



## Article

# The Current Model of Sports Organization for People with Disabilities in Spain: Challenges and Opportunities

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## Abstract

In the current paradigm of adapted sport in Spain, national sports federations play a crucial role. This study aims to map and characterize the public visibility of the current situation of Spanish sports federations in relation to the integration and development of Sports for People with Disabilities on their official websites, and to interpret these publicly reported indicators in relation to federation-level integration practices discussed in the international literature and legislative changes promoted by Sports Law 39/2022. To this end, through an exploratory and descriptive cross-sectional study, a systematic survey of the published digital resources of the 61 national single-sport federations recognized by the Higher Sports Council has been carried out. The results show that federations present initiatives related to the integration of people with disabilities in sport: 21 have a Paralympic category, 42 present themselves as inclusive entities, 13 of the federative regulations specifically address the issue, and in 38 cases, specialized personnel can be found or linked to sport for people with disabilities. In conclusion, this research shows the degree of integration and development of Spanish sports federations in relation to sport for people with disabilities.

**Keywords:** sports federations; disability; inclusive sports

## 1. Introduction

Although there is a general agreement that physical activity and sports are a fundamental component of health and quality of life in modern societies, not all populations have equal access to them [1]. People with disabilities constitute a significant proportion of the global population, with 3.8 million men and women with disabilities in Spain, representing almost 9% of the national population [2]. This group experiences disparities, including higher rates of health problems [3], as well as lower use of preventive health services [4]. The World Health Organization's (WHO) International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) [5] provides a conceptual framework that interprets disability as an individual condition, considering it the result of the interaction between a person's characteristics and their environment. Within this model, participation in activities, such as sport, is influenced by environmental factors that can act as facilitators or barriers [6], including the physical environment, social attitudes, policies, and institutional systems, which are particularly relevant in the context of Spanish sports federations [7]. This study's



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approach allows for addressing the factors that affect the inclusion of people with disabilities in these organizations. WHO [5] recognizes that health encompasses all aspects of a person's life experiences and is inherently multifactorial, arguing that disability should not be equated with illness and that people living with disabilities can enjoy good health and experience a high quality of life [8].

The benefits associated with physical sporting activity have been explained on numerous occasions, as it contributes to strengthening a sense of belonging, promotes empathy, fosters mutual respect, and favors tolerance and the acceptance of established norms [9], as well as improving the resilience of participants [10–12]. Similarly, as Campos et al. [13] point out, the benefits impact not only the participants but also the wider society involved. Beyond its recreational and competitive function, sport plays a fundamental role in overcoming social barriers and has a significant social impact [14]. Thus, its impact transcends the individual, becoming a transformative element of social and cultural dynamics [14,15]. Therefore, it plays a key role in transforming identities, promoting a new vision of this concept, and facilitating the empowerment of individuals, while preventing attitudes that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion [16].

The importance of sports practice has also been recognized internationally and nationally through decisive legislative frameworks. At the international level, for example, the United Nations General Assembly recognized the right of people with disabilities to equal access to participation in games and recreational and sporting activities (Article 30) [17]. At the national level, various references can be found, such as the former Sports Law [18], which established that sport is, among other things, a corrective factor for social imbalances, contributing to the development of equality among citizens and creating habits that facilitate social integration. Another reference is "The White Paper on Sport for People with Disabilities" [19], which highlights the important role of sports practice for people with disabilities and emphasizes the need for specific and inclusive groups. Clearly, sport for people with disabilities has become a fundamental tool for promoting social inclusion and equal opportunities, as well as fostering the comprehensive development of society [1,14]. Along these lines, this perspective aligns with the World Health Organization's biopsychosocial model of disability, which is an integral approach that explains disability as the result of the interactions between environmental and personal factors [5].

Despite the wide variety of benefits mentioned and the support provided by existing legislative frameworks, significant shortcomings persist that hinder access to sports practice for people with disabilities [20]. The international literature on physical sporting activity highlights a number of barriers related to the presence of negative attitudes in the environment [21], a lack of support from coaches and other professionals in the sports context [22], participation in sports that are not appropriate for the type of disability of the practitioner, or the failure to modify certain sports [23], as well as the lack of training for professionals [24]. Due to the lack of adequate infrastructure that addresses access for persons with disabilities to sport, this is addressed in the current Law (Law 39/2022, of 30 December, on Sport) [25], which plays a crucial role in recognizing the right of all persons to access the practice of physical activity and sport, with a specific mention of the promotion of inclusive sport in Article 6.6, which states the duty of federations to promote the development of sports practice for persons with disabilities, including the holding of inclusive sports activities. The Law introduces specific measures to promote equal opportunities and gender equality, as well as the integration of athletes with disabilities into common organizational structures, such as sports federations. This reinforces the need for structural legislative changes in Spanish sport to support the real participation of persons with disabilities in the field of sports. In this regard, scientific evidence identifies facilitators of the inclusion of people with disabilities in sport, such as professional support [26],

adaptation of equipment [23], and specific training [27]. Although there are precedents for integration processes in other countries, there is a lack of consensus regarding the model or process that should be adopted to promote the integration of people with disabilities within the context of sports federations [7,28,29].

