

# Zero Waste Blue

## INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN SPORTS EVENTS: A GUIDE FOR ORGANISERS



# LIST OF CONTENTS

## INCLUDING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN SPORTS EVENTS : A GUIDE FOR ORGANISERS

- 1** 1. INTRODUCTION
2. TERMINOLOGY **2**
- 3** 3. THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
4. EVENT PUBLICITY  
WHO DO WE WANT TO REACH?  
HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE? **4**
- 5** 7. EVENT ORGANISATION  
BEFORE THE EVENT  
DURING THE EVENT  
AFTER THE EVENT
13. USEFUL TIPS **6**



# 1

## INTRODUCTION



People with disabilities have the need to play sports, i.e. to have permanent and appropriate physical activity as much as any other non-disabled person, regardless of their physical limitations. The inclusion of people with disabilities in sports activities is one of the prerequisites for the best possible integration into society and adaptation to their living conditions, regardless of whether the disability is congenital or acquired later in life.

Programs and events involving people with disabilities should have the support of the wider community. This support is crucial not only for humane reasons but also because the care for people with disabilities and their successful integration into social life can help us measure the cultural and civilisational reaches of both the community and the society in large.

An organiser of sports event plays a vital role in making sport and exercise accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities.



We know how challenging it can be to engage with diverse communities with their respective ranges of needs. This guide supports you in communicating and engaging more effectively with audiences that include people with disabilities. It contains hints and suggestions on how you can motivate people with disabilities and how you can reassure them that their needs will be met.

# 2 TERMINOLOGY

“ Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

”

This is the definition prescribed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The European Union and all its Member States are parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Also, the EU and its Member States have committed themselves to improve the social and economic status of persons with disabilities, on the basis of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.



# 3

## THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES



Participation in sports events mitigates behavioural changes that occur when a disability occurs – such activities change the affected person as well as the immediate family the person lives with. Continuous sports activity is primarily a psychosomatic form of therapy for them, and just then a recreational aspect of a better quality of leisure time

Through sports, people with disabilities learn to take control of their lives. Sports achievements lead them to a sense of achievement and pride and turn their attention from defects and disabilities to virtues and abilities.

One should not neglect the fact that the positive impact of sport is also achieved through interaction with other people during a sports event. Participation in group physical activity encourages socialisation, which is an important component of identity development.

Increasingly, athletes with disabilities are viewed first as athletes and only then as disabled. This is precisely how people with disabilities achieve greater equality in society through sport. Public perceptions are changing and people are realising that people with disabilities can do more than others expect them to be able to.

\* As of 03/05/2019.

\*\* Data from the Report on Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Croatia, provided by the Croatian Institute for Public Health



**By 2020, one-fifth of the EU population is expected to have some kind of disability.**

**This already tells you enough regarding the number of potential participants in sports events!**

**In Croatia, there are 511,281 persons with disabilities\*, of which 307,647 are men (60%) and 203,634 are women (40%), thus making people with disabilities account for about 12.4% of the total population of the Republic of Croatia. \*\***

# 4 EVENT PUBLICITY

## WHO DO WE WANT TO REACH?

This is a vital first question to ask before designing the publicity. The way you advertise an event will largely define people's assumptions about what the event will be like and who is able to participate in it. The event will need to live up to these expectations.

Engaging with people with disabilities in regard to your event will be much more effective if you have a clear idea of who the activity is aimed at and how the event will be run.

People with disabilities find advertising about activity or sports events more engaging when it really captures the feel of what it will be like to take part in that particular event.



- It should be clear whether an event is for beginners or for those more experienced.

- Is it a general event for people with disabilities and non-disabled people alike, or is it for people with a specific impairment?

- Is it targeted at a particular demographic group, for example young people or women only?

- Is the emphasis on pure enjoyment or on a more competitive edge?



## HOW DO WE COMMUNICATE?



This applies to posters, banners, flyers, advertisements and all other forms of communication. It is necessary to have:

- One bold, attention-grabbing headline. This needs to be larger than every thing else.
- An engaging image/set of images.
- A supporting message that clearly explains who is welcome to take part.
- A way for potential participants to ask any questions / have a conversation with the organiser. Provide more than one form of contact, such as a phone number and an email address.
- A way to find out more via a website link, so people can get a very clear idea of what the event is like without having to contact anyone.
- Practical details (e.g. date, time, location) that are punchy and stand out.

