

# Equivalent and inclusive

Advice on the continued  
development of Paralympic sport





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# Foreword

At the request of the Minister for Sport, the Netherlands Sports Council has taken a closer look at Paralympic sport, with the key issue being how Paralympic sport can be developed further and what role the Dutch government can play in this regard.

Over the course of the process, it became clear to the Council that Paralympic athletes are role models. These sportsmen and women show society what it means to push boundaries and participate in society. Their elite athletic achievements, accomplished with their disability, place them among the best athletes in the world, making Paralympic athletes a source of inspiration for people both with and without a disability.

At the same time, an awful lot can still be achieved for Paralympic athletes. Much remains to be done before they reach the same position as their Olympic counterparts. European and world championships for Paralympic sport are unknown to the general public and are rarely held during regular championships. Outside of the Paralympics, there is little media coverage of Paralympic sports. In addition, the Paralympic Games are held long after all the Olympic athletes have returned home.

The Netherlands Sports Council is advocating change. The Council envisages a future in which the performances of Paralympic and Olympic athletes are appreciated and recognised on the same terms. The first steps in this direction have already been taken in the Netherlands. The organisational integration of Paralympic sports at NOC\*NSF (Dutch Olympic Committee\*Sports Federation) and the sports federations has in any case contributed to the realisation of equal facilities for Paralympic sports. However, the Netherlands Sports Council also recognises that an additional step is needed to achieve an equivalent position for Paralympic athletes. This step is the key focus of the advice on the continued development of Paralympic sport. Furthermore, the Netherlands Sports Council has set itself the goal of ultimately achieving integrated competition for Paralympic and Olympic athletes. In order to achieve this, the Council recommends that the Minister take the lead and make the Netherlands a model for other countries.

The Netherlands Sports Council took an interactive approach to carrying out this analysis, with consultations with experts, stakeholders, Paralympic athletes and coaches leading to enrichment, debate and support. The Council would like to thank all its interlocutors for their input. The knowledge and experiences they shared with us have been invaluable to this advice. Finally, the Netherlands Sports Council wishes to thank the members of the Advisory Committee. This advice would not have come about without their expertise, commitment and discussions.

Michael van Praag, chair of the Netherlands Sports Council



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# Summary

The position of Paralympic sport should be just as mature and robust as that of Olympic sport. At present, the position of Paralympic sport is on parity with Olympic sport, but it should become fully equivalent. This could eventually lead to inclusive elite sport for people with and without disabilities. This is the Netherlands Sports Council's recommendation to the Minister for Sport. The Minister has requested that the Council provide an advice, including on the role that the Dutch government can take up in terms of the further development of Paralympic sport. The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister take a leading role and take steps to make the Netherlands a model for other countries.

The Netherlands Sports Council has used the prospect of an inclusive society as the goal on the horizon to guide this advice. In an inclusive society, people with a disability are not excluded from any avenue in life and feel that they are a fully-fledged part of society – on all fronts. In that light, the Council sees the inclusion of grassroots sports, elite sports and sports events for people both with and without disabilities as the ultimate objective.

### **Equivalence as the principal focus**

Before that objective can be achieved, however, the first priority is to work towards achieving an equivalent position for Paralympic sport. In its analysis, the Netherlands Sports Council has established that, in the Netherlands, Paralympic sport largely has access to similar facilities to those of Olympic sport. However, equal is not the same as equivalent. Equivalence means that specific facilities and provisions are available where necessary. The current lack of equivalence, for example, is manifested in the partially invisible funding streams for Paralympic sport. Other examples include the limited extent to which Paralympic sport is integrated in regular sporting events and the absence of media coverage outside of the Paralympic Games. As a result, there is a lack of broader public interest in Paralympic sport.

### **Shared vision and clear visibility within sport disciplines**

Over the past decades, the organisation of almost all disciplines of Paralympic sport has been delegated to regular sports federations and NOC\*NSF (Dutch Olympic Committee\*Sports Federation). On the one hand, Paralympic sport has been able to develop and grow as a result of this development, with the level of elite sports performance being elevated higher and higher. The Council believes that this focus on performance is part of elite sports. On the other hand, this development has also led to the disintegration of the network of experts. According to the Netherlands Sports Council, the position of Paralympic sport is currently too vulnerable and is too often dependent on a limited number of stakeholders within a sports discipline. As a result, there is no unified vision on the development of Paralympic sports that is shared by the parties within the sports industry. The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister for Sport take the initiative and engage in a dialogue with the industry and Paralympic athletes to develop a joint vision and approach.

## **From budding talent to Paralympic athletes**

The progression from grassroots or recreational sport to elite sport is limited in the Paralympic sports domain. A person who develops a disability in young adulthood will often already be familiar with sport, elite or otherwise. Talent recruitment days are an efficient instrument for the scouting of these types of athletes. However, children and young people who have lived with an impairment from an early age need more encouragement and motivation to make use of their athletic talent. The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister for Sport continue devoting attention to the athletic motivation of these children and young people and organise similar talent days for them.

## **Equivalent position of elite athletes**

The position of Paralympic athletes deserves earnest attention and focus. One aspect of this is the focus on their impairment. Paralympic athletes wish to be recognised and appreciated for their athletic performance rather than for 'being capable of performing with their disability'. The Netherlands Sports Council respects that wish, yet at the same time observes that the media and sponsors have a particular interest in the person behind the elite athletic achievement, be it Paralympic or Olympic. A physical or mental impairment is part of 'the person behind the achievement', being a specific aspect of the elite athlete. The Council sees no harm in highlighting this aspect, just as specific aspects of the lives of Olympic athletes are highlighted. By devoting attention to this aspect of the lives of Paralympic athletes, they can even set an example for others. The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that NOC\*NSF and the sports federations reflect on the ways in which the position of Paralympic athletes can be made equivalent. Equalising the prize money awarded to Olympic and Paralympic medallist athletes could constitute a key step in that direction.

## **Professionalisation of classification**

Classification in Paralympic sports raises many questions, due to the disorganised nature of classification and limited funding. Investment is required both at national and international level to professionalise classification. The recommendation of the Netherlands Sports Council is to set up a centralised support hub in the Netherlands for this. In addition, the Council recommends that the Minister for Sport work alongside the NOC\*NSF and the major sports federations to push for further professionalisation of classification at international level and the funding thereof. This is an endeavour that also requires an international support hub. The Netherlands Sports Council recognises that innovation is taking place within various sports to allow Paralympic athletes with varying degrees of impairment to compete with one another. The nature of a sport determines what is feasible, and it is vital that sports are open to alternative methods or rules.

## **Visibility in the media and at events**

Outside of the Paralympic Games, little attention is devoted to Paralympic sports – including on the part of the media. The Netherlands Sports Council believes that the government should take an additional step toward improving the visibility of Paralympic sports. The Council recommends that the State Secretary for Culture and Media supplement the list of events in the Media Act with Paralympic sporting events (such as world championships in athletics, wheelchair basketball or para cycling). Furthermore, the Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister for Sport invigorate inclusive elite sports events with subsidies. This will raise the appeal of Paralympic sport for a larger audience – a key example being the ABN AMRO World Tennis Tournament. The Netherlands will be able to act as a model for other countries in this regard.

### **Scientific and practical knowledge**

The Netherlands has a great deal of knowledge to offer that is of value to Paralympic sport. In addition, it has the capacity and knowledge infrastructure to impel innovation further. The Netherlands Sports Council similarly recommends that the Minister for Sport take a leading role in this regard. An equal position for Paralympic sport is crucial in this respect, for example, in relation to the allocation of research funds. Practical knowledge that is currently spread across the various federations could be aggregated at a support hub at the NOC\*NSF. In addition, the Council recommends that additional funds be invested in the knowledge function of the Knowledge Centre for Sport and Physical Activity for Paralympic sport.

### **The Netherlands as an international model country**

The Netherlands Sports Council believes that the Netherlands should use its position as an innovation leader to support other countries. For that reason, the Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister of Foreign Affairs work alongside NOC\*NSF to reflect on how Dutch citizens can take up more international positions in the domain of Paralympic sport. In addition, the Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in consultation with the Minister for Sport, make bilateral agreements with countries where sport for people with disabilities is still in its infancy.

### **Structural investments required**

Structural investment is needed to further develop Paralympic sport to ensure the transition from equality to equivalence and eventually integrated competition. This includes more resources for the professionalisation of classification, equivalent support for current and up-and-coming Paralympic athletes and the promotion and stimulation of Paralympic sports in elite sporting events. It should be noted that this relates to additional funds, meaning that the funds must not be allocated at the expense of existing funding in elite sport.



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# Introduction

# 1.1 Request for advice

The Minister for Sport has requested that the Netherlands Sports Council advise on the continued development of Paralympic sport – at both a national and international level.<sup>1</sup> The Minister currently believes there is momentum to give the development of Paralympic sport with an additional boost. In that context, the Minister has referred to recent developments, such as the preliminary agreement *Topsport die inspireert!* (Elite sport that inspires!) and the NOC\*NSF (Dutch Olympic Committee\*Sports Federation) vision on Paralympic sports.<sup>2</sup> The state of affairs surrounding the classification system and related social developments, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, national and international sports developments and technological developments, likewise play a key role in that regard. In particular, the Minister has requested that the Netherlands Sports Council advise on the role that the Dutch government can take up in further developing Paralympic sport.

Although the primary focus of this advice is on elite sport, the Netherlands Sports Council has also examined talent development and grassroots sport. Given that sport for people with disabilities is a relatively small domain, a robust and effective bridge between grassroots sport and elite sport is crucial. For that reason, where relevant, the Council has included grassroots sport in the scope of this advice.

# 1.2 An inclusive society

The Netherlands Sports Council has chosen to take a broader perspective with regard to the continued development of Paralympic sport. This perspective centres around an inclusive society in which all people, including those with disabilities, are able to take part to the fullest, including in grassroots sport and elite sport.

Achieving an inclusive society is a key social target for the government.<sup>3</sup> Since 2016, the Netherlands has been working on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>4</sup> People with disabilities should be able to participate in society according to their own needs and abilities – just like everyone else. This is precisely the objective of the *Onbeperkt meedoen!* (Unlimited Participation!) programme, which is a partnership between the central government, municipalities, businesses and organisations.<sup>5</sup> Leisure activities, including sport, are one of the key themes within the programme. The *National Sports Agreement* sets out measures for a range of sports facilities that are physically and socially more accessible.<sup>6</sup> Despite all of the attention devoted to the subject, there is a significant difference in participation in society between people with and without a disability.<sup>7</sup> This also applies to participation in sport and exercise.<sup>8</sup> In the Netherlands, people with disabilities still encounter exclusion or are disadvantaged in many domains. This exclusion is not a consequence of their impairment, but rather is related to the way in which society

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<sup>1</sup> [Request for advice on the further development of elite Paralympic sport | Letter | Netherlands Sports Council \(nederlandse-sportraad.nl\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [TeamNL Paralympic vision – NOCNSF](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Broad Societal Reconsideration 6 Inclusive Society | Report | Government.nl](#)

<sup>4</sup> [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities | Government.nl](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Unlimited Participation! programme | UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities | Government.nl](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Preliminary agreement on inclusive sports and exercise](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Vermeij & Hamelink \(2021\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Weekly participation in sport | Figures on sport and exercise](#)

is set up and goes beyond inaccessible buildings or overly high pavement kerbs. It is the cultural and social types of exclusion that require our attention. Exclusion often takes place unconsciously. As a result, no one will question it, and people with disabilities will even conform to it.<sup>9</sup> The Netherlands Sports Council has taken an inclusive society as the starting point for its analysis of Paralympic sport, which is a topic that relates to aspects such as equal opportunities, an equivalent position for Paralympic athletes and the degree of equal recognition and, where possible, full or partial inclusion of Paralympic sport in regular elite sport. Our review is based both on objective data and on the subjective perceptions and experiences of Paralympic athletes.

## 1.3 Advisory process approach

In response to the government's request for advice, the Netherlands Sports Council conducted an analysis of the state of affairs of elite and non-elite Paralympic sport and of the developments within and outside sport, including Paralympic sport.<sup>10</sup> The Council carried out its analysis based on the available literature and additional research carried out by Utrecht University into the climate surrounding Paralympic sport.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the Council conducted interviews and held four consultations with athletes, coaches, stakeholders and experts with involvement at both national and international level (see Appendix 2 for the report and Appendix 3 for the list of interviewees).

## 1.4 Structure of the document

Chapter 2 sets out the Council's analysis, which includes a number of sections that focus on the most pressing themes in Paralympic sport. The following issues are discussed in those sections: the national and international organisation and funding of Paralympic sport; the athletic career of Paralympic athletes and the ways in which it differs from that of Olympic athletes; the state of Paralympic classification; perception and media coverage; scientific developments in relation to Paralympic sports and the position of the Netherlands in an international context. In Chapter 3, the Netherlands Sports Council concludes that the analysis raises a number of questions about the future. These questions are defined by the Council, after which, following due consideration of the landscape as a whole, it sets out its vision on the further development of Paralympic sport. Chapter 4 contains the Council's recommendations on how to kick off the next stage of development of Paralympic sport in the direction of equivalence.

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<sup>9</sup> Discrimination and exclusion of people with a disability (referred to as ableism) takes on various forms and occurs at different levels, which are all interrelated (Den Brok-Rouwendaal, 2005):  
cultural ableism: negative perception (significance) of physical disabilities at a societal level, which legitimises the exclusion and marginalisation of people with disabilities;  
institutional ableism: denying or limiting access to social institutions, such as work, education, marriage and family, politics and science, on the basis of a physical disability, based on prevailing views on health and disability;  
interactional ableism: actual discrimination against people with a physical disability in everyday and functional relationships and interactions with people without a physical disability;  
internalised ableism: the conforming of the individual with a physical disability to the prevailing views and the resulting exclusion, as a result of which it is perceived as legitimate. Internal ableism is the result of socialisation or of the perceived inability to change one's own circumstances.

<sup>10</sup> [Netherlands Sports Council response to the request for advice on further development of Paralympic sport | Letter | Netherlands Sports Council \(nederlandse-sportraad.nl\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> Van der Roest (2021)

## 1.5 Definitions

This advice relates to Paralympic sport. To ensure a clear understanding of the advice, the Netherlands Sports Council uses a number of definitions, which partly build on definitions used in previous advisory processes.<sup>12</sup>

### Elite sport

Elite sport refers to athletes taking part in main tournaments and elite competitions at the highest level in an international context. This may relate to the Olympic and Paralympic Games, European or World Championships or other commercial or non-commercial tournaments, as is common, for example, in tennis, cycling, golf, automobile and motorsports and snowboarding. In many cases, a professional elite sports environment will be in place, and sport will be the elite athlete's principal activity. Elite sport contributes to the sporting experience through media coverage and events and therefore has crucial entertainment value. It is also a source of inspiration as well as a type of leisure activity for the general population.

### Paralympic sport

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has recognised 28 individual disciplines as Paralympic sports alongside 10 permanent and verifiable impairments (see Appendix 1 for a list), with athletes competing with a motor, vision or intellectual impairment. NOC\*NSF follows the IPC's recognition in terms of its own delineation of Paralympic sporting disciplines. In this advice, where the Dutch Sports Council uses the term 'Paralympic sport', this is used to refer to elite Paralympic sport.

### Non-Paralympic competition and elite sport

Forms of competitive and elite sport for people with disabilities that are not recognised as Paralympic sport and are not part of the Paralympic Games. Relevant examples include international tournaments and competitions for people with a hearing impairment or sports such as sailing or CP football.<sup>13</sup>

### Disability Sport

Disability sport refers to all sports, games and exercise activities for people with a disability or chronic condition considered to be a 'sports activity' by the general population of the Netherlands. This includes the organisation of these types of activities at associations, enterprising sports providers and care or rehabilitation centres, as well as the organisation of grassroots sporting events such as Special Olympics or the Invictus Games.

### Impairment, disability, handicap

In sports, the terms 'disability' and 'handicap' are both commonly used, although they are both dependent on the zeitgeist and on social developments. The Netherlands Sports Council uses both terms in this advice. The medical community, which includes rehabilitation, uses the terms impairment, disability and handicap. 'Impairments' relate to abnormalities at organ level, 'disabilities' are experienced by a person when performing activities and 'handicaps' relate to the social disadvantages that a person experiences as a result of health problems.

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<sup>12</sup> Netherlands Sports Council (2020b)

<sup>13</sup> CP stands for Cerebral Palsy, a condition resulting from brain damage.



