



SPÓRT ÉIREANN
SPORT IRELAND

Evaluation of Sport Ireland's Investment into the Disability Programme 2018-2020



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Foreword

The Evaluation of Sport Ireland's Investment into the Disability Programme (SIDP) 2018-2020 is a substantial set of evaluations of the investments Sport Ireland made into 1. Sports Inclusion Disability Officer (SIDO) network within the Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs), 2. Active Disability Ireland, and 3. The National Governing Bodies of Sport through Dormant Accounts funded NGB Community and Disability project. The evaluation work was carried out in 2021-22 by Sector 3 Solutions, generating a comprehensive report for each pillar of the project along with an overall report, the latter presented here.

The publication of the report was delayed due to staff changes, however, its findings have already begun to shape the disability sporting landscape. We highlight some of the changes that has taken place since this evaluation has taken place:

- Sport Ireland has updated its policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability, following a commissioned review. The new *Disability Inclusion in Sport: Statement of Commitment and Action*, helps to ensure cohesion between Sport Ireland's Diversity and Inclusion Policy and its dedicated work in the area of disability inclusion, as recommended by the SIDP evaluation.
- Active Disability Ireland (formally CARA) have a new name and brand identity, which was revealed along the launch of a new Strategic Plan 2023-2027. Following the recommendations of the SIDP evaluation, the new Strategic Plan was developed in consultation with the community and stakeholders, with its action plans developed in with clearly measurable and assessable objectives.
- The Participation Unit at Sport Ireland has made a conscious effort to connect LSPs and the SIDOs within LSPs. A new National Sports Development Officer Annual Conference provided a clear opportunity for networking and peer learning, as recommended by the SIDP evaluation.

The Director of Ethics and Integrity at Sport Ireland Helen McHugh said "Making evidence-based decisions is one of Sport Ireland's guiding principles, so to have access to the SIDP evaluation report as we commenced the process of reviewing and updating Sport Ireland's Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities was a huge asset. LSPs, NGBs, Active Disability Ireland, Paralympics Ireland and others have delivered positive, impactful results over many years for people with disabilities and their work and dedication is to be commended. Sport Ireland's vision is an active Ireland where everyone can enjoy the benefits of physical activity and we recognise that for disabled people there are barriers to participation which we must recognise and remove through investment, effective communication, listening to people with disabilities and their advocates, and the delivery of targeted programmes and initiatives. The contents of this report, including the recommendations, has directly influenced our ambition for what we can achieve and how it can be achieved, collectively, to benefit people with disabilities, the sport sector and wider society for years to come."

The CEO of Active Disability Ireland Brenda O'Donnell said "We are delighted to welcome this report and the recommendations arising from it. As part of our new strategic plan and operational overview it is clear that we are committed to working closely with all the relevant stakeholders including Sport Ireland, the LSP network, the NGB network and the Disability Sports Group Consortium. There are many elements that will support the increased participation of people with disabilities into sport and physical activity and the recommendations of a more objectively driven framework with stronger collaborations will ensure that our commitment is front and centre of the New Diversity and Inclusion Policy with Sport Ireland. We welcome future conversations with Sport Ireland to review the current training and education framework with a view to increase delivery from national through to local provision which will support increased awareness, development and education. Our work has always been driven through consultation of our stakeholders and we are fully committed to continuing this through our insights officer ensuring that our work has a focused purpose, is relevant and supports the measure of impact and evaluation."

The SIDP evaluation report represents an important milestone in the development and progression of disability sports, and it provided the mandate for Sport Ireland and Active Disability Ireland to evolve and work more effectively with the rest of the sporting sector.

Section 1

Introduction to the Report



1.1 Introduction and Purpose of the Report

Sport Ireland's commitment to reducing disability gradients in Sports Participation is underpinned by Sport Ireland's Policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability¹, the National Sports Policy and Sport Ireland's Statement of Strategy.

This report sets out summary findings from an evaluation of three specific strands of Sport Ireland's Investment into the Disability landscape between 2018-2020. These strands include:

- Investment into the Sports Inclusion Disability Officer (SIDO) Network
- Investment into Active Disability Ireland (formally Cara Sport Inclusion)
- Investment into National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) through the Dormant Accounts funded *NGB Community and Disability* projects funding

A total funding allocation of €3.9m was made across the three strands during the period 2018-2020. This investment is referred collectively throughout this report as the Sport Inclusion Disability Programme (SIDP). The information presented in this report was gathered during the period of October 2021 to March 2022.

1.2 Evaluation Objectives and Questions

The objectives of the overall evaluation as set out in the terms of reference are to:

- Undertake a literature review to identify best practice internationally in improving Sport and Physical Activity Participation in People with a Disability.
- Undertake an evaluation of the SIDO network to ascertain the extent to which actions of the network have been delivered along with a focus on the successes and challenges faced by the network.
- Undertake an evaluation of Active Disability Ireland in relation to delivering on the objectives set out in its Sport Ireland investment key performance indicators (KPIs), which are aligned to its strategic plan.
- Undertake an evaluation of projects awarded funding through the NGB Community and Disability Projects funding stream to determine their position on achieving Action 49 of the National Physical Activity Plan².

In carrying out the tasks above, it is anticipated that the evaluation will provide insights and answers to the following:

- **Participation** – To what extent have opportunities and linkages been created with relevant national governing bodies, local clubs, volunteers and the wider community to provide inclusive pathways in participation for people with a disability in sport and physical activity?
- **Sustainability** – To what extent have sustainable participation opportunities for people with a disability been supported through the provision of quality initiatives, engaging with the existing clubs and the wider community?
- **Capacity Building** – To what extent has the facilitation of training, information and awareness-raising led to volunteers and clubs supporting participation of people with a disability?
- **Awareness** – To what extent have effective partnerships been created at a local level, underpinning the development of participation in sport and physical activity for people with a disability?

1 Throughout this report, we will use "people with a disability/disabilities" and "disabled people" interchangeably as a way to acknowledge the differing preference individuals may have.

2 Action 49: Extend existing and developing programmes for physical activity for those with special needs and their families to enhance and deliver a comprehensive health and wellbeing programme

1.3 Report Structure

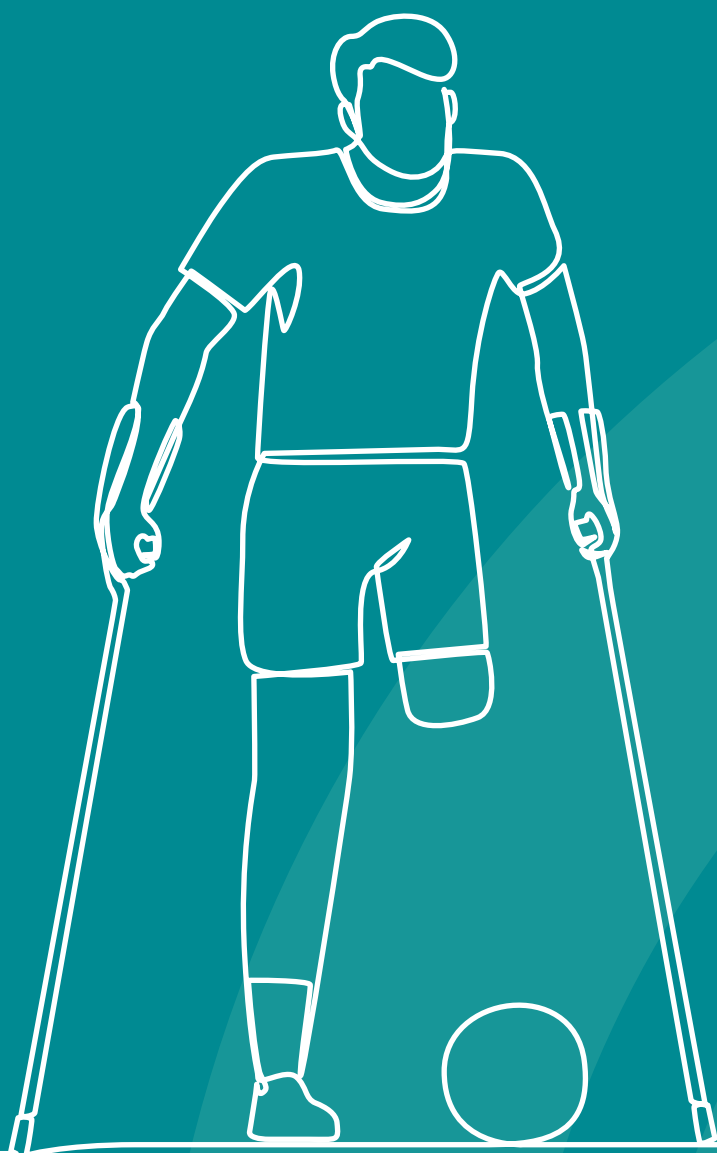
This report includes the following:

- **Section 2** sets out the context of disability participation in sport and physical activity in Ireland through the lens of the Irish Sports Monitor. It also summarises the strategic and policy context within which the SIDP investments operate.
- **Section 3** provides an overview of the evaluation methodology.
- **Section 4** sets out a literature review on best practice internationally in improving sport and physical activity participation in people with a disability.
- **Section 5** offers an overall analysis of findings framed under the key evaluation questions.
- **Section 6** sets out key conclusions and recommendations.

Individual evaluation reports are also provided for each of the three elements of the SIDP, as described in section 1.1.

Section 2

Disability Participation in Sport and Physical Activity



2.1 Setting the Evaluation in Context

Sport Ireland is the authority tasked with the development of sport in Ireland. This includes participation in sport, high performance sport, anti-doping, coaching and the development of the Sport Ireland Campus. The National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027³ is the key policy driver for sport in Ireland.

Increasing participation is the cornerstone of the policy which aspires for every citizen to engage regularly in some form of sport and physical activity, irrespective of their age, economic or social circumstances, their ethnic background or their physical capabilities. One of the core values of the National Sports Policy is the promotion of inclusion: “Sport must be welcoming and inclusive, offering appropriate opportunities for participation and improvement to all. We will promote inclusion to deliver our desired outcomes with a focus on addressing social, disability, gender, ethnic and other gradients.”

Action 6 of the National Sports Policy tasks Sport Ireland to: “develop initiatives with the NGBs, LSPs, schools, third level institutions, the CARA [known as Active Disability Ireland since 2023] Centre and other relevant parties to address participation in sport among adolescents and young adults, particularly females, those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, **persons with a disability**, the LGBTQI+ community, the Traveller community and other ethnic minorities.”

