



CAFE

CENTRE
FOR ACCESS
TO FOOTBALL
IN EUROPE

Disabled Supporters Association (DSAs) Information Pack

Centre for Access to Football in Europe

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Members of Handi-Supporters ASSE – the DSA of St Etienne

Introduction

The Centre for Access to Football in Europe (CAFE) was established in 2009 with the aim of improving access and inclusion for all disabled fans across Europe using the unique power of football. We are a UEFA corporate social responsibility (CSR) partner.

CAFE works together with UEFA and its National Associations, clubs, disabled fans, disabled fans groups, NGOs and other key stakeholders to ensure a more accessible, welcoming and inclusive matchday experience for all across Europe.

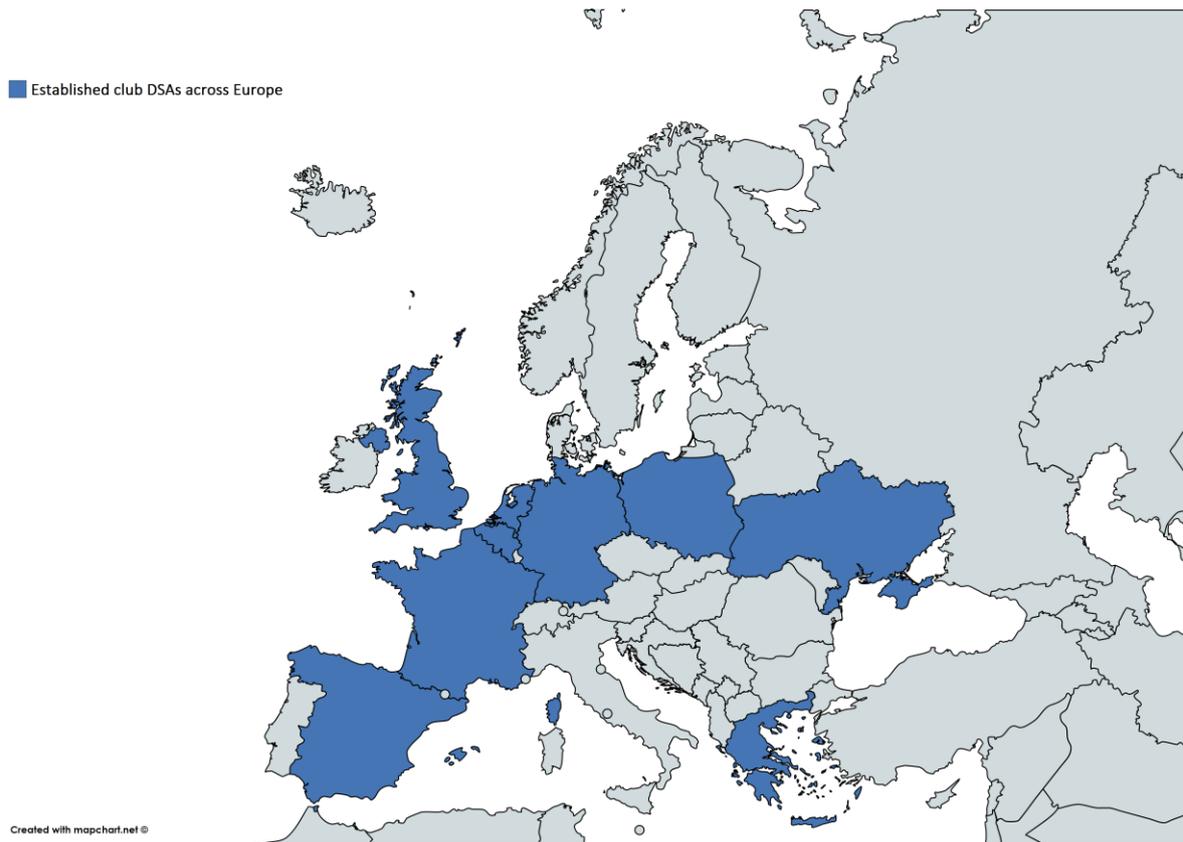
As part of our works, CAFE supports the creation of Disabled Supporters Associations (DSAs). Through these user-led groups, differently disabled football fans are able to represent not only their own interests but also the interests of other disabled supporters at their football club. The main aim of DSAs is to help create an accessible and welcoming environment at football clubs, which enables disabled people to take their rightful places alongside other fans.

