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Sports offering for people with intellectual disabilities: Analysis of the current situation in Spain

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ABSTRACT

In Spain, national disability data reported 274,833 people with recognized intellectual disabilities (IDs) by the end of 2018. This study aimed to (a) identify the current offer of physical sports activities for people with IDs in Spain by territorial distribution, sport modalities, nature of practice (competitive/non-competitive), and type of participation (specific/inclusive); and (b) explore whether the number of activity categories differs by gender. For this purpose, ninety-eight organisations filled out an ad hoc questionnaire on their activities. Results showed notable territorial inequality and that most entities offered only one sport modality. Programs typically combined competitive and non-competitive activities, with both specific and inclusive participation formats. Regarding gender, no entity lacked women's categories, although mixed categories predominated; the number of categories offered did not differ by gender. The results were differentiated between federative entities and the associative movement, revealing significant differences in all study variables. This study advances the identification and characterisation of the current offer of physical sports activities for people with IDs in Spain and provides a theoretical basis to establish practical actions for improving inclusion and participation in such activities, contributing to their quality of life.

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Introduction

Sports, recreation, and fitness opportunities for people with disabilities are increasing in number and diversity and are being identified as part of a growing industry worldwide (Pitts & Shapiro, 2017). In concrete numbers, people with disabilities represent a significant proportion of the world's population, totalling 3.8 million people in Spain, equivalent to 9% of the total population. Of these, some 274,833 have a recognised intellectual disability (ID, with a certificate of disability equal to or greater than 33%), comprising 157,995 men and 116,888 women (IMSERSO, 2018). One of the main concerns at the international and national levels is policies related to the general

population's health, as well as the health and quality of life of people with disabilities (Ginis et al., 2021). In this regard, the United Nations (2006) highlighted the role of participation in cultural, recreational, and sporting activities by people with disabilities. This idea was supported by the World Health Organisation's (WHO, 2018) recommendation to participate in physical sporting activities.

Recent research has highlighted physical sports activities' positive impact in improving perceived well-being and quality of life (Bondár et al., 2020), with the relevant role of sports for people with disabilities being highlighted in the 'White Paper on Sport for People with Disabilities' (Leardy et al., 2018). This stated that in order to meet the challenge of inclusion and guarantee access for people with disabilities to the practice of physical and sporting activity in the best accessibility conditions, the public administrations or responsible entities should guarantee that facilities are adapted to the characteristics presented by people with disabilities (Mendoza et al., 2018b). In Spain, according to the Law on Sports (Ley 39/2022, de 30 de diciembre, del Deporte, 2022), the administrative structure of sports is shared between the State and the autonomous communities. The State, through the Higher Sports Council (CSD), exercises jurisdiction over basic legislation and support for high-level sports, among others, while the autonomous communities manage grassroots sports and sports development. Sports for people with disabilities are currently structured into five national sports federations, such as the Spanish Federation of Sports for People with Intellectual Disabilities (FEDDI). However, there are entities within the associative movement that promote sports for people with disabilities in coordination with the federations.

In this regard, despite the consensus that physical activity and sports are essential components of health and quality of life in modern societies (Pérez-Tejero & Ocete, 2018), scientific evidence shows that people with disabilities are between 16% and 62% less likely to follow physical activity recommendations (Ginis et al., 2021). This inactivity problem is especially exacerbated in women and girls with IDs since, despite institutional commitment, data indicate that only 3,488 of the 13,051 people with disabilities with a federation licence in Spain are women. This number represents less than a quarter of all athletes with disabilities in the country and only 1% of all women with disabilities in Spain (IMSERSO, 2018). This disparity is often attributed to gendered social roles, limited access to inclusive sports programs, and increased caregiving responsibilities (Owen et al., 2025). These intersecting factors create additional barriers that disproportionately hinder women's participation in physical activity (Peng et al., 2023), beyond the challenges associated with disability itself. Furthermore, the lack of data on the sporting habits of women with IDs coupled with their low participation underlines the need to promote physical activity among them, as they face a double risk of not reaching the recommended levels of physical activity due to their disability and gender (Ocete & Delgado, 2023). To the above must be added the barriers that limit access by people with disabilities to essential public services and everyday activities that favour their participation in society and therefore their social inclusion (Louw et al., 2020). Specifically, barriers to access to physical activity and sports are related to training, lack of programs, the sports offering (Jaarsma et al., 2014; Ríos et al., 2009), accessibility, communication and information, and personal attitudes, among others (Delgado et al., 2024; Ocete et al., 2024; Shields & Synnot, 2016; Wright et al., 2019).

Sports' importance in Spain was already highlighted in the Sports Law of 1990 (Law 10/1990 of 15 October 1990), which stated that sport is a fundamental element of the educational system and its practice is important for the maintenance of health and, therefore, is a corrective factor of social imbalances, contributing to the development of equality among citizens and creating habits that facilitate social integration.

