

ANNUAL REPORT

Latin America

2024



**Special
Olympics**



Table of Contents

Message from the President	3
Athlete’s Message	5
Health	6
Education, Youth and Families	8
Leadership	12
Political Advocacy	14
Opening Minds and Hearts	18
Sports	22
Football Week 2024	
IV Special Olympics Latin American Games Asunción 2024	
Partners	27



Message from the President



Claudia Echeverry
President and Regional Director
Special Olympics Latin America

Dear Special Olympics community and friends:

As we close this chapter of 2024, we do so with a deep sense of gratitude, pride, and renewed hope. This year witnessed countless moments in which inclusion ceased to be an aspiration and became a reality experienced by thousands of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Through sports, health, education, leadership, public advocacy, and our strategic alliances, we built a year that will go down in the history of our regional movement as one of the most transformative to date.

The power of sport: a universal language of inclusion

2024 was an unprecedented year in sporting terms. We proudly celebrated the first **Special Olympics and CONMEBOL Football Week**, a milestone for the movement in South America. Thanks to the support of national football associations, we experienced a sporting celebration that demonstrated that football can also be a driving force for inclusion and respect.

We also witnessed historic moments during the Copa América, where captains like Lionel Messi and James Rodríguez wore the sash of inclusion, carrying our message to millions of people across the continent.

And of course, the **IV Special Olympics Latin American in Asunción, Paraguay**, were the heart of the year. More than 1,000 athletes from 23 countries gathered for a competition that exceeded all expectations.

These Games set records for participation in the number of athletes, sports, female inclusion, athlete leadership, and the presence of new sports such as badminton, hockey, artistic gymnastics, and beach volleyball. We also implemented the **Motor Activities Training Program (MATP)** for the first time, further expanding the reach and accessibility of our competitions.

And how can we not mention **Chile 2027!** For the first time, our region will host the **World Summer Games**. How proud!

Health that transforms lives

One of the strongest pillars of our movement is, without a doubt, health. In 2024, we continued to strengthen our programs in the region, ensuring that our athletes not only access basic medical services but are also cared for in a dignified, compassionate, and inclusive manner. **“Healthy Athletes”** shone once again, allowing thousands of people with intellectual disabilities to receive evaluations, preventative treatments, and education on physical and emotional well-being thanks to the work of our volunteer professionals, allies, and governments.

Education, Youth and Families: Sowing the Future

Inclusive education was another central focus of the year. Through our **Unified Schools, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Comprehensive School Participation**, we reached new generations with a clear message: inclusion begins in the classroom, in play, in friendship. These initiatives not only promoted the participation of thousands of young people with and without



intellectual disabilities throughout the region, but also empowered families, who are the heart of our community, as allies and primary advocates.

Unified Leadership: Transforming Perceptions Through Experience

In 2024, we elevated the power of inclusive leadership to the highest level. Through our regional partnerships, our Athlete Leaders demonstrated firsthand to executive and sports teams what it means to lead with empathy, lived experience, and a commitment to inclusion.

These awareness-raising visits, exchanges, and joint activities led by our athletes were not only inspiring: they were catalysts for cultural change in spaces traditionally under-exposed to intellectual disabilities.

Advocacy and partnerships that generate change

Our public advocacy work reached new levels thanks to strong

partnerships with governments, sports organizations, humanitarian entities, and the private sector. Together, we promoted campaigns, events, and public policy transformations that guarantee the full recognition and exercise of the rights of people with intellectual disabilities, leading to the *Asunción 2024 Call to Action*, a roadmap identified and drawn up with governments and strategic multilateral allies that will guide our actions in the coming years.

“Don’t Let Another 200 Years Pass!”

campaign, developed in conjunction with CAF (Latin American Development Bank) and the Government of Paraguay as part of our Latin American Games. This campaign highlighted the urgency of moving toward a truly inclusive society, where people with intellectual and developmental disabilities no longer have to wait for their rights.

Opening Minds and Hearts

In everything we did this year, the voices of our athletes were the driving force. From public forums to international stages, our leaders spoke clearly and firmly, claiming their rightful place in their communities and society.

We close this year with the certainty that we are on the right path, but also aware that there is still much to do.

To every athlete, family, volunteer, donor, ally, and member of our network: thank you. Thank you for believing, for taking action, and for joining us on this journey of transformation.

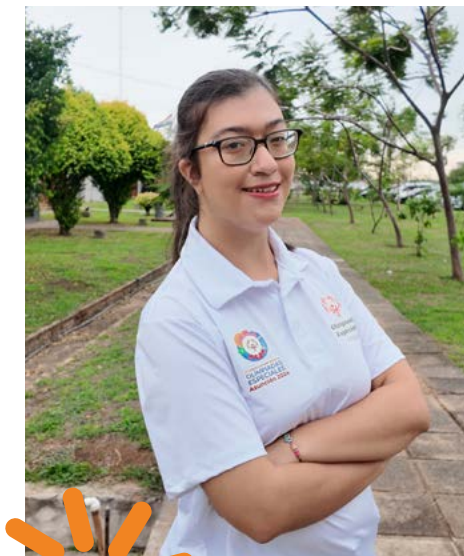
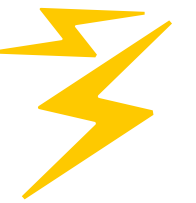
Let’s continue building a world where inclusion is not the exception, but the norm.

