

# Special Olympics World Summer Games in the Netherlands

## A study into its feasibility and viability

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### Introduction

The Special Olympics World Summer Games (hereafter referred to as the World Games) are a multisport event for athletes with an intellectual disability. The World Games take place every four years. They are part of a broader global movement, in which sports is regarded as a valuable way to enrich athletes' lives and improve their participation within society.

With similar goals in mind, Special Olympics the Netherlands aspires to host the World Games in the Netherlands in 2035. The Mulier Institute was tasked with the study into the feasibility, which is part of the first phase of a sports event cycle.

### Method

We have used several methods to gather the necessary insights:

- We carried out desk and literature research.
- We conducted interviews with representatives of different sectors relevant to (organising) sports events.
- We held group interviews with a few municipalities and two Athlete Leaders.
- An advisory group composed of experts from different sectors provided their input on (the process of) the study.

### Aim of the research

The study demonstrates the feasibility and viability of bringing out a bid and hosting the World Games in The Netherlands. We did so by focusing on the following questions:

1. What do the World Games entail, what kind of budget is necessary, and which variants of the event are promising?
2. Which terms and conditions apply to hosting the World Games in the Netherlands, and what are their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?
3. To what extent could the Netherlands meet these terms and conditions, and to what extent is it likely a bid will be awarded?

#### 4. What kind and extent of impact and legacy can be achieved with the World Games, and how?

##### Concluding remarks per research question

###### ● What are the World Games?

The World Games are an event of global scale. Approximately 7.000 athletes with an intellectual disability from around 170 countries (programs) partake in more than 20 types of sports during the event. To organise the event, the host country will need to raise between a 90 and 170 million euros.

###### ● Terms and conditions when organising the World Games

Strict terms and conditions apply. A strong financial foundation is necessary, as is a solid bid that includes the official financial guarantee parties, and elaborates on the intended impact and legacy goals. In organising the World Games, there is an emphasised value of focusing on:

- diversity and inclusion;
- good governance;
- a robust infrastructural and logistical foundation;
- safety and security;
- medical care;
- (a sufficient number of) volunteers.

###### ● SWOT: Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

We carried out a SWOT-analysis to categorise the potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of organising the World Games in the Netherlands.

The **strengths** are:

- the existing capabilities and experience of organising large-scale events within the country;
- a good infrastructure;
- a solid Dutch Special Olympics program.

**Weaknesses** include:

- the World Games not being an elite sports event;
- limited commercial potential;
- dealing with budgets and stakeholders without knowledge;
- low awareness in the Netherlands regarding Special Olympics.

Organising the World Games also provides **opportunities**:

- the event's societal value and therefore potentially increased impact;
- the event's potential to contribute to national inclusion and policy;
- the possibility of raising funding outside the sports sector.

The **threats** mostly pertain to:

- the long and complicated preliminary stages;
- having to compete with other (international) sports events and countries;
- the general audience not yet being reached;

- the decline of volunteers in sports.

### ● **Is it possible?**

The Netherlands can fulfil many of the current terms and conditions, partly thanks to its existing infrastructure, organisational expertise, and solid judicial and logistical foundation. However, the feasibility also depends on:

- a good organization and establishment of the financial funding: as the World Games hold a more societal than sports-related value, funding needs to be acquired outside the sports-related framework and budgets;
- a detailed description of the intended legacy in The Netherlands, which is an essential part of a winning bid;
- further actions based on the SWOT analysis, such as:
  - utilising the existing organisational expertise and solid Dutch Special Olympics program;
  - establishing strategic partnerships;
  - finding creative ways to generate the necessary sources of income, in collaboration with partners;
  - professionalising budget and stakeholder management, partly by setting up good project planning and communication.

### ● **Impact and legacy**

The World Games can generate both short-term (impact) and long-term (legacy) change.

- In the short term, the impact could be achieved by increasing the self-confidence, health and visibility of athletes, strengthening the sentiment of community and appreciation amongst visitors and volunteers as well, and temporarily increasing employment and catering businesses in adjacent areas.
- In the long run, a well-established legacy program has the potential to bring about relevant sustainable collaborations, promote inclusive sports, and strengthen awareness of the societal participation of people with a disability. It does require a carefully detailed program with sufficient resources.

### ● **Scenarios for the World Games**

We generated four possible scenarios for the World Games. They are based on two variables: geographical distribution of the event, and the central message the host country wishes to convey. The four scenarios are:

- central, within sports (one city, municipality or central region, focus on sports);
- central, outside sports (one city, municipality or central region, social focus);
- decentralised, within sports (cluster of regions, focus on sports);
- decentralised, outside sports (cluster of regions, social focus).

### **General conclusions and recommendations**

The feasibility study has led to the following conclusions and recommendations:

- Feasible, with a guaranteed funding: hosting the World Games in the Netherlands is possible organisation-wise. The most important condition is securing the minimal required portion of the necessary budget.
- Viable, if bid contains a strong, convincing legacy: a winning bid includes a detailed, clear description of the intended impact and legacy by means of the event, in line with the international values of the Special Olympics movement.
- Make strategic use of nationwide strengths: it is essential to utilise the organisational strengths and strong Special Olympics program in the Netherlands, to establish broad partnerships, and to make use of innovative financing models.
- Long-term approach necessary: the eventual success of hosting the World Games in the Netherlands is determined by early planning, a strong governance model, sustainable involvement of stakeholders, and stable political and financial support.