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BASELINE ASSESSMENT: SPORT AS AN INCLUSIVE MECHANISM REPORT



PHYSi**CAL**



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1. Introduction

The *PhysicAL* project aims to develop a learning course aimed at trainers and health personnel, who carry out their professional practice with persons with disabilities and great support needs. This training course will provide sports and inclusion skills and competencies to improve the health and lifestyle of persons with disabilities, integrating and promoting the activity in their daily learning and training experience.

The first task collected in the *PhysicAL* project has been to have a baseline assessment of the current situation regarding the participation of persons with disabilities in sports activities in the partner countries and specifically for each region. This evaluation will provide specific details that will make up the bases of the training program, such as: (a) model of the rights of persons with disabilities to physical-sports practice; (b) current model of disability; (c) participation within the framework of the model of human functioning; (d) The Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Sport Activities in Partner Countries - Spain and Portugal; (It is) The Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity for Persons with Disabilities; (f) profile of professionals in physical activity in disability; (g) legislative and regulatory framework.

2. Background

2.1. Model of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to Physical-Sports Practice

Participation is considered as part of a healthy life and, therefore, a human right. *The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 2006) includes as a general principle "effective participation and inclusion in society". Article 19 states that "States recognize the right under equal conditions of all persons with disabilities to live in the community,

with equal options to those of others, and shall adopt effective and pertinent measures to facilitate the full enjoyment of this right for persons with disabilities and their full inclusion and participation in the community". Likewise, it is recognized in article 30 that the right to "participation in cultural life, recreational activities, recreation and sports" is established.

In this direction, in the Instrument of Ratification of the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, in article 30.5 it was proposed that the States Parties adopt the pertinent measures to: (a) encourage and promote participation, to the greatest extent possible, of persons with disabilities in general sporting activities at all levels; (b) ensure that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to organize and carry out sporting and recreational activities specific to such persons and to participate in such activities and, to that end, encourage them to be offered on an equal basis with others , instruction, training and adequate resources; (c) ensure that persons with disabilities have access to sports, recreational and tourist facilities; (d) ensure that boys and girls with disabilities have equal access with other boys and girls to participation in playful, recreational, leisure and sports activities, including those carried out within the school system; (e) ensure that persons with disabilities have access to the services of those who participate in the organization of recreational, tourist, leisure and sports activities ([Agencia Estatal](#)).

Currently we talk about capacity, citizenship, competence, participation, diversity, community, self-determination and quality of life because they are the appropriate expressions when we talk about people with limitations in their functioning since it is based on respect for them, a treatment with dignity and is based on the Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2006). We talk

about disability and inclusion to highlight that there are people with limitations who have the right to full participation, to enjoy a full life and to have a personal life project with the same conditions as any citizen.

2.2. Current Disability Model

The current conception of disability proposed by the World Health Organization defines disability as a result of the interaction between the person and their environment, and not as an attribute of the person (World Health Organization et al., 2001).). Consequently, disability is no longer a disease and its study is carried out from a biopsychosocial model. In addition, it is considered that the factors of the physical, social and attitudinal environment are determining both the origin of the disabilities and the solution of the problems that they entail.

Therefore, the disability condition is not something static and unchangeable, but the functional limitations that a person may have are compensated by the supports available in their environment. In this way, the solution to the problems inherent to disability is not only individual, but also requires changes in the immediate environments (home, school, work,...), in the formal and informal social structures existing in the community (transportation, communications, accessibility and support provided), and also in the norms and practices that govern and influence the behavior and social life of people (Thompson et al., 2010; Verdugo Alonso, 2018; Verdugo Alonso et al., 2013).

2.3. Participation in the Framework of the Human Functioning Model

The model of human functioning on which the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (World Health Organization, 2001 [CIF]; Schalock et al., 2010) is based includes participation as an essential dimension. Participation according to the ICF is defined as the act of

becoming involved in a vital situation. Some of the examples of life situations in which people often participate include relationships with family and friends, domestic life, learning and applying knowledge, and community, social, and civic life, including physical-sports activities.

The ICF (2001) defines the environment as the physical, social and attitudinal factors that facilitate or hinder participation. Thus, environmental barriers such as the lack of adapted sports facilities or negative attitudes can affect participation in physical activities and sports. In reality, it is important to know both the negative aspects (barriers) of the environment that can negatively influence participation in physical activities, and the positive environmental factors (facilitators), which by encouraging them can increase the levels of participation in such activities.