Sport Ireland currently funds and works with a range of organisations providing and promoting opportunities for people with disabilities to take part in sport and physical activity. Included among these are:

- The National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) that cater exclusively for people with disabilities (Deaf Sports Ireland, Irish Wheelchair Association, Special Olympics Ireland and Vision Sport Ireland) and mainstream NGBs that have the capacity and capability to include people with disabilities in their programmes
- Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) primarily through the work of the Sports Inclusion Disability Programme and the Sports Inclusion Disability Officers (SIDO) network
- Active Disability Ireland, which advocates for the inclusion of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity, encourages a national vision while supporting local provision, and builds capacity through education and training programmes. Active Disability Ireland also supports Local Sports Partnerships and National Governing Bodies in relation to their inclusive policies and practices
- Paralympics Ireland, the lead agency in the support of high performance athletes with disabilities

³ <https://assets.gov.ie/15979/04e0f52cee5f47ee9c01003cf5559e98d.pdf>

2.2 Policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability

Sport Ireland is committed to the equal treatment of people with disabilities when it comes to their participation in sport and physical activity in line with Article 30.5 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This is reflected in the development and launch of the Policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability (November 2017; May 2020; June 2024)⁴. The policy document sets out five key commitments:

- To encourage and promote the participation of persons with disabilities in mainstream sporting activities at all levels;
- To ensure that persons with disabilities have an opportunity to organize, develop and participate in disability-specific sporting and recreational activities and, to this end, encourage the provision, on an equal basis with others, of appropriate instruction, training and resources;
- To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sporting, recreational and tourism venues;
- To ensure that children with disabilities have equal access with children without disabilities to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities, including those activities in the school system;
- To ensure that persons with disabilities have access to services from those involved in the organisation of recreational, tourism, leisure and sporting activities.”

The completion of a review of the Sports Inclusion Disability Programme was identified as a key action within the policy. To this end, this summary report and the subsequent evaluations represent the delivery of one of the commitments of the policy.

2.3 National Physical Activity Plan (NPAP)

Ireland’s National Physical Activity Plan⁵ was launched in January 2016. The aim of the plan is to increase physical activity levels across the entire population thereby improving the health and wellbeing of people living in Ireland, where everybody will be physically active and where everybody lives, works and plays in a society that facilitates, promotes and supports physical activity and an active way of life with less time spent being sedentary.

Action 49 of the plan is to “Extend existing and developing programmes for physical activity for people with disabilities and their families to enhance and deliver a comprehensive health and wellbeing programme”. Whilst the Health Service Executive (HSE) are referenced as the lead agency, all stakeholders (including NGBs) are identified as partners.

The NGB Community and Disability Projects Fund reflects Sport Ireland’s and NGBs’ contribution to Action 49 and therefore its alignment to the National Physical Activity Plan.

2.4 Participation in Sport by People with a Disability

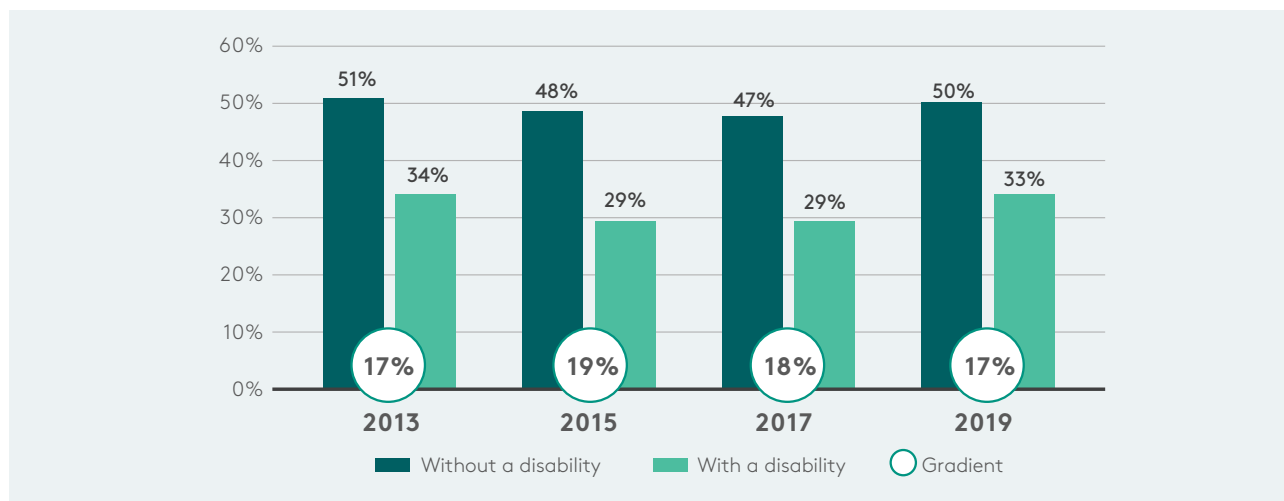
The following sets out a summary of the evolving trends in relation to disability participation from between 2013 and 2019 through the lens of the Irish Sports Monitor (ISM), which is a large population study undertaken biennially in order to provide trends in participation in sport and physical activity in Ireland.

⁴ [Policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability](#)

⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/b60202-national-physical-activity/>

2.4.1 Participation activity gradient

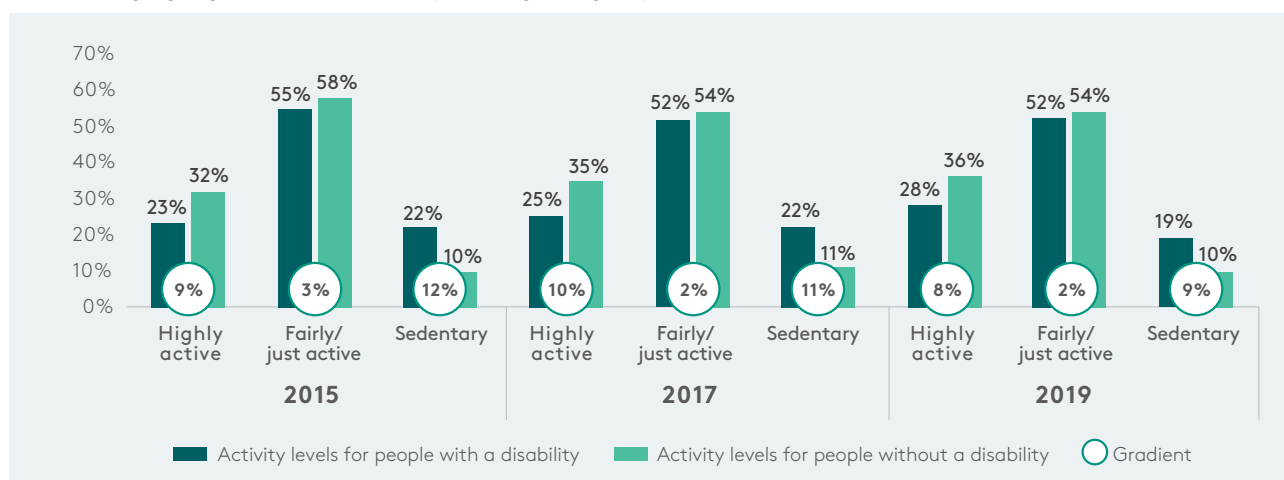
Overall, the Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) demonstrates that individuals with a disability are far less likely to participate in sport. The 2019 ISM found that the participation gradient (illustrated by the difference between the two line-series in Graph 1) between those with disabilities and those without had decreased by 1% compared to 2017. However, this reduction represents a return to the same observed participation gradient (17%) reported in 2013. It is therefore evident that there has been no significant change in the gradient of active sports participation between people with a disability and people without a disability between 2013 and 2019. Consideration of the age profile of people with a disability is of particular importance from a policy perspective. Census 2016 data demonstrates that up to up to 10% of people below 45 years of age had a disability, this figure is 20% by age 60⁶. The rate of disability also increases further with advancing age, which is of particular significance when considering our ageing population demographics.



Graph 1: Participation in sport among those with a disability versus no disability (%)

2.4.2 Level of activity

Since 2017, there has been an increase in the reported numbers of people with a disability being classified as highly active (from 25% to 28%) and a decline in the numbers being classified as sedentary (from 22% to 19%). Graph 2 shows a narrowing of the gap between individuals with a disability and those without in respect of both categories. This is encouraging, although the data still shows that those with a disability are almost twice as likely to be sedentary compared to those without a disability across all three years, and a key challenge remains in encouraging higher levels of activity among this group.



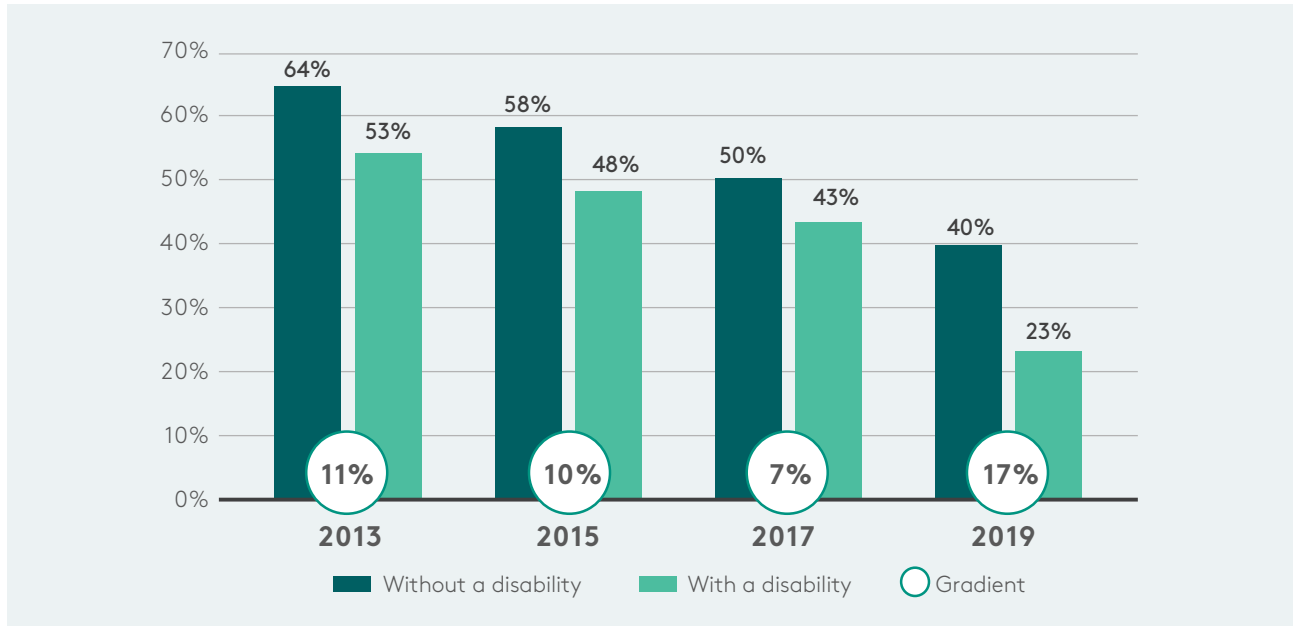
Graph 2: Participation rates across levels of activity among those with a disability versus no disability (%)

⁶ Census of Population 2016 – Profile 9 Health, Disability and Carers

⁷ Highly active (considered to be meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines) - At least 30 minutes a day of moderate intensity activity, five days a week (or 150 minutes a week). Fairly active- participated in 30 minutes of physical activity at least twice a week. Sedentary- no participation in sport, recreational walking, walking for transport or cycling for transport.

