

EQIA and Screening flowchart and template (taken from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for public authorities April 2010 (Appendix 1)).

Introduction

Part 1. Policy scoping – asks public authorities to provide details about the policy, procedure, practice and/or decision being screened and what available evidence you have gathered to help make an assessment of the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations.

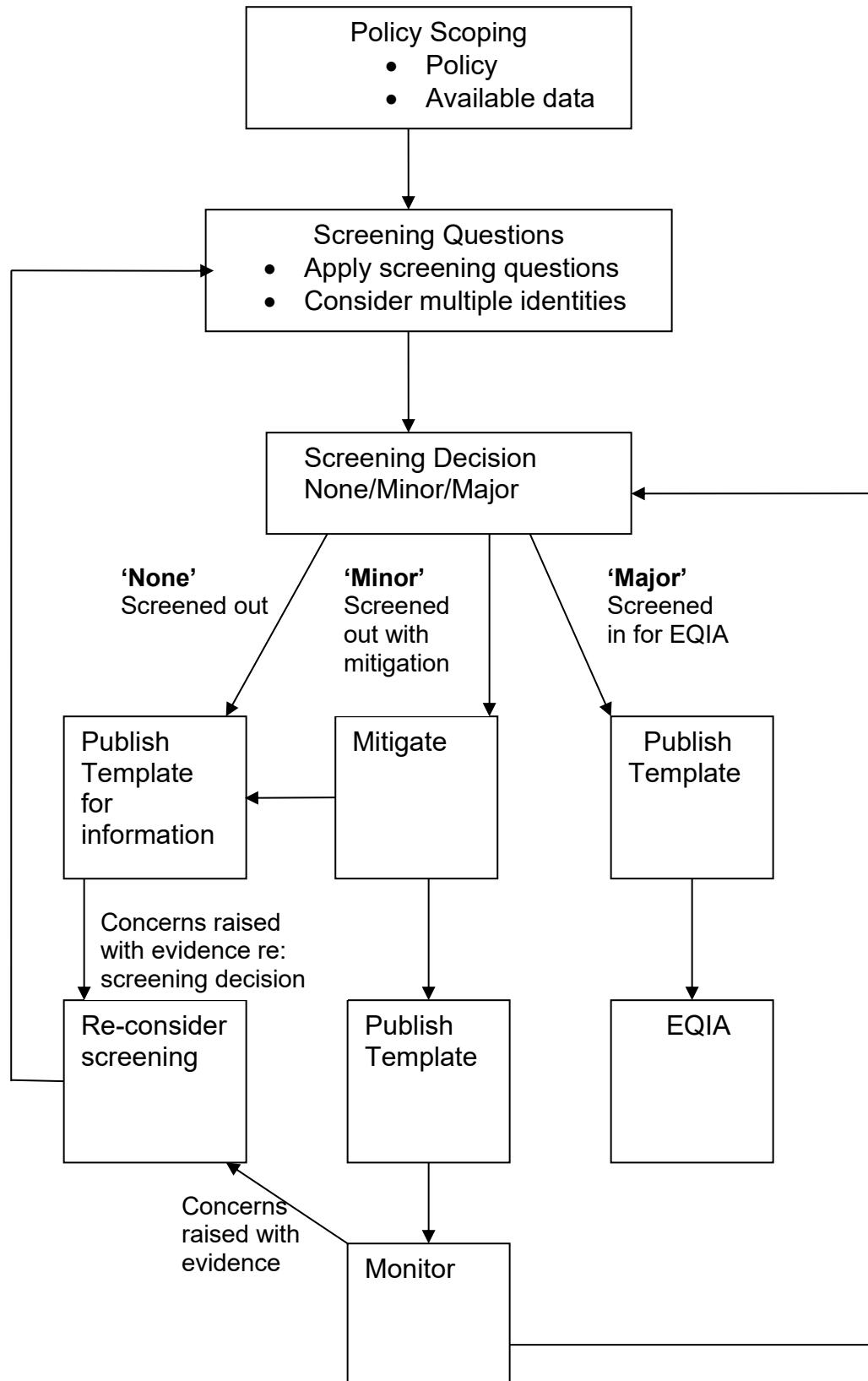
Part 2. Screening questions – asks about the extent of the likely impact of the policy on groups of people within each of the Section 75 categories. Details of the groups consulted and the level of assessment of the likely impact. This includes consideration of multiple identity and good relations issues.

Part 3. Screening decision – guides the public authority to reach a screening decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment (EQIA), or to introduce measures to mitigate the likely impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Part 4. Monitoring – provides guidance to public authorities on monitoring for adverse impact and broader monitoring.

Part 5. Approval and authorisation – verifies the public authority's approval of a screening decision by a senior manager responsible for the policy.

A screening flowchart is provided overleaf.



Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step-by-step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy

Name of the policy

Delivery of sporting activities for people with learning disabilities across Northern Ireland through exchequer investment into Special Olympics Ireland (2025–2026).

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

Revised for 2025-2026 (previous investment 2024-25).

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

To invest in Special Olympics Ireland to deliver inclusive sporting opportunities for people with learning disabilities. Intended outcomes include improved physical and mental health, increased participation in sport, enhanced educational engagement, growth in volunteering, and a reduction in social exclusion.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?

If so, explain how.

The Section 75 category that will primarily benefit from this policy is disabled people, and more specifically, disabled people with learning and intellectual disabilities. This also includes other Section 75 categories, where there is intersectionality.

This policy forms part of the portfolio delivery of the Sport NI Corporate Plan, the Power of Sport (available for reference: <https://www.sportni.net/about-us/corporate-plans/> including the delivery of outcome one and two. Outcome one is concerned with increasing “People adopting and sustaining participation in sport and physical activity” and outcome two is concerned with “Our athletes amongst the best in the world”. These outcomes are underpinned by Sport NI’s four cornerstones, which promote equality and inclusion.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

Developed by the Inter-Departmental Oversight Group (IDOG), which includes the Departments for Communities, Education, and Health, alongside Sport NI.

