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# **Guidelines for the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Sanctioned Athletes**

## **1. Purpose and Scope**

These guidelines support International Federations (IFs), National Anti-Doping Organisations (NADOs), and other stakeholders in establishing structured, fair, and athlete-centred approaches to reintegration. They respond to a well-recognised gap between formal sanctioning systems and the long-term experiences of affected athletes, while also acknowledging the perspectives and concerns of clean athletes.

## **2. Background and rationale**

Sanctioned athletes are often defined solely by their rule violation and the punitive consequences that follow, yet anti-doping sanctions can generate enduring harms that extend well beyond the formal period of ineligibility, including impacts on mental health, identity, livelihood, relationships, reputation, and social belonging. From a human rights and athlete-welfare perspective, a system committed to fairness, proportionality, dignity, and procedural justice cannot end at punishment alone. In the absence of clear reintegration and rehabilitation pathways and support, athletes are unlikely to be able to return - representing a loss not only to the individual athlete, but also to their club, sport, and country - or they may return to sport and society carrying unresolved stigma, limited access to support, and few opportunities to demonstrate learning, accountability, or positive change. A policy on reintegration and rehabilitation is therefore necessary not only to mitigate avoidable harm, but also to strengthen the moral and social legitimacy of anti-doping itself. If the system is perceived as abandoning athletes after sanction rather than facilitating responsible re-entry, recovery, and restoration, its claims to fairness and justice are weakened. By embedding structured support, clear expectations, and pathways for meaningful reintegration,

such a policy can help align anti-doping practice with both clean sport objectives and broader human rights principles.

### 3. Evidence sources

The recommendations are grounded in qualitative evidence from the Erasmus+ and WADA-funded TALE – *What About Us?* project, complemented by a participatory sense-making process using a World Café method. The World Café brought together diverse stakeholders, including:

- sanctioned and non-sanctioned athletes
- representatives from national and international sport organisations
- legal experts
- representatives from human rights institutions

Together, these perspectives highlight the need for reintegration to be understood not as an optional add-on, but as an integral part of effective and credible anti-doping systems. Reintegration is not an optional step — but neither is it unconditional.

#### KEY MESSAGE:

Reintegration is not a reward. It is a necessary, but structured and conditional, component of a fair and credible anti-doping system.

### 4. Core Principles

Reintegration approaches should be grounded in shared principles that guide both policy and practice.

#### *Athlete-centred approach*

Reintegration must reflect the individual circumstances of each case, including the nature of the violation and the context in which it occurred. At the same time, reintegration policies must also consider the impact on athletes put in a position to share training and competition space with ex-sanctioned athletes, and the integrity of competition.

#### Athlete voice:

“It felt like I was treated the same as someone who cheated on purpose - even though my case was completely different.”

#### *Distinction between behaviour and identity*

Sanctions are designed to address rule violations, not to define an athlete's identity or long-term place in sport and society. Reintegration processes should actively support this distinction.

#### Athlete voice

“The punishment didn't just stop me competing - it made me feel like I didn't belong anywhere anymore.”

#### *Fairness and proportionality*

Reintegration should be neither automatic nor purely punitive.

Instead, it should reflect:

- the severity of the violation
- the level of intent
- the athlete's willingness to engage in rehabilitation

In that regard, stakeholders also emphasised the value of more clearly differentiating between intentional doping and unintentional violations (for example, contamination or medication errors), including in the terminology used, rather than applying a single, undifferentiated label.

Athletes must also have equitable access to:

- legal advice
- psychological support
- financial guidance

### *Transparency and clarity*

Anti-doping processes are often complex. Clear, accessible, and timely communication about rights, obligations, and procedures is critical to reduce confusion, anxiety, and harm. Both sanctioned and clean athletes require clear, transparent, and consistent rules of reintegration. Lack of clarity undermines trust in the system.

Additionally, transparent communication of reintegration conditions, including progress where appropriate, can help rebuild confidence among clean athletes and the wider sport community.

### *Reintegration as part of clean sport*

Reintegration should not be seen in tension with clean sport. On the contrary, well-structured reintegration reduces stigma, supports learning, and lowers the risk of repeat offences, thereby strengthening integrity systems overall.

Reintegration, when structured and credible, contributes to clean sport by:

- reinforcing accountability
- supporting learning and prevention
- reducing the risk of repeat offences

#### **KEY MESSAGE**

Reintegration should treat every athlete as an individual—with a unique story, circumstances, and needs—and therefore be designed in a way that is fair, individualised, and proportionate.

#### **INSIGHT BOX**

Reintegration must balance two objectives:

- ✓ supporting the rehabilitation of sanctioned athletes
- ✓ protecting the rights and trust of athletes not sanctioned

## **5. During the Sanction**

*Structured support: Introducing conditional reintegration elements*

**Goal: Demonstrate credible behavioural change for sanctioned athletes who intentionally committed an ADRV**

- ✓ Clear compliance with rules on activities and prohibited association
- ✓ A period of structured testing
- ✓ Engagement in anti-doping education or prevention activities (where appropriate)
- ✓ Demonstrated acknowledgement, reflection, and willingness to change
- ✓ Access to education, dual career pathways, and support structures
- ✓ Where necessary:
  - Adaptation of the training environment or support network
  - Engagement with mentors or guidance structures

**Why this matters:**

Rehabilitation is not defined by time alone - it must be **visible, credible, and meaningful to others**.