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**Analysis of current  
state of affairs**

For the purposes of this advisory process, the Netherlands Sports Council conducted an analysis of the current state of science, commissioned research and interacted with experts and stakeholders by way of interviews and consultations. This chapter sets out the Council's analysis of the information obtained. The appendices include background information on the organisation and funding of Paralympic sport, a report of the consultations and an overview of the interviewees. The six key themes of the analysis are derived from the key areas of focus of the request for advice submitted by the Ministry and the priorities that were highlighted in the interviews and consultations.

## 2.1 Organisation and funding

### 2.1.1 Complex organisational structure at international level

At present, Paralympic sport consists of 28 individual sports disciplines (please see Appendix 1 for a list) and includes athletes with motor, visual and mental impairments. Not all athletes with these impairments can compete in the Paralympic Games: the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has designated ten eligible impairments, all of which have in common that they are verifiable and permanent in nature. In addition, Minimum Impairment Criteria have been established for each discipline. Athletes with other disabilities, or who are disabled in another way, such as athletes with a hearing impairment, are not part of Paralympic sport and do not participate in the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games.

From 2026, the IPC aims to focus solely on its leadership of Paralympic Movement, its supervision of the Paralympic Games and supporting its membership.<sup>14</sup> The IPC's vision states that it aims to promote inclusion in society through Parasport.<sup>15</sup> The recent #WeThe15 campaign, which is an initiative organised by a variety of organisations, including the IPC, centres around people with disabilities asserting that they do not want to be superheroes; they simply want to participate, fulfil their potential and be part of society.<sup>16</sup> The objective is to foster a society in which people both with and without disabilities can live side by side. Achieving this, however, will first require a firm commitment to ensuring greater awareness and visibility of people with disabilities. The question is whether Paralympic sport has already reached that point. International experts have stated that the position and organisation of the IPC is not yet robust enough for it to be integrated into the IOC from an organisational standpoint.

International sports federations are responsible for the technical organisation of a specific branch of a sport, with responsibilities ranging from promoting sport to elite sport. The federations are free in their choice of elite sports disciplines and in organising associated events that are not offered at the Paralympic Games. In addition, they are able to hold such events for athletes with other disabilities or who are disabled to a different degree.

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<sup>14</sup> The national Paralympic committees, international sports federations, international organisations of sport for the disabled (IOSDs), regional organisations and the athletes (please also see [2020\\_10 Governance Review\\_EN.indd \(paralympic.org\)](#))

<sup>15</sup> [About Us \(paralympic.org\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> [#WeThe15 – A movement for an inclusive world.](#)

The international federations for Paralympic sport are diverse in terms of their structure. Some have their origins in organisations for people with a disability, whereas others are part of the mainstream international sports federation. There are also others that have set up an independent sports federation for their branch of Paralympic sport. At present, ten sports are still organised directly under the banner of the IPC (please see Table 1 in the Appendix).<sup>17</sup> The aim is for these sports to become independent from 2026 through the establishment of their own dedicated international federation or by way of integration into conventional sports federations. The Netherlands Sports Council believes that this autonomisation offers promising opportunities for the further development of international Paralympic sport. The Council has also identified risks, however. If organisational integration is supervised too lightly, the focus on Paralympic sport within the major sports federations may fall by the wayside. In the next few years, it should become clear whether international federations (such as the international ski federation (FIS), athletic federation (IAAF) and swimming federation (FINA)) wish to include Paralympic sport as a component. A key area of focus within this process is achieving an equivalent position for Paralympic sport. This also includes safeguarding specific knowledge, such as regarding the classification system.

Collaboration in the organisation of the Paralympic and the Olympic Games has undergone major development in recent decades. Countries that currently wish to bid are bound by the 'One Bid, One City' agreement.<sup>18</sup> This means that they agree to host the event in a single country, at the same location and with the same organising committee. Its purpose is to raise the public and commercial profile of the Paralympic Games and secure more income for the IPC.<sup>19</sup>

Based on its review, the Netherlands Sports Council has concluded that this complex structure within Paralympic sport – more so than in regular sport – hinders any coordination regarding further international development. One key example is the organisation of events and the marketing of such events. The involvement of various parties, each with their own rules, makes collaboration more difficult. The Council believes that both development within international sports federations and the organisation of the Games in a city offer significant opportunities for the further development of Paralympic sport. However, the Council has established that taking an *equal* approach to elite Olympic and Paralympic sport will not necessarily result in an *equivalent* position for Paralympic sport.

### 2.1.2 The Netherlands: organisational integration

In the Netherlands, virtually all forms of sport for people with a disability, including Paralympic sport, have been integrated into regular sports organisations from an organisational standpoint in recent decades.<sup>20</sup> The Netherlands Sports Council notes that sport is currently the principal focus, which has contributed to the further development of disability sport in general and Paralympic sport in particular. At the same time, the Council notes that the pendulum may have swung too far the other way.<sup>21</sup> The integration of disability sport has resulted in the network of experts, administrators, policy officers and implementation becoming fragmented across various sports organisations. The Council has concluded that no structure has been set up to maintain and support this network. The Netherlands Sports Council regards this aspect as a weakness to any further development.

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<sup>17</sup> In the Netherlands, these ten sports, with the exception of para ice hockey, are organisationally integrated with the relevant sports federations.

<sup>18</sup> 2: Historic 'One Bid, One City' agreement ([paralympic.org](https://www.paralympic.org))

<sup>19</sup> Pankiwak (2020)

<sup>20</sup> Van der Poel (2008)

<sup>21</sup> Please also see Notté et al. (2011)

A number of types of sport for people with a disability have not yet been fully integrated or have not yet been integrated at all: Special Olympics, the Royal Dutch Deaf Sports Federation (KNDSB) and the sports that are currently still organised by Disability Sports Netherlands (Gehandicaptensport Nederland, boccia, goalball, wheelchair rugby and para ice hockey) still have their own structures. This means that they do not receive equal support in certain areas. The Council notes that Disability Sports Netherlands still principally retains the role of representative, which role is focused mainly on grassroots sports. There is no effective advocacy for Paralympic sport. The regular sports federations have insufficient capacity to reserve the required time or build up the required expertise.

### 2.1.3 Government policy on Paralympic and disability sports

At national level, the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport administers policy on elite sport, including Paralympic sport. However, the Ministry does not have a specific remit, statutory or otherwise, in the area of sport or elite sport including Paralympic sport. Central Government has linked its sports policy to the *National Sports Agreement*.<sup>22</sup> Two of the six preliminary agreements focus on disability sport, including on Paralympic sport. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport finances a large part of commercial and non-commercial elite sport and does not impose any requirements on what percentage must be allocated to Paralympic sport.

The preliminary agreement *Topsport die inspireert!* aims to inspire as many Dutch citizens as possible through elite sport, including Paralympic sport.<sup>23</sup> In addition, this preliminary agreement sets out the Netherlands' ambition to be an innovation leader in the area of Paralympic sport. Six key projects have been identified to realise a greater degree of focus and control in the implementation of the preliminary agreement.<sup>24</sup> Focus on Paralympic sport is implicit in these six key projects, which may be an expression of organisational integration. For the Netherlands Sports Council, it does raise the question as to whether this will result in Paralympic sport receiving equivalent attention.

Most provinces and municipalities similarly do not devote specific attention to Paralympic talent development and elite sport.<sup>25</sup> The province of Gelderland, however, is an exception and is home to the *Uniek Groot Worden* (Growing Up to Be Unique) programme, which focuses on development of Paralympic talent.<sup>26</sup> The Council concludes that Paralympic sport generally lacks visibility in national and regional government policy. In ideal terms, this should mean that Paralympic sport is fully integrated and receives attention, preferably equivalent attention. However, the Netherlands Sports Council recognises that Paralympic sport falling by the wayside in policy and its implementation remains a key risk.

The aim of the preliminary agreement *Inclusief sporten en bewegen* (Inclusive sports and exercise) is to reach all Dutch citizens who have to make more of an effort to make use of existing sports facilities due to physical, intellectual or social reasons.<sup>27</sup> Including inclusive sports in regular sports facilities is an explicit objective of national government policy, as well as that of the municipalities and the sports sector, with regard to grassroots sports. The Council believes it is vital that all target groups, including vulnerable people, are able

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<sup>22</sup> The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, the Netherlands Association of Sports and Municipalities (VSG) & NOC\*NSF (2018)

<sup>23</sup> [Elite sport that inspires! – Sports Agreement](#)

<sup>24</sup> Balk & Pulles (2021)

<sup>25</sup> Reitsma & Hoekman (2019); Van Suijlekom & Dopheide (2021)

<sup>26</sup> [Growing Up to Be Unique allows Gelderland athletic talent with a disability to grow – Gelderland Sports Agreement](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Preliminary agreement in brief – Sports Agreement](#)

to participate in sports and exercise.<sup>28</sup> As a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, the Dutch government is also obliged to ensure that people with disabilities are able to take part in sports and exercise according to their own needs and abilities. This preliminary agreement is essential to Paralympic sport in that it serves to strengthen progression from participation in sport to elite sport via talent development (please also see §2.2).

Implementation of this preliminary agreement is taking place primarily at regional level and involves reliance on the existing regional partnerships of *Grenzeloos actief* (Unbounded activity). Many local stakeholders, such as sports associations, municipalities and district sports coaches, have indicated that they are relatively unfamiliar with the sports needs and requirements of people with a disability.<sup>29</sup> The Council notes that this matching up of supply and demand remains a key issue (please also see §2.2).

Finally, the Council concludes that the *National Sports Agreement* is set to end in 2022. Paralympic sport requires clarity in the short term regarding the securing of funds, and the parties in the regional partnerships for disability sport and talent development likewise stand to benefit from clarity in the short term.

#### 2.1.4 Organisation and funding of Paralympic sport in the Netherlands

NOC\*NSF and the sports federations jointly organise and finance Olympic and Paralympic sport in the Netherlands (please also see Appendix 1.3).<sup>30</sup> NOC\*NSF is responsible for the participation of Dutch athletes in the Olympic and Paralympic Games and allocates the funds received from the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, the National Lottery, the IOC and partners among the sports federations. These resources are referred to as the collective funds. The funding parties do not earmark the funds for specific allocation.

The sports federations are responsible for the talent programme, organising the national selection and the participation of athletes in international competitions, including European and world championships. This is an aspect that the federations invest in independently, using membership contributions, sponsorship revenue and the collective funds allocated to them by NOC\*NSF. Within the federations, the organisation of disability sport and Paralympic sport is assigned to professionals in some instances and to volunteers in others. A number of federations do not have structural policy focus in place for this target group. Sports federations have indicated that they have insufficient manpower and funds to tackle this issue.<sup>31</sup> This was already a problem in 2011.<sup>32</sup> This has therefore remained a key area of focus over the past ten years.

NOC\*NSF recognises all Olympic and Paralympic disciplines as elite sport as designated by the IOC and the IPC.<sup>33</sup> In the Netherlands, 26 Paralympic sports are recognised as elite sport.<sup>34</sup> In addition, NOC\*NSF recognises a number of non-Olympic sports (such as korfbal, motorsport and draughts) as elite or competitive sports. A key condition is that the international sports federation should organise a

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<sup>28</sup> Netherlands Sports Council (2021b)

<sup>29</sup> De Jonge et al. (2021), Gutter & Van Lindert (2020)

<sup>30</sup> Over the past decade, achieving the top 10 was the principal goal. Since the end of 2021, NOC\*NSF and the sports federations have been exploring the opportunities of a new sports agenda for 2032, which will devote more attention to the social value of elite sport. Please also see the PowerPoint presentation ([nocnsf.nl](https://nocnsf.nl))

<sup>31</sup> Gutter et al. (2021a)

<sup>32</sup> Notté et al. (2011)

<sup>33</sup> Provisional regulations for Elite sports programmes ([nocnsf.nl](https://nocnsf.nl))

<sup>34</sup> Dancesport and canoeing, however, are recognised as Paralympic sport by the IPC but are not recognised as elite sport in the Netherlands.

world championship in which a minimum number of countries take part.<sup>35</sup> NOC\*NSF does not do this for non-Paralympic sports (such as CP football or sailing), which are not recognised as elite or competitive sports. The Council notes that policy in respect of non-Paralympic elite sport differs from that for non-Olympic elite sport, as a result of which non-Paralympic elite sport is excluded from government and other funding and facilities.

In order to claim collective funds, a sports discipline must be recognised as an elite or competitive sport, after which the technical director of the sports federation can submit a plan for a contribution to the funding and implementation of the elite sports or training programme. The NOC\*NSF General Assembly, in which all federations are represented, is responsible for formulating the criteria for the allocation of the budget. Based on those criteria, the NOC\*NSF Board, following consultation with a committee of experts, decides on the actual allocation. All recognised Olympic, Paralympic and non-Olympic sports draw on the same budget to fund elite sports and training programmes,<sup>36</sup> meaning that the various sports effectively compete against one another.

In 2021, 15 of the 26 Paralympic sports received funding for their elite sports or training programme. Of the total budget of 33 million euros, roughly 11% went to Paralympic sport, which percentage has remained constant since 2016.<sup>37</sup> The Netherlands Sports Council concludes that, within this setup, the technical directors and NOC\*NSF play a key role in deciding which proportion of the funds is allocated to Olympic, non-Olympic and Paralympic elite sport. In addition, the General Assembly is crucial in terms of the decision to include or exclude non-Paralympic elite sports.

As a result of organisational integration, the decision-making process regarding Paralympic and non-Paralympic elite sports has become an internal matter for the sports federations and NOC\*NSF. There are no external representatives when it comes to putting Paralympic or non-Paralympic elite sport on the agenda. In addition, the Netherlands Sports Council concludes that, more so than in the case of Olympic sport, Paralympic sport often involves small units at both sports federations and NOC\*NSF, with a single person or a small number of persons being responsible for both the content and the implementation of the elite sport programmes. The Netherlands Sports Council has identified a lack of control (four-eyes principle) as a risk in that regard, which may lead to undesirable situations, such as abuses of power.<sup>38</sup> In addition, as a result of their disabilities or their experiences in society, Paralympic athletes may be more vulnerable than other elite athletes.<sup>39</sup>

In the report entitled *De Fitheid van de sport* (The Fitness of the Sport), the Netherlands Sports Council concluded that NOC\*NSF and the sports federations are largely dependent on government funds and on gambling for the execution of elite sports programmes.<sup>40</sup> This also applies to Paralympic sport. In the absence of a statutory remit for government, the funding of elite sport is vulnerable. Furthermore, the

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<sup>35</sup> [Provisional regulations for Elite sports programmes \(nocnsf.nl\)](#)

<sup>36</sup> [NOC\\*NSF elite sports policy – NOCNSF](#)

<sup>37</sup> [Van der Roest \(2021\)](#)

<sup>38</sup> [The study on elite sports culture in the Netherlands, which was initiated in the autumn of 2021, also focuses on elite Paralympic sport \(Large-scale pilot study into elite sports culture to kick off in January – Knowledge Centre for Sport and Physical Activity\).](#)

<sup>39</sup> [Please also see the study that Utrecht University and the Mulier Institute will be setting up at the request of Disability Sports Netherlands \(Preventing transgressive behaviour against athletes with a disability | Mulier Institute\).](#)

<sup>40</sup> [Netherlands Sports Council \(2021a\)](#)

Council concludes that Paralympic sport requires additional investments, which are currently provided in part by external partners. The Johan Cruyff Foundation (JCF), for example, funds a key percentage of seven Paralympic talent development programmes.<sup>41</sup> Many Paralympic sports and training programmes are under development and require professionalisation. Facilities related to the disabilities of the athletes (such as additional supervision, additional care supervision, the use of expensive sports equipment or modifications to transport or accommodation in hotels) will entail additional costs, particularly in the case of elite athletes with a more severe disability. The Netherlands Sports Council concludes that the ratio between expenditure on Olympic and Paralympic sports has not been laid down in any form. Paralympic athletes often feel they have been relegated to playing second fiddle to their Olympic colleagues.

The allocation of elite sports funds from central government, through an umbrella organisation, similarly fuels the debate on the governance of organised sport. The Netherlands Sports Council has previously commented on the situation created by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. In this situation, the Ministry allows government funds to be distributed by a membership organisation and the membership is required to hold the organisation that decides how much money they get to account. The Council therefore previously recommended that the government funds available should be allocated in a transparent manner by an independent administrative body or by an independent foundation.<sup>42</sup> This recommendation applies all the more to Paralympic sport.

