Seventy-three financed projects in total were identified from 2014 to 2022, for a total investment of 24,025,906 euros, with an average of $329,122 \pm 107,599$ euros per project.

The report “Dual career in European-funded projects: a critical analysis and review”¹ findings show a relevant focus of the financed projects in the period 2014-2022 on the micro and multi-dimensional aspects of DC of athletes as the main target group, implementing training courses/programs in different settings, and partnerships mostly composed by educational institutions and NGOs. The authors recommend in the future, sports bodies to engage more in partnerships, whereas DC of employee-sportspersons as athletes and sports staff should be implemented, with a strong focus on the project's long-term impact and sustainability. According to the analysis of projects targeting different stakeholders, 47 (65.3%) involved athletes and 24 (33.3%) sports staff (coaches/trainers), respectively. The most represented outcome resulted in training courses/program (n=44; 61.1%) and guidelines/recommendations (n=19; 26.4%). The authors recommend a cross-national, multi-stakeholder approach should be envisioned to provide relevant evidence on the feasibility of dual career interventions within different settings and to facilitate the dissemination of best practices. The results of the present study confirmed the lack of projects adequately addressing the meso dimension of dual career, calling for potential future research and investment in this area (Guidotti et al., 2015).

¹ Guidotti, F., Conte, D., Bertocchi, L., Doupona, M., & Capranica, L. (2023). Dual career in European-funded projects: a critical analysis and review. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências do Esporte*, 45, e20230057.

The study by López-Flores et al. (2021) highlighted that most of the projects were focused on adult and/or former elite athletes, with only a limited number of projects targeting the talented youth population. Despite the major interests of scholars and stakeholders focused on student-athletes, dual career represents a challenge that concerns also the labour market sectors when athletes are employed during their athletic career (European Commission, 2021; EU Expert Group, 2012). Furthermore, in 2020, the European Commission called for additional measures to support dual career paths and to strengthen the employability of sportspersons (e.g., athletes/coaches/sports managers) (European Commission, 2020).

SERVE pilot actions

The core project work package (WP) in SERVE project is WP3 with the following deliverables:

WP3. DEVELOPMENT OF SERVE PROGRAM & SERVE PLATFORM & APP. The WP3 was implemented during 7 months with leader the University of Vienna, supported by Bulgarian Volleyball Federation, National Sport Academy “Vasil Levski”, Croatian and Serbian volleyball Federations.

WP 3 objectives: 1) To develop SERVE interactive multimedia eLearning program including the new methodology; 2) To elaborate, pilot and disseminate the Dual career course aiming at preparing talent athletes for school Volleyball coaches and outdoor education managers; 3) To implement the development of an e-learning platform for educational content and the development of a mobile application for the use in in practical settings.

The WP3. answers the project specific objectives: SO3, SO4 and SO8 as follows:

SO3. To elaborate, pilot, disseminate and evaluate an innovative eLearning program in EU volleyball clubs and schools based on the integration of volleyball sport in physical and science formal and non-formal education, using the latest innovative sports technologies, gamification, and peer-to-peer learning with 300 athletes and 30 coaches from Bulgaria, Serbia and Croatia. To draft a New Volleyball training guidelines including coaches’ module at federation base and transfer it among Volleyball federations and clubs in 3 PPC.

SO4. To increase the European volleyball sports organizations' competencies in elaborating DCA programs based on eLearning education. To raise the awareness of the sports organizations' employees and managers in DCA.

SO8. To raise digital skill sets, scientific knowledge and social skills of athletes, coaches, students and teachers, as well as the adolescents' creative thinking and educational skills through Serve program and platform, EUTeen Lab program, and the How to Play Volleyball mobile application.

All activities were implemented as planned and described in the project description.

