



SPÓRT ÉIREANN  
SPORT IRELAND

**SPORT IRELAND DISABILITY INCLUSION IN SPORT**  
Statement of Commitment and Action

# Introduction

Sport Ireland is the statutory agency tasked with leading, advocating and providing directed investment for the development of sport in Ireland.

The Sport Ireland Statement of Strategy 2023-2027 sets out a five-year vision of how Sport Ireland will lead the sport sector to further develop sport and physical activity in Ireland. The Statement of Strategy reflects the legal framework of the Sport Ireland Act, 2015 and the policy context of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027.

Achieving the Irish Government's National Sports Policy targets requires effective engagement with non-participants, sedentary and low participation groups. To do this, Sport Ireland and partners must meaningfully and equitably address issues related to diversity, inclusion, disability, female participation, and socio-economic disadvantage. Sport Ireland therefore works with and through partner organisations, such as National Governing Bodies (NGBs), Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs), and others who deliver sport and physical activity and this collaboration is pivotal in achieving the ambitions set out in the National Sports Policy.



**SPORT IRELAND STATEMENT  
OF STRATEGY VISION:**

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An active Ireland where everyone can enjoy the lifelong benefits of sport and physical activity.

To inform what this collaboration looks like on a practical level, Sport Ireland consults and engages the sports sector to develop and implement a range of policies that guide and inform its approach across different aspects including participation, high performance, women in sport, the outdoors and diversity and inclusion.

The positive impact of regular participation in sport and physical activity for people with disabilities is clear. There is a wide body of evidence connecting regular participation to improved physical health, enhanced mental well-being, increased social connectedness, improved self-confidence and self-esteem as well as increased opportunities for skill development and personal growth. Sport is considered a powerful medium to enhance social inclusion of people with disabilities within the community.

As the state agency with responsibility for the development of sport in Ireland, Sport Ireland recognises the leadership role it plays in ensuring that the commitment and actions set out in this document are delivered.

Sport Ireland also recognises and values the key contribution of the entire sport sector, disability sport organisations, other state agencies and bodies, and the individuals, paid and voluntary who dedicate their time and expertise to delivering opportunities for people with disabilities to participate and thrive in sport.





# Sport Ireland Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport

One of the seminal policy documents informing our approach is the Sport Ireland Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport.

The Sport Ireland Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport, launched in 2022 sets out a mission To lead by example and be a force for inclusion and belonging. In doing so, our intended outcome is that we hope to see more people from diverse communities participating and engaging in lifelong sport and physical activity and reaching their full potential, whatever that might be.

This policy has a specific focus on three key target groups: people with a disability, ethnic minority communities including Irish Travellers and the LGBTQI+ community. The policy describes the most prominent barriers and challenges facing each of the target groups, including people with a disability in becoming more active. In response to these barriers, the Diversity and Inclusion Policy identifies five key pillars which guide and shape both Sport Ireland's, and the wider sport sector's approach to improving participation levels amongst diverse groups – including people with a disability.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY VISION:

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A sport sector that celebrates diversity, promotes inclusion and is pro-active in providing opportunities for life-long participation for everyone.



## CHANGE

### *How we become champions of change involves:*

- Conversations about diversity
- Awareness, Understanding and Confidence
- Conduct and use of language



## COMMUNICATION

### *How we tell people and raise awareness involves:*

- Visibility of inclusion
- Representation and role models – the celebration of success
- Promote opportunities, amenities and facilities



## ACCESS

### *How we break down barriers involves:*

- Proactive efforts
- Outreach
- Venues, Transport and Affordability



## CAPACITY

### *How we build capacity and skills across sport to lead on inclusion involves:*

- Education and Sharing of Knowledge
- Resources and Support



## LEADERSHIP

### *How we make the right decisions and take responsibility involves:*

- Culture
- Governance structures
- Research, Monitoring and Evaluation

# Sport Ireland Policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability

The Sport Ireland Policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability was developed and launched in 2017. It is considered an important and strategic document that helped shine a light on participation barriers, provided an overarching approach to the work being conducted across Sport Ireland and its partners and provided the impetus for greater collaboration and investment in disability sport and physical activity.

