

Recognition of talented children

Recommendations for
Decision makers



Background

The TALENT project emerges from a strategic collaboration between seven European countries, including Croatia, Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Spearheaded by the Centre of Excellence of Split-Dalmatia County (CI SDZ), this project brings together a diverse consortium of universities, non-governmental organisations, and network organisations. This partnership leverages the unique strengths and experiences of each member to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young athletes pursuing dual careers in sports and academics.

Initiated on December 1st, 2022, and set to span over 30 months, the TALENT project is designed to foster a comprehensive approach to talent identification and development. By incorporating advanced educational techniques and innovative sports science technologies, the project aims to create a supportive ecosystem that facilitates the harmonious growth of young talents in both their educational pursuits and athletic endeavours.

This multinational collaboration is not just a pooling of resources but a fusion of cultural perspectives and expertise, which enriches the project's approach and enhances its applicability across different socio-economic contexts. The synergy of this diverse consortium is anticipated to set new standards in the detection and nurturing of sports talents, offering a model that can be adapted by other regions around the world.

Purpose of the project

The primary goal of the TALENT project is to seamlessly integrate sports and education to support young athletes in managing dual careers effectively. This integration is crucial as the demands of maintaining high performance in both academics and athletics can place significant stress on young individuals, often leading to burnout or early dropout from one or both fields.

Objectives of the project

- **Development** of methodologies for early talent identification
- **Adaptation** of educational programmes to meet the needs of athletes
- **Establishment** of a supportive environment that involves coaches, educators, and families.

Purpose of the TALENT Recommendations

Through the developed online platform, these recommendations are targeting teachers, parents, coaches, sports clubs and decision makers to better understand what the needs of talented children are, in order to support their development and prevent drop-out from school or from sports.



Introduction

Ensuring that young athletes can pursue both education and sports requires systemic support through policies that promote dual career pathways. As a policymaker, you have the ability to shape frameworks that encourage cooperation between educational institutions, sports organisations, and families. This booklet highlights key policy recommendations to prevent school and sports dropout, promote flexible learning pathways, and enhance funding opportunities for dual career initiatives.

The success of young athletes does not rely solely on their effort, talent, or coaching, it is also deeply influenced by the broader policies and structures that govern sports and education. Policymakers hold the key to creating environments where young talents can thrive, ensuring they are not forced to choose between athletic ambition and academic success. By developing well-structured policies, providing financial and institutional support, and integrating sports into the educational system, policymakers play a pivotal role in securing the future of talented athletes.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of dual-career pathways, which allow young athletes to combine their sports training with academic pursuits. However, many student-athletes still struggle with inflexible school schedules, limited financial aid, and inadequate career planning for life beyond sports. To address these issues, policymakers must design and implement comprehensive, sustainable, and inclusive policies that support young athletes throughout their development.

This booklet provides an in-depth guide on the role of policymakers in talent development, dual-career support, inclusivity in sports, and long-term sustainability. By ensuring that young athletes receive the necessary institutional backing, we can create a system where talent flourishes, participation grows, and sport becomes a lasting pillar of personal and professional success.

The role of policymakers in talent development

Well-designed policies ensure that young athletes can access quality education, structured sports training, and comprehensive psychological and financial support. Policymakers must take a strategic approach to talent development, ensuring that young athletes have the necessary infrastructure, funding, and institutional support to balance their academic and sporting commitments. Establishing pathways from grassroots participation to elite competition while integrating sports into education systems is essential for long-term success.

Moreover, policy decisions directly influence how well young athletes transition from junior to professional levels. Without a structured framework, many talented individuals struggle to maintain their performance while managing their education. Governments can ensure that sports development is both inclusive and sustainable, allowing athletes to thrive beyond their competitive years through implementing evidence-based policies.



Key responsibilities of policymakers in talent development include:

- A. Creating and enforcing** dual-career policies that support young athletes in balancing academic and sports commitments. This includes flexible schooling options, online learning platforms, and adjusted curricula for student-athletes.
- B. Investing** in sports infrastructure and grassroots programmes to provide accessible training facilities and development pathways for young athletes from all backgrounds.
- C. Ensuring** financial support mechanisms such as scholarships, grants, and sponsorship incentives to help cover the costs of training, competition travel, and academic support for student-athletes.
- D. Monitoring and evaluating** sports policies through data-driven research, stakeholder engagement, and continuous policy assessment to improve talent development initiatives.

