V1

SPORT4
EMPOWERMENT
EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND PLUS PROGRAMME

Communications Guidelines

A Practical Guide for Local Sports Partnerships and ESF+ Social Innovation in Sport Officers

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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How to Use This Guide

This Communications Guidelines document is the practical companion to the Sport4Empowerment Strategy. Where the strategy explains what we want to achieve and why, this guide tells you how - giving you the tools, language, and frameworks you need to communicate about Sport4Empowerment with confidence, consistency, and care.

It is written primarily for two (internal) audiences:

Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) the community-based organisations delivering Sport4Empowerment in every county in Ireland and ESF+ Social Innovation in Sport Officers, the specialist officers embedded in LSPs who focus on inclusion, innovation, and ethical storytelling.

Sport Ireland staff, communications teams, and external partners may also find this guide useful as a reference.

This guide is organised into seven sections:

1. **ABOUT SPORT4EMPOWERMENT -**
   key facts, messages, and who we serve.

2. **OUR LANGUAGE AND VOICE -**
   tone of voice, inclusive language, and terminology.

3. **ETHICAL STORYTELLING -**
   our principles, and working with participants.

4. **PHOTOGRAPHY AND VISUAL CONTENT -**
   practical guidance on taking and using photos.

5. **SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES -**
   platform-by-platform guidance, hashtags, accessibility.

6. **CANVA TEMPLATES -**
   how to access and use shared design templates.

7. **APPROVALS AND CONTACTS -**
   governance, sign-off, and who to call.

Note: This guide is a living document. It will be updated as the programme grows and as we learn from experience on the ground. Always check that you are using the most recent version. Contact Sport Ireland if you are unsure.

ESF+ Requirement: All public-facing materials produced in connection with Sport4Empowerment must use the emblem lockup with “Co-funded by the European Union”, and body copy and captions use “This project is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union. This is a mandatory requirement. See the Sport4Empowerment Brand Guidelines for full details.

The official Communications Guidelines for the 2021-2027 period are available to download from the eufunds.ie website under “Regulations and Guidance” - this is the authoritative source for all EIST-funded projects including Sport4Empowerment.

01

About Sport4 Empowerment

What is Sport4Empowerment?

Sport4Empowerment (S4E) is a national programme led by Sport Ireland that uses sport and physical activity to support social inclusion. It is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

The programme works with communities and individuals across Ireland who face barriers to participating in sport - including ethnic minorities, youth at risk, persons with disabilities and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Sport4Empowerment is delivered locally through Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) and ESF+ Social Innovation in Sport Officers across all 29 LSPs.

Brand Principles

These principles support a people first approach, ensuring that Sport4Empowerment is shaped around lived experience, local need, and meaningful opportunities for participants.

INCLUSION

Inclusion is at the heart of Sport4Empowerment. 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

Sport4Empowerment 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

Sport4Empowerment 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

Sport4Empowerment 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.

Who We Serve

Sport4Empowerment is designed to reach people who are most often excluded from sport. The programme works with - but is not limited to - the following communities:

- Ethnic minorities
- Youth at risk
- Persons with disabilities
- Persons from disadvantaged backgrounds

Sport4Empowerment does not work for these communities. It works with them - listening, co-designing, and empowering at every stage.

Elevator Pitches

Sometimes, we need one easy sentence to describe an otherwise 'complex' concept. Use the appropriate message length depending on the context. All three versions carry the same meaning.

ONE SENTENCE (SOCIAL MEDIA, SHORT CAPTIONS)

Sport4Empowerment uses sport and physical activity to build social inclusion across Ireland - bringing people together through movement to improve lives, create meaningful opportunities and a sense of belonging.

SHORT PARAGRAPH (PRESS RELEASES, WEBSITE INTRODUCTIONS, EVENT PROGRAMMES)

Sport4Empowerment is a national programme led by Sport Ireland that uses sport and physical activity to support social inclusion. Delivered by Local Sports Partnerships across Ireland and co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through ESF+, the programme works alongside people who face barriers to participating in sport - ensuring their stories are shared with care, consent, and dignity.

EXTENDED (STAKEHOLDER BRIEFINGS, GRANT APPLICATIONS, MEDIA BACKGROUNDERS)

Sport4Empowerment is a national social inclusion through sport programme led by Sport Ireland and co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+). It works with Local Sports Partnerships and ESF+ Social Innovation in Sport Officers across Ireland to make sport and physical activity genuinely accessible to people facing barriers to participation such as ethnic minorities, youth at risk, persons with disabilities and persons from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Stories are captured and shared ethically, with full participant consent and agency, as part of Ireland's commitment to community centred, people-first sport.

02

Our Language and Voice

The language Sport4Empowerment uses reflects its values. This section provides guidance on how to write and speak about the programme, the people it serves, and the communities it works with - in a way that is consistent, respectful, and accurate.