2.4.3 Social class and participation

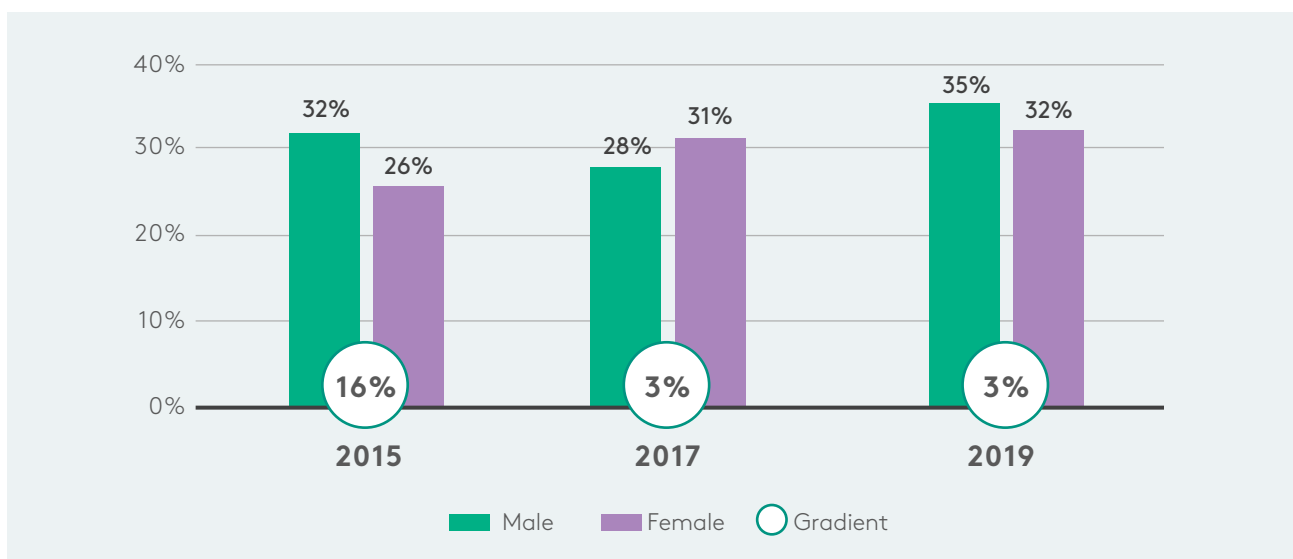
ISM 2019 data shows there is a large socio-economic gradient for active participation in sport (as seen in the steepness of the slopes in both line series in Graph 3). This is also noticed among people with a disability wherein those in the AB socio-economic category are more than twice as likely to participate than their counterpart in the DE category. Individuals with a disability from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to be active and more likely to be sedentary than those without a disability.



Graph 3: Participation in sport among those with a disability versus no disability by Socio-economic status (%)

2.4.4 Gender and participation

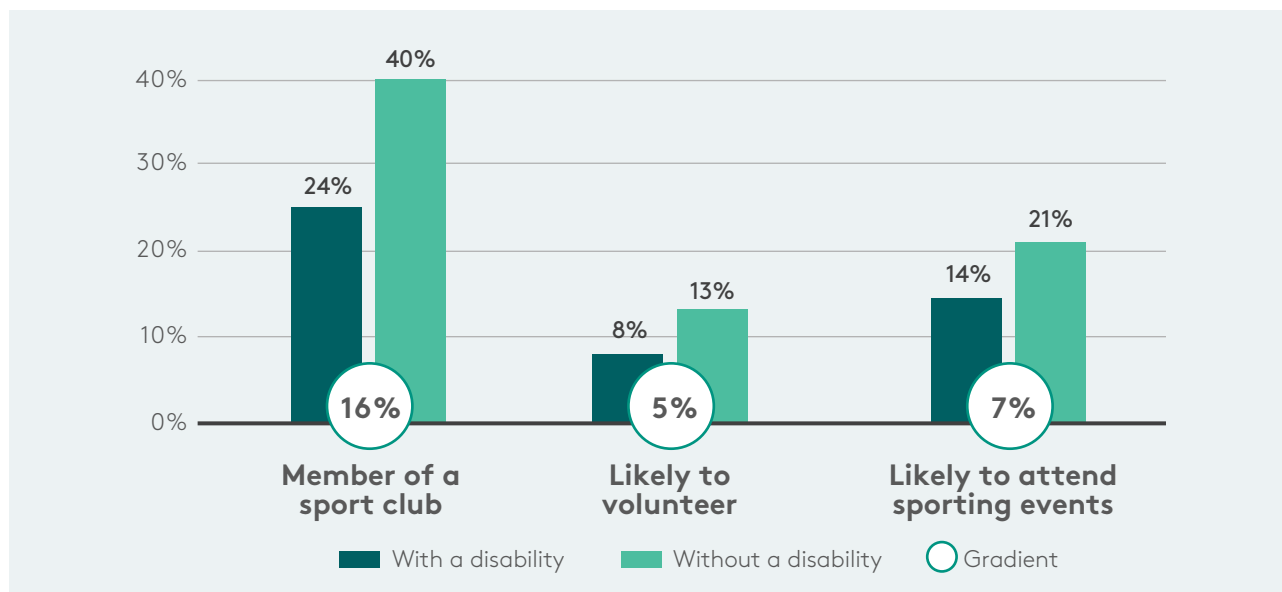
A common theme through the ISM series is the gender gap for the general population in sports participation. Women are not only less likely than men to play sport, but are also less likely to be engaged socially in sport. This trend is also observed when analysing data for people with disability, males with a disability are more likely to participate in sport than females with a disability. However in 2017, men reported lower levels of participation than females (see Graph 4).



Graph 4: Participation in sport among those with a disability by gender (%)

2.4.5 Membership of sports clubs and activities

The ISM 2019 data found that only 35% of individuals with a disability participate socially in sport, compared to 50% of individuals without a disability. People with a disability are also less likely to be members of a sports club, less likely to volunteer, and less likely to attend sporting events compared to people without a disability (see Graph 5).



Graph 5: Social Participation in Sport for those with and without a disability (%)

2.4.6 Capabilities, Opportunities and Motivations

The following analysis considers the association between the perceptions of people with a disability around their *capability* (C) to perform physical activity; the *opportunities* (O) to do physical activity; and their *motivations* (M) to be active, and their reported *behaviours* (B) around sports participation and recreational walking. It also considers their status in terms of activity level classification (highly active or sedentary). The analysis has its foundations in the COM-B framework of behavioural change. The COM-B model suggests that a specific behaviour is the outcome of three components - capability, opportunity and motivation. It was originally presented by Michie et al (2011)⁸ following their analysis of 19 frameworks of behavioural change interventions. In turn it forms the hub of a Behaviour Change Wheel which has been used to characterise a number of population health interventions.

Each of the COM-B categories are represented through four statements presented to respondents to ISM 2019. Respondents were asked to identify the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a five-point scale. Responses to the 12 statements were scored and aggregated to form a COM score for each individual respondent⁹. Highly positive responses were assigned a 5, and highly negative response were assigned a 1. Respondents answering that they did not know or refusing to answer were assigned a score of 3. On this basis, every respondent had a score of between 12 (very low COM-score) and 60 (very high COM-score).

⁸ [The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions](#)

⁹ [The 12 COM statements can be found in the Appendix](#)

Average COM scores across gender, age and socio-economic group for people with a disability who participate in sport and physical activity

Men	48	16-19	48	AB	51
Women	50	20-24	50	C1	46
		25-34	47	C2	45
		35-44	50	DE	43
		45-54	47		
		55-64	50		
		65+	48		

Gender differences are observed, with females reporting higher overall average COM scores. Social class gradients are also observed, with those from lower socio-economic groups bearing lower average COM scores. This is consistent with findings from the broader population, which reported that participation in sport and physical activity differs strongly across these dimensions. Males with a disability scored similarly across each of the COM components, with an average score (out of 20) of 16 for Capability, 15 for Opportunity and 17 for Motivation. Females with a disability reported similar scores in each of the components, with an average of 16 for Capability, 16 for Opportunity and 18 for Motivation. COM scores were higher for both males and females without a disability (51 and 52) respectively, interestingly the main variation existed with capability scores.

