



RESPECT

Recognizing Sport as a
Powerful Tool for Inclusion

RESPECT

Inclusion Handbook for Sports Clubs

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THE PREFACE

Sport is one of the most powerful ways to bring people together, strengthen social bonds, and make individuals part of a more inclusive society. This book has been designed as a guide to help sports clubs enhance their understanding of inclusivity. It provides the knowledge, tools, and practical recommendations needed to ensure equal participation for individuals with different abilities, particularly people with disabilities, in sports activities.

Prepared as part of the RESPECT Project under the Erasmus+ KA2 framework, this handbook aims to promote the stronger social inclusion of individuals with disabilities through sports. It includes practical suggestions on how sports can improve the quality of life for people with disabilities, support their physical and psychological well-being, boost their self-confidence, and strengthen their social connections. Additionally, it offers policy and implementation recommendations for sports clubs to adopt this inclusive approach.

We extend our gratitude to our valuable partners KEAN, ANGEF, SMARTLEAP, USMA, and IYECSA for their contributions and efforts in preparing this book. Their dedicated work and collaboration on inclusive sports practices have formed the foundation of this guide and reinforced our belief in the power of sports to overcome barriers. Their support and contributions have greatly helped in the creation of this important resource promoting inclusivity.

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CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	6
	1.1. Description of the project	6
	1.2. Description of the Handbook.	6
2	UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY AND INCLUSION	9
	2.1. Definition of concepts.	9
	2.2 Disability models.	10
	2.3 Disability groups.	11
	2.4. General and Specific Benefits of Sports for Young People with Disabilities.	12
	2.4.1. Physical Benefits.	12
	2.4.2. Social Benefits.	13
	2.4.3. Psychological and Emotional Benefits.	13
	2.4.4. Economic Benefits.	14
	2.4.5. Educational and Cognitive Benefits.	14
	2.5 The Unifying Power of Sports.	15
	2.6 The importance of social inclusion through sports.	17
3	CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT	18
	3.1. Communication and Approach to Disabled Individuals.	18
	3.1.1 General Communication and Interaction Guidelines.	18
	3.1.2. Non-Verbal Communication and Body Language.	19
	3.1.3. Practical Approaches for Interaction.	20
	3.1.4. Fostering an Inclusive Environment.	20
	3.1.5. Legal and Ethical Considerations in Communication.	21
	3.1.6. Cultural Sensitivity in Communication.	21
	3.2 Recommended Inclusive Sessions.	21
	3.2.1. Session: The Minefield of Trust (Teambuilding)	22
	3.2.2. Session: Sound Ball	23
	3.2.3. Session: Polygon Skilled Child Theme: Motor skills training for children with physical disabilities and their non-disabled peers Time: 45 minutes.	24
	3.2.4. Session: Bulldog.	26
	3.2.5. Session: Inclusive Basketball.	27
	3.2.6. Session: Blanketball.	29

CONTENTS

4

CHALLENGES AND EXAMPLES OF INCLUSION THROUGH SPORTS ----- 31

- 4.1. Preventing Exclusion and Racism Through Sport. ----- 31
 - 4.1.1 Raising Awareness and Providing Education. ----- 32
 - 4.1.2. Implementing Inclusive Policies. ----- 32
 - 4.1.3. Promoting Mixed-Ability Teams and Reverse Integration. ----- 32
 - 4.1.4. Addressing Systemic Racism in Sports. ----- 33
 - 4.1.5. Community Engagement and Collaboration. ----- 33
- 4.2. Main Problems Faced by Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families. ----- 34
 - 4.2.1. Accessibility Issues in Infrastructure and Facilities. ----- 34
 - 4.2.2. Financial Barriers. ----- 34
 - 4.2.3 Lack of Awareness and Support ----- 34
 - 4.2.4 Social Stigma and Discrimination. ----- 34
 - 4.2.5 Emotional and Mental Health Struggles. ----- 35

5

DISABILITY POLICIES AND ORGANIZATIONS ----- 36

- 5.1. Disability policies around the world. ----- 36
 - 5.1.1. International Frameworks. ----- 36
 - 5.1.2. Regional Strategies. ----- 37
 - 5.1.3. Disability and Development Policies. ----- 37
 - 5.1.4. Challenges in Disability Policy Implementation. ----- 37
- 5.2. International Sports Policies for Disabled Youth. ----- 38
- 5.3 International Paralympic Committee (IPC). ----- 38

6

RESOURCES FOR DISABILITY AND SPORTS INCLUSION ----- 40

- 6.1. Research and Publications. ----- 40
- 6.2. Videos. ----- 40
- 6.3. Online Courses and Webinars. ----- 41
- 6.4. Organizations. ----- 41
- 6.5. Online Resources. ----- 42

7

STAY CONNECTED: FOLLOW OUR JOURNEY ----- 43

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Description of the project

The main objective of **RESPECT** project is to **promote social inclusion for young people with disabilities** (18-25 years old) through sports activities. The project seeks to provide young people with disabilities with opportunities to develop physical and social skills, increase self-confidence and interact with peers and coaches in a positive and supportive environment. With these goals, we seek to contribute to an inclusive and equal society for all young people with disabilities.

Additional objectives of the project are to increase the skills and competences of coaches and trainers to be able to work with young people with disabilities in sport, to raise awareness among stakeholders about the potential of sport as a tool for the inclusion of young people with disabilities, and to promote cooperation and networking between organizations working with young people with disabilities in sport.

1.2. Description of the Handbook

The present handbook is the first result of RESPECT project, the first educational material created as part of the project. It's primary purpose is to provide guidance on creating a sporting environment where **disabled athletes** can fully participate alongside their peers. This is achieved by addressing common barriers that people with disabilities often face in sports, such as:

➡ **Access to Facilities:** For example, a local football club might lack ramps or suitable changing rooms for wheelchair users. The handbook will guide clubs on how to modify their facilities, ensuring they are accessible to all athletes, regardless of physical ability.

➡ **Resources and Equipment:** In some cases, disabled athletes may require specialized equipment to participate in sports. The handbook will outline strategies for securing and providing this equipment, ensuring that disabled athletes can engage fully in the sport of their choice. For instance, it might suggest ways to source or fundraise for sports wheelchairs or other adaptive sports tools.

➡ **Training and Support for Coaches:** The manual emphasizes the importance of training coaches and staff to work with disabled athletes. For example, a basketball coach may not be familiar with how to modify drills for an athlete with limited mobility. The handbook will provide methods for training coaches on how to adapt exercises, making sure every athlete, regardless of their ability, benefits from coaching and practice.

➡ **Inclusion in Events:** To foster an inclusive environment, clubs are encouraged to organize sports events that cater to athletes of all abilities. The handbook might suggest, for instance, creating mixed-ability teams or organizing inclusive tournaments where disabled and non-disabled athletes compete side by side.

These initiatives, outlined in the handbook, ensure that all athletes feel welcomed and supported, and that sports organizations take proactive steps in removing obstacles that might otherwise exclude disabled participants.

The goal of the present handbook is to encourage sports clubs to take concrete actions that guarantee equal opportunities for disabled athletes. The focus is not merely on compliance but on fostering a genuine commitment to inclusion. Here's how clubs are expected to demonstrate this commitment:

➡ **Inclusive Policies:** Clubs should adopt policies that explicitly guarantee the inclusion of athletes with disabilities. For example, a tennis club might develop a policy ensuring that any athlete, regardless of their physical ability, is provided with an equal opportunity to join and compete. This might include reserving time slots for adaptive tennis or setting up training sessions that accommodate both disabled and non-disabled players.

➡ **Equal Access to Training and Competitions:** Disabled athletes should be able to train and compete on the same terms as their non-disabled peers. For example, a local swimming club could ensure that a swimmer with limited mobility has access to an adaptive training program, while also competing in the same tournaments as the rest of the club. The handbook emphasizes that this goes beyond simply allowing disabled athletes to participate; it includes making sure they receive the same level of coaching, resources, and opportunities for advancement.

➡ **Fostering an Environment of Support:** The handbook also encourages clubs to create a culture of support, where every athlete feels valued. An example of this might be a basketball club that holds regular team-building sessions to foster friendships and teamwork between disabled and non-disabled athletes, ensuring that everyone feels like an integral part of the team.

The handbook emphasizes that through these policies and practices, clubs show their dedication to making sure that every member, regardless of ability, feels supported and appreciated.

The RESPECT project reinforces key values that are essential to creating a truly inclusive environment in sports. These values include:

➡ **Respect:** Every athlete, regardless of ability, should be treated with respect. For example, if a club is holding a football practice, coaches and team members must ensure that an athlete who uses a prosthetic limb is not only included but also treated as a valuable member of the team. Respect means seeing every athlete as capable and worthy of equal participation.

