



TO THE MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS OF FIFA

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Publication of the FIFA Disability Football Toolkit

Dear Sir or Madam,

FIFA is pleased to announce the publication of a new educational resource: the FIFA Disability Football Toolkit.

As part of its commitment to inclusion, FIFA is proud to present this new tool, which is aligned with the organisation's mission as the global governing body of football to ensure the game is accessible to all, including disabled people and people with limited mobility.

The objectives of the FIFA Disability Football Toolkit are to:

- provide an understanding of the basic principles of disability football and the various disciplines that can be implemented by Member Associations and other stakeholders;
- support increased participation in disability football globally; and
- share knowledge, celebrate best practices and accelerate collective action in disability football initiatives.

The toolkit also includes examples from several Member Associations and international disability football organisations, showcasing their impactful work and innovative approaches in promoting disability football. These reference points aim to highlight successes, share challenges and inspire collaborative action across our global football family. Several practical tools are also available to download and personalise according to each Member Association's specific context.

We encourage you to share this resource to foster an increasingly inclusive football community.

The [FIFA Disability Football Toolkit](#) is currently available in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

If you have any questions regarding the FIFA Disability Football Toolkit, please contact Laure Gruffat, FIFA Disability Football & Accessibility Manager, at laure.gruffat@fifa.org.

Yours faithfully,

FÉDÉRATION INTERNATIONALE
DE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION



Mattias Grafström
Secretary General

Encl.: FIFA Disability Football Toolkit

cc: - FIFA Council
- Confederations

FIFA[®]



Disability Football Toolkit

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
Why was this toolkit developed?	6
How was the toolkit developed?	8
Objectives of the toolkit	8
Who is this toolkit for?	9
How can this resource be used to best effect?	10
What this toolkit does not do	11

1.

UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY	12
Terminology	13
Person-centred approach	17
The social model of disability	17
Beneficiaries of good access	20

2.

DISABILITY FOOTBALL	21
Participation in sport for disabled people	22
What is Disability Football?	27
Mainstream Football	29
Modified Football	32
Pan-Disability Football	34
Disability-Specific Football	37



3.

GETTING STARTED	49
Phase 1: Preparation and research (months 1-3)	51
Phase 2: Programme development (months 4-6)	59
Phase 3: Take action – pilot programme and testing (months 7-12)	69
Phase 4: Programme expansion (months 13-18)	71
Phase 5: Sustainability and growth (months 19-24)	76
TOOLS	86
Glossary	88
FIFA Accessibility Terminology Guide	91
Directory of key international federations and organisations	94
Barriers for disabled people to participate in sport	98
Disability Football work plan template	98
Disability Football policy template	98
Practical tips for inclusive football coaches	99



Introduction



“ Football unites the world, and FIFA’s role is to be a vehicle for social inclusion and economic development across the planet. This includes the development of all disciplines of disability football. Indeed, in many parts of the world, there is still a lack of opportunity for disabled people to play and enjoy football, and this is why FIFA is constantly working to ensure that all disabled people have the opportunity to play football, no matter where they come from or where they live.”

Gianni Infantino

FIFA President





Why was this toolkit developed?

According to the [World Health Organization](#), 1.3 billion people, or 16% of the world's population, experience some form of disability – and this number is expected to increase. In line with article 30 paragraph 5 of the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), all disabled people have a right to participate in recreation, leisure and sport on an equal basis with others, whether this is in mainstream or disability specific sporting activities.

One of FIFA's key missions as world football's governing body is to promote inclusion for all in the game, including disabled people and people with limited mobility. Further, in Goal 6 of the Strategic Objectives for the Global Game: 2023-2027, which focuses on social responsibilities, FIFA commits to promoting the growth of Disability Football worldwide.





[FIFA's Human Rights Policy](#) and article 4 of the [FIFA Statutes](#) also prohibit discrimination of any kind against a private person or group of people, including on account of their disabilities.

The power of football in global society is evident every day. It is a game that brings people together, inspires whole generations and promotes team spirit. FIFA is dedicated to harnessing this power in order to make a positive social impact. Around the world, there are various disciplines and formats offering opportunities to disabled people to play football. In countries where Disability Football is more established, these opportunities have mostly been made available by civil society organisations that aim to include disabled people in football.

FIFA has developed this Disability Football Toolkit to support and enhance opportunities for disabled people. The toolkit has been designed to support the global advancement and sustainability of Disability Football opportunities and structures and the inclusive and active participation of disabled people in all aspects of the beautiful game.

FIFA recognises that many member associations (MAs) and relevant stakeholders already have good policies, procedures, initiatives and training in place. It therefore builds on this great work.



How was the toolkit developed?

FIFA has developed the content of this toolkit with the invaluable support of the FIFA Para Football Working Group. Special thanks go to the confederations and the various MAs and international Disability Football federations who have contributed their expertise, case studies, advice and input.

Objectives of the toolkit

The main objectives of this toolkit are:

- to provide readers with an understanding of the basic principles of Disability Football and the various disciplines which can be implemented by MAs and other relevant stakeholders;
- to support increased participation in Disability Football globally – whether programmes and competitions are led by confederations, MAs, Disability Football international federations or other key stakeholders; and
- to share knowledge, celebrate best practice in Disability Football initiatives and accelerate collective action.



Photo credit: Soccability Canada



Who is this toolkit for?

As part of the evolution and integration of different versions of the global game, FIFA has established this toolkit to assist all stakeholders working towards the development of Disability Football. This resource can be used by the following stakeholders:

1. Confederations and MAs seeking to take action and deliver, promote and grow Disability Football within their region.
2. Football leagues, clubs, coaches or volunteers who want to start or increase participation in Disability Football but do not know where to begin.
3. Players with disabilities who would like to play football but do not know that it is possible or need to give guidance to their coach. Parents, families and support workers would also benefit from this information to help the players.
4. Other multi-sport disability organisations who would like guidance on offering Disability Football to their members.

We invite all football stakeholders to use this tool as a catalyst to further enhance football participation for all, in particular disabled people.



How can this resource be used to best effect?



Throughout the three chapters, practical tools and templates are available to help the reader to take action. These documents have been produced as guidance only and will need to be adapted to each local context. All the [tools](#) are also available at the end of the document.

This toolkit is intended to assist those who wish to start or develop work in relation to Disability Football.

It is currently focused on three stages:

1. Understanding disability
2. Disability Football
3. How to start or grow Disability Football in your region

If your organisation is working on this topic for the first time, it may be helpful to start by gaining a deeper understanding of what disability, the social model and Disability Football mean, together with the different types of Disability Football that may be played and how prevalent these formats are around the world.

This toolkit is an advisory document and is not intended to be prescriptive or to inhibit alternative and creative solutions as long as they are designed in consultation with local disability organisations.

To request a copy of this resource in a reasonable alternative format for accessibility purposes, please contact humanrights@fifa.org.



What this toolkit does not do

This resource is not intended to do any of the following:

- Replace existing policies, procedures and training on Disability Football.
- Provide complete guidance on how to implement Disability Football programmes. The toolkit simply offers information to help focus on a set of principles and minimum requirements.
- Include details of all current, evidence-supported practices globally. Innovative approaches and programmes regarding Disability Football are currently being adapted and implemented in many countries. This toolkit focuses on the core components that need to be in place, based on the current experience of MAs and other sports organisations around the world. FIFA considers this to be a living document that will need to be updated regularly and reviewed every 24 months based on feedback, the practical experience of our members and evolving best practice across all sports.
- Provide detailed accessibility guidelines on infrastructure, stadiums, training sites or inclusive services for spectators attending football competitions. Please refer to other FIFA resources on this topic.

To send enquiries or feedback to FIFA on this toolkit, please contact humanrights@fifa.org.



1. Understanding disability



Terminology



[Accessibility Terminology Guide](#)

More definitions and terminology explainers can be found in the [glossary](#).

“Disability” can be used as an umbrella term to cover a wide range of health conditions, diverse capacities and specific access requirements that affect people’s abilities to see, hear, speak, move, think and feel.

Disability can be visible and obvious (for example if someone uses a wheelchair) or not visible to others (for example, if someone is hard of hearing). In addition, it is important to understand and consider that some people (for example, a wheelchair user who may also be blind or deaf) may have complex or multiple access requirements.

A disability can be congenital, acquired with age or the consequence of a disease or injury. It may be temporary, recurring or permanent.





There are many types of disability, not all of which can be covered by this resource. However, some can be grouped into several broad categories, which are described below.



Auditory

Auditory disabilities can range from partial to complete hearing loss. People with auditory disability may communicate through sign language, spoken language or both and often use hearing aids or cochlear implants to amplify sounds.



Cognitive

Cognitive disabilities are also known as mental, intellectual or learning disabilities. This may mean that a person has difficulty communicating, learning or retaining information. This group can include people with brain injuries, Alzheimer's disease, mental health issues such as anxiety, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia or post-traumatic stress disorder.



Mobility

This type of disability impacts on someone's mobility or range of movement, e.g. an amputation, a spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy or short stature. Individuals may be ambulant (which means they do not use a wheelchair or mobility aid such as a prosthetic, cane or crutches) or use a mobility aid all the time, occasionally or only when participating in sport.



Sensory

For people with a sensory disability, the brain might overreact to the sights, noises and smells in an everyday setting, resulting in distress. This group includes people with Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or neurodivergence.



Speech and language

Speech disorders can range from mild slurred speech to the complete inability to move the mouth to speak. The ability to physically speak may be completely unrelated to the person's language capabilities.



Visual

Visual disabilities can range from some amount of vision loss, the loss of visual acuity or increased or decreased sensitivity to specific or bright colours, to colour blindness or the complete or uncorrectable loss of vision in one or both eyes.



The use of terminology and guidelines on what to say and what not to say can be daunting when beginning work in this area, but this should not be a deterrent or prevent progress from being made. Not everyone will agree on the correct terms to use.

FIFA acknowledges that the terms used in the accessibility field differ depending on the region and organisation. FIFA has produced an Accessibility Terminology Guide to indicate what it currently considers to be the most appropriate accessibility terms, on the understanding that such terms are constantly evolving and may be subject to change. In all cases, the individual's preferences should be respected.

In addition to this resource, you are encouraged to work with local and national disability organisations or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which may assist you to establish appropriate terminology for your territory.



