

Co-funded  
by the European Union



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



Co-funded and implemented  
by the Council of Europe

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

### **Launch event**



**15 May 2025 - 12.30 pm – 5.30 pm (CEST)**

**Council of Europe, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg**

### **Speakers' biographies**

## **Gianluca Esposito**

### **Director General of Human Rights and Rule of Law, Council of Europe**



Gianluca Esposito has been Director General of Human Rights and Rule of Law of the Council of Europe since 1 August 2024.

He was previously the Director of the Private Office of the Secretary General and the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe. Prior to this, he served as Executive Secretary of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), Head of the Crime Problems Department, and Head of the Equality and Human Dignity Department.

Gianluca started his career at the Council of Europe in 1995 where he was involved in the negotiation of several conventions and other legal instruments, in the areas of nationality, anti-corruption, cybercrime, the efficiency of justice, combating trafficking in human beings, money laundering, terrorism and its financing. From 2005 to 2009, he was an adviser in the Private Office of the Council of Europe's Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General. Gianluca served as the Council of Europe's first Ethics Officer.

From 2009 to 2015, Gianluca was as a Senior Counsel in the Legal Department of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Washington, DC.

## **Normunds Popēns**

### **Deputy Director-General, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission**



Since January 2024, Normunds Popēns is the Deputy Director General in the Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. From 2011, Normunds Popens has been the Deputy Director General for Implementation in the Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission and in charge of overseeing the implementation of structural and cohesion fund programmes in EU member states and candidate countries.

Before joining the European Commission in March 2011 he has occupied several posts in the Latvian diplomatic services. Notably from 2007 until 2011, he was a Permanent Representative of Latvia to the EU.

Before that he dealt with European affairs as Undersecretary of State of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has been also responsible for the issues of foreign trade and transatlantic relations and has worked as an Ambassador in Norway, Iceland and in the USA as a diplomat.

## Alexandre Husting

**Adviser, International and European affairs for the Luxembourg Ministry of Sports; Chair of the Chair of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS)'s Governing Board**



Chair of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS), Attaché for Education, Youth, Culture and Sport at the Permanent Representation of Luxembourg to the European Union and International and European Affairs Advisor at the Ministry of Sport of Luxembourg.

## Charlotte Girard-Fabre

**Chair of the EPAS Consultative Committee**



Charlotte Girard-Fabre is Secretary General and CEO of the International Federation for Sports Officials (IFSO), President of the French Association of Multisport Referees (AFCAM), a handball and curling referee at national level and a former Olympic ice hockey referee.

I have been a high-level sportswoman since the age of 13, and I wish to represent this new generation of committed women. The quest for excellence and the requirement of performance led me to referee at the Olympic Games in Sochi (Russia) 2014 and Pyeongchang (South Korea) 2018, and I sharpen my skills and expertise every day to honor my 10 Olympic rings.

A fighter at heart and an explorer of new horizons, I push my limits in sport as well as in my professional life today and tomorrow. Decision-making, time management and conflict management are among my areas of expertise. Resolutely focused on excellence and performance, I accompany your teams collectively to develop a disruptive and pragmatic approach.

An ardent defender of gender diversity and the place of women in our society, I am also passionate about civic engagement: elected Secretary General of IFSO, formerly Secretary General and now President of AFCAM and Ambassador of several think-tanks, I have also chosen to act at the highest institutional level (Ministries, UNSS, FFHB, ...).

## **Zakia Khudadadi**

### **Afghan taekwondo athlete, Paralympic & European Champion, Champion for Peace, Paralympic Medalist**



Zakia Khudadadi is a para-taekwondo athlete and the first Afghan woman to compete internationally in this sport.

At 18, Khudadadi won the African Para-Taekwondo Championship, which qualified her for the 2020 Paralympics. Although the Taliban's return to power nearly prevented her participation, she fled Afghanistan and gained permission from the International Paralympic Committee, becoming the

first Afghan woman to compete post-Taliban rule.

At the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games, she won the bronze medal and became the first-ever medallist for the Refugee Paralympic Team.

## **Gizem Girişmen**

### **Turkish archery athlete, Paralympic & World Champion**



@ Kaan Verdioğlu

Born on November 25, 1981, in Ankara, Gizem Girişmen had a spinal cord injury at the T5 level following a traffic accident in the summer after completing primary school. She successfully completed her secondary and high school education at Lycée Tevfik Fikret d'Ankara and later graduated from Bilkent University with a degree in Business Administration.