➡ **Inclusion:** The belief that sport is for everyone means that sports programs should be designed to include athletes of all abilities. An example might be a local athletics club that organizes multi-ability races where runners of different capabilities, including those with disabilities, participate in the same event. The handbook stresses the importance of making adaptations where necessary (e.g., staggered starts or modified equipment) so that everyone can compete on fair terms.

➡ **Belief in the Power of Sport for All:** The manual highlights the belief that sports are a powerful tool for social inclusion, regardless of physical or mental ability. For instance, a basketball club could promote the idea that everyone benefits from sports—not just physically, but socially and emotionally. This belief is rooted in the idea that sport helps athletes, including those with disabilities, build self-confidence, enhance social skills, and develop a sense of achievement.

The manual aims to instill these values in every aspect of a club's activities, from how they structure their teams to how they conduct competitions. The overarching message is that sport is a universal right, and everyone—disabled or not—should be able to participate fully and equitably.

Examples in Action:

A **swimming club** implements accessible changing rooms and pool entry points for athletes with physical disabilities. They also train their coaches on how to modify training plans to meet the needs of swimmers with various disabilities, ensuring these athletes feel respected and supported.

A **football league** adopts a policy to recruit players with disabilities and provides adaptive equipment, such as specialized cleats or braces, ensuring everyone has the same chance to participate and improve. The coaches hold regular meetings to discuss how to further integrate athletes with disabilities into the team, ensuring no one feels left out.

A **mixed-ability rugby team** holds joint practices where able-bodied players and those with disabilities train together. The handbook's core values guide their practice structure, with an emphasis on teamwork, respect, and inclusion. Both groups of players support and learn from each other, demonstrating that sport truly is for everyone.

These examples highlight how clubs can actively adopt the guidelines set out in the handbook, making sports a **more inclusive and supportive environment** for all athletes, regardless of their abilities.

2 UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY AND INCLUSION

Inclusion in sports focuses on ensuring that individuals with disabilities can fully participate, specifically after their access to sporting activities has been ensured.

People with disabilities tend to have less favorable experiences in sports compared to their non-disabled peers and competitors. Common barriers they face include a lack of awareness among non-disabled individuals about how to effectively integrate them into teams, limited opportunities for training and competition, insufficient accessible facilities due to physical obstacles, and restricted access to information and resources.



Inclusion isn't just about access, but about empowering disabled athletes and creating environments where they can fully participate, develop their skills, enjoy the benefits of sports, and overcome barriers. This includes providing necessary support, breaking down stereotypes, and promoting a sense of belonging and achievement.[1]

2.1. Definition of concepts

The UNESCO Chair at IT, Tralee adopts a broad definition of sport, recognizing its role in promoting physical fitness, mental well-being, and social interaction. This inclusive understanding acknowledges that sports can take many forms, from casual play to organized competitions, and stresses that different approaches to participation, whether through segregated or adapted activities, should hold equal value. This stance avoids privileging so-called inclusive sports over segregated ones, recognizing the legitimacy of both.

The term "**disability**" encompasses physical, mental, sensory, intellectual, or developmental conditions that substantially impact a person's ability to carry out certain tasks or engage with their environment. Disabilities can be temporary or permanent, visible or invisible, and can vary greatly in severity and how they affect an individual's life.

The present handbook adopts WHO's biopsychosocial model, which highlights the complex interplay between an individual's condition and societal factors. The model underscores that disability is not just about a person's physical or mental state but also about how external environments, such as accessibility in sports, can either limit or facilitate participation. In this way, the text encourages a holistic view of inclusion in sports, focusing on the need for both adaptable environments and supportive frameworks that address physical, social, and attitudinal barriers.[2]

[1] Kiuppis, F. (2018). Inclusion in sport: disability and participation. In *Sport and Disability* (pp. 4-21). Routledge. DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2016.1225882

[2] WHO (World Health Organization). 2001. *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health*. Geneva: WHO.

2.2 Disability models

Considering models of disability allows coaches to gain insight into their own and others' perspectives and assumptions about disability. This awareness helps them reflect on their coaching approach and planning. By understanding these models, coaches can expand their perspective and discover new ways to enhance their practice, as well as design and deliver sport more effectively. Here are the key models:

1. Medical Model of Disability

The medical model views disability as a personal issue caused by illness or injury, focusing on the limitations it creates. It sees disability as something to be "fixed" through treatment. In coaching, this can lead to a more controlling approach, where the coach emphasizes rehabilitation or medical treatment to improve the athlete's performance by "fixing" their body.

2. Social Model of Disability

The social model sees disability as a result of societal barriers, not individual impairments. It focuses on removing obstacles like inaccessibility to enable full participation. However, in coaching, this model may downplay the physical challenges athletes face, such as pain or illness, by focusing too much on social factors.

3. Biopsychosocial Model of Disability

The biopsychosocial model offers a comprehensive way to understand disability by considering biological, psychological, and social factors. Unlike the medical model, which focuses only on physical impairments, or the social model, which blames societal barriers, this model recognizes that disability results from a combination of physical, mental, and social influences. It suggests that treatment and support should address not only medical issues but also the individual's mental well-being and social environment. This holistic approach encourages personalized, inclusive care and policies.

4. Human Rights Model of Disability

The Human Rights model, from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), says everyone has the right to play sports and make their own choices. It builds on the social model, focusing on equality. Sports clubs must create inclusive policies and help coaches make welcoming environments. This "whole-club" approach promotes inclusion at all levels.

2.3 Disability groups

In sports and other areas where inclusivity and equal opportunities are important, individuals with disabilities are often organized into disability groups. These groupings are designed to reflect the specific types of disabilities people experience, ensuring that competition or participation is fair and accessible. While the details may vary across contexts (sports, education, employment, etc.), disability groups generally fall into the following broad categories:



Physically impaired athletes,

Physical disabilities affect a person's mobility, dexterity, or physical abilities. These can be present from birth or happen later due to injury or illness, like spinal cord injuries, cerebral palsy, amputations, or arthritis. People with physical disabilities may use assistive devices like wheelchairs, prosthetics, crutches, or braces to help them move and stay independent.

Visually impaired athletes,

Visually impaired athletes compete in sports even with partial or complete vision loss. They take part in various adaptive sports, such as athletics, swimming, and goalball, which is designed for blind players. Competitions are often organized by the level of visual impairment to ensure fairness. These athletes may use assistive tools like sound signals, guides for running, or tactile markings.

Athletes with intellectual disabilities,

Athletes with intellectual disabilities compete in sports despite facing challenges with cognitive functioning, learning, and social interaction. They may have conditions like Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, or other developmental disabilities. Many participate in organizations like the Special Olympics.

Deaf athletes,

Deaf athletes compete in sports while facing challenges related to hearing loss, which can range from partial to complete deafness. They often participate in separate events, like the Deaflympics, where visual signals, such as flashing lights or hand signals, replace sounds like starting guns or whistles. Popular sports for deaf athletes include basketball, football, athletics, and swimming. Although their hearing impairment does not affect their physical abilities, communication and teamwork may require adaptations like sign language or other non-verbal methods.

2.4. General and Specific Benefits of Sports for Young People with Disabilities

Sports have long been recognized as a valuable tool for improving the physical, social, psychological, and economic well-being of young people with disabilities. When appropriately structured and inclusive, sports provide not only physical health benefits but also foster social connections, enhance psychological resilience, and open doors to economic opportunities. Here's an in-depth look at these benefits.

