Athlete Representation in Anti-Doping Organisations

iNADO 2024 Survey Analysis

June 2025

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1. Introduction

In 2024, the Institute of National Anti-Doping Organisations (iNADO) undertook a global survey to explore the current landscape of athlete representation within Anti-Doping Organisations (ADOs). This initiative aimed to better understand how athlete voices are integrated into anti-doping governance, identify existing barriers to meaningful representation, and examine the availability of essential support services such as legal assistance and ombuds functions.

Engaging with athletes is particularly important, as they are subject to significant responsibilities and obligations under anti-doping rules. Given the scope and complexity of these requirements, the athlete perspective and experience are critical to shaping policies that are fair, effective, and responsive to the realities of clean sport.

The findings presented in this report offer valuable insights into the strengths and challenges of current systems, with the goal of fostering more inclusive and athlete-centred approaches across the global anti-doping community.

We hope this report informs your understanding, stimulates further discussion, and supports ongoing efforts to empower athletes in the fight for clean sport. Meaningful athlete engagement is not only a matter of fairness—it is essential to the credibility and success of clean sport.

Enjoy reading.

2. Background

In 2022, iNADO initiated a membership survey to assess membership needs and identify topics for iNADO to pay specific attention to. Athlete representation came out as a topic of particular interest, not only through the survey but also through ongoing conversations with members.

The focus on athlete representation also aligns with the 1st Guiding Principle of the Guiding Principles for the Future of Anti-Doping: *"Anti-doping focuses on protecting the rights, careers, health and safety of athletes, who are the main focus of anti-doping – the athletes' voice should therefore be given a prominent position in anti-doping reflecting their importance and demonstrating respect for the burden of responsibilities they bear in the name of clean sport.*

Therefore, athletes should have the right to elect their own representatives to representative bodies and be able to provide their feedback on all new developments in the governance and operational side of anti-doping. The Athletes' Anti-Doping Rights Act, including the "Recommended Athlete Rights" should be incorporated into the Code and made mandatory for all Code Signatories. "

Both the membership's interest and the iNADO endorsement of the Guiding Principles reflected a clear need for increased attention and action in this area.

3. Methodology

Building on input from the 2022 Membership Survey, additional feedback received, and through the consultation with a number of athletes, a set of targeted questions was brought together. From this, four key thematic areas were identified as presented in Figure 1.

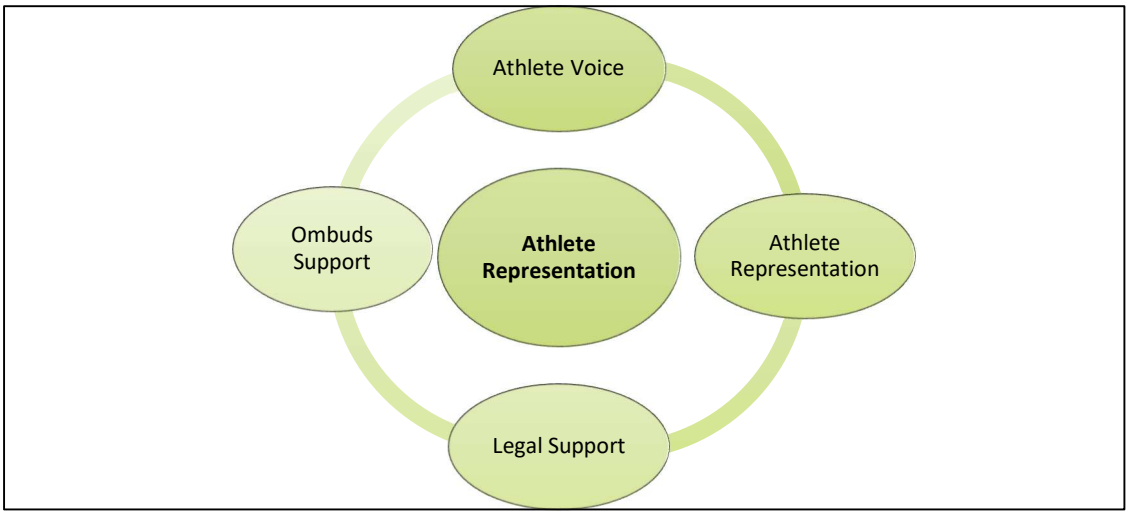

Fig. 1. Themes identified for the Athlete Representation Survey

Within this work, iNADO defines an "athlete" as a current or former athlete who may have been subject to Testing and/or Whereabouts requirements — such as inclusion in a Registered Testing Pool — excluding those participating solely at a recreational level.

