

PARALYMPIC MOVEMENT OF AZERBAIJAN: OPPORTUNITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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Abstract. Azerbaijan's Paralympic movement thrives on outstanding achievements and commitment to inclusion. Athletes demonstrate resilience and skill on global stages, reflecting the nation's commitment to excellence. The movement is moving forward thanks to continued efforts to nurture talent and increase accessibility. By focusing on increasing the opportunities of people with disabilities and expanding sports opportunities, Azerbaijan's Paralympic future shines bright, enriching both the sports and social landscape.

Keywords: *Azerbaijan, Paralympic movement, achievements, inclusion, disability, sports opportunities, excellence.*

1. Introduction. The Paralympic movement stands as a beacon of inclusivity and athletic prowess, embodying the resilience and determination of individuals with disabilities worldwide. Among the nations championing this cause, Azerbaijan emerges as a prominent player, with its Paralympic endeavors marked by remarkable achievements and a steadfast commitment to empowerment. Azerbaijan's journey within the Paralympic arena is a testament to its unwavering dedication to excellence and inclusivity. Over the years, the nation has embraced the transformative power of sports in transcending physical limitations and fostering a culture of acceptance and respect for individuals with disabilities. This commitment has propelled Azerbaijan's Paralympic movement to great heights, earning admiration both domestically and on the global stage. At

the heart of Azerbaijan's Paralympic success story lies the remarkable achievements of its athletes. These individuals, endowed with remarkable resilience and unwavering determination, have defied odds and shattered stereotypes, showcasing their exceptional talent and skill on international platforms. From the jubilant celebrations of medal victories to the quiet moments of personal triumph, each athlete's journey reflects the spirit of perseverance and triumph that defines the Paralympic ethos. Central to Azerbaijan's Paralympic philosophy is the belief in the transformative power of sports as a tool for empowerment. By providing individuals with disabilities the opportunity to participate in high-level athletic competitions, Azerbaijan's Paralympic movement serves as a catalyst for personal growth, self-confidence, and social inclusion. Through sports, athletes are not only able to push their physical limits but also challenge societal perceptions of disability, proving that determination and talent know no bounds. The success of Azerbaijan's Paralympic movement is further underscored by its commitment to nurturing talent and expanding access to sports for individuals with disabilities. Through strategic initiatives and investment in grassroots programs, the nation has created a supportive ecosystem that identifies, trains, and develops promising athletes from diverse backgrounds. This emphasis on talent cultivation ensures a steady pipeline of skilled Paralympians, poised to make their mark on the global stage.

Today, like our Olympians, our Paralympians are able to have their say in world sports. Under the leadership of the National Paralympic Committee established in 1996, our athletes have tried their strength in 7 Summer and 1 Winter Paralympic Games. Our athletes

who improve their results in every Paralympics, showing character and strong will, play the role of a beacon in the integration of disabled people into society through sports. The love of our Paralympians for sports and the desire to conquer new heights unite thousands of athletes around the National Paralympic Committee. As a result of relentless training, sleepless nights, belief in victory, love of the country and perseverance, the great victory of our Paralympians at the Summer Paralympic Games “Tokyo-2020” was engraved in the memory of history with golden letters. In fact, it was a continuation of the path of heroism and success.

In parallel with its focus on athletic excellence, Azerbaijan’s Paralympic movement places a strong emphasis on accessibility and inclusivity. Recognizing the importance of providing equal opportunities for all, the nation has implemented various measures to remove barriers to participation and ensure that individuals with disabilities have access to sports facilities, training resources, and support services. By fostering an environment that celebrates diversity and embraces inclusion, Azerbaijan’s Paralympic movement sets a powerful example for promoting social cohesion and equality.

Looking ahead, the future prospects of Azerbaijan’s Paralympic movement shine bright with promise and potential. As the nation continues to build upon its past successes and forge new paths in the realm of adaptive sports, it remains committed to advancing the principles of inclusivity, empowerment, and excellence. With each triumph and milestone, Azerbaijan’s Paralympic movement reaffirms its role as a catalyst for positive change, inspiring generations to come and championing the rights and abilities of individuals with disabilities on the global stage.

