



Asuncion Call to Action

According to World Bank estimates (2011), approximately 15% of the world's population, that is, around 1 billion people, live with some type of disability.¹ In Latin America and the Caribbean, an estimated 85 million people have disabilities. This diverse population experiences a wide range of realities, yet all face daily barriers, social exclusion, and rights violations to varying degrees.

Monitoring the situation of people with disabilities in the region presents significant challenges due to inconsistent use of disability indicators in official statistics.² The *Social Panorama of Latin America*, produced by ECLAC's Social Development and Statistics Divisions, reveals that, among individuals with disabilities, visual and mobility limitations are most prevalent, followed by hearing, speech, mental, and dexterity impairments, based on 2012 census data from 18 countries.

Nearly a decade later, the World Bank (2021) still highlighted the complexities of collecting disability data, particularly regarding populations with intellectual disabilities. This statistical invisibility exacerbates the vulnerability of individuals with intellectual disabilities, who are frequently excluded from public policies, social programs, and essential services. The absence of comprehensive data not only renders them invisible but also restricts access to critical rights such as education, healthcare, employment, legal capacity, independent living, and social participation.

Without adequate recognition of their specific needs, people with intellectual disabilities remain trapped in a cycle of exclusion, facing persistent stigmas and barriers. This limits their potential for personal development, autonomy, and full participation in society.

Despite these challenges, countries across the region have demonstrated commitment by ratifying international instruments such as the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (OAS) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). These frameworks have spurred important regulatory reforms.

¹ <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/region/lac/publication/rompiendo-barreras>

² Disability data in the region still have numerous limitations. In many countries, quantitative data are relatively recent and have other restrictions in terms of time span, comparability, and coverage of certain subgroups (especially people with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities). World Bank. 2021. Inclusion of persons with disabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean: A path to sustainable development. Executive Summary. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Regional collaboration is essential to identifying and addressing the needs of people with intellectual disabilities effectively.³ While cultural, social, and economic diversity demands context-specific solutions, common challenges require a coordinated, regional approach.

⁴ In this context, sport emerges as a powerful tool for inclusion, fostering social cohesion and empowering persons with intellectual disabilities.

To achieve true inclusivity in sports, it is crucial to ensure accessible infrastructure and tailored programs that accommodate diverse abilities. Additionally, training for coaches and professionals in inclusive practices is vital to ensure broad participation.⁵

Governments must implement public policies and allocate resources to guarantee access to these opportunities. With these actions, sport in Latin America and the Caribbean can become a key driver of social inclusion, promoting societies that respect and uphold the rights of people with disabilities.⁶

The IV Special Olympics Latin American Games are more than a sporting event; they are a powerful symbol of inclusion, diversity, and unity. They represent a platform to coordinate efforts and raise awareness across Latin America and the Caribbean, reinforcing the role of sport as a tool to advance social inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities.

This event not only showcases the talent and abilities of athletes with intellectual disabilities, but also creates a platform where stigmas are dismantled, and equality is actively promoted.

³ According to the WHO World Report on Disability, collaboration between governments is crucial to ensure accessibility to health services, inclusive education and employment for PWD (World Health Organization, 2011).

⁴ Physical activity and sport not only improve the physical and mental health of people with disabilities, but also foster social cohesion and empowerment (UNESCO, 2016). Sport benefits people with intellectual disabilities by increasing their independence, confidence and self-esteem (UNESCO, 2016). In addition, it transforms their families' and society's perception of their abilities, and not only in the sporting arena. It also promotes the development of social skills by providing opportunities for interaction in a structured and supportive environment, thus improving collaboration, communication and problem solving, which facilitates their integration in various areas of life.

⁵ Sherrill, C. (2004). *Adapted Physical Activity, Recreation, and Sport: Cross disciplinary and Lifespan*.

⁶ The return on investment in sports is fundamental for economic and social development in Latin America and the Caribbean, according to CAF and the IDB. These organizations emphasize that sport not only improves physical and mental health, but also fosters social and human capital, promoting productivity and inclusion. The IDB points out that spending on sports in the region is low, representing only 0.1% of GDP, and emphasizes the need to increase investment to maximize benefits such as violence reduction and healthy living. In addition, data from Brazil indicate that physically active people can earn up to 31% more than those who are not. CAF has also promoted sports programs that favor the inclusion of persons with disabilities, using sports as a means to improve equity in the region.



Furthermore, the Games emphasize the transformative role of sport as a powerful tool for empowering persons with intellectual disabilities and their families. Through the actions and initiatives embedded within its calendar, the Games serve as a catalyst for addressing broader human rights and fundamental freedoms associated with individuals with intellectual disabilities.

