

## **Inclusive Practices in Sport: Perceptions and Experiences of Professionals Across Diverse Contexts**

Artur Jorge Santos<sup>1,2,3</sup>, Carla Pedroso de Lima<sup>1</sup>, Ana Raquel Prada<sup>1</sup>, Emine Büşra Yılmaz<sup>4</sup>, Riller Reverdito<sup>5</sup>, Emanuel Carvalho<sup>5,6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bragança Polytechnic University (IPB) Transdisciplinary Research Centre in Education and Development (CITed), Portugal; <sup>2</sup> Bragança Polytechnic University (IPB) Research Center for Active Living and Wellbeing (Livewell), Portugal; <sup>3</sup> Higher Institute of Educational Sciences of the Douro (ISCE-DOURO), Portugal; <sup>4</sup> Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, Turkey; <sup>5</sup> Faculty of Health Sciences, State University of Mato Grosso (UNEMAT), Brazil; <sup>6</sup> Paralympic Reference Centre at the State University of Mato Grosso (CRPB-Unemat)

artursantos@ipb.pt

### **INTRODUCTION**

Promoting inclusion in sport is essential to creating equitable and accessible environments. Inclusion goes beyond the participation of people with disabilities, encompassing diversity of abilities, identities, and life circumstances (Naylor et al., 2021). In sporting contexts, professionals play a crucial role in creating environments that favour the participation of all, regardless of their differences (MacIntyre et al., 2020). Although the benefits of inclusion are widely recognised, significant challenges remain, such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of training, and social prejudices about who 'belongs' in sport (Doll-Tepper & Hede, 2021). Understanding the perceptions and practices of professionals is essential for developing effective strategies that promote inclusion in diverse sporting contexts.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- 1- Explore the perceptions of sports professionals regarding inclusive practices in different contexts.
- 2- Identify the challenges faced by professionals when implementing inclusive practices in sport.
- 3- Analyse the strategies adopted by professionals to promote inclusive environments.
- 4- Assess the need for ongoing training and resources to improve inclusive practices in sport.

### **METHODOLOGY**

"This study adopted a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured interviews with 18 professionals from various sports contexts, including gyms, football, swimming, surfing, and community-based institutions.

Participants were selected based on their involvement in activities aimed at promoting inclusion, with diverse professional backgrounds such as coaching, training, and facility management.

The interview guide consisted of six key domains:

1. Previous experiences with diverse participants.
2. Conceptualizations of inclusion.
3. Perceived challenges in fostering inclusion.
4. Strategies for creating inclusive environments.
5. Professional training in inclusive practices.
6. Areas needing further development.

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in responses, focusing on recurring themes related to the professionals' practices, perceptions, and challenges in implementing inclusion.

### **RESULTS**

Professionals emphasized the importance of inclusion in promoting well-being, reducing social barriers, and fostering a sense of belonging. However, several challenges were identified:

**Limited Accessible Infrastructure** - Many facilities lacked the necessary adaptations to accommodate individuals with different physical and cognitive abilities.

**Insufficient Resources** - There were often not enough human or material resources to adequately support inclusive practices.

**Lack of Training** - Many professionals reported insufficient training in inclusive pedagogies, leading to uncertainty in how to adapt their methods effectively.

**Societal Misconceptions** - Deep-seated societal beliefs about who "belongs" in sports remained a barrier to full inclusion.

To address these challenges, professionals described several strategies:

**Individualized Task Adaptation** - Modifying activities to suit individual needs.

**Flexible Organization of Space and Time** - Adapting schedules and physical spaces to allow diverse participation.

**Supportive Communication** - Using inclusive language and fostering an open, respectful environment.

**Welcoming Group Dynamics** - Actively encouraging participation and positive group interactions.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

sports professionals generally recognize the importance of inclusive practices, understanding them as vital for participant well-being and social cohesion.

However, barriers to full inclusion persist, primarily due to inadequate infrastructure, lack of professional training, and societal misconceptions about inclusion.

To **foster more inclusive sports environments**: Expanding specialized and continuous training on inclusive methodologies for sports professionals.

**Investing in universally accessible facilities and resources.**

**Implementing public awareness campaigns** to challenge societal misconceptions and promote diversity in sport.

While sports professionals are motivated to enhance inclusion, achieving it fully will require structural support, consistent educational efforts, and a cultural shift towards embracing diversity across all dimensions of sport and physical activity.

### **REFERENCES**

- Naylor, P. J., HuOldörp, F., Mihajlovic, C., & Giese, M. (2025). Inclusion in and through disability sport? A scoping review using the examples of goalball and wheelchair basketball. *JSAMS Plus*, 5, 100096. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsampl.2025.100096>
- O'Rourke, R. H., Knibbe, T. J., McPherson, A. C., Faulkner, G. E., Wright, F. V., & Arbour-Nicitopoulos, K. P. (2025). Developing disability inclusive coaching principles within community recreational sport programming for children. *JSAMS Plus*, 6, 100109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsampl.2025.100109>