

PORTAL Project

Building an Inclusive European Platform for Olympians' Post-Career Transitions

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The Project

PORTAL is an Erasmus+ Sport Project addressing the intricate challenges faced by Olympians during their transition to post-retirement life.

The project's core objective is the development and implementation of an inclusive online platform, complemented by a network of Real Life Transition Officers to provide comprehensive support to Olympians particularly those facing fewer opportunities.

General Objective

To develop and implement an inclusive and diverse online platform focused on supporting Olympians during their transition to post-retirement life, with a particular emphasis on social inclusion and outreach to individuals facing fewer opportunities, like Olympians without medals, with physical and mental health issues, lacking of financial support, employment opportunities, educational background or early-school leavers



Update the State of the Art

about Olympians' challenges by conducting research and a needs analysis study.

02

Create

an Open Platform for athletes to find resources, opportunities and match with other athletes to ease their transitions.

04

Launch and Pilot

the programme with NOCs, evaluate its efficacy and update the contents based on the feedback.

01



Design

Mental health and real-life transitioning toolkits to guarantee the well-being of athletes.

03

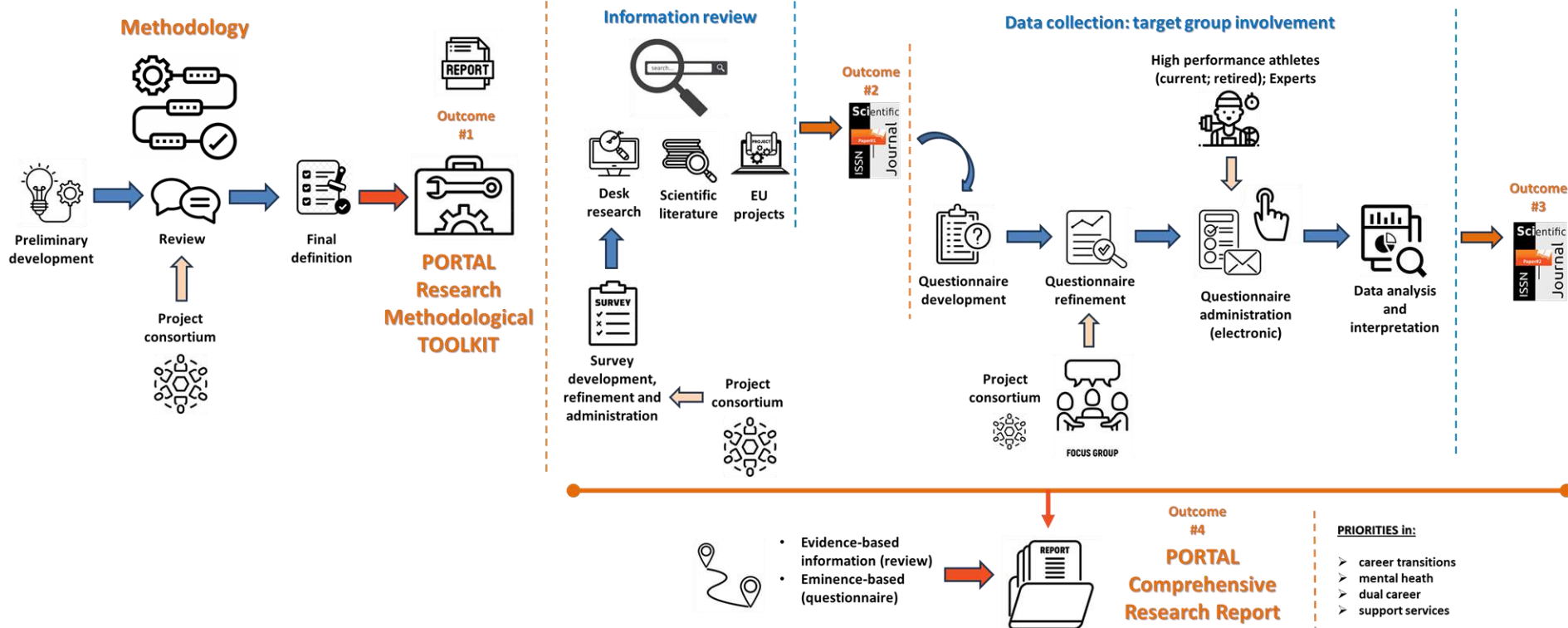


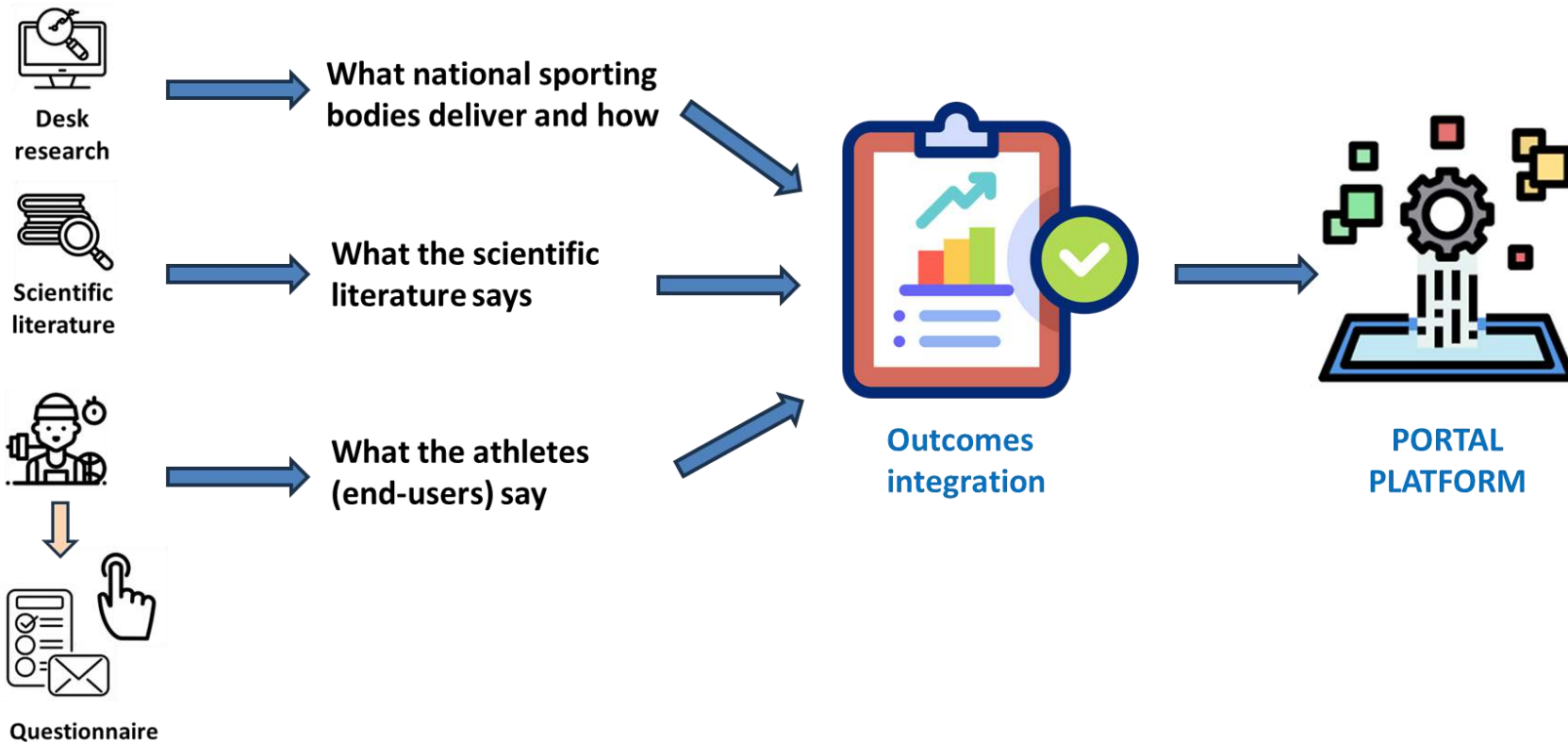
Elaborate

the toolkit of procedures for the Real-Life Transitioning Officers.