The survey was launched via an iNADO news release on 6 June 2024, with additional promotion through iNADO's social media channels. By the closing date at the end of September, sixty-one (61) responses had been submitted.

Following the data cleaning process, responses from individuals or organisations that indicated they did not represent an ADO (14), as well as one submission from an academic, were removed. This brought the final dataset to 46 valid responses.

4. Data and Results

Responses from 46 ADOs are included in this analysis. Please note that not all respondents necessarily responded to all questions, hence most of the data are presented by percentage.

About half of the ADOs represent a European NADO, with 4 out of 5 respondents being an iNADO member (Figure 2).

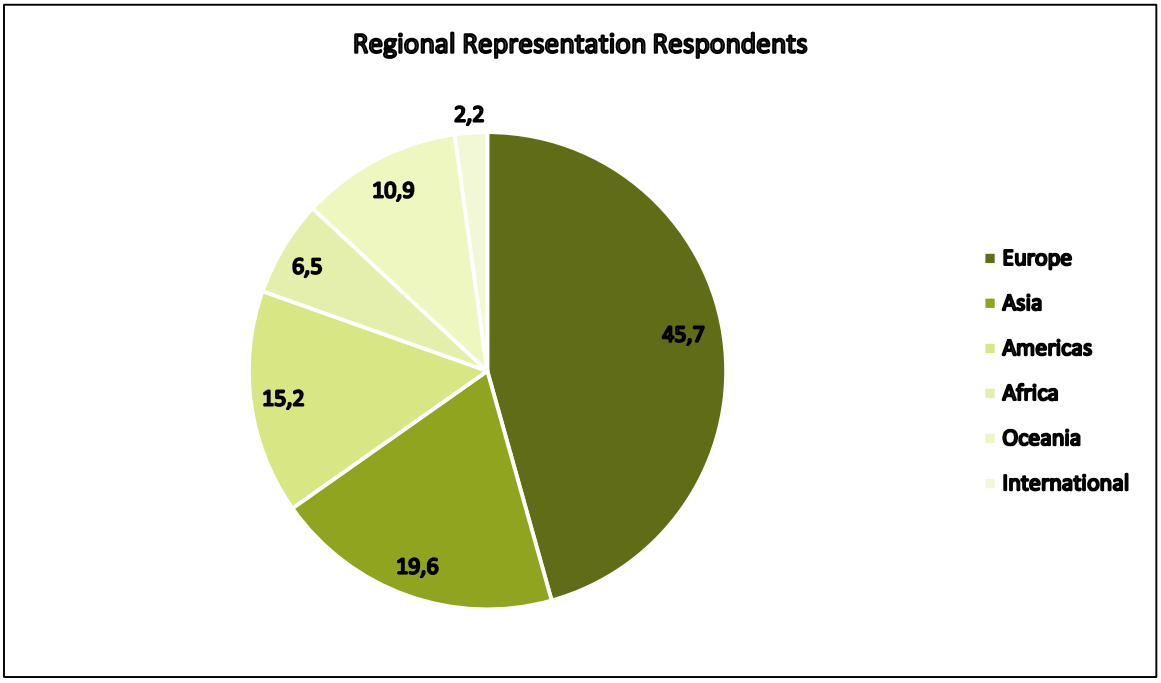

Fig. 2. Regional Distribution of Responding ADOs (%)

4.1 Athlete Voice

The survey results highlight gaps in formal integration of athletes into governance and staffing structures within ADOs. Most of the participation appears to be informal or voluntary, rather than required by policy, e.g. for 2/3 of the respondents, there is no formal requirement for the Board of the ADO to include Athlete representatives (Figure 3).