### 2.1.5 Professionalisation of trainers and coaches

The Council concludes that there is a growing degree of professionalisation of coaches and trainers in Paralympic sport: Paralympic coaches increasingly have a background in sports rather than in physical rehabilitation and receive the same salary as their Olympic counterparts. Studies show that Paralympic athletes are satisfied with their coaches. Three quarters of these athletes believe that their coaches have a good level of knowledge and expertise, with a fifth of athletes scoring that level as adequate.<sup>43</sup> Opinions differ on the extent to which a Paralympic trainer/coach should have specific knowledge of medical and exercise physiological aspects of training people with a disability.<sup>44</sup> Many sports federations have included attention for disability sports in their training programmes for coaches and trainers. Sports programmes in senior secondary vocational and higher professional education similarly devote attention to sport for people with disabilities. However, the number of hours is very limited, and the degree of specialisation is often related to the choice of work placement.<sup>45</sup> These programmes are often aimed at sports promotion and grassroots sport, rather than at elite sport. The Netherlands Sports Council notes that, in vocational education and programmes provided by the federations, insufficient attention is generally devoted to the specific aspects of training athletes with a disability – particularly when it comes to supervising and supporting Paralympic athletes.

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<sup>41</sup> [Cruyff Foundation \(cruyff-foundation.org\)](https://www.cruyff-foundation.org) disability sport/sports associations

<sup>42</sup> Netherlands Sports Council (2021b)

<sup>43</sup> Van der Roest (2021)

<sup>44</sup> Patatas et al. (2018)

<sup>45</sup> Heijnen & Elling (2020)

## 2.2 Sports careers in Paralympic sport

### 2.2.1 Lack of data on potential number of Paralympic talents

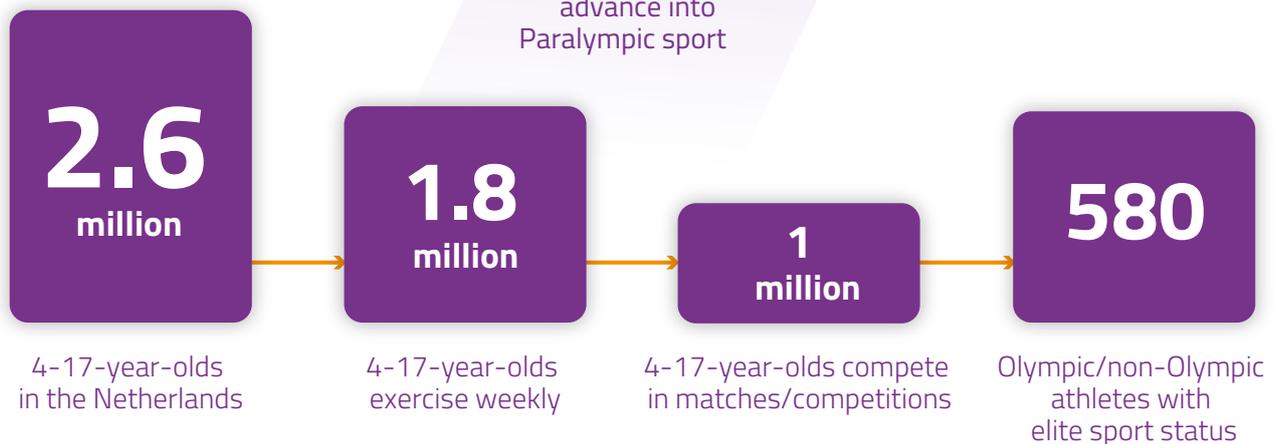
Currently, 139 Paralympic athletes and 580 Olympic athletes hold an elite sports status,<sup>46</sup> meaning that one fifth of all elite athletes with a status are Paralympic athletes. There are also few precise figures available regarding the number of talented athletes with a disability, how many people with a disability take part in competitive sports and what the extent of sports participation is among people with a disability. This makes it difficult to gain insight into the potential number of talented individuals and elite athletes (Figure 1). It is, however, clear that there are relatively many Paralympic athletes with an elite sports status. In addition to the development of talented individuals to elite athletes, it is vital from a social standpoint to devote attention to sports promotion and inclusion of people with disabilities in sports and exercise.

**Figure 1** // Relationship between Paralympic and Olympic athletic potential. Source: please see box on the next page.

#### Paralympic sport



#### Regular sport



<sup>46</sup> This concerns both the Summer and Winter sports and athletes with A, HP or selection status. Of the non-Olympic athletes, 79 athletes have a status (source: written statement of NOC\*NSF on 3 February 2022). Athletes with an elite sports status have access to supplementary provisions, such as a stipend or an allowance for insurance or transport costs.

## Limited data available on sport among young people with disabilities

Estimates show that 3.5% of young people in the Netherlands have a disability,<sup>47</sup> which translates to roughly 90,000 children.<sup>48</sup> Some of these young people will have been born with a disability, and others will have acquired a disability as a result of illness or due to an accident. The available data in this instance are similarly limited. The data do, however, show that approximately 23,000 children and young people are in a rehabilitation programme and that, in 2020, there were approximately 22,000 applications from 0-24-year-olds for a type of medical aid (prosthesis, wheelchair or other type of aid).<sup>49</sup> Some of these young people with a disability make use of the adapted sports facilities available and may be new talent for Paralympic sport.

The percentage of children with a disability taking part in sport is only known for the 70,000 children attending special education. Of this group of children, 56%-65% take part in sports weekly, depending on their disability.<sup>50</sup> The other children with disabilities attend regular education, and no data are available regarding their participation in sports. Nor are there any data on whether they require modifications when they participate in sport or whether they take part in the mainstream sports activities. Surveys conducted among all children in the Netherlands have shown that 65-70% of 4-to-17-year-olds in the Netherlands take part in sport weekly, which translates into 1.8 million children and young people.<sup>51</sup> One million children take part in competitive sports or competitions.<sup>52</sup>

For the sake of comparability in terms of the numbers, the emphasis in Figure 1 is on 4-to-17-year-olds. Talent in Parasport also comes from older age groups, i.e. as a result of a rehabilitation process after an illness or accident. Yet again, however, no data are available on numbers of athletes or available talent.

### 2.2.2 Introduction to sports

Children and young people without disabilities have a wide range of sports activities available to them in their immediate residential environment. However, this offering is much more limited for children with a disability. In addition, this group experiences more barriers to the use of such facilities. Introduction to sport and participation in sport for children with a disability requires additional focus from the government and the sports industry. Many children with a disability find it difficult to connect with an association or to find alternative sports providers.<sup>53</sup>

- Parents struggle to arrange transport, in part due to the fact that the sports activities available are organised at a regional level, and they have to travel greater distances.
- People do not know what sports activities are on offer locally, the facilities do not sufficiently meet their needs and there are no suitable trainers and coaches.

<sup>47</sup> Brandsema et al. (2017). This publication also shows that 60% of this group has an intellectual disability, 24% has a physical disability and 14% has a sensory disability.

<sup>48</sup> Using Statistics Netherlands data (StatLine – Population; sex, age and marital status, 1 January (cbs.nl).

<sup>49</sup> Rehabilitation Netherlands (2018) and <https://www.gipdatabank.nl>. Data on adults in rehabilitation programmes or applications for sports or other aids relate to the entire age group up to 65 years of age and therefore offer no additional insight in respect of elite Paralympic sport.

<sup>50</sup> Brandsema et al. (2017)

<sup>51</sup> Participation in sports | Figures on sport and exercise

<sup>52</sup> Participation in sports | Figures on sport and exercise

<sup>53</sup> Brandsema et al. (2017)

- Children are hesitant and are afraid that they will not be able to participate.
- The number of children who want to practice a specific sport is too small to form a team or training group.

4,100 sports associations and commercial and other providers are open to people with a disability.<sup>54</sup> By way of comparison, there are 28,000 sports associations and 6,600 commercial sports providers in the Netherlands,<sup>55</sup> so approximately 10% offer facilities for people with disabilities. Around 100 associations focus solely on sports for people with disabilities. It is estimated that 2,100 to 3,400 sports associations in fact have one or more members with a disability.<sup>56</sup> This not only relates to members with disabilities that are recognised in Paralympics, but may also include athletes with chronic conditions or psychological problems. Many of the sports facilities on offer are aimed at grassroots sport. In general, they have little specific knowledge on sports and exercise for people with a disability. Four out of five associations with members with disabilities do not even have a specific framework or support in place for supervisors of people with a disability. Athletes with disabilities often participate in the mainstream activities available. Sports associations have indicated that the shortage of qualified or other trainers or supervisors is a key reason for the absence of an increase in the sports participation of people with disabilities. In addition, many people with disabilities are unaware of the activities available, which means that matching supply and demand remains an issue.<sup>57</sup> There are no data as to what percentage of these providers supervise and guide athletes into competitive sport or support talented individuals in their progress to elite sport.

Advancement from special needs education into sport is a separate area of focus, given that many children in special education require additional support and supervision to be able to take the step to join an association. Children in special-needs primary education, however, receive more hours of physical education in the curriculum (92% of schools) than their peers in regular primary education (60% of schools),<sup>58</sup> which provides them with the best possible foundation for participating in sports. In spite of this aspect, children in special-needs education are less likely to cross over to a sports association.

At regional level, cooperation in the area of disability sport between municipalities, community sports workers, sports providers, care institutions and education is increasingly taking shape. The range of providers and activities is announced on the Uniek Sporten portal.<sup>59</sup> There are also a number of specific intervention programmes, such as Sport Heroes, Rehabilitation, Sport & Exercise and, more recently, the kickoff of the sports clinics of the Esther Vergeer Foundation.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, the Netherlands Sports Council notes that effective coordination of supply and demand remains an issue, affected by various key factors, both in the child's immediate environment and in the range of sports providers and activities available. Encouraging children, young people and adults with disabilities to take part in sport therefore remains an important area of focus, which similarly impacts the opportunities available to identify talent and allow those individuals to advance to elite sport.

<sup>54</sup> [Find a sport | Uniek Sporten | Sports with a disability!](#)

<sup>55</sup> KPMG (2019)

<sup>56</sup> Gutter et al. (2021b)

<sup>57</sup> Gutter et al. (2021b)

<sup>58</sup> Slot-Heijs & Lucassen (2019)

<sup>59</sup> [Find a sport | Uniek Sporten | Sports with a disability!](#)

<sup>60</sup> [Stichting Special Heroes Nederland » Sport Heroes, Stichting Special Heroes Nederland » Rehabilitation programmes, Sports clinics added to multidisciplinary clinics as 'additional consultation' \(esthervergeerfoundation.nl\)](#)

## Insufficient access to sports equipment

Some people with a disability are dependent on sports equipment, such as a prosthesis or a wheelchair, to be able to participate in sports or exercise activities. Applying for a reimbursement for sports equipment is riddled with difficulties and obstacles from both an organisational and financial point of view. Sports equipment is not available to everyone due to certain regulations, funding issues, lack of familiarity with available equipment and lack of knowledge on the part of municipal authorities and health insurance companies. At present, there is a lack of effective cooperation within the chain of local and central government, insurance companies, medical specialists, commercial parties, such as suppliers, and sports organisations, resulting in potential athletes being unable to take control of their own situation.<sup>61</sup> This is at odds with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified in 2016 and which sets out that appropriate measures must be taken to give people with disabilities the opportunity to take part in sports activities.<sup>62</sup>

The Netherlands Sports Council has established that, despite the commitments set out in the UN Disability Convention, the government has not yet made sufficient structural efforts to make sports equipment available to athletes with a disability. The Uniek Sporten Hulpmiddelen portal, which was set up recently, currently offers a temporary safety net,<sup>63</sup> reimbursing a portion of the costs of equipment in 2021 and 2022, in the event of dismissal of the case by administrators of the Social Support Act (Wmo) or by the health insurance company. However, this is not a permanent solution. Reimbursement and provision require the attention of health insurers and the administrators of the Social Support Act, given that, by law, they are the first points of contact. The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights recommends that the government ensure that costs do not mount to an excessive degree for people who need care and for municipalities to establish more accurately and effectively whether people are able to afford the equipment.<sup>64</sup> In December 2021, the House of Representatives used an amendment to enforce a standard personal contribution of up to €250.<sup>65</sup>

The costs of sports equipment are even higher for talented athletes and elite athletes, as their equipment must be regularly modified to optimally support the development of their skills and strength. These additional costs are not reimbursed. The Netherlands Sports Council notes that Olympic athletes receive support for that purpose from sponsors and partners of NOC\*NSF, such as Koga or DSM. This is only rarely the case for Paralympic athletes and often takes place on an individual basis.

### 2.2.3 Recognising and supporting talent

The Dutch talent scouting system accounts for part of the success of the Dutch Paralympic team. Compared to other countries, the Netherlands scouts out many talented Paralympic athletes at a later age – an aspect that emerged in the interviews and sessions held by the Netherlands Sports Council, as athletes who acquired a disability at a relatively advanced age also attend the talent recruitment days. A person who

<sup>61</sup> Knowledge Centre for Sport and Physical Activity (2020)

<sup>62</sup> [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities | Government.nl](#)

<sup>63</sup> [Uniek Sporten Hulpmiddelen | Acquisition or lending](#)

<sup>64</sup> The Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (2021)

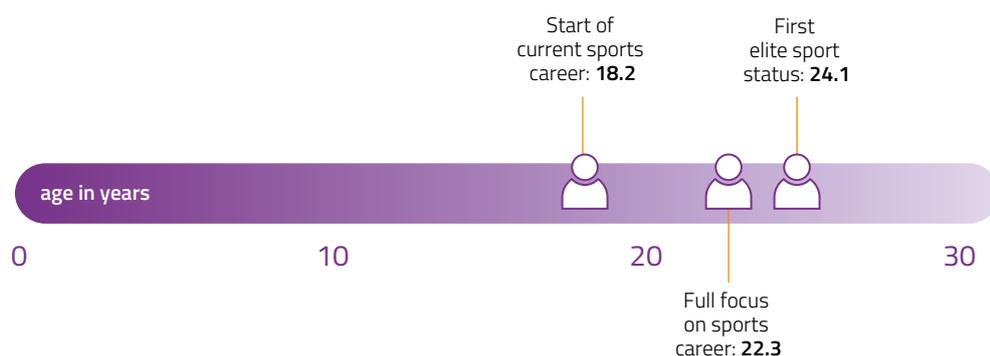
<sup>65</sup> Amendment 156: kst-35925-XVI-156 ISSN 0921 - 7371

develops a disability in young adulthood will often already be familiar with sport, elite or otherwise, and talent recruitment days are an efficient instrument for scouting of these types of athletes. However, children and young people who have lived with an impairment from an early age need more encouragement and motivation to make use of their athletic talent.

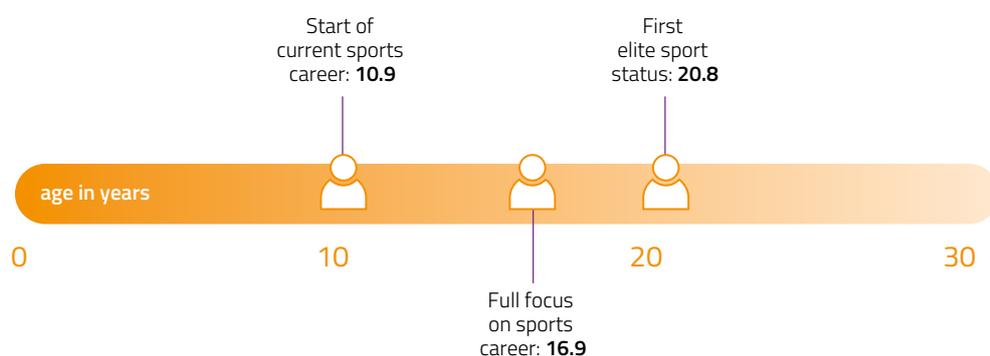
Studies have shown that Dutch Paralympic athletes are currently older than Dutch Olympic athletes at the point they start to focus fully on sport or are awarded elite athlete status (Figure 2). On average, Olympic athletes start practising their sport when they are nearly 11 years old, whereas Paralympic athletes start when they are on average 18 years old, probably also due to the later age at which some of them got a disability. Paralympic athletes devote their full attention to their sport within four years, whereas this will take six years for Olympic talent. The period of time in which an athlete develops from a budding talent to an elite athlete is similarly shorter in Paralympic sport than it is in Olympic sport. It takes an average of two years for Paralympic athletes to focus fully on their sport and for them to achieve their first elite sport status – this is four years for Olympic athletes.

**Figure 2** // From talent to elite athlete timeline based on ages of status athletes. Source: Van der Roest (2021).

### Elite Paralympic athletes



### Elite Olympic athletes



Scouting Paralympic talent on talent recruitment days has resulted in a large number of Paralympic athletes in the Netherlands. At the same time, the Council has concluded that grassroots sport or education does not 'automatically' result in talent recognition. Conversely this frequently does apply for athletes without disabilities. In Paralympic sport, the difference between grassroots sport and elite sport has become so great that it is difficult for up-and-coming talent to take that step. The smaller numbers of athletes are similarly to blame for this.