As stakeholders committed to promoting inclusive societies through sport, Special Olympics Latin America, UNESCO, and the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean-CAF recognize the transformative power of sport to foster social inclusion, health, education, and the recognition of the autonomy and independence of people with disabilities, especially people with intellectual disabilities. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where disparities and significant barriers for people with disabilities persist, *The International Forum on Sports for Development*, held on 5 October 2024 as part of the IV Latin American Special Olympics Games with the support of the Government of the Republic of Paraguay represents a critical opportunity to drive meaningful change.

This event takes place at a time of growing momentum in the region to push forward the inclusion agenda for people with intellectual disabilities. The commitment of the Government of Paraguay and the roadmap to the first Special Olympics World Games in the region in 2027, supported by the Government of Chile, highlight the significance of this effort. By spearheading these international inclusive sports events and building long-lasting legacies, both governments issue a powerful call to other nations in the region to join this collective movement. Their leadership highlights the transformative power of sport in improving the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and fostering more inclusive and equitable societies.

This call to action aims to mobilize Latin American and Caribbean governments and local authorities, non-governmental organizations, private sector leaders, educators, social leaders with and without disabilities and sports organizations to unite efforts around promoting the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities by fostering collaborative actions and strategic investment. The Forum provided a critical opportunity to address these inequalities through actions that promote effective and sustainable inclusion.

This collective effort aligns with global frameworks, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aim is clear: to advance the rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

This Call to Action fully endorses the [*Paris 2024 Call to Action*](#), issued on the occasion of the Partners' and Ministerial Fora co-organized by UNESCO and the International Paralympic Committee on 27 and 28 August 2024, with the participation of Special Olympics and CAF. As such, the present document complements the *Paris 2024 Call to Action* with measures addressing the needs and opportunities to foster specifically the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in and through sport, physical education and physical activity in the region of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Accordingly, the member countries of Special Olympics Latin America and the Caribbean, the participants in The International Forum on Sports for Development, Special Olympics athlete leaders and their families appeal to all Latin American and Caribbean governments and local authorities, international and national sports federations and other interested parties to:

Advance inclusive public policies that ensure the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in sports, facilitating their social integration and safeguarding the full realization of their rights.

- I. **Enact legislation** that upholds the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities in sports, aligning national frameworks with international treaties and standards.
- II. **Increase policy development and implementation** aimed at advancing the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in sports, ensuring measurable outcomes and accountability.
- III. **Foster inter-ministerial collaboration** to implement inclusive sports programs, addressing the intersectionality of disability, education, and health for a holistic approach to inclusion.

Enhance access and facilitate participation: Ensure that people with intellectual disabilities have equal opportunities to engage in sports, from grassroots to elite levels, by systematically removing barriers across physical education, community sports, and competitive arenas.

- I. **Mobilize public and private sectors** across Latin America and the Caribbean to invest in accessible infrastructure, coach development, and inclusive sport programs, fostering participation from grassroots to high-performance levels.
- II. **Assess and prioritize investments** in accessible sports infrastructure and adapted programs that drive the inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities, ensuring long-term impact and sustainability.
- III. **Forge strategic partnerships** between public and private sectors to enhance investment in inclusive sports, guaranteeing sustained development and scalability.
- IV. **Leverage major sporting events** to drive urban and cultural transformation, ensuring lasting legacy and inclusive growth for cities
- V. **Equip coaches and sports professionals** with inclusive training to create supportive, respectful environments that enhance participation and engagement.
- VI. **Focus on community-based sports initiatives** to create permanent, inclusive spaces for socialization, training, and empowerment of persons with intellectual disabilities.

Guarantee equal access to health and sport as interdependent rights, recognizing both as critical pillars for the social inclusion and holistic well-being of people with intellectual disabilities.

- I. **Formulate integrated policies** that link access to health services and sports activities, ensuring both sectors reinforce one another for better outcomes.
- II. **Design sports programs** that include comprehensive health evaluations for persons with intellectual disabilities, ensuring their physical and mental well-being is continuously monitored.
- III. **Promote health and sports education** within communities and schools, fostering an active lifestyle from an early age to support long-term well-being.
- IV. **Accelerate health equity efforts:** Prioritize initiatives that close the gap in access to health care for persons with intellectual disabilities.
- V. **Guarantee access to quality health services**, including specialized and adapted medical care and preventative health programs for persons with intellectual disabilities.
- VI. **Advance inclusive health policies and services** that ensure equitable access to both health care and education resources for this population.
- VII. **Identify opportunities for health system strengthening:** Conduct assessments to pinpoint gaps and craft more inclusive, effective health policies.
- VIII. **Implement evidence-based reforms:** Leverage data and research to enhance the accessibility and quality of health services for persons with intellectual disabilities.
- IX. **Integrate training on inclusion competencies** into ongoing education for health professionals, equipping them with the skills needed to deliver inclusive care.

