

PORTUGAL



Country Para sport Factsheet

February 2026

"Sport For All: Promoting Inclusion and Combating Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities"

This country factsheet was drafted by ACT LLC in collaboration with the Council of Europe, the European Union and other Sport For All joint project partners.

The data in this factsheet is from the "Sport For All: Promoting Inclusion and Combating Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities", a European Union (EU) and Council of Europe joint project, to create a more inclusive sports culture by addressing the barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in sport and fostering a safe and welcoming sports environments for all. One of the project goals was to generate a comparable, policy-relevant evidence base on disability inclusion in sport across eight countries and identify how Para sport systems are structured, where systemic constraints recur, and which strengthening priorities emerge.

►► To find more information about the project and other countries involved in the project, as well as a synthesis report and an educational toolkit created to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in sport settings, have a look at the project website: www.coe.int/sport/sportforall

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Country Context

Indicator	Data
Population (estimate)	10.75 Million (Statistics Portugal, December 2024)
Estimated number of persons with disabilities	Approximately 10% of the population (1.0–1.1 million; Census 2021 estimate)
Persons with disabilities in Para sport	Approximately 5,062 (as of 2024)
Paralympic Games 2024 (Paris)	27 athletes (17 men; 10 women) Medals – 6
Paralympic Games 2020 (Tokyo)	33 athletes (23 men; 10 women) Medals – 2
Paralympic Games 2016 (Rio)	37 athletes (25 men; 12 women) Medals – 4

Population: Statistics Portugal (INE), December 2024. Disability prevalence: estimate based on Census 2021 and EU-SILC data. Para sport participation: athletes with disabilities registered across multiple federations - (Source: IPDJ institutional statistics (<https://ipdj.gov.pt/estatisticas>) Note the declining trend in Paralympic delegation size: 37 (2016) → 33 (2020) → 27 (2024).

System Summary

The summary below highlights the main systemic strengths and constraints shaping Para sport development in Portugal.

Key Strengths

- A multi-layered legal framework provides constitutional recognition of the right to sport (Law nº 5/2007), high-performance support legislation (Decree-Law 272/2009), and post-career protection for Paralympic athletes (Law 13/2024).
- Formal coordination between the national sport authority (IPDJ) and the Institute for the Rights of People with Disabilities links sport policy and disability inclusion within governance.
- The Sports Inclusion Map digital platform operated by the Paralympic Committee of Portugal (CPP) is designed to make inclusive and Para sport opportunities easier to find, identifying clubs and associations offering adapted sports by region and discipline. (<https://paralimpicos.pt/mapa-inclusao-desportiva>).
- Olympic, Paralympic, and Deaflympic athletes receive equal monetary prizes, training conditions, and preparation support under national legislation.

Key Gaps

- Portugal's Paralympic delegation reached its smallest size since Seoul 1988 at the Paris 2024 Games, despite a structurally well-developed institutional framework. Rather than signalling systemic failure, this contraction invites reflection on pipeline depth,

recruitment, and athlete transition mechanisms - areas where even well-governed systems can benefit from closer attention.

- No unified national participation monitoring system exists; available data is limited to participation within recognised sports federations, leaving grassroots and recreational engagement less visible to policymakers.
- Participation opportunities are geographically uneven, concentrated in coastal regions, with interior areas significantly underserved in terms of clubs, coaching capacity, and transport access.

Legal and Policy Framework

Portugal is a State Party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Provisions related to participation in sport, as set out in Article 30 of the CRPD, are reflected in national legislation and policy documents. At constitutional level, the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic recognises both the rights of persons with disabilities, requiring the State to implement policies for prevention, rehabilitation, integration, and participation, and the right of all citizens to physical culture and sport.

The core legal framework governing sport is established by the Law on Physical Activity and Sport (Law No. 5/2007), which defines public sports policy principles and the responsibilities of public authorities. Within this framework, sport for persons with disabilities is integrated into the general sports law system, requiring public authorities to promote and support participation through adapted technical means, specific participation measures, and the prevention of discriminatory practices.