Key principle: The words we choose signal what we value. Language that is person first, dignified, and accurate builds trust with communities and reinforces the programme's commitment to inclusion.

Tone of Voice

Sport4Empowerment communicates in a voice that is:

WARM AND HUMAN.

We talk about real people, real experiences, and real communities. We avoid jargon, bureaucratic language, and abstract phrases.

HONEST AND GROUNDED.

We do not oversell or sensationalise. We describe what the programme does and the difference it makes, without exaggeration.

RESPECTFUL AND DIGNIFIED.

We always put the person before their circumstance. We do not define people by their challenges, labels, or history.

CONFIDENT BUT NOT SELF-CONGRATULATORY.

We are proud of what Sport4Empowerment does without making it the hero of every story. The people participating are the story.

CLEAR AND ACCESSIBLE.

We write for a broad audience. Acronyms are always written out in full on first use. Plain language is preferred throughout.

Use	Avoid
Sport4Empowerment empowers people through sport.	This ground-breaking initiative leverages synergies across stakeholder ecosystems.
People taking part in the programme.	Beneficiaries / recipients / service users.
He found belonging through the group.	He was rehabilitated through sport.
The programme works with people seeking international protection and people in the international protection process.	The programme targets migrants and asylum seekers.
She joined a walking group and started building connections.	A vulnerable woman was referred into sport provision.
We share stories with care and consent.	We amplify the voices of the marginalised.

Inclusive Language Guide

This section provides specific guidance on how to write about the communities Sport4Empowerment works with. These guidelines reflect current best practice and have been developed with respect for the communities themselves. Language evolves - if you are unsure, ask.

This is subject to change, if unsure please check with Sport Ireland ethics.

People Seeking International Protection, People Seeking Asylum, and the International Protection Process

Use	Avoid
Person seeking asylum / person in the international protection process	Illegal immigrant / illegal asylum seeker
Refugee (only if the person has been granted refugee status)	Asylum seeker used for someone who has refugee status
Person living in IPAS accommodation (International Protection Accommodation Service)	Person in Direct Provision (the system has changed; IPAS is now the correct term)
Undocumented person / person without papers	Illegal alien / illegal migrant
People from migrant backgrounds / new Irish communities	Foreigners / non-nationals (avoid as primary descriptor)

Do not disclose someone's nationality, country of origin, or immigration status in communications without their explicit consent. For some people, this information could pose a safety risk.

Do not describe participation in Sport4Empowerment in terms of 'integration' or 'fitting in'. Frame it as access and connection.

Avoid implying that the programme is 'helping' people seeking international protection or asylum seekers 'become' more Irish. The programme supports inclusion - not assimilation.

Traveller and Roma Communities

Irish Travellers are a distinct ethnic group recognised under Irish law. Traveller identity is a protected characteristic under the Equal Status Acts. The Roma community is a separate and distinct group with its own culture, language, and identity.

Use	Avoid
Member of the Traveller community / Traveller (capitalised) / Roma community / Roma person	Gypsy (unless the person self-identifies with this term)
The Traveller community has distinct cultural practices and traditions.	Travelling people (implies movement is a defining characteristic)

Traveller with a capital T, always. This reflects their status as a recognised ethnic group, in the same way that 'Irish' is capitalised.

Do not describe Traveller or Roma identity as a barrier, challenge, or complexity. Systemic discrimination is the barrier.

Be aware that Traveller and Roma communities are distinct - do not conflate them. Some people identify with both, but they have separate histories, languages, and cultures.

Engagement with Traveller and Roma communities should always involve community leaders or representatives in the design and consent process.

Survivors of Domestic Violence and Abuse

This is an area requiring particular care. The safety implications of misidentification or disclosure are serious. People affected by domestic violence may have fled their homes, changed their names, or be at ongoing risk.

Use	Avoid
Survivor of domestic violence / person affected by domestic abuse	Victim / battered woman / abused wife
People affected by domestic or gender based violence	DV case / DVA referral
She has experienced domestic violence (only if she has chosen to share this herself)	She is a victim of domestic violence (labels and disempowers)

Critical: Never identify someone as a survivor of domestic violence in any public communication - including photos, social media, event programmes, or case studies - unless they have given fully informed, explicit consent and understand where and how the content will be used.

Even with consent, consider whether publishing the story creates any risk. A person's former partner may see the content. Consult your programme lead before proceeding.

Do not describe Sport4Empowerment as a domestic violence programme. It is a sport inclusion programme that works with, among others, people who have experienced domestic violence.

People in Recovery or with Drug and Alcohol Dependencies

Language in this area is evolving. The most important principle is person-first language - always the person before the diagnosis, behaviour, or experience.