Sport Ireland, and the wider sport sector, believed that the time was right to review the Policy<sup>1</sup> and to consider its continued relevance and alignment with the Sport Ireland Statement of Strategy 2023-2027 and the 2022 Sport Ireland Policy on Diversity and inclusion in Sport.

This document reflects a Statement of Commitment and Action by Sport Ireland in relation to its approach to disability inclusion in sport and physical activity and so increase participation in sport and physical activity by people with a disability.

**This document replaces the previous Sport Ireland Policy on Participation in Sport by People with a Disability.**

Given the extent of consultation, research and engagement carried out to inform the Diversity and Inclusion Policy launched in 2022 and its clear focus on people with a disability, it was agreed during the early stages of consultation to develop this Statement of Commitment and Action, that it should be framed under the architecture of the D&I Policy, adopting its vision, mission, values and five pillars.

<sup>1</sup> This was identified during an independent evaluation of the Sports Inclusion Disability Programme, carried out in 2022



# Sport Ireland Investment and Support for Disability Sport – The Journey So Far



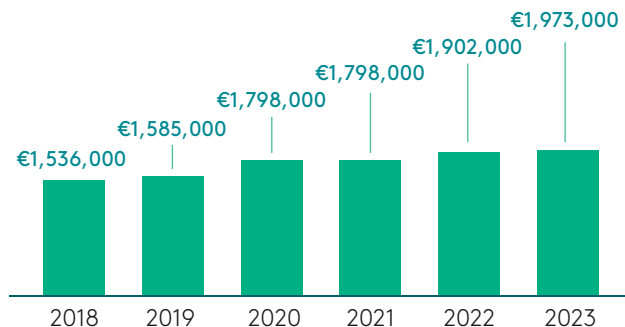
# Investment

## NGB Core Funding

There has been an increase year on year in Core funding for disability NGBs since 2018. The below represents over **20% increase** from 2018 – 2023 in Special Olympics, IWA Sport, Vision Sport Ireland and Deaf Sport Ireland. These NGBs and others also benefit from other funding streams such as Sport Ireland Women in Sport Grants

### Dormant Accounts Funding

From 2018 to date we have seen a consistent increase in the administration of Dormant Accounts Funding by Sport Ireland.



In 2019 Sport Ireland administered just over €350,000 in Dormant Accounts Funding targeting Sports Inclusion Disability Capital Supports and Sports Disability Training Framework.

In 2023, approximately **€3million** was administered to funds specifically targeting Disability Inclusion:



**€250,000**

for the Sports Disability Training Framework



**€600,000**

for in Sports Disability Inclusion Projects



**€2.2m**

Local Disability Sports Fund

In total across these 2 funding streams this represents an increase of over 150% between 2019 and 2023.

## Sports Inclusion Disability Officers (SIDO)

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As committed to in the National Sports Policy, Sport Ireland funds a SIDO in every LSP in the country. This equals an investment of almost €1million per year when the network is at full capacity. The total amount invested from 2017 – 2023 in the SIDO Network alone totals over €5.5million.

## 2024

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2024 represents the highest-ever level of Core investment into NGBs and LSPs, increasing by almost €11.9m over the lifecycle of the National Sports Policy 2018-2027. Some further examples of investment during 2024 includes:

- Sport Ireland provided Paralympics Ireland with funding of €2,813,000 for the over the course of the Paris cycle, which includes €800,000 for the 2024 Paralympic Games.
- €1 million to support Sport Inclusion Disability Officers at local level.
- Investment of €2,155,000 across four disability specific NGBs in 2024.
- Continued investment in Age & Opportunity and Active Disability Ireland to provide additional support.

# Support, Research, Policy

Sport Ireland supports the sport sector to develop, deliver and promote opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity by disabled people. Through the development and dissemination of guidelines, the facilitation of regional and national events and engagements to build capacity and share best practice, Sport Ireland works with the sector to ensure that the expertise that exists across the country is utilised to capacity.