Likewise, the current Law on Sports (Ley 39/2022, de 30 de diciembre, del Deporte, 2022), for the first time in history and in a novel way, has introduced elements to promote inclusive sports and has enshrined equal opportunities for this group's access to sports. Likewise, Article 6 states that equality in sports is achieved by integrating men and women with disabilities into sports in order to enjoy the benefits associated with them (Ley 39/2022, de 30 de diciembre, del Deporte, 2022):

... the General State Administration, in collaboration with the rest of the Public Administrations, shall promote the policies necessary to guarantee the full autonomy, social inclusion and equal opportunities of persons with disabilities in the field of sport, paying particular attention to the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities, eliminating obstacles to their full integration and attending to the principles established in the Consolidated Text of the General Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and their Social Inclusion, approved by Royal Legislative Decree 1/2013, of 29 November, as well as in the international standards ratified by the State, especially, in the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (p. 20)

Among the factors that determine the general population's physical activity are the supply and distribution of physical activity. Areas with deficiencies in wellness-oriented infrastructure and equipment, as well as those characterised by significant socioeconomic inequalities, have been identified as having high rates of physical inactivity among their residents (Burillo et al., 2010). Determining aspects of the practice of sports by people with disabilities are the availability of resources for practice and the type of participation (Reina, 2010). Sports practice can be classified into two main types: specific and inclusive. Specific practice refers to sports that must be adapted to the characteristics of people with disabilities and comply with the regulations of the sport practiced (e.g. boccia). On the other hand, inclusive practice can be carried out in four different ways: 1) reverse-inclusion sports, where people without disabilities participate in the sport modality of people with disabilities, simulating their limitations; 2) inclusive sports with group adaptations, involving modifications that allow participants with and without disabilities to take part according to their abilities; 3) inclusive sports with individual adaptations, where conventional sports are practiced with some modifications that do not significantly alter the original modality but compensate for possible limitations of the person with a disability; and 4) regular or conventional sport, which implies full normalisation of the sport practice, following the standard regulations and provisions.

Considering the structure of Spanish sports and the current legislative changes, together with the evolution of sports for people with disabilities experienced in recent years (Zapata & Ocete, 2024), this study aims to describe the current situation of the national offer by autonomous community according to the sport modality, the nature of the activity (competition/non-competition) and the form of participation (inclusive/specific). Furthermore, given the particularly vulnerable

situation identified for women and girls with IDs, the aim is to analyse to what extent the supply of physical sports activity for people with IDs differs according to gender. Therefore, this study's objectives are: a) to identify the current offer of physical sports activities for people with IDs in Spain according to their territorial distribution, modalities offered, nature of the practice, and type of participation; and b) to explore whether the number of physical sport activity categories offered differs according to gender.

Materials and methods

Participants

The study universe consisted of 540 entities, including federations, foundations, associations, sports clubs, and other organisations that, at the time of the study, offered physical sports activities for individuals with IDs across the national territory, regardless of their management structure (public, private, or public-private). More details about the sample universe can be found in the procedure section.

The final sample consisted of 98 organisations that provided sports for people with IDs. This number represents 18.4% of the contacted universe. Among the entities analysed, we found different natures: 22.4% (n=22) were national federations, 18.4% (n=18) were regional or territorial federations, 4.1% (n=4) were foundations, 18.4% (n=18) were associations, 35.7% (n=35) were sports clubs and schools, and 1% (n=1) was a Special Education Centre.

To facilitate a more meaningful interpretation of the results, the organisations analysed were grouped into two categories based on their structural and functional characteristics: a) federative organisations, comprising national and regional/territorial sports federations (n=40; 40.8%), which tend to operate within formalised sports governance frameworks and competitive systems; and b) associative movement or third-sector organisations, including foundations, associations, clubs, sports schools, and educational centres (n=58; 59.2%), which are generally more flexible and community-oriented in their approach to offering sports opportunities. This categorisation was intended to reflect the heterogeneity of the entities involved and to enable more accurate interpretation of the potential differences in practices, resources, and challenges related to sports provision for people with intellectual disabilities.

Instrument

An ad hoc questionnaire for data collection was developed following the procedure explained in the following section. The sections that composed the questionnaire are specified below:

Sociodemographic data of the entity

This section asked for the name, location, and nature of the entity (national/autonomous federation, delegation, foundation, association, club, town council, educational centre, university, or day centre).

Table 1. Study variables.

Variable	Definition	Categories
Sport modality	Sports or activity offered	Examples: equestrian sports, football, Zumba, swimming, etc.
Nature	The activity's competitive or non-competitive nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive • Non-competitive • Both
Form of participation	Defined by the people for whom the activity is intended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive • Specific • Both
Gender categories	If gender differentiation is made	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men* • Women* • Mixed • Men and women • Men, women, and mixed

*These categories indicate that the entity only has teams in either men's or women's categories, but not both.

Characteristics of the activities offered

For each of the sports modalities offered, it was necessary to specify the nature of the activity (competitive, non-competitive, or both), the form of participation (inclusive, specific, or both), and the gender categories, among which the following options were given: a) men; b) women; c) mixed; d) men and women; or e) men, women, and mixed. These categories can be found in [Table 1](#).

Procedure

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Universidad Pontificia Comillas (Ref. 2022/46). Based on a literature review focused on the provision of sports for people with IDs and on validated instruments in the field of sport management (e.g. Arufe et al., 2013; Méndez et al., 2014), an ad hoc questionnaire was designed to collect relevant information at the national level.

The design process followed three main phases. First, a literature review and identification of variables was made. A team of four researchers specialised in sports management and disability analysed existing studies and instruments in order to select key variables relevant to the objective of the present study. This included both sociodemographic variables of the entities and variables related to the characteristics of the sports activities offered.

Secondly, a focus group was held with four expert researchers (different from those in the literature review phase), all with academic and/or practical experience in sports for people with disabilities. In this session, relevant dimensions and indicators were discussed, and an initial version of the questionnaire was drafted based on consensus. The resulting instrument included the two main parts (specified in the instrument section). The variables were designed in connection with the five-category framework proposed in the theoretical section, which addresses the following key dimensions: national distribution of the sports activity offer for people with IDs, sport modalities, nature of the activities (competitive or non-competitive), form of participation and gender categories.

