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Strasbourg, 31 October 2025

SFA(2025)15

Sport For All:
Promoting Inclusion and Combating Discrimination Against
Persons with Disabilities

Webinar

Training and development of Para sport coaches, referees and
managers

Tuesday 14 October 2025
10.00 am – 12.20 pm (CEST)

Online on Zoom platform

Highlights and recommendations

Highlights

Stanislas Frossard, Head of the Sport Division and Executive Secretary of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS), Council of Europe

- While inclusive policies and frameworks are important, it is grassroots practitioners who turn that vision into reality, which is why their training and professional development is crucial to building inclusive sports systems.
- Inclusion is intentional: it requires diverse skills and competencies that go beyond sport-specific expertise, as well as systematic commitment from sport organisations and practitioners.
- Referees should have training opportunities to better ensure that sport remains a safe and empowering space for all. Moreover, sport managers' awareness of and capacity to implement inclusive strategies and actions directly impact sport organisations' practices and structures.
- Training and development of Para sport coaches, referees and managers is not just about improving performance; it is an expression of values and commitment to human rights, equality and respect – the core principles of the Council of Europe's work on sport, which are enshrined in the [European Sports Charter](#).
- By equipping those who lead and guide athletes, we make sure that sport becomes a space of belonging and growth.

Philipp Müller-Wirth, Chief of the Sport Section, Sector for Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO

- UNESCO considers sport a fundamental right for everyone, without discrimination.
- It is crucial to move from policy to implementation: coaches, educators, referees and managers have a vital role in translating inclusive principles into measurable actions.
- [International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport](#) includes strong provisions for the inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- UNESCO is developing a global framework of policy standards for inclusive, equitable and safe sport and PE following the [MINEPS VII outcomes](#) (Baku, 2023), as well as a Trainer's guide on inclusive sport activities (to be published soon and tested in Egypt, 2026).
- Important past and upcoming milestones:
 - [Paris 2024 Call to Action](#) by UNESCO and International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and [The Asuncion Call to Action](#) by UNESCO, Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF) and Special Olympics to advance inclusive sport policies worldwide, strengthen teacher and coach training, and promote inclusive curricula;
 - adoption of UNESCO's Disability inclusion strategy (November 2025);
 - [International Forum on Inclusive Sport and Physical Education](#) (Santiago, Chile, 27-28 November 2025).

Apolline Poas, French triathlon referee

- In triathlon, all referees officiate both triathlon and Para triathlon events; at local level «*everyone races together*». The federation has a strong focus on accessibility and diversity: «*disability is just a different ability and not a limitation*».
- The federation aims to find the right balance between making the sport more open and inclusive and taking into consideration technical and environmental imperatives to provide necessary adaptations for athletes; accessibility issues are addressed pragmatically (e.g. providing more space in transition areas for handbike users; communication with organisers is key).

- While there is basic training for [Para] referees at national and international level, «*at local level, you learn as you go*». Peer-to-peer mentorship between officials also exists.
- Based on her experience as a hard-of-hearing referee, acceptance is not the issue, but the lack of knowledge and adaptations are.
- For the French Association of Multisports Referees (AFCAM), inclusion is a *modus operandi* rather than a fight, and anyone can become a referee with the right skills and motivation.

Alan Dineen, Department of Physical Education & Sport Sciences, University of Limerick

Preliminary evidence from the Gateways and Barriers Report, which aims to explore Para sport coaches' experiences of professional development in Ireland:

- Most coaches enter Para sport through informal or accidental pathways; there is no structured recruitment or onboarding process.
- Structural barriers that limit coach engagement and retention: geographic isolation, poor communication with national governing bodies (NGBs), lack of club capacities to include Para athletes. Coaches outside major hubs feel disconnected and unsupported.
- Lack of formal education or continuous professional development specific to Para sport: coaches rely on trial and error; majority of learning happens through experimentation, peer advice and athlete feedback.
- Lack of system coordination, which limits the growth of Para sport: stakeholders operate in silos without a system to connect them; coaches do not know who to contact or how to get involved.
- Many coaches feel unrecognised despite their contributions.

