

SERBIA



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)	6.59 Million (Statistical Office, 2024)
Estimated number of persons with disabilities	356,404 (5.5% of population; UNFPA, 2022)
Persons with disabilities in Para sport	4,033 (of whom 1,728 are women); 651 athletes in Paralympic disciplines (of whom 36 are women) (Ministry of Sports, 2024)
Paralympic Games 2024 (Paris)	22 athletes (15 men; 7 women); Medals – 6
Paralympic Games 2020 (Tokyo)	20 athletes (13 men; 7 women); Medals – 6
Paralympic Games 2016 (Rio)	16 athletes (13 men; 3 women); Medals – 9

Population: Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2024 estimate). Disability prevalence: UNFPA (2022). Para sport participation: Ministry of Sports (2024). Figures reflect registered athletes; recreational and informal participants are not captured.

System Summary

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

Key Strengths

- The Law on Sports designates preparation for and participation in the Paralympic Games, and the development of the Serbian Paralympic Committee, as activities of general interest in sport, providing a statutory basis for sustained public financing.
- The Paralympic Committee of Serbia holds institutional status formally equivalent to the Olympic Committee, with para-athletes entitled to the same rights and recognition.
- The Ministry of Sport operates an annual dedicated tender financing physical accessibility adaptation of sports facilities, with documented implementation at local level.

Key Gaps

- Governance responsibilities are distributed across the Ministry of Sport, the Paralympic Committee, four separately recognised disability sport bodies, Competent National Branch Sport Associations, Territorial Sports Associations, and municipalities, with the Ministry concluding individual contracts with each body. This fragmentation makes the system difficult to navigate and limits coherence in athlete development planning and participation monitoring across the sector.

- No standardised national athlete development pathway exists; progression depends on the organisational capacity of individual federations, producing uneven development conditions across disciplines.
- Local funding for Para sport varies significantly between municipalities, creating territorial disparities in participation access that are not systematically addressed.

Legal and Policy Framework

Serbia 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. The core legal framework governing sport is the Law on Sports (Official Gazette No. 10/2016), which establishes the principles of non-discrimination and guarantees access to sport for all citizens, including regardless of disability. The Law recognises the promotion of participation of children, youth, women, and persons with disabilities as a matter of general interest in sport and includes preparation for and participation in the Paralympic Games among activities of general interest.

Implementation of the Law is supported by numerous by-laws and rulebooks regulating organisational, financial, and operational aspects of sport governance. These instruments apply uniformly to all sport organisations, including those operating in Para sport, and do not create a separate disability-specific sport framework. Para sport is therefore governed within the mainstream sport regulatory system.

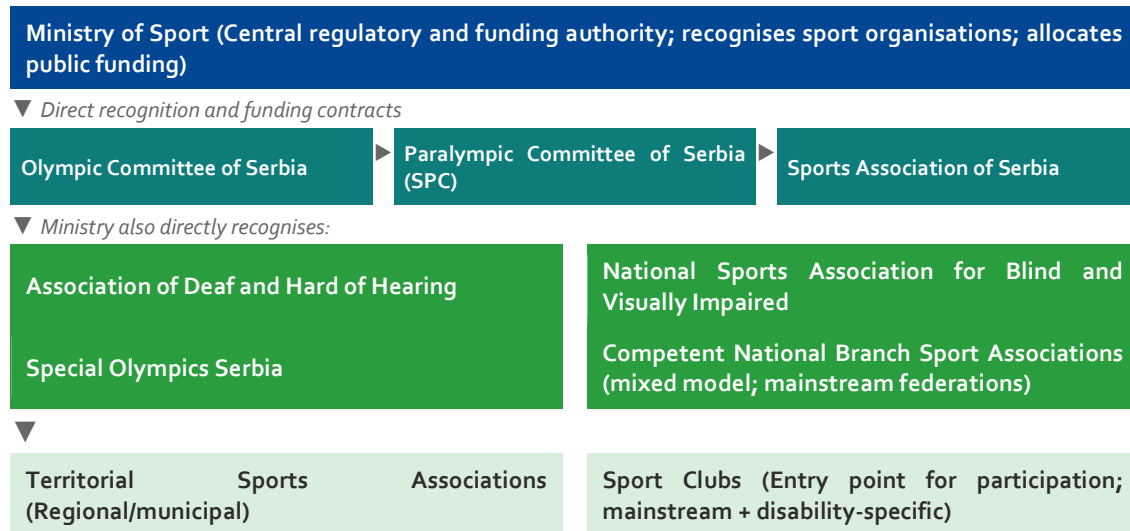
At policy level, the National Sport Development Strategy 2026–2035 is currently under preparation through a multi-stakeholder working group that includes representatives of disability sport organisations. Para sport-related objectives are expected to be reflected in the forthcoming strategy and action plan, creating an important policy opportunity to address current structural gaps in governance, participation, and athlete development.