Who owns and who implements the policy?

Sport NI leads implementation. IDOG has coordinated funding for Special Olympics Ireland annually since the 2006 Belfast Special Olympics Games.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?

Yes

- **Financial:** Annual funding approval creates periods of operational risk.
- **Operational:** Delivery depends on staffing, volunteers, and participant engagement.
- **External:** Broader social and economic factors (e.g. pandemics, cost of living) may influence outcomes.

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon? (please delete as appropriate)

- **Staff:** Internal staff at Sport NI, external staff at Special Olympics, external staff/volunteers at Special Olympics clubs.
- **Service users:** People with a learning and intellectual disability.
- **Other public sector organisations:** Representatives of the IDOG, outlined above.
- **Voluntary/community/trade unions:** Special Olympics Ireland, Special Olympic Clubs.
- **Other, please specify:** Parents and carers of participants.

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

- Sport NI Corporate Plan 2021–2026 - [Power of Sport – Sport NI’s New Five-Year Plan | Sport NI](#)
- ‘Active Living: No Limits’ Action Plan - [Active Living](#)
- Draft Programme for Government 2024–2027 - Programme for Government 2024–2027 ‘Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most’ | The Northern Ireland Executive
- Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for Northern Ireland - About Us
- Sport NI Equality Scheme - [Equality scheme](#)

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data. The Commission has produced this guide to [signpost to S75 data](#).

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for each of the Section 75 categories.

Religious Belief

Evidence relating to religious belief is drawn from the Continuous Household Survey 2023/24, which captures data on religious identification within the population and their engagement with sport and physical activity.

Source: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#)

Additionally, the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Sport NI's Corporate Plan highlights the importance of supporting sports to develop more mixed and inclusive participant bases that are not segregated along religious lines.

Source: [Equality Impact Assessment – Sport NI Corporate Plan](#)

Political Opinion

The EQIA for Sport NI's Corporate Plan also references research (2016) which identified the symbolic nature of sport in Northern Ireland's divided society, where some sports can reflect religious, cultural, and political allegiances. However, the same research suggested that the politicisation of sport may be gradually weakening, indicating a potential shift toward greater inclusivity across political divides.

Source: [Equality Impact Assessment – Sport NI Corporate Plan](#)

Racial Group

Currently, Sport NI does not hold comprehensive participation data disaggregated by racial group. This gap in data was explicitly identified through Sport NI's participation in the 2021 'Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport' collaborative study, conducted alongside the other UK Sports Councils.

Source: [Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport Review 2021](#)

A key finding for Northern Ireland was that a lack of available data and insight into the racial diversity of participants in sport makes it difficult to measure progress or identify specific barriers faced by ethnically diverse communities.

The study's lived experience component — #*TellYourStory* — further highlighted this issue, stating that:

“The final numbers provide sufficient data for the England analysis, but the in-depth one-to-one interviews conducted in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales offer only initial insights for these countries. Low engagement may also reflect weaker networks and relationships between the Sports Councils and ethnically diverse communities at local level.”

Further contextual evidence can also be drawn from the Northern Ireland Assembly’s paper on grassroots sport, which outlines general participation trends and potential challenges across communities.

Sources:

- [Grassroots Sport in NI: A Summary of Participation and Potential Challenges](#)
 - [Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport Review 2021](#)
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Age

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides the most up-to-date data on participation in sport across different age groups in Northern Ireland. Findings are available at:

[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24.](#)

In addition, the 2022 the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Survey ([CSPPA Reports – CSPPA.ie](#)), the 2022 Children's Report Card ([PA-Report-card-full-report-final.pdf](#)) the 2023 Kids' Life and Times Survey (focused on P7 pupils) and the Young People Life and Times Survey (focused on 16-year-olds) offer valuable insights into participation patterns and attitudes towards sport and physical activity among children and young people ([Northern Ireland Kids Life and Times Survey: 2023](#) and [\(Young Life and Times Survey: Sport\)](#)). These surveys highlight a clear decline in participation levels as children transition from primary to post-primary education, indicating the importance of targeted interventions to sustain participation into adolescence and adulthood.

Marital Status

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) also provides insight into sport participation rates based on marital status. This evidence helps Sport NI better understand how relationship status may influence participation. Findings can be accessed at: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24.](#)

This evidence is supplemented by the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Sport NI’s Corporate Plan, which reviewed broader research and data on participation patterns across different Section 75 groups, including marital status.

Sexual Orientation

Currently, Sport NI does not hold robust quantitative data on sport participation rates disaggregated by sexual orientation, largely due to the absence of this data in standard population-level surveys.

However, evidence gathered through extensive consultation for the Corporate Plan highlighted a number of barriers faced by LGBTQIA+ people in sport, including:

- The invisibility of LGBTQIA+ identities within many sporting environments.
- The absence of visible role models and a reluctance among athletes to come out.
- Homophobic microaggressions and unreported hate incidents creating hostile environments in some sports settings.
- Specific challenges faced by single-identity LGBTQIA+ teams, particularly around sustainability and broader acceptance.

These insights are captured within the Corporate Plan's Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and demonstrate the ongoing cultural and structural barriers impacting LGBTQIA+ inclusion in sport.

Men and Women

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides gender-disaggregated data on sport participation, enabling Sport NI to track differences in participation rates between men and women.

The data is available at:
[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24.](#)

In addition to participation rates, consultation evidence from the development of the Corporate Plan highlighted gender-specific barriers to participation, including:

- Caring responsibilities, which disproportionately impact women.
- Concerns around personal safety, particularly when accessing facilities or participating in sport after dark.
- Gendered stereotypes affecting perceptions of who sport is for and what activities are seen as appropriate for different genders.