Activities:

T3.1 Elaboration of methodology and content for SERVE interactive multimedia eLearning program

The first step was the elaboration of methodology of the program for the different target groups which was prepared according to sports organisations experience and needs in holistic development of athletes and coaches. Afterwards based on the methodology it was elaborated the design and content of SERVE program. The design of SERVE program content took into consideration the conclusions and analysis of SERVE SURVEY REPORT and included identifying the learning objectives for the SERVE program, how materials will be created and designed and deciding on the selection and use of technology. Learning objects were developed related to the identification of relevant educational material to be included in the eLearning program. These learning objects were successfully assembled into different online modules for the target groups with videos, images, presentations, animations, quizzes, graphics, reading material and simulations.

The second step was the development of the SERVE program content. The education and training program aims to provide talented athletes and coaches with new knowledge and skills in matters related to volleyball as well as other matters such as digital technologies in team sports, sport science basics and science (mathematics and physics). The program benefits also other participants, with tools and ideas as well as practical experience and first-hand knowledge on how to integrate digital sports courses and STEM sports programs in formal and non-formal education. The program shall serve as a sustainable educational tool for talented grassroots volleyball players in Europe after the project end.

The program consists of UNIT 1 and UNIT 2. UNIT 1 has three modules:

- Module 1 for athletes aged 9-14 years with focus on the main elements of the volleyball game as history, rules of the game with animations, main elements with videos showing skills and interactive quiz and values of sport;
- Module 2 for athletes aged 15-19 years including tactical, technical and sport science specific content as sports science behind Volleyball and qualitative biomechanical analysis, STEM volleyball, basic technical skills and basic tactics, digital technologies in Volleyball and team motivation and soft skills development.
- Module 3 for volunteering coaches including opportunities and technologies like VR etc. for improving the training with basic unified methodical instructions on how to train 9 – 14 and 15 – 19 years old players, digital technologies knowledge in analysing and improving the training, updates on the latest trends in Volleyball coaching based on data and sports science and Dual Career skills.

UNIT 2 has one special DC module for talented volleyball athletes 15 -19: **“Outdoor education management basics for schools”** including topics like role and principals of an outdoor education manager, basic skills to integrate outdoor education activities in education programs, knowledge about life skill trough volleyball applicable for an entire life.

Further on the SERVE WP4. was implemented as described in the project description.

WP4. PILOT DELIVERY OF THE INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA ELEARNING PROGRAM TO ATHLETES AND COACHES

It was with duration 5 months and with a leader Bulgarian Volleyball Federation, supported by Croatian and Serbian Volleyball Federations.

One of WP tasks was Task 4.3 as follows:

T4.3 Pilot delivery of the SERVE program Unit 2 – to 150 participants aged 15 – 19 from 30 grassroots Volleyball sports clubs in Bulgaria, Serbia, and Croatia (5 clubs in each of the three PPC)

The DC module was delivered to 150 participants aged 15 – 19, part of the initially attracted 300 participants. The participants who took the DC module were chosen by each sports club taking part into the program based on athletes' motivation and will. Minimum two sports clubs in each country were

from backwards community. The program DC module was delivered to the targets as blended learning - 20 hours of face to face and online learning as well (3 hours per week) for one month.

Task 4.6 Included Set-up of a EUTeen LAB & development of a STEM outdoor Volleyball program.

The winners of the competition during the multiplier sport events /two teams, one boys and one girls - 12 persons per country/ created EUTeen LAB and each team developed a STEM outdoor volleyball program for secondary schools which combined their acquired knowledge during the SERVE delivery program and the communication with coaches, PE and science school teachers from 3 local schools /1 school in Bulgaria, 1 in Serbia, 1 in Croatia/. The elaboration of the STEM outdoor Volleyball programs took three weeks.

Project experts evaluated the three countries STEM outdoor Volleyball programs and the winning program was piloted in 10 EU secondary schools /3 schools from CRO, 3 schools from SRB and 4 schools from BUL/. The country program coordinator in each country made a selection process of the schools - secondary schools with volleyball sport included in the curriculum or extra curriculum.

