



# CLEAN ATHLETES' PERSPECTIVES ON THE REINTEGRATION OF SANCTIONED ATHLETES IN SPORTS

WORK PACKAGE 3: STATUS REPORT MARCH 2025



## MISSION

- Explore clean athletes' views on reintegrating sanctioned peers into elite sports.
- Understand emotional, ethical, and practical considerations from athletes' perspectives.
- Provide athlete-informed insights to shape effective, fair, and credible anti-doping policies and support anti-doping education initiatives.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Identify clean athletes' emotional and ethical reactions towards returning sanctioned athletes.
- Assess perceived consequences of reintegration on athlete morale, competition fairness, and institutional trust.
- Determine necessary prerequisites athletes demand for legitimate reintegration.
- Develop practical recommendations for supportive educational strategies facilitating sustainable reintegration and fostering an anti-doping culture.



## METHODOLOGY

- Athlete-centred study using a qualitative research approach.
- Peer-led focus group interviews conducted by trained athlete co-researchers.
- Thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns.



## PARTICIPANTS

- 15 elite international-level athletes (average age: 28.4 years)
- Disciplines: Cycling (11), Track & Field (2), Weightlifting (1), Rowing (1)
- Gender distribution: 87% male, 13% female
- Nationalities: German (11), Austrian (4)
- Including Olympic Champions and World Champions



## FINDINGS

### 1) Perceptions of Reintegration of Sanctioned Athletes

- Athletes express varied emotional reactions to sanctioned athletes returning to sport, including betrayal, anger, and disappointment.
- Empathy is conditional and occurs mainly when doping seems unintentional or due to external pressure.
- Opinions differ about offering second chances, with some athletes firmly against reintegration and others open under strict conditions.
- Sincere remorse must be demonstrated through concrete actions, not just words.
- Clean athletes perceive themselves as moral gatekeepers responsible for protecting sport integrity.

### 2) Perceived Consequences of Reintegration of Sanctioned Athletes

- Reintegration influences athletes' emotional well-being and can negatively impact motivation and morale.
- Transparency in reintegration processes strengthens trust in anti-doping systems, while lack of transparency fosters skepticism.
- Fairness concerns persist, particularly due to perceived ongoing advantages from past doping.
- Reintegration can disrupt team dynamics, causing mistrust and tension among athletes.
- The need for vigilance towards reintegrated athletes creates ongoing psychological stress.
- Reintegration practices significantly affect broader cultural attitudes towards doping.

### 3) Prerequisites for a Second Chance

- Athletes demand explicit, public acknowledgment of guilt and authentic remorse from sanctioned athletes.
- Reintegration must include cooperation with anti-doping authorities and credible evidence of doping-free behavior post-sanction.
- Tailored restrictions are necessary to prevent returning athletes and complicit personnel from re-engaging in doping-supportive environments.
- Additional professional or financial penalties should reinforce accountability and seriousness of doping offenses.
- A visible shift in personal and professional surroundings away from doping contexts is critical.
- Transparent and consistent communication from sports organizations regarding reintegration procedures is essential.

### 4) Measures for Reintegration

- Former dopers should actively participate in anti-doping education, sharing experiences to deter future doping.
- Psychological support services must be provided to assist athletes with emotional consequences and help manage identity, stigma, and exclusion challenges.
- Educational initiatives must address individual vulnerabilities, ensuring sustainable and meaningful reintegration into sport and society.

## NEXT STEPS

After data collection and analysis are completed, the results will be prepared for a peer-reviewed journal article and will inform the next phases of the project:

- WP4: Policy Recommendations - Formulate comprehensive policy recommendations ensuring transparent, consistent reintegration practices, promoting fairness, athlete well-being, and the integrity of sports governance.
- WP5: Education Initiatives - Develop athlete-informed educational materials utilizing insights gained from WP3, integrating authentic stories to foster effective doping prevention.



Co-funded by the European Union



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.