Girişmen began her archery career in September 2004 and joined the Turkish Paralympic Archery National Team in 2005. Her international

breakthrough came in 2006 when she won a bronze medal at the 4th European Paralympic Archery Championships held in the Czech Republic. At the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games, she made history by winning the gold medal in the Women's Individual Recurve (ARW2) category, becoming the first Turkish female athlete ever to win a gold medal at the Paralympic Games.

In 2009, she became World Champion in the ARW2 Women's Recurve category at the 7th Paralympic Archery World Championships and also secured a bronze medal as part of the Women's Recurve Team. That same year, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) named her "Athlete of the Month" for August. In 2010, she became the first Turkish athlete to be nominated for the Laureus World Sports Awards. Between 2007 and 2010, Girişmen ranked first in her category in the IPC World Archery Rankings.

At the opening ceremony of the London 2012 Paralympic Games, she proudly carried the Turkish flag. She also served as a sports ambassador during Turkey's bid for the 2020 Olympic and Paralympic

Games. In 2017, she became one of the first recipients of the Mustafa V. Koç Sports Award, alongside Olympic champion Taha Akgül.

Beyond her athletic career, Girişmen has worked as a Sports Advisor at the Ministry of Youth and Sports. From 2014 to 2021, she was a member of the Paralympic Games Performance Evaluation Commission. She has served on the Para Archery Technical Committee of the Turkish Sports Federation for the Physically Disabled (TBESF) and contributed to both the Sports and Classification sub-committees of the National Paralympic Committee (NPC) Türkiye.

At the 2016 Rio Paralympic Games, she served as Deputy Chef de Mission for Team Türkiye. In 2017, she earned her master's degree in Social Policy from Middle East Technical University (METU). In addition to her role as an executive board member of NPC Türkiye (2012–2015), she served on the Executive Board of the European Paralympic Committee (EPC) as the athletes' representative (2012–2017), and from 2012 to 2021, she was a member of the IPC Athletes' Council.

In 2025, she completed her PhD in Physical Education and Sports at METU with a dissertation titled "Paralympic Athletes' Dual Career Paths in Sport: A Grounded Theory Study". She currently serves as Chair of the Para Shooting Technical Committee of the Turkish Shooting Federation and is a member of its External Relations Board.

Beyond her professional and academic accomplishments, Gizem remains committed to empowering young people and people with disabilities through sports. She frequently engages with youth, sharing her personal experiences to inspire resilience and inclusion.

## **Yaroslav Denysenko**

### **Ukrainian swimming athlete, Paralympic, World & European Champion**



Yaroslav Denysenko was born and raised in Poltava, a small town in the center of Ukraine.

He started swimming at the age of 5 and he says that he is never going to stop swimming!

In 2013 he joined the Ukrainian national Paralympic team and became twice Paralympic Champion at Paris 2024 Paralympics Games in swimming.



## **Arnaud Assoumani**

### **French athlete specialised in long & triple jump, Paralympic & World Champion**



Arnaud Assoumani, Paralympic champion (6 Games between 2004 and 2024), is a builder of bridges between sport, education and culture. For over 20 years, he has been committed to reinventing links and promoting the emergence of inclusive and sustainable models. An opinion leader, speaker and strategic advisor, he works with companies, institutions and the younger generation on issues of inclusive leadership, ethical performance, human transformation, diversity and societal impact. Also an artist, he uses narration and emotion to create new narratives for change. His actions are based on strong values: authenticity, integrity, transparency and courage. He works for a society founded on equal opportunity, accessibility and diversity, and supports organisations in their systemic and sustainable transformation.

## **Iva Stoyanova**

### **Sport journalist, Bulgaria**



Iva Stoyanova is a Bulgarian journalist with 30 years of experience in the media industry. She began her career in 1995 as a sports reporter at a national sports daily, later becoming a commentator for Eurosport Bulgaria and the owner and editor-in-chief of a monthly multi-thematic magazine.

In 2006, she transitioned into political journalism, working as a political reporter and hosting several high-profile political shows. She has held senior leadership roles, including CEO of Bulgaria's highest-rated news TV station - Channel 3, and CEO of NOVA Broadcasting Group, the largest media group in the country.

In 2013, she completed professional media training at CNN Headquarters in Atlanta. Her political show The City was awarded Best Political Show, and she was named Media Manager of the Year in Bulgaria.