The EUTeen Lab team created a presentation on STEM outdoor Volleyball program and essential lessons and were presented during a school experiment.

T.4.7 included School experiment to deliver and test the EUTeen Lab STEM outdoor Volleyball program

The first step of the activity was to identify volunteers – school students and school students-athletes for participation in the experiment. The experiment was done in 9th grade and among 200 students.

There were equal number male and female participants. The students were recruited based on pre-submitted application forms and were chosen on the first come first served principle. The opportunity for participating at the implementation were widely promoted through the social media and through the networks of the partner organizations – federations and clubs.

The next step was the delivery and test of the STEM outdoor Volleyball programs to students in school curriculums or extra curriculums as an experiment. The EUTeen Lab team /talented athletes 15 – 19/ presented and tested the STEM outdoor Volleyball program in 10 EU secondary schools in 8 physical education hours per school along with the coaches, PE and science teachers.

This experiment aimed to complement physical activity and science education. Based on the EUTeen Lab STEM outdoor program the students had the opportunity to get behind the volleyball sport and get useful knowledge as learning the science of force, acceleration and mass and Newton's second law of motion, using math to measure the area and perimeter of a volleyball court, discovering the technology behind optimal serving speed, understanding the engineering design process, creating solutions to problems. Each country program coordinator was responsible to ensure that in each school children with fewer opportunities from backward communities will be include. Following the experiment feedbacks were gathered and local evaluation reports done. The evaluation took one month, following the compilation of the school experiment.

T.4.8 Transnational meeting in Croatia

The fourth transnational meeting was held in Zagreb in the end of the work package. The scope of the meeting was to exchange experience and know - how in delivery and experimenting with the program.

The evaluation of the school experiment was presented. During the meeting was developed final guidelines for further implementation of the SERVE program, containing results from the evaluation of the students, resources needed to deliver it further to athletes and coaches, advices for future multipliers of the SERVE program. During this meeting there was held meeting of the Steering Committee representatives. The project meeting finished with a press conference.

WP5 was implemented as follows:

AWARENESS RAISING, COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION

Duration: M1 - M24 / Led by the Bulgarian Volleyball Federation and supported by the Croatian and Serbian Volleyball Federations.

WP objective: To raise awareness about the value of sport as an educational tool through studying and sharing good practices in integrating digital sports courses in national and European school curriculum and extra – curriculums and to raise awareness about the importance of studying among talented young volleyball athletes and coaches, thus promoting the EU Dual career of athletes' guidelines through SERVE innovative program.

T.5.5 Policy Recommendation Report on Dual Career

Following the DC pilot actions the experts drafted the current document - Policy Recommendation Report which will be transferable to any Volleyball or other interested sport organization - Transferability Plan.

SERVE Policy Recommendations Guidelines

Policy recommendations based on research of SERVE

Recognizing the challenges faced by athletes in balancing their athletic commitments with education or work, it is essential to ensure access to quality education, training, and lifelong learning opportunities. This is crucial for developing the skills and competencies necessary to meet current and future demands in the labor market. Recent European sports statistics from Eurostat (2021) reveal that only 40% of individuals employed in sports have attained a higher education level. This underscores the need to promote lifelong learning initiatives and establish sustainable dual career pathways for athletes. Policymakers should prioritize implementing measures to facilitate the transition between sports and employment.

In line with this, there is a growing emphasis on creating educational pathways to increase the number of qualified athletes, which has emerged as a key priority for fostering the sustainable development of sports in Europe. This commitment is reflected in various policy documents, including those from the European Commission (2021, 2020) and the EU Expert Group (2012). A main research-based recommendation is to support the employee-sportspersons through full recognition of their dual career status, the development of agreements safeguarding their right to pursue their sports commitments, and for envisaging improvements in their working conditions.