Use	Avoid
Person in recovery / person recovering from addiction	Addict / junkie / alcoholic (as identity labels)
Person who uses drugs / person with a substance use disorder	Drug abuser / substance abuser
Person with alcohol dependency / person in recovery from alcohol use	Alcoholic (as identity label)
Someone who has experienced addiction	Ex-addict

The words 'addict' or 'alcoholic' may be used by individuals to describe themselves - this is their choice. It is not Sport4Empowerment's language to use in communications.

Do not disclose someone's recovery status or addiction history without their explicit consent. This information is private and can carry serious stigma in some communities.

Frame participation positively: connection, movement, belonging, community - not recovery, rehabilitation, or intervention.

People with Disabilities

Person-first language is widely preferred in Ireland: 'person with a disability' rather than 'disabled person'. However, some communities - particularly Deaf communities and some autistic people - prefer identity-first language ('Deaf person', 'autistic person'). Where possible, ask individuals how they prefer to be described.

Use	Avoid
Person with a disability	Disabled person (as general usage - see note above)
Person who uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair-bound / confined to a wheelchair
Person with a hearing impairment / Deaf person	Hearing-impaired (some find this offensive) / deaf-mute (outdated)
Person with a visual impairment / blind person	The blind
Person with an intellectual disability	Mentally handicapped / retarded (both unacceptable)
Autistic person / person with autism	Person suffering from autism / afflicted by autism

Avoid language that implies suffering, tragedy, or limitation. People with disabilities are not defined by what they cannot do.

Do not suggest that sport is 'therapeutic' or 'rehabilitative' for people with disabilities. Frame it as participation, connection, and enjoyment - the same framing used for everyone.

People Experiencing Homelessness

Use	Avoid
Person experiencing homelessness / people experiencing homelessness	The homeless / homeless people (objectifying)
Person who has experienced homelessness	Former homeless person
Person in emergency accommodation / person without stable housing	Rough sleeper (as identity label)

LGBTQ+ People

LGBTQ+ is an umbrella term for people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, and others. It is the most widely used and recognised term in Ireland.

Use	Avoid
LGBTQ+ people / the LGBTQ+ community	The LGBT community (incomplete) / homosexuals (clinical, often offensive)
A person who identifies as transgender / a transgender person	A transgendered person / transsexual (outdated)
Same-sex relationships / same-sex couple	Gay lifestyle / homosexual lifestyle
Use the pronouns a person uses for themselves	Assume pronouns from appearance or name

Never out someone as LGBTQ+ without their explicit consent. This includes in photos, captions, or stories - even if their involvement in an LGBTQ+-specific activity implies identity.

If unsure of someone's pronouns, use their name or ask respectfully. If someone requests a specific pronoun (he/him, she/her, they/them), use it in all communications.

Do not describe LGBTQ+ identity as a barrier, challenge, or difficulty. Being LGBTQ+ is not the problem - exclusion is.

Terminology and Acronyms Glossary

The following terms are used regularly in Sport4Empowerment communications. Always write the full term on first use in any document, press release, or communication, followed by the acronym in brackets. After that, the acronym may be used.

Example: 'Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) deliver Sport4Empowerment across Ireland. LSPs work closely with…'

Term / Acronym	Definition and Usage Notes
S4E	Sport4Empowerment. The national programme led by Sport Ireland. Always write out in full as 'Sport4Empowerment' on first use. Note the capital E.
LSP	Local Sports Partnership. The community-based organisations delivering Sport4Empowerment in every county. There are 29 LSPs across Ireland.
ESF+	European Social Fund Plus. The EU funding stream co-funding Sport4Empowerment through the 2021–2027 programming period. First use: European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).
IPAS	International Protection Accommodation Service. The current system provides accommodation for people in the international protection process in Ireland. Previously known as Direct Provision - avoid 'Direct Provision' as the primary term as it has negative connotations and the system has changed.
ESF+ Officer	ESF+ Social Innovation in Sport Officer. The full title should be used on first reference and where there is space to do so. 'ESF+ Officer' may be used subsequently in informal communications.
Sport Ireland	Always capitalise. Do not abbreviate. The state agency for the development of sport in Ireland.
EU	European Union. Write out in full on first use in formal communications.

03

Ethical Storytelling

Storytelling is at the heart of Sport4Empowerment. Through film, audio, photography, and written narrative, the programme shares how sport changes lives - building understanding, inspiring action, and honouring the experiences of the people involved.

But storytelling about people who face social exclusion carries risks as well as opportunities. Done well, it builds dignity, visibility, and trust. Done poorly, it can reinforce stereotypes, disclose sensitive information, cause harm, or exploit the very people it claims to celebrate.

This section sets out the ethical principles and practical frameworks that govern all storytelling within Sport4Empowerment.

The fundamental rule: stories are shared with people, not about them. Participants are co-creators with full agency - not subjects, case studies, or beneficiaries.