**In order for the announcement or promotion of the event to be as effective as possible and reach the target audience as easy and quickly as possible, the promotional materials should be clear, accessible and avoid the information overload.**



## SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

Answer queries and leave the opportunity to communicate about specific questions and needs. This can easily be shaped through questions like:

**"Any questions?"**

**"Tell us what YOU expect from this event."**

**"Everyone's different – tell us how we can make this work for you?"**

It is advisable to put as much information on the website as possible for anyone who wants to learn more about a particular event. The website information must be consistent with everything communicated through all the other channels. In addition, the website provides the ability to come up with a lot more details than can be disseminated through social networks, posters, banners, and other visuals.

People with disabilities often have smaller social circles than non-disabled people and they place great trust in those they know. In some cases, people with disabilities rely on supporters for practical or emotional help.

That's why it's important to understand how communications are perceived by supporters too. Be aware that supporters can often be very protective.





# 5

## EVENT ORGANIZATION



### BEFORE THE EVENT

Provide extensive information in a timely manner so people can plan their attendance at the event. Use a variety of formats and ways to inform the public to make sure the information reaches the widest audience possible.

Be sure to reach out to associations of people with disabilities or associations working with them, in order to reach people who may not receive information through traditional media (print, TV, radio) or the web and social networks.

Be available for contact by phone or e-mail. Remember that for some people it will take some courage to get in touch or make a call, so try to be careful and respond quickly. Offer a private conversation if someone wants to talk about their specific needs.

Make sure the location of the event is accessible to people with mobility difficulties, hearing or vision impairment, and that location is easily accessible by traffic. Visit the event site and make a list of necessary changes and obstacles that need to be overcome in order to make the location accessible to everyone.



**You have successfully promoted your event and someone decided to join it - congratulations!**

**What you want now is to provide a positive first experience so that the same people come back next time.**

**Designate an Event Access Coordinator who will oversee all the stages of accessibility implementation, from planning to completion. This role is extremely important for major events with a number of conditions that must be met.**



- Prepare your volunteers and other staff: everyone should have at least a basic awareness of disability and understand the sensitivity of the issues involved, as well as know the availability and location of accessible toilet rooms, ramps, and other aids. They must know that people with disabilities expect to be treated like all other participants at the event and viewed as individuals, rather than through their disability. Any anxiousness or overly protective behaviour should be avoided, as in most cases people with disabilities will let you know if they need anything. In case of doubt, simply ask.
- Make it known to people with disabilities in advance if any assistance will be provided on the spot or if that they should provide it themselves. It is necessary to respect the physical independence of people with disabilities. When it come to the need for physical contact or approaching a service animal, always ask first.
- Publicly available promotional material (brochures, maps, event schedules) should include appropriate accessibility tags for the various forms of disability and, if possible, be available in larger print versions. In order to make the information accessible to blind and partially sighted people, including promotional material using large fonts/Braille, and use audio signals on the location as much as possible. Use the services of a sign language interpreter for the needs of the deaf and hearing-impaired people.
- Use signage to indicate the locations of available parking spaces, accessible boarding points, access routes and entrances. Use recognisable accessibility symbols and sufficiently large, easy-to-read fonts. Provide a sufficient number of portable ramps to ensure accessibility. Check for sidewalk defects that may be a problem for wheelchair users. Use barriers to protect accessibility ramps and access points for wheelchair users.



- The nearest parking lot, clearly marked on the map enclosed in promotional materials, should be no more than 50 meters away. Special vehicles for transport must be able to park within 50 meters of the event location or the meeting place of the participants.



- In order to safely use the parking space, people with disabilities who use mobility devices need a space larger than the designated parking spaces. Each of their locations must have additional manoeuvring space due to special vehicles with built-in lifts. Available parking spaces must be as close as possible to the location of the event; if they are not, an accessible route or a temporary parking space should be provided. A minimum of one parking space for people with disabilities should be provided for every 20-25 parking spaces.
- Be sure to provide easily accessible unisex restrooms suitable for wheelchair users. In the case of a larger location or if an event that takes place in multiple locations, it is necessary to provide a larger number of such toilets (at least one in addition to the toilets for other participants).
- Connect with associations and service providers who work with people with disabilities and are well aware of all the challenges. Their tips and suggestions will be extremely helpful.

