

Inclusive Healthy Lifestyles Groups in Schools

Project Summary

It's widely acknowledged and underscored by scientific evidence that physical inactivity, poor diet and lack of access to fitness and wellbeing opportunities are the main drivers for health risk factors such as obesity, cancer, cardiovascular and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and are also the excelling cost factors for health systems and health insurances in Europe and the world. They are also recognized as the main reason for health disparities and health inequity in vulnerable groups such as people with intellectual disabilities (ID).

People with intellectual disabilities are among the most neglected and underserved population when it comes to health care and prevention as well as health promotion and well-being programs and services.

According to the WHO 2-3% of the population have an ID ranging from moderate ID to severe and profound ID often corresponding with multiple functional disorders and handicaps. In the EU we are looking at approximately 15 Million people with all levels of intellectual disability. Despite the expansion of improved health care policy and execution of the UN convention on equal rights for people with disabilities in many countries in the EU, people with ID are still the most neglected, institutionalized, excluded and underserved disability population across the world. The WHO world report on disability (2011) suggests that people with disabilities "have poorer health, lower education achievements, fewer economic opportunities and high rates of poverty than people without disabilities. This is largely due to the lack of services available to them and the many obstacles they face in their everyday lives". The report furthermore suggest that people with disabilities i) have a greater risk of developing co morbid conditions through chronic health conditions (high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases) and experience an earlier onset of these conditions; ii) have greater vulnerability to age related conditions such as premature aging and experience age related health conditions more frequently; iii) have increased rates of health risk behaviors such as poor nutrition, smoking, physical inactivity and vision and hearing impairments; and iv) higher risk of premature death. (1)

ID specific research also highlights the additional multifaceted health issues people with ID face including the risk factors of genetic syndromes or poorer access to health among persons with ID in lower socio economic groups. However, the common definition of evidence of differences in health in people with ID is: (1) decreased life expectancy (i.e., mortality); (2) increased morbidity; (3) increases in negative determinants of health, such as poverty; and (4) the difference in healthcare in terms of access to services or quality of services. (2)

Despite increased investments in Health Promotion programs in the member states there is evidence that disparities exist for persons with ID. One example is that very high prevalence of obesity and weight problems among people with ID. Lack of access to health promotion has been identified as a major cause of disparity because the information (i.e., educational materials) is often inaccessible, irrelevant, or inappropriate. As a result, persons with ID are less likely to be able to be exposed to generic health promotion than their age peers without disabilities. Health promotion figures prominently in any efforts directed at reducing disparities in health status. (2)

Therefore, the "Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle Groups in Schools (IHLGiS)" project aligns with the purpose and focus areas of the EU "HealthyLifestyle4All" initiative aiming to promote healthy lifestyle in the Union, in particular among children and students with an emphasis on vulnerable groups such as persons with ID.

Special Olympics Europe Eurasia Foundation (SOEEF) is the EU-registered entity of Special Olympics, the world largest public sport and health organization for children and adults with an intellectual disability (ID). SOEEF operates in all 27 EU member states reaching over 450.000 people with ID. Special Olympics EU Eurasia Foundation supports public health activities operating from offices in Dublin, Brussels and Warsaw, and supports Special Olympics National Programs in all 27 Member States. The SO network cooperates and assists local services, agencies and organizations dedicated to the promotion of physical fitness, health and well-being of people with intellectual disabilities and develops activities and programs across EU and across borders that enables Special Olympics athletes to take a fuller and more active role in their community and society and realize their potential as contributing citizens.

SOEEF's overarching goal is to improve the health, fitness and well-being of children and adults with an intellectual disability across Europe by providing health screenings and intervention programming, education and training programs for health care professionals, students and families of people with ID as well as community-based health and inclusive fitness initiatives.

SOEEF is addressing health issues and health disparities people with ID face through year-round comprehensive health and well-being initiatives adapted to the needs of people with ID. With its variety of inclusive health programs (Healthy Athletes initiative, inclusive Fitness programs, Family Health Forums etc.) SOEEF is aiming to bring better fitness, healthy nutrition and healthier lifestyles to everyone involved in Special Olympics - from athletes and their families, to coaches, care givers, health care professionals and students without disabilities. SOEEF therefore is

one of the most relevant and established public health organization in Europe working directly with the target group through a wide range of hands-on health activities in the areas described above.