In Norway, the Olympic and Paralympic Committees have been integrated into a single entity alongside the Norwegian Sports Confederation, enabling full inclusion and coordinated governance [7,30]. In Canada, legislation introduced in 2000 and 2006 aimed to integrate sports federations and eliminate participation barriers. However, integration remains partial and largely symbolic, particularly within high-performance sports [7,29]. In the UK, most sports are under a single federation covering Olympic and Paralympic disciplines, while separate disability-specific and multisport federations coexist, reflecting partial integration [7]. In the Netherlands, the Olympic and Paralympic Committees and the Dutch Sports Federation have formed a single coordinated organization since 2008, promoting inclusive national sports governance [22]. In the USA, the US Olympic Committee has incorporated Paralympic athletes since 2012. The Critical Change Factors Model [28] identifies the key factors required to transition from marginalization to legitimization within an inclusive sports paradigm.

The complexity and challenges surrounding the processes of federative integration in the sports field are not without difficulties, coinciding with what Reina [31] contributed regarding the lack of legislation on federative integration before the appearance of the new legal regulations. Despite the existence of legislation and policies promoting the integration of sports for people with disabilities, few studies have examined how this integration occurs within the Spanish sports federations. Furthermore, the barriers and facilitators that influence the implementation of inclusive practices have yet to be documented, hindering evidence-based decision-making in federations' sports policy. Meanwhile, Martínez-Ferrer's [32] work involved identifying existing models and developing an initial protocol based on a qualitative analysis conducted with stakeholders in the federative environment. However, this proposal was developed without considering the current legal framework.

The lack of prior scientific literature on this subject, particularly within the Spanish context following the implementation of the Sports Law 39/2022, highlights the novelty of this study. The limited availability of references and research has added challenges to the contextualization, while simultaneously reinforcing the relevance of the present work by offering an original contribution that provides insight into the current state of disability integration processes within the national federative framework. In doing so, this study not only addresses a gap in the literature but also offers valuable evidence for understanding and contextualizing the relationship between the new legislation and publicly reported sport integration practices.

Consequently, this study contributes to understanding the current state of Spanish sports federations with regard to the integration and development of sports for people with disabilities. It also serves to further our understanding of the process of integration of sports for people with disabilities in Spanish single-sport federations, which are key agents in the promotion of sports for people with disabilities. It represents the preliminary stage of an approach to the Spanish Sport Federations, within the framework of a larger study, which was complemented later by the administration of questionnaires to all the federations, in order to gather the necessary information regarding the processes of disability integration and the implications of the Spanish Sports Law 39/2022. The data collection from the official websites of sports federations aimed to identify and make visible the information related to disability integration initiatives, ensuring its accessibility to the general public. This is particularly relevant given that, as highlighted by Pérez-Tejero and Ocete [33],

one of the main barriers to sports participation for people with disabilities lies in the limited accessibility to information regarding the availability of opportunities for the sporting practice.

In addition, the analysis tried to determine whether the mainstream sport federations made explicit reference to, or demonstrated sensitivity towards, people with disabilities among their potential target audiences. This concern is consistent with the contribution of Fay et al. [28], Martinez-Ferrer [32], and Van Lindert et al. [22], who emphasize the need to foster training and awareness-raising processes within sports federations in relation to the diverse dimensions associated with disability.

According to the current Spanish Sports Law 39/2022 [25], federations are essential platforms to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities through sports, so the study hypothesizes that the level of integration of sports for people with disabilities varies among Spanish single-sport federations. The specific research questions are as follows:

1. How do the Spanish national single-sport federations publicly present the integration of sports for people with disabilities on their official websites?
2. To what extent do federations' publicly accessible web materials reflect indicators linked to Sports Law 39/2022 and federation-level integration practices discussed in the international literature?

Therefore, the present study aims to provide an exploratory baseline by mapping and describing the current situation of Spanish sports federations in relation to the integration and development of sports for people with disabilities in Spain, as publicly reported on their official websites.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The Consejo Superior de Deportes (CSD)—in English called the High Council of Sports, from now on referred to as HCS [34]—recognizes a total of 66 Spanish sports federations, including those dedicated to sports for persons with disabilities. These are classified according to the four categories defined by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) [35]: federations of Paralympic sports managed by International Federations (IFs) (sports that the IPC has transferred to International Federations and that have been integrated in Spain following international integration), sports disciplines created by IFs (these disciplines did not originally depend on the IPC, but International Federations have developed them specifically for persons with disabilities), disability IFs (federations specialized in persons with disabilities that continue to manage and organize the corresponding sports independently), and sports directly managed by the IPC and National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) (disciplines where the IPC acts as the international federation responsible for overseeing them, in collaboration with national Paralympic committees).