Currently, Iva is a lecturer in Sports Journalism at the National Sports Academy, the founder of a media consulting and communications company, and a published author of two books.

In addition to her media career, she is a national champion in Sports Acrobatics and a two-time World Championship participant. She holds Master's degrees in Journalism and Public Management and Politics. Iva is married and the mother of two daughters.

## Gaël Rivière

### President of the French Handisport Federation, Paris 2024 Blind Football Champion



@ CPSF\_KMSP

Gaël Rivière, born in 1989 in La Réunion, has been President of the French Handisport Federation since December 2024, while also being a top-level blind football athlete (Paralympic champion at Paris 2024 and silver medallist at the London Games).

Also a lawyer at the Paris Bar with the firm Bredin Prat, he works to develop the skills of people with disabilities, using sport as a tool for inclusion and working to make the FFH the leading inclusive federation in France.

He has long been involved in disabled sport, both as an athlete and a leader. Blind from birth, he discovered blind football as a teenager after arriving in mainland France. Selected for the French national team at the age of 16, he went on to win a silver medal at the London 2012 Paralympic Games and a gold medal in Paris in 2024, marking a remarkable sporting career.

A graduate in business law and banking and finance law (Université Panthéon-Assas), valedictorian of his class, he has been a lawyer at the Paris Bar since 2017, with the law firm Bredin Prat, specialising in financial regulation, corporate governance and stock market law.

Involved with the Fédération Française Handisport since 2017, he became vice-president in 2018, before being elected president in December 2024, succeeding Guislaine Westelynck. A member of the board of directors of the French Paralympic and Sports Committee since 2021 and of the board of directors of the organising committee for the 2030 games, he is committed to positioning the Federation as the leading inclusive federation in France, by strengthening its influence, promoting athletes and developing innovative practices.

Gaël Rivière has been awarded the Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite (2012) and the Légion d'Honneur (2024), and defends a vision of sport where inclusion, performance and social commitment go hand in hand.

## Elvira Stinissen

### Vice President of World ParaVolley, former Dutch Paralympic sitting volleyball player



@ Mathilde Dusol

Elvira Stinissen is a former Paralympic sitting volleyball player for the Netherlands, having represented her country in three Paralympic Games and earning a bronze medal in Beijing. And was Vice Chair of the IPC Athletes Council until 2020. She is currently Vice President of World ParaVolley and works as a policy officer at the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, where she focuses on making sport more inclusive. Elvira also serves as an

advisor at the Dutch Volleyball Federation (Nevobo) and is a member of the Advisory Council for Sports in The Hague. With a background in Public Administration and Organizational Sciences, she brings extensive experience in athlete representation, organizational development, and inclusive sport leadership.

## **Mireille Loeffler**

**Creator of the first French women's blind football team, Paris 2024 Paralympic Torch bearer**



Mireille Loeffler has been blind since the age of 12 following a congenital glaucoma. She has her own piano tuning business, which she combines with her work as conductor of an inclusive choir and artistic director of various musical projects. She is vice-president of the young blind football association in Schiltigheim. Two and a half years ago, she created the first women's blind football team in France.

She initiated this project of a women's team in France around 5 years ago, and was supported by Toussaint Akwé, current coach of the men's blind football team and Rémi Garranger, responsible for the development of blind football at the French Handisport Federation.

## **Delphine Szachszejder**

**Educator of adapted physical activity and physical trainer, DS Coaching, Paris 2024 Paralympic Torch bearer**



Delphine Szachszejder has been a teacher of adapted physical activities and health since 2013. She worked in the medico-social sector (EHPAD, HAD) and was a volunteer for disabled athletics in a centre for young visually impaired people, while continuing her studies until 2016 with the ARHAPA master's degree (Autonomisation and rehabilitation of disability through adapted physical activities). She started developing athletics for people with disabilities in 2016 while doing the ESS master's degree. She has written three university dissertations, the last of which was on disabled athletics.

Delphine developed athletics for people with disabilities for almost 10 years (2015-July 2024) in the department of Bas-Rhin in Alsace. She started with the Lingolsheim club, near Strasbourg, and ended up coaching three different clubs in the department. There were specific slots for people with disabilities, rarely mixed (able-bodied and disabled). All disabilities were catered for and managed by Delphine, from racing wheelchairs and prostheses to visual impairments. Thanks to the clubs' good results, she was asked to coach JAP (young people with potential) courses in the region and at national level, as well as the Espoirs team. She was selected to coach at the European Youth Games in Pajulahti, Finland.



