



Championing Inclusivity: Saudi Arabia's Path to Para-Sports Excellence

 portas

February 2023

Current situation

The last 2 years have been marked with **positive initiatives** and strong **government commitment** to boost para-sports in Saudi

► Saudi Vision 2030, the Quality of Life Program, and the Fakher Program Initiative

In line with Saudi Vision 2030's emphasis on promoting healthy living through sports and physical activity for all, the government has shown a commitment to developing the para-sport ecosystem and making sports inclusive to all.

The Quality of Life Program, a cornerstone of the vision, prioritizes the well-being of individuals and families, with the goal of creating a supportive environment for para-sports and athletes.

Under the Quality of Life Program sits The Fakher

Program Initiative (under the Ministry of Sports), launched in 2021 and dedicated to providing adaptive sports opportunities for those with special needs through training camps and competitions both locally and abroad. Multiple training camps have already been organized in Holland, Spain and Poland.

These initiatives align with the International Olympic Committee's push for more inclusive sports participation through the Olympic Agenda 2020+5.

► The SOPC Merger

In 2022, the Saudi Olympic Committee and Saudi Paralympic Committee merged to become the Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee (SOPC), highlighting the commitment to the inclusion and equality between athletes with disabilities and

abled-bodies. Alongside this, 5 new Para-Federations were formed, while 14 federations absorbed new para-sport mandates, with dedicated funding to be allocated.

Saudi Arabian Para-Sports has **medaled at every Paralympics since 2008**

► Paralympic Achievements



01
gold



02
silver



02
bronze



2008

The Saudi Arabian Paralympic Team has medalled in every edition of the Paralympics since 2008, accumulating 1 gold, 2 silver, and 2 bronze medals.

1996



Since 1996, Saudi Arabia has sent a total of **29** athletes across **7** editions.

Current situation

While progress has been made, there are still **obstacles that impact the growth of para-sports**, including a small pool of athletes, limited facilities and shortage of specialized workforce

There is an opportunity to enhance the current understanding, recognition, and education surrounding para-sports, both among disabled people and the wider public, to raise awareness of the sporting opportunities available and increase recognition of para-sports

The para-federations, federations with para-sports mandates and SOPC, being newly established, currently have limitations in capability and capacity to fully fulfil the development of para-sports

There is room for growth in terms of providing accessible, para-sport-friendly infrastructure throughout the kingdom



There are currently challenges in communication among key stakeholders in the local ecosystem, including federations, para-clubs, SOPC, healthcare providers, non-profits, and schools, as established communication channels and processes are currently lacking

There are currently challenges in terms of specialized workforce and adequate capacity to effectively support and develop para-athletes at all levels, from the grassroot to elite stages

A vision for the future

Imagine a future where the current challenges have been overcome, and a **thriving and dynamic Saudi para-sports ecosystem is flourishing**

Saudi Arabia: An example of a connected, innovative, and inclusive para-sports ecosystem, sparking inspiration for all.



A visionary national philosophy for para-sports

A published ambition and direction for para-sports, guided by the SOPC, lighting the way towards a brighter future for all those involved in para-sports and beyond



Dynamic initiatives from key para-sports stakeholders

Innovative para-sport initiatives, cutting-edge infrastructure, exciting activations, and state-of-the-art technology coming to life, pushing the boundaries of what is possible in para-sports



Unparalleled excellence in para-sports promotion and education

Powerful para-sports messaging and education inspiring the public to fully embrace and believe in the transformative power of para-sports

► A regional leader in multiple para-sports segments, especially excelling in:

High Performance

A Saudi Paralympic team consistently ranking among the top medal winners in regional competitions and bringing home multiple medals from the Paralympics:

Regular top 3 medalling country at the Asian Para Games

Regular top 20 medalling country at the Paralympics

Growing contingent of athletes participating in the Asian Para Games and Paralympics