1. New Breath, Advanced Ideas and Challenges in Azerbaijani Paralympic Sports. Sports serve as a reflection of a nation’s culture, identity, and progress. In Azerbaijan, a country rich in history and tradition, sports have always held significant importance. However, in recent years, there has been

a noticeable shift towards embracing new ideas, adopting advanced techniques, and facing unique challenges in the realm of sports. Each of our 36 athletes who participated in “Tokyo-2020” deserved an award. Each of them are athletes who have been tested and have made themselves known by their wonderful achievements. Despite the fact that our country faced serious problems in the Paralympics, no factor allowed to break the mood in the team, did not give way to discouragement. The professional staff was ready for all problems and thought only about victory. The team showed incredible results and managed to be in the top ten. Winning 14 gold medals in one Paralympic Games is a great achievement. The family of Paralympians set a goal to maintain this result and even achieve a higher success in the next Paralympics. President of our country Ilham Aliyev’s opinion that “Our paralympians are among the strongest teams” was once again confirmed at the Tokyo Paralympics. The basis of this success is the high organization of the National Paralympic Committee and the formation of a professional coaching staff over the years. Experts working in the committee know this field very well. Professionalism, high organization, love for this field and kindness in the team are the main factors.

In recent decades, Azerbaijan has undergone significant transformations, both socially and economically. This transition has had a profound impact on the sports landscape. The country has invested heavily in sports infrastructure, with state-of-the-art facilities emerging across various regions. Additionally, there has been a concerted effort to promote sports at the grassroots level, encouraging participation from a young age and nurturing talent for future success. Azerbaijan’s commitment to excellence in sports has yielded impressive results on the international stage. Athletes from Azerbaijan have excelled in various disciplines, from wrestling and boxing to gymnastics and judo. Notable achievements include Olympic medals, world championships, and victories in prestigious tournaments. These accomplishments not only bring glory to

the nation but also inspire future generations of athletes to aim for greatness [1].

Representatives of the sports community, institutions and federations operating in this field have begun to see the benefits of activation in the country's sports. Thus, the new appointments in the leadership structure of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the activities carried out by the new management, the focus of all federations have created more favorable conditions for the development of sports in the country. The Ministry's approach to every small problem with great care, solving the issues in time and without delay laid the foundation of the road to success. Of course, such cooperation once again confirms that the achieved achievements will be sustainable. After a certain period of time, the silence in the sports field has been broken. Although there is very little time for the Paris-2024 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games. But a big leap awaits the country's sports. Elements of this breakthrough are already visible. Because it is observed that not only Olympians, but also Paralympians have achieved successful results in the world and European championships and prestigious tournaments, rejuvenated teams, ensured the participation of all regions of Azerbaijan in national teams, activated the work of Olympic sports complexes in the regions, and made efforts to increase the mass in sports. All of these will show their successful results, this direction, this policy will bear fruit and our teams will be more strongly represented in Paris. In the near future, a headquarters will be established in the National Paralympic Committee for the preparation of the "Paris-2024" Paralympics, and very serious tasks will be assigned here. In that headquarters, all issues will be analyzed, the involvement of athletes in training, their pharmacology, provision of necessary equipment and participation in tournaments will be discussed. The goal of the committee is to increase this figure to 50 in Paris-2024, if our country was represented by 36 athletes in Tokyo-2020. If our Paralympians tested their strength in 6 sports in Tokyo, it is planned to fight for medals in 8 sports at the Paris Para-

lympics. Increasing both quantity and quality will allow for more successful results in Paris. In terms of distance and time, the Paris Paralympic Games will be more convenient for our representatives.