Photo credit: Japan Inclusive Football Federation



Person-centred approach

Each disabled person's experience will most likely differ from that of others, even if they share the same disability. Recognising that each person has their own experience will prevent you from making assumptions and ensure you are able to fully understand and support their individual aspirations and make reasonable adjustments to cater to their potential access requirements. Taking a person-centred approach allows you to pay closer attention to what disabled people of diverse abilities can do, rather than what their disability is.

It is recommended that any work done in relation to disability and accessibility topics be conducted in consultation with people with relevant lived experience.

The social model of disability

The social model of disability recognises that although a person may have a particular disability or health condition, certain external barriers or challenges can, in fact, be the main limitations on their experiences, opportunities and options. When these barriers are removed, disabled people can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their lives.

It includes consideration of the following factors:

- **Physical design of the built environment**, such as inaccessible buildings, facilities or services (for example, the absence of ramps or other arrangements to assist a wheelchair user to reach the changing rooms or playing area) or spaces in a stadium that are unsuitable for wheelchair users.

- **Digital design of online services.**
- **Other people's attitudes or assumptions** (and sometimes a disabled person's own personal perceptions), including stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice. This includes making untested assumptions about what a disabled person cannot do or resisting the inclusion of disabled participants in sport.
- **Systems and processes**, such as organisations' inflexible policies, procedures and practices. This includes failing to consider reasonable adjustments such as adapting sports rules or to provide suitable equipment to include disabled participants.

When speaking about accessibility, it is important to see the person and not the disability. For example, a person who uses a wheelchair is only disabled when there are steps or steep gradients that cannot be accessed in a wheelchair. Likewise, a blind or partially sighted person is only disabled when information is not provided in an accessible format and access routes are blocked by physical barriers or trip hazards. Therefore, it is the environment that should be seen as disabling, rather than the person's condition. Nevertheless, it is equally important to recognise people who self-identify as disabled and for whom disability is a part of their identity that they do not want to be overlooked or ignored.



Examples

- A wheelchair user would like to attend a powerchair football activity but is unable to do so due to access issues at the facility (several steps must be negotiated at the entrance to the building). Using a social model solution, adding a ramp to the entrance would enable the wheelchair user to access the building without assistance.
- A person who is blind or partially sighted wants to research where they could play blind football in their area. However, not all of the promotional literature is compatible with accessible communication tools, so they cannot get the appropriate information. A solution under the social model would ensure that all promotional materials are compatible with all mobile phone applications and screen readers when the session is first advertised. This means that those who are blind or partially sighted can independently access the activity on the same basis as everyone else.
- A deaf person would like to try playing football with a club for the first time. However, when consulting the club website, their only option to enquire is to make a phone call to the club's office. Using the social model, the club would offer different ways to engage, such as a video call service with sign language interpreters to facilitate the conversation and written communication channels such as email or a chat tool on its website or social media pages.

All service providers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the relevant disability legislation in their region.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that disabled people are often more vulnerable to discrimination or abuse. Make sure you are aware of the safeguarding policies and mechanisms available to you to report discrimination if you witness it.



Beneficiaries of good access

Although the main focus of this resource is ensuring that disabled people can play football, others can also benefit from good access. This includes elderly people, pregnant women, families with young children, young children themselves, injured people and people with limited mobility. Almost everybody will benefit from accessible environments at some stage in their lives as a result of the natural ageing process and the accompanying reduction of sensory and physical function.

Examples

- A route that is accessible for a wheelchair user is also accessible for a person who is pushing a pushchair or a heavy-loaded trolley.
- Having signage with symbols also supports those who may not speak the local language.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, automatic doors, contactless taps and soap dispensers were used by everyone to prevent the spread of the virus in addition to being helpful to those with limited mobility.
- Television captions are routinely turned on in crowded bars and restaurants for everyone's benefit.
- Colour-coding (designed for people with intellectual disabilities) on bus routes and other transit lines makes it easier for everyone to orient themselves when using public transport.



2. Disability Football



Participation in sport for disabled people

Participation in sport for disabled people is highly advantageous not only for their physical health but also to promote their social inclusion, mental well-being and personal development. Unfortunately, disabled adults are significantly more likely to be physically inactive compared to non-disabled people.¹ Fewer than 20% of people with acquired neurological damage practise the levels of physical activity recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO)² and more than 50% of individuals with spinal cord injuries are physically inactive.³

In addition, this disparity starts at a young age. Studies show that disabled children and adolescents participate far less in sporting activities than their non-disabled peers.⁴

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- ¹ Carroll DD, Courtney-Long EA, Stevens AC, et al. Vital signs: disability and physical activity – United States, 2009–2012. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep.* 2014; 63(18): 407–413.
 - ² Declerck L, Kaux J-F, Vanderthommen M, Lejeune T, Stoquart G. The Effect of Adaptive Sports on Individuals with Acquired Neurological Disabilities and Its Role in Rehabilitation. *Curr. Sports Med. Rep.* 2019; 18(12): 458–473.
 - ³ Yazicioglu K, Yavuz F, Goktepe AS, Tan AK. Influence of adapted sports on quality of life and life satisfaction in sport participants and non-sport participants with physical disabilities. *Disabil. Health J.* 2012; 5(4): 249–253.
 - ⁴ World Health Organization. *Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities.* 2022.



This lack of activity places them at an even greater risk of developing serious health problems such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes. WHO has recognised this disparity and published specific physical activity guidelines for people living with disabilities, stating that even small amounts of exercise below the recommended 150 minutes per week⁵ can result in meaningful health benefits.

The lack of participation in sport has far-reaching consequences not just for physical health but also in terms of overall social engagement and emotional well-being. Engaging in sport is a powerful tool for social inclusion as it helps disabled people to connect with others, reduce social isolation and improve self-esteem. Research highlights that sport promotes teamwork, empathy and respect, which foster a sense of belonging within both the disabled community and wider society. Studies show that participation in sport can also significantly boost confidence and contribute to the mental well-being of people with disabilities, helping them to make new friends and feel more connected to their communities.



Sport, and Disability Football in particular, serves as a platform for empowerment. Through participation, disabled people not only improve their physical fitness but also gain vital life skills such as resilience and problem-solving, enhancing their social standing and self-worth. Involvement in adapted sport has been shown to help reduce feelings of isolation while creating opportunities for personal growth and empowerment.

⁵ World Health Organization. *WHO Guidelines on Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour: At a Glance*. 2020.



Expanding participation in Disability Football is crucial for building a more inclusive and equitable sporting culture. It allows people with disabilities to benefit from improved fitness, enhanced mental health and greater social integration. Moreover, it helps to break down barriers and challenge stereotypes, contributing to a broader cultural shift towards the acceptance and inclusion of disabled people.

Adaptive sport, and by extension Disability Football, could be considered a potential stand-alone public health intervention, “providing new perspectives and motivating individuals with disabilities to actively engage in their own health process”.⁶

There are now more opportunities than ever for disabled people to get involved in football.

FIFA is committed to promoting and supporting inclusive football at all levels.

Note: *At the time of publication, the quantity and quality of research on physical activity in disabled people lag far behind research on physical activity in the general population; virtually all of the extant data on physical activity and disabled people has been collected in high-income countries, so improved data collection in low and middle-income countries must be a priority.*

⁶ Isidoro-Cabañas E, Soto-Rodríguez FJ, Morales-Rodríguez FM, Pérez-Mármol JM. Benefits of Adaptive Sport on Physical and Mental Quality of Life in People with Physical Disabilities: A Meta-Analysis. *Healthcare*. 2023; 11(18), 2480.



Example

The social and health impact of Disability Football in Oceania

The OFC's Just Play social responsibility programme (a Football for Good initiative that promotes learning through play, integrating messages of health, gender equality, social inclusion, safeguarding, play and physical activity through active and fun participation in football) is one of the region's most accessible opportunities for disabled people to play organised football in Oceania.

Established in 2009, the Just Play programme has reached over 400,000 children across Oceania. The programme encourages disabled children to participate in football-centric activities and disabled adults to take part as programme volunteers, coaches and administrators. Just Play organises inclusive football sessions for all, mixing young people with and without disabilities. It has demonstrated that there are clear health and social benefits for all participants, regardless of whether they have a disability. For example, following the programme, there was a 30% increase in participants who thought that people with a disability could play football. Participating disabled children testified that making new friends and learning a new sport were the major benefits of joining the programme.

The success of the programme was attributable to:

- great collaboration between MAs and other local stakeholders such as ministries for education, disability organisations, NGOs, schools and community groups;
- best practice being shared between MAs belonging to the same confederation (the OFC), allowing them to replicate and adapt successful programmes;
- a "training of trainers" approach to help educate programme personnel about inclusion;



- the flexible format of “football festivals”, where community days are organised with very little equipment required and featuring adaptable games for all abilities; and
- a strategic partnership between several MAs and Special Olympics to deliver activities in collaboration with special schools.

Find out more about [Just Play](#).



What is Disability Football?

Disability Football is the umbrella term referring to all formats of football available for disabled people and people with limited mobility to participate in – with or without special equipment or rule modifications.

There are four formats of Disability Football:

<p>Mainstream Football</p> <p>Players with or without disabilities</p> <p>FIFA rules</p>	1	
<p>Modified Football</p> <p>Players with or without disabilities</p> <p>Modified rules</p>	2	
<p>Pan-Disability Football</p> <p>Players with various disabilities</p> <p>Modified rules</p>	3	
<p>Disability-Specific Football</p> <p>Players with similar disabilities</p> <p>Modified rules</p>	4	

Players without disabilities	FIFA rules
Players with disabilities	Modified rules



[Directory of major
Disability Football
organisations](#)

The development of these four formats of Disability Football is important and, with support, can allow players to move freely between the formats. For example, a player with a disability could play alongside their non-disabled peers (in format 1 or 2) but may also transfer to the disability-specific discipline (format 4) to provide them with the best possible experience. Conversely, a player with a disability could start their playing journey in Pan-Disability Football (format 3), and, as they build their confidence and self-esteem, they could choose to move into Mainstream Football (format 1) or follow the high-performance pathway offered by Disability-Specific Football (format 4).

Offering different formats to disabled players has proven to be a successful approach in other disability sports (called the twin-track approach) and helps everyone to feel safe and welcome to take part, regardless of the format chosen by the individual. Please refer to [chapter 3](#) to find out how to grow these different formats and where to start if your organisation only offers a version of Mainstream Football that is not inclusive.