With hope and commitment,

Claudia Echeverry

Athlete’s Message

“Let’s be the voice of those who can’t speak up.”



Sara Jorgge
Rhythmic Gymnastics Athlete
Special Olympics Paraguay

I am Sara Jorgge, I am 21 years old, a Sociology student at the National University of Asunción, I live in the city of San Lorenzo and I am a rhythmic gymnastics athlete at Special Olympics Paraguay.

From a very young age, I had some health problems, which led my parents to seek professional help until they found a doctor who would help them diagnose me. They repeated some tests and diagnosed me with developmental delay. I started with early stimulation therapies and speech therapy at SENADIS (National School of Social Development), but the challenge of finding good support led us to look for other alternatives so I could continue my treatment and my studies. As I grew up, I had many social, sensory, and motor difficulties, but thanks to my parents’ efforts, I was able to improve and develop as a person. After much hard work, thanks to the experience of a coworker of my father’s who had a son with ASD, my mother began to investigate, and they performed evaluations and were able to arrive at my final diagnosis, which was Autism Spectrum Disorder.

During my school years, I went through a lot. I was excluded from activities by my classmates and even by the school. I often didn’t realize it until I changed schools, and that’s when I underwent a radical change. I was included in all the school activities, birthdays, and events, and I was able to understand everything that was happening at my previous school. This helped me improve my social skills and my tolerance for noise.

Since I was a child, I practiced several sports, but due to my motor difficulties, I tried several in search of

improvement. Although I was never chosen to play on a team, I kept trying. I also studied dance for several years. When I came of age, I took a break from my sports activities, and coupled with an illness my brother suffered, it was difficult for me to resume them. At the end of 2023, my uncle told me he had a friend who worked at Special Olympics Paraguay, and told him about my situation. It was there that I was invited to train in Rhythmic Gymnastics, which rekindled my passion for music and dance.

2024 was a big year for me! It was very challenging, but it was a great honor to be able to represent my country at the IV Special Olympics Latin American Games held in my home country. I was able to meet great people and my teammates, whom I now consider my sisters. At the Latin American Games, I won silver and bronze medals, which made me very happy. I felt excited knowing my family was supporting me and proud of my achievements. I began participating in the unified choir “Todos Somos Parte” and in Leadership activities, which made me feel more supported.

Thanks to Special Olympics, I feel more empowered, more independent, more fulfilled. I feel more important. I’m now capable of achieving anything. It even helped me in college, and now I consider myself a spokesperson for Special Olympics. I carry the message wherever I go. I feel like I’m part of something bigger, and I’m very proud of that.

I invite you to fight together for inclusion; together, everything is easier. Let’s be the voice of those who can’t speak up. Let’s fight for a more inclusive society.

Health



To perform well on the playing field, an athlete must be in good physical and emotional health. However, people with intellectual disabilities face significant barriers to accessing health services in their countries and communities.

Special Olympics' Health programs are one of the pillars of our movement, focusing on improving the physical and emotional well-being of people with intellectual disabilities through increased inclusion in healthcare systems. This includes the training of healthcare professionals and partnerships with universities and colleges that train future physicians and healthcare professionals. It also includes a robust program of free health

screenings for athletes with intellectual disabilities, Healthy Athletes, made possible through the support of powerful public and private sector partners, volunteerism, and the care of healthcare professionals trained in serving people with intellectual disabilities.

But Inclusive Health can also be practiced from home, and that's why we offer learning and exchange spaces for families, caregivers, and people with intellectual disabilities themselves, so they can meet and connect with health professionals, community leaders, and social service providers, in forums specifically designed to raise awareness and inform.

Healthy Athletes in Latin America

Special Olympics and the Golisano Foundation: An uninterrupted partnership for inclusion

In April, **Chile hosted a major visit** by an international delegation, including leaders from Special Olympics International, Special Olympics Latin America, and the **Golisano Foundation**. The visit, led by **Erica Dayton**, Executive Director of the Golisano Foundation, focused on reviewing the inclusive health projects supported by the Golisano Foundation, a Healthy Athletes partner since its inception. "Chile has been truly inspiring. I was able to see firsthand the effort they're putting in, how they're progressing and growing. I also had the opportunity to meet athletes in their communities, monitoring their health to ensure they're ready to compete and live a full life," said Erica Dayton, highlighting the inspiring progress and commitments she's seen.

The **Golisano Foundation**, founded by philanthropist **Tom Golisano**, founder of Paychex, Inc., invests in a variety of causes and initiatives, including millions of dollars donated to Special Olympics, to create a more dignified, just and inclusive world for people with intellectual disabilities.



"Opening Eyes" and Changing Lives



Healthy Athletes is comprised of a variety of disciplines that provide free medical screenings to our athletes. Disciplines like Opening Eyes are made possible thanks to the tireless support of the Lions Club International Foundation (LCIF), a powerful ally in our Inclusive Health efforts.

With the support of the Federation of Optometrists of Ecuador and Lions Club International, the "Opening Eyes" program was carried out in two schools in Quito, providing free ophthalmological care to children and young people at the Dr. Rodrigo Crespo Toral Specialized Educational Units in the Solanda and Rodríguez Hidalgo areas north of the capital.

Eye exams, donations of glasses and visual aids were provided to more than 300 children and young people.