Sport Ireland has expanded its disability research questions to better understand the heterogeneity of disabilities in Ireland, their distribution across the population and their impact on sports participation and physical activity levels. This new research, to be published in 2025, will help to inform the development of targeted solutions for specific disabilities.

Sport Ireland engages with other state agencies and government departments to ensure the contribution of sport is realised across Whole of Government policies and strategies. Sport Ireland contributed to the development of the National Autism Strategy and the update of the National Disability Inclusion Strategy. Sport Ireland recognises that the successful implementation of this document will be critical in ensuring its delivery of relevant actions in those Strategies.

Sport Ireland works with the sector to ensure that the expertise that exists across the country is utilised to capacity.





# People with Disabilities





## Language

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Throughout this Sport Ireland Disability Inclusion in Sport Statement of Commitment and Action, and in our work going forward, the terms “people/persons with disabilities” and “disabled people” are used interchangeably.

Many people within the disability rights movement in Ireland recognise the term ‘disabled people’ because it is considered to acknowledge the fact that people with an impairment are disabled by barriers in the environment and society and so aligns with the social and human rights model of disability.

However, this document also recognises that others prefer the term “people/persons with disabilities”. This also reflects the language used in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We also acknowledge that some people do not identify with either term<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://nda.ie/publications/nda-advice-paper-on-disability-language-and-terminology>

## Diversity

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The disability community is incredibly diverse, comprising individuals with a wide range of abilities, backgrounds and experiences. This statement of commitment and action acknowledges and recognises this diversity which we see as crucial in promoting inclusive sport and physical activity.

Disabilities may be visible or physical, such as mobility impairments, sight impairments or chronic illnesses, others are invisible, including, learning disabilities, hearing impairments, mental health conditions and neurodivergences like autism. Each individual’s experience of disability is unique and can be influenced by a wide range of factors such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural background.

## Landscape

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A total of 1,109,557 people reported experiencing at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty to any extent, accounting for 22% of the population. Of these, 407,342 (8% of the population) reported experiencing at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty to a great extent or a lot. A further 702,215 (14% of the population) reported experiencing at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty to some extent or a little<sup>3</sup>.

Contained within the National Sports Policy is a commitment to increase participation in sport among those with a long-term illness or disability to 40% by 2027 from a baseline of 29% in 2017<sup>4</sup>. Participation rates for people with a disability have increased since 2017, however the Irish Sports Monitor (2023) shows that individuals with a disability are still less likely to participate in sport. In 2023, 52% of people without a disability took part in sport on a weekly basis, compared to 32% of people with a disability.

One of the Key Performance Indicators in the Statement of Strategy is: the Delivery of Sport Ireland's Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities including focused leadership.

As the population ages, the likelihood of acquiring impairments or chronic health conditions tends to increase. In Census 2022, the term disability refers to people who experienced long-lasting conditions or difficulties.

From age 50 onwards, the percentage of people experiencing long-lasting conditions or difficulties to any extent began to rise, increasing more rapidly from age 75. After the age of 75, more than 50% of the population report a disability or long-term illness<sup>5</sup>.

As the number of people over 75 is due to increase significantly this will have a large impact on disability sports participation rates.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp4/census2022profile4-disabilityhealthandcarers/disability/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/205690/47eb7782-14d4-4988-ad24-ee18d20ee786.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp4/census2022profile4-disabilityhealthandcarers/disability/>





Shifting the participation gradient in line with Government targets will require extensive work with older cohorts of the population, which is not a traditional target group for sport. Recreational walking is likely to be a key activity for this cohort, however recreational walking does not contribute to the NSP sports participation targets. Census data also shows higher proportions of disabled people living in rural areas. This further complicates the challenge due to limited infrastructure and transport options.

Research informing Sport Ireland’s Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport also highlights that where disability intersects with other aspects of identity such as ethnicity, gender, and/or sexuality that additional barriers and challenges to participation are likely.