A central expectation from clean athletes is that reintegration must be earned and demonstrated, not assumed. Reintegration pathways should include clear conditions that demonstrate rehabilitation, including:

- Acknowledgement of responsibility and remorse where appropriate
- Engagement in educational or preventive activities, such as contributing to anti-doping awareness
- A period of by structured testing
- Consideration of cooperation with anti-doping authorities, on a voluntary basis

These elements help rebuild trust and ensure that reintegration is perceived as credible and fair by clean athletes.

***Addressing the athlete's environment***

Evidence highlights the importance of the athlete's environment in both doping behaviour and reintegration success.

Where necessary, reintegration processes should include:

- changes to training environment, teams, or support networks
- distancing from individuals or systems linked to doping
- access to mentoring or ethical guidance

**PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY BOX**

Reintegration is not only about the athlete. It is also about the system and environment they return to.

***Supporting dual career and life beyond sport***

Athletes should be supported in developing:

- education pathways

- alternative career options

This reduces dependency on high-risk environments and supports long-term well-being.

## 6. Post-Sanction Reintegration

*Long-term measures: Rebuilding trust, belonging and legitimacy*

### **Goal: Enable a trusted and sustainable return**

- ✓ A clear and transparent reintegration pathway was engaged in by the returning athlete
- ✓ The athlete demonstrated commitment to clean sport values
- ✓ Reintegration conditions are proportionate to the severity and context of the violation
- ✓ Continued monitoring and support after return provided by ADOs
- ✓ Where appropriate:
  - Gradual or conditional return to competition
  - Contributions to education or prevention activities
  - Clear separation from previous high-risk environments

### **Why this matters:**

Reintegration is complete only when trust is restored—not only administratively, but socially.

Returning to sport is not only a formal process but also a social one. Returning to sport does not automatically mean successful reintegration. Social dynamics, trust, and identity play a critical role.

Organisations should:

- establish formal reintegration frameworks
- clearly communicate conditions for return to competition
- involve independent bodies where appropriate to strengthen trust towards these actions
- designate reintegration or welfare contact persons
- ensure access to continued support services (i.e., financial, legal)

### **Athlete voice**

“Coming back wasn’t the problem—the problem was how people treated me when I came back.”

### *Ensuring accountability and proportional consequences*

To maintain trust in the system, reintegration frameworks may include:

- restrictions linked to the severity of violations
- differentiated approaches depending on intent and context
- continued monitoring following return

In parallel, particular attention should be given to:

- strong sanctions for enablers (e.g. coaches, medical staff involved in doping systems)
- addressing systemic drivers of doping, not only individual behaviour

### *Reintegration as contribution*

Reintegrated athletes can play a meaningful role in:

- education programmes
- prevention initiatives (e.g., provide peer-to-peer support)
- sharing lived experiences responsibly

This should, however, be conditional on demonstrated responsibility and readiness. Where athletes share their experiences, for example through testimonials or a verified podcast, this should be voluntary, fact-checked, and hosted on official, trusted platforms. Anti-doping organisations should clarify what information may be shared, so that storytelling offers accurate context to clean athletes and a realistic roadmap for newly sanctioned athletes, rather than spreading unverified narratives. Confidential peer-to-peer formats, in which previously sanctioned athletes support those currently going through the process, can complement this.

### *Providing continued support*

Long-term reintegration requires:

- access to psychological support
- structured follow-up
- ongoing engagement with clean sport values

### *Strengthening the wider system*

Organisations should also share reintegration best practices internationally, for example through frameworks such as those supported by UNESCO, and work toward greater harmonisation of reintegration conditions and sanctioning processes across jurisdictions, reducing inconsistency and strengthening trust in the fairness of the system.

## **7. System Risks**

Without structured and credible reintegration approaches, the following risks emerge:

- Stigma and social exclusion, which undermine recovery and return
- Loss of trust among clean athletes
- Lack of harmonisation, leading to unequal treatment across organisations
- Unclear rules, increasing the risk of unintentional further violations
- Insufficient support, which may contribute to repeat offences
- Financial inequality, which can leave athletes from lower-income sports or countries without adequate legal or reintegration support

## **8. Key Recommendations**

Taken together, the evidence, stakeholder perspectives, and phased analysis presented above point to a clear conclusion: **reintegration must be addressed as a core policy responsibility within anti-doping**, not as an informal or discretionary afterthought. The experiences described across the sanctioning, sanction, and post-sanction phases, together with the system risks identified, show that the absence of structured reintegration undermines athlete welfare, weakens

trust among clean athletes, and can compromise the fairness, credibility, and legitimacy of anti-doping systems.

