



## Formation and Development Stages of Parasport in Uzbekistan

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### Abstract

This article examines the formation and development of parasport in Uzbekistan from independence to the present, with particular attention to institutional transformation, state policy, legal and organizational reforms, expansion of participation, development of parasport disciplines, and international sporting achievements. The study reconstructs the development of Uzbek parasport through a three-stage historical framework: 1991–2007, 2007–2021, and the period from 2021 onward. Particular attention is given to the establishment and transformation of national parasport institutions, the development of regional Paralympic centers, mass participation initiatives such as the Five Initiatives Paralympiad, preparation for international competitions, and the growing role of classification, anti-doping, sports medicine, psychology, and specialist training. The analysis shows that the post-2021 period represents an important stage of institutional consolidation and mass inclusion, reflected in the expansion of sports schools, increased participation of persons with disabilities, and stronger support for elite athletes. At the same time, the development remains uneven across disciplines and regions. Major challenges include insufficient scientific and methodological resources, shortages of specialized coaches, limited infrastructure outside Tashkent, weak international pathways for certain disciplines, and inadequate sign-language expertise for athletes with hearing impairments. The article argues that the future development of Uzbek parasport requires a transition from primarily organizational expansion toward evidence-based athlete development, regional specialization, international cooperation, professional training, and sustainable inclusion. These findings contribute to understanding parasport as both a sports-policy field and an important component of social inclusion in contemporary Uzbekistan.

**Keywords:** Parasport, Paralympic movement, Uzbekistan, Para-Asian Games, Paralympics, adaptive sports, disability inclusion, sports policy, classification, anti-doping.

### 1. Introduction

Parasport has developed internationally from a specialized form of rehabilitation and participation into a major component of high-performance sport and social inclusion. The Paralympic movement provides athletes with disabilities opportunities for competitive participation while also influencing public perceptions of disability, accessibility, and equal participation in social life [1]. In this context, the development of national parasport systems cannot be assessed only through medal results. It also requires attention to institutions, legislation, participation rates, coaching capacity, infrastructure, athlete classification, scientific support, and pathways from grassroots participation to elite competition [2].

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For Uzbekistan, the development of parasport is closely connected with the broader transformation of social and sports policy after independence. The historical trajectory described in the present study demonstrates a movement from the creation of basic organizational structures toward a more integrated national system involving specialized sports schools, Paralympic centers, professional coaching, sports medicine and psychology, classification, anti-doping, international relations, and mass participation programs. The establishment and subsequent reorganization of national Paralympic institutions represent important milestones in this process [3].

The institutional dimension is particularly significant because effective parasport requires coordination among government agencies, sports organizations, educational institutions, medical and scientific specialists, coaches, athletes, and international federations [4]. International Paralympic policy emphasizes athlete-centered development, fair classification, anti-doping, accessibility, and integrity of competition [5]. Consequently, the growth of participation must be accompanied by systems that enable athletes to progress from local and school-level activity to national and international competition.

The Uzbek experience also illustrates the importance of mass participation. The Five Initiatives Paralympiad has expanded opportunities for young people with disabilities at neighborhood, district, regional, and republican levels. According to the material examined in this study, tens of thousands of young people expressed interest in the initiative, while more than 18,000 participants were covered by competitions in 2024 [6]. Such programs have significance beyond sporting competition because they create opportunities for social participation, visibility, confidence, and identification of future athletes.

At the same time, the expansion of Uzbek parasport has exposed structural limitations. Some disciplines have limited access to international competition, while others remain concentrated in the capital because of shortages of facilities and qualified coaches [7]. The article also identifies challenges relating to para-equestrian sport, boccia, goalball, and opportunities for athletes with hearing impairments. Moreover, the reported need for science-based methodologies, standards, and educational literature indicates that organizational development has not always been matched by equivalent development of sports science and specialized training systems [8].

