



**Empowering Journeys for All Abilities
Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Sport**

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Executive summary

The reports from the partner countries reveal that in all selected ecosystems the right of persons with disabilities (PwD) to participate in sport and organized physical activities are formally recognized. Moreover, countries adopted relevant international standards and instruments and aligned its regulatory framework with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights. Despite formal regulatory mechanisms in place across selected countries, structural barriers are embedded in sport-related governance, funding mechanisms and infrastructural constraints. Notwithstanding, regardless of high motivation highlighted by surveyed participants in all four countries, inclusion is limited by cumulative effects of structural barriers along with more practical challenges associated with insufficient adapted equipment, lack of inclusive coaches and limited transport solutions.

Among selected countries, Austria has the most robust regulatory and policy infrastructure exercised through (i) established sport governance and public sport funding structures, (ii) disability equality and accessibility frameworks, and (iii) national strategies that support physical activity and participation. However, the evidence indicates a persistent implementation gap: inclusion commitments do not consistently translate into accessible opportunities, inclusive coaching capacity, and practical participation pathways, particularly for activities requiring infrastructure and structured support (e.g., swimming, hiking, and running). This gap is reinforced by multi-layered barriers (accessibility, transport, costs and equipment, information, and social inclusion).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina the challenge lies in complex political and institutional setting. The decentralized governance exercised creates fragmentation and inconsistent jurisdiction with overlapping competencies resulting in uncoordinated efforts and uneven implementation. The limited accountability and infrastructure are widespread especially within school and community-based sport facilities. The scope of work of NGOs and sport-based organizations working with PwD is limited due high dependence on public funding which is characterized as inconsistent and short-term. It is noted that major sport entities lack appropriate systematic inclusion mechanisms.

Montenegro represents a challenging governance landscape, as it remains a centralized and interventionist approach toward policymaking limited by frequent political restructuring. The report suggest that regulatory and policy setting is in place, however, it remains fragmented in practice with limited impact. The sport ecosystem remains centralized lacking a needed degree of interoperability with clear delineation of jurisdiction and competences along with robust monitoring system in place. High-performance sport is prioritized, while grassroots and non-competitive initiatives receive limited institutional support and operational resources. The existing sport-related policies acknowledge needs for facility adaptation, proper equipment and professional staff.

In Portugal, the legal and policy framework for inclusive sport is among the most comprehensive in the selected countries, anchored in a strong constitutional commitment to sport as a universal right (Article 79) and dedicated disability sport legislation (Law No. 5/2007, Article 29; Law No. 38/2004, Articles 38–39). The country has established institutional infrastructure, including IPDJ, the Paralympic Committee, and the FPDD, alongside dedicated funding mechanisms such as the Programa Nacional de Desporto para Todos and the Medida III.1. However, a significant implementation gap persists as federated disability sport is active in only 9 of 20 districts, youth athletes represent merely 6.1% of registered practitioners, and 73% of the general population reports never exercising, one of the highest inactivity rates in the EU.

The finding suggests that reaching the concept of inclusive sport and sport for all approach requires more than formal regulatory mechanisms and legal guarantees. It depends on developing horizontal and interoperable coordinating policy networks from sport, health, education, social protection and transport authorities. Across all four countries there is an immediate need to provide professional development for coaching staff and other sport professionals, enable predictable disability-sensitive budgeting and improve accessibility of sport-related and transport infrastructure and adapted equipment.

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1. Introduction

Approximately 1.5 billion people worldwide live with a physical, mental, sensory, or intellectual disability, about 80% of which are in low- and middle-income countries. People with disabilities (PwD) are 16–62% less likely to meet physical activity guidelines and are at higher risk of serious health problems related to inactivity than people without disabilities. PwD can have substantial health benefits from physical activity participation; the WHO recently published physical activity guidelines for PwD, stating that meaningful benefits can be achieved from physical activity even below the 150 min per week recommendation. Estimates of the proportion of adults with disabilities living in high-income countries who meet physical activity guidelines range from 20.6% to 60.1%, in contrast to estimates ranging from 53.7% to 91.1% for adults without disabilities. For children with disabilities aged 11–15 years, estimates of those meeting physical activity guidelines vary from 8.5% to 40.4%, with girls being less active than boys. Although only approximately 20% of adolescents aged 11–17 years worldwide meet physical activity guidelines, physical education is compulsory in 232 countries and autonomous regions worldwide. Conversely, just 72% of children with disabilities who attend school have access to physical education, suggesting a lower prevalence of school-based physical activity in children with disabilities than in children without disabilities (Ginis et al. 2021).

1.1 General objectives of Stride and Glide: Empowering Journeys for All Abilities

This project addresses the critical lack of inclusive sports participation for PwD, focusing on capacity-building, social inclusion, and transnational cooperation. While sports have proven benefits for mental health, physical fitness, and social integration, studies reveal that PwD are 50% less likely to participate in sports than the general population (Ramsden et al., 2023).

Sports participation among PwD remains significantly low, not only due to physical barriers but also because of social stigma, lack of trained professionals, and absence of structured inclusive programs. A 2022 report from the European Disability Forum highlights that 70% of PwD in Europe have never participated in organized sports activities, despite overwhelming evidence that physical activity reduces health risks, improves social integration, and enhances mental well-being. While many European nations have implemented inclusion policies, there remains a significant gap in grassroots-level initiatives, where PwD face the most exclusion.

The project aims to fill this gap by providing inclusive, accessible, and sustainable opportunities for participation. In addition to aligning with EU priorities, the project leverages recent developments in adaptive technology, digital learning tools, and international policy efforts, ensuring a holistic, modernized, and scalable approach to inclusive sports development.

General objectives:

- Raising the capacity of Grassroots organizations.
- Promoting multi-sectoral cooperation and the basis for overall sports perception changes.
- Sharing of good practices from different countries.
- Promoting social inclusion through sport with a focus on people with disabilities.
- Promoting positive values through sport such as tolerance, team spirit,
- Fostering cooperation of different regions through joint initiatives.
- Raise awareness.
- Educate sport professionals to work with PwD.
- Significantly improve accessibility of sports objects and activities for PwD.
- Engage in physical activity and sport as a collective unit and provide role models.

1.2 Background to the report

The promotion of inclusive sport has been a priority of UNESCO, Council of Europe and European Union, as an important value and part of safeguarding the concept of human rights. In 2017 during the UNESCO's MINEPS conference the Kazan Action Plan was adopted fully aligned with the SDGs. It specifically addressed the importance of human rights-based approach to sport aimed at reducing inequalities and building inclusive societies.

As a UNICEF report explains: "Sport, in particular, has helped overcome many societal prejudices (Sportanddev, 2013). Experiences in a number of countries have shown that access to sport and recreation is not only of direct benefit to children with disabilities but also helps to improve their standing in the community. In March 2021, the European Commission adopted the Strategy for Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 which aims to further empower

people with disabilities and ensure their full participation in society (European Commission, n.d.).

The revised European Sport Charter places sport for people with disabilities as one of the core principles of sport policy. This reasoning is in line with the European Convention on Human Rights. Further, the European Union recognizes the importance of the approach ability over disability and breaks the barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, the role of sport and physical activity as a source of and driver for social inclusion is highlighted in several policy documents, such as the EU Work plan for Sport (2021-2024), Council Conclusions on the access to sport of people with disabilities and the new Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Inclusion and Diversity Inclusion Strategy. Children, youth and adults with disabilities are up to 62% less likely to meet the World Health Organization's physical activity guidelines than the general population. This is because people with disabilities face over 200 barriers to doing physical activity, two of the largest being built environments and transportation (Martin Ginis et al., 2016).

1.3 Aims and objectives

The key objective is to gain insight on opportunities and barriers to participation in sport and organized physical activities for people with disabilities.

The main aim of the research is to systematically identify, analyze and compare the facilitators and barriers influencing the participation of people with disabilities in sport and organized physical activities across partner countries.

In order to address aims and objectives the report will communicate the state of affairs of the current sport ecosystem for PwD across partner countries. Further, the report discusses systemic barriers that prevent PwD from participating in sport and organized physical activities. Finally, the best practices and policies have successfully improved inclusion of people with disabilities in sport and organized physical activities will be highlighted.

1.4 Methodology

The study employs multi-level mix methods qualitative study in order to better understand systemic and structural barriers and opportunities for PwD. The research was conducted within three subsequent phases in each country. Given the research inquiry, the interplay between public sector, sport movement and other relevant stakeholders is examined.

The document analysis is primary research methodology, examining regulatory regimes and national policy documents. Taking into account policy and organizational perspectives, the research methodology here included: document analysis of legislation, policy papers and reports from both the governmental and not-for-profit sectors in sport followed by survey and unstructured interviews with governmental representatives and sport stakeholders.

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), document analysis stands for a systematic procedure for examining documents to interpret and to understand their meaning. Official documents serve to outline the institutional framework to understand the opportunities and barriers to participation in sport and organized physical activities for PwD. Data analysis was conducted using a critical policy approach, providing a structured approach to examine the institutions, key stakeholders, administrative structures and contextual factors within institutional theory framework. The data was coded deductively, guided by the core constructs of critical policy analysis. During the initial coding phase, these constructs were systematically applied to the dataset. Following this initial coding phase, related codes were categorized into broader themes, which were then further refined into higher-order themes. The key themes of the critical policy analysis that were identified were policy-driven public sector and its interplay with non-governmental (sport movement and other) actors operating under centralized and interventionist sport ecosystem.

Following this phase, the results from the survey will be used to map patterns of experiences by understanding frequencies and percentages regarding participation levels, main barriers and opportunities. The rationale behind this approach is to create strong evidence for policy-related interpretation as a subsequent phase discussing institutional regimes, structural patterns and inequalities.

Lastly, unstructured interviews were conducted with professionals coming from public administration, sport movement and NGOs for PwD. The interviews were conducted individually, stimulating a more open dialogue with a focus on experiences. Hermeneutics has been used for interpreting data, understanding live experiences from the participants and their respective environments. According to Gadamer (1988) in the process of understanding the meaning, presupposes connecting particularities-individual accounts collected through the interviews with the whole.

1.5 Structure of report

The report is structured as follows. The next four sections provide country-level analysis (Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Portugal) aimed at understanding the participation of PwD in sport and organized physical activity. Section six brings consolidated analysis highlighting key lessons and providing recommendations for future intervention within this project.

2. National Report: Austria

Tsatsral Baatar¹, Mark Gomilko²

2.1 Overview

Stride & Glide – Empowering Journeys for All Abilities is an international initiative to make running, swimming, hiking and other sports more accessible to people living with disabilities (PwD) through (1) training and educational sessions for professionals who support PwD and (2) inclusive sport events supported by modern/adaptive equipment. For Austria, the project is significant, as it operationalises national and EU commitments on disability rights and accessibility by translating them into practical delivery models that sport providers and support professionals can apply in day-to-day practice.

This national review, combining desk research with exploratory survey data (N = 18) and interview data, indicates that Austria has a strong enabling foundation for inclusive sport participation through established sport governance and funding structures as well as disability equality and accessibility frameworks. However, an implementation gap persists between policy intent and real-world participation conditions. Barriers for PwD are typically multi-layered and cumulative, most commonly related to accessibility of facilities and environments, transport feasibility, affordability and equipment needs, availability of inclusive coaching and programme design, and information/communication barriers. These barriers often interact and can limit sustained participation even where inclusive intent exists.

At the same time, findings suggest that motivation for participation is strong, particularly in relation to health, wellbeing, and social inclusion. The primary constraints therefore appear structural rather than attitudinal. Recommendations are consequently oriented toward practical implementation: embedding inclusion expectations into sport funding and programme design; strengthening inclusive coaching and delivery capacity; improving access to adapted equipment and low-barrier entry pathways; strengthening cross-sector referral and coordination mechanisms; and improving monitoring of inclusion outcomes using Austria's existing data foundations.

Structure of the report: Section 2 outlines the methodology (desk research and the planned survey integration). Section 3 presents the Austrian context, including participation

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barriers/enablers, sport-related and non-sport policy frameworks, and key stakeholders, as well as survey results and data from the interview. Section 4 summarises and synthesizes preliminary results of the research and lists policy implications. Further, based on this, Section 4 proposes targeted changes to strengthen inclusion in sport and organised physical activity.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 Purpose and research focus

This national report aims to provide an Austria-focused overview of the opportunities and barriers affecting participation in sport and organized physical activity for people living with disabilities (PwD). It supports the Stride & Glide project by identifying key ecosystem features, relevant policies and legal frameworks, and practical constraints that influence inclusion in sport.

The report is guided by three core research questions:

- What is the current sport ecosystem for PwD in Austria (key actors, roles, and forms of provision)?
- What systemic barriers limit participation in sport and organized physical activity for PwD?
- Which existing policies, institutional arrangements and practices contribute positively to inclusion?
- To what extent does the current legal and governance framework support or limit the development of inclusive sport?

A working assumption of the report is that PwD remain underrepresented in sport and organized physical activities and face systemic barriers that are not consistently addressed across settings and providers.

2.2.2 Data collection

The report uses a mixed-methods approach, combining desk research and primary survey data, as well as further qualitative interview data.

- **Coordination and contributors:** Data collection and synthesis are coordinated by a core team of 2 researchers (Tsatsral Baatar, and Mark Gomilko, from the Austrian partner team, ACTIVE Austria).

- **Desk research:** A targeted qualitative document review was conducted, focusing primarily on Austria-relevant sources published within the last decade. The search parameters included:
 - Sport-related and non-sport-related policies and regulations (e.g., sport governance, disability rights, health, social care, education, accessibility).
 - Institutional publications and high-quality grey literature (e.g., public agencies, established NGOs, sport federations, and relevant initiatives).
 - Available research evidence on disability, sport participation, accessibility, and inclusion.
- **Survey instrument and interview:** To complement desk research with participant perspectives, a structured questionnaire was prepared to capture the lived experiences and needs of PwD in Austria. The survey is distributed digitally through ACTIVE's and partner organizations' stakeholder networks. It covers six thematic areas: demographics, current participation, perceived barriers, perceived benefits, support gaps, and interest in future participation (e.g., running, hiking, and swimming). Further, a semi-structured interview was conducted with a representative of an organisation. The organisation has long-standing experience working with children and young people in Vienna, Austria, including those with physical and mental disabilities, in cooperation with schools, institutions, and families.
- **Ethical considerations:** The survey protocol was designed in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national data protection laws. Participation is voluntary, informed consent is required, and all collected data regarding disability status and personal identifiers is anonymized and securely stored.

2.2.3 Data analysis and survey sample descriptives

- **Document and policy analysis:** Reviewed materials were analyzed using a qualitative thematic framework to map the Austrian sport ecosystem for PwD. This involved identifying relevant legal and policy provisions, defining stakeholder responsibilities, and extracting key enabling or constraining factors for inclusive participation.
- The survey was conducted between 13 and 23 February 2026 and collected eighteen anonymous responses (N = 18) from people living with disabilities in Austria who are currently engaged in sport or have participated in the past. Respondents were primarily recruited through sport-related networks and clubs.

The survey sample includes:

- 11 male and 7 female respondents
- Age distribution ranging from 18 to 65+ years
- Majority residing in rural areas, with additional respondents from urban and suburban areas

Respondents reporting primarily physical disabilities or mobility impairments (n=13), alongside additional self-identifications including psychosocial/mental health conditions (n=4), visual impairment/blindness (n=2), hearing impairment (n=1), intellectual disability (n=1), and chronic illness limiting activity (n=2). Several respondents identified themselves as wheelchair users and/or users of assistive mobility devices (e.g., walking aids, white cane), with some reporting the need for companion or support assistance.

The survey sample consists of people living with disabilities who are currently engaged in organised sport or participate regularly in physical activity. Most respondents are active members of sport clubs or participate in structured sport environments. The majority report weekly participation, including wheelchair sports, para-athletics, adaptive fitness activities, cycling/handbike, swimming, and recreational outdoor sports. Several respondents use assistive mobility devices (e.g., wheelchairs or walking aids), and some report additional support needs related to accessibility or assistance. As the sample was recruited primarily through sport-related networks, it reflects individuals already connected to sport systems rather than those who are completely inactive.

Survey responses were summarized descriptively and grouped thematically to identify recurring barriers, support needs, participation patterns, and motivational factors. Given the relatively small and sport-connected sample (N = 18), findings are interpreted as exploratory and indicative rather than statistically representative.

Where relevant, survey findings are triangulated with desk research and interview insights to strengthen analytical conclusions and refine policy-relevant recommendations for project implementation.

2.2.4 Limitations

The findings of this study are subject to certain limitations related to the accessibility of the data collection instrument. Particularly, the survey required support or assistance for individuals who are blind or have significant visual impairments, which may have limited independent participation for some respondents. As a result, the level of interest and engagement among certain groups of people living with disabilities may be underrepresented, potentially affecting the overall representativeness of the findings. Further, as the sample is not statistically representative of the Austrian population, findings are exploratory and only bear evidence for PwD who are active (or were previously active) in sports.

To mitigate these limitations and to strengthen the depth of analysis, the study incorporates a multi-stage qualitative mixed-methods approach. This complementary approach aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of systemic and structural barriers, as well as opportunities for people living with disabilities, beyond the constraints of the survey instrument alone.

2.3 Context

2.3.1 Participation and activity patterns (Austria and EU context)

Austria has a substantial population living with disability and/or long-term health-related limitations, which makes inclusive access to sport and physical activity a relevant public health and participation issue. Statistics Austria's disability and participation statistics report that 759,311 people had a "registered disability" in Austria at the end of 2022 – about 8.3% of the resident population (Statistics Austria, 2024b). In parallel, Statistics Austria reports that around one quarter of women and men in Austria describe health-related limitations in everyday activities (Statistics Austria, 2026), indicating that disability and functional limitations affect a significant share of the population beyond "registered disability" status.

At the EU level, the overall participation picture suggests a large inactivity challenge in the general population. In the Special Eurobarometer on Sport and Physical Activity (2022), 45% of respondents report that they never exercise or play sport, while 38% do so at least once a week (European Commission, 2022). This matters for disability inclusion because global evidence consistently shows that people living with disabilities are less likely to meet physical activity guidelines than people without disabilities and face a higher risk of health problems associated with inactivity (World Health Organization, 2020).

For Austria specifically, the national evidence base for physical activity patterns is anchored in the Austrian Health Interview Survey (ATHIS), which collects population-level information on physical activity and also includes questions on functional impairments, for instance, mobility, sensory function, cognitive abilities, and limitations in daily living (Statistics Austria, 2021). In the Stride & Glide context, this means Austria has strong foundations for monitoring physical activity and disability-related limitations, but translating monitoring into practical inclusion pathways (accessible opportunities, support, equipment, and inclusive coaching) remains essential, particularly for sport types that require infrastructure, guidance, and safe environments (such as running, hiking, and swimming). While national monitoring systems provide valuable macro-level data on disability and physical activity patterns, they offer limited insight into the lived experiences of people with disabilities who engage in sport in practice. The exploratory survey conducted for this report, which primarily reflects individuals already connected to sport clubs and structured activities, suggests that even among active participants, structural and environmental barriers remain relevant. This reinforces the importance of examining not only participation rates, but also the conditions under which inclusive sport participation can be sustained.

