



**Dr. Una May**  
**CEO Sport Ireland**  
**Joint Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport, and Media**  
**Wednesday, October 11, 1.30pm**

## **Introduction**

Chairperson and Committee members, thank you for the invitation to attend this meeting today to discuss inclusion in sport. I am joined here today by Helen McHugh, Sport Ireland's Diversity and Inclusion Manager.

Sport Ireland is not a regulator, it is the statutory authority tasked with the development of sport in Ireland. We are tasked with increasing participation in sport, supporting Ireland's high-performance athletes, operating Ireland's anti-doping programme, delivering coaching training, and developing the Sport Ireland Campus in Blanchardstown.

Sport Ireland focuses its work on ensuring that Ireland is an active nation where people are encouraged to participate, progress, and achieve in sport.

Inclusion is a core value of both the recently published Sport Ireland Strategy 2023 to 2027<sup>1</sup>, and of the government's National Sports Policy<sup>2</sup>.

The commitment by Sport Ireland to address inequalities in sports participation is highlighted within three key policies

1. Sport Ireland's Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport<sup>3</sup>.
2. Sport Ireland's Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities<sup>4</sup>.
3. Sport Ireland's Policy on Women in Sport<sup>5</sup>.

These policies are implemented through a range of measures undertaken directly by Sport Ireland, with the National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs), Paralympics Ireland, Special Olympics Ireland, Active Disability Ireland, Age and Opportunity Ireland and other partners.

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<sup>1</sup> [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)

<sup>2</sup> <https://assets.gov.ie/15979/04e0f52cee5f47ee9c01003cf559e98d.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2022-05/Sport%20Ireland%20Policy%20on%20Diversity%20and%20Inclusion%20in%20Sport.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/sport-ireland-policy-on-participation-in-sport-by-people-with-disabilities.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/wis\\_policy.pdf](https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/2019-11/wis_policy.pdf)

Sport Ireland promotes inclusion through its Diversity and Inclusion Policy which was published in May 2022. The implementation of this policy is overseen by Helen, our full-time Diversity and Inclusion Manager. While it is important to have a dedicated person responsible for leading our work in diversity and inclusion, it is crucial that our approach to inclusion is embedded throughout the organisation. Following the publication of this policy a representative Diversity and Inclusion in Sport Advisory Group was formed in November of 2022, which assists, advises, and provides guidance to Sport Ireland about its actions regarding the implementation of the Sport Ireland Policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport, and the promotion of an inclusive sports sector in Ireland.

Sport Ireland recognises that training and education in diversity and inclusion is key to ensuring sport is welcoming and inclusive. One of the high-level objectives in our Diversity and Inclusion policy is to: *Develop a suite of capacity-building and education resources for the sport sector to empower the sector to cater for the needs of diverse communities at national and club level.*

In recent weeks, the issue of racism in Irish sport has been reported on in the media. I want to take this opportunity to reiterate that similar to the organisation I lead and represent, I condemn racism in any form. It has no place in sport or society.

A wide range of government funding is invested by Sport Ireland to deliver an inclusive sport sector in Ireland. In 2023 Sport Ireland will invest €10 million in the network of Local Sports Partnerships and €2 million in funding into Disability focused Governing Bodies including Special Olympics Ireland, Irish Wheelchair Association Sport, Vision Sports Ireland, and Irish Deaf Sports. During 2022 Sport Ireland distributed over €11 million in Dormant Accounts Funding, including a dedicated €2.2 million Disability Club Fund.

Sport Ireland has also successfully applied to the European Social Fund (ESF+) programme and has been awarded €11 million for the implementation of a social innovation and inclusion programme over the next 5 years.

Through the Women in Sport programme, Sport Ireland invested €2 million in 2023 across 50 organisations to support the development and implementation of programmes and initiatives targeting women and girls.

In the area of High Performance, Sport Ireland values our Paralympic and Olympic athletes and medals equally and has provided equal funding to Para Sport athletes under the International Carding Scheme since the Scheme's inception in 1999.

Alongside funding Sport Ireland engages with and works closely with over 60 autonomous National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of Sport to raise awareness of and promote behaviours to uphold best practice and fair play in all sport. In August of 2023, Sport Ireland published a

code of conduct template<sup>6</sup> outlining good practice procedures required of those participating in sport, regardless of their role.

Sport Ireland tracks progress in participation through the Irish Sports Monitor<sup>7</sup> (ISM) and the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study<sup>8</sup> (CSPPA), two large population studies undertaken to monitor trends in participation in sport and physical activity in Ireland amongst adults and children, respectively.

The COVID-19 pandemic saw a drop in Sport Participation across the board and some sections of society have returned quicker than others. For example, in 2022 we have seen a widening of the disability gap to 20 % from 17 % in 2019.

However, in other areas, I am pleased to say that there has been progress. On Women in Sport, when the ISM was first implemented in 2007, the gap in sports participation between men and women stood at 16%. It now stands at 5% percentage points.

Sport participation has also increased in each ethnic group, participation remains highest among White Irish people at 56%, compared to 53% among Black people, Asian people or other backgrounds and 51% among people from other White backgrounds.

In the past year Sport Ireland has undertaken a review of our Women in Sport Policy, we are undertaking a review of our Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities. We have also created a detailed implementation plan to deliver the actions from our Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

Through our continued efforts Sport Ireland aims to create a sport sector that celebrates diversity, promotes inclusion, and is pro-active in providing opportunities for lifelong participation for everyone.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2023-08/Sport%20Ireland%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20Template.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2023-08/2022%20ISM%20Full%20Report%20200829.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.sportireland.ie/sites/default/files/media/document/2023-09/2022%20CSPPA%20FINAL%20V3.pdf>