The advancement of Paralympic talent therefore seems to depend on the talent recruitment days. However, it emerged from the interviews and consultations with the Council that the focus of sports federations and NOC\*NSF on talent recruitment days is waning, with the number of talent recruitment days held decreasing. The design and setup of the talent recruitment days is yet another area of focus. On talent recruitment days, sports federations and coaches compete with one another to select talented athletes. The Council has also established that, although talent recruitment days are useful, they are perhaps somewhat of an opportunistic instrument, with scouts often thinking in terms of prospects of winning medals instead of considering athletes' developmental needs.<sup>66</sup>

### Dispensations for athletes with disabilities

In mainstream competitive sports, athletes with disabilities would in many cases be disqualified, for example, due to their needing equipment, despite the fact that such participation would allow for inclusion in the world of sport. In a number of branches of sport, athletes with disabilities can participate on the basis of dispensation rules. In such cases, athletes are allowed to compete in mainstream competitions with the use of equipment and/or modifications. Participation in equestrian dressage or shooting sports are examples of sports where dispensations are granted.<sup>67</sup>

#### 2.2.4 Facilities for current or former Paralympic athletes

Paralympic athletes who are part of an elite sports or training programme are able to make use of the same facilities as Olympic athletes in terms of a stipend and expense reimbursement, insurance, transport or education.<sup>68</sup> However, their financial situation is a matter of concern. Paralympic athletes with selection status in particular earn nothing from the sport itself. These athletes are less frequently professional athletes and less frequently receive a salary from a sponsor or club.<sup>69</sup> Half of Paralympic athletes have insufficient income to pay for costs of living or to pay the costs of training and competitions. Various Paralympic athletes receive a WAJONG benefit allowance (Disablement Assistance Act for Handicapped Young Persons). The coordination of this benefit allowance with a stipend (and any medal prize money) is likewise an area of concern, given that, in the event that the standard amount is exceeded, athletes are required to repay part of their benefit allowance to the government.

<sup>66</sup> Van der Roest (2021)

<sup>67</sup> For example, [Classification assessment – KNHS, KNSA – Range of sports](#)

<sup>68</sup> [Facilities and advice for athletes – NOCNSF](#)

<sup>69</sup> Van der Roest (2021)

Paralympic athletes have more difficulty taking up an ordinary career in society following their athletic career – an aspect that was flagged up by athletes who were interviewed by the Netherlands Sports Council. With a few exceptions, elite athletes have noticed that, in such cases, employers still tend to focus on their disability instead of on their abilities. Paralympic athletes (31%), however, also make less use of the career coaching facilities offered by TeamNL@work than Olympic athletes (40%). The service did, however, receive a comparable score from both groups.<sup>70</sup>

The Netherlands Sports Council concludes that greater focus is required in terms of providing tailored solutions for the provisions of facilities. This not only includes focus in concrete terms but should also extend to the perception of equivalence of athletes, which is crucial. Para athletes, for example, receive less prize money from NOC\*NSF for a gold, silver or bronze medal at the Games than Olympic athletes. Paralympic athletes feel this is a crucial issue. Four out of ten of all athletes with an elite sport status believe that equal prize money is fair. Nevertheless, the Council also notes that the equivalence of Paralympic athletes is still an area of concern for elite athletes, with three out of ten status-holding elite athletes finding it difficult to express their opinion about equal prize money for medals.<sup>71</sup>

## 2.3 Classification

### 2.3.1 Development, implementation and evaluation of the classification system

During the Paralympic Games in Tokyo, the conversation in the media coverage regularly turned to classifications. In addition to the effort involved in explaining the classifications to the general public, the conversations focused on intentional misrepresentation in classification, which, like doping, leads to unfair competition. A properly functioning classification system requires attention for the development of the classification code, its implementation in practice and the evaluation of the performance of the system. Until now, the focus has mainly been on the development of the code.<sup>72</sup> Drawing up, adapting and verifying the classification code is the responsibility of the international federation and takes place for each branch of sport. The IPC has designated three research institutions worldwide as central coordination centres for classification research, including Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, which focuses on the classification of visual impairments. The Netherlands Sports Council sees the further development of classification criteria that are as objective as possible as an essential component for continued development.

Classification codes and any relevant changes can have major consequences. Athletes must have certainty regarding whether they are able to compete in an event (depending on the Minimum Impairment Criteria) and to which class they have been allocated. This is similarly crucial to trainers, coaches and technical directors, who are responsible for selecting and allocating athletes for teams and specific events. As such, greater focus is required for the proper implementation of classification codes.<sup>73</sup> This requires long-term planning, clear decision-making structures and effective communication. The classification code must in any case be established four years prior to the next Games.<sup>74</sup> The Netherlands Sports Council concludes that a lack of

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<sup>70</sup> Van der Roest (2021)

<sup>71</sup> TeamNL (2018)

<sup>72</sup> Mann et al. (2021)

<sup>73</sup> Mann et al. (2021)

<sup>74</sup> Mann et al. (2021)

clarity regarding classifications can lead to a lot of distress and frustration. For that reason, ensuring clear, worldwide agreements and transparent communication with classifiers, national Paralympic committees and federations, athletes and coaches is crucial. If too little progress is made in this regard, whether at international or national level, the Netherlands Sports Council regards this as a key obstacle to the future development of Paralympic sport.

## Classification as part of Paralympic sport

The IPC's mission is to support Para athletes in achieving sporting excellence. Classification systems are crucial to the realisation of that mission.<sup>75</sup> A classification system determines the minimum impairment for competition. In addition, a classification system categorises athletes into sports classes. The aim is for the impact of an impairment to affect the outcome of the competition as little as possible. It is the athletic performance of a given athlete or team that should determine who wins.

The classification process has changed a great deal since the inception of Paralympic sport. The first classifications were made solely on the basis of medical evaluation (for example, based on the height of a spinal cord injury or site of an amputation), with little attention devoted to sport-specific skills. In the 1980s and 1990s, a functional classification system was therefore set up, which considered the various functional capabilities of an athlete in relation to the branch of sport.<sup>76</sup> The current development is for the classification code to be fleshed out further through research conducted among as many athletes as possible (evidence-based classification).<sup>77</sup> The current classification system is laid down in the IPC Classification Code and in the international sport-specific standards.<sup>78</sup>

Developments in sports, in medical science and in technology continue to require adaptations to classification systems. Experts have identified five distinct steps in which sports federations and the scientific community are required to work together:<sup>79</sup>

1. making choices regarding which athletes with which disabilities are allowed to compete in a sport;
2. determining what sports skills are required to achieve a specific type of performance and what characteristics of disabilities may hinder the use of those skills;
3. developing methods to measure both the impairment and the sports skills. Implementation may take place either in a laboratory or when practising the sport. This places certain requirements on the methods: they must accurately measure what they are designed to measure and at the same time be useful in practice;
4. testing the methods to establish the relationship between disability and athletic performance;
5. developing Minimum Impairment Criteria and determining profiles for each sports class.

These five steps are followed by implementation in practice and review of the results. Together, they form a permanent cycle for the ongoing development of classification.

<sup>75</sup> Mann et al. (2021)

<sup>76</sup> VanLandewijck (2019)

<sup>77</sup> Tweedy & Vanlandewijck (2009)

<sup>78</sup> [www.paralympic.org/classification-code](http://www.paralympic.org/classification-code)

<sup>79</sup> Mann et al. (2021)

In addition to technical sporting decisions, changes in technology, training methods and medical developments may similarly necessitate adjustments to the classification code. In this regard, the Netherlands Sports Council notes that a technical perspective on classification is not the only essential aspect. Devoting attention to the impact of the classification code on the comprehensibility and appeal of Paralympic sport is likewise vital. Portraying Paralympic sport in an attractive way is a challenge to the media. Spectators want information that is easy to understand to allow them to judge how unique an achievement is. The Netherlands Sports Council notes that developments in classification systems can contribute to the appeal and comprehensibility of Paralympic sport. Examples include a points system (such as in wheelchair basketball and rugby) or the use of conversion factors (such as in triathlon or skiing).

### Participants without disabilities competing in disability sports

In order to encourage competition in disability sports, to increase the number of participants and to change perceptions, people without disabilities can also compete in these sports.<sup>80</sup> In the Netherlands, for example, athletes are able to compete in the wheelchair basketball or sitting volleyball competition without having to meet the Minimum Impairment Criteria, thus making the Paralympic sport a regular sport, with its own sports equipment (such as a wheelchair) or its own rules (requirement to remain seated on the ground). However, these athletes without a minimum impairment are not permitted to compete in international competitions.

### 2.3.2 Professionalisation of the implementation of classification

The Netherlands Sports Council notes that, both in the Netherlands and at an international level, the organisation of classification is key to the further development of Paralympic sport. A crucial concern in this regard is the funding and professional development of the classifiers. These highly committed rehabilitation physicians or physiotherapists are associated with the international sports federation as volunteers and travel around the world for international competitions for no more than an expense allowance. No funds are made available by the international federations or the IPC to provide these professionals with a suitable appointment and thereby improve this process. In addition, these organisations have insufficient funds to hold frequent meetings for classifiers aimed at developing expertise and sharing knowledge. The Netherlands Sports Council notes that the lack of professionalisation of the classification process increases the risk of arbitrariness.

NOC\*NSF would like to see the establishment of an international and independent classification institute, in which regard the umbrella organisation makes reference to the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).<sup>81</sup> Stakeholders in other countries that were interviewed by the Council likewise consider professionalisation and the establishment of an independent organisation to be required. Interviewees have stated that, as yet, there is no funding available for an international classification institute. By way of comparison, the WADA is funded by the national governments (50%) and by the IOC (50%), making the WADA independent of the

<sup>80</sup> Mashkovsky & Brittain (2017)

<sup>81</sup> [TeamNL Paralympic vision – NOCNSF](#)

international sports federations.<sup>82</sup> The WADA carries out scientific research, provides education and ensures enforcement of the anti-doping code. Within Paralympic sport, these duties are currently the remit of the IPC. Unlike in the case of the anti-doping code, the implementation of the Classification Code requires specific sporting expertise. In many sports, the assessment of an athlete in a competition setting is a standard component of classification. This personal assessment by a classifier requires additional attention with regard to the independence of the process. This is an area of concern relevant to the establishment of any international institution.

The classification system is not only a key area of focus at an international level. Additional focus on classification is similarly required in the Netherlands. The handover of the duties of Disability Sports Netherlands to NOC\*NSF in 2014 likewise entailed the transfer of the classification institute. Based on the information obtained from the interviews and consultations conducted, the Netherlands Sports Council concludes that Paralympic athletes and talent are currently similarly unable to get or find what they need. Sports federations do not know who to approach about additional expertise, and insufficient attention is devoted to the recruitment and professional development of classifiers. As a result, the expertise of Dutch classifiers and coaches, associated with a sports federation or otherwise, may not be in line with international developments. This may lead to athletes who do comply with the classification rules (such as the Minimum Impairment Criteria) in the Netherlands, but who are not allowed to compete at international level or are assessed for a different class. The Council has also heard that there is no permanent coordination between classifiers and coaches and that the expertise of coaches regarding classifications is an area of concern. The Council concludes that, as with ensuring the integration of Paralympic sport into the sports federations, the structure that has been set up is insufficient and inadequate to maintain and support the classification network.

## Design and implementation of classifications

Classification of athletes with a physical disability takes place on a sport-specific basis and is carried out by at least two classifiers, based on their medical/paramedical or sporting background. They determine the degree of disability on a medical basis and also assess to what extent the disability impacts sports skills and how this is reflected in a training or competition setting. There is a distinction between national and international classification. Athletes must undergo an international examination to be able to compete in international competitions. For logistical reasons, this often takes place during international competitions. The considerable diversity of rules and structures of sports and whether or not a wheelchair or prosthesis is used means that every sport has its own classification system and therefore has a wide variety of classes. Classification does not take place on a sport-specific basis for athletes with a visual impairment. An ophthalmologist or optometrist will carry out a measurement of the athlete's vision, and a classifier from the International Blind Sport Association (IBSA) determines in which of the three classes (B1-3) the athlete will compete.

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<sup>82</sup> [Funding | World Anti-Doping Agency \(wada-ama.org\)](https://wada-ama.org/)

Athletes with an intellectual impairment are tested on their IQ and behaviour by a psychologist. The classifiers of the international sports federations are responsible for athletes competing in the Paralympic Games. At the Paralympic Games, these athletes can compete in various events in athletics, swimming and table tennis in a single class.

## 2.4 Perception and visibility

### 2.4.1 Perception and social value

Media coverage of Paralympic sport often will emphasise athletes' disabilities and how impressive their performance is in spite of their disabilities, which is a sore point for Para athletes. Para athletes want to be recognised and appreciated for their achievement, and they often associate any focus on their disability with charity and victimhood. However, perception is multi-faceted. Storytelling is a useful tool from a marketing perspective and highlights what makes the sport and the athlete unique, which in the case of Paralympic sport is the athlete's disability, which, in turn, highlights the athlete's achievements. The Para Athletics team uses storytelling successfully to raise additional funds, as do Esther Vergeer and Bibian Mentel for their foundations.<sup>83</sup> Many Para athletes (71%) also believe that their sporting excellence allows them to contribute to advancing social equality and inclusion in society. There is more awareness of this among Para athletes than among Olympic athletes, of whom only half regard equality and inclusion as a social value of elite sport.<sup>84</sup>

Another key observation is that not all branches of sport and not all disabilities receive equivalent attention. The media prefer to focus on branches of sport that are visibly or otherwise competitive, spectacular and physical in nature. This also applies to Paralympic sport, which can lead to exclusion. Particularly in cases where an athlete's disability is more severe or where communication is more difficult, Para athletes can be portrayed as being 'different' or 'abnormal'. An athlete with strong spasms in an electric wheelchair will therefore appear on screen less or in a different context than a verbally skilled athlete with cool blades or in a flashy wheelchair. This creates a disability hierarchy within Paralympic sport, and the extent to which disabilities are visible will affect the media coverage of the athlete.<sup>85</sup> The Netherlands Sports Council regards increasing the numbers and level of diversity of the overall group of Para athletes as an opportunity for future development. This will allow for more diverse and versatile perceptions of Parasport in society and increase its social value.

At the Paralympic Games in particular, an attempt is made to strengthen its image as an elite sporting event with a high entertainment value.<sup>86</sup> The IPC also applies the event viability rule, which, inter alia, stipulates that at least ten athletes from four countries must compete in a medal event. Although this rule is also

<sup>83</sup> Bibian Mentel passed away in 2021. However, her foundation, Mentelity, continues to work for the benefit of people with disabilities ([Mentelity Foundation – Motivation to move!](#)).

<sup>84</sup> Van der Roest (2021). Other social values that athletes were asked about include happiness and passion, collective identity and pride, sporting excellence and health. There are fewer differences between Paralympic and Olympic athletes with regard to these values.

<sup>85</sup> Van Sterkenburg (2013)

<sup>86</sup> Van Sterkenburg (2013)

commonly used in Olympic sport, it has a different impact in Paralympic sport, as it excludes athletes with a more serious disability.<sup>87</sup> First and foremost, there is a smaller number of elite athletes with a severe disability. In addition, the selection of athletes with a more severe disability for national teams is discouraged because they require more (and therefore more expensive) support. The Netherlands Sports Council has also concluded that not all disabilities receive equal media coverage and regards the debate on showcasing all elite athletes with a disability as a key issue affecting public perception.

### Heightened and changing media coverage

Media coverage of Paralympic sport has been increasing since 2000, and perception surrounding Parasport has changed. Initially, the AVRO and EO broadcasters would take a medical or disability-based approach to their coverage of Paralympic sport. Sporting achievements were already covered to a greater extent in the NOS and BNN programme '*Met een been in de finale*' (One leg in the finals), after which the Events department of the NOS took over coverage of a number of events, including the 2012 Paralympic Games in London. During the Tokyo Games, NOS Sport broadcast the Paralympic sporting events daily during the prime-time slot. The opening and closing ceremonies and the wheelchair basketball semi-final and final, in which the Dutch women's team clinched the gold medal, were broadcast live. The NOS also holds broadcasting rights for the 2022 Winter and 2024 Summer Games.

#### 2.4.2 More broadcasting time and focus on new media platforms

Half of the Dutch population would like to see more Paralympic sport on TV.<sup>88</sup> Almost nine million Dutch citizens watched one or more broadcasts during the Tokyo Paralympic Games, and the broadcasts received good ratings.<sup>89</sup> This shows how important the placement of broadcasts is in the broadcasting schedule of the public broadcaster.