Providing inclusive, accessible and sustainable opportunities for disabled people can therefore be complex and should also consider that the needs and preferences of each person with a disability can vary. Also, supporting individuals to value physical activity and to identify and overcome barriers they face, will assist them to develop their personal relationship with physical activity (become more physically literate<sup>6</sup>).

In addition, high performing disabled athletes are a powerful source of inspiration, acting as role models they can shift societal perceptions of disability, promoting inclusivity and encouraging greater participation among people with disabilities.

6 [https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2023-09/strategy\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2023-09/strategy_FINAL.pdf)

# Sport Ireland Disability Inclusion in Sport: Statement of Commitment and Action

This Sport Ireland Disability Inclusion in Sport: Statement of Commitment and Action outlines our dedication to increasing participation in sport and physical activity by people with a disability. The content in the Statement of Commitment and Action is informed by three key sources:

- Direct consultation with the sport sector and with people with disabilities to develop this statement of commitment and action including survey, focus group and interview
- Review of the contributions of stakeholders in Research to inform Sports Irelands' Policy on Diversity and Inclusion
- Review of the contributions of stakeholders in the Evaluation of the Sports Inclusion Disability Programme.

*This included the following:*

**402**

People with disabilities contributed via online survey across the three key consultation processes

**42**

Sports sector organisations such as NGBs, LSPs, Active Disability Ireland contributed via online survey

**154**

Stakeholder groups including sports clubs, community organisations and sector representatives contributed via online survey

**19**

Focus groups/interviews with NGBs, LSPs, Sport Ireland Board members and other sports sector organisations

**3**

Planning meetings with Sport Ireland and/or the Disability Sports Consortium

In advancing and evolving its commitment to disability inclusion in sport, below, Sport Ireland set out five clear statements of commitment, with accompanying actions, framed under each of the five pillars of the Sport Ireland Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport.

The statements of commitment were co-designed by and are owned collectively by the sport sector, they represent a unity of purpose in how we work together to increase participation in sport and physical activity amongst people with a disability.

The delivery of the actions is owned by Sport Ireland as the state agency with responsibility for the development of sport in Ireland. Sport Ireland recognises and values the critical and impactful role that all organisations will play in supporting the delivery of these commitments and actions, including NGBs, with a particular focus on disability NGBs, LSPs, Active Disability Ireland and Paralympics Ireland.

*Terminology: in the actions below Sport Ireland references "Core funded partners". This is the collective group of organisations funded by Sport Ireland including NGBs, LSPs and others such as the Olympic Federation of Ireland (OFI), Paralympics Ireland (PI), the Federation of Irish Sport (FIS), Active Disability Ireland, Student Sport Ireland and Age & Opportunity.*



# Pillar 1: Change

We commit to fostering change by ingraining the inclusion of people with disabilities into the very fabric of the sport sector. We will cultivate confident, knowledgeable, and well-trained organisations throughout the sector, enabling them to offer inclusive environments and experiences for individuals with disabilities in sports.





## Pillar 1 Actions

1. Support the sport sector to produce, promote and implement resources and toolkits that promote a quality standard practice of accessibility for all documents, events, conferences, websites and software.
2. Collaborate and engage with other sectors such as health and education to support inclusive and accessible sport and physical activity practices.
3. Work with the sports sector and other relevant expert partners to establish and promote access to an online repository of resources including research, evidence and guidance/information from National policies to support inclusive sport and physical activity.
4. Advocate for disability inclusion nationally and internationally, learning from best practice and sharing the learning from an Irish perspective.
5. Support the identification and delivery of innovative approaches to disability inclusion in sport.
6. Promote the representation of people with disability to engage in co-design and co-production activity within existing and new Diversity and Inclusion advisory structures across the sport sector.

# Pillar 2: Communications

We pledge to include representation and promotion of individuals with disabilities in our campaigns, communications, and promotional activities. Furthermore, we are dedicated to actively involving disabled people in the development, design, implementation, and review of campaigns and programs that influence their participation.