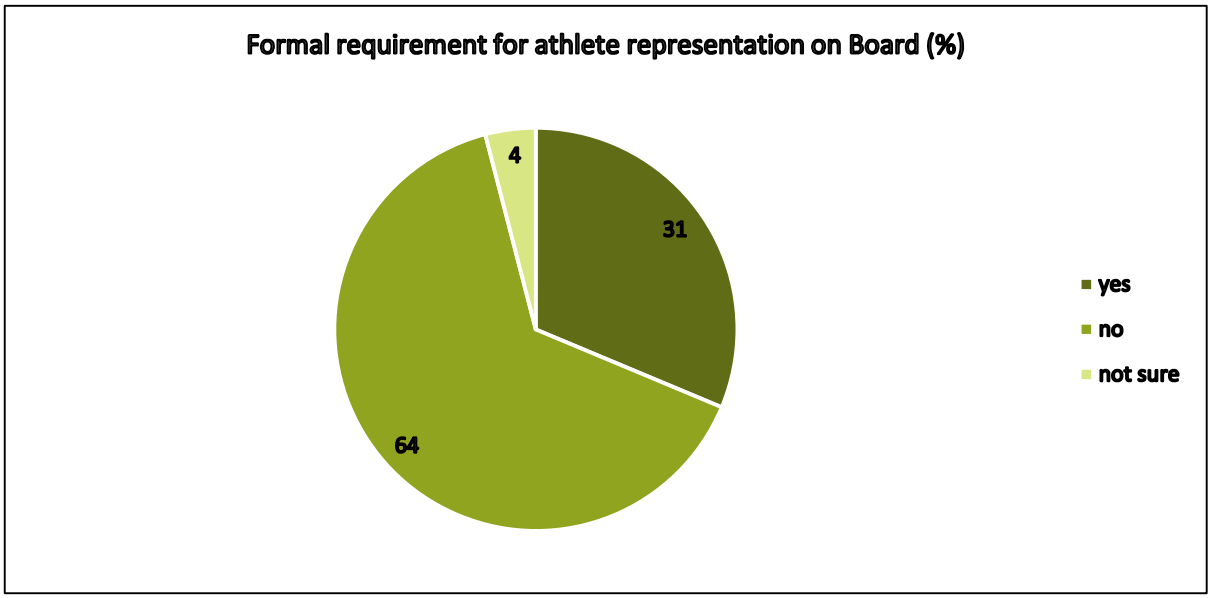

Fig. 3. Formal requirement for the Board of the ADO to include athlete representatives (%).

The formal requirements to include athlete representatives differ by ADO:

- The Chairperson of the Athlete Commission is a Board member;
- (at minimum), 1 athlete representative;
- 20% athlete representation rule;
- The athlete representative must have a history of fair play and always have responded to his/her responsibility in the anti-doping program;
- The presence of a formal athlete is "highly recommended".

Approximately 50% of the respondents state that they do have an athlete representative on their Board (Figure 4).

The following detail was provided in cases where there was no formal Athlete representation on the Board:

- There is no Board;
- Athlete representation in an Advisory Board;
- Athlete representation in a Supervisory Board;
- We do not formally have a Board, but we have an Advisory Council that contains three former elite athletes. The Advisory Council provides strategic advice to the Board;
- The position is vacant, due to the departure of an athlete representative on personal grounds.