Mass Participation

A world leader in para-sports for disabled people, where mass participation thrives, and facilities are readily accessible to the local community:

One of the highest physical activity rates among disabled people, globally

World leading ratio of number of para-sports programs per disabled person

Among the global leaders for variety of para-sport programs on offer by discipline and audience

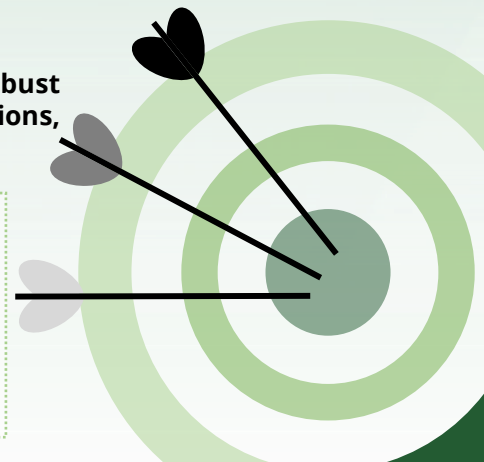
Workforce

A dedicated and skilled para-sport workforce, backed by robust training programs, diversity initiatives, and world-class certifications, setting the standard for excellence in the region

Region leading number of coaches and referees specialized in para-sports

Region leading representation of disabled people in para-sports federations and senior sporting positions

An extensive para-sport coach education program offering courses and certifications for all coaching levels, as well as tailored courses for specific para-sport disciplines



The way forward for Saudi Para-Sports

Building on the current state of para-sports in Saudi and lessons from top-performing nations, **targeted steps can be taken** to drive forward progress

01 Create distinct roles and responsibilities for key para-sports stakeholders and set-up formal communication channels

To avoid overlapping or conflicting agendas, key stakeholders in Saudi para-sports should have their own distinct set of roles and responsibilities. To implement this, a series of meetings could be set up to attract buy-in, and definitively allocate roles and responsibilities for stakeholders such as the SOPC, the national federations, the para-clubs, the Ministry of Sports, Quality of Life, the Ministry of Education (schools), charities, and the Ministry of Health.

In addition, formal communication channels should be implemented to ensure effective coordination and communication. For example, a taskforce could be created with representatives from key stakeholders that meet regularly to provide updates and raise challenges. An example set up could see SOPC chair the task force, while sub-groups could be formed for stakeholders with similar priorities.

02 Ensure every stakeholder has a tangible, action oriented plan for developing their portion of Saudi Para-sports

Achieving comprehensive para-sports ecosystem development requires a collective approach from all stakeholders, each with their own strategy and KPIs. For example, Paralympics NZ have a 10-year plan for New Zealand focusing heavily on improving public recognition and developing the elite pathway with specific KPIs for monitoring.

As an umbrella, an overarching philosophy should connect all efforts, like the US Olympic & Paralympic Committee's inclusion of both Olympic and Paralympic ambitions in their vision.

Key components and initiatives to actualize the vision could include:

Workforce

Create a para-sports coaching accreditation accessible to all coaches e.g., Norway have a mandatory trainer's certificate that all coaches must obtain

Implement D&I measures to create more inclusive opportunities for disabled people in sports e.g., the US use diversity scores to measure representation in federation senior management

Funding

Create a para-sport development fund for federations and para-clubs to utilize for additional para-sport initiatives e.g., Norway have a SAR 11m fund for this purpose

Ensure base funding is given to federations to run core operations and attain basic capabilities e.g., Canada have a dedicated fund for training para-sport coaches

Mass Participation

Develop a para-sports school program to ensure disabled children have access to participation opportunities e.g., pre-Paralympics 2020, many Tokyo schools ran paralympic lessons and demonstrations to educate school children

Update existing sport facilities to be para-friendly and accessible through building codes

High Performance

Provide para-sports federations access to experts to develop their para-offering and a clear pathway
Equalize Olympic and Paralympic support to encourage disabled people to continue in sports e.g., the US award equal prize money to Olympians and Paralympians