The aim was to ensure that the methodological design provided a comprehensive representation of the federated sports landscape in Spain, taking into account the particularities and specificities of each federation. In order to provide a complete and representative overview of the national sports scene, the inclusion criteria for the sample were as follows:

1. Federations that met the following requirements were included:
  - Federations that were officially recognized by the HCS.
  - Federations that were operational during the study period, excluding those that were inactive or in the process of dissolution.
2. Spanish Sports Federations are considered to be organizations officially recognized by the HCS that regulate and manage all sports disciplines at the national level. They include Single-Sport National Federations (Federaciones Nacionales

Unideportivas—FU) and specific federations for sports for persons with disabilities, and Multi-Sport Federations (Federaciones Multideportivas—FM).

3. All FUs were included, regardless of whether they organized sports for persons with disabilities in general, and Paralympic sports in particular, in order to reflect a comprehensive perspective of sport, including its inclusive aspect.
4. Likewise, federations of diverse nature were included, regardless of their size, number of affiliates, or relevance, to ensure that the entire spectrum of federated sport in Spain was represented.

Thus, data collection covered all the Single-Sport National Federations previously described, and the only federations not included were the Multi-Sport Federations, as these already serve athletes with disabilities.

Each federation was prospected from the HCS official list. All the data extractions regarding inclusive sport were registered in an Excel document. The approach allowed the capture and analysis of all the federation information on the web.

## 2.2. Instruments

The information was gathered through a systematic survey of the various digital resources available and accessible on the official websites of the different sports federations in the first semester of 2023. Microsoft Excel v.16 was used to collect data and for the subsequent analysis.

## 2.3. Procedure

An exploratory and descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted [36,37], with the objective of mapping and describing publicly accessible or visible online indicators of the current situation of the 61 Spanish Sports Federations regarding the integration and the promotion of sport for people with disabilities. This study combined quantitative and qualitative data collection from public sources across all the Spanish sports federations, enabling a detailed analysis of the accessible information.

Data collection was carried out on 3 January 2023 and continued until 7 March 2023, working Monday through Friday, covering a total of 61 single-sport federations at a pace of approximately six federations per week and reviewing around two federations per day. A series of predefined aspects was reviewed through the systematic survey of digital resources found on the websites of various Spanish National Sports Federations (FU). More specifically, data collection began with the recording of the federation's full name, its acronym, and the sports and specific disciplines it encompasses and governs. Particular attention was given to identifying any disciplines directly related to sports for people with disabilities. Additionally, reference was made to the corresponding International Federation, given its potential implications for future integration processes.

Once the initial identification had been completed, a systematic, step-by-step review protocol was followed for each federation. First, an Excel template designed for this purpose was opened, which included all the predefined categories for data collection. Next, the official website of each federation was visited via the HCS portal.

Within each federation website, information was located through a standardized sequence: review of the main navigation tabs (e.g., organisation/governance, development, competitions, inclusion/adapted sport), screening of statutes and regulatory documents available as webpages or PDFs, and keyword-based searches within the website or within these documents when applicable, using predefined terms such as disability, adapted, inclusive, para-, Paralympic, etc. Given this context, and because the data collected did not involve human participants and all was public information, ethical committee approval was not required.

The first step was to examine the organizational structure to see if it included any reference to sport for people with disabilities. Specifically, the organigram was checked for disability-related units, commissions, or committees, and for specific tabs or sections dedicated to adapted, Paralympic, or inclusive sports. Any such information found was systematically recorded in the Excel template, including a direct link to the relevant webpage.

The statutes were subsequently reviewed to verify whether sport for people with disabilities, adapted sport, or inclusive sport was formally recognised. Where such references were found, the corresponding section and a direct link to the statutes were recorded. The same procedure was applied to the regulations to identify whether there were any specific regulations for disability sport or if they were integrated into the general regulatory framework.

Next, the website was searched for programs, projects, or initiatives related to sport for people with disabilities. If any were found, they were documented, and the corresponding links were added to the template. Financial information was then examined by reviewing the federation's annual reports, usually from the previous three years, to identify whether specific budget lines had been allocated to disability-related activities. If so, the amount and link were recorded.

Operational definitions and decision rules were established prior to the start. A program, project, or initiative was coded as "Yes" only when the website reported a named or clearly described action targeted to persons with disabilities and provided at least one verifiable element (e.g., dedicated webpage, calendar, report, or pathway description). "Specialized staff" was coded as "Yes" only when a role explicitly linked to adapted, para, inclusive sport, or disability was publicly listed. For each "Yes" code, the location of evidence (section name and/or URL) was recorded in the Excel matrix to ensure auditability.

Finally, the website was revisited to identify any news articles, graphics, or audiovisual resources related to disability. These were also recorded in the Excel template. This systematic procedure was repeated for all 61 federations to ensure the consistency, comparability, and completeness of the data in the Excel database.

