International Standard of Eligible Impairments

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Introduction

The IPC Classification Code (‘the Code’) details policies and procedures common to Classification in all Para-Sports. The fundamental purpose of the Code is to uphold confidence in Classification and advance participation by a wide range of Athletes. To achieve this, the Code requires a best standard of operation from all Signatories carried out in a manner, which Athletes and other Paralympic stakeholders understand and have confidence in.

The Code is complemented by five International Standards that provide technical and operational standards for specific aspects of Classification. Compliance with these International Standards is mandatory. This Standard is one of those International Standards and should be read in conjunction with the Code and the other Standards.

Purpose

The purpose of the International Standard of Eligible Impairments is to ensure that International Federations adopt the same standards when they determine which Athletes are eligible to participate in the sports that they govern. These standards are that all Athletes who compete in a sport within the Paralympic Movement must have an Eligible Impairment and comply with the Minimum Impairment Criteria applicable to that sport.

This Standard identifies what an Eligible Impairment is and specifies that Minimum Impairment Criteria should be set in relation to Eligible Impairments.

Definitions

A list of Defined Terms used in this Standard are included as a Glossary.
1 General Provisions

1.1 The Code and the International Standards (including this International Standard) designate certain Impairments as ‘Eligible Impairments’.

1.2 Any Athlete wishing to compete in Para-Sport must have an Eligible Impairment. International Federations must comply with this International Standard by ensuring that their relevant sport governance rules (including but not limited to their Classification Rules) provide an opportunity for participation to Athletes who have at least one Eligible Impairment.

1.3 The Code requires that an Athlete with an Eligible Impairment must also comply with the Minimum Impairment Criteria set by the International Federation for the particular sport (or discipline within a sport). These Minimum Impairment Criteria must ensure that the relevant Eligible Impairment has an impact upon sport performance.

1.4 A reference to ‘sport’ in this Standard includes an individual discipline within a sport.

[Comment to Article 1: Each Paralympic sport has to clearly define for which impairment groups they provide sports opportunities. This must be described in the Classification Rules of each sport. While some sports include athletes of all impairment types (for example athletics, swimming), other sports are limited to one impairment type (for example goalball, boccia) or a selection of impairment types (for example equestrian, cycling). The presence of an applicable eligible impairment is a prerequisite but not the sole criterion of entry into a particular Paralympic sport.]

2 Establishing Eligible Impairment

2.1 International Federations are required (by way of their Classification Rules and in any other relevant rules) for each sport they govern to have a process in place by which the existence of an Eligible Impairment can be established.

2.2 This process must encompass the following features:

2.2.1 the Athlete’s National Body must initiate the process on behalf of an Athlete;

2.2.2 the International Federation Head of Classification for the relevant sport will assess the existence of the Eligible Impairment based upon the provision of medical documentation and any other records;
2.2.3 the Athlete's National Body must provide medical documentation and any other records so that the International Federation Head of Classification is satisfied that the Athlete has one or more Eligible Impairments;

2.2.4 if the International Federation Head of Classification for the relevant sport is satisfied that an Athlete has one or more Eligible Impairments this will be recorded.

2.3 An International Federation may delegate any of the responsibilities described in Article 5.2 to a Classification Panel.

2.4 If an International Federation concludes that an Athlete does not have an Eligible Impairment that is required in order to compete in a particular sport, the International Federation must designate the Athlete with Sport Class Not Eligible (NE) for that sport.

[Comment to Article 2: this Article requires International Federations to establish a process by which an Athlete can verify that he or she has an Eligible Impairment. This must be done before a Classification Panel commences the components of Athlete Evaluation that it is required to undertake (by the International Standard for Athlete Evaluation).]

3 Eligible Impairments and Commonly Associated Health Conditions

3.1 The following are Eligible Impairments in the Paralympic Movement:

3.1.1 Impaired muscle power

Athletes with impaired muscle power have a Health Condition that either reduces or eliminates their ability to voluntarily contract their muscles in order to move or to generate force. Examples of conditions which may lead to impaired muscle power include: spinal cord injury (complete or incomplete, tetra-or paraplegia), muscular dystrophy, post polio syndrome and spina bifida.

3.1.2 Impaired passive range of movement

Athletes with impaired range of movement have a Health Condition that either reduces or eliminates movement in one or more joints. Health Conditions which may lead to impaired range of movement include: arthrogryposis and contracture resulting from chronic joint immobilisation. Athletes with a Health Condition that reduces range of movement because
of pain (for example osteoarthritis) are not considered Eligible Impairments. Hypermobility of joints and joint instability are not considered Eligible Impairments and athletes with Health Conditions causing these Impairments are not Eligible.

3.1.3 Limb deficiency

Athletes with limb deficiency have total or partial absence of bones or joints as a consequence of trauma (for example traumatic amputation), illness (for example bone cancer) or congenital limb deficiency (for example dysmelia).

3.1.4 Leg length difference

Athletes that have a difference in the length of their legs as a result of dysgenesis or trauma.

3.1.5 Short stature

Athletes with standing height reduced due to reduced length in the bones of upper and lower limbs or trunk. Examples of Health Conditions that lead to short stature include: achondroplasia, growth hormone dysfunction, and osteogenesis imperfecta.

3.1.6 Hypertonia

Athletes with hypertonia are characterized by a condition marked by an abnormal increase in muscle tension and a reduced ability of a muscle to stretch which is caused by damage to the central nervous system. Examples of Health Conditions that lead to hypertonia include: Cerebral Palsy, traumatic brain injury and stroke.