Health data collected through the Special Olympics Healthy Athletes program mirrors the findings in the above-mentioned reports: (3)



Data through 2018-2019 collected at HA events in Europe/Eurasia.

SOEEF and the Special Olympics programs work with special schools, institutions, and other educational settings for people with ID – in fact the majority of the beneficiaries are special schools and social institutions which provide the foundation to implement the IHLGiS project by partnering with these institutions and their community. SOEEF has a strong emphasis on an inclusive approach which means that young people with and without ID are invited to any Special Olympics activity and engaged equally in meaningful way. SOEEF realizes that the majority of youths with and without ID are still very much separated which has multiple reasons and cannot be explained by one factor only. However, the segregated school environment across many EU member states must be considered as a mayor challenge which creates barriers for youth with and without ID to be connected on a regular basis, learn from and grow with each other equally. That's why SOEEF and its project partners are aiming at taking the actions together to overcome these barriers and promote a healthy lifestyle for all equally.

More than ever, we experience a high demand and need for young people to learn and exchange more on how to stay fit and live a healthy life. From our experience with different Special Olympics National Programs across the EU, we have seen that schools are the perfect platform for introducing a healthy lifestyle to students with and without ID and encouraging healthy habits that can positively impact the students' quality of life. Further, the school environment offers a great peer-to-peer learning opportunity for students with and without ID. This is why SOEEF sees a great potential in the IHLGiS initiatives to serve as vehicles for empowering students with and without ID in schools to take action and lead, learn about social-emotional well-being and celebrate fitness and a healthy lifestyle together. We believe that it is important that young people with and without ID take the lead on collaboratively group fitness activities, teach and learn how to achieve optimal health and performance through adequate physical activity, health promotion activities about nutrition and hydration.

This inclusive approach is also a direct response to the findings of an international cross-sectional study mentioned in the **Missing billion report** (4) in which is stated that children with disabilities had a much higher chance (5x) than children without disabilities to become sick. Therefore, the accessibility and need for inclusive initiatives are necessary to counteract this discrepancy through a unique peer-to-peer approach. Further, the **Missing billion** report states that "Children with disabilities need early identification and additional support in their early years to allow them to maximize their development and functioning (page 4)". Looking at the report, two of the suggested guiding principles on how to move forward shall be the foundation of this project: "The following principles are based on experience in disability-inclusive development, and on existing policy frameworks such as the WHO Disability Action Plan. [...]":

A "twin-track" approach is needed. This means that people with disabilities must be incorporated within mainstream services, but also need focused attention in order to "remove barriers and improve access to health services and programs and meet their specific needs" (WHO Disability Action Plan). [...]

Efforts to include people with disabilities and to overcome barriers throughout the health seeking journey should be made across the whole spectrum of health care services (promotive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative), across the life course (including children) and for both men and women."

In the four project partner sites Special Olympics programs plan to work with in total 150 schools and institutions in 4 member states (20 schools in Estonia, 50 schools in Poland, 30 schools in Greece and 50 schools in Germany).

The general objectives of the IHLGiS project are:

1. Develop and implement accessible, inclusive health promotion, fitness and well-being programs in special schools and institutions adapted to the needs of students with ID led by peer-to-peer groups with and without ID supported by mentors and health experts with focus to healthy nutrition and hydration, regular health enhancing physical activity, mental health and health literacy.

2. Include community health services, families, local education establishments and other organizations to support inclusive and healthy school environment and improve awareness of healthy lifestyle needs of persons with ID.
3. Connect the project with the European Week of Sport, the Special Olympics World Summer Games in Berlin 2023 and other EU health initiatives.
4. Evaluation of project activities with focus on health outcomes of the participants. Disseminate project outcomes and results through social media, conferences and publications.
5. Conclude the project with best practices in inclusive approach to adapted health promotion programs in schools and institutions for people with ID.

The intention of Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle groups in Schools is to provide a fun, social environment that encourages a holistic approach to year-round healthy nutrition, health enhancing physical activity and well being led by youth with and without ID.