Mainstream Football

The term Mainstream Football refers to the best-known version of football that follows FIFA rules. Everyone can play; however, teams, clubs and leagues may need to consider what arrangements they need to have in place to facilitate participation by people with disabilities. For example, they may need to allow hearing aids and cochlear implants to be worn during training and matches or allow people with prosthetics to take part. Colour-blind players also play Mainstream Football and there is very little awareness of how to support them.

Examples

Famous players with disabilities have played at the highest level in Mainstream Football teams. For example:

- Mackenzie Arnold (the Australia women's national-team goalkeeper) is deaf, but only revealed this during the FIFA Women's World Cup 2023™.
- Former Premier League defender John O'Kane is autistic and explained that he retired from football at the age of 29 because of mental health issues and the struggles his disability involved. He has said he would have loved to have received additional support to meet his needs when playing in Mainstream Football.
- Carson Pickett, who played as a defender for the US women's national team, is a lower arm amputee.
- Óscar de Marcos and Thomas Delaney are colour-blind and rely on certain strategies to identify their team-mates at game speed, for example by checking the colour of their shorts and socks instead of their shirt colour.



In England, **The Football Association (The FA)** has put in place national initiatives to ensure the mainstream pathway is as inclusive as possible.

- The FA Dispensation Policy exists to ensure that disabled children or those with significant delays in physical development are able to play football with the most appropriate age group for their size and development.
- The guidelines state that players are allowed to wear their hearing aids and cochlear implants in FA-sanctioned matches.
- Players with an amputation can request a dispensation to wear their prosthesis in FA-sanctioned matches.





Colour vision deficiency (or colour blindness) affects over 300 million people globally.

One in 12 men and one in 200 women globally experience colour blindness. The most common type of colour vision deficiency makes it difficult to distinguish between red and green. Another type causes blue and yellow to appear similar and, in rare cases, individuals have complete colour vision deficiency, meaning they see no colour at all. This condition can significantly affect the football experience. Players with colour blindness may struggle with differentiating team kits, equipment like bibs, cones and flags, and clearly identifying opponents or referees.

Colour blindness poses challenges not only for players, but also for fans, referees, officials, staff and volunteers. Simple adjustments, such as carefully considering colour choices for kits and equipment, can greatly improve the experience for colour-blind individuals. These small changes can make a big difference in creating an inclusive environment for everyone involved in football.

Another helpful practice is to consider people with visual impairments, including colour vision deficiency, when designing your organisation's communication media, whether printed or digital (such as your website, coaching app and social media accounts).

[Colour Blind Awareness](#) offers further training on colour blindness and its impact on football. Several websites, such as [WebAIM: Contrast Checker](#), allow you to visualise how people with colour vision deficiency would see your photos and content.



Regular vision during a match between Cameroon, playing in green, and Switzerland, playing in red.



Colour vision deficiency simulation where it is very difficult to distinguish opposing players.



Modified Football

This version of football uses modified rules to suit all players, such as requirements to use smaller pitches or goals. Modified Football enables people with and without disabilities to play together. FIFA uses the term Modified Football, but other terms such as Unified Football or Integrated Football also refer to forms of play where the rules are adapted to ensure that people with and without disabilities can play together to the best of their abilities.

There is no formal classification for this type of football.

Mental health football

This is football for players with a mental health condition, which can be played in various formats, including futsal. The Dream World Cup is the futsal world championship for people with mental health conditions, organised by the [International Football Committee on Mental Health](#).

Walking football

Walking football was created in 2011 and is continuing to evolve and develop. The game can be played in 5-, 6- or 7-a-side formats. Running or jogging on or off the ball is not permitted. Players who have been sanctioned by the referee for running must leave the pitch for two minutes. The ball may not travel above head height. The offside rule does not apply. Walking football can be played on either grass, synthetic turf or an indoor surface. It is a small-sided, low-impact, modified version of the game suitable for all ages, levels of ability and fitness. While walking football is popular among all ability levels, it has seen



particular growth among the 50+ age group, thriving in environments where rule adaptations are in place to suit player or movement needs. [The Federation of International Walking Football Associations](#) (FIWFA) governs walking football internationally and organised the first official FIWFA World Nations Cup in 2023. Find out more in the [UEFA Walking Football Toolkit](#) and the [FIWFA Laws of the Game](#).

Examples

Special Olympics delivers Unified Football where players with and without intellectual disabilities focus on their shared love of football rather than their differences.

In Unified Sports, teams are made up of people of a similar age and ability. This makes training more fun and games more challenging and exciting for all. More than 1.2 million people worldwide take part in Special Olympics Unified Sports, which can be played at recreational, development and competitive levels.

Find out more about [Special Olympics](#).

The Ray Kennedy Cup is an international football tournament for people with Parkinson's disease. Over the course of the weekend, matches are organised using both mainstream and walking football rules. The tournament is also organised by athletes with Parkinson's. The matches are refereed by professionals from the host MA. Currently, around ten teams, mostly from Europe, take part in men's and mixed-gender matches. This event supports physical activity, well-being and networking among people with Parkinson's. It honours the late Ray Kennedy who played for Arsenal and Liverpool, but whose career was cut short when he was diagnosed with young-onset Parkinson's at the age of 32.

Find out more about the [Ray Kennedy Cup](#).



Pan-Disability Football

Pan-Disability Football enables players with a broad spectrum of disabilities and health conditions (e.g. people with cerebral palsy, amputees, wheelchair users, etc.) to play together. It can also be called Adaptive or Adapted Football.

There is no formal classification for this type of football and no pathway towards high-performance competition exists.

The format of Pan-Disability Football may vary, but it will typically be a small-sided 5-, 7- or 9-a-side game, providing opportunities for players to achieve their potential in Mainstream, Modified or Disability-Specific Football.

Wherever possible, ability grouping or banding is used for competitive environments, with teams being sorted into age and ability categories. It is easy to create mixed-gender competitions.



Photo credit: Argentinian Football Association



Example

Pan-Disability Football in England

The FA offers three main competition pathways open to disabled people: Mainstream Football, Pan-Disability Football and Disability-Specific Football.

The pan-disability pathway allows players with a broad spectrum of disabilities and health conditions to play together. Most competition-based opportunities in England use this format, making it the largest Disability Football pathway. Anyone who has a disability or long-term health condition can take part in Pan-Disability Football. However, blind players and wheelchair users are encouraged to join the disability-specific programmes.

Over 1,600 affiliated pan-disability teams play across the more than 40 county football leagues in England. These teams and leagues form the foundations of the disability player pathway and provide an environment in which players can compete on a regular basis. In many cases, these country-based leagues have been established and supported by county FAs who work in partnership with a range of organisations to ensure that Pan-Disability Football is both standardised and sustained.

The leagues are at different stages of development but, in general, they share the following similarities:

- Fixtures take place at least monthly during the season and at central venues.
- Games are small-sided in format (usually 5-, 7- or 9-a-side).
- In junior football, there is a maximum age banding of four years, meaning competition is usually organised for U-8, U-12 and U-16 age groups.
- No one under the age of 16 can play in adult Pan-Disability Football.
- There are three levels of ability banding.
- Where no female-specific opportunities exist, FA dispensation is available for adult mixed-gender competitions.



For some players, affiliated football is not an option because of a lack of time or ability or simply because they do not want to play competitive football. There are a range of England Football participation programmes that are designed to cater for both adults and children and allow them to play football in an organised but informal way, purely for fun. In England, this is a growing and important area for Disability Football, as not everybody wants to play competitively in a team.

Learn more about [Pan-Disability Football in England](#).





Disability-Specific Football

Disability-Specific Football enables people with the same disability to play together. There are a range of formats, each of which is designed to meet the needs of the players' specific disability. Some examples described below include blind football, cerebral palsy football and powerchair football.

Disability-Specific Football offers opportunities from grassroots participation through to an elite level. This includes world and regional championships, the Paralympic Games and a variety of other international competitions. Modified rules that are specific to players with the same disability are used. In most disciplines, players need to be classified (meaning that the impact of their disability on how they play football has been assessed).

Note: *Non-disabled people are of course welcome to play Disability-Specific Football (for example, in education settings, at a recreational level, with their friends or family or to ensure there are enough people to practise or play a game). However, non-disabled athletes cannot be classified and cannot take part in Disability-Specific Football competitions.*

The main Disability-Specific Football disciplines are presented below in alphabetical order. Other forms and variations exist, but they currently have a very limited number of participants.



Amputee football

The game: Amputee football can be played in whatever form the individual chooses, with or without the use of a prosthetic limb. In its codified format, the [World Amputee Football Federation](#) (WAFF) recognises the international 7-a-side format where outfield players with above- or below-the-knee single-leg amputations participate on elbow crutches and goalkeepers are single-arm amputees.

Each team has six outfield players and one goalkeeper. Kick-ins are used instead of throw-ins, there is no offside rule and unlimited substitutions are allowed but can only take place when there is a break in play. Unlimited substitutions are allowed on a “roll-on, roll-off” basis.

Specific equipment: Crutches are needed for athletes to play.

Structure and competitions: WAFF is the international disability-specific organisation responsible for amputee football. WAFF organises the Amputee World Cup, which is the pinnacle of its four-year competition cycle. This includes regional championships across the continents, which are qualification tournaments for the World Cup. Women’s amputee football is also growing rapidly, with the first Women’s Amputee Football World Cup having taken place in 2024. Prior to this, mixed teams including female players were allowed to play at the Amputee World Cup



Blind and partially sighted football

The game: This is also called Football 5-a-side and is based on adapted FIFA rules. All players wear blindfolds regardless of their level of vision and receive help from sighted coaches who guide them from the sidelines. The goalkeeper is sighted. The ball makes a noise thanks to an internal sound system that helps players orientate themselves. As communication and auditory skills are so important to blind players, spectators must remain silent when the ball is in play, so that players can hear the ball and communicate with one another. The pitch can be between 38m and 42m long and between 18m and 22m wide. There are rebound sideboards down the length of each touchline to keep the ball moving and in play, and the only restarts are when the ball goes over the sideboards or behind the goal, a foul is committed, the game kicks off or after a goal. There are no throw-ins, nor is there an offside rule.

Specific equipment: Smaller goals, smaller pitch with rebound sideboards, specific ball with bells inside and blindfolds.

Structure and competitions: The sport is governed by the [International Blind Sports Federation \(IBSA\)](#). Blind football (Football 5-a-side) has featured at the Paralympics since Athens 2004. The Blind Football World Championships take place every four years in between the Paralympics. There are three official classifications. Only men's blind football teams are currently represented in the Paralympic programme, with the potential addition of women's teams at the Los Angeles 2028 or Brisbane 2032 Paralympic Games.