Another gap that needs to be addressed in the future is the dual career of the coaches, physical trainers, and referees, in line with the policy recommendations of the European Union (European Union, 2020), which expanded the dual career to these important actors in recognition to the crucial role they play in sports.

Policy recommendations for supporting the dual career of young volleyball athletes at the federation level, in general, should encompass several key aspects to ensure comprehensive support and development. These recommendations include:

Education and academic support

- Implement flexible educational programs that accommodate the training and competition schedules of young athletes.
- Provide academic counseling and support services to help athletes balance their athletic and academic commitments effectively.

- Establish partnerships with educational institutions to facilitate access to educational resources, tutoring, and academic accommodations.

Athletic support and development

- Develop structured athlete development programs that focus on skill development, physical conditioning, and mental resilience.
- Provide access to qualified coaching staff and sports science professionals who can support athletes in their training and competition.
- Create pathways for talent identification and progression within the sport, including opportunities for elite competition and national team selection.

Career guidance and transition support

- Offer career counseling and guidance to help athletes explore future career options beyond volleyball.
- Provide resources and support for athletes to pursue internships, work-study programs, or vocational training alongside their athletic careers.
- Develop programs to assist athletes in transitioning out of competitive sports, including job placement services, resume-building workshops, and networking opportunities.

Health and well-being

- Prioritize the health and well-being of athletes by implementing injury prevention programs, mental health support services, and access to sports medicine professionals.
- Promote a holistic approach to athlete development that prioritizes physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

Supportive environment and culture

- Foster a supportive and inclusive team environment that values education, personal growth, and individual well-being.
- Encourage open communication between athletes, coaches, administrators, and support staff to address any challenges or concerns related to dual career pursuits.
- Recognize and celebrate the achievements of athletes both on and off the court, highlighting their academic accomplishments and contributions to their communities.

Policy implementation and monitoring

- Establish clear policies and guidelines for supporting dual-career athletes within the federation, outlining roles, responsibilities, and expectations for all stakeholders involved.
- Regularly evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of dual career initiatives, soliciting feedback from athletes, coaches, and other relevant stakeholders to inform continuous improvement efforts.
- By addressing these key areas and implementing comprehensive policy recommendations, federations can create a supportive and conducive environment for young volleyball athletes to thrive both academically and athletically as they pursue their dual careers.

At state level

- Development of a state strategy (program) and policy combined with concrete actions to support outstanding students/volleyball players.
- Establish a clear vision in defining dual careers and thus establishing clear pathways for program implementation.
- Develop technology on the implementation of a targeted awareness campaign in the sports sector on the importance of dual careers for athletes.

At regional level

- Incentivise local authorities to support talented students/athletes through scholarships, career development advice.
- Create tailored programs for students/athletes, tailored to the requirements of each sport in particular.
- Establish partnerships between schools and sports clubs for the long term.

At club level

- Encourage clubs to participate in various initiatives to support dual career talented volleyball players ages 15-19.
- Activate clubs in seeking additional funds to support dual career volleyball players, including participation in project funding.
- Create an internal dual career database and periodically distribute to athletes.
- Increase communication between sports clubs, the national volleyball federation and educational structures regarding the problems of young athletes.

Policy recommendation based on project pilot actions and school experiments

1. Attraction of target group for taking DC module of SERVE Unit 2 educational program

The participating federations have established contacts with their most interested in the SERVE educational module in DC sports clubs and each federation from Bulgaria, Serbia, and Croatia provided for 10 clubs to be piloting the SERVE DC module. The module **“Outdoor education management basics for schools”** includes topics like role and principles of an outdoor education manager, basic skills to integrate outdoor education activities in education programs, and knowledge about life skills through volleyball applicable for an entire life. Each club attracted the most talented volleyball athletes motivated and interested in DC and in total 150 athletes were educated in the Unit 2 DC module. The athletes were at the age of 15-19 which is the most delicate age for sports talents. The athletes showed high interest in the educational program and its topic. They were part of the 300 athletes who took all SERVE Unit 1 and Unit 2 modules.