2.4.1. Physical Benefits

- **Enhanced Motor Skills and Coordination:** Participation in adaptive sports, like wheelchair basketball and swimming, helps disabled individuals improve motor functions, balance, and coordination. Regular involvement in these activities enhances motor control and reduces the risk of secondary disabilities caused by inactivity[3]
- **Increased Strength and Endurance:** Regular participation in sports boosts muscle strength, endurance, and cardiovascular health in individuals with physical disabilities. This leads to improved physical fitness and functional independence, helping them perform daily activities more easily.
- **Weight Management and Cardiovascular Health:** Individuals with disabilities often face obesity and heart issues from sedentary lifestyles. Regular adaptive sports help manage weight, improve heart health, and reduce the risk of conditions like hypertension and diabetes, while also providing a fun, social experience.[4]
- **Prevention of Secondary Health Complications:** Physical inactivity can cause muscle atrophy, osteoporosis, and joint stiffness. Sports like swimming and adaptive skiing help maintain flexibility, bone density, and joint health while minimizing high-impact strain, making them ideal for individuals with mobility challenges. [5]

[3] Puce, L., Marinelli, L., Girtler, N., Pallecchi, I., Mori, L., Simonini, M., & Trompetto, C. (2019). Self-perceived psychophysical well-being of young competitive swimmers with physical or intellectual impairment. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 126(5), 862-885. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031512519865849>

[4] Sorgente, V., Cohen, E. J., Bravi, R., & Minciocchi, D. (2021). Accept. Understand. Then play! The impact of sport and physical activity in autism spectrum disorder. *Authorea Preprints*. doi: [10.22541/au.162345044.42442036/v2](https://doi.org/10.22541/au.162345044.42442036/v2)

[5] Maffulli, N., Longo, U. G., Spiezia, F., & Denaro, V. (2010). Sports injuries in young athletes: Long-term outcome and prevention strategies. *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*, 38(3), 29-34. <https://doi.org/10.3810/psm.2010.06.1780>

2.4.2. Social Benefits

- **Building Social Connections and Friendships:** A key social benefit of adaptive sports is building friendships and social networks. In team sports like wheelchair basketball or rugby, young disabled individuals connect with peers, make lasting bonds, and develop teamwork and communication skills.
- **Reducing Social Isolation:** Disabled youth often feel isolated from mainstream activities. Sports can break down these barriers by creating inclusive environments that encourage community engagement. Research shows that participating in community sports reduces isolation and improves social inclusion and emotional well-being.
- **Promoting Social Skills and Collaboration:** Sports help teach important social skills like communication, cooperation, and empathy. Disabled young people involved in team sports gain positive social experiences, learn to navigate social dynamics, and work together toward common goals, fostering community and support for better societal integration.
- **Challenging Societal Norms and Stereotypes:** Sports provide a platform to challenge stereotypes about disability. By participating, disabled individuals showcase their abilities and resilience, changing misconceptions about their capabilities. This benefits them personally and promotes greater acceptance and inclusion in society.

2.4.3. Psychological and Emotional Benefits

- **Boosting Self-Esteem and Confidence:** Participating in sports helps young disabled individuals experience success, build self-confidence, and develop a positive self-image. Achieving personal or team goals boosts self-esteem, which positively impacts other areas of their lives and fosters a hopeful outlook.
- **Psychological Resilience and Emotional Well-Being:** Sports participation helps young people, especially disabled athletes, develop resilience by teaching them to cope with adversity and manage stress. Overcoming challenges in sports builds coping strategies that translate into daily life, helping them navigate personal and social difficulties.[6]
- **Mental Health Improvements:** Regular physical activity is associated with better mental health. Sports help reduce anxiety and depression by releasing endorphins, which boost mood. Engaging in adaptive sports provides disabled individuals a structured way to manage their mental health, improving mood and reducing stress. [7]
- **Identity Formation and Self-Worth:** Sports help disabled young people build a positive self-identity by emphasizing their abilities over their disabilities. Adaptive sports foster pride and self-worth, leading many disabled athletes to identify strongly as athletes, which enhances their confidence and social identity. [8]

[6] Martin, J. (2010). The psychosocial dynamics of youth disability sport. *Kinesiology*, 19(1), 49-69. <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10237-011-0032-9>

[7] Youngson, L., Foster, C., & Lambert, J. (2023). The physical and mental health benefits of lifestyle sports for disabled people: A scoping review. *International Journal of Disabilities Sports & Health Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.33438/ijds.hs.1197978>

2.4.4. Economic Benefits

- **Increased Employability:** Engaging in adaptive sports boosts employability for disabled individuals. Participation improves social skills, discipline, and teamwork, making disabled athletes more likely to secure jobs than those who do not participate in sports.
- **Improved Workplace Skills:** Adaptive sports help young people develop key workplace skills such as leadership, communication, problem-solving, and time management. These skills are valuable for career success, and the discipline learned in sports often leads to better job performance and career advancement.
- **Economic Empowerment and Independence:** Adaptive sports enhance employability and workplace success, helping young disabled individuals achieve economic independence. The skills and social connections gained through sports improve career prospects, leading to greater financial stability. [9]

2.4.5. Educational and Cognitive Benefits

- **Improved Academic Performance:** Participation in sports leads to better academic results, improving focus, discipline, and cognitive skills. For young disabled individuals, sports enhance attention and problem-solving abilities, resulting in improved academic performance and time management. [10]
- **Life Skills Development:** Sports help disabled young athletes learn important life skills like leadership, teamwork, perseverance, and decision-making. These skills can be applied in education, work, and personal relationships, creating a strong foundation for future success.[11]
- **Enhancement of Concentration and Focus:** Sports practice improves concentration and mental endurance. Adaptive sports like wheelchair basketball and rugby require strategic thinking, helping young people focus on complex tasks longer. This builds mental resilience and attention span, positively impacting their academic and personal success.

[8] Napolitano, J. T., Iliescu, D., Hoehn, J., Berner, T., Meyer, C., Jackson, K., & Kemp, E. (2021). Athlete identity and common benefits and barriers to sport participation amongst adolescent sled hockey players. *Orthopaedic Journal of Sports Medicine*, 9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2325967121S00078>

[9] Lastuka, A., & Cottingham, M. (2016). The effect of adaptive sports on employment among people with disabilities. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 38(8), 742-748. <https://doi.org/10.3109/09638288.2015.1059497>

[10] Ommundsen, Y. (2000). Can sports and physical activity promote young peoples' psychosocial health? *Tidsskrift for den Norske laegeforening*, 120(29), 3573-3577. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.38123.737081.55>

[11] Gould, D., & Voelker, D. K. (2012). Enhancing youth leadership through sport and physical education. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 83(8), 38-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2012.10598828>

2.5 The Unifying Power of Sports

But what are the benefits of inclusive sports, where disabled and non-disabled athletes compete side-by-side? When sport is not fully inclusive, it neglects a critical population that has a rightful and central place in the sporting environment. Including athletes with disabilities in sports brings numerous benefits that go beyond the playing field. Sports have an exceptional ability to unify individuals by creating common goals, fostering teamwork, and enabling a sense of achievement. Inclusive sports environments provide disabled and able-bodied youth with the opportunity to challenge societal norms, build relationships, and contribute equally to a shared goal. Research supports that inclusive sports can create meaningful social connections that extend beyond the playing field. [12]

→ Building a Shared Identity and Team Spirit

When disabled and able-bodied youth play sports together, they develop a shared identity as teammates, focusing on collective goals like improving skills or enjoying the game. For disabled youth, being part of a team fosters belonging and acceptance, valuing their contributions over their disabilities. Programs like Unified Sports, part of the Special Olympics, which bring together athletes with and without intellectual and physical disabilities, emphasize collaboration over competition. These programs promote equality, reduce isolation, and build mutual respect, creating an inclusive environment where everyone's abilities are celebrated.

→ Fostering Social Integration Through Common Goals

Sports have a powerful unifying effect, bringing together people from different backgrounds and promoting social integration. For disabled youth, sports offer a unique opportunity to engage with peers in an environment that values ability, effort, and teamwork. Inclusive sports programs, like Mixed Ability Sports, in sports like rugby, actively integrate disabled and non-disabled players, allowing disabled athletes to be full contributors alongside their peers. This fosters teamwork, understanding, and meaningful social connections. [13]

For disabled youth, who may often feel isolated or excluded in other areas of life, these inclusive programs provide crucial social opportunities. Research shows that such programs help reduce feelings of isolation, offering disabled athletes a sense of belonging and enabling them to form lasting friendships. By creating a sense of community and shared effort, inclusive sports teams break down stereotypes and reduce the social barriers that often separate disabled individuals from their peers, promoting mutual respect and social inclusion. [14]

[12] McConkey, R., Dowling, S., Hassan, D., & Menke, S. (2013). Promoting Social Inclusion Through Unified Sports for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities: A Five-Nation Study. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1362788.2012.01587.x>.

[13] Spencer-Cavaliere, N., Peers, D., & Watkinson, E. J. (2017). Part of, or Apart From Sport? Practitioners' Experiences Coaching Athletes with Disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly: APAQ*. <https://doi.org/10.17645/SI.V5I2.889>.

[14] Ramsden, R., Hayman, R., Potrac, P., & Hettinga, F. (2023). Sport Participation for People with Disabilities: Exploring the Potential of Reverse Integration and Inclusion through Wheelchair Basketball. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20032491>.