2.3.2 Barriers and enabling factors for participation (Austria-focused)

Evidence from Austria and EU-level policy frameworks consistently indicates that people living with disabilities (PwD) face multi-layered barriers to participating in sport and organized physical activity. These barriers are rarely “single-point” problems; instead, participation is shaped by how accessibility, support services, costs, information, and inclusive provision interact across settings and regions (European Commission, 2021; Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022).

Findings from the exploratory survey (N = 18) and interview conducted for this report reinforce this multi-dimensional perspective. Even among respondents who are already connected to sport clubs and structured activities, barriers were reported across several domains simultaneously – most prominently financial constraints, limited availability of inclusive offers, lack of accessible facilities, and insufficient adapted equipment, alongside transport feasibility and access to trained inclusive coaching. The interview further highlighted that structural factors such as specialised transport and limited outreach can compound these

barriers, particularly for young people with physical disabilities. Together, these findings suggest that participation constraints are cumulative rather than isolated.

2.3.3 Accessibility and the built environment

A foundational barrier is physical and environmental accessibility – whether facilities, routes, and services are designed so that participation is realistically possible. Austria’s disability-related policy context explicitly frames barrier removal as essential for equality and inclusion, referencing developments such as the Federal Disability Equality Act (BGStG) and Austria’s alignment with the UNCRPD (Republic of Austria, 2005; United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2013).. Accessibility constraints are particularly relevant for Stride & Glide activities (running, hiking, swimming), which depend on safe routes, accessible changing facilities, sanitary infrastructure, and barrier-free entry to venues.

The survey findings reinforce the centrality of accessibility as a participation determinant. A substantial share of respondents identified a lack of barrier-free facilities (e.g. ramps, accessible changing rooms, pool access, adapted infrastructure) as a significant barrier to participation. Similarly, in the interview, accessibility was described not only in terms of sport venues themselves but also in relation to the broader environment (e.g. public facilities and infrastructure that enable participation beyond the activity site). These insights suggest that accessibility must be understood holistically, encompassing both sport-specific infrastructure and the surrounding built environment that enables safe and dignified participation.

2.3.4 Health-related limitations, support needs, and unequal living conditions

Beyond “registered disability,” a large share of the population reports health-related limitations in everyday activities (roughly a quarter of women and men in Austria) (Statistics Austria, 2024a). These groups are also described as being more affected by material and social deprivation and reporting a lower quality of life (Statistics Austria, 2026). This matters for sport participation because limitations in daily living and unequal access to support services can reduce the feasibility of sustained activity, even when motivation exists.

The survey findings provide illustrative insight into how these dynamics manifest in practice. Respondents reported a range of disability types, most commonly physical or mobility impairments, alongside psychosocial/mental health conditions, visual impairment, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, and chronic illness limiting activity. Health- or impairment-related limitations were explicitly identified as participation barriers by several respondents,

alongside financial constraints and the need for accessible infrastructure. This suggests that participation challenges are not solely environmental, but also shaped by individual health conditions and the degree of external support required to engage in sport safely and consistently.

The interview further highlighted that participation often depends on the availability of family support or caregivers, particularly for young people with physical disabilities. Where such support is limited, access to sport may become practically unfeasible, even if formal opportunities exist. Together, these insights underline the interaction between health-related limitations, socio-economic factors, and structural access conditions in shaping sustained sport participation.

2.3.5 Transport and “last mile” access to opportunities

For many PwD, participation depends on whether sports opportunities are reachable and logistically manageable. Barriers such as limited public transport accessibility, long travel times, and the need for support can make participation difficult, even when inclusive programs exist. This is closely linked to the broader disability rights agenda, which emphasizes equal participation and the reduction of exclusion from community activities, including sport (European Commission, 2021; Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022).

Transport emerged as a particularly salient issue in the interview. It was highlighted that while specialised transport arrangements are often organised for essential activities such as school attendance, access to extracurricular sport or leisure activities frequently depends on parental availability, private arrangements, or additional financial resources. Where such arrangements are not feasible, young people may be effectively excluded from sport participation regardless of interest or ability.

Survey responses provide complementary insight, with transport and logistical feasibility identified by several respondents as barriers to sustained participation, and transport support frequently highlighted as a factor that would facilitate greater engagement. This is particularly relevant given that a substantial share of respondents reside in rural areas, where local availability and mobility constraints can compound access challenges. Together, these findings suggest that “last mile” access – including coordination of assistance and reliable, affordable

transport – can represent a decisive threshold between theoretical access and actual participation.

2.3.6 Costs, equipment, and affordability

Participation in swimming, hiking, and running can require specialized equipment, support personnel, or adapted formats. Affordability barriers often arise from the combined cost of participation fees, transport, equipment, and assistance. Austria’s disability statistics highlight that people living with disabilities are, on average, more affected by material and social deprivation, suggesting that affordability and resource constraints are relevant participation determinants (Statistics Austria, 2026).

The survey findings strongly reinforce the central role of affordability and equipment access in shaping participation. Financial barriers (including participation fees, equipment costs, and assistance-related expenses) emerged as the most frequently identified constraint. In parallel, a lack of adapted or accessible equipment and infrastructure was widely highlighted as a limiting factor. When asked what would most support their continued or increased participation, respondents most commonly indicated free or low-cost offers, alongside accessible facilities and adapted equipment.

These responses suggest that even among individuals already connected to sport systems, affordability and equipment access significantly influence the sustainability and regularity of participation. Costs therefore function not only as an entry barrier, but also as a determinant of long-term engagement.

2.3.7 Availability of inclusive coaching and accessible program design

A common implementation gap is the availability of trained personnel and “inclusive-by-design” programs, coaches, and organizers who can adapt activities, communicate in accessible ways, and maintain safe environments for diverse needs. Austria has a strong national monitoring capacity for functional impairments and limitations through the Austrian Health Interview Survey (ATHIS; Statistics Austria, 2021), which includes questions on mobility, sensory function, cognitive limitations, and difficulties in daily living. However, monitoring alone does not ensure inclusive provision; participation ultimately depends on practical capacity at the program and club level.

The survey findings indicate that inclusive coaching and program design are meaningful factors at the delivery level. A number of respondents identified a lack of trained or inclusive coaches as a participation barrier, and a larger share highlighted the need for more trained professionals and inclusive sport formats when asked what would improve participation conditions. This suggests that coaching capacity may function less as an absolute access barrier and more as a quality and sustainability determinant for inclusive participation.

The interview conducted for this report further underscored that inclusive provision extends beyond technical adaptation. It involves creating environments where participants feel welcome, safe, and able to engage without performance pressure. Particular emphasis was placed on allowing individuals to participate at their own pace and, where appropriate, organising initial activities within more homogeneous groups (e.g. participants with similar mobility profiles) to build confidence before broader integration. These insights suggest that inclusive program design is not solely about physical accessibility, but also about social climate, communication, and gradual participation pathways.

2.3.8 Information barriers and awareness of opportunities

Even where options exist, participation can be limited by information gaps: programs that are not visible, not communicated in accessible formats, or unclear pathways into activities (who to contact, what support is available, what equipment is provided, and what adaptations can be requested). This can be particularly important for people who are not already connected to sports networks.

The interview highlighted awareness and outreach as central determinants of participation. It was noted that many potential participants may not actively seek out sport opportunities, particularly if they have limited prior experience with inclusive sport environments. In such cases, participation often depends on proactive communication, clear invitations, and collaboration with trusted intermediaries such as schools, social workers, or disability organisations.

Survey responses provide complementary but more limited insight. While information gaps were not among the most frequently identified barriers, a small number of respondents indicated that clearer communication and more accessible information about inclusive offers would facilitate engagement. In addition, some respondents pointed to digital accessibility challenges (e.g. registration platforms or websites), suggesting that communication pathways

themselves can function as participation filters. Together, these findings suggest that inclusive sport provision must not only exist but must also be actively and visibly communicated in accessible formats and through established community networks.

2.3.9 Attitudes, confidence, and social inclusion

Participation is also shaped by social factors: whether PwD feel welcome, whether staff are confident and competent in inclusive delivery, and whether there are supportive peer environments. At the EU level, the Disability Rights Strategy frames sport as part of equal participation in society and highlights that people with disabilities are often excluded from community activities, including sport (European Commission, 2021).

The survey findings suggest that social and psychological dimensions of participation are highly relevant. Respondents reported strong perceived benefits of sport in terms of health, social connection, and participation in society, and consistently expressed high levels of agreement with statements relating to increased self-confidence, mental wellbeing, and feeling more active in the community. At the same time, a minority of respondents reported having experienced exclusion or discrimination in sport environments, primarily linked to disability type or accessibility barriers. These responses indicate that while many participants perceive sport as empowering and socially beneficial, inclusive environments cannot be assumed and require ongoing attention.

The interview further emphasized that inclusion is not only a matter of access, but of atmosphere. Clear invitations, welcoming attitudes, and safe, respectful environments were described as essential. In some cases, especially during initial engagement, participation within groups of similar ability levels was seen as supportive in building confidence before broader integration. Together, these findings underline that inclusive sport provision must address not only structural and logistical barriers, but also social climate, confidence-building, and the prevention of exclusionary dynamics.

2.4 Enabling factors and opportunities relevant to Stride & Glide

2.4.1 Policy alignment and rights-based momentum

There is strong policy justification for inclusive sport at the EU level, including explicit attention to equal access and participation in sport under the EU Disability Rights Strategy

2021–2030 (European Commission, 2021). This provides a supportive “top-down” environment for projects that translate rights commitments into practical delivery models .

The survey and interview conducted for this report suggest that such policy alignment resonates with lived experience. Respondents consistently emphasised the importance of accessible, affordable, and welcoming sport environments, and a substantial share indicated openness or interest in further inclusive sport opportunities, while others expressed more cautious or conditional views. These findings indicate that rights-based commitments at EU and national level are not merely symbolic but correspond to tangible participation needs and expectations at the community level.

2.4.2 Demonstrated health and well-being benefits of activity for PwD

Global evidence underpinning WHO guidance indicates that PwD are less likely to meet activity guidelines, and that increased participation is linked to meaningful health benefits, reinforcing the public health rationale for inclusive sport initiatives (World Health Organization, 2020).

The survey findings strongly align with this public health perspective. The vast majority of respondents identified health and wellbeing as a primary motivation for engaging in sport, and high levels of agreement were reported for statements relating to improved self-confidence, social connection, and feeling more active in the community. These responses suggest that sport participation is not perceived solely as physical activity, but as a broader contributor to psychological wellbeing, social inclusion, and quality of life.

The interview similarly emphasised that sport should be communicated not as performance-driven, but as health-oriented, social, and enjoyable. Together, these findings reinforce the relevance of inclusive sport initiatives as both health-promoting and socially integrative interventions.

2.4.3 Strong national data foundations for targeting and evaluation

Austria’s disability and participation statistics provide a robust foundation for understanding the scale of disability and limitations, including “registered disability” figures and broader health-related limitations (Statistics Austria, 2026). This enables better targeting of interventions and clearer evaluation once program data (including the project survey) are incorporated.

2.5 Sport-related policies and regulations (Austria)

Austria's sport policy and delivery system is shaped by a combination of federal-level legislation and funding rules, national policy strategies, and implementation through the organized sport movement (federations, umbrella bodies, and clubs). For Stride & Glide, this framework matters because inclusive sport depends not only on "good practice," but also on how sport is financed, governed, and operationalized, including whether inclusion and accessibility are embedded in mainstream funding and program design.

2.5.1 Core legal basis and national sport governance

At the federal level, the key legal foundation for sport funding and sport policy steering is the Bundes-Sportförderungsgesetz 2017 (Federal Sports Promotion Act 2017). It lays the foundation for public support for sport in Austria and frames sport as a matter of public interest. In practice, this law underpins how sport is supported through recognized sport structures and how resources are channeled into both performance sport and broader sport participation.

Regarding policy direction and system overview, Austria's federal sports ministry publishes an annual Sportbericht (Sport Report). The Sportbericht 2024 is an official government report that provides a consolidated picture of priorities, developments, and the funding context in the Austrian sport sector (Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport, 2024). This is a useful anchor document for describing Austria's sport governance landscape and the institutional environment within which inclusion initiatives must operate.

2.5.2 Participation-oriented policy framing (health & sport policy alignment)

Austria's sport policy context also aligns sport with broader public health and participation goals. For example, Austria's "Austrian Health Targets" include a goal focused on promoting healthy, safe physical activity in everyday life through supportive environments (Gesundheitsziele Österreich, n.d.), demonstrating policy recognition that participation depends on enabling conditions rather than only individual motivation.

In addition, the federal sport ministry issued the Nationaler Aktionsplan Bewegung (Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport, 2024) which sets a national policy direction for increasing physical activity and strengthening conditions that make "more movement and sport" the easy choice. For Stride & Glide, these strategies provide a strong

national “participation” rationale that complements disability inclusion goals and aligns with the motivations expressed by survey respondents and in the interview, where sport participation was predominantly framed in terms of health, wellbeing, and social inclusion rather than performance.

2.5.3 Inclusion and accessibility as sport-policy requirements

While disability rights are primarily governed by non-sport frameworks (addressed in Section 3.4), accessibility and inclusion are increasingly seen as practical requirements for sport providers. Austria’s official guidance on accessibility emphasizes the state’s obligation to enable barrier-free access to services and offerings, grounded in the Federal Disability Equality Act (Bundes-Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz, BGStG, Republic of Austria, 2005). This is highly relevant to the sport sector, where many participation barriers are environmental (facilities, entry points, information, route design) and operational (program design, staffing, equipment).

Sport umbrella bodies also translate these principles into operational guidance for sport organizations, for example, by highlighting the relevance of barrier-free offers and non-discrimination principles for publicly available services. This policy-to-practice translation is important for Stride & Glide because the project’s added value lies in turning general inclusion principles into deliverable models (training, equipment use, event delivery standards) for running, swimming, and hiking participation. The survey and interview findings suggest that, despite strong formal commitments to accessibility and non-discrimination, practical implementation remains uneven at the delivery level, particularly regarding accessible infrastructure, equipment availability, inclusive coaching capacity, and the visibility and reach of inclusive offers.

2.5.4 What this implies for Stride & Glide implementation

Taken together, Austria’s sport policy and regulation environment provides:

- A formal public-interest basis for sport funding and support (via the Federal Sports Promotion Act 2017), which is relevant for scaling inclusive sport delivery through established structures.

- Official national reporting and policy framing (Sportbericht 2024) helps map the sport ecosystem and identify where inclusion can be embedded in mainstream systems.
- Participation and health-oriented strategies that reinforce the legitimacy of interventions aimed at lowering barriers and increasing sustained participation.
- A practical requirement for accessibility and non-discrimination that supports the case for inclusive design, staff training, and accessible delivery models.

The empirical findings from the survey (N = 18) and interview suggest that these enabling conditions correspond to tangible participation needs at the delivery level. While interest in further inclusive sport opportunities was expressed by a substantial share of respondents (with others expressing more cautious or conditional views), there was strong and consistent emphasis on the importance of affordability, accessible infrastructure, adapted equipment, and trained inclusive coaching. Persistent barriers related to infrastructure, equipment, transport feasibility, and program design were identified even among sport-connected participants. This indicates that Stride & Glide is well positioned to operate within an enabling policy framework while addressing implementation-level gaps that remain visible in practice.

2.6 The non-sport policies and regulations relevant to inclusive sport (Austria)

While sport law and sport funding shape how activities are delivered (see Section 3.3), the strongest “inclusion obligations” in Austria come from disability equality and accessibility frameworks. These non-sport regulations matter for Stride & Glide because many barriers to participation are not “sport-specific” (e.g., inaccessible infrastructure, communication barriers, discrimination, lack of reasonable accommodation). The survey and interview findings reinforce this cross-sectoral dimension, highlighting that participation constraints often arise from broader accessibility conditions, transport feasibility, financial affordability, and information pathways rather than from sport provision alone. Together, these insights underline that inclusive sport delivery depends on alignment not only within sport governance, but across disability policy, infrastructure planning, and social support systems.

2.6.1 Disability equality and non-discrimination

A central national pillar is Austria’s Federal Disability Equality Act (Bundes-Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz, BGStG; Republic of Austria, 2005), which establishes a

statutory ban on discrimination on the grounds of disability in broad areas of everyday life. This provides an important legal basis for expecting barrier reduction and equal access to services and offerings that affect sport participation (e.g., facilities, service provision, information access).

Austria also frames disability equality as a constitutional and policy commitment, with public guidance that emphasizes its guarantee and implementation through key federal laws (including the BGStG).

While the survey sample was small and predominantly sport-connected, a minority of respondents reported experiences of exclusion or discrimination in sport settings, underscoring the continued practical relevance of statutory non-discrimination guarantees in the field of sport.

2.6.2 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

At the international level, Austria is bound by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The UNCRPD provides the rights-based foundation for inclusion, including full participation in society on an equal basis, an important underpinning for inclusive sport and physical activity as part of social participation.

Austria has been reviewed by the UN CRPD Committee, which issued Concluding Observations on Austria's implementation (United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2013), reinforcing that inclusion is not only "good practice" but a rights-based obligation.

2.6.3 Austria's strategic disability policy: National Action Plan on Disability 2022–2030

Austria's main national disability-policy strategy is the National Action Plan on Disability 2022–2030, adopted by the federal government in July 2022 as the successor to the 2012–2021 plan (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022). The Social Ministry presents it as a cross-government framework intended to implement the UNCRPD through concrete goals, measures, and monitoring.

For Stride & Glide, the NAP is relevant because it provides an Austrian policy reference point for:

- Accessibility and participation,
- Cross-sector coordination (federal, Länder, and relevant stakeholders), and
- The expectation that implementation is supported by measurable objectives and indicators.

The survey and interview findings underline the practical relevance of this cross-sector perspective. Many identified participation barriers – including transport feasibility, accessible infrastructure, equipment access, affordability, and coaching capacity – extend beyond the remit of sport organisations alone and require coordinated implementation across sport, disability policy, infrastructure planning, and social support systems. This reinforces the importance of aligning project-level interventions with broader cross-government inclusion strategies.

2.6.4 EU policy anchor shaping national expectations

At the EU level, the European Commission’s Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030 explicitly aims to ensure equal participation and access across domains, including sport. This strengthens the policy rationale for national and local initiatives that reduce barriers and expand inclusive participation.

2.6.5 Accessibility requirements affecting participation environments and information

Many participation barriers are mediated through the accessibility of information, services, and environments.

- **Web Accessibility Act (WZG):** Austria implements the EU’s Web Accessibility Directive for public-sector bodies via national law (WZG). This is relevant when public institutions provide online sports opportunities, registration, and event information.
- **Accessibility Act (Barrierefreiheitsgesetz, BaFG):** Austria implemented EU accessibility requirements for certain products and services through the BaFG (BGBl. I Nr. 76/2023), which entered into force on 28 June 2025. While not “sport law,” it is part of the broader accessibility environment shaping access to key services (including digital and consumer-facing services) that can affect participation pathways.