Strengthen Inclusive Sports and Educational Programs

- I. **UNESCO, CAF, and Special Olympics** reaffirm their commitment to close collaboration in strengthening inclusive sports and educational programs across the region, fully aligned with international frameworks. This cooperation will support the efforts of the **Special Olympics Global Leadership Coalition for Inclusion; CAF's League for Inclusive Education;** and **UNESCO's Fit for Life sport initiative**, empowering young persons with intellectual disabilities through sport, advocacy, education, and holistic development.
- II. **Broaden the scope of inclusive education** by leveraging sport as a key tool to foster inclusion for youth with intellectual disabilities, ensuring equitable access to quality education.
- III. **Promote inclusive youth leadership opportunities**, positioning young persons with and without intellectual disabilities as active agents of change and key contributors to the inclusion agenda.
- IV. **Strengthen collaboration in teacher training** programs by integrating robust inclusion-focused methodologies, ensuring educators are well-equipped to foster inclusive learning environments.

- V. **Innovate through digital tools**, integrating technology into inclusive sports and education programs to enhance accessibility and learning outcomes for all.
- VI. **Engage national governments and local authorities** to secure increased funding and political commitment for national inclusive policies that protect, empower, and support young persons with intellectual disabilities through education and sport.
- VII. **Collaborate on developing specialized training curricula** for public officials, enhancing their understanding of the rights, realities, and specific needs of persons with intellectual disabilities to ensure better policy implementation and advocacy.

Promote Collaborative Engagement for Sustainable Inclusive Policies

- I. **Foster inclusive dialogue platforms** where individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families can actively participate in shaping sports policies, ensuring their voices are integral to decision-making processes.
- II. **Encourage strategic alliances among government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector** to develop and finance inclusive sports initiatives that effectively address the diverse needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- III. **Empower families to take an active role** in these collaborations, recognizing their essential contribution to the support and advocacy of individuals with intellectual disabilities, thus enhancing the sustainability and impact of inclusive programs.
- IV. **Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework** to enable stakeholders to regularly assess the effectiveness of inclusive sports policies and programs, ensuring that the perspectives and needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities are considered.

Promote Autonomy and Independence for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

- I. **Implement comprehensive training programs** focused on Articles 12 and 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, aimed at empowering individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families to understand and advocate for their rights to autonomy and independent living.
- II. **Establish support networks** that enhance the decision-making capabilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities, fostering empowerment and enabling them to exercise their rights fully.
- III. **Integrate human rights education into sports and educational programs**, prioritizing self-determination and equipping persons with intellectual disabilities with the knowledge to advocate for their autonomy.

Promote the Strategic Use of Data, Research, and Impact Investing

- I. **Enhance and diversify data collection mechanisms** to capture comprehensive information on intellectual disabilities, utilizing this data to guide policy decisions and assess progress in the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities. This effort should include the integration of Ibero-American indicators developed by UNESCO and CAF, offering a nuanced regional perspective on inclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- II. **Evaluate and report on the outcomes of the *Trampolín* Project**, which aims to enhance access to community-based sports for individuals with disabilities, leveraging research and relevant data collection to inform best practices.
- III. **Establish a unified framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact** of collaborative initiatives, ensuring accountability and continuous improvement in strategies aimed at fostering inclusion for persons with intellectual disabilities.
- IV. **Define clear, measurable indicators** to evaluate the impact of initiatives on the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities, facilitating accountability and transparency in policy implementation.

Advancing Strategic Representation and Visibility

- I. **Foster inclusive media narratives** that elevate and authentically represent athletes with intellectual disabilities, positioning them as key contributors to sports and society.
- II. **Champion inclusive leadership in policy-making**, ensuring that individuals with intellectual disabilities have a direct voice and active participation in decision-making processes at all levels.
- III. **Launch coordinated awareness campaigns** to promote the rights, achievements, and potential of persons with intellectual disabilities, leveraging partnerships across sectors for maximum impact.

The *IV Special Olympics Latin American Games* and *The International Forum on Sports for Development* represent a pivotal opportunity for Latin American and Caribbean countries and key stakeholders across sectors to collaborate in fostering an inclusive society where every individual, with and without disabilities, can fully participate in sport, physical education, and physical activity.

The Asuncion Call to Action will help advance progress in the key areas identified in [*The Paris 2024 Call to Action*](#) with a focused commitment to drive transformative change for persons with intellectual disabilities in Latin America and the Caribbean, ensuring their inclusion and empowerment in all spheres.