



# Sport for persons with intellectual disabilities in Switzerland

Position paper of Special Olympics Switzerland

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**Special Olympics**  
Switzerland



## 1 Situation

Special Olympics has promoted regular training and competition opportunities in a variety of sports for people with intellectual and multiple disabilities around the world since 1968. Its aim is to help athletes with intellectual disabilities to gain more recognition, self-confidence and ultimately more participation in society through sport. Special Olympics is active in 193 countries and reaches about 3.6 million people with intellectual disabilities.

The organization has maintained a presence in Switzerland as a foundation since 1995 and is active in all parts of the country. In 2018, Special Olympics Switzerland (SOSWI) became a partner of Swiss Olympic and thus part of the country's sports system. The foundation offices are in Ittigen, near Bern.

SOSWI organizes regional and national multi-sport events, trains caregivers, sends delegations to competitions abroad (including the European Games and World Games) and is an important advocate for the interests of athletes with intellectual and multiple disabilities in the Swiss sports system. SOSWI also advocates for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

## 2 Positions

### **Position 1: An athlete is an athlete**

Historically, athletes with intellectual and multiple disabilities have found opportunities for physical activity and sport through special programs in institutions and sports clubs for people with disabilities. They are seen first as "disabled" rather than as athletes.

There will always be people who, due to severe disability, cannot be regular members of a sports club. These people require individually tailored programs with diverse levels of support.

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***We support sports federations and their member clubs in allowing athletes with intellectual disabilities to practice sport in such clubs and participate in club life.***

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### **Position 2: National oversight**

Sport in Switzerland is organized through associations for specific sports disciplines. There are currently 81 sports federations in the country. They oversee about 18,000 sports clubs. Swiss Olympic is the umbrella organization for all sports federations.

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***We are committed to ensuring that athletes with intellectual disabilities have access to sports federations, are subject to their regulations and can benefit from their support.***

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### **Position 3: Transfer of competition opportunities**

Most competitive sports opportunities for people with intellectual and multiple disabilities are currently not organized and hosted by the sports federations, but rather by organizers specialized in working with people with disabilities; SOSWI is one of these.

Some sports federations have begun to allow athletes with intellectual disabilities to train and compete through their member clubs. SOSWI's role as a specialist organization includes sharing its experience and knowledge regarding this target group with sports federations and their members.

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***We are actively working to ensure that competitive sports programs for athletes with intellectual disabilities are organized and supported by the responsible sports federations.***

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### **Position 4: Open multi-sport events**

Special Olympics Switzerland's sport events are affirmations of humanity, joy, appreciation, openness and emotion. They provide a platform for people with intellectual and multiple disabilities.

Multi-sport events (defined as those with three or more disciplines) are held in the form of SOSWI Regional Games and National Games, in cooperation with the respective associations where possible. They pave the way for participation in the Special Olympics World Games, which take place every two years and alternate between Summer and Winter Games.

Participation in multi-sport events is open to athletes from sports federations as well as those from disability organizations and private initiatives.

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***We make it possible for athletes with intellectual disabilities to participate in our multi-sport events and international Special Olympics competitions***

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### **Position 5: Recognition of performance**

For people with intellectual and multiple disabilities, training and competition means athletic development and individual progress. These athletes are achieving remarkable things within the scope of their abilities. They deserve recognition and have the right to be seen, supported and encouraged.

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***We are committed to ensuring that people with intellectual disabilities are given the recognition that they deserve for their athletic achievements as well as the support and encouragement of Swiss Olympic and the organized sports associations.***

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## **Position 6: The prerequisite of good health**

A prerequisite to engaging in sports and improving one's performance is good health. Persons with intellectual and multiple disabilities still face obstacles in navigating the Swiss health care system. They are spoken down to, not given information that they can understand, encounter structures that are not designed to meet their needs and have lower life expectations than the national average. Their access to prevention, exercise and health education resources is also greatly limited.

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***We strive to improve the physical, social and emotional well-being of people with intellectual disabilities and support their access to health and wellness programs and care systems.***

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## **Position 7: The right to co-determination**

SOSWI is committed to ensuring that people with intellectual and multiple disabilities have the opportunity to participate in decision-making and taking on responsibilities. At the same time, we are aware of the need for new forms of communication, co-determination and decision-making processes. Internally, we maintain a critical view of how actual participation could take place and what it could bring.

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***We include people with intellectual disabilities from all levels of the organization in our decision-making and design processes with respect to their abilities and strengths.***

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## **Position 8: Recognition for caregivers**

Every sports program in Switzerland depends on the involvement of dedicated people for programs for recreation, games and sports. This also applies to athletes with intellectual disabilities. In the Swiss sports system, it is difficult to find people to fulfil these duties and support them so that they do not experience failure or burn out.

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***We seek, promote and support people who create programs for recreation, games and sports for people with intellectual disabilities, and we are committed to their visibility, societal recognition and appreciation.***

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