Disability

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) also captures participation rates for disabled and non-disabled people, providing a key evidence base for understanding disparities in participation.

This data can be accessed at:
[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24.](#)

Alongside this quantitative data, Sport NI continues to engage closely with Disability Sport NI, gathering practical insights into the lived experiences of disabled athletes, participants, coaches, and volunteers. This qualitative evidence helps contextualise participation data and highlights barriers such as:

- Accessibility of facilities and equipment.
- Limited availability of inclusive programmes.
- Gaps in awareness and understanding among coaches and volunteers.

Persons with Dependents

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides further evidence on participation in sport among individuals with caring responsibilities. This data helps identify the impact of dependants on levels of participation, particularly for parents of young children, lone parents, and carers of disabled or older relatives.

Data is available at:
[Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

Consultation for the Corporate Plan further reinforced how caring responsibilities create a significant barrier to regular participation, particularly for women. Issues raised include:

- Lack of affordable childcare.
- Timetabling of sessions, which may not be compatible with family schedules.
- Limited availability of family-friendly sport and physical activity options.

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

Specify details of the needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 categories below:

Religious Belief

Current Participation Patterns

The 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides the most recent data on participation in sport across different religious backgrounds in Northern Ireland. According to the survey:

- 46% of people identifying as Catholic participated in sport at least once in the previous seven days.
- 47% of people identifying as Protestant participated in sport at least once in the previous seven days.
- 56% of people identifying as 'Other' or having no religion participated in sport at least once in the previous seven days.

Source: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#)

Research Insights and Consultation Feedback

Evidence from the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for Sport NI's Corporate Plan references a 2016 study (Mitchell, Somerville & Hargie) on Sport and Social Exclusion. This research found:

- Strong public support (86%) for the principle of sport as a peacebuilding tool in Northern Ireland.
- Both Protestant and Catholic communities expressed a desire for sports to become more mixed in terms of participation and support bases.

Source: Sport NI Corporate Plan EQIA

Through Sport NI's extensive public consultation for the 2021-2026 Corporate Plan, further religious and cultural considerations were identified:

- Religious and cultural practices impact participation, particularly for some women and girls from specific faith backgrounds.
- Issues raised included the need for:
 - Female-only sessions for activities such as gym classes and swimming.
 - Private changing facilities for those unable to use communal spaces.
- The need for dedicated development officers to support participation within culturally diverse communities, helping sustain engagement and facilitate progression within sport.

Inclusive Provision and Facility Access

The Department for Communities (DfC) screening of the Active Living Strategy reinforces these priorities, highlighting:

- Facility access at times that respect religious observances.
- Programming of gender-specific sessions to align with religious and cultural requirements.

Sport NI also acknowledges that community background continues to influence sporting preferences and participation. This reality should inform the allocation of resources and the design of inclusive programmes. Further, Sport NI respects the personal choice of athletes in relation to national representation, recognising the diverse identities within Northern Ireland's sporting landscape.

Political Opinion

Historical Context and Evolving Trends

The EQIA for Sport NI's Corporate Plan references evidence (Mitchell, Somerville & Hargie, 2016) that highlights the historical politicisation of sport in Northern Ireland, where certain sports became associated with particular political, religious and cultural identities.

However, this research also found emerging evidence that the politicisation of sport may be gradually weakening, with some sports becoming more cross-community in character.

Consultation Feedback and Strategic Priorities

Through consultation on Sport NI's Corporate Plan (2021-2026) and the Department for Communities' Active Living Strategy, the following needs and experiences were identified for people of differing political opinions:

- Neutral and accessible facilities: Facilities should be seen as welcoming to all and free from political or sectarian symbolism that could discourage participation.
- Safe and inclusive environments: Participants highlighted the importance of feeling safe and secure when using facilities, venues, and open spaces.
- Avoidance of territorial markings: Facilities should be free from flags, emblems, murals, or other territorial markers that could alienate potential users.

Sport NI also recognises the importance of respecting personal choice in relation to international representation, acknowledging that some athletes may choose to represent Northern Ireland, Ireland, or the UK — and that this choice should be fully supported within the system.

Racial Group

Current Evidence and Research Insights

Sport NI, alongside the other Home Country Sports Councils, commissioned an extensive quantitative and qualitative research programme to better understand racial inequalities and racism in sport across the UK. This resulted in two key reports:

- “Tell Your Story” (2021) – capturing the lived experiences of people from ethnically diverse communities within sport, highlighting racism, microaggressions and structural inequalities.
- “Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport” (TRARIIS) – bringing together existing data to map inequalities in participation, representation, and experience within sport and physical activity.

Headline Findings:

- People from ethnically diverse backgrounds consistently report lower participation rates in sport and physical activity compared to White British/White Irish populations.
- Structural and cultural barriers, including language barriers, lack of visible role models, experiences of overt racism and microaggressions, contribute to lower engagement.
- Inequalities exist across all levels of sport – from grassroots participation through to elite performance and leadership roles.
- The research identified five common themes for action, which guide Sport NI’s approach:
 - Representation and Leadership
 - Embedding Anti-Racism
 - Education and Cultural Awareness
 - Data and Insight
 - Systems and Accountability

Sources:

- [Tell Your Story](#)
- [Tackling Racism and Racial Inequality in Sport](#)
- [5 Common Themes for Action](#)

Consultation Feedback and Community Insights

Through consultation on Sport NI’s Corporate Plan 2021-2026 (‘The Power of Sport’), alongside the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for the Plan, the needs, experiences and priorities of ethnically diverse communities were explored in greater detail.