Alongside this activity, Delphine was a part-time teacher in Strasbourg at the Strasbourg Sports Faculty from 2015 to 2024, and occasionally at physiotherapy and nursing schools. She also supervised a number of disabled sports training courses.

Since 2019, as she could not work full-time on handisport athletics, she decided to devote her skills to freelance activity, by setting up her own business. She provides physical activity sessions for anyone who needs them (physical deconditioning, anxiety, musculoskeletal disorders, sport-health, sports on prescription, hospitalisation at home, and even palliative care) and for all objectives (rehabilitation, resuming activities of daily living, taking care of body, etc.). She also provides disability awareness training in schools and companies and offers in-company physical activity sessions for people with disabilities and inclusive courses.

## Olivia Conrad

### Senior Project Officer, Council of Europe



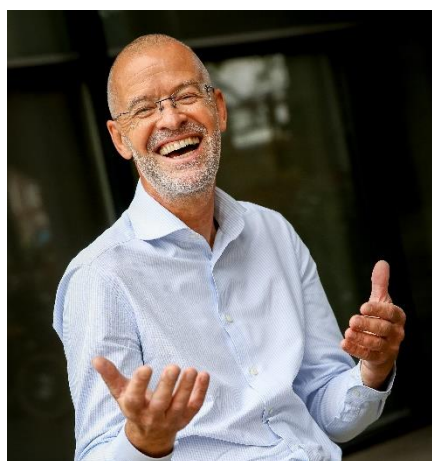
**Olivia Conrad** has a background in communication and is currently working as Senior Project Officer in the Council of Europe Sport Division, ensuring the management of the joint European Union and Council of Europe project "[Sport For All: Promoting Inclusion and Combating Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities](#)" (March 2025 – August 2026).

From May 2023 until February 2025 she managed the joint European Union and Council of Europe project "[All In Plus: Promoting greater gender equality in sport](#)", in co-operation with the European Commission, the International Olympic Committee and the European Broadcasting Union. 21 jurisdictions were involved on the [data collection](#) campaign.

She is a former volleyball player (at pre-national level) and still participates to multi-sport outdoor adventure races (Raid Amazones, Raid Défi d'Elles).

## Raymon Blondel

### President, European Paralympic Committee



Everyone counts, everyone has the right to explore her or his life to the max! And therefore everyone has the fundamental right to be totally included. Inclusion is not an option - it is a necessity. A truly equitable society is one where every individual, regardless of ability, is given the opportunity to thrive, to contribute, and to be celebrated. I am convinced that Para sports hold a uniquely powerful role in leading this transformation.

By placing ability over disability, Para sport challenges outdated perceptions, breaks down barriers, and proves that excellence knows no limits. It is through the stories, strength, and determination of para-athletes that we redefine what is

possible and inspire societies to embrace diversity in all its forms. I believe in action over aspiration. I invest in visibility, grassroots participation, and governance that integrates rather than separates. Because when everyone can play, everyone belongs.

And that is the future we must build - together.

In the realm of sports, Raymon Blondel has been a prominent figure in promoting inclusivity and excellence. Since 2021, he has been the President of the European Paralympic Committee (EPC), where he has been instrumental in advancing the Paralympic Movement across Europe. Under his leadership, the EPC has organized significant events, including the inaugural European Para Championships in Rotterdam in 2023, and is preparing for the European Para Youth Games in Istanbul in 2025.

He served as President of the Netherlands Paralympic Committee from 2016 to 2024 and was Vice-President of the Netherlands Olympic Committee and Netherlands Sports Confederation (NOC\*NSF) during the same period.

Raymon Blondel's leadership style is characterized by a human-centric approach, emphasizing connection, dialogue, and inclusivity. His background as a former elite alpine skier, representing the Netherlands in international competitions until 1995, provides him with a unique perspective on athlete development and sports administration. Fluent in multiple languages, he effectively bridges cultural and organizational divides, fostering collaboration across diverse stakeholders.

Being educated as urban designer and city-planning engineer, his 30 years professional journey includes leadership roles at multinational consultancy firms like ARCADIS, where he contributed to major strategic national and regional planning initiatives.