Following the International Paralympic Committee's terminology, Football 5-a-side is the only discipline of Disability Football that can be called "Para football".

Partially sighted football is a version of blind football where players do not use blindfolds and can benefit from their partial vision to play. Playing conditions include limiting light reflections and regulating light intensity on the pitch and the colour of the ball.





Cerebral palsy football

The game: Cerebral palsy (CP) affects approximately 17 million people worldwide and is one of the most common disability groups participating in disability sport. CP football is for people who were born with cerebral palsy, have had a traumatic brain injury, stroke or neurological motor control impairment of a cerebral nature, causing a permanent and verifiable activity limitation.

CP football is played on a smaller pitch, with smaller goals and no offside rule. Matches consist of two equal periods of 30 minutes.

Equipment: The field of play is 70m x 50m, with the goals measuring 5m x 2m.

Structure and competitions: CP football (previously known as Football 7-a-side) has not been included on the Paralympic programme since Rio 2016. The highest level of competition is the IFCPF Men's and Women's World Cup, which are organised every four years. The [International Federation of CP Football](#) (IFCPF) governs this sport. Classifications are required to play at a high level.



Deaf football

The game: This is football for players with a hearing disability. Deaf football is played as 11-a-side football or as futsal using the mainstream FIFA rules. Players remove any kind of hearing aids/amplifiers or external cochlear implant parts to compete. The referee may start and stop the game using a whistle but also carries a flag which is used to indicate a stoppage in play. Players, coaches and referees might also communicate using sign language. Many deaf players choose to compete in Mainstream Football where they should be allowed to wear their hearing aids.

Specific equipment: No specific equipment is needed.

Structure and competitions: The sport is governed by the [Deaf International Football Association](#) which runs a four-year competition cycle for male and female athletes in 11-a-side and futsal formats. The Deaflympics, at which football has been present since the inception of the games in 1924, is the top 11-a-side competition. Deaf football competitions require all players to have a hearing loss of a minimum of 55dB in their better ear to qualify to play.



Down syndrome football

The game: Football for players with a combined intellectual and physical disability, either Down syndrome (trisomy 21) or mosaic Down syndrome. Down syndrome football can also be played as futsal.

Specific equipment: No specific equipment is needed.

Structure and competitions: The sport is governed by the Football International Federation for Players with Down Syndrome and the [Sports Union for Athletes with Down Syndrome](#). People with Down syndrome can also take part in intellectual disability football competitions.





Dwarf football

The game: This is football for players with a physical disability of short stature. Dwarf football is played as football with eight players or futsal with seven players. Four classifications exist to ensure that competitions are fair. In dwarf football competitions, class 4 athletes are only eligible to play in the first half of any game. Class 1, 2 and 3 athletes are eligible throughout the game. FIFA rules apply with some exceptions (there should be no head contact with the ball or slide tackles and matches consist of two halves of 25 minutes).

Specific equipment: No specific equipment is needed.

Structure and competitions: The [International Dwarf Sports Federation](#) governs the sport. The World Games are held every four years and provide opportunities for athletes to take part in several sports, with football being the most popular sport. There are no qualification events and countries indicate whether they would like to enter a team in the various age groups. Where no female competition is to be held, mixed teams are permissible. Where a country does not have enough players for a team, a mixed country entry is allowed (e.g. France and Germany).



Frame football

The game: This is football for players with a physical disability, which currently includes hypertonia, ataxia and athetosis. The sport is still under development. Players use a posterior posture walker, walking frame, crutches or a cane to play the sport. Frame football can be played on grass or a variety of other surfaces, but it is of paramount importance that the surface is smooth to allow participants to move as smoothly as possible. Running is allowed for players who are able to do so.

Specific equipment: Walking assistance device for each player (walker, walking frame, crutch or cane).

Structure and competitions: This discipline is also governed by the [International Federation of CP Football](#). There is currently no pathway to high-performance, classification or international competitions.



Photo credit: International Federation of CP Football



Intellectual disability football

The game: This is football for players with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs), with an IQ of 75 or below, adaptive behaviour and a disability that was present before the age of 18. Intellectual disability football is played as 11-a-side football or as futsal.

Specific equipment: No specific equipment is needed.

Structure and competitions: Both 11-a-side football and futsal are governed and promoted by [Virtus](#) (the International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability). The Virtus Global Games offer futsal as part of the programme. The next event will be in Egypt in 2027.

[Special Olympics](#) (SO) also offers football for people with IDD, taking a non-elite approach. There are 106,500 football players with IDD worldwide, together with 6,500 coaches, playing and working at all levels from grassroots to national and international tournaments, in 58 countries. In 2021, SO football was the second most popular SO sport in terms of athlete numbers. SO football can be played in 11-a-side, 7-a-side, 5-a-side and futsal formats. Futsal and 11-a-side football matches follow FIFA rules with variations on the rules regarding playing time, substitutions and extra time. SO organise the SO World Games every four years.



Powerchair football

The game: This is football for players with a physical disability, for anyone who uses a wheelchair.

Players use a powerchair to play the sport at competition level. Powerchair football is played in the futsal format on a basketball court. A team comprises four players, including a goalkeeper, who play with a larger ball. The object of the game is to manoeuvre the ball over the goal line of the opposing team while preventing them from doing the same. Teams can be mixed gender. The maximum permitted speed for powerchairs during the match is 10kph (6.2mph).

Specific equipment: Powered wheelchairs with footguards, specific powerchair ball.

Structure and competitions: The [Fédération Internationale de Powerchair Football Association](#)

(FIFPA) is the international governing body.

Two international classifications exist. Powerchair football has applied to enter the Paralympic programme for many years, but is not currently included. The Powerchair Football World Cup, held every four years, is the pinnacle of the sport.



Example

Disability Football is well established in Japan, where 9.2% of people identify as having a disability. Seven distinct Disability-Specific Football organisations exist: Japan Amputee Football Association, Japan Cerebral Palsy Football Association, Japan Social Football Association, Japan Football Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability, Japan Powerchair Football Association, Japan Blind Football Association and Japan Deaf Football Association.

However, there used to be almost no cooperation between the seven organisations and it was difficult for the Japan Football Association (JFA) to support them individually and fairly. Therefore, in order to support all the different Disability-Specific Football organisations, the JFA offered to merge them and create a unique entity in 2016 – the Japan Inclusive Football Federation (JIFF). Information is now more easily available and is centralised on a single website.

More than 8,000 players participate in the seven Disability Football disciplines. Elite disabled players in the national teams now also wear the same kit as the Japan national Mainstream Football teams at international matches.

Find out more about the [Japan Inclusive Football Federation](#).



3



Getting started

How to start or grow

Disability Football in your region

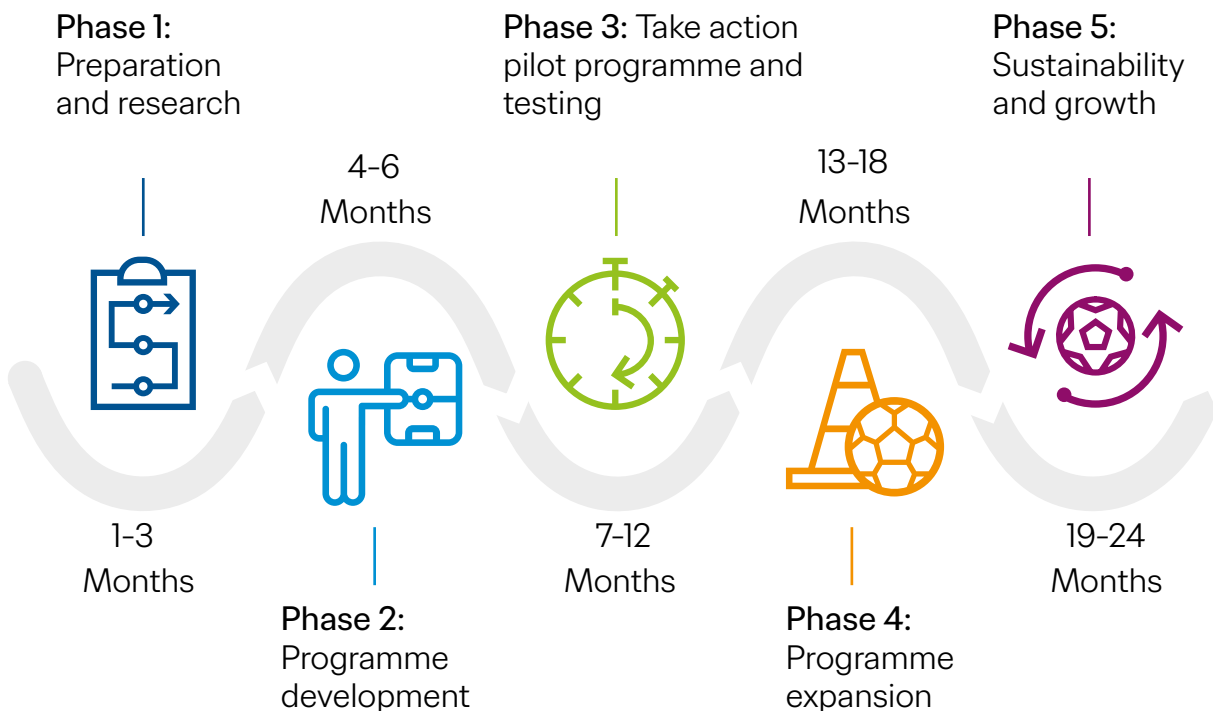




Practical tools and templates are available to help you along the way. These documents are designed as guidance and will need to be adapted to each local context.

This chapter is designed with the understanding that whilst several MAs have well-developed structures in place, many may be just beginning their journey to establish Disability Football activity.

This chapter contains a 17-step guide to assist and enhance your efforts at whatever part of the journey you are on to grow Disability Football in your region. A summary of the 17 steps can be downloaded as part of the [work plan tool](#). The aim of implementing such steps is to support a long-term and sustainable approach to creating inclusive opportunities for all disabled people to take part in the beautiful game. Such efforts should be made incrementally and collaboratively whilst working with the relevant local partners, organisations and authorities.





Phase 1: Preparation and research (months 1-3)

Objective: Understand the current state of Disability Football in the country and gather the necessary resources and expertise.