The hope is that greater media coverage of Paralympic sport will contribute to the visibility and development of the sport. Dutch women's football is often mentioned as a point of comparison, given that women's football has visibly undergone development since the European Football Championship in 2017. Although media coverage of the Paralympic Games has increased in recent years, hardly any attention is devoted to Paralympic sport outside of the Games. This is in spite of the fact that the sport benefits from continued coverage to increase acceptance of people with disabilities in society.<sup>90</sup> The interviews and consultations revealed that many stakeholders expect social media to be able to make a significant contribution in this regard. Social media are important to make Paralympic sports broadcasts more accessible to a wider audience. At the same time, the value of social media as a source of income should not be overestimated, particularly when it comes to smaller sports, such as Parasport.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Dutia and Tweedy (2021)

<sup>88</sup> Dopheide et al. (2022)

<sup>89</sup> [High ratings for Paralympic NOS programming – About NOS](#)

<sup>90</sup> Van Sterkenburg (2013)

<sup>91</sup> Cornelissen (2016)

## Allotted broadcasting time for Parasport

The Media Decree (*Mediabesluit*) sets out how public broadcasters must cover a particular subject, such as sport, and how much coverage they must devote to it.<sup>92</sup> The Decree distinguishes between full, live coverage (various international football, skating and tennis championships), partial, live coverage (such as of the Olympic Games: at least six hours a day) and partial, deferred coverage (various events: European or World Championships for tennis, hockey, swimming, athletics and professional football (Premier League and Cup competitions)). Paralympic sport is included in this final category. The public broadcaster is required to provide at least 30 minutes of coverage daily of the Summer Paralympic Games and at least 15 minutes of the Winter Paralympic Games.

Netherlands Public Broadcasting (NPO) determines placement in consultation with the broadcasters, such as the NOS. The increased coverage of Paralympic sport is not limited to the linear media, as on-demand and online media are similarly increasing their coverage of Parasport. The NOS shared the live streams of the British Channel 4 via its social media channels. Many sporting events could also be followed via the YouTube channel of the IPC.

### 2.4.3 Value of sporting events to Paralympic sport

Sporting events are a platform for the achievements of athletes and are an experience to be enjoyed by sports fans. At a number of events, Paralympic athletes are always given a platform, whereas at other events, this takes place on a one-off basis or not at all. The sharp fragmentation of the international administrative landscape in Paralympic sport has an adverse impact on the organisation of joint events. Organisational rights for regular and Paralympic events, for example, are not always held by the same rights holder (this proved to be a stumbling block at the 2016 European Athletics Championships in Amsterdam).<sup>93</sup> In other sports, the inclusion of people with disabilities is practically a matter of course. This is because the interests of both groups are represented by a single organisation, as is the case for the triathlon.<sup>94</sup>

There are opportunities to include and showcase Paralympic sport at sporting events, and there are some excellent examples of this taking place. One key example is the development that the ABN AMRO World Tennis Tournament has undergone by appointing Esther Vergeer as the tournament director for the wheelchair tennis tournament. The tournament's namesake equally uses this to enhance equal opportunities and inclusivity for the benefit of the bank's image. Another example of a major platform is the European Para Championships (EPC), which may be held in Rotterdam in 2023. This will prove to be a new organisational form for Paralympic sport, given that it takes place outside federation-related events. Although Paralympic athletes will not compete alongside elite athletes without a disability at this event, the major scale of the event may contribute to increasing public interest. The event is also expected to contribute to the organisational power of Paralympic sport in the Netherlands, within federations, knowledge institutions and the business community.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2008)

<sup>93</sup> Hover & Heijnen (2021)

<sup>94</sup> Hover & Hoeijmakers (2018)

<sup>95</sup> Koning et al. (2021)

## 2.5 Knowledge sharing and innovation

The Netherlands possesses a great deal of knowledge about Paralympic sport, such as regarding innovation and rehabilitation. However, that knowledge could be utilised and organised better. The scientific knowledge available on Paralympic sport in the Netherlands is produced by a relatively small network.<sup>96</sup> However, there is no permanent link between professional practice and the scientific community. In addition, various parties compete with each other for the limited research funds available.

The Knowledge Centre for Sport and Physical Activity raises awareness for and focuses on disability sports in the broad sense, having taken over that function from Disability Sports Netherlands.<sup>97</sup> In addition, *Topsport Topics*<sup>98</sup> makes scientific information available for Paralympic sport. However, the number of articles published by *Topsport Topics* on Paralympic sport is still limited.<sup>99</sup> The Netherlands Sports Council notes that the bundling of knowledge on disability sport and Paralympic sport is fragmented across various parties, which weakens the aggregation and availability of both research and practical knowledge.

The lack of joining up is reflected in the significantly differing level of satisfaction of Paralympic athletes regarding the application of scientific research and the possibilities for technological innovation. Familiarity with specialist scientific or other support, or a lack thereof, may provide an explanation for this, as it is primarily elite athletes who train and live at a TeamNL centre who are more often satisfied.<sup>100</sup> The Netherlands Sports Council concludes that the available knowledge and expertise could be used better. The knowledge network in the Netherlands is well organised and is made up of committed scientists. The linking up of science and professional practice, translation into practical guidance and support and the accessibility of knowledge are all prerequisites for the realisation of such use. The knowledge chain (from science through to applied research to professional practice and from practical issues back to science) is incomplete and could be strengthened. The Netherlands Sports Council notes that no one has assumed ultimate responsibility for closing this knowledge chain.

Another observation is that EU funds could help further develop Paralympic sport. Post-career programmes for athletes, for example, could be set up using Erasmus+ projects, which can similarly be used to stimulate international research. Technological developments and innovation provide opportunities for the future development of Paralympic sport. In terms of the knowledge transfer regarding technological developments, there is a lack of clarity: the target group in Paralympic sport is small, which limits the market value of any products developed. However, if the number of Paralympic athletes worldwide were to increase, and with it the economies of scale, this would lead to opportunities. The Netherlands Sports Council concludes that the Netherlands is a pioneer in terms of the development of Paralympic sport, has a great deal of knowledge at its disposal and also has the means to make that knowledge available to others.

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<sup>96</sup> Such as the Center for Adapted Sports Amsterdam | CASA (aiss.nl), the Professorship in Technology for Inclusive Exercise and Sport – The Hague University of Applied Sciences, Sport & Performance – SSIg, Alliance for Sports Engineering Education (A4SEE) (tudelft.nl).

<sup>97</sup> The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (2014)

<sup>98</sup> [TopsportTopics](#)

<sup>99</sup> One explanation for this is that the number of international publications on elite Paralympic sport is limited compared to regular elite sport. The broad diversity of disabilities makes it difficult for researchers to set up a large-scale study.

<sup>100</sup> Van der Roest (2021)

## 2.6 The position of the Netherlands abroad

### 2.6.1 The Netherlands as a model for other countries?

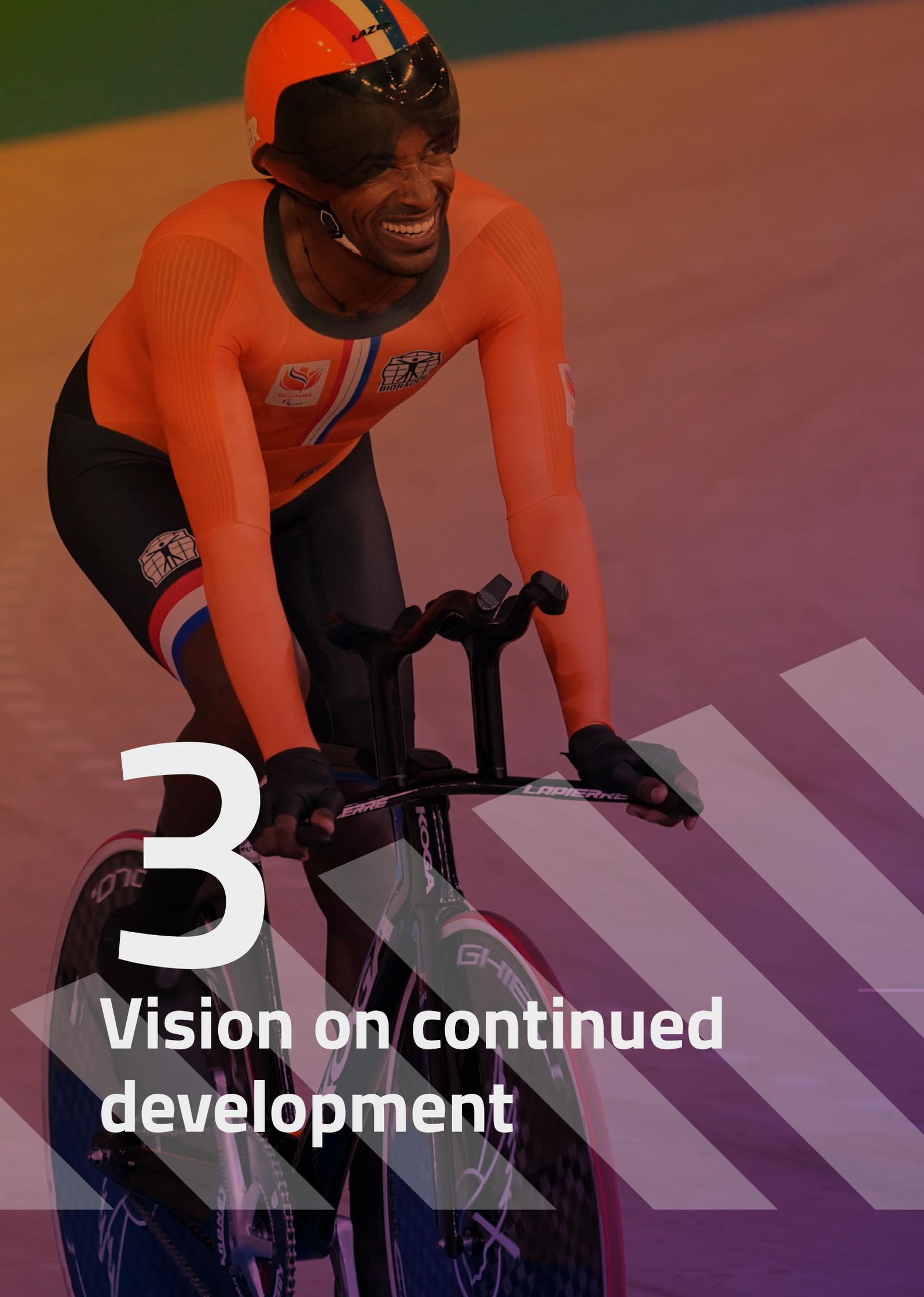
Paralympic sport is organisationally integrated into regular sport in only a handful of countries, with the Netherlands leading the way in this regard. Other countries see the Netherlands as a pioneer as a result of the sporting excellence achieved by the Netherlands at the Paralympic Games. It is vital to the continued development of Paralympic sport that it should be supported and professionalised in more countries. Indeed, there is a significant difference in this domain between economically developed countries, less developed countries and countries in which awareness for people with disabilities has developed with difficulty for cultural reasons. It often starts with the acceptance of people with disabilities and whether they are able to participate in sport at all in their society. The Netherlands Sports Council concludes that the Netherlands has already taken on a leadership role in the *Game Changer* project in Tokyo.<sup>101</sup> This may form a starting point for the continued international development of Paralympic sport.

### 2.6.2 The Netherlands in international administrative positions and work organisations

The IPC and the IOC, the international sports and disability-based federations, determine the positions and developments in Paralympic sport worldwide. The international federations draw up classification rules for each branch of sport and issue licences for sporting events. The Netherlands Sports Council has concluded that the Netherlands will have to take up positions on committees or boards of those organisations if it wishes to exert influence upon them. At present, the number of Dutch administrators is limited. There are similarly only a few Dutch citizens who are employed by international organisations.

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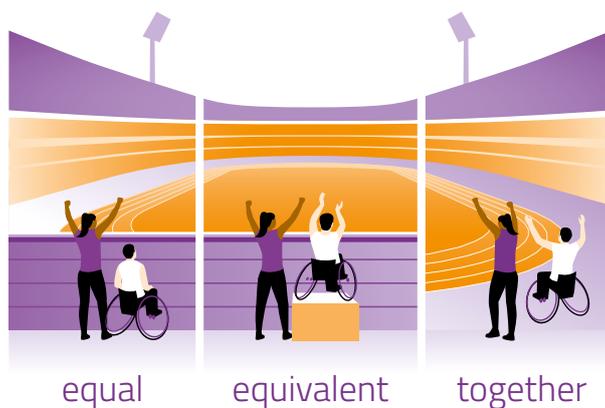
<sup>101</sup> In the four years leading up to the Games in Tokyo, NOC\*NSF, the Japan Sport Council, the Dutch Embassy and three Tokyo municipalities collaborated closely on the sharing of knowledge on the integration of people with disabilities through sport and on inspiring stakeholders (Game Changer Tokyo 2020 Project – NOCNSF)



3

Vision on continued development

The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport has requested that the Netherlands Sports Council advise on the continued development of Paralympic sport. The Council has considered the advice in this report from the broader perspective of an inclusive society. In its analysis, the Council has concluded that Paralympic sport is developing rapidly. The level of athletic achievement has increased significantly in recent decades. Paralympic sport faces a number of choices in terms of future development. In this chapter, the Council will outline its vision on the direction in which Paralympic sport ought to develop. This vision will be translated into a set of recommendations in Chapter 4.



## 3.1 Equivalent and together

The athletes at the Paralympic Games deliver fantastic performances. This may partly be the result of the organisational integration of Paralympic sport into NOC\*NSF and the sports federations. The use of specific instruments, such as talent recruitment days, may play a key role as well. Paralympic sport largely has the same facilities available to it as Olympic sport. However, equal is not the same as equivalent. Equivalent requires specific facilities to be available where necessary. At present, the embedding of Paralympic sport in the sports sector is in danger of becoming invisible. As a result, a great deal of expertise is also at risk of being lost. In addition, the funding streams for Paralympic sport are not completely transparent, and the limited extent to which Paralympic sport is included in mainstream sporting events, as well as the lack of media coverage aside from the Paralympic Games, and the consequent lack of public interest are key risks. In the Council's view, the step that must now be taken is the step from equality to equivalence. This means creating an equivalent position for Paralympic sport – both in the Netherlands and, preferably, at an international level.

In the opinion of the Netherlands Sports Council, an equivalent position is a necessary stepping stone, though not necessarily the final destination of the continued development of Paralympic sport. In an inclusive society, people with disabilities will no longer be excluded and will feel that they are a fully-fledged part of society – on all fronts. In that light, the Council sees the inclusion of grassroots sports, talent development, elite sport and sporting events, and potentially the Olympic Games, as the ultimate objective.

Over the past two decades, efforts have been made in terms of the organisational integration of Paralympic sport. This has paid off in terms of comparable facilities at TeamNL for elite Olympic and Paralympic athletes. In addition, this has led to comparable support for both disciplines within sports federations and comprehensive funding of elite sports and talent programmes. However, there is a risk that Paralympic sport may fall by the wayside due to this organisational integration. It may, for example, be unclear exactly which investments are being made in this domain. Another risk is that explicit focus on and awareness of Parasport may gradually wane. The attention, time and budget for, personal commitment to and expertise related to Paralympic sport all constitute a small part of the remit of the sports federations and NOC\*NSF.

There is an absence of equivalent attention and awareness regarding a number of aspects. For example, there is limited awareness of and focus on Paralympic sport among event organisers and limited coverage of Parasport in the media, which makes it less attractive for sponsors to invest in Paralympic sport. Paralympic medallists see the lack of equivalence reflected in lower prize money for medals. Furthermore, the current NOC\*NSF regulations limit the organisation and funding of elite sport by people with a disability to the sports that are organised at the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games, resulting in other disciplines, elite or otherwise, such as CP football or sailing, and athletes with other disabilities, such as a hearing impairment, being excluded. There is similarly an absence of visibility in key naming and visual assets. The name of the National Paralympic Committee, for example, is not reflected in the name NOC\*NSF.

The Netherlands Sports Council believes that the position of Paralympic sport should be just as mature, vigorous and robust as that of Olympic sport. Paralympic sport not only requires equal conditions, but above all requires an equivalent position in order to eventually become an inclusive component of elite sport. In the opinion of the Netherlands Sports Council, the position of Paralympic sport is currently too vulnerable and too often dependent on a limited number of stakeholders. The Council believes that a stepping stone is required in order to be able to take the final step towards fostering elite sport that is inclusive and recognised and appreciated on equal terms. Paralympic sport must receive equal appreciation and recognition, both in sport and in society. If the Netherlands succeeds in this endeavour, it can truly become a model for other countries.