In the third phase, the initial version of the questionnaire was evaluated by two external experts in sports management and research methodology. They were selected

according to the following criteria (Skjong & Wentworth, 2000): a) recognised expertise in evidence-based decision-making, b) academic or professional recognition, c) motivation and availability to participate, d) impartiality and personal commitment, and e) high level of professionalism. Each expert assessed every item using a 4-point Likert scale (1 = 'very low', 4 = 'very high') across four dimensions: sufficiency, clarity, coherence and relevance (Escobar-Pérez & Cuervo-Martínez, 2008). Items with an average score below 3.0 in any of the dimensions, or those that received specific comments, were revised. Finally, the definitive version of the questionnaire was created in an online format (Microsoft Forms) and hosted in an institutional OneDrive repository to ensure secure data management. The study variables that finally were considered are specified in Table 1.

To disseminate the questionnaire, a digital information sheet was designed and distributed via e-mail to the entities targeted for participation in the study. The initial e-mail, which outlined the study's objective and invited participation, was sent to 540 institutions identified through the following official sources:

- *Census of Spanish Sports Federations*: census compiled by the Higher Sports Council (CSD), which includes data on each of the 59 federations such as name, address, telephone number, and contact e-mail address. (<https://www.csd.gob.es/es/federaciones-y-asociaciones/federaciones-deportivas-espanolas/federaciones-espanolas>).
- *Census of Spanish territorial Federations for people with IDs*: census elaborated by the Federación Nacional de deportes para personas con Discapacidad Intelectual (National Federation of Sports for People with Intellectual Disabilities, FEDDI; <https://feddi.org/es/federacion/federacionesterritoriales.html>) which contains information from 21 federations.
- *Official list of foundations*: list drawn up by the Spanish Association of Foundations, which includes a total of 908 institutions. (<https://www.fundaciones.org/fundaciones-asociadas>). It is important to note that, from the total list of foundations, only 55 were contacted, specifically those deemed likely to offer sports activities for individuals with IDs.
- *Census of sports clubs for people with IDs*: census prepared by the FEDDI which includes data (name, address, municipality, and province) of sports clubs with physical sports activities for people with IDs in Spain in the year 2023. (<https://feddi.org/es/federacion/clubesdeportivos.html>). In this section, a total of 405 sports clubs were considered. Six autonomous communities (FCDPD, FCDDI, FEDEACYL, FGDA, FESAIB, and FNDA) do not have an established list of clubs, thus precluding the determination of the total number of clubs in Spain that offered activities for people with IDs. Furthermore, the lists provided by each autonomous community do not distinguish between activities for individuals with IDs and those for other types of disabilities (e.g. visual, physical, etc.).

Two weeks after sending the first e-mail, a reminder was sent to non-respondents. Four weeks after the initial contact, entities that had not replied were contacted by telephone to encourage participation. The data from the entities initially contacted and those that ultimately responded and were included in the study are shown in Figure 1. A total of 98 entities completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 18.15 %.

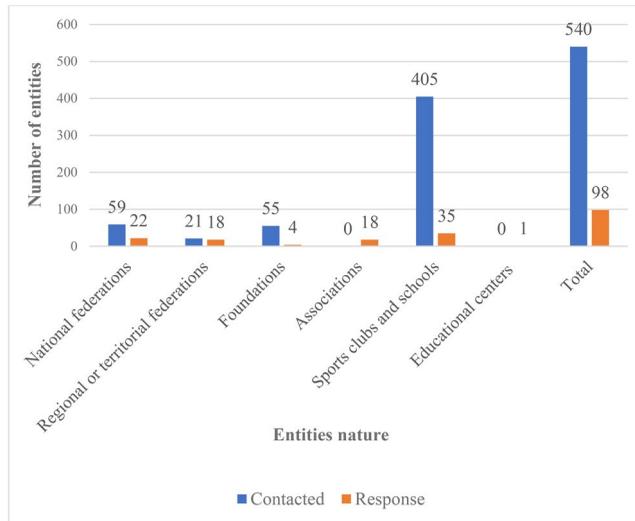


Figure 1. Entities contacted and responses received according to their nature.

All participating entities signed an informed consent form to participate in the study before filling out the questionnaire, and the confidentiality of the data provided was guaranteed at all times.

Data analysis

The information collected through the online questionnaire was exported to an Excel document in order to process the data. Once the data had been processed, a descriptive analysis of the different study variables' means and frequencies was carried out. This analysis was carried out with the statistical analysis software SPSS (version 28).

Results

The results obtained in this study on the situation of sports provision for people with IDs in Spain are shown below in different sections, depending on the study variables established, in order to facilitate their understanding. Likewise, in each section, the results obtained will be specified according to the differences detected in the participating entities depending on whether they belong to the federative sphere or the associative movement.

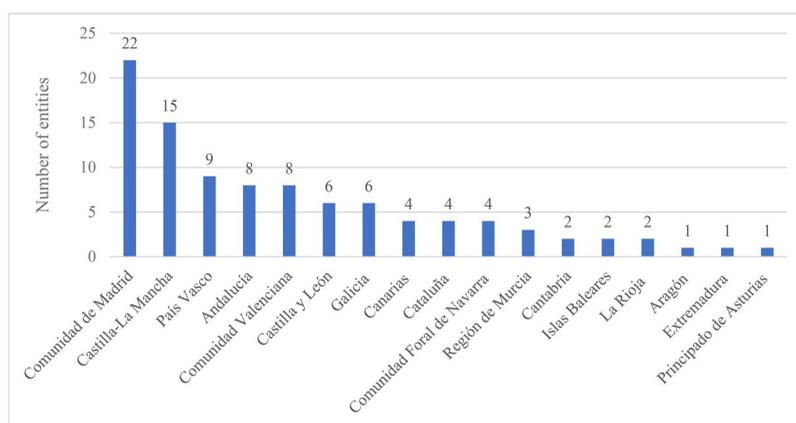
Firstly, a general comparison of the results obtained is shown, referring to the number of sports modalities per entity, the nature of the activities, the type of participation, and the gender categories (see [Table 2](#)). These results will be developed in detail in each of the corresponding sections.