- Inclusivity should always be emphasised. However, in some cases, separation is a better way to include people with disabilities in the event. For example, a separate race for the disabled as part of a major competitive event such as a marathon/half marathon. Runners with prosthetic legs and artificial limbs may then seek competition with other runners, so a flexible participation policy is the best option.



### Things to keep in mind...

**Not every event or activity needs to be offered to everyone, as it doesn't even need to be tailored to everyone. It is necessary to be realistic about the possibilities of inclusion and the course of the event.**

**In principle, to say that every event is appropriate for everyone is not true and can also mean that it is not really tailored to anyone.**

## DURING THE EVENT

- At the actual event location, it is necessary to provide a route that can safely be used by people with reduced mobility, wheelchairs or walking aids. The route should cover all the site's key locations, including parking, restrooms, seating area, info desk, and existing service stands. The route should be the same one used by other participants in the event, with compact surfaces, sufficiently wide, without stairs and similar obstacles.
- Some people with disabilities may need extra time to move, participate in a particular activity, or speak to express their needs. The behaviour of people with developmental or cognitive disabilities may be unsettling to someone unfamiliar with these disabilities, so it is necessary to approach the situation without fear and with sufficient patience, just as you would do with all other participants.
- Provide one group of volunteers who will be especially available to people with disabilities and familiarise them with the latter's needs, as well as with the functioning of the devices and aids they use. Explain to volunteers they should avoid vague statements and gestures and always provide articulate and intelligible answers to queries. Warn them that louder speech does not ensure a recipient will understand them better.



- In the case of multi-activity events, keep in mind the degree of mobility of people with disabilities and allow them sufficient time between activities, especially if activities take place at different locations. For the same reason, try to avoid sudden changes in schedule to avoid stress and tension.



- Make it clear to people with disabilities that their support and all the help they need is always available, that they can rest and, if necessary, be free to give up if necessary.

- Provide a special start space for people with disabilities – by no means place them in the margins. Take care of their comfort and closeness with colleagues and friends. If people with disabilities need to have an accompaniment while attending your event, consider registering an accompaniment for free. If you are booking audience seats for people accompanying the people with disabilities, plan to provide them with good viewing locations.

- If there are speakers present at the event, ask them to always use the microphone and speak to the audience, not too quickly or too quietly, and to be aware of the possible audio delays with people using hearing and interpretation devices. In addition, be sure to remove all the sources of unnecessary noise.

- In consultation with service providers, ensure that people with disabilities can access their services, goods, food, and beverages without difficulty.

### Avoid...

**Inquiring about disability or special needs in front of others**

**Giving priority or special attention to certain people with disabilities over others**

**Isolating people with disabilities from others in any way**



## AFTER THE EVENT

- Reach out to your participants and ask for feedback and tips to be used in the upcoming events. You can do this individually or through the disability associations you work with.
- Check out whether everything went according to plan, if everyone was well informed and able to fully enjoy the event.
- Use the information provided to continue improving the accessibility of your event to people with disabilities.



# 6

## USEFUL TIPS



Don't make assumptions about any person's abilities. If you're not sure what someone can do, just ask!

Ask before you help and respect a person's right to refuse your help.

Speak and/or partner with service providers who work with people with disabilities.

Provide safe, friendly and accessible environments.

Be open to suggestions and advice.

Mix physical and social activities.

Talk to adults with a disability as adults.

Relax! People with disabilities are just people looking for fun and recreation.



It is important to understand that you do not have to be a disability expert. It is much more important to know and understand the barriers standing in the way of disabled people - not only during sports events but also in everyday life, and to be able to talk openly with people about their respective needs.

We thank the following associations for  
their help in developing the guide:

**RIJEKA SPORTS ASSOCIATION FOR  
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**ASSOCIATION FOR SPORT  
RECREATION OF PERSONS WITH  
DISABILITIES RIJEKA**

This guide was created as part of  
the **ZERO WASTE BLUE** project.

Opatija, 2019.



European Regional Development Fund