SPORT4
EMPOWERMENT
EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND PLUS PROGRAMME

European Social Fund Plus Programme

This project is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union

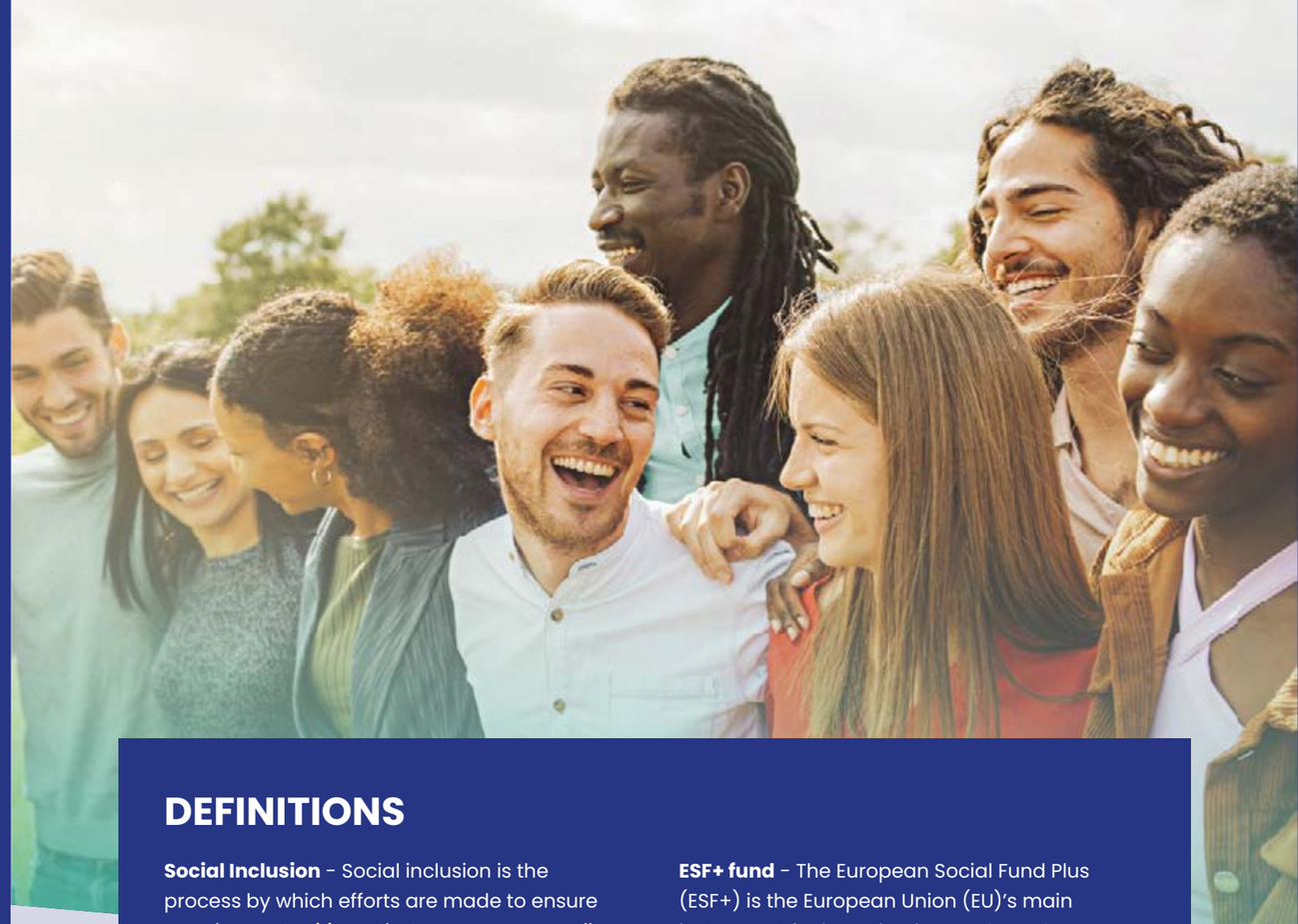
Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Arna chomhchistiú ag an Aontas Eorpach
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SPÓRT ÉIREANN
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DEFINITIONS

Social Inclusion - Social inclusion is the process by which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities – that everyone, regardless of their background, can achieve their full potential in life. Such efforts include policies and actions that promote equal access to (public) services as well as enable citizens' participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Social Innovation - Social innovation refers to the design and implementation of new solutions that imply conceptual, process, product, or organisational change, which ultimately aim to improve the welfare and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Design Thinking - Design thinking is a process for solving problems by prioritising the consumer's needs above all else. It relies on observing, with empathy, how people interact with their environments, and employs an iterative, hands-on approach to creating innovative solutions.

ESF+ fund - The European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) is the European Union (EU)'s main instrument for investing in people and supporting the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

LSPs - Local Sports Partnerships are an initiative of Sport Ireland and aim to co-ordinate and promote the development of sport at local level. The key aims of the LSPs are to increase participation in sport, and to ensure that local resources are used to best effect.

NGB – National Governing Body, an organisation, recognised by Sport Ireland, that coordinates the development of a particular sport or sports through constituent clubs.

