



**Ms Niamh Smyth TD**

**Chair of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Tourism**

**Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media**

**March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**Ref: JCM-I-1235**

Dear Ms Smyth,

Thank you for the opportunity to **submit written evidence on inclusion in sport**

The written submission covers the topics of

- a. Sport and women
- b. Sport and disability
- c. Sport and LGBTQIA+ communities
- d. Sport and ethnic minority
- e. Grassroots sport and socioeconomic diversity
- f. Sport and older people
- g. Intersectionality in sport

Thank you.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary O'Connor", written over a horizontal line.

Mary O Connor, Chief Executive Officer



**Joint Committee on Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sport, and the Gaeltacht**

**Submission by**

**The Federation of Irish Sport**

**March 30th**

**Firstly, I would like to thank the Chairperson, deputies, and senators for inviting the Federation of Irish Sport to make a submission on written evidence on inclusion in sport.**

For those who may not be familiar with the work of the Federation, we are an independent representative body for 110 sporting organisations across Ireland including 81 National Governing Bodies and 29 Local Sports Partnerships.

Our vision is to provide a dynamic and effective voice for Irish sport, promoting the value of sport to Ireland while providing outstanding representation and services to members. As governing bodies, our members' priorities lie with their sport. Therefore, our job is to communicate their views regarding the benefits of sport in areas such as personal health/wellbeing, the economy and society as a whole.

The objectives of the Federation of Irish Sport are:

- To raise political awareness around the benefits of sport to society.
- To increase state investment in sport.
- To underpin and promote sport as part of education.
- To establish and promote sport as part of health.
- To increase interaction between NGBs and LSPs.

The Federation of Irish Sport' written submission on inclusion in sport, will refer to all the themes outlined below and will refer to participation in sport, leadership structures, officials, coaches, players, and spectators/audiences.



- a. Sport and women
- b. Sport and disability
- c. Sport and LGBTQIA+ communities
- d. Sport and ethnic minority
- e. Grassroots sport and socioeconomic diversity
- f. Sport and older people
- g. Intersectionality in sport

However, it is important to note that the Federation of Irish Sport as an advocacy body does not house statistics or evidence relating to themes A – G. This type of information would stay within the respective National Governing Bodies of Sport, Local Sport Partnerships’, and the government agency responsible for the development of sport in Ireland – Sport Ireland.

In this submission we will highlight key evidence under each heading while acknowledging that there is now an exhaustive list of actions, programmes and achievements under the heading of inclusion that have been led by key stakeholders in Irish Sport and it is the expectation of the sector that inclusion will remain an integral part of the Irish Sport and Physical Activity landscape.

**The National Sports Policy 2018 -2027 outlines Ireland's vision as follows:**

Our vision for sport seeks to capture the importance of sport to life in Ireland and to counteract a commonly-held view that it is nothing more than a game or merely a distraction from the important events in life. We believe that getting more people involved in sport as active and social participants, enabling them to have quality experiences, and securing international success from our top sports people will enrich our country in a variety of ways. We believe that the vision must also acknowledge the importance of a strong and vibrant sports system, continually growing and developing, and operating in a strong spirit



of collaboration with partners within and beyond the sporting sector to deliver these outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

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 focusing on addressing social, disability, gender, ethnic and other gradients."<sup>2</sup>

The accompanying Sports Action Plan 2021 – 2023 has several dedicated actions on inclusion and participation, including delivering an information campaign highlighting the unacceptability of prejudice, racism, homophobia and all forms of discrimination in sport, and focusing campaigns to increase participation, especially on women, minority communities, people with disabilities and communities with lower levels of participation.<sup>3</sup> References are also made in the Action Plan to dedicated funding for Disability Inclusion, training on LGBTI+ participation and other important actions which can support the right to participate in sport.

Furthermore, the National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland – Get Ireland Active! – sets out as a guiding principle to the plan to "Embrace an equity and human rights approach aimed at reducing social inequalities and disparities of access to physical activity."<sup>4</sup>

#### **a. Sport and women**

The Sport Ireland Women in Sport Policy is in place and is the road map for the development and progression of women in sport in Ireland. Two aspects of a very far reaching policy we have highlighted below are Gender Balance on boards and Coach Education and Gender, however evidence of inclusion can be seen from research, initiatives

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<sup>1</sup> Government of Ireland (2018) *National Sports Policy 2018 -2027* <https://assets.gov.ie/15979/04e0f52cee5f47ee9c01003cf559e98d.pdf> pg. 17

<sup>2</sup> National Sports Policy pg.19

<sup>3</sup> Government of Ireland (2021) *Sports Action Plan 2021 – 2023* <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/93232-sports-action-plan-2021-2023/> pg.8

<sup>4</sup> Health Ireland, (2016) *Get Ireland Active! The National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland* <https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/b60202-national-physical-activity/> pg. 11



and programmes being undertaken by funded organisations such as LSP's and NGB's throughout Ireland.