Within the broader disability rights framework, the Law on Prevention of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (2006) requires local self-government units to take measures ensuring equal participation of persons with disabilities in cultural, sporting, and community life.

Taken together, Serbia's legal and policy framework integrates Para sport within the general sport system while also recognising equal participation of persons with disabilities as a matter of public interest and non-discrimination.

Para sport System Overview

Governance Structure



Responsibility for sport and Para sport policy in Serbia lies with the Ministry of Sport, which acts as the central regulatory and funding authority. The Ministry recognises national sport organisations, approves annual programmes, allocates public funding, and concludes annual financing contracts with recognised sport bodies.

At national level, the sport system is organised around three main pillars: the Olympic Committee of Serbia, the Paralympic Committee of Serbia (SPC), and the Sports Association of Serbia. Within the Para sport field, the Ministry directly recognises and finances the SPC, the Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Serbia, the National Sports Association for Blind and Visually Impaired in Serbia, and Special Olympics Serbia.

The SPC is the nationally recognised body responsible for the development of the Paralympic Movement and for coordinating Serbia's participation in the Paralympic Games and other international competitions. It acts as the central body for Paralympic sport branches under its competence and each year collects programme proposals from member sport organisations for submission to the Ministry as part of the national funding process.

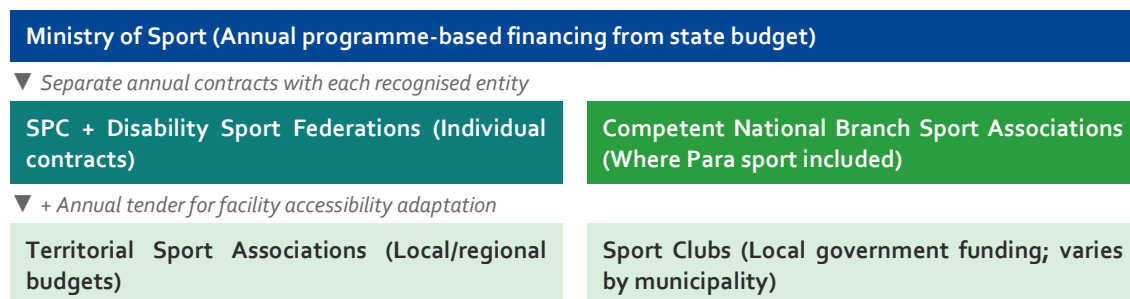
Serbia has gradually moved toward a mixed governance model in which responsibilities for specific Para sport disciplines are increasingly exercised by Competent National Branch Sport Associations, that is, recognised mainstream sport federations governing individual disciplines. Where these federations include a recognised Para sport structure, they may become members of the SPC. In practice, this means that some disciplines remain coordinated through disability sport bodies, while others are managed through mainstream sport federations.

At subnational level, Territorial Sports Associations coordinate sport activities at regional, municipal, and provincial level and connect local sport organisations with the wider national sport system. Sport clubs represent the primary point of entry for participation and may operate either as mainstream clubs or as clubs specifically dedicated to persons with disabilities.

An additional actor within the broader disability sport field is the Disability Sport Association of Serbia, which promotes recreational and grassroots sport participation for persons with disabilities. However, capacity and membership constraints have limited its practical role within the system.