Developing dual-career frameworks

Balancing academic and athletic commitments is one of the greatest challenges for young athletes. A well-designed dual-career framework ensures that they are not forced to choose between their education and sports ambitions. To achieve this, policymakers should implement policies that allow greater flexibility in academic schedules for student-athletes. Schools should provide hybrid learning models, where athletes can access online education while traveling for competitions or training.

Furthermore, financial aid and scholarship programmes should be introduced to support student-athletes, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many young athletes face financial barriers that prevent them from fully committing themselves to their training. Policymakers can ensure that no talented individual is excluded due to financial constraints by providing targeted funding.

Career guidance programmes should also be established to educate athletes about post-sports career opportunities. These programmes can help athletes develop alternative career paths while maintaining their passion for sports, ensuring they are prepared for life after competition.



Table 1. Interesting facts and evidence on dual-career frameworks

Fact	Evidence
Dual-career athletes perform better academically	Studies show that student-athletes often achieve higher academic results than their non-athlete peers due to enhanced time management skills.
A lack of dual-career support leads to dropout	Research indicates that many young athletes drop out of either school or sport due to an inability to balance both commitments effectively ¹ .
Hybrid learning models improve athlete retention	Countries with well-developed hybrid education models for athletes report higher retention rates in both education and sports.
Financial barriers are a major obstacle	Surveys reveal that financial concerns are one of the primary reasons why young athletes quit competitive sports before reaching their full potential ² .

Strengthening school-sports club partnerships

An effective school-sports club collaboration plays a fundamental role in talent development. Many young athletes struggle to manage their school responsibilities alongside their training schedules. A well-integrated system that connects schools with sports organizations can help create structured training schedules without compromising academic performance.

1 Jiang, X., & Wang, K. (2025). Exploring relationships between identities, dual career competency, and burnout among young talented athletes. *BMC psychology*, 13(1), 190.
 2 Pandya N. K. (2021). Disparities in Youth Sports and Barriers to Participation. *Current reviews in musculoskeletal medicine*, 14(6), 441–446.

Table 2. Examples of how policymakers can strengthen school-sports club partnerships

Strategy	Description
Shared facilities	Schools and sports clubs can collaborate by allowing shared use of sports fields, gyms, and training centers, ensuring young athletes have access to high-quality facilities.
Integrated curriculum	Schools can adapt their academic curriculum to include sports training modules, making it easier for student-athletes to balance education and sports commitments.
Joint coaching programmes	Schools and clubs can employ shared coaching staff, ensuring that training methodologies are aligned and athletes receive consistent coaching in both environments.
Flexible scheduling	Schools can implement flexible timetables, allowing student-athletes to attend training sessions without negatively impacting their academic progress.
Mentorship programmes	Schools and sports clubs can introduce mentorship initiatives where elite or retired athletes provide guidance and career advice to young talents.
Scholarship and funding support	Clubs and schools can collaborate on scholarship programmes to financially support promising athletes, helping them cover education and training costs.

School coaches should also receive additional training to support student-athletes effectively. Governments should invest in teacher-coach training programmes, equipping educators with the necessary skills to understand and support the needs of young athletes.

Long-term sustainability in talent development

A sustainable sports development model requires long-term investment and continuous policy evaluation. Policymakers should implement multi-year sports funding models rather than relying on short-term grants. A predictable funding structure ensures that sports academies, training centers, and school programmes have the stability needed to operate efficiently.

Encouraging corporate sponsorship and public-private partnerships can also strengthen financial support for talent development programmes. Many businesses are willing to invest in grassroots sports initiatives, provided there are clear incentives such as brand visibility and community engagement opportunities.

Moreover, data-driven policy evaluation should be prioritized. Governments must continually assess the effectiveness of their sports policies through regular impact studies, stakeholder consultations, and performance metrics. By collecting and analyzing data on participation rates, athlete progression, and programme outcomes, policymakers can make informed decisions that lead to sustainable sports development.

Conclusion

Sports clubs are at the forefront of athlete development, education, and career preparation. Clubs can create an environment where young athletes can excel on and off the field by fostering strong school partnerships, ensuring financial sustainability, and offering comprehensive athlete support. With the right policies and initiatives, clubs can truly become hubs of excellence in both sports and education.

Further information can be found on the project's website

www.talent-edu.eu





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