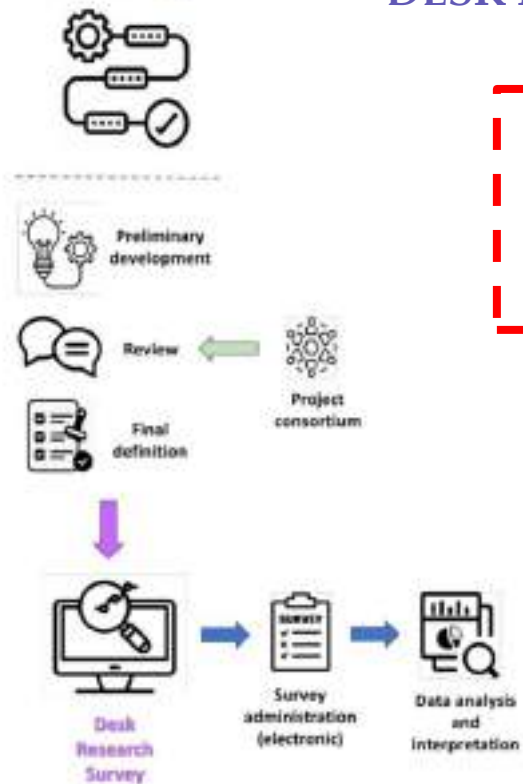
05







Methodology



DESK RESEARCH: survey with major European Sports Organizations

The main key objectives of this research stage were:

1. the provision of an evidence foundation for subsequent tasks by collecting and reviewing national information on career transitions, mental health, and support services;
2. the identification of potential challenges and gaps within and among national contexts to be addressed through the PORTAL platform implementation;
3. the cross-national comparison of strategies, policies, and performance in this area.

Information sources in the PORTAL Desk Research included survey responses.

Respondents



N=17

16 NOCs

1 National Sport Institute

Critical key points

- 35% of countries provide career services (35% in development and 30% without any services)
- 63% have no regulatory framework (temporary initiatives or informal support)
- Disparity between promotion efforts and actual athlete reach
- Limited funding resources (own funds 35% or public funds 35%)
 - Lack of opportunities to connect with athletes and share information
 - Lack of human resources
 - Disparities in service provision, structure, access, and awareness
 - Limited development of holistic support systems



Mental Health support services

Major services offered

Access to external professionals
Mental health awareness training and education)
In-house sports psychologists or counsellors
Peer support programmes

Major problems

Anxiety
Loss of identity
Depression
Difficulty in adjusting to a new routine
Career uncertainty

Assessment

Regular check-ins with coaching staff
Athlete self-referral process
Individual counselling sessions
Anonymous surveys or assessments

Obstacles



Lack of funding
Lack of available services
Lack of professionals involved
Stigma





Career transitions support services

Educational workshops (e.g., resume building,
interview skills)
Career counselling services
Competences/Skills development programs



Additional support services

Nutrition counselling
Financial aid and budgeting support
Social support services
Travel and logistics support



Delivery

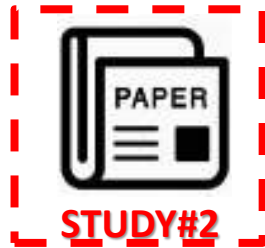
Directly through the organization's internal support network
Via referrals from coaches or staff
Self-referral process

Recommendations



1. Countries should establish national regulatory frameworks
2. Countries should ensure equitable access to services
3. Countries should strengthen inter-institutional partnerships
4. Countries should develop centralized communication strategies
5. Countries should implement and standardize assessment tools
6. Countries should diversify funding models
7. Athletes' voices through structured feedback mechanisms should be considered to refine service quality, relevance, and delivery methods

