



## Guidelines

<b>Title:</b>	<b>Guidelines for Inclusion of Transgender Participants in Special Olympics</b>
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### Guidelines

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Special Olympics Ireland are committed to equality and diversity across all of our activities. These guidelines are part of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion suite of policies. No individual involved in Special Olympics activities should ever have to fear negative, threatening, discriminatory or adverse reactions or treatment by other athletes, volunteers, parents/guardians or carers due to gender expression or identity. All eligible participants/volunteers should have the opportunity to take part in Special Olympics activities in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity, irrespective of the gender listed on their registration records and without subsequent medical or other professional consultation. It is our commitment to ensure everyone is included.

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### Guideline Description

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Special Olympics Ireland promotes an inclusive environment, respecting and celebrating diversity and the unique gifts of all individuals.

#### Gender Identity-Based Participation:

These guidelines have been developed to facilitate the inclusion of transgender participants in all activities.

For the purposes of these guidelines, the following definitions apply:

- **Transgender Person:** A person whose gender identity differs from their sex at birth
- **Non Binary:** A person whose gender is outside the gender binary. This can include people who are neither male nor female, somewhere in between, both or otherwise.
- **Gender Identity:** The gender which a person identifies as; this may differ from their sex at birth
- **Gender Expression:** How a person expresses their gender identity; typically through their appearance, dress and behaviour. How a person expresses themselves may not be how they identify.
- **Participant:** Special Olympics Ireland athlete or unified partner
- **Volunteer:** A person who voluntarily, without payment, offers their time or service, such as Official, Coach, Committee Member

Special Olympics Ireland recognises that there are many different forms of gender identity. Within the Special Olympics programme, gender identity factors most prominently with respect to:

1. Sport Competition Divisioning;
2. Accommodation; and
3. Changing/shower/toilet facilities, which follow current societal norms of “male” and “female”.

For the purposes of the above 3 primary applications of gender identity in Special Olympics, it is advised that the Club Safeguarding Officer or Regional Director speak with those individuals who identify as transgender or another gender identity, and their parent/carer/guardian to verify the gender they will identify with during their involvement in Special Olympics activities, if appropriate to do so.

Trans identity should not be considered a safeguarding issue.

1. **Eligibility to Participate** – Eligible participants, those that meet all other registration requirements, are permitted to participate in a manner consistent with their gender identity in accordance with the position outlined below
2. **Notifying Special Olympics Ireland** – The participant and parent/carer/guardian shall contact Special Olympics Ireland via the Club Safeguarding Officer or Regional Director, indicating that the participant has a gender identity different than the sex listed on the participant’s registration records and that the participant desires to participate in a manner consistent with their gender identity. This should be completed in writing and any further communication should also be in writing.
3. **Confidentiality** – With the exception of the notification required in point 2 above, participants/volunteers affected by these guidelines have the right to, and should expect, confidentiality and discretion in all matters relating to this. If a transgender person discloses their gender identity to you this should remain confidential and should not be disclosed to anyone else; except where there is a related child or vulnerable adult welfare concern.
4. **Changing Areas Toilets and Showers** – Transgender participants/volunteers shall be permitted to use the changing room, shower and toilet facilities in accordance with local law, facility protocols and their gender identity. When requested by a transgender participant, where possible, the hosting body (club, region or Special Olympics Ireland) will provide private, separate changing, showering, and toilet facilities for the participant’s use; however, transgender participants should not be required to use separate facilities.
5. **Accommodation** – Transgender participants/volunteers will be provided housing accommodation based on their gender identity, with a recognition that any athlete who requires extra privacy/supervision will be accommodated, where possible. As with any athlete, bed sharing is not permitted. If shared housing is not an option the transgender participant/volunteer will be accommodated with a room to themselves, where possible. This should be considered and discussed on an individual basis.
6. **Sports Participation** – Special Olympics Ireland will adhere to the athlete competition divisioning processes as outlined in the Official Sports Rules (Article 1) (“Sports Rules”) which do not rely heavily on gender. In the event that divisioning requires separation by gender, athlete divisioning will be based on the participant’s gender identity.
  - a) All sports-related protests/appeals shall be handled in accordance with the Sports Rules.
  - b) Please see Appendix A for additional guidance regarding team sports.
7. **Language: Preferred Names and Pronouns** – A transgender participant/volunteer may have a preferred name and/or gender pronoun that is different from that which may be indicated on their registration record. Coaches, volunteers, and officials shall make every reasonable effort to honour the participant/volunteer’s preferred name and/or pronoun and to ensure that



their name and pronoun preferences are respected by others including teammates, opponents, spectators, etc.

8. **Dress code and team uniforms** – All participants should have uniforms as outlined in the Sports Rules. No participant should be required to wear a gendered sports uniform that conflicts with the participant’s gender identity, nor should they be prevented from wearing the same uniform as the other athletes of their gender. With respect to gymnastics and swimming, transgender athletes should be permitted to wear whatever uniform is most comfortable for them so long as it meets the National Governing Body requirements and the clothing covers the parts of the body which would normally need to be covered.
9. **Compliance with Applicable Law** – Special Olympics Ireland shall review and update these guidelines periodically in line with local and national legislation and best practices. We will seek guidance from organisations who advocate and provide support to transgender people.
10. **Education** – Special Olympics Ireland will provide education opportunities for members to assist club volunteers or other volunteers in creating an inclusive environment for all; and in understanding the pathway within the Special Olympics sports training and competition programme and any guidance associated with their participation. We will signpost members to relevant organisations who can provide further and specialised education on gender identity and being inclusive and welcoming for participants.
11. **Participant and Volunteer Engagement** – We will engage with participants and volunteers, and other relevant members, to learn from their experiences and take guidance from them in improving the Special Olympics experience.
12. **Memorandum of Understanding** – This is an informal document drawn up from a discussion with the transgender person. It outlines the responsibilities of the organisation/club, the expectations of the transgender person and a timeline of any necessary changes that might be agreed. The memorandum should be individual and used to ensure the needs of the transgender person are being met, within the abilities of the organisation/club. This will not always be necessary and should not be a requirement, a discussion should be had with each individual to assess their needs. It is a flexible agreement which may need to change over time.

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## **Appendix A: Team Sports**

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With respect to team sports, it is important that teams are divisioned in the appropriate category at the initial level of competition in the advancement progression.

Per the Sports Rules, Article 1, section 10.4.1.1: “mixed gender teams shall be divisioned with male teams unless there are sufficient mixed gender teams of similar ability to make a separate division.”

As such, a transgender female on an all-female team, should be placed in a female division and not inappropriately placed in a mixed division for ease. Special Olympics division athletes in the following order: 1) by gender, 2) by age, 3) by ability.



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## **Appendix B: Legislation**

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### ***Northern Ireland***

[\*Sex Discrimination \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1976\*](#)

[\*Data Protection Act 2018\*](#)

[\*Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998\*](#)

[\*Gender Recognition Act 2004\*](#)

[\*Criminal Justice \(no.2 \) \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2004\*](#) (Hate Crime Legislation)

### ***Republic of Ireland***

[\*Equal Status Act 2000 Gender Recognition Act 2015\*](#)

[\*National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021\*](#)

[\*Criminal Justice \(Hate Crime\) Bill 2020\*](#)