These groups shall meet at least once per week throughout the school semester. The groups can gather during or after sport classes, during or after schooling hours in person or via virtual fitness activities through social media or other virtual platforms.

Inclusive Youth Leader teams are youth with and without ID who collaboratively set up and implement IHLGiS project for other students with and without ID in their school or university, face-to-face or virtually. These inclusive Youth Leader teams are supported by an adult mentor (e.g. teacher, coach or local SO Coordinator) and are responsible for the content and implementation of the weekly Health Promotion and Fitness sessions.

The activities will encourage and support schools and other educational settings to adopt the concept of healthy schools – also known as health-promoting schools, and will collect, develop, endorse and share evidence-based practices.

(1) https://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report.pdf

(2) *Journal of Policy and Practice in Intellectual Disabilities*, Volume 2 Number 3/4 pp 249–255
September/December 2005

(3) https://media.specialolympics.org/resources/research/health/2018-Healthy-Athletes-Prevalence-Report.pdf?_ga=2.253430857.170137495.1642706945-227262862.1620377783

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d79d3afbc2a705c96c5d2e5/t/5f284cb69af8a9396df3f81c/1596476607957/v3+TheMissingBillion+revised+0620.pdf>

Project Objectives

Youth with ID are among those most underserved by education systems globally, perpetuating the discrimination they face in countries of the Global North and Global South alike. Youth with ID are the least likely to access inclusion due to contextual constraints like living in special institutions, being educated in segregated education systems as well as lacking of accessing local sports clubs. Negative attitudes are the second largest barrier to disability inclusion. Bullying, lack of access to physical activities, well-being opportunities and social isolation also impede inclusion by preventing access to education and sport facilities, limiting retention of youth with ID and limiting the quality of education. These challenges for youth with ID reflect societal patterns in other areas like inclusion of youth with ID in schools or at the workplace and other community-based activities. Due to that, SOEEF sees a greater need to promote and share values such as dignity, trust, respect and fairness among youths through sport.

As described above Special Olympics offers inclusive activities for youth with and without ID, namely Unified Sports® and Inclusive Youth Leadership, which brings youth integrity in their schools and local communities. Unified Sports® is an internationally proven mechanism to break down barriers of exclusion and to tackle discrimination and bullying on and off the playing field with a focus on youth engagement. By participating in Unified Sports® activities within schools and local communities, both youth with and without ID learn lessons in self-confidence, experience social inclusion and learn the social emotional skills considered critical for 21st Century workplaces and engaged citizenship such as teamwork, communication, and ability to work across differences.

Additionally, to the engagement of youth in Unified Sports®, SOEEF provides different ways to nurture youth leadership. Ensuring that various leadership roles are inclusive to all youths who have ranging skillsets, abilities, and perspectives will enhance efforts to create and sustain change within the local level. SOEEF uses an inclusive approach to its leadership activities in order for youths to find their voices and teach them to become change agents in their communities by promoting equity and acceptance.

The principle of Special Olympics Unified Sports® and youth engagement programming provide the foundation for this proposal namely creating an inclusive, youth and student driven model to build and promote healthy school

environments incl. models for regular health enhancing physical activities, health promotion, mental health initiatives and health education. It is also a model for youth volunteering and inclusive, active European citizenship.

Based on the given reality for youth without ID across the globe, the importance for youth with and without ID to develop leadership skills and take action for social inclusion, we see a great need to support youth to become leaders for inclusion in their community by planning, organizing and running Unified Sports® events as well as youth leadership and advocacy trainings to foster inclusion.

In front of this background, this project encourages all involved partners to establish local IHLGiS led by trained Youth Leaders with and without ID in schools supported by adult mentors. These IHLGiS and additional health promotional activities (e.g.: Special Olympics Health Promotion, Special Olympics Fun Fitness screenings and Special Olympics Strong Minds sessions, Family Health Forum, Outdoor healthy lifestyle camps, etc.) will increase the stakeholders' awareness about health literacy, healthy lifestyle habits and daily fitness activities. Especially, mentoring, guiding and empowering students with and without ID to run inclusive fitness activity sessions including discussion rounds on mental as well as emotional health and healthy lifestyles will improve the knowledge of the participants and further the outreach to other students in the participating schools. Through the IHLGiS and health promotion activities, stakeholders in the respective countries will be encouraged to run similar activities among youth locally with the support of schools. With these measures this project aims to increase the awareness of the importance of fitness and HealthyLifestyle4All and improve the health literacy of students with and without ID in the schools and local communities (e.g.: sports clubs, local social institutions, etc.).