The survey and interview findings suggest that, while structural barriers such as cost and infrastructure were more frequently identified, communication and accessibility of information remain relevant participation factors. A small number of respondents indicated challenges related to digital accessibility or unclear communication pathways, and the interview emphasized the importance of proactive outreach, clear invitations, and accessible registration processes. This underscores the practical relevance of broader accessibility legislation beyond the sport sector itself, particularly in ensuring that inclusive opportunities are not only available but also visible and navigable.

2.7 Key stakeholders in Austria (public sector and sports movement)

Inclusive sport participation for people living with disabilities (PwD) in Austria is shaped by a multi-actor ecosystem. Responsibilities are distributed across public authorities (federal and regional), sport governance bodies, disability-representative organizations, and service providers. For Stride & Glide, stakeholder mapping is essential because reducing barriers typically requires coordination across sectors (sport, disability equality, health promotion, social support, transport, and education/training).

The survey findings reinforce this distributed responsibility perspective. When asked which actors should play a greater role in promoting inclusive sport, respondents most frequently identified sport clubs, coaches/trainers, schools, health professionals, and national sport federations, alongside public institutions and civil society actors. This indicates that inclusive sport is perceived not as the responsibility of a single authority, but as a shared task across governance levels and implementation settings.

2.7.1 Public sector stakeholders

Federal level – sport policy and funding

- **Federal Sport Ministry (BMWKMS):** Provides national sport policy direction, oversees federal sport initiatives, and publishes Austria's Sportbericht, which offers an official system overview. This ministry is a key stakeholder for mainstreaming inclusion into sport policy priorities and funding mechanisms.

Federal level – disability equality and inclusion

- **Federal Ministry of Social Affairs (Sozialministerium):** Leads disability policy, hosts official information and implementation resources (e.g., around accessibility),

and coordinates Austria's National Action Plan on Disability 2022–2030. This ministry is relevant for aligning sport inclusion with broader disability rights and accessibility commitments (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022).

Federal level – statistics and monitoring

- **Statistics Austria:** Provides national data infrastructure for disability-related indicators and physical activity monitoring (e.g., “registered disability” statistics and the Austrian Health Interview Survey). These datasets are relevant for evidence-based targeting and evaluation of participation gaps.

Regional/municipal level (Länder and municipalities)

- Sport and inclusion policies are implemented through Länder and local governance structures, which often influence facility management, local programs, accessibility investments, and community sport delivery. For Stride & Glide, this level is important because access to swimming facilities, safe walking/hiking routes, and local program delivery frequently depends on regional and municipal cooperation.

The survey findings indicate that public actors are perceived as relevant contributors to inclusive sport development. In addition to sport clubs and coaches, respondents identified schools, health professionals, and public institutions as actors that should play a greater role in promoting inclusive sport. This suggests that inclusive participation is expected to be supported not only within sport governance structures, but also through education systems, health services, and public-sector coordination mechanisms.

2.7.2 Sport movement stakeholders

Umbrella sport organizations

- Austria's organized sport movement operates through umbrella and federation structures, which are central for scaling inclusive sport practice through clubs and local programs. These actors are important for translating national inclusion goals into operational guidance, training, and club-level implementation. (Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport, 2024)

Austrian Paralympic ecosystem

- The Austrian Paralympic Committee (ÖEPC) represents and supports para-sport structures and provides a clear national reference point for disability sport development and visibility. It is a relevant stakeholder for expertise on inclusive pathways, athlete support needs, and connections to clubs and sport disciplines (Austrian Paralympic Committee, n.d.)

Sport federations and clubs

- Sport federations and local clubs are the main delivery points for organized sport. Their participation is crucial because inclusive sport depends on practical factors at the club level: coach capacity, inclusive program design, facility accessibility, equipment, and safe participation environments.

The survey findings strongly reinforce the central role of sport movement actors. Respondents most frequently identified sport clubs as the key actors that should play a greater role in promoting inclusive sport, followed by coaches/trainers and national sport federations. This indicates that participants perceive inclusive sport not primarily as a policy abstraction, but as something that must be realised at the level of everyday delivery – within clubs, through trained staff, and through inclusive program design. It further suggests that capacity-building within the organized sport movement is a critical leverage point for Stride & Glide implementation.

2.7.3 Disability-representative organizations and civil society

Disability advocacy and representation

- Disability umbrella bodies and advocacy organizations play a key role in representing the interests of PwD, identifying lived barriers, and shaping inclusion priorities. These actors are essential partners for Stride & Glide because they can support outreach, co-design, and validation of what “accessible participation” practically requires.

NGOs and project-based inclusion providers

- Civil society organizations often bridge the gap between policy commitments and local implementation by running inclusive activities, providing support services, and developing practical tools (e.g., training, checklists, accessible formats). In Austria, ACTIVE/ACTIVA is positioned within this “implementation bridge” space, connecting sport inclusion aims with practical delivery models and training capacity.

While survey respondents most frequently identified sport clubs and coaches as key drivers of inclusive sport, a smaller but notable share also indicated that NGOs and community-based organisations should play a greater role. In combination with the interview insights emphasizing outreach through trusted intermediaries, this suggests that disability-representative organisations and civil society actors remain important connectors between formal sport systems and potential participants, particularly those who are not yet actively engaged in sport networks.

2.7.4 Health, social support, and education actors (cross-sector enablers)

For many PwD, participation is affected by factors outside of sport governance alone. Key enabling systems include:

- health services and rehabilitation networks (referrals, health guidance, continuity of support),
- social support services (assistance needs and eligibility contexts),
- education and training providers (inclusive coaching, staff competencies, and professional development),
- and transport and infrastructure actors (physical access and “last mile” feasibility).

These cross-sector linkages are consistent with Austria’s broader disability policy approach (e.g., NAP Behinderung 2022–2030), which emphasizes coordination across domains to achieve participation outcomes. (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022).

The survey findings support this cross-sector perspective. Respondents identified schools and health professionals among the actors that should play a stronger role in promoting inclusive sport, and transport feasibility emerged as both a barrier and an enabling factor. In addition, the demand for more trained inclusive coaches highlights the importance of education and professional development systems in strengthening delivery capacity. Together, these insights suggest that inclusive sport participation depends not only on sport structures, but also on coordinated engagement across health, education, social support, and infrastructure domains.

2.8 Results

2.8.1 Overall results of the study

Based on desk research, Austria has a strong formal foundation for inclusive participation in sport through (i) established sport governance and public sport funding structures, (ii) disability equality and accessibility frameworks, and (iii) national strategies that support physical activity and participation. However, the evidence indicates a persistent implementation gap: inclusion commitments do not consistently translate into accessible opportunities, inclusive coaching capacity, and practical participation pathways, particularly for activities requiring infrastructure and structured support (e.g., swimming, hiking, and running). This gap is reinforced by multi-layered barriers (accessibility, transport, costs and equipment, information, and social inclusion) that interact and can prevent sustained participation even when individual motivation exists (commission.europa.eu; Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022).

The survey findings (N = 18) and interview conducted for this report provide participant-level validation of this implementation gap. Financial barriers and affordability emerged as the most frequently identified constraint, followed by limited availability of inclusive offers, lack of accessible facilities, and insufficient adapted equipment. Transport feasibility and coaching capacity were also identified as relevant determinants of participation sustainability. The interview further highlighted that access often depends on factors beyond sport provision itself – including specialised transport arrangements, parental or caregiver availability, and proactive outreach through trusted intermediaries such as schools or disability organisations.

At the same time, respondents reported strong intrinsic motivation, with the vast majority identifying health and wellbeing as primary drivers of engagement and expressing high perceived benefits in terms of self-confidence, social connection, and quality of life. The interview reinforced that participation is not only about access to infrastructure, but also about social climate: welcoming environments, clear communication, and opportunities to build confidence in appropriately structured settings were described as decisive for sustained engagement.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the primary challenge in Austria is not a lack of policy commitment or participant motivation, but the consistent translation of inclusion principles into accessible, affordable, and locally available sport opportunities. Even among sport-connected individuals, participation remains shaped by cumulative structural, logistical, and social

factors. The results therefore reinforce the need for coordinated, cross-sector implementation strategies that address cost, infrastructure, coaching capacity, transport, outreach, and inclusive atmosphere simultaneously rather than in isolation.

2.8.2 Main findings

Finding 1: A large potential target group exists, and inclusion is a relevant national participation issue

Austria's population includes a sizable community of people with PwD and functional limitations. Statistics Austria reports 759,311 people with registered disability at the end of 2022, alongside a broader group reporting health-related limitations in daily activities (Statistics Austria, 2024a). This supports the relevance of structured inclusion pathways in sport rather than ad hoc initiatives

The survey conducted for this report (N = 18) reflects a diverse range of disability types, age groups (18–65+), and residential contexts (including a strong rural representation), indicating that inclusive sport is relevant across life stages and geographic settings. Respondents demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation for sport participation, particularly in relation to health and wellbeing. These findings reinforce that inclusive sport participation is not a niche issue, but a broadly relevant participation concern with cross-demographic reach.

Finding 2: Participation barriers are multi-dimensional and cumulative

Participation is constrained by overlapping barriers: physical accessibility of facilities and routes, transport feasibility, affordability (including equipment/support), availability of inclusive coaching and program design, and information/communication accessibility. These barriers often compound, for example, even when a program exists, a participant may still be excluded due to transport or the absence of adapted equipment and trained support (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022).

The survey findings strongly confirm this cumulative barrier structure. Financial constraints emerged as the most frequently identified participation barrier, followed by limited availability of inclusive offers, inaccessible infrastructure, and insufficient adapted equipment. Transport feasibility and coaching capacity were also identified as relevant sustainability factors. The interview further emphasized that participation often depends on external support arrangements

(e.g., caregiver availability, specialised transport), meaning that access is shaped by broader social and logistical conditions beyond the sport activity itself. Together, these findings demonstrate that barriers rarely operate in isolation and must be addressed systemically.

Finding 3: Policy frameworks are strong, but implementation tools and delivery capacity are uneven

Austria has a clear legal and policy basis for equality and accessibility (BGStG; NAP Behinderung 2022–2030) and an EU-level policy anchor (EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021–2030). In sport policy, the Federal Sports Promotion Act provides a funding and governance baseline, and national reporting/strategy documents support participation-oriented approaches. Yet desk research indicates that delivery mechanisms for inclusive sport (e.g., standardized training, club-level models, operational guidance, and accessible delivery templates) are not consistently embedded across providers and settings. (Republic of Austria, 2005; Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022; Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport, 2024)

Survey and interview findings provide practical confirmation of this implementation gap. Even among participants who are already active within sport clubs and structured environments, persistent barriers related to affordability, infrastructure, equipment access, transport feasibility, and inclusive coaching capacity were reported. This suggests that the challenge lies less in policy commitment and more in consistent operationalisation at the delivery level.

Finding 4: Stakeholder coordination is necessary but challenging

The ecosystem spans public authorities (sport policy/funding; disability policy), sport federations and clubs, para-sport structures, disability-representative organizations, and cross-sector services (health, social support, transport, education/training). The system has the components required for inclusion, but sustainable participation outcomes depend on clearer coordination and role clarity, especially for referral pathways, equipment access, and inclusive program delivery standards. (Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport, 2024; Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022)

Survey respondents most frequently identified sport clubs, coaches/trainers, schools, and health professionals as actors that should play a greater role in promoting inclusive sport. This

distribution of responsibility expectations illustrates that participants perceive inclusion as a shared task across governance levels and service systems rather than as the responsibility of a single institution. The interview similarly highlighted the importance of coordinated outreach and referral mechanisms, particularly for young people and those not yet embedded in sport networks.

Finding 5: There is a clear “practice gap” that a project can address

Given the rights-based and policy-driven environment, the most immediate need is not new principles but practical support for implementation: training modules for professionals, inclusive delivery models for clubs, accessible event templates, basic equipment access arrangements, and low-barrier entry pathways for PwD into running, hiking, and swimming activities. These measures align with EU-level expectations for participation and accessibility and provide feasible, scalable outputs for Stride & Glide. (European Commission, 2021)

The survey findings indicate meaningful openness to further inclusive sport opportunities, though with varying degrees of enthusiasm, suggesting that implementation should remain responsive and context-sensitive rather than one-size-fits-all. Strong demand for affordable participation, accessible infrastructure, adapted equipment, and trained inclusive coaches highlights where practical interventions can generate immediate impact. The interview further emphasized the importance of welcoming environments, gradual entry pathways, and confidence-building formats, particularly for participants who may initially prefer participation within more homogeneous groups before broader integration. Together, these insights suggest that Stride & Glide can most effectively contribute by translating inclusion principles into concrete, adaptable, and participant-centred delivery models.

Finding 6: Motivation for sport participation is strong; barriers are primarily structural rather than attitudinal - insights from the survey and interview.

Survey findings indicate that the vast majority of respondents identify health and wellbeing as a primary motivation for engaging in sport, and report high perceived benefits in terms of self-confidence, mental wellbeing, and social inclusion. Very few respondents identified lack of confidence or motivation as a primary barrier.

Instead, participation constraints were overwhelmingly linked to structural and environmental factors, including affordability, infrastructure, equipment access, transport feasibility, and

delivery capacity. The interview reinforced that when welcoming environments and appropriate support structures are in place, interest and engagement are present. This suggests that inclusive sport policy in Austria should prioritise reducing structural barriers rather than focusing primarily on awareness-raising or motivational interventions.

Survey respondents' open-ended responses further reinforce this structural perspective. When asked in one sentence what would make sport inclusive for people with disabilities, participants most frequently referred to affordability, accessible infrastructure, trained inclusive coaches, equal treatment, and a welcoming environment characterised by mutual support and belonging. These statements echo the quantitative findings and underline that inclusion is understood not as a special programme, but as a combination of accessible conditions and respectful social climate.

2.8.3 Policy implications for the existing legal framework and policy

Austria's legal and policy framework establishes a strong mandate for non-discrimination and accessibility (BGStG; UNCRPD implementation; NAP Behinderung 2022–2030), supported by EU-level strategy. This implies that inclusive sport should be approached not only as “optional inclusion programming” but as part of equal participation in community life. (Republic of Austria, 2005; Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022; European Commission, 2021)

In sport policy terms, the existence of federal sport governance and funding mechanisms suggests that inclusion can be embedded through mainstream instruments (funding criteria, program design standards, training requirements, monitoring indicators), rather than relying solely on isolated projects. (Republic of Austria, 2005; Federal Ministry of Housing, Arts, Culture, Media and Sport, 2024)

The empirical findings of this study indicate that the primary policy implication does not concern the absence of legal principles, but their consistent operationalisation. Survey and interview results show that barriers are concentrated at the level of affordability, infrastructure accessibility, equipment availability, transport feasibility, and inclusive coaching capacity. This suggests that existing frameworks may benefit from stronger integration of accessibility and inclusion criteria into funding allocation, facility planning, training standards, and monitoring mechanisms. In this sense, the policy environment provides a mandate for action,

while implementation tools and delivery standards determine whether equal participation is realised in practice.

2.8.4 Implications of existing policies and approaches (what seems to work / what is missing)

- **What seems to work (policy level):** Austria and the EU provide strong rights and strategy signals on inclusion and accessibility; national physical activity strategies support participation-oriented framing. The legal and policy environment clearly positions sport participation as part of equal participation in community life rather than a discretionary social add-on. (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022; European Commission, 2021). The findings of this study suggest that this normative framing resonates with participant perspectives: respondents overwhelmingly emphasised health, wellbeing, and social inclusion as key motivations for sport engagement. This indicates that the policy narrative of sport as a health-promoting and socially integrative activity aligns well with lived experience and intrinsic motivation.
- **What is missing (delivery level):** Standardised implementation tools and capacity across sport providers remain uneven, particularly regarding inclusive coaching competence, accessible program templates, equipment access, and referral pathways from disability, health, and social services into sport opportunities (Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection, 2022; European Commission, 2021). Survey and interview findings indicate that barriers are concentrated less at the level of legal entitlement and more at the level of practical conditions: affordability, infrastructure accessibility, transport feasibility, and the availability of trained inclusive staff. Even among sport-connected individuals, these delivery-level constraints limit sustainability of participation. This suggests that existing policies require stronger operational embedding through funding criteria, training standards, structured referral mechanisms, and accessible participation models in order to translate rights-based commitments into consistent everyday practice.

2.8.5 Recommended changes in policymaking and targeted policy development

The desk research supports a focus on practical, implementable changes that connect policy commitments to delivery. Survey and interview findings further indicate that structural

conditions – rather than participant motivation – are the primary limiting factors for inclusive sport participation. The following targeted measures are therefore recommended:

1. **Embed inclusion requirements into sport funding and program design**

Introduce or strengthen accessibility and inclusion criteria (e.g., inclusive coach training, accessible communication, participation support, affordability safeguards) within relevant sport funding streams and club support instruments. This may include linking public funding more explicitly to demonstrable inclusion standards, accessible infrastructure use, and evidence of inclusive outreach practices. Embedding inclusion within mainstream funding mechanisms would reduce reliance on isolated project-based initiatives and support systemic integration of inclusive practice.

2. **Build inclusive coaching and delivery capacity**

Scale practical training for coaches and professionals working with PwD, including adapted delivery methods for running, hiking, and swimming, with a focus on safety, communication, and reasonable accommodation principles aligned with disability equality frameworks (Republic of Austria, 2005). Survey findings indicate that trained inclusive coaches are perceived as a key enabling factor, while interview insights emphasize the importance of welcoming environments and gradual entry pathways. Structured professional development, practical toolkits, and standardised inclusive delivery templates could therefore strengthen implementation consistency across clubs and regions.

3. **Support equipment access and low-barrier entry pathways**

Promote models such as equipment pools, partnerships with para-sport organizations, and structured “first participation” formats that reduce the costs and logistical burden for newcomers. Given the prominence of affordability and equipment barriers in the survey results, cost-reduction mechanisms and shared equipment solutions may represent high-impact interventions. Initial low-pressure, confidence-building formats – including group-based introductory sessions – may further reduce psychological and logistical entry barriers.

4. **Strengthen cross-sector referral and coordination mechanisms**

Develop clearer pathways linking disability organizations, health and rehabilitation services, schools, and social support providers to inclusive sport opportunities (especially at the local level). This would reduce information barriers, improve early identification of potential participants, and support sustained engagement. Survey

respondents identified schools and health professionals as actors that should play a stronger role, while the interview highlighted the importance of trusted intermediaries and structured outreach.

5. Improve monitoring and use of data for inclusion outcomes

Austria already has a strong national monitoring capacity (disability participation statistics, ATHIS; Statistics Austria, 2021). Strengthening the linkage between monitoring and program delivery, through consistent inclusion indicators, would support more evidence-based investment and better evaluation of participation outcomes. (Statistics Austria, n.d.) Incorporating participant-level feedback mechanisms – similar to the survey conducted for this report – into routine program evaluation may help ensure that implementation gaps are identified early and addressed systematically.