Territorial distribution

The distribution by autonomous community of the entities analysed that offered physical sports activities for people with IDs in Spain is shown in [Figure 2](#). The

Table 2. Results obtained in terms of the characteristics of the sports offering at the national level for people with IDs, differentiated into federative entities and the associative movement.

Variable	Category	Federative entities (n=40)	Associative movement (n=58)
Number of sports modalities offered	1 modality	45% (n=18)	27.6% (n=16)
	2–5 modalities	15% (n=6)	41.4% (n=24)
	6–10 modalities	22.5% (n=9)	24.1% (n=14)
	11 or more modalities	17.5% (n=7)	6.9% (n=4)
Nature	Competitive	50% (n=20)	17.2% (n=10)
	Non-competitive	7.5% (n=3)	12.1% (n=7)
	Both	42.5% (n=17)	70.7% (n=41)
Form of participation	Specific	50% (n=20)	17.2% (n=10)
	Inclusive	7.5% (n=3)	12.1% (n=7)
	Both	42.5% (n=17)	70.7% (n=41)
Gender categories	Men	0% (n=0)	1.7% (n=1)
	Women	0% (n=0)	1.7% (n=1)
	Mixed	47.5% (n=19)	70.7% (n=41)
	Men and women	15% (n=6)	12.1% (n=7)
	Men, women, and mixed	37.5% (n=15)	13.8% (n=8)

**Figure 2.** Territorial distribution of the entities analysed by autonomous community.

autonomous communities with the highest number of offers are the Comunidad de Madrid (n=22; 22.4%) and Castilla-La Mancha (n=15; 15.3%), followed by the País Vasco (n=9; 9.2%), Andalucía (n=8; 8.2%), and the Comunidad de Valencia (n=8; 8.2%).

For a more detailed analysis of the results, [Figure 3](#) compares the territorial distributions of the entities analysed, with those belonging to the federative sphere shown in blue and those belonging to the associative movement in green. It can be seen that most of the federations analysed are located in Comunidad de Madrid (n=18), followed by Comunidad Valenciana (n=4), Cataluña (n=3), and País Vasco (n=2). In the rest of the autonomous communities, there is only one federation per territory, and there are communities such as Asturias, Aragón, and Islas Baleares that do not have any sports provision at a federative level. The associative movement's territorial distribution is different, with more organisations in Castilla-La Mancha (n=14), followed by Andalucía (n=7) and País Vasco (n=7). This grouping also includes autonomous communities without entities offering physical sports activities for people with IDs, such as Cantabria and Extremadura.

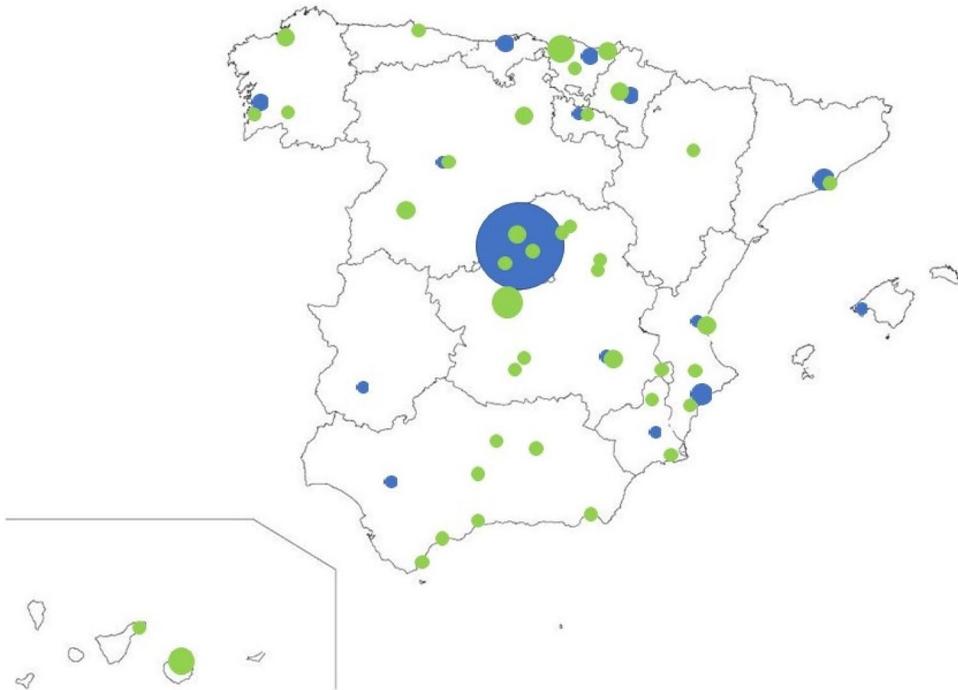


Figure 3. Comparison of the territorial distribution of the entities analysed offering physical sports activities for people with IDs in Spain.

For a more accurate interpretation of the representativeness of the results presented in this section, [Table 3](#) shows the territorial distribution of the entities analysed, taking into account the population characteristics of each autonomous community. The table shows, first, the variables relating to the total population per community, the number of people with intellectual disabilities (ID) and the relative percentage of the population with ID. It also includes the number of entities analysed and the proportion of entities per 1,000 people with ID. This information allows for a more rigorous contextualisation of the differences observed between regions, providing a solid basis for comparison and evaluation of the results. The data show that the territorial distribution of sports organisations for people with ID varies considerably between autonomous communities, which does not correspond to the proportion of the population with ID in each territory.