Our Five Ethical Principles

1. INFORMED CONSENT.

Every person featured in a story has understood what the story is for, where it will appear, who will see it, and how it will be used - and has freely agreed to participate. Consent is ongoing: a person can withdraw at any time, and that decision is respected without question or pressure.

2. PARTICIPANT CHOICE.

People decide how they are shown and what is shared. Options include appearing on camera, speaking in voice-only, remaining anonymous, or not participating at all. No option is presented as better than another.

3. CARE AND SAFETY.

Stories are shared in a way that avoids harm, re-traumatisation, or risk. The potential consequences of a story being seen by specific audiences - family members, former partners, employers, immigration authorities - are considered in advance.

4. DIGNITY FIRST.

The focus is on strength, growth, agency, and connection - never on deficit, suffering, or victimhood. People are introduced through place, movement, and voice - not through diagnosis, status, or label.

5. TRANSPARENCY.

People know where stories will appear, for how long, and how they may be adapted for different platforms. There are no surprises after consent is given.

The Consent Process - Step by Step

Consent for storytelling should always be handled through a clear, unhurried conversation - not just a form. The following steps apply before any filming, photography, audio recording, or interview takes place.

BUILD TRUST FIRST.

Storytelling conversations should never happen at a person's first session. Allow trust to develop through repeated contact and shared activity before raising the idea.

EXPLAIN CLEARLY AND SIMPLY.

Tell the person what the story is for, where it will appear, who will see it, how long it will be available, and whether it will be on social media or used in fundraising or policy communications.

EXPLAIN THE OPTIONS.

The person can appear on camera, appear with their face obscured, speak in voice only, be paraphrased rather than quoted directly, or not participate at all. Make clear that participation has no effect on their access to the programme.

GIVE TIME.

Do not rush the decision. If the person wants to think about it, that is the right answer. Return to the conversation at a later session.

GET WRITTEN CONSENT.

Use the standard Sport4Empowerment consent form (available from Sport Ireland). For people with literacy challenges or in languages other than English, support is available - contact Sport Ireland.

KEEP THE SIGNED CONSENT FORM.

File it securely in line with your organisation's data protection procedures.

CHECK IN AGAIN BEFORE PUBLISHING.

After content is created, share it with the participant before it goes public. Give them the opportunity to withdraw or request changes.

HONOUR WITHDRAWALS IMMEDIATELY.

If a participant withdraws consent at any stage, remove the content from all channels as quickly as possible and without question.

Storytelling Considerations

Some communities face specific risks when their stories are shared publicly. The additional guidance below should be read alongside the general principles above.

High risk: The consequences of misidentification or disclosure can be severe, including contact from perpetrators. Treat all storytelling involving this group with the highest level of care.

Never identify someone as a survivor of domestic violence in any public communication without their explicit, fully informed consent.

- Consider the reach and permanence of the content. Social media posts can be screenshotted and shared widely. Once published, control is limited.
- Consult your programme lead or Sport Ireland before publishing any story involving a participant who has experienced domestic violence.
- Avoid images where a person could be identified by physical surroundings, distinctive clothing, or background details.
- Do not disclose nationality, country of origin, or the fact that someone is in the international protection process without their explicit consent.
- Be aware that content could be seen in a person's home country, creating risk for them or family members who remain there.
- Do not use language that suggests people are 'integrating' - frame participation as access, connection, and belonging.
- Engage community representatives and cultural mediators in the consent and storytelling process.
- Be sensitive to historical experiences of discrimination and exploitation. Build the relationship before raising storytelling.
- Do not use stories about Traveller or Roma participants to illustrate 'barriers' or 'challenges'. Frame their participation as natural and deserved.
- Do not disclose someone's recovery status or addiction history without consent. Consider whether the participant understands that the content may be seen by employers, family members, or others.
- Frame stories around participation, connection, and sport - not recovery or treatment.

What Good Storytelling Looks Like

A good Sport4Empowerment story introduces a person through what they love, where they are from, and what brought them to this moment - not through what they have experienced or what services they receive. It shows sport as a shared space where people simply belong. It ends with the person having more agency and connection than when the story began.

04

Photography and Visual Content

Images are among the most powerful tools in the Sport4Empowerment toolkit. A single photograph can communicate belonging, connection, and dignity in a way that takes paragraphs of text to describe. But images can also, unintentionally, expose people, reinforce stereotypes, or cause harm.

This section provides practical guidance for LSPs and ESF+ Officers on taking, selecting, and using photographs and video content - with and without professional photography support.

The ethical principles in Section 3 apply equally to photography. Informed consent, participant choice, care and safety, and dignity first are not optional extras - they are the starting point.