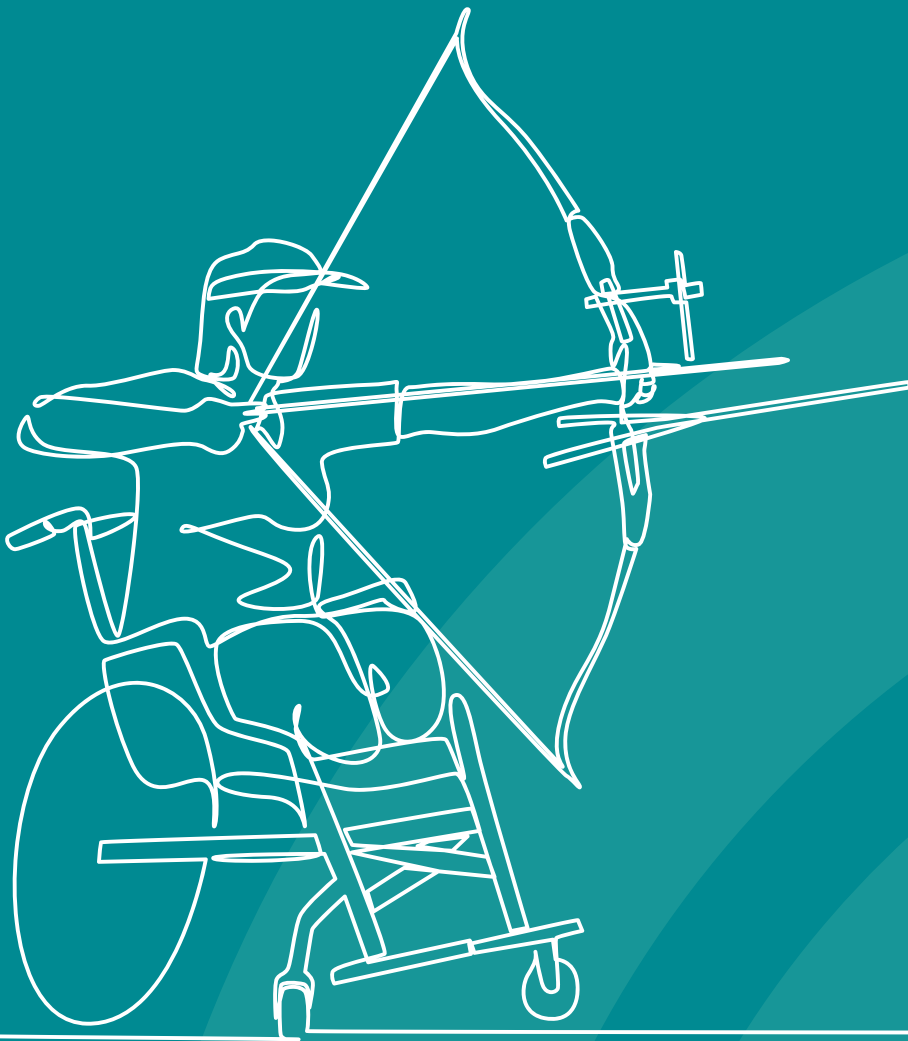
Average COM (capacity, opportunity, motivation) scores among sports participants and non-participants with a disability. The table reports aggregated scores for overall, ABC1, C2DE and a break down under the COM domains.

	Sport		Recreational Walking	
	Participate	Do not participate	Participate	Do not participate
Overall	49	42	46	43
Capability	17	15	15	15
Opportunity	15	13	15	14
Motivation	17	14	16	14
ABC1	50	44	48	46
Capability	16	15	16	16
Opportunity	16	15	15	15
Motivation	18	14	17	15
C2DE	47	42	45	42
Capability	15	14	15	15
Opportunity	15	14	15	13
Motivation	17	14	16	14

People with a disability who participate in sport report higher COM scores than those who participate in recreational walking, and those who do not participate in either activity consistently report lower COM-B scores. This association is also consistent among socio-economic groups. As shown in the table, motivation is the main source of variation between groups for those do and do not participate.

Section 3

Methodology

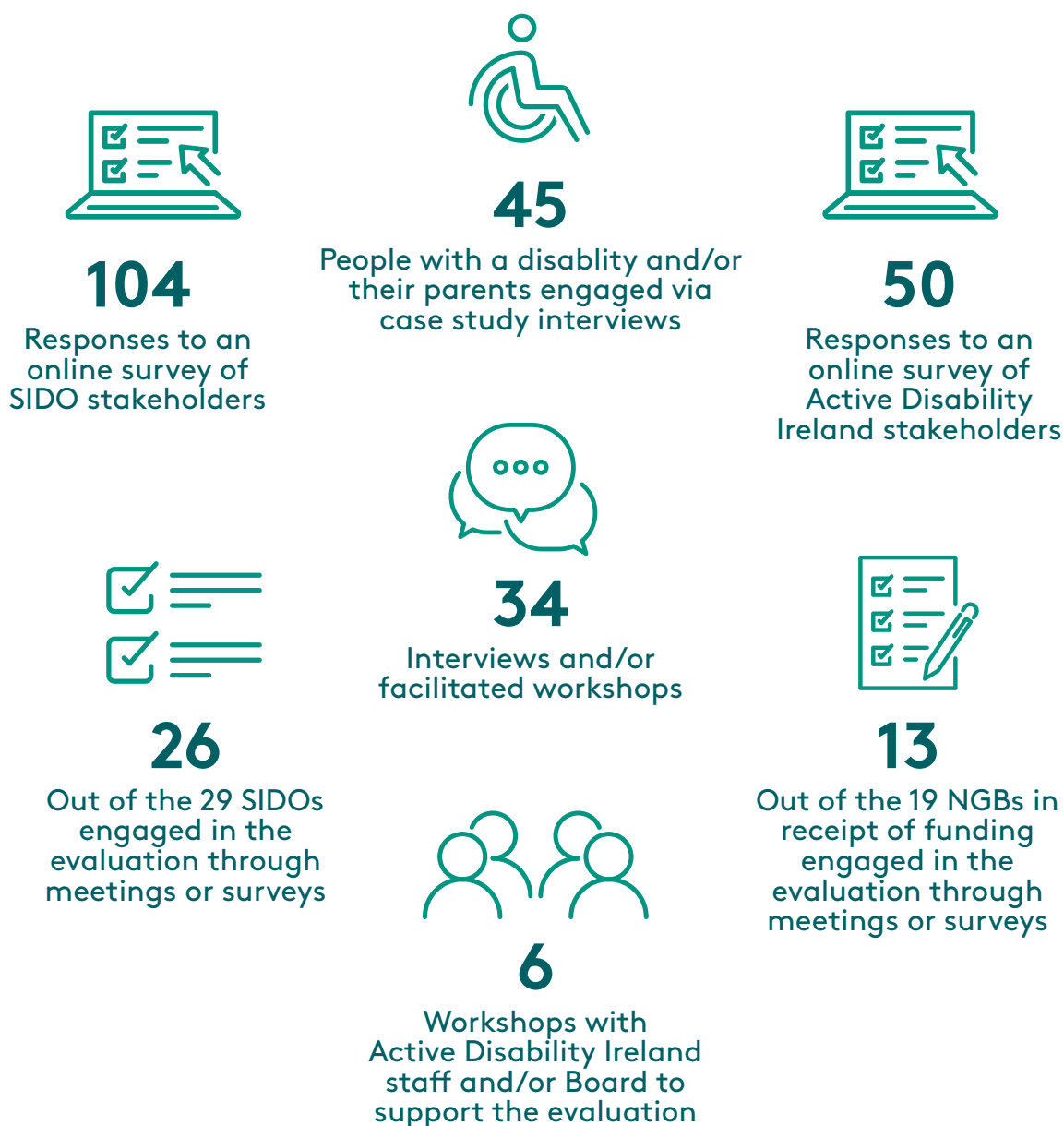


3.1 Introduction

The following section sets out the methodology used to inform the evaluation including approaches to data collection and analysis, as well as identifying some limitations impacting on findings.

3.2 Methodology

A mixed methods approach to data collection was used. This included semi-structured interviews, group discussions and an online survey. The following summarises the data collection activities across all three elements of the evaluation, a full list of data collection activity is included within each of the individual evaluations.



3.3 Desk Review

The evaluators carried out a review of relevant literature on best practice internationally in improving sport and physical activity participation in people with a disability (See appendix 1). A selection criteria and list of key words were agreed with the Evaluation team at Sport Ireland, enabling an examination of 20 key documents. Operational data from LSP, NGB and Active Disability Ireland monitoring reports were used to explore output data whilst a review of the Irish Sports Monitor Data 2013-2019 was also carried out exploring participation trends.

3.4 Data Analysis

Overall, a qualitative descriptive approach was adopted. Constructivist in orientation, the aim was to generate data on the 'who, what, and where' of events and experiences from the perspective of those involved in the delivery and receipt of sport and physical activity opportunities for people with a disability. Qualitative data analysis was conducted using both thematic and narrative approaches¹⁰. Interviews were recorded and reviewed, categories were developed, coded, and reduced. Survey data and thematic data from interviews were cross referenced in order to identify emergent themes and issues, and to explore the relationships between issues¹¹.

3.5 Limitations

The SIDP evaluation relies primarily on qualitative evidence from stakeholders, cross referenced against deliverables and output data to assess to what extent identified objectives are being met. Whilst the information collected enables an objective assessment of achievement and progress, the evaluation would have benefitted from clearer targets and baseline data for clearly defined Key Performance Indicators.

We note the following possible limitations:

- a) Lapse of time – the scope of the evaluation covered activities during 2018-2020, therefore the consultation discussions and survey responses may be subject to recall bias.
- b) In respect to the surveys, these included a range of self-reporting questions on perceived success against objectives. As with surveys of this nature, there is a risk of social desirability bias (i.e., respondents producing responses that are perceived to be desirable to the evaluators).
- c) We acknowledge the issues of time and operational restraints in engaging with stakeholders and participants, particularly in strengthening the voice of people with disabilities.

¹⁰ Lewis-Beck, M. S., Bryman, A. & Liao, T. F. (Eds.) (2004). The SAGE encyclopedia of social science research methods (Vols. 1-3). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications

¹¹ Morgan, D. L. (1997). Focus groups as qualitative research (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Section 4

Learning and Discussion



4.1 Introduction

The three strands of this evaluation as set out in Section 1 are referred to collectively as the Sports Inclusion Disability Programme (SIDP). The SIDP is a term that emerged following the launch of the Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities in 2017.

Whilst each of the three strands have been evaluated individually, this section provides a summary of findings on the overall SIDP in the context of the key evaluation themes of participation, sustainability, capacity building, and awareness.

4.2 Participation

To what extent have opportunities and linkages been created with relevant national governing bodies, local clubs, volunteers and the wider community to provide inclusive pathways in participation for people with a disability in sport and physical activity?

Each of the individual evaluations have set out how opportunities and linkages with inclusive pathways have been created to varying degrees within each component of the SIDP, as well as some of the limitations in measuring the extent of the same.

Every SIDO and NGB engaged during the evaluation were able to draw on examples of positive opportunities and linkages to develop inclusive pathways. There is a strong culture of partnership intent across all elements of the SIDP and a consistent acknowledgement by stakeholders that the most effective pathways and programmes are those that are underpinned by robust, purposeful and multi-layered partnerships. The majority of stakeholders consulted describe the level of collaboration on programmes and initiatives as 'good'. There is a consistent view amongst SIDOs that strong linkages and connections have been developed between the SIDO Network and Active Disability Ireland, and that the reinvigoration of the Regional and National SIDO Network Meetings (19 took place during 2018-2020) has been hugely beneficial as a source of peer support, shared learning and collaboration. Equally, NGBs reflected positive working relationships with Active Disability Ireland in the development and roll out of training, as well as in accessing advice, guidance and support.