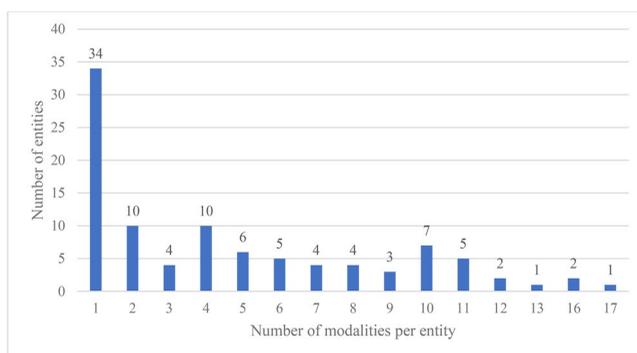
Modalities

[Figure 4](#) shows a list of the number of modalities offered by the entities analysed. In general, the average number of modalities offered by the entities was 4.73 (SD = 4.14). Most of the entities ($n=34$; 34.7%) offered only one sport modality. Ten entities (10.2%) offered two sports modalities, and 10 entities (10.2%) offered four sports modalities.

The results shown in [Table 2](#) above show that there is an unequal offering among federations, since the majority (45%; $n=18$) had only one sport modality, while other federations (2.04%, $n=2$) had 16 (ACELL) and 17 (FERDIS) different modalities. In contrast, 41.4% ($n=24$) of the organisations belonging to the associative movement

Table 3. Regional distribution of population and institutions analysed, adjusted for population with disabilities.

Autonomous community	Total population	People with IDs	Relative percentage of population with IDs	Number of entities analysed	Proportion of entities per 1000 people with IDs
Comunidad de Madrid	6871903	22900	.33	22	.96
Castilla-La Mancha	2084086	7300	.35	15	2.05
País Vasco	2216302	7100	.32	9	1.27
Andalucía	8584147	49400	.58	8	.16
Comunidad Valenciana	5216195	13900	.27	8	.58
Castilla y León	2383703	13300	.56	6	.45
Galicia	2699424	8400	.31	6	.71
Canarias	2213016	8200	.37	4	.49
Cataluña	7901963	35100	.44	4	.11
Comunidad Foral de Navarra	672155	3100	.46	4	1.29
Región de Murcia	1551692	8400	.54	3	.36
Cantabria	588387	1900	.32	2	1.05
Islas Baleares	1209906	3200	.26	2	.63
La Rioja	322282	1100	.34	2	1.82
Aragón	1341289	5500	.41	1	.18
Extremadura	1054306	6300	.60	1	.16
Principado de Asturias	1006060	4400	.44	1	.23

**Figure 4.** Number of modalities offered by the entities analysed.

had between 2 and 5 modalities, while it was less common to find organisations with 11 modalities or more (6.9%; $n=4$). The most frequently offered sports modalities, regardless of the nature of the entities (federations or associative organisations), are swimming, basketball, athletics, and futsal. For more detailed information on the different sports modalities offered by both types of entities, please consult [Annexe I](#).

Nature

Among the organisations, 58.2% ($n=57$) had activities of both natures (competitive and non-competitive), 29.6% ($n=29$) had only activities of a competitive nature, and 9.2% ($n=9$) had only activities of a recreational nature. Specifically, most federations (50%; $n=20$) had competitive activities and to a lesser extent non-competitive activities (7.5%; $n=3$). This pattern is different if we look at the data from the associative movement, since most of its entities (70.7%; $n=41$) presented activities with both natures (competitive and non-competitive).

Considering a possible relationship between the gender variable and the nature of the activities offered, it can be noted that among the activities offered to men, 31.2% were competitive, 6.5% were non-competitive, and 62.4% were mixed; in the case of women 28.0% were competitive, 6% non-competitive, and a 66% had both.

Form of participation

Analysing the type of participation, we find that the majority of entities (n=53; 54.1%) present activities with both forms of participation (specific and inclusive). Among the rest, 34.7% (n=34) have only specific participation, and 8.2% (n=8) only inclusive participation. On the other hand, in the federations, there was more specific participation (50%; n=20), and in only three entities (7.5%), there was inclusive participation. On the other hand, it was observed that third-sector organisations generally had both types of participation (specific and inclusive).

Similarly to the previous section and considering a potential relationship between gender and the form participation, it can be observed that among the activities available for men, 33.3% were specific, 2.2% were inclusive, and 64.5% had both forms of participation; for women, the corresponding percentages were 34%, 2% and 64% respectively.

Gender categories

Given the relevance of gender in the context of physical activity and sports, particularly due to the lower participation rates among women, this study deemed it appropriate to include a specific section dedicated to addressing this issue. The results obtained, shown in Figure 5, indicate that the majority of the entities had mixed categories (n=56; 57.1%), 23.5% (n=23) had all three categories (men, women and mixed), and 13.3% (n=13) had differentiated men and women categories. Of the 98 entities analysed, only one (1.02%) did not include categories in which women could participate, which can be considered a positive result in that women were included in most entities.