Another victory for Inclusive Health

Special Olympics Paraguay successfully held the 2024 edition of its **Health Fair**, where **more than 200 athletes** from Asunción received free medical checkups under the Special Olympics **Healthy Athletes Program**. **More than 160 healthcare professionals and students** participated as volunteers, providing healthcare in diverse areas such as dentistry, optometry, nutrition, and much more. The 2024 Health Fair was made possible thanks to the support of the Lions Club, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the Vision Foundation, and the Clinical Directors of Special Olympics Paraguay.



Strengthening relationships with allies



One of the keys to Special Olympics' success lies in its **powerful partnerships** with various organizations that seek to create a more inclusive world for all. In Peru, meetings have been held with **Lions Club teams** to generate powerful actions and strengthen the inter-institutional partnership between the two organizations.



Education, Youth and Families



Special Olympics seeks to create a truly inclusive world, where people are valued, respected, and included regardless of their differences; a world where diversity is celebrated as a strength of humanity.

To create these lasting changes in attitudes globally, we must begin with youth and family support, pillars of the future of our Movement. As part of the strategy to ensure Special Olympics reaches as many young people as possible, across all demographics, models of inclusive education and youth participation have been developed, including Unified

Schools, Inclusive Youth Leadership, and Whole School Engagement.

To strengthen and encourage family participation, initiatives have been created to bolster the support network for families with members with intellectual disabilities, supporting family members and caregivers at every stage of the life and development of the person with intellectual disabilities. These initiatives include Young Athletes, Family Forums, and other resources that prepare, empower, and educate family members, transforming them into important members of the Movement.

Unified Schools, a growing legacy of inclusion



Our flagship program of engaging youth, educators, and the entire school community in creating more inclusive learning environments for young people of all ability levels begins with the adoption and implementation of Special Olympics Unified Sports, but extends far beyond the playing field.

In 2024, Unified Schools was selected by the **Zero Project**, a global initiative supporting the implementation of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Out of more than 500 projects and programs nominated worldwide, Special Olympics Unified Schools was one of 77 recipients of the Zero Project 2024 award for its positive impact on inclusive education.

Latin America, leaders in experience and expansion of Unified Schools

Open Schools – Creating a more inclusive society through partnerships with government



Special Olympics Paraguay, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, developed the Open Schools project, which involved more than 350 educational institutions and 50,000 students with and without intellectual disabilities throughout the country. Schools and educational centers were used as venues for extracurricular sports and cultural activities for children and youth in the surrounding communities during vacation periods. Special Olympics Paraguay's participation in the training of facilitators has been crucial to its success and the creation of truly inclusive environments for children and youth of all ability levels.

Latin America participates in the Global Center Summit



The **Summit of the Special Olympics Global Centre in Abu Dhabi**, held on November 19-20, brought together **more than 300 inclusion leaders** for a knowledge and practice-sharing session focused on promoting social inclusion through sport, youth leadership, and school engagement.

Representatives from **Special Olympics Latin America** were present, participating as speakers, sharing the region's successes in these areas with their international counterparts. **Special Olympics Argentina, Special Olympics Brazil, Special Olympics Paraguay, and Special Olympics Dominican Republic** participated in the working sessions as part of His Highness Mohamed Bin Zayed's project, which supports inclusion in education for young people with and without intellectual disabilities.

Argentina hosts the Excellence in Action workshop: Expanding Unified Champion Schools in Latin America



Special Olympics Argentina had the honor of hosting Special Olympics delegations from six countries in the region (Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, and Venezuela) for an important event related to the expansion of the **Unified Champion Schools Program** in Latin America. Unified

Champion Schools (UCS) represents the next level of the Special Olympics Unified Schools Program, with greater commitment and participation from schools, educational centers, and the entire community in creating truly inclusive school environments for people with intellectual disabilities. Special Olympics Argentina shared its experiences, best practices, and knowledge so that more countries and schools can join this successful inclusion model.

Brazil celebrates its Inclusive Rio Games



Special Olympics Brazil celebrated its successful **2024 Carioca Inclusive Games** in collaboration with the Comprehensive Education Coordination of the Rio de Janeiro Department of Education. **More than 26,500 students** from **134 municipal schools** participated in workshops and Unified Sports activities, promoting interaction between students with and without intellectual disabilities, thus strengthening values such as respect, unity, and empathy in the largest education network in Latin America. The achievements of the 28 Unified Champion Schools were also highlighted, showcasing the potential of sport as a powerful tool for social transformation.

Breaking down barriers and distances; celebrating what unites us as human beings



Special Olympics Mexico, Special Olympics Panama, and Special Olympics Peru participated in the **Special Olympics North America Unified Youth Exchange**, where young people with and without intellectual disabilities from different North American programs visited, met, and shared time with their Latin American counterparts. Through sports and cultural activities, participants not only strengthened their leadership skills; they also built bridges of inclusion that will endure in their communities, and bonds of friendship that transcend the barriers of distance and language.

Special Olympics is proud to support athletes with intellectual disabilities at every stage of their lives, enabling them to learn about, enjoy, and develop a passion for sports and physical activity. Through programs like **Young Athletes**, designed for children with and without intellectual disabilities ages 2 to 7 and easy to implement for families, caregivers, and schools, we sow the seeds of inclusion and physical activity for future generations.



