WP5.1: General overview, findings, and recommendations

Arts & Humanities | Herbert Wagner & Philip X. Fuchs

Athletic migration

Dual Career and qualification in sports

Migration across borders in the EU is a requirement in many elite sports and poses a fundamental challenge for Dual Career athletes. Prof Dr Herbert Wagner and Dr Philip X. Fuchs, PhD, from the University of Salzburg, Austria, are tackling the obstacles of migration within the EU for Dual Career athletes together with their project partners in Austria, Germany, Finland, Slovenia, and Italy. In addition to collecting and exchanging best practices across Europe, the network of researchers is developing a toolkit for stakeholders to enhance Dual Career migration across Europe.

Being a top athlete is demanding. Athletes who also study at the same time walk a tightrope between the intensive training and competition required to perform in their sport while concomitantly pursuing studies. Only a small number of high-potential athletes evolve into elite athletes. It is therefore crucial for talented athletes to invest in a Dual Career, building their educational career path at the same time as their sport career, if they are to reach their full potential and prepare for their future when their competitive sports period comes to an end.

Migration across borders in the European Union is a requirement in many elite sports and poses a fundamental challenge for Dual Career athletes. The various legislative frameworks that apply to both the sports and education sectors across Europe create a huge diversity. There is no central Dual Career policy in place, and agreements and initiatives vary between and within individual sports and educational institutions. Existing support structures are not capable of overcoming exchange difficulties. More so, insufficient support for migrating Dual Career athletes jeopardises their performance and retention in both education and sports.

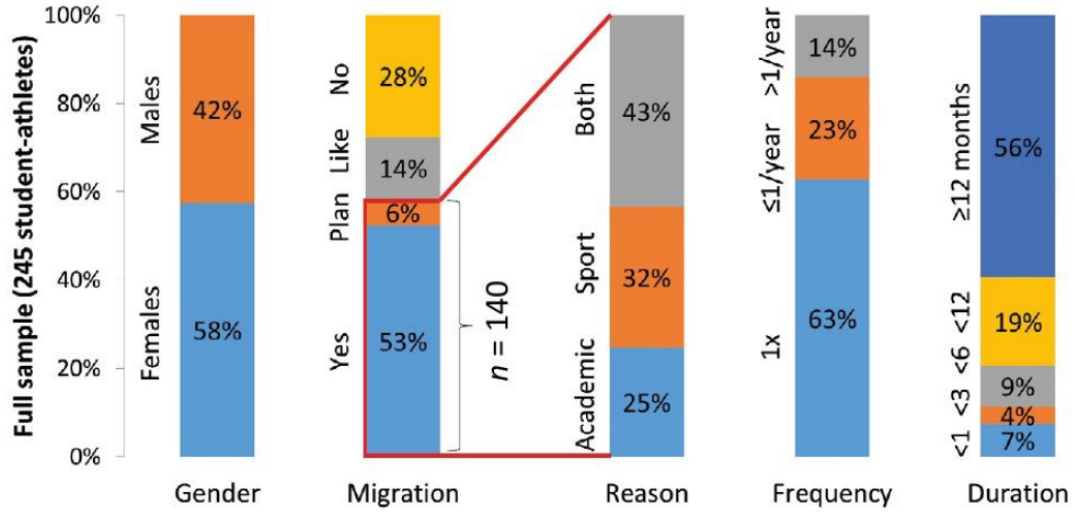


Herbert Wagner and Philip X. Fuchs from the University of Salzburg, Austria, are tackling the obstacles of migration within the EU for Dual Career athletes with their EU-funded research project 'Athletic migration: Dual Career and qualification in sports (AMiD)'. Together with their project partners, they are collecting scientific evidence and best practices and develop support structures for Dual Career migration within the EU.

The AMiD project partners comprise Laura Capranica and Laurence Blondel from the European Athlete as Student network (EAS) together with complementary academics: Heikki Hannola and Niko Niemisalo from the Lapland University of Applied Sciences; Cristina Cortis and Loriana Castellani from the University of Cassino e Lazio Meridionale; Jörg Förster, Patrice Giron, and Jakob Kuhnert from the University of Hamburg; Mojca Doupona and Marta Bon from the University of Ljubljana; along with non-academic organisations, including federations, clubs, and Olympic organisations in Austria, Germany, Finland, Slovenia, and Italy.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

With the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, the AMiD project has three key objectives. Firstly, to raise awareness and



The researchers surveyed a sample of 245 student-athletes. They found out that most participants relocated for both academic and sports reasons.

knowledge of the phenomenon of Dual Career migration. Secondly, to build a network and develop support structures for student-athletes migrating within the EU, including the implementation and evaluation of best practices. Thirdly, to provide good practices for governance and supply practical tools for stakeholders.

