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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUSION AND DISABILITIES IN AND THROUGH SPORT - IDI4SPORT

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Launched in January 2023, the **IDI4Sport project** brings together partners from Denmark, France, Greece, North Macedonia, Portugal, and Spain to promote inclusive sport in schools and sport clubs for young people aged 10 to 20, with and without disabilities. By drafting training resources, supporting teachers and coaches, and engaging with experts, the project has shown that inclusive sport is both possible and highly beneficial for all children.

Drawing on our experience, we invite policymakers, teachers and sport coaches' training institutions, schools and sport federations at the local, national and European levels to take action through the following recommendations.

All project resources are available on the project's coordinator website

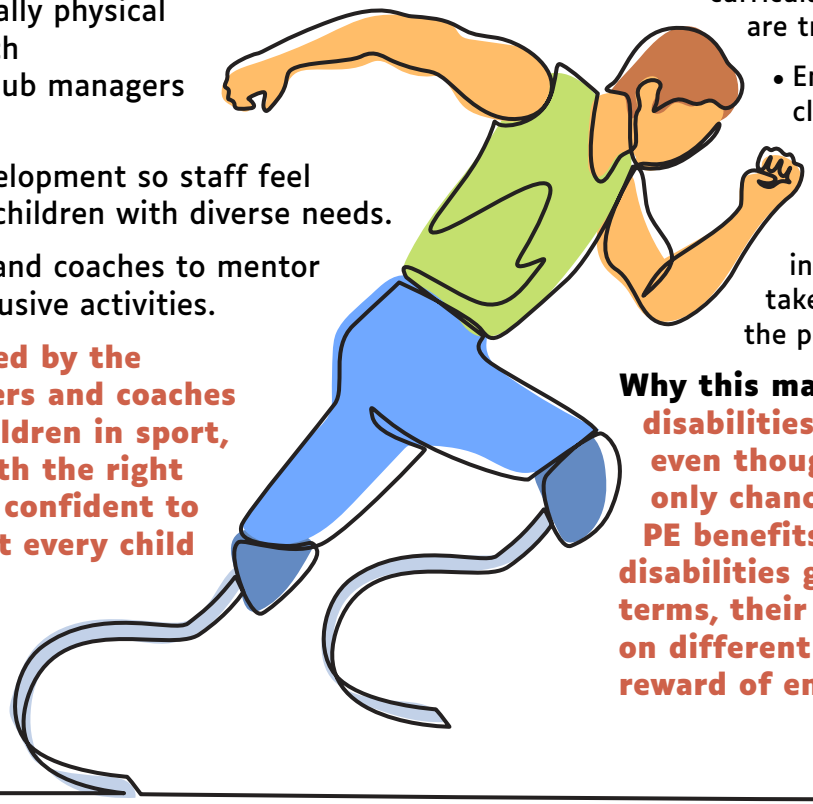
1

EMPHASIZE ON TRAINING: EQUIP TEACHERS AND COACHES WITH THE RIGHT SKILLS

To whom: Ministries of Education, Ministries of Sport, teacher training institutions/universities, sport federations

- Make training in inclusive sport practices a standard part of teacher education, especially physical education (PE) teachers, and coach certification. School and sports club managers should also be trained.
- Provide ongoing professional development so staff feel confident adapting activities for children with diverse needs.
- Encourage experienced teachers and coaches to mentor peers with less experience in inclusive activities.

Why this matters: **As highlighted by the IDI4Sport project, many teachers and coaches are motivated to include all children in sport, but don't always know how. With the right training and support, they feel confident to adapt activities and ensure that every child can take part.**



2

REFORM CURRICULA: MAKE PARTICIPATION THE RULE IN SCHOOLS, NOT THE EXCEPTION

To whom: Ministries of Education, school leaders, PE teachers

- Embed inclusive sport practices in PE teachers curricula in universities so that all teachers are trained in inclusive sport practices.
- Ensure that exemption from sport classes is no longer the default option for pupils with disabilities. Inclusion should be the norm.
- Encourage schools to teach inclusive sports that allow all pupils to take part together by including them in the pupils' curricula.

Why this matters: **Too often, children with disabilities are left out of PE classes, even though school is often their only chance to access sport. Inclusive PE benefits everyone: children with disabilities get to participate on equal terms, their peers gain new perspectives on different abilities, and teachers see the reward of engaging the whole class.**

3

SUPPORT NON-FORMAL EDUCATION: PROMOTE INCLUSIVE SPORTS IN CLUBS

To whom: Ministries of Education and Sport, sport federations, local authorities, club leaders

- Provide clubs with guidance and resources to adapt training sessions and competitions.
- Recognise and reward clubs that prioritise inclusion (prices, grants etc.)

