



Submission by Irish Wheelchair Association to the Joint Committee

on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media.

Inclusion in Sport - Sport and Disability.

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&

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Executive Summary

Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) is Ireland's leading representative organisation and service providers for people with physical disabilities. Irish Wheelchair Association Sport (IWA-Sport) is a National Governing Body (NGB) in Ireland for people with a physical disability, recognised and funded by Sport Ireland. Our organisation has led the way since its foundation in 1960 in providing participation opportunities across a range of para sports and at all ages, from first time participants to elite athletes to older adults. We are supported hugely in our work by a vibrant network of Volunteers across many counties in Ireland. IWA is the National Governing Body for Para Powerlifting, Wheelchair Basketball, and Wheelchair Rugby.

Vision, Mission, Values

Vision

Our vision is for everyone with a physical disability to enjoy sport, physical and recreational activities on a fully inclusive basis in any environment.

Mission

To develop and promote sport, physical and recreational opportunities for people with a physical disability to reach their full potential.

Values

Fun: IWA-Sport's ethos is that having fun should be at the heart of everything we do.

Belonging: IWA-Sport is dedicated to fostering and instilling a sense of belonging and camaraderie through involvement in our programmes.

Empowerment: IWA-Sport believes that our members will be empowered to achieve greater independence, by building confidence and self-determination, through involvement in our programmes.

Introduction

Participation - through our sports club network our Volunteers deliver organised age-appropriate training for our members, people with a physical disability of all ages. We deliver approximately 70 home events each year that provides both recreational and competitive opportunities in our focus sports of Wheelchair Basketball, Wheelchair Rugby, Para Powerlifting and Para Athletics. Additionally we collaborate with Local Sports Partnerships and other National Governing Bodies regularly across a range of participation programmes for people with a physical disability.

Performance - at Performance level we support our National Teams to compete at major competitions annually. These typically include, European Championships in Wheelchair Basketball, Wheelchair Rugby, Para Powerlifting. The Irish Paralympic movement was founded on the back of the establishment of the Irish Wheelchair Association. Our founding Members competed at the inaugural Paralympic Games in Rome in 1960.

Advocacy - we advocate for the inclusion of People with a Disability in all recreational leisure and sporting environments. We work closely with a wide range of stakeholders to achieve this including Sport Ireland, Local Authorities, other National Governing Bodies, the Irish Disability Sport Group and many other agencies.

International and National Policy that guides our work.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (UNCRPD)

Article 30 – Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport

The ratification of the UNCRPD brought with it a legal basis for people with disabilities to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. With a view to enabling persons with disabilities to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, leisure and sporting activities. Article 30(b) includes the instruction that State parties ensure that people with disabilities have the opportunity to partake in disability specific sporting and, to this end, encourage the provision of necessary corresponding resources needed for disability specific sporting in order to ensure that sporting for people with disabilities are able to participate on an equal basis with nondisabled people.

National Strategy / Policy

National Sports Policy (2018-2027) [Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport & Media]

The National Sports Policy sets out a vision for Irish sport in 2027 and fifty-seven actions towards its realisation. The policy prioritises increasing participation and sets as a key aim that ‘every Irish citizen will engage regularly in some form of sport or physical activity, irrespective of their age, economic or social circumstances, their ethnic background or their physical capabilities’.

Actions 6, 9, 12, 15 and 48 are specific to improving the inequalities and narrowing the participation gradients to include people with disabilities.

Participation Plan (2021-2024) (Sport Ireland)

The Participation Plan outlines a vision of ‘a country where everyone can regularly enjoy taking part in sport and physical activity for life’ and states that its mission is ‘to create a culture that encourages, supports and empowers everyone in Ireland to actively participate in sport and physical activity’.

National Physical Activity Plan (2016-2025) [Healthy Ireland]

Get Ireland Active promotes a vision of a society that facilitates, promotes and supports physical activity and an active way of life. Its main aim is to increase physical activity levels across the population and it sets two key targets as follows: - to increase the proportion of the population meeting the National Physical Activity Guidelines by 1% per annum; - to reduce by 0.5% per annum the proportion that are sedentary. The plan places particular emphasis on addressing inequalities by gender, age, social class or disability status.

Diversity and Inclusion Policy in Sport (2022) [Sport Ireland]

The Diversity and Inclusion Policy in Sport expresses a vision for a sport sector that celebrates diversity, promotes inclusion, and is pro-active in providing opportunities for lifelong participation for everyone. Inclusion is a core value of both the National Sports Policy and complementary Sports Action Plan, and builds on the success of the Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities, and the Policy on Women in Sport.

Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities (2017) [Sport Ireland]

In this policy Sport Ireland commits to - the equal treatment of people with disabilities in participation terms and - support to organisations providing opportunities.

These **RIGHTS and OBJECTIVES** stated in the above Policies will only be achieved when it is truly realised that people with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else. Unless real consultation and implementation of policy becomes a reality, the full and meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities in all sports and leisure activities in Ireland will not be realised.

The lack of appropriate funding towards the Irish Disability Sport Sector is a violation of Ireland's commitment to protecting the human rights for people with disabilities outlined in the UNCRPD. This violation has a direct effect on people with disabilities and their ability to be involved in their communities equal to their peers.

Key issues, concerns and recommendations.