Key messages from consultation included:

- Inclusive Culture: Participants highlighted the need for a genuinely open, welcoming and inclusive sporting culture that actively promotes wellbeing and inclusion, rather than simply expecting participation.
- Cultural and Language Barriers: Stakeholders proposed practical tools to overcome cultural and language barriers, including:
 - A multi-language app to support signposting, tailored to different confidence levels, sports and local club options.
 - Welcome videos from relatable participants to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions around sport being elite-focused.
- Tackling Racism and Bias: Participants reported both blatant racism and subtle microaggressions in sporting environments. This aligns with the findings of the TRARIIS research and further emphasises the need for:
 - Anti-racism training for clubs, officials and coaches.
 - Stronger policies and enforcement mechanisms to challenge discrimination when it occurs.
- Targeted Development and Pathways: Feedback highlighted the need for culturally diverse development officers, who can act as bridges between communities and the sporting system, helping build trust and sustained engagement.
- Affordability and Accessibility: Cost was consistently raised as a barrier to participation. This includes not only membership fees, but also kit, equipment and transport costs. Clubs and governing bodies were encouraged to explore more flexible pricing structures and targeted outreach programmes to remove these barriers.
- Pathways to Leadership and Representation: Feedback highlighted the lack of ethnically diverse representation within coaching, officiating and governance roles. Clear pathways to leadership were seen as essential, alongside targeted mentoring and outreach.
- 'Who You Know' Culture: A strong theme across consultations was frustration at the informal networks that often shape access to development and leadership opportunities within Northern Ireland sport. More transparent recruitment and targeted outreach to ethnically diverse communities were identified as a critical priority.

Broader Strategic Alignment

The Sport NI EQIA also referenced the Sport England "Sport for All" study (2020), which provides further evidence that:

- Different ethnic communities have diverse needs and preferences, which should inform programme design.
- People's experiences are shaped by multiple factors, including age, gender, disability, faith, sexual orientation — meaning solutions must account for these intersecting identities.

- Systemic change requires collective action across the whole sporting system, not just at club or governing body level.

Source: Sport for All: Why Ethnicity and Culture Matters

Age

Sport NI has reviewed a range of research and data to understand how age affects people's participation in sport and physical activity. Key sources include the 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey, the Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA), and the Kids Life and Times (KLT) and Young Life and Times (YLT) surveys.

What we know from the data:

- Sport participation declines as people get older, particularly between primary and post-primary school.
- 17% of students aged 10-18 in Northern Ireland meet the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity.
- Boys are more likely to meet this target than girls.
- Participation rates are lower for children with disabilities and children from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 92% of primary pupils and 76% of post-primary pupils take part in school sport outside of PE at least once a week.

What older people told us:

- They want more adapted sports like walking football, table tennis and bowls.
- Transport, costs and lack of local facilities are big barriers, especially in rural areas.
- Better communication and promotion of activities is needed.
- Feeling self-conscious about going to classes alone puts people off.
- Health concerns, lack of changing facilities and digital barriers (for online classes) also affect participation.
- There is strong support for fun, social and non-competitive activities.
- Linking with initiatives like Age Friendly programmes and ensuring sports facilities meet accessibility standards was highlighted.

What children and young people told us:

- There is strong demand for better quality PE in schools, with more focus on skill development and physical literacy, not just competition.
- Early focus on competitive sports leaves many children feeling excluded.
- School-to-club pathways need to improve to help children stay involved.
- After-school activities are often unaffordable for low-income families.
- Young people want a wider range of sports and more adventure-style activities, especially in rural areas.

- Transport, self-confidence, and stereotypes around which sports are for boys or girls are barriers.
- 17/18-year-olds feel there are fewer suitable activities for them locally.

What parents, early years staff and community workers told us:

- Early years play and fundamental movement skills are crucial but often overlooked.
- Many parents lack the knowledge or confidence to encourage physical activity at home.
- Financial pressures, lack of local support, and digital exclusion all affect family participation.
- Outdoor play and using natural environments should be encouraged, but weather is often seen as a barrier.
- Costs of clothing, equipment and club fees can exclude families.
- There's a need for better partnerships between clubs, schools and local community groups to offer low-cost options.
- Messaging should focus on fun, health and wellbeing rather than competition.

In summary:

There is clear evidence that participation levels change across the life course, with steep declines during adolescence and into adulthood. Different age groups face distinct barriers, from the cost of after-school sport for children, to transport and health concerns for older adults. The consultation highlighted strong support for improving PE in schools, providing affordable community sport for all ages, and ensuring that messaging, facilities and programmes are truly inclusive.

Marital Status

Overview

The 2022/23 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) gathered data on participation in sport. Findings related to marital status are available in the published tables: [engagement-culture-arts-heritage-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202223.xlsx \(live.com\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/engagement-culture-arts-heritage-sport-by-adults-in-northern-ireland-202223.xlsx).

Participation levels by marital status were as follows:

- Married / Cohabiting: 50%
- Single: 52%
- Widowed: 21%
- Separated / Divorced: 36%

More recent data from the 2023/24 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) indicates:

- 51% of married people had participated in sport within the previous 7 days.
- 54% of single people had participated in sport within the previous 7 days.

Needs, Experiences and Priorities

The Department for Communities' screening assessment on the Active Living Strategy highlights several factors affecting participation across different marital status groups:

- Access to facilities at times that fit around family and work commitments.
- Encouraging parental involvement in children's sports and physical activity.
- Childcare issues are a significant barrier for many parents, particularly those in dual-working households.
- Cost is a limiting factor, particularly for those on lower incomes.

Sexual Orientation

Overview

There remains a lack of robust data on the sexual orientation of those participating in sport in Northern Ireland.

However, the Sport NI Corporate Plan consultation highlighted important insights:

"There is an invisibility of narrative around trans inclusion and sexuality, a lack of athletes comfortable to come out, and cultural normalisation of homophobic microaggressions and both reported and unreported hate crime. These factors present serious barriers to accessibility within the sporting system. Single-identity teams exist, but they often struggle to sustain themselves."