CAFE research has shown that DSAs can bring many other benefits to both disabled fans and clubs. These benefits include the empowerment of disabled fans to influence decisions at their club and increased awareness and understanding from clubs on accessibility matters.

We often find that the most effective DSAs enjoy a close working relationship with their football clubs. Yet, it is important DSAs remain independent, as their priority is to represent the interests of its members and ensure all disabled supporters voices are heard.

There are currently over 100 established club DSAs across Europe. These DSA's are in England, Wales, Scotland, France, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland and Ukraine.

We hope that with the publication of the CAFE Disabled Supporters Association information pack, the number of DSAs across Europe will increase over the coming seasons.



A map indicating the location of established club DSAs across Europe

In addition to club DSAs, there are also seven national disabled supporters associations (NDSAs) currently in existence. These are based in England and Wales, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Poland and Ukraine. NDSAs bring together club DSAs with a shared message of the importance for improved access and inclusion; they allow for the easier sharing of best practice ideas amongst club DSAs and provide opportunities for disabled fans to influence decision-making at a higher level within national associations and even government. CAFE would be happy to introduce newly formed DSAs to a NDSA, where one exists in your country.

This guide aims to present important information on how to successfully create and establish a DSA at your club. Sections include why and how to create a DSA, the types of activities often carried out by DSAs, case studies from existing DSAs from across Europe and how CAFE can support clubs and disabled fans in creating a sustainable DSA.



Members of Klub Kibiców Niepełnosprawnych (KKN) – the disabled supporters group of Śląsk Wrocław, Poland

Why create a DSA?

The main objective of a DSA is to help create an accessible and inclusive environment for all fans, enabling disabled people to have the same matchday experience as non-disabled people. In addition, a DSA empowers disabled fans to have a unified voice to influence change within their football club.

Although DSAs are independent, it is important that they establish a good working relationship with their club, in order to be able to bring about mutually beneficial changes and sustainable results.

The role of the DSA is to liaise with the club to share knowledge and first-hand experiences from its disabled fans. The better club officials and staff understand the barriers facing disabled supporters who attend live football matches, the easier it is to establish a productive relationship between the two parties and to introduce sustainable changes at stadiums. Thanks to the work done by DSAs across Europe, many clubs have introduced new accessible services and facilities at their stadiums and in doing so have improved the matchday experience for disabled supporters.

Creating an official and organised association empowers disabled fans by giving them a platform on which they can actively express their opinions, share their experiences and help influence decisions taken at the football club. A DSA creates an environment where recommendations, complaints, new ideas and best practice can be shared and, most importantly, heard and acted upon by club officials.

In order to achieve effective and long-lasting results, it is necessary to increase awareness on disability and accessibility issues amongst both fans and clubs. A DSA can do this by highlighting the issues and barriers that are often faced by disabled match going fans and showing how some of these difficulties have or can be overcome. It is important that people at every level of football understand the importance of improved access and inclusion across the game so that disabled people can take their rightful place alongside their peers as not only as spectators, but as players, volunteers, coaches and decision-makers.

CAFE believes in the unique power of football to bring about social change. Improving people's understanding of access and inclusion within the game will positively influence people's attitudes towards disability in the wider society. To illustrate, if club owners, staff and fans become more aware of accessibility within a stadium, they will also gradually start to notice it beyond the stadium.

Football can help to create an environment in which disabled people can participate in and enjoy the game in exactly the same way as non-disabled people do. DSAs are one of the most effective ways in which disabled fans can get actively involved in their club and play their part in the sport they love.