Why this matters: **Many sport clubs lack suitable facilities for children with disabilities, and adapted clubs are often far from their home. Yet clubs are where many children first find their passion for sport. By supporting clubs' desire to be more inclusive, we allow children with disabilities to enjoy sport beyond school.**

4

LISTENING TO CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES: PROMOTE THEIR VOICES AND UNDERSTAND EXPERIENCES FROM THEIR PERSPECTIVE

To whom: Ministries of Education and Sport, local authorities, school boards and sport federations, teachers and sport coaches

- Set aside regular opportunities for children with disabilities to share their views, through one-on-one meetings, suggestion boxes, surveys or other channels.
- Ensure children with disabilities (or representatives) are included in school or sports club committees to communicate their accessibility needs and perspectives.

Why this matters: **Children with disabilities have unique experiences that can reveal perspectives often overlooked in educational settings. Actively listening to them and giving them space to speak is not only about understanding their needs, but also an opportunity to learn from their viewpoint and see the world through a different lens. Incorporating their insights fosters more inclusive and empathetic learning environment for all children.**

5

PARENTS ARE KEY PARTNERS: ENGAGE FAMILIES FROM THE START

To whom: school leaders, sport club managers, teachers and coaches

- Involve parents and guardians early by sharing information about adaptations, expectations, and the benefits of participation in inclusive sports for both children with and without disabilities.
- Encourage families to take part in awareness events on inclusive sport or to take active roles within clubs and schools to encourage inclusive sport practices. Give parents space and confidence to participate.
- Encourage families to share insights about their children's needs to help teachers and coaches integrate them effectively.

Why this matters: **Parents are key partners. When families understand and support inclusive sport, participation is smoother and more sustainable. Better communication also helps ensure families are aware of the opportunities available.**

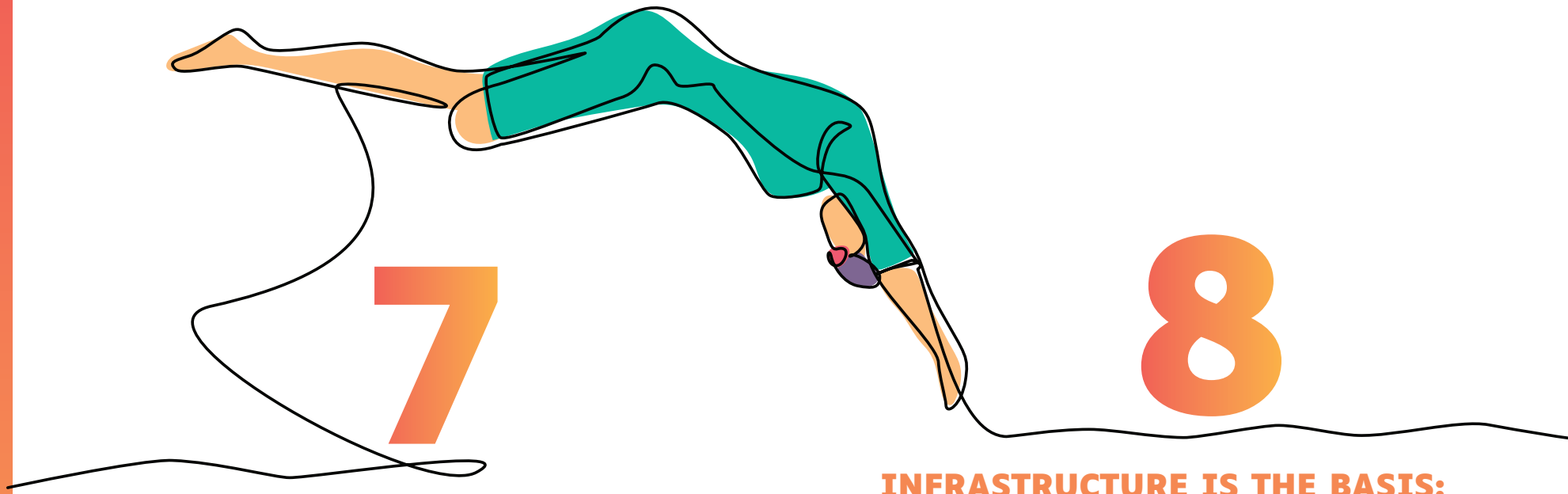
6

SCHOOL AND CLUB CULTURE AT THE CENTER: CREATE A CULTURE OF INCLUSION AMONG CHILDREN

To whom: school leaders, club managers, teachers and coaches

- Run awareness campaigns in schools and clubs to encourage empathy, respect and teamwork across abilities. This could also include universities, sport federations etc.
- Use buddy systems, mixed-ability teams, and inclusive events to make sport participation the norm for everyone.
- Highlight role models, including athletes with disabilities, to inspire positive attitudes.
- Emphasise local role models, teachers, coaches, students, club members, or community figures, who embody inclusion and positive attitudes in everyday life.