Key Research and Evidence Sources

In preparing the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for the Corporate Plan, Sport NI reviewed academic and other relevant sources on LGBTQIA+ experiences in sport, including:

- (2016) *OUTstanding in your field: Exploring the needs of LGB&T people in rural Northern Ireland*, Rainbow Project.
- (2015) *Through Our Eyes: Housing and homelessness experiences of LGBT people in Northern Ireland*, Rainbow Project & Council for the Homeless NI.
- (2013) *Through Our Minds: Emotional health and wellbeing of LGBT people in Northern Ireland*, Malachai O'Hara.
- (2012) *Multiple Identity; Multiple Exclusions and Human Rights*, Disability Action & Rainbow Project.
- (2012) *All Partied Out: Substance use in Northern Ireland's LGBT community*, Eoin Rooney.
- (2011) *Making this Home my Home: Inclusive nursing/residential care for older LGBT people*, AgeNI & Rainbow Project.
- (2011) *Left Out Of The Equation: Experiences of LGB young people at school*, Gavin Boyd.
- (2011) *Through Our Eyes: Experiences of LGB people in the workplace*, Matthew McDermott.

- (2009) *Through Our Eyes: Perceptions and experiences of LGB people towards homophobic hate crime and policing*, John O'Doherty.

Needs, Experiences and Priorities

Findings from the Department for Communities Active Living Strategy screening assessment (through pre-consultation focus groups) further illustrate the barriers faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in sport:

- The need for exclusive access sessions for LGBTQ+ participants and appropriate changing facilities.
- A lack of understanding and awareness of LGBTQ+ needs within the sport sector.
- LGBTQ+ participants often feel they need to belong to be motivated to join groups — many feel isolated because of their sexual orientation.
- Fears of judgement at facilities such as gyms.
- Transphobic abuse experienced during outdoor exercise, with some feeling safer walking in different areas.
- Transgender inclusion is a cross-sport issue, requiring sector-wide consideration.
- Separate sessions with dedicated changing facilities for trans participants were requested.

Findings from Sport NI Corporate Plan Consultation

The public consultation on Sport NI's Corporate Plan 2021-2026 reinforced these insights:

- Marginalised and under-represented groups consistently emphasised the need for an open, welcoming, inclusive sporting culture, one that promotes wellbeing.
- Many felt this welcoming culture does not currently exist across the sporting landscape.
- Specific solutions proposed by focus groups (including the Celebrating Diversity Panel, Young Persons Panel, and Women's Panel) will be integrated into future plans.

Developing the Sporting System

Innovative ideas emerged through creative discussions with culturally diverse groups, including the concept of a translated app. This app would:

- Allow users to select their preferred language, sport, and confidence level.
- Signpost users to inclusive clubs.
- Feature welcome videos from relatable participants to break down perceptions of exclusivity and competitiveness.

Organisations such as Stonewall, Rainbow Project, and Sporting Mermaids supported the idea of clubs actively indicating their LGBTQ+ inclusivity via this app.

The invisibility of trans and LGBTQ+ narratives within sport, coupled with a lack of visible role models, creates systemic barriers. Sport NI is now working with Stonewall, the Rainbow Project, and Sporting Mermaids through their Ambassadors Programme, building training and

education tools for the sector, as well as storytelling campaigns to increase empathy and awareness.

People Development

LGBTQ+ groups (along with others) reported a significant lack of signposting to development opportunities — reinforcing Northern Ireland's perceived 'who you know' culture. Outreach via non-traditional channels was suggested to better engage underrepresented communities.

Connected Communities

Focus groups raised further concerns, particularly around:

- Racist and homophobic aggressions in sport — both blatant and subtle microaggressions.
- Outing of young people/athletes transitioning.
- Wheelchair athletes being deemed health and safety risks in some school settings.

These experiences reinforce the need for proactive, ongoing work to foster an inclusive and welcoming sporting environment.

Men and Women

Participation Data (2022/23 and 2023/24)

The 2022/23 **Continuous Household Survey (CHS)** examined participation in sport by gender. Findings are available in the report: [Engagement in Culture, Arts, Heritage & Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2022/23](#).

Key findings:

- 55% of males participated in sport at least once in the previous year compared to 40% of females (2022/23).
- Males participated in a wider range of sports, while females were more likely to participate in activities such as keep-fit, aerobics, dance exercise, yoga, and weight training (26% of females compared to 22% of males).

The **2023/24 Continuous Household Survey** indicated similar patterns:

- In the past 7 days, 55% of males participated in sport compared to 42% of females.
- Full findings available here: [Experience of Sport by Adults in Northern Ireland 2023/24](#).

Women's Participation – Sport NI Insights

Sport NI's **2019 Club Survey** highlighted ongoing gender disparities in club membership:

- 65% male, 35% female membership split.
- Female representation was particularly low among ages 19-49, with 71% male and only 29% female.
- Among club coaches, 69% were male and 31% female. This disparity worsened with age, as women aged 31-49 accounted for just 11% of all coaches.

Sport NI's **Women and Girls in Sport** research (November 2022) identified these key challenges for females:

- Lower participation rates, declining further with age, social class, and disability.
- Preference for recreational activities over competitive sport.
- Reduced visits to outdoor spaces (2020/21).
- Under-representation in club participation, coaching, performance, and leadership roles.
- Declining enjoyment and participation at post-primary school level.

Sporting System – Women's Focus Group Findings

Women's focus groups identified the need for gender-specific approaches to participation:

- Inactive girls are more influenced by friends and social media; therefore, initial activities must align with their existing social habits.
- Lack of confidence and competence (physical literacy) was a barrier, with issues stemming from both school PE and traditional club environments.
- Women preferred flexible, family-friendly club offerings rather than rigid competitive structures.
- Greater visibility of relatable female role models, particularly on social media, is needed.
- Short-term funded projects were deemed ineffective in driving sustained change.