NGO - Non-governmental organisation

Diversity - refers to the different characteristics of people who make up our community.

Youth at Risk - refers to young individuals who may face various challenges and vulnerabilities that put them at a higher risk of negative outcomes or difficulties in life.

European Social Fund Plus Programme

In 2023, Sport Ireland was awarded €11 million from the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) programme as part of the Employment, Inclusion, Skills, and Training (EIST) Programme 2021 – 2027. The EIST programme aims to improve employment and education opportunities, enhance social inclusion, and tackle poverty in Ireland.

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) is the managing authority for all ESF+ programmes in Ireland. Sport Ireland will work closely with DFHERIS and other partners and stakeholders to ensure effective and efficient programme delivery.

Sport Ireland's programme will contribute to the overall objectives of the EIST programme and will complement and support the aims and objectives of existing national strategies and policies.

These include the:

- National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027
- Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025
- Pathways to Work Strategy 2021- 2025
- Sport Ireland's Statement of Strategy 2023 -2027
- Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025
- LSP Statement of Ambition
- Sport Ireland Policy on Diversity and Inclusion
- Sport Ireland's Participation Plan
- Sport Ireland Policy on Women in Sport
- Sport Ireland Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities



Sport4Empowerment

Sport Ireland has developed a new "Sport4Empowerment" (S4E) programme as part of Ireland's EIST Programme for 2021 – 2027. This programme will develop new social inclusion programmes through sport and physical activity with a specific focus on people at risk of social exclusion and poverty. Sport Ireland has developed the following vision, mission, and principles for the S4E programme.

Sport Ireland's programme is within the social innovation priority of the EIST 2021-2027 programme. This programme will support innovative ideas, and methods to tackle social issues through user-focused design thinking. Design thinking boosts creative problem-solving and innovation, enabling successful projects to scale on a national level. Sport and physical activity will be used as the mechanism to reach and engage with the identified target communities through innovative programmes.

Sport Ireland's network of Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) will play a key role in the programme and are deeply involved in the design and delivery of local initiatives that will meet the specific needs of the target groups. The LSPs' experience and expertise will be utilised to develop and implement programmes at a local level.

The programme will see the phased employment of newly created ESF+ Social Innovation in Sport Officer positions within LSPs. These officers will be responsible for the piloting and implementation of a range of new, targeted, and innovative programmes which aim to enhance the wellbeing, education, and economic prospects of participants. By 2025, the aim is to have an ESF+ Social Innovation in Sport Officer across all 29 of Sport Ireland's network of LSPs.





VISION

A society that fosters social inclusion and empowers people to reach their full potential.

MISSION

To develop and implement people-first programmes to improve lives, create meaningful opportunities and a sense of belonging through sport and physical activity.

Principles

These principles support a people first approach, ensuring that Sport 4 Empowerment is shaped around lived experience, local need, and meaningful opportunities for participants.

INCLUSION

Inclusion is at the heart of Sport 4 Empowerment. The programme values people's different backgrounds, abilities, identities, and circumstances, and aims to create environments where everyone feels welcomed, respected, represented, and able to belong. It recognises that people may face overlapping barriers and that inclusive sport must respond to lived experience, local context, and individual need.

PARTNERSHIP

Sport 4 Empowerment is built on strong partnerships. By working with Local Sports Partnerships, communities, representative groups, and local, national, and European stakeholders, the programme brings together the knowledge, trust, and resources needed to support social inclusion and empowerment.

INNOVATION

Sport 4 Empowerment uses sport and physical activity as a platform for new ideas and creative problem solving. Through design thinking, co creation, and locally responsive approaches, the programme aims to test, learn from, and scale new ways of addressing social challenges.

LEARNING

Sport 4 Empowerment promotes continuous learning for participants, partners, and the programme itself. Through sport and physical activity, participants can build confidence, skills, knowledge, social connections, and pathways to future education, training, and employment opportunities. The programme will also use evidence, evaluation, and shared practice to understand what works, improve delivery, and increase impact over time.



Pillars of Success

There are four pillars that will contribute to achieving success in the S4E programme, these include achieving the following for the participants:

1



Increased sports participation and physical activity levels

The programme aims to increase sports participation and physical activity levels of participants, which will contribute to the target of having more adults regularly playing sport by 2027 (National Sports Policy). Participation in sport helps to improve physical and mental health and contributes to a better quality of life. The programme aims to create inclusive and accessible opportunities that will enable all participants, regardless of their background or ability, to engage in sport and physical activity.

2



Enhanced education and training opportunities

The programme aims to increase the education and training opportunities for participants which will contribute to the objective of having more people engage in lifelong learning (National Skills Strategy 2025). The programme will use sport and physical activity as a platform to help develop the skills, confidence, and knowledge of participants, which can contribute to their future engagement in lifelong learning.

3



Improved employment prospects

The programme aims to increase employment prospects of participants, aligning with the objective of improving employment rates of people from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds (Pathways to Work 2021-2025). This programme will utilise sport and physical activity to help participants develop and enhance transferable skills that are valued in the workforce.