→ Redefining Success and Achievement in Inclusive Sports

In inclusive sports, success is measured not just by wins but by personal progress, effort, and teamwork. For disabled youth, sports offer a platform to showcase their abilities, shifting the focus from limitations to growth and contribution. This shift boosts self-esteem and fosters a sense of accomplishment. Events like the Paralympic Games highlight that success is based on skill and determination, challenging societal views of disability and celebrating all athletes' capabilities. On a local level, programs like Wheels for Wellbeing emphasize personal milestones, helping disabled youth build confidence and engage more fully in sports and life by celebrating their achievements beyond competition. [15]

→ Fostering Social Integration Through Common Goals

Empathy is a key outcome of inclusive sports. When disabled and able-bodied athletes train and compete together, they share experiences that build understanding and appreciation for each other's efforts. In sports like wheelchair basketball, able-bodied athletes gain a deeper respect for the resilience and skills of their disabled teammates. Programs like CP Football, where athletes with cerebral palsy play alongside able-bodied players, show how these interactions foster empathy and change perspectives. This empathy not only enhances team dynamics but also promotes inclusion and respect beyond the sports field, helping to build more inclusive communities.

→ Enhancing diversity

By including persons with disabilities, sports also provide opportunities for innovation and recognize the range of diversity within the disability community itself. This diversity includes a wide spectrum of abilities, from physical to cognitive, and sports can provide a variety of mainstream and disability-specific opportunities across the inclusion spectrum for persons with disabilities. Athletes with disabilities bring unique experiences and perspectives to a team, broadening the horizons of their teammates and challenging any preconceived biases. This diversity helps break down stereotypes related to disabilities, promoting a culture where everyone, regardless of their abilities, has an equal opportunity to participate and succeed.

Incorporating athletes with disabilities builds a positive club culture, centered on empathy and respect. A club that embraces inclusivity nurtures an environment where consideration for others becomes a core value, which has a ripple effect beyond the sport itself. This focus on adaptability and creativity, whether in training methods, game strategies, or facility design, benefits everyone, as it encourages innovation and open-mindedness.

[15] Hutzler, Y., Barda, R., Mintz, A., & Hayosh, T. (2016). Reverse Integration in Wheelchair Basketball. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723516632043>.

2.6 The importance of social inclusion through sports

Today, many sports have been created for people with disabilities, specifically designed to meet their needs. Examples include wheelchair basketball, blind cricket, goalball, and sitting volleyball, where disabled and non-disabled children can play and compete together. Additionally, inclusive sports such as para-athletics—part of the Paralympic Games since 1960, featuring track and field events—and blind football, where players wear blindfolds and rely on their hearing to locate a ball with internal bells, are also significant. Boccia, introduced in the Paralympics in 1984, is particularly inclusive, as it allows everyone to participate without needing a separate version for disabled players. Players aim to get their ball closer to a jack, and those using a ramp may have a parent assist them by following their instructions, giving the child a sense of control and independence.

Sports, when effectively planned and conducted, can significantly foster integration and equal rights for diverse groups. Their popularity, especially among children and youth, makes sports a valuable avenue for promoting healthy habits and values within families and communities. Communities play a crucial role in harnessing the transformative power of sports to include marginalized individuals, normalizing their participation and enhancing their overall life experiences. This inclusive mindset also extends to spectators, as seeing disabled athletes compete reinforces the notion of equality among all athletes.

Families of disabled children experience positive impacts as well, gaining a sense of autonomy and the potential for self-realization through sports participation. The involvement of non-disabled athletes is also influenced, as they recognize that disabled athletes have equal dignity and opportunities to compete. In many mixed activities, disabled and non-disabled athletes compete together, promoting true equality and inclusivity in the sporting arena.

By promoting a sports culture for individuals with disabilities, sports clubs can significantly increase their membership, volunteer participation, and overall engagement. This not only showcases the club's ethical commitment but also attracts sponsors, enhancing the club's brand, visual identity, and resources. Additionally, fostering such inclusivity strengthens community ties and awareness of the true value of sports, ensuring the club's long-term sustainability. Ultimately, this creates a virtuous cycle of community engagement that enhances the overall value of the sports club, benefiting everyone involved.

3 CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Effective communication and approach are essential in fostering inclusion for young disabled individuals. Recognizing their diverse needs and abilities is crucial for creating an empowering and supportive environment, especially in the context of sports as a tool for inclusion.



3.1. Communication and Approach to Disabled Individuals

Effective communication and approach are essential in fostering inclusion for young disabled individuals. Recognizing their diverse needs and abilities is crucial for creating an empowering and supportive environment, especially in the context of sports as a tool for inclusion.

3.1.1 General Communication and Interaction Guidelines

- **Person-first language:** Person-first language focuses on the individual rather than their disability. Saying "a person with a disability" instead of "a disabled person" emphasizes their humanity. This shift promotes respectful interactions and enhances the dignity of disabled individuals. Language significantly influences how people perceive and relate to those with disabilities. [16]
- **Avoid assumptions about abilities:** Non-disabled individuals often make assumptions about what disabled people can do, which can hinder meaningful communication. Such assumptions may reduce autonomy and harm self-worth. It is important to ask individuals directly about their preferences and abilities to ensure communication meets their specific needs.

- **Patience and understanding in communication:** Communicating with disabled individuals, especially those with cognitive or speech impairments, may require more time. Research shows that healthcare providers who adopt a patient-centered approach, allowing for pauses, improve interactions and understanding. It's important to ensure that disabled individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves.
- **Respect autonomy and decision-making:** Empowering disabled individuals to make decisions about their care and activities is essential. Autonomy is vital for self-determination and improves confidence and quality of life. [17] Allowing them to express preferences in sports can encourage active participation and foster independence.
- **Provide multiple communication options:** Disabled individuals may need different communication methods. Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems, like picture boards and sign language, help those with verbal challenges and improve social participation.[18] Providing options like written, visual, or audio formats promotes inclusivity and accessibility.

3.1.2. Non-Verbal Communication and Body Language

- **Pay attention to non-verbal cues:** Non-verbal signals like facial expressions, gestures, and body language are important when communicating with disabled individuals. For those with severe disabilities, these cues may be their main way to communicate. Professionals should notice these signals for better communication. [19]
- **Respect personal space:** Disabled individuals, especially those using mobility aids, may have specific needs regarding personal space. Always ask before touching or moving their devices, as these can be part of their personal space. Respecting this helps maintain their dignity.
- **Inclusivity in written communication:** Written materials should be easy to read for those with visual or cognitive challenges. Use large fonts, high-contrast text, and simple language. Providing braille, audio versions, or other accessible formats helps ensure everyone can engage with the content. This approach improves participation and reduces barriers [20]

[17] Olney, M. (2001). Communication Strategies of Adults with Severe Disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*, 44(2), 87-94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003435520104400205>

[18] Hagan, L., & Thompson, H. (2014). It's good to talk: developing the communication skills of an adult with an intellectual disability through augmentative and alternative communication. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42(1), 66-73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/BLD.12041>

[19] Griffiths, C., & Smith, M. M. (2016). Attuning: A Communication Process between People with Severe and Profound Intellectual Disability and Their Interaction Partners. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 29(2), 124-138. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12162>

[20] Godsell, M., & Scarborough, K. (2006). Improving communication for people with learning disabilities. *Nursing standard*, 20(30).

3.1.3. Practical Approaches for Interaction

- **Ask before offering assistance:** Always ask disabled individuals how they would like help instead of assuming. This empowers them and enhances their sense of control, especially in sports where they may need support but want to be involved in decisions.
- **Promote independence:** Create environments that allow disabled individuals to show their abilities and make choices. Encouraging independence helps build self-confidence and social skills, particularly in team sports. Research shows that physical activities improve independence and social interactions among disabled youth. [21]
- **Use inclusive and respectful language:** Avoid outdated terms like "handicapped" or "crippled." Use modern, respectful language that highlights individuals' abilities and strengths. Respectful language helps shape positive attitudes and reinforces dignity and self-esteem.

3.1.4. Fostering an Inclusive Environment

- **Adopt positive and inclusive attitudes:** Professionals and caregivers should focus on individuals' strengths rather than limitations. A positive mindset fosters a supportive environment and enhances feelings of belonging [22]
- **Create opportunities for empowerment through sports:** Sports provide a great way to promote inclusion, social skills, and empowerment for disabled youth. Full participation in sports leads to better physical and mental well-being, increased social interaction, and a stronger sense of self-efficacy. Sports also encourage teamwork, leadership, and personal growth
- **Foster a sense of belonging:** Being part of a supportive community, like a sports team, helps disabled individuals feel a sense of belonging and identity. Participation in team sports enhances social connections and reduces feelings of isolation.

[21] Hagan, L., & Thompson, H. (2014). It's good to talk: developing the communication skills of an adult with an intellectual disability through augmentative and alternative communication. *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42(1), 66-73.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/BLD.12041>

[22] Taylor, C. (2008). Assessment of communication in people with learning disabilities. *Advances in Mental Health and Learning Disabilities*, 2(1), 15-20. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17530180200800035>

3.1.5. Legal and Ethical Considerations in Communication

- **Compliance with laws and regulations:** Communication with disabled individuals must follow legal standards, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which requires providing reasonable accommodations for equal access to services and opportunities. Not doing so can lead to exclusion and unfair treatment.
- **Ethical considerations in communication:** Professionals must understand the ethical aspects of communicating with disabled individuals. It's vital to respect their rights to be heard, make choices about their care, and fully participate in society. Following ethical communication practices is especially important in healthcare and caregiving.