Before You Take Any Photo or Video

- Confirm that all participants have been informed that photography or filming will take place at the session.
- Identify any participants who have not given consent to be photographed. Ensure they are clearly known to the photographer before the session begins, and that images of them are not taken.
- Use the standard consent form. A general consent form for 'activity photography' can be used for regular sessions (available from Sport Ireland). A separate, specific consent form is required for any story-based or featured content.
- **For under-18s:** written consent from a parent or guardian is required in addition to the child's own agreement.
- Brief the photographer (if not you). Share the consent list, explain the ethical guidelines, and make clear that dignity and care are non-negotiable.
- **After the session:** review images before use. Remove any images that could identify a person who has not consented, or that could expose sensitive information.

Do	Don't
Show people engaged in activity - moving, laughing, connecting.	Stage 'grateful recipient' poses where people look passive or helpless.
Capture natural, candid moments - real emotions in real settings.	Take formal, clinical group shots where people look uncomfortable.
Focus on faces where consent has been given - expressions of effort, joy, concentration.	Photograph faces of people who have not consented, even if they are in the background.
Use good natural light - face your subject toward the light source.	Shoot against windows or bright backgrounds (creates silhouettes and dark faces).
Show the sport or activity clearly - this is what brings people together.	Focus exclusively on equipment, buildings, or infrastructure with no people.
Include images that reflect the diversity of who is in the room.	Only photograph the people who are easiest to photograph.
Check the background before shooting - what else might be visible?	**Inadvertently capture identifying information:** signs, addresses, name badges.
Review images with the participant before publishing, where possible.	Publish images without final review if the content is sensitive.

Practical Photography Tips for Non-Professionals

Not every Sport4Empowerment activity will have a professional photographer present. These tips will help you capture strong, usable images with a smartphone or basic camera.

LIGHT IS EVERYTHING.

Natural light is best. Position your subject so the light falls on their face - not behind them. Avoid shooting directly into windows or bright sunlight.

GET CLOSE ENOUGH.

A photo of a full room from the back of a hall rarely shows the connection and energy you want. Move closer and capture smaller moments.

TAKE MORE THAN YOU NEED.

You can always delete. Take multiple shots of the same moment and choose the best one later.

CAPTURE MOVEMENT.

Sport is about movement - a blurred ball, running feet, arms in the air. These images convey energy in ways that static poses cannot.

LOOK FOR THE SMALL MOMENTS.

Belonging is shown in small details: two people laughing, a hand on a shoulder, someone being shown how to hold a racquet. These are the moments that make stories human.

HORIZONTAL IS USUALLY BETTER.

Portrait (vertical) images are good for Instagram Stories. Landscape (horizontal) is more versatile for web, print, and Facebook.

STEADY THE SHOT.

Rest your elbow on a surface or brace against a wall to reduce camera shake, especially indoors.

CHECK THE BACKGROUND.

Before pressing the button, look at what is in the frame behind your subject. Cluttered or distracting backgrounds reduce image quality.

DON'T OVER-EDIT.

Light corrections and a small crop are usually all that's needed. Avoid heavy filters that alter skin tones.

LABEL YOUR IMAGES.

When saving, note the date, location, activity, and consent status of the images. This saves time later and is essential for data protection compliance.

Community-Specific Photography Guidance

- Explicit individual consent is required for every image - general session consent is not sufficient.
- Consider using images from behind, in profile, or with faces obscured - these can still be powerful and story-telling while protecting identity.
- No location-specific images (distinctive buildings, signage, streets) that could identify a specific refuge, service, or support location.
- Do not photograph official letters, documents, or anything that reveals immigration status.

- If a person does not want their face shown, back-of-head shots or hands-focused images can still tell a powerful story.
- Images showing LGBTQ+-specific contexts should only feature participants who have specifically consented to being photographed in those contexts and understand the content will be shared publicly.
- Never caption or describe an image in a way that outs a person.
- Build the relationship before raising photography. Some Traveller community members have negative experiences of media photography.
- Ask directly, explain clearly, and give full control over how images are used.
- All images must be stored securely in line with GDPR and your organisation's data protection policy.
- Maintain a record of consent forms linked to each image or set of images.
- Do not share images via personal email, personal social media, or unsecured file sharing platforms.
- Images should be uploaded to the central Sport4Empowerment image library (details from Sport Ireland) so they are available for shared use.
- Images of under-18s require additional data protection measures - consult your Data Protection Officer.
- If consent is withdrawn, delete all copies of the relevant images from all platforms and storage locations and confirm deletion to the participant.

05

Social Media Guidelines

Social media is one of the primary ways Sport4Empowerment shares stories, updates, and impact with Irish and European audiences. This section provides platform-by-platform guidance, advice on writing captions, required hashtags and tags and accessibility standards.

Approval required: Any content that features named participants, specific communities, or sensitive subjects must be approved by Sport Ireland before posting. See Section 7 for the approval process.