In order to achieve this, a strong local stakeholder-network (school admins/teachers, health care professionals, SO Programs) in the local communities will be established to offer specific easy to read resources (e.g.: fitness toolkits, banners about healthy nutrition and habits) and adaptable activities to provide accessible educational information. Ultimately, this project will enable SOEEF to 1) increase the healthy lifestyle and fitness opportunities in the partner countries and 2) enhance the Programming in new school communities across other EU countries by using the gained knowledge from best practices and project evaluation.

Alongside SOEEF, The project will be implemented in four Member States by Special Olympics Estonia, Special Olympics Berlin, Special Olympics Hellas (Greece) and Special Olympics Poland as well as a research partner (University of Athens, Department of Physical Education and Sport Science, National and Kapodistrian) from Greece.

The establishment of Inclusive Healthy Lifestyle groups in Schools or similar settings, is based on the following key objectives of the project:

- a. Training and activate IHLGiS (Youth Leaders, Mentor, Health messengers) in participating schools
- b. Implementing ongoing evidence based IHLGiS activities focusing on healthy nutrition, health literacy, healthy lifestyle choices and health enhancing physical activities.
- c. Engaging community stakeholders, local authorities and other organisations into the project to train and raise awareness about health promotion needs of persons with ID.
- d. Evaluating impact of the project in relation to health outcomes of the participants and provide best practices to stakeholders and EU member states.

Specific objectives of the project including key indicators:

	Specific objectives of IHLGiS	Key performance indicators
1	Identify and train youth leaders with and without ID and mentors to become project leads; identify and train at least 100 schools in 4 different EU countries to participate in the project.	Identify and engage at least 100 schools in year one. Train at least 200 Youth Leaders with and without ID, at least 100 mentors supporting the project implementation in schools throughout the project period of 3 years
2	Implement IHLGiS in at least 100 schools in 4 EU countries and run regular IHLGiS activities throughout the 3-year project led by youth leader and mentor pairs.	Engage over 4.000 students with and without ID participating in IHLGiS activities.

3	Development and creation of IHLGiS implementation tool kits and inclusive education materials for school teachers, students with and without ID, youth leaders and other participants aiming to promote healthy lifestyle, healthy nutrition and health enhancing physical activity. The format will be primarily in easy to read. (e.g.: IHLGiS tool kits, flyers and manuals. Fit 5 resources, etc.)	Production of 4.000 flyer and leaflets in four project country languages, including 100 IHLGiS implementation toolkits and 4.000 "Fit 5" resources.
4	Generate local partnerships with local authorities, civil society organizations, Universities and other organizations to support the project, raise awareness and access further resources throughout the project timeline of 3 years e.g.: Berlin Senat (department for interior and sports & department for health, care and equality); Polish Ministry of Sport; Estonia: Tartu and Tallinn Health Care Colleges and University;	Engage and formalize partnerships with at least 8 local organizations from different sectors in all project sites.
5	Train and onboard health care professionals to provide Special Olympics Health Promotion (healthy nutrition, healthy lifestyle education), Special Olympics Strong Minds (mental and emotional health and coping strategies) and Special Olympics FunFitness (Physiotherapy) screening and education events to participants across schools throughout the project years to foster behavioural change towards healthy lifestyle choices and to provide technics and tools for self-determined health management of the participants.	Identify and train at least 1 new lead volunteer Clinical Director (e.g.: Psychologist, Physiotherapist, Dietician or HP experts) and clinical volunteer teams (15 volunteers per team) for three specific Healthy Athletes disciplines in each country throughout the project period. Provide at least two screening and education events per year (1 event in year one). Conduct at least 500 Healthy Athlete screenings per year and health information and health status of the participants for base line analysis and to measure health outcomes.
6	Promote healthy canteens and cafeterias in each participating school by creating promotional materials and resources for healthy and balanced nutrition and hydration, healthy snacks, fruits and vegetables (in easy to read) to raise awareness and emphasis healthy choices among the participants throughout the project period.	Promotion materials and resources successfully implemented in 100 participating schools incl. responsible school staff trained (at least one in each school)
7	Run awareness campaigns about the project goals and outcomes in conjunction with EU initiatives and larger inclusion and disability events such as the annual European Week of Sports, The Special Olympics World Summer Games 2023 in Berlin and other events by utilizing trained youth with ID (Health Messengers), influencers, ambassadors and promotional campaigns.	3 promotional campaigns in framework of the European Week of Sports; 1 campaign and workshop at the Special Olympics World Summer Games 2023; Engage influencers and Health Messengers.