As for the federations, six (15%) of them had both men and women categories separately; 19 (47.5%) had mixed categories; and 37.5% (n=20) had men, women,

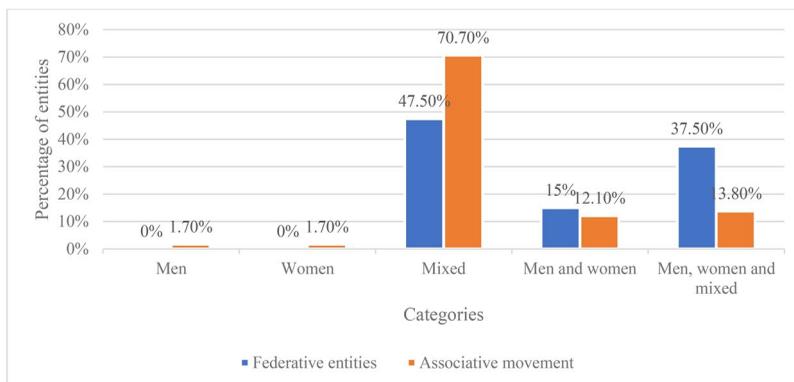


Figure 5. Percentage of entities according to categories by gender, differentiated between federations and the associative movement.

and mixed categories. On the other hand, 70.7% (n=41) of third-sector entities offered mixed categories, 12.10% (n=12) provided separate categories for men and women, and 13.8% (n=14) included all three categories. It is noteworthy that within third-sector entities, there is one organisation (1.02%, n=1) that offers only a female category and another (1.02%, n=1) that provides exclusively a male category.

Discussion

It is becoming increasingly common to affirm that people with disabilities can practice physical activities and sports for the same motivations as people without disabilities, as according to Mendoza et al. (2018a), sports are an increasingly demanded leisure activity that shows a direct relationship with the quality of life of people with and without disabilities. However, although the literature contains numerous studies that address the sports offering in Spain, no works have analysed the offering for people with IDs. For that reason, this study's objectives were: a) to identify the current offer of physical sports activities for people with IDs in Spain according to their territorial distribution, modalities offered, nature of the practice, and type of participation; and b) to explore whether the offer of physical sports activities differs according to gender.

What is the current offer of physical sports activities for people with IDs in Spain?

How is the offer of physical sports activities distributed territorially?

The findings on the territorial distribution of sports entities indicate that there is an unequal distribution in terms of supply for people with IDs in Spain. As shown in the results, the autonomous communities that had the greatest general offer for people with IDs were Comunidad de Madrid and Castilla-La Mancha. Specifically, most of the federations were centralised in Spain's capital, Madrid (Pérez-Calzado, 2024), while the associative movements had more entities in the autonomous community of Castilla-La Mancha. An example of support for physical activity for people with disabilities from the political sphere is that of the Comunidad de Madrid. Specifically, the General Department of Sports, through programs such as '*Activa Tu Capacidad*,' financed with funds from the European Union's Recovery and Resilience Mechanism, promotes the creation of scholarships and grants for disabled sportspeople, specific sports programs for women and girls with disabilities, actions for the acquisition of disability equipment, and sports training programs for the disabled.

In contrast, there are communities without federative representation, as is the case of Asturias, Aragón, and Islas Baleares, and without entities within the associative movement, as in the cases of Cantabria and Extremadura. This situation is in line with that suggested by Burillo et al. (2010), who reported that sports facilities had an unequal density per autonomous community at the national level. In this regard, an interesting finding is that the availability of sports opportunities for individuals with IDs is not proportional to the population density of this group in each autonomous community. In fact, IMSERSO (2023) data indicated that Andalucía, Cataluña, and the Comunidad de Madrid had the highest numbers of individuals with IDs. However, this does not align with the results of the present study, which identified the Comunidad de Madrid and Castilla-La Mancha as the regions offering the greatest number of sports opportunities.

In this regard, it is important to consider the role played by national federations in shaping this territorial distribution. Although most of their headquarters are concentrated in the Comunidad de Madrid, it is necessary to question whether their sporting activity is limited exclusively to this region or whether, on the contrary, it effectively extends to the whole of the national territory through specific delegations or programmes. This reflection is key to correctly interpreting the concentration of resources in the capital, as their presence could be due more to administrative and logistical factors than to a greater real offer of sporting opportunities for people with IDs in that community.

On the other hand, there are many autonomous communities in which practice opportunities for this group are greatly reduced. In this respect, Mendoza and collaborators (2018a) presented the situation of access to sports facilities for people with IDs in *Libro Blanco del Deporte de Personas con Discapacidad en España* (White Book on Sports for People with Disabilities). These authors exposed that facilities are still insufficient, both in their accesses and in their interiors, evidencing a situation of discrimination by reducing the possibilities for people with disabilities to practice sports. Therefore, this inequality is a general barrier to the practice of physical sports activity and may contribute, in turn, to access by residents with IDs (Jaarsma et al., 2014; Ríos et al., 2009), since it implies a lack of spaces and, therefore, causes a lack of opportunities for this population. In this sense, the authors provide a series of recommendations on the main aspects to consider in the design of facilities to facilitate access to services for people with IDs in both their use and access to the information provided about them.

It should be noted that it is the public administrations that have the competencies and must ensure that the services whose management has been outsourced comply with the accessibility conditions established by the regional and/or state regulations, as stated in the preamble of the current Law on Sports (2022):

... a mandate is given to the various public authorities to ensure that these facilities meet, as a minimum, the standards of universal accessibility so that people with disabilities can enjoy sports facilities on an equal basis, in addition to respecting the essential rules of safety and sustainability. (p. 15).

Likewise, the entities and organisations that provide such public services must guarantee compliance with these conditions, such as in the information on their web pages (accessibility conditions of the services they offer, available means of support, etc.), in the use of information and communication technologies that facilitate the relationship with people with specific accessibility requirements by providing users who require accessible information with documents in easy reading, Braille, enlarged print, or alternative systems.