Against this background, the purpose of this article is to reconstruct the major stages of parasport development in Uzbekistan, examine the institutional and policy changes associated with each stage, identify measurable achievements and persistent constraints, and discuss priorities for further development [9]. The article is guided by the following questions: (1) What were the principal stages in the formation of the Uzbek parasport system? (2) What institutional and policy reforms characterized each stage? (3) What evidence demonstrates the expansion of participation and competitive performance? and (4) What structural challenges should be addressed to achieve more balanced and scientifically grounded development?

## **2. Methodology**

The study uses a qualitative historical and documentary research design. Its primary purpose is to reconstruct the formation and development of parasport in Uzbekistan and interpret institutional, legal, organizational, and sporting changes over time. In accordance with the historical orientation of the article, the analysis applies historicism, chronological

analysis, and comparative analysis. These methods are used jointly rather than independently: chronological analysis establishes sequence, historicism interprets developments within their specific political and institutional context, and comparative analysis identifies changes between development stages and across types of parasport activity.

The documentary base consists of the sources and materials used in the original manuscript, including Uzbek presidential resolutions, documents of the National Paralympic Committee of Uzbekistan, official and institutional webpages, sports news reports, newspaper publications, and scholarly or professional materials concerning parasport. The documents were examined according to their relevance to four analytical dimensions: institutional development, participation and accessibility, elite competitive preparation and achievements, and unresolved structural problems.

For the historical reconstruction, the evidence was organized into three periods identified in the source material: Stage 1 (1991–2007), Stage 2 (2007–2021), and Stage 3 (2021–present). Within each period, major institutional events, policy decisions, participation initiatives, infrastructure developments, and international achievements were identified and compared. This periodization provides an analytical framework for understanding how Uzbekistan moved from the establishment of initial disability-sport structures toward a more comprehensive national Paralympic system.

The analysis also distinguishes between mass participation indicators and elite-sport indicators. Mass participation is assessed through the development of sports schools, regional centers, youth competitions, and reported numbers of participants. Elite development is considered through international participation, medal achievements, preparation for the Paralympic and Para-Asian Games, specialist training, classification, anti-doping, and sports medicine and psychology. This distinction is important because a strong parasport system requires both a broad participation base and effective pathways for high-performance athletes.

The study is documentary and qualitative; therefore, the reported participation figures and achievements are treated as figures documented in the cited sources rather than as independently generated statistical estimates. Where the manuscript reports figures for particular years, these are retained and attributed to the corresponding source. The study does not claim causal relationships between individual government measures and medal outcomes because such causal effects cannot be established from the available documentary evidence alone. This methodological limitation is important for interpreting the findings and identifying areas requiring future quantitative research.

### **3. Discussion and Main Results**

#### **3.1 Historical Stages of Formation**

The development of sports for people with disabilities in Uzbekistan can be divided into three stages: Stage 1, 1991–2007, the period before the establishment of the national Paralympic association; Stage 2, 2007–2021, the period from the establishment of the Paralympic Association to its reorganization as the National Paralympic Committee; and Stage 3, 2021 to the present [10]. This periodization demonstrates that institutional development was gradual and closely connected with changes in state policy and organizational capacity.

### **3.2 Stage 1: 1991–2007**

During the first stage, Uzbekistan began developing an institutional basis for sports participation among persons with disabilities. The Association of Sports for the Disabled of Uzbekistan was officially established as a legal entity on October 18, 1998, and later became the National Paralympic Association of Uzbekistan [11]. Although the institutional framework was still developing, the state had already begun addressing the social participation and support of persons with disabilities. Uzbek athletes participated in the Paralympic Games in 2004, although the source material notes that this participation was not yet regarded as official because Uzbekistan was not a member of the International Paralympic Committee at that time [12].