El Salvador expands Young Athletes to more areas of the country

Special Olympics El Salvador expanded the reach of the Special Olympics **Young Athletes** program with the **Young Athletes Festival**, a celebration of inclusion attended by **more than 300 athletes** from the western, eastern, and central regions of El Salvador. The festival included a Christmas celebration and a special Unified Schools commemorative event.

More sports, more fun, and more inclusion at Unified Champion Schools



Innovation and dynamism dominated the Regional Sports and Recreation Event of the **Unified Champion Schools** (UCS) program, with clinics and competitions in pickleball and flag football. In addition to these disciplines, the event also featured rhythmic exercises, tennis, and activities from the **Young Athletes** program, which impacts children up to eight years old in a pre-sports development stage.

"It is important to convey the message of inclusion from an early age and extend it to higher levels of education, and what better way to do so than in the classroom, where students with and without intellectual disabilities come together in the same space using the wonderful tools of sports and socialization".

Sonia Vallés Franqui
Administrator of the Unified Champion Schools program at Special Olympics Puerto Rico



Families

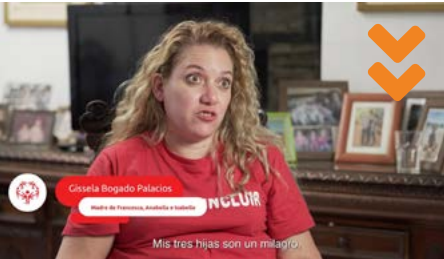
Families are the first pillar of support for an athlete with an intellectual disability, and of course, their biggest fans in the stands! Special Olympics provides a support network so families can share, learn, and support each other in a positive way.

Strengthening families, an essential pillar in the lives of athletes



The **Regional Conference for Families "Empowering Families to Be Advocates for Inclusion"** brought together family coordinators from **more than 15 programs in Latin America** for exchange and learning sessions benefiting families of the Movement, a fundamental pillar for the development of athletes with intellectual disabilities. The conference focused on providing the necessary tools to families of athletes to increase their participation and involvement in leadership roles.

Special Olympics offers a variety of resources and tools to support families



Behind every face, there's a story begging to be told. **Faces of Inclusion** is a video series that offers a glimpse into the real lives and experiences of members of the Movement: athletes, families, coaches, allies, and volunteers. In 2024, Faces of Inclusion focused on the importance of fathers, mothers, and other family members in the development and well-being of our athletes, through the story of **Gissela and her three daughters**, athletes from **Special Olympics Paraguay**.

The synergy between Youth Leadership and family support strengthens the framework of our support network



Special Olympics Youth Innovation Grants are funds distributed to Youth Leaders who spearhead inclusion projects in their schools and communities. Many Youth Leaders without intellectual disabilities are Unified Partners or family members of athletes with intellectual disabilities, and they understand the importance of family involvement in the life and development of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

In Argentina, Sofia Duarte and Bianca Orihuela, Youth Leaders from the city of Rosario, held the **"Reinforcing Ties"** event, aimed at brothers, sisters, and other family members of people with intellectual disabilities. The event featured distinguished guests, experts in various areas related to the quality of life of families with members with intellectual disabilities.

National Meeting of Families, Health and Family Forum, and National Invitational Meeting of Inclusive Leadership in San Rafael, Argentina



More than 80 people, including Youth Leaders with and without disabilities and family members, received training on topics of interest that promote leadership skills and maximize their opportunities for participation within the movement.

Women's rights, with and without intellectual disabilities, and violence prevention



Athlete Leaders from Special Olympics El Salvador led a workshop on women's rights and violence prevention, an activity that brought together 71 women and girls, both with and without intellectual disabilities. The workshop was held in conjunction with the **"We Decide"** project, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Special Olympics Unified Schools Program.

Like any other member of their community, our athletes also take an active interest in their surroundings and the communities they inhabit. Members of our Movement are also keenly aware that creating a more inclusive world requires the support and effort of everyone, and they do not hesitate to lend a helping hand to their communities when needed.

Special Olympics Chile held a charity campaign to support victims of the forest fire in the Fifth Region. The initiative was successful, and the donations were delivered to Los Fresnos School in Viña del Mar. From there, they were distributed to eight special and individual schools in the region.

"We are proud to say that the donations received are now being delivered to each family. We thank Special Olympics for their campaign and for providing support. Strength to all the families because together, we will all make it through," said Elena García, principal of Los Fresnos School.

Leadership



Special Olympics is creating a new paradigm for leadership, inspired by our athletes, highlighting the leadership potential of people of all abilities. Rooted in sports, Inclusive Leadership is a way to challenge existing prejudices and expectations about what a person with an intellectual disability can achieve. We provide the tools and opportunities for our athletes to be leaders, both on and off the playing field, teaching them how to succeed in meaningful roles.

In parallel to our Athlete Leadership program, we also empower the next generation of leaders through our Youth Leadership program, which focuses on pairs of young people with and

without disabilities. These Youth Leaders work together, developing practical and sustainable solutions that foster inclusion in their schools, universities, and communities, creating agents of change committed to improving their environments and creating a truly inclusive society.

Finally, we have our Unified Leadership program, which seeks to raise awareness and prepare industry and community leaders, showing them firsthand the potential of people with intellectual disabilities and the benefits of adopting and promoting more inclusive work environments.