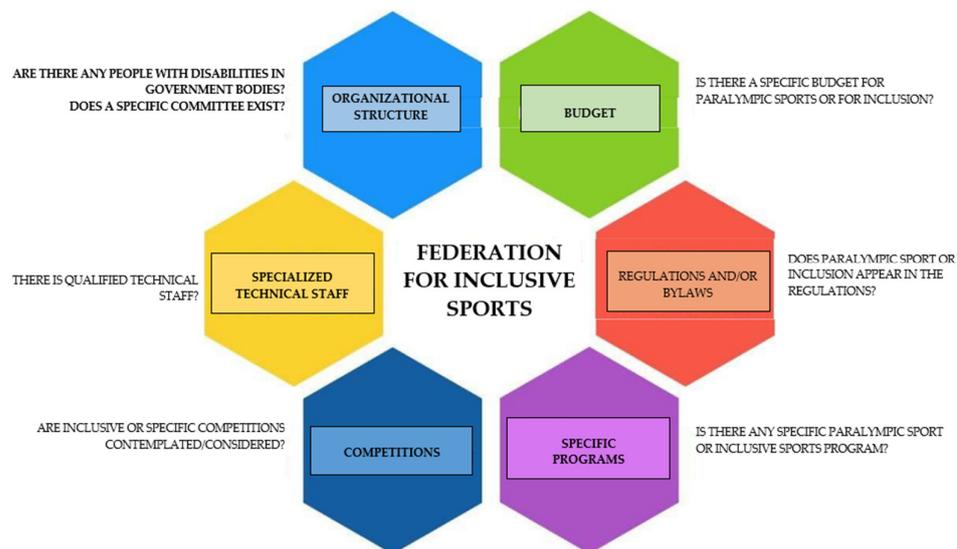
The analysis phase was carried out between 7 March and 4 April 2023, during which the Excel information matrix was completed and the characteristics of each federation were examined. Each variable was then coded based on its nature. Categorical variables reflected the presence or absence of a feature (e.g., mention of inclusive sport, specialized personnel, or a specific budget) and were coded as "Yes" (1) or "No" (0).

Numerical variables represent measurable quantities, such as the number of athletes with disabilities holding a licence. This approach enabled appropriate analysis according to the variable type.

It has to be pointed out that of the 61 sports federations studied, specific data was not found on the websites of 19 of them. Accordingly, these cases were treated as "absence of publicly visible information related to the study topic at the time of data collection", rather than absence of practice. For this reason, they are not included in the count in Figure 2. Recording this limitation maintains the consistency of the results presented in the study and helps explain why some federations were included in the data collection. The federations without accessible information are as follows: basketball (FEB), fencing (RFEE), football (RFEF), weightlifting (FEDEALTER), hockey (RFEH), swimming (RFEN), skating (RFEP), modern pentathlon (FEPM), volleyball (RFEVB), aeronautics (RFAE), billiards (RFEB), bowling (FEBOLOS), hunting (FECAZA), pigeon racing (REAFEDE), speleology (FEE), powerboating (RFEM), polo (RFPOLO), squash (RFES), and clay pigeon shooting (RFETAV).

Due to the lack of information regarding the situation of sports federations, and more specifically in relation to the integration of sports for people with disabilities, as highlighted by Hernández-Beltrán et al. [9], attention was focused on the elements consistent across all

federations. These elements are considered fundamental to the proper management and development of the sports they represent (see Figure 1).



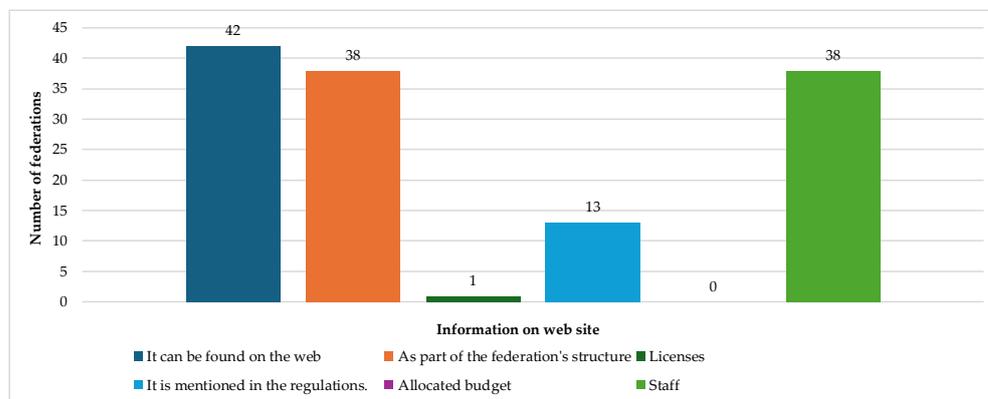
**Figure 1.** Analysis of the parameters of different Spanish sports federations as found on their websites.

2.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and categorical coding were used in the present study. This included identifying the presence or absence of inclusive practices, comparing types of federations, and identifying elements related to sports for people with disabilities, among other things. The qualitative findings were summarized in narrative form to highlight trends or gaps, and the quantitative results were expressed as percentages or frequencies. In addition to frequencies, federations were grouped into “web-visible integration levels” based on a composite of publicly visible indicators.

3. Results

The results of the present research demonstrate the online visibility of publicly reported indicators of the level of integration and development of Spanish sports federations in relation to sport for persons with disabilities (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Web content on sports for people with disabilities across different Spanish sports federations.

