*Haut-Commissariat Aux Droits de L’Homme*/

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Palais des Nations

1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Reference: JS/FCP/KY

July 30, 2020

Subject: **Human Rights Council resolution 43/L.34**

Dear Madam/Sir,

Founded in 1968, Special Olympics is a global movement to end discrimination against people with intellectual disabilities. We foster acceptance of all people through the power of sport and programming in education, health and leadership. With more than six million athletes with intellectual disabilities and teammates without intellectual disabilities in over 190 countries and territories, and with more than one million coaches and volunteers, Special Olympics national organizations deliver more than 30 Olympic-type sports and over 100,000 Games and competitions every year.

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide information for the thematic study on sports following Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). While much of our submission documents good practices of partnerships between Special Olympics national organizations and signatories to or States Parties of the CRPD, we also would like to highlight that much remains to be done to ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are able to enjoy the right to sport, recreation, leisure, and play; for example:

* **Many physical education teachers and other professionals involved in sport training and fitness are not aware that people with intellectual disabilities are *able* to participate in sport and physical fitness activities, and that need for these opportunities is critical.** A 2018 Eurobarometer report shows that having a disability or illness (22%) is a main reason for not practising in sport at all*. (Special Eurobarometer 472, Sport and Physical Activity, Report, March 2018).* Among adults, individuals with disabilities are significantly less likely to participate in sport and exercise than those without disabilities. Ireland’s Quarterly National House Survey (2017) recorded that 38% of adults with disabilities participated in sport and exercise compared to 66% of those without disabilities while the 2015 Independent Sports Monitor (ISM) recorded that 27% of adults with disabilities participated in sport, compared to 49% of those without a disability. In Chile’s National Disability Study (2015), 40.8% of adults without disabilities had practiced a sport or exercised outside of their work hours for at least 30 minutes in the past month, compared with only 20.5% people with disabilities. The failure to equip people with intellectual disabilities for non-sedentary lifestyles affects their lives in many ways; for example, many people with intellectual disabilities have poor health status and high rates of non-communicable diseases that are directly related to physical inactivity.
* **Children with intellectual disabilities are among those with least access to early childhood development (ECD) opportunities, which often include play and motor skills activities that lay the foundations for participation sport and physical activity across the lifespan.** Due to a shortage of ECD programming, and especially lacking inclusive opportunities, children with intellectual disabilities often cannot access programming that has been shown to foster cognitive development, maximize function, and develop precursor skills for sport and physical activity.
* **The persistent lack of opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to have meaningful interaction with the general population perpetuates the exclusion of this population.** Inclusive sport represents an opportunity to break the cycle of exclusion by empowering people with intellectual disabilities and pushing people without intellectual disabilities to face their prejudices.

Having briefly described these structural issues, we turn to the questions suggested by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, noting that while our submission is unfortunately not exhaustive of the experiences of all Special Olympics national programs, it identifies lessons and trends that are repeated the world over.

# Recreation and leisure

1(a). Does your country have laws, policies, plans, strategies or guidelines[[1]](#footnote-1) and departments at any level of government relating to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream (not disability-specific) recreational and leisure physical activity, including but not limited to:

* **Private settings:** Private gymnasiums, sports clubs, sports associations and foundations, summer camps, marathons, swimming pools, among others;
* **Public and private tourism** **platforms:** tourism facilities (e.g. beach, mountain, forest, among others), including services for persons with disabilities;
* **Public settings in urban areas:** Urban sports trails, cycling trails, public physical training, yoga, recreational sports, playgrounds for children, recreational facilities for older persons, among others.
* **Nature trails:** hiking trails, nature centers, toilets, viewing platforms, count with accessibility and services.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, mainstream sports clubs include Special Olympics clubs and individuals with intellectual disabilities. As an inclusive measure, there is a law that requires a percentage of persons with disabilities to participate.

In **Ireland**, there are some sports centres that accommodate people with disabilities, but these are in the minority. Most playgrounds do not accommodate people with disabilities.

In **Chile**, the government public policy *Elige Vivir Sano* (Choose to Live Healthily) promoted by the Ministry of Social Development entails the establishment of a number of centers throughout the country. Special Olympics Chile works through these centers to directly increase the access that people with intellectual disabilities have to a variety of sport, recreation, and physical fitness initiatives. Special Olympics Chile also trains the sport trainers from the government and from other civil society organizations who staff these centers to promote the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

The Ministry of Education in **Peru** is collaborating with the Special Olympics national organization to make accessible (easy-read) fitness resources focused on people with intellectual disabilities available on their resources webpage. Thanks to partnership with the Ministry of Education, Special Olympics national organizations in **Kenya** and **Montenegro** will be able to directly provide materials relating to fitness and nutrition (Kenya) and ECD and motor skills development (Montenegro) to Special Olympics-involved people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In many countries around the world, including **Hungary, Mongolia,** and **Pakistan,** Special Olympics national organizations foster partnerships directly with entities like private fitness clubs, yoga studios, and gymnastics centers to raise awareness of the needs of people with intellectual disabilities and ensure the doors of these establishments are open for this population.