Mirosław Krogulec, Vice President for Sports, Special Olympics Europe Eurasia

- Special Olympics works with over 6 million athletes worldwide, focusing on persons with intellectual disabilities. Their goal is to foster inclusion through unified sports (where athletes with and without disabilities train together).
- Specific initiatives in the area of education and training for coaches:
 - new [Coaching Standards at International Competitions](#) (2025);
 - co-operation with sports federations and universities (e.g., joint initiative with the International Skiing Federation “Special Olympics 10”);
 - [Online Learning Portal](#);
 - [Coach Webinar Series](#).
- Safeguarding is a compulsory component of accreditation for all national programmes; benefitted from EU funds to develop toolkits and online training modules.
- Grassroots sport and communities/school-based inclusion are vital for long-term change.
- Special Olympics offer career pathways for retired athletes (coaches, mentors, referees, public speakers).

Päivi Tolppanen, Vice-President, Finnish Paralympic Committee, Para judo coach

- In Finland, many Para sports are integrated in the mainstream sport federations.
- Athlete dual career: in Finland, all athletes who receive funding must make a plan for their professional life after sport, which could offer pathways into coaching, refereeing, administration etc.
- After retirement, athletes are recruited into sport federations randomly, primarily based on the chemistry with federation officials.

- Finland runs various programmes for Para athletes, including “Young Actor”, Para Sports Trainer Education, and Athlete Leader programme (for Special Olympics athletes).
- Example of adaptative martial arts training programme: co-operation among federations to pool resources.
- Mainstreaming gender equality: “[Coach like a woman](#)” project included a module on Para coaching.

Ivo Quendera, Director of Projects, European Paralympic Committee (EPC), Para canoe coach

- The [ParaManager](#) project (Erasmus+), co-ordinated by the EPC, aims to create a certified training programme for Para sport managers and to strengthen management capacity of and professionalise national Paralympic committees (NPCs).
- The project also promotes the co-operation between NPCs, universities, and organisations: *«joining forces, learning from each other, and making sure that good practices do not stay in one country but travel across borders»*.
- The importance of full participation of persons with disabilities in all sport roles, not just as athletes but also in leadership and governance positions, to be included in decision making.
- European-wide standards and qualification frameworks for Para sport management should be established to promote mobility and co-operation.

Recommendations

Pathways and structures in Para sport

- Create clear and supported entry pathways to Para sport coaching.
- Actively recruit retired Para athletes into coaching, refereeing and sport management roles.
- Promote a skill-based approach: anyone with the right competencies can be an official.
- Provide accessible environments and tools for officials with disabilities.
- Strengthen regional and remote support structures for coaches.
- Make safeguarding policies mandatory and harmonised across countries.

Training and education

- Create formalised education frameworks for Para sport coaches where inclusive curricula is a standard.
- Integrate Para sport modules into mainstream coaching education.
- Build practical, sport-specific education resources and tools for Para sport practitioners (coaches, educators, managers, officials).
- Ensure continuous professional development for sport practitioners, focusing on empathy, flexibility, communication and adaptability.
- Offer structured education and coaching certification for persons with disabilities.
- Create European frameworks for transferable Para sport qualifications.
- Invest in education and awareness for referees and organisers about disabilities and adaptive measures.
- Start with inclusive education and sport early: in schools and local communities.

Visibility and representation

- Increase visibility and representation of referees with disabilities to encourage others to join.
- Celebrate the work of Para sport practitioners to increase motivation and visibility; make Para sport practitioners role models for others in your country.
- Ensure parity and representation of women in Para coaching.

Leadership and decision-making

- Invite and empower persons with disabilities to take part in all levels of sport governance.
- Move from “inclusion” to “full participation”: ensure that persons with disabilities hold leadership roles.

Paradigm shift

- Treat inclusion not as a special initiative but a standard in sport practice.
- Move from the approach of “long-term athlete development” to “long-term active sport development”.

Partnerships and co-operation

- Promote networking and co-operation between international, regional and national organisations to bridge the gap between vision and action.
- Avoid silos: create multi-disciplinary teams combining coaches, managers, educators and officials with and without disabilities.
- Create stable, long-term multi-stakeholder partnerships (including public authorities, sport governing bodies, NGOs etc.) that are sustained beyond project funding.
- Encourage collaboration between federations to share educational resources and support smaller NPCs through shared learning platforms to ensure all organisations have access to good practices and resources from across Europe and beyond.