Since our founding in 1960, Sport has had a hugely positive impact on our Members lives. The physical benefits are many and include, improved physical fitness, bone metabolism and increased functional independence. Members who are physically active in sport have increased mobility and a reduction in risk of chronic disease and secondary complications. The social benefits of sport are endless, including networking opportunities to meet new friends and peers, a positive impact on mental health, a greater sense of belonging and greater independence. Often, we provide the only access to physical activity to our members, who without our services can find it difficult to access and play an active role in our society. The key issues for our organisation are as follows;

Participation opportunities

Fact

- There are currently no specific para sports clubs for children with physical disabilities in approximately two thirds of counties in Ireland. Conversely, sporting clubs in Ireland for nondisabled children are found in every county and indeed community in Ireland. This reflects a violation of Article 30(b) of the UNCRPD and illustrates the barriers to sport that children with physical disabilities experience throughout Ireland; barriers that their nondisabled peers do not experience. It is important that there is an opportunity for participation for children with a physical disability that ensures our members do not travel more than 45 minutes from their home to access meaningful sport, as we aim to provide an initial positive para sport experience for children with a physical disability to play with and make friends with their peers. (rephrased this sentence)

Recommendation

- Additional core and dormant account funding has been welcomed in recent years. Whilst welcomed, the level of funding is not sufficient to address our organisations and Members needs and there is no long-term commitment to funding. For IWA to deliver a uniformed programmes of activities that provide meaningful

participation programmes and a pathway for lifelong involvement at all levels throughout Ireland, additional annual core funding is required. The impact of this funding would see increased staffing levels in more regions to develop new sports clubs in the following counties;

Ulster - Donegal, Monaghan, Cavan.

Connaught - Mayo, Roscommon, Leitrim.

Leinster – South Dublin, Wicklow, Wexford, Laois, Offaly, Longford.

Munster – Limerick, Waterford, Clare.

The knock-on impact of establishing and supporting new Clubs would result in a significantly increased national events programme, which whilst costly, would be very welcome as we aim to achieve our overall objective and that of many national policies.

Male, 13 years old, Mayo.

I would love to be able to take part in para sports in my local town with children who have similar disabilities to me. I watch my friends playing lots of different team sports and I feel there is nothing for me, I feel so excluded.

Participation – Club Support

Facts

- The allocation of funding through the Dormant Account 'Sport for All' grant scheme was very welcomed by our 17 Sports Clubs and sections in 2022. This scheme has enabled our Clubs cover essential day to day operational costs associated with running their programmes such as hall hire, competition costs, small equipment.
- IWA is not funded sufficiently to provide funding support to our club network to support them with their running costs.

Recommendation

Parent of Member, Tipperary.

Before our Club was formed my son had no local para sport to get involved in. Now our IWA Club gives my child and all his friends, a real purpose and some hope for the future. He has dreams of making it to the Paralympic Games some day.

- That this funding scheme is maintained permanently for disability sport programmes in the IWA Club network.

Performance Programmes

Facts

- IWA-Sport support and coordinate underage and senior national teams to compete at major international competitions such as European Championships and World Championships annually in the sports of, Wheelchair Basketball, Wheelchair Rugby, Para Athletics and Para Powerlifting.
- As many of the teams are not competing at High Performance level as defined by Sport Ireland, they fall outside of the High Performance model and funding structure. Para sport teams have significantly higher costs than 'able bodied' teams due to the requirement for increased support staff and sports equipment (ie sports wheelchairs) which is personal in nature.
- Typically costs to support our teams to prepare and compete at major international competitions range between €60 - €100k annually depending on the number of international competitions each year.
- Pre Covid, Athletes must provide approximately 95% of these costs.
- Para Sport athletes are more likely to be socio economically disadvantaged. People with a disability are less likely to be working. Looking just at the population aged between 20 and 64, we see from the CSO **2016** Census that 73% of people who do not have a disability are working. However, for people with a disability of

the same age, only 36 per cent are working. Looking at those at work only 6.3 percent of all workers have a disability (that is 120,775 of the people at work have a disability).

Recommendation

- Ring fenced, ongoing funding to the value of 90% of our performance programmes is required.
- That a funding scheme is made available for NGBs to host major international competitions in Ireland.

Female 32.

I loved representing my country at the European Championships however the fees to travel to the competition were really hard to raise and I'm afraid I won't be able to raise these funds every year. Additionally, the costs that to simply train are really high. These include car fuel costs, my personal assistant hours, and a new wheelchair every few years.

Sports Capital Programme

Fact

- The Sports Capital Programme is essential to support the provision of sports programmes for people with physical disabilities.
- Funding has enabled IWA to ensure the provision of sports wheelchairs for our athletes which are both expensive and 'personal' in nature, whereas typically 'non-personal equipment' is specifically supported in the scheme.
- Recognition that people with physical disabilities require more support in terms of sports equipment such as sports wheelchairs, walking/running frames, athletics throwing frames, storage, and that this equipment is typically significantly more expensive than 'regular' sports equipment for able-bodied athletes.

- Indoor and outdoor facilities and infrastructure need continued investment to ensure levels of accessibility are of the highest standards. This includes sports centres, gyms, public parks, greenways, playgrounds and beaches.

Recommendation

- That provision is made in the Sports Capital Programme funding terms to allow specifically for sports equipment that is personal in nature and supports people with a disability.
- That all state awarded grants allow for the same condition.