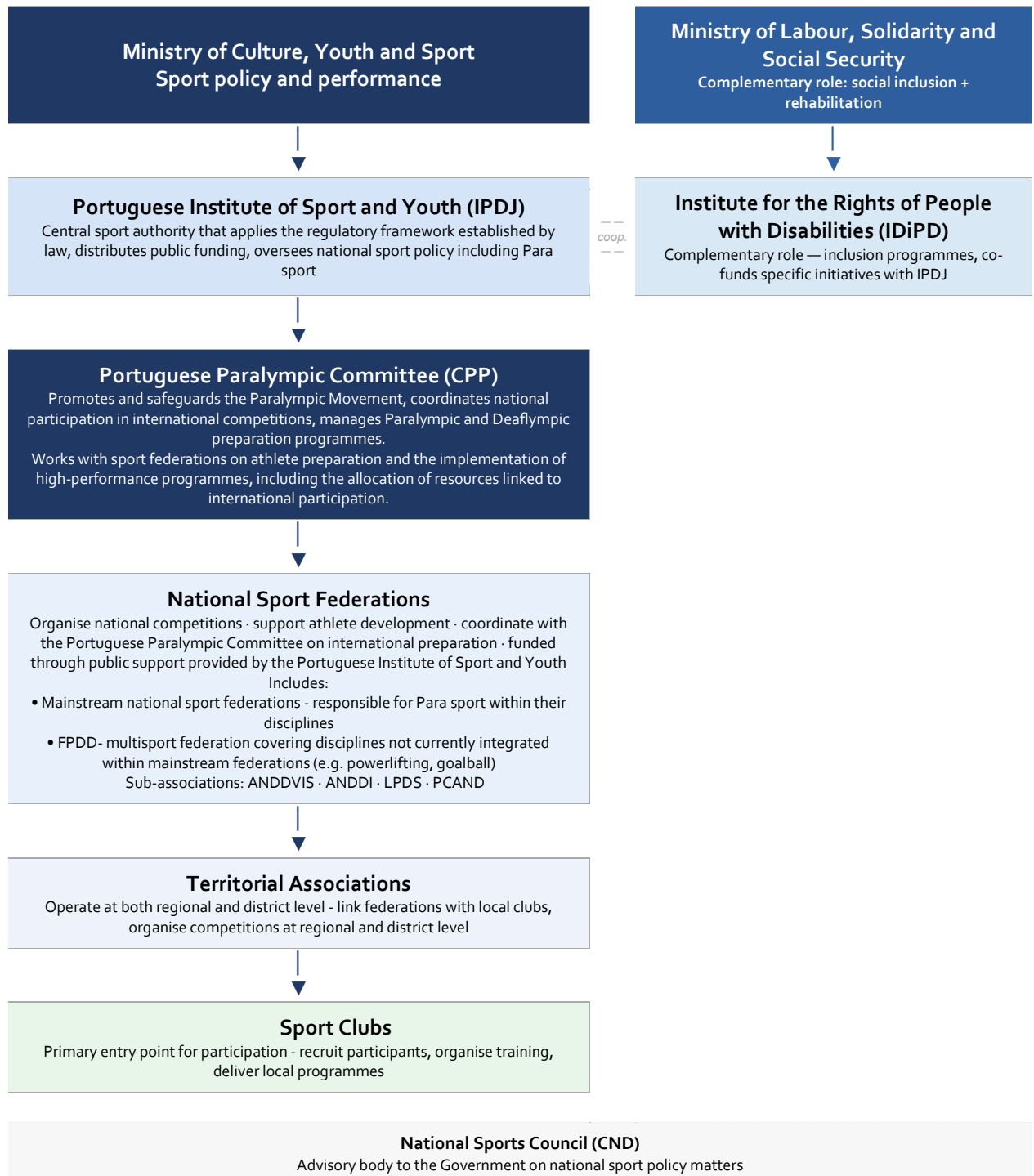
Decree-Law No. 272/2009 establishes the legal regime for high-performance sport, including public support mechanisms linked to elite participation, including for persons with disabilities. Law No. 13/2024 further establishes post-career support measures for Olympic, Paralympic, Deaflympic, and high-performance athletes. At policy level, the National Strategy for the Promotion of Physical Activity, Health and Well-being (2016-2025) aims to increase physical activity among vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities.

Within the broader disability rights framework, the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Law No. 38/2004) establishes the general legal framework for prevention, facilitation, rehabilitation, and participation of persons with disabilities, including participation in cultural, sporting, and recreational life. The National Strategy for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2025 (ENIPD) sets cross-sector objectives including concrete goals to increase participation of persons with disabilities in both recreational and competitive sport.

Taken together, Portugal's legal and policy framework establishes participation in sport as a general right and integrates disability sport within both the national sport system and the wider disability inclusion framework.

Para sport System Overview

Governance Structure



The governance of Para sport in Portugal falls primarily under the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, through the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth. The Ministry of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, through the Institute for the Rights of People with Disabilities (IDiPD), plays a complementary support role, particularly through inclusion programmes and initiatives promoting the participation of persons with disabilities in sport.

The Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth functions as the central public authority for sport governance. It applies the regulatory framework established by law, distributes public funding, and oversees the implementation of national sport policy, including measures supporting Para sport participation and athlete development. The IDiPD collaborates with sport institutions on specific inclusion programmes, contributing to the funding of some of these initiatives in coordination with the IPDJ.

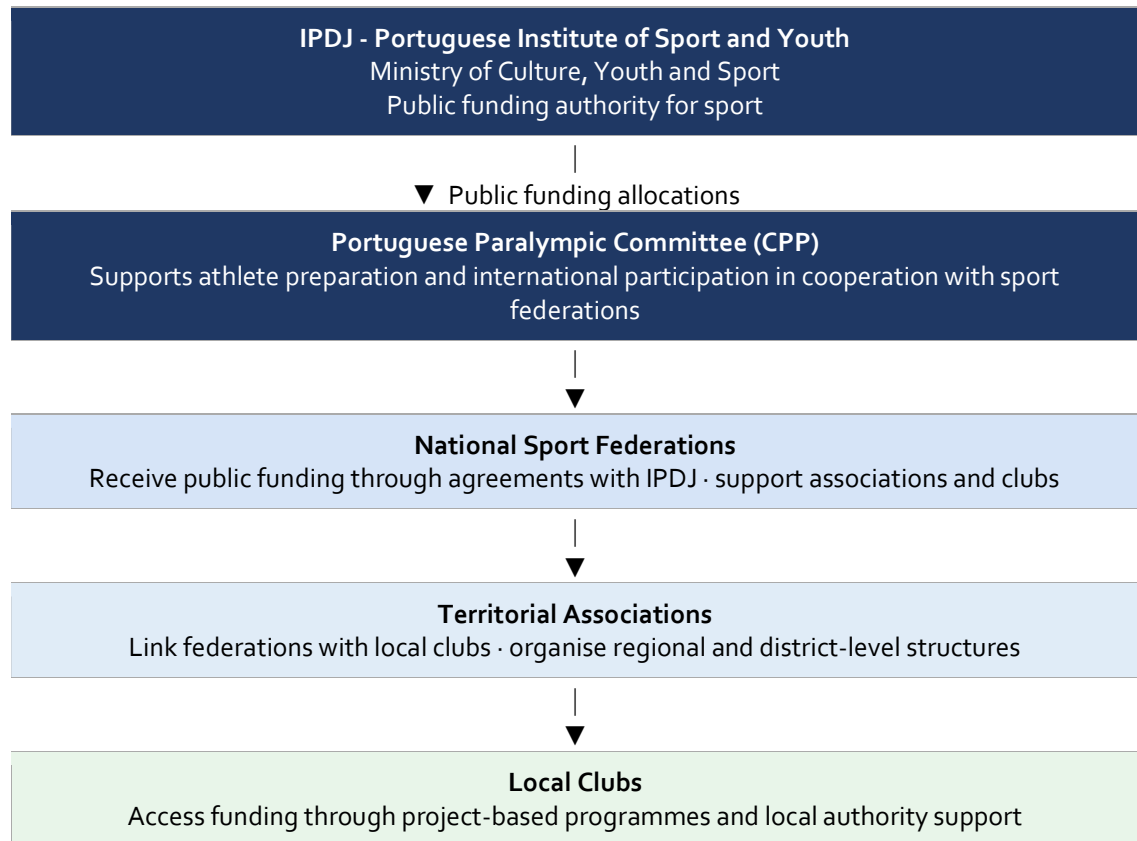
The Portuguese Paralympic Committee plays a central role within sports system, connecting athletes, federations, clubs, support programs, and public policies. It is the nationally recognised body responsible for promoting and safeguarding the Paralympic Movement, coordinating national participation in international competitions, and managing Paralympic and Deaflympic preparation programmes. It coordinates with sport federations on elite athlete preparation and the implementation of high-performance programmes.

At federation level, Portugal combines disability-specific and mainstream structures. The Portuguese Sports Federation for Persons with Disabilities governs selected disciplines not integrated within mainstream federations, such as powerlifting and goalball, while mainstream National Sport Federations are responsible for Para sport within their respective sports. These federations organise national competitions, support athlete development, and work with the Portuguese Paralympic Committee on preparation for international competition. Funding is provided primarily by the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, with the Institute for the Rights of People with Disabilities (IDiPD) contributing to specific programmes.

Below national level, territorial associations link federations with local clubs and organise competitions and structures at regional and district level. At local level, sport clubs represent the primary entry point for participation. Clubs recruit participants, organise training, and deliver local programmes, while relying on support from associations and federations for competition pathways and athlete progression.