2.4. The Benefits of Sport and Physical Activity for Persons with Disabilities

The benefits of physical activity are universal for all children, including those with disabilities. Participation of children with disabilities in sports and recreational activities promotes inclusion, improves physical fitness, and enhances well-being (Law et al., 2006; Murphy & Carbone, 2008). Despite these benefits, children with disabilities have fewer opportunities to participate in physical sports activities and can have a negative impact on the development of socialization, the acquisition of skills and on the health status of children with disabilities (Longo Araújo de Melo & Badia Corbella, 2009).

Badia et al. (2013) in a study on the participation in extracurricular activities of children and adolescents with cerebral palsy in the Autonomous Community of Castilla y León, it has been shown that their participation in physical activities is restricted, which can cause negative effects on the development of child regarding the acquisition of social skills and

competencies, and physical and emotional well-being. More specifically, this study has shown that children present a very low diversity and intensity of participation in physical activities, although they show high degrees of enjoyment. Likewise, it has been shown that they participate in very few formal physical activities, which can cause a loss of opportunities to engage in social activities and impair the development of important life skills of these children and adolescents with cerebral palsy.

Likewise, in another study carried out in Spain on profiles and determinants of participation in leisure activities in children and adolescents with cerebral palsy, the low diversity and intensity of participation in physical activities has also been demonstrated. Children and adolescents with cerebral palsy participated in an average of two physical activities and with an intensity of one time in the last four months. However, although the diversity and intensity of participation was very low, they showed very high levels of enjoyment (Longo et al., 2013). Finally, Badia, Sánchez, Orgaz and Gómez-Vela (2013) have analyzed the differences in participation in extracurricular physical activities between children with and without physical disabilities in the ordinary school in Salamanca. On the one hand, this study has shown that children with disabilities participate less in extracurricular physical activities and, on the other hand, it has been found that children with and without physical disabilities participate equally in formal physical activities. However, by type of activity, it has been found that they participate less in team sports activities.

A relevant result of this study has been that children with and without disabilities participate in physical activities with the same frequency, whether formal or informal, or vigorous or moderate. This means that children with physical disabilities, although their diversity of participation is low, those who do practice them with the same intensity as their peers

without disabilities. A probable explanation for this result could be due to the characteristics of the sports program in which these children are included, focused on promoting participation in extracurricular physical activities, normalized and organized in educational centers. Regarding enjoyment, both children with and without disabilities show high levels of enjoyment in physical activities. Regardless of their functionality, children with physical disabilities enjoy themselves in a similar way to children without disabilities. However, children with disabilities enjoy more formal and vigorous activities, while children without disabilities enjoy more informal and moderate physical activities. Therefore, it seems to be confirmed that participation in physical activities in an inclusive environment favors the frequency of participation in such activities.

Also, various studies have shown the scarce physical-sports practice in adults with disabilities (Badia et al., 2012; Badia, Orgaz, et al., 2013; Temple, 2007; Temple et al., 2006). In Spain, a study on the profile of leisure activities, including physical activities, aimed to analyze what kind of physical activities they did, what their preferences were among the physical activities they practiced, and what interests young people and adults with disabilities had. of development by practicing physical activities that they do not perform. The results showed a low participation in physical activities in young people and adults with developmental disabilities, confirming the results of previous studies that indicate that persons with disabilities practice little sport (European & Commission, 2001; Temple, 2007). In addition, it was found that among the physical activities with the highest participation rates were: gymnastics, swimming, bowling, basketball, cycling, jogging, petanque, ping-pong and soccer; and the lowest participation rates are found in: water skiing, skiing, skating, golf, volleyball, fishing, horse riding and tennis. However, the participants in this study showed a greater preference for wanting to do a greater number of

physical activities more frequently, such as horseback riding, playing petanque, and bowling. Finally, they showed a greater interest in trying a greater number of physical activities such as playing golf, fishing, playing petanque, water skiing and skiing (Badia, Orgaz, et al., 2013).