The analysis of the situation of Spanish Sports Federations in relation to the integration of sports for people with disabilities has yielded the information detailed below. Most federations have initiatives related to the integration of people with disabilities in sport: of the 61 sports federations, 21 have Paralympic categories. It is also observed that 42 of

them present themselves as inclusive entities. In 38 cases, sports for people with disabilities form part of the structure; the cycling federation (RFEC) is the only one that discloses the number of licenses held by athletes with disabilities. Thirteen of the federative regulations specifically address sports for people with disabilities or inclusive sports. None of the websites consulted provides information on the budgets allocated to athletes with disabilities. Specialized personnel related to sports for people with disabilities can be found in 38 cases. Nineteen of the 61 federations recognized by the HCS, not counting the 5 federations for people with disabilities, did not present publicly visible digital content related to the study topic at the time of the data collection.

In other words, 42 of the federations have an online presence to varying degrees. In general, this includes information about their structure. The 38 federations that have assigned personnel have individuals ranging from representatives of the Adapted/Inclusive Sport committees or departments and the technical director of Adapted Sport to specialist technicians, classifiers, technical coordinators, the head of medical services, the refereeing area, and the development director, as well as assistant personnel.

However, we found a lack of specific information about athletes with disabilities and their inclusion in the regulations, as well as a complete absence of information regarding specific budget allocations for adapted sports. There is room for improvement in terms of support and transparency regarding sports for people with disabilities within the sports federations. Knowing the number of licensed athletes with disabilities and accessing specific budgets for adapted and inclusive sports would provide greater insight into the scope and resourcing of integration processes within each federation.

Among the results (see Figure 2), of the 61 SFs studied (Sports Federations), 69% of the federations (42) had established specific adapted or inclusive sports committees. This pattern may be consistent with the guidelines of the Law (Law 39/2022, of 30 December) and, in cases where integration processes for disability had already begun, may reflect movements made in this regard by their international reference federations. In 62% (38) of the federations, adapted, Paralympic, or inclusive sports appeared in the federation's structure, or they have specialized personnel. However, only 21% (13) of the sports federations' statutes or regulations mentioned sports for people with disabilities. Meanwhile, specifically adapted, Paralympic, or inclusive sports programs have been identified in 54% (34) of the federations, according to the projects presented on their websites.

#### 4. Discussion

This study aims to map and interpret publicly visible website-based indicators of the current situation of Spanish sports federations regarding the integration and development of sports for people with disabilities in Spain. Despite precedents in other countries, there is no consensus on the most effective way to integrate people with disabilities into sports federations [7,22,28,29]. Furthermore, despite supportive policies existing, few studies have examined the implementation of sports integration for people with disabilities within Spanish sports federations. The only study to date to address this issue was carried out by Martinez-Ferrer [32], who developed a protocol through qualitative analysis of stakeholders in sports federations. However, this proposal was created without considering the current legal framework. Thus, the present study addresses this knowledge gap by providing a visibility baseline to guide federations in enhancing inclusion and promoting equitable participation in sport. The results obtained are discussed below, moving beyond a reiteration of descriptive frequencies to interpret patterns through the ICF biopsychosocial model and the socio-ecological perspective, and highlighting that not all federations publicly report actions regarding the integration of sports modalities for people with disabilities on their official websites.

It should be noted that this study has adopted the WHO biopsychosocial model of disability operationalized through the ICF, which conceptualizes disability as the interaction between functioning and contextual factors. This framework justifies examining sports federations as institutional environments that may act as facilitators or barriers through governance structures, policies, and resource allocation. To further specify how context operates across levels, we complement the ICF with a socio-ecological perspective, focusing on the organizational and policy levels, which are observable via systematic analysis of public-facing digital resources.

The results highlight uneven publicly visible organizational capacity and report significant environmental barriers that limit the full participation of people with disabilities in sports federations. Only 69% of federations have dedicated committees; just 21% of federations mention disability sport in their statutes, and only 54% have specific programs documented on their websites. Furthermore, only 62% have included adapted Paralympic or inclusive sport in their organizational structure or have specialized staff. From an organizational and policy perspective, this pattern can be read as a potential gap between normative and governance signaling (e.g., statutory mentions or nominal structures) and publicly visible operational capacity (e.g., dedicated roles, documented programs, and public reporting of resources and participation data). Importantly, because the evidence comes exclusively from federation websites, these findings should be interpreted as differences in transparency and institutional signaling rather than as direct evidence of implementation outcomes.

These findings align with the environmental component of the ICF model, in which barriers are not just physical obstacles but also reflections of the structural and systemic discrimination present in the current models within the sporting context. To deepen this analysis, the results are aligned with Rodríguez-Díaz et al. [38] and Monforte et al. [39], that it is also important to consider another framework, such as the socio-ecological model. This model breaks down the environmental context into different levels—organizational, community, and political—allowing for a more detailed understanding of how policies and institutional structures affect the inclusion of people with disabilities in sports. Within the socio-ecological reading, the present study primarily captures organizational and policy-level indicators, whereas community-level implementation and individual experiences are not directly observable through websites. This distinction is critical to avoid overinterpretation and to situate the findings as a visibility baseline.