In institutional terms, strategic direction, legal recognition, and most public financing are concentrated at the Ministry level. The SPC coordinates the Paralympic Movement and international representation, recognised disability sport bodies and branch federations manage sport-specific development, Territorial Sports Associations support local coordination, and clubs provide the main participation base.

Funding Mechanisms and Distribution



At national level, public funding for sport, including Para sport, is allocated by the Ministry of Sport through annual programme-based financing. Recognised Para sport bodies and other recognised sport organisations submit annual programme proposals to the Ministry, which evaluates the proposals, approves funding amounts, and concludes separate annual contracts with each recognised entity.

Within this system, the Paralympic Committee of Serbia, the Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Serbia, the National Sports Association for Blind and Visually Impaired in Serbia, and Special Olympics Serbia receive funding directly from the Ministry under individual agreements. Although programme proposals for Paralympic disciplines may be coordinated through the SPC, funding contracts are concluded separately with each recognised organisation, which remains individually responsible for implementation and financial reporting.

Where Para sport disciplines are governed through Competent National Branch Sport Associations, these federations also access public funding through the same annual programme mechanism. This means that public financing flows directly from the Ministry to recognised sport bodies rather than through a single intermediary institution.

At subnational level, Territorial Sports Associations and sport clubs may receive funding from local or regional government budgets. These allocations are managed independently from national funding

and vary across municipalities, which contributes to differences in local support for Para sport activities.

In addition, the Ministry of Sport announces an annual tender supporting the adaptation and construction of sports facilities to improve accessibility for persons with disabilities. Projects are submitted by local self-government units, evaluated by the Ministry, and implemented at local level.

Overall, Para sport financing in Serbia is structured through direct annual contracts between the Ministry and recognised sport organisations, combined with separate local-level funding and targeted accessibility tenders. This creates a formal national financing framework, but one in which local participation opportunities depend significantly on municipal funding capacity and variation across local authorities.

Coordination Mechanisms

National coordination of Para sport in Serbia is structured primarily through the Ministry of Sport's direct contractual relationships with recognised sport organisations. Each recognised Para sport body submits its own annual programme proposal and reports separately on implementation and use of public funds. This creates a coordination model in which the Ministry remains the central institutional anchor through programme approval, funding decisions, and reporting requirements.

Within this framework, the Paralympic Committee of Serbia (SPC) coordinates the Paralympic sport branches under its competence and serves as the main body for Serbia's participation in the Paralympic Movement. At the same time, certain Para sport disciplines are governed by Competent National Branch Sport Associations, meaning that coordination of sport-specific development is partly distributed across mainstream federations. In practice, this creates a mixed coordination model in which the SPC leads the Paralympic Movement while sport-specific development may be managed through different recognised organisations depending on the discipline.

The Ministry also maintains direct coordination links with other recognised disability sport bodies, including the Association of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Serbia, the National Sports Association for Blind and Visually Impaired in Serbia, and Special Olympics Serbia. Because funding agreements are concluded separately with each recognised entity, coordination occurs through parallel institutional relationships rather than through a single unified Para sport structure.

At subnational level, Territorial Sports Associations coordinate sport activities within their local jurisdictions and connect municipal sport structures with national sport organisations. Local self-government units also participate in coordination through their role in funding local sport activities and implementing programmes of public interest in sport.

In addition, Serbia has a cross-governmental disability coordination mechanism led through the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights. The Ministry of Sport participates in this interministerial structure, which addresses disability inclusion across multiple policy areas. This means that Para sport coordination is linked not only to the sport system but also to a broader horizontal disability policy framework.

Data Collection

No unified national portal consolidating Para sport participation data has been identified in Serbia. Available information is held primarily by the Ministry of Sport, the Paralympic Committee of Serbia, and recognised sport associations for operational, programme, and funding purposes.

