



# Mapping on Access to Sport for People with Disabilities

*Executive Summary to the  
European Commission*

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# **Mapping on access to sport for people with disabilities**

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written by



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# Executive Summary

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The Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) of the European Commission commissioned Ecorys in July 2018 to undertake a mapping review of data availability and programmes to address sport and physical activity participation for people with disabilities across the EU28.

## Background

There are an estimated 80m people with a disability in the EU, equivalent to approximately 15% of the EU population. Disabled people are less likely to participate in organised sport practised in sport clubs than non-disabled people. The EU is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which specifically requires enabling persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities. The EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020 also aims to empower people with disabilities so that they can enjoy their rights and participate fully in society. The European Commission Communication to “Develop the European Dimension in Sport” (2011) emphasises the rights of persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis (with non-disabled people) in sporting activities.<sup>1</sup>

## Aims and methodology

The key objective of this small-scale research study has been to develop insight on participation and barriers to participation in sport amongst people with disabilities. It also aims to develop knowledge of good practice approaches in addressing the particular barriers identified and provide information on the funding opportunities which are available to support such actions. The specific focus of the study has been participation in sporting activity. Volunteering in sport, coaching or spectating are not included within the study’s scope. At the scoping stage of the study a rapid literature review was completed covering the subject of sport and disability participation. The review covered policy and official policy documents, papers and academic publications. The second element of the desk research was to undertake rapid and systematic reviews of available data and information and evidence on relevant programmes in specific Member States. Within the limits of the resources available for the study, it was possible to complete systematic desk reviews of available evidence and information on programmes for people with disabilities in 11 countries covering a range of geographies and large and small countries. Finally, a number of programmes were examined in more depth through more detailed desk research and telephone interviews with programme managers. This resulted in seven case studies which are presented in boxes in the findings chapter.

## Key findings and lessons

The rapid literature review highlighted three separate categories of benefits of sport participation for people with disabilities: personal health (mental and physical wellbeing), individual development (cognitive benefits, for example increased self-confidence, etc.), social/environmental (for example social integration).

Barriers to participation in physical activities are generally classified in terms of three distinct levels: individual, social and environment. Individual barriers relate to functional limitations of the disability or to psychological and physical aspects. Social barriers mainly refer to the lack of professional preparation among community sport and physical activity personnel in communicating and adapting physical activities to the needs of people with disabilities. Environmental barriers generally refer to the available of

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2011) Developing the European Dimension in Sport European Commission. Published January 18.

facilities that are conveniently located and generally the opportunities available for people with disabilities to shift from mere physical activities to competitive sports.

The review has also highlighted specific participation facilitators that can be used to overcome barriers to participation. These include: raising awareness and improving the communication on sport opportunities for people with disabilities; the role of elite sport development in encouraging wider participation in particular sports and the creation of accessible and adapted facilities that meet the specific needs of people with disabilities.

The country reviews revealed considerable variation in the scope of data availability relating to sport participation for people with disabilities which means that it is difficult to make consistent comparisons across countries in terms of the rate of participation. There is scope to develop more consistent approaches to data collection across the EU with reference to good practice approaches to data collection highlighted in this report where data is collected for different levels of active behaviour across different types of disability.

Reviews in the sample countries identified a range of different types of relevant programmes. Over 70 were identified. The majority of the programmes target people with disability in general, however the results suggest that increasingly general sport participation programmes are developing a strong disability component. The mapping review also highlighted numerous programmes that target specific types of disability.

The programmes cover a range of different types of interventions, for example service and information provision, support for dedicated roles, grants for facilities and infrastructural development and support to develop new partnerships and structures.

The complex range of sources and varying governance and management structures across the member states, have made it difficult within the limits of this small-scale research to identify overall funding levels dedicated to sport participation for people with disabilities. The country reviews however suggest that across the EU there is a strong variation in levels of funding allocated to sport participation programmes.

The mapping review of existing evidence and the detailed case study research have also highlighted a number of key lessons that should be relevant to the funding, design and implementation of programmes across the EU, as follows:

- The role of dedicated professionals: in order to engage people with disabilities in sporting activities it is highly important to focus on the expertise of different actors and in particular to support the roles of dedicated experts who can become 'champions' (leaders) in promoting the importance of sport opportunities for people with disabilities. Such professionals may work in local municipalities, partnerships or mainstream sport federations.
- The importance of consulting with people with disabilities, their carers and disability organisations in designing activities that meet the specific needs of different disability groups.
- The importance of inclusive activities that encourage the integration of people with and without disabilities.
- The role of 'advocates' (i.e. those who have taken part and benefitted from the activities) in promoting the programmes to harder to reach groups.
- The development of new support systems for disability sport through stimulating inter-sectoral collaboration and regional/local partnerships between all of the relevant actors involved in working with people with disabilities such as charities, health services and educational establishments.

- The importance of different government levels working effectively particularly by allowing scope for local partnerships to identify specific needs working with specialist disability organisations and to develop tailored provision that utilises the assets of their local areas.
- The benefits of national level agencies facilitating links between national federations, local partnerships and disability organisations to develop new activities for people with disabilities.

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