The AMiD researchers aim to expand their network, exchange best practices across European policies, and include representatives from national authorities in all participating organisations. This will enable AMiD to continue contributing to the standardisation of European education and sports measures long after the project's time frame and extend beyond the participating organisations.

To achieve these objectives, the researchers examined the current Dual Career situation in Europe. This involved an extensive literature review together with the collection of current practices in all partner countries. With the help of Dual Career experts, they clarified definitions and characteristics of athletic migration. Factors were examined that included the place of migration, the reasons for migration being related to academics, sports, or both, and the level of both careers. Then, the researchers performed a questionnaire study which identified the challenges and needs of athletic migration and suggested potential improvement.

PRACTICAL ACTIONS TO FACILITATE MIGRATION

Potential actions to support Dual Career athletes included the student-athletes making individual agreements with their professors regarding the classes and examinations that they are unable to attend due to long-distance travels to international competitions. This could include the provision of online material that could be accessed while travelling.

Raising awareness and usage of Dual Career organisations, together with expanding cooperation among different organisations would enhance the provision of support services for student-athletes. Implementing financial support is another mitigating factor. Furthermore, the survey revealed that offering peer-support and mentoring for daily life problems, as well as sport and academic issues, would facilitate the student-athletes' smooth transition to the new environment.

Insufficient support for migrating Dual Career athletes jeopardises their performance and retention in both education and sports.

SUPPORT SERVICES AT NATIONAL LEVELS

The AMiD research team found that a wide range of Dual Career services is available. These include accommodation, Dual Career tutors, sports facilities, professional coaches, nutritional advisors, and health care services. The study also revealed the institutions' committed efforts to improve Dual Career for student-athletes. The researchers note that the commonalities between universities offer opportunities for the potential merging and exchanging of support services for migrating athletes. Conversely, only two of the five universities offered the opportunity for e-learning, a fundamental requirement to enable migrating student-athletes to keep up with their educational commitments.

IDENTIFYING APPLICABLE SUPPORT SERVICES

AMiD's next step was to exchange and develop applicable support services. The researchers hypothesised that there would be differences in the migration experience of student-athletes with respect to gender, age, country, career levels, and characteristics of sports and migration. They surveyed a sample of 245 student-athletes (42% males and 58% females), evenly distributed between countries. Participants were

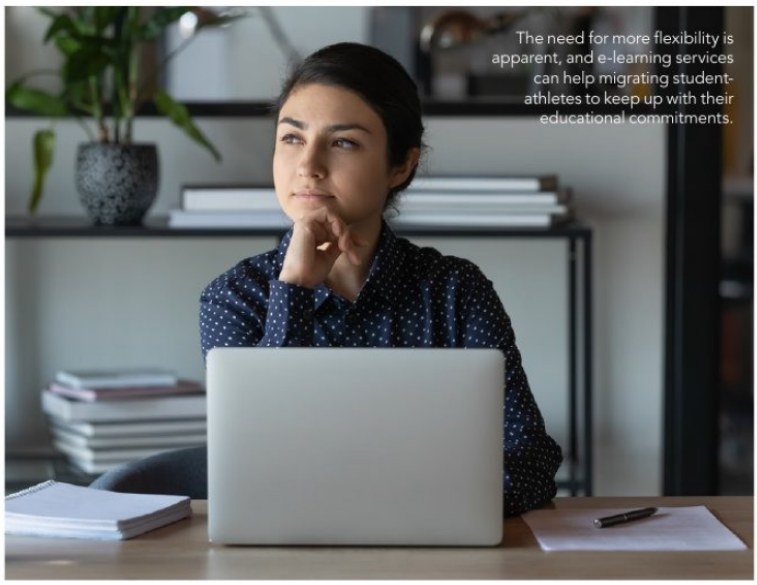
engaged in both undergraduate and postgraduate studies and competed in a variety of sports. Most of the athletes (52%) had already experienced migration, and 28% did not intend to migrate. Gender had no major effect on the perceptions and the successful implementation of migration periods. Financial support was only available for 55% of the migrating student-athletes. The researchers found that migrating student-athletes consider academics and sports equally relevant. Most participants relocated for both academic and sports reasons, with 32% relocating for sports reasons and 25% for their education. The analysis revealed that the academic performance of female athletes was less likely to seriously decrease due to migration, whereas sports performance was less affected in males. Most of the migrating athletes did not receive any tutoring or counselling support.