In institutional terms, strategic direction, regulation, and most public funding are concentrated at central level through the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, with the complementary contribution of the IDiPD. The Portuguese Paralympic Committee coordinates the international and high-performance dimension, federations manage sport-specific development, territorial associations connect national structures with local delivery, and clubs provide the main participation base.

Funding Mechanisms and Distribution



Funding is channelled primarily through the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, with complementary contributions from other public bodies. The Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth concludes formal agreements with the Portuguese Paralympic Committee and National Sport Federations, providing resources for high-performance programmes, athlete preparation, and broader sport development activities.

The Portuguese Paralympic Committee receives part of its funding from public sources, complemented by a share of private sponsorship. It supports federations in the preparation of athletes for international competition. Federations also receive public funding directly through annual agreements with the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth and use these resources to support national competitions, athlete development, and grassroots initiatives.

At subnational level, Territorial Associations act as intermediaries at regional and district level. Local clubs may access funding through project-based programmes managed by federations, inclusion initiatives supported by the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth through the National Sports for All Programme, and support schemes provided by local authorities. More recently, the Portuguese Paralympic Committee has received financial support from IPDJ to channel specific funding directly to local clubs to support sport projects for persons with disabilities.

In practical terms, public financing for Para sport is concentrated at the central level, with national entities such as the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth and the Portuguese, Institute for the Rights of People with Disabilities, Paralympic Committee playing an increasingly direct role in supporting grassroots participation. Local authorities contribute as a complementary layer, often with closer knowledge of local needs and contexts, reinforcing a multi-level effort to strengthen sport opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Coordination Mechanisms

Coordination of Para sport in Portugal takes place through both formal institutional arrangements and operational cooperation between sport and disability inclusion bodies.

At national level, the National Sports Council functions as an advisory body to the Government on sport policy matters. It brings together government representatives and sport stakeholders and provides a structured setting in which national sport-related policy issues, including matters relevant to Para sport, can be discussed. The Portuguese Paralympic Committee participates in this body as the principal representative of the Paralympic Movement.

Operational coordination within the Para sport system is carried out primarily through the interaction of the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, the Institute for the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Portuguese Paralympic Committee, and the relevant sport federations. The Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth coordinates sport governance and funding arrangements, in partnership with the National Institute for the Rights of People with Disabilities. The Portuguese Paralympic Committee links these institutional lines with the federation system through its role in athlete preparation and international representation. At federation level, coordination occurs through contractual arrangements, programme implementation, and athlete preparation processes. The Portuguese Paralympic Committee works with both disability-specific and mainstream National Sport Federations in the preparation of high-performance athletes and the organisation of participation in international competitions. Federations, in turn, coordinate with regional associations and local clubs on domestic competition structures and grassroots participation activities.

Data Collection

Portugal does not currently maintain a unified national database providing comprehensive statistics on persons with disabilities participating in sport. Data is held across multiple sources, including sport federations, the Portuguese Paralympic Committee, and other institutional actors, but is not consolidated within a single national monitoring framework.

The Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth statistics portal provides data on participation within federated sport structures, disaggregated by district, sports federation and gender.

The commonly cited figure of approximately 5,062 persons with disabilities participating in Para sport reflects registered participation within these structures as of 2024. Non-affiliated grassroots and recreational practice is largely undocumented. As such, available figures reflect participation within organised structures and do not cover all forms of sport involvement among persons with disabilities.

Participation Pathway



⚠ Transition Gap: Grassroots participation development is uneven across the country; insufficient recruitment programmes and limited participation infrastructure in interior regions may constrain entry and sustained engagement.

Entry

Entry into Para sport occurs through multiple pathways. Persons with disabilities are often introduced to sport following medical recommendations, through family encouragement or personal initiative, via school-based awareness activities, or through programmes developed by disability support organisations. Disability support organisations operating at national, regional, or local level also serve as entry points into sport through the activities they promote or in which they participate. Local sport clubs constitute a primary participation pathway, offering regular training opportunities.

Development

Athletes who demonstrate competitive potential progress through the Club → Territorial Association → National Federation pathway, participating first in local and regional competitions organised by associations and then advancing to national-level competition structures managed by sport federations. However, the development of grassroots participation is uneven across the country, with insufficient recruitment programmes and limited infrastructure in interior (inland) regions may constrain entry and sustained engagement.

Elite Preparation

The CPP coordinates the preparation of high-performance athletes for international competitions, including the Paralympic Games and other major competitions, in cooperation with sport federations with financial support from the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth. In Portugal, Olympic, Paralympic, and Deaflympic athletes receive equal monetary prizes, training conditions, and preparation support, and high-performance athletes additionally receive monthly financial assistance through government sport programmes. Legal parity between Olympic and Paralympic athletes in prizes and state recognition represents a strong normative foundation.