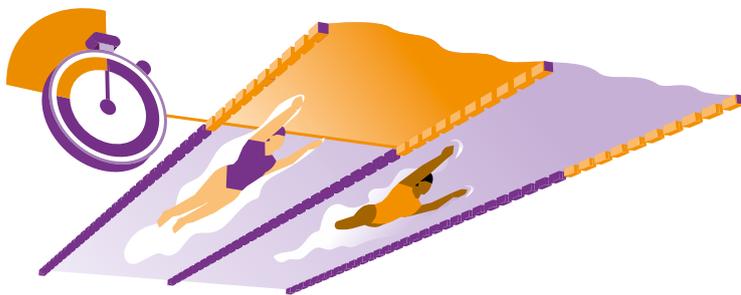


## 3.2 Elite sport means achievement

Elite sport focuses exclusively on performance and achievement: only the best athletes qualify for European and World Championships and for Olympic and Paralympic Games. This applies to all elite athletes, including elite athletes with a disability. NOC\*NSF and the sports federations set the bar high in recent decades with

their ambition to be among the top ten best elite sports countries in the world. These days, more attention is devoted to the social value of elite sport. For example, this is reflected in the study into the elite sport culture in the Netherlands, the preliminary agreement *Topsport die inspireert!* and the establishment of the new Sports Agenda 2032.<sup>102</sup> With its unique character, Paralympic sport contributes to that social value. The Paralympic movement is currently in two minds as to whether to pursue further professionalisation and focus on achievements or to continue to ensure that every can compete in all classes – including those with severe disabilities. The Netherlands Sports Council believes that the further development of Paralympic sport should be focused on achievement, with grassroots sport primarily focused on participation. If Paralympic sport professionalises, this will also increase awareness and interest in the Paralympic Games as an elite sporting event, with other events, such as the European Para Championships, hopefully following in its wake. All parties involved – from Paralympic athletes, coaches, sports federations and NOC\*NSF to event organisers, sponsors, the scientific community, public authorities and businesses – should collaborate to increase the level of achievement.

A choice in favour of achievement does not mean that participation will fall by the wayside in the Dutch sports system. A key prerequisite for the continued development of Paralympic sport is that society as a whole participates in sport. Another prerequisite is making additional efforts to organise sports facilities for children and young people with disabilities and to provide support for them in that endeavour. After all, today's kids are tomorrow's elite athletes.



### 3.3 Innovation in classification

Classification is inextricably linked to elite sport: separate categories for men and women or classification into various weight classes in many sports determine who can compete in which competitions. In Paralympic sport, classification carries an additional degree of significance. In order to create an equal, fair competition, it is necessary to exclude the impact of the disability on the athlete's performance as much as possible. However, too many classes with a small selection of participants are undesirable. This reduces the value of a Paralympic medal for the athletes, in addition to the social and economic value. Furthermore, having too many classes hinders strong, international competition and makes Paralympic sport less comprehensible and appealing to the general public.

<sup>102</sup> [Large-scale pilot study into elite sport culture to kick off in January – Knowledge Centre for Sport and Physical Activity, Elite Sport that Inspires – Sports Agreement, Sports Agenda 2032 Framework](#)

The Netherlands Sports Council believes that, in the short term, assessment of athletes by well-trained classifiers is crucial to facilitating the further development of Paralympic sport. At present, the implementation of classifications leaves a lot to be desired due to chaotic organisation and limited funding. At both national and international level, investment is required for the professionalisation of classification and to support and aggregate the expertise of classifiers.

In the long term, the Netherlands Sports Council regards debate on and innovation of classification systems as useful developments to make classification more objective and to make Paralympic sport more attractive to the general public. The responsibility for these developments and any decision-making rests with the international federations and the IPC. However, the Netherlands may choose to take up an active role in this regard as a model for other countries. The Netherlands Sports Council recognises that there are opportunities to have Paralympic athletes from different classes competing against one another. Examples include the settlement of the impact of the disability in the finishing time or compensation in points due to differences in physical ability. The nature of a sport will determine what can be achieved, and openness to innovation in terms of alternative rules or methods is key.



## 3.4 Achievement and disability

Paralympic athletes wish to be recognised and appreciated for their athletic achievement, rather than for 'being capable of performing with their disability'. The Netherlands Sports Council respects that wish, yet at the same time observes that the media and sponsors have a particular interest in the person behind the athletic achievement, be it Paralympic or Olympic. In Paralympic sport, the physical or intellectual disability of an athlete is a specific attribute of that elite athlete, which makes their achievements unique. The Council therefore believes that attention should be devoted to the achievement as well as to the athlete behind the achievement, including their disability.

Paralympic athletes should be able to 'use' their disability precisely for the purpose of generating additional interest and sponsorship for themselves and for Paralympic sport as a whole, as well as to act as a source of inspiration to children and adults with a disability, who see themselves reflected in these elite athletes and see what can be achieved. The Council expects that, over time, the interest of both the media and the general public will shift to the achievements of Paralympic athletes as the level of Paralympic achievements increases, becomes more spectacular and receives more coverage.



## 3.5 Knowledge sharing and growth

The Netherlands has a good track record of achievement at the Paralympic Games. 'We' win a lot of medals, and the communication that takes place around those events is that, as a small country, we perform extremely well in elite sport. In recent years, NOC\*NSF, supported by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, has strived to achieve a position in the top ten best elite sport countries in the world. If the Netherlands wishes to maintain this position on the medal table or wants to extend its lead, it would be better not to assist the competition, which would mean keeping any knowledge developed within the Netherlands within our own team.

Nevertheless, the Netherlands Sports Council believes that this would be the wrong course of action in respect of the national and global continued development of Paralympic sport. It is precisely by sharing knowledge and helping other countries to raise the bar that competition will increase as well as the number of countries competing. This will in turn lead to more media coverage and sponsors. In addition, the Netherlands itself will be forced to improve its performance and to seek out the details that lead to victory. This will allow the Netherlands to truly become a model for other countries.



4

Recommendations

In Chapter 3, the Netherlands Sports Council states that the further development of Paralympic sport must first be aimed at achieving an equivalent position for Paralympic sport, with the inclusion of grassroots sport, talent development, elite sport and sporting events as its ultimate objective. This starting point forms the crux of this advice. In this chapter, the Council will set out its recommendations to set in motion this continued development. The structure of the sections will correspond to the thematic structure of Chapter 2.

## 4.1 Organisation and funding

### Take control of the development of disability sports

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The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister for Long-term Care and Sport (hereinafter: the Minister for Sport) take control of the development of Paralympic sport and disability sport in the Netherlands. The Council has established that the parties involved in disability sport in the Netherlands do not consult with each other frequently enough and that there is no joint plan or joint vision. This limits the development of disability sport in general and of Paralympic sport in particular. The Minister for Sport can take up a coordinating role in this regard by consulting with the sector on several occasions each year to discuss the key developments.

The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister for Sport work closely with elite and other athletes in drawing up a vision for the long term, as well as with regard to the continued development of sport. In the Council's opinion, a vision of this nature should be aimed at the inclusion of disability sport and Paralympic sport. This will not be realised in one go, which is why the first step will have to be to achieve visible equivalence for Paralympic sport in the Netherlands.

### Level up organisational integration: visible equivalence

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The Netherlands Sports Council is convinced that organisational integration has in principle contributed to the development of Paralympic sport. Nevertheless, the Council believes that new steps are needed to ensure that Paralympic sport attains an equivalent position and for it ultimately to be inclusive. The Netherlands Sports Council has concluded that, at present, Paralympic sport makes up a small and invisible part of the organisation and funding of both the sports federations and NOC\*NSF, leading to a vulnerable position for Paralympic sport. The risk of specific knowledge being lost due to small or overly small organisations and suborganisations must be taken seriously. The same applies to the lack of transparency in terms of accountability for the budget and in respect of the Paralympic sport selection. The lack of equivalence perceived and experienced by Paralympic athletes should similarly be taken seriously.

The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that NOC\*NSF and the sports federations reflect on the ways in which Paralympic sport can be made visible and inclusive. Many options are available for this.

For example, the Netherlands Sports Council believes that making the NPC visible in the NOC\*NSF name, i.e. the NOPC\*NSF, would be one of those options. In addition, Dutch IPC members should be able to attend NOC\*NSF Board meetings as a matter of course, just like IOC members. Furthermore, Paralympic athletes in the Netherlands should receive the same medal prize money as Olympic athletes.

### Embed equivalence in organisational and financial accountability

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The Council recommends that NOC\*NSF and the sports federations enhance equivalence by improving the embedding of organisational and financial accountability for Paralympic sport, both in the boards and in the work organisations. One of the options available to achieve this, in the Council's opinion, is to establish an annual consultation within the general meetings of the sports federations regarding the allocation of funds between Olympic and Paralympic elite sport programmes and talent development. The key principle is that Paralympic sport should be given an equivalent position in this context. The Council also regards public accountability for the expenditure of the Paralympic funds in the annual reports of NOC\*NSF and the sports federations as a method to achieving this.

The Council's analysis and vision also highlight the need for additional investments to be made in order to further develop Paralympic sport. Such investments refer to additional permanent investments in addition to the current elite sport budget. The Council does not wish for the aim of achieving an equivalent position for Paralympic sport to cannibalise or go to the detriment of the existing elite sport funds, but believes that additional funding is required for a number of aspects, including:

- structural funding for the organisation of Paralympic sport at sports federations and NOC\*NSF and for classification;
- accessibility and affordability of elite sports equipment;
- structural investments in talent programmes;
- equivalent elite sports programmes for Paralympic sports;
- organising Paralympic sports in elite sporting events.

#### **Paralympic sport in the context of the advice 'De opstelling op het speelveld'**

In *De opstelling op het speelveld* (The positioning on the playing field), the Netherlands Sports Council recommends making sport and exercise a public service. This naturally also applies to disability sport and Paralympic sport, with a number of specific areas of focus.

#### **Market regulation and the government**

The 'market' for Paralympic sport is limited. The Netherlands Sports Council therefore believes that additional efforts on the part of the government are required, due to the social value of Paralympic sport. The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister for Sport work alongside the provinces to clarify the role of the government in facilitating Paralympic sport.

### Joint industry representation

Paralympic sport has developed from a range of disability-based sports to an integrated part of Dutch elite sport. The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that experts in the field of Paralympic sport continue to be involved in the development of a joint vision and industry representation within the sports sector. Active involvement of elite and other Paralympic athletes will likewise contribute to the ongoing development of Paralympic sport.

### Good governance and transparency

The Netherlands Sports Council has identified certain obstacles to the allocation of lottery funds and funds allocated to NOC\*NSF by the government. This also applies to Paralympic sport, as it does to sport in general. The Council wishes to emphasise that the governance of and integrity within Paralympic sport require specific attention. Athletes with disabilities may be especially vulnerable. Moreover, the small-scale nature of Paralympic sport makes it vulnerable compared to elite sport in general. The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that this interest representation be safeguarded more clearly.

## 4.2 Sports careers in Paralympic sport

### Encourage participation in sport by children and young people with a disability

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The Netherlands Sports Council believes it is vital that there should be permanent awareness of and focus on the athletic motivation of children and young people with disabilities and, by extension, the advancement of talent. This aspect will be given prominence by sports organisations, municipalities and other stakeholders in the implementation of the *Inclusive sport and exercise* preliminary agreement. In the long term, this focus will contribute to the further development of inclusive elite sport for athletes with disabilities. The Council recommends that the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport continue this policy after this preliminary agreement has come to an end in 2022.

### Include disability sport in degree and other programmes

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The Council has observed that the level of knowledge in relation to supporting people with disabilities in sports activities is often still too limited in physical education, at sports providers and in healthcare. This also hinders talent development. For that reason, the Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister for Sport and the Minister of Education, Culture and Science encourage that various aspects of disability sport be included in sports training structures and in adjacent domains (education, healthcare) as a permanent component. The Council also recommends that the Ministers make relevant investments.

### Use talent recruitment days for introduction, athletic motivation and talent development purposes

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Talent recruitment days are a good way to scout out potential talent. However, they can be used in a more accessible way to introduce more young people and adults with disabilities to sport. If these events were to be set up on a larger scale, the Council expects that the selective pressure would likewise decrease.

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In addition, the Netherlands Sports Council recommends broadening the setup of the talent days with a view to facilitating introduction and athletic motivation. The threshold for participation will be lower by holding talent recruitment days at regional level or by clustering sports that can be practised by people with a specific disability (such as goalball, judo and football for athletes with a visual impairment). The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that NOC\*NSF and the sports federations invest in the concept of combined introductory and talent recruitment days and develop the approach further.

### Provide clear delineation of the Paralympic athlete profession

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The Netherlands Sports Council has concluded that the elite athlete profession is not clearly defined. This applies to both Olympic and Paralympic athletes.<sup>103</sup> The Council has identified specific issues in relation to Paralympic athletes, which include allowances for sports equipment and additional support, the operation of the stipend scheme and the Disablement Assistance Act for Handicapped Young Persons (WAJONG) scheme, post-career opportunities and pension accrual. The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister for Sport work in consultation with NOC\*NSF as well as with Paralympic athletes to examine the Paralympic athlete profession, to outline the prerequisites and to draw up a plan to improve those prerequisites.

## 4.3 Classification

### Stimulate technological or other development to make Paralympic sport appealing to the general public

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The Netherlands Sports Council has identified opportunities to have Para athletes from different classes compete against and alongside one another. Examples include the settlement of the impact of the disability in the finishing time or combining the different degrees of disabilities in a single team. The Netherlands Sports Council requests that the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport stimulate classification research.

### Focus on professionalising classification in the Netherlands and worldwide

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The Netherlands Sports Council has concluded that the implementation of classification requires additional attention. Classifiers need funding and effective support in the performance of their duties, at both national and international level. Support is similarly needed for networking and knowledge transfer between classifiers and between classifiers and sports federations. At national level, a support hub can be set up for that purpose at NOC\*NSF, which will then be able to support the network of Dutch classifiers by providing advice and assistance and ensuring that these classifiers receive international training.

Classifiers will therefore not fall directly under a specific federation. This will ensure their independence, while at the same time, they will be able to follow the sport closely. The Council has considered recommending the creation of a committee or authority, but believes that the establishment of such an authority would be

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<sup>103</sup> The elite athlete profession is one of the topics that will be examined in greater detail in the forthcoming advice on the organisation and funding of elite sport in the Netherlands, which the Netherlands Sports Council will be kicking off in 2022.

disproportionate to the task. In addition, the Council recommends that the Minister for Sport work alongside the NOC\*NSF and the major sports federations to push for further professionalisation of the implementation of classification and funding for this purpose, and the development of the Classification Code, at international level. Furthermore, the Council recommends that they make efforts to establish the international support hub required, in which regard the WADA may serve as an example.

## 4.4 Perception and visibility

### Increasing media coverage and comprehensibility

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Increased media coverage and the development of a specific branch of sport have the potential to reinforce one another, if the sport is appealing to the general public as well as easy to understand. The Council recommends that the Minister for Sport reflect on how Paralympic sport can be made more accessible to a larger audience. The Netherlands Sports Council sees the use of live streams and social media as platforms as examples for athletes and sports organisations to raise their profile. Creating content to present and explain Paralympic sports to a wider audience may also be a way to reach a larger audience.

In addition, the Council recommends that the Minister for Sport and the State Secretary for Culture and Media enter into a dialogue with the sports sector on supplementing the list of events in the Media Act (*Mediawet*) with Paralympic sports (such as athletics, wheelchair basketball and para cycling). Through the Media Act, central government will be able to contribute to the visibility of Paralympic sport by putting it on screen more often than solely during the Paralympic Games. In the context of equivalence, the Netherlands Sports Council believes that the government can go the proverbial extra mile for Paralympic sports.

### Focus on joint sporting events

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Sporting events provide a tremendous opportunity for Paralympic sports to present themselves to the general public. The Netherlands can set an example in this regard, as is already happening with the ABN AMRO World Tennis Tournament and the 2019 World Archery Championships in Den Bosch. This platform for elite athletes with disabilities provides an opportunity in particular for cities and sponsors who wish to present themselves as being inclusive and socially responsible.