Last month, the Turkish city of Konya hosted the 5th Islamic Solidarity Games. As in the IV Islamiad held in Baku in 2017, paralympians competed for medals in Konya. It is gratifying that Azerbaijani paralympians were also among the prize winners. At the Islamiad held in Baku, Paralympians tried their hand at judo and athletics. At that time, athletes of the National Paralympic Committee won 24 medals, 12 of which were gold. The awards received by our paralympians played a big role in Azerbaijan's position in the medal ranking. Our athletes who did not have high experience in international competitions went to Konya. Our athletes participating in the table tennis competitions were taking part in the competition outside the country for the first time. Also, among our archers there were those who had just entered the sport. Despite this, our paralympians, who showed perseverance, managed to get medals. In general, our representatives showed great results in Konya. A good result is not only getting a gold medal. Azerbaijani athletes won 99 medals at the 5th Islamiad, and the analysis shows that our athletes have seriously prepared for the competition and have set themselves the goal of conquering the peaks. The competition also gave sports bodies and federations an opportunity to reassess their team's preparation and acted as a review stage. The observations showed that Azerbaijani sports are developing in the right direction and the federations are also performing successful activities in this direction. Undoubtedly, hard work and hard work will show their successful formula in Paris as well [4].

To stay competitive in the ever-evolving world of sports, Azerbaijan has embraced innovative approaches and cutting-edge technologies. Sports science and performance analysis have become integral parts of training regimes, allowing athletes to optimize their performance and minimize the risk of injury.

Moreover, there has been a growing emphasis on sports psychology, helping athletes develop mental resilience and overcome challenges on and off the field. Despite the progress made, Azerbaijani sports face several challenges that must be addressed to sustain growth and success. One such challenge is the need to diversify the sporting landscape and explore new disciplines. While traditional sports hold cultural significance, embracing emerging sports can attract a broader audience and expand the talent pool. Additionally, there is a need to enhance governance and transparency within sports organizations to ensure fair play and integrity. Furthermore, Azerbaijan must address socioeconomic barriers that hinder access to sports for marginalized communities. By investing in inclusive programs and facilities, the country can empower individuals from all backgrounds to participate in sports and reap the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. Moreover, fostering partnerships with international organizations and neighboring countries can create opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaborative initiatives aimed at advancing sports development in the region.

2. The National Paralympic Committee Has Become a Place Where People with Disabilities Gather and Trust. The main goal of the National Paralympic Committee is to involve people with disabilities in sports and organize their integration into society. The committee is doing important work related to the involvement of veterans who lost their health in the battles for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan to the Paralympic movement. Regular meetings are held with the veterans, they are given detailed information about the Paralympic movement, summer and winter sports. A commission on work and sports selection with Karabakh veterans is already functioning in the Committee. The commission encourages veterans to join the Paralympic movement and engage in professional sports. People who were disabled during the war are now successfully representing our country in the international arena, participating in various sports as part of the National Paralympic Committee's national teams. In addition

to its direct impact on the lives of individuals with physical disabilities, the Azerbaijan NPC plays a vital role in promoting awareness and advocating for the rights of people with disabilities in society. Through public outreach initiatives, educational campaigns, and media engagements, the NPC raises awareness about the capabilities and contributions of individuals with physical disabilities, challenging stereotypes and fostering a culture of inclusion. Moreover, the NPC serves as a powerful advocate for disability rights, lobbying for policy reforms and legislative changes that promote equality, accessibility, and social justice. Despite its significant achievements, the Azerbaijan NPC faces various challenges in its quest to empower individuals with physical disabilities and promote inclusivity in sports. Limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and societal attitudes towards disability pose significant obstacles that require strategic solutions and collaborative efforts. Moreover, there is a need to expand the reach of NPC programs and services to ensure that individuals with physical disabilities in all regions of Azerbaijan have access to sports opportunities and support networks [1].

The Azerbaijan Athletics Federation has been operating in our country for two years now. It was not possible to attract all the people who applied to the National Paralympic Committee to sports. The Paralympic Movement is a professional sport. The results achieved by the Paralympians reach the results achieved by the Olympians. To be able to become a professional athlete, it is important to have talent first. Because of this, the committee had to turn away most of the people who applied. However, in addition to this, discussions in this area were held in the committee. There was an exchange of ideas about the areas in which the citizens who applied should be involved in public works. However, we would not be wrong if we say that the world experience came to the aid of the National Paralympic Committee in this compassionate and noble work. As a result of the successful search, the Abilimpiya movement was launched in our country. The Olympics are not a

sports competition, but professional competitions. Next year, the Olympic Games will be held in France, and Azerbaijan is also expected to participate in the competition. Currently, our team is seriously preparing for this competition. The services of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population should be specially emphasized in the formation of the Federation. In general, the ministry plays an important role in the development of both Paralympic and Abilimpic movements in our country. In addition to the start of the Federation, many projects were implemented together with the DOST Center for Inclusive Development and Creativity. It was as a result of joint cooperation that the recognition, popularization and massification of the Abilimpia movement in the country became widespread. Currently, thousands of people with disabilities apply to this movement. In addition, there is close cooperation between the National Paralympic Committee and the Center for Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities of the Social Services Agency.