The following recommendations therefore translate these insights into practical policy priorities for sport organisations and anti-doping bodies seeking to establish reintegration pathways that are fair, proportionate, transparent, and credible.

**Key recommendation 1:** Embed reintegration within anti-doping policy through formal, structured, and conditional processes rather than leaving return to ad hoc decision-making or automatic reinstatement at the end of a sanction.

**Key recommendation 2:** Require rehabilitation to be demonstrated through defined actions—such as engagement in education, evidence of reflection and accountability, compliance with conditions, and, where appropriate, a period of structured testing—rather than relying on time served alone.

**Key recommendation 3:** Develop formal reintegration frameworks with clear, transparent, and consistently applied rules governing sanction, rehabilitation, and return, in ways that protect the rights, expectations, and trust of both sanctioned and clean athletes.

**Key recommendation 4:** Design reintegration policies and procedures to address not only the individual athlete, but also the wider environment to which they return, including training settings, support personnel, relationships, and organisational culture.

**Key recommendation 5:** Integrate athlete voices, including those of both sanctioned and clean athletes, into the development, implementation, and periodic review of reintegration policy to ensure that frameworks are credible, fair, and responsive to lived experience.

## **10. Contribution to Further Framework Development**

This policy recommendation provides a conceptual and practical basis for the further development of structured approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration following anti-doping sanction. It translates the current evidence base into an initial framework for policy reflection, stakeholder dialogue, and early implementation, while recognising that more detailed guidance, clearer standards, and stronger system coordination will be needed as knowledge, practice, and institutional learning evolve.

As a policy-oriented model, its purpose is not to prescribe a final or universally fixed solution, but to identify the core domains that require attention if reintegration is to be managed in a way that is fair, proportionate, credible, and consistent with both athlete welfare and clean sport objectives. In this sense, the recommendation is intended to support organisations in moving beyond fragmented, discretionary, or informal approaches by providing a clearer structure for how rehabilitation, trust building, accountability, support, and return to sport may be addressed in a more coordinated and transparent manner. It is intended to inform discussion and refinement, support alignment across stakeholders, and contribute to the development of a more detailed and operational reintegration framework in subsequent project phases. Given the different expectations and responsibilities of athletes, sport organisations, anti-doping bodies, legal actors, and human rights stakeholders, a shared policy framework can help clarify roles, reduce

inconsistency, and provide a more transparent foundation for future policy development and implementation.

Importantly, further framework development should include **stronger system-level capacities for data capture, monitoring, and evaluation**. At present, reintegration is often treated as an outcome to be assumed rather than a process to be documented, monitored or managed. A more credible and effective system will require organisations to collect more consistent data on whether athletes return to sport, when they return, under what conditions they are readmitted, what forms of support or monitoring accompany return, and what obstacles or exclusions they encounter in practice. Such information is necessary if anti-doping systems are to assess whether reintegration policies are working fairly, consistently, and effectively across different contexts and should be collected in proportion to the respective ADOs context. **Improved data capture on athletes returning to sport should therefore be understood as a systemic condition for a better reintegration system**. This includes documenting return pathways, the use of conditional or phased return arrangements, engagement with rehabilitation measures, and the extent to which athletes are able to re-enter training, competition, and social sport environments in ways perceived as credible by both sanctioned and clean athletes. Better evidence in this area would support organisational learning, strengthen policy accountability, and help identify which reintegration approaches are most effective in balancing athlete welfare, trust restoration, and the integrity of clean sport.

A related priority is the development of **clearer and more systematic approaches to monitoring repeat offending following return to sport**. If rehabilitation and reintegration are to be treated as meaningful policy objectives, anti-doping systems must be able to assess whether particular forms of support, supervision, and conditional return are associated with reduced risk of subsequent anti-doping rule violations. Monitoring reoffending rates should not be seen only as a control mechanism, but as part of a broader system of policy learning and accountability. It allows organisations to evaluate whether reintegration frameworks are facilitating behavioural change, restoring trust, and contributing to sustainable clean sport outcomes, or whether additional safeguards and support structures are required. In this sense, improved monitoring is a systemic condition for legitimacy as much as for effectiveness.

This recommendation should therefore be understood as an iterative contribution rather than an endpoint. Subsequent phases may build on it by testing practical applicability, identifying implementation priorities, clarifying minimum standards, and specifying which elements should be mandatory, recommended, or context dependent. Future development may also be strengthened through the inclusion of athlete-reported outcomes, stakeholder feedback, comparative policy analysis, and improved longitudinal evidence on reintegration trajectories and repeat violations.

In this way, the policy recommendation contributes not only to immediate discussion and refinement, but also to the longer-term development of a more detailed, operational, and evidence-informed reintegration framework. Ultimately, its value lies in helping anti-doping and sport systems recognise rehabilitation and reintegration not as optional additions after sanction, but as necessary systemic conditions for fairness, consistency, learning, and legitimacy within anti-doping governance. As a direction for future research, the scope could be expanded to athletes' wider personal environment, including athlete support personnel, parents, and sport

physicians, to inform dedicated policy recommendations for these groups in subsequent project phases.