Athlete Leadership – To create a more inclusive organization and a more dignified and just world for people with intellectual disabilities, the support and contributions of Special Olympics athletes beyond the playing field are crucial.

The **Regional Athlete Leadership Council (RALC)** is a platform that provides insight into the opinions and perspectives of our athletes in their advisory roles within their national programs and the Latin American region.

In 2024, elections were held for three positions within the Regional Athlete Leadership Council. Those elected, by popular vote among their peers, were Cristhian Sornoza (Special Olympics Ecuador), Hengel García (Special Olympics Nicaragua), and Gonzalo Escobar (Special Olympics Chile), the new RALC President. They join four other RALC members: Ruth Álvarez (Special Olympics Panama), Daniel Guerra (Special Olympics Guatemala and Vice President of the Global Athlete Leadership Council), and Melissa de León (Special Olympics Guatemala) and Pablo Composto (Special Olympics Argentina), Sargent Shriver Global Messengers.

Emanuelle Dutra appointed to the SOI board of directors

Emanuelle “Manu” Dutra, Special Olympics Brazil Athlete Leader, former Global Messenger, and former member of the Regional Athlete Leadership Council, has always been an inspiring role model for thousands of people, both with and without intellectual disabilities. For these reasons, Special Olympics Brazil is proud to announce that Emanuelle has been appointed to the **Special Olympics International Board of Directors**.

“I am thrilled with this opportunity to have a stronger voice within the Movement, represent athletes from around the world, and make decisions in conjunction with global leaders so that our programs and services reach more people and have a greater impact on society,” Emanuelle said of this important achievement.

Athlete Leaders participate in leadership workshop at Summit Park

Special Olympics Panama’s Athlete Leaders participated in the leadership workshop held at Summit Municipal Park, accompanied by student volunteers from the Cultural Institute, to gain knowledge about the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.



Youth Leaders paving the way for a more inclusive future

Special Olympics Nicaragua marks another resounding success with the celebration of its first **Youth Leadership Summit**, held in the city of Bluefields. The event brought together **Youth Leaders with and without intellectual disabilities** from the Movement for training and leadership skills development sessions, fostering the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in the community and preparing the next generation that will lead us toward more just and inclusive societies. The event was attended and supported by **Gustavo Castro, Mayor of Bluefields**, who reaffirmed his unwavering support for true inclusion.



Unified Leadership

In 2024, we had the opportunity to share the potential of Unified Leadership with powerful allies: Hays, a leading global consulting and recruiting firm, and CONMEBOL, the South American Football Confederation. We visited the headquarters of both organizations in Latin America, and through interactions, testimonies, and activities with Athlete Leaders, members of those organizations learned firsthand the importance of the inclusion mission of Special Olympics and the role they can play in creating a more dignified and just world for people with intellectual disabilities.



Regional leaders chart the future of the Movement

The **2024 Regional Leadership Conference – “Advancing the Latin American Legacy: Leading for Transformative Inclusion”** brought together **leaders from the 20 Latin American Programs** for strategy sessions and analysis of the future of the Movement, preparing Special Olympics for the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.



“My mission is to seek out and gather ideas from each athlete here, to find out what they want, how we can collaborate, and how we can work together with them”.

Gonzalo Escobar
Athlete Leader and
President of the RAL

Political Advocacy and Advocacy



For nearly 60 years, Special Olympics has fought against discrimination against people with intellectual disabilities by promoting social integration and inclusion through sports and health, education, and leadership programs.

With the support and involvement of governments, international organizations, and development banks, Special Olympics advances the agenda of inclusion for people with disabilities.

The goal of the Department of Government Relations and Global Development is to develop and strengthen governmental and multilateral partnerships to integrate the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities into public policies and social programs, ensuring that they have equal opportunities to develop and actively contribute to their communities.

UNICEF promotes the full and effective inclusion of children and adolescents with disabilities



On October 5, 2024, Special Olympics, together with the CAF - Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean, and UNESCO, organized the **International Forum on Sport for Development**, within the framework of the **IV Special Olympics Latin American Games Asunción 2024**.

First Ladies, Ministers of Sports, Education, and Health from the Region, and global leaders (UNICEF, UN Women, PAHO, IDB, CAF, UNESCO, and Special Olympics) addressed topics such as access to inclusive education, access to health services, the autonomy of people with disabilities, and the pressing need for data on this population.

The Asunción Call to Action plan was adopted, emphasizing a collaborative and multisectoral approach through government institutions and international organizations to improve the lives of people with intellectual disabilities in the region, aligning with global frameworks and regional initiatives.

Special Olympics participates in the 36th ODESUR General Assembly



“By holding these Games, we’re not only going to celebrate the sporting spirit of our athletes. We’re also going to celebrate the transformative power of sport in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities, their families, and their communities. Because we all know that sport has the power to educate, transform, and raise awareness; it definitely has intrinsic value in personal development, social inclusion, and, above all, in developing truly meaningful relationships between people.”

Claudia Echeverry
President and Regional Director
of Special Olympics Latin America



It has been our deepest honor to participate in the **South American Sports Forum Rio 2024** and the **XXXVI General Assembly of ODESUR**, presenting to the distinguished presidents of the Olympic Committees what will be the largest sporting celebration of inclusion in Latin America, the IV Special Olympics Latin American Games Asunción 2024, together with the Deputy Director of ASU 2024, Larissa Schaerer.