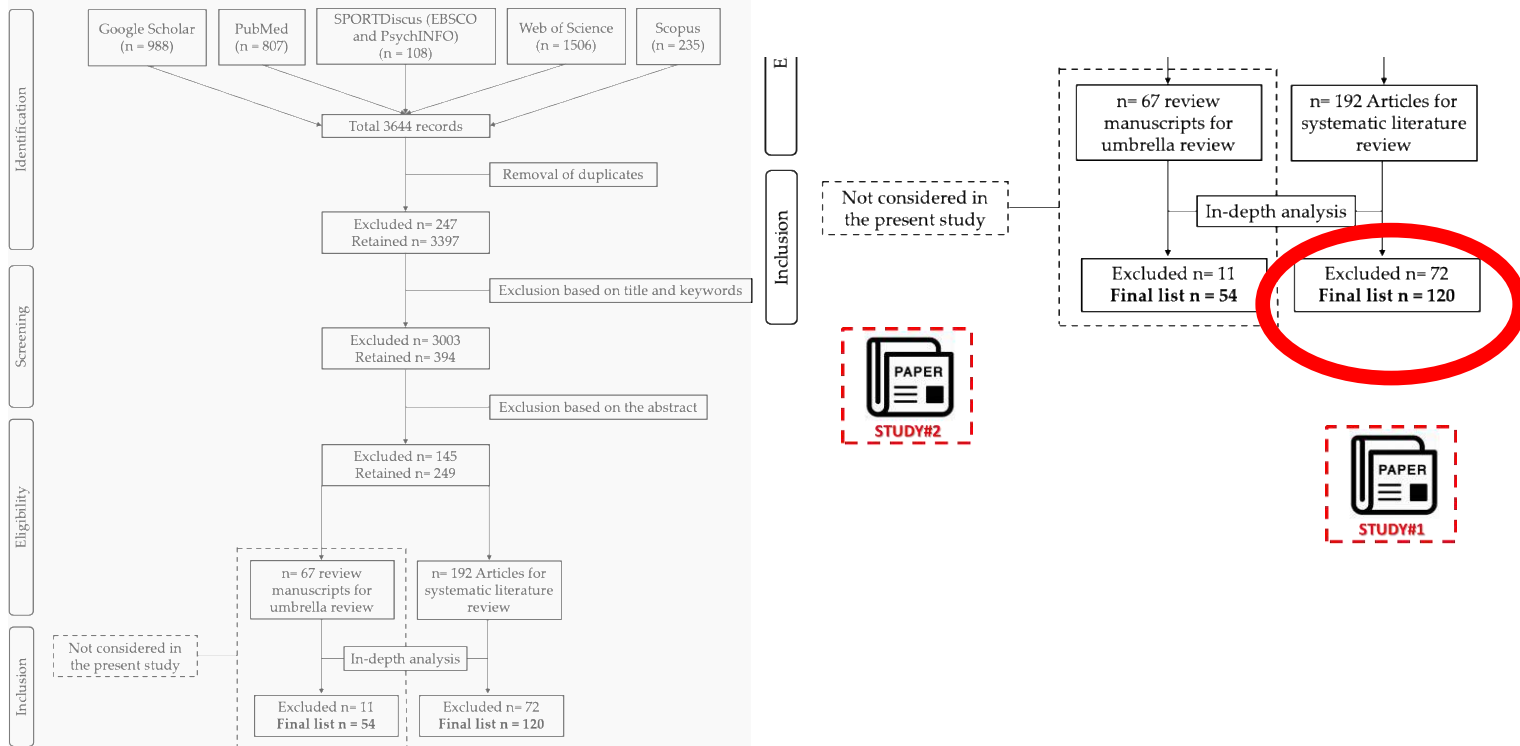
The Systematic Literature Review



5 scientific databases
Selected keywords

OUR FINAL research string

(high-performance athletes career transitions) OR (elite athletes career transitions) OR (Olympic athletes career transitions) AND (high-performance athletes' mental health) OR (elite athletes' mental health) OR (Olympic athletes' mental health) AND (high-performance athletes' psychological health) OR (elite athletes' psychological health) OR (Olympic athletes' psychological health) AND (high-performance athletes' support services) OR (elite athletes support services) OR (Olympic athletes support services)



Main Outcomes from the SLR

Ref.	Research context	Synthetic outcomes of the included studies	Outcomes relevant for digital resources implementation	Applicability to digital resources	Sustainability takeaways
[75,79,113,131,147,148]	Athletic identity and retirement	Athletic identity often dominates elite athletes' lives, with transition out of sport posing complex challenges for well-being, self-esteem, and personal development. Effective adjustment is linked to retirement planning, self-complexity, and support from both reflective practices and close relationships.	Support should emphasize balanced personal development, reflective practices, identity diversification, and tailored transition planning. Resources for families/partners and ongoing post-retirement support are needed.	Platform should provide interactive modules for identity work, career planning, family involvement, and long-term adjustment—using mentoring, journaling, workshops, and targeted resources.	Holistic and proactive support for athletes and their networks promotes well-being and long-term engagement with the platform.