Education & Promotion

Run inclusivity training open to public that raises awareness and capabilities for engaging with disabled people as done by New Zealand's Halberg Foundation

Partner with television broadcasters to increase visibility of para-sports competition e.g., UK's Channel 4 has significantly improved the perception of para-sports in the UK through its Superhumans promotion campaign of Team GB para-athletes over 10 years

The way forward for Saudi Para-Sports

Building on the current state of para-sports in Saudi and lessons from top-performing nations, **targeted steps can be taken** to drive forward progress

03 Prioritize initiatives that break down existing barriers in para-sports for long-term, sustainable growth

Accelerate development by targeting critical barriers by prioritizing initiatives that tackle present challenges and lay a solid foundation for long-lasting growth. This is to ensure resources are allocated efficiently and are directed to

initiatives that make the highest impact.

There are various approaches that can be taken to this, two examples are:

Example 1: 100-Day Plan

A 100-day plan approach can be taken to encourage speed and efficiency to roll out new plans and initiatives across all components.

Example initiatives to prioritize could include:

- **Designing a national education program** to shift public perception of disability and articulate the benefits of para-sports
- **Developing a para-workforce capability development program** for all current staff working in para-sports to attend
- **Developing a para-sports infrastructure masterplan** to increase supply of para-facilities to meet demand

Example 2: Prioritisation per key component

Prioritisation can be done per key component to ensure efficient first steps are taken in each area to collectively build up offerings across all components. Initiatives can be rolled out in phases based on a criteria of factors such as impact and resources required.

Two example phases for the workforce component could be:

- **Phase 1:** Develop coaching accreditation to ensure all current coaches are quickly equipped with para-sport skills
- **Phase 2:** Once the core para-sport workforce is established, focus on improving D&I in the workplace using D&I scorecards

04 Ensure federations are given ample support and are incentivized to develop para-sports within their own disciplines

As federations have recently absorbed new para-mandates or have been recently established, it is important that they receive sufficient support to develop their capacity and capability. In addition, it is crucial to incentivize these federations to

invest into para-sports or many may only do the bare minimum and focus on able-bodied sports instead.

Potential support mechanisms could include:

Core Support

Support provided to federations to meet basic needs to operate their para-sports mandate

For example:

- **Base Fund:** Base fund that all federations receive to fund core para-activities *e.g., operations, infrastructure*
- **Expertise Network:** Create an SOPC expertise network to provide federations with access to para-experts when needed

Additional Support

Additional support provided that incentivizes federations to invest further into para-sports.

For example:

- **Innovation Fund:** A fund for para-sport innovation projects that federations can propose projects to access
- **Subsidies:** Cost relief provided to federations for certain activities or programs aligned to national priority areas of para-sports

References

In addition to **expert consultations**, several para-sports and sports organizations were **benchmarked**

	Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports		Canadian Paralympic Committee
	Olympiatoppen		Sport for Life Canada
	United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee		Coaching Association of Canada
	Sport New Zealand		Coaching Association of Canada
	Paralympics New Zealand		Halberg Foundation
	Japanese Paralympic Committee		UK Sport
	Nippon Foundation Para Sport Support Centre		



About Portas

We are the leading global strategy consultancy dedicated to sport and physical activity. Our mission is to help our clients harness the power of sport and physical activity for the benefit of all. Over the past 15 years, we have served leaders and decision makers across the sports sector, including federations, license holders, clubs, corporates, charities and governments. We have a team of nearly 100 consultants based out of regional offices in London, Dubai, Riyadh and Singapore. Please reach out to any of the names below for further information.

Contacts:



Patrick Raupach, Partner
Public Sector Practice Leader
 praupach@portasconsulting.com



Zineb Soulami, Project Manager
Sport Strategy and Transformation
 zsoulami@portasconsulting.com