The results of the present study indicate that, despite legal frameworks and institutional guidelines, visibility, accountability, and data availability regarding sport for people with disabilities remain limited. The study findings show that the integration of people with disabilities into Spanish sports federations is partial and uneven, with some areas in need of improvement, such as resource allocation and inclusion policies. However, the present data allows us to conclude only that publicly visible reporting of these elements is limited and uneven. This study highlights the need for sports federations to increase transparency, collect and report accurate data on participation in adapted sports, and implement inclusion measures. However, it also notes that the actual effectiveness of these measures cannot be established solely from the information available on their websites.

In this instance, and based on website materials, 42 of the national federations publicly report actions related to the integration of sports for people with disabilities. Some federations provide more extensive and diverse publicly visible evidence across multiple indicators (e.g., dedicated sections, documented programs, listed roles), including the Cycling Federation, Triathlon, Judo, Canoeing, Table Tennis, Archery, Sailing, and Karate. Analysis of the results reveals existing actions, such as the creation of Sports Commissions for People with Disabilities (Article 46.5 of the Sports Law 39/2022), representatives of sports for peo-

ple with disabilities appearing in the federative organizational chart (Articles 6.4 and 47.3), and the integration of specific sports modalities for different sports (Article 6.3). Some federations have launched specific programs for sports development (Article 5.4) and for technical personnel (Article 38.4), taking advantage of public administration funding (Article 6.8) through subsidies from the National Sports Council. These programs may support coordination and capacity-building when working with athletes with disabilities, although program quality and effectiveness cannot be inferred from website evidence alone. Of all the federations, 42 have initiated integration-related activities, while 19 federations had not presented publicly visible information related to the study topic on their digital platforms at the time of the data collection. Key strategies identified include creating Inclusive Sport Commissions, integrating representatives of sports for people with disabilities into the board structure, and developing specific adapted or Paralympic sports programs. For example, the Cycling Federation reports on the number of athlete licenses held by people with disabilities, and federations such as Triathlon, Judo, Table Tennis, Canoeing, Archery, and Karate publicly report initiatives and inclusion-related information on their official websites.

Nevertheless, significant gaps remain. Only 14 federations include explicit references to sports for people with disabilities in their statutes or regulations, and none provide information on the budget allocated to these sports. These findings suggest that although integration initiatives may exist, they are limited in terms of publicly visible content and transparency. The presence of specialized personnel in sports for people with disabilities was identified as a facilitating factor in 38 federations, while the lack of accessible data on athletes and budgets reflects an incomplete public reporting on integration elements. From an accountability perspective, the absence of publicly visible budget and participation data constrains stakeholders' ability to assess resourcing, monitor progress, and compare approaches across federations, even when internal work may be underway.

In contrast, federations that have started to integrate people with disabilities into their structures are usually aligned with Sports Law 39/2022, especially Article 6, which promotes the inclusion of people with disabilities within the federative structure and the establishment of a federative commission dedicated to this goal. Based on publicly available website materials, some federations appear to publicly reflect elements emphasized in Sports Law 39/2022, such as commissions and organizational representation, although legal compliance and implementation cannot be verified through website evidence alone. A clear example of this is the initiatives proposed by the Spanish Karate Federation, which has promoted the integration of para-karate within the framework of specific aid from the National Sports Council. It is worth noting that legislation has sometimes promoted the modification of federation statutes or regulations, and it is through updating these that structural changes affecting the guidelines of different national sports federations have occurred, as has happened with the Sailing and Archery federations. Some federations have launched specific programs for sports development (Article 5.4) and for technical personnel (Article 38.4), taking advantage of public administration funding (Article 6.8) and subsidies from the National Sports Council. These initiatives may represent institutional responses that are publicly communicated, although their reach and sustainability can only be evaluated with additional evidence beyond what is available on the federation's websites.

Nevertheless, significant gaps remain. The creation of Inclusive Sports Commissions reflects international trends in which federations establish governance structures to promote sport for people with disabilities and inclusive sport, in line with recommendations from international sports federations. However, implementation is sometimes inconsistent, as some commissions exist nominally but without functional responsibilities, indicating superficial alignment with mandatory legislation rather than real and comprehensive inte-

gration. In some cases, commissions are listed on websites but with limited publicly visible information about mandate or ongoing activities, which may indicate formal alignment rather than clearly documented institutionalization.

According to the results obtained, the elements for which hardly any information is available on the digital platforms of the different federations are the following: (1) the budget dedicated to sports for people with disabilities and/or inclusive sports (no federation shows this information), (2) the number of licenses held by athletes with disabilities (only the Cycling federation reports on this on its platform), and (3) the lack of mention of sports for people with disabilities in the regulations or federative rules (it is only mentioned in 14 of the 61 federations). The establishment of numerous Inclusive Sports Commissions in many federations may have been influenced by the availability of subsidies. In recent years, the National Sports Council has presented a comprehensive aid proposal for Inclusive Sports, derived from the Inclusive Sports Master Plan [34]. This aid is intended to facilitate the integration of sports for people with disabilities into federations, develop specialized training, organize inclusive competitions, promote and disseminate sports for people with disabilities, hire specific personnel, and identify talent and develop athletes with disabilities before they turn professional—serving as a facilitating element for legal compliance. This aid may have contributed to the creation of public reporting for governance structures and activities; however, online information cannot confirm whether the commission functions beyond a merely nominal or formal role. At the same time, the aid is serving as a facilitator for supporting alignment with the legal framework.