The participants identified several Dual Career services that they would like to see developed. These included increasing student-athletes' awareness of Dual Career service providers, developing collaboration between academic institution and sports bodies, establishing clear Dual Career policies and the provision of financial support.

The student-athletes appreciate the increase in their teachers' awareness of Dual Career and suggested an increase in individualised study programmes, online study material, and flexible attendance in courses and examinations to support them at the academic level. At the sports level, they would like more organisational support for sports facilities and accommodation to facilitate their smooth transition into new training environments.

EXPERIENCES OF DUAL CAREER EXCHANGE ATHLETES

To find out more about the challenges faced by international exchange student-athletes, detailed interviews were carried out. Each project partner recruited five student-athletes aged between 18 and 30 years with a sport commitment of at least 10 hours per week. Semi-structured non-standardised interviews were used to examine the experiences of Dual Career exchange athletes for previously unknown details about the challenges that student-athletes face when migrating in the EU. These interviews also explored how the provision of systematic support could resolve challenges.



The need for more flexibility is apparent, and e-learning services can help migrating student-athletes to keep up with their educational commitments.

The commonalities between universities offer opportunities for the potential merging and exchanging of support services for migrating athletes.

Qualitative analysis of the transcripts revealed the problems faced by many Dual Career athletes migrating within the EU. This research suggests solutions, including a well-established network of professionals from the top sports and policies that further support stakeholders and facilitate large-scale research into the migration of elite athletes in the EU.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Many athletes taking part in the study thought that financial support would help them pursue their sports career, particularly those in higher expenses sports such as ski jumping, bobsleigh, and triathlon. However, most of the reported challenges were caused by limited organisation and coordination between sport and academic duties. These issues could be tackled by cost-efficient measures such as tutoring and counselling services, Dual Career coaching, and improved communication between sports and academic bodies. Participating student-athletes with the option of online study programmes reported greater flexibility that enables them to prioritise either sports or education depending on their individual situations. While the need for more flexibility is apparent, EU universities may be limited in what they can provide due to local and national laws.

The AMiD research team also recommend that the personal interests of exchange students are considered. Factors including homesickness and interpersonal problems can impact both academic and athletic performance. Opportunities for interpersonal support should be created for exchange students to identify and counteract the early stages of such personal challenges.

BROADER IMPACT

Having collected and exchanged good practices across Europe, the network of researchers has also identified opportunities to improve practices and raise governance standards. These practices have been implemented and tested in the participating organisations and involve migrating athletes from multiple countries. The evaluation of these practices and the development of a toolkit for stakeholders will provide strategies to enhance Dual Career migration across Europe.

Behind the Research



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Research Objectives

Through their project AMiD, Assoc Prof Dr Wagner and Dr Fuchs, PhD, develop best practices and support structures for student-athletes migrating in the EU.

Detail

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Dr Philip X. Fuchs, PhD is Project Coordinator at the University of Salzburg. He has scientific expertise in kinesiology and performance analyses in volleyball, jumping, and balance assessment.

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Athletic Migration in Dual Career

PARIS LODRON UNIVERSITY SALZBURG

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Personal Response

What are your plans for future research with Dual Career athletes?

"As a research activity, the AMiD project will be finalised in 12/2020. However, the network maintains, and all partners are willing to support interested stakeholders in advancing their endeavours in this field or implementing their own Dual Career migration."

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WP5.2: Possibilities for academic organisations

Why should academic organisations care about DC migrations?

- Many student-athletes are enrolled in academic programmes without the academic institution knowing about the students' DC. The unawareness of universities does not change the fact that enrolled students pursue a DC and have special needs.
- Due to the parallel commitment to (semi-)professional sports, academic performance can be decreased in the absence of lacking support measures by the academic environment.
- Effective and cost-efficient support services exist and can greatly improve the academic performances and career development of student-athletes.
- Facilitating DC migration allows for enhanced academic performances in student-athletes and increased international exchange, networking, and collaborations at all levels (not only for students), which can even create possibilities for academic staff.

What can I as a member or a representative of an academic organisation (e.g. university) do to facilitate DC migrations to or from my institution?

- Cost-free tutoring/consulting services as simple as providing information and tips can help student-athletes immensely. Organisation and management are key difficulties for student-athletes. Lacking information from any environment can lead to severely increased difficulties to organise both careers.
- Increasing awareness of any existing services, contact persons, and other sources of information so that measures are not only in place but also perceived by student-athletes.
- Flexibility in attendance and/or the form of attendance (e.g. in presence, online stream, alternative modes) for the participation in courses and/or exams. Lacking flexibility and tolerance in at least one environment can create huge obstacles in a DC.
- Early and reliable preparations and schedules. Vague information and last-minute changes in programme schedules can ruin a previously well-prepared coordination between the tasks of both careers.

