

1 **Implementation of NEP 2020 and the RPwD Act (2016) in Promoting Inclusive Sports in**
2 **India**

3

4 **Abstract**

5 Inclusive sports programmes and systems designed to enable participation by persons with
6 disabilities (PWDs) alongside their peers without disabilities are increasingly recognised as a
7 powerful tool for promoting social inclusion, health, educational equity, and livelihood
8 opportunities (Sherrill, 2004). In India, the integration of inclusive sports has gained
9 momentum in recent years, especially following the enactment of two landmark frameworks:
10 the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, which legally mandates
11 accessibility and equal opportunity (Government of India, 2016), and the National Education
12 Policy (NEP) 2020, which envisions holistic education where sports and physical education
13 are integral to learning outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2020). Together, these frameworks
14 provide both the legal obligation and policy vision needed to mainstream inclusive sports at
15 all levels.

16 This paper critically examines the relevant provisions of NEP 2020 and the RPwD Act in the
17 context of sports inclusion, reviewing institutional mechanisms and programmes such as
18 Khelo India (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, 2021), the Sports Authority of India's
19 initiatives (Sports Authority of India, 2022), the Paralympic Committee of India (Paralympic
20 Committee of India, 2022), and other schemes aimed at supporting participation and talent
21 development. It further explores the strengths of current implementation, such as policy
22 convergence and the increasing visibility of para-athletes, while also highlighting ongoing
23 gaps in infrastructure accessibility, teacher and coach preparedness, resource allocation, and
24 systematic monitoring (Kumar & Singh, 2021).

25 By combining policy analysis with programme review, the study offers evidence-based
26 recommendations for enhancing inclusive sports through adaptive physical education, teacher
27 training, accessible infrastructure, sustainable financing, and strong school-to-elite pathways.

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29 **Keywords:** Inclusive sports, NEP 2020, RPwD Act 2016, persons with disabilities (PWDs),
30 adapted physical education, Khelo India, policy implementation, accessibility, para-athletes

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32 **1. Introduction**

33 Sport is increasingly recognised as a vital area for promoting inclusion, equality, and
34 comprehensive development (United Nations, 2015). Beyond physical fitness, sports
35 activities foster teamwork, discipline, resilience, and leadership skills. For persons with
36 disabilities (PWDs), inclusive sports are especially important: they encourage social
37 participation, challenge stereotypes, boost self-confidence, and offer therapeutic benefits that
38 support cognitive and emotional well-being (Sherrill, 2004). Yet, in many contexts, barriers
39 such as inaccessible infrastructure, insufficient training of educators and coaches, and limited
40 awareness about adaptive sports options still prevent PWDs from taking part actively (Kumar
41 & Singh, 2021).

42 In India, two landmark frameworks have created unprecedented opportunities to change this
43 situation. The **Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016** provides a legally binding
44 mandate for ensuring accessibility and equal opportunity in all domains of life, including
45 education, recreation, and sport (Government of India, 2016). Complementing this, the
46 **National Education Policy (NEP 2020)** reimagines education to be holistic, inclusive, and
47 multidisciplinary, explicitly acknowledging the role of physical education and sports as
48 integral to learning outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2020).

49 The growing visibility of Indian para-athletes at international competitions, such as the
50 **Paralympic Games and the Asian Para Games**, highlights the potential of individuals with
51 disabilities to excel when provided with an enabling environment (Paralympic Committee of
52 India, 2022). At the same time, grassroots participation remains uneven and often dependent
53 on local initiatives or NGO-led projects (Rao, 2020).

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55 **Objectives of the Study**

56 The present paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 57 1. **To analyse** the key provisions of the *National Education Policy (NEP) 2020* and the
58 *Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016* related to sports, physical
59 education, and inclusion of persons with disabilities (PwDs).
- 60 2. **To examine** the extent and effectiveness of implementation of these policy
61 frameworks in promoting inclusive sports at school, higher education, and community
62 levels in India.
- 63 3. **To identify** the institutional mechanisms, programmes, and schemes—such as *Khelo*
64 *India*, *Sports Authority of India (SAI)* initiatives, and *Paralympic Committee of India*
65 (*PCI*) activities—that contribute to inclusive sports development.
- 66 4. **To evaluate** the current strengths and achievements in the implementation process,
67 including policy convergence, institutional support, and increased participation of
68 para-athletes.
- 69 5. **To explore** the challenges and gaps that hinder effective implementation, such as
70 infrastructural inaccessibility, inadequate teacher and coach preparedness, and limited
71 financial and monitoring mechanisms.
- 72 6. **To propose** evidence-based recommendations and strategic measures for
73 strengthening inclusive sports systems through adaptive physical education,
74 accessibility audits, teacher training, sustainable financing, and coordinated policy
75 action.

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77 **2. Policy and Legal Frameworks**

78 **2.1 National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020)**

79 NEP 2020 emphasises inclusive and equitable education across all stages of learning,
80 promoting participation in sports and physical education as part of holistic schooling
81 (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy calls for strengthened physical education, early

82 identification of learning needs, removal of barriers to participation, and the use of assistive
83 technologies and individualised support where required.