3.1.6. Cultural Sensitivity in Communication

- **Understanding cultural perspectives:** Different cultures have various beliefs about disability, with some focusing on medical treatment and others on social or spiritual aspects. Being culturally sensitive and respecting these views helps build rapport and understanding.
- **Adapting communication styles:** Cultural backgrounds can shape communication preferences. Some cultures may prefer indirect communication and non-verbal cues, while others favor direct expression. Recognizing and adjusting to these preferences can help disabled individuals feel more comfortable and understood.

3.2 Recommended Inclusive Sessions



Before you begin, it might be helpful to assess how inclusive your club already is by doing an inclusion check. The "Welcome to Sport" campaign was launched in the Netherlands in January 2022 to encourage sports providers to discuss the importance of creating an inclusive and welcoming environment. This campaign is supported by the Sports and Exercise for Everyone alliance and the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport. Its goal is to raise awareness among professionals about the opportunities and barriers people may face in participating in sports and exercise due to factors like age, physical or mental health, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or social status.

Conduct the inclusion check. Are you interested in evaluating how your club is performing? Please respond to the following 10 statements with either “agree” or “disagree”:

- 1** The term "inclusion" applies to my club.
- 2** There are members from diverse backgrounds (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation) in my club.
- 3** The skills of our staff (directors, trainers/coaches, volunteers) align with the needs of our members.
- 4** The club recognizes that there are potential members who are not currently participating in sports and considers their wishes, needs, and barriers.
- 5** My club fosters a welcoming environment where everyone feels included.
- 6** My club's policy incorporates diversity, a positive sports culture, and a safe sporting environment.
- 7** Additional assistance or support (such as adjusted membership fees) is available to ensure everyone can participate.
- 8** The sports facilities used by my club are accessible to everyone.
- 9** My club is easy to reach by various transportation methods (car, public transport).
- 10** The club provides enjoyable and positive sporting experiences for all. [23]

3.2.1. Session: The Minefield of Trust (Teambuilding)

Time: 25-30 minutes

Overview:

This session involves navigating a simulated minefield while blindfolded, relying only on verbal instructions from a partner. The goal is to foster teamwork, trust, and effective communication, while also raising awareness of visual impairments. Participants will learn the importance of clear communication, trust, and adaptability, as well as developing empathy toward people with disabilities.

Objectives:

- Build confidence and trust within teams.
- Raise awareness about visual impairments.
- Improve verbal communication and active listening skills.
- Encourage problem-solving and adaptability.
- Promote inclusivity and teamwork.

Materials:

- Blindfolds
- Objects to create obstacles (cones, chairs, ropes)
- Markers to define the start and end of the path

Preparation:

Facilitators should understand the objectives, ensure safety, and be mindful of participants' emotional and physical comfort. The minefield should be set up in a safe environment, and clear instructions provided. Facilitators must guide, support, and ensure a safe, inclusive experience for everyone.

Instructions:

- Participants are divided into pairs: one is blindfolded, the other guides them verbally through the obstacle course.
- If mistakes occur, the team restarts, emphasizing clear communication and trust.
- The blindfolded partner cannot speak or be touched, relying entirely on verbal cues.

Debriefing:

After the activity, participants discuss their experiences:

- How did it feel being blindfolded or guiding?
- What challenges arose, and how were they overcome?
- How did this activity highlight the importance of trust and communication?

The discussion emphasizes the skills learned and their relevance in real-life teamwork situations.

Facilitator Tips:

- Ensure safety and adapt if needed for anxious participants.
- Encourage open dialogue during the debrief to allow everyone to share their insights.

3.2.2. Session: Sound Ball

Theme: Precision and orientation exercises for both visually impaired and non-visually impaired participants.

Time: 45 minutes

Overview:

The session helps develop non-visual senses (auditory and tactile) for visually impaired participants and improves spatial awareness and movement for all participants. It promotes concentration, precision, and understanding of the challenges faced by those with visual impairments.

Objectives:

- Enhance non-visual senses and spatial orientation.
- Improve movement and coordination without relying on sight.
- Foster concentration and precision.

Materials:

- Sound balls or ordinary balls in plastic bags (to make noise).
- Blindfolds for non-visually impaired participants.
- Cones for goal markers, tactile markers (ropes or paper tapes), numbers (1-9) for goal targets.

Group Size: 20-30 participants

Preparation:

- Divide participants into groups (4-6 people).
- Non-visually impaired participants are blindfolded, except for the team leader, who gives verbal instructions.
- Ensure participants are comfortable and check for any physical or emotional concerns (e.g., claustrophobia).

Facilitator Tips:

- Ensure safety and comfort for all participants.
- Adapt activities based on the group's needs (e.g., use hoodies as blindfolds).
- Adjust for participants with different levels of visual impairment.

3.2.3. Session: Polygon Skilled Child

Theme: Motor skills training for children with physical disabilities and their non-disabled peers

Time: 45 minutes

Overview:

This session promotes empathy, teamwork, and motor skill development (agility, speed, strength, and precision) through a fun, inclusive activity. It helps children understand the needs and abilities of others while developing their physical coordination.

Objectives:

- Foster teamwork and cooperation.
- Build empathy for different abilities.
- Develop motor skills like agility and precision.

Materials:

Cones, hurdles, balls, sticks, ropes, bottles, and a table or desk.

Group Size: 20-30 participants

Preparation:

Facilitators need to know the number of children with and without disabilities to organize the activity effectively. Children with cerebral palsy, amputations, paraplegia (wheelchair users), or intellectual disabilities can participate.

Instructions:

1. Warm-up (10-15 minutes): Facilitator leads exercises, adapting them for children with different abilities (e.g., upper body exercises for children in wheelchairs).

2. Main Activity (25-30 minutes):

- Children are divided into teams with both disabled and non-disabled participants.
- Each child completes an obstacle course (polygon) and finishes by shooting balls at cones (earning points for accuracy).
- The team with the most points wins.

Obstacle Course for Non-Disabled Children:

- Zig-zag running between cones.
- Jumping over hurdles.
- Touching cones alternately with left and right hands.

Obstacle Course for Wheelchair Users:

- Zig-zag wheelchair driving.
- Turning around cones.
- Touching cones with alternate hands.

Obstacle Course for Children with Cerebral Palsy or Amputation:

- Zig-zag running or walking.
- Jumping or stepping over a line/hurdle.
- Touching cones alternately with both hands.

Debriefing (5 minutes): Discuss how the game felt, how it could be improved, and the importance of helping peers with disabilities in everyday life.

Facilitator Tips:

- Adjust the course or equipment based on the children's abilities and the group size.
- Modify target height and distance to match participants' capabilities.

3.2.4. Session: Bulldog

Theme: Inclusive and fun chasing game adaptable for all abilities.

Time: 45-60 minutes

Overview:

This session focuses on teamwork, motor skill development, and strategic thinking in a fun and inclusive environment. The game allows everyone, regardless of ability, to participate in the excitement of running, chasing, and tagging.

Objectives:

- Encourage participation from everyone, regardless of ability.
- Promote teamwork and collaboration.
- Support physical activity in an enjoyable, inclusive setting.
- Create a welcoming environment where all feel valued.

Materials:

- Open space (playground/field)
- Cones or markers (for boundaries)
- Comfortable clothing
- Optional: Soft balls or fabric strips for tagging

Group Size:

- Minimum: 5-6 participants
- Maximum: 20+ depending on space

Preparation:

- Set clear boundaries with cones or markers.
- Review game rules, emphasizing teamwork and inclusivity.
- Adjust rules to accommodate diverse abilities.

Instructions:

1. Players start on one side of the playing area, with one player as the Bulldog in the middle.
2. The goal is for players to cross the area without being tagged by the Bulldog.
3. Once tagged, players become Bulldogs and help tag others.
4. The game ends when all players are tagged, or a time limit is reached. The last untagged player wins.
5. Adaptations for inclusivity:

- Softer tagging (e.g., tapping or using fabric strips).
- Allow walking or use of assistive devices.
- Slow down the Bulldog (e.g., start with a push-up).
- Modify the space for wheelchair use.

Debriefing (after the game):

- What did you enjoy most?
- How did teamwork impact your experience?
- Were the adaptations helpful for inclusion?
- What strategies did you use?
- How did the game make you feel?