The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister for Sport encourage joint elite sporting events. When granting subsidies to major sporting events, the Minister may impose the participation of Paralympic sports disciplines – at the very least as a demonstration sport – as a precondition. To start with, the Minister may consider this strategy for the European and World Youth Championships. In addition, the Minister for Sport in consultation with the Minister of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy can set up a consortium of cities and sponsors who profile themselves as parties that will be organising joint events over the next ten years. Finally, the Council suggests making subsidy funds available to transform the Olympic Experience, a Dutch public event during the Games, into an Olympic & Paralympic Experience. This will generate more interest in Paralympic athletes, raise the profile of Paralympic sport among the general population and make it more attractive for sponsors to invest in Paralympic sport.

## 4.5 Knowledge sharing and innovation

### Continued development of knowledge and innovation

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The Netherlands has a great deal of knowledge to offer that is of value to Paralympic sport. It also has the capacity to continue to innovate. Research universities, universities of applied sciences, rehabilitation centres, sports organisations, event organisers, public authorities and businesses can work together more effectively to develop innovative knowledge and make use of the knowledge available. The Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister for Sport take charge of the knowledge chain. The Minister can have certain preconditions included in the provision of research funds regarding the allocation of a portion of these funds to Paralympic sport.

### Provide a centralised point of contact for practical knowledge and support

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At present, knowledge relating to Paralympic sport is very often held by one or a few people within organisations. This puts the continued development of Paralympic sport in a vulnerable position. The Council believes that knowledge can be shared and made available more widely. This concerns knowledge in the area of classifications, adjustments in training, sports equipment or technological developments. The Council recommends transferring practical knowledge to a support hub at NOC\*NSF. In addition, the Council recommends that additional funds be invested in the knowledge function of the Knowledge Centre for Sport and Physical Activity for Paralympic sport.

## 4.6 The position of the Netherlands abroad

### Provide a clear plan and establish an active, international Dutch presence

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The Netherlands Sports Council believes that the Netherlands should sue its position as an innovation leader to support other countries with knowledge and experience. This will increase international competition in Paralympic sport, make Paralympic sport more appealing and raise its profile. In addition, the Netherlands can support and promote inclusive events and thus contribute to joint Paralympic and Olympic sport.

The Netherlands can form a consortium with partners, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Scandinavian countries and other leading countries, to promote inclusion and to help other countries develop Paralympic sport.

The Council recommends that the Minister of Foreign Affairs draw up a plan in consultation with NOC\*NSF and the sports federations regarding the Netherlands' efforts abroad, in which they can set out how more Dutch officials can take up international board positions and/or participate in work organisations. This will allow the Netherlands, for example, to influence decisions on competition, classification or the organisation of Paralympic sport. Furthermore, the Netherlands Sports Council recommends that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in consultation with the Minister for Sport, focus on bilateral agreements with countries in which sport for people with disabilities is still in its infancy. These agreements may relate to sports promotion, talent development or elite athlete achievement.





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# Appendix

RGK

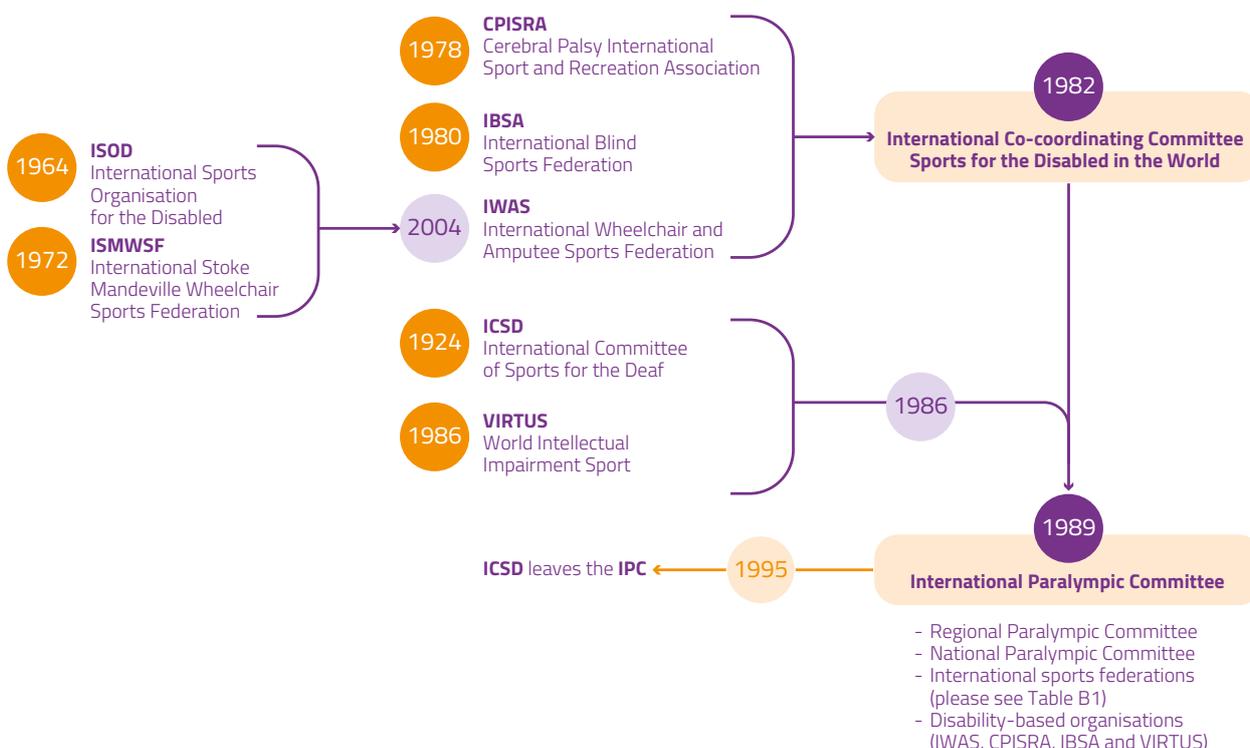
# Appendix 1

## Background information

### Historical development as a basis to shape the future

Awareness of sport for people with disabilities first started gaining ground in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>104</sup> The English doctor Ludwig Guttmann believed sport to be key to victims of war suffering from neurological conditions or amputations. In 1948, Guttmann organised the first World Wheelchair and Amputee Games in London, analogous to the Olympic Games that were also held in London that year. Over the following decades, various international federations were established, based on the specific type of disability (please see Figure 3). These federations jointly organised the Paralympic Games and their predecessors until the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) was founded in 1989. By comparison, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was founded in 1896 – nearly a century earlier.

**Figure 3** // International organisations involved in disability sport



In international sporting events, it is similarly evident that they developed from a focus on the disability. The first events focused on sport for people in a wheelchair or living with an amputation. The Olympic Games for people with a disability in Arnhem in 1980 also welcomed athletes with a vision impairment and a congenital brain injury. Athletes with an intellectual disability took part in the Paralympic Games for the first time in 1996 in Atlanta.

<sup>104</sup> Verhaag (2013)

## Paralympic sports and recognised disabilities

The IPC has recognised 28 branches of sport as Paralympic sport. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC), in consultation with the international federations, determines which sports and components of sports and which disability classes they will allow to compete in the upcoming editions of the Summer and Winter Paralympic Games (please see Table 1).<sup>105</sup> Just like regular sport, disability sport has more branches of sport and components thereof than are offered at the Paralympic Games. These sports and components of sports may be included in World Championships and continental championships of the various international sports federations.

Every sport is part of an international federation. The involvement of a variety of parties, each with their own rules, does make collaboration more difficult. Four branches of sport, for example, are part of the international disability-based sports federations, such as goalball (IBSA) and wheelchair fencing (IWAS). Other branches of Paralympic sport are integrated into the mainstream international sports federations (such as badminton, wheelchair tennis and triathlon) or have their own international federation (such as wheelchair basketball and wheelchair rugby). Ten branches of sport have so far been organised under the banner of the IPC (such as various winter sports, athletics and swimming).

A number of international federations, whose sports are not or not yet part of the Paralympic Games, do contribute to the development of sport for people with a disability. The IPC will recognise these federations if they meet the organisational standards of the IPC.

In addition to the branches of sport, the IPC has determined which impairments have been recognised for Paralympic competition:

1. impaired muscle power due to, for example, spinal cord injury or spina bifida;
2. impaired passive range of movement;
3. amputation of limbs as a consequence of trauma or illness or congenital limb deficiency;
4. significant leg length difference, whether as a result of a growth disturbance or as a result of trauma;
5. achondroplasia (dwarfism);
6. hypertonia, such as cerebral palsy (spasms);
7. ataxia (impaired coordination);
8. athetosis (neurological symptom with movement problems);
9. visual impairment, whether in terms of focus, field of vision or perception/colour perception;
10. intellectual impairment, measured in IQ (<75), limited conceptual, social and practical adaptive skills required for everyday life, which impairment must be present before the age of 18.

These ten impairments all have in common that they are verifiable and permanent in nature. If an athlete has one of the ten recognised impairments, this does not automatically allow them to compete in every Paralympic sport. There are Minimum Impairment Criteria. This means that the impairment must have an impact on the athletic achievement. The description of a Minimum Impairment is reflected in the classification system for each branch of sport. Not all impairments are admitted. Athletes with a hearing impairment, for example, are not part of Paralympic sport.

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<sup>105</sup> IPC handbook Chapter 2.7 – [Schedule to bylaws sport governance and management](#)

**Table 1a** // List of Paralympic/non-Paralympic branches of sport and organisational forms  
(*Internationally integrated sports*)

| Paralympic sport <sup>106</sup><br>( <i>Internationally integrated sports</i> ) | International Federation (Paralympic) | International Federation (regular)    | Dutch sports federation                          | Recognised as an elite sport by NOC*NSF <sup>107</sup> | Elite sport funding <sup>108</sup> |
|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|------------------------------------|
| <b>INTERNATIONALLY INTEGRATED SPORTS</b>  |                                       |                                       |  |  |                                    |
| badminton   | -                                     | Badminton World Federation            | Badminton Nederland                              | yes  | yes                                |
| archery   | -                                     | World Archery                         | Nederlandse Handboog Bond                        | yes  | no                                 |
| canoeing  | -                                     | International Canoeing Federation     | Watersportverbond                                | no   | no                                 |
| equestrian sport  | -                                     | Federation Equestre International     | Koninklijke Nederlandse Hippische Sportfederatie | yes  | yes                                |
| rowing  | -                                     | World Rowing Federation               | Koninklijke Nederlandsche Roeibond               | yes  | yes                                |
| wheelchair curling  | -                                     | World Curling Federation              | Koninklijke Nederlandse Cricket Bond             | yes  | no                                 |
| wheelchair tennis   | -                                     | International Tennis Federation       | Koninklijke Nederlandse Lawn Tennis Bond         | yes  | yes                                |
| Taekwondo   | -                                     | World Taekwondo Federation            | Taekwondo Bond Nederland                         | yes  | no                                 |
| table tennis  | -                                     | International Table Tennis Federation | Nederlandse Tafeltennisbond                      | yes  | yes                                |
| triathlon   | -                                     | International Triathlon Union         | Nederlandse Triathlon Bond                       | yes  | yes                                |
| cycling   | -                                     | Union Cycliste Internationale         | Koninklijke Nederlandsche Wielren Unie           | yes  | yes                                |

<sup>106</sup> IPC handbook Chapter 2.7 – Schedule to bylaws sport governance and management

<sup>107</sup> List of recognised elite sports and international competitive sports disciplines 2021 – 2024

<sup>108</sup> Grants for federation and elite sports centre programmes 2021

**Table 1b** // List of Paralympic/non-Paralympic branches of sport and organisational forms  
(Sports organised by the IPC)

| Paralympic sport <sup>106</sup>    | International Federation (Paralympic)                   | International Federation (regular)      | Dutch sports federation                            | Recognised as an elite sport by NOC*NSF <sup>107</sup> | Elite sport funding <sup>108</sup> |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|------------------------------------|
| <b>SPORTS ORGANISED BY THE IPC</b> |   |   |  |  |                                    |
| alpine skiing                      | Para Alpine Skiing                                      | International Ski Federation            | Nederlandse Ski Vereniging                         | yes  | yes                                |
| athletics                          | Para Athletics  | World Athletics                         | Atletiekunie                                       | yes  | yes                                |
| biathlon/nordic skiing             | Para Biathlon/<br>Nordic Skiing                         | International Ski Federation            | Nederlandse Ski Vereniging                         | yes  | no                                 |
| dancesport                         | Para Dance Sport<br>(not on Paralympic Games programme) | World Dancesport Federation             | Nederlandse Algemene Danssport Bond                | no   | no                                 |
| ice hockey                         | Para Ice Hockey   | International Ice Hockey Federation     | Gehandicaptensport Nederland                       | yes  | no                                 |
| powerlifting                       | Para Powerlifting                                       | International Weightlifting Federation  | Koninklijke Nederlandse Krachtsport en Fitnessbond | yes  | no                                 |
| snowboarding                       | Para Snowboarding                                       | International Ski Federation            | Nederlandse Ski Vereniging                         | yes  | yes                                |
| shooting sport                     | Shooting Para Sport                                     | International Shooting Sport Federation | Koninklijke Nederlandse Schietsport Associatie     | yes  | no                                 |
| swimming                           | Para Swimming   | International Swimming Federation       | Koninklijke Nederlandse Zwembond                   | yes  | yes                                |

**Table 1c** // List of Paralympic/non-Paralympic branches of sport and organisational forms  
(*Independent international sports federation*)

| Paralympic sport <sup>106</sup>                    | International Federation (Paralympic)                         | International Federation (regular)                | Dutch sports federation   | Recognised as an elite sport by NOC*NSF <sup>107</sup> | Elite sport funding <sup>108</sup> |
|--|---|---|---|--|------------------------------------|
| <b>INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL SPORTS FEDERATION</b> |   |   |   |  |                                    |
| boccia   | Boccia International Sports Federation                        | -   | Gehandicapsport Nederland                                       | yes  | yes                                |
| wheelchair basketball                              | International Wheelchair Basketball Federation (part of FIBA) | International Basketball Federation               | Nederlandse Basketball Bond                                     | yes  | yes                                |
| wheelchair rugby                                   | Wheelchair Rugby Federation                                   | World Rugby                                       | Gehandicapsport Nederland                                       | yes  | yes                                |
| sitting volleyball                                 | World ParaVolley  | International Volleybal Federation                | Nederlandse Volleybalbond                                       | yes  | no (until 2021)                    |
| <b>DISABILITY-BASED ORGANISATIONS</b>              |   |   |   |  |                                    |
| football 5-a-side                                  | International Blind Sport Association                         | Federation Internationale de Football Association | Gehandicapsport Nederland / Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond | yes  | no                                 |
| goalball   | International Blind Sport Association                         | -   | Gehandicapsport Nederland                                       | yes  | no                                 |
| judo   | International Blind Sport Association                         | International Ice Hockey Federation               | Judo Bond Nederland   | yes  | no                                 |
| wheelchair fencing                                 | International Wheelchair and Amputee Sports Federation        | International Fencing Federation                  | Koninklijke Nederlandse Algemene Schermbond                     | yes  | no                                 |

**Tabel 1d** // List of Paralympic/non-Paralympic branches of sport and organisational forms  
(These sports are not part of the Paralympic Games)

| Paralympic sport <sup>106</sup> | International Federation (Paralympic)           | International Federation (regular)                | Dutch sports federation                            | Recognised as an elite sport by NOC*NSF <sup>107</sup> | Elite sport funding <sup>108</sup> |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--|--|------------------------------------|
| arm wrestling                   | -   | World Armwrestling Federation                     | Koninklijke Nederlandse Krachtsport en Fitnessbond | no   | no                                 |
| bobsleigh and skeleton          | -   | International Bobsleigh & Skeleton Federation     | Bob en Slee Bond Nederland                         | no   | no                                 |
| sport climbing                  | -   | International Federation of Sports Climbing       | Nederlandse Klim- en Bergsport Vereniging          | no   | no                                 |
| CP football                     | International Federation of CP Football         | Federation Internationale de Football Association | Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbal Bond               | no   | no                                 |
| frisbee                         | -   | World Flying Disc Federation                      | Nederlandse Frisbee Bond                           | no   | no                                 |
| golf                            | -   | International Golf Federation                     | Nederlandse Golf Federatie                         | no   | no                                 |
| handball                        | -   | International Handball Federation                 | Nederlands Handbal Verbond                         | no   | no                                 |
| hockey                          | -   | International Hockey Federation                   | Koninklijke Nederlandse Hockey Bond                | no   | no                                 |
| karate                          | -   | World Karate Federation                           | Karate-do Bond Nederland                           | no   | no                                 |
| modern pentathlon               | -   | Modern Pentathlon International Union             | Moderne Vijfkamp Bond                              | no   | no                                 |
| powerchair football             | International Federation of Powerchair Football | Federation Internationale de Football Association | Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbal Bond               | no   | no                                 |
| sailing                         | -   | World Sailing                                     | Watersportverbond                                  | no   | no                                 |
| squash                          | -   | World Squash Federation                           | Squash Bond Nederland                              | no   | no                                 |

**IN ADDITION TO THESE SPORTS, THE IPC RECOGNISES A NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL FEDERATIONS FOR THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF DISABILITY SPORT. THESE SPORTS ARE NOT PART OF THE PARALYMPIC GAMES**

## Funding streams in Dutch Paralympic sport

Funding within Dutch elite sport comes from various sources, with the level of funding clearly defined on the one hand and less clear on the other.<sup>109</sup> The TeamNL budget for 2021 shows that revenue was allocated as follows:<sup>110</sup>

- Central government (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport) contributes to elite sporting events, elite sports programmes and national and international anti-doping control through subsidies, which amounted to a total of 39.9 million euros in 2021.
- Central government (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport) finances the *Fonds voor de Topsporter* (Elite Athlete Fund). In 2021, 13.8 million euros was spent on stipends and expense allowances.
- In 2021, the Dutch State Lottery contributed 14.7 million euros to elite sport,
- with the IOC and partners contributing 2.5 million euros in the same year.