Platform Guide

INSTAGRAM

Element	Guidance
Audience	General public, sport community, younger adults, advocacy organisations, EU and international partners.
Tone	Warm, human, visually led. Captions can be longer but should breathe - short paragraphs with line breaks.
Best content	Strong photography, short video (Reels up to 90 seconds), participant stories, behind-the-scenes activity.
Image size	Square 1080x1080px or portrait 1080x1350px. 1080x1920px for Stories.
Captions	Lead with the strongest sentence. Use line breaks. Include up to 5 to 8 hashtags at the end.
Accessibility	Always write alt text for images. Use closed captions on all video.

FACEBOOK

Element	Guidance
Audience	Older adults, local community members, families, LSP networks, community groups and services.
Tone	Community-focused, conversational, local. Can be slightly more detailed than Instagram.
Best content	Programme updates, event announcements, video stories, longer participant features, links to web content.
Image size	1200x630px for shared links and posts.
Captions	Keep it to 1–3 short paragraphs. Ask a question or invite a response where appropriate.
Accessibility	Add alt text to all images. Use closed captions on video.

LINKEDIN

Element	Guidance
Audience	Sport Ireland partners, ESF+ stakeholders, government and public bodies, NGOs, European networks, media.
Tone	Professional, evidence-led, but still human. Impact data and leadership positioning sit here.
Best content	Impact stories with data, programme milestones, policy relevance, European context, case studies.
Image size	1200x628px.
Captions	Longer form is acceptable. Structure with short paragraphs. Include a clear call to action.
Accessibility	Alt text for images. Captions on video. Avoid using emojis as bullet points.

Writing Captions

A good Sport4Empowerment caption leads with the human story, not the programme name. It is specific rather than generic. It uses plain, accessible language. It does not identify sensitive information about participants. It includes a call to action where appropriate. It acknowledges EU co-funding on formal content posts.

CAPTION EXAMPLES

Instagram: "Every Tuesday morning in Drogheda, something simple happens. A group of women show up. They move. They laugh. They show up again the next week. That's what Sport4Empowerment looks like on the ground. #Sport4Empowerment #InclusionThroughSport #SportIreland #ESFPlus"

LinkedIn: "Sport4Empowerment is now active across 29 Local Sports Partnerships, supporting over 500 people to engage with physical activity who previously faced barriers to participation. Co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through ESF+, this is what inclusive sport looks like when it's community-led. Read the full update: [link] #ESFPlus #InclusionThroughSport"

Other Communication Obligations to Be Aware Of

Sport4Empowerment is co-funded through ESF+ shared management under the EIST Programme 2021–2027. The communication obligations for this programme are set out in the **eufunds.ie** Communication Guidelines 2021–2027, which is the authoritative source for all EIST-funded projects.

In addition to the hashtag and tagging guidance above, all LSPs must:

- Ensure the emblem lockup carries "Co-funded by the European Union", and body copy and captions use "This project is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union
- Ensure both logos are visible on landing on any project website, without the user needing to scroll

For full details of your communication obligations under ESF+ shared management, refer to the Communication Guidelines 2021–2027 at **www.eufunds.ie**.

Accessibility Standards

ALT TEXT ON ALL IMAGES:

Write a clear, descriptive sentence explaining what is in the image. For example: 'Three women in sports clothes walking together along a riverside path, laughing.'

CLOSED CAPTIONS ON ALL VIDEO:

Any video posted on social media must include accurate closed captions. Auto-generated captions should always be reviewed and corrected before posting.

AVOID TEXT IN IMAGES:

Text embedded in images cannot be read by screen readers. If text is essential, include it in the caption or post body as well.

USE PASCALCASE FOR HASHTAGS:

Write hashtags with capital letters at the start of each word (#InclusionThroughSport, not #inclusionthroughsport). Screen readers use capital letters to distinguish words.

EMOJIS:

Use sparingly. Screen readers read emoji descriptions aloud. Where emojis are used, put them at the end of text rather than as bullet points or within sentences.

PLAIN LANGUAGE:

Use short sentences, plain words, and active voice. Avoid jargon and acronyms without explanation.

What Not to Post

- Images or names of participants who have not given consent.
- Any information that identifies someone as a domestic violence survivor, person in recovery, person in the international protection process, or LGBTQ+ without specific consent.
- Personal details: addresses, phone numbers, email addresses of participants.
- Photos of children or young people without written parental consent.
- Content that has not been reviewed and approved where the approval process applies (see Section 7).
- Negative comments about other organisations, communities, or individuals.
- Content that has not gone through the required checks for third-party music, footage, or photography.

Responding to Comments and Messages

- Respond to positive comments and questions promptly and warmly - same day where possible.
- Do not engage in arguments or respond to trolling. Report and block where necessary.
- If a complaint or concern is raised publicly, acknowledge it politely and take the conversation to a private channel. Do not argue publicly.
- If a participant or community member raises a concern about content, treat it as a priority. Contact Sport Ireland immediately.
- For media enquiries received via social media, refer to the Sport Ireland communications contact (see Section 8).

