

The measurable criteria for funding social inclusion in sport: The Slovenian perspective

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Funding for sports programs in Europe predominantly hinges on two principal criteria: a) athletic achievements and b) participant numbers. Nonetheless, the imperative of social inclusion within sports necessitates a distinct approach to evaluation, given the inherently smaller population of vulnerable individuals, which renders the participant number criterion less applicable. Moreover, the essence of social inclusion transcends the realm of competition and accolades, cantering instead on fostering integration across a spectrum of abilities with aims towards socialization, normalization, and enhancing overall well-being.

Slovenia prides itself on a rich heritage in Paralympic sport and has embraced several international directives that champion social inclusion in sports. A significant achievement is the equalization of awards for Paralympic athletes with those of Olympic athletes. Despite these advancements, sports programs for individuals with special needs continue to navigate the mainstream funding channels, absent specific criteria tailored for co-financing inclusion initiatives. Our investigation underscores the urgent necessity for structured support alongside clearly delineated criteria, facilitating a more efficacious and equitable allocation of funds towards sports inclusion programs.

The inclusion of vulnerable individuals into mainstream sports clubs at the local level sketches an aspirational future landscape. This vision is significantly propelled by the exploration of measurable criteria for the co-financing of sports inclusion programs. Focus group participants, including athletes requiring adaptations due to intellectual, physical, or social circumstances, as well as parents, coaches, volunteers, managers, and other stakeholders active in sports clubs, shared their insights on potential measurable criteria. Additionally, experts in social inclusion contributed their perspectives through comprehensive interviews. This collaborative process led to the identification of six potential measurable criteria for co-financing: (1) sustainability, (2) performance, (3) sociability, (4) attitude towards inclusion, (5) competencies, and (6) good governance. These criteria are set to undergo a rigorous evaluation and testing phase within sports clubs following presentations to policymakers and various stakeholders. Our findings accentuate the imperative of developing a sustainable framework at both national and European levels, one that meticulously accounts for the unique needs and challenges faced by diverse abilities athletes, thereby fostering a more inclusive and supportive societal order.