1(b). What are the challenges to implementing the above? Are you aware of good practice related to the above?

Three interrelated challenges cut across the categories of activity to be covered in this thematic report: lack of awareness and stigma about people with intellectual disabilities, and lack of training on how to work with this population.

# Education

2(b)(i). Are teachers and professors of physical education trained to include students with disabilities in either mainstream or disability-specific physical education?

In many countries, lack of training of teachers and professors of physical education on how to include students with disabilities is a significant problem. For example, in **Estonia**, there are a few elective classes that students of physical of education may choose related to the inclusion of students with disabilities, but nothing compulsory; in **Ireland**, the situation is similarly dire. In **Serbia**, there are relevant courses offered in the Defectology Department, but not in the Sports Faculty.  In **Poland**, anyone who coaches persons with disabilities needs to have a special education degree and certificate in physical education. While this level of specialization may ensure that graduates have a high level of commitment to this population and can contribute to high quality, the high barriers to entry may limit the availability of services and pose challenges to inclusive programming.

Special Olympics national organizations in many countries have been or are involved in curriculum change efforts so to make the physical education field of study more inclusive, as well as initiatives to directly train physical education and other teachers to work with people with intellectual disabilities. In **Russia**, sports universities have adapted physical education subjects, to whose curriculum Special Olympics has contributed over the years, just as **Special Olympics Poland** contributes to the curriculum of the Ministry of Education. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina,** Special Olympics provides inclusive sports training to physical education teachers, while **Special Olympics Serbia** provides training through a Faculty of Sport in a private education institution.

Special Olympics promotes inclusive sport opportunities for youth in schools by training physical education and other teachers on how to work with and include students with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics trains teachers and school staff in countries including **Argentina,** **Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Mexico, Panama, Peru, and the United States**. Special Olympicsnational organizations in **Argentina, Costa Rica, El Salvador,** [**Panama**](http://www.meduca.gob.pa/prensa/Meduca_y_Olimpiadas_Especiales_crean_nuevo_programa_de_educacion_inclusiva)**, and Peru** have national-level agreements with the Ministry of Education to support this work, while the Special Olympicsnational organizations in **Botswana**, **Brazil, Canada, Chile, Guatemala, Nigeria,** and **Zambia** have worked closely with public education entities at municipal and local levels.

Special Olympics also partners with numerous public entities in countries including **El Salvador,** **Kenya,** [**Montenegro**](https://www.unicef.org/montenegro/en/stories/youngathletesathome-and-playathome-children-disabilities), and **Panama** to provide an inclusive motor skills- and play-focused early childhood intervention for children with and without intellectual disabilities ages 2-7. In addition to the benefits associated with increasing motor function and associated benefits for cognitive functioning, this programming helps children develop the skills they will need to participate in a variety of sports.

2(c). What are the challenges to implementing the above? Are you aware of any good practices related to the above?

In inclusive school settings, one of the biggest challenges is that teachers of physical education have not received training on how to conduct inclusive physical education, lead inclusive sports, or include people with intellectual or other disabilities. In some locations, general education teachers also provide physical education, which can pose additional challenges. Special Olympics’ programming in schools, discussed above, provides a direct response to these barriers associated with inclusive or disability-specific physical education in schools by training physical education and general education instructors, as well as school staff, and providing sport equipment and pedagogical/coaching support resources.

With regards to opportunities for inclusive sport, the existence of separate schools that persists in many parts of the world is a barrier. Some Special Olympics national organizations working in such settings, as in **Mexico**, have been able to pair a special and a mainstream school and coordinate transportation of students for inclusive activities; however, for resource reasons, such encounters occur only a few times per academic year.

# Sports

3(b). Do disability-specific competitions have a similar structure to mainstream competitions, either integrated or separated, to organize local, regional, national, continental and international competition?

**Chile** and **Paraguay** have both created competitive divisions for athletes with intellectual disabilities in national school games.