Finally, various studies have shown that sports practice in persons with disabilities is determined by the presence of personal and environmental factors, rather than by factors related to disability (IQ level, percentage degree of disability, etc.) (Beart et al., 2001; Buttimer & Tierney, 2005; Rimmer et al., 2004; Temple, 2007). Badia et al. (2011) carried out a study in Spain on the effects of the interaction between the personal factors of young people and adults with developmental disabilities and their environment on the performance of leisure activities, including physical activities. The results of this study demonstrated that participation in physical activities was associated with personal factors and perceived barriers, rather than factors related to disability. More specifically, they found that participation in physical activities was determined by the perception of barriers; those people who considered themselves good at practicing sports but did not have someone to teach them, participated less in physical activities.

Likewise, the difficulty in accessing the resources provided by sports services for persons with disabilities is an obstacle to participation in such activities. Frequently the services are located in urban areas and many of the people who live in rural areas or in neighborhoods on the outskirts of large cities have difficulties accessing the services that provide this type of activity. Thus, for example, in a study carried out in Spain on environmental barriers and facilitators that influence the social participation of children and adolescents with cerebral palsy, it has been shown that 73% of parents

reported that their children did not have access to leisure programs (Badia et al., 2014).

2.5. The Profile of Physical Activity and Sports Professionals

Regarding the profile of physical activity and sports professionals, a study from Gutiérrez-Conejo, Campos-Izquierdo and González-Rivera (2021), points out that a significant percentage of professionals who work with persons with disabilities do not have an adapted physical activity degree.

Of all the professionals, the main training activity for permanent training is the courses, with the oldest professionals and those with the most professional experience having the greatest diversification in said training. These authors conclude that in Spain there are people who work performing functions in adapted physical activity without the appropriate specific qualification, having a negative impact on professionalization. They also propose the need for these professionals to have adequate qualifications and have a direct impact on persons with disabilities, while guaranteeing physical activity adapted to the needs and characteristics of each person.

3. The Participation of Persons with Disabilities in Sport Activities in Partner Countries - Spain and Portugal

Physical activity is important for maintaining the health of all people, including those with disabilities. However, at the European Union level there is no specific periodic collection of data on the participation of persons with disabilities in sport, nor do we have recent official figures from Portugal and Spain.

In the article entitled "*Adapted sport in Portugal: from concept to practice*" (Saravia et al., 2013), he draws attention to the fact that, in Portugal, sport for persons with disabilities has not developed at the same rate than the

international scene, so until the mid-seventies the participation of these people in sports activities was very sporadic. However, this issue has evolved, including the adoption of focused public policies, with the inclusion of persons with disabilities as a strategic objective for the valorization of all citizens.

In Spain, according to the *Survey on Disability, Personal Autonomy and Dependency Situations* (INE, 2008), 0.5% carried out regulated physical-sports practice, while the population without disabilities is 15%. Pérez Tejero and Linaje García (2011) only 0.4% of persons with disabilities had a federal license. Canellas et al. (2003) carry out a study on the sports habits of persons with disabilities in the city of Barcelona, obtaining the following most relevant results: (1) persons with physical disabilities are the ones who practice the most, followed by people with intellectual disabilities and people with sensory disabilities; (2) women practice to a lesser extent but without notable differences; (3) the most important reason for practicing sport is health promotion; (4) men show motivations linked to having fun, spending time with friends, and self-satisfaction; (5) the reasons given for not engaging in physical or sports activity are the lack of adapted sports facilities, age, transportation difficulties and lack of time; (6) Only 3% practice sport in a federated way.

In a study on sports habits in persons with disabilities in the province of Guipúzcoa, they show that 28.57% dedicate "little" and another 33.40% dedicate "nothing" of their time to practicing sports. Only 3.71% admit spending "a lot" of time practicing. In addition, only 19% perform physical activity adjusted to the health criteria and in terms of the type of disability, people with hearing disabilities are the ones who practice in a more adjusted way, while people with cerebral palsy are the ones who do it less adjusted. these criteria (Ramírez Muñoz et al., 2007).

4. Legal Framework and Public Policies

Within the framework of the United Nations (UN), in resolution 70/1, entitled "*Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*" and approved in 2015, the role of sport in promoting social progress is recognized: "Sport is another important enabler of sustainable development. We recognize that sport increasingly contributes to making development and peace a reality by promoting tolerance and respect, and that it also supports the empowerment of women and youth, individuals and communities, as well as health goals, education and social inclusion". Sport can foster social development by changing perceptions about persons with disabilities and giving them the opportunity to participate.