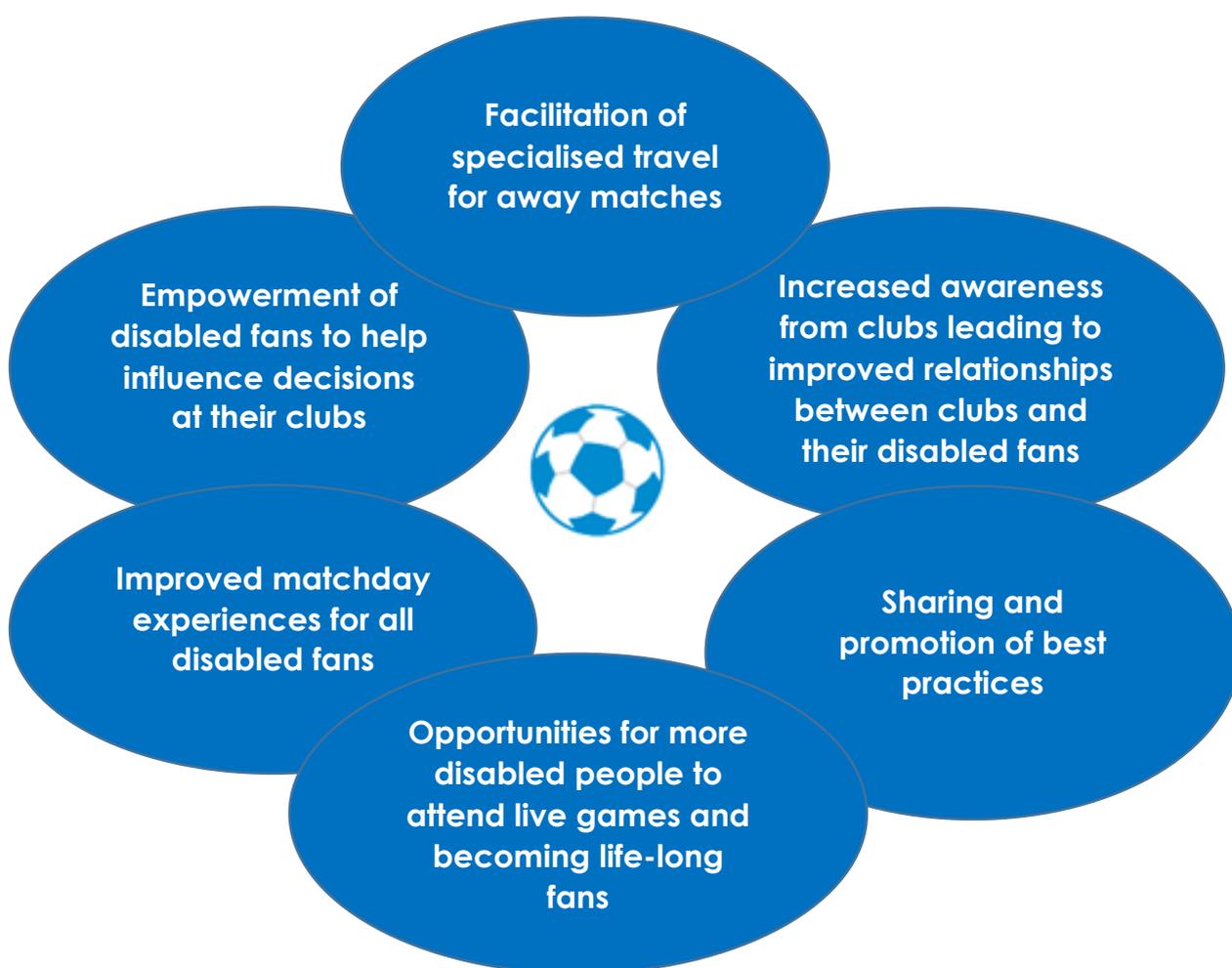
Members of Dinklager-werderwichtel, the DSA of Werder Bremen in Germany

Benefits of a DSA

In addition to those mentioned above, there are many other reasons for having a DSA that benefits both a football club and disabled fans alike. Changes and improvements that have resulted from positive dialogue between a club and its DSA can help to create a welcoming environment that will encourage more disabled people to attend a live match. Not only will the improvements encourage existing disabled fans to continue attending matches, they may also lead to new disabled spectators visiting the club for the first time and potentially become life-long fans.

The existence of a DSA also provides a platform for promoting and sharing best practices with similar associations and groups based at other clubs. DSAs can share information and their experiences, helping to better inform decisions and provide disabled fans with the best possible advice and guidance that they can then share with their own club.

Many DSAs often arrange specialised travel for away matches including European away games i.e. arranging wheelchair accessible transport and booking of accessible hotel accommodation. This provides the opportunity for more disabled fans to be to attend live matches.



What does a DSA do?

The issues each DSA deals with varies depending on the situation at the club and the barriers disabled fans face at their stadium. Nevertheless, some of the areas that DSAs often work on include -

- Advising clubs on the categorisation and distribution of match tickets (but not the selling of the tickets themselves).
- Organising accessible transport to and from matches.
- Organising away match trips including to European away games.
- Liaising regularly with the club's Disability Access Officer on issues affecting disabled fans (for more information on the role of the DAO, please refer to the [UEFA and CAFE Disability Access Officer Handbook](#)).
- Advising clubs on how to improve access and inclusion at their stadium.
- Advising clubs on implementing and promoting accessible matchday services.
- Liaising with other local and national DSAs to share best practice examples.
- Organising of events, which give disabled fans opportunities to socialise with each other as well as with club staff and players.
- Maximise exposure of the DSA to increase awareness around the importance of accessibility and inclusion.