Special Olympics national organizations develop their own calendars for competition, which usually include national games every 1-2 years. Special Olympics is increasingly developing regional games platforms, including the Latin American Regional Games 2017 (**Panama**) and the 1st Pan-African Games 2020 (**Egypt**), as well as the Latin American Regional Games planned for 2022 (**Peru**). International competitions traditionally include World Games on a calendar emulating that of the Olympic Games (i.e., every four years, alternating between the Summer and Winter Games every two years in the four-year period). Generous host countries for these Games have included **Greece** (summer 2011), **South Korea** (winter 2013), Los Angeles, **USA** (summer 2015), **Austria** (winter 2017), and **United Arab Emirates** (summer 2019), and Russia and Germany will be hosting the summer and winter games planned for 2022 and 2023, respectively. Special Olympics also hosts sport-specific tournaments, such as the World Tennis Invitational 2018, **Dominican Republic**), and is expanding its competition opportunities to include International Beach Games.

3(e). Please provide information on the organizational structures of disability-specific sports, including examples and good practices. Kindly consider the following aspects when replying:

* Are they separate structures, or are they integrated into mainstream federations and clubs?
* Are they decentralized covering the whole territory or they only operate in capital city/area?
* Are they sports-discipline specific, or they integrate multiple disciplines?
* Do they receive equal funding opportunities compared to mainstream sports?
* Are joint activities between sportspersons in disability-specific sports and mainstream sports encouraged or carried out to facilitate exchange among sportspersons within similar disciplines?
* Are persons with disabilities considered in sports beyond their role as sportspersons, including as referees, coaches, spectators, administrators, workers, volunteers in the sports industry, board members, among others?

As a global movement, Special Olympics offers more than 30 Olympic-type sports. The number of sports on offer varies across the 190+ countries and territories where Special Olympics operates, as well as within these countries and territories. This is because most Special Olympics national organizations do not operate only in the capital city/area. By way of example, Special Olympics provides programming in all 14 of Jamaica’s parishes; 28 of India’s 29 states; in remote parts of Peru and Paraguay; in refugee settings in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Cyprus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Malta, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, and Thailand; and throughout Cuba.

Many Special Olympics national organizations receive funding from government entities (e.g., Ministry of Sport) or in-kind benefits, such as access to government sporting facilities. Government entities rarely organize inclusive sporting activities or opportunities for sportspersons with and without disabilities to share the field, but many Special Olympics national organizations promote this type of activity find support from government entities or federations.

Although there are a few countries, such as **Serbia**, where Special Olympics is integrated into mainstream sports federations, Special Olympics national organizations in most countries are separate from the mainstream federations and clubs. They nevertheless often have a relationship or formal agreement with mainstream federations and clubs.

The relationships between Special Olympics and mainstream federations and clubs have been very useful for promoting inclusive sport activities where people with and without disabilities play together on the same teams. For example, partnerships with mainstream sports clubs in **Germany** help ensure that people with intellectual disabilities can have a lifetime of sport-related engagement, and numerous National Associations within the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) have [highlighted partnership with Special Olympics](https://uefaacademy.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/20170327_UEFAFinalReport_Kitchin-Paul.pdf) as creating key opportunities for inclusive football. Similarly, [19 countries](https://www.specialolympics.org/about/press-releases/football-legends-unite-for-inaugural-unified-cup-in-chicago) participated in Special Olympics’ Inaugural Unified Cup 2018, an international inclusive football tournament. In order to have a team participate in this inclusive tournament, Special Olympics national organizations needed to demonstrate a partnership with a national federation or club in their country and/or an indication that the federation or club planned to develop inclusive football after participation in the Cup. **Slovakia** sent a coach from the national federation to the Cup and the country’s delegation—which ultimately won the women’s division!—included players from its national development team. **Slovakia** is among the 75% of countries who participated in this tournament who have advanced their activities in inclusive football in the two years since.

Special Olympics is actively working to promote opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities in sport beyond their role as athletes. In cooperation with mainstream sports federations around the world, a growing cadre of people with intellectual disabilities who are Special Olympics athletes have been certified as coaches and referees and officiated at various levels—from local school games to Special Olympics World Games, including in [Los Angeles in 2015](https://www.ultimahora.com/paraguay-4-y-6-lugares-patines-n917251.html) and [Abu Dhabi in 2019](https://www.aipsmedia.com/index.html?page=artdetail&art=25384&Abu-Dhabi-2019-Special-Olympics-World-Games-Badminton-Vikneswaran-Raman). People with intellectual disabilities also increasingly participate in Special Olympics as sport advisers and members of rules committees, as well as in competitions as (assistant) technical delegates.

Sincerely,

David Evangelista

President and Managing Director, Special Olympics Europe Eurasia

1. These regulations and guidelines should refer to ensuring accessibility of venues/facilities, accessibility of information and communications, reasonable accommodation, support service provision, affordability, procurement, data collection and disaggregation, among others. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)