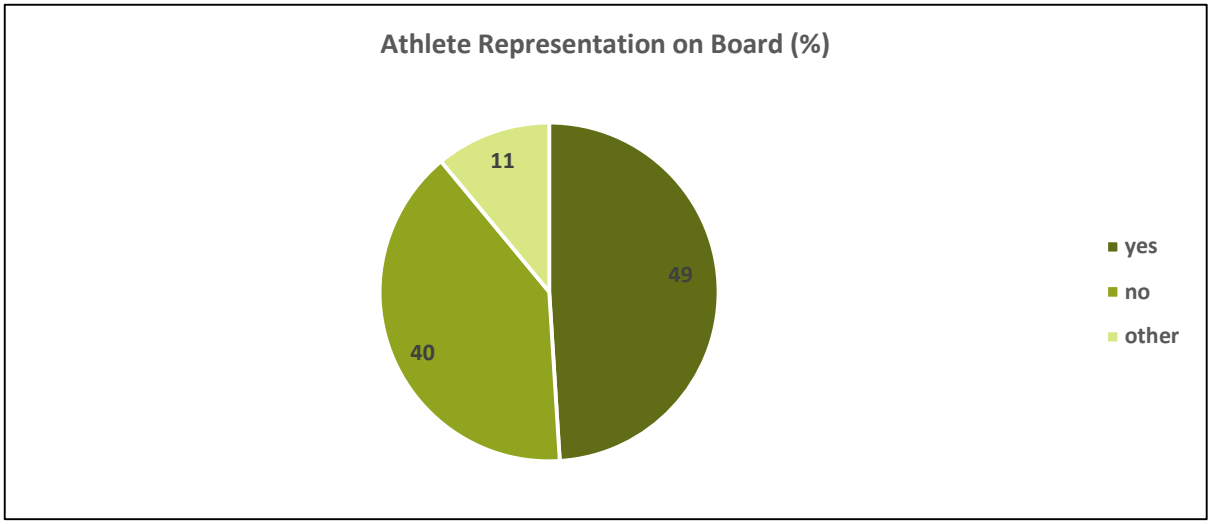

Fig. 4. Athlete Representation on Board of the ADO (%)

The vast majority of ADOs adopt mechanisms to ensure the elected or appointed athlete(s) represent the diversity of the athlete spectrum (different sports, gender, athletes with an impairment, ethnicity and cultural diversity, …), either by policy or good practice.

Furthermore, 41% of the respondents employ athletes. The most common roles for (former) athletes are:

- Educators, Clean Sport Ambassadors
- Athlete mentors
- Members of Athlete Outreach programs

Unless required by legislation, the "be (former) athlete" criterion is secondary to the qualification for the job. Only 27% of the respondents have policies in place that prioritise the hiring of athletes.

In Summary,

- Athlete involvement in ADO governance and staffing is often informal and not embedded in formal structures or policies. For two-thirds of responding ADOs, there is no formal requirement for athlete representation on their Board. Where representation does exist, criteria and standards vary widely. Some organisations cite alternatives, such as Advisory Councils or Supervisory Boards, to involve athlete voices.
- Encouragingly, most ADOs report efforts to ensure athlete diversity and inclusion, though only 27% have policies that prioritise hiring athletes. While 41% of respondents employ (former) athletes—primarily in education, outreach, and mentorship roles—the emphasis tends to be on qualifications rather than athlete status.

Recommendation 1. **Establish formal policies** that mandate an athlete voice in governance structures, while also ensuring that such representation reflects diverse backgrounds and experiences through inclusive practices and a strong emphasis on the value of lived athlete experience.

Recommendation 2. **Promote consistent standards** for athlete inclusion across ADOs by sharing best practices that strengthen athlete voice and guide effective implementation.

4. 2 Mechanisms of Athlete Representation

A vast majority of the respondents (78%) have at least one formal mechanism in place to receive support and feedback from an athlete / athlete community. It is however fair to say that a number of ADOs are currently formalising Athlete Committee policies.

The following formal mechanisms to hear the athlete voice are reported:

Athlete Representative/Committee/Council **within** the ADO	33%
National Athlete Committee/Council/Organisation **outside** the ADO e.g. Independent Group, NOC AC	28%
Communication with individual athletes	14%
Surveys	11%
Attending athlete Forum(s)/Meetings (e.g. invitation from a National Athlete Committee)	6%
Hosting/Organising Athlete Forum(s)/Meetings	3%
Anonymous feedback cards	3%
Regional Athlete Commission structure	3%

For most of the respondents, the (formal) contact with the athlete (representatives) is 3-4 times per year, with further frequent email / WhatsApp contact for updates and occasional advice.

Athlete consultation for ADOs is concentrated on the following topics:

Anti-doping education	100%
Feedback on ADO-specific initiatives	88%
Feedback/input on the anti-doping system regarding rules, prohibited list, etc.	75%
Questions or input about national or international anti-doping governance structures	50%
Feedback/input on anti-doping topics, e.g. contamination, technology utilised for whereabouts	50%
Other (safe sport, competition manipulation)	25%

In addition to the above, 10 respondents replied that the athlete voice is heard through a different (national) Athlete Committee/Council/Organisation. In most cases, this is through the (Athlete Committee of the) National Olympic Committee.

Only 30% of the respondents have (athlete) contact information available on their (ADO) website. The most common mode of contact is through direct contacts established within the athlete community. Informal communication with athletes (personal email communication, phone calls, in-person contact) seems equally important to formal meeting structure (online, in-person).

Challenges to hear the athlete voice by an ADO include:

- Lack of time / capacity of the staff;
- Financial limitations to compensate athletes for their time and engagement;
- Lack of interest from athletes;
- No priority;
- No relevance;
- Unsure which athletes or athlete representative groups to contact;
- How to reach athletes or athlete representative groups.