“True Colors Festival” was held in June of this year under the joint organization of the Committee and the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population. The festival dedicated to the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Japan and held under the slogan “One world, one family” was not only a manifestation of friendly relations between the two countries, but also served as a platform for people with physical disabilities to show their skills. The festival, organized with the support of the Embassy of Japan in Azerbaijan and the leading charity organization of Japan, “The Nippon Foundation”, could be seen as an ordinary concert and show. But behind this festival there was hard work. It took about half a year to conduct rehearsals and prepare numbers performed together by people with disabilities from Japan and Azerbaijan. This festival, which took place in the Seaside National Park for two days, gathered a large number of spectators. After this festival, the number of people who wanted to join the Abilimpiya movement

increased. Such measures lead to more active participation of disabled people [4].

Some people with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities have a certain psychology. They are afraid and refrain from going out into society and participating in any issue. But this is just a psychology, not a human factor. Man was created to live and create. If a person has a physical limitation, God gives him a talent on the other hand. In Azerbaijan, we have world-class and specially talented athletes with disabilities. In general, there are many people with creative disabilities in the republic. It is imperative to reveal this talent in each of them and guide it. Because every person with a disability should have their own path to success. In order to convey this to the public, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation and the National Paralympic Committee jointly presented the “Invincibles” project in 2019. World famous motivators were invited to Azerbaijan. The goal was to convey the concept of the path to success of the disabled to all classes. You just need will and desire to succeed. If these coincide, success is not so difficult. The main role of the committee, state bodies, and the public in general is to be with people with disabilities, to reveal their existing talent and to return people from this category to society. Among the projects implemented at the initiative of the First Vice-President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, Mehriban Aliyeva, social activities, as well as events aimed at people with disabilities and children with limited health opportunities, have a special place. To date, the Heydar Aliyev Foundation has implemented a number of projects in support of state policy in the direction of providing care, rehabilitation, and increasing opportunities for people with physical limitations to integrate into society. At the same time, attention is paid to forming a healthy lifestyle among those people, increasing their interest in sports, and creating appropriate conditions for this purpose. In the strengthening of social policy in our country year after year, in increasing the attention and care for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, children with limited

health opportunities, low-income families, young people without parental care, and in strengthening the social protection system in general on the principles of social justice, Mehriban Aliyeva has played a very wide role. consistent services, projects and initiatives that span the scale have an important role [3].

3. The Children's Paralympic Committee Plays An Important Role in The Formation of The Reserve Team. On the initiative of the National Paralympic Committee, the Children's Paralympic Committee was established for the first time in the world in 2013. Perhaps earlier in some country, work was done in the direction of engaging children with limited health opportunities in sports. But there was no organization. This organization was held for the first time in Azerbaijan. "UNICEF-Azerbaijan" provided exceptional services in this case. Since 2013, the Children's Paralympic Games have been held in our country for the first time, with 8 sports. Children from Georgia also participated in the last games. The main goal of the National Paralympic Committee is to give world status to the Children's Paralympic Games. In the future, in addition to the adult Paralympics, children's Paralympic Games will be held, and the fact that our country is the initiator of this project will be a matter of pride for every Azerbaijani. The next year will mark the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Children's Paralympic Committee. Many events and competitions are planned in this regard. 2023 will be an important year for Paralympians in terms of obtaining a license. The National Paralympic Committee will carry out all the work necessary to cover children with attention and care in such an important period and will try to celebrate the jubilee at a high level. The Children's Paralympic Committee has an important role in forming the reserve team of Paralympians. We already have a Paralympic champion among the children of that committee. Our swimmer Veli Israfilov won a gold medal at the Tokyo Summer Paralympic Games. Our other swimmer, Dana Shandybina, received a license for "Tokyo-2020" and had the right to participate in the