The extent of linkages and opportunities for inclusive pathways between NGBs and SIDOs is less consistent and whilst there are examples of positive, effective and impactful partnerships, these tend to be less systematic and sporadic. There is a lack of a consistent channel of communication and a lack of regular opportunities to engage and stimulate collaborative approaches. Effective collaborations tend to be fuelled by personal relationships, so the further development of relationships between NGBs and the SIDO Network would merit time and effort. It was the consistent view of stakeholders across all 3 evaluations that the level of communication and information sharing could be improved and that there was a regressing 'unity of purpose' across the SIDP. The view is that whilst SIDP has historically been used as a heading to capture the collective investment in disability participation initiatives, this is not reflective of the current situation whereby the investment in SIDOs, Active Disability Ireland and NGBs appear to be three distinct and separate investments, rather than 3 components of an overall SIDP. This is exacerbated by the fact that SIDOs, Active Disability Ireland and NGBs are all working to and are evaluated against a different set of objectives. As a result, the concept of a collective SIDP has somewhat diluted since 2017. The feedback indicates that effective opportunities, links and partnerships are driven by individual, using personal connections, and that the three components of the SIDP are not as connected as they could be, and are more disparate at a strategic level.

There are three main potential reasons for this:

- 1.** Stakeholders within the SIDP feel that the lack of a dedicated advocate within Sport Ireland for the Policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability has created an element of a vacuum in leadership terms. Whilst there is a nominated lead within Sport Ireland Coaching (and stakeholders were overwhelmingly positive about their contribution) this is a historic arrangement and is perceived as an 'add on' to an existing full-time role. Stakeholders look to the Women in Sport Policy and the Policy on Participation in Sport in the Outdoors as examples of policies with strong and clear leadership. In contrast, whilst the SIDO Network find the support offered by Active Disability Ireland extremely valuable, the lack of connection to the participation unit creates a feeling of disconnect from Sport Ireland and the policy, which frames and shapes the SIDOs' work. For SIDOs, there was some uncertainty about who they should 'turn to' – Sport Ireland or Active Disability Ireland – with issues relating to funding, programming and general advice. This was less apparent for NGBs who have a direct connection to the NGB unit whilst Active Disability Ireland engage with multiple units in Sport Ireland.
- 2.** The emergence of the Sport Ireland Diversity and Inclusion Policy will see disability, ethnic minority (including Irish Travellers) and LGBTQI+ coalesce under a broader remit of Diversity and Inclusion. Indeed, stakeholders across the SIDP landscape contributed positively to research to help shape and inform this policy. Whilst stakeholders are supportive of the development of a broader culture of inclusion and acknowledge the opportunity that may be created through a designated Diversity and Inclusion lead within the Ethics unit in Sport Ireland, there remains some uncertainty about how the policy will interact with the Policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability as well as influence investment strands, strategic priorities and objectives. Much of this can be addressed through strong communication and engagement, with SIDP stakeholders as this can influence the direction of organisational strategic plans. For example, one of the 14 actions within the Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities is to designate Active Disability Ireland as the supporting organisation to assist with the implementation of Sport Ireland's policy commitments under that policy. Clarification on the ways in which, if any, the Diversity and Inclusion policy will influence this action will be important for Active Disability Ireland and other SIDP stakeholders.
- 3.** COVID-19 impacted every aspect of society since March 2020. For the Irish sport and physical activity sector, the pandemic brought an almost universal cessation of activity through 2020. The impact of COVID-19 contributed to a decline in collaborative initiatives and increased feelings of separation across the various elements of the SIDP.

In 2021, in response to the challenges highlighted in preceding paragraphs, SIDP stakeholders have developed a collaborative network: Disability Sports Group Consortium (DSG) to act as a voice for and actively promote sport and physical activity for people with a disability in Ireland. The group provides a platform to share experiences and support each other at a strategic level and, where relevant, at an operational level. The consortium is composed of representatives from 6 organisations (Active Disability Ireland, Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA)-Sport, Paralympics Ireland, Special Olympics Ireland, Vision Sports Ireland/NCBI (National Council for the Blind of Ireland), and the Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs). This strategic body offers a strong collaborative network that could be a useful sounding board for the emerging Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

4.3 Sustainability

To what extent sustainable participation opportunities for people with a disability have been supported through the provision of quality initiatives, engaging with the existing clubs and the wider community?

It is clear that sustainability is a central pillar of the planning and design of programmes and stakeholders across the SIDP referenced that sustainability planning is now considered at application stage and throughout programme delivery. Across the evaluations, a number of consistent, critical success factors that influence sustainable participation opportunities emerged:

- 1.** A multi-layered partnership involvement of the SIDO Network – According to survey data, SIDOs delivered more than 780 programmes during the time period and SIDOs estimate that around 50% of their programmes would be considered “sustainable”. For NGBs, sustainability was tied to the ongoing availability of NGB Community & Disability funding – a small proportion of programmes funded have sustainable elements but remain reliant on funding. The involvement of a range of partners is synonymous with successful and sustainable programmes. This typically includes a combination of a SIDO, a local club, Active Disability Ireland, an NGB, as well as a local community organisation/school or disability service. The multi-layered partnership is seen to enable strong recruitment, quality venues, quality training and better pathways. The SIDO is considered a critical local resource in terms of driving awareness, managing relationships, accessing facilities and providing ongoing support whilst NGBs can leverage the involvement of member clubs – supporting the development of pathways.
- 2.** People/Person – the importance of a ‘driving force’ within a programme or location who advocates and leads the drive for inclusion within the programme, club or group is vital. This person is someone that takes a coordinating role, bringing together stakeholders, venues and other participants and may be someone recruited by a SIDO or NGBs on a part time basis to help roll out programmes at a local level. Access to dormant accounts funds has been a crucial enabler in this regard.
- 3.** Capacity of clubs, communities and volunteers – ensuring that clubs/community groups have the capacity to host or continue running a programme is considered important. This includes capacity at governance level in terms of policies and processes, but also that there is an adequate pool of trained volunteers who have the skills and importantly, the confidence to engage with participants and their families.
- 4.** Access to facilities and equipment – the availability of accessible equipment and facilities is important, as is the provision of additional supports such as transport.
- 5.** Culture of Inclusion within the NGB/Capacity of the NGB – the consultation made reference to a range of highly skilled and committed development officers both within disability specific and non-disability specific NGBs, and that the extent of drive and commitment from the NGB is a key determining factor in the sustainability of participation opportunities. This includes sourcing additional mainstream funding to support the continuation of activities, embedding programmes into existing NGB initiatives or leveraging other NGB/club resources to add value to programmes. Where this occurred, it was the view of respondents that sustainable participation opportunities were enhanced.

A range of additional considerations for sustainable participation emerged consistently across the three components of the evaluation:

- Many stakeholders referenced a tension that exists between events, taster sessions and short-term programmes that target large numbers of participants vs more intensive engagements through programmes with smaller numbers which, in the view of stakeholders, are often more impactful in terms of sustained participation. There are a number of considerations here:
 - From a SIDO perspective, much of this is driven by Objective 1 “significantly decrease the gradient of active sports participation between people with a disability and people without a disability”. A reduction in the gradient would require engagements at a significant scale. The SIDO evaluation reports that SIDOs are engaging with approximately 15-20,000 people with disabilities per annum. This engagement currently comprises a mix of larger, short term participation events and smaller more intensive programmes. The 2016 Census tells us that 643,131 people had a disability in Ireland, thus SIDOs are engaging approximately 3% of the disabled population annually. A review of ISM 2019 data suggests that there was no change in the active participation gradient since 2013, highlighting the complexity of the challenge at hand. Therefore, there may be a need to reframe a more realistic and achievable SIDO objective, which in turn may facilitate a focus on more intensive but more impactful and sustainable programmes and opportunities. In addition, the development of participation and activity data for people with disabilities at a local level would provide more valuable insights than national level data and encourage data informed decision making on programmes.
 - Across those consulted, the demand for a multi annual (3-5 year) commitment was referenced consistently. Whilst stakeholders understand and acknowledge the restrictions placed on Sport Ireland through Dormant Accounts, such was the consistency and strength of feeling, it is incumbent on this evaluation to reference the strong views that a longer term commitment would facilitate greater innovation in planning, remove the ‘short termism’ that focuses on numbers/outputs as well as facilitate better, more effective partnerships which are believed to be at the heart of impactful and sustainable programmes.
 - SIDOs consistently referenced issues with SIDO staff turnover and replacement as a significant barrier to sustainability. If the knowledge and directory of contacts/networks that the SIDO builds over time is not adequately captured and transferred, it is extremely difficult to re-establish and time intensive for new staff to re-build relationships and networks, significantly impacting the quality and sustainability of programmes. SIDO staff turnover was linked to the lack of security that arises from the annualised nature of funding.
- Adequately capturing and measuring the impact of programmes, in particular the extent to which participants remain active and the extent to which people trained are implementing inclusive practice was identified consistently as a challenge across the SIDP stakeholders. There was a strong view amongst SIDOs and NGBs that the M1 measure is not the most appropriate or effective tool for people with disabilities. In particular SIDOs referenced issues with its application across the spectrum of people with disabilities, its ability to sensitively pick up change, particularly social and behavioural aspects, as well as the administrative challenges of following up participants 3 months post engagement. There is a strong interest and desire in implementing effective, appropriate and proportionate impact measurement practice but stakeholders felt that further work was required to co-produce the best approach.

4.4 Capacity building

To what extent the facilitation of training, information and awareness raising has led to volunteers and clubs to support participation of people with a disability?

Training and capacity building can be considered one of the cornerstones of the SIDP investment. Almost all of the NGB Community and Disability funds contained a significant focus on building the capacity of volunteers and clubs whilst the Active Disability Ireland evaluation indicates that 216 workshops were delivered with 4,146 workshop attendances during the period 2018-2020. Stakeholders reflected extremely positively on the quality, range and scope of training available both through Active Disability Ireland and sport specific training through NGBs.

The need and demand for training was also a significant element of the consultation with NGBs, SIDOs and other sport sector organisations who all identified the lack of skilled, confident coaches, tutors and volunteers as one of the major barriers in developing additional participation opportunities for people with a disability. Despite having high quality and evolving content which is subject to regular review and update (which were successfully pivoted online during COVID-19), the cost of training was raised as a considerable barrier and one that needs consideration as a fundamental part of the wider SIDP.

The current funding model whereby Active Disability Ireland are supported through Dormant Accounts to deliver training, then providers use programme money through Dormant Accounts to pay for additional training does not represent the most effective and efficient use of funds according to those consulted. As Active Disability Ireland move towards a new strategy, there is merit in considering the co-design of a new way to maximise funding for training to meet the demand and enable equitable reach across regions. This is likely to continue to be a core component of the organisation's work under the SIDP.

4.5 Awareness

To what extent effective partnerships have been created at a local level, underpinning the development of participation in sport and physical activity for people with a disability?