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3. National Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina

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3.1 Overview

Inclusion of persons with disabilities (PwD) in sport represents one of the issues in contemporary policies of equality, human rights and social cohesion. Sport is no longer viewed solely as a form of physical activity or recreation, but as a powerful social tool that contributes to health, education, employment, self-confidence and active participation in the community. For PwD, sport has an additional transformative value; it can serve as a means of rehabilitation, empowerment, social integration and breaking stereotypes, but also as a space where existing social inequalities and structural barriers become clearly visible.

This national report has been developed within the framework of the *Stride and Glide* project, an international initiative aimed at improving the inclusion of PwD in sport. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country with a complex administrative structure and a multi-layered system of responsibilities in all areas, not just in sport, the project has particular significance. It provides an opportunity to examine the issue of inclusive sport from a systemic perspective, to recognize the existing strengths and weaknesses of the system, and to develop a longer-term approach that goes beyond partial and isolated initiatives. *The Stride and Glide* project is also significant for the organizations involved in its implementation, as it contributes to strengthening their

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professional and institutional capacities. Through international cooperation, organizations gain a deeper understanding of inclusive approaches to sport, adapted sports programs, accessibility of infrastructure and participatory work with PwD. The project also contributes to their strategic positioning as relevant actors in the field of sport and disability, both at national and international levels. At the state level, the importance of the project is reflected in strengthening the links between sport, social policy, education and healthcare. The inclusion of PwD in sport cannot be viewed in isolation; it requires a cross-sectoral approach involving public institutions, sports federations, schools, local communities, organizations of PwD and families.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the inclusion of PwD in sport takes place in the context of numerous challenges. Infrastructural barriers, lack of adapted equipment, limited financial resources, insufficient education of coaches and sports professionals, as well as the presence of social prejudices, continue to significantly affect the opportunities of PwD to participate equally in sports activities. Differences between urban and rural areas further deepen these inequalities, as specialized programs and services are often available only in larger cities. At the same time, there are positive examples of good practice; sports clubs, associations and initiatives that demonstrate that an inclusive approach is possible and brings multiple benefits, both for the participants themselves and for the wider community.

In the broader post-transition context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, disability inclusion has historically developed within fragmented welfare and institutional frameworks. As Grech (2015) observes in the analysis of post-conflict disability governance, inclusion policies in transitional societies are often shaped by “institutional fragmentation and uneven enforcement rather than comprehensive rights-based reform” (p. 74). This structural characteristic is visible in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where responsibilities for sport, social protection and accessibility are distributed across multiple administrative levels.

The Alternative Report on the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina highlights that “legislative alignment with international standards has advanced; however, implementation mechanisms remain inconsistent and inadequately monitored” (MyRight & ICVA, 2022, p. 18). In practice, this gap between normative commitment and operational implementation directly influences access to sport and organized physical activities.

Furthermore, UNICEF Bosnia and Herzegovina (2021) emphasizes that children with disabilities are significantly less likely to participate in extracurricular sport activities due to limited adapted programmes and insufficient inclusive physical education practices. Early exclusion from school-based physical activities may contribute to long-term disparities in participation patterns.

The findings of this report indicate that, despite the existence of a formal legal framework guaranteeing equality and non-discrimination, participation of PwD in sport and organized physical activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains limited and unevenly distributed. Structural barriers related to infrastructure, funding, governance fragmentation and insufficient cross-sectoral coordination continue to restrict access to inclusive sport opportunities. At the same time, the country demonstrates strong achievements in parasport at elite level, particularly through the work of the Paralympic Committee and Special Olympics structures.

Based on the analysis, the report recommends the development of a more coordinated policy framework for inclusive sport, clearer integration of accessibility criteria within public funding mechanisms, systematic investment in infrastructure adaptation, and the introduction of inclusive education modules for sport professionals. Strengthening cooperation between sport, education, health and social protection sectors emerges as a key precondition for sustainable inclusion.

The report is structured as follows: the methodology section explains the research design and analytical approach; the context section provides a review of relevant literature, legal and policy frameworks and institutional actors; the results section presents the main findings regarding barriers, governance gaps and good practices; and the final section outlines policy implications.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Research design

This study applies a qualitative policy analysis approach aimed at examining opportunities and barriers to participation in sport and organized physical activities for PwD in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The research design follows the objectives defined within the Stride and Glide project and is aligned with the research framework outlined in the WP2 Guidelines for National Reports. The analysis is grounded in a document-based research methodology, complemented

by a review of academic literature and institutional reports. Document analysis is particularly appropriate in contexts where institutional arrangements, legal frameworks and policy instruments form the primary basis for understanding systemic conditions. As Bowen (2009) notes, document analysis enables the researcher to “identify patterns, inconsistencies and institutional priorities embedded within formal texts” (p. 31).

Given the decentralized governance structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the methodology was designed to capture the interaction between different administrative levels and sectoral responsibilities.

3.2.2 Research Questions

In accordance with the objectives of the Stride and Glide project, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What is the current sport ecosystem for PwD in Bosnia and Herzegovina?
- What systemic barriers prevent PwD from participating in sport and organized physical activities?
- Which existing policies, institutional arrangements and practices contribute positively to inclusion?
- To what extent does the current legal and governance framework support or limit the development of inclusive sport?

The working hypothesis guiding the analysis is that PwD in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not adequately and sufficiently involved in sport and organized physical activities due to structural and institutional barriers.

3.2.3 Data collection

Data were collected through systematic review of:

- National and entity-level sport legislation
- Disability-related strategies and policy documents
- Social protection and anti-discrimination legislation
- Youth and NGO legislation
- Institutional reports from public authorities
- Reports of disability organizations

- European Commission country reports
- Academic literature on disability governance and sport inclusion

The research process was coordinated at national level within the framework of the Stride and Glide project activities. The analysis focused on publicly available official documents and policy instruments, ensuring transparency and verifiability of sources.

3.2.4 Data analysis

The collected material was analysed using a qualitative content analysis approach. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), qualitative analysis allows for systematic categorisation of data in order to identify themes and relationships within institutional contexts. In this study, documents were reviewed in order to identify:

- Legal provisions directly regulating sport participation
- Indirect regulatory influences (health, social protection, education)
- Institutional competences and jurisdictional overlaps
- Funding mechanisms and allocation criteria
- Accessibility requirements and implementation gaps

The analytical framework was informed by a rights-based perspective on disability inclusion. As Grech and Soldatic (2016) argue, effective inclusion requires “institutional coherence and alignment between normative commitments and material policy instruments” (p. 8). The analysis therefore examined the extent to which formal commitments to equality are translated into operational measures within the sport system.

Themes were identified deductively, guided by the core dimensions defined in the WP2 Guidelines, including institutional structure, legal framework, public funding, systemic barriers and good practices.

3.2.5 Limitations

This study is limited by several factors. First, comprehensive and disaggregated statistical data on participation of PwD in sport in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not systematically available. Second, the decentralized administrative structure means that practices may vary significantly between entities and cantons, which limits the possibility of uniform generalization. Third, the

research relies primarily on document analysis rather than primary field research and therefore reflects institutional frameworks more than individual lived experiences.

Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a structured basis for assessing systemic opportunities and barriers to inclusive sport development.

3.3 Context

The rights of PwD in Bosnia and Herzegovina are regulated through the implementation of the principles and standards established by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)*, as well as through domestic legislation. The national framework includes strategic and legal documents aimed at improving the status and protection of PwD. At the European level, the inclusion of PwD in sport is framed as a fundamental right and an essential component of social participation. The *Union of Equality: Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030* sets out a comprehensive policy framework aimed at ensuring full and effective participation of PwD in all areas of life, including sport. The Strategy builds on the (UNCRPD), particularly Article 30, which calls for both mainstream and disability-specific sporting activities to be accessible to PwD. Sport is recognized not only as a means of improving physical and mental health, but also as a powerful tool for combating discrimination.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a highly decentralized structure, with competences distributed across the state level, two entities, ten cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Brčko District. In this governance framework, responsibilities related to sport, education, health and social protection are primarily exercised at the entity, cantonal, and local levels, while the state level plays a limited coordinating role. The decentralized constitutional arrangement established by the Dayton Peace Agreement significantly shapes the implementation of sectoral policies. Kovačević (2018) describes Bosnia and Herzegovina's governance model as one characterized by "overlapping competences and limited functional coordination between administrative levels" (p. 112). Within such a structure, inclusive sport policy development depends largely on entity and cantonal priorities rather than on a unified national framework.

The European Commission (2023), in its country assessment, similarly noted that “administrative fragmentation continues to affect effective policy implementation across sectors, including social inclusion and accessibility” (p. 58). This institutional context creates structural challenges for the coordinated development of inclusive sport opportunities.

At the state level, Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted a framework for the protection of the rights of PwD through anti-discrimination legislation and international commitments, including the ratification of the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. At the entity and cantonal levels, disability-related policies are primarily addressed through legislation on social protection, health care, education and employment, which indirectly affect access to sport and physical activity.

While existing sport legislation generally recognizes the social and educational role of sport, explicit provisions addressing the inclusion of PwD in mainstream sport structures are limited. The intersection between sport policy and disability policy in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains largely indirect. Inclusion of PwD in sport is primarily influenced by the combined effects of general sport regulations and broader disability-related policies, rather than by targeted, integrated strategies. As a result, access to inclusive sport opportunities often depends on local initiatives, specific programs, or the engagement of individual sport organizations and disability associations.

Among the relevant policy instruments at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, are the Strategy for the Advancement of the Rights and Status of Persons with Disabilities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the period 2025-2030, Law on Sport in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, Law on Social Welfare, Protection of Civilian War Victims and Protection of Families with Children and The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Bosnia and Herzegovina has established a general human rights framework that applies to all areas of public life, including sport and physical activity. The country has ratified the UNCRPD, thereby committing to the promotion, protection and fulfilment of the rights of PwD on an equal basis with others. The Convention emphasizes full and effective participation in society and explicitly recognizes the right of PwD to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport. At the national level, the principles of equality and non-discrimination are

further reinforced through the *Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, which establishes a comprehensive framework for preventing discrimination on multiple grounds, including disability, across all sectors of public and private life. The Law applies to access to services, public spaces and activities of public interest, thereby providing a general legal basis for equal access to sport and recreational activities for PwD. Despite the existence of a formal equality framework, reports by the Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina indicate that accessibility of public institutions and facilities remains uneven. The Ombudsman's 2023 report states that "physical accessibility of public infrastructure continues to vary significantly across municipalities, limiting equal participation in community life" (Ombudsman of BiH, 2023, p. 27).

Similarly, the Coordination Board of Disability Organizations of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022) underlined that "legal guarantees of equality are not systematically accompanied by sufficient budgetary allocations or monitoring instruments" (p. 9). These findings suggest that the intersection between sport policy and disability rights remains largely declarative rather than operational.

The Law on Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Protection of Families with Children of the Sarajevo Canton defines the rights of PwD primarily in terms of financial benefits, institutional care and social services. The law regulates the work of social welfare institutions, centers for social work and organizations providing support to PwD, but does not include provisions related to participation in sport, physical activity or inclusive recreational programs. An analysis of youth policy legislation indicates that the *Law on Youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina* does not contain specific provisions addressing young PwD at all. Similarly, the *Law on Associations and Foundations of Bosnia and Herzegovina* regulates the establishment, registration and operation of civil society organizations, including sport and disability-related associations. However, the law is primarily administrative in nature and does not include provisions that would support or incentivize the development of inclusive sport programs for PwD. In particular, it does not address issues such as accessibility of sport activities, participation of PwD in sport governance, or mechanisms for sustainable funding of inclusive sport initiatives.

As a result of decentralized state structure, there is no single, unified national policy framework governing inclusive sport; instead, responsibilities are shared across multiple levels of

governance. Sport in Bosnia and Herzegovina is regulated through the *Law on Sport of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, which defines sport as an activity of public interest and explicitly includes organized sport activities for PwD within its scope. The Law establishes principles of equal access, non-discrimination and decentralized governance of sport, while recognizing the responsibility of different administrative levels to regulate sport through their own legislation and strategic documents. The Law also affirms alignment with international and European sport standards and acknowledges the role of public authorities in creating conditions for participation in sport for all population groups, including PwD. However, the decentralized nature of the system means that the practical organization, funding and implementation of inclusive sport activities are largely determined at entity, cantonal and local levels.

In addition to general human rights and sport legislation, disability-specific policies play a significant role in shaping access to sport and physical activity. In the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, this is reflected in the *Strategy for the Advancement of the Rights and Position of Persons with Disabilities 2025–2030*, a multisectoral strategic document aligned with the UNCRPD and European policy frameworks. The Strategy addresses multiple areas of life, including sport, and recognizes participation in sport and recreational activities as an important component of quality of life and social inclusion. The Strategy emphasizes cross-sectoral coordination and the involvement of organizations of PwD in policy development and implementation. While it does not constitute a sport-specific strategy, it provides an important policy framework that indirectly influences the development of inclusive sport opportunities through measures related to accessibility, participation and institutional cooperation.

The Strategy for the Advancement of the Rights and Status of Persons with Disabilities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina aims to improve the position of PwD by ensuring their equal participation in all areas of social life. The Strategy promotes inclusion in education, culture, sport, public and political life in accordance with international human rights standards. Within this framework, sport is recognized as an important component of social participation and quality of life.

In the Republic of Srpska, disability-related policies are primarily guided by the *Strategy for the Improvement of the Social Position of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Srpska 2017–2026*, a comprehensive, multisectoral policy document adopted by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. The Strategy is aligned with the principles of the UNCRPD and addresses

a wide range of policy areas, including sport. Within this framework, participation in sport and recreational activities is recognized as an important component of social inclusion and quality of life for PwD. The Strategy emphasizes equalization of opportunities, accessibility of public spaces and facilities, and the role of local authorities and sectoral institutions in creating conditions for active participation of PwD in community life. Although sport is not treated as a standalone policy area, it is embedded within broader measures related to physical culture, accessibility and community-based inclusion, thereby indirectly shaping the development of inclusive sport opportunities in the Republic of Srpska.

Public sector stakeholders include ministries responsible for sport, education, health, and social protection at the entity and cantonal level. Within the sport movement, national and entity-level sport federations, the Paralympic Committee and local sport clubs play a central role in organizing and delivering sport activities for PwD. Civil society organizations, particularly organizations of PwD, contribute through, program delivery and awareness raising.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Overall state of inclusion

The analysis indicates that PwD in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not adequately included in sport and organized physical activities. Participation remains limited and largely dependent on local initiatives, individual engagement of families and civil society organizations, and the availability of specialized programs in larger urban centers. Opportunities for regular and structured participation in sport are unevenly distributed across the country, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas.

Sport for PwD is still predominantly organized within disability-specific structures, while inclusion in mainstream sport clubs and programs remains rare. As a result, sport participation often occurs in segregated settings rather than through inclusive models that would enable joint participation of persons with and without disabilities.

3.4.2 Systemic barriers

Several systemic barriers limit the participation of PwD in sport.

Infrastructural barriers remain one of the most significant obstacles. Many sport facilities, including school gyms, local sport halls and outdoor recreational areas, are not physically accessible. Lack of ramps, accessible changing rooms, adapted sanitary facilities and accessible

transport reduces the possibility of regular participation. An accessibility assessment conducted by disability advocacy organizations in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina found that less than half of surveyed sport facilities met minimum accessibility standards for persons with mobility impairments (Coordination Board FBiH, 2022). The report concluded that structural adaptations are often partial and do not ensure independent access.

The Council of Europe (2021), reviewing disability inclusion practices in Southeast Europe, emphasized that “accessibility reforms require systematic planning and dedicated financial resources rather than isolated renovation initiatives” (p. 31). In the absence of coordinated infrastructure investment strategies, accessibility improvements remain inconsistent.

The findings of the document *Policy in the Field of Disability in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, developed by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Republic of Srpska, indicate that existing sport and recreation legislation does not adequately address the specific needs of PwD and may indirectly contribute to their exclusion from organized sport and recreational activities. According to the same policy analysis, accessibility of sport and recreational facilities remains insufficient, as many venues lack adapted entrances, sanitary facilities and equipment required for different types of impairments. In addition, disability-specific sports are not sufficiently developed, which further limits opportunities for both recreational and competitive engagement.

Financial barriers are also substantial. Sport programs for PwD require specialized equipment, adapted transport and trained staff, which increases operational costs. Existing public funding mechanisms do not sufficiently recognize these additional costs, and funding criteria are often not tailored to disability sport. As a result, organizations working in this field rely heavily on project-based funding and volunteer work. Financial sustainability remains a recurring concern among organizations working with PwD. According to ICVA (2022), “civil society organizations supporting PwD frequently depend on short-term project funding, limiting continuity and long-term planning capacity” (p. 22). This funding model directly affects the stability of inclusive sport programs.

Moreover, the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022) indicates limited availability of disaggregated data on budget allocations related to disability sport, reflecting the absence of systematic monitoring mechanisms within public funding frameworks. *Policy in the Field of Disability in Bosnia and Herzegovina*, also emphasizes that public funding

mechanisms do not take into account the higher costs of parasport, including specialized technical equipment and support services. As a result, available budget allocations are not adequate for the expansion and sustainability of sport activities for PwD. It further notes the limited inclusion of Paralympic sport issues in the programs of mainstream sport institutions.

Human resource capacity is limited. There is a lack of coaches and sport professionals trained in inclusive and adaptive sport methodologies. Inclusive physical education in schools is inconsistently implemented, and cooperation between the education system and sport organizations is weak.

Social and cultural barriers also persist. Persons with disabilities, particularly girls and women, face additional exclusion due to gender stereotypes and reduced access to sport opportunities. Low public awareness of the benefits of inclusive sport and the continued presence of medical and charity-based models of disability further limit participation. Research on social inclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina suggests that persistent paternalistic attitudes toward disability influence participation in public life. Hadžibajramović (2019) notes that PwD are often perceived “through a predominantly medical or charity-oriented lens, rather than as active agents in social and recreational environments” (p. 61). Such perceptions may discourage inclusive sport initiatives and reinforce segregated participation structures.

The Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020) further reports that women with disabilities experience multiple forms of discrimination, particularly in access to public participation spaces (p. 19). These intersecting barriers may reduce participation rates of girls and women with disabilities in organized sport.

3.4.3 Institutional and policy gaps

The decentralized governance structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina leads to fragmented responsibilities for sport, disability policy, education and social protection. While the legal framework formally recognizes equality and non-discrimination, there is no comprehensive national policy specifically addressing inclusive sport. The absence of a comprehensive national strategy dedicated specifically to inclusive sport results in fragmented policy development. As noted by Grech and Soldatic (2016), effective disability inclusion requires “institutional coherence, fiscal alignment and measurable accountability mechanisms” (p. 8). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, coordination between sport, education, health and social protection sectors remains limited.

Without clear monitoring indicators and inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms, inclusive sport development continues to rely heavily on the initiative of individual organizations and local authorities rather than systemic policy instruments.

Sport legislation includes PwD within its general scope, but does not provide detailed mechanisms for implementation, monitoring or funding of inclusive sport programs. Coordination between ministries responsible for sport, education, health and social protection is limited, and inclusive sport is rarely addressed through cross-sectoral policies. Public funding mechanisms are not systematically aligned with inclusion objectives. Criteria for allocation of funds do not consistently prioritize accessibility, participation of PwD or inclusive program design.