In order to improve / optimise the dialogue with the athletes, the following recommendations are formulated by the respondents:

- Funding / governance support;
- Formalise / legislate athlete advisory functions;
- Increased support from Senior Management within the organisation;
- Greater availability of ADO personnel to engage with athletes;
- (financial) incentives for athletes that engage.

Only 10% of the respondents provide specific training on anti-doping topics for representatives of Athlete Committees / Organisations they engage with.

In Summary,

- While some ADOs are still formalising athlete representation policies, many respondents have at least one formal mechanism to engage with athletes or athlete groups. These include internal committees, links with national athlete bodies, and/or direct communication. Most contact occurs a few times a year, supported by continuous informal channels like email and messaging apps.
- Athletes are most frequently consulted on education, ADO initiatives, and anti-doping rules. However, a minority of ADOs publish athlete contact information, and offer training for athlete representatives. Key challenges include limited time, funding, athlete interest, and clarity on how to engage with athlete groups effectively.

Recommendation 3. **Formalise Athlete Advisory Roles and Strengthen Representation.** Establish structured athlete advisory roles to ensure consistent and meaningful input in governance and decision-making processes. Secure leadership commitment to prioritise and elevate the athlete voice across all levels of the organisation.

Recommendation 4. **Build Capacity Through Training and Support.** Provide targeted anti-doping and governance training to athlete representatives to enhance their effectiveness. Allocate dedicated resources—including staff time and fair compensation—to support sustained athlete engagement.

Recommendation 5. **Improve Visibility and Access to Athlete Representatives.** Publish contact information for athlete representatives to improve transparency and accessibility, enabling more athletes to connect, seek guidance, and share feedback.

Recommendation 6. Expand Outreach to Diverse Athlete Communities. Develop and implement outreach strategies to better engage underrepresented athlete groups, ensuring that athlete input reflects the full diversity of the sporting community.

4.3 Legal aid and support

One of three ADOs offer legal aid and support to athletes, with another 30% exploring options. The risk of a potential conflict of interest to provide legal aid is mentioned, e.g. in result management cases. That is the main reason why some ADOs recommend different support modes and (re-)direct their athletes to:

- legal assistance through ADO partners and/or governmental structures. This legal assistance can, depending on the particularities of the case, be pro-bono, through access for funding, or with a (minimal) own financial contribution of the athlete;
- Athlete Ombuds structures (see section 4.5);
- Non-sport resources.

The main challenge for ADOs and athletes is to know where to access legal support.

Recommendation 7. Clarify and Communicate Legal Support Pathways. Ensure athletes and staff have clear, easily accessible information about available legal support options. This includes outlining procedures, eligibility, and contact points for accessing services such as Athlete Ombuds, governmental resources, or non-sport legal aid.

Recommendation 8. Promote Independent and Conflict-Free Legal Support Models. Encourage the use of independent legal aid structures—such as external ombuds services or third-party

legal networks—to mitigate conflicts of interest, especially in sensitive matters like result management cases.

Recommendation 9. Expand Access Through Strategic Partnerships and Awareness Campaigns. Collaborate with governmental bodies, legal aid organisations, and athlete commissions to provide affordable or pro bono legal services. Complement this by raising awareness amongst athletes about their rights and support options through targeted education and outreach.

4.4 Ombuds Support

Athlete Ombuds structures and support are not always available:

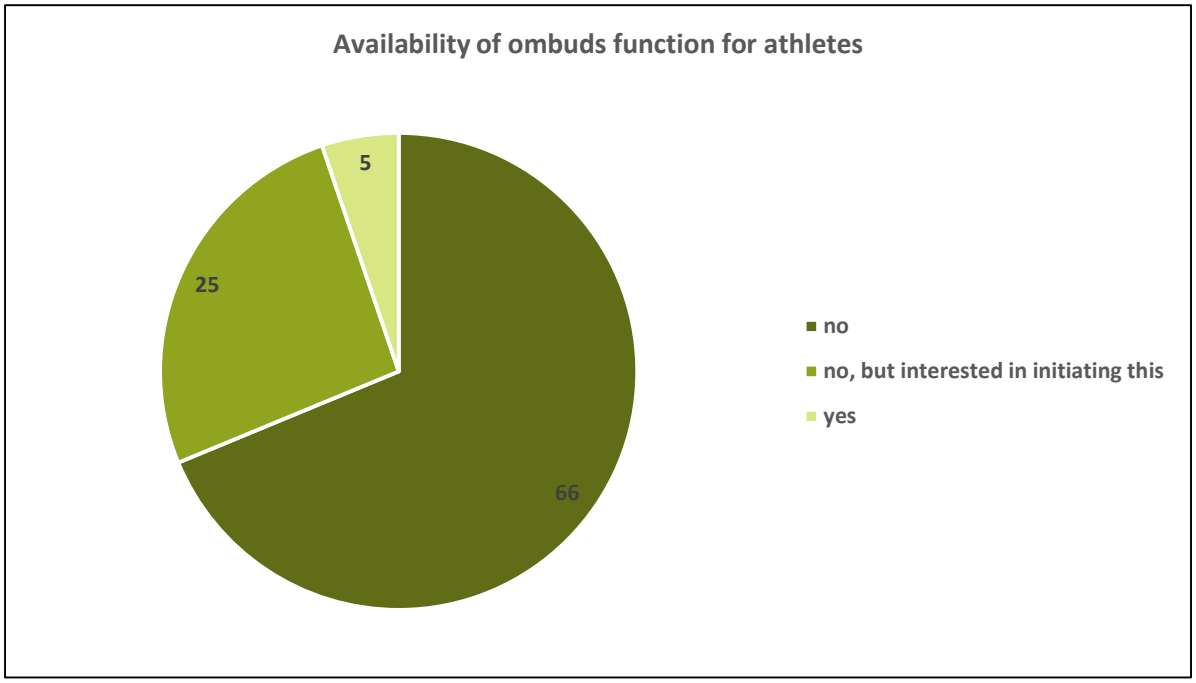

Fig. 5. Availability of an ombuds function for athletes

Only 7% of the ADOs have their own structure in place. The vast majority either is not in a position to help the athlete, or relies of provisions from partner organisation (e.g. government, International Federation, professional player associations):

I am not aware of any Ombuds service available to athletes in my country	61%
Government Ombuds Office	14%
NOC Ombuds	11%
Athletes' Anti-Doping Ombuds	9%
Through your organisation (e.g. representative within your organisation)	7%
Other (e.g. Player Associations, WADA Athletes Council, IF Ombuds Person, ethics compliance officer)	5%

If available, the main support provided is:

- Assistance in the Result Management process and procedures;
- Referral to expert legal counsel;
- Support to sanctioned athletes;
- Connect (sanctioned) athletes to mental health resources;
- Help athletes to understand whereabouts responsibilities;
- Assist in the resolution of athlete concerns and disputes through fact-finding, facilitated communication, and mediation;
- Advocate for fair, transparent, timely and equitably administered policies and processes on behalf of athletes.

Recommendation 10. **Strengthen Awareness and Visibility of Ombuds Services.** Increase awareness of existing Ombuds services among athletes and staff through targeted communication, education, and onboarding initiatives. Clear, accessible information should be provided about the role of the Ombuds, how to access their services, and the types of support available—especially in navigating complex or sensitive procedures.

Recommendation 11. Expand and Institutionalise Independent Ombuds Support. Promote the development of independent, athlete-focused Ombuds services to provide confidential and impartial support. Where in-house services are not feasible, encourage collaboration with external Ombuds or ethics offices. Advocate for the broader integration of Ombuds functions into national and international sport and anti-doping frameworks to ensure consistent, trusted access to athlete-centred support systems.

5. Advancing Athlete Representation

The 2024 iNADO survey on athlete representation shows important insights into how ADOs support and engage with athletes. There is growing awareness of the value of athlete perspectives, particularly in areas such as governance, education, legal support, and procedural fairness. While some ADOs have already established mechanisms for athlete voice and representation, the majority are in the early stages of formalising structures and policies. However, key challenges persist, including a lack of formal requirements, limited resources, insufficient training, and low awareness of available support services. Although informal communication is common and valued, formal inclusion — such as representation on boards, advisory groups, and access to independent support (e.g. ombuds function) or legal aid — is often missing.

This report underscores a growing recognition of the vital role athletes play in shaping a fair, transparent, and effective anti-doping system. To make athlete engagement a reality rather than a principle, the anti-doping community must take deliberate and coordinated action. Based on the recommendations presented, the following pathways can be considered by Anti-Doping Organisations to foster meaningful and sustainable athlete engagement.