In analysing the consultation findings, stakeholders appear to identify effective partnerships as ones that:

- Are multilayered – reflecting National (NGB), local (SIDO and clubs/organisations) as well as a third dimension that may include a training partner (Active Disability Ireland), equipment provider or specialist provider
- Have clearly defined roles, specifically in relation to the recruitment of participants or an agreed approach to sustain the programmes
- Have secured high levels of participation amongst disabled people
- Have positive feedback, in the form of case studies, quotes or qualitative statements reflecting positive experiences and impacts
- Have clear evidence of some form of sustainability such as: new clubs or groups established, additional funding secured, projects become embedded into another project or clear evidence of participants moving along a pathway

There are considerable examples across the three evaluations of partnerships meeting the criteria referenced above, however there is a consensus of 'room for improvement' in this regard. Stakeholders believe that effective and enduring partnerships are driven and fuelled by personal relationships, and whilst this may in many ways be inevitable, there is an onus on all stakeholders to provide greater opportunities to build more relationships – particularly between NGBs and SIDOs.

A common theme from both a SIDO and disability perspective, was the need to continue to build a culture of inclusion, particularly within more mainstream NGBs and that this would precipitate enhanced partnerships. The extent to which 'inclusion' is embedded within the culture of NGBs and the perceived commitment of NGBs to building participation opportunities vs high performance was referenced frequently as a key factor, on which the development of inclusive pathways, sustainable participation programmes and effective partnerships was contingent. This, as suggested by several respondents, was often dependent on the personal interest or commitment of individual staff within NGBs, rather than a systemic culture that is built into the fabric of strategic plans and objectives.

The findings describe a group of stakeholders that understand the value of partnership and consistently demonstrate strong partnership intent. However, factors such as time and resources available mean that intent is not always converted into practice. An investment that supports initiatives to stimulate effective partnership would likely be a logical and worthwhile endeavour for SIDP stakeholders moving forward.

4.6 Conclusion

This report and the accompanying evaluations describe a group of organisations and individuals across the SIDP landscape that are passionate, skilled and committed to increase participation in sport in people with a disability.

There is good evidence of alignment between the range of approaches within the SIDP and the review of literature on best practice in supporting participation amongst people with a disability. However, further work in unifying the various elements of the SIDP under the banner of the Diversity and Inclusion Policy will be important, and in doing so identify opportunities to enhance data and information gathering pathways to evidence the impact of the work.

Section 5

Conclusions & Recommendations



5.1 Introduction

Each of the individual evaluations provide specific recommendations that have relevance across the SIDP. The following set of two overarching recommendations are provided to augment those set out in the individual evaluations.

5.2 Overall Recommendations

Unity of Purpose within the SIDP

There are positive examples of how these stakeholders have worked collaboratively to improve opportunities, but the key focus should be to stimulate a renewed unity of purpose across the SIDP. Much of this will be achieved by providing clarity on the relationship between the new Diversity and Inclusion Policy and the existing Policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability and through enhanced regular communication.

However, one of the challenges for this evaluation and one of the key reasons for perceived disconnection within the SIDP was that each of the three stakeholder groups were working to, and evaluated against a different set of objectives. It is recommended that the objectives of the various strands of the SIDP coalesce under one consistent set of objectives, ensuring that each of the stakeholder groups are working towards common objectives and outcomes. There is merit in co-designing an agreed set of objectives with SIDP stakeholders. For example (not exhaustive):

- To build the capacity of coaches and volunteers across the sports sector to provide inclusive opportunities
- To develop sustainable and inclusive participation pathways for people with a disability in sport and physical activity
- To increase the profile and visibility of disability sport and physical activity and raise awareness of opportunities
- To work across sectors to increase investment in and access to opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in sport and physical activity
- To increase choice and opportunity, leading to increased participation in sport and physical activity amongst people with a disability

This will assist future evaluations of the SIDP.

Multi Annual Funding

Across those consulted, the demand for a multi annual (3-5 year) commitment was referenced consistently. Whilst understanding the limitations and restrictions placed on Sport Ireland and Dormant Accounts funding, stakeholders believe that a longer-term funding commitment, alongside a revised set of objectives, would stimulate greater partnership working, innovation and development of more sustainable pathways. It is recommended that stakeholders work collectively to lobby for multi annual funding commitments.

Communication across the SIDP

The implementation of initiatives that improve communication and stimulate engagement between SIDP stakeholders with a focus on building effective partnerships is recommended. There is an onus on all stakeholders to provide greater opportunities to build more relationships – particularly between NGBs and SIDOs. This may include regular online and or in person meetings/workshops/events or other team focused communication tools.

It is recommended that Sport Ireland consider the use of the DSG consortium as a link to wider SIDP stakeholders, creating a strong connection between the SIDP stakeholders and the relevant units within Sport Ireland. The consortium has commissioned support to define its purpose and its potential (May 2022), and it is recommended that Sport Ireland engage in this process.

5.3 Active Disability Ireland Recommendations

Architecture and Evaluation of Future Strategy

The architecture of the Active Disability Ireland strategy and the language used in the strategic objectives and measures of success lack specific, measurable components such as KPIs¹². This presented challenges for evaluation, particularly in responding to questions of 'extent'. In some cases, the strategic objective statement was easier to measure than the 'measure of success' statement. In addition, the strategy does not consistently include outcomes that reflect the intended change resulting from its activities. A future iteration of Active Disability Ireland's strategy would benefit from the use of a theory of change setting out a stronger causal link between the goal, SMART objectives, intended outputs/activities (how much), intended change (so what) and the subsequent development of a clear and proportionate evaluation framework to accompany this.

Involvement of People with Disabilities

The involvement of people with disabilities is a key component in the development of programmes and initiatives and should continue to be prioritised through the work of the Insights Researcher at Active Disability Ireland.

Diversity & Inclusion Policy

The Sport Ireland Diversity and Inclusion Policy was launched in 2022 and includes a focus on people with a disability alongside ethnic minorities including Irish Travellers and the LGBTQI+ community. This may have implications for Active Disability Ireland in that it will help shape and define future ambitions and approaches to increase participation opportunities for people with a disability as one of the core target groups of their policy. It is recommended that Active Disability Ireland engage with Sport Ireland to explore its role in supporting the policy implementation, to better define Active Disability Ireland's roles and responsibilities as part of the wider SIDP ecosystem and to ensure that a future Active Disability Ireland strategy demonstrates strong alignment with the policy.

Partnerships and Maximising Active Disability Ireland's Positioning

Active Disability Ireland should continue to expand its reach across relevant government departments and strategic working groups, with targeted and focused efforts to engage non-traditional sport sectors including health and education. Efforts should be made to cascade stronger connections and opportunities nationally to local levels, enabling NGBs and LSPs (SIDOs) to develop strong local partnerships to enhance provision of opportunities and the sustainability of programmes.

It is recommended that Active Disability Ireland work with others to retain the recently established strategic group comprising Active Disability Ireland, NGBs and SIDO. This offers a positive platform to enhance information sharing and communication between the three components of the SIDP.

Training

It is recommended that Active Disability Ireland engage with Sport Ireland and other sports sector stakeholders to co-design of a new way to maximise funding for training to meet the demand and enable equitable reach across regions. Methods for better understanding the impact of training should be considered and embedded into the next strategic plan, this could include more robust pre- and post-training surveys with participants, follow ups with those completing training or regular engagement with LSPs/SIDOs to explore the impact of training.

¹² Active Disability Ireland have developed a new strategy since the evaluation: <https://activedisability.ie/governance/>

5.4 SIDO Recommendations

Participation

1. To explore the potential to gather participation and activity data for people with disabilities at a local level. The availability of local level activity data for people with disability would provide valuable insights that may not be captured or reflected in the national level data. This could also help set baselines and more specific measurable targets for SIDOs and provide a more realistic overview of SIDOs' contribution in reducing the activity gradient for people with disabilities.
2. There is a need to review the existing SIDO guidelines document comprising 10 objectives and 14 suggested actions. It is recommended that SIDO objectives are reframed and realigned alongside other elements of the SIDP. There is a need to develop clear objectives with measurable targets and indicators to be able to objectively measure the extent to which the SIDO network is achieving or progressing against each objective. Where objectives refer to national targets, there needs to be a clear understanding of the contribution of SIDOs towards this.

Sustainability

3. The SIDP stakeholders have recently established the Disability Sports Group (DSG) consortium. This group is composed of representatives from 6 organisations (Active Disability Ireland, IWA Sport, Paralympics Ireland, Special Olympics Ireland, Vision Sports Ireland/NCBI, & the Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs)). This strategic body has evolved organically and offers a strong collaborative network that could be a useful sounding board for the emerging Diversity and Inclusion Policy. It is recommended that SIDOs continue to be represented in this group which offers a positive platform to enhance information sharing and communication between the three components of the SIDP. In particular, it is recommended that SIDOs use this group to enhance communication and interaction with NGBs – stimulating more consistent partnerships.
4. The development of a multi annual approach to funding emerges consistently within the community, voluntary and sporting sector. This evaluation acknowledges the restrictions on funding timeframes, however it is recommended that stakeholders (including Sport Ireland and the DSG Consortium) collectively work to develop and embed multi annual funding cycles.
5. SIDOs consistently referenced challenges associated with measuring the impact of their work. The implementation of follow ups on the M1 Measure and the need to consider social and behavioural aspects within evaluation were flagged regularly. There is a strong interest and desire in implementing effective, appropriate and proportionate impact measurement practice but stakeholders felt that further work was required to co-produce the best approach. The M1 measure was co-produced by Sport Ireland with LSP coordinators. It is recommended that Sport Ireland carry out similar work with SIDOs. In addition, to alleviate the administrative challenges of following up with participants 3 months post engagement, this process should explore ways to automate the end user evaluation data collection.
6. If the knowledge and directory of contacts/networks that the SIDO builds over time is not adequately captured and transferred, it is extremely difficult to re-establish and time intensive for new staff to re-build relationships and networks, significantly impacting the quality and sustainability of programmes. It is recommended that LSPs consider how to best embed and harness these networks, relationships and contacts within the wider LSP team – ensuring longer term sustainability.

Capacity Building

7. The need and demand for training is significant and the current funding model presents challenges in meeting this need and demand. It is recommended that a more streamlined approach to training, including a more effective allocation of dormant accounts funding is developed by SIDOs, Sport Ireland, NGBs and Active Disability Ireland. The aim is to increase the delivery of training at reduced/subsidised cost for volunteers. The DSG Consortium may be a useful mechanism to facilitate this.
8. The regional SIDO Network is an effective and valued initiative, managed and driven by Active Disability Ireland. It is recommended that this network is retained and supported, offering consistent opportunities for information sharing, peer support, collaboration and advice.