Paraguay joins the Global Coalition for Inclusion

The **Global Leadership Coalition for Inclusion** is a pioneering effort calling on governments around the world to expand support for Unified Sports and Special Olympics inclusive education programs. This project has an international reach and strengthens educational environments for the benefit of all students, regardless of their background or ability level. Its goal is to reach 2 million young people in 150,000 schools and communities worldwide.

Paraguay was the **first South American country** to join the Global Coalition for Inclusion, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between Special Olympics Latin America, the Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, and Special Olympics Paraguay. This Coalition is made possible through a generous contribution from the **Stavros Niarchos Foundation** and includes national governments from diverse regions, including Angola, China, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ghana, Gibraltar, Iceland, Kenya, Kosovo, Jamaica, Malta, Mongolia, Montenegro, Panama, the Seychelles, and South Africa.



Claudia Echeverry, president and regional director of Special Olympics Latin America; Luis Fernando Ramírez, Minister of Education and Science of Paraguay; Luis Cáceres Brun, president of Special Olympics Paraguay.

The Universidad Mayor de San Simón (UMSS) and Special Olympics Bolivia sign an alliance for a more inclusive world



A letter of intent was signed to develop joint activities between the **UMSS Physiotherapy and Kinesiology Program** and the **Special Olympics Bolivia Motor Activities Training Program (MATP)**. This is an important milestone that will allow, among its first actions, the implementation of the MATP pilot program in the city of Cochabamba, which will later be replicated nationwide. Authorities and distinguished professors from the program participated, highlighting the importance of creating spaces for true inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities and affirming their commitment to this cause.

Special Olympics Panama visits UNICEF headquarters

Special Olympics athletes shared experiences and opinions with young people from the Meta Juvenil network of the Inter-American Institute on Disability and Inclusive Development and the ONCE Social Group to discuss how we can become a more inclusive society. UNICEF Panama hosted this important discussion on awareness, access, and inclusion.



Recognizing the work of allies committed to inclusion



Special Olympics Chile recognized the important work being done by companies and public institutions committed to inclusion with the distinguished **Special Olympics Inclusive Seal**. The award was given to partners who participated in awareness-raising talks about people with intellectual disabilities and promoted inclusive work environments, fostering a truly inclusive, dignified, and just world. The first partners to receive the seal were Unimarc, Liqui Moly, Energy Club, the Municipality of Lo Barnachea, and the companies Iansa, Ideal-Bimbo, Bain & Company, and Hays.

The Ecuadorian Government reiterates its commitment



Special Olympics Ecuador and the **Ecuadorian Ministry of Education** signed a renewed **inter-institutional support agreement** that seeks to improve the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities in the country. Through this agreement, the government affirms its commitment to providing funding for the administration, maintenance, and staffing of the 16 existing Special Olympics schools, as well as support for Special Olympics activities in the country's 21 provinces.

"Thanks to this agreement, we will be able to have a more inclusive country, where people can live with inclusion without having to ask for it."
Cristhian Sornoza
Lead athlete of Special Olympics Ecuador

The Miguel Litton Foundation for Medical-Surgical Cooperation donates sports equipment to Special Olympics El Salvador



Through the **National Sports Institute of El Salvador**, a donation of soccer apparel was received thanks to the **Miguel Litton Foundation for Medical-Surgical Cooperation**. This support is essential for our athletes, who will be able to train and compete with better equipment, especially in Unified soccer activities.

The donation was presented in a ceremony, attended by athletes and representatives from both organizations.

Opening Minds and Hearts



Special Olympics aims to change existing prejudices about the potential of people with intellectual disabilities, and it does so by opening people’s minds and hearts through awareness campaigns and events where people with and without intellectual disabilities can share and interact. There is no more powerful ambassador for our

Movement than our own athletes, and there is no experience as transformative as participating in a Special Olympics activity. In 2024, the voices and rights of our athletes reached new audiences across the region, helping to spread a powerful message of inclusion, dignity, and respect.



Don’t let another 200 years pass!

In a joint effort to raise awareness and vindicate the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, **Special Olympics**, the **CAF development bank of Latin America and the Caribbean**, and the **Government of Paraguay** launched the campaign “Don’t let another 200 years pass!” to raise awareness in society about the importance of inclusion and respect for the human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The campaign, funded by the CAF and launched in conjunction with the IV Special Olympics Latin American Games Asunción 2024, stems from Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities. It points out that, as Latin American countries celebrate 200 years of independence, a crucial question remains: **what about people with intellectual disabilities? When will they achieve their independence and full respect for their rights?**

“The Compass Within You” Making History, the first book about Special Olympics athletes



The book “**The Compass Within You**” by Guatemalan author and Inclusion Ambassador **María Fernanda Jiménez** presents the stories of five athletes who are part of the **Special Olympics Guatemala program** and have achieved feats both on and off the playing field.

The launch of this work was held on June 15th at an event full of emotions that included the presence of **Rafael Ovalle**, **Ericka Fonseca**, **Odette Cobos**, **Melissa de León** and **Daniel Guerra**, whose experiences and some of their successes are described in its pages.