High Performance – Women's Pathway Challenges

Women's groups also highlighted barriers in the high-performance pathway:

- Lack of female role models in performance and coaching roles.
- Need for empathetic coaching, life skills training, and post-athlete career support.
- Low media coverage of female athletes reduces visibility and aspiration.

People Development – Addressing the Coaching Gap

There is a clear need to develop coach education to:

- Recognise women's different learning styles.
- Embed empathetic, athlete-centred coaching approaches.
- Improve safeguarding and wellbeing provisions, particularly in female sports.
- Remove barriers to female coaching and volunteering, such as rigid qualification processes and time commitments.

Department for Communities – Active Living Strategy

The Department for Communities' screening assessment of the Active Living Strategy identified specific needs for men and women, summarised below.

Common Needs for Both Genders:

- Safe, affordable, welcoming facilities.
- Wide range of sports and opening hours.
- Clear coaching pathways and opportunities for progression.
- Innovative use of technology to support engagement.

Gender-Specific Needs and Priorities

Women:

- Increased visibility of female role models.
- Challenge unconscious bias in clubs to ensure equal opportunities.
- Targeted recruitment and training of female coaches.
- Address transport barriers and rural access issues.
- Improved promotion and advertising of available opportunities.
- Build confidence and self-esteem, especially in gym and changing environments.
- Encourage buddy systems for new participants.
- Address family/work/time commitments.
- Combat societal attitudes towards women in sport.
- Provide women-only swimming/exercise classes.
- Use local, community-based venues rather than large leisure centres.
- Align exercise opportunities with children's activities so parents can participate too.
- Encourage GPs to prescribe physical activity.
- Offer non-competitive, social or fun-based activities.
- Empower women to prioritise their health without guilt.
- Emphasise lifelong participation over competitive success at school level.
- Maximise use of local outdoor spaces and school facilities.
- Expand successful community initiatives such as Couch to 5K and parkrun.
- Develop tailored classes for women with limited mobility.

Men:

- Recognition that not all men are active and some face significant barriers.
- Stronger link between physical activity and health prevention.
- Specific focus on men transitioning into retirement to avoid isolation.
- Address lack of confidence and motivation.
- Use sport as a vehicle for tackling social isolation and mental health.

- Rebrand sport-based interventions as "activities" to reduce intimidation.
 - Improve rural facilities (walking paths, lighting).
 - Address facility availability and access in disadvantaged areas.
 - Improve access to GP referral schemes at affordable rates.
 - Encourage greater community use of stadiums and elite sports facilities.
 - Foster partnerships between Men's Sheds and sports clubs to promote physical activity.
 - Ensure programmes are long-term rather than short interventions.
 - Embed mental health support into physical activity initiatives.
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Disability

The 2022/23 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) included questions on participation in sport by adults with disabilities. Findings are presented in the report available at: [NISRA Data Visualisation](#).

The report highlighted a significant participation gap between disabled and non-disabled adults. In 2022/23, only 26% of adults with a disability participated in sport over the previous year, compared to 56% of adults without a disability. This pattern was also evident when looking at participation within the previous four weeks — only 21% of disabled adults took part, compared to 48% of non-disabled adults.

The 2023/24 CHS (available at: [Experience of Sport by Adults in NI](#)) revealed a slight improvement in participation rates among disabled adults, rising to 30%, but this remained significantly lower than the 59% participation rate of non-disabled adults.

Barriers and Challenges

Disability Sport NI (DSNI) has highlighted the complex range of factors contributing to lower participation rates among disabled people. These include:

- The lasting negative impact of COVID-19 on participation habits.
- Reduced provision of disability-specific sports opportunities by District Councils.
- Disruption to Governing Body programmes during the pandemic.
- Financial pressures due to the cost-of-living crisis, making it harder for disabled people to afford participation fees and travel costs.

DSNI expressed particular concern about this decline, as it follows a period of steady progress up to 2019/20 when disabled sports participation was at its highest. This progress had been driven by targeted programmes delivered by Sport NI, District Councils, and Governing Bodies across Northern Ireland.

Research Findings and Insights

The **Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service (2015)** examined sports provision for disabled people and found that disabled adults were far less likely to engage in regular physical activity than their non-disabled peers (19% compared to 37%).

Disability Sport NI estimates that approximately 20% of Northern Ireland's population — around 360,000 people — live with a long-term limiting illness, which is the current working definition of 'disability'.

Consultation Feedback and Recommendations

Consultation on **Sport NI's 2021-2026 Corporate Plan: The Power of Sport**, and the Department for Communities' screening assessment on the **Active Living Strategy**, identified several critical themes from the disability sector:

- Marginalised and under-represented groups, including disabled people, stressed the need for an open, welcoming, inclusive sporting culture, which promotes both wellness and wellbeing.
- Participants reported that many sports environments still feel unwelcoming and inaccessible.
- There was evidence of **underreporting** of disability, meaning some disabled people's needs may go unrecognised in sport participation data.
- A **targeted focus on inactive people** (rather than just those identifying as disabled) was seen as a more effective engagement strategy.
- Inconsistent accessibility support across Councils was noted, with accessibility provisions appearing to decline in recent years as capital asset management became a higher priority.
- There were calls for a more **diverse leadership** within sports organisations, noting that cognitive bias at Board and committee level can perpetuate exclusion.
- Limited **data quality and granularity** on disability participation makes it harder to design effective policies and programmes.
- The importance of **advocacy, awareness raising, storytelling, training, and the integration of inclusivity requirements into funding criteria** was strongly emphasised.

Specific Needs and Barriers

The **Department for Communities screening assessment on the Active Living Strategy** further highlighted several specific needs and barriers for disabled people:

- Tailored approaches for different types of disability — physical, mental health, sensory, and learning disabilities.
- **Transport and accessibility barriers**, especially in rural areas.