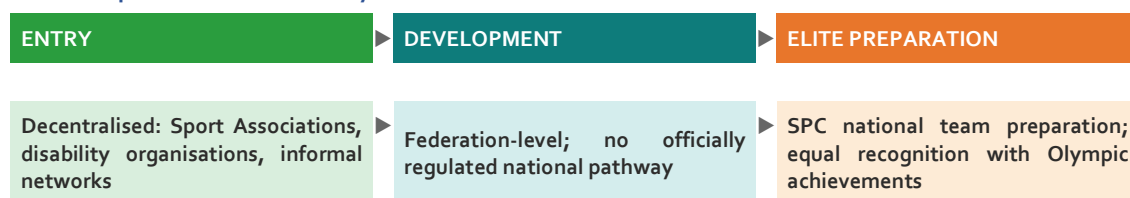
The commonly cited figures on Para sport participation reflect registered athletes within organised sport structures rather than total participation of persons with disabilities in sport. These figures should therefore be understood as administrative records of competitive and organised participation, not as a comprehensive measure of overall sport engagement among persons with disabilities in the country.

Recreational and informal participation is not systematically monitored at national level. Data disaggregated by disability type, age, region, or level of participation is not consolidated within a single national system, and publicly available statistics remain limited. As a result, existing participation figures provide only a partial picture of Para sport activity in Serbia.

Monitoring is conducted mainly through programme evaluation and reporting procedures linked to public funding. Recognised sport organisations submit annual programme proposals and financial plans to the Ministry, which evaluates these submissions and requires implementation reporting under separate funding agreements. This creates a reporting-based monitoring system focused on funded activities rather than a unified participation database.

At local level, Territorial Sports Associations report to the local administrations that finance them rather than to the Ministry of Sport. Local-level data therefore does not automatically feed into a consolidated national picture, which limits the ability to track participation trends, identify geographic disparities, and assess the overall reach of Para sport programmes.

Participation Pathway



⚠ Transition Gap: No officially defined or standardised athlete pathway exists in Serbian Para sport. Progression depends largely on the specific sport and its level of development.

Entry

Entry into Para sport in Serbia is decentralised and varies by sport. Recruitment occurs through sport associations, disability-related social organisations, and informal networks. No structured national referral pathway links schools, rehabilitation settings, and sport organisations. The Disability Sport Association of Serbia was intended to strengthen grassroots recruitment, but capacity and membership constraints have limited its practical role.

Development

Progression pathways are determined at the level of individual sport federations. No officially regulated national athlete development pathway exists that defines stages, responsibilities, and support mechanisms from grassroots participation to elite performance. As a result, athlete development pathways are largely developed on a case-by-case basis and tailored individually within specific sport disciplines.

Elite Preparation

The SPC supports high-performance athletes through national team preparation. Paralympic achievements are formally recognised on equal terms with Olympic achievements, and athletes with disabilities are granted the same rights, recognition, and support conditions as Olympic athletes within the national sports system. Legal parity between Olympic and Paralympic athletes in prizes and state recognition is a feature shared with Portugal and represents a strong normative foundation by European standards.

Coach qualification requirements are governed by the Law on Sport and accompanying rulebooks, which apply equally to Olympic and Paralympic sport. Coaches working in Para sport must obtain the same type of licence required for the corresponding mainstream sport discipline.

Transition Gap

Recruitment into Para sport and elite preparation structures exist, but a clearly defined progression pathway connecting grassroots participation, structured athlete development, and national team preparation is not formally established. As a result, movement from entry-level participation to elite competition depends largely on discipline-specific initiatives rather than a coordinated national athlete development system.

Key Challenges

Despite the presence of a functioning institutional framework, several structural and operational challenges continue to affect the development of Para sport in Serbia.

Structural system constraints

- Public funding for Para sport is structured at national level, but local support varies significantly between municipalities. This contributes to unequal conditions for clubs and affects the development of grassroots participation across different parts of the country.
- Local clubs and some associations face capacity constraints, relying heavily on volunteers and lacking sufficient professional management and administrative support. These limitations reduce their ability to sustain programmes, recruit participants, and support athlete progression.

Participation barriers

- Grassroots recruitment remains weak and depends largely on sport-specific initiatives, disability organisations, and informal networks. The absence of a structured national referral mechanism linking schools, rehabilitation services, and sport organisations limits systematic entry into Para sport.
- Participation of women with disabilities remains low. Contributing factors include limited visibility of female Para sport athletes, weak targeted outreach, and the general capacity constraints of local clubs and organisations.