What You Should Never Do in a Comment

- Never discuss, confirm or deny anything about an individual participant, including whether they attend. Move the conversation to a private message and, if unsure, check with Sport Ireland.
- Never argue or defend the programme in public. Acknowledge the comment, then take the conversation to a private channel.
- Never respond to media enquiries. Take contact details and refer them to the Sport Ireland Communications Lead (see Section 7).
- Never confirm or correct information about anyone's immigration status, recovery, domestic violence history, sexual orientation or gender identity, even if a commenter gets it right or wrong.

Escalation: What to Do and Who to Tell

What you see	What to do	Who to tell	When
A safeguarding concern (a child or adult at risk, or a disclosure of harm or abuse)	Do not reply publicly. Take a screenshot. Follow your organisation's safeguarding procedure.	*Your designated safeguarding lead, then the S4E Emergency/ Safeguarding Contact (Section 8). If someone is in immediate danger, contact the Gardaí. Child protection concerns follow the statutory route.*	*Immediately*
A participant or community member objects to content featuring them	Remove the content from all channels without question. Confirm removal to the person.	*Sport Ireland Communications Lead*	*Immediately*

A comment identifies a participant (a name, a location, or immigration, recovery, domestic violence or LGBTQ+ status)	Hide or delete the comment, then check whether the post itself should come down.	*Sport Ireland Communications Lead*	*Same day*
Hateful, abusive or threatening content	Take a screenshot, then hide or delete it and report it to the platform. If it contains a threat, report it to the Gardaí.	*Sport Ireland Communications Lead*	*Same day*
A serious or repeated complaint about the programme or your LSP	Acknowledge it politely in public, invite the person to message you, and handle it privately.	*Sport Ireland Communications Lead, particularly if it concerns funding or safeguarding*	*Within one working day*
A media enquiry	Do not comment. Take contact details.	*Sport Ireland Communications Lead*	*Same day*

Hide, Delete or Report

Hide comments that are unhelpful but not harmful, such as off-topic posts, mild rudeness, repeated unrelated comments and spam. Hiding keeps a record and avoids a public row. Hide first when unsure.

Delete comments that:

- reveal personal or sensitive details about a participant (names, addresses, phone numbers, status, or the location of a service)
- contain hate speech, slurs or discrimination
- threaten or harass participants or staff
- are explicit or illegal

Report to the platform and block repeat offenders, trolls, scam accounts and impersonators. Do not engage with them first. Do not respond to trolling.

Leave in place genuine criticism and difficult questions, even when uncomfortable. Reply calmly and factually, or invite the person to message you. Removing fair criticism damages trust.

ALWAYS

Screenshot before you hide or delete. Record the date, the post and the username. Store it securely in line with your organisation's data protection procedures and GDPR.

- Never delete a safeguarding disclosure before reporting it.
- Switch on keyword filters on each platform (for example, Hidden Words on Instagram and the moderation settings on Facebook) to catch common abuse and any terms that could identify a participant.
- If a post attracts a wave of hostile comments, pause your replies and tell Sport Ireland. Do not post follow-up content until a response has been agreed.
- Review regularly. If you hide or delete a comment under the rules above, there is no need to explain publicly. If the person contacts you privately, respond politely and refer to these guidelines.

When in doubt, ask. It is always better to check before replying than to manage the consequences of getting it wrong.

Posting What, Where, When?

HOW OFTEN TO POST

Consistency matters more than volume. A rhythm you can keep up is better than bursts of activity followed by silence. Never post just to fill a gap. Post when you have something to share that you are ready to share. Every post must still meet the consent, safety and co-funding requirements.

Channel	Best used for
Facebook	Programme updates, event announcements, longer stories
Instagram feed	Strong photography, carousels, short video
Instagram Stories	In-the-moment updates, only where consent allows
LinkedIn (Sport Ireland and ESF+ Officer accounts)	Impact stories, milestones, programme updates

Frequency

- Plan a simple monthly calendar around your sessions, events and key dates such as European Week of Sport and local events.
- Aim for a mix: roughly one human-story post for every announcement or update.
- One story can become an Instagram carousel, a longer Facebook post and a Story.
- Tip: sharing official S4E content from Sport Ireland channels counts toward your rhythm.
- A quiet week is fine. A missed week is better than a post that isn't ready to go out.