## Pillar 2 Actions

1. Continue to support and promote the adoption of the Sports Inclusion Disability Charter across the sector.
2. Recognising the upcoming change to Irish legislation regarding accessibility, build capacity across the sports sector on digital accessibility and appropriate and accessible use of language on all communications and promotional activity.
3. Showcase people with disabilities as role models across all areas of sport and physical activity including administration, volunteering, coaching and participation.
4. Working together with relevant core funded partners, promote the visibility and achievements of Irish athletes with a disability on the global stage, to inspire the next generation.
5. Strengthen the requirement for accessible communications in achieving compliance within the Governance code for Sport.
6. Commit to and deliver on a specific disability focus within our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion communication campaigns.

# Pillar 3: Access

We are committed to spearheading efforts aimed at enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of spaces and facilities where individuals with disabilities engage in physical activities. Moreover, we will continuously seek and allocate funding for innovative programs and initiatives aimed at eliminating barriers, thereby enhancing participation and performance in sports and physical activities for disabled individuals.



### Pillar 3 Actions

1. Establish key accessibility enhancements across the Sport Ireland Campus and ensure that inclusion is embedded in the future development of the campus – through design, consultation and planning.
2. Work collaboratively with Local Authorities and Transport for Ireland, utilising Get Ireland Active, to promote effective public transport links to sports facilities for people with a disability.
3. Work with the disability sports sector to develop, promote and distribute facility accessibility guidelines and checklists for clubs, local authorities, NGBs and private operators, with a view towards embedding these in Local Sports Plans in the future.
4. Continue to invest in disability sports capital initiatives annually.
5. Through core funded partners, continue to support promote and invest in inclusive opportunities for people with disabilities to be active in sport and physical activity, aligned to local needs, resources and capacity.
6. Ensure that Get Ireland Active is a vehicle for the advancement of improved accessibility of facilities and opportunities across Ireland.
7. Develop and support tools that assist an individual with disabilities in recognising how physical activity could enhance their life, and to begin the process of overcoming barriers and building the supports that allow them to access the physical activity of their choice.
8. Support the development of accessible facilities for participation in sport and physical activity in the outdoors.
9. Work with the sport sector to remove barriers to participation in sport and physical activity at all levels for disabled people - this includes coaching, volunteering, attendance at events, leadership etc.



# Pillar 4: Capacity

We are dedicated to expanding the capacity within our organisations by providing comprehensive training, education, and upskilling opportunities focused on the inclusion of disabled people. This includes targeted and tailored training and education initiatives to ensure that resources and expertise are readily available within core funded partners. Our aim is to establish sustainable, inclusive opportunities for all.



## Pillar 4 Actions

1. Increase our investment in the Sports Inclusion Disability Programme through our core funded partners.
2. In line with action 46 of the National Sports Policy, to ensure the disability sport sector is engaged in funding model reform efforts alongside the wider sports sector, pursuing longer term, multi annual investments in disability sport and physical activity.
3. Strengthen and embed the inclusion of disability awareness training for all staff and volunteers across the sports sector, in the context of the Volunteer policy and other relevant Sport Ireland policies and strategies.
4. In line with recommendations from the 2022 evaluation of the SIDP, to review the effectiveness of the current model of funding disability education and training across the sports sector.
5. Develop resources and toolkits that promote a quality standard practice of accessibility for all documents, events, conferences, websites, software and empower the sector to implement.
6. Continue to support the Active Disability Ireland Xcessible programme to develop and increase capacity of organisations to support people with disabilities to be active in sport and physical activity.
7. Enhance our investment into research and evaluation within disability sport & physical activity to better understand the barriers and opportunities (including for administrators, coaches, officials, etc.) and to enable evidence informed approaches.
8. Build capacity across the sport sector to deliver opportunities for older adults with disabilities to engage in sport and physical activity.