Why this matters: **The Paralympic Games demonstrate how sport can change perceptions of disability, celebrating talent and resilience over limitations. The same shift can happen in classrooms and clubs. When children play together as teammates, barriers fall and respect grows. Sport can build fairer, more inclusive societies from an early age. The IDI4Sport project confirmed this on a smaller scale: children with and without disabilities enjoyed inclusive activities, discovering new ways to play together. Their excitement and eagerness to share the games with others show the power of inclusive sport to foster a fairer society.**



7

TRYING IS IMPORTANT: DON'T BE AFRAID TO ADAPT THE RULES AND THE EQUIPMENT

To whom: school leaders, PE teachers, coaches, sport club managers

- Encourage teachers and coaches to modify games and activities to fit the needs of all children, rather than sticking to standard rules.
- Adaptations can be simple—changing team size, using different equipment, or adjusting scoring systems—to ensure everyone can participate meaningfully.
- Promote a mindset where experimentation and creativity in sport are valued as much as competition.

Why this matters: **Fear of "changing the rules" often stops children with disabilities from participating. IDI4Sport showed that thoughtful adjustments allow all children to engage, have fun, and feel part of the team.**

8

INFRASTRUCTURE IS THE BASIS: INVEST IN ACCESSIBLE FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

To whom: Ministries of Education and Sport, local authorities, school boards and sport federations

- Upgrade facilities to meet accessibility standards (e.g. ramps, adapted changing rooms, visual and audio signage).
- Design new sport facilities with accessibility standards in mind.
- Support shared equipment schemes between schools and clubs to reduce costs.

Why this matters: **Focus groups during the project highlighted poor infrastructure as a recurring problem. The real barrier is often not ability, but inaccessible environments. Willingness to include children is not enough if the physical setting makes participation impossible.**

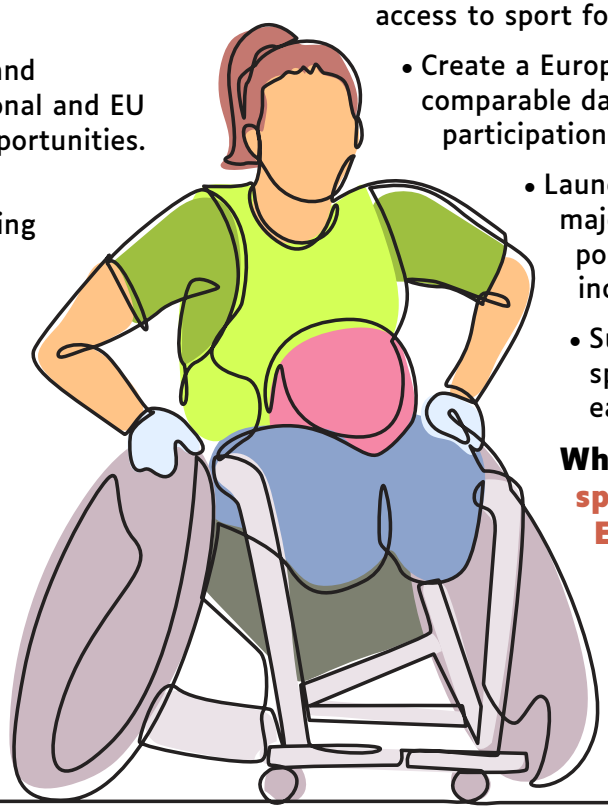
9

BACK INCLUSION WITH POLICY AND FUNDING

To whom: National governments, Ministries of Education and Sport, European institutions, regional and local authorities

- Provide dedicated funding for training, equipment, and facility improvements.
- Encourage clubs, schools, federations, and education authorities to apply for national and EU funding, and to actively share these opportunities.
- Create shared platforms for specialized equipment to promote access and sharing between different organisations.

Why this matters: **Without clear policy signals and financial support, inclusive practices remain isolated pilots. Scaling them up requires structural backing. Many schools and sport clubs reported during the evaluation phase the lack of financial means to buy equipment that would ensure all kids participation.**



10

NETWORK IS KEY: STRENGTHEN EUROPEAN COLLABORATION ON INCLUSIVE SPORT

To whom: European Commission including the EACEA, European Parliament

- Establish a European framework for inclusive sport, setting shared principles and standards, and drawing on the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 and the council conclusions on the access to sport for people with disabilities (2019).
- Create a European observatory on inclusive sport to collect comparable data across countries and track progress on participation of children with disabilities.
- Launch a Europe-wide awareness campaign, leveraging major events like the Paralympic Games, to promote positive attitudes and highlight the benefits of inclusive sport for all young people.
- Support transnational networks of teachers and sport coaches so inclusive practices travel more easily across borders.

Why this matters: **Progress on inclusive sport is uneven across Europe. A stronger European push can inspire action at national and local levels, reduce disparities between countries, and ensure that no child misses out on sport, wherever they live.**

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