How to create a DSA?

When creating a DSA, disabled supporters and clubs may want to consider the following guidance to help establish and sustain the DSA -

- If you wish to set up a DSA at your club, you must first reach out with other disabled fans to establish whether there is a general interest in creating a DSA.
- Ensure that the group is made up of differently disabled people (such as partially sighted and blind people, deaf and hard of hearing people, wheelchair users, learning disabled people and supporters with hidden disabilities etc.).
- Arrange for an initial meeting to take place. Ask to hold it at the club's stadium or other club premises i.e. training ground.
- Nominate a committee (consisting of a minimum of three people) who will help set up and develop the DSA.
- Establish the DSA's main objectives according the specific issues at your club i.e. the existing facilities at the club, the needs of fans etc.

- Arrange a meeting with club representatives at which you can present the plans and the realistic aims and aspirations of the DSA.
- Ask the club to formally recognise your association / group and their help to promote the DSA via the club's official website, social media channels and official publications such as the matchday programme.
- Arrange regular meetings with the committee to discuss issues affecting disabled supporters.
- Arrange regular meetings with the committee and relevant club representatives where you can put forward ideas, discuss the issues affecting disabled supporters and suggest solutions and improvements – **use these meetings as your DSA's platform to enhance your influence within the club.**
- Attract new members to the group through promotion via leaflets, newsletters, social media and other means such as reaching out to local disability groups.
- Promote your mutually beneficial successes through work with the club. Ensure that the DSA and the club are praised publically for any positive improvements made together – **more people will be willing to join and support the DSA if they see harmony between the DSA and the club.**
- Connect with other DSAs in your region, country and abroad. A network of DSAs enables you to share experiences and best practices.
- Consider adopting a constitution – CAFE can advise on this.
- Connect with CAFE – we are able to provide support and guidance to DSAs and promote their news stories amongst a wider European network.



Members of the Parafan Club – The DSA of Ukraine's Dynamo Kiev

Case Studies

The following section includes examples from DSAs across Europe showing their objectives, achievements, difficulties they have faced and how they overcame them.

Handicap Fan Club Nationalmannschaft e.V



Handicap Fan Club Nationalmannschaft e.V (HFCFN) follows the German national football team and was established in 2006 as a result of a complicated ticketing process for disabled fans for the 2006 FIFA World Cup.

It serves as a platform for all disabled supporters and aims to improve stadium visits for disabled fans, both in Germany and abroad, and to implement joint actions at national games with non-disabled fans. The group has the continued backing from the Deutscher Fußball-Bund e.V (DFB). Regular meetings are held to provide support and answer questions ahead of both home and away games of the German national football team.

Before its creation, it was not possible for tickets for disabled fans to be purchased via the national team's fan club, but now thanks to the work of the Handicap Fan Club Nationalmannschaft e.V, disabled fans now have a point of contact to help make the ticket processing easier. The DSA also arranges travel packages for away games and at all games including major championships, members of the HFCFN are always present to offer support and guidance to disabled fans.

Thomas Vorberger from the group said:

“Since our existence, the number of disabled fans who travel abroad for the UEFA European Championship, the FIFA World Cup or qualifying games has increased and our group is represented at every game”

When asked what advice Thomas had to other disabled fans who are interested in setting up a DSA at their club, he said:

“A community of people is always better than if you try as an individual to bring about changes and improvements”



Members of Handicap Fan Club Nationalmannschaft e.V

Blue Army on Wheels

The DSA of KRC Genk in Belgium, Blue Army on Wheels was established in June 2000 after a group of disabled supporters and their friends came together following the Belgian Cup Final to help to improve conditions for disabled fans. The group now has around 200 members.

Maurice Bielen, chair of the DSA said the group's main aim is **“that disabled supporters can participate in the football matchday and can go to football without having any worries, both Genk and away. We do this in good consultation with KRC Genk and Overarching Supporters Club of KRC (OSV). Blue Army on Wheels is the mouthpiece for disabled supporters”**.



Blue Army on Wheels also wants to raise awareness of the issues facing disabled fans at other clubs across Belgium and contribute to the recognition of disabled people being fans, just like any other supporters.