Facilitator Tips:

- Be flexible and attentive to participants' needs.
- Use clear, simple instructions.
- Ensure everyone feels comfortable and included.[24]

3.2.5. Session: Inclusive Basketball

Duration: 60 minutes

Group Size: 12-20 participants (mixed abilities)

Age Group: 8-18 years old

Location: Indoor basketball court or gymnasium

Objectives:

- To develop fundamental basketball skills (dribbling, passing, shooting).
- To promote teamwork and communication among participants.
- To foster an inclusive environment where all players feel valued.

Materials:

- Basketballs (varied sizes, including softer options for beginners)
- Adjustable hoops (if available) or standard hoops
- Cones for drills
- Markers (to indicate boundaries or targets)
- Whistles (for the facilitator)

Instructions**1. Warm-Up (10 minutes)**

- Start with a group circle. Lead a dynamic warm-up including arm circles, leg swings, and light jogging.
- Incorporate movements that can be adapted for different abilities (e.g., seated exercises for those in wheelchairs).

2. Skill Development Drills (25 minutes)

Drill 1: Dribbling (10 minutes)

Setup: Create a zigzag course with cones.

- Players dribble the basketball through the cones, focusing on control and speed.
- Adapt for abilities: Players in wheelchairs can navigate the cones with modified dribbling techniques.

Drill 2: Passing (10 minutes)

Setup: Pair players up facing each other at a short distance.

- Players practice chest passes, bounce passes, and overhead passes.
- Encourage them to communicate and move around while passing.
- For players needing additional support, allow them to pass from a stationary position or closer distance.

Drill 3: Shooting (5 minutes)

Setup: Create multiple shooting stations at different distances.

- Players take turns shooting from different spots, focusing on form.
- Offer modifications, like lower hoops or closer shooting distances for beginners.

3. Team Activity (20 minutes)

Modified 3v3 Games

Setup:

- Divide players into mixed-ability teams (3-4 players each).
- Set up two mini-courts if possible to allow multiple games simultaneously.
- Play short games (5-7 minutes each) with modified rules:
- Allow for additional steps or dribbles if necessary.
- Encourage teamwork by rewarding assists or teamwork points.
- Emphasize that players can use any assistive devices as needed (e.g., canes for visually impaired players, wheelchairs).
- Rotate teams so players can play with and against different participants.

4. Debriefing (5 minutes)

- Lead a cool-down with gentle stretching exercises.
- Gather participants in a circle and ask reflective questions:
- What did you enjoy most about today's session?
- How did you feel working with your teammates?
- What skills do you want to improve next time?
- How can we support each other better in future sessions?

Facilitators Tips

- **Encourage Participation:** Remind participants that the focus is on fun, teamwork, and skill development rather than competition.
- **Adapt as Needed:** Be prepared to make further adaptations based on the specific needs of the participants present that day.
- **Provide Positive Feedback:** Use encouraging language and praise effort, teamwork, and improvement throughout the session.

3.2.6. Session: Blanketball

Materials:

- Blankets, sheets, or large towels (one per team)
- Volleyball net, rope, or a marked line to create a playing area
- Ball (lightweight, such as a beach ball or volleyball)

Instructions

Team Setup:

- Organize children into teams, ideally with 4 players per team. If there are fewer players, teams can consist of pairs.
- Each team is given a blanket, bed-sheet, or large towel.
- Each player holds a corner of the blanket (or two players if using towels).

Toss and Catch Practice:

- Teams practice by tossing the ball into the air using their blanket and catching it as a group.
- Encourage teamwork by seeing which team can toss the ball the highest and still catch it in their blanket.

Cooperative Play:

- Pair teams together. Each pair of teams tosses the ball between them, trying to catch it with their blankets.
- This encourages cooperation between teams as they toss and catch the ball.

Competitive Game:

- Set up a basic court with a barrier (net, rope, or a line on the floor) in the middle.
- Teams play a game similar to volleyball by tossing the ball over the barrier. Points are scored if the opposing team fails to catch the ball in their blanket or throws the ball out of bounds.
- Teams work together to communicate and coordinate their movements to catch and toss the ball.

Inclusion and Adaptation:

- **Mobility-Friendly:** The game requires minimal running, making it ideal for participants with mobility issues.
- **Teamwork-Oriented:** The game emphasizes cooperation, allowing all participants to feel included.
- **Light Equipment:** Using lightweight balls and blankets ensures safety and ease of participation for everyone.

Facilitator Tips

- Emphasize cooperation over competition, especially in the initial stages. Remind participants that success in the game comes from working together to toss and catch the ball.
- **Mobility Adjustments:** For participants with limited mobility, adjust the size of the playing area or allow them to sit while holding the blanket. The game's design already requires minimal movement, making it ideal for mixed-ability groups.
- **Ball Adaptations:** Use softer, lighter balls (such as beach balls) to accommodate all skill levels. This ensures everyone can participate comfortably and reduces the risk of injury.

Role Adjustments: If some players have difficulty holding the blanket, they can take on roles like guiding teammates, giving instructions, or being in charge of counting scores.



CHALLENGES AND EXAMPLES OF INCLUSION THROUGH SPORTS

4.1. Preventing Exclusion and Racism Through Sport

Sport has the potential to serve as a powerful platform for inclusion, where individuals from diverse backgrounds can come together and develop mutual respect. However, if not managed intentionally, sport can reflect and perpetuate broader societal exclusions, including racism and the marginalization of disabled people. Therefore, proactive strategies are necessary to prevent exclusion and racism in sports, transforming it into a platform for social change.



4.1.1 Raising Awareness and Providing Education

Preventing exclusion and racism in sports starts with education. A major barrier for disabled athletes is the lack of awareness among coaches, players, and staff about the challenges these athletes face. Many coaches are not trained to manage diverse teams, which can lead to unintentional exclusion.

Training sessions on disability awareness and inclusive coaching can help coaches create environments where disabled athletes can succeed alongside their peers. Research in wheelchair basketball shows that when able-bodied athletes participate in disability sports, they develop greater respect and understanding of their disabled counterparts, helping to combat stereotypes [25]

Education should also address racism, particularly where disability and race intersect. Disabled youth from minority backgrounds often face multiple forms of discrimination. For example, Black disabled athletes may encounter both racial bias and assumptions about their abilities. Programs like Sport Against Racism Ireland (SARI) provide a model for integrating anti-racism and anti-ableism in sports education. [26]

[25] Verdonck, M., Ripat, J., Clark, P., Oprescu, F., Gray, M., Chaffey, L., & Kean, B. (2020). Reverse Integration in Wheelchair Basketball: Stakeholders' Understanding in Elite and Recreational Sporting Communities. *Adapted physical activity quarterly: APAQ*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2019-0082>.

[26] Gomez-Gonzalez, C. (2023). Towards policies to eradicate ethnic discrimination in amateur sports. *Current Issues in Sport Science (CISS)*. <https://doi.org/10.36950/2023.2ciss005>

Workshops that emphasize inclusive coaching practices while building cultural competence are important for coaches. They need to understand how cultural norms can shape their interactions with disabled athletes from diverse racial backgrounds. [27] For instance, some communities may have different perspectives on disability, which can affect how families and local groups engage with sports. By addressing these cultural nuances, coaches can create a more welcoming and supportive environment for all young athletes.

4.1.2. Implementing Inclusive Policies

Inclusive sports policies are essential for preventing exclusion and racism, ensuring that everyone, regardless of ability, background, or ethnicity, has equal access to participate. A significant barrier for many disabled athletes is the lack of accessible facilities, such as ramps and accessible restrooms, which can exclude them from events.

The UK's Inclusive Sports Program exemplifies effective inclusive policy by requiring government-funded sports facilities to meet accessibility standards. [28] This initiative recognizes that sports are a right for everyone, leading to funding for upgrading older facilities and building new accessible venues. Similarly, the Activity Alliance in England helps sports organizations develop inclusive policies.

Policies should also include strong anti-discrimination measures and clear guidelines for reporting exclusion or discrimination incidents, including racism. Sports organizations should adopt "zero-tolerance" policies for such incidents and implement strict anti-racism campaigns, like UEFA's No to Racism initiative, to create safer and more inclusive environments.

4.1.3. Promoting Mixed-Ability Teams and Reverse Integration

Mixed-ability teams, which include both disabled and non-disabled athletes, are an effective way to promote inclusion and reduce exclusion in sports. This approach breaks down barriers, fosters empathy, and challenges societal norms. Reverse integration, where able-bodied athletes participate in disability sports, is a key example, as seen in wheelchair basketball. Here, through participation, able-bodied players gain a profound appreciation for the abilities of their disabled teammates, helping to reduce ableist attitudes. A successful model is the Mixed Ability Rugby Movement, which started in the UK and has spread to several other countries, where players of all abilities compete together under the same rules, showing that disabled athletes can thrive alongside their peers, breaking down stereotypes about disability. [29]

[27] Hutzler, Y., Barda, R., Mintz, A., & Hayosh, T. (2016). Reverse Integration in Wheelchair Basketball. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723516632043>.