## **Patrick Stolpmann**

### **Executive Director, International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE)**



Patrick Stolpmann is the Executive Director of the International Council of Sport Science and Physical Education (ICSSPE), bringing extensive international experience from his work within the Paralympic Movement and across the sports sector. As a dedicated advocate for Diversity & Inclusion with a ten-year track record of service at the IPC, he leads ICSSPE's strategic initiatives and organisational development, advancing its global mission in sport, science, education, and policy.

With a robust background in strategic planning, project execution, and performance management, Patrick has successfully overseen complex global initiatives. He is an accomplished leader and communicator, recognized for establishing strong stakeholder relationships and high-performing teams. His career is characterized by a results-oriented approach to addressing critical issues and implementing sustainable change.

## **Osazemen Aghedo**

### **Project Manager, TAFISA**



Osazemen Aghedo works as a Project Manager at TAFISA in Frankfurt, Germany. She is a dedicated advocate for community development through sports and volunteering. With over five years of experience in the non-profit sector, she combines her passion for sports with her commitment to creating lasting community impact. A recipient of the prestigious Erasmus Mundus Scholarship, she holds a Master's degree in Sport Integrity from KU Leuven, Belgium. This academic background underpins her expertise in sports integrity and management. She also actively contributes to organisations like Women Sport Africa Network. Her work aligns with Sustainable Development Goals 3, 5, and 8, reflecting her commitment to health, gender equality, and economic growth.

## **Shanaia Xuereb**

### **Special Olympics Malta athlete**



Shanaia Xuereb is an athlete from Special Olympics Malta in the Europe Eurasia Region. Shanaia participates in bowling and swimming. She has been involved in Special Olympics since 2009.

Shanaia's favorite part about Special Olympics is that it encourages athletes not only to be active in their sports discipline, but also involves them in other activities, giving them a voice.

Shanaia is employed full time as a Senior Clerk Officer. Her role involves checking registrations to see that that all information and requirements are filled correctly.

When Shanaia isn't working or competing, she enjoys listening to music, hanging out with family and friends, and going for walks. She also likes to model and says that modeling has helped boost her confidence, helped her stay positive and achieve more in life.

Shanaia says that being an athlete leader means a lot to her. It has helped Shanaia build leadership skills and become more responsible not only as an athlete but also in her everyday life. Shanaia appreciates the opportunities Special Olympics Malta has given her and she wants to give back. She says that as an athlete leader her role is to listen to all athletes and be able to pass on their message not only related to sports but also to other daily issues. Shanaia strongly believes that to achieve something you must believe in yourself to achieve it. "Dream it! Believe it! Achieve it!"

## **Kateryna Lavryk**

**Junior Project Officer, Council of Europe**



Kateryna Lavryk is a Junior Project Officer at the Council of Europe and currently supports the implementation of the joint European Union – Council of Europe project “Sport For All: Promoting Inclusion and Combating Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities”. She joined the Sport Division in 2022, contributing to the work on gender equality, child safeguarding and sport integrity at the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS). She has a background in sports ethics and integrity, anti-

doping, and social research. A former badminton athlete, she is dedicated to promoting inclusion and human rights in and through sport.

## **Pia Haschke**

**Policy Officer, Sport Policy and Programme Unit, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission**



Since 2023 Pia Haschke is seconded to work with the European Commission as a national expert in sport within the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. As a policy officer she is responsible for interinstitutional relations. After completing her training as an attorney of law she started teaching economic and sports law within various faculties in Austria. From 2008 onwards she worked within the international field of sport as a representative of Austria within the Council of Europe, UNESCO and Expert Groups of the European Union having the honor and pleasure to chair CAHAMA from 2019 to 2023. Since 2012 she works for the Austrian Ministry for Sport. She is a graduate from Vienna Law Faculty with a postgraduate focusing on European and International Business Law as well as from Vienna Technical University in real estate management.



## **Sophie Kwasny**

### **EPAS Executive Secretary and Head of the Sport Division, Council of Europe**



Sophie Kwasny is the Head of the Sport Division of the Council of Europe (international organisation based in France). She is responsible for the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) and for the promotion and implementation of ground-breaking legal instruments upholding the integrity and values of sport. Combating doping and the manipulation of sport competitions, and promoting an integrated safety, security and service approach at sports events are the key aims of the three Council of Europe Sport Conventions.

She is a graduate of the Strasbourg Law University and has been working for the Council of Europe for 25 years on a variety of topics ranging from data protection to prisons' reforms, or from the independence of the judiciary to nationality law. Her sole objective: Championing human rights in and through sport!