Since its creation, the DSA has improved accessible toilet facilities at the stadium, implemented customised transport to matches, including European

games, and is responsible for the allocation of accessible car parking permits on matchdays.

When asked what the benefits of having a DSA at clubs are, Maurice said:

“A larger and unified pressure group helps reduce the difficulties faced by those who are disabled; it gives a recognised point of contact for fans to raise their issues and helps to overcome them. Working and talking with your club and other disabled supporter associations is also important to making the DSA a success”.

Liverpool FC DSA



The disabled supporters association of Liverpool FC, England was founded in 2003 after a group of fans held a meeting to help raise concerns of disabled people who were attending matches at Anfield stadium. The DSA believes that football clubs need the assistance of disabled supporters in order to maintain and improve the facilities that are provided.

The association has a good working relationship with all departments in the club including the Equality and Inclusion Advisor, the ticketing department and the stadium manager.

The main issue that DSA has helped to overcome recently was the mis-use of accessible toilets within the stadium by non-disabled supporters. Now all of the accessible toilets are now fitted with RADAR locks, a national scheme which involves fitting standard locks to accessible toilets and making keys available to disabled people. For disabled fans who do not have their own RADAR key, the DSA and the club have ensured that matchday stewards are located nearby and have spare keys to open the toilet doors.

Stephen Evans, the DSAs social secretary explained the **“group acts almost as go-between for supporters to have their voices heard by the club – we act as a single, unified point of contact. We then use social media and email to communicate information out to our members. The club also asks us to canvass views of supporters ahead of any changes in planned in the stadium”.**

Stephen's advice to anyone who wants to establish a DSA is to **“use the support out there from organisations like CAFE and other DSAs both locally and nationally. Speak to your club regularly and particularly people from relevant departments within the club. Support from the club is essential. Hold regular meetings to help address issues and use all methods of communication that is available to promote the DSA”.**

How CAFE can help

CAFE can support disabled fans and football clubs who want to create a DSA by offering support and guidance to both parties and helping to facilitate meetings with the view of establishing the DSA.

Once the DSA has been created, CAFE will actively promote the group via our website and dedicated monthly newsletter, as well as through our social media channels. We will willingly promote DSA-run events and share news stories of improvements that the DSA has helped to bring about at the club.

CAFE will happily promote any activities and events that a DSA run under the umbrella of the CAFE Week of Action (Please refer to the [CAFE Week of Action 2018 Information Pack](#) for further information regarding this CAFE lead initiative).

We will also add the DSA contact details to our specific club / stadium page. This will help to facilitate contact between other DSAs and help disabled fans who have never attended the stadium before by giving them a point of contact for any questions they may have regarding their visit.

If you have any questions or queries regarding DSAs and how to create one at your club, please contact CAFE by email info@cafefootball.eu, or call +44 (0)20 8621 2405.

Have Your Say!

Have Your Say on your matchday experience by leaving a comment on our stadium page. Disabled fans comments help CAFE and our stakeholders to share more information about access at stadiums across Europe, and in turn help disabled fans planning a trip to the stadium.

The Have Your Say section of the CAFE website is easy to use - Simply go to www.cafefootball.eu and, using the 'Stadiums' menu, select the venue that you have recently visited. Each stadium has its own fans comments section where you can share your experiences in any language, and we have added an automatic Google translate to this section so that comments can be shared more widely.

About CAFE

Disabled people are the largest minority group at >15% and rising (World Health Organization) and it can be fairly assumed that many of the one billion disabled people living today will be football fans – the world's most popular sport. Many can still only aspire to watch live football with many stadiums around the world not yet accessible and inclusive.

The Centre for Access to Football in Europe (CAFE) was established in 2009 with support from UEFA to improve access and inclusion across the game using the special influence of football.

CAFE works with national associations, leagues, clubs, disabled fans, fans groups, NGOs and key stakeholders to ensure a more accessible and inclusive matchday experience for disabled fans across Europe.

Further, by raising awareness and sharing best practice solutions, CAFE aims to improve access and inclusion across the game so that disabled people can take their rightful places as spectators, players, volunteers, coaches, administrators, and as leaders and decision makers.

www.cafefootball.eu

For more information and support, contact CAFE by email, phone or Twitter, or by visiting our website:

E: info@cafefootball.eu

T: +44(0) 8621 2410 2405

W: www.cafefootball.eu

T: @cafefootball

VK: https://vk.com/cafe_football

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