Step 1. Research the market and assess needs

Before launching a Disability Football programme, it is essential to understand the needs of the local community. Conduct surveys or engage with disability groups to identify what format of Disability Football programmes would best serve potential players. Assess barriers to participation, such as transport or facility accessibility, to tailor your programme to the local context.

Partner with local disability organisations to create detailed data maps showing where the most significant gaps in football participation exist and better understand how to meet their needs.

It is often harder to find data about disabled people and sport. However, it is important to break the common misconception that not enough disabled people are interested in football. Setting up the right environment and communicating will quickly debunk this myth. Connect with other organisations (locally or further afield) who have been successful at setting up a Disability Football programme and learn from them.



Identify your own
barriers preventing
disabled people from
participating in sport

Questions to answer:

- Who currently delivers Disability Football in your region?
- What format of Disability Football is currently delivered (please refer to chapter 2)?
- Would anyone in the community, regardless of age, gender or disability, have the opportunity to take part in a football programme?
- How many people currently participate?
- What are the main challenges in the region for disabled people to access sports programmes?
- If there are no Disability Football programmes or sessions, is there a particular reason for this? If past initiatives have failed, investigate why.





Example

Starting your own Disability Football programme can be daunting at first as it is difficult to know where to start. That is why it is so important to connect with other local clubs who have been on the same journey.

Soccability Canada, a not-for-profit organisation, was created to support the growth of more than 30 existing accessible programmes for clubs across the country.

To support the clubs they:

- organise quarterly meetings where clubs can share updates, tips and best practice with each other;
- deliver in-person and online workshops to coaches and club leadership; and
- create guidelines and resources.

Soccability Canada is recognised by Canada Soccer for its expertise in this area of the game, and the two organisations have partnered to create a free online module to promote the value of inclusion. Soccability Canada recently took the first ever blind soccer national team to compete in the USA.

Soccability Canada is a small organisation, supported mainly on a volunteer basis. They are able to operate thanks to grants, sponsors and fees paid by workshop participants.

Find out more about [Soccability Canada](#).



Step 2. Prepare early for success



[Disability Football work plan template](#)

Put in place the best conditions within your organisation to carry out your Disability Football project. This should include the following:

- Appointing key individuals within your organisation to oversee the initiative and drive it forward.
- Identifying key individuals outside the organisation to partner with (formally or informally) and receive guidance from.
Note: If you set up official working groups such as a Disability Football committee with disabled people, it is recommended that you pay them for their time and expertise as you would any other expert.
- Establishing clear roles and responsibilities.
- Writing down a work plan with relevant timelines.
- Defining what a successful project would look like and set key performance indicators (KPIs).



Example

Setting up the appropriate structure to govern Disability Football can take time and several steps may be needed. That is why it is important to act and start setting up for success as soon as possible.

By way of example, here is some information about the **creation of the Scottish Para Football structure**.

- 2012: The Scottish Football Association (SFA) launched its first published Disability Football strategy which aimed to increase participation and create clear competitions and pathways within five years.
- 2017: The SFA further developed its vision and ambition through a new strategy on Disability Football.
- 2018: The first Para Football Working Group was created and policies, procedures and funding opportunities for Scottish Para Football to become a registered charity were put in place.
- 2018: The necessary changes were made to the SFA's constitution to allow Scottish Para Football to become a Scottish FA Affiliated National Association.
- 2019: Scottish Para Football was officially launched with its first AGM and the election of the first board.

Governed by the SFA, the purpose of Scottish Para Football is to provide a voice for all those playing parallel versions of the game, to champion the achievements of Scottish Para footballers and to promote inclusivity and equality in order to grow the game.

Find out more about [Scottish Para Football](#).



Step 3. Identify and allocate resources

Effective planning requires identifying the financial, human and material resources that will support your programme. Allocate funding to cover essentials such as venue hire, equipment and coaching. Consider whether volunteers could be involved and if any external funding or sponsorship opportunities could help to support the initiative.

Tips to secure resources for your Disability Football programme:

- Apply for funding through grants and scholarships. If your organisation has not had a disability sport programme before, you might qualify for new funds. Make sure to explore opportunities at local, regional and countrywide levels.
- Let your current commercial partners (if you have any) know that you are working on this project and require support. Partners are always looking for meaningful and engaging initiatives. They might be able to support you financially, but also with value-in-kind contributions (e.g. free access to an accessible venue once a week, help upgrading your website or creating a promotional video, new equipment, volunteers, etc.).
- Talk to your current members and colleagues about this project. You might find valuable allies, including people with a personal vested interest in growing Disability Football who might want to support and be involved in the project.



- Work with other departments within your organisation and identify, review and optimise current costs. You might find that a pitch or futsal-style court has been paid for but is not being used by anyone for the next six months or that another programme is ending and the coach or budget allocated to it could be used for Disability Football.
- Very little is needed immediately to start your pilot programme (identify the main costs).
- Partner with a local university or tertiary education programme to identify students that might be interested in learning how to coach Disability Football and would be available as volunteers or interns to assist the coach in your sessions.



Photo credit: Brazilian Football Association



Example

FIFA has invested more than USD 2 million in Disability Football projects since 2017 through FIFA Forward funding. Although funding is not directly allocated to such projects, confederations and MAs can use these funds to support national grassroots Disability Football programmes.

NGOs with sustainable and long-term Disability Football projects can also seek financial support via the FIFA Foundation Community Programme. For more information, contact CommunityProgramme@fifafoundation.org.

Other **international foundations and organisations that might support Disability Football projects** (non-exhaustive list):

- [AFC Dream Asia Foundation](#)
- [Beyond Sport](#)
- CAF Impact Programme (no website available)
- [Common Goal](#)
- [Concacaf NextPlay Programme](#)
- [CONMEBOL Evolución Programme](#)
- [EEA Grants](#)
- [European Union/Erasmus](#)
- [Integrated Dreams](#)
- [International Sports Promotion Society \(ISPS Handa\)](#)
- [Laureus Sport for Good Foundation](#)
- [OFC Just Play Programme](#)
- [UEFA Foundation for Children](#)
- [UEFA HatTrick programme](#)
- Other local, regional and national lotteries and foundations



Phase 2: Programme development (months 4-6)

Objective: Develop a structured programme that caters to the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Step 4. Design your Disability Football programme

Based on the knowledge acquired in chapters 1 and 2 and your own research and planning, identify the scope and goals of your Disability Football programme. The scope, ambition and size of the programme can vary based on your context and the current level of development of Disability Football.

Examples:

- Develop Disability Football within the association or organisation
- Create a CP football national team and qualify for the IFCPF World Cup in eight years' time
- Create a powerchair football league in Mexico
- Develop amputee football for women and girls in Brisbane
- Upskill all coaches in my club to adapt Mainstream Football sessions to cater for disabled players
- Create a walking football programme in my community where everyone is welcome to participate
- Organise an annual Disability Football festival at my club



Not sure where to start?

It is important that in your region disabled people can choose between:

- joining an existing Mainstream Football programme that is inclusive for disabled people, where the necessary reasonable adjustments have been made and universal design principles have been incorporated; and
- joining a programme that is specifically tailored to disabled people.

This approach is not about having to choose between the specific or mainstream option but, rather, having the right access to the most appropriate high-quality support or service – at the right time and in the right place – based on individual needs. Some people might prefer to be included in the mainstream sessions with other players whilst others might feel more confident playing only with disabled people.

That is why FIFA recommends ensuring that each region has a minimum of the following:

- A Mainstream Football programme with a welcoming environment for all, where coaches and staff know how to adapt some of the exercises and sessions for disabled people.
- A Pan-Disability Football programme where players with a broad spectrum of disabilities and health conditions (e.g. people with CP, amputees, wheelchair users, etc.) play together. Coaches should know how to adapt sessions to the needs of each individual and smaller groups make this easier to manage.





[Chapter 2: Disability Football](#)

[Directory of major Disability Football organisations](#)

If both of the above options are available, it is possible to start diversifying the offering and consider Modified or Disability-Specific Football. Identify gaps and try to ensure that football is available for everyone, no matter their age, gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, etc.

Which form of Disability-Specific Football should you start with?

All Disability-Specific Football disciplines are different and offer football for people with different disabilities. Work with your community to understand their needs. Some disciplines only offer opportunities at recreational level (frame football, Down syndrome football, etc.) whereas others can lead to high-performance pathways (blind football, CP football, etc.). Some disciplines, such as powerchair football, require indoor courts or specific equipment.

It can be more challenging to gather enough players with the same disability to participate in Disability-Specific Football compared to Pan-Disability Football.

Contact the relevant international federations or experts to get help and support in relation to the specific discipline.



Step 5. Select accessible venues

Whether you need indoor futsal pitches or outdoor football pitches for your sessions, you should conduct an accessibility audit of your venue.

Ensure parking spaces, changing rooms and playing surfaces are adapted for wheelchair users and people with mobility issues. Check with the venues that they comply with the local building regulations or accessibility standards. Do not hesitate to carry out your own investigations to understand the minimum requirements in your region.

In order to offer Disability Football, your venue has to comply with local law as a minimum. Some countries have more regulations in place than others and your organisation can make a positive impact by choosing accessible venues.

The most important aspect is to communicate as much information about accessibility as possible to your participants, including how to get there using public transport, whether it is possible to park an accessible van close to the pitch, whether there are accessible bathrooms, etc. Planning is key!

Investing in advanced accessibility features such as sensory rooms or inclusive seating areas for spectators could be highly beneficial.





Step 6. Source your equipment

Depending on the design of your programme and the format of Disability Football played, you might require specific adaptive equipment. Many sessions can be held with regular football equipment (balls, bibs, whistle, cones, goals, etc.). In addition, it could be helpful for coaches to have:

- adapted footballs (available in different sizes, weights and speeds, with or without inbuilt bells) that will be helpful for people with mobility, visual or other sensory requirements;
- freestanding goals or mini-goals;
- rebound panels; and
- other tools to facilitate communication between the coach and the players such as emotion cards, whiteboards, fidget toys, etc.

All equipment and bibs should ideally be of high-contrasting colours, avoiding red and green to improve accessibility for people with colour blindness.

Please refer to chapter 2 for details of specific equipment for each disability-specific discipline and consult the relevant international federations for the relevant rules and regulations around high-performance equipment.