4



Increased social inclusion opportunities

The programme aims to utilise sport and physical activity as sources of socialisation to facilitate active participation, and social connections, which aligns with the aims of the Roadmap to Social Inclusion 2020-2025. Through sport and physical activity, participants will develop social connections, thereby fostering a sense of belonging. For instance, club membership and volunteering in sport are good pathways for social inclusion and community cohesion.

Target Groups

Sport Ireland's programme will target people at risk of social exclusion and poverty which aligns with the overall aims of the EIST programme.

Sport Ireland's programme will focus on, but not exclusively limited to, the following target groups: ethnic minorities, youth at risk, persons with disabilities, and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds. Women are even more marginalised within each of the target groups and will be a priority for this programme.

Each of these groups face unique challenges and experiences that are shaped by multiple intersecting identities and this programme recognises the compounding marginalising impact that can be experienced by people with intersecting identities – even beyond those in the target groups listed. Recognising the importance of intersectionality will be fundamental to the programme's success. The needs and lived experience of people from different religious backgrounds, the LGBTI+ community, people from different socio-economic backgrounds, and others will be a key component of the programme.



Ethnic minorities

The programme will strive to promote inclusivity, and equal opportunities for ethnic minorities using sport and physical activity as a platform to foster inclusion, and address barriers. In an Irish context, Irish Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority and will be a key target group for this programme.



Youth at risk

The programme aims to provide support, and opportunities for youth at risk to develop life skills, and positive engagement through sport and physical activity.



People with disabilities

The programme aims to create inclusive sport environments for persons with disabilities, improving their physical health, social connectivity, education, and employment prospects.



Persons from disadvantaged backgrounds

The programme will focus on empowering persons from disadvantaged backgrounds by providing sport-based activities, and skill-building opportunities to enhance their confidence and improve social connectivity, education, and employment prospects.

Innovation

Sport Ireland's programme is listed under the social innovation priority of the EIST programme 2021-2027, which will support social innovation and social experimentation measures including the development and testing of new ideas and approaches designed to address social challenges. The overall aim of the social innovation priority is to develop new approaches to the challenges faced by disadvantaged groups and to develop the social innovation ecosystem in Ireland.

Sport Ireland and LSPs will work alongside an innovation consultant on the innovation aspects of the programme. This will include co-creating and co-designing new programmes that have the target groups' needs at the centre of the programme and will ensure innovation is embedded throughout.

The programme will track innovative projects and emphasise the use of specific innovative language. Local projects will be designed around the innovative principles of design thinking. Design thinking will foster a user-centric approach, promoting creative problem-solving and enhancing the overall innovation process. Successful projects may be scaled outwards at a national level.



Sport Ireland's programme will contribute to the development of the social innovation ecosystem in Ireland.

Stakeholders

Sport Ireland and the LSPs will deliver the programme and will work with additional stakeholders, at local, national, and international level, to ensure programme success. The stakeholders' active involvement, collaboration, and support will contribute to achieving the programme's objectives.

Sport Ireland will actively engage with national representative groups to understand target groups' lived experiences and perspectives which will ensure that target group voices and needs are recognised, incorporated, and respected. The programme will look to work with local partners and NGBs to collaborate with LSPs on the programme at local and national level to strengthen the programme's capacity and reach.





Sport Ireland will look to engage with European partners. This engagement provides opportunities for knowledge exchange, learning from best practices, and allows for cross-border collaboration on European initiatives that promote social inclusion.



Communications

Communication will be an important aspect of the “S4E” programme, designed to foster understanding, awareness, and engagement among stakeholders and target groups. The programme’s communication objectives include the following key elements:

Promote understanding of the programme objectives

Communications will focus on clearly and concisely conveying the core objectives of the programme. By providing comprehensive and accessible information about the programme’s purpose and goals, the programme aims to build a shared understanding among all stakeholders, ensuring alignment and commitment to the common vision of the S4E programme.

Increase awareness and visibility of the programme

The programme’s communication efforts will be designed to increase its visibility and reach among all relevant parties, including local, national, and international stakeholders. Different communication channels will be used to reach different target groups and stakeholders.

Provide information about opportunities, results, and impact

The programme will communicate updates about the various opportunities, activities, and initiatives offered. Capturing the programme impact and sharing participant success stories is a vital aspect of our communication strategy. The programme believes in the power of storytelling to illuminate the personal journeys and triumphs of individuals who have benefited from the programme.





Evaluation and Monitoring

Evaluation will be a fundamental component of the S4E programme to assess the programme’s effectiveness, progress, and impact.

Evaluations will be conducted throughout the programme to track progress and identify areas of success and improvement. This will involve collecting and analysing data related to participants, such as sport participation rates, educational and training opportunities, employment outcomes, and overall social inclusion indicators.

Monitoring will be an ongoing process that allows the programme to closely observe the implementation of activities, ensuring they are delivered as planned. Through a rigorous evaluation framework, the programme will gain valuable insights into its impact on the lives of the participants, and in turn the broader communities and society.

The programme’s commitment to evaluation demonstrates accountability to stakeholders and will serve as a platform for sharing best practices, knowledge, and successes with relevant local, national, and international stakeholders.

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