The European Council includes the principles of inclusion in the European Charter for Sport 2021 ([European-charter-sports-2021-castilian](#)), establishing the guidelines to guarantee that all members of the community have the opportunity to participate in sport, so that Boys and girls with disabilities enjoy educational and sports programs adapted to their needs and to practice sports based on values, equality and inclusion.

The most recent document, the *National Strategy for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities 2021-2025* in Portugal (ENIPD 2021-2025), highlights how "only a society that includes all people can realize their true potential, contributing decisively to a further strengthening of social inclusion and greater participation in civic action in all aspects of community life by all people, but with a special focus on persons with disabilities". This document indicates a set of inclusion policies that constitute instruments of collective social intelligence, capable of counteracting disadvantages and limitations, and of developing cycles of opportunities for action, inclusion and improvement of the quality of life, always having as reference the principles of United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with

disabilities (2006), ratified by Portugal in 2009, as well as the recommendations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the guidelines derived from the *European Strategic Strategy* (European Disability Strategy 2010-2021) of the *European Union and the Council of Europe Disability Strategy and the Council of Europe Disability Strategy* (2017-2023). Specifically in strategic axis 7, entitled "Culture, sports, tourism and leisure", the document indicates that the quality of life, well-being and personal and social development of all people necessarily imply access to the various cultural activities, the practice of sport and physical activities and the possibility of carrying out tourist and leisure activities, both inclusively, but always as an option and by the free choice of persons with disabilities and their families. The promotion of these various dimensions is an indicator of social development that Portugal wants to assume and guarantee. Thus, in general objective 2, the promotion of sports practice at all ages is reinforced by the following specific objectives: (1) develop the practice of physical activities and adapted sports in schools and (2) promote and develop the practice of sport and physical activity, informal or formal, regular or not, throughout life.

The Spanish Disability Strategy 2022 – 2030 (2030, 2022) has as its driving force *Active Citizenship and the Full Exercise of Human Rights* and brings, in its Strategic Axis 1 - Inclusion and Social Participation-, among the objectives of the health area "increase the participation of persons with disabilities in sport as a fundamental tool for enjoyment, full life and social inclusion, both in federated, organized or competitive modalities, seeking their development in community spaces with conditions of universal access, as well as promoting the sport as a hobby and source of well-being for all persons with disabilities, ensuring conditions of universal accessibility

to resources, equipment and community environments, facilitating options and alternatives, and the development of social networks that motivate and promote it".

The European Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 (European & Directorate-General for Employment, 2021) aims to promote an intersectoral perspective, focusing on the specific barriers faced by persons with disabilities at the intersection of entities (gender, racial, ethnic, sexual, religious), in difficult socioeconomic or other vulnerable circumstances. Among persons with disabilities, women, children, the elderly, the homeless, refugees, migrants, Roma and other ethnic minorities deserve special attention. The European Commission document "*Mapping access to sport for persons with disabilities*" (European & Directorate-General for Education, 2018) highlights that barriers to participation in physical activities are generally classified at three different levels: individual, social and environmental. Individual barriers are related to functional limitations of the disability or psychological and physical aspects. Social barriers are mainly due to the lack of professional preparation of sports and physical activity professionals in the community to communicate and adapt physical activities to the needs of persons with disabilities. Environmental barriers often refer to the availability of conveniently located facilities and, more generally, to the opportunities available for persons with disabilities to move from mere physical activities to competitive sports. However, it also highlighted specific participation facilitators that can be used to overcome barriers to participation, namely the role of professionals from all walks of life in engaging persons with disabilities in sporting activities, focusing on the experience of different actors and, in particular, supporting the roles of dedicated experts who can become leaders in promoting significance opportunities for persons with disabilities.

5. Conclusions

The baseline assessment of the current situation regarding the participation of persons with disabilities in sporting activities in the partner countries makes clear the need for more interventions in this area so that there is a real increase in sports practice by persons with disabilities since there is no doubt about the multiple benefits of their integration into their daily lives.

Good legislation can be found at the European and national level among the partner countries that support and can be tools to promote the practice of physical activity and/or sports for persons with disabilities.

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