[Chapter 2: Disability Football](#)

[Directory of major Disability Football organisations](#)

It is not recommended that players use their everyday mobility aids such as wheelchairs, crutches or prosthetics; instead, they should use specialised sports equipment. It is important to be mindful of the condition of this equipment: is it safe for use in football training sessions? To support your players, it is a good idea to research sport-specific equipment options and available funding, as these can often be costly. As players progress on the pathway towards high performance, football-specific aids such as amputee football crutches and powerchairs will be highly regulated to meet competition standards.



Photo credit: Japan Inclusive Football Federation



Step 7. Upskill coaches, staff and volunteers

Provide training for coaches and volunteers to develop an understanding of Disability Football. This includes learning about different disabilities, communication techniques and how to adapt coaching methods to suit the needs of all participants. This investment in staff development is crucial to building a sustainable programme.

Some ideas to upskill your coaches, staff and volunteers in your Disability Football project include the following:

- Identify and recruit coaches with expertise in Disability Football. If experts are available or already work for your organisation, investigate how they could share and transfer their knowledge to the rest of the coaches.
- Encourage all your Mainstream Football and Disability Football coaches to read the FIFA Disability Football Toolkit chapters 1 and 2. This training may also be useful for the rest of your staff, volunteers and parents, etc.
As previously stated, it is important to open up your Mainstream Football programmes to disabled people and offer them a welcoming and safe space to practise the sport by having trained coaches.
- It is important to ensure that a person-centred coaching approach is used.



[Chapters 1 and 2](#)

[Practical tips for inclusive football coaches](#)

- Adapt your communication style to your players: it is essential for coaches of disabled players to understand their individual needs. There could be as many communication styles as there are individuals. Not everyone with the same type of disability will respond in the same way.
- Trained referees should also be involved in creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment.
- Upskilling and training people within your organisation can take time. Make accessibility and inclusion an agenda item at most meetings, organise workshops specifically on this topic, invite coaches to connect with others with experience in disability support, etc.





Example

The Football Association of Ireland (FAI) delivers a three-hour Awareness and Coaching in Disability Football Workshop, which contains theoretical and practical elements and has been designed to provide participants with a broad overview of different types of disabilities and the implications for coaching.

The content provides information on the following areas:

- Knowledge: Participants will learn how to define disability and distinguish between the main disability groups.
- Awareness: Participants gain an increased awareness of the important roles of communication, language and etiquette, and of how people with disabilities take part in football and what opportunities to do so exist in their community.
- Insight: Participants experience different formats of the game through practical experience.

The workshop is regularly delivered to clubs applying to develop a Football for All programme and also to those studying sports coaching and adaptive recreation.

It has helped to create greater awareness of how to offer a more inclusive football environment. This has resulted in a large number of opportunities becoming available for people with disabilities, helping them to reach their potential as players. The certification of coaches plays a key role in ensuring that the quality of coaching provided to footballers with a disability is of a high standard.

This workshop is linked to the FAI's grassroots coach education pathway and contributes towards the 40 hours of grassroots coach education needed to receive a national D licence.



The course is delivered by FAI staff to ensure minimal costs for clubs, who are charged as follows:

- Free of charge for anyone working with a Disability Football team
- EUR 15 for any Mainstream Football coaches.

The success of this programme is down to the FAI's close relationship with local disability organisations, which helps to ensure that the content is accurate and up to date.

Find out more about [FAI coaching opportunities](#).



Photo credit: Royal Netherlands Football Association



Phase 3: Take action – pilot programme and testing (months 7-12)

Objective: Run a pilot programme to test the effectiveness of the initiatives. Start small, but start now!

Step 8. Launch your pilot programme

Start with a small-scale pilot to test your programme. This allows you to gather feedback, make adjustments and demonstrate early successes. Involve your community to generate excitement and engagement, ensuring that the programme meets the needs of participants.

- Choose a club or community with which to start the programme. This could be alongside a disability organisation or a school with disabled students, so you already have a pool of interested participants.
- Organise initial training sessions and matches for participants with disabilities for a defined period of time (i.e. three to six months, one school term, etc.). Remember to collect testimonials and photos and record attendance numbers during the pilot programme. This will be important for reporting purposes and to scale up your programme.
- Collect feedback from participants, coaches and families regularly (i.e. after the first session, at the halfway stage and at the end of the programme).



Start small and build momentum. It is fine to make mistakes and for the programme to be imperfect at the start. You will adapt, adjust, consult and seek advice to do better.

Step 9. Evaluate and adapt

Assess the pilot programme's success and identify areas for improvement. Use collected data, testimonials from participants and parents and lessons learned from coaches to make informed changes that can enhance the programme, addressing any barriers or gaps identified during the pilot phase.

Make the necessary adjustments to coaching techniques, facilities and resources.





Phase 4: Programme expansion (months 13-18)

Objective: Expand the programme to reach more individuals with disabilities.

Step 10. Scale up

Decide, based on the findings from your pilot programme and feedback from participants, the extent to which you want to scale up the project, for example by:

- increasing the number of sessions and participants within the club/school;
- duplicating this initiative in other locations/clubs; or
- extending the programme to run for a longer period.

This could be achieved by the following means:

- Raising awareness about your pilot and upcoming programmes. Set up a proper promotional plan to advertise your programme and encourage more participants to attend or more clubs to offer it. The programme can be promoted by word of mouth through past participants, local media, social media and local disability organisations' networks. Share success stories, create promotional materials and highlight the benefits of the programme to increase visibility and attract new participants.



Find out more about [digital accessibility](#), including how to make your websites and digital documents accessible for disabled people.

- Actively contacting local disability organisations, schools, rehabilitation centres or communities with disabled people to promote the programme and highlight its accessibility.
- Ensuring relevant information about the Disability Football programme is easily accessible on your website/social media accounts. Ensure the content is clear and available in an accessible format.
- Hosting an open day event to encourage new players to attend.
- Participating in community events such as festivals, sports events and school events to increase the programme's reach and visibility.
- Adopting a buddy or mentor system where more experienced players can help newer ones.
- Encouraging family members and siblings (whether or not they have a disability) to take part in the session if this would help participants.
- Raising awareness about Disability Football through local media, public talks and school conferences, and disability organisations.
- Building up the community. Organise your own tournament or contact other local clubs or organisations with a Disability Football team to create regular competitions or fun days.



Step 11. Seek partnerships and sponsorships

- Build partnerships with disability organisations, local businesses and sports bodies. Sponsorships can help cover costs for equipment, venue hire and event hosting. Strong partnerships also bring credibility and additional resources to the programme.
- Use your pilot programme results to support the success of your initiative and convince partners or apply for further funding.
- Collaborate with sister organisations (other similar national/local organisations) and even with other sports going through the same journey to increase participation in disability sports (such as disability rugby, disability cricket and adaptive flag football). There might be great opportunities to share best practice, resources, equipment and grounds, for example.
- Develop partnerships with schools and universities to promote Disability Football and encourage young disabled people to participate as players, instructors or volunteers.
- Create self-sustaining financial models by hosting fundraising events, securing long-term sponsors or partnering with foundations.



Example

The Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA) partnered with the Belgian Paralympic Committee to support the development and professionalisation of the Belgian Blind Devils, the blind football men's national team. The team receives communication and marketing support (logo, visibility on social media and website) as well as national-team equipment. They can also train at the national technical centre alongside the other Belgian national teams.

The RBFA also receives funding from the national lottery for their social responsibility projects, including the Disability Football teams. This facilitates the professionalisation of the Blind Devils and allows them to participate in international events.

The RBFA also recently built a new technical centre that includes a blind football pitch. This new asset can be used to create revenues, for example by inviting foreign teams to rent the facility during training camps. This income can be used to grow Disability Football programmes.

Find out more about the [RBFA Disability Football national teams](#).



Step 12. Develop your players and coaches

Invest in continuous development for both players and coaches. Provide advanced training opportunities, mentorship and pathways for growth, enabling players to improve their skills and coaches to refine their techniques.

- Continuously assess and improve player development pathways.
- Encourage participation from individuals with varying abilities.
- Provide opportunities for players with disabilities to receive coaching from professional players and coaches (for example, from your elite programme).
- Encourage coaches to gain further qualifications such as specialist disability sport coaching certificates or advanced certifications in working with complex needs.





Phase 5: Sustainability and growth (months 19-24)

Objective: Ensure the long-term sustainability and growth of Disability Football within your organisation.

Step 13. Establish a governance structure

Implement a formal governance structure to oversee the programme's operations. This could include regular committee meetings and clear reporting lines and policies to ensure the programme aligns with national and international disability sport standards. Your governance structure can evolve as your programmes grow. Clear governance and recognised status often help with funding, partnerships and grant applications.



[Disability Football policy template](#)

Example

One example of best practice in governance is to ensure that disabled athletes' voices are represented. **The United States Soccer Federation (USSF) is a good example of inclusive governance and decisionmaking processes.**

Of the 11 senior national teams that are administered and funded within the USSF, five of them are for players who have a disability: CP men's and women's national teams, a powerchair football national team and deaf men's and women's national teams.

Senior national-team disabled athletes can be members of the Athletes' Council. In turn, the Athletes' Council allocates athletes to sit on various committees and task forces within the association and votes members onto the association's board of directors.



Another non-board committee is the Disability Soccer Committee. This committee comprises eight individuals who represent disability service organisations, two independent advocates and three grassroots football providers.

Find out more about the [USSF](#).

Step 14. Continue to promote

Promotion and awareness-raising will be needed throughout the life cycle of your programme. Please refer to step 10 for tips on how to promote the programme. The call to action might be different once the programme has become sustainable, as it might be more focused on retaining players, looking for more volunteers or establishing more accessible grounds.

Ensure that Disability Football is included as a standing item on your organisation's overall communication plan throughout the year.

Maintain regular communication and perform outreach activities with disabled communities. People move and personal situations change, and people who were unresponsive or not interested in the past might be more receptive to your promotional campaign this time around.



Example

In 2024, the **Argentinian Football Association (AFA) celebrated the 27th edition of its Inclusive Football League** (*Liga de Fútbol Inclusiva*) for people with disabilities. Launched in 1998 in Moreno, Argentina, the league has expanded across the country and the wider continent. Through this initiative, organised by the AFA and the charity Asociación Civil Andar, football is used as a platform to foster positive values, create equal opportunities and build a more inclusive society.

Each year, the start of the tournament is marked by an exciting opening ceremony and an invitation to participate is published online to encourage as many players with a disability as possible to participate.

In 2024, more than 900 players with disabilities from 34 organisations in nearby regions took part.