- Online learning material, online lecturing, and online examinations are very helpful to allow for full participation in the academic programme even during phases of physical absence due to necessary sports commitments (e.g. competitions abroad).

WP5.3: Possibilities for sports organisations

Why should sports organisations care about DC migrations?

- Across sports and up to the very highest levels, athletes are documented to be enrolled in academic programmes and to actively pursue a DC, with or without the support of the sports environment.
- Studies show that sport is not necessarily the number one priority for student-athletes, even at the highest level and in most promising or already successful athletes. The number of cases prioritising the academic path is comparable with the counterpart who focuses on sports. A huge portion of athletes in DC are willing to accept deficits in sports development or even drop-out from the sports career in favour of the academic career.
- Lacking support by the sports environment in coordinating both career tasks can lead to detrimental development of performance in sports.
- Effective and cost-efficient support services exist and can greatly improve the sports performance and development of student-athletes.
- New insights and experiences from foreign athletes or own athletes after return can add value to the own club, team, and regime.

What can I as a member or a representative of a sports organisation (e.g. club) do to facilitate DC migrations to or from my organisation?

- Cost-free tutoring/consulting services as simple as providing information and tips can help student-athletes immensely. Organisation and management are key difficulties for student-athletes. Lacking information from any environment can lead to severely increased difficulties to organise both careers.

- Early and reliable preparations and schedules. Vague information and last-minute changes in programme schedules can ruin a previously well-prepared coordination between the tasks of both careers.
- Flexibility in individual training (e.g. when attendance with the team is not required) to match the student-athletes academic schedule.
- Tolerating and acknowledging the athlete's decision to pursue an academic path parallel to the sports career, creating student-friendly schedules during planning stages (e.g. allowing for academic activities between training sessions or during training camps).

WP5.4: Possibilities for DC organisations

Why should DC organisations care about DC migrations?

- It should be in the interest of a DC organisation to facilitate DC.
- National and international DC migrations can contribute to positive developments in both career paths.
- Domestic, outgoing student-athletes return from DC migration periods with valuable experiences and career developments. Foreign, incoming student-athletes can bring different backgrounds and skills to domestic academic and sports environments.
- DC migrations support expanding national and international networks and collaboration between institutions and clubs in both career sectors.

What can I as a member or a representative of a DC organisation (e.g. university) do to facilitate DC migrations?

- Raising awareness of DC organisations and services, promoting support services especially in collaboration with academic institutions.
- Clarifying support services in place including their national/international scope.
- If possible, maintaining services across borders. Otherwise, consulting and preparing the migration as precisely as possible in advance.

- Establishing communication and coordination between academic and sports staff, installing intermediaries or DC coaches to communicate and express the student-athletes' needs and help coordinating both commitments.
- Creating a student-athletes identity, which increases recognition at both careers' organisations and allows for a clear definition and minimum requirements of being an official student-athlete.
- Establishing formal contracts with academic and/or sports organisations to build a network that supports DC.

WP5.5: Possibilities for student-athletes

Why should student-athletes care about DC migrations?

- As a student-athlete, you are the key stakeholder in your personal DC who benefits from it. A DC migration is a chance for personal and career develop. Both careers can benefit and be a good reason to migrate to another place for short-, mid-, or long-term.
- Studying abroad can introduce new views, knowledge, and skills, learning from renowned experts in the field, and connecting with peers who may become collaborators in the professional future.
- Competing abroad in international sports tournaments and leagues is a requirement at higher levels and can lead to several weeks of absence for a single event. Training abroad can also be a requirement especially for seasonal sports and can be beneficial for the future development due to national differences in skill levels and know-how.

What can I as a student-athlete do to improve my personal DC migration experiences and outcomes?

- Preparation and planning before the migration was frequently reported to be decisive for the whole migration period. Prepare by connecting with the persons in both career fields who are responsible for you. Do so early and collect all the information required for you to plan and draw a precise picture of how to relocate,

how to transition to the new phase, and how to integrate into the new environment.

- Involve multiple people from different fields (e.g. university, sports, but also friends and family) during the planning.
- Communicate with the key persons from both fields (e.g. coaches and professors) and involve them in the coordination of both career activities and how requirements can be fulfilled for both commitments, preferably via group meetings all together.
- At all stages, express your needs. Do not only demand but provide ideas and potential solutions.
- Communicate and tackle approaching difficulties (e.g. time overlap of commitments and periods of absence) in advance.
- Plan activities in advance, prepare material required for learning, and use your time wisely (e.g. between training sessions and during trips).