8	<p>Demonstrate project impact and outcomes on the participating individuals and institutions by conducting research design collecting quantitative and qualitative pre- and post-data in selected settings. The results will be incorporated into project reports, best practices and recommendations for project stakeholders and EU member states</p>	<p>1 research design and evaluation toolkit assessing project implementation and impact; 1 final research and activity report</p>
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The project will be implemented in four Member States (Estonia, Germany, Greece and Poland) including one research partner from Greece.

Specific project objectives are:

- During the project, partners will engage with 4 (local) government authorities and 4 (local) media outlets to achieve the overall goal of the project to engage:
- 8 civil societies and youth organisations
- 100 special schools and other education settings for people with ID.
- 4.000 Number of pupils/ students between age 10-25
- 2.000 Number of people who indicate that they would agree to change their health behaviour and lifestyle after the end of the project.

Specific project metrics are:

1. train 200 Youth Leaders with and without ID and 100 mentors to run inclusive healthy lifestyle groups for 2.000 youth with and without ID
2. establish school network of 100 schools running inclusive Healthy Lifestyle groups
3. train and activate at least 190 volunteer health care professionals and medical students to run healthy literacy and health promotion activities for in total 4.000 youth with and without ID
4. create four accessible resources packages in Easy-to-Read including mental health and health literacy education and health promotion material (e.g.: Healthy Athletes education material, SO Fit 5 resources)
5. One Final Research and Activity Report including qualitative and quantitative analysis and set of recommendation for replication purposes in other EU member states.

Timeframe of the project: 3 years

Communications

SOEEF creates a solid dissemination platform through partnerships with numerous key stakeholders at local, national and international level e.g. the EU, universities, schools, grassroots sports clubs, professional sports clubs, national and international sports governing bodies, institutions for people with ID, governments and corporates amongst others. A fully integrated approach towards communication and dissemination for this grant will ensure results are widely shared with internal and external stakeholders. SOEEF's communications project expert will support this project throughout the months to ensure high visibility of activities and results While SOEEF has its own social media channels, a main component of our work from a communications perspective is to enhance and support the SO National Programmes. and their athletes with their own communications objectives. All the communications and dissemination activities mentioned will be developed in a cohesive manner in order to communicate/disseminate the activities and results related to the project. If successful, a detailed communications plan will be drafted by SOEEF with the input of all the consortium to ensure that the project activities and results are disseminated widely.

At a wider level, SOEEF communications team works closely with SOI's HQ communications team, and the foundation of our communications strategy are our 3 Global Mission Moments around which the communication planning is focused. These 3 Moments are based around our global message of inclusion under the message of our "The Revolution is Inclusion", occur at specified times of the year and are as follows: **1) Inclusive Health**

(Q1/Q2) 2) **Celebrating Champions of Inclusion** 3) **Inclusion Works**. Naturally, as this project focuses on health, the key messaging from this project will be integrated into SOEEF's and the consortium's messaging around Mission Moment 1. As SOEEF is a disability focused organisation, all our communications will promote positive inclusive language, that will show how youth with an ID can be empowered and be changemakers in the community. SOEEF also already has an excellent track record in communicating the activities of projects for Erasmus+ funded projects such as the award winning "Keep Up with the Girls Campaign" (see previous projects in the Appendix) from 2019 which focused on females with ID. SOEEF is very confident that we will provide a high level of visibility for the EU during this project.