However, in many cases, the establishment of these commissions has not resulted in them being given the function for which they were created. Many federations have these commissions in name only, having not yet provided them with content or real work. Despite compliance with the update of Article 49 of the Spanish Constitution [40], the provisions of Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [17], and support from the Sustainable Development Goals [41,42], particularly SDG3 (Good Health and Well-Being), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Strong Institutions), SD goals aligned with arguments related to health, equity, inclusion, governance, and institutional responsibility in sport and disability contexts, there was no prior legislative reference requiring single-sport federations to meet any of these requirements. Therefore, cases in which some federations have spearheaded and led their own initiatives with a specific idea of sports inclusion have been more due to philosophical issues and a sense of responsibility to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities than any mandatory nature. In recent years, various actions have been carried out to integrate sports for people with disabilities, with varied results depending on the tradition and presence of these sports in the Paralympic Games, or on the need for financial support, the provision of resources, coordination between administrations and federations, and the training of professionals in specific aspects of sports for people with disabilities, all of which are key elements for success in federative integration [19]. From a systems perspective, these factors can be interpreted as interacting barriers and facilitators across socio-ecological levels, which helps explain why publicly visible indicators may focus on governance signaling rather than on transparent reporting of resources and participants.

The level of integration varies among the federations depending on different variables such as inclusive sports activities, information in the statutes or regulations, a specific budget, and the availability of specialized personnel. Consequently, federations with higher levels of these facilitating factors are expected to be at a more advanced phase of integration. In the present study, these factors are interpreted as publicly visible indicators of institutionalization and transparency (rather than as direct measures of integration achieved).

The findings support the hypothesis that federations with higher levels of facilitating factors achieve more advanced integration. Federations that provide specialized personnel (trained in disability issues related to sport), integrate sport for people with disabilities into their organizational structures, and implement specific programs demonstrate more consistent and visible integration efforts. By contrast, federations lacking these factors tend to show minimal or no integration, with no publicly visible evidence of trained personnel or dedicated budget reported on the website.

For example, federations with active inclusive programs and specialized personnel, including Cycling, Karate, and Triathlon, show advanced integration stages, whereas those federations with limited visibility of resources remain in the initial stages. The presence of the facilitating factors and integration progress confirms the value of the hypotheses.

The complexity and challenges surrounding federative integration processes in sport are considerable. This coincides with Rimmer's contribution that the lack of legislation on federative integration is one of the weak points preventing its achievement. In this sense, the current Sports Law aims to guarantee the mandatory nature of integration processes for the different state sports federations, outlining the steps to achieve this. However, the mere existence of this legislation is insufficient for this to be achieved, as Ocete [1] states that strategies should aim to create inclusive sports environments that allow people with disabilities to choose the sport and level at which they wish to participate, regardless of their location, age, or gender. This further reinforces the need to avoid treating website-visible governance structures as sufficient evidence of inclusive outcomes. These results align with those obtained by Monforte et al. [39], whose study reveals differences in organizational models, connections, and institutional networks across sports organizations in different countries. This reinforces the idea of barriers and differences in organizational capacity to promote the participation of people with disabilities in sports. Similarly, the results obtained in the systematic review by Elipe-Lorenzo et al. [43] reveal numerous structural and organizational barriers (insufficient staff training, discriminatory attitudes, and lack of accessible facilities). These findings support the idea that a legislative framework alone is insufficient; real obstacles exist that limit full participation and the effective implementation of inclusive policies.

Also, Pochstein et al. [44] acknowledge the necessity of enhancing community inclusion within sports clubs. Furthermore, strategies are needed to motivate people with disabilities to participate in sports activities, ensure their continued participation, and facilitate their progression in sports. While the identified indicators have provided clear information on organizations carrying out disability integration, they have been insufficient, as they rely solely on information from sports federations' websites. A more specific study of each federative entity is therefore necessary. Likewise, five of the federations currently depend on other organizations for specific disciplines for people with disabilities, despite these being adapted modalities of the same sport. Examples include wheelchair basketball, fencing, powerlifting, swimming, and sitting volleyball. As a result, when investigating single-sport federations, no information has appeared in this regard. Therefore, we agree with Hernández-Beltrán et al. [45] that it is necessary to continue investigating this topic to understand trends in federated sports, and more specifically, sports for people with disabilities within sports federations.