An analysis of the institutional structure presented by the Ministry of Civil Affairs indicates limited visibility of disability sport within the national sport governance framework. Within the sport sector, the Ministry lists five key institutions and fifteen sport federations; however, the Paralympic Committee is not explicitly included among the central actors. Disability sport is referenced only indirectly through the Special Olympics, which is categorized under non-Olympic sports. This institutional positioning reflects a fragmented and selective approach to disability sport. *The absence of the Paralympic Committee from the central institutional mapping suggests that disability sport is not fully integrated into mainstream sport governance structures.*

3.4.4 Good practices and emerging initiatives

Despite systemic challenges, several positive examples demonstrate the potential for inclusive sport development. Paralympic sport structures and disability sport organizations have developed expertise in adaptive sport and have enabled participation in both recreational and competitive activities. Local sports clubs in some municipalities have introduced inclusive training sessions and cooperation with schools and organizations of PwD.

Parasport in Bosnia and Herzegovina has a well-established history that began with the founding of the Paralympic Committee of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995. The Committee was initially created to enable persons with physical disabilities, many of whom were war veterans, to participate in sport as part of the broader process of rehabilitation and social reintegration. In the same year, the Committee was recognized by the International Paralympic

Committee and the European Paralympic Committee, which enabled athletes from Bosnia and Herzegovina to take part in international competitions.

Since its establishment, a wide range of sports has been developed, including athletics, sitting volleyball, swimming, shooting, wheelchair basketball, alpine skiing and table tennis. Bosnia and Herzegovina participated in the Paralympic Games for the first time in Atlanta in 1996, demonstrating rapid institutional and organizational development. The Paralympic Committee of Bosnia and Herzegovina operates through a network of affiliated sport federations that govern specific para-sport disciplines. These member organizations include federations for sitting volleyball, para-athletics, wheelchair basketball, swimming, table tennis, shooting and winter sports, among others. This structure enables the organization of national competitions, athlete classification, training processes and participation in international events across multiple sport disciplines. However, despite this established internal structure, the Paralympic sport system remains largely separated from mainstream sport governance and funding mechanisms. The federated model exists primarily within the framework of the Paralympic Committee and does not appear to be systematically integrated into broader national sport policy planning.

The most significant achievements have been recorded in sitting volleyball, where the national team is a two-time Paralympic champion (2000, 2012) and a multiple silver medalist (2004, 2008), as well as a winner of numerous world and European titles. The national federation for sitting volleyball includes 28 clubs across different competition levels and more than 600 registered athletes, indicating a relatively developed sport structure in this discipline.

Athletes in other sports, including swimming, alpine skiing, table tennis and para-athletics, have also represented Bosnia and Herzegovina at major international competitions and achieved notable results, including medals at world-level events. Participation in the Winter Paralympic Games has also been recorded, with athletes competing in Vancouver 2010 and Sochi 2014.

Despite systemic limitations, the Special Olympics movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina exemplifies an organized, structured approach to sport for persons with intellectual disabilities. Established in 2006, the program operates across the entire territory of the country and currently involves more than 25 organizations, including sport clubs, institutions, day-care centers and schools working with persons with intellectual disabilities. The program

contributes to the physical, cognitive and social development of participants and promotes community-based inclusion through sport training and competitions. Given that approximately 20,000 persons with intellectual disabilities live in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Special Olympics provides an important platform for participation and visibility. However, its positioning as the primary reference point for disability sport also highlights a narrow understanding of disability within sport policies, with greater institutional recognition of intellectual disabilities compared to physical, sensory and multiple disabilities. At the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Abu Dhabi in 2019, athletes from Bosnia and Herzegovina won a total of ten medals across four sports, making this one of the most successful appearances of the national delegation.

Recent international results further demonstrate the potential of parasport development in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A notable example is the young para-swimmer Ismail Barlov, a member of the SPID Swimming Club Sarajevo, who won a silver medal in the 50-metre breaststroke at the Paris Paralympic Games. With a time of 1:02.74, he became the youngest athlete in the history of Bosnia and Herzegovina to achieve an Olympic qualification standard. In addition to his medal performance, Barlov improved his qualification time in the final, indicating strong competitive capacity at an early age. His participation in multiple disciplines at the Games reflects both individual talent and the presence of emerging pathways for young athletes with disabilities.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has also ensured continuity of participation in the Winter Paralympic Games through para-alpine skiing. At the Beijing 2022 Winter Paralympics, the country was represented by two athletes, Ilma Kazazić and Jovica Goreta, competing in alpine skiing disciplines.

3.4.5 Policy implications

The findings indicate the need for a more structured and coordinated approach to inclusive sport in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Key policy implications include:

- development of a comprehensive policy framework for inclusive sport at entity and cantonal levels
- integration of inclusive sport objectives into public funding criteria

- systematic investment in accessible sport infrastructure
- introduction of training programs for coaches and physical education teachers on inclusive methodologies
- strengthening cooperation between sport, education, health and social protection sectors
- targeted measures to increase participation of girls and women with disabilities
- support for the transition from segregated to inclusive sport models

A shift from project-based and individual initiatives towards sustainable institutional support is necessary in order to ensure equal opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity for PwD.

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4. National Report: Montenegro

Marko Begović⁷

4.1 Overview

The research on sport and PwD is limited and most data presented within this report represent regulatory and policy documents. According to Szpakow et al (2025), on sociodemographic determinants of university students' attitudes toward wheelchair users, collaboration between public sector, education sector and society as whole represent a key prerequisite for developing inclusive and supporting environment (Towensend et al., 2021). Sociodemographic, cultural and social factors on perception of disability play an important role. Youth and women tend to demonstrate greater flexibility on disability, while in general citizens in Montenegro demonstrated the lowest positive attitude across nine Eastern European Countries (Szpakow et al., 2025).

The report suggests that regulatory and policy setting is in place, however, it remains fragmented in practice with limited impact. The sport ecosystem remains centralized lacking a needed degree of interoperability with clear delineation of jurisdiction and competences along with robust monitoring systems in place. High-performance sport is prioritized, while grassroots and non-competitive initiatives receive limited institutional support and operational resources. The existing sport-related policies acknowledge needs for facility adaptation, proper equipment and professional staff.

That being said, it is necessary to adopt a multisectoral approach by establishing a plural policy network together with an inter-ministerial coordination body to harmonize health, education, social welfare and sport-related for PwD. While it is important to continue supporting programs of POK, it is crucial to enable more opportunities for SOCS and other organizations outside of formal sport movement, by ensuring PwD inclusion in society. In order to make these actions sustainable, it is necessary to recalibrate existing public funding schemes and include PwD access indicators along with specific funding opportunities for coach education, accessible facility standards and public awareness.

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4.2 Recommendations

Policy framework: to establish a plural policy network and inter-ministerial body and encourage stakeholders within the appropriate public sector and sport movement to apply PwD inclusion in preparation, adoption, implementation and evaluation phases of strategy and action plans. Sport movement should be encouraged to adopt formal policy outlining objectives and appropriate actions aimed at involving PwD in sport and organized physical activities.

Regulatory framework: to conduct revision of the Law on Sport in order to recognize the role of NGOs for PwD that provide a number of sport-related services and opportunities. This will widen delivery capacity and provide consistency with Law on NGO.

Education: develop accredited inclusive coaching modules.

Sport infrastructure: conduct research on accessibility of public sport facilities (including ones located within education institutions and schools). Following the inputs from the research, develop facility accessibility programs.

Funding mechanism: to conduct revision of the Law on Sport and related bylaw to create inclusive grassroots funding opportunities.

4.3 Methodology

The study employs multi-level mix methods qualitative study in order to better understand systemic and structural barriers and opportunities for PwD. The research was conducted within three subsequent phases by a principal investigator. Given the research inquiry, the interplay between public sector, sport movement and other relevant stakeholders is examined.

The document analysis is primary research methodology, examining regulatory regimes and national policy documents. Taking into account policy and organizational perspectives, the research methodology here included: document analysis of legislation, policy papers and reports from both the governmental and not-for-profit sectors in sport followed by survey and unstructured interviews with governmental representatives and sport stakeholders.

According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), document analysis stands for a systematic procedure for examining documents to interpret and to understand their meaning. Official documents

serve to outline the institutional framework to understand the opportunities and barriers to participation in sport and organized physical activities for PwD. Data analysis was conducted using a critical policy approach, providing a structured approach to examine the institutions, key stakeholders, administrative structures and contextual factors within institutional theory framework. The data was coded deductively, guided by the core constructs of critical policy analysis. During the initial coding phase, these constructs were systematically applied to the dataset. Following this initial coding phase, related codes were categorized into broader themes, which were then further refined into higher-order themes. The key themes of the critical policy analysis that were identified were policy-driven public sector and its interplay with non-governmental (sport movement and other) actors operating under centralized and interventionist sport ecosystem.

Following this phase, the results from survey will be used to map patterns of experiences by understanding frequencies and percentages regarding participation levels, main barriers and opportunities. The rationale behind this approach is to create strong evidence for policy-related interpretation as a subsequent phase discussing institutional regimes, structural patterns and inequalities.

Laslty, a total of 4 unstructured interviews were conducted with professionals coming from public administration, sport movement and NGOs for PwD. The interviews were conducted individually, stimulating a more open dialogue with a focus on experiences. Hermeneutics has been used for interpreting data, understanding live experiences from the participants and their respective environments. According to Gadamer (1988) in the process of understanding the meaning, presupposes connecting particularities-individual accounts collected through the interviews with the whole.

4.4 Context

According to Begović (2024), the constitutional provision in Art. 77 represents a foundation for the development of sports-related legislation. The Law on Sport has been subject to changes in 2004/2007, 2011/2013, and 2018/2021 and every time it was more a product of politics than policy orientation (Begovic, 2021). The location of sport has been changed frequently

(Ministry of Culture or Education, semi-independent to independent governmental body), with public servants frequently seeing their scope of work change (Begović, 2020). This instability remains present today with many delineations of jurisdiction on a horizontal level unclear (e.g. health-related). The central public sector remains predominant in shaping sports policy, with a rather formal multisectoral approach, while responsibility for implementation is transferred to the not-for-profit sector (Begović, 2024). The Law on Sport stipulates key responsibilities and even the structure and composition of sports organizations (Begović, 2025a). In addition, the MSM is set not only as the centralized authority within the specific political environment, but administrative legislation prescribes executive jurisdiction over all stakeholders in sport (Begović, 2025a). On the other side, the sport movement is consolidated within the COK which acts as an association of all NSFs from both Olympic and non-Olympic sports. The Law on State Administration, Decree on Government, and Rules on the Procedure of Government represent the legal framework for policy making (Government of Montenegro, 2018, 2022; Parliament of Montenegro, 2018). The MSM is recognized as the major state authority acting in a centralized and interventionist capacity to develop sports-related policies and legislation (Government of Montenegro, 2022).

The MSM through the Law on Sport sets the foundation, scope, and composition for policy making. It recognized that the sports movement itself is responsible for implementation; however, no clearly defined division of competencies between the NSFs and the COK has been developed. The policy process is heavily bureaucratized, with the law ensuring a similar composition and structure for the sports movement (Begović, 2025b). In 2017, simultaneously, the MSM was developing new laws and a major strategic document that represents a political landmark in sport. A year later, the NPRS 2018 – 2021 was adopted along with the Law on Sport. With respect to the development of sport, the implementation responsibility of the NPRS is transferred to the sports movement, while policy making and administrative tasks remain within the MSM at the central level, and with local self-governments at the local level (Government of Montenegro, 2017).

The founding principles of sport embedded within key political landmark such as Sport Development Strategy (NPRS) and Law on Sport focuses on promotion of high-performance sport, taking care of elite athletes and young talents and encouraging youth sport and sport for persons with disabilities (PwD). The NPRS aimed to set out the priorities and objectives for the development of sport as an activity of public interest (Government of Montenegro, 2024).

In particular, it addresses the current state of sport, the vision and mission of sport within society, the funding methodology and mechanisms for the sport movement as major actors in implementing the NPRS along with the construction and reconstruction of sporting infrastructure. The key strategic goals of the current NPRS are:

- Improved system of sports financing from public finances and the private sector.
- Improved and developed system of high-performance sport in Montenegro.
- Developed and enhanced system of children's and youth sport through creating conditions to increase the number of children and young people engaged in sport.
- Increased participation in regular physical activity across all population groups, especially among children, youth, women, persons with disabilities, and the elderly.
- Improved and developed system of support for women in sport.
- Developed and enhanced sport for PwD and persons with intellectual impairments.
- Developed and improved sport within the armed forces and the police.
- Safeguarding integrity of sport in Montenegro.

In respect to goals 4 and 6, The Paralympic Committee of Montenegro (POK) and Special Olympics Montenegro (SOCG) are recognized as the key non-governmental stakeholders and sport entities responsible for development of sport for PwD. The NPRS emphasize the need to increase participation in sport among PwD by creating sustainable parasport ecosystem with POK closely cooperating with the Ministry of Sport and Youth (MSM) and ensuring consistency of policy implementation.

While the primarily focus of the POK was on maintaining sport excellence, recently in cooperation with other organizations of civil society (NGOs) the aim was to broaden its scope by organizing a number of education-related activities and public awareness campaigns. Currently, according to the MSM for 2024, POK holds bi-monthly seminars and workshops on the importance of sport and organized physical activities (Government of Montenegro, 2024). Additionally, POK initiated establishment of local sport organization for persons with disabilities and broaden number of sport and sporting disciplines as new opportunities for PwD

4.5 Results

Following independence, Montenegro ratified the United Nations Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities and the Council of Europe Convention on Human Rights. However, the analysis from 2017 indicated that institutional capacity and implementation of these binding

instruments are rather limited. A renewed study conducted in 2025 suggests a certain progress suggesting the need for a multisectoral approach by establishing an inter-ministerial body (Stefanović, 2025, p. 117).

As for the health-related regulation, Montenegro became the first European country to implement the WHO Disability Guide for Action, nominally committing to the highest standard of health for all people in conformity with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The accessibility of health services is the key goal embedded with the Strategy for the Protection of PwD from Discrimination and the Promotion of Equality (World Health Organization, 2024).

The current NPRS also stresses the importance of systematic support for adaptation and reconstruction of existing public sport places and facilities, including school sport infrastructure and planning the construction of new ones. As for the high-performance sport, POK is part of a policy network tasked to create necessary conditions for development of national training centers adapted and accessible for PwD and Paralympic athletes. In order to provide these measures more binding, the NPRS suggest additional amendments of the Law on Sport.

As policies related to PwD are multisectoral and there are a number of policies that directly and indirectly deal with sport for PwD Both Law on Youth (LoY) and Youth Strategy recognizes the importance of creating a sustainable and inclusive ecosystem for youth population including youth with disabilities. One of the key measures of fiscal policy is to secure funds for supporting projects on the annual basis. From the central level, the Government of Montenegro provides special funds for financing projects and programs for NGOs for PwD in the amount of 0.1% of the annual state budget (Government of Montenegro, 2024). The Guidelines in Macroeconomic and Fiscal Policy exercise monitoring capacity for projects related to development of sport for PwD. Based on the human rights model, the Strategy for the Protection of PwD from Discrimination and the Promotion of Equality 2022-2027 with the bi-annual actions plans aimed at ensuring equal status and full participation of PwD in all aspects of society, through improvement of regulatory, institutional, social and economic framework for protection against discrimination (Government of Montenegro, 2024).

One of the key challenges recognized is discrimination within sport and recreation and the understaffing primarily within local self-governments, therefore, this strategy underlines the need of ensuring equal participation and access for PwD to sport and recreational activities. In most municipalities (17), there are adequate numbers of employees and experts to support development of sport for PwD (Government of Montenegro, 2024). This is in line with the Montenegrin Blind Federation report on PwD experiencing higher degree of discrimination in the personal mobility and quality of assistive devices and related equipment. Especially, youth with disabilities are particularly vulnerable and being deprived of their rights during COVID-19 measures and today in access to regular healthcare, necessary assistance, rehabilitation services, education, employment and the right to information (Udruženje mladih sa hendikepom Crne Gore, 2021). Participants of these studies found sport and organized physical activities particularly important for achieving inclusion and adequate participation in community life. Also, they indicate the importance of recreational and sport for all aspects for physical and mental well-being. Montenegro still has not ratified the Marrakesh Treaty, which aims to facilitate access to published works for people who are blind, visually impaired, or print-disabled by establishing exceptions to copyright laws (Government of Montenegro, 2024).

Following the constitutional provisions on right on association, the main legal resource, Law on Non-governmental Organizations (NGO) in the form of *lex generalis*, enables establishment of organizations for PwD as main drivers for disability inclusion in social participation, including in organized physical activity. However, there is a certain discrepancy and inconsistency with the Law on Sport, as the latter recognizes in terms of association only Paralympic sport as an activity for PwD. In article 38 of the Law on Sport, for sport and recreation competition for PwD, an organization may be established only within sports and sporting disciplines recognized by the POK. In practice, this means that types of organizations established by the Law on NGOs are not recognized as sport organizations, which limits access to sport-related funding opportunities. However, according to the interviewees from NGO sector and POK, they indicated a high level of cooperation and a certain degree of coordinating efforts that goes beyond high-performance sport. Moreover, they highlighted the need for more balanced prioritization by increasing public support for sport for all concepts and grassroots initiatives.

Further, social welfare regulation aims to enable PwDs direct access to quality of social care services to ensure equality and non-discrimination. However, the Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro (UMHCG) identifies the gap between law-on-the-book and law-in-action, especially inconsistencies with application of international standards (Smart Balkans, 2026). This is in line with the survey's finding regarding the main barriers that limits participation in sport. 80% of respondents indicated limited availability of disability specific or inclusive sports programs, while 90% either didn't receive any support or they were not aware of available support after feeling excluded or discriminated against in a sport-related environment. However, the majority of respondents remain motivated to overcome these barriers and to stay active in sport. In connection, in order to increase participation, 80% of respondents would like to have opportunities for free or low-cost activities, accessible and adapted sport facilities and appropriate equipment. In terms of who should be playing a more prominent or active role in supporting inclusion in and through sport, schools, local authorities, national sport federations and health experts. Health and well-being, inclusion and socialization are dominant drivers behind participation.

In order to tackle these and other challenges, it is recommended to enable inclusive and plural policy networks and to employ a sort of dual approach. On one hand, this would be based on the inclusion of PwD in sport and organized physical activities planned for the general population, while on the other hand to stimulate key stakeholders to continue organizing specialized activities for PwD reflecting diversity and specific needs (Mina News, March 24, 2025). Equally, it is necessary to ensure media promotion and public awareness campaigns on the importance of participation of PwD in sport, recreation and cultural events (Begović, 2025b).