top competition of the quadrennial. Our table tennis player Dinara Suncheleyeva won a bronze medal at the 5th Islamic Solidarity Games "Konya-2021". The National Paralympic Committee, in addition to attracting children to national teams, frees parents from psychological stress. So, parents who used to be ashamed of their children now watch their children with great enthusiasm and pride. The creation of the Children's Paralympic Committee was also aimed at attracting children with disabilities to competitive sports. This Committee, which is the first in the world, aims at the inclusive development of physical education and sports, the rehabilitation and development of those children, and the expansion of opportunities for integration into society. Another responsible test awaits the National Paralympic Committee. So, in November, our country will host the world championship among paralympians for the first time. Before the Parajudo World Championship, Grand Prix competitions were organized at a high level in our republic. According to the number of participating countries, Grand Prix competitions are not far behind the World Championship. But the peculiarity of the world championship is the beginning of a new stage of preparation for "Paris-2024" and collection of rating points. The collection of the first ranking points for the Paris Olympics began with the European Championship held in Cagliari, Italy at the beginning of September this year. The World Cup in Baku will be the second ranking competition of the season. Parajudokas from about 40 countries will participate in the competition in Baku. In the World Championship, the rating points will be at least twice as much as in the continental competition. It is planned to organize a medical classification in Baku before the World Championship. Specialists from four countries will come to Azerbaijan, which will allow athletes to finish their work in the field of classification faster. Medical classification is a burden, excitement and stress for athletes. They are very excited before the competition, because the participation in the competition depends on the result of the medical classification. At the same time, the "Grand

Slam” judo tournament will be organized in Baku before the World Championship [3].

It should also be noted that certain changes were made in the medical classification of the international parajudo competitions at the suggestion of the National Paralympic Committee. So, although previously there was a 3-level classification, now this number has been reduced to 2. According to the change, blind and partially sighted parajudokas will compete separately. Thanks to this, fair and healthy competition in parajudo will be ensured. This also enables children of the Children's Paralympic Committee to participate in more competitions. An example of this is Ismayil Muradov, a member of our national team. It should be noted that our athlete won a bronze medal at the European Championship held in Cagliari, Italy. Based on the experience of last year's Grand Prix competitions, we believe that the world championship will be the most beautiful and the most productive of the competitions organized within the framework of the Paralympic movement. The National Paralympic Committee closely cooperates not only with the International Sports Association of Visually Impaired Persons (IBSA), but also with international and local judo federations. The championship will be organized jointly with these institutions.

The Committee constantly urges Paralympians to adhere to anti-doping rules and to be committed to clean sport. For this, there is close cooperation with the Azerbaijan National Anti-Doping Agency (AMADA). AMADA representatives regularly meet with Paralympians to provide them with detailed information on the doping control process, the banned list and anti-doping regulations. The National Paralympic Committee also gives a special place to the topic of the fight against drugs. Sportsmen are given reports about the harms of drugs and their consequences, the importance of sports to stay away from drugs and other harmful habits and to have a healthy lifestyle is promoted. Our Paralympians always feel the care of the head of the country. According to the orders of the President, our athletes and their coaches who have achieved

high achievements in international competitions are awarded with orders and medals. The financial well-being and living conditions of our Paralympians are improved, they are rewarded with apartments and cars. In his speeches, the head of state calls himself the closest friend of the Paralympians, and values their achievements as an example of sacrifice and heroism. The state of Azerbaijan attaches great importance to educational work so that disabled people are not discriminated against in the country. The state always tries to reveal the abilities and skills of disabled citizens. In many cases, in order to facilitate the education of disabled children, multi-disciplinary educational institutions, boarding schools, and special workplaces are created for disabled people to use their labor skills [3] [4].