Athlete pathway constraints

- No clearly defined national athlete development pathway exists specifying progression stages, institutional responsibilities, and support mechanisms from grassroots participation to elite sport. As a result, athlete development depends largely on discipline-specific arrangements and the organisational capacity of individual federations.
- Declining athlete numbers can be observed in some Para sport disciplines, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of the athlete pipeline and the adequacy of transition mechanisms between development and elite levels.

Institutional capacity constraints

- Differences in capacity across federations and local sport structures affect the consistency of Para sport development between disciplines. In practice, some sports are better able to organise recruitment, training, and competition pathways than others.

Monitoring and coordination issues

- Serbia does not maintain a unified national monitoring system consolidating participation data across Para sport. Existing figures reflect registered athletes within organised sport structures, while recreational participation, local-level trends, and broader participation patterns are not systematically captured.
- Coordination within the system remains complex because responsibilities are distributed across the Ministry, the Paralympic Committee of Serbia, recognised disability sport bodies, branch federations, territorial associations, and municipalities. This can make the overall governance structure difficult to navigate and may reduce coherence in athlete development and participation planning.

Opportunities

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

- The forthcoming National Sport Development Strategy 2026–2035 provides an important policy window for addressing structural issues in Para sport, including governance clarity, athlete development pathways, and participation targets. The involvement of disability sport

organisations in the drafting process creates an opportunity to ensure that Para sport priorities are more clearly reflected in the next strategic framework.

- Serbia's programme-based financing system managed by the Ministry of Sport provides an existing administrative structure through which recognised Para sport organisations submit annual programmes, receive funding, and report on implementation. This framework could support more coordinated development planning across recognised bodies and sport disciplines.
- The formal equality of recognition between Olympic and Paralympic achievements within the national sports system provides a strong institutional basis for strengthening the status, visibility, and support of Para sport athletes.
- The network of Territorial Sports Associations, sport clubs, and municipal sport programmes provides an existing local structure that could be used more effectively to widen grassroots participation and strengthen entry points into Para sport.
- The current reporting and monitoring procedures linked to Ministry funding provide a starting point for improving national monitoring of Para sport participation and activities, if coordination between the Ministry, recognised sport organisations, and local structures is strengthened.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1.

The Ministry of Sport, in cooperation with the Paralympic Committee of Serbia, recognised disability sport bodies, and Competent National Branch Sport Associations: develop and formally adopt a national Para sport athlete development pathway defining progression stages from grassroots participation to elite competition and clarifying institutional roles at each stage.

Recommendation 2.

The Ministry of Sport, in cooperation with recognised Para sport organisations, local self-government units, and community services:

establish more structured referral and recruitment mechanisms linking schools, rehabilitation settings, disability organisations, and sport clubs in order to strengthen grassroots entry into Para sport.

Recommendation 3.

The Paralympic Committee of Serbia, in cooperation with branch federations and relevant disability sport bodies: conduct a structured analysis of declining athlete numbers in affected Para sport disciplines and use the findings to strengthen athlete pipeline development.

Recommendation 4.

The Paralympic Committee of Serbia, in cooperation with recognised sport federations and disability sport organisations: develop targeted outreach and recruitment measures aimed at increasing the participation of women and girls with disabilities and introduce systematic collection of gender-disaggregated participation data.

Recommendation 5.

The Ministry of Sport and local self-government units:

promote more balanced local funding arrangements for Para sport clubs and programmes in order to reduce disparities in access to participation opportunities between municipalities.

Recommendation 6.

The Ministry of Sport, in cooperation with the Paralympic Committee of Serbia, recognised federations, and Territorial Sports Associations:

develop targeted capacity-building measures for local clubs and associations focusing on organisational management, programme delivery, and athlete support.

Recommendation 7.

The Ministry of Sport, in cooperation with recognised sport organisations and local administrations:

strengthen coordination of Para sport monitoring and reporting in order to improve the availability of national data on participation, local trends, and programme reach.

Recommendation 8.**Disability sport organisations and Para sport stakeholders:**

actively engage in the development of the National Sport Development Strategy 2026-2035 to ensure that Para sport priorities, participation objectives, and governance needs are explicitly reflected in the new strategy and action plan.

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