The content of the NPRS suggests that activities were aimed at a balance between school sport, setting up specific funding opportunities for sports organizations aimed at developing grassroots sport, and promoting high-performance sport through providing additional funds targeting sports' excellence. The major public sector involvement in sport is to adopt criteria and, subsequently, to fund sports organizations based on these criteria. In addition, the lack of monitoring is a result of the majority of the sports' movement failing to adopt their own policy documents to align with the NPRS priorities. The major challenge lies in the composition of the NPRS, as reports on implementation have blurred how particular objectives of the strategy have been achieved (Begović, 2018). In addition, the report indicated an overall focus on high-

performance sports in terms of funding, while the main activities envisaged for sub-granting and subsidizing school sports were not carried out. In terms of the funding of sport, there were no criteria for allocating public funds and no monitoring tools until 2022.

The focus on high performance is evident with specific categories for sports' excellence: athletes with extraordinary results (top athletes) and promising athletes (Art. 29-30). A top athlete can be classified within both individual and team sports, in terms of achieving a top three finish at the Olympic Games, the Paralympic Games, the official world or European championship in a discipline or sport which is part of the Olympic Games or the Paralympic Games. In addition, Montenegrin citizens competing at a professional level within the main boxing federations (WBC, WBA, WBO, IBF, or WBU), or those who reach the finals of tennis competitions – the Davis Cup, the Fed Cup or a Grand Slam Tournament of the International Tennis Federation also gain this status. According to the Decree on the Criteria for Determining the Amount of Lifetime Monthly Benefits, Scholarships, Premiums, Sport Disability Benefits, Award for Athlete of the Year, and Distinguished Sport Professional athletes above the age of 35 shall receive lifetime monthly compensation ranging, depending on their results, from 2x,

1.5x or 1x the average monthly salary (Government of Montenegro, 2018). A promising athlete is an athlete achieving sporting success, placing in the top three, in individual or team sports at the youth level at world or European championships in a discipline or sport included in the Olympic Games or the Paralympic Games. This status is granted for a period of one year and an athlete shall receive monthly compensation of 30% of the average monthly salary for first place, 25% for second place, and 20% for third place for Olympic sports, and 25%, 20%, and 15% for Paralympic sports.

An important support is related to sport disability compensation. This compensation is granted to an athlete, who as a member of the national team of Montenegro, competed at the Olympic Games, World or European Championship in a sport or sporting discipline included in the Olympic program, and how, during that period, developed a condition or illness attributable to sport-related activity or sustained a serious injury either in preparation for such competition or during the competition itself. The amount of the compensation is 50% of the average monthly net salary in Montenegro. Among other, the procedure includes mandatory medical report not older than two months and proof of the determined degree of disability that has resulted in the termination of the sporting career. Further, the minister responsible for sport shall establish a

commission responsible to determine a proposal of the decision recognizing the athlete's right to sport disability compensation.

To sum up, sport for PwD is an important part of the political landmark and sport-specific public policies. The NPRS foresees continuous support for Paralympic athletes, aimed at their full affirmation within the sport ecosystem. Further, there are actions planned to encourage PwD to take part in sport and organized physical activities with zero tolerance policy for any form of discrimination as fundamental principles of Montenegrin sport. In order to maintain policy consistency and horizontal coordination POK and Montenegrin Olympic Committee (COK) are recognized as umbrella sport organizations, POK for Paralympic sport and for Olympic sport and other sports. Although not directly recognized by LoS, the NPRS recognizes SOCG as the umbrella organization for sport for persons with intellectual disabilities. With the NPRS priorities, the aim is to create an inclusive environment for PwD fostering a sense of belonging while combating stigmatization. The second principle to inclusion is accessibility. The NPRS identifies barriers that prevent PwD from taking part in sport, related to access to sporting infrastructure, lack of adaptive equipment and access to organized training and coaching. In regard to high-performance sport, the NPRS set up a mechanism establishing a talent identification development system for PwD. In terms of funding, the NPRS directs the public sector for budgeting (state/municipal) to create sustainable and inclusive funding schemes, while for the private sector there are tax incentives as part of corporate social responsibility. The third principle closely aligns with inclusion and funding, by placing priorities of sport for PwD as an activity of public interest.

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5. National Report: Portugal

Inês Caetano⁸

5.1 Overview

Stride & Glide – Empowering Journeys for All Abilities is an international initiative co-funded under the Erasmus+ Sport programme, bringing together partners from Portugal (Sports Embassy), Austria (ACTIVE), Montenegro (RegSPO), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (SZSR FBiH and Verlab Institute). The project aims to make running, swimming, hiking, and other sports more accessible to people living with disabilities (PWD) through (i) training and educational sessions for professionals who support PWD and (ii) inclusive sport events supported by modern adaptive equipment. For Portugal, the project holds particular significance given the country's strong constitutional commitment to sport as a universal right and the existence of a comprehensive — yet unevenly implemented — legal framework addressing disability, accessibility, and sport participation.

Approximately 1.5 billion people worldwide live with a physical, mental, sensory, or intellectual disability, and PWD are 16–62% less likely to meet physical activity guidelines than people without disabilities (Martin Ginis et al., 2021). Despite substantial health benefits achievable through sport — including improvements in cardiovascular fitness, musculoskeletal fitness, cardiometabolic risk factors, and mental health outcomes — structural, social, and environmental barriers continue to limit participation globally (Martin Ginis et al., 2021). Portugal is no exception: according to the 2021 Census, 10.9% of the resident population aged 5 or older has at least one disability, yet only 1,217 federated athletes with disabilities were registered with the Federação Portuguesa de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência (FPDD) in 2020, of whom merely 74 (6.1%) were youth athletes. These figures point to a significant participation gap that this report seeks to examine.

The promotion of inclusive sport has been a priority of UNESCO, the Council of Europe, and the European Union. The 2017 Kazan Action Plan, adopted at UNESCO's MINEPS VI conference, specifically addressed the importance of a human rights-based approach to sport aimed at reducing inequalities and building inclusive societies. The revised European Sports Charter (2021) places sport for people with disabilities as one of the core principles of sport

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policy. Furthermore, the European Commission adopted the Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030, which aims to ensure equal participation and access across domains, including sport (European Commission, 2021).

This national report combines desk research with a review of Portugal's legal and policy frameworks governing the inclusion of PWD in sport and organized physical activity. It serves as the foundation for the Stride & Glide national analysis, which will later be complemented and validated by survey data and stakeholder consultations. The report is guided by three core research questions: (i) What is the current sport ecosystem for PWD in Portugal? (ii) What systemic barriers limit participation in sport and organized physical activities for PWD? (iii) Which existing policies, legal frameworks, and institutional arrangements contribute positively to inclusion?

The structure follows the project's agreed methodology: Section 2 outlines the methodology; Section 3 presents the Portuguese context, including participation data, barriers and enabling factors, sport-related and non-sport policy frameworks, and key stakeholders; Section 4 summarizes and synthesizes preliminary results and discusses policy implications. References are provided in APA 7th edition format throughout the text.

5.2 Methodology

5.2.1 Purpose and Research Focus

This national report provides a Portugal-focused overview of the opportunities and barriers affecting participation in sport and organized physical activity for PWD. It supports the Stride & Glide project by identifying key ecosystem features, relevant policies and legal frameworks, and practical constraints that influence inclusion in sport. The working assumption is that PWD remain underrepresented in sport and organized physical activities and face systemic barriers that are not consistently addressed across settings and providers.

5.2.2 Data Collection

The report employs a multi-level mixed-methods qualitative study. The primary research methodology is document analysis, examining regulatory regimes, national policy documents, academic literature, and institutional reports. Data was collected through:

- Desk research: A targeted qualitative document review was conducted, focusing on Portugal-relevant sources. Search parameters included sport-related and non-sport-related policies and regulations (e.g., sport governance, disability rights, health, social care, education, accessibility); institutional publications and grey literature (e.g., IPDJ, INR, FPDD, CPP); and available research evidence on disability, sport participation, accessibility, and inclusion;
- Survey instrument: A structured questionnaire was prepared to capture the lived experiences and needs of PWD in Portugal, covering six thematic areas: demographics, current participation, perceived barriers, perceived benefits, support gaps, and interest in future participation (e.g., running, hiking, and swimming). The survey was distributed between 24 February and 1 March 2026 through stakeholder networks, including disability sport federations, clubs, and disability advocacy organisations, yielding 30 valid responses. Results are presented in Section 3.8;
- Ethical considerations: The survey protocol was designed in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and national data protection laws. Participation is voluntary, informed consent is required, and all collected data is anonymized and securely stored.

5.2.3 Data Analysis

Reviewed materials were analyzed using a qualitative thematic framework to map the Portuguese sport ecosystem for PWD. This involved identifying relevant legal and policy provisions, defining stakeholder responsibilities, and extracting key enabling or constraining factors for inclusive participation. Descriptive statistical analysis — including absolute and relative frequencies, means, medians, and standard deviations for Likert-scale items — was applied to the 30 survey responses to map patterns of participation, barriers, perceived benefits, and support needs. Open-ended responses were analysed using thematic coding.

5.2.4 Limitations

This report integrates desk research and document analysis with exploratory survey data (n=30). While the mixed-methods approach strengthens the evidence base, several limitations should be noted. First, the survey sample is small (30 respondents) and was recruited through stakeholder networks — primarily disability sport federations, clubs, and advocacy organisations — resulting in a convenience sample that does not allow for statistical generalisation to the broader population of PWD in Portugal. Second, the sample is heavily skewed towards active, federated sport participants: 80% of respondents reported regular weekly participation, which means that the perspectives of non-participants — who may face the most severe barriers — are underrepresented. Third, physical disability / mobility limitation accounts for 83.3% of the sample, with limited representation of intellectual, sensory, and developmental disabilities. Fourth, the survey instrument requires support or assistance for individuals who are blind or have significant visual impairments, which may have limited independent participation and contributed to the underrepresentation of this group. Fifth, men represent 73.3% of the sample, whereas national disability data shows women account for 62% of PWD in Portugal (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2022), indicating a gender imbalance. Despite these limitations, the survey results provide valuable participant-informed insights that corroborate and complement the desk research findings. Future iterations of this report may benefit from targeted outreach to non-participants, women, and persons with sensory or intellectual disabilities to broaden the evidence base.

5.3. Context

5.3.1 Participation and Activity Patterns

5.3.1.1 Disability Prevalence in Portugal

According to the 2021 Census (INE, 2022), 10.9% of the resident population aged 5 or older in Portugal has at least one disability. This condition mainly affects women (62%) compared to men (32%). The prevalence of disability increases progressively with age: 2.3% for ages 15–24, 6.8% for ages 25–44, 23.7% for ages 45–64, and 67.2% for ages 65 and over. For the age group of 10 to 19 years — the core target group of the Stride & Glide project — the total number of people with disabilities is 23,934 (2.2%), comprising 12,749 males (3.1%) and

11,175 females (1.6%), with a prevalence rate of 4.7% for the age group (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2022).

The most prevalent type of difficulty reported is difficulty walking or climbing stairs (6.1% of the population aged 5+), followed by vision difficulties, memory or concentration difficulties, and hearing difficulties (INE, 2022).

5.3.1.2 Sport Participation Among PwD

Portugal faces a significant overall physical inactivity challenge. The Special Eurobarometer 525 on Sport and Physical Activity (2022) found that 73% of the Portuguese population reported never exercising or playing sport — one of the highest inactivity rates in the European Union. Globally, PLWD are 16–62% less likely to meet physical activity guidelines than persons without disabilities, placing them at considerably higher risk for health problems related to inactivity (Martin Ginis et al., 2021; World Health Organization, 2020).

Data from the FPDD for 2020 (IPDJ, 2021) shows the following profile of federated athletes with disabilities:

Indicator	Value
Total registered practitioners	1,217
Female practitioners	308 (25.3%)
Youth (up to junior) practitioners	74 (6.1%)
Senior-level practitioners	580
Veteran-category practitioners	489
Active clubs	98
Districts with geographic implantation (out of 20)	9

A study conducted by the FPDD on the perception of adapted physical activity in Portugal found that 69.8% of PwD respondents were physically active, of whom 36.1% engaged in recreational activity. The most practiced sport was swimming (12.9%). The main motivation for participation was health improvement (20.2%), while the most frequently cited barrier was a lack of sports on offer (20.7%).

At the European level, the Eurostat data on sport participation, based on 2022 EU-SILC data (Eurostat, 2024), revealed that people declaring at least some level of activity limitation had significantly lower attendance in live sports events across all EU countries. In 12 EU countries, the participation rate of people with some level of disability did not reach 10%, and in 15 EU countries, the rate for people without disability was at least twice that of people with disability.

5.3.2 Barriers and Enabling Factors for Participation

Evidence from Portugal and EU-level policy frameworks consistently indicates that PwD face multi-layered barriers to participating in sport and organized physical activity. These barriers are rarely single-point problems; rather, participation is shaped by how accessibility, support services, costs, information, and inclusive provision interact across settings and regions (European Commission, 2021; European Parliamentary Research Service, 2021).

5.3.2.1 Accessibility and the Built Environment

A foundational barrier is physical and environmental accessibility — whether facilities, routes, and services are designed so that participation is realistically possible. Portugal's Decree-Law No. 163/2006 establishes accessibility norms for buildings and establishments that receive the public, including sports facilities. However, inaccessible infrastructure — narrow doors, absence of ramps, reduced circulation spaces, and slippery floors — remains a widespread problem (Rimmer et al., 2004; Martin, 2013). In the Stride & Glide context, accessibility constraints are particularly relevant for running, hiking, and swimming, which depend on safe routes, accessible changing facilities, sanitary infrastructure, and barrier-free entry to venues. Survey data corroborate this finding: 23.3% of respondents identified the lack of accessible facilities as a key barrier, and accessibility barriers were the dominant reason cited by those who reported experiences of exclusion in sport contexts (see Section 3.8.3).

5.3.2.2 Lack of Specialized Professional Support

A wide variety of professional categories are involved in promoting sport for PwD — trainers, sport technicians, teachers, health technicians, psychomotor therapists, referees, classifiers, and others. Despite this, the scarcity of coaches with formal education in adaptive sport remains a

critical barrier. In the Stride & Glide project context, it was noted that 90% of grassroots coaches have no formal education in adaptive sport. This capacity gap limits the ability of clubs and organizations to offer safe, effective, and inclusive programming.

Among survey respondents, 20.0% identified the lack of qualified or inclusion-trained coaches as a main barrier (see Section 3.8.3), while one respondent noted the difficulty of finding 'a coach willing to work with someone with reduced mobility.

5.3.2.3 Financial Constraints and Equipment Needs

Participation in swimming, hiking, and running can require specialized equipment, support personnel, or adapted formats. Affordability barriers often arise from the combined cost of participation fees, transport, equipment, and assistance. Unfavorable socioeconomic conditions were identified as one of the barriers to physical activity for PWD in Portugal (Ataíde et al., 2024). Given that disability is associated with higher rates of material and social deprivation across Europe (Eurostat, 2024a, 2024b), affordability and resource constraints are relevant participation determinants.

Financial barriers were cited by 23.3% of survey respondents, and free or low-cost activities were identified as a priority facilitator by 46.7% (see Sections 3.8.3 and 3.8.8).

5.3.2.4 Transport and Logistical Barriers

For many PWD, participation depends on whether sport opportunities are reachable and logistically manageable. Limited public transport accessibility, long travel times, and the need for support can make participation difficult even when inclusive programmes exist. This is closely linked to the broader disability rights agenda, which emphasises equal participation and the reduction of exclusion from community activities (European Commission, 2021).

Transport barriers were reported by 23.3% of survey respondents, and transport support was the second most cited factor that would increase participation (see Section 3.8.5)

5.3.2.5 Information Barriers and Awareness

Even where sport options exist, participation can be limited by information gaps — programmes that are not visible, not communicated in accessible formats, or unclear pathways into activities (who to contact, what support is available, what equipment is provided, what

adaptations can be requested). This was identified as a relevant factor in both EU-level research (European Commission, 2021) and Portuguese stakeholder consultations (Ataíde et al., 2024). *Among survey respondents, 10.0% identified lack of information about accessible activities as a barrier (see Section 3.8.3).*

5.3.2.6 Social Stigma and Attitudinal Barriers

Social factors also shape participation — whether PWD feel welcome, whether staff are confident and competent in inclusive delivery, and whether there are supportive peer environments. The Stride & Glide project notes **Error! Bookmark not defined.** that PWD face exclusion, low visibility, and negative stereotypes in sport environments. Personal factors encompass attitudinal issues such as discrimination (Koldoff & Holtzclaw, 2015), fear of the unknown, lack of confidence in their own abilities (DePauw & Gavron, 2005; Haegele et al., 2017), and family overprotection (Rimmer et al., 2004).

Attitudinal barriers were cited by very few survey respondents (3.3%), although this may reflect the sample's composition of experienced athletes who have already overcome such barriers (see Section 3.8.3).

5.4 Sport-Related Policies and Regulations

Portugal possesses a robust constitutional and legislative framework governing the right to sport and the inclusion of PLWD. The following sections provide a comprehensive analysis of the sport-specific legal architecture.

5.4.1 Constitutional Foundations

The Constitution of the Portuguese Republic establishes the foundational principles for sport and disability rights:

- Article 79 (Physical education and sport): "Everyone has the right to physical education and sport" (Constitution of the Portuguese Republic [CRP], 2005, Art. 79). The State is tasked, in cooperation with schools and sporting associations, with promoting, encouraging, guiding, and supporting the practice and dissemination of physical culture and sport.

- Article 71 (Citizens with disability): Affirms the equal rights of persons with disabilities and requires the State to carry out a national policy of prevention, rehabilitation, and integration (CRP, 2005, Art. 71).
- Article 13 (Principle of equality): Prohibits discrimination on any grounds, which has been interpreted to encompass disability (CRP, 2005, Art.13).

5.4.2 Law No. 5/2007 – Basic Law on Physical Activity and Sport

The Lei de Bases da Atividade Física e do Desporto (Law No. 5/2007, of 16 January) is the central legislative instrument governing sport policy in Portugal. Key provisions include:

- Article 2 (Principles of universality and equality): Establishes that all persons have the right to physical activity and sport, regardless of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, economic situation, social condition, or any other ground (Law No. 5/2007, Art. 2)
- Article 29 (Persons with disabilities): Stipulates that "physical activity and the practice of sport by persons with disabilities is promoted and fostered by the State, Autonomous Regions, and local authorities with the appropriate technical aids, adapted to their specificities, envisioning their full social integration and participation, in equality of opportunities with other citizens" (Law No. 5/2007, Art. 29).
- Article 7: Tasks the public administration in the area of sport with supporting and developing regular and high-performance sport practice through the provision of technical, human, and financial means (Law No. 5/2007, Art. 7)
- Article 45: Classifies participation in national teams and other national representations as a mission of public interest, subject to special State support (Law No. 5/2007, Art. 45)

5.4.3 Law No. 38/2004 – Basic Law on Prevention, Habilitation, Rehabilitation, and Participation of Persons with Disability

Law No. 38/2004, of 18 August, defines the general bases of the legal regime for prevention, habilitation, rehabilitation, and participation of persons with disability. It is the cornerstone disability legislation in Portugal. Key provisions relevant to sport include:

- Article 2 (Concept): Defines a person with disability as one who, by reason of loss or irregularity of bodily functions or structures, including psychological functions, has specific difficulties that, in combination with environmental factors, limit or hinder activity and participation under equal conditions with others. This definition aligns with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) framework adopted by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2001)
- Article 25 (Habilitation and rehabilitation): Specifies that habilitation and rehabilitation encompass measures in the areas of sport and leisure, among others, aimed at developing aptitudes, independence, and quality of life (Law No. 38/2004, Art.25)
- Article 38 (Right to take part in sporting activities and leisure): Requires the State to adopt specific measures to ensure access by PLWD to sporting activities and leisure, creating appropriate structures and forms of social support (Law No. 38/2004, Art.38)
- Article 39 (Top-class competition): Mandates the State to adopt specific measures to ensure PLWD can participate in top-class sporting competition, through the creation of appropriate structures and forms of social support (Law No. 38/2004, Art.39)
- Fundamental Principles: The law establishes principles of singularity (Article 4), citizenship (Article 5), non-discrimination (Article 6), autonomy (Article 7), participation (Article 9), globality (Article 10), quality (Article 11), priority of public responsibility (Article 12), and transversality (Article 13) (Law No. 38/2004, Arts. 4–13)

5.4.4 Decreto-Lei No. 248-B/2008 – Legal Regime of Sports Federations

This decree-law establishes the legal regime of sports federations and the conditions for granting the status of Public Utility for Sport (*Utilidade Pública Desportiva*, UPD) (Decree-Law No. 248-B/2008, Art. 10). Federations with UPD status — including the FPDD — are entitled to public funding through IPDJ and bear responsibility for regulating, organizing, and representing their respective sport modalities at national and international levels.