These are not prescriptive requirements, but practical avenues for strengthening governance, inclusion, and trust — adaptable to each organisation's unique context, capacity, and culture.

I. Formalise Athlete Representation

Recommendations: 1, 2, 3, 9

Establish clear guidelines and policies securing athlete representation or an athlete voice in governance structures. These policies should also ensure that such representation reflects diverse backgrounds and experiences through inclusive practices.

II. Secure Organisational Commitment

Recommendations: 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10

Gain leadership buy-in to prioritize athlete engagement as a core element of clean sport governance, both in management positions as well as in advisory roles. Leadership support is crucial to embedding athlete perspectives in decision-making processes and ensuring they are valued as a strategic asset across the organisation.

ADOs are encouraged to recognise the value of systematically incorporating athlete perspectives. This includes coordinating regular meetings with athlete representative groups, integrating their input into decision-making, and formalising these contributions within governance processes.

It hereby is vital to implement outreach strategies targeting underrepresented voices, thus strengthening the relevance and effectiveness of athlete input within the decision-making process.

Sharing tools, models, and best practices across ADOs lead to a collective capacity, accelerate progress, and ensure consistency in strengthening athlete engagement globally.

III. Empower Athlete Representatives

Recommendations: 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10

Build capacity through targeted anti-doping and governance training to athlete representatives to enhance their reach and effectiveness. Provide athlete representatives with adequate resources, clear role definitions, staff support, and fair compensation. These measures will help ensure that athlete representatives can make informed, meaningful contributions. The sharing of tools, training materials, communication templates, and engagement strategies can

accelerate progress. ADOs are encouraged to collaborate and learn from each other's experiences to build collective capacity.

IV. Enhance Awareness and Access to Athlete Services

Recommendations: 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 ,10, 11

ADOs can publish athlete representative contact information and actively promote their availability. This will allow athletes to connect with representatives more easily and engage in important discussions related to anti-doping policies and practices.

ADOs can proactively seek to connect with athlete representative bodies by raising awareness, initiating contact, and establishing regular channels of communication. A mapping of existing athlete groups—both national and international—can help streamline engagement and ensure broader, more inclusive input.

ADOs can collaborate with governmental bodies to increase visibility of athlete services and facilitate athlete access hereto, and with other external partners, e.g. in the area of legal services by offering affordable or pro bono legal services.

Greater visibility can be given to international athlete-focused organisations and services—such as independent Athlete Ombuds and advisory bodies—that provide independent support.

Promoting these structures can help athletes access trusted guidance and feel supported within the system.

This report and the paths forward reflect a shared commitment to centring athlete voices in the global anti-doping system. By continuing to build inclusive structures, invest in representative capacity and/or an athlete voice, and foster collaboration, ADOs can enhance the integrity and effectiveness of their work.

Further academic and practical exploration of athlete representation in anti-doping governance is supported. Such research initiatives and evidence-based assessments will help identify what works, where gaps exist, and how representation can be improved.

6. Acknowledgements

This survey was made possible thanks to the generous participation of Anti-Doping Organisations who took the time to respond and share their insights. We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who contributed, participated, and helped promote the survey.

iNADO would like to extend special thanks to the following individuals for their valuable contributions:

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- Anna Van Brummen, (Team USA Olympian & Data Scientist) for her work on data analysis and interpretation;
- Nikki Hamblin, Consultant, for her guidance and support during the initial survey development;
- Anna Thorstensen, Athlete Ombuds, for her advice and recommendations on the Legal and Ombuds themes.

A special thanks also goes to the athletes who contributed to the themed session at the 2025 iNADO Annual Workshop, engaging in meaningful discussion on the survey findings and the overarching theme of athlete representation: Christoffer Stouby Nielsen (National team fighter, Danish Karate Federation & Danish Athlete Committee); Elizabeth Ramsey (Executive Director, Team USA Athletes' Commission); Greta Neimanas (First Vice Chair, Team USA Athletes' Commission); Inge Janssen (Chair, Dutch NOC Athletes Commission); Line Krægpøth (Project Manager, Danish Athlete Committee). Their voices, along with those of athletes at the individual level and those on the committees and groups engaged in anti-doping, continue to shape the future of athlete representation in anti-doping governance.