Regarding the methodology used in the research, the main strength of the data extraction approach based on the official websites of sports federations lies in its ability to analyze the open and accessible information that these entities make available to the public, as stated by Cucaita et al. [10]. This information is what those seeking to learn about the different opportunities for sports participation actually access. However, this approach has certain limitations. Some federations may be implementing initiatives or programs

that are not yet publicly disclosed. As a result, the data extracted from federation websites may be biased due to under- or over-reporting on federation websites, and may not fully capture ongoing activities not reflected on their digital platforms. Conversely, federations may demonstrate their commitment to sports for people with disabilities without taking effective action, which would also affect the validity of the analysis, as organizations may adopt symbolic structures or discourses to gain legitimacy without fully implementing corresponding practices. Despite these limitations, this approach remains relevant as an initial approximation of the situation, particularly because the analysis is based on publicly available information that reflects what federations choose to communicate to external stakeholders rather than their actual internal practices [46]. In this context, the absence of information on federations' websites was interpreted as an "absence of publicly visible information" rather than as a lack of practice, and the results should therefore be read as a baseline for understanding current trends. Importantly, these findings will be complemented in subsequent phases of the research by the administration of specific questionnaires aimed at assessing federations' practices more directly, following a triangulation logic that allows the limitations of publicly available secondary data to be addressed through additional data collection methods.

In this regard, it is relevant to examine the official websites of sports federations, as these platforms constitute the primary institutional channel through which information is communicated to internal stakeholders and the public. Article 6 of the Spanish Sports Law stipulates that Spanish sports federations must ensure the effective integration of sporting disciplines for persons with disabilities within their organizations, while also promoting and encouraging the participation of this group and incorporating inclusive sports activities. Consequently, it can be expected that these actions may be reflected on their digital platforms as signals of alignment with the legal framework, institutional transparency, and commitment to accessible information. Analyzing the presence or absence of such content on the federations' websites provides initial insight into how these organizations publicize their integration strategies, as well as highlighting potential discrepancies between the legal framework and the sports federations' communication practices. Consequently, it is reasonable to expect that at least some actions may be reflected on digital platforms as signals of alignment with the legal framework, institutional transparency, and commitment to accessible information. Analyzing the presence or absence of such content provides an initial insight into how these organizations publicly communicate integration-related elements, while also highlighting potential gaps between statutory expectations and communication practices.

### *Managerial Implications*

The results of this research could inform/transfer to other national and international federations, providing a framework for an inclusion proposal grounded in publicly visible indicators and practical examples reported on the federation websites. The findings could serve as a guide for sports federations that have not yet taken the step to lay the groundwork for an inclusion proposal, based on real-world examples that have already been implemented, and could facilitate those that have begun the integration process. Listed below are a series of proposed practical applications that could help integrate people with disabilities into sports through sports federations, supporting alignment with current legislation:

1. Create a training proposal for the main stakeholders of sports federations on disability, focusing on the effective integration of people with disabilities into the specific sports of each federation.

2. Review and update the statutes and regulations of sports federations to include specific provisions related to the inclusion of people with disabilities, establish policies and procedures for the integration of athletes, and gather effective guidelines to advance towards real integration within the federations.
3. Allocate a specific budget for developing adapted sports modalities, acquiring specific adapted equipment if necessary, and improving accessibility to any sports facilities dependent on or linked to the federation.
4. Create and/or activate inclusive Sports Committees and allow people with disabilities to be included on the boards or committees of the federations to support alignment with current regulations regarding representation of governing bodies, as mandated by law.
5. Organize and develop initiatives, events, and activities to promote inclusive and adapted sports within the framework of each federation.

## 5. Conclusions

It can be concluded that the current model of sports organization for people with disabilities in Spain presents a series of challenges and opportunities arising from the significant changes that Spanish sports federations are undergoing in order to integrate disability. Based on publicly available website content, the study results show an overall increase in web-visible inclusion-oriented activity, driven by an increasing number of federations expanding their offerings to include adapted or inclusive sport modalities, with the presence of initiatives aimed at integrating people with disabilities into sports. Twenty-nine specific adapted sports committees have been created, and technical staff have been appointed for specific disciplines. Nine specialized departments have also been established to address all matters relating to sports modalities for people with disabilities. Furthermore, adapted sports disciplines have been introduced into the federation's regular competitions. However, there are still significant challenges that highlight the urgent need to implement intervention strategies and strengthen institutional capacity and transparency, such as the need for the 19 sports federations that have not yet made their work for the integration of sports for people with disabilities or for any inclusive proposal for their disciplines visible, to become active and take a step forward. Importantly, "no visible evidence" should not be interpreted as "no practice", rather it indicates limited public reporting at the time of data collection. Likewise, the presence of visible evidence does not necessarily imply the presence of actual practice, as it may be limited to making an announcement with no further content. Future research should triangulate website-based indicators with federation-level documentation and stakeholder input to assess implementation depth and outcomes.

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**Disability Language/Terminology Positionality Statement:** The author team comprises researchers and educators in sport and health sciences with prior and current research interests, in collaboration with people with disabilities. This study uses person-first language, following the World Health Organization’s biopsychosocial model, which prioritizes the person over their disability. Therefore, we have chosen to consistently use person-first language throughout the manuscript.

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

IPC	International Paralympic Committee
IF	International Federations
NPC	National Paralympic Committees
HCS	High Council of Sports (Consejo Superior de Deportes)
FU	Single-Sport National Federations (Federaciones Nacionales Unideportivas)
FM	Multi-Sport Federations (Federaciones Multideportivas)
SF	Sports Federations
WHO	World Health Organization

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