5.5 Non-Sport Policies and Regulations Relevant to Inclusive Sport

While sport law and sport funding shape how activities are delivered, the strongest inclusion obligations in Portugal come from disability equality, anti-discrimination, and accessibility frameworks (European Commission, 2021). These non-sport regulations matter because many

barriers to participation are not sport-specific (e.g., inaccessible infrastructure, communication barriers, discrimination, lack of reasonable accommodation).

5.5.1 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

Portugal signed the UN CRPD on 30 March 2007 and ratified it in 2009, through Resolution of the Assembly of the Republic No. 56/2009 and Decree of the President of the Republic No. 71/2009 (Resolution of the Assembly of the Republic No. 56/2009; Decree of the President of the Republic No. 71/2009). The Optional Protocol was ratified concurrently. Article 30(5) of the CRPD specifically addresses sport and recreation (United Nations, 2007, Art. 30(5)), requiring States Parties to take appropriate measures to:

- Enable PwD to participate on an equal basis with others in recreational, sporting, and leisure activities;
- Ensure PwD have access to sporting, recreational, and tourism venues;
- Ensure children with disabilities have equal access to participation in play, recreation, leisure, and sporting activities, including those in the school system;
- Ensure PwD have access to services from those involved in the organization of recreational, tourism, leisure, and sporting activities.

Portugal submitted its initial report under the CRPD, which was examined by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Portugal, 2012).

5.5.2 Law No. 46/2006 – Anti-Discrimination Law

Law No. 46/2006, of 28 August, prohibits and punishes discrimination based on disability and the existence of aggravated health risk. It covers both direct and indirect discrimination (Law No. 46/2006, Arts. 1 & 3). This law was further regulated by Decree-Law No. 34/2007, of 15 February, which provides implementation mechanisms to prevent and prohibit discrimination on grounds of disability (Decree-Law No. 34/2007, Art. 1).

5.5.3 Decree-Law No. 163/2006 – Accessibility Regime

Decree-Law No. 163/2006, of 8 August, establishes the regime of accessibility to buildings and establishments that receive the public, public roads, and residential buildings (Decree-Law No. 163/2006, Art. 1). This is a critical regulation for sport inclusion, as it governs the physical accessibility standards that sport facilities must meet, including stadiums, sports halls, swimming pools, fitness centers, and gymnasiums. Despite the legislation, practical implementation remains uneven, particularly in older facilities and in rural areas.

5.5.4 National Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (ENIPD) 2021–2025

Approved by Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 119/2021, of 31 August (Portugal. Council of Ministers, 2021), the ENIPD 2021–2025 is Portugal's main national disability policy strategy. It is coordinated by the Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação (INR) and builds upon the previous ENDE 2011–2013. The ENIPD is structured around eight strategic axes:

- Citizenship, equality, and non-discrimination
- Promotion of an inclusive environment
- Education and qualification
- Work, employment, and vocational training
- Promotion of autonomy and independent living
- Social measures, services, and support
- Culture, sport, tourism, and leisure
- Knowledge, research, innovation, and development

Axis 7 – Culture, Sport, Tourism, and Leisure establish as a general objective the promotion of sports practice at all ages, fostering participation and ensuring equal opportunities for PLWD in sport and recreational activities. The ENIPD creates an inter-ministerial commission to ensure policy coordination across government departments, with representatives from each government area, presided over by the member of government responsible for work, solidarity, and social security (Portugal. Council of Ministers, 2021).

5.5.5 European Union Policy Anchors

At the EU level, several policy instruments reinforce the national framework:

- EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021–2030: Explicitly aims to ensure equal participation and access across domains, including sport, and invites Member States to support education and training of sports educators with specific knowledge to include PwD in sport, cooperate to promote exchange of good practices, and ensure accessibility to sports facilities (European Commission, 2021).
- EU Work Plan for Sport 2021–2024: Highlights the role of sport and physical activity as a driver for social inclusion (Council of the European Union, 2020)
- Council Conclusions on Access to Sport of People with Disabilities: Emphasizes the "ability over disability" approach and breaking barriers to participation (Council of the European Union, 2019)
- European Pillar of Social Rights (Principle 17): Establishes that persons with disabilities have the right to services that enable them to participate in society and a work and living environment adapted to their needs (European Parliament, Council of the European Union, & European Commission, 2017).

5.5.6 Decree-Law No. 54/2018 – Inclusive Education

Decree-Law No. 54/2018, of 6 July, establishes the inclusive education system in Portugal, providing a legislative foundation for inclusion in schools, including in school sports programmes (Decree-Law No. 54/2018, Art. 1). This is relevant for the Stride & Glide project given the importance of school sport as a pathway for young PwD into organized physical activity.

5.6 Key Stakeholders

The Portuguese sport ecosystem for PwD involves multiple actors across public administration, the sport movement, and civil society.

5.6.1 Public Sector Stakeholders

Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude (IPDJ): The central government body responsible for formulating, implementing, and evaluating national sport policies. IPDJ

provides financial support to federations, the Olympic and Paralympic Committees, and programmes such as the Programa Nacional de Desporto para Todos (PNDpT). Until 2025, through the PNDpT, IPDJ distributed 21.5 million euros to more than 2,000 projects nationwide (Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude [IPDJ], 2024).

Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação (INR): Coordinates the ENIPD 2021–2025 and partners with IPDJ in delivering the disability axis of the PNDpT. INR serves as the national focal point for disability policy coordination (Instituto Nacional para a Reabilitação, 2022; Portugal. Council of Ministers, 2021).

Directorate-General for Education (DGE) – School Sports Division: Oversees school sport programmes, including inclusive sport activities within the education system (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2023).

5.6.2 Sport Movement Stakeholders

Comité Paralímpico de Portugal (CPP): Founded on 26 September 2008, the CPP coordinates Paralympic sport in Portugal and assumed the international representation role previously held by the FPDD (Comité Paralímpico de Portugal, 2024). The CPP manages the Medida III.1 – Inclusão e Desporto para Todos programme, which in 2026 supports up to 400 projects for the inclusion of PLWD in qualified sport practice (Comité Paralímpico de Portugal, 2026). The CPP also coordinates the Plano de Preparação Paralímpica e Surdolímpica with IPDJ support.

Federação Portuguesa de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência (FPDD): Founded on 7 December 1988, the FPDD is a multi-sport federation with UPD status since 1995 and holds status as a Non-Governmental Organisation for People with Disabilities (ONGPD) (Federação Portuguesa de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência, 2025). The FPDD operates through four national disability sport associations (ANDDs):

Association	Abbreviation	Disability Area
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Associação Nacional de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência Visual	ANDDVIS	Visual impairment
Associação Nacional de Desporto para Desenvolvimento Intelectual	ANDDI-Portugal	Intellectual disability
Liga Portuguesa de Desporto para Surdos	LPDS	Hearing impairment
Paralisia Cerebral – Associação Nacional de Desporto	PCAND	Cerebral palsy

(Federação Portuguesa de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência, 2025)

At the international level, until the creation of the CPP in 2008/2009, the FPDD was a member of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and was responsible for all Paralympic missions from Barcelona 1992 to Beijing 2008.

Confederação do Desporto de Portugal (CDP): Acts as a confederative body within the sport movement, coordinating and promoting sport development across federations (Confederação do Desporto de Portugal, 2025).

Comité Olímpico de Portugal (COP): While focused on Olympic sport, the COP is part of the broader sport governance ecosystem and is formally consulted on matters of sport policy (Comité Olímpico de Portugal, 2024).

Sport Federations and Clubs: The 60+ national sport federations and local clubs constitute the primary delivery points for organized sport. Inclusive sport depends on practical factors at club level — coach capacity, inclusive programme design, facility accessibility, equipment, and safe participation environments (Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude, 2024).

5.6.3 Civil Society and Disability Organizations

Disability advocacy organizations play a critical role in representing the interests of PLWD and shaping inclusion priorities. Notable organizations include:

- APCAS (Associação de Paralisia Cerebral de Almada Seixal): Leads the nationally recognized "Desporto Com Sentido" (Meaningful Sport) project and the BIRD programme, which have collectively involved over 92,000 participants since 2013 (Associação de Paralisia Cerebral de Almada Seixal [APCAS], 2016).
- ACAPO (Associação dos Cegos e Amblíopes de Portugal): Actively participates in disability strategy consultations, including the ENIPD development (ACAPO, 2021).
- UMHCG-equivalent Portuguese organizations: Various disability-specific NGOs provide grassroots-level advocacy and service delivery (Observatório da Deficiência e Direitos Humanos, 2023).

5.7 Enabling Factors and Opportunities

Despite the barriers, Portugal possesses several enabling factors that provide a favorable environment for the Stride & Glide project:

- Strong constitutional and legal framework: The combination of Article 79 (right to sport) and Article 71 (disability rights) of the Constitution, together with Law No. 5/2007 (Article 29) and Law No. 38/2004 (Articles 38–39), creates a robust rights-based foundation for inclusive sport.
- Dedicated public funding mechanisms: IPDJ's financial support for the CPP, FPDD, and the PNDpT disability axis, together with the Medida III.1 programme supporting up to 400 inclusion projects, demonstrates concrete financial commitment (Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude, 2024; Comité Paralímpico de Portugal, 2024)
- Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 196/2025: Explicitly establishes as a priority "a significant investment in improving conditions for the practice of sport by persons with disabilities," authorizing IPDJ funding for the CPP's Paralympic and Surd Olympic preparation programmes (Resolution of the Council of Ministers No. 196/2025)
- Established best practices: Projects such as Desporto Com Sentido — which produced 21 adapted sport manuals distributed to over 5,200 schools, clubs, and institutions — and the IDI4Sport Erasmus+ project provide replicable models for inclusive sport delivery (Pereira, 2016; IDI4Sport Consortium, 2024)

- EU policy alignment: Portugal benefits from alignment with the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021–2030 and has demonstrated leadership in EU sport policy, including hosting the 2024 Sport Ministerial Conference and leading the EUPASMOS project for harmonized EU sport monitoring (European Commission, 2021; European Commission, 2021b)

5.8 The Portuguese Sport Ecosystem: A Summary of the Policy-Practice Gap

Portugal's legal and policy framework for inclusive sport is, on paper, one of the most comprehensive in the European context. The combination of constitutional rights, dedicated disability and sport legislation, a national inclusion strategy, and EU-level commitments creates a strong enabling environment. However, the evidence points to a persistent implementation gap — a disconnect between the policy intent articulated in law and strategy documents and the reality of participation conditions at the community level (CRP, 2005; Law No. 5/2007; Law No. 38/2004; Portugal. Council of Ministers, 2021; European Commission, 2021).

Key manifestations of this gap include:

- Geographic concentration: Federated disability sport is active in only 9 of 20 districts, indicating significant territorial asymmetries (Federação Portuguesa de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência, 2021)
- Youth underrepresentation: Only 6.1% of federated athletes with disabilities are youth, suggesting that pathways from school sport to organized sport are weak (Federação Portuguesa de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência, 2021)
- Dominant barrier — lack of supply: The most-cited barrier among Portuguese PwD is a lack of sports on offer (20.7%), rather than attitudinal or motivational factors, indicating that structural provision is the primary bottleneck (Ataíde et al., 2023).
- Eurobarometer gap: Portugal's 73% rate of physical inactivity in the general population suggests that inclusion in sport for PwD is embedded within a broader participation crisis that compounds disability-specific barriers (European Commission, 2022)

5.9 Survey results

5.9.1 Respondent Profile and Methodological Note

The Stride & Glide survey for Portugal was distributed between 24 February and 1 March 2026 through stakeholder networks, including disability sport federations, clubs, national paralympic committee and disability advocacy organisations. A total of 30 valid responses were received. While the sample size does not allow for statistical generalisation, the results provide an exploratory, participant-informed complement to the desk research findings and offer indicative insights into the lived experiences of persons living with disabilities (PWD) in Portugal regarding sport participation.

The respondent profile is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent demographic profile (n=30)

Characteristic	N	%
Gender		
Male	22	73.3
Female	8	26.7
Age group		
18–24	4	13.3
25–34	12	40.0
35–44	4	13.3
45–54	8	26.7
55–64	1	3.3
65+	1	3.3
Area of Residence		

Characteristic	N	%
Urban	20	66.7
Suburban	7	23.3
Rural	3	10.0
Disability type (multiple selections allowed)		
Physical disability / mobility limitation	25	83.3
Intellectual disability	2	6.7
Visual impairment / blindness	2	6.7
Hearing impairment / deafness	1	3.3
Developmental disability / learning difficulties	1	3.3
Mobility and access needs (multiple selections allowed)		
Wheelchair user	15	50.0
No assistive devices needed	12	40.0
Walking aid (cane, crutches, walker)	4	13.3
Assistive technology (screen reader, captioning, etc.)	1	3.3

The sample is predominantly male (73.3%), urban-based (66.7%), and concentrated in the 25–34 (40.0%) and 45–54 (26.7%) age groups. Physical disability / mobility limitation is the dominant disability type (83.3%), with 50% of respondents being wheelchair users. This profile aligns broadly with the federated disability sport population in Portugal, where physical disability is the most represented category (Federação Portuguesa de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência, 2021).

Key limitation: The sample is heavily skewed towards active sport participants (see Section 3.8.2), which means that the perspectives of non-participants — who may face the most severe barriers — are underrepresented. Results should therefore be interpreted as reflecting the experiences of PWD who are already engaged or have been recently engaged in sport, rather than the broader population of PWD in Portugal.

5.9.2 Current Participation Patterns

A striking feature of the sample is the high rate of current sport participation: 24 of 30 respondents (80.0%) reported participating regularly in sport at least once per week. Two respondents (6.7%) reported occasional participation, two (6.7%) had previously participated but stopped, and two (6.7%) did not participate at all.

Table 2. Sport types practised by respondents (multiple selections allowed; n=28 active/occasional participants)

Sport / Activity	n
Adapted swimming	8
Wheelchair sport (basketball, tennis, athletics)	8
Gym / fitness / physiotherapy exercise	5
Table tennis	3
Cycling / handbike	2
Boccia	2
Blind/visually impaired sport (goalball, adapted athletics)	2
Deaf sport	1
Para-athletics / running	1

Sport / Activity	n
Adapted collective sport (football, sitting volleyball)	1
Outdoor activities (hiking, canoeing)	1
Adapted surfing	1
Equestrian	1
Sailing	1

Adapted swimming and wheelchair sport were the most practised activities (8 respondents each), followed by gym/fitness (5) and table tennis (3). The prominence of swimming is consistent with findings from the FPDD pilot study, which identified swimming as the most practised sport among PWD in Portugal at 12.9% (Ataíde et al., 2023).

Regarding training frequency, 14 respondents (46.7%) reported training 4 times per week, 9 (30.0%) trained 2–3 times per week, 3 (10.0%) trained once per week, and 4 (13.3%) had irregular participation. The dominant training setting was sport clubs (73.3%), followed by outdoor/public spaces (10.0%) and schools/universities (6.7%).

These participation levels are notably high compared to the general population of PWD, suggesting a strong selection bias in the sample towards committed, federated athletes. This should be considered when interpreting barrier and benefit data in subsequent sections.

5.9.3 Perceived Barriers to Participation

Despite the high participation rates in the sample, respondents identified multiple barriers affecting their ability to participate in sport. Respondents could select up to three barriers from a predefined list; some also provided open-text responses.

Table 3. Main barriers to sport participation (n=30; multiple selections allowed)

Barrier	n	%
Limited availability of disability-specific or inclusive sport programs	11	36.7

Barrier	n	%
Financial barriers (fees, equipment, support costs)	7	23.3
Lack of accessible facilities (ramps, changing rooms, pools, equipment)	7	23.3
Lack of accessible transport	7	23.3
Lack of qualified/inclusion-trained coaches	6	20.0
Lack of adapted equipment (sport wheelchairs, guides, tactile markers)	4	13.3
Lack of information about accessible activities	3	10.0
Lack of training partners / peers	1	3.3
Digital barriers (registration platforms, inaccessible websites/apps)	1	3.3
Negative attitudes or discrimination	1	3.3
Safety concerns	1	3.3
Lack of confidence / fear of judgement	1	3.3

The most frequently cited barrier was the limited availability of disability-specific or inclusive sport programs (36.7%), reinforcing the desk research finding that the primary bottleneck in Portugal is a supply-side issue rather than an attitudinal or motivational one (Ataíde et al., 2023). This is followed by a cluster of three equally cited barriers at 23.3% each: financial barriers, lack of accessible facilities, and lack of accessible transport. The lack of qualified coaches (20.0%) also emerged as a significant concern, corroborating the project's finding that 90% of grassroots coaches have no formal education in adaptive sport. Notably, attitudinal barriers (discrimination, lack of confidence, stigma) were cited by very few respondents, which may reflect the sample's composition of experienced, active athletes who have already overcome such barriers, rather than indicating their absence in the broader population.

Open-text barrier responses offered additional nuance. One respondent noted: *"Neste momento tenho treinador, mas é muito difícil encontrar um treinador disposto a trabalhar com alguém com mobilidade reduzida"* ["I currently have a coach, but it is very difficult to find a coach willing to work with someone with reduced mobility"], highlighting the interpersonal dimension of coaching availability beyond formal qualifications.

5.9.4 Experiences of Exclusion and Discrimination

When asked whether they had ever felt excluded or discriminated against in a sport context (Q13), 8 respondents (26.7%) answered "Yes", 3 (10.0%) answered "Not sure", and 19 (63.3%) answered "No".

Among those who reported exclusion, the predominant reason was **accessibility barriers** (7 out of 9 reasons given). One respondent cited lack of qualified/inclusion-trained coaches and one cited communication barriers.