2. Piloting of SERVE Unit 2 DC module

The DC module complemented their education with specific knowledge and skills in **Outdoor education management basics for secondary schools based on STEM Volleyball programs**. The athletes were mostly interested in the SERVE unique approach to combining sports and science in practice to attract more young students to volleyball. Module 2 for athletes aged 15-19 years including tactical, technical, and sport science-specific content (as sports science behind Volleyball and qualitative biomechanical analysis), STEM volleyball, basic technical skills and basic tactics, digital technologies in Volleyball and team motivation, and soft skills development provided a sound base for them to learn the content in DC module. The DC module was delivered to the targets as blended learning - 20 hours of face-to-face and online learning as well (3 hours per week) for one month. The athletes were highly interested in the digital tools for training volleyball, including using the SERVE mobile app.

3. Follow-up and pilot results

Further on the EUTeen Lab team /talented athletes 15 – 19/ presented and tested the STEM outdoor Volleyball program in 10 EU secondary schools in 8 physical education hours per school for 1 month along with the coaches, PE,

and science teachers. The program was well accepted by students and resulted in their higher interest and results in physics and maths along with their interest in Volleyball. Based on the experiments 3 schools organised volleyball clubs with integrated STEM volleyball program.

The main policy recommendations based on the project pilot actions at club level are as follows:

1. The DC educational dual career activities at the club level should be based on sound research of the labour market needs and mostly oriented to the sports professions of the sports people such as coaches, club managers, school outdoor managers, etc.
2. The DC educational programs should include presentations on the latest digital tools in training volleyball as well as to be presented by their use, such as mobile apps, etc.
3. The DC educational programs should be focused on creating sports, life, and digital skills in target groups based on the European competence frameworks.
4. The clubs to implement educational programs (training or courses) to create competencies and skills about both dual career and future employability for their target groups;
5. The establishment and strengthening of links between organizations of different natures and typologies should be considered a critical aspect for clubs to implement successful dual career programs;
6. To maintain strong club-school relationships to promote volleyball in schools and provide for school outdoor volleyball managers and trainers for school volleyball clubs.
7. To provide for DC leaders at the club level to organise the DC programs elaboration, implementation and dissemination;

Main SERVE Policy Recommendations

Policy recommendations for supporting dual careers of adolescent athletes in volleyball

1. Clear vision and concept development

- Develop a clear understanding of the "dual career" concept for adolescent athletes to facilitate its realization.
- Create a national strategy at the government level with specific actions to support adolescent student-athletes.

2. Awareness and education campaigns

- Conduct information and education campaigns within the sports sector to emphasize the importance of dual careers in sports.
- Provide seminars, courses, and round tables to educate stakeholders on the significance of balancing sport and education.

3. Tailored digital training programs

- Develop tailor-made digital training programs for student-athletes to improve the balance between sports and education.

4. Regional incentives and support

- Incentivize talented athletes at the regional level through initiatives such as scholarships for career development.
- Allocate additional funds to support dual career programs and initiatives at the regional level.

5. Encouragement from national federations and clubs

- Implement initiatives and provide support for dual careers among talented volleyball players aged 15-19.
- Establish a database containing targeted information, including best practices and partnerships, to facilitate collaboration between national federations, clubs, and educational institutions.

6. Long-term partnerships and communication

- Foster long-term partnerships and increase communication between educational and sports institutions to address challenges faced by young athletes.
- Facilitate coordination between coaches, teachers, family, and friends to provide guidance and support to student-athletes throughout their dual career journey.

7. Role of DC educational managers

- Introduce educational managers to assist adolescent athletes in balancing quality education with effective sports activities.
- These specialists will serve as main coordinators between educational and sports institutions, guiding athletes in achieving their dual career goals effectively.