Awareness

9. Whilst SIDOs have successfully developed awareness and partnerships at a local level, it is recommended that further support is provided to promote the work of SIDOs nationally. This could include improving external awareness through the development of webpage/resources, or through national level engagements with disability services, education sector which can cascade down to local levels. Clarity on who is responsible for these engagements should be provided.

5.5 NGB Recommendations

Retention of the Grant

As Sport Ireland introduces its Diversity and Inclusion policy, it is unclear as to the future role or scale of the Community and Disability fund. This evaluation concludes that the fund is an important resource in developing and/or extending programmes for physical activity for people with disabilities and their families and there is emerging evidence of health and wellbeing outcomes. The fund is valued by NGBs, and the activity funded is unlikely to have progressed in the absence of the fund or to a much lesser extent. The absence of the fund would be a significant loss for disability participation.

It is recommended that the fund is retained, and consideration is given to an extension or reinvigoration of the fund to stimulate an enhanced unity of purpose across the wider SIDP. A reinvigoration may include a longer-term commitment (3-5 years), increased resources and a stronger mandate for partnership working across the SIDP stakeholders.

Grant Management, Reporting and Evaluation

The inconsistent nature of reporting and the lack of easily accessible output data presents challenges for evaluation. The time and effort required by internal Sport Ireland staff to mine grant files in support of the evaluation reflects this and does not represent the best use of time. The development of a coherent and consistent reporting framework for grant recipients that frames intended versus actual outputs would be beneficial.

We propose two recommendations:

1. It is recommended that Sport Ireland consider the merits of a more system-based management of grants, potentially using technology or an online grants management system to streamline both the application and reporting process.
2. It is recommended that grant recipients should be encouraged and supported to collect quantitative data on programme numbers, demographics, outputs and outcomes. Where appropriate, increased support to collect participation-based data at a local level will also enhance evaluation efforts. The implementation of recommendation 1 will help facilitate this approach.

Grant Structure

The grants awarded under the fund ranged from €10,000 over 1 year to €120,000. **Those projects funded over multiple years and with larger allocations were in a position to provide better data to support this evaluation, there is strong evidence of partnerships, training and perceived impact from these projects.** For example, Special Olympics received €120,000 across the period 2018-2020, these funds were used to match existing investment from Special Olympics Ireland which supported the delivery of the Young Athletes initiative. This delivered significant outputs in terms of participation: engaging over 350 young children and the development of new programmes, capacity building: within the development of new clubs and training of tutors and educational opportunities. It is unclear as to the extent of impact within smaller allocations.

It is recommended that Sport Ireland should consider setting a minimum value on funding levels and (insofar as possible) encouraging a multiyear approach to projects, with a strong focus on effective partnerships.

Collaboration and Partnerships

The evaluation identifies that the most impactful work appears to be aligned with 'effective partnerships'.

Whilst there are positive examples of partnership working, this could be enhanced.

We propose two key recommendations:

1. It is recommended that SIDOs, NGBs, Active Disability Ireland and other relevant organisations develop a mechanism for enhanced communication both at a local and strategic level. Throughout the consultations having effective partnerships and open communication with stakeholders was constantly referenced. Where examples of this were seen, it tended to be on an ad-hoc basis, namely at a local level and was not consistently replicated. This communication should focus on targeted and purposeful collaborations that result in joint applications (where appropriate) to future iterations of the fund.
2. It is recommended that an 'effective partnerships' guide or toolkit is co-produced and shared across the SIDP stakeholders to stimulate and encourage strong commitment to partnership working in future iterations of the fund, this could include examples of good practice.

Appendices



Appendix 1: Review of the Literature

1.1 Introduction

The following section presents a review of literature on international best practice, specifically focusing on the provision of participation opportunities in sport and physical activity for people with a disability. The search strategy used for this literature review included twelve key search words/phrases, as displayed in the table below.

Key Search Terms			
Disability	Participation	Sport	Physical Activity
Physical Disability	Inclusion	Paralympics	Volunteering
Intellectual Disability	Special Olympics	Recreation	Leisure

These search terms were firstly used in isolation and then in combinations of twos and threes. The primary databases used were Google Scholar, JSTOR, Project Muse, and Research Gate. These were included within advanced search options as essential words to be included with the abstract. Following this a further refinement and search was performed to include articles which specifically included participant impact within their delivery model. The search returned 20 relevant research articles, which were then coded to identify the common characteristics of successful interventions that support the participation of people with disabilities in sport and physical activity. This resulted in a condensed list of eight common characteristics – set out in the sub sections below.

1.2 Capacity, Skills & Knowledge of Staff and Volunteers

The importance of skilled and knowledgeable staff and volunteers was consistently highlighted in the literature as a key characteristic of successful interventions. This includes: a) participant knowledge – of the specific profiles of the participants involved in their initiatives (both disability type and personal circumstances) and b) sport/activity specific knowledge – of how the sport or activity can be delivered specific to the needs of the participants.

Scifo et al conducted a review of sports programmes which aimed to improve health and social inclusion in people with intellectual disabilities. This research highlighted trained coaches as crucial to addressing the individual needs of participants, in the creation of interventions which match participant skill, and in encouraging maintained participation within sports programmes¹³. These findings aligned with Shirazipour et al. research which reviewed interventions and programme conditions that fostered quality participation in people with disabilities¹⁴. The researchers found that instructors who are informed and knowledgeable about their sports and participant’s disabilities can utilise this to foster quality participation, helping participants achieve their goals and gain competence and confidence, allowing them to continue the activity on their own.

Hassan et al’s review of the Special Olympics’ Youth Unified Sports programme¹⁵ also identified: a comprehensive knowledge of the sport; a focus on nurturing teamwork; acting as a role model; and assessing participant strengths and needs to offer additional support as important characteristics. The InDive programme¹⁶ handbook which compiles best practice examples in encouraging social inclusion and equal opportunities in sport

13 Scifo et al (2019) Sport Intervention Programs (SIPs) to Improve Health and Social Inclusion in People with Intellectual Disabilities: A Systematic Review. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7739438/pdf/jfmk-04-00057.pdf>

14 Shirazipour et al (2020). Program conditions that foster quality physical activity participation experiences for people with a physical disability: a systematic review. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09638288.2018.1494215>

15 Hassan et al (2012) The inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in team sports: lessons from the Youth Unified Sports programme of Special Olympics. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17430437.2012.695348>

16 In Dive Integration Diversities Through Watersports (2016). Good Practices <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/project-result-content/e398aff4-91e0-4676-aa11-a4f5b54a9440/IN%20DIVE%20GOOD%20PRACTICES%20-%20EN.pdf>

reinforces these findings, suggesting that a coach's knowledge should be extended to include the participant's personal circumstances and resources, proposing that successful disability sports programmes possess a focus on building trust and meaningful relationships between coaches and participants. Findings from this research suggest that coaches who provide complementary activities such as educational events or environment exploration sessions which consider the needs of the disability group, can encourage sustained participation in the sport.

Gütt's research¹⁷ similarly notes the importance of education and training for coaches but goes further in highlighting that training and education should be extended to sports officials, administrators, and the general public when it comes to the rights, needs and capabilities of people with a disability in sport. This report suggests that co-operative training initiatives should be initiated alongside disability sports programmes and that these should be delivered as partnerships between disability sport organisations and mainstream sport organisations, with support from training providers and public authorities.

1.3 Disability Specific and Inclusive Activities

The importance of providing an adequate blend of both disability specific and 'inclusive' sport and physical activity opportunities was frequently referenced in the literature.

Scifo et al. research on sports programmes which aim to improve health and social inclusion in people with intellectual disabilities, provides support for activities specifically designed or adapted for the participation of disabled people. This research found that inclusive education, person-centred programmes, and group-based programming alongside those with similar disabilities can promote participation in sport for disabled people¹¹. These conclusions are mirrored in Shirazipour et al. review¹² which focused on physical, not mental disabilities. The review found that group-based programming alongside participants with similar disabilities was important in fostering quality participation for disabled people. This research suggests that in situations where a sport or physical activity has been adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities, the presence of individuals with a large variance in ability may impact negatively on the participants experience as it affects feelings of competence and belonging.¹¹ It was found that when participants feel part of their sporting community, organized with fellow members of a group who have similar experiences, and witness the completion of tasks by those with similar or more severe impairments, they are then inspired to try the new task themselves. This in turn encourages sustained participation in the sport or activity¹¹.

Much of the research evidence posits a view that the further development of mainstreamed sport and physical activity initiatives to be inclusive of people with a disability is important. A report on the best practice in removing barriers to sport for people with disabilities created for the European Commission¹⁸ highlighted the Go Out Get Active programme (GOGA) in the UK as case study. The GOGA programme aimed to increase the number of people, with or without disabilities, who were able to access and enjoy local opportunities, successfully achieving this outcome without specifically targeting of those with disabilities. This is mirrored in Hassan et al. evaluation of the Special Olympics' Youth Unified Sports programme¹⁸ which brought together athletes with intellectual disabilities and partners without disabilities. The incorporation of disabled and non-disabled people was found to be beneficial for increasing participation levels and found success in breaking down the distinction between ability and disability. Instead, leaders and coaches adopted inclusive practices which translate into an equal treatment of all players whilst still valuing each person individually for their contribution to the team.

Facilitating the participation of athletes with intellectual disabilities in mainstream activities was found to promote social inclusion in Grandisson et al. review¹⁹. Perceptions of adolescents and parents indicate that

17 Gütt (2013) Disability Sport in Europe: Learning from Experience.
<https://edoc.coe.int/en/people-with-disabilities/6958-disability-sport-in-europe.html>

18 ECORYS (2018) *Mapping on Access to Sport for People with Disabilities*
<http://www.eusport.org/files/243-nc0618380enn.en.pdf>

this can be an effective way for athletes with disabilities to develop friendships with peers without disabilities. This research does note that for these types of initiatives to achieve success, the role of coaches is paramount in terms of promoting a culture of inclusion and matching athletes and partners according to their athletic skills levels; this strongly resonates with the findings of section 1.2 which highlighted the integral role and responsibilities of the coach.

1.4 Inclusive sport in practice

Hassan et al. research noted that sports that are inclusive of all abilities are of particular success when incorporated into existing community organisations or clubs¹³. In these cases, programmes can profit from the profile of established clubs in their local communities, and leaders and coaches can tap into pre-existing sources of support and networks that enabled the development of the club in the first place. Adopting such practices can also improve the sustainability of participation opportunities.

Research suggests that providers should carefully consider both the context within which their programme will be delivered as well as the details of the disability types to be engaged before designing their programme. Research indicates that offering disability specific sessions initially to increase confidence and capability with a forward progression into inclusive activities is an effective approach.