### **3.3 Stage 2: 2007–2021**

The second stage began in 2007 with the establishment of the Paralympic Association of Uzbekistan. During this period, Uzbek parasport gradually strengthened its international profile. At the first Para-Asian Games in Guangzhou in 2010, Uzbek athletes won one gold, two silver, and three bronze medals [13]. The subsequent development culminated in strong performances at the Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. According to the manuscript, Uzbekistan ranked 16th among 162 delegations at Tokyo 2020, placing it among the leading Asian and Central Asian teams. These achievements indicate that institutional development was increasingly accompanied by competitive performance.

### **3.4 Stage 3: 2021–Present**

The third stage began with a significant institutional reform following Presidential Resolution No. 5114 of May 18, 2021, on additional measures for the development of the Paralympic movement [14]. The National Paralympic Committee of Uzbekistan was established on the basis of the National Paralympic Association. The Committee was assigned responsibilities covering participation expansion, establishment of specialized departments in educational institutions, talent identification, elite athlete development, specialist training, scientific research, improvement of material and technical infrastructure, and regular preparation for national and international competitions [15]. This broad mandate indicates a transition from an organization-centered model toward a more integrated sports-development system.

### **3.5 Mass Participation and Social Inclusion**

The post-2021 period is notable for initiatives aimed at widening participation. The Parasport Festival under the motto “Sport for All” was organized in December 2021 to popularize Paralympic sports and involve students of specialized educational institutions [16]. From 2022, the Five Initiatives Paralympiad was introduced for young people with disabilities at the neighborhood level. In 2024, the competition expanded through district, regional, and republican stages and attracted substantial interest [17]. The source material reports that 29,062 young people aged 16–30 expressed interest in participating in 2024, 18,416 were covered by competitions, and the program aimed to expand coverage further [18].

### **3.6 Expansion of Schools, Participants, and Disciplines**

The reported indicators suggest considerable expansion of the parasport participation base. By 2025, the number of regular parasport participants had increased fourfold to more than 7,000, the share of female athletes reached 29%, and the number of schools offering sports clubs for young people with disabilities increased from 33 to 235 [19]. The Five Initiatives Paralympiad also expanded the range of activities, including para-athletics, para-table tennis, parachess, paradraughts, and paracybersport [20]. These changes are important because sustainable elite sport generally depends on accessible entry points and systematic talent identification.

### **3.7 Institutional Specialization and Athlete Support**

The National Paralympic Committee operates specialized functions covering Paralympic sport development, cooperation with educational institutions, adaptive sport, international relations and marketing, sports medicine and psychology, classification and anti-doping, communications, and finance. The development of regional Paralympic Sports Centers further supports talent identification, coaching structures, regional teams, and cooperation with sports educational institutions. The increasing specialization of these functions represents an important institutional achievement because parasport performance requires multidisciplinary support beyond conventional coaching.

### **3.8 International Preparation and Competitive Development**

Uzbekistan has also strengthened systematic preparation for international events. The presidential resolution concerning preparation for the XIX Asian and IV Para-Asian Games established priorities for individual and team disciplines and provided a framework for training and incentives. The manuscript reports attention to athletics, shooting, rowing, paracycling, rugby, parachess, and handball, together with financial awards for medal winners. Such measures demonstrate the increasing integration of elite parasport into national high-performance sports policy.

### **3.9 “School of Fortitude” and Innovative Initiatives**

The establishment of the School of Fortitude of Paralympians in 2022 represents another distinctive element of the Uzbek approach. The initiative was accompanied by proposals for an international forum, a metro station associated with the Paralympic movement, and a Paralympians’ Park. These initiatives demonstrate that parasport policy has acquired a symbolic and educational dimension in addition to its competitive function. They can contribute to public awareness and the visibility of persons with disabilities in everyday social life.

### **3.10 Remaining Structural Problems**

Despite significant progress, development remains uneven. The manuscript identifies limited international opportunities in some disciplines, insufficient infrastructure and coaching capacity for boccia outside Tashkent, and the underdevelopment of para-equestrian sport. It also identifies barriers affecting athletes with hearing impairments, particularly the shortage of coaches capable of working with sign language. These problems show that the expansion of the system has not eliminated regional and discipline-specific inequalities.