The scarcity of opportunities for people with IDs in Spain to practice physical sporting activity could be one of the determining factors for this population's failure to comply with the recommended physical activity recommendations (Ginis et al., 2021). Mendoza et al. (2018b) already highlighted that in Spain, 80% of sports facilities offering activities for people with disabilities did not comply with universal accessibility regulations for a user (athlete-practitioner or spectator-visitor). To solve this situation, these authors propose a series of aspects to be taken into account in the design of

sports facilities to properly serve people with alterations in cognitive functions: communication and speech, functional academic skills, leisure and work, personal care, home life, social skills, community use, self-governance, and health and safety. Furthermore, in this regard, authors such as Di Palma et al. (2016) have exposed the importance of the development of an innovative approach to 'disability management', which aims to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities through the implementation of principles and rules governing the management of traditional economic and industrial sectors, including, in this case, sports management.

What sports modalities do the analysed entities offer?

With regard to the number of modalities offered by the entities analysed, they had a generalised specificity, with most of them offering a single sport modality. When examining the federative movement independently, it was observed that some entities followed the general trend of offering a single modality, while others presented a wide range of sports modalities. This variability is due to the very structure of Spanish sports, where conventional federations tend to specialise in a single sport, which limits their offer to a single modality (Pérez-Calzado, 2024), unless the sport is made up of different modalities, as in the case of triathlon (composed of swimming, cycling, and running). On the other hand, the specific sports federations for people with disabilities, having the competencies for the promotion of sports for people with this specific type of disability according to Article 50 of the Law on Sports (2022), have the responsibility to meet the demand for sports activities, in this case, for people with IDs in their community.

As far as the associative movement is concerned, in general, the number of modalities offered per entity tends to range between two and five. This could be explained by the fact that these organisations, which include sports clubs and associations with social purposes among others, generally operate in areas where historically there were no other disability-related sports entities, such as regional sports federations or clubs (Moscoso & Moyano, 2006). This situation is similar to that of disability-specific federations, since they aim to promote the greatest possible number of modalities for the practice of physical sports activities for people with IDs.

To what extent are the activities offered competitive or non-competitive?

The results on the nature of the activities offered indicate that most institutions include both competitive and non-competitive activities. However, there are differences depending on the nature of the institution, which can be explained by the objective of the activity offered. Federations generally offer competitive activities in which performance- and results-oriented approaches predominate, while entities of the associative movement promote non-competitive activities in which subjective experiences of participation, such as autonomy, a sense of belonging, and meaning, are emphasised (Engdahl-Høgåsen & Bentzen, 2025).

When comparing the results between the federative and associative movements, it is observed that most federations focus mainly on competitive activities in relation to people with IDs, with less emphasis on non-competitive sports activities. This could be because federations tend to be oriented towards competitive sports and high performance. However, it is relevant to note that some federations also offer

non-competitive activities in addition to competitive ones. In particular, the *Real Federación Española de Deportes de Hielo* (Spanish Ice Sports Federation, n.d.) and the *Real Federación Española de Rugby* (Spanish Rugby Federation, n.d) offer exclusively non-competitive activities for people with IDs. In the associative movement, most entities offer both competitive and non-competitive activities. This is in line with the nature of the organisations that are part of this movement, offering two types of activities: a) non-competitive, focused on the practice of physical sports activity and health promotion with an additional social purpose, and b) competitive activities (such as leagues or tournaments), in which both people from the entity's own recreational activities and members of other organisations participate.

What is the type of participation in the activities offered?

The results of this research indicate that the entities studied offered activities that included both specific and inclusive participation. In the context of federations, it was observed that in multisport federations (aimed at people with IDs), specific participation predominates, which implies that people with IDs do not share sporting experiences with people without disabilities. In contrast, in conventional federations, when there are people with disabilities, participation tends to be inclusive, where people with and without disabilities share spaces and sports experiences. In addition, it was found that third-sector entities generally offer both types of participation. It would be interesting for both Spanish federations (conventional or multisport) and third-sector entities to encourage the creation of inclusive spaces for people with IDs.

In particular, inclusive practice arises with the aim of making sports more accessible, so inclusion in general contexts of sports practice is an increasingly common scenario (Strnadová et al., 2018), having its significance in the social dimension for the person with a disability, since the social interactions of people with IDs contribute to improving their quality of life (Aujla & Needham-Beck, 2020; Schalock & Verdugo, 2007) because they promote their self-determination and emotional well-being (Franco et al., 2023).

Does the offer differ between men and women?

Finally, taking into account the double vulnerability of women with IDs in the field of physical activity and sports (having a disability and being women), this study collected data on this collective's inclusion in sports entities in Spain. Encouragingly, almost all of the entities analysed (all but one) offered categories for women, a finding that is both interesting and very promising for this group, especially considering that existing literature generally reports lower sports participation rates among women and girls compared to men (Ocete & Delgado, 2023). This disparity is often linked to limited social support (Anderson et al., 2008) and perceived barriers that restrict their involvement in sports (Ascondo et al., 2023), factors that can contribute to serious health issues (Quezada et al., 2021). In this regard, the entities analysed offer specific categories that accommodate the participation of women with IDs, which represents a positive step in terms of availability of opportunities, though it cannot be assumed to reflect a comprehensive commitment to actively promoting their involvement.

It is important to note that, in the federative context and within the associative movement, six and seven organisations, respectively, established separate men and women categories. This practice is not considered discriminatory but rather a reasonable measure. As in sports for people without disabilities, separating men and women categories can help ensure fairer competition by accounting for certain physical differences such as body constitution, weight, and height. However, some entities indicated that due to the low number of participants—particularly women—it is often necessary to create mixed categories or teams. This is not seen as a limitation, but rather as a practical strategy to promote inclusion and ensure that both women and men, who might otherwise be excluded due to small group sizes, have the opportunity to participate. Furthermore, although mixed categories may present some challenges in terms of balancing physical capacities, several studies have highlighted the positive aspects of mixed-gender participation, such as promoting cooperation, social integration, and mutual respect among athletes (Ocete & Caballero, 2021).