Basketball clinic with the Cleveland Cavaliers in Brazil

Special Olympics Brazil hosted a visit from one of the NBA’s top teams, the **Cleveland Cavaliers**, known for their achievements and efforts on and off the court. The Cavaliers visited Monsignor Bruno Nardini Park in the municipality of Valinhos, where they participated in a fun basketball clinic with young people with and without disabilities, including 50 athletes from Campinas, Vinhedo, and Jundiaí.

“It’s very important, in terms of visibility, to have a globally recognized team as a partner of Special Olympics, and we are very pleased that Brazil has been chosen to receive the support of the Cleveland Cavaliers. It’s a team committed to the cause, especially Tristan Thompson, an exemplary athlete who was recently named an Ambassador of our Movement for being a person sensitive to our cause, with a brother with an intellectual disability,” said Thomas Gorman, president of Special Olympics Brazil.



Running with a Cause - 3rd Inclusive Race 2024

The **third** edition of the **Bantrab Inclusive Race** became a true celebration of inclusion.

The Olympic circuit between zones 4 and 5 of Guatemala City was the stage where the participants gave life to the athletic test in the distances of **5 and 10 kilometers**, whose main purpose was to support the delegation of athletes that would represent the country in the **IV Special Olympics Latin American Games - Asunción 2024**.



Sesame Street invites Special Olympics athletes to the Inclusive Race



Sesame Street celebrates inclusion, respect, diversity, and unity through an inclusive race, to which they also invited athletes from **Special Olympics Mexico**! This race, characterized by being completely inclusive for all participants, regardless of their abilities, was a beautiful experience for all and another example of how society is stronger when it accepts the great diversity found in humanity.

Inclusive Festival 2024 brings together hundreds of people



Special Olympics El Salvador and the **Unified Champion School Instituto Nacional “General Francisco Menéndez” (INFRAMEN)**, held the **2024 Inclusive Festival**, a celebration of inclusion where children, youth, and adults with and without disabilities participated in Unified recreational dance and soccer events. The event, which brought together **more than 300 people**, including more than 100 people with intellectual disabilities and their families, coaches, and volunteers, also had significant support from the Municipal Sports Institute of the Mayor’s Office of San Salvador.

Sports



Every year, Special Olympics hosts thousands of sports competitions around the world, both large and small, from local tournaments to major international events, such as Football Week and the IV Special Olympics Latin American Games Asunción 2024. Each one brings out new strengths and abilities in our athletes, changing existing attitudes about the talents and potential of people with intellectual disabilities, and providing health and well-being to those who participate in these sports.

As the cornerstone of our organization and a powerful tool for social change, sport remains our top priority: providing the highest quality and highest level of sporting opportunities to people with intellectual disabilities in all regions of the world. This work also requires powerful partnerships and the training of thousands of volunteers and movement allies, from coaches to Unified Partners.



Michael Phelps Foundation IM Program certifies Special Olympics coaches



Tournaments, competitions, and sports practices elevate the quality of life of our athletes and their families.

Throughout the year, Special Olympics Latin America offers competitions and training to raise the level and quality of opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities. Partnerships, like the one Special Olympics has with the Michael Phelps Foundation, create direct and significant impact in our communities.

Football Week 2024

MORE THAN	2500 Athletes	400 Trainers	100 Judges and Officials
	2000 Families	500 Volunteers	Because football is all of us!

South America embodied football to celebrate the first Football Week, organized by the South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) and Special Olympics, supported by the local National Football Associations that make up CONMEBOL.

Football Week celebrated inclusion through a series of sports and educational activities, including clinics, Unified competitions, coach training, skill development, and exhibitions, in 10 South American countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela. These activities benefited footballers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and players without disabilities, as well as members of the CONMEBOL Member Associations, promoting the true inclusion of people of all abilities.

“Thanks to our collaboration with CONMEBOL, we are creating more inclusive societies for people with intellectual disabilities in South America, through one of the region’s most iconic sports. Football awakens passions and is part of the Latin American culture; that’s why we are proud that it is also a vehicle for educating and creating a more dignified world for people of all abilities. We can all enjoy and experience football in the same way, breaking down walls and differences, uniting in our shared humanity.”

Claudia Echeverry
President and Regional Director of Special Olympics Latin America

“We are committed to an inclusive sport that contributes to the holistic development of all people. Football is about passion and a desire to excel; it’s about breaking down barriers and limits, propelling people toward a more fulfilling life. We share this vision with Special Olympics and work together toward this goal”

Alejandro Domínguez
President of CONMEBOL



IV Special Olympics Latin American Games Asunción 2024

Latin America Beats to the Rhythm of Inclusion!

The Special Olympics Latin American Games, held in Asunción, Paraguay, from October 4 to 12, 2024, have represented much more than a sporting event. They have been a true engine of social change, promoting the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in all aspects of life.

More than a thousand athletes, from 19 Latin American countries and four guest countries, competed in 14 sports disciplines and one exhibition sport, demonstrating to the world the strength of their determination and the true sportsmanship within each of our athletes.

All roads lead to Asunción



From the moment it was announced that Asunción would host the largest inclusive sporting event in the Americas, Special Olympics and its partners worked tirelessly to ensure these Latin American Games would be an unforgettable, high-quality experience for all participating athletes, families, coaches, partners, and volunteers.