- **Financial barriers**, including the cost of public transport and sports services — with community-based options seen as more accessible.
 - Lack of awareness and **poor promotion** of available services and opportunities.
 - **Low confidence, motivation and self-esteem**, along with fears of being judged, create psychological barriers to participation.
 - The importance of **peer support** — disabled people were more likely to engage if attending with someone they know.
 - The need for **advocates or support workers** to help individuals build motivation and confidence to take part.
-

Dependants

The 2022/23 Continuous Household Survey (CHS) also gathered data on sporting participation levels among adults with dependants. Findings are available in the associated data tables: [Engagement in Culture, Arts, Heritage & Sport by Adults in NI 2022/23](#).

In 2022/23, participation rates were slightly higher among adults with dependants (50%) compared to adults without dependants (46%).

In 2023/24, this gap widened slightly, with 54% of adults with dependants participating in sport, compared to 49% of those without dependants.

This indicates that having dependants is not necessarily a barrier to participation in sport, and may in some cases act as a motivator, potentially linked to family-based or child-led activity programmes. However, further exploration is needed to understand the nature of these activities and whether they provide meaningful opportunities for sustained engagement.

Part 2. Screening questions

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4 which are given on pages 66-68 of this Guide.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

- a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
- b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment to better assess them;
- c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
- d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;
- e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
- f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

- a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible.

- b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
- c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
- d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

- a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
- b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories. [OB]

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1. **What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?**

Please provide details of the likely policy impacts and determine the level of impact for each S75 categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

The policy presents a number of opportunities to promote equality of opportunity across all Section 75 categories. These are embedded within the programme design and delivery model of Special Olympics Ireland and reflect Sport NI's commitment to inclusion and fairness.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

Special Olympics Ireland is open to participants from all faith backgrounds. Clubs operate across Northern Ireland and welcome members from different religious communities. Events and programmes are non-denominational and designed to bring people together through shared sporting experiences. This approach promotes equality by ensuring that no individual is excluded or treated less favourably due to their religious belief.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

The investment promotes equality of opportunity by ensuring that sport is accessible to all, regardless of political opinion. Special Olympics Ireland clubs operate in both urban and rural areas, attracting participants from across the political spectrum. All programming is delivered in a neutral and inclusive environment, fostering shared space and encouraging participation based on ability and interest rather than political identity.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

Special Olympics Ireland actively encourages participation from individuals with learning disabilities across all ethnic and racial backgrounds. Programmes are promoted through inclusive communications and outreach to communities where people from minority ethnic backgrounds may face barriers to participation. By creating safe and welcoming environments, this investment helps support greater diversity and representation within sport.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Age**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

Special Olympics programming is inclusive of all age groups. This includes a specific focus on early intervention through 'Young Athletes' sessions for children aged 4–13, and continuing support for adults of all ages. Activities are age-appropriate and flexible, helping

to promote lifelong participation in sport and physical activity for people with learning disabilities.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Marital Status**: (insert text here)
What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

Participation in Special Olympics Ireland is not influenced by an individual's marital or relationship status. Clubs are inclusive and open to all, ensuring that no assumptions are made about an individual's personal or domestic circumstances. All activities are designed around ability and interest, not background or status, supporting equality of access.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Sexual Orientation**:
What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

Special Olympics Ireland is committed to creating inclusive, respectful environments for participants and volunteers, regardless of sexual orientation. Clubs support a culture of acceptance and dignity, where LGBTQIA+ individuals feel safe, welcomed, and able to fully engage in sport. This helps challenge stigma and promotes participation from underrepresented groups.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Men and Women**: (insert text here)
What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

Programmes are equally accessible to men and women, boys and girls. A wide range of sports and roles (e.g. athlete, coach, volunteer) are promoted to all genders. Clubs aim to address gender imbalances in participation and leadership through inclusive outreach and role modelling. This supports broader efforts to increase female and non-binary representation in sport.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Disability**: (insert text here)
What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

This investment is specifically designed to benefit people with disabilities, particularly learning disabilities. All programmes are adapted to be inclusive, supportive, and accessible. The environment created by Special Olympics Ireland helps break down the physical, social and emotional barriers that can prevent disabled people from taking part in mainstream sport. This creates meaningful opportunities for the most marginalised to enjoy the benefits of participation.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Dependants**:
What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

While the primary focus is on individuals with learning disabilities, this investment also provides indirect benefits to carers, parents and family members. Volunteering opportunities offer social connection, personal development and respite for those who support dependants. Families are welcomed into the club community and can experience positive outcomes through their involvement.

Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories? Yes

Detail opportunities of how this policy could promote equality of opportunity for people are outlined within each of the Section 75 Categories below and incorporated in the project

The policy actively supports good relations by creating inclusive opportunities for participation where individuals of different religious beliefs, political opinions, and racial groups can engage together. By ensuring programmes are open to all and delivered in shared, neutral environments, it reduces barriers to access, encourages cross-community interaction, and helps build mutual respect and understanding.

Religious Belief - If Yes, provide details:

Level of Impact: Minor (Positive)

This investment will benefit people with learning disabilities across all religious backgrounds. Special Olympics Ireland clubs are inclusive, non-denominational, and open to all. By providing welcoming, shared spaces where individuals from different religious communities train, compete and volunteer together, the policy helps to build positive relationships and mutual respect.

Special Olympics Ulster will deliver a wide range of sporting activities which are representative of all religious groups for example, programming will include a variety of sports that draw participation from all sections of the community.

Political Opinion - If Yes, provide details:

Level of Impact: Minor (Positive)

The programme supports participation irrespective of political belief. Special Olympics clubs operate across Northern Ireland and serve communities with a range of political identities. The shared nature of sport, and the ethos of inclusion within Special Olympics, helps to reduce division and encourage a culture of cooperation and mutual support.