### **Progress towards Gender Balance on Boards**

In line with its Policy on Women in Sport, Sport Ireland published the latest snapshot of female representations on the boards of funded National Governing Bodies of Sport and Local Sports Partnerships in December 2022.

Female representation stands at 36% in National Governing Bodies this is up from 22% in 2012. Local Sports Partnerships (LSP's) has increased by 2% over the last year with females accounting for 39% of Board members. 33 sporting bodies have obtained the minimum requirement of 40% and 33 sporting bodies are yet to obtain the minimum requirement of 40%. Positively 28 sporting bodies report a 60/40 gender split.

30% of CEOs in sporting bodies are women.

- 12 funded bodies have a female President.
- 15% of boards have a female Chairperson.

39% of board members of LSPs are women.

- 12 LSPs have obtained the minimum requirement of 40%
- 17 LSPs are yet to reach 40%
- 50% of LSP Coordinators are female.
- 14% of Chairs of LSP boards are female (Down from 21% in 2021)

### **Coach Education and Gender**

Sport Ireland Coaching certified 11,555 coaches in 2022, 41% were female. The percentage of female coaches certified has increased by 7% over the last five years from 33% in 2018 to 40% in 2022.

A Women in Sport Coaching Conference was held in December 2022. Over 385 coaches registered for the conference. A new Women in Sport Coaching Toolkit was launched also in 2022 by Sport Ireland.



**b, Sport and disability, c. Sport and LGBTQIA+ communities, d. Sport and ethnic minority**

In 2020 Sport Ireland commissioned specific research relating to diversity and inclusion in sport.

The Research & Consultation Report set out a comprehensive overview of the barriers and challenges to participation in sport and physical activity for people with a disability, people from minority ethnic communities including Irish Travellers, and individuals from the LGBTI+ community.

This was informed by contributions from 2275 individuals, 1056 of those from across the target groups (593 LGBTI+, 310 people with a disability & 153 people from minority ethnic communities) and from more than 150 unique organisations that provide sport and physical activity opportunities, or general support to people from across the target groups.

Research carried out in 2021 by Sport Ireland found that 70% of people agree that sport clubs actively welcome those from diverse ethnic backgrounds, however lower proportions feel sports clubs are welcoming to those from LGBTI+ community (59%) or to those from Traveller or Roma backgrounds (32%)

In May 2022, Sport Ireland launched their first Diversity & Inclusion Policy in Sport which expresses its vision for a sport sector that celebrates diversity, promotes inclusion, and is pro-active in providing opportunities for lifelong participation for everyone.

The policy identified a number of strategic pillars which will guide us in the implementation of the policy. Those Pillars are: Change, Communication, Access, Capacity & Leadership.

Objectives for the policy include;



OBJECTIVES		DESIRED OUTCOMES
<b>CHANGE</b>		
1.	Sport Ireland will lead from the front and provide a nationally co-ordinated approach, engaging with the sector to create a cultural and practical shift towards inclusion.	That sport becomes more welcoming and inclusive, offering greater opportunities for participation and improvement to all.
2.	Support the sector to understand diversity and inclusion and its benefits, what it means at national, local and club level and how to be more inclusive, covering areas such as supporting culture change and developing champions of change.	An increase in awareness and confidence in the sector to engage people from diverse backgrounds.
<b>COMMUNICATIONS</b>		
3.	Promote the availability of programmes, initiatives and opportunities for people from diverse communities, using targeted, inclusive and culturally appropriate methods of communication.	Greater awareness amongst diverse communities of opportunities to participate.
4.	Develop and support the use of a visible outwards commitment to diversity and inclusion that will be promoted by campaign at national level, for use at local level – club, venue, facility.	Greater awareness of diversity and inclusion at national level; participants at local level feeling welcome.
5.	Improve the visibility and profile of local and national role models to inspire others in relation to participation, performance and high performance.	That the make-up of sport (volunteers, coaches, officials, players, family) reflects the make-up of the broader population.
<b>ACCESS</b>		
6.	Provide support to sports and clubs to develop outreach programmes – proactively bringing the sport out to diverse communities, or partnering with existing outreach programmes.	More clubs will be more inclusive and proactively retain diverse communities as active members of their clubs.
7.	Development of specific programmes to focus on diverse communities and on removing cost, transport and access barriers.	More people from the target groups will be participating in sport and physical activity because of the barriers to access being removed.