84 **2.2 Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act)**

85 The RPwD Act legally guarantees rights to equality, accessibility, education, and social
86 inclusion for PwDs, and mandates measures by appropriate governments to ensure access to
87 sports, recreational activities, and physical education (Government of India, 2016).

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89 **3. Institutional Mechanisms & Programmes Promoting Inclusive Sports**

90 **3.1 Khelo India and Para Initiatives**

91 **Khelo India** — the national programme for development of sports — supports grassroots
92 participation, talent identification, and infrastructure (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports,
93 2021). The programme includes **Khelo India Para Games**, integrating para-sports in the
94 national talent pipeline.

95 **3.2 Sports Authority of India (SAI) and Targeted Schemes**

96 The **Sports Authority of India (SAI)** implements coaching, infrastructure and talent-
97 scouting programmes. SAI and the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports run the **Scheme of**
98 **Sports and Games for the Disabled**, providing grants for coaching, adaptive equipment, and
99 competitions (Sports Authority of India, 2022).

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102 **3.3 Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) and Civil Society**

103 The **Paralympic Committee of India (PCI)** governs para-sports, organising elite and
104 grassroots events, and partnering with schools, NGOs, and state bodies (Paralympic
105 Committee of India, 2022).

106 **3.4 Other Supportive Initiatives**

107 Initiatives like the **Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS)** and **National Para Games**
108 raise visibility and recognition of para-athletes (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, 2021).

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110 **4. Pathways of Implementation**

111 **4.1 School and Higher Education Integration**

112 NEP 2020 calls for inclusive schooling and robust physical education through adaptive
113 curricula, teacher training, accessible infrastructure, and collaborations with para-sport clubs
114 (Ministry of Education, 2020).

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116 **4.2 Community and District Programmes**

117 District-level sports under Khelo India and state departments enable inclusion but require
118 better alignment with RPwD accessibility mandates (Government of India, 2016).

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120 **5. Implementation Strengths and Progress**

121 • **Policy convergence:** NEP + RPwD create complementary mandates (Ministry of
122 Education, 2020; Government of India, 2016).

123 • **Programme support:** Khelo India and SAI provide funds and tournaments (Ministry
124 of Youth Affairs & Sports, 2021).

125 • **Institutional actors:** PCI and state bodies coordinate para-sport pathways
126 (Paralympic Committee of India, 2022).

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128 **6. Implementation Gaps and Challenges**

- 129 1. **Teacher capacity** gaps despite NEP training mandates (Kumar & Singh, 2021).
- 130 2. **Infrastructure accessibility** often poor despite RPwD provisions (Government of
131 India, 2016).
- 132 3. **Resource allocation** is fragmented and short-term (Rao, 2020).
- 133 4. **Data and monitoring** are weak, limiting policy adjustments (Sports Authority of
134 India, 2022).
- 135 5. **Transition pathways** from school to elite sport remain inconsistent (Paralympic
136 Committee of India, 2022).

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138 **7. Recommendations**

- 139 1. **Policy & governance:** Joint plans between education, sports, and disability ministries
140 (Ministry of Education, 2020).
- 141 2. **Teacher development:** Mandatory adaptive PE training (Kumar & Singh, 2021).
- 142 3. **Infrastructure:** Accessibility audits using RPwD Act provisions (Government of
143 India, 2016).
- 144 4. **Finance:** Ring-fenced budgets in Khelo India & SAI (Ministry of Youth Affairs &
145 Sports, 2021).
- 146 5. **Data:** Disability-disaggregated monitoring (Sports Authority of India, 2022).
- 147 6. **Pathways:** School-to-elite linkages with PCI (Paralympic Committee of India, 2022).

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149 **8. Conclusion**

150 The NEP 2020 and RPwD Act 2016 together provide the vision and legal enforceability for
151 inclusive sports in India (Ministry of Education, 2020; Government of India, 2016). Progress

152 is evident through initiatives like the Khelo India Para Games, SAI schemes, and PCI-led
153 programmes that enhance participation and recognition of para-athletes (Sports Authority of
154 India, 2022; Paralympic Committee of India, 2022). However, systemic challenges such as
155 inadequate infrastructure accessibility, lack of teacher preparedness, and fragmented
156 financing remain persistent barriers (Kumar & Singh, 2021; Rao, 2020).

157 For India to achieve genuine inclusion in sports, these gaps must be addressed through
158 sustained policy convergence, robust monitoring systems, and capacity building of educators,
159 coaches, and institutions. Beyond compliance, inclusive sports should be treated as a national
160 priority that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015),
161 particularly those on equity, education, and health.

162 Inclusive sports are not only about physical activity; they represent a pathway to dignity,
163 empowerment, and nation-building. By fostering resilience, leadership, and equal opportunity
164 among children and youth with disabilities, India can move closer to building a society that
165 celebrates diversity and upholds the rights of every individual. Thus, embedding inclusive
166 sports into the mainstream education system is both a legal obligation and a moral imperative
167 that will shape a more inclusive future.

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