Continuing with the above, we rely on the work of Quezada et al. (2021) on the needs of women with IDs in Spain, in which they highlighted the importance of promoting opportunities for physical sports practice, especially during adolescence, as an interesting measure to combat social isolation. Likewise, these authors stressed the need to establish empowerment strategies for women and girls, promoted by social models in the field of sports. Likewise, they agreed with Olasagasti-Ibargoiien et al. (2023) on the need to investigate ways to address the aforementioned barriers and analyse the most effective strategies to increase the participation of women and girls with IDs in physical activities and sports.

Finally, based on McDowell et al. (2022), in order to move forward in terms of the sports offering in Spain, we must recognise that there are systemic inequalities that directly transfer to individuals' personal and professional outcomes. The historical and current realities that perpetuate discrimination and inequality directly impact the lives of people with disabilities. An example of this is the scarcity of sports offerings for people with IDs, for example, or the fact that until 2022, the Sports Law never clearly and profoundly addressed issues related to women and girls with disabilities in sports.

Study strengths and limitations

The research carried out has shed light on the situation of the supply of physical sports activities in the national panorama, providing updated and high-quality information. These results are particularly useful not only for people with IDs and their caregivers, but also for sports federations, institutions, and public entities responsible for designing, promoting, and implementing inclusive physical activity programs.

Likewise, this study responds to the current need for updated knowledge about the provision of physical sports activities for people with IDs in Spain. By offering a comprehensive overview of available opportunities, it lays the groundwork for future actions and policies aimed at improving access. Indirectly, this knowledge may also help reduce the participation gap by addressing one of its contributing factors: the lack of awareness about existing opportunities.

Regarding the study's limitations, it could be pointed out that it was not possible to analyse all the sports entities that offered activities for people with IDs at the national

level due to the difficulties in contacting certain institutions as well as to the limited personal resources available to carry out such an extensive investigation (possibly through on-site visits to the institutions identified in the census data). Furthermore, a significant additional limitation was the difficulty in determining the exact total universe of the sample. This challenge arose because several of the institutions initially considered did not have an updated or reliable census of the entities that comprise them, which in turn made it impossible to accurately identify, include, and contact all potential participants. This lack of comprehensive data may have restricted the scope of the study, as some relevant organisations may have been unintentionally left out. Nevertheless, despite these constraints and the fact that participation was entirely voluntary, the research still provides a robust and representative foundation upon which further studies can build, ultimately contributing to the promotion of physical activity among people with IDs and enhancing their overall health and well-being.

Future research lines

In view of the aforementioned limitations, a future line of research could focus on increasing the study sample by attempting to cover all institutions across the national territory and on exploring the differences between federative entities and the associative movement through the use of inferential methods.

Having achieved this expansion and with the information collected, it would be of extreme interest to generate a free-access database where sports and health professionals, as well as people with disabilities themselves, could find the necessary information for the initiation of any sport from different platforms and applications. In this way, the transfer of scientific research to meet the needs of access to information by people with IDs would be achieved. Understanding the behaviour regarding sports practice choices by people with IDs is a challenging task, but more than necessary since it will provide valuable information to design strategies that meet the latent desires and needs in each organisation, as suggested by Avilés Jiménez and Freire Morán (2022).

People with disabilities have already suggested integrating the sports structures of sports federations in favour of sports inclusion (Pérez-Tejero et al., 2013). However, it has not been until the current Sports Law (2022) that it has become an obligation on the part of Spanish sports institutions. For that reason, and to better understand the scope and depth with which issues related to sports for people with IDs are addressed from a legislative perspective, it would be interesting to delve into the processes of inclusion in sports federations.

In turn, sports for women and girls with IDs remains a pending issue at the national level. Future lines should start from the identification of contextual factors as barriers and facilitators (WHO, 2001) of access to sports practice by women and girls, as well as establishing social and educational policies that promote their practice from the educational field with direct transfer to leisure and recreation (Ocete et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The present study has allowed an advance in the identification and characterisation of the current offer of physical sports activities for people with IDs in Spain. A

notable territorial inequality has been observed in the distribution of the entities offering these activities. This territorial disparity evidences significant structural barriers, which could be related to the lack of accessible facilities and regional strategies to promote inclusive sports practice. In this sense, public administrations must guarantee accessibility and equity in the sports offering, in accordance with current legislation promoting universal and accessible standards in sports infrastructure.

Taking into consideration the comparison made between the federations and the associative movement, a tendency towards specialisation has been observed in the federations in terms of the number of modalities offered, while the associative movement shows a more diversified approach. Furthermore, while federations tend to prioritise competitive activities, entities within the associative movement typically combine both competitive and non-competitive activities. This approach reflects a more inclusive perspective, offering a greater variety of sports opportunities and adapting to the diverse needs of individuals with IDs.

Regarding gender-related findings, the preponderance of mixed categories is also relevant, especially in the associative movement, reflecting a strategy to facilitate inclusion, although often motivated by the low number of participants in certain areas. In this regard, it is encouraging to note that almost all entities have categories for women. However, the implementation of mixed categories—often justified by the low number of participants—reflects both a challenge and an opportunity: while it arises from structural limitations, it also offers a valuable strategy for promoting inclusion, encouraging social interaction, and empowering all athletes regardless of gender. It is crucial to address social and structural barriers to foster supportive strategies and inclusive models that promote the participation of women and girls with IDs, especially at key stages such as adolescence. Public policy and research should focus on designing effective strategies to ensure equal opportunities and overcome systemic inequalities in access to sports for this group.

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Annexes

Annexe I. Difference in modalities offered by federations and the associative movement