3.1.7 Ataxia

Athletes with ataxia have voluntary movement which is unsteady or clumsy. It may result from damage to the motor or sensory nervous system. Examples of Health Conditions that lead to ataxia include: Cerebral Palsy, traumatic brain injury, stroke and multiple sclerosis.

3.1.8 Athetosis

Athletes with Athetosis have unwanted, involuntary movement and posturing that occurs even when a person is trying to be still. Examples of
Health Conditions that lead to athetosis include cerebral palsy, traumatic brain injury and stroke.

3.1.9 Vision impairment

Athletes with impaired vision have a Health Condition that either reduces or eliminates normal vision. It can result from damage to the eye structure, optical nerves or optical pathways, or visual cortex of the brain. Examples of Health Conditions that lead to vision impairment include: retinitis pigmentosa and diabetic retinopathy.

3.1.10 Intellectual impairment

An Intellectual impairment is characterised by a limitation in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour as expressed in conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills. This impairment originates before the age of 18.

[Comment to Article 3.1: the list of eligible impairment types gives examples of primary diagnoses which may lead to an eligible impairment type. The examples are not exhaustive – health conditions that are not listed above may also lead to eligible impairment types.]

3.2 In accordance with the International Standard of Athlete Evaluation, an International Federation must specify which of the above impairment types in article 2.1 are Eligible for their sport, and describe procedures for ensuring that all Athletes in their sport have a Health Condition which leads to an Eligible Impairment type.

[Comment to 3.2: An International Federation may specify in its Classification Rules that an Athlete who wishes to be allocated a Sport Class must provide medical documentation and any other records requested by the International Federation Head of Classification for the relevant sport to establish that the Athlete has a Health Condition that leads to an Eligible Impairment.]

3.3 Each Impairment listed above is referred to individually as an ‘Eligible Impairment’ and two or more as ‘Eligible Impairments’.

4 Non Eligible Impairments

4.1 Impairment types which are not part of the list under 2.1 are called Non Eligible Impairment types. Some examples are:

4.1.1 Pain;
4.1.2 Hearing impairment;
4.1.3 Low muscle tone;
4.1.4 Hypermobility of joints;
4.1.5 Joint instability, such as unstable shoulder joint, habitual/repetitive dislocation of a joint;
4.1.6 Impaired Muscle endurance;
4.1.7 Impaired Motor reflex functions;
4.1.8 Impaired Cardiovascular functions;
4.1.9 Impaired Respiratory functions;
4.1.10 Impairment Metabolic functions;
4.1.11 Tics and mannerisms, stereotypes and motor perseveration

[Comment to Article 4: the non-eligible impairment types listed in article 3 are examples only- it does not list every non-eligible impairment type. The aim of the list is to assist International Federations to enhance the clarity of rules governing eligibility.]

5 Health Conditions that will not lead to an eligible impairment type

5.1 International Federations may specify in their Classification Rules that certain Health Conditions do not lead to an Eligible Impairment. An International Federation may specify in its Classification Rules that any Athlete who has such a specified Health Condition may not be considered for Classification in relation to one or more sports governed by that International Federation.

5.2 The IPC has specified that certain Health Conditions are not leading to an Eligible Impairment. Examples are:

5.2.1 Health conditions, where pain is a leading symptom:

   Myofacial pain-dysfunction syndrome/fibromyalgia: Myofascial pain syndrome is a pain disorder that affects the muscles and fascia throughout the body

   Complex Regional Pain Syndrome: A chronic systemic disease characterized by severe pain, swelling, and changes in the skin.

5.2.2 Others
Chronic fatigue syndrome: Chronic fatigue syndrome is a disorder characterized by extreme fatigue that cannot be explained by any underlying medical condition. The fatigue may worsen with physical or mental activity, but doesn't improve with rest.

Ehlers-Dahlos Syndrome: impairment related to problems with connective tissue, sometimes leading to decreased muscle power. It is categorized under ‘hypermobility’ of ‘hypotonia’.

Conversion Disorders: A conversion disorder causes patients to suffer from neurological symptoms, such as numbness, blindness, paralysis, or fits without a definable organic cause. These symptoms/impairments do not fit the definition of an eligible impairment.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: is a mental health condition which is a lasting consequence of traumatic events.

5.2.3 Health Conditions, which at early stages do not cause an eligible impairment, but in later stages may:

Multiple Sclerosis: At early stages the presentation of MS may be confounded by MS-related fatigue. More advanced stages of MS will commonly lead to an Eligible Impairment.

Juvenile (idiopathic/rheumatoid) arthritis: Pain is an important symptom. Juvenile arthritis (JA) is an umbrella term used to describe the many autoimmune and inflammatory conditions that can develop in children ages 16 and younger. In some cases arthritis later on may destroy joints and an objective restriction of passive Range of Motion can be measured.

Rheumatoid Arthritis: Pain is an important symptom and inflammation of joints. In later stages joints can be seriously affected and an objective restriction of passive Range of Motion can be measured (without causing pain).

[Comment to Article 5: the health conditions listed in this article are examples only - there are many other health conditions that do not lead to an eligible impairment type. The aim of the list is to assist International Federations to enhance the clarity of rules governing eligibility.

It is of course quite feasible for an Athlete to have a Health Condition that can lead to an Eligible Impairment as well as a Health Condition that cannot lead to an Eligible Impairment].
Glossary

Capitalized Terms used in this Standard shall have the meaning given to them in the Classification Code.