The close and strong collaboration with the Paraguayan government has been a crucial part of the success of the IV Special Olympics Latin American Games, particularly the support of the Office of the First Lady, the National Secretariat of Sports, and the Paraguayan Olympic Committee. By working together with Special Olympics Paraguay and Special Olympics Latin America, it was possible to create an inclusive event that is a benchmark for the entire region; a powerful reminder of the potential of a truly inclusive society.

Asunción, a meeting point for inclusion in action



Tami, the official mascot of the IV Latin American Special Olympics Games Asunción 2024, welcomes our delegations with love and emotion.

The Special Olympics Latin American Games go beyond sports competitions; they are a celebration of the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in all spheres, and a reminder of the importance of advocating for and respecting the rights of all members of society. For this reason, parallel events were also held, such as the Regional Athlete Congress, the Regional Youth Leadership Summit, the Family Forum, the Healthy Athletes Health Fair, and the International Forum on Sport for Development.

Regional Athlete Congress: The Voices of the Movement



Athlete Leaders from across Latin America gathered, along with their mentors, to share, learn, and discuss important topics concerning the inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in society. Together, they developed ideas on how to implement these changes in perception and attitude, trained in advocacy and advocacy, and held elections for new members of the Regional Athlete Leadership Council (RALC) in 2024.

Cristhian Sornoza (Special Olympics Ecuador), Hengel García (Special Olympics Nicaragua), and Gonzalo Escobar (Special Olympics Chile) were elected, with Gonzalo being appointed as the new president of the RALC.



Regional Youth Leadership Summit: Commitment to a More Inclusive Tomorrow



Youth Leaders with and without intellectual disabilities from Latin America gathered in Asunción to train as leaders and managers of inclusive projects, developed and implemented by themselves, in their schools, universities, and communities.

Family Forum: Working together for family well-being



The **2024 Regional Family Forum** brought together family members and caregivers of athletes, providing a space for learning, capacity building, and the exchange of ideas and best practices, all with the common theme of achieving family well-being. More than 200 people participated in the experience, which included talks by invited experts.

International Forum on Sport for Development: Call to Action in Asunción



The Forum, supported by the Government of the Republic of Paraguay, Special Olympics Latin America, UNESCO, and CAF, and sponsored by Lion's Club International, was inaugurated by the Paraguayan President, Santiago Peña. Its objective was to address the persistent barriers faced by people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Latin America.

The Forum made the following calls:

- ▶ Empowering people with intellectual disabilities through sport
- ▶ Construction of accessible infrastructure
- ▶ Strengthening inclusive education
- ▶ Access to quality healthcare
- ▶ Data, research, and impact investing
- ▶ Progress in representation and visibility

The Forum was sponsored by UNESCO and CAF (Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean). High-level officials and executives participated, including Timothy Shriver Kennedy, President of the Board of Directors of Special Olympics International; Ana María Baiardi, Gender, Inclusion and Diversity Manager, CAF; Jaime Pizarro, Minister of Sports of Chile; Ray Quiñones, Secretary of Sports, Puerto Rico; Fabricio Oliveira, President of Lions Club International; Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of the UN; and Luis Fernando Ramírez, Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Paraguay, to name a few.

Healthy Athletes: Changing Lives Through Physical and Emotional Well-being



Healthy Athletes, our flagship Inclusive Health program, provided free medical checkups in various disciplines to all athletes in participating delegations. This was made possible thanks to the invaluable support of health partners such as the **Golisano Foundation, the Pan American Health Organization, the Lions Club International Foundation, Starkey, Safilo, OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation, the Visión Foundation, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare of Paraguay, and its National Public Health Program.**



Games

More than 1,000 athletes from 19 countries in the region and four invited athletes (Germany, Belgium, Bonaire, and Spain) competed in 14 sports disciplines, proudly representing their countries and communities.

The IV Special Olympics Latin American Games have achieved several milestones. Compared to previous Latin American Games, Asunción 2024 had:

- ➔ **Greater number and variety of competitive sports:**
14 sports disciplines and 1 exhibition sport
- ➔ **Greater participation of Athletes and Unified Partners**
- ➔ **Greater female participation**
(51% of total participation)
- ➔ **Greater participation of Athlete Leaders in sports roles**
- ➔ **For the first time, the implementation of MATP** (Motor Activities Training Program) in Regional Games
- ➔ **Sports offered for the first time at the Regional Games:** Badminton, Hockey, Artistic Gymnastics and Beach Volleyball

Closing Ceremony and Homecoming

Asunción bid farewell to all the courageous athletes who traveled from all corners of Latin America with a beautiful closing ceremony, a celebration of inclusion, and a powerful reminder of their triumphs.

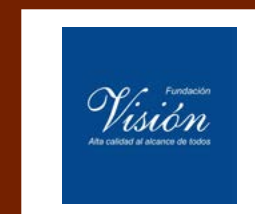
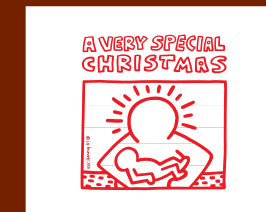
Upon arriving home, our athletes were greeted like heroes, with great emotion, happiness, and pride.

This is the power of inclusion.

This is Special Olympics.



Partners





TikTok
@OlimpiadasEspeciales

Instagram
@OlimpiadasEspeciales

Facebook.com
/OlimpiadasEspeciales

LinkedIn
**Special Olympics Latin
America**