Racial Group - If Yes, provide details:

Level of Impact: Minor (Positive)

Special Olympics Ireland promotes a culture of respect and belonging for participants and volunteers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Clubs are inclusive, culturally sensitive, and promote interaction among people from diverse communities. This helps to challenge prejudice, foster understanding and improve good relations across racial groups.

2. To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Please provide details of the likely policy impact and determine the level of impact for each of the categories below i.e. either minor, major or none.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Religious belief**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

This investment will benefit people with learning disabilities across all religious backgrounds. Special Olympics Ireland clubs are inclusive, non-denominational, and open to all. By providing welcoming, shared spaces where individuals from different religious communities train, compete and volunteer together, the policy helps to build positive relationships and mutual respect.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Political Opinion**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

The programme supports participation irrespective of political belief. Special Olympics clubs operate across Northern Ireland and serve communities with a range of political identities. The shared nature of sport, and the ethos of inclusion within Special Olympics, helps to reduce division and encourage a culture of cooperation and mutual support.

Details of the likely policy impacts on **Racial Group**: (insert text here)

What is the level of impact? **Minor** / Major / None (circle as appropriate)

Special Olympics Ireland promotes a culture of respect and belonging for participants and volunteers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Clubs are inclusive, culturally sensitive, and promote interaction among people from diverse communities. This helps to challenge prejudice, foster understanding and improve good relations across racial groups.

3. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Detail opportunities of how this policy could better promote good relations for people within each of the Section 75 Categories below:

Religious Belief -

If No, provide reasons:

Yes

The programme's neutral delivery model promotes participation across the political spectrum. This includes club activity in both unionist and nationalist communities. Joint training, regional competitions, and volunteering enable individuals with differing political views to work together, building empathy and reducing division.

Political Opinion -
If No, provide reasons

Yes

The programme's neutral delivery model promotes participation across the political spectrum. This includes club activity in both unionist and nationalist communities. Joint training, regional competitions, and volunteering enable individuals with differing political views to work together, building empathy and reducing division.

Racial Group -
If No, provide reasons

Yes

Special Olympics Ireland provides opportunities for positive intercultural exchange through inclusive events and club-level interaction. The policy encourages engagement with minority ethnic communities, particularly those who may not yet be well-represented in sport. This actively promotes good relations by breaking down barriers and building trust.

Additional considerations

Multiple Identities

The policy is expected to have a positive impact on individuals with multiple identities. This includes, for example:

- Disabled people from ethnic minority communities
- Older women with learning disabilities
- LGBTQIA+ individuals with learning disabilities
- Young Protestant men with disabilities

The design of the programme supports inclusion across all these intersections by fostering safe, accessible, and welcoming spaces. By embedding diversity and inclusion into delivery, Special Olympics Ireland helps address multiple layers of marginalisation at once.

The investment therefore supports broader equality goals by improving the lived experience of people with intersecting identities, many of whom are traditionally underrepresented in sport.

This project is targeted at all sections of the community therefore, there may be positive impacts on individuals within the community with multiple identities. For example, the investment will benefit older female disabled persons and disabled people from culturally diverse groups.

Part 3. Screening decision

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

Yes

On advice from the Equality Commission, it is prudent to consider an EQIA for even a minor positive impact and the components of an EQIA have been considered within this document.

If the decision is not to conduct an equality impact assessment the public authority should consider if the policy should be mitigated, or an alternative policy be introduced - please provide details.

If the decision is to subject the policy to an equality impact assessment, please provide details of the reasons.

All public authorities' equality schemes must state the authority's arrangements for assessing and consulting on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. The Commission recommends screening and equality impact assessment as the tools to be utilised for such assessments. Further advice on equality impact assessment may be found in a separate Commission publication: Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment.

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

If so, **give the reasons** to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

Not applicable – No adverse impacts have been identified. The policy is already structured to promote equality and inclusion across all Section 75 categories.

Timetabling and prioritising

Factors to be considered in timetabling and prioritising policies for equality impact assessment.

If the policy has been '**screened in**' for equality impact assessment, then please answer the following questions to determine its priority for timetabling the equality impact assessment.

On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being the lowest priority and 3 being the highest, assess the policy in terms of its priority for equality impact assessment.

Priority criterion	Rating (1-3)
Effect on equality of opportunity and good relations	1
Social need	1
Effect on people's daily lives	1
Relevance to a public authority's functions	1

Note: The Total Rating Score should be used to prioritise the policy in rank order with other policies screened in for equality impact assessment. This list of priorities will assist the public authority in timetabling. Details of the Public Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Timetable should be included in the quarterly Screening Report.

Is the policy affected by timetables established by other relevant public authorities?

If yes, please provide details.

No – this investment follows an annual budget cycle agreed by the Inter-Departmental Oversight Group (IDOG), but there are no fixed external deadlines impacting screening.

Part 4. Monitoring

Public authorities should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, the public authority should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Effective monitoring will help the public authority identify any future adverse impact arising from the policy which may lead the public authority to conduct an equality impact assessment, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

Although no adverse impacts have been identified, Sport NI will:

- Monitor the performance of this investment annually.
- Review data collection processes with Special Olympics Ireland to improve future analysis.
- Identify and act on any emerging issues affecting Section 75 groups.
- Use findings to refine future investments and address any inequalities.

Monitoring will also assess:

- Demographics of participants (where possible)
- Accessibility of activities
- Volunteer and staff representation
- Feedback from service users and families

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by: Patrick O Toole/Robbie Geary

Position/Job Title: Sports Developer/Sports Development Manager

Date: 04/07/2025

Approved by: Rebecca Hope

Position/Job Title: Interim Director of Sport

Date: 02/10/25

Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.