The consistency and sustainability of the programme, combined with the upbeat and friendly atmosphere, are the keys to its success. It may have started small, but it has now become unmissable.

Find out more about the [AFA's Liga de Fútbol Inclusiva](#).



Step 15. Identify talent

Note: *If the Disability Football discipline you are developing as part of your programme does not offer a development pathway to higher levels (only possible at non-competitive community and recreational levels), skip this step and go directly to step 17.*



[Directory of major Disability Football organisations](#)

- Develop pathways to identify talented players who can play and compete at higher levels. Work with coaches to scout talent and offer these players additional training or opportunities to compete in regional or national competitions. Be aware of the classification requirements for each discipline (find specific information on the relevant international organisation's website). Some talented players might not be able to progress through the competition pathway due to how their disability is impacting the way they play the sport.
- Implement talent identification programmes to identify potential athletes for national teams or international competitions.
- Develop a database of disabled players to facilitate talent identification and recruitment.
- If you are running several programmes (i.e. pan-disability and disability-specific), observe the players, assess whether they would be better suited to another one of your programmes and advise them if this is the case.
- Be respectful and do not attempt to classify a player and perform medical examinations without the help of a certified classifier.



Step 16. Prepare players for national and international events

Note: *If the Disability Football discipline you are developing as part of your programme does not offer a development pathway to higher levels (only possible at non-competitive community and recreational level), skip this step and go directly to step 17.*



[Directory of major Disability Football organisations](#)

Help players showing competitive potential to prepare for national and international Disability Football events. This includes organising specialised training camps and offering support to help them navigate the process of competing at higher levels.

- Map and identify regional and international events in your discipline.
- Work with international federations to understand qualifying standards, etc.
- Prepare and support players and staff to participate in national and international Disability Football events. Team campaigns and travel to competitions with disabled players often require more preparation, time, adjustments and money than with non-disabled players.



Example

The Royal Netherlands Football Association (KNVB) uses the colour orange as a source of inspiration

In the Netherlands, every child dreams of donning the iconic orange kit and following in the footsteps of players like Cody Gakpo, Frenkie de Jong, Esmee Brugts and Vivianne Miedema by playing at a FIFA World Cup™ or FIFA Women's World Cup™. Representing their country in a major tournament is an honour and a dream come true for adults and children alike.

Football players with a disability can quite rightly share that dream. In the Netherlands, there are various forms of Disability Football that also have a national team, which are known collectively as the Orange Para Football Teams. Having the chance to play in orange shows that there are opportunities to achieve something, to pursue goals, to develop and to make the most of your abilities.

It is important to give players with disabilities a stage and the same opportunities as players in any other national team. Six times a year, the KNVB organises an Orange Para Football Day at the KNVB Campus. The campus is the place where all Dutch national teams are based and offers perfect pitches and professional facilities. Training in that top-level sports environment provides inspiration and motivation for anyone who is working towards a goal.

The following teams attend the Orange Para Football Days:

- Men's amputee football national team
- Blind football talent team (mixed)
- Men's and women's CP football national teams
- Men's U-23 CP football national team
- Men's U-18 CP football national team
- Men's U-15 CP football national team
- Men's and women's deaf football national teams (played in a futsal format)



How the KNVB contributes to the development of its Disability Football national teams in an accessible way:

- Giving them national-team shirts
- Enabling them to train in the same place as all other national teams (their national-team campus)
- Taking pictures of the players in the national-team kit and promoting them, which will show other people that they can compete for their country and play at a high level with a disability and also help ensure that more children, young people and adults with disabilities will be inspired to play football
- Making the opportunities visible on their website

Find out more about the [KNVB's Disability Football national teams](#).





Step 17. Evaluate, adapt (again!) and repeat

Building on the “evaluate and adapt” model introduced in step 9, this step focuses on continuous programme monitoring and improvement. Regularly gather feedback from participants, coaches and stakeholders to assess the programme’s performance. Make the necessary adjustments to address concerns and enhance the experience.

At the end of each season, hold a thorough review with focus groups involving coaches, players, parents and support staff to discuss successes, challenges and areas for growth. This review should inform a published report outlining the progress, achievements and areas for development.

As part of this process, revisit your action plan and set more ambitious goals for the following season, using performance data to track progress. A critical aspect of growing your programme is retaining players. To foster player loyalty, prioritise engagement by making them feel valued, offering incentives such as additional training or leadership opportunities, and creating a strong sense of community within the programme.



Example

The Brazilian Football Association (CBF) is evaluating and sharing information about its disability national teams (*seleções inclusivas*) in its management report for the first time this year. This means that the activities of the dwarf football team, Down syndrome football team and Unified Football team – played in a futsal format – are being reported alongside those of the mainstream national teams (in football, futsal and beach soccer), demonstrating the association's strong commitment to supporting Disability Football.

Some examples of how the CBF has provided support include the following:

- Brazil's *Brasa* team (dwarf football, played in a futsal format) were welcomed to the CBF's headquarters, where the players and coaching staff had the opportunity to experience a media day, visit the Brazilian national-team museum and have lunch with CBF President Ednaldo Rodrigues. Afterwards, the team flew to Argentina to participate in the World Cup, with all expenses being covered by the association.
- The CBF covered all logistics and equipment expenses, using FIFA Forward funds, for the national team of players with Down syndrome to attend the 2024 Trisome Games held in Türkiye, where they were crowned world champions for the third time!
- The CBF also sponsored, using FIFA Forward funds, the first edition of Brazil's Unified Football Cup, organised by Special Olympics Brazil in Rio de Janeiro last June, in partnership with CONMEBOL.

Find out more about the [CBF's support for Unified Football](#).



Conclusion

Once the programme is running smoothly, consider revisiting the steps from phase 2 onwards to explore launching new initiatives, such as introducing another discipline or expanding the offering to cater for a different group of participants. This cycle of evaluation, adaptation and growth ensures that the programme remains dynamic, inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community.

This work plan serves as a guideline for developing Disability Football within a national association. It can be adapted according to the specific needs and resources available in your country, whilst the timeline can be adjusted as needed to achieve successful implementation. Regular evaluation and adaptation are key to ensuring the long-term success of the programme.





Tools





This section contains the practical tools and templates that are mentioned throughout this toolkit to support the reader in taking action. They have been produced to provide guidance only and will need to be adapted to each specific context.

Some tools are easier to use in Microsoft Word and are available to download below.

Summary of tools available:



Glossary	88
FIFA Accessibility Terminology Guide	91
Directory of key international federations and organisations	94
Barriers for disabled people to participate in sport	98
Disability Football work plan template	98
Disability Football policy template	98
Practical tips for inclusive football coaches	99

To suggest additional tools that may be useful for you to grow Disability Football in your region, please contact humanrights@fifa.org.



Glossary

Ability grouping/ability banding: The practice of sorting players by formal or informal measures of ability or achievement for the purpose of fairness of the game.

Accessibility: The usability of a product, service, environment or facility by people with the widest range of capabilities. This definition is related to the fundamental principle of universal accessibility in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which outlines the requirements to be fulfilled by environments, processes, goods, products and services, objects, instruments, tools and devices in order to be understandable, usable and viable for all people in safe and comfortable conditions, and as independently and naturally as possible.

Adaptive Football/Adapted Football/All Abilities Football: These terms are often used interchangeably and refer to modified version of Mainstream Football to best suit disabled people's needs. For the purpose of this toolkit, Disability Football is the umbrella term chosen to refer to it.

Classification: The process which defines who is eligible to compete in Para sport or disability sport and groups athletes into sports classes according to how much their disability affects their ability to carry out the fundamental activities involved in a specific sport. Classification is integral to disability sport at competitive level as it provides a structure for fair and equitable competition. Classification is sport-specific because disabilities affect the ability to perform in different sports to a different extent. Classification is more formal than ability grouping and is led by trained experts for each sport who follow strict and extensive rules.



Disability: According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Disability Football: Umbrella term referring to all opportunities and formats of football available for disabled people and people with limited mobility to participate in – with or without specific equipment or the modification of rules.

Disability-Specific Football: A form of football for people with the same disability to play together, with modified rules and adapted equipment. There are several main disciplines of Disability-Specific Football.

Inclusion: In the context of disability and accessibility, this refers to the active and meaningful engagement of disabled people at all levels of society.

MA(s): FIFA member association(s).

Mainstream Football: The most commonly known version of football that follows FIFA rules.

Modified Football: This version of football offers modified rules and allows people with and without disabilities to play together. Modified Football can also be called Unified Football or Integrated Football.

Pan-Disability Football: A form of football for players with a broad spectrum of disabilities and health conditions to play together.



Para football: The term “Para” is a trademark of the International Paralympic Committee. The term “Para” may only be used by sports that comply with the IPC athlete classification code and with the express permission of the IPC. The only current Para football played at the Paralympic level is blind football (also known as Football 5-a-side). Para athletes are athletes with disabilities who participate in sports on the Paralympics programme but who have not yet participated in their first Paralympic Games. Paralympians are Para athletes who have represented their country at a Paralympic Games. For clarity, “Para” is short for “parallel”, i.e. running directly alongside the mainstream game.

People with lived experience: In the context of disability and accessibility, this refers to individuals and communities with personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand experience of living with a disability rather than through representations constructed by other people.

Twin-track approach: This is about making sure mainstream services and support (such as public transport) are inclusive of, and accessible to, disabled people, while services and support that are specific to disabled people are also available. This approach is not about having to choose between the specific or mainstream option, but rather, is about having the right access to the most appropriate high-quality support or service at the right time and in the right place. Ensuring that mainstream services and support are inclusive of disabled people requires the provision of reasonable accommodation and incorporation of universal design.



FIFA Accessibility Terminology Guide

Language is not universal, and that is also true for the disability community. Some players view disability as a critical component of their identity and prefer to use identity-first language (e.g. disabled person), whereas others prefer person-centred language (e.g. person with disability).

It is appropriate for a coach to ask a player which term they prefer. While preferences may differ, it is universally agreed that language that implies ableism (by suggesting that typical abilities are better) should be avoided. Therefore, when writing articles or raising awareness on social media, it is important to focus on players' accomplishments and to only incorporate disability-related content if it is essential to the story, topic or context. If it is relevant, disability-related content should be treated as a characteristic rather than the primary focus. Do not use patronising phrases such as "physically challenged", "special" or "handicapped" which are inappropriate because they reinforce differences between communities. When a player is successful, avoid describing them as having "overcome" their disability and avoid using inspirational language ("she is such an inspirational story"). This tone can be condescending to the disability community and overshadow athletic achievements.