Transition Gap

Portugal's comprehensive legal and policy framework supporting disability sport does not always translate into broad participation outcomes. The relatively small number of registered athletes within federated structures and the declining size of the Paralympic delegation indicate that the transition from grassroots participation to sustained athlete development may be limited in several disciplines.

Key Challenges

Despite the existence of a structured legal and institutional framework, several structural and operational challenges continue to affect the development of Para sport in Portugal.

Geographic access and participation barriers

- The geographic distribution of Para sport opportunities is uneven. Interior regions are underserved in terms of clubs, coaches, and programmes, which may constrain both entry into Para sport and sustained participation at grassroots level.
- Accessible transportation is a barrier for persons with disabilities seeking to reach training and competition venues on a regular basis. This constraint is particularly relevant in areas with limited public transport and contributes to unequal access to sport opportunities.
- Grassroots recruitment and participation initiatives may be insufficient in several parts of the country. Limited local outreach, uneven club infrastructure, and weak recruitment mechanisms may reduce the continuity of athlete pathways from community participation to competitive sport.

Inclusion and representation gaps

- The participation of women with disabilities in Para sport is low. Contributing factors include the lack of systematic gender-disaggregated data beyond federated structures, particularly regarding grassroots and non-affiliated participation, the lack of identified recruitment initiatives specifically targeting women and girls with disabilities, and limited visibility of participation patterns by discipline.

Institutional and federation capacity constraints

- Capacity-building needs remain evident within sport federations, particularly regarding the effective integration and development of Para sport across disciplines. Differences in institutional capacity affect the extent to which federations are able to support athlete development, grassroots expansion, and competition structures.

Monitoring and data limitations

- Portugal does not yet have a unified national monitoring system providing comprehensive statistics on participation of persons with disabilities in sport. Available figures primarily reflect registered competitive athletes and do not capture recreational or community-level participation, which may limit the ability to assess participation trends, regional disparities, and programme effectiveness.

Opportunities

Several institutional and policy features provide opportunities to further strengthen the development of Para sport participation in Portugal.

- The CPP Sports Inclusion Map represents a practical digital tool that identifies the geographic distribution of Para sport clubs and organisations across the country, supporting evidence-based planning and the identification of underserved regions.
- The institutional cooperation between the Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth (IPDJ) and the Institute for the Rights of People with Disabilities (IDiPD) provides a structured governance arrangement linking sport policy and disability inclusion programmes, creating favorable conditions for coordinated Para sport development.
- Portugal's dual-career support framework for high-performance athletes provides structured mechanisms enabling athletes to combine sport careers with education and employment pathways, strengthening long-term athlete sustainability.
- The legal recognition of equal treatment between Olympic and Paralympic athletes, including equal monetary prizes and state recognition, provides a strong normative foundation supporting the visibility and status of Paralympic sport.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1.

Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, in cooperation with the Portuguese Paralympic Committee and national sport federations:

Consider measures to improve the geographic distribution of Para sport opportunities, particularly in interior regions, including support for the development of sport programmes, identification of suitable facilities for adapted sport, and incentives to attract and retain qualified coaches and sport personnel.

Recommendation 2.

Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, local authorities, and relevant transport actors:

Consider measures to improve accessibility of transport for persons with disabilities travelling to training and competition venues, including local support schemes for adapted transport services or financial assistance.

Recommendation 3.

Portuguese Paralympic Committee, national sport federations, and territorial associations:

Consider expanding grassroots recruitment and community-based sport initiatives, particularly in regions with more limited participation opportunities.

Recommendation 4.

Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, Portuguese Paralympic Committee, and national sport federations:

Consider targeted initiatives to increase participation of women and girls with disabilities in Para sport, including outreach measures, improved gender-disaggregated monitoring, and clearer participation pathways.

Recommendation 5.

Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth and national sport federations:

Consider capacity-building measures to support the integration and development of Para sport across disciplines, including access to specialised equipment and training for coaches working with athletes with disabilities.

Recommendation 6.

Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, Portuguese Paralympic Committee, and relevant stakeholders:

Consider structured dialogue on governance arrangements within the sport system, including the relationship between Olympic and Paralympic structures.

Recommendation 7.

Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth and relevant public authorities:

Consider the development of a unified national monitoring system for participation of persons with disabilities in sport, including indicators allowing analysis by region, gender, and level of participation.

Recommendation 8.

Portuguese Institute of Sport and Youth, Portuguese Paralympic Committee, and national sport federations:

Consider approaches to strengthen the participation of persons with disabilities in governance and decision-making processes within Para sport.

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