Due to the integration of Paralympic sport, it is unclear what percentage was allocated to Paralympic sport or athletes. However, an indication can be provided.

- In 2021, NOC\*NSF spent 33.2 million euros on elite sports and training programmes, of which Paralympic programmes received 3.8 million euros (11%).<sup>111</sup>
- The TeamNL centres (formerly Centres for Elite Sport and Education) and the Centre of Expertise for Secondary Education & Elite Sport (formerly Stichting Loot) received 7.8 million euros. A number of Paralympic sports, such as wheelchair basketball and boccia, make use of those facilities.
- Other expenditure related to the support and coaching from the federations and national coaches (4.8 million euros), Games Operations (8.7 million euros), Athlete services (3.7 million euros) and collective projects (2.6 million euros). It is impossible to determine what percentage of this budget went to Paralympic sport. What is certain is that Paralympic sports federations are supported by performance managers and that participation in the Paralympic Games was paid for from this budget.

The Johan Cruyff Foundation contributes to the funding of talent programmes of various federations, spending over 200,000 euros on such programmes in 2020.<sup>112</sup> The *Fonds Gehandicaptensport* (Disability Sport Foundation) supported a number of Paralympic athletes and contributed to Team Para athletics.<sup>113</sup> Amounts cannot be provided for other sources of revenue, including for the sports federations' own investments in Paralympic talent and elite sports programmes, athletes' contributions to training, materials and travel expenses and revenue from sponsors.

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<sup>109</sup> In 2022, the Netherlands Sports Council began the advisory process on [Organisation and Funding of Elite Sport](#). Shedding more light on funding streams will be part of that process.

<sup>110</sup> [NOC\\*NSF spending targets elite sports budget | Publication | Government.nl](#). In addition, the federations themselves made 21.3 million euros available for elite sports programmes.

<sup>111</sup> [nocnsf-lijst-topsporttoekenningen-2021.pdf](#)

<sup>112</sup> [2020 Financial Statements of the Johan Cruyff Foundation](#)

<sup>113</sup> [2020 Financial Statements of Fonds Gehandicaptensport](#)

# Appendix 2

## Report on consultations

The Netherlands Sports Council held four consultation sessions in the context of the process for the advice on *Continued development of Paralympic sport*. The results of these discussions are summarised in this report. The consultation sessions were structured as follows:

1. International consultation: the committee spoke to international scientists and representatives of various national Paralympic committees and sports organisations during an online session on 29 September.
2. Stakeholder consultation: on 7 October, the committee met with Dutch stakeholders from the sport, media and events sector and the municipalities.
3. Expert consultation: on 8 October, representatives from the Dutch science and policy research provided their input.
4. Consultation with elite athletes and coaches: on 28 October, Paralympic athletes and coaches shared their thoughts on the key priorities in the context of continued development.

### Structure of the consultations

At the request of the Netherlands Sports Council, those who attended the consultations provided a SWOT analysis of the current state of Paralympic sport. They were invited to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of Paralympic sport, both in the Netherlands and at international level. The participants then discussed the threats and opportunities that they saw to the continued development of Paralympic sport. These discussions took place based on the following three themes:

- the governance, organisation and funding of Paralympic sport;
- the athletic careers of and support for Paralympic athletes;
- the social impact of Paralympic sport.

In the Dutch consultation sessions, participants subsequently set out what they considered to be the most important issues in the context of the continued development of Paralympic sport. The session was concluded with a discussion about the key priorities, focusing in particular on the question of which parties should organise and fund the associated activities. In the international consultation, the focus was on the role that the Netherlands (including the government) could play as a model for other countries in the context of the ongoing international development of Paralympic sport.

### Organisational integration, elite sport climate and integrity

Most participants believe that the organisational integration of Paralympic sport within NOC\*NSF and the sports federations has contributed to the development of Paralympic sport. The comparable facilities for all elite athletes in one single TeamNL, such as the availability of a stipend for A status athletes, is an example of this. Attendees also highlighted the risks of organisational integration, pointing to fragmentation of knowledge and the conflicts of interest at both the sports federations and NOC\*NSF.

Disability sport and Paralympic sport in particular are forced to compete for attention as a small target group. According to the participants, specific knowledge and permanent interest and attention are insufficiently safeguarded within NOC\*NSF, the sports federations and municipalities. International experts also see this as a relevant risk in an international context. If Paralympic sport is to be further integrated into international federations or even the IOC, attention and focus will have to continue to be devoted to the unique aspect of the sport. This can be described as the difference between integration and inclusion: has Paralympic sport merely been included from an organisational perspective or does it truly belong and is it visible enough? The consultations revealed that the prerequisites for success are still insufficiently safeguarded in the organisation of Paralympic sport. Participants referred to issues such as the vulnerable position of Paralympic athletes, issues relating to integrity in terms of the selection of Paralympic participants and oversight in terms of the allocation of funds, which can lead to undesirable situations in Paralympic sport, such as abuses of power.

### **Cultivation and development of talent**

Many participants regard the cultivation and development of talent as a key condition to the continued development of Paralympic sport. The number of talented Paralympic athletes is small both in an absolute and in a relative sense compared to that for Olympic sport. Sports participation of children with disabilities is similarly at a far lower level than that of children without disabilities. The participants identified a number of important opportunities for the continued development of Paralympic sport. Greater focus, for example, is needed on sport and exercise during the rehabilitation process, on good physical education for all children and on social and physical accessibility of sport for people with disabilities.

The sports federations and NOC\*NSF make decisions regarding the allocation of funds for elite sports programmes and training programmes. They are therefore dependent on the budget available for both Olympic and Paralympic sports. During the consultations, various remarks were made regarding these choices. A number of individuals indicated that there are too few training programmes available for talented individuals. In addition, the funding of these types of programmes is dependent on foundations or private funds. In addition, the scouting of athletes with a disability on talent recruitment days is crucial to Dutch performance and achievement. According to participants, the funding and organisation of these days has declined. Finally, the current financing of focus sports has contributed to the current position held by Dutch Paralympic sport. Nevertheless, some participants question how beneficial this is for broad Paralympic sport development and future performance.

The lack of access to and the funding of sports equipment (such as wheelchairs, prostheses, hand cycles, sitting skis) was a recurring issue at the consultations. Sports equipment is, first and foremost, vital to getting acquainted with sport and exercise. Provision by municipalities or under the Social Support Act (Wmo) creates a lot of uncertainty. Talented individuals depend on sports equipment to be able to develop into elite athletes, which is why sports equipment should be adapted to their level of performance. This means that athletes will often need new – often customised – sports equipment. In addition to the availability and funding of sports equipment, this required a great deal of technical knowledge. A number of individuals indicated that all three aspects constitute weaknesses to continued development.

## Classification

The purpose of classification of Paralympic athletes is to organise fair competition, meaning that their impairment should not be a factor that impacts the result. How to objectively determine the extent to which a disability affects performance is a difficult issue. The classification of athletes into classes that are both fair and competitively challenging is likewise a challenge. In certain sports, such as athletics and swimming, a large number of classes have been defined – often with few participants. This makes it difficult for spectators to understand and difficult for the media to portray in an appealing manner.

Participants cited the current organisation of classification as a weakness of Paralympic sport. Classification requires further professionalisation, both in the Netherlands and at international level, and relates *inter alia* to its technical and organisational implementation. Volunteers, for example, carry out classification duties for athletes during competitions. Participants cited insufficient funds for a professional classification organisation and the lack of knowledge sharing between classifiers as weaknesses, which could potentially lead to a risk of arbitrary decisions.

## Perception and visibility

Participants of the consultations agreed that the media generate a great deal of interest in Paralympic sport during the Paralympic Games, thereby creating momentum for the Games to be linked to sports promotion. However, once the Games are over, public interest quickly fades. In addition, there is a consensus that Para athletes can be important role models for future elite athletes and for the inclusion of people with disabilities in society. The way in which a role model can optimise their value resulted in a great deal of discussion during the sessions. It is crucial, for example, to consider the identity and the unique story of the Para athlete, including the story behind the disability. Sharing the story behind the disability can be crucial to *athlete branding* or in relation to finding sponsors. At the same time, athletes wish to be recognised and appreciated for their performance and do not want the ‘sad’ side of their disability to dominate the story.

## Knowledge sharing and innovation

The Netherlands has a good infrastructure for Paralympic sport, as well as a great deal of knowledge, such as in relation to innovation. However, that knowledge could be put to better use. The experts indicated that there is no permanent bridge in place between professional practice and the scientific community. One possible remedy for this may be the use of embedded scientists, as is the case in Olympic sport. In addition, the sports sector can make more use of the knowledge and knowledge facilities available at research universities and universities of applied sciences, which often have knowledge on sport in addition to a great deal of knowledge on rehabilitation in the broad sense at their disposal. The technical and organisational knowledge on movement technology and sports equipment can likewise be developed and utilised more effectively.

The knowledge on Paralympic sport in the Netherlands can contribute to the development of sport for people with disabilities in other countries. Significant gains in that domain still stand to be made through EU programmes and other aid programmes, such as Erasmus+, which could be used to establish post-career programmes for athletes or stimulate international research.

## The Netherlands abroad

International experts have highlighted the significant difference between developed, mostly Western, countries and less developed countries in terms of the development of Paralympic sport. In many other countries, the government similarly plays a role in the funding of Paralympic sport. Organisational integration in these countries is often less advanced than in the Netherlands. If the goal is to enhance global competition and performance in Paralympic sport, then less developed countries will have to be assisted in terms of the athletic motivation of people with disabilities. The Netherlands could serve as a model country in this regard. The Game Changer Project in Tokyo is an example of this type of development-oriented partnership. The Netherlands can equally act as a model country with its knowledge in the field of innovation, such as in relation to the development of affordable blades.

In terms of its role as a model country, it is vital that the Dutch take an active role in international federations and the IPC/IOC, given that the international federations inter alia draw up the Classification Codes for each branch of sport. Anyone wishing to influence this will have to sit on the committees and boards of those organisations.

Finally, the experts pointed out that a country cannot simply become a model. This requires systematic relationship building. In addition, it is vital to take into account local customs and use customised solutions. What works well in the Netherlands may have a very different effect elsewhere. Taking a critical view of the situation at home likewise continues to be crucial, such as consideration of the degree of inclusion of people with disabilities in Dutch society.

# Appendix 3

## List of interviewees

### Interviews

|                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| Frank Slooten        | NOC*NSF                                  |
| Paul Hover           | Mulier Institute                         |
| Radboud Koning       | Rebel                                    |
| Ralf van der Rijst   | NOC*NSF                                  |
| Lisanne Balk         | Mulier Institute                         |
| Caroline van Lindert | Mulier Institute                         |
| Raymond Blondel      | NOC*NSF/NPC                              |
| Dos Engelaar         | Gehandicaptensport Nederland             |
| Joep Pelsser         | Gehandicaptensport Nederland             |
| Nike Boor            | Fonds Gehandicaptensport                 |
| Sandra Titulaer      | Rijndam Revalidatiecentrum               |
| Guido Davio          | Dutch Volleyball Association (Nevobo)    |
| Susanne van Waert    | Former NOC*NSF and IPC employee          |
| Andre Cats           | Royal Dutch Swimming Federation (KNZB)   |
| Ilja Simons          | Breda University of Applied Sciences     |
| Greg Richards        | Breda University of Applied Sciences     |
| Monique Berger       | The Hague University of Applied Sciences |
| Sam de Vor           | NOC*NSF                                  |
| David Mann           | Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam             |

### International consultation on 29 September

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| David Legg          | Department of Health and Physical Education, Mount Royal University, Canada          |
| Hans Westerbeek     | Institute for Health & Sport, Victoria University, Australia                         |
| Aija Saari          | Finnish Paralympic Committee   |
| Linda Torége        | Parasport Sweden & Swedish Paralympic Committee                                      |
| Ian Brittain        | Centre for Business in Society Faculty of Business and Law, Coventry, University, UK |
| Tony Sainsbury      | former British Paralympic Chef de Mission, consultant                                |
| Todd Nicholson      | former chairman of the IPC Athletes' Council, Canada                                 |
| Tabo Huntley        | School of Sport and Exercise Science, Liverpool John Moores University, UK           |
| Anoma van der Veere | Leiden Asia Centre, Leiden University, NL/Japan                                      |
| Cato Zahl Pedersen  | Idrettsforbundet Norway  |
| Mads Andreassen     | Idrettsforbundet Norway  |
| Winnie Tiemans      | Deutscher Behindertensportverband e.V. – National Paralympic Committee Germany       |
| Jacqueline Patatas  | Vrije Universiteit Brussel/ British Columbia Wheelchairrugby, Canada                 |
| David Mann          | Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam   |
| Chelsey Gotell      | Chairperson IPC Athletes' Council, Canada  |

### Stakeholder consultation, 7 October

|                        |                                   |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Esther Vergeer         | NOC*NSF                           |
| Joep Pelsser           | Gehandicaptensport Nederland      |
| Niels Meijer           | Cruyff Foundation                 |
| Maurice Leeser         | Sportbedrijf Lelystad             |
| Erik Kersten           | Team TOC                          |
| Peter Blangé           | Rotterdam Topsport                |
| Jean-Pierre Kempeneers | Ministry of Foreign Affairs       |
| Nike Boor              | Fonds Gehandicaptensport          |
| Paul Vloon             | NOS                               |
| Maarten Nooter         | NOS                               |
| Anja van Ginhoven      | NOC*NSF/Esther Vergeer Foundation |

### Expert consultation, 8 October

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Lisanne Balk            | Mulier Institute                                 |
| Paul Hover              | Mulier Institute                                 |
| Monique Berger          | The Hague University of Applied Sciences         |
| Thomas Janssen          | Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam                     |
| Herman IJzerman         | Knowledge Centre for Sport and Physical Activity |
| Afke Kerkstra           | Inholland University of Applied Sciences         |
| Caroline van Lindert    | Mulier Institute                                 |
| Jorge Alves Lino-de Wit | Fontys University of Applied Sciences            |
| Lars Hagen              | Fontys University of Applied Sciences            |
| Jacco van Sterkenburg   | Erasmus University Rotterdam                     |

### Athletes and coaches, 28 October

|                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| Rogier Dorsman       | Swimming          |
| Sem Roelofs          | Table tennis      |
| Sanne Voets          | Equestrian sport  |
| Rogier van Meggelen  | Goalball (coach)  |
| Bas de Bruin         | Triathlon (coach) |
| Jeroen Kampschreur   | Skiing            |
| Fleur Jong           | Athletics         |
| Guido Bonsen         | Athletics (coach) |
| Chantalle Zijderveld | Swimming          |
| Barbara van Bergen   | Skiing            |

## Publication details

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- 
- Claudia Bokel, *chair*;
- 
- Jiske Griffioen and Farid Gamei, *council members*;
- 
- Lara Ankersmit, Rita van Driel, René Martens, Jan-Willem van der Roest and Cees Vervoorn, *advisors*;
- 
- Annet Tiessen and Lennart Langbroek, *secretariat*.



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The Netherlands Sports Council is an independent advisory board that focuses on enhancing the significance of elite sport, grassroots sport and exercise in society. The Netherlands Sports Council provides advice on both sport-specific themes and aspects such as the relationship between sport and other policy areas. The Council's recommendations are developed in a transparent manner in consultation with experts and based on first-hand experience. The Council issues recommendations that are innovative, relevant, feasible and substantiated by research.

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