[28] Pérez-Tejero, J., Grassi-Roig, M., Coterón, J., & Hutzler, Y. (2022). Reverse Integration in Wheelchair Basketball-A Mixed-Method Spanish Stakeholders' Perspective. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly: APAQ*. <https://doi.org/10.1123/apaq.2022-0028>

[29] Spencer-Cavaliere, N., & Peers, D. (2011). "What's the Difference?" Women's Wheelchair Basketball, Reverse Integration, and the Question(ing) of Disability. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly: APAQ*. <https://doi.org/10.1123/APAQ.28.4.291>.

4.1.4. Addressing Systemic Racism in Sports

Racism remains a serious issue in sports, and it often worsens the exclusion faced by disabled athletes, especially those from minority ethnic backgrounds. These athletes experience discrimination based on both race and disability, making it harder to access sports opportunities. To address this, sports organizations need to take an intersectional approach that tackles both racial and disability discrimination. [30] Programs like Show Racism the Red Card raise awareness and educate athletes, coaches, and fans on preventing racism in sports, helping to create a more inclusive environment. Additionally, diverse leadership within sports organizations is crucial. When athletes see leaders who share their racial or ethnic background, it fosters a stronger sense of belonging and encourages greater participation. [31]

4.1.5. Community Engagement and Collaboration

Creating an inclusive sports environment requires active community involvement. Sports organizations should collaborate with schools, NGOs, and disability advocacy groups to promote inclusion and reach marginalized populations. [32] A good example is the Special Olympics Unified Sports program, where athletes with and without intellectual disabilities compete together, fostering teamwork and breaking down stereotypes.[33]

Partnerships with schools and local organizations are also vital for helping disabled youth access sports opportunities. These collaborations provide essential support and address challenges like transportation, ensuring that disabled athletes can participate fully.

[30] Ferri, B. A., & Connor, D. J. (2005). Tools of Exclusion: Race, Disability, and (Re)Segregated Education. Teachers College Record. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810510700305>.

[31] Hammond, S. M., Ginis, K. A. M., & Churchill, S. M. (2021). Enactments of Integrated and Disability-Inclusive Sport Policy: A Study of Local Sport Organizations. Journal of Sport & Social Issues. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2020-0151>.

[32] Marivoet, S. (2014). The Challenge of Sport Towards Social Inclusion. International Review for the Sociology of Sport. <https://doi.org/10.2478/pcssr-2014-0017>

[33] Hammond, S. M., Ginis, K. A. M., & Churchill, S. M. (2021). Enactments of Integrated and Disability-Inclusive Sport Policy: A Study of Local Sport Organizations. Journal of Sport & Social Issues. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2020-0151>.

4.2. Main Problems Faced by Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families

Disabled youth and their families face a range of significant challenges, many of which extend beyond the realm of sports. These challenges affect not only their participation in sports but also their broader social integration and personal development. Studies consistently show that addressing these challenges is essential for creating truly inclusive environments

4.2.1. Accessibility Issues in Infrastructure and Facilities

A major challenge for disabled athletes is the lack of accessible sports facilities and infrastructure. Many venues lack ramps, elevators, or accessible restrooms, preventing disabled youth from participating in sports. For example, a wheelchair-bound athlete may struggle to enter a facility or find the playing field unsuitable. Sports equipment is also often not adapted for disabled individuals, such as a swimmer with cerebral palsy needing a flotation device that isn't available at the local pool. Additionally, transportation can be a hurdle, especially in rural areas with limited accessible public transport, increasing the financial burden on families.

4.2.2. Financial Barriers

A major issue for disabled youth in sports is the high cost of participation. Adaptive equipment, like customized wheelchairs or prosthetics, is often prohibitively expensive. For example, a sports wheelchair for basketball can cost thousands of euros, beyond what many families can afford (Spencer-Cavaliere & Peers, 2011). Additionally, travel costs for competitions and specialized training camps add further financial strain. Many families struggle to support their child's participation in sports, often having to choose between basic needs and sports involvement. These financial barriers contribute to lower participation rates in competitive sports among disabled youth. [34]

4.2.4 Social Stigma and Discrimination

Disabled individuals and their families often face social stigma, leading to exclusionary attitudes and discrimination in sports. For example, a young girl with a learning disability may be discouraged from joining a team because the coach fears she might "slow the team down." Even when included, disabled youth may face subtle discrimination, such as less playing time or non-competitive.

Discrimination can also be seen in competitive environments, where disabled athletes receive less training and fewer opportunities than their able-bodied peers, limiting their potential. Additionally, parents of disabled children often feel isolated in the sports community, struggling to connect with others and feeling unsupported by organizations focused on able-bodied athletes, which deepens feelings of exclusion for both the athletes and their families.

[34] Berger, R. J. (2008). Disability and the dedicated wheelchair athlete: Beyond the "supercrip" critique. *Journal of contemporary ethnography*, 37(6), 647-678. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241607309892>.

4.2.5 Emotional and Mental Health Struggles

The combined effects of financial strain, social stigma, and exclusion from sports can significantly impact the mental health of disabled youth and their families. Disabled youth who are frequently excluded due to accessibility or financial barriers may feel frustrated, isolated, and have low self-worth. Research shows that repeated exclusion increases the risk of mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression. For example, a teenager with a physical disability who is often denied opportunities to join sports teams may start to feel inferior because of their disability.

Families also bear an emotional burden. Parents may feel guilty or helpless when they cannot provide the same opportunities for their disabled children as they do for their able-bodied children. For instance, a parent unable to afford a specialized sports camp might experience feelings of inadequacy and frustration. These emotional challenges, along with a lack of support from the sports community, contribute to increased stress and mental health issues for families of disabled athletes.

5.1. Disability policies around the world

Disability policies across the globe are shaped by international frameworks, national legislation, and local initiatives. These policies aim to protect the rights of people with disabilities, promote inclusion, and ensure equal opportunities in all spheres of life—education, employment, healthcare, and public participation. Below is an overview of the key international conventions, regional strategies, and national policies on disability:

5.1.1. International Frameworks

→ United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

The CRPD, adopted in 2006 and ratified by over 180 countries, is the leading international treaty focused on the rights of people with disabilities. It advocates for their full inclusion in society, emphasizing equality, non-discrimination, accessibility, and independent living.

Key Articles include:

- **Article 9:** Accessibility – Ensures equal access to physical spaces, transportation, and communication technologies.
- **Article 24:** Education – Promotes inclusive education for people with disabilities.
- **Article 27:** Work and Employment – Supports the right to fair employment without discrimination.

→ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development integrates disability rights throughout its 17 goals, especially in:

- **Goal 4:** Quality Education – Promoting inclusive education for all, including persons with disabilities.
- **Goal 8:** Decent Work and Economic Growth – Encouraging equal opportunities for employment.
- **Goal 10:** Reduced Inequalities – Reducing social and economic inequalities, including for persons with disabilities.

5.1.2. Regional Strategies

→ European Union (EU)

The European Commission's 2021-2030 Disability Strategy aligns with the CRPD and EU Charter, focusing on improving accessibility, inclusion, and participation for people with disabilities. It targets employment, education, digital access, and independent living, aiming to create a barrier-free Europe through collaboration between member states.

→ Council of Europe

The Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023 emphasizes upholding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law for persons with disabilities. The strategy outlines key areas for action such as equality, awareness-raising, accessibility, freedom from violence, and recognition before the law.

5.1.3. Disability and Development Policies

In low- and middle-income countries, disability policies aim to remove barriers in healthcare, education, and employment through inclusive development programs. International organizations like WHO and UNDP work with governments to promote disability inclusion. Key initiatives include:

- **Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR):** A WHO-recommended approach that encourages community efforts to integrate people with disabilities into all areas of life.
- **Inclusive Education Programs:** Countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, are incorporating systems that support children with disabilities in mainstream schools.

5.1.4. Challenges in Disability Policy Implementation

Despite progress in disability rights, key challenges remain:

- **Inadequate Enforcement:** Disability laws exist, but enforcement is weak, especially in rural or under-resourced areas.
- **Stigma and Discrimination:** Social stigma still limits full participation for people with disabilities.
- **Accessibility Barriers:** Infrastructure and digital access remain major issues, particularly in developing countries.
- **Limited Resources:** Low-income countries often lack the resources to fully implement disability policies.

While global disability policies have advanced, more work is needed to achieve full inclusion. Continued collaboration among governments, civil society, and international organizations is crucial for ensuring disability rights and participation in all areas of life.