# Pillar 5: Leadership

We commit to taking a leadership role and fostering collaboration within the sport sector. This entails continually enhancing our understanding of the barriers to disability participation in sport and physical activity. Moreover, we will actively seek, invest in, and optimise funding opportunities to develop sustainable participation opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Through proactive leadership and strategic partnerships, we aim to create lasting impact and meaningful change in the realm of disability sports.



## Pillar 5 Actions

1. Appoint a dedicated Disability Inclusion in Sport Lead within Sport Ireland who will support the sport sector and advocate and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities across all Sport Ireland strategies, policies, units, funding and initiatives.
2. Undertake a comprehensive mapping exercise of the disability sports sector including establishing relevant baseline data on representation, employment, inclusion.
3. Continue to work with, and through, the sector to provide important strategic, operational and advocacy roles for disabled people in Irish sport.
4. Maintain and support the Sports Inclusion Disability Officer Network in line with National Sports Policy commitments.
5. Support the work of the Disability Sports Group as a conduit for collaboration between NGBs, LSPs, Active Disability Ireland, Sport Ireland, Paralympics Ireland and other Disability sector organisations.
6. Establish a baseline position on disability inclusion and monitor, report and communicate.
7. Support positive action recruitment to increase the number of people with disabilities that are employed across the sports sector, and that are members of sport organisations boards/committees.
8. Embed disability inclusion within evolving strategies and policies including local sports plans, outdoor recreation plans, national strategies and organisational strategies.
9. Continue to invest in NGBs who deliver High Performance Programmes across Olympic and Paralympic disciplines and continue to target success for Ireland at the Paralympic Games across a spread of sports.
10. Support relevant core funded partners to prioritise the development and growth of athlete pathways for those with a disability and ensure supports are provided at appropriate stages, from participation to National representation.

# Accountability

The consultation process told us that our statement of commitment and action should not only be aspirational but also actionable and measurable.

To ensure that our efforts over the next five years are both effective and sustainable, we will put in place a robust accountability and transparency framework. This framework will help us monitor our progress, address challenges proactively and with flexibility, and engage with key stakeholders regularly.

The ultimate measure of success is improvement in participation in sport and physical activity by people with disabilities alongside a reduction in disparities such as club membership between disabled and non-disabled people as set out in the Irish Sports Monitor.

We believe that the actions set out in this document will make a positive contribution to these outcomes.

*In addition to existing reporting and accountability structures in place across Sport Ireland, the approach to accountability specific to the successful implementation of this Statement includes:*

- **Development of an Operational Plan** – led by the dedicated Disability Inclusion in Sport Lead within Sport Ireland we will develop a comprehensive operational plan that outlines specific and time-bound tasks, resources, and strategies that we will implement against our headline actions and pillars.
- **Annual Report** – we will continuously monitor activities delivered to assess their impact and identify any adjustments that need to be made. This monitoring will involve both quantitative and qualitative measures as well as feedback from our key partners and stakeholders. We will include a comprehensive update of our progress in Sport Ireland’s Annual Reports. This report is made publicly available and will ensure transparency with our partners and stakeholders.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Annual Presentations** - as part of our accountability strategy, we will host an annual presentation of our work to key stakeholders including: the Disability Sports Group and the Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Group. This will provide an opportunity to present key findings from our annual report and outline our upcoming operational plan and receive valuable feedback.



# Delivery

Sport Ireland will assign appropriate resources to deliver on the commitments of this Statement. The dedicated Disability Inclusion in Sport Lead will work across the sport sector and with other key stakeholders to deliver the commitments and actions outlined in this document. Sport Ireland also recognises that the success of this Statement depends on the level of investment and support provided and is committed to investing in the areas required to support the successful delivery.





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Version Control		
Disability Inclusion in Sport Statement of Commitment and Action		
VERSION NO.	DATE	STATUS
1	2017	Sport Ireland Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities published
2	2024	Disability Inclusion in Sport Statement of Commitment and Action approved by the Board of Sport Ireland. This statement replaces the 2017 policy and is linked to the Sport Ireland Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport.

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