Hashtags and Tagging: Required vs Recommended

Hashtags are best practice for visibility. #ESFPlus is mandatory as an **S4E programme rule.**

Hashtag / tag	Status	Guidance
#ESFPlus	Required (S4E rule)	*Use on all posts about S4E. Funding-related content must be identifiable as ESF+ funded.*
#Sport4Empowerment	Required (S4E rule)	*Primary programme hashtag. Use on all content. Always capitalised as shown.*
@SportIreland (tag)	Required when posting from LSP or officer accounts	*Tag Sport Ireland's account so the national team can find and share your content.*
#EUInMyRegion	Recommended	*The EU cohesion campaign hashtag. eufunds.ie says it "should be used wherever possible". Add it where there's room.*
@EUFundsIreland (tag)	*Recommended*	*eufunds.ie says update posts should include tags to the EU Funds social media accounts. Check the current handle with the programme officer before publishing.*
#InclusionThroughSport	*Recommended*	*Use where the inclusion focus is explicit.*
#EUfunds	*Optional*	
#SocialInnovationPlus	*Optional*	

06

Canva Templates

Sport4Empowerment Canva templates are pre-designed, brand-compliant layouts that allow LSPs and ESF+ Officers to create high-quality visual content quickly and consistently — without needing design skills.

How to Access the Templates

The Sport4Empowerment Canva template library is accessed through a shared Canva team workspace.

Contact Sport Ireland to request access. You will need a Canva account (free accounts work with the shared workspace).

Template Type	Description
Instagram Post (Square)	**1080x1080px**. For activity updates, quotes, and announcements.
Instagram Post (Portrait)	**1080x1350px**. For participant stories and featured content.
Instagram Story	**1080x1920px**. For short-form updates, event promotion, and behind-the-scenes content.
Facebook Post	**1200x630px**. For programme updates and event announcements.
LinkedIn Post	**1200x628px**. For impact content and stakeholder communications.
Event Poster (A3)	For printing and display at Sport4Empowerment activities.
Event Flyer (A5)	For distributing at community venues and partner organisations.
Pull-up Banner	For events and showcases.
Email Header	For use in programme update emails to partners and stakeholders.
Quote Card	For sharing participant quotes — with and without photo versions.

What You Can Change

Text content - headlines, body copy, quotes, dates, locations.

Photos - swap in your own photos (ensure consent is documented).

LSP name and logo - a designated area for local branding is included in each template.

What You Must Not Change

Programme logo - do not move, resize, or recolour.

Sport Ireland logo - do not modify.

EU emblem and 'Co-funded by the European Union' statement - these are mandatory and must remain visible and unmodified.

Core colour palette and font choices - these ensure brand consistency across all 29 LSPs.

Reminder: If you need a template type that does not exist in the library, contact Sport Ireland rather than creating your own from scratch. This ensures the EU co-funding requirements are always met and the brand remains consistent.

Exporting and Saving

Export images at the highest quality available (PNG for social media images, PDF for print).

For print materials, always request a PDF proof before printing and confirm with Sport Ireland that the EU emblem and logos are correctly displayed.

Save exported files with clear naming conventions: S4E_[LSP name]_[content type]_[date], for example: S4E_DonegalLSP_InstagramPost_March2026.png

07

Approvals and Contacts

What Needs Approval Before Publishing

Not all content requires central approval, but the following types must be reviewed by Sport Ireland before they are published or shared:

Content type	Approval required from
Video stories featuring named participants	Sport Ireland communications lead
Press releases and media statements	Sport Ireland communications lead
EU award submissions and European facing content	Sport Ireland + ESF+ programme officer
Statements on policy or programme impact	Sport Ireland
Use of new partner logos or co-branding	Sport Ireland
New template designs outside the Canva library	Sport Ireland communications lead
Content for national media or broadcast	Sport Ireland communications lead

Content that does not require Sport Ireland approval (but must still follow all guidelines in this document):

- Routine session update posts on LSP social media channels using approved templates.
- Reposting or sharing official Sport4Empowerment content from Sport Ireland channels.
- Event listings and activity announcements on LSP channels.

Key Contacts

[The following contact details to be completed by Sport Ireland before distribution]

Role	Contact
Sport Ireland Communications Lead	[Name]	[Email]	[Phone]
Sport4Empowerment Programme Lead	[Name]	[Email]	[Phone]
ESF+ Programme Officer	[Name]	[Email]	[Phone]
bigO + Fiola Foley (Communications Agency)	[Name]	[Email]
Emergency/Safeguarding Contact	[Name]	[Phone — available outside office hours]

Raising Concerns

If you have a concern about any content, whether it was published by your LSP or by another partner, raise it immediately with the Sport Ireland Communications Lead. You do not need to wait for a scheduled meeting.

If a participant raises a concern about content that features them, treat this as a priority. Remove the content from all channels immediately and contact Sport Ireland.

Concerns about safeguarding should be reported through your organisation's designated safeguarding lead and, if urgent, directly to the relevant statutory authorities.

When in doubt, ask. It is always better to check before publishing than to manage the consequences of getting it wrong.

SPORT4
EMPOWERMENT
EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND PLUS PROGRAMME

Communications Guidelines

A Practical Guide for Local Sports Partnerships and ESF+ Social Innovation in Sport Officers

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Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Arna chomhchistiú ag an Aontas Eorpach
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