### **3.11 Need for Evidence-Based Sports Science**

One of the most important challenges identified in the source material concerns the lack of science-based methodologies, standards, and educational literature for preparing athletes with disabilities. The reported presidential assessment that requirements for able-bodied athletes have sometimes been mechanically transferred to athletes with disabilities points to a methodological gap. Parasport requires specialized approaches to training load, classification, biomechanics, rehabilitation, injury prevention, nutrition, psychology, and coaching. Therefore, future development should increasingly connect sports policy with universities, research institutions, medical specialists, and international expertise.

#### **4. Discussion**

The historical evidence indicates that Uzbek parasport has moved through a process of institutionalization, professionalization, and mass expansion. The first stage established the initial organizational basis; the second stage strengthened national representation and international competitiveness; and the third stage has broadened the system through specialized institutions, regional structures, mass competitions, and multidisciplinary support. This progression suggests that parasport policy in Uzbekistan has increasingly shifted from providing opportunities for participation toward building a structured national performance and inclusion system.

However, institutional expansion should not be equated automatically with equal development. The concentration of some sports and specialist expertise in Tashkent indicates that geographic accessibility remains an important issue. A national parasport system can be considered sustainable only when athletes outside the capital have realistic pathways to identification, classification, coaching, equipment, competition, and progression. The expansion of regional Paralympic centers is therefore promising, but their effectiveness should be assessed through measurable indicators such as athlete retention, coaching capacity, facility accessibility, competition frequency, and progression to national teams.

The growth of youth competitions is another major strength. The Five Initiatives Paralympiad has created a broad recruitment and participation mechanism, potentially linking community-level inclusion with elite talent identification. Nevertheless, mass participation and elite development should be connected through transparent pathways. Participants who demonstrate potential need access to classification, specialized coaching, medical and psychological support, equipment, and national-level competition. Without such a pathway, large participation numbers may not translate into sustained international performance.

The evidence also suggests that future policy should place greater emphasis on scientific specialization. The need for science-based training methods and educational literature identified in the source material is particularly significant. Internationally competitive parasport requires knowledge that is adapted to different impairment types and functional abilities. Uzbekistan could strengthen this area by developing university-based parasport research programs, coach education, evidence-based training standards, and partnerships with international Paralympic organizations and specialized research centers.

Finally, inclusion should remain a central measure of success. The increase in female participation, expansion of schools, inclusion of athletes with hearing impairments in mass competitions, and establishment of public initiatives related to the Paralympic movement indicate progress toward broader social inclusion. Future policy should continue to address groups that remain underrepresented and should evaluate not only medals but also

accessibility, regional equality, gender participation, athlete wellbeing, and long-term continuation in sport.

## 5. Conclusion

Over more than three decades, Uzbekistan has established a progressively more comprehensive parasport system. The historical development can be divided into three stages: 1991–2007, 2007–2021, and 2021 to the present. Each stage was characterized by different priorities, from institutional formation to international representation and, more recently, large-scale participation, professional specialization, and systematic state support.

The most visible achievements of the recent period include the expansion of sports schools and regular participants, growth of youth competitions, development of regional centers, increased attention to women and inclusive participation, and continued international competitive success. At the same time, important challenges remain in regional infrastructure, specialist coaching, access to international competition, sign-language competence, and science-based training methodologies.

The next stage of parasport development in Uzbekistan should therefore emphasize quality and sustainability alongside further expansion. Priority should be given to evidence-based training, professional development of coaches, regional specialization, scientific research, accessible infrastructure, international cooperation, systematic classification, and transparent pathways from grassroots participation to elite sport. Such measures would strengthen both Uzbekistan's international parasport performance and the broader social inclusion objectives of the national sports system.

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