It is important to note that language evolves based on the preferences of an evolving society.



The following table offers recommendations on language to avoid and language to use:

DO SAY	AVOID
Non-disabled person	Able-bodied person
Disabled person and person with limited mobility/Person with a disability	Handicapped, the disabled
Has a disability	Afflicted with, suffering from, Cripple, defective, victim of...
Congenital disability	Birth defect
Wheelchair user/player who uses a wheelchair or mobility device	Confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair bound
Brain injury	Brain damage
Person with Down syndrome	Down's (they have Down's)
Non-verbal, Deaf-blind person	Dumb, mute
Deaf, or hard-of-hearing person	Hearing-impaired person
Intellectually disabled person, Learning-disabled person	Person with a learning difficulty or a disabled, retarded, slow or special person
Person with mental health issue(s)	Mentally ill, insane person
Person with dwarfism, person of short stature, little person	Midget, dwarf
Person with cerebral palsy, person who has cerebral palsy	Spastic
Blind person, partially sighted person, person with low vision or visual impairment	The blind/partially sighted



This list is not exhaustive, nor is it representative of acceptable language in every country or territory, but it can be used as a guide. It should be noted that language or terminology that is perceived to be offensive in one country may be acceptable in another, and it is of paramount importance that disabled persons are involved and assist MAs when developing appropriate language for the specific country's Disability Football programmes.





Directory of key international federations and organisations

Note: This is a non-exhaustive list and the organisations are listed in alphabetical order.

Deaf International Football Association (DIFA)

An organisation that promotes and oversees deaf football events globally. DIFA was established in 2010 and has since worked to promote and develop deaf football around the world. DIFA has strict regulations and standards for deaf football tournaments and events. DIFA is a member of the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD).

Fédération Internationale de Powerchair Football Association (FIPFA)

The organisation that regulates powerchair football internationally. FIPFA was established in 2006 and has since worked to promote and develop powerchair football around the world. FIPFA is a member of the International Paralympic Committee and has strict regulations and standards for powerchair football tournaments and events.

Federation of International Walking Football Associations (FIWFA)

FIWFA is the international governing body for walking football and was established in 2018.

Football International Federation for Players with Down syndrome (FIFDS)

The organisation that leads futsal for players with Down syndrome. FIFDS hosted the first world championships in Portugal in April 2017. FIFDS is a member of the [Sports Union for athletes with Down Syndrome](#) (SU-DS).

International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA)

An organisation that promotes sports for the visually impaired and runs blind football events globally. IBSA is a member of the International Paralympic Committee and works closely with other organisations to promote and develop blind football alongside other blind sports.

The IBSA World Games are a chance for new and established athletes to compete against a strong field of their peers in both Paralympic and non-Paralympic sports. The blind football competition at the IBSA World Games is usually a qualifier for the Paralympic Games.

International Dwarf Sports Federation (IDSF)

The organisation was formed in the wake of the very successful 1st World Dwarf Games in Chicago in 1993. The World Dwarf Games are held every four years.

International Federation for Cerebral Palsy Football (IFCPF)

The international governing body for the sport of CP football and frame football. Officially formed in January 2015, CP football became an independent sport after 37 years under the [Cerebral Palsy International Sport and Recreation Association](#) (CPIRSA).

International Football Committee on Mental Health (IFCMH)

The body founded in 2013 promoting the Dream World Cup and the futsal world championship for psychiatric patients.



International Paralympic Committee (IPC)

The global governing body of the Paralympic Movement. The IPC oversees the delivery of the Paralympic Games (held in summer and winter every four years) and supports members to enable Para athletes to achieve sporting excellence. The current version of Disability Football played at the Paralympic Games is blind football.

International Sports Federation for athletes with intellectual impairment (Virtus)

Virtus is the international federation for athletes with an intellectual impairment. Formed in 1986, Virtus (formerly INAS) is recognised by the International Paralympic Committee as the International Organisation of Sport for people with a Disability (IOSD) governing the eligibility of athletes with an intellectual impairment, elite competition and sport development. Virtus promotes both football and futsal for people with intellectual disabilities.

Para Football

A foundation and worldwide body of football for disabled people. Registered in the Netherlands as a foundation and non-profit, Para Football was founded in 2020 and builds upon a history of collaboration between international federations linked to the International Paralympic Committee which has now been expanded to cover all types of football for disabled people. Para Football brings together independent international federations of football for disabled people, supporting collaboration, sharing resources and centralising areas of work where possible.



Special Olympics

A global organisation that offers sport and programmes for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, founded in 1968 and featuring events and international games, the World Games as well as regional and national competitions.

World Abilitysport

World Abilitysport was formed in 2022 after the merger of the International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation (IWASF) and CPISRA. World Abilitysport is a member of the International Paralympic Committee as the IOSD. The World Abilitysport Games feature multiple disability sports, selected by the Local Organising Committee. CP football may be part of the programme.

World Amputee Football Federation (WAFF)

An organisation that promotes and oversees amputee football events globally. WAFF was established in 2002 and has since worked to promote and develop amputee football around the world.



Barriers for disabled people to participate in sport

It is important to keep these barriers in mind as you follow the step-by-step guidance.

Please note that this tool is a guide and should be customised to fit the specific needs and context of your organisation and may need to be adapted to your own local context.



[Download](#)

Disability Football work plan template

Template to be adapted to your own plans and timeline. Please refer to the methodology presented in chapter 3.



[Download](#)

Disability Football policy template

This template can be customised to suit the specific needs of Disability Football organisations. They are designed to simplify the process of developing and managing events, training programmes and sponsorship opportunities. By using these templates, organisations can save time and resources and focus on delivering high-quality programmes and services to athletes with disabilities. Having a policy in place often helps get approvals from an organisation's board or management.

Please note that this policy template should be customised to fit the specific needs and context of your association and may require a legal review to ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations related to disability rights.



[Download](#)



Practical tips for inclusive football coaches

These tips are provided as guidance only, having been designed to encourage coaches to create their own adaptations. There could be as many communication styles as there are individuals. Not everyone with the same type of disability will respond in the same way.

General advice

- Know your players and create a trusting relationship. No two disabilities are the same and most are not visible, so always talk to your players about their movement limitations and regular medication and encourage them to share with you how this may affect their training.
- Offer a call or in-person meeting with each participant/parent before the participant enrolls to make sure you understand their disability and accessibility requirements.
- Adapt your session schedule to allow more time for athletes to get changed and/or transfer into sport-specific equipment, wheelchairs, etc.
- Sessions might need to be shorter as some conditions or disabilities cause greater fatigue.
- Ensure the athletes get the right support, allowing carers or companions to assist when necessary. The coach-to-player ratio may need to be adjusted (ask parents and carers to help on the pitch if appropriate).
- Always follow strict safeguarding policies.
- Do not reveal or share details of a player's disability in front of the rest of the group. Treat everyone respectfully.
- If you have put in place successful methods of communication and adaptation with your athletes, share this knowledge with other coaches.



Mobility

- A person's mobility aid represents independence and freedom. It is part of who they are.
- Players with spinal cord injuries have an impaired sympathetic nervous system, meaning they can have difficulties regulating their heart rate, blood pressure and perspiration, which affects temperature regulation. It is important to keep this in mind, especially in warm environments.
- Players with CP or a brain injury may also suffer from more frequent dehydration, muscle cramps and exhaustion. This can be due to the fact that prolonged exercise increases muscle tone and specific movement patterns require more energy expenditure.
- Water breaks and shade are key. Work-to-rest ratios may need to be adjusted once a coach gets to know the physical fitness level of their players.
- Check the condition and appropriateness of the player's mobility aids (wheelchairs, crutches or prosthetics).
- Lack of sensation (especially with muscle loss) makes players more susceptible to cuts, sores or burns that they might not feel. Ensure the environment is safe, including hot or cold surfaces.
- Certain surfaces may present greater mobility challenges than others, such as a synthetic turf or grass in comparison to a futsal-style court.
- Keep the area as unobstructed as possible; for example, use flat cones rather than the traditional shape.



Visual

- Find out how much sight the player has – do not be afraid to ask respectfully how well an individual can see. This will enable you to make sure your communication is appropriate.
- Ask the person if they need to be shown or guided around the environment.
- Identify yourself verbally to the person when you approach them, for example by saying your name, and always let them know when you are leaving. It is important that the players understand who is present and what their roles are.
- Use adapted equipment (such as brighter colours and balls containing bells).
- Lead the sessions in a quiet environment (with fewer disturbances from other activities or music, away from other groups, etc.).
- Use descriptive coaching (verbal and touch/feel) rather than visual demonstrations.
- Do not push or move a person.
- Callers or guides may assist with coaching and help to create a low coach-to-player ratio.



Cognitive

- The coach may wish to consider sending an email ahead of a training session or matchday since some players might find it beneficial to know what will be covered and what to expect in advance. Some would benefit from receiving written instructions in simple language.
- Coaches might need to adapt their delivery style by using simpler words, avoiding metaphors or technical football expressions, for example. Provide short and precise instructions. Avoid negations.
- If possible, use pictures or other visual aids.
- Choose words carefully, especially when delivering feedback. Feedback might be best received in a one-to-one setting rather than in front of the group.



Sensory

- It might be easier for the coach to assign pairs or groups rather than letting the players choose for themselves, which could lead to socially uncomfortable situations that players do not know how to handle.
- Players might isolate themselves or become withdrawn. This is fine. Do not pressure them; they will rejoin the group when they are ready.
- Be patient. Give the person time and try to create a comfortable environment.



Speech and language

- Identify what is the best communication method for the player.
- If possible, use pictures or other visual aids.
- Emotion or symbol cards or posters could be helpful.



Auditory

- Attract the person's attention before starting a conversation (this might be with a light touch or a visual sign, such as waving an arm or a flag, for example).
- Determine the player's preferred method of communication (for example, lip reading, sign language or working with an interpreter). If the person uses an interpreter or signer, talk to the person, not the interpreter or signer.
- Be aware that hearing loss can impact a player's balance.
- Providing visual instructions and drawings on a whiteboard could be helpful.
- During matches, suggest to the referee that they communicate using simple gestures and signs.
- If the person is using sign language, it could be helpful for the coach and team-mates to learn a few basic signs to communicate with the player.
- A quiet and well-lit environment will make it easier to communicate.

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