Ref.	Research context	Synthetic outcomes of the included studies	Outcomes relevant for digital resources implementation	Applicability to digital resources	Sustainability takeaways
[64,90,110,111,121,122,128,134,167]	Career support	Career support for athletes is most effective when it combines psychological, educational, social, and practical resources. Holistic development, dual-career planning, and personalized guidance are critical for performance and transition. Access gaps, stigma, and varying support needs (by sport, gender, and background) are key challenges; coaches and organizations play a pivotal but sometimes underutilized role.	Platforms should integrate dual-career, psychological, and vocational modules; promote self-awareness, financial literacy, and mentoring; tailor resources to athlete profiles; and reduce barriers to help-seeking. Practitioner support and best-practice sharing are key for quality improvement.	Offer personalized dual-career planning, mental well-being, and career transition resources for both elite and non-elite athletes. Engage families/coaches, reduce stigma, and continuously evaluate and share best practices.	Personalization, adaptive pathways, family/coach engagement, and ongoing quality improvement support long-term digital resources sustainability.

Ref.	Research context	Synthetic outcomes of the included studies	Outcomes relevant for digital resources implementation	Applicability to digital resources	Sustainability takeaways
[18,46,49,50,52,54,57,60,62,63,65,69,72,74,76,78,80,86,91,93,96,99,101,104,106,112,113,119,123,126,130,133,135,138,142,143,145,150,151,156,166]	Career transition out of sport and retirement	Athletes' retirement is complex, involving psychological, social, financial, and cultural factors. Successful transition depends on early planning, dual career support, strong networks, tailored mental health resources, and structured life skills development. Barriers include performance-centered cultures, stigma, financial strain, and lack of accessible support, with subgroups facing unique challenges.	Digital resources should provide integrated, personalized services for career planning, mental health, dual careers, and identity management. Best practices include early intervention, digital mental health literacy and education, interactive and group support, mentoring, family/peer/community engagement, and specific resources for vulnerable groups.	Modular, customizable online tools for career transitions, career retirement, mental health, and career support; integration of family/peer/practitioner networks; flexible services for diverse needs.	Proactive, continuous, and inclusive support, stakeholder collaboration, and ongoing quality monitoring underpin digital resources sustainability and positive athlete outcomes.

Ref.	Research context	Synthetic outcomes of the included studies	Outcomes relevant for digital resources implementation	Applicability to digital resources	Sustainability takeaways
[4,50,51,53,59,61,66]		Mental health is a central concern in elite sport, with high prevalence of symptoms such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and mental distress. Risk factors include injury, identity foreclosure, stigma, performance culture, and lack of timely support. Protective factors and recovery are linked to mental health literacy, social support, early intervention, autonomy-supportive environments, and access to qualified professionals. Unique barriers persist for women, minority, and retired athletes, and maltreatment or abuse increases risk.	Athlete support platforms should provide regular mental health screening, mental health literacy, stigma reduction, self-management and coping tools, and easy, confidential access to professional support. Key features include digital literacy modules, family and peer engagement, resources for body image and identity, crisis reporting, trauma-informed approaches, and context-specific interventions for transitions, injury, or retirement.	Online digital resources should offer personalized, modular support journeys, combine self-assessment with professional follow-up, promote inclusive, psychologically safe environments, and ensure collaboration with practitioners, coaches, and families. Confidentiality, trust, and accessible communication channels are essential for engagement.	Sustainable support depends on continuous monitoring, integration of evidence-based practices, regular evaluation, collaboration with all stakeholders, and adaptability to evolving athlete needs. Addressing culture, gender, age, and sport-specific risks enhances long-term well-being and online platform impact.
	Mental Health support to elite athletes				