The Key Audiences for Dissemination are as Follows:

1. The General Public, especially Youth.
2. The Consortium's Key Stakeholders/National Governments/Health Authorities etc.
3. The EU

Communications Channels – General Public

From a communications perspective, project activities, the project results will be disseminated in the following manner:

1. Social Media – SOEEF will post activities from the project on our social media channels – Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. The consortium will also regularly post content on their social media channels which will showcase their Athlete Youth leaders' activities. On social media the Athlete Leaders will use their own channels to tell their stories on how they are engaging with the project as well as encouraging their peers to become more active and why they need to focus on improving their diets and nutrition. Social media in particular will be highly effective in reaching youth who will be the key participants and beneficiaries of this project. The SO Programmes will look to develop specific awareness campaigns around the project activities with the support of SOEEF. A specific social media handle will be set up for the project that all members of the consortium and other partners can use.

2. Websites: SOEEF will share information on the project on our SOEEF pages which is part of the overall SOI website: www.specialolympics.org. The consortium and the SO Youth Athlete Leaders will also post stories from our youth leaders on their respective websites and blogs.

3. World Games – Berlin 2023: As mentioned, the 2023 Special Olympics Summer World Games take place in Berlin and provide an excellent platform to communicate about the project. SOEEF will work closely with our global media partners (ESPN etc., APS) at the Games to ensure that content from the activities relate to the project which will take place both before and during the Games can be shared to a European audience. SOEEF will also oversee the production of a video to showcase the activities and outcomes of the project and use it to disseminate the final results and key activities from the project.

4. Printed, Online and Visual Media – The SO Programmes in particular will use the activities from the project as an opportunity to engage national and local media. This will be achieved through inviting journalists and local/national media to key events during the project and encourage media in attendance to interview the participants about the impact of the project. This dissemination channel will be a key component of the communications plans at national level. The SO Programmes in the consortium have strong relationships with local and national media and will be able to utilise these relationships to disseminate the activities and results from the project

5. Ambassadors/Influencers – the SO Programmes will also aim to utilise their relationships with their celebrity and sports ambassadors during this project e.g. (Robert Lewandowski, professional footballer – SO Poland ambassador). They will ask their ambassadors to utilise their social media channels during the project to post about and support the project activities. Where possible, the SO Programmes may invite their ambassadors to attend some of the key project events which will naturally attract media attention.

Dissemination – Key Stakeholders

SOEEF engages and works with a number of key stakeholders who focus entirely on both health and youth. Examples of such stakeholders are ENGSO Youth, European Football Development Network, UEFA, International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE), Mine Vaganti, Bulgarian Sports Development Association and other various youth and sporting bodies. From a health perspective, SOEEF had a wide network of health practitioners and medical experts who support SOEEF's health work and a regional level. At a national level, all the SO Programmes involved in the consortium have strong relationships with national and regional governments. Through these various networks, the activities of this project and its results will be disseminated far and wide. Also, at a National Level across the EU, our National Programmes partner with universities, schools, local and national governments to deliver programming and again the results and the activities of the project will be disseminated through these networks. This will happen through social media, invitation of key stakeholders to key project events, and the final dissemination events that SOEEF and the SO Programmes will host. It is envisaged that the SOEEF dissemination event will aim to invite international agencies who work in the area of health alongside key people



and stakeholders who are responsible for developing or advising the EU and national governments around health policy.

The European Week of Sport will also form a key part of our communications strategy with the aim of having showcase activities taking place during the Week of Sport throughout the project. More details will emerge on this in the coming months.

Branding/Acknowledgement of EU

Integrated into all communications and dissemination activities will be acknowledgement of the EU to thank them for their support for the project. This will be done in the following ways:

1. Branding featuring the EU at either face to face or virtual events.
2. All printed material related to the grant activities will feature the EU logo.
3. The EU will be tagged on all social media posts made by SOEEF, the Athlete Youth leaders and the National Programmes during the project.
4. The EU will be acknowledged verbally at all events/meetings related to the project activities.
5. At the final dissemination events – the EU will be fully acknowledged to all stakeholders attending the webinar.

The EU logo will also feature on any official videos compiled by the consortium during this project.

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