5.2. International Sports Policies for Disabled Youth

International sports policies for disabled youth aim to promote inclusion, equal opportunities, and participation in sports. These policies align with global frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which emphasizes the right to engage in recreational and sporting activities.

Key Components of International Sports Policies for Disabled Youth:

- **Inclusive Sports Programs:** Organizations and governments create programs that provide access to sports facilities and opportunities for disabled youth, supporting both recreational and competitive participation.
- **Development Programs:** Bodies like the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the International Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA) work with national sports federations to enhance training, coaching, and infrastructure for disabled youth, including talent identification and funding.
- **Education and Awareness:** Policies include training for coaches and communities to raise awareness about inclusion and incorporate disability awareness into coaching programs.
- **Paralympic and Special Olympics Pathways:** Clear pathways for youth with disabilities aspiring to compete include early engagement in adapted physical education and talent identification initiatives.
- **Collaboration with NGOs:** Partnerships with organizations like Right to Play and Special Olympics empower disabled youth through sports and advocacy.
- **Focus on Equity and Inclusion:** Policies emphasize removing barriers related to facilities, equipment, funding, and public perceptions to ensure sports are accessible to all youth, regardless of disability.

5.3 International Paralympic Committee (IPC)

The **International Paralympic Committee (IPC)** is the global governing body for the Paralympic Movement, dedicated to empowering athletes with disabilities through competitive sports. Founded on September 22, 1989, as a non-profit organization, the IPC oversees the Paralympic Games and promotes para-sports worldwide, aiming to provide equal opportunities for athletes with disabilities.

As of January 1, 2024, the IPC includes:

- **183 National Paralympic Committees (NPCs):** Represent the Paralympic Movement in their territories and enter athletes into competitions.
- **17 International Federations (IFs):** Govern sports in the Paralympic program, including Olympic and Paralympic federations.
- **5 Regional Organizations:** Focus on regional Games and cooperation (Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, Oceania).
- **3 International Organizations of Sport for the Disabled:** These include the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA), Virtus, and World Abilitysport, which focus on sports development for athletes with specific impairments.

Mission and Vision

- **Mission:** Enable para-athletes to achieve excellence and inspire the world, challenging perceptions of disability.
- **Vision:** Create a more inclusive society through sports, promoting understanding and respect for diversity.

Key Activities and Responsibilities

- **Organizing the Paralympic Games:** Hosts the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games, showcasing the talents of athletes with disabilities.
- **Development of Para-Sports:** Collaborates with federations to create pathways for competition.
- **Classification System:** Manages a system to ensure fair competition based on athletes' impairments.
- **Advocacy and Inclusion:** Promotes the rights of persons with disabilities through sports.
- **Partnerships and Sponsorships:** Engages sponsors to increase visibility and funding for para-sports.

Programs and Initiatives

- **Funding for Sports Development:** Provides grants to support grassroots para-sports initiatives.
- **Support for NPCs:** Offers resources to help build infrastructure for greater participation.
- **Educational Initiatives:** Conducts training and awareness campaigns to promote inclusivity.

Governance and Structure

The IPC is led by a President and an Executive Committee, ensuring diverse and inclusive decision-making. It collaborates with international federations to support para-sports globally.

Major Events

The IPC organizes:

- **Summer Paralympic Games:** Held every four years, featuring sports such as athletics, swimming, wheelchair basketball, and para-cycling.
- **Winter Paralympic Games:** Also held every four years, these games feature sports like para-alpine skiing, para-snowboarding, and wheelchair curling.

Impact of the IPC

The IPC has transformed perceptions of disability and athleticism, promoting inclusion, equality, and determination. Its efforts in advocacy, education, and competition organization help inspire new generations of para-athletes and foster a more inclusive world through sports.

RESOURCES FOR DISABILITY AND SPORTS INCLUSION

To support sports clubs in enhancing their understanding of disability and sports inclusion, a range of valuable resources—articles, videos, websites, and more—are available. These resources offer insights, best practices, and practical guidance. Here's a refined list of recommended sources:

6.1. Research and Publications

"Disability Sport & Physical Activity Research Network (DSPARN)": A global network focusing on disability sport and physical activity. [DSPARN](#)

"Inclusion in Sport: An Exploration of the Participation of People Living with Disabilities" by Edmore Nhamo: A research-based article that examines barriers and facilitators influencing sports participation for individuals with disabilities, emphasizing its importance for enhancing quality of life. Accessible via [SpringerLink](#)

"Disability and Sports in Social-Emotional and Social Inclusion Processes" by María Elisa Alvarez and Edgar H. Ramírez: This article explores how sports foster social-emotional development and social inclusion for individuals with disabilities, leading to positive outcomes like improved self-esteem and community engagement. Available through academic databases like [Google Scholar](#)

"Strategies to Foster Inclusion Through Sports: A Scoping Review" by Marie Grandisson et al.: A scoping review presenting strategies that enhance social inclusion for individuals with intellectual disabilities through sports. [Link to Article](#)

"The Relationship Between Disability and Inclusion Policy and Sports Coaches' Perceptions of Practice" by Andrew M. Hammond: This study investigates how coaches experience including disabled athletes in their practices, balancing elite and mass-participation objectives. [ResearchGate](#)

6.2. Videos

"Disabled People in Sport and Active Recreation" by Activity Alliance: An informative animated film bringing the principles of engaging disabled individuals in sports to life. [Watch here](#)

"Not disabled enough": The Paralympics and the fight for fairness; This video highlights discrimination faced by disabled athletes, advocating for greater inclusion and equity in sports. <https://bitly.cx/zHlx>

“Heroes of Life- Children with Disabilities Doing Sports” by Israel ParaSport Center: A documentary showcasing inspiring stories of children with disabilities engaged in sports, emphasizing their achievements and the impact of athletic participation. [Israel ParaSport Center Website](#)

“Inclusive Sports Documentary” by Inclusive Sports Academy CIC: Highlights the importance of inclusive sports programs, showcasing perspectives from athletes, coaches, and advocates. [Inclusive Sports Academy](#)

“Inclusion Through Sport for Children with Developmental Disabilities” by Special Olympics Europe Eurasia: A video emphasizing the transformative power of sports in the lives of children with developmental disabilities. [Special Olympics Europe Website](#)

“Ignite Adaptive Sports: Changing Lives”: An inspirational video showcasing stories of athletes who have overcome challenges through adaptive sports. [Ignite Adaptive Sports](#)

6.3. Online Courses and Webinars

- **“Creating Inclusive Sports Environments”:** An online course for coaches and sports administrators, covering inclusion essentials. Available on [Coursera](#)
- **Webinars by the National Center on Health, Physical Activity, and Disability (NCHPAD):** Expert insights on promoting physical activity and sports for individuals with disabilities. [NCHPAD Webinars](#)
- **“Sports and Disability Inclusion”:** A webinar discussing successful programs that address the needs of athletes with intellectual disabilities and challenge stereotypes. Available on <https://bitly.cx/qCZo>

6.4. Organizations

- **International Paralympic Committee (IPC):** [IPC Website](#)
- **Turkey Paralympic Committee (TPK):** [TPK Website](#)
- **Greek Paralympic Committee (GPC):** [GPC Website](#)
- **Greek National Sports Federation for People with Disabilities:** [Website](#)
- **Special Olympics.** [Special Olympics Website](#)
- **Türkiye Bedensel Engelliler Spor Federasyonu (TBESF):** [TBESF Website](#)

- **Special Olympics.** [Special Olympics Website](#)
- **United States Olympic & Paralympic Association (USOPA):** <https://www.usopc.org/>
- **International Platform on Sport and Development (sportanddev):** [Sportanddev Website](#)
- **Activity Alliance (AA):** [Activity Alliance Website](#)

6.5. Online Resources

- **Inclusive Sport Design:** A blog and resource site dedicated to inclusive sport design and practice. [Inclusive Sport Design](#)
- **Sport and Development:** Promotes the use of sport for social development, including disability inclusion. [Sport and Development](#)

STAY CONNECTED: FOLLOW OUR JOURNEY

Our project, which focuses on fostering inclusive sports environments for young people with disabilities, is supported by our website and social media platforms. These channels are crucial for sharing resources, project updates, and inspiring stories of inclusion in sports. Follow us to stay informed about the latest improvements and developments in our project.

Project Website: respectyoung.com

Social Media Accounts

- **Instagram:** [@respecteuproject](https://www.instagram.com/respecteuproject).
- **Twitter:** [@respectproje](https://twitter.com/respectproje)
- **Facebook:** [Respect Project](https://www.facebook.com/RespectProject)



RESPECT

Recognizing Sport as a
Powerful Tool for Inclusion