OBJECTIVES		DESIRED OUTCOMES
<b>CAPACITY</b>		
8.	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 – these resources will be co-designed with expert partners.	An improvement in the skills, knowledge and capacity of the individual and the organisation to engage people from diverse communities
9.	Expansion of and investment in the Sports Inclusion programme to create a Diversity and Inclusion remit across the LSP network	An increased focus on building the capacity of clubs at a local level to become more diverse and inclusive.
<b>LEADERSHIP</b>		
10.	Improve research (data and insight) around the participation of diverse communities in sport across all levels, so that actions taken can be based on data, and changes tracked and evaluated.	Access to data-based decision making and the ability to track change and design actions according to that data
11.	Support the representation of a minimum % of marginalised groups in leadership positions at Board level in Sport Ireland, NGBs and LSPs, and next within staffed positions, and later onwards to local/club level	More people from the target groups will be represented on senior and other positions e.g. coaching, management and committee level roles
12.	Establishment of a Diversity and Inclusion Champion at national and club level.	Changes made to organisational culture to foster inclusion, as well as improved understanding across & within communities

## Impact of policy on the ground

Cara Sport Inclusion Ireland is the supporting organisation playing a vitally important strategic, operational and advocacy role for persons with a disability in Irish sport. Cara facilitates participation for people with a disability by promoting the Sport Inclusion Disability Charter. It also does this through coordinating the delivery of training and education workshops on the inclusion of people with disabilities in Sport and Physical



Activity such as their Xcessible, Disability Awareness and Disability Inclusion programs.

Badminton Ireland are one such NGB that has 64 affiliated bodies signed up to CARA Sport Inclusion Ireland's Disability Charter and has Incorporated CARA Sport Inclusion Ireland's Disability Inclusion Training as part of their Coach Education, Volunteer Development and TY Leadership Programmes. Finally Badminton Ireland has trained over 70 staff and volunteers in the areas of Disability Inclusion and Autism in Sport.

Examples of Sport Ireland's Diversity, Inclusion and Equality policy roll out is the support of initiatives such as Volleyball Ireland's VolleyALL programme, which aims to help Ukrainian refugees integrate into communities through sport. The fund also supported Athletics Ireland's Diversity Games initiative, which seeks to deliver an outdoor Diversity Games Day for primary school pupils of all ethnic backgrounds from 3rd to 6th class.

#### **Sport for All Disability Supports Club Fund introduced in 2022.**

The aim of this fund is to offer clubs small scale grants between €1,000 & €5,000 to deliver disability specific activities within their clubs, providing inclusive opportunities for participation for people with a disability under the following headings;

- Disability specific training and education.
- Commencement or expansion of a disability specific programme or project.
- The purchase of equipment or the completion of small scale infrastructure works that support a disability specific programme or project.

Under the scheme 1,023 grassroot Clubs are being supported across 27 NGBs.

In 2023, Sport Ireland will invest €910,000 to continue supporting the full network of 29 Sport Inclusion Disability Officers (SIDOs) in the local sport partnership network. The aim of the Sport Inclusion Disability programme is to encourage and facilitate more people with disabilities to participate in sport and physical activity and develop sustainable clubs and programmes in all settings. The SIDOs work in a coordinating capacity with all relevant stakeholders to increase and sustain participation opportunities for people with disabilities.



SIDOs can also play an important role in helping both people with a disability and older adults to safely re-engage with community based or independent sport and physical activity opportunities.

Sport Ireland and Sporting Pride (a volunteer-run LGBTQ+ community organisation that focuses on developing inclusivity in sport, and sports clubs within the whole Irish community) have collaborated on a LetsGetVisible campaign. The campaign aims to recognise and acknowledge the importance of visibility and representation amongst the LGBTQI+ community, specifically in the sport sector.

30 NGBs, 10 LSPs and 34 Sport Club Allies participated in the original campaign in 2021. Improving visibility and outward expressions of inclusion are objectives of the Sport Ireland policy on Diversity and Inclusion in Sport. The #LetsGetVisible campaign gives all those involved in the sport sector the opportunity to show their support for the LGBTI+ community.

Sport Ireland in 2023 will invest €939,000 in the LSP network for the employment of Community Sport Development Officers (CSDOs), which will ensure a nationwide rollout of the CSDO initiatives. CSDOs are tasked with activating local communities through a variety of means including the co-ordination of targeted programmes and training initiatives for clubs and communities. CSDOs are also tasked with increasing the reach of LSPs to ethnic minorities and teenagers.

#### **e. Grassroots sport and socioeconomic diversity**

##### **Community Sport and Physical Activity Hub**

Community Sports and Physical Activity Hubs (CSHs) project is a collection of progressive sports clubs and other local organisations that want to work together to improve sport offered in their local community. The Hubs provide information, support, and advice on a wide range of sports and physical activities to make it easier for people in disadvantaged areas to engage in a more active lifestyle.