1.5 Involving people with disabilities

A large body of research evidence exists that promotes the involvement of people with disabilities in developing and delivering participation opportunities.

A common characteristic of successful interventions within the research literature was that programme design should incorporate a level of meaningful consultation to ensure that it is needs-led. The research suggests that co-production activities promote choice, and that this plays an important role in both creating the opportunity for participation and sustaining the opportunity. The ECORYS report¹⁸ identified key lessons relevant to the funding, design, and implementation of disability sport programmes, recognised the importance of meaningful engagement with people with disabilities, their carers, and disability organisations in the design of activities. Correspondingly, Smith et al. research²⁰ on strategies for overcoming disparities for disabled individuals in organized sports found consultations to be directly linked to the success of interventions. This research highlights that consultation with the targeted communities and the employment of community representatives as project providers can increase trust, improve cultural sensitivity, and the responsiveness of those targeted to the project. Awareness training for staff members who are not part of these communities was also shown to be beneficial in this regard.

Gütt's research suggests that in order to maximize the potential for positive outcomes in terms of participation, consideration should be given to the specific needs and circumstances of the group and/or area within which a programme is developed¹⁵. This is supported by the Activities Without Boundaries¹⁶ programme in the Netherlands which aimed to create a national structure comprised of appropriate sport and mobility offerings so that all disabled people would have opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity. This programme highlighted flexible design as one of the key factors in its success. Research on the programme found that flexibility in design increased participation in disability sport as the needs of each region varied and were catered for. Comparably, Smith et al found that being flexible in activity design and delivery can assist participants in overcoming any initial lack of confidence they have which may otherwise serve as a barrier to their participation²⁰.

19 Grandisson et al (2019) *Strategies that Foster Inclusion Through Sports: A Scoping Review*.
<https://corpus.ulaval.ca/bitstreams/ffd5246a-5552-47c1-9548-dae74afc7770/download>

20 Smith et al (2015) *Overcoming disparities in organized physical activity: findings from Australian community strategies*.
<https://academic.oup.com/heapro/article/31/3/572/1751363>

1.6 Accessibility of equipment and Facilities

Programme design should also consider the facilities and equipment which are necessary for sports programmes targeting people with disabilities. ECORYS's research¹⁸ identified an interplay between participation, accessibility and suitability of sporting infrastructure. Similarly, InDive¹⁴ identifies the importance of environments which are adapted for the individuals participating in the activity. The research consistently points to the importance that environments and available equipment are moulded around the individual rather than placing the onus on the disabled individual to adapt to the sport.

Darcy et al.²¹ findings reinforced that a lack of accessible and affordable opportunities to participate in disability sport was a barrier. This created a narrow set of options for individuals to choose from and there was often a lack of support in many areas of sport participation. Research consistently referenced inaccessible facilities and equipment; and difficulty accessing transport to get to training and events as significant barriers in participation for people with disabilities²². The complex interplay included issues of costs to meet transport needs, barriers in using and accessing public transport and the lack of physically accessible transport²³. An important aspect in the research literature was the urban/rural impact of available opportunities, highlighting the need to build provision and capacity within rural areas.

1.7 Awareness

Raising awareness of the availability of opportunities for individuals with disability and promoting the success of disabled individuals in sport was raised as best practice in the literature. The ECORYS¹⁸ report found that before barriers to participation in sport can be removed for disabled individuals, awareness must be raised about the opportunities available. Methods of awareness raising include the use of social media channels, the promotion of elite sports role models, and travelling for competitive sport. Travelling to compete in sport has also been found to have benefits for social inclusion and integration as these opportunities give participants opportunities to promote the sport and themselves and thus inspire greater levels of participation from others with disabilities.

Advocates were also cited in the ECORYS report as an effective method of raising awareness. Advocates can be athletes who have previously taken part in the programme or sport and have benefitted from their involvement, or they can be professionals who have specific expertise in the area of sport, disability, or disability sport and can promote the importance of sport opportunities for people with disabilities.

Ginis et al. systematic review of factors related to physical activity participation among children and adults with physical disabilities found that sporting role models were frequently cited as being positively related to sport and exercise participation. Grandisson et al. review¹⁷ of strategies that foster social inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in sports found that showcasing disabled athletes' abilities can help change attitudes. This research found that involvement in disability sport by volunteers, helped individuals without disabilities improve their attitudes towards people with an intellectual disability. Advocates were successfully employed in the Active Without Boundaries¹⁶ programme with the production of factsheets and the sharing of stories about participants found to be key components for success²³.

21 Darcy S, Dowse L. In search of a level playing field – the constraints and benefits of sport participation for people with intellectual disability. Routledge; 2013; 28(3):393–407.

22 Shields, N., & Synnot, A. (2016). Perceived Barriers and Facilitators to Participation in Physical Activity for Children with Disability: A Qualitative Study. *BMC Pediatrics*, 16, Article No. 9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-016-0544-7>

23 Kiuppis F. Inclusion in sport: disability and participation. Routledge; 2018; 21(1):4–21.

1.8 Leadership and Partnerships

Effective leadership and partnerships featured prominently as important factors in the delivery of successful disability sports programmes. The ECORYS report¹⁸ noted the importance of the role of national agencies in leadership and partnership. The research suggests that country-wide bodies should facilitate the collaboration of national federations, disability organisations, and any partnerships which may develop in the pursuit of increased participation in sport for disabled people¹⁴. Intersectoral and interagency partnerships and collaboration networks should be used to develop new support systems for disability sport¹⁴.

Further, Gütt's research¹⁷ highlights that stakeholder co-operation is important as operating in isolation can lead to diverging actions which may limit and dilute the potential for impact. The need for a coordinated and cohesive approach was consistently referenced in the research literature. It is recommended that stakeholders achieve a high level of interaction and networking so that cooperative policies can be developed, and resources shared¹³. Partnership was identified as one of the key factors in the success of Active Without Boundaries Programme¹⁶. A regional partnership examined as part of this evaluation, entitled Unique Sports, was founded on a close working relationship between local authorities, care, and education bodies. The success of this partnership has been linked to a 10% increase in sport participation for people with disabilities in the region¹⁴.

1.9 Creating Sustainable participation

Research evidence provides strong support for the benefits of physical activity for people with disabilities²⁶. Not only is it important to engage and offer participation opportunities, there is a need to create the structures and conditions which enable sustainable participation²⁴. Hassan et al. evaluation of the Special Olympics' Unified Sports programme discusses the benefits of facilitating and enabling long term participation in activities for people with disabilities¹⁵. In the case of Unified Sports, multiple evaluated programmes that had been operating for several years demonstrated sustained participation with athletes continuing to participate since the programmes inception. Creating the environments to enable sustained participation for people with disabilities is consistently highlighted as a characteristic of success, but equally being able to provide a sustainable delivery model beyond the funding period represents a major challenge²⁵. Research highlights the need to create sustainable and effective partnerships between the disability and sport sectors; and to sustainably increase participation in sport by disabled people by achieving an improved understanding of innovative practice and 'what works', this can be achieved through monitoring, evaluation and the use of local data²³.

1.10 Application of findings in practice

SIDP stakeholders consistently reinforced the need not only to provide opportunities for people with disability to participate but importantly to ensure pathways existed to support their continued participation. The need to facilitate choice for people with disabilities and align to local need was also critical in ensuring sustained participation. This is in alignment with the best practice research evidence reiterating the need to create the structures and conditions that enable sustainable participation. Research emphasised the importance of using local knowledge and data to share what works in practice, this is an important consideration and equally a challenge to create the space to facilitate knowledge sharing and peer learning within the elements of SIDP. Equally funding was one of the main barriers towards creating sustainable delivery models, this is of relevance as the SIDP evaluation demonstrated the importance of the funds in delivering participation opportunities for people with disabilities, highlighting in its absence activity may still occur but to a much lesser extent.

24 Gins et al., 2016. A systematic review of review articles addressing factors related to physical activity participation among children and adults with physical disabilities. *Health psychology review*, 10(4), pp.478-494.

25 Promoting the Participation of People with Disabilities in Physical Activity and Sport in Ireland <https://nda.ie/Publications/Health/Health-Publications/Promoting-the-Participation-of-People-with-Disabilities-in-Physical-Activity-and-Sport-in-Ireland1.html>

Throughout the SIDP consultations, stakeholders were in favour of adopting inclusive practices to increase participation, this aligns with the research evidence which additionally supports that inclusive practice can also help break down the distinction between ability and disability. However, evaluation findings suggested the extent to which inclusion was embedded was often dependent on the personal interest or commitment of an individual, rather than a systemic culture that is built into the fabric of strategic plans and objectives. Correspondingly, it was the view of SIDOs and stakeholders there was a need to reflect and acknowledge that in terms of participation and sustainability the starting point wasn't the same for people with disability with a recognition that there was much more to do to ensure the structures and procedures were delivering high quality and positive participation experiences for people with disabilities.

Training and education was a central theme throughout every element of the SIDP evaluation, this is in agreement with research literature which cite skilled and knowledgeable staff and volunteers as a key characteristic of successful interventions. In terms of the knowledge within SIDP cohort, findings would suggest that sport/activity specific knowledge is currently the gap as this is not specifically covered in the training and education courses offered by Active Disability Ireland. This is an important consideration for inclusion, as findings suggest there is a need for practical support in how to incorporate and tailor activities for people with disabilities.

The current evaluation provides examples of co-production activities which promote choice, demonstrating that this plays an important role in both creating the opportunity for participation and sustaining the opportunity. Findings suggest this could be further improved, strengthening the voice of disabled people from the very early stages of programme inception rather than later stage of delivery. Best practice methods of awareness raising were also used in practice across the SIDP namely the use of social media channels, promotion of elite sports role models, and disability specific campaigns.

There is clear alignment between what the best practice research evidence suggests alongside what is happening on the ground for the SIDP. Synergy also exists between the barriers and facilitators highlighted through the SIDP evaluation amongst those highlighted in the research literature.

Appendix 2: 12 COM statements used in ISM 2019

Capability

- My level of fitness prevents me from doing physical activity
- I'm not skilful enough to do physical activity
- I know exactly where I can go to do physical activity
- I know what days and times I can go to do physical activity

Opportunity

- My local area is not very attractive and this puts me off doing physical activity
- There is nowhere near me to do physical activity
- I think people like me do physical activity
- I don't have anyone to do physical activity with

Motivation

- Doing physical activity is helping me achieve a current goal
- I want to do physical activity
- Doing physical activity is part of my weekly routine
- I don't like doing any physical activities





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