On the instructions of the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, construction works are being carried out at a great speed in our territories freed from occupation. The first international tournaments have already been organized in those areas. The National Paralympic Committee also set the goal of developing the Paralympic movement in Karabakh. At present, discussions are being held in this direction, development directions are being determined. The main goal is to cover all of Azerbaijan with the Paralympic movement. The first sprouts of the Great Return are already visible. This will bring new life to those areas. Children growing up in those lands will represent our country at a high level in the international arena in the future. The National Paralympic Committee, which aims to conquer new heights, makes important contributions to the development of the Paralympic movement in our country with its multifaceted activities in the direction of engaging disabled people in sports, taking a decent position in society and forming a sense of self-confidence in them. The National Paralympic Committee has declared the training of professional athletes, their patriotic spirit and their commitment to the principles of fair sports as the main principles of its activity. This idea, this vision and these challenges allow Azerbaijan to play an exceptional role in the international Paralympic mo-

vement, gain deep respect in the sports community with its achievements, and apply the rich experience gained in other countries. Paralympians of the winning country go out to meet any opponent with open faces and open foreheads. Adhering to the principle “success brings success”, the main task of the Committee is to conquer Paris. For this, will, desire and perseverance are important, and these listed are the most basic principles in the activities of our Paralympians [4].

4. Conclusion. In conclusion, Azerbaijan’s Paralympic movement stands as a testament to the nation’s unwavering commitment to inclusivity, empowerment, and excellence in sports. From its remarkable achievements on the global stage to its steadfast dedication to fostering a culture of acceptance and respect for individuals with disabilities, Azerbaijan has emerged as a beacon of inspiration in the Paralympic community. The success of Azerbaijan’s Paralympic endeavors is not only measured in medal counts but also in the profound impact it has on the lives of individuals with disabilities, providing them with opportunities for personal growth, self-confidence, and social inclusion. Through strategic initiatives, investment in grassroots programs, and innovative approaches, Azerbaijan continues to pave the way for the advancement

of adaptive sports and the promotion of equality and accessibility for all. As the nation looks ahead to future challenges and opportunities, its Paralympic movement remains poised to lead by example, inspiring generations to come and championing the rights and abilities of individuals with disabilities on the global stage.

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AZƏRBAYCAN PARALİMPIYA HƏRƏKƏTİ: İMKANLAR, NƏİLİYYƏTLƏR VƏ GƏLƏCƏK PERSPEKTİVLƏR

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Annotasiya. Azərbaycanın Paralimpiya hərəkəti görkəmli nailiyyətlər və inklüzivliyə sadiqliyi ilə çiçəklənir. İdmançılar global səhnələrdə möhkəmlilik və bacarıq nümayiş etdirərək, millətin mükəmməlliyə olan bağlılığını əks etdirirlər. İstedadları yetişdirmək və əlçatanlığı artırmaq üçün davamlı səylər sayəsində hərəkət müsbət irəliləyir. Əlilliyi olan şəxslə-

rin imkanlarının artırılmasına və idman imkanlarının genişləndirilməsinə diqqət yetirməklə Azərbaycanın Paralimpiya gələcəyi həm idman, həm də ictimai mənzərəni zənginləşdirərək parlaq işıq saçır.

Açar sözlər: *Azərbaycan, Paralimpiya hərəkəti, nailiyyətlər, inklüzivlik, əlillik, idman imkanları, mükəmməllik.*

ПАРАЛИМПИЙСКОЕ ДВИЖЕНИЕ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНА: ВОЗМОЖНОСТИ, ДОСТИЖЕНИЯ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

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Аннотация. Паралимпийское движение Азербайджана процветает благодаря выдающимся достижениям и приверженности инклюзивности. Спортсмены демонстрируют стойкость и мастерство на мировых аренах, отражая стремление страны к совершенству. Движение продвигается вперед благодаря постоянным усилиям по воспитанию талантов и повышению доступности. Сосредоточив внимание на расширении возможностей людей с ограничен-

ными возможностями и расширении спортивных возможностей, паралимпийское будущее Азербайджана сияет ярким светом, обогащая как спортивный, так и социальный ландшафт.

Ключевые слова: *Азербайджан, Паралимпийское движение, достижения, инклюзия, инвалидность, спортивные возможности, мастерство.*