The intended impact of a CSH is to increase the number of people of all ages participating in sport and physical activity in their communities, with a specific focus on adolescents/young people.

All activity taking place in the CSH is centred around community participation. This includes developing and strengthening linkages between the community, sports clubs and other physical activity groups.

CSHs operate within the existing structure of Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) which operate under the remit of Sport Ireland. Aims: -

- Provision of a pathway for Sport and Physical Activity
- Well-trained people to develop the capacity of local sport.
- Creation of strong organisations
- Provision of quality facilities.

As such, the intended impact of a CSH is to increase the number of people of all ages participating in sport and physical activity in their communities, with a specific focus on adolescents/young people.

f. **Sport and older people**

**Age & Opportunity - Go for Life Programme**

Sport Ireland funds the Age & Opportunity Active Go for Life sport and physical activity programme to increase participation in recreational sport among older people. Go for Life aims to get older people more active, and its objectives are closely aligned to the National Sports Policy as well as the National Physical Activity Plan, the National Positive Ageing Strategy and Healthy Ireland. The Go for Life programme works closely with the network of Local Sports Partnerships to create a range of opportunities to help older people get more physically active.

A range of initiatives include:



- PALs (Physical Activity Leaders) training – suitable for anyone interested in leading physical activity initiatives in their community;
- CarePALs training – for those working or volunteering in care settings to lead suitable physical activities with people in their care;
- FitLine – a telephone mentoring service that encourages participants to start getting more active

**g. Intersectionality in sport**

When considering sport and development initiatives, it is important to apply an intersectional lens. Gender differences in participation are worsened when other factors are considered too: such as ethnicity, disability, or low economic status.

With Funding from IHREC, (the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission) the UNESCO Chair at Munster Technological University and key sports stakeholders including the Federation of Irish Sport, Sport Ireland, the GAA, Sport Against Racism Ireland and the Central Statistics Office TRUST Ireland was launched in 2021. TRUST Ireland promotes 'sport as it should be'. It is being spear headed by the UNESCO Chair at Munster Technological University.

TRUST Ireland is designed to socialise sport, human rights and the Sustainable Development Goals among government agents, the sports sector, higher education and training, and rights holders on the island of Ireland.

Trust Ireland believes that everybody has the right to participate in sport. From removing all forms of discrimination to improving health and education outcomes, sport is ideal for promoting human rights. Sport must protect rights by creating a safe, inclusive, and fair environment.

TRUST Ireland promotes a broad understanding of sport, including sport for all, physical play, recreation, dance, organised, casual, competitive, traditional, and indigenous sports and games in their diverse forms.



In collaboration with key partners, in Europe, a linked project called TRUST developed an educational toolkit for sports practitioners in schools, colleges, clubs and the wider community, providing human rights teaching resources which can be viewed here: <https://trustsport.net/>. TRUST Ireland is working with stakeholders at governmental, national and local levels to raise awareness of the potential role that sport can play in promoting human rights, particularly when addressing the needs of minority groups.

TRUST Ireland identified the main concerns of rightsholder groups regarding the issues they face in accessing sport in Ireland and the changes needed from the sport sector and the State. Issues spanned the following themes: governance, financial, environmental, educational, attitudinal, and programmatic.

#### **Recommendations emerging from TRUST Ireland are**

- a) **Prioritise #FurthestBehindFirst** in all sports related planning, including the National Sports Policy, its action plans, and all other policy areas that use sport from now to 2030. Ensure rights-based and outcomes-driven approaches to sport provision at all levels in line with Public Sector Duty and Equality legislation.
- b) **Invest in robust, outcome oriented disaggregated data** to inform evidence-based policymaking, advocacy, and impact assessment across the multiple policies in Ireland that focus on or use sport, physical activity, health, education, and inclusion of specific groups. This will help orient sports investments as an enabler of sustainable development. Convergence with cross-cutting data developments on SDGs, Well-being Index and Equality should be examined.
- c) Establish participatory approaches to cross-sector sports policy and planning at all levels of sport. Ensure broad representation of underserved groups (consider quota systems) and diversify stakeholders involved in the process to reflect the diverse impact of sport across the sustainable development goals.



d) **Prioritise capacity building and workforce development** and call on the Department of Further and Higher Education and education and training providers to deliver a skilled workforce for equality and social outcome-based approaches to sport delivery.

e) **Expand cross-sectoral funding access and allocations** (beyond capital and equipment emphasis) to support the elimination of barriers for marginalised and underserved groups. Examine social outcomes contracts to access capital, accelerate action, and grow necessary capacity in the sector to deliver broader grassroots opportunities to diverse stakeholder groups.

Ends.