Regarding support received after such experiences (Q14), 9 respondents (30.0%) indicated that no support was available, 11 (36.7%) said "No" (without specifying availability), 6 (20.0%) received support, and 2 (6.7%) did not know if support existed. This indicates a significant gap in post-discrimination support mechanisms within the Portuguese sport ecosystem.

When asked about the impact on their participation (Q15), 21 respondents (70.0%) reported no impact, 5 (16.7%) reduced their participation, 3 (10.0%) were unsure, and 1 (3.3%) stopped participating altogether. While the majority were resilient — likely reflecting their established commitment to sport — the fact that 6 respondents (20.0%) either reduced or ceased participation as a result of discrimination experiences is a meaningful finding.

5.9.5 Factors That Would Increase Participation

Respondents were asked what would help them continue or increase their participation in sport (Q16; multiple selections allowed).

Table 4. Factors that would help increase participation (n=30)

Factor	n
Accessible and adapted sport facilities	14

Factor	n
Transport support	11
Access to adequate equipment	9
Flexible schedules	9
Qualified and inclusive coaches	8
Programmes near area of residence	8
Free or low-cost activities	7
Safe and judgement-free environment	4
Opportunities to participate with persons with and without disabilities	4

The top-ranked facilitator is **accessible and adapted sport facilities** (14 mentions), followed by **transport support** (11) and **access to adequate equipment** (9). These results directly mirror the barrier analysis and reinforce the desk research conclusion that the primary obstacles are structural and environmental — not motivational or attitudinal.

5.9.6 Perceived Benefits of Sport (Likert Scale)

Respondents rated their agreement with nine statements about the benefits of sport on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree).

Table 5. Perceived benefits of sport participation (n=30)

Statement	Mean	Median	SD
Sport improves my self-confidence	4.47	5.0	0.94
Sport helps me develop teamwork and social skills	4.37	5.0	0.96
Sport helps me feel included in society	4.33	5.0	0.96

Statement	Mean	Median	SD
Sport contributes to my mental well-being	4.30	5.0	1.15
Sport helps me connect with people from different backgrounds	4.27	5.0	1.17
Sport motivates me to be more active in my community	4.23	5.0	1.07
Sport helps me feel safe and respected	3.93	4.0	1.17
Sport helps me reduce stress and anxiety	3.90	4.0	1.27
Through sport, I feel more confident interacting with others	3.87	4.0	1.22

All nine items scored above 3.87 on average, indicating strong perceived psychosocial benefits of sport participation among the sample. The highest-rated benefits were self-confidence (M=4.47), teamwork and social skills (M=4.37), and social inclusion (M=4.33). These findings are consistent with the evidence base reviewed in Section 3.2, which identifies improvements in cardiovascular fitness, mental health, and social connectedness as key benefits of sport participation for PWD (Martin Ginis et al., 2021; Bull et al., 2020).

The relatively lower scores for "feeling safe and respected" (M=3.93), "stress reduction" (M=3.90), and "confidence to interact" (M=3.87), while still positive, may reflect the competitive orientation of many respondents — for whom sport is more about performance than therapeutic outcomes.

5.9.7 Assessment of Community Opportunities

When asked whether sufficient accessible and inclusive sport opportunities exist in their community (Q18), the responses revealed a clear perception of insufficiency:

Assessment	N	%
Very few opportunities	10	33.3
Some, but gaps exist	9	30.0

Assessment	N	%
Not sufficient	8	26.7
Adequate	2	6.7
More than sufficient	1	3.3

90.0% of respondents (27/30) considered the available opportunities insufficient in some form. This is a particularly powerful finding given that the sample consists predominantly of active sport participants — suggesting that even those who have succeeded in accessing sport recognize the systemic inadequacy of provision for PWD in Portugal.

5.9.8 Stakeholder Responsibility and Accessibility Priorities

When asked who should play a more active role in supporting youth inclusion in sport (Q19; up to 3 selections), the top-cited actors were:

Stakeholder	n	%
Schools	21	70.0
Sport clubs	20	66.7
National sport federations	17	56.7
Local authorities	16	53.3
Universities and research institutions	9	30.0
Private companies / sponsors	8	26.7
Families	5	16.7
Health professionals	4	13.3
Coaches	4	13.3

Schools (70.0%) and sport clubs (66.7%) were identified as the two actors with the most urgent need for greater engagement — reinforcing the importance of school-to-sport pathways and club-level inclusion capacity highlighted in the desk research (see Section 3.7).

When asked what would make sport more accessible and inclusive for young people (Q20; up to 3 selections), the priorities were:

Table 6. Priorities for making sport more accessible (n=30)

Priority	n	%
Better access to adapted equipment	18	60.0
More qualified and inclusive coaches	15	50.0
Free or subsidised participation	14	46.7
More inclusive sport programmes at local level	14	46.7
Better transport options	13	43.3
Disability-specific programmes	10	33.3
Activities adapted to each disability type	9	30.0
Flexible schedules	5	16.7
Community awareness campaigns	5	16.7
Universal design in facilities and services	4	13.3
Safe and discrimination-free spaces	3	10.0

Access to adapted equipment (60.0%), qualified coaches (50.0%), and affordability (46.7%) emerged as the top three priorities — directly aligned with the recommendations proposed in Section 4.5 of this report.

5.9.9 Motivations for Sport Participation

Respondents' primary motivations for staying active in sport (Q21; up to 5 selections) were:

Motivation	n	%
Health and well-being	23	76.7
Competition	21	70.0
Improvement in relation to disability	12	40.0
Socialising	11	36.7
Feeling included in society	8	26.7
Self-esteem development	6	20.0
Trying something new	4	13.3

Health and well-being (76.7%) were the most cited motivation, followed closely by competition (70.0%). The high ranking of competition is consistent with the sample's profile of active, federated athletes and resonates with the open-ended responses, where several respondents emphasized that the competitive paradigm of sport should be respected, not reduced to an inclusion narrative alone.

5.9.10 Interest in the Stride & Glide Project

Respondents were asked about their interest in participating in activities developed within the Stride & Glide project (Q22) and in future inclusive and adapted sport programs (Q23):

Response	Q22: S&G Activities	Q23: Future Programs
Yes	15 (50.0%)	15 (50.0%)

Response	Q22: S&G Activities	Q23: Future Programs
Maybe	15 (50.0%)	15 (50.0%)
No	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

No respondent rejected the possibility of participation — 100% expressed either definite or potential interest. This result indicates strong receptivity among Portuguese PWD towards the project's aims and activities.

5.9.11 Voices from the Field: Open-Ended Responses

Twenty-one respondents (70.0%) provided an open-ended answer to Q24: *"In one sentence, what would make sport inclusive for persons with disabilities?"*. Thematic analysis of these responses reveals five recurring themes:

Theme 1 — Freedom of choice and adequate equipment. Several respondents emphasized the right to choose their sport freely, contingent on the availability of appropriate equipment:

"A world where the athlete could practice whatever they wanted. An amputee having a suitable prosthesis to go for a run. A wheelchair user having a handbike to go for a ride. A blind person having support in a pool to go for a swim. Being free is being able to choose what to practice."

Theme 2 — Qualified professionals, accessible facilities, and affordability. At least six respondents pointed to the triad of trained coaches, accessible infrastructure, and low cost as the essential conditions for inclusive sport:

"Activities with adequate coaches, accessible facilities, flexible schedules at low cost."

Theme 3 — Focus on functional profile, not on disability. Multiple respondents called for a shift from a disability-focused to a function-focused approach:

"Do not look at the disability but at the functional profile."

Theme 4 — **Respect for the competitive paradigm.** Several respondents challenged the framing of sport primarily as an inclusion tool, asserting that competitive sport is a valid end in itself for PWD:

"Respect the competitive paradigm of sport and do not merely speak of it as an inclusion tool, as this very survey suggests."

Theme 5 — Sport for All, not "inclusive sport". One respondent questioned the concept of "inclusion" itself:

"Stop being inclusive, because inclusion means exclusion a priori. Sport for All."

These qualitative findings add critical nuance to the quantitative data and highlight the heterogeneity of perspectives among Portuguese PWD regarding sport, inclusion, and the framing of disability sport policy.

5.9.12 Summary of Survey Findings

The survey results, while exploratory (n=30), provide participant-level validation of several key findings from the desk research:

- The **primary barrier** to sport participation is structural — limited availability of programs, inaccessible facilities, transport, and cost — not motivational or attitudinal. This mirrors the FPDD pilot study finding that 20.7% of PWD cited "lack of sports on offer" as the main barrier (Ataíde et al., 2023).
- **90% of respondents** perceive community sport opportunities for PWD as insufficient, even among active participants who have managed to access sport.
- **Accessibility barriers** are the dominant driver of reported exclusion/discrimination experiences, rather than interpersonal discrimination.
- The top priorities for improving access are **adapted equipment** (60.0%), **qualified coaches** (50.0%), **affordability** (46.7%), and **local programs** (46.7%) — directly aligned with the policy recommendations in Section 4.5.
- **Schools and sport clubs** are identified as the actors most urgently needing to increase engagement in inclusive sport.
- Strong perceived **psychosocial benefits** of sport are confirmed (all Likert means above 3.87/5).
- **Competition** is a primary motivation (70.0%), underscoring the need to respect the competitive dimension of disability sport alongside inclusion objectives.
- **100% of respondents** expressed interest (definite or potential) in Stride & Glide activities.

These findings will be further contextualized through cross-referencing with survey results from Austria, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina at the comparative analysis stage of the project.

6. Results and Policy Implications

6.1 Overall results

The desk research indicates that Portugal has a strong formal foundation for inclusive sport participation through (i) established sport governance and public funding structures, (ii) disability equality, anti-discrimination, and accessibility frameworks, and (iii) national strategies that explicitly address sport and disability. However, a persistent implementation gap exists; inclusion commitments do not consistently translate into accessible opportunities, inclusive coaching capacity, and practical participation pathways, particularly for activities requiring infrastructure and structured support such as running, swimming, and hiking.

6.2 *Main Findings*

Finding 1: A large potential target group exists. With 10.9% of the population aged 5+ reporting at least one disability (approximately 1.1 million people), inclusive sport is not a niche concern but a mainstream participation issue. The 23,934 young people aged 10–19 with disabilities represent a critical target for the Stride & Glide project (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2022).

Finding 2: Participation barriers are multi-dimensional and cumulative. Barriers operate across individual (health conditions, confidence), social (stigma, overprotection, discrimination), and environmental (infrastructure, transport, equipment, cost, information) levels. These barriers often compound — even when a programme exists, PwD may be excluded due to transport constraints, absence of adapted equipment, or lack of trained coaching support.

Finding 3: Policy frameworks are strong, but implementation tools and delivery capacity are uneven. Portugal has a clear legal and policy basis for equality and accessibility. However, the practical mechanisms for translating policy into club-level inclusion — standardized training, inclusive coaching certification, operational guidance, accessible delivery templates, and equipment access arrangements — are not consistently embedded across providers and settings.

Finding 4: The funding architecture exists but requires targeted use. Public funding mechanisms — including the PNDpT disability axis, the Medida III.1, and specific CPP/FPDD support — provide financial resources. However, funding criteria could more explicitly embed inclusion standards, accessible infrastructure requirements, and evidence of inclusive outreach practices to ensure resources translate into participation outcomes.

Finding 5: Stakeholder coordination is necessary but not systematized. The ecosystem spans IPDJ, INR, CPP, FPDD, sport federations, municipalities, schools, disability organizations, and health services. While the ENIPD inter-ministerial commission provides a coordination mechanism, sport-specific coordination pathways at the local level remain underdeveloped.

Finding 6: There is a clear practice gap that the Stride & Glide project can address. Given the rights-based and policy-driven environment, the most immediate need is not new legislation or principles, but practical support for implementation: training modules for professionals working with PLWD, inclusive delivery models for clubs, accessible event templates, basic equipment access arrangements, and low-barrier entry pathways into running, hiking, and swimming activities.

6.3 Policy Implications for the Existing Legal Framework

Portugal's legal framework establishes a clear mandate for non-discrimination, accessibility, and the right to sport for PwD. Articles 38 and 39 of Law No. 38/2004, combined with Article 29 of Law No. 5/2007, explicitly require the State to ensure access to both recreational and high-performance sport. The CRPD (Article 30) reinforces these obligations at the international level (Law No. 38/2004, Arts. 38–39; Law No. 5/2007, Art. 29; United Nations, 2007, Art. 30). The primary policy implication does not concern the absence of legal principles, but their consistent operationalization. The evidence indicates that barriers are concentrated at the delivery level — affordable, accessible, and inclusive provision — rather than at the normative level.

6.4 Implications of Existing Policies: What Works and What Is Missing

What seems to work (policy level):

- Portugal provides strong rights and strategy signals on inclusion and accessibility (CRP, 2005; Law No. 5/2007; Law No. 38/2004; Portugal. Council of Ministers, 2021)
- The ENIPD 2021–2025 creates a cross-government coordination mechanism with sport explicitly addressed in Axis 7 (Portugal. Council of Ministers, 2021)
- Dedicated funding streams exist for disability sport through IPDJ, CPP, and the PNDpT (Instituto Português do Desporto e Juventude, 2024; Comité Paralímpico de Portugal, 2024; Federação Portuguesa de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência, 2021)
- Best practice projects (Desporto Com Sentido, InSport, IDI4Sport) demonstrate that effective inclusive sport delivery is achievable (Pereira, 2016; APCAS, 2014; IDI4Sport Consortium, 2024)

What is missing (delivery level):

- Standardized inclusive coaching modules and certification are not systematically embedded in coaching education
- Equipment access and sharing arrangements (e.g., equipment pools, lending schemes) are limited
- Geographic disparities persist — 11 of 20 districts have no federated disability sport club (Federação Portuguesa de Desporto para Pessoas com Deficiência, 2021)
- Monitoring and evaluation of inclusion outcomes in sport are weak; harmonized statistics that would allow comparison with other EU Member States are lacking
- Cross-sector referral mechanisms — from health, rehabilitation, education, and social services into sport — are informal and inconsistent.

5.10 Recommended Changes and Targeted Policy Development

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen the inclusion of PWD in sport in Portugal:

- Embed inclusion requirements into sport funding mechanisms. Introduce or strengthen accessibility and inclusion criteria within IPDJ funding streams, linking

public support more explicitly to demonstrable inclusion standards, accessible infrastructure, and evidence of inclusive outreach practices.

- Build inclusive coaching and delivery capacity. Scale practical, accredited training for coaches and professionals working with PwD, including adapted delivery methods for running, hiking, and swimming. This should be developed in partnership with IPDJ, CPP, FPDD, and higher education institutions, building on the model established by the Desporto Com Sentido collection.
- Support equipment access and low-barrier entry pathways. Promote models such as equipment pools, partnerships with para-sport organizations, and structured introductory participation formats that reduce cost and logistical barriers for newcomers.
- Strengthen cross-sector referral and coordination mechanisms. Develop clearer pathways linking disability organizations, health and rehabilitation services, schools, and social support providers to inclusive sport opportunities, especially at the municipal level.
- Improve geographic coverage. Target investment and programme development in the 11 districts that currently lack federated disability sport clubs, leveraging the PNDpT and Medida III.1 frameworks.
- Enhance monitoring and data systems for inclusion outcomes. Strengthen the linkage between existing statistical infrastructure (INE, IPDJ statistics) and programme delivery, incorporating consistent inclusion indicators to support evidence-based investment and evaluation.
- Leverage the Stride & Glide project as a demonstration model. Position the project's training modules, inclusive event templates, and equipment access models as transferable tools that can be embedded in mainstream sport governance, in alignment with the ENIPD Axis 7 objectives and the EU Disability Rights Strategy 2021–2030.

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6. Concluding remarks

Policy commitments to PwD inclusion in sport and organized physical activities in all four countries exist, with inconsistent implementation in place. This is particularly evident in formal regulatory mechanisms being in place, ranging from centralized approach in Montenegro to robust and highly developed in Austria. However, the inconsistency in implementation is related to inability for these policies to be appropriately translated into program delivery, accessibility and equitable participation opportunities. The latter should be contextualized as

PwD showed interest and motivation for active participation recognizing health, psychological and social benefits. However, the participation and opportunities remain limited primarily due to inaccessible infrastructure and adapted equipment, absence of available and properly trained professional staff (e.g. coaches), limited funding and high costs and transport-related barriers.

Selected countries are experiencing different governance structures, ranging from Bosnia and Herzegovina's multilayered and fragmented approach to Austria's well-structured model. Despite this heterogeneity, all countries experiences policy delivery gap, especially in terms of sporting infrastructure and professional staff capacity. That said, para-sport entities and related NGOs remain essential drivers behind successful programs and progress in terms of opportunities and participation. Portugal presents a distinct pattern: while possessing one of the most comprehensive legal frameworks, combining constitutional sport rights, dedicated disability sport legislation, and a national inclusion strategy (ENIPD 2021–2025), the delivery gap is evidenced by federated disability sport being active in only 9 of 20 districts and youth athletes representing merely 6.1% of registered practitioners.

The operational capacity of sport movement along with public actors on different levels (from national to subnational and local levels) represent prerequisite for inclusive sport as regulatory frameworks proved not to enable inclusion by itself. This is particularly related to delivery mechanisms, funding scheme, infrastructure and professional staff capacity. According to surveyed participants, barriers and limitations extend beyond ramps or adapted lifts, highlighting the importance of interdependence of elements related to available information on different programs, affordable programs, accessible infrastructure, adapted equipment and transportation feasibility. The Portuguese survey findings reinforce this pattern: 90% of respondents, predominantly active, federated athletes, perceived existing inclusive sport opportunities in their community as insufficient, with the limited availability of inclusive programmes (36.7%), financial constraints, inaccessible facilities, and transport barriers (each 23.3%) as the most cited obstacles. In order to address these systemic challenges, a horizontal and interoperable coordinating policy network comprised from sport, health, education, social protection and transport authorities is essential, as the lack of the same is noted as limiting factor across researched systems.

6.1 Recommendations

Prioritize horizontal and interoperable coordinating policy network: each country's ecosystem should establish inclusive and plural coordinating body linking sport, health, education, social protection and transport authorities with clear jurisdiction and defined competencies including oversight and monitoring responsibilities. Local authorities should be encouraged to engage in formal cooperation with NGOs and sport organizations to reduce financial strain, broaden participation and improve overall quality of delivery services.

Introducing disability-sensitive budgeting approach: funding scheme should be revised in order to focus on supporting inclusive-based programs aimed improving participation of PwD in sport and organized physical activities, developing, maintaining and managing infrastructure, adaptive equipment, and implementation education of professional staff.

Introducing evidence-based policymaking: mapping accessibility of sport-related infrastructure for PwD should be conducted on national, subnational and local level including school and related infrastructure used for sport activities.

Education of professional staff: together with academia, public sector and sport movement should work on developing mandatory coaching program focusing on inclusion, use and management of adaptive equipment, and strengthening soft skill and communication with PwD.

Access to adapted equipment: public sector and sport movement should be encouraged to develop programs aimed at creating equipment pools accessible to PwD.

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