Clear guidelines, ongoing quality monitoring and implementation, and evidence-based evaluation tools

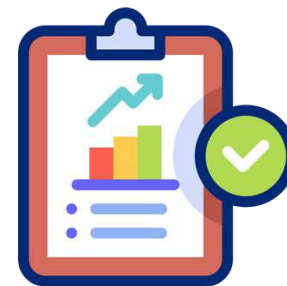
Core tools and practices with potential for sustainable, cross-national implementation could be summarized as follows:

- digital self-assessment modules for mental health and career transition readiness;
- asynchronous peer mentoring networks;
- modular educational contents on dual-career management, career planning, financial literacy, and identity development;
- confidential, online access to professional support;
- family/community engagement in athletes' support programs.

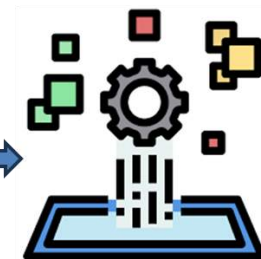


What can we do as PORTAL project's Partners?

This systematic review confirms the complexity and multidimensionality of elite athletes' career transitions and mental health challenges, highlighting the urgent need for integrated, proactive, and individualized support across the athletes' lifecycle. Early holistic preparation, especially through dual career pathways, psychological support, and anticipatory career planning remains critical for building resilience, personal development, well-being, and employability opportunities beyond sport.



**Outcomes
integration**



**PORTAL
PLATFORM**



sustainability



Manuscript ID **sports-3897432**

Status Under review

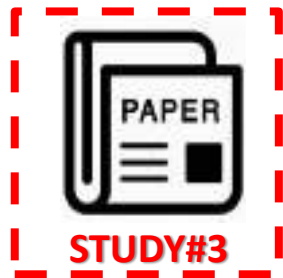
Article type Systematic Review

Title Sustainable Career Transitions and Mental Health support in Elite Sport: A Systematic Review of Evidence and Practices

Journal *Sports*

Abstract The present systematic review aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of evidence and practices regarding sustainable career transitions in elite sport. Following PRISMA guide-lines, an extensive literature search was conducted in SPORTDiscus (EBSCOhost), PsychINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases resulted in 120 manuscripts meeting the inclusion criteria. The review focused on mental health, dual-career pathways, transition readiness, and identity-related issues among elite athletes, Olympi-ans, and Paralympians. Methodologies included qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs, with multisport and mixed-gender samples prevailing. The most commonly used instruments were semi-structured interviews and surveys. The main findings highlighted the centrality of mental health support, the role of dual-career plan-ning, and the importance of proactive identity negotiation. Despite growing research in-terest, significant gaps persist in access to psychological support, structured transition planning, and dual-career strategies, with notable inconsistencies across countries and sports. The review emphasizes the necessity for integrated, multidimensional guidance, culturally sensitive psychological services, and flexible educational pathways to promote athlete well-being and sustainable post-sport careers. These insights are intended to in-form the implementation of the ERASMUS+ funded PORTAL project, supporting evi-dence-based interventions and the development of resources such as an online platform and Real-Life Transition Officers to enhance the transition experiences of elite athletes.

Keywords Sustainable career transitions; athletic identity; transition planning; mental health support; retirement adaptation.

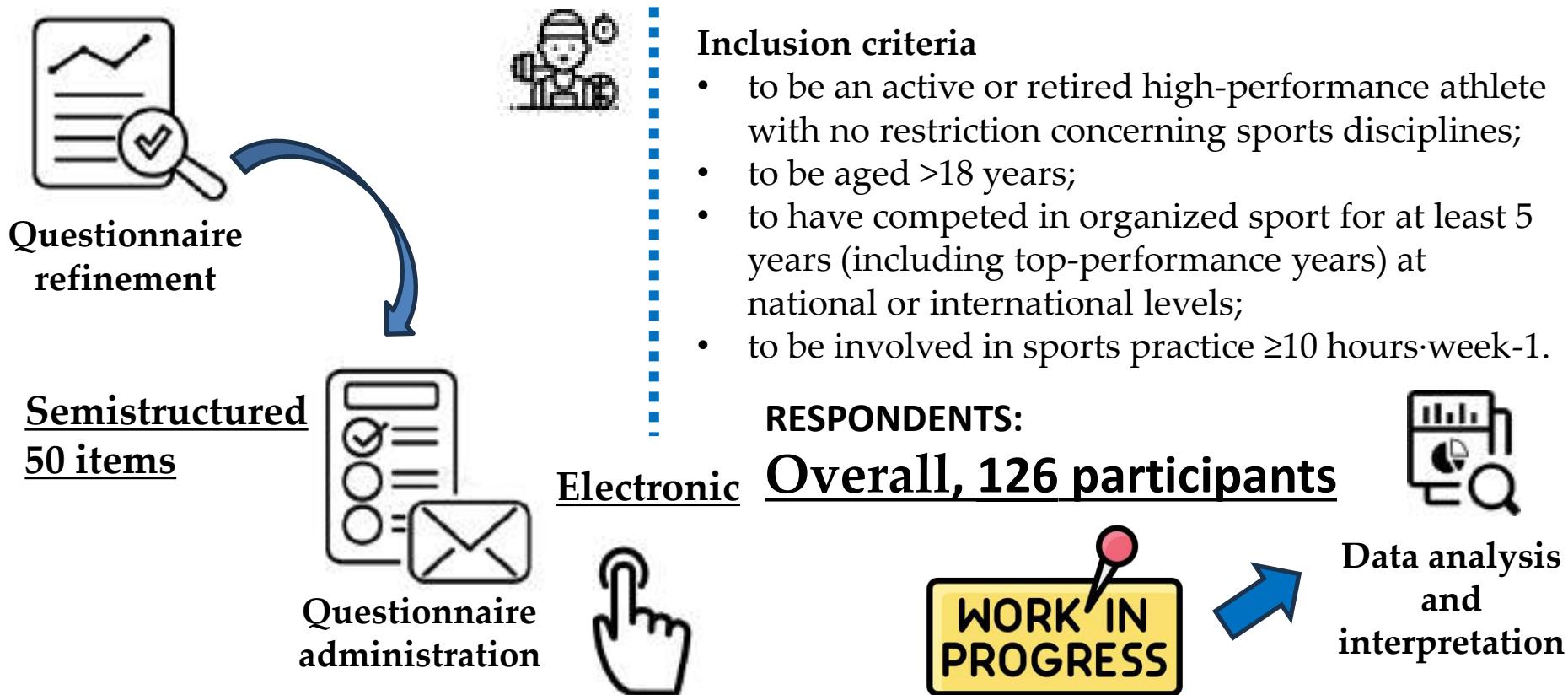


Questionnaire with elite European Athletes



Questionnaire
initial
development

- **Outcome definition**
Career transitions (available services; perceived satisfaction, challenges, and needs about the services; opinions regarding possible/necessary implementation);
Mental Health (available services; perceived satisfaction, challenges, and needs about the services; opinions regarding possible/necessary implementation);
Other Support (available services; perceived satisfaction, challenges, and needs about the services; opinions regarding possible/necessary implementation)



Take home message of Systematic Literature Review, Desk Research and Questionnaire for athletes

✓ 1. Recognize Coaches as Key Stakeholders

Include dedicated resources and training for coaches to support athletes during transitions

✓ 2. Promote Dual Career Awareness

Embed educational materials and testimonials to encourage athletes to prepare for life beyond sport

✓ 3. Address Gaps in Mental Health Access

Integrate directories of psychological services, anonymous support tools, and stigma-free mental health education

✓ 4. Offer Structured Transition Planning Tools

Create step-by-step guides, self-assessment checklists, and goal-setting templates for pre- and post-retirement phases

✓ 5. Facilitate Peer and Mentor Networks

Enable moderated forums, peer mentoring programs, and contact with former athletes who successfully transitioned

✓ 6. Ensure Cultural and Sport-Specific Adaptability

Allow for flexible content modules tailored to gender, sport type, and national context

